syllabus

description. This semester we shall explore five dominant currents flowing through Modernism—that breathtaking, challenging, and adventurous moment in late 19th- and early 20th-century American and European arts and thought:

- investigations into the limits of aesthetic construction;
- an increasing focus on interiority & the circus of the mind in motion;
- quests for viable existential responses to industrialization, urbanization, mediatization, globalization, & warfare on a previously unimaginable scale;
- neo-classical engagements with the idea of The Past;
- the problematization of conventional notions concerning temporality, epistemology, language, and reason.

Our voyage sets out from a perhaps initially unlikely literary shore: the magnificent epic *The Odyssey* (ca. 700 B.C.). From there we sail into James Joyce’s complex rethinking of it, and then on into four other pivotal modernist texts (William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*; Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*; Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*; Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*), along the way putting in briefly to meet several key art movements (Impressionism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Cubism, etc.), Arnold Schönberg’s twelve-tone music and Igor Stravinsky’s ballet *Rite of Spring*, various poets (Guillaume Apollinaire, e. e. cummings, Erza Pound, Rainer Maria Rilke, Wallace Stevens, et al.), the odd theorist/philosopher and manifesto writer (Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, André Breton, Karl Marx, et al.), and Dziga Vertov’s experimental silent film *Man with a Movie Camera* (that arrives sans plot or actors & invents cinema as it reels along). Finally, we conclude with Samuel Beckett’s arguably postmodern & inarguably stunning response to *Ulysses*, the non-novel *The Unnamable*—quite possibly having discovered along our journey, as the philosopher Martin Heidegger maintained, that not-being-at-home is always the fundamental human condition.

content warning. Writings in this course may include material that some students find offensive. Such material may include—but is not limited to—obscenity, profanity, representations of sexuality, violence, religion, politics, encounters with controversial issues in the media, etc. Most texts in this course will be dense and demanding. Students who feel that this may be a matter of concern should consider taking another class.
**evaluation methods.** Group presentation, start-up questions before each class, attendance and remarkably active participation, two critical essays, one creative response, two tests.

**leading class discussion.** Your group presentations will be an important part of your grade, and perhaps a new experience for some of you, so you should plan to spend a good deal of time and work on them; you should think of them as the equivalent of a research paper in terms of the time and energy you dedicate to them. An effective presentation will be enjoyable, informative, illuminating, thought-provoking, well-organized, and well-paced. Make sure you have read and reread the material on which you will present. Plan to meet with the others in your group at least twice (for at least one hour each time, although probably more) well before the day of your presentation. During your presentation, spend up to 10 minutes providing significant background information about the author, text’s publication history, critical reception, your own critical/theoretical perspective on it, etc.; your job here is to contextualize the text at hand and provide optics through which the class can begin to understand it in fruitful ways. Present the class (preferably one period beforehand) with three questions that will guide the rest of your discussion/presentation and our class period beyond it. Be creative. Generate a strong outline with clear goals and share that with the class. Budget your time. Check all tech setup well in advance of your presentation. Remember: because this is a collective undertaking, everyone in your group will receive the same grade, so make certain that each person is carrying his or her own weight and that that is clear to me and to the rest of the class.

**grading.** Final grades will be calculated on a 100-point system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>64-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-73</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**attendance.** You are expected to attend all class sessions, to arrive on time and stay for the entire class session, to bring any texts under discussion, and to participate actively in our discussions.

**participation.** This course is discussion-based and highly interactive. You are required to be present in all senses of the word, genuinely involved. While active participation is
essential, it is also essential that you respond respectfully, expressing differences of opinion without silencing, excluding, interrupting, or monopolizing. Failure to participate actively and frequently will hurt your grade considerably.

**absences/tardiness.** Each absence after the second will lower your final grade for the course by one letter grade. Two late arrivals or early departures will count as one absence.

due dates. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned.

late assignments. **No late assignments will be accepted.**

success in the course. Successful students in this course typically demonstrate a high degree of intellectual/creative curiosity, as well as an ability to respond positively to feedback from their instructor and peers. An “A” student not only does well on written assignments, but is prepared (not only has read the material, but actively brings insights into and questions about it to the class), turns in assignments on time, and contributes meaningfully and consistently to the discussion.

plagiarism: The University’s plagiarism policy will be strictly enforced. The Student Code defines plagiarism as “the unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person’s work in, or as the basis for, one’s own work offered for academic consideration or credit.” Examples of plagiarism include “representing as one’s own, without attribution, any other person’s words, phrasing, ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.” Disciplinary action for plagiarizing papers or exams ranges from a failing grade on the assignment or in the course to suspension or expulsion from the University.


classes & readings.

Jan.  08  Introductions. What & why was Modernism?

10  Homer, *The Odyssey* (ca. 750 – 650 B.C.): books 1, 2, 4.

15  Homer, *The Odyssey* (ca. 750 – 650 B.C.): books 5, 8 (lines 54 – 239; 527 – 584), 9, 10 (1 – 61; 222 – 617), 11, 12, 14.


31 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922): 10. **Presentation One.**


19 **Test One.**
21 **No Class.**

26 Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (1914). Discuss Critical Essay Two. **Presentation Three.**

Mar. 05 Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Cubism & Montage. Discuss Creative Response. **Presentation Four.**

12 **Spring Break**
14 **Spring Break**


26 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). **Presentation Six.**
28 **No Class.**

Apr. 02 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Discuss Test Two.

09 William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930). **Creative Response.**
18 **Test Two.**

23 Conclusions.