

Comparative Modernisms Seminar



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IES - School of Advanced Study, University of London
Senate House, Malet Street, Room 234

26 June 2017

16:00-18:00

Seminar and Roundtable Discussion

Free and Open to all

Organiser: Dr Angeliki Spiropoulou, Assoc. Prof. Peloponnese University;
Research Fellow IES-SAS

Seminar:

“Trans Reading and Comparative Modernism”

Jessica Berman (University of Maryland, Baltimore, President of MSA)

The Seminar will be followed by a **Roundtable Discussion** on:

“Transnational Modernist Arts”

Participants: Suzanne Bellamy, Jessica Berman and Maggie Humm

Coordinator: Angeliki Spiropoulou

SEMINAR ABSTRACT:

Prof. Jessica Berman

“Trans Reading and Comparative Modernism”

In this talk I will argue for the power of using a “trans critical optic” to read modernism. A trans critical optic uses the potentially transgressive energy of the prefix “trans” to challenge categories of identity, nationality, and gender. In loosening the prefix trans from its ties to specific identity categories, a trans optic emphasizes the important ways that the prefix “trans” can work to destabilize and disrupt discourses of nationality and gender and help us recognize the comparative energies of modernist literature. While transgender theory generally focuses on the social roles of the sexual body, it offers a way to “disrupt, denaturalize, rearticulate and make visible” (Stryker and Whittle) all normative habits of identity and the power dynamics surrounding them. Like the critique of the sex/gender system instigated by trans theory, I argue, a trans critical optic serves to decenter the “national tradition” as an object of inquiry, exploring texts in relation to other, comparative and transnational horizons of expectations. It also pushes us to recognize the importance of attending to assumptions of embodiment and gender identity in our discussions of transnational, world, or planetary modernism.

BIOS:

Jessica Berman is Professor of English and Director of the Dresher Center for the Humanities at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), USA. She is the author of *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge 2001) and *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics and Transnational Modernism* (Columbia 2011), co-editor (with Jane Goldman) of *Virginia Woolf Out of Bounds*, editor of *A Companion to Virginia Woolf* (Wiley-Blackwell 2016) and editor of the annotated edition of Iqbalunnisa Hussain’s *Purdah and Polygamy* (Oxford, forthcoming, 2017). Berman is a co-editor of *Futures of Comparative Literature*, the American Comparative Literature Association’s decennial Report on the State of the Discipline (Routledge, 2017) and also co-edits, with Paul Saint-Amour, the Modernist Latitudes book series at Columbia University Press. She is currently serving as president of the Modernist Studies Association.

Suzanne Bellamy (University of Sydney) is an artist and writer working on text/image fusions and abstractions, Australian modernism, Stein and Woolf. Recent publications include essays in Allison Pease(ed) *The Cambridge Companion to To The Lighthouse*(2015), Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (eds) *Virginia Woolf in Context* (2012), Derek Ryan and Stella Bolaki (eds) *Contradictory Woolf* (2012), the ground-breaking Eileen Barrett and Pat Cramer (eds) *Virginia Woolf Lesbian Readings*, NYU Press 1997, and the forthcoming *Sentencing Orlando* Amy Bromley and Elsa Hogsberg (eds) with Edinburgh University Press in 2017.

Maggie Humm is an Emeritus Professor University of East London, UK and was Co-organiser of the IES Modernism Seminar 2003-2012. Work on Woolf and modernism includes *Feminist Criticism; Feminism and Film; Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema; Snapshots of Bloomsbury: the Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*; and *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts. Radical Space* (co-edited) was published in 2016. Currently she is re-writing a novel *Who Killed Mrs. Ramsay?* – longlisted for the Lucy Cavendish Prize 2017 and shortlisted for the Fresher Writing Prize 2017.

Angeliki Spiropoulou (PhD Sussex) is Associate Professor of European Literature and Theory at Peloponnese University, and Research Fellow at the Institute of English Studies, University of London. She is author of *Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin* (Palgrave-Macmillan), and co-authored *History of European Literature 18th-20thC* (Hellenic OU). She has edited or co-edited the volumes: *Walter Benjamin: Images and Myths of Modernity; Culture Agonistes: Debating Culture, Rereading Texts; Contemporary Greek Fiction: International Perspectives*, and special issues on gender, history and contemporary art for the journals *EJES; Theatre Polis; and Synthesis*. She has recently contributed to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, the *Edinburgh Dictionary of Modernism*, and the volumes, *1922: History, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge UP) and *Sentencing Orlando* (forthcoming Edinburgh UP). She is currently working on modernist historiographies and co-editing a volume on Modernism and History with Jean-Michel Rabaté.