

MODERNISM

(for English Hons., Sem V & VI, CC 12 & 13)

(BASIC CONCEPTS TO REMEMBER)

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DEFINITION

- ▶ **Modernism** refers to a **reforming** movement in **art, architecture, music, literature** and the **applied arts** during the **late 19th Century** and **early 20th Century**. There is no specifically Modernist movement in Philosophy, but rather Modernism refers to a movement **within the arts** which had some **influence** over later philosophical thought. The later **reaction against** Modernism gave rise to the Post-Modernist movement both in the arts and in philosophy.

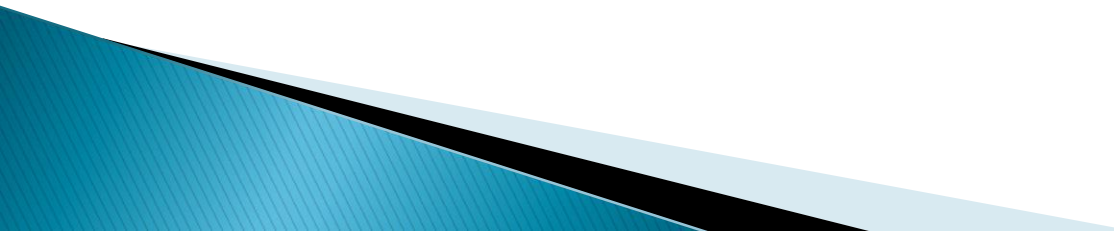
MODERNISM– A REBELLION

- ▶ Modernism was essentially conceived of as a rebellion against 19th Century academic and historicist traditions and against Victorian nationalism and cultural absolutism, on the grounds that the "traditional" forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life (in a modern industrialized world) were becoming outdated. The movement was initially called "avant-garde", descriptive of its attempt to overthrow some aspect of tradition or the status quo. The term "modernism" itself is derived from the Latin "modo", meaning "just now".

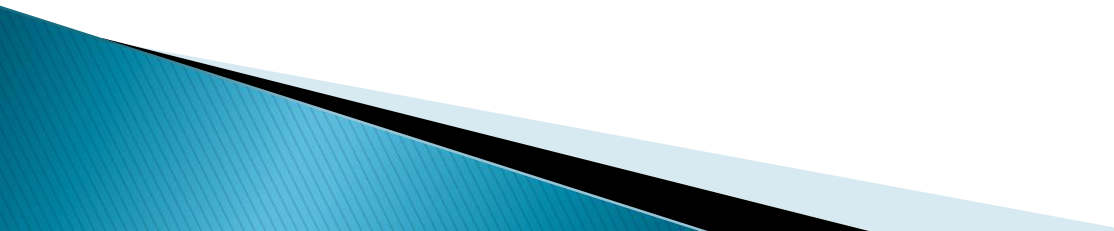
RE-EXAMINATION TO REJECTION

- ▶ It called for 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 better ways of reaching the same end. Modernists believed that by **rejecting tradition** they could discover radically **new ways** of making art, and at the same time to force the **audience** to take the trouble to **question** their own preconceptions. It stressed **freedom of expression, experimentation, radicalism** and **primitivism**, and its disregard for conventional expectations often meant **startling** and **alienating** audiences with bizarre and unpredictable effects (e.g. surrealism in art, atonality in music, stream-of-consciousness literature).
- ▶ Some Modernists saw themselves as part of a **revolutionary culture** that also included political revolution, while others **rejected** conventional politics as well as artistic conventions, believing that a revolution of **political consciousness** had greater importance than a change in actual **political structures**.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNISM

- ▶ Marked by a strong and intentional break with tradition. This break includes a strong reaction against established religious, political, and social views.
 - ▶ Belief that the world is created in the act of perceiving it; that is, the world is what we say it is.
 - ▶ There is no such thing as absolute truth. All things are relative.
 - ▶ No connection with history or institutions. Their experience is that of alienation, loss, and despair.
 - ▶ Championship of the individual and celebration of inner strength.
 - ▶ Life is unordered.
 - ▶ Concerned with the sub-conscious.
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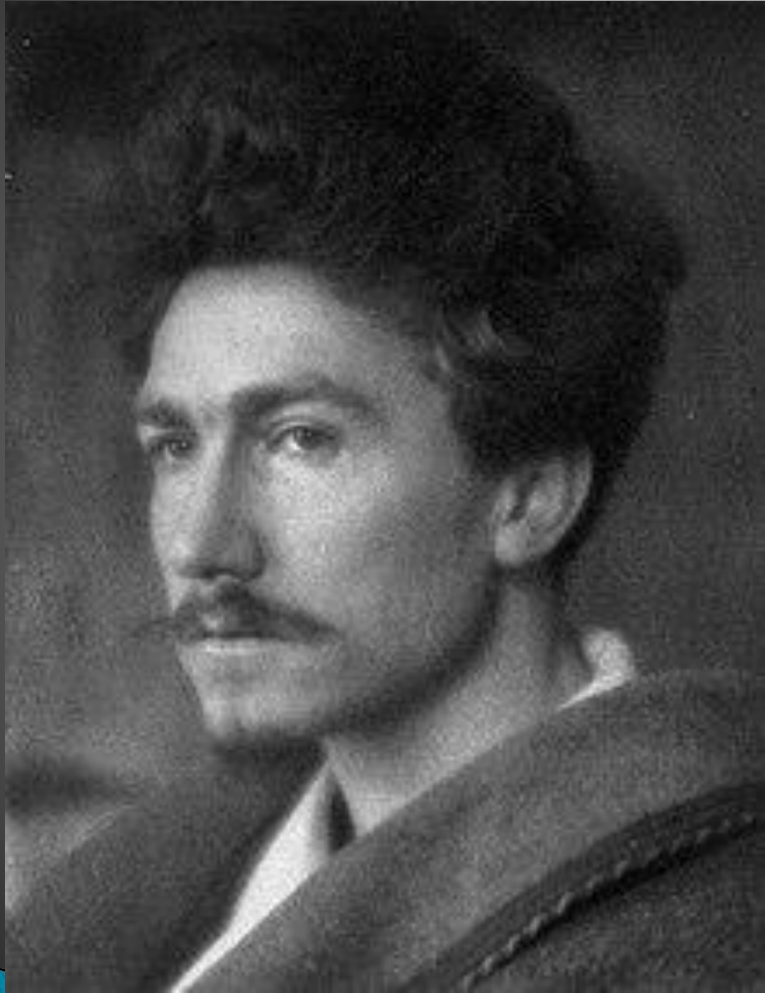
THE FACTORS THAT SHAPED MODERNISM

- ▶ The development of modern industrial societies
 - ▶ The rapid growth of cities
 - ▶ Reactions of horror to world war I.
 - ▶ Modernism also rejected the certainty of enlightenment thinking
 - ▶ Many modernists rejected religious belief.
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WHAT IT INCLUDES

- ▶ Modernism, in general, includes the activities and creations of those who felt the traditional forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, philosophy, social organization, activities of daily life, and sciences were becoming ill-fitted to their tasks and **outdated** in the new economic, social, and political environment of an emerging fully industrialized world.

"MAKE IT NEW!"



- ▶ The poet Ezra Pound's 1934 injunction to "Make it new!" was the touchstone of the movement's approach towards what it saw as the now obsolete culture of the past. In this spirit, its innovations, like the stream-of-consciousness novel, atonal and twelve-tone music, divisionist painting and abstract art, all had precursors in the 19th century.

EXPERIMENTATION

- ▶ A notable characteristic of modernism is self-consciousness and irony concerning literary and social traditions, which often led to experiments with form, along with the use of techniques that drew attention to the processes and materials used in creating a painting, poem, building, etc. Modernism explicitly rejected the ideology of realism and makes use of the works of the past by the employment of reprise, incorporation, rewriting, recapitulation, revision and parody

MODERNISM AS A MODE OF THINKING

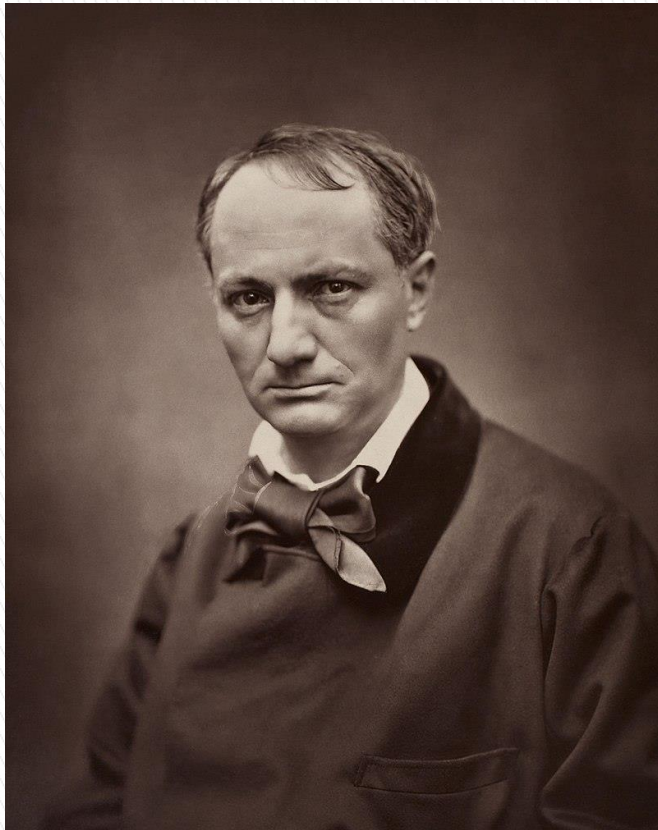
- ▶ Some commentators define modernism as a mode of thinking—one or more philosophically defined characteristics, like self-consciousness or self-reference, that run across all the novelties in the arts and the disciplines.
- ▶ More common, especially in the West, are those who see it as a socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve and reshape their environment with the aid of practical experimentation, scientific knowledge, or technology.

AESTHETIC INTROSPECTION

- ▶ Some focus on modernism as an aesthetic introspection. This facilitates consideration of specific reactions to the use of technology in the First World War, and anti-technological and nihilistic aspects of the works of diverse thinkers and artists spanning the period from Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) to Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERNISM IN FRANCE

- ▶ Historians, and writers in different disciplines, have suggested various dates as starting points for modernism. Historian William Everdell, for example, has argued that modernism began in the 1870s, when metaphorical (or ontological) continuity began to yield to the discrete with mathematician Richard Dedekind's (1831–1916) Dedekind cut, and Ludwig Boltzmann's (1844–1906) statistical thermodynamics. Everdell also thinks modernism in painting began in 1885–86 with Seurat's Divisionism, the "dots" used to paint *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. On the other hand, visual art critic Clement Greenberg called Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) "the first real Modernist", though he also 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)." The poet Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), and Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* were both published in 1857.



CHARLES BAUDELAIRE



IMMANUEL KANT

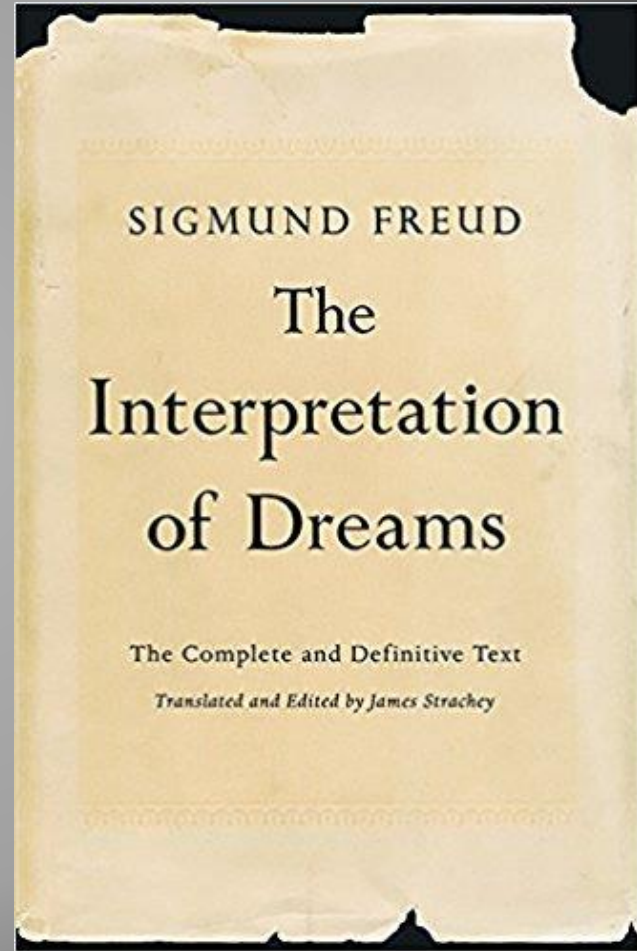
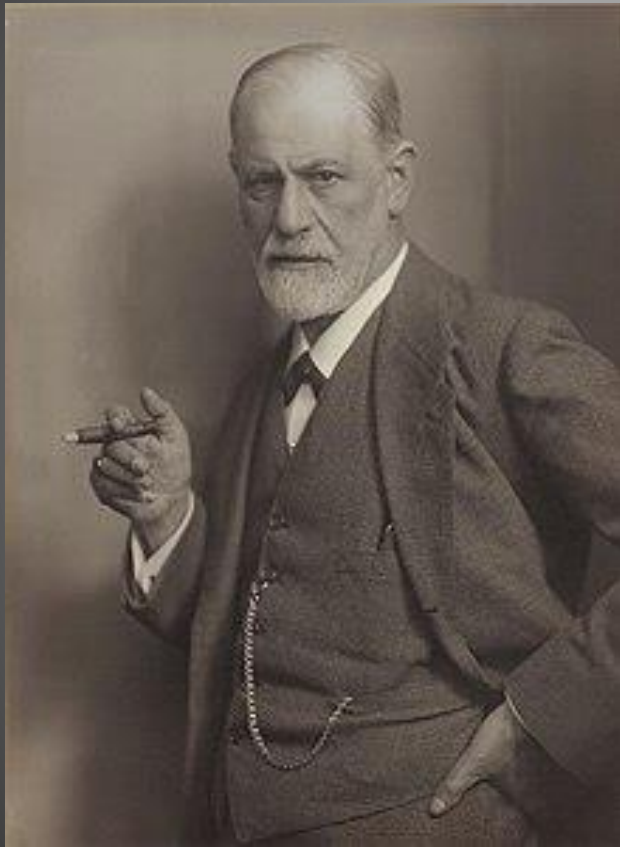
GUSTAVE FLAUBERT



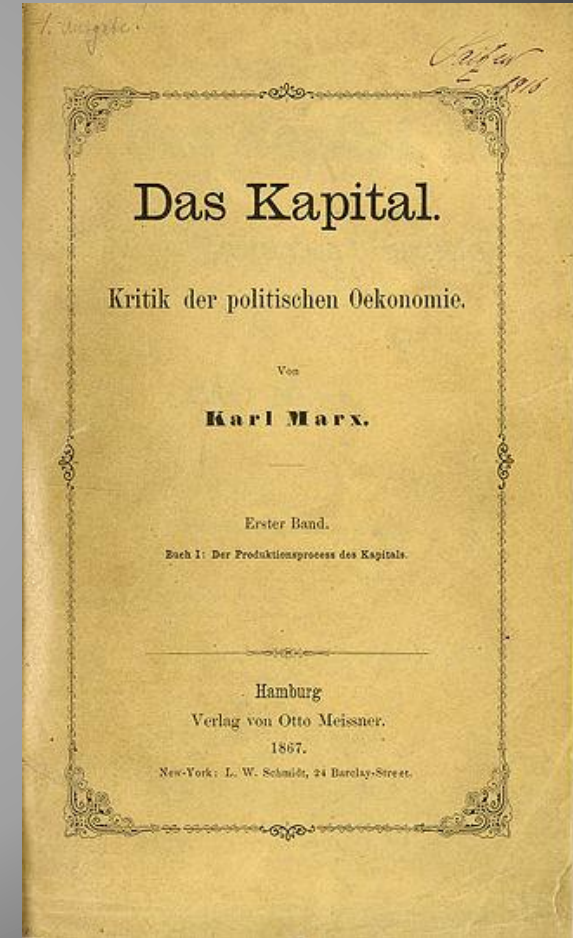
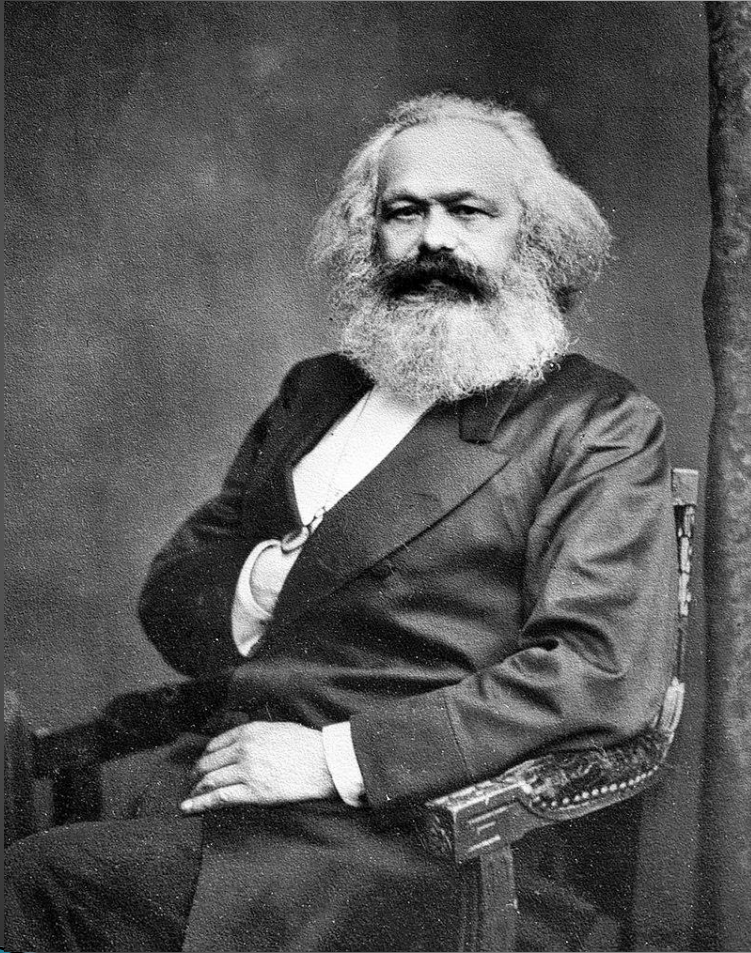
LITERARY MODERNISM

- ▶ **Literary modernism, or modernist literature**, has its origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mainly in Europe and North America, and is characterized by a very self-conscious break with traditional ways of writing, in both poetry and prose fiction. **Modernists** experimented with literary form and expression, as exemplified by **Ezra Pound**'s maxim to "Make it new." This literary movement was driven by a conscious desire to overturn traditional modes of representation and express the new sensibilities of their time. The horrors of the **First World War** saw the prevailing assumptions about society reassessed, and modernist writers were influenced by such thinkers as **Sigmund Freud** and **Karl Marx**, amongst others, who raised questions about the rationality of the human mind.

Sigmund Freud

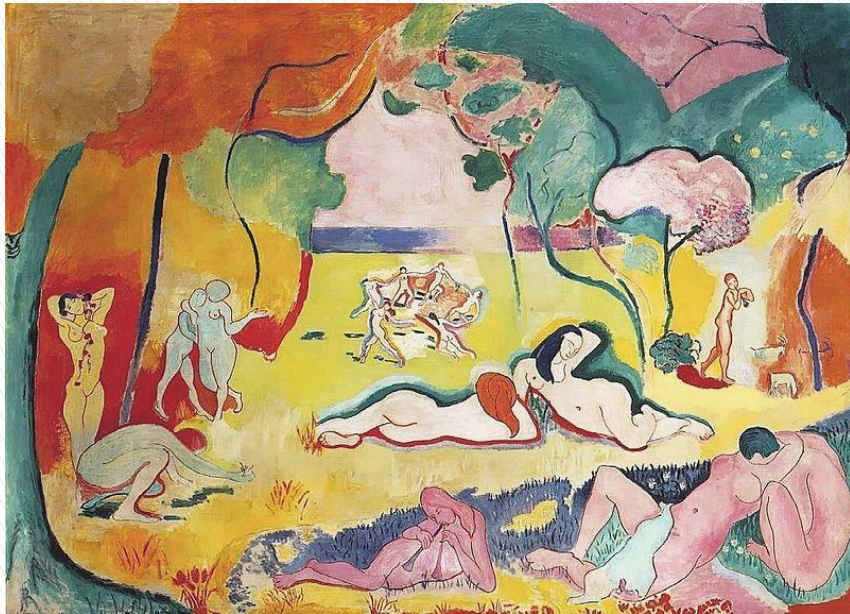


Karl Marx



Sub Genres of Literary Modernism

- ▶ Imagism
 - ▶ Symbolism
 - ▶ Vorticism
 - ▶ Expressionism
 - ▶ Futurism
 - ▶ Surrealism
 - ▶ Acmeist poetry
 - ▶ Dada
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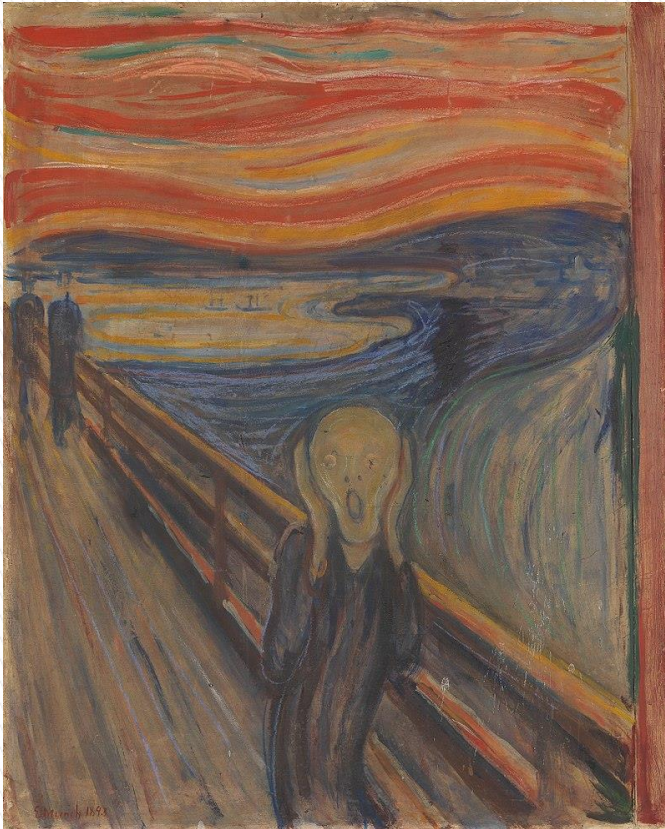
Matisse



Odilon Redon, *Guardian Spirit of the Waters*, 1878,

PABLO PICASSO





Edvard Munch, The Scream, 1893,



Gino Severini, 1912, *Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bal Tabarin*

Sub genres in classes to follow

THANK YOU.