

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

NORTH AMERICAN CULTURE – 20th Century

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Overview In the Twentieth century, art and literature were used to undermine not only institutions but entire ideas about aesthetics and hierarchy. The spirit of revolution was accompanied by challenges to economic, religious, and other institutional social fabrics, resulting in cultural productions that incorporated often contradictory messages. Further complicating the mixed messages was a powerful consumer culture that tended to commodify culture, and then, in a paradoxical manner, question the entire process of assigning value to culture. With technology and mass communication allowing the production and exchange of cultural artifacts in ways that were never possible before, 20th-century North American culture is a fascinating and diverse complex of human achievement.

VERBAL ARTS

Literature

Imagism: An early version of Modernism, Imagism flowed from the experiments of French (Apollinaire, Rimbaud, Baudelaire) and reacted against ornate Romanticism and Victorian poetry. Ezra Pound wrote that imagism attempted, with great simplicity, to capture an intellectual and emotional complex at a particular moment in time. Pound's poem, "In a Station in the Metro" is considered the quintessential example.

Modernism:

American modernists included T. S. Eliot, whose poetry of the "Lost Generation" included *The Wasteland*, and *Four Quartets*. It was allusive, fragmentary, and incorporated tenets of imagism as well as minimalism. Gertrude Stein's prose was ground-breaking in its exploration of emotional landscapes but using minimalist forms in such works as *The Making of Americans*. Hemingway was deeply influenced by Stein and his prose, *The Snows of Mount Kilimanjaro*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *Death in the Afternoon* influenced a generation of writers.

Minimalism: William Carlos Williams was one of the first of the poets whose work reflected the Armory Show of 1913 in which the modernist art of Europe exploded upon the New York arts scene and the consciousness of a nation and a world in flux. Key elements were meaning through juxtaposition and informal, spoken-word syntax. His collection *Spring and All* was tremendously influential. The experimental Black Mountain School further explored minimalism. The poetry included that of Robert Creeley and Mina Loy's *Lunar Baedeker*, which is a travel guide to magical, nether world.

Surrealism: Exploring the impact of unlikely juxtapositions and the sense of hype-reality, poets were inspired by artists such as Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, Marc Chagall and Frida Kahlo. They include John Ashbery, whose *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* was very influential.

Social Realism: John Dos Passos wrote a trilogy, *U.S.A. Trilogy*, which include *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936). It explores the experience of immigrants. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was an expose of food processing practices. Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* and *Miss Lonelyhearts* explore the dark side of the American Dream with its attendant loneliness and nihilism.

Postmodernism: Postmodernist writing counters the ideas and values that realism and positivism promotes. For Postmodernist writers, reality is a construct, teleology is suspect, time is fragmented into a series of perpetual presents, and a profound rejection of "master narratives" for history and culture. Examples include Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, William Gass's *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* and *On Being Blue*, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*.

Beat Poets: Influenced by Walt Whitman and Imagistic notions of freedom of expression, as well as a pulling together of Buddhist philosophy, the Beat poets wrote to counter the status quo in the 1950s. They included Alan Ginsberg and *Howl* and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind*.

New York School: Influenced by Abstract Expressionism and a painterly, imagistic approach to descriptions and prosody, the New York School included Kenneth Koch, Wallace Stevens, Barbara Guest, and Frank O'Hara.

Confessional Poets: The Confessional School of poetry built on the flow and emotional expressionism of the Beat Poets, but focused more on exploring the notions of psychology and the idea that truth can be found by delving deeply into repressed ideas, emotions, memories and dreams. Examples include Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and W. D. Snodgrass. It is hard to find a confessional poet who did not eventually commit suicide.

Magical Realism: The structures and themes are deeply influenced by the Boom writers in Latin America who combine history with visions, time travel, magic, and human behavior / emotions. Examples include Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick*, and *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko.

Discussion

Literature: The twentieth century was a time of rapid technological, social, and communication change, all of which is explored in the literature of the century. Describe the types of writing that seem to be most extreme (social realism as opposed to minimalism, for example) and discuss how they could, despite their different modes of expression, be exploring the same basic questions about the human condition.

Readings

Literature:

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Foster, Hal. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. New York: New Press, 2002.

Foster, Hal, Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-modernism, Postmodernism*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004.

Language

Creole French: Creole French continued to evolve in Louisiana, and be known also as "Cajun." The use of Creole French or "Cajun" expanded and was more or less mainstreamed as musical forms such as zydeco incorporated Creole lyrics and they gained popularity.

Native American Languages: In the 20th century, many native speakers of Native American languages began to die without teaching the language to their children. The practice of forced assimilation through boarding schools accelerated the decline in the number of native speakers. To combat the loss of their languages, many tribes established funds to record conversations of Native speakers and to create dictionaries and language guides. They also began teaching and studying the language and the oral narratives in colleges and universities.

Mexican Spanish: Mexican Spanish began to dominate the Southwest U.S. as the most prevalent second language, while the archaic Spanish of the mountainous north of New Mexico (Sangre de Cristo mountains, etc.) began to lose speakers.

Cuban Spanish: Cuban asylum seekers and economic refugees after the Ariel boat lift, and the rise of Fidel Castro flocked to Florida, where they became a very important demographic group. Their Spanish is related to that of Cuba, with many unique words and pronunciations.

Puerto Rican Spanish: Individuals from Puerto Rico as well as the Dominican Republic moved to New York during the 1950s, and then again when economic times were difficult in the **Caribbean**. In addition to a unique vocabulary and dialect, the Caribbean Spanish also came with new types of music and cuisine, all of which were very influential in New York, New Jersey, and along the northern East Coast.

“CNN” English: When CNN broke new ground and offered 24-7 news broadcasting coverage, a new American accent was born. It was an American accent, but devoid of many of the characteristic pronunciations or word choices of the East Coast (Philadelphia, New York, Boston, etc.), or of California. Although located in Atlanta, the CNN accent was in no way southern. This broadcast dialect quickly became the “standard” for American pronunciation.

Asian Languages: Vietnamese and Hmong languages became important in many urban communities after the fall of Saigon, when the U.S. welcomed the former allies of the U.S. during the Vietnam War. Eruptions of violence and war in different countries in Asia resulted in additional important pockets of language and culture, including Pashtun, Urdu, Hindi, Mandarin, Cambodian, and Tagalog.

Discussion

Language: In the twentieth-century, many different subgroups of languages formed based on the lands of origin and also the reasons for their arrival in the continental United States. Identify one example of a diaspora and describe how and where the language might have an impact on communities and on the native speakers. Also, will the language stay the same while the language spoken back in the country of origin stays the same?

Readings

Language:

Algeo, John (2001) *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Vol. 6: English in North America* (Volume 6) Cambridge University Press; 1st Edition edition (November 12, 2001)

Gray, Edward. (2014) *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

Van der Sijs. (2009) *Cookies, Coleslaw, and Stoops: The Influence of Dutch on the North American Languages*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

<http://www.doabooks.org/doab?func=fulltext&rid=12627>

Mithun, Marian. (2001) *The Languages of Native North America*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP.

Script

Comics: One of the most dramatic changes in writing in the 20th century was the advent of the comic, which quickly attained status as a bona fide mode of telling a story and developing an ongoing narrative. One of the first of the comics involved Steamboat Willie, which morphed into Mickey Mouse. But, much more complex narratives were explored by Chester Gould, from Pawnee, Oklahoma, who wrote and sketched the graphic novels / comics series, Dick Tracy. Dick Tracy, who was a variant of the hard-boiled detective novel, changed the landscape of the comic / graphic novel forever, and opened the door for the existential explorations and a heuristic that focused on an identity in flux, a deep insecurity triggered by questions of whether or not the self-actualization of modernity is actually possible.

Newspapers: Without a doubt, the writing that had the most impact in the early to late 20th century, where the meaning of an article was less about the words and more about the layout and placement in the newspaper, as well as the juxtaposition of images (photojournalism), diagrams, logos, and other non-textual elements that contributed semiotic (sign) meanings.

Limited edition poetry chapbooks: A chapbook was a small book with less than 20 pages. It often featured wood-block prints and hand carved calligraphic elements. It made many works of poetry not just about the words, but also of their physical appearance, and the aesthetics. The work of H.D. was issued in hand-made chapbooks. Later, artists including Cy Twombly would blur the boundaries of text, art, and

language itself with his cursive-inspired loops and writing which may or may not be fully decipherable. Indeterminacy was a key element in the art production.

Graffiti: Allen Ginsberg's ground-breaking long poem, "Howl," brought the street to the salon, and pushed Walt Whitman's urgent thumping chaos of prose poetry into the fearful yet rebellious heart of the mushroom-cloud consciousness of the 1950s. Later, the calligraphic expression of the street took its shorthand rage and joy to the walls, streetcars, and defenseless metal of subway cars. In the 1980s, graffiti was recognized as an art form and many galleries began to show their art as a form of pop art or street art. It had a special cache, and the earliest artists were in New York City, where the elite galleries existed alongside examples of the graffitied subway cars, buildings, and fences. The "street galleries" were often featured in Sunday arts supplements in the *New York Times*. The first to achieve acclaim (and to sell their work for thousands of dollars) were Jean-Michel Basquiat whose work was considered neo-expressionist and Keith Haring, whose work was more Pop Art. The most influential graffiti artist working today is Banksy, whose identity is not known. Banksy does include writing, but also incorporates street murals that include a number of visual allusions and puns. Lady Pink, the "first lady of graffiti," for being one of the first to be active in the early 1980s subway graffiti subculture, lives and works in New York City. She also blends writing / graffiti with murals, many of which are known for their effect trompe l'oeil.

Reading

Script / Writing:

In the twentieth century, technology and urban living put pressure on discourse (writing). Old forms suddenly were too slow to produce or required too much time to fully interact with it. Describe how comics, graffiti art, different types of fonts, newspapers, posters, and broadsides found ways to communicate in a world of diverse people, emerging technologies, and the fast pace of life.

Discussion

Script / Writing:

Sawyer, Mitch (2017). Hip Hop, Punk, and the Rise of Graffiti in 1980s New York.
<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-hip-hop-punk-rise-graffiti-1980s-new-york>

U.S. Library of Congress (2014) An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera. <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/time-capsule/file.html>

The Bradshaw Foundation (2016) The American Rock Art Archive.
<http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/america/index.php>

Mythology

Myths of transformation / re-invention:

This myth focuses on the idea that arrival in the U.S. can allow one to profoundly transform oneself. It also involves the notion that America really is a melting pot where all are treated equality. This belief, which has mythical elements because it is aspirational and not really borne out by the facts, is an idea important to the identity and core vision of the U.S. As such, it is something to aspire to, and has been the foundation of the Civil Rights movement.

Myths of exceptionalism: From its inception, the American Revolution was framed in terms that had been forged by the French philosophes, who were concerned of the idea of personal liberty, freedom, and equality. The concepts took root and shaped Americans' sense of self, even though those notions did not actually extend to the majority of inhabitants (women, Indians, slaves, indentured servants and landless workers). Nevertheless, the idea persisted and in the twentieth century, the idea that the American vision is so unique and its history so unusual created a moral obligation to play a dominant role in the world stage in order to enforce American values of equality, dignity, fair play, democracy, and personal freedom. Issues of corporate self-interest and colonial expansion were shrouded in this myth. In the case of wars, has been difficult to untangle the economic vested interests with the moral and "exceptionalism" arguments.

Myths of the final frontier / space: The exploration of outer space is extension of the dream of boundless, limitless self-transformation with possibilities re-invention. Space is viewed as not only a place to potentially populate, but also as the way into an understanding of the cosmos, and a platform from which to unveil, develop, unleash transformative, utopian technologies.

The American Dream: Myth of boundless self-actualization and upward mobility

Almost all the American myths of the twentieth century are utopian, and the most potent one is that of The American Dream. It's grounded in the idea of freedom and economic access. With hard work, intelligence, and honesty it is possible to achieve economic prosperity, not only for the individual, but for the family and future generations. It is a powerful motivator and gives recent immigrants the ability to endure extreme hardship, grueling conditions, and economic privation. The fact that it has been possible to achieve the dream has kept it alive, even as social inequality began to increase in the 20th century and the actual achievement of the dream is by no means a given, regardless of personal effort and entrepreneurial spirit.

Dystopian myths: Conspiracy theories, the Illuminati, UFOs, Reptilian Alien World Leaders

While utopian myths abound, their dystopian counterparts have been an important part of twentieth century myths and mythos. Dystopian myths often bring together the idea of a shadow world which is the obverse of the philosophies of individual freedom, liberty, self-expression, and equality. They have a unifying preoccupation with an anti-democratic force that seeks to undermine the defining official myths of America. They also focus on the misuse of new science and technology, so that the same technology used to enable economic prosperity, social mobility, and improved health and welfare, is turned against the people in order to enslave them and reduce their numbers, thereby "culling the herd." Conspiracy theories, many promulgated on social media, include suggestions that a group called "the Illuminati" controls the world, there have been sightings and contact with extraterrestrial crafts and beings (UFOs), and that the world's leaders are, in fact, space aliens of the shape-shifting "reptilian" class.

Discussion Question

Mythology:

It can be argued that rapid industrialization and technological change create great social instability and the only way to combat it or harness it for the good is to have in place a series of myths that reinforce the notion of individual agency and the possibility of self-actualization. In other words, people have to believe that they can plunge into the fast-moving stream of rapid change and use that force to create wealth, security, and freedom for themselves and their families. Describe just how the twentieth century myths encourage such activities, and how even the dystopian myths can be harnessed to control rapid social, economic, and technological change for the good.

Readings

Mythology:

Botkin, B. A. (2016) A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions of the People. Globe Pequot Press.

Donovan, James. (2013). The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo and the Sacrifice that Forged a Nation. Boston: Back Bay Books.

Library of Congress. (2015) The American Dream.

<https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/american-dream/students/thedream.html>

Lowenstein, Tom. (2011). Native American Myths and Beliefs. New York: Rosen Pub Group.

Murray, Charles. (2013). American Exceptionalism: An Experiment in History (Values and Capitalism). Chicago: AEI Press.

Folklore

Folk stories: Columbia-educated African American author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston collected stories of the South in order to study their origins. She also did so in Haiti, where she collected and analyzed the Creole oral narratives and folklore, especially those having to do with zombies.

Great Depression oral histories: In the 1930s, the United States Library of Congress embarked on a large project to hire anthropologists and to record narratives of cultural significance. Among the narratives recorded were those of sharecroppers, oil field workers, Dust Bowl refugees, and former slaves.

Urban Legends: Urban legends have been passed down through oral narrative, and in the latter part of the 20th century, by means of social media and digital communications. They reflect deep psychological truths about a culture and its hopes, fears, and aspirations. Not surprisingly, then, there are many that seem to repeat themselves, but with variations. For example, there are several variations of the contamination tale, which usually goes something like this: A woman orders fried chicken tenders from KFC, and as she is eating them, she notices a strange texture... and a tale. She pulls it out of her mouth to find that she has partially consumed a piece of Kentucky Fried **RAT**.

Political narratives: At the beginning of the 20th century, grassroots movements led to a number of oral narratives. The most dominant were connected with the Women's Suffrage movement, as well as the Temperance Union and unionization. Some oral narratives were promulgated by leaders of the movements, such as Mother Jones (union movement), Carrie Nation (temperance) and Susan B. Anthony (women's suffrage). Mother Jones, in particular, developed a narrative about her background (family died in the Chicago Fire), and a series of tragedies that radicalized her and made her sensitive to the plight of the downtrodden.

Alien Abduction Tales: In the 1950s after the advent of nuclear weapons, strange lights and movements were witnessed in the American western desert, near where nuclear weapons were developed and tested. They were tagged as Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs). After sightings in Roswell, New Mexico, among other places, stories started to circulate of people being abducted by alien creatures, who took them to their crafts, conducted experiments, and then released them back to where they found them.

Super Food and Contamination Tales: With the increasing use of steroids, pesticides, and fertilizers, people became worried about the food supply, and the quality of the food. At the same time as stories were circulated about the contamination of the supply, narratives emerged that had to do with healing properties of plants, herbs and foods. The so-called "super foods" were touted as having almost miraculous properties. Paradoxically enough, one year's super food narrative could easily become the next year's "never eat this" food narrative.

Technology fears: Oral narratives that reflect the deeply unsettling nature of technological advances, particularly those of surveillance and invasion, tend to circulate quickly. The narratives often have to do with identity theft, surveillance, cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and more. The oral narratives are often presented in the form of cautionary tales, and sometimes are used in conjunction with the sale of a protective device or policy.

Conspiracy Theories: Oral narratives (whether disseminated via face to face methods or via digital technologies) are powerful. They are so powerful that they can even disrupt or influence electoral processes, as in the case of so-called "fake news" (disinformation) which were shared by individuals face to face and via social media. Many were conspiracy theories about cover-ups or deep plots by individuals or groups to do harm to a culture or a way of life.

Discussion Question

Oral Narrative / Folklore:

Thanks to the development of mass media, oral narratives came to be transmitted by more methods than before. At first, they were transmitted through radio, and later through television, and finally through the

Internet and social media. Describe how urban legends, conspiracy theories, and political narratives were communicated to different groups, and describe the specific use of mass media.

Readings

Oral Narrative / Folklore:

Armitage, S. (2010) *Speaking History: Oral Histories of the American Past (1865 - present)*. New York: Palgrave.

American Social History Project. *Who Built America?, Vols. I & 2*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1989, 1992.

Foner, Eric and Lisa McGirr, eds. *American History Now*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2011.

Hansen, Arthur A. "A Riot of Voices: Racial and Ethnic Variables in Interactive Oral History Interviewing." *Interactive Oral History Interviewing*, edited by Eva M. McMahan and

Harrin, Paul. *Black Rage Confronts the Law*. Critical America. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, edited by Jean Fagan Yellin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.

VISUAL ARTS

Painting

American Impressionism: Beginning in the 19th century, and continuing into the 20th century, American Impressionists were known for their bright palettes and energetic brush strokes. Artists include Childe Hassam and Mary Cassatt.

Ashcan School: Realism returned with the "Ashcan School" which focused on social change through art and literature by painting scenes of everyday life in middle and working class settings. Examples include George Bellows, Everett Shinn, and George Benjamin Luks.

Harlem Renaissance: The 1920s and 30s Harlem Renaissance was a literary and artistic movement which brought together music, poetry, prose, and painting. The techniques were influenced by music, and known for their bright colors and cultural elements. Examples include Romare Bearden, Palmer Hayden, and Jacob Lawrence.

Socialist Realism / New Deal art: Thomas Hart Benton is perhaps the best-known of the artists commissioned by the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established during the Great Depression. Influenced by the Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera, the artists brought together myth and populist movements. Examples include Grant Wood, Reginald Marsh, and Thomas Hart Benton.

Abstract Expressionism: After World War II, artists in New York took the minimalism and modernist painting many steps further than the famous New York Armory Show of 1911, where Cubism and other abstract works were shown. Abstract Expressionism was characterized by experimental paint application and dramatic brush strokes. Examples include Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, and Alexander Calder.

Color Field: Color Field painting focused on large canvases with paint applied in unique ways, including dripped from a stick or poured directly from the can. Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko were the first, and in the 1960s, color field painting continued with Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Helen Frankenthaler.

Mixed Media Pop Art: Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein incorporated everyday objects of popular culture and also blended photos, newsprint, comic strips and discarded objects. Their goal was often satiric commentary on American life, and in particular, consumerism.

Discussion Question

Painting:

The 20th century began with a break from the values, hierarchies, and techniques of the past, and in regular succession, sought to break with its immediate forebears, even if they were only a decade or so in use. Describe the early 20th century artworks in America and explain how they represented a break from the past and a commentary on America. Then, follow up and create a timeline in the 20th century that links art movement with an underlying philosophical or aesthetic idea or ideal.

Readings

Painting:

Doss, Erika. (2002) *Twentieth-Century American Art*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Groseclose, Barbara. (2000) *Nineteenth-Century American Art*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Hughes, Robert. (1991) *The Shock of the New: The Hundred-Year History of Modern Art – Its Rise, Its Dazzling Achievement, Its Fall*. New York: Knopf.

Wright, Tricia. (2007) *Smithsonian Q&A: American Art and Artists: The Ultimate Question and Answer Book*. New York: Harper.

Sculpture

Modern Classicism: Greek sculptural ideas and styles were revived in the early 20th century with Art Deco, which embraced the combination of stylized Greek gods and the development of a style that paid homage to technology, sleek lines, and technocracy. Paulanship, Paul Jennewein, and Edward McCartan are examples.

African-American sculptors: The Harlem Renaissance provided an opportunity for young African-American sculptors to find a receptive audience and supportive patrons. The sculptures often depicted scenes or personages from everyday life. An example is Richmond Barthe's *Boxer*.

Abstract: Abstract sculpture shocked American audiences with the now famous / infamous Armory Show of 1913, which echoed the values of Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" which stated that representational art was a slave to bourgeois "elitist" values. European sculptors such as Constantin Brancusi (Romanian) whose *Torso of Mademoiselle Pogany*, shocked the exhibit-goers, deeply inspired and influenced Americans. Others, with "found art" included French-American Marcel Duchamp, who exhibited a urinal as though it were a neo-classicist sculpture.

Modernist: American modernist sculpture moved away from representational, realistic art as it sought to propose an art form that represented the potential of humanity to overcome limitations on human ambition imposed by old aristocratic or religious institutions. The dominant motif of "breaking free" and also of "machine-nature-human creation" were common. Sculptures were broken into Cubist-influenced block shapes, or captured like individual frames of film, or alternatively represented as motion-machines (cars, planes, trains), or cyborg-like superhumans. Dehumanization represented liberation. Examples include Jacques Lipchitz, Alexander Calder, and Gaston Lachaise.

Social Commentary: The latter part of the 20th century was populated by sculpture with a message, and usually of social commentary, subversion of institutions, or the desire for reform. Super-realistic sculpture embraced working class subjects, and defied the notions of Neo-Classical art which idealized and sought to impose classical notions of beauty. Institutions such as the Catholic church were critiqued by creating

sculptures out of scatological materials (elephant dung, for example), and social inequality was depicted in a number of ways, often with the use of unusual materials, and by echoing while subverting a classical or well-known work of art, often a monument that embodied the values the artist sought to challenge (or interrogate). The sculpture took on the role of artist along with that of critic and also social architect, and his / her written commentary became as important as the physical work. In Canada, First Nations motifs have been incorporated to both honor the people, culture, and contributions.

Discussion Question

Sculpture in the 20th century began to focus on different messages than that of the 19th century. In addition to identity, the messages were multiple and had to do with the role of technology in society, the capacity of technology to transform people and society for the good, the way that technology could be used to interject fear of extermination, the subversion of the “eternal verities” as represented by big government and big religion, and the substitution of consumer culture for religious or political self-actualizing aspiration. Please select three works that call into questions traditional values and explain how and why they do so.

Readings

Falk, Peter Hastings, ed. *Who Was Who in American Art*. Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1999.

Groce, George C., and David H. Wallace, eds. *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564–1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

Havlice, Patrice Pate, ed. *Index to Artistic Biography*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981–.

Igoe, Lynn Moody, and James Igoe. *250 Years of Afro-American Art: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1991.

Optiz, Glenn B., ed. *Dictionary of American Sculptors: 18th Century to the Present*. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Apollo Book, 1984.

Optiz, Glenn B., ed. *Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers*. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Apollo Book, 1983.

Architecture

Skyscrapers: (Early): People both embraced and resisted industrialization and the thrust toward modernism and all its attendant philosophical notions. Technology made new accomplishments possible, and where the tallest building in the town was typically a spire of a church or cathedral, in the new city, the churches were supplanted by the skyscrapers, the new “Cathedrals of Commerce.” The early skyscrapers were very functional, and had as a goal to lead the eye skyward.

Art Nouveau: In many ways, art nouveau represented a resistance to industrialization and the materials of factories and machines. The antithesis of mechanical and linear, art nouveau was characterized by a highly decorative, organic feeling with shapes that borrowed from nature. Characteristic of art nouveau was the presence of plants, flowers, vines, in wrought iron and stained glass. Art nouveau contained a blend of geometric and flowing forms and was often incorporated in the Arts and Crafts movement.

Art Deco: Deeply influenced by modernist art and the philosophical writings of the Futurists (namely the Futurist Manifesto by Marinetti), the Art Deco movement broke from past aesthetics, namely Revival movements and embraced simple, clean, and high-performance materials such as chrome, brushed aluminum, and leathers. It embraced air travel and the automobile, and many building designs incorporated symbols and motifs that looked like propellers, etc. The French government sponsored a show in 1925 in Paris that showcased the new design. Named the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes (1925), the show gave rise to the name, Art Deco. Because of the fascination with technological innovation, skyscrapers were a perfect location to incorporate the principles

of Art Deco. Perhaps the most famous example is the Chrysler Building in New York, designed by William van Alen.

The International Style: Another prominent show influenced a generation of architects, who embraced the underlying ideas which had first appeared in Europe. The show, the International Exhibition of Modern Architecture, was held in 1932 at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. The show included only the purest examples of modernist architectures and they had to adhere to a set of principles. The most prominent characteristics were: 1) no ornamentation; 2) functional and logical floor plans; 3) balance rather than symmetry; 4) the prominent use of glass for the façade and steel for exterior support, with concrete for interior supports and floors. Prominent architects included Mies van der Rohe, Eliel Saarinen, and Gropius.

Naturalism: (Falling Waters): Frank Lloyd Wright, whom most writers consider the greatest American architect, transformed architecture with his naturalistic view of design. Based in Chicago, Wright was deeply influenced by Japanese architecture, which he incorporated into a concept of “organic architecture” which focused on developing a harmonious relationship between the parts of the building and its natural setting. He developed the famous “prairie houses” in which one can easily see the elements of Japanese bath houses and homes in the sense that they have low, wide profiles, low sloping roofs with long projections, and bands of windows. As his style developed, Wright began to include more Japanese and pre-Columbian art influences. He continued to include the environment, especially peaceful pools of water, and also the incorporation of spirals and circles, not only in homes but also in corporate spaces. His masterpiece is Fallingwater, located in Bear Run, Pennsylvania.

Corporate Modernism: Growing from the International Style, Corporate Modernism came to dominate architecture in the last half of the twentieth-century to the point that it almost became almost the only acceptable option. Mies van der Rohe designed the first steel and glass skyscraper, New York’s Seagram Building (1954-58), which is notable for its stark verticality, the curtain wall of bronze and glass, and a grid pattern (windows). The base consists of green travertine columns, all in a very minimalist style. The architecture communicates a message of powerful vertical projection to connect with soaring ambitions and strength. Avoiding the echoes of religious architecture that one might see in the spire-like Chrysler Building, Mies’s Seagram Building, and other examples such as the United Nations Building (designed by Le Corbusier) and the Inland Steel Building in Chicago, projected power, strength, austerity, and an almost Sparta-type warrior adherence to corporate mission.

Decorative Formalism: Not everyone agreed with the almost aggressive austerity of Corporate Modernism, even as they did wish to project through architectural design core values that informed a positive, almost utopian embrace of progress for progress’s sake and innovative technology as the driver of human prosperity and happiness. The architects embraced curvilinear forms the resulted in a formal expressiveness, with the goal of being simultaneously calming and euphoria-producing. Examples include Saarinen’s TWA terminal at New York’s JFK International Airport and Louis Isadore Kahn’s the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (1951-53); the Richards Medical Research Laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (1957-65); the Salk Institute for Biological Studies at La Jolla, in California (1959-65); and the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth (1966-72).

Postmodernist Architecture: A backlash to the extreme forms of modernism which eschewed all ornamentation and was purely functional occurred in the 1970s, when the attempt to rehumanize public architecture occurred. It is useful to note that modernism in architecture tended to be utopian; for example, housing projects and large city projects were envisioned in an ultra-modern format, which would allow the maximum number of people to work, live, and interact in a very democratic way. Unfortunately, some public housing projects that were built using large modernist designs had the unfortunate destiny of becoming centers of crime and urban decay. One particularly notorious example was the 1955 Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri for which the architect, Minoru Yamasaki received awards. In just 20 years, the project (33 11-story slab apartment buildings) had become so crime-infested and poorly maintained that it was declared unfit for human habitation and demolished in 1975. As a result, architects tried to change the approach to urban design and to re-introduce green spaces, curves, ornamentation and “humanizing” elements. That included incorporating echoes of famous historical architectural styles

of the past. Essentially, critics blamed the harsh lines of modernist architecture of the projects for inciting violence, crime, and drug addiction. Postmodernist design encouraged blending of motifs and an eclectic approach to create more harmonious environments. Examples include Robert Stern's design for the Prospect Point and the Denver Public Library, designed by Michael Graves (1995).



Post-Modernist Architecture - Denver Public Library - <https://www.failedarchitecture.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/denver-830x587.jpg>



Modernist Architecture – the Pruitt-Igoe Public Housing Project, 1955.
<http://www.pruitt-igoe.com/YAMA/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/P-199.jpg>

Deconstructivism: Pushing the limits of technological and structural possibilities, plus challenging existing aesthetics standards (essentially attributing aesthetics to taste enforced by the dominant culture), architects such as Gehry disassembled, disarmed, and deconstructed the forms, traditions, and conventions of traditional architecture. Frank O. Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi and the Co-op Himmelblau group explored an architecture that was deliberately in opposition to the values of the past. They emphasized disharmony, irregularity, and seemingly impossible physical proportions.



The Dancing House (Frank O. Gehry), Prague

Discussion Question

Architecture:

Twentieth-century architecture has been described as extremely utopian in its design, but dystopian in its ultimate actualization or realization. Describe the optimism and sense of human potential embodied in modernist architecture and find examples. Then, describe how the modernist designs were accused of having a negative impact on the human spirit, and how postmodernist designs sought to ameliorate that impact.

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PERFORMING ARTS

Dance

Ragtime: Ragtime, which emerged during the late 19th century and reached its peak before World War I, was characterized by its "ragged" rhythm (syncopation). It was a mainstay in certain African-American communities, but quickly crossed over and was sold in sheet music. Dances evolved to accompany ragtime, and they included the Two-Step, and the Cake Walk. A number of dances were popular among the working classes, and they included the Turkey Trot, the Grizzly Bear, and the Camel Walk. An elegant married couple, Irene and Vernon Castle, exhibited the new American dances in Paris, which served to popular and lessen the scandal.

Jazz: The "Jazz Age" began in earnest after the close of World War I, and the dance parlors and private parties that included an orchestra (or a phonograph) and dancing continued to be very popular. Instead of taking ballet or tap dances, children regularly learned ballroom dancing, and the new dances that were danced with the new music were extremely popular. They were upbeat and fairly easy to learn, and they expressed the exuberance of the era. Dances included the Fox-Trot, the Charleston, and American variations on Latin American imports, the Samba and the Tango.

Hollywood Dance: After the Wall Street crash of 1929, Hollywood became the emotional salve of the nation, and cinema-goers could escape their anxieties by watching elaborate spectacles of dance and exuberant, graceful dances in musicals. Busby Berkeley, Hollywood's most renowned choreographer, created spectacles of waves of women, men, fountains, and light. Individual dancers such as Fred Astaire (noted for his grace and versatility), Gene Kelly (known for his muscular vitality), Ginger Rogers, Cyd

Charisse, and many other very talented dancers inspired ballroom dancing and also the incorporation of Latin dance moves. Great dance musicals were popular through the 1950s.

Swing: The returning veterans of World War II were eager to participate in the boom, and their optimism blossomed in a new form of music, the Swing, which included a new kind of dance, the Swing. The most famous Swing dance was the Jitterbug. The Western Swing evolved from the original Swing forms, and is danced with country-western music.

Modern Dance: As the desire for a less rigid form of ballet deepened, a new kind of interpretive dance emerged. While it uses moves from ballet, it incorporates additional moves, and it seeks to create a mood, tell a story, or break with tradition. It emphasizes the new and the creative urge. Isadora Duncan (1878-1927) wore tunics rather than tutus, and forged a new philosophy of dance that focused on creative self-expression and athleticism, rather than adherence to tradition. The movement gained acceptance, and now is one of the most important trends of dance. It is inclusive, and does not limit itself to body shape, age, or music.

Broadway / Hollywood Modern Dance: There was something of a revival of the dance musical in the 1970s with the gifted Bob Fosse, who took the experimental ideas of modern dance and combined them to make the uniquely American Dance Theatre. Fosse, who started out as a dancer, became a gifted choreographer and visionary. He began in the 1950s, at the end of the song and dance musical, but later his work deepened and darkened, with choreography that was both muscular and reflected the political edge of the day. His first break-out "dance theatre" production was *Cabaret*, which won every possible award for film and stage. Later, *Pippin*, *Chicago*, and his re-envisionings of *Sweet Charity* and *All That Jazz* made it clear the impact he had on choreography and in the widening influence of American Dance Theatre. Most of his stage productions took place in the 1950s through 1970s, and they were later made into movies, using the same choreography. His unique style pivoted the moves of ballet and jazz; Fosse's "positions" were turned-in knees, shrugging shoulders, sideways shuffling, "amoeba" movements, and the use of splayed fingers in the "jazz hand" and his willingness to emphasize decay and degradation through garish colors and grotesque makeup.

Pop Culture Dance: Closely tied with music, and disseminated through television dance shows, competitions, and later, music videos, popular music was often accompanied by a distinctive dance style or technique from the 1950s through the end of the century. Examples are Rock 'n' Roll (the "Twist" etc.), rap (Breakdancing), Country line dancing, HipHop, Reggae, Reggaeton, techno electro-dance.

Discussion Question

Dance:

Innovative dance forms went hand in hand with the rise of the recording industry and the commercialization of music. At first, there was sheet music that helped popularize the songs that were accompanied with dance (ragtime, fox-trot, the Charleston, etc.). Later, records were marketed, and dance halls helped spread the new music and dance. With the advent of television, and then later, the Internet, music and dance shows, as well as music videos encouraged both innovation and adoption of dance forms. Select 4 different dances that connected with popular music and describe the way that they reflected changing times.

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Music

Classical: The 20th century was a time of the blending of popular forms and classical music structure. It took the nineteenth-century Romantic incorporation of folk tunes even further because it had as its goal the desire to destabilize the form and to radically alter taste and aesthetics (rather than colonize it, which Romanticism did). It was also a time of extreme expressionism with fragmentation of classical forms in order to express emotions, human states of being, and beingness in the world.

Scott Joplin (1867/68–1917): As an African-American, Scott Joplin was a revolutionary figure whose works were extremely popular, both in popular venues and in more elite settings, such as ballet. Born in Texarkana, Texas in 1868 just a few years after slaves were freed, Joplin composed ragtime for the piano, which was published as sheet music and sold quite well. The *Maple Leaf Rag* was perhaps his most well-known. He later wrote and published work for the opera. Unfortunately, his experiments were not financial successes. Nevertheless, his piano compositions and his opera (*Treemonisha*) were great successes in the 1970s when they were used in conjunction with the movie, *The Sting*.

Charles Ives (1874–1954): Like many innovative composers, Ives achieved most of his success posthumously (which, given the miserable lives of most of the composers seems like a cruel trick of fate). Ives, however, was not indigent, thankfully enough. He was a successful insurance broker in New York City, where he helped develop what we now know as estate planning. While he was doing innovative work in insurance / estate planning, Ives was also a prolific composer of modernist music, much of which was shockingly outre, including highly dissonant songs such as “The Majority.” His compendium (the bulk of his oeuvre) was published in 1922, and was entitled *122 Songs*. Shortly after that, he had a series of health problems and composed very little more after that time. His highly experimental *Holiday Symphony* (1911) and *Three Places in New England* (1915), as well as *Fourth Symphony* (1917) are remarkable examples of modernism.

George Gershwin (1898–1937): Spanning both popular and classical music, Gershwin was one of the first composers to openly incorporate African-American ragtime, jazz, and traditional folk tunes in his classical compositions. He worked with his brother, Ira, and they became perhaps the most famous and successful songwriters of the early twentieth-century, with songs such as *Summertime* and the longer works *An American in Paris* (1928) and the opera, *Porgy and Bess*. Later, he wrote for Hollywood films, as he became one of the powerhouses behind the success of New York’s “Tin Pan Alley.” He might have continued writing, but began displaying bizarre behavior, attributed at first to mental illness, but later to the large brain tumor that killed him in 1937 at the age of 37.

John Cage (1912–1992): Taking the experimentation of Charles Ives even further, and combining it with Abstract Expressionism and a philosophy of randomness, John Cage’s aleatory (chance) composition methodology pushed the boundaries of music and simple sound and/or noise. A leading figure of the post-WWII avant-garde, Cage’s work interrogated the notion of music, and also the reasons for designating one type of organized sound as “music” and another as either “noise” or “pure sound.” The music was used to deconstruct the notion of dance as well, and Merce Cunningham’s collaborations with Cage transformed modern dance.

Aaron Copland (1900 – 1990): One of the most influential classical American composers of the twentieth-century, Copland embraced the great American myths and expressed, with wild, expansive musical scores, the feelings of boundlessness of the American West and the American Dream. He incorporated jazz, African-American field hollers, spirituals, square dances, Mexican folk tunes and hymns to create a unique sound. His most famous are his ballets, *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Appalachian Spring* (1944), and *Rodeo* (1942). In addition to writing symphonies, Copland wrote scores for films, including *Of mice and Men*, *Our Town*, *The Red Pony*, and *Letter from Home*. He later experimented with the 12-tone school of Arnold Schoenberg.

Popular Music: Ranging from music sold as sheet music and played at home or in dance halls, to showtunes for Broadway plays and Hollywood, and then later, music for the radio, television, and music video, popular music in North America has been very influential, primarily because of its extreme commercialization and means of distribution. A few of the most popular genres appear below:

Ragtime: Ragtime derived its name from its syncopated or “ragged” rhythm, which made it very catchy and up-beat for dance halls. Not surprisingly, new kinds of dances were developed with it, and were performed at home dances and also in dance halls. It is of African American origin.

Jazz: Jazz took ragtime a few steps further and incorporated syncopation and a great deal of improvisation. The first emergence of jazz was in Memphis (Dixieland) and also in New Orleans. Later, more improvisatory forms prevailed and jazz came to denominate any kind of experimental, improvisatory music.

Swing: Emerging in the 1930s, the “swing” is the movement (in dance) when the emphasis is placed on the off beat, resulting in a powerful, anchoring rhythm and an often euphoria-producing energy, with much room for vocal improvisations and solos.

Rock ‘n’ Roll: Essentially a fusion of a large number of African American musical styles and genres, “rock and roll” is basically built on a rhythm that emphasizes an accentuated backbeat, accompanied by drums (including snare and bass). The main instruments of rock and roll were the electric guitar (lead and rhythm) and electric bass guitar. It has been one of the most influential musical genres, and its popularity has always affiliated itself with social, cultural, and commercial movements and trends.

Country-Western / Country: Taking its place in purely North American music, country-western music evolved from Appalachian folk and Western cowboy songs. It has been embraced as the music of the working class, and the lyrics often focus on tragedy, lost love, broken lives, and heartache. The instruments are primarily electric and acoustic guitars, steel guitars, fiddles, harmonicas, and banjos.

Discussion Question

Music:

In the 20th century, classical music in North America tended to follow either one or another track. Either it tended to move toward experimental, innovative, and abstract music, representing a break from previous classical forms, or, it followed earlier forms (opera, for example), while incorporating folk songs, dance rhythms, and impressionistic tone poems corresponding to myths and landscapes. Identify one composer from each group and describe his or her work.

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Theatre

Vaudeville: Emerged in the early twentieth century, vaudeville acts included burlesque comedies, stand-up comedians, short one-act skits, and song and dance. They were considered “low” culture, but

nevertheless were very influential, especially as the film industry developed. Stock characters appeared in film, especially those that challenged racial, class, and gender role boundaries.

Revues: A pastiche of sketches, comedy routines, music, dancing (Ziegfried dancing girls). Most revues took place in population centers such as New York, San Francisco, and Chicago, and they tended to stay in one location for an entire season.

Expressionist Theatre: Influenced by the symbolist poets of the fin-de-siècle, the most acclaimed expressionist playwright was Eugene O'Neill, with *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*. His depictions of family drama, individual angst, and anxiety about social roles and expectations owed a great deal to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and German expressionists such as E. T. A. Hoffmann.

Realistic Theatre: Examples include Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*, Lillian Hellman's *Little Foxes*. Many early plays were one-act plays performed in the Provincetown Theatre near Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The themes tended to be bold, potentially controversial, as in *Trifles*, which is a "payback" drama that satisfies an audience hungry for social justice and female empowerment.

Political Theatre: Led by Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*). Miller and other authors wrote to allegorize the Cold War dynamics, which pitted people against each other and resulted in black lists and very serious accusations of treason. The plays were extremely intense and dark; in retrospect it might have been more effective to take a lesson from Renaissance Europe (Rabelais, in particular) and choose satire. Fiction writers chose that direction (*Catch-22* being perhaps the most famous example), and they achieved fame and fortune. This is not to say that Arthur Miller did not; it is just that his work was narrowly framed.

Protest Theatre: During the 1920s and 1930s, influences of socialism and communistic activism found effective vehicles in plays that embodied their values. For example, Christopher Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) has to do with taxi drivers planning a strike and has as its foundation social inequality and a desire to make things right.

Musical Theatre: Musical theatre was a new genre that incorporated music (and sometimes dance) with the plot, in which the songs were perhaps more important than the dialogue in advancing the plot. *Oklahoma!* (Richard Rodgers, music and Oscar Hammerstein, lyrics) was the first breakthrough musical theatre, which debuted on Broadway on March 31, 1943 and ran for 2,212 performances. It was based on Lynn Riggs's 1931 play, *Green Grow the Lilacs* which was set in Oklahoma Territory outside the town of Claremore in 1906. Other important works of musical theatre include *The Pajama Game*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *West Side Story*, *Show Boat*, *The Fantasticks* (the world's longest-running musical),

Civil Rights Theatre: The grassroots movement of African-Americans to gain the right to vote and to roll back Jim Crow laws (*Plessy vs. Ferguson*) found gratifying expression in theatre (often being adapted into film). Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* was perhaps the most widely acclaimed. Other plays included *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*.

Avant-Garde and Experimental Theatre: They were concentrated in Off-Broadway theatres in New York and also theatres in San Francisco and Chicago. Examples included La MaMa (New York), Corner Theatre (New York), Broom Street Theatre (Madison, WI), Nature Theater of Oklahoma (Theater company – New York City). Experimental plays in the 1960s included *Hair!* (perhaps the most well-known), and Rochelle Owens's *Futz*.

Broadway: In New York, mainstream plays targeted not just the local audiences of New York, Connecticut and New Jersey, but also a growing number of tourists who made New York City their destination, principally because of the Theatre District. The theatre tourists were often theatre groups from high schools from throughout the U.S., and they often sought plays that they could later perform in their own towns. For that reason, some of the most popular were ones that had a decided "Americana" feel, were perhaps musicals, and also had a love story at the core, such as *The Music Man*, and *The*

Fantasticks. Some of the examples of Broadway successes included Neil Simon (*Barefoot in the Park*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *The Sunshine Boys*, *Lost in Yonkers*), Sam Shepard (*Fool for Love*, *Mad Dog Blues*, *Curse of the Starving Class*), David Mamet (*Glengarry, Glenross*; *House of Games*, *Speed-the-Plow*), Harvey Fierstein (*Torch Song Trilogy*, *La Cage au Falles*, *Hairspray*)

Activist Theatre: Social justice became an extremely important focus, and in the 1990s and early 2000s, almost all successful new plays had a political message. They included *Miss Saigon* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. Later, plays such as *Hamilton* blended social activism, political messages, and "feel good" cathartic affirmation of self and the idea of infinite transformation.

Discussion Question

Theatre:

In the twentieth century, American theatre split and went down different paths. On the one hand, popular theatre (including musical theatre) reinforced the values of Middle America. But, on the other hand, theatre became the voice of the marginalized and those who lacked a voice, and it both subverted and supported social change and equality. Find examples of the theatre of the mainstream and of the activist / subversive fringe, and explain why they were popular with their audiences.

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Cinema

Often considered one of the primary cultural influencers in the world, American cinema has blended new film techniques with technologies, with directors and actors constantly innovating and responding to changing social and political pressures. Since its beginnings, American cinema has been an international endeavor, as directors, technical experts and actors from around the world participated in the development and execution of both large studio and independent film enterprises.

Launching Hollywood

The earliest films were shot in many different locations, but after careful evaluation of numerous locations, the small suburb of Los Angeles, Hollywood, was chosen due to its 320 (on average) days of sunshine, temperate climate, and wide range of settings and topography within 50 miles. The early marketing philosophy was that of the chain store, such as Woolworth's. The goal was to produce films that would be attractive to consumers in virtually all towns and cities in the U.S., and to constantly rotate the stock with shorts and feature-length films arriving in the local movie theaters every week.

Screwball Comedies

A subgenre which flourished during the 1930s, screwball comedies took the war of the sexes (as in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*) and often blended it with social commentary, as in *Nothing Sacred* which juxtaposed the idle rich with a tramp (who happened to be an educated businessman who lost his fortune in the crash). *It Happened One Night* (1934) likewise dealt with the extreme income inequality of the Great Depression. In it, Claudette Colbert, an heiress, runs away from her wedding and then happens to encounter a relatively impecunious reporter, Clark Gable, who plans to bring her back for

the reward. It is one of the first films to feature a road trip, and it shows the early motels (cabins) and cross-country highways. Carole Lombard, Cary Grant, William Powell, Claudette Colbert, Clark Gable, and Katherine Hepburn acted in many of them. The most well-known include *It Happened One Night*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *His Girl Friday*, *My Many Godfrey*, *The Awful Truth*, *Nothing Sacred*, and *My Favorite Wife*.

Film Noir

Deeply influenced by German Romanticism and the work of directors such as the German Fritz Lang, whose *"M"* (1931) explored the dark psychology of a child murderer, writers and directors explored alienation, the impact of urban environments, obsessions, desire, hidden behaviors under cover at night, flawed antiheroes, heartless heroines, and an unknowable labyrinthine city. For the viewer, the experience was one of extreme identification with the protagonist, who found himself or herself in a dark battle to survive, both psychologically and physically. Film techniques of extreme chiaroscuro, quick cuts, and unusual camera angles typify film noir.

The Western

As in the case of literature, the American West became the great canvas upon which to paint the American identity, first of expansiveness and boundlessness, and then later of a "can-do" attitude which meant overcoming adversity, focusing on an overarching vision, and enduring great sacrifice. Clashes between the so-called cowboys and Indians were somewhat representational of historical events, but were more accurately considered the visual manifestation of a persistent post-war dialectic; the self in collision with the "Other" and the necessity of adopting a stoic stance in the face of world that could never achieve its utopian promise, thus necessitating a personal honor code, translating into existentialism. Examples include *High Noon* (1952), *Shane* (1953), and *Rio Bravo* (1959).

Golden Age Studio Directors

The studio system encouraged directors to develop their own signature styles, and also to work with some of the same actors. The results were often predictable in a way that allowed the studios to create recognizable brands. A few of the most distinguished included John Ford, Henry Hathaway, King Vidor, Howard Hawks, Billy Wilder, Elia Kazan.

Method Acting

Popularized in the 1950s, and utilized throughout the 1960s and 70s, "method acting" developed by Konstantin Stanislavski involved an exploration into the psychology of the character. Almost a fusion of Freudian psychology and Zen Buddhism, the goal was "to be" the character and consciously leaving behind all notions of the actor's own particular identity or sense of self. Some of the actors who were practitioners of method acting included Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Robert DeNiro, and Elizabeth Taylor in movies such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Night of the Iguana*. Directors included Elia Kazan and David Ayer. While the final results could be intensely cathartic for the audience, the actors often suffered deep psychological trauma, which led many to consider the technique to be highly risky.

Auteur Directors / Art House Films

The influence of foreign "art house" cinema was dramatic, beginning in Europe and then finding expression as well in Japan, Mexico, and then in the U.S. Opposing the commerciality of the studio system in the U.S., the "art house" films were deliberately experimental and included many of the techniques found in modernist and post-modernist art and photography. The directors took aesthetic risks and experimented with camera angles, lighting, pace, with innovative mise-en-scene. Notable films include Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and *8 1/2* (1963), Jean-Luc Godard's *A Bout De Souffle* (1960) (aka *Breathless*) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybl_R34ODHo , Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) and *Blow-Up* (1966) <https://youtu.be/j7u22W4K0Xw>, Francois Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960) and *Jules Et Jim* (1962) <https://youtu.be/tjd6Eg9APAs> and <https://youtu.be/UkGFRwmakGQ>

Continued Ascendency of the Independents

The “art house” and “auteur” films of the 1950s and 60s carved a pathway for filmmakers, directors, and actors who wanted to experiment and push the boundaries of the genre. In the 1980s and through the 2000s, independent film was treated with respect, albeit not always commercially viable, through many small independent film festivals, the largest and most prestigious being that of Robert Redford’s Sundance Film Festival. Further, distribution via the Internet made it possible for larger audiences to view independent films. Independent films began exerting a very significant influence as they tackled some of the topics that were previously taboo, and they used different kinds of film-making techniques. The small space is intensely democratic and validates alternative viewpoints, including those regarding gender, social class, outsider art, the “invisible,” making the independent film space a philosophical one of becoming and constant reification, and re-reification. Some of the most influential independent films of the 1980s and 1990s include *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Clerks* (1994), *The River’s Edge*, *sex, lies, and videotape*, and *This Is Spinal Tap*.

Technological Advances: Extreme Animation

The blockbuster movies of the 2000s were dominated by those based on comics, superhero graphic novels, and Japanese anime. Technology using extremely detailed and convincing animation reached new heights with *Avatar* (2009). Superhero films often turned into franchises and included *Batman*, *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, *Captain America*, and *The Avengers*.

Discussion Questions

“Pre-Code” Hollywood consisted of movies that often unflinchingly addressed the real-life behaviors of people, and the genre was used for exploring new ways of taking theatrical productions to middle America. The long-standing clash of values between the world of the music halls, vaudeville, and theatre and polite society were magnified as Hollywood talent and investment largely came from the often scandalous worlds of the traveling theatres, musicals, and vaudeville. Explain how Hollywood sought to invent a unified front and to purify itself by establishing codes of decency in the films, and also by tightly controlling the perception that the public had of its stars.

The arrival of the technology for making videos with a soundtrack (talkies), and then the advent of color led to an explosion of creativity in the 1930s and 1940s. Describe how the talkies were used to create soundtracks that heightened emotion (through musical scores), and how musicals became popular. Then, identify directors and their movies that took full advantage of color, such as in the case of Busby Berkeley’s elaborate music and dance productions, almost hallucinogenic travel / dream scenes (*The Wizard of Oz*), and animation (*Fantasia*).

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WORLDVIEW

Religion

Protestantism: During the twentieth century, many of the denominations that were launched in the 19th century organized themselves and became more formal. They began to develop networks of churches as

well as seminaries, bible colleges, and universities. With the increasingly rigid structure and social control of the formal churches, there arose a desire for religions that promised healing, physical prosperity, and immediate happiness. Using radio, television, and later the Internet, megachurches and televangelists appealed to millions of Americans. The result was the creation of a block of like-minded citizens, as well as a politicization of religion (more overt than in the past) Jerry Falwell / Liberty University, etc.

African American churches and the Civil Rights Movement: African Methodist / African Baptist churches flourished in African American communities and were important as a social support system. They helped organize and support grassroots movements that championed the right to vote, right for equal treatment and abolishing Jim Crow / Plessy vs. Ferguson (separate but equal) towns and facilities.

Catholicism and Activism: The Roman Catholic Church was very politically active in the twentieth century, and sometimes gave support for socially conservative movements, even backing authoritarian dictators. Much changed in the 1960s with activism and something that came to be known as Liberation Theology that was involved in the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement. Later, when the charismatic activist Pope died, the Catholic Church became very conservative again, marked by scandals relating to abuse and coverups.

Apocalyptic doomsday cults: Behind every utopian cult lies the possibility of a dystopian counterpart. In the 20th century, a number of cults that focused on the idea of end times emerged. The apocalyptic narrative of the book of Revelations in the New Testament of the Bible was often invoked, with the idea that the destruction of the earth was imminent, thanks to the wickedness of humanity, and that only “true believers” would survive. Pushed into a corner by perceived outside threats, they committed mass suicide. Groups included Jim Jones, David Koresh, Um Hari (Japanese nerve gas), Heaven’s Gate (the Halley-Bop Comet believers).

Buddhist: Japanese and other Asian communities established Buddhist temples. Buddhism became even more prominent in the 1970s after the exodus of South Vietnamese to the United States.

Hindu: Primarily from India, Hindu traditions have been maintained especially in the form of wedding traditions and holidays. Home altars feature Ganesh (the elephant-headed household deity) and holidays such as Diwali (Festival of Lights) are celebrated.

Muslim: The Muslim faith has many different manifestations in the United States. There are a number of mosques in communities and they have traditionally focused on education and social support.

Judaism: The Jewish faith is very important in many communities in North America, where there are temples for Orthodox Jews as well as more moderate or mainstream. In all cases, there is an emphasis on learning the sacred texts and traditions, which is a strong force in creating an ongoing cultural identity.

Discussion Question

Religion:

In the 20th century, the advent of mass media profoundly changed the way that we obtain information and how we decide the best way to practice our religious beliefs. Describe how mass communications transformed religious groups from intimate networks of social co-dependency to something else, that looked like self-determination, but could be argued was mass indoctrination.

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Philosophy

Charles Sanders Peirce: One of the “greats” of American philosophy, Charles Sanders Peirce was renowned as a logician. In addition, he made contributions to the philosophy of language and explored how and why language has meaning. With an underpinning in mathematics, probability and statistics, Peirce proposed that language has semiotic meaning and functions as a “sign” – that idea alone allowed the breakthrough notions of signs, with their different categories, to flow into deconstructivism and the notion that the meaning of language is influenced by who / how / why a sign is assigned a meaning.

George Santayana: Originally from Spain, Jorge (or “George”) Santayana was raised in the U.S. He was a pragmatist and was an early advocate of bridging mathematics and logic, as well as looking at the essential work of language in the creation of meaning and a concept of reality.

Charlotte Gilman Perkins: An ardent advocate of individual self-expression and the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, Perkins wrote about women’s worlds and roles, and the essential powerlessness of women. Perkins was an advocate of women’s rights to vote and to own property individually and independently. She wrote a utopian novel, *Herland*, which details a world where women are in command. Despite that, Perkins is less a feminist and more a humanist who advocates for social equality for all.

John Dewey: As a pragmatist who focused on the consequences of free will and the implications of human agency, Dewey believed that the most important change agent was the individual who was willing to build educational and philanthropic institutions. Dewey is best known for his writings on democracy and education.

Richard Rorty: A controversial neo-pragmatist, Rorty offended many feminists because they accuse him of creating a philosophical framework that reinforces privilege and excludes ideas that are considered in the realm of the “Other.” Rorty suggests that human rights arguments are often tainted by sentimentalism, a stance which alienated him from feminists.

Cornel West: One of the most outspoken and influential philosophers of race, race relations, and social hierarchies, West has written influential texts that have provided a foundation for social equality and justice.

Discussion Question

Philosophy:

In the 20th century, a kind of philosophy emerged that suggested that words had no meaning except those that had been assigned to them by the dominant class, and that all kinds of non-textual signs transmitted messages and stories just as well as words. The result was that the study of semiotics (signs that have meaning) merged with the study of language and literature. What resulted was the notion that every text

has many possible meanings and interpretations, and because of that, there is always a level of indeterminacy, flux and non-meaning in all forms of communication, but especially in language. What were some of the destabilizing consequences of such a belief or mindset?

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Science

Overview: The enabling sciences for the explosion of technological breakthroughs included a better understanding of physics, chemistry, materials science, and mathematics. New abilities to process complex mathematics and to fabricate new materials made inventions possible that totally transformed every aspect of life. Ironically, the same breakthroughs that could have enormous positive impact also had deadly ones, such as in the case of nuclear physics, and the development of the nuclear bomb, but also nuclear power.

Vladimir Zworykin: Known for perfecting x-rays and the cathode ray tube, Zworykin has been credited for developing the early television. Originally from Russia, Zworykin, like many others, moved to the U.S. to escape political oppression.

Niels Bohr: With other early 20th-century physicists, Bohr made contributions to the understanding of the atom, of subatomic particles, and nuclear physics.

Medicine: Understanding in the area of microbiology, anatomy, and also in the ability to see (microscopes) and to image (x-ray, ultrasound, scanning electron images) made it possible to evaluate medical conditions in a new way, and to devise new, ethical experiments and treatment protocols. Great advances were also made in pharmacology, with breakthrough developments in pain management and anesthesia, enabling better surgical procedures. Other breakthroughs in the use of genetics to develop more effective antibiotics and immunizations had dramatically positive effects on the population.

Edward Teller: Known as the “father of the hydrogen bomb,” Edward Teller advanced theoretical physics to the point that his group at Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico was able to harness nuclear fission and create the atomic bomb.

Wilbur and Orville Wright: Often in competition with Curtiss (in upstate New York), the Wright brothers perfected the first flying machine in the U.S., which had its first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

John Bardeen: Miniaturization and solid-state electronics were key elements in the development of fast, economical super-computing. John Bardeen invented the transistor, which was the first step to miniaturization.

Space travel: The scientists at NASA were funded by a U.S. government eager to show dominance in the Cold War. While the U.S. space program achieved remarkable results and fascinated the public, there were also many breakthroughs that benefited the world in unexpected ways. Space travel was accompanied by breakthroughs in plastics, new lightweight materials, electronics, optics, computing, new fabrics, and medicine.

Medicine: NIH (National Institutes of Health) led research in molecular genetics, genomics, biochemistry to identify, prevent, diagnose, and treat disease and disability. Combined with a private and well-funded health industry, dramatic breakthroughs occurred in the area of medical imaging (x-rays, acoustic, nuclear/ radiography, magnetic, etc.) laser technologies (surgery, etc.), immunology, public health (vaccinations, women's health), DNA / human genome mapping, improved pharmaceuticals, and more.

Telecommunications: Telegraph, telephones, radio and television broadcasts, satellite transmissions are just some of the ways in which a deeper understanding of physics combined with mathematics and computing power have transformed the United States.

Discussion / Questions

Science:

The twentieth century presents a dizzying array of truly society-changing inventions and scientific breakthroughs. And yet, the foundational building blocks upon which these are constructed are few. They include the development of a better understanding of the structure of matter (the atom, etc.), the ability to process vast arrays of numbers (supercomputing), and an understanding of electricity. Select a few examples of the most society-transforming inventions and discuss a) the role of physics, computing, and energy. Then, select one scientific breakthrough of the 20th century and discuss its impact for now and the future.

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