“Modernist Transmissions”

Yasna Bozhkova (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle) and Nell Wasserstrom (Boston College)

Atelier Société d’Études Woolfiennes (SEW)/Société d’Études Modernistes (SEM)

Congrès La Société des Anglicistes de l’Enseignement Supérieur (SAES)

Université Rennes 2, June 1-3 2023

Cultural modernism, as a response to the social, economic, and technological changes wrought by the spread of capitalist modernity in the 19C, is particularly well-positioned to mediate the SAES 2023 topic of “[Transmission](https://congres2023.saesfrance.org/textes-de-cadrage/#cadrage_ve).” Radio waves, the telegraph, the gramophone, cinema, and other new technologies not only facilitated the propagation of ideas in/about modernity, but also inspired innovative modernist aesthetics predicated on the ideas of speed, immediacy, and change. Little magazines had a key role in circulating modernist texts and debates, as well as in creating novel forms of readership, triggering an unprecedented degree of engagement with the most innovative aesthetic, scientific, and philosophical ideas and discourses of the time. We may broadly define modernism as the very Zeitgeist of experimentation and rupture which characterizes Turn-of-the-Century and post-WWI culture and thinking, a moment of ebullient transatlantic and intercultural transmission among avant-garde artistic communities.

Yet modernism is not only an initial moment of rupture and irrevocable change (one recalls Virginia Woolf’s “On or about December 1910 human nature changed,” or Jean-Michel Rabaté’s *1913: The Cradle of Modernism*), but also a phenomenon which refracts our idea of time and transmission, as it ricochets through generations. Equally relevant, therefore, are the various forms of transmission and filiation between different waves of modernist writers, for example between the seminal Imagist poetics of Ezra Pound and the Objectivism of the 1930s (“*We said Objectivist”: Lire les poètes Lorine Niedecker, George Oppen, Carl Rakosi, Charles Reznikoff, Louis Zukofsky*, Xavier Kalck), or more broadly speaking contemporary artists’ revisiting of the modernist and avant-garde experiments of the past (*Recycling Virginia Woolf in Contemporary Art and Literature*, eds. Monica Latham, Caroline Marie, Anne-Laure Rigeade). Such transmission often takes place through far-reaching intertextual dialogues.

Likewise, if modernism’s legacy of experimentation and rupture extends far into its future, so, too, do questions of transmission demand a reckoning with the past. Thus, in spite of F.T. Marinetti’s grandiloquent claim that we should “burn the libraries and destroy the museums,” modernist writers engaged with the difficulties of tradition and inheritance in complex and far-reaching ways (*Virginia Woolf’s Unwritten Histories, Conversations with the Nineteenth Century*, Anne Besnault). Paradoxically, then, modernism is marked just as much by multifarious forms of continuity as it is by its foundational myth of rupture (“Make it new!”).

These ruptures (and legacies) are marked by modernism’s intense interarts and intermedial experimentation, the objective of which was to bridge the gaps between literature, the visual arts, music, and the performance arts through the transposal of innovative aesthetics from one art and medium to another. These transmedial innovations also include, importantly, transdisciplinary engagements with new developments in philosophy and the advent of psychoanalysis. As the SAES CFP states, the etymology of transmission derives from the Latin “to send (*mittere*) beyond (*trans*)”; *trans*, however, also contains the meanings of “across,” “over,” and “to the far side of.” Thus, transmission can be defined as a sending beyond, across, over, or even askew; a movement from one place to another, a “conveyance” (*OED*), a dis-placement. Nietzsche will call this “transvaluation”; Sigmund Freud will call it “transference”; Walter Benjamin will call it “translation.” In all cases, what is at stake is the relation between transmission and *transgression*: to transmit is to exceed a border or limit; to send *beyond* implies that some kind of violation of the “proper” has taken place. Something, perhaps, has gone “awry.” As Woolf argues in “Modern Fiction,” this sense of being jolted out of time leads modernists both back to the classics (“Our quarrel is not with the classics”) and to attempt to register the break (“We must reconcile ourselves to a season of failures and fragments”).

This joint workshop of the SEW/SEM invites contributions that focus on modernist transmissions with a particular emphasis on the prefix “Trans-” in all of its transcultural, transgenerational, transmedial, transhistorical, and transgressive forms. The nineteenth century marked the mass institutionalization of the disciplines of art and history: the transmission of knowledge and culture became codified, as Benjamin writes in Thesis VII, as the “triumphal procession” of the “rulers.” Indeed, this is perhaps one of modernism’s defining characteristics: its singular position in relation to the nineteenth-century’s institutionalization of cultural transmission and its investment in rethinking those politically motivated modes of transmission. And these modes of thinking transmission otherwise (askew), as Woolf’s oeuvre reveals in various ways (not least through her insistence on maternal genealogy: “We think back through our mothers” she writes in *A Room of One’s Own*), are inseparable from ways of resisting the institutionalization of sexuality and *genre* (as both gender and generic forms). As Michel Foucault has shown, the nineteenth century’s introduction of disciplinary norms led to the proliferation rather than repression of transgressive identities. Thus, we also invite papers that explore modernism’s transgressions of gender and sexuality “norms” and engage a tradition of queer modes of transmission—or, the “queerness” of transmission itself (*Dead Letters Sent: Queer Literary Transmission*, Kevin Ohi).

Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- The conflicted heritage/transmission/legacy of modernism and modernist studies in our contemporary moment (for example, approaches to modernism as understood outside of traditional forms of periodization and localization, such as Susan Stanford Friedman’s *Planetary Modernisms* and Niall Gildea and David Wylot’s “The And of Modernism: On New Periodizations”; or the debates taking place on *Modernism/modernity*’s Print+ forum surrounding the sexual and gender violence of *The Waste Land* in the era of #MeToo)

-Intermedial forms of modernist aesthetics (including contemporary transmission of modernist works through new digital platforms)

-Modernism’s engagement with the past: historical or transgenerational legacy, the Classics, with thinking historical transmission otherwise

-Modernism and feminist, trans-generic, queer transmission

-Geopolitical cultural transmission and modernism’s colonial relations/relationality

-Material culture and the material means of transmitting/circulating modernist works

-New technologies and the technicity of modernist aesthetics

-Modernism and transnational/translingual transmission (including questions of translation)

-Modernism and (the transmission of) disease

-Environmental modernisms and the question of cultural/climate heritage

-Psychoanalytic modes of transmission (i.e. transference, dream-work, case histories, the “talking cure”) and their relation to cultural modernism

-Modernism’s politics of (aesthetic) transmission and/or the aesthetics of political transmission (for example, through the manifesto format or the propaganda poster)

Please submit abstracts (~250 words) with a short biographical notice by December 1, 2022 to Yasna Bozhkova ([yasna.bozhkova@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr](mailto:yasna.bozhkova@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr)) and Nell Wasserstrom ([wassersn@bc.edu](mailto:wassersn@bc.edu)).