# COLT 1813O: *Adventures of the Avant-Garde*, Spring 2014

# MWF 12-12.50, Smith-Buonanno G01

# Prof. Michelle Clayton

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**Office hours W 2-4**

**Course Description:**

The turn of the twentieth century witnessed an explosion of artistic movements and of the traditions which preceded them. As new categories for culture emerged, writers, artists, and critics alike undertook reevaluations of art’s relationship to society, as well as to its possible pasts, presents, and futures. This course will introduce students to an international moment in artistic production, marked as much by polemics and enmities as by friendships and collaborations, taking place both inside and across national cultural and linguistic traditions, ranging across ideologies and art-forms. We will study the avant-garde as a series of ruptures and responses, beginning with predecessors (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé), moving through a sequence of consequential and overlapping –isms: Cubism, Italian Futurism, Russian Cubo-Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Vorticism, Dada (New York, Zurich, Berlin, Paris), and Surrealism, closing with an exploration of some of the avant-garde’s (likely and unlikely) legacies. In keeping with the cross-pollinating spirit of the avant-garde, we will study texts from a variety of traditions, forms, and genres – from poetry through prose to manifestoes, from painting through photography to film, potentially also music and dance (depending upon student expertise in these fields); our discussions will touch on questions of translation and translatability between languages, cultures, and art-forms. Recurring sub-topics will revolve around cities, bodies, psychologies, temporalities; tensions and bridges between high and mass culture, aesthetics and politics; readings across (and problematic readings of other) cultures; gender, class, ethnicity, and representation.

**Textbooks:** Textual materials should be downloaded from the course website and read carefully in advance of class; visual materials will be shown in class and posted on the course website. Both kinds of material will require our full attention in class: to drown out the siren song of other distractions, no computers will be allowed.

**Grading:** Avant-garde materials are notoriously difficult, and we will be attacking them in the spirit in which they were produced – imaginatively, critically, and collectively. Attendance is absolutely mandatory, and all are expected to participate actively on a regular basis (25%). Students will be assigned presentations according to interests and areas of expertise (10%). There will be a mid-term exercise (25%) and a final research paper or project (40%); each student should make at least one appointment with me to discuss progress and plans for writing.

**Jan 22/24** Intro

**Jan 27/29/31: Precursors**

Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé

**Feb 3/5/7: Theories of the Avant-Garde**

Benjamin, Ortega y Gasset, Apollinaire

**Feb 10/12/14: Cubism**

Apollinaire, Cendrars

**Feb 17/19/21: Italian Futurism**

Manifestoes, artworks, noise

**Feb 24/26/28: Russian Cubo-Futurism & Film**

Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, Vertov, Eisenstein

**Mar 3/5/7: Anglo Avant-Gardes**

Eliot, Loy, Stevens, Stein; Armory Show; Baroness Elsa

**Mar 10/12/14: Dada Takes the Stage**

In Zurich, Berlin, Cologne

**Mar 17/19/21: Dada Goes to Paris**

Duchamp, Picabia, Clair, Satie

**Mar 24/26/28: Relâche**

(Spring break)

**Mar 31/Apr 2/4: Surrealism**

Narrative, painting, film

**Apr 7/9/11: Performance**

and events

**Apr 14/16/18: Beyond Europe**

Anti-colonialism and marvelous reals

**Apr 21/23: Recent avant-gardes**

Recreations, uncreations