Modernism

Modernism is a trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve, deconstruct and reshape their environment, with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology and practical experimentation, and is thus in its essence both progressive and optimistic. The term covers many political, cultural and artistic movements rooted in the changes in Western society at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Broadly, modernism describes a series of reforming cultural movements in art and architecture, music, literature and the applied arts which emerged in the decades before 1914. But Modernism encouraged the re-examination of every aspect of existence, from commerce to philosophy, with the goal of finding that which was "holding back" progress, and replacing it with new, progressive and therefore better, ways of reaching the same end. In essence, the modernist movement argued that the new realities of the industrial and mechanized age were permanent and imminent, and that people should adapt their world view to accept that the new equaled the good, the true and the beautiful. Modern (quantum and relativistic) physics, modern (analytical and continental) philosophy and modern number theory in mathematics are, however, also said to date from this period. Embracing change and the present, modernism encompasses the works of thinkers who rebelled against nineteenth century academic and historicist traditions, believing the "traditional" forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life were becoming outdated; they directly confronted the new economic, social and political aspects of an emerging fully industrialized world. Some people divide the 20th Century into movements designated Modernism and Postmodernism, whereas others see them as two aspects of the same movement.
The first half of the nineteenth century for Europe was marked by a number of wars and revolutions, which reveal the rise of the ideas and doctrines now identified as Romanticism: emphasis on individual subjective experience, the sublime, the supremacy of "Nature" as a subject for art, revolutionary or radical extensions of expression, and individual liberty. By mid-century, however, a synthesis of these ideas with stable governing forms had emerged, partly in reaction to the failed Romantic and democratic Revolutions of 1848. It was exemplified by Otto von Bismarck’s realpolitik and by "practical" philosophical ideas such as positivism. Called by various names — in Great Britain it is designated the "Victorian era" — this stabilizing synthesis was rooted in the idea that reality dominates over impressions that are subjective.

Central to this synthesis were common assumptions and institutional frames of reference, including the religious norms found in Christianity, scientific norms found in classical physics, especially electromagnetism, and doctrines that asserted that the depiction of external reality from an objective standpoint was not only possible but desirable. Cultural critics and historians label this set of doctrines Realism, though this term is not universal. In philosophy, the rationalist, materialist and positivist movements established a primacy of reason and system.
Against the current ran a series of ideas, some of them direct continuations of Romantic schools of thought. Notable were the agrarian and revivalist movements in plastic arts and poetry (e.g. the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the philosopher John Ruskin). Rationalism also drew responses from the anti-rationalists in philosophy. In particular, Hegel's dialectic view of civilization and history drew responses from Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, who were major influences on Existentialism. All of these separate reactions together began to be seen as offering a challenge to any comfortable ideas of certainty derived by civilization, history, or pure reason.

From the 1870s onward, the ideas that history and civilization were inherently progressive and that progress was always good came under increasing attack. Writers Wagner and Ibsen had been reviled for their own critiques of contemporary civilization and for their warnings that accelerating "progress" would lead to the creation of individuals detached from social norms and isolated from their fellow men. Arguments arose that not merely were the values of the artist and those of society different, but that Society was antithetical to Progress, and could not move forward in its present form. Philosophers called into question the previous optimism. The work of Schopenhauer was labelled "pessimistic" for its idea of the "negation of the will", an idea that would be both rejected and incorporated by later thinkers such as Nietzsche.

Two of the most disruptive thinkers of the period were, in biology, Charles Darwin and, in political science, Karl Marx. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection undermined religious certainty of the general public, and the sense of human uniqueness of the intelligentsia.

The notion that human beings were driven by the same impulses as "lower animals" proved to be difficult to reconcile with the idea of an ennobling spirituality. Karl Marx seemed to present a political version of the same proposition: that problems with the economic order were not transient, the result of specific wrong doers or temporary conditions, but were fundamentally contradictions within the "capitalist" system. Both thinkers would spawn defenders and schools of thought that would become decisive in establishing modernism.

Separately, in the arts and letters, two ideas originating in France would have particular impact. The first was Impressionism, a school of painting that initially focused on work done, not in studios, but outdoors (en plein air). Impressionist paintings demonstrated that human beings do not see objects, but instead see light itself. The school gathered adherents despite internal divisions among its leading practitioners, and became increasingly influential. Initially rejected from the most important commercial show of the time — the government-sponsored Paris Salon — during the 1870s and 1880s the Impressionists organized yearly group exhibitions in commercial venues, timed to coincide with the official Salon. In 1863 art was shown at the Salon des Refusés, created by Emperor Napoleon III to display all of the paintings rejected by the Paris Salon. While most were in standard styles, but by inferior artists, the work of Manet attracted tremendous attention, and opened commercial doors to the movement.

The second school was Symbolism, marked by a belief that language is expressly symbolic in its nature and a portrayal of patriotism, and that poetry and writing should follow connections that the sheer sound and texture of the words create. The poet Stéphane Mallarmé would be of particular importance to what would occur afterwards.

At the same time social, political, and economic forces were at work that would become the basis to argue for a radically different kind of art and thinking. Chief among these was steam-powered industrialization, which produced buildings that combined art and engineering in new industrial materials such as cast iron to produce railroad bridges and glass-and-iron train sheds—or the Eiffel Tower, which broke all previous limitations on how tall man-made objects could be—and at the same time offered a radically different environment in urban life.

The miseries of industrial urbanism, and the possibilities created by scientific examination of subjects brought changes that would shake a European civilization which had, until then, regarded itself as having a continuous and progressive line of development from the Renaissance. With the telegraph's harnessing of a new power, offering instant communication at a distance, the experience of time itself was altered.

The breadth of the changes can be sensed in how many modern disciplines are described, in their pre-twentieth century form, as being "classical", including physics, economics, and arts such as ballet or architecture.

**The beginning of modernism, 1890–1910**
William Everdell has argued that Modernism began with Richard Dedekind's division of the real number line in 1872 and Boltzmann's statistical thermodynamics in 1874; but Clement Greenberg wrote "What can be safely called Modernism" emerged in the middle of the last century— and rather locally, in France, with Baudelaire in literature and Manet in painting, and perhaps with Flaubert, too, in prose fiction. (It was a while later, and not so locally, that Modernism appeared in music and architecture)."[1] The "avant-garde" was what Modernism was called at first, and the term remained to describe movements which identify themselves as attempting to overthrow some aspect of tradition or the status quo.

In the 1890s a strand of thinking began to assert that it was necessary to push aside previous norms entirely, instead of merely revising past knowledge in light of current techniques. The growing movement in art paralleled such developments as the Theory of Relativity in physics; the increasing integration of the internal combustion engine and industrialization; and the increased role of the social sciences in public policy. It was argued that, if the nature of reality itself was in question, and if restrictions which had been in place around human activity were falling, then art, too, would have to radically change. Thus, in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century a series of writers, thinkers, and artists made the break with traditional means of organizing literature, painting, and music.

- Sigmund Freud offered a view of subjective states involving an unconscious mind full of primal impulses and counterbalancing self-imposed restrictions, a view that Carl Jung would combine with a belief in natural essence to stipulate a collective unconscious that was full of basic typologies that the conscious mind fought or embraced. Jung's view suggested that people's impulses towards breaking social norms were not the product of childishness or ignorance, but were instead essential to the nature of the human animal, the ideas of Darwin having already introduced the concept of "man, the animal" to the public mind.

- Friedrich Nietzsche championed a philosophy in which forces, specifically the 'Will to power', were more important than facts or things. Similarly, the writings of Henri Bergson championed the vital 'life force' over static conceptions of reality. What united all these writers was a romantic distrust of the Victorian positivism and certainty. Instead they championed, or, in the case of Freud, attempted to explain, irrational thought processes through the lens of rationality and holism. This was connected with the century-long trend to
thinking in terms of holistic ideas, which would include an increased interest in the occult, and "the vital force".

Out of this collision of ideals derived from Romanticism, and an attempt to find a way for knowledge to explain that which was as yet unknown, came the first wave of works, which, while their authors considered them extensions of existing trends in art, broke the implicit contract that artists were the interpreters and representatives of bourgeois culture and ideas. These "modernist" landmarks include Arnold Schoenberg's atonal ending to his Second String Quartet in 1908, the abstract expressionist paintings of Wassily Kandinsky starting in 1903 and culminating with the founding of the Blue Rider group in Munich, and the rise of cubism from the work of Picasso and Georges Braque in 1908.

Powerfully influential in this wave of modernity were the theories of Freud, who argued that the mind had a basic and fundamental structure, and that subjective experience was based on the interplay of the parts of the mind. All subjective reality was based, according to Freud's ideas, on the play of basic drives and instincts, through which the outside world was perceived. This represented a break with the past, in that previously it was believed that external and absolute reality could impress itself on an individual, as, for example, in John Locke's tabula rasa doctrine.

This wave of the modern movement broke with the past in the first decade of the twentieth century, and tried to redefine various artforms in a radical manner. Leading lights within the literary wing of this movement (or, rather, these movements) include:

- Rafael Alberti
- Gabriele D'Annunzio
- Guillaume Apollinaire
- Louis Aragon
- Djuna Barnes
- Basil Bunting
- Jean Cocteau
- Joseph Conrad
- H.D.
- T. S. Eliot
- Paul Eluard
- William Faulkner
- Hugo von Hofmannsthal
- Max Jacob
- James Joyce
- Franz Kafka
- D. H. Lawrence
- Wyndham Lewis
- Federico García Lorca
- Marianne Moore
- Robert Musil
- Ezra Pound
- Marcel Proust
- Pierre Reverdy
- Gertrude Stein
- Wallace Stevens
- Tristan Tzara
- Paul Valery
- Robert Walser
- William Carlos Williams
- Virginia Woolf
- W. B. Yeats

www.Wikipedia.com
The explosion of modernism 1910–1930

Le guitariste (1910), by Pablo Picasso.

On the eve of World War I a growing tension and unease with the social order, seen in the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the agitation of "radical" parties, also manifested itself in artistic works in every medium which radically simplified or rejected previous practice. In 1913, the year of Einstein's first paper on the General Theory of Relativity, Niels Bohr's quantized atom, Edmund Husserl's Ideas, Ezra Pound's founding of Imagism, and the New York Armory Show, famed Russian composer Igor Stravinsky, working for Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, composed Rite of Spring for a ballet, choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky that depicted human sacrifice, and young painters such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse were causing a shock with their rejection of traditional perspective as the means of structuring paintings—a step that none of the Impressionists, not even Cézanne, had taken.

These developments began to give a new meaning to what was termed 'Modernism': It embraced disruption, rejecting or moving beyond simple Realism in literature and art, and rejecting or dramatically altering tonality in music. This set modernists apart from 19th century artists, who had tended to believe in 'progress'. Writers like Dickens and Tolstoy, painters like Turner, and musicians like Brahms were not 'radicals' or 'Bohemians', but were instead valued members of society who produced art that added to society, even if it was, at times, critiquing less desirable aspects of it. Modernism, while it was still "progressive" increasingly saw traditional forms and traditional social arrangements as hindering progress, and therefore the artist was recast as a revolutionary, overthrowing rather than enlightening.

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Futurism exemplifies this trend. In 1909, F.T. Marinetti's first manifesto was published in the Parisian newspaper Le Figaro; soon afterward a group of painters (Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini) co-signed the Futurist Manifesto. Modeled on the famous "Communist Manifesto" of the previous century, such manifestoes put forward ideas that were meant to provoke and to gather followers. Strongly influenced by Bergson and Nietzsche, Futurism was part of the general trend of Modernist rationalization of disruption.

Modernist philosophy and art were still viewed as being part, and only a part, of the larger social movement. Artists such as Klimt and Cézanne, and composers such as Mahler and Richard Strauss were "the terrible moderns"—those farther to the avant-garde were more heard of than heard. Polemics in favour of geometric or purely abstract painting were largely confined to 'little magazines' (like The New Age in the UK) with tiny circulations. Modernist primitivism and pessimism were controversial but were not seen as representative of the Edwardian mainstream, which was more inclined towards a Victorian faith in progress and liberal optimism.

However, World War I and its subsequent events were the cataclysmic upheavals that late 19th century artists such as Brahms had worried about, and avant-gardists had embraced. First, the failure of the previous status quo seemed self-evident to a generation that had seen millions die fighting over scraps of earth—prior to the war, it had been argued that no one would fight such a war, since the cost was too high. Second, the birth of a machine age changed the conditions of life—machine warfare became a touchstone of the ultimate reality. Finally, the immensely traumatic nature of the experience dashed basic assumptions: Realism seemed to be bankrupt when faced with the fundamentally fantastic nature of trench warfare, as exemplified by books such as Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front. Moreover, the view that mankind was making slow and steady moral progress came to seem ridiculous in the face of the senseless slaughter of the Great War. The First World War, at once, fused the harshly mechanical geometric rationality of technology with the nightmarish irrationality of myth.

Thus in the 1920s, modernism, which had been such a minority taste before the war, came to define the age. Modernism was seen in Europe in such critical movements as Dada, and then in constructive movements such as Surrealism, as well as in smaller movements such as the Bloomsbury Group. Each of these "modernisms", as some observers labelled them at the time, stressed new methods to produce new results. Again, Impressionism was a precursor: breaking with the idea of national schools, artists and writers adopted ideas of international movements. Surrealism, Cubism, Bauhaus,
and Leninism are all examples of movements that rapidly found adopters far beyond their original geographic base.

Exhibitions, theatre, cinema, books and buildings all served to cement in the public view the perception that the world was changing. Hostile reaction often followed, as paintings were spat upon, riots organized at the opening of works, and political figures denounced modernism as unwholesome and immoral. At the same time, the 1920s were known as the "Jazz Age", and the public showed considerable enthusiasm for cars, air travel, the telephone, and other technological advances.

By 1930, modernism had won a place in the establishment, including the political and artistic establishment, although by this time modernism itself had changed. There was a general reaction in the 1920s against the pre-1918 modernism, which emphasized its continuity with a past while rebelling against it, and against the aspects of that period which seemed excessively mannered, irrational, and emotionalistic. The post-World War period, at first, veered either to systematization or nihilism and had, as perhaps its most paradigmatic movement, Dada.

While some writers attacked the madness of the new modernism, others described it as soulless and mechanistic. Among modernists there were disputes about the importance of the public, the relationship of art to audience, and the role of art in society. Modernism comprised a series of sometimes contradictory responses to the situation as it was understood, and the attempt to wrestle universal principles from it. In the end science and scientific rationality, often taking models from the 18th Century Enlightenment, came to be seen as the source of logic and stability, while the basic primitive sexual and unconscious drives, along with the seemingly counter-intuitive workings of the new machine age, were taken as the basic emotional substance. From these two poles, no matter how seemingly incompatible, modernists began to fashion a complete worldview that could encompass every aspect of life, and express "everything from a scream to a chuckle".