

Literature and Arts C-56

Putting Modernism Together

Fall 2007, TTh 12-1 + a weekly section

Harvard Hall, Room 201

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1. Course Description

How do you put together the literature, music, and painting of an age? Do they fit together like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, or like the limbs and organs of a body?—or do they remain isolated from one another, resisting integration? In the Modernist age (which, for our purposes, begins with the Franco-Prussian War, climaxes with the Great War, and ends with a third catastrophe, the Great Depression), there was a special belligerence to these questions. It was an age that had many different models of itself: to the Cubists it looked like a vast jigsaw puzzle, to the Expressionists it looked like a convulsive body, to the Dadaists it looked a heap of junk following an explosion. We will try to sort out these various models by sorting out the aesthetic and cultural assumptions that made them attractive.

Our main strategy for investigating ways of comparing the arts will be to study simultaneous developments during certain **key years**: what does it mean that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) appeared at the same time as Claude Debussy's *Nocturnes*, beyond the fact that the word "Impressionist" has been used to describe each? Why did the composer Arnold Schoenberg and the painter Vassily Kandinsky feel such striking artistic kinship around 1912? We will also connect these key years by tracing the evolution of artistic movements. We will give roughly equal attention to literature, music, and painting; the course doesn't assume that you have a technical background in any of those media, but it does presuppose that you have a certain curiosity about technique. *How* artists achieved their peculiar effects will always be the object of our investigations, but all such technical questions finally involve the entire intellectual history of the age. I assume that (for example) Impressionist painting and the idea that reality consists of impressions are wound together inextricably.

During the lectures I will develop some of the large themes of Modernism, and scrutinize certain telling details of particular novels, paintings, and musical compositions as reflexes of these large themes. Two of these large themes will be: (1) Modernism as a testing of the limits of art itself—how far can art go toward expressiveness? how far toward inexpressiveness? how far toward representation? how far toward abstraction? (2) Modernism as a destabilization of artistic categories, calling into question the difference between high art and popular art, between evocations of the past and extrapolations of the future.

2. Lecture Schedule

Sept 18

1. INTRODUCTION I

Introduction. Modernism defined historically as the art of 1872-1927, ahistorically as the testing of the limits of aesthetic construction. Methods for

studying painting—Panofsky’s separation of iconography (identifying the subject of a painting) and iconology (understanding the presentation of the subject as the reflex of a culture); Modernist painting as building upon / spoofing / usurping / erasing past painting.

Sept 20 2. INTRODUCTION II

Methods for studying literature: recent literature as building upon / spoofing / usurping / erasing past literature. Methods for studying music. Musical semantics: the history of codes (Byrd’s woeful Orpheus; Monteverdi’s *stile concitato*). Ways of manipulating kinesthesia (heartbeat, breathing) by music. Structuralist binaries encoded in music (Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*): how music thinks.

Sept 25 3. INTRODUCTION III

More methods for studying music. Tonality and cadence; accurate punctuation of musical sentences. Deviant harmonic systems as a principle for establishing areas of special meaning-intensity; symmetrical divisions of the octave, including (1) the tritone, (2) the augmented triad, (3) the diminished seventh, (4) the whole-tone scale, and (5) the chromatic scale.

The Year 1872

Sept 27 4. NIETZSCHE

Read Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872)—126 pages.

Today’s themes: ancient Greece as the locus of modern Europe’s dreams: Winckelmann on the cheerful and the general. The emancipation of Schopenhauer’s Will. The rhythm of dreams and dreamless sleep governing Nietzsche’s book. Reverse sun-spots.

Oct 2 5. WAGNER

Read Nietzsche: “On Truth and Falsehood in the Extramoral Sense” (1873)—10 pages.

Listen to Wagner: Prelude and Love-Death from *Tristan und Isolde* (1865).

Today’s themes: Nietzsche’s anti-Platonism: the death of forms, the death of god. The sadistic origin of Christian morals. Changes in the sort of music thought appropriate for Greek tragedy, from Mendelssohn’s *Antigone* on. Nietzsche’s debt to Wagner’s essay on Beethoven. Nietzsche’s *Manfred-Meditation*.

Oct 4 6. PATER

Read Pater: *The Renaissance* (1873): “Luca della Robbia,” “The School of Giorgione,” “Winckelmann,” “Conclusion”—57 pages.

Today’s themes: Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater—the shift from criticism as mineral assaying (the touchstone) to criticism as a measure of intensity of

electrical fields. Nietzsche and Pater. Winckelmann and Pater: the homosexual Greece. The explicit vs. the veiled—approaching the aesthetic of Symbolism.

Oct 9 7. IMPRESSIONISM

Look at Impressionist paintings on website.

Today's themes: The optical science of Chevreul. The public's response to the first Impressionist exhibition. Painting retinal instead of mental images: the blind man given sight. Dispensing with old conventions (outline, black shadows) while creating new ones. Renoir's concept of Irregularism in light of Nietzsche's philosophy.

The Year 1899

Oct 11 8. CONRAD

Read Conrad: *Heart of Darkness* (1899)—93 pages.

Today's themes: changing the venue of experience itself—the shift from Conrad's Congo diary to the novel. Phrenology and the role of the skull—George Eliot's model of the realistic novel vs. Conrad's. Conrad's attraction to and fear of Symbolism—the hatred of the explicit. The attack on the steamship and the attack on the noun—the horror, the horror.

Oct 16 9. DEBUSSY

Listen to Debussy: *Nocturnes* (1900-1).

Today's themes: Debussy's aesthetic as expressed in *Monsieur Croche Antidilettante*—listen to the wind. Destabilizing tonality with ninth-chords. Ezra Pound on Debussy's eye music: strategies for increasing music's powers of the picturesque. Interpreting *Nocturnes* with and without Debussy's hints at a program. ***First paper due at time of section meeting.***

The Year 1913

Oct 18 10. SCHOENBERG

Listen to Schoenberg: *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912); and Schoenberg / Pappenheim: *Erwartung* (Expectation, 1909).

Today's themes: the emancipation of dissonance and the air from another planet: Schoenberg's second string quartet. *Erwartung's* harmonic language: chords with major sevenths; the concept of chromatic saturation as a replacement for consonance. Disruptions of continuity. Pappenheim and the "Anna O." of Freud's and Breuer's case history. Adorno and the electroencephalogram as the ideal artistic act. The decline of Expressionism into self-parody: *Gemeinheit* (from *Pierrot*) and trephination. Pierrots in Laforgue and Giraud. Bakhtin on the carnivalesque; is *Pierrot Lunaire* positive or negative parody?

Oct 23 11. KAFKA

Kafka: *The Judgment* (1912), *The Metamorphosis* (1912), *In the Penal Colony* (1914), *An Imperial Message* (1917)—92 pages.

Today's themes: the theatre of unbeing. Stories in which the characters aren't people. Learning how to read an upside-down fiction: beetle as angel. Gnosticism. Transmission difficulties between spirit and matter.

Oct 25 12. EXPRESSIONISM

Read Kandinsky: *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911)—80 pages; and Kokoscha, *Murderer*, *Hope of Women* (1907).

Look at paintings by Kandinsky, Heckel, Kirchner, and Grosz on the website.

Today's themes: early Expressionism—Edvard Munch, *Die Brücke*, *Der blaue Reiter*. Jack the Ripper as a figure of power. Woodcuts and other gashes. Strategies for dematerialization in art. Kandinsky on the unity of all the artistic media.

Oct 30 13. CUBISM

Harrison, Frascina, and Perry: *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction*, chapter 2 (Frascina on Cubism—93 pages)—be sure to study the pictures carefully.

Today's themes: Picasso and Braque as mountaineers. Creating depth and volume: classical perspective vs. simulations of uncrumpled paper. Apollinaire's notions of Cubism. Analytic vs. synthetic Cubism. Cubism as cerebral (a play with signifiers) vs. Cubism as intuitive (*Les demoiselles d'Avignon*). Apollinaire's calligrams.

Nov 1 14. IMAGISM

Read Pound: "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1913)—6 pages; Sept. 1914 Vorticism article—11 pages; *Lustra*. T. E. Hulme: "Romanticism and Classicism" (1913)—27 pages.

Today's themes: poetry as a stripping down to a pictorial or tactile minimum. A poem as rebus or picture-pun. Well-defined poetic images vs. skeins of silk and plates of spaghetti. Imagism and Vorticism: Alvin Coburn's vortoscope and the taking of Picassos from nature.

Nov 6 15. THE RITE OF SPRING

Listen to Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

Today's themes: the première—riot as the proper response to Modernism. Nijinsky's choreography: the hunched-in as opposed to the turned-out; Dalcrozean arithmetic. Stravinsky's hard bits of rhythm. Roerich's archeology of pagan Russia. T. S. Eliot on Stravinsky's convergence of the archaic and the up-to-date. The odd look of the Joffrey reconstruction of the ballet.

Nov 8 16. **Midterm examination.**

Nov 13 17. MANN

Read Mann: *Death in Venice* (1912)–64 pages.

Today's themes: Nietzsche and Mann—how the loss of relation between Apollo and Dionysus destroys. Tadzio as a caricature of Apollo, the red man as a caricature of Dionysus. The implied music of Mann's novel; Aschenbach and Mahler. Aschenbach and Faust–Schoenberg as a protagonist of a Mann novel.

The Year 1919

Nov 15 18. NEOCLASSICISM

Listen to Stravinsky: *Pulcinella* (1919).

Read T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919)–8 pages; "Gerontion" (1919)–3 pages.

Today's themes: mediocre artists borrow, great artists steal. Theft: revivifying the past vs. announcing its extinction. The art of defamiliarization: Shklovsky and Proust. Adumbrations of Neoclassicism in Tchaikovsky. Strategies for asserting artistic individuality in the act of renouncing it: comparing Stravinsky with Pergolesi and Gallo. Eliot: identifying oneself with the mind of Europe. Gerontion: the senescence of the present, the enfeebling of the past.

Nov 20 19. DADA

Read Richard Huelsenbeck: *Dada Almanac* (1920): articles by Tristan Tzara (including "Dada Manifesto"), Huelsenbeck (including "What did Expressionism Want?") and "Partens"—70 pages.

Listen to Duchamp, *Erratum musical*.

Look at Dada pictures.

Today's themes: the Great War and the great war on art itself. Hugo Ball and the Dada cabaret. Dada visual motifs: biomorph (Ernst, Arp) and garbage (Schwitters). Dada literature: make a poem by the Tzara recipe and commit an act of literary criticism upon it. Dada music: Duchamp and Schwitters. Dada as a form of realism, sometimes oddly rigorous.

Nov 22 **Thanksgiving**

The Year 1927

Nov 27 20. OEDIPUS REX

Listen to Stravinsky / Cocteau: *Oedipus Rex* (1927).

Today's themes: decadent Neoclassicism: decadence as the use of functional elements as non-functional ornaments. Nietzsche's Dionysus gone gaga. The fracturing of the stage into mini-stages; Greek tragedy emasculated or turned into cabaret. Leonard Bernstein on *Oedipus Rex*: Handel meets hoochie-koochie.

The liberation of prosody from language. Adaptation of the tragic ritornello from Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762).

Nov 29 21. SURREALISM

Look at Surrealist paintings on the website.

Read André Breton: "Discourse on the Paucity of Reality"—11 pages.

Today's themes: games with disorientation and false space--why Surrealist paintings, unlike Dada ones, have horizon lines. Breton's "Surrealist Manifesto": French psychic automatism. Simulations of mental disease. Magritte's *The Conquerors* (1925) and acephalism. ***Second paper due at time of section meeting.***

Dec 4 22. LAWRENCE

Read D. H. Lawrence: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1927)—338 pages.

Today's themes: Lawrence's notion of the unconscious, hostile to Freud's. Lawrence's biophysics—his subject is not diamond or charcoal but carbon. Guide to proper sexual behavior. Obscenity in theory and practice.

Dec 6 23. MECHANICAL MEN

Look at Lawrence's paintings and Mark Gertler's *The Merry-Go-Round* on the website.

Listen to Antheil: *Ballet Mécanique* (1926).

Today's themes: Clifford Chatterley and H. G. Wells: the extrapolations of science fiction into ever scarier futures. Lawrence's robots: the poems "Seabathers" and "The Triumph of the Machine." Duncan Forbes and Lawrence's attitudes toward modern art. Models of health and disease as reflected in the human and animal figures in Lawrence's paintings. Antheil and Léger: the teasing-out of the mechanical aspects of the human body. Antheil's wish to send a message to Mars—the last strident dream of Modernist assertion.

Dec 11 Dadaist happenings, to be performed by groups of students from our class.

Dec 13 Surrealist dreams, to be performed by groups of students from our class.

Jan 7 ***Final papers due***

3. Required Reading, Listening, and Looking

A. **Books and Short Essays** (all in English or English translation; all in print; short pieces available in the Sourcebook)

books to be purchased at the Coop:

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*
 Harrison, Charles, et al. *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction*
 Kandinsky, Vassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*
 Kafka, *The Metamorphosis, In the Penal Colony, and Other Stories*
 Lawrence, D. H. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*
 Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice*
 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*
 Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance*
 Pound, Ezra. *Personae*

in Sourcebook available at the Harvard Coop:

Breton, André. "Discourse on the Paucity of Reality"
 Eliot, T. S. "Gerontion"
 ----- "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
 Huelsenbeck, Richard. *The Dada Almanac*
 Hulme, T. E. "Romanticism and Classicism"
 Kokoschka, Oskar. *Murderer, Hope of Women*
 Nietzsche, Friedrich W. "On Truth and Falsehood in the Extramoral Sense"
 Pound, Ezra. "Vorticism"

Note: This makes about 99 pages of reading per week, not taking into account the listening and the looking. Because the meeting on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has the heaviest reading, students should prepare accordingly.

B. Music (to be placed on reserve and on the website)

Antheil, George. *Ballet Mécanique*
 Debussy, Claude. *Nocturnes*
 Duchamp, Marcel. *Erratum musical*
 Schoenberg, Arnold. *Erwartung*
 ----- *Pierrot Lunaire*
 Stravinsky, Igor. *Pulcinella*
 ----- *Oedipus Rex*
 ----- *The Rite of Spring*
 Wagner, Richard. *Prelude and Love-Death from Tristan und Isolde*

C. Slides (organized by week on the class website)

D. Reference Works on Modernism (to be placed on reserve)

Butler, Christopher. *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916*
 Ellmann, Richard, and Charles Feidelson, Jr., eds., *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*
 Everdell, William R. *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origin of Twentieth-Century Thought*

Kolocotroni, Vassiliki, et al., eds., *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*
Levenson, Michael. *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908-22*

Watkins, Glenn. *Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century*.

4. Course Requirements

Course work will consist of a midterm and a final examination, plus two short papers (four pages each) and a term paper (ten to twelve pages). These papers will be graded according to the usual virtues of good organization (clear statement of a properly delimited thesis plus a logical marshaling of supporting evidence), and according to the force and grace of your prose. Those who enjoy creative writing and acting may substitute a playwriting exercise (see the syllabus for the two final meetings above) for the second short paper, pending approval of the project by the course's central administration; if this appeals to you, please tell me so. I will supply a list of suggested paper topics; you shouldn't regard yourself as limited to these topics, and in any case you should first discuss your topic with your section leader. The slides will be available on the Internet, and you will be provided with means to listen to the musical selections; you should attend to them carefully, because they are overwhelmingly pleasurable and because you will be tested on them.

Final grades will be computed as follows: 10% for each of the two short papers (remember, the acting/writing exercise at the end of the course can replace the second paper), 20% for the term paper, 20% for section participation, 15% for the midterm, and 25% for the final.

During my office hours I prefer company to solitude, and I hope that, if you like, you will come to talk with me, for any reason, or for no reason at all.