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 in order to confirm, supplement, and disrupt this proposed characterization of “the 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 implicit 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 of the period, but we will also look to objects from the edges of such a modernism in order to grapple with the character and the utility of the category itself.

Core Texts:
Jules Verne, Around the World in Eighty Days (0199552517)
August Strindberg, Miss Julie and Other Plays (9780199538041)
Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (0374521344)
Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (9780141183411)
Tayeb Salih, Season of Migration to the North (9781590173022)
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictée (0520261291)
Course Reader (available B1 of HSS)

Course Assignments and Assessment:
Participation, Preparation, and Presentations 15%
Poetry Mini Essay 10%
Image Essay 25%
Comparative Essay 35%
Summative Reflection Exercise 15%

Prospective Itinerary

Week 1 – Modern Overtures: Untimely Beginnings
August 14 – Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”

Week 2 – Modernity without the Modernism
August 21 – Verne, Around the World in Eighty Days
Week 3 – Falling into Modernism
August 28 – Strindberg, Preface to Miss Julie and A Dream Play; Freud, from “On Dreams”

Week 4 – Looking Around
Image Draft Due

Week 5 – Writing What We See
September 11 – Barthes, Camera Lucida

Week 6 – Screen Memories
Image Essay Due (~750 words)

Recess

Week 8 – The Times of Narrative
October 9 – Woolf, “The Window”

Week 9 – Time Passing (And After)
October 16 – Woolf, “Time Passes” and “The Lighthouse”
Poetry Mini-Essay Due (~500 words)

Week 10 – Stage Time
October 23 – Artaud, “No More Masterpieces” and “Spurt of Blood”; Cocteau, The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower; Yeats, Purgatory

Week 11 – Late Arrivals or Alternative Routes
October 30 – Salih, Season of Migration to the North

Week 12 – Taking Stock
November 6 – Kern, from The Culture of Time and Space; Friedman, “Planetarity”
Summative Reflection Exercise Due (TBD)

Week 13 – Modernism Remains (Group Presentations)
November 13 – Cha, Dictée

November 29 – Comparative Essay Due (~1500 words)