

On the Edge

Tate Modern, Level 1 Seminar Room

Saturdays 31 May – 05 July 2014, 13.30–16.00

Extended first session in the Starr Auditorium on 31 May from 13.00 – 17.00

Led by Richard Martin and Lucy Scholes

What happens on the edge?

This six-week course explores the potential excitements, challenges and dangers that being on the edge entails – in art and life. The course itself moves across conventional boundaries to encompass discussion of modern and contemporary art, cinema, cities, literature and a diverse range of cultural theorists. Topics of discussion include precariousness, migration, imbalance and cultural innovation, which are examined through the work of artists, film-makers and writers such as Andrea Fraser, Tania Bruguera, John Akomfrah, and Adam Phillips. The course includes visits to the collection displays and the *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs* exhibition, featuring works marked by their sharp and colourful edges, a screening of the acclaimed British film *Fish Tank*, and class discussions within a supportive and dynamic environment.

No prior knowledge of these artists is required, though participants are encouraged to discuss various works and texts within the group. Ultimately, the course considers where cultural innovation takes place today – on the edge or at the centre?

Course Schedule

Week 1 (31 May), 13.00 – 17.00: Tate Modern, Starr Auditorium
Edgelands

The course begins with a screening of the acclaimed British film *Fish Tank*. From its title onwards, *Fish Tank* tackles ideas of confinement and escape amidst tower blocks, suburban estates and wastelands on the eastern edges of London. It's also a film about economic uncertainty, the powers of creative expression and competing notions of cool – ideas that will return throughout the rest of the course. After an initial introduction to the course's main themes and a screening of the film, we discuss the neglected spaces and communities that exist on the edges of towns and cities, and the potential they might hold.

Class Screening: *Fish Tank* (dir. Andrea Arnold, 2009).

References: Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wildness* (2012); Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2005); Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive' (1956); *Two Years at Sea* (dir. Ben Rivers, 2011); *The Selfish Giant* (dir. Clio Barnard, 2012).

Week 2 (7 June), 13.30 – 16.00: Tate Modern, Level 1 Seminar Room
Precarity

The concept of 'precarity' – a life lived without social or economic security – has become increasingly influential in recent years, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. In this session, we look at how artists, film-makers and theorists have adopted new strategies in response to the vulnerabilities of living on the edge. We also position precariousness as an idea closely connected to ephemerality, by discussing works, such as the performance pieces of Tino Sehgal, that exist for only a brief moment in time, as well as its links with physical vulnerability, by considering works composed of fragile materials.

References: Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (2011); Dan Hancox, *The Village Against the World* (2013); *Wendy and Lucy* (dir. Kelly Reichardt, 2008); *Human Resources* (dir. Laurent Cantet, 1999); *Decasia* (dir. Bill Morrison, 2002).

Week 3 (14 June), 13.30 – 16.00: Tate Modern, Level 1 Seminar Room
Borders

Where does an artwork begin and end? What borders and boundaries govern our lives? In this class, we consider artists whose work blurs the conventional boundaries of the artwork, as well as figures that have created their own framing devices and powerful edges. To illustrate these discussions, we visit Tate Modern's exhibition of Matisse's cut-outs, in which the artist began 'cutting into colour'. We also consider the role of borders in terms of migration and identity. By looking at contemporary artists such as Tania Bruguera, Rasheed Araeen, John Akomfrah and Steve McQueen, we discuss changing attitudes towards global centres and edges.

Class Visit: *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs* exhibition at Tate Modern.

References: Josh Cohen, *The Private Life: Why We Remain in the Dark* (2013); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (2001); Xiaolu Guo, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary For Lovers* (2007); *Late at Night: Voices of Ordinary Madness* (dir. XiaoluGuo, 2013); *In This World* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2002); *The Edge of Heaven* (dir. Fatih Akin, 2007).

Tate Modern: Level 4, Energy and Process, Rooms 2 and 3: Beyond Painting, and Arte Povera and Anti-Form.

Event Archive: Zamy Cultural Forum on Global Citizenship at Tate Modern (<http://www.zamynforum.org>).

Week 4 (21 June), 13.30 – 16.00: Tate Modern, Level 1 Seminar Room
Imbalance

Being on edge suggests a state of imbalance, nervousness or irritability. In this class, we'll think about psychological and chemical imbalance, about formal ideas of asymmetry and irregular forms of balance (such as the upside down imagery of Georg Baselitz and Rodney Graham), and about how the limits of sanity and madness have been historically conceived. If being on edge often suggests something is slightly askew or out of control, we'll consider the restrictions of balance. As Adam Phillips writes, 'the sign that something does matter to us is that we lose our steadiness'.

References: Adam Philips, *On Balance* (2010); Darian Leader, *What is Madness?* (2011); Stephen Grosz, *The Examined Life* (2013); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964); B. S. Johnson, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973); Don DeLillo, *Libra* (1988); *Man on Wire* (dir. James Marsh, 2008).

Tate Modern: Poetry and Dream, Rooms 3 and 8: Andrea Fraser and Joseph Beuys.

**Week 5 (28 June), 13.30 – 16.00: Tate Modern Level 1 Seminar Room
Cool**

The word 'edge' derives from an old English term for the sharpened side of a blade. Indeed, the idea of the 'cutting-edge' continues to drive artistic practice and broader cultural changes. From avant-garde movements to a current commercial desire for 'edginess', as well as alternative models such as Straight edge culture and Outsider Art, this class considers changing notions of cool. It examines the idea that culture is at its most vibrant on the margins and that crossing boundaries always equates to innovation and transgression. We take a particular look at the historical creation of the teenager, a figure at both the centre and the margins of society, who is poised on an edge between childhood and adult life.

References: Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (1999); *The Alternative Guide to the Universe*, exhibition catalogue (2013); Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (2007); *Teenage* (dir. Matt Wolf, 2013); *Derek* (dir. Isaac Julien, 2008).

Tate Modern: Level 4, Structure and Clarity, Room 6: The Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop).

**Week 6 (5 July), 13.30 – 16.00: Tate Modern, Level 1 Seminar Room
Mainstream**

Considering the edge suggests that a centre exists. In this final class, we explore the status of the centre in various forms – downtown districts, institutional policies and the idea of mainstream culture. To aid us in these discussions, we are joined by Dr Adam Kaasa, Research Fellow in the School of Architecture at the Royal College of Art, to help us conduct our own mapping exercise on London alongside discussions of different models of urban development taking place across the globe.

Guest Speaker: Dr Adam Kaasa.

References: William Wordsworth, 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802' (1807); Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (1960); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).

Mapping London Blog: <http://mappinglondon.co.uk>

Tate Modern: Level 3, Transformed Visions, Room 8: Identity Politics.

Tate Art Maps: <http://artmaps.tate.org.uk>