

HL4020: Advanced Studies in Modernist Literature
Thursdays, 2:30pm – 5:20pm

Assistant Professor Zhao F. Ng
zhaofeng.ng@ntu.edu.sg

Description

Modernism, modernity, the modern—these are primary terms in the characterisation of the literature, art, and culture of the twentieth century. We are familiar with their various articulations in previous courses, and will extend our understanding of their aims, achievements, and failures in re-envisioning the world after the turn of the century, in light of numerous breakthroughs in the sociocultural landscape—from technological developments in photography and engineering, to the irruptions of war, violence, and revolutionary politics, various new architectural fantasies of the city, the stimulus of drugs, fashion and self-fashioning, and the persistence and transformations of faith.

In this course, we will pay particular attention to the comparative dimension of the arts of the period. The impact of the new cultures of visibility, embodiment, sex, city life, transgression, trauma, and hope will be examined with an intermedial attention to literature's relationship with photography, collage, architecture, sculpture, painting, design, fashion, and faith. As we navigate our way through the upheavals of the twentieth century, we will develop our awareness of the persistence, disappearance, and/or transformations of the modernist project in our contemporary world after the close of the twentieth century.

Books you may wish to purchase

Most of the texts on your reading list are available online; others will be made available to you in/before class. You should, however, get your hands on a copy of the following:

André Breton, *Nadja*. Trans. Richard Howard. Penguin Classics.
Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*. Trans. Simon Watson-Taylor. Exact Change.
Aldous Huxley. *The Doors of Perception*. Vintage.
Djuna Barnes. *Nightwood*. Faber.

Assessment

Participation, Preparation, and Presentations	15%
Field Report	10%
Image Essay	25%
Comparative Essay	35%
Summative Reflection Exercise	15%

Participation, Preparation and Presentations (15%)

Over the semester, students are evaluated on their commitment to the course. This includes a group presentation on an original manifesto in the spirit of the modernist manifesto (Week 4).

Modernism Today Field Report (10%)

Identify a site, object, or event, in Singapore that corresponds with the ongoing modernist project (whether it is architecture, visual art, performance, etc.). Provide a thick description of

this chosen phenomenon and link it to a major theme in our common course readings. (Week 10)

Image Essay (25%)

Practice your critical, intermedial skills. Integrate visual criticism into a short literary analysis. We will focus on how a different object requires a different balance and different sequencing of description, context, and analysis. (Week 7)

Comparative Essay (35%)

For your major essay, define your own topic in consultation with one another and myself. You are required to work with at least two objects from different media traditions in order to practice comparative analytic strategies. (Week 12)

Summative Reflection Exercise (15%)

For this final exercise, we devise our own questions on how to extend our work beyond the course. Students process and synthesize the materials we've collectively read and define goals for how to extend these ideas beyond the semester. (Week 13)

Penalties for Late Work

If your essay is late, it will be marked down by one third of a letter grade for each day that it is overdue (i.e. a paper that would have received an A will receive a A-).

Academic Integrity

Generative AI is not permitted for this course. This includes (but is not limited to) Chat GPT, Google Bard, and editing software such as Grammarly and Quillbot. The use of any AI tools will result in a significant grade deduction (including a potential fail grade or zero for the assignment). A fail grade will be given in the case of plagiarised work.

Seminar Schedule

- Wk 1 *Blast to the Future: Dynamo and Dynamite*
15/8 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Manifesto of Futurism* (1909). In *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey et al.
Mina Loy. "Aphorisms on Futurism" (1914). In *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996).
- Wk 2 *Blasting and Bombadiring: More Dynamite*
22/8 Wyndham Lewis, ed. "Manifesto—I," "Manifesto—II." *Blast I* (1914).
Mina Loy. "Feminist Manifesto" (1914). In *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996).
- Wk 3 *After the Blast: Remaking the City*
29/8 F. T. Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo. "Against Passeist Venice" (1910). In *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey et al.
Hope Mirlees. *Paris: A Poem* (1920).
Wyndham Lewis. *The Caliph's Design* (1919).

Wk 4 **BYOM: Bring Your Own Manifesto**
5/9 Groups of 3–4. 20-min. presentation.

Wk 5 *Image and Trace*
12/9 André Breton. *Nadja* (1928).

Break

Wk 6 *Fashion: Beauties and Beasts*
26/9 Walter Benjamin. "Fashion." In *The Arcades Project* (2002).
Djuna Barnes. *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915).
Mina Loy. "Nancy Cunard." In *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996).
Image Draft: In-Class Practice and Feedback

Recess week

Wk 7 *Sculpted Bodies*
10/10 Umberto Boccioni. "The Plastic Foundations of Futurist Sculpture and Painting" (1913).
Umberto Boccioni. "Absolute Motion + Relative Motion = Dynamism" (1914). In
Futurism: An Anthology, ed. Lawrence Rainey et al.
Jacob Epstein. "Rock Drill: 1913–1914." In *Let There Be Sculpture*.
Mina Loy. "Brancusi's Golden Bird." In *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996).
Image Essay Due [750 words]

Wk 8 *Secrets of the City*
17/10 Louis Aragon. "The Passage de l'Opéra." *Paris Peasant* (1926).
Walter Benjamin. "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress." In *The Arcades Project* (2002).

Wk 9 *Serenity in the City*
24/10 Louis Aragon. "Parc des Buttes-Chaumont." *Paris Peasant* (1926).
Field Report Draft: In-Class Practice and Feedback

Deepavali

Wk 10 *Hashish and Mescaline*
7/11 Walter Benjamin. *On Hashish* (2006 [1927–34]).
Aldous Huxley. *The Doors of Perception* (1954).
Field Report Due [500 words]

Wk 11 *Theater of Pain*
14/11 Antonin Artaud. "Theatre and Cruelty"; "The Theatre of Cruelty"; "Letters on Cruelty";
"No More Masterpieces." In *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938).
Antonin Artaud. "The Spurt of Blood" (1925 written). Samuel Beckett. "Not I" (1972).

Summative Reflection Exercise Due [500 words]

*****End of Course*****

24/11 Comparative Essay Due [1500–2000 words]