

# How romanticism and photography shaped western modernitymodern

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



“ Western modernity was shaped by cross-currents between Europe and North America in the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century.

” Neoclassicism was a movement which focused on the rediscovery of Ancient Greek and Roman values and style (and called Greek revival in the United States[1]). It was a defining trait of the Enlightenment age and of its reasoning-based political and artistic thinking and saw its apogee during the Napoleonic era.

Starting in the 19th century, this movement was opposed by the Romantics, who ended the strict rules of neoclassicism and made the expression of their emotions and feelings the basis for their art, may it be poetry, literature, painting or music. The English romantic poet William Wordsworth called romantic poetry “ the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility”[2]. Compared to the neoclassicists, romantics such as Edgar Allan Poe or Victor Hugo were “ modern”.

They anticipated mentality changes in the Western world. Parts of western modernity were shaped by interactions and cross currents between Europe and the United States during the 19th and 20th century. These centuries were characterised by a break from the established rules and the artistic past and were times of new technologies as well as increasing interaction between the two sides of the Northern Atlantic. Such Euro-American relations, may they be artistic, cultural and even political have never died out.

To understand our Western modernity, this paper shall examine two different aspects of these artistic cross-currents. Firstly, the romantic current played

an important role in all the arts, ranging from poetry to architecture. Finally, the appearance of the documentary art of photography has in many aspects shaped modernity and even later led to the invention of motion picture and cinema[3]. Firstly, the Romantic Movement that swarmed across Europe and North America starting in the 19th century helped to shape western modernity.

The Romantics broke away from the neoclassicism and the Enlightenment era and, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge puts it, Romanticism is the expression of "intellectual intuition", and combines reason and emotion to find Truth and Beauty. The movement focused on individualism and even egocentrism, the importance of the "self"; the concept of "author-as-hero" was particularly popular. Romantics also elevated human and divine imagination and inspiration, revered nature and its mysteries and authors often opposed an ideal view of reality to the sense of loss and melancholy, as Baudelaire does in the section "Spleen and Ideal" of "Les Fleurs du Mal", his poetry volume. In short, they believed in beauty for beauty's sake and art for art's sake. This was modernity. Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire are the epitome of the relations and cross-currents between North America and Europe shaped modernity, as Charles Baudelaire often translated Poe's work from English and made it accessible to French readers.

Edgar Allan Poe was a famous American romanticism writer who lived in the first half of the 19th century. He surely deserved William Butler Yeats's praise for being "always and for all lands a great lyric poet" as he was one of the earliest short story writers and often considered as the inventor of

modern crime fiction and the modern character of the detective, a self-referential character. Poe clearly revolutionized and therefore modernized literature and western modernity greatly inherits from his work. He had a well-known taste for writing ghoulish and mysterious stories.

In "The Man of the Crowd", a short story he wrote in 1840 for example, an unknown narrator follows a mysterious old man throughout the crowds and bazaars of London. This story emphasizes how the "wanderer" or "stroller" can walk through the crowded city while still maintaining an outside view: he does not buy anything and does not even notice the narrator. The story opposes the individual to the rest of the people, seen as one group: "the crowd". Charles Baudelaire translated this story to French in "L'homme des foules". For Baudelaire, the flaneur becomes important to understand urban modernity as he "walks the city to experience it".

This image of an outsider is also mixed with the image of the dandy, and Baudelaire is known to be somewhere between the two, as his peculiar habits testified. Baudelaire defines modernity as the "ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" in "The Painter of Modern Life", which he writes about Constantin Guys without revealing his name. For Baudelaire, Guys is the painter of modern life because he is not only a flaneur, he is also able "to distil the eternal from the transitory".

Guys, who wanted to remain unnamed in Baudelaire's review, was an army man with no artistic education who started with drawings specialized in war but later also represented modern urban life in London and Paris such as

popular celebrations or simply street scenes[4]. Constantin Guys never signed or exposed his paintings and was only recognized in his time by Baudelaire and a circle of friends of which the prominent photograph Nadar. He painted and drew from memory and Baudelaire writes in " The Painter of Modern Life" that " Monsieur G. ever ceases to drink the fantastic reality of life; his eyes and his memory are full of it. "[5] " Ou il faudrait ne voir que le Beau, notre public ne cherche que le Vrai", writes Baudelaire in « Le public moderne et la photographie». Modernity for Poe, Baudelaire and the Romantics in general is finding and creating beauty for the sake of beauty. Baudelaire did not appreciate the first photographs that were made of him such as the one by Etienne Carjat shown below. In his critique of the Salon de 1859, he blames the new industry of photography for the decline of French spirit.

In " Le public modern et la photographie", Baudelaire writes that the ignorant modern crowds believe that what is identical to nature is art and that they wrongly believe that therefore photography is " l'art absolu". " Les insenses! ". Even though photography was the refuge of bad painters and was first considered industry and not art at first, it is nowadays considered by many both an art and a way of documenting life and events as in all newspapers and magazines, especially the ones that focus on nature, journalism or even fashion photography. [pic][pic] Baudelaire by Carjat.

Carosse, drawing by Guys One of the first kinds of photography, the daguerreotype process was named after its French inventor Frenchman, Louis Daguerre. In 1839, it was eulogized in the French academies of

Sciences and of Fine Arts by Francois Arago because he found it useful for astronomy. Using such processes, the French photographer Nadar, friend of Guys and Baudelaire who lived and had his studio on the rue Saint-Lazare in Paris, had the opportunity to photograph many figures of the French arts and journalism scene such as Gustave Dore or Alexandre Dumas.

Until the 1870s defined the modern photographic portrait: thanks to an astute use of lights, his portraits were more life-like than the ones by other photographers. He used no decor, a “ neutral background” and “ clothes that served simply to bring out the sitter's outline”[6]. The telegraph inventor Samuel Morse brought the daguerreotype to the United States after meeting Daguerre in Paris in 1839. Such cross-Atlantic contact was already common in the 19th century and even Poe spent time on both sides of the ocean.

Because photographic techniques kept on improving and modernizing, picture looked more and more lifelike and representative of reality. Photography was most notably used during the American Secession War from 1861 to 1865. Photography was not only used by upper-class citizens in daily bourgeois life but also as documentary photography. The great characters as well as horrible events of the civil war were for instance immortalized, partly for the sake of information and truth. As shown below, Gardner's pictures of the war have integrated the American historical heritage.

It was the avant-garde of modern mass media: in 1933, the first photograph was transferred on a newspaper, revolutionizing forever modern newspapers. [pic][pic] Alexander Gardner's photographs in Antietam, USA,

September 1862 But modern photography was also well elevated to the statute of fine art in the life time of the internationally recognized photographer and gallery director Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946): he is considered “ a crusader for modernism”[7]. Stieglitz worked painstakingly and succeeded in legitimizing the fine art of photography.

He became of Expressionist leaning and started to replace naturalism in his art with exaggeration and the expression of “ intense, subjective emotion”[8] as his piece shown below, Equivalent suggests. , once again proving his pioneering role in the perception of modernity. [pic][pic] The Terminal by Alfred Stieglitz (1892)Equivalent by Stieglitz (1926) Western modernity was shaped by the cross currents across the Atlantic in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially the Romantic Movement of which Poe and somehow his follower Baudelaire were part of.

Poe and Baudelaire pioneered western modernity as they have for the self-reflecting character of the flaneur and by for example noticing Constantin Guys and his modern urban dweller drawings. Thanks to the invention and rise of photography during the end of the 19th century painting was liberated from the need to represent accurately and modern painting was triggered by a wave of creativity in the beginning of the 20th century. Photography also contributed to shaping western modernity, especially by documenting the Civil War that ravaged North America and by the creation of portraits of intellectuals in France.

The invention of photography also eventually led to cinema, which became increasingly popular and accessible throughout the 20th century to become

the seventh art and for some companies a very profitable industry. Photography is also one of the ways journalists make us see what is too far from us, such as modern day events like the Arab revolutions. In short, photography, starting with, among others, Daguerre, Nadar, Gardner and later Stieglitz became a full part of western modernity both in industry and fine art.