Modernist Practices and the Politics of Modernism
COLT 526: Topics in Modern Literature, Class #22077R
Spring 2008, Wednesdays, 3:30-6:30, THH 110

The aims of this course are three-fold: to examine the grand narrative of modernism by focusing on the literary works of such modernist figures as Apollinaire, T.S. Elliot, Osip Mandelstam, Ezra Pound, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gertrude Stein, and many others, and scrutinize their vision of tradition and the rupture with the past. The course will also strive to provide a more dissonant view of Western modernism and the dominant discourses of modernity by offering a comparative and more global [international] perspective that includes the literary and artistic production of Latin-American and Caribbean writers, Meiji modernizers, and other “minor” authors and artists from other parts of the world.

To map literary modernism and rewrite from below a history of modernity is also to reconsider the impact of “new media” like photography and film on modern art and literature. We will be attentive to the complex relation between new technologies and modernist culture, mass media and industrial society, avant-garde formations and modernisms. We will also take into account the historical conditions for the emergence of these modern movements (like the impact of World War I on French or Anglo-American modernism), in order to assess the politics of modernism, what Raymond Williams described as its “comfortable integration into the new international capitalism.”

Readings will include poetry, essays, manifestos, and theoretical texts on art, cinema, and literature from a variety of sources and national traditions. Participants in the seminar are encouraged to develop individualized topics for their final paper congruent with theoretical issues and debates relevant to their interest and field of study.

A note on the format of the course. The seminar will be taught as a pro-seminar, team-taught with faculty members in Comparative Literature, East Asian Languages & Cultures, English, French & Italian, German, Slavic Languages & Literatures, and Spanish & Portuguese.

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