Passage Pomeraye
Nantes (Loire Atlantique)
begun in the 1840s
What is Modern?

modern politics
structures that allow for mass participation in public life

modern society (and economy)
industrialization and mass production (peasantry replaced by “modern” working class)

modern culture
awareness of change, which seems to be speeding up, such that “all that is solid melts into air”* and nothing is left but dizzying excitement of the always new as experienced via mass consumption and mass communication

* Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto (1848)

Background and review: ways to define “modern”
Modern and its suffixes

Modernism

modernization

modernity


Gare du Nord (North Station), Paris (built, 1861-1864; recent photo).

Eiffel Tower, Paris (built for 1889 World’s Fair).

Background and review: ways to define “modern”
# Modernity: Politics, the Public, and Representation

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* but in France, unlike the United States, there is a strong tendency within even republican political theory to think of elected legislators *not* as representing a particular constituency but as standing for “France”—representation is “unitary” or “universalist” rather than divided or individualist.

François Boucher, *The Toilet of Venus* (1751) commissioned by Madame de Pompadour (Louis XV’s mistress who played the part of Venus in a 1750 play) Metropolitan Museum, New York


Modernity and Representation
Introduction: What is Modern?

Modernity (like “realism”) as active cultural creation.

Baudelaire’s “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863).

Impressionism.

Alfred Sisley, *Allée of Chestnut Trees* (1878)
Metropolitan Museum, New York

Modernity and the City: Lecture Structure
Charles Baudelaire, 1821-1867

1848  fights on the barricades in both February and June

1852  translates Edgar Allen Poe into French

1857  *Les Fleurs du mal (Flowers of Evil)* convicted of “offense to morality”

Remember that object we saw, dear soul,
In the sweetness of a summer morn:
At a bend of the path a loathsome carrion
On a bed with pebbles strewn,…

Yet to this rot you shall be like,
To this horrid corruption,
Star of my eyes, sun of desire,
You, my angel and my passion!

Yes, such you shall be, you, queen of all graces,
After the last sacraments,
When you go beneath the grass and waxy flowers,
To mold among the skeletons.

Baudelaire photographed in 1863.
Courbet, *The Painter’s Studio, A Real Allegory* (1855) 141 x 235 inches; Musée d’Orsay, Paris www.musee-orsay.fr
The flâneur—a modern observer

The child sees everything as a novelty; the child is always “drunk”… genius is no more than childhood recaptured at will, childhood equipped with man’s ability to express himself…

The crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird’s and water that of the fish. For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer, it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting, the infinite.

To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very center of the world, and yet to be unseen by the world—such are some of the minor pleasures of those independent, intense, impartial spirits…

He admires the eternal beauty and the astonishing harmony of life in the capital cities… He gazes at the landscape, landscapes of stone: now swathed in mist, now struck in full face by the sun. He enjoys handsome carriages, proud horses, the spit and polish of the grooms, the smooth rhythmical gait of the women, the beauty of the children—in short, life universal.

'Why should a lobster be any more ridiculous than a dog?' he used to ask quietly, 'or a cat, or a gazelle, or a lion, or any other animal that one chooses to take for a walk? I have a liking for lobsters. They are peaceful, serious creatures. … And Goethe had an aversion to dogs, and he wasn't mad.'

Théophile Gautier describing his friend Gérard de Nerval (1867).
He is looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call “modernity”, for want of a better term… Modernity is the fleeting, the ephemeral, the contingent…

Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863)

Constantin Guys, “Woman with young girl and man with walking stick” (1860?) Courtauld Institute, London
Painter of Modern Life

Today I want to talk to my readers about a singular man, whose originality is so powerful and clear-cut that it is self-sufficing, and does not bother to look for approval. None of his drawings is signed ... except by his soul. [When he learned I was going to write this] he begged me, in a most peremptory manner, to suppress his name, and to discuss his works only as though they were the works of some anonymous person. I will humbly obey this odd request. The reader and I will proceed as though M. G. did not exist... He is an I with an insatiable appetite for the non-I, at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself

Baudelaire, “Painter of Modern Life”
Does modernity have a gender?

Woman is a divinity, a star... a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds wills and destinies suspended on her glance... Woman is quite within her rights, indeed she is even accomplishing a kind of duty, when she devotes herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us; she is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adored.

Baudelaire, “Painter of Modern Life”

Constantin Guys, “Two Shopgirls and Two Soldiers” (c. 1860)
Is “modernity” a “reflection” of social or economic changes?

Courbet, *Burial at Ornans* (1849-1850), detail

C. Guys “French Officer on Horseback” (1850s?) Basel

Millet, *The Gleaners* (1857)
Modernity, Above and Below

Nadar, “Paris sewers”

Edouard Manet, 1867 *Universal Exhibition*

Felix Nadar, self-portraits in hot-air balloon and in Catacombs

Modernity and new techniques of seeing
Modernity Below:
Catacombs of Paris

photos from http://lphe.epfl.ch/~lhinz/france/paris/catacombes/
Anonymous Modernity and the City: Impressionism
When Impressionism was new

Monet, *Sunrise Impression* (1873)

Bellange, *Reviewing the Troops under the Empire*

Caillebotte, *The Europe Bridge* [in Paris] (1876)

Fromentin, *Heron Hunting in Algeria*
Edouard Manet, *Bar at the Folies Bergères* (1882) Courtauld Institute, London