MANIFESTOS and MODERNISM: 1915-1945

This seminar examines the manifesto as a political and artistic form that was mobilized by artists and writers during the Interwar period to mark new movements, strike out new creative territories, and fuel polemics. The period we will study is particularly rich as it is during the Interwar period that some of modern European art’s most notable movements arose: Futurism, Dadaism, Constructivism, Purism, Surrealism. These movements formed part of an avant-garde that often saw revolutionary artistic forms as coinciding with revolutionary politics, thus the relation of these art movements to the political issues of their times will be of interest to us. It was also a time when artists and writers used the most modern tools of communication to connect with each other across national, geographic and linguistic borders. So, while our central focus is Europe, we will also look at how manifesto carrying forms like the magazine, poster, and correspondence helped create a dynamic flow of new ideas across and between continents. We will also look at a few instances of how artists in the Americas responded to and generated new formations to the problem of modernity by forging new ideas around local culture, national identity and indigeneity.

Over the course of the semester, students will gain an understanding of the modern art movements of the period, gain an understanding of the main protagonists driving these movements, and they will also explore methodological tools for thinking about manifestoes as a primary source for research, as well as a creative tool for thinking about different modes of communication, which range from the printed page and exhibitions to radio transmission and fashion. All of these modalities were put to use by artists and writers to explore often clashing ideas about culture, and in many instances these clashes were in response to or helped generate the political tensions for this generation which in Europe was book-ended by two World Wars.

Against the backdrop of Europe’s colonial legacy (and the ongoing wars and occupations that defined the Interwar period) and the rise of the “new woman”, this seminar will also think through issues of race and gender as they were challenged by the artists and writers of this generation. Thus, issues of access, training, language, profession, and status will also come into play as we study the many forms manifestoes took, and the different environments in which they circulated.

Throughout this semester, students will be encouraged to learn how to carefully read primary texts (documents and manifestoes from the early 20th century), look closely and think critically about works of art, and most importantly together we will discuss what role the production of texts and images plays in forging ideas that seek to change culture, which for the artists we study often meant wanting revolutionary changes in society.

In addition to the regular assignments for class, students will work on a final project that centers on their selection of one manifesto, through which they will become the class expert on that particular document, its historical context, and the controversies that may have surrounded its publication.

Note on Academic Integrity: Please consult the university’s rules and regulations regarding academic integrity and plagiarism: http://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html

Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
Library research: Independent and guided research form a central part of this course. Bobst Library offers several workshops that you should take full advantage of, especially in preparation for research papers.
https://library.nyu.edu/services/teaching-learning/learning/
https://nyu.libcal.com/

Make-ups. No late work will be accepted without approval from Professor Mendelson.

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Assignments:
Detailed descriptions of each assignment will be posted to NYU Classes, as well as suggested resources to help you complete the assignment.
All work can be submitted electronically to Prof. Mendelson: jordana.mendelson@nyu.edu

Attendance and participation 5%
Because we only meet once a week regular attendance is very important; If you have a medical emergency or excused absence please inform Prof. Mendelson as soon as possible and arrange to make up the work.

“What is a manifesto?” 10%
3 pages, double spaced, 1” margin: Due Feb. 14 (Friday)
Summary, report of first 3 weeks readings; be sure to cite specific readings, examples, discussed in class

MoMA: Looking Assignment 10%
3 pages, double spaced, 1” margin: Due March 6 (Friday)
The Museum of Modern Art has reinstalled its collection. Students are asked to go to the museum and select a work of art made during the period of our class (1915-1945) that belongs to either the Futurist or Dadaist movements (Professor Mendelson will provide a list of suggested works): Take notes on it, make a sketch of it (to be submitted with written work) and think about how it relates to Dadaism or Futurism (as studied in class readings). This is part 1 of a 2 part assignment. In this part you are to write a formal analysis of the work and in your description of the work consider the following questions:
How does a work of art function as a manifesto?
How does it communicate visually the ideas of the art movement it relates to?

**Art & Politics (Dada and Futurism)**
15%
5 pages, double spaced, 1” margin: Due March 27 (Friday)
Bibliography of 4 sources, following MLA format guidelines
Taking as your point of departure the formal analysis you did of one of the works in the MoMA (either Dada or Futurist), this second part asks you to do some bibliographic research:
Identify and read 2 articles about your chosen artist
Identify and read 2 articles about the movement you chose
Write a paper that incorporates your formal analysis and your bibliographic research and builds on your answer to the questions posted in the Looking Assignment

**Final Project (in stages)**
60%
Choose a manifesto from the Mary Ann Caws anthology
Write a justification for your choice (1-2 pages) based on your readings from class (10%): Due Feb. 28 (Friday)
Research your manifesto: create a bibliography of 10 sources (articles and books) (10%): Due April 10 (Friday)
Write an annotated bibliography of your choices (10%): Due April 17 (Friday)
10 minute presentation about your manifesto to the class (10%): April 28 & May 5
Write a 5 page paper about your chosen manifesto (20%): Due May 8 (Friday)
(analyzing the manifesto, considering its author, placing it within the context of the movement it belongs to, and in relation to other manifestos you’ve studied)

Weekly readings will be posted on NYU Classes.
Power points and hand-outs from class posted to NYU Classes

**Required textbooks:**

**Syllabus:**

**Week 1 (Jan. 28):** Historical Context: Modernism and the Avant-garde
-In-class overview of art movements and discussion of selection of manifestos

**Week 2 (Feb. 4):** What is a Manifesto? (Form & Genre)

**Week 3 (Feb. 11):** What is a Manifesto? (Gender & Race)

**Week 4 (Feb. 18):** Surveying the Avant-Garde (Magazines and Surveys) – Visit with Lori Cole, Associate Director, Center for Experimental Humanities
Week 5 (Feb. 25): FUTURISM

Week 6 (March 2): DADA

Week 7 (March 9): GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM, BEFORE AND AFTER WWI
-Rose-Carol Washton, Ida Katherine Rigby and Stephanie Barron, eds., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (G.K. Hall, 1993), selection

FILM SCREENING: Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919)

SPRING BREAK: March 16

Week 8 (March 23): TRIP TO TAMIMENT LIBRARY COLLECTION, BOBST, NYU
-Readings TBA

Week 9 (March 30): FUTURISM TO PRODUCTIVISM IN THE USSR (POST-1917 REVOLUTION)

-Dziga Vertov, "Film Directors, A Revolution" (1923)

FILM SCREENING: Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)

Week 10 (April 7): SURREALISM


Week 11 (April 14): TRIP TO THE MET MUSEUM
-Readings TBA

Week 12 (April 21): MANIFESTOES IN THE AMERICAS


Week 13 (April 28) & Week 14 (May 5): FINAL STUDENT PRESENTATIONS – Distribution of selected manifestos and background readings chosen by students