

French 361/Comp Lit 362

Spring 2012

Paris Modernisms

Course: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 2:30 to 3:20, Rice 100B
 French Section: Monday 3:30 to 4:20, Rice 100B
 Professor: Libby Murphy (Libby.Murphy@oberlin.edu)
 Office Hours: Wednesday 11:00 to 12:00, 3:30 to 4:30, and by appointment
 Rice 10 (basement), 775-5402

“[On] or about December, 1910, human character changed.” –Virginia Woolf

“Paris was where the 20th century was.”
 –Gertrude Stein

“Modernism is not a meaningful category of literary history or art history. It’s a feather bed for critics and professors [...]”
 –Roger Shattuck

Course Description and Objectives

In this course we will consider a wide variety of literary and artistic texts from the early 20th century (roughly 1900-1930) that were produced in and/or were directly influenced by the city of Paris. Our primary goal will be to approach these texts on their and our own terms—as intellectually curious and engaged readers/listeners/viewers—and to develop our own opinions, critical responses, and reflections on these texts and their significance for us today.

Along the way, we will ask ourselves certain questions about art, literature, society, and the individual that are as relevant for us today as they were for artists, writers, and thinkers working in the early twentieth century. Indeed, such questions assume fresh urgency in an age of drastic budget cuts, pragmatic thinking, multi-tasking, and exponentially expanding access to information through electronic media. Some of the questions we will ask in this course are: How can painting, poetry, ballet, architecture, or fashion create “images of dissent, propaganda, and political coercion?” How do art, music, or poetry “[define] the world of pleasure, of sensuous communion with worldly delights?” How have the arts sought to “bring about Utopia” or recreate “religious exaltation”? Conversely, in what ways and by what means do works of art and literature register “Dystopia” and “despair”? How have the arts engaged with the shock of the new, the fast-paced, the irrational, or the unconscious? In what ways do avant-garde or experimental works deal with or draw upon traditions inherited from the past? What was the status of “art” in the early 20th century? What “changes were forced on art by the example and pressure of mass media”?¹ How and why does art matter for us today?

A secondary objective of this course will be to put pressure on the concept of Modernism itself by approaching modernisms in the plural. We will consider many of the dominant themes often associated with Modernism and the avant-garde, such as the nature of identity and subjectivity in the modern world; the position of the individual with respect to history, myth, belief, the city, and society; the construction and destruction of gender and sexuality as stable conceptual

¹ Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

categories; the relationship between literary and artistic technique and contemporary consciousness.²

As we consider such themes, we will also ask ourselves what kind of critical and historical stance we are taking when we approach Paris modernisms? Should we conceive of Modernism as a universal category? An international one? A national or local one? A historical one? A trans-historical one? A gendered one? What are the promises and pitfalls inherent in privileging Modernism as a way of approaching the “Modernity” of the early 20th century? Are there other responses to modernity that we fail to recognize if we use “Modernism” as our lens onto this period? Critic Rita Felski suggests that our focus on the new, the experimental, the ambitious, the iconoclastic, and on products of elite, metropolitan culture, might lead us to fetishize (my word, not hers) certain texts while completely ignoring others. “There is a great deal of writing on modernity and the city,” Felski points out, “but much less on modernity and the suburb, much on the avant-garde, but much less on twentieth-century realism and melodrama, much on nihilism and the absurd but much less on modern forms of religion and spirituality.”³ This is a point that we should keep in mind as we explore many different expressions of (Paris) Modernism(s).

Readings

All readings and films will be made available through Blackboard or through the reserve desk at Mudd. If there are texts to be ordered for the second half of the semester, you will have the option of buying them yourself on-line or getting them through the College bookstore.

Departmental Credit

Paris Modernisms counts towards both the Comparative Literature and French majors. Students taking the course for FREN credit must do the readings and written work in French.

Evaluation, Course Requirements, and Due Dates:

Daily **attendance**, two in-class **presentations** (leading discussion), and active **participation** in both the course and the “Modernism Mash-Up”: 25%

“Modernism Mash-Up” includes three meetings in the course of the semester and one 10-minute presentation in a special session to be held Wednesday, May 9 from 6-8 pm with a group of students from two modernism-related classes: HISP 347 (“Luis Buñel”, taught by Professor Sebastiaan Faber) and ENG/COMPLIT/FREN 367 (“The French Joyce”, taught by Professor Jed Deppman). We will help you form your groups and get organized.

5 **written reactions/responses** (1-2 pages): 25%

- 1 short “think-piece” on why you are taking this course and what you hope to get out of it (beginning of course: due Friday, February 10)
- 1 short “think-piece” synthesizing your understanding of Modernism(s) gained from your experience of the course and from the “Modernism Mash-Up” (end of course: due May 11)

² Steven Matthews, *Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

- 2 short reactions to a text or texts encountered during the first half of the semester (pick your own due dates)
- 1 short reaction to a text or texts encountered during the second half of the semester (pick your own due date)

***3 Papers** (4-6 pages): 50%

1 due Friday, March 9 (may be a development/expansion of a reaction paper) (15%)

2 due Friday, April 20 (may be a development/expansion of a reaction paper) (15%)

3 due Weds., May 16 (may be a development/expansion of a reaction paper) (20%)

**Upon consultation with the instructor, students may elect to do one 4-6 page paper (15%) and one 8-12 page research paper (35%) instead of three 4-6 page papers. Students choosing this option must declare their intentions by mid-term (March 23) and set up a writing schedule with the instructor (proposal, bibliography, first draft. Final version due May 16)

This course and all assignments are covered by the **Oberlin College Honor Code**. I encourage you to work collaboratively with your classmates and to seek feedback and support from writing tutors, librarians, classmates, and friends. I ask that you clearly state on each assignment you turn in precisely what kind of collaboration, help, feedback, or support you received, from whom, and in what form. If another person marks up a draft of one of your pieces of writing, you must turn in a copy of that draft with your final version. If you are inspired by an idea a critic, author, or student has expressed in writing or orally, credit that written source or that student in a footnote, including complete bibliographical information, where appropriate. If you have questions about what constitute appropriate forms of support for this course, please come talk to me **before** you turn in your written work. (<http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/2011-2012/11-Policies-Honor.pdf>)

The college will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should notify the **Office of Disability Services** located in Peters G-27/G-28 and their instructor of any disability related needs.

Course Schedule

The goals and objectives of this course and the course requirements will not change. Adjustments may be made to the course schedule, however, depending upon student interests. The following rough guideline will give you an idea of the topics I have imagined for the course. These topics may change after I read your short **“think-pieces” due Friday, February 10**, and after we take stock of our experiences at **mid-term**. The most up-to-date list of readings and course schedule will be found in Blackboard. Please check the site and your email several times per week, if not every day.

Introductions and Overviews

- 2/6 Introduction to course
 2/8 In-class Screening: *Paris, The Luminous Years: Towards the Making of the Modern*
 2/10 Discussion of Film
 Due today: 1-2 page **think-piece** that addresses one or all of the following questions:
 Why are you taking this course? How does it fit into your studies at Oberlin?
 What do you hope to get out of this course? What “intellectual itch” do you hope to “scratch”?

“After us the Savage God.” Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu roi* (1896)

- 2/13 Read and come prepared to discuss
 Alfred Jarry, *Ubu roi, drame en cinq actes en prose* Acts I and II [BB]
 2/15 *Ubu roi*, Acts III, IV, and V
 2/17 **Visit to the Allen Memorial Art Museum** (full instructions to be sent by email)
 2/20 Mash up of the following articles: Each group of 3 students will present the main points of one of the following articles:
- Neil Blackadder, “Down with Ligné Chamber Pot!”: Playing with the Taboo, Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*” in *Performing Opposition: Modern Theater and the Scandalized Audience* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003), pp. 41-68).
 - Thomas Postlewait, "Cultural Histories: The Case of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Theater Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 60-85.
 - Christopher Innes, "Dreams, Archetypes and the Irrational," in *Avant Garde Theater (1892-1992)* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 19-35.
 - Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, "Reconstruire le réel ou suggérer l'indicible," in *Le Théâtre en France du Moyen Age à nos jours*, dir. Jacqueline de Jomaron (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992), pp. 705-730.

Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*: “The Most Important Painting of the 20th Century”?

- 2/22 Discussion of David Cottington, *Cubism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 6-31.
 2/24 Class canceled
 2/27 Watch for today and come to class prepared to discuss (using questions prepared by Abby and Emily). Picasso, *Les Femmes d’Alger (1907)* BBCW Documentary “Les Femmes d’Alger” from series, Private Life of a Masterpiece: Ten Great Works of Art Exposed. 50 minutes. Streaming in OBIS (full details and viewing/discussion notes will be available in BB).
 Suggested secondary readings:

- Patricia Leighton, “Colonialism, l’art nègre, and Les Demoiselles d’Avignon,” in *Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, ed. Christopher Green (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 77-103). [BB]
- Carol Duncan, “The MoMA’s Hot Mamas,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), pp. 171-178. [BB]

2/27 **French Section:** *L’Analyse d’une peinture (suite...) Robert Delaunay (vidéo d’Art d’art)*

“The Futurist Moment”: Marinetti, Apollinaire, Cendrars

- 2/29 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” [BB] translation of “Le Futurisme” in *Le Figaro*, 20 février 1909 [BB] in *Let’s Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings*, R. W. Flint, ed., R. W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli, trans. Preface by Marjorie Perloff (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Classics, 1991), pp. 47-52 and Preface [BB]
 Petra, Simon: Discussion of Marinetti
 Liv: Brief exposé on Russian Futurism
- 3/2 Guillaume Apollinaire, “Zone,” in *Alcools*, Trans. Anne Hyde Greet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 2-13 [BB]
- 3/5 Blaise Cendrars/Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (1913) [BB]
- 3/5 **French Section:** *Guillaume Apollinaire, “Lettre-Océan” in Calligrammes, Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916) Trans. Anne Hyde Greet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 58-65 and 380-382 [BB]*

“Astonish me!” Diaghilev, Stravinsky, Nijinsky and *Le Sacre du printemps* (1913)

- 3/7 Watch for today and come to class prepared to discuss: “Documentary on the *Ballets russes* and interview with Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer” [DVD, Reserve]
- 3/9 Watch for today and come to class prepared to discuss: *Le Sacre du printemps* [DVD, Reserve]
 Discussion led by Liam and Kanti
- 3/12 Discussion
- 3/12 **French Section:** *Parade (Cocteau, Satie, Picasso, Massine): une dizaine de pages en français à lire [BB]*

World War I: “Kubism”, Dada, and the Discovery of America

- 3/14 Kenneth E. Silver, “In the nightmare through which we are passing,” and “Comme il faut” in *Esprit de corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 3-27 and pp. 74-107.
 Discussion led by Angelica and Petra
- 3/16 Discussion
- 3/19 Tristan Tzara, “La Première aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine,” and “Manifeste Dada, 1918” [BB] Trans. Barbara Wright as “Monsieur Antipyrine’s Manifesto” and “Dada Manifesto 1918” [BB]
 Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), “Introduction”, “The Dada Actor and Performance Theory,” and “Theater at the Dada Gallery” (pp. xiii-xviii, 57-73, 76-85)
- 3/21 Charlie Chaplin, “The Floorwalker” (YouTube)

Richard Abel, "American Film and the French Literary Avant-Garde (1914-1924)", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 17 No. 1 (Winter, 1976), pp. 84-109. [BB]

Discussion/Presentation: Joyce and Nicole

3/23 Discussion

March 24-April 1 Spring Break

Bringing the Jazz Age to Paris

4/2 Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996): Introduction, "Freedom Overseas: African American Soldiers Fight The Great War", "Bringing the Jazz Age to Paris", "The Golden Age of African American Literature in Paris: The Romance of Cafés and Cheap Hotels"

Discussion led by Katherine

4/4 Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930* (University Park, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), [BB] Mash up of the following chapters: Half of the class will be prepared to present and discuss the main points of each of the following chapters:

- "Bamboula in the Temple of August Perret: The Call to Order", pp. 83-110)
- "Jamming on the *rue Fontaine*: Surrealism", pp. 111-136

Discussion led by Liam and Abby

4/6 Josephine Baker, clips from *La Revue des revues*, including the "banana dance" (YouTube, 1928) [BB]

Bonus documentary on Josephine Baker on DVD (Mudd) *Siren of the Tropics*
Jon Kear, "Venus noir: Josephine Baker and the Parisian Music-Hall", pp. 46-70, in *Parisian Fields*, Michael Sheringham, ed.

Discussion led by Nicole and Vel

Optional Secondary reading:

Terri Francis, "The Audacious Josephine Baker: Stardom, Cinema, and Paris," in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, Edited by Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 238-259.

"Nothing More Than A Rigid Straight Line" Post-War Women's Fashion and *La Femme Moderne*

4/9 Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). [BB and Ebrary]
Introduction and "Women are cutting their hair as a sign of sterility"

Discussion led by Liv and Stephanie

Suggested secondary readings:

Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*: Chapter 12: "Haute Couture in the 20th Century" (pp. 245-285).

Mary E. Davis, *Clasic Chic: Music, Fashion, and Modernism*: "Coco Chanel" (pp. 158-201) see also Elsa Schiaparelli

Bridget Elliott, "Deconsecrating Modernism: Allegories of Regeneration in Brooks and Picasso," in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 35-51.

4/11 Colette, *La Fin de Chéri* (1926) (read first 1/3)

- 4/13 Colette, *La Fin de Chéri* (1926) [French orders placed with Bookstore: English translation should be ordered through Amazon) (second 1/3)
- 4/16 Colette, *La Fin de Chéri* (1926) (end)

“Machines for Living in”: Architecture, Art Deco, Urban Planning

- 4/18 Tag Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).
Introduction: "Illusory Cities" (pp. 1-22)
Chapter 5 "Cars and Jars: *L'Esprit nouveau* and a geometry of the city" (pp. 114-145)
Conclusion (pp. 146-158)
- 4/20 Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (1923), selected chapters
Discussion led by Katherine and Joyce
- 4/23 Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (1925), selected chapters
Discussion led by Kanti and Vel
- 4/25 Discussion

“La Révolution surréaliste”

- 4/27 André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924), excerpts.
- 4/30 Discussion
- 5/2 André Breton, *Nadja* (1928) (French ordered from Bookstore; English version should be purchased at Amazon or read on Reserve in Mudd)
Discussion led by Maddie and Emily
- 5/4 André Breton, *Nadja*

Conclusions, Modernism Mash-Up, Discussion

- 5/7 Discussion
- 5/9 All students attend and present at **“Modernism Mash-Up”, 6-8 pm.** (Venue TBA)
2:30-3:20 NO CLASS TODAY
- 5/11 Conclusions, Discussion