What is new? What is modern? Who decides? This course asks whether we might define modernism as an exercise in idiosyncrasy or as a deliberate conflagration of –isms and schools. Charting the constellations of aesthetic statements that underpin the modernist moment, we will approach modernism via its most canonical moments as well as (and especially) its most arbitrary and idiosyncratic. Given that debates about the value of poetic modernism preoccupied its practitioners and detractors (and, in some ways, continue to preoccupy modernist scholarship), we will work our way through the poetry of modernism with an eye toward its impassioned and often conflicting agendas.

Course texts to purchase* (all other readings listed below):
Djuna Barnes, Nightwood
H.D., Collected Poems 1912-1944
Mina Loy, The Lost Lunar Baedeker
The Cantos of Ezra Pound
William Carlos Williams, Spring and All

Recommended:
Frank O’Hara, Collected Poems

*All other required readings will be available as PDFs on Studium.

Assignments:
Throughout the term, we collectively will develop a bibliography of modernist criticism via class presentations. Each of you will be responsible for 1-2 presentations (if you do more than one, it will earn you good karma) that summarize the books’ arguments and relevance to our primary materials. As an accompaniment to your presentation(s), you will create a one-page blueprint that summarizes, in whatever form you choose, the text (feel free to be creative: make a flowchart, a drawing, a list, a graph, a poem, an outline, etc.); you should bring copies of this blueprint to distribute to the class during your presentation.

You will also be responsible for an 15-20-page paper, due in late April.

Grading:
Participation: 15%
Presentation(s): 35%
Final Paper: 50%