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REASSESSING MODERNISM:
KATHERINE S. DREIER AND THE SOCIETE ANONYME

by

JOHN DAVID ANGELINE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1999

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CONTENTS

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List of Illustrations

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KSD: Katherine S. Dreier

BL: The Katherine Dreier/ Société Anonyme Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

MOMA: The Archives of the Museum of Modern Art.

WTUL: Women's Trade Union League

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Introduction

Katherine Dreier's efforts as an artist, patron, museum director, educator and activist were so important to the development of modernism in America that Alfred Barr, Jr. wrote: "No one has done more for the advancement of the more experimental movements in modern art than you, so far as New York and the country at large is concerned."[1] For the first half of this century Dreier strove to put her social, philosophical, and artistic ideals into practice in order to change the way Americans regarded the artistic and social phenomena of modernism that they so often resisted.

Dreier is a figure to whom history has not been particularly kind. Far too often, when the histories of modern art are written, her name is nowhere to be found, and in the rare instances when she is mentioned it is frequently in an irresponsible manner. Two notable studies on art patronage mention Dreier. One of them, Aline Saarinen's The Proud Possessors[2], has minor factual errors, and more importantly casts Dreier as a somewhat ignorant follower of Duchamp with few ideas or innovations of her own. Kathleen McCarthy's Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1890-1930[3], is more accurate in its facts and places Dreier in the context of women cultural patrons, but her discussion of Dreier is brief and extremely limited. Ruth Bohan's

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1982 The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modern America[4] has done the most to provide Dreier's work with the thorough treatment it deserves, but as the book's title implies its focus is largely limited to the 1926 Brooklyn Museum exhibition organized by the Société Anonyme, and Bohan forgoes any museological critique in her discussion of Dreier. Bohan's study derived from the work she did on the 1984 Société Anonyme catalogue raisonné published by Yale University.[5] While remaining an invaluable reference tool, this book contains unfounded criticisms and in many other respects ignores many contributions that are Dreier's. For example, it underplays her role as a women's rights activist and dismisses her lectures and writings as being incoherent.[6] Most recently, Francis Naumann's 1995 New York Dada: 1915-1923[7] devotes a chapter to Dreier and is a curious mix of the informative and the disparaging, as when he inaccurately describes Dreier as being incapable of comprehending the more sophisticated movements in modern art and follows Saarinen's lead in placing Dreier in a hopelessly subservient position to Duchamp.

Apart from these texts and some minor biographical articles, the literature is largely silent regarding Dreier. Most of the above-cited literature stands in need of some revision, and none of it devotes a full consideration of

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Dreier in the terms I have chosen to consider. Yet it is through the different foci I propose that the study of Dreier's work becomes the most relevant.

This dissertation examines Dreier and her achievements during her most active years, from 1914 when she founded the Cooperative Mural Workshops until her death in 1952. My study will approach Dreier from the following four perspectives: her role as a museum director and patron; her function as a nexus between centers of non-Parisian prewar modernism, particularly between Germany and the United States; her efforts to merge social activism with artistic practice; and her identity as a woman artist and patron of the arts.

One of the reasons why Dreier has been a somewhat neglected figure in the histories of twentieth century art is because many of her contributions could not be fully appreciated until the present, when postmodernist, museological, and feminist inquiries have provided art scholarship with a new set of issues to examine. I will stress the areas in which her impact was the most lasting and the ways in which her project seems most relevant.

For the first forty years of her life Dreier divided her time between many Progressive activities and her personal involvement in the arts. In 1916 Dreier became a member of the Board of Trustees for the Society of

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Independent Artists and helped organize their massive 1917 exhibition at Grand Central Palace. It was through this exhibition that she first made the acquaintance of Marcel Duchamp.

In 1920 Dreier and Duchamp decided to form a new institution for the support of modern artists and the education of the general public. Duchamp invited Man Ray to help found the group, and he is credited with the name Société Anonyme, which Dreier responded warmly to, relating the name to her focus upon "art, not personalities." What Dreier did not initially realize was that the name "Société Anonyme, Inc." is a typical Dada wordgame, meaning "Incorporated, Inc." when translated from the French.

The Société's heyday was in the 1920's with a series of exhibitions and lectures devoted to the cause of furthering modernism in this country. As Saarinen has written: "In the strategic period between the Armory Show of 1913 and the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, she performed almost single-handedly a courageous service for modern art."[8] Alfred Barr reminisced in a 1979 catalogue that: "During those years, too, I was learning more about the modern arts from original works seen at dealers' and Société Anonyme shows."[9] The Société Anonyme was responsible for introducing 73 artists to America for the first time, and the organization provided the first one-man shows for

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Alexander Archipenko and Jacques Villon (1922), Wassily Kandinsky (1923), Paul Klee (1924), and Fernand Léger (1925) among others.

Throughout the 1930's Dreier would attempt projects such as publishing a magazine, staging more elaborate exhibitions, and creating satellite offices on the West Coast; these invariably failed to be successfully realized. All along, however, the Société's collection continued to grow, as did Dreier's own personal collection, and very often periods which seem to indicate inactivity on Dreier's part in terms of the organization merely meant that she was devoting herself to her own art or to teaching. Her extensive correspondence with the most influential artists and critics of the period reveal that she never ceased campaigning on the Société's behalf even after she bequeathed the collection to Yale University in 1941.[10] In 1950 the Société was officially closed, and in 1952, upon Dreier's death, Duchamp distributed her personal collection. 288 additional works went to Yale for a grand total of 1019 pieces, and other works found their way into the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, Guggenheim Museum, and the Phillips Collection. Indeed, between Dreier's personal collection and the organization's collection--and often the two were

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interchangeable--there was a body of work that was "unrivaled by no other collection in America, except for those of the Museum of Modern Art and Solomon R. Guggenheim."[11]

Dreier's achievements extended beyond the acquisition of some valuable art, however, and by considering her practices in the four areas I am focusing on it is possible to see just how ahead of her time she could be. In many ways, modern art history has only recently begun to catch up.

To begin with, Dreier's role as a museum director needs a much more careful consideration, which I address in the first chapter. In addition to introducing many modern artists to America, Dreier's curatorial practices could often be quite radical, such as hanging artworks among store-bought furniture in specially-designed "domestic" galleries in 1926 or planning a "tele-museum" with Frederick Kiesler. I will draw connections between Dreier's willingness to exhibit in many unconventional settings--indeed her group's very lack of a permanent, institutional space for exhibitions--and the anti-institutional stance that many artists had adopted in the early years of the 20th century. Dreier's radical philosophies of democratization in the curatorial process, a viewpoint she clearly expressed when defending the 1917 Independents exhibition that she

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helped organize, stand out in stark contrast to the dictatorial stance assumed by most traditional museums.

Dreier also conceived of a more permanent museum, according to a 1928 plan that she drafted for such an institution. This "blueprint," written in the hopes of funding from the Carnegie Corporation, illustrates just how innovative Dreier's museological concepts were; it would be easily labelled contemporary were it not for the fact that it was conceived almost sixty years ago, and none of the literature on Dreier has given it any consideration.

Dreier was very much a part of the internationalism of pre- and inter-war modernism. In Chapter Two I explore Dreier's concept of internationalism. Dreier made a point of not favoring any one national school over another in her role as curator, collector, and lecturer. While she was in many ways most closely linked with the French artist Duchamp, Dreier by no means offerred a Francophile modernism to the American public. For example, out of the 180 artists in the Société Anonyme's permanent collection, only 25 were of French origin, as opposed to 51 from Germany. This is all the more daring when one considers how very French-oriented other modern institutions, especially the Museum of Modern Art, were to become--so much so that groups like the American Abstract Artists would stage protests over their

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lack of inclusion. Through her efforts, Americans were able to see what was happening in places like Hannover, Berlin, and Moscow, in addition to Paris. The influence of German and Soviet modernism in America has begun to be traced in recent studies; in fact, one of the major tendencies in recent art scholarship is a dissatisfaction with the standard "master narrative" of modernism that privileges France above all else until World War II. By examining the wide range of countries that Dreier explored in her one-person and group exhibitions, as well as how a non-hegemonic worldview tied into her more
esoteric notions about art and society, I will contrast her version of modernism with the Francocentric one that became standard.

Chapter Three considers Dreier's attempts to marry art with social activism. Dreier's identity as an artist and arts professional was formed by a family history of social activism and refined through the writings and philosophies of individuals like William Morris, Wassily Kandinsky, and Rudolf Steiner. Like these men she too believed in the function of art as an instrument of social utopia and spiritual transcendence. To date Bohan has done the most toward connecting these philosophies to Dreier's life, but she fails to take Dreier's own art into account and to draw the connection, so apparent with Dreier, between esoteric

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mysticism and social activism. I will discuss certain of Dreier's works to illustrate how she connected abstraction with social progressiveness, and discuss both Dreier's writings on art and social issues and those that were owned by the Société Anonyme to firmly place her work in a strong theoretical framework. Dreier organized many public programs, including lectures on art and society, screenings of modern films, and artistic performances including Dada recitals and modern dance, all of which fall outside of the realm of Bohan's study. These, as well as her exhibitions, attest to her belief in using art as a social tool and expanding the parameters of artistic expression. Indeed, a number of these provide a connection between the Société Anonyme and today's espousal of art that predicates itself on non-formalist concerns and the recognition of art education and public programs in museums.

Finally, Dreier's identity as a woman artist and art patron is considered in Chapter Four. Despite both the catalogue raisonné and McCarthy's suggesting a lack of feminist concerns on Dreier's part, Dreier represents a pioneering figure who tried to occupy both the traditional female sphere of behind-the-scenes cultural support as well as the somewhat more radical realm of being an outspoken women's rights advocate and professional modern artist. As a curator Dreier organized many shows that focused on women

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modernists such as Dora Bromberger, Liubov Popova, and Sophie Täuber-Arp, and as a lecturer she spoke at many women's venues. I will focus on women's issues in the development and legitimation of modernism with her assuming a more prominent position.

It is only in recent years that such issues as those outlined above have been considered worthwhile explorations for art historians. Unfortunately, the omissions in the traditional modernist narrative have often been accounted for by the establishment of an alternate universe that is referred to by some as "revisionist" and is populated by art and individuals that are labelled "postmodern." I want to suggest that when we realize how timely and contemporary Dreier's goals and ideas were, bearing in mind that she considered herself unequivocally to be a modernist, we may realize that the modernist narrative is more elastic than some postmodern theoreticians would allow.

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Notes for Introduction

1. Alfred Barr, Letter to KSD, 7 November 1936, BL.

2. Aline Saarinen, The Proud Possessors (New York: Random House, 1958).

3. Kathleen McCarthy, Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1890-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

4. Ruth Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Museum Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modern America (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982).

5. Robert Herbert, Eleanor S. Apted, and Elise Kenney, The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

6. The Introductory essay includes such statements as "Clarity occupied a lowly place in Miss Dreier's own hierarchy of values," p. 1, or the suggestion that the Société's 1926 Brooklyn Museum exhibition's "legacy was a modest one," p. 11.

7. Francis Naumann, New York Dada: 1915-1923 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995).

8. Saarinen, The Proud Possessors, 239.

9. William Lieberman, Art of the Twenties (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), 7.

10. Although Yale possessed the collection there was the stipulation that it could be added to by Dreier or Duchamp until such time as they officially closed the organization. Apparently Dreier took this to mean that she could still make use of the collection whenever she chose, and as late as March 4, 1946 she had written to Alfred Barr, inviting him to join the Board (Barr accepted in a letter dated March 18). In 1948 she wrote to Barr, frustrated by Yale's lack of activity with the collection, that "I just cannot understand the workings of the minds of these people when you consider the value of the collection we have given them" (7 September 1948; all papers BL).

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11. Herbert, Apter, and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 28.

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Chapter One
A New Museum

A standard assumption about modern art in America is that very little of it could be seen until the Armory Show of 1913. However, this scenario which presents European and American modernism as springing from nowhere into the Lexington Avenue Armory like Athena from the head of Zeus is a bit misleading. As early as the first decade of the twentieth century galleries such as Stieglitz' 291 and the MacBeth Gallery were showing artists such as Rodin, Picasso, Marin and Dove, as well as non-Western art in New York, and in 1910 the Newark Museum under John Cotton Dana was showing American modernists.[1] In the period from 1920-1940 there was a veritable explosion of museums and collections that left established institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art hopelessly mired in the past. These new museums were small, privately endowed, focused on modern art, and quite often were created, funded and directed by women. While there are many vital art centers in New York alone that deserve consideration during this period, such as the Museum of Modern Art (established 1929), the Whitney Museum of American Art (established 1930), and smaller gallery-museums such as A.E. Gallatin's Gallery of Living Art (established 1927) and Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century (established 1942), they were all preceded by the Société

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Anonyme and none matched its daring and innovation.

The Société Anonyme, which subsequently adopted the subtitle "Museum of Modern Art: 1920" on its official stationary and literature, has generally been recognized as the first modern art museum in America. However, it is important to consider what kind of modernism it was espousing and how Dreier's organization fit into--or rather subverted--the categorizations that have developed around the concept of the museum itself.

From the outset Dreier and Duchamp challenged all the accepted notions of what constituted a proper museum, including the concept of a trained museum professional. To begin with, it cannot be stressed enough that Dreier saw herself first and foremost as an artist. The importance of this identity is clear in a statement she wrote a friend who questioned her activities: "Ever since the death of my parents all the influences in my life tended to kill the art in me and to turn my energies into other channels which they deemed more important."[2] To her, it was as an artist that she was building a collection, as an artist that she was able to exercise judgement and understanding in the new movement, and as artists that she and Duchamp could best aid other artists. In her 1923 book Western Art and the New Era she wrote:

> Because a man is a manufacturer and makes excellent steel rails, does not guarantee him to

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> be an authority on the manufacturing of silks, nor would we demand it. Yet we call upon the doctor to pass on the mental make up of our modern artists, delighted when they pronounce them mad, or art historians to pass on the coming of a new era, when the whole training of the art historian is to look back.[3]

The Société was always about "art, not personalities," and Dreier constantly attempted to break down hierarchies and demystify the elitist posturing she saw in the art world. Dreier's oft-cited ideal for museums of democracy, as well as a suspicion of the connoisseur's dictates, were already apparent in a statement she prepared for the 1917 Independent show: "Heretofore [sic] has always stood between the artist and the public a group known as the "Jury"....Without freedom of exhibition these men would have passed by as unnoticed as they are unsought."[4]

In an age of growing museum professionalization, with the hegemony of the disciples of Paul Sachs' museum course at Harvard (whose most notable graduate was Alfred Barr) or the wealthy collector-connoisseur taking charge of museum boards, Dreier's position as an artist helping other artists was anomalous. If artists were already too well established, whether modern or not, she did not feel the need to promote them, and much has been written about the "minor" artists she proudly hung besides the emerging "masters". In the Museum's statement of purpose Dreier stated: "One of the chief aims of the Directors of the

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Société Anonyme, Inc., is to rise above personal taste and to conduct a gallery free from prejudice."[5] In another essay she wrote: "Good taste cannot include ugliness or too much vigor or vitality. Whereas art can and does include both."[6] Not everyone was inclined to agree with her, however, and in fact the director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art rejected her proposed bequest of the Société Anonyme collection due to what he felt was the inconsistent level of quality that the collection represented. Dreier responded by informing him that her interest, "as well as that of Duchamp's, has always been to show that the new approach in Art was a movement--not simply the work of highly-gifted individuals. It is, therefore, in our judgement, both coherent and comprehensive."[7] By the time the collection was retired, it contained works by 180 artists from virtually every Western nation.

Dreier's adamant stance about her identity as an artist during the first half of this century is noteworthy, but to be a practicing modernist in this country during the 1920's was particularly outstanding. While historians constantly caution that this decade merits a more nuanced treatment, it is clear that there was a general decrease in enthusiasm for modern art from the initial interest shown by the public in the period just after the Armory Show. Additionally, World War I had put a halt to the more internationalist outlook of

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the previous decade, and a period of official and private isolationism was prevalent. This general attitude was coupled with a new fear of Bolshevism, and many things that seemed foreign were rendered suspect. This included most modern art, which was often decried as being "bolshevist" or too tainted with European affectations.

Despite the Armory show most modern galleries in the teens were unable to remain solvent including Stieglitz's and MacBeth's. By 1920, Dreier was virtually alone in her endeavors. Despite her relative isolation during the Société's initial period of activity, however, she did not form her museological opinions in a vacuum. In the decade preceding the Société's inception many innovative ideas in the role and practice of the museum were being initiated by John Cotton Dana at the Newark Museum. Dana was a somewhat eccentric figure who has been described as "the quintessential museum populist."[8] Dana worked to expand the breadth of the Museum's collection and exhibitions program and is credited with organizing the first museum exhibition of modern art in America in 1910. He also exhibited art from nonwestern cultures as well as folk art and craft, and in 1920 he published A Plea for a New Museum which called for art institutions to embrace a more public mandate. Dreier, who opened her new museum the very year of Dana's plea, was familiar with Dana and his museum. She even

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assisted Dana with his 1924 exhibition on China by lending him fabrics and artifacts from her own collection, as well as a large group of photographs that she took when she lived in China for a year in 1921-22.

Dreier was inspired by European institutions as well, most notably in Germany. In many respects, aspects of the Société Anonyme have close parallels with a German museum which could be seen as a precedent for Dreier's organization--the Folkwang Museum in Hagen (now in Essen).[9] Founded, funded and directed by Karl Ernst Osthaus, the museum was one of the only art institutions in its country to present artists who were not exhibited elsewhere in the beginning of the century. Osthaus focused on supporting the artists of his time and saw the need for a smaller museum that could provide a forum for art that the larger public institutions eschewed. Osthaus also maintained an international outlook, all the while working in a country where issues of nationalism have always been of major importance. Dreier's and Osthaus' paths crossed at least once, with the 1912 Sonderbund exhibition which Osthaus arranged, from which Dreier purchased her first Van Gogh (hers was the first Van Gogh to be purchased by an American, he was the first German museum director to collect Van Gogh), and the idea of which would influence the 1913 Armory Show (in which Dreier's own work was shown as was her Van

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Gogh),[10] and in turn Dreier's own 1926 Brooklyn Museum show.

Dreier would subsequently develop close professional ties with Berlin's Der Sturm gallery and close personal ties with many of the artists represented by Der Sturm. Dreier first visited Der Sturm in 1919, but the enterprise began in 1910 with the publication of the journal Der Sturm. Founded by Herwarth Walden, it was the first art journal "to reproduce, discuss, and defend works by Oskar Kokoshka, the Brücke artists, and the Blaue Reiter."[11] By 1912 Walden had opened a gallery of the same name, which also presented Futurists, Fauvists and Cubists both in its space in Berlin and through travelling shows. Beginning in the Fall of 1916 there were "Sturm-art evenings", and a "Sturm-school" was founded in 1917. Although Walden's enterprise was somewhat more commercially minded than Dreier's, both were concerned with the simultaneous goals of educating the public in the new art and helping to support the artists themselves. All of Walden's activities "were emulated by Dreier when she directed the Société Anonyme over the course of the next two decades, and Der Sturm stands as the nearest thing to a model for her planning."[12] Dreier envisioned producing a journal like Walden, and in July 1928 produced the first issue of Brochure Quarterly. Although there were some interesting directions promised in the first issue, including the treatment of photography as an art, only one

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more issue appeared.

Dreier was concerned in making sure that her exhibitions included performances and lectures, many of which were delivered by her. Before it was officially disbanded, the Société Anonyme would sponsor presentations of Dada poetry, modern music, modern dance, and cinema in addition to its exhibitions of visual art.

Having allied herself with some of the most radical and unconventional artists of her time, Dreier quickly became one of the most unconventional museum directors of her time. As befits the personalities of its two main founders, the Société Anonyme, subtitled "Museum of Modern Art," was from the outset a challenge to standard notions of museum practice, all the while assuming a role of respectability and seriousness as to its pedagogical mission. Initially this radical and unconventional identity was not surprising given the group's close affiliations with Dada. Although Dreier did not always seem easily to grasp some of Dada's more absurdist gestures, to the extent that she once wrote about Duchamp's In Advance of the Broken Arm from the perspective of design principles and claimed that "the average eye was too untrained to notice a difference in snow shovels,"[13] her reputation for being antagonistic to Dada or incapable of appreciating its projects is undeserved. One of the Société's first public notices was a humorous

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announcement of an exhibition that advertised the "pen of the future" from the Archie Pen Co. and used Archipenko's Woman Standing, (which interestingly enough does appear like a pen of sorts). Although in all likelihood Dreier was not responsible for the ad, she certainly approved its publication and doubtless was aware of its humor. Similarly, in 1921 a Société Anonyme publication of a Henry McBride essay, designed by "Rrose Selavy" (an assumed female persona of Duchamp's), makes a mockery of typography, beginning with impossibly tiny type which gets progressively larger and then shrinks again. The first Société Anonyme exhibition featured paintings framed by paper doilies and gallery walls draped with white fabric which picked up on the soft blue lighting that was installed throughout.

The organization officially sponsored a Dada Symposium on April 1, 1921 [Fig. 2]. This event, which Francis Naumann describes as the "first and only public gathering under the official auspices of the Dada movement" in New York,[14] featured a lecture by Marsden Hartley entitled "The Importance of Being Dada." Although Hartley is not usually thought of as a Dada artist, these labels were far more fluid in New York than in Europe, and by virtue of his personal friendships with Duchamp and other members of the Arensberg circle, his close ties with Germany, his own iconoclastic art including abstract portraiture, and his

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early involvement with the Société, Hartley must not have seemed an inappropriate choice.

Dreier's appreciation of Dada notwithstanding, when Duchamp and Man Ray left America in 1921 the Société took a far more earnest turn. However, this seriousness should not be confused with conventionality. The official Société Anonyme logo, to be found on all its official stationary, was a profile of what Dreier referred to as a "laughing ass" (designed by Duchamp as a chess piece), [Fig. 3] and Dreier was just as aware as anyone else in the group of the self-mockery and irreverence that the image conveyed. Dreier was never afraid to innovate or break rules, nor did she leave in doubt for a moment that her museum was antithetical to the type of institution represented in this country by places such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On the whole, Dreier had little use for the Metropolitan, which to her exemplified the traditionalist, conservative, qualitative institution. The closest that the Metropolitan had come at this time to acknowledging modernism was an exhibition held in 1921 that did not extend beyond the Post-Impressionists, and in fact when the curator of the exhibition purchased a Cézanne for the Museum he was promptly dismissed.[15] The draft of a press release for the Société expressed its opposition quite bluntly: "Practically everything for which the Metropolitan stands,

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this new museum...seeks to break away from."[16] Later that year, she wrote to Dr. Abraham Flexner of the Rockefeller Institute: "Unfortunately, the Metropolitan does not feel as if it ought to have a department where the works of modern men can be studied. This is exactly as if the Academy of Medicine would feel that no new ideas relating to medicine should be discussed at their Annual Conferences, unless such ideas had the test of fifty years."[17] At a later date, when the Danbury News-Times mistakenly referred to her as a staff member of the Metropolitan, she offerred the following correction:

> I fear that the good and wise trustees of the Metropolitan Museum would look askance at the thought that such a rebel in their eyes, should now be counted one of them--for it is only Cezanne whom they have permitted in their sacred precinct and not even Van Gogh, though he died fifty-two years ago...and you can imagine how they feel about us!!!![18]

If Dreier seemed somewhat unconventional in her role of museum professional, then Société Anonyme itself was perhaps the most atypical museum to ever exist. In fact, to accept that it was truly a museum means that we have to modify our concepts of what a museum is. In the first place there was never any structure that was truly home to this museum. At first the Société rented galleries, but when it could no longer afford to do this it simply moved about from host institution to host institution. Dreier recognized the need

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for a building; she once wrote to Arensberg: "The only way to become well-known is to have our own building, with our permanent exhibition besides our occasional splendid exhibitions."[19] She never let go of her dream of having a permanent home for the museum, and she was actually able to conceptualize it in some detail.

In 1928, perhaps feeling pressured by the impending opening of The Museum of Modern Art, she devised a plan for a working cultural complex that she hoped the Carnegie Corporation would finance. An intercessor on Dreier's behalf--Mary Van Kleek, of the Russell Sage Foundation--discussed the need for such a building because she found it doubtful whether the established museums were in the frame of mind for the experimental and open-minded attitude which was the essence of Dreier's plan.[20] When describing her plan, Dreier reminded Dr. Keppel of the Carnegie Corp. that "the Société Anonyme has always stood for international art and has never emphasized one country."[21]

Her description was of a complex that would have two wings or branches, one for contemporary art and one for experimental, modern art. Dreier maintained that one could not substitute "contemporary" for "modern," although, like her definitions of modernism itself, what distinguished the two is not completely clear. The most extensive attempt she made at defining the two was in her introduction to the

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Brooklyn Museum exhibition of 1926. This essay was published in an abridged form for the Buffalo Academy of Art when the show travelled there in 1927, and it stated:

> This is not a haphazard gathering together of modern pictures--as many people seem to consider--or a collection of Contemporary Art--which has failed to include certain viewpoints which are making their appearance in Europe and here--but a selection made with a very conscious thought that so-called Modern Art is not Contemporary Art--but has a distinct meaning within itself--and that is--that it is an expression of the new cosmic forces coming to the fore, which in time will change our vision of life as radically as when Giotto broke with the Byzantine.
>
> What the aim of the Société Anonyme wanted to imply was that art should not be STATIC--ENCRUSTED--FEARSOME TO VENTURE--but that it had a new vitality which DARED NEW FORMS OF BEAUTY. But why a name? If we could live without being tagged or ticketed--how much simpler life would be--but, alas, we cannot and therefore we in America have termed these various new expressions Modern Art--but only so long as they give an indication that they are prophetic of the new cosmic forces which are creating a new era. Otherwise, it is Contemporary Art.[22]

Dreier seemed to indicate that not all art being made at the time (contemporary) was imbued with the proper intellectual/philosophical/esoteric spirit that would make it modern. According to the Carnegie prospectus, it was her plan that the Société Anonyme would run the Modern wing of the museum. If this art became established in time it would automatically revert to the Metropolitan to make room for fresher innovations, therefore eliminating the need to

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preserve a permanent collection.

Dreier indicated in the prospectus that she wanted the building to be the first attempt in this country to break with the temple-palace style museum, and her proposed location was facing Union Square. While it is unclear what this building would have looked like, she did at one point have plans worked up by Frederick Kiesler, although there is some dispute over whether or not these were done at her prompting or his. These plans are now missing, but it is easy to assume that the design would have been innovative. In fact it is possible that they were too much so, for Dreier wrote to Kiesler: "A careful examination of the plans shows they are absolutely no use to the Société Anonyme, or to anyone else, as a workable plan for a building."[23] This response may have been a bit extreme, however, due to the fact that Kiesler was trying to demand money for what were, in fact, unsolicited plans. At the same time, Kiesler had a reputation for making unworkable plans that everyone had to consider unrealizable.

Perhaps inspired by her visits to the Bauhaus in Dessau, part of the complex was to include workshops and print shops, temporary living and studio spaces for the artists who would contribute their artistic production, and library and lecture spaces. The museum's income would be derived from orders done in the work and print shops, the

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restaurant that she envisioned, and public programs. Among the museum's activities were to be lectures, exhibitions, modern music and dance programs, modern cinematographs, and a photography department was to be developed.[24]

Despite the fact that the Carnegie Plan was not realized, Dreier never abandoned her dream of having a permanent museum. Her last major attempt towards this end was proposed under the title of "The Country Museum." This Museum was in fact to have occupied Dreier's Connecticut estate and was intended to contrast with the city-type museum. She enlisted the aid of William Hekking, who was formerly at the Albright Art Gallery and the Los Angeles Museum of Art, to "professionalize" the prospective institution. The Country Museum, comprised of several buildings spread out over 117 acres, was to be an overall arts and community complex. The estate's location in Milford, Connecticut was considered ideal due to its proximity to many schools and colleges, most notably Yale University. The core of its permanent collection was to be both the Société's and Dreier's own collection, the heart of which was Duchamp's Large Glass which was installed in her living room along with his Tu m', some sculptures by Brancusi, and other assorted pieces. The juxtaposition of modern art and a traditional New England country home with traditional furnishings would have the pedagogical benefit

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of demonstrating how art could be a part of everyday life. Other exhibits would be devoted to quilts and other traditional handicrafts. There would be temporary exhibitions, and other buildings would be used as workshops and public programs spaces.[25] Unfortunately, as was the case with many of Dreier's ambitions, the Country Museum was unrealized due to lack of funds, and the director of the Yale University Art Gallery, who had been approached to be custodian of the Country Museum, persuaded Dreier to bequeath the Société Anonyme Collection to Yale, which she finally agreed to in 1941.

At certain points Dreier indicated a willingness to relinquish her goal of seeing the Société Anonyme exist as a separate physical entity for the sake of ensuring that the collection would have a home. As early as 1923, and despite her annoyance with that particular institution, Dreier envisioned a special relationship between her organization and the Metropolitan. She wrote to a colleague: "Personally I feel that we are doing the work which the Metropolitan should be doing, and I hope the time will come, when we will be embodied in the Metropolitan, and lose our identity in it."[26] Later, her proposal to the Carnegie Corporation included a transference plan that would send her museum's art to the Metropolitan every twenty years.[27] If these ideas seem incongruous with her general feelings

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towards the Metropolitan, it should be remembered that at this time, there was essentially no other established art museum in Manhattan, and certainly not one with the encyclopedic breadth of the Metropolitan. On still another occasion, she wrote to the Assistant Director of the Brooklyn Museum that in the Twenties she had wanted to merge with that institution:

> [I had] suggested letting the Société Anonyme with its collection and small modern library become a part of the Brooklyn Museum--but the Trustees could not see the value at that time since it had not yet become fashionable--there was no Mrs. Rockefeller or Mr. Goodyear playing with the idea. In fact at that time Mr. Goodyear [who was to become the first President of the Museum of Modern Art] insisted that I was both unbalanced and crazy and it was against his judgement that the [1927] Exhibition go to Buffalo.[28]

The lack of a building did not prevent Dreier from being active and the Société Anonyme was one of the most important modern institutions in this country despite its "at large" existence. Despite her intention of having a permanent home, Dreier never wanted the museum to remain static. Hers was not a "if you build it they will come" attitude, but rather a "bring the art to the people" attitude. From the Société's inception until it went to Yale, Dreier was constantly organizing travelling exhibitions and loan shows. Among these were the lending of works of art by Malevich to Macy's in 1927 for an exhibit, which tied in to Kiesler's dictum that "the dept store...was

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the introducer of modernism to the public at large."[29] There were also venues such as the Rand School, at which she offerred a series of lectures and the New School of Social Research where likewise she prepared a lecture series, both in 1930-31.[30] She arranged shows for various schools, including an early exhibition that travelled to Smith College in 1922 and another one to Vassar in 1923. At other times the Société was allowed to present exhibitions at host institutions, including the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, the Worcester Museum of Art, and the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Dreier did most of this work herself and the budgets were always modest--in fact the yearly allocation that she asked from Carnegie was $28,000.[31] While works of art were often for sale she never charged a fee and only asked what the artist or lending gallery dictated; often she wound up buying the works herself. Dreier and Duchamp would tie American and European progressive art together, and as Herbert describes it, "they would do it as artists showing the work of their colleagues, rather than as dealers tied to commercial interests or historians who cluttered museums and books with the sanctioned art of the past."[32] She also attempted to establish a West Coast branch in 1927 upon the invitation of Mrs. Farley McLouth of the Los Angeles Museum of Science and Art, further deconstructing the model of the

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museum as tied to a municipal identity or a particular city's locus of pride, culture and wealth.

Some of these undertakings and ideas were truly noteworthy and in their way mark Dreier as a reformer of museum practices as much as of the philistine public. The best-known of these shows is her 1926-27 Brooklyn Museum exhibition, more formally known as an International Survey of Modern Art--a title she lifted from the Armory Show.[33] This exhibition brought together 308 works by 106 artists from 23 countries. Dreier travelled throughout Europe to visit artists and make selections for the exhibition. Along the way she was aided by local representatives, including Duchamp in France, Kurt Schwitters in Germany, and Helma Schwitters in Central Europe. After its initial run in Brooklyn, where it was seen by 52,000 visitors, smaller versions of the exhibit travelled to the Anderson Galleries in Manhattan, the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, and the Art Gallery of Toronto.

In addition to being a well-curated and highly attended exhibition of European and American modernism during a relatively quiet spell in America for such things, the Brooklyn exhibition also made deliberate attempts to affect people in a more lasting manner. Dreier had four galleries in the exhibition made up to resemble rooms in a house to illustrate how modern art could and should readily

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integrate into an everyday domestic environment. The art was cutting edge, the furniture was Abraham & Strauss. This was a visual manifestation of Dreier's own ambiguity regarding traditional art institutions and her sense of the limitations inherent in experiencing art in a gallery setting. She had written about these sentiments earlier in Western Art and the New Era: "It is a tragic mistake to think that our public museums can ever replace the influence which the daily use of beautiful implements exercises."[34] There was also a prototype of a "television room," designed in conjunction with Kiesler, which would make any house or museum a worldwide museum of art by illuminating different slides of masterpieces with the turn of a knob.[35] Despite Walter Benjamin's arguments regarding the aura that supposedly infused the original work of art,[36] Dreier obviously felt that there would be no loss of spiritually beneficial results from these mechanical reproductions. A precursor to Andre Malraux's museum without walls, this "tele-museum" was intended to bring all art, including old masters, to those who could not travel, and it was the more democratic concern of creating mass audieces for art that mattered to Dreier. This would indidcate that she shared Duchamp's antipathy towards what he saw as the fetishization of art.

While the Brooklyn Museum exhibition did not include

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film or photomontage, it did include photography as well as most other forms of experimental media, including the debut of Duchamp's Large Glass, which Douglas Crimp has suggested "may well be the decade's most significant work"[37] and which she later bought from the Arensbergs for $2,000.

In addition to the Large Glass, the Brooklyn Exhibition marked the American debut of Surrealism and introduced Joan Miró to the U.S. for the first time.[38] The exhibition also marked Mondrian's first American presentation, and in 1927 Dreier became the first American to purchase a work by the Dutchman.[39] The exhibition catalogue stressed the international character of the art and was a pioneering example of modern graphic design in this country. Designed by Constantine Aladjalov and dedicated to Kandinsky, it represented Dreier's desire to have a catalogue that would "stand out in the art of printing as, I hope, the Exhibition will stand out in the world of painting."[40]

In the Brooklyn Museum show Dreier not only provided an outlet for the most radical art of her time, but she also called into question the authority of the museum itself. The catalogue carried a disclaimer that stated it was not the museum's role to impose taste but merely to offer things to the public who would then decide.[41] This attitude was seen as so atypical that it was remarked upon at some length by the reviewer for the show in Art News, who wrote: "A

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museum was but a place where the general public went restfully, assured by the sanction of authority that all paintings and sculptures on display were really art." He then referred to the Brooklyn Museum show as an attempt to collapse this situation of museum authority and visitor passivity. Emboldened by the show, he even went so far as to write, clearly somewhat tongue in cheek: "In fact, we cherish the hope that the ultimate development of freedom in museums may be the removal of labels from paintings, which, after all, make life a little too easy."[42] The domestic environments showed how art belonged to life, not just to museums. The "tele-museum" removed the primacy of the palace that housed the actual masterpiece, and the travelling sections of the show, which went to Manhattan, Buffalo and Toronto, lived up to the bringing art to the public ideal. In the case of the Toronto segment, this exhibition was later recognized as "the first exhibition of abstract art in Canada."[43]

When we consider the Brooklyn Museum exhibition as an (admittedly large) part of a whole lifetime of such endeavors, Dreier's total commitment to revolutionary arts and their institutions is unavoidable. Perhaps befitting someone who reached artistic maturity with the Dada movement and who was one of Duchamp's most faithful friends and patrons and greatest defenders, Dreier always pushed for the

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boundary-shattering. This included her forays into dance as an early supporter of Isadora Duncan and later sponsorship Ted Shawn. She was no stranger to cinema, presenting on the evening of March 23, 1931, at the New School of Social Research, a screening of Duchamp's Anemic Cinema and Lotte Reineger's Prince Achmed. And that same evening she devoted a large portion of time to Thomas Wilfred, who gave a recital of his Clavilux.[44]

In an age of isolationism, Dreier was international in her outlook. Whereas many authors and theorists discuss the museum as an organ of national goals and nationalistic programs, Dreier saw her museum as a global enterprise. According to the catalogue raisonné, the Société Anonyme collection had representatives from 19 different countries, and France was definitely not given the pride of place. It was not a stronghold of wealth and patrimony that Dreier was trying to build, but rather a vehicle for aiding artists and educating the public.

Another important aspect of the Société Anonyme's programs was its recognition of photography and willingness to include it in exhibitions. The permanent collection of the Société Anonyme contained a number of Rayographs by Man Ray, and the Brooklyn Museum exhibition featured a suite of Stieglitz's Equivalents. Moreover, the premier issue of Brochure Quarterly, the journal that Dreier was hoping to

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establish, featured an article by Sara Parsons entitled "Photography in Aesthetics." This essay clearly attempted to establish photography as an independent form of expression, and in it Parsons wrote: "The photographer can no longer imitate the painter because the painter is no longer imitating the photographer."[45]

Just as Dreier's initial concepts concerning museums were formed by certain institutions that preceded her own, the Société in turn was to have an impact on the generation of museums that was to follow. The most notable of these, and the institution that was in many ways symbolically tied to her own, was the Museum of Modern Art.

Founded in 1929 and with an initial financial support that Dreier could only dream of, the Museum of Modern art established itself as the authoritative institution of modernism. Dreier's initial reaction was hostile; she wrote to Duchamp: "I give them three years in which to live and die."[46] When it became apparent that this would not be the case, her annoyance turned to resentment. She was bothered by the larger budget the Modern enjoyed, as well as its development of a permanent residence. And she considered the Museum's appropriation of her own institution's name to be unforgivable. Despite these grievances, however, relations between the Société Anonyme and the Museum of Modern Art and its two directors, Dreier and Alfred Barr,

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Jr., was very complex and essentially symbiotic.

Barr was an early admirer of Dreier's work and in fact was in contact with her in 1927, borrowing works and asking for information and advice for an exhibition he was preparing in Boston.[47] Even after he became director of the Museum of Modern Art he was often dependent upon Dreier for loans and introductions, as well as some historical information. He never hesitated to credit her efforts and contributions, for instance in his introduction to Cubism and Abstract Art:

> Except in a few of its aspects this exhibition is in no sense a pioneering effort [...] Special acknowledgement should also be made of the work of Miss Katherine Dreier, the founder, in 1920, of the Société Anonyme, which brought to this country innumerable exhibitions of European abstract art long before the Museum of Modern Art was founded.[48]

Dreier's influence on Barr is clear in many ways and in other ways the two manifested a shared sensibility. Barr's initial collecting and exhibitions made a concerted effort to present modernism as an international phenomenon. He tried to not favor one form of expression over another. Like Dreier he early recognized the importance of Duchamp's contributions to the art of this century. He created departments for film, photography and design that Dreier had hoped to be able to establish. In the 1930's MOMA even had a dance department; although this was short-lived, it coincides with when Dreier was most actively supporting

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dance as well.

There were marked differences in the approach of the two as well. Barr's involvement with and presentation of modern art was more dependent upon scholarship and less upon personal relationships than Dreier's was. For all his innovation, Barr was very much a product of Paul Sachs' museum class and had the imprimatur of a professional in the standard sense. As Sybil Kantor has observed: "The most important thread that runs through his various approaches to art was his commitment to a formalist point of view,"[49] whereas Dreier focused primarily on the esoteric and social. Moreover, "where [Dreier] was dedicated to showing each radical 'ism' in its purity, Barr's method was to synthesize the overall view and demonstrate by comparisons."[50] Dreier herself saw the Modern as being essentially more conservative than the Société Anonyme, especially in later years after it became a much more historical and francophile institution: "The museum deals principly [sic] with what has become acceptable to history and the taste of those who sell and those who collect paintings in the USA. Thus it deals more with patrons and dealers than with artists, a fact which contradicts almost everything the Société Anonyme stands for."[51] On another occasion Dreier wrote to Duchamp: "Yesterday I met Domela...His remarks about the Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art was very telling; they have

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really only emphasized the cubists and the rest trot along!!!"[52]

Sometimes their differences could result in outright conflict. The most notable instance of this was in 1936 with Barr's Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism exhibition. Once again Dreier was a major lender to this show, but when she discovered that Barr had included works by children and the insane in the exhibition, she withdrew her entries from the travelling portion of the show. Duchamp, who was not particularly fond of Barr, either, scolded Dreier for lending some of his works in the first place.[53] Dreier then issued a press release stating her dissatisfactions concerning the exhibition:

> The weakness in my opinion is that the Museum of Modern Art, which is supposed to foster living art, is trying to make its exhibition historical. It was attempted last year in the presentation of cubist art in the saddest of all shows. It is like holding an official funeral when the corpse is still alive![54]

Although this incident is hardly mentioned in any of the literature today, at the time the dispute made most of the major New York newspapers. It was important enough that fourteen years later she wrote to Barr concerning this affair: "Where you and I differed on this situation was that I did not feel the American public was ripe for such 'comparative material,' whereas you had more confidence than I in their developed judgement of art. I still think I am

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right."[55]

Dreier was never shy about discussing what she considered to be the Modern's shortcomings. This did not prevent her from calling upon the Museum for assistance, however, and she often made special research requests of the Library staff. In the 40's she invited Barr to be on the Board of Trustees for the Société Anonyme and called upon him to help raise funds for the catalogue of the collection that she was trying to produce. In light of Dreier's outspoken criticism of MOMA, one might characterize her as impossibly demanding or grant Barr saintlike status in his dealings with her, but that is too simplistic. In fact, despite Barr's largely gestural assistance, and he did come through with some meager amounts of cash, even authorizing the Museum to purchase Dreier's Abstract Portrait of Marcel Duchamp for 500 dollars, his prime motivation was not altruism nor was his goal to see the Société Anonyme independently established. The fact of the matter is that Barr coveted Dreier's collection, and as early as 1935 he was trying to secure it. In a letter clearly developed with Barr but signed by Artemas Paetrard, an offer was made to Dreier: "To help you work out some modus vivendi with the Museum of Modern Art whereby you might be relieved of the expenses and responsibility of caring for the collection." One of his suggestions was a "closer physical co-operation"

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between the two collections.[56] In a private memo to Nelson Rockefeller, Barr wrote: "Over the past few years I have served as a trustee of the Société Anonyme partly out of respect and affection for Miss Dreier, partly because I hoped that...she might feel encouraged to leave two or three very important works in her own, personal collection to our Museum, especially the great glass composition by Marcel Duchamp."[57] Barr had left similar memos instructing his staff to indulge Dreier in the hopes of a large payoff by way of a bequest.

It should be noted that the relationship was not so one-sided, either. There were instances where Dreier shared her knowledge with the Modern's staff and shared the contents of her library with the Museum's. Barr was embittered that the Museum did not ultimately get the Large Glass, but his complaints of Dreier's ingratitude are somewhat specious given the numerous thank-you notes that make up their correspondence and the fact that the Museum of Modern Art received 102 works from the Dreier Bequest, including many important works by Duchamp and Schwitters.

Another museum whose collection and programs in many ways imitated Dreier's was the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, later known as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Though paid for by Solomon R. Guggenheim, the collection was curated and directed by Hilla Rebay. Rebay had much in

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common with Dreier, and once the two were introduced by Mondrian (who asked Dreier to include Rebay in one of her exhibitions), they became friendly. Both shared a German heritage and a strong adherence to the supernatural and spiritual matters, especially as this related to art. Both women were abstract painters, and both pursued their artist missions with such zeal and fervor that a lack of public appreciation helped engender a persecution complex in both. As opposed to Barr, both women favored abstract and central European art, to the extent that Picasso was all but neglected in their collections and Kandinsky was prized above almost anyone else.

There were many moments when these two women enjoyed each other's professional support and friendship. In addition to luncheons in Connecticut, the two often lent works to one another's institutions. On one occasion when Dreier experienced financial duress, Rebay purchased two Kandinsky oils from her but promised not to take them until Dreier chose to part with them, for the duration of her lifetime. On another occasion Rebay purchased from Dreier the translation rights to Kandinsky's Punkt und Linie zur Fläche, although this was a difficult collaboration and Dreier eventually dropped out of the project.

On other occasions the two women were at odds with one another. Each was possessed of a dogmatic will, and as much

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as their ideals and theories of art overlapped, there were disagreements as well. One of the most notable differences between the two was over the term "Non-Objective," which was Rebay's way of discussing nonfigurative art.[58] Dreier was never pleased with this idea and was in fact alarmed by the efforts Rebay spent in making this term part of the accepted terminology. Dreier made her dissatisfaction known in a 1939 catalogue essay for the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Gallery, in which she wrote:

> The confusion which surrounded this expression of Art from the very beginning has not lessened, but rather has been increased by the Guggenheim Foundation applying the term Non-Objective Art to what is in general termed Abstract Art. These new Forms of Beauty...are far too positive, too vital, to be encompassed by a negative term.[59]

Despite these differences, the two maintained a professional relationship and the Guggenheim Museum received 54 works from the Dreier Bequest. Although (in marked contrast to Barr), Rebay never publicly acknowledged Dreier, the parallels between her Museum and Dreier's are in some ways even closer. However, whereas Barr retained Dreier's eclecticism but not her esoteric ideals, Rebay shared Dreier's cosmic and missionary sensibilities but was far more narrow in the art she encouraged and supported.[60]

In many ways Dreier's efforts as a museum director were ahead of her time. Given her ideals, plans and ambitions, it is tempting to wonder what she might have realized with

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Rockefeller's or Guggenheim's money backing her. Throughout her directorship her art museum broke with the standards and norms of what a museum could and should do, and many of her innovations have not been followed until more recently. In the past few years in New York the New Museum of Contemporary Art has attempted to put into practice her idea of a "semi-permanent collection" that will not grow too old and attempts to run itself as much as possible as a democratic cooperative, albeit one with a fairly strong-willed woman in charge. Exit Art has experimented with allowing artists to establish living/working spaces in its galleries, the payback being works of art. Douglas Crimp and others have theorized a museum space that they consider "postmodern" in its reliance upon unconventional installation, the deconstruction of the sterile white cube, the integration of various media including photography, and a revival of the 19th century ideal of the collapsing of art into life. These goals were espoused more than half a century earlier by Dreier, and many of them were put into practice. Her museology stands out not just for what was collected but for how these works were presented, and her conceptualization of what a museum could be left other modern institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim to appear less open to innovation.

Milton Brown, one of the earliest authorities on 20th

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century American art wrote: "Revolutions in art are made by artists through creative activity, but such developments mean nothing until they are exhibited."[61] Many of the modern museums in this country would seem to have been defying traditional models of what has been called "the universal survey museum."[62] In contrast to the large, male, bureaucratic, patrimonial, powerfully wealthy public institutions prior to the 1920's, these tended to be small, private, often modestly endowed, women-run and conceived, and progressive. Yet even these institutions, most notably the Museum of Modern Art can seem to have been quite traditional when compared to what Dreier attempted to, and sometimes actually did, achieve. Whether this makes her, along Crimpian lines, postmodern before her time or whether she is yet another example of the failures of formulating a "postmodernism" in the first place is something worth considering.

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Notes for Chapter One

1. The first exhibition of the Newark Museum Association featured art by Marin and members of the Eight and was an explicit effort to showcase "the current art of the country: work of sincere and earnest men."

2. KSD, Letter to Elisabeth Achelis, 23 November 1926, BL.

3. KSD, Western Art and the New Era (New York: Bretano's, 1923) 89.

4. KSD, "Independent Artists' Aim," American Art News, 28 April 1917, 13.

5. KSD, Its Why and Wherefore, (New York: Société Anonyme, 1920), reprinted in Société Anonyme, Selected Publications, vol. 1 (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

6. KSD, "Introduction," Catalogue of an International Exhibition Illustrating the Most Recent Developments in Abstract Art (Buffalo: Albright Art Gallery, 1927), 6.

7. KSD, Letter to Fiske Kimball, 17 April 1951, Arensberg Archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

8. Karl Meyer, The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1979), 36.

9. For more on Osthaus and the Folkwang Museum, see Jill Lloyd, German Expressionism, Primitivism and Modernity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) and Carmen L. Stonge, "Karl Ernst Osthaus: The Folkwang Museum and the Dissemination of Modernism," (Ph.D. diss, CUNY Graduate Center, 1993).

10. Milton Brown, The Story of the Armory Show (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 97.

11. Rose-Carol Washton Long, German Expressionism: Documents From the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), 55.

12. Herbert, Apted, and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 3.

13. KSD, Western Art and the New Era, 71.

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14. Francis Naumann, New York Dada: 1915-1923, 201.

15. Milton Brown, American Painting From the Armory Show to the Depression (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 82.

16. Russell Crouse, untitled manuscript, April 1920, BL.

17. KSD, Letter to Abraham Flexner, 11 November 1920, BL.

18. KSD, Letter to George Murray, 25 February 1942, BL.

19.KSD, Letter to Walter Arensberg, 23 June 1925, BL.

20. Mary Van Clark, Letter to Dr. Keppel, 26 October 1928, Katherine Dreier file, MOMA.

21. KSD, Letter to Keppel, 8 February 1929, Katherine Dreier file, MOMA.

22. KSD, "Introduction," International Exhibition of Modern Art (Buffalo: Buffalo Academy of Art, 1927), 1-2.

23. KSD, Letter to Kiesler, 21 July 1927, BL.

24. KSD, Prospectus for Museum to be Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, Katherine Dreier file, MOMA.

25. KSD and William Hekking, Series of prospecti, "The Country Museum," BL.

26. KSD, Letter to Charles Worcester, 2 February 1923, BL.

27. KSD, prospectus for a museum to be funded by the Carnegie Corporation, Katherine Dreier File, MOMA.

28. KSD, Letter to Phillip Youty, 2 February 1934, BL.

29. Frederick Kiesler, Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display (New York: Brentano's, 1930).

30. It is interesting to note that Dreier was actively involved with two institutions that were actively aligned with Leftist politics and thinking, particularly the New School for Social Research which featured John Dewey as one of its founders and which established a University in Exile that became home to, among others, the core of the expatriate Frankfurt School.

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31. KSD, Prospectus for a museum to be funded by the Carnegie Corporation, 1928, Katherine Dreier File, MOMA.

32. Herbert, Apted and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 1.

33. In fact, Dreier had intended to make a separate gallery that was intended as an homage to the Armory Show, but this plan was abandoned when Arensberg refused to lend Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase 2. Arensberg, Letter to KSD, 8/20/26, BL.

34. KSD, Western Art and the New Era (New York: Bretano's, 1923), 70.

35. According to Bohan, the telemuseum was fabricated too late for inclusion in the Brooklyn Museum but was installed in the Anderson Galleries; The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 62-63.

36. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217-251. While Benjamin argues that the original object has an "aura" that the reproduction lacks, Dreier obviously felt that reproductions were better than nothing and that no loss of the artwork's beneficial powers would be suffered. She may have been aided in this belief through Duchamp and his attitudes towards the sacralization of the "original".

37. Douglas Crimp, On the Museum's Ruins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 66.

38. Herbert, Apted, and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 461.

39. Ibid., 479.

40. KSD, Letter to Aladjalov, 8 August 1926, BL.

41. William Henry Fox, "Introduction," Modern Art, (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1926), unpaginated.

42. "The New Museum Spirit.," Art News, 4 December 1926, 8.

43. L.R. Pfaff, "Lawren Harris and the International Exhibition of Modern Art," Revue d'art canadienne, 1-2 (1984): 79.

44. Herbert, Apted, and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 16.

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45. Sara Parsons, "Photography in Aesthetics," Brochure Quarterly 1 (July 1928): 24.

46. KSD, Letter to Duchamp, 4 November 1930, BL.

47. Alfred Barr, Letter to KSD, 9 February 1927, and KSD to Barr, 14 March 1927, BL.

48. Alfred H. Barr, Cubism and Abstract Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936 (reprint, Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 9.

49. Sybil Kantor, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Establishment of the Culture of Modernism in America 1993, CUNY Graduate Center, Ph.D Dissertation Collection, New York, vi.

50. Ibid., 153.

51. KSD, Letter to Marchal Landgren, 23 May 1950, BL.

52. KSD, Letter to Duchamp, 4 April 1936, BL.

53. Marcel Duchamp, Letter to KSD, 15 December 1934, BL.

54. KSD, press release ms., 1937, BL.

55. KSD, Letter to Barr, 20 June 1950, BL.

56. Artemas Paetrard, Letter to KSD, 15 November 1935, BL.

57. Alfred H. Barr, Memo to Nelson Rockefeller, 25 April 1950, Alfred Barr Papers, MOMA.

58. See Rose-Carol Washton Long's essay on "Non Objective," in Guggenheim Museum A-Z, ed. Nancy Spector (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1992), 200, for a concise treatment of the term and its general inappropriateness.

59. KSD, "Introduction," Some New Forms of Beauty (Springfield, MA: George Walter Vincent Smith Art Gallery, 1939), 5.

60. For a comparison of the two in relation to Dreier, see Alfred Barr, Jr., Cubism and Abstract Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936) and Hilla Rebay, "Non-Objective Art," Southern Literary Messenger, December 1942, 473-475 or any of her essays for the first exhibition catalogues of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting.

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61. Milton Brown, The Story of the Armory Show (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 235.

62. See Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," Art History (December 1980).

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Chapter Two
Modernism Outside of France

In her 1928 museum proposal to the Carnegie Corporation Dreier wrote: "The Société Anonyme has always stood for international art and has never emphasized one country."[1] This internationalist approach set Dreier apart from the general tenor of her times, given the trend towards isolationism that marked both American foreign policy and popular sentiment. Such a broad outlook was also rare in the arts as well. Almost from the first exhibitions and texts, the story of modern art as presented in this country was the story of French art. The foreign art at the Armory Show was disproportionately--one could say almost exclusively-- French, and French modernism comprised the bulk of art collections that were comparable to Dreier's, such as John Quinn's, Duncan Phillips', A.E. Gallatin's, or Albert Barnes'.

Dreier was opposed to such a Francocentric view of modernism and stated this quite explicitly when she wrote to a colleague: "I am getting quite bored at the attitude of the average American, claiming for instance that the only art being produced at present is in France, and the only men of note are the French painters."[2] To her, modernism was a global phenomenon tied to a new spirit of man, a new cosmic and spiritual sensibility, that could not be tied to one

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country or group of people. She explored these ideas in her catalogue of the 1926 Brooklyn Museum exhibition, which was also known as the "International Exhibition of Modern Art." This catalogue, which represented artists from 23 countries, was arranged geographically, and as Ruth Bohan has observed: "In a country reared almost exclusively on the modern French tradition, the emphasis on non-Parisian art represented a marked departure from established practice."[3] In the catalogue, Dreier wrote of the School of Paris: "For the last fifty years all artists throughout the world have flocked to Paris. It has become the international meeting-ground and yet it is a mistake to think that one can find all art in Paris."[4] Her praise for Picasso was in some ways even more dubious. She described him as:

> A middle-aged gentleman who started life full of enthusiasm and helped to create the cubist movement, which, however, is far bigger than he. He is a master in his own way. Though a fighter in his youth, he settled down to retirement as far as the world of art goes today, painting his own individual pictures.[5]

In the mid-20's many of those who favored experimental art or championed abstraction regarded Picasso's shift into his "Neoclassical" phase as a betrayal.

If Dreier's comments regarding French modernism seem somewhat excessive, this is probably because she was reacting to what she saw as a one-sided and uneven favoring of one aspect of modern art over all others. Dreier did not

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in fact have an anti-French bias: she was after all best friends and a collaborator with Duchamp,[6] she travelled to Paris often and planned to live there in the 1930's, and she was a member of the French artists' organization Abstraction-Création. Dreier's reputation as an artist and appreciation for the Société's activities was often warmer and more positive in France than in America. The Société Anonyme collection included 25 French artists, and Dreier was responsible for introducing Léger to America by giving him his first one-man show in 1925,[7] about which Léger wrote: "Never, not even in Paris, have I had such an important exhibition."[8] The fact was simply that Dreier did not recognize any inherent superiority in French art, and was disturbed by how it was being collected in America to the exclusion of other art. To her, the reason for this was not due to taste but rather economics:

> France, knowing the full influence of Art on a nation, was wise as well as shrewd and made a bargain with us, whereby she would reduce the export tarif on lard--a commodity we then needed, if we would reduce the import on French paintings by living men. Since we needed the lard we agreed. With what result? That we are steeped in French Art--French Tradition--but rarely understand the art of another country. And even today there is hardly a critic who can see beauty in any other expression than that based on French Tradition.[9]

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While the historical veracity of this statement may be questionable, it indicates Dreier's attitude toward the disproportionate amount of French art in American collections, and it is interesting that she made an equation between French art and lard. Recognizing both the French bias and neglect of other nations' art in America, Dreier considered it part of her mission to correct the imbalance. One of the most important aspects of her project, then, became her almost singular patronage of art outside of France, particularly in Russia and Germany, and how she served as a bridge between these other movements and the modern movement in America.

The Société Anonyme was not the first institution in America to present Russian art; that honor belongs to the Brooklyn Museum.[10] However, her support of Russian modernism was unparalleled at the time. The Société Anonyme collection contained 16 artists of Russian origin, representing the major movements in Russian modernism. She had intended to travel to Russia after her stay in China. Although this did not happen, she did visit the Erste Russiches Kunstausstellung in Germany in 1922, from which she purchased many works including El Lissitzky's Proun 19D and Malevich's Knifegrinder.[11] Dreier was also a friend of Dr. Christian Brinton, who was something of an authority on Russian modernism in America and who had in fact organized

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the 1923 Brooklyn Museum's Exhibition of Russian Painting and Sculpture, to which Dreier lent some of her new acquisitions. She further lent works to Brinton's Russian Art section at the 1926 Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia.

Dreier herself had many contacts with artists of Russian origin. She organized the first solo exhibitions in America for Archipenko, in 1921, and Kandinsky, in 1923, at the Société Anonyme galleries at 19 East 47th Street, and David Burliuk at the new galleries at 44 West 57th Street, in 1924. She furthermore wrote a monograph on Burliuk in 1944. Also in 1924 was the Société's own Russian Art exhibition, with works by Russian artists supplemented by cubists such as Albert Gleizes, Juan Gris and Jean Metzinger. This exhibit was accompanied by a pamphlet produced by the Société which contained one of the first English-language texts on Russian modernism. She became an early champion of Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, and was one of the first Americans to buy works by Popova.

Dreier's awareness of Russian art included her recognition of how many Russian modernists became expatriates, such as Archipenko and Kandinsky. In seeking to put a positive spin on this phenomenon, as well as avoid any overtly political judgements, she wrote in the Brooklyn Exhibition catalogue: "The service which Soviet Russia has

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rendered to the rest of the world has been chiefly that it has scattered most of its creative and living spirits over the whole world, like the sower sowing his seed, so that all might benefit by that great spiritual contribution which Russia has to give."[12] By the end of the 1920's, many of the Russian artists with whom Dreier was acquainted--including Burliuk, Kandinsky, Archipenko, Gabo and Pevsner--were living outside of the USSR.

As important as Russian modernism was to Dreier, it was Germany to which she felt the strongest ties. Dreier's parents came to America from Bremen to flee the upheavals of 1848. Her family had longstnading ties to that city and there are members of the Dreier family that served in high civic posts throughout the history of Bremen. Dreier's father attained a high position in an iron-shipping firm, and the family, while not in the same league as the Whitneys or the Morgans, lived an upper-middle-class existence. Though Dreier was born in America, through her family she never lost touch with her German heritage: German was spoken in the house, German meals consumed. Moreover, Dreier would make annual trips to visit her relatives still in Bremen. Two years after studying at Pratt, beginning in 1903, she worked under Walter Shirlaw, who was one of the more prominent 19th century American painters to have spent an extended European sojourn in Germany rather than Paris.

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Dreier's insistence upon not favoring any one nation notwithstanding, if she had a bias, it was for Germany. 51 of the 180 artists in the Société Anonyme collection were German, and that number would increase if one factored in the artists (such as Kandinsky and Moholy-Nagy) who were essentially German emigres.[13] This bias was also represented in the Brooklyn Museum Exhibition. Out of 106 artists from 23 countries, 16 were German, prompting Bohan's observation that "the exhibition's German component came to rival, even to surpass, its French counterpart in the depth and comprehensiveness of its coverage."[14] In her essay for the catalogue Dreier indicated that while France had only Paris as an art center, Germany had many including Berlin, Munich, and Hannover. She wrote that expressionism could be seen as a greater artistic force than cubism, because expressionism "enabled one to understand cubism, whereas cubism did not enable one to understand expressionism."[15] Finally, in the back of the catalogue there were little one-page "bouquets of appreciation," and she devoted one each to Der Sturm, Merz, and the Bauhaus.[16]

Dreier's involvement with Germany was thorough. In the early 1920's she wrote articles for The Survey about "Housing Conditions in Germany," "The Democratizing of the Economic Life of Germany Since the November Revolution of 1918," and German agitprop entitled "Posters and Paving

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Stones," in which she tied together the social radicalism of the time and the expressionist posters that were being produced. Dreier's concern with and support of German society would at times create a difficult situation for her, particularly during the two World Wars, which will be examined in a later chapter.

Concerning German modernism, Duchamp stated the case succinctly when he told Pierre Cabanne: "She was positively interested in the work of German artists...everybody who is anybody now--and they were completely unknown then."[17] Dreier in fact once wrote to Duchamp: "I think that German art made a contribution which even Paris didn't make--and it is high time that it would be recognized."[18] From the beginning she included German modernism in the Société's exhibitions, and the Société Anonyme gave Klee and Heinrick Campendonk their first solo exhibitions.

In the Société Anonyme's 1921 Annual Report, Dreier listed herself as an expressionist. Additionally, the Société Anonyme's reference library was comprised in part of many German publications, including Paul Fechter's Expressionismus, Wilhelm Worringer's Abstraktion und Einfühlung, and the pamphlet produced by the Work Council for the Arts, Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrates für Kunst in Berlin. Among numerous periodicals held by the organization

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were Die Aktion, Der Ararat, Der Anbruch, Die Rote Erde, Der Sturm, Der Schrei, and Der Dada[19].

As Norman Rosenthal has stated: "In contrast to the formal and decorative qualities prevalent in French art...[in German art] the concern [has been] with art as a therapeutic activity, a means towards a better, more optimistic form of life."[20] This is a sentiment that Dreier shared. Dreier's appreciation for and understanding of German aspects of modern art extended beyond a mere formal enjoyment to a fuller involvement with the more esoteric leanings that many of these artists subscribed to. She corresponded extensively with many of the leading artists in Germany, especially Kandinsky and Schwitters, and developed a deep understanding for what they were trying to achieve in their art. In a lecture she gave at the New School for Social Research regarding "Present Day German Tendencies," she stated: "Russia and Germany are essentially nations who concern themselves with philosophy,"[21] and it was this esoteric quality in art that would always be of interest to her.

In gathering works for her exhibitions, especially the Brooklyn Museum show, Dreier travelled throughout Europe. German stops included Hannover, Dessau, and Berlin. Hannover in the 20's was a thriving city as far as the arts were concerned: "A new dance form (Mary Wigman, Max Teris,

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Yvone Georgi, Harold Kreutzberg) was created, buildings of well-known architects (Poelzig, Hoeger, van de Velde) went up and open-minded publishers (such as Steegman-Verlag) established themselves successfully."[22] Hannover was also the home of the Landesmuseum, which was directed by Alexander Dorner from 1922-1936.[23] Guiding her through such an artistic mecca were Kurt and Helma Schwitters and Sophie Küppers, who was not only an art dealer but would also marry El Lissitzky in 1927.

Dreier and Schwitters in particular struck up a strong friendship, one that was to last until Schwitters' death. As Hanne Bergius has written: "Chiefly among [his] contacts was Katherine Dreier, a co-founder of the Société Anonyme, and it was thanks to her understanding of avant-garde art that Schwitters was accorded so excellent an introduction to the USA."[24] Gwendolen Webster described their relationship in even more glowing terms: "Katherine Dreier seemed too good to be true. She was...a valuable lifeline to [the Schwitters] in an often indifferent world."[25] Schwitters invited Dreier to live in Europe and she attempted to arrange his transfer to America.

Dreier had intended to sponsor an exhibition of Schwitters' and Lissitzky's works, but she never realized this goal. Nevertheless, she became a major collector of Schwitters' work and exhibited and often tried to sell his

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Merz pictures. In fact, Dreier had a deep sensitivity for the Merz pictures and even equated Schwitters with Duchamp. She once wrote: "I was so angry with Alfred Barr when he translated the word--Merz--with Rubbish Picture...Schwitters used it in the same philosophic term as Duchamp did in the mural [presumably either Tu m' or The Large Glass]. They took that which had been rejected."[26] In November of 1928 Dreier hosted an evening of music and poetry at her home, a prominent feature of which was the recital of Schwitters' Lautsonate. There was also some discussion of Dreier attempting to produce a film version of Schwitters' story Zoologische Gartenlotterie, but this never came close to being realized.

When Dreier was in Dessau, she went to the Bauhaus. Dreier had previously visited the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1922, where she met with Kandisnky and Klee and through them met other faculty memebers and students. The Société Anonyme collection featured works by numerous Bauhaus artists, including: Josef Albers, Rudolf Bauer, Willi Baumeister, Werner Drewes, Lionel Feininger, Kandinsky, Klee, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Georg Muche. Moreover, when many of these artists fled to America during the reign of the National Socialists, she endeavored to connect them with viable situations. In Berlin she acquainted herself with the artists associated with Der Sturm and reestablished her ties

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with Walden. Among the artists whose works Dreier first experienced through Der Sturm were Bauer, Campendonk, Oskar Fischer, Klee, Johannes Molzahn, Kurt Schwitters, and the Hungarians Béla Kádár, Sándor Bortnyik, and Moholy-Nagy.

In terms of general awareness of what was happening in Germany at the time, it is evident that Dreier did not particularly favor the Neue Sachlichkeit artists (although she and Grosz could be seen as having very similar goals in terms of bringing new art to the masses). She once wrote to Barr of her dislike for Otto Dix in particular, claiming that he was not doing anything new, he had built up a career out of filth, and he was too successful to need the Société Anonyme.[27] Dreier was not terribly fond of Käthe Kollwitz's art either, and once wrote to a friend: "In speaking to Käthe Kollwitz...be sure to say that from my point of view her intense interest in sociological problems causes her to belong more to a literary phase of expression through the eye rather than to the realm of pure art."[28]

Dreier did have an appreciation for Dada. As mentioned, she was a full supporter of Schwitters, whom she listed as a Dadaist. Moreover, in a letter to Gabrielle Buffet Picabia concerning a planned trip to Germany, she wrote:

> It may interest you to know that when I am in Germany, I shall get in touch with Max Ernst and I hope to arrange for an exhibition of his work and that of his confreres as well. Would you be so

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> kind as to get in touch with Tzra [sic] and ask him how much he would charge us to send a monthly letter with short telegraphic sentences, telling us about the general happenings and the exhibitions pertaining to the modern art movement in Europe.[29]

Dreier has long suffered a reputation in the literature for lacking any comprehension of Dada, and yet her appreciation for this art seems to have been sincere and somewhat insightful when she wrote to John Graham that Dada

> Is a profound philosophic truth which was presented in mocking form. The philosophic thought that only the human mind gives value to any given object--per se it has no value at all. Picabia and Duchamp were just as much founders of [Dada] as Tzara and Arp.[30]

In Western Art and the New Era she further explained that the Dadaists "express themselves through satire. The more cutting and biting their satire is, the more pleased they are. They laugh at you but they do not spare themselves."[31] Some American examples of Dada that she listed included advertising, jazz, and Charlie Chaplin.

The Société Anonyme's support of Dada was not limited to the movement's European manifestations. As has already been discussed, from its inception the Société Anonyme was firmly rooted in the Arensberg circle of New York Dada; how could any organization co-founded by Duchamp and Man Ray not be? According to William Agee: "In its first three years the Société Anonyme was a hotbed of Dada ideas and activities and was particularly important in maintaining the movement

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after Duchamp and Man Ray had left for Paris in 1921." This included the art that Dreier brought to America, including that of Schwitters, who "quickly became a Dada influence in America as important as Duchamp or Picabia."[32] Among the artists Agee lists as having been influenced by seeing Schwitters' work are Joseph Stella, Stuart Davis, and Arthur Dove. In fact, Agee credits Dreier with having insight when she referred to Dove in Modern Art as the "only American Dadaist," which he calls "an overstatement, to be sure, but a revealing, contemporary account of a relationship we have overlooked ever since."[33] Another artist we could consider having been impressed by the materiality of the Merz pictures is John Covert. Covert's career was an unfortunately brief one, but his assemblages and abstract compositions were of such a sophistication that George Heard Hamilton has written: "On the basis of these few but provocative works it is possible to say that by 1920 John Covert as much as any of his contemporaries was in a position to lead the avant-garde of American art."[34] When Covert abandoned art to become a businessman in 1923 he donated his works to the Société Anonyme, thus initiating its permanent collection with a representative from the American avant-garde.

Despite her reputation for being Eurocentric, all of Dreier's efforts intended to benefit the American public.

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Dreier supported American artists in direct ways as well. Not only did she include American artists in her exhibitions--lest one forget, she was an American artist herself, and 28 of the 106 artists in the Brooklyn Museum Exhibition were American--she more importantly aided these artists by purchasing their works. Through the years Dreier added to the permanent collection with purchases from artists like Morton Schamberg, Marsden Hartley (who was secretary of the Société for many years and shared with Dreier a great appreciation for German art and culture), Joseph Stella, and Patrick Henry Bruce. At final count there were 53 American artists in the permanent collection, more than any other nationality.

Man Ray was a fellow founder of the Société Anonyme, and although he was invited--and accepted--because of Duchamp, he did not take his responsibilities for the Museum very seriously, which led to clashes with Dreier. Nonetheless, the alleged enmity between these two is largely false. Despite later historians' mistaken belief that "the domineering collector seems to have had little use for the talents of the young, nonconformist American artist,"[35] as their correspondence attests, Dreier always expressed an appreciation for Man Ray's art and a willingness to add it to the Société's collection. Ray, in his turn, was

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consistently polite to Dreier and showed a genuine interest in the fortunes of the organization.

Dreier did not encourage these different areas of modernism in isolation from one another, but rather endeavored to serve as connector and catalyst. The Société Anonyme exhibitions were usually an eclectic mix bringing together in one show representatives from many different movements and nationalities. Moreover, the Société--and Dreier herself--served as a research resource, often for foreign artists and materials that could not be found anywhere else. Very often Dreier was a point of reference between the two continents. Thus El Lissitzky would ask her to send American print media to him and Duchamp would prevail upon her as a sort of de facto American agent for himself. On this side of the Atlantic, there was a request from Alfred Barr to introduce Dreier to Phillip Johnson, who "shares our interest in Germany and in German Art and wants very much to see your pictures."[36] Dreier also lent the dancer/choreographer Ted Shawn a large sum of money and arranged a tour for him through Germany, where he could bring American modern dance to Europe and establish ties with German choreographers such as Mary Wigman. Perhaps one of the most profound examples of Dreier's serving as a means to an artist's development is that of Stuart Davis and his Egg Beaters series.

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Stuart Davis (1892-1964) has long been regarded as one of the most important American artists of the 20th century. One of the most crucial set of paintings he executed was called the Egg Beater series, whose compositional and structural breakthroughs were so important to the artist that he once remarked to James Johnson Sweeney: "You may say that everything I have done since has been based on that eggbeater idea."[37]

These works, executed in 1927-28, are paintings of abstract shapes, lines and planes that interact with one another in complex ways, and are invariably described in the literature as being cubist-derived: Diane Kelder has called the Egg Beaters "the climax of Davis' efforts to master Cubist structure"[38] and Louis Kachur has written that Davis "had already proved himself an accomplished cubist with his recently completed Egg Beater series,"[39] just to cite two recent examples. Furthermore, William C. Agee has carefully traced the entrenchment of cubism's lessons in Davis' art in his essay on Davis during 1922-24.[40]

Yet Ruth Bohan has suggested an alternative inspiration for this seminal series. Bohan proposes that Davis found a catalyst in the works of El Lissitzky, whose paintings he saw at the 1926 survey of modern art that was organized by the Société Anonyme and held at the Brooklyn Museum.[41] While an in-depth study of Davis' series was not a goal of

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Bohan's nor entirely appropriate in the context of her study of the exhibition, there are enough substantial clues for a careful consideration of the possibility. Indeed it is quite odd that in the more than ten years since Bohan's book was published, no Davis scholar has been interested in bearing out or disproving her postulate, one which offers a completely new interpretation of the central body of work of one of the greatest American modernists. This interpretation furthermore opens up the range of influences upon Davis to go far beyond the incessantly evoked School of Paris.

Davis was included in the Brooklyn Exhibition after writing to Dreier. She and Davis had both shown their artwork in the Armory Show and knew some of the same people but apparently had never become acquainted with one another. It is tempting to think that Davis might have seen the Société Anonyme's 1925 Léger exhibition, although there is no record of this, given the close connections that would develop between the art of the two men. At the time when Dreier was planning the Brooklyn exhibition there had not been a survey of modern art on such a scale since at least the 1917 Independent Show. Davis' excitement over the prospect of being in such an exhibition is evident in a letter he wrote to Dreier: "Burliuk saw my work and said I should be in the show. I would like very much to be a member

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of the Societe [sic] and will do anything you may suggest to make it possible..."[42] Even if his tone was somewhat overly polite and solicitous, the genuine feeling of interest and desire to be included is apparent. Dreier responded warmly to Davis, telling him she had followed his work for years[43], and later upon seeing his painting wrote: "I was delighted when I saw your picture and...I shall, of course, exhibit it."[44]

Davis was forthright in his praise for the exhibition, writing that "the exhibition itself was an inspiration to me and has given me a fresh impulse."[45] By this point Davis and Dreier seem to have struck up a friendship, inviting one another over for discussions when they were both in Manhattan, and Davis offerred his services to the Société. Indeed, Davis did not stop commenting on the Brooklyn show after it had left the museum. All participating artists were given a complementary copy of the catalogue and Davis seems to have made use of his. He wrote to Dreier: "Looking through the catalogue has been a very stimulating experience. I have gotten more from the catalogue than from the exhibition itself owing to the understanding that comes with familiarity. It would interest me very much to see more reproductions of the constructionist [sic] school, Lissitzky, etc..." Out of 106 artists Lissitzky is the only name he singled out. Davis then continued: "Inquiry at the

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stores where art books are sold failed to produce any and so I thought I might be able to see some in your library. I would also like to talk to you about art and living conditions in Germany. It is possible I may go there."[46]

While there is no record of what books Dreier might have lent to Davis, the two seem to have had discussions about art. Since Dreier was fresh from closing the Brooklyn exhibition (which had travelled to Manhattan, Buffalo and Toronto) and had acquired some Lissitzky works for the Société she was definitely prepared to answer most of Davis' questions. Furthermore she was preparing an exhibition of Lissitzky and Schwitters for 1928, and was actually corresponding with both Lissitzky and his wife, Sophie Küppers. Although she and Lissitzky never met, their correspondence was certainly warm, and Dreier would furthermore supply Lissitzky with sports magazines and other graphic material which reflected American culture to him.[47]

Given the amount of information that Dreier was able to supply (knowledge virtually no other of their peers was capable of imparting), Davis must surely have been excited by the many parallels between himself and the Russian artist.

The main examples of Lissitzky's work that Davis was exposed to were his Prounen. This series of calculatedly arranged architectonic abstract shapes was executed by

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Lissitzky from 1919 to 1924. The word Proun has been given some differing interpretations but the standard seems to have been as an acronym for PROjekty Utverzhdeniya Novogo: Projects for the Affirmation for the New.[48] These works took the pure, reduced geometric shapes that were produced in the Russian Suprematist movement and gave them a sort of ambiguous materiality and broader set of applications. Sophie Küppers has described the Prounen as follows: "There, within the confines of the picture-frame, was cosmic space, in which floating geometric forms were held counterpoised by tremendous tensile forces," and she mentioned that Lissitzky regarded them as "the interchange...between painting and architecture."[49]

Many of these concepts find their reflection in Davis' treatment of the Egg Beaters. John Lane has discussed this series in terms of "the forging a harmonious relationship between the geometric planes representing subject matter transferred to a flat surface."[50] James Johnson Sweeney presented them as "an invented series of planes which was interesting to the artist."[51] Both artists were essentially concerned with a new constructed spatiality, in which each artist has laid out a somewhat obscure yet extremely compatible system of reconstructed space, reconfigured subjects, machine aesthetics and angular geometric forms with which to put forth their artistic message.

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Furthermore, both emphasized the confines of the rectangular canvas even as they attempted to subvert it.

The similarity between Davis' and Lissitzky's two series extends beyond overlapping theories. One need only to examine some examples from each series to see the relationship. While there were seven paintings by Lissitzky in the Brooklyn exhibition, only one was reproduced in the catalogue that Davis continued to examine--Proun 99 [Fig. 4]. This painting is both highly ephemeral with its nonrepresentational floating forms and materialistically grounded with its silver and black paint and perspectival grid. Yet standard conventions of dimensionality are subverted, as in the fact that the diagonals of the grid do not converge as they should in Renaissance perspective and the cube can be seen as either solid or hollow, advancing or receding.

These blocky forms are complemented by thin wiry lines which change color depending upon their background. Many of the same things could be said, for example, about Egg Beater No. 2 [Fig. 5] or No. 4 [Fig. 6] with their large diagonal planes which seem to inscribe a new space yet bear no true perspectival relation with the rest of the created spaces. Furthermore, these paintings also contain thin wiry lines that change colors given the ground they are placed upon.

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After exploring the facts and making comparisons of both the artists' works and their similar attitudes, a recognition of the role that El Lissitzky played in the Egg Beaters of Stuart Davis is unavoidable. Furthermore, the absolutely essential role that Dreier played cannot be ignored. She managed to connect two disparate artists who never met one another, and through her efforts--both curatorial and pedagogical--helped to dramatically alter the course of one of America's most important artists and set him on the path of his mature style. To consider this case is to realize the breadth that international modernism enjoyed.

The Francocentric view of modernism is a model that has recently begun to be reappraised and its limitations have become more clear. For several decades of the 20th century, modernists were unwilling or unable to look beyond France's borders. The explorations and appreciation of German, Soviet, and prewar American modernism are still relatively new. Yet as these modernisms assume a greater place in the narrative of twentieth century art, Dreier's role in that narrative continues to be recognized.

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Notes for Chapter Two

1. KSD, proposal to Carnegie Corporation, Katherine Dreier File, MOMA.

2. KSD, Letter to Paul Warburg, 18 April 1923, BL.

3. Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 36.

4. KSD, Modern Art, 14.

5. Ibid., 82.

6. Although, as William Agee has suggested, there is a case to be made for considering Duchamp an American artist. Not only did Duchamp eventually obtain American citizenship, but the majority of his most important works, including but not limited to the Large Glass, were made in New York.

7. Herbert, Apted, and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 400.

8. Fernand Leger, Letter to KSD, 1 August 1925, BL.

9. KSD, "Modern Art," Buffalo Arts Journal (April 1927), 232-33.

10. The Brooklyn Museum's Exhibition of Russian Painting and Sculpture, with a text by Christian Brinton, was on display from January through March 1923. The Société Anonyme, which lent a Kandinsky and an Archipenko to the exhibition, held their show of Russian modernism in 1924.

11. Herbert, Apted, and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 428.

12. KSD, Modern Art, 69.

13. While there are still many art historians who feel it is worthwhile to debate over which national affiliation belongs to which artist--ie, is Ernst German or French, Duchamp French or American, Kandisnky Russian or German--this author is choosing to sidestep the entire issue. References to nationalities or grouping are all borrowed from the Catalogue Raisonné Appendix 1.

14. Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 47.

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15. KSD, Modern Art, p. 70. Like many other aspects of her writings, there is no lifetime consistency in Dreier's choice whether or not to capitalize movement names. Since this quote chooses not to, my text follows suit for consistency.

16. KSD, Modern Art, unpaginated; towards the back of the book.

17. Pierre Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 57.

18. KSD, Letter to Duchamp, 5 August 1938, BL.

19. The Société Anonyme: Its Why and Wherefore, n/p.

20. Norman Rosenthal, "A Will to Art in 20th Century Germany," in German Art in the 20th Century, ed. Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal, and Wieland Schmid (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1985), 13.

21. KSD, "Present Day German Tendencies," 1931, ms. BL.

22. Dietrich Helms, "The 1920's in Hannover," Art Journal 22 (Spring 1963): 140.

23. For more on Dorner and the Landesmuseum, see: Samuel Cauman, The Living Museum (New York: New York University Press, 1958).

24. Hanne Bergius, "Kurt Schwitters: Aspects of Merz and Dada," in German Art of the 20th Century, p. 445.

25. Gwendolen Webster, Kurt Merz Schwitters: A Biographical Study (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 186.

26. KSD, Letter to George Heard Hamilton, 17 December 1945, BL.

27. KSD, Letter to Barr, 14 March 1927, Alfred H. Barr Papers, MOMA.

28. KSD, Letter to Miss Kerr, 9 May 1926, BL.

29. KSD, Letter to Gabrielle Buffet, 10 May 1920, BL.

30. KSD, Letter to Graham, 7 July 1936, BL.

31. KSD, Western Art and the New Era, 118.

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32. William Agee, "New York Dada, 1910-1930," ArtNews Annual (1968): 112.

33. Ibid., 113.

34. George H. Hamilton, "John Covert: Early American Modern," College Art Journal 12 (Fall 1952): 41.

35. Francis Naumann, New York Dada: 1917-1923, 90.

36. Alfred Barr, Letter to KSD, 25 May 1934, BL.

37. Reprinted in Diane Kelder, Stuart Davis (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 7.

38. Diane Kelder, "Stuart Davis and Modernism: An Overview," in Stuart Davis: An American Painter, ed. Lowery Stokes Sims (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 24.

39. Louis Kachur, Stuart Davis: An American in Paris (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1987), 2.

40. William Agee, Stuart Davis: The Breakthrough Years, 1922-1924 (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 1987).

41. Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 125.

42. Stuart Davis, Letter to KSD, 25 September 1926, BL.

43. KSD, Letter to Davis, 29 September 1926, BL.

44. KSD, Letter to Davis, 13 October 1926, BL.

45. Stuart Davis, Letter to KSD, 5 April 1927, BL.

46. Stuart Davis, Letter to KSD, 15 April 1927, BL.

47. El Lissitzky, Letter to KSD, 26 July 1926, BL.

48. Sophie Küppers, El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 11.

49. Ibid., 21.

50. John Lane, Stuart Davis: Art and Theory (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 16.

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51. James Johnson Sweeney, Stuart Davis, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1945), 16.

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Chapter Three
Art as Activism

Dreier was forever displeased at being described as being merely a collector. This is not surprising, since such a label overlooks many of her other roles and achievements. Moreover, to consider Dreier only as a collector is to put her interest in art firmly in the realm of the elitist and self-indulgent, when from the beginning Dreier's involvement with art was marked by an activist sensibility. As Milton Brown has written: "The modern collector does not play as vital a role in the development of art as did the patron of other times...To the tycoons of the late 19th and early 20th centuries collecting art presented the highest form of conspicuous consumption, indicative of wealth and refinement."[1] This model of art patron was completely antithetical to Dreier. She was not involved in art because it was expected of a woman of her class. In fact, the opposite was true; although cultural cultivation was of some importance in Dreier's family, it was insignificant in relation to a sense of civic commitment.

While Dreier's brother was allowed to pursue his ambitions in the world of business, with seemingly few other interests, it was incumbent upon the women to play a more socially active role. Dreier's older sister Margaret was an

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advocate of the working class and helped found the Women's Trade Union League. Her sister Mary was active in the Suffrage movement and supported many charities. Later, her nephew Theodore would found Black Mountain College. Dreier herself was the model of the Progressive Era woman while in her twenties, when she worked as the Treasurer of the German Home for Recreation for Women and Children (which her mother had helped found), the Director of the Manhattan Trade School for Girls, and the founder of the Little Italy Neighborhood Association.[2] These activities, while no doubt gratifying for Dreier, were not sufficient to supplant her interest in art and her desire to pursue a career as an artist. She would therefore spend her professional life attempting to combine her involvement in art with a larger social vision.

Modern art was a perfect vehicle for such ambitions. While there are still many people who would agree with Charles Alexander's assertion that "Modernism, preoccupied with technique and idiosyncratic statement, relieved the creative individual of any obligation to make himself understood,"[3] as Dreier saw it the need was all the greater for someone to help render this art intelligible to the masses. It was Dreier's conviction that art was a beneficial force in society, and she lamented what she saw as the breach between art and everyday life in America.

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One of Dreier's earliest attempts to put her reform-through-art theories into practice was an organization she founded in either 1913 or 1914 called the Cooperative Mural Workshops. This group was based upon the ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris[4], who sought to reform post-Industrial Revolution society through a return to excellence in design and an emphasis on handicraft. Sensing a kindred sensibility in the desire to unite aesthetics and social reform, Dreier engaged herself deeply in the writings of these two men and of later English examples to follow their ideals, such as the Omega Workshops, while she lived and studied in London from 1909-1912. Though short-lived, Dreier and her colleagues wanted the organization "to seek the principles of art along the lines of democracy, and to make a vigorous attempt to bring democracy into the realm of art."[5] The organization's prospectus indicated the desire to include "architects, landscape gardeners, sculptors, pottery makers, cabinet makers, tile makers, weavers, needle workers, etc."[6] as one comprehensive design firm, similar to such European models as the Omega Workshops or the Wiener Werkstätte. Moreover, this organization was run exclusively by women.

Although it was disbanded before the end of World War I and there remain practically no records of its existence or remnants of its projects, the Cooperative Mural Workshops

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represents essentially the first example in America of putting into practice the ideals of handicraft versus prefabrication and arts organizations as viable business collectives. This embrace of the handcrafted design product and the goal of improving society through better wares derived directly from the theories and practice of Ruskin and Morris. It is quite evident from the Workshops and the terms in which Dreier discussed them that the English Arts and Crafts Movement had left an indelible impression upon her, one that was reinforced by her years spent living in England. It was also through her awareness of Ruskin and Morris that Dreier became fond of the works of Oscar Wilde, himself indebted to the two men, and she avidly collected first-edition copies of his works.

Of greater reach and more lasting impact was the Société Anonyme. With this organization Dreier was in a position to promote the most challenging art being produced, aid living artists who often had little support, and render a great service to the general public. The Société Anonyme was chartered with the aim of being an educational institution, and Dreier took this role very seriously. Towards this end, she supplemented exhibitions with pamphlets and lectures and frequently arranged Société Anonyme exhibitions at such unconventional venues as colleges and trade schools.

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When Dreier turned toward increasingly radical art, however, she found herself often criticized by her former Progressivist colleagues. These criticisms were often laced with an unfavorable comparison between what she was attempting and her sister Margaret's endeavors, and she often found herself having to defend her choices: "It took a long time to become fully convinced that what I was attempting to do was as constructive a piece of work as what my sister is trying to do. We in America look upon art so serenely as a non-essential, that if we do not take care, we will soon find that we are pure materialists."[7] On another occasion she wrote to the Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League: "Unless you leaders will recognize that art is an essential quality of life, and of spiritual value, you are going to pull down your people, instead of helping them to inherit the earth,"[8] and a few days later: "Art is not a luxury but a necessity...if you were right and I was wrong, you would find no love of Art, no appreciation of art except among the wealthy; but even you know that's not true."[9]

Even during her Brooklyn Museum exhibition she endured the displeasure of an old family friend, to whom she finally defended herself by writing that "ever since the death of my parents all the influences in my life tended to kill the art in me and to turn my energies into other channels which they deemed more important." Having found art once again, she

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offerred to her friend: "Any time you would like to talk to me about Modern Art I should be only too happy to answer questions, because that at present is my life's work--just answering questions."[10]

Dreier attempted to undertake other projects to help realize her goals. One of these was her proposal in the mid-1930's to establish a College of Fine Arts under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation. As opposed to most art academies at the time, Dreier's school would have been more progressive in its orientation and was in many ways modelled after the Bauhaus. For example, she wrote: "The proposed College of Fine Arts differs from all others in that the students are placed in the relationship of apprentice and master...because our faculty is composed of artists actively engaged in work in their own studios on the premises."[11] In outlining plans for the school, alternately entitled the Carnegie Guild and College of Art, she drafted pedagogical diagrams shaped as wheels, much like Gropius' for the Bauhaus [Fig. 7]. She wrote: "Each student will be taught that the only value of his contribution in art is to be true to his own vision, no matter how modest, for all imitation is suicidal." She prepared a budget that would render the school self-sustaining within three years, and suggested courses such as Theory and Practice of Color (from the title this would seem to have been derived from the Bauhaus

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Preliminary Course), Fundamentals of Symbolism, and her own course, the Development of the Imagination. She would also supervise students interested in museum work.[12]

Although the proposed school was never established, Dreier did teach some courses. In 1930 she was invited by the Rand School for Social Science to teach a course and in 1931 the New School for Social Research did the same. These courses consisted of a series of lectures, which could be attended individually or through subscription. Some of her lecture topics were "Intrinsic Significance in Modern Art," and a series of "Present-Day Tendencies" in Germany, Russia, France and America[13]. She supplemented these lectures by arranging exhibitions at the schools, including one that inaugurated the New School's new building at 66 West 12th St in 1931. She also presented an "Evening with Art of the Future" at the New School, which featured Lotte Reiniger's Prince Achmed, Duchamp's Anemic Cinema, and Archipenko's motorized Archipentura, among other interesting exhibits and performances. Years later she also gave a series of lectures at Weylister Junior College, a local girls' college in Connecticut. Art for Dreier was always to be placed in the public's service, and was seldom unaccompanied by pedagogy.

One of the main reasons Dreier turned to art as an instrument for her activism was that she herself was an

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artist. Dreier's belief and interest in art, however, extended beyond mere formal enjoyment. Her views on art were not only formed by social philosophies such as Ruskin and Morris' aesthetic Socialism but were also directly related to her interest in spirituality and occultism. In fact, Dreier's life work can basically be seen as an attempt to marry her spiritual, artistic, and reformist principles.

Dreier's esoteric leanings were typically idiosyncratic but were dependent upon a few key sources. These included an awareness of and appreciation for Theosophy and the metaphysical theories of Wassily Kandinsky. Theosophy's influence for many artists and intellectuals at the beginning of the century should not be discounted. As Peter Fingesten has written: "During the forty years of its greatest influence (1875-1915) it made a deep impression in the thinking of many leading scientists (Flammarion), philosophers (Rudolph Steiner), scholars (Max Muller), writers (Maeterlink), musicians (Scriabin), and artists (Kandinsky and Mondrian)."[14] Dreier's personal involvement with Theosophy and its offshoots is evident in many ways. In an essay she wrote for a book that the Dreier siblings published to commemorate their mother, Katherine recalled sitting at the dinner table as a child and members of her family discussing Theosophy, "which was then much talked about."[15] As late as 1943, in a lecture Dreier gave

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entitled "Intrinsic Significance in Modern Art," she stated: "It is not only the physical eye which sees, but the mind or inner eye." She then moved on to a discussion of "Madame Blavatsky, who died in 1891, formed the Theosophical Society and was one of the great women of the last century."[16] She also took time to criticize the 1947 book The Mona Lisa's Mustache for the irreverence with which it treated Blavatsky. Dreier also expressed her dissatisfaction with the book to her sister Mary: "You of course know that [Blavatsky] founded the Theosophical Society which had as its base--To establish a nucleus of the Brotherhood of man and to promote the study of comparative religion and philosophy and science. Think of referring to this wonderful effort as a 'sinister influence'!"[17]

In addition to Blavatsky, Dreier owned Annie Besant and James Leadbetter's Thought Forms and appears to have been familiar with the theories of Rudolph Steiner since many of her ideas regarding art seem to be modelled on his.[18] Throughout her life Dreier underwent extensive spiritual training. Initially she attended classes with the Aso-Neith Cochran Cryptogram School of Universal Vibration. Virtually nothing is known about this school, but Dreier's scribbled notes relating to it include ideas on numerology, cryptograms, and sketches for occult earring designs. During her studies with Cochran, Dreier assumed the name

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Enea. Later Dreier studied with a man named Dr. Pedro Pequeno, whose lessons were largely imparted through a series of mail-order lectures (although Dreier does mention talking to him frequently). Pequeno often invoked Blavatsky and Theosophy in his somewhat obscure texts.[19]

To Dreier, these esoteric investigations and her role as an artist were inseparable. In a 1937 lecture she gave on modern art she stated: "To the true artist or art lover...Art is as profound and deep as religion."[20] As the title suggests, in Western Art and the New Era Dreier mapped out a system whereby a new era of the spiritual had arrived and she suggested that all such eras brought about a revolution in art. Even more explicitly, in the Brooklyn Museum catalogue she wrote: "The secret of [art's] power lies in the fact that cosmic forces are at work and with such potentiality enter the individual who perceives them that it changes his vision and sweeps him upwards to greater heights...Modern Art is the outgrowth of cosmic expression...it is something beyond the people."[21]

The Société Anonyme's collection contained many artists who were concerned with Theosophy and spirituality, notably Marc, Mondrian, and Kandinsky, one of the most important artists in Dreier's life. Dreier first learned of Kandinsky while studying art in Europe, and his Art of Spiritual Harmony was one of the prized volumes in the Société Anonyme

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library. She met him at the Bauhaus in 1922[22], and in 1923 the Société Anonyme gave him his first solo show in America. Kandisnky was named honorary Vice President of the Société Anonyme, and the catalogue to the Brooklyn Museum exhibition was dedicated to him in honor of his 60th birthday. Dreier was also granted the rights to translate Kandinsky's Punkt und Linie zur Fläche into English, although these were ultimately transferred to Hilla Rebay.[23]

While Dreier was friends with and respected many artists, Kandinsky occupied a special niche in her pantheon, one that even Duchamp could not quite claim. Like many artists interested in removing material reality from their art, Dreier looked to Kandinsky as a beacon. As Rose-Carol Washton Long has written: "His essays, with their moral and philosophical justification of abstraction as the ultimate purveyor of spiritual values, provided a metaphysical impetus for the development of an abstract style."[24] Dreier herself wrote to the Director of the Brooklyn Museum, stating: "I believe you know that I consider Kandinsky even more important than Picasso as far as the future is concerned, for he is less whimsical and more constructive."[25] The correspondence between Dreier and Kandinsky is warm and full of observations of the art being made around them.

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As much as Kandinsky's influence upon Dreier's writings is evident, it is in her own art that we can see a very close relationship. Dreier's artistic output is very uneven, and owing to her energies being dispersed elsewhere it is sometimes easy to understand why most people have not thought of her as an artist first and foremost, despite her wishes. Moreover, she experimented with various styles and tendencies and could at times appear like a dabbler. In her oeuvre, one can find examples of her own personal interpretations of Whistlerian tonality (Moonlight on the Thames--Fig. 8), Van Gogh' Post-Impressionism (Path, Holland, Fig. 9), Stella's Futurism (Stonington Harbor, Fig. 10), Chagall's hybridization (The Cat, Fig. 11), Surrealism (Futile Activity, Fig. 12), and even a very stark proto-Minimalist type of abstraction (Untitled, Fig. 13). Most of her art, however, involves some aspect of metaphysical abstraction, and these paintings can be related to Kandinsky or Theosophy, either in specifics or in general tenor.

In 1918 Dreier painted her Abstract (Psychological) Portrait of Marcel Duchamp [Fig. 14], now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Dreier was not the first artist to work in abstract or nonconventional portraiture at the time; rather she was operating in a milieu established by such artists as Marius De Zayas, Francis Picabia and Arthur Dove [Fig. 15-17]. Yet she was different in

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attempting to get at the pure spirit of her subject, without relying on external or biographical clues. This horizontal painting features a central disc, offset by some off-center triangles and overlapped by a long expanding form that projects diagonally from the upper left corner. This particular element could have some relation to the diagonal color patches similarly situated in Duchamp's own Tu m' [Fig. 18] of the same year, which Dreier commissioned from him. It could also, however, relate to some of the trumpet forms that we see in many of Kandinsky's apocryphal sketches and pre-abstract paintings, in this case perhaps signalling Duchamp's role as a herald of a new age [Fig. 19]. Dreier's employment of triangles is also of interest, and could relate to Kandinsky's own dictum: "A triangle...is a decided being, possessing its very own spiritual essence," and his suggestion that the triangle can be seen as a schematic diagram representing the artist advancing ideas and concepts before the masses.[26] The floating, ungrounded triangle also appears in Thought Forms as the projectile of directed thought [Fig. 20]. This glyph also appears in Dreier's painting The Eternal Hills [Fig. 21], which was included in the 1936 Mysticism in Art exhibition at the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Gallery in Springfield, Massachusetts.

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The circular disc in the center of the painting is a particularly recurring motif of Dreier's. Perhaps a visual rendering of all the references Blavatsky makes to wheels and cycles in her writings, the spiral or circle also has a longstanding association with the spiritual in built forms and design, dating back at least to Stonehenge. More importantly, the spiralling circle figures in Thought Forms as the "LOGOS" of pure thought [Fig. 22]. This potentially rotating circle appears not only in the portrait of Duchamp, but can also be found in works such as 1926's Unknown Forces [Fig. 23], In Orbit of 1934-35 [Fig. 24], and two other abstract portraits; that of the dancer Ted Shawn and the composer Dr. Vassily Savadsky, done in 1929 and 1931, respectively [Fig. 25, 26].

Dreier's portraits--and sponsorship--of Shawn and Savadsky reveal her interest in synesthesia. As Long has written: "Several Theosophists also viewed the synthesis of the arts--using the theatre as the basic framework--as the most direct means of communicating their ideas to a larger audience."[27] Dreier showed an awareness of and appreciation for these principles when she lectured and said that Kandinsky's first contribution was "accustomizing the eye to the beauty of color as the ear is trained to the beauty of sound."[28] As an artist her involvement with this concept is realized in her portraits of Shawn and Savadsky. Her

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involvement in connecting the arts, however, was more actively pursued through the Société Anonyme, which produced programs of modern music recitals, including Savadsky's, and was the official sponsor of an evening at her home in 1928 which included music performances, dance discussed and demonstrated by Ted Shawn, and Schwitter's poetry being recited. Dreier's involvement with modern dance began with the Cooperative Mural Workshops, which apparently sponsored Isadora Duncan's company for a season, but it reached a fuller level with Ted Shawn.

Ted Shawn, born Edward Myers Shawn on October 21, 1891, had intended for most of his early life to be a minister. While a university student, however, he contracted diphtheria and was temporarily paralyzed from the waist down due to the medicine he was given. The physical therapy he had to undergo lead him to become involved in dance. After a brief career as a dancer-entertainer, he began a relationship with Ruth St. Denis in 1914, and the two would eventually marry and establish the Denishawn School and Dance Company.[29] Denishawn is well-known to anyone familiar with modern dance for its innovations, along with other pioneers such as Isadora Duncan, for an expanded dance vocabulary and the introduction of nonwestern dance motifs into a standard repertory. As a school, Denishawn was

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responsible for training Martha Graham, among other dance luminaries.

By 1930, Shawn and St. Denis had parted on a personal as well as a professional level. He then began a new chapter in modern dance by founding a troupe of all-male dancers at Jacob's Pillow in Lee, Massachusetts. For the next four decades Shawn would labor constantly: devising new dances, training new recruits of young men in modern dance, and running the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. He remained largely active until his death in 1972.

It is not entirely clear under what circumstances Shawn and Dreier met. According to Herbert, they met in the Autumn of 1928.[30] However, in a rough manuscript for an unpublished autobiography, Shawn suggests that he participated in an activity of Dreier's related to her Brooklyn Museum exhibition (curiously, this is one of the only mentions he makes of Dreier in the entire text).[31] The 1928 date seems to be the likeliest, since this is the year that Shawn opened his own studio in Westport, Connecticut, thus making him a neighbor of Dreier's. It is also at this point that the correspondence between the two begins. They became close friends almost immediately, and remained as such until Dreier's death. During this time they supported each other's projects both emotionally and financially and

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formed a bond of mutual admiration that is sometimes remarkable for its intensity.

There are many reasons why Shawn and Dreier sensed a kindred spirit in one another. To begin with, both shared a German ancestry to which they felt quite connected. They expressed this connection by paying attention to German cultural developments at a time when most of their peers were devoted to Paris. As discussed in Chapter Two, Dreier collected and exhibited a disproportionately large number of German artists. For his part, Shawn wrote an article in 1930 about modern dance in Germany in which he envisioned a "German-American brotherhood" that would bring the art of the dance to the fore.[32] In pursuing this aim, Shawn embarked upon two performing tours of Germany, in 1930 and 1931. Both trips were underwritten by Dreier,[33] who at times accompanied Shawn and introduced him to German audiences in her role as President of the Société Anonyme.

Another major connection between Dreier and Shawn was their adherence to spirituality and a greater esoteric significance in their work. Shawn commented upon this aspect of their relationship almost immediately. In 1929 he wrote to Dreier about her book Western Art and the New Era, a survey of modern art that explained artistic developments along the lines of the spiritual development of humanity, and stated: "Your book makes me feel that I would receive

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great benefit, help, strength, from your rare vision and understanding if you would be gracious enough to give me some time, to work with me on some of those new things that I know are coming through me soon."[34]

Shawn's interest in a more esoteric significance in art was also expressed in his adherence to the DelSarte system of movement, which advocated a system of correspondences between movements, moods, and states of consciousness. In one book that presented the DelSarte system to American students, Shawn wrote: "No true artist has denied his God...Art is divine in its principles, divine in its essence, divine in its action, divine in its end."[35] Like Dreier, Shawn maintained his spiritual beliefs throughout his life.

The separate activities of Dreier and Shawn overlapped on a few significant occasions, when their compatible philosophies and mutual admiration found more concrete expression. In 1933 Dreier published a book on Shawn entitled Shawn the Dancer which was simultaneously produced in Germany, England, and America. In 1935 Shawn choreographed a dance based on Dreier's lithographic suite entitled 40 Variations. But perhaps the most meaningful sign of their association is the portrait Dreier painted of Shawn in 1929 [Fig. 25].

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The exact origins of this painting are unknown. The Dreier/Shawn correspondence contains no reference to the portrait and there is no mention of it in any of her papers. Presumably Dreier presented this work as a gift to her friend in person (making it the only such portrait she did that was given to the subject), and if Shawn required any explanations he received them firsthand. The Abstract Psychological Portrait of Ted Shawn is a vertical-format composition that is completely lacking in any recognizable figuration. In an undefined field of mottled greys and browns she has placed a violet-blue circle that gives a swirling impression and is surrounded by radiating lines throughout the upper half of the picture. This circular form is grounded by a dark diagonal line that intersects it and continues to the upper-right corner. In the lower-right corner is a static rectangular form set in a larger rectangular field.

Perhaps the best explanations for Dreier's formal choices in the portrait of Shawn come from Dreier herself. This painting was reproduced once, as the full-color frontispiece for Shawn the Dancer. Although the book was written independently of the painting approximately three years later, Dreier's discussion of Shawn is actually quite revealing. Dreier wrote: "As Pavlova stands for lightness and pureness of motion as she floats through the dance, so

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Shawn stands for a power of rhythm which refills one with fresh vitality."[36] Looking at the painting we can see the heavily-grounded areas, solidly planted in contrast to a sense of floating lightness. Bur Dreier also wrote: "In expressing the now and its needs, Shawn especially emphasizes [a] spiral form of rhythm."[37] We also get the rhythmic changes from the static, posed rectangle moving into the sweeping circle, whose "spiralling rhythm" is an almost exact pictorial transcription of what Dreier has written. The energies and values that she sees in Shawn's dancing have been conveyed in this work.

Dreier had relied upon the circular motif in paintings prior to this one. Her portrait of Duchamp [Fig. 14] is dominated by a central circular form, as well. What is different, however, is that the forms in Duchamp's portrait are self-contained and somewhat static, while Shawn's are open and in motion. Interestingly, in the margin of a letter from the German art historian Hans Hildebrandt (who wrote the introduction to Dreier's book on Shawn)[38] Dreier wrote: "Shawn's rhythm spans the world. Duchamp's rhythm is self-centered."[39] These concepts seem to have found plastic expression in the two paintings.

Other significant elements of the painting may include the color scheme. While Dreier was not known to have followed a strict law of color correspondences in her art,

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she was very influenced by both Theosophy and Kandinsky's artistic theories, and both sources suggest that colors have spiritual hierarchies. According to Kandinsky, blue, for example, was seen as a typical heavenly color, yellow as the typically earthly color, and white evinced an advanced spiritual state.[40] It is noteworthy to see in the undulating circular forms a progression from blue to yellow and white, especially since these are the most colorful passages in the painting. Also of interest is the dynamic element of the diagonal line, which sets up a sense of travel or passage, which could relate to Shawn's movements across the stage or around the globe in search of new kinesthetic influences.

Dreier does not appear to have been nearly as close to Dr. Savadsky as she was to Duchamp or Shawn, yet she made an abstract portrait of him as well [Fig. 26]. This painting was reproduced in Sheldon Cheney's Expressionism in Art and he described in connection to its synthetist ideas:

> The approach to abstraction in painting by definite parallelism to the qualities or "effects" of music is illustrated in the portrait of Dr. Savadsky--himself a musician--by Katherine Dreier. The subject of the portrait has written thus: "This form of art is the result of the acuteness and vigilance of spiritual insight rather than the sharpness and keenness of the eye." Katherine Dreier's enigmatically interwoven lines, forming here and there geometrical proportion, resemble combinations of harmonic chords of music. These crossing rays of light, through colors or fantastic unknown forces...are reminiscent, in music, of a masterly design of the contrapuntal

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> order...Thus, like music, these paintings compel us to join in the process of their unfoldment, stimulating our senses and directing our emotions. This property of abstract painting brings about the coordination of emotional vibrations and gives it the music-like quality of fluidity.[41]

One of the most explicit instances in which Dreier conspicuously attempted to apply Kandinsky's theories in painting was with her work entitled Zwei Welten, 1930 [Fig. 27]. This title is directly taken from a letter Kandisnky had written to her in which he outlined his idea of the dual aspects of reality. A handwritten translation by Dreier accompanies the letter, which reads as follows:

> There are two worlds in which apparently purposeless beings exist, secluded beings which in their totality always build larger groups and finally become systems...
> These two worlds are--1st nature
> 2nd art
> To humanity these two worlds are that man is created by the first and the second is created by man.[42]

In her painting Dreier presents two extended tube-like forms which open towards the foreground in a sphere and a wheel/disc, respectively. In addition to these "two worlds" Dreier added an abstracted chess knight to the upper right, separate from the intersecting tubes. The Société Anonyme logo, designed by Duchamp, whose great passion was chess, was a chess knight. Thus in addition to being a visual transliteration of Kandinsky's theories, this work also pays hommage to Duchamp's unique intellect/spirituality, and

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brings together in one painting the two most important artists in Dreier's life.

Dreier's worldview, albeit largely progressive and spiritual, was nevertheless an inconsistent one. Despite her professed adherence to a cosmic sensibility that was larger than nations or races and her claims to treat all people independently of nationality or race, she was possessed of an anti-Semitism so virulent that Herbert's description of it as "ladylike"[43] is far too polite. Dreier would confide her feelings to her closest friends, such as Duchamp, to whom she worte: "I know one thing: that I must cut out all Jews from my life--I wish them no harm--but they just can't be near me."[44] Unfortunately, this anti-Semitism, combined with her pro-German sentiments, resulted in Dreier's assuming a role otherwise unthinkable--with the exceptions of Phillip Johnson and Wyndham Lewis--for a champion of modern art: that of Hitler supporter and apologist. In 1933 she presented a lecture at the Long Ridge Women's Association in which she traced the events leading up to Hitler's election, including the excessive reparations demanded under the Dawes Plan, and the general poverty she witnessed there in the 20's and most vividly described in her article on "Housing Conditions in Germany"[45]. She stated: "To me Germany was dying--and so I turned to that man who has both the moral and spiritual

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courage to inspire the youth of his nation to build anew.--But beginning with themselves. That to me is the GREATNESS of HITLER and that to me is the Hope of Germany."[46] While it would be tempting to ascribe such sentiments to a naivete born of ignorance of the facts, this was clearly not the case. In the same lecture she addressed what had been happening to the German Jews and dismissed it by suggesting that anti-Jewish behavior was not unique to Germany: "Let me begin by saying that I regret this as much as anyone else, but one must bear in mind that for one reason or another there has always been a Jewish Question in Germany...France has had it occasionally--as in the case of the Dreyfus Case--and Spain."[47] She later wrote to another Hitler apologist: "I think that Germany has handled the whole Jewish situation badly--but maybe she [sic] could not do it otherwise."[48]

In addition to the Nazi treatment of Jews, Dreier seems to have been willfully in denial about what was happening to modern artists. Once again this is not due to ignorance; in letters Kandinsky, Schwitters, and Howard Dearstyne, among others, apprised her of the situation, and still she wrote to a magazine editor: "As to Professor Kandinsky, I would not say that he was an exile. Just as he left Russia to be in Germany because he felt that his art needed what Germany had to give--so now he felt the call for the time being to

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Paris."[49] She knew from firsthand accounts how her friend Schwitters had also been exiled and how hard his life had become, and yet they seem to have tacitly agreed to not speak explicitly of the cause.[50] She described the Entartete Kunst show as a "farce"[51] and was besieged by her friends and artist associates who were formerly at the Bauhaus for leads and introductions as they fled Europe, and yet her support of Hitler never wavered. She simply ascribed his actions towards her colleagues to an ignorance of their art and felt that it was unfortunate that he did not understand modernism better. She maintained this position throughout the 1930's despite opposing opinions from her friends, artistic colleagues, and family members, none of whom really explicitly took her task for her stubborn refusal to face the facts. In the 1940's Dreier simply became silent on the topic. It is unclear if she ever renounced her Hitler sympathies, or considered herself to have been mistaken; there is not one recorded instance of her apologizing for or retracting her earlier statements. All the while she insisted that right or wrong, Hitler had been necessary, and if Americans were so interested in dictators they needed to look no further than Roosevelt.

This stance of Dreier's is extremely hard to reconcile or understand, in large part because it is so antithetical to so many of her other activities, words, and beliefs.

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Despite her numerous anti-Semitic statements, the Société Anonyme collection contained many Jewish artists, and in the case of Dora Bromberger at least Dreier purchased the works due to her concern over the financial hardship National Socialism had imposed upon her. One of Dreier's good friends and colleagues in New York was the artist Annot, who Dreier knew had been forced to leave Germany due to her refusal to reject Jewish students from her art school[52]. And despite Dreier's suspicion that the Kieslers were Jewish, she was their friend and worked with him and his wife for decades.

Such inconsistencies were not limited to Jews or Germany. Despite indications of racism and anti-Semitism, Dreier could also be very tolerant of people from cultures not her own. At one lecture she proclaimed:

> It is amazing how the White-Man, as a whole, still looks down on all other races, not realizing that he is but one third of all the races on Earth. In the full orchestra of Nations--each one has its part to play, and it is important to realize that we must not play our trumpet too loudly, so as to drown the music of the other instruments.[53]

She lectured about the cultural practices of other nations, especially China, and on the situation that the American Indian and the American "Negro" faced in this country. Sometimes Dreier even managed to confuse one cause or issue with another, as when she wrote to her sister: "Why should we be up in arms because of the persecution of the

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Jews and not lift our voices because of the persecution of the Negro especially, the educated Negro, I cannot understand--or permit the conditions which exist among our American Indians who are considered only wards of this country though they too died for it in the last war."[54] Interestingly, this very sentiment was echoed in the African-American press when America was considering boycotting the 1936 Olympics in Germany.

Dreier's proper, ladylike and conservative manners and appearance belied what she herself considered to be a truly radical nature, and she often described herself as such. Indeed, if her anti-Semitism was typical for an American of her particular cultural and social background in the 1920's and 1930's, her other stances were not. In the 1920's in particular, her espousal of radical international art and expression was antithetical to what has been called "the period of uninhibited strike-breaking, of the Palmer raids, of the renewal of the Ku Klux Klan, of the new, stringent immigration laws, and of the farcical Dayton 'monkey trial.'"[55] While the 1920's saw a general period of retrenchment among the Progressivists, it was the period of Dreier's greatest activity.

Dreier's relation to the Left was also a bit inconsistent. She made many anti-Communist remarks in her letters and lectures, and in fact used such sentiments as an

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excuse for the acceptance of National Socialism. In one instance she managed to conflate her anti-Semitism with her anti-Communism when she wrote to a friend:

> When Communism became the order of the day in Russia--the Christians throughout the world did not turn a political upheaval into a religious persecution. But when Germany wants as a nation to stamp out Communism the Jews turn it into a religious persecution.[56]

However, she gladly allied herself with both the Rand School of Social Science and the New School for Social Research, two institutions which she fully acknowledged as bastions of Marxist thought.[57] She believed in art movements as being instituted by the masses rather than select individuals, and in an essay on the economic development in Germany she wrote: "Since the ownership of...material resources is of the utmost importance to the individual life of a community, it is clear that the doing away with...capitalistic controls is of vital interest to the nation as a whole."[58] Thus while her socio-economic philosophy is no easier to summarize than many of her other positions, it is clear that she equated anticapitalism as a form of social progressivism with artistic progressivism.

In the end, finding a way to neatly package or summarize Dreier's social sensibilities proves to be extremely difficult, and it may be fruitless and pointless to even try. Consistency is rarely a human trait, and in this Dreier could be more human than most. Nevertheless,

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through her example we see how the development and fostering of modernist tendencies in this country were concerned with more than just a formalist teleology. Dreier and the Société Anonyme are strong examples of the marriage between social and aesthetic radicalism, complete with all their complexities and inconsistencies. As Bohan has written: "That Dreier held these views and campaigned actively on their behalf...conclusively proves that postwar American modernism in America was actually far richer and more complex than has previously been thought."[59]

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Notes for Chapter Three

1. Milton Brown, American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 92.

2. Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 3.

3. Charles Alexander, Here the Country Lies: Nationalism and the Arts in 20th Century America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 51.

4. For more on Dreier's connection to Ruskin and Morris see Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Museum Exhibition, 8.

5. "Cooperative Mural Decoration--An Attempt to Establish Democracy in Art," Current Opinion 58 (March 1915): 200.

6. Cooperative Mural Workshops prospectus, ms, BL.

7. KSD, Letter to Miriam Shepherd, 26 April 1921, BL.

8. KSD, Letter to Maud Swartz, December 1920, Women's Trade Union League Papers (Reel 81, 669-70), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

9. KSD, Letter to Maud Swartz, 11 December 1920, WTUL Papers, (Reel 81, 687-88), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

10. KSD, Letter to Elisabeth Achelis, 23 November 1926, BL.

11. KSD, Letter to John Russell, 10 May 1935, BL.

12. Plans for Carnegie Guild and College of Art, ms., BL.

13. "New School for Social Research" and "Rand School for Social Science" files, BL.

14. Peter Fingesten, "Spirituality and Mysticism in Non-Objective Art," Art Journal (Fall 1961): 2.

15. KSD, ed. In Memory of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Dorothea Adelheid Dreier (Springfield: Pond-Ekberg Co., 1940), 75.

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16. KSD, "Intrinsic Significance in Modern Art," lecture given at Yale March 5, 1948, ms., BL.

17. KSD, Letter to Mary Dreier, n/d, Mary Dreier Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

18. For a more thorough comparison between Steiner's teachings and Dreier's thinking, see Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 17-20.

19. "Cochran, Aso-Neith," and "Pequeño, Pedro," files, BL.

20. KSD, "Lecture on Modern Art," Art Gallery of Toronto, 4 April 1927, ms. courtesy Art Gallery of Ontario Archives.

21. KSD, "Introduction," Modern Art (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1926).

22. Herbert, Apted and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 355.

23. Joan Lukach, Hilla Rebay: In Search of the Spirit in Art (New York: George Braziller, 1983), 228-231.

24. Rose-Carol Washton Long, Kandinsky, the Development of an Abstract Style (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 137.

25. KSD, Letter to William Henry Fox, 21 July 1926, BL.

26. Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Spiritual in Art," in Kandinsky: the Complete Writings, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 133-134.

27. Long, Kandinsky, the Development of an Abstract Style, 55.

28. KSD, "Kandinsky and His Contribution," lecture given 9 March 1931, New School for Social Research, ms., BL.

29. For background on Shawn, Denis, and Denishawn, see Walter Terry, Ted Shawn: Father of American Dance (New York: Dial Press, 1976).

30. Herbert, Apter and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 14.

31. Ted Shawn, manuscript for unpublished autobiography, undated/unpaginated, Ted Shawn Papers, Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

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32. Ted Shawn, "Germany's Contribution to the Art of the Dance," The Foreword (Nov. 1930), 5.

33. Herbert, Apted and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 14.

34. Ted Shawn, Letter to KSD, 8 January 1929, BL.

35. Ted Shawn, Every Little Movement (New York: Dance Horizons, Inc., 1974), 23.

36. KSD, Shawn the Dancer (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1933), 11.

37. Ibid., 13.

38. There is no information regarding how Dreier and Hildebrandt became acquainted. The two likeliest possibilities, however, are either that she was introduced to Hildebrandt through her Bauhaus connections or simply that he was commissioned by the German publishers of the Shawn book to write the introduction. There is very little correspondence between the two and it largely pertains to the book.

39. Hans Hildebrandt, Letter to KSD, 20 July 1931, BL.

40. Wassily Kandisnky, "On the Spiritual in Art," in Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 181-185.

41. Sheldon Cheney, Expressionism in Art (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1948), 338-339.

42. Wassily Kandinsky, Letter to KSD, 13 December 1922, BL.

43. Herbert, Apted and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 19.

44. KSD, letter to Duchamp, 20 July 1937, BL.

45. KSD, "Housing Conditions in Germany," The Survey 46 (May 1921), 169-172.

46. KSD, "Germany," lecture given 7 June 1933, Long Ridge Women's Association, BL.

47. Ibid.

48. KSD, Letter to Rev. William S. Jackson, n/d, BL.

49. KSD, Letter to Frank Merchant, 8 July 1936, BL.

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50. Gwendolen Webster, Kurt Merz Schwitters (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 285-86.

51. KSD, Letter to "Fern," 31 July 1938, BL.

52. KSD, pamphlet prepared for 13 Women exhibition, 1934, BL.

53. KSD, "Some Reflections on China," lecture given 17 November 1947, Historical Society of Milford, BL.

54.KSD, Letter to Mary Dreier, n/d, Mary Dreier Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

55. Milton Brown, American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 87.

56. KSD, Letter to Katherine Hanfstaengl, 2 April 1933, BL.

57. This was especially true of the New School, whose "University in Exile" was the point of introduction to the United States for many European scholars, including the Frankfurt School.

58. KSD, "The Democratizing of the Economic Life of Germany Since the November Revolution of 1918," ms, 1920, BL.

59. Ruth Bohan, "Katherine Dreier and the Spiritual in Art," in The Spiritual Image in Modern Art, ed. Kathleen J. Regier (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), 72.

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Chapter Four
Dreier and Women's Culture

Underlying all of Dreier's efforts is her identity as a woman. Her role as a woman modernist in the 1920's both sets her apart and connects her to her times; it is both a source of appreciation for her work and the source of much of the criticism written about her. In an American context, Dreier had assumed a prominent position--in fact, was an early pioneer--in what was developing into a woman's cultural phenomenon: the encouragement and support of modern art in America. The history of modernism in this country has a disproportionate amount of women's names attached to it, from private collectors like Louisine Havemeyer, Gertrude Stein, and Claribel and Etta Cone, to women who would attempt to institutionalize modernism, like Mabel Dodge Luhan, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Lizzie Bliss, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Hilla Rebay, and Peggy Guggenheim. This female involvement in modern art was not accidental; as Kathleen McCarthy posits: "Women made the most influential contributions by legitimizing new and neglected areas of artistic endeavors, rather than by paraphrasing the cultural activities of men."[1]

It may be somewhat simplistic to read the encouragement of new art as a strictly feminine endeavor, especially since

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it was usually male artists that these women supported and they often insisted upon including prominent men in their projects. However, it is valuable to consider the smaller, private museum as a response to the larger, more male-dominated institutions that had shut women out. McCarthy's model of the large, "universal survey museum" as being gendered male and the small private museum as female holds in a number of ways. It is compelling to draw a parallel between the major civic survey museums that were headed by robber barons and titans of industry and run as if they were also large, expansionist conglomerations. As strong as this comparison was in the early part of the century, it bears out even more when one considers contemporary examples such as the Guggenheim, which was once a female-run[2] and moderate-scaled educational institution but has now become male-dominated, run by businessmen, and at present has four satellite branches, three of which are in other countries. Interestingly, as its multinational status has expanded, the Guggenheim's educational mandate has all but disappeared.

In the early twentieth century more women had access to their own independent wealth and were eager to apply their money and education to nurturing culture and aiding in its development. The argument that women turned to modern art because it was cheaper doesn't quite account for fabulously wealthy women like Whitney or women who had access to great

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wealth like Rebay supporting the moderns, nor does it account for the less well-endowed women like Isabella Stewart Gardener who retained a passion for the Old Masters, to say nothing of the wealthy men who frequently sponsored modernism like Quinn, Phillips, or Barnes. It is not inconsequential, however, that these women had the opportunity to collect in a relatively untouched field, and by using their wealth to support living artists they were perhaps behaving more responsibly than the men who continued to inflate the older market in order to, among other things, appease their male egos. While many women art patrons were not lacking in egos of their own, as a general rule, hardly any of them named their collections after themselves or made large public displays of their art-acquiring largess. Most of the wealthy businessmen collected art to improve their social standing or clean up their public image, problems that these women did not face. Indeed, by aggressively spending their own money, especially on modern art, women ran the risk of damaging their reputations. Women had in the 19th century been given the role of preserver of culture; in the twentieth century they shifted the task to assuring that culture would have a future.

Dreier herself was aware of the gender issues prevalent in society. Years after her childhood, Dreier would thank her father for "the vision he firmly held to, ahead of his

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time, of giving the same privilege to his daughters as to his son."[3] Among these privileges was the opportunity for education.

Dreier was also acutely conscious of the role gender played in the arts. She once confided to Marchal Landgren: "As a woman, I am very conscious of how women are pushed aside in certain positions in the Art World if they are modest and more than usually sincere."[4] Another time she wrote to Nelson Rockefeller, who had sent her a fundraising letter on behalf of the Museum of Modern Art, and stated: "I do not quite know how to answer this letter...I have often wondered why the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art felt that it was so important to expand to the extent that they have and yet I imagine that it is very natural for men of your means to respond to such expansion."[5]

That Dreier had a difficult time while attempting to realize her goals due to her gender-determined identity is perhaps a given; that the subsequent literature still takes her to task on this issue is somewhat more disheartening. The essay in the Yale catalogue raisonné shows great inconsistency when rating Dreier's worthiness as a woman by stating at one moment that "her feminism was at best a circumspect one," but then admitting that the Société collection held more work by women "than any comparable collection at the time."[6] And even McCarthy, in the midst

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of all her praise, states: "Dreier set aside her feminism when it came to art."[7]

While it is true that Dreier did focus most of her attention on men, especially Duchamp to whom she never failed to give credit even when it was not clearly due, she was actively involved in feminist causes. As was previously stated, Dreier was a major participant, along with her two sisters, in the Suffragist cause, and in 1911 she was a delegate at the sixth annual Women's Suffrage Alliance in Stockholm. She in fact referred to herself explicitly as a "feminist" in a letter to a curator of the Wadsworth Atheneum.[8]

To date, whenever the literature has been favorable towards Dreier it has always been regarding her role as an art collector. While Dreier's patronage activities were indeed crucial to fostering modern art in this country, to focus solely on this role is to diminish her other contributions. The unfortunate underside to recognizing women's contributions as patrons is that often it delimits these women's other activities and relegates them to upper-class dilettantes doing little more than glorified shopping. As Nancy J. Siegel has correctly stated: "The more aggressive act of being included as an abstract painter within an essentially male dominated territory has been subverted and [Dreier] has been relegated to the role of

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mother or caretaker of the modernists."[9] This gendered focus on Dreier as a collector has in all likelihood been responsible for the neglect her efforts as a museum director have met with as well.

While it would be somewhat inaccurate, not to mention anachronistic, to compare Dreier's conception of "feminism" with today's understanding of the term (which, in fact, is itself under revision), there is no question that she was quite radical for a woman of her generation and was furthermore fully active in the women's questions of the time. Dreier almost seems to have perfectly fit the mold of the Progressive-Era New Woman, especially as described by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg: The American New Woman was either college educated or professionally trained, usually unmarried, and often assumed a public voice. Moreover, she was involved in the settlement house movement, educational reform, and her number included physicians, women writers, and artists.[10] With the exception of medical training, this could read as a description of Dreier herself.

In addition to the right to vote, Dreier was in support of many women's causes and aware of the sociological factors of many women's existences. In addition to helping run the German Rest Home for Women and Children, Dreier helped found the Manhattan Trade School for Girls, which operated for many years and attempted to provide young women with

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practical training in manufacture and design work.[11] Her concern with the role that economic factors played in women's lives was apparent in many other ways as well. For example, it is important to recall that the Cooperative Mural Workshops was entirely run and executed by women. In 1914, the same year she founded the Workshops, Dreier wrote an editorial, published in the New York City Sun, in which she argued:

> Women are to be economically free from men so that they will not be forced to sell themselves for a home and daily bread or to secure by subterfuge what should be theirs by right. The "feminist" point has always seemed to me to mean an insistence on the economic value to the community of a mother's work in rearing her own children and making a home.[12]

Moreover, in an article on Germany's November Revolution and new constitution, she wrote: "Emphasis should be laid on article 128 which expands all political positions to women, demanding only qualification for the position to be held, thereby removing all sex disqualifications."[13]

Dreier's views on marriage were similarly independent, as her editorial mentioned above indicates. Dreier was once briefly married to the English artist Edward Trumball in August of 1911, but this was almost immediately annulled once she learned that he was in fact already married. Although the situation was a bit of a scandal and was reported in the society pages of the New York press[14], there are other statements of Dreier's that indicate an unease

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with marriage that cannot simply be attributed to her hurt feelings over this affair. The conventions of marriage were not particularly appealing to her sisters Dorothea and Mary, for only her brother and older sister Margaret ever married. In 1911, just preceding her affair with Trumball, Dreier wrote to her sister about marriage: "It is the most precious thing I know--but I am afraid that it will never enter my life--a great many things have made me come to that conclusion, a certain strange streak which would make it very unwise to marry...I hope to adopt a little girl, whom I hope to help to grow into a fine woman, who may help the Great Cause one day."[15] Many years later, in 1937, she wrote to a friend: "I believe firmly in families and the importance of family life. This may sound strange coming from a maiden lady but no artist in my judgement should marry unless Life is unusually kind in sending a special helpmate--like Schwitters is blessed with--and no woman artist can at this day and generation expect such a husband."[16]

Dreier undertook many excursions on her own, such as her year-long trip to China in 1921-22, and more importantly her visit to Argentina in 1918. Perhaps inspired by Duchamp to undertake such a voyage but by no means travelling with him, Dreier undertook a sort of fact-finding mission to assess women's lives in Latin America. The result of her

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trip was a book she wrote entitled Five Months in the Argentine and it carried the subtitle From a Woman's Point of View.[17] While Dreier devoted sections of her book to economics, colonization, and improving North/South relations, her main emphasis was on the identity and treatment of women, which she succinctly summed up right at the beginning by writing: "Women do not travel alone in South America."[18] She went on to condemn the South American treatment of women and discounted the defense that sexism is really a form of chivalry.

One of the most bitter ironies about Dreier's visit to Argentina is that despite her strong display of independence in undertaking the trip and the bold feminist text that resulted from it, many authors--including Saarinen, Herbert and Nauman--have suggested that she undertook the voyage simply out of an obsessional love for Duchamp. In fact, in no way is Dreier's contribution as a woman and feminist undermined more than in considerations of her relationship with Duchamp. Aline Saarinen likened her to "an admiring, gawking girl trying to follow the lead of an exquisite tango partner"[19] when describing her relationship with Duchamp. Other sources merely spell out the suggestion that everything Dreier did was out of unrequited love for Duchamp. Particularly egregious is Francis Nauman's insistence that Dreier's love for Duchamp was so great that

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it was able to overcome her complete inability to comprehend any of his art. He has recently written that Dreier "never really understood Duchamp's work,"[20] and "if Dreier were shaken up by some avant-garde object she did not understand, then the well-intentioned though intimidated collector would act irrationally."[21] In fact, Nauman establishes a dichotomy between Dreier and Duchamp that is unrealistically neat in its binarism and unfortunately lapses into well-established sexist patterns for describing strong-willed women of accomplishment. Thus Dreier is described as "autocratic, doctrinaire, domineering," while Duchamp is "reserved, soft-spoken, always tolerant and considerate."[22]

It is true that Duchamp managed to present himself as being more even-tempered than Dreier did and in many ways they seemed to have differing temperaments. However, to assign the male genius the cool reserve and unflagging saintliness that his irrational (i.e., female) counterpart utterly lacks is an overstatement that relies upon conventional sexual stereotypes regarding artists and creative persons. It is also true that Dreier did not always grasp the significance of Duchamp's gestures immediately; this hardly isolates her from her artworld peers. Moreover, she readily admitted as much herself. When she voted against including Fountain in the Society of Independent Artist's exhibition, she wrote an apologetic

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letter to Duchamp stating: "When I voted 'No,' I voted on the question of originality--I did not see anything pertaining to originality in it; that does not mean that if my attention had been drawn to what was original by those who could see it, that I could not also have seen it."[23] Years later she wrote to Barr: "I have always considered [Duchamp] one of the most advanced spirits of our time--and though I did not always understand what he was doing I was intuitive enough to let Time reveal it to me."[24] Dreier's admiration for Duchamp's art and intelligence was great, and she was not shy about offering her own explanations and interpretations of his art in some of her writings. She was also willing to collect many of his pieces and to support him financially at times.

It is possible that Dreier cared for Duchamp more deeply than she would sometimes allow herself to admit, but to suggest that this was a blind devotion or a mere crush is ludicrous and insulting. To begin with, most people, both male and female, who associated with Duchamp seem to have fallen under the sway of his charisma, and compared to some women's behavior such as the Stettheimer sisters or Beatrice Wood, Dreier was nothing less than dignified and restrained.[25] She felt a great longing for his company and often revealed a dependence upon him, but then again he was one of her closest friends, her one long-term collaborator

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in her life's work, and one of her staunchest allies. Their relationship was not one-sided, nor did it lack mutual points of interest and substance. Susan Grace Galassi has suggested that maybe Dreier had some influence on Duchamp: "In 1918, for example, [Dreier] convinced Duchamp to return to painting after a six-year hiatus to execute a commission for her New York apartment. The result was Tu m', his last oil painting and one of his masterpieces."[26] Galassi's take on the painting is a refreshing change from the point of view expressed by Calvin Tomkins, who wrote: "The do-it-yourself title...is usually read as a contraction of tu m'ermerdes...and it may very well have summed up Duchamp's feelings at the time, not only about the painting but towards the lady who commissioned it."[27]

John Moffitt makes a compelling case that "Tu m' represents a synthesis of the fourth dimension, a new pseudoscientific concept, and alchemy, an ancient one."[28] He then goes on to suggest that the painting's position over Dreier's home bookcase could be very indicative as to the contents of her collection of wissenschaft. What remains unexplored are the possible terms of the commission: just how much influence did Dreier exert, and is the resemblance between Tu m' and her Portrait of Duchamp meaningful here? Furthermore, the sign-painter's hand in Duchamp's painting is signed "A. Klang:" putatively (but improbably) this is

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the name of a sign painter; it could also be a reference to Kandinsky, who used that term in his writings.[29]

There has been much debate about how much Duchamp subscribed to esoteric and mystical philosophies and even further how much these ideas can be seen in his art. Opinions and assertions range from straightforward declarations that Duchamp was connected to Theosophy to almost complete denials that esoteric matter exists in his belief system or work. In the correspondence between Dreier and Duchamp there is nothing that approaches the level of metaphysical discussion and artistic philosophizing that one finds in her correspondence with Kandinsky, such as his essay on "two worlds" that she found inspirational. However, Duchamp certainly knew of Dreier's interests and beliefs, and seems to have exhibited a certain tolerance for them. He allowed Dreier to introduce him to Kandinsky and the three of them spent some time together in Germany in 1929. Dreier later wrote to a friend: "Duchamp came to Weimar to be there at the same time for we both were deeply interested in Kandinsky's ideas of a new Science of Art."[30] Of course, this was not Duchamp's first visit to Germany; he had lived there for a brief but crucial period of time in 1912, just as he was achieving a breakthrough into abstraction in his own art. Duchamp was known to at least some German artists at the time; he was on a list drafted by

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August Macke of possible participants in the First German Autumn Salon[31], although he ultimately was not included. Moreover, the cosmic spiral motif that Dreier often employed in her paintings is remarkably similar to the undulating spiral effects produced by Duchamp's Rotary Glass Plates and his Rotoreliefs, both of which were owned by Dreier.

In 1958 Duchamp himself told an interviewer:

> Miss Dreier was correct in stressing the spiritual and poetic aspect of my work, but she lost some of its value by not allowing for the ironic aspects. She used the word spiritual as it related to religion. She believed in God, and dabbled in Indian mysticism with the idea of reincarnation. My notion of the spiritual is not the same; it does not include the religious implication. It is too bad she could not get over this mental block for she had a fine sense of humor, as her other writings show.[32]

He also stated: "In order to explain the part of man that is important but not material or rational I use the word spiritual."[33] While it would be inaccurate to describe Duchamp as being nearly as doctrinaire as Dreier in these matters, the two of them did have remarkably compatible views on art.

Tellingly, most of the other Duchamp works that Moffitt singles out as being alchemical or occultist have connections to Dreier. These include The Large Glass, which was first shown at the Brooklyn Museum show and later purchased by Dreier from the Arensbergs for $2,000; and the Anemic Cinema, which was screened by Dreier at an evening

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program she had organized in 1931 in conjunction with a series of lectures she was doing for the New School for Social Research. The Large Glass was of particular importance to Dreier. It was the very linchpin of her Country Museum idea since it was installed in her house, and she wondered about where to leave it for posterity, "since many people believe it to be the greatest achievement in the Art World of this century, which Time will prove."[34] She and the painter Matta had published a pamphlet on the work (Matta referred to it in a letter as an "astral mirror"[35]), and Dreier wrote to Henri-Pierre Roché: "I wrote in that small pamphlet which Matta and I brought out that through the Glass Marcel wished to emphasize the philosophic truth that one cannot possess the things of the spirit. The minute one tries they vanish like smoke in air."[36]

When Dreier died in 1952, Duchamp was the principal trustee of her estate and undertook the responsibility of distributing her collection to various institutions. Despite many periods when he neglected their correspondence, seemed to have abandoned the Société Anonyme, and did not appear to give her the amount of demonstrated affection or support she required, Duchamp remained a steadfast friend to Dreier all her life. That historians and critics could take a deep and substantial friendship that lasted 35 years and contributed much to the arts in America and reduce it to a

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schoolgirl crush by an ignorant hysteric is completely misguided and sexist.

Not only was she involved in the suffragist cause, and women's political issues, she supported many women artists as well. In terms of arts patronage, Dreier did not exclude women from her organization's activities. Out of 180 artists the *Société Anonyme* collection contained art by 27 different women, a total that may be somewhat disappointing but was nevertheless unparalleled by any other collection. Dreier was perfectly willing to exhibit women artists right alongside the men, and in 1934 she was approached by the American Women's Association to organize an exhibition for a reception and fundraising purposes. Dreier arranged an exhibition of 13 women artists entitled "From Post-Impressionism to Abstraction," which was said to have "demonstrated her enduring feminist concerns."[37] Ironically, this exhibition was not initially accepted by the Association. They wanted some big-name male artists to be included, particularly Picasso and Matisse, but Dreier held her ground, and finally got her way.[38]

A few years later Dreier herself participated in an exhibition presented at the Decorator's Club Gallery, which was entitled Women Artists at Work, in which her work was displayed alongside paintings by Isabel Bishop among others. Dreier collected and exhibited the work of many otherwise

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unknown German and Russian women, including Annot, Milly Steger, Sophie Tauber-Arp, Lily Uhlmann Hildebrandt, Angelika Hoerle, Kate Steinitz, Ella Bergmann-Michel, Maria Uhden, Liubov Popova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova. Furthermore, Dreier and Sophie Küppers had a warm correspondence[39]. And for the second issue of Brochure Quarterly dated January 1929 she commissioned Lucia Moholy-Nagy to report on the International Congress for Art, Education, Drawing, and Art Applied to Industry. Lucia also accompanied Dreier to Prague where she aided in selections for the Brooklyn Museum show.

Even where Dreier spoke is significant, for she is recorded as having lectured and arranged exhibitions at the Heterodoxy Club of New York, which Mabel Dodge Luhan described as being "for unorthodox women, women who did things and did them openly."[40] At this talk Dreier exhorted her audience that "unless a group of intelligent women connected with the various arts in one form or another will take up the question once more of art as pertaining to life, and do their share to bring it back as an inherent part of life, our contribution to art will be in vain."[41]

This last statement illustrates Dreier's awareness of the cultural role that women, at least women of her class, were expected to play in preserving and fostering the arts in this country. Just as Dreier was able to bring together

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her dual inclinations for art and social reform, so was she able to bring her identity to bear on her endeavors as well. The Société Anonyme, under her guidance, became the prototype for all the small, private, modern art institutions that would develop in the 20th century, all of which at least initially endeavored to break with the mold of the large, masculine, traditional museum. Her willingness to encourage little-known and unconventional artists included women modernists of her time. And her relationship with Duchamp was one of friend and collaborator, not follower and devotee. In many ways the women who followed her, such as Rebay, Peggy Guggenheim, and MOMA's founding trinity of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lizzie Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan, were inheriting her mantle.

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Notes for Chapter Four

1. Kathleen McCarthy, Women's Culture, 179.

2. Although it is true that Solomon R. Guggenheim paid for the initial museum and its collection, it was Hilla Rebay who envisioned the museum, directed it, and told Guggenheim what to purchase. Guggenheim's lack of control can be seen symbolically in the fact that although the foundation that supported the museum was named after him, the museum itself was not until well after his death.

3. Aline Saarinen, The Proud Possessors, 246.

4. KSD, Letter to Marchal Landgren, 23 March 1950, BL.

5. KSD, Letter to Nelson Rockefeller, 7 January 1948, BL.

6. Herbert, Apted and Kenney, The Société Anonyme, 31.

7. Kathleen McCarthy, Women's Culture, 195.

8. KSD, Letter to Robert Drew-Bear, 16 December 1934, BL.

9. Nancy J. Siegel, "An Artist Patronized--The Abstract Paintings of Katherine Dreier," Rutgers Art Review, v. 11-12 (1991-1992): 23.

10. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Knopf, 1985), 176.

11. Ruth Bohan, The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition, 3.

12. KSD, "A Standard Wage Proposed for Wives," New York City Sun, 25 May 1914.

13. KSD, "The Democratizing of the Economic Life of Germany Since the November Revolution of 1918," ms, 1920, BL.

14. "Wed Miss Dreier for Money, Said Artist's Wife," newsclipping, Aug. 26, 1911, Women's Trade Union League Papers, reel 102, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

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15. KSD, Letter to Margaret Dreier Robbins, 1 January 1911, Margaret Dreier Robbins Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

16. KSD, Letter to Arthur Moore, 19 November 1937, BL.

17. KSD, Five Months in the Argentine: From a Woman's Point of View (New York: Frederick Fairchild Sherman, 1920).

18. Ibid., 4.

19. Aline Saarinen, The Proud Possessors, 243.

20. Francis Naumann, New York Dada 1915-1923 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 50.

21. Ibid., 90.

22. Ibid., 156.

23. KSD, Letter to Duchamp, 13 April 1917, BL.

24. KSD, Letter to Barr, 11 May 1935, BL.

25. There are, for example, no anecdotes of Dreier fighting over Duchamp like a schoolgirl the way the Stettheimers are said to have and she certainly did not throw herself at him openly and sneak into his bed the was Wood was reported to have. See Francis Naumann, New York Dada: 1915-1923 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 113-116; 148-154.

26. Susan Grace Galassi, "Crusader for Modern Art," Art News (Sept. 1984) 93.

27. Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp, a Biography (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996), 203.

28. John Moffitt, "Marcel Duchamp: Alchemist of the Avant-Garde," in The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985, ed. Maurice Tuchman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 269.

29. Kandinsky often made correspondences between colors and sounds, and in his writings the German word usually chosen for sound was klang. This set of correspondences was further made visible when his collection of illustrated prose poems, Klänge, was published in Munich either in 1912 or 1913 (interestingly, Duchamp lived for a short time in Munich in 1912).

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Recently, Eleanor S. Apter has published an essay that posits essentially the same connection. See Eleanor S. Apter, "Regimes of Coincidence: Katherine S. Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Dada," in Women in Dada, ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 377-378. While I came to my conclusion independently of Apter, I am all too glad to have this scholarly support. It is clear that much more work must be done in mapping the relationship between Duchamp and Kandinsky.

30. KSD, Letter to Howard Dearstyne, 11 September 1945, BL.

31. August Macke, Letter to Herwarth Walden, 21 April 1913, quoted in Rose-Carol Washton Long, German Expressionism: Documents From the End of the Whilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism (New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 1993), 59.

32. Lawrence S. Gold, "A Discussion of Marcel Duchamp's Views on the Nature of Reality and Their Relationship to the Course of His Artistic Career," Undergraduate diss. Princeton University, 1958).

33. Ibid., iii.

34. KSD, Letter to Mrs. Chester Dale, 10 October 1940, BL.

35. Matta, Letter to KSD, 1941, BL.

36. KSD, Letter to H.P. Roché, 24 September 1946, BL.

37. Barbara Sickerman and Carol Hurd Green, Notable American Women: The Modern Period (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 204.

38. Catherine Fitzgibbon, Letter to KSD, 26 October 1934, and reply, 27 October 1934, BL.

39. Letters between the two can be found in the Küppers file, BL.

40. Mabel Dodge Luhan, Movers and Shakers (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1936) 284.

41. KSD, Talk at Heterodoxy Club, 5 March 1921, ms., BL.

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Conclusion

Dreier once confided to a friend that she believed it would take at least 75 years for the general public to appreciate the endeavors of the Société Anonyme[1]. That would bring us roughly to today, and perhaps conditions have shifted enough to allow for such a reassessment.

The literature on Dreier, limited though it is, tends to fall so consistently into one of two camps that it becomes clichéd. On the one hand, there is the approach to Dreier, usually when she is not the primary focus of the text, that is unnecessarily and inaccurately disparaging and mean spirited in its treatment of this woman. The other approach, seen in articles by Galassi, Calo and Bohan, tends to border on a hagiography, or at least a strong insistence that attention must be paid to Dreier and her accomplishments must be appreciated. However, these texts tend to never move beyond the level of the introductory, and moreover they tend to focus on only one aspect of Dreier's efforts, that of patron/collector. These two approaches are not even necessarily exclusive; they can be combined in one text, as with Saarinen or Naumann (whose ongoing love/hate position vis-à-vis Dreier has shifted recently to more favorable treatment[2] but remains wildly imbalanced).

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At this point, to me, the obvious question is why. What accounts for the ongoing neglect that Dreier faces in the constant retellings of the modern movement? And why does Dreier seem to attract such a large and hostile group of detractors?

There does not seem to be any one easy explanation. There are many strong possibilities, but none of them are consistently satisfying, or at best they employ some sort of double standard.

To begin with, one of the most obvious-seeming points against Dreier was her virulent anti-Semitism, and more specifically, her adamant pro-Hitler sensibilities. Whether or not she stopped espousing her pro-Nazi agenda by the 1940's, her attitudes were known in her circles and it was intimated to her that she had a reputation for being a Nazi. Such a reputation would be understandably hard to live down, and could certainly color attitudes against her by professionals who were writing the story of modernism as it unfolded in the second half of this century. However, it seems unfortunate, not to mention odd, to single Dreier out for this sort of treatment, when other well-known cultural figures, such as Phillip Johnson and Walt Disney, have not suffered similar treatment by history despite having similar sympathies.

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Dreier has often been described as stubborn and difficult, and her correspondence offers ample evidence of this. Apparently run-ins with her could be so memorable that George Heard Hamilton has recently written to me that although he remembers little else about Dreier he remembers the arguments and flashes of temper[3]. Nevertheless, the stories of temperamental, stubborn, argumentative, or even irrational figures in the art world are legion. It is possible that Dreier has been judged by a more severe standard due to her sex; forcefulness, while long being a virtue in a man, has been seen as a vice for a woman.

The simple fact that Dreier was a woman is also a major factor to consider. Unless their names were attached to an institution, most women who helped foster modernism have been forgotten by the general public and many scholars as well. Certainly the men who pioneered collecting modern art in this century have remained better known, even if their efforts did not match Dreier's in ambition or scope.

Professor Marlene Park of the City University of New York suggested to me in conversation that another point to consider was the quality of Dreier's writing. Given the established professionalism of Harvard-educated curators and directors, Dreier's texts and lectures could appear clumsy and therefore amateurish. It is true that Dreier will never be considered the most eloquent writer in the history of art

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history, but I find the claims of illegibility that have been thrown her way to be grossly overstated. Many of the texts I have excerpted in this document reveal someone who had many provocative, original, and compelling ideas, and who was moreover able to express them more often than not. Rather than the quality of her writing, I feel that many art historians have responded to the content and tenor of her words, including her total lack of embarrassment to speak of "cosmic forces" and spirituality. This is a mode of discourse that is still frowned upon in academia and the museum world to this day, and anyone who dares use this kind of language risks being dismissed by the art/intellectual establishment.

Related to but somewhat distinct from this notion of being an "amateur," it would seem that Dreier suffered more for her challenges to the status quo maintained by these new professionals. Indeed, in many ways the Société Anonyme was founded upon the principle that no one has the right to exercise a greater authority than another in matters of art. The censorship of the Jury, the authoritarianism of the Professional Curator, and the elitism of the Collector were all anathema to her. Thus she tried to run her museum on much more cooperative grounds, only to be constantly lacking in support. She also suffered from people's perception of her as having more wealth than she truly did, especially

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after the stock market crash of 1929. While it is true that she always lived in comfortable surroundings, she did not command even a fraction of the wealth that women like Abbey Aldrich Rockefeller or Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney did. Dreier often found herself in the unpleasant situation of not only being refused financial support, but of being asked for financial assistance more often than she could afford.

Another important consideration is that the Société Anonyme never established its own home. People still associate a museum with a building, something Dreier was aware of, and in this instance there is no such institutional edifice. Not creating a permanent museum is probably the most unfortunate in a long list of unrealized goals that Dreier set for the Société, and the collection's subsequent dispersal (and treatment at Yale), clearly do nothing to make us aware of the scope and force of modernism that the Société represented.

This is probably the most crucial point, and it is the issue that this text has been most concerned with. What has changed in the "75 years" since the Société Anonyme began its program? Scholars have begun really looking at modernism again, for one thing. As Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick have noted:

> The reputed exhaustion, decline, obsolescence and end of modernism may after all have more to do with certain accounts of modernism than the thing in

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> itself...Of course the very assumption of a modernism as such is highly dubious. One of the reasons that earlier accounts for modernism have recently fallen into disrepute is precisely that they have attempted to homogenize a widely heterogenous field of discourses and practices, to press them into a relatively rigid framework of categories and concepts, the implied ideology of which has increasingly become evident.[4]

For far too long the "Master Narrative" read like a history of French art, shifting miraculously to New York in the second half of the century, and it was one that traced an inexorable teleology of increasing purism, flatness, and abstraction.

With the advent of what has been given the somewhat unfortunate label "postmodernism," people have begun to look to an art that defies this monolithic teleology: "What emerges from such rereadings is the insight that rather than being a totally new departure, the postmodern is in many ways involved in renegotiations of the constructive terms of the modern, a rewriting of the problematics of modernism itself."[5] And as a greater pluralism enters into the arena, one that includes gender issues, cross-hybridizations of mediums, and a suspicion of the high-art pillars of Quality and Purity, more and more precedents for this supposedly "new" direction are being unearthed.

In the last decade and a half, a long-overdue reappreciation has begun that includes Dada, modernism

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outside of France, and artists other than heterosexual white European males. New media and technologies have been embraced, and a discomfort with the "white cube" art institution or the temple/palace of culture models of museums has become of paramount concern. Moreover, a reading of art that moves to extraformal concerns has once again reasserted itself. And when we look to these "recent" developments, we see them being consistently anticipated by Dreier and the Société Anonyme.

The Société Anonyme should be seen as nothing less than a (the?) prototype for the "postmodern" art institution. It embraced a plurality of styles and artistic philosophies, from quasi-sacred paintings and sculptures to Dadaist iconoclasm; it reconceived the museum space as a laboratory or workshop rather than a temple, and the purpose of the museum as a forum for presenting what was current rather than preserving what was eternal; and by lacking an actual building it in some ways deconstructed its very existence in a way far more profound than hanging some stripes by Daniel Buren--it called into question the very way one could define museums in the first place and what degree of authority these sites should command.

To counter the Paris-to-New York domination of modernism, the scope of Dreier's projects force us to recognize the activities of artists who fall outside of this

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axis. By connecting two such heretofore unlinkable artists as Stuart Davis and El Lissitzky, looking at Dreier helps remind us that modernism was a truly international phenomenon and rather than one linear flow chart of influence we must read it as a network of interces.

As Greenbergian formalism has fallen out of favor and scholars become increasingly concerned with what Leo Steinberg so aptly termed "other criteria," we can better appreciate the social function of the Société Anonyme. And as women's histories become ever more evident it is time to include Dreier in the pantheon of female achievers who left an indelible mark on the century.

In some ways, Dreier's modernism is the "alternate" modernism that had been so long overlooked. Craig Owens once referred to the "postmodernist 'shift' in elocutionary mode, from history to discourse," and suggested that "this shift...is characteristic of all of Duchamp's work."[6] The works that Owens especially singled out to illustrate this point were Tu m', To Be Looked At..., and the Anemic Cinema. All these are works, of course, that were commissioned, owned, or initially exhibited by Dreier. We have lived long enough to see Duchamp's reputation rise from relative obscurity to unsurpassed celebrity; his contributions to art are not infrequently argued to be greater than Picasso's, and this is also something that Dreier anticipated. Perhaps

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we will see the same thing occur for his longtime partner and the organization they co-founded.

To look at what is being produced and discussed and considered in the artworld today, and then to realize that much of it was already done or argued or considered by Dreier and her circle more than half a century ago, should destabilize some of the complacency with which many historians reinforce a modern/postmodern binarism. Many times, postmodern theorists are in just as much danger of reducing modernism to a monolith as the earlier scholars that they claim to oppose. If we learn anything by re-examining the Société Anonyme, it is how pluralistic and elastic classic modernism was. There are many modernisms, most of which have yet to be properly explored. Katherine Dreier and the Société Anonyme loom large at the crossroads of most of them. It may be that 75 years later, we have begun to catch up.

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Notes for Conclusion

1. KSD, Letter to Marechal Landgren, 4 May 1926, BL.

2. In his 1995 New York Dada book, Nauman began to show a greater appreciation for Dreier's efforts that he had previously. More importantly, he included Dreier's Abstract Portrait of Duchamp in his 1997 New York Dada exhibition and gave both Dreier and the Société Anonyme prominent mention throughout the show.

3. George Heard Hamilton, Letter to the author, 6 June 1997.

4. Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick, "Modernism and the Experience of Modernity," in Modernity and the Text, ed. Huyssen and Bathrick (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3.

5. Ibid.

6. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two," October (Summer 1980), 67.

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Fig. 1
Katherine S. Dreier
c.1935

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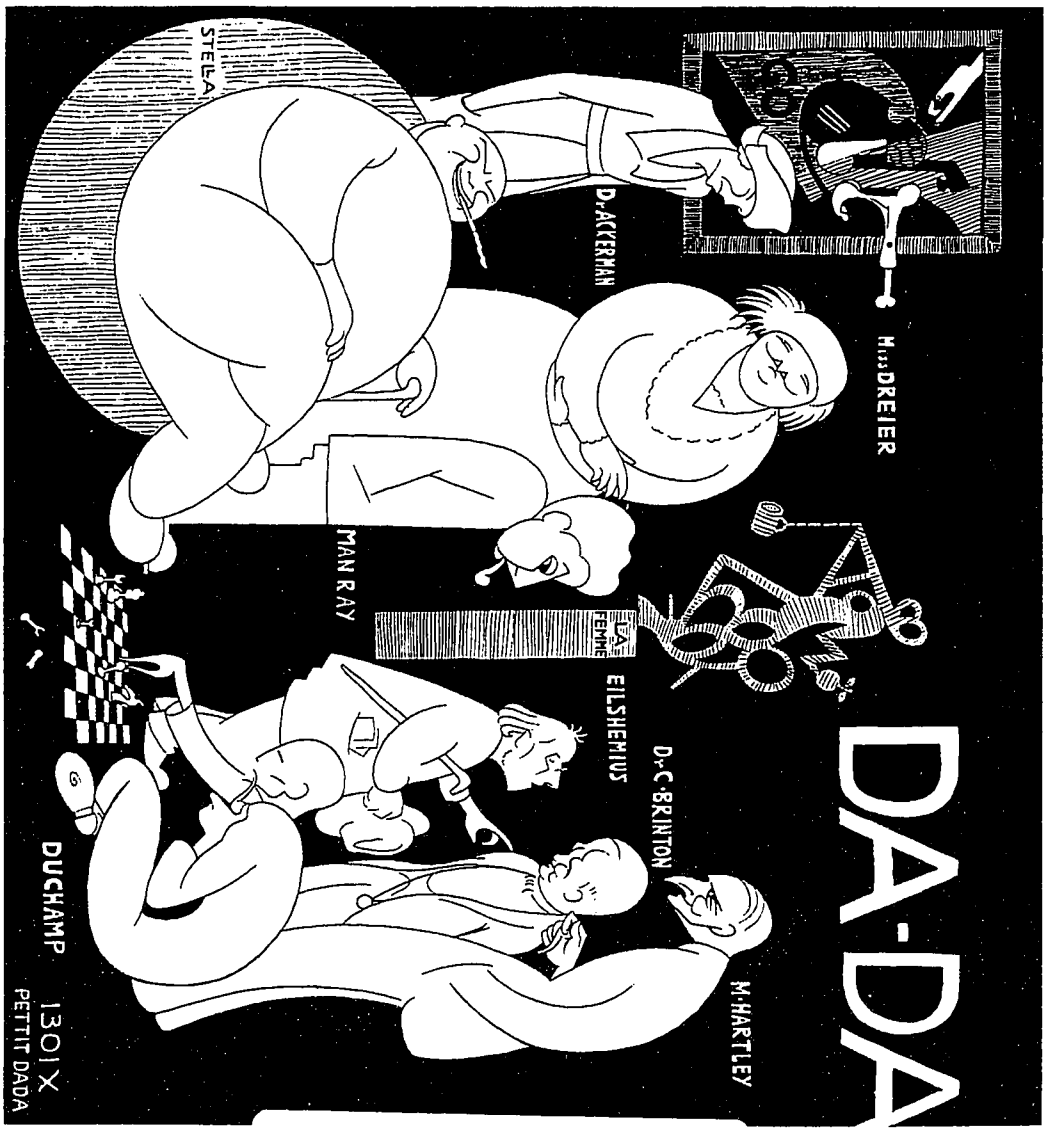

Fig. 2
Richard Boix
New York Dada Group
1921

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Fig. 3
Marcel Duchamp
Chess Knight
c. 1920

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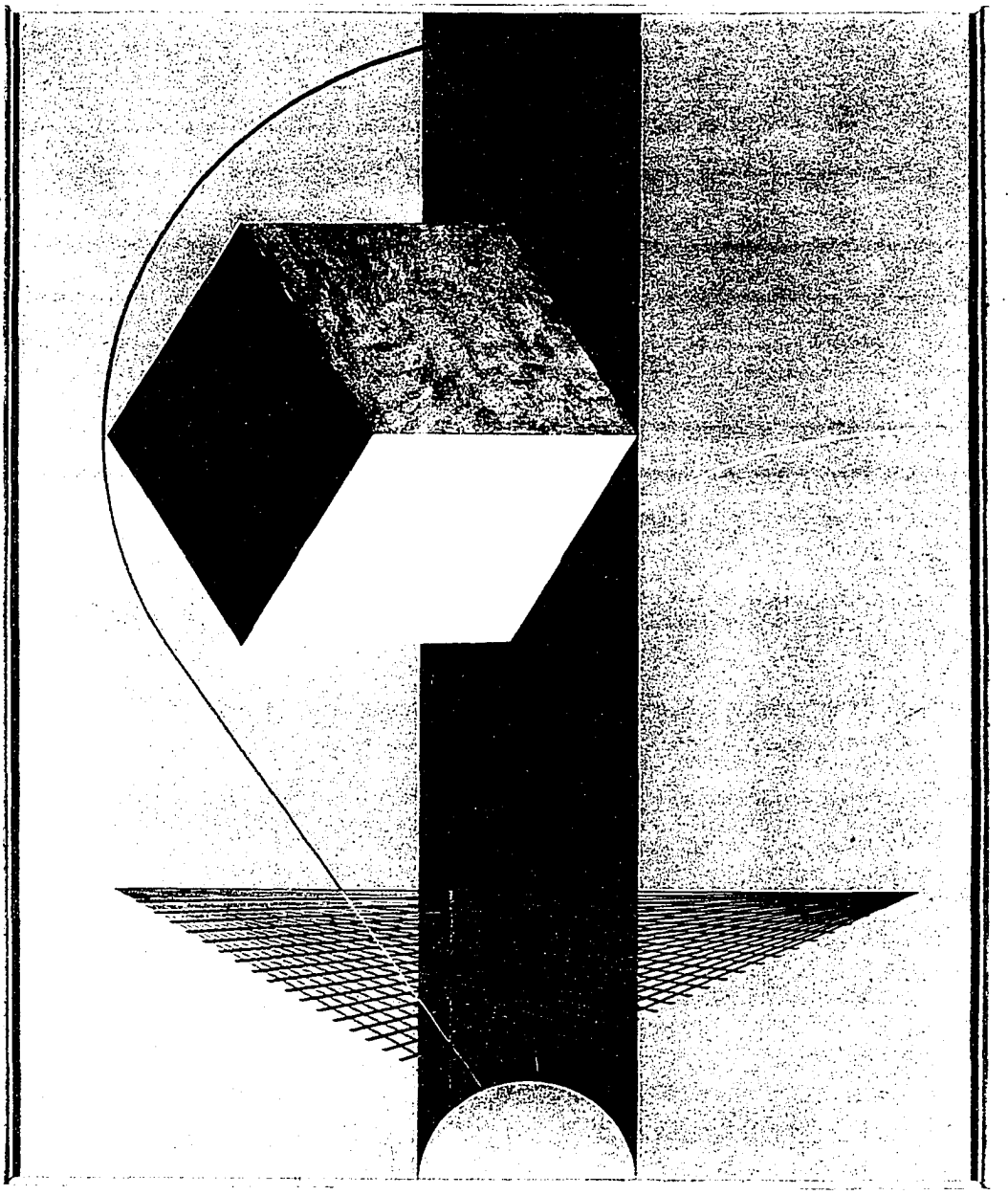

Fig. 4
El Lissitzky
Proun 99
1923-25

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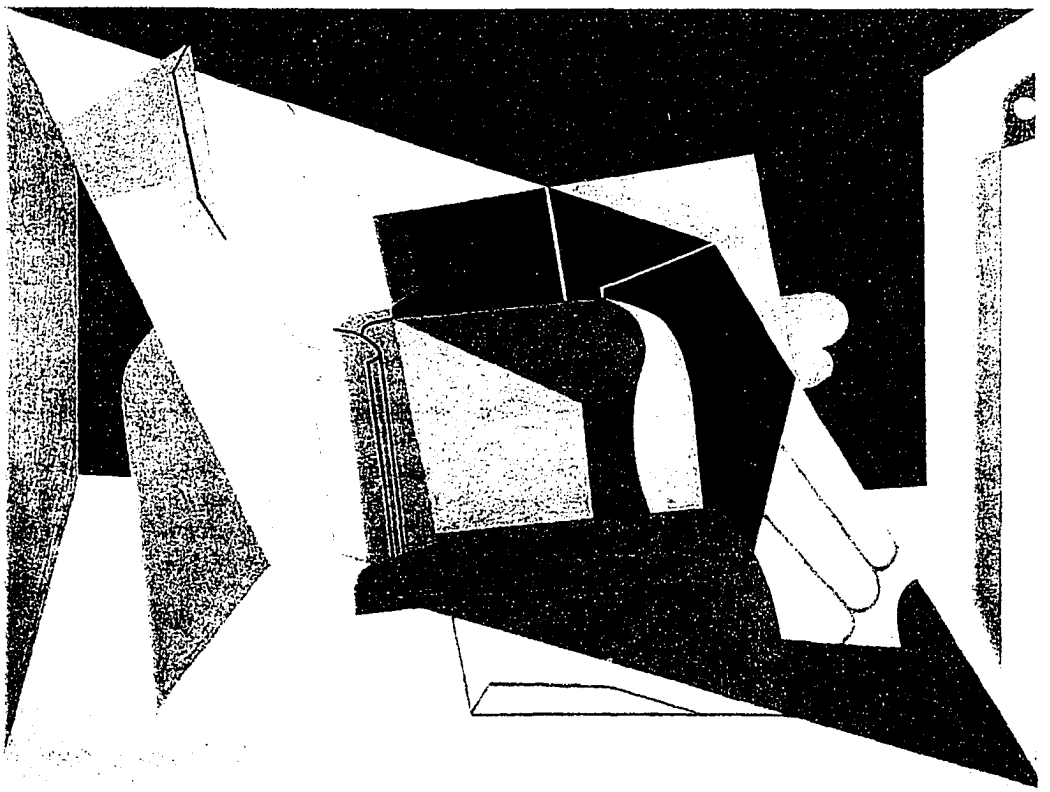

Fig. 5
Stuart Davis
Egg Beater #2
1928

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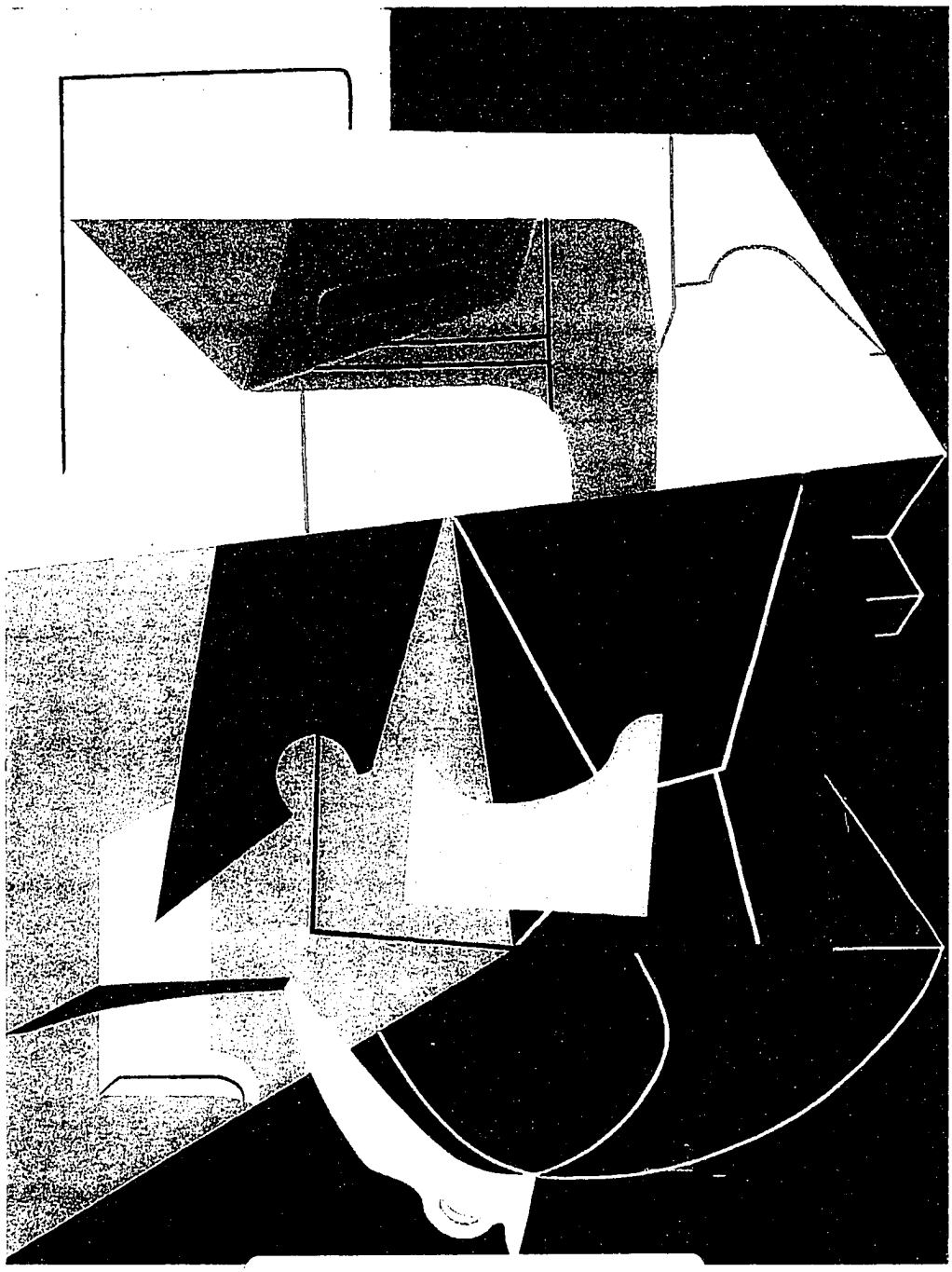

Fig. 6
Stuart Davis
Egg Beater #4
1928

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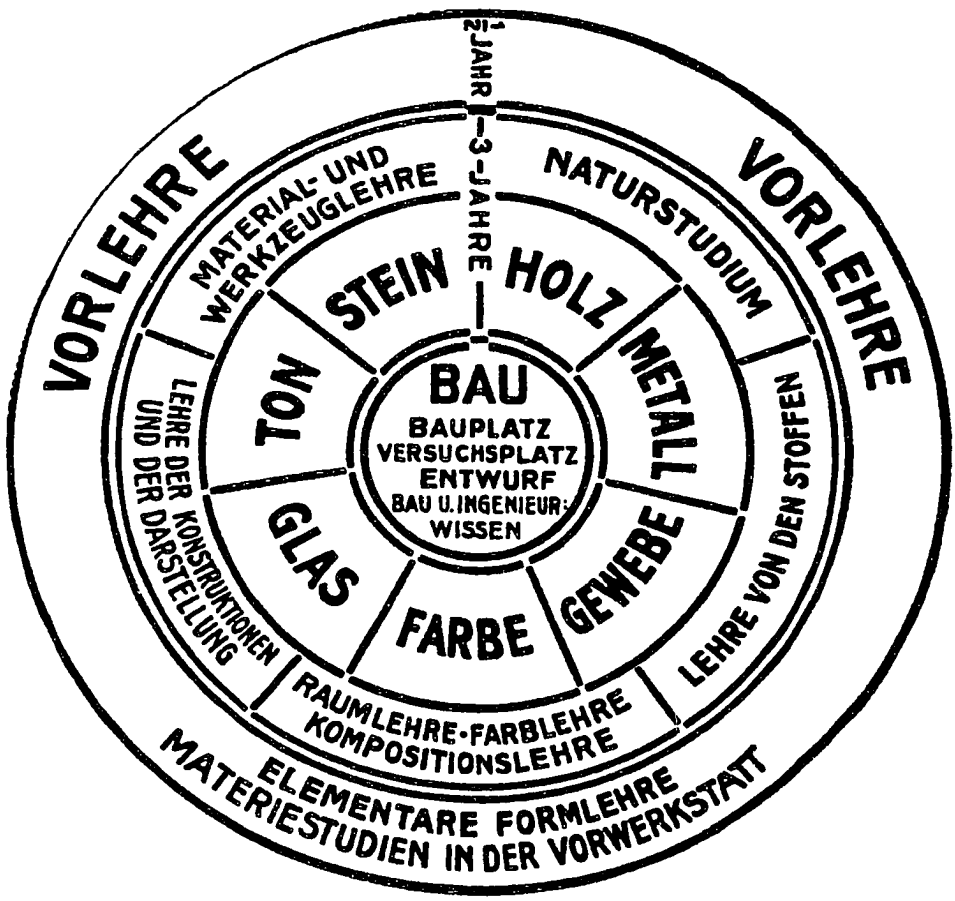

Fig. 7
Walter Gropius
Bauhaus Pedagogical
Plan
c. 1919

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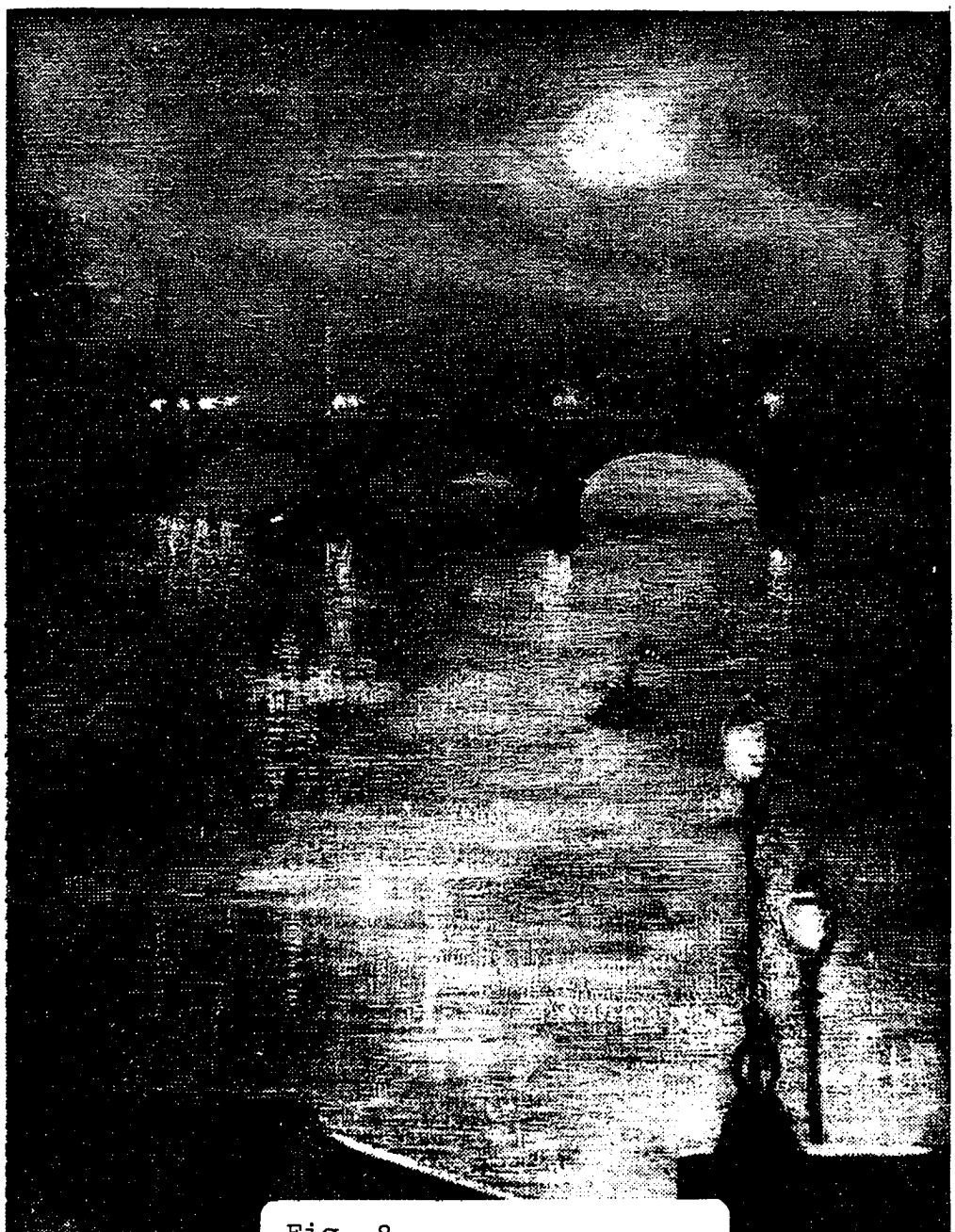

Fig. 8
Katherine Dreier
Moonlight on the Thames
1910

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Fig. 9
Katherine Dreier
The Path, Holland
c. 1911-12

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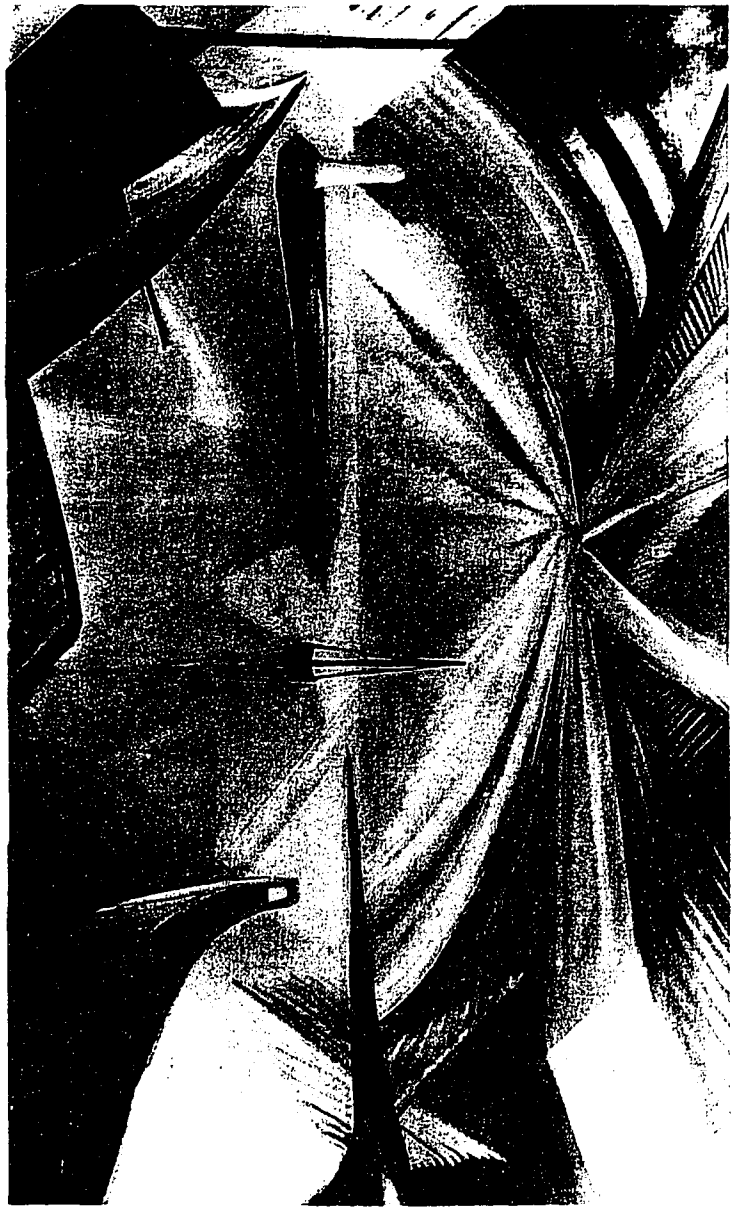

Fig. 10
Katherine Dreier
Stonington Harbor
n/d

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Fig. 11
Katherine Dreier
The Cat
1933

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Fig. 12
Katherine Dreier
Futile Activity
1932

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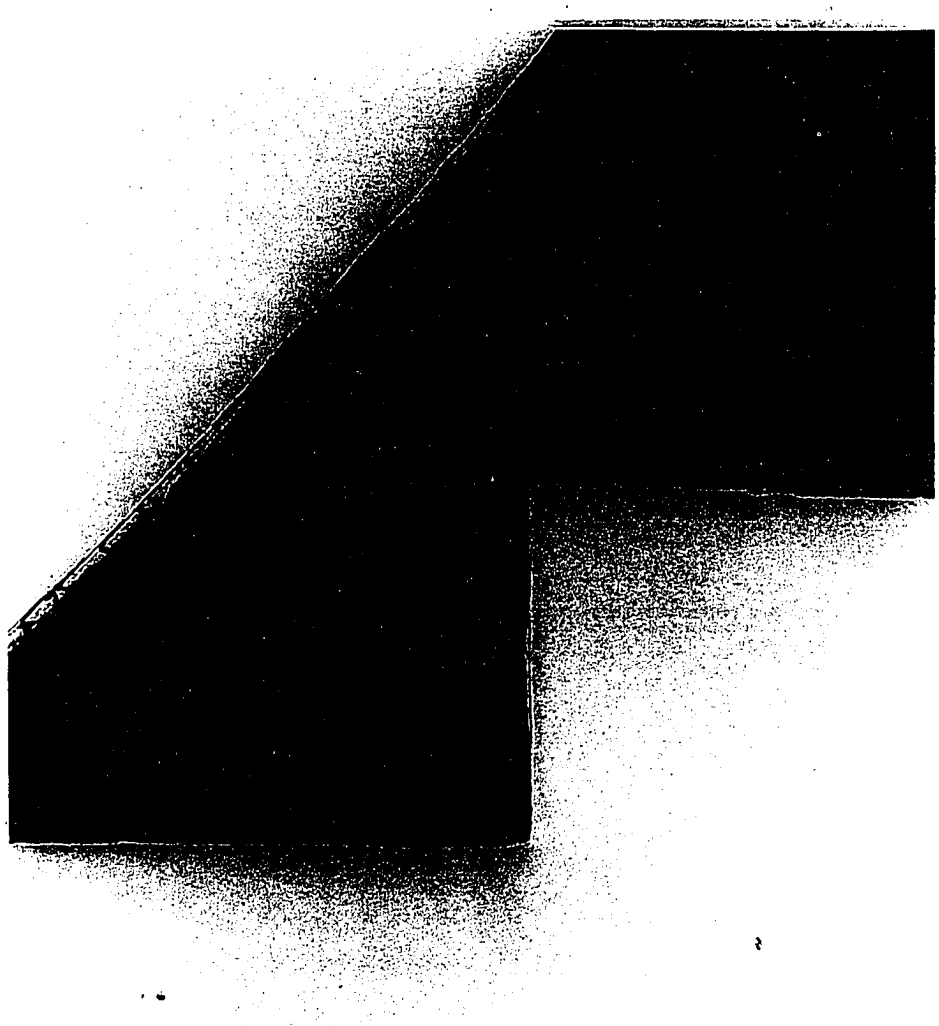

Fig. 13
Katherine Dreier
Untitled
1934-35

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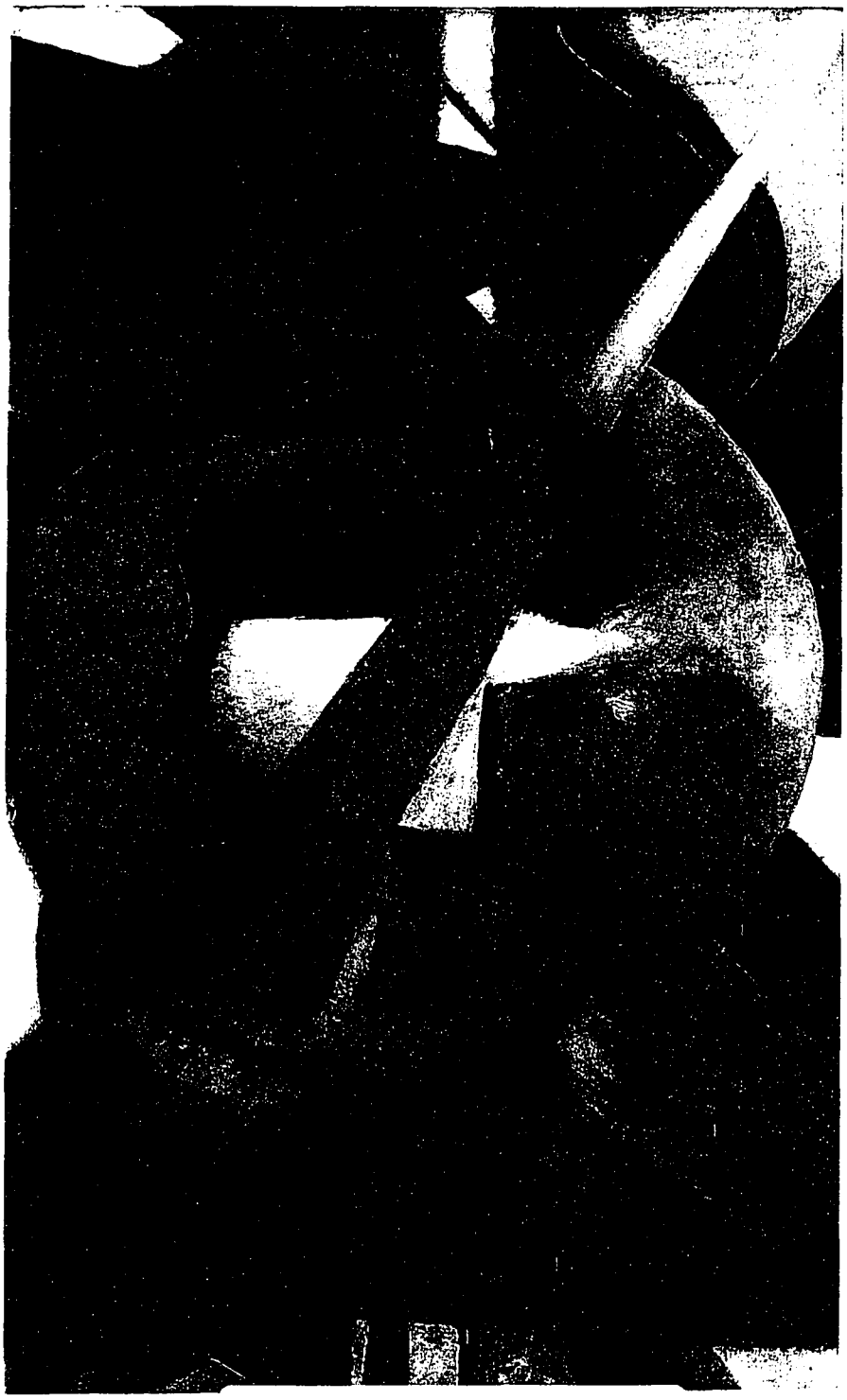

Fig. 14
Katherine Dreier
Abstract Portrait of
Marcel Duchamp
1918

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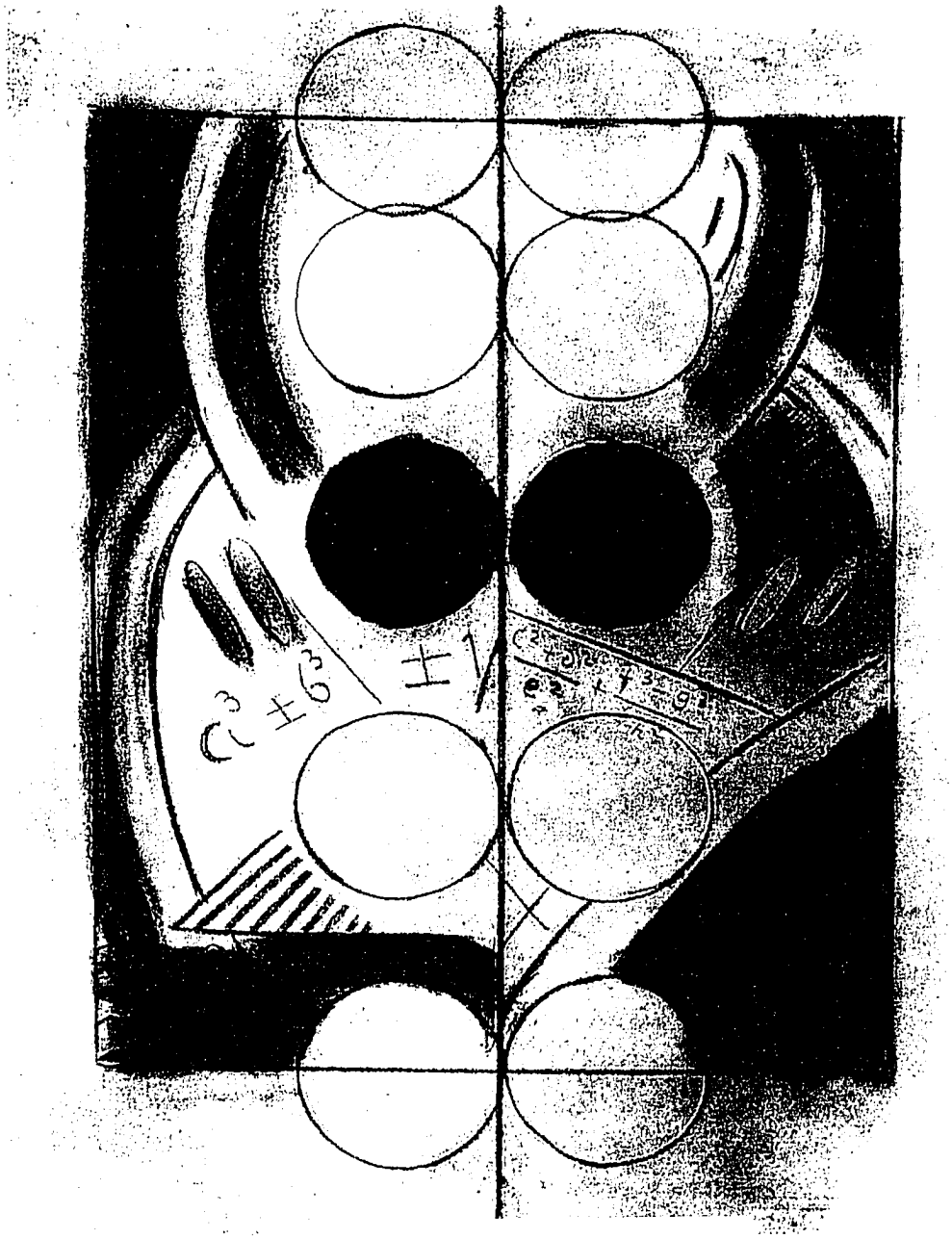

Fig. 15
Marius de Zayas
Portrait of Steiglitz
1912

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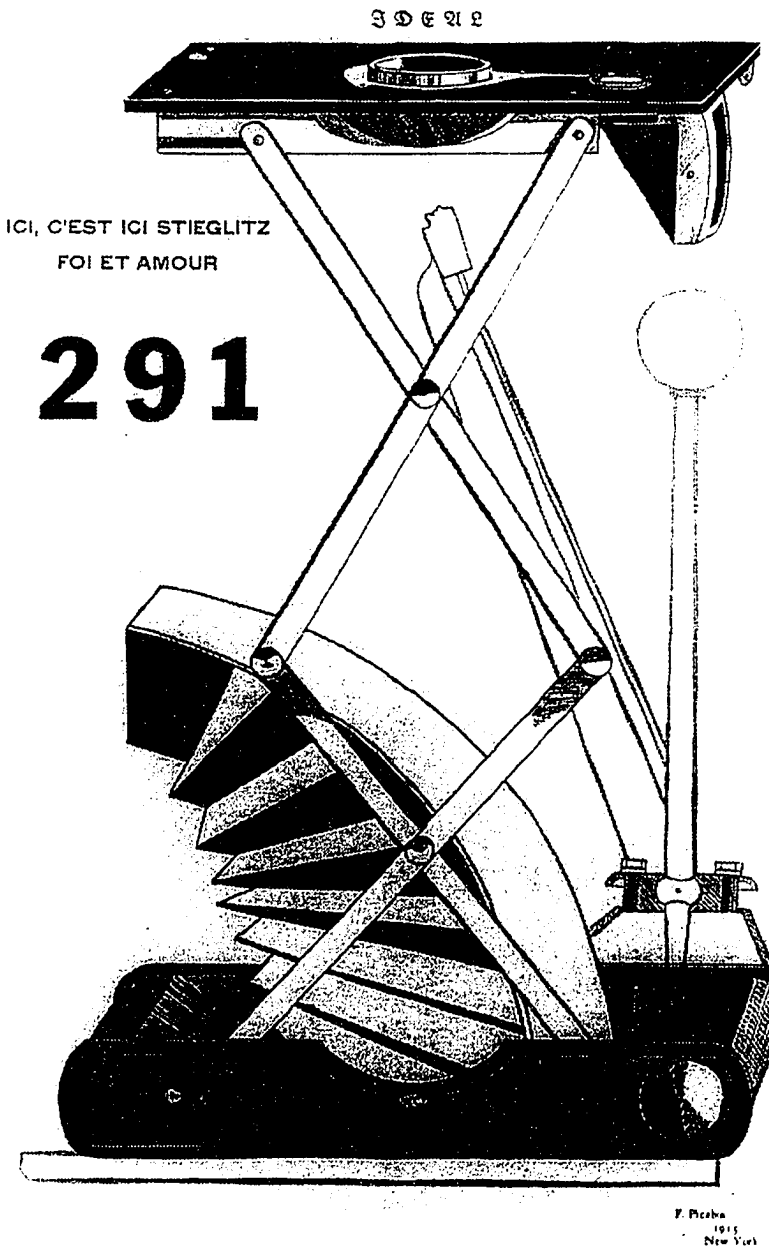

Fig. 16
Francis Picabia
Ici, c'est Steiglitz
1915

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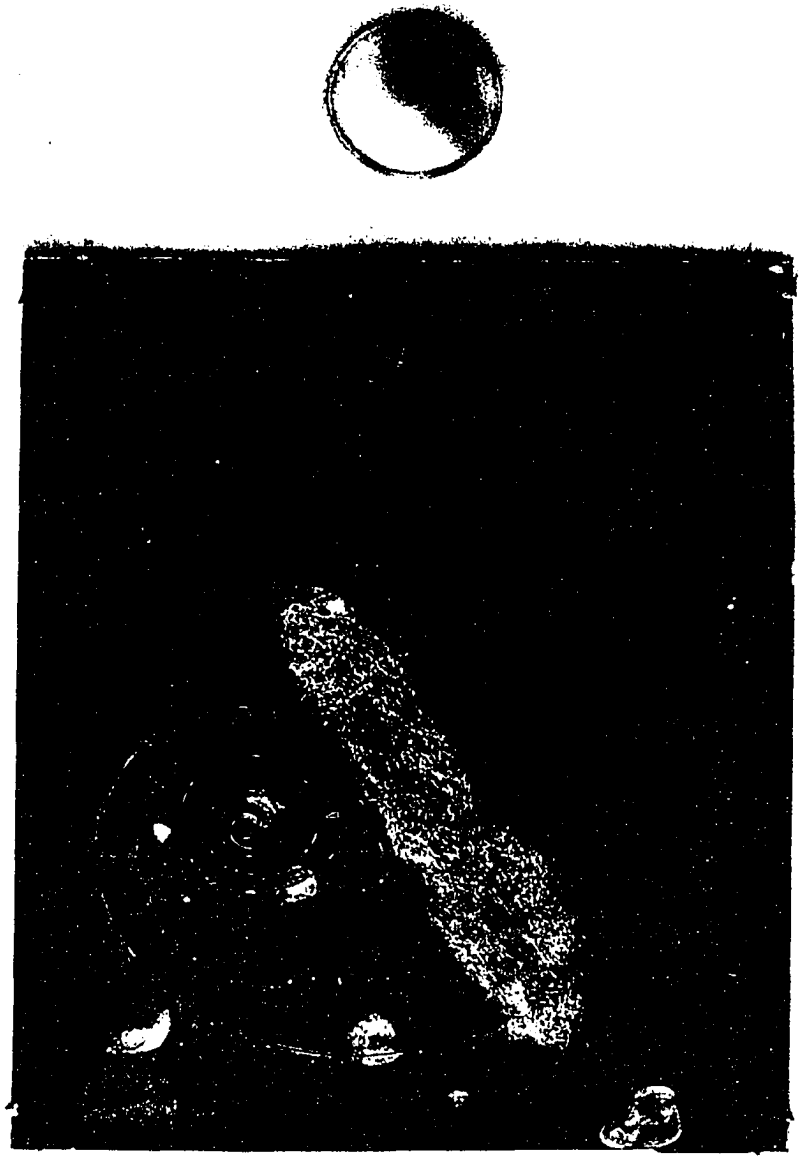

Fig. 17
Arthur Dove
Portrait of A. Steiglitz
1924

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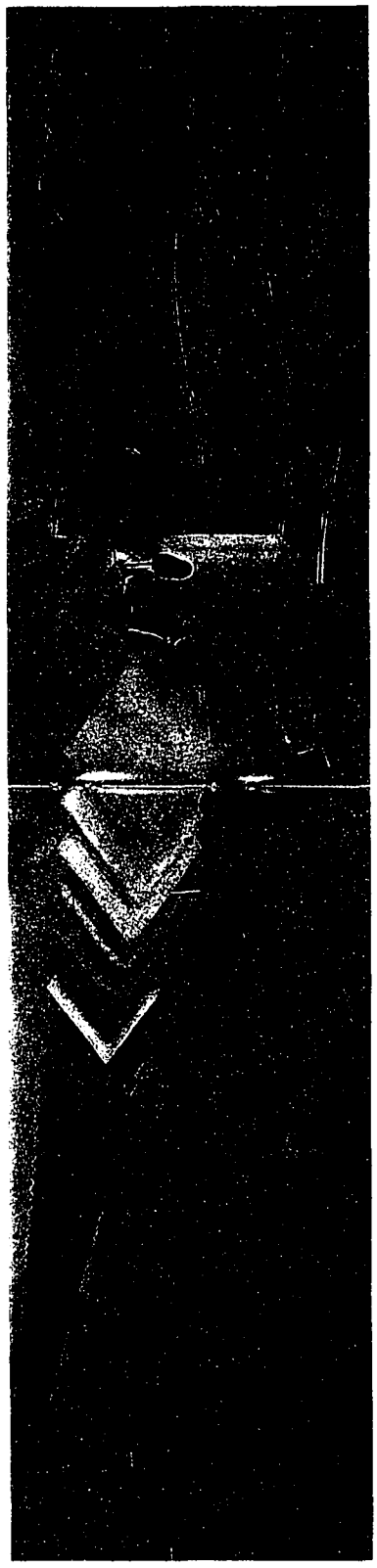

Fig. 18
Marcel Duchamp
Tu m'
1918

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Fig. 19
Wassily Kandinsky
Last Judgement
1910

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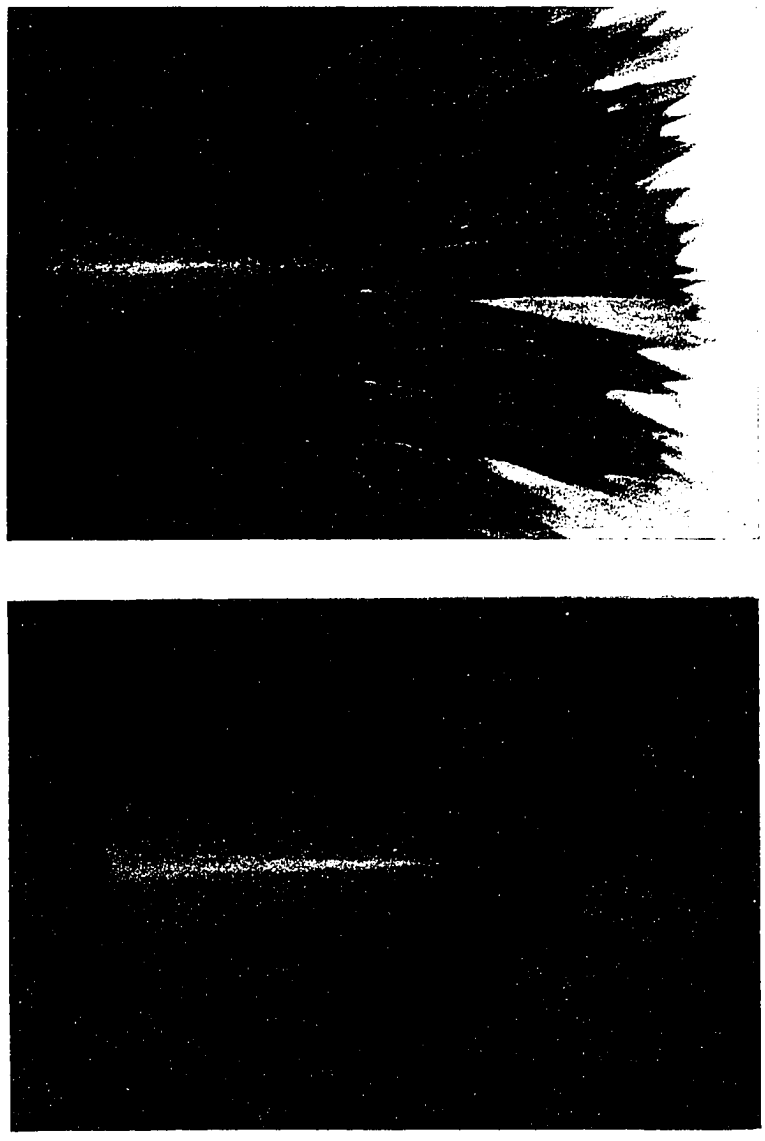

Fig. 20
Besant and Ledbetter
Pure Thought

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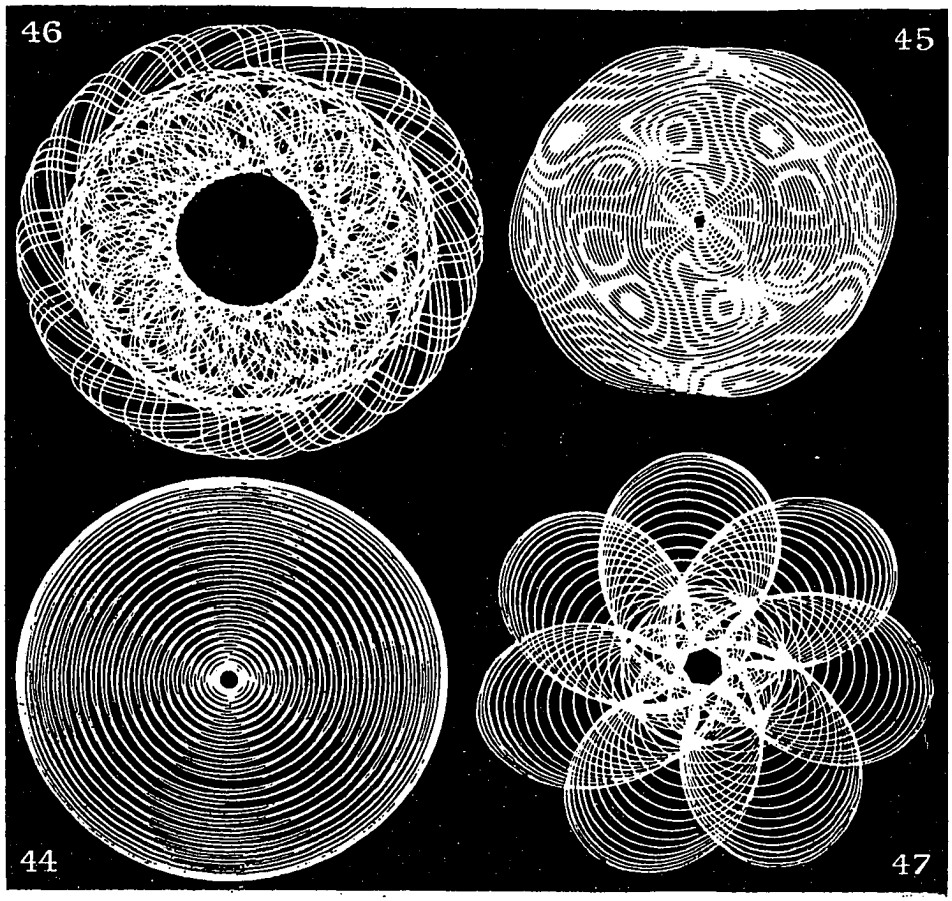

Fig. 21
Besant and Ledbetter
Different Thoughts in
Conversation

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Fig. 22
Katherine Dreier
The Eternal Hills
c. 1937

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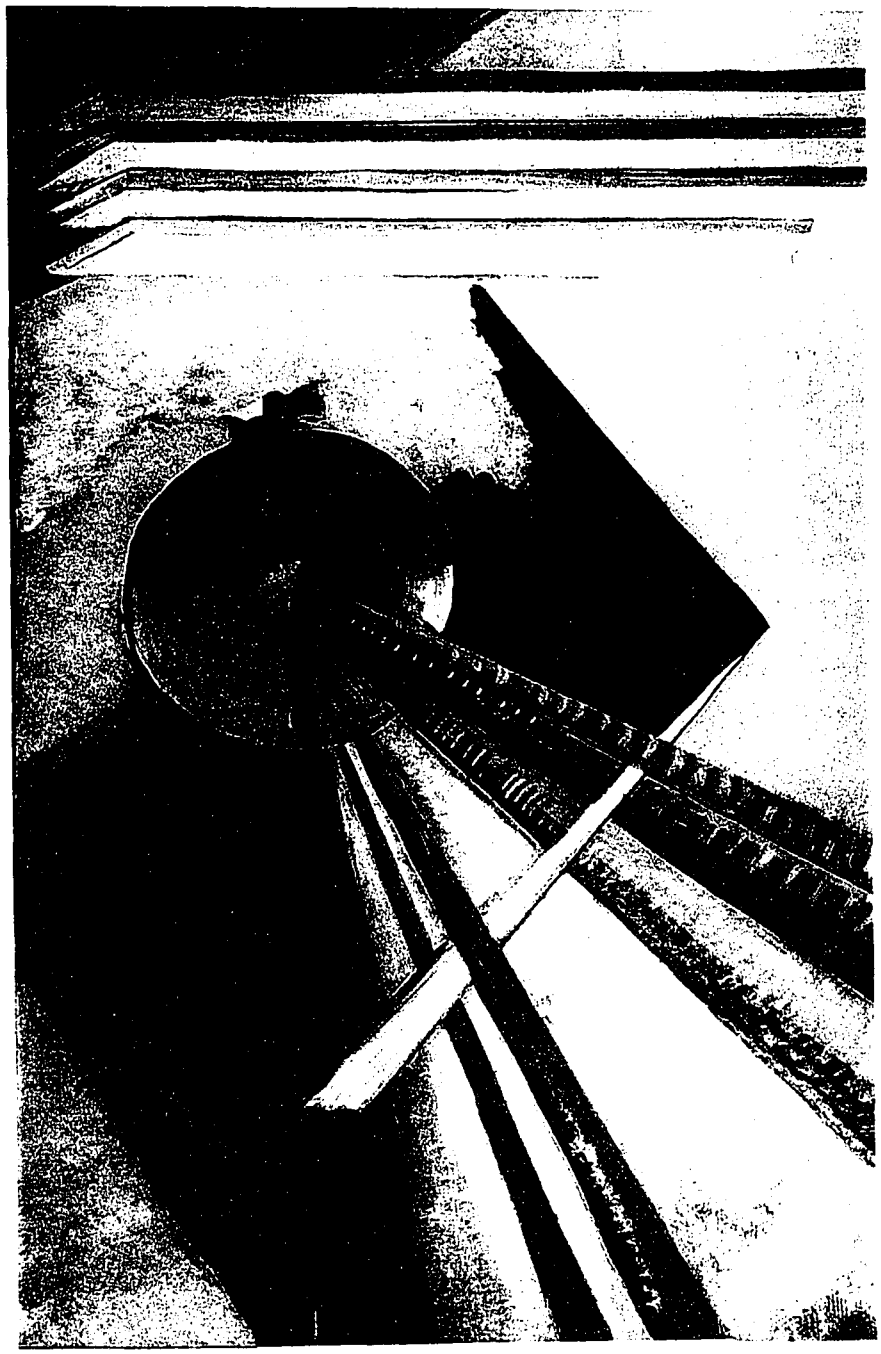

Fig. 23
Katherine Dreier
Unknown Forces
1926

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Fig. 24
Katherine Dreier
In Orbit
1934-35

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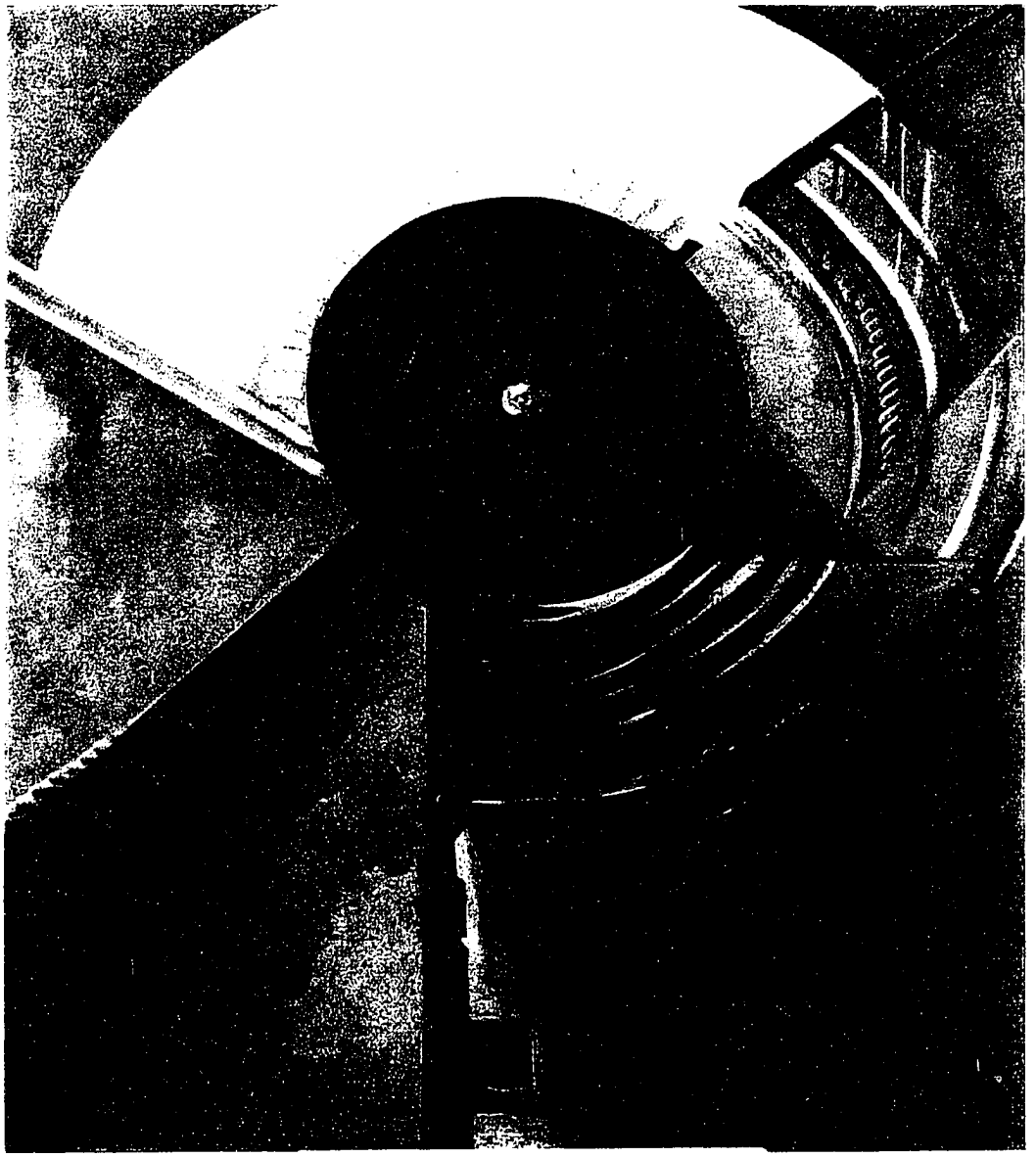

Fig. 25
Katherine Dreier
Abstract Portrait of
Ted Shawn
1929

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Fig. 26
Katherine Dreier
Abstract Portrait of
Wassily Savadsky
1929

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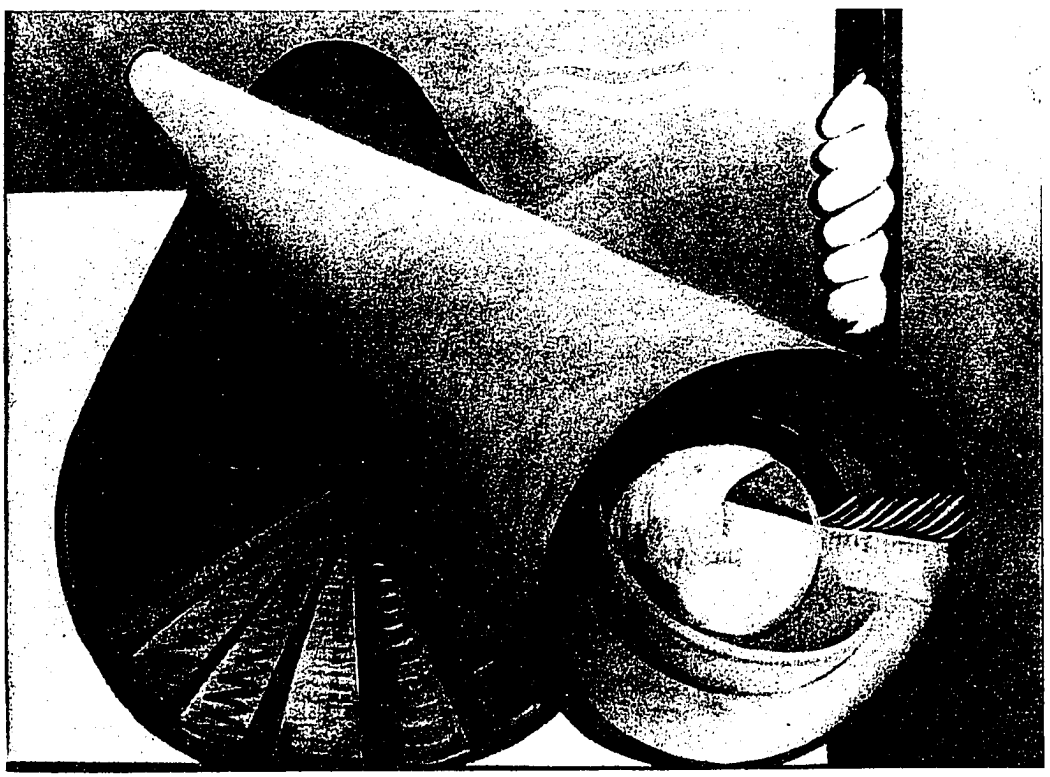

Fig. 27
Katherine Dreier
Zwei Welten
1930

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