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**Georgia O'Keeffe and photography: Her formative years,
1915–1930. (Volumes I and II)**

Peters, Sarah Whitaker, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1987

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**GEORGIA O'KEEFFE AND PHOTOGRAPHY:
HER FORMATIVE YEARS
1915 - 1930**

by

SARAH WHITAKER PETERS

VOLUME I

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


1987

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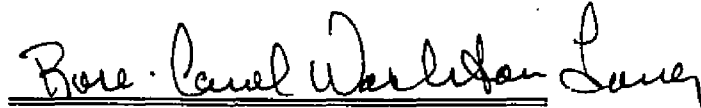
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Art History
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

12/21/86
Date


Chairman of the Examining Committee

1/27/87
Date


Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

To my parents, Margaret Allen Whitaker
and Robert Burbank Whitaker.
And to my husband Arthur King Peters.

With gratitude and love.

Preface and Acknowledgments

The first idea that a dissertation might be possible on the topic of Georgia O'Keeffe's painting and photography came from a fresh and intensive acquaintance with her work during preparation for the landmark exhibition *Women Artists 1550-1950*, organized by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. As a member of Professor Nochlin's 1976 spring seminar "Women and Art" at the City University of New York Graduate Center, I was asked to write the catalogue entries for O'Keeffe--and accepted with a pleasure somewhat tinged by the nostalgic. Like the artist, I had been born and raised in Wisconsin, not very far from Sun Prairie, and had made a special journey, when quite young, to see her work at The Art Institute of Chicago. I was given a list of half a dozen or so pictures that seemed set for the show, did the appropriate research, and wrote them up. Then the phone rang. "Terribly sorry," said Jeanne D'Andrea, Coordinator of Exhibitions and Publications for the museum, "Miss O'Keeffe won't let us have *so-and-so*, and *so-and-so*. She doesn't like group exhibitions, and she regards herself as an artist--*not* a 'woman artist'." A new list of O'Keeffe possibilities was drawn up, and other catalogue entries were written. The phone rang some more. But the result of all this was that I looked closely at a wide range of pictures, wrote many extra entries--and found myself newly in thrall to O'Keeffe's painting. Among other things, I thought I could see photography in it as a causal force.

Before forming a dissertation proposal, I spoke of my ideas with Professor Peter Bunnell at Princeton, Professor William I. Homer at the University of Delaware, Professor Alan Trachtenberg at Yale, John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art, Lloyd Goodrich at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Weston

Naef at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Professor Eugene Goossen at my own university. All were enthusiastic and helpful, as was Professor Estelle Jussim of Boston University, who answered a long letter with much positive reinforcement. Professors Goossen and Bunnell agreed to act as my advisors and I embarked on a task that I had no idea would take a decade to finish.

I had chosen to write about that most invisible of all human endeavors--the creative process. And I had chosen a justly celebrated living artist, who graciously, but firmly, refused to see me, and who turned down not quite all of my "permission" requests. (O'Keeffe never liked discussing her sources, and, understandably, she liked it even less with someone she didn't know.) But what was not given could not be taken away. And it was clear right from the start that in order to write with any learning, clarity and fairness everything was up to me--what pictures I could see, who else would talk to me, and what primary documents I could find to read as partial substitutes for the information contained in the O'Keeffe/Stieglitz correspondence, officially sealed at Yale until the year 2020.

Georgia O'Keeffe was born November 15, 1887, and died March 6, 1986. We are just beginning to understand that she was one of the most autobiographical artists of the 20th century. Despite the ever-mounting evidence for this in her work, and despite her nearly seventy years of fame, surprisingly little is known about O'Keeffe's daily conduct as a human being--what she was up to and how she felt about it. That she fully intended this information-gap is certain. ("Where I was born, and where and how I have lived is unimportant, it is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest."¹) As anyone who has done research on O'Keeffe knows, she became an expert over the years at covering her tracks. So much so that the "real" O'Keeffe may always show up best in the impulsive letters she wrote as a young woman. Not all of this correspondence has surfaced yet, but in the lively, ruminative, tart, and funny

accounts of her activities to Anita Pollitzer, Sherwood Anderson, Mabel Dodge Luhan and Henry McBride, among others, are many vivid glimpses of the artist before she chose to speak primarily through her public persona. The 1915 letters to Pollitzer (at Yale) are especially revealing because they show O’Keeffe “plain” only months before she came to Alfred Stieglitz’s powerful attention. And the free and easy voice we hear is that of a vulnerable, forceful, honest and private individual--a self-starter, with shrewd opinions about life, people and ideas. (“I believe in having everything and doing everything you want.”) We learn how well versed she was in some of the more advanced thinking of her time, despite her deprecatory references to “my so-called mind.” That her common reading included Synge’s *Riders to the Sea*, H. G. Wells’ *Tono Bungay* (“so hopelessly true”), the Murray translation of *The Trojan Women*, Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull*, Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (“it is very interesting”), Randolph Bourne’s *Life and Youth*, and Floyd Dell’s *Women as World Builders*. “I seem to go at reading the same vague intuitive way that I go at life--am interested--amused--like--or discard--for no particular reason excepting that it is inevitable at the moment,” she wrote Anderson in 1923. (Newberry Library.) O’Keeffe was a subscriber to what she called “The Suffrage Masses,” she practiced the violin, and she tried her hand at poetry. (“But the strongest card in the whole blame pack/was the fine sensation that paid men back./ For the finest feeling that’s been furled/ Is the feeling of fur on the tail of the world.”) It is also quite clear that the erotic energy pulsing through her first charcoal abstractions was all the greater for having been so long and thoroughly suppressed. (“Don’t mention loving anyone to me--It is a curious thing--don’t let it get you Anita if you value your piece [sic] of mind--it will eat you up and swallow you whole.”)

When the lines finally blurred between O’Keeffe’s private and public persona is not certain. Perhaps this process began as early as 1918, when Stieglitz

first started to photograph what he called “her many selves.” By 1923, in her Anderson Galleries catalogue statement, O’Keeffe’s familiar public personality is in almost full view. (“ . . . I decided I was a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only thing I could do that didn’t concern anybody but myself--That was nobody’s business but my own.”)

That O’Keeffe’s early relationship with Stieglitz had its Pygmalion aspects is easy to see. (This is particularly evident in the portrait photographs taken during the late ’teens and early ’twenties when he was trying to link her in every way he could with some of his favorite famous artists, notably Rodin, Whistler and Matisse.) No less visible, if heretofore less documented, is O’Keeffe’s artistic influence on Stieglitz. Although different in kind, this influence may have been even stronger in measure. For without O’Keeffe, Stieglitz’s greatest work could never have happened--specifically his cumulative portrait of her, the Lake George photographs, the Equivalentents, and the New York skyscraper series.

One of the most self-revelatory statements ever made by O’Keeffe about the complexities of her relationship to Stieglitz is buried in a 1923 letter to the critic Henry McBride (at the Archives of American Art). Describing her own “particular kind of vanity,” she said she didn’t at all mind being ignored or called names,

but I don’t like to be 2nd, 3rd or 4th. I like being first, if I’m noticed at all. That’s why I get on with Stieglitz. With him I feel first. And when he is around and there are others, he is the center and I don’t count at all.

Although she frequently complained that “words and I are not friends,” her writing has an amazing eloquence for one so reticent. Like her recorded speech, there is fiber as well as flavor.

With O’Keeffe, as with any major artist, no single perspective is possible. This is as true for the feminist viewpoint as it is for any other. From her

words and actions, O’Keeffe comes across as one who sincerely believed that to separate painting, or music, or literature, into two sexes is to emphasize values in them that is *not* art. (Hence her determination never to be billed as a “woman artist.”) She was, nonetheless, acutely aware of the role played by gender in the making of all art--and of her own in particular. In the letters to Pollitzer, O’Keeffe calls it her “woman’s feeling.” And in 1925 she asked Mabel Dodge Luhan to write, “Something about me that the men can’t . . . I feel there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore--men have done all they can do about it.” (Yale) O’Keeffe made her position on the issue of feminism clear in a 1930 debate with Michael Gold, editor of the *New Masses* . This remarkably forthcoming statement, elicited under pressure, is as revealing of her intelligence of vocation, as anything she ever said publicly.

I am interested in the oppression of women of all classes . . . though not nearly so definitely and so consistently as I am in the abstractions of painting. But one has affected the other . . . I have had to go to men as sources in my painting, because the past has left us so small an inheritance of woman’s painting that has widened life . . . Before I put a brush to a canvas I question, “Is this mine? Is it all intrinsically of myself? Is it influenced by some idea or some photograph of an idea which I have acquired from some man?”

That, too, implies a social consciousness, a social struggle. I am trying with all my skill to do painting that is all of a woman, as well as all of me. . . I have no hesitancy in contending that my painting of a flower may be just as much a product of this age as a cartoon about the freedom of women--or the working class--or anything else. And since the literary element will not blind the onlooker to the painting element, I think it is much more likely to be good art.”²

By all accounts, O’Keeffe was capable of great warmth and great coldness in her relations with people. (How much of this was due to a mixed Irish, Hungarian and Dutch inheritance can only be guessed at.) Long-time friendships,

such as she had with Louise March, Dorothy Schubart, and Ansel Adams were actually quite rare. Her silences and quarrels with old friends and associates, especially in the long years after Stieglitz's death, suggest that she felt obscurely threatened by persons who might know her, or her concerns, too well--particularly those for whom she was not "first." ("I don't know why people disturb me so much-- They make me feel like a hobbled horse," she wrote Anderson in 1923.) It is a truism that no great achievement was ever accomplished without ruthlessness, and O'Keeffe, when she wished, could be ruthless indeed—despite her deeply civilized heart. These characterological swings between the warm and the cold are almost palpable in her paintings. Although the larger dividing line can easily be said to begin with the New Mexico animal bone themes (which started after her mental breakdown in 1932), her abrupt shifts of mood are apparent even in the so-called Lake George period of the 'twenties.

O'Keeffe had a penchant for secrecy, a mystic, rather than orthodox, sense of the spiritual, an irrepressible comic streak, and an unpredictable capacity for outrage. These diverse elements in her nature are highly visible in her work, once we have been alerted to look for them. Her intrinsic independence is also there to see, even in her borrowings from photography. While O'Keeffe never lost her respect for Stieglitz's "eye," she didn't hesitate to borrow from, or paraphrase, photography that she liked and he didn't. A good example of this divergence of opinion is her aesthetic regard for Alvin Langdon Coburn, whom Stieglitz professed to despise. "Coburn is clever. But rarely a print of his wears. There is no soul in them. The prints are good but empty," he wrote J. Dudley Johnson in 1924 (Royal Photographic Society, Bath, England). O'Keeffe was, in fact, an extremely eclectic artist. Like Matisse (with whom it sometimes pleased Stieglitz to compare her), she almost never copied from her many sources. Rather she re-shaped them out of her own immediate interest and emotion during the actual work

process. This is, in good part, why every one of her paintings--whether abstract or "ridiculously realistic" (her words)--looks exactly like an O'Keeffe, and no other. Significantly, very few formal sketches exist for any of her works.

Why did photography interest O'Keeffe so much for so long? The answer may never be perfectly clear. It is true that when she first met Stieglitz, certain "photographic" characteristics like the close-up and the fragment--or crop--were already familiar to her through Arthur Wesley Dow's Japanese-derived exercises in *Composition*. (Dow was himself an enthusiastic amateur photographer.) But O'Keeffe was first and foremost a colorist, and the images made by Stieglitz, and the photographers of his circle were composed of monochrome shades of warm and cool tones. She was a master of expression in watercolor, pastel and oil, whereas in photography the relation of hand to eye is very different. She could synthesize observation, emotion and design, while the photograph is essentially disassociative, contingent and static. Furthermore, the painter's "here and now" is quantitatively different from the photographer's: the former is meditated, while the latter is not. Painting registers changes of consciousness, and creates substitutes for space, light, motion and mass. All of this is missing from the isolated instant that is a photograph.

Nevertheless, photography excited O'Keeffe. She always liked to find out what things looked like when they were photographed--even her paintings. And she often thought the results beautiful. ("Isn't it funny that I hate my drawings--and am simply crazy about the photographs of them," she wrote Pollitzer in November of 1916.) These reasons alone would be worth some investigation. But between 1919 and 1924, O'Keeffe's undeniably eccentric use of photography became the nexus of her mature style. One of the several reasons this has gone virtually undetected for so long is because photography did not tear down the edifice she had already built up out of Art Nouveau and European Modernism.

Rather it was joined *to* them, and this synthesis is what enabled her to create “the new” in American art, so urgently called for by Stieglitz.

Despite the enormous amount of critical literature accumulating on O’Keeffe’s work since 1917, comparatively little attention has been paid to the interconnections between her paintings and photography. Obviously she herself was responsible for this. In her lifetime she made only four published statements on the camera as a major source for her art: in *Manuscripts* (1922), where she wrote that photography had been “part of my searching”; in a 1962 interview with Katharine Kuh (*The Artist’s Voice*) where she stated that photography had nothing to do with her enlarged flowers; in her limited edition of *Some Memories of Drawings* (1974) where she described using a camera to capture the odd angle in her 1963 painting *The Winter Road*; and in her autobiographical picture book *Georgia O’Keeffe* (1976) where she again cited the use of one of her own snapshots, for *Road Past The View I* (1964). Four of O’Keeffe’s “snapshots,” taken c. 1955, are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.³

Daniel Catton Rich may have been the first to state outright that O’Keeffe drew upon photography for her art. In 1943 he wrote that she was “unquestionably affected” by Stieglitz’s “clean, new vision in photography,” and went on to say, quite accurately, that

unlike certain other painters of this period, O’Keeffe avoided the *imitation* of photographic form in paint. Various qualities she simply translated into her own medium. . . O’Keeffe made scrupulous use of the camera’s suggestions but wholly in terms of pictorial design.⁴

Among the relatively few later writers and critics to point out photographic aspects in O’Keeffe’s work in specific ways are Milton W. Brown (1946)⁵, Clement Greenberg (1946)⁶, Martin L. Friedman (1960)⁷, Bram Dijkstra (1969)⁸, Barbara Rose (1975)⁹, also in 1977¹⁰, and Patterson Sims (1981)¹¹.

Thus far, the most serious and extended attempt to investigate O’Keeffe and photography has been Meridel Rubenstein, “The Circles and The Symmetry: The Reciprocal Influence of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz,” Master of Fine Arts dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1977. Rubenstein had three interviews with O’Keeffe (25 September 1975, March 3 and 5, 1976), and was permitted to look at the artist’s notebooks at Abiquiu. Rubenstein presents much useful material and she is clearly correct in her observation that throughout their working life together Stieglitz and O’Keeffe “picked up ideas from each other, reworking, synthesizing, incorporating opposites, shifting back and forth between realistic and abstract subjects.” (p. 124.) But she takes a broad, and often confusing, view of their artistic relationship, rarely offers a persuasive comparative analysis of key paintings and photographs, and does not define the special “291” terms that she uses, like “abstraction,” “objectivity” and “equivalence.” These particular concepts are extremely important to grasp because many of the images made by Stieglitz and O’Keeffe were not only deliberately based upon them, but can even be said to *represent* them.

In the case of a great artist, of course, nothing is irrelevant or discreditable. The more we know about the creative process, the more we are enriched, and the greater our regard for the artist. During her life with Stieglitz, O’Keeffe was part of a photographic culture, and this imposed on her a cognitive and occupational way of seeing which she learned, from her own volition, to transfer to painting.

I have sought to discover O’Keeffe’s intentions with regard to what *she* wanted, but also with regard to what was wanted *from* her, by Stieglitz, and, less directly, by the art world in New York--about which he was extraordinarily astute. My investigations deal only with those photographers who were Stieglitz’s close associates during the life span of his Little Galleries of The Photo-Secession,

forever known as “291.” Although O’Keeffe’s painting evidently made a strong visual impression on Edward Weston, Paul Outerbridge, Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham (and, perhaps, vice versa), their photography is excluded here because they were not, strictly speaking, 291 artists.

First, I had to learn from scratch about the whole photographic process--and did, thanks to my friend Simon Heifetz, who spent many long hours patiently explaining and demonstrating basic principles in his photo laboratory. There was also the immediate necessity to learn as much as possible about the history of photography--and, early on, my colleague Dr. Naomi Rosenblum kindly invited me to audit her excellent classes at The New School. Susan Dodge Peters, the art and photography critic, also helped immeasurably by recommending bibliography, and sending me much useful material, including some of her original research on Elizabeth McCausland. Summers, and between my own teaching terms at the University of Long Island (C.W. Post), I commuted to Yale University to read the vast (unrestricted) correspondence in The Stieglitz Archive, donated by O’Keeffe in 1949 to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Many people who had known O’Keeffe and Stieglitz for a long time agreed to be interviewed, including Ansel Adams, Georgia Engelhard Cromwell, Louise March, Blanche Matthias, Dorothy Norman, Dorothy Schubart and Flora Stieglitz Straus. Of inestimable value were the well researched biographies by Laurie Lisle (*Portrait of an Artist, A Biography of Georgia O’Keeffe*) and Sue Davidson Lowe (*Stieglitz, A Memoir/Biography*) which came out midway through my task. Both authors have been incredibly giving with their time and hospitality in answering all my extra questions. And Sue Lowe made it possible for me to see some of the wonderful O’Keeffes still owned by the Stieglitz family. Without Sarah Greenough’s seminal scholarship on Stieglitz’s writings, my work would have been far more difficult. We met in May, 1978, when I first came to the National Gallery of Art to study the

“key set” of his photographs, and she was a Kress Foundation fellow charged with cataloguing it. Over the years, in true collegial spirit, we have shared quite a few ideas, and I, for one, have benefitted greatly from our discussions, and from her always generous and straightforward help. Also valuable, in terms of feedback for my visual findings, were the talks I was invited to give at the symposium “Photography and Painting of the Stieglitz Circle,” presented at Tufts University (1979); at the Fall Lecture series of The International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House (1979); and at the Madison Arts Center, in Wisconsin, on the occasion of the first retrospective exhibition ever given the artist by her native state (1984).

The thesis is divided into two unequal parts. The first (Chapters One through Six) is largely a documentary study of the generic and philosophical relationships between painting and photography, as cumulatively understood by the Stieglitz circle artists and writers. This “understanding” reached its apex in the Seven Americans Show of 1925. To uncover O’Keeffe’s hidden use of photography it was necessary also to investigate her earlier sources, and the ways in which she transformed *them*. Only in this way could I get at what she actually understood photography to be--as a process and as an idea. (She herself never discussed it.) It was during this part of the research that I discovered how unexpectedly similar her (essentially Symbolist) artistic formation was to Stieglitz’s.

The second part (Chapters Seven and Eight) offers a close examination of O’Keeffe’s painting vis-à-vis photography, in terms of what Michael Baxandall has called “inferential criticism.”¹² That is, I have tried to combine “good gritty bits of causal circumstance”¹³ with perceptual, emotional and imaginative scrutiny. From the comparison of many examples I gradually perceived that her use of

photography fell into three general categories: the adoptive, the adaptive and the innovative. (See pp. 274-275.)

My overall method might be called soritical, since my views about O'Keeffe's painting--its making and its meanings--were formed over the years in a kind of chain syllogism from reading what she (and others) wrote about her intentions, from examining documents peculiar to her time and milieu, and most of all from looking at and thinking hard about her images. Whenever feasible, and for obvious reasons, I chose paintings and photographs for discussion that were known to me first hand, rather than through book reproduction. While each choice seemed to me to best exemplify the characteristics of a photographic vision, there were countless others that could have been made. I also tried to suit my language to the character of the period these images were created in. Whether or not I have succeeded it is perhaps an effort that O'Keeffe would have appreciated.

The subject of a famous Edward Steichen photograph, J. Pierpont Morgan, once said, "There are two reasons why a man does anything. There's a good reason, and there's the real reason." Turning the light of this remark on O'Keeffe and photography, I think what I have written about are the "good" reasons. The "real" reason, of course, was art.

Finally, a word about the extensive bibliography. The entries listed are those which taught me most about the tangled relationship between painting and photography, about O'Keeffe and Stieglitz as individual artists, and about the heady "291" idea of an original modern American art--one which they strove to create together, in their separate mediums, during the 1920's.

I have been helped by people every bit as much as by books. Besides those already mentioned, I wish especially to thank the extraordinary faculty of the City University of New York, in particular Milton Brown, William Gerdts, Rose-Carol Washton Long, Linda Nochlin, Robert Pincus-Witten, John Rewald, Leo

Steinberg and, most of all, my advisor Eugene Goossen for his guiding wisdom, his concern for accurate prose, and his unflagging encouragement. Peter Bunnell of Princeton deserves special thanks for generously taking on the task of being my second advisor. His help was as continuous as it was invaluable, and his own profound understanding of Stieglitz's work was a reliable compass throughout my far-flung explorations.

Lacking O'Keeffe's cooperation, I faced many formidable documentation problems. I wish to record that my dissertation would not have been possible in the same way--perhaps not possible at all-- without the timely aid of two people: Lloyd Goodrich, former Director of The Whitney Museum of American Art, who arranged permission for me to photograph the unique collection of O'Keeffe reproductions in the Whitney files, begun by Rosalind Irvine, which enabled me to gradually construct a working visual chronology despite some vexing lacunae. (Some of these are cited in my text.) And the artist Patricia Johanson, who freely shared with me the catalogue raisonné she herself compiled in 1966 of O'Keeffe's oeuvre, working directly from the notebooks at Abiquiu. Although not conclusive, because numerous works have turned up since then, it has nonetheless been an extremely important tool. I am deeply grateful to them both.

I was aided in diverse ways by many others to whom I owe warm thanks: Dr. Mary Steichen Calderone, Susan Cohn, William C. Dove, Charles Eldredge, Katherine Hoffman, William Innes Homer, who kindly let me read the transcript of his 1972 interview with O'Keeffe, David McAlpin and Lewis Mumford--all of whom gave careful and complete attention to my letters and calls, as did Terence R. Pitts of the Center for Creative Photography and Mrs. Frederick Reinert, of The Ipswich Historical Society.

To Georgia Engelhard Cromwell (Stieglitz's niece, herself a fine photographer), to Nina Starr Howell, photographer and scholar, and to Grace A.

Mayer, curator of The Steichen Archive at The Museum of Modern Art, my heartfelt appreciation for help and courtesies beyond all expectation.

I wish to thank Patricia M. Howell and Anne Whelpley of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University, as well as Donald Gallup, now Curator Emeritus of the Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke. Also, Cecilia Chin, formerly of The Art Institute of Chicago Library, May Fitzgerald of The Whitney Museum of American Art Library, Diana Haskell of The Newberry Library, and the incredibly knowledgeable staff of The New York Public Library.

Still others to whom I owe special debts of thanks are: Thomas Beckman of The Milwaukee Art Museum, Roland Buffat, Marcel Burri, John Driscoll of The William H. Lane Foundation, Susan Ehrens, Frederick J. Fisher of The Hyde Collection, Thomas Garver of The Madison Arts Center, John Gernand of The Phillips Collection, Lynn Gould, Christopher Hewat, Ronald Hill, Michael E. Hoffman of The Paul Strand Foundation, Ruth Kaufmann, Anne Kennedy, Gail Levin, Harry Lunn, Jim McQuaid, Nancy Merritt, Charles Millard, Peggy Davidson Murray, Christopher Phillips, Elizabeth Pollock, William Rubin, Steven W. Siegel, Archivist of The 92nd Street Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association, Patterson Sims of The Whitney, Kate Rodina Steichen, Hazel Strand, Andrea Turnage, Joan Washburn, Richard York and Virginia Zabriskie.

I have been sustained and stretched by discussions with my colleagues Julia Ballerini, Taube Greenspan and Sandra S. Phillips.

Although I have mainly referred to photographic criticism of the period in the text, my eye and mind have also benefitted greatly from writings of the last decade or so on the nature and intent of photographic meaning. From Robert Adams, Rudolf Arnheim, Hollis Frampton, Peter Galassi, Henry Holmes Smith, Rosalind Krauss, Christopher Phillips, Joel Snyder, Abigail Solomon-Godeau,

Susan Sontag, John Szarkowski and Kirk Varnadoe in particular, I have learned and pondered much. Respectful thanks to them all.

I am most appreciative of the many friends who listened patiently to my ideas, read sections of the manuscript, and offered practical advice and encouragement--especially Thomas Cassilly, George Hamlin and Greg Schwed.

Warmest thanks go to Mark Flower, Mike Peters and John Von Sneidern, who helped to photograph some of my material, to Lila Brooks, Maggie Peters and Heide Waleson, who, with great calm and skill, typed successive handwritten drafts of many chapters, and to Deborah Glaser, who cheerfully took on the task of keying the whole manuscript into the word processor.

I am very grateful to Annie Martin, Vivian Munroe and Dorothy S. Norman for the many reasons they (and I) know best.

Last, but far from least, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the members of my large and wonderful family, who bore with me even as they bore me up, and who somehow kept and communicated their strong faith in what I was doing for so long--especially my husband Arthur King Peters, and our children Robert Bruce Peters and Susan Dodge Peters, Margaret Peters Schwed and Peter Gregory Schwed, Michael Whitaker Peters and Donna Waszmer Peters. To Bruce I owe special thanks for editing and laser printing the manuscript, under great pressure, at the end.

Preface Notes

- ¹Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* . New York: Viking Press, 1976. no pagination. This august pronouncement bears a remarkable similarity to one made by the Symbolist critic Sadakichi Hartmann in 1903. "Biographical data do not interest me. What is the difference where a man is born, how old he is, where he studied, and where he was medalled. His art must speak--that is all I care for." Sidney Allen [Sadakichi Hartmann] "A Visit to Steichen's Studio." *Camera Work* 2 (April 1903): 25.
- ²Gladys Oaks, "Radical Writer and Woman Artist Clash on Propaganda and its Uses." *New York World* ,16 March 1930, Woman's sections, pp. 1, 3.
- ³They were published in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* , Volume XL11, Number 2, Fall 1984, pp. 33, 43. Very probably these photographs were taken with a Brownie camera. Grace M. Mayer, curator of the Steichen Archive at the MOMA, told me that Todd Webb once offered to teach O'Keeffe to use a Leica when he saw her using a Brownie, but that she declined. It is now well known that even that master inventor of forms Picasso took photographs for his own creative use during the years 1912-1913. Some of these were on exhibition at the Pace/McGill Gallery in New York, May-August, 1986.
- ⁴Daniel Catton Rich, *Georgia O'Keeffe* , exhibition catalogue, The Art Institute of Chicago (1943): 21.
- ⁵"Cubist Realism: An American Style." *Marsyas* III (1946): 155. Brown's findings vis-à-vis O'Keeffe and Strand are taken up in Chapter Eight.
- ⁶"Art," *The Nation* 162 (June 15, 1946): 727. Greenberg's comments on O'Keeffe are consistently negative, and he describes her painting as "little more than tinted photography."
- ⁷*The Precisionist View in American Art*, exhibition catalogue (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1960): 14-15. "Edward Steichen and Paul Strand, both influenced and encouraged by Stieglitz, used in their work many of the devices that characterize O'Keeffe's painting: the sudden enlargement of an architectural detail, the close-range, intimate view of a flower section which, while all outside contours and references disappear, reveals an unsuspected, new identity."
- ⁸*The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969): 152-154. "It would seem clear that O'Keeffe's pervasive use of sharply etched line finds its origin in Stieglitz's photography."

⁹*Readings in American Art 1900-1975* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1975): 54-55. "Although Georgia O'Keeffe has denied that photography provided the example for her enlarged close-ups of flowers, there is an undeniable similarity between certain of her compositions, both floral and abstract, and the photographs of her husband, Stieglitz, and his colleagues Paul Strand and Paul Haviland."

¹⁰"O'Keeffe's Trail," *New York Review of Books* (March 31, 1977): 31. "Contrary to what critics have concluded, photographic enlargement seems to have been more coincidental to her work than an influence on it . . . Photography's influence on her work is more a matter of her use of 'cropping' in her compositions." Rose's seeming contradiction here of her own 1975 statement may have reflected her close contact with O'Keeffe at this time--a contact O'Keeffe was to break only a little later.

¹¹*Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1981): 21-23. "The connection between O'Keeffe's work and the art of photography has generated more intrigue than clarification. Nowhere has the connection been more clear, yet less discussed, than in her paintings of flowers . . . Her direct observation of lush natural details has antecedents in the photographs of de Meyer, Sheeler, and Steichen, and parallels in the contemporary photographs of Blossfeldt, Cunningham, Hagemeyer, and Strand."

¹²Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985): 136-137.

¹³*Ibid*, p. 74.

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It will be noticed that some of the information for the above citations is incomplete. The official cataloguing of O'Keeffe's oeuvre has just begun. Accession numbers for Stieglitz's "key set" of prints are not given because they are still in the process of being revised by The National Gallery.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE SYMBOLIST SPIRIT OF 291

When “they” ask you what anarchism is, and you scuffle around for the most convincing definition, why don’t you merely ask instead: “What is art?” Because anarchism and art are in the world for exactly the same kind of reason.

Margaret C. Anderson
The Little Review. (1916)¹

The essential function of art is moral. Not æsthetic, not decorative, not pasttime and recreation. But moral ... a passionate, implicit morality, not didactic. A morality which changes the blood rather than the mind. Changes the blood first, the mind follows later.

D. H. Lawrence
Studies in Classic American Literature. (1922)²

Of course the important thing the last 10 days has been O’Keeffe. —She is much more extraordinary than even I had believed. In fact, I don’t believe there has ever been anything like her. —Mind and feeling very clear—spontaneous—and uncannily beautiful—absolutely living every pulse beat.

Alfred Stieglitz to Arthur Dove (June 18, 1918)³

In 1949, three years after the death of her husband, the great photographer Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O’Keeffe painted her first oil of the Brooklyn Bridge. (Plate 1.) In this severely simplified, resonate, radiant picture we can see an

exceptionally rich mixture of the three major elements in her mature art: abstraction, photography, and the Symbolist æsthetic. That *Brooklyn Bridge* was thought out with extra care by O'Keeffe is clear from a rare, full-scale, charcoal sketch she made for it. (Plate 2.) Although the artist had lived in Manhattan on and off since 1907, and had made many pictures of its buildings and streets—especially during the late 'twenties—she had not represented this immensely popular American cultural symbol before. Nor had she painted the city at all since 1929. It is probable that *Brooklyn Bridge* was finished about the same time as her sad and arduous task of dispersing Stieglitz's seminal collection of early twentieth century art to American museums.⁴ Shortly thereafter, she went to New Mexico to live the rest of her long life. She was sixty one.

Why did O'Keeffe choose to paint this almost banal American motif at that particular moment? The answer may be that *Brooklyn Bridge* was intended as a kind of visual history of the nearly thirty, mutually inspiring, years she had spent with Stieglitz. Like so many of her works, it is at once accessible and hermetic. It reveals her large debts to the theorists of modern European abstraction (primarily Kandinsky and Picabia) even while it presents a quintessential American modern art theme: New York City. There is also much to indicate that O'Keeffe meant *Brooklyn Bridge* to be both a final salute to the half-century of Stieglitz's self-styled "fight" to have photography accepted as art in his own country, and a poignant farewell to their unique artistic and personal relationship.⁵

In 1920, Stieglitz's 291 colleagues Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler made a six-minute documentary film they called *New York The Magnificent*, later known as *Manhatta*, with titles and subtitles taken from Walt Whitman's 1861 poems. An often-reproduced still from one of *Manhatta's* frames of the Brooklyn Bridge bears such a marked resemblance to O'Keeffe's painting that she may have wished it to

be understood as a direct quote.⁶ (Plate 3.) Further, to judge from earlier works of a similar type by both artists⁷, this painting would seem to be an abstract double portrait of herself and Stieglitz, side by side, in Whitman's "proud and passionate city." For like the Hellenic column, the shape of the ogive arch may be symbolically read as a summation of the human figure. The bridge is itself a familiar symbol of unity. The inner form created by the filigree of cable wires has the shape of a heart—a universal metaphor for love. And the left diagonal effectively crosses out the space of the left arch, a particularly graphic way to suggest death. The colors also contribute to this double-portrait impression. They combine graduated tones of black and white and pale brown (photography) with blue—the first hue chosen by O'Keeffe for her 1916 watercolor abstractions ("the things in my head.")

The relevance of this critical analysis for an understanding of O'Keeffe's mature art is two-fold: First, because her work is, by her own account, autobiographical. ("I find that I have painted my life—things happening in my life—without knowing."⁸) And second, because Stieglitz—his ideas, his colleagues, his photography—was of singular importance to her artistic development.

The first (mutually conscious) meeting of these two artists, in the spring of 1916 at Stieglitz's 291 gallery in New York, has long since entered the more familiar annals of American art.⁹ Less familiar is a letter Stieglitz wrote to Paul Strand in May, 1918, just a year after O'Keeffe's first solo show at 291. She was then 31, and teaching art to children in Canyon, Texas. Stieglitz was 54.

I want her to live—I never wanted anything as
much as that. She is the spirit of 291—Not I.¹⁰

In 1920, after O’Keeffe and Stieglitz had lived and worked together for two years, he wrote the following to Arthur Dove:

O’Keeffe is truly magnificent. And a child at that—we are at least 90% alike—she is a purer form of myself—the 10% difference is really perhaps a too liberal estimate—but the difference is really negligible. ¹¹

Stieglitz’s recognition of O’Keeffe as the “spirit of 291”, and “a purer form” of himself, suggests more than the classic stages of a love affair. As will subsequently be documented, what the famous photographer perceived in the unknown young painter was an æsthetic and moral value system already deeply connected to his own. The many threads of this commonly held value system all converge at abstraction—an evolving concept structured, in both their cases, by the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau (particularly Jugendstil), Symbolism, the teachings of Arthur Wesley Dow, Wassily Kandinsky’s *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, and the 1913 pronouncements of Francis Picabia. For Stieglitz, the route to early modernist abstraction was long and intellectually circuitous. For O’Keeffe, it was less long and more intuitively direct, like her sensibility.¹²

In the pluralist/modernist decade between 1919 and 1929,¹³ the painter and the photographer were to borrow frequently (without saying so) from each other’s mediums to serve their own independent experiments in communicating through abstract form.

For Stieglitz, robbing painting in increasingly non-imitative ways to pay photography was an old and complicated story going back to the 1880’s, when he first began to think of the photograph as a picture and a work of art. For O’Keeffe, the reverse process was brand new. Consequently, everything in her art—style,

subject matter, content—was freshly at stake. A letter from Stieglitz to Strand on August 11, 1919, may pinpoint her own acute awareness of this crisis.

... G. has not done much painting. She is doing a heap of thinking—my photography and manner of working are affecting her.¹⁴

It is extremely likely that this letter marks the actual start of O’Keeffe’s creative attention to the aesthetics of the camera. As will become apparent, her images were also affected by the photography of some of Stieglitz’s closest associates at 291; particularly Charles Sheeler, Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, and, to a lesser degree, Alvin Langdon Coburn and Baron de Meyer.

In the precarious task of getting at the points of origin of O’Keeffe’s style, it is not really possible to consider her work apart from that of Stieglitz. And his “work” must, of necessity, include the theories which generated his exhibition activities as well as his own photography—since she was to profit artistically from both.

What *was* the “Spirit of 291”? And how did Stieglitz and O’Keeffe come to understand and use abstraction in their different mediums? It is with these two closely connected questions that our investigations into the reciprocal relationship between O’Keeffe’s painting and photography must begin.

Historically, the origins of 291 go back to the Photo-Secession, a group of Pictorial¹⁵ photographers brought together by Stieglitz in 1902, to present group exhibitions which would demonstrate to America that photography was an art form.¹⁶ By using the term “Secession,” Stieglitz was deliberately linking his group of American and European photographers with the famous Munich Secession of 1892—the first in a series of catalytic movements by German and Austrian artists to free themselves from the stultifying past by presenting exhibitions of all the best

modern tendencies in the arts, including early Jugendstil illustrations.¹⁷ Although it is well known that Stieglitz admired the Symbolist paintings of Franz von Stuck and Arnold Böcklin—both charter members of the Munich Secession—and that reproductions of Stuck's *Sin*, and Böcklin's *Island of the Dead* hung on the walls of the Stieglitz family home at Lake George,¹⁸ the influence these two painters had on his concept of photography has perhaps not been sufficiently taken into account.

Stieglitz's proto-modernist beliefs in individual artistic freedom, and the continuing sequence of revolutionary change, appear in his first published statement on the Photo-Secession in August 1903. He described it as "an active protest against the conservative and reactionary spirit whose self-satisfaction imbues them with the idea that existing conditions are akin to perfection ... [and] an insistence upon the right of its members to follow their own salvation as they see fit."¹⁹ He was even more adamant and specific in a short article published the same year by the Bausch and Lomb Optical Company (which had just awarded Stieglitz the grand prize for his *The Winter* in its 1903 competition).

...it is to the extremist that mankind largely owes its progression ... [The aim of the Photo Secession] is to loosely hold together those Americans devoted to pictorial photography in their endeavor to compel its recognition, not as the hand-maiden of art, but as a distinctive medium of individual expression ...²⁰

When Stieglitz founded the Little Galleries of The Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue in 1905, he had the enlightened—and crucial—help of the painter-photographer Eduard J. Steichen.²¹ Nevertheless, the essential character of The Little Galleries, and of its "mouthpiece" *Camera Work*, "the illustrated quarterly magazine devoted to Photography"²² was determined at the outset by Stieglitz's

own unwavering view that change and progress in art are only possible through revolutionary action.

From the very beginning, the intention of The Little Galleries was to exhibit *all* the fine arts—not just pictorial photography. The original letter sent to members of the Photo-Secession on October 14, 1905, states clearly that:

These small but very select shows will consist of not only American pictures ... but also Austrian, German, British, French and Belgian photographs, as well as other art productions other than photographic, as the Council of The Photo-Secession can from time to time secure.²³

An explanation by Stieglitz for exhibiting “art productions other than photographic” was printed five years later in *Camera Work* :

...photography, claiming to be a legitimate medium of personal pictorial expression, should take its place in open review with other mediums in order that its possibilities and limitations might be more fairly judged.²⁴

While these early statements reveal the daring basic design of Stieglitz’s enterprise, they are not complete in themselves because of the evolving nature of The Little Galleries. With the plan to show photography and the other visual arts came new and persisting problems of defining the boundaries between painting and photography.

Steichen’s promise to obtain the great Rodin’s drawings had been a chief factor in Stieglitz’s risky decision to open The Little Galleries. But it was not Rodin who received the first non-photographic exhibition there. (When Rodin’s watercolors did finally appear in January of 1908, they were seen by Georgia O’Keeffe, then a new student at the Art Students League, making her fortuitous

first visit to 291.) In January 1907, Stieglitz presented the Symbolist drawings and watercolors of Pamela Colman Smith—an unknown American-born artist raised in England, and a former student of Arthur Wesley Dow's—who painted the visions which came to her when listening to music.²⁵ This decision was quite a shock to Steichen when he heard of it in France²⁶ but it was totally in keeping with another of the expressed goals of the Photo-Secession:

... the bringing out of new talent, of hitherto unknown or ignored men [sic] ... painters and sculptors, as well as others, will have an opportunity, the only requirement being that their art is art in the true sense of the word.²⁷

What Steiglitz saw and valued in the work of Smith, (he gave her three successive shows in three years) indicates something important about his eye for “art in the true sense of the word” at that time. His highly developed picture consciousness clearly tabulated with approval her Symbolist/Art Nouveau stylistic antecedents, the way she used human figures to personify elements in nature, and her invention of pictorial equivalents for music. Her flat color, emphasis on pattern, and abstract two-dimensional designs faithfully reflected Dow's widely taught principles of space composition, well known to such Stieglitz circle photographers as Gertrude Kasebier, A.L. Coburn and Clarence White.²⁸

Despite the fact that Smith's first painting exhibition at The Little Galleries was popular with the crowds and press (and financially successful for the artist as well), Stieglitz received so much criticism from conservative Photo-Secession photographers that he used *Camera Work* to state his rights and reasons to the American Symbolist critic James Gibbons Huneker—a frequent contributor to the periodical. In this defense lie some of the rock-bound principles underlying 291 and its spirit.

[Pamela Colman Smith's exhibition] marked, not a departure from the intentions of the Photo-Secession, but a welcome opportunity of their manifesting. The Secession Idea is neither the servant nor the product of a medium. It is a spirit. Let us say the Spirit of the lamp; the old and discolored lamp of honesty; *honesty of aim, honesty of self expression, honesty of revolt against the autocracy of convention.* The Photo-Secession is not the keeper of this Lamp but lights it when it may; and, when these pictures of Miss Smith's, conceived in this spirit and no other, came to us, although they came unheralded and unexpected, we but tended the Lamp in tendering them hospitality. (Italics added.)²⁹

Ten years after Smith's first exhibition, Paul Strand wrote that Stieglitz "at once sensed anti-photography—the essence of modern art" in her drawings.³⁰ This was hindsight on Strand's part (and perhaps on Stieglitz's as well), for Stieglitz did not conceive of the term "anti-photographic", by which he meant abstraction, until 1912.³¹

In April 1908, Stieglitz was forced to close the original Little Galleries because of growing professional and financial difficulties. Seven months later, with major support from the wealthy critic/photographer Paul Haviland,³² they were reopened in a new two-room space in the building next door. Steichen's original Art Nouveau decorating scheme, inspired by Joseph Hoffmann of the Vienna Secession, was retained.³³ But after 1910, photography exhibitions there were increasingly crowded out by those of avant-garde paintings and sculpture. This was due to Stieglitz's new interest in modern European art—with its revolutionary ramifications for photography in general, and his own in particular.³⁴ It is not known exactly when the new galleries (only fifteen feet square) began to be referred to as "291" by Stieglitz and his associates.³⁵ The first mention of it in print was in *Camera Work* No. 37, January 1912, when Paul Haviland titled his (formerly) "Photo-Secession Notes" as "Notes on the Exhibitions at '291'."

Stieglitz was exposed to the latest developments in modern European art in Paris during the summer of 1907. On this trip, however, neither he nor Steichen was able to see the significance of Cézanne's late watercolors, ("nothing there but empty paper, with a few splashes of color here and there").³⁶

The gradual radicalization of Stieglitz's perception habits may be measured by his decision to exhibit Cézanne's watercolors at 291 (for the first time in America) in March of 1911, and by a public statement he made later that same year:

... without the understanding of Cézanne ... it is impossible to grasp, even faintly, much that is going on in the art world today.³⁷

This shift in Stieglitz's visual thinking, which changed the direction of both 291 and *Camera Work* between 1908 and 1911, occurred under the well-documented tutelage of Steichen, Marius de Zayas, whose caricatures were the first non-photographic art ever published in *Camera Work* (in January 1910), and Max Weber, the first American painter to use Cubist geometric structure.³⁸

Two of Steichen's letters from 1908 record the remarkably free hand he was given by Stieglitz in choosing the exhibitions of modern art for 291 between 1908 and 1911:

The Matisses I'll bring along— I'll explain all about that stuff and my plans about it when I get there—and I would not show any of the things even to the fellows at the Secession—till we get them up.³⁹

...I keep wondering how things are over there with you at 291... I think we should, if we have two shows, have one!!! and the other—well, an "understandable one" ... as for the red flag, I'm sure Picasso would fill the bill if I can get them— 40

Also on the lookout for avant-garde American artists in France, Steichen was instrumental in forming the New Society of American Artists in Paris on February 25, 1908. It included John Marin, Max Weber, Alfred Maurer, and Arthur Carles—all of whom would be in 291's "Younger American Painters" exhibition in March 1910.⁴¹

Early that same year of 1910 (justifying the decision to exhibit modern art "to the fellows at the Secession," as well as to the public) it was announced in *Camera Work* that the name "Photo-Secession" had now taken "a somewhat different meaning"—one which is prescient of Stieglitz's later espousal of abstraction.

Having proved conclusively that along certain lines, pre-eminently in portraiture, the camera had the advantage over the best trained eye and hand, the logical deduction was that *the other arts could only prove themselves superior to photography by making their aim depend on other qualities than accurate reproduction*. The works shown at the Little Galleries in painting, drawing and other graphic arts (during the past two years) have all been *non-photographic* in their attitude, and the Photo-Secession can be said now to stand for *those artists who secede from the photographic attitude toward representation of form*. (Italics added)⁴²

Steichen's original idea of Picasso as a "red flag" did not prevail.

According to Marius de Zayas:

The selection of the exhibits for 291 was 'a delicate and serious matter' ... In 1910 we thought that the New York public was ripe enough to receive Picasso's cubist work... The proposed exhibition [actually held March 28-April 25, 1911] was to be of drawings only, and for their selection a real "jury" was composed by Picasso himself, Steichen, Frank Burty (Haviland) and myself.⁴³

Steichen's on-the-spot account to Stieglitz does not mention the presence of de Zayas. (Whether this was through forgetfulness or jealous design is not

known.) “Haviland and Picasso selected the Picasso pictures themselves—I came in for a little advice in the end to make the collection a little more clear by its evolutions.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless it was de Zayas whom Stieglitz asked to write a catalogue essay for this exhibition—later published in *Camera Work*. Based on a series of conversations de Zayas had with Picasso, the essay is at once a landmark statement of Picasso’s intent, and a prototype for Stieglitz’s own revised intentions as an artist photographer—which would come to fruition (in the form of the *Equivalents*) during his early years with Georgia O’Keeffe.

(Picasso) receives a direct impression from external nature, he analyzes, develops and translates it, and afterward executes it in his own particular style, with the intention *that the picture should be the pictorial equivalent of the emotion produced by nature...* he wants the spectator to look for the emotion or idea generated from the spectacle itself. When he paints he does not limit himself to taking from an object only those planes which the eye perceives, but deals with all those which according to him constitute the *individuality of form*, and with his peculiar fantasy he develops and transforms them ... *he does not put on the canvas the remembrance of a past sensation, but describes a present sensation ...* Picasso’s paintings present to us the evolution by which light and form have operated in developing themselves in his brain to produce the idea, and *his composition is nothing but the synthetic expression of his emotions.* (Italics added)⁴⁵

By the middle of 1911, after two more trips to Paris, Stieglitz’s eye for European vanguard art had developed enough so that he felt he could rely on himself rather than Steichen. In a December letter to the Photo-Secession critic Sadakichi Hartmann, (who helped to introduce Symbolism to the American public after attending one of Mallarmé’s Tuesday evenings in 1893)⁴⁶, Stieglitz spoke revealingly of his three weeks in Paris the summer of 1911 in the company of de Zayas and Steichen:

Paris made me realize what the seven years at 291 had really done for me—All my work, all my many and nasty experiences had all helped to prepare me for the tremendous experience. Think of it, several hundred Cézannes, any number of Van Goghs and Renoirs ... *Matisse is doing some beautiful work, but somehow it didn't grip me. Possibly he is ahead of me. Picasso appears to me the bigger man.* I think his viewpoint is bigger; He may not as yet fully realize in his work the thing he is after, but *I am sure he is the man who is counting*. It was a great pity that you missed his little show at 291. It was possibly the most interesting one yet held there; *Undoubtedly the most remarkable ever held in this country as far as art is concerned.* (Italics added)⁴⁷

Stieglitz's comments here on Matisse and Picasso show how much closer his aesthetic views were drawing to those of de Zayas, and that Steichen's influence at 291 was definitely on the wane. For example, while Steichen admired Matisse as "the most modern of the moderns", "Picasso was a man I never could see", he wrote Stieglitz early in 1911:

I admire him but he is worse than Greek to me ... I am afraid I am too human and sensitive to flesh to follow [the] man's abstraction ... There is one late picture that represents a nude woman. If you can make it out you are as good as I am. [Here Steichen sketches the "Nude" abstraction of 1910 which Stieglitz eventually decided to buy] ... Picasso may be a great man but it would be real snobbery for me to say I see it now.⁴⁸

The "tremendous experience" of this trip to Paris apparently crystalized Stieglitz's long-range goals for 291. From November, 1911 to May, 1917 (when 291 closed after exhibiting "recent work" by Georgia O'Keeffe), there were just three photographic exhibitions—his own work, and that of the only two photographers close to him at the time: Baron Adolf de Meyer and Paul Strand. Their photography was presented as an equal partner to painting in revealing the true vision of modern life through the new medium of expression—abstraction.⁴⁹

A characteristic action taken toward this new goal by Stieglitz appeared in the October 1911 issue of *Camera Work*. Sixteen gravures of his own, mostly recent, “straight”⁵⁰ photographs—including *Spring Showers* (1900), *The Hand of Man* (1902) and *The Steerage* (1907)—were presented in the radical company of a single Picasso drawing. The same drastically simplified 1910 Cubist composition (nicknamed “the fire escape” in New York) that Steichen had deplored in his letter. Stieglitz had purchased it on the advice of de Zayas—who considered it “the clou” to Picasso’s first 291 exhibition.⁵¹ By indirectly, but unmistakably, juxtaposing the echoing verticals and diagonals of his own *Spring Showers* (*CW* p. 63) with the straight lines and segments of “Nude” (*CW* p. 71), Stieglitz not only identified his earlier camera image with Picasso’s Cubism (in effect, making the photograph seem almost like a precursor), he set a deliberate new standard for straight photography as an expressive medium.⁵² He made another specific connection between the actuality of photography and the expressivity of modern art (essentially Cubism) at the height of the Armory Show furor when he presented a retrospective (1892-1912) of his own work at 291 between February 24 and March 15, 1913. And he did it again in 1916 by showing Paul Strand’s Cubist-inspired photographs of New York and other places (billed as “the direct expression of today”) during the Forum Exhibition of American Art. This “non-commercial” show at the Anderson Galleries of approximately 200 works by 17 American modernists (which included Sheeler, Walkowitz, Hartley, Maurer, Marin, and Dove) advocated the, by now, prestigious Symbolist analogy between music composition and abstract painting. Not surprisingly, five of the six members of the selection committee (which included Stieglitz) had already written for *Camera Work*.⁵³

Thus, as Paul Strand wrote shortly after 291 closed in October 1917, “an organization without officers, dues or politics came about which was known as the

Photo-Secession ... The crystalization of the photographic idea . . [and] life through freedom of expression.”⁵⁴

The invisible psychological/metaphysical effect of the 291 spirit on the artists, writers, and public who came in contact with it, is less easy to trace⁵⁵ The basic reason for this difficulty lies in the consistent (if idiosyncratic) Symbolist character of Stieglitz’s mission—and of his art as well.⁵⁶ That Stieglitz was essentially a Symbolist artist has been a surprisingly recent critical assessment. In 1975, Allan Sekula (from an admitted personal bias toward photographic communication as reportage) pejoratively labelled Stieglitz’s 1942 short memoir *How the Steerage Happened* as “pure symbolist autobiography”, going on to say that “Stieglitz invented himself in Symbolist clichés”, and that “The final Symbolist hideout is in the Imagination, and in the fetishized products of the Imagination Stieglitz comes back ... with a glass negative (*The Steerage*) from another world.”⁵⁷ In 1978, Dennis Longwell asked the crucial question, “How did the Symbolist æsthetic influence Stieglitz’s work?” But Longwell’s own answer was mainly concerned with mapping Stieglitz’s early recognition and appreciation of Steichen’s Symbolist photography.⁵⁸ In 1980, Rosalind Krauss observed that Stieglitz’s 1923-32 “Equivalents” are masterpieces of Symbolist art, primarily because they are *signs* by virtue of the crop.⁵⁹ In 1983, after a close examination of Stieglitz’s writings, and editorial choices, for *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, Sarah Greenough concluded that his æsthetic theories of “individualism”—particularly his belief that the phenomena of the world could be made to express the thoughts and feelings of the photographer—were “heavily indebted” to the Symbolist movement.⁶⁰ However, none of these contributions has inquired into the circumstances of Stieglitz’s first powerful encounters with Symbolism. Thus the actual texts and images which early spurred his intellect, and continued to feed

his imagination throughout some fifty years of photography, are still topics open to speculation and research.

Perhaps de Zayas was the first to pinpoint Stieglitz's Symbolist outlook publicly. Three de Zayas caricatures of Stieglitz made between c. 1911 and 1915 would support this view. De Zayas defined caricature as "the representation of the individual self and his relation to the whole."⁶¹

L'Accoucheur d'idées (c. 1909)⁶² is one of de Zayas's earliest pictorial equivalents of the feelings and ideas of his subject. [Plate 4.] It shows the elongated frontal figure of Stieglitz standing in a dark empty space—his head silhouetted against a halo-positioned full moon. (The visionary, so beloved by Symbolist painters, sees things in a lunar light, and the moon has a long and well known history of being associated with fertility rites, the mirror, imagination, and fantasy.) Stieglitz's encircled, almost closed-eye head bears an uncanny resemblance to the disembodied flower face of *Marsh Flower* (charcoal drawing c. 1885) by the quintessential Symbolist artist Odilon Redon—a work which de Zayas could have known from his 1910-1911 sojourn in Paris.⁶³ (Plate 5.) Redon's closed-eye images are apt to indicate elevated mental activity. And his proto-Symbolist credo "I recognize the necessity of observed reality ... (but) true art lies in a reality that is felt."⁶⁴ is close in spirit to Stieglitz's own, as expressed by him in a 1923 letter to Sherwood Anderson: "There is a reality so subtle that it becomes more real than reality. That's what I am trying to set down in photography."⁶⁵

The second de Zayas caricature, *Alfred Stieglitz*, executed c. 1912 (and published in the October 1914 *Camera Work*), was rendered from a different principle: "Logically abstract form [used] to express abstract characterization".⁶⁶ (Plate 6.) According to de Zayas himself, this humorous, yet serious, abstract portrait was derived from a primitive artifact of Pacific origins which he saw in the ethnographic collection of the British Museum:

It consisted of a wooden stick to which a few circles made of some vegetal material were fixed by pairs right and left of the stick ... it reminded one of the physical appearance of Stieglitz. I say “physical” because the resemblance was also spiritual. The object ... was built as a trap for catching souls ... I had previously made a caricature of Stieglitz with the caption “L’Accoucheur d’Idées”. These two caricatures expressed my understanding of Stieglitz’s mission: *to catch souls and to be the midwife who brings out new ideas to the world.* (Italics added) ⁶⁷

The third de Zayas caricature is so abstract that it is only recognizable as Stieglitz with previous knowledge of the second one.⁶⁸ (Plate 7.) It appeared on the first cover of *291*, March 1915, with the caption *291 Throws Back Its Forelock*—a direct quote from Picabia’s “Que Fais-tu 291?” response to Stieglitz’s “What is 291?” issue of *Camera Work*.⁶⁹

In this work, the round “soul catcher” camera lens/eye glasses are drawn only once (this time with orange irises behind them), the triangular moustache is without its 1914 hatching, and the forelock (photographs of Stieglitz usually stressed his mussed bushy hair) is indicated by four diagonal lines. The form below the face remains puzzling.⁷⁰ It may be read as a metronome, and also as a hand (box) camera of the type Stieglitz was using at the time.⁷¹ In fact, the image is very probably a double visual pun—one typical of proto-New York Dada, and of the later issues of *291* in particular.

That O’Keeffe’s eye had already advanced enough by 1915 to appreciate this de Zayas caricature is clear from a letter she wrote to Anita Pollitzer.⁷²

... Then 291 came and I was so crazy about it I sent for No. 2 and 3— and I think they are great. They just take my breath away—almost as good as going to 291 ...⁷³

Not recorded in the correspondence is whether O’Keeffe tried to figure out the difficult iconography of *291 Throws Back Its Forelock*.

Why, indeed, should a metronome have been chosen for Stieglitz’s body form? It may have been suggested to de Zayas by Paul B. Haviland’s printed dialogue in the same issue between an imaginary professor (Steichen) who chides 291 (Stieglitz) for “*marking time*” (Italics added), urges him to stop waiting for “WHAT’S NEXT”, and calls upon him to “arrive at the laws which govern the phenomena [he has already] observed.”⁷⁴ Since the metronome both marks and beats time, it implies that Stieglitz is still in control—calls the tune, as it were—for the next 291 task. Furthermore, Picabia’s same *Camera Work* article, from which the caption for this abstract caricature was taken, concludes: “he [Stieglitz] is a musician and his music is an inexhaustible spring ...” —thus adding to the aptness of the metronome metaphor. The camera body implications of de Zaya’s visual pun need no explanation.

To sum up briefly: These three “Psycho-type” drawings of the seer, the soul-catcher and the art photographer/musician (who is being called upon to reveal the new laws of art) are clearly late forms of the familiar 19th century Symbolist quest to reach the mysterious truth or spirit beyond the appearances of reality.

That de Zayas clearly understood Stieglitz to be a Symbolist is also underlined by a 1915 comment in *291* (No. 5 and 6) which says he “wished to work through suggestion,” and by the even more specific 1940 statement about Stieglitz’s mission:

It would be a mistake to think that [his] purpose and objective was to make people understand modern art. Modern art to him was only an instrument to bring to the surface—a *mirror* to put before the public for them to see that the image reflected on it was not the image they thought they had. Modern art was to most incomprehensible, for that reason it was the best tool to make people understand themselves. Stieglitz believed and had

faith in something he did not know, and had he known it, he would not have believed in it.⁷⁵

To see just how Symbolist the 291 spirit was, we have only to review some of the key statements from Albert Aurier's celebrated manifesto *Symbolisme en Peinture: Paul Gauguin* (published in *Mercure de France*, March, 1891), which defined pictorial Symbolism for the first time:

The normal and final goal of painting, as of all the arts, cannot be the direct presentation of objects. Its ultimate goal is to express Ideas by translating them into a special language. To the eyes of the artist ... objects are valueless merely as objects. They can only appear as *signs* ... The Idea alone is everything. The artist thus has above all the duty to avoid carefully that antimony of all art: concrete truth, illusionism, *trompe l'œil*, so as not to give by his picture that fallacious impression of nature which would act on the spectator just as would nature itself. ... The work of art ... will be

1) *Ideological*, because its sole ideal is the expression of the ... Idea;

2) *Symboliste*, because it expresses this Idea through forms;

3) *Synthetic*, because it presents these forms, these signs, in such a way that they can be generally understood;

4) *Subjective*, because the object presented is considered not merely as object, but as the sign of an idea suggest by the object;

5) (And therefore) decorative ... He [the artist] would have to add to this power of comprehension ... the gift of emotiveness ... Oh! how rare are those whose bodies and hearts are moved by the sublime spectacle of pure Being and pure Ideas!⁷⁶

Three well-known letters written by Stieglitz between 1912 and 1917 reflect the ideals of this doctrine:

...Don't worry that I'm not looking after the interests of pictorial photography quite as much as ever ... it is essential for them (the people at large and the artists themselves) to be taught the real meaning of art. That is what I am attempting to do, not only at 291 but through *Camera Work*.⁷⁷

... *Camera Work* is not a publication run for any other purpose except the expression and development of an idea ... The only person who interests me to satisfy is myself. I am the sole judge of what I am doing, for I am the only one who fully knows what I want.⁷⁸

... The Little Gallery is not devoted entirely to the ultra modern in painting and sculpture. it is devoted to ideas. To the development of such ... [your work] is not adding anything to the idea of photography; nor to the idea of expression. And for that reason it would be out of place in the Little Gallery.⁷⁹

There is another often-quoted 19th century Symbolist document which should also be cited here because it appears to have been the source for de Zaya's crucial essay "Photography and Artistic Photography" published in *Camera Work* in 1913. It is Gustave Kahn's 1886 "Réponse des Symbolistes."⁸⁰

As to subject matter, we are tired of the quotidian, the near-at-hand, and the compulsively contemporaneous; we wish to be able to place the development of the symbol in any period whatsoever, and even in out-right dreams (the dream being indistinguishable from life)... *The essential aim of our art is to objectify the subjective (the externalization of the Idea) instead of subjectifying the objective (nature seen through the eyes of a temperament. (Italics added)*⁸¹

“Photography is not not Art, but photography can be made to be Art,”

wrote de Zayas. And he continued:

The difference between Photography and Artistic-Photography is that, in the former, man tries to get at that objectivity of Form which generates the different conceptions that man has of Form, while the second uses the objectivity of Form to express a preconceived idea in order to convey an emotion ...The first is a process of indigitation [sic], the second a means of expression. In the first, man tries to represent something that is outside of himself; in the second he tries to represent something that is in himself. The first is a free and impressional research, the second is a systematic and personal representation ...*The artist photographer in his work envelops objectivity with an idea, veils the object with the subject ...* Stieglitz has begun with the elimination of the subject in respresented Form to search for the pure expression of the object. He is trying to do synthetically with the means of a mechanical process, what some of the most advanced artists of the modern movement are trying to do analytically with the means of Art. (Italics added)⁸²

It is significant that Stieglitz considered this article to be extremely important, and that he described it as “one of the blossoms of the seed sown by me.”⁸³ This innately Symbolist notion of objectifying the subjective, and its fruitfulness for Stieglitz and, later, for O’Keeffe will be examined more closely further on in the text.

Whether Stieglitz was directly familiar with Aurier and Kahn remains undocumented, although his correspondence attests to the veracity and variety of his reading in English, French and German.⁸⁴ In any case, the artistic principles behind literary Symbolism were common currency on both sides of the Atlantic after the turn of the century—due, in good part, to the American Francophile journal *Mlle. New York* (founded in 1895) and Arthur Symons’ *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1889).⁸⁵

If we juxtapose the gist of these principles against selections from the 68 answers Stieglitz received to his question “What does “291” mean?” (published in *Camera Work*, No. 47), the Symbolist roots emerge almost like penitenti.

I know a place
where reason halts ...
where something takes the place
in place of reason ...
a something felt by those who feel it.

John Marin⁸⁶

“291” . . is what the observer sees in it an idea
to the 7th power.

Arthur G. Dove⁸⁷

To me “291” represents an Idea. ... The soul of
the Idea has been the liberty of spiritual growth.

Charles H. Caffin⁸⁸

The Great Purveyor of Ideas (Stieglitz) is one
who not only lives in rapport with his audience ... he
takes their life and having transmuted it hands it back
to them.

Ward Muir⁸⁹

To me a strenuous morality is the highest way
in which the human spirit expresses itself and at
“291” the dominant note seems to me a strenuous
morality.

Hutchens Hapgood⁹⁰

291 is the Attic near the Roof . . it is an ideal.

Djuna Barnes⁹¹

“Silence. It was what Mæterlinck calls an ‘active silence.’”

Anne Brigman⁹²

It is the most helpful place to be in for anyone whose mind is open to suggestion.

Francis Bruguière⁹³

'291' is to me a modern Cour des Miracles where Kings can be found in beggar's clothes ...

There is but one definite thing which I can always depend on finding there: opportunity.

Paul B. Haviland⁹⁴

'291' is ... an adventure and a dream.

Lee Simonson⁹⁵

It has, above all, taught us to consider art ... as a spiritual experience.

Christian Brinton⁹⁶

"291" is a growth— ... A Revelation, I press close—and find.

E. Zoler⁹⁷

The modern elixir.

Arthur B. Davies⁹⁸

The lover of all through himself [Stieglitz] ...The words he utters came from everywhere and their meaning lies in the future.

Man Ray⁹⁹

It has been and still is a kind of many headed creature standing firm for every variety of truth and every variety of expression of the same.

M. Hartley¹⁰⁰

A cosmos-reflecting dew-drop, returning to each one of us his illumined spectre—is "291" to me.

John Weichsel¹⁰¹

On the flyleaf of a friend's copy of this same issue of *Camera Work*, Stieglitz wrote a dedication which suggests rather than describes his own Idea of 291:

“291” —what is it?—To me it is the expression of all that has been— all that is—and all that will be. That at least is its Spirit. All that it has been given an opportunity to accomplish—and possibly just a little more—it is this more that is “291”.¹⁰²

As de Zayas remarked about this dedication, it showed “the difference” Stieglitz made “between the physical and metaphysical sides” of 291. “In Stieglitz’s hands, modern art had transcendental value.”¹⁰³

These contributions for *Camera Work* were composed in 1914. By June of 1917, war disruptions, rising costs and diminishing interest and support (even from colleagues) combined to close 291. When, after the armistice, Stieglitz again took up the 291 fight in the Anderson and Intimate Galleries and, finally, (until his death) in An American Place, his new battle plan called for an American vanguard art formed from American culture.¹⁰⁴ This was to have perhaps its finest hour in the Seven Americans exhibition of painting and photography in 1925.

Although “the spirit of 291” now burned for American rather than European Modernism, it was still largely fueled (as were Stieglitz’s own new photographs) by the old Symbolist aesthetic. Two on-the-spot witnesses for this statement, themselves steeped in European Symbolist literature, are Paul Rosenfeld and Waldo Frank.¹⁰⁵

Rosenfeld, a music and art critic who became the Stieglitz circle artists’ foremost interpreter during the late ‘teens and early ’twenties, described 291 as:

a place...where people got very hot and explanatory and argumentative about rectangles of color and lumps of bronze and revealed themselves ... *people were making serious study of the components of expression, and Stieglitz was watching ... observing its patterns, proving his intuition, "registering" the psychic reactions of America ... the little attic was a house of God besides ... this profane space, where every spirit stuff and rag were shaken free, and anarchism and the essence of sex remained ever present, was indeed ... a church ... perpetual affirmation of a faith that there existed somewhere, here in very New York, a spiritual America . . . Suddenly there came new affirmation ... Now, the older years seemed merely the bud. The fire was spread out, and became a blossoming form ...*The shows [Stieglitz's photography] of 1921 and of 1923 were religious demonstrations ... If ever American man brought American people into relation with people and trees, rocks and skies, *brought the finite into tune with the infinite*, it was this man of the black box and chemical bath ... Into a single living circle of relativity *all people, rock, and trees have been drawn and made to confess the single informing one* ... One portrait gives Stieglitz's idea in boniest, most essential aspect. It is the series of almost 200 prints made of Georgia O'Keeffe ... The pictures of a single woman give the way that spirit has to go among the tombs of the world organized against it. (Italics added)¹⁰⁶

In 1919, Waldo Frank wrote:

"291" is a religious fact ... A little altar at which life was worshipped above the noise of a dead city. Here was refuge certain and solitary from the tearing grip of industrial disorder ... New York was a lying and destroying storm: "291" was a candle that did not go out, since *it alone was the truth* ... at the end, artists like John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Max Weber, Authur Dove, Walkowitz, Sterne and Georgia O'Keeffe emerged with strengthened wings—able to fly alone. (Italics added)¹⁰⁷

These descriptions bear such a close resemblance to Arthur Symons's famous account of Stephane Mallarmé's legendary Tuesday evenings at the Rue de

Rome during the last twenty years of the 19th century, that the parallels can scarcely be read as coincidental:

One of the best talkers of our time ... He [Mallarmé] seemed to be no more than brushing the dust of your own ideas, settling, arranging them a little, before he gave them back to you, surprisingly luminous ... There was always the feeling of comradeship, the comradeship of a master, whom, while you were there, at least, you did not question; and that very feeling lifted you, in your own estimation, nearer to art ... Here was a house in which art, literature, was the very atmosphere; a religious atmosphere; and the master of the house, in his just a little solemn simplicity, a priest. I never heard the price of a book mentioned ... Here, in this one literary house, literature was unknown as a trade. And, above all, the questions that were discussed were never, at least in Mallarmé's treatment ... other than essential questions, considerations of art in the abstract ... of life as its amusing and various web spins the stuff of art ... It was impossible to come away from Mallarmé's without some tranquillising influence from excellence. The resolve, at least, to write a sonnet, a page of prose, that should be in its own way as perfect as one could make it, worthy of Mallarmé. (Italics added)¹⁰⁸

Even if Rosenfeld and Frank had not intended to compare Stieglitz with Mallarmé (which seems unlikely), there are many parallels between the two men. Both were focal points for the artistic currents of their day, and they shared a common foe in commercialism. Both were spellbinding monologists who were yet able to release others to express themselves. Both gave lavishly of their time, in letter-writing as well as personal contact, which undoubtedly limited their own artistic output. And both were highly practiced at what Mallarmé called “the demon analogy.”

Certainly the major witness for the continuous presence of the Symbolist æsthetic in Stieglitz's life was Stieglitz himself. For him, as for Mallarmé, reality

was based on sensation. And like most of his Symbolist counterparts of the 19th century who protested a social order in which artists had no place, Stieglitz was an anarchist—in thought and work, if not in deed.¹⁰⁹ (His “bombs” went off on the walls of 291.) During the ’teens and ’twenties he was constantly railing against American Philistinism¹¹⁰

Three of Symbolism’s key concepts—suggestion, mystery and dream—were almost second nature to Stieglitz.¹¹¹

Suggestion (the psychic power of a work to affect the spectator—beyond the appearances of reality) was a central requirement for the art Stieglitz chose to exhibit, as well as for his own photography.¹¹²

A near perfect example of Stieglitz’s love of mystery for its own sake is the following, often-quoted, conversation with the Symbolist photographer Gertrude Käsebier in 1902:

“What is this Photo-Secession?” asked Käsebier, “Am I a Photo-Secessionist?” “Do you feel you are?” inquired Stieglitz. “I do,” she responded and Stieglitz concluded, “That’s all there is to it.”¹¹³

Stieglitz frequently spoke of the artist’s creation as a dream within a dream. In the late 19th century the dream was considered a means to penetrate the world of the invisible. (Mallarmé’s poem *Le Nenuphar blanc* is a well known expression of this interior quest). Stieglitz’s confessional “One Hour’s Sleep—Three Dreams” published in *291* (No. 1, March 1915)¹¹⁴ reveals several Symbolist obsessions within the dreams themselves. For example: Death, which was highly cherished as Symbolist subject matter;¹¹⁵ Woman, in her Symbolist double nature of temptress/destroyer (as in Franz von Stuck’s 1895 *Sin*); and the Kiss (a symbol of the unity of body and soul—“A Kiss would kill me,” cries Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade*, “were it not that beauty itself is death”) which was

constantly used between 1880-1900 by artists as different in style as Edvard Munch and Peter Behrens.

It was the highest form of approbation for Stieglitz to call someone, or something, “white.”

Georgia is a wonder . . . If ever there was a
whiteness she is that.¹¹⁶

... at the post office there was an unusually big
mail for me .. all [letters] happened to be very white
from very white people.¹¹⁷

As a natural symbol of purity, white has had a long and familiar history. But White Symbolism was also an extremely popular theme in turn of the century literature and painting—in America as well as Europe. In the writings of Maurice Mæterlinck, for instance, whiteness invariably represents eternity and/or the eternal, which may point to a more specific meaning of the word for Stieglitz, since Mæterlinck’s Symbolist philosophy and methods were frequently extolled and analyzed in *Camera Work* by Sydney Allen (Sadakichi Hartmann), Benjamin De Casseres, James Huneker and Charles Caffin. *Je Crois*, Mæterlinck’s words of welcome to the new art of photography, appeared in *Camera Work’s* second issue and was twice reprinted (*CW*, April 1906 and *CW*, Jan. 1912). Also, it is well known that his famous essay, *Silence* (with its doctrine that the truth of love, death and destiny can only be communicated voicelessly) had a powerful early effect on both Steichen and Stieglitz.¹¹⁸

No direct proof exists that Stieglitz read the work of Mallarmé, who regarded white—the presence of light and of all colors—as the “nothingness of Truth”. (Over and over, the French master of Symbolism refers to the “virginity of the white page,” “milky white lace curtains,” “white stars,” and “the hollow

whiteness” of the waterlily, “an animal whiteness at rest,” and so on.) Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that such well-known poems as *L’Azur*, *L’Après-Midi d’un Faune*, and *Un Coup de Dès*, would have been unfamiliar to one of Stieglitz’s voracious and multilingual reading habits. Certainly Mallarmé was almost as cited (if not quite as discussed) in the pages of *Camera Work* as Mæterlinck.

In Mallarmé’s writings we find many of the same moralizing-of-nature themes which fascinated Stieglitz the artist-photographer: “crystal winter,” night, cloudy skies, water/mirror, windows, doors, the suspenseful identity between man and tree, the poetic dream, the constant, metaphoric tension between black (the absence of light and color) and white.¹¹⁹

It may also be useful to compare Stieglitz’s concepts to those of Mallarmé in “Music and Literature,” which first appeared in English in *La Revue Blanche*, October 1894, because it contains his chief æsthetic views. These show some marked similarities to Stieglitz’s “idea” of photography: namely to put his feelings about himself, the weather, America (his native land), and 20th century technology (the machine) into form. According to the French writer:

It is not description which can unveil the efficacy and beauty of monuments, seas or the human face in all their maturity and native state, but rather evocation, allusion, suggestion ... At any moment in history, a man may appear who will be fully forgetful—and always remember he will be consciously forgetful—of the intellectual impedimenta of his contemporaries. Using the most elemental and elementary of means, he will try (for example) the symphonic equation of the seasons of the year, the habits of a sunbeam or a cloud. He will make one or two observations analogous to the undulent heat or other inclemencies of the changing climate, which are the multiple sources of our passions ... And he will have a native land. . . Nature exists; she will not be changed, although we may add cities, railroads, or other inventions to our material world. (Italics added)¹²⁰

This paragraph reads like a veritable catalogue essay on Stieglitz's best-known photographs from 1890 to 1910—and beyond.

Stieglitz's later photographic use of the natural and the ordinary (such as trees and clouds) to represent his experience and philosophy of life—which, in the mid-twenties, he came to call *Equivalents*—is also in the spirit of another of Mallarmé's most frequently quoted statements: "Describe not the object itself, but the effect it produces."¹²¹ In his art, Mallarmé, too, chose familiar real objects which had (for him) both innate beauty and metaphysical meaning—such as an empty room, a closed book, or a woman's hair. As Wallace Fowlie has written, the symbols in a Mallarmé poem

... attain an autonomous life and meaning of their own ... similar to that of any art whose beauty seems to come solely from its own symbols and to remain independent of the experience which preceded its form in art.¹²²

The term "equivalents" (which means, essentially, to render feeling through the abstract equivalents of line, form, and color) has, of course, a long Symbolist and early Modernist history. It was commonly used and understood by such painter-writers as Maurice Denis ("le symbolisme des équivalents"), Paul Sérusier ("les pensées et les qualités morales ne peuvent être représentées que par des équivalents formels"), and Paul Cézanne ("des équivalents plastiques").¹²³

Although "equivalents" is not a special Mallarmé word, the theory itself is implicit in the famous lines from "A Crisis in Poetry":

... the horror of the forest, or the silent thunder afloat in the leaves, not the intrinsic dense wood of the trees.¹²⁴

Here is Stieglitz on almost the same tack:

I have found that the use of clouds in my photographs has made people less aware of clouds as clouds in the pictures than when I have portrayed trees or houses or wood or any other objects ... The true meaning of the Equivalents comes through without any extraneous pictorial factors intervening between those who look at the pictures and the pictures themselves.¹²⁵

He also wrote of his Equivalents that:

My photographs are a picture of the chaos in the world, and of my relationship to that chaos. My prints show the world's constant upsetting of man's equilibrium, and his eternal battle to re-establish it.¹²⁶

This concept of his later years as an artist may give further evidence of his familiarity with Mallarmé's last poem, *Un Coup de Dés*, in which the poet uses the metaphors of sky, sea, and shipwreck to suggest the many ways order is established over chaos by man and the universe.

Mallarmé's belief in the Baudelaire notion of universal analogy (as expressed in the poem *Correspondences* of 1857) led him to regard outward nature as a "forest of symbols" and music as the highest form of art. Pure poetry, to Mallarmé, was "silent music", since it contained all the pure expressiveness of music without the necessity of sound.¹²⁷

As one of Stieglitz's most frequently expressed goals was to make "visual music", the aesthetic parallels between the "silent music" of words on a white page, and the equally silent music of photographic syntax on platinum or palladium paper, would hardly have escaped his acute literary sensibility.

Certainly Stieglitz's awareness of the powerful "correspondence" between art forms and human sensations was what finally permitted him (as it did all abstract artists) to eliminate the literary—or documentary—element from his photography, even while holding on to a full range of emotion.

We may never learn how or when Mallarmé and his ideas first came to Stieglitz's formal and moral attention. Very probably this interest began during his all-important, and almost unknown, formative period in Germany, through French and German periodicals. (The German Symbolist movement came into being well after Stieglitz left Berlin in 1890. It was created almost singlehandedly by the poet Stefan George, during the '90's, after his visit to Paris in 1889, where he met the French Symbolist writers at Mallarmé's Tuesday evenings.¹²⁸) Later, certain 291 colleagues of similar Symbolist persuasion—such as Steichen, Hartmann, de Casseres, Huneker, Picabia and (perhaps most of all) O'Keeffe—may simply have re-ignited for Stieglitz what was already inside.

Stieglitz has never recorded why he first used the word "Equivalents" in the 1925 *Seven Americans* catalogue to describe his essentially abstract photographs of clouds. (Years later, he would say that all his prints were equivalents, and, finally, that "all art is an equivalent of the artist's most profound experience of life."¹²⁹ Among the more probable factors in his decision to do so are these: His old memory of de Zayas's 1911 quote from Picasso: "The picture should be the pictorial equivalent of the emotion produced by nature".¹³⁰ And his new exposure to T.S. Eliot's influential concept of the "objective correlative", which was common currency among many American writers by the early 'twenties.

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any

of Shakespeare's most successful tragedies you find this exact equivalence.¹³¹

Eliot himself claimed that his reading of the French Symbolists in Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was what gave him "an introduction to wholly new feeling as a revelation ... [leading] to results of permanent importance."¹³² That Stieglitz also respected Symons' important work, and its author, (who was one of the first exponents of Mallarmé's aesthetics), is indicated by his decision to reprint Symons' later essay on Rodin in *Camera Work* (No. 22, 1908, pp. 35-36.)

The many affinities between 19th century Symbolist poets and painters¹³³ are paralleled by Stieglitz's own interest in the advanced writing of his day. *Camera Work* was the first to publish (and encourage) the work of Gertrude Stein,¹³⁴ and it well documented that Stieglitz had a galvanic influence on at least three other American writers: Sherwood Anderson,¹³⁵ William Carlos Williams,¹³⁶ and Hart Crane.¹³⁷

If Stieglitz the artist did not regard the relationship between his purist or Straight photography (with its clarity of definition) and the highly significant distortions of pictorial Symbolism as a problematic one for himself—and it is quite clear that he did not—the reason may well be his early regard for that peculiarly Germanic hybrid of "naturalistic symbolism" which Böcklin and von Stuck practiced. Robert Goldwater's discussion of these two painters offers a primary clue to Stieglitz's own unique position as a straight Symbolist photographer:

[their titles] proclaim that they are dealing with ideas, but there is nothing in the *manner* of their art which suggests that the visible world is a sign for any further reality.¹³⁸

To go back to Stieglitz's mysterious Idea (or Ideal)—“the spirit of 291” which he saw incarnate in Georgia O’Keeffe—there is repeated evidence that this Idea was actually a cluster of many. The outer membrane, so to speak, was the search for spiritual and factual truth in both art and life. Arthur Dove put this (and the consequences) as plainly as anyone when he wrote to Stieglitz:

Am convinced that you have a will through living your life as an idea *that makes things happen*. Treating life as a work of art is a thing that is seldom done. (Italics added)¹³⁹

The rest of the Idea-cluster seems to have included: the notion of art as religious experience (later made explicit by Rosenfeld and Frank); a strong, often zany, sense of humor (as Gelett Burgess put it in 1912 “truth does not always have to be couched in the solemn form”);¹⁴⁰ simplicity of means; continuous experiment; a strictly non-commercial sales policy (art was sold to deserving or discerning buyers for the single purpose of enabling 291’ers to go on working to create the new); a trust in the intuition of the artist over reason and logic (an idea derived in large measure from Henri Bergson)¹⁴¹ “anarchism and the essence of sex” (Rosenfeld);¹⁴² “honesty” (of aim, self-expression, and revolt against convention);¹⁴³ and “the development of Today”—by which Stieglitz meant abstraction.¹⁴⁴

If we place this Idea-cluster against some of the statements in Georgia O’Keeffe’s letters to Anna Pollitzer from roughly the same period, it is quite clear that she did indeed personify “the spirit of 291,” and that she apparently was “at least 90%” like Stieglitz.

I believe I would rather have Stieglitz like something—anything I have done—than anyone else I know of—I have always thought that ... Still—I don’t see why we ever think of what others think of

what we do—no matter who they are—isn't it enough just to express yourself.¹⁴⁵

This feeling of not knowing anything and being pretty sure that you never will is—well—I might say awful—if it wasn't for a part of my makeup that is always very much amused at what ought to be my greatest calamities—that part of me sits in the grandstand and laughs and claps and screams—in derision and amusement, and drives the rest of me on in my blundering floundering game.¹⁴⁶

I got out that Marin [cover] number of 291 and put it where I could see it ... I believe it is the only kind of stuff there is any sense in.¹⁴⁷

I could stand to sell [the drawings]—for ideas that would help me to go on working—or for money— money gives us the things we need to help us say things.¹⁴⁸

... Stieglitz sent me five wonderful Camera Works—the pictures excited me so that I felt like a human being for a couple of hours—they are wonderful.¹⁴⁹

... his [Stieglitz's] letters ... have been like fine cold water when you are terribly thirsty.¹⁵⁰

Art is just another way of expressing yourself—saying what life is and means to you.¹⁵¹

I always have a curious sort of feeling about some of my things... I am afraid people won't understand—and I hope they won't—and am afraid they will ... It is only a human document—that wild blue picture with the yellow and red ball in the corner I made during the summer when one of his [a friend Arthur MacMahon—not Stieglitz] letters almost drove me crazy—I just exploded it into the picture—it was what I wanted to tell him only I didn't dare in words.¹⁵²

The lineage of Stieglitz's and O'Keeffe's "human document" abstractions will be traced in the next chapters. It was a lineage richly informed by the international Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century—which intended nothing less than the total spiritual and social reform of life through line, color and form.

Notes

Chapter One

- ¹ "Art and Anarchism", *The Little Review*, (March , 1916): 3.
- ² "Walt Whitman", collected in *The Shock of Recognition* , ed., Edmund Wilson,(New York: Doubleday Doran, 1943): 1071.
- ³ Arthur Dove papers, Archives of American Art: Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Roll no. 725). Hereafter cited as AAA.
- ⁴ For her own account of this arduous task, see Georgia O'Keeffe, "Stieglitz: His Pictures Collected Him." *New York Times*, (December 11, 1949): 24-30.
- ⁵ Georgia O'Keeffe to Henry McBride, undated, c. early 1940's: "I see Alfred as an old man that I am very fond of—growing older— so that it sometimes shocks me when he looks particularly pale and tired. Aside from my fondness for him personally, I feel he has been very important to something that has made my world for me—I like it that I can make him feel that I have hold of his hand to steady him as he goes on." Henry McBride papers, AAA: (Roll # NMcB 11, letters from O'Keeffe, 1917- 1959.)
- ⁶ It was first reproduced in *Vanity Fair* (April, 1922): 51. *Brooklyn Bridge* was in fact one of five stills from *Manhatta* presented by the magazine on a one page spread that is known to have been arranged for by Sheeler. But there is no notation as to which photographer took which photograph. The anonymous sub-title reads, "A view of Brooklyn Bridge in which space, in the third dimension, is emphasized by the direction of lines—indicated by cables-and planes, the boundaries of which are marked off by these lines."
For more details on this historic film (which seems to have paid visual homage to Stieglitz's turn of the century photographs, *The Hand of Man* and *The City of Ambition*), see Scott Hammen, "Sheeler and Strand's 'Manhatta': A Neglected Masterpiece," *Afterimage* (January, 1979): 6-7.
- ⁷ For examples, see my Chapter Seven, pp. 291-300.
- ⁸ *G'OK* (1976). Text opposite plate 52.
- ⁹ For two of the most recently documented accounts, see Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: A Biography of Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Seaview Books, 1980): 74-76, hereafter cited as L.L. Also, Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz : A Memoir/Biography* (New York: Ferrar Straus Giroux 1983): 201-215. Hereafter cited as S.D.L.

Stieglitz gave O'Keeffe three shows at 291. The first was in May 1916, with Duncan and Lafferty. The second was in November 1916, with Hartley, Marin, Walkowitz, MacDonald-Wright and the drawings of ten year old Georgia Engelhard. The third was a solo show in May, 1917.

¹⁰Stieglitz to Strand, May 17, 1918. Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. Hereafter cited as PSA/CCP.

¹¹Arthur Dove papers, AAA: (Roll # 725, undated letter c. Sept. 1920.)

¹²Use of the word "sensibility" here simply describes that tendency of the creative mind to incline in a certain direction, while resisting other alternatives.

¹³Two recent studies on the individualistic nature of early American Modernism and how it differed from the radical European "isms" of the same period are: Ann Lee Morgan, "Toward the Definition of Early Modernism in America: A Study of Arthur Dove." Unpublished dissertation, The University of Iowa (1973) pp. 114-129, 161-170; and Judith Katy Zilczer, "The Aesthetic Struggle in America, 1913-1918: Abstract Art and Theory in The Stieglitz Circle." Unpublished dissertation, University of Delaware (1975), pp. 26-33, 222- 233. For a succinct survey of the artists involved in early American Modernism see: Milton W. Brown, et al., *American Art*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979): 366-368, 377, 389.

¹⁴Stieglitz to Strand, Aug. 11, 1919. PSA/CCP.

¹⁵A concept originating in the work of Henry Peach Robinson in the late 19th century. Pictorial photographers considered themselves to be artists who made pictures of their prints, as against those who made scientifically accurate (or applied) photographs. P.H. Emerson, a major influence on Stieglitz's thinking, stated the cardinal principle of Pictorialism in 1886 in his paper *Photography A Pictorial Art*: "Pictorial art is man's expression by means of pictures of that which he considers beautiful in nature." For a concise history of Pictorialism see Peter C. Bunnell's introduction to *A Photographic Vision: Pictorial Photography 1889-1923*, (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Inc. 1980): 1-7.

¹⁶For a summary of the issues surrounding the founding of the Photo-Secession., see Sarah E. Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and the Opponents of the Photo-Secession," *New Mexico Studies in The Fine Arts II* (1977) : 13-18. Greenough concludes that Stieglitz and his opponents were rival factions of the same movement. The issues were tactical rather than aesthetic ones.

¹⁷For an excellent short account of the Munich Secession, see Peg Weiss *Kandinsky in Munich*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1979), 19-21. Eduard J. Steichen pointed out the reason for this link of the two secessions to the readers of *The Photogram* 8 (January 1901): 4-9, in his article. "The American School", saying "Secessionists of Munich

... gave, as the reason of their movement, the fact that they could not longer tolerate the set conventions and stereotyped formulæ, that checked all spirits of originality instead of encouraging them, that refused its ear to any new doctrine." (Steichen would change the spelling of Eduard to Edward in 1918.)

¹⁸Edward Steichen *A Life in Photography*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Company, Inc. 1963), no pagination.

¹⁹"The Photo-Secession — Its objects," *Camera Craft* 7 (August 1903): 81-82.

²⁰Alfred Stieglitz, "The Photo-Secession", *Bausch and Lomb Lens Souvenir*, Rochester, New York: Bausch and Lomb Optical Company, (1903):3. For this and other examples of Stieglitz's (little known) early writing, see the appendix of Sarah E. Greenough's unpublished Master's Thesis "The Published Writings of Alfred Stieglitz," The University of New Mexico, 1976.

²¹For the most recent and succinct account of the blood and tears history of the Little Galleries and its exhibitions, see Weston Naef, *The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/The Viking Press, 1978): 137-153. For a more complete description of the background, origin and work of the Photo-Secession, see Robert Doty, *Photo-Secession: Stieglitz and The Fine Art Movement in Photography*. (New York; Dover Publications, Inc. 1978.)

²²*Camera Work* 1 (January, 1903): 16 and 1.

²³Published in *Camera Work* 12 (October 1906): 59.

²⁴"Our Illustrations" *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 47. This is, in fact, almost a paraphrase of Charles Caffin's 1901 definition of the purpose of "advanced photographers [who strive] to secure in their prints the same qualities that contribute to the beauty of a picture in any other medium, and ask that their work may be judged by the same standard." *Photography As a Fine Art*, (New York: Doubleday Page & Company, 1901): vii.

²⁵It has not to my knowledge been noted before that the linear rhythms of Smith's figures, which grow out of the waves of the sea and curl out of rock formations, are extremely close in formal design and feeling to George Minne's drawings for the early poems of Mæterlinck, *Serres chaudes* (1889).

²⁶Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, n. p.

²⁷Cited by Roland Rood, "The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession", *American Amateur Photographer* 17 (Dec. 1905): 566-569.

- ²⁸Smith studied with Dow in 1897 at the Pratt Institute. For the most recent compilation of information about this still mysterious artist, see Melinda Boyd Parsons, *To All Believers — The Art of Pamela Colman Smith*, (Wilmington, Delaware, Delaware Art Museum, 1975): unpaginated.
- ²⁹*Camera Work* 18 (April 1907): 37-38.
- ³⁰Paul Strand. "What was '291'?" unpublished typescript, October, 1917. PSA/CCP.
- ³¹The importance of this term for Stieglitz, and its derivation, is discussed in Chapter Five.
- ³²For the most complete account of Paul Burty Haviland's career and his seven years of important work for the Photo-Secession, see William I. Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and The American Avant-Garde* (Boston, New York Graphic Society, 1977): 50-52, 190-196.
- ³³For a description of Steichen's decoration of the first Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession see *Camera Work* 14 (April 1906): 48.
- ³⁴For details of this change and transition see Næf pp. 177-184. For a diagram of the new Photo-Secession Galleries see William I. Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 47.
- ³⁵In 1942 Stieglitz recalled that he had said to Haviland one day, "Photo-Secession won't do any more. Let's speak of the gallery as '291'. Haviland looked at me and seemed to understand." *Twice-A-Year* (No. 8/9) p. 125. Oddly, although the address was now 293 Fifth Avenue, the name flourished as 291.
- ³⁶For Stieglitz's retrospective account of this trip, which includes these quoted reactions to Cézanne, see Dorothy Norman ed. "From the Writing of Alfred Stieglitz," *Twice-A-Year* 1 (Fall-Winter, 1938) p. 79.
- ³⁷*The Evening Sun*. (New York December 18, 1911): editorial page. What Stieglitz meant by this statement may be gauged by Caffin's "A Note on Paul Cézanne" (*CW* 34/35, April-July, 1911) which concludes: "It is through the example of Cézanne that the younger generation of artists has discovered its triune creed: Simplification, Organization, Expression. Substitute for the last its equivalent in modern everyday affairs—efficiency—and one recognizes that Cézanne's influence is tending to bring painting once more into serious alignment with everything else that is worth while in modern civilization." (p. 51)
- ³⁸Data on what Stieglitz actually learned from Weber is sparse. Weber returned from Paris to New York City January 9, 1909, and did not become associated with Stieglitz for at least another year. (Matisse had already been exhibited at 291 in 1908.) In addition to exhibiting

Weber's work twice at 291 (1910 and 1911), it is clear that Stieglitz was respectful of Weber's Dow-trained design sense, for he nominated Weber to hang the famous 1910 Exhibition of Pictorial Photography in Buffalo. (Weber also designed the catalog cover.) How much Weber taught Stieglitz about modern art may never be known, for their 291 conversations were not put on record. According to Dorothy Norman, "Stieglitz considered Weber extraordinarily well-informed about the major developments in modern art and felt he learned a great deal from their many talks." (*Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, (New York: Random House, 1973): 103. Judging from the Weber-Stieglitz correspondence, Stieglitz never thought of himself as instructed by Weber. In fact, Weber's own written introduction to his 1911 exhibition at 291 called "My Aim" (which was never used because he and Stieglitz decided to present the paintings without explanation) contains ideas which Stieglitz had already espoused, i.e., "whenever or whatever I draw I aim to arouse the sense of touch as well as sight ... through the objective I aim at the subjective." For what is presently known about the mutually embittered Stieglitz/Weber relationship, see Phyllis Burkley North, "Max Weber: The Early Paintings (1905-1920)", unpublished dissertation, The University of Delaware, 1975. pp. 53-54, pp. 79-80, pp. 90-95. For Stieglitz's later (clearly played-down) account of what he owed Weber ("helpful in a way of clarifying my own ideas"), see A. Stieglitz, "The Story of Weber," unpublished script, February 22, 1923. Stieglitz Archive, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Hereafter YCAL. For Stieglitz's comparison of Weber and Steichen as artists see his letter to Paul Rosenfeld, October 21, 1923, YCAL. Steichen, in his autobiography, wrote that "Weber was the first one to argue Stieglitz into seeing that Stieglitz's early work was much better than his later 'pictorial' work." Something of Weber's profound understanding of the art of Cézanne, Picasso and Henri Rousseau must have rubbed off on Stieglitz, for all three artists were exhibited at 291 in 1911 — as was Weber's own work. It should not be forgotten that it was Weber who presented Cézanne (rather than Picasso) as the father of the Cubists by writing that Cézanne's art reorganized "the natural into the purely plastic domain." (See Weber's article "The 4th Dimension from a Plastic Point of View." *Camera Work* 31, July 1910: 25.

³⁹Steichen to Stieglitz, January 1908 (undated), YCAL.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* July 1908 (undated). Despite the somewhat commanding tone of these letters, Stieglitz was always at the helm of 291 — in his mind and in Steichen's. As Stieglitz put it in one of his few extant letters to Steichen: "It is only in the process of building that individuals see themselves sacrificed for the whole. They can impossibly see the whole until it is finished. But I do and can see it — that is my advantage." (undated 1909), YCAL.

⁴¹For a remembered firsthand account of how Steichen met Matisse and Picasso through "Les Stein", his first meeting with Marin, and the formation of The Society of Americans in Paris, see Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography*.

⁴²*Camera Work* 30 (April, 1910): 54 (Under "Photo-Secession Notes," therefore probably written by Paul Haviland.)

⁴³Marius de Zayas, "How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York." Unpublished manuscript ca. late 1940's. Rediscovered and edited by Francis M. Naumann, *Arts Magazine* (April 1980): 102.

⁴⁴Steichen to Stieglitz, undated, February, 1911. YCAL.

⁴⁵See *Camera Work* 34/35 (April - July 1911): 65-67, for entire article.

⁴⁶Hartmann is believed to be the first American critic to mention Gauguin in an unsigned article for *The Art Critic* I (January 1894). Harry W. Lawton and George Knox, introduction to *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre*, by Sadakichi Hartmann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978):3.

⁴⁷Stieglitz to Hartmann, December 22, 1911. YCAL.

⁴⁸Steichen to Stieglitz, February, 1911 (undated). YCAL.

⁴⁹This idea is spelled out in the well-known letter Stieglitz wrote in German to the pictorial photographer Heinrich Kühn, October 14, 1912. YCAL. It will be discussed further on in the text.

⁵⁰For a summary of the scholarly difficulties in defining the term "straight" —since every photograph is, in effect, manipulated in the process between negative and print—see Patricia D. Leighton, "Critical Attitudes Toward Overtly Manipulated Photography in the 20th Century", *Art Journal* (Winter, 1977/78): 133-138. For the purposes of my discussion, I have accepted Leighton's definition that straight photography allows the subject to speak for itself without being overtly manipulated in the printing process. I am, of course, aware that Stieglitz never went quite straight himself when printing his photographs because of his constant struggle to find the elusive balance between the desired art form and the object. His correspondence (especially to Bayley, Strand and Seligmann) is full of complaints about the problems involved. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, to be a straight photographer did not mean to be a modernist one. It wasn't until the late 'teens and 'twenties that Sheeler, Schamberg and Strand, among others, made straight photography synonymous with modernism. For Stieglitz, the straight photographic aesthetic would always make an allowance for transcendental experience through the objective signification of the thing itself — a concept which Weston would extend.

⁵¹De Zayas, "How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York," p. 103. Stieglitz's admiration for Picasso's work was returned. In a letter from London dated June 11, 1914, de Zayas wrote: "The day I left Paris, I was with Picasso ... we had a very interesting and intimate talk on art and on his latest manner of expression ... The sum and total was

that he confesses that he has absolutely enter [sic] into the field of photography. I showed him your photograph ... (Steerage). He came to the conclusion that you are the only one who has understood photography." Stieglitz replied: "It was mighty interesting to hear what Picasso had to say about my photographs. Of course I value his opinion tremendously ... to me the Steerage ... comes nearest to expressing the thing I wanted to express." Stieglitz to de Zayas, June 22, 1914. YCAL.

⁵²For a recent examination of Stieglitz's presumed experiments with Cubist composition in his 1915-1916 photographs from the rear window of 291 see: John Pultz and Catharine B. Scallen, *Cubism and American Photography, 1910-1930*. (Williamstown, Mass.:Clark Art Institute, 1981): 16-22.

⁵³For an informative short history of how the Forum exhibition was conceived, and how its premise was received by the critics, see Zilcher, pp. 81-95.

⁵⁴Paul Strand, "What was 291?": 2, 4. For a more complete history of what Strand here labels "The photographic idea", see Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and The Idea Photography", Sarah Greenough and Juan Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz, Photographs and Writings* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983): 12-32. Hereafter cited as Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*.

⁵⁵"Several thousand visitors" had come to 291 by Stieglitz's own count in 1914. *Camera Work* 47 (1914-1915): 3. As Steichen was to describe the atmosphere years later: "During those winters in New York, I was able to observe the prodigious amount of work that Stieglitz did ... He was always there, talking, talking, talking; talking in parables, arguing, explaining. He was a philosopher, a preacher, a teacher, and a father confessor. There wasn't anything that wasn't discussed openly and continuously in the Galleries at 291. If the exhibitions ... had been shown in any other art gallery, they would never have made an iota of the impact they did at 291. The difference was Stieglitz ...but none learned as much there as Stieglitz did himself." (*A Life in Photography*). Stieglitz would probably have agreed with the whole statement, for as he said in 1921, he "was not an authority on any subject. Merely a student. One who still actively learned. Everywhere. Every moment." ("Regarding the Modern French Masters Exhibition," *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 8 (July, 1921): 107-13.

⁵⁶Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, fresh investigation is needed into Stieglitz's formative years in Berlin (1882-1890) to expose the Symbolist roots of his thinking. As Marsden Hartley wrote to Stieglitz from Berlin on Sept. 28, 1913: "The German is most essentially a Symbolist, and there is every evidence that mysticism has had its home here." YCAL. Unfortunately, only a "scant handful" of Stieglitz's own letters from his Berlin student days survive. S.D.L. p.71.

- ⁵⁷Allan Sekula, "On The Invention of Photographic Meaning," *Artforum* (January, 1975): 41,42.
- ⁵⁸Dennis Longwell, *Steichen The Master Prints 1895-1914: The Symbolist Period*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978): 19-20.
- ⁵⁹Rosalind Krauss, "Alfred Stieglitz's Equivalents", *Arts Magazine* (February, 1980): 134-137.
- ⁶⁰Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*: 15.
- ⁶¹See "Exhibition Marius de Zayas", *Camera Work* (April - July 1913): 20-22, for his own explanation of his work.
- ⁶²Published in *Camera Work* 39 (July, 1912): 55.
- ⁶³Interest in Redon's work was at a high point in Europe during 1910-1911. Less than two years later, 75 Redons would be chosen for exhibition in America's Armory Show.
- ⁶⁴John Rewald, *Post Impressionism: From Van Gogh to Gauguin* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1956): 169.
- ⁶⁵Stieglitz to Anderson, August 15, 1923. Sherwood Anderson Archive, The Newberry Library. Chicago, Ill. Hereafter cited as Newberry.
- ⁶⁶Paul B. Haviland, "Marius De Zayas — Material, Relative and Absolute Caricatures," *Camera Work* 46 (1914): 33.
- ⁶⁷De Zayas. *Arts Magazine* , p. 114. The first close investigation into the sources for de Zayas's abstract equivalents to portraiture is Craig R. Bailey, "The Art of Marius de Zayas", *Arts Magazine* (September, 1978): 136-44. Bailey explores the influence of European Modernism on de Zayas's work between 1910 and 1914, and makes the important point that de Zayas mostly caricatured people he knew, liked and admired. Bailey accepts de Zayas's after-the-fact (1940's) association between catching souls and photography in the two caricatures as "plausible." The repeated eye glasses are read by Bailey as infinity signs—and a particularly witty compliment to Stieglitz. Willard Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas", *The Art Bulletin* (September, 1980): 434-452, provides the most recent survey of the genesis and dating of de Zayas's work. Bohn enlarges on the importance of Positivism and Cubist theory on de Zayas's "double abstraction," observes that his realistic and abstract styles were used interchangeably, and agrees with Bailey that Picabia's machine drawings for 291 derived from de Zayas, instead of vice versa (as thought by William A. Camfield in his 1979 monograph on Picabia). Bohn labels *Alfred Stieglitz* as the first of the abstract caricatures, and the source of all those to follow. By comparing the drawing to the original artifact in the British Museum (see page 436) he can accept de Zayas's 1940's statement as fact.

- ⁶⁸Dickran Tashjian missed the Stieglitz identification of this work completely in his discussion of it in *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and The American Avant-Garde, 1910-1925*. (Middletown, Conn. Wesleyan University Press 1975): 31.
- ⁶⁹For Picabia's elliptical, proto-Dada essay in French and English, see *Camera Work* 47 (1914-15): 72.
- ⁷⁰To Willard Bohn, it is either a jack-in-the-box or a camera with extended bellows. Bohn. pp. 445-446.
- ⁷¹For a description of this hand camera, see Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York, Random House 1973): 36. For Stieglitz's own description, see his article "The Hand Camera — Its Present Importance" (1897), republished in *Photographers on Photography*, a critical anthology edited by Nathan Lyons (New York: Prentice Hall, 1966): 108-110.
- ⁷²Anita Pollitzer was a younger (by seven years) classmate of O'Keeffe's at Columbia Teachers College during 1914-1915. They had many interests in common, including music, the suffragette movement, and Stieglitz's exhibitions at 291.
- ⁷³O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 25, 1915 YCAL.
- ⁷⁴Paul B. Haviland. 291, 1 (March 1915) n p. This dialogue was taken from an actual criticism of 291 by Steichen, published in *Camera Work* 47.
- ⁷⁵De Zayas, *Arts*, p. 115.
- ⁷⁶This translation of Albert Aurier's *Symbolisme en Peinture: Paul Gauguin* is from Rewald, pp. 481-482.
- ⁷⁷Alfred Stieglitz to George D. Pratt, Dec. 7, 1912. YCAL.
- ⁷⁸Alfred Stieglitz to L.B. Manley, Jan. 14, 1915. YCAL.
- ⁷⁹Alfred Stieglitz to Willamina Parrish, May 8, 1917. YCAL.
- ⁸⁰Kahn wrote this piece, published in *L'Evènement* Sept. 28, 1886, in support of Jean Moréas's Symbolist manifesto "Le Symbolisme", published in *Figaro Littéraire*, Sept. 18, 1886.
- ⁸¹This translation is from Rewald, p. 148.
- ⁸²De Zayas, "Photography and Artistic-Photography", *Camera Work* 42/43 (publ. Nov. 1913): 13.

⁸³Stieglitz to R. Child Bayley. April 15, 1913. YCAL. The letter goes on to say "... I wonder what you thought of DeZayas's article on Photography and whether you really realize its importance ... the meaning of photography as a medium of expression is finally getting its place."

⁸⁴Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson, July 8, 1924: "Russian I don't read, German is fluent and French I can read fairly well." Newberry. Stieglitz may have been predisposed to the Symbolist doctrine through exposure to Schopenhauer's metaphysics during his Berlin years. And it would have been possible for him to absorb the thinking of the French Symbolist Masters from such periodicals as the *Revue Wagnerienne*, *Mercure de France*, *La Vogue*, *L'Art Moderne* and the *Revue Blanche*..

⁸⁵For a survey of how and when American artists received French Symbolist ideas, see Charles C. Eldredge, "Americans and the Symbolist International," in *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting*. New York : Grey Art Gallery (1979): 17-37. Eldredge does not examine the Symbolist roots of 291, although he describes the work of O'Keeffe, Dove and Hartley as "Abstract Symbolism".

⁸⁶*Camera Work* 47 (Publ. Jan. 1915) : 74.

⁸⁷*Ibid.* p. 37.

⁸⁸*Ibid.* p. 62.

⁸⁹*Ibid.* p. 23.

⁹⁰*Ibid.* p. 11.

⁹¹*Ibid.* p. 30.

⁹²*Ibid.* p. 18.

⁹³*Ibid.* p. 29.

⁹⁴*Ibid.* p. 32.

⁹⁵*Ibid.* p. 29.

⁹⁶*Ibid.* p. 45.

⁹⁷*Ibid.* pp. 42-43.

⁹⁸*Ibid.* p. 27.

⁹⁹*Ibid.* p. 61.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.* p. 35.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.* p. 70.

¹⁰²As quoted in Marius de Zayas, *Arts*, (April, 1980): 115.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴Stieglitz did not consider this a complete switch of intent. "I had been thinking of America constantly in the days before the war. What was 291 but a thinking of America?" (Alfred Stieglitz, "Ten Stories" *Twice-a-year* V-VI (1940-1941): 135-63. This statement is borne out by a letter to Marsden Hartley dated May 4, 1915. "So between you, de Zayas & Walkowitz it looks as if 291 would be devoted chiefly to the development of 291ers. And that is as I should like it best." YCAL.

¹⁰⁵The most recent sources for Rosenfeld are: Hugh M. Potter, *False Dawn, Paul Rosenfeld and Art in America: 1916-1946* (published for University of New Hampshire by U.M.I., 1980); Bruce Butterfield, "Paul Rosenfeld: The Critic as Autobiographer" unpublished Ph.D. dissertation University of Illinois, 1975). For Frank, see *Memoirs of Waldo Frank* (Amherst: University of Mass. Press 1973), particularly Alan Trachtenberg's Preface, and Lewis Mumford's Introduction. Also, Helge Normann Nilsen, "Waldo Frank and the Idea of America." *American Studies International* . (Spring 1979): 27-36. And, Wanda Corn, "Apostles of The New American Art: Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld", *Arts Magazine* (February, 1980): 159-163.

¹⁰⁶Paul Rosenfeld, "Alfred Stieglitz", *Port of New York* (1924), reissue University of Illinois Press, Urbana & London (1966): 257-276. For an excellent short account of Rosenfeld's life, work and times, see Sherman Paul's introductory essay to this edition, pp. vii-ivi.

¹⁰⁷Waldo Frank, *Our America*, (New York; Boni and Liveright 1919): 184, 183.

¹⁰⁸Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1919): 184-188. This popular book, first published in 1899, was the earliest introduction to French literature for many Americans — including T. S. Eliot. Several of Mallarmé's more difficult poems (including *Hérodiade*) and statements were translated into English.

¹⁰⁹Rewald, pp. 154-155.

¹¹⁰For just one example, see Alfred Stieglitz to Marsden Hartley, "I fully believe that here in this country art is really the appendix of society ... as yet it is not vital to the American." (May 12, 1914) YCAL.

¹¹¹For a literary and visual history of these three concepts, see Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York; Harper & Row, 1979): 115-147.

112 Alfred Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson, "I wonder how do those prints of mine look these days. Do they still give you anything at all. You know I never know are they really what I want them to be. When I let them go I feel they are right — And when I begin to think about them I wonder." (April 12, 1925) Newberry.

113 "The Origins of the Photo-Seession and How it Became 291." *Twice-A-Year*, 8-9 (1942): 114-127.

114 One Hour's Sleep
Three Dreams

- I. "*I was to be buried.* The whole family stood about. Also hundreds of friends. My wish was carried out. Not a word was uttered. There was not a single tear. All was silence and all seemed blackness. A door opened and a woman came in. As the woman came in I stood up; my eyes opened. but I was dead. All screamed and rushed away. There was a general panic. Some jumped out of the windows. Only the Woman remained. Her gaze was fixed upon me. Eye to Eye. She said: "Friend are you really dead?" The voice was firm and clear. No answer. The Woman asked three times. No answer. As she asked the the third time I returned to my original position and was ready to be buried. - I heard one great sob. I awoke."
- II. "I was very ill and everyone asked me to take a rest. No one succeeded to induce me. Finally a Woman said: "I will go with you. Will you go?" We went. We tramped together day and night. In the mountains. Over snow. In the moonlight. In the glaring sun. We had no food. No a word was said. The Woman grew paler and paler as the days and nights passed by. She could hardly walk. I helped her. And still not a word was uttered. Finally the Woman collapsed and she said, in a voice hardly audible: "Food-Food-I must have food." And I answered: Food-Food-, Child, we are in a world where there is not Food-just Spirit-Will." - And the woman looked piteously at me and said, half dead: "Food-Food" and *I kissed the Woman*, and as I did that there stood before the Woman all sorts of wonderful food - on a simple wooden table, and it was Springtime. And as the Woman began to eat ravenously - conscious of nothing but Nature's Cry for Food, I slipped away. And I continued walking. Onward. - I heard a distant cry. I awoke."
- III. "The Woman and I were alone in a room. She told me a Love Story. I knew it was her own. I understood why she could not love me. And as the Woman told me the story - she suddenly became mad - she kissed me in her ravings - she tore her clothes and mine — she tore her hair. Her eyes were wild - and nearly blank. I saw them looking into mine. She kissed me passionately and cried: "Why are you not HE?" "Why not?" And I tried to calm her. But did not succeed. And finally she cried: "What makes me kiss you— it is He I want, not you. And yet I kissed you. Kissed you as it were He." - I didn't dare to move. It was all much too terrible for Fear. I stood there spell-bound. Suddenly the woman moved away - it was ghastly. her look. Her eyes. - The Woman stood immovable, here eyes glued on mine; when suddenly she screeched: "Tell me you are He—tell me—you are He. And if you are not He I will kill you. For I kissed you." I stood there and calmly said, what I really

did not want to say, for I knew the woman was irresponsible and mad. I said, "I am not He." And as I said that the woman took a knife from the folds of her dress and rushed at me. She struck the heart. The blood spurted straight ahead, as if it had been waiting for an outlet. And as the Woman saw the blood and saw me drop dead she became perfectly sane. She stood motionless. With no expression. She turned around. Upon the *immaculate white wall* she saw written in *Blood Red* letters: He killed himself. He understood the kisses." There was a scream. I awoke."

Alfred Stieglitz
(Italics added)

¹¹⁵Böcklin's *Island of the Death* (1886) was, as has been mentioned, a favorite of Stieglitz's. Presumably he knew *Self Portrait with Death Playing The Fiddle* (1872) and *The Plague* (1898), as well. That he also appreciated the macabre, death saturated work of Felicien Rops is clear, since *Le Sacrifice* (1883) is in the Stieglitz Collection belonging to the Metropolitan Museum.

¹¹⁶Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson, Sept. 18, 1923. Newberry.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.* Nov. 28, 1923.

¹¹⁸For an investigation into the influence of Mæterlinck, George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and Henri Bergson on Stieglitz's thinking during the *Camera Work* years, see: Joseph Schiffman, "The Alienation of the Artist: Alfred Stieglitz", *American Quarterly* 3, Fall 1951: 244-258. Among the *Camera Work* references to Mallarmé, are de Casseres "Modernity and Decadence" (*CW* No. 37, Jan. 1912), and Hartmann, "Broken Melodies", (*CW*, No. 38, April, 1912).

¹¹⁹For my brief discussion here of Mallarmé's work, I am mainly indebted to *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays and Letters*, translated and with an introduction by Bradford Cook. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1956). And to Wallace Fowlie, *Mallarmé*, (Chicago and London; The University of Chicago Press, 1953). Also useful was *Yale French Studies*, No. 54 "Mallarmé" (1977).

¹²⁰Mallarmé, "Music and Literature," in *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays & Letters*, pp. 43-56.

¹²¹Letter to Henri Cazalis, October, 1864, reprinted in *ibid.* p. 83.

¹²²Fowlie, p. 19.

¹²³For specific research on the theory of equivalents, see H.R. Rookmaaker, *Gauguin and 19th Century Art Theory* (Swets & Zietlinger — Amsterdam, 1972): 155, 161, 164, 171, 206, 207-8.

¹²⁴*Mallarmé: Selected Prose*, p. 42. This particular passage also appeared in Arthur Symons much read *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 199.

¹²⁵Norman, p. 161.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷For a discussion of Mallarmé and the music of poetry (which owes nothing to the influence of Wagner in France), see A.G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France: 1885-1895* (Oxford, England, Basil Blackwell, 1950): 149-167. Also on the topic of Mallarmé and musicality, see Rookmaaker, pp. 210-220.

¹²⁸For an account of the Symbolist poetics of Stefan George and his circle in Munich during the 1890's, and their influence on Kandinsky after 1900, see Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979): 81-91.

¹²⁹Norman, p. 144.

¹³⁰*Camera Work*, No. 34/35. p. 29. The young Picasso had owned the works of Mallarmé, according to Anthony Blunt and Phœbe Pool, *Picasso The Formative Years: A Study of his Sources* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1962): 6. For a discussion of the effect of Mallarmé's poetry on Cubism, see Christopher Grey, *Cubist Aesthetic Theories*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1953): 12-16, 98-100, 102-104, 117-118.

¹³¹T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1920): 100. It should be said that Eliot's "objective correlative" had more to do with the reader's response than with the artist's original feelings. Nevertheless, Stieglitz, too, was deeply concerned with his viewers' responses - often to the point of trying to manipulate them. (See Chapter Six.)

¹³²*Ibid.* p. 5.

¹³³For an examination of Mallarmé's deep interest in painting and painters, see : Lloyd James Austin, "Mallarmé and the Visuals," in *French 19th Century Painting and Literature*, ed. by Ulrich Finke (New York: Harper & Row, 1972): 232-257. For a study of the effect of Stieglitz and his photography on American writers and poets, see F. Richard Thomas, *Literary Admirers of Alfred Stieglitz*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983).

¹³⁴"You have undoubtedly succeeded in expressing Matisse and Picasso in words, for me at least. It is for that reason that I am desirous of sharing my pleasure with others." Stieglitz to Stein, Feb. 26, 1912. YCAL. Gertrude Stein's two articles "Henry Matisse" and "Pablo

- Picasso" appeared in *Camera Work*, Special Number (August 1912): 23, 29.
- ¹³⁵See the Stieglitz/ Anderson correspondence, Newberry.
- ¹³⁶For a discussion of the Stieglitz-Williams relationship, see Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*, pp.82-107, 127-144, 161-198. Also, Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives*, pp. 91-115; and Tashjian's 1976 Whitney catalog, *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920-1940*, which contains much information on the Stieglitz Circle artists and photographers during the '20's and '30's . The most brilliant and useful of them all may be Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background*. (England: Cambridge University Press, 1971.)
- ¹³⁷Crane used the Brooklyn Bridge as an "objective correlative" to celebrate America, in his long poem *The Bridge* (1930). The published Stieglitz-Crane correspondence is included in Brom Walker, *The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1965). And their unpublished correspondence is at YCAL.
- ¹³⁸Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism*, p. 56.
- ¹³⁹Dove to Stieglitz, c. Dec. 1930, YCAL.
- ¹⁴⁰Gelett Burgess, *Camera Work* 37 (Jan. 1912): 46.
- ¹⁴¹An extract from Bergson's *Creative Evolution* appeared in *Camera Work*, 36 (Oct, 1911) and "What is the Object of Art" from Bergson's *Laughter*, was reprinted in *CW* 37 (Jan. 1912.) Bergson lectured at Columbia University in 1913. After that, his ideas spread like wildfire through intellectual America. See Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959): 226-230.
- ¹⁴²Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, p. 258.
- ¹⁴³*Camera Work* 18 (April, 1907): 37-38.
- ¹⁴⁴Stieglitz to Hartley, Jan. 12, 1915 YCAL. "... There is hardly any chance of Daniel's [the dealer] going into "abstraction" in the near future. 291 seems to be the only place interested in the development of Today."
- ¹⁴⁵Georgia O'Keeffe to Anita Pollitzer, Oct. 15, 1915.
- ¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1916.
- ¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, Feb. 21, 1916.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, February, (undatd), 1916.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, June 21, 1916.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, undated , 1916 (marked "after 1st exhibition").

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1917.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, October (undated) 1915.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERNATIONAL ART NOUVEAU IN CHICAGO: SEEDBED OF O'KEEFFE'S ABSTRACTION

The keynote of the modern movement in art is expression of self: that is, the expression of one's inner self as distinguished from the representation of the outer world.

A.J. Eddy *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* ¹

America, more than any other country of the world, is the soil predestined to the most brilliant bloom of a future art which shall be vigorous and prolific ... her brain is not haunted by the phantoms of memory; her young imagination can allow itself a free career, and, in fashioning objects, it does not restrict the hand to a limited number of similar and conventional movements.

S. Bing *L'Art Nouveau* ²

In the letters to Anita Pollitzer that Georgia O'Keeffe wrote between August 25, 1915 and June 20, 1917, and in the abstract images she made during those same years, before Stieglitz became her mentor and prime confidant, lie the major clues to her artistic sensibility.

There are at least two important reasons to probe into her sources and, as far as possible, to chart the method of her abstraction. First, because O'Keeffe was to draw on the creative capital of these special forms from her early passionate sensibility throughout her long artistic life. They were the models, so to speak, for her total oeuvre. As the artist herself recently put it "I always say that my work was never as good as it was in the beginning. You may wander around a bit, but your work doesn't change much."³ Second, because the ways in which O'Keeffe reinvented and rearranged these forms to carry her own content has much to tell us about how she

drew upon all of her sources—including photography—to develop her mature style.

The letters specify the modernist texts which O’Keeffe studied and taught, even while they unguardedly record many of the sequences of her own thinking and experiment. The following extracts give some rare contemporary evidence about what actually led up to the creative breakthrough of her twenty seventh year.

Georgia O’Keeffe to Anita Pollitzer:

I got Jerome Eddy a long time ago
(25 August, 1915.)⁴

Kadinsky [sic] is reading much better
this time than last time. (September, 1915)

I think I’m going to have lots of time to
work but ... one can’t work with nothing to
express (October, 1915);

I wish you could see the thing I made
today— I am afraid I will get so distorted
with only seeing my own things that I will be
more queer than ever — I don’t mind — I
would show it to you only it doesn’t satisfy
me even a little bit as I must work longer
(8 October, 1915);

I like music better than anything in the
world—color gives me the same thrill once in
a long long time. I can almost remember and
count the times—it is usually just the
outdoors or flowers—or a person—
sometimes a story—or something that will
call a picture to my mind—will affect me like
music (October, 1915);

You see I took the cart before the
horse— drawing with no idea of composition
... If I ever get this darned watercolor
anything like I want it —maybe I’ll send it to
you—Today’s is the 10th edition of it— and
there it stands saying—“Am just deliciously
ugly and unbalanced” (October, 1915);

What is Art anyway? When I think of
how hopelessly unable I am to answer that

question I cannot help feeling like a farce—pretending to teach anybody anything about it ... what are we trying to do—What is the excuse for it all ... the things I've done that satisfy me most are the charcoal landscapes—and—things—the colors I seem to want to use absolutely nauseate me ... I decided I wasn't going to cater to what anyone else might like—why should I? (October, 1915);

I sent you the things I have done that would roll ... I have painted three portraits—I hate to use that word—I should have said people—or heads—or something— ... Tell me—do you like my music—I didn't make it to music—it is just my own tune—it is something I wanted very much to tell someone—and what I wanted to express was a feeling like wonderful music gives me. (undated, but possibly from mid-November, 1915);

Did you ever have something to say and feel as if the whole side of the wall wouldn't be big enough to say it and then sit down on the floor and try to get it on to a sheet of charcoal paper- and when you had put it down look at it and try to put into words what you have been trying to say with just marks—and then—wonder what it all is anyway—I've been crawling around on the floor till I have cramps in my feet—one creation looks to [sic] much like T.C. [Teachers College] the other to much like soft soap—maybe the fault is with what I am trying to say—I don't seem to be able to find words for it—I always have a hard time finding words for anything. (13 December, 1915);

It's a wonderful night—... I'm going to try to tell you—about tonight—another way—I'm going to try to tell you about the music of it with charcoal—a miserable medium—for things that seem alive and sing. (December, 1915).

O'Keeffe's account seven years later of her decision to "Paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted",⁵ completely leaves out the anxious, self-critical, and deeply excited body-and-mind process of her

search for forms to convey “the expression of self,” as A.J. Eddy put it.⁶ However, another letter dated December, 1915, reveals her analogic condition very plainly: “I guess their [sic] all rotten—but when you have done a thing over and over again till it gets to be a sort of mania—you get a notion you would enjoy hearing some else say it’s awful.”

It was out of a dire need for feedback, then, that O’Keeffe sent three separate rolls of her earliest abstractions in pastel, watercolor, and charcoal to Pollitzer in New York, between the months of October and December, 1915. The results were both satisfying and portentous.

Anita Pollitzer to Georgia O’Keeffe (“Pat”):

I saw them yesterday—and they made me *feel* —I swear they did—they have emotions that sing out or holler as the case may be. I’m talking about your pastels—of course. They’ve all got feeling ... written in red right over them—no one could possibly get your meanings ... that is unless they knew you better than I believe anyone does know you—but the mood is there every time. (14 October, 1915 YCAL);

They [a roll of charcoal drawings] came in your two moods ... very pure (and) ... very direct ... so sensational, so explosive that it’s bound to carry me. I don’t know what to say about it. I’d love to ask Mr. Stieglitz ... of course I never should till you said the word, and I don’t feel the time’s come yet—but keep on working this way like the devil. Hear victrola records, read Poetry, think of people and put your reactions on paper” (16 November, 1915);

Astounded and awfully happy were my feelings today when I opened the batch of drawings. I tell you I felt them! and when I say that I mean that. They’ve gotten past the personal stage into the big sort of emotions that are common to big people (...) if they’d been stuck on a wall and I’d been told X.Z. did them I’d have liked them as much as if I’d been told Picasso did them, or someone I’d never heard of, (...)—Well they’ve

gotten there as far as I'm concerned and you ought to cry because you're so happy. You've said something! I took them up in the 4th floor and stayed alone with them in one of the studios- And they spoke to me, I swear they did.

... I walked up to 291—It was twilight in the front room Pat and thoroughly exquisite. *He* came in. We spoke. We were feeling alike anyway and I said "Mr. Stieglitz would you like to see what I have under my arm". He said "I would—come in the back room"—I went with your feelings and your emotions tied up and showed them to a giant of a man who reacted—*I unrolled them—I had them all there—The two you sent, (...) before, and those I got today*. He looked Pat—and thoroughly absorbed and got them—he looked again—the room was quiet—one small light—His hair was mussed—It was a long while before his lips opened—Then he smiled at me and yelled "Walkowitz come here"—Then he said to me—"Why they're genuinely fine things—you say a woman did these—She's an unusual woman—She's broad minded, she's bigger than most women, but she's got the sensitive emotion—I'd know she was a woman—look at that line—and he kept analysing and squinting Pat—Then little Walkowitz came. His eyes got big and saucer like—"What do you think" Stieglitz asked him—"Very fine"—and then he sat down and held them—Pat they belong there and I took them down—I had to—They gave those men something—your pieces did—they gave me much. (...) I left them alone—They lived thru them — Then Stieglitz said "Are you writing to this girl soon" I said "yes"—"Well tell her," he said, "they're the purest, finest, sincerest things that have entered 291 in a long while"—and he said— "I wouldn't mind showing them in one of these rooms one bit—perhaps I shall—For what they're worth"—"you keep them—He turned to me and said this "For later I may want to see them and I thank you, he said—for letting me see them *NOW*. Pat, I hold your hand I think you wrote me once—"I would rather have Stieglitz like something I'd done than anyone else"—Its come time. (Italics added).

I've written you only what I plainly
remember —Those are mighty near his
words—I've left out what I wasn't sure—

Pat—
They do it to me too—and I wouldn't
give a hang—You're living Pat in spite of
Columbia!!" (January 1, 1916)

This last letter from Pollitzer straightens the record as to what Stieglitz actually said and did when he first saw O'Keeffe's abstractions.⁸ It also states clearly that Pollitzer brought him her complete record of O'Keeffe's three-month-old venture into abstract expression, which contradicts the long established information that Stieglitz saw only one roll (the last received) of charcoal drawings.⁸

O'Keeffe's incredulous letter to Pollitzer about Stieglitz's reaction (January 4, 1916) is especially instructive. It reveals, on the one hand, that she was able to satisfy her own new intentions; and, on the other, that she still felt the classic worry of all pioneer abstractionists, from Kandinsky and Mondrian to Dove and Hartley: could a personal visual language communicate meaning to others coherently?

I wasn't even sure that I had anything worth expressing ... the thing seems to express in a way what I wanted it to but—it also seems rather effeminate—it is essentially a woman's feeling— [and] satisfies me in a way ... it is so nice to feel that I said something to you—and to Stieglitz..I wonder what I said—I wonder if any of you got what I tried to say— ... If Stieglitz says any more about them—ask him why he liked them—anyway ... it makes me want to keep on—and I had almost decided it was a fool's game.

Evidently Stieglitz did feel that he got what she tried to say. But what did he actually see on that January 1st of 1916? Certainly included were the following:

Special No. 1 1915

Charcoal on paper 25" x 19"

Special No. 2 1915
Charcoal on paper 23 3/4" x 18 1/2"

Special No. 4 1915
Charcoal on paper 24 1/2" x 18 1/8"

Special No. 5 1915
Charcoal on paper 24" x 18 1/2"

Special No. 7 1915
Charcoal on paper 24" x 18 1/2"

Special No. 8 1915
Charcoal on paper 25" x 19"

Drawing No. 9 1915
Charcoal on paper 25" x 19"

Untitled 1915
Charcoal drawing on paper 24" x 18 1/2"

Special No. 12 1915
Charcoal on paper 24" x 18 1/2"⁹

It is possible that two pastels should also be on this list, although they are presently dated 1914.¹⁰

Special No. 32 (c. 1914)
Pastel 13 1/2" x 19 1/2"

Special No. 33 (c. 1914)
Pastel 11" x 14"

The question of whether these pastels were done 1914 or 1915 may be an academic one, for what "satisfied" O'Keeffe most at the time were "the charcoal landscapes—and—things." And Stieglitz must have felt the same way, because he presented his choice (without her knowledge or approval) of ten charcoal drawings at the first 291 exhibition in 1916.¹¹ Without the evidence of Stieglitz's installation photographs it cannot be said for certain which ten charcoals these were. The chances are excellent, however, that he chose those listed above—since they have been recorded and photographed—plus *Drawing No. 3*.¹²

What did Stieglitz see in these unexpectedly large “Lines and Spaces in Charcoal”¹³ which connected them with everything he had been striving for at 291? Judging from his correspondence, they looked (and continued to look) to his experienced eye, like something that had never been done before: “A young girl of unusual sensibility has done some really personal abstractions,” he wrote to Paul Haviland on the 19th of April, 1916.¹⁴ Over a decade later, he still saw them as “something truly new—Fabulously pure.”¹⁵ Out of this judgment was born the popular and consistent legend of O’Keeffe as a native/naive American genius. A legend carefully nurtured by Stieglitz, his immediate circle, and the artist herself, for a complex of reasons centering around Stieglitz’s well-known desire to foster an American modern art created out of American life. There are enough elements of truth in this legend to have discouraged serious challenge, for indeed she never studied in Europe (as had everyone else in Stieglitz’s circle), and the basically European origins of her first charcoal abstractions—the core of her whole symbol system—are just beginning to be tracked down.

From the start, critics have taken two main lines in writing about O’Keeffe’s work—both of them actively encouraged by Stieglitz: 1) her art as the depiction of “feminine forms”.¹⁶ And 2) her art as completely free from the influence of European Modernism—a somewhat surprising appraisal in the light of what 291 actually made possible for her to see during the many visits she made to the gallery.

In 1921 Marsden Hartley published an essay containing the quintessential litany on O’Keeffe, which has been re-written, with variations, ever since: “[O’Keeffe] sees the world of a woman turned inside out ... the pictures ... are as living and shameless private documents as exist

in painting ... She is modern by instinct and therefore cannot avoid modernity of expression.”¹⁷ Paul Rosenfeld’s summation of O’Keeffe appeared three years later and comes to the same conclusion: “No inherited rhetoric interposes between her feeling and her form of expression. Her concepts ... come out of general American life; not out of analyses of Cézanne and Picasso. They come out of the need of personal expression of one who has never had the advantage of the art treasures of Europe and has lived life without the help of Paris.”¹⁸ In 1930, Arthur Dove (the only artist whose work O’Keeffe consistently admired) told Stieglitz in a letter that “with O’Keeffe there did not happen to be any tradition. There had been nothing to compare her with.”¹⁹ And in 1963, Lloyd Goodrich summed up this prevailing opinion (clearly with O’Keeffe’s blessing):

From the beginning, Georgia O’Keeffe’s art was a personal language, without discernible derivations; growing out of nature, yet attaining abstractions as pure as music. In her remarkable abstract creations from the late 1910’s on, the concepts were completely original ... the design daring and effective, the style absolutely clearcut, yet always with a sense of enigmatic depths.²⁰

Continuing in the same vein, Barbara Rose stated, in 1977, that “[O’Keeffe’s] earliest surviving works are stark abstractions,”²¹ and in 1979, Charles Eldredge wrote that “... in the early abstractions of Georgia O’Keeffe we encounter forms without concrete references to nature and sense or meaning without objects.”²²

O’Keeffe never failed to support the spontaneous eruption theory of her early abstractions, maintaining that they were “things in my head that others didn’t have”.²³ If, however, we assume with E.H. Gombrich that the innocent eye is a myth,²⁴ and with Nelson Goodman that an artist may often strive for innocence of eye in order to be rescued from the traditional

patterns of seeing,²⁵ then it is imperative to ask how those “things” got into her head in the first place.

O’Keeffe’s traditional art education has been pretty thoroughly recorded.²⁶ The salient facts are these: A life class with John Vanderpoel at the Art Institute of Chicago during 1905-1906, where she earned an “exceptionally high” recommendation; portrait and still life classes with William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League in New York during 1907-1908, where she won first prize of a hundred dollars for an oil still life; Drawing I for elementary school teachers based on the Dow method during the summer of 1912 given in Charlottesville, Virginia by Alon Bement, assistant professor of fine arts at Columbia University; and courses (at Bement’s suggestion) with Arthur Wesley Dow at Columbia Teachers College in New York during 1914-1915, and again in the spring of 1916.

O’Keeffe herself credited Dow with having had the strongest influence on her work (although the many ways he did so have never been examined in depth): “the way you see nature depends on whatever has influenced your way of seeing, I think it was Arthur Dow who affected my start, who helped me to find something of my own ... this man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way—and that interested me.”²⁷

Why did this interest her so much, and where did she find the “things” to fill her spaces? Although she did not have “the help of the city of Paris,” she certainly had plenty of other opportunities to develop an exceedingly vanguard modernist eye.

O’Keeffe first went to 291 in 1908—that crucial year when Stieglitz began to show avant-garde European art to America—and, by her own account, saw the Rodin drawings there in January. (Eight years later

she would make at least twelve nude watercolors which bear some startling similarities to the Rodins, in spite of her statement that the latter were of no interest to her at the time.²⁸) That same winter and spring of 1908 at 291, she could also have seen Pamela Colman Smith's drawings to music (in February/March) and a Matisse exhibition in April which included drawings, lithographs, watercolors, etchings and one oil—although she has not recorded doing so. The official account skips now to 1912, when she met Alon Bement, who put her in touch with the Dow/Fenollosa method. He suggested she look at the drastically new paintings illustrated in Eddy's *Cubists and Post Impressionism*, and told her to read Kandinsky's *Art of Spiritual Harmony*. She has recalled²⁹ that in the 1914-1915 season she went to 291 to see the Picasso-Braque show of Cubist oils and charcoal drawings from the collection of Gabrielle and Francis Picabia; three huge 1914 paintings of Picabia's (*Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie, C'est de moi qu'il s'agit*, and *Mariage comique*); the work of Marion Becket and Katharine Rhoades; and John Marin's oils and watercolors (which she greatly admired). It has not been recorded whether she saw the Cubist watercolors exhibited at the Carroll gallery in December, Hartley's paintings at the Daniel in January, and a Matisse show at the Montross gallery (which ran during January-February)—although it is highly probable that she did. Missing also from her remembrances of visits to 291 is the November-December 1914 exhibition of eighteen African sculptures organized by de Zayas—and billed by Stieglitz as “the Root of Modern Art.”

Even though she has written that “I had gotten a lot of new ideas [in New York] and was crazy to be off in a corner and try them out”,³⁰ the first abstract drawings seem to be only secondarily connected with the European modernism she saw that year. What these drawings recall first to

the eye are the myriad floral forms of Art Nouveau—the least acknowledged, and very probably the most permanent and pervasive of all her sources.³¹

O’Keeffe and Art Nouveau

Where did Georgia O’Keeffe first come into contact with Art Nouveau? For the answer, we have to go back to her formative Chicago period: the already mentioned Art Institute School year (1905-1906), and the years between 1908-1910 when she returned to Chicago to work as a free-lance commercial artist, drawing lace and embroidery advertisements for newspapers. The disappearing act of this critical training ground of her artistic life is almost complete. We know virtually nothing about her professional contacts and activities there —only that she lived in the city with relatives of her mother’s.³² Fortunately, the record is rich about Chicago itself as one of the most important centers for the Arts and Crafts movement in America.

The Industrial Arts League was organized in Chicago in 1899. It aimed to provide work, instruction, exhibition and publication to benefit artists and craftsmen. The even more prestigious Chicago Arts and Crafts Society, founded in 1897 at Hull House, was directly inspired by the English Aesthetic movement. Such distinguished figures as Walter Crane and C.R. Ashbee had prepared the way by coming over to lecture at the Art Institute, and by the late 1880’s William Morris fabrics, wall papers and furniture were already available at Marshall Field Company. In 1902, Tobey Furniture Company held a unique Arts and Crafts Exhibition in a recreated “Morris room”, which was furnished with objects from Morris’s own

establishment. The William Morris Society was born in 1903, and, by then, numerous small arts and crafts groups flourished as well. Almost from the beginning, the Art Institute was of paramount importance in disseminating decorative arts ideas. Annual craft exhibitions were held there from 1902 through 1921, and the Society of Decorative Arts of the Art Institute sold its members' work at a sales gallery right in the museum. Several Chicago-published periodicals were also extremely influential in spreading the message of Arts and Crafts. Among them: *House Beautiful* (founded in 1896); *Common Clay*, *Ornamental Iron* (1893-1895); *Western Architect* (1902-1931); *Fine Arts Journal* (1899-1919); *Forms and Fantasies* (1898-1899); and *Builder and Woodworker* (1868-1895).³³

When O'Keeffe attended the Art Institute School in 1905-1906, the Department of Decorative Designing offered a stiff three-year course to prepare students to go directly into professional work. There were studies in "the theory of design and exercise in original designs for stained glass, wallpaper, rugs, bookcovers, metal work, carved wood, interior decorations, carpets and decorative work of all kinds" (including embroidery).³⁴

The name of Georgia O'Keeffe is listed solely under the "Academic Department" section of the Catalogue of Students for 1905-1906, and she herself has spoken only of the life classes she attended during that year.³⁵ Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that she found ways to absorb instruction and information from the more practical curriculum offered by the Department of Decorative Designing, since she felt competent and interested enough to find paid work in the applied arts upon her return to Chicago in 1908. How she obtained this work is unknown, but the Art Institute School contacts, and her "exceptionally

high” record as a student there, must have been important factors. Furthermore, as an alumna in good standing, she may have had easy access to the Art Institute (Ryerson) library, which, to quote from the catalogue, contained “many valuable books upon decorative art of which the students make constant use, each ... setting up from the beginning a scrapbook of tracings which gradually form a reservoir of useful patterns.”³⁶

Many of the school’s faculty instructors and lecturers were European trained,³⁷ and by 1903 Ryerson library subscribed to the following periodicals: *Art et Décoration*, *Brush and Pencil*, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, *L’Art décoratif*, *The Craftsman*, *Studio*, *The Artist*, *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, and *Pan*. Although Ryerson did not accession *Décoratif Kunst*, the Newberry Library did—beginning with Volume I in 1898. Therefore, with all this material available, it is not so surprising that Georgia O’Keeffe’s 1915 charcoal abstractions should contain such a remarkable knowledge of international Art Nouveau.³⁸

But why, after the passage of five years, did she turn back to it for inspiration and guidance in her own first efforts at abstract personal expression? Perhaps it was Art Nouveau’s dual aspect of imaginative form and rational construction that appealed to her, for she could work in freedom yet keep to the reasonably strict rules of logical design, in the approved Dow fashion. Perhaps, also, the frank fecundity of Art Nouveau’s subject matter seemed to her a logical way to equate abstraction with creation. If so, then she (unwittingly) joins the ranks of other pioneer abstractionists, like Frantisek Kupka and Morgan Russell, who specifically tried to suggest connections between the birth of life and the making of new art forms.³⁹ As is well known, Matisse had a similarly delayed response to

Art Nouveau in the composition of his first fully independent painting *Bonheur de Vivre*, in 1905-1906.⁴⁰

At the very least, her Chicago years made her aware that Art Nouveau was regarded as “Art pure and simple, untrammled by convention, and therefore in a sense original. Its proper expression must result rather from what is within a man, his sympathies, his nobler qualities and aspirations, than from studious effort; he must feel rather than know, sympathise rather than study.”⁴¹

She may also have been inspired by the written words of S. Bing—originator of the term “Art Nouveau” for applied art—who visited Chicago in 1893.⁴² After seeing the work of Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School at the World’s Columbian Exposition, and examples of industrial and decorative design in other American cities, Bing published his admiring and perceptive views in *La Culture Artistique en Amerique* in 1895 — the same year that his celebrated shop “L’Art Nouveau” opened in Paris. A section from this article, in translation, appeared in the American periodical *The Craftsman* in 1903:

... America, more than any other country of the world, is the soil predestined to be the most brilliant bloom of a future art which shall be vigorous and prolific ... she will quickly cast off the tutelage of the Old World, under which she put forth her first steps upon the sunlit path of Art ... her brain is not haunted by the phantoms of memory; her young imagination can allow itself a free career, and, in fashioning objects, it does not restrict the hand to a limited number of similar and conventional movements ... Her rare privilege is to profit by our old maturity and ... to place all this practical and proven knowledge at the service of a fresh mind which knows no other guide than intuitions of taste and the natural laws of logic.”⁴³

It is almost as if Stieglitz, not Bing, had written these words, and that the “fresh mind” to come was that of the young Georgia O’Keeffe. Careful analysis of her late 1915 abstractions may reveal some of the Art Nouveau sources she used, and, more importantly, *which* motifs fertilized her spirit and evoked her activities—to paraphrase Henry van de Velde.

The first thing to be said about the drawings is that virtually all of them appear to be based upon the unmistakable iconography of Art Nouveau: coiling, swelling, bending plant forms, and the rhythmic patterns of water and waves. Some drawings are much more abstracted than others, but *none* are “without concrete references”.

To take them one by one:

In *Special No. 5* (Plate 8.) it is nearly impossible to recreate the original nature source. Is it the twining roots of an aquatic plant? Or is it, as seems quite probable, a further development of the more legible ebb tide motifs in her earlier pastels, *Special No. 32* (Plate 9.) and *Special No. 33* (Plate 10.)? Whatever the original forms, they have been culled out and reassembled into an undeniable version of the whiplash motif—one that seems to owe much to Hermann Obrist—the influential leader of the Jugendstil movement in Munich.⁴⁴ As an embroidery and lace draftsman, O’Keeffe would surely have been familiar with Obrist’s work, since his famous 1895 Jugendstil masterpiece, the embroidered wall hanging *Cyclamen* (later known only as “The Whiplash”) was much reproduced in American periodicals.⁴⁵

About *Special No. 8*, (Plate 11.) O’Keeffe has written: “I have made this drawing several times—never remembering that I had made it before—and not knowing where the idea came from.”⁴⁶ The spiral was another of Obrist’s favorite organic shapes for the expression of

feeling—one which he shared with Symbolism in general, and with Odilon Redon in particular. There is, in fact, a strong stylistic similarity between O’Keeffe’s huge, space filling spiral, and the serpentine coil (shroud) in Redon’s 1889 lithograph *La Mort: mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres!* (Plate No. 12.) Where could she have seen this illustration for Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, which so impressed Gauguin that he exchanged one of his own ceramics with Redon for a print of it?⁴⁷ In view of Redon’s large and acclaimed representation in the 1913 Armory Show,⁴⁸ it is quite possible that O’Keeffe may have been alerted to his work when she was in New York during 1914-1915. *Special No. 8* might also have drawn upon her respectful memory of the highly original ornamental spirals designed by Louis Sullivan for the iron facade of his Carson, Pirie, Scott and Co. department store in Chicago. The building was finished to great praise in 1904, the year before O’Keeffe arrived at the Art Institute School, and Sullivan’s architectural use of organic ornament, clearly loaded with metaphoric meaning, must have been an extremely topical issue for student study and discussion. To compare O’Keeffe’s four-whirled spiral, with its thickened foetus-like center, to a detail photograph of Sullivan’s outward-sprouting metal plant forms, is to see some surprising affinities in shape and feeling—despite the difference in mediums. (Plate 13.)⁴⁹

O’Keeffe has written that *Drawing No. 9* (Plate 14.) depicts a headache; “It was a very bad headache at the time that I was busy drawing every night, sitting on the floor in front of the closet door. Well, I had a headache, why not do something with it? So — here it is.”⁵⁰ The seashore motifs of wave, froth and foam, which are suggested so strongly in the drawing, are almost perfect visual metaphors for the pounding ebb and flow of a headache. There are, as well, some interesting similarities between this

O'Keeffe and a proto-abstract Jugendstil painting by Obrist's pupil Hans Schmithals, titled *Studie* (ca. 1904), which she could have seen in *Dekorative Kunst* of March, 1904—even as Kandinsky did.⁵¹ (Plate 15.) The indeterminate space of both these works is similarly divided—with the misty light area at the top. Schmithal's swirls of droplets, and his diagonally stretched, webby figurations seem to be echoed (consciously or unconsciously) by O'Keeffe's more reduced and stylized wave and bubble patterns—although in reverse direction.⁵²

Of all the 1915 charcoals, perhaps *Special No. 1* (Plate 16.) and its variation *Special No. 2* (Plate 17.) tell us most about O'Keeffe's absorption of Art Nouveau in its infinite variety. To begin with, there are the highly characteristic erotic, uterine, and phallic overtones. Henry McBride must have been referring specifically to these phallus-like forms penetrating their ovoid surrounds when he wrote “... it was one of the first great triumphs for abstract art, since everybody got it.”⁵³ However, what they “got” was a simplistic reading, heavily influenced by fashionable interpretations of Freud's theories.⁵⁴ As Willard H. Wright told Stieglitz, “all these pictures say is ‘I want to have a baby’.”⁵⁵ Why O'Keeffe's primary sources should have completely escaped her contemporary critics remains somewhat of a puzzle. There are two probable factors. The first, and most obvious one is that the Art Nouveau-Jugendstil æsthetic had generally come to be regarded as overcharged frippery long before 1916—having been driven completely from the art world's fickle consciousness by Expressionism and Cubism.⁵⁶ The second factor is that the wholly sexual (“Freudian”) reading of O'Keeffe's artistic intentions, by artists and critics alike, was strongly aided and abetted by Stieglitz. A visual proof for this statement exists in the photograph he made in 1919

which shows O'Keeffe's 1916 phallic-form sculpture placed in front of her 1919 painting *Music — Pink and Blue I*.⁵⁷ The intercourse inference is as unmistakable as it is contrived. (Plate 18) Her conspicuously Art Nouveau characteristic of these two charcoals is their ornamental wall paper patterning. Both share the simple scheme of an almost symmetrically opposed design—that of an ovoid shape bisected by a vertical stalk with a jewel-like head. This curious stalk is similar to, if not derived from, the flambeau, a decorative candlestick greatly fancied by applied artists of the time.⁵⁸ In *Special No. 2*, the more definitively rendered oblong “jewel” strongly suggests the scarab—a stone prized since ancient times for its eye symbolism. (It is no wonder that the new Freudians had such a field day in looking at O'Keeffe's work!) A favorite of Art Nouveau jewelers, the scarab was used frequently by Tiffany & Company in their metal and jewelry designs from the turn of the century on.⁵⁹ It should also be noted concerning *Specials No. 1* and *No. 2*, that the catalogue of the Art Institute School of Chicago for 1905-1906 reproduced several illustrations of student work in decorative wall paper, and one of the examples (by Maud Hamish, p. 103) is built upon an upper ovoid shape penetrated by a top-heavy vertical line—a clear indication that this was a design device familiar to O'Keeffe's colleagues at the time. (Illustration) The oscillating tendrils which curve protectingly over the lower edges of the ovoids in both these charcoals suggest that she had seen a reproduction of Obrist's *Fantastic Shell* (ca. 1895). (Plate 19.) The tendrils in *No. 2* are especially Jugendstil in their sinuous linearity, and resemble quite closely the highly conventionalized convolutions in Obrist's image. Furthermore, the smudgy indeterminate space behind O'Keeffe's two configurations is not unlike the infinite, watery-looking void surrounding Obrist's floating shell. Peg

Weiss has written that Obrist hoarded an “arsenal” of natural forms, such as shells, stones and pods, and even microscopic photographs, in order to stoke his imagination—and that he constantly called for a combination of fantasy and function in Jugendstil design.⁶⁰ Even if O’Keeffe did not borrow directly from Obrist’s *Fantastic Shell* for her charcoal “Specials”, the tendril itself was an old and familiar shape in Arts and Crafts designs—and one especially common to embroidery.⁶¹

Special No. 4 (Plate 20.) is a study of reflection variations upon the stylized fern—another typical form in Art Nouveau decoration. S. Tschudi Madsen has observed that the marked preference by decorative artists for tall slim stalks with curled heads reveals an “interest in the structure of Nature rather than her external splendor ... this approach is in complete harmony with Art Nouveau ... the bud, after all, symbolizes the future, concealing within its closed form the promise of the growth and beauty that will unfold.”⁶² There are other Art Nouveau characteristics in this drawing of a fern shape and its shadows: the asymmetrical composition; its ornament/still life ambiguity; and its emphasis on surface rather than space.

In *Special No. 7* (Plate 21.) , seemingly a later variant of *No. 4*, the stylized fern shapes have been abstracted into a configuration of planar shapes without any visual connections to nature. This is essentially a two dimensional image. In its almost poster-like simplification, *No. 7* remains the flattest of all O’Keeffe’s early abstractions. Even the negative spaces become shapes. Robert Goldwater might have been describing what happened in the gap between *No. 4* and *No. 7*, when he said “the practitioners of Art Nouveau became conscious of the degree to which the

abstract, rather than the associational, or representational, elements should constitute the character of a work of art ...".⁶³

"Untitled" (Plate 22.) was described (in an unsigned critical article) in *Camera Work* 48 (pp. 12-13) as "a thin scarecrow ... humorously victim for the elements." Here, again, are the budding stalk and the spiral—this time combined into a vertical anthropomorphic form somewhat reminiscent of Felicien Rops. The eerie "setting" for this form may be read three-dimensionally by taking the horizontal division of space for a low horizon line, and the thick dark arabesque above for a cloud shape. Nevertheless, the overriding visual impression of this image remains that of a cleverly balanced two dimensional linear design—one which combines many of the most familiar and ambiguous elements in Art Nouveau.

Special No. 12 (Plate 23.) remains the most difficult of the 1915 abstractions to read coherently.⁶⁴ In this charcoal image, shapes resembling feathers, tree trunks, buds, fruit and clouds have been reduced to a rhythmically balanced amalgam of swelling curves and calligraphic straight lines. (A bird and an apple seem particularly insistent within the central, superimposed forms. Perhaps an impression not too farfetched, since both would turn up, far more legibly, in her later iconography.) This, then, would seem to be an important embryo work primarily because it contains several of O'Keeffe's future signature forms. In fact, *Special No. 12* may have been the germinating source for her 1916 "Blue" series of four watercolors (belonging to the Brooklyn Museum), to be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Whether the meanings and motifs behind O'Keeffe's earliest abstractions actually registered in Stieglitz's mind as Art Nouveau remains

undocumented. But it must have in some sense, since the theoretical concept of Jugendstil was a principal factor in his own evolution as a Pictorialist/Straight photographer.⁶⁵ Even the format of *Camera Work* was designed by Steichen according to Art Nouveau principles of beauty, quality, and style—from its rectilinear cover design (which has marked parallels to that of the German periodical *Pan*), to its *mise-en-pages* fusion of illustration and crisp, graceful typography.

The many remarkable similarities between Stieglitz and S. Bing are worth noting within the context of Art Nouveau. Both established salons (in effect) to carry out their beliefs, and both unfailingly supported young artists. Bing's earlier campaign for the recognition of decorative art has marked parallels to Stieglitz's efforts to elevate photography into the category of Fine Art. And Bing's statements on Art Nouveau, published in *The Architectural Record* in 1902, might well have been an encouragement to Stieglitz when, in that same year, he founded the Photo-Secession.

“L'Art Nouveau at the time of its creation did not aspire in any way to the honour of being a generic term. It was simply the name of an establishment opened as a meeting ground for all ardent young spirits anxious to manifest the modernness of their tendencies, and open also to all lovers of art who desired to see the workings of the hitherto unrevealed forces of our day. Thus, the term was nothing but a title, a name, or if you like, a sign incapable of expressing in the two words composing it the idea which called it forth, the aim to which it tended. This idea, this aim, would be indicated more clearly—if the name of an establishment could extend to the length of a phrase—by the denomination: The Revival of Art.”⁶⁶

To sum up: On the basis of the visual evidence presented, there seems little reason to doubt that O'Keeffe's first abstractions were directly

fueled by a still vigorous Chicago offshoot of the fin-de-siècle Art Nouveau movement. What she saw in that city during the first decade of the twentieth century taught her first-hand that line, color, and form have independent powers. Moreover, it seems increasingly clear that this historic movement to synthesize the arts nourished her sensibility in many important ways. In fact, we can say that her whole concept of iconography was to remain profoundly that of Art Nouveau in its resolute escape from civilization and in the poetic ambiguity of her form and content. Her photographic close-up views of plants and flowers not only hark back to William Morris, Walter Crane, Eugène Grasset and Alphonse Mucha, among others, they may also be seen as latter-day examples of Art Nouveau's utopian efforts at urban ecology.⁶⁷ Even her fantasy cityscapes of the late 1920's are inclined to render skyscrapers as if they were warm plants instead of cold steel. O'Keeffe was to follow yet another Art Nouveau craft principle by designing some of her own frames "with a practical sense of what makes a picture go," as Elizabeth McCausland described it.⁶⁸ O'Keeffe's well-known preference for stark emptiness in all of her dwelling places, may be likened to the sparse lightness of van de Velde's landmark house "Bloemenwerf", built in 1895.⁶⁹ And she never seems to have swerved from William Morris's famous dictum to have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful— as the many photographs taken at Abiquiu and her "Ghost Ranch" demonstrate.

That O'Keeffe also had an interest in Art Nouveau type-face and lettering is indicated by her virtuoso logo for the cover of Stieglitz's short-lived magazine *Manuscripts* of the early 'twenties. (Plate 24.) Very little has been said about how she came to do this almost forgotten work. In issue Number 4, of March, 1922, the following statement appeared: "For

the cover design : apologies to ‘Dada’ (American), Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and acknowledgment to ‘Anonymous’”—whom Dorothy Norman later identified as Georgia O’Keeffe.⁷⁰ However, the visual pun of this design seems more Art Nouveau than New York Dada in its obvious desire to transform letters into new expressive forms. So cleverly are the negative and positive spaces combined here that we are equally aware of the white forms between the three letters, which read as exquisitely simplified lily and leaf shapes floating in a black void. O’Keeffe may have been familiar with the work of Heinrich Blömer, and with van de Velde’s famous cover illustration for Max Elskamp’s *Dominical* (1892) and his equally famous engraving for *Van Nu en Straks*. Both these artists distorted natural forms and letters for rhythmic silhouette effect. But neither Blömer nor Van de Velde offers any specific precedents for this original and personal graphic design.

Finally, it is tempting to believe that O’Keeffe’s subsequent use of photography in her painting, which occurred for several linked reasons, was also encouraged by Art Nouveau’s embrace of modern technology and the machine in its own mighty effort to create a new international style.

Although Art Nouveau appears to have been the dominant source for most, if not all, of O’Keeffe’s abstractions, there are other important influences to consider as well—particularly in the drawings, watercolors, and oils she did between 1916-1924. In fact, her early abstract work may be divided into three periods which, although closely related, are quite distinct from each other in style and iconography. The first period consists of the breakthrough charcoal images already discussed. The second contains the pictures she made (mostly in Texas) between 1916-1917, which began right after her course with Arthur Wesley Dow at Columbia Teachers College the

spring of 1916, and continued on during the months of her growing correspondence with Stieglitz. Many of these would appear in her solo exhibition at 291 in 1917. And the third period consists of the works made between 1918-1924—perhaps the most dependent of her years spent by Stieglitz's side in New York and at Lake George—culminating in the 1923 and 1924 exhibitions he gave her at the Anderson Gallery.

For all its richness and diversity, Art Nouveau was just one of the four common sources separately mined by Stieglitz and O'Keeffe before they joined forces in 1918. The others were Kandinsky, Whistler, and Arthur Wesley Dow.

Notes Chapter Two

- 1 Arthur J. Eddy, *Cubists and Post Impressionism* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg 1914); 112.
- 2 S. Bing, "L' Art Nouveau," translated by Irene Sargent, *The Craftsman V* (October 1903) No. 1: 14-15.
- 3 Forman, Nessa. "Georgia O'Keeffe and Her Art: 'Paint What's in your Head.'" *Philadelphia Museum Art Bulletin* 22 October 1971.
- 4 The O'Keeffe-Pollitzer correspondence is at YCAL.
- 5 Georgia O'Keeffe, Anderson Galleries exhibition catalogue, January 29, 1923.
- 6 Eddy, p. 112.
- 7 For Stieglitz's imperfectly remembered 1926 account (often repeated) of the incident, including the famous statement "At last a woman on paper," see Herbert J. Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking* (New Haven, Yale University Library, 1966): 23.
- 8 See Charles C. Eldredge, "Georgia O'Keeffe: The Development of an American Modern", Unpublished dissertation (The University of Minnesota, 1971): 26-27. Also L.L. pp. 68-69
- 9 For access to this list, from O'Keeffe's own catalogue raisonné of her work up to 1966, I am completely indebted to Patricia Johanson. Lloyd Goodrich granted me the crucial permission to photograph all of the reproductions of O'Keeffe's work in the files of the Whitney Museum of American Art.
- 10 Some of the dates of O'Keeffe's work from the 'teens and 'twenties are still insecure. The major reason for this is that O'Keeffe's pictures were not officially recorded until the spring of 1946, when she and Doris Bry dated them from existing exhibition catalogues. To quote from Doris Bry's Master List in the Whitney files: "The O'Keeffe exhibition catalogues were the main source for dating the pictures, as each exhibition held was of pictures done the previous year ... In the case of pictures in the 1923 exhibition some of them were done before 1922, and in this case O'Keeffe dated them from memory ... gallery photographs for the 1923 and 1924 exhibits were also used ... O'Keeffe is fairly absent-minded and if asked to give a date offhand it is apt to be a few years off. But when she puts her mind to it ... she has an amazingly clear memory of where and when she painted things." Apparently, neither the 1914 "music things" nor the 1915

watercolors were ever exhibited — either at 291, or in later shows. Perhaps most are no longer extant, for O’Keeffe often destroyed work that did not finally satisfy her.

- 11 For the most plausible account of this now legendary story, see L.L. pp. 74-76.
- 12 Although O’Keeffe’s 1966 catalogue raisonné records this charcoal as being from 1915, *Drawing No. 3* will not be discussed because no photograph of it exists in the Whitney files.
- 13 Anita Pollitzer, “That’s Georgia,” *The Saturday Review* (November 4, 1950): 42.
- 14 YCAL.
- 15 Stieglitz to Heinrich Kühn, 6 August, 1928. YCAL.
- 16 “Georgia O’Keeffe—C. Duncan—René Lafferty,” *Camera Work* 48 (October, 1916): 12-13.
- 17 Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc., 1921): 116, 118.
- 18 Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, p. 204.
- 19 Dove to Stieglitz, c. March, 1930. YCAL.
- 20 Lloyd Goodrich, *The Decade of the Armory Show 1910-1920*, Whitney Museum, 1963.
- 21 Barbara Rose, *New York Review of Books* (March 31, 1977): 31.
- 22 Charles Eldredge, *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting*, p. 117. In his 1971 dissertation Eldredge had also grappled fruitlessly with the origins of O’Keeffe’s early work.
- 23 Quoted by Lloyd Goodrich in *Georgia O’Keeffe Drawings*. New York: Atlantis Editions, 1968. Unpaginated.
- 24 E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (New York: Pantheon Books, Bollingen Foundation 1960): 298.
- 25 Nelson Goodman, *Language of Art* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968): 9.
- 26 The most detailed, up-to-date summary is L.L., pp. 32-50, 54-63.

- 27 Georgia O'Keeffe, quoted by Katharine Kuh, ed. *The Artist's Voice* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962): 189.
- 28 *G O'K* (1976).
- 29 Georgia O'Keeffe, in a 1972 interview with William Homer that he kindly let me read.
- 30 *G O'K* (1976).
- 31 Sanford Schwartz has referred only briefly to the "Art Nouveau surface" of her art: "O'Keeffe's æsthetic is closest to Art Nouveau, but she doesn't have the conscious sense of style or the witty and romantic double awareness that we expect from figures of the fin-de-siècle." (*The New Yorker*, August 28, 1978, p. 90). In Diane Chalmers Johnson, *American Art Nouveau*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1979) O'Keeffe's "Spring" of 1922, (plate 365) is included as a late example of American Art Nouveau, but it is presented without specific commentary, aside from the brief mention that she was influenced by Dow and Kandinsky. After this section was written, Susan Fillin Yeh's "Innovative Moderns: Arthur G. Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe" appeared in *Arts Magazine* (Summer, 1982): 68-72. At the suggestion of Professor George Hersey of Yale, Yeh looked into the American Arts and Crafts movement as a source for O'Keeffe's early abstractions. But her findings (chosen from a single exhibition catalogue, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1876-1916*), ed. Robert Judson Clark) barely scratch the surface of O'Keeffe's visual knowledge of international Art Nouveau. Yeh's article is discussed further in footnote 62.
- 32 L.L., pp. 44-57. According to her sister Catherine Klenert, one of O'Keeffe's accomplishments was to create the Dutch Cleanser Girl ad, but concrete evidence for this statement is still missing.
- 33 I am indebted for this information to Oscar Lovell Triggs's chapters in *The History of The Arts and Arts and Crafts Movements*. Published by the Bohemia Guild of the Industrial Arts League, Chicago (1902), and to David A. Hanks, "Chicago and the Midwest," *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America 1876-1916*, ed. Robert Judson Clark (Princeton University Press, 1972): 58-59.
- 34 *The Art Institute of Chicago Circular of Instruction of the School of Drawing, Painting, Modelling, Decorative Designing, Normal Instruction and Architecture, 1905-1906*, p. 36.
- 35 *G O'K* (1976).
- 36 *The Art Institute of Chicago Circular* (1905-1906), p. 37.

- 37 *Ibid.* Frederick Freer and Louis W. Wilson are listed as pupils of the Royal Academy, Munich, and Louis J. Millet and Albert Fleury as having studied at the École des Beaux-Arts.
- 38 For a short, up-to-date discussion of Art Nouveau's international character and dissemination, see Yvonne Brunhammer, "The Diffusion of Art Nouveau: Expositions, Art Reviews and Museums," in *Art Nouveau: Belgium, France* (Houston: Rice University, 1976): 33-37.
- 39 For a discussion of this tendency among the pioneers of abstraction, see Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky, The Development of an Abstract Style*, (England, Oxford University Press, 1980): 143-147.
- 40 See Frank Anderson Trapp, "Art Nouveau Aspects of Early Matisse," *Art Journal* (Fall, 1966): 2-8.
- 41 Konrad Lange, "L'Art Nouveau - What It Is and What Is Thought Of It - A Symposium," *Magazine of Art* (New York: March-June, 1904): 111.
- 42 For information on this important figure in the European and American decorative arts see: Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Samuel Bing; Patron of Art Nouveau," *Connoisseur* (October, 1969): 118-25; (December, 1969): 294-99; (January, 1970): 61-68. Also, "Samuel Bing: International Dealer of Art Nouveau," *Connoisseur* (March, 1971): 200-205; (April, 1971): 275-83; (May, 1971): pp. 49-55; (July, 1971): 211-19. Also "Bing Porcelain in America," *Connoisseur* (November, 1971): 200-203. For a collection of Bing's writing, see Robert Koch, ed. *Artistic America, Tiffany Glass, and Art Nouveau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1970.) S. stands for Siegfried, not Samuel, according to the most recent research, see Weisberg, "A Note on S. Bing's Early Years in France, 1854-1876" *Arts* (Jan. 1983): 84-85. The most up to date work is Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1986.)
- 43 S. Bing, "L'Art Nouveau," pp. 14-15.
- 44 For a recent summary of Obrist's work and thought, see Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich.*, pp. 28-34, 120-122, For a more thorough investigation see Weiss, "Wassily Kandinsky: The Formative Munich Years (1896-1914) From Jugendstil to Abstraction." Ph.D. Dissertation (Syracuse University, 1973): 90-112.
- 45 One interesting example, *The Artist* (June-September, 1901): 17-26, presented a laudatory article by W. Fred, "A Chapter on German Arts and Crafts, with Special Reference to the Work of

H. Obrist," with many black-and-white illustrations of his best known embroideries and sculpture.

- 46 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Some Memories of Drawings* . n.p.
- 47 John Rewald, *Odilon Redon, Gustave Moreau, Rodolphe Bresdin* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961): 36.
- 48 For an account of the 38 known Redons chosen for the Armory Show (*La Mort* was not listed among them) see Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1963): 279-283.
- 49 For an informative discussion of Sullivan's architecture as American Art Nouveau, see Diane Chalmers Johnson, *American Art Nouveau*: 124-162.
- 50 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Some Memories of Drawings*. n.p.
- 51 For some further persuasive visual evidence that O'Keeffe was indeed familiar with *Dekorative Kunst*, compare her 1916 watercolor composition *Hill, Stream and Moon* with the commercial art design *Qirstuvwxyz - Automobile in DK 16* (1907-1908): 534. Schmithals is now recognized as one of the very first painters to seriously investigate abstract forms in the twentieth century. For information on Schmithals (1878-1964) and his possible influence on Kandinsky, see Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich*, p. 122 and p. 210.
52. It is perhaps significant that Schmithals abstracted his nature forms by a process likened to music, which he learned at the Obrist-Debschitz school. (For a description of these exercises, see Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich*, pp. 121-22.) Whether O'Keeffe could have known about the methods of the Obrist-Debschitz school through Art Institute School faculty members who had studied in Munich may always remain a question, although not a very important one — for in 1915 she was to become acquainted with the same ideas filtered through Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, which she came to through M. T. H. Sadler's 1914 translation, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*.
- 53 Henry McBride, *The Herald*, February 4, 1923, (reprinted in the catalogue for O'Keeffe's 1924 Anderson Galleries show).
- 54 For an examination of the (distorted) dissemination and interpretation of Freud's ideas in America during the late teens and twenties, see Frederick J. Hoffman, *The Twenties* (New York: The Free Press 1965): 229-49.
- 55 Quoted by Jean Evans, "Stieglitz — Always Battling and Retreating," *PM* 23 (December, 1945), magazine section: 12-14.

- 56 Not until the 1950's did scholars seriously concern themselves with the rich literature of Art Nouveau. See Richard Kempton, *Art Nouveau: Annotated Bibliography* (Los Angeles, Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc. 1977). The one contemporary review of O'Keeffe's charcoals which came closest to recognizing her inventive translations of Art Nouveau appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor*, June 2, 1916: "Miss O'Keeffe looks within herself and draws with unconscious naivete what purports to be the innermost unfolding of a girl's being, like the germinating of a flower." (No by-line, although probably by Ralph Flint, correspondent of the *CSM*.)
- 57 Unpublished photograph, accession number OK 128, in the Alfred Stieglitz collection of the National Gallery of Art. Hereafter NGA. Lowe has written that Stieglitz sampled the writings of Freud "like smorgasbord." (S.D.L. p. 211).
- 58 For an example of a flambeau similar in shape designed by Lucien Levy-Dhurmer, see *Art Nouveau: Belgium/France*, p. 268.
- 59 For a discussion, and some illustrations, of Tiffany and Company's American designs including the use of the scarab, see Diane C. Johnson, pp. 90-106.
- 60 Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich*, pp. 28-34.
- 61 For examples of the tendril motif as used in Art Nouveau embroidery, see Lewis F. Day, Mary Buckle, *Art in Needlework: A Book About Embroidery* (London, B.T. Batsford Ltd. 1900), especially figs. 11, 12, 95. For further examples of conventionalized Art Nouveau needlework patterns and designs, see *The Craftsman*, Vol. VIII 1905: 704-707; also Vol. IX, 1905-1906: 749-750. Susan F. Yeh (*Arts*, Summer 1982) has suggested that O'Keeffe's 1915 "alphabet of shapes" (including the tendril) comes from American arts and crafts pottery — in particular, Rookwood, Grueby Faience, Marblehead and Tiffany. But instances of O'Keeffe's "sparse, charged fields in which a single motif makes up the whole of the image" also abound in Art Nouveau and Jugendstil planar designs for wallpaper, bookbinding and posters — as well as for embroidery, lace cut work and appliqué patterns. It therefore seems more plausible to assume that O'Keeffe drew upon her Chicago exposure to the full panoply of international Art Nouveau instead of the similarly simplified elements which appear on American pottery.
- 62 S. Tschudi Madsen, *Art Nouveau* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967): 33.
- 63 Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism*, p. 26.

- 64 Possibly this is because I have not been able to see the original (in the artist's collection), and the tiny photographic reproduction in the Whitney files is quite dark.
- 65 Weston Naef, in *The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz* has documented that the spirit of the Secession movement in photography during the 1890's, in Germany, Austria and England, was "expressed in various styles including Symbolism, Jugendstil, German Impressionism, as well as the work of idiosyncratic individualists like Edward Munch, Felicien Rops ... Will Bradley ... (and) Alphonse Mucha (among others)." (pp. 62-63); and Margaret F. Harker in examining The Linked Ring Brotherhood (of which Stieglitz was a member from 1894-1907) has written of the importance which the Pictorialists attached to decorative values in their images: "The influence of Art Nouveau is easily discernible between 1895 and 1915." *The Linked Ring: The Secession Movement in Britain, 1892-1910* (London: Heinemann, 1979): 68.
- 66 S. Bing, "L' Art Nouveau," *The Architectural Record*, 12 (1902): 181-185.
- 67 For a recent discussion on this topic, see Alessandra Comini, "Art Nouveau as Urban Ecology," *Arts Magazine* (November 1976): 84-87.
- 68 Elizabeth McCausland, *The Springfield Daily Republican*, Springfield, Massachusetts, January 16, 1935. I am indebted to Susan Dodge Peters for this reference. For more information on O'Keeffe's frames and her highly developed sense of craft, see James W. Lane, "Notes from New York," *Apollo* (April 1938): 209.
- 69 For a verbal description of van de Velde's residence at 80 Avenue Vanderaye, Uccle (near Brussels): see *Art Nouveau: Belgium/France*, p. 369.
- 70 Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 242.

CHAPTER THREE

ARTISTIC ROOTS SHARED BY STIEGLITZ AND O'KEEFFE

I: KANDINSKY AND WHISTLER

The work of art is born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way ... The artist is not only justified in using, but it is his duty to use, only those forms which fulfil his *own need*. Absolute freedom, whether from anatomy or anything of the kind, must be given the artist in his choice of material. Such spiritual freedom is as necessary in art as it is in life.

Wassily Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* ¹

Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong: That is to say, the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy of a picture is rare, and not common at all.

From Whistler's "Ten O'Clock", reprinted in *Camera Work*, 1904.²

Art always aims at what is individual ... by what sign do we know it to be genuine? Evidently, by the very effort it forces us to make against our predispositions in order to see sincerely ... truth bears within itself a power of conviction, nay of conversion, which is the sign that enables us to recognize it.

Henri Bergson, *Camera Work*, 1912.³

The influence of Kandinsky on Alfred Stieglitz, and on certain other members of his circle—Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Oscar Bluemner, Abraham Walkowitz and Konrad Cramer—has been often and justly cited.⁴ Mentioned less often, and never yet from close examination, is Kandinsky's influence on Georgia O'Keeffe.⁵

It is not easy to gauge the extent of Kandinsky's effect on O'Keeffe's abstractions. The reasons are several. First, of course, because O'Keeffe's habit was always to minimize, or ignore her sources publicly. Second, because she appears to have been even more interested in Kandinsky's ideas than his images—just as Hartley was.⁷ Third, because she may have come to certain visual understandings of Kandinsky through the art of Arthur Dove.⁸ And fourth, because her studies with Arthur Wesley Dow would seem to have prepared her eye, hand and mind much more directly for abstraction. Nevertheless, some important things should rightly be noted vis-a-vis Kandinsky in the context of O'Keeffe's developing style.

O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and Kandinsky

It is virtually certain that O'Keeffe learned of Kandinsky through Eddy's *Cubists and Post Impressionism*—and not from Stieglitz.⁹ This, despite the fact that Stieglitz seems to have been the first artist in America to recognize the importance of Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. It is not certain where, or from whom, he heard of it (probably from Konrad Cramer, who lived in Munich during 1910-1911¹⁰), but barely six months after the first 1912 edition was published in Munich by R. Piper Verlag, "Extracts from 'The Spiritual in Art'" appeared in *Camera Work* 39. Stieglitz's choice, and possible translation,¹¹ of this short passage reveals what interested him most in Kandinsky's treatise—at least at the time. In good Symbolist fashion, it begins: "These are the seekers of the inner spirit in other things," and goes on to speak of Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso—each of whom Stieglitz had already introduced to America at 291. And it concludes with the sentences: "Matisse—Color. Picasso—Form. Two great highways to one great goal."¹²

Stieglitz's own early identification with "Picasso—Form" has already been noted. His apparent efforts to propel O'Keeffe on to the other great highway of "Matisse—Color" would be forthcoming.

As is well known, O'Keeffe missed the Armory Show (she was then teaching in Amarillo, Texas). It is likely, therefore, that she did not see Kandinsky's *Improvisation 27* until long after Stieglitz purchased it out of the show for \$500.00 (March, 1913) to influence the American art world.¹³ Her correspondence with Pollitzer never mentions this painting, but it does specify that she "got" Eddy sometime between 1914-1915, and was thus familiar with his color reproductions of Kandinsky's work. (Namely: *Village Street, Landscape with Two Poplars, Improvisation No. 29*, and *Improvisation No. 30*.) The correspondence also specifies that it was during the summer of 1915 that she finally obtained a copy of *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*—the first English translation (1914) of *Über das Geistige* by Michael T. H. Sadler—which included reproductions of *Impression No. 4, Moscow* (1911), *Improvisation No. 29* (1912), *Composition No. 2* (1910) and *Kleine Freuden* (1913). Therefore, by mid 1915, she not only had a fairly good idea of what Kandinsky was saying (her September, 1915, letter to Pollitzer tells of a second reading), she had also seen several examples of what he was doing—that is reducing ("selecting") and "veiling" objects in order to conceal his imagery.

O'Keeffe has never publicly admitted to reading *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*—just to looking at the illustrations.¹⁴ But a 1917 letter to Pollitzer shows that she was indeed familiar with Eddy's text.¹⁵ Eddy's paraphrases of many of Kandinsky's most puzzling and poetic arguments in *Über des Geistige*, *Der Sturm*, and *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac must have been a great help to her, not to mention his copious quotes from Kandinsky's letters—written to clarify further the artist's radical intentions for his work. In fact, it is highly probable that

Kandinsky's exegesis to Eddy of *Improvisation No. 30* ("Cannons") was of particular importance for O'Keeffe's own groundbreaking watercolor *Blue No. 1* of 1916.

Before going into any of the formal aspects of O'Keeffe's debt to Kandinsky, it must first be asked whether she received any new aesthetic permissions from her reading of *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*. Put another way, what did she really understand of his mystical ideas on inner necessity, synthesis, and color music with regard to her own concerns? Although her correspondence of the period is silent on this topic, her attitude and her work both suggest that she was inspired and encouraged in her on-going experiments with abstraction by some of Kandinsky's most adamant statements. For example, his Blaue Reiter belief that "the various arts of today learn from each other and often resemble each other ...They are finding Music the best teacher."¹⁶ is one that may have contributed to her willingness to borrow elements from photography. Whether or not this was the case, she would soon become aware, through Stieglitz, that American Pictorial photography had also benefited from music. The Buffalo Photo-Pictorialists (inspired by, and contemporary with, Stieglitz's Photo-Secession in New York) frequently compared their landscape photography to "absolute music", and many of them specialized in "non-narrative, non-associative compositions which explored musical form in the absolute."¹⁷

The following Kandinsky statement may also have stuck fruitfully in her memory:

"Purely abstract forms are beyond the reach of the artist at present; they are too indefinite for him. To limit himself to the purely indefinite would be to rob himself of possibilities, to exclude the human element and therefore to weaken his power of expression."¹⁸

In the long span of her art, O'Keeffe was never to limit herself to "purely abstract forms". Without exception, as will be made clear, her abstractions were transcriptions from visual experience and works of art. Whether or not she was encouraged by Kandinsky in this, it still is clear that her decision came primarily from her own artistic temperament.

It is also of some significance that all her life O'Keeffe would adhere to two of Kandinsky's most pronounced biases: The primacy of the role of color in painting ("... it is necessary for the artist to know the starting point for the exercise of his spirit. The starting point is the study of color and its effects on men,"¹⁹ and the inferior role of (analytic) Cubism in the rise of a future art that is "truly monumental."

There has arisen ... the tendency to inertia, to a concentration on this form (Cubism) for its own sake, and consequently once more to an impoverishment of possibility ... The search for constructive form has produced Cubism, in which natural form is often forcibly subjected to geometrical construction, a process which tends to hamper the abstract by the concrete and spoil the concrete by the abstract.²⁰

As Eddy put it, "Picasso abstractions are based on the outer world, while Kandinsky's are based on the inner ... [Picasso] has refined nature, that is, things *outside* him, to the last degree ... further progress is impossible ... But Kandinsky has before him an unlimited view."²¹ O'Keeffe never became a Cubist, despite her early exposure to the Cubist illustrations in Eddy, and to the Cubism (Picasso and Braque) exhibited at 291.

Two large questions remain to be asked. The first: how attentive was O'Keeffe to Kandinsky's bold statement that in the "new great epoch," starting with the work of Henri Rousseau, "The new naturalism will not only be equivalent to but even identical with abstraction?"²² Although O'Keeffe did not pick up on this

liberating equation in 1915, there is strong evidence (both visual and written) that she was encouraged to do so later by Stieglitz—who had, after all, been the first to show Rousseau’s work to America at 291, in 1910.

In O’Keeffe’s *Red Barn, Lake George, New York* (Plate 25.), and *Little House* (Plate 26.), both of 1922, we find an enforced naiveté, and iconicizing of forms, that is very like the Douanier’s mode of primitivism. That these were deliberate and specific references there can be no doubt, and it is quite probable that they were directly inspired by Kandinsky’s eloquent tribute to Rousseau in *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac:

Here lies the root of the new total realism. In rendering the shell of an object simply and completely, one has already separated the object from its practical meaning and peeled forth its interior sounds. Henri Rousseau, who may be considered the father of this realism, has pointed the way simply and convincingly ... [he] has revealed the new possibilities of simplicity. At present this aspect of his complex talent is most valuable to us.²³

It is also probable that Stieglitz was acutely mindful of the importance of this statement for her work, since he saw to it that O’Keeffe was linked to Rousseau in articles by Herbert J. Seligmann, at just about the time of her major 1923 exhibition at The Anderson Galleries.²⁴

The second question: even though Sadler hailed Kandinsky as the “visual musician” who had “broken down the barrier between music and painting” in his translator’s introduction to *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*,²⁵ should we regard Kandinsky as the prime catalyst for the musical elements in O’Keeffe’s art?²⁶ It must be presumed not, for her prior connections with music were at once innate (like Matisse, she could play the violin), atmospheric (a matter of *Zeitgeist*²⁷) and tutored—in the sense that she was already well aware of music as essentially

abstract, and as “the condition toward which all the arts aspire.” She had, after all, been schooled in the Art Nouveau concept of melody as an arabesque—in the famous words of Otto Eckmann, she knew exactly how “to borrow from the angry swan the rhythmic line and not the swan.” Furthermore, like all of Arthur Wesley Dow’s students, she was familiar with Whistler’s use of music analogy to make color, line and form the primary concern of his paintings, rather than subject matter.²⁸ In fact, American appreciation and understanding of Whistler reached a wider audience through Dow’s class teachings than through his and Fenollosa’s writings about Whistler.²⁹

O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and Whistler

How directly did Whistler affect the elements of O’Keeffe’s style and subject matter? Again, the facts are few. In a letter to Pollitzer dated October 8, 1915, O’Keeffe speaks familiarly of Whistler’s need of sixty-two sittings for a portrait, but she never mentions having seen his *Arrangements, Nocturnes* and *Harmonies*.³⁰ Nevertheless, in New York, during the years she studied there, she had plenty of opportunities to do so. In March, 1908, the Macbeth Gallery offered “Paintings by a Group of American Artists, Copley to Whistler,” and in April, 1914, M. Knoedler and Company presented “Oils, Watercolors, Pastels and Drawings by J. McN. Whistler.” Also, by 1914 the Metropolitan Museum owned six Whistlers—four portraits and two nocturnal paintings: *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Gardens* (1876), and *Cremorne Gardens, No. 2* (1872-77). Even though her sensibility (and her times) would lead her in a direction far from Whistler’s own, there appear to be several important links between her work and his. Common to both is the use of musical nomenclature, and the series concept—that is, the repetition of a motif with subtle variations. (For example,

O'Keeffe's *Music Pink and Blue I and II*, and *Black Spot I, II, III* of 1919). Also, Whistler's arts-and-crafts penchant for designing and painting frames to carry beauty beyond the picture itself was one which O'Keeffe came to use.³¹ Certainly Whistler's integration of English, French, Dutch, Greek and Japanese forms and themes—a synthesis of Western and Eastern traditions—was a sturdy American example in eclecticism for any young artist attempting to digest modernism through Dow's methods.

Like Whistler, O'Keeffe was given to renaming her works in the interest of anti-naturalism (or abstraction). As is well known, Whistler's *The White Girl* (1862) became *Symphony in White No. 1: The White Girl* almost ten years after the critic Paul Mantz first called it a "Symphonie du blanc" in 1863. And O'Keeffe's composite title *Abstraction—White Rose III* is but one example of this among many. Further, O'Keeffe's propensity for rendering the night and the sea from memory—with suggestive and poetic intent—reflects the spirit of Whistler's landmark *Nocturnes* of the 1870's. Despite obvious differences in facture, her *Starlight Night* (1917), *Wave, Night* (1928) and *The Lawrence Tree* (1929) owe a great deal to his rhythmic "arrangements" of line, form and color.

It is now well documented that Whistler's synthetic approach to his art after 1865—its musicality, dream-like memory method, and mood suggestibility—anticipated many of the methods and theories of pictorial Symbolism.³² And this brings up the issue of whether O'Keeffe was a Symbolist before she met Stieglitz, or whether she became one after she knew him. There may be little profit in trying to settle such a boundary line, but a few things should be noted in order to support our theory of the remarkably similar formations of Stieglitz and O'Keeffe.

The elements of style in Art Nouveau and Symbolism are, of course, profoundly interrelated—since they draw upon many common sources.

Nevertheless, as Robert Goldwater has pointed out, the ideal of Art Nouveau and the ideal of Symbolism are at different ends of an emotional scale: The swirling, self-generating Art Nouveau line “is expressive of nothing but itself, and so finally the very opposite of the personally expressive line of Symbolism.”³³ In her early self-expressive abstractions, O’Keeffe was clearly partaking of the treasury of Symbolist ambience, transmitted in large part by her Europe-educated art teachers—and perhaps Dow as well³⁴—but without any real knowledge or care for Symbolist aesthetics and philosophy. Apparently it was Stieglitz who interested her in aesthetics. The first indication that this was indeed so turns up in some of the letters written to Pollitzer about a year after O’Keeffe and Stieglitz began their own correspondence early in 1916.

The letters—291 letters—have been great—sometimes they knock me down—but I get up again.³⁵

I have been reading Faust—Bayard Taylor’s translation ... I almost lost my mind the day I started it—He [Stieglitz] sent it to me.³⁶

I had to give a talk at the Faculty Circle last Monday night—so I had been laboring on Aesthetics ... everywhere ... even read a lot of Caffin ... I worked like the devil for three months, and it was a great success.³⁷

Had a letter from Stieglitz that set me thinking so hard—it has stupified me for almost anything else.³⁸

“Thinking” about aesthetics was never to be O’Keeffe’s strong suit, but her correspondence reveals that she dutifully read many of the books Stieglitz recommended to her—among them the writings of Rémy de Gourmont, acknowledged in America as the spokesman for the new Symbolism literature, and described by Edmund Wilson as “the most distinguished critical champion of the (Symbolist) movement.”³⁹ At the heart of de Gourmont’s Symbolism (which may

have made him particularly appealing to Stieglitz) was this Bergsonian message: "Let us therefore admit that Symbolism, though it may be excessive, though it may be inconvenient, though it may be pretentious, is the expression of individualism in art."⁴⁰ It is significant, in this context, that in her important written statement "Can a Photograph Have the Significance of Art" for *MSS* No. 4 (December 1922) O'Keeffe chose to conclude with a quote from de Gourmont:

I can only agree with Rémy de Gourmont's Antiphilos that there are as many philosophies (I add ideas on 'Art') as there are temperaments and personalities.⁴¹

O'Keeffe may well have considered herself to be still living in a Symbolist period of art. As Sadler put it, in his introduction to *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, "... not since the time of the so-called Byzantines ... has the 'Symbolist' ideal in art held general sway over the 'Naturalist.'"⁴² Certainly Stieglitz stressed the illustrious lineage of O'Keeffe's particular Symbolism within his circle. In 1920, Hartley was to write:

... Georgia O'Keeffe's pictures are essays in experience that neither Rops nor Moreau nor Baudelaire could have smiled away.⁴³

By this time, however, Hartley himself was privately of the opinion that the American brand of Symbolism had run its course. (Even by 1915, the acute and prescient de Zayas had written: "We have also moved on from the age of Symbolism. It is only the day after that we believe in the orange blossoms of the bride.")⁴⁴ In a letter to Stieglitz dated August 12, 1920, Hartley (who may have understood O'Keeffe's art at that time better than anyone) wrote:

I despise the American quest for symbol because it argues nothing but the vilest mediocrity ... I regret I am not the physical giant to practice all I comprehend ... One must destroy life and destroy it with images greater than itself. That is what [O'Keeffe] is on the verge of to my thinking. Naturally she is terrified. If you want to create origins of experience for yourself you have necessarily to face the holocaust and the typhoon.⁴⁵

In spite of de Zaya's and Hartley's accurate perception of the Symbolist movement's demise in America, neither Stieglitz nor O'Keeffe would ever really lose this ideological/anagogical mental attitude. Their recorded words are as revealing of the religious aspirations of Symbolism as their later pictorial equivalents. On December 21, 1925, Seligmann noted down a conversation between Stieglitz and the Russian artist David Burliuk:

Here Stieglitz broke in to say that it was strange Burliuk should use those words ["simple," "mystical"] since utter simplicity held something bordering on the mystical for him. He drew a diagram making dark adjacent dark spots. "Here," he said, "is reality: When that is seen it is so close to the mystical that the dividing line is almost imperceptible." He drew a line between the two spots. "This is the line of my life running between them."⁴⁶

Another example from Seligmann:

Pointing to a (big white) O'Keeffe painting, Stieglitz said, "I might say, this is the beginning of a new religion." (February 4, 1926).⁴⁷

In 1943, Daniel Catton Rich asked O'Keeffe why she never painted the human figure or face. She said, "I've always believed that I can get all that into a picture by suggestion, I mean the life that has been lived in a place."⁴⁸ Yet another

graphic example of O’Keeffe’s perennial Symbolist attitude lies in a letter she wrote to Blanche Matthias during the mid ’twenties: “I wish I could help you [get well]. I am learning something myself. I don’t know exactly what it is—but if I did—if I could put it clearly into form it would cure you. That is worthy of a laugh—but I am sure it is true.”⁴⁹

To return to Whistler. The major (and obvious) difference of opinion between O’Keeffe and Whistler is that she could not accept the art-for-art’s sake philosophy he espoused in such passages as this:

Art should be independent of all clap-trap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye and ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love patriotism and the like. All these have no concern with it, and that is why I insist on calling my work ‘arrangements’ and ‘harmonies.’⁵⁰

“One can’t work with nothing to express,” O’Keeffe had written Pollitzer in October 1915, or, to put it in Kandinsky’s stern and challenging words:

Beauty of Form and Color is no sufficient aim by itself ... the artist must have something to say, for mastery over form is not his goal but rather the adapting of form to its inner meaning.⁵¹

It is well known that most of the Photo-Secession photographers considered Whistler’s paintings and Japanese prints to be models of abstract design.⁵² Although Stieglitz’s own debt to Whistler may never be wholly clarified, since the known clues are so opaque—it is nonetheless important to consider the few there are.

Stieglitz’s interest in Whistler’s formalist ideas goes back at least to 1904, when *Camera Work* published “From Whistler’s Ten O’Clock,” including these catalytic statements:

Nature contains the elements in color and form of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose and group with science these elements that the result may be beautiful, as the musician gathers his notes and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos glorious harmony ... Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong: That is to say, the condition of things that shall bring the perfection of harmony worthy [sic] a picture is rare, and not common at all.⁵³

This still reads like a written permission for Pictorialism, and surely Stieglitz considered it to be so—hence its selection at the time. Appearing in the same issue was Sadakichi Hartmann's short essay "White Chrysanthemums" on the controversial topic of Whistler's opposition to realism:

... Whistler was opposed to realism. The Realists endorse every faithful reproduction of the facts. Also Whistler believed all objects beautiful, but only under certain conditions, at certain, favored moments ... It was Whistler's life-long endeavor to fix such supreme and happy moments ... upon his canvases.⁵⁴

That Stieglitz held with this measurement of Whistler's art for his own Pictorialist picture-making is evident from his 1905 article *Simplicity in Composition*.

Taking now our single, simple object and introducing another simple object into the composition, there immediately springs up a more complex sense of relation. The newly introduced object must now be studied not only in its relation to the three factors previously enumerated (light, shade and spacing) and to object No. 1, but its relation to each one of the three factors operating upon our first object ... yet should all these relations be harmonious. The result, though seemingly simple, is wonderfully fascinating to the mature student of

composition. An instance of this can be found in Whistler's "Piano Room."⁵⁵

If nothing else, this passage reveals that Stieglitz was as close an observer of Whistler's paintings as he was of Whistler's ideas.

Even after Stieglitz turned more toward Straight photography, Whistler-like compositional principles based upon the simplicity of decorative design continued to appear in his work, through a combination of camera placement, cropping (as in the different versions of *Winter Fifth Avenue*, and *The Terminal*), and elimination (some re-touching of the negative).⁵⁶

While Stieglitz never acknowledged a kinship of spirit with Whistler—as did Steichen, who found Whistler's writings and the titles of his pictures more radical than the pictures themselves⁵⁷—there is a marked similarity of artistic concern, and Symbolist vision, between the following two passages:

Stieglitz:

I stood spellbound as I saw that building (The Flat Iron) in that storm. I had watched the structure in the course of its erection ... But that particular snowy day, [c. 1902] with the street of Madison Square all covered with snow, fresh snow, I suddenly saw the Flat Iron building as I had never seen it before. It looked, from where I stood, as if it were moving toward me like a bow of a monster ocean steamer, a picture of the new America which was still in the making.⁵⁸

Whistler:

And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lost themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home; the working man and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand, as they have ceased to see, *and*

Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and her master —⁵⁹ (Italics added)

The connection is hardly astonishing, given *Camera Work's* frequent attention to Whistler. To add to the Symbolist history already traced in Chapter One, it was Mallarmé who translated Whistler's "Ten O'Clock Lecture" into French for the *Revue Indépendante* of May, 1888, because ... "Je sympathisais tout avec votre vision de l'art."⁶⁰ Furthermore, as their mutual friend Jacques Émile Blanche observed long afterward, "In Paris [during the late 1880's] the Whistler cult became entangled in men's minds with Symbolism, the Mallarmé and ... the Wagner cults."⁶¹

During 1905, in *Camera Work*, the critic Charles Caffin wrote somewhat warily of Whistler's attempt to get away from the "obsession of form."

Moved by the example of the Japanese, which fitted in with [Whistler's] own rarely sensitive feelings for beauty, he tried for a time to eliminate form from his pictures, and to depend as nearly as possible only upon color. He realized that form, the concrete thing, expressible in words and suggesting them, draws off the mind of the spectator from the more abstract qualities of beauty; moreover, that music, because of its appeal being uninterrupted by the concrete, is capable of deeper and farther reaching expression than paintings, and that the nearest analogy to the harmony of sound within the scope of the painter, is the harmony of color. So, for a time, he experimented with Symphonies, Nocturnes, Harmonies. But it was an experiment, and by the nature of the case incapable of more than temporary and partial success.⁶²

By 1910, however, Caffin had come to consider Whistler as the prime source of modern abstraction.

Whistler, unless we except Corot, was the first modern to attempt this abstract use of form. [By “this abstract use of form” Caffin meant detaching it from concrete actualities “to invite and stimulate the higher faculties of the imagination”]. No sooner had he received the lesson of impression from Velasquez than he began to learn of Oriental art. He was the only man of his time to divine the difference of motive on which the latter is based and to fit it to his own purpose. It became the habit of his mind to view the particular in relation to the general, to see the type in the individual, to regard the personal and the local as manifestations of the universal. His portraits, to quote his own word, are “evocations” of the idea with which the personality had inspired him. In his nocturnes, forms lose their concrete assertiveness and became as presences, looming athwart the infinity of spiritual suggestion. But the nocturnes after all, are beautiful evasions, wherein the artist has taken refuge from the obviousness of facts by immersing himself in the penumbra. Whistler left this new motive to be carried further by others who would view the facts of appearances in clear open daylight and yet discover how to render their abstraction.⁶³

In these articles, Caffin is adamant about the experimental nature of Whistler’s abstraction, and about its partial success, because he dealt only with the penumbra. Perhaps, in this sense, the simplified reality of Stieglitz’s late 19th century night city-scapes, taken with a soft focus lens, are his own earliest abstractions. In any case, he was to be among the few “others” who would discover, through Modernism, how to render the abstraction of appearances in daylight.

A close study of the essentially collaborative photographic portrait that Stieglitz made of O’Keeffe between 1917 and 1937 turns up some oblique—but unmistakable—references to Whistler, especially in the early years when he was trying to make her name as an artist. Stieglitz had never stopped obeying his own 1899 injunction “to study art in all its forms”, and this composite portrait contains many conceptual, illustrational and compositional references to 19th and 20th

century art that have barely begun to be catalogued—let alone examined for meaning.⁶⁴

To digress briefly: It has recently been suggested that the O’Keeffe portrait is indebted to Cubist faceting and Cubist theories of time and space, because of its partial views, countless angles and shifting vantage points.⁶⁵ Given Stieglitz’s enlightened interest in Picasso, it is easy to understand the derivation of this hindsight theory. But, on the strict basis of visual evidence, this composite portrait, in which he attempted to document what was changing and changeless in O’Keeffe over a twenty-year period, fits quite securely into the tradition of (interrupted) serial photography—that is, a factuality attained through accumulations of evidence.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the photographic effect of “faceting” (caused by superimposition) in Stieglitz’s often reproduced double-exposure portrait of Dorothy True (1919) was apparently accidental in origin, and was never repeated in the O’Keeffe composite portrait. Most importantly, it was not Cubism, but Rodin’s influential concept of the partial figure (endowing body parts with an expressiveness equal to the face, by animating them from every point of view) which directly informed Stieglitz’s angled close-ups of O’Keeffe’s torso, hands, breasts, thighs, buttocks and feet. Prime evidence for this observation lies in Stieglitz’s unabating attention to the theatrical, or miming, action of O’Keeffe’s hands and fingers, one which recalls Rodin’s similar obsession throughout *his* long artistic career.⁶⁷

Among the more striking, and unremarked, examples of Rodin’s sculpture to appear in the composite portrait is an untitled photograph from 1920 which shows O’Keeffe enveloped in Stieglitz’s black cape, standing statuesquely against the open sky⁶⁸. (Plate 27.) She is presented in an obviously planned pose closely resembling Rodin’s famous *Monument to Balzac* (1898). Steichen’s 1908 night photograph of this sculpture titled *Balzac—The Open Sky*, reproduced in the

scandalous “Rodin number” of *Camera Work* (No.s 34/35, 1911), may well be the source for O’Keeffe’s similarly tilted, cloth-bound body form. (Plate 28.) And Sadakichi Hartmann’s essay “Rodin’s Balzac,” in the same issue, may hold some important contextual reasons for Stieglitz’s photographic linkage here. Hartmann considered the sculpture to be “a symbol of temporary accomplishment as well as new aspiration ... perhaps the highest expression of ... art convictions in modern times.” He exulted in its “musical Form”, that is, its “orchestration by the blending of planes—and by the vibration of light on these planes.” And he named it “a sculpture for the mind [because] ... it represents the activity of the soul, the conscience of the man in search for the beautiful... an ideal struggling through matter.” Hartmann’s words suggest that Stieglitz intended this photograph of a young artist to be both a prediction and a call-to-arms of her great talent.

Another Rodin example is the famous expressive neck of *The Prodigal Son* (1889), which appears in a new guise as the close-up of O’Keeffe’s throat in 1921. (Illustrated in *Georgia O’Keeffe, A Portrait*, plate 23.) Also influential were Rodin’s drawings—exhibited at 291 in 1908. Perhaps the most outstanding example is the female nude squeezing, or pinching, her breasts—an artistically rare erotic gesture which turns up several times in the O’Keeffe portrait.⁶⁹ The highly probable source for it is Rodin’s *Standing Female Nude Squeezing Breasts Together* (c. 1900.)⁷⁰

To return once more to Stieglitz and Whistler. Stieglitz’s 1918 (untitled) close-up of O’Keeffe in a white kimono with her hair falling over her shoulders⁷¹ (Plate 29.) holds his richest and most creative references to Whistler—the first American artist to cause revolutionary change in painting. Differences notwithstanding, this photographic idea is clearly based on *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* of 1862. Stieglitz has altered and amended his source, but he tells a similar visual truth.

To begin with, there is the resonance of the familiar name *The White Girl*.⁷² (“Georgia is a wonder ... If ever there is a whiteness she is that.”⁷³) Further, it could not have been lost on Stieglitz that Whistler’s famous model, Jo Hiffernan, was also his companion and mistress; nor even, perhaps, that the painting had been rejected by the establishment (the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon), before it became a “succès de scandale” at the Salon des Refusés in 1863.

Stieglitz could have seen *The White Girl* when it was exhibited in New York in 1894, and again in 1898–9, but it is likely that he came to know this work best through the widely circulated early photograph of it (c. 1865-1870) made in London by Elliott and Fry.⁷⁴ (Plate 30.) It was signed by Whistler in 1870, and taken before the artist did considerable re-painting of the face and hands. In this photograph *The White Girl*’s face is thinner, the eyes larger, and the mouth smaller and more wistful—which increases her uncanny resemblance to O’Keeffe. Although the white curtain, the lily, the flowered carpet and the wolfskin are absent from Stieglitz’s half-length photograph, he has closed in on *The White Girl*’s troubled and troubling expression, as mirrored on the face of O’Keeffe. They share that strangely sorrowful stare (so shocking to Whistler’s 19th century viewers), which is accentuated by the lighting—causing one eye to appear much larger than the other—and by the slightly up-from-below angle of vision.

Instead of the drooping lily, that Victorian symbol of lost innocence, Stieglitz has employed a much subtler and more personal visual metaphor: O’Keeffe’s navel. According to a description of this photograph by Paul Rosenfeld in 1921 (who could have heard it only from Stieglitz): “Sorrowful and knowing eyes gaze out; the navel is the center of anguish.”⁷⁵

In this context, it should also be remarked that nuanced variations on this “suffering” expression appear over and over again in the O’Keeffe portrait. A clue

to its meaning for Stieglitz may reside in a letter he wrote to Hartley in October, 1923:

“You were given your original show in 291 because of my reading “Suffering”, spiritual anguish on your face. And because I felt a supreme worthwhile struggle of a Soul. No other reason. And that is why I have fought for you to this day and will continue to fight.”⁷⁶

Although Stieglitz did not choose in this photograph to have O’Keeffe stand against a window with the light filtering through a transparent muslin curtain, like *The White Girl*, three other photographs taken during the same year *do* show O’Keeffe’s full length (nude) figure back-lit in exactly this manner.⁷⁷ Therefore it may not be sheer fancy to think that Stieglitz intended the embossed flower patterns of O’Keeffe’s kimono to relate visually to the brocade-like patterns painted so exquisitely by Whistler on the white curtain.

In a real sense, the photograph we have been discussing is a triadic portrait, for it would seem quite certain that Stieglitz not only linked O’Keeffe with Whistler through his most famous painting, but with himself as well, in ways that are at once intimate and artistic.

It is entirely consistent with Stieglitz’s aims and intentions (as documented in the foregoing chapters) that he should have drawn so deeply upon the Symbolist art of Rodin and Whistler during the early years of the O’Keeffe composite portrait. That O’Keeffe herself partook of their work for her own artistic ends adds yet another dimension to our growing understanding of Stieglitz’s great portrait of her.

Notes

Chapter Three

- ¹ Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, translated by M.T.H. Sadler (London: Constable & Company Limited, 1914): 104-105. Quotations from this translation are used throughout the thesis because it was the one O'Keeffe read and studied. Hereafter, Kandinsky, *TASH*.
- ² J. McNeil Whistler, *Camera Work* 5 (January, 1904): 52.
- ³ Henri Bergson, "What is the Object of Art?," *Camera Work* 37 (January, 1912): 22.
- ⁴ The basic treatise on this topic is Sandra Gail Levin, "Wassily Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde, 1912-1950," unpublished dissertation (New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1976): see especially 52-70, 79-140.
- ⁵ Levin, for example, offers only a footnote (*Ibid.*, p. 209) to the effect that "Georgia O'Keeffe, who was close to Dove, also read Kandinsky's treatise and 'liked his paintings'." (Letter from O'Keeffe to the author, 22 Nov., 1974.) And Sam Hunter, who stated flatly that O'Keeffe's painting derives from the art of Kandinsky, admitted, nonetheless, that such paintings as *Light Coming in on The Plains No. 3*, and *Pond in the Woods* seem to be "a sharp departure". *American Modernism: The First Wave* (Boston: Brandeis University, 1963.)
- ⁶ "In Kandinsky's own work I do not find the same convincing beauty as his theories hold—he seems to be a fine theorist first and a good painter after ..." (Hartley to Stieglitz, received 20 December, 1912, YCAL). "Kandinsky has a most logical and ordered mind which appeals so earnestly to the instinct which has been overmastered—In other words in my heart of hearts, I think he is not creative—..." (Hartley to Stieglitz, May, 1912. YCAL).
- ⁷ The relationship of Dove's art to Kandinsky remains a vexed question. Dove's six earliest known abstractions (or "extractions" as he called them) of 1909-1910 were apparently made from his own independent efforts to remember sensations of the shapes of nature through form and color. The abstract pastel series of 1911-12, known as "the Ten Commandments," only recently identified as such by William Homer (*American Art Journal*, XII: Summer, 1980: 21-32), require much more study, but the most visible influences appear to be Synthetism, Cubism and Fauvism. (See Barbara Haskell, *Arthur Dove*, (Boston: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1974): 15-29. Also, Sasha M. Newman, *Arthur Dove and Duncan Phillips: Artist and Patron*, (New York: George Braziller, 1981): 26-29. Whether Dove saw Kandinsky's Fauve landscapes in the 1908-09 Paris salons is not certain, but he did see *Improvisation No. 27*, in The Armory Show, which seems to have

begun his profound interest in Kandinsky's painting and writing. It was Stieglitz who gave Dove a copy of the first German edition of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, and also *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac—the latter inscribed “Mar. 19, 1913 from Mr. Stieglitz.” (See Gail Levin, *Wassily Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde* pp. 52-55.) Both these books clearly offered Dove supportive theory and evidence for his own earlier findings and perhaps more. An in-depth comparison of Dove's post-1913 abstractions with Kandinsky's 1912-1914 canvases is yet to be made. (For a start, see William Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz*, pp. 212-213, and Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky*, p. 157.) The importance of Dove's own work for O'Keeffe—and hers for him—has just begun to be explored. See Susan F. Yeh, “Innovative Moderns: Arthur G. Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe,” *Arts* (Summer, 1982): Also, Sherrye Baker Cohn, “The Dialectical Vision of Arthur Dove: The Impact of Science and Occultism on His Modern American Art,” unpublished dissertation (St. Louis: Washington University, 1982): 204-205, 233. Something of the quality of O'Keeffe's regard for Dove's vision may be understood by knowing that she owned his *Golden Sunlight* (1937)—the single work hung in her house at Abiquiu (reproduced in Haskell, *Arthur Dove*, p. 79).

⁸ Eddy himself apparently saw Kandinsky's work for the first time in the Armory Show. The Eddy-Kandinsky correspondence (some of which appeared in *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*) began later in 1913.

⁹ Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 31. See, also, p. 226, for an account of the similarities between Kandinsky's and Stieglitz's artistic concerns.

¹⁰ Thus far, Gail Levin has been the only scholar to state categorically that Stieglitz did this translation, in “Marsden Hartley and the European Avant-Garde,” *Arts Magazine* (September 1979): 158. When questioned by me in an interview (February, 1980) she said a “certain awkwardness” of the translation decided her that it was Stieglitz.

¹¹ *Camera Work* 39 (July, 1912): 34.

¹² See Alfred Stieglitz to Wassily Kandinsky, May 26, 1913, YCAL. “I knew I might influence the people to look at the picture which I thought of importance to themselves.”

¹³ *G O'K* (1976).

¹⁴ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 17, 1917, YCAL. (“I had to give a talk at the Faculty Circle ... so I had been laboring on Aesthetics - Wright - Bell - De Zayas - Eddy.”)

¹⁵ Kandinsky, *TASH*, pp. 34-41.

¹⁶ See Anthony Bannon, *The Photo-Pictorialists of Buffalo* (Buffalo, Media Study, 1981): 23-24.

¹⁷Kandinsky, *TASH*, p. 58. Although Kandinsky would change his mind on the potential of pure abstraction by 1914, this did not appear in print until the fourth German edition of *Über das Geistige*. For a discussion on Kandinsky's slowly changing interpretation of abstraction between 1913 and 1919, see Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky*, pp. 3–12.

¹⁸*Ibid*, p. 71.

¹⁹*Ibid* pp. 88, 103.

²⁰Eddy, p. 123.

²¹Kandinsky, *TASH*, p. 102.

²²Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form", *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, *The Documents of 20th Century Art* (New York: The Viking Press 1974): 178. Kandinsky reproduced seven of Rousseau's paintings in the *Almanac*, and Eddy reproduced two others—so O'Keeffe would have been well aware of Rousseau's stylistic constants.

²³For example, in *MSS*, No. 5, March, 1923. Later that same year Seligmann wrote, "No other woman [O'Keeffe] has ever painted so, and except for the intensity of Greco and the song-like serenity of Rousseau, no man among the painters occurs for comparison with this singularly gifted woman." ("Why Modern Art?" *Vogue*, October 15, 1923, p. 112). For an account of the significance for the Stieglitz circle of the primitive and the child-like, in modern art and photography, see Zilczer, pp. 136-139.

²⁴Sadler, introduction to Kandinsky, *TASH*, p. xxi, p. xxiii.

²⁵For an important recent discussion on the practical problems encountered by Kandinsky himself, see Peter Vergo, "Music and Abstract Painting: Kandinsky, Goethe and Schoenberg," *Towards a New Art* (London, The Tate Gallery, 1980): p. 41–63. Vergo points out that it was the systematic aspect of music which occasioned the envy painters felt for their sister art—that music appeared to rest on a basic science or system which painting lacked. In fact, says Vergo, color is *not* similar to music, but strikingly different. He finds Kandinsky's account of color "curious in the extreme," and shows the ways in which it was based on the difficult new music of Schoenberg—who tried to prove that tonality was not essential but contingent. The crucial question remained: what was to replace the object and/or a sense of key? In throwing out the rules for their arts, these avant-garde artists were confronted with new problems of clarity and organization—which were not finally solved.

²⁶See Howard Risatti, "Music and the Development of Abstraction in America: The Decade Surrounding the Armory Show," *Art Journal*, (Fall, 1979): 8-13.

²⁷For an excellent summary of the ways in which Whistler's work and philosophy affected the goals and aesthetic standards of Ernest Fenollosa and Arthur Dow, see Zilczer, pp. 48-52.

²⁸*Ibid* p. 51.

²⁹It has not been recorded whether (as seems probable) O'Keeffe read Eddy's 1903 *Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeil Whistler* – a widely known biography which quoted whole sections of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* on the relationship between music and art. In Eddy's own summation: "... there is a music of color even as there is a music of sound, and there should be delight in color composition even as there is delight in sound composition; and this delight should be something fundamentally distinct from any interest in the subject of the composition." (pp. 183-4).

³⁰See Chapter Two, footnote 69. For the most recent study of Whistler's ingenuity in frame designing, see Ira M. Horowitz, "Whistler's Frames", (*Art Journal*, Winter, 1979-1980): 124-131. The question also arises as to whether Stieglitz may have been influenced by Whistler's tiny (9 x 10 inches) oil sketches of Chelsea landscapes which were framed and exhibited as "Notes" (as opposed to "Symphonies") when he painstakingly framed his own 5 x 4 cloud photographs - The Equivalents.

³¹For two recent studies on Whistler as a Symbolist, and fresh insight into his relationship with Baudelaire, see Ron Johnson, "Whistler's Musical Modes: Symbolist Symphonies," and "Whistler's Musical Modes: Luminous Nocturnes," *Arts Magazine* (April 1981): 164-176.

³²Goldwater, *Symbolism*, p. 25.

³³Dow is known to have had a life-long interest in spiritualism and related matters. On this, see Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963): 180. How much Dow shared such ideas with his students does not seem to have been recorded by Chisolm, or anyone else.

³⁴O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1916, YCAL.

³⁵*Ibid*, 30 October 1916.

³⁶*Ibid*, 17 January 1917.

³⁷*Ibid*, 19 February 1917.

³⁸Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931): 22. For a study on de Gourmont's effect on American thought, particularly the Imagist movement, see Glenn S. Burne, *Rémy de*

Gourmont: His Ideas and Influence in England and America (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963.)

- ³⁹Rémy de Gourmont, introduction to *Livre des Masques*, 1896, quoted in Robert Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1978): 158.
- ⁴⁰For the origin of this quote, see Rémy de Gourmont, *Mr. Antiphilos, Satyr*, translated from the French by John Howard (New York: Lieber and Lewis, 1922): 188.
- ⁴¹Sadler, introduction to Kandinsky, *TASH*, p. xii.
- ⁴²Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, p. 117.
- ⁴³de Zayas, 291, No. 5 (July-August, 1915): 5-6.
- ⁴⁴Hartley to Stieglitz, 12 August, 1920. YCAL.
- ⁴⁵Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, p. 2.
- ⁴⁶*Ibid*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁷Quoted by Daniel Catton Rich, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, p. 29.
- ⁴⁸O'Keeffe to Blanche Matthias, (c. 1926) YCAL.
- ⁴⁹Whistler, "The Red Rag" (1878) *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York: Dover edition, 1967): 127-8. Whistler was not O'Keeffe's only experience with the notion of art-for-art's-sake. William Merritt Chase, her teacher at the Art Students League, also had an unswerving faith in the ultimate triumph of "The right of the painter to make pictures that stand or fall not by reason of their subject, but by reason of their style," as Duncan Phillips wrote in "William M. Chase", *The Magazine of Art* (American) VIII (December, 1916) 2: 45.
- ⁵⁰Kandinsky, *TASH*, pp. 91, 107.
- ⁵¹For examples, see Wanda Corn, *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism 1880-1910*. (San Francisco, H.H. De Young Memorial Museum, 1972): 17-19.
- ⁵²*Camera Work* 5, (January 1904): 52-3. In fact, Stieglitz may have been familiar with Whistler much earlier than 1904, for Whistler's paintings were well known in Germany during the 1890's, through reproduction in such periodicals as *The Studio*, and *Die Kunst*.
- ⁵³Sadakichi Hartmann, *Camera Work* 5 (January 1904): 19-20. In 1899 Hartmann considered Whistler "The greatest artist of his century." ("Portrait Painting and Portrait Photography", reprinted in *The Valiant*

- ⁶¹Charles Caffin, "Of Verities and Illusions," Part I, *Camera Work* 12 (1905): 56.
- ⁶²Charles Caffin, "A New Thought Which is Old," *Camera Work* 31 (July, 1910) p. 22.
- ⁶³For a general discussion of Stieglitz's intentions for his "composite portrait," see Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 22 and p. 231, footnote 30.
- ⁶⁴See Naomi Rosenblum, "Paul Strand: The Early Years, 1910-1932," unpublished dissertation, The City University of New York, 1978: 77. Also Pultz and Scallen, *Cubism and American Photography, 1910-1930*, p.52.
- ⁶⁵Proof of Stieglitz's serial intent lies in many of his statements, including this one: "To demand *the* portrait that will be a complete portrait of any one person is as futile as to demand that a motion picture be condensed into a single still." Quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz, Introduction to An American Seer* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1960): 35.
- ⁶⁶Out of the 329 finished portraits of O'Keeffe in the key set at the National Gallery of Art, at least 140 show a specific concentration on the action of her hands. At present, one can only speculate on what O'Keeffe's hands stood for in Stieglitz's mind, throughout many different photographs. At the very least, they appear to be visual meditations on hands as "an inductive sign of the human essence," to borrow a phrase from Roland Barthes ("The Plates of the Encyclopedia," [1964] in *New Critical Essays*, New York: Ferrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1980: 29). Also, Stieglitz may have wished to infer that the hand can never be eclipsed by the machine, since he considered the quality of "touch" to be inherent in all his photographs. It has not, to my knowledge, been noted before that several of O'Keeffe's hand poses resemble the conventions used by Nadar in his photographic portraits. For example, two O'Keeffe portraits from 1918 and 1919 [Plate nos. 16 and 22 in *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* have extremely eccentric hand positions that are very close to the pose assumed by Nadar in a self-portrait belonging to the MOMA.
- ⁶⁷Plate 33, in *Georgia O'Keeffe, A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz*. (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978) Unpaginated. There is another photograph similar to this in the NGA Key Set, number 147.
- ⁶⁸NGA *Hands and Breasts* (1918), no.s 112, 116. And *Hands and Breasts* (1919) nos. 113, 115.
- ⁶⁹Reproduced in Albert Elsen, J. Kirk T. Varnadoe, *The Drawings of Rodin* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc. 1971): 129.
- ⁷⁰Published in *Georgia O'Keeffe, A Portrait*, plate 24.

⁷¹For the history of the additive title of this painting, see A. McL. Young, McL. MacDonald, R. Spencer and H. Miles, *The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler* (text) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980): 17-18.

⁷²Already quoted in Chapter One, p. 27.

⁷³The photograph belongs to the Avery Collection of the New York Public Library.

⁷⁴Rosenfeld, "Stieglitz", *The Dial* LXXI (Dec. 1921), 6: 408.

⁷⁵Stieglitz to Hartley, October, 1923. YCAL.

⁷⁶NGA, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait* (1918) nos. 36,37,38.

CHAPTER FOUR

ARTISTIC ROOTS SHARED BY STIEGLITZ AND O'KEEFFE

II. ARTHUR WESLEY DOW

“Abstract design is the primer of painting, in which principles of Composition appear in a clear and definite form ... one uses the facts of nature to express an idea or emotion ... a fundamental fact must be understood, that synthetically related masses of dark and light convey an impression of beauty entirely independent of meaning.”

Arthur Wesley Dow *Composition* ¹

Research over the last decade or so has revealed that the widely taught Fenollosa-Dow (anti-Academic) system of art education prepared the native soil of American artists for early modernist abstraction in ways that were surprisingly parallel to vanguard European developments during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.² This, despite the fact that Fenollosa and Dow never thought to throw out the recognizable motif — but, rather, to “synthesize” it through line, mass (notan) and color. In other words to construct instead of imitate.

Because Whistler preached *against* mimetic art and *for* the fusion of East and West art principles, Ernest Fenollosa and Arthur Wesley Dow regarded him as the first great master — and “the common nodule” between Asiatic and European cultures.³

Like Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter, both Fenollosa and Dow believed that society could be bettered through the universal insight of artists. According to Fenollosa:

We are approaching the time when the art work of all the world of man may be looked upon as one, as infinite variations in a single kind of mental and social effort ... which as easily subsumes all forms of Asiatic and of savage art and the efforts of children as it does accepted European schools.⁴

The dream of both men was to create a new American style out of the synthesis of Eastern and Western art.

In 1892, Dow began to teach — and further develop — Fenollosa's monocular (essentially Japanese) principles of picture making. To be precise: harmoniously spaced linear design instead of descriptive analysis, and abstract arrangements of dark and light patterns (notan) instead of illusionistic effects of light and shadow (chiaroscuro). The so-called "synthesis" was, in Fenollosa's words, a "perfect marriage on equal terms between the beauty in the subject and the beauty in the pictorial form ... [with] every part and relation ... absorbed in the new organic product without a remainder."⁵ At his summer school in Ipswich, Massachusetts, and, after 1895, at the Pratt Institute, Dow gradually worked out a synthetic system of exercises in line, notan and color which his students came to know as "the trinity of power." He started work on *Composition* in 1896, and the first three editions were published in 1899. Of considerable significance, with regard to O'Keeffe's formation, is his introduction, "Beginnings," which paid special tribute to Fenollosa's "radically different" idea, based on music, and synthetic principles. "[Fenollosa] believed music to be, in a sense, the key to the other fine arts, since its essence is pure beauty; that space art may be called 'visual music,' and may be studied and criticized from this point of view."⁶

Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Wesley Dow

O'Keeffe has said that she first kindled to Dow's teachings during the summer of 1912 — through Alon Bement's art classes at the University of Virginia. Nevertheless her earliest exposure to the liberating ideas and methods in *Composition* seems to have taken place (somewhat by osmosis) in Chicago seven years before.

Dow's book may justly be regarded as a sort of compendium of the Arts and Crafts movement in America — illustrating, as it does, the themes of everyday life in flat decorative design.⁷ As early as August 1899, the Chicago periodical *Brush and Pencil* published an enthusiastic twelve-page article about *Composition* with liberal quotes and illustrations from Dow's text.⁸ In March, 1900, Dow gave his first lecture in Chicago at Hull House (the center for the Chicago Arts and Crafts movement), and that same summer, the Prang Educational Company of Chicago exhibited the work of his students. A new curriculum based on Dow's principles of design composition was established at the Chicago Art Institute within the year by Mary Scovel, a former student of his. And Dow himself gave a lecture there in December of 1900 on the topic of "Principles of Composition in some of the World's great Pictures." So strong was the sudden groundswell of public interest in his methods at this time, that Dow was nearly persuaded to leave the Pratt Institute in New York and re-base his teaching activities in Chicago.⁹

How, and in what ways, did the Fenollosa-Dow system muster, and permanently motivate, O'Keeffe's creativity?

If the cognitive scientists are right in saying that creative work, at least on the conscious level, involves a far more orderly set of procedures than many artistic people like to think,¹⁰ then the design problem-solving taught by Dow to release the artist's imagination seems to have been tailor-made for O'Keeffe. It offered her the simple, the elementary, the essential and the causal, as we shall see.

In *Composition*, Dow redefined painting as essentially two-dimensional — "a rhythmic harmony of colored spaces" — rather than the imitation of three-dimensional modeling it had been since Leonardo's time. He considered this new/old art of filling space to consist of three formal elements: the already-mentioned line, notan and color, and five compositional principles:

1. **Opposition:** The simple meeting of two straight lines in variations on the vertical and the horizontal.
2. **Transition:** Two straight lines with an added third — which may be modified into curves.
3. **Subordination :** In which the character of the whole is determined by a single dominating element (or group) to which all smaller parts are attached, or related. In any line composition the arrangement of principal and subordinates may be made in three ways: (a) by grouping around an axis (as a leaf related to stem); (b) by radiation (as flower petals to the carolla); (c) by size (as in clusters of apples on branches).
4. **Repetition (the opposite of Subordination):** Producing beauty by repeating lines in a rhythmic order in equal or unequal patterns. Repetition is also the basis of all music and poetry.
5. **Symmetry:** The placing of two equal lines or shapes in exact balance — three and four part groups may also be used. The effect produced is of repose and completeness.

In Dow's concise later work of 1908, *Theory and Practise of Teaching Art* (which O'Keeffe purchased instead of the more extensive and expensive *Composition* ¹¹), the five principles of design were narrowed and combined into the two most important: Subordination and Rhythmic Repetition. The illustrations in both texts are either similar or exactly the same. Dow never regarded these principles as recipes for art — rather they were carefully chosen to indicate the great range of possibilities for arranging lines as harmonious boundaries of shapes. ("A picture, then, may be said to be in its beginning actually a pattern of lines ... Abstract design is, as it were, the primer of painting."¹²)

Dow considered the rectangle (instead of the square or the circle) to be the most capable of infinite variation in its boundary lines. This was one of the reasons

why his system was of such immediate interest to American photographers, particularly, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Gertrude Käsebier and Clarence White.

“The beauty of proportion in your rectangle is measured by your feeling for fine relations, not by any formula whatever Art resists everything that interferes with free choice and personal decision; art knows no limits.”¹³

Although Dow made every effort to stress the equal importance of his three form building elements, line was always to dominate his thinking and his teaching. It is in the concept of Notan (“darks and lights in harmonic relations”) that he seems to have come closest to abstraction as later construed by Modernism. “At the onset a fundamental fact must be understood, that synthetically related masses of dark and light convey an impression of beauty entirely independent of meaning.”¹⁴

As to color, Dow kept surprisingly close to the old academic practise of choosing value adjustments over the harmonies of hue. For example, consider this statement of his on color theory:

Color, with its infinity of relations is baffling; its finer harmonies, like those of music [cannot] be grasped ... by reasoning or analysis. Color, in art, is a subject not well understood as yet ... [However] a systematic study of line and tone is very profitable, as we have seen; [and] I believe that color may be approached in like manner.¹⁵

And compare it with the following selections from Charles Blanc’s 19th century compendium of optical precepts and techniques, *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving*:¹⁶

The predominance of color at the expense of drawing is a usurpation of the relative over the absolute, of fleeting appearance over permanent form, of physical impression over the empire of the soul.¹⁷

We hear ... that color ... is an impenetrable arcanum to him who has not received its secret

influence; that one learns to be a draftsman but one is born a colorist — nothing is falser than these adages: for not only can color, which is under fixed laws, be taught like music, but it is easier to learn than drawing.¹⁸

Dow, like Blanc, would remain puzzled and ambivalent about the emotional power of color. While the two agreed that it could be “taught like music”, both frankly relied on imperfect systems — not of their own devising — for doing so.¹⁹ And even while they insisted that color obeyed principles which could be learned, both warily concurred that this element of painting was guided by instinct rather than intellect. As Blanc put it, color tells us “what agitates the heart,” while drawing shows us “what passes in the mind,” and he warned that “the taste for color, when it predominates absolutely, costs many sacrifices, often it turns the mind from its course, changes the sentiment, swallows up the thoughts.”²⁰

It can be said with some justification that Dow went further than Blanc by his struggle to base color harmony on the principle of Notan. Briefly, he used Munsell’s invention of the photometer to scale each of the five basic hues (red, purple, blue, green, yellow) to its middle (gray) value. This early photographic zone system of standardization, which reduced all the various colors to an identical value and intensity, enabled the artist (Dow then believed) to make color compositions analogous to, and combined with, those in Line and Notan.

It was as a practising artist that Dow discovered the grievous holes in Munsell’s measured system. During 1911 and 1912 he tried to paint the colored air of the Grand Canyon, and found himself unable to render the wildly inconstant values and brilliancy of the canyon’s hues.²¹ But it was the Armory Show which convinced Dow that he should re-examine his attitude toward color — and toward Modernism in general. In his hand-written notes of 1916 for an article on “Modernism in Art” (subsequently published in the *American Magazine of Art* in

January, 1917) can be glimpsed his somewhat revised ideas and attitudes, which were re-formulated into new Teachers College art courses given during the exact periods when O’Keeffe studied there.²²

Dow defined Modernism as “an inclusive name applied to the many forms of rebellion against the accepted and the traditional ... A modernist likes to be thought a rebel.”²³ In his list (quoted below) of “things generally desired by modernists”, Dow’s most unshakeable beliefs battle the few cracks of new light, and largely prevail over them.

The denial that beauty is worth seeking, as this seems opposed to the principle of evolution and is only negative, I do not see how it can be maintained ... Less attention to subject, more to form. Mass and color have pure æsthetic value, whether they represent anything or not Ceasing to make representation a standard, but comparing the visual arts with music. finding a common basis for *all* the visual arts ... Convincing us that there are limitless fields as yet unrevealed by art ... new expression by color, not by colors of things or color in historic art. Seeking hitherto unexpressed relations of color.²⁴

Dow then warns that some of the things on this list were attained long ago, and therefore it is useless to claim them as new. “Matisse says ‘I condense the significance of the body by looking for its essential lines’ [but] ... the Japanese found[ed] all their drawing on that ... Kandinsky does not equal Keisai Yeisin” because Chinese and Japanese artists had already realized more completely than any modern painter “a purely abstract language — a visual music.”²⁵

Even in 1915, when Dow forecast that “the next decade will see the development of creative color ... largely through the graphic arts”,²⁶ he was still being faithful to his system. He and Fenollosa had long considered the Japanese art of woodblock printing in color to *be* painting, for not only could the plank be cut to

show the direction of the brush, but this method in itself insured that color could never “predominate completely.”²⁷

O’Keeffe’s close attention to the European artists exhibited and extolled by Stieglitz shows that she did not agree with Dow that the Chinese and Japanese had done Modernism first and best, even though she was never to lose her admiration for Oriental art.²⁸ Her own natural and intuitive gift for using pure uncontrolled color obviously drew prime nourishment from the optical brilliance of Kandinsky, and (later) from Matisse — neither of whom believed that color could be taught like music. For them, the assumed correspondence of hues to notes was always a matter of “inner necessity” or “feeling.”²⁹ Nevertheless, Dow’s basic principles, which she herself taught for nearly six years, are affirmed over and over again in her compositions. And his actual exercises would initiate the basic grammar of her forms.

In the visual proofs of this crucial point lie important keys to her curiously limited, although richly multivalent, symbol system. Before presenting these “proofs,” it may bear repeating that in Dow’s synthetic method representation always follows design (“nature will not teach composition”),³⁰ and that the actual “synthesis” consists of lines intercepting curves in ways that qualify each other. His exercise-examples, each one reduced for easiest readability, are composed from the following motifs: the simple rectangular house (represented singly or in clusters), and isolated architectural details such as spires, roofs, doors and windows; the tree trunk with branches (singly or in clusters); flowers and fruit with stems, and leaves, rendered in vertical and horizontal formats; landscape designs such as mountain peaks against the sky, tree shapes against diagonal roofs, and road or river bends; the designs of found objects in nature like shells, stones, stumps and loam; the symmetrical “wild rose” motif (radiation from the center); textile patterns and motif variations in series; copies of Japanese landscapes

(Hiroshige), and botanical brush and ink drawings of leaf and blossom enlargements from Japanese books. Dow's own work in color woodcut, oil and photography (well known to his students) concentrated upon full-moon scapes, Ipswich shanties, road and river bends, flower close-ups, empty Atlantic ocean beaches, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, and the New Mexico mesa.

In the following generalized breakdown of O'Keeffe's frequently combined themes and motifs of the late 'teens and 'twenties, we find fresh and unassailable evidence of the fierce trust of her eye in the actual machinery of Dow's "synthesis" — a trust she would add to, and subtract from, during six decades of work but never really lose.

Still Life Themes

Still lifes were by far the largest category of O'Keeffe's art during the period 1915-1930, consisting of approximately 227 naturalistic and semi-abstract "studies in line and curve" arranged in various rectangular spaces.³¹ (*Petunias in Oval No. 1* and *No. 2*, of 1924, seem to be the only exceptions.) There are, approximately 111 flower motifs, forty-four of fruit, twenty-seven of leaves, sixteen shells and shingles (found objects in nature), and six of vegetables — the rest are combinations of the aforementioned (for example, *Red Pepper with Green Grapes* of 1928) and a few miscellaneous motifs such as seaweed, eggs, china and wood sculpture (New Mexican) and the unique *Mask with Golden Apple* (1924).

Flower forms were regarded by Dow as prime examples for line schemes within a space. O'Keeffe's *Red Canna Lily* of 1919 (Plate 31.) obeys Dow's purpose in view almost to the letter: "Not a picture of a flower is sought — that can be left to the botanist — but rather an irregular pattern of lines and spaces, something far beyond the mere drawing of a flower from nature, and laying an

oblong over it, or vice versa.”³² In a fashion very similar to Dow’s *No. 66*, upper right (Plate 32.), O’Keeffe has cut the space with the main lines of her canna stem — always an “essential” ingredient in Dow’s flower compositions.

Filling a skinny vertical rectangle with a single plant is a typical Art Nouveau format, and another of O’Keeffe’s favorite space cutting devices. Dow himself found it a special challenge in his frequently exhibited color woodcut *Lily*, of c. 1914 (Plate 33. reversed), and O’Keeffe may have paid tribute to the problems he set up and solved with her own work *Corn, Dark No. 2* of 1924. (Plate 34.) In these two images the central forms lean to the left in a curve that bisects the vertical field. This unusual curve is interrupted in both cases by a similarly formed central leaf (and in Dow’s work by the flower, as well). Even though he has represented a naturalistic lily pad growing out of the water and O’Keeffe has abstracted her corn stalk into a veritable explosion of floating conical shapes, their pictures share an essential overall design and many common forms and patterns. The narrow rectangular format (for specific exercises see *Theory and Practice of Teaching Art*, p. 14) would be used frequently by O’Keeffe during the ’twenties. (Examples are the *Calla Lily in Tall Glass* series of 1923, the *Calla Lily* series of 1927, and *Iris* of 1929.)

Unpopulated Landscape Themes

O’Keeffe painted approximately eighty-seven naturalistic and semi-abstract works which extract Dow’s design principles from the terrain of Texas (plains, canyons, stars, moonrises and sunrises); Lake George (gardens, hills, the lake, woods and mountains); Maine (the ocean beaches by night and by day); and New Mexico (her first images of Southwestern mountains and desert). There are also “portraits” of the seasons, the weather, and of particular “days” (so titled).

For landscape composition, Dow stressed the so-called “plaid pattern” — that is, irregular spacing of vertical and horizontal straight lines. (See *Composition*, p. 32). O’Keeffe’s little known 1918 watercolor *Park at Night* (Plate 35.) might well be a deliberate variation on Fig. 2 of *Theory and Practice of Teaching Art* — which shows a like arrangement in Opposition and Repetition. (Plate 36.) Both present a grove of trees in groups of two and three, and the divisions of sky, mountain, and foreground are similarly placed. Predominantly horizontal inventions on the plaid pattern (see exercise *No. 35, Composition*) include the *Lake George, Autumn* series of c. 1922.

Tree Themes (titled as such by the artist)

There are approximately thirty-six compositions based on the isolated tree (“a multiple of parts organized into a single whole”), or groups of trees in landscape in regular or irregular spacing, with vertical lines cutting horizontal lines in a great variety of patterns. Birches prevail (fourteen). There are also nine maples, two chestnuts, two cedars and one pinetree (sometimes combined), and the rest are unspecified as to species. Most were painted at Lake George except for three in New Mexico — including *The Lawrence Tree* (a ponderosa pine).

Dow considered the tree a perfect natural example of his most important principle, Subordination (“unity secured through the relation of principle and subordinate, even down to the veinings of leaves.”³³ O’Keeffe’s *Tree and Mountain, Lake George*, c. 1921 (Plate 37.), balances Subordination and Repetition with growing ease. The straight diagonals at top and bottom play off of each other, even as they pull the composition beyond its frame. And the curved spaces between the bare tree trunks orchestrate every other curve in the picture.

O'Keeffe once told Hartley "I wish people were all trees and I think I could enjoy them then."²² This statement may be regarded as a broad hint that she had come to see (and render) some trees as people. Two works especially suggest abstract portraits of Stieglitz, even while they hold most rigorously to Dow's principles — namely *The Chestnut Red* of 1924 (Plate 38.) and *The Old Maple, Lake George* of 1926. (Plate 39.) They may even be regarded as a sort of visual barometer of her changing ideas and emotions toward her mentor and husband — who also liked to identify with certain trees on the family property at Lake George. (For instance, a 1926 photograph of his is titled *The Dying Chestnut Tree - My Teacher.*) *The Chestnut Red* was painted the year of their marriage, when O'Keeffe still felt totally dependent on Stieglitz — artistically, emotionally, financially, and perhaps even spiritually.³⁵ This tree, which so clearly demonstrates Subordination (to an "axis" as well as to a "centre") and marvels of line and space Repetition, has become far more than a form element. Towering high above the earth in nearly the shape of a cross, the Chestnut has been transformed into an icon of primeval strength and endurance. (This work may, in fact, be the earliest prototype for her New Mexico crosses of 1929.) *The Old Maple*, on the other hand, is known to have been painted during a period of great strain between O'Keeffe and Stieglitz.³⁶ The obviously anthropomorphic characteristics of this tree (including the sperm-like designs of the bark, and the huge phallic form that acts as the composition's major dividing line) combine graphically to suggest sexual passion frighteningly out of control from a female point of view. It is known that Stieglitz's infidelities—whether emotional or actual—were a particular anguish to O'Keeffe during this period.³⁷

Architecture Themes

There are approximately sixty compositions in three distinct categories.

1. *Architecture in Landscape*: Some thirty works of simple buildings (secular and sacred) observed in the countrysides of Texas, Lake George, Wisconsin and New Mexico. Particularly dominant in these compositions is the diagonal (roof) line. Dow-like motifs include: houses with tree and sky (six watercolors of 1916); nine major oils of Lake George and Wisconsin barns (among the most searching and personal of her compositions); several oil portraits of Stieglitz's Lake George studio (*The Little House*) and one of her own (*My Shanty*); and seven oils of adobe churches and pueblos. In all of these, she was mindful of the master: "One uses the facts of nature to express an idea or emotion."³⁸

2. *Cityscapes* (a rare category for the artist, which, with one or two exceptions, she painted solely between 1925-1929): Approximately twenty-three works (including the three charcoal sketches of c. 1920) of assertively rectangular New York skyscrapers in vertical and horizontal formats. There are nine (known) East River panoramas viewed from the 30th floor of the Shelton Hotel, where O'Keeffe and Stieglitz lived. With one major exception (*New York Night* of 1929) the rest of her cityscapes are positioned from the street level — looking up from angles more or less extreme. Of the twenty oils, six are night scenes. The severely reduced *Madison Avenue* of 1929 is now titled *White Abstraction* (St. Petersburg Museum in Florida). In several of the cityscapes may be seen some of O'Keeffe's most inventive combinations of Dow's system with photography. (These are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.)

3. *Isolated Architectural Details* (interior and exterior): there are only about seven compositions in this category from this period, but three of them are among O'Keeffe's best known and most advanced paintings: *59th Street*

Studio (1919), *Lake George Window* (1929), and *Black Cross, New Mexico* (1929). Each of these has important photographic (non-mimetic) characteristics. (See Chapters Seven and Eight.) Dow considered the paneled door a most excellent example of synthesis. (“Rectangular spacing lays a double burden upon the designer, boundary lines and interior lines.”³⁹) His students were urged to draw doors in actual perspective before proceeding on to freehand designs, keeping always in mind “the requirements of construction.” O’Keeffe was to remain fascinated with trying to solve various door problems in space. The *Patio* series of the 1940’s and 1950’s, examines the door in the wall of her Abiquiu house from an astonishing number of ranges and angles.

Abstractions (titled as such by the artist)

O’Keeffe kept approximately eighty-five of the apparently countless abstractions which she made between 1915 and 1929. Judging simply from the evidence so far catalogued, her two most fertile years were 1916 (about eighteen abstractions) and 1919 (about sixteen). A close survey of this work shows conclusively that her interest was always in the formal reduction of recognizable motifs and not in the rock-bottom invention of purely abstract forms. O’Keeffe’s habit of retitling certain of her most extreme reductions of a familiar motif as an “abstraction” has often blinded viewers to her method. A case in point is the Whitney Museum’s 1926 *Abstraction* — actually a severely subtracted horizontal view of Lake George (1/2 terrain, 1/2 water reflections) which, upon completion, the artist up-ended vertically, perhaps to further disguise its origins. In fact, the design of the composition is so perfectly balanced from *all* sides, that the Whitney inadvertently hung the (vertical) painting upside down for ten years after its

acquisition.⁴⁰ As will be shown, O’Keeffe would come to use photography as a new tool for her system of abstraction.

In the four *Blue* watercolors of 1916 (Brooklyn Museum), we can see early (perhaps first) evidence of the important ways Kandinsky helped her to stretch Dow’s method, and cut away from his hampering restrictions on color. The design of *Blue No. 1* (Plate 40.) appears to be an amalgam of shapes from two of her earlier works, the already mentioned charcoal *Drawing No. 12* of 1915 (which also uses calligraphic verticals and diagonals — probable reductions of tree trunks and root lines - as well as similarly placed loam-like motifs along the upper borders), and the 1916 watercolor *House with Tree-Green* (Plate 41.). The round and bulbous shapes, and the vertical lines in *Blue No. 1* look as if they were derived from the sun, treetops and trunks in *House* — but re-positioned to fill a new space differently. There is, however, a marked change of style between these two watercolors. The easily-read *House*, with its extra wide outlines of forms and its “dug-out” type of brush stroke, has a woodcut quality about it. (Dow exalted the woodcut to his students, as we know.) *Blue No. 1*, on the other hand, looks as if O’Keeffe had taken a large and sudden dose of Kandinsky. (“The most extreme man ... of the entire modern art movement”, according to Eddy.⁴¹) Like Kandinsky’s *Improvizations* (so-called, even though very carefully plotted by the artist), this work is neither unconscious, spontaneous nor improvised.⁴² To look closely at the original is to see the clearly penciled composition underneath her exquisitely controlled puddling of black, blue and yellow. This is the same color antithesis stressed by Kandinsky as having powerful “spiritual appeal” in his chapter on “The Language of Form and Color.”⁴² She has used stripping (“selection” in Sadler’s translation of “des Blossgelegton”) to simplify her tree forms down to partial-ellipse outlines that are strikingly similar to the loops of smoke in *Improvizations 30* (“Cannons”) — which she knew from Eddy’s color

illustration. And she has also used color “veiling”⁴⁴ to cut down on the instant legibility of her forms — whether or not her intention was to extend their “inner significance” as Kandinsky suggested.⁴⁵

The transition from *Blue No. I* to *Blue No. 2* (Plate 42.) is extremely abrupt, compared to the rest of the series. Gone completely from *No. II* is the upper border of aquatic forms, with their delicate references to conch shells, sea foam and ripples. Only two of the ellipses have survived—their outlines smoothed and rounded—and they are now suspended, one above the other, with a thick cluster of calligraphic diagonals acting as a base. What happened in the development gap between these two works? The answer lies in a letter dated October 1916 (YCAL) which O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer in partial reply to her questions.⁴⁶

I recognized two of the drawings you spoke of. [Draws two sketches of them] Number one [*Blue No. I*] is the first of a dozen or more you speak of - number two [*Blue No. II*] came next to last. It didn’t quite satisfy me so I tried again - the last one was so much worse than the one you like that I thought I had just about worn the idea out so quit.

From these comments we know that she did not reduce her motifs in the order (or number) in which they appear in this series. It should also be noted that *Blue No. I* and *Blue No. IV* were hung side by side in O’Keeffe’s 1917 show at 291.⁴⁷ Therefore, O’Keeffe definitely formed the final series well after the individual drawings were made. It is not known when she did this, nor is it known whether Stieglitz made any suggestions to her about it. But the series system she employed is not unlike looking at contact sheets and choosing the best composed prints — or the most meaningful progressions — long after the actual photographic fact. Certainly the four *Blues* chart what she wished the *viewer* to regard as her

method of reduction, or “selection”, or “synthesis.” (We can accurately use any one of these terms here). But though O’Keeffe has kept to Dow’s principles of Subordination and Repetition throughout the series, the last three *Blues* are (seemingly) object-less, and each has been constructed directly with arbitrary color — not a pencil mark is to be seen. In all probability this would not have happened the way it did without Kandinsky’s example. Furthermore, in choosing blue to predominate in this series, she certainly must have been aware of these catalytic comments of his:

The power of profound meaning is found in blue, and first in its physical movements (1) of retreat from the spectator, (2) of turning in upon its own centre. The inclination of blue to depth is so strong that its inner appeal is stronger when its shade is deeper. Blue is the typical heavenly color. The ultimate feeling it creates is one of rest ... in music a light blue is like a flute, a darker blue a 'cello; a still darker blue a thunderous double bass: and the darkest blue of all - an organ.⁴⁸

In short, there can be little doubt that Kandinsky’s strongly expressed trust in the psychic effect of colors converted O’Keeffe extremely early to the contemporary belief that “the art of modernist painting equals the art of color” — as Willard H. Wright was to put it in 1922.⁴⁹ Kandinsky may also have taught her how to soften her outlines by his own dematerialization of forms, and to be more resolute in abjuring vanishing point perspective. Perhaps his art also had something to do with her “unreal” light - a light which seems to come from within the core of the picture rather than a directional source.

Nevertheless, it is still Dow to whom she owes most, for he taught her first about the rudiments of reduction. The famous *Blue Lines* (from another connected group of 1916 watercolors) is drawn with Dow’s preferred instrument for developing the power of expression, the Japanese brush. His directions for using it

are almost a description of this painting: “Begin with straight lines, remembering that straightness of direction is the essential thing, not mere geometric straightness ... slight waverings are not objectionable; in fact they often give character to a line.”⁵⁰ Stieglitz himself was so fascinated by this particular work that six months before O’Keeffe’s second 291 exhibition, (as Anita Pollitzer was “thunderstruck” to observe in a letter to her) he hung it on the gallery wall nearest to his private back room.⁵¹ In 1918, Stieglitz photographed O’Keeffe quite specifically as the pupil of Dow. Sitting beside a Lake George flower bed, in a white dress and dark sweater, she absorbedly makes a watercolor sketch with her Japanese brush held in the precise manner recommended on p. 16 of *Composition*. (Plate 43.)⁵²

Stieglitz and Dow

However much Stieglitz revised and reevaluated Pictorialism, he never stopped thinking of the photographic print as a “picture”; that is, a reflection of the individual photographer’s preconceived ideas of beauty and truth — instead of a mechanical recording of nature. A picture “made” rather than “taken”. Or, as put in his own words, “The development of an organic idea, the evolution of an inward principle; a picture rather than a photograph.”⁵³

In Pictorialism, composition was held second only to individuality. As defined by A. Horsely Hinton, the influential Linked Ring Pictorialist⁵⁴, composition is “the desire ... in every cultivated mind for a certain symmetry of design ... it is [however] ... of secondary importance and its infringement, to a limited degree, is greater virtue than its perfect achievement and display.” Leo Katz later defined the problem more precisely: “Serenity and strength in [photographic] composition depend on the intimate understanding of the two-dimensional nature of

your composition-surface, even when your subject matter demands extreme depth illusion.”⁵⁵

With those important facts in mind, the question to be asked here is a double one: How much did Dow’s two-dimensional composition principles influence Stieglitz’s judgment, and support, of the arts of others; and how much of an impact did these same principles have on Stieglitz’s own work?

In 1892, seven years before *Composition* was published, Stieglitz had written that simplicity, originality and atmosphere were the main qualities necessary for the photographer to produce artistic pictures, and that they were obtainable only by “the study of art in all its forms”.⁵⁶ In his essay *Pictorial Photography* of 1899, he stated that photographers “must be quite familiar with the laws of composition as is the landscape or portrait painter; a fact not generally understood.”⁵⁷ In 1905, he enlarged on these beliefs in the famous article commissioned by Eastman Kodak Co., *Simplicity in Composition*. After pointing out the difficulties of making a truly simple composition — one which forcibly communicates the dominant idea of the picture — Stieglitz compared the photographer artist’s problem with that of the musician’s. (“Just as in music we find that the simpler the theme, the more thorough must be the knowledge of the musician in order to compose acceptable variations thereon”.) Declaring “balance to be the one element absolutely essential in every composition,” Stieglitz cited “elimination” as the greatest practical problem in both photography and painting. (“To exclude *everything* that is unessential to a clear statement of the dominant underlying idea ...”) Finally, differentiating between simplicity of subject and “the totally different quality of simplicity in composition”, he offered three suggestions on how to attain the latter: observe the work of recognized artists; study the appearance of nature everywhere; and “avoid books on composition as you would the plague, lest they destroy in your mind all other considerations than the formula they lay down.”⁵⁸ Despite his last words, it

is extremely likely that Stieglitz was familiar with Dow's principles, and that he would become increasingly respectful of them — although he never said so.

To begin with, there are several statements of Dow's which seem to be particularly congenial with those made by Stieglitz in 1905. Among them:

“The study of Variation tends to lead the mind ... toward original and individual expression ... The masters of music have shown the infinite possibilities of variation — the same theme appearing again and again with new beauty, different quality and complex accompaniment.”⁵⁹

Fine art, by its very name, implies fine relations.⁶⁰

Contact with the best works of art is an essential part of art education, for from them comes the stimulus to create.⁶¹

Nature is [the artist's] storehouse of facts.⁶²

The beauty of proportion in your rectangle is measured by your feeling for fine relations, not by any formula whatever.⁶³

Also, Stieglitz's emphasis on “balance” and “elimination” is close to the essence of Subordination — Dow's major reductive principle. (“A work of fine art constructed upon ... Subordination has all its parts related by delicate adjustments and balance of proportions, tone and color. A change in one member changes the whole.”⁶⁴)

Major, if indirect, evidence for Dow's considerable influence on Stieglitz's eye rests upon his approval and support of a veritable succession of Dow's pupils, ending up, of course, with O'Keeffe. First, in chronological time, among the painters was Pamela Colman Smith, who took Dow's “Life, Composition and Design” course at Pratt during 1896-1897.⁶⁵ Second was Max Weber, who

considered Dow the greatest teacher he ever had. Weber met Dow at Pratt in 1898, and studied with him for three years. Weber's later photographic criticism, particularly his 1913 article "The Filling of Space", clearly shows that he believed Dow's principles to be just as valid for photography as for painting.⁶⁶ Not only had Dow long been a dedicated amateur photographer himself,⁶⁷ he was responsible for adding art photography to the curriculum of Columbia Teachers College in 1907. As head lecturer for the new department Dow chose Clarence White, then one of Stieglitz's closest associates at 291. And it was during this same year, 1907, that Stieglitz collaborated with White on their unique photographic series of nudes.⁶⁸

Other early Photo-Secession photographers having close contact with Dow were Gertrude Käsebier, and Alvin Langdon Coburn. It is not recorded whether Käsebier ever worked formally with Dow.⁶⁹ Nor is it clear when his basic visual principles first began to affect her photographic work. All that is known for certain is that her portraits were exhibited at Pratt in 1897, where Dow saw them. Two years later he wrote an article for Stieglitz's *Camera Notes* extolling her portrait photographs *From a Painter's Point of View*. Distinguishing between the photograph, which renders "bare facts just as they are ... as a scientific record," and the fine art photograph which is something beautiful in itself," Dow goes on, in true Pictorialist fashion, to praise Käsebier's portraits for including many of the characteristic skills of great portrait painters: "a color harmony, a dark and light harmony, a graceful line composition, and at the same time a presentation of the special characteristics of the sitter.", and above all, for attaining "characteristic likeness."⁷⁰ It is significant that the same year this article was written (1899) Stieglitz was to call Käsebier the leading artistic portrait photographer in America.⁷¹

As for Coburn, his own words tell the tale:

My first one-man show was held at the Camera Club of New York in January 1903. How proud I

felt when Stieglitz called my pictures "original and unconventional." After working for about a year in the studio of Mrs. Gertrude Käsebier . . . I returned to Boston. In 1903, I participated in the Summer School at Ipswich, Massachusetts, directed by Arthur W. Dow ... At the summer School we were taught painting, pottery and woodblock printing, and I also used my camera, for Dow had the vision, even at that time, to recognize the possibilities of photography as a medium of personal artistic expression. I learned many things at his school, not least an appreciation of what the Orient has to offer us in terms of simplicity and directness of composition. Oriental art influenced a photograph called "Sand Dunes" which I took at Ipswich ... I think that all my work has been influenced to a large extent and beneficially by this oriental background, and I am deeply grateful to Arthur Dow for this early introduction to its mysteries."⁷²

Two of the major Photo-Secession critics, Charles H. Caffin and Sadakichi Hartmann, frequently referred to Dow with knowledge and approval in their articles. In writing of Coburn's photography in *Camera Work* in 1904, Caffin reports that Coburn had the "privilege of studying for some months with Mrs. Käsebier and of spending a summer with the landscape painter Arthur W. Dow, at the latter's studio in the country. In each case he found himself in contact with an artist of originality from whom he could get inspiration as well as experience in methods." Discussing *The Dragon* print, which Coburn photographed from Dow's studio, Caffin praises the "curious effect of the serpentine lines of water winding through the flat-lands." And he adds,

In the fascination of the patterning of the composition it would have been easy to lose sight of the substantial realities of the ground plan. But in this case they are naturally, though unobtrusively, enforced; with the result, I think, that the bizarrerie of the lines receives increased interest ... the most attractive of these pictures is 'The Bridge,' Ipswich, strikingly handsome in composition.⁷³

Caffin's essay on Käsebier in his 1901 book *Photography as a Fine Art*, does not mention Dow by name — but traces of his principles (including musicality) are apparent throughout.⁷⁴ Discussing Käsebier's *Going to Boston* (1901) Caffin picks on what is the most identifiable compositional characteristic of every Dow student:

I turn [the picture] upside down and this way or that, and every way it is beautiful. Its adjustment of the forms to the space, the subtlety of mass and line and balance of the dark and light seem equally admirable ... the picture has the decorative simplicity and exquisite precision of a fine Japanese print.⁷⁵

Caffin also appears to have borrowed liberally from Dow's text in the influential 1906 essay "Of Verities and Illusions — Part II" for *Camera Work*. Writing of the importance of "abstract expression", as exemplified in Japanese art, Caffin warns that "If painting is to maintain a hold upon the intelligence and imagination, as music does ... it must find some fundamental motive other than the appearances of the world."⁷⁶ In Dow's words; "It is the 'visual music' that the Japanese so love in the rough ink paintings of their masters where there is but a hint of the facts ..."⁷⁷

Hartmann was by far the most prolific of the *Camera Work* critics. As noted by Alexander S. Horr in 1904: "Stieglitz was in need of a man who could write up his disciples and at the same time criticize them in a manner which he, in the position of their patriarch, could not very well do himself. Hartmann performed this task with great verve."⁷⁸ He has often been described as similar to Stieglitz in intellect, imaginativeness and temperament — and they shared a similar vision for developing a native American art.⁷⁹ Hartmann's Japanese-German heritage probably contributed to his acute interest in the arts of Japan,⁸⁰ literary symbolism⁸¹ and decorative design.⁸² In view of this background it is not

surprising to find Hartmann a firm and admitted partisan of Dow's reductive principles:

Keiley ...was wise enough to study A. W. Dow's book on composition, and whenever he fails he at least knows why. (1901)⁸³

"The two most helpful works on composition at the disposal of the American landscape photographer are at present, "Pictorial Composition," by Henry A. Poore, and "Composition," by A. W. Dow. (1910)⁸⁴

Hartmann never mentions Dow when writing of Stieglitz's photographs, nevertheless there are several instances where Hartmann seems to have used Dow's yardstick — and Stieglitz was not found wanting.

Four styles of composition [are] in vogue at present [1901]: line composition, light and shade [notan] composition, space composition and tone composition ... Stieglitz excels in space composition ... Line Composition is still rarer. The only photograph I know that can claim this quality is Stieglitz's "Decorative Study" ... [others only] succeed in suggesting it."⁸⁵

A light and shade composition ... is rarely attempted nowadays. [1910] Photographers seem to be afraid of it. Stieglitz in his early days, before he became the fantastic champion of the tonal school, recognized the beauty of it. "The Old Mill" is a charming study of sunlight and shadow... Coburn also considers his "Ipswich Bridge" a light and shade composition. It is an attempt at it, a twilight version.⁸⁶

As a (relatively) Straight photographer, Stieglitz did not rely on the wide-open soft focus lens for aid in simplifying composition — as did Coburn and Käsebier — when necessary, he intervened more directly. From Hartmann, in 1904, it is known that Stieglitz "eliminated several logs of wood ...when he took the snapshot of his 'Winter on Fifth Avenue' [1893], took out a rope that disturbed

the foreground in his 'Scurry Homewards' [1897], lightened the sky in 'The Net Mender' [1894], and darkened the rail in 'The Hand of Man' [1902]." But none of these retouchings of the negatives diminished him as a Straight photographer in Hartmann's eyes because "they do not interfere with the natural qualities of photographic technique. Brushmarks and lines, on the other hand, are not natural to photography."⁸⁷ With regard to Dow, the dates alone of three of these photographs would make it quite certain that Stieglitz's correction (simplification) of the truth of the lens came from his early study of the dynamic centricity of the Old Masters,⁸⁸ and his own well-developed sense of the Jugendstil arabesque, rather than from Dow's *Composition*. A possible exception is the later *The Hand of Man, New York* (1902), because of its Dow-like concentration on straight line and curve relationships on either side of the arabesque.

In his important *Camera Work* article of 1910, "On the Possibility of New Laws of Composition," Hartmann may have been helping to alert the public eye to Stieglitz's newly visible changeover (ca. 1910) from the arabesque to repeated geometrical shapes:

Composition tersely expressed is the complete unity of parts. If we wish to emphasize any one part of the representation it cannot be done without subordinating the other elements... This general principle will be true for all time. The symmetrical art of the Occident based on geometrical forms, and the unsymmetrical arrangement of Oriental art based in rhythm are guided by the same idea.⁸⁹

After citing the qualities most characteristic of photography as a medium of expression (the facility of detail, differentiation of textures, depth and solidity of dark planes, lines produced solely by tonal gradations, and the suggestibility of shimmering light), Hartmann went on to predict an abstract design composition which clearly partakes of Dow's principles: "the balancing of different tonal planes

and the reciprocal relation of spaces ... Also the relationship of lines ... may be compared to the unresolved discords, unrelated harmonies, little wriggling runs, and all the external characteristics of the modern French composers [like] Debussy.”⁹⁰ This forecast notwithstanding, it was to Cubism — not to Dow — that Stieglitz turned for his next experiment with the new.⁹¹

In 1934, Paul Rosenfeld isolated what may be the most characteristic — or at least the most persistent — “Stieglitzian” compositional form within all of his stylistic experiments: an “aspiring” centricity.

In each [picture] the shapes, lines and tones constitute two great major complexes, one wedgelike, and the other complimentary to it. These balance the picture by their gentle but firm counterposition. Their points of deepest conjunction generally lie in the center of the picture: in several cases however, they lie very high in it, inducing the perceptive eye to rise, as it were, not only toward something which lies in the inner depths, but also in the heights ... The rectangular surface of every one of the prints is divided into two or more rhythmically disposed, intrinsically interesting primary units, which in turn are made up of aggregations of smaller units, some of them fine hair lines, some gamuts and rhythms of light. These primary units compose pairs or groups of anththeses intricately, subtly complementary in point of tone and of shape and balance; for they are predominantly triangular and oval, beak-shaped, and bell-shaped ... The character of this counterpressure and interpenetration varies from picture to picture ... But in all the pictures, the aspiring tendency of movement predominates.⁹²

“Aspiring” centricity is a compositional device used frequently — and with authoritative effect — by O’Keeffe after she began to work alongside of Stieglitz, as will become apparent.

The last important photographer in the Stieglitz circle known to have been exposed to Dow’s teaching was Paul Strand — although just how much his first notions of abstract photography were influenced by Dow may never come to light.⁹³ It is known that Dow lectured at the Ethical Culture School in New York

while Strand was a student there between 1904 and 1909.⁹⁴ He may have further absorbed Dow's basic principles from Caffin, with whom he studied Art Appreciation at ECS between 1907 and 1908. Coburn, too, was a probable carrier to Strand of Dow's composition design. Naomi Rosenblum has pointed out that Strand's early photographs (1913-1914) "owe something to the influence of Coburn ... [who] frequently selected photographic vantage points that enabled him to stress the patterns created by architectural elements as in *The Octopus* 1912".⁹⁵ Not only is this one of the most Dow-influenced of Coburn's images, but Strand's own *Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue* (1915), with its repetitions of circular forms, may well indicate a close attention to Dow's famous Repetition principle.

That American photographers were taking a new look at Dow's studies in abstract design right after the shock of the Armory Show is evident from an extract from *Composition* reprinted in *Photo-Era* — which speaks of the "one-ness of art", and the synthetic likeness of picture, plan and pattern.⁹⁶ The challenge of the Armory Show (as it had long been at 291) was whether photographers could take pictures abstract enough to hold the viewer's visual interest when seen alongside pictures painted by Kandinsky, Picasso, Matisse and Picabia. Writing of Strand's efforts in 1916 to understand better what an abstract painting really was by trying to take abstract photographs, Rosenblum observed that several of the most extreme of these images "can be viewed from any side."⁹⁷ She does not make the point, however, that this is the most tell-tale sign of a Dow composition — and one which Coburn especially fancied.⁹⁸

There is some visual evidence to suggest that Stieglitz's tremendous respect for O'Keeffe's Dow-nurtured "Oriental" originality rekindled his earlier interest in the basic principles of *Composition* after he began to photograph her and her work. Several photographs made between 1917-1924 would indicate that this was so. For example: *Hands With Thimble* (1920), which looks harmoniously balanced when

viewed from any one of its four sides.⁹⁹ This was clearly intentional, for on the back of one print is written in Stieglitz's hand, "The photograph can be hung 4 ways — each a "different" picture. [dated] Oct. 2, 1939."¹⁰⁰ And the same (Dow) characteristic may be observed in the cloud Equivalents after they became disconnected from the hills of Lake George in 1925. Further, two 1922 photographs, *Apple and Raindrops* and *Apples and Gable*¹⁰¹ have almost blatantly elemental design similarities to Dow's apple-branch-leaf illustrations for his Subordination principle.¹⁰² Well known to be symbolic, these photographs were first exhibited in 1923 in a group sequence of three with the suggestive title *Birds, Apple and Gable, Death*. To Stieglitz, at the time, they were the happy result of waiting until his own felt "impulses" (inner reality) joined with and "register[ed] the objective world directly" (outer reality).¹⁰³ Since Stieglitz never photographed without exercising total choice in the matter, he would have had a good reason for using Dow's "line ideas" in these particular photographs — the most direct, if not the earliest, precedents for the cloud equivalents. It may have been simply to make their meaning (his philosophy of life) more readable to more people. Composition for Dow, as Stieglitz well knew, had one overriding purpose — to best express an idea. And by the 1920's Dow's synthetical principles had been transmitted by teachers like O'Keeffe to a whole generation of Americans through the public school system.¹⁰⁴

Although Stieglitz never finally summed up his views on photographic composition, we can make an educated guess at the core of his later thinking on this slippery topic from the writings of others close to him. Three statements, which span approximately 30 years, seem particularly prescriptive — if somewhat conflicting. The first is an anonymous 1908 article from *Camera Work* titled "Is Photography a New Art?" — parts of which sound suspiciously like Stieglitz:

[To] make a composition; it is essential that such elements should be present that some particular idea is conveyed to the mind of the spectator... it is equally essential that no more elements than necessary shall be present ... [Composition] is a series of facts whose truth is purely dependent upon their special juxtaposition ... to compose is to give order ... All art is a matter of order, and nothing else, and where order has been produced, art has been produced."¹⁰⁵

The author of the second is Sadakichi Hartmann (c. 1910):

Painting and Photography, true enough, are two entirely different propositions, but the fundamental principles of composition remain the same in all mediums of pictorial representation.¹⁰⁶

The last by Edward Weston is taken from his essay "Photographic Art" written for the 1941 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Stieglitz's favorable opinion of this essay can hardly be doubted since he permitted the reproduction of two of his own photographs to illustrate it — much to Weston's amazed gratification.¹⁰⁷

Nowhere has the painter's influence had a more lasting hold on photography than in the field of composition ... To compose a subject well means no more than to see and present it in the strongest manner possible. The painter and the photographer will have two different ways of doing this because of the basic differences between their mediums. Its capacity for rendering fine detail and tone makes photography excel in recording form and texture. Its subtlety of gradation makes it admirably suited to recording qualities of light or shadow, and its ability to record sharply everything within the angle of lens-vision from the immediate foreground to the distant horizon carries it far beyond the painter's province. The photographer cannot depend on rules deduced from finished work in another medium ... An intuitive knowledge of composition in terms of the capacities of his process, enables the photographer to record his subject at the moment of deepest perception; to capture the fleeting instant when the light on a landscape, the form of a cloud, the gesture of a hand or the expression of a face, momentarily presents a profound revelation of life.¹⁰⁸

On the basis of the evidence compiled in this chapter we can certainly say that Stieglitz was not in basic disagreement with Dow, Hartmann or Weston about what “good” composition was. Of greater interest to him, however, (judging from his constantly inquiring and explaining presence at every one of the exhibitions he presented over the years) was the *why* of composition — its effects on photographic intelligibility and visual pleasure. It is composition, after all, which makes a picture a picture. And in photography, perhaps even more than in painting, it is the report of the event, not the event itself, which interests the viewer and causes him to think.¹⁰⁹ Thus, it is more than likely that composition’s overriding purpose for Stieglitz was to enable a photograph to capture the viewer’s attention and imagination for at least as long as a painting. In fact, the fear that this might not really be the case may have helped to keep Stieglitz from actually hanging photographs side by side with paintings at 291, in spite of his forthright 1910 announcement in *Camera Work* that “Photography ... should take its place in open review with other mediums”.¹¹⁰ It was Georgia O’Keeffe who finally inspired him to do so — with his own photographs at risk.

Notes

Chapter Four

- 1 A.W. Dow, *Composition* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1912): 44. This is a later edition. The first one was published in 1899, by Joseph Bowles, Boston.
- 2 See, for example, Chisolm, *Fenollosa*, pp. 177-195; *The Aesthetic Struggle*, pp. 33, 49-52, 77, 165-172; Frederick C. Moffatt, *Arthur Wesley Dow* (Wash. D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977): 78-91, 111-129; Marianne W. Martin, "Some American Contributions to Early Twentieth Century Abstraction," *Arts Magazine* (June, 1980): 158-165.
- 3 Ernest F. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (London and New York: William Heinemann, 1913): xxv. It should be noted that this volume, which declared that all art is harmonious spacing, was on the reading list for Dow's course, Fine Arts 69, at Columbia Teachers College — when O'Keeffe took it in 1914-1915.
- 4 *Ibid*, p. xxiv. It is noteworthy, in view of what has already been written here, that Fenollosa and S. Bing were acquainted with each other. Bing's collection of Japanese prints was exhibited in Boston in 1894. In the spring of 1896, en route to Japan, Fenollosa went to Paris and made a visit to Bing's shop, "L'Art Nouveau." (Chisolm, *Fenollosa*, pp. 130-131).
- 5 Ernest Fenollosa, "The Significance of Oriental Art," *The Knight Errant* (1892) I: 65-70. Cited by Clay Lancaster, "Synthesis: The Artistic Theory of Fenollosa and Dow," *Art Journal*, XXVIII (Spring, 1969): 287.
- 6 Dow, *Composition*, p. 5.
- 7 For an account of Dow's Ipswich school, where he directed *all* of his students to affect "a primitive state of mind," to use the "found" designs of nature, and to make serious contributions to the arts and crafts, see Moffat, pp. 92-103.
- 8 Mabel Key, "A New System of Art Education, Arranged and Directed by Arthur W. Dow," *Brush and Pencil* (August, 1899) 4: 258-270.
- 9 For more detailed information on all of these facts see Moffatt, pp. 90-91, 144-145.
10. On this topic, see Morton Hunt, "How the Mind Works," *The New York Times Magazine*, (January 24, 1982): 31.

- ¹¹ For this information I am again indebted to William Homer's 1972 interview with O'Keeffe.
- ¹² Dow, *Composition*, p. 44.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, p. 38.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 53.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 100.
- ¹⁶ This partial translation of Blanc's *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (1867) was made by Kate Newell Doggett (Chicago, 1879). It was a staple in art schools across America, and O'Keeffe, diligent young art student that she was, must have been familiar with its precepts. It should also be stressed that Blanc's *Grammaire* (which contained the full spectrum of Old Master findings on the expressive powers of color, value and line) was given deeply respectful, if cloaked, attention by the early architects of Modernism: Van Gogh (*The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* . Ed. by Mark Roskill, New York: Atheneum, 1970): 218, 240; Gauguin (Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and The Impressionist Circle* . Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1970: 266-267); Cézanne (Christopher Gray, *Cubist Aesthetic Theories*, p. 49; and Seurat (William Innes Homer, *Seurat and the Science of Painting*. Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1964: 29-36, 208-217.) Harmony was regarded as one of the chief ends of art in 19th century art theory. Nevertheless, Blanc's unchanging and perennially radical thesis was that the formal elements of a picture should always be adjusted to the emotions the artist wished to evoke in the spectator. In other words, expression first, concepts of unity second. Like the Post-Impressionists, Matisse also embraced this well-known attitude of Blanc's, even though he expressed it differently: "Those who work in an affected style, deliberately turning their backs on nature, are in error — an artist must recognize that when he uses his reason, his picture is an artifice and that when he paints, he must feel that he is copying nature — and even when he consciously departs from nature, he must do it with the conviction that it is only the better to interpret her." (quoted in Alfred Barr, *Matisse: His Art and His Public* . New York: MOMA, 1966: 122.) As Linda Nochlin has rightly written, Blanc's mid-nineteenth century compendium "holds, in suspension as it were, all the separate elements which will, or have already, given rise to the divergent and, by definition, more limited, stylish 'isms' of the 19th and 20th centuries." (*Realism*, England: Penguin, 1981: 240.)
- ¹⁷ Blanc, *Grammar*, p. 169.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 147.
- ¹⁹ Blanc's famous chromatic color rose (which Gauguin valued enough to copy into his notebook *Vers et Prose*) originated from a color wheel devised in 1852 by J. Ziegler, and Dow referred all his students to Albert

H. Munsell's *A Color Notation* (1905) for working out their problems in color scheming. (*Composition*, pp. 100-110.)

²⁰ Blanc, *Grammar*, p. 168.

²¹ For an account of this crisis, see Moffatt, pp. 117-119.

²² In fact, during 1914-1915, O'Keeffe took Charles J. Martin's course in "Modernist Painting" at CTC — in which colored chalks were used to develop "expression" — but only after the student had first rendered a symmetrical design to contain the color. For a description of this course, see Arthur W. Dow, "New Art Work at Columbia University" in *Proceedings of the Eastern Art Teachers' Association* (April 1916): 165.

²³ Arthur Wesley Dow papers, AAA, Roll No. 1033, frame 1310.

²⁴ *Ibid*, Frames 1322-1324.

²⁵ *Ibid*, Frames 1325-1326.

²⁶ See Dow's statement to this effect in *Courses in Color Printing and the Arts of the Book*, Teachers College, Columbia University pamphlet, 1915.

²⁷ For a discussion of Dow's own woodcuts, see Moffatt, pp. 65-78. There is one known O'Keeffe woodcut extant, *Lady with Red Hair*, c. 1910 (linoleum block print 7 1/2 x 7 inches). Reproduced in *Georgia O'Keeffe: Works on Paper* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1985): 20.

²⁸ Her letters of the period testify to a certain impatience with "Pa Dow", and the flattering students in his color printing class. (See O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, Feb., no date, 1916.)

²⁹ Kandinsky: "The strife of colours ... these make up [the] harmony [of our age]. The composition arising from this harmony is a mingling of colour and form, each with a separate existence, but each blended into a common life, each with a separate existence, but each blended into a common life which is called a picture by the force of inner need." (*TASH*, p. 86) Matisse: "My choice of colors does not rest on any scientific theory; it is based on observation and feeling, on the very nature of experience." ("Notes of a Painter", reprinted in Barr, p. 121.)

³⁰ Dow, *Composition*, p. 44.

³¹ Since a final catalogue raisonné does not yet exist, the numbers in each classification must remain provisional, but it is the reasonably accurate ratios between themes and motifs which are of major interest here. Too infrequent for inclusion are O'Keeffe's (largely experimental) nudes, portraits and animals.

- 32 Dow, *Composition*, p. 62.
- 33 *Ibid*, p. 23.
- 34 Quoted in Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, p. 116.
- 35 Georgia Engelhard Cromwell, whose mother, Agnes, was one of Stieglitz's two sisters, and who became O'Keeffe's young friend during the increasingly difficult Lake George summers, has said that during the early 'twenties all O'Keeffe wanted was "for Stieglitz to hold her hand and tell her she was good." Interview with me, 12 March 1980, Unterseen (Interlaken), Switzerland.
- 36 See Lowe, p. 310.
- 37 Cromwell interview (1980).
- 38 Dow, *Composition*, p. 50.
- 39 Dow, *Theory and Practice of Teaching Art*, p. 10.
- 40 See Patterson Sims, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, p. 19.
- 41 Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, p. 115.
- 42 For recent evidence on the numerous studies Kandinsky made for each one of his Improvizations, see E.J. Carmean, *Kandinsky, The Improvizations*, flyer catalogue for the National Gallery of Art, 1981.
- 43 Kandinsky, *TASH*, pp. 72-73.
- 44 In Sadler's translation (p. 87) "veiling" is described as "legitimate and illegitimate combinations of colors, contrasts of various colors, the over-painting of one color with another, the definition of colored surfaces by boundaries of various forms, the over-stepping of these boundaries ... all these open great vistas of artistic opportunity."
- 45 *Ibid*, pp. 64-65.
- 46 Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, Sept. 27, 1916: "Where did you do [them] ... the pod of stuff standing quite erect and without assistance - near the other shape - is the one I call cucumber. It's rather self evident in meaning - I've known it always - but as art (Dow's darn art) its O.K. - very good ... [Does a tiny sketch of "Blue No. 4" and describes it as "very beautiful"] ... Where did you keep the rest of yourself while you were doing it? It's right. I wouldn't like one line different. There are dozens almost like it in this bunch - I wonder if this came first or last." YCAL.

- 47 See the 1917 Stieglitz installation photograph published in Homer, p. 241.
- 48 Kandinsky, *TASH*, pp. 75-76.
- 49 W.H. Wright, "The Future of Painting," *The Freeman* (22 Nov. 1922): 256.
- 50 Dow, *Composition*, p. 16.
- 51 Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, Dec. 21, 1916. YCAL.
- 52 This photograph, apparently unpublished, is titled "G.O'Keeffe: A Portrait with Watercolor Box" (1918). NGA, O'K, no. 83.
- 53 Stieglitz, *Camera Notes*, (July 1897) 1:3.
- 54 Hinton, "Individuality - Some Suggestions for The Pictorial Worker" (1899), reprinted in Bunnell, *A Photographic Vision*, p. 76. Stieglitz published Hinton's articles in *Camera Work*, Nos. 4 and 5, and two Hinton photographs are in *CW II* (July, 1905).
- 55 Leo Katz, "Dimensions in Photography", *The Complete Photographer*, 4, issue 21 (1942): 1342.
- 56 Stieglitz, "A Plea for Art Photography in America," *Photographic Mosaics* 28, (1892): 136.
- 57 Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography", *Scribner's Magazine* 26 (Nov. 1899), reprinted in *Photography: Essays and Images*, ed. by Beaumont Newhall (New York: MOMA, 1980): 166.
- 58 Stieglitz, "Simplicity in Composition," from *The Modern Way of Picture Making* (Rochester, New York: Eastman Kodak Co., 1905): 161-64.
- 59 Dow, *Composition*, p. 38.
- 60 *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 61 *Ibid*, p. 39.
- 62 *Ibid*, p. 49.
- 63 *Ibid*, p. 38.
- 64 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 65 For a discussion of Dow's influence on Smith's work, see Parsons, *To All Believers*, unpaginated.

- ⁶⁶ The opening sentence reads "Photography is a flat space art, as is drawing, painting or printing." (*Platinum Print*, Dec. 1913, Vol. 1, No. 2: 6) For Weber's admiring description of Dow's class methods, see Holgar Cahill, *Max Weber* (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1930): 5.
- ⁶⁷ Several of Dow's untitled photographs (landscapes and seascapes) are at the George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography, Rochester, New York. His interest in photography may be traced back to 1894.
- ⁶⁸ For a recent examination of the work and life of Clarence H. White, see *Symbolism of Light* (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1977.)
- ⁶⁹ Although Käsebier studied portrait painting at the Pratt Institute for four years, beginning in 1889, she had already left for Germany to pursue photography by the time Dow arrived there in 1895. For a summary of what is presently known about Käsebier's career, see W.I. Homer, *A Pictorial Heritage: The Photographs of Gertrude Käsebier* (Wilmington: The Delaware Art Museum, 1978.)
- ⁷¹ Arthur W. Dow, "Mrs. Gertrude Käsebier's Portrait Photographs," *Camera Notes* 3 (July 1899): 22-23.
- ⁷¹ See Stieglitz "Our Illustrations", *Camera Notes* 3 (July 1899): 24.
- ⁷² *Alvin Langdon Coburn Photographer*, an autobiography edited by Helmut and Alison Gernsheim (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1978): 22. Moffatt remarks à propos of this statement, "It is rather surprising that Coburn should in later years place Dow's influence upon his work even above that of Käsebier, Steichen and Demachy. But, as with Max Weber... it was Coburn's discovery of a new language of art under Dow that made all the difference." (*Arthur Wesley Dow*, pp. 98-99.) Both Käsebier and Coburn used the soft-focus lens — which greatly facilitated the control of unwanted details and flattened space — in their efforts to compose by shapes and Notan patterning in the Dow manner. For a detailed examination of Coburn's photographs vis-à-vis Dow's principles, see Mike Weaver, *Alvin Langdon Coburn: Symbolist Photographer, 1882-1966*. New York: Aperture Foundation Inc., 1986.
- ⁷³ Caffin, "Some Prints by Alvin Langdon Coburn," *Camera Work* 6 (April, 1904): 17-19. These two extremely Dow-type compositions were also singled out by Sadakichi Hartmann in "The Photo-Secession Exhibition at the Carnegie Art Galleries, Pittsburgh, Pa.", in the same issue of *Camera Work*. "[Coburn] has begun to see objects, insignificant in themselves, in a big way. His 'Ipswich Bridge' is one of the strongest pictures in the exhibition. He displays a decided feeling for the decorative arrangement of masses, and his composition, strongly influenced by the Japanese, via Dow, is at times exceedingly clever, as shown in 'The Dragon'." (p. 49).

- 74 "She composes [her figures] with the surroundings, and makes the whole composition a beautiful pattern of line and form and color, contriving at the same time that this pattern shall help elucidate the character ... her dark passages have a resonate, sonorous quality; elsewhere the effects of light are flute-like in their tremulous purity, or the impression upon one may be of the vibration of stringed instruments, and all are fused into a harmony of tone and feelings." (Mrs. Gertrude Käsebier and the Artistic-Commercial Portrait", p. 64, p. 81.)
- 75 *Ibid*, p. 69.
- 76 *Camera Work* 13 (1906): 43.
- 77 Dow, *Composition*, p. 54.
- 78 A.S. Horr, "Sadakichi Hartmann as a Photographic Writer," *Photo Beacon* 16 (Oct. 1904), p. 308. Quoted in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre*, p. 5.
- 79 Hartmann, *The Valiant Knights*, p. 12.
- 80 For some examples of Hartman's profound knowledge of Japanese composition see his *Landscape and Figure Composition*. New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, New York, 1910 Arno Press reprint, *The Literature of Photography* series (1973): 37-56, p. 75.
- 81 See Hartmann's shortlived, avant-garde magazine *The Art Critic*, published during 1893.
- 82 In his 1898 essay on Stieglitz's photography, Hartmann makes this revealing comment "'On the Seine' is a tribute to the undeniable truth that the future of art lies largely in decoration." (*Valiant Knights*, p. 163.)
- 83 Hartmann, "On Composition", *Camera Notes* 4 (April 1901): 62.
- 84 Hartmann, *Landscape and Figure Composition*, p. 36.
- 85 Hartmann, "On Composition", p. 61.
- 86 Hartmann, *Landscape and Figure Composition*, p. 51.
- 87 Hartmann, "A Plea For Straight Photography", *American Amateur Photography* 16 (Mar. 1904) reprinted in *The Valiant Knights*, pp. 108-114.
- 88 On the subject of the Old Masters' centricity see Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Center: A Study of Composition in The Visual Arts*. (Berkeley: University of California Press Ltd., 1982): 10-41, 71-91. During his student years in Germany Stieglitz's favorite Old Masters

were Rubens, Van Dyke, Tintoretto, Michelangelo. See W. Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁹ S. Hartmann, *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 23.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁹¹ See Chapter One, pp. 13-14. Also, for a discussion of the putative Cubist composition in Stieglitz's 1915 photographs from the rear window of 291, see Pultz and Scallen, pp. 20-21.

⁹² Rosenfeld, "The Boy in The Dark Room," *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait*. Ed. by Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld and Harold Rugg. (New York: The Literary Guild, 1934): 74, 85-86.

⁹³ Naomi Rosenblum, barely mentions Dow in connection with Strand. She stresses, instead, the importance of Lewis W. Hine's teaching (at the Ethical Culture School) and Stieglitz's criticism (at 291) on Strand's earliest photography, pp. 23-27, pp. 48-54.

⁹⁴ See David Travis, *Photography Rediscovered: American Photographs 1900-1930*. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980): 151.

⁹⁵ Rosenblum, p. 46.

⁹⁶ "... The picture, the plan, and the pattern are alike ... each is a group of synthetically related processes. Abstract design is the primer of painting." (*Photo-Era* 5, May 1913, p. 235.) Further proof is furnished by an ad in the front section of this issue (no pagination) extolling *Composition* as "A valuable aid to the photographer in composing his pictures."

⁹⁷ Rosenblum, p. 56.

⁹⁸ A. L. Coburn. "Think of the joy of doing something which it would be impossible to classify, or to tell which was top and which was bottom." ("The Future of Pictorial Photography", *Photograms of the Year 1916*. London: Hazell, Watson, and Viney Ltd., 1916: 23.)

⁹⁹ Reproduced in Norman, p. 146.

¹⁰⁰ The back of this photograph, with Stieglitz's autograph note, is reproduced in *Photography: Essays & Images*, ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York: MOMA, 1980): 216.

¹⁰¹ Reproduced side by side in Sarah E. Greenough, "From the American Earth: Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Apples", *Art Journal* (Spring, 1981): 52-53.

- ¹⁰²See Dow, *Composition*, p. 25, and *Theory and Practice of Teaching Art*, p. 8.
- ¹⁰³Stieglitz "Is Photography a Failure?" *The New York Sun* (14 March, 1922): 20.
- ¹⁰⁴See Moffatt, pp. 105-111.
- ¹⁰⁵*Camera Work*, No. 21 January 1908. pp. 17-18.
- ¹⁰⁶S. Hartmann, *Landscape and Figure Composition*, p. 120.
- ¹⁰⁷See Weston's letters to Stieglitz, beginning 7-24-39, reprinted in *Photo-Notes* (Spring, 1949): 15. The photographs Stieglitz chose for reproduction in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* were "New York City" (1931) and "Georgia O'Keeffe" (1918).
- ¹⁰⁸(E. Wn.) "Photographic Art", *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1941, Vol. 17: 798-799.
- ¹⁰⁹On this topic, see William M. Ivins Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, Mass; The M.I.T. Press, 1953): 158-180.
- ¹¹⁰Alfred Stieglitz "Our Illustrations," p. 47.
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CHAPTER FIVE

291 PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY: ABSTRACTION AND/OR OBJECTIVITY

Just as we stand before the door of a new social era, so we stand in art too before a new medium of expression—the true medium (abstraction).

Stieglitz to Heinrich Kühn (1912).¹

Photography has helped art to realize consciously its own nature, which is not to mirror the external world but to make real, by plastic means, internal mental states ... the camera cannot reproduce a mental fact. It can only make real the immaterial or emotional fact: so that art and photography are opposites.

Francis Picabia (interview) reprinted in *Camera Work* (1913).²

The desire of modern plastic expression has been to create for itself an objectivity.

Marius de Zayas (1915).³

After 1912, abstraction was to become both the dividing line and the common denominator between painting and photography for the major 291 artists and critics. To perceive the significance of this paradoxical fact, it is important to be clear about what the *Camera Work* writers, and especially Stieglitz himself, meant by abstraction. It was in fact an extremely oscillating term, as was its frequently designated opposite “objectivity.” Since both of these key definitions cannot be considered apart from 291’s active endeavors to distinguish creatively

between painting and photography, it will be necessary to summarize the last part of this cultural debate first. Major shifts of attitude will be noted chronologically, and in their original statements, the better to disclose the infrastructure of Stieglitz's thought, which O'Keeffe was to absorb from him during a—perhaps the—watershed period of her art.

291 Distinctions Between Painting and Photography: An Overview⁴

Since Stieglitz is the lodestar for this consequential body of opinion, it seems proper to begin with several of his own statements. They present most of the running arguments in the venerable issue of photography's validation as a fine art.⁵ Not only do they chart the wide-ranging eclecticism of his entire generative aesthetic, they are consistently true to his earliest article of Romantic⁶/Symbolist faith: emotion *must* precede form.

By declaring in the first issue of *Camera Notes* (1897) that his permanent allegiance was to pictures that intended “the development of an organic idea, the evolution of an inward principle,”⁷ Stieglitz not only evokes the dicta of Aurier and Kahn (“The Idea alone is everything”), he attaches photography strategically to the Romantic ideal of “originality,” thus furthering the cause of autonomous fine print.

In his landmark essay, *Pictorial Photography* of 1899, Stieglitz pays just tribute to Dr. P.H. Emerson by this carefully selected quote from the latter's *Naturalistic Photography*: “The originality of a work of art refers to the originality of the thing expressed and the way it is expressed, whether it be in poetry, photography, or painting.”⁸ Stieglitz then disclosed his own creative answer to that perennial dispute at the core of photography as an art practice: the machine versus the hand/mind. He defines artistic photography as “the feeling and inspiration of the

artist to which is added *afterward* the purely technical knowledge.” And because “it has never been possible to establish a scientifically correct scale of values between the highlights and the deep shadows”, he concludes that “in proper hands print-making is essentially plastic in its nature.”⁹

In 1901, Stieglitz was quoted by Charles H. Caffin as saying (and not for the last time) that “unless photography has its own possibilities of expression, separate from those of the other arts, it is merely a process, not an art; but granted that it is an art, reliance should be placed unreservedly upon those possibilities, that they may be made to yield the fullest results.”¹⁰ Even though it has a “proto-modernist” ring,¹¹ this statement is best understood in terms of Stieglitz’s early commitment to the Arts and Crafts movement, and to Art Nouveau—since both stressed the independence of the means and materials of art. He would, however, make increasingly rigorous investigations into the essential qualities of a photograph.

Late in 1912, Stieglitz wrote George D. Pratt, extolling the “vital force” of Post-Impressionism: “Men like Matisse and Picasso, and a few others are giants. Their vision is anti-photographic ... It is this anti-photography in their mental attitude and in their work that I am using in order to emphasize the meaning of photography.”¹² The letter documents an early stage in 291’s growing efforts to consider contemporary photography as independent from painting. By his new term “antiphotography” Stieglitz apparently meant using subject matter primarily to render formal changes (as Matisse and Picasso were doing), although it would later come to be linked more specifically with abstraction—as will be shown. The actual genesis for this term may be a *Camera Work* statement of 1910: “The Photo-Secession can be said now to stand for those artists who secede from the photographic attitude toward representation of form.”¹³

In his 1922 newspaper article *Is Photography a Failure?*, Stieglitz defines the nature of a photograph simply as “Anything that is drawn by the rays of light, and which is so chemically treated as to be fixed and permanent.”¹⁴ Predictably, he takes basic issue with Emerson’s opinion that “Painting alone is our Master,”¹⁵ contending, instead, that “If a photographer has the æsthetic perception ... he can get the spirit of it through the camera as well as the painter can through paint.” Nevertheless, he employs Emerson’s didactic language to help form some of his own most cherished beliefs.

Emerson:

A work of Art is ... an expression by means of pictures of what is beautiful, and the points to gauge in a picture are to notice what a man wishes to express, and how well he has expressed it ... A photographic artist strives for the same end, and in two points only does he fall short of the painter — in colour, and in the ability to render so accurately the relative values, although this is, to a great extent, compensated for by the tone of the picture.¹⁶

Stieglitz:

The criticism is made that no photograph can be made beautiful as an oil painting because it is lacking in colors. This is ... a lack of understanding of the underlying laws of beauty ... the attacks on photography [came because] the “machine”, which the camera was dubbed, [is] opposed to the handwork of painters and sculptors. Yet this “machine” can negate 99 percent of what was and is still called painting.¹⁷

Emerson:

The photograph is not art, but a mechanically recorded reflection of Nature ... whose results are sometimes more beautiful than Art.¹⁸

Stieglitz:

Photography is not an art. Neither is painting nor sculpture, literature nor music. They are only different media for the individual to express his aesthetic feelings; the tools he uses in his creative work ... [the photographer] who knows how to really photograph [can] channel the impulses of human beings and register the world directly.¹⁹

Although little more than an amalgam of fragmentary arguments, *Is Photography a Failure?* is nonetheless an important article to mark. First, because these beliefs, as expressed, were such fruitful ones for Stieglitz himself, and second, because they enabled him to inspire painters as well as photographers — O’Keeffe among them.

In 1923, Stieglitz wrote Seligmann that

Photography can catch the essence of the moment. And if the ... photographer is synthetical in his choice of the moment he does something which the painter cannot do as well.—He achieves a sense of reality, an exactness of reality, a different kind of reality than the painter can put down when he synthesizes. What the photographer achieves is not greater. It is different in kind. *It appeals more to the consciousness of today.*— Something like that is more to the point than the idea of line, for the photographer who works in the sense of the above works with relationship of spaces achieving line, etc., etc. — *In short he deals with the problems related to those of the painter — the basic urge towards “art” being identical or very nearly related.* (Italics added.)²⁰

This off-the-cuff letter recapitulates many of 291’s most cherished and productive distinctions between painting and photography. The operative word is “synthetical.” Its use here by Stieglitz not only assumes authorship as a given in

photography, it attempts to cancel (in a philosophical sense) the negative aspects of the machine with regard to the hand and the mind.

Unmentioned, so far, is Stieglitz's potent and idiosyncratic formalism which seems to have developed mainly (if unevenly) out of his own mixed inheritance of Romanticism, Symbolism and Modernism — coming to full flower in the work he did between the mid 'teens and early 'twenties. The genus formalist photography uses the medium's most distinctive elements in order to create images that valorize compositional, spatial and tonal elements rather than subject matter.²² Stieglitz's brand of formalism includes this definition easily, but it has other characteristics as well. Even after 291 had declared painting and photography to be separate mediums in 1913, Stieglitz continued to be fascinated by the formal elements which joined them as pictures — such as analogic composition, texture, solidity and planes. His penchant for prescribed forms also showed up in the shape-connective way he hung all of his shows, as the known installation photographs clearly attest. Nevertheless form and content were regarded as identical by Stieglitz. ("Shapes, as such, mean nothing to me, unless I happen to be feeling something within, of which an equivalent appears in outer form."²³) Last but not least, he believed implicitly in the spiritual transcendence and revelation capabilities of the work of art — photographs, of course, included. (The following statements may be regarded as almost classically formalist: "'Songs of the Sky — Secrets of the Skies as revealed by my Camera' are ... direct revelations of a man's world in the sky — documents of eternal relationship."²⁴ And, "What the artist is trying to express ... what we call a masterpiece, which lives, expresses what people see today, plus what people *will* see in the future."²⁵) Reliable witnesses to Stieglitz's relentless talk in his galleries, from Steichen to Seligmann, have all stressed his democratic approach to viewing works of art: i.e., an immediacy of response through the eyes rather than through the intellect — anyone, even children, can do

it. (“Art begins where thinking ends.”²⁶) That the aim and value of this essentially formalist ethic often impinged on the choices made by the creative act itself seems not to have been an intellectual problem for Stieglitz. Indeed, he not only had a deep understanding of the degree to which art lives in its response, he appears to have profoundly absorbed Tolstoy’s celebrated concept of the artist:

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling — that is the activity of art.²⁷

Whether Stieglitz’s knowledge of this passage came first-hand from Tolstoy or from mentions in other sources, such as Fry’s 1909 *An Essay in Aesthetics*, may never be known. It should be noted in this context that Stieglitz was apt to read books and essays to confirm his own personal experience, rather than to discover new ideas.²⁸ In his later years, Stieglitz liked to say with pride that he had gotten his “philosophy” from living, and then when he finally did take up “the philosophers” he found they had arrived at conclusions “very similar” to his own.²⁹

Although the voices of many of Stieglitz’s most important colleagues and *Camera Work* contributors have grown faint, some of their efforts to distinguish fruitfully between painting and photography deserve fresh consideration— even though they are not consistently coherent. (In fairness, the topic is almost as problematic as it was in Stieglitz’s day—as the many current theories and heresies attest.)

Nobody knew exactly what photography *was* — or should be. Conventional wisdom held (then as now) that the camera “make[s] a picture of whatever it sees,” as Fox Talbot first observed in 1844;³⁰ and that the photographic process is inherently modern,

mainly because its formal potentials, functions and themes were all there from the beginning.³¹

Among the most vehement, thoughtful, and interesting opinions on the nature of photography to appear in *Camera Work* are those by Maurice Maeterlinck (1906)³²; Henri Matisse (1908)³³; Roland Rood (1908)³⁴; Eduard Steichen (1908)³⁵; Charles Caffin (1908, 1909)³⁶; Sadakichi Hartmann (1909, 1911)³⁷; Paul Haviland (1910)³⁸; and A.L. Coburn (1911).³⁹

In 1912, Caffin declared that “Photography is powerless to continue its rivalry with painting.”⁴⁰ But it was not until 1913, as Stieglitz’s correspondence and other published writings have clearly shown, that 291 came finally to designate painting and photography as opposites. Chief among the factors responsible for this timing were the Armory Show, and the well publicized arrival from France of Francis Picabia and his wife Gabrielle Buffet to spread their conviction that “pure” abstraction was the natural tendency of modern thought.

The *Camera Work* articles written early in 1913 by de Zayas (drawing on discussions with Stieglitz) are frequently and justly cited as important documents in the new effort to separate photography from painting. In the first one, “Photography”, de Zayas claimed photography to be “the plastic verification of a fact.”⁴¹ And in the second, “Photography and Artistic Photography,” he divided the two by arguing that only the former can present reality so that forms express their own spirit naturally (“pure objectivity”):

The artist photographer [Steichen] in his work envelops objectivity with an idea, veils the object with the subject. *The photographer [Stieglitz] expresses, so far as he is able, pure objectivity.* The aim of the first is pleasure; the aim of the second, knowledge. The one does not destroy the other ...[for] one is *the means by which man tries to bring the natural expression of Form to the cognition of the mind.* (Italics added.)⁴²

Another document important to the history of this separation of the two mediums is Hutchins Hapgood's "A Paris Painter," based on a newspaper interview with Picabia. It was written three days after the Armory Show opened, and reprinted in the same issue of *Camera Work* as de Zaya's second article. In summarizing the "spirit" of Picabia's words, Hapgood recorded them as follows:

Photography has helped art to realize consciously its own nature, which is not to mirror the external world, but to make real by plastic means, internal mental states. The artist sees that photography can reproduce actuality better than any artist can, and so he sees that he must have a field to himself. The camera cannot reproduce a mental fact. Logically, pure art cannot reproduce a material fact. It can only make real the immaterial or emotional fact. So that art and photography are opposites ... The attempt, made by most artists to reproduce the third dimension of space is a mistake, as it is only a trick. The canvas has only two dimensions and this natural limitation should be observed ... There should be no perspective in painting.⁴³ (Italics added.)

The early history of Picabia and 291 deserves a short retelling here, not only for the specific topic now under discussion but because of the seminal influence Picabia had on Stieglitz's aesthetic values and methodology, and later, to a very different degree, on O'Keeffe's. It must surely have been of interest to those at 291 that Picabia was a grand-nephew of the celebrated Dr. Charcot, with whom Freud had studied hypnotism in Paris during 1885-1886.

Stieglitz and Picabia

Picabia met both Stieglitz and de Zayas within a month of his arrival in New York on January 20, 1913. The three apparently got on well from the first —

personally and aesthetically.⁴⁴ Picabia's on-the-spot "New York Studies" (many totally abstract) were exhibited at 291 just two days after Stieglitz's own photographs of the city were taken down, and Picabia's show was followed three days later by one of de Zaya's abstract caricatures. The aesthetic links between these exhibitions were calculated, multiple, and graphic. Moreover, Stieglitz made it a point to inform the *New York Sun's* critic Samuel Swift (among others) that the American ground had already been well prepared for Picabia's advanced work and idea by Dove's earlier independent abstractions, and by Marin's futurist watercolors of New York, exhibited at 291 just before the Armory Show. Swift's faithful article to this effect was reprinted shortly afterward in *Camera Work*. Part of it follows to underline Stieglitz's thinking at this juncture, and to illustrate the perspicacity and effectiveness of his proselytizing methods — since O'Keeffe would herself learn and profit well from them.

Arthur Dove, the radical young American painter ... came into 291 Fifth Avenue, while the new studies by Picabia were being placed upon the walls ... They conveyed to him as definite a meaning in terms of emotion, as any formula might have done that had been already accepted the world over. Why? *Because Dove himself, working independently, as Mr. Stieglitz will tell you, and evolving these symbols out of his inner consciousness, utilized similar modes of expression a year ago ...* And while Mr. Dove was looking at Picabia's cryptograms the Frenchman was confronted without warning with what Dove, of whom it is probable that he never heard, had done. *Recognition followed ... quickly.*⁴⁵ (Italics added.)

Reprinted, as well, was Swift's earlier article on Marin's fourth 291 exhibition.

[The New York series] is simply a new version, personal to the artist, of the familiar truth that art's business is not necessarily to present facts ... It is an approach in a way to the sister art of music, in which definite meanings may not be

attached to the materials out of which one build his composition ... *Marin has come near ...to depending upon pure pattern for the expression of his thought.*"⁴⁶ (Italics added)

And in the same issue, P.B. Haviland urged the comparison of Marin's and Picabia's "newest and most advanced" renditions of New York with Stieglitz's photographs of the same subject over the last 20 years in order to afford "a clearer understanding of the place and purpose of the two media ... Naturally, in view of the Marin and Stieglitz New York pictures, the interest in Picabia's abstract expression of New York was greatly intensified."⁴⁷ To add significantly to his point, Haviland quoted the 291 catalogue statements of Marin ("It is this moving of me that I try to express...") and of Picabia:

Art is one of the means by which men communicate with each other and objectivize the deepest contact of their personality with nature ... expression means objectivity otherwise contact between beings would become impossible, language would lose all meaning. This new expression in painting, is 'the objectivity of a subjectivity.' We can make ourselves better understood by comparing it to music.⁴⁸

Much of the astonishing (and immediate) æsthetic compatibility between Stieglitz and Picabia may be accounted for by Stieglitz's ease in speaking French, and by their common grounding in Symbolist theories of correspondence.⁴⁹ Not only did Picabia quote Gustave Kahn directly in his 291 exhibition statement ('The objectivity of a subjectivity'), he tried consistently to make tangible "the idea" by setting the mind against the senses, the inner against the outer. He also used analogies with music to create universals out of his own personal moods.

Gabrielle Buffet carried the old Symbolist notion of "musicality" a step further. In her article for *Camera Work* titled "Modern Art and The Public" (written to clarify her husband's difficult "Preface"), she asserted that

The abstract idea in pure line and pure color is conveyed to our understanding more directly than in the musical form, for ... the deepest meaning of a musical composition will escape, in part, the comprehension of those listeners who are not educated in music.⁵⁰

For Picabia, as for Stieglitz, New York City was the epitome of the modern. And Modernism as a new pictorial language was, of course, an already familiar (if distasteful) idea to the readers of *Camera Work*. But Picabia was arguing for theories even more extreme than those of Marin and Dove: an art with no subject matter, no perspective, and no recognizable objects. In a word (Picabia's own), "abstractionism."⁵¹ For Picabia, abstractionism had replaced Cubism as the latest thing in art. In a 1913 *New York Times* interview, he stated that the Cubists were as intent in producing facsimiles of their original models as the Old Masters. "But my idea is not the same. You will find no trace of the original in my pictures."⁵²

Out of the sixteen watercolors and drawings exhibited by Picabia in his first one-man show at 291, ten were titled *New York*. Apparently done in his room at the Hotel Brevoort, they are among his earliest "abstractionist" experiments — despite the addition of titles. About these titles, a seeming contradiction to "pure" abstraction, Gabrielle Buffet wrote, "If [Picabia] calls some of his recent watercolors 'New York', or 'Negro Songs' it is only because he did them when stimulated by his impression of the city, or by the bizarre rhythms of ragtime."⁵² The whole point was to be "subjective" — meaning abstract. As Picabia himself put it, "The way in which we artists can best express what we feel is by the purely subjective, by the abstract."⁵³ Because this statement squares quite neatly with Stieglitz's own that "contemporary art consists of the abstract (without subject),"⁵⁴ the question arises as to what he actually picked up from Picabia. Impetus, for one

thing, and example for another. Nobody had yet said “I improvise my pictures as a musician improvises music”⁵⁵ and then done it almost under Stieglitz’s nose. As Charles Caffin observed, Picabia’s method “starts with a few forms, colored according to the key of the impression he wishes to create and combines and recombines these in a variety of relations until he has produced a harmonic composition.”⁵⁶ Did Stieglitz find this essentially two-part system of composition close enough to his own to take new inspiration from it? This is hard to prove, although it is highly probable that he did so — judging from the titles he gave his earliest cloud photographs: *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* (or, *Clouds in Ten Movements*) in 1922, and *Songs of the Sky* in 1923. Kandinsky may also be presumed to have been a root influence here, since Stieglitz almost titled the 1923 series “Music of the Spheres.”⁵⁷ This pseudo-scientific phrase was quite fashionable at the time for its occult (theosophical) connotations, and, as Stieglitz undoubtedly knew, Kandinsky had used it in his famous 1913 autobiography *Reminiscences* to signify creation—both artistic and cosmic.⁵⁸ Perhaps the motivating force behind the use of this phrase in *this* instance, however, was Claude Bragdon, the architect and painter. Bragdon was the author of several books on theosophy between 1910-1930, and a friend and neighbor of Stieglitz and O’Keeffe’s in the Shelton Hotel. It is known that they met together quite frequently during 1923, and for some years thereafter.⁵⁹

That Picabia himself was familiar with Kandinsky’s theories, probably through his contacts with La Section d’Or, is certain - particularly the idea that a work of art must be slowly deciphered through clues in order to be meaningful to the spectator. (Early examples of Picabia’s experiments along this line are the anagrammatic titles he invented for his 1913 paintings *Udnie [jeune fille américaine; danse]* and *Edtaonisl [Ecclésiastique]*.)—also based on memories of America.⁶⁰

Although Stieglitz does not mention Picabia in “How I Came to Photograph Clouds” (1923), these photographs, and the Equivalents to follow, were clearly intended to be “improvized music” pictures — abstract forms of his feelings — as were the Picabias exhibited at 291. By Stieglitz’s own later account, the Equivalents were not attained by a preconceived formula — nor were they “previsualized,” to use Weston’s 1922 term.⁶¹ The significance of a conception of a photograph frequently became clear to Stieglitz only after looking at the print.⁶² Certainly de Zayas had already contributed much to this working system, since it was he who, in 1910, first perceived the intrinsic Modernism in *The Steerage*, a photograph which Stieglitz actually took in 1907.⁶³

Judging simply from the visual evidence, it seems likely that Stieglitz experimented with being an “abstractionist,” in Picabia’s sense of the term, in at least three different series of photographs before he finally came to the cloud Equivalents. First, in the 1915-1916 camera views out of the back window of 291. This series has been labelled “Cubist” because of the photographer’s presumed intention to concentrate on analytic construction, on the planes and angles so pertinent to American understanding of Cubism at the time.⁶⁴ But it, and the two other series mentioned below, would seem instead to be a patient exploration, through photography, of Picabia’s *newer* methodology: negation of perspective (by compressing or flattening space); denial of subject matter (clued by the dry, almost scientifically precise titles); and a consistent effort to cause all-over patterns of ambiguous forms (by judicious cutting of shapes with the lens, and by accentuating certain built-in optical distortions, particularly those caused by snow, darkness, and artificial light).

Second, in the small 4 x 5" series, c. 1916, titled *Shadow[s] on the Lake*.⁶⁵ In *Shadow on the Lake: Self Portrait*, Picabia’s three ‘forbiddens’ are recast in a most unusual (for Stieglitz) and inventive way.⁶⁶ Without the title it would be

almost impossible to identify the photographer's crouched body with the arabesque of his water-distorted shadow—a configuration which acts to divide the picture plane into three triangular forms. And because it is not always clear whether the sun's sparkling rays and flecks of seaweed are on top of the water or reflected on the shallow bottom beneath, pattern and depth are very nearly indistinguishable.

Stieglitz's third experiment in this vein seems to have been with some of the extreme close-ups of O'Keeffe's torso taken in 1919 — particularly the series of two titled "Georgia O'Keeffe, A Portrait: Breasts."⁶⁷ In both these images the frame is completely filled with the surprisingly ambiguous lines and curves made by her upper arms pressing against her breasts. As so often with Stieglitz's most abstract photographs, triangular forms predominate. (For example, in the 1978 book *Georgia O'Keeffe, A Portrait By Alfred Stieglitz*, plate 28, the powerful outer triangle drawn by her arms is echoed by an interior one that is only just suggested by the factual "dots" of her nipples and navel.) This series contains perhaps the most subtle and advanced variations on Picabia's three rules for abstraction ever made by Stieglitz, with the exception of the *Equivalents*. It should be noted here that Stieglitz himself considered his "mature" photography to date from 1918 — when the O'Keeffe portrait was begun in earnest.⁶⁸ And further, that during 1919 O'Keeffe painted some of her own most radical abstractions - in particular *The Black Spot* series, which Picabia may also have influenced, as will be discussed further on.

The blatantly autobiographical character of Picabia's work may have acted as a creative spur to Stieglitz, after his relatively fallow period between 1911 and 1915. And, as Sue Davidson Lowe has recorded, Picabia was a direct influence on the increasingly sexual and scatological discourse used by Stieglitz during the late 'teens and early 'twenties.⁶⁹ She states further that when Picabia came back to New York in 1915, Stieglitz had begun to consider him as a "collaborator."⁷⁰ The

factual history of the Picabia/Stieglitz artistic relationship after 1915 (which includes the founding and demise of *291* magazine, and the brief, but fecund, glory of New York Dada mechanistic mythology) is not really germane to the task at hand, and too recently and well documented for inclusion here.⁷¹

O'Keeffe, Picabia and Matisse

Even if O'Keeffe and Picabia had met — which they apparently never did⁷² — they would have been unable to converse. Picabia could not speak English and, unlike Stieglitz, O'Keeffe did not know French. She was certainly aware, however, of Stieglitz's warm correspondence with Picabia right into the 'twenties — despite the demise of *291* magazine, and the dissolution of his marriage to Gabrielle.⁷³ And she also knew that Stieglitz never lost his faith in Picabia's work and ideas, although some in his circle felt differently—Steichen in particular. (“Picabia very likely is an attempt at expressing the *theory* of modern art but the theory does not express Picabia ... —His pictures are colossally rotten.”⁷⁴) Dove, on the other hand, often drew upon Picabia's work for ideas, starting from 1913, and his later machinist and post-machinist paintings are known to have been an influence on other *291* artists, particularly Schamberg, Sheeler and Demuth.⁷⁵

In 1928, with the encouragement of Marcel Duchamp, Stieglitz presented one last “Picabia Exhibition” at the Intimate Gallery (April 19-May 11). The catalogue essay, by Meraud Michael Guinness, might be said to sum up why Stieglitz kept his old admiration for Picabia's ceaselessly experimental art.

... Picabia has caught and imprisoned in his pictures all the best things in life — spontaneous gaiety, happiness, a fearlessly clear insight into things, the spirit of adventure, of change and of the unexpected that is in the essence of all things that are alive.

He has the courage to express life as he feels it, in complete disregard of all formulas, and he has the courage to change as all life changes. Nothing alive ever stays still; why should a painter invent a formula for himself and then sit down and expect it to last him forever?⁷⁶

With these supporting facts duly noted, it may now be asked when Picabia began to register with O'Keeffe, and which of his many ideas and works she found relative to her artistic needs. Her first acquaintance with his painting was undoubtedly the work reproduced in Eddy, (titled on page 68 as "Dance at The Spring," now known as *Danse à la source I*). Probably more important to her at the time, though, was Eddy's lengthy quotation from "An Interview with François Picabia" in the *New York Tribune*, which included the most nuclear of all Picabia's statements:

I absorb these impressions [of New York]. I am in no hurry to put them on canvas. I let them remain in my brain, and then when the spirit of creation is at flood-tide, I improvise my pictures as a musician improvises music ...Art, art, what is art? ... I do not call [painting nature as she is] art today, because we have outgrown it . It is old, and only the new should live. Creating a picture without models is art.⁷⁷

Were these the words that launched O'Keeffe's first charcoal abstractions? There is no way, of course, to be sure, but the timing fits. And it would therefore seem logical to consider them, at the very least, a conscious reinforcement, or sanction, for her accomplishment that fall of 1915.

As noted earlier, O'Keeffe went to 291 in January of 1915 to see Picabia's three huge 1914 paintings — the zenith of his experiments with total abstraction. (*Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie, C'est de moi qu'il s'agit*, and *Mariage Comique*.) Several of her later paintings suggest that she paid a good deal of visual

attention to their morphology. Specifically, it would seem that her *Black Spot III* (1919)⁷⁸ and *Spring* (c. 1922)⁷⁹ owe much to the right section of Picabia's *C'est de moi qu'il s'agit*.⁸⁰ In particular, his hallmark juxtapositions of thick, straight bisecting lines with swollen biomorphic shapes. Also, it could not have been lost on her acutely modernist eye that many of his entwined plant-like forms (especially in *Je Revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie*) can be read simultaneously as phallic, vulva-like, and phanerogamic.

That she became familiar as well with some of Picabia's abstractionist New York charcoals and watercolors of 1913 is equally certain. A letter from Stieglitz to Arthur Carles tells that Picabia left five of his "New York things [at 291] so we can use them as we see fit."⁸¹ All of them are large, (approximately 555 x 755mm) and all seem to contain multiple-view vestiges of ship's hulls and funnels, church spires, skyscraper towers and even traffic signs. But these are phantom forms, secondary rather than primary images. They are products of his composition-process, and, by his own account, independent from direct observation.⁸² Although there can be no doubt that O'Keeffe used an improvised "musical" method without models, based on her impressions of Art Nouveau, in the early abstractions, she did not stick with this method very consistently or very long. (Neither, of course, did Picabia!) And her own New York "things" (1925-1928) were not "abstractionist," but were abstracted (simplified) from her observations of actual buildings — and sometimes from photographs, as will be discussed. In point of fact, O'Keeffe's painting process was much closer to Matisse than to Picabia — as was her sensibility.⁸³ As Caffin had correctly observed in 1913:

Picabia's method ... is the reverse of Matisse ... the latter's method involves a simplification that strips away as much as possible to the details of objective appearance. Picabia, on the other hand, ...does not precede from the concrete to the

abstraction, but from the abstraction to a spiritual impression of the concrete.⁸⁴

To further the point, O'Keeffe had doubtless read the sober but radical statement made by Matisse in 1913 about the importance of seeking inspiration from the emotions, since it was quoted in full in Eddy:

A true artist ... should not copy the walls, or objects on a table, but he should, above all, express a vision of color, the harmony corresponds to his feeling. And above all, one must be honest with one's self. If one feels no emotion, one should not paint ... While working I never try to think, only to feel.⁸⁵

O'Keeffe has almost never mentioned Matisse in her public statements, but the two best known descriptions of her working processes do (unintentionally) reveal how close many of her basic artistic values were to his. In 1958 she wrote to John I.H. Baur that:

I think I would say I have worked differently at different times ... From experiences of one kind or another shapes and colors come to me very clearly. Sometimes I start in a very realistic fashion and as I go on from one painting to another of the same thing, it becomes simplified till it can be nothing but abstract, but for me it is my reason for painting it, I suppose.⁸⁶

And in 1962 she told Katharine Kuh:

I rarely start anything that isn't pretty clear to me before I start. I know what I'm going to do before I begin, and if there's nothing in my head, I do nothing. Work brings work for me.⁸⁷

To be noted here as well are the documented facts that O'Keeffe saw the first American Matisse show at 291 in 1908,⁸⁸ and later went "often" to see the Matisses exhibited at the Montross Gallery in 1915.⁸⁹ It has already been suggested that Stieglitz actively encouraged and fostered an aesthetic link between Matisse and O'Keeffe (Chapter Three pp. 85-86). Some visual evidence of this doubtless sincere (and shrewd) intention may rest in an unpublished portrait of O'Keeffe, taken by Stieglitz around 1921,⁹⁰ for in her left hand she holds Matisse's African-inspired bronze sculpture, *Small Torso with Head (La Vie)* of 1906 — which Stieglitz owned at the time, and which is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Plate 44.) In fact, Stieglitz may have considered the African aspects of the Matisse sculpture especially important to associate with O'Keeffe and her work. Having been in the vanguard of the American vogue for primitivism with his pioneer exhibition of African sculpture at 291 in 1914, he was well aware of Negro art as a direct precursor for abstraction. Probably the best known critical article to couple her art with Matisse's is by Lewis Mumford. "O'Keeffe and Matisse" was originally written for *The New Republic* in 1927, and reprinted by Stieglitz for the catalogue of her 1928 Intimate Gallery exhibition. Despite his provocative title, Mumford does not offer a comparative analysis of each artist's creative process. Instead he presents two separate encomiums, and concludes

Miss O'Keeffe's paintings ... would tell much about the departure of Victorian prudery and the ingrowing consciousness of sex in resistance to a hard external environment ... They reveal and refocus many of the dominant aspects of our time. It is the same with Matisse ...⁹¹

Did Picabia's "abstractionist," yet unmistakable, renditions of the orgasmic aspects of sexual intercourse in his large-scale paintings of 1913-14 help trigger O'Keeffe's turning point decision in 1924 to zero in on the stamens and pistils of flowers? (As has

already been mentioned, O'Keeffe often used her sources retroactively.) This question gives rise to another: Was Picabia the prime instigator of her use of plant close-ups as visual metaphors for the human sexual act? For despite O'Keeffe's consistent, and defensive, denials that she intended to associate *any* of her flowers with sexuality, it is clear that she often did exactly that — and with mounting imaginative and innovative power. A good case in point is the great *Jack-in-the-Pulpit* series of March, 1930 - which she has referred to as the "set of Jacks."⁹² To see all six paintings hung together in rare progression, as they were recently at the Whitney⁹³ was to become freshly aware of how profoundly she transformed, modernized and iconicized this almost banal, Symbolist-derived, theme. And it seems a nearly perfect example of what William Rubin has called that "peculiarly modernist situation where iconography turns inward to engage style."⁹⁴ Each of the "Jacks" is essentially frontal and centric, but with its own highly decorative, Dow-like, individuality; its own exquisitely nuanced color tones (especially notable are some of the minute gradations between black and white — the classic range of photography); and its own variety of texture (silk-smooth to sandy to pitted) within the brushstrokes, which unfailingly follow the increasingly simplified outlines of her forms. According to O'Keeffe, "the last one in the set only [had] the Jack from the flower."⁹⁵ True. But this elongated phallic form, with its white aura and its echoing, seemingly pulsating, outlines, gives the optical effect of exploding right out of its vertical format. And the image as a whole engenders a reading that seems closer to the votive power of a neolithic lingam sculpture than to even the most sophisticated and suggestive of botanical drawings. Possibly, O'Keeffe's own primitivist phallic-form sculpture [illustrated in Plate 18.] acted as a sort of prototype for this image.

Final answers to the two questions above may forever remain O'Keeffe's secret. But there can be little doubt that Picabia's work and ideas (especially his frequently expressed desire to make universals out of personal moods) helped to challenge and redirect her art — and in ways that were utterly distinctive from his influence on Stieglitz,

and on the other 291 painters. One of the prime reasons for this distinctiveness is because whenever her forms become most abstracted (through simplification or enlargement) they almost invariably reconnect with the shapes of her 1915-1916 drawings — a special characteristic often observed by critics, Goodrich in particular.⁹⁶

Manuscripts, No. 4, December 1922

The first issue of Stieglitz's new periodical *Manuscripts* appeared in February 1922. Formulated according to the idealistic principles of 291, with Stieglitz as over-all advisor, and Rosenfeld, Seligmann and Strand as separate editors, *Manuscripts* put out six issues—the last one published May 1923.⁹⁷ In the spring of 1922, Stieglitz had talked Strand into overseeing a fresh exploration of the old *Camera Work* question, "Can a Photograph Have the Significance of Art?". Believing that photography had achieved an additional ("new") significance since the Armory Show, Stieglitz and Strand invited forty friends and acquaintances in the arts who had not previously written on photography to respond to the question in 600 words or less. Thirty one replies were received within a six month period, and were presented, without editing, in *Manuscripts* No. 4. Of these respondents, two said they did *not* think photography can have the significance of art (Joseph Pennell and Kenneth Hayes Miller); three refused politely to comment at all (Charlie Chaplin, Charles Demuth, and Evelyn Scott); four dodged the question brilliantly and entirely (Marcel Duchamp, Sherwood Anderson, Arthur Dove, and Walter Lippman); three clearly chose to be equivocal, rather than to express their obviously well known commitments to the primacy of painting (Thomas H. Benton, Thomas J. Craven, and Oscar Bluemner); and nine asserted loyally that only Stieglitz's photographs had (so far) attained the status of art (Elizabeth Davidson [Stieglitz's

niece], Waldo Frank, Leo Ornstein, George F. Of, John Marin, Hutchins Hapgood, J. B. Kerfoot, Ernest Bloch, and Alfeo Faggi).

Those who tried to deal most thoughtfully and analytically with the question, despite their prejudices and lack of expertise in photography, were: Leo Stein⁹⁸; S. MacDonald Wright⁹⁹; Thomas H. Benton¹⁰⁰; George F. Of¹⁰¹; John Marin¹⁰²; Kenneth Hayes Miller¹⁰³; Waldo Frank¹⁰⁴ (whose article, *A Thought Hazarded*, so outraged Stieglitz, that he fastened upon it as his goad in *How I Came to Photograph Clouds*); De Zayas¹⁰¹; and Georgia O’Keeffe, quoted in part below.

... Photography is able to [register] the fleeting expression of a moment ...To me Stieglitz portraits repeat in a more recognizable way what he expresses with the photographs of trees, streets, room interiors, horses, houses, buildings etcetera ...They express his vision, his feeling for the world, for life. They are aesthetically, spiritually satisfying in that I can return to them ... almost daily for the period of four years with always a feeling of wonder and excitement akin to that aroused in me by the Chinese, the Egyptians, Negro Art, Picasso, Henri Rousseau, Seurat etc., even including modern plumbing — or a fine piece of machinery. [This last is clearly a reference to Picabia’s mechanomorphic concerns] ...subject matter, as subject matter, has nothing to do with the aesthetic significance of a photograph any more than with a painting ...The object that is Art must be a unity of expression so complete that the medium becomes unimportant, is only noticed or remembered as an afterthought.¹⁰⁶

This issue of *Manuscripts*, despite Stieglitz’s original hope for it, reveals an across-the-board ignorance of the vaunted “new” (Modernist) photographic developments since the Armory Show — with just one exception to be mentioned. Little, in fact, was offered that had not been earlier, and better, stated in *Camera Work*. Only Craven, Marin and Wright tried to ask what *kind* of an art photography was, or could become — and none of the three built a specific argument. Even the most thoughtful statements were apt to stress the old view of

photography's built-in lack of invention and imagination. Only de Zayas took the occasion to lash out at what he considered to be its lack of empirical truth — or “true objectivity.” His severely reductive statement that “the photography that will represent the object without the interference of man ... does not exist as yet” (see footnote 105) would seem to hark back to Lady Eastlake's view of photography in 1857, (“... the facts which are neither the province of art nor of description, but of that new form of communication between man and man — neither letter, message, nor picture — which now happily fills up the space between them.¹⁰⁵) But de Zayas projects forward, as well, to the value system of the Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus, wherein camera vision was privileged because it was deemed superior to normal vision, and its impersonality and rationality were thought to be in tune with the new goals of a technological society.

The general consensus in *Manuscripts* was that photography's place in the creative arts was (still) a minor one. And, more specifically, that photography was not truly aesthetic because it could only “isolate and register phenomena” instead of cause “new harmonious and sequential relationships out of memory and imagination,” as Benton put it.

Æstheticism is, of course, an ideology no matter what the medium. And it was O'Keeffe alone, in her undeniably privileged listening position to Stieglitz, who cited the “new ” photography of Strand (“he has bewildered the observer into considering shapes, in an obvious manner, for their own inherent value”); Sheeler (“He is always an artist. He has done things with photography that he could not do with painting and vice versa.”); and Man Ray (“I have not seen anything but reproductions of his work with the camera so have no definite idea of it excepting the fact that he seems to be broadening the field of work that can be done with it.”)¹⁰⁸

There is ample proof in Stieglitz's correspondence to Strand that this article, like O'Keeffe's cover illustration, was an independent effort (despite its obvious source), that it was strongly felt, and that she strove hard to attain accuracy of expression.

Steiglitz to Strand:

Georgia is still busy on her little piece on Photography [for *MSS*]. She writes and re-writes. Haven't seen anything yet — Naturally I'm curious to see what she'll evolve. (August 18, 1922)

... Georgia is having an awful time getting something into shape for *MSS*. Working all day long for a week. She really ought to be painting. And still I suppose she needed this mental exercise. (Sept. 12, 1922)¹⁰⁹

In her struggle to express her own æsthetic responses to photography, what O'Keeffe did, in effect, was to reduce a vast, and contradictory, array of 291 ideas and opinions down to three: (1) photography as “the fleeting expression of a moment;” (2) photography as “music” (abstract expression) and (3) photography (Stieglitz's alone) as able to arouse the same daily “wonder and excitement” as looking at ancient and modern art. These are still major and controversial issues in considering the artistic significance of the medium, and they will be examined more closely vis-a-vis the works themselves.

First, it is necessary to be clear about what the *Camera Work* and *Manuscripts* writers meant when they said photography was (or wasn't) art. Their general assumption appears to have been that art means the making of a picture as defined by the so-called Albertian tradition. That is: the presentation in linear perspective of a significant narrative seen as if going on inside a framed window. This Italian Renaissance notion of the picture lies at the heart of the well-known Robinson/Emerson/Hinton/Stieglitz concept of

Pictorialism.¹¹⁰ It loosened radically for Stieglitz between 1908 and 1916, as we have seen, and again (even more radically) with the Equivalents, but it never really disappeared completely. It was during the very process of trying to absorb the different ramifications of Picasso's and Picabia's abstraction for his own photography that Stieglitz seems to have shifted, consciously or unconsciously, to another early concept of picture making: that of the seventeenth century Dutch painters. As has been well established, the northern artists of this period trusted the intermediary of the lens as well as the eye.¹¹¹ A few general observations may suffice for preparatory argument here: In the seventeenth-century, the Dutch tended to present the world as it is seen, on a small scale, instead of trying to narrate (or blow-up) significant human actions as the Renaissance painters did. Northern pictures often look like fragments, with the action/view seeming to extend beyond the frame—thus giving the viewer a powerful sense of the picture as a surface, rather than one of a “window” on the world. Finally, Dutch art is “notoriously subject to confusion with life.”¹¹²

From 1910 on, and particularly between 1915-1916, Stieglitz's photographs show a new interest in taking direct, pure photographs that were calculated to reveal “truth” about life and the world, as he grappled with what he called “the fundamental idea of photography.”¹¹³ Like seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, these photographs may be said to add up to a world, but they do not aim to order or narrate it.¹¹⁴

With the arrival of O'Keeffe in his life came the greening of Stieglitz's old Symbolist concern with the image as an equivalent for his emotional state. And his pictures again become hybrids of opposite tendencies: this time of the “descriptive” and the suggestive. In particular, he would find exemplars of universality and revelation in the face and figure of Georgia O'Keeffe, and in the “local” countryside of Lake George.

Stieglitz's dichotomous attitude was of course not a new one. He had already tried to deal creatively with other pairs of opposites — ones crucial to the generic differences

(and conflicting demands) of painting and photography: namely objectivity/imagination, and science/art - both of which underlay the rich concept of Pictorialism.

To take these briefly and separately: The basic, and most devastating, criticism of photography as an art made by the *Camera Work* and *Manuscripts* writers was that “ideas of the imagination [are] outside the range of the photographic point of view,” as Caffin (possibly paraphrasing Baudelaire) put it in 1908.¹¹⁵ Or as Picabia often said, You can photograph as much as you like, but you can’t photograph what is in my head.

Attempting to make a strength out of this weakness, de Zayas wrote that photography’s advantage over the imagination was that it could penetrate to “the objective reality of forms” — which have their *own* essence and spirit.¹¹⁶ Although Stieglitz did, for a time, explore the ramifications of this theory in his photographs (mostly between 1913-1916), it proved far too limiting for one who was prone, first and last, to borrow from Modernism its most Symbolist aspects.¹¹⁷

Understanding perfectly that photographic meaning depends mainly on context, Stieglitz found a way to by-pass the inherent actuality (objectivity) of the photographic process. Again inspired by Symbolist notions of correspondence and suggestion, he tried to make what he (and Dow) called “visual music.”¹¹⁸ To make his photographs “sing — of his life,” as Marin described it.¹¹⁹ Later he would even use the word “imagination” in discussing one of his photographs at the Intimate Gallery.

That—what you see—is not an apple tree nor raindrops nor a barn. It is shapes in relationships, the imagination playing within the surface. Perhaps the raindrops are tears. (*Italics added*)¹²⁰

It is well documented that Stieglitz’s experiments with the scientific and functional aspects of photography were what convinced him by 1902 that the medium was versatile enough to project artistic experience.¹²¹ Here, again, he was working in two minds. As he wrote to Coomaraswamy in 1924:

Photography is an addition in the scientific sense of the word addition ... I ever moved ahead as a scientist. To establish and then try to destroy what I had established if it could be destroyed. If it couldn't something of value in the sense of addition had been established.¹²²

Obviously Stieglitz's unshakable belief that photography was both science and art worked to his artistic advantage. Many of the most highly regarded of his photographs were without question the direct result of technical experiments, such as the bad weather and night-time views he took of New York City at the turn of the century, and his later contrast-ratio pictures of the landscape around Lake George. Further, by making this intellectual assumption (despite its problematic aspects¹²³) Stieglitz showed a profound, if instinctive, understanding of both art history and camera history. As Alberti's *De Pictura* clearly attests, Renaissance linear perspective came about primarily through the efforts of artists to represent what they thought we really see — e.g., “realistic” pictures.¹²⁴ Stieglitz's undeniably eccentric and self-serving concept of the scientific artist also became increasingly allied to his theory of abstraction. Suffice it to note for this section that he was able to combine a deep interest in metaphysical thought (Bergson, for example, and the fourth dimension) with serious readings in science: Einstein's *The Theory of Relativity*, J.B.S. Haldane, and Bertrand Russell, as well as Kraft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Freud.¹²⁵ This dualism seems to have been innate to Stieglitz, but it was also very much in the air. “There is no opposition between science and mysticism,” wrote Havelock Ellis in *The Dance of Life*, “... at their outset they are closely related ... we cannot fail to conclude that science and mysticism are nearer to each other than some would have us believe.”¹²⁶

To return to O'Keeffe's *Manuscripts* article, and an important point she was the only one to bring up:

The painter as soon as he begins to paint almost unconsciously assumes himself the honored or unappreciated present representative of a glorious past tradition... The photographer has no great tradition. He must gain all the respect he is to have by what he himself can actually do.

This statement deserves comment because it shows O’Keeffe’s special awareness of a generic (and too rarely considered) difference between the two mediums: namely that although photography may use the formal characteristics and even the ideas of painting to create pictures, it does not belong to the millenniums-old tradition of making accurate manual transcriptions of meaningful reality. In fact, consensus as to what a photograph should look like seems even more remote now than it was in 1922.¹²⁷ Like the Modernist she was, however, O’Keeffe placed a high value on photography’s lack of time-proven, measurable standards. As for the inescapable old question, “can the camera’s ‘fleeting expression of a moment’ hold the viewer’s interest for as long as the layers of observed time in a painting?”, her answer was yes — if the photographs were Stieglitz’s. Although she never specified why this was so, her eye must have told her (if Stieglitz didn’t) that his multiple and multivalent borrowings from paintings were carefully calculated to stretch the meaning of his photographs well beyond their exposed moments of time. As is well recorded, he meant his images to be revelations for the viewer — and hard-earned ones at that. (“New York is still not ready for some of the most significant photographs I have made,” he wrote challengingly in his 1923 Anderson Galleries catalogue.) For Stieglitz, as for O’Keeffe, the picture, whether a painting or a photograph, was made first in the mind — in the imagination. And despite their increasingly circular borrowings from each other it is clear each artist was aware of the core difference between their two modes of picture-making: that painting is basically an art of suggested space, and that photography is an art of literal time. Today’s reader of *Camera Work* and *Manuscripts* will find relatively

little interest expressed in the arrested second of time as an imprint or emanation of reality. Even Rosenfeld's "The majesty of the moment, the augustness of the here, the now"¹²⁸ is not as explicit as Roland Barthes's "The that-has-been ... [is] the very letter of Time."¹²⁹ But this singular fact of all photography is nevertheless implicit in the immensely fruitful²⁹¹ notion of "objectivity."

Objectivity

The term objective, or "objectivity," has, of course, been associated with photography from its beginnings.¹³⁰ Although all photographic images carry a trace of objective reality, the variations caused by camera position and different focal length lenses make a completely unbiased objectivity forever impossible for the photographer.¹³¹ Further, and related to this, the scanning eye and the static camera have different optical systems. We do not see the world as the monocular camera does, even with one eye, because of the modifying compensation of the brain. Human vision, in short, cannot be replicated.¹³² Certain photographs made specifically for scientific or identification purposes are quite properly regarded as objective facts. But this type of picture cannot, strictly speaking, be considered an artistic truth. To cite briefly why: Scientific/identity photographs do not in themselves constitute meaning because they must be interpreted (solved) in the light of additional information. The interpretation of photographs intended to be expressive is, on the other hand, a philosophical problem — since such images are, in effect, *representations*.¹³³

In 1924, just before her first (and only) dual gallery exhibition with Stieglitz, O'Keeffe wrote the following to Sherwood Anderson:

My work this year is very much on the ground
— There will be only two abstract things [*in the show*] — or three at the most — all the rest is

*objective — as objective as I can make it ... I suppose the reason I got down to an effort to be objective — is that I didn't like the interpretations of my other things.*¹³⁴ (Italics added.)

Did she mean that the objectively true image is only what the machine can record in a moment — an arbitrary slice of time and place? This does not seem likely for a painter. Did she mean that objective truth is what is reduced to the instantaneous and, therefore, the discontinuous? This is not likely either, although both statements come under the category of common wisdom about photography. What, then, *did* she mean by “objective”?

A careful definition is in order here, not least because it is the artist who sets the terms for our understanding of the oeuvre. (This, of course, is not meant to suggest that a work of art cannot partially escape the intention and understanding of its maker.) Clearly O’Keeffe was still in the process of changing her own goals for her art — goals linked in new and special ways to photography.

For the 291 photographers and painters, objectivity was a working concept rather than a scientific term. A concept which would grow beyond the bare facts and become indissolubly linked to abstraction. It was Kandinsky who first conjoined the objective (“subject paintings”) with abstraction (“pure art”) in his influential essay “On The Question of Form” in *Der Blaue Reiter*. As paraphrased, and popularized, by Eddy, Kandinsky’s argument ran thus:

Step by step the “objective,” the photographic elements, are eliminated until in the end there may be no trace of any object, and with this elimination the spiritual content becomes plainer and plainer ... Objects need not necessarily be eliminated from a picture, but they should be used *not* for the sake of forcing their photographic likenesses upon the observer, but solely to more perfectly express the inner, the spiritual significance of a work.

If a painter introduced a suggestion of a landscape or a bit of still life it should be for the purpose of making *his* meaning, *his* inner feeling plainer to the beholder, and not for the purpose of making a colored photograph of a field of flowers

Therefore it does not matter whether actual or abstract forms are used by the artist, so long as both are used to express spiritual values.¹³⁵

At the crux of 291's concept of objectivity, for painting as well as photography, lie the 1913 writings of Picabia and de Zayas, published in the 1913 double issue of *Camera Work*. (Nos. 42/43) As has been mentioned in another context, Picabia made a theoretical distinction between the "old objectivity" (the mechanical reproduction of the outside world which no longer satisfies), and the "new objectivity" (the painter's representation of the complexity of his feelings before nature). And his conclusion was that

The qualitative conception of reality can no longer be expressed in a purely visual or optical manner: and in consequence pictorial expression has had to eliminate more and more objective formulae from its convention in order to relate itself to the qualitative conception ...This new expression in painting is 'the objectivity of a subjectivity'.¹³⁶

De Zaya's contribution to this notion was the distinction he made between photography and "artistic-photography" (also mentioned in an earlier context). He defined "pure" photography as trying to get at the objectivity of Form. Specifically that "initial phenomenon of Form" which the mind of man uses to create emotions, sensations, and ideas. In "artistic-photography" the objectivity of Form is used by the photographer "to express a preconceived idea in order to convey an emotion." (Although de Zayas is careful to be even-handed in this article, his advanced sympathies clearly rest with "pure" photography.) He concludes that "one [side of

photography] is the means by which man fuses his idea with the natural expression of Form, while the other is the means by which man tries to bring the natural expression of Form to the cognition of his mind.”¹³⁷ What he is actually discussing here, of course, is his understanding of the difference between Pictorial and Straight photography.

The amplitude and foresight of de Zaya’s use of “objective” as a model for modern art is worth pursuing a bit further. In 1914, in his catalogue note for the Photo-Secession’s exhibition of African Savage artifacts, presented at the “Root of Modern Art,” he wrote about the “purely objective” way in which these primitive carvers approached their subjects.

In almost every case it is not representation, but suggestion, that secures the objective reality ... The main characteristic of these carvings is their vital objectivity, rendered by means that are abstract. This or that objective fact has been, as it were, drawn out into constructive prominence, and has been given such a shape as would most decisively emphasize it.”¹³⁸

And in 1915, for the periodical *291*, he argued that

The desire of modern plastic expression has been to create for itself an objectivity ... photography in the hands of Stieglitz has succeeded in determining the objectivity of form, that is to say, in obtaining *the initial condition of the phenomena of form, phenomena which under the domain of human thought give birth to emotions, sensations, and ideas.* (Italics added.)¹³⁹

De Zaya’s cumulative understanding of objectivity (which owed much to his own eye for caricature) would be considerably reduced and clarified for photography by Paul Strand — in his words no less than his photographs. His first article, *Photography*, appeared in 1917. In it, Strand defined the essence of

the medium as “an absolute unqualified objectivity,” and called upon the photographer to have “a real respect for the thing in front of him.”

*The objects may be organized to express the causes of which they are the effects, or they may be used as abstract forms, to create an emotion unrelated to objectivity as such. (Italics added)*¹⁴⁰

This last sentence contains 291’s concept of expressive Straight photography at the zenith of its development. And when O’Keeffe wrote Anderson of her intention to make her work “objective” it is quite likely that she meant the word in the paradigmatic sense that Strand presents it here. (The fact that she met Strand at the time when his applauded piece first appeared adds further to this likelihood.¹⁴¹)

O’Keeffe’s realization that the objects of concrete reality could be represented *as is* (without abstraction), and still express her deepest feelings, may therefore owe as much to Strand as to Stieglitz. Even so, it should not be forgotten that it was de Zayas who first suggested in *Camera Work* that the object itself is perfectly capable of standing for the artist’s emotions, instead of just being a metaphor for something else.

As the 1924 letter to Anderson also makes plain, O’Keeffe’s new interest in depicting natural facts came from her mounting annoyance and resentment over the purely sexual interpretation of her abstractions by critics.¹⁴² The 291 artists were, of course, well aware that the objective (direct vision) canon was not new in American art.¹⁴³ What *was* new, however, were the close-up views of leaves and flowers that O’Keeffe began to paint in earnest in 1924. Without question these pictures owe much to the same 291 idea of objective and abstract truth that had led Strand and Stieglitz to move their cameras ever closer to their subjects. It should be said as well that by turning to photography in order to disassociate her painting

from its sexual connotations, O’Keeffe was also being true to her own, extremely private, nature.¹⁴⁴ In a very real sense the impersonal eye of the lens was ideally suited to a sensibility as discreet and reticent as hers, for it combined a high intensity of feeling with an undeniable emotional detachment. For these reasons, and for others as well, she would become increasingly interested in the “hiddenness” of optical facts. Certainly the optical offered her an alternative way to veil her subjective responses. And she clearly hoped that this new accuracy of observation in her work would lead viewers *away* from their over-simplifications of her intentions, and *toward* 291’s decreed goal of universal understanding through personal revelation. It should be said, in addition, that O’Keeffe’s traditional formation as a painter may have predisposed her to think of the camera’s single point perspective as truth — since it was, in fact, modeled on Renaissance linear perspective.

Two of the most eccentric and productive characteristics of 291’s concept of objectivity have gone largely unremarked as such. They are worth some further investigation here, and not just for their general relevance to 291 concerns. They would have newly visible effects on O’Keeffe’s work as well.

The first characteristic is geometry. *Camera Work* critics often stressed it as a means to attain universal truth in modern art — whether through objectivity or abstraction.¹⁴⁵ And it is well known that the earliest American understanding of Picasso’s Cubism was based partly on its geometric structure and partly on its equivalence to natural objects—thanks primarily to the de Zayas interview and analysis published in *Camera Work*. In 1911, during the landmark Picasso exhibition at 291, Stieglitz was sent the following quotation from Plato’s *Philibus* by a writer friend:

I do not mean by beauty of form such beauty as that of animals or pictures ... *understand me to mean straight lines and circles and the plane or solid*

*figures which are formed out of them by turning lathes and rulers and measurers of angles; for these I affirm to be not only relatively beautiful like other things, but they are eternally and absolutely beautiful. (Italics added)*¹⁴⁶

It is surely significant that this particular Dialogue of Socrates appeared, in another translation, in *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911, p. 68), and that it was also quoted just after Picabia's "Preface," in his 291 catalogue statement of 1913. What these citations suggest is that objectivity as a methodology came to mean the use of geometric forms—in composition, and, quite frequently, in subject matter as well.

O'Keeffe had long worked with the ovoids and spirals of Art Nouveau. And Dow had seen to it that she was no stranger to geometry in composition. (In particular the division of rectangular space, as has already been cited in Chapter Four.) Nevertheless, in 1924 there does seem to be a sudden and marked concentration on ellipses and incomplete triangles—or, more accurately, on ovals containing, or contained by, V-shape structures. An excellent case in point is her *Flower Abstraction* (1924).¹⁴⁷ This work, as the title suggests, may be plausibly read as a pure abstraction, or as an objective microscopic view of a flower's interior. (Plate 45.) It is structured upon a series of repeating V-shapes (petals) which unfurl from the bottom of the picture like a fan to reveal centralized clusters of oval (pod-like) forms. The composition's "aspiring" centricity (to use Rosenfeld's 1934 phrase about Stieglitz's photography) is further enhanced by the vertical canvas itself, and by the attenuated shape which divides its upper portion exactly in half, like some sort of evolutionary tear or fissure. To be noted as well are the croppings of the forms by the frame, accentuating rather than diminishing our overall sense of the triangular, and of botanical growth. (As Gombrich, for one, has pointed out, "the incompleteness of familiar forms actually arouses our

anticipations [to complete them] in almost hallucinatory manner ... Hence, perhaps, the increase in the impression of ... movement.”)¹⁴⁸ This type-form of open triangles and ellipses was not wholly new for O’Keeffe.¹⁴⁹ But her truly astonishing array of variations on it did not really begin until 1924. It is of notable interest that at least twelve of these compositions appeared in *The Seven Americans Show* put on by Stieglitz in 1925 — very probably the quintessential expression of what 291 stood for in painting and photography.¹⁵⁰

The second characteristic is an amalgamation of the objectivist viewpoint with the rising American aesthetic of “place” — a synthesis which began around 1917, and would come to a full flower during the 1920’s as the Precisionist movement in art and literature. It is not a discovery to say that the objectivist tenets of Imagism were in great part responsible for this synthesis — mainly through the writings of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless it seems appropriate here to cite several of the key ideas from this experimental poetry movement, in their original form, since they would have a direct effect on O’Keeffe’s iconography and style — even though it is probable they were siphoned through the words of others.

In his exhortatory 1921 article “American Painting” for *The Dial*, Paul Rosenfeld called for more paintings like those of Alfred Ryder which “speak to the American of what lies between him and his native soil.”¹⁵² But the idea that art must have a local character in order to be timeless had already surfaced in William’s 1917 essay *America, Whitman and the Art of Poetry*, wherein he made his first published plea for “new canons” of “place.”¹⁵³ It had also appeared in John Dewey’s “Americanism and Localism” which *The Dial* published in 1920. (“The Locality is the only universal.”)¹⁵⁴ Most influential of all on Rosenfeld, perhaps, was William’s short-lived, but well circulated periodical *Contact*, published in four issues between 1920-1921. Conceived for the purpose of spreading his conviction

that the “art which attains is indigenous of experience and relations,”¹⁵⁵ *Contact* contained such important statements:

*We seek only contact with the local conditions which confront us. We believe that in the perfection of that contact is the beginning not only of the concept of art among us but the key to technique also ... If Americans are to be blessed with important work it will be through intelligent, informed contact with the locality which alone can infuse it with reality. (Italics added.)*¹⁵⁶

The so-called “rules” of Imagism, as first presented by Ezra Pound for the Chicago based *Poetry* magazine in 1913, urged the “direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective.”¹⁵⁷ Pound defined the “thing,” or Image, as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” And he asserted further that “the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.” (Clearly Strand’s 1917 article *Photography* with its call for “real respect for the thing itself” owes a significant debt to Pound.) By the late ’teens, Imagism had come essentially to mean a visual form of writing. Its alleged derivation from Cézanne’s conception of painting as a unique act of direct seeing remains murky.¹⁵⁸ But its aims, as developed from Pound through Williams, are very clear. And nowhere were they more simply and fully stated than in a letter Pound wrote in 1915 to Harriet Munroe (the founder of *Poetry*):

Objectivity, and again objectivity, and expression; no hindsight — beforeness, no straddled adjectives... nothing that you couldn’t, in some circumstances, in the stress of some emotion, actually say ... When one really feels and thinks, one stammers with simple speech.¹⁵⁹

It should be noted as well that Pound himself wrote Stieglitz that they both “fought the same devils from different points of attack.”¹⁶⁰

The actual mechanics of Williams’s radical synthesis between the local (“place”) and objectivity have no place here.¹⁶¹ But they would have important ramifications for Precisionist painting in general, and Sheeler’s in particular.¹⁶² O’Keeffe’s joining of the two took a very different turn from Precisionism per se as will be made increasingly clear. The local conditions confronting her after 1918 were primarily those of Lake George — Stieglitz’s own “place.” And the skeleton key to her unique objectivist technique was photography. It was at Lake George that her subject matter began to turn from the uterine-personal (“the gloriously female,” in Rosenfeld’s words) to shelter shapes of another order: namely trees, barns, shells, flowers and fruit. Just one example of her 1924 interest in particularizing the forms of ordinary things may suffice. It is the well known *Autumn Trees - The Chestnut Grey*, exhibited in *The Seven Americans*. (Plate 46.) To compare this painting with Stieglitz’s unpublished photograph *Chestnut Tree, Lake George* of 1919 (which was exhibited in his 1921 Anderson Galleries show)¹⁶³ is to see a rare instance of direct, and nearly untranslated, photographic influence in her work. (Plate 47.) The tree is the same. And so is the view, or angle. The compositions are nearly identical, although Stieglitz’s camera was somewhat closer than O’Keeffe’s eye, hence *his* croppings take off a little more of the branches. Only the season and weather differ. Stieglitz’s view must have been taken on a misty summer day (there are some leaves to be seen), whereas O’Keeffe’s bare chestnut is in sharp silhouette against a cold blue sky. The formal impression made by these two images is so similar that it takes a while to see how cleverly the artists have reversed the 291 attitudes toward their mediums: O’Keeffe’s painted tree is presented “straight,” with utter clarity and linearity, while the lines and details in Stieglitz’s photograph are as blurred by mist and fog as if he

had kicked the tripod. One can, perhaps, perceive a certain irony in these two pictures — a tendency not uncommon to both artists.

In summary, O’Keeffe’s growing preference for objectivity, as perceived in local motifs like the chestnut tree, led her to emphasize the formal qualities of composition in new ways. She was also, it seems fair to say, re-examining and re-affirming Dow’s old teaching that the essence of an object lies in its shape.

Abstraction

The first thing to be noted is that the mechanical and chemical photographic process is, and was from its beginnings, intrinsically abstract. To be specific: Photography can generate and organize meanings independent from its subject matter. It produces a negative image in which dark is light, and light is darkest of all — a reversal of values never seen before. It creates design (intentionally and unintentionally) under the varying conditions of light. It can neglect everything not clearly visible on the surface of objects, as well as isolate forms unintelligible to the photographer’s naked eye. It confuses normal sizes and gives contradictory spatial clues — according to where the photographer stands, and what lens he uses. And it transforms the colors of nature into a limited white-black scale (or myriad tones of sepia—depending on the paper used). Stieglitz himself made only a few experiments with Lumière’s auto-chrome color process shortly after it became publicly available in 1907¹⁶³. The black-white scale was, in fact, one of the more important 291 distinctions and bonds between painting and photography. As Rosenfeld wrote in 1924, “Modern color, supposed to be anti-photographic, is indeed the close ally of Stieglitz’s photography... There is no more conflict between the two media than between the means of poetry and music. The struggle of the colorist is the struggle of the photographer.”¹⁶⁴

Quite apart from the characteristics cited above, what did abstraction come to mean as a usable idea for the 291 photographers and painters? Throughout its unstable history of definitions and redefinitions in *Camera Work*, the one reasonably consistent voice seems to have been that of Charles Caffin.¹⁶⁵ In his 1910 essay, “The New Thought Which is Old,” Caffin gave the most inclusive — and arguably the most enduring — description of early Modernist abstraction as it was gradually perceived and practiced by Stieglitz, and his closest colleagues.

*The motive is no longer to represent form, but to express the quality, the character of form; to use it as a symbol of expression. It therefore precedes by simplification, in order as far as possible to divest form of its formal significance, and make it yield suggestion to the imagination. And, once more, the suggestion is abstract, detached from association with the concrete actualities of form, and expressive of qualities that invite and stimulate the high faculties of the imagination. (Italics added.)*¹⁶⁶

It should also be remarked that in 1906, Caffin, like Dow before him, had called for a synthesis of Western painting (self expression) with the Japanese ideal of “Kokoro” (to regard the world in the abstract, “as a visible embodiment of unseen forces, seeable only through their temporary material habitation”).¹⁶⁸

Depend upon it, if painting is to recover for itself something of that needfulness to the modern intelligence which music has developed, it must be along the lines of the latter, in the direction of *abstract expression*.¹⁶⁹

In this vein, and no doubt for this reason, Stieglitz exhibited 19th century Japanese prints (including Sharaku, Utamaro and Hokusai) at 291 in May, 1909.

Although Caffin’s concept of “abstract expression” was originally a yardstick for painting—one intended to draw the boundaries more stringently between painting and photography — his 1910 remarks on Cézanne’s painting

might also be said to sum up the 291 concept of abstract photography. For instance, he called Cézanne

an out and out realist; in the philosophical sense of the term ... *The abstraction, at which he arrives, has not been superimposed upon the facts by his temperament or imagination, but actually extracted from the facts themselves* ... The final aim in Cézanne's simplification is to reach an organic unity, in order that the expression may be a single and harmonious one. (Italics added.)¹⁷⁰

It is common photographic history that the 1911 Picasso show at 291 confirmed Stieglitz's worst fears that conventional (Pictorial) camera representations could never "stand up" to pictures by Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso. Equally well known is the reconceptualization of photography which Stieglitz set for himself over the next six or seven years. This meant, on the one hand, a re-examination and re-embrace of the "truth" of optical facts—with special attention to lenticular space and to the eccentric patterns arbitrarily created by the postive/negative process. And on the other, a full-scale exploration into the form-making innovations of early Modernism.

The conceptual and technical effort made by Stieglitz and some of his colleagues (particularly Coburn, Karl Struss, Paul Haviland, Strand, Sheeler and Schamberg) to unite these different systems of abstraction requires further probing, and so do the glaring similarities between many of their experimental photographs of the mid and later 'teens.¹⁷¹ Although these tasks are beyond the scope of the discussion at hand, there is already enough visual and documentary evidence to suggest that by the time Stieglitz joined forces with O'Keeffe in 1918, he had come full circle — ending, as he began, with what might be called the "juste-milieu" ideas of Charles Caffin.

This circle seems to have been accomplished in several, quite distinct, stages: First there was the visual shock caused by Picasso's "scientific" Cubist-faced composition, which resulted in Stieglitz's retroactive linkage of his 1900 photograph *Spring Showers* with Picasso's 1910 abstract drawing *Nude*. (In *Camera Work*, October 1911.¹⁷²) That visual recognition, or conversion, also resulted in Stieglitz's impatient reply, in German, to Heinrich Kühn, who had written him (October 2, 1912) to inquire what the abstract art of Matisse and Picasso, pictured in the August issue of *Camera Work*, had to do with photography's "absolute reality."

You don't understand what Picasso & Co have to do with photography! ... With *Camera Work* I will strive that once and for all one may get some idea of what has been accomplished artistically in photography ... what photography essentially means... whether employed through the camera (Photography in the purest sense) or through the painter with his brush (photography in an intellectual sense just as though a camera were used.) *Now I find that contemporary art consists of the abstract (without subject) like Picasso etc., and the photographic ... just as we stand before the door of a new social era, so we stand in art too before a new medium of expression — the true medium (abstraction).* (Italics added.)¹⁷³

Despite its puzzling aspects (possibly because Stieglitz had gotten rusty in writing German) the unmistakable message of the letter is that henceforth abstraction would be as "true" for art-photography as for painting.

Abstraction up to this point, then, meant "without subject." That is, it consisted of a total attention to the unrhetorical and mundane aspects of contemporary life, accompanied by a new concentration on form (art for art's sake). Whether Stieglitz realized it or not, this richly contradictory aesthetic was at the very

core of late 19th century avant-garde Realism (“the heroism of modern life”) — which included, and sometimes fed upon, photography.¹⁷⁴

The second stage, already traced, was Stieglitz’s brief but somewhat retroactive encounter with Picabia’s pure “abstractionism” between 1913-1916, and his parallel discussions with de Zayas about the ability of photographed forms to reveal their own essence (“the plastic verification of fact”). In 1914, Arthur Dove described 291’s goal as “the elimination of the non-essential.”¹⁷⁵ And Stieglitz’s 1915-1916 photographs show a definite concentration on the essential lines and volumes of objects. (The “291 window” series.)

It was around this time, as well, that he entered yet another stage. Probably under the impetus of Paul Strand’s extreme new close-ups of shadows, chairs and crockery (c. 1916), Stieglitz began to move his camera ever closer to his sitters, isolating them from their backgrounds so that they became rhyming forms first and people second. (The 1916 portrait of Marie Rapp is an almost perfect example of this.) By 1918, when he began the cumulative O’Keeffe portrait in earnest, he was completely willing to let any part of the body stand for the whole (synecdoche). For him, now, the close-up *was* abstraction. This is very clear from a letter he wrote to Sadakichi Hartmann in 1919.

I am at last photographing again ...all who have seen the work say it is a revelation — It is straight. No tricks of any kind.— ...No sentimentalism. — Not old nor new. — It is so sharp that you can see the [pores] in a face — and yet it is abstract — All say that [they] don’t feel they are conscious of any medium. — It is a series of about 100 pictures of one person [O’Keeffe] — heads and ears — toes — hands — torsos. — It is the doing of something I had in mind for many years.¹⁷⁶

This letter seems also to criticize the “tricks” of abstraction he had played with in 1916 by allowing water reflections to cause a natural distortion in his

Shadows on the Lake self portraits.¹⁷⁷ In any case, he was never to distort form in the name of abstraction again — either by natural or unnatural methods, such as Coburn’s Vortoscope.

Probably what came to stand Picabia’s notion of “abstractionism” on its head for Stieglitz in the late ’teens was a concatenation of events: His (291’s) failure to interest America in the relevance of Modernism, his subsequent decision to define and support a native American art rooted in American experience, and the rejuvenative effect of Georgia O’Keeffe on his own life and work. “Abstractionism” simply wasn’t large enough, or flexible enough, for the creative tasks newly at hand. Besides, he was never really aesthetically indifferent to his subjects — even when he was trying hard to be so. (After all, the back window view from 291, O’Keeffe’s body, and even the clouds above the hills of Lake George, were very close to his heart.)

It can fairly be said that objectivity and abstraction came completely together for Stieglitz during the summer of 1923 with his *Songs of the Sky*. Using clouds “to put down the philosophy of my life” in photographs that “look like photographs,” he wrote Hart Crane later that same year that

I know exactly *what* I have photographed. I know I have done something that has never been done — May be an approach occasionally [found] in music. — I also know that there is more of the really abstract in some “representation” than in most of the dead representations of the so called abstract so fashionable now. — I have scientific proof to show the correctness of that statement. The camera is really a wonder instrument — if you give it a chance.¹⁷⁸

The three-way link between music, abstraction and “scientific proof” in this letter is an important one to grasp. As early as 1911, Caffin had written of Cézanne’s “scientific attitude of mind.” That he had “subjected his sensations to

logical analysis, tried to formulate them on the basis of reasoning and to realize them in a manner that would stand the test of scientific scrutiny.”¹⁷⁹ Music had, of course, long been regarded as “mathematical” and “scientific.” And many American artists and critics were quick and eager to emphasize the relationship of abstraction to science, and the progress of modern life¹⁸⁰ — a notion that came to perhaps its fullest visual and verbal expression in March of 1916, with “The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters.”¹⁸¹ By this time, Stieglitz had clearly ceased to consider abstraction as the whole story for American art. Significantly, he chose to present Paul Strand’s “pure” (unmanipulated) photographs at 291 concurrently with the Forum Exhibition (March 13 - April 3).

Commenting on the comparative methods of objective and abstract art, Caffin labeled the Strands “records of actual objectivity,” and went on to say

today, with our increased scientific knowledge
... we demand an absolute objectivity ...we want our
facts straight, and we can only get them so through
the straight use of the mechanisms of
photography.¹⁸²

Although Caffin did not pick up on the embryonic abstract intentions behind many of these 1915 photographs (including *Wall Street* and *Telegraph Poles, Texas*,¹⁸³) they are clearly visible — thanks in good part to Strand’s two year exposure to 291, and, even more importantly, to the frequent reviewing of his work by Stieglitz.¹⁸⁴ Apparently, however, it was not until the summer of 1916 that Strand began to experiment in earnest with the combination of “strict” objectivity and early modernist abstraction.¹⁸⁵ In such photographs as *Abstraction, Bowls, The White Fence, and Porch Shadows*, abstraction seems intended to prevail over the objective (mainly because of his rigorous concentration on two-dimensionality, and the after-the-fact tilting of the image 90 degrees from the angle at which the

photograph was originally taken). But Strand never allowed his original subject matter to lapse completely from view, as Coburn would do in England with the Vortographs. For both Stieglitz and Strand, at this time, the point of abstraction was to get at the *essence* of the object — not make it into something else.

During the years between 1916 and 1924, abstraction and objectivity would be thoroughly (if differently) reconciled in theory and practice by Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O’Keeffe, as they worked together in their separate mediums at Lake George.¹⁸⁶ It is therefore completely understandable that when Strand wrote a review of O’Keeffe’s 1924 Anderson Gallery show¹⁸⁷ he should have made the point of stressing the expressive unity of abstraction and objectivity in her work — further proof, in fact, that a new tradition for the “native” American artist had been deliberately established.

[O’Keeffe’s] projection of experience is as often made upon objects which would be called “representative”, a cana [sic] lily, a few apples or plums, as that which is miscalled “abstract” only because it is less easily recognizable. The hocus pocus of æsthetic lingo may have its value in æsthetics but in life it is evident that there is no such thing as “representation” in itself and that “abstraction” is merely quantitative extension, or simplification, not necessarily more potent, in the perception of objectivity... Nor is it the method or way of perceiving objectivity which holds any particular virtue of itself, but only the quality and profundity of experience released thereby, that is of importance. It is this latter which is the true abstract, “significant form” or whatever you want to call it and it exists not less, as the enduring living element, in the “representations” of Memling or Durer, as in the “abstractions” of Picasso or Marcel Duchamp. And like Picasso, O’Keeffe moves freely both in method and medium. Her work, like his, exhibits the same intensity of expressiveness whether it appears as “representation” or “abstraction.”¹⁸⁸ (Italics added.)

This is actually almost pure Caffin of 1910. ("The motive is no longer to represent form but to express the quality, the character of form; to use it as a symbol of expression." And so forth.¹⁸⁹) What Caffin himself thought about O'Keeffe's work is not a matter of record. He could have seen her 291 shows in 1916 and 1917, but he never reviewed them. He died January 15, 1918, just six months before she came to New York to work under Stieglitz's wing.

Would O'Keeffe's early abstractions have squared with Caffin's theories about art? Probably not. To support this guess we have his remarks on the Walkowitz drawings and watercolors exhibited at 291 in 1916 (February 14 - March 12).

... by the time a man adopts abstraction to visualize what was originally an abstraction, he gets a long way from a mutual viewpoint of communication. He is employing symbols ... arbitrarily selected for the occasion — arbitrarily because he is the sole judge of the fitness with reference to his own feeling. The other man is left to grope for a key to the enigma.¹⁹⁰

That O'Keeffe would have had his approbation for her synthesis of the objective and the abstract, in order to express universal themes is more certain. And in 1976, she made a culminating statement which seems to echo many of Caffin's own.

It is surprising to me to see how many people separate the objective from the abstract. Objective painting is not good painting unless it is good in the abstract sense. A hill or tree cannot make a good painting just because it is a hill or a tree. It is lines and colors put together so that they say something. For me that is the very basis of painting. The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint.¹⁹¹

In this long overview of the central 291 distinctions and connections between painting and art-photography, every designated constant seems to carry its own contradiction. (Perhaps a proof, of sorts, that there can never be an *aesthetic* discourse entirely proper to photography.¹⁹²) No one quite added up in a concise way what most of the writers quoted above, particularly Stieglitz, knew perfectly well: That the rock-bottom distinction between the photographic process and painting is the arrested moment caught by the speed of the shutter. That this “fleeting expression of a moment” (O’Keeffe’s words) is, in fact, a second degree replication, or copy. And that the photographer is only able to be an artist before and after the camera clicks — not during — whereas the painter has no such creative interruption. To fill in this permanently missing gap, Stieglitz developed perhaps his most imaginative and scientific strategy: the narrative as told by a series of arrested moments. It was, of course, through serial imagery that he “added” most to photography by chronicling the physical and psychological evolution of Georgia O’Keeffe, and his own “philosophy of life” — the cloud Equivalents.

His other strategies are summed up best by his own statements:

I am the moment with all of me.¹⁹³

What I’m after is the A.I. — 1 [contact print] negative. When I get that as I sometimes do, the print *lives* — it is ART. It satisfies *aesthetic* requirements.¹⁹⁴ (Italics Stieglitz’s.)

My photographs do not lend themselves to reproduction. The very qualities that give them their life would be completely lost in reproduction. The quality of *touch* in its deepest living sense is inherent in my photographs. When the sense of *touch* is lost, the heartbeat of the photograph is extinct.¹⁹⁵ (Italics Stieglitz’s.)

Yes there seems [sic] to be millions on millions of photographers, and billions of photographs made annually but how rare a really fine photograph seems to be ... Its [sic] a pathetic situation. — So little

vision. So little true *seeing* — So little *inness* in any
print.¹⁹⁶ (Italics Stieglitz's.)

Like many other great æsthetes, Stieglitz was expert at having it both ways. O'Keeffe clearly listened to him and, for a time crucial to the development of her art, she believed.

Notes

Chapter Five

- 1 14 October 1912. YCAL.
- 2 *C.W.*, Number 42/43 (April-July 1913): 19.
- 3 *291*, Numbers 7-8 (1915), n.p.
- 4 The term 291, as used here, goes beyond the closing of the gallery in 1917. For years thereafter, Stieglitz often signed his letters "291", meaning, no doubt, that the original spirit behind it was still alive and well.
- 5 For recent writing against the reconceptualizing of photography according to art historical logic and methods (such as the selective interpretation of images and a creator-centered lineage) see Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* (Winter 1982): 311-319; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Calotypomania," *Afterimage* (Summer 1983): 7-12; and Christopher Phillips, "A Mnemonic Art?" *October* 26 (Fall 1983): 35-62.
- 6 Since the redefinitions of Romanticism as a term constitute a history in themselves, Baudelaire's classic statement of 1846 is chosen to suffice here: "Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subjects nor in exact truth, but in mode of feeling ... To say the word Romanticism is to say modern art—that is, intimacy, spirituality, colour, aspiration towards the infinite, expressed by every means available to the arts." (Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846," *Art in Paris, 1845-1862*, translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon, 1965): 46-47. For a study of Stieglitz as a Romantic artist, see Richard Nevin Masteller, "Romanticisms in a Modern Mode: The Photography of Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota (1978). Much of what Masteller writes about Stieglitz in this vein is true, as far as it goes, but he fails to mark the overarching importance of Symbolism for all of Stieglitz's work.
- 7 A. Stieglitz, *Camera Notes* 1 (July 1897): 3.
- 8 Alfred Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography," *Scribner's Magazine*, 26 (Nov. 1899): 529. The essay has been reprinted in *Photography: Essays and Images*, ed. B. Newhall (New York: MOMA 1980): 163-66; and also in *A Photographic Vision*, ed. P.C. Bunnell, pp. 124-127. Stieglitz was, of course, perfectly aware that even though Emerson had decided in 1891 that photography was not a fit medium for art, he went right on experimenting compulsively with art photography. Ironically, Emerson achieved perhaps his greatest work in 1895 with *Marsh Leaves*.

- 9 *Ibid*, Newhall, p. 164.
- 10 Alfred Stieglitz quoted by Charles H. Caffin in *Photography as a Fine Art*, p.36.
- 11 See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art and Literature* (1965) Reprinted in *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. 1973): 67. ("The use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence".)
- 12 Stieglitz to Pratt, 7 Dec. 1912. YCAL Pratt was a member of the Photo-Secession. Greenough has noted that this is Stieglitz's first use of the term "antiphotography." *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 255.
- 13 "Photo-Secession Notes," unsigned, but habitually by Haviland. *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 54.
- 14 Stieglitz, "Is Photography a Failure?," *The Sun* (Tuesday, March 14, 1922): 20.
- 15 P.H. Emerson, "Photography, A Pictorial Art," *The Amateur Photographer* 3 (March 19, 1886), reprinted in Newhall, *Photography: Essays & Images*, p. 160. For a study of the respectful, but growingly contentious relationship between Emerson and Stieglitz, and an extensive account of their correspondence from 1888-1933 (the letters are mostly Emerson's), see Nancy Newhall, *P.H. Emerson: The Fight for Photography as a Fine Art* (New York: Aperture Monograph 1975): 53-69, 112-134.
- 16 Emerson, "Photography, A Pictorial Art," in Newhall, p. 163.
- 17 Stieglitz, *Is Photography a Failure?*
- 18 Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography* (1899) Reprint New York: Arno Press Inc. (1973): 174.
- 19 Stieglitz, *Is Photography a Failure?* Although this article is clearly geared toward educating the general public about photography as an artistic medium of expression, Stieglitz fired it off in the spirit of setting the record straight shortly after reading some of the unenlightened responses to his question "Can a Photograph Have the Significance of Art?," published (without editing) in *Manuscripts*, No. 4, December, 1922.
- 20 Stieglitz to Seligmann, 9 August, 1923. YCAL.
- 21 See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Formalism and Its Discontents", *Print Collector's Newsletter* (May-June, 1982): 44. In this article, Solomon-

Godeau makes the further point that the lineage of 291's "Anglo-American" photographic formalism started in the early 'twenties with the writings of Roger Fry and Clive Bell. But judging from the statements Stieglitz made in 1897, 1899 and 1901 (already quoted in the text) it began much earlier. Even if Stieglitz had read Fry's "An Essay in Aesthetics" when it was first published in *The New Quarterly* in 1909 (reprinted in *Vision and Design* in 1920) his own formalist leanings were already apparent, and functioning—that is, he believed in the purity, self-reflexivity and absolute autonomy of the work of art. How much Stieglitz's repression of subject matter in the 1915-1916 photographs from 291 stemmed from Picabia and/or de Zayas's theory of "pure objectivity" in *Photography and Artistic Photography* (1913), and how much from his readings in or awareness of Fry and Bell, is yet another topic for investigation. Certainly the meaning of the latter's special terms "plasticity", "significant form" and "musicality" were well known to Stieglitz, as was their joint insistence that the originality of a work of art lay not in its subject matter but in its formal expression of a vision (or idea), for among the books that Stieglitz sent to O'Keeffe in 1916 was Bell's *Art* (1913). She was not impressed, however. Her letter to Pollitzer of Oct. 30, 1916, says "I've been reading Wright's *Creative Will* ... Have been reading Clive Bell again too. He seems so stupid beside Wright." (YCAL)

- 22 As quoted by Dorothy Norman in *Alfred Stieglitz: Introduction to an American Seer*, p. 36.
- 23 From the catalogue for *The Third Exhibition of Photography by Alfred Stieglitz*, The Anderson Galleries, 1924, n.p.
- 24 *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, Seligmann, p. 83.
- 25 *Ibid.* p. 3. Seligmann himself notes that "At The Exhibition of Seven Americans ... hundreds of children had been running about enjoying themselves during one or two days of the exhibition and *they had invariably chosen the things that Stieglitz and O'Keeffe had themselves preferred* (p. 15). Italics added.
- 26 Leo N., Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (first translated from the Russian in 1899), reprinted by The Library of Liberal Arts, (New York: Bobbs Merrill Co. Inc., 1960): 51. I have not come upon any specific references to Tolstoy by Stieglitz in his correspondence. Nor do Joseph Schiffman, Robert E. Haines, and F. Richard Thomas, in their examinations of his literary sources, mention *What is Art?* But Tolstoy was himself steeped in the writings of the French Symbolists — particularly Mallarmé. And many of Stieglitz's comments suggest he knew and agreed with the major premise of the book. For example, this letter of criticism to John G. Bullock (26 March, 1917): "In most of [your work] I am conscious primarily of photographs, and not of the thing you felt." The letter is published in Greenough and Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz*, pp. 199-200. It is quite possible that Stieglitz may have been originally alerted to Tolstoy's premise through Kandinsky's writing: "A work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the

outer. The inner is the emotion in the soul of the artist. This emotion had the power to arouse a similar feeling in the soul of the observer." (As quoted in Eddy, p. 119.)

- 27 For a recent discussion on just this point, see Robert E. Haines, *The Inner Eye of Alfred Stieglitz* (Washington, D.C. University Press of America, 1982): 87-106.
- 28 Alfred Stieglitz, "Thoroughly Unprepared", *Twice a Year* 10-11, (Fall-Winter 1943): 252-53.
- 29 W.H. Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*. A facsimile of the 1844-1846 edition (New York: Da Capo Press 1969) Text accompanying Plate III.
- 30 In her 1857 essay *Photography*, Lady Eastlake remarks that it was "made for the present age ... for cheap, prompt and correct facts." (See *Photography: Essays & Images*, p. 93) A.L. Coburn makes a powerful case for photography's modernity in his 1911 *Camera Work* essay "The Relation of Time to Art": "[photography] is the most modern of the arts .. [because it] is more suited to the art requirements of this age of scientific achievement." (CW, No. 36, Oct. 1911, p. 72.) And Stieglitz's 1923 letter to Seligmann ("it appeals more to the consciousness of today") is in much this same vein.
- 31 "Today it seems that thought has found a fissure through which to penetrate the mystery of this anonymous force [photography], invade it, subjugate it, animate it, and compel it to say such things as have not been said in all the realm of chiaroscuro, of grace, of beauty, and of truth." (From "Mæterlinck on Photography"), *Camera Work* (April, 1906): 62.
- 32 "Photography should register and give us documents." From "A Series of Interviews", Matisse, *Camera Work* 24, October, 1908, p. 22. About this passage, Jack Flam has written that Matisse is not extolling 'documentary' photography *per se*, rather he is saying that photography is yet another way of approaching the study of nature ('external reality'), *Matisse on Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1973): 40. Matisse himself makes this quite clear in his 1933 statement to Tériade on creativity: "Photography has greatly disturbed the imagination, because one has seen things devoid of feeling. When I wanted to get rid of all influences which prevented me from seeing nature from my own personal view, I copied photography." (Reprinted in Flam, p. 66.)
- 33 "Photography is the art that expresses itself through symbols, which, in their imitativeness of nature, are like those used in painting, but which, in their being scientifically made, and not hand-marked, are also like those used in architecture ... photography is one of the fine arts, but no more allied to painting than to architecture... Photography is photography, neither more nor less." ("Is Photography a New Art?", *Camera Work* 23: July, 1908: 17-22. The article is unsigned but has been identified as Rood's by Peter Bunnell, *A Photographic Vision*, p. 178.)

- 34 "Photography can never be a great art in the same sense that painting can, it can never create anything, nor design . . . It is an art entirely apart and for itself." ("Painting and Photography," *Camera Work* 23 (July 1908): 5.
- 35 "All artists who set out to represent the world as it is have the eye photographic ... There is, however, that other field of art which is occupied, not with the facts of sight, but with the ideas of the imagination. This is outside the range of the photographic point of view." ("The Camera Point of View in Painting and Photography," *Camera Work* 24, Oct. 1908: 24,26.) "Photography is itself a scientific process, lending itself at every turn to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge." ("Some Impressions," *Camera Work* 28, Oct. 1909: 34.)
- 36 "The mechanism of the camera is essentially the one medium which renders every interpretation impressionistic, and every photographic exposure, whether sharp or blurred, really represents an impressionist composition." ("Unphotographic Paint: The Texture of Impressionism," *Camera Work* 24, Oct. 1909: 23. Originally an unsigned article, and now generally credited to Hartmann.) "What we would like to fathom is what photography can do better than any other monochrome medium... with this conveyance of the actual flow and shimmer of light ... line is invariably suggested by the gradation of tonal planes ... The absence of actual line ... is natural to photography and consequently one of the powerful characteristics. ("What Remains," *Camera Work* 33, Jan. 1911: 30.)
- 37 "Having proved conclusively that along certain lines, pre-eminently in portraiture, the camera had the advantage over the best trained eye and hand, the logical deduction was that the other arts could only prove themselves superior to photography by making their aim dependent on other qualities than accurate reproduction... The Photo-Secession can be said now to stand for those artists who secede from the photographic attitude toward the representation of form." ("Photo-Secession Notes," *Camera Work* 30, April 1910: 54. Unsigned, but written by Haviland during this period.)
- 38 "The essential difference [between painting and photography] is not so much a mechanical one ... but rather as compared with an instantaneous, concentrated mental impulse, followed by a longer period of fruition. ("The Relation of Time to Art," *Camera Work* 33, Jan. 1911: 72.)
- 39 Caffin, "Exhibition of Prints by Baron Ad De Meyer", *CW* 37 (Jan. 1912): 43.
- 40 de Zayas, "Photography", *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 17.

- 41 de Zayas, "Photography and Artistic-Photography", *Camera Work* 42-43 (April-July, 1913): 13-14.
- 42 Hutchins Hapgood, "A Paris Painter", *Camera Work*, 42-43, pp. 49-51. First published in the *Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, (N.Y.) February 20, 1913, p. 8.
- 43 A letter from Stieglitz to Arthur B. Carles dated 11 April, 1913 confirms this: "Picabia left yesterday. All at '291' will miss him. He and his wife were about the cleanest propositions I have ever met in my career. They were one hundred percent purity ... Picabia came to '291' virtually daily ... Even [he] was astonished at de Zayas's ability." (YCAL) For a recent study of the symbiotic artistic relationship between Picabia and de Zayas in New York and Paris, see Willard Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas", *Art Bulletin* (Sept. 1980): 434-435, 447-452.
- 44 *Camera Work* 42-43 (Published in November, 1913): 48.
- 45 *Ibid.* p. 24.
- 46 *Ibid.* from *Notes on '291'*, p. 19.
- 47 *Ibid.* p. 18, pp. 19-20.
- 48 Lowe, in a telephone conversation with me, 20 July 1985, confirmed that Stieglitz spoke French without difficulty — that, in fact, the whole family did, and that they prided themselves in being "language conscious." For a résumé of Picabia's extremely various artistic influences between 1908-1912, including the leit motif of Symbolism, see William Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979): 17-39.
- 49 Gabrielle Buffet, "Modern Art and the Public," *Camera Work*, (June 1913): 13. Her argument of the superiority of painting over music was picked up later by Willard Huntington Wright. Writing in defense of Synchronist painters for *Forum Magazine*, he described their art as superior to music because "it is more intimately attached to reality." ("Impressionism to Synchronism," *Forum Magazine* 50 (July-Dec., 1913): 770.) In point of fact, Gauguin was the first modern artist to contest (c. 1890) that painting was superior to music. (In "Notes Synthétiques," published in *Vers et Prose*, VI, 1910). And Kandinsky also wrote of the superiority of painting to music in *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* ("painting can present to the spectator the whole content of its message in one moment").
- 50 According to Marcel Duchamp, "Picabia was above all an Abstractionist, a word he invented ... He thought about nothing else," Pierre Cabanne and Marcel Duchamp, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Viking Press 1969): 39.
- 51 *The New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1913, Part 5.

- 52 Buffet, *Camera Work* (June 1913): ;12.
- 53 Picabia as quoted by Samuel Swift, "Art Photographs and Cubist Painting," reprinted in *CW*, (42-43): 46.
- 54 Stieglitz to Heinrich Kühn, 14 October 1912, YCAL.
- 55 Francis Picabia, "How New York Looks to Me," *New York American* (March 30, 1913) Magazine Section: 11.
- 56 Charles Caffin, "The International—Yes—But Matisse and Picabia?," *New York American* (March 3, 1913.)
- 57 Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Rosenfeld, 6 Sept. 1924, YCAL ("Oddly enough, I was going to call the series of my sky pictures "Music of the Spheres"—but feel it too ambitious a title.")
- 58 "Technically, every work of art comes into being in the same way as the cosmos—by means of catastrophes, which ultimately create out of the cacophony of the various instruments, that symphony we call the music of the spheres. The creation of the work of art is the creation of the world. (*Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art*, Vol.One (1901-1921). Edited by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982): 373.
- 59 For recent research on the Bragdon/Stieglitz relationship, see Sherrye Cohn, "Arthur Dove and Theosophy: Visions of a Transcendental Reality," *Arts* (Sept. 1983): 88.
- 60 For a discussion on this point, see Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, pp. 61-62.
- 61 "The real test of not only technical proficiency but intelligent conception is not in the use of some indifferent negative as a basis to work from, but in the ability to see one's finished print on the ground glass in all its desired qualities and values before exposure." Edward Weston, quoted in Newhall *The History of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982): 188.
- 62 "It is only after I have put down an equivalent of what has moved me, that I can begin to think about its meaning." Stieglitz, quoted by Norman, *Introduction to an American Seer*, p. 36.
- 63 For what is known about this revealing incident, see Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, pp. 29-30.
- 64 For a discussion of Stieglitz's "Cubist" composition in the 1915-16 photographs, see Pultz and Scallen, pp. 16-27. For Stieglitz's own

opinion of what he had done, see his letter to R. Child Bayley, 1 Nov. 1916 (YCAL): "...I have done quite some photography recently. It is intensely direct. Portraits. Buildings from my back window at 291, a whole series of them, a few landscapes and interiors. All interrelated I know of nothing outside Hill's work which I think so direct, and quite so intensely honest ... Just the straight goods ... But everything simplified in spite of endless detail."

- 65 The NGA has three 4x5 platinum prints from this series in the "key set," Stieglitz's self portrait (D381) and two others, less abstract, taken of himself and Walkowitz, (D382 and D383). It should be noted that all of the accession numbers of the "key set" are in the process of being changed. Therefore, none of the listed numbers in my thesis are the final ones.
- 66 This strange, rarely exhibited, photograph was published on the cover of the 1958 catalogue *Alfred Stieglitz*, published by the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- 67 NGA nos. O.K. 110 and 111. See also a reproduction in *Georgia O'Keeffe, A Portrait* (1978) Plate 28.
- 68 Stieglitz to Haviland, July 22, 1928.
- 69 Lowe, p. 212.
- 70 *Ibid.* p. 169.
- 71 Among the most useful recent contributions to this period are: William A. Camfield, "The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia," *Art Bulletin* (Sept-Dec. 1966): 309-322; William Innes Homer, "Picabia's 'Jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité' and Her Friends," *Art Bulletin* 58 (March 1975): 110-115; Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives*, pp.15-48; *Arts Magazine* (May 1977: Special issue on New York Dada and the Arensberg Circle); Jan Thompson, "Picabia and His Influence on American Art, 1913-17," *Art Journal* (Fall, 1979): 14-21. This article does not mention Picabia's influence on O'Keeffe—nor do any of the others.
- 72 O'Keeffe was not in New York or Chicago during Picabia's notorious Armory Show visit to the States in 1913 (January-April). Although his second trip across the Atlantic (June 1915-summer, 1916) is poorly documented, despite the activities that culminated in his highly influential mechanomorphic style, O'Keeffe's existence in New York as a CTC student during the spring of 1916 did not include the glittering Arnsberg circle, where he often held sway. (Nor does she ever mention meeting Picabia in her letters to Pollitzer.) During his third visit to New York (March-September, 1917), O'Keeffe was teaching in Texas. And Picabia never afterward returned to America.

- 73 The Stieglitz-Picabia correspondence, Stieglitz's in English, Picabia's in French, is at YCAL.
- 74 Steichen in Paris to Stieglitz in New York, received Dec. 19, 1913. Steichen Archive, MOMA, New York. I am especially indebted to Grace A. Mayor for making it so easy to examine Steichen's correspondence there.
- 75 For some specific examples, see Jan Thompson, pp. 16-21.
- 76 Meraud Michael Guinnes, "Francis Picabia," in the exhibition catalogue for *The Picabia Exhibition*, April 19-May 11, 1928, Room 303, The Intimate Gallery, n.p.
- 77 Eddy, pp. 96-97.
- 78 Reproduced in G O'K (1976), with the artist's commentary: "There are three paintings of the *Black Spot*. I never knew where the idea came from or what it says. They are shapes that were clearly in my mind—so I put them down." *Black Spot II* was illustrated in *The Dial* LXXXI (Dec. 1921): 664. *Black Spot No. 1*, long in the artist's own collection, was recently reproduced for the first time in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1986: 340. (Like several other of her abstractions, these secret shapes may have derived from an up-ended view of the Lake George shoreline—half cloudy sky, half reflection. The actual, "black spot" may originally have been a boat on the water. (Stieglitz's boat?))
- 79 This work belongs to the Vassar College Art Gallery. It is reproduced in black and white in *American Art Nouveau*, p. 262.
- 80 Reproduced (in black and white, prior to restoration) in Camfield, fig. 98.
- 81 Stieglitz to Carles, April 11, 1913, YCAL. These five works by Picabia became part of Stieglitz's personal collection, which O'Keeffe decided to divide up and donate to several American museums after his death. For her account of this difficult task, see "Stieglitz: His Pictures Collected Him." pp. 24-30.
- 82 The two Picabia watercolors of Stieglitz's that I was able to examine most closely are now in the Art Institute of Chicago. (*Entrance to New York*, and *New York* [#1949, 577]) Somewhat surprisingly they are linear rather than painterly—to use Wölfflin's terms. Picabia's palette is arbitrarily reduced hues of red, black and white—with some secondary and tertiary tones of pink, orange and gray. But, almost without exception, the colors are applied precisely within the boundaries of the (still visible) penciled shapes.
- 83 The relationship of O'Keeffe's art to Matisse's begs for a more thorough evaluation. In addition to Art Nouveau (already spoken of in

Chapter Two) they share several other basic interests, techniques and bents: Japanese art principles (for recent writing on Matisse's underestimated interest in Japanese woodcuts and crépons, see Robert Reiff, "Matisse and Torii Kiyonaga," *Arts* (Feb. 1981): 164-167); formal reduction of nature motifs rather than invention of purely abstract forms; frequent use of an imaginary plumbline (as Matisse described it for himself in *Jazz* [1947], "Around this fictive line the arabesque develops. I have derived constant benefit from my use of the plumb line. The vertical is in my mind. It helps give my lines a precise direction ... I never indicate a curve ... without a consciousness of its relation to the vertical."); a life-long obsession with doors and windows; a non-linear artistic development—one constituting a backward and forward type of searching; and a self-conscious mining of their very first independent images (in Matisse's case, *Bonheur de Vivre* [1906]) in their later works.

- 84 Caffin, "The International—Yes—But Matisse and Picabia?" p. 45.
- 85 Eddy, p. 45. Earlier, in *Notes of a Painter* (1908), Matisse had severely condemned the artist who turns his back on nature.
- 86 John I. H. Baur, *Nature in Abstraction* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1958): 77.
- 87 Quoted in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice*, p. 194. Although O'Keeffe has always been extremely secretive about the actual mechanics of her painting method, a number of friends and critics have observed the following: In 1927, Frances O'Brien noticed that "Beside her is a glass palette, very large, very clean, each separate color on its surface remote from the next. As soon as a tone has been mixed and applied to the canvas its remains are carefully scraped off the palette, which thus retains its air of virginity." (*The Nation*, Oct. 12, 1927: 361.) In 1929, Robert Coates wrote, "... she paints as she feels, impulsively. She does no underpainting on her canvases; she rarely even blocks out her design in advance. Sometimes, in the midst of an evening's conversation, she will be seen furtively sketching a few lines on a bit of paper or the back of an envelope; when she sets up her canvas, she begins at one corner and paints right across it, as one would write a letter." (*The New Yorker*, July 6, 1927.) Georgia Engelhard Cromwell, who painted frequently with O'Keeffe in 1932, confirmed much of this in the interview with me, 12 March 1980. She also added that O'Keeffe stretched her own canvases, used a separate brush for each color, did not thin colors with turpentine, and rarely over painted. In a subsequent letter to me, dated April 22, 1980, GEC wrote: "When OK painted small objects—flowers, leaves, clam shells, stones etc., she did paint from a model. The first paintings were usually small and then later she would develop the motif into something larger. She definitely worked from realism to abstraction on many occasions ... When we were on the Gaspé and [she] did the barn and cross series, these were painted from nature—she would paint the most important sections [on the motif] and then finish the work later from memory. But many of her landscapes were NOT painted directly from nature—and they are largely the impressions that certain scenes made on her ... But she never talked

much about her painting ...She was an excellent draughtsman—which I feel is due to her conservative art training. I always feel that so many modern artists can't draw—but she certainly COULD." It should also be added, from my own observation, that O'Keeffe sometimes used tape for her straight line boundaries. This can be seen in *Radiator Building—Night* (1927), among others.

- 88 Lisle, p. 43.
- 89 O'Keeffe to Homer interview, Sept. 1972.
- 90 NGA O'Keeffe portrait # 177. She herself dated the photograph c. 1921 in 1947.
- 91 Lewis Mumford, "O'Keeffe and Matisse," *The New Republic* (March 2, 1927) In a definitely cryptic letter to me on 14 Feb. 1980, Mumford wrote, " ...Stieglitz was pleased by my piece on Matisse and O'Keeffe—mistakenly supposing that I was thus elevating her!"
- 92 *Georgia O'Keeffe* (1976), text facing plate 41.
- 93 In the show titled *Reflections of Nature*, curated by Ella M. Foshay March 1-May 20, 1984.
- 94 William Rubin "From Narrative to 'Iconic' in Picasso," *Art Bulletin* (Dec. 1983): 615.
- 95 As quoted in *G O'K* (1976) text facing plate 41.
- 96 Lloyd Goodrich, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe Drawings* (New York: Atlantis Editions, 1968) For an example of this O'Keeffeian characteristic in the set of "Jacks," we may compare *Jack-in-the-Pulpit V* with *Drawing No. 13* of c. 1916. Not surprisingly, Stieglitz knew this before anyone else. A letter to Sherwood Anderson, dated 27 Oct. 1924 says: "Georgia's done some amazing canvases. Intimately related to the early drawings which so overwhelmed me when brought to me the first time back in 1916. I know of nothing like them." Newberry.
- 97 For an account of the genesis and accomplishment of this valuable "little magazine," see Lowe. pp. 243-2.
- 98 "The ordinary photograph is a picture made with monocular vision ... [Therefore] freedom in the choice of the focal plane is practically infinite ... That the constitution of the arabesque [compact planes] is sufficiently within the range of photography is obvious, and since it can add to this, control of the focus, it would seem ... photographic art ... is actual." (*MSS* 4 (Dec. 1922): 5-6.)
- 99 "The usual objection to photography, that it is impossible to choose a subject without having many objectionable and extraneous things to intrude themselves into the frame, is not valid [for] ... a desired order is

not accomplished only by *subtraction*. It may be achieved by *adding* until another manifestation of the same order appears." Underlining Wright's. (*Ibid.* pp. 7-8.)

- 100 "Man enters into the æsthetics of photography in a selective capacity, in the isolation of what is æsthetically moving in nature ... True photography is the isolation and registration of phenomena of visual sensations and chemical progressions and is interesting according to the selective and directive intelligence of the photographer." (*Ibid.* p. 8.)
- 101 "In the matter of space, the procedure in photography is the reverse of what it is in painting but space-feeling, an absolute essential, is the same in both. (*Ibid.* p. 9.)
- 102 "The painter can produce any form or line—the photographer only those—ahead [of] the camera. The painter can create in past-present-future [and] the photographer only in [the] present ... [but] all men are forced more or less to create from material ahead of them—the most imaginative thing being a composite of influences of things seen. As for time—is not the present—but a composite of past and future ... are not all men more or less slaves to their medium [?] ... whether [the Artist's] instrument be brush-camera-spade-saw-fiddle—matters not—provided it gives out the SING—of his life—and the record of that SING—may be that which we will term Art in the future." (*Ibid.* pp. 10-11.)
- 103 "The evocation of form arises in the sensory intuition of substance, weight and motion. It is founded in the body's knowledge of itself—and in the experience of the nervous system as a whole. For every reason perhaps, except that of the truly aesthetic, photography holds a strong position ... —and admirable work about which anything may be said except that it is a piece of true creative art." (*Ibid.* p. 13.)
- 104 "The work of Stieglitz is more than half upon his subject and this fact brings clearer the old intuitive mechanism. By talk, atmosphere suggestion, and the momentum of a personal relationship, Stieglitz lifts the feature and body of his subject into a unitary design that his plate records. His work in thus moulding material is analogous to the work of any good portraitist, who does his moulding in his eye and with his hand on canvas." (*Ibid.* p. 5.) [In *How I Came to Photograph Clouds*, Stieglitz's derisive substitute word for "moulding" was "hypnotism."]
- 105 "I must say that I have come to the conclusion that [photography] does not exist as yet. I mean the photography that will represent the object without the interference of man, who always has prejudices, points of view, selections ... Photography as it is done up to the present is nothing else than a means of expression of man—therefore it is Art." (*Ibid.* p. 18.)
- 106 *Ibid.* pp. 17-18.
- 107 Eastlake, "Photography," (1857), reprinted in Newhall, *Photography: Essays and Images*, p. 94.

- ¹⁰⁸ O'Keeffe, *MSS*, pp. 17-18.
- ¹⁰⁹ Stieglitz/Strand correspondence. 18 Aug. 1922, and 12 Sept. 1922. PSA/CCP.
- ¹¹⁰ For an examination of the sources for this statement, see Peter C. Bunnell, Introduction, *A Photographic Vision*, pp. 1-7.
- ¹¹¹ For a virtual compendium of 17th century ideas on vision, optics and picture-making, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) Alpers also argues convincingly that the ultimate origins of photography do *not* lie in the 15th century invention of perspective, as proposed by Peter Galassi in *Before Photography* (MOMA, 1981, p. 12), but rather in the "descriptive" mode of the north. "If we want historical precedence for the photographic image it is in the rich mixture of seeing, knowing and picturing that manifested itself in 17th century images." (pp. 244,43.) For other opinions on Galassi's theory, see Janet Malcolm, "Maximilian's Sombrero," *The New Yorker* (July 6, 1981): 91-94; Vickie Goldberg, "Photography Painting's Child?" *Art in America* (November 1981): 35-37; Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, "Proto-Photo," *New York Review* (December 3, 1981): 31-32; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Tunnel Vision," *The Print Collector's News Letter* 6 (January - February 1982): 173-175.
- ¹¹² Alpers, p. xxvii. Much of the information for this summary comes from Alpers's useful collection of sources for the "descriptive" tradition.
- ¹¹³ Stieglitz, "Foreword" to the Wanamaker Exhibition Catalogue, 1913, later reprinted in *Photo-Miniature* (March 1913).
- ¹¹⁴ There are some small pieces of documentary evidence to suggest that Stieglitz was aware of a visual kinship between his "new" photographs and the northern tradition of image making. In an entry dated 1926, January 27, in Seligmann's *Stieglitz Talking* is the following: "Stieglitz remarked that Memling was the first 'photographic' painter who had lived before the days of 'pictorial photography' and illustration. O'Keeffe said she thought the Van Eykes should be named also." (p. 30) And in a 1980 interview with Georgia Engelhard Cromwell, conducted by this writer, her husband Eaton (Tony) remembered that in 1940, when he was inspected by the Stieglitz family as a perspective husband for young Georgia, Stieglitz quizzed him as to the painters he liked. "When I said Vermeer, Stieglitz was pleased. Neither he nor O'Keeffe like Rembrandt, Raphael or Botticelli. The Renaissance was not for them. O'Keeffe loved the Dutch flower painters and Vermeer too." For an interesting discussion of the affinities of O'Keeffe's painting with the domain of the later Northern (Romantic) painters (of whom Kandinsky was also an offshoot) see Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975): 207-8, 214. He especially remarks on her "characteristic Romantic sense of scale which leaps from the microcosm

to the macrocosm, from the infinitely large to the infinitely small.” (p. 20) This, of course, may also be regarded as a photographic characteristic.

- ¹¹⁵ Caffin, “The Camera Point of View in Painting and Photography.” *Camera Work* 24 (October 1908): 26. As a highly educated (Oxford) and progressive critic of modern art Caffin was undoubtedly familiar with Baudelaire’s “Salons” and with this famous statement: “It is time, then, for [photography] to return to its true duty, which is to be the servant of the sciences and arts ... if it be allowed to encroach upon the domain of the impalpable and the imaginary, upon anything whose value depends solely upon the addition of something of a man’s soul, then it will be so much the worse for us.” (“The Salon of 1859,” reviewed by Charles Baudelaire, reprinted in *Art in Paris, 1845-1862*, translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon 1965): 154.) Caffin, it need hardly be said, disagreed with the bottom line of Baudelaire’s statement—having supported the cause of photography as an art form since 1899. In this essay, he proposed the province of the camera to be objective fact, whereas painting should concern itself with “conceptions existing only in the inner vision.”
- ¹¹⁶ De Zayas, *CW* 41 (Jan. 1913): 17 and *CW* 42-43 (April-July, 1913): 13.
- ¹¹⁷ On this important point Greenough’s position is that although Stieglitz’s photographs of clouds have their roots in Symbolism, “They and [his] idea of photography, quickly developed beyond their heritage and incorporated his understanding of the aims of modern art” (*Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 23) But the case may justly be made that his “idea of photography” and his understanding of the “aims of modern art” remained essentially Symbolist. For in his dual role as artist/crusader, Stieglitz never really stopped emulating and extolling the following basically Symbolist theories and goals: to present work which (1) requires that the spectator “look for the emotion or idea generated from the spectacle and not the spectacle itself,” as de Zayas described Picasso’s early Cubist work (*CW* 34 April-July 1911: 65); which (2) seeks in Kandinsky’s words “the inner spirit in outer things,” (*CW* 39, July 1912: 34); and which (3) expresses what Picabia called the new “objectivity of a subjectivity. We can make ourselves better understood by comparing it to music.” (*CW* 42-43, Nov. 1913: 20.)
- ¹¹⁸ This phrase was also used by Roger Fry, in his 1912 preface to the catalogue of *The Second Post Impressionist Exhibition*: “The logical extreme of [the Post-Impressionists’] method would undoubtedly be the attempt to give all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language of form—a visual music, and the later works of Picasso show this clearly enough.” (Re-printed in *Vision and Design*, p. 239.)
- ¹¹⁹ *MSS*, Nos. 4, 1922: 11.

- 120 As quoted by Seligmann in *Stieglitz Talking*, pp. 61-62. The actual photograph referred to by Stieglitz has not been finally identified.
- 121 For an excellent short summary of this period, see Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, pp. 13-15.
- 122 Stieglitz to Coomaraswamy, 14 Feb. 1924. YCAL.
- 123 A recent essay to take up this endlessly debatable issue is Allan Sekula, "Photography Between Labor and Capital," in the catalogue *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures, 1948-1968* (Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983) Sekula sees photography as neither art nor science but "suspended between the discourse of ... [the two], staking its claims to cultural value on both the model of truth upheld by empirical science and the model of expressiveness offered by romantic esthetics." (p. 201)
- 124 A recent essay which explores these historic facts vis-à-vis our habits of perception and depiction with remarkable probity and clarity is Joel Snyder, "Picturing Vision," reprinted in *The Language of Vision*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980): 219-246.
- 125 For Stieglitz's scientific readings, see Lowe, pp. 210-211/ Not mentioned by Lowe is Stieglitz's long-time interest in the fourth dimension, or hyperspace philosophy, which shows up frequently in the pages of *Camera Work* (for just one example, see Weber's "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View." *CW*, July 1910.) For further data on this topic see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "The Artist, 'The Fourth Dimension,' and Non-Euclidean Geometry: 1900-1930," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University (1975). Henderson doesn't treat Stieglitz specifically, but she documents the immensely fertile effect that fourth dimension concepts had on the work of some of his colleagues and close contacts: In addition to Weber (pp. 121, 180-181), there was Duchamp (pp. 122, 297, 217-178), Claude Bragdon (pp. 316-322), and David Burliuk (p. 323). It remains difficult, however, to determine the degree of artistic influence on Stieglitz or on O'Keeffe of the fourth dimension—despite their well-known encounters with Bragdon's proselytizing ideas of hyperspace philosophy, during the early 'twenties. Interestingly, O'Keeffe's work is cited several times in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. (By Maurice Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art," pp. 42-43, and by Charles Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized: American Painting from Ryder to Hartley," pp. 112, 116-127.) But, so far, no hard evidence has been turned up by anyone to suggest that O'Keeffe ever used occult teachings and occult illustrations for her imagery—as did Dove and Hartley. While this remains a fascinating topic for research, Louise March told me she didn't think O'Keeffe really cared for that sort of thing—being much too independent-minded. And when March sent O'Keeffe a copy of Gurjieff's *All and Everything*, she said she couldn't get through it. (Interview with me, 16 September 1986.)

- 126 Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923): 209. For a discussion of Bertrand Russell, Einstein, Haldane, D. H. Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson and T. S. Eliot (all read and admired by Stieglitz) and the way in which these writers reflected, and acted upon the scientific and religious values of the 1920s, see Frederick J. Hoffman, "Science and the 'Precious Object'", *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965): 275-343.
- 127 Two recent publications to offer a useful survey of the wide range of opinion on the 'true nature' of photography are: *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), which documents a chronological record of thinking about the medium from the early 19th century to the present. And *Reading Into Photography: Selected Essays, 1959-1980* edited by Thomas F. Barrow, Shelley Armitage, William E. Tydeman (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), which presents a sampling of criticism particularly concerned with the nature of photographic meaning. Overall conclusion: The photograph continues to defy interpretation.
- 128 Paul Rosenfeld, "Stieglitz," *The Dial* 70 (April 1921): 398.
- 129 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, transl. by Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc. 1981): 107-119.
- 130 The lexical definition of objective derives from optics: the "objectif" is the lens through which the rays of light pass from an object to focus on chemically sensitized surfaces.
- 131 For a succinct discussion of the reasons why photography can never be purely "objective," see Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, Vision and Representation," *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn, 1975): 143-169.
- 132 See R. L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing*, World University Library (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973): 164-176.
- 133 Much of the information in this summation comes from E. H. Gombrich's studies in perception, mainly, *The Image and the Eye*. (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1982): 40-62, 244-277.
- 134 O'Keeffe to Sherwood Anderson, February, 1924. Newberry.
- 135 Eddy pp. 133-34.
- 136 Picabia, reprint of the "Preface," *Camera Work* 42-43 (1913): 20.
- 137 De Zayas, "Photography and Artistic-Photography," *Camera Work* 42-43: 13.

- 138 De Zayas, catalogue for 291 exhibition of 18 African Sculptures (Nov. 2-Dec. 8) 1914.
- 139 De Zayas, 291 7-8 (Sept.-Oct.) 1915. n.p.
- 140 Strand, "Photography," *Seven Arts* (Aug. 1917): 524-25. Also printed in *Camera Work* 49-50 (June 1917): 3-4.
- 141 For O'Keeffe's excited account of her first meeting with Strand, see her letter to Pollitzer of 20 June 1917. YCAL.
- 142 Somewhat ironically, this standard was set by two of Stieglitz's closest colleagues: Marsden Hartley, who wrote in 1920 that O'Keeffe "sees the world of a woman turned inside out ... [her] pictures ... are probably as living and shameless private documents as exist, in painting certainly, and probably in any other art." (*Adventures in the Arts*, p. 116). And Paul Rosenfeld, who described her art in 1921 as "gloriously female. Her great painful and ecstatic climaxes make us at last to know something man has always wanted to know ... All is ecstasy here, ecstasy of pain as well as ecstasy of fulfillment." ("American Painting," *The Dial* (Dec. 1921): 666.
- 143 As the contemporary New York critic Royal Cortissoz put it in 1923, "The prevailing tendency ... [of the American mind] has been toward an objective treatment of the facts of nature." (*American Artists*, New York: Scribner's, 1923: 93.) In 1927, Lewis Mumford would attempt (with some reason) to link O'Keeffe's painting with that of Ryder. "Alfred Ryder ... too, in his landscapes and in his more deliberately symbolic pictures, sought to use the objective fact as a means of projecting a more interior and less articulate world." ("O'Keeffe and Matisse," *The New Republic*, March 2, 1927).
- 144 Two letters offer some direct proof for this statement: "Self control is a wonderful thing," O'Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer (October, 1915), "I think we must even keep ourselves from feeling too much—often—if we are going to keep sane and see with an unprejudiced vision... I have to keep my head for purely physical reasons—it wears me out too much not to."; Stieglitz's words to Strand (October 1919) are even more graphic: "Georgia had heard her father had been killed ... I don't know the actual facts. You know she is not a talker ... don't mention G's father's death to her or anyone else—don't write—you know she prefers silence on all such matters." YCAL.
- 145 One of the earliest articles to do this was Caffin's "A Note on Paul Cézanne," where he remarks that Cézanne's art is "scientific" because "it is based upon the geometric figures of the sphere, cone and cylinder," which are "inherent" in nature. (*CW*, April, 1911: 49.) De Zayas compared Picasso's work to the abstract sensation of a Gothic cathedral, an "ensemble of geometrical figures" whose significance and real form have a universal appeal even if we do not understand them immediately. (*CW* 34/35, April-July, 1911: 67.) And Hartmann, in an

article titled "Structural Units" wrote that "In the past, as should be the case today, geometric shapes form the intelligent and austere understructure of all arts ... A rhomb, an isosceles triangle, ellipse are beautiful in themselves." (CW 36 (October 1911): 18)

¹⁴⁶ This incident, and the quotation are recounted in de Zayas's "How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York," first published in *Arts* (April, 1980): 102.

¹⁴⁷ This 48 x 30" oil is a promised gift to The Whitney Museum of American Art by Sandra Payson, and was on exhibition there in 1981, where I saw it and was permitted to make some detail photographs.

¹⁴⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *The Image and The Eye*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁹ It may be seen in embryo in such earlier works as *Calla Lily in Tall Glass No. 1* (1923), and *Spring* (c. 1922).

¹⁵⁰ Among the 1924 triangle/ellipse compositions of O'Keeffe's that I have so far managed to identify as having appeared in the Seven Americans Show are: *Eggplant* (listed as "The Egg Plant"); *Corn Dark II* (listed as "Corn — No.2"); *Petunias in Oval No. 2*; *The Chestnut Grey* ("Autumn Trees — The Chestnut-Grey"); *From the Lake — No. 3*; *Leaf Motive No. 1*; *Leaf Motive No. 2*; *A Celebration*; *Petunia and Coleus* ("Petunia — No. 1"); *Petunia No. 1*; *Calla Lilies*; *Portrait of a Day - Third Day*. There may well be others, but these are the only ones I have been able to track down or find reproductions for. The Whitney was given access to O'Keeffe's records in 1981 and from this now believes that *Flower Abstraction* also appeared in The Seven Americans show, listed in the catalogue as "Abstraction."

¹⁵¹ The contribution of literature to this joining has been brilliantly traced by Patrick Leonard Stewart, "Charles Sheeler, William Carlos Williams and The Development of The Precisionist Æsthetic 1917-1931," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Wilmington: University of Delaware, 1981.) For a useful overview of *Imagism* in American literature, and of Ezra Pound's role as prime catalyst, see Frederick J. Hoffman, *The 'Twenties* pp. 197-204. For a rich summary of Williams's fertile connections with Imagism and with (later) Precisionist poetry, see Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams, The American Background* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 23-36, 39-42, 55-64. The pioneer study on Williams's early connections with the visual arts is Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*.

¹⁵² Rosenfeld, *The Dial* (Dec. 1921): 649.

¹⁵³ W. C. Williams, *Poetry Journal*, VIII (Nov. 1917): 27-36. Williams had been even more specific for himself in an earlier unpublished manifesto titled *Vortex* of 1915: "I will express my emotions in the appearances: surfaces, sounds, smells, touch of the place in which I

- happen to be.” (See *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists* (New York: New Directions Books 1978): 58.
- 154 John Dewey, “Americanism and Localism” *The Dial* LXVIII (June 1920): 684-688.
- 155 Williams, *Contact* I, 1920, reprinted in *A Recognizable Image*, p. 6.
- 156 *Ibid*, p. 66, p. 68 (*Contacts* II and IV).
- 157 There were in fact two separate articles on Imagism published in the same (March 1913) issue of *Poetry*—one by Pound and one by F.S. Flint. But it is generally accepted that the ideas behind both articles were Pound’s.
- 158 For as lucid a discussion of this heritage as seems to exist, see Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*, pp. 24-25.
- 159 Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe, January, 1915. Cited in Hoffman, p. 199. If ever O’Keeffe had needed a model for her own “direct” prose (which she did not), this would have served perfectly.
- 160 Ezra Pound to Alfred Stieglitz, Jan. 1925. YCAL.
- 161 For this, see Stewart, pp. 79-115.
- 162 *Ibid*, pp. 126-159.
- 163 NGA, D. 439.
- 164 Several of Stieglitz’s autochromes still exist, and may be seen at the NGA. For Stieglitz’s account of his experiments, see “The New Color Photography — A Bit of History,” *Camera Work* 20 (October 1907): 20.
- 165 Rosenfeld, *The Port of New York*, pp. 255-256. Rosenfeld’s statement might have made even more sense if he had not stipulated “modern color,” which implies the use of hues unadulterated by white and black—begun by the Impressionists. In 19th century academic painting the “effect” was always defined in terms of light and dark values.
- 166 Two other notable 291 figures to tussle intellectually with abstraction between 1913-1915 were the critic John Weichsel, who held that abstracting from reality impoverished the visual and would therefore cause the death of art. (“Cosmism or Amorphism?”, *CW*, 42-43, Nov. 1913: 69-82); and the architect-painter Oscar Bluemner, who perceived Cubism at the time of the Armory Show as “realizing a new pictorial precision of form,” and who extolled “pure color harmony” as one of several important possibilities for modern art. (“Audiator et Altera Pars: Some Plain Sense on the Modern Art Movement,” *CW* 41, June 1913:

25-38). But less than a year later Bluemner recanted somewhat from his early acceptance of abstraction. In a 1914 article on the work of Walkowitz (*CW* 44, March 1914: 25-26, 37-38), Bluemner questioned whether "color in painting [was] possible and desirable without the concrete form of reality." By 1915, the enthusiasm for non-representational abstraction had cooled even further at 291. In a diary entry dated Nov. 10, 1915, Bluemner noted a group conversation held "at Stieglitz's" in which Picabia was described as relying upon the viewer "to provide 90% of the meaning of his work," but his results were "lifeless, unrealized, mechanical." Walkowitz and Bluemner apparently agreed with each other that "the abstract can be reversed; that is, the feeling, the sensation can be reproduced in [a] genuinely objective form (like the old Germans, Dürer and Cranach.)" De Zayas is also quoted as saying, "That's all right; then one can produce the abstract through the concrete." (This passage from Bluemner's painting diary was transcribed and translated by Zilczer, pp. 277-8.)

- 167 Caffin, "The New Thought Which is Old," *Camera Work* 31 (July, 1910): 22.
- 168 Caffin, "Of Verities and Illusions — Part II," *Camera Work* 13 (1906): 41-45.
- 169 *Ibid*, p. 44. Apparently this was Caffin's first use of the term "abstract expression." It would become his favorite measurement for the most "sincere" modern art. To cite just two examples: "... that higher conception of painting which will eventually leave to photography the recording of factual phenomena and reserve for itself the most complete interpretation, in a word, the most abstract expression possible." ("The Art of Eduard J. Steichen", *CW* 30, April, 1910: 36); "[Hartley] tells us that he has expressed only what he has seen, unless it be in the mind's eye ... abstract expression." (*CW* 48, October, 1916: 59). Alfred Barr employed the term in 1929 to distinguish between Kandinsky's Improvizations and the paintings of Die Brücke. And Robert Coates, critic for *The New Yorker*, was the first to apply it to works by Pollock and de Kooning in 1946.
- 170 Caffin, "The New Thought Which is Old", p. 24.
- 171 An excellent start is Pultz and Scallen, *Cubism and American Photography, 1910-1930*.
- 172 See my earlier discussion of this clearly deliberate juxtaposition in Chapter One, pp. 13-14.
- 173 Stieglitz to Heinrich Kühn, 14 October 1912. YCAL. Both letters are in German. The translation used here was kindly left in the Yale file by an unknown researcher.
- 174 See Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc. 1971): 149-150, 167-9, 179-206.

- 175 Dove, "What is 291?" CW 47, July 1914.
- 176 Stieglitz to Hartmann, 27 April, 1919. YCAL.
- 177 It might be reasonable to ask whether these uncharacteristic photographs were made in response to Coburn's clarion call for "fresh and untried" abstract photography in his widely read essay "The Future of Pictorial Photography," *Photograms of the Year, 1916*: 23-34.
- 178 Stieglitz to Hart Crane, 19 December 1923. YCAL. For a cogent discussion of how and when Stieglitz's cloud equivalents became images that were both abstract and representational (objective), see Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*: 24-25.
- 179 Caffin, "A Note on Paul Cézanne," CW 34-35 (1911): 48.
- 180 For a useful overview of the developing arguments of American critics and artists on this important topic, including the "science" of muscular analogy, see Howard Anthony Risatti, "American Critical Reaction to European Modernism 1908-1917," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois (1978): 138-148.
- 181 Stieglitz served on the six man selection committee, and contributed a rather depressed essay to the voluminous catalogue, lamenting America's continued lack of interest in "painting as a life expression." Of the sixteen artists represented, seven had already exhibited at 291 and all had some ties to Stieglitz.
- 182 Caffin, CW 48 (Oct. 1916): 57-8 (Reprinted from *The New York American*, "Paul Strand in 'Straight' Photos," 20 March, p. 7.)
- 183 Although the 1916 exhibition had no catalogue listing, these two photographs undoubtedly appeared because they were reproduced in *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916).
- 184 See Rosenblum, pp. 45-49.
- 185 *Ibid*, p. 56.
- 186 There were others who had already come to the same conclusion by 1916 such as Thomas H. Benton. "I make no distinction as to the value of subject matter. I believe that the representation of objective forms and the presentation of abstract ideas of form to be of equal artistic value." (Statement in *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters* catalogue.) For a discussion of the artistic relationship between Stieglitz and Benton, see Edward Abrahams. "Alfred Stieglitz and/or Thomas Hart Benton," *Arts*, (June, 1981) pp. 108-113. Hartley had his own way of putting it: "Objects are incidents: [an] apple does not for long remain an apple if one has the concept. Anything is therefore pictural [sic]; it remains only to be observed and considered. All

expression is illustration—of something.” (*Forum Exhibition* statement).

- 187 Subsequently published in *Playboy* 9 (July, 1924): 16-20.
- 188 I am grateful to Naomi Rosenblum for alerting me to the typescript of Strand’s final draft of this article. (The published version was considerably shortened.) It is in the Strand archives at CCP, and this quotation (which shows several corrections by him) is from pp. 5-6 of the draft.
- 189 Caffin, “The New Thought Which is Old,” *CW* No. 31. Another, somewhat later, version of Caffin’s 1910 argument (and terminology) may be found in Dove’s catalogue statement for his 1929 Intimate Gallery exhibition:

There is no such thing as abstraction. It is extraction, gravitation toward a new direction and minding your own business. If the extract be clear enough its value will exist. It is nearer to music, not the music of the ears ... the music of the eyes

(Italics added,)

- 190 Caffin *CW* 48 (October 1916): 53. (Reprinted from the *New York American*.) January, p. 6. Caffin ceased writing directly for *Camera Work* in 1911, but Stieglitz reprinted twenty of his reviews for the *New York American*, right up to *CW*’s last issue of June, 1917.
- 191 *G O’K* (1976). Text: opposite plate 88. For a useful summary of Caffin as an enlightened spokesman for early modernism see Sandra Lee Underwood, “Charles H. Caffin: A Voice For Modernism 1897-1918,” unpublished dissertation (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1981): 295-323.
- 192 For a recent discussion on just this point, see Rosalind Krauss, “A Note on Photography and the Simulacral.” *October* 31 (Winter 1984): 49-68.
- 193 There are many variations on this frequent statement of Stieglitz’s. The most complete version was clearly intended to be an expression of his over-all philosophy of life. “I simply react to the moment. For, to me, all lived moments are equally true, equally important. Thus, only in being true to all moments, can one be true to any. It is in this sense that I say that I am the moment, but I am the moment with all of myself, when I am no longer thinking, but simply am, then I may be said to be truly affirming life. Not to know, but to let exist what is, that alone, perhaps is truly to know.” Quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz, Introduction to an American Seer*, p. 55.

- ¹⁹⁴ Stieglitz to R. Child Bayley, 9 October, 1919. YCAL.
- ¹⁹⁵ A 1931 letter written by Stieglitz, quoted by Norman, p. 56. On this topic, see also his 19 January, 1942 letter to James T. Soby, published in Greenough and Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 216.
- ¹⁹⁶ Stieglitz to Edward Weston, 3 September, 1938. Greenough and Hamilton
Alfred Stieglitz, p. 218.

CHAPTER SIX

CAN (SHOULD) PHOTOGRAPHS HANG BESIDE PAINTINGS?

THE SEVEN AMERICANS SHOW

It is our faith, and the faith of many, that we are living in the first days of a renascent period, a time which means for America the coming of that national self-consciousness which is the beginning of greatness. In all such epochs, the arts cease to be private matters; they become not only the expression of the national life but a means to its enhancement.

The Seven Arts, 1916¹

Life, life, a thousand times, is the important thing for Stieglitz. Yourself, your own experiences, your own reactions—and art is only of value as it helps you to attain them ... It is his lofty conception of art, not as a bridge to consciousness of self, to life, and through that, to new life and new creation again.

Peter Minuit (Paul Rosenfeld), 1916²

The test of a photograph's value as expression is to hang it or place it beside the best of the Old Masters ... or the primitive savage Art; —if it continue[s] to live it is worthwhile—has its own life.

Stieglitz to R. Child Bayley, (9 October, 1919)³

The photographs and paintings made by Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe during the first eighteen months of their relationship were shown together by him to a highly select audience beginning in January, 1919. The setting for these works was not a gallery—Stieglitz had been without one since the closing of 291 in 1917. It was a small two room studio, where the couple was then living, located on the top floor of a brownstone on 59th Street just behind the Anderson Galleries. Whether the works were hung side-by-side or in separate groupings does not seem to have been recorded. That they were presented in the same room is

does not seem to have been recorded. That they were presented in the same room is fairly certain, however, since, as O'Keeffe has written, "the studio was bright with a north skylight and two south windows ... [while] the room back of the studio had a rather narrow window opening into a small court so it was not very light."⁴

Stieglitz's letters to Strand that winter and spring convey his own pride and excitement over the success of the experiment.

114 East 59th quite a centre. Seeing Georgia's work. And mine. Everyone surprised greatly at both. Great strides forward. [Leo] Stein very much impressed. —And others of repute and value equally moved. [Specifically Arthur Davies, who helped to organize the Armory Show, and Frank Crowninshield of *Vogue*]⁵

Visitors galore all coming to see our work. There has been but one opinion—opinion is not the word—All say our work is unlike anything they have ever seen. —And it is—Both very direct—very powerful—very beautiful.⁶

De Zayas spent over 3 hours with me at the studio—Saw G's work and the photographs—some you didn't see just landed him—as I knew they would as they landed others. On Sunday morning Arensberg came up with Sheeler. The same result as with De Zayas. —All very real—and important in many ways ... Arensberg was nearly taken off his feet by the photographs and said that no painter could ignore their existence. —He was also impressed deeply by G's work. But that really lies outside of his own line of thought and immediate development.⁷

Is it a madness to produce as we are producing—and living as we are living—in the center of the maddest city that ever happened—mad—soulless—cruelly heartless?⁸

Although a list of these photographs and paintings has yet to turn up, we can safely assume that paramount among Stieglitz's photographs were his early portraits of O'Keeffe—including (perhaps emphasizing) those which presented her posed in front of her own work. Some of these photographs were, in effect,

double advertisements, because in them the strange beauty of the artist was proclaimed and identified with the strange new beauty of her art.

An untitled 1918 portrait is a good case in point.⁹ (Plate 48.) This complex, and sexually charged photograph reveals some of the ways in which O'Keeffe directly inspired Stieglitz's new rush of picture-making. For one thing, it is an entirely difficult kind of abstraction from the Picabia-type "abstractionist" pictures which he exposed from the window of 291 during the winter of 1915-16. Here, he has taken his formal and compositional cue from O'Keeffe's own large, undeniably erotic, abstraction in the background.¹⁰ And the ways in which he has insisted that this drawing be seen as an extension of the artist herself tell us much about his extraordinary ability to generate emotional meaning by relating subject to background in a very shallow space. Consider first the curious, almost conjuring pose of her arms. The zig-zag diagonal caused by this gesture effectively divides the composition into two echoing tiers. The shapes of her left hand, and the pale oval of her face surrounded by dark hair in the lowest tier, are repeated in the one above (in reverse order) by her right hand and the light ovoid form of her drawing with its dark center. Did Stieglitz mean O'Keeffe's highlighted left thumb to be read as if it were an arrow pointing to her head—the place where she has always said her images came from? And did he also intend the countless linear parallels between O'Keeffe's deeply incised palm lines, and the dynamic lines of her drawing? Both are in equally clear focus, and the implication for the viewer is that they are *all* connected to her personal identity. Judging from his other pictorially sophisticated photographs that go back as far as *Sunlight and Shadows: Paula/Berlin* (1889)¹¹, these observations would seem to be valid ones. Finally the optical image of O'Keeffe as a kind of modern sorceress projects a Symbolist meaning similar to de Zayas's caricature *L'Accoucheur d'idées* (c. 1911-12) which presented Stieglitz as a visionary-seer. Just a year later, as we know, Stieglitz

would write to Dove that he and O’Keeffe were “at least 90% alike—she is a purer form of myself.”¹²

The positive viewer response to their work (cited in the letters to Strand) was to result in a small two-medium “Exhibition on Modern Art” arranged by Stieglitz in March 1919 at the library of the Young Womens’ Hebrew Association in New York. The flyer of this almost forgotten show of American artists (all with ties to Stieglitz) lists 15 pictures:

1. Wasp	Arthur G. Dove
2. Nature Forms	Arthur G. Dove
3. Pueblo Mountin N.M.	Marsden Hartley
4. Sage Brush Summer	Marsden Hartley
5. Still Life	Conrad Kramer
6. Landscape - Massachusetts	John Marin
7. Landscape	A. McFee
8. Still Life	Geo. F. Of
9. Landscape	Georgia O’Keeffe
10. Blue and Yellow	Georgia O’Keeffe
11. Hands - G. O.	Alfred Stieglitz
12. Head - G. O.	Alfred Stieglitz
13. Photograph	Paul Strand
14. Landscape	A. Walkowitz
15. Synchrony	S. Macdonald Wright

Unfortunately it is not possible now to identify most of these works. Not only are they all undated, but even the titles are suspect, since they were often changed over the years. The important point to be made is that, at last, two of

Stieglitz's photographs and one of Strand's took their place "in open review" side by side with some of the most advanced examples of American modernist painting.¹³

The first and only American¹⁴ precedent for this milestone was "Special Exhibition of Contemporary Art" held at the National Arts Club in New York during January of 1908.¹⁵ As described by J. Nilsen Laurvik in *Camera Work*, it was composed almost entirely of works by the "leading artistic rebels of America."¹⁶ These were, in fact, the Photo-Secessionist photographers, and the Ashcan School painters—whose large debt to photography was well understood by Stieglitz. The 1908 exhibition ran for three weeks, and attracted "thousands" of people to it. The photographs were "shown on a level" with the paintings and etchings, and "held their own". Some of the photographs were so similar to the paintings that "many mistook them for mezzo-tints". This visual confusion of the mediums he was working so hard to separate may have displeased Stieglitz, but he could not have faulted Laurvik's conclusion: "One thing was demonstrated beyond dispute— ... the work of these [photographers] reflected their personality with no less certainty than did the paintings of Luks, Henri or Dabo, and in certain instances with a more potent charm."¹⁷

As has already been noted, Stieglitz made relatively few photographs between 1910 and 1915—being occupied with the ramifications of European abstraction for his own photography, and with using 291 to make America aware of "progressive modern tendencies toward individual expression", as Hartley then expressed it.¹⁸ In 1913, Stieglitz had chosen to put photography to a new and "diabolical" test by presenting his own first 291 retrospective at the height of The Armory Show.¹⁹ It is a striking fact that although he continued to show his photographs beside O'Keeffe's paintings until they left the 59th Street studio in the summer of 1920,²⁰ he did not have a joint public exhibition of their work for four

more years. First would come definitive solo shows for them both: two for Stieglitz and one for O'Keeffe.

"The First Exhibition of Photography" opened at Mitchell Kennerley's Anderson Galleries²¹ in February, 1921. Shown were 145 prints representing the development of nearly forty years of Stieglitz's work—only seventeen having been seen before. Each of these prints contained, in his word, "the sharp focussing of an idea."²² In the rest of his now famous catalogue statement he informed the public that over half (seventy eight) of the prints had been made since July, 1918 (when O'Keeffe came into his life); and that his ideal, clearly unattainable given his materials, methods and poetic/Symbolist perfectionism, was "to achieve the ability to produce numberless prints from each negative, prints all significantly alive, yet undistinguishably alike, and to be able to circulate them at a price of... a daily paper." His oracular conclusion, or credo, "I am an American. Photography is my passion. The search for truth my obsession",²³ is almost impossible to understand without some knowledge of his earlier—and later—statements, and of the social and political issues of post-World War I. Not only did Stieglitz consider truth in photography to be an always fresh adjustment between information and evocation, he constantly tried to see the here-and-now in terms of the universal. (Other statements of his confirm this, for example: "Photography brings what is not visible to the surface," and "Beauty is the universal seen."²⁴) The thought behind "I am an American" may have come out of the post-war temper in literature which trumpeted that Americans need not feel inferior to Europe in their attainments of mind and moral probity, and perhaps also to Stieglitz's own sad realization that, due to his German formation, he was not emotionally on the right (French) side of the war.²⁵

Included in this 1921 exhibition were forty-five anonymous images of O'Keeffe (1918-1920) taken in series of two to seven photographs, and titled

respectively: *A Woman, Hands, Feet, Hands and Breasts, Torsos, and Interpretations*.. With these, he clearly intended to arouse new public interest in her and her work. (It worked, but the subsequent notoriety proved a mixed boon for O’Keeffe.²⁶) Toward this same end, in April, Stieglitz sent three of her paintings (*Red, Pink, and The Black Spot*) to an exhibition titled “The Later Tendencies in Art” at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.²⁷ But it was not until January, 1923 that he arranged to present “One Hundred Pictures, Oils, Water-colors, Pastels, Drawings by Georgia O’Keeffe” at the Anderson Galleries. This show, which contained her earliest assimilations of photography, ran for only two weeks. As is well recorded, it pleased the critics, none of whom attributed the stylistic advance in her work to photography, drew huge audiences (500 people a day)—and netted O’Keeffe \$3,000 in sales.²⁸ Not previously recorded is the curious fact that the show was hung in a style markedly similar to that used by Stieglitz and Joseph Keiley for the first exhibition of the Photo-Secession—“American Pictorial Photography” which was held at the National Arts Club in March of 1902.²⁹ Several installation photographs discovered in the papers of Mitchell Kennerley³⁰ (Plate 49.) clearly reveal that O’Keeffe’s large and small paintings were also hung either in vertical stacks, or in clusters resembling a maltese cross. The major difference being that O’Keeffe’s work was grouped according to subject matter, whereas the 1902 show had been arranged to feature each photographer’s work separately.³¹

Barely two months after O’Keeffe’s show closed, Stieglitz presented his “Second Exhibition of Photography” at the Anderson Galleries (April 2-15). It consisted of the 116 prints—all but one never publicly shown. Included were twenty five new portraits of O’Keeffe, the *Birds, Gable and Apples, Death* series (one of these prints has already been mentioned in connection with Dow), and *Music — A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs*. The story of how the

Music/Cloud series caused photography to break the museum barrier deserves a quick retelling here. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Keeper of Indian and Muhammadan art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, was among the many notables who saw the Second Exhibition.³² Although Coomaraswamy himself detested modern art (“the very term ... is an absurdity. The notion that one should attempt to be original in art is sheer nonsense.”³³), he saw in Stieglitz’s ten cloud photographs “the grand tradition ... precisely the right values stressed. Symbols are used correctly. His photographs are ‘absolute’ art in the same sense that Bach’s music is ‘absolute’ music.”³⁴ It was Coomaraswamy’s self-described “aesthetic shock”³⁵ which led him to propose that Stieglitz donate twelve of his most “comprehensive and representative” prints to the Museum of Fine Arts. Stieglitz’s letters to J. Dudley Johnson (of the Royal Photographic Society) over the fourteen-month period he spent printing, mounting and framing this historic gift are very instructive. (During this process, the number of prints grew from twelve to twenty seven.) The letters not only help to clarify his 1921 credo, they are a vivid recapitulation of his attitude, homage and service to photography—which O’Keeffe was then absorbing from him at very close range.

To me photography has ever been a passion—a love—a philosophy of life—a religion. (7 Dec. 1923)³⁶

I rarely print more than one print from my negative as I am so full of “ideas” and “experiments” that after I have finally gotten a print—this sometimes takes me years—even tho’ my work is all direct—straight—I do not find much interest ...in making a “second” print. Still I sometimes do. Just now I’m trying my best to make a dozen second prints for the Boston Museum ... It’s truly a luxury these days to have a mad passion for honest work—that’s really all my passion amounts to. (10 Dec., 1923)³⁷

I have just sent a collection of 27 of my prints to the Boston Museum ... I know they are creating a real stir. All are pure photography. (10 Feb. 1924)³⁸

It is the spirit of my work that means something to me. Individual prints of mine as photographs can only have a significance to those sensing the spirit ... Most of these exist in one example only. Not that I want to make them precious. On the contrary, I wish there were hundred of each, I'd like it better. But ... I have worked under terrible disadvantages for the last 20 years ... no facilities, very little money— ... I have been fighting for *ideas* and for *others*. It is all of my own choice. (3 April 1925)³⁹

Stieglitz's letters to Coomaraswamy during this period are also germane, for they summarize some of his most developed ideas about presenting photography as art, and photography as good company for other art. On the vital issue of the matting and framing of his 8x10 and 4x5 prints—and, therefore, of their overall size as complete pictures—he is especially specific:

I find it impossible to mount [my prints] on the Museum standard sizes of mounts.⁴⁰ I find I have through years of experience worked out such a *right* way of making my *prints* and *mounts one* that changing anything in the relative sizes changes the spirit & robs my work of its life and significance ... Photography is still on trial—I can't possibly go ahead feeling the museum's standard sizes come before photography in this particular case ... This work of mine is really something new. I know that after 40 years of intensest work—thought & great sacrifice. It is the beginning of photography as expression—not merely photographs or pictures in the "pictorial" sense ... Please let me know will they be acceptable on my sizes—18 1/4 x 22 1/4 & 10 7/8 x 13 1/2.⁴¹

Stieglitz's photographs were not formally exhibited at the Boston Museum until July, 1928. His letters to old colleagues during that summer show how fiercely competitive he felt about having his photographs hold their own (literally) against the black and white art of the Old Masters. To Paul Haviland, for example,

he wrote, "I'm told that they look magnificent with the Rembrandts and Meryons."⁴² And again two months later:

I just had a letter from Paul Rosenfeld. He had been in Boston to the Museum to have a look at the Durer-Goya-Stieglitz Exhibition ... Rosenfeld writes there are three rooms full of Durer & that my 27 photographs (the Museum's property) looked wonderfully fresh and beautiful)—*stood right up*. I'm about ready with 21 prints for the Metropolitan [Museum].⁴³ (*Italics added.*)

This understandably jubilant report notwithstanding, the MFA showed Goya's prints from March 21 to July 12, Stieglitz's photographs from July 12 to September 28, and Durer's woodcuts from March 16 to September 13. The last two displays were presented in separate galleries—not side by side.

It was not till early in 1924 that the public exhibition gap between Stieglitz's photographs and O'Keeffe's paintings began to close—somewhat. A letter from O'Keeffe to Sherwood Anderson in February describes the plan:

Stieglitz and I are both showing our work of this year in the rooms I had last year. They are to be two separate exhibitions—He in the two smaller ones—I in the larger one. There are to be two separate catalogues—His prints of this year are all 4 by 5 inches all of the sky. They are very wonderful—way off the earth—all but four or five that are of barns and snow—He has been writing on the statement for his catalogue for two days—it is like his others—very direct—with a real kick to it ... I wanted to have an exhibition ... to confirm what started last year [probably her large-scale leaves and flowers] ... instead of a small exhibition of my own it has developed into two small exhibitions.⁴⁴

Stieglitz's catalogue statement was indeed "very direct with a real kick to it". He described his 4x5 sky photographs as "an addition to his past achievements [in that] they are something not before accomplished in any medium—as

expression—as scientific fact”. And he went on to connect them, in his elliptical fashion, to the Symbolist value system of his earlier art:

Songs of the Sky—Secrets of the Skies as revealed by my Camera, are tiny photographs, direct revelations of a man’s work in the sky—documents of eternal relationship—perhaps even a philosophy. “My” camera means any camera—any camera into which [my] eye may look.⁴⁵

For further proof of this Symbolist continuity there is Stieglitz’s letter to Dudley Johnson of 3 April, 1925, “The *spirit* of my early ‘work’ is the same spirit of my ‘later’ work.” (Stieglitz’s italics.) As was often his habit, the “joint” show included several of his late 19th and early 20th century photographs.⁴⁶

A fair sampling of the critical response to this exhibition shows it to have been amazingly astute. (Helped, no doubt, by Stieglitz’s continual availability at the Anderson as “village explainer” —to borrow a phrase from Gertrude Stein.)

... having had these swift visions of [“Secrets of the Sky”] revealed to you, there cannot be these harassing doubts as to art or not art, to make you feel guilty over the rapture of the exhilarating experience.

Miss O’K has lost none of her burning intensity or her beautiful luscious color ... A flower leaf in watercolor ... is both abstract design and absolute realism. It is all leaves, it is no leaf. So with [her] calla lilies, or pears, or figs, sunflowers or seaweed.⁴⁷

[Stieglitz and O’Keeffe] ... provide a joint exhibition that will exercise a considerable portion of the community ... There is more than meets the eye. There is something also for the ear ... It is curious that the event should have so unique an aspect .. [Mr. Stieglitz’s] “Songs of the Skies” in photography seem to be about as far in finish, subtlety and richness as the camera can go or need go ... Mr. Alan Burroughs ... said “I, too, think there’s something spooky in them.”

Miss O’Keeffe ... courts that supreme of dangers—self revelation ... I suppose there isn’t a picture in her collection that wouldn’t provide volumes of information to a Freudian expert ... Yet it

passes as being mere color and design ... [She] has been studying the nature of the plant we used to call a "calla lily" ... and finding in it the secrets of the universe.⁴⁸

Alfred Stieglitz has written philosophy with his camera and expounds it starting with a tiny beautifully textured print called "Spiritual America" ... "Song of the Sky" [is] a struggle through 7 prints of dark and light, of value and texture, each print for some inexplicable reason emotionally torturous. *Stieglitz gives elaborate explanations and follows them intellectually through one state of struggling to another.* Pictures should speak for themselves, however, and *without his verbal analysis there is a question just what descriptive conclusion one would come to.* There is no question of their amazing appeal, of their suggestion of worlds beyond, of an instant made eternity controlled by esthetic structure unsentimental and unsensational ... He has let imagination work out two future possibilities—a happy and an unhappy ending, as it were.

Even though each plate of Stieglitz is a solved mathematical problem, there is a curious suggestion of other problems to come. *In every composition of Georgia O'Keeffe, with a greater simplicity and a more direct power, there is something more satisfying and complete ... [In them] the day's problems already solved, rather than, as in the Stieglitz compositions, in spite of the solution of an existing problem, there is the beginning of the next. Georgia O'Keeffe's arrangements grow, but complete themselves in their growth..* (Italics added)⁴⁹

Not only did this "joint" exhibition at the Anderson receive a good press—with the pictures in both mediums compared as if they were equals—but Stieglitz and O'Keeffe sold some of their work at unexpectedly good prices.⁵⁰ These last successes were, of course, doubly sweet. They were also directly responsible for Stieglitz's next, and most ambitious, plan: to present a group exhibition of paintings and photographs by the artists in his immediate circle. Although the original impetus for this idea came from the practical hope of financial gain for all concerned, Stieglitz's goals for the show kept on multiplying—becoming bigger, and more complicated as he went along.

“O Pioneers”

With the title *Seven Americans: 159 Paintings Photographs & Things Recent & Never Before Publicly Shown by Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Charles Demuth, Paul Strand, Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz*, the show opened March 9, 1925, on the top floor of the Anderson Galleries. It occurred during the twentieth anniversary year of the opening of 291 as “a part of that Progression,” according to the catalogue. And it has scarcely begun to be examined vis-a-vis American Modernism in general (“America without that damned French flavor”⁵¹) and the above named artists in particular. This task has been, and still is, severely handicapped by the lack of installation photographs.⁵² Until they turn up the only direct access to this unprecedented gathering of paintings and photographs is through the wide critical coverage it received, the sixteen-page catalogue with its vested exhortations of prose and poetry, and Stieglitz’s correspondence. Although hardly impartial, these sources must be heeded for they offer important contextual pointers to the pictures themselves.

A month before the show opened, Stieglitz wrote to the American Symbolist painter Jennings Tofel: “I’m arranging an exhibition which I have no way of escaping. It is either the end or the beginning. —It is not one of initiation but has come about, inevitably—most naturally. Yet I don’t like the exhibition idea. But there’s no escape.”⁵³

An earlier letter to Sherwood Anderson dated 7 Dec. 1924, is a little more explicit: “I am playing with an idea of a 3 week show in March ... O’Keeffe, Marin, Hartley, Dove, Demuth, Strand & myself. Only work that has never been shown anywhere to be in the exhibition. The stuff is ready—I think it would be the show of the year. —and *American* .” Anderson later wrote a statement for the

catalogue. Although he didn't actually see the works hung, he found himself able to say, "This show is for me the distillation of the clean emotional life of seven real American artists." (As Henry McBride would note, with truth, "From the first the Stieglitz group has known how to attach literature to itself."⁵⁴)

Stieglitz's subsequent letters to Anderson tell the tale of the "Seven Americans" intent and effect from his own point of view. Two days after it opened he wrote:

It is a thousand pities you couldn't have remained to see the show. It is overwhelming. And *there is much resentment* and many people. *Even Paul [Rosenfeld] the first day was so bewildered* he didn't know the difference between heads & tails. Waldo [Frank] ... *says the spirit of 291 never burned so intensely* ... There were many "celebrities" ... they all sang the praises of life—*Life—again at last—My own blood they really feel—the blood of the Seven.* It is terrific ... [the rooms] breathe a *Cathedral feeling* —a finest feeling.⁵⁵

Just before the show ended, he wrote Anderson again:

It's an odd world turn it as one will. Another big day of visitors ... Everyone acclaiming O'Keeffe—yet so far in the two weeks but one picture placed—at \$200! ... *So far there have been about 2500 visitors with the press not much with us considering what we are really giving* ... *All I see is a spiritual fight—money—as important as it may be is not even secondary.* —The fellows are very brave and O'Keeffe as always very white—very helpful. *But I feel I am still needed on the bridge. Never more needed.*⁵⁶ (Italics added.)

The show received wide critical coverage, and was the largest Stieglitz would ever present. There were twenty five paintings, drawings and collages by Arthur Dove, twenty five canvases by Marsden Hartley, twenty seven watercolors by John Marin, six portrait posters by Charles Demuth (his first showing with Stieglitz), thirty one O'Keeffe's, eighteen photographs by Paul Strand, and twenty

eight of Stieglitz's own Equivalents. (But it is not known exactly which works were shown by Stieglitz, Strand, Hartley, Marin and O'Keeffe.⁵⁷)

In his opening statement for the catalogue, Stieglitz announced what he wished the public to think was at stake: "... the pictures are an integral part of their makers. That I know. Are the pictures or their makers an integral part of the America of today? That I am still endeavoring to know." It is clear that he was already convinced of the answer from his actions on "the bridge". Most, if not all, of the arriving critics were taken immediately in tow. According to an account by Edmund Wilson, he and the others were given "a ribbon of talk [by Stieglitz] that was as strong as a cable—and .. influenced the mind of the listener in a way that was not accidental."⁵⁸ Another critic, as reported by Wilson, even wondered at the time, "whether it hadn't been a case of the innocent young serpent being swallowed by the wily old dove."⁵⁹

Research into what fourteen of the major reviewers⁶⁰ of the show had to say breaks down into the following information:

Not one critic commented on the extreme rarity of exhibiting paintings and photographs together. Stieglitz's Equivalents (which he then called his "innocent little photographs") were uniformly well received for their "hypnotic quality" (Deogh Fulton), "sound workman[ship]" (Royal Cortissoz), "beauty" (*New York Times*, and *The Arts*), "expert[ise]" (Helen Appleton Read), and "conscientious and lofty ideals of craftsmanship" (Glen Mullin). Margaret Breuing said they were "worth a show in themselves", and *The Dial* described them as "characteristically interrogatory". *The Christian Science Monitor* called Stieglitz "a master photographer, and Edmund Wilson said he was "an amazing genius ... [because of] pushing his mastery of the camera ... closer and closer to the freedom of plastic art." Strand fared less well. His photographs were given poor or luke-warm reviews by Mullin, Fulton and *The New York Times* . Wilson and Cortissoz did

not even mention Strand's name, and one reviewer (Henry McBride) mistook his work for Stieglitz's.⁶¹ (All the others, however, *were* favorable to Strand.) O'Keeffe received only one poor review, and that was from Breuning—who detested everything in the exhibition except the photographs: “a few good flower studies ... [but] the rest of her show might be termed a flop both in color and design”. Even Cortissoz (no great admirer of O'Keeffe's) said “she shows more [craftsmanship] than she has ever shown before ... The technical quality that commands respect.”

None of the critics mentioned the influence of photography on O'Keeffe's work—although this was the first appearance of her enlarged flowers. (An understandable omission, perhaps, since the use of mechanical methods was still regarded as an artist's “dirty little secret”. The widespread use of photography by earlier American artists—such as Lane, Mount, Church, Bierstadt, Remington, Homer and Eakins—is, of course, relatively recent knowledge.)

The most frequent cavils by the critics were for the catalogue: “The exhibits are not allowed to speak for themselves, but are offered to our attention via a catalogue ... with emotionalism and Americanism stressed on all sides.” (*The Arts*); “[It] has the effect of being too ‘talky’, it detracts from the real dignity of the exhibition (*The Art News*); “propaganda” (Breuning); “the pictures are not allowed to speak for themselves ... Americanism and emotionalism are self-consciously and unduly emphasized” (H.A. Read).

What the reviewers seem not to have grasped here is that Stieglitz believed the art of the Seven to be completely original—hence a brand new set of terms existed which had to be articulated—“the hieroglyphics of a new speech,” as Egmont Arens had described Stieglitz's own photographs in 1924.⁶² It can also be said with some justification that this catalogue, composed by Stieglitz, Anderson, Dove and Arnold Ronnebeck,⁶³ is to the Seven Americans what the writings of

Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg became to Abstract Expressionism. And further, that 1925 marks one of the earliest manifestations of the ever growing parity between American modernist art and criticism. The frankly instructive contributions of Stieglitz and Anderson have already been noted above. Intentionally or not, Dove's cryptic prose-poem, *A Way to Look at Things*,⁶⁴ isolates and describes what may well be the common denominator idea behind the art of the Seven: To perceive—and reveal—the underlying (universal) meaning of nature's structures by eliminating the non-essential, for the express purpose of experiencing the world (life) anew.

Works of nature are abstract,
 They do not lean on other things for meaning
 The seagull is not like the sea
 Nor the Sun like the moon
 The Sun draws water from the sea
 The Clouds are not like either one—
 They do not keep one form forever
 That the mountainside looks like a face is
 accidental.

Ronnebeck begins his essay, *Through The Eyes of a European Sculptor*, by asking the old Modern Art question “Do these American artists ask too much of the public?” Grappling with “what *is* essentially American [about American art]” he concludes (with Stieglitz's approval if not his insistence) that these seven painters and photographers used

symbols of ingenuity, action, business, adventure, exploiting discovery [and many others] to build universal reality out of the “reality” ... [they] belong to the New World, to the world of today. They belong to no school. They fit no “ism”. Their daring self-consciousness forms their harmony ... There are no pictures in this exhibition which, in spite of their being “contemporary”, could have been made 2,000 years ago or 5,000 years from today—because they are animated and dictated by the ever flowing sources of life itself... These Seven Americans are explorers... I believe their creative

self-discovery means nothing less than the discovery of America's independent role in the History of Art.

It is from Forbes Watson that we learn most about how the show was hung: works were not interspersed, but separately grouped according to artist and medium.

Charles Demuth introduces the visitor to the exhibition with three mildly entertaining posters and a still life [this was inaccurate, there were six, and the "still life" was probably the abstract portrait of O'Keeffe, which consisted of the leaves, fruits and vegetables of her most familiar subject matter], while directly facing the entrance is a well framed and beautiful Marin who, in the large gallery, is so completely shown. Each of the painting exhibitors is represented in the entrance hall by a small group, and this room in itself makes a choice exhibition. Going into the main gallery, the voluminous designs, in sweeping color movements, by Georgia O'Keeffe immediately hurl themselves upon the eye of the spectator ... Turning to the left, the visitor is faced by the handsomest wall in the Galleries, which is made of a beautifully arranged group of the work of Marsden Hartley.⁶⁵

Although Watson describes Strand's group of photographs as "quite magnificent," he neglects to mention that they were hung in a room well apart from the others—a decision by Stieglitz that Strand resented, then and later.⁶⁶ Once the space was allocated, Strand hung his own work.⁶⁷ Probably the others did as well—with two exceptions. Hartley was in Europe. And O'Keeffe, who was to take over the task of hanging nearly all of Stieglitz's later exhibitions, seems to have had surprisingly little voice in this one. By her own account: "My large flowers were shown [in 1925] for the first time. At the end of the hall just outside the door of the show was a perfect place for my first "New York" [a city-scape, *New York City Moon*]. It carried well and would have been seen when you stepped out of the elevator to go toward the show. But "New York" wasn't hung—much to my

disappointment.”⁶⁸ Instead of an O’Keeffe for that special place, Stieglitz chose the “well framed and beautiful Marin.”

From all the evidence so far gathered, it is obvious that Stieglitz was not only the master-mind of the Seven Americans show, he was the star (“my own blood ... the blood of The Seven”). “This Exhibition is an integral part of myself” he announced publicly in the catalogue. And he made sure visitors would grasp the point visually by allowing only *his* photographs—and not Strand’s—to hang beside the important paintings of Marin, Hartley and O’Keeffe in the largest room of the Galleries. “Photography [meaning his own] stands up beautifully,” he exulted privately to Dudley Johnson, midway through the show.⁶⁹

At present, some of the most important questions raised by this research can be answered only in part.

Why was so little sold when over 2500 people came to see the show? The long and persistent worship of French art by American collectors, which began with the Barbizon School, was undoubtedly a factor. Another one was the innate conservatism of the American art world—which preferred “the æsthetic of the picturesque” till well into the twentieth century.⁷⁰ “Art in America [is still] like patent medicine, or a vacuum cleaner. It can hope for no success until 90 million people know what it is,” Hartley had observed sourly in 1921.⁷¹

Why was Rosenfeld (as reported by Stieglitz) “so bewildered he didn’t know the difference between heads & tails”? Rosenfeld had already written with more understanding than anyone else about Stieglitz’s ideas of America, and of photography as art, in *The Dial* (December, 1921). Perhaps it was as simple a reason as the basic difference in their sensibilities. Rosenfeld’s mode of criticism was impressionistic, but even he sometimes failed to interpret correctly that all-important emotion felt by Stieglitz at the time he made a photograph—particularly when it was a cloud Equivalent. “I am mortified to hear that my interpretation of

the 'sky' you so kindly sent me, was mediocre," Rosenfeld wrote apologetically to Stieglitz just a few years later.⁷² It need hardly be mentioned again that one of Stieglitz's prime articles of belief was the old Romantic idea that art is the language of the emotions, and therefore has the power to cause emotional contagion.

Why was there "much resentment"? Was it because these artists were still pressing abstraction too hard as a controversial issue? This is not very likely for the following reasons. Comparatively few of the works were purely abstract. All of the Doves had descriptive titles, and only one O'Keeffe was actually labelled "Abstraction". As *The New Yorker* critic remarked soothingly "Even the forbidding part of the term abstraction is lost when Georgia O'Keeffe lays on color [in her] glowing mysterious canvases." Furthermore, according to the *Christian Science Monitor*, "Most of the [Seven Americans'] pictorialist adventures seem comparatively tame after all the modernism that has flowed under the bridge to date." McBride was equally tranquil; "[the pictures] represent nothing newly revolutionary." The rest of the critics do not even raise the issue of abstraction.

What exactly did Stieglitz and Ronnebeck mean by their heraldic claims, "Life again at last!, [these] pictures ... are animated and dictated by the everlasting sources of life itself"? In the answer to this question lies Stieglitz's shrewd and catalytic interpretation of the major difference between European and American modernism. By 1910, many of the *Camera Work* artists and critics were becoming increasingly convinced that the avant-garde European painters were primarily concerned with solving formal problems.⁷³ Even while assimilating European stylistic advances (from Impressionism to Cubism) the 291 painters had started to question the worth of what they were doing. Rather than continuing to concentrate on ever-new experiments with the *means* of art ("isms"), they began to search for a creative source to call their own. "Art," wrote Oscar Bluemner for *Camera Work* in 1913, "selects from life or nature and transforms the visible manifestations into

corresponding effects—equivalents—such as the materials of art make possible. Further, art composes or arranges, since it imitates for the purpose of expression.⁷⁴ A similar opinion was offered by Benjamin De Casseres: “The Intellect is bankrupt ... The Mississippi and The Amazon flow through the heart. All ends are myths. Life itself explains life. Chance, danger and the irrational constitute the new Trinity.”⁷⁵

Hartley summed up this view of the essential unity of art and life for himself in 1914, so compellingly that it seems, now, as if he were speaking for all the Stieglitz painters—even for the still-to-appear O’Keeffe. In a foreword to the catalogue of his 291 show for that year he declared that:

The intention of [my] pictures separately and collectively is to state a personal conviction—to express a purely personal approach ... *Its only idea and ideal is life itself, sensations and emotions drawn out of great and simple things ... A picture is but a given space where things of moment which happen to the painter occur ...* It is essential that they occur to him directly from his experience, and not suggested to him by way of prevailing modes. True modes of art are derived from modes of individuals understanding life.⁷⁶ (Italics added)

However fresh its language, this declaration must also be recognized for what it is: a taking of sides in that venerable conflict between the formalist and humanist (“personal”) approaches to art. For Hartley, as for all the major 291 painters, the humanist argument gradually became a credo—one which permitted them to adapt European modernism to their own native subject matter with unmatched straightforwardness, fertility, and individuality.

The extent of Stieglitz’s influence on Hartley’s 1914 declaration may never be known.⁷⁷ Certainly Stieglitz’s own words on this topic are no less powerful. As he wrote to a friend in 1917, “It is the intensity of feeling expressed which lives ... Technique is a dead thing, no matter how masterly it may be in

itself.”⁷⁸ In speaking of his *Equivalents* to Hart Crane just two years before the *Seven Americans* show, he was even more eloquent and succinct: “Life compelled me in the doing—that’s all.”⁷⁹ (As a photographer, of course, Stieglitz knew he could capture the moment—in effect, life encapsulated.)

What Stieglitz, Ronnebeck and Hartley all meant by “life”, then, seems to have been self-validated experience coupled with the possibility of personal growth. Or, to put it another way, the ever new acute emotion which permits the individual artist to see as he does. As Stieglitz himself specified much later, “Seeing signifies awareness resulting from inner experience.”⁸⁰ It should be noted here as well that the 291 artists’ obsession with emotional authenticity also harks back to the popular American 19th century notion of the primacy of experience, as elaborated in the philosophies of Pragmatism and Transcendentalism.⁸¹

What, in fact, *was* so American about these 159 works of art, quite apart from what they were billed (and perceived) to represent at the time? It goes without saying that any full scale appraisal has to wait for a new gathering of the works themselves. Nevertheless, a few observations are in order, not least because they may further our contextual understanding of O’Keeffe’s painting at one of the peak moments of her artistic life with Stieglitz.

To survey the subject matter, even by title, is to suspect that Stieglitz himself didn’t realize just how deeply these paintings and photographs were linked to the American vernacular tradition. As Barbara Novak has pointed out in her important study *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, the qualities of form and modes of procedure most commonly denoted as “American” from the time of Copley were frequently a combination of indigenous properties and transformations of European traditions.⁸² Novak also isolated several traits which might be called “national,” since they have kept reappearing in new contexts through the nineteenth century. These are: the preservation of literal fact, the unique relation of object to

idea, a preoccupation with *things*, and a strong folk art tradition—which may have helped to restrain American artists from taking up the more decorative extremes of each successive European style.⁸³ Theodore Stebbins, in his 1983 survey of this early material, *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting 1760-1910*, holds that the roots of a distinctly American culture were set right after the War of 1812, when writers like Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper, and William Cullen Bryant identified American art with the American land—and thus set the stage for the rise of the landscape school.⁸⁴

Landscapes accounted for well over half of the entire Seven Americans exhibition.⁸⁵ Although these landscapes originated from five uniquely American locales —Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Mexico and Lake George—the painters did not (in this period) concern themselves with the indigenous as such. Rather, they were especially preoccupied with sea and sky, the sun and the moon, wind, rain, trees, clouds and (in Dove and O’Keeffe’s case) gardens. The garden itself is a familiar abundance-image of America which goes back to the eighteenth century—and whether this idea actually occurred to either Dove or O’Keeffe does not alter the point. Stieglitz’s Equivalents, although not finally identified, are in the same general landscape category, since they included “pictures of natural objects, clouds, [and] a poplar tree, its leaves shimmering in wind and sunlight,” according to Herbert J. Seligmann, who went to the show.⁸⁶

These concrete, localized expressions of the world of summer, suggestive of revelation, may be regarded as direct descendants of the “ideal” American landscapes of Frederick Edwin Church and Fitz Hugh Lane—but with a new difference. In terms of subject matter, if not in style (and frequently that as well) they are abstractions. Specifically, they are abstractions of nationalistic symbols. Although Gertrude Stein never saw the Seven Americans show, she apparently knew, just as well as her old friend and admirer Stieglitz, that

After all anybody is as their land and air is ...
 Anybody is as the sky is low or high, the air heavy
 or clear and anybody is as there is wind or no wind
 there. It is that which makes them and the arts they
 make and the work they do and the way they eat and
 the way they drink and the way they learn and
 everything.⁸⁷

The fact that the show included ten pictures of New York City (five Marin watercolors and five Strand photographs) may be regarded as yet another example of the unique doubleness of the American pastoral tradition—the flipside, which has been described by Leo Marx as “the rhetoric of the technological sublime.”⁸⁸ Strand’s close-up photographs of machines⁸⁹ as a counterforce to the weather and garden images seem also to fit into the dual category of American pastoralism. Not only had the machine long been regarded as the most telling sign of modern life,⁹⁰ Stieglitz himself often referred to New York city as a machine—a fact to be reckoned with in his choice of Strand’s photographs for the show.

I never was so little part of N.Y. as I am now.
 —Hartley hates the place because the ‘people have
 no soul’. —It fascinated me for years because of
 that lack—I thought that the huge machine would
 eventually discover its soul—will it? Machines have
 great souls. —I know it. —Have always known it.
 —But they must be given a chance to show
 them—People interfere too much and have no
 faith.⁹¹

To examine those “national” traits singled out by Novak with particular regard to the Seven Americans is to find still more connections between their work and the past. There were approximately thirty-eight still lifes in the show (fifteen of them by O’Keeffe) with an overall concentration on familiar vegetables, leaves and flowers. Dove’s still life collages (or, more properly, assemblages) which he called “things,” were actually nature-based abstractions that owe more to Victorian American folk-art than to the irony of New York Dada. For instance, *Ten Cent Store*, which looks, at first glance, like a reasonably traditional still life of colorful

pressed flowers is a construction of 'real' artificial objects purchased at Woolworths.⁹² It is actually an almost perfect latter-day example of the "preservation of literal fact." None of the Seven Americans critics connected Dove's "things" to folk-art, however, even though sophisticated collectors and artists were becoming extremely interested in what was then called American primitive art. (Among them were Kuniyoshi, Alexander Brook, and Stieglitz's old friend, the critic Hamilton Easter Field.⁹³) Dove's fare as a whole was described as "quite silly" (*Christian Science Monitor*), and "a grand ensemble of bunk" (Breuning). Watson was even more withering—and unseeing.

It is a little over 10 years since Croti's [sic] wire portrait of Marcel Duchamp was exhibited at the Montross Gallery, and if Mr. Dove could remember that portrait and could cultivate a little sense of humor, he might perhaps have a clearer idea of his own aims.

In their use of superannuated objects to purvey personality traits, Demuth's composite poster portraits of four of the Seven Americans also have the stylistic flavor of folk-art. For in them likeness and design are based on intuition rather than any naturalistic technique.⁹⁴ As for O'Keeffe, the undeniably ideographic aspects of her work have not even begun to be explored in relation to the American primitive folk-art tradition—and to the art of children as well.⁹⁵ In any case, it would seem that the Stieglitz circle painters were able to be conspicuously Modernist, even with a popular and traditional theme in America like still life.⁹⁶

Of what, then, did the vaunted "pioneer stuff" (as described by *The New Yorker*) consist? In a word, style.⁹⁷ Oddly, none of the critics were able (or willing) to find accurate words for The Seven Americans' system of forms—either individually or collectively. Hence, contemporary viewers received no descriptive help in discerning what was being said through these forms. (Aside from the

catalogue.) *The New York Times* observed only that “it was astonishing how these artists differ from one another, whether in landscape or still life.” Many of the reviewers used the term “modernist,” as though that should suffice. (If, as Hartley contended in his 291 statement of 1914, “the idea of modernity is but a new attachment to things universal—a fresh relationship to the courses of the sun and to the living swing of the earth—a new fire of affection for the living essence present everywhere”, then, in this sense, the reviewers were not far off.)

Although they were certainly aware of the many (and different) stylistic debts owed to European modernism by the Seven, why didn't any of the critics speak of Kandinsky, Picasso, Matisse, Picabia, Synthetic Cubism and Futurism? One reason surely was that these sources had already been individually restructured and reshaped. Yet another was Stieglitz's watchdog presence on “the bridge. His rhetoric for the Seven Americans show seems close in spirit to Whitman's avowed sourcelessness for *Leaves of Grass* . (In order to “sing the song of myself,” Whitman had also resolved, despite his well-stocked mind, to “make no quotations and no references to other[s] ... take no illustrations whatever from the classics ... and forms of Europe. Make no mention or allusion to them whatever, except as they relate to the new, present things—to our country—to American character or interests.”⁹⁸) Nevertheless, as rhetoric, it is perhaps best understood in terms of the rampant pro-Americanism of the postwar decade.

Since stylistic emphasis cannot be separated from the Seven Americans' conception of their subjects, the all-important question of meaning—collective and individual—must be shelved until the show can be reconstructed. With regard to the “collective” however, it should be emphasized that the group, as such, was under Stieglitz's very tight control—theoretically, financially, and emotionally.

Despite the grievous lack of installation photographs, it is possible to suggest one or two things about Stieglitz's master-plan for the hanging of the

show. One of his concerns seems to have been to stress the *equality* of the paintings and photographs; the public and critics were intended to know every one of these pictures as works of art by the company they kept with each other. Even if it was not Stieglitz's prime intention to foster specific visual analogies between the two mediums, he was certainly aware of the following: that however and whenever an object is placed it is being interpreted; that certain groups of forms hang better together than others; and that the so-called "rightness" of a successful hanging is always governed by formalism—since it aims for the immediate (first) level of understanding. He was also acutely conscious that photographs in general—and the fastidious platinum, paladium, and gelatin silver prints of his era in particular—lack the immediacy, the scale, and the eye-riveting color and form synthesis of paintings; and that they therefore require closer, if not harder, looking from the viewer. (Hence, of course, his always painstaking calibration of mount size to photographic print.) Further, no one knew better than Stieglitz that the resemblances and influences between paintings and photographs are essentially formal; that functionally they have nothing in common. Obviously, the sum of these simple, inescapable facts account for why he so rarely exhibited the two mediums together, despite his often expressed determination to "test" photography's value as expression by placing it beside the "best" paintings. After the *Seven Americans* there would be only one more exception, *Beginnings and Landmarks: 291* shown at An American Place in 1937. But the purpose of this exhibition was different from the earlier ones. It was organized by Stieglitz and Dorothy Norman to show representative examples of the works presented at 291 as "firsts" in America. To quote from Norman's catalogue essay:

Stieglitz has always insisted upon recognizing and exhibiting the various forms: watercolors, oils, sculpture, drawings, prints, as being of equal potential value ... Thus in this exhibiton these

various forms are shown together without further comment.⁹⁹

And indeed some unpublished installation photographs of the exhibition show that it was hung (mainly by O’Keeffe) with a sort of wild formalist abandon, and with photographs interspersed between paintings. Stieglitz’s most enlarged photograph, *The Steerage* (1907), is between Picasso’s 1910 drawing (*Nude*) and O’Keeffe’s *Blue Lines* (1916); Strand’s *Abstraction* (actually *Wire Wheel* of 1920—not 1916, as listed) is next to Gordon Craig’s *Etching for the Theatre* (1907); and Stieglitz’s 1889 *Sun Rays* (*Paula*) is between Dove’s *Cow* (1914) and Marin’s *Brooklyn Bridge* (1913).¹⁰⁰ (Plates 50. and 51.)

From the foregoing, it is quite clear that Stieglitz regarded the Seven as chosen people. Only *they* could bring the word (art as a symbol of life) to a hostile (philistine) world. How? As O’Keeffe told Blanche Matthias just a year later, “One ... [can’t] be an American by going about saying that one is an American. It is necessary to feel America, live America, love America and then work.”¹⁰¹

There can be little question that the idea of an indigenous American art had been in the air for some time. Despite what might be called Stieglitz’s selective chauvinism, many of the governing metaphors and intellectual assumptions embraced by him in the name of the Seven Americans are very similar to those preached earlier by Robert J. Coody in his independent periodical, *The Soil: A Magazine of Art* (published in five numbers between December 1916, and July, 1917).

... By American Art I mean the æsthetic product of human beings living on and producing from the soil of these United States. By American Art I mean an American contribution to art ... Our art is, as yet, outside of our art world ... Its in the skyscraper ... The East River, The Battery ... The Tug Boat and The Steam-Shovel ... The Steel Plants ... Æroplanes ... Rag-time ... The Crazy Quilt ... The Cigar-store Indians ...¹⁰²

Even when all of the works in the Seven Americans show are finally tracked down, it may take a long time before they are understood—since it is always easier to read cultural manifestations of public feelings than the complicated works artists produce to represent them.

It seems fitting that the last word as to whether photographs can (should) hang beside paintings should be O’Keeffe’s. In a typescript filed with her collection of Stieglitz’s “wastebasket” prints, donated to Yale in 1970, she wrote:

It is my intention that [these photographs] only be looked at in the hand like a book and never be hung on the wall. I even think that maybe all photographs are better looked at that way to really appreciate them.¹⁰³

Clearly O’Keeffe felt no compunction at all about looking seriously at photography for her own artistic ends. How and when she did so, and what kinds of photographs interested her in particular, will be discussed in the next, and last, two chapters.

Notes

Chapter Six

- 1 Editorial in *The Seven Arts* (November, 1916): 52–53.
- 2 *Ibid.*, Peter Minuit (Paul Rosenfeld) “291 Fifth Avenue,” p. 64
- 3 9 October, 1919. YCAL.
- 4 *G O’K* (1976)
- 5 Stieglitz to Strand, January 5, 1919. YCAL.
- 6 Stieglitz to Strand, January 23, 1919. YCAL.
- 7 Stieglitz to Strand, May 20, 1919. YCAL.
- 8 Stieglitz to Strand, June 8, 1919. YCAL.
- 9 Reproduced in *Georgia O’Keeffe, A Portrait* as Plate 9.
- 10 An identification of this drawing was not possible, for it is not among those photographed for the Whitney file. It appears to be a later variant on “Special No. 1” of 1915, with a much more explicit connotation of sexual intercourse.
- 11 For a perceptive analysis of “Paula” as Stieglitz’s own definition of the photographic image, see R. Krauss, “Stieglitz/Equivalent,” *October* 11 (Winter, 1978): 131-135.
- 12 Already quoted in Chapter One, p. 2.
- 13 Alas, the Archives of the 92nd Street Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Association, has nothing in its files as to the public reception of this exhibition. This was not Stieglitz’s first show at the YWHA. In March, 1918, he arranged an exhibition there of 29 American and European Pictorial photographs, which included his own *The Terminal* (1892) and *The Steerage*, Steichen’s 1898 *Rodin*, and *Bernard Shaw*, Sheeler’s *Interior* (1917), Strand’s 1916 *The Blind Woman* and *The Auto*, and a 1917 portrait by Schamberg. A letter to Strand dated March 9, 1918 says, “the evening at the YWHA was about the most perfect I ever spent in New York. It was really very beautiful. I don’t think anyone who participated will ever forget it. Rich and poor. I spoke on the spur of the moment ... the whole affair was an inspiration.” YCAL.

- ¹⁴ In 1898, the Munich Secession Exhibition added the new category of art photography to the traditional ones of painting, sculpture and printmaking. Among the exhibitors was Stieglitz, who showed nine photographs. For an account of that epochal 19th century exhibition, see Naef, *The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz*, pp. 62-64.
- ¹⁵ For a documentation of this rare test by "that bunch at 291" see Doty, *Photo-Secession*, p. 46.
- ¹⁶ "New Tendencies in Art." *Camera Work* 22 (April, 1908): 33.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 34.
- ¹⁸ *Camera Work* 45 (January, 1914): 17.
- ¹⁹ For the details of this decision, see Stieglitz to Ward Muir, 30 January, 1913. YCAL.
- ²⁰ A letter from Stieglitz to Paul Haviland dated April 2, 1920 says: "Agnes Meyer trotted up 4 flights a short time ago to see O'Keeffe's work and my photographs. —We spent 3 hours together." (Access to the Stieglitz-Haviland correspondence was granted to me courtesy of the Lunn Gallery, Washington, D.C.).
- ²¹ The business of the Anderson Galleries was "to appraise, catalogue, exhibit and offer for sale" all objects of art. Some of the galleries could be rented by individual artists—as Stieglitz did.
- ²² Catalogue statement for *An Exhibition of Photography by Alfred Stieglitz*, at the Anderson Galleries, February, 1921.
- ²³ *Ibid*, n.p.
- ²⁴ Quoted by Norman in *Alfred Stieglitz, Introduction to an American Seer*, p. 12.
- ²⁵ On these two points, see Hoffman, *The 'Twenties*, pp. 21-66, and Lowe, pp. 191-192.
- ²⁶ For a behind the scenes report of this endeavor and its harmful effects on O'Keeffe, see Lowe, pp. 241-42.
- ²⁷ Stieglitz was a member of the committee of selection for this show, which was organized to present "only the best" in modern art, by means of the jury system. The committee also included Arthur Carles, Joseph Stella, and Thomas Benton.
- ²⁸ Unfortunately the catalogue does not list the paintings. They were shown by number and by date without titles. (Most of O'Keeffe's titles were attached long after the paintings of this period were done.)

But even though ninety of the pictures had never been shown publicly, quite a few of them may be identified through O'Keeffe's 1966 catalogue raisonné, and from some of the recently discovered Anderson Galleries installation photographs.

- ²⁹ Reproduced in Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, p.45.
- ³⁰ Kennerley papers, New York Public Library. Photographed with the kind permission of Georgia O'Keeffe.
- ³¹ By so doing, it was Stieglitz's intention in 1902 to help the viewer "make a comparative study of the individual work and scope of the photographer." "The Photo-Secession at the National Arts Club, New York," *Photograms of the Year* (1902): 18. In all likelihood, these similarities in hanging were caused by the restrictions of space, rather than by any intention on Stieglitz's part to connect O'Keeffe's 1923 show with the successful emergence of the Photo-Secession—however tempting it is to think otherwise.
- ³² Coomaraswamy had an experienced eye for photography. He had used the camera as a record keeping tool in his work since 1903. After migrating to America in 1917, he became an enthusiastic Pictorial photographer—one good enough to exhibit prints occasionally. For an account of the mutually admiring Stieglitz-Coomaraswamy relationship see Roger Lipsey, "Double Portrait: Alfred Stieglitz and Ananda Coomaraswamy," *Aperture* 16 (1972): n.p.
- ³³ Told to Dorothy Norman in 1928, and quoted in *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, p. 175.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ His other term for this was "samvega," a Pāli word meaning "the body-blow that is delivered by any perfect and therefore convincing statement of truth." See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Samvega: Aesthetic Shock," *Aperture* 16 (1972): n.p.
- ³⁶ Stieglitz to J. Dudley Johnson, Royal Photographic Society, Bath, England.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ *Ibid.* The "stir" was not all positive, however. Several trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts remained opposed to the inclusion of photography, consequently Coomaraswamy felt obliged to cancel his plans to have Stieglitz come to Boston and give a lecture on the topic.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*

- ⁴⁰ The standard mat sizes of the Boston MFA were: 14x18 inches, 16x21 1/2, and 22x28. I am indebted to Drew Knowlton of the BMFA for this information.
- ⁴¹ Stieglitz to Coomaraswamy, Dec. 31, 1923. Courtesy of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Department of Prints, Drawings and Photographs. Just how well Coomaraswamy came to understand what Stieglitz was trying to do with photography may be measured by the 1924 article he wrote for *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*. ("A Gift from Mr. Alfred Stieglitz.") It is full of late *Camera Work* arguments.

The camera is a means of expression with virtues and limitations of its own; the photograph which looks like a drawing, etching or painting is not a real photograph. The peculiar virtue of photography, and at the same time, in the hands of a purely mechanical operator, its severest limitation, is its power of revealing all textures and revealing all details. The art of photography is to be sought precisely at this point: it lies in using this technical perfection in such a way that every element shall hold its place and every detail contribute to the expression of the theme. Just as in the other arts there is no room here for the non-essential. Inasmuch as the lens does not in the same way as the pencil lend itself to the elimination of elements, the problem is so to render every element that it becomes essential; and inasmuch as in the last analysis there are no distinctions in Nature of significant and insignificant, the pursuit of this ideal is theoretically justified. A search for and approach to this end distinguishes the work of Alfred Stieglitz." 22 (April, 1924): 14.

- ⁴² Stieglitz to Haviland, July 22, 1928. Lunn Gallery. The word "with" here should probably be stretched to mean being shown in the same department of the Museum as the Rembrandt and Meryon prints and drawings, because no special exhibition of the three artists, as such, is listed.
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, Sept. 14, 1928. For an up-to-date account of how the Metropolitan's print collection finally obtained 22 (not 21) Stieglitz photographs, see Lowe, pp. 287-288.
- ⁴⁴ O'Keeffe to Sherwood Anderson, 11 Feb. 1924, Newberry. This is a very rich letter in terms of understanding O'Keeffe's intentions for her art. She wrote it to persuade Anderson to write a short introduction for her catalogue "because you are read—this part of the world is conscious of you ... [and] the picture has to send out the printed word to get people to come and look at it." Interestingly, in the act of

writing down the things she wishes *he'd* say, she ends by telling him that she may be able to handle it herself. Anderson, in fact, declined, and O'Keeffe subsequently changed her own plans. "I feel my work this year may clarify some of the issues written by the critics," she wrote, and then offered a selection of complimentary and derogatory reviews by Henry McBride, Allen Burroughs, and Royal Cortissoz of her 1923 show. It is noteworthy that all three stressed their admiration for her color, and that Cortissoz—no fan of abstraction—complained of the lack of "intelligible elements of design." Clearly he was not a fan of Dow's either.

⁴⁵ Statement, "Chapter Three," *Third Exhibition of Photography* by Alfred Stieglitz. Anderson Galleries, March 3-16, 1924: n.p.

⁴⁶ These were: *The Terminal*, New York (1892), *Spring Showers* (1899), *The Flatiron Building* (1901), *The Hand of Man* (1902), and *The Steerage* (1907).

⁴⁷ Margaret Breuning, "Modern Photography Raises Question to Baffle Artists," *New York Evening Post* (March 8, 1924): 15.

⁴⁸ Henry McBride, "Stieglitz—O'Keefe [sic] Show at Anderson Galleries," *New York Herald* (March 9, 1924): section 7, p. 13.

⁴⁹ This unusually perceptive article is unsigned. It appeared in the *New York Times*, Sunday, March 9, 1924, in a column titled "Art Exhibitions of the Week." (Section 8, p. 10.)

⁵⁰ See Lowe, p. 262.

⁵¹ Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 5 September, 1923. YCAL.

⁵² It is likely that at least some such photographs exist, since there are many precedents for them. In *Camera Work*, for example, Stieglitz often reproduced his own prints of important 291 shows. Among the more recent were Negro Art (1914), Brancusi sculpture (1914), Picasso-Braque (1915), and Nadelman (1915). Although O'Keeffe gave me permission to examine any photographs taken of the Seven Americans, they are not to be found in Abiquiu, nor in the the Stieglitz Archives at YCAL. Judging from several notations on documents in the Whitney files for O'Keeffe's 1970 show, these, and many other installation photos of her shows, may be in Doris Bry's possession.

⁵³ Stieglitz to Jennings Tofel, 5 February, 1924, YCAL.

⁵⁴ Henry McBride, *The Sun*, March 14, 1925.

⁵⁵ Stieglitz to Anderson, 11 March, 1925, YCAL.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 23 March, 1925.

- ⁵⁷ Presumably, all of Stieglitz's "Equivalents" in the show were taken between 1924-1925, but no specific record exists of his choices. The same is true of Strand's untitled photographs. (The catalogue lists five of New York, three of leaves, and ten of machines.) O'Keeffe's paintings *are* titled, but some confusingly (i.e. *Abstraction*) and others were changed later. (*Petunia No.1* is now *Petunia and Coleus*) The catalogue notes that Hartley's twenty-five paintings were "part" of the 1921 Hartley auction at the Anderson Galleries, but categorizes them simply as "landscape and still life." Marin's last five paintings have exactly the same title (*New York*). Dove's twenty-five titles appear to be more reliable (judging from the catalogue Ann Lee Morgan compiled for her 1973 thesis on Dove). And Demuth's six abstract portrait posters are secure.
- ⁵⁸ Edmund Wilson, *The American Earthquake* (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979): 98-108.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁰ Edmund Wilson, "The Stieglitz Exhibition," *The New Republic*, March 18, 1925, pp. 97-98; Forbes Watson, "Seven American Artists Sponsored by Stieglitz," *The World*, March 15, 1925; *The Arts*, Vol. VII, No. 4, April, 1925 (unsigned); *The New Yorker*, March 28, 1925 (unsigned); *The Art News*, March 14, 1925 (signed H. C.); *New York Times*, March 15, 1925 (unsigned); *Christian Science Monitor*, March 20, 1925 (signed R. F.); Margaret Breuning, "Seven Americans," *New York Evening Post*, March 14, 1925; Helen Appleton Read, "Alfred Stieglitz Presents 7 Americans," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 15, 1925; Royal Cortissoz, "291: Mr. Alfred Stieglitz and His Services to Art," *The New York Herald Tribune*, March 15, 1925; Henry McBride, "Crowds at Stieglitz Opening," *The Sun*, March 14, 1925; (also by McBride, "Seven Alive" *The Dial*, May, 1925, pp. 435-436); Glen Mullin, "Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans," *The Nation*, May 20, 1925, pp. 577-578; *The Dial*, August, 1925, "Comment," pp. 177-178 (unsigned); Deogh Fulton, "Cabbages and Kings," *International Studio*, LXXXI, May, 1925, pp. 144-147. *In the rest of the chapter, these critics will be mentioned only by their last names or by newspaper or periodical, if articles are unsigned or initialled.*
- ⁶¹ See Stieglitz to McBride, March 14, 1925. YCAL.
- ⁶² "Alfred Stieglitz: His Cloud Pictures," *Playboy* 9 (July, 1924): 15.
- ⁶³ The German sculptor, who, in the late 1920's became director of The Denver Art Museum. Ronnebeck was a life-long friend of Hartley's.
- ⁶⁴ For recent research on Dove's interest in theosophy, which began in the mid-1920's (about the time of this prose-poem) and its undoubted effect on his subsequent paintings, see Sherrye Baker Cohn, "The Dialectical Vision of Arthur Dove," pp. 93-162.

- ⁶⁵ In 1974, the Washburn Gallery presented a gathering of some of the known works in the Seven Americans show. Artists were not grouped individually, as in the original, and photographs were arbitrarily hung in between paintings. Emphasized by the Washburn in particular were such formal juxtapositions as O'Keeffe's enlarged flowers and Strand's photographs of Mullens (leaves).
- ⁶⁶ Conversation winter of 1980 with Naomi Rosenblum. See also, Rosenblum, *Paul Strand*, pp. 223, 237. Whether Stieglitz's decision was a matter of space necessity, or because of certain aesthetic differences which he perceived between Strand's images and those of the other six is not known. Certainly Strand was the furthest from being a Symbolist of them all.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid* . p. 223.
- ⁶⁸ *G O'K* (1976) n.p.
- ⁶⁹ Stieglitz to Johnson, March 17, 1927. Bath, England.
- ⁷⁰ For a recent discussion on this point, see Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting 1760-1910* . (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts 1983): 160.
- ⁷¹ Hartley, "Modern Art in America," *Adventures in the Arts*, p. 60.
- ⁷² Rosenfeld to Stieglitz, 3 August, 1928. YCAL.
- ⁷³ Among them, S. [Sadakichi] H. [Hartmann] "That Toulouse-Lautrec Print," *CW* 29 (Jan. 1910): 36; Max Weber "The Fourth Dimension From a Plastic Point of View," *CW* 31 (July 1910): 25; John Weichsel, "Cosmism or Amorphism," *CW* 42-43 (April-July 1913): 69.
- ⁷⁴ Oscar Bleumner "Audiator et Altera Pars: Some Plain Sense on The Modern Art Movement," *CW* (June 1913): 33.
- ⁷⁵ Benjamin De Casseres, "The Renaissance of the Irrational," *CW* (June 1913): 22.
- ⁷⁶ Marsden Hartley, 291 Catalogue statement (1914) reprinted in *On Art by Marsden Hartley*, ed. by Gail R. Scott (New York: Horizon Press, 1982): pp. 62-63.
- ⁷⁷ Scott has rightly emphasized the importance for Hartley in having Stieglitz for a "sounding board" correspondent during the very years when he was imbibing modernism in Europe. *Ibid*, p. 29.

- ⁷⁸ Quoted in Doris Bry, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographer* . (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts 1965): 20.
- ⁷⁹ Stieglitz to Hart Crane, 9 Oct., 1923, Columbia University Library. It should also be noted that ten years earlier Caffin had written a book titled *Art for Life's Sake* (New York: The Prang Company, 1913).
- ⁸⁰ Quoted in Dorothy Norman (1960), p. 52. Seligmann wrote later (1934) that by "life" was meant "spiritual intensity and psychic life." (*America and Alfred Stieglitz* , p. 64.)
- ⁸¹ For a discussion of this point vis-à-vis the progression of Hartley's essays, see Scott, pp. 24-25.
- ⁸² Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row 1979): 7-10.
- ⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 59, p. 15, p. 55.
- ⁸⁴ Stebbins, pp. 64-65.
- ⁸⁵ An exact count will not be possible until the twenty-five Hartley canvases (which appeared in the 1921 Hartley Auction) are tracked down.
- ⁸⁶ Seligmann, "291 A Vision Through Photography," *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 121. Seligmann met Stieglitz through Strand in 1917.
- ⁸⁷ Gertrude Stein, "An American and France," *What Are the Masterpieces?*, Los Angeles Conference Press, (1940): 62.
- ⁸⁸ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964): 195.
- ⁸⁹ As has already been noted, it is not certain which Strands these were. Most probably they included *Drilling Machine* (1923) and *Akeley Camera* (1922) to judge from an unsigned *Dial* review (August, 1925, p. 178) which described them as an "orientally perfect combining of disks, parabolas, and verticals—when we perceive the silver flexibility of skin or the depth of tone upon the anaconda-like curves of central bearings."
- ⁹⁰ For a brilliant discussion of the cumulative history of this idea in literature and art see Marx, pp. 24-33, 145-226.
- ⁹¹ Alfred Stieglitz to Georgia O'Keeffe, 7 October 1916. Cited in Sarah Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 201.

- ⁹² On the folk-art aspects of Dove's twenty-five collages made between 1924-1930, see Dorothy R. Johnson, *Arthur Dove: The Years of Collage* (College Park: The University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1967): 9-16. (*Ten Cent Store* is illustrated on p. 39.) Also, Sherrye Baker Cohn, "The Dialectical Vision of Arthur Dove," pp. 210-212, p. 239. It should be noted, apropos of the close Dove-O'Keeffe relationship, that O'Keeffe bought Dove's *Rain* right out of the Seven Americans Show. In her letter to Johnson about this work, she says "I still own it and it has been hanging where I live most of the time since I bought it—longer than any other painting I have around." (p. 17).
- ⁹³ See Ian Quimby and Scott Swank, eds. *Perspectives on Folk Art* (New York: Norton and Co., 1980): 13-32.
- ⁹⁴ For a recent study, see Abraham A. Davidson, "Demuth's Poster Portraits," *Artforum* (November, 1978): 54-57. Davidson, however, does not discuss the influence of folk art on these portraits. On the Dada origins of the abstract poster portrait, see James R. Mellow, "Gertrude Stein Among the Dadaists," *Arts* (May, 1977): 124-126.
- ⁹⁵ O'Keeffe may have picked up a certain way of simplifying form from her teaching contact with Mexican and American children in West Texas. Several of her watercolors of the period suggest it. For example, *Chicken in Sunrise* (1917) and *Tree and Picket Fence* (1918). By this time she was in close correspondence with Stieglitz, and must have been well aware that he had shown the art of children three times at 291. In this decision he was undoubtedly influenced by *Der Blaue Reiter's* profound respect for the powerful artlessness of children's images.
- ⁹⁶ Stebbins *A New World*, p. 126-127.
- ⁹⁷ Used here according to Mayer Schapiro's definition: "... style is, above all, a system of forms with a quality and a meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist and the broad outlook of the group are visible. It is also a vehicle of expression with the group communicating and fixing certain values of religious, social and moral life through the moral suggestiveness of forms." "Style," *Aesthetics Today*, ed. Morris Philipson (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961): 81.
- ⁹⁸ Walt Whitman, *Notes and Fragments*, Ed. Dr. Richard Maurice Burke, London, Ontario, Canada, (1899) p. 56.
- ⁹⁹ Dorothy Norman, *Beginnings and Landmarks: "291" 1905-1917, October 27-December 27, 1937, An American Place*, n.p.
- ¹⁰⁰ These installation photographs are in the Stieglitz Archives, YCAL. In a telephone interview with me on May 29, 1980, Norman remembered that the show was Stieglitz's idea, that it was decided

upon late and quickly, and that it was hung by O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, "and anyone else who happened to be close at the time." She said she had to do the catalogue in a hurry, and that these installation photographs were taken by either Juley or Baker. She herself never saw the Seven Americans show, nor any installation photographs of it, but thinks they probably do exist.

¹⁰¹Quoted in Blanche C. Matthias, "Stieglitz Showing Seven Americans," *The Chicago Evening Post: Magazine of the Art World* (March 2, 1926): 16. Matthias and O'Keeffe first met in the early '20s. They were the same age. In an interview prepared by me and carried out by Margaret Peters in San Francisco, November 24, 1980, Matthias said that she saw the Seven Americans show. She loved the O'Keeffes in it and thought them very different from the Marins, Doves and Hartleys, but could not remember any other details. That she understood Stieglitz's goals well at the time is clear from another statement in the same article: "... and so the Seven Americans follow the idea of Stieglitz, and so Stieglitz will follow for all time to come and whenever he finds it, the unchangeable, yet ever changing life that gives itself to him in the guise of art."

¹⁰²R. J. Coady, *The Soil* (January, 1917): 54-55. For more on Stieglitz and Coady, and *The Soil*, see Zilczer, pp. 143-153; Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives*, pp. 71-84; and Gorham Munson, *The Awakening Twenties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985): 39-46.

¹⁰³When the printing fit was upon him, Stieglitz, in his search for perfection, usually threw away more photographs than he kept. At some point during the 1920's, O'Keeffe began to retrieve them, (with his knowledge, if not his approval) and it is these prints which constitute her "wastebasket" collection. They are in the YCAL Stieglitz Archives, filed under the title *My Collection of Alfred Stieglitz Photographs—Georgia O'Keeffe*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

O'KEEFFE AND STIEGLITZ: THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY

It is often said that the admission of the possibility of one art helping another amounted to a denial of the necessary differences between the arts. This is, however, not the case ... repetition of the same appeal thickens the spiritual atmosphere which is necessary for the maturing of the finest feelings, in the same way as the hot air of a greenhouse is necessary for the ripening of certain fruit.

Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (1914)¹

Whoever doesn't see O'Keeffe doesn't see my work either.

Stieglitz to Heinrich Kühn(1926)²

With O'Keeffe there did not happen to be any tradition. There had been nothing to compare her with ... However there were Stieglitz's photographs. There is something else there.

Dove to Stieglitz (c. 1930)³

The intimate and secret process in which one artist is affected by another's work can obviously never be finally or even satisfactorily charted. With Stieglitz and O'Keeffe the usual difficulties are compounded. Not only are their mediums different, but the superficial differences between their artistic intentions, and the profound resemblances between many of their pictures (especially during the early 'twenties), keep raising the question "who was the bear and who was leading the bear?"—to borrow from Gertrude Stein's apt vernacular.⁴

What has long been visually clear is that the symbiotic relationship between these two artists caused them to create many unique and coherent works of art that would not otherwise have been possible. Equally clear is the fact that O'Keeffe's signature style was hammered out during her early years with Stieglitz.

Perhaps the first of O'Keeffe's works to show a direct Stieglitz stimulus were her 1916 charcoal drawing, *Train in The Desert at Night*, and a 1916 watercolor, similarly titled, of the same motif.⁵ Both seem to have been inspired by his photograph *The Hand of Man* (1902), for not only is the locomotive-advancing-under-a-plume-of-smoke unique to O'Keeffe's canon, we know from her correspondence with Anita Pollitzer (already cited) that she was receiving copies of *Camera Work* from Stieglitz during this period. (*The Hand of Man* was reproduced in two issues, No. 9, January 1903, and No. 13, October 1911.)

Despite this probable early reference, it is reasonably certain that what brought photography most forcibly to O'Keeffe's creative attention was becoming the prime focus of Stieglitz's camera lens herself. His earliest exposures of her were taken in the spring of 1917 at 291. Some weeks later, he sent them to Texas for her to see.

[His] photographs of me came—two portraits of my face against one of my large watercolors and three photographs of hands. In my excitement at such pictures of myself I took them to school and held them up for my class to see. They were surprised and astonished too. Nothing like that had come into our world before.⁶

A year earlier, Stieglitz had made installation photographs of her first 291 show of charcoal drawings. Her reaction upon receiving them, as expressed to Pollitzer, is also worth noting.

Did I tell you that Stieglitz sent me 9 wonderful photographs of my exhibition—that he had taken himself—would you like to see them ... Isn't it funny that I hate my drawings—and am simply crazy about the photographs of them.⁷

Another thing that helped to bring photography to O'Keeffe's aesthetic attention was watching and, on occasion, helping Stieglitz to print his negatives under the most intimate, crowded and elemental conditions in the 59th Street studio,

and at Lake George. His letters to Strand and Rosenfeld are quite revealing about this. "G. is a great companion," he wrote Strand in November of 1918 from New York.

She is getting a liberal education—a real 291er. Yesterday for instance I printed from 9 til 2:30—roof—backroom—bathroom—whole room full of dishes, bottles, clotheslines.⁸

Six months later, he told Strand that "Georgia hasn't painted much—she is torn with the desire to do different things—so is apt to do nothing but be with me."⁹

From Lake George, the fall of 1920, he wrote to Rosenfeld that

All morning I've been at it again—just trying all over again to learn the ABC of working. And now G. is at the Lake—in the Lake (had painted all morning after having counted wash for weekly laundry *and helped me preparing to develop*) ... (Italics added)¹⁰

In another letter to Rosenfeld, sent the summer of 1922, he tried to explain his working attitude.

... printing ever remains a gamble .. *Georgia was busy spotting some [of my] prints* —and I laughed and said I really didn't know why I worked like one possessed to achieve prints .. [it was] to satisfy myself. No one else ... none were for any other purpose. (Italics added)¹¹

As O'Keeffe herself has written in retrospect:

Each print, even when printed from the same negative, could say something different when Stieglitz printed it and mounted it. As he developed negatives and prints, I began to learn about a print—to choose the best prints from among the others.¹²

From all of the above, there can be little doubt that by the very early 'twenties O'Keeffe had come to understand and appreciate the chemical beauty of

photography, and more importantly, to regard it as an exciting heritage available to her own work. What she had to do first was to identify the elements that she, as a painter, could extend or re-invent. Her most anxious, most experimental, period appears to have been between 1918 and 1925. And it is scarcely less significant that Stieglitz himself made more photographs during those seven years than in all his previous years combined.¹³

Was it O'Keeffe's new appreciation for the facticity of photography that began her shift from watercolor to oil late in 1918?¹⁴ Without a close and comparative study of all the 1918-1925 works (not yet possible) we cannot finally answer this question. But Stieglitz's correspondence of the period indicates that facticity per se was *not* the operative factor. In November of 1918 he wrote a description of O'Keeffe's new oils to Strand:

I think they'd stagger you—no matter what you might expect. Loveliness—Savage Force—Frankness—the Woman—all is there—Beautifully expressed. Her medium is very much more under control and full of quality—more like her watercolors and pastels—that is *the oil quality is nearly equal to the charcoal quality*—In other words, oil is becoming a real part of her—the struggle with medium is disappearing. Still no strength or directness is disappearing.¹⁵ (Italics added.)

From this we can be reasonably certain that the new oils were all abstractions, and that verisimilitude was not what first captured—and kept—O'Keeffe's artistic interest in photography.

Stieglitz was clearly delighted with her return to oils—perhaps he even suggested it as a greater imaginative investment. (He often gave her advice, but she did not always take it. For example, in 1917 he told her, fortunately in vain, that she ought to stick with black and white.¹⁶) In any case, her watercolors dropped off sharply, although she kept on trying to work with them for another

year. The switch-over, if not the reasons for it, may be glimpsed from a letter Stieglitz wrote to Dove.

Georgia has been having an awful time with the watercolors. She has done a few things, oils, which are worthy to be added to her good things of last year ... She claims to be having a hellish time getting her mind clarified.¹⁷

To work in the liquidity of watercolor is to work in the realm of chance. And perhaps this was what made it so unsatisfactory to O'Keeffe at a time when she was trying hard to "clarify" her mind—and her goals. She continued to use pastel, however, and some of the most exquisitely colored, and spontaneously conceived of all her works were done in this medium in 1922. In that year Stieglitz wrote Dove that

Georgia is pastelling just at present. She's certainly most at home in that medium. That is, most free to put down just what she wants to.¹⁸

The available visual and epistolary evidence both indicate strongly that O'Keeffe began her serious, and increasingly sophisticated, synthesis of painting and photography in 1919. The first characteristic to show up on her new agenda seems to have been the close-up—but rendered on relatively small boards and canvases. (The magnified leaves and flowers on large canvases would not become prevalent until 1924.) There can be little doubt that O'Keeffe's first-hand experience as subject/object for Stieglitz's camera was a prime factor in her 1919 decision to bring her eye up closer to her own motifs. Two letters in particular support this view. In March, 1919, Strand wrote to Stieglitz that

Your photographs and her [O'Keeffe's] work are part of me—they are great ... I am seeing the grey painting and the portrait—they seem somehow related.¹⁹

Six months later, Stieglitz and O'Keeffe received the following from Dove:

Dear people ... have you done more with the *close-ups* ? And were they more satisfying? *And the paintings. I am wondering if they do not abstractly feel the same force* . Am anxious to see them.²⁰
(Italics added.)

For a revealing description of Stieglitz's close-up method and rationale during this period, there is his own account to Edward Weston, as recorded in the latter's *Daybooks* in 1922:

Stieglitz said that he used an anastigmat lens of 13 in. focus on 8 x 10 plates, stopped down to f 45 or more, that he used a head rest to enable him to give exposures of 3 or 4 minutes ... [quote] You see that in my work, I have broken every photographic law, optics included. I have put a lens a foot from the sitter's face because I thought when talking intimately one doesn't stand ten feet away; and knowing that it takes time to get deep into the very innermost nature of matter, I stopped way down. *You see my prints, the eye is able to wander all over them, finding satisfaction in every portion, the ear is given as much consideration as the nose, but it is a task, this desire to obtain detail and simplification at the same time. To make your subject forget a headrest during such long exposures is heartbreaking* . (Italics added.)²¹

Although the exact sequence and dating of O'Keeffe's 1919 works must await further scholarship, four close-ups from that year offer some vital clues to her new thinking and methodology. Perhaps the most advanced, and least known, example is *Inside Red Canna*, exhibited in 1923 at the Anderson Galleries.²² (Plate 52.) In this 1919 work, as in almost no other, the magnified bee's-eye view of her later flowers is clearly presaged. It appears to be a severely simplified study of a canna based upon Subordination, Dow's most important design principle. All the lines and spaces "radiate" out from the carolla, and the composition has the

asymmetrical symmetry typical of Art Nouveau. Present as well is the familiar aspiring centricity of her early charcoals. Both *Red Flower* ²³ and *Lake George, Coat and Red* ²⁴ are 1919 variants on spiral forms. In *Red Flower*, O'Keeffe has moved in so close that edges of the flower have been cropped by the frame. The best known of the four, *Music — Pink and Blue I*, ²⁵ commonly regarded as a pure abstraction, is based upon the enlarged segment of a shell. O'Keeffe's hidden (abstract) use of synecdoche here must be considered in light of the fact that fragments of her own body were being isolated by Stieglitz's camera during this period, even though she was already aware of the picture's edge as a cropping device—thanks to her Dow/Fenollosa training in the Oriental scroll tradition.

There is other evidence in O'Keeffe's 1919 oil abstractions of her increased attentiveness to the aesthetics Stieglitz espoused in his photography. For example, in *Black Spot III* ²⁶ her exquisitely modulated pastel colors are newly accentuated by her so-called "black spot", and she has included as well a full range of almost chemically transparent greys. From having looked at, as she said, "rafts" of photographs, she was well aware that the lines of reality are extremely precise, particularly when dividing different qualities of brightness and shade. And in this painting, the color lines are absolutely sharp on her smooth, all-over surface.

Nascent photographic characteristic such as these were soon observed (but not quite named as such) by Paul Rosenfeld: "The color of O'Keeffe has an edge that is like a line's ... Much of her work has the precision of the most finely machine-cut products."²⁷

Baudelaire never stopped believing that choice of subject matter was half the work of the true artist. Relatedly, we can also say that just as subject matter has always had a significance and a resonance of its own, so the artist's conception of it reveals a great deal about how he is moved, how he grows. These are useful things to keep in mind when looking at the work O'Keeffe did between 1919-1929.

Although the code to her Lake George subject matter cannot be finally cracked without a systematic survey of this still uncatalogued decade in her art, much that is important to understand about it can be surmised through examining some of the known works.

To begin with, she soon learned that what comes first in perceiving a photograph is identifying the subject, and what a photograph does best is to describe things. As has already been documented, Stieglitz and O'Keeffe were enduring Symbolists. Although any work of art is a system of multiple meanings, the fact that these two artists believed *true* reality is hidden (and therefore needs to be found and unveiled) must be taken into account with regard to their choice of subject matter. As hidden meanings are nearly always suggested by allusion and ambiguity, this may help to explain the narrow—and related—range they both worked in. It is also instructive here to consider a section from the American Symbolist manifesto, written in 1917 by Jennings Tofel:

A work of art shall be abstracted from nature. Life shall enter it—indeed it must, but through the crucible of the artist's mind. It shall suggest more than relate, for suggestion is the depth beyond the depth—the gauntlet to the imagination of the observer that disturbs and quickens his sensibilities.²⁸

The Baudelaire/Mallarmé lineage of Tofel's statement is clear. And it should be mentioned in this connection that he became a cherished friend of Stieglitz's during the early 'twenties. Although Stieglitz never considered Tofel's so-called Introspective paintings "new" enough to present at the Anderson Galleries, or *An American Place*—his letters to the man between 1923–1939 are revealing of their shared Symbolist values and ideas. For example:

[O'Keeffe and I] do think of you frequently—and with pleasurable consciousness that

we were fortunate this winter in coming closer in touch with a real rare soul—so when again you look at the moon as it comes up silently from behind the hills remember I know clearly the feelings you must have—sitting there so alone—just seeing. Yes, I know. Sometimes I wish I didn't.²⁹

We are alone on the Hill—in the house— ... such stillness—and the greatest Harmony of all Supreme Silence.³⁰

Paintings and America! Art and America! I try to believe that it is entirely I who am blind—but there is an inner loud voice that says: you are not blind—you have simply not found the adequate form to express what is within me and for so many years is seeking the Light! ... O'Keeffe and I feel you are one of the few really clean people we know. We not only feel it, but say it.³¹

In 1919, O'Keeffe's choice of subject matter began to shift dramatically. Not surprisingly, the changes we see over the next few years are directly related to the inner and outer changes in her life—with Stieglitz as mentor, protector and fulcrum. To start with, there was the geographical shift from *her* Texas to *his* territory of New York City and Lake George. There was also Stieglitz's powerful hope (and undoubted pressure) that O'Keeffe take a significant role in the creation of a native American art. And, most importantly, there was her own brilliantly intuitive decision to transform the "uterine personal" subject matter of her first charcoals into shelter shapes of a more covert and objective order: barns, shells, fruit, vegetables, trees, flowers and skyscrapers.

Before inquiring specifically into these new sources and forms for O'Keeffe's art, some admittedly speculative observations will be proffered: Two of Stieglitz's parabolical ideas appear to have been particularly germinal for O'Keeffe's pictures after 1919—and for his own as well. The first may be grasped from some 1919 notes he made, at the request of S. Macdonald Wright, on the topic of "Woman in Art."

Woman *feels* the World differently than Man feels it. And one of the chief generating forces crystallizing into art is undoubtedly elemental feeling—Woman's & Men's are differentiated through the difference of their sex make-up. They are One together—potentially One always. The Woman receives the World through her Womb. That is the seat of her deepest feelings. Mind comes second ... The underlying aesthetic laws governing the one govern the other—the original generative feeling merely being different. Of course Mind plays a great role in the development of Art. Woman is beginning—the interesting thing is *she has actually begun*.³² (Italics all Stieglitz's)

Without Stieglitz's recognition of O'Keeffe's early "uterine" charcoals, this later thought might never have been expressed. And without this thought of Stieglitz's, O'Keeffe might never have invented her many marvelous visual metaphors on the "womb." It should be noted as well that Stieglitz himself is recorded as having compared a barn to a womb in 1926:

Perhaps that dark entrance that seems to you mysterious is the womb, the place whence we came and where we desire when we are tired and unhappy to return, the womb of our mother, where we are quiet, and without responsibility and protected. That is what men desire, and thinking and feeling and working in my own way I have discovered this for myself.³³

The second germinal idea of Stieglitz's that seems to have been accepted, for a time, by O'Keeffe is a less easy—and less tidy—one to pin down. The key to it lies in the early 1924 statement for his third Anderson Galleries exhibition, wherein he described his *Songs of the Sky — Secrets of the Sky* as "direct revelations of a man's world in the sky." In a letter to Sherwood Anderson written during the exhibition, O'Keeffe described these prints (actually taken the summer/fall of 1923) as "way off the earth." *Her* work of the past year, she said, was "very much on the ground."³⁴ It therefore appears that she and Stieglitz had

come to some sort of profound, if temporary, agreement about their separate artistic spheres: namely earth (female) and sky (male). If so, where, or whom, did this idea come from? It is, of course, a division of psychic and thematic territory that reaches back into the prehistoric, when the sky was conceived of as having a time-transcending order for men, *not* women, and when the earth was habitually regarded as a bearing and nourishing mother.³⁵ Stieglitz's creative interest in the ancient sexual imagery of earth and sky may have originated from his reading of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915).³⁶ In the opening chapter Lawrence wrote:

Heaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? ... *They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth* ... Their life and inter-relations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to the furrow for the grain and became smooth and supple after their ploughing and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire ... *it was enough for the men, that the earth heaved and opened its furrows to them*.³⁷ (Italics added.)

It is important to record here that O'Keeffe had often chosen the sky as a theme *before* 1923. It may be seen in such works as *Starlight Night* (1917), *The Evening Star* series (1917), *From the Plains I* (1919), *Orange and Red Streak* (1919), *Storm* (1921), *Waves* (1921), *Starlight Night, Lake George* (1922), *Lightning at Sea* (1922), and *Ocean and the Pink Moon* (1922). During and after the summer/fall of 1923, however, her country-sky motifs dwindle appreciably. And the few that do exist seem to have had intimate and powerful connections with Stieglitz. For example, the *Flagpole* series (1922-1925) which depicts Stieglitz's studio/darkroom on the Lake George property,³⁸ and *A Celebration* (1924), which was first titled *Cloud Forms*. (This last work may have been painted as a special tribute to ten particularly fruitful and happy weeks of work for both artists during the autumn of 1924.³⁹) Although the motif of the sky never disappears completely

from O'Keeffe's Lake George paintings of the mid-to-late 'twenties (and may still be read as one of the most telling barometers for her emotions), it is no longer a major "country" theme for her. With the advent of the cityscapes in 1925, the sky begins to figure more prominently again. But it was not until O'Keeffe went to New Mexico in 1929, that the sky theme re-emerged in her work with new glorification, new force—and new meaning. *The Lawrence Tree* (1929) is one of the earliest examples of this significant and independent (from Stieglitz) change in her work. Certainly the majority of O'Keeffe's Lake George themes were resolutely *of* the earth. And some can be even said to possess a double fertility, since she had a garden plot on "The Hill", and often grew her own flower and vegetable motifs.⁴⁰

Through an age-old metaphor system—the sexualization of nature—Stieglitz and O'Keeffe would therefore seem to have developed an iconographic code for their pictures as personal, and perhaps as mystical, as the New York Dada of Picabia and Duchamp.

Expansionist as the issues above may be, they hold contextual pointers that cannot be ignored if we would try to comprehend some of the multiple meanings in O'Keeffe's work of the 1920's.

There are at least three significant categories which can be identified in her borrowings from photography between 1919 and 1929. These might be termed the *adoptive* (using a typically photographic view point or angle for compositional purposes, such as the close-up, the overview or aerial, and the telephoto); the *adaptive* (using a single photograph, or series, as a kind of optic theme on which to make her own painted variations); and the *innovative* (drawing imaginatively upon her highly sophisticated knowledge of the photographic process and its quirks—such as halation and flare—for abstract or expressive purposes.) The use of even such a rudimentary yardstick as this requires a good deal of delicacy, however, because O'Keeffe was not progressive about these divisions. Pure

examples are, in fact, quite rare, and they tend increasingly to overlap—as will be seen.

In the decade between 1919 and 1929, the work of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz swung, quite literally, between the poles of nature (Lake George) and civilization (New York City). This ancient and rhetorical contrast will therefore serve as the basis from which to examine their paintings and photographs.

The Country: Lake George 1919-1924

Thoreau’s boast that he had “travelled a good deal in Concord” might easily have been said by Stieglitz about Lake George—particularly after 1918, when O’Keeffe came to share the time he spent there. Although Lake George was not the first landscape he ever photographed,⁴¹ it was almost certainly the first one to register consciously upon his artist’s eye.⁴² Stieglitz’s personal identification with this place, and the profound significance of its topography for his later work, would be graphically described by him to Sherwood Anderson in 1925.

I have been looking for years—50 upwards—at a particular skyline of simple hills—how can I tell the world in words what that line is—changing as it does every moment—I’d love to get down what “that” line has done for me—maybe I have—somewhat—in those snapshots I’ve been doing the last few years ...⁴³

What O’Keeffe thought about Lake George that extraordinary summer of 1918 is still unknown. But how Stieglitz felt about sharing it with her is revealed in a letter he wrote Strand in August.

Time and space seem to have disappeared for me—It’s an incredibly wonderful life [O’Keeffe and I] have been leading up here ... —It’s all so real and so full of peace and intensity—of great livingness

that I often feel it must be a trance—as there has been but [one] 291—one Camera Work—I feel “this” is fully equal to those—quite as full and rich—*a oneness all the way through* ... It is impossible to give you any picture of what we are living—the Day is sufficient unto itself—not as theory—but as actual feeling from within.⁴⁴ (Italics added.)

There is a telling photograph of O’Keeffe wearing Stieglitz’s familiar black Loden cape (in effect, his “mantle”), taken by him that first summer at Oaklawn, which seems to illustrate this report to Strand—and something else besides.⁴⁵ (Plate 53.) In this semi close-up, she stands arms akimbo, her eyes looking complicitly into those of the photographer. Over her shoulders we see the lake, the line of the hills, and the sky—one of the earliest examples of Stieglitz’s “particular skyline,” even though it is shown out of focus. She is represented in an obviously challenging posture, and almost as if she were a mirror image of Stieglitz himself. As if, in fact, *she* were now the source of his artistic aspiration to create the new.

There is absolutely no information, visual or otherwise, to suggest that O’Keeffe ever felt “a oneness all the way through” with Stieglitz—even when she was most dependent upon him emotionally and financially. Perhaps it should not come as a surprise, therefore, the nature of their mediums aside, that O’Keeffe and her paintings are generally more visible in Stieglitz’s work than he and his photography are in hers’. She refers to them both in her pictures, certainly, but her references are almost always hidden and multi-valent, and the original context of the photographs radically (and often poetically) transformed.

In some ways, the collaboration between Stieglitz and O’Keeffe at Lake George may be likened to the relationship between the artist/seer Prospero and his daughter, Miranda/Ceres, in Shakespeare’s fantasy play about the new world of America—*The Tempest*. There is a quite astonishing similarity between Stieglitz

and Prospero, the civilized ruler who renews and recreates himself through the protection of an innocent, spontaneous and natural woman who has the gift of “wonder.” Continuing with this comparison we might say that in Stieglitz’s mind (and even for a time in O’Keeffe’s) Lake George came to be the place where “music” sounded from the air, the earth and the water, just as it did on Shakespeare’s magic island. Although no record exists that Stieglitz ever thought of himself as Prospero, the fact remains that he was a generation older than O’Keeffe (the exact age of her mother), and that he guarded and guided her like a Miranda until 1929 when she exchanged his Lake George for her New Mexico. There were also times, particularly in 1920, when he photographed her almost as if she were “Ceres, most bounteous lady”, holding cobs of corn, apple boughs, and the like, in her hands.⁴⁶

In looking more closely at O’Keeffe’s Lake George themes, we shall also be examining some of the “inner” and “outer” ways that she affected Stieglitz’s chosen subject matter. Indeed, O’Keeffe may have been a major catalyst for Stieglitz’s interest in picturing the Lake George landscape—the place of their first lyrical happiness. Also it is highly probable that she was directly responsible for his burgeoning fascination with “nature” per se. Compositions based on trees, hillsides, clouds and water hardly ever appear in his photography before late 1918. And by this time he was well aware of O’Keeffe’s nature-based watercolors on such themes as: *Hill, Stream and Moon* (1916), *Morning Sky* (1916), *Sunrise and Little Clouds* (1916), the *Pink and Green Mountain* series (1917), *Tree and Earth* (1917), *Tree and Picket Fence* (1918). Further, it would have been very natural for his eye—always hospitable to painting ideas—to receive fresh inspiration from the work of someone he had come to identify with so closely.

In fact, we can say that the earth, water and sky of the Lake George surroundings became fresh artistic territory for them both at almost the same time.

Were they, perhaps, influenced by Kandinsky's idea that "repetition of the same appeal thickens the spiritual atmosphere which is necessary for the maturing of the finest feelings"?⁴⁷ We do not yet know. But there, in 1919, O'Keeffe would paint her first abstract pictures with "music titles": *Blue and Green Music* (originally called *Music — Black, Blue and Green*) and the *Music, Pink and Blue* series of two.

It would be impossible to improve on Rosenfeld's masterful description of O'Keeffe's highly original use of color during this period. Being a music critic, he was able to find language for what he saw as concise as it was ardent.

Painters have perceived the relativity of all color: have felt that every hue implies the presence in some form or other of its complement, its ideal opponent that gives it force; and have expressed those complements in their works. But few have dared place a sharp triad based on red in as close juxtaposition to one equally sharp based on green as Georgia O'Keeffe has done ... other painters have recognized the relation of all colors to pure white since pure white contains them all; few have had it in them to dare lay hardest piercing white between baking scarlets and the green of age-old glaciers, and make ecstatically lyrical the combination ... It may be a chord of burning green that is felt against one of incandescent red, a chord of intensest blue against ripe orange ... O'Keeffe does not play obvious complements of hot and cold against each other. It is more often the two warm tones in the two triads that will be found opposed in her compositions, and the two cold. Oblique, close, tart harmonies occur ... The latitude between proximate tones, between shades of the same color, is stressed. Dazzling white is set directly against tones of pearl. Violet abuts upon fruity tomato. It is as though O'Keeffe felt as great a width between minor seconds as Leo Ornstein does.⁴⁸

Among her major oil abstractions of 1919 is *Orange and Red Streak* .⁴⁹ (Plate 54.) This work, which looks as if it had been abstracted from an actual rainbow arched across the sky and lake, might well have influenced Stieglitz's 1920

photograph *Rainbow, Lake George* . (Plate 55.) There are several strong formal similarities between them: Both have vertical-rectangle picture fields divided into uneven thirds. O’Keeffe’s frame-cropped arc, or “orange and red streak”, cuts across her three divisions (presumably the sky, shoreline and lake), while Stieglitz’s rainbow (in a reverse curve from O’Keeffe’s arc) is cropped by the trees of the lower foreground. Furthermore, it is quite possible that with this photograph Stieglitz was attempting to make his own version of “color music”—a Kandinsky analogy he and O’Keeffe had both come to use about her painting⁵⁰—since the total spectrum of color is implicit in his black and white exposure of a rainbow. If so, it was certainly a logical progression. In 1918, just before O’Keeffe came to New York at his urging, he wrote Strand of a perfect 291 afternoon, when “The O’Keeffes [her watercolors] never sang so wonderfully.”⁵¹ A few months later (with her by his side), he spoke exultantly of his own work to Strand: “Well I have a few prints which when finished will sing the high C.”⁵²

None of this, of course, is to say that O’Keeffe’s painting was in itself the inspiration for Stieglitz’s photograph *Rainbow* . The landscape itself was that.⁵³ It is rather to suggest that her work may have acted as an intermediary for him, offering and confirming certain formal ideas. In any case, by 1920 he seems to have become acutely aware of her abstract shapes, and her “music” methods, for his photography. In this, also, he could have found support in the words of Kandinsky:

The borrowing of method by one art form from another, can only be truly successful when the application of the borrowed methods is not superficial but fundamental. One art must learn first how another uses its methods.⁵⁴

Stieglitz’s abundant letters to Strand, Rosenfeld and Seligmann offer a ringside seat on what he and O’Keeffe were experimenting with during the early

'twenties—as well as an invaluable idea of their growing contiguous working rhythms and methods. It is also apparent that he wished his closest colleagues to be impressed with the originality, and the forward motion, of his latest protégé.

“G. has started to paint,” he wrote Strand during August,

Has got to get “started” before [striking] a gait—her gait—Lake George is not visually exciting as you know—not until autumn—and G. needs excitement of some kind to get her going.⁵⁵

To Strand, Sept. 12, 1920.

Georgia is painting some. —Not as much as other summers. And neither of us knows whether what she has done is good or not. —She has primarily tackled summer greens. —Perhaps the autumn will put a little bit more ginger into both of us.

To Strand, Sept. 21, 1920.

Georgia continues to paint—I wonder what you will think of her new work—the color is as fresh—as pure—as ever. As she is herself.

To Strand, Oct. 9, 1920.

It has been a most wonderful week. —One of the greatest peace imaginable for both G. and myself. The weather has been perfect ... There has been painting. There has been printing.

To Paul Rosenfeld (almost his alter-ego with regard to American culture theory during the early 'twenties), Stieglitz often wrote in more intimate detail. In a letter dated August 28, 1920, he described how O'Keeffe acquired her own studio (and haven from the family) at Lake George. This building, “The Shanty”, would become the subject of one of her major paintings, to be discussed further on.

There is an old shanty on the place. —It has been going to pieces—was half dismantled ... Georgia had always had her eye on it ... Within a few days, with virtually no outlay—doors and hinges salvaged from—or in old barns, old windows fished out of old woodpiles etc. etc., Georgia had her dream in concrete form — ... and you should

have seen G. up on the roof astride the top—working away with hammer and brush like an old adept ... This building activity seemed to put life into G. and she soon was apaint.⁵⁶

To Rosenfeld, Sept. 20, 1920.

I have been experimenting with portraits—family mostly. —Have done nothing of Georgia as yet. —It hasn't worked out that way. [She was clearly too absorbed in her own work to pose for him.] ... [G.] is busy with preparing canvases in her shanty. ... Has a few very interesting things. Not as many as last year. —And different. —I am not able to judge them. —I'm much too close to really see them here.

During the summer/fall of 1920, Stieglitz began on a richly symbolic series of American “apple portraits,” seven of which featured members of his circle—among them Georgia O’Keeffe.⁵⁷ In two of these portraits, she is pictured with her fingers portentously touching specimens of a bounteous apple harvest.⁵⁸

It can hardly have been accidental that 1920 was also the year when O’Keeffe’s own subject matter shows a new and decided shift from abstraction to the fruits of the Lake George soil. “Georgia is painting apples,” Stieglitz wrote to Marie Rapp Boursault, his former 291 secretary, “She has the apple fever. They are really marvelous [on the Hill] this year.”⁵⁹ The sudden concentration on apples by them both would seem to be yet another case of “who was leading the bear?”.

There were more O’Keeffes in this ‘fruits of the soil’ vein during 1920. For example: *Grapes on White Dish* (“Georgia is on the porch, in the black cape. —She is eating grapes of the vine.”⁶⁰), *Plums*, *Three Zinnias*, *The Red Maple*, and so forth. In the same context, it should also be noted that Rosenfeld would shortly be pleading with American artists to consider “the wonder of the world of humdrum familiar things.”⁶¹

Judging from Stieglitz’s correspondence, the 1921 season at Lake George was not as productive for him as it was for O’Keeffe. Early that October he

grumbled to Rosenfeld, "I haven't had much luck with my recent attempts at photography ... —In short I know that this year I seem to be anything but a Master."⁶² And to Seligmann he wrote often of his pride in what O'Keeffe was accomplishing.

Went out on the Lake at 5:30 and got back at 7. The beauty of the water & hills—the forms—colors—ever changing—every second—indescribable. Perhaps Georgia's work will reflect it.⁶³

To Seligmann, Sept. 18, 1921.

The weather continues beyond description. No 2 moments is the landscape the same. *Georgia is putting experiences into paint ... A new note. Quite extraordinary. Very different.* (Italics added.)

To Seligmann, Oct. 14, 1921.'

We had just gone down to the lakeside to look at the red maple by the water. Georgia is painting it. A most, hilarious, yet sombre, picture. *Every fall she has painted that tree.* (Italics added.)

Just two months before, Stieglitz had complained to Strand, "Have the tree subject still up my sleeve. May stay there for a long while."⁶⁴

What *was* the "very different" note in O'Keeffe's painting? He may have been referring to her extended series of apple still lifes. The rather obsessive quality—and quantity—of canvases painted between 1920-1922 on this theme suggests that they may be among the very earliest of her newly abstract/objective self portraits.⁶⁵ That all fruits are literally, and figuratively, female (within them lie the seeds) must surely be taken into account here. And so must a strange close-up photograph of O'Keeffe, made by Stieglitz around 1920, which has a disembodied stem of two apples (ovaries?) hanging right next to her face in the left foreground.⁶⁶ (Plate 56.)

Despite the ground-breaking importance of her apples as personal “experience,” it is most likely that Stieglitz’s September 18 letter to Seligmann referred to *Lake George with Crows* . For this painting was certainly the most “extraordinary,” not to say radical, of the twenty-five canvases O’Keeffe did during that incredibly productive autumn of 1921.⁶⁷ (Plate 57.) For one thing, it introduces the aerial view, which she would use variously, off and on, for the rest of her artistic life, most notably in the plant close-ups during and after 1924.⁶⁸ In Texas, in 1917, she had painted *Canyon with Crows* , a small (9 x 12) watercolor—seemingly from on the motif.⁶⁹ (Plate 58.) And it is by comparing these two works with similar titles that we can see some of the ways her vision changed and expanded during the three years spent with Stieglitz.

The birds-eye (Renaissance) perspective of her watercolor is essentially an oblique and earthbound view—not an aerial one. Whereas in *Lake George with Crows* there is a real sense of being suspended from a point in space. By this time, O’Keeffe had surely seen A. L. Coburn’s angled aerial view, *Octopus, New York* , taken from a new skyscraper in 1912. And she was, of course, well aware of Stieglitz’s own long-time interest in looking-down views from tall buildings, going back to *From My Window, New York* of 1900.⁷⁰

Unlike these photographs, however and unlike her *Canyon* watercolor, *Lake George with Crows* was not based on strictly experiential seeing, for O’Keeffe did not fly in an airplane until 1929—nor did Stieglitz.⁷¹ We therefore have to ask what else might have served as a model (or models) for her eccentric “new” space construction? One possibility, certainly, is the commercial aerial photograph. After World War I, aerial views of resort areas like Lake George became extremely popular through postcards, and the like. And O’Keeffe may well have been inspired by this type of image, and adopted her initial vantage point from it. Several other characteristics would suggest that *Lake George with Crows* is

actually a composite image of at least three different sightings: the hovering (aerial); the high oblique (as from nearby Prospect Mountain, since it includes the far shore of the lake;)⁷² and the low oblique (as from, say, an upper window of the Stieglitz farmhouse on The Hill.)⁷³ The possibility of a second story view is reinforced by the long, grayish, transparent shape at the extreme right of the painting, which may be read as a window frame, or even as an organdy-type curtain hanging from it. If so, there is yet another dimension to her complicated space—that of being inside, looking out. Further evidence that this landscape was built in the artist's imagination from layers of factual information, lies in the colors (chalk-like, arbitrary tones based on red and yellow fall foliage), the reduction of her three crows into free-form triangular patterns, and the enlarged, carefully centralized, oval of the lake.

Compositions with dominant, or domineering, ovoids like this one would become increasingly prevalent in O'Keeffe's work—no matter what the subject matter. In *Lake George with Crows*, the textured blue ovoid is opaque, suggesting deep water. In her 1940's pelvis-bone series, the ovoids are empty holes. Bone shapes that act as natural visual metaphors for the eye, through which, in actual fact, the artist peered to render the infinite (untextured) blue of the New Mexico sky, as, for example, in *Bone with Blue* of 1944.⁷⁴

There is enough visual evidence extant to say that O'Keeffe made photography "the servant" of her art from the very beginning—just as Baudelaire had written it should be.⁷⁵ And in *Lake George with Crows*, she has clearly used it, however unwittingly, to further Baudelaire's "domain of the impalpable and the imaginary."⁷⁶

Judging by the significant leaps forward made by both Stieglitz and O'Keeffe in 1922, this was the peak year of their consanguineous collaboration—which seems to have been at its most fertile from 1919 through

1924. By 1925, events such as health, age differences, and O’Keeffe’s growing visual and psychological boredom with Lake George, conspired increasingly against the powerful resonance between their two minds.⁷⁷ After this, they started to pursue independent, if still somewhat parallel, aesthetic concerns—O’Keeffe especially.

A combination of visual and epistolary evidence from 1922 makes it reasonably certain that this was the year when O’Keeffe began her unique and ongoing contribution to the apex of Stieglitz’s art: the abstract expressive cloud photographs.

Toward this point it is also significant that Stieglitz mentions O’Keeffe’s name twice in his famous 1923 account of *How I Came to Photograph Clouds*.⁷⁸ In the article, (a graphic example of formal change as biography) he says he “told” her that he wanted a series of photographs which would make the great composer Ernest Bloch exclaim “Music! Music! Man, why that is music!” Since we know that she had herself been making “visual music” pictures, with clouds as a major factor, from at least the time of her 1916-1917 watercolors, and since she was as steeped as he in the ideas of Kandinsky and Picabia, it is likely that the project *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* had been well and thoroughly discussed between them. This was, in fact, their standard artistic practice.⁷⁹

Still, when and why did the clouds over the Lake George hills suddenly become visual music for Stieglitz’s camera? The closest answer to “when” comes from his 1922 correspondence: letters to Strand dated July 26th and September 7th speak of “battling with the barn” on the Hill—trying unsuccessfully in his view to expose its interior shadow and exterior sunlight simultaneously. There is also a frustrated letter to Rosenfeld written in mid-August:

I continue to tinker. It frightens me to see how much material I use to get a print or two that finally seem to be something alive ... Georgia is painting.

Doing curious things. —Curious colors ... I do hope autumn will give Georgia the real chance she is hoping for. Summer is really nothing but a sort of preparation for that as far as she is concerned.⁸⁰

Yet another to Rosenfeld, dated October 4th, tells that O'Keeffe is painting "a remarkable apple," and goes on to complain, with some bitterness, about a recent visit from Strand.

While Strand was here I virtually did no photography. He photo-ed like one possessed—shooting right and left—forward and backward—upward and downward—and in directions not yet named.⁸¹

From all this, it was apparently not until well into October that Stieglitz began to work "daily for weeks" on the clouds. On October 29th, he reports to Seligmann that

As for ourselves we are madly, madly busy. You really have no idea with what intensity O'Keeffe and I work—and over what periods. I put in nearly 17 hours yesterday.

We also know that over and beyond his indignant intention to refute Waldo Frank's description of his photography in *Manuscripts* as "the power of hypnotism" by choosing "free" clouds (described in the 1923 article), Stieglitz like Mallarmé, had had a long-time interest in the weather as an influence on, and indicator of, his emotions.⁸² And clouds are, of course, the most familiar and potent carriers of weather. There is, as well, a letter he wrote to Rosenfeld dated August 8th, which speaks of reading some of Mozart's and Beethoven's letters: "I'm always amazed at the simplicity, the directness of these men. —Direct like their music. —Ever refreshing."⁸³

Questions such as "why" are apt to resist scholarship, not least because the cultural past counts for so little in a poetic imagination like Stieglitz's. Images

do count, however. And it is quite possible that the germinal idea for *Music No. 1* (Plate 59.) came from the aesthetic impact on Stieglitz of two different paintings: Hartley's *The Dark Mountain* of 1909⁸⁴ and O'Keeffe's *My Shanty* (1922). To take the Hartley first (Plate 60.): Not only did Stieglitz own this particular work, he had been an admirer of Hartley's Maine cloud and mountain motifs, painted from memory, since 1909—the year when they were first exhibited at 291.⁸⁵ We also know that in 1916, Stieglitz offered one of Hartley's "black landscapes" to O'Keeffe, who had admired it during one of her visits to 291—urging her to take it home. ("If you get tired of it, bring it back."⁸⁶) Perhaps nothing better reveals the profound and lasting impression Hartley's paintings made on Stieglitz than his letter to Rosenfeld of November 5, 1920. In it, he describes a Lake George walk taken with O'Keeffe just before sundown.

Hartley's black landscapes—there they were before us. Only much deeper—more tremendous ... Everything clear cut—intense—clean ... As for the incompleteness of some of the Hartleys—I don't always know if that is a shortcoming ... Of course all his pictures are autobiographical to a very great degree.

What undoubtedly struck Stieglitz about the "black landscapes" was their obvious sense of place; the crucible for Hartley's self-expression—even as Lake George was becoming for himself.

The Dark Mountain renders some far-off white farmhouses encircled by mountains and trees so dark that their vaguely anthropomorphic shapes are nearly indistinguishable from each other. Despite obvious differences in composition and meaning, Stieglitz's *Music No. 1* photograph presents a similar motif in a markedly similar fashion: trees and mountain shapes nearly obscured by darkness, jittery massive clouds blown by a high wind, and, in the lower distance, one explicably illuminated dwelling in very clear detail. (In Stieglitz's key print, the

divisions between every roof slate and clapboard can be made out—even the windowsill is visible.)

As for O’Keeffe’s painting,⁸⁷ (Plate 61.) the visual links with *Music No. 1* are stronger still. Although her beloved “Shanty” studio (which she helped to build that same summer) dominates, and almost fills the canvas, and Stieglitz’s dwelling (actually the Hill’s farmhouse) is dwarfed by the sky and mountains, their theme is one and the same: a single building in landscape. That both buildings are presented in their most triangular aspect may be yet another instance where objective fact was made to coincide with the abstract spiritual intentions of these artists. In Stieglitz’s photograph, there are two very subtle triangular forms. The second is made by branches against the sky just above the horizon line.⁸⁸ Stieglitz’s sky takes up two-thirds of his picture, and O’Keeffe’s roughly one-fourth. But her clouds, with their outstretched tendrils, are as somber and menacing as his dark rolling masses.

The other nine photographs in Stieglitz’s *Music* sequence are without any man-made structures. They are absolutely pure Edenic landscapes. As such, they are faithful in fact, if not in aim, to America’s only ancient past. *Music* has an even more significant theme: the sun. One of the hardest of all subjects to photograph, the sun is an almost palpable presence in each of these ten images. Its disc-shape is directly visible in half of them (numbers 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10), and indirectly visible, as the prime source of illumination, in the rest. The entire sequence may have been intended by Stieglitz as a definition of, or homage to, the photographic process itself: the sun equals light equals photography.⁸⁹

At some point during that same autumn of 1922, O’Keeffe made a picture of Stieglitz’s new-found studio, *Little House* . (Plate 62.) Nearly half of this Rousseau-like,⁹⁰ vertical painting is occupied with clouds. Did she perhaps intend it as a visual act of praise for “his” new subject matter?

In November 1922, the aspiring young Edward Weston had noted in his *Daybooks* that when he brought his photography to New York to be reviewed by Stieglitz, O'Keeffe shared equally, and with marked perception, in the responsibility of evaluating it.⁹¹ And it was in December of that same year that O'Keeffe herself stated

Nothing is less real than realism—details are confusing ... It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we can get at the real meaning of things.⁹²

As every student of photography knows, a photograph simplifies, even while it presents a different kind of legibility to the eye. By 1922, there can be little question that photography had become an unrivaled tool for simplification and abstraction in O'Keeffe's painting. In her ever constant search for the essence of forms, she would use this tool with increased secrecy and virtuosity.

During the summer/fall of 1923, and consistently thereafter, Stieglitz's cloud photographs were taken with his four by five inch Graflex. He titled these images *Songs of the Sky*, and he made more of them in 1923 than in any of the years to follow.⁹³

Although some of these photographs include portions of trees and hillsides, most of them were indeed "way off the earth," as O'Keeffe had expressed it. Just before they were exhibited in 1924, she wrote an extremely revealing letter about them to Sherwood Anderson.

He has done with the sky something similar to what I had done with color before [sic]—as he says—proving my case. he has done consciously something that I did mostly unconsciously—and it is amazing to see how he has done it out of the sky with the camera.⁹⁴ (Italics added.)

Even with this documentary proof of Stieglitz's intentions, it is "amazing" to find O'Keeffe's 1916-1918 abstract watercolor forms in many of his five by four cloud photographs of 1923.

The actual process for this accomplishment seems to have been a triple one, and not always "straight"—to judge from Stieglitz's correspondence, as well as from the prints themselves. The first step was based on his original idea of "the moment": that very instant when cloud patterns in the sky seemed to him to stand for something he was feeling, or thinking about—or was perhaps reminded of. ("It's a wild glorious morning. Maddeningly beautiful ... I ought to be skying but I'm not going to—the negatives are too easy to make."⁹⁵ Nine days later: "I have really gotten the breathing of moments down. —Georgia gets all excited when she looks at the tiny things."⁹⁶) The second step was identifying the most significant contact prints—those "more real than reality," as he describe them to Anderson that August 15th. ("I have been busy with clouds ... I believe I have a few very wonderful pictures. I can never tell though *what* I have until I am through with it. Do I ever get quite through with It?"⁹⁷) The vital third step consisted, in his words, of "Mounting—spotting. Spotting—mounting. Mounting—spotting. —Placing—Trimming—Spotting—Mounting."⁹⁸ As a small number of the prints show, sometimes Stieglitz even spotted out whole clouds in order to make a given configuration more emotionally definitive—or more like an O'Keeffe abstraction.⁹⁹

Prime examples of his earliest references to O'Keeffe's work exist in a 1923 series of *Songs of the Sky*, numbered 1-5, as reproduced in Doris Bry, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographer*.¹⁰⁰

Songs of the Sky No. 1 (Plate 63.) has strong formal similarities to two of O'Keeffe's Texas watercolors: *Red and Blue, Numbers I and II* of 1916. (Plates 64. and 65.) The pincer-like configuration issuing from the right of his horizontal photograph is practically identical to the dominant forms in O'Keeffe's

vertical series—especially to the looser version, *No.1* . (Whether, as seems likely, the nebulous, puffy shapes in both watercolors originated from her own sky observations is not known.)

In *Songs of the Sky No. 4* , (Plate 66.) the concentric clouds expanding out from the sun disc look as if they had been motivated by the similarly cropped concentric color rings of another of O’Keeffe’s 1916 watercolors, *Blue, Green and Red* —but in reverse. (Plate 67.)

In *Songs of the Sky No. 5* ; (Plate 68.) the wind-blown, misty clouds seem gradually to assume the double spiral shape of her watercolor *Cerise and Green* of c. 1918. (Plate 69.) This shared configuration becomes quite unmistakable when the watercolor is turned upside down—a practice common to both artists. To add to the pictorial and personal significance for Stieglitz of these watercolors, all three were shown in O’Keeffe’s 1917 show at 291.

Songs of the Sky No. 2 (Plate 70.) holds the clearest visual reference to O’Keeffe’s work in the series—specifically to *Evening Star V* (1917). (Plate 71.) This is a logical link for two unassailable reasons: First, because written on the back of the NGA key print, in Stieglitz’s hand, is “Portrait of Georgia.” And second, because a more perfect choice for an abstract cloud photographic portrait of O’Keeffe can hardly be imagined than re-presenting her own early sky material.¹⁰¹ In both pictures we see a spiral shape with a comet-like tail that is perhaps as expressive of spiritual emotion as similar forms in Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* .¹⁰² As for *Songs of the Sky No. 3* , there is a strong likelihood that its space-filling, phallic form was intended by Stieglitz as an abstract self-portrait. (Plate 72.)

Toward the end of October, 1923, he wrote Hartley with somewhat ironic pride:

I have gone through a great deal this summer.
That’s why “clouds” (really the Sun) and I became
fast friends . —And in spite of being merely a

photographer I think I have gotten some things down
I haven't seen anyone else do.¹⁰³ (Italics added.)

One of the larger questions about this material is why Stieglitz chose to make so many references to O'Keeffe's subjective abstractions in his, equally subjective, *Songs of the Sky*? The answer that this series is yet another of his "new" joinings of early modern American painting with photography—the most original of them all—is surely correct, as far as it goes. But there are some extra dimensions to consider, if we would begin to grasp the complex range of Stieglitz's intentions. He may have been trying, yet again, to make "color music" with photography, since all his formal references in *Songs* are to her watercolors—not to her charcoals. Further, it is probable that he meant some of the *Songs* to be visual conversations with O'Keeffe—coded messages, or tributes, on the order of her, equally probable, painted ones to him. For some verbal proof toward this last, there is Stieglitz's own statement, as recorded by Seligmann in 1926:

Sometimes I have been talking with O'Keeffe. Some men express what they feel by holding a woman's hand. But I have wanted to express the more, to express the thing that would bring us still closer. I would look at the sky, for the sky is the freest thing in the world, and when I would make a photograph from clouds and the sky and say to O'Keeffe, "Here is what we were talking about," she would say, "That's incredible, it's impossible."¹⁰⁴

These formal and emotional references to O'Keeffe's work in the *Songs* persisted well after 1923. One of the most "incredible" is to be found in a c. 1924 photograph best known as *Mountains and Sky*.¹⁰⁵ (Plate 73.) Visually there can be little doubt that Stieglitz was referring specifically to her 1919 oil, *Blue and Green Music*.¹⁰⁶ (Plate 74.) Like the painting, the photograph is a study in large-acute-angled triangles—which is also Kandinsky's famous simile for the "life of the spirit." Stieglitz's exposure caught a cloud cluster floating above his "particular

skyline of simple hills” in a formation astonishingly like the geometric configuration in O’Keeffe’s painting. (Her central triangle looks to have been abstracted from a favorite group of birch trees on the shore line—the same one that appears in *Lake George with Crows* —but the rippled forms, at bottom left, are easily recognizable as some of her earliest shorthand for clouds.) In a certain sense, Stieglitz’s photograph could also have been titled *Blue* (sky and lake) and *Green* (trees and mountains) *Music* . And this raises another logical question: why would he have wanted to make color music through photographs such as *Rainbow* and certain of the *Songs* —if that was indeed his intention? Again, the answer may rest with Kandinsky. In *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* , he speaks of “chromotherapy,” or the therapeutic effect of color—how it can exercise very definite influences on the whole body and be a power which directly influences the soul.¹⁰⁷

In documentary support of the above argument, there is a letter from Stieglitz to Rosenfeld dated November 14, 1923.

You say I’m the greatest artist in America. May be, may be not. I feel it’s an unnecessary challenge and emphasizes something you really don’t care to sacrifice at the expense of your whole “statement” about me, [in *Port of New York*] so I’d change that. Georgia agrees with me ... *It isn’t modesty on my part. I know my worth. But I’m not sure about being as much an artist as one of the leading spiritual forces in this country. That they may challenge* . (Italics added.)

There is also Stieglitz’s famous, stark, close-up of O’Keeffe’s throat (1921) which is a kind of meditation on acute-angled triangles.¹⁰⁸ In short, there can be little question that Stieglitz’s working idea of abstraction was, and remained, close to Kandinsky’s. That is to say, profoundly Symbolist, messianic and utopian.

The summer and fall of 1923 were also extremely creative for O’Keeffe. She was testing new ground through the symbolic/abstract portrait—and mostly, it

would seem, with still life portraits of herself. While the Renaissance artist's concept of a self-portrait was to look in a mirror, this was hardly necessary for O'Keeffe, since she was already being immortalized by Stieglitz's photographs of "her many selves" (as described by Stieglitz in a letter to Strand, 17 November, 1920). It was, of course, the advent of photography that originally drove so many painters to experiment with model-less variations on the self-portrait, and O'Keeffe's concept seems at once 19th century and new. She may have been unfamiliar with such Realist symbols of the artist's presence as Courbet's *The Trout* (c. 1872)¹⁰⁹, but there can be little doubt that she used Stieglitz's close-ups of her body as models for some of her own abstract/objective self-portraits. One of the most revealing cases in point is *Alligator Pears* (c. 1923), a small (9 x 12") oil on board. (Plate 75.) To compare this painting with Stieglitz's often reproduced 1918 photograph of her breasts, bisected by the flower-like shape of her left hand,¹¹⁰ (Plate 76.) is to see an unmistakable kinship in terms of form and composition—even though O'Keeffe left out her own left hand. The alligator pear is also a powerful natural symbol of the full womb. And she may have intended to convey, in yet another guise, Stieglitz's favorite notion that "The Woman receives the world through her womb ... The seat of her deepest feelings." To this loaded equation a sad biographical factor might be added: There are eight known alligator pear canvases from 1923—a rather large number on a single theme for O'Keeffe—and it is entirely possible that they have a direct connection to the sudden, and final, loss of her long hope of having a child with Stieglitz.¹¹¹ If so, this adds much to our understanding of the artist's own comments on her alligator pears some forty years later.

The first alligator pear I became acquainted with I didn't eat. I kept it so long that it turned a sort of light brown and was so hard that I could shake it and hear the seed rattle. I kept it for years—a dry thing, a wonderful shape. Later I had two green

ones—not so perfect. I painted them several times. it was a time when the men didn't think much of what I was doing ... I was an outsider. My color and form were not acceptable ... I had an alligator-pears-in-a-large-dark-basket period. One painting is dark with a simplified white scalloped doily under the basket. There was a painting of pears in the basket with a pink line around the outside as a sort of frame.¹¹²

In 1923, O'Keeffe was also concentrating her mind on calla lilies and leaves. To take the callas first—ten of which are known to have been painted during this year.¹¹³ Perhaps no flower has had a wider range of associations in America than the calla lily. During the nineteenth century it was commonly associated with feminine modesty, and with mortality—becoming a familiar symbol in Victorian death and funeral scenes. Its exotic appearance also attracted such still life painters as John La Farge, George Lambdin and John Henry Hill, particularly during the 1870's and 1880's.¹¹⁴ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the calla acquired a whole new fascination for artists, due largely to its blatantly sexual configuration, and its naturally abstract form. For the first Freudian generation, the calla's connotations seem to have run a gamut from the purely feminine, to the heterosexual, to the homosexual.

Reviewing O'Keeffe's callas, which appeared in her joint exhibition with Stieglitz in 1924 at the Anderson Galleries, Henry McBride wrote knowingly:

Miss O'Keefe [sic] has been studying the nature of the plant we used to call a "calla lily," but which botanists assure us is not a lily at all, and finding in it the secrets of the universe. To be sure, when one understands a calla lily one understands everything. The crux, so to speak, of the calla is the yellow rod at the base of which the real flowers occur, and it is this yellow that sounds Miss O'Keefe's new note. The best of her new pictures to me was a flaming arrangement of yellows, very spirited and pure. Just where yellow comes in the occult scheme of things I forget, I used to know. I think it means progress for Miss O'Keefe.¹¹⁵

The calla motif, with its prominently phallic “yellow rod,” had already been picked up during the late 'teens by Hartley and Demuth—possibly with private homosexual implications for them both.¹¹⁶ But what caused O’Keeffe’s intense preoccupation with the calla in 1923? To research this deceptively small question is to come to grips with the very stuff of O’Keeffe’s mature art, with what makes it personal, profound, and unique.

Flowers and Leaves

We can be quite sure at the outset that in fastening on the calla, O’Keeffe was alternating, as usual, between two visions: The moral—in the D.H. Lawrence sense of giving form to some felt aspect of her life—and the aesthetic. It must be stressed at the start that flowers had always given her “a curious feeling of satisfaction,”¹¹⁷ and that they outnumber every other category in her work between 1915 and 1930. Up to 1923, however, the flowers O’Keeffe had chosen to paint were rather humble ones. Sturdy, high colored, common garden varieties without any special visual or symbolic history—the canna, in particular, but also the zinnia, spiraea, and dahlia.¹¹⁸ Clearly, therefore, the calla represented a definite turning point in her artistic intentions.

The intensity and the precision of twentieth century American flower painting is commonly thought to have derived from the nineteenth century artists’ objective and scientific desire to document the landscape of the New World.¹¹⁹ But while O’Keeffe’s earlier cannas, zinnias, and the like, can easily be considered as “brute” natural facts which speak for themselves, her callas really cannot. There is something extra about them. The history of flower symbolism is generally characterized by two quite different considerations: the flower in its essence (as an archetypal image of the eternal human life cycle and the soul’s immortality), and the

flower in its shape. All floral plants are, of course, designed by nature for the single purpose of sex. Most species have both male and female organs which are more or less visible, but the calla's sexual strategems are laid so bare, it is easy to see them as erotically suggestive. O'Keeffe obviously did so, but out of her own habits of mind. She may not have known, or cared, that the name calla derives from the Greek word *Kallōs*, meaning beautiful. But as a child of her time she would certainly have been aware of flower dictionaries. Popular American literature of the turn of the century is rife with the view that flowers were carriers of emotional and spiritual truths.¹²⁰ The argument as to whether O'Keeffe, as a sophisticated twentieth century artist interested in objectivity, did or did not practice disguised flower symbolism can go either way. And what this may mean is that she *sometimes* did. In the so-called language of flowers, the calla stands for "magnificent beauty."¹²¹ Further, the lily as a species had been a cultural metaphor for purity and immortality in Christian art since the Middle Ages. It also appeared frequently, in this context, in Pre-Raphaelite paintings and photographs—but with a new (and secular) urgency.¹²²

Even if, as seems probable, that "extra something" about O'Keeffe's callas has emblematically to do with sex, beauty and the generic female, there are other points of origin to consider before we can get at the core of their significance in and for her art. Almost without exception, whenever O'Keeffe broke new ground it was to Dow's exercises that she looked for support and ballast. If, for example, we take two of her best known 1923 calla paintings, both of which appeared in the 1924 Anderson Galleries show, *Calla* (illustrated in *Arts*, April, 1924, p. 220) and *Calla Lily in Tall Glass No. 1* (also in *Arts*, p. 221), and put them beside one of Dow's "flower lines in space composition" in the *Theory and Practice of Teaching Art* (Fig. 9, p. 14), the relationship between the three is immediately visible. Although Dow's calla (Plate 77.) is reduced to decorative

divisions of space, the discrete asymmetry of a flower within a vertical rectangle was closely followed by O'Keeffe in both her paintings. (Plates 78. and 79.)

Hartley also appears to have been an influence, but mostly in terms of style. If we compare her *Calla Lily in Tall Glass No. 1* with his well known *The Blue Cup* (or *Color Analogy*) c. 1921,¹²³ (Plate 80.) we can see several stylistic connections between them. These range from the centralized iconic format, to the quasi-geometric (circles and triangles), to the dark contour lines, to the flat, rhythmically patterned backgrounds, to the angular, simplified ornamentality characteristic of American folk art. There is also a distinctly anthropomorphic quality about O'Keeffe's three-tier callas in their vases, even as there is about Hartley's *Blue Cup*. (All of these relationships are easiest to see in black and white reproductions, for O'Keeffe's use of color is utterly opposed to Hartley's.¹²⁴) It is this quality of anthropomorphism—quite new to her flowers in general—which first leads one to suspect that the 1923 calla lilies are the earliest of O'Keeffe's floral self portraits. For one thing, the vase, or jar, is one of the most common of all symbols for the female principle. And for another, the flower as an identification with self was certainly a less esoteric—and more legible—metaphor for O'Keeffe to choose than the apple or the alligator pear, since the association of women with flowers had been a long-time favorite in Symbolist and Art Nouveau analogies.¹²⁵ *Camera Work*, for example, was riddled with Symbolist images connecting women to flowers. Especially notable are Steichen's photograph *Cyclamen — Mrs. Philip Lydig*, and his painting *The Lotus Screen — S. S. S.*¹²⁶

To what extent did O'Keeffe's idea of making floral self portraits come from Stieglitz? There are several reasons to think that he was, at the very least, a psychological influence, even though he rarely posed her *with* flowers.¹²⁷ Chiefly, there is the visual fact that he often photographed parts of her body as phytomorphic forms. One of the earliest examples of this may be a five by four, c.

1923, image of her head and shoulders against the sky, like a blossom on a stem.¹²⁸ (Plate 81.) Only her face is visible—a circular hat hides her hair, and the identifying outlines of her neck and shoulders are obliterated by the black cape she wears. This ingenious photograph resembles Redon's flower-head lithograph *La Fleur du marécage une tête humaine et triste* (1885) so closely that it can hardly be a coincidence.¹²⁹ (Plate 82.) Sometimes Stieglitz composed O'Keeffe's hands so they too would resemble floral forms—mostly, it seems, in terms of the waterlily and the tulip.¹³⁰ But perhaps the least known, and most abstract, of all his phytomorphic conceptions of her body are the singularly beautiful photographs of her buttocks. The earliest one, a silver print titled *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait Thighs*, was made in 1922.¹³¹ Although the bud-like analogy in this work is quite unmistakable, it becomes even more specific in the 1932 series of two, labelled *Georgia O'Keeffe; A Portrait Buttocks and Thighs*.¹³²

To sum up: what all of the foregoing suggests is that during 1923 the visually androgynous calla—possibly the most simplified and rigorous of all flower forms—came to stand in O'Keeffe's mind for her newly conscious decision to create “magnificent beauty” (art), instead of a child with Stieglitz. True or not, it would be hard to imagine a more perfect choice for the first of her floral self portraits than the calla's waxy uterine shape, with its subtle implications of immortality. Further, it would seem indisputable that these alter-images of O'Keeffe's, with their use of nature's artifacts to express psychic states and human physical characteristics, are direct descendants of de Zayas's “soul-state” caricatures (1912-1915), Picabia's 1913 mechanically expressed “objects-portraits,” and Hartley's abstract/symbolic German officer paintings of 1914-1915. But why the abstract portrait received such sudden and simultaneous attention from O'Keeffe and Stieglitz, in the guise of callas and clouds, during the last half of 1923 remains a question. Demuth's composite “poster-portraits” of the mid-twenties, and Dove's

portrait collages of 1924-1925 are obviously linked to this same rich and puzzling resurgence.¹³³

There is some strong evidence that O’Keeffe began to experiment with magnifying her plant studies as early as 1923—but by using leaves rather than flowers. At least nine leaf canvases are known to be from that year, seven of which appeared in her 1924 Anderson Galleries show.¹³⁴ All of these leaf canvases seem to be small ones, except for *Pattern of Leaves* . (Plate 83.) This painting is exceptional on two counts: its large dimensions (20 x 18 inches), and the obvious magnification of its forms.¹³⁵ Confronting the task of yet another major shift in her work, O’Keeffe again seems to have turned to Dow for a lead. If we compare her *Pattern of Leaves* with a Notan drawing exercise (No. 52) of “Japanese botanical work” in *Composition* (Plate 84.), Dow’s visual inspiration becomes very apparent. It looks, in fact, as if she has combined most of the elements illustrated on this page. These range from her blown-up leaf, to the overlapping of forms and background, to the free and arbitrary croppings. But while O’Keeffe’s dark oak leaf has a distinct similarity in outline to one of Dow’s (at lower left), she renders it with a central vertical tear—her own innovative way, at once natural and abstract, to cut space with the main lines of her subject matter. Just exactly, of course, as the Master had always taught his students to do.

Without being able to compare all of O’Keeffe’s leaf canvases of 1923 and 1924 with the flowers she painted during the same period, it is obviously not possible to state categorically that she magnified leaves to a large scale before she did flowers. Nevertheless, this would seem to be the case. For in *Pattern of Leaves* , clearly an experimental work, she filled a large canvas with three superimposed leaf forms painted nearly parallel to the picture plane. Further, there can be little question that the enlarged close-up point of view made O’Keeffe aware of yet another type of abstraction—the singled out object that instantly takes on a

life of its own quite separate from its ordinary reality. It was one that never ceased to interest her.

Why leaves? O’Keeffe seldom discussed the choices she made for her symbolic system, and certainly never in terms of meaning. We therefore have to get at her rhetorical approach from other sources. It is surely significant that Stieglitz himself had considered the leaf (as well as the apple) when, in 1922, he was searching through nature for a worthy container to hold and express his feelings. As he described it to Strand: “I tried to coax a leaf into keeping still a little while—and was wishing for a head rest for it”.¹³⁶ For Stieglitz, leaves must have seemed very nearly as “free” as clouds. Further, his Dada-educated side may have regarded leaves as “found objects” par excellence.¹³⁷

The leaf was not wholly new to O’Keeffe’s canon in 1923.¹³⁸ One of its earliest appearances can be found in her 1916 charcoal drawing *Abstraction IX*.¹³⁹ (Plate 85.) The source for this abstraction is said by the artist herself to be the head and arms of a young girl.¹⁴⁰ In it, she combined the figurative with landscape imagery: The “eye” is unmistakably an elm leaf, and the “arms” clearly resemble a winding river bed. (This type of dual nature imagery would remain one of the most durable characteristics of O’Keeffe’s art.) While we cannot be sure that the leaf continued to stand for an eye—perhaps, even, the eye of the artist—in O’Keeffe’s private symbolic language, the fact remains that her 1923-1925 leaf canvases are among the most imaginative, innovative and photographic of all her works.

Certainly leaf forms, with their myriad organic patterns *and* intrinsic flatness, were almost bound to interest a painter as schooled in the surface design of Art Nouveau as O’Keeffe. But there is also a literary factor to be considered, vis-a-vis her content. Namely Thoreau’s extraordinary paean to the leaf in *Walden*.¹⁴¹ Observing the patterns made by thawing ice and sand around Walden Pond during the early spring, Thoreau wrote:

This [flowing mass] ... takes the form of sappy leaves or vines ... a sort of architectural foliage more ancient and typical than ... any vegetable leaves ... *No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly* . The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype ... The feathers and wings of birds are still drier and thinner leaves ... Even ice begins with delicate crystal leaves, as if it had flowed into moulds which the fronds of water plants have impressed on the watery mirror. *The whole tree itself is but one leaf, and rivers are still vaster leaves whose pulp is intervening earth* ... What is man but a mass of thawing clay? *Is not the hand a spreading palm leaf with its lobes and veins* ? The ear may be regarded, fancifully, as a lichen, umilicaria, on the side of the head, with its lobe or drop. Each rounded lobe of the vegetable leaf, too, is a thick and now loitering drop, larger or smaller; the lobes are the fingers of the leaf ... Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all but the operations of Nature. *The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf* *The earth is but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit, —not a fossil earth, but a living earth ; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic.*¹⁴² (Italics added.)

Two of O'Keeffe's leaf canvases in particular suggest that she knew this passage of Thoreau's, for they seem to be built, in part, upon his primal premise. The first is *Leaf Motif No. 2* (1924), one of the largest (35 x 18 inches) of all her magnified leaves. (Plate 86.) In this work (which appeared in the *Seven Americans*), semi-abstracted oak leaves have been carefully composed into the dominant shape of a human ear. Even more illustrative is the second one, *Red and Brown Leaves* (25 x 19 3/4 inches), a little known, vividly colored, painting of fall foliage dated c. 1925.¹⁴³ (Plate 87.) A giant, frontal maple leaf is presented against a background of sky and clouds—its edges slightly cropped by the frame. Superimposed upon it is a smaller sized poplar leaf, with veins depicted like branches, and the sturdiness of its stem emphasized as if to resemble a tree trunk. ("The whole tree itself is but one leaf.") Seen in a black and white reproduction,

this picture can almost qualify as a double exposure photograph. It should also be noted that very little of the over-all photographic appearance of *Red and Brown Leaves* is caused by the ordinary optical deception of reducing colors to black and white. In addition to the double exposure effect, there is the strong visual sense of a scene cut out from nature—one innate to the photograph, and to the close-up in particular.

It seems incredible that we should still not know for certain which flower canvas was the first to be enlarged, or when exactly in 1924 it was done. Nevertheless, this is the case. Among the surrounding facts, the firmest would seem to be these: In a September 26, 1976 interview with Meridel Rubinstein, O'Keeffe said that she *thought* the first one was a "horizontal painting of two huge pinkish flowers that a sister owns."¹⁴⁴ And that was all she cared to say, or could remember. O'Keeffe has also written that her large flowers were shown for the first time in the Seven Americans show (March, 1925.)¹⁴⁵ If the first one she did was among them (and this seems highly probable), then the possibilities may be narrowed down to two, judging simply from the thirty titles listed under her name in the show's catalogue, and from the dimensions given for them in her 1966 catalogue raisonné. These are *Petunia No. 1* (36 x 30 inches), now known as *Petunia and Coleus*, and *Petunia No. 2* (35 1/2 x 30 inches). *Petunia and Coleus* (Plate 88.) has been reproduced in color,¹⁴⁶ and can easily be described as "pinkish." But the little known *Petunia No. 2* has apparently never been reproduced for publication.¹⁴⁷ (Plate 89.) Although not "horizontal,"¹⁴⁸ *Petunia No. 2* is without question a magnified image containing "two huge flowers." By comparing it to *Petunia and Coleus*, we can see what a major breakthrough it represents. And even though we may never know exactly what triggered this pictorial development, it is safe to say that hazard was a very small factor and photography a large one.

Both paintings are, in effect, aerial views. More accurately, they are seen, somewhat magnified, from above. But the petunia in *No. 1* is rendered with clarity and wholeness, in an actual, if indeterminate, space. With *No. 2*, two blown-up petunias take over the entire canvas—their details somewhat blurred (as if out of focus), their edges heedlessly cropped by the frame's four sides. This is, of course, a camera version of the bee's eye view in nearly every respect. And it well demonstrates the visual paradox that the closer we get the less we see. But O'Keeffe left the merest suggestion of a horizon line at the top of her canvas. And what this suggests is that she was not yet ready to separate pictorial space completely from actual space—as normally happens with the extreme photographic close-up. She would, however, quickly learn to take her own advantage of the close-up's inherently abstract patternmaking.

With regard to the timing of *Petunia No. 2*, and the magnified flowers following right after it, Stieglitz's correspondence offers some important clues.

To Strand, June (no specific date), 1924.

Georgia is in fine shape. Happier than I have seen her in a great while ... She is on the 3rd canvas. All very amusing. Larger than last year. She's at a whopper now.¹⁴⁹

To Rosenfeld, Sept. 6, 1924.

Georgia completed an amazing large picture—real red—"abstract"—as she says, not a picture anyone will want to purchase.¹⁵⁰

To Strand, Sept. 14, 1924.

Georgia ... has produced two large canvases—amazing ones—abstract. On her "old" order. —Really extraordinary.¹⁵¹

The enthusiasm of the last two letters represents a distinct change in Stieglitz's own opinion of O'Keeffe's magnified flowers. When they first started, he described them to Beck Strand as "silly but lovely."¹⁵² Whether their increased

abstraction helped him to see them in terms of the “new” (as indeed they were) is not a matter of record.

O’Keeffe’s disingenuous reply to Katherine Kuh’s 1962 question, “Has your use of isolated, blown-up details been influenced by photography?” also has a place proper to this discussion.

I’ll tell you how I happened to make the blown-up flowers. In the twenties, huge buildings sometimes seemed to be going up overnight in New York. At that time I saw a painting by Fantin-Latour, a still life with flowers I found very beautiful, but I realized that were I to paint the same flowers so small, no one would look at them because I was unknown. So I thought I’ll make them big like the huge buildings going up. People will be startled, they’ll *have* to look at them—and they did. I don’t think photography had a thing to do with it.¹⁵³

While it is never wise to discount any of O’Keeffe’s sparse explanations made in hindsight, it is clear that she was never above her little joke at public expense—especially when it could be used to cover some of the tracks of her artistic process.¹⁵⁴ Her linkage of flowers to architecture is an especially important one to mark, however, and will be taken up further in the text.

There is little question that the close-up became O’Keeffe’s most urgent space during the ’twenties. What, in addition to the points already discussed, did this photographic view-point offer her as a painter? Certainly she found in it a range of new opportunities for rendering surface details: the rough and the smooth, the hard and the soft, the rigid and the limp, the hairy and the slick, the damp and the dry—and so forth. Her magnified flowers would become increasingly full of these distinctions, even when they emphasized a “licked”, or sleek, canvas surface. The close-up view also offered her different kinds of abstract patterning in its suppression and exaggeration of shadows—an extension of Dow’s Notan principles not normally grasped by the eye. A very early case in point is her 1922

pastel, *Single Alligator Pear*.¹⁵⁵ (Plate 90.) This work appears to have been richly informed by a still life photograph of Baron Adolf de Meyer's.¹⁵⁶ Despite his grounding in 19th century aesthetics, de Meyer often translated his material into what Caffin described as "a fantasy of abstract beauty."¹⁵⁷ And it could not have been lost on O'Keeffe that Stieglitz always held de Meyer in high esteem—as an artist, and as a human being.¹⁵⁸ By comparing *Single Alligator Pear* with de Meyer's c. 1907 photograph *Hydrangea* (Plate 91.), which O'Keeffe doubtless knew from *Camera Work* (No. 24, 1908), we can get a pretty fair idea of her "adaptive" use of photography. (That is, using a photograph as a theme on which to make her own painted variation.) Both pictures are painstaking explorations into relationships between line, light and shadow. And both are similarly top-heavy in composition—dark forms at the top and light ones on the bottom. O'Keeffe's precisely illusionistic alligator pear takes up nearly the same portion of her space that de Meyer's precisely focused flower in a glass of water does in his. And his shimmering, ambiguous glass shadow dwindles away in a manner very like her pear's shadow in the foreground. She has rendered two shadows: The background one is "true," in the sense that it obeys a logical light source, and the foreground one "false," in that its shape is completely arbitrary. De Meyer's own "abstraction" has much to do with allowing reflection to create the optical illusion that his glass is swollen on its right side. The major distinction between these two pictures, their mediums and their subject matter aside, is that De Meyer's hydrangea is radically cropped, and O'Keeffe's pear is not cropped at all. There is also a balanced centrality in her picture, while his is asymmetrical. In fact, considering the year it was made, the photograph seems far more daring and eccentric than the pastel. O'Keeffe, however, has called this the "best" of her alligator pears, "I have always considered that it was one of the times when I did what I really intended to do. One isn't always able to do that."¹⁵⁹ In any case, it is hard to believe that *Single*

Alligator Pear could have ended up looking the way it does without the impetus, and challenge, of de Meyer's photograph.

There is also strong visual evidence to suggest that toward the end of 1923, and well into 1924, O'Keeffe did some rather agitated searching through the hallowed halls of Modernism according to *Camera Work* before she lit securely on magnification.¹⁶⁰ Two paintings from this 'searching' period deserve our attention because of what she rejected. The first is *Three Pears No. 1*, c. 1924,¹⁶¹ (Plate 92.) If we compare it with Picasso's *Woman with Mandolin*, and Cézanne's *Still-Life* (Plates 93. and 94.), as reproduced in *Camera Work* (Special No., June 1913), several of the sources for her experimentations become instantly visible. Although she has isolated and enlarged Cézanne's pears—pushing them all together, and reversing the direction of the horizontal one—their common shapes and positions are easy to recognize. And the forms in her uncharacteristically faceted background are clearly based upon those in Picasso's early analytic Cubist work. O'Keeffe's flirtation with Cubism seems to have begun and ended with this painting. By the time she got to *Three Pears No. 2* (Plate 95.), the "faceting" can barely be seen. (Nor was it to reappear later.)

The second, *Mask with Golden Apple*, c. 1923-4, is even more aberrant in terms of her development.¹⁶² (Plate 96.) This is the only known African mask ever painted by O'Keeffe. Juxtaposed as it is with an apple, what we would seem to have is a sort of visual argument made up of two of Stieglitz's favorite (and most enlightened) pronouncements: that the "root" of European modern art lies in "the statuary in wood by African savages,"¹⁶³ and that the apple is an appropriate metaphor for the native American artist's spirit.¹⁶⁴ The work also possesses a distinctly photographic quality because the distance between apple and mask looks artificially compressed—a typical characteristic of close-up photographs.

From all of the foregoing, there can be little doubt that O'Keeffe's decision to magnify her flowers came from the innermost recesses of her artistic thought, that this changeover had a long preparation (going back to 1919), and that it was, at first, mostly a matter of scale. As we have already seen, her habit was to do "new" things that were in fact "old" in terms of her own development.

If still more confirmation is needed as to O'Keeffe's self identification with leaves and flowers, there is Waldo Frank's "in-house" description, written sometime after the Seven Americans show.

Her arms and her head stir like branches in a gentle breeze ... She is almost as quiet as a tree and almost as instinctive ... [O'Keeffe's] paintings are but the leaves and flowers of herself.¹⁶⁵

During that turning point summer/fall of 1924, O'Keeffe wrote an unusually revealing letter to Sherwood Anderson which should be recorded here.¹⁶⁶

I've been thinking of what you say about form—and either I don't agree with you—or I use a different way of thinking about it to myself—maybe we mean somewhat the same thing and have different ways of saying it.

I feel that a real living form is the natural result of the individuals effort to create the living thing out of the adventure of his spirit into the unknown—where it is has experienced something—felt something—it has not understood—and from that experience comes the desire to make the unknown—known. —By unknown—I mean the thing that means so much to the person that he wants to put it down—clarify—something he feels but does not clearly understand. —Sometimes he partially knows why—sometimes he doesn't—Sometimes it is all working in the dark—but a working that must be done. —Making the unknown—known—in terms of one's medium is all absorbing—if you stop to think of form as form you are lost. —The artists form must be inevitable—you mustn't even think you won't succeed ... Making your—unknown

known is the important thing—and keeping the unknown always beyond you ... *The form must take care of itself if you can keep your vision clear—I some way feel that everyone is born with it clear but that with most of humanity it becomes blasted* —one way or another.¹⁶⁷ (Italics added, but punctuation O’Keeffe’s.)

Passionate, groping and authentic as these words clearly are, the essential “Spirit of 291” shines right through them. In 1911, for example, Benjamin De Casseres had warned in *Camera Work* that: “A work of art we can understand at sight is mediocre or worse ... It is the unknown, the indefinable, the thing that ‘worries’ you in Rodin, Whistler, Matisse, Rops, that fascinates you ...”¹⁶⁸ In 1913, de Zayas had stated:

Formerly art was the expression of a collective or individual belief; now its principal motive is in investigations. *It proceeds toward the unknown, and that unknown is objectivity* . It wants to know the essence of things; and it analyzes them in their phenomena of form, following the method of experimentation set by science.¹⁶⁹ (Italics added.)

And in 1914, Hartley had explained the basis for his paintings by saying: “It is the artist’s business to select forms suitable to his own specialized experience, forms which express naturally the emotions he personally desires to present, leaving conjectures and discussions to take care of themselves.”¹⁷⁰

All of these statements (including O’Keeffe’s) may be said to go back to Stieglitz’s core idea of what art is—perhaps best defined by him in 1910, during an interview:

We [at 291] are somewhat of the same condition as they were in the early days of the Renaissance ... *seeking for the unknown* ... I don’t know when it will be reached, but I do see that these men are alive and vital, and my object is to show to Americans who have not the opportunity of going abroad what vitality in art exists here ... [The men]

whose works are exhibited ... do believe in themselves—and that's an important item—*but they do not believe they have reached ... ever will reach—the point for which they are striving*.¹⁷¹ (Italics added.)

The City: New York 1925-1929

During November of 1925, Stieglitz and O'Keeffe moved into the new Shelton Hotel at Lexington between 48th and 49th Streets. They had watched this thirty-four story skyscraper going up for two years, and would live and work in a small suite of two rooms on the thirtieth floor (3003) for the next decade.¹⁷²

O'Keeffe had loved New York since her earliest student days there.¹⁷³ In a 1928 interview she spoke about the excitement and challenge of being a painter in the city in exceptionally candid terms. There can be little doubt either about her Romantic (as against Precisionist) intentions.

When I came to live at the Shelton about three years ago I couldn't afford it. But I can now so I'm going to stay. Yes I know it's unusual for an artist to want to work way up near the roof of a big hotel, in the heart of a roaring city, but I *think that's just what the artist of today needs for stimulus. He has to have a place where he can behold the city as a unit before his eyes but at the same time have enough space left to work. Yes, contact with the city this way has certainly helped me as no amount of solitude in the country could.* Today the city is something bigger, grander, more complex than ever before in history. *There is a meaning in its strong warm grip we are all trying to grasp. And nothing can be gained by running away. I wouldn't if I could.*¹⁷⁴ (Italics added.)

It is another measure of the growing differences between O'Keeffe and Stieglitz that his own once passionate feelings for the city had changed, and were growing ever more negative and escapist. Three letters in particular chart this estrangement.

To Rosenfeld, during the summer of 1920 he wrote:

Strand and Seligmann [are] in Nova Scotia both busy and glad to be away from the City of Terribleness. For that is what the idea of New York becomes more and more to me—Personal of course, I know.¹⁷⁵

In a letter to Hamilton Easter Field later that same year he was even more specific and elegaic:

I was rather surprised to see what you had to say about New York—my old love. But my New York is the New York of transition—the Old gradually passing into the New. —You never saw the Series I did—beginning 1892 and through 1915. —Not the ‘Canyons’ but the Spirit of something that endears New York to one who really loves it—not for its outer attractions but for its deepest worth—its significance. —The universal thing in it.¹⁷⁶

Shortly after moving into the Shelton, he wrote Anderson that

New York is madder than ever. The pace ever increasing. —but Georgia & I somehow don’t seem to be of New York—nor of anywhere. We live high up in the Shelton Hotel—for a while—may be all winter—The wind howls and shakes the huge steel frame—we feel we were out at midocean—all is so quiet except the wind—&the trembling shaking hulk of steel in which we live—¹⁷⁷

O’Keeffe’s strong sense of “place” continued to operate even in New York. The motifs for her city paintings were all found within easy walking distance of the Shelton, or else they originated from what she could see out the windows of Suite 3003.¹⁷⁸ In this, certainly, she still felt like Stieglitz, who told Weston in 1938 (with only slight exaggeration) that

All my photographic work has been done in this 50 yards of this home on The Hill [Lake George] or out of the window of the Shelton where O’Keeffe

and I lived for 12 years or out of the window of An American Place.¹⁷⁹

O'Keeffe always liked to make the point that her right to paint New York was hard won from Stieglitz, and "the men" of his circle, because they considered the city to be a strictly masculine preserve.¹⁸⁰ We can imagine, however, that she simply persevered in the spirit of one who had long ago absorbed Dow's enlightened and prophetic view that

Who[ever] is trained in principles, and has his appreciation developed can do anything in any style—invent a style of his own. The energy and power of the American will find expression in art—is finding it now in many ways. The highbuilding, for example, is a form and construction particularly our own. The highbuildings are taking on beautiful form—they have not yet equalled the Tower of Giotto, or the spires of Chartres—but when they are as perfect as our genius can make them, they will be great works of fine art.¹⁸¹

The central theme of O'Keeffe's cityscapes is the "highbuilding" or skyscraper—as seen from vantage points and angles that are quintessentially photographic. That photography and architecture went well together has been clear from the earliest daguerreotypes and calotypes.¹⁸² And it could not have been lost on O'Keeffe that this traditional empathy ran like a leitmotif through the photogravures in *Camera Work*—from Frederick Evans and Coburn to Stieglitz and Strand.

By 1925, Dow's 1909 prediction for "highbuildings" had come true. The skyscraper (Louis Sullivan's "proud and soaring thing") was commonly thought of—not to say revered—as twentieth century America's own art form.¹⁸³ Between 1925-1926, more skyscrapers were erected in New York than at any other time in its history—some forty-five of them.¹⁸⁴ The visual sense given by O'Keeffe's buildings of giant plant forms rising up from the cement may indeed have been

nourished by her first-hand witnessing of this extraordinary phenomenon, as she told Kuh—but the phytomorphic metaphor had long since been explored by Art Nouveau, and was, of course, as old as architecture itself. O’Keeffe would also have been aware of Dove’s similarly conceived early modernist work, *Nature Symbolized No.1* (1911-1912), with its man-made towers poking up from the earth.¹⁸⁵

If “all architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it,” as Whitman wrote in *Leaves of Grass*,¹⁸⁶ what was it according to O’Keeffe? In her first city painting, *New York With Moon* (1925) lie some major clues. (Plate 97.) The design of this work appears to have been adapted from one of Stieglitz’s best known photographs, *The Flatiron Building* (1902). (Plate 98.) Both pictures are composed within vertical formats. Both contain a series of echoing verticals that act to divide the foreground, middleground and background. And both play with variations on the right angle, or triangle, caused by their severely cropped edges. As the tree has pride of place on the right side of Stieglitz’s photograph, so also does the street light in O’Keeffe’s painting. At this point the formal resemblances between the two pictures cease. But with her street light O’Keeffe goes on to employ, in a particularly innovative way, a phenomenon singular to photography: halation. Stieglitz had also used halating lights for expressive purposes in some of his earliest night views of the city, such as *An Icy Night, New York* (1898).¹⁸⁷ But her rendition of halation is different, and reveals a highly technical understanding of its cause and effects. Halation is in fact a malfunction. It happens when a strong beam of light penetrates the film emulsion and is reflected back into the emulsion by the film base.¹⁸⁸ And it can give two slightly different effects: a continuous bloom around lights—as in Stieglitz’s photograph—or a kind of white halo with a dark fringe.¹⁸⁹ O’Keeffe clearly chose the second, or “fringe,” type of halation for *New York with Moon*, rather than Stieglitz’s “bloom” version. And it

is by her innovative use of this odd photographic truth that she makes the street lamp into the dominating form, and major light source, of her painting. Is it yet another abstract self-portrait? Possibly. For the flower had by now become her emblem. And this halating light bulb hangs down like a round golden blossom from its wrought-iron stem in an unmistakably organic way. Just below it is the glow of a red traffic light. (Does the color stand literally for “stop”—the restriction “the men” had tried to place upon her?) And just above it shines the moon in the sky—a nature motif recognizable in her work since 1916.

This is one of O’Keeffe’s most joyous and optimistic paintings. In Stieglitz’s photograph, architecture (the Flatiron Building) is nearly eclipsed by eternal nature (a tree and snow). In *New York with Moon*, the buildings all rise up as if no end were in sight, and their powerful forms are illuminated by her halating (doubly metaphoric) streetlight—rather than the cloud-threatened moon. Architecture, it might be said, was becoming nature’s “other” to her, and in ways very different from what it was to Stieglitz.

During 1926, O’Keeffe seems to have thought a great deal about architecture as subject matter, judging from the large number of canvases on this theme—and she painted the barn as searchingly as the skyscraper, although less often.¹⁹⁰ Among these, in both categories, are some of her most inventive, self-revelatory, and photo-optic works.

To speak of the barns briefly first. As O’Keeffe wrote to Mitchell Kennerley in 1929:

The barn is a very healthy part of me—There should be more of it—It is something that I know too—it is my childhood. —I seem to be one of the few people I know of to have no complaints against my first twelve years.¹⁹¹

As a building of exceptional individuality and practical intelligence—and as an archetypal symbol of shelter and abundance—the barn seems a natural, and innately personal, theme for O’Keeffe. But it must also be remembered that the barn had been represented as indigenous American architecture by painters and photographers ever since World War I—and, as such, had already become what Constance Rourke called a “source form.” An obvious case in point is Charles Sheeler, whose *Bucks County Barn* was photographed in 1915. (Plate 99.) To compare this work with O’Keeffe’s *Lake George Barns* (1926) can be quite instructive. (Plate 100.) For there are some elements in her composition that look like creative corrections of the photograph: particularly her cropping decisions and the formal relationships she developed between vertical, diagonal and horizontal lines. Also, her barns are embedded in the landscape, whereas Sheeler’s have little to do with their surroundings.

There are other important things to be noticed about *Lake George Barns*. O’Keeffe’s earliest, and most enduring, artistic intention was to simplify, or reduce, her forms to their essence as shapes, and by 1926 photography had become a valued tool toward that end. At first glance this painting does not seem to be evoking photographic means at all—there is no optical acuity, or distinctness. But the reduction of nearly all of its forms to planes suggests that she borrowed something else from the photographic process: namely the blocking of highlights.¹⁹² For it is by manipulating the tonal scale, while exposing and developing a negative and making a print, that textured surfaces can (often by mistake) be reduced to single planes. But O’Keeffe seems to have taken some poetic license with *Lake George Barns*, because photographic detail is never lost in the middle tones by such means—only in the extreme ends of light and dark. To make the point even clearer, and to underline O’Keeffe’s own accurate understanding of the mechanics of this developing process, we have only to look at

her *Barn with Snow* of 1934.¹⁹³ (Plate 101.) These are the same barns that she painted in 1926, and from essentially the same vantage point. But they are rendered very differently. The glaring snow-covered roofs, and the shadowed flanks of the 1934 barns are without detail for reasons that are consistently photographic—for the lights and darks are quite properly at the opposite ends of the tonal scale. Furthermore, the only details rendered with absolute precision in the painting are the foundation stones, and these reside consistently in the middle values of light, as captured by the camera.

To return one last time to *Lake George Barns*. There is something crowded and stifling about these three shuttered buildings. They deprive the viewer of a sense of distance, and there is no exit at either end. A low gray sky adds to our sense of being completely hemmed in. The only exit offered is through the blue crack in the clouds—suggesting a metaphysical rather than a physical escape. It is well recorded that O’Keeffe was becoming increasingly restless in the close and pretty greenness of upstate New York. Three summers later, she escaped to New Mexico.

After 1926, there would be few barns—about one a year over the next three years.¹⁹⁴ Then they cease entirely, with the single exception of *Barn with Snow* in 1934 (which seems to be more of a problem-solving picture than a personal statement). As well as anything, perhaps, O’Keeffe’s barns illustrate the inconvenient truth that Lake George was not her psychic homeland. Even Stieglitz came to know and accept this as fact. “Lake George is not for her,” he wrote sadly, but with new understanding, to Dove in 1929.¹⁹⁵

During 1926, O’Keeffe painted ten known New York cityscapes—the record number for city architecture in a single year. They add up to a virtuoso display of her understanding of photo-optics, with some extraordinary syntheses of the “adoptive,” “adaptive,” and “innovative.” To take only four examples:

In *Shelton Hotel, New York No. 1*, she presents her city home soberly (in terms of browns and greys), frontally, and iconically. (Plate 102.) This icon quality can itself be called photographic, e.g., a single frozen moment, seen by a single unmoving eye, in one-point perspective. Also, it may not be without historical importance that the notion of the iconic had always figured large in Symbolist/Synthetist art theory. It was, for instance, closely related to the requirement that the work of art, as such, should represent the meaning of the object.¹⁹⁶ But in O'Keeffe's unquestionably static and concentrated image there is an even more obvious photographic characteristic: vertical convergence. The tall buildings framing each side of the Shelton lean inward—a condition that often occurred with the old view cameras when they were pointed at an upward angle, unless laboriously corrected through “swings and tilts.”¹⁹⁷

The *Shelton with Sun Spots* further emphasizes and embellishes convergence, even while it presents some transformational variations on still another photographic malfunction: lens flare. (Plate 103.) Although the visual results may look similar to halation, the causes are different. Flare is a rather general term used to describe a complex of random internal reflections in the camera.¹⁹⁸ The multiple ghost image spots represented in this painting happen most often when the camera is used without a lens hood. Stray light outside the image comes into the lens and bounces around, thereby getting reflected into the shadow areas of the film, and sometimes even projecting an image of the lens diaphragm. Flare often destroys, or dilutes, the solidity of dark areas of the image—completely obliterating sharp outlines—which is exactly what happens on the upper right side of O'Keeffe's building. Her 1976 remembrance of painting *Shelton with Sunspots*, after seeing “the optical illusion of a bite out of one side of the tower made by the sun, with sunspots against the building ... and sky,”¹⁹⁹ leaves out the camera's crucial part in her perceptual process. (It is, of course,

almost impossible for the normal naked eye to see in just this way.) What her statement *does* suggest, most clearly, is that by 1926 she had almost completely combined photo-optics with her own inner vision.

But what was this vision? There is a small documentary clue in a letter Stieglitz wrote to Anderson during this year.

G. is doing some very fine work. —She often feels that painting has nothing to do with today—I know it hasn't. —But she does some wonderful things—and so may be that's what she best do instead of hitching up with the huge machine.²⁰⁰

With regard to “today,” certainly none of O’Keeffe’s images of the city are concerned with its citizens or its sores. Like Stieglitz’s own images of New York, they are people-less. But perhaps not completely. For just as architecture originated from a body-centered concept of space and place, so many of O’Keeffe’s cityscapes are, in the profoundest sense, body-scapes. This is largely because our most basic orientation is up/down, and our most sensitive sensory apparatus high up—on the face. Further, both the standing figure and the building are implicit links between earth and sky.²⁰¹ Returning to *Shelton with Sunspots* with these basically common sense observations in mind, several things now become more immediately apparent: O’Keeffe has concentrated on “up,” and the sky—the realm of light, the ethereal and the divine. We do not see the ground at all. Nor are we sure whether this is the front or back of the building. An explosion seems to have taken place high up, as if caused by a bolt of lightning—a nature simile which is borne out by the smoke-like clouds, and the fire-colored flare dots. It may also be significant that this “explosion” takes place at just about the level of Suite 3003 on the 30th floor.

The penurious elegance, and emotional drama, of *City Night* (1926) is also based upon convergence.²⁰² (Plate 104.) The black skyscrapers in the

foreground topple toward each other—their sharp convergence accented by the bisecting blue streaks of floodlights—creating a canyon-like effect. The halating streelight at the bottom of the picture acts as a beacon in this black wilderness. A beacon that seems to be pointing the way toward the three-tiered white building in the background—whose outlines (though partial) are suspiciously like the Shelton's. Few of O'Keeffe's images are quite so radically disjoined from human vision as this one.

During 1926, also, she painted five, known, views of the East River from the 30th floor of the Shelton, the place where she could literally behold “the city as a unit”. As sight always says too much in too short a time, there can be little doubt that photographs helped her to get a grip (her grip) on the city.

In *East River No. 1* (possibly the first of them all), the horizontal format is itself reminiscent of panoramic wide-view photography. (Plate 105.) O'Keeffe is now dealing with the “far,” as opposed to the “near” of her close-ups. By comparing this painting to one of Stieglitz's pictures, *From the 30th Story, Shelton Hotel (Room 3003) Looking East*, taken in 1927 (Plate 106.), we can see a different kind of photographic evidence. In the first place Stieglitz's photograph was taken with a telephoto.²⁰³ Likewise, the view of the river in O'Keeffe's painting could not have appeared as close as it does without access to data from a long focal length lens. There is another tell-tale sign: In the left foreground section she has removed a whole block of buildings, to further the balance of her composition. This type of subtraction is a well known and typical procedure used by artists who work from photographs. At the very least, the telephoto helped her to perceive as landscape the untidy urban-industrial culture then flourishing on both sides of the East River.

During 1927, O'Keeffe apparently painted only two cityscapes, one a pastel²⁰⁴ and the other, an oil, *Radiator Building — Night, New York* —without

question one of her most elusive masterworks. (Plate 107.) Before any discussion of this work, it is well to review some contemporary facts concerning the Radiator Building. It was completed in 1924—the year, incidentally, that O’Keeffe married Stieglitz. The architect, Raymond M. Hood, designed it as a black tower—the first black building in New York. Its gilded crown was electrically wired for illumination—another first. By the time O’Keeffe painted it, the Radiator Building was the most eye-catching sight offered by New York after dark.²⁰⁵ Situated at 40 West 40th Street and Sixth Avenue, it was the furthest from the Shelton of all O’Keeffe’s street motifs. Although we cannot be sure that she based her design for this painting on one of the many night photographs made at the time, it is probable (judging from past performance) that she did so.

Once again, we have an iconic image in a vertical format. For a static picture, however, there is a great deal of hyper-activity going on in *Radiator Building — Night*. The rectangular window lights in and around this skyscraper appear to glitter and wink (caused, in part, by O’Keeffe’s canny alterations of their shapes and tones.) The round halating street lights at the bottom of the picture have the look of balls bouncing up and down. And the billowing steam at the right seems to be shifting its pattern right under our gaze, while being continuously absorbed into the atmosphere. In short, this is a *faux-naif* image of the twentieth century city as monstrous in scale, perpetually in motion, always lit, and never quiet. In the same vein, there is a distinctly satanic and anthropomorphic quality about O’Keeffe’s Radiator Building,²⁰⁶ an impression accentuated by such “hell’s fire” connotations as the steam, and the burning red sign. On this same neon sign appears the name of “Alfred Stieglitz”—perhaps intended as a complimentary double-play on words, for in 1927 the sign actually said “Scientific American. Is, then, *Radiator Building — Night, New York* to be thought of, quite literally, as Stieglitz’s “City of Terribleness”? It would seem not. For there is one other detail

which, when finally observed, robs the picture permanently of such a dark reading. Up on Radiator Building's facade, formed by the negative space left by its unlighted windows, (and "pointed" to by the red sign) can be perceived the silhouette of a woman. It looks as if she were sitting on a stool, with her back to us, and her arm upraised—as if, perhaps, she were painting at an easel. This may indeed be one of O'Keeffe's more wickedly witty self-portraits. And the idea for it might have come from one of the electrically animated advertising signs beginning to appear on Broadway during the late 'twenties. One of the things this picture is about seems incontrovertible: "Terrible" (or "diabolical") New York City might be, but it was still an extremely exciting and inspiring place for O'Keeffe to make her "unknown known." By signing its (then) most original, most imaginative, most popular building with her own image, she makes this point in a way that is as Symbolist as it is characterological. In the old and spacious spirit of 291, truth did not always have to be "couched in the solemn form."²⁰⁷

In the years between 1926 and 1929, O'Keeffe appears to have looked with acute interest at Coburn's Dow-schooled photographs of New York made between 1909-1912.²⁰⁸ Four paintings in particular suggest this. If we compare her *Shelton Hotel, New York, No. 1* of 1926 (Plate 102.) with Coburn's *The House of 1000 Windows, New York* of 1912 (Plate 108.) they can be seen to share the same obsessively geometric concentration on window perforation patterns (Dow's principle of Repetition)—although Coburn is looking down, and O'Keeffe up.

Also, it can hardly be accidental that her *Ritz Tower, Night* of 1928 (Plate 109.) and his *Metropolitan Tower* of 1909 (Plate 110.), both have the same unusually skinny vertical format with an even skinnier skyscraper bisecting its space. And Coburn's abstract interest in the circular clock shape in the middle of his building looks as if it had been echoed deliberately by O'Keeffe in the central

positioning of her, seemingly disembodied, street light. Coburn's even more noticeable effect on two of her last city paintings will be taken up shortly.

During 1928, in addition to *Ritz Tower, Night*, O'Keeffe made four East River pictures.²⁰⁹ One of these was the still life pastel, *Pink Dish and Green Leaves*. (Plate 111.) A letter she wrote in 1929 to Kennerley describes this unusual work: "The pink dish with the city is frankly my foolishness—but I thought to myself—I am that way, so here goes—if I am that way I might as well put it down."²¹⁰ It has been singled out for further comment here because it shows O'Keeffe in the act of playing with the discrepancies between the way the eye and the camera focus and judge perspective. Her concerns were not at all like Stieglitz's—in the sense of presenting a sharp all over image. Although the river view has been brought closer than her eye could see it by a telephoto lens, it is yet out of focus. The close-up still life, on the other hand, is sharp—especially the leaves. This is a meditation on near and far. There is no middle ground—although she has left the window sash visually ambiguous. Are the subject matter and eccentric perspective meant to suggest that O'Keeffe was getting fed up with the view from her Shelton window, and longing for nature—even nature in a pink vase? Plausible as this may seem at first, all her city paintings have a kind of celestial irony about them—one that defies a too easy nomenclature.

Earlier the same year, she completed perhaps the most photo-optic—and most arcane—of all her cityscapes; *East River From Shelton*. (Plate 112.) The painting is exceptional, in no small part, because it took so long for her to finish—from December, 1927 to April, 1928. (At Lake George she often completed a canvas in one day.) This implies strongly that its making was a self-redefining, almost serial, operation for O'Keeffe. The scene itself is based upon the evidence of an extremely powerful focal length lens—obviously trained from her window. It is an image of the far (the building bordering the East River) and

the very far (the sun) brought quite near in an almost seamless way. To accomplish this, O’Keeffe may have referred to another type of photographic data. For example, in Coburn’s 1910 time exposure of *The Singer Building, Twilight* (Plate 113.), the circles of halation are joined to each other by horizontal streaks of light. These “streaks” on the film were caused by the lit up traffic moving along the street. And it is quite possible that she subtracted this whole peculiar, but veristic, detail from Coburn’s photograph, reversed its direction from vertical to horizontal, and used it for her own expressive intent. His “light lines” became the spreading rays of her sun, joining sky to landscape in the upper two-thirds of the picture. To further emphasize and cement the joining of these disparate elements, she used blue, with its huge legacy of the spiritual from Kandinsky. There is even a plume of blue smoke issuing from the highest stack in the foreground, bridging the gap of the river itself. The formal unity, then, between the sun and the city is very tight and very complicated, although rigorously simplified. What did O’Keeffe intend by these joinings? From the halating circles that form a nimbus around the sun, the picture can be construed as a witty, but eloquent, visual pun on Stieglitz’s *Equivalents*—the sun equals light equals photography. But there seems to be much more to it than that. From the uncharacteristic length of time it took to paint, and from its methodical rigor, we can assume that *East River From Shelton* contains some of O’Keeffe’s most deeply pondered ideas about the city.

One can argue that the total effect of this enigmatic picture is spiritual. Generically speaking (in terms of western tradition), the work is structured by form and color in ways not unlike an altarpiece. In fact, what it suggests is nothing less than an abstract Annunciation.²¹¹ The sun, with its traces of gold, has been depicted as if it were a divine eye. One almost expects to see an angel, or the Dove, descending from its rays. The city is seen as if plunged in darkness, although it is day. But the river, an element of nature with familiar sacramental connotations, is

irradiated with light that is white, red and blue—doubtless to be read as the colors of America. An announcement of what? And by whom? O’Keeffe being O’Keeffe, there is a distinct possibility that the eye is the artist’s “I.” If so, perhaps she intended herself as the annunciator—the herald of a new American art capable of the same therapeutic power so urgently pursued by Kandinsky and the Symbolists.

In 1929, she did only one painting of the city, *New York Night*—her last major canvas on this theme. (Plate 114.) It is an aerial view from a window unto Lexington Avenue, which, according to O’Keeffe, looked “like a very tall thin bottle with colored things going up and down inside it.”²¹²

Here again, it appears that she has taken some direct inspiration from a Coburn photograph—this time from his twilight vista *Fifth Avenue from the St. Regis*, of 1910. (Plate 115.) Although her format is far more vertical (19 1/2 x 40 1/2 inches) than the photograph, she has divided and cut her space in ways that are nearly identical to it: the electrically lit canyons of Lexington and Fifth Avenues bisect the two picture fields diagonally, and disappear into the haze at upper right. In both images the darkest buildings reside in the foreground, and the tallest ones, on the left, are cropped at their tips. Whether she chose this view of Lexington Avenue because her eye had been unconsciously prepared by an earlier knowledge of the photograph, or whether she consciously drew upon the precision of Coburn’s planes and patterns to create an “objective” order out of a vast jumble of lights and forms, hardly seems to matter. For it is the power of paint to cause those lights and forms that makes *New York Night* such a warm and resplendent city image. The scintillate windows themselves repay endless attention, for each one is different from the others through kaleidoscopic shifts of arbitrary color. (They look very like miniature Rothkos, Pollocks and Newmans—some twenty years before their time.) And this infinite variety adds to our sense of real lives being lived

behind every one of them. The painting also holds what may be O'Keeffe's only rendition of that most ubiquitous of America's symbols, the automobile—which she painted like a yellow tinker-toy. (Plate 116.) Whether this primitivizing was intended as an ironic comment on what she liked to call “The Great American Thing,” or a gentle dig at the auto iconography of New York Dada, may never be known. But her amusement in painting it this comical way seems very nearly palpable.

To sum up the overall impression made by O'Keeffe's cityscapes: They were done by night and by day, and in all kinds of weather. (At least one of the *East Rivers* was painted in the snow.) They are outdoor views—even when seen from the inside. As to the difficult and interesting matter of meaning, her cityscapes, like the rest of her work, are susceptible to continuous readings. Some appear to be disguised self-portraits, some spiritual statements. Some possess a sophisticated wit, others a child-like humor. All are evasive images. Whenever O'Keeffe used the singular authenticities of photography it was to aid and abet her own profoundly romantic view of the city. And this would seem to set her urban landscapes well apart from those of her other contemporaries who drew upon photography—especially the group alternately labelled Cubist-Realists/Immaculates/Precisionists, to which she has so often been linked.²¹³

In many ways, O'Keeffe's understanding of city architecture as emotional, dramatic, rhythmic, voluptuous, exalting, phytomorphic and timeless, is close in spirit to that of Louis Sullivan—later called “The Whitman of American Architecture.”²¹⁴ Not only was she directly exposed to his early skyscrapers, and perhaps to his rhetoric, during her Chicago period, she must have heard Claude Bragdon—Stieglitz's friend of the Shelton years—extolling Sullivan's ideas.²¹⁵ (Even his battle cry “Form follows function” isn't very far from her own 1924

remarks to Anderson that “form must take care of itself if you can keep your vision clear.”)

On June 12, 1900, Sullivan gave an address to the Architectural League of America, which said (in part):

The architectural elements, in their baldest form, the desire of the heart in its most primitive, animal form, are the foundation of architecture ... try to study a plant as it grows from its tiny seed and expands toward its full fruition. Here is a process, a spectacle, a poem, or whatever you may wish to call it, not only absolutely logical in essence, because exhibiting in its highest form the unity and the duality of analysis and synthesis, but .. *vital and inevitable* : and it is specifically to this phenomenon that I wish to draw you earnest attention, if ... you wish to become real architects ...

Some day, watch the sun as he rises, courses through the sky, and sets ... note a wild bird, flying: a wave, breaking on the shore ... Whenever you have done these things attentively ... there will come to your intelligence a luminous idea of *simplicity* , an equally luminous idea of a resultant organic complexity, which, together, will constitute the first significant step in your architectural education, because they are the basis of rhythm. (Italics Sullivan's)²¹⁶

After *New York Night* , the city “well” ran almost permanently dry for O’Keeffe.²¹⁷ And this failure, so to speak, may be intimately connected to the summer of 1929, when she went to New Mexico for four months and discovered another kind of architecture—that of the pueblo culture. Adobe buildings, made by hand, in the shapes of the mountains, by an ancient people to whom nature was literally themselves.²¹⁸ In retrospect it seems inevitable that O’Keeffe would consider such architecture—and its surround—more essential to her artistic being than Lake George, or the steel, glass and concrete of New York City. She did not know this all at once, however. A letter written to Ettie Stettheimer, in August

1929, tells how New Mexico was, and what she felt about it, but does not suggest that she would ever be able to return:

I am on the train going back to Stieglitz—and in a hurry to get there. —I have had 4 months west and it seems to be all that I needed. —It has been like the wind and the sun—there doesn't seem to have been a crack of the waking day or night that wasn't full. — ... I feel so alive that I am apt to crack at any moment. I have frozen in the mountains in rain and hail—slept under the stars—and cooked and burned on the desert. —I even painted—and I laughed a great deal—I'm ready to go back East as long as I have to go sometime. —If it were not for the Stieglitz call I would probably never go—but that is strong—so I am on the way. He has had a bad summer but the summers at Lake George are always bad—that is why I had to spend one away. —I had to have one more good one before I get too old and decrepit.²¹⁹

The 1929 painting *Lake George Window* (Plate 117.), probably done not long after her return from New Mexico, can be said to toll the knell of O'Keeffe's symbiotic artistic relationship with Stieglitz. It is also one of the most creatively photographic of all her major works, with references as resonate as they are multifarious.

First, there is an indisputable link between the window and the camera lens in that both admit the light. O'Keeffe had always liked to explore light sources—from the sun, moon and stars to electricity. That she fully intended this special metaphoric connection in *Lake George Window* is hard to doubt, for her joyful abstraction *At the Rodeo*, painted earlier that summer in New Mexico, is yet another visual pun on the camera lens. (Plate 118.)

As an informed Modernist, O'Keeffe surely took the window's intrinsic flatness into account as subject matter. Similarly, she must have been aware of its wide-ranging implications for the Symbolists,²²⁰ for the Post-Impressionists (so extolled by *Camera Work*),²²¹ and above all, for Matisse—who investigated the

window endlessly, by and for itself. Further, she was obviously acquainted with such *Camera Work* photographs on this theme as Clarence H. White's *Ring Toss*, (1899)²²² and *Drops of Rain*,²²³ C. Puyo's *Nude — Against the Light*,²²⁴ and Stieglitz's early "snapshots", *From My Window, Berlin* (c. 1886-1889) and *From My Window, New York* (1900-1902)²²⁵ as well as his many later window variations. Nevertheless, *Lake George Window* is a very different kind of picture from those mentioned—despite the convention of its subject matter.

Like Matisse, O'Keeffe chose the window for itself. But her's is an isolated exterior architectural detail, seen straight on, and so up close, that it literally becomes the rectangular canvas space: an image within an image. Whereas Matisse is always indoors, looking *out* of his usually open windows, primarily to gardens or the sea, O'Keeffe has stayed outside—and she does not look in.²²⁶ Her window is closed, opaque and completely impenetrable. It has become the equal of a closed door—a barrier rather than a bridge.²²⁷

Lake George Window was originally titled *Portrait of a Farmhouse*. It has some very interesting formal and emotional parallels to Stieglitz's profoundly psychological portrait of his young niece, *Georgia Engelhard*, made in 1921. (Plate 119.) Both these pictures have a daguerreotype frontality. And if we subtract the girl and the potted plant, and add shutters, Stieglitz's door becomes, in effect, O'Keeffe's window. (It is actually the same building.) Even the glass in the door has caught the light in such a way that it looks half opaque and half reflective of the outdoors. While Stieglitz contrasted the rectilinearity of his composition with the coltish gesture of the girl's body, O'Keeffe found a more abstract solution. She chose to point up the rhythmic curves of the upper moulding as a counter-action to the crisp frontality of the window. Although Stieglitz's photograph is utterly sharp in terms of acutance, resolution and contrast, the details and edges in O'Keeffe's painting—particularly the shutters—resemble those of an overexposed negative, or

an underexposed print. It's not possible to tell which. Her "blacks" and "whites" do not contain textural information so much as they delineate boundaries and define shapes. Taken overall, this seems to be yet another of her translations of photographic seeing with a personal twist.

Stieglitz has posed the adolescent Georgia Engelhard before the door in an extremely ambiguous manner. She could be entering or leaving it—or even barring access to it. (The connotations with virginity are inescapable here.) O'Keeffe's window is no less ambiguous, but for different reasons. A window is by its very nature a transparent wall. But we cannot see through this one—even the all-important light is unable to penetrate. It is as if the inside (hers and Stieglitz's real "shelter space" at Lake George) has been sealed off—not just from ourselves, but from the artist as well. Even the windowpane acts like a bar.

She had left the open space of New Mexico behind her with regret. Dead ahead is the flat, reduced wall of *Lake George Window*, with its preponderant greys and blackish greens. Few, if any, of her works give off such a personal sense of frustration and despair.

Each of O'Keeffe's images can be understood as a summary of her own psychic state at the time—she has said so herself. But all of them manage, in different ways, to recreate emotion while transmitting the facts. Whether she painted a named (or nameless) abstraction, the seasonal world of Lake George, the quotidian world of New York, or the Pueblo world of New Mexico, this dual impression holds true.

It was Stieglitz's dearest wish that O'Keeffe's work would rest securely within the "great American Thing" tradition—even while helping to define it. On both counts this would seem to be the case.

**Notes
Chapter Seven**

- ¹Kandinsky, *TASH* , pp. 83-84.
- ²Stieglitz to Kühn, 6 August, 1926. YCAL.
- ³Dove to Stieglitz, c. March, 1930. YCAL.
- ⁴This phrase seems to have originated from Gertrude Stein's explanation for her rivalrous relationship with Mabel Dodge Luhan, see James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974): 179.
- ⁵Both these works were exhibited in O'Keeffe's 1917 show at 291. The watercolor, *Train at Night in The Desert*, belongs to the Museum of Modern Art.
- ⁶Georgia O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz*, n.p.
- ⁷O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, 27 Nov. 1916, YCAL. In the NGA Key Set, there is a print of O'Keeffe's *Special No. 9* , (1915).
- ⁸Stieglitz to Strand, 17 Nov. 1918, PSA/CCP.
- ⁹*Ibid* , 23 April, 1919.
- ¹⁰Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 20 Sept. 1920, YCAL.
- ¹¹*Ibid*, July 22, 1922. Prints are spotted by hand to clean up any errors, mostly those caused by dust. O'Keeffe used a brush dipped in India ink. For a technical discussion of the craft of spotting, see David Vestal, *The Craft of Photography* , (New York: Harper & Row, 1974): 353.
- ¹²Georgia O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe A Portrait*, n.p.
- ¹³For data on this point, see Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 203.
- ¹⁴O'Keeffe had mostly neglected this medium since her Art Students League classes with William Merritt Chase. Among the very few exceptions extant are: *Painting No. 21* (Palo Duro Canyon), 1916, oil on board, 13 x 16"; *No. 22* , 1916, oil on board, 12 7/8 x 17 1/4" (which looks as if she had been practicing Cézanne's constructive brushstroke); *Canyon Landscape* , c. 1916-17, 22 x 18", coll. artist; *Series I*, No. 4, 1918, oil on board, 20 x 16" coll. artist.

- ¹⁵Stieglitz to Strand, 17 November 1918, YCAL.
- ¹⁶See L. L. p. 82.
- ¹⁷Stieglitz to Dove, 18 Sept. 1919, YCAL.
- ¹⁸*Ibid* , 22 August, 1922, YCAL.
- ¹⁹Strand to Stieglitz, 20 March 1919, YCAL. Unfortunately it is not, and may never be, known which works "the grey painting and portrait" are.
- ²⁰Dove to Stieglitz, 16 September, 1919, YCAL.
- ²¹*The Daybooks of Edward Weston* , Vol. I. Edited by Nancy Newhall (N. Y., An Aperture Book, 1961): 5.
- ²²My photograph of this work was made from one in the Whitney files. It should also be recorded that O'Keeffe's 1966 catalogue raisonn  has "poss. destroyed" written after the title, so perhaps it is no longer extant.
- ²³1919, oil on canvas, 17 x 22". Reproduced in Dennis R. Anderson, *American Flower Painting* (N. Y., Watson-Guption Publications, 1980): 60.
- ²⁴1919, oil on canvas, 27 x 23". Reproduced in *The Precisionist View in American Art* , p. 16.
- ²⁵1919, oil on canvas, 35 x 29". Reproduced in *G O'K* (1976), plate 14.
- ²⁶1919, oil on canvas, 24 x 16". Reproduced in *Ibid* , plate 15.
- ²⁷Rosenfeld, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Port of New York*, (1924) University of Illinois reprint, 1961: 203. This essay was based upon an earlier one, "The Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe," published in *Vanity Fair* (19 October 1922): 56, 112, 114.
- ²⁸Jennings Tofel, as quoted by Edith W. Powell in "The Introspectives", *International Studio* , Vol LXI (May 1917): xcii.
- ²⁹Stieglitz to Tofel, March 25, 1924, YCAL.
- ³⁰*Ibid*, August 23, 1924.

- ³¹*Ibid.*, Feb. 11, 1925. In 1934, Tofel contributed an essay to *America and Alfred Stieglitz* titled "A Portrait". Speaking of Stieglitz's photographs, Tofel wrote, "[They] are not statements only, by which are meant primarily states of the mind; they are states of the soul."
- ³²Stieglitz to S. Macdonald Wright, 9 October, 1919, YCAL. Also quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, pp. 136-138. The relationship of this statement to the value system expressed in D. H. Lawrence's early novels merits further investigation.
- ³³Cited in Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, pp. 61-62.
- ³⁴O'Keeffe to Anderson, 11 February, 1924, Newberry Library.
- ³⁵For further clarification of this point, see Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: The Viking Press, 1959): 88-89, 66-67.
- ³⁶Although I have found no specific mention of Lawrence's work in Stieglitz's letters before 1923 ("I have had a rare pleasure, D. H. Lawrence's book 'Studies in American Literature'," he wrote to Dove on July 18, 1923, "Read it—You'll have a great time."), Lowe has documented that by 1918, Stieglitz had already revelled in Lawrence's novels, because they had something "true" to offer. She also adds that Stieglitz did not often refer to his voracious reading of contemporary fiction in letters to his friends, p. 212.
- ³⁷D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961): 2-3.
- ³⁸According to Lowe (p. 253) Stieglitz turned the old potting shed on The Hill into a real dark room for himself in 1922. It was referred to as the "Little Building." As later described by O'Keeffe, it was "a small square house that had been the wooden part of a large greenhouse. Two electric wires ran to it from the farm house and there was a fine weathervane on top of it. In front of the little house was a tall white flag pole. Stieglitz used the little house as a darkroom for his photographic work." *G O'K* (1976), text opposite plate # 36.
- ³⁹For a glowing account of this halcyon period, see Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 9 Nov. 1924, YCAL.
- ⁴⁰For example, during 1923, O'Keeffe painted *Pink and Yellow Tulips*, *Pink Gladioli*, and some ten different calla lily canvases. In 1924, she painted *Brown Marigold*, *White Iris*, four (known) petunia canvases, three of corn, three of eggplants, and a series of two titled *From the Old Garden*. In 1925, there were two paintings of squash blossoms, five of petunias, three callas, *Pink Tulip*, and *Yellow Sweet Peas*. (All of these are listed in the 1966 catalogue raisonné.)

⁴¹Stieglitz's earliest surviving landscape prints were made in Italy during 1887. In 1894, he photographed the picturesque countrysides of Gutach (Germany) and Katwyk (Holland). But between 1895 and 1917, as Greenough has documented, he made fewer than a dozen landscape photographs. *Art Journal* (Spring, 1981): 54.

⁴²Lowe has recorded that from the age of nine to the age of eighty-two, Steiglitz missed only eleven summers at Lake George, p. xix.

⁴³Stieglitz to Anderson, 5 July, 1925, YCAL.

⁴⁴Stieglitz to Strand, 22 Aug. 1918, PSA/CCP.

⁴⁵Reproduced in Lowe, as plate II, following p. 232. That this photograph was a very special one to Steiglitz is reinforced by Lowe's statement that it was among the family "fragments" which he had apparently chosen for his own personal album (*Stieglitz*, p. xiii.) It was also chosen for Rosenfeld's major article "The Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe," *Vanity Fair*, October, 1922.

⁴⁶See, for example plate 37, in *Georgia O'Keeffe A Portrait, and* figs. 3 and 4 in Sarah Greenough, "From the American Earth: Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Apples", p. 49. Greenough's persuasive argument that Stieglitz considered the apple tree to be symbolic of the long-neglected American artist, and its fruit an expression of the artist's soul, would not preclude my suggestion here. And Waldo Frank adds to it, unwittingly, by this description: "For O'Keeffe is a peasant—a glorified American peasant. Like a peasant, she is full of loamy hungers of the flesh. Like a peasant, she is full of star dreams." *Time Exposures* (N.Y., Boni Liveright, 1926): 32.

⁴⁷Kandinsky, *TASH*, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁸Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, pp. 200-201.

⁴⁹Reproduced in *G O'K* (1976) as plate no. 4.

⁵⁰For example, McBride quotes Stieglitz's use of this phrase in a review of O'Keeffe's painting for *The New York Herald*, Feb. 4, 1923. The same review was later reprinted O'Keeffe's 1924 catalogue.

⁵¹Stieglitz to Strand, May 16, 1918. PSA/CCP.

⁵²*ibid*, Nov. 17, 1918.

⁵³On this important point, there is a letter from Stieglitz to Rosenfeld dated Nov. 5, 1920, which may describe his original inspiration. He

speaks of taking a walk with O’Keeffe before sundown on Bolton Road. “An evening that reminded of last year’s Passionate autumn. [Their first together.] —We were wishing you could see the mountains and the trees—the sky—the rainbow—the hills gradually turning from warm gold into a great blackness.” YCAL.

⁵⁴Kandinsky, *TASH*, pp. 41-42.

⁵⁵Stieglitz to Strand, August 9, 1920, PSA/CCP.

⁵⁶Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, Aug. 28, 1920, YCAL. See also Lowe, pp. 234-5.

⁵⁷On the inspired and complexly nationalistic intentions for these “apple portraits”, which were based, in good part, on American contemporary literature and criticism, see Greenough, “From the American Earth,” pp. 46-54.

⁵⁸*Ibid*, reproduced on p. 49.

⁵⁹Stieglitz to Marie Rapp Boursault, 6 October, 1920, YCAL. Unfortunately it is not yet possible to know which ones he was referring to, as O’Keeffe’s 1966 catalogue raisonné mistakenly dates all 15 of her earliest apple paintings as c. 1921.

⁶⁰Stieglitz to Strand, 15, October, 1920, PSA/CCP.

⁶¹Rosenfeld, “American Painting” *The Dial* 71 (Dec. 1921): 654.

⁶²Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, Oct. 2, 1921, YCAL. For an account of just how and why the 1921 summer/fall was personally difficult for Stieglitz, see Lowe, pp. 245-247.

⁶³Stieglitz to Seligmann, Sept. 16, 1921, YCAL.

⁶⁴Stieglitz to Strand, August 4, 1921, YCAL.

⁶⁵Proper explication of this consequential, and barely known, series is greatly needed. That Stieglitz particularly valued O’Keeffe’s apple portraits (and wanted them to be brought to public attention) is clear from his choice of *Apple Family I* to be reproduced in Paul Rosenfeld’s 1922 article for *Vanity Fair*, titled “The Paintings of Georgia O’Keeffe.” (The painting appears as “Still Life” on p. 56.) It is also quite evident from several of these canvases that O’Keeffe was still casting among the great European modern masters for her own style. For example, *The Green Apple* (c. 1921) shows some striking similarities to Matisse’s *Les Pommes Sur La Table Sur Fond Vert* (1916), in the Chrysler Museum at Norfolk, Conn.

⁶⁶Although the NGA key set presently retains Doris Bry's date of 1918 for this unpublished photograph (accession no.9), Greenough has told me it is probably too early because of O'Keeffe's changed hairstyle, and because Stieglitz's other apple photographs did not begin until 1920.

⁶⁷Reproduced in *G O'K* (1976) as plate 32.

⁶⁸*Corn Dark* (1924) may be one of her very earliest experiments with the aerial in this genre.

⁶⁹Reproduced in *G O'K* (1976) as plate 13.

⁷⁰Reproduced in *Camera Work* No. 20, Oct. 1907.

⁷¹See Lowe, pp. 295-6.

⁷²O'Keeffe and Stieglitz often climbed this mountain together, and the view from the top offers a similar orientation, but without the extreme angle obtained by an aerial photograph. I am indebted to Sue Davidson Lowe for this information, in a letter of 2 Feb. 1984.

⁷³In the same letter cited just above, Lowe recalled that the view from the attic window of the farmhouse faced east—as does O'Keeffe's key position in *Lake George with Crows*.

⁷⁴"When I started painting the pelvis bones I was most interested in the holes of the bones—what I saw through them—particularly the blue from holding them up in the sun against the sky as one is apt to do when one seems to have more sky than earth in one's world ... They were most wonderful against the Blue—the Blue that will always be there as it is now after all man's destruction is finished." (O'Keeffe, as quoted in her exhibition catalogue, *An American Place* (1944).)

⁷⁵"The Salon of 1859," *Baudelaire: Art in Paris 1845-1862*. Translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon, 1965): 154.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Three letters in particular chart these changes: O'Keeffe to Ettie Stettheimer (6 Aug. 1925): "Stieglitz passed a kidney stone and is feeling better—when he wasn't busy with that he was busy with that other hot water heater we had ... before we got the new one. —And once in a while he ran after a cloud—and sometimes he caught it ... I have decided that next summer I am going to tent on that 366th island they talk about here—the one that only comes up for leap year—with the hope that there won't be anything on it to tend to." The O'Keeffe-Stettheimer correspondence is at the Art Institute of Chicago. Stieglitz

to Waldo Frank (25 Aug. 1925): "Georgia is painting some—but has not found her "swing" as yet— ... *She still dreams of the plains—of real spaces—*Lake George is [too] pretty. —If I were strong enough I guess I'd take her to Texas for a while.", YCAL. Stieglitz to Strand, (15 Sept. 1925): "Our summer has been anything but inspiring for work. First there were the months of illness ... Then, although there has been perfect peace on The Hill you know *Georgia's inner yearn for big spaces* ." Italics added.) PSA/CCP.

⁷⁸Published first in *Amateur Photographer and Photography* 56 (19 Sept. 1923): 225, and reprinted many times thereafter.

⁷⁹For more on this, see Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, p. 58.

⁸⁰Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 16 August, 1922, YCAL.

⁸¹For an enlightening account of this curious incident, see Rosenblum, *Paul Strand*, pp. 205-207. Whether Strand' usurpation of Stieglitz' own "turf" had anything to do with his sudden concentration on the sky above it may always remain a question. The resentment toward Strand felt by Stieglitz for photographing *his* Lake George motifs may be contrasted with his eagerness to share them with O'Keeffe.

⁸²On this personal history, see Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, p. 20.

⁸³Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 8 August, 1922. YCAL.

⁸⁴*The Dark Mountain* is part of the Stieglitz collection that belongs to the Chicago Art Institute. Hartley also painted a more close-up view of the same motif titled *Deserted Farm* (reproduced in Barbara Haskell, *Marsden Hartley* (New York: New York University Press, 1980): 20.

⁸⁵For a cogent summary of the early years (1908-1912) of the Stieglitz-Hartley relationship, see *Ibid*, pp. 14-22.

⁸⁶This information, and the quote, are in O'Keeffe's introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* n.p.

⁸⁷*My Shanty* is reproduced as plate 33 in *G O'K* (1976).

⁸⁸In *The Art of Spritual Harmony*, Kandinsky writes that "The life of the spirit may be fairly represented in diagram as a large acute-angled triangle divided horizontally into unequal parts with the narrowest segment uppermost. The lower the segment the greater it is in breadth, depth and area." (p. 14).

⁸⁹In the 1859 words of Alphonse de La Martine. "[Photography] is better than an art; it is a solar phenomenon in which the artist collaborates

with the sun." (As quoted in the catalogue *After Daguerre: Masterworks of French Photography (1848-1900) from the Bibliothèque Nationale*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980: 72.) Other examples of Stieglitz's probable symbolic "homages" to photography are: *Sunlight and Shadows: Paula/Berlin* (1889), see Rosalind Krauss, "Stieglitz/Equivalents," *October*, Winter, 1979, pp. 131-133. And *Little House*, (c. 1933), see Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 231.

⁹⁰In using this style, O'Keeffe may well have been influenced by Kandinsky's statement "Henri Rousseau has revealed the new possibilities of simplicity. At present this aspect of his complex talent is most valuable to us." *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, *The Documents of 20th Century Art*, p. 178.

⁹¹*The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, Vol. I., p. 6.

⁹²O'Keeffe, as quoted in the *New York Sun*, Dec. 5, 1922.

⁹³See Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 233. A small possibility exists that he took some 4 x 5 photographs of clouds during the summer of 1922, a time when he was intensively searching through nature for forms to express his emotions. This rests upon a letter to Anderson from Stieglitz, dated July 30, 1923. All in the same paragraph, he writes: "This is Monday morning. A new week about to begin. The sun's disc sharply defined through a vaporous atmosphere, most curious in color & movement. Is the day to be one of bright sunlight—or is it to be gray? There was a marvellous [sic] full moon last night—very still— & the hills very tranquilly dark guarding the Lake so peacefully still—dark too & inviting. —Towards midnight vapors began to rise & settle here & there along the sides of the hills—& gradually some seemed to play about the moon disc like the Rhine daughters played about the Rhinegold guarding it with their laughter & song. —I had been fooling all day with small prints made a year ago—prints I frequently took a peep at during the year & wondered why I took such an interest in them—such fool things many—yet fascinating each—I wondered how could I place them properly on the thing one calls mount—just a piece of paper. Frequently hopeless—they seemed merely to remain prints—beginnings—and yet I knew someday there might be a little more than that if I felt just right. —And yesterday somehow I again began playing & by night I had 14 of the prints virtually placed each on a piece of paper—established a life between print & paper—and some of these tiny pictures give much pleasure—There is life. —So simple— what is it?"

I have discussed with Greenough the possibility that these "small photographs" were of clouds, but she thinks it more likely they were of apples—despite the general sky/weather topic of the above paragraph. She also thinks this because none of the *Songs of the Sky* in the key set were dated earlier than 1923 by Stieglitz. But the fact remains that he sometimes did not "see" his photographs until well after they were exposed, and therefore might not have considered such experimental snapshots dateable until they had been finally selected and mounted.

The issue, admittedly a minor one, is of interest mainly because of the inspiration and timing for *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs*.

- ⁹⁴O'Keeffe to Anderson c. 11 Feb. 1924. Newberry.
- ⁹⁵Stieglitz to Seligmann, 6 Oct. 1923, YCAL.
- ⁹⁶Stieglitz to Strand, 15 Oct. 1923, YCAL.
- ⁹⁷Stieglitz to Anderson, 2 Sept. 1923. Newberry.
- ⁹⁸Stieglitz to Seligmann, 12 Oct. 1923, YCAL.
- ⁹⁹I am indebted for this information to Greenough, whose careful study of the NGA Cloud photographs has helped disclose the extent to which Stieglitz sometimes went in his spotting. The fascinating question as to whether O'Keeffe herself ever helped to spot his *Songs of the Sky* to look more like her abstractions (under his direction) will obviously never be answered.
- ¹⁰⁰Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass. (1963) plates 39-43. Apparently Stieglitz himself considered these five *Songs* especially important ones, for they were part of his gift of 27 framed photographs to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1923. Greenough informs me that Bry's numbering for this series is inaccurate, and that no.s 1 and 3 should be reversed in order to tally with Stieglitz's original ones. But I shall stick with Bry's published numbers in discussing these illustrations, in order to avoid any possible visual confusion in my text.
- ¹⁰¹For more evidence of Stieglitz's intent here, there is a letter to Anderson, dated 2 Sept. 1923. "Somehow it doesn't happen that I am photographing persons this summer—or at any rate not *persons* as *persons*. Maybe that will come later." (Italics Stieglitz's). Newberry.
- ¹⁰²In support of this mention it will be remembered that Stieglitz published selections from Van Gogh's letters in *Camera Work* as early as 1912, (no. 40).
- ¹⁰³Stieglitz to Hartley, 27 Oct. 1923, YCAL.
- ¹⁰⁴Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, p. 58.
- ¹⁰⁵NGA accession number D916. This photograph is reproduced in *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (1934) as Plate XXVII, D, with the title *Lake George, 1924*. It also appears in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz An American Seer*, p. 153, as *Equivalent Mountains and Sky, Lake George, 1924*. Greenough thinks the 1924 date correct, despite Stieglitz's own date of 1919, written on the back of the NGA mount.

- But she believes it should have the title *Lake George*, not *Equivalent*.
(Letter to me of November 13, 1985.)
- ¹⁰⁶This painting, now in The Chicago Art Institute, was originally titled *Music — Black, Blue and Green*.
- ¹⁰⁷Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, pp. 47-52. For a discussion of the art of the Blaue Reiter as intended universal medicine for the human soul, see Peg Weiss, exhibition catalogue, *Kandinsky in Munich 1896-1914*, pp. 71-76.
- ¹⁰⁸This photograph is reproduced in *Georgia O'Keeffe A Portrait* as plate 23.
- ¹⁰⁹For an analysis of this Courbet work as a visual embodiment of the artist's experience, see Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism & Realism* (New York: The Viking Press, 1984): 176-177.
- ¹¹⁰This photograph appears in *Alfred Stieglitz, Aperture* (1976), p. 63. And in *Georgia O'Keeffe A Portrait* as plate 29.
- ¹¹¹This incident is well documented in L.L., (pp. 114-116), and Lowe (pp. 247-249), and both authors suggest that the tragic postpartum illness of Stieglitz's daughter Kitty in June, 1923 was what made his decision not to have a child with O'Keeffe final.
- ¹¹²*G O'K* (1976), text opposite plates 30 and 31.
- ¹¹³The 1966 catalogue raisonné lists: *Calla Lily in Tall Glass No. 1 and 2, Calla, Calla Lily, Calla Lily with Red Background, Calla Lily Turned Away, and Two Calla Lilies*. Seven of the above were in her 1924 Anderson Galleries show listed only as "8-14 calla lillies" [sic].
- ¹¹⁴For some examples, see Foshay, *Reflections of Nature*, p. 107.
- ¹¹⁵Henry McBride, *The New York Herald*, Sunday, March 9, section 6, p. 7.
- ¹¹⁶As to this, Demuth made an undated, unfinished, and, to my knowledge, unreproduced, poster portrait of Hartley (c. 1920-1922) with a conspicuous calla in it. Emily Farnham described it as "Framed in open window, large flowerpot holding red calla lily with yellow pistil and green leaves. On left, letters of the name HARTLEY give vertical emphasis. Various notations inscribed on work; all red, snow winter, quite blue, white clouds." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "Charles Demuth: His Life, Psychology and Works". University of Ohio (1960); 674.) Hartley's own callas appear to have begun around 1917; among them are *Red Calla in Blue Vase*, *Still Life No. 9*, and *Atlantic Window*

- ¹¹⁷O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October, 1915 (day date missing), YCAL.
- ¹¹⁸The 1966 catalogue raisonné shows that among these 4 varieties, the canna was O'Keeffe's overwhelming favorite between 1918 and 1922. There are approximately 13 watercolors and oils of it listed. She also seems to have been interested in the form and color of the wild lowly skunk cabbage, as 4 oils appear under 1922 with that title, including the well-known *Cos Cob* (formerly called *Skunk Cabbage*).
- ¹¹⁹On this, see Foshay, *Reflections of Nature*, pp. 67-93.
- ¹²⁰For a discussion on American 19th century flower symbolism, see William H. Gerds and Russell Burke, *American Still Life Painting* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971): 89-92. For a more recent exploration of this popular but hard to pin down material, see Foshay, pp. 35-36. Assuredly known to O'Keeffe was Maeterlinck's widely read Symbolist meditation on *The Intelligence of Flowers*, illustrated by A. L. Coburn's photographs in 1907.
- ¹²¹One such description out of many may be found in *The Language of Flowers*, written anonymously in 1913, and printed in England by Beric Press Ltd. 1968.
- ¹²²See, for example, Michael Bartram, *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1985): 120-180.
- ¹²³Once part of the Ferdinand Howald Collection, *The Blue Cup* is now the property of the Columbus (Ohio) Museum of Art.
- ¹²⁴For an unmatched discussion of some of these differences in 1922, see Rosenfeld, "The Paintings of Marsden Hartley," *Vanity Fair*, vol. 18, August, 1922, pp. 47, 84. Hartley's early understanding and admiration of O'Keeffe's painting is well known, but O'Keeffe's attentiveness to Hartley's work deserves a much closer study, starting from such preliminary observations as these: both Hartley and O'Keeffe had William Merritt Chase for a teacher in their formative periods; both combined mystical and romantic qualities with an expressive realism; both were, in Hartley's phrase, "hermit radicals" (the radical reliance on simple experience); both were profoundly influenced by Kandinsky and Matisse, and this would include their attempts to paint visual equivalents to felt experiences of music; both liked to minimize (and deny outright) their stylistic sources; both felt the need to work in series, (among Hartley's earliest explorations are the "Intuitive Abstractions" (1912), the Berlin Series (1913), and the German military series of 1914-1915); both swung in and out of the "objectivist" philosophy; and both succumbed to the spell of the New Mexico landscape. (In Hartley's view, it was "the only place in America where true colour exists, excepting the short autumnal season in New England." This, from a letter Hartley wrote to Harriet Munroe, Sept. 13, 1918, AAA.) Both

artists preferred not to sign their pictures. In speaking of this preference he shared with O'Keeffe, Hartley wrote: "[She] believes also, as I do, that if there is any personal quality, that in itself will be signature enough." (*Adventures in the Arts*, p. 121.) The estrangement between Hartley and Stieglitz that began in 1923, partly for financial reasons, does not seem to have operated between Hartley and O'Keeffe. Thus, Stieglitz to Hartley, "Georgia has always been a champion of yours and continues to be so." (From a letter dated 2/5/29, YCAL.) In 1930, O'Keeffe even paid a freight bill for Hartley's paintings, that he was not able to manage. (On this, see Haskell, *Marsden Hartley*, p. 143.) Hartley and O'Keeffe carried on a correspondence of their own that has yet to be catalogued—if indeed it still exists. (A letter from Stieglitz to Hartley dated Oct. 27, 1923, says, "I read your letter to Georgia ... ") Whether O'Keeffe and Hartley shared a secret interest in the occult remains an open question, although Hartley's own interest in the occult does not. (On this, see Gail Levin, *Arts*, Sept. 1979: 160.)

¹²⁵ Among the superabundant sources available to O'Keeffe on this particular motif from the time of her student years at the Art Institute of Chicago were: Walter Crane's *Flora's Feast: A Masque of Flowers* (1889); Eugene Grasset's *Estampes Decoratives* (1896-1898); Paul Berthon's turn-of-the-century posters, ceramics and decorative panels; and above all, Alphonse Mucha's posters and frequently reproduced *panneaux decoratifs* (1896-1903). *La Plume*, for instance, devoted the whole issue of July 1897 to Mucha's work.

¹²⁶ Both of them appeared in *Camera Work*, 42/43, 1913. The woman in *The Lotus Screen* was Stieglitz's sister, Selma Stieglitz Schubart.

¹²⁷ Among the NGA key prints there are only three: *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait with Flowers* (1918), in which she sits on the porch of the Lake George house, her head propped against the glass of the door, holding a few leaves and flowers in her left hand; and three 1934 exposures of her standing in a field holding some ferns and daisies. (NGA accession numbers are 82, 326, 327, 328.) In his later years, Stieglitz was fond of saying that he loved flowers, but had "never felt himself worthy of either picking them or photographing them." (Norman, *An American Seer*, p. 204.)

¹²⁸ My photograph of this O'Keeffe portrait was taken in the Philadelphia Museum in 1979. NGA accession number D 1518.

¹²⁹ This well-known work of Redon's is reproduced in Goldwater, *Symbolism*, p. 122. There is a possible prototype for this image, as de Zayas apparently also built upon a Redon (*Marsh Flower*) for his c. 1911-12 caricature of Stieglitz, *L'Accoucheur d'idées*. And much later (May, 1946) Picasso would paint Françoise Gilot as *La Femme-fleur*.

¹³⁰ For just a few examples of this, see *Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz*, plates 19 and 32. Plate 29 has already been mentioned in this context.

- ¹³¹NGA accession number D 1511. Permission to reproduce this photograph was not granted by O'Keeffe.
- ¹³²NGA accession numbers Bry 32 B and C. Not only are the three "buttocks" photographs unpublished, they have apparently never been exhibited. The 1932 series looks to have been considerably influenced by Weston's manner of treating the line as a fold. (The fact that Weston had a show of his work in New York in 1932 adds to this possibility.) These were the last nude photographs of O'Keeffe Stieglitz ever made.
- ¹³³Since this section was written, Sarah Greenough has suggested that in their abstract portraits, Stieglitz, Demuth and Dove were analysing the personalities of their immediate artistic community for the express purpose of creating new forms and symbols for America. ("Equivalentents as Portraits; Portraits as Equivalentents," lecture delivered at The Henry Luce Foundation Symposium, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, April 5, 1986.) If so, then O'Keeffe's early fruit and plant self-portraits may have been a direct spur for that idea.
- ¹³⁴These were listed in the exhibition catalogue simply as "35-42 Leaves." The 1966 catalogue raisonné, however, lists the following titles and dimensions: *Maple Leaves* (oil on canvas, 10 1/4 x 8 1/4); *Four Dark Red Oak Leaves* (oil on canvas, 12 x 9); *Leaves Under Water* (oil on canvas, 9 x 6); *Oak Leaves* (oil on canvas 12 x 9); *Oak Leaves* (oil on maisonite, 10 x 7 1/2); *Pattern of Leaves* (oil on canvas, 22 x 18). There are three works also listed as *Leaves*, with no dimensions given, but each one of these has a notation (according to O'Keeffe) that it appeared in the 1924 Anderson Galleries show.
- ¹³⁵This watershed work, owned by the Phillips Gallery, has been variously dated from c. 1923 to c. 1926. Since, however, the 1966 catalogue raisonné is unequivocal about dating it 1923, and notes its appearance in the March 1924 Anderson Galleries show as definite, I find no good reason (style included) not to accept 1923 as the firm date.
- ¹³⁶Stieglitz to Strand, 6 August 1922, PSA/CCP.
- ¹³⁷Hartley, for one, understood Stieglitz's Dada proclivities very well. In a 1921 essay, *The Appeal of Photography*, he wrote, "Incidentally it may be confided [Stieglitz] is an artistic idol of the Dadaists which is at least a happy indication of his modernism ... Perhaps he will not care to be called Dada, but it is nevertheless true." (Reprinted in Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, p. 111.)
- ¹³⁸The 1966 catalogue raisonné lists *Green Leaves* in 1921, and *Purple Leaves* in 1922.
- ¹³⁹This work was recently reproduced in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Fall, 1984: 8.

¹⁴⁰"I had been walking for a couple of weeks with a girl in the big wood somewhere in the North Carolina mountains. One morning before daylight, I was combing my hair. I saw her lying there—one arm thrown back, hair a dark mass against the white, the face half turned, the red mouth. It all looked warm with sleep." Georgia O'Keeffe in *Some Memories of Drawings* (1974) no pagination.

¹⁴¹Ironically, perhaps, considering their veneration for "place," the artists and writers in Stieglitz's orbit do not seem to have extolled (or read) Thoreau or Emerson quite as much as Whitman. Thoreau's name does not, for example, appear on Stieglitz's life-time favorite reading list, as compiled and separately examined by Schiffman, Haines, Lowe and Greenough. Nevertheless Stieglitz was certainly aware that Benjamin de Casseres had named Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman as the real fathers of the cubists and futurists, "for they reported what they *felt*, not what they *saw*" ("The Renaissance of the Irrational." *Camera Work*, Special issue June 1913, p. 23), and that Van Wyck Brooks regarded the same three as "the accepted canon of American literature," and therefore prime grist for America's "usable past." ("On Creating a Usable Past," *The Dial*, April 11, 1918, pp. 337-341.) Nor would it have escaped Stieglitz's notice that Waldo Frank in *Our America* called *Walden* "America's first great prose ... the first conscious 'yea' of the Puritan world." (Cited by Gorham Muson *The Awakening Twenties*, p. 65.) For a discussion as to why Whitman's work was preferred to the transcendentalists by intellectuals during the 1920's, see Frederick J. Hoffman, *The 20s*, pp. 144-156. And for a comparative study of Stieglitz's "romantic" attitude toward Lake George with Thoreau's descriptions of his days at *Walden*, see Richard N. Masteller, "Romanticisms in a Modern Mode", pp. 29-42.

¹⁴²Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the Woods*, (1854) reprint edition, Peter Pauper Press, N. Y. (n.d.) pp. 291-294. Although the connection between this passage from *Walden* and O'Keeffe's leaves has never to my knowledge been noted before, I am not the first to pick up on the probable influence of Thoreau on her art. In 1977, Barbara Rose was able to state categorically (from interviews with O'Keeffe?) that she "began reading Emerson and Thoreau when she was young." But Rose's conclusion that O'Keeffe's flower enlargements originated *not* from photography, but from Thoreau's 1841 essay "The Method of Nature," and, even more directly, from Martin Johnson Heade's flower paintings, is far from my own—as will become increasingly apparent. (For all of Rose's arguments, see "O'Keeffe's Trail," *New York Review of Books*, March 31, 1977, pp. 29-33.)

The question as to whether O'Keeffe drew upon Thoreau because he was considered part of America's "usable past" by the Stieglitz circle, or because she had always cherished his values for her art, may never be known for certain. Both would seem to have figured—but well transformed by her own fiercely independent mind.

¹⁴³This privately owned work was shown at the Madison (Wisconsin) Art Center's exhibition, *Georgia O'Keeffe, Paintings 1919-1977* (March 3 - April 29, 1984), where I first saw it.

¹⁴⁴Rubenstein, *The Circles and the Symmetry*, p. 72. Typically, O'Keeffe did not say which sister this was; Mrs. Robert Young (Anita), Mrs. Raymond Klenert (Catherine), or Claudia O'Keeffe. (Ida O'Keeffe died in 1961.)

¹⁴⁵*G O'K* (1976), text opposite plate 18.

¹⁴⁶It appears as plate 65 in the new, revised edition of *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, Aperture, Inc. (1979), but not in the original edition of 1934. The revised edition credits *Petunia and Coleus* as belonging to the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert H. Kinney.

¹⁴⁷There is a black and white print in the O'Keeffe picture archives at the Whitney, from which I took this photograph. *Petunia No. 2* is listed in the 1966 catalogue raisonné as belonging to the artist, and this may also be significant in terms of its importance. For O'Keeffe, like Picasso, often purchased back for her own collection what she considered to be her key paintings.

¹⁴⁸From their dimensions as given, neither *No. 1*, nor *No. 2* is a horizontal picture. But with O'Keeffe's Dow-propensity for painting pictures that look right hung from any side, her memory of it in 1976 may not be wholly reliable. Be that as it may, *Petunia and Coleus* was reproduced vertically, and *Petunia No. 2* definitely looks to have been composed vertically for reasons discussed in my text.

¹⁴⁹PSA/CCP.

¹⁵⁰YCAL. The work mentioned may well be *Red Canna*. It belongs to the University of Arizona Museum of Art, and is presently dated c. 1923. But O'Keeffe, to my knowledge, painted no work as advanced as this in 1923. Further, *Red Canna* has a strong stylistic kinship to the Whitney Museum's 1924 *Flower Abstraction* (discussed in my Chapter Five, pp.187-188.) In all probability, *both* were painted during those amazingly creative weeks of September, 1924, judging from Stieglitz's letters to Rosenfeld and Strand.

¹⁵¹PSA/CCP.

¹⁵²Stieglitz to Rebecca Salsbury Strand, 18 June 1924, YCAL.

¹⁵³Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962): 190-191.

¹⁵⁴Examples of this urbane wit and love of parody abound. One of the more recent concerns her *Cow's Skull — Red, White and Blue* (1931): "... how was the Great American Thing going to happen? So as I painted along on my cow's skull on blue and I thought to myself, 'I will

make it an American painting. They will not think it great with the red striped down the sides—Red, White and Blue—but they will notice it'." (*Georgia O'Keeffe* (1976), text opposite plate 58) O'Keeffe also tells a nicely mocking story about herself and Duchamp—two of the more autobiographical artists of their time. "[Duchamp] was at my first large show in 1923 on the top floor of the Anderson Galleries .. he came up to me quickly and said, 'But where is your self-portrait? Everyone has a self-portrait in his first show.' Well, I didn't have a self-portrait and we laughed about it and that's all I remember about that." Georgia O'Keeffe in *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973): 212-213.

¹⁵⁵This work is reproduced in *G O'K* (1976) as plate 31. It was first reproduced in *The Dial*, vol. 79, August, 1925, p. 120.

¹⁵⁶De Meyer met Stieglitz sometime between 1905 and 1906. His photographs were first exhibited at 291 (with those of George H. Seeley) in Jan.-Feb., 1907. He received 291 solo shows in Feb. 1909, and in Dec.-Jan. 1911-1912. Seven of his photographs were published in *Camera Work* No. 24, Oct. 1908, and in 1912 an entire section of *Camera Work* was given over to 14 of his photogravures (No. 40). The friendship between de Meyer and Stieglitz was unusual in that it never faltered. De Meyer died Jan. 6, 1949, by then almost forgotten in his profession. For more monographic information, see *De Meyer*, edited by Robert Brandau, essay by Philippe Jullian (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1976.)

¹⁵⁷"The De Meyer and Coburn Exhibitions", *Camera Work* 27 (July, 1909): 29.

¹⁵⁸Two of Stieglitz's letters in particular reveal his aesthetic regard for de Meyer: "[De Meyer's] work is distinguished, and the medium is fully mastered from one point of view. His work is sincere. No man cannot see beyond himself. Should De Meyer develop personally his work will develop with him." (Stieglitz to Hartmann, 22 Dec. 1911. YCAL.) "Outside of Baron De Meyer, who is here in New York very busy photographing society, and doing it in a masterful fashion, I see none of the photographers ... because they have not developed mentally but have stood still during the past six or seven years." Stieglitz to Ward Muir, 30 Jan. 1913, YCAL.

¹⁵⁹*G O'K* (1976), text opposite plate 31.

¹⁶⁰A letter from Stieglitz to Anderson would seem to confirm O'Keeffe's see-saw state of mind during this intensively creative period: "... Georgia has her ups and downs—if she could only tone down and not be upset by so many meaningless things." (Sept. 5, 1924) Newberry.

¹⁶¹This 18 x 12 oil appeared in O'Keeffe's 1924 Anderson Galleries show as *Pears*.

- ¹⁶²This curious, small (9 x 15), privately owned oil also appeared in her 1924 Anderson Galleries show. I first saw it in a Zabriskie Gallery exhibition titled *Alfred Stieglitz and An American Place: 1929-1946*.
- ¹⁶³Stieglitz, as quoted by Harry Tyrrell in *Camera Work* 48 (October, 1916): 20.
- ¹⁶⁴See Greenough, *Art Journal*, Spring 1981, p. 48.
- ¹⁶⁵Waldo Frank [Searchlight], "White Paint and Good Order," *Time Exposures* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926): 35.
- ¹⁶⁶The relationship between O'Keeffe and Anderson deserves much more investigation than this thesis permits. She wrote him ten extraordinarily candid letters between 1923 and 1924. (All are in the Sherwood Anderson papers, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.) Stieglitz's own letters to Anderson reveal that she even gave him some painting lessons. Five out of six of Stieglitz's 1923 photographs of Anderson are posed in front of her paintings. (Three have *Lake George with Crows* in the background, and the other two show a portion of *City Night*.) In her (undated) letters to Anderson, O'Keeffe often expressed the pleasure she felt in reading his work—possibly recognizing in it a style as deceptively simple and spare as that of her own painting. In sum, the letters disclose that she felt she was writing to a kindred spirit. But Anderson never really responded in kind (his letters to Stieglitz are much more forthcoming), and this may be why O'Keeffe's simply stopped.
- ¹⁶⁷O'Keeffe to Anderson, letter no. 6, c. early fall, 1924. Newberry.
- ¹⁶⁸De Casseres, "The Unconscious in Art", *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911): 17.
- ¹⁶⁹De Zayas, "Modern Art Theories and Representation", *Camera Work* 44 (October 1913): 14.
- ¹⁷⁰Hartley, 291 catalogue statement, 1914.
- ¹⁷¹Reprint of B. P. Stevenson's interview with Alfred Stieglitz in the "Evening Post", *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 45.
- ¹⁷²For the details on this decision, and its advantages for both artists, see S. D. L., pp. 276-287.
- ¹⁷³In a letter to Pollitzer from Texas dated 14 Jan. 1916, O'Keeffe wrote "There is something wonderful about the bigness and the loneliness [sic] and the windyness of [Texas] ... *next to New York its the finest thing I know .*" (Italics added.)

- 174B. Vladimir Berman, "She Painted the Lily and Got \$25,000 and Fame for doing It!" *New York Evening Graphic*, Magazine Section (Sat., May 12, 1928): 3-m. This significant article on O'Keeffe is in the Mitchell Kennerley papers, New York Public Library.
- 175Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 28 August, 1920, YCAL.
- 176Stieglitz to Hamilton Easter Field, 16 Nov. 1920, YCAL.
- 177Stieglitz to Anderson, 9 Dec. 1925. Newberry. There are other letters in this isolation vein, such as the one he wrote to Rebecca Strand; "I feel more & more 'out' of New York—may be 'out' of the so-called world." (4 March, 1925, YCAL.)
- 178*Brooklyn Bridge* (1949) would seem to be the major exception to this rule.
- 179Stieglitz to Weston, 3 Sept. 1938. Published in Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 218.
- 180See, for example, *G O'K* (1976) text opposite plate 17. The 291 idea of the "masculinity" of New York may have begun in March, 1910, when Stieglitz presented an exhibition of "Younger American Painters" that included Maurer, Hartley, Marin, Dove, Weber and Carles—most of whom were obsessed with painting the modernity of the city. And John Marin's frankly muscular language in the catalogue statement for his 1913 exhibition no doubt contributed to this idea. "I see great forces at work; great movements; the large buildings and the small buildings; the warring of great and small ... Feelings are aroused which give me the desire to express the reaction of these 'pull forces,' those influences which play with one another." Reprinted in *Camera Work* 42-43 (April-July, 1913): 18.
- 181A. W. Dow papers, AAA, frame 1096-7. Excerpts from a lecture to the Eastern Art Teachers Association meeting, Pittsburgh, 1909. All of Dow's speeches were composed of the ideas he taught to his students, and this remarkably predictive one would have been no exception.
- 182On this history, for example, see Richard Pare, *Photography and Architecture: 1839-1939*, Centre Canadien D'Architecture (distributed by Callaway Editions, 1982.)
- 183On this topic see Ada Louis Huxtable, "The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered," *The New Criterion*, 1 (November, 1982) 3: 1-25.
- 184See Cervin Robinson and Rosemary Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975): 12. See

also, W. Parker Chase, *New York The Wonder City: 1932* (New York: The Wonder City Publishing Co., 1932.)

¹⁸⁵This pastel of Dove's was exhibited at 291 in 1912, and at the Forum Exhibition (which O'Keeffe saw) in 1916.

¹⁸⁶Walt Whitman, "A Song for Occupations," *Leaves of Grass*, The First (1855) Edition, England: (Penguin Books, 1959): 92.

¹⁸⁷Writing on Stieglitz's late nineteenth century night photographs in *Photography as a Fine Art*, Caffin speaks of "the combined effects of brilliant and of diffused light," and says that *An Icy Night* "amply justifies [Stieglitz's] contention that a certain amount of 'halation' (the muzzy halo surrounding some of the lights) is true to facts and pictorially pleasant," (p. 45.) The first night photographs of street light reflections on wet pavement were made by the English photographer Paul Martin in February, 1896. Stieglitz saw these, and began his own experiments with New York at night in 1897. For information on Paul Martin (1864-1944) see *The Golden Age of Photography: 1839-1900*. Ed. by Mark Haworth-Booth (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1984): 184.

¹⁸⁸For a lucid discussion of halation, its causes and prevention, see C. I. Jacobson & R. E. Jacobson, *A Focal Manual of Photo-Technique: Developing The Negative Technique* (London & New York: Focal Press, 1970): 56-60. I am indebted to Simon Heifetz for my knowledge of this useful source.

¹⁸⁹For photographic illustrations, see *Ibid*, pp. 186-187.

¹⁹⁰There are three canvases from this year according to the 1966 catalogue raisonné. They are Barn (7 x 7), *The Barns, Lake George* (once *Side of the Barn No. 1*) and *Lake George with Barns*, (first, *Side of the Barn, No. 2*.) The latter is the best-known of the three, although O'Keeffe thinks that the small one was "maybe the best." (*G O'K*, 1976, text opposite plates 44 and 45.)

¹⁹¹O'Keeffe to Kennerley, 20 Jan. 1929, Kennerley papers, NYPL.

¹⁹²On this topic see Ansel Adams, *The Negative* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1948): 104-105, 109-110.

¹⁹³Reproduced, tellingly, on the same page of her 1976 book with *Lake George Barns*, as plates 44 and 45.

¹⁹⁴In 1927, she painted *Red Barn in Wheat Field* (9 x 12), in 1928 *Red Barn, Wisconsin* (24 1/8 x 37 1/8) during a four week visit to her old aunts there, and in 1929, *Lake George Barn*. There is also a notation of a huge mural (11'2" x 35'2"), apparently based on *Red Barn*,

- Wisconsin*, in the 1966 catalogue raisonné. Of these later works I have seen only the bright and cheerful *Red Barn, Wisconsin* .
- ¹⁹⁵Stieglitz to Dove, 11 June, 1929, YCAL.
- ¹⁹⁶For a classic discussion of the iconic element in Symbolist painting, see Rookmaaker, pp. 204-210.
- ¹⁹⁷On the problems of convergence with view-cameras and their corrections, see *Photography with Large-Format Cameras* (Rochester, New York: Eastman Kodak Company, 1977): 19-20, 24-26.
- ¹⁹⁸On this condition, its distortions, and its advantageous aspects, see Adams, *The Negative*, pp. 53-56.
- ¹⁹⁹*G O'K* (1976) text opposite plates 18 and 19.
- ²⁰⁰Stieglitz to Anderson, 9 Aug. 1925. Newberry. "The huge machine" remark probably refers to the art market, and Stieglitz's worry that O'Keeffe may have been sailing upstream—compared, say, to what the "Immaculates" Sheeler, Demuth, Lozowick and Joseph Stella—later called the Precisionists—were doing.
- ²⁰¹I am indebted for some of my points here to Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore, *Body, Memory and Architecture*, New Haven: (Yale University Press, 1977): 37-44.
- ²⁰²This work followed the little known *A Street in New York* (1926), first titled *Street, New York, No. 1* . They were, in fact, a series of two, as *City Night* was exhibited at the Intimate Gallery in 1927 as *Street, New York, No.2* . In the former, the canyon effect is more marked, but the convergence almost non-existent.
- ²⁰³I know this for certain, because in 1979, when the Shelton was being refurbished as the Halloran House, I received permission to visit Suite 3003, and took a series of photographs out of O'Keeffe and Stieglitz's windows, and also from the 30th floor of 777 3rd Avenue (the new building that now blocks their once clear view of the river), using a normal focal length lens and telephotos of three different strengths. Stieglitz's photograph must have been taken with his 180 mm Goertz Double Anastigmatic.
- ²⁰⁴*East River, New York, No. II*, owned by Flora Stieglitz Straus, who most generously allowed me to photograph it—and her other O'Keeffes.
- ²⁰⁵For more details on the construction and cultural reception of this building, see Elizabeth Duvert, "Georgia O'Keeffe's 'Radiator Building': Icon of Glamorous Gotham," *Places* , Boston, MIT Press,

Vol. 2, No. 2 (1985): 3-17. Duvert links O'Keeffe's painting with the transformation going on in the city streets, but she does not mention photography. She also sees *Radiator Building* as a celebration and parody of the city's new commercial image, but did not notice O'Keeffe's self-portrait on it. It should also be noted that Seligmann has written that O'Keeffe's painting was derived from "four years of study" of the motif. (Herbert J. Seligmann, "Georgia O'Keeffe", typescript essay, YCAL.)

²⁰⁶In a letter to Dudley Johnson on 25 June 1924, Stieglitz described New York as "a magnificently *diabolical* place", Royal Photographic Society.

²⁰⁷Gelett Burgess, *Camera Work* 37, (January 1912): 46.

²⁰⁸Coburn's pictorial photographs had been published in *Camera Work* No. 6 (April 1904), No. 15 (July 1906), and No. 21 (January 1908). Stieglitz, however, took against Coburn personally around 1910 because he tried to take too much credit for the Lumière process in London, and for other reasons well enough described by Mike Weaver in *Alvin Langdon Coburn 1882-1966, Man of Mark*, The Royal Photographic Society, England (1982): 5-6. Stieglitz's opinion of Coburn's later work may have reflected this personal animosity. In a letter to Dudley Johnson of 24 June 1924, Stieglitz wrote "I do believe Coburn had it in him to be much more than he is", Royal Photographic Society.

O'Keeffe surely knew that Coburn had attended Dow's Summer School of Art at Ipswich, Massachusetts in 1903, and that the two men felt close enough to each other to have visited the Grand Canyon together in 1911.

²⁰⁹Three of these are: *East River From the Shelton*, *East River from the 30th Story of the Shelton Hotel* (New Britain Museum), and *River, New York*.

²¹⁰O'Keeffe to Kennerley 20 Jan. 1929, Kennerley papers, NYPL.

²¹¹During her 14th year, O'Keeffe was taught by Dominican nuns, and she later attended the Chatham Episcopal Institute for two years. Her formative period would thus have included an easy familiarity with traditional religious art.

²¹²*G O'K* (1976), text opposite plate 20.

²¹³See, for example, Milton W. Brown, "Cubist-Realism: An American Style," *Marsyas*, III (1946): 139-60; Martin L. Friedman, *The Precisionist View in American Art*, (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1960): 11-52; Susan Fillin Yeh, *The Precisionist Painters, 1916-1949: Interpretations of a Mechanical Age*, (Huntington, N.Y., Heckscher Museum, 1978): 9-15; Karen Tsujimoto, *Images of American Precisionist Painting and Modern Photography*, (Seattle: University of

- Washington Press, 1982): 13-106; Rick Stewart, "Charles Sheeler, William Carlos Williams and Precisionism: A Redefinition." *Arts Magazine* (November 1983): 111-112.
- ²¹⁴Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades* (1931) Dover Publications Inc., (New York, 1971): 65.
- ²¹⁵Bragdon often linked Lincoln's life, Whitman's poetry, and Sullivan's architecture with "the spirit of democracy." See his *Architecture and Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918): 148. This book is full of direct quotes from Sullivan.
- ²¹⁶It is of no small interest that this particular speech of Sullivan's was reprinted in its entirety in the Stieglitz—Norman periodical *Twice A Year*, No. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1939): 109-121. The editors' comment: "Burning and true words in 1900. Burning and true, still, in 1939."
- ²¹⁷In 1932, O'Keeffe was invited by the Museum of Modern Art to submit a design for their spring mural exhibition. She accepted, and titled her three panel design *Manhattan*. (The sketch is reproduced in *The American Magazine of Art* 25, August, 1932: 97.) These skyscraper forms look more Precisionist in their jagged linearity than anything else she ever did. The design was well received, but led to the traumatic episode of her abortive mural project for Radio City, and subsequent mental breakdown. (On this, see L.L., pp. 203-206.)
- ²¹⁸For a study of this culture and its architecture, see Vincent Scully, *Pueblo/Mountain, Village, Dance*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1975.)
- ²¹⁹O'Keeffe to Stettheimer, 24 August, 1929. Art Institute of Chicago. For an on-the-spot observer's account of O'Keeffe's 1929 summer in New Mexico, see Mabel Dodge Luhan, "Georgia O'Keeffe in Taos," *Creative Art* (June, 1931): 407-410. The prodigious amount of work that O'Keeffe accomplished in those four months may be seen in nineteen canvases: *Trees at Glorietta New Mexico*; *Taos Pueblo, New Mexico*; *Ranchos Church, I, N. M.*; *Ranchos Church, II, N. M.*; *Ranchos Church, III, N. M.*; *After a Walk Back at Mabel's, N. M.*; *White Flower, N. M.*; *Two Yellow Flowers, N. M.*; *Gray Cross with Blue*; *Black Cross with Stars and Blue*; *Black Cross with Red Sky*; *Black Cross, Arizona*; *After the Las Vegas Rodeo, N. M.*; *Pine Tree with Stars at Brett's, N. M.*; *Trees by Camp at Bear Lake, N. M.*; *The Wooden Virgin*; *Porcelain Rooster*; *Sand Hills, N. M.*; *Sand Hills, Alcalde, N. M.*
- ²²⁰Such tenuous images as Redon's *The Light of Day* (1891) and *The Reader* (1892) were undoubtedly known to O'Keeffe, and perhaps, also, Mallarmé's poem *Les Fenêtres* (1863), which speaks so powerfully of liberation from the quotidian.

- 221 Among the works O'Keeffe could easily have been familiar with are Cézanne's *Card Player* series (1890-1892), Van Gogh's 1889 views from his window in the Saint-Rémy asylum, and countless other works using windows by painters of the late 19th century—even if only through reproduction.
- 222 *Camera Work*, July 1903, 3: 14.
- 223 *Ibid*, July 1928, 23: 41.
- 224 *Ibid*, October 1906, 16: 29.
- 225 *Ibid*, October 1907, 20: 43, 41.
- 226 Matisse's unusually abstract *Open Window at Collioure* (1914) is the one work which might be compared to O'Keeffe's *Lake George Window*. Their formal similarities are quite startling, and both have a despairing quality due to their opaqueness, and sombre, black-dominated palettes. (Matisse's uncharacteristic work may have reflected his anguish over the onset of World War I.) It is extremely unlikely that O'Keeffe knew of Matisse's painting. It was owned by a private collector in Paris until recently, and was not exhibited in the United States until 1966. It belongs now to The Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.
- 227 O'Keeffe may have known Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* (1920), his visual pun based upon a miniature (door-like) French window, with panes covered over in black leather. She and Stieglitz were great admirers of Duchamp, and his alter-ego "Rose Selavy."

CHAPTER EIGHT

O'KEEFFE AND THE 291 PHOTOGRAPHY OF STRAND, SHEELER AND STEICHEN

Photography['s] ... uniqueness of means ... is an absolute unqualified objectivity ... It is in the organization of this objectivity that the photographer's point of view toward Life enters in, and where formal conception born of the emotions, the intellect, or of both, is as inevitably necessary for him, before an exposure is made, as for a painter, before he puts brush to canvas. The objects may be organized to express the causes of which they are the effects, or they may be used as abstract forms to create an emotion unrelated to the objectivity as such.

Paul Strand (1917)¹

Charles Sheeler, one of America's most distinguished young modern painters (this includes all under 60) also photographs. No one considering his work questions his paintings and drawings as ranking amongst the most interesting of their type in America today. To me his photographs are of equal importance. He is always an artist. He has done things with photography that he could not do with painting and vice versa.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1922)²

In those early days, a photographer came to Paris and knew us all. He was Steichen. He had been one of Stieglitz's men and came over excited about photography. Pretty soon he decided that ordinary painting did not interest him; one could do all that with photography. That is to say, that the photographs of pictures looked just like photographs of real landscapes or of still lifes if they were good pictures. There must be something else, and so he became very interested in modern painting and was one of those who told Stieglitz and the rest of them all about it.

Gertrude Stein (1934)³

Between 1919 and 1929, as should already be clear, O’Keeffe took many different qualities and values from photography and bent them, sometimes almost out of recognition, to her own purposes. Although Stieglitz’s work and ideas were unquestionably the most powerful sources for her art during this period, she also looked hard at the photographs of his three greatest colleagues, Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, and Edward Steichen. Her references to their work seem to have been made for aesthetic or formal reasons, rather than iconographic ones (as with Stieglitz). But they still add significantly to our understanding of the different needs she had while developing her mature style.

O’Keeffe and Strand

O’Keeffe first saw Strand’s photographs when she came to New York from Texas for her 291 solo show during June, 1917. We know this—and their initial effect on her—from a letter she wrote to Pollitzer:

Did you ever meet Paul Strand? Dorothy [True] and I both fell for him. He showed me lots and lots of prints—photographs—and I almost lost my mind over them—photographs that are as queer in shapes as Picasso’s drawings.⁴

Strand had visited 291 first as a student in 1907, but it was not until 1913-1914 that he became attentive to the exhibitions there of the modern European masters, and to experiment with their formal solutions in his photography.

I would ask myself, what do Picasso and those other painters mean? Why do they do it that way?⁵

During 1915, Strand brought his photographs to Stieglitz for criticism, and by 1916 he had become a full-fledged member of the 291 circle. Stieglitz gave him

a one-man show at 291 during that March, and as a follow-up published six of his photographs in *Camera Work* No. 48, and eleven more of them in *Camera Work* No. 49/50.⁶

Strand's last, and most radical, experiments with abstraction apparently took place during the summer of 1916 at Twin Lakes, Connecticut. As he said

... The simplest of subject matter, or maybe object matter would be a better term in this case—such as kitchen bowls, cups, plates, pieces of fruit, a table, a chair, the railing of the porch, the shadows of the railing of the porch—things as simple as that were my material for making experiments to find out what an abstract photograph might be, and to understand what an abstract painting really was.⁷

After O'Keeffe left New York to return to Texas, she and Strand corresponded for about a year (1917-1918).⁸ In one of her letters she told him that his work had made her look at objects in a new way, and that she had hung up his New York snow scene (from *Camera Work* 48: 31) where she could see it often.⁹ What may have appealed to her especially about this particular photograph was its Dow-like opposition of curves and straight lines, and variety of diagonals. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to find nothing extant of O'Keeffe's that shows an "adoptive" or "adaptive" use of it. (Her 1919 charcoal, *Black Diagonal*, is clearly based upon her own 1916 *Abstraction*, owned by the Addison Gallery.) The possibility exists, of course, that she *did* make some experiments with Strand's photographs between 1917-1918—and then destroyed them, along with many of her other early abstractions.

Strand has been habitually cited as the primary source for O'Keeffe's close-up plant forms.¹⁰ Nevertheless, all of the visual evidence available (and datable) suggests that Strand's influence on these images was indirect, at best, and that whatever does exist was filtered first through Stieglitz.¹¹ As to this last, there

is little doubt any more that Stieglitz's earliest close-ups of O'Keeffe were, to a large degree, triggered by Strand's new "brutally direct"¹² prism portraits and abstract still lifes.

O'Keeffe's formal, and perhaps emotional, influence on Strand's photography has received very little attention. Some examples of this are worth examining here, even though more may be revealed about Strand than O'Keeffe in the process. Again, a lot is owed to Stieglitz. There is, for instance, Strand's *Rock, Port Lorne, Nova Scotia* of 1920, (Plate 120.) about which he has written: "I couldn't have done the rocks without having seen Braque, Picasso and Brancusi."¹³ He does not go on to mention O'Keeffe or Stieglitz, although the compositional similarities between *Rock* and Stieglitz's 1919 "abstract" portrait of O'Keeffe's breasts and torso¹⁴ (Plate 121.) are so close that they can only have been deliberate. To be precise, the tubular shapes made by O'Keeffe's cropped arms, the breasts themselves, and even the dark region of her pubic hair, are echoed by Strand's rock forms in a manner as calculated as it is uncanny.

It is possible to argue that *Rock* is Strand's own abstract portrait of O'Keeffe—once removed. A portrait that is well within the old 291/de Zayas/Picabia tradition, but with new, if disguised, resonance.¹⁵ It is also instructive, on several levels, to compare this photograph with one Strand took of O'Keeffe during the spring of 1918, when Stieglitz sent him to Texas to bring her back to New York. (Plate 122.) Strand was twenty six, she was twenty nine. By all accounts he was in love with her then, and apparently remained so for a long time afterward.¹⁶ However much O'Keeffe may have "fallen" for Strand right after they met, this photograph certainly suggests that she felt emotionally indifferent to him a year later. Her eyes glance to one side, and her body leans to the other, as if she were impatient to get away. Complete frontality needs a subject's cooperation,

unless a false lens is used, and it is significant, by comparison, that O'Keeffe had no trouble gazing into Stieglitz's camera from the very beginning.

The real question is why Strand chose to make a photograph like *Rock*, despite its still painful associations for him? We may never know for certain, but several things combine to suggest a reason. First, Stieglitz constantly urged Strand to photograph from his *own* inner experience—and worried increasingly that he wasn't.¹⁷ While *Rock* is clearly based upon one of Stieglitz's own pictures, the actual subject did hold a deep personal meaning for the younger photographer. Second, Strand's goals for himself at the time were essentially those of 291, as his writings show. For example:

Above all, look at the things around you, the immediate world around you. If you are alive, it will mean something to you, and if you care enough about photography, and if you know how to use it, you will want to photograph that meaningfulness ... There are no shortcuts, no formulae, no rules except those of your own living.¹⁸

Finally, there can be little doubt that even while Stieglitz was calling for self expression within his circle of artists, he was also encouraging *communal* expression. (An effort that would culminate in The Seven Americans show.) Strand may therefore have felt something of an obligation to draw upon Stieglitz's photography—as Dove also seems to have done.¹⁹ At stake, as Stieglitz himself saw it, was nothing less than the creation, by his circle, of powerful new cultural symbols for America.

That Strand was disappointed with his treatment in the Seven Americans show has already been recorded. Perhaps, by this time, he was also becoming aware that trying to conform to the Romantic/Symbolist spirit of 291 went against his own more literal grain. Certainly this was becoming increasingly plain to

Stieglitz. “I realize more and more how far removed I am from what Strand is doing,” he wrote (not without censure) to Seligmann in 1927.²⁰

Despite his growing alienation from 291 and its concerns, Strand continued to refer to images of and by O’Keeffe until well into the ’thirties. There are at least two (albeit rarefied) instances in his Maine photographs of 1928. One is *Toadstool and Grasses*, (Plate 123.) which evidently took much of its inspiration from Stieglitz’s 1917 close-up of O’Keeffe’s hands posed against one of her early abstract charcoals. (Plate 124.) The shape of Strand’s solitary toadstool—even its position—is an astonishingly close match for the foetus-like form in her drawing. The other photograph is *Driftwood*, (Plate 125.) with its more subtle (because of having to be turned upside down) references to O’Keeffe’s *Music—Pink and Blue I* of 1919. (Plate 126.) Why, in 1928, Strand should have borrowed from two of O’Keeffe’s most signatred forms constitutes a puzzle still to be explained.²¹

There is an even thornier and more important question: Why *didn’t* O’Keeffe “adopt”, “adapt” or “innovate” from Strand’s work during and after 1919?²² The question is particularly acute since we now know that she did from practically every other major 291 photographer. Although the court is out on the matter until her correspondence with Strand and Stieglitz is available to scholarship, several possibilities present themselves. By this time O’Keeffe may have felt inhibited about taking direct ideas from Strand because his sentiments toward her had become both embarrassing and unwelcome. There are signs, moreover, in Stieglitz’s correspondence that she had come to feel a real personal antipathy for the rather stiff and solemn Strand.²³ Nevertheless, O’Keeffe’s paintings do have some indirect affinities with Strand’s photographs—perhaps because of her determination to attain objectivity. For instance, several of their most pivotal images were done in the same locales—although not at the same time. It was Strand who went first to Nova Scotia (1920), although O’Keeffe knew and loved New Mexico (1917) and

Maine (1920) before he did. Again, the evidence is strong that when there were borrowings, they came from Strand—not O’Keeffe. Two familiar comparisons may suffice here: O’Keeffe’s *Ranchos Church* (1930) and Strand’s *Ranchos de Taos Church* (1931); O’Keeffe’s *Cross By The Sea, Canada* (1932) and Strand’s *Cross, Gaspé* (1936).²⁴ In both these cases, the compositional similarities are too obvious for further comment.²⁵

In addition to the above, the painter and the photographer were frequently drawn to the same spare type of man-made structure: solitary buildings (such as barns and churches), crosses, the isolated details of windows and doors.²⁶ They were also quite partial to gardens, driftwood, storm clouds, trees, and the complicated intersection between earth and sky. Neither took a serious interest in imaging the nude. And both tended to identify American art with the American landscape—as did every one but Sheeler in Stieglitz’s inner circle during the twenties.

In sum, we can say that whatever O’Keeffe and Strand may have felt about each other personally, each had a “real respect” for the other’s work, even though this was expressed at different times, and in dissimilar ways.

O’Keeffe and Sheeler

It is highly probable that O’Keeffe saw Sheeler’s earliest concrete/abstract photographs (the so-called *Doylestown House* series of twelve interiors, c. 1914-1917) before Strand showed her his “queer” Picasso-like prints at 291 in June, 1917. A letter from Stieglitz to Sheeler, dated 1 March, 1917, seems to confirm that this was indeed the case:

Of course I received those beautiful prints long ago, on time. *And the young lady was delighted with them ...* when you come to New York will you

bring along the negatives as I'd like to pick out a few from which I'd like to have photogravures made for *Camera Work*.²⁷ (Italics added.)

As is well known, Stieglitz had planned to publish a last issue of *Camera Work* during 1917 in order to feature O'Keeffe's drawings and watercolors and Sheeler's *Doylestown* series—a project for his newest protégés that never came off. It therefore seems likely that “the young lady” referred to in the letter was O'Keeffe. It is also reasonably certain that she saw Sheeler's photographs well before she met the man.²⁸

Real work on the hard to analyze artistic relationship between O'Keeffe and Sheeler has scarcely begun, and most of it lies beyond the scope of this thesis.²⁹ Nevertheless, a few observations are in order as to the significance of Sheeler's photography for O'Keeffe.

We already know from her 1922 article for *Manuscripts* that she considered Sheeler's photographs of “equal importance” to his “most interesting” paintings and drawings. And since he remained committed to both mediums, she doubtless felt a special curiosity during the first crucial years of her own creative synthesis. What, then, did O'Keeffe take from Sheeler's camera work?

Before tackling this question, it may be instructive to consider Sheeler's own strongly held opinions on the distinctions between painting and photography.

Although he declined, in 1922, to express his opinion on whether a photograph can have the significance of art, (“For me it would be like a fish who, wishing to demonstrate his pleasure in a seafaring life, came out on the beach.”³⁰) Sheeler did put down some thoughts on the matter fifteen years later in his unpublished *Autobiography*.

Among other qualities peculiar to it *photography has the capacity for accounting for things seen in the visual world with an exactitude for their differences which no other medium can*

approximate ... Photography is rather seen from the eyes outward, painting from the eyes inward. Photography records inalterably the single image while painting records a plurality of images wilfully directed by the artist ... The image which the camera records is that which its eye has seen during the fraction of a second that it is looking. This has to do with esthetics. The time elapsing between the conception of a painting and the final evidence of fulfillment is necessarily immeasurably longer. This has to do with the mechanics of painting ... Because of these differences between the two processes in delivering their final results ... it would seem to make the encroachment of one upon the territory of the other impossible. For those reasons I came more and more to value photography for those things which it alone could accomplish, rather than to discredit it for the things which could only be achieved through another medium .³¹ (Italics added.)

It is a well known fact that Sheeler became a commercial photographer in 1912 so that he could afford to go on painting. His early professional work consisted mainly of building exteriors and interiors for a Philadelphia architectural firm, and (more lucratively) photographs of works of art for dealers and collectors—Knoedler and Albert Barnes among them.³² When de Zayas opened the Modern Gallery in 1915, he hired Sheeler as an assistant to record the exhibition stock. Sheeler's photographs of African wooden sculpture from de Zayas's personal collection were published by him in a separate portfolio in 1917. And during that same year, the Modern Gallery exhibited Sheeler's creative photographs twice: the first time (April) was a group show with Schamberg and Strand, but the second (December) was a solo presentation of his twelve Doylestown house prints.³³

That Sheeler himself considered these prints to be "art" (as against his ongoing commercial photography) is very clear from a letter he wrote to Stieglitz late in 1917.

About the photographs of my house, which I am glad to hear you liked—de Zayas was quite keen about them and proposes to make a show of the set (12) following ... the present Derain show. *I decided that because of something personal which I was trying to work out in them that they were probably more akin to drawing than to my photographs of paintings and sculptures* and that it would be better to put them on a different basis—to make only three sets.³⁴ (Italics added.)

Sheeler's artistic interest in the American colonial architecture of Bucks County began around 1910, when he and Morton Schamberg first rented the so-called "Doylestown house" together. That this "Pennsylvania Dutch" (Deutsch) fieldstone farmhouse came to hold a particular imaginative power for Sheeler—long after he had ceased to go there—is clear from its frequent re-appearance in his paintings of the nineteen thirties and forties. A major example is the familiar 1943 self portrait, *An Artist Looks at Nature*, which shows him in the act of drawing a variation on his photograph *Interior With a Stove* (c. 1914-15).

Sheeler began to photograph the 1768 Doylestown house, more accurately known as the Jonathan Worthington House³⁵, around 1914. Of the twelve interior pictures known to exist (c. 1914-1917), only six have ever been reproduced.³⁶

The six known Doylestown house interiors contain perhaps the earliest evidence of Sheeler's individual vision—one that was fully intended to be both objective and abstract. (Steichen's often quoted statement from the 'thirties that Sheeler "was objective before the rest of us were"³⁷ would seem to be quite accurate.) Certainly the critics who first saw these photographs in 1917 understood clearly what he was about.

Charles Sheeler, a disciple of modernism, has evolved a new advocacy for that cult by submitting typical pictorial puzzles to the exactions of the camera. Strange forms employed by the modernists, regarded generally as abstract, fantastic or imaginative, find now a kindly mechanical

interpreter, for the photographs shown are surely of real and sane things, true in line and graceful in form and otherwise good, plain pictures. *Sheeler says his object has been to prove that the principal elements in modern art are sensorial and exist in nature; and that the impersonal lens has furnished proof of fundamental truths in modern art*. It is an instructive exhibition.³⁸ (Italics added.)

Sheeler may have begun to borrow from his own photography for his paintings and drawings as early as 1917, with the conté crayon Pennsylvania barn series.³⁹ Despite this, however, and despite his avowed creative intent for the Doylestown house prints—and their turning point in his own development—none of his paintings were based upon them until c. 1923-1931.⁴⁰

The first painter to experiment with some of the visual ideas in these landmark photographs seems to have been Georgia O’Keeffe. Among her “new oils” of 1919 was *Fifty-ninth Street Studio* (Plate 127.), and if we compare this work to Sheeler’s *Stairwell* of c. 1914 (Plate 128.), it is clear the painting owes a great deal to the photograph.

To start with, the subject matter is the same: an isolated detail of the artist’s studio. Sheeler presents a view of the underside of his wooden staircase, and O’Keeffe a small windowed “darker room” as seen from her “bright” workplace.⁴¹ It is common knowledge that Sheeler used a longer than normal focal length lens for his Doylestown series to minimize the perspective of convergence. Also known is that he trained a spot light on his interiors with frankly Cubist intent, i.e., to bring out the hard-edged geometric planes, and to equalize positive and negative space. In truth, the forms in *Stairwell* have been made so relative, through lighting and forced perspective, that it is difficult to distinguish up from down, inside from outside.

O’Keeffe’s painting is also an ambiguous image of intimate space. And she has turned her motif into abstract pattern by using the same type of spatial

compression as Sheeler. For instance, she seems to have deliberately reversed his spot-lighting: the core of her picture is dark, and its framing elements light. She has also revised the blackness of his flat L-shaped shadow, enlarging it, and turning it upside down so that it reads as the dark area surrounding her window. Even so, much remains ungraspable about this experimental work. Why are the upper and lower regions so contradictory in their use of perspective? (The top part is two-dimensional, but the bottom suggests deep space—due to the arbitrary, and perplexing, convergent forms.) Why does the apparent doorframe curl away from the wall at its edges—as if it were a poster, or a matted photograph? Did she, in fact, hang a print of *Stairwell* upside down on the wall—the better to contemplate its tight polarity—and then transpose her own findings? This is not so farfetched as it might seem since we know that O’Keeffe hung a photograph of Strand’s on her wall for study purposes. Also, by 1919 she was obviously aware that view cameras present their images upside down on the ground glass, and that this often enriches and purifies a photographer’s eye for abstract design. (There can be little question that Sheeler found this to be so.⁴²) In any case, she seems to have understood what Sheeler himself was after. For by basing the structural design of her paintings on his empty L-shaped shadow form, she was making her own investigation of his theory, as a photographer, that “light is the great designer.”⁴³ Later, in his unpublished 1937 *Autobiography*, he would write that he considered shadows to be “concrete forms as essential to the structure of a picture as the solids appearing in it, rather than being projections from the solids denoting the absence of light.”⁴⁴

From all of the foregoing, there can be little doubt that *Fifty-ninth Street Studio* was directly inspired by Sheeler’s *Stairwell*. But it was also an independent mental invention—not least because of her use of color. Whereas the

actual fifty-ninth street studio was yellow and orange,⁴⁵ O'Keeffe constructed her painting upon a bold and untypical harmonic balance of black, gray, red and blue.

During 1920, Sheeler received a great deal of fresh and positive critical attention. In February, the De Zayas Gallery presented an exhibition of his photographs and watercolors on Bucks county barn and flower themes—both mediums shown together on an equal basis. Reviewing this show, Henry McBride commented that Sheeler's art was "as ascetic as the early Dutch painters," and went on to say that

All who look on photography as a means of expression should see these photographs of barns. They rank among the most interesting productions of the kind that have ever been seen here ... This artist ... emphasizes the things a machine can do better than hands.⁴⁶

All things considered, it is little wonder that O'Keeffe's creative interest in Sheeler's photography rose even higher in 1920. Stieglitz's enthusiasm for it was also at a peak then, which a letter of his to the *New York Herald* well illustrates:

As a fanatic on photoplay I was naturally deeply interested in what you [McBride] said about Sheeler's very fine photography. Sheeler is always the artist.⁴⁷

The warm collegial relationship between the two men would end soon, however—a casualty (in Stieglitz's view) of increasingly opposed value systems.⁴⁸

During 1920, O'Keeffe apparently made at least three charcoals of New York, her first known pictures of the city.⁴⁹ As historic precursors for her cityscapes of the late 'twenties they deserve further study. As stunning drawings in their own right, it can be said that much of their immediate impact comes from her formal references to Sheeler's own first photographs of New York. What are these references and how did she use them? By comparing her charcoal *New York* of c.

1920 (Plate 129.) to Sheeler's print of the same title, and same approximate date, (Plate 130.) we can see some of O'Keeffe's earliest efforts to "mix and match" photography with her art.

Sheeler's *New York* was probably taken during the creative months of 1920, when he was filming *Manhatta* with Strand—who described their joint efforts as "the abstract organization of reality."⁵⁰ *New York* may, in fact, be a still from Sheeler's own original footage. It is, in any case, a photograph redolent with his particular understanding of analytic and synthetic Cubism, i.e., juxtapositions of crisp geometric planes and abstract surface patterns. While it would be easy enough to call O'Keeffe's drawing "Cubist" for these same reasons, Cubism, per se, does not seem to have been her intention. For although her drawing also presents an all-encompassing view from a high vantage point, it is solidly anchored upon a Dow-type diagonal. The photograph, on the other hand, is essentially non-compositional—maintaining its two and three dimensional tension through arbitrary geometric patternings. What seems to have interested O'Keeffe most about Sheeler's picture is his deliberately abstract use of shadows to obscure, and even blot out, architectural outlines and detail. In a word, simplification. As with the *Doylestown House* series, although in a less controlled way, Sheeler relied upon light to design the most important areas of positive and negative space. That O'Keeffe's picture has light and dark shapes in places similar to his photograph—beginning with the large shadowed area in the right foreground—can hardly have been accidental. Sheeler's concentration on the jagged surface rhythms caused by window patterns may also have been an influence on O'Keeffe's drawing, although her windows sometimes seem to take on the imaginative character of musical notation. (This would be seen later, in a more developed form, in *The Shelton with Sunspots*, and *Radiator Building — Night, New York*.)

The third known charcoal of O’Keeffe’s from this period, *New York Rooftops*, seems the most daring in its composition. (Plate 131.) Most of the action (interrelated forms) is at the top, while the bottom part consists of a few bare, monolithic rectangles and one small triangle. In several of the divisions between her middle ground forms, slightly to the left, we can see one of Sheeler’s favorite abstract tricks with light—wide, white rimmed outlines.⁵¹

In a 1920 interview, published in *Vanity Fair*, Sheeler spoke publicly for the first time about the uses of photography in painting—obviously from his own experience. Certain problems baffling to the Modernist painter could, he said, be “partially solved by photography—*particularly those having to do with selection, arrangement, mass, texture and line.*”⁵² (Italics added.) The article was accompanied by a reproduction of Sheeler’s 1915 photograph *Zinnia and Nasturtium Leaves*. (Plate 132.) And if we compare it with O’Keeffe’s small 1920 still life *Zinnias* (Plate 133.) there can be little question that she recast Sheeler’s photographic material, and that she did so with complete understanding that a photograph is no less of a convention than a painting. First of all, she moved her eye even closer to the motif than Sheeler’s lens—cropping his bowl entirely. Although she subtracted his two nasturtium leaves, she added another zinnia in the exact position of the (missing) lower one. Interesting as she found this photograph, she seems to have been looking for ways to rebel against it rather than imitate it. For instance, she kept a portion of the rectangular table, but tilted hers at an angle. She also paid her own attention to shadow design—not Sheeler’s. Most of all, she ignored his “straight,” high contrast presentation of detail. *Her* focus is almost Pictorial—being “soft” and diffused. Despite all these changes, it would be hard to dispute the fundamentally photographic character of *Zinnias*—if not entirely in terms of its “selection, arrangement, mass, texture and line.”⁵³

Aside from O’Keeffe’s respectful remarks about Sheeler’s work in 1922, there is little or nothing to suggest that they ever formed a friendship of their own—even during the years between 1918 and 1923 when Sheeler was a member of Stieglitz’s inner circle. This is odd, in a way, since it is well recorded that O’Keeffe was, and remained, on very good (if different) terms with Dove, Demuth, Hartley and Marin. Although they both valued the sensibility over the intellect,⁵⁴ Sheeler’s personality was, perhaps, even more reticent and secretive than O’Keeffe’s. Apparently, also, he was not at all interested in her paintings—there are no visual signs that *she* ever influenced *him*. (But these same things can also be said of Marin.)

Leaving aside their baffling personal relationship, the aesthetic reasons for Sheeler’s disinterest in O’Keeffe’s work are much clearer. And what they come down to is an artistic philosophy of color and abstraction completely opposed to her own. Not long after his frankly experimental abstract landscapes of 1914, Sheeler returned to recognizable (if reduced) forms—never to leave them again.⁵⁵ Some time later, when considering the question “Am I a colorist?” he said

If you want to look at it in one way I am not. Values undoubtedly come first with me—those relationships of light and shadow by which form is achieved. Color wouldn’t mean very much to me if it didn’t have the structure of values to support it. I mean to use color to enhance form.⁵⁶

It is hardly necessary to say that O’Keeffe’s palette was based on chroma rather than values, and that she used abstraction interchangeably with representation throughout her career. Furthermore, Sheeler’s mature art, photography included, was primarily nourished by the still life tradition, whereas O’Keeffe was, above all, a true Symbolist landscape painter—spiritually committed to the idea of a specific and local “place.”

In summary: For a short period (c. 1919-1921) O’Keeffe did things in her paintings with Sheeler’s prints that he never did himself. While he regarded his photography largely as “a fixative” for his vision,⁵⁷ she used his bare facts, light-designs, and clear, sharp-edged planes for abstract—and poetic—purposes. And she seems to have borrowed from his most advanced prints earlier, and more radically, than he—judging from *Fifty-ninth Street Studio* and *Zinnias*. She also appears to have built upon the visual coherence she saw in his 1920 views of New York for her own first attempts to capture the city with charcoal. It should be mentioned here as well that O’Keeffe’s consciously creative corrections of Sheeler’s photographs—in effect, her disciplined perverseness—is remarkably akin to what Harold Bloom has called “misprision” in poetry.⁵⁸

Critics over the years have described the craftsmanship of both O’Keeffe and Sheeler as “clean-cut,” “immaculate,” “lucent,” “transparent,” “impersonal,” “slick,” “photographic,” and the like.⁵⁹ Although Sheeler was frank to say that he sought the Old Masters’ “concealment of means” rather than the “painty,”⁶⁰ O’Keeffe’s paintings are another—and more complicated—matter. Her conception of painting was never that of a uniform chemical layer “laminated” on its supporting surface, as has sometimes been remarked—especially by those critics who would link her work to Precisionism. Even though her use of the oil medium inclines to be spare and thinly applied, the exquisite and subtle syntax of her brush marks is nearly always visible. These range from the directional (following the outlines and angles of her forms), to the textural (but never corrugated), to the emphatic, to the feathery, to the (infrequently) constructive. Her facture, in short, deserves much more attention and delectation than it has received. Two excellent cases in point are *Black Iris III* (1926) and *Ranchos Church* (1930), both in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Further, it is a little known fact that O’Keeffe often ground her

own pigment. As to this, her friend and colleague Ansel Adams reported from his own firsthand observation that

A lot of [O'Keeffe's] paintings in New Mexico are done from the stones she's just picked up in the desert. [This way] she gets the kind of thing she wants—directly and perceptively.⁶¹

It should be noted, finally, that O'Keeffe never lost her admiration for Sheeler's photography. But his painting, as she put it, years later, "just wasn't my cup of tea."⁶²

"I try" wrote Sheeler, "to arrive at an organization ... in nature. There I stop without trying to give expression any hid [sic] or underlying meanings."⁶³

With O'Keeffe, what you see is never all of what you get—just as she fully intended. But did she, perhaps, think back to Sheeler when, in the 1960's, she came to use some of her own snapshots as "fixatives" for her vision?

The [Abiquiu] road fascinates me with its up and downs and finally its wide sweep as it speeds toward the wall of my hilltop to go past me. I had made two or three snaps of it with a camera. For one of them I turned the camera at a sharp angle to get all the road. It was accidental that I made the road seem to stand up in the air, but it amused me and I began drawing and painting it as a new shape.⁶⁴

O'Keeffe and Steichen

It is clear that O'Keeffe's artistic sensibility operated in a very different sphere from Sheeler's and Strand's. With Steichen, however, the emotional gap was a good deal narrower. He too had been formed by Symbolist principles, and these show up in his photography no less than in his painting—although he never really embraced Modernism, despite his early exposure to it.⁶⁵ In fact, Steichen's early use of the two mediums was often so interchangeable in style and content

(except for the photographic portraits), that in 1904 Sadakichi Hartmann dubbed his prints “paintographs” or “photopaints.”⁶⁶

What drew Steichen’s mind permanently away from the old 291 concerns—including photography as non-commercial, individual artistic expression—were his truly remarkable experiences in the First World War.

In an anguished and prophetic letter to Stieglitz from France, dated 27 August 1914, Steichen wrote of the terrible carnage that had already taken place—his home at Voulangis was only a few miles from the northern front.

[Germany’s] crime is against Humanity. But she will pay—the dearest—and ultimately Humanity will win out ... This blood is not flowing over our souls to deaden us but to give us new life—and faith in humankind—in the genius of man’s soul not in the calculative side of his intellect. If it lasts long and now I fear it will—we will all be ground down in one way or another ... I have never felt as close to my friends as I do now—nor wanted to feel them as close.⁶⁷

This could not have been an easy letter for Stieglitz to receive, with his profound regard for German cultural values. Indeed, it would be the war—and most of all, perhaps, the post-war temper—that finally destroyed their extraordinary friendship.⁶⁸

Before 1914 was out, Steichen returned to America with his family, and did what he could to help Stieglitz with the exhibitions, despite his own strong feeling that 291 was “marking time” instead of making itself a “vast force.”⁶⁹ By his own account, he was present when a roll of drawings arrived, addressed to Stieglitz. As he remembered it:

... we all looked at them. We were dumbfounded. They were a batch of charcoal drawings by Georgia O’Keeffe. In these abstract drawings was a woman who spoke with amazing frankness of herself as a woman.⁷⁰

Steichen volunteered for service, and in 1917 was commissioned a First Lieutenant in the American Expeditionary Force. He was sent to France shortly afterward, and there commanded the Army Signal Corps' pioneer efforts to furnish aerial photographs of combat zones for strategic and intelligence purposes.⁷¹

Steichen's little-known letters to Stieglitz over the next few years do him credit, for they honestly try to keep the lines of communication open with his estranged and, seemingly, side-lined old friend. They are revealing, as well, for their glimpses into his new concerns, and for their polite references to O'Keeffe.

Steichen to Stieglitz, January (no date) 1917.

Well here I am in the famous somewhere in France—hard at it, in a way living through the old experiences of getting 291 on the map—fighting the same kind of battles and games—and once again for photography—only this time it had photography & plus, a surprise that means the lives of men. —I wish I could tell you all about it but naturally that is tabooed ... [Arrived] in time to drop a handful of earth into Rodin's grave—a few days later to stand near Haviland at his marriage to a daughter of Lalique—the same fine Haviland ... full of the fullest appreciation and the realist friendship for you. —I have slept to the rumble and whiz bang of bombardment, seen the men who have lived it for three years and marvelled at them—passed through Voulangis—with a peep into bygone days.⁷²

To Stieglitz, from Paris, c. 1920.

Art—ah art in Paris is exactly the same funeral thing it is in N.Y. The best men have a virility and opulence however that is totally lacking with american [sic] artists—I saw an exhibition the other day by two guys their names sounded Italian. —*Well theirs was a most puerile and painfully futile attempt at what Georgia O'Keeffe gloriously accomplished at least six or eight years ago.* So much for European progress. —Matisse is doing some fine things and like all the others of worth is getting fabulous prices for everything before the paint is even dry ... Brancusi is as fine as ever—a regular Diogenes. Lives by himself & within himself

... He is still struggling on those few things we showed at 291 years ago ... Picasso is doing all kinds of things, some very fine some childishly stupid—all successful beyond imagination—he'll be a millionaire if he keeps it up. Photography—wow—it's awful. (Italics added.)

To Stieglitz, on board SS Olympic, 1921 (n.d.).

It was nice to get your note with its whiff of Lake George autumn ... *I felt particularly worried about O. K.'s eyes—It seems a particularly serious trouble when eyes of people that see are afflicted* . But I hope it's over. —I did not trust myself up at the Lake [George] realizing how small the place was and how much family there was to occupy and permeate it. —But with you & O. K., and the autumn alone, 'twould have been *great* . [Steichen's underlining.] ... Have had a few nice jobs this summer and made a little money to clear up about half of my debts and then keep things going for another 6 months or so. (Italics added.)

From these letters it is certain that O'Keeffe had at least some contact with Steichen during her early years with Stieglitz, and that it was amiable enough—despite the ever deepening strains between the two men.⁷³

Steichen's three-year artistic crisis in Voulangis right after the war is best, if dramatically, summarized in his 1963 photo-biography *A Life in Photography* : The burning of his "wall paper" paintings; the decision to "participate and communicate" with the world only through photography; the experiments with photographic abstraction based upon "universal symbols"; and the new relevance for his work of Einstein's "Time-Space Continuum," and The Golden Section, as well as such pseudo-scientific writings on the "laws of art" as Theodore Cook's *The Curves of Life* (1914) and Jay Hambidge's *The Diagonal* (1919-1920).⁷⁴ (Steichen later believed that he accomplished the most valuable work of his life between 1919-1922, that "the inexorable discipline gave me a new kind of freedom."⁷⁵)

During this same period he made several trips back to New York in order to earn money by exhibiting and selling his paintings.⁷⁶ His efforts were not successful enough, however. In March, 1923, he changed tactics, and joined the Condé Nast Publications in New York as chief photographer. With this entry into the fashion world, his contacts with Stieglitz virtually ceased. (Somewhat ironically, Steichen hired Sheeler to work for Condé Nast in that same year.) From then on, Steichen would act upon his strong belief that "If I can't express the best that's in me through ... advertising photos ... then I'm no good."⁷⁷

What Stieglitz thought about Steichen's defection from all that was held sacred by them both during the 291 years should be recorded here, even though we do not yet know how much of his attitude was shared by O'Keeffe.

Stieglitz to Rosenfeld, 21 October 1923.

I realize more & more why poor Max Weber suffered so when he saw Steichen's paintings and imagined I thought them the alpha & omega of art—which of course I never did. *I did feel something fine in them not as paintings but in spirit ... much hidden by a youthful brazen lack of real knowledge—that to a man like Weber such painting was an insult. But the joke is Weber although always an artist—which Steichen was not—St. was always artistic—sometimes approaching art perhaps—was lacking in a quality which kept him from being that which he so eagerly asserted he was. I often think of Steichen & Weber & my relationship to them & theirs to me. What a youngster I was—so much younger than they.*⁷⁸ (Italics added.)

Stieglitz to Dudley Johnson, 25 June 1924.

Steichen is a terrific worker. And very clever. His work is straight these days. —And to me lacks any inner something to give it life ... Steichen is in every way Coburn's superior ... Steichen was an idealist ... [his] work has vision. Even though much of the work is merely effective, and also decidedly lacking when looked at from the big, universal point of view, that is, critically examined, the "gum" prints are "photographic" history ... Without Steichen I never would have been able to do what I have for

photography. Coburn helped somewhat. *But very little that is in the big sense. And that's the only ultimate sense* . Steichen knew that in helping the cause in my sense he would be helping himself.⁷⁹ (Italics added.)

Many years later, O'Keeffe would write of Stieglitz's tendency to turn upon old colleagues whom he felt had let him down, for one reason or another.

There was such a power when he spoke—people seemed to believe what he said, even when they knew it wasn't their truth ... If they crossed him any way, his power to destroy was as destructive as his power to build—the extremes went together. I have experienced both and survived, but I think I only crossed him when I had to—to survive.⁸⁰

Stieglitz to Haviland, 22 July [c. 1926].

Steichen I have seen once in about eight years [sic]. —Brancusi wanted to see me. Steichen brought him. —Steichen is making over 50,000 a year at photography—chiefly working for a gigantic advertising firm and for Vanity Fair, Vogue etc. Also does portraits. Is a terrific worker as ever.⁸¹

Stieglitz to Haviland, 14 Sept. 1928.

You mustn't send the Steichen [painting]. it has no value. Not at present ... There is no market for him. And that is what I mean by "no value" ... [Steichen] knows his metier [photography] from every angle—At any rate he is fast becoming a rich man. —His goal after he returned from the war. When he has his million (or so) soaked away I hear he intends to paint. So you'll have to wait till then—I fear.⁸²

Steichen always believed that his work as a photographer had a greater influence on his painting than his paintings did on his photography. It is therefore quite logical to ask what he thought of O'Keeffe's art—with its widening array of photo-optic characteristics. Nothing seems to have been recorded on this subject by Steichen (perhaps old loyalties forbade it), but the chances are that he was not

interested enough in her work to follow it closely. He had, after all, never learned to like abstraction—and this was as true for Dove as it had been for Picasso and Picabia.⁸³

It seems inevitable, on the other hand, that O’Keeffe would have found Steichen’s photography of interest. Whether she knew of it or not, he had put in a youthful stint at designing advertisements in Milwaukee even as she had in Chicago.⁸⁴ More importantly, he was well schooled in the decorative two-dimensionality of Art Nouveau, and had chosen (in 1901) to photograph Alphonse Mucha standing before one of his celebrated posters of Sarah Bernhardt, *La Dame Aux Camelias* (1896). Further, O’Keeffe would certainly have been aware of Steichen’s many photographic identifications of women with flowers.⁸⁵

Despite all of this, and despite Steichen’s long and formidable reputation as an artist-photographer, O’Keeffe does not seem to have looked at his camera work for her own ends until 1926-1927. Why she did so at that particular time remains a mystery. Much of the archival material needed to write cogently about the extent of his influence on her painting is still—and may always be—missing. Therefore this section is briefer than it perhaps should be. The visual evidence rests mainly with two paintings and two photographs, but it is very strong.

In 1914, at Voulangis, Steichen made one of his most masterly palladium prints, *Heavy Roses*. (Plate 134.) Although never shown formally at 291, and never published in *Camera Work*, it is quite impossible for O’Keeffe to have been ignorant of this distinguished early close-up. Steichen brought it back to New York with him at the beginning of the war, and it was doubtless well known to everyone connected with 291. Nonetheless, the question persists as to why and how *Heavy Roses* came to O’Keeffe’s sudden creative attention in 1926.⁸⁶ Visual proof that it did so lies in her *Calla Lily with Roses*. (Plate 135.)

In Steichen's photograph, his highly trained horticulturalist eye⁸⁷ joined with his Symbolist sensibility to compose a work doubly rich in analogy and botanical detail. Steichen may have believed with Maeterlinck that "the flower sets man a prodigious example of insubmission, courage, perseverance and ingenuity."⁸⁸ And by choosing a motif as charged with meanings as the rose, he was undoubtedly aware of the many historical and literary reverberations the word itself had for his time, ranging from the mystical Salon de la Rose + Croix (founded in 1892 by Sâr Péladan and Antoine de La Rochefoucauld⁸⁹), to Gertrude Stein's "A rose is a rose is a rose" (from her 1913 play *Sister Emily*) to its traditional attributions—such as Venus, Eros, and Dante's paradise.

All we see in Steichen's print is roses. (Only one small leaf is visible.) They fill the frame and there is nothing specific to indicate whether they were actually growing in the garden or amassed in a bowl. The overt theme is the life span of this particular species: bud, to half-open, to full-blown, to over-blown. Every detail is in sharp focus, and the emphasis is on the behavior of the petals—how they fold, curl, droop and crumple.

Calla Lily with Roses appears to be O'Keeffe's first "rose" painting,⁹⁰ which may be one reason why she chose to look so closely at Steichen's print. Although the huge white calla dominates—and nearly obliterates—the roses in this work, if we look at them closely, we can see that they are almost painted analogues of Steichen's. Especially comparable are the heavy bulbous buds (similarly placed) and the scalloped curls of her petals. She, too, has included just one definitive leaf. And her forms, like his, appear to be floating in empty space. Despite these samenesses, the two pictures suggest very different meanings and intentions. Steichen's is a true fin-de-siècle image in which we sense the origins of the Aesthetic Movement, with all its elegant insularity, ambiguity and obsession with the decorative arts. No doubt these were flowers that he grew himself—in effect,

home culture—and, as such, directly related to the late 19th century’s deliberate cultivation of taste.⁹¹ It is also possible that the covert theme of “heavy roses” may have been Steichen’s carefully conceived elegy to a world that changed forever with the 1914 guns of August.

O’Keeffe’s scarcely naive use of the timeless erotic symbolism connected with the “male” calla and the “female” rose can be said to combine the old free-wheeling spirit of 291, and the newly sophisticated Freudian preoccupation with sex during the 1920’s. That the calla lily almost blocks our visual access to the roses in this powerful double image may be as bitter a feminist statement as O’Keeffe ever allowed herself to make. Nor should it be discounted in the overall scheme of things that O’Keeffe’s personal relationship to Stieglitz held increasing stresses and strains during 1926.

During 1927, O’Keeffe is known to have rendered at least three canvases of poppies,⁹² including the breathtakingly beautiful *Poppy*. (Plate 136.) It is a work that at first appears as realistic as any flower she ever painted. But if we compare *Poppy* to the photograph that (in part) inspired it, we can see what an abstraction it really is. The photograph is Steichen’s 1914 silver print *Lotus, Mount Kisco, New York*. (Plate 137.)

A theme common to both these images seems to be what Steichen called “the charlatan light.” Up through the period when this photograph was made, he used light primarily for the expression of emotion (according to Symbolist suggestion) rather than for design—as Sheeler did. And the color values of O’Keeffe’s red *Poppy* petals are modified in ways very like *Lotus*’s subtle moves from black and white, caused by the optical and chemical action of light. In fact, it is entirely possible that O’Keeffe deliberately set herself this challenge. Could she have known of Steichen’s early statement that “there are certain things that can be done by photography that cannot be accomplished by any other medium, a wide

range of finest tones that cannot be reached in painting.”⁹³ We cannot, of course, be sure. But it is visually clear that O’Keeffe consciously, and conscientiously, added to the photographic qualities of her enlarged flower pictures as she went along. Further evidence toward this particular comparison rests with the fact that O’Keeffe’s *Poppy* has been stage-managed for viewing from an angle and distance very similar to Steichen’s *Lotus*. And the flattened space and abstract patterns of her background seem to function like gentle reminders of his background forms—which have been so cropped and printed down that we can’t be sure whether they are leaves, shadows or reflections.

Heavy Roses and *Lotus* may not be the only photographs of Steichen’s that O’Keeffe used as referents for her paintings.⁹⁴ But they are quite sufficient to demonstrate her immense esteem for the work of Stieglitz’s oldest and most important 291 colleague.

As Steichen wrote in 1941:

In 1902, we were fighting for the recognition of photography as art.

In 1908, we were fighting for the recognition of Art that was not photographic.

Out of all this work and struggle, and out of deep faith and belief came many clarifications.⁹⁵

**CHAPTER EIGHT
NOTES**

¹"Photography," *Seven Arts* (August, 1917): 524-526. Reprinted in *Camera Work* 49/50 (June, 1917): 3-4.

²*Manuscripts*, Number 4 (December, 1922): 17.

³"And now." *Vanity Fair* (September, 1934): 65.

⁴O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, 20 June 1917. YCAL.

⁵Strand, quoted in a 1972 interview with Lou Stettner, reprinted in *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photographs* (Millerton, N.Y., Aperture, Inc., 1976): 142.

⁶For a documentary account of these important events for Strand, see Rosenblum, *Paul Strand: The Early Years*, pp. 44-54.

⁷Quoted in *Paul Strand* (1976) p. 144. For an examination of these later abstract images, their dating to 1916 (instead of 1915, as Strand himself remembered) and their probable visual connections to the abstractions of Hartley and Dove—instead of French Cubism—see Rosenblum, pp. 55-58.

⁸The O'Keeffe/Strand correspondence is at PSA/CCP, but is said to be sealed from scholarship until approximately 1990.

⁹This information comes from Rosenblum, p. 73.

¹⁰The earliest prototype for these many citations (the most recent being Lisa Mintz Messinger, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* New York Fall 1984: 18) is Milton W. Brown; "Cubist-Realism," (1946) p. 155.

¹¹O'Keeffe's earliest experiments with nature-form close-ups date from 1919, while Strand's first ones were made in Nova Scotia in August 1920. (Rosenblum p. 139.) In 1921, at Twin Lakes, Connecticut, Strand made some close-up studies of a mullen plant (Rosenblum p. 140), but these are quite different in character from O'Keeffe's blown-up leaves and flowers of 1923-1924—in part because her forms, unlike Strand's, have been isolated from their backgrounds. Certain formal similarities have also been noted between O'Keeffe's later magnified flowers and Strand's Georgetown Island, Maine flora photographs of 1925-1928 (many made in Isabel Lachaise's garden). But even if we

allow for dating problems—Strand kept no records during this period (Rosenblum p. 152)—O’Keeffe’s paintings on this topic would seem generally to pre-date his photographs. One familiar comparison may suffice to make the point: her *Black Iris III* (1926) and his *Garden Iris* (1928). I am grateful to Michael Hoffman, Director of the Strand Archive, Aperture, Millerton, New York, for permitting me to look closely at Strand’s early work—some of it unpublished. (June, 1980.)

¹²The phrase is Stieglitz’s, in “Our Illustrations,” *Camera Work*, 49/50 (June, 1917): 36.

¹³Paul Strand, as quoted in *Sixty Years of Photography*, p. 146.

¹⁴Reproduced in *Georgia O’Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz* as plate 28.

¹⁵Apparently O’Keeffe also made an abstract portrait of Strand, perhaps on the order of her Texas watercolor *Portrait W — No. 1* of 1917. (This quite phallic work is properly reproduced—as to top and bottom—in *Georgia O’Keeffe* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, 1980: 9.) But if the Strand portrait is still extant, it has yet to be identified. My information that there might be such a portrait comes from Greenough, “Equivalents as Portraits: Portraits as Equivalents.” She is presently preparing a selection of the Stieglitz-O’Keeffe correspondence for publication.

¹⁶This last is very plain from some of Stieglitz’s letters to Strand: “Someday I hope you and she [O’Keeffe] will be at ease again with each other.” (November, 1919); “I hope Georgia’s reading her MS to you didn’t cause any heartache—except passing ones.” (4 October 1922) PSA/CCP. The last letter was written many months after Strand’s marriage to Rebecca Salsbury (21 January 1922.) The fact that “Beck” looked much like O’Keeffe was often remarked at the time. Strand also photographed his wife in ways that were similar to Stieglitz’s cumulative portrait of O’Keeffe. (On this, see Rosenblum, pp. 145-148.)

¹⁷Stieglitz’s letters to Seligmann are full of such worries: “In many ways [Strand] is certainly developing. In others the development is not so certain.” (7 September 1921); “To be a master of the [photographic] process is no mean achievement—And [Strand] has that. The rest may still come. —In the meantime I still hope he’ll be able to find *himself* fairly soon.” (1 October 1921.) YCAL.

¹⁸Paul Strand, *British Journal of Photography* (October 5, 1923): 615.

¹⁹Sasha Newman has rightly observed that many of Dove’s paintings of the ’twenties are closely related in composition and subject matter to Stieglitz’s Lake George photographs. *Arthur Dove and Duncan Phillips: Artist and Patron* (Washington, D.C.: The Phillips Collection, 1980): 37.

²⁰Stieglitz to Seligmann, 16 October 1927. YCAL.

²¹One possibility may be that although Strand increasingly felt himself an outsider in the 291 circle, he had not yet found his own way to go. Therefore, from time to time, he tried to reposition himself within the old group vis-à-vis Stieglitz's photography and O'Keeffe's (highly successful) visual language. He may also have hoped that by making such references Stieglitz would sponsor another show of his work.

²²To the best of my knowledge this is the case. I was not permitted to read O'Keeffe's correspondence with Strand.

²³A letter from Stieglitz to Seligmann, dated 30 July 1924, says, "Strand and Georgia had an unfortunate difference. I regret it greatly. I refuse to talk about it. Strand is innocent. Women are certainly queer folks." YCAL.

²⁴O'Keeffe's *Ranchos Church* is reproduced in *G O'K* (1976) as plate 63, and her *Cross By The Sea, Canada* as plate 68. Strand's *Rancho de Taos Church* may be found in *Paul Strand A Retrospective Monograph, The Years 1915-1968* (Millerton, N.Y., Aperture Inc., 1971): 87, and his *Cross, Gaspé* on p. 68.

²⁵With *Ranchos de Taos Church*, Strand even went to the effort of removing a basketball stanchion close to the rear buttress of the church so that he could present it (as O'Keeffe had also done) without any signs of contemporary civilization. (Rosenblum p. 162.)

²⁶"All my life ... I've been photographing windows and doors. Why? Because they fascinate me." Strand (1974), quoted in Calvin Tomkins, "Profile," *Paul Strand, Sixty Years*, p. 35.

²⁷YCAL.

²⁸Sheeler, who began his correspondence with Stieglitz on 22 December 1914 from Philadelphia, doesn't begin to mention O'Keeffe's name till c. late 1918. "It is so rarely that one meets a personality of the calibre of O'Keeffe's [sic] that one does not soon forget it." (Dated only November 30, but probably 1918 because the letter is addressed to "Dear Stieglitz—instead of "Mr. Stieglitz" like the earlier ones.) Another sends "Best wishes to you and O'Keeffe [sic]." (2/25/19) And another (undated, but with his letterhead of 160 East 25th Street, New York—indicating that it was written sometime after his move there in 1919) says: "I am glad if you and O'Keeffe [sic] enjoyed the evening—for I haven't spent a more enjoyable one since I have been here." These letters are at YCAL. We do not yet know what O'Keeffe thought of Sheeler during that time.

²⁹Among the many fertile topics for study are these: how Sheeler and O'Keeffe each went about jettisoning the teachings of William Merritt Chase in their still lifes and landscapes (Sheeler studied the longest

with Chase—from 1904–1906 at The Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts—but it was O’Keeffe who often kept to that strictest of all Chase’s instructions, the completion of a canvas in one day); their separate, and little known, experiments with Cézanne—Sheeler’s took place much earlier than O’Keeffe’s judging from her *Three Pears No. 1*, c. 1924, and his *Peaches in a White Bowl* of 1910, and *Plums on a Plate*, c. 1910 (on these last two, see John Driscoll, “Charles Sheeler’s Early Work: Five Rediscovered Paintings,” *Art Bulletin*, March 1980: 127); their different methods (and reasons) for reducing their forms—a start might be to compare Sheeler’s 1914 black crayon abstractions of the landscape around Doylestown with O’Keeffe’s 1916–1917 Texas landscape charcoals and watercolors; their different uses of primitivism (Sheeler’s interest in American Colonial Shaker forms, and O’Keeffe’s in children’s drawings, Henri Rousseau and the Indian artifacts of New Mexico); their opposing attitudes toward Cubism (Sheeler had adapted its formal principles into his own style by 1917, but O’Keeffe never did); their seemingly contradictory reasons for choosing native architecture and plant forms as subject matter (Sheeler was ahead of O’Keeffe in these choices); the extreme importance of the extra-pictorial idea of “place” for them both, *and* the dissimilar ways they incorporated this notion into their works; the polar differences between their artistic sensibilities, as revealed in the diverse ways they used photography in their paintings (perhaps most fruitfully understood within the 19th century concepts of Romanticism and Realism); and whether either artist was ever directly influenced by the other’s drawings and paintings. (It would seem not at all.)

³⁰*Manuscripts*, No. 4 (letter dated June 5th 1922): 3.

³¹AAA, Charles Sheeler papers, Roll NSH 1, *Autobiography* /unpublished manuscript, 1937), frames 66, 93, 95, 96.

³²For more details on this, see Charles Millard, “Charles Sheeler; American Photographer,” *Contemporary Photographer*, VI, No. 1 (1967) n.p.

³³For a selection of the excellent critical reviews Sheeler received for these shows (most of which approved of the “Cubism” he found in nature), see de Zayas, “How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York,” pp. 104–105, 121.

³⁴Sheeler to Stieglitz, 22 November 1917. YCAL. Limiting these prints to only “three sets” was, of course, one more way of encouraging their value as works of art.

³⁵See Karen Davies, “Charles Sheeler in Doylestown and the Image of Rural Architecture,” *Arts* (March 1985): 135.

³⁶One of Sheeler’s complete sets is owned by the William H. Lane Foundation, Leominster, Massachusetts. Because of O’Keeffe’s “delighted” response to *all* of these photographs in 1917, I have tried to see the other six of them ever since 1978. During my interview with

Ansel Adams in his home, 19 October 1978, he happened to mention that he knew William Lane well, and volunteered to write a letter to Lane asking that I be allowed to see the set. This he kindly did (24 October 1978), sending me a copy. But it was to no avail. In 1981, I contacted the, then, new curator of The Lane Foundation, John Driscoll, who told me that Sheeler's Doylestown house prints had been in storage since 1939, and that despite his own work on Sheeler for seven years, he had not seen them either. Although Driscoll agreed to let me know whenever they should be available to scholars, that, so far, has been the end of the matter. Doubtless Mr. Lane holds with the opinion of Sheeler's dealer Edith Halpert (The Downtown Gallery) that his photography is less worthy than his painting. For more on Halpert's prejudice and its restrictive practice, see Susan Fillin Yeh, "Charles Sheeler and The Machine Age," unpublished dissertation, City University of New York (1981): 112. It is also of interest that among the works of art apparently photographed by Sheeler during 1917 were Georgia O'Keeffe's drawings and watercolors, from her solo show at 291. (On this, see Rosenblum, p. 66.) No one I have interviewed has seen these photographs, and it is possible that they, too, are "in storage" in The Lane Foundation.

- ³⁷Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler, Artist in The American Tradition* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1938): 67.
- ³⁸*New York Evening World*, December 9, 1917. As reprinted in de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, p. 105. Other articles on Sheeler in this same vein are excerpted by de Zayas as well.
- ³⁹On this, see Patrick Leonard Stewart, "Charles Sheeler, William Carlos Williams and The Development of the Precisionist Aesthetic, 1917-1931", unpublished dissertation, University of Delaware (1981): 91-93.
- ⁴⁰The earliest possibility I have been able to find is *Interior with Stove* of 1923. (Coll. Mrs. Edward Steichen) But this work could have been painted directly from the motif itself. The same may also be true of *Staircase, Doylestown* of 1925. (The Hirschhorn Museum, Washington, D. C.) Davies cites seven paintings and drawings from 1931 and says they are definitely the first to be based upon the early Doylestown prints (p. 137).
- ⁴¹See *G O'K* (1976), text opposite plate 16.
- ⁴²See, for example, Ernest Brace, "Charles Sheeler," *Creative Art XI* (October, 1932): 104.
- ⁴³Sheeler, as quoted in Rourke, p. 109.
- ⁴⁴AAA, Sheeler papers, Roll NSH 1. frame 67.
- ⁴⁵*G O'K* (1976) text opposite plate 16.

⁴⁶Henry McBride, *The Sun and New York Herald*, February 22, 1920. AAA, HMcBP, NMcB2, 296. Did O’Keeffe remember McBride’s comments on Sheeler’s barn photographs, when she painted *Lake George Barns* (1926)? If this painting was indeed a sort of creative correction of Sheeler’s *Bucks County Barn* (1915), as I have suggested (Chapter Seven p. 315), perhaps so. O’Keeffe was very respectful of McBride, as their correspondence indicates.

⁴⁷Stieglitz to the editor of *The Sun and New York Herald*, March 21, 1920, Section 4, p. 4. It should also be remarked that Stieglitz’s phrase “Sheeler is always the artist” is one that O’Keeffe would use in her 1922 *Manuscripts* article.

⁴⁸For a judicious account of the artistic and commercial reasons for their break up in 1923 from Strand’s intimate vantage point, see Rosenblum, pp. 103-105.

⁴⁹There is still some confusion as to the dating and titles of these charcoals. The most commonly cited date is c. 1920. The 1966 catalogue raisonné, however, lists only one of these drawings. It is titled *Backyard at 65th Street* (25 x 18 3/4), and dated c. 1920. As its dimensions, and date, tally closely with the two discussed in my text, it is likely that the three were done by O’Keeffe at about the same time. But while *Backyard at 65th Street* is a view from the brownstone house at 60 East 65th Street, owned by Dr. Leo Stieglitz (where the two artists lived between 1920-1924), the other two charcoals are downward angle views from far taller buildings—possibly the same ones from which Sheeler and Strand filmed portions of *Manhatta*.

⁵⁰Strand to Mrs. Shreve, 9 August [1920] YCAL.

⁵¹Examples of this type of outlining may be seen in at least two of Sheeler’s 1920 photographs titled *New York*, reproduced in *Charles Sheeler* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968): 84, 147.

⁵²Sheeler, quoted in “A Painter’s Solution with a Camera of a Problem Usually Deemed Solvable with Paint Alone,” *Vanity Fair* (May, 1930): 80.

⁵³It has been suggested by Yeh that Sheeler based his own 1918 watercolor *Flower in Bowl* on this same 1915 photograph. (“Charles Sheeler and the Machine Age,” pp. 118-119.) Her arguments are not very persuasive, however. Not only is the watercolor differently “arranged” and “selected” from the photograph, but its tilted angle of vision more closely reflects his experiments with Cézanne. Further, during the late ’teens and early ’twenties, Sheeler often seems to have painted many of the same motifs and objects he had already photographed, without trying to utilize his exposures (the Doylestown house comes quickly to mind)—and this could easily account for the

dual appearance of the zinnia and the white bowl. In addition, Sheeler's earliest known correlations between his paintings and photographs (1917 and 1918) began with barns and landscapes, not still lifes. (Stewart, pp. 93-96.) Therefore, it is again possible that O'Keeffe drew upon one of Sheeler's photographs before he did. Certainly we can say that her *Zinnias* is in no way similar to his watercolor *Flower in Bowl*. The latter is reproduced in black and white in *Charles Sheeler*, exh. cat. NCFCA (1968): III.

⁵⁴In 1916, Sheeler wrote a statement for the Forum Exhibition catalogue than said, in part, "I believe that human intellect is far less profound than human sensibility: that every thought is mere shadow of some emotion which casts it." (unpaginated.) This contradicts the influential 1924 comparison of his work with O'Keeffe's made by Virgil Barker, who wrote: "Miss O'Keeffe's pictures are the clean-cut result of an intensely passionate apprehension of things; Mr Sheeler's, the clean-cut result of an apprehension that is intensely intellectual." (*Arts*, Vol. V, No. 4, April 1924: 222.)

⁵⁵For a discussion of this permanent changeover in Sheeler's work by c. 1915, and the reasons for it, see Driscoll, *The Art Bulletin*, pp. 128-132.

⁵⁶Sheeler, quoted in Rourke, p. 175.

⁵⁷For more on this see Millard, "Charles Sheeler; American Photographer," *Contemporary Photographer*, n.p.

⁵⁸On this, Bloom has written: "Poetic influence ... always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation." *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973): 30 and passim.

⁵⁹Generally speaking, these descriptive phrases were intended to be complimentary to both artists. In Sheeler's case, however, a major critic took strong exception to his facture. Reviewing his one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1939, Elizabeth McCausland argued that Sheeler's later work causes "esthetic bewilderment" because he "betray[s] the nature of the painting medium. The paint is forced into the canvas, so that the picture is in the supporting surface rather than on it. In the photographic print, such a procedure is correct, because the picture is actually contained in the light-sensitive emulsion organically integrated with the paper base support. But in painting the pigments are placed on the canvas and a different spatial relation exists. The beauty of a medium is ultimately that its esthetic statement is harmonious with its technical method; and in such instance one feels disharmony." *Springfield Union and Republican* (Sunday, 8 October 1939.) I am indebted to Susan Dodge Peters for this citation. It is quite possible that McCausland's review helped to mould Edith Halpert's negative attitude toward Sheeler's photography and her fear, as his dealer, that the public and the art critics might think he had just "copied" his photographs.

- ⁶⁰On this, see Rourke, pp. 177-178, 181.
- ⁶¹Ansel Adams, Berkeley Oral History Tapes, conducted by Teiser (1972): 82. These remarks were verified and developed further by Adams in my interview with him in Carmel, California. (19 October 1978.)
- ⁶²O'Keeffe, in tape interview with Sarah Greenough (28 November 1983).
- ⁶³Sheeler to Leslie Cheek, AAA, n.d.
- ⁶⁴*G O'K* (1976) Text opposite plate 104. *Road Past the View I* (1954.)
- ⁶⁵The classic survey of Steichen's early photography is Longwell, *Steichen The Master Prints 1895-1914: The Symbolist Period*. For a study of Steichen's early paintings, see Willam Innes Homer, "Eduard Steichen as Painter and Photographer, 1897-1908" *American Art Journal*, Vol. VI (Nov. 1974): 45-55.
- ⁶⁶Hartmann, "A Monologue," *Camera Work* No. 6 (April, 1904): 25.
- ⁶⁷Steichen to Stieglitz, 27 August 1914, Steichen Archive, the Museum of Modern Art, hereafter SA/MOMA. Again, I wish to thank Grace. A. Mayer for her many kindnesses in facilitating my research. On occasion she even helped me to decipher Steichen's difficult handwriting.
- ⁶⁸For a sensitive account of the painful and complex breakup of the historic Stieglitz-Steichen relationship, see Lowe, pp. 185-194. See, also, the folder marked "Rift with Stieglitz," SA/MOMA.
- ⁶⁹See Steichen's irritable response to the "What is 291?" issue of *Camera Work* (No. 37, published Jan. 1915: 65-67.)
- ⁷⁰Steichen, *A Life in Photography* n.p. This must have taken place during the spring/summer of 1916, when O'Keeffe sent Stieglitz an occasional roll from Columbia, South Carolina, where she was then teaching.
- ⁷¹It is not certain whether Steichen actually took any of the A. E. F. photographs, although some have been recently attributed to him. (*He* never said that he did.) For an account of this issue—unfortunately an extremely biased, even vitriolic, one—see Allan Sekula, "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War," *Artforum* (December, 1975): 26-35.
- ⁷²SA/MOMA.

⁷³That the O’Keeffe-Steichen relationship never really progressed beyond this early stage is borne out by the letters she wrote thanking him for his flowers and thoughts during Stieglitz’s final illness in 1946. (SA/MOMA.) They are warm and friendly but signed formally “Sincerely, Georgia O’Keeffe.”

⁷⁴On the “systems” of Cook and Hambidge, and their popularity for American artists during the first decades of this century, see Milton Brown, “Twentieth Century Nostrums: Pseudo-Scientific Theory in American Painting,” *Magazine of Art* (March, 1948): 98-101. As Brown rightly points out, Stieglitz was suspicious of any kind of systems-making where art was concerned. Whether O’Keeffe herself ever looked into Cook’s “principles of growth and beauty,” or Hambidge’s “dynamic symmetry,” or, later, D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson’s *On The Growth of Form* (with its diagrammatic investigations into shell-spirals, horns, pelvic bones, flowers and leaves) remains a topic for research.

⁷⁵*A Life in Photography*, n.p.

⁷⁶Grace Mayer believes that Steichen showed his work in many more exhibitions than have so far been recorded. Stieglitz, of course, had no gallery during these years.

⁷⁷Steichen, quoted in Paul Strand, “Steichen and Commercial Art,” *New Republic*, LVII (Feb. 19, 1930): 21. Fashion photography was not new to Steichen in 1923. In 1911, thirteen of his photographs of Paul Poiret gowns appeared in the April issue of *Art et Decoration* (Paris.)

⁷⁸YCAL. Some research remains to be done on the delicate issue of whether O’Keeffe ever borrowed from—or was inspired by—any of Steichen’s paintings. There are a few rather curious, if insubstantive, similarities. For instance, Steichen often depicted the sun with a large circular halo around it. Two examples are *Landscape with Avenue of Trees* of 1902 (Lunn Gallery), and *Grand Canyon* of 1909. (Coll. Mary Steichen Calderone.) This same convention also appears in a few of O’Keeffe’s paintings—most notably in *Red Hills and Sun* of 1927. (Phillips Coll.) Also, Steichen’s triangular “Radio Gull” from *The Oochens* (1919-1922), carefully calculated according to the Golden Mean, may have had some effect on her triangular birds in *Lake George With Crows* (1921), and even her much later *Black Bird Series* of 1950. Although Stieglitz never showed Steichen’s solo paintings at 291 (or anywhere else), they were frequently exhibited in New York. O’Keeffe could have seen what may have been the most prestigious of them all, in 1915 (Jan. 25-Feb. 6) at M. Knoedler & Co. This one included 21 of his canvases, and seven mural decorations titled *In Exaltation of Flowers*, painted for Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Meyer, Jr. (These last works, lost for years, were found again recently, and now belong to the Museum of Modern Art.) It should be noted, however, that she, like Stieglitz was known to disparage Steichen’s painting. Still, the fact that he was a painter-photographer for so much of his life would almost certainly have caused her to take some interest in his

canvases—at least for a time. For some early contemporary opinion on Steichen's painting, see Sidney Allen (Sadakichi Hartmann) "A Visit to Steichen's Studio," *CW*, No. 2 (April 1903): 25-27, and Charles Fitzgerald "Eduard Steichen: Painter and Photographer," *CW* No. 10 (April 1905): 42-43. Three of Steichen's paintings were reproduced in *CW* No. 42/43 (April-July 1913.)

⁷⁹Royal Photographic Society, Bath, England.

⁸⁰O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz*, n.p.

⁸¹Lunn Gallery.

⁸²*Ibid*. In 1941, Steichen wrote a graceful and nostalgic article for *Vogue* titled "The Fighting Photo-Secession," tracing the group's remarkable history and individual contributions. ("Some forty years or so ago, Alfred Stieglitz began to be called the Father of American Photography, and I am speaking here as a son in this movement.") *Vogue* (15 June 1941): 22, 74. Stieglitz was deeply pleased, and the two men were at last reconciled. ("Dear Steichen: What can an old fellow like me say except that if you were here I'd grasp your hand and stand before you—you & I together ... you have gladden[ed] [sic] the hearts of very many. —I'm still fighting—So are you. It's one fight. —Again I say what you have written is glorious & gloriously generous. —My love to you. —Ever your old Stieglitz." 15 June 1941, SA/MOMA.) In 1957, Steichen did indeed begin experimenting with painting again.

⁸³In *A Life in Photography*, Steichen refers to Dove as "Stieglitz's favorite 'wild man'," (opposite plate 44.) His negative comments about the abstraction of Picasso (1911) and Picabia (1913) have already been quoted.

⁸⁴In the Steichen archives at the MOMA, there is an example of one of his designs for "Cascarets," the candy cathartic (c. 1890's).

⁸⁵In addition to the famous *Cyclamen* (1905) there are the 1902 pigment print *Figure with Iris*, the 1907 portrait of Mrs. Condé Nast, *Mary and her Mother, Long Island* (1905), the autochrome *Young Girl Standing Beside a Vase of Flowers* (c. 1908), and *Kate Steichen* (c. 1917)—among others.

⁸⁶Steichen's biographical outline by Grace M. Mayer, in the Steichen archive at MOMA, lists no exhibition of his photography in 1926, nor, for that matter, in 1927.

⁸⁷Steichen began hybridizing delphinium in his gardens at Voulangis as early as 1910. In 1928, he established the Umpawaug Plant Breeding Farm at West Redding, Connecticut.

⁸⁸Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Intelligence of Flowers* (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1907) 12.

⁸⁹For a study of this group and its exhibitions, see Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France, Josephin Péladan and The Salons de la Rose + Croix* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1976.) Originally Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1968.

⁹⁰The 1966 catalogue raisonné lists nothing with “rose” in the title before this work in 1926. There are four “rose” canvases listed for 1927 (including the great *Abstraction — White Rose III*, and three for 1928. It may be significant, in terms of meaning, that *Calla Lily with Roses* was first titled *L. K. White Calla and Roses* . The initials L. K. stood for the critic Louis Kalonyme.

⁹¹For more on this point, see Elizabeth Aslin, *The Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1969.)

⁹²The 1966 catalogue raisonné lists *Oriental Poppies*, *Red Poppy*, and *Poppy* —the work under discussion. Her first rendering of this flower, *Red Poppies* of 1925, is listed as destroyed. She apparently did not paint one again until 1927, and we do not know which of the above was done first.

⁹³Although this statement was first published in an undated clipping [Summer, 1902] that has been preserved in the so-called Steichen scrapbook (collected by his mother) at MOMA, it sounds like a statement Steichen may have made frequently over the years, out of his permanent devotion to photography.

⁹⁴Other comparisons that might profitably be made are her *Peach and Glass* (1927) with his *Pear on a Plate* (c. 1920), and her *Shell I* (1928) with his *Spiral, France* (c. 1921).

⁹⁵Steichen, “The Fighting Photo-Secession,” p. 74.

AFTERWORD

It is often observed that photographic images lose their original distinctions and context almost immediately, and that's why they so quickly acquire new meanings. It didn't take O'Keeffe long to see the many ways photography can obscure as well as clarify—turning subjects into evasive images that have an order very different from the information gathered by the scanning eye. And, as we have seen, her earliest, and most persistent, use of photography was for the purposes of abstraction.

O'Keeffe never treated photography in the scientific/intellectual manner of artists like Degas and Eakins. She seems, rather, to have absorbed it right into her particular way of seeing. For instance, O'Keeffe's painted edges, like those in photographs, create the shapes that surround objects. Helping Stieglitz to develop and print, as she sometimes did, she was very familiar with the negative's radical reversal of dark and light. There is a story told by her friend Blanche Matthias, the Chicago critic, which may illustrate how completely she transformed even this fundamental part of the photographic process; The two women were walking together in Central Park (probably during the late 'twenties) when O'Keeffe asked Matthias, "What do you see?" "I see green trees against a blue sky," Matthias replied, "What do *you* see?" "Blue sky against green trees," O'Keeffe answered.¹

Ansel Adams once described New Mexico as being "isolated in a glowing world between the macro and the micro [lens]."² And indeed many of O'Keeffe's paintings of this high, dry region, with its strange "white" light³ tend to stress the very close and the very distant—with little or no evidence of the middle ground. This light-and-atmosphere distortion is surprisingly similar to the viewpoint of a long focal length lens. And while it would be too much to say that O'Keeffe loved

New Mexico for its “photographic” qualities, certain paintings of hers, such as *Black Cross, New Mexico* (1929), *From The Faraway Nearby* (1937) and *Red Hills and Bones* (1941), do pick up and accentuate this natural lenticular characteristic. That she also availed herself of a real telephoto, from time to time, is obvious from the manner in which the “faraway” fills the whole frame in *The White Place in Shadow* (1942) and *Cliffs Beyond Abiquiu* (1943).

O’Keeffe always worked a great deal from memory—an old Synthetist procedure she may have picked up first from Dow. (Memory, it was believed at Pont-Aven, simplifies the object’s image and rejects its inessentials, even while it retains only the dominant lines and colors of nature’s structure, *and* the painter’s mood, before the motif.⁴) Photography also helped her to simplify, just as it helped her to retain a picture in her mind—when she wished. Not unlike Caspar David Friedrich, she knew how to close her “bodily eye” so that she could see her picture first with the “spiritual eye.”

There can be little question that looking at different kinds of photographs also affected O’Keeffe’s artistic concept of nature—her choice of what was beautiful enough, and significant enough, to paint. Like the earliest photographers (and like Strand, Steichen and Weston), she frequently chose those highly structured forms in nature which have a complete order in themselves: leaves, flowers, shells, bones, horns, and so forth. Forms which, in truth, resemble a work of art. As Valéry has written:

A crystal, a flower or a shell stands out from the usual disorder that characterizes most perceptible things. They are privileged forms that are more intelligible to the eye, even though more mysterious for the mind, than all the others we see indistinctly.⁵

What is astonishing about O'Keeffe and photography is not that she should have incorporated it into her painting—for so, in their various ways, did Martin Johnson Heade, Seurat, Picasso, Matisse and Hartley. It is rather that her exact references to the whole photographic process should function so seamlessly with the glorious “music” of her color. And that her timeless, universal, spontaneous, therapeutic images should bear such scrupulous witness to the felt life of Georgia O'Keeffe.

Afterword

Notes

- ¹Interview with Matthias conducted for me by Margaret Peters, 24 November 1980.
- ²Adams, quoted in Paul Richard, "Ansel Adams: Appreciation," *The Washington Post* (24 April 1984): c-2. Cited in Charles C. Eldredge, *Art in New Mexico, 1900-1945* (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1986): 179.
- ³As Hartley wrote to Stieglitz, "[New Mexico] is not a country of light on things. It is a country of things on light. Therefore it is a country of form, with a new presentation of light as a problem." (26 August 1918) YCAL.
- ⁴These ideas, so influential to twentieth century painters, had their origin in Lecoq de Boisbaudran's *Education de la Mémoire pittoresque* (1862).
- ⁵Paul Valéry, *Les Merveilles de la Mer*, quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969): 104-105.
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**GEORGIA O'KEEFFE AND PHOTOGRAPHY:
HER FORMATIVE YEARS
1915 - 1930**

by

SARAH WHITAKER PETERS

A

VOLUME II

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

1987

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