

A Gendered History of the Avant-Garde

Bodies, Objects, Emotions, Ideas



The very concept of ‘avant-garde’ is steeped in a masculine warlike imagery, and the founding manifesto of Futurism even glorifies the ‘contempt for the woman’. Yet, feminine, queer, androgynous, and non-binary perspectives on sexual identity played a central role — from Rimbaud to contemporary experimentalism — in the development of what has been called ‘the tradition of the new’.

We will explore such a paradoxical anti-traditional tradition through texts, images, sounds, and videos. We will unearth the stories and works of great experimentalists who have been neglected because of their gender. We will deal with poems made up entirely of place names, of recorded noises, of typographical symbols. We will try to read texts with no words, surreal stories, performances, objects.

Class Codes:

ITA 305 / COM 375 / GSS 308 (HA)

Weekly meeting:

Thursday, 1:30 - 4:20

Instructor:

Alessandro Giammei

Office Hours: Wed 1:30-3:00

and by appointment

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Reading/Writing assignments:

40-60 pages of selected readings per week.

Take-home Midterm paper (6-8 pp.) Final Essay (10-12 pp.)

Prerequisites and Restrictions:

Class, discussions, and reading/writing assignments in English.

No knowledge of Italian language is required. Freshmen are welcome.

Concentrators in Italian (certificate or major) should arrange writing assignments in Italian with the professor.

Assessment Components:

Paper in Lieu of Mid Term - 25%

Paper in lieu of Final - 40%

Oral Presentation(s) - 20%

Class Participation - 15%



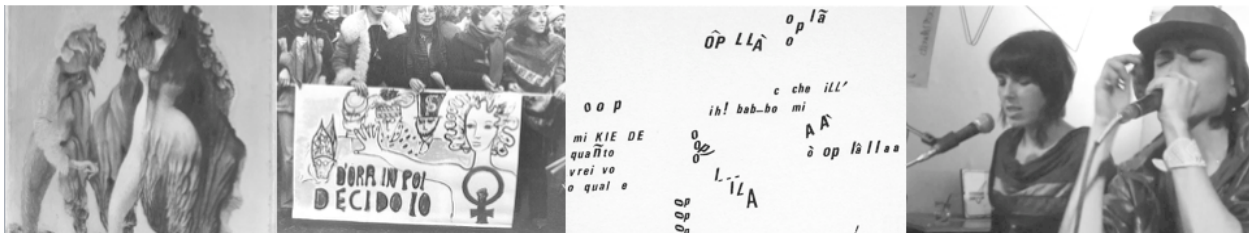
Material

All **required readings** (40-60 pages per week) will be on blackboard. I do not expect you to fully understand the most experimental texts, such as abstract or visual poems: some experiments are supposed to be unreadable, and confusion is perfectly fine. Just bring your impressions and interpretations in class and we will discuss together. If you feel really lost (or really curious), I selected some **suggested readings** (available on blackboard or at Firestone in our course reserve) that should be useful to put the texts in their contexts — and to have an idea of what scholars and critics think of the material that we are dealing with. Probably, the most disorienting (but, at least for me, also most exciting) materials are the **audio-tracks and the videos**. Most of them will be uploaded on blackboard, or I will provide you with links to reach them on artists' personal sites, on UPenn's Penn-Sound, and on a rather peculiar archive created by an Italian vanguardist, Maurizio Spatola.

You are very welcome to suggest additional material (texts, films, audio-tracks, etc.) and bring it to the attention of the class. The syllabus can be modified (within reason) to meet the interest and curiosity of the participants.

Oral Presentations

Periodically, one student (or a small team) will open the discussion in class with an oral presentation (10-15 minutes) on multimedia materials related to the topic of the week. **Presentations will be scheduled at least one week in advance and will be guided.** The sub-topic will be tailored on the presenter's interests.



Museum Visits

Class will be held at the Princeton Museum of Art on week 6 and week 11 (March 10, April 14). We will have a guided tour in the galleries and a discussion in a seminar room. Selected works of art from the museum's collection will be on display in the seminar room, and a curator will be present. A **list of the objects** that we will focus on will be available on Blackboard.

We will discuss the possibility of a visit to the MoMA in New York (second half of the semester).

In Class

This is a seminar, so **attendance and class participation are essential**. It is a seminar on experimentalism, so you are encouraged to **be experimental**: no interpretation of the material is definitive, and any interpretative attempt is welcome — as long as it is based on evidence.

Before Class

Being prepared on the **required readings** is fundamental. A look at the **audio/video material** is also expected. No knowledge of gender studies, modern history, or avant-garde techniques is required, but the suggested readings (and the books in our course reserve at Firestone) are there to enrich your perspective on the issues and topics addressed in class.

Gender and the Avantgarde: Objects, Premise, Method

Introduction to two core-concepts: Avantgarde and Experimentalism. Presentation of my favorite case-studies. How to read non-textual literature, visual experiments, and acoustic material. Discussion on expectations, methodology, perspective, and assignments.

(Clip from the oscar-winning film *La Grande Bellezza*, 2014: <https://youtu.be/wMjovG2PqZM>)

Late-Modernity and Fascism (1909-1946)

Part I - Weeks 2-7

Contempt for the Woman

Founding of Italian futurism and gendered reactions to the first Manifesto. Womanhood in Europe before and during WWII. Italian society, literature, and aesthetics before Fascism (tradition vs. avantgarde, “decadentismo” and masculinity, catholic morality and sexuality).

Required readings

- Anthology of futurist Manifestoes and pamphlets
[on blackboard, 38 pp.]

Audio/video material

- Giacomo Balla, *L'annoziata*;
Francesco Cangiullo, *La piccola cioccolataia*; Valentine De Saint-Point, *Manifesto futurista della lussuria* (tracks from Arrigo Lora Totino, *Futura* - LP of futurist declamations recorded in 1978)
[Arch. Maurizio Spatola]

Suggested readings

- *Poetry and the avant-garde* (Oxford Companion to Italian Literature)
- Lucia Re, *Futurism and Feminism*
[5+19 pp.]

Florence & the Machine

The avantgarde in Florence: futurism, vocianesimo, late-modern reactions to classicism. The experimental work of neglected key-figures such as Mina Loy, Benedetta, and Valentine De Saint-Point. Aviatrixes/aeropainters and paroliberiste. War and modern industrialization.

Required readings

- Anthology of linear and visual poems by Mina Loy, Valentine De Saint-Point, Dino Campana, Marietta Angelini, Emma Marpillero, Benedetta Cappa, Irma Valeria, Maria Ginanni.
[on blackboard, 53 pp.]

Audio/video material

- Maria Sideri, *Vibrant Matter/ La Métachorie*, 2014 (video performance inspired by De Saint-Point's avantgarde dance)
[mariasideri.co]

Suggested readings

- Siobhan Conaty, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti and the Second Phase of Futurism*
- Lucia Re, *Mina Loy and the Quest for a Futurist Feminist Woman*;
- Lucia Re, *Maria Ginanni vs. F. T. Marinetti: Women, Speed, and War in Futurist Italy*
[9+19+21 pp.]

Metamorphoses of Surreal Bodies

Androgyny, masculinity, femininity in the aesthetics of Surrealism, Magic Realism, Meta-physical Art. Sexual desire and trauma in gothic and surreal narrative. Body vs. sub-conscious in surrealist/dada experiments. Zoomorphism, goddesses, monsters. Fascist Italy and gender issues.

Required readings

- Alberto Savinio, *The Laranà Theatre* (from *Tragedy of Childhood*)
- Tommaso Landolfi, *The Death of the King of France* (excerpt) [on blackboard, 26+27 pp.]

Audio/video material

- Salvador Dalì, *The Great Masturbator*; Mina Loy, *Auto-Facial-Construction*; Robert Desnos, *Awakenings and Ideal Mistress* (tracks from *What Oozed Through the Staircase: A Winter Afternoon of Surrealist Writing and Music*, by Kenneth Goldsmith and Tracie Morris, Philadelphia Museum, 2014) [PennSound]

Suggested readings

- Allison Pease, *Sexuality* (Cambridge Companion to Modernist Culture)
- Luca Somigli, *Italy* (Cambridge Companion to European Modernism)
- *Fascism and culture* (Oxford Companion to Italian Literature) [15+15+1 pp.]

March 3

Week 5

Not So Desperate Housewives

Female subalternity, motherhood, and marriage from the Risorgimento to the Regime. Life and work of Paola Masino. Localness vs. Europeanism in the age of fascist censorship. Preparation for the visit to Princeton Art Museum. Discussion on the midterm paper.

Required readings

- Paola Masino, *Birth and Death of the Housewife* (chapters 1-4) [on blackboard, 55 pp.]

Audio/video material

- Marni Kotak, *Raising Baby X*, 2011-2014 (series of videos by Kotak, who gave birth in front of an open audience at the Microscope Gallery in Brooklyn) [marnikotak.com]

Suggested readings

- Louise Rozier, *Motherhood and Femininity in Paola Masino's Novels*
- E. Paulicelli, *Art in modern Italy* (Cambridge Companion to MIC) [17+21 pp.]

March 10

Week 6

The Witch, the Bride, the Bitch, the Saint, and Other Bodies

Class held at the Princeton Art Museum. Guided tour (curator Veronica White) with focus on works related to our topic. Discussion at the museum's seminar room, with display of specific objects from the collection (see Object-Package on Blackboard).

Required readings

- Essays and articles on movements and artists included in the visit [handout]

Suggested readings

- Paola Masino, *Birth and Death of the Housewife* (chapters 5-6) [60 pp.]

Deadline for submitting midterm papers: Friday, March 18.

Suggested readings

- Paola Masino, *Birth and Death of the Housewife* (chapters 7-8)
[49 pp.]

Post-War and Post-Modernity (1947-2012)

Part II - Weeks 8-13

March 24

Week 8

Girls Don't Want to Have Fun

Women as workers after WWII. Neorealism and Neo-Avantgarde: the birth of "I novissimi" poets. Post-war industrialization: Milan. Marxism and Experimentalism. Male and queer gazes on feminine bodies and minds. Gendered identities in the age of "Mad Men". The myth of Marilyn.

Required readings

- Elio Pagliarani, *A Girl Named Carla*

- Alfredo Giuliani, *Introduction to "I Novissimi: Poetry for the Sixties"*
[on blackboard, 27+14 pp.]

Audio/video material

- Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La Rabbia*, 1963 (film made with leftover video-materials from newsreels)
[on blackboard, 50 minutes]

Suggested readings

- Paola Masino, *Birth and Death of the Housewife* (chapter 9)

- Robert Dombroski, *Socialism, Comunist and other 'isms' (Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture)*
[24+17pp.]

March 31

Week 9

The 'Only Ones' (the Junkie, the Lunatic)

Postmodern (?) avantgarde in Italy: Gruppo '63 and Mulino di Bazzano. The "only" woman of the Neoavanguardia (actually at least four). Focus on Rosselli and Vicinelli, reasons of their marginalization (psychosis, addiction, suicide, incarceration). Informal sounds, performance poetry.

Required readings

- Amelia Rosselli, *Metrical Spaces* and excerpts from *Palermo '63* and *Bellicose Variations*

- Patrizia Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of Schizoid Woman* (excerpt)
[on blackboard, 58 pp. (but half images)]

Audio/video material

- Patrizia Vicinelli, *Fonemi*, 1986 and *Majakovskij*, 1988 (clips from Italian poetry festivals in the Eighties)
[on blackboard]

- Amelia Rosselli, *Impromptu*, 1981 (audio-recording - in Italian, but focus on the rhythm)
[PennSound]

Suggested readings

- *Neo-Avant-Garde + Experimental Novels* (Oxford Companion to Italian Literature)

- Jennifer Scappettone, *Stanza as "Homicide": The Poetry of Amelia Rosselli*
[10+49 pp.]

Verbivocovisual

Visual poetry, Sound poetry, Concretism, Post-punk publishing, Neo-surrealism. Abstraction vs. Pop, marxist realism vs. informal experimentalism (1969-1977). The multilingual/multimedia work of Giulia Niccolai. Preparation for the second visit to the Princeton Art Museum.

Required readings

- Giulia Niccolai, *Humpty Dumpty and Greenwich*
[on blackboard, 43 pp. (but mostly images)]

Audio/video material

- Adriano Spatola, *Aviation/Aviateur*, Giulia Niccolai, *In the downs*, and Toti Scialoja *Ballad*, F. Tiziano, *To type to hit* (tracks from "Baobab", soundpoetry journal)
[on blackboard]
- Demetrio Stratos, *Investigazioni (Diplofonie e triplofonie)* (vocal experiments)
[Youtube]
- Area, *Gioia e Rivoluzione* (song by Demetrio Stratos' band)
[on blackboard]
- Arrigo Lora Totino, *Discussion between two aliens, Toccata in A, The critic* (vocal performance at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan)
[Youtube]

Suggested readings

- The 1970s (Oxford Companion to Italian Literature)
- Lucia Re, *Language, Gender and Sexuality in the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde*
- Sarah Patricia Hill, *Poems as Objects: The Visual Poetry of Giulia Niccolai*
[5+38+18 pp.]

The Personal Is Public

Class held at the Princeton Art Museum. Guided tour (curator Veronica White) with focus on works related to our topic. Discussion at the museum's seminar room, with display of specific objects from the collection (see Object-Package on Bb). Feminism and feminist poetry in Italy.

Required readings

- Anthology of poems by feminist authors Biancamaria Frabotta and Dacia Maraini
[on blackboard, 43 pp.]
- Essays and articles on movements and artists included in the visit [handout]

Suggested readings

- Sharon Wood and Joseph Farrell, *Feminism* (Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture)
[9 pp.]

Gendered Childhoods, Gendered Consumptions

Gender and consumerism during the “Boom”. Experimentalism and disengagement between the Eighties and the Nineties (Cannibal Writers, Gruppo 93, euphoric postmodernism). Minimalist narrative and Nouveau Roman. Discussion about final papers.

Required readings	Audio/video material	Suggested readings
- Sandra Petrigiani, <i>The Toy Catalogue</i> (excerpt) [on blackboard, 60 pp.]	- <i>La grammatica della massaia - Lezioni per la donna moderna</i> (series of educational films for Italian housewives of the late 50s) [Youtube]	- <i>The 1980s</i> (Oxford Companion to Italian Literature) [7 pp.]

The New Wave

Experimental writing in the last decade: hyper-modernism, neo-feminism, post-human. Migrant/Southern/Queer: a new Italian avantgarde? Experiments based on new media, internet, and social networks. Final remarks, discussion on final papers, wrap up.

Audio/video material	Suggested readings
- Selection of audio-poems, recorded performances and readings by Jonida Prifti (<i>Ku ku ku</i>), Giovanna Marmo (<i>Sex in Legoland</i>), Gian Maria Annovi (<i>La scolta</i>), Gilda Policastro (<i>Antiprodi-gi</i>), and others [links and files on blackboard]	- Rebecca West, <i>Italian Culture or Multiculture in the New Millennium?</i> (Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture) [15 pp.]

Deadline for submitting final papers: Monday, May 16.