

‘Efface the Traces!’ – Modernism and Influence

Durham University, 9-11 April 2013

‘[T]he poets of the nineties were entirely missed out of my personal history [...] I never read any of these people until it was much too late for me to get anything out of them’.

T.S. Eliot, letter to Ezra Pound, 1924

‘[I]t was towards the end of my school days or in my first year or two at Harvard University [that] I was reading the poets of the ‘nineties, who were the only poets [...] who at that period of history seemed to have anything to offer me as a beginner’.

T.S. Eliot, *Saltire Review*, iv, 1957

If Ezra Pound’s clamorous injunction – ‘make it new!’ – might be considered the first commandment of modernism, then Brecht’s dictum – ‘efface the traces!’ – stands as its complementary shadow statement. As the example of Eliot begins to illustrate, the Poundian urge to transfigure ‘legitimate’ influences results in a comparable urge to efface influences considered inappropriate. However, criticism has often proved inadequately alert to the motives underlying authorial advertisement and evasion of influence, instead colluding with the artist in the construction of a suspiciously orderly canonical narrative of modernist influence. We dutifully discuss Eliot as the heir of Dante and Donne; we corroborate Woolf’s departure from Wells and Bennett; we identify the Ibsen in *Exiles*, and the Confucianism of the *Cantos*.

This conference is conceived in the belief that the intersection between advertised and effaced influence operates as a particularly illuminating point of departure from which to develop new critical perspectives on the narrative(s) of modernism. This approach is also efficacious in projecting enquiry beyond the conventional spatial and temporal locus of modernism (London/Paris, 1890-1930), by drawing attention to hidden nineteenth-century proto-modernisms, and the contemporaneous cross-cultural interaction of rivalling counter-modernisms. Similarly, it encourages a nuanced handling of the vicissitudes of the mid-to-late twentieth-century reception of modernism – from Larkin’s early jettisoning of Yeats to Winterson’s strident advocacy of Woolf – by drawing attention both to the cultural investments of the

modernist authors themselves, and to those of subsequent writers striving to stake out a distinct position beyond modernism's daunting shadow.

We invite 20 minute papers on any of the following variations upon this theme, although respondents should not consider themselves restricted to these topics. Interdisciplinary research is also very much welcomed.

- Negotiating anxieties of influence
- Modernist self-fashioning
- The response of present-day writers to modernism
- Influence across disciplines
- Effacement strategies
- The figuring of modernism as either a positive or negative aesthetic precursor
- Influence as a factor in constructing aesthetic communities
- The marketing of influence
- Originality in an age of mechanical reproduction
- The traffic of influence between medical discourses and modernist texts
- Feminist celebration of influence
- Other modernism(s): influence across cultural borders
- Authorial progression and amendment of influence
- The mediation of influence through parody and allusion
- Defining disciplines: influence within academic theory after modernism
- The politics of literary parentage
- Friendship networks, publicity conspiracies, and group-think
- Nineteenth-century post-Romantic culture and modernism

Abstracts of no more than 250 words are invited by **1st December 2012**. Please email submissions to **effacethetraces@gmail.com**. You can also use this address to contact us with any additional questions, such as how to arrange attendance as a non-speaking delegate. Additionally, you can visit our website at **effacethetraces.wordpress.com**.

The conference will take place in St. Chad's College, Durham. Panels will follow the format of three 20-minute papers followed by questions, and each day will feature a

plenary speaker. Our plenary speakers will be **Dr Matthew Bevis** (University of Oxford), **Dr Marina MacKay** (Durham University), and **Professor Pat Waugh** (Durham University). The registration fee is £30 for salaried academics and £15 for postgraduates and postdoctoral researchers. We will be offering three postgraduate bursaries to particularly outstanding applicants, to cover the registration fee, accommodation, and a portion of travel costs. If you are the recipient of a bursary, we will inform you when accepting your paper.