Modernism vs Postmodernism

Martin Toft 2011

Modernism

Modernism was a broad movement encompassing all the avant-garde isms of the first half of the 20th century. Although different modern-isms were often incompatible (and occasionally antagonistic) they all rejected the dominance of older movements such as Classicism, Naturalism, and Academicism in favour of new experimental ways of producing art.


Ansel Adams, *Yosemite*, 1934

Early modernity is characterised intellectually by a belief that science could save the world and that, through reason, a foundation of universal truths could be established. The common trend was to seek answers to fundamental questions about the nature of art and human experience. Modernity imbue all aspects of society and are apparent in its cultural forms including fiction, architecture, painting, popular culture, photography

Avant-garde art movements associated with Modernism

All modern-isms shared a common feeling that the modern world was fundamentally different from what had passed before and that art needed to renew itself by confronting and exploring its own modernity. For some this meant rejecting the industrial in favour of the primitive (Primitivism), for others a celebration of technology and machinery (Futurism) and using photography as a new medium. In Modernism generally, the artist's exploration of his or her vision was paramount. Although this trend was already evident in the 19th century, it became an orthodoxy for Modernists. Certain modern-isms began to question what art is, what it is for and what it supports. Through this process artistic activity and cultural critique became more closely identified with each other. The Dadaists displaced the individual entirely, replacing him with the unconscious. Modern-isms contested between themselves whether art should explore emotions and states of mind (Expressionism), spiritual order (Neo-plasticism), social function (Constructivism), the unconscious (Surrealism), the nature of representation (Cubism) or the social role of art in a capitalist, bourgeois society (Dadaism).Many of these trends overlapped with one another. Art increasingly became a means of discovering truth, whether a peculiar modern truth (Futurism) or a universal truth (Suprematism)
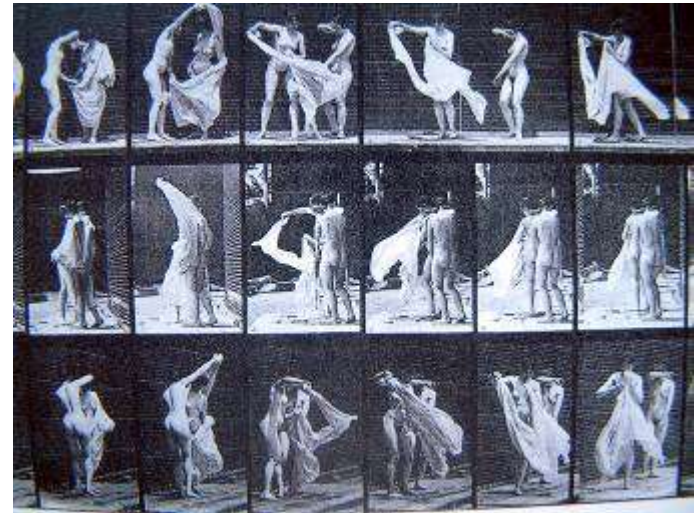
Eadweard J. Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion*, 1887

Avant-garde art movements:
Fauvism, Primitivism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Neo-Plasticism, Surrealism, Spatialism, Abstract Expressionism, Social Realism, Straight Photography, Formalism

Modernism and photography

The invention of photography was part of the process of modernization of the means of production that took place during the industrial revolution. Photography is a modern form of image making, contributing to the development of modernism, for example, in painting, by taking on its representational task (family portraits become more readily affordable for ordinary citizens and photographs of paintings are used in art books/ magazines etc.)

By the beginning of the 20th century, with the diffusion of illustrated magazines and newspapers, photography was a mass-communication medium. Photojournalism acquired authority and glamour, and document-like photographs were used in advertising as symbols of modernity.

Margareth Bourke-White (1904-71)

Straight Photography and Realism

Walker Evans, *Hale Country*, 1936

Straight Photography were photographers who believed in the intrinsic qualities of the photographic medium and its ability to provide accurate and descriptive records of the visual world. These photographers strove to make pictures that were 'photographic' rather than 'painterly', they did not want to treat photography as a kind of monochrome painting. They abhorred handwork and soft focus and championed crisp focus with a wide depth-of-field.

Realism (closely associated with 'straight photography') photography grew up with claims of having a special relationship to reality, and its premise, that the camera's ability to record objectively the actual world as it appears in front of the lens was unquestioned. This supposed veracity of the photographic image has been challenged by critics as the photographer's subjectivity (how he or she sees the world and chooses to photograph it) and the implosion of digital technology challenges this notion opening up many new possibilities for both interpretation and manipulation. A belief in the trustworthiness of the photograph is also fostered by the news media who rely on photographs to show the truth of what took place.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946)

Straight Photograph and Realism…cont

In 1907 Stieglitz took this picture, *The Steerage* and thereby rejected Pictorialism's aesthetics and became in favour of what Paul Strand called 'absolute unqualified objectivity' and 'straight photographic means'. Stieglitz and Strand was also influenced by European avant-garde art movements such as Cubism and Fauvism and some of their pictures emphasised underlying abstract geometric forms and structure of their subjects.
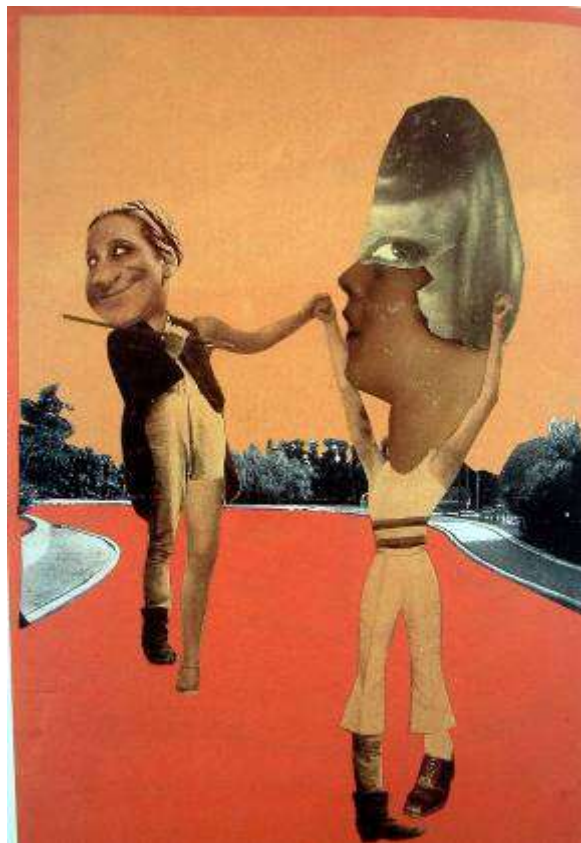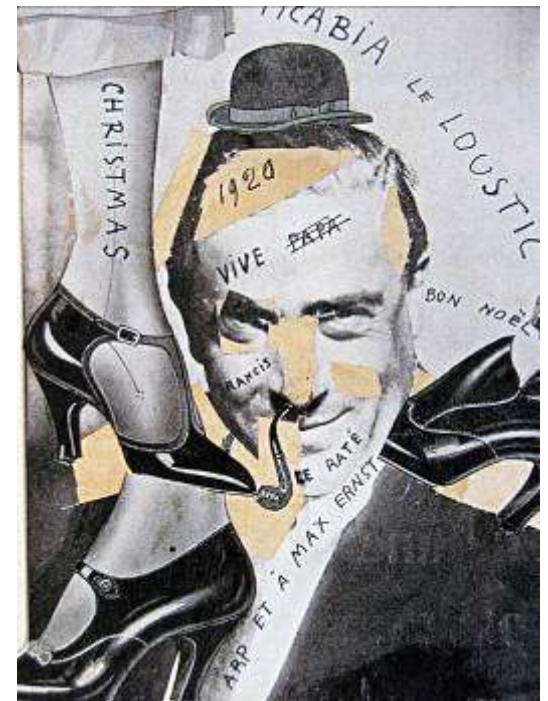

Paul Strand

Paul Strand (1890-1976

Dadaism and the development of photomontage: In Europe during WWI avant-garde artists such as the Dadaists sought to break down traditional definitions of art, and the barriers between art and design, often with the utopian aim to merge art with everyday life. They also questioned the notion of the artists as a mythic emotive being toiling away on his canvas in solitude in his studio. Instead they embraced technologically advanced means of production, developed mixed media practices, and often engaged with social and political issues. Their use of photomontage was used to challenge the authority of mass-cultural representations used in advertising in the new illustrated press and magazines.

Francis Picabia (1879-1953)

Johannes Baader (1875-1956)   **Hannah Höch (1889-1978)**

The Russian Avant-garde: In Soviet Russia, Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzsky worked on a new aesthetic vision using extreme viewpoints and perspective both on their photography and graphic design. They emphasized the constructedness of images rejecting the illusion that photographic representation could be an unproblematic mirror of reality. This new movement in art was named Constructivism.
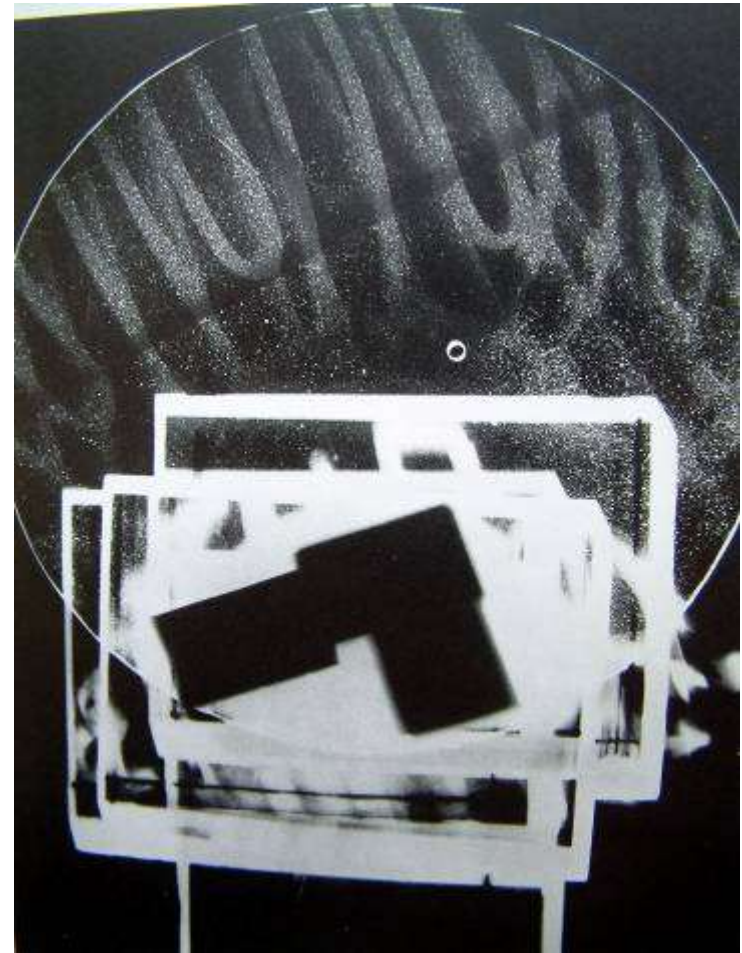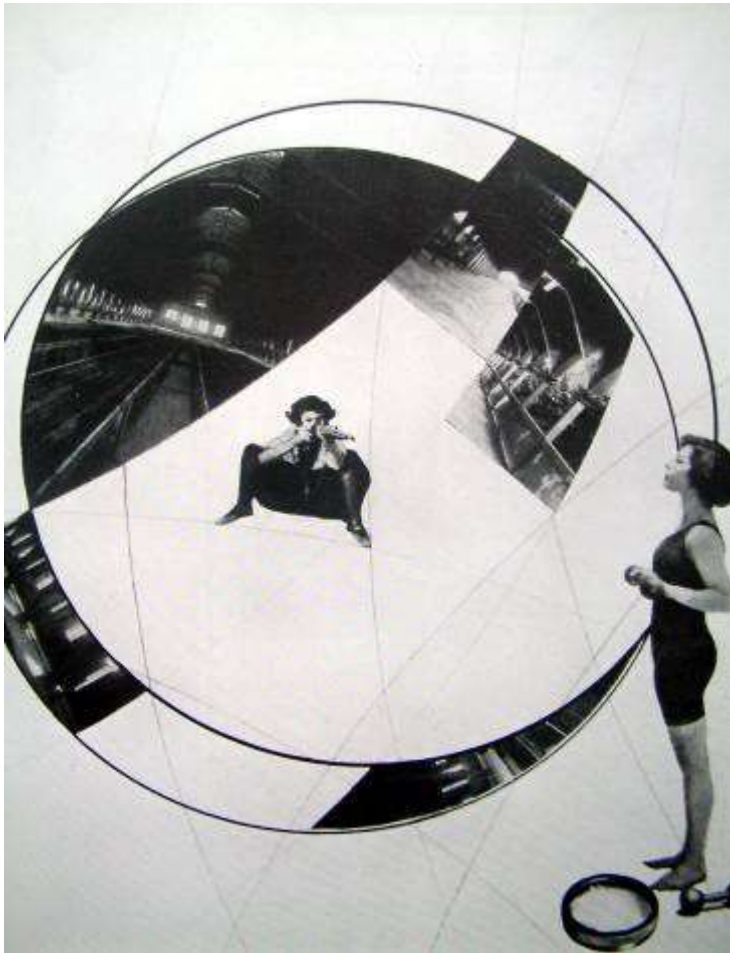

Alexander Rodchenko, Russian, 1891-1956

El Lissitzky, Russian, 1890-1941
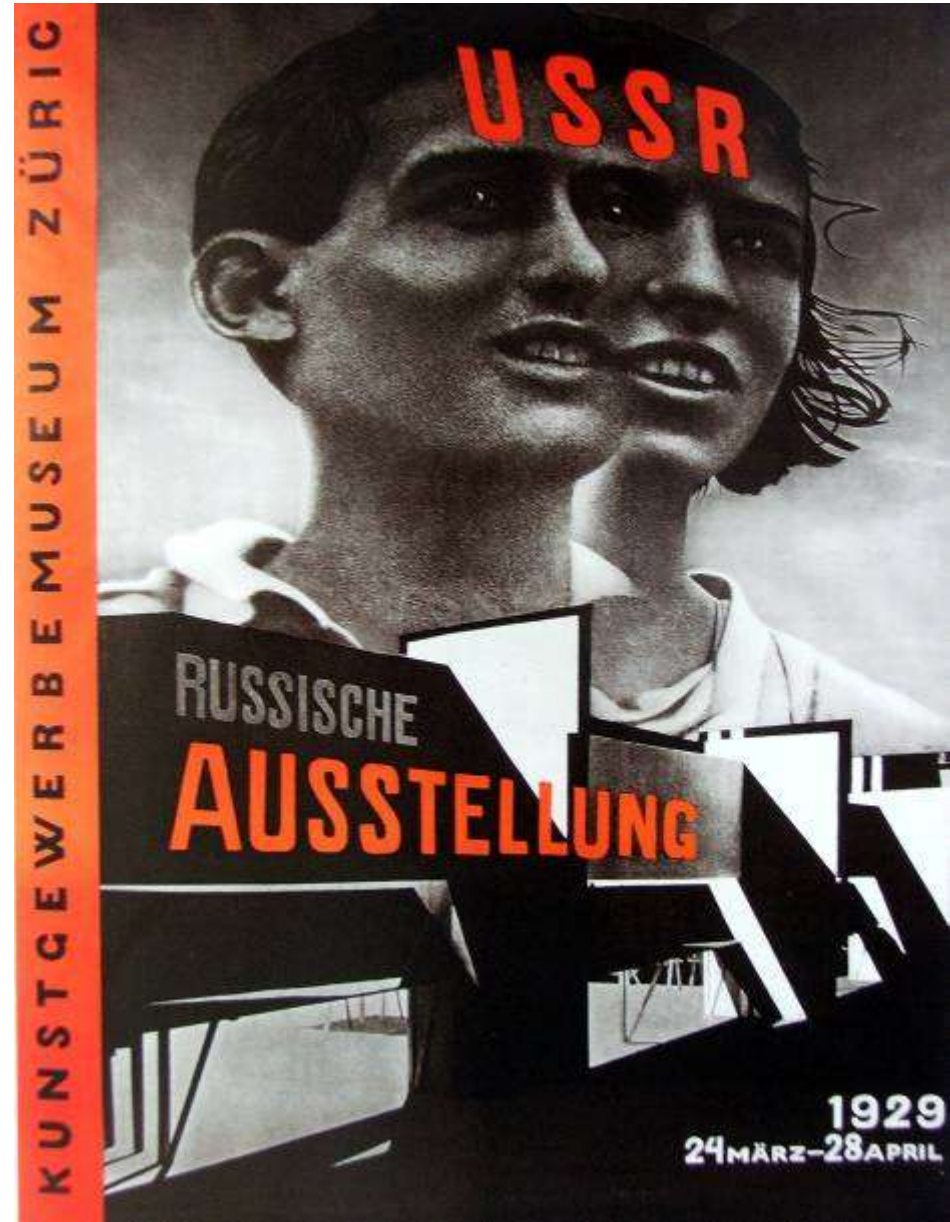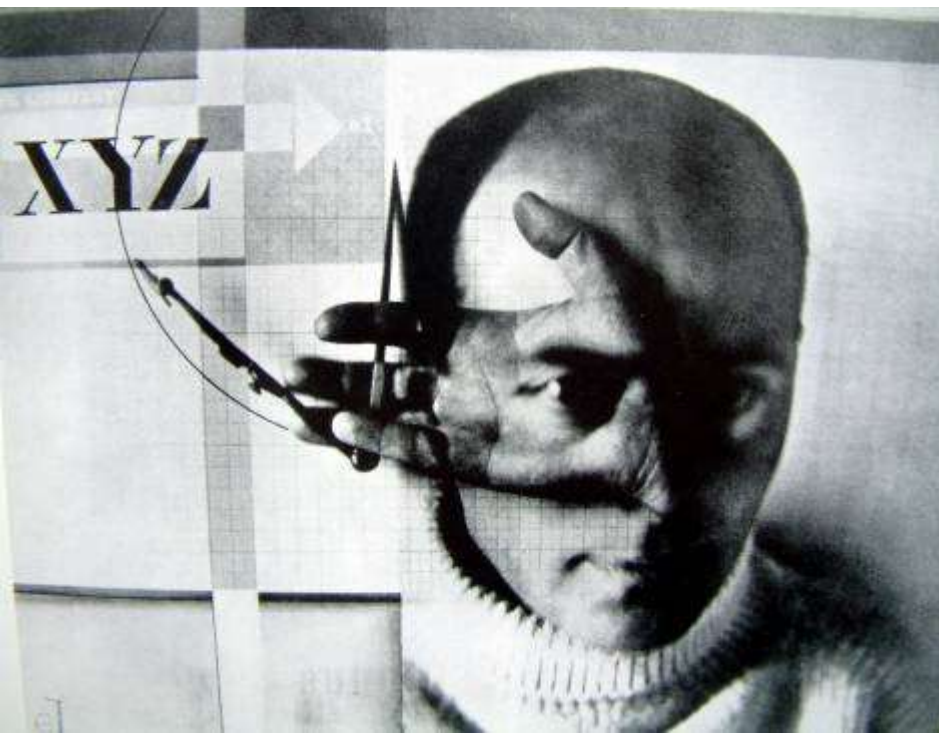
At the Bauhaus in Germany Laszlo Mohology-Nagy
explored the abstract possibilities of photographic
and cinematic images

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Hungarian, 1895-1946

Surrealism – an introduction: Surrealism was founded in Paris in 1924, by the poet Andre Breton and continued Dadaism' exploration of everything irrational and subversive in art. Surrealism was more explicitly preoccupied with spiritualism, Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism. It aimed to create art which was 'automatic', meaning that it had emerged directly from the unconscious without being shaped by reason, morality or aesthetic judgements. The Surrealist also explored dream imagery an they were an important art movement within Modernism involving anything from paintings, sculpture, poetry, performance, film and photography.

Rene Magritte (1898-1967)
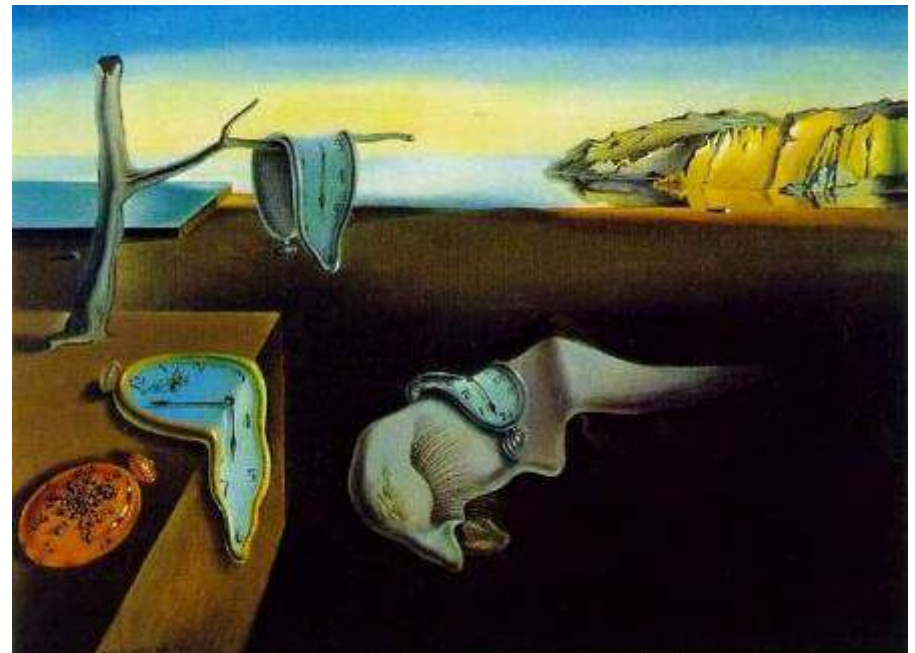
Salvatore Dali (1904-1989)

Surrealism and photography: Surrealist photography itself took several forms. There was a great use of techniques of manipulation. Many artists used photomontage. The foremost inventor of Surrealist photography was Man Ray – born in America but living in Paris from 1921. He developed a poetic form of the photogram which he called the 'Rayograph' Later he explored the technique or solarization with great delicacy, especially in his portraits and nudes. Others such as Belgian Raoul Ubac mixed solarization with photomontage to make more multi-layered images (superimposition)

Man Ray (1890-1976)

Raoul Ubac (1910-1985)
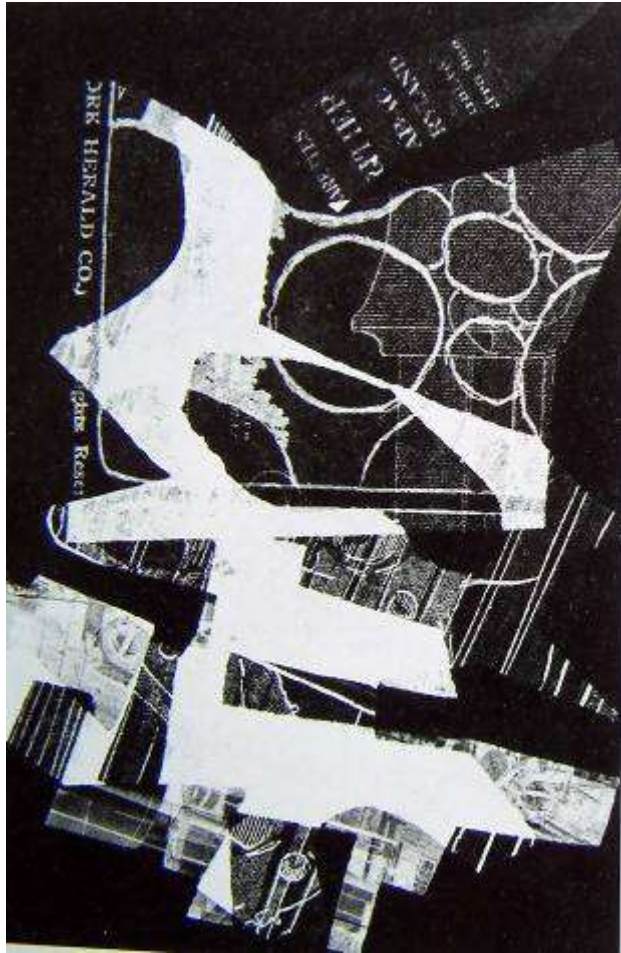
Rayograph

Solarization

Superimposition

Maurice Tabard, *Untitled*, 1928, silver gelatin print (superimposition)

Staged photography was also important for a number of Surrealist photographers, for example the controversial photographs that Hans Bellmer took of his 'Poupee' – the female doll he made in the 1930s showing sexual and misogynistic scenarios. Recently, the work of two lesser known figures, Pierre Molinier (1900-76) and Claude Cahun (1894-1954) has been much discussed for the way they crossed gender boundaries, Molinier dressing in corset and black stockings while Cahun often rendered herself neuter, almost alien.

Hans Bellmer (1902-1975)

Claude Cahun (1894-1954)

Pierre Molinier (1900-76)

The influence of Surrealism within photography have been far reaching, Simply within the convention of documentary photography people like Eugene Atget, pictures of empty Parisian streets influenced street photographers like Andre Kertesz (1894-1985), Brassai (1899-1984) and even Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004). All these photographers were interested in how the camera can simultaneously record everyday reality and probe beneath its surface to reveal new possibilities of meaning.

Brassai, (1899-1984)

Andre Kertezh (1894-1985)

Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004)

American Modernism In the post-1945 period: American modernism became dominant in the West, emphasising specialisation and purity, and downplaying the political engagement of earlier avant-garde groups: to be modern, each discipline had to refine the definition of its own competencies. Photography became art by transcending its reality-bearing function through the subjectivity that photographers, as authors of their images, managed to instil in their pictures.

The writings of the art critic Clement Greenberg and the photographic historian Beaumont Newhall and the exhibitions mounted by MoMa (Museum of Modern Art), New York by its influential curator, John Szarkowski, emphasised formal and aesthetic qualities that defined 'masters' and 'canonical' images that transcended their historical and social context. A tradition of essential photographic values was indentified for successive photographers to explore and push to further limits.

See next slides with examples of key figures who are considered to be **'masters'** of modernist photography.
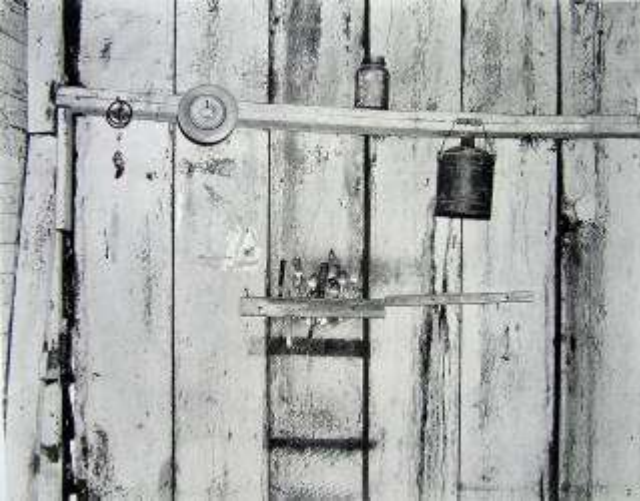
Walker Evans, American (1903-75)

Often considered to the leading American documentary photographer of the 20th century. He rejected Pictorialism and wanted to establish a new photographic art based on a detached and disinterested look. He was particularly interested in the vernacular of American architecture, but his most celebrated work is his pictures of three Sharecropper families in the American South during the 1930s Depression.

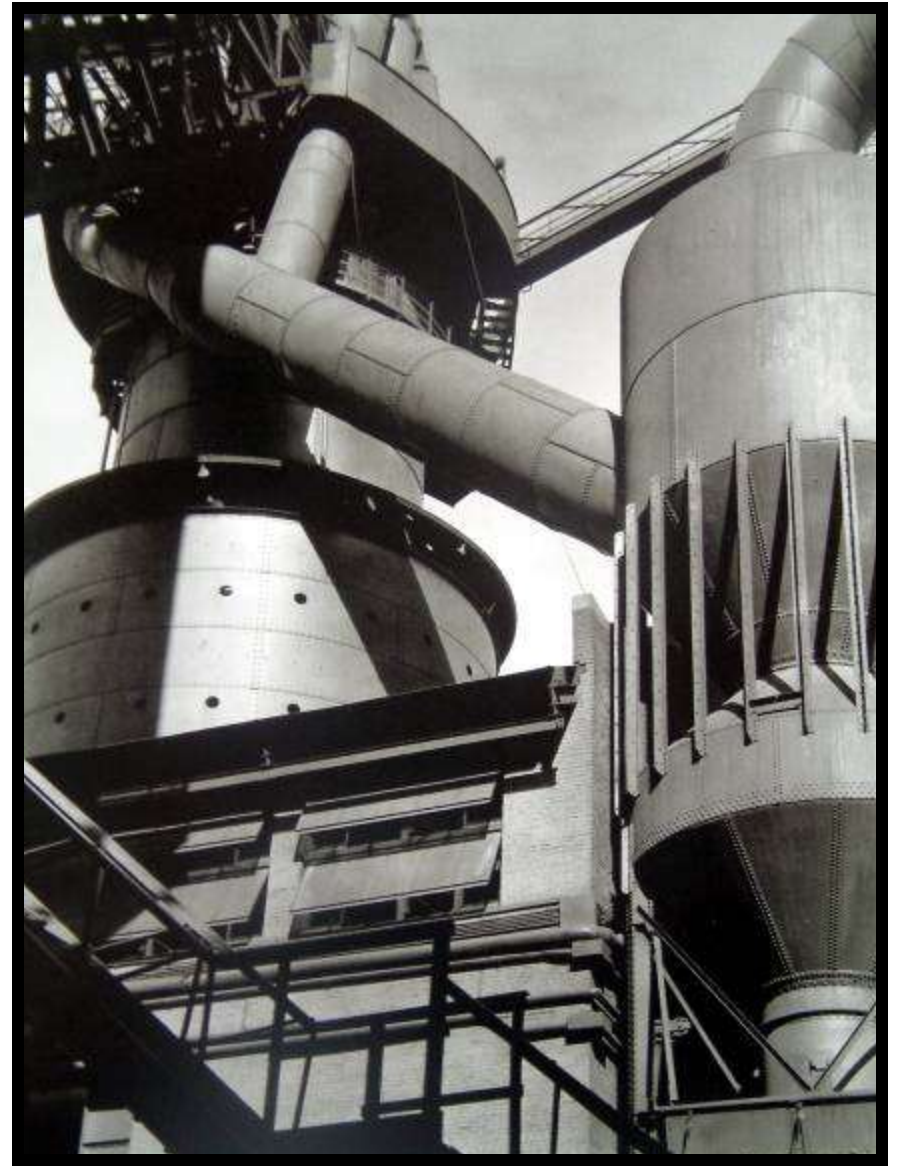*Cementery, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania* 1935

Walker Evans, American, 1903-75

Sidewalk and Shopfront, New Orleans, 1935

Many Are Called, New York subway pictures
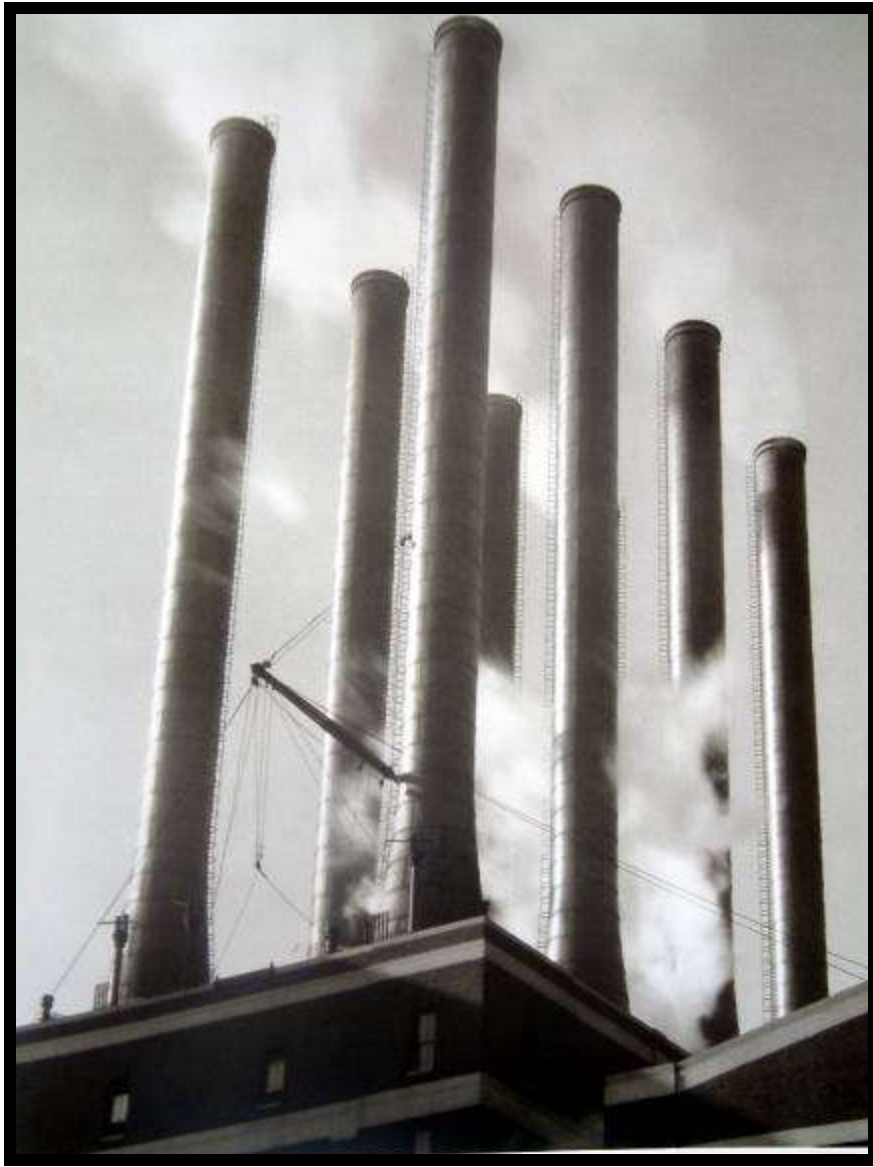
From his series, *Ford Plant, River Rouge*, 1927

Social Reform photography

Dorothea Lange (1895-1965)

The rural poor or the urban environment were not subjects for Pictorial photographers. But when A Danish immigrant , Jacob Riis published his book, 'How the Other Half Lives' about the slums of Manhattan a new kind of realism was born with a socialist dimension. A number of photographer's such as Lewis W Hine and Dorothea Lange began to document the effects of industrialization and urbanization on working-class Americans. Their work brought the need for housing and labour reform to the attention of legislators and the public and became the origins of what we now call photojournalism.
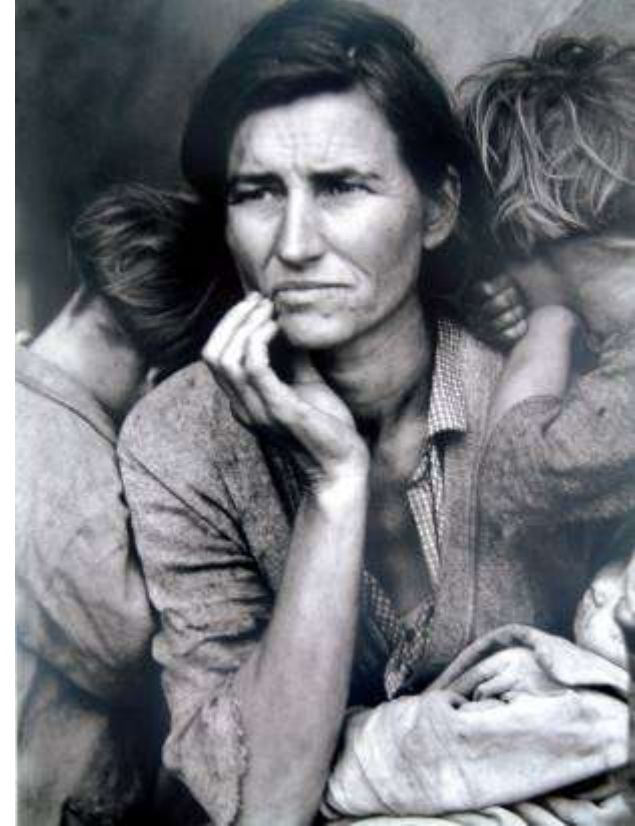
Lewis W Hine (1874-1940)

Jacob Riis (1849-1914)

Social Documentary in the USA under the FSA (Farm Security Administration)

Dorothea Lange, American, 1895-1965

Robert Frank (b 1924 -) and his seminal book
The Americans, published in 1959

American street photography

Gary Winogrand (1928-84)

Lee Friedlander (b 1934)

William Klein (b 1928)
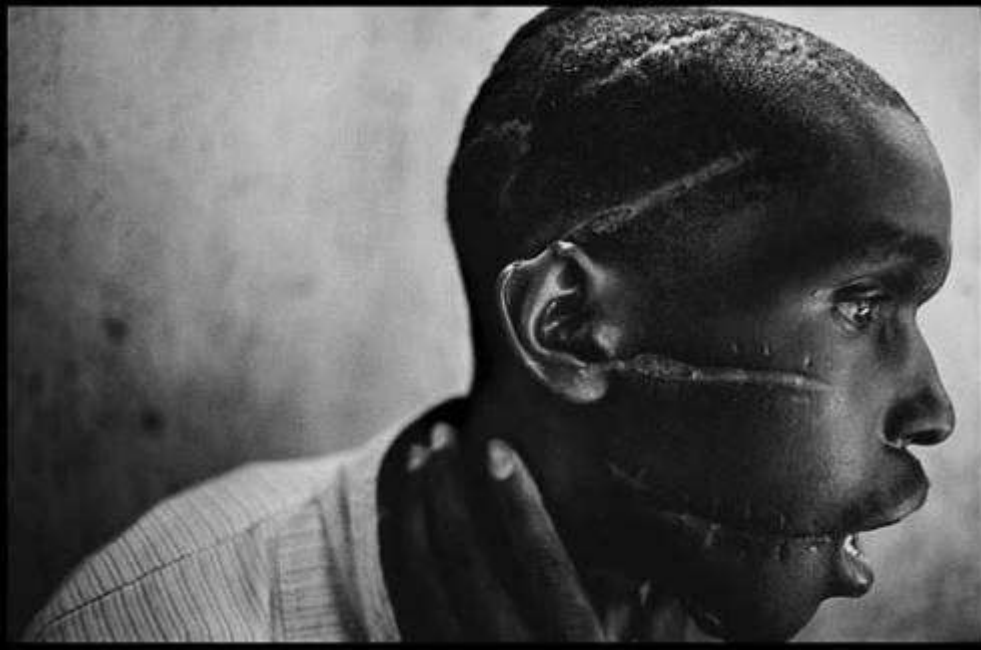
Modern photojournalism

James Nachtwey (b. 1948)

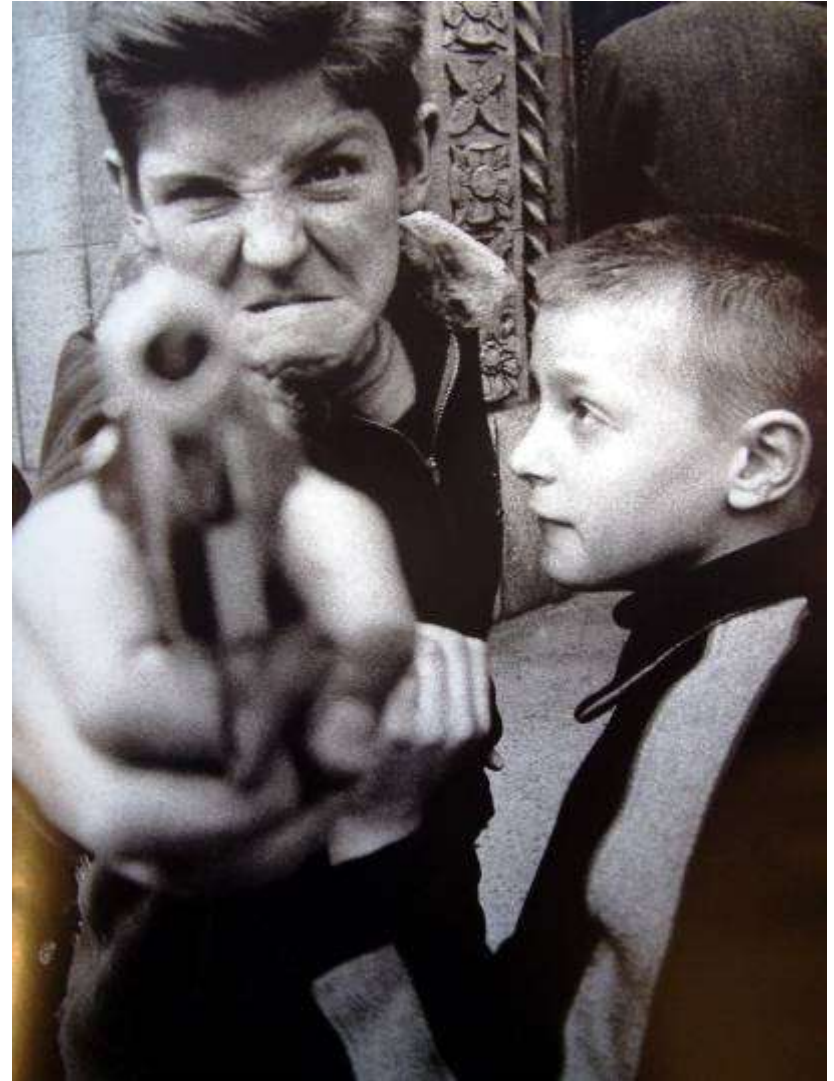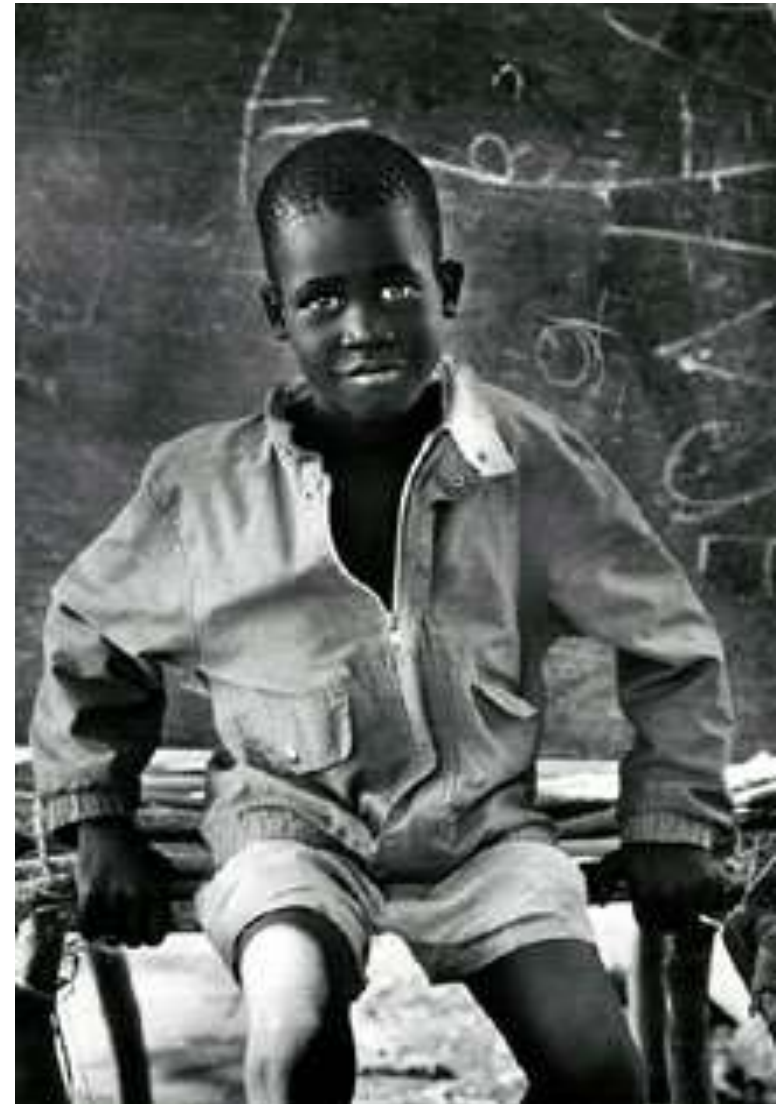Sebastio Salgado (b. 1944)

Abstract Photography

Abstract photography rejects the idea that something identifiable must be depicted, preferring instead to take the image itself and the process of image making as its object. To achieve this, an abstract photograph may emphasise the internal structures of the image, visualise the invisible, or manifest pure visibility. The creation of abstract images ha soften been undertaken as a form of visual research in order to understand better the principles and significance of images. Early examples include William Henry Fox Talbot's contact prints of plants made in the 1830s and Etienne-Jules Marey's late 19th century chrono-photographs. However, Alvin Langdon Coburn is generally considered to be the father of abstract photography, having first used the term in his 1916 essay 'The Future of Pictorial Photography' in which he suggests exhibiting work that emphasizes the form and structure underlying the image, rather than references to anything outside the image. He called his abstract experiments Vortographs inspired by the movement, Vorticism in painting
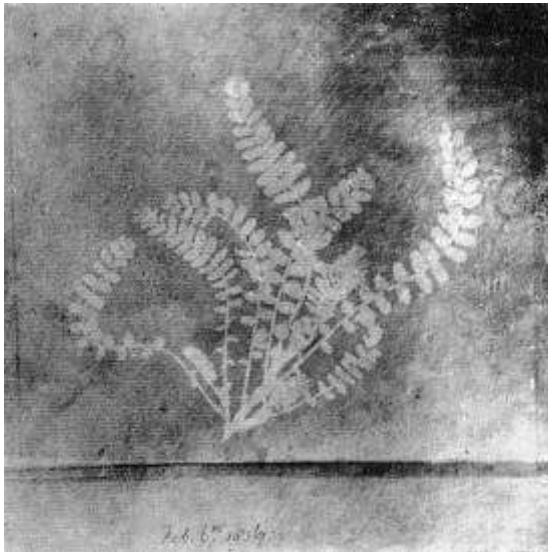
William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-77)   Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)   Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966)
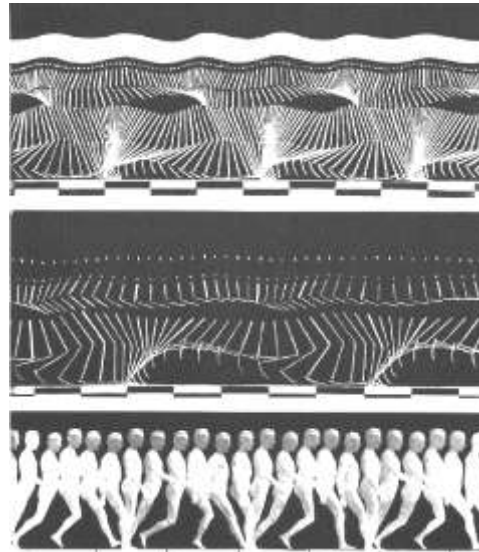
Abstraction and Modernism

In 1918 Christian Schad developed the photogram which he called the Schadograph, a form of cameraless photography the lends itself to diverse creative intentions. A number of artists seized upon the photograpm as a useful and expressive technique, including Man Ray, El Lisstitzky, Franz Roh and Lazslo Moholy-Nagy. Other experimental techniques that gained prominence in the first half of the 20th century include: solarization, multiple exposure, *cliché-verre*, photomontage and *brûlage*. Surrealism and Russian Constructivism and other art movements embraced these methods and helped to promote abstract photography
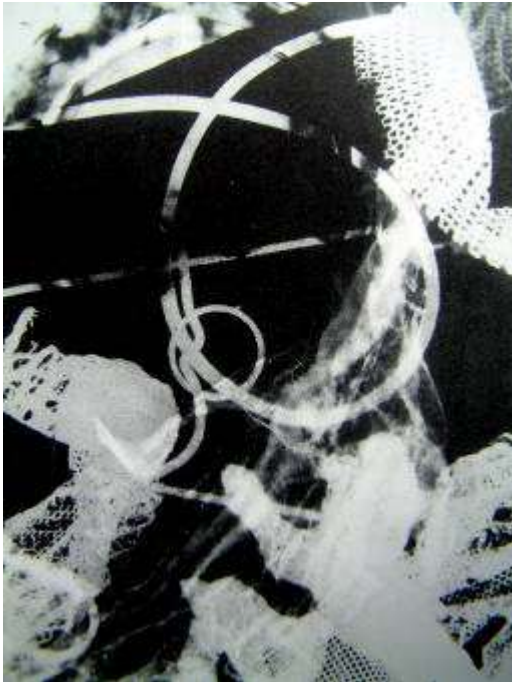
Christian Schad (1894-1982)

Franz Roh (1890-1965)

Man Ray (1890-1976)

Abstraction and Modernism

In Germany in the 1950s Otto Steinart led the fotoform group in exploring the creative potential of abstract imagery under the label Subjective Photography – broadly, photography undertaken for purposes of self-expression rather than to record the appearance of the external world. The 1960s saw a very different approach to abstraction in the attempt to wed innovations and methodologies of science and technology to create work, resulting in early use of computers to produce works of art. The concept of Generative Photography developed by photographer and historian Gottfried Jäger arose from this movement, and includes luminograms of Kilian Breier for which light rays are directed on to light-sensitive paper.

Otto Steinart (1915-1978)
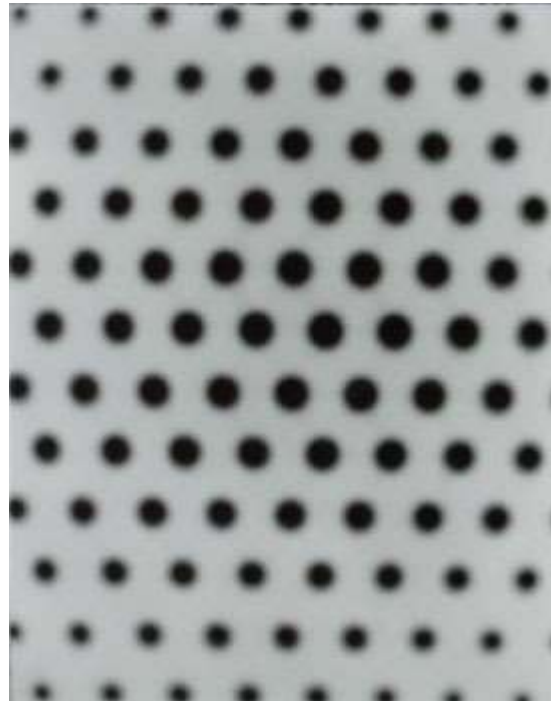
Kilian Breier (b 1931)
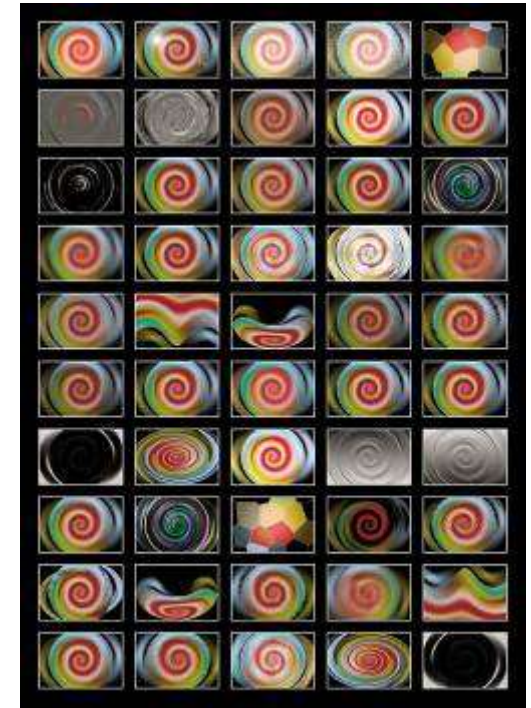
Gottfried Jäger (b 1937)

Abstraction and Modernism

Abstract photography, however, is not restricted to the play of light and chemicals in the darkroom or the creation and manipulation of images with computers, but throughout its history has equally found expression through Straight Photography. Images by Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz, Saul Leiter, Harry Callahan, Frederick Sommer and Aaron Siskind among many others employ unusual framing and viewpoints to dissociate the identity of the objects photographed from the resulting image. These methods have not been supplanted by more technical means of creating images, whether in the darkroom or at the computer, but have recurred throughout the history of abstract photography and persist very much today.
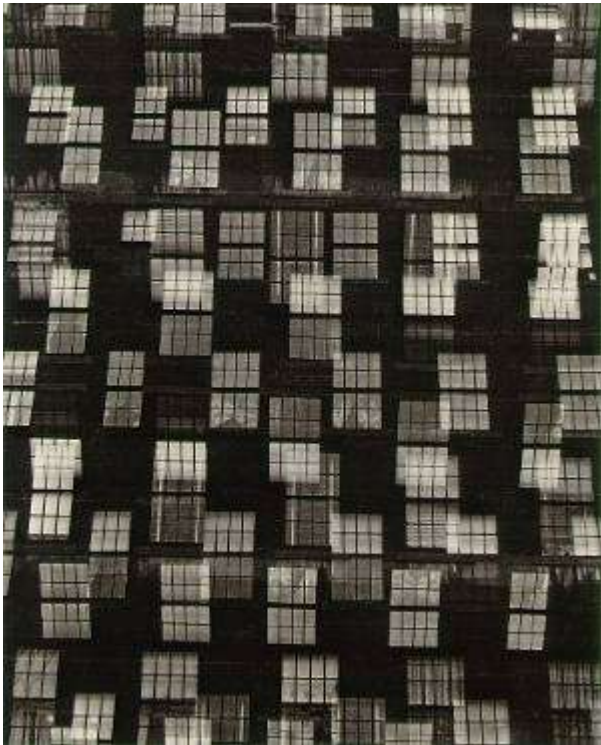
Harry Callahan (1912-99), Chicago, 1948   **Frederick Sommer (1905-99)**, Three Grazes, 1985   **Paul Strand (1890-1976)**, Porch Shadows, 1916

Abstraction in nature

Minor White, Frosted Window

Edward Weston, Burned Three, 1938
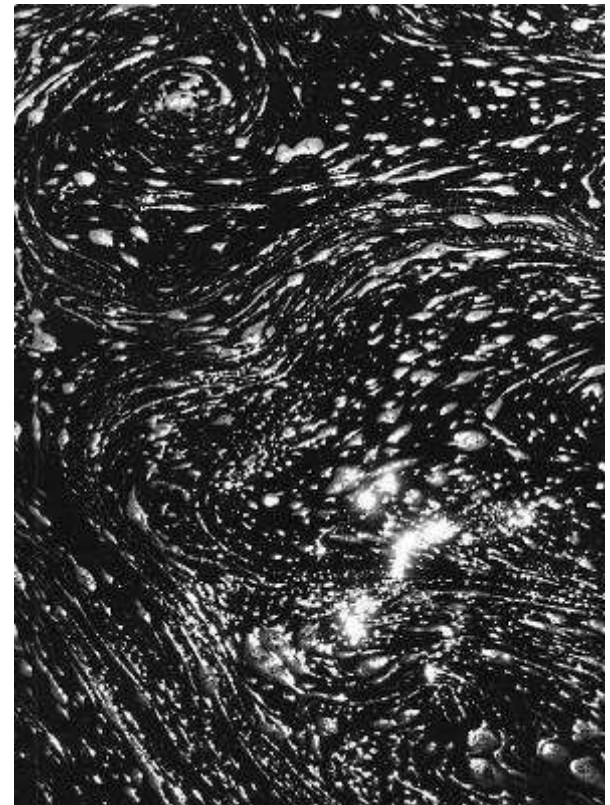
Ansel Adams, Water and Foam

Modernism and the Landscape

The First World War was a cultural as well as a political, social and economic watershed. The 'high' machine age had arrived and Modernism had a profound effect on photography. Landscape photographers began to move away from painterly effects created by soft-focus lenses and manipulation of the negative print (as practised by the Pictorialist photographers). They sought once again to exploit the medium's ability to render fine detail, and to reveal the subtleties of tonal graduation in monochrome prints. With its antecedents in the topographical photography of the 19th century this return to a 'straight' approach was what made photography unique and in tune with the European New Objectivity movement that was to influence West Coast American photographers led by Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham and Ansel Adams. Landscape and nature were their principal motifs and the eventually formed the Group f.64 which produced exquisitely crafted prints that transformed the subject into a specifically photographic aesthetic experience rather than simply a record of what was in front of the camera.

Ansel Adams (1902-84)

Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976)

Ansel Adams and the American West

Adams was one of the first photographers ultimately to be able to live from sales of his prints and by the 1970s the finely crafted landscape photograph had become a collectable art object, eagerly acquired by museums, exhibited in newly created photographic galleries and sold through established auction houses. The Ansel Adams 'industry' played a major role in popularising landscape photography and the buying of photographs for domestic as well as public display. Adam's landscapes stemmed both from his fascination with the natural environment, and from his conception of it as a space of spiritual redemption. He took his first photographs on visiting Yosemite National Park in 1916, aged 14 and later set up a studio there. He photographed at different times and seasons, exploring the effects of changing patterns and intensities of light.
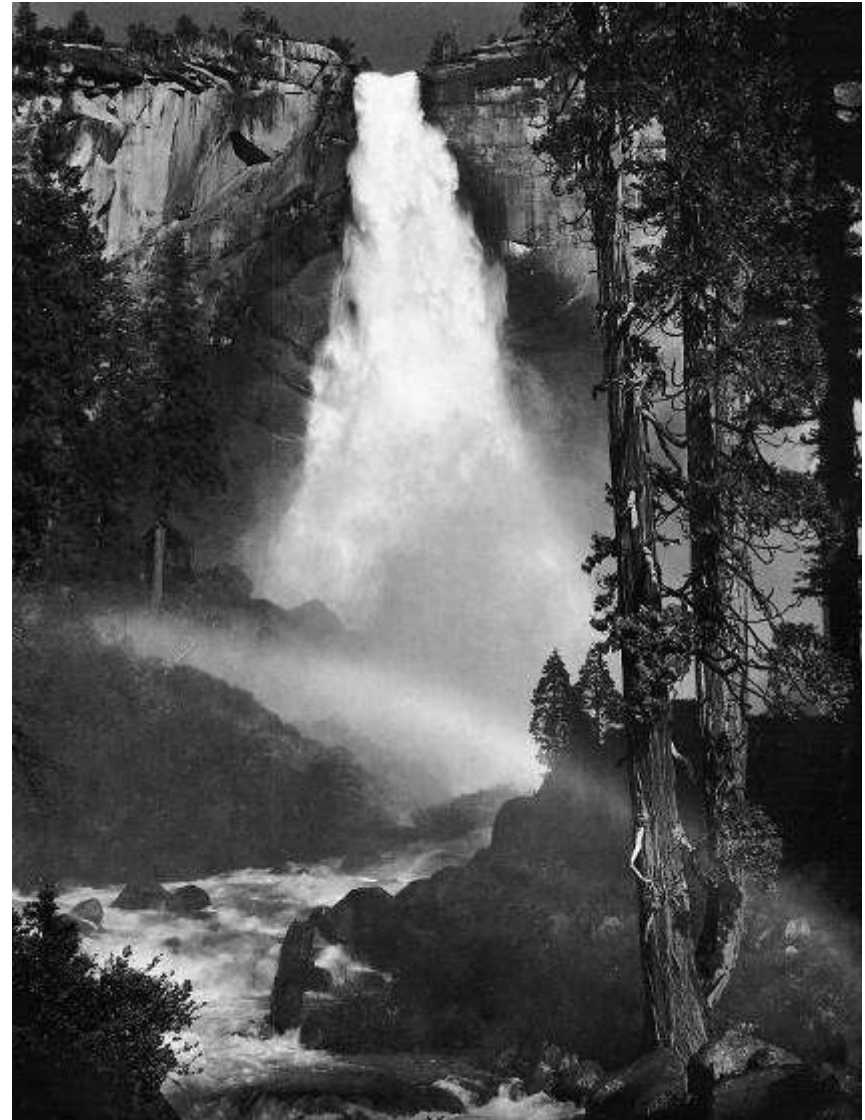
Nevada Fall, Rainbow

His pictures are known for their remarkable composition, tonal contrast, registration of detail and printing quality. His contribution to photographic method derived from his insistence on visualisation and control of the photographic process from framing and exposure to printing. He devised the Zone System, a system determining exposure and controlling black and white by visualising different tonality in a landscape and making several exposures which are then reproduced in the developing and printing process in the dark room. He emphasised the relationship between the quality of the negative and the potential for producing a fine print and worked almost exclusively in monochrome, though later experimented with colour. Although Ansel Adams remains a towering father figure in the history of American photography his visionary interpretation of the wilderness and the western landscape was eventually challenged by younger photographers associated with the 1975 *New Topographics* exhibition, who rejected his idealised and romanticised images of the natural world and instead concentrated on the impact of human activity on the land.

Summary of main characteristics of Modernism

Modernism makes references to things inside the art work itself…e.g. form, composition, medium, material, skills, techniques, process etc.

Modernism in art hold a belief in the individual genius of the artist, a desire for originality, a thirst for the new, and reverence for the precious, unique art object

Modernism is concerned with object rather than subject and form rather than content, creator rather than spectator.

Postmodernism

Architects took the lead in the development of postmodernism. They criticised the international style of modernist architecture for being too formal, austere and functional. Postmodern architects felt that international style had become a repressive orthodoxy. It had been adopted by the corporate world and exploited at the expense of its social vision. Postmodernist architecture uses more eclectic (various) materials and styles with greater playfulness. Parody of earlier styles is a dominant postmodern trait. Another is the refusal to develop comprehensive theories about art, architecture and social progress.

The ethical touchstone of Postmodernism is relativism – the belief that no society or culture is more important than any other. Although few postmodern artists are pure relativists, they often use their art to explore and undermine the way society constructs and imposes a traditional hierarchy of cultural values and meanings.

Frank Gehry, Walt Disney Concert Hall, c.1998-2003, L.A.

Postmodernism vs Modernism

Postmodernists see all kinds of things as text, including photographs, and insist that all texts need to be read critically. For postmodernists a text is different from modernists' notion of a work. A work is singular, speaking in one voice, that of the author, which leads the reader to look for one meaning. For postmodernists many readings (interpretations and understandings) of a text or a work of art are desirable - no single reading can be conclusive or complete.

Postmodernism also explores power and the way economic and social forces exert that power by shaping the identities of individuals and entire cultures. Unlike modernists, postmodernists place little or no faith in the unconscious as a source of creative and personal authenticity. They value art not for universality and timelessness but for being imperfect, low-brow, accessible, disposable, local and temporary. While it questions the nature and extent of our freedom and challenges our acquiescence to authority, Postmodernism has been criticised for its pessimism: it often critiques but equally often fails to provide a positive vision or redefinition of what it attacks.

Jeff Wall, *Insomnia*, 1994

Postmodernism and Photography

Postmodernism was the collective name given to the shattering of modernism. In photography this was the direct challenge to the ideal of fine art photography whose values were established on an anti-commercial stance. At the end of 1970s artists suddenly began to use the codes and conventions of commercial photography against itself (e.g. Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Laurie Simmons, Martha Rosler), but this was also symptomatic of the collapsing of an opposition that had maintained men as artists. The dramatic influx of female artists in 1980s Postmodernism using photography had an impact on the very discourse on photography too, on the subject matter of art photography. New aspects of the social and private worlds of women made their way into the galleries in a number of guises and ideological positions (see Chapter 5 'Intimate Life' in Charlotte Cotton's book *The Photograph a Contemporary Art* e.g. Nan Goldin, Jurgen Teller, Corinne Day, Larry Clark, Araki, Tilmanns, Billingham, Anna Fox, Larry Sultan, Elina Brotherus. Annelies Strba, Mitch Epstein, Anne Hardy)

Barbara Krüger, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)*, 1982

Corrine Day, *Diary*, 1997

Postmodernism and Photography

In the 1930s, cultural theorists, Walter Benjamin wrote two essays on photography that are frequently cited by current critics. In these essays Benjamin stressed aspects of the photographic medium different from those that modernist photographers, like Paul Strand and Edward Weston were advocating. While they heralded the honesty of the medium and the infinite detail of the negative and the beautiful photographic print, Benjamin pointed out, that unlike the painting, the photograph is infinitely reproducible.

While reproduction is photography's main contribution to postmodernist practice, a photograph is also readily adaptable; it can be blown up, cropped, blurred, used in newspapers, in a book, on a billboard. Other formal devises used by postmodernists practitioners are seriality, repetition, appropriation, simulation or pastiche (which is opposite to principles of modernity: the autonomy, self-referentiality and transcendence of the unique and precious work of art.)

Sam Taylor-Wood, *Soliloquy I*, 1998

Art those not exist on its own, outside society, or can be understood only in relation to its own formalist characteristics, as modernists would believe. Those embracing postmodernist art generally recognise that art exemplifies the political, cultural, and psychological experience of a society; they are aware of and make reference to the previously hidden agendas of the art market and its relation to art museums, dealers and critics; they are willing to borrow widely from the past, they have returned to the figurative in art; they embrace subject and content over object and form, and they represent a plurality of styles.

Summary of main characteristics of Postmodernism

Postmodernism makes references to things outside the art work…e.g. political, cultural, social, historical, psychological issues

Postmodernism favours the context of a work including examining subject and the reception of the work by its audience.

Postmodern work are aware of and make reference to the previously hidden agendas of the art market and its relation to art museums, dealers and critics;

Postmodern work often uses different approaches in the construction of the work such as…eclecticism, intertextuality, collaboration, pastiche, parody, recycling, reconfiguration, bricolage

Approaches to the construction of a postmodern work

Eclecticism - mixing art forms, mixing cultures, mixing styles

No Value to the worth of Art - mixing high art with pop culture

Intertextuality - Including the work of others, the "quoting" of others work

Collaboration - Creating work with others

Pastiche – copying an original

Parody – imitating in order to ridicule, ironically comment on, or poke some fun at

Recycling – re-using the same material more than once

Refiguration - re-structuring of an original

Bricolage - deconstructing and then restructuring existing materials in a new, exciting and inventive way

MODERNISM VS POSTMODERNISM

Modernism	Postmodernism
Is it new? Is it different? Has it developed its own form? Then it must be Modern!	**Does it embrace everything? Is it an anti form? Does it have no rules or manifesto to follow? Then it must be Postmodern!**
1. Clear distinction between "high" and 'low' art and culture – between the rare unique work of art (e.g. painting) and the mass-produced image (e.g. a photograph) with references to popular culture	1. Self-consciously ironic and eclectic outlook, boundaries blurred between high and popular art. Use of the mundane, everyday, familiar
2. Sense of the past and reacting against it	2. The end of history
3. Linear timelines and narratives, within a social structure (often challenged but fundamentally accepted)	3. Fractured timelines, fragmented language and narratives, social structures, human experience, artistic style Manipulation and fragmentation of language
4. One new and exciting style that was exclusive.	4. Mixing styles
5. Work limited to one style and culture	5. Eclecticism
6. Works must be original with no reference to other work.	6. Intertextuality
7. Hierarchical structures of lead practitioners, "The Master", Art form distinctions and definitions.	7. Collective working, Collaborations within and across art forms.
8. Technology had influenced work however there were still limitations in place	8. Influenced by technology
9. Tried to achieve the essence of universal existence.	9. Value-free, a sense of having no pedantry, no definitive line, no structural, formal imperatives to follow and reflects the disappearance of "grand narratives"
10. Prescribed fixed gender roles	10. Gender is less specific, and roles are challenged.
11. Art as one unique object created by an artist genius. Analog media: quality deteriorates the farther removed a copy is from the original.	11. No value to the worth of art. Art as copies (Andy Warhol's Factory, CDs and DVDs) Digital media: there is no distinction between an original piece of art and a copy
12. A reaction against the past Everything must be new, original	12. The past a valuable resource to plunder Recycled, pastiche, refigured and bricolage work acceptable and admired

Tableaux Photography
Narrative in contemporary photography

Tableaux are a style of staged photography in which a pictorial narrative is conveyed through a single image or a series of images that makes references to fables, fairytales, myths, unreal and real events from a variety of sources such as paintings, film, theatre, literature and popular media.

Cindy Sherman, Film Stills, 1974

Gregory Crewdson, Twilight, 1998

AES & F, Action Half Life , 2003

Historical context: Tableaux photography is a style of photography in which a pictorial narrative is conveyed through a single image as opposed to a series of images which tell a story such as in photojournalism and documentary photography. This style is sometimes also referred to as 'staged' or 'constructed photography' and tableaux photographs makes references to fables, fairy tales, myths and unreal and real events from a variety of sources such as paintings, film, theatre, literature and the media. Other tableaux photographs offer a much more ambiguous and open-ended description of something that are subjective to interpretation by the viewer. Tableaux photographs are mainly exhibited in fine art galleries and museums where they are considered alongside other works of art.

Tableau photography involves a performance enacted before the camera and embraces studio portraiture and other more or less elaborate peopled scenarios in constructed settings directed or manipulated by the photographer to suggest a story. The word tableau derives from *tableaux vivant* (plural) which in French means 'living picture' and the term describes staged groups of artist's models often using dramatic costumes, carefully posed, motionless without speaking and theatrically lit, recreating paintings 'on stage'. Before radio, film and television, tableaux vivants were popular forms of entertainment in the Victorian and Edwardian era.

Photographers that makes references to paintings from art history

John Everett Millais, *Ophelia,* oil on canvas, 1852

Tom Hunter, The Way Home, 2000

Others have adopted the same approach, for example Tom Hunter who has made a series, *Thoughts of Life and Death* of provocative photographic reworking of Victorian paintings from the past - especially those of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. How-ever his work is emphatically contemporary and takes as its subject the lives of the ordinary residents of Hackney (East London). In Hunter's *The Way Home* (2000) he not only make a direct compositional and narrative reference to John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-52) but the contemporary stimulus for the image was from reading an article in the local newspaper (Hackney Gazette) about a young woman who had drowned on her way from a party.

From his book,
Living in Hell and Other Stories

soliloquy I

Henry Wallis, *The Death of Thomas Chatterton* (1830-1916)

In her photograph, *Soliloquy I* (1998), British artist Sam Taylor-Wood shows the figure of a beautiful young man, expired on a sofa, his right arm hanging lifeless to the floor. This pose, with the light source behind the figure, emulates a popular work by the Victorian painter Henry Wallis, *The Death of Chatterton* (1856). Taylor-Wood's image has rich colour, size and combination of a Pietà-like figure study and frieze of animated action of Renaissance religious paintings and altarpieces.

The Soliloquies are made up of two parts: a staged portrait of an individual and a smaller panoramic photograph positioned under the portrait, like the predella of a Renaissance altarpiece

Her rich baroque style is often used to create bohemian and dandyish characterizations entwining aspects of her own life, including her close friends, in her staged photographs (see her series *Five Revolutionary Seconds* 360 degree panorama images) Taylor-Wood plays the role of a contemporary court painter, portraying an artistic and social elite of which she is part.

Passerby, 1996

Digital technology has also offered new ways to combine disparate moments and interrogate accepted meanings. One who is deploying state-of-the art film and computer technology is Canadian artist, Jeff Wall who since the 1970s has problematized the relationship between photography, documentary and art in his dramatizations of apparently ordinary street scenes and social encounters. His giant transparencies are mounted on light boxes to combine the seductive glow of a cinema screen with the physical presence of a minimalist sculpture. Wall's carefully composed tableau depicts everyday social relations, e.g. in *Passerby* (1996), a b/w photograph of a spontaneous street scene which looks like a candid moment caught on camera but is a pre-conceived and stage act.

Jeff Wall also makes pictures using literary works as subjects, for instance in *Invisible Man* (2001) he was inspired by the character in the novel, 'Invisible Man' by Ralph Ellison (1952), a black man hibernating in a cellar, cluttered with possession and the ceiling covered in 1369 light bulbs.

Invisible Man, 2001

The Storyteller, 1986

As with much 19th-century staged photography, his constructed realities regularly quote the history of painting, for example Wall's *The Storyteller* (1986) is an appropriation of Manet's famous painting, *Le Déjeuner sur L'herbe* (1863)

Edouard Manet, French, (1832-1883), *Le Dejeuner sur L'herbe*, 1863

The Guitarist, 1987

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, French, (1780-1867), *The Odalisque with the Slave*, 1843

The Arrest, 1989

Caravaggio, Italian, (1571-1610) The
Flagellation of Christ, 1607

Student example of analysing postmodern approaches

Postmodernism

Intertextuality is to use other works within a piece in a witty sense for fun and for comparison. Modernists would never use references to other pieces. They would think it was wrong because it was not new. An example of Intertextuality in David LaChapelle's work is below. He has made reference to Andy Warhol's style of using silk-screen process in his portraits.

Andrew Warhola more commonly known as Andy Warhol, was an American painter, printmaker, and filmmaker who was a leading figure in the visual art movement known as pop art.

Warhol would take an image in black and white and then paint in the colour after where as Lachapelle added th colour to the models previous to the photo being taken to make the final image less complicated to edit. This is just one example of how Lachapelle intertextualises other artists work and styles into his own. This could also be considered recycling or a pastiche.

Postmodernism

<u>Recycling/ Pastiche:</u> Post modern photographers recycle the styles and works of previous artist a lot in their work. For example in the image of LaChapelle's he has recycled the compositions of two famous paintings into one. Making this modern apocalypse using imagery from older famous paintings makes the image instantly recognisable to a viewer if the viewer knows the background history into the art.

From looking at LaChapelle's Deluge carefully I can see that the point he was trying to put across was to try and show the greed that we all posses for example the front of Caesars Palace (famous casino) looks as if it is sinking. Many people think of casinos and gambling as greed, same goes for food there is a Burger King sign in the bottom right corner and this shows our obsession with fast food and how our greed is starting to damage out health. There is also a Gucci sign in the right corner signifying out obsession with fashion. There are many other things that can represent greed in this image also including a satellite dish, car, shopping trolley, Starbucks sign, food packets and many more. Lachapelle has taken inspiration from two famous paintings for this image the first being The Raft of the Medusa from 1819 by Theodore Gericault and the second being Deluge from the Sistine Chapel in 1509 by Michelangelo.

David LaChapelle
Deluge
2007

Théodore Géricault
The Raft of the Medusa
1819

Michelangelo
Deluge, from the sistine Chapel
1509

Analysis of a David LaChapelle Image Cont.

The Deluge is painting on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in the Vatican painted by Michelangelo.

A deluge myth or flood myth is a mythical story of a great flood sent by a deity or deities to destroy civilization as an act of divine retribution. It is a widespread theme among many cultures, though it is perhaps best known in modern times through the biblical account of Noah's Ark, the Hindu Puranic story of Manu, through Deucalion in Greek mythology or Utnapishtim in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

For me, "The Deluge" is about the craziness of being faced with danger, with imminent death, when every material thing is taken away. You have to find some sort of enlightenment when everything you value suddenly becomes worthless. Michelangelo's Deluge in the Sistine Chapel shows humanity at its best, people helping each other.

Analysis of a David LaChapelle Image Cont.

The Raft of the Medusa-

(French: ***Le Radeau de la Méduse***) is an oil painting of 1818–1819 by the French Romantic painter and lithographer Théodore Géricault (1791–1824). Completed when the artist was just 27, the work has become an icon of French Romanticism. At 491 cm × 716 cm (193.3 in × 282.3 in), *The Raft of the Medusa* is an over-life-size painting that depicts a moment from the aftermath of the wreck of the French naval frigate *Méduse*, which ran aground off the coast of today's Mauritania on July 5, 1816. At least 147 people were set adrift on a hurriedly constructed raft; all but 15 of them died in the 13 days before their rescue, and those who survived endured starvation, dehydration, cannibalism, and madness. The event became an international scandal, in part because its cause was widely attributed to the incompetence of the French captain acting under the authority of the recently restored French monarchy.

Analysis of a David Lachapelle Image

This image is on the cover of David Lachbelles book Heaven to Hell. I have chosen this image because firstly I like the composition and colours of the image and secondly I believe it has many given and symbolic meanings to it.

<u>Denotation-</u> in the image we clearly see what looks like a woman with an ora around her head, she looks as if she has been made to represent the Madonna (Jesus' mother) a very important religions figure. Laying across her is what looks like Jesus (her child), he has holes in his wrist and feet showing that he has been nailed to a cross he also almost naked with a beard and long hair which is how Jesus is seen in many images. Through popular culture we believe him to be Courtney Love's dead rock star husband Kurt Cobain. The Cobain figure has track marks from drug use in his arms as well as stigmata. The clock ,slightly obscured on the left side on the picture by drug and tablet bottles, looks like it tells the time of 2.30-ish, approximately the time Cobain was found. Courtney Love is sitting on a hospital stretcher. The image points towards issues in Cobains life for example the track marks, drug , abuse, alcohol abuse representing how he attemptedsuicide and how these items affected his life. The couple   are positioned on an
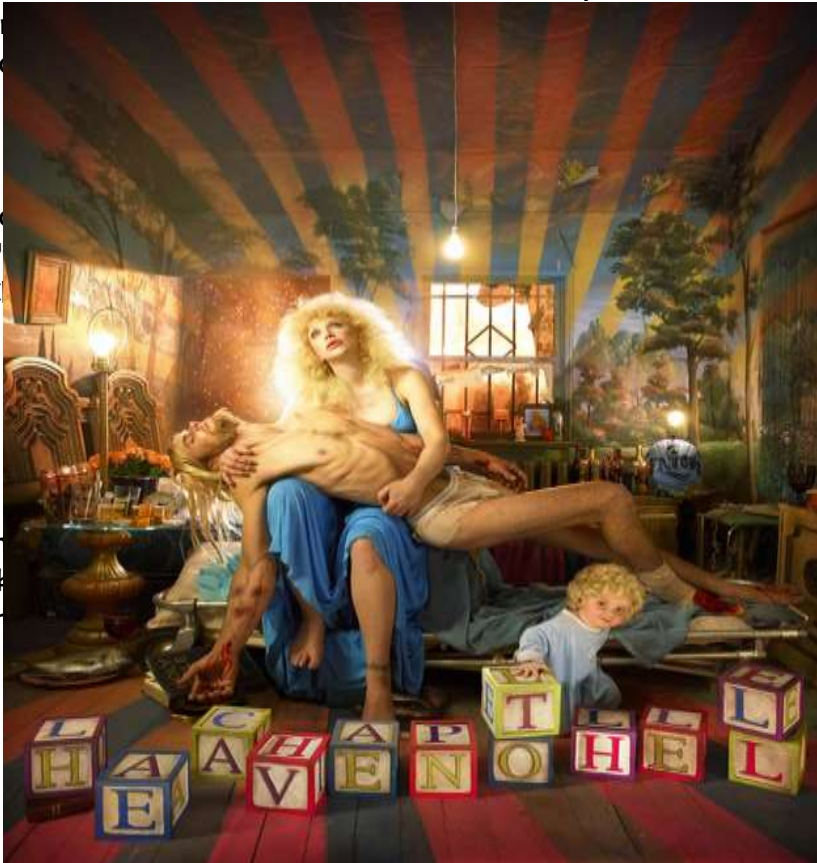
a   when Cobain committed suicide that

L   Lots of religious imagery and objects are in the room I

d light stands. A Holy Bible, red wine

in the left of

us   theme.

L   blue is often worn by the

V   Renaissance paintings. Beer cans with the image of

C   sit on a table with wine bottles, beside which is a light

which reads "Faith". Electrical lights in the image

add a rawness to the scene. An

head disperses light so it

ok and

ter   blocks

sh   a baby grow who looks

li   advertising and he also may be representing Cupid

th   child may also represent the couple's daughter Frances

Cobain. He leaning on a block as if he spelt out the

Analysis of a David Lachapelle Image Cont.

Connotation:

A toddler, who could be their daughter Frances Bean, plays on the floor with beside building blocks. It could also reflect a Nativity Scene. The blocks spell out the name of the Photographer and the title of the book for which this photograph was chosen to be the cover.

Reasons I believe why Lachapelle may have added a child that looked a lot like cupid and the soap child is firstly to show a pure cleansed baby but also the baby may have kept the couple together through their troubles as cupid may be represented as the god of love.

In Roman mythology, **Cupid** (Latin *cupido,* meaning "desire") is the god of erotic love and beauty. He is also known by another one of his Latin names, Amor (cognate with Kama). He is the son of goddess Venus and god Mercury.

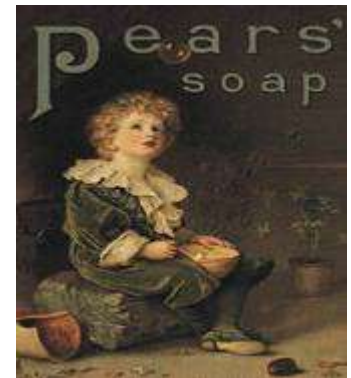On August 18, the Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love's first child was born. Daughter Frances Bean Cobain.
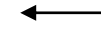

Image of Cupid

Frances Bean Cobain

Image of an advert for Pears Soap with the famous Pears baby.

Analysis of a David Lachapelle Image Cont.

Connotation:
Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love

This is an example of a painting of the Madonna which Courtney love is representing.

Cobains death: Kurt Cobain had attempted suicide and threatened to attempt again after so was put on a detox program which he escaped. On April 8, 1994, Cobain's body was discovered at his Lake Washington home by an electrician who had arrived to install a security system. Apart from a minor amount of blood coming out of Cobain's ear, the electrician reported seeing no visible signs of trauma, and initially believed that Cobain was asleep until he saw the shotgun pointing at his chin. A suicide note was found that said, in part, "I haven't felt the excitement of listening to as well as creating music, along with really writing . . . for too many years now". A high concentration of heroin and traces of Valium were also found in his body. Cobain's body had been lying there for days; the coroner's report estimated Cobain to have died on April 5, 1994.

Many fans of Cobain say that Love was the one who caused his death, meaning that she pushed his so far that he committed suicide so people see her in a very bad light and she is hated a lot by fans, so to see her represented as the mother of Jesus shows us a very different view on her.

Analysis of a David LaChapelle Image Cont.

Connotation:

Pieta

The original
Pieta Statue

The ***Pietà*** (Italian for *pity*) is a subject in Christian art depicting the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus, most often found in sculpture. As such, it is a particular form of the *Lamentation of Christ*, a scene from the Passion of Christ found in cycles of the *Life of Christ*. When Christ and the Virgin are surrounded by other figures from the New Testament, the subject is strictly called a *Lamentation* in English, although *Pietà* is often used for this as well, and is the normal term in Italian.

Quote from Wikipedia:

She has worked with photographer David LaChapelle, appearing on the cover of his book 'Heaven to Hell' depicting the pieta

Pietà is a large-scale video projection based on Michelangelo's Vatican sculpture and portrays the artist struggling to hold actor Robert Downey Jr in the pose of the dying Christ.
35mm Film/DVD

Theorizing portraiture

Portraiture is one of the most enduring and compelling of photographic genres. Above all others, it signifies a relationship between the photographer and the subject that is not explicit in other genres. What is common to all portrait photographs is a situational element. In portrait photography, the presence of the photographer's gaze also becomes an integral part of what the picture is about: the activity of one person looking, manifested in a moment that can feel like the blink of an eye or a small eternity.

A portrait is the questioning or exploration of self and identity through a literal representation of what somebody looks like. The paradox is that the inner workings of the complex human psyche can never really be understood by just looking at a picture. However much one is tempted to read a face subjectively for clues of someone's character, the many versions, and indeed the many selves, which can be fashioned in front of the camera can say anything the artist or the sitter wishes to say at that precise moment. Furthermore, the viewer of the photograph then adds his or her experience to it to create another version of its meaning. However much we want to capture a person's true personality with a camera, it just isn't possible. If you put a different caption under the image or change its context, the meaning will change with it. Identity can be changed in an instant.

There are always 3 people in a portrait

Sitter

Photographer

Spectator

The gaze

"The desire to look always implies, at least unconsciously, a desire to be looked at"

Photography is about looking and seeing what something looks like photographed. In portraiture the gaze has a multi layered meaning as a portrait represents both the way a photographer 'looks' at a subject and the subject looks back at us, the spectator who in turns is looking at a portrait of both the sitter and the photographer who made it.

The relationship between the photographer and sitter is often a complex interplay of power, positioning and performance. Sometimes the making of a photographic portrait is an act of collaboration and portrait could be an illusion constructed by the photographer or the sitter or in conjunction to represent a certain image or ideal version of that person.

The Comtesse de Castiglione, (1863-66) mistress of Napoleon III commissioned Pierre Louis Pierson to photograph her and she controlled the sittings and costumes to create a certain appearance.

The gaze and voyeurism

The pleasures of the gaze are in psychoanalytical terms related to unconscious fantasies of control and power, and its active and passive forms, voyeurism and exhibitionism, are connected. Voyeurism, as an active form is associated with masculinity; exhibitionism with passitivity and femininity.

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Grande Odalisque*, 1814

Historically and culturally from early painted portraits to images of women in popular media (e.g. The Sun, Nuts etc) the female body has been represented as a fetishized sex object and man, both as artist-creator and spectator is the bearer of the look (active) and woman is the image - the one being looked at (passive).

Task: Find an image that represent woman as a fetishized sex object and analyse the active and passive forms of looking at the image

Does a portrait reveal more about the photographer than the sitter?

**Analytical Task:** Find a portrait and try and answer that question (write 400-500 words.)

Practical task: Take two portraits of the same person. One that reveal something about that person (the sitter) and one that reveal something about you, (the photographer)

Diane Arbus, *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, NYC,* 1962

Society portraits vs Social portraits

Society portraits - in which the person is a sitter of consequence and known to society. When we look at a society portrait we tend to read biography and celebrities like their picture to flatter. Society portraits are of individuals and reading it is a matter of information.
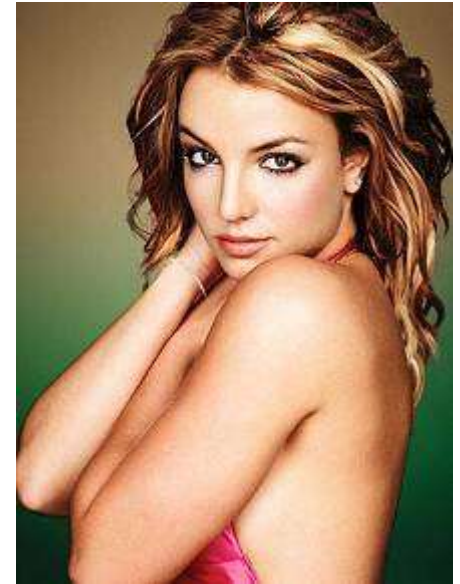
Social portrait - in which the sitter is anonymous and known only to family and immediate circle. When we look at a social portrait we tend to read sociology and these pictures are not obliged to flatter. Social portraits are of types and reading it is more a matter of speculation.

August Sander, *Young Farmers*, 1914   **Paul Strand** *Blind Woman*, 1917

Task: Research both types of portraits and analyse. Take two portraits, one using your family/ friend that flatter and show an individual and another of a stranger which makes more reference to a social type.

Feminism

Feminist theory…is concerned with how woman are represented. What is central to feminist theory explains cultural theorist, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'is the recognition that woman does not speak herself: rather, she is spoken for and all that that implies: looked at, imagined, mystified and objectified.' Feminist art-historian, Griselda Pollock makes a related point about women's position in fine art: 'Representing creativity as masculine and circulating Woman as the beautiful image for the desiring male gaze, High Culture systematically denies knowledge of woman as producers of culture and meaning.'

Sex and Gender…two key ideas propel feminist theory…sex is different from gender, and feminism is instrumental. Sex refers to the physical features that make us female or male, and gender to the cultural ideas of what it is to be a man or a woman. Gender is how a culture expects and tries to ensure that men act a certain way and woman another, or a gay man this way and a lesbian that way.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled film-still*, 1977

Film Stills (1977-80)

Cindy Sherman, American, (b. 1954 -)

Film Stills (1977-80)

Cindy Sherman, American, (b. 1954 -)

Moving to colour she has continued to point to the socially constructed nature of femininity by subverting culturally prevalent images. E.g in her *Untitled* series of 1981 Sherman used the horizontal, looking-down format of the 'centrefolds' in pornographic magazines, but frustrated the expectations of the viewer, using discordant and unsettling poses.

Untitled 'Centrefolds' (1981)

In *Fashion Pictures* (1983-84) the smooth appeal of conventional fashion photographs is disturbed by angry or inane poses, scarred faces, or the appearance of bodily fluids, as if the models were beginning to physically reject the masquerade of femininity.

Fashion Pictures (1983-84)

Cindy Sherman, American, (b. 1954 -)

Her images from the later 1980s and 1990s seem to reveal the monstrous otherness behind masquerade. Loosely based on myth, horror and fairy tales, they feature characters of uncertain gender and species, enlarged glistening organs, oozing orifices, decomposing body parts and foodstuff tainted by vomit and decay – all rendered vividly by her accomplished use of deeply saturated coloured prints.

American Housewives (2000-2)

Returning to her preoccupation with female identity, her late work seems to reference the 'makeover' photographs advertised at the back of women's magazines read by housewives. We still wince at the fashion mistakes, bad skin and excessive make-up of Sherman's protagonists as they struggle to fulfil familiar clichés of successful femininity.

American Housewives (2000-2)

Feminism continued….

Genders are political constructions…usually in a hierarchically order: Power, usually male, would have it be that it is better to be male than female, masculine than feminine, 'straight' than 'queer.'

Feminism is instrumental…in that to be a feminist is a political choice, a choice toward action to resist and to change the status quo. One is not born a feminist, but rather one chooses to become one. All women are not feminists, and all women do not make feminist art; nor do all feminists make feminist art.

Nan Goldin, *Nan and Brian in bed, New York City*, 1983

Claude Cahun (1894 – 1954) was a French artist who moved to Jersey in 1939 when the Germans invaded France. Cahun is famous for her self-portraits where she is transformed by make-up, masks, costumes and *mise-en-scene*. Her work is both political and personal, often playing with the concepts of gender, sexuality and stereo-types which foregrounds the constructed nature of identity.

Francesca Woodman (1958-1981) was an American photographer best known for her black and white pictures featuring herself and female models. Many of her photographs show young nude women, blurred by camera movement and long exposure times, merging with their surroundings, or with their faces obscured. Her work continues to be the subject of much attention, years after she committed suicide at the age of 22.

Francesca Woodman, American, (1958-81-

Feminism continued….

Fashion and the female…fashion imagery constructs the female as different, as other, and therefore estranges and oppresses her by making her the voyeuristic object of the male gaze. When fashion imagery is presented for women, the female viewer must project her own sexual identity as existing by and for the eyes of men. Women in fashion images are presented as ritual objects and as commodities.

Helmut Newton, *Raquel Big Nude*, 1981

Jemima Stehli, *Strip No 4 Curator*, 1999

Jemima Stehli, British, 1961-

Helmuth Newton, German 1920-2004

Jemima Stehli, British, 1961-