Modernism, Modernity and History

EN 5331
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The aim of this course is to introduce students to recent thinking on Modernism (or Modernisms, as Peter Nicholls puts it), and to a range of issues within the study of modernism, in particular its historical location and the relationship between literary modernism and social modernity. There will also be some attempt to relate the texts studied to developments in the visual arts, music, and cinema. The choice of texts is designed to reflect the topics covered, and the reading is often contextual (a series of short extracts from the course reader) rather than literary: this is not a survey.

The term is divided into two parts. The first part includes an examination of some of the foundational modernist movements, manifestoes, and crucial moments; the second looks at more general issues relating to modernism’s cultural and historical context.

Teaching and Assessment

Teaching is by weekly-two hour seminar. Students will be asked to prepare for seminars by setting up reading groups which meet for an hour before the seminar to prepare the main literary example. The course is assessed by one term paper: see Departmental Taught MA Handbook for regulations and word limits. Where (as will usually be the case) the course is taught in term 1, drafts of the essay must be handed in by the first day of term 2 in order to receive feedback; final versions are to be handed in early in term 3. Advice will be offered on choice of topics. For further details about assessment criteria and regulations, consult the Programme Document for the MA.

Required reading. The reading for each week’s seminar, which may comprise a novel, essay, poetry or other kinds of writing, is detailed in the Course Description below.

Additional Reading. Suggestions for additional reading are detailed below. Although the first task is always the primary reading, secondary material will be needed for all presentations and essays.

Feedback

If there are any issues you need to discuss during the course, please see Tim Armstrong, Room 203 or your assigned academic advisor. At the end of the course, the usual anonymous questionnaire will be distributed to collect your feedback on the course. Issues can also be raised via the MA’s representative on the Postgraduate Staff-Student Committee.

In this booklet you will find:

- a week-by-week Course Description.
- a list of topics which you might consider each week.
- a list of Secondary Sources both general and specific to each week.

The set text is Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), referred to below as MAS with page numbers of the beginning of excerpts. You should also buy Nathanael West’s Collected Works, since three of his novellas are used as points of discussion in term 1. Recommended secondary texts include Peter Nicholls’s Modernisms and Tim Armstrong’s Modernism: A Cultural History.
**Week 2:**  Introduction: lecture; points of origin in Modernism

Reading from *MAS*: Marx (5), Nietzsche (17), LeBon (36), Veblen (38), Worringer (72), Baudelaire (102), Pater (112), Mallarmé (123), Shklovsky (217).

**Literary examples:** poems by Baudelaire, Apollinaire, Loy, Pound

**Topics**
- modernity and modernism
- skepticism
- abstraction and subjectivism
- individualism vs. the crowd
- commodification
- modernity and urban life

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**Week 3:**  Literary Avant-gardes: Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism

Reading from *MAS*: Loos (77), Huelsenbeck (207), Jarry (129), Marinetti (249), Zdanevich & Larionov (257), Loy (258), Tzara (276), Schwitters (281), Grotz (287), and Gramsci on Marinetti (214); with additional handout. T. E. Hulme (178), Lewis (200), Imagism (268), Vorticism (291), Pound (373) with additional handout of examples including Imagist poems, material from *The Egoist*, and a short extract from the *Cantos*. *Blast* can be read in its entirety at [http://www.modjourn.org](http://www.modjourn.org).

**Topics**
- Anti-art and the radicalism of Dada
- the machine age and the attack on the past
- Futurism’s aesthetics: speed, connection
- Futurism and war
- Futurism and gender
- the role of the literary magazine
- Pound’s debt to Futurism
- the Imagist programme and its application
- Vorticism and scientific language
- the legacy of Vorticism in the Cantos

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**Week 4:**  The Great War as Mass Trauma

Reading from *MAS*: Apollinaire (211); ‘A member of the Audience: Storming the Winter Palace’ (223), Stein ‘Composition as Explanation’ (421); Freud on the War (h/o).

**Literary texts:** accounts and poems of the Somme (h/o); short stories by Mary Butt, Wyndham Lewis, D. H. Lawrence (h/o); Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier*.

**Topics**
- war and modernity
- shell-shock, wounding and trauma
• gender and the war
• war and madness
• mourning

**Week 5:** Establishing High Modernism: The Men of 1914 and the occasion of *The Waste Land*

Context: Norbert Elias, ‘The Kitsch Style and the Age of Kitsch’ (1935); Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*; Wayne Koestlenbaum, *Double Talk*; Eliot’s letters; Eliot essays (MAS 366); the first issue of the *Criterion* (handouts of these texts will be distributed via Moodle).

Literary example: *The Waste Land* and drafts

**Topics**
- the making and selling on *The Waste Land*
- modernist obscurity and the audience
- the modernist fragment
- the psychosexual matrix of the poem
- social anxieties in the poem

**Week 6:** Surrealism and Late Modernism (manifestos, art, writings)

Reading in MAS: Freud (47), Surrealist Manifestos (307, 597), *transition* (312) and Jolas (312), Bruñel (238), Benjamin on Surrealism (563); handout of more material.

Literary Example: English surrealist poetry and writings (on Moodle)

**Topics**
- Surrealism and the unconscious
- automatic writing and other techniques
- the image vs. writing
- gender and desire
- the carnivalesque body
- Surrealism and the everyday
- Surrealism and death (Nicholls)
- politics: how radical is Surrealism?
- Black humour

**= READING WEEK =**

**Week 8:** Vital Streams: Shock, Distraction and the Embodied Subject

Reading from MAS: George M. Beard (handout); Baudelaire again (102), Simmel (51), Bergson (68), Ford (323); Williams (344); Stevens (518); Benjamin on Baudelaire (h/o); Sinclair (351), Pound (379), H.D. (382), Woolf (391-5), Lawrence (405).
You might compare on the other side of the argument (and in particular on the armored self and the marionette-theatre): Jarry (129) Craig (150), Yeats (337), Eliot again (367); Artaud (470); and Wyndham Lewis, ‘Skin and Intestines’ (from The Art of Being Ruled, short h/o).

Literary texts: Virginia Woolf, ‘Street Haunting’ (h/o) and Dorothy Richardson, Pilgrimage 1 (Pointed Roofs), chs. 1-3 (h/o).

Topics
- electrical conceptions of the nerves
- processing sense impressions / literary impressionism
- the flaneur and the city
- distracted aesthetics and automaticity
- Objectivism and impersonality
- the marionette and the rejection of the body
- the body and its energies
- sex and vitalism: art as discharge?
- vitalism and primitivism
- Human vs. machine time (the cinematographic)
- the structure of the moment
- debates on time

Week 9: Mass Culture
Reading in MAS: Simmel again (51); Kracauer (457), Adorno (577), Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (570). The Benjamin extracts are a little unsatisfactory: the full text of his essay can be found in his Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt; or can be downloaded from the web (the address tends to move about, so try Google). We will also read Siegfried Kracauer’s 1927 essay ‘The Little Shopgirls go to the Movies ’ (h/o).

Literary example: Nathanael West, Miss Lonelyhearts; also read ‘Some Notes on Miss L’ (MAS 479).

- Simmel and the city as alienated identity
- Adorno’s critique of mass culture
- Kracauer and the pleasures of the Mass Ornament
- Gender
- Filmic desire

Week 10: The Politics of Modernism
Reading: Marx (MASD 5,6); Morris (27), Trotsky (229); Radical aesthetics – Meyerhold (240), Gan (298), Moholy-Nagy (299), LEF (305) – vs. Zhdanov on Socialist Realism, 1934 (524) and Lukács either side of that divide (229, 584); Hitler (560); Read (526), Gill (530), Stead (536), Dos Passos (548), Cornford (548), Jameson (556), Siquerios (595), Breton et al (597).

Literary Example: Ezra Pound, usura and Italian Cantos (h/o); a handout of American political writing of the twenties and thirties (h/o of poems by: Muriel Rukeyser and others); visual material from Cary Nelson, Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Recovery of Cultural Memory (h/o).
- politics and the avant-garde
- socialist realism
- propaganda and commitment
- Fascism and anti-Fascism

**Week 11: Geographies of Modernism: Race, Empire, Nation**

Reading from *MAS*: Frazer (33), Blavatsky (31); T E Hulme, from ‘Modern Art and its Philosophy’. (handout). We will also discuss examples which may include visual work by Picasso and Gauguin, a short film by Len Lye, and ‘Jazz’ concerti by Stravinski and others.

Literary examples: Edith Sitwell, ‘Gold Coast Customs’; Vachel Lindsay, ‘The Congo’; Countee Cullen, ‘Heritage’; Bolo and other poems by T.S. Eliot (all h/o); and Nella Larsen’s novella *Passing*.

- Primitivism and abstraction
- the wisdom of the ancients
- Modernism and Occultism
- Civilization and its discontents
- Modernism’s geography

**Week 12: Modernism and Gender**

Reading in *MAS*: Pound (‘Preface to the Natural Philosophy of Love’), Bebel (60), Fawcett (83), Gilman (185), Riding (479), Richardson (485).


**Topics**
- the attack on tradition
- feminism and franchise
- women and space
- women and culture
- man-made language
- feminine sexuality
SECONDARY SOURCES

Note: not all texts listed here are in the College library – it is expected that, particularly when writing dissertations, MA students will use the wider resources offered by the University of London (Senate House) Library and the British Library; and that they will flesh out the reading here on individual authors using the MLA bibliography on CD-Rom and other bibliographies.

General

Tim Armstrong, *Modernism* (2005) [recommended general text]
Peter Brooker, ed., *Modernism/Postmodernism* (1992)
Peter Faulkner, ed., *A Modernist Reader* (1986)
Briony Fer et al, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars* (1993)
Rosalind Kraus, *The Originality of the Avante-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1987) [art]
Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism* (1998)
Richard Weston, *Modernism* (1996) [focus on art, architecture & design]

**Journals** of particular interest include *Modernism-Modernity, Journal of Modern Literature, Twentieth-Century Literature*.

**Futurism, Dada**


Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzalla, *Futurism* (1978)

**Imagism & Vorticism**

Secondary reading from the general list: Kenner, Nicholls, Larrisey, Levenson, Perloff (*Dance of the Intellect*, ch.2; *Poetics of Indeterminacy:*, Bradbury & McFarlane; Albright, Trotter. Also:

William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avante-Garde* (1972)

**Marketing the Men of 1914**

Secondary reading from the general reading list: Rainey (in particular), Morrison, Nicholls, Levenson, North (both books), Trotter, Sherry, Smith, Perloff and others. There are, of course, a huge number of studies of both Pound and Eliot. On *The Waste Land* you could look at, among other works:

Wayne Koestlenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (1989) [on the sexual politics of collaboration]

**Surrealism**


Secondary material from the general list: chapter in Nicholls, Kraus (plus *The Optical Unconscious*, 1993). Also:

Anna Balakian, *Andre Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (1971)
Haim N. Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (1979)
Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (1965)

**The Great War as Trauma**

The accounts of the Somme in the set reading come from Anne Powell, ed., *The Fierce Light: The Battle of the Somme July-November 1916. Prose and Poetry* (1996). More material can be found in two collections: *Women’s Fiction and the Great War*, ed. Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate (1997); *Women, Men and the Great War: an anthology of stories*, ed. Trudi Tate (1995); and in Tim Cross, ed., *The Lost Voices of World War I: An International Anthology* (1988). Two classic English war memoirs are Graves’s *Goodbye to All That* and Sassoon’s *Sherston’s Progress*; two fictional trilogies investigate the war, Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* and R. H. Mottram’s *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* (both 1924-6). American materials include Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and the war novels of Dos Passos, Faulkner (*Soldier’s Pay*), and e. e. cummings (*The Enormous Room*).
Writings by women relating to the war include (among many other texts) Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*, May Sinclair’s *The Tree of Heaven*, Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, Rose Macaulay’s *Non-combatants and Others*, Willa Cather’s *One of Ours*, and Stein’s *Wars I have Seen*. The war records of nurses are also worth considering: see e.g. Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone* (1929) and Helen Zenna Smith’s *Not So Quiet* (1930); and the collection edited by Margaret Higonnet, *Nurses at the Front: Writing the Wounds of the Great War* (2001) [includes Borden and others].


Secondary reading from the general list: Ann Douglas (chs. 4-5) and Kern are both very good; as, (with more reservations) are Gilbert & Gubar. Also (including background & theory):


Agnes Cardinal, Jane Goldman & Judith Hattaway, eds., *Women’s Writing of the First World War*  
Helen M. Cooper et al, eds., *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation* (1989)  

Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975)  
Margaret Higonnet, ed., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (1987)  
Samuel Hynes, *War Imagined The First World War In English Culture* (1991)  


**Vitalism and the body**


Secondary reading from general list: Kern (see also his *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns* [1992]); Tichi; Albright. Also:

Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism* (1996) [good chs. on Williams and Lawrence]  
Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks: 1800/1900* (1990)  [on technologies/flows of information]

**Bergson, Time, Taylorism**

Primary: Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1907); Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (1927)

Secondary Reading from general list: Kern, Levenson, Butler, Armstrong (ch.2). Also:


Martha Banta, *Ta yo red Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford* (1993) - this is on the 'opposition', as it were -- Taylorism and its time-philosophy.


**Distraction, Technology and the City**

Primary: *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby & Mike Featherstone (1997); Henry Adams, 'The Virgin and the Dynamo' (1905); writings of Benjamin covered below.


Rachel Bowlby, 'Walking, Women and Writing: Virginia Woolf as *flaneuse*', in *Still Crazy After All these Years* (1992) [also in New Feminist Discourses, ed. Isobel Armstrong (1992)]


Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000)

**Modemism and Mass Culture (Adorno and others)**


Secondary: from general list: Huyssen vs. North, *1922* (especially), Danius (ch.1), Berman, Poggioli, Williams. Also:


Franco Moretti, *Signs taken for Wonders* (1983) [see Eliot essay]


**Krakauer and Benjamin**

Primary: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (1973) and *One-Way Street* (1978);


Secondary: the Bibliography on Benjamin is very large (he is used everywhere in cultural & film studies), and I have not attempted to reproduce it; there is much less on Kracauer:

Theodor Adorno, ‘Letters to Walter Benjamin’, in his *Aesthetics and Politics* (1977), 110-33 [important critique of Benjamin at the time of the ‘Artwork’ essay, stressing need to distinguish between different technologies of production, reproduction and distribution]


---------, ‘“With Skin and Hair”: Kracauer’s Theory of Film, Marseilles 1940’, *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993), 437-69.


Peter Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (1993) [on Kracauer]

**Modernism and Film** (in addition to the above)


**On Nathanael West and mass culture/cinema**


Jonathan Veitch, *American Superrealism: Nathanael West and the Politics of Representation in the 1930s* (1997) [also very useful]

**Primitivism**

Secondary reading from general list: Doyle, North (both books), Armstrong. Also:


**Dream**

**Race and the Harlem Renaissance**
From general list: Baker, Douglas. Also:

And on Larsen (there are many other articles locatable via the MLA) see also:

**Gender and Sexuality in Modernism**
From general list: Benstock, DeKoven, Scott, Gilbert and Gubar, Nicholls and Armstrong. Also:

On Barnes specifically: Tyrus Miller from the general list; and

**The Politics of Modernism**

**Theories of the Avant-Garde**

**Marxism and Modernism**
Theodor Adorno, from letter to Walter Benjamin (1936) and from ‘On the Fetish character in Music and the Regression of Listening’ (1938), in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, pp. 577-84.
Karl Marx, from letter to Ruge, September 1843, in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, pp. 5-6.
Leon Trotsky, from *Literature and Revolution* (1923), in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, pp. 229-32; 584-90.

**Modernism and Ethics**
George Orwell, from ‘Inside the Whale’ (1933), in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, pp.605-10.

**Modernism and Empire**
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).
Raymond Williams, ‘When Was Modernism?’, in *The Politics of Modernism*, pp. 31-5.