

HL4020 – Advanced Studies in Modernist Literature: Other Ways of Seeing

Wednesdays 14:30–17:20, LHS-TR+33

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In their foundational 1978 study, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane provide provisional shape for the subsequent study of modernism. They suggest that modernism “responds to the scenario of our chaos. It is the art consequent on Heisenberg’s ‘Uncertainty principle,’ of the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud, and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity.” This course reckons with a range of modernist texts to confirm, supplement, and counter this proposed “scenario of our chaos.”

Bradbury and McFarlane’s *Modernism* is subtitled “*A Guide to European Literature, 1890–1930*,” and much of the field’s more recent scholarship has been devoted to challenging and expanding that characterization, whether in geographical, historical, or generic terms. In this seminar, our task will be to learn from and contribute to the field’s consistently shifting ground. We will re-familiarize ourselves with significant works from the literary tradition but also look to objects from the edges of that modernism to grapple with the character and utility of the category itself. In the course’s first half we will be particularly interested in how image culture interfaces with literary modernism; in the second, we will turn our attention to understanding our position in Singapore as a site for modernist production, circulation, and reception.

Core Texts:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (0374521344)

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (9780141183411)

Course Reader (available B1 of SHHK)

Course Assignments and Assessment:

Participation, Preparation, and Presentations	20%
Singapore Modernist Object	15%
Image Essay	15%
Woolf Excursion Essay	20%
Final Essay	30%

Prospective Itinerary

Week 1 – Modern Overtures: Untimely Beginnings

August 10 – Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”

Week 2 – Comfort Zones and Contact Zones

August 17 – Friedman, “Planetarity;” Mungoshi, “The Accident;” Yeats, “The Second Coming”

Week 3 – Poetry as a Point of Departure

August 24 – Gui, “Global Modernism in Colonial Malayan and Singaporean Literature;” Hoo, “Singlish Modernism;” Ng, *F.M.S.R*

Poem Slide Due

Week 4 – Looking Around

August 30 – Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility;” Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave”

Week 5 – Writing What We See

September 7 – Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Image Essay Draft Due

Week 6 – Screen Memories

September 14 – Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions;” selected films

Week 7 – Near-Sighted, Far-Sighted

September 21 – Berger, from *Ways of Seeing*; Greenberg, “Modernist Painting;” Yeo, “Singapore Art, Nanyang Style”

Image Essay Due (~750 words)

Recess

Week 8 – Shifting Points of View

October 5 – Woolf, “The Window”

Week 9 – Watching Time’s Passage

October 12 – Woolf, “Time Passes” and “The Lighthouse”

Week 10 – Other Prosaic Returns

October 19 – Holden, “Literature in English in Singapore before 1965;” Pang, “Reclaiming Literature;” Rajaratnam, “The Tiger”

Woolf Excursion Essay Due (~1000 words)

Week 11 – Networking the Local and the Global

October 26 – Conrad, *The End of the Tether*; Jasanoff, from *The Dawn Watch* (Optional)

Week 12 – On the Late Stage of History

November 2 – Kuo, *The Spirits Play*; Sulaiman, *Occupation*

Week 13 – Harbor Views

November 9 – In-class Exhibition

Singapore Modernist Object Due (500-1000 words)

November 25 – Final Essay Due (1500-2000 words)