

Class 11: A Geography of Modernism

A. The Modernist Pandemic

1. Class title (Jasper Johns: *Map*, 1961 MoMA)
2. Section title A: The Modernist Pandemic

This class is about Modernism. As I've done a whole course on it, some of you will have seen some of my examples before, but I'll try to marshal them to make new arguments. My title slide is a 1961 painting, *Map*, by **Jasper Johns** (b.1930). It leads to a video map on which I'll attempt to plot some of the artistic movements in Europe and later in America between about 1870 and 1960. I call it the **Modernist Pandemic**, for suddenly in the first two decades of the 20th Century, new art movements seemed to spring up almost everywhere. Sometimes they spread to other countries, sometimes they remained local. A few died out within a few years; others remained a force for decades. The video that follows is quite arbitrary in its selection, choice of colors, and so on. But I have tried to pinpoint the start of each art movement fairly accurately, and to give some general idea of its spread, but have faded out the longer-lasting movements after a while to stop the map getting too cluttered. The music is the opening of the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* (1937) by **Igor Stravinsky** (1882–1971).

3. Video timeline
4. — still from the above

Of course that was selective and very approximate. In particular, some movements such as **Cubism** disappeared relatively quickly from the chart, because they had morphed into something else, or spawned successors, but those successors would continue to influence art for half a century at least. Most of these movements had international repercussions, which rather gives the lie to my title, "A Geography of Modernism." And some movements could not be tied easily to a single country of origin.

5. The 1890s: a Decade of Art Nouveau

An even more remarkable example, which I did not include in the map at all, is **Art Nouveau**, which seemed to happen almost everywhere simultaneously. Everything on this slide, for example, was created in the 1890s, but look at the list of cities: Paris, Glasgow, Munich, Brussels, Barcelona, Amsterdam. I could easily have added New York (with **Tiffany**), Vienna, Eastern Europe, or Scandinavia.

6. *De Stijl* sampler

But there are a few movements that one thinks of a specifically *national*. The clearest, which I omitted from the video because it was so local, is **De Stijl**, also known as **Neoplasticism**—think of **Piet Mondrian** (1872–1944). This sprung up in Holland in 1917 and involved other arts besides just painting. Although others were doing similar things elsewhere, *De Stijl* itself remained an exclusively Dutch phenomenon.

B. Germany: Color and Conflict

7. Section title C (Marc: *Fighting Forms*, 1914)

8. — the same without title

The painting is by the German artist **Franz Marc** (1880–1916); if you don't know it, can you suggest a title, and perhaps why I chose it to head up my section on Germany? Its name is *Fighting Forms*. Painted in 1914, it was Marc's final work before being drafted at the beginning of WW1, in which he was killed a year and a half later. It chose it because of its intense color, its abstraction, its theme of conflict (implicit even without the title), and the historical coincidence of its creation. **It illustrates my principal point for the remainder of this hour: that a country's National Identity in art is shaped not only by the ideas that spread among its artists—the *Zeitgeist*, to use the appropriate German term—but by the historical, political, and social events through which they lived.** But let's start with music, in the closing pages of *Salome*, the opera that **Richard Strauss** (1864–1949) flung onto the stage in 1905. The teenage princess has had her wish; John the Baptist has been executed, and his head presented to Salome on a silver platter. But the intensity of her necrophilia disgusts even her lecherous stepfather Herod, who orders her killed. The singer is **Nadja Michael**, and the production from Covent Garden is by **David McVicar**.

9. Strauss: *Salome*, ending

10. German painting, 1906–12

What kind of painting was being produced around this time? Here are four works painted in the years between 1906 and 1912; the artists are **Emil Nolde** (1867–1956), **Wassily Kandinsky** (1866–1944), **Franz Marc** again, and **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner** (1880–1938). While none of them depict subjects quite so out-there as *Salome*, they all share its aesthetic of heightened color and intensity of expression. Indeed, although the term was not coined until later, all four are classified among the **German Expressionists**. Walking through the Museum of Modern Art in New York a month or so ago, I was struck by walking into the Expressionist room after being with the Cubists, and even the late Impressionists; it was as if I was suddenly being bombarded by color on all sides.

11. Kandinsky: three landscapes from 1908

It is **Kandinsky**, the painter of the image at top right, that I want to concentrate on just now. He was actually born in Russia, but worked in Germany until the outbreak of WW1. He returned in 1922, and became a German citizen, but again was forced to leave by the rise of Hitler. Anyway his works of the first decade of the century are obviously influenced by the **Fauves** in France, but with even stronger color. Around 1910, however, his palette lightened and other strange things began to happen. Here is the top left corner of a painting from that year; what do you think it represents, or is it entirely abstract?

12. Kandinsky: *The Cow* (1910, Munich, Lenbachhaus), transformation video

There are hints, are there not? Some hills, perhaps a building with a chimney, and even the tail of some animal. As I unveil the rest of it, you will see it for what it is, a cow with a woman milking her, and a

couple of other cows grazing just beyond. But the point is that large portions of it work just in terms of paint alone. So taking this a step further, what do you think of this?

13. Kandinsky: *Improvisation 27 (The Garden of Love)*, 1910, NY Met, transformation video

In fact, I am showing it upside-down, but there is a point here. Kandinsky returned to his studio late one evening, probably with a few drinks inside him, and saw this painting propped against the wall. In fact he had intended it to be representational, but it was upside-down and for a moment he didn't recognize it. All he thought was, "Hey, that's rather marvelous!" It did have a title, *The Garden of Love*; you can see the lovers, part of a picket fence, and perhaps another animal, but the rest of it is simply paint, the expression of pure emotion. In 1910, he had made the discovery that the American Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s and 1960s would take so much farther, as we shall see in the next hour.

14. Schoenberg: Self-Portrait sequence

Kandinsky was good friends with the composer **Arnold Schoenberg** (1874–1951), who as it happened was also a painter. He produced a number of self-portraits, and since he always seemed to look straight ahead into the mirror, it was easy for me to put half-a-dozen of them together into a montage. Apart from the generally darker tone, there is no doubt that these are **Expressionist** works, exaggerated in form and color, to the point where some are almost grotesque. The music was a snatch of his Second String Quartet, which also seems to change moods on a dime. At about the same time that Kandinsky was moving into abstraction, Schoenberg was experimenting with throwing away the old concept of music having a *tonal center* or key, and moving towards music that was entirely **Atonal**. [He would go further a decade or so later by inventing a system of organization known as **Serialism** to replace the harmonic system he had thrown out, but that is beyond the scope of this class.] The first of his *Five Orchestral Pieces* of 1912 is called "Premonitions"; a later movement is *Peripatie*, or "Turning Point," both apt descriptions of what was going on in his music. I thought it would be fun to put the first of these together with a chronological series of paintings by his friend **Kandinsky**, showing his similar evolution around the same time.

15. Schoenberg: "Premonitions" from *Five Orchestral Pieces*, with Kandinsky paintings

I must emphasize, however, that Kandinsky's abandonment of representation did not mean abandonment of emotion; at first, indeed, it intensified it. And Schoenberg's abandon of tonality involved an increase, not a diminution, of his Expressionist tendencies. Scarcely anything could be more dramatic, exaggerated, grotesque—Expressionist in the most challenging sense—than his hugely influential *Pierrot Lunaire* also of 1912. This setting of 21 poems translated from the French of **Albert Giraud** (1860–1929) involves a group of only five players and a soprano reciting in *Spechstimme*, Schoenberg's own invention for a type of declamation that follows a notated line but is nonetheless delivered as speech. Here are two of the poems, performed by **Hila Baggio** with the **Israeli Chamber Project**. An eyewitness of the Berlin premiere describes the performance of **Albertine Zehme**, the original Pierrot, as follows:

When she appeared in a Pierrot costume, her painted, frightened face framed by a ruff, her aging ankles in white stockings, she was greeted by an ominous murmur from the audience.

One could not help admiring her courage, as she went on from poem to poem, disregarding the hissing, booing and insulting invective shouted at her and Schoenberg. There were fanatical ovations from the young generation, but the majority were outraged.

16. Schoenberg: *Pierrot Lunaire, Nostalgia & A Mean Trick*

17. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: *Self Portrait as Soldier (1915)*

But something far more important than stylistic change was in the air: a **World War**. Kandinsky returned to Russia, but many of the German artists were drafted, killed, or maimed. Here is a self-portrait by Kirchner, whose picture of a young model we saw in an earlier slide. Apparently, he has lost the use of his painting hand, though in fact this was not the case; he suffered so badly from battlefield neurosis that he was invalided out. But I have chosen another artist to be the standard-bearer for the rest of this hour, **Otto Dix** (1891–1969); he will take us through the First World War and almost to the outbreak of the second. Here is a sequence of *his* self-portraits, ranging from the chaotic but rather grandiose Cubist-inspired *Self-Portrait as Mars* to the devastating simplicity of *Self Portrait as a Target*. No music; the portraits speak for themselves.

18. Dix: War portraits

Seen on its own, you would say that this last one from 1917, called simply *The Trenches*, is as Expressionist as they come. But if you compare it to photographs or British war artists like Paul Nash, you will see there is no exaggeration; months of shellfire have distorted the landscape far more radically than the most fevered artistic imagination.

C. Weimar Contrasts

19. Section title D (Dix: *To Beauty*, 1922)

Dix survived the War, and went on to become one of the most trenchant observers of postwar Germany, the **Weimar Republic**. Crippled by debts imposed by the **Treaty of Versailles**, the new republic suffered hyperinflation; everywhere in the cities, WW1 veterans, some horribly disfigured, could be seen begging in the streets.

20. Otto Dix: *War Cripples (1920, now lost)*

This 1920 painting by Dix is also called *45% Fit for Service*, an allusion to the government's policy of allocating disability benefits in proportion to the amount of the body lost; presumably a stump still counted as 25% of a leg. Dix is still an Expressionist—this obviously-composed painting has no claim to literal reality—but he did many others around this time which have the air of reporting what he sees.

21. Otto Dix: *Match Seller (1920, Stuttgart)*

Here is an example, his *Match Seller* of 1920. When I look at it, I see the reality; I would have no problem including it in a documentary about the time. And yet it has something of the nature of a political

cartoon: the text coming out of the blind man's mouth, the feet of the better-off people rushing past with averted eyes, the dog pissing against the beggar's stump.

22. Otto Dix: *Skat Players* (1920, New National Gallery, Berlin)

Did you notice that Dix's style has also changed? Compare this 1920 picture of veterans playing cards (the German game of Skat) to anything he produced in the war. That wild abandon with the loaded brush has gone completely; in its place, you get precision of detail upon detail. One of my books tells me that Expressionism died after the War, to be replaced by *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or the **New Objectivity**. And Dix is cited as one of the principal artists of the new style. In technique, yes indeed, but there is nothing objective about Dix's *attitude*; this picture is every bit as full of feeling as any of his earlier work. Deliberately over-the-top, it is designed to shock, and if that is not Expressionist, then what is?

23. Brecht & Weill: *Dreigroschenoper*, poster (1928), with Dix *Metropolis* detail

Dix continued to paint beggars right through the decade. Here is one from 1927, the same year that **Bertolt Brecht** (1898–1956) and **Kurt Weill** (1900–50) were writing their *Threepenny Opera*, which is an adaptation of the 18th-century English *Beggar's Opera* as a satire of contemporary conditions; I will play you something else by them before the break. Dix's painting is not, of course in black and white, and this is only part of it. You are looking at the left wing of a large and rather garish triptych called *Metropolis*, showing a modish interior framed by beggars looking on from outside. I have put it together as a video.

24. Dix: *Metropolis* (1928, Stuttgart), transformation

This triptych shows why I called this section "Weimar Contrasts." It was a period of great poverty, yes, but also enormous wealth in the hands of a few. The depression of the early twenties was ended by an influx of American money, and with it an influx of American jazz, American slang, and the morals of a New York nightclub. It was a period that somehow managed to fuse energy and nihilism. It was a period of intense creativity in the arts, which were as full of contrasts as anything else. It was a period of reaction and counterreaction, of wild experiment. It was emphatically *not* a period of moderation, and so absolutely supports my idea of exaggeration being part of the German artistic identity in this period. Let's see if I can sum it up in a sequence of brief vignettes.

25. Poster for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)

CINEMA. All through the twenties, the film industry in Berlin was notably more innovative than anything being done in Hollywood. And German cinema is one area where you can emphatically say that Expressionism still ruled; indeed, if you look up "German Expressionism" on Google, what you get is an essay on film, not art. The first masterpiece of the period, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) by **Robert Wiene** (1873–1938) is a horror movie that uses hand-painted and deliberately distorted sets and strongly directional lighting. The music was added to the clip later, but would have been played live. The colors were filters that the projectionist was required to place in front of the lens for certain scenes.

26. Robert Wiene: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, end of Act II

27. Hannah Höch: *Cut with the Kitchen Knife...* (1919, Berlin)

DADA. The chaos of the First World War indirectly gave rise to an movement that entirely rejected reason and made chaos into an art form. This was Dada, which as I mentioned before was launched in Zurich in 1916, but sprang up almost simultaneously in Paris and New York as well. In an art devoted to the random and the absurd, a favorite medium was **collage**, and one of the wittiest collage artists of the time was **Hanna Höch** (1889–1978). This is one of her largest works, with an equally large title, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919).

28. Schwitters: *Merzzeichnung 85*

This work of Höch's had a definite political edge, but there were other artists who used collage simply for its ability to take them way outside the box. One such was **Kurt Schwitters** (1887–1948), who developed a form of art called **MERZ** (from the middle of the word "KOMMERZBANK"), using only found materials. He was a sculptor as well, making whole rooms on a similar principle, a poet, and even a composer. Here, as a kind of echo of the Marinetti we heard earlier, is a portion of his virtuoso *Ursonate*, composed entirely of nonsense syllables. The performer is **Michael Schmid**.

29. Schwitters: *Ursonate, excerpt*

30. Bauhaus poster, and Kandinsky: *Circles in a Circle* (1923, Philadelphia)

BAUHAUS. The art of the absurd was one understandable reaction to the 1914–18 War; another was its diametric opposite, the arts of the **Bauhaus**, founded originally in Weimar in 1919 by the architect **Walter Gropius** (1883–1969), as a school of art and design, intended to bring all the arts together on rational principles. For the 14 years it survived, the Bauhaus was one of the prime movers of modern design in Europe, and its influence was spread by the diaspora of its faculty to the United States and elsewhere after the Nazis shut it down in 1933. Although there were a few artists on the faculty who continued on a figurative path, it gave particular prominence to abstraction. Gropius invited Wassily Kandinsky to return from Russia in 1922, and as you see from this painting from the next year, his work had become largely geometrical; his Expressionist years were behind him.

31. Dix's *War Cripples* in two exhibitions

POSTSCRIPT. We have seen what became of one of our featured artists, Kandinsky; what happened to the other one, **Otto Dix**? The slide shows two newspaper photographs of exhibition openings, both as it happens featuring the 1920 *War Cripples* by Dix. The one at top left is the 1920 Dada exhibition in Berlin; although Dix was not really a Dadaist, it seems they invited anyone who was doing anything unusual. The one at bottom right is the *Entartete Kunst* or **Degenerate Art** exhibition of 1937 put on by the Nazis in Munich, and later touring elsewhere, to invite the public to ridicule the art that they condemned as degenerate, and whose creators had either fled or were now in fear of their lives. This included virtually all the remaining Expressionists and Dadaists, and the majority of the Bauhaus people, many of whom were also Jewish.

32. Otto Dix: *Self Portrait as a Prisoner of War* (1946)

Dix did not emigrate. But when the Nazis came into power, he retreated to the country near Lake Constance and kept a low profile. Even so, he was at one time arrested on suspicion of complicity in a

plot to murder Adolf Hitler, but was acquitted. Then in the last weeks of the war, when Germany was desperate for manpower, he was drafted into the Home Guard, but was promptly captured by the French and interned. This, his last self-portrait, was painted after his release.

33. Brecht: *Mahagonny*, Alabama Song text

I'll end with something a little more cheerful, the "Alabama Song" from *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, the next collaboration of **Brecht** and **Weill** after the *Threepenny*. Premiering in 1929, this is a real opera, sung throughout. A trio of petty criminals, fleeing from the police, decide to set up a new City in the desert when their truck breaks down. What follows is a satire on capitalism and, incidentally, the Weimar Republic. The first people to arrive, naturally, are the bartenders and whores. This is a song sung by one of them. The words are not a translation; Brecht wrote this, and a few other numbers, in his own particular version of American English. The clip is from a production at the Salzburg Festival; **Catherine Malfitano** is the aging whore; her singing is not great, but the mood is perfect. The painting on the score cover, incidentally, is yet another by **Dix**.

34. Brecht/Weill: *Mahagonny*, Alabama Song

35. Intermission title ("Next stop America...")

D. The Art of Improv

36. Section title D (The Art of Improv)

37. Dix: *Metropolis* to Arthur Dove: *George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue"* (detail, 1927)

When **Otto Dix** painted *Metropolis* in 1927, he was using American swing music as an emblem of decadence—the idle rich ignoring the conditions all around them. But jazz had very different connotations on its own turf; it was the music of a new America, vibrant and energetic.

38. Arthur Dove: *George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue"* (detail, 1927)

The painter is **Arthur Dove** (1880–1946), one of the first abstract painters in America. Its title is *George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," part 1*. Dove in fact loved to listen to records as he painted, and his improvisations often take the title of the piece he had on at the time. Here, with recordings from the original 78s, are three of them.

39. Arthur Dove: jazz paintings

Jazz is music that cannot completely be written down. It depends upon improvisation, sometimes only involving how the notes are played, sometimes inventing the notes themselves, often for long stretches at a time. In this hour, I am going to pick out two characteristics in the arts that I think of as typically American: (1) improvisation, and (2) connection with the commercial world. Most of the works I shall show in the next twenty minutes involve improv to one degree or another.

40. Kandinsky: *Improvisation 27 (The Garden of Love)*, 1910, NY Met

Dove was one of those young Americans knocked backwards by the Armory Show of 1913. And one of the works in that show was Kandinsky's *Garden of Love*, which we saw earlier. But note Kandinsky's main title, *Improvisation 27*. He was an Expressionist, and he was quickly becoming Abstract. There is a gap of half a century or more, but much of the work of the American Abstract Expressionists that established New York as the center of the postwar art world was inspired by Kandinsky paintings like this; by this time, Kandinsky was enthroned as one of the stars of the new Museum of Non-Objective Art that later became the Guggenheim. But let me try an even greater leap, connecting Kandinsky to a work by **Helen Frankenthaler** (1928–2011), sixty years later.

- 41. Frankenthaler: *Nature Abhors a Vacuum* (1973), transformed from the Kandinsky
- 42. — the above two paintings compared

I chose this comparison because of the similarity of their colors and shapes, but there is one huge difference; can you see what it is? Kandinsky may have been improvising, but he was doing so with a brush on the stretched canvas. Frankenthaler was folding the unstretched canvas into valleys and pouring diluted paint into them, somewhat controlling where it would run, but leaving much to chance. It really was improvisation.

- 43. Arshile Gorky: *Water of the Flowery Mill* (1944, NY Met)
- 44. — detail of the above

There is at least one more intermediary between the Abstract Expressionism of Kandinsky and that of the postwar **School of New York** (the term of art for the group of not-necessarily-related artists working in New York City in the fifties and sixties). This is Armenian-born painter **Arshile Gorky** (1904–48), who was brought to the US as a child by his mother, fleeing the Armenian genocide in 1915. He would have been barely 11 at the time, so not a mature artist, but he did look back to Europe for his models as he developed, and clearly one of these was Kandinsky. The ostensible subject is a bridge over the Housatonic River in Connecticut, but you'd never know from the picture alone. All the same, you can see it as a procession of figures coming towards you from under that arch at the top left. Now look at the detail of the bottom right corner. You can see that Gorky applies the paint with great freedom in places, and allows it to spatter or drip.

- 45. Willem de Kooning: *Woman and Bicycle* (1952, NY Whitney)
- 46. Willem de Kooning: *Woman* (1952, NY Met)

Gorky befriended the younger immigrant painter (a stowaway actually), **Willem de Kooning** (1904–97), who did this drawing of himself and Gorky titled *Self-Portrait with Imaginary Brother* (1938). In the postwar years, De Kooning burst into the New York scene with his series of *Women*—large canvases daubed with paint in riotous confusion, Picasso-meets-Gorky-in-a-hurricane, as it were. The scumbles and drips in Gorky's late paintings now became the main point. "*At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event,*" wrote the influential critic **Harold Rosenberg**, who dubbed the new approach **Action Painting**. The canvas is less a finished product than a record of the energy used in

making it. Later Rosenberg was displeased when he found out that De Kooning planned out his improvisations in detail; this was not what action painting was supposed to be about!

47. Jackson Pollock in Action, 1952

Meanwhile, in another part of Manhattan, **Jackson Pollock** (1912–56) was developing an even more radical form of Action Painting, in which he put the canvas on the floor and stood over it, dribbling paint from a can, on throwing it on with energetic flicks of the brush.

48. Franz Kline: *Painting #2* (1954, NY MoMA)

And in yet another New York studio, **Franz Kline** (1910–62) had taken some advice from Willem de Kooning to project his sketches onto the wall of his studio. In doing so, he had discovered that brushstrokes had a special kind of energy when totally divorced from their representational context. About the same time, he began painting in black and white—or at least I thought he did, until coming upon this painting at MoMA a few weeks ago, and realizing how subtle his greys could be! I also now read that his apparently spontaneous brushstrokes were the result of careful planning.

49. Abstract Expressionist collage

I don't know if I told you that, before coming over here, I was hired to edit and partially rewrite the *Larousse Pocket Dictionary of Modern Art*. I did a bad job, because I was an enthusiast not a scholar. But working on the American sections gave me a burning desire to come here to see for myself. This montage—a baker's dozen of works from the period—is a kind of tribute to what excited me so. The paintings, which I arranged somewhat chronologically, are not all Abstract Expressionist, but the music, *Walkin'* by **Miles Davis** (1926–91) is certainly of the period, and conceived in a similar spirit. Three of the dozen painters, incidentally, were born in Europe; three others are children of immigrants; the School of New York arose from the impact of old and new.

50. Postwar American paintings

51. Miles Davis: *Kind of Blue*, LP cover

When I first showed that video, I put music by **Samuel Barber** with it. But **Miles Davis** is far more appropriate, not least because he brought more improvisation to jazz than most people had done before. Jazz is not my field, but apparently he came to the studio in 1959 to record *Kind of Blue* with only half a page written out for each collaborator, just some scales and a couple of chords. All the rest was improvised. They launched straight into the session without any rehearsal beyond a sound check, and most of the tracks were recorded in a couple of takes. I am going to play the opening of *Blue in Green*, partly for the wonderful saxophone playing of John Coltrane, and partly for the fine poem about this track written (and here read) by **Grace Schulman** (b.1935). The paintings are by **William Baziotés** (1912–63), not the greatest of the Abstract Expressionists, but boy does he do blue in green!

52. Davis/Schulman: *Blue in Green*

53. Alvin Ailey and a still from *Revelations*

There was quite a bit of improvisation in other media at the time: classical music, poetry, theater, and dance. But the few available clips are grainy and rather messy. So I am stretching the point a bit by giving you the “Wade in the Water” sequence from *Revelations*, choreographed in 1960 by **Alvin Ailey** (1931–89) at the age of 29. It is not improvised, of course; this is a modern performance by the company he founded, faithfully reproducing the original. But it is based upon moves and music that *would* have been improvised by the people it represents: African Americans singing spirituals and celebrating a baptism. And the stage lighting in this performance is very much in the Abstract Expressionist manner.

54. Alvin Ailey: “Wade in the Water” from *Revelations*

E. Popping Up All Over

55. Section title F (PopBlast montage and Lichtenstein: *Pop!*)

The other characteristic that I mentioned as particularly American, at least in the middle of the 20th Century, is engagement with the commercial world. Or in words of one syllable: POP. There is an enormous amount of material to choose from, so I am going to confine myself to a very few specific examples to ask the questions: **WHY? What is going on? In what ways are these American?**

56. Eduardo Paolozzi: *I Was a Rich Man’s Plaything* (1947), with Hamilton

Here are two works that are often cited as marking the start of the Pop Art movement: *I Was a Rich Man’s Plaything* by **Eduardo Paolozzi** (1924–2005) and *Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?* by **Richard Hamilton** (1922–2011). In what ways are they American? In fact, neither artist is American; both are British: Paolozzi was Scottish and Hamilton English. Both works are *collages* of clips from American magazines not generally available in Britain, and sent over by mail. So they do address popular aspects of American culture, but from a distance. I don’t think there is any necessary implication of decadence, as there was with Otto Dix in *Metropolis*, but the question is certainly out there. Both artists were members of a loose collective known as the Independent Group, who co-organized a ground-breaking exhibition in 1956, called *This is Tomorrow*; Hamilton’s picture was originally a design for its catalogue.

57. Richard Hamilton, section of *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, 1956

Here is part of Hamilton’s work in the exhibition itself. Yes, the **Marilyn Monroe** picture and the robot from *Forbidden Planet* are American images, but we also get **Van Gogh’s** ubiquitous *Sunflowers* on the wall, and a **Guinness** bottle, both of which are European. So criticism of America was not central to British Pop. It was more concerned with breaking down the barriers between Fine Art and everyday life. The previous year, British critic **Lawrence Alloway** had argued for what he called a “mass popular art” that engaged with mass communications and contemporary visual culture. Paolozzi and Hamilton provided it. Alloway then went to America and organized the 1963 exhibition *Six Painters and the Object* at the Guggenheim that put American Pop on the map, following several years after its British birth, but

totally eclipsing its parents. Pop became an international phenomenon, but in the popular mind it is always associated with American culture.

58. Five Pop artists (Lichtenstein, Johns, Rosenquist, Oldenburg, Warhol)

Here are the five artists we shall glance at: two works each from Johns, Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, and Rosenquist; Warhol will keep popping in and out. **Jasper Johns** (b.1930), though, does not entirely belong. He was one of Alloway's "Six Painters," but his roots are closer to **Abstract Expressionism**.

59. Jasper Johns: *Flag* (1954, NY MoMA)

His *Flag* of 1954 was certainly as early as anything in Britain, but if you look at the surface, you see paint handling every bit as active as anything in **De Kooning**. Johns used a technique called *encaustic*, in which the pigments are mixed with hot wax which hardens quickly. And he would first lay a collage of newsprint over the surface, which would show through in places, giving a network of random references as a kind of background noise. There is no sense that the flag is used for any reason other than it was a familiar flat surface; it is not political, it is not parody.

60. Jasper Johns: *Ballantine Ale Cans* (1960, NY MoMA)

Not that Johns lacked humor. There is a story that De Kooning, who was a friend, once joked that **Leo Castelli**, Johns' dealer, was so good he could even sell a couple of beer cans. So Johns cast a couple of beer cans out of bronze, and painted on an obviously approximate version of the original labels. Castelli sold them for \$960 virtually the same day; they are worth at least thousand times that amount now.

61. Andy Warhol: *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962, NY MoMA)

62. Andy Warhol: *Brillo Boxes* (1964, Pennsylvania)

Very soon after this, **Andy Warhol** (1928–87) began painting *Campbell's Soup Cans*, both singly and in groups. And shortly after that, he too turned to sculpture, making arrangements of *Brillo Boxes* out of painted wood.

63. Stuart Davis: *Lucky Strike* (1921, NY MoMA), with Johns and Warhol

Can you see the difference between Warhol and Johns? Let me add one further element, *Lucky Strike* (1921) by **Stuart Davis** (1894–1964), whom we met in the first class. To me, the main difference is the concept of art and the role of the artist. **Davis** paints a cigarette packet, yes, but he rearranges it as elements in a Cubist-inspired work of art. **Johns** does no such rearrangement, but does not disguise his artistic personality either; he *could* have painted a real-looking label, but deliberately chose not to. Although the soup cans are painted, **Warhol** removes every possible trace of his technique; there is nothing painterly whatsoever about his cans. And in the *Brillo Boxes*, he doesn't even use a brush; these are screen-prints, like in almost all his later work, produced by the very same process that would have been used to print the original cardboard boxes. Moreover, they are virtually mass-produced, sold and often displayed in multiples. However common the object, the Johns is a work of art; the Warhol is a philosophical question about what art is. Though he was notoriously oblique about such matters. Flamboyant though he could be in public, Warhol was surprisingly deadpan in his interviews.

64. Warhol interviewed about the soup cans (1986)

65. Claes Oldenburg: *Meats* (1964)

We seem to have arrived at an aesthetic of the object as a thing in itself, and less “arty” the better. The irony, of course, is that this so-called popular art is not for the general public at all, but produced for gallery owners to sell to wealthy patrons just like traditional art. One artist who tried to buck this, at least at first, is the Swedish-American sculptor **Claes Oldenburg** (1929–2022). At the start of his career, he had a store-front studio in the Lower East Side, where he would make painted plaster models of food items, and sell them at modest prices. But of course, the dealers found their way there, and soon his prices were as high as those of anybody else.

66. Claes Oldenburg: *Clothespin* (1976, Philadelphia) and *Eraser* (1999, Washington)

What I have always loved about Oldenburg, though, is that, big business or not, he has always retained a sense of fun, and a real charm. His giant *Clothespin* in Philadelphia, for example, is wonderfully witty in its suggestion of an embracing couple, and his *Typewriter Eraser* down the road in Washington seems to be racing across the lawn. I saw it with my 9-year-old grandson last year, and he had absolutely no idea what this object might be, so I suppose there is an historical element there as well.

67. Roy Lichtenstein: *Drowning Girl* (1963, NY MoMA), with Warhol: *Marilyns* (1967)

68. Roy Lichtenstein: *Whaam!* (1963, London, Tate Modern)

I used this comparison in a discussion class last year. Warhol appropriated the screen-printing techniques used on commercial products to make multiples of iconic figures like *Marilyn Monroe*. **Roy Lichtenstein** (1923–97) took his subject matter from comics, but meticulously painting every detail himself, down to the dots used in cheap printing. Controversially, he was adapting the designs of other people, in this case an artist called **Tony Abruzzo**, who eventually sued. Lichtenstein showed that his alterations, though slight, were crucial to the painting. And when you come to the impact of his huge *Whaam!*, it is hard not to recognize it as a work of art in its own right, not merely a blown-up comic.

69. James Rosenquist: *F-111* (1964, NY MoMA)

Which brings me on to my last example of the day, the even huger *F-111* (1964–65) by **James Rosenquist** (1933–2017), another painter who imitated the techniques of contemporary commercial art. If we go back to my comparison between the cigarette packet, the beer can sculpture, and the soup can painting, though, Rosenquist is closer to Stuart Davis than to either Johns or Warhol, in that he uses pop techniques to create works that are not only obviously paintings, but are composed on principles deriving ultimately from the juxtapositions of later Cubism. My main reason for showing it, though, is that for once we have an artist willing to describe what was in his mind when he painted it. It is a huge work of 22 panels, occupying three walls of a gallery, so I will show you first my own video that scans it from one end to the other, and then the video that the artist made for MoMA, where it hangs.

70. James Rosenquist: *F-111*, video with sound

71. James Rosenquist: *F-111*, artist’s explanation

Finally, although **Andy Warhol** cut a surprisingly modest figure in his interviews, he made no secret of his flamboyant lifestyle, his homosexuality, and his fondness for cross-dressing. So he himself has become one of those pop icons to whom he paid homage in his prints, on a par with Marilyn and Jackie. So let's watch what I believe to be the finale of *ANDY, a PopOpera* by **Heath Allen** and **Dan Visconti**, produced by Opera Philadelphia in 2015.

72. *ANDY, a PopOpera, finale*

73. Closing title (Oldenburg: *Cherry Spoon Bridge*)