Modernism Lecture (thingie)

1) Problematics of definition
   a) Modernism, by its very definition (i.e. what it tries to do) defies definition
   b) History of the Term: Modern, Moderne, Avant-Garde, Symbolism
      i) Impressionism, post-impressionism, vorticism, fauvism, imagism, futurism, etc
   c) Pan global, pan generational, pan genre, pan discipline
   d) defies categorical definition
      i) Semantic definition: “Modern” that which isn’t the past, that which isn’t tradition
         (1) Problematic since modernism has become a literary tradition
      ii) Contrary essence of modernism, disruption, hierarchically defined against what came before: Victorianism, realism, enlightenment.
         (1) Defining against is a Violent act
         (2) Both subverts and aspires towards tradition
            (a) Flaubert & Madame B. and Romance, lady novels
   e) Hence a “definition” of modernism should be based upon attitudes, commonly shared attributes, tone, elements of philosophically based questioning, stylistics, influences, etc.
      (1) Realization of this versus the “canonical definition.”
         (a) “Canonical definition” based upon “marketing” or self-propagating agenda.

2) Canonical definition:
   a) (now under revision, “modernism” is really “modernisms,” but canonical definition gives a starting point for discussion and revision, gives an illusion of cohesion to an innately non-cohesive movement.
      i) CLASS CANONICITY
   b) Loosely 1899 – 1945, though others have noted different dates: 1910 (woolf), 1914 (pound, others), Baudelaire 1860s These discrepancies point to the arbitrariness of definition.
   c) Avant-Garde movement for the intellectual / artistic elite by the elite.
      i) Restricted availability: Distributed via “Little Magazines” and Small Press books [example, Shakespeare and company’s Ulysses]
      ii) Rarified
         (1) “Art for Art’s Sake”
            (a) WALTER PATER
(2) Autonomy of the artist
(3) Redeeming Value of Art
   (a) Mathew Arnold
(4) ART AS NEW RELIGION:
   (a) Modern artist’s social responsibility
   (b) Also, aspires to the Mythic
      (i) ELIOT AND FRASER
      (ii) Ulysses and the Odyssey
d) Definition based upon writings of “canonical” modernists: Pound, Lewis, Lawrence, Forster, Ford, Yeats, Conrad (though he was also considered a Victorian), Eliot.
   i) Masculine Pantheon, begrudgingly included Stein and Woolf.

e) International movement: French modernism as early as 1860s with Baudelaire, Flaubert:” madame Bovary 1857; Germany: Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy (1872), some even consider later Goethe, etc...
   i) True globalism. Marked by ex-patriotism, international centers of modernism such as London, then Paris
f) Across disciplines: Occurred in Music, Dance, Architecture, Plastic Arts, philosophy, etc.
   i) Influence of Painting upon literature, Picasso upon Stein, Impressionism upon Pound, Cubism on Hemingway, etc. Literary Movements labeled Imagism, Impressionism, Symbolism, etc after visual techniques
g) A product of modernity: Technology, Science, Psychology
   i) Technology
      (1) Speed, communication, transportation
         (a) Temporal instability
            (i) Mechanized trauma and fascination
      (2) Marinetti, Lewis, Faulkner, Conrad Aiken, Robert Brown and Cubism
   ii) Science
      (1) Entropy
      (2) Darwinism
      (3) Einstein and time/space, Duchamp and the Dada 4th Dimension
         (a) Bleak existential outlook
         (b) IRONY AND SARCASM
   iii) Psychological
      (1) Freudian Symbology
(a) Sexuality
(b) Pushing of Moral Boundaries, (BAUDELAIRE, ART, ANTI-VICTORIANISM)

iv) Resulted in casting about for alternatives to western religious and philosophical foundation
   (1) Mysticism
   (2) Mythic
   (3) Pre-christianity
v) Rebelled against Victorian Attitudes, stylistics, and morality
   (1) Open (and often shocking) sexuality

h) Stylistic experimentation: other tensions manifested in modernist stylistics
i) Also Rebelled against earlier LITERARY forms
   (1) Lewis and feminism of novels
   (2) Bovary and romance
      (a) Often, anti-novels of manners
         (i) Hemingway’s break with Stein
ii) Stream of consciousness and unreliable narrators
    (1) Displacement of the reader
    (2) Simultanaety and collage
iii) Unstable texts and double voiced narratives
iv) Erudition, difficulty, and inscrutability
    (1) Challenge the reader via a reinvention of the text
       (a) ➔ as tied to social responsibility
       (b) Re-awaken the word “worn thin by careless usage”
    (2) Confirmed the idea of “artist as privileged”

3) Overall, tensions of modernity resulted in the “instability of the signifier,” i.e. the old truths no longer held true “the center can not hold / things fall apart” (yeats).
   a) Basic hierarchies fall apart, art (and truth) exists in the space (tension)
      between opposing forces (Dionysian/apollonian, Point / counter-point, the fugue, negative dialectic, blurring of boundaries)

4) Hence the traditional categorization of modernism as a cohesive movement falls apart or is or is exposed as false truth, self marketing, masculine posturing, etc...
5) IN ACTUALITY, rich tapestry:
6) Danger of Modernism: “canonical” definition/tradition’s link to fascism; misogynistic, elitist, and prejudiced tradition. –Violence of the break w/tradition
   a) MODERNISM and FASCISM: Pound, Mussolini; Lewis,
7) DRAWBACKS of monolithic definition
   a) Ignores liminal voice
   b) Reductive of kaleidoscope of modernism
      i) Simplifies output
      ii) Innately elitist
         (1) ART for Art’s sake ignores economics and class, relies on difficulty and privilege
8) Important to realize the role that Academia has played in this definition!!!
   a) New Criticism and reification