

About us



Over the course of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth a process of rapid industrialisation in the West resulted in the formation of distinctively 'modern' conceptions of self and society that are still enormously influential in Western thinking.

We study that process of formation not only to better understand the nature of modernity (its motivations, its character, its effects and its affects), but also to recognise the contingency of much of what defines us today.

The remit of our conceptual field might best be delineated through (although not exclusively defined by) a cluster of themes and events that exemplify 'cultural modernity':

the theorisation of evolution (publication of Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859)

- the rapid expansion of cities and the provision of civic art galleries, libraries and cultural centres over the course of the nineteenth century
- the new inventions which changed modes of travel, production and the texture of every-day life (The French 'Industrial Exposition' of 1844; London's 'Great Exhibition' of 1851)
- the growing dominance of the middle class, and bourgeois taste and commodities
- globalisation and cosmopolitanism
- the rise of psychoanalysis (Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams, in 1899)
- the invention of quintessentially 'modern' items, such as the vacuum cleaner and the paper clip – both invented in 1900
- the loss of God
- the Theory of Special Relativity (Albert Einstein 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies', 1905)
- the new technologies of warfare (WW1 and WW2)
- philosophies theorising time, space and the subject in relation to modernity (Marx, Nietzsche, Adorno, Benjamin etc.)
- the wealth of forms which developed within the full range of artistic media to respond to the experiences of modernity and its technologies (atonality, 'realism', 'aestheticism', 'symbolism', 'impressionism', 'decadence', 'modernism', the birth of film and photography)

The Centre welcomes approaches that relate to its core remit but stretch back to encompass the early days of industrialisation at the start of the nineteenth century, and also those that look forward to the legacy and development of this newly established 'modern' construction of self and society within the next revolution of new media and new technologies that we associate with postmodernity.

It also welcomes approaches that foreground geographically diverse responses to the new industrialisation of the West which might foreground transactions crucial to its development, or commentary on it.