

**ENGLISH 650-01:
MODERN LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEORY
Avant-Garde, Neo-Avant-Garde, Post-Avant-Garde (3.0 CR.)**

Professor Christian Moraru
Spring 2019
MHRA 3204
W, 6:30 - 9:20 PM

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: This is a graduate survey of avant-garde thinking in modern, postmodern, and contemporary literature, arts, and critical theory. Specifically, we will pursue the contentious problematics of aesthetic innovation and revolution across the last century or so, with focus on the interplay of the avant-garde and experimentalism, on one side, and *arrière-garde* and (neo)traditionalism, on the other, in manifestoes and other kinds of works, fictional and non-fictional, old and new, modern and antimodern, postmodern and even “post-postmodern” (the “new contemporary”). To that effect, our course is organized around key texts of modernist aesthetics (Charles Baudelaire-Gustave Flaubert-Henry James), of the historical avant-garde and its insurgent “isms” (Filippo Tommaso Marinetti-Mina Loy-André Breton, etc.), high modernism (Ezra Pound-T. S. Eliot-Samuel Beckett), postmodernism (John Barth), as well as avant-garde, avant-pop, and post-avant-garde scholarship by Matei Calinescu, Antoine Compagnon, Philip Nel, Marjorie Perloff, Larry McCaffery, and Lionel Ruffel, among others.

We will read and discuss works recognized as typically avant-garde as well as later material that, in light of its lasting implications, can be retrospectively considered as representing or speaking to radical turning points, milestones, or advancements in modern and even postmodern literary history. The direct and indirect exchanges of our authors emphasize, we shall note, artistic language’s fundamental—and fundamentally transformative—relation to reality, on the one hand, and to previous art forms, on the other. Our literary “target text” is Don DeLillo’s 2016 novel *Zero K*, which we will approach as a problematization of some of the aesthetic and political issues under scrutiny in this class.

PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY AND CLASS FORMAT: Running for almost three hours, this class will resemble a seminar. It will combine lecture, extensive discussion, student presentations, and group work. Usually, our meetings will open with a lecture by the instructor providing historical and cultural background and placing the scheduled readings in the appropriate context. Following this introduction, students give 15-20-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of those readings. Then, we discuss collectively the materials for the day. I will set aside time to prepare and evaluate writing projects, presentations, etc.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES: Graduate students are encouraged to use this course to put their work in the larger, more demanding and competitive perspective of professionalism and academic performance. The class is geared toward graduate reading and writing carrying potential for publication and presentation outside UNCG. While fulfilling the course's requirements is your main goal, I urge you to take these requirements as an opportunity to think about yourselves as part of the academic community, with its standards, language, methods, tools, and venues. Here are a few questions for us: where do I stand as a scholar, teacher, critic, and writer, and which are my goals? What is or will be my audience? In what kind of scholarly conversation do I wish to intervene based on what I learn here? What steps do I have to take to do that? What are the available resources? Which are the outlets for my work? What do I have to do, for instance, to turn my seminar presentation/paper into a conference paper/journal article/dissertation chapter/writing sample?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Substantial oral participation is expected.
2. Individual presentations on the materials for the day. Guidelines for presentations: Students sign up for their final project and oral presentations right away so that we can spread out the presentations over the course of the semester. Each student will give a brief, **15-20-min.** talk on the scheduled readings. The presentations need not be written. Presentations cover a relevant aspect or material for the day. I do not expect you to fully analyze or explain the assignments or even one of these assignments. I ask you to a) briefly outline the argument or content of the readings you intent to talk about; b) identify one major element or theoretical problem in these works, which should help us open up our conversation; c) articulate a personal viewpoint—make an argument—on this issue. Feel free to consult with me before you pick your presentation topic.
3. Final Project Presentation: Each student will give a **10-15-min.** presentation on his or her final paper (see syllabus, last weeks).
4. Papers: a midterm (7-8 pp. max., including notes and Works Cited) and a final paper (20 pp. min. plus notes and Works Cited). The final paper may expand the midterm if the latter has been particularly successful. Both essays must be thesis-based and incorporate research.
5. Attendance and Participation. Both are expected and will factor into the final grade (see below under course policies).

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my regular office hours or make an appointment to discuss your specific interests, goals, or any aspect of this class. We will also talk about your plans for the final project.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. Late Papers: No late papers—and any other kind of late work for that matter—accepted. However, if you foresee any deadline-related problems, please come to see me ahead of time. We shall work together to find a solution.

2. Absences: You are allowed no more than 2 (two) justified absences during the semester for illnesses (which you must document afterwards), religious holidays, or emergencies preventing you from attending. No undocumented absences allowed. Should they occur, they will affect your final grade. I will subtract 5% from the latter for any undocumented absence. Since we meet once a week, attendance is particularly critical to the success of your work. If you are the victim of an emergency, please stay in touch with me by e-mail or phone.

GRADING: As a general rule, no incompletes (but come to see me if you anticipate any problems). The quality of your work will be reflected in the final grade as follows:

1. Papers: 85%
2. Oral participation (includes group work and presentations): 15%

REQUIRED READINGS:

- *1. Barth, John. *Further Fridays: Essays, Lectures, and Other Nonfiction, 1984-1994*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995. / ebook
2. Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987 or latest pbk.
3. Compagnon, Antoine. *Five Paradoxes of Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 or latest pbk.
4. DeLillo, Don. *Zero K*. New York: Scribner, 2016 or latest pbk.
5. Ferraris, Maurizio. *Manifesto of New Realism*. Translated by Sarah De Sanctis. Foreword by Graham Herman. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014 or latest pbk.
- *6. Kolocotroni, Vassiliki, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, eds. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
PN49 .M478 1998 / ebook
7. McCaffery, Larry, ed. *After Yesterday's Crash: The Avant-Pop Anthology*. New York: Penguin, 1995 or latest pbk.
8. Nel, Philip. *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2002 or latest pbk.
9. Ruffel, Lionel. *Brouhaha: Worlds of the Contemporary*. Translated by Raymond M. MacKenzie. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018 or latest pbk.

WEEKLY SYLLABUS:

Note: All assignments are due in class under the day indicated in the syllabus. Also, unless page numbers are indicated, books are due in their entirety on the first day they are scheduled.

Week 1

W 01/16

Introduction to the course: topics, scope, structure, format, requirements.
 Planning ahead, getting organized: individual presentations and conferences;
 discussion groups

Individual presentations (sign-up)

Introductory lecture: Modern literary history and our basic vocabulary

Week 2

W 01/23

Modernity, Modernism, and the "New"

Calinescu 13-92

Compagnon vii-29

Week 3

W 01/30

Modernism and the Avant-Garde

Calinescu 95-148

Compagnon 31-56

Kolocotroni xvii-xx; 97-98 (Flaubert); 102-108 (Baudelaire); 147-150 (James)

Week 4

W 02/06

Avant-Garde Manifestos and Declarations (I)

Kolocotroni 249-256 (Marinetti); 258-261 (Loy); 262-267 (Apollinaire); 270-275
 (Kandinsky)

Compagnon 57-111

Week 5

W 02/13

Avant-Garde Manifestos and Declarations (II)

Kolocotroni 276-287 (Tzara & Schwitters); 299-303 (Moholy-Nagy & Gropius &
 Fleischmann); 307-312 (Breton); 563-569 (Benjamin); 597-601 (Breton, Trotsky,
 Rivera)

>DeLillo

Discussing the midterm paper: intervening in the debate**Week 6**

W 02/20

Modernist Traditions (I)

Kolocotroni 366-385 (Eliot); 391-397 (Woolf); 449-454 (Beckett); 465-472
 (Brecht & Artaud); 551-556 (Eisenstein)

Week 7

W 02/27

Modernist Traditions (II)

Kolocotroni 334-336 (Dos Passos); 354-357 (Muir); 411-421 (Locke & Hughes);
 439-443 (Fitzgerald); 479-485 (Laura [Riding] Jackson); 617-618 (Wright)

> DeLillo

Visit by Professor Jürgen Grandt**Week 8**

W 03/06

Spring break: no class

Week 9

W 03/13

Modernism to Postmodernism

Calinescu 265-312

Compagnon 113-146

Midterm paper due in class**Final project presentations (sign-up)****Week 10**

W 03/20

Postmodernism (I): Exhaustion and Renewal

Barth 113-126; 275-366

Week 11

W 03/27

Postmodernism (II): The Relationship with the Avant-Garde

Nel ix-40; 96-115; 176-181

>DeLillo

Week 12

W 04/03

Postmodernism and Avant-Pop (I)

McCaffery ix-xxix; 59-148 (fiction)

Presentations, final project**Week 13**

W 04/10

Postmodernism and Avant-Pop (II)

McCaffery 200-294 (fiction)

Presentations, final project**Week 14**

W 04/17

Avant-Pop Realism to "New Realism;" Cultural Critique, "Post-Critique," and Anti-Postmodernism

Ferraris

>DeLillo

Presentations, final project**Week 15**

W 04/24

Postmodernism, Post-Postmodernism, and the "Contemporary

Ruffel

>DeLillo

Presentations, final project**Week 16**

W 05/01

Final meeting

Overview

Student evaluations

Final papers due in class