Since antiquity, verbal and musical arts have always been in touch, related to each other through intense exchanges and cooperations: the poet as a singer of “cantos,” the importance of formal rules like repetition, reflection, and variation; the effects of sound and rhythm which do not seem to have clear semantic references, but still are “meaning something” to us, just to name a few examples. In order to observe and discuss the aesthetic differences and similarities of these two “neighbor arts,” the seminar will focus on four historical paradigms of music that have gained rich attention in literature: (1) J. S. Bach and the art of counterpoint: here we will examine novels by Thomas Bernhard (Der Untergeher/The Loser) and Richard Powers (The Gold Bug Variations); (2) the Viennese classics Mozart and Beethoven, seen through descriptions by E. T. A. Hoffmann (Don Juan) and Thomas Mann (Dr. Faustus); (3) the narrative voice in romantic songs (Schubert: Winterreise/Winter Journey) and (4) music in the age of politics (with selected chapters from William T. Vollmann’s Europe Centrale and with Julian Barnes’s The Noise of time, dedicated to Dmitry Shostakovich.

Schedule of Readings

(1) E. T. A. Hoffmann: Ritter Gluck. Form vs. Fantasy, Classical and Romanticism (Scher: Verbal Music)

(2) J. S. Bach: Goldberg Variations and the Art of Counterpoint (E. Said: “The Music Itself”)

(3) Thomas Bernhard: The Loser / Der Untergeher. Glenn Gould and the “Goldberg Myth”

(4) Richard Powers: The Goldbug Variations. Ratio vs. the Irrational

(5) Viennese classics: E. T. A. Hoffmann: “Beethoven’s Instrumental Music” (Kreisleriana) and “Review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony” – Don Juan

(6) Beethoven and the Fugue: Thomas Mann: Doktor Faustus, Chapters 4, 8: the relation of genius and mechanism

(7) Thomas Mann, Schönberg and Adorno: Doktor Faustus, Chapters 22, 45: From musical progress to the end of enlightenment (Vaget: Seelenzauber)

(8) Schubert: Winter Journey / Winterreise. Narrative Plot and lyrical expression; words and musical phrase

(10) William T. Vollmann: Europe Centrale. Can the historical conditions of production be heard in the music itself?

Bibliography