

A Cubist World



The **Cubist period** began around the beginning of the 20th Century in Europe and went up to the end of World War II.

Cubism - was a major avant-garde movement (which means experimental). It pushed the boundaries in terms of literature, art, culture and politics and was the birth of the **modernist** movement.

Avant-Garde - artists, writers, thinkers are often estranged from society and many end up living away from their world in small communes.

Renato Poggioli - wrote an influential book in 1962 called 'The Theory of the Avant-guard' (initially in Italian – it has been translated into many languages, including English).

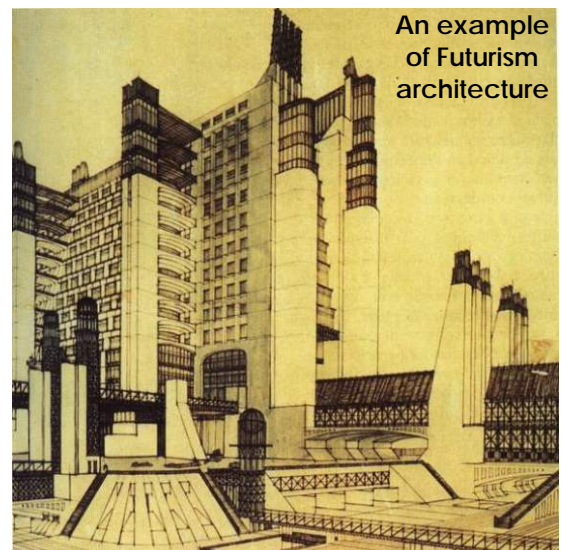
Poggioli noted that Avant-Gardist thinkers, whether they were writers, artists, poets or politicians, shared many common ideas and values which showed up in the non-conformist way they lived their lives and thought.

Poggioli reflected on the ideas of a leading Avante-gardist of the nineteenth century who claimed that "this society that will not let him live", and Poggioli claimed that the typical Avant-gardist exists in a state of mutual antagonism towards the public and tradition. Avant-gardists shun popularity and are not interested in things like fashion, judging it to deal in stereotypes, falsehoods and insincerity. Avante-gardists usually go out of their way to subvert current trends and as pioneers they often have strong 'down-with-the-past' ideas.

This means that many avant-gardist thinkers are alienated from society and historically their revolutionary ideas have appealed mostly to the intelligentsia – the educated elite.

Poggioli defined avante-gardists in four ways:

1. **Nihilism** - a position which argues that existence is without meaning or value and therefore objective morality does not exist, no action is morally better than another, in the absence of morality there is no higher good, there is nothing to prove a higher being like G-d exists and even if a creator does exist humans are under no obligation to worship them.
2. **Agonism** - is an ideology that emphasises the positive aspect of opposition and conflict as a way for the 'other' and people of difference to express that difference. They do not believe in ideas like democracy which are about giving everyone a voice to find harmony and representation within society but rather that we should look at difference and conflict as positive representations in society.
3. **Futurism** - is a movement which emphasises the future directions of the world and loathes anything old. Filippo Marinetti represented this view when he said in a newspaper report in 1909; "We want no part of it, the past . . . we the young and strong *Futurists!*" The Futurists admired speed, technology, youth and violence, the car, the plane and the industrial city, all that



An example
of Futurism
architecture

represented the technological triumph of humanity over nature, and they were passionate nationalists. The Futurists practiced in every medium of art, including painting, sculpture, ceramics, graphic design, industrial design, interior design, theatre, fashion, textiles, literature, music, architecture and even gastronomy.

4. **Decadence** – characterised by a decline in moral values and a “luxurious, self-indulgence”

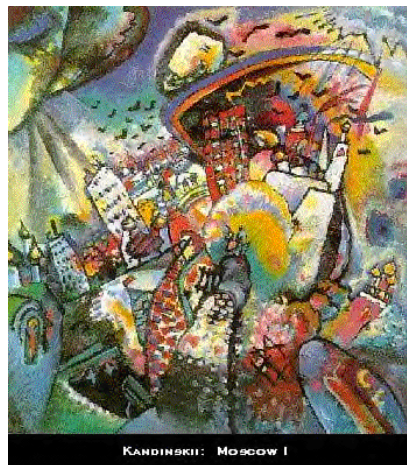


The origins of Avant-garde - way of thinking that resulted in the Modernist and Cubist movement had its origins in a French movement of the 19th Century referred to as **Bohemianism**.

Bohemian - came to refer to a group of artists, writers, musicians and actors in the Nineteenth century who lived untraditional lifestyles, marginalised (separated) from the rest of society. Bohemians were associated with unorthodox, nontraditional, antiestablishment political or social viewpoints which resulted in their relaxed moral view of the world. They often purposely lived a poorer lifestyle and the term Bohemia comes from the gypsy type of life they lived (because there used to be a belief that Gypsy's came from a part of Eastern Europe called Bohemia).

Bohemian art was often characterised by images that were very colourful and often abstract (ie went against the traditional art works of the 19th and early 20th Century which were realistic portraying real-life images of people, landscape and or other things like bowls of fruit etc)

Examples of Bohemian art:



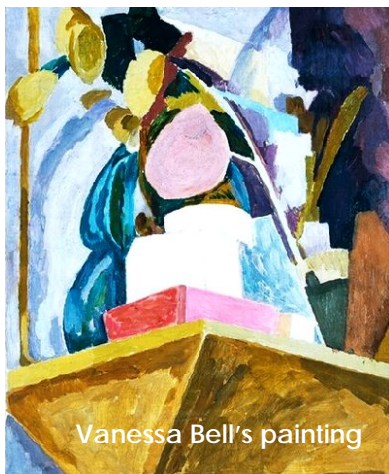
The Bloomsbury Group – Avant-garde, bohemian groups of writers that lived in London at the beginning of the 20th Century. They were controversial and mainly consisted of essayists and novelists. The best known members were; Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster and Lytton Strachey.

Writers:

- ✧ E. M. Forster – ‘Where Angels Fear to Tread’, ‘The Longest Journey’, ‘A Room with a View’, ‘Howard’s End’ and ‘A Passage to India’ (some of these have been made into movies)
- ✧ Virginia Woolf – ‘Mrs Dalloway’, ‘To the Lighthouse’ and ‘Orlando’ (some of these have been made into movies)
- ✧ John Maynard Keynes was also a member of this group – he was one of the most influential economists of the time and still today and he proposed a system of economics where governments intervene to stop recessions. He is considered to be one of the greatest thinkers of the modern era.

Painters:

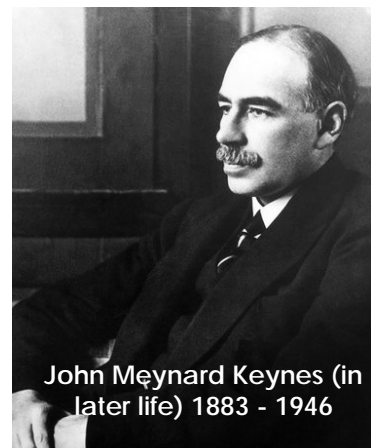
- ✧ Duncan Grant – well known painter of the time
- ✧ Vanessa Bell – well known artist and interior designer – sister of Virginia Woolf
- ✧ Clive Bell – husband of Vanessa – well known art-critic of the time.



Vanessa Bell's painting



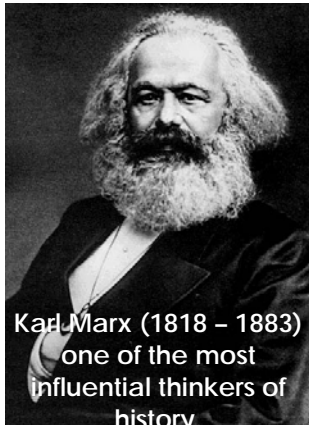
Duncan Grant's painting



John Maynard Keynes (in later life) 1883 - 1946

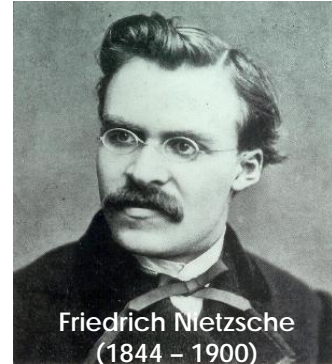
Modernism – The Bloomsbury Group and other Avant-gardist groups such as Cubism came about during the Modernism revolution. Modernism revolted against many of the conservative, old-fashioned values of the pre-twentieth century. Modernists believed that human beings had the power to create, improve and reshape their environment with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology or practical experimentation. Modernism encouraged the re-examination of every aspect of existence from commerce to philosophy, technology, literature, art, architecture, music and so on. They believed that through this human beings could progress and become enlightenment. They believed that through this all the disadvantages, discriminations and suffering of the past could be overcome.

Charles Darwin – a forerunner of modernism – The Origin of Species (1859) – developed a theory about human history and evolution. At the centre of creation is mankind rather than G-d. Very influential at the time and even till today.



Karl Marx (1818 – 1883)
one of the most
influential thinkers of
history.

Karl Marx – a forerunner of modernism – The Communist Manifesto (1848) – known as the “father of communism” a political thought that reinterprets history as class struggle. His ideas did much to change the way people thought about the world and gave birth to many radical new ideas that reinterpreted ideas and history such as bohemianism and modernism. Mostly people that followed Marxist ideas refused to accept society the way it had always been and questioned existing social, political, moral, literature, musical and artistic norms.



Friedrich Nietzsche
(1844 – 1900)

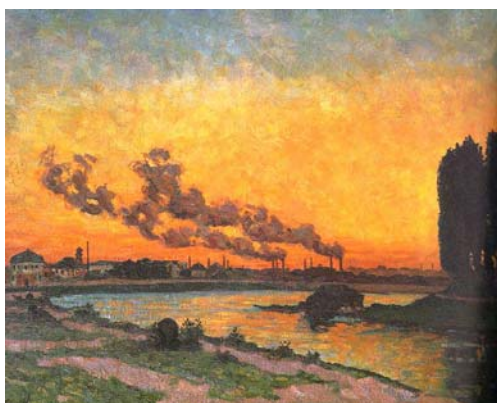
Friedrich Nietzsche – a forerunner of modernism –
one of the most influential thinkers of the

Nineteenth Century onwards. He wrote critical texts on religion, morality, philosophy and history. One of his most influential books is ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’. Nietzsche called himself an ‘amoralist’ and was against religious morality or societal morality that existed in the day. He saw the existing ideas of morality akin to a master-slave relationship – where people were the slaves to social dictates. One of his best known statements was “G-d is dead” and through this he believed that there was no such thing as universal and objective truth and therefore people made truth as applied to them. He saw all human behaviour as a “will to power”, a way to overcome and control others – and even slaves or inferiors were using this as a way to dominate their masters. Through casting off these previous held ideas, humans could then become “Übermensch” – a sort of superhuman not controlled by the conservative moral values of the past that held back progress.

Existentialism – Nietzsche’s ideas gave birth to existentialism which claims that individuals create meaning in their lives as opposed to meaning being created by an outside G-d. Their work focused on such themes as “dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment, and nothingness” as fundamental to human existence.

Nietzsche’s philosophy inspired other great modernist philosopher’s and you should research them and try to understand their ideas.

- ✧ Jean-Paul Sartre
- ✧ Martin Heidegger
- ✧ Albert Camus
- ✧ Simone de Beauvoir



Armand Guillaumin ‘Sunset at Ivry’

Impressionism – a forerunner of modernism – was a nineteenth century art movement that began in Paris. Characteristics of this art movement involved visible brush strokes, emphasis on light and its changing qualities, realistic subject matter and portrayal of movement. Impressionists broke with tradition by the style they used and thus served as a forerunner of other modernist inspired art forms.

Industrialisation – a forerunner of modernism – The time preceding the Modernist period was affected greatly by the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution began in England in the latter part of the 1700s. This means that the means of production changes from mostly manual labour (people) to machinery (at this stage mostly controlled by steam).

This had huge social repercussions on life in England. It meant that many people were put out of work. There was a huge movement from countryside to cities to look for work, also a rise in development of slums and poverty. There was no social security to protect these people out of work.

It also meant the growth of factories emitting pollution. By and large industry grew up in the North (cities like Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool) and the south (London) remained frozen in a much calmer period of time.



Original Steam Engine in a museum in England

For a comprehensive understanding of the terrible conditions in Factory's and attempts to reform in you need to go to the excellent website -

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRchild.main.htm>

Events to research –

World War One

1920s – the Jazz Age (including Jazz music and how it fits in with Modernist thought)

The Great Depression

World War II

Also look up Czech Cubism

Beginning of Modernism (1890 – 1910) – This period began a new wave of thinking – not only based on past ideas and creating something new – but completely breaking away from those ideas and inspired by thinkers such as Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx. These ideas had human beings at the centre of understanding and how they affected the world rather than studying how the world affected them. Many artforms and literature during this period were radical while at the same time adhering to ideas of realism in artistic, literary and musical forms.

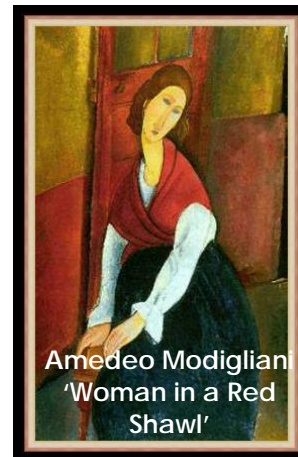
Composers during this period that you need to research:

Writers/poets:

- ✧ T. S. Elliot
- ✧ William Faulkner
- ✧ Aldous Huxley
- ✧ Franz Kafka
- ✧ William Butler Yeats
- ✧ Joseph Conrad
- ✧ James Joyce
- ✧ D. H. Lawrence
- ✧ Gertrude Stein
- ✧ Ezra Pound

Artists:

- ✧ Wynham Lewis
- ✧ Jose Negreiros
- ✧ Amedeo Modigliani



First Wave Modernism (1910 – 1930) – On the Eve of World War I – there was a growing tension in the world and Modernists felt that this was heading for a crisis within society in general. Modernism of this period did not just seek to radically change perception of the world but actually saw to disrupt existing ideas. Modernists at this time no longer admired realism because they saw a world that was disrupted and destroyed by Realism. The Great War was a totalising war at the end of it the world was never the same as before it, particularly in ideas about society, politics and morality. The 1920s was seen as a time of excess (when people only existed to party in the moment) which then led to the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the Great Depression.

Art, literary, dramatic and musical forms changed dramatically during this period.

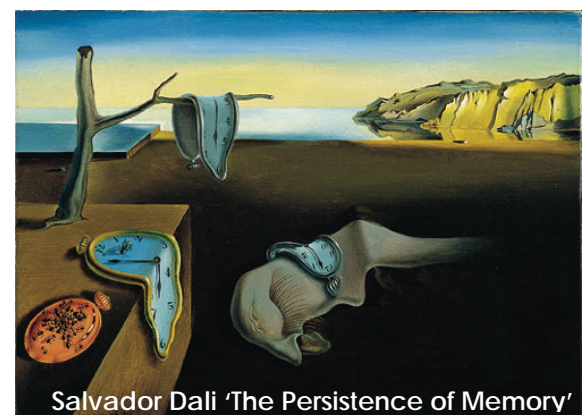
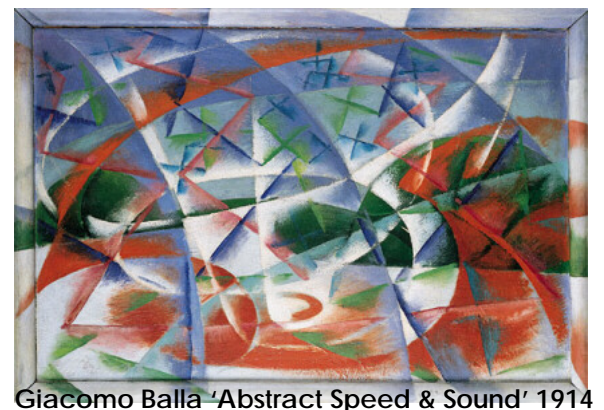
Composers during this period that you need to research (and perhaps read) include:

Writers/poets:

- ✧ Erich Maria Remarque 'All Quiet on the Western Front'

Artists/Art movements:

- ✧ Pablo Picasso
- ✧ Henri Matisse
- ✧ Futurism painters – Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carra, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini.
- ✧ Surrealism – features elements of surprise, and juxtaposition as a way to free people from what surrealists saw as false rationality and restrictive customs and structures.



Surrealism was very revolutionary in thought and practice and inspired lots of artists, writers, musicians and politicians – you should research these people.

✧ Bauhaus

✧ Cubism

Music:

✧ Igor Stravinsky

Second Wave Modernism (1930 – 1945) – Modernism

at this time is based more on thoughts of the modern condition as populations become increasingly urbanized. An important development during this time is the adoption of everyday items to include in works of art and literature ie telephone, car.

Modernism at this time was influenced by the rise of Fascism, Nazism and World War II.

World War II is often seen as a crisis in Modernism as it was this more than anything else that showed that society was not heading towards a progressive and enlightened state. Germany, the most industrialised, civilised country in Europe at that time had also introduced Nazism and mass murder to the world.

An influential painter at this time was Joan Miro.



Joan Miro 'The Tilled Field'



Joan Miro 'La Leçon de Ski'

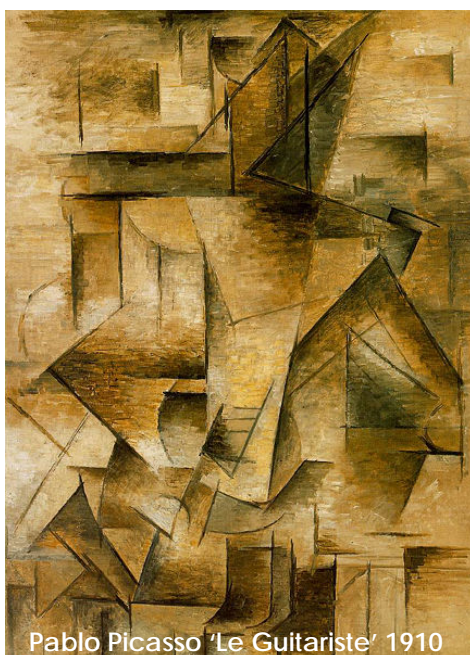
Cubism - (It is impossible to fully understand Cubism without understanding Modernist thought).

There were two phases of Cubism – Analytical Cubism (1908 – 1911) which is more angular in patterns and synthetic Cubism (1911 onwards) which is more free flowing.

Cubism broke with traditional ideas of art in that there should be a single viewpoint and in that way Cubism gave birth to modern abstract artforms. A main feature of Cubism is that the subject material is broken up to be viewed from different perspectives – to offer a multiple perspective view.

Cubism is strongly influenced by African, Micronesian and Native American art forms.

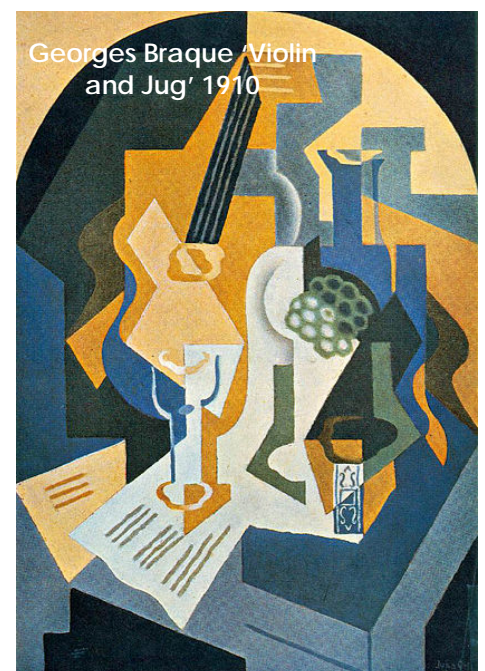
Cubism was also realised in architecture and music forms.



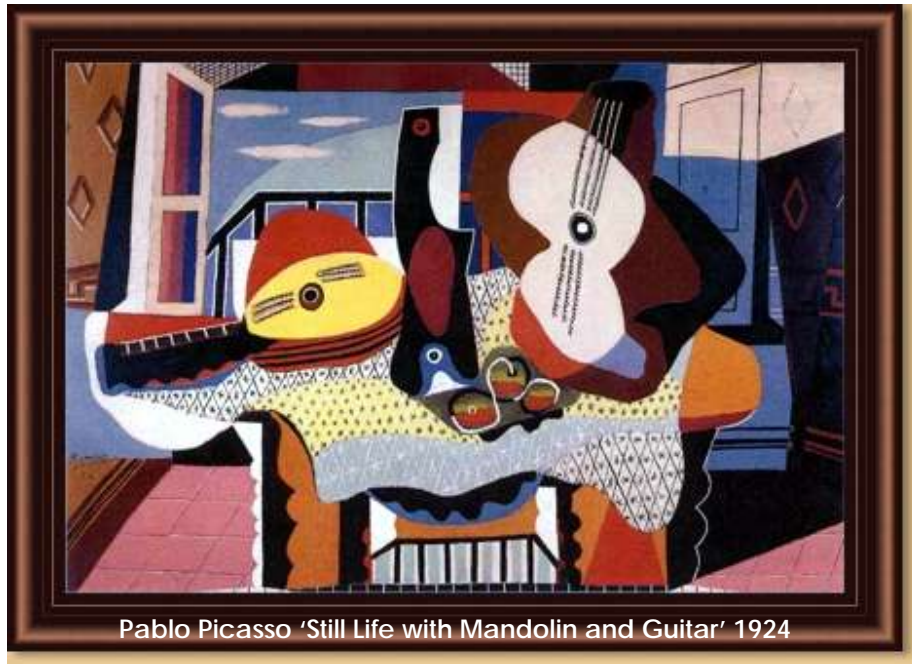
Pablo Picasso 'Le Guitariste' 1910



Georges Braque
'Violin and Jug' 1910



Georges Braque 'Violin
and Jug' 1910



Pablo Picasso 'Still Life with Mandolin and Guitar' 1924

Jacques Lipshitz - was a French cubist sculptor.

Raymond Duchamp-Villon - was a French cubist sculptor.

Alexsandr Arkipenko - Ukrainian cubist sculptor



Jacques Lipshitz 'Mother and Child' 1930



Alexsandr Arkipenko
'The Gondolier' 1913



Raymond Duchamp-Villon 'Large Horse' 1914



Stuart Davis 'Hot Still-Scape for six colours' 1939



Stuart Davis - American Cubist painter

Lyonel Feininger - American-German painter