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FINE ART AND POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT:  
THE EMERGING DIALOGUE BETWEEN "HIGH" AND "LOW" IN AMERICAN ART  
OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

by

LAURAL WEINTRAUB

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

1996

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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.

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To my parents, Hyman and Lucy Weintraub,  
who have helped in so many ways to make this work a reality

## 1. Introduction

As the Western world emerged from the inhibiting climate of the Victorian age, it discovered a number of popular alternatives to the edifying diversions that made up the realm of Victorian “high” culture. Among these discoveries were illustrated novels, variety theater, amusement parks, movies, and the tango. Several of these diversions had existed in some form throughout the nineteenth century; others had only emerged in recent times. While the separate categories of highbrow and lowbrow entertainment were still recognized in the United States at the turn of the century, the lower forms were multiplying and diversifying and attracting larger audiences than ever before.

Many artists active in New York, where entertainment outlets were concentrated, were sensitive to these changes; beginning around 1900, the entertainment site figured as a key element of the iconography of modern New York that realists had begun to develop. The realists chose to focus on the urban environment in order to capture more direct and authentic depictions of “life” than did most academic painting. Their work tended to reflect democratic, if not socialistic, values: above all, respect for the culture of the people.

In the second decade of this century, the anti-academicism of the realists was eclipsed by international modernism. Though in many ways the transition from one phase to the next was abrupt and without continuity, there did remain some vital connections between the old guard and the new. Popular entertainment remained an inspiration for several artists active in New York in the 1910s, who not only depicted its imagery in their work, but, to some extent, borrowed its forms.

Throughout the first two decades of this century the pursuit of entertainment in New York was reflected in a number of different ways in the work of a variety of artists. In this investigation, I focus primarily on images and practices related to vaudeville and motion pictures, and I do so for two main reasons. Firstly, one of the key objectives of this study is to assess the relationship between fine art and popular entertainment across two distinct periods of American art, and thus it is necessary to focus on aspects of entertainment that are pertinent to both. Secondly, I wish not only to shed light on a selected group of works of art, but also to demonstrate their vital connection to a momentous phase of popular culture. More than any other phenomena of the period, vaudeville and motion pictures represented the ascendancy of democratic culture. That artists paid significant attention to these phenomena suggests at least their awareness, if not their approval, of the growing importance of these cultural forms.

### The Interrelationship of Movies and Vaudeville

My decision to explore movie-related and vaudeville-related imagery simultaneously may seem on the face of it an eccentric one. In actuality, the destinies of both popular entertainment forms became linked immediately after the advent of motion pictures in the middle of the 1890s.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1890s, Thomas Edison invented Kinetoscope, the first system for producing short films and exhibiting them in viewing machines; his first films depicted vaudeville and circus performers. Edison's "peep show" viewers, each of which contained a single 50-foot loop of film, were first installed in Broadway amusement arcades in 1894. Shortly thereafter, the Lumière brothers of Lyons, France, inspired by Edison's technology, developed the Cinématographe, a system of motion picture projection that first allowed film exhibitors to present their novelty to an assembled audience. Edison

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<sup>1</sup> The first to analyze the interrelationship of movies and vaudeville in depth was Robert C. Allen, in Vaudeville and Film, 1895-1915: A Study in Media Interaction (New York: Arno Press, 1980). Douglas Gomery gives a useful overview of this phenomenon in Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 13-17.

responded quickly and invented his own projection system, the Vitascope, which he exhibited to the press on April 3, 1896. Within months, both the Vitascope and the Cinématographe had had premier presentations at vaudeville houses in New York.

Vaudeville itself was not long established as a popular entertainment form in the decade of the 1890s. The form of variety entertainment that was first dubbed vaudeville in the 1880s derived its identity from various sources. It drew inspiration from melodrama and minstrelsy, and also from dime museums, which combined exhibitions of “curiosities” with variety entertainment. One of the most important ancestors of vaudeville in New York City was the concert saloon, a “boozy, licentious” venue for variety theater. By the early 1850s, the concert saloon was an established outlet for cheap entertainment in New York City’s Bowery and adjacent districts. By 1872, there were some seventy-five to eighty concert saloons located on the Bowery, Broadway, and the side streets of lower Manhattan.<sup>2</sup>

The key difference between the variety venues of the mid-1800s and turn-of-the-century vaudeville theaters was the element of “respectability.” Late Victorian audiences apparently craved the sort of vivid humor and exuberant music and dance that were prominent features of variety. However, the ambiance had to suit the tastes of the middle-class. In the 1880s, pioneers like Tony Pastor began to effect a momentous transition in the history of popular entertainment, by presenting variety theater geared to “respectable” audiences. Robert Snyder notes that Pastor “took vaudeville out of the Bowery without entirely taking the Bowery out of vaudeville.”<sup>3</sup> Pastor, an entertainer as well as a producer, opened his first theater on the Bowery in 1865. In 1881, he relocated to Union Square, then New York City’s main theater district, a move that marked an important step in the gradual transition of variety from marginal lower-class to mainstream middle-class entertainment.

By the turn of the century, vaudeville was the preeminent form of popular amusement in larger cities throughout the U. S. By this time also, movies had established

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<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Snyder, The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

their place in vaudeville, as “acts” on the variety bill. From the late 1890s until the middle of the first decade of the 1900s, vaudeville served as the principal outlet for movie presentation in the U. S. and provided the forum in which many urban Americans were introduced to the movies.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 1905, however, a new era in motion picture exhibition began with the booming spread of make-shift movie theaters, usually converted store-fronts, that were known as nickelodeons.

The nickelodeon craze, though significant, was a relatively short-lived phenomenon. Nickelodeon theaters were crude and unadorned, but poorer patrons were attracted to them, because their prices were low. More affluent patrons, however, were willing to pay a little bit more for a degree of comfort and elegance. After 1910, movies were typically presented in “real” theaters, many with lavish decor. In the latter part of the decade, there were “movie palaces” that brought vaudeville and movies together again, with each filling roughly half of the bill. The “stage show,” a combination of movie show and vaudeville entertainment, tended toward extravagance in the 1920s. (A vestige of the era survives in the entertainment offerings of Radio City Music Hall today.) The onset of the Depression in 1929 ended the extravagance; and at the same time, the advent of movies with sound made all but superfluous the complement of live entertainment.

#### The Popular Entertainment Subject Before and After the Armory Show

The subject matter of entertainment links the art of the realists associated with Robert Henri with the work of several of their colleagues who later embraced abstraction, suggesting some sort of continuity between two otherwise distinct phases of twentieth century American art. Such thematic connections are frequently overlooked and their cultural implications neglected, because art historical literature tends to emphasize stylistic criteria. For example, in a very recent survey text, Wayne Craven’s American Art: History and Culture, the categorical presentation based on stylistic affinities actually works against

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<sup>4</sup> Gomery, Shared Pleasures, 15-17.

the author's purpose, as stated in the preface of the book, of placing the work of art in its "cultural context."<sup>5</sup> Distinctive subject matter, such as that of popular entertainment, serves not only to identify the individual work of art with a particular context; it also serves to locate the individual work along with other works of differing style but similar subject in a shared cultural context.

The popular entertainment subject not only survived the transition between the pre- and post-Armory Show periods, but it maintained its vitality in the process. Even with the new impetus to engage in formal invention in American art after 1913, the subject matter of popular entertainment remained a distinct and potent signifier in the visual art of the period. In 1891 the influential literary realist William Dean Howells had stated that "the arts must become democratic" in order to have "the expression of America in art,"<sup>6</sup> and this vision of a democratic culture, though modified, continued to inspire American writers and artists well after the turn of the century. As the new mass entertainment forms of vaudeville and motion pictures became more and more prominent, many cultural observers, including Howells himself, recognized their democratic appeal. Certainly there were other critics, such as Lewis Mumford, Randolph Bourne and Horace Kallen, who disparaged these popular entertainments, along with other manifestations of popular culture. However, the fact that these critics addressed the status of movies and vaudeville at all suggests the potency of these developments.

The idea of "democracy" in American culture remained an important touchstone for conservative as well as progressive-minded writers on art and literature in the period after the Armory Show. For James Oppenheim, for example, editor of the eclectic little magazine The Seven Arts, which published some of the most significant cultural criticism of the day, the role of democracy in American art was an unresolved yet still vital issue. "Our moderns slap democracy on the back," he wrote in 1916, "but what are they giving it in art?"<sup>7</sup> "Yes," he goes on to state, "we have magazines that circulate in the millions: we

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Craven, American Art: History and Culture (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). Craven devotes separate consecutive chapters to "Realism and Regionalism, 1900-1940" and "The Modern Mode, 1900-1940."

<sup>6</sup> William Dean Howells, Criticism and Fiction (New York: Harper & Bros., 1891), 140.

<sup>7</sup> James Oppenheim, "Editorials," Seven Arts 1 (December 1916): 153.

have cities sown thick with theaters: we have ragtime and the movies.” These manifestations are signs of cultural democracy, he implies, albeit devoid of “art.”

In the decade of the 1910s a number of critics, including Oppenheim, began to perceive in the vitality of “lowbrow” culture an implicit challenge to the guardians of the “highbrow.” For the most part, even the most liberal critics refused to allow that any form of popular expression might suitably represent American culture. Nonetheless, the question emerged: given the distinction and vitality of movies, vaudeville and other forms of popular expression in the U. S., what was their cultural value?

#### “High” vs. “Low” Culture: Art Historical and Other Perspectives

The relationship between elitist and popular elements of past and present culture has over the past few decades become a subject of concern among sociologists and popular culture specialists, as well as art historians and other scholars in fields such as music and literature. Each of the disciplines involved has brought its own unique perspective to the problem of “high” vs. “low,” and each has established its own set of goals and criteria. The sociologist Herbert J. Gans, for example, whose ideas have profoundly influenced much thinking about American culture in the last few decades, describes five different “taste cultures”: high culture, upper-middle culture, lower-middle culture, low culture, and quasi-low folk culture. Each taste culture has distinctive standards, and each responds to the same basic need for diversion and aesthetic experience. The breakdown that Gans employs is meant to facilitate comparison of groups of people with differing social and economic status. This comparative approach is designed to obviate the dichotomy of high and popular culture.<sup>8</sup> Art historians, however, who have traditionally concerned themselves with the “higher” forms of cultural expression, continue to recognize the opposing values inherent in fine art and popular culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert J. Gans, Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 69.

In the last several years, art historians have begun increasingly to embrace the dialectical opposition of high art and popular art as a model of cultural dynamics. Certainly, The Museum of Modern Art's 1990 High and Low exhibition served to codify this dialectical model as an art historical paradigm. This exhibition, moreover, afforded its organizers an opportunity not only to reassert art history's traditional preoccupation with hierarchies of aesthetic value and issues of "quality" but also to suggest the applicability of such standards in the realm of popular culture. In their introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik criticize the "uninflected leveling impulse, or . . . doggedly perverse will to stand conventional hierarchies on their head, [that] takes the place of any attempt to make discriminations about enduring value and importance among the creations of low culture, or to follow the intricate, peculiar history of their engagement with high art."<sup>9</sup> In addition, the authors seem to promote the idea that fine art and popular art are, indeed, separate categories of cultural expression. Though they claim not to utilize the terms "high" and "low" to define fixed classes of things, they also recognize that "the imperative need to have reliable, solid distinctions between high and low--whether as a challenge for future achievement or as a lost ideal--haunts the theoretical literature concerned with the different levels of culture in modern society."<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that there are art historians and critics who have long challenged this point of view, and their attitudes have supplied a strong counter-current to art history's mainstream. In an article entitled "The Cultural Snob: There Is No 'Highbrow' Art," which appeared in the 1950s, John Berger claimed that highbrow and lowbrow culture derive essentially from "the same attitude of life and differ only in their degree of self-consciousness."<sup>11</sup> About ten years later, Susan Sontag, more of a culture critic than an art critic *per se*, though certainly a representative of the "high" intellectual style, decried the fact that contemporary art seemed so divorced from social reality. As an alternative, Sontag envisioned a "new sensibility" that was "defiantly pluralistic," "rooted in the cultural present," and "dedicated both to an

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<sup>9</sup> Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, introduction to High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture, by Kirk Varnedoe, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> John Berger, "The Cultural Snob: There Is No 'Highbrow' Art," Nation, 5 November 1955, 380.

excruciating seriousness and to fun and wit and nostalgia.”<sup>12</sup> More recently, Robert Storr has offered his own vision of the expanded cultural horizon in an essay entitled “No Joy in Mudville: Greenberg’s Modernism Then and Now.” In this essay, Storr looks at the social and political milieu in which Greenberg flourished, examines his aversion to mass culture, and addresses his inadequacies as an appraiser of “mixed”--as opposed to “pure”--specimens of art. “With few exceptions,” Storr maintains, “art in our time has . . . demanded a critic as ‘wrapped in the melodrama of vulgarity’ as the artists upon whose work he presumed to pass judgment.”<sup>13</sup> Clearly, Greenberg was not such a critic; so, as an alternative model, Storr recommends Baudelaire, “a man of the crowd” who embraced contemporary life and all its diversity.

Without a doubt, critics like Berger, Sontag, and Storr have, over the last few decades, forcefully challenged some of the older, entrenched ideas that have long guided the discipline of art history. Certainly, it is more than coincidental that the popular culture discipline itself has risen in stature in the academic arena over the same period. Popular culture specialists may still fail to recognize that high art and popular culture have, for quite some time, been mutually sustaining phenomena. Art historians, on the other hand, now eagerly acknowledge the interplay of fine art and popular art, and their research in this area will surely complement the work being done by colleagues in the field of popular culture.

The anthology of essays edited by Varnedoe and Gopnik that was published in conjunction with The Museum of Modern Art’s High and Low exhibition provides an instructive overview of the range of art historical material that has been analyzed in terms of its “high” and “low” content. The earliest period addressed in this anthology is the Baroque period. This occurs in Irving Lavin’s “High and Low Before Their Time: Bernini and the Art of Social Satire,” an essay characterized by the editors as “the Genesis story of

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<sup>12</sup> Susan Sontag, “One Culture and the New Sensibility,” in Popular Culture and the Expanding Consciousness, ed. Ray B. Browne (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 28, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Storr, “No Joy in Mudville: Greenberg’s Modernism Then and Now,” in Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 180. For further discussion of Greenberg’s legacy, see Thomas Crow, “Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts,” in Pollock and After: The Critical Debate, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 237-39.

discrete 'high' and 'low' categories in Western art."<sup>14</sup> Apparently, Lavin himself believes that both elevated and more commonplace cultural elements have exerted their mutual influences throughout history and in all societies. As he himself puts it, "'high' and 'low,' the sophisticated and the naive, are always present as cultural alternatives—in all societies, even 'primitive' ones—exerting opposite and equal thrusts in the history of human awareness and self-revelation."<sup>15</sup> However, he goes on to demonstrate that for Western art, the emergence of the high/low dichotomy is rooted in the peculiar conditions that shaped the Italian Renaissance and gave its cultural legacy such monumental force. Lavin argues that the notion of a "high" or elevated cultural expression with corresponding social value that emerged in Renaissance Italy engendered an oppositional trend that gave rise to "popular" alternative styles such as that of caricature. It follows, then, from Lavin's argument that high art and popular art entered into a specific dialogue with one another only after the preconditions for a "high art" tradition had been established in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thus far, at least, scholars have treated the high/low relationship as a problem principally inherent in art produced after the Renaissance. Most of the remaining eight essays in the anthology address aspects of French art between circa 1800 and the 1910s or British and American art from World War II on.<sup>16</sup> These are the two phases of Western art that have thus far received the most thoroughgoing analysis in terms of the high and low cultural dichotomy.

It is a curious fact that the "high" and "low" relationship in early twentieth-century American art has received so little attention when, in actuality, quite a number of American artists active at the time—including the majority of the "ashcan" realists—contributed directly to popular culture through their work as magazine illustrators. It is true that in recent years the magazine illustration work of several celebrated "fine artists" has gained some

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<sup>14</sup> Varnedoe and Gopnik, introduction to Modern Art and Popular Culture, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Irving Lavin, "High and Low Before Their Time: Bernini and the Art of Social Satire," in Modern Art and Popular Culture, 19.

<sup>16</sup> The exceptions are John E. Bowlit, "A Brazen Can-can in the Temple of Art: The Russian Avant-garde and Popular Culture," 134-58, and Roger Shattuck, "The Last Cause: At the Bethany Theater," 230-42. The latter is a fanciful review of an imaginary comedy whose cast includes Paul Klee, the Marx Brothers, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Antonin Artaud, and a host of others.

recognition.<sup>17</sup> Also the influence of various popular and commercial arts on the production of individual artists—for example, film in the case of Edward Hopper and advertising in the case of Stuart Davis—is now frequently acknowledged. Even so, within the discipline of art history, at least, the dynamic relationship between “high” and “low” forces in American art and culture in general in the early years of this century has been largely overlooked.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, a few words must be said about the treatment of the two specific elements of popular culture that I propose to address here—namely, vaudeville and motion pictures—in the art historical literature. In my assessment, the visual entertainment component of popular culture has received somewhat less than its due attention in studies of the engagement of fine art with more popular forms of expression. The Museum of Modern Art’s High and Low exhibition, for example, attempts only to correlate specimens of Modern art with popular graphic styles and material; thus, for instance, we are invited to compare Philip Guston’s imagery to that of the comics, Cy Twombly’s to that of urban graffiti, and Fernand Léger’s to that of contemporary advertising. The relationship between Modern art and popular entertainment is beyond the scope of the exhibition. A more recent exhibition organized by the National Museum of American Art, Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York, does address the conspicuous presence of images of “commercial leisure” in the work of members of Henri’s circle. However, the organizers of the exhibition are principally concerned with the reflection of changing social values in “ashcan” realism, and the catalogue does not attempt to assess the significance that the

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<sup>17</sup> Still, monographs treating painters’ illustration work are rare. A notable exception is Gail Levin’s Edward Hopper as Illustrator (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.; in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Ironically, there may be more interest in the overarching high/low dialectic in twentieth-century American culture among European scholars. See, for example, Rob Kroes, ed., High Brow Meets Low Brow: American Culture as an Intellectual Concern (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), a volume of essays covering a broad range of topics, including the relationship between American scientists and mass culture, “mass” nutrition in America, as well as aspects of literature and visual art.

realists themselves, as “fine artists,” attached to popular entertainment.<sup>19</sup>

Though some scholars have attempted to address the impact of popular entertainment on the development of Modern art, their efforts thus far have focused only on the limited, albeit crucial, phase of Cubism. Most notably, Natasha Staller has explored Picasso’s and Braque’s relationship to the pioneering cinema of Georges Méliès, and Jeffrey Weiss has looked at Cubist collage as a reflection of the music hall environment.<sup>20</sup> Staller, on the one hand, has discovered an analog in early film to Cubist fragmentation of physical form, while Weiss has found an analog in music hall parlance to the word fragments in Cubist collage. What is more important, however, in the work of the latter, is an overall correlation between collage and music hall expression. As I am concerned primarily with specific content and only secondarily with formal issues, Weiss represents for me the most valuable research model. In an effort to place Cubism “within a larger cultural expression,” Weiss demonstrates how the “music-hall manner” informed the style and content as well as the spirit of Picasso’s work in collage. I, likewise, will explore the ways in which early twentieth-century American Realism and Modernism borrowed from popular entertainment and will ultimately attempt to relate this activity to a larger cultural context.

#### Vaudeville and Movie-Related Subjects in the Context of “Ashcan” Realism

In the first part of this two-part study, I explore the emerging emphasis on popular entertainment imagery in pictorial realism after the turn of the century, and I relate this development to similar emphases in contemporary literature and journalism. American

<sup>19</sup> See Robert W. Snyder and Rebecca Zurier, “Picturing the City,” chap. in Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York, exh. cat. (Washington, D. C.: National Museum of American Art; in association with W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1995), 156-71. “Commercial Leisure” is one of seven subdivisions of the chapter entitled “Picturing the City.” The other six address “the urban infrastructure,” “rich and poor,” “ethnic communities and urban types,” “public spaces and public behavior,” “shopping,” and “men and women.” The artists included in the exhibition are George Bellows, William Glackens, Robert Henri, George Luks, Everett Shinn and John Sloan.

<sup>20</sup> See Natasha Staller, “Méliès’ ‘Fantastic’ Cinema and the Origins of Cubism,” Art History 12 (June 1989): 202-17 and Jeffrey S. Weiss, “Picasso, Collage, and the Music Hall,” in Modern Art and Popular Culture, 83-115.

artists, as well as novelists and journalists, who gravitated to New York in the 1890s and early 1900s were fascinated by the teeming metropolis, its contrasts, and its diversions. Many of these observers shared a similar awareness of the advent of a new urban culture that thrived in the streets, in the immigrant neighborhoods, in the parks, and anywhere else that people gathered to seek pleasure and amusement. This new awareness of the urban experience was a key link not only between literary and pictorial realism, but also between the higher literary and artistic endeavors and the more popular forums for writing and illustration, such as newspapers and magazines. The realism embraced by Henri and his followers was profoundly informed by this new sensitivity to the environment of the city. These artists, I will argue, derived much of their inspiration from this “general culture” of urban realism as opposed to the more narrow “culture” of fine art. Therefore, their realistic style and the subjects they embraced can only be fully assessed, and perhaps fully understood, in the larger cultural context within which the realist ethos came to play a significant role. I devote the first several chapters of part one to an exploration of the nineteenth-century roots of American Realism and to its subsequent manifestations in novelistic literature and pictorial journalism. Subsequent chapters are devoted to a more focused look at the careers of the individual artists treated as principals in this study: John Sloan, William Glackens, Everett Shinn, and Stuart Davis.

Sloan, Glackens, Shinn, and Davis were not the only four artists associated with realism to depict entertainment phenomena in their work. Several other artists often identified with this group—including George Luks, Jerome Myers, and Glenn Coleman—were also drawn to entertainment subject matter. Luks was drawn early on to the subject of vaudeville and produced at least one painting of vaudeville entertainers prior to 1900—The Amateurs, also known as The Vaudeville Singers, of 1899 (Private Collection). However, from what survives of his oeuvre, it is impossible to discern a sustained interest in vaudeville phenomena. Coleman produced one significant drawing of a vaudeville theater interior, which I discuss at some length in chapter two. Otherwise, Coleman, like Myers, more often recorded the life of the streets, including its spontaneous or inadvertent entertainers. This special interest in the street as site of spontaneous spectacle represents an

important trend within pictorial realism, which I touch upon in the pages that follow. However, because of the minimal involvement of these several artists with vaudeville and/or movie subjects *per se*, I have elected not to focus extensively on their work.

Each of the separate chapters I've devoted to Sloan, Glackens, Shinn, and Davis is presented as a "case study," in which the unique perspective of the individual artist is analyzed and assessed. Sloan is presented as a distanced observer who remained aloof from the subjects he depicted. From this distance, he perceived that the "spectatorial habit" was fundamentally rooted in contemporary society, and he saw its manifestations everywhere: in the street, in the movie theaters, in art galleries and museums. Sloan conceived of painting vaudeville as well as movie-related subjects; however, only the latter were realized. Moreover, he was the only artist of his generation to demonstrate a sustained interest in such subjects.<sup>21</sup> Glackens owns the distinction of being the first member of the realist group to complete a major painting of a contemporary vaudeville subject. This well-known work, entitled Hammerstein's Roof Garden, is a key painting in Glackens's early oeuvre, and its evolution is presented as the centerpiece of my discussion of the artist.<sup>22</sup> In exploring the conception and development of the theme of the painting, I uncover a direct correlation between Glackens's work in fine art and his concurrent work in illustration. In Glackens's case, however, there was no consistent link between his painting and his illustrations; however, in Shinn's case, the correlation was consistent and unabashedly direct. The popular appeal of contemporary vaudeville was, almost certainly, a key factor in Shinn's success as a "fine artist" between roughly 1900 and 1910. His example serves more forcefully than any other to illustrate the intersection of "high" art and popular impulses in early twentieth-century American culture. I conclude part one with a discussion of Stuart Davis, who briefly carried on the "Ashcan" tradition in the early 1910s. An adventurer by nature, Davis was drawn more to working-class and ethnic

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<sup>21</sup> Shinn depicted a movie-related subject at least once, in a pastel entitled During the Biograph. The title is listed in the catalogue of Shinn's first exhibition at Boussod, Valadon, and Co., New York, 1900; however, the location of the object is unknown.

<sup>22</sup> I will demonstrate that Hammerstein's Roof Garden was at least begun in 1899. (The Whitney Museum of American Art assigns a date of ca. 1901.) Though Luks's The Amateurs may still predate Hammerstein's, the latter remains a much more fully-realized evocation of contemporary vaudeville and commands a far more important place in Glackens's oeuvre.

environments than to the respectable realm of vaudeville. Nonetheless, he found models and inspiration in the entertainment depictions of his elders. Davis began his career in a period in which popular art forms were, in some sectors, first fully recognized to be valid components of American culture. Davis, it appears, was unusually far-sighted in this respect. In his chapter, I attempt to demonstrate how his initial approach to popular entertainment subject matter, which was somewhat eclectic in nature, gave way to a more concentrated focus on entertainment in the black community--on its music and its dance forms, which were rapidly being assimilated by the general culture.

#### Vaudeville and Movie-Related Subjects in the Context of Early Modernism

By the middle of the second decade of this century, movies and vaudeville had become an integral part of the American experience, and the destinies of both were widely discussed in artistic and literary circles. The distinct attributes of the "popular arts"--a category that included movies and vaudeville--were first recognized at this time. Artists themselves were involved in creating new definitions of art to meet the needs of a changing culture. For example, in conjunction with the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917, there were presentations of the cinematograph (though it is unclear whether these were included as examples of fine or popular art).

I introduce part two with an extended discussion of the peculiar dynamics of American culture in the decade of the 1910s. Following the appearance in 1915 of Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age*, which addressed the historical schism in the U. S. between highbrow and lowbrow forces, the destiny of American culture became a subject of intense debate. The cultural critics of the later 1910s were largely concerned with identifying what was unique and indigenous to American soil. One man in particular, a gallery director and magazine publisher named Robert Coady, recognized American popular culture as a valid source of American art. While Coady, who was more of an iconoclast than most of his contemporaries, celebrated the "primitive" aspects of American

culture, including movies and vaudeville, others recognized American popular entertainments as potentially significant American arts.

Vaudeville and movie-related subject matter in American art of the 1910s reflects the dialectic of high and low in American culture that emerged during this period. Consciously or not, the artists who embraced such subjects asserted the validity of an earthy, exuberant, inclusive, democratic form of culture. In this respect, they were all at least a little bit “Dada,” as American Dada came to be understood in the early 1920s. That popular entertainment had special meaning in the context of New York Dada is suggested by the rather remarkable use of a vaudeville metaphor in Marsden Hartley’s well-known essay, which was first published in 1921. “The Importance of Being ‘Dada’”:

You will find . . . that if you aware of yourself, you will be your own perfect dada-ist, in that you are for the first time riding your own hobby-horse into the infinity of sensation through experience, and that you are one more satisfactory vaudevillian among the multitude of dancing legs and flying wits. You will learn after all that the bugaboo called LIFE is a matter of the tightrope and that the stars will shine their frisky approval as you glide, if you glide sensibly, with an eye on the fun in the performance.<sup>23</sup>

Being ‘Dada,’ at least for Hartley, meant giving in to “the infinity of sensation through experience,” casting in your lot with the other performers, and joining in the fun. In Dada, as in vaudeville, playfulness, humor, even vulgarity, were encouraged. By the early 1920s, the earthy qualities of “low” art and popular culture were explicitly identified with New York Dada.

In the final chapter of part two, I discuss the vaudeville and related imagery of Charles Demuth, the vaudeville and movie-related subjects of Man Ray, and the persona of Rose Sélavy, a character, I maintain, that was directly inspired by vaudeville. Between the mid-1910s and the early 1920s, Demuth concentrated on vaudeville subjects, producing some seventy or eighty water colors representing acrobats, comedians, dancers, and other vaudeville performers. The pictorial record of vaudeville that Demuth has left us is a highly

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<sup>23</sup> Marsden Hartley, “The Importance of Being ‘Dada,’” chap. in *Adventures in the Arts* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1921), 253.

personal one that appears to reveal a great deal about the construction of sexuality. Working with some of the ideas that have previously been advanced by Demuth scholars and introducing some of my own, I explore the representation of sexual identity in his vaudeville and related work. Next, I present Man Ray as an eclectic modernist who assimilated a broad range of influences--including some from the realm of popular entertainment--during his formative period in New York. One of his most influential associates at this time was Marcel Duchamp, who was a great fan of American movies and vaudeville. My discussion of Man Ray's development during this period centers on his celebrated oil entitled The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows, which represents a vaudeville theme that is foreshadowed in his earlier work and echoed in his work that followed. Finally, I examine the character of Rose Sélavy, who was first revealed in physical form in photographs by Man Ray of circa 1920. Duchamp's masquerade, I will argue, was directly inspired by contemporary vaudeville, in which both female and male impersonators enjoyed unusually high profiles and garnered much acclaim.

#### Case Study and Cultural Context: Some Notes on Approach and Objectives

An important advantage of the case study approach is that it isolates individual artists for examination and serves to accentuate the uniqueness of each. Each of the artists I've considered addressed the subject matter of popular entertainment somewhat differently because of his own psychology and experience; each gave the subject a personal, if not idiosyncratic, spin. To a large extent, the works of art themselves confirm and illustrate the individual distinction of each of these several artists. However, there are a number of important questions that the art works themselves cannot answer. For example, what relevance did these subjects have to their contemporary cultural context? Why were they selected? Was their "lowbrow" identification an attractive feature? If these subjects were chosen because they were "lowbrow," were they meant to reflect upon or even directly challenge the distinction between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" taste?

For the most part, the artists who figure in this study wrote little about their experiences with and perceptions of movies and vaudeville. (John Sloan is an exception.) Therefore, I've had to look elsewhere for clues to the answers to these questions. I've had to rely extensively on the writings of others who were these artists' contemporaries and with whom they presumably shared certain attitudes with respect to art. Between 1900 and 1920, distinctions between "high" and "low" were commonly made in critical writing on American culture and art. In the 1910s especially, "highbrow" tendencies were often disparaged while "lowbrow" trends were praised. Like many of their literary contemporaries who were receptive to popular entertainment, these visual artists may well have, by virtue of their identification with "high" culture, experienced some feeling of superiority vis-à-vis movies and vaudeville. On the other hand, they surely recognized these forms of popular entertainment as cultural "alternatives," which, if not wholly acceptable to their "higher" tastes, were nonetheless fresh and vital. Their depictions of vaudeville and movie subjects therefore not only reflect their own pleasure in these amusements but also a shifting of values between "high" and popular art.

## 2. American Realism: Its Roots and Manifestations

### “Culture” in Nineteenth-Century America: An overview

Though as early as 1871, Walt Whitman had put forth his view of culture as egalitarian and based on solidarity in a “native expression-spirit,” the democratic vision he expressed would not truly captivate progressive America until the later years of the century.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, a self-conscious reevaluation of non-native—that is, European—cultural forms was underway in the U.S. throughout most of the Victorian era. This process, which Lawrence Levine has termed the “sacralization of culture,” altered the very meaning of the arts in America. Levine has shown that most of the cultural forms that we consider highbrow today did not have such elitist appeal before the mid-nineteenth century. Rather, the foreign-language opera, the Shakespearean drama, the symphony concert, as well as the art museum, were viewed as popular attractions.<sup>2</sup> Theaters, concert halls, opera houses, and even lecture halls, were, to a large extent, open forums for the public. Audiences, which included bourgeois as well as working class segments, behaved raucously, sometimes even irreverently. The cultural experience, therefore, brought disparate elements of society together on equal terms. There was no enforced hierarchy

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<sup>1</sup> Walt Whitman, Democratic Vistas (Washington, D. C., 1871). For discussion of Whitman’s outlook on American culture as expressed in Democratic Vistas, see Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), 158-60.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 147. Levine identifies, as a case in point, Charles Willson Peale’s museum of art and natural curiosities, which opened in Philadelphia in 1786 and was depicted in Peale’s famous painting of 1822, The Artist in His Museum.

and no call for special reverence. Thus, far from being elevated above other forms of expressive art in the first half of the nineteenth century, drama, opera, instrumental music, painting and sculpture were, according to Levine, “part of the general culture and were experienced in the midst of a broad range of other cultural genres by a catholic audience that cut through class and social lines.”<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, distinct lines had been drawn between vulgar entertainment and refined cultural diversion. By this time, the cultural arena had come to be regarded as “a privileged domain of refinement, aesthetic sensibility, and higher learning,”<sup>4</sup> and the various social classes no longer mingled so freely in so formalized an environment. While culture became represented increasingly as edifying and ennobling, the organized cultural setting assumed an other-worldly aspect as a realm existing separate and apart from the crass material world of business and commerce. Certainly, myriad factors contributed to this new tendency to assess cultural options in hierarchical terms. Changing economic realities and social restructuring in the post-bellum years no doubt played a significant part in altering patterns of use and patronage; but, more importantly, changes in the “moral climate” in the U.S. during those years altered expectations of culture itself. The moral force of women, together with the “feminine” religious element in Victorian society, had a profound effect on the U.S. cultural environment in the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, along with the “feminization” of culture—that is, its identification with womanly virtues such as beauty, grace, good taste, and moral refinement—came an expanded role for women as guardians of the moral establishment. Thus, women became increasingly responsible—as charity workers, schoolteachers, and librarians—for sustaining the higher values of society. Social, educational, and cultural institutions became, like the home, spheres of feminine influence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>4</sup> Trachtenberg, Incorporation of America, 143.

<sup>5</sup> For further analysis of the feminine element and the role of women in nineteenth and early twentieth century American culture, see Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Knopf, 1977) and Kathleen D. McCarthy, Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

By all indications, a critical transition was underway in American culture and society by the 1890s, one that would have profound implications for American art and life in the early twentieth century. A new liveliness seemed to infect the American spirit as the new century approached. In some sectors, the effete culture of the Victorian age was explicitly challenged. John Higham has characterized this shift in the following way:

From the middle of the nineteenth century until about 1890 Americans on the whole had submitted docilely enough to the gathering restrictions of a highly industrialized society. . . . By [the early 1890s], a profound spiritual reaction was developing. It took many forms, but it was everywhere a hunger to break out of the frustrations, the routine, and the sheer dullness of an urban-industrial culture. It was everywhere an urge to be young, masculine, and adventurous.<sup>6</sup>

During this time of transition, both men and women sought greater freedom to express themselves in body and spirit. There was, as Higham points out, a dramatic upsurge of enthusiasm at this time for outdoor recreation and physical exercise in which both sexes participated. For this was the decade of the birth of the “New Woman,” a vigorous, athletic counterpart to the contemporary man. In addition to the new athleticism, there was an avid new appreciation for rousing popular songs like “Ta-ra-ra-boom-der-e,” for ragtime music, and for the spirited African-American dance step known as the Cakewalk.<sup>7</sup> In short, Americans had begun to discover the delightful freedom inherent in popular forms of expression. Moreover, these distinctly American styles of music and dance were beginning to be accepted, in both the U.S. and abroad, as salient aspects of American culture.

American arts and letters, like American society as a whole, had suffered from lack of vitality during the Victorian age. Americans had rediscovered the active life in the 1890s and were beginning to liberate themselves from Victorian ennui. There is evidence that American arts and letters were also touched by this effort. Walt Whitman, who died in 1892, had in his lifetime created a model of literary achievement that stood as the perfect antidote to Victorian over-refinement. In the 1890s his following grew, though the better

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<sup>6</sup> John Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s,” chap. in Writing American History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 79.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

part of the literary establishment still denigrated his poetry.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the spirit of Whitman's verse matched that of the 1890s. As Whitman's biographer, John Burroughs, observed in 1896, "The culture of life, of nature, and that which flows from the exercise of the manly instincts and affections, is the culture implied by 'Leaves of Grass.'"<sup>9</sup> The "manly" option that Whitman represented appears to Burroughs as an explicit challenge to the effete-ness of prevailing culture: "We are living in an age of great purity and refinement in taste in art and letters, but destitute of power," Burroughs wrote; Whitman is almost "too strong for current taste"; people still want "more art and less man, more literature and less life."<sup>10</sup> The liberated spirit of the 1890s may have awakened more slowly in art and literary circles than it did in society as a whole; even so, increased enthusiasm for Whitman may be seen to go hand-in-hand with the renewed pursuit of spontaneous and energetic forms of physical and cultural expression during the decade. Though Whitman still may have enjoyed a limited following at this time, he would become an essential point of reference for many artists and writers after the turn of the century.

### The Advent of Realism in Art and Literature

Twentieth-century scholars often refer to the constellation of attitudes and impulses informing Victorian art and literature as "the genteel tradition." This term was actually coined by the philosopher George Santayana, who first outlined the characteristics of America's older, more conservative mentality in an address delivered at the University of California on August 25, 1911.<sup>11</sup> In the 1940s, Frederic I. Carpenter reinterpreted this outlook in broad terms as the traditionalist mentality in America conditioned by the

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<sup>8</sup> John Burroughs, *Whitman: A Study* (Cambridge, 1896; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1969), 6. Burroughs claims that "perhaps three fourths of the readers of current poetry, and not a few of the writers thereof, cannot stand Whitman at all, or see any reason for his being."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>11</sup> The text of this address appeared soon thereafter in print. See George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," chap. in *Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 186-215.

influence of Puritan morality and aristocratic culture.<sup>12</sup> To some extent, the values inherent in this tradition--idealism, conservatism, humanism, moralism--are transhistorical. Nonetheless, the progressive developments in American culture that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have been interpreted as reactions to the genteel tradition as manifested in the immediate past. Though painterly realism and literary realism emerged independently in nineteenth-century America, the two phenomena assumed similar oppositional roles with respect to the genteel tradition.

Thomas Eakins's The Gross Clinic of 1875, which he exhibited initially in Philadelphia and subsequently in New York, was almost certainly the first really potent example of realism in artistic form presented to any sector of American society during the latter part of the Victorian age. When shown within the medical section of Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition of 1876, this work apparently aroused little controversy. However, when Eakins later presented the painting in an art exhibition in New York City, the outrage was considerable. New York critics found the work "horrible and yet fascinating," "sickeningly real," and "a degradation of Art." One was especially concerned that such a powerfully shocking depiction should be shown to women and children. "Even strong men find it difficult to look at long, if they can look at it at all," he wrote, "and as for people with nerves and stomachs, the scene is so real that they may as well go to a dissecting room and have done with it." For this critic and others, The Gross Clinic had no *raison d'etre* as a work of art for it betrayed no effort to distinguish the painted image from the reality on which it was based. Therefore, the painting represented not only a direct assault on refined Victorian taste and sensibility but also a powerful blow to the idealizing tendency inherent in the genteel tradition.<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, a more general revolt against conservative domination of the American art world was getting under way in the 1870s. Soon, Eakins would come to be associated with a group of progressives--including Frank Duveneck, William Merritt

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<sup>12</sup> Frederic I. Carpenter, "The Genteel Tradition: A Re-Interpretation," New England Quarterly 15 (September 1942): 428.

<sup>13</sup> For full discussion of the critical response to The Gross Clinic following its inclusion in the second annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists, New York, March 1879, see Lloyd Goodrich, Thomas Eakins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1:134-37.

Chase, and other mostly foreign-trained artists--that was referred to under the banner heading of "The New Movement."<sup>14</sup> Certainly, not all members of the New Movement embraced realism; and even among those who did, none did so as fervently as Eakins. Nonetheless, Eakins's own thoroughgoing realism established a critical precedent for younger artists in his native Philadelphia. Through his influence as a teacher as well as the force of his work, Eakins contributed much to the future development of conscientious dissension among younger artists, who adopted realism as a sign of their opposition to prevailing genteel tastes.

In the fall of 1886, less than a year after Eakins had resigned from his teaching post at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Robert Henri entered the school as a student. Though Eakins was gone, his influence lingered on for a few years, so that Henri was exposed, at least indirectly, to his ideas and his methods. Moreover, during Henri's attendance at the Academy, the Eakins tradition was reinforced by Thomas P. Anschutz, who had taken over Eakins's classes in February of 1886. Anschutz was a former pupil and assistant of Eakins and likewise eschewed idealism in his work; however, in some ways, he went even further than his mentor in his search for quotidian themes. His Iron Workers' Noon-Day Rest (c. 1880), for example, depicts a rugged workaday world far removed from the professional or middle-class environments depicted by Eakins. Anschutz, therefore, played an important role in preserving and, in some ways, enhancing the legacy that he passed on to Henri, his student. Henri, in his turn, would deliver this legacy in slightly modified form to the younger men he taught and befriended after 1890, whom he advised to "forget about Art" and instead paint pictures of what interested them in life, to "paint with emotion not sentimentality . . . honesty not cleverness."<sup>15</sup>

William I. Homer contends that the "new and distinctive" realistic style of painting applicable to "native American subjects" which emerged in Philadelphia in the late

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 133-34.

<sup>15</sup> John Sloan, "John Sloan Discussing Robert Henri," in John Sloan/Robert Henri: Their Philadelphia Years (1886-1904), exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art Gallery, 1976), 23. For a detailed discussion of Henri's relationship to various aspects of Eakins's work and philosophy, see William I. Homer, "An Art Student in Philadelphia, 1886-1888," chap. in Robert Henri and His Circle, rev. ed. (New York: Hacker Books, 1988), 21-37.

nineteenth century was a product of the influence of Eakins strengthened by the enthusiasm of Henri.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, Eakins was a key point of reference for Henri and his associates; however, their embrace of realism has to be viewed in an altogether different context from that of their older colleague. As an exponent of uncompromising realism, Eakins was an isolated figure in the early years of his career. By the 1890s, when Henri emerged as the guiding light of the Philadelphia School, there was a burgeoning awareness of realistic expression as an alternative to more conservative styles in literature as well as painting. Realistic tendencies in American literature, especially, were widely noted and discussed. There was much concern with this new development and much debate about its role and meaning in American culture.<sup>17</sup>

The 1890s were, according to Eric Sundquist, “in many respects *the* decade of literary realism in America.”<sup>18</sup> By this time the trend not only had a recognized leader in William Dean Howells, but Howells himself was widely considered the foremost writer of fiction in the U.S.<sup>19</sup> His first novel *Their Wedding Journey*, which appeared in 1872, had announced its author’s incipient realism: “Ah! poor Real Life, which I love, can I make others share the delight I find in thy foolish and insipid face,” Howells declares in the midst of the story. However, Howells did not truly develop his realist agenda until the 1880s when he began to read Tolstoy seriously and to relate literary realism to social conscience.

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<sup>16</sup> Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle*, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Several cultural historians have treated in broad terms the phenomenon of realism in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century America. Trachtenberg, for example, opens his chapter on “Fictions of the Real” in *The Incorporation of America* with a brief discussion of the contributions of Eakins and Homer to the spirit of the age. Miles Orvell also identifies, in his study entitled *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), a general shift away from imitation toward “the real” just prior to the turn of the century. Orvell, however, concentrates on literature, photography, architecture, and decorative arts and does not treat painting and sculpture. The most recent contribution to the literature, *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850-1920* by David E. Shi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) provides “a synthetic overview of the major events, ideas, and individuals that combined to generate the various types of ‘realistic’ expression” (3) during the period and surpasses its predecessors in comprehensiveness.

<sup>18</sup> Eric J. Sundquist, preface to *American Realism, New Essays*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), vii.

<sup>19</sup> Today the work of Howells is almost universally regarded as less distinguished than that of his contemporaries Henry James and Mark Twain, both of whom Howells knew as friends. For some thoughtful reflections on Howells’s diminished reputation, see Lionel Trilling, “William Dean Howells and the Roots of Modern Taste,” chap. in *The Opposing Self* (New York: Viking, 1955), 67-91.

Following the appearance in 1882 of his first controversial novel, A Modern Instance, which dealt with divorce, a subject still considered taboo at the time, Howells began increasingly to voice his advocacy of realism as a vital mode of American expression.

The Rise of Silas Lapham, which first began appearing in serial form in late 1885, marked a watershed in Howells's career and in the course of literary realism in America.<sup>20</sup> The novel is at once a tale of American enterprise and class consciousness. The hero of the story, Lapham, is a *nouveau riche* paint manufacturer in Boston who tries his best to earn the approbation of the city's old-moneyed elite. In 1885, a coarse parvenu like Lapham was indisputably a vulgar specimen on which to base a novel, on ostensible work of art. At this point, conservative critics began to take serious exception to Howells's realism. In his review of Lapham, Hamilton Wright Mabie takes the opportunity to address what he judges to be the gravest faults of this new tendency in American fiction. Mabie is dismayed, to say the least, that "realism is crowding the world of fiction with commonplace people; people whom one would positively avoid coming in contact with in real life; people without native sweetness or strength, without acquired culture or accomplishment, without that touch of the ideal which makes the commonplace significant and worthy of study." Mabie goes on to draw distinctions between "the theoretical realism of the day and the older and eternal realism of fidelity to nature as the basis of art." The divergence between the two, he argues, "goes to the very bottom of our conceptions of life and art." Mabie, in effect, voices the essence of the genteel protest against Howells's brand of realism: "the realists of the new school deny the existence in nature of the things which the older realists have held to be deepest and truest. The new realism is not dissent from a particular method; it is a fundamental skepticism of the essential reality of the old ends and subjects of art."<sup>21</sup>

As criticism of his work increased, Howells campaigned more and more vigorously for the cause of realism in literature. The "Editor's Study" column that he began writing for

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<sup>20</sup> Two other important works of realist fiction first appeared as serials the same year (all three in The Century magazine)—Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and James's Bostonians.

<sup>21</sup> Hamilton Wright Mabie, "A Typical Novel," Andover Review 4 (November 1885); reprinted in part in Edwin H. Cady and David L. Frazier, eds., The War of the Critics Over William Dean Howells (Evanston, Ill. and Elmsford, N. Y.: Row, Peterson & Co., 1962), 40-41.

Harper's Weekly in 1886 served as a useful vehicle for such advocacy. In 1891 he published a collection of these essays in a book entitled Criticism and Fiction; this volume, in a sense, constituted the *summa* of his realist program. Several of Howells's most vital concerns emerge in the pages of this book: for example, that creative work reflect real life, that it be judged by standards of simplicity, naturalness, and honesty, and that it appeal to the sensibilities of the common person. His belief in a democratic tradition in American culture colors every one of these concerns. Howells appeals to a community of others "who can say, with Emerson: 'I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic . . . . I embrace the common: I sit at the feet of the familiar and the low . . . .'"<sup>22</sup> He ultimately identifies the common, familiar, and low aspects of life as essentially American. Matthew Arnold, Howells observes, has complained that he found no distinction in American life. Howells suggest that "the fact pointed out by Mr. Arnold ought to be a source of inspiration . . . not discouragement." He calls upon "talent that is robust enough to front the every-day world and catch the charm of its work-worn, care-worn, brave, kindly face." "The superstition of the romantic, the bizarre, the heroic, the distinguished," he implies, may no longer be preminent as artistic subjects, if America is to find its native expression. "The arts must become democratic," he asserts, "and then we shall have the expression of America in art."<sup>23</sup>

Howells's prominence in American literature and journalism made him prominent and influential in American culture in general. His opinions, therefore, were very likely known to many progressive painters and sculptors of the day.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Howells himself was clearly concerned with the broader sphere of American culture and with the role of the plastic arts within that sphere. From early childhood, he was drawn to artists and their work, and throughout his career he maintained vital connections with

<sup>22</sup> Howells, Criticism and Fiction, 79.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-40.

<sup>24</sup> Homer in Robert Henri and His Circle (227 n.39) cites one piece of evidence that indicates Henri was aware of the realist trend in American literature: a letter to his family dated Aug. 16, 1891, in which he mentions his knowledge of Howells's writings. Shinn met Howells in early 1900 when sent to make a pastel drawing of the famous author for reproduction in The Critic. A few years later Glackens made illustrations for an epistolary series by Howells entitled "Letters Home" that appeared in Metropolitan Magazine April through August 1903.

contemporary artists and artistic trends.<sup>25</sup> The Boston painter George Fuller, for example, was one of Howells's close artist friends, and after his death in 1884 Howells contributed a lengthy sketch of the artist's life to a memorial volume of essays and engravings of his work.<sup>26</sup> Somewhat later in his career, Howells offered advice to Augustus Saint-Gaudens as he worked to complete a sculpture group, including the figure of General William T. Sherman and an allegory of Victory, for New York's Central Park. Howells apparently regretted Saint-Gaudens's departure from realism and was critical of the allegorical figure. Howells wrote to the artist's son Homer Saint-Gaudens in 1908: Your father . . . showed me with particular interest the figure of the Victory . . . . I owned that I did not like the introduction of the ideal in that group . . . but he defended it strongly."<sup>27</sup>

The two instances described above only begin to suggest the extent of Howells's involvement with contemporary art and his degree of awareness of art's potential for realism. In actuality, his connections with the art world of his day were far more diverse and intricate, as Clara Marburg Kirk has shown. The critical point is that Howells exercised a broadly inclusive interest in American culture. Inevitably, he sensed the ethical continuity between realism in art and realism in literature, and he communicated this awareness to others, both directly and indirectly, as an individual, and as a resonant voice in American culture.

Howells's brand of realism, once identified with liberal politics, gained even greater cultural force. In an article published in 1893, Clarence Darrow, the brilliant lawyer and social reformer, made explicit the broader implications of realism for American society as a

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<sup>25</sup> For full treatment of the subject of Howells's relationship to contemporary art and artists, see Clara Marburg Kirk, W. D. Howells and Art in His Time (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965).

<sup>26</sup> William Dean Howells, "Sketch of George Fuller's Life," in George Fuller, His Life and Works, ed. Josiah B. Millet (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1886), 1-52.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from William Dean Howells to Homer Saint-Gaudens, dated 15 November 1908; reprinted in The Reminiscences of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, ed. Homer Saint-Gaudens (New York: Century Co., 1913), 2:61-62, 65. Saint-Gaudens apparently completed the figure of Victory (or Victory-Peace) around 1900, prior to presenting the entire monument in plaster at the Paris Exposition of 1900. The monument was unveiled in situ at the south entrance to Central Park on Decoration Day, 1903. See John W. Bond, Augustus Saint-Gaudens: The Man and His Art (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, 1967), 310.

whole. An author by avocation, Darrow was profoundly inspired by Howells's work and his ideas. He saw Howells as "one of the great authors of the natural school" and identified him with Tolstoy, Ibsen, Flaubert, Zola, Hardy, and other "great masters" of realism.<sup>28</sup> In his 1893 article Darrow also extols realism in painting and sculpture, though he names no realist masters of the visual school. The realistic artist, according to Darrow, reveals the human form in its natural perfect state, without shame, and without inhibition. It is obvious here that Whitman's ideas have had a profound influence on his thinking: even the distinctive cadence of Whitman's counterpoint phrasing has found its way into parts of his text, as is evident in the statement, "There is not a single portion of the human body which some people have not believed holy, and not a single portion which some have not believed vile."<sup>29</sup> Thomas Eakins might very well represent Darrow's ideal practitioner of realism in painting, for his work so pointedly reflects the spirit of Whitman.<sup>30</sup> For Darrow, however, realism is much, much more than a style of expression in literature or art. For him, realism is a mirror of American life and progressive values, an expression of moral conscience and democracy itself. The realist, according to Darrow, "paints his picture so true and perfect that all men who look upon it know that it is a likeness of the world that they have seen; they know that these are men and women and little children whom they meet upon the street, and they see the conditions of their lives, and the moral of the picture sinks deeply into their minds."<sup>31</sup> Later, he fervently declares that artists of the realist school, like "all the world's best minds," have been inspired "with the hope of greater justice and more equal social life." They are visionaries who "feel the coming dawn, when true equality shall reign upon the earth--the time when democracy shall no more be confined to constitutions and to laws, but will be part of human life."<sup>32</sup> In its totality, Darrow's essay represents a remarkable synthesis of ideas about realistic representation,

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<sup>28</sup> Clarence Darrow, "Realism in Literature and Art," *Arena* 9 (December 1893): 107.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Eakins actually met Whitman for the first time in 1887. As Elizabeth Johns suggests, the two men had numerous affinities. See Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 144-49.

<sup>31</sup> Darrow, "Realism in Literature and Art," 109.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

literature, art, democratic society, and social justice. The contents of this piece would seem to reflect the synthesis of these ideas in the less conservative sector of American culture in the 1890s.

By the 1890s, then, there existed what might be termed a “realist front” in American art and literature. This development gathered increasing force as it incorporated ideas from the social and political as well as cultural spheres. It is unlikely that an artist who promoted realism or adopted a realist style of painting during this period would have been ignorant of the values attached to this mode of artistic expression. We may assume, then, that the direction taken by Henri and his younger followers in the 1890s and beyond was encouraged and informed by the general ethos of realism fostered by Howells, Darrow, and other contributors to the literary branch of the movement.

### Realism and Urban Imagery

The American painters who began representing city subjects around 1900 were participants in a much larger phenomenon in American art, literature, and social conscience that derived from urban culture. One of the most significant developments in the U.S. after the Civil War was the unprecedented growth of cities. Between 1800 and 1910 the total urban population of the U.S. tripled, while rural population was augmented by barely one third. In addition, from roughly 1880 to 1890 and from 1900 to 1910 there were huge surges in immigrant arrivals, and most of these newcomers settled in the cities, bringing increased diversity to expanding urban populations.<sup>33</sup> By the 1890s many observers of the urban scene began to manifest growing concern with the quality of urban life and, particularly, with the living conditions of the poorer denizens of the city. This focus of interest on urban phenomena was reflected in the work of pictorial artists--in that of photographers and illustrators, in particular--and in the work of journalists and writers of fiction.

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<sup>33</sup> Blake McKelvey, The Urbanization of America, 1860-1915 (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 63.

After the turn of the century popular awareness of urban problems was fueled by muckraking journalists, who, for the most part, took their cue from the influential reporter, photographer, and social reformer, Jacob Riis, who had been active in New York throughout the latter decades of the nineteenth century. In the late 1870s and most of the 1880s Riis had worked as a police reporter for the New York Tribune, and his work put him in constant contact with New York's blighted neighborhoods and disadvantaged residents. In 1887 he began taking photographs to complement his journalistic writings and soon afterward committed himself further to lecturing and presenting lantern slides to church audiences in New York. His lecturing activities gained him a certain notoriety, and as a result, the editor of Scribner's Magazine solicited an article from him reflecting the substance of his message. A nineteen-page illustrated essay that would later be expanded to book form appeared in Scribner's in December of 1889.<sup>34</sup> This expanded text was Riis's famous How the Other Half Lives, a work that galvanized public sentiment with regard to the plight of the poor and served as a turning point in Riis's own career as a social reformer. For after the book's publication in 1890, Riis abandoned his regular newspaper work in order to devote all of his time to free-lance journalism and reformist activities.

After the initial appearance of Riis's "How the Other Half Lives" in the pages of Scribner's, "the city" as a pictorial subject enjoyed an ongoing vogue that was sustained by several of the popular illustrated periodicals. After 1890 Scribner's itself began to feature articles on cities throughout the world. Some of these addressed humanitarian issues; for example, between April 1892 and July 1893 an extended series of articles appeared under the heading of "The Poor in Great Cities." Riis's "Children of the Poor" was included in this series along with other essays examining conditions in the slums of New York, London, Naples, and Boston. By the the mid-1890s the downtrodden must have occupied a special place in the imagination of the average American reader, for these unfortunate folk were pictured repeatedly in Scribner's, in Harper's Weekly, and in other popular magazines. Through popular illustration, the situation of the urban poor was made relevant to the lives of more affluent Americans in the 1890s, much like the issue of homelessness

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<sup>34</sup> Jacob A. Riis, "How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements," Scribner's 6 (December 1889): 643-62.

has been made a general concern in our own time through the agency of our contemporary media.<sup>35</sup>

Riis's descriptive prose and "documentary" photographs brought to light the harsher aspects of urban existence and were meant to arouse public sympathy and to further the cause of reformism.<sup>36</sup> Riis, therefore, had no "aesthetic" aims whatsoever and no reason to show the pleasant and diverting aspects of lower-class life. The representation of multifaceted urban existence at all levels did, however, become the province of the "city novel." Blanche Housman Gelfant, who treats this category of fiction as a twentieth-century phenomenon, finds the city novel anticipated in Howells's A Hazard of New Fortunes, which was published almost contemporaneously with How the Other Half Lives.<sup>37</sup> According to Gelfant, the city novel does contain "social implications" but remains distinct from "city *problem* fiction," which brings to light social evils in order to establish the need for reform.<sup>38</sup> Of course, it is still possible that Howells was indirectly influenced by Riis's pictorial and written descriptions of the city, as Lewis Fried has maintained;<sup>39</sup> nonetheless, a separate tradition of city representation devolved from Howells's fiction. For if, as Jay Martin has noted, Howells and other novelists had revealed "metropolitan evil," they had also found in the city a "rich and various metaphor of human experience."<sup>40</sup>

In Howells's writing and in the writing of some of his followers we find urban imagery analogous to that which we find in paintings and illustrations by members of

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<sup>35</sup> For further discussion of the role of contemporary periodicals in fostering interest in and concern with the "the other half" in New York City, see Marianne Doezema, "The Other Half," chap. in George Bellows and Urban America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 137-40. Doezema states that "when Henri's students went out to study street life on the Lower East Side, they were at the same time exposed to hundreds of pictures of 'the other half.' For these artists, as much as for the magazine-reading public, perceptions of tenement districts were partly conditioned by the mass-circulation press" (140).

<sup>36</sup> Lewis Fried, Makers of the City (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 40-42. Fried states that Riis believed that his photography was an instrument of reform.

<sup>37</sup> Blanche Housman Gelfant, The American City Novel (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 64.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Fried, Makers of the City, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 247.

Henri's circle.<sup>41</sup> Both realist authors and realist painters, it seems, sought to capture the varied spectacle of the city in their work. The frenetic urban life that surrounded them absorbed their interest and inspired their wonder. Howells himself made his own position vis-à-vis his novelistic subjects relatively clear: he recognized the "smiling aspects of life" in the U.S. and therefore infused his fiction with a good deal of positive spirit and light-hearted detail. Moreover, he seemed to imply that such cheerful optimism ought to be the natural outlook of other American novelists who generally enjoyed freedom from dire hardship themselves.<sup>42</sup> Howells's loyal disciple Hamlin Garland confirmed this point when he wrote that the realist or veritist (Garland's term) "is really an optimist, a dreamer. He sees life in terms of what it might be, as well as in terms of what it is."<sup>43</sup> For the most part, American realist painters approached their urban subject matter with the same sort of optimism that Howells and Garland associated with American realist fiction.

In Howells's A Hazard of New Fortunes, two cities are contrasted, Boston and New York; however, New York is the more fully developed "character." Basil March, Howells's alter ego in the novel, has moved his family to the metropolis from Boston so that he may assume editorship of a new magazine. His wife warns him that he'll see plenty of misery in New York, but March is not put off. "I don't suppose there's any more

<sup>41</sup> Wanda Corn cites and quotes at length from Howells's A Hazard of New Fortunes in her article, "The New New York" (Art in America 61 (July-August 1973): 60), thus directly linking the urban imagery of literary realism with the visual style of contemporary painting that addressed the urban scene. According to Corn, writers such as Howells "sketched urban sights one by one, enlivening their observations with human vignettes and sensory responses to the crowds, atmosphere and city spaces. Much like the Impressionists, but without their detachment, the city was comprehended as a twenty-four hour theater-in-the-round, a constant unfolding spectacle seen from a bystander's vantage point." Howells, she indicates, wrote "a classic perception of this sort" in A Hazard of New Fortunes--a description of the panorama of the city as viewed while riding the Elevated at night. Cf. Sidney H. Bremer, "Toward a National Economic City," chap. in Urban Intersections: Meetings of Life and Literature in United States Cities (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 54-55. Bremer cites John Sloan's The City from Greenwich Village (1922) in connection with this portion of Howells's text.

<sup>42</sup> Donald Pizer and Earl N. Harbert, eds., American Realists and Naturalists, vol. 12, Dictionary of Literary Biography (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1982), s. v. "William Dean Howells (1837-1920)," by James Woodress. In commenting on Crime and Punishment in an 1886 Harper's Weekly column, Howells wrote that American novelists "concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life" because "whatever their deserts, very few American novelists have been led out to be shot, or finally exiled to the rigors of winter at Duluth."

<sup>43</sup> Hamlin Garland, Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting and the Drama (Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1894), 52.

suffering here to the population than there is in the country,” he remarks, “and they’re so gay about it all.” March imagines the gaiety of New York to be an all-pervasive influence that touches the lives of rich and poor alike. The city may be “splendidly gay or squalidly gay,” but regardless, gaiety is its natural expression.<sup>44</sup> After his arrival in the metropolis, March spends a good deal of time strolling through the city, learning its character, and, in a sense, participating in its mobile public life. He observes the mundane details of urban existence—clotheslines fluttering, children playing, lovers courting. The ethnic diversity of the city captivates him: he “liked the swarthy, strange visages; he found nothing menacing for the future in them.”<sup>45</sup> Eventually, March discovers the seamy side of New York, where “there are boxes and barrels of kitchen offal on all the sidewalks, but not everywhere manure-heaps, and in some places the stench was mixed with the more savory smell of cooking.”<sup>46</sup> On another stroll through a similar neighborhood March finds the abundant refuse troubling. Nonetheless, when he compares the gritty reality of life downtown with the tidier spectacle of uptown society, March thinks the poorer folk better off. “I understand now why the poor people don’t come up here and live in this clean, handsome, respectable quarter of the town,” he says, “they would be bored to death. On the whole, I think I should prefer Mott Street myself.”<sup>47</sup>

The separate “traditions” of city representation exemplified by Riis and Howells were also manifested in popular periodicals where the trend in illustrating the conditions of the urban poor was complemented by another trend in picturing the city more positively. Throughout the 1890s and into the 1900s, the city appeared in pictorial spreads that emphasized its spectacular nature. In the early 1890s, for example, Harper’s Weekly profiled numerous American cities including Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. These were mostly pictorial profiles unaccompanied by text, and they generally focused on architectural features. While Harper’s, for the most part, provided city views for the

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<sup>44</sup> William Dean Howells, A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 50-51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

disembodied spectator, Scribner's seemed to favor urban imagery from the person-in-the-street's point of view. In 1891 the magazine inaugurated a series entitled "Great Streets of the World" that included articles on the Corso of Rome and the boulevards of Paris as well as Broadway in New York. In these and at least one subsequent article, New York, Rome, and Paris are represented as series of sights taken in from the vantage point of the street. In 1891 and again in 1900, New York is described in roughly the same terms. When viewed from the street, the city appears striking in its heterogeneity and in its stark contrasts of wealth and poverty; shopping activity is intense, and crowds are everywhere; in experiencing the city from the street, one is at once observer and element of the crowd; ogling is universal.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1890s, then, the person-on-the-street was generally presumed to be an active spectator of the urban scene. Two articles appearing in Broadway Magazine in 1903 suggest that in the early twentieth century, the person-on-the-street may have been an active *recorder* of the urban spectacle as well. Both of these articles treat New York City as a photo-opportunity and give implied and/or specific recommendations for the spectator armed with a camera.<sup>49</sup> By this time it was certainly clear that virtually any element of the urban scene—from architecture, to city parks, to shoppers, to street urchins—could be represented with aesthetic distinction. This climate of heightened sensitivity to urban experience and urban imagery affected the orientation of American painters as it did that of others in the cultural sphere.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Richard Harding Davis, "Broadway," Scribner's 9 (May 1891): 585-604; and Jesse Lynch Williams, "The Walk Up-Town in New York," Scribner's 27 (January 1900): 44-59.

<sup>49</sup> See Allston T. Brown, "Seeing New York with a Camera," Broadway Magazine 10 (February 1903): 527-31; and Horace F. Higgins (text) and George Grantham Bain (photos), "Summer Street Scenes in New York," Broadway Magazine 11 (July 1903): 327-29.

<sup>50</sup> For in-depth treatment of the image of the female shopper, in particular, in American painting between the world wars, see Ellen Wiley Todd, The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

### Popular Entertainment in Realist Fiction

In the late 1880s, when Howells was writing *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, a revolution in popular entertainment was already underway in New York and elsewhere in the U.S., though it was perhaps still too early for the comfortable middle class to be fully aware of it. Generally, the forms of entertainment of which America's Victorian middle class tended to approve were overwhelmingly polite and enriching. The rowdier species of entertainment--acrobatic dancing, boisterous song, vulgar humor--in short, any amusement that delighted the senses and offered nothing for the spirit--constituted a real dilemma for the Victorian moral conscience. However, while respectable folk had been seeking diversion through cultural enrichment, the lower classes had been developing their own satisfying forms of diversion with little regard for "respectability." Snyder points out that as early as the 1830s, the Bowery on Manhattan's Lower East Side was "well on its way to becoming the city's center for lower-class pleasures" and to serving as "an earthy counterpart to polished Broadway." The Bowery had dance halls, oyster houses, grogshops, gambling dens, bordellos, ice cream parlors, and theaters that catered to a diverse clientele prior to the mid-nineteenth century. The Bowery Theatre, for example, which presented melodrama in the 1830s, attracted a mixed audience that included "rowdies" and "fancy men" (the gallery gods), "working girls of doubtful reputation," common prostitutes and their companions, as well as respectable families. After mid-century, however, "vulgar" and "respectable" audiences became increasingly polarized: while more affluent New Yorkers tended to seek diversion at the opera house or the legitimate theater, the poorer residents of the city continued to seek their pleasure in the cheap theaters, where melodrama, variety, blackface minstrelsy, popular music, and comedy were performed.<sup>51</sup> Toward the end of the nineteenth century, enterprising showmen realized that the entertainment demands of middle-class audiences were changing. Moreover, new urban constituencies--immigrants and those recently arrived from rural areas--had by then altered the essential make-up of the entertainment-consuming

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<sup>51</sup>Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 5-6. The description of the Bowery Theatre is found in George G. Foster, *New York Naked* (New York, 1850s), 145.

public. As they became increasingly separated from whatever sustaining culture they had previously known, these new city residents were faced with a crisis in collective identity.<sup>52</sup> Vaudeville in New York City incorporated diverse traditions as well as impulses both high and low. Its peculiar synthesis of tastes and traditions united disparate audiences once again: middle and working-class constituencies, both native and foreign-born, established residents and newcomers to the city. Eclectic in its format and democratic in its appeal, New York City vaudeville reflected in a microcosm the dynamic diversity of the teeming metropolis just before and after the turn of the century.

In describing the evolution of urban culture in the U.S. between 1860 and 1910, Blake McKelvey argues that “it would not be difficult to relate most American social and cultural developments during these decades to the urban scene.”<sup>53</sup> In a sense, then, the new forms of social and cultural expression that emerged in U.S. cities during this time may be viewed as products of urbanization. Innovations in urban amusement, in particular, can be linked to the changing nature of the urban experience. By 1890 the entertainment habits of New York residents had begun to reflect a “new cultural order” of heterogeneity, egalitarianism, and free exchange that was no doubt influenced by the changing demographics of the city. In the decade of the 1890s the first truly mass forms of American entertainment came into being. John F. Kasson, who has chronicled the rise of Coney Island during this period, has suggested that the very symbols of this new order were created by commercial attractions, such as Coney Island, which helped “to knit a heterogeneous audience into a cohesive whole.”<sup>54</sup>

Howells does not provide in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* elaborate descriptions of the sort of public entertainment attended by Basil March and his family. However, he does pointedly state that “the whole [March] family went to the theatre a good deal and enjoyed

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<sup>52</sup> Albert F. McLean, *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 2-3. The roots of vaudeville, McLean maintains, “lay deep in the experience of the millions who had swarmed into American cities in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and who sought images, gestures, and symbols which would objectify their experience and bring to their lives a simple and comprehensive meaning.”

<sup>53</sup> McKelvey, *Urbanization of America*, 183.

<sup>54</sup> John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 4.

themselves together in their desultory explorations of the city,” thereby suggesting that theater-going and strolling the city were, for the Marches, comparable sources of amusement.<sup>55</sup> However, in 1893, just a few years after the appearance of A Hazard of New Fortunes, a new emphasis on entertainment phenomena seemed to be emerging in progressive American fiction. In that year, Stephen Crane published his first novel, Maggie, a Girl of the Streets, which may be considered a “city novel” in the Howells tradition, but with added innovation. While in Hazard, Howells makes only passing allusion to theater as part of the urban experience, in Maggie, Crane fully and explicitly inscribes the entertainment environment within the larger urban scene. Though Howells and his work no doubt influenced Crane to some degree, the work of the younger author represented a significant departure from that of the elder.<sup>56</sup> Howells and other earlier writers had been like passionate sightseers who never fully surrendered their more privileged middle-class perspective when confronted with lower-class life. Crane, on the other hand, succeeded in eliminating the distance between himself and his “low-life” subjects and was therefore able to see the world through their eyes and to represent their subjectivity.<sup>57</sup> In Maggie, the subjectivity of Crane’s heroine is reflected, above all, in the distinct spaces and separate realities of working-class entertainment. Crane alludes throughout the novel to entertainment options available to Maggie in the Bowery, her home, and elsewhere in New York. The first time Pete asks Maggie out, they go to a beer garden with variety entertainment. Subsequently, he takes her to a dime museum, and then,

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<sup>55</sup> Howells, A Hazard of New Fortunes, 267. See Amy Kaplan, “The Unreal City in A Hazard of New Fortunes,” chap. in The Social Construction of American Realism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 50. Kaplan describes Howells’s mode of depicting the ‘urban spectacle’ and notes how Basil March implicitly identifies the spectacle of the city as a kind a theater.

<sup>56</sup> It seems that Howells may have actually contributed, albeit unknowingly, to the realization of Maggie. Apparently, he had suggested to Hamlin Garland that he investigate the life of the Bowery, and subsequently Garland, who was disinclined to pursue this advice himself, passed the recommendation on to Crane. See Hamlin Garland, “Stephen Crane: Soldier of Fortune,” Saturday Evening Post 28 July 1900, 17; cited in Martin, Harvests of Change, 57. After Crane met Garland in the summer of 1891, he began to spend more and more time in New York City studying slum life firsthand, and eventually he established permanent residence. Most likely, Crane’s published text is based partly on his direct observation of lower-class life during this time and partly on a preexisting manuscript prepared several years earlier, when Crane was a Syracuse University student.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, “Experiments in Another Country: Stephen Crane’s City Sketches,” in American Realism, New Essays, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 138-54.

“racking his brains for amusement,” he discovers the Central Park Menagerie and the Museum of Art.<sup>58</sup> On weekday evenings, Pete would take Maggie to melodramas, from which she “always departed with raised spirits,” braced, no doubt, by the spectacle of “the wealthy and wicked” overcome by “the poor and virtuous.” The melodramatic formula did more, however, than offer Maggie solace for the social injustice she had known. More importantly, Maggie saw in the melodramas she witnessed a super-vivid enactment of her own dreams and aspirations played out upon the stage: “The theater made her think. She wondered if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated, perhaps grotesquely, by the heroine on the stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory.”<sup>59</sup> Significantly, the two events that most profoundly affect the course of Maggie’s adult life—her initial experience of “falling in love” with Pete and her subsequent abandonment by him—occur in a public entertainment context. Maggie’s relationship with Pete essentially begins and ends in a Bowery beer garden/variety entertainment setting. Not surprisingly, of all the forms of amusement that Crane mentions in the course of the novel, this distinctive working-class entertainment site so characteristic of the Bowery is described most often and in greatest detail. For Maggie, this environment has awe-inspiring sophistication and glamor; however, Crane makes it clear, through his use of irony, that Maggie’s vivid experience, her excitement, her heightened expectation, are but products of an almost willful delusion that is encouraged and enhanced by the mood and spirit of the entertainment milieu. Within this setting even uncouth Pete is transformed in Maggie’s eyes. Incredibly, he displays “the consideration of a cultured gentleman”:

“Maggie perceived that Pete brought forth all his elegance and all his knowledge of high-class customs for her benefit. Her heart warmed at his condescension.”<sup>60</sup> At best, Pete can only provide an imperfect illusion of upper-class style. This is also true of some of the variety entertainment. For example, in the finale of the first act, a dancer emulates some of the “grotesque attitudes” that are currently popular among the dancers in theaters uptown,

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<sup>58</sup> Stephen Crane, *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets: A Story of New York*, with an introduction by Joseph Katz (1893; reprint, Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), 68.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

“giving the Bowery public the phantasies of the aristocratic theatre-going public, at reduced rates.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, in his evocation of the variety entertainment environment, Crane establishes a critical perspective on both upper-class and lower-class amusements. While he reflects ironically on the tendency of working-class folk to ape the ways of the upper class, at the same time, he raises some doubt about upper-class taste itself. Most importantly, Crane’s characterization suggests a significant breakdown in “high” and “low” distinctions in the realm of entertainment.

Like Maggie, a Girl of the Streets, Theodore Dreiser’s Sister Carrie (1900) locates the aspirations of a working-class girl within the world of entertainment.<sup>62</sup> Dreiser’s Carrie, however, unlike Crane’s Maggie, achieves the image she covets and obtains a form of success. Success, for Carrie, consists in having as well as representing upon the stage the attributes of wealth and glamor. Unlike Maggie, Sister Carrie is a thoroughly modern novel with a thoroughly modern heroine. The story of her success, however, is a standard and familiar one recalling the tales of Horatio Alger. Inevitably, Alger’s self-made hero had to make it in the great city, facing the city’s various challenges. Ultimately, he succeeded through sheer ambition, and his reward was conspicuous wealth. Dreiser, in Sister Carrie, not only describes his heroine’s rise to success upon the stage in New York City, but also explores the context that feeds her ambition. In this novel, the urban environment mirrors the pageantry of the stage and vice-versa; Dreiser, as Deborah Garfield has observed, “labors to depict the city as a mega-stage.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, in a sense, both the world of the theater and the city itself appear as catalysts of Carrie’s ambition and her desire.

Sometime after she initially arrives in New York, Carrie has her first opportunity to experience the essence of the city. Her neighbor Mrs. Vance invites her to see a matinée at Madison Square and suggests, as a preliminary, “an interesting walk” down Broadway. On Broadway, Carrie witnesses an eye-opening display of “pretty women who love a showy parade” and “the men who love to gaze upon and admire them”:

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>62</sup> At least one scholar has suggested that the character of Carrie may be partly based on that of Maggie. See D. B. Graham, “Dreiser’s Maggie,” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910 7 (Spring 1974): 169-70.

<sup>63</sup> Deborah M. Garfield, “Taking a Part: Actor and Audience in Theodore Dreiser’s Sister Carrie,” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910 16 (Autumn 1983): 224.

Carrie . . . fixed her eyes upon the lovely company which swarmed by and with them as they proceeded. She noticed suddenly that Mrs. Vance's manner had rather stiffened under the gaze of handsome men and elegantly dressed ladies, whose glances were not modified by any rules of propriety. To stare seemed the proper and natural thing . . . . With a start [Carrie] awoke to find that she was in fashion's crowd, on parade in a show place . . . . The whole street bore the flavour of riches and show, and Carrie felt that she was not of it. . . . she longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal. Ah, then she would be happy!<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately, Carrie does find her place of glory, her platform for parade, on the stage. As a star in the world of entertainment, she represents the image of worldly success in the theater, a microcosm of the city.<sup>65</sup>

Dreiser clearly perceived that the fashion parade on Broadway and the theatrical performance were both *spectacular*—that is, visually dazzling, forms of display. On Broadway, as in the theater, “to stare seemed the proper and natural thing.” Apparently, Dreiser was not alone in recognizing this connection at the turn of the century. Writing in The Dial in 1903, Annie Russell Marble alluded to this association in an article entitled “The Reign of the Spectacular.”<sup>66</sup> Marble saw this phenomenon in even broader terms than did Dreiser, for her critical assessment extends beyond urban and theatrical spectacle. She

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<sup>64</sup> Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie: An Authoritative Text, Background and Sources, 2d ed., ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1990), 227.

<sup>65</sup> Though a number of literary historians have sought to analyze and interpret the role of “the city” in realist fiction and in American and European fiction in general, none, to my knowledge, have identified the particular emphasis on popular entertainment to which I have alluded. Several literary scholars have, however, addressed the centrality of entertainment world imagery and metaphor in Maggie and Sister Carrie without connecting these two works or identifying them with a general trend. In addition to Garfield, “Taking a Part,” 223-39, see, for example, Barbara Hochman, “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Actress: The Rewards of Representation in Sister Carrie,” in New Essays on “Sister Carrie”, ed. Donald Pizer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 43-64; Ellen Moers, “Theater Lights,” chap. in Two Dreisers (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 100-11; Janet Overmyer, “From ‘The Structure of Crane’s Maggie’,” in The Merrill Studies in “Maggie” and “George’s Mother”, ed. Stanley Wertheim (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1970), 65-67; Donald Pizer, “Stephen Crane’s Maggie and American Naturalism,” in Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Maurice Bassan (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967), 110-17; and R. W. Stallman, “Crane’s Maggie: A Reassessment,” chap. in The Houses That James Built and Other Literary Studies (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1961), 72-81.

<sup>66</sup> Annie Russell Marble, “The Reign of the Spectacular,” Dial, 1 November 1903, 297-99.

regrets finding city life “melodramatic in its seething streets by daylight not less than in its illusive forms around the footlights;” however, there are other “spectacular” phenomena that cause her equal, or even greater, concern. Among these are illustrated books and magazines, lectures with lantern slides, and educational materials with excessive pictorial content. That presently “the eye of the senses in regnant” and “surface-impressions satisfy” makes Marble very uneasy. However, already in 1903, she is able to look beyond the current “reign of the spectacular” to a time when “noble standards” will return to “rebuke mere affluence and gaud.”

After 1900 Howells too recognized the centrality of entertainment in contemporary American life and, more importantly, the vitality of expression inherent in its more popular forms. In a series of essays published in 1902 under the heading Literature and Life, Howells made his case for the validity of popular taste in entertainment. His ideological position comes across most clearly in his chapter entitled “At the Dime Museum,” where, in characteristic fashion, he sets up a dialogue between advocate and critic. The advocate opens the dialogue by asking his partner whether he has visited any of the “cheaper amusements” available in the city or knows anything about “the really clever and charming things one may see there for a very little money.”<sup>67</sup> After his conservative interlocutor expresses skepticism, the advocate of “cheaper amusements” goes on to describe an hour agreeably spent at a dime museum. He describes the curio hall of the museum where there were lecturers in white wigs and scholars caps and gowns who explained inventions and scientific phenomena as well as a fortune-teller, birds and animals in cages, and an entire Australian family that “may simply have been there ethnologically.”<sup>68</sup> In addition, the museum has a theater offering variety entertainment. On the afternoon of his visit, the

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<sup>67</sup> William Dean Howells, “At a Dime Museum,” chap. in Literature and Life (New York: Harper & Bros., 1902), 194. Literature and Life, a collection of thirty essays, is rarely discussed in the Howells literature. An exception is Oscar W. Firkins, William Dean Howells: A Study (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), in which the author makes occasional reference to the book, noting that in it “the reader has the exceptional advantage of observing critical essays and pictures of travel in instructive proximity” (52). Though Firkins seems to think more highly of the critical essays, he mentions none of them in his analysis of Howells’s critical writings in general (262-303). Literature and Life includes essays on “The Circus in the Suburbs,” “The Beach at Rockaway,” and “The Art of the Adsmith,” as well as the dime museum.

<sup>68</sup> Howells, “At a Dime Museum,” 195.

advocate sees a playlet, a comedian in black-face, and a pair of contortionists. The advocate's enthusiasm apparently offends the sensibilities of his more conservative partner, who seems to prefer more edifying amusements. In his defense, the advocate challenges the critic: "How can you say that any art is higher than the others? Why is it nobler to contort the mind than to contort the body?"<sup>69</sup> That popular entertainment represents a challenge to more elitist forms of cultural expression is recognized by advocate and critic alike. Speaking as a man of letters, the conservative critic maintains that "to aim at nothing higher than the amusement of your readers is to bring yourself most distinctly to the level of the show business."<sup>70</sup> The proponent of cheap amusements, on the other hand, sees popularity as a virtue in itself. Rather than promoting books, which don't appeal to the mass of Americans, he recommends the promotion of entertainments that are "really level with the popular taste."<sup>71</sup>

Though Crane, Dreiser, and Howells presented slightly different views of popular entertainments in their work, that all three paid attention to such phenomena is significant. As I shall demonstrate, after 1900 popular entertainment subject matter would have a significant place in American pictorial art as well. In painting, as in literature, the emphasis on urban amusement may be viewed, at least in part, as an outgrowth of the preoccupation with the city and urban phenomena that began around 1890 and continued into the twentieth century. Both literary and pictorial references suggest a positive interest in or even fascination with the burgeoning "culture" of the urban environment. Jay Martin has observed that "writers like [Henry] James and Howells, followed by Crane, [Frank] Norris, Dreiser, and Edith Wharton, wrote a literature depicting the delights and dramas of city existence, and helped to shape, by their art, humanly satisfying patterns of urban life."<sup>72</sup> The young artists in Henri's circle, it may be argued, contributed to the new urban consciousness emerging in the early years of this century in a similarly positive way.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>72</sup> Martin, Harvests of Change, 4.

### Realism in Illustration

Before turning their attention to the “serious” pursuit of art, Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn all worked as newspaper illustrators. It was Henri, Sloan maintains, who encouraged their loftier ambitions: “I was just drifting along as an illustrator like the rest of our gang,” Sloan once stated in an interview, “but he [Henri] kept at us to be real painters.”<sup>73</sup> However, before this influence took hold, each of these three young men had at least a budding career in the growing and increasingly noteworthy field of illustration.

Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn began working as illustrators in the 1890s in the midst of a “revolution” in reproduction use and technology. Beginning in the 1870s, new applications of the photographic process, such as the zincograph, had made it much easier and much faster to reproduce artists’ work. Further innovations in reproduction technology had followed quite rapidly: by the 1880s, the modern half-tone process had been perfected, and by the 1890s, it had been widely adopted for newspaper illustration.<sup>74</sup> Felice Jo Lamden contends that “major technological advancements in the field of engraving led to the widespread use of illustrations.”<sup>75</sup> Certainly, the numerous photo-mechanical innovations of the late 1800s served to encourage the use of pictures; however, the *motive* for their increased use must be discovered elsewhere. Very simply, newspaper publishers were moved to include more illustrations in their papers because their audiences responded so favorably to this added pictorial element. In an 1891 article, for example, the illustrator Valerian Gribayédoff alludes to the habit the American Press Association had of “testing” the public through its newspapers in order to discover whether or not illustrations were appreciated. According to Gribayédoff, the association “invariably found that matter without the accompaniment of cuts [line cuts] does not take half as well as when

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<sup>73</sup> John Sloan, notes for Time interview, 6 February 1948, John Sloan Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

<sup>74</sup> Felice Jo Lamden, “Newspaper Illustration, 1890-1910,” in City Life Illustrated, 1890-1940: Sloan, Glackens, Luks, Shinn--Their Friends and Followers, exh. cat. (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1980), 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

illustrated.<sup>76</sup> Thus, in order to satisfy popular taste (and sell newspapers, of course), the American Press Association continued and augmented its emphasis on illustration. The phenomenal rise in pictorial journalism in the late 1800s, which was at least indirectly mandated by the people, must be viewed as a critical development in the popular culture of the period.<sup>77</sup>

By the early 1900s some critics saw reflected in American illustration not only a national spirit but also the realist ethos, which was by then widely recognized as a critical component of American democratic culture. Some American observers had begun to take distinct pride in the prominence and sophistication of American illustration as early as the 1890s. In 1895, for example, Joseph Pennell declared unabashedly that illustration in the U.S. was more advanced than anywhere else in the world.<sup>78</sup> He gave credit for this ascendancy not only to the artists themselves but also to the “intelligent and far-seeing” publishers in the U.S. who encouraged and sponsored their work.<sup>79</sup> Eventually, the excellence of American illustration inspired some to view this popular art form as a principal element of national culture. Julius F. Harder, for one, saw the potential for national expression in almost all areas of American life. In 1904 he included “the new profession of journalism, and its beautiful and useful adjunct--illustration” among the most noteworthy developments within recent American culture.<sup>80</sup>

Contemporary critics recognized the diversity of style as well as the artistry, abundance, and “American-ness” of American illustration. Very early on, the Philadelphia realists were identified with the most progressive stylistic faction within the burgeoning

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<sup>76</sup> Valerian Gribayédoff, “Pictorial Journalism,” *Cosmopolitan* 11 (August 1891): 476.

<sup>77</sup> The popular appeal of pictorial journalism was recognized and often deplored by individuals of a more elitist sensibility. In 1893 a contributor to *The Nation* responded negatively to a recent statement approving newspaper illustration that appeared in *Harper’s Weekly*. The writer, it seems, rejected the suggestion put forward by the editors of *Harper’s* that illustration provides “accurate information” as well as “pleasing or satisfying impressions.” From the elitist standpoint, the rise of illustrated journalism was an unfortunate development. It could only mean catering to the lowest common denominator and making concessions to childishness, vulgarity, and sensationalism. See “Newspaper Pictures,” *Nation*, 27 April 1893, 306-7.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Pennell, preface to *Modern Illustration* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1895), xv.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>80</sup> Julius F. Harder, “Architecture--American Aspect,” *Craftsman* 6 (August 1904): 420.

ranks of American illustrators. In 1900, for example, Regina Armstrong wrote a series of articles for the Bookman in which she set forth several distinct categories of contemporary illustration. She classed Glackens, Shinn, and Luks (along with Henry McCarter and F. C. Yohn) among the “typists”: each of these men, she argued, followed his own convictions and accordingly “exercised the conceit of his individual expression rather than followed the tradition of his forbears in art.”<sup>81</sup> Eventually, subsequent critics recognized and acknowledged among some illustrators (the Philadelphia artists, in particular) an adherence to a “realist” style of illustration and to the subjects subsumed under that heading.<sup>82</sup>

The recognition of “realism” in American illustration, which apparently happened in the first decade of the century, may very likely be credited to Mary Fanton Roberts, associate editor of the Craftsman and dedicated supporter of the Eight. In 1909 and 1910 two telling articles published without bylines appeared in the Craftsman: “Foremost American Illustrators: Vital Significance of Their Work” (December 1909) and “People Who Interest Us: May Wilson Preston, Illustrator of Real Life” (July 1910). The first of these articles is ostensibly a survey of contemporary American illustration, though the author’s bias toward the “realist school” is obvious. Over a dozen artists are mentioned; however, the main body of the text is given over to discussing the work of Glackens, Sloan, Shinn, and several of their associates, including Jerome Myers, George Bellows, Boardman Robinson, May Wilson Preston, and Florence Scovel Shinn. Charles Dana Gibson and Frederick Remington, who were very popular illustrators at the time, are only briefly mentioned in the conclusion. America’s foremost illustrators, according to the author, “are more concerned with the actual subject presented in art than the means of presenting it.”<sup>83</sup> These artists take their subjects from the panorama of human existence.

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<sup>81</sup> Regina Armstrong, “The New Leaders in American Illustration [Pt. 4],” Bookman 11 (May 1900): 244.

<sup>82</sup> For an instructive appraisal of this “realist” style, see Margaret H. Cohen, “Realism in Magazine Illustration, 1900-1920,” in City Life Illustrated, 18-20.

<sup>83</sup> “Foremost American Illustrators: Vital Significance of Their Work,” Craftsman 17 (December 1909): 266.

and the greatness of their art lies in "the fulness of its presentation of life."<sup>84</sup> About Glackens's work in particular, the author comments: "there is no question of aesthetics or ethics in such art, but only of reality."<sup>85</sup> In the subsequent article on May Wilson Preston, this theme is revived once again: Preston's work is praised for being inevitably derived from life and involved with the realities of "present civilization." Ultimately, Preston is classed with the realist group of illustrators of which Glackens is acknowledged the head.<sup>86</sup>

### The Popular Entertainment Subject in "Realist" Illustration

The popular magazines of the late 1800s and early 1900s tended to use illustrations in one of two ways: either to accompany works of fiction or to play a journalistic role. In the latter case, illustrations usually served to complement a written text; however, they occasionally stood on their own as isolated features or figured in pictorial essays. Pictorial journalism, like written journalism, might cover a broad range of "newsworthy" topics. More often than not, however, pictorial journalism reflected the human interest quality of the society pages rather than the urgency of front-page news.

As early as 1892, William A. Coffin recognized among contemporary illustrators several who specialized in "New York life," that is, in representing the human interest of the city. "The people in our streets have infinite variety of type," he wrote, "and though a New York crowd is wanting in some of the elements that make a continental rassemblement so picturesque, there is no lack of material for character study . . . ."<sup>87</sup> One of the illustrators profiled in Coffin's article was William T. Smedley, an artist from Pennsylvania who studied painting in the late 1870s at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. By the 1880s, Smedley was a successful illustrator in New York City who specialized in

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>86</sup> "People Who Interest Us: May Wilson Preston, Illustrator of Real Life," Craftsman 18 (July 1910): 472.

<sup>87</sup> William A. Coffin, "American Illustration of Today [Pt. 3]," Scribner's 11 (March 1892): 347.

representing “social life” for the magazines. Smedley focused on fashionable society and became well-known as an illustrator of beautiful women and the upper class of New York City.”<sup>88</sup>

“Easter Sunday on Fifth Avenue, New York” is an example of Smedley’s work from the 1890s (Fig. 1). A number of years after its initial appearance in Harper’s, the drawing resurfaced in a piece published in the Bookman entitled “American Social Life in Illustration.”<sup>89</sup> This article, which attempts to survey the depiction of diversions of U.S. high society from the 1850s to roughly the turn of the century, brings together illustrations of horseback riding in Central Park, ballroom dancing, bicycling, drawing-room conversation, and other indoor and outdoor activities. Smedley’s drawing is not the only one that represents the “society of the street.” An earlier work by Arthur Lumley, captioned “Caught in the Act--A Scene on Broadway” (1873), also illustrates a fashionable parade on a celebrated New York thoroughfare (Fig. 2). These late nineteenth-century examples establish a clear precedent for early twentieth-century illustrations of New York social life in the context of the street.

Before the turn of the century, illustrators of American “social life,” like Lumley and Smedley, focused almost exclusively on the leisure activities of the upper-middle and upper classes. Beginning in the 1890s, however, the less privileged had begun to occupy a prominent place in the popular imagination, and this factor almost certainly led to increased representation of the underclasses in popular illustration. By the late 1890s, then, the panorama of New York social life represented in current illustration had begun to reflect the differing pastimes of the rich, the middle-class, and the poor.

Charles Dana Gibson, like the older Smedley, earned his reputation as an illustrator of elegant society. In the late 90s, however, even Gibson was forced to adopt a more catholic view of “social life” in his magazine illustration. His series of pictorial essays illustrating the four phases of “A New York Day,” which appeared in Scribner’s in 1898,

<sup>88</sup> Peter Hastings Falk, ed., Who Was Who in American Art (Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1985), 575.

<sup>89</sup> Arthur Hoeber, “American Social Life in Illustration, I: From the American Point,” Bookman 28 (February 1909): 551-65.

provides evidence of the shifting perspective. Throughout the four segments of the series Gibson depicts the denizens of the City involved in their typical activities: at breakfast, an old gentleman reads his newspaper; at noon, ladies enjoy luncheon; in the evening, a group of “average guys” watch a baseball game; at night, the privileged attend a musical performance, the theater, or a private club (Figs. 3, 4, 5, and 6). Significantly, Gibson includes as a counterpoint to his scenes of pleasure several illustrations of aspects of the lives of working people and aspects of the lives of the poor. In the morning, for example, a crowd of drowsy-looking commuters waits impatiently for the ferry; at night, men line up for bread outside Fleischmann’s Bakery on Broadway (Figs. 7 and 8). Apart from the baseball fans he depicts, all of Gibson’s pleasure-seekers belong to the privileged classes. The contrasting images of poverty, it seems, are made increasingly poignant when juxtaposed with such images of pleasure. Gibson’s attempt to provide a “balanced” perspective on urban society would appear to correspond with the new level of social consciousness among consumers of popular illustration. In the 1890s, the appropriate response to the plight of the poor was pity; in Gibson’s scenario, the poor are pictured without pleasure, and therefore they are all the more pitiful. Even so, Gibson establishes somewhat of a precedent in recognizing the place of the poor and middle-class in the scheme of urban society.

Between roughly 1900 and 1910 the emphasis on realistic representation in American magazine literature and illustration grew significantly, and these two manifestations of realistic expression were unquestionably linked. Margaret Cohen, for one, suggests that a more realistic style of illustration was required once magazines started publishing Realist short stories and realistic non-fiction.<sup>90</sup> It is quite likely that art editors demanded illustrations that were more earthy and direct to accompany many of the stories published in popular magazines after 1900. However, at the same time the straightforward style of certain illustrators recognized during this period—for example, Glackens—clearly fostered some awareness of realism as an independent development in illustration.

Realism in illustration, which earned formal recognition around 1910, was

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<sup>90</sup> Cohen, “Realism in Magazine Illustration,” in *City Life Illustrated*, 18.

apparently identified by choice of subject above all else. The practitioners of realism in illustration were, as noted in the Craftsman, “far more concerned with the actual subject presented in art than with the means of presenting it.”<sup>91</sup> In fact, many of the illustrators associated with realism continued to represent “social life” and the human interest of the city, just as did fashionable illustrators before them. With realist illustration, however, the emphasis shifted from high society and the privileged classes to working-class and middle-class subjects. The realists, moreover, did not present the less privileged as objects of pity. On the contrary, the lives of ordinary and often disadvantaged people were seen in realist illustration in a new and more positive light.

By 1910, then, “social life,” as it appeared in American illustration, had been altogether transformed. No longer was pleasure shown to be the exclusive privilege of the wealthy. That ordinary people too enjoyed their leisure time was now reflected in illustration. A series of drawings by Glenn O. Coleman executed around 1909 provides evidence of this transformation. In these drawings, Coleman represents New York street life and the amusements of the less privileged classes in a direct and incisive manner. An article appearing in the Craftsman praised the work and described the artist’s achievement as follows:

[Coleman] has a rare understanding of New York and the people that form the undercurrents in the vast river of its population. He has drawn them quite impartially, seeing them apparently with the level eye, neither exalting them by sentimental pity nor patronizing them as ignorant and weak. He has represented them in this series of pictures, enjoying the pleasures in their lives which, regardless of poverty and pitiable surroundings, average about the same as those in the lives of all other classes of persons.<sup>92</sup>

Among the subjects represented in Coleman’s series are amateur night at a Bowery theater, children dancing on a city sidewalk, a Jewish couple on Forty-second Street, two bums in Union Square, and a neatly-dressed shop-girl in front of her tenement home. In each of

<sup>91</sup> “Foremost American Illustrators,” 266.

<sup>92</sup> “Undercurrents of New York Life Sympathetically Depicted in the Drawings of Glenn O. Coleman,” Craftsman 17 (November 1909): 142.

these drawings, pleasure and amusement are either represented explicitly or implied in a way that could be more-or-less understood by contemporary audiences.

Coleman made the most explicit reference to popular entertainment in his drawing entitled "Amateur Night on the Bowery" (Fig. 9). Here he represents the interior of a small-time vaudeville house on the Bowery, the sort of establishment that would offer a periodic "amateur night" during which aspiring performers could "try-out" before a regular audience. The act that Coleman depicts does not appear to be very successful: the two women look awkward and bashful, and their removal from the stage seems imminent, as the "hook" is raised and visible at the left side of the stage. Actually, amateur night was not always such a dismal affair, for occasionally careers were launched on these evenings. Eddie Cantor, for one, began his illustrious vaudeville career as an amateur-night performer.<sup>93</sup> The institution of amateur night was, without a doubt, an essential part of vaudeville, for it represented the open opportunity that gave meaning to the phenomenon as a whole.

In another of the drawings that Coleman exhibited in 1909, entitled "Future Chorus Girls," there is a city street corner depicted where a number of spirited youngsters express their *joie de vivre* through dance (Fig. 10). This is an illustration of how the spirit of amusement arises naturally and spontaneously in the bosom of the most humble and innocent of city-dwellers. Coleman does not make any attempt to editorialize here. He does not attempt to analyze or "see beneath" what is there before his eyes. "Change any little bit of this life," he maintained, "give it your own Puritanical conception, or ideal abstract beauty and you lose that real beauty; the energy of this New York life is dead."<sup>94</sup> Coleman's refusal to present a "moral perspective" on the situation of the urban poor may have been difficult for some to understand and accept at the time, for when "Future Chorus Girls" was reproduced in Current Literature, it was captioned in the following way: "This picture may be interpreted as both comedy and tragedy. It shows the dance which, as so often in life, is set against grim backgrounds. The dancing girls of today may be the 'white slaves'

<sup>93</sup> See Snyder, Voice of the City, 51, 99-100.

<sup>94</sup> Glenn O. Coleman, quoted in "An Artist of the New York Underworld," Current Literature 48 (March 1910): 330.

of tomorrow."<sup>95</sup> Despite the editorial view expressed in the caption, the article goes on to quote the artist's own words at length, including his statement to the effect that what he sees as he goes about New York he simply accepts and does not attempt to comment upon or analyze.<sup>96</sup>

Several of the other drawings exhibited by Coleman in 1909 alluded to middle-class and working-class pleasures in a far less obvious way. One of these, which was reproduced in the *Craftsman*, illustrates two ragged and relatively undistinguished-looking men walking along side-by-side (Fig. 11). The title of the work, "Union Square, New York," identifies the location, and the text of the article tells us that the two are on their way to "a beer on the Bowery." Could contemporary audiences have deduced the "message" of this illustration from the pictorial evidence alone? In this case, there may be some question. At least two of the other drawings, however, made more readily grasped references to the "social life" and entertainment options of middle and working-class people. One of these, entitled "Forty-Second Street," shows a stout man and woman bundled up in overcoats and walking along a dimly-lit sidewalk (Fig. 12). The text informs us that the couple is pictured leaving the theater:

Everyone familiar with New York knows Forty-Second Street at the hour when the buoyant, excited crowd throngs out from the theaters. This is the moment of the first picture . . . . From the midst of the crowd the artist has selected two Jews. It is not chance that they are there; every night they are on the street, the fat, smug couple, taking their pleasure. A hundred like them have already passed and a hundred others might emerge from the crowd . . . .<sup>97</sup>

In other words, the Jewish man and woman out for an evening's entertainment represent

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<sup>95</sup> "An Artist of the New York Underworld," 327.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>97</sup> "Undercurrents of New York Life," 147.

urban “types.”<sup>98</sup> Forty-Second Street, their “turf,” is recognized as a “pleasure zone” within the city. Though isolated in Coleman’s drawing, the two stand for myriad others who follow the same route in pursuit of similar diversions: theirs is the “typical pleasure of the street.”

Finally, Coleman included among his “Scenes from the Life of the People” a drawing entitled “The Shop Girl at Home” which pictures a neatly-dressed young woman standing on the porch of a ramshackle tenement with a younger girl seated nearby (Fig. 13). The “shop girl,” we are to understand, is not destined for work but for her evening’s entertainment. She, like her fictional relative, Carrie Meeber, is a girl who is “made for pleasure”: “She wants no part in the sordidness and misery of [life], so she goes to the department store with long hours and small pay, to be an onlooker at the pageant that winds continuously between the counters.”<sup>99</sup> Like Stephen Crane’s heroine Maggie, she cherishes the illusion of elegance: she is the sort who “buys herself cheap imitations of what women who have beauty in their lives are accustomed to wear, because she, too, is seeking the beauty of life . . . .”<sup>100</sup> She is vulgar and common, according to the *Craftsman*, but at the same time she represents a certain fact of contemporary life. Her existence has a significance in the scheme of urban life which Coleman acknowledges and dignifies.

In effect, then, Coleman’s “Scenes from the Life of the People” represented a new chapter in the history of American social life in illustration. While illustrators before him had catalogued the diversions of the privileged classes, Coleman chose to focus his attention on the pleasures of the ordinary denizens of the city. Coleman undertook to explore the social context of the street in a way that earlier, more “fashionable” illustrators would never have conceived. Clearly, his strategy was influenced by contact with Henri and

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<sup>98</sup> Coleman’s stereotypical characterization of the Jewish pair as a “fat, smug couple” was not necessarily standard for the period, though racial characterizations in general—and racial humor, in particular—were highly conspicuous in current popular culture, especially on the vaudeville stage. In vaudeville, “stock” Jewish characters wore hooked noses, shuffled, rubbed their hands together in anticipation of a good deal, wore battered derbies jammed down on their heads, complained the tailor made the pants too long, etc. See Martin W. Laforse, “The Ethnic Immigrant as Object of Humor,” chap. in *Popular Culture and American Life* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 132.

<sup>99</sup> “Undercurrents of New York Life,” 149.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

members of his circle. According to Current Literature, Henri hailed Coleman as “an artist of rare promise.”<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Henri saw the importance of recognizing the real motive behind Coleman’s art: in a tribute written for the magazine, he cautioned others not to look for “crime, decay, [and] misery” in Coleman’s work, but rather to recognize the “human sympathy” that had guided the artist’s effort.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> “An Artist of the New York Underworld,” 326.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Henri, quoted in *ibid.*, 329.

### **3. The Philadelphia Realists and Popular Entertainment: Formative Influences**

#### Entertainment Depicted in American Painting Before Circa 1900

The realist painters in Henri's circle consciously divorced themselves from many aspects of previous American art. Their style of execution as well as the subjects they chose tended to set them apart from the fine art tradition still widely cherished in the United States at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to overemphasize the rupture that occurred in the history of American art with the advent of this phase of realism. For example, it is not difficult to establish a credible link between early twentieth-century realism in the United States and mid-nineteenth-century genre: in each case, we find depictions of common folk and their everyday experiences and typical pastimes. The representation of popular amusements was, therefore, no novelty in American painting circa 1900. Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn, however, did make such subjects an unusually prominent part of their repertoire. Moreover, unlike earlier American artists, they sought their material in the public entertainment sphere.

The spectacle of leisure and private amusement actually played a significant role in nineteenth-century American genre painting. Some of the most noted genre specialists--for example, Eastman Johnson and William Sidney Mount--frequently represented musical

performers and appreciative listeners in their work. Entertainment scenes in mid-nineteenth-century genre were invariably located in rural settings. Often, as in Johnson's Old Kentucky Home, Life in the South of 1859, such settings had an idyllic nature (Fig. 14). The suggestion that leisure was a part of life utterly separated from the real world of sweat and toil was implicit in such evocations. In Old Kentucky Home, as in other works, such as George Caleb Bingham's Jolly Flatboatmen of 1846 and Mount's Dance of the Haymakers of 1845, leisure is represented ideally; in each case, we're offered a glimpse into a timeless universe wherein human existence is transformed through pleasure and merriment (Figs. 15 and 16). The artist, we understand, is not a part of this world, nor are we, the privileged onlookers. The sphere of leisure, as represented in mid-nineteenth-century genre painting, is private and essentially hermetic.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century the bourgeois interior came to figure more frequently than the barnyard as a setting for musical entertainment in American painting. In fact, we might even speak of the emergence at this time of "parlor entertainment" as a subclass of domestic genre. In addition, the domestic setting often served as a backdrop for paintings that combined elements of portraiture together with genre. Individuals and sometimes entire families were shown entertaining themselves at home. Given the emphasis placed on refinement and genteel accomplishments in women in the late Victorian era, it is not surprising to find many portraits from this period of women seated at the piano or harpsichord or holding some other instrument. Women, however, also enjoyed a privileged place in the more purely genre type of Victorian entertainment subject. In the 1880s and 90s the "musicale," or musical party, was a typical form of at-home entertainment. The musicale was a private amusement in which women often played principal roles.<sup>1</sup> A number of American artists represented this subject in the late nineteenth century; however, the best-known, if not the most typical, example is Eakins's The Pathetic Song of 1881 (Fig. 17).

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<sup>1</sup> For general discussion of Victorian amusements, see Lewis Erenberg, "Victorian Culture and Amusements," chap. in Steppin' Out: New York Night Life and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981) and Lary May, "The Backdrop: Victorian America and Amusements," chap. in Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

The setting of The Pathetic Song is a domestic parlor in which a several musicians have gathered to perform for an intimate group. As a genre painting, it represents a typical scene from Victorian life. Nonetheless, formal values in this painting dominate and even obscure the genre aspect. Eakins has arranged his models (including Susan MacDowell at the piano) according to the laws of pyramidal composition. The singer of the pathetic song is at the center of this arrangement. Her standing and forward position as well as the emphasis given the illuminated surfaces of her skin and garment make her the focal point of the painting. Her physiognomy is especially striking; there is mobility as well as character in this finely executed face. We observe her expression--especially her open mouth--and feel we've interrupted a performance in progress. In this way, Eakins allows us to enter the temporal realm of his work.

In contrast to the general exuberance of later realist depictions of entertainment subject matter, The Pathetic Song is a model of restraint and understatement. This conspicuous restraint, we feel, may have a little to do with the "serious" nature of the performance represented. However, Eakins's goals as an artist were also very different from those of his followers. Felicitously, Eakins allows a suggestion of spontaneity in the mobile expression of the singer's face to enliven an otherwise static composition. But he does not allow his attention to the momentary to disrupt the essential/eternal aspect of the phenomenon represented. The later realists would not, for the most part, seek to essentialize their subjects the way Eakins sought with his. Rarely working from posed subjects, these younger artists asserted the values of spontaneity and authenticity in the entertainment subjects they depicted. For them, the vaudeville performances and moving picture shows they represented were also directly-lived experiences. They enthusiastically took part in the ordinary amusements of average people and sought to record the visual aspect of this experience. Their goal was not to transform the ordinary, as Eakins attempted, but to make it manifest.

### Experience in Amateur (and Professional) Entertainment

That Glackens, Shinn, and Sloan placed special emphasis on entertainment in their pictorial work is not surprising given that each of these men was apparently somewhat “stage-struck” from youth or young adulthood on. Shinn’s childhood ambition was to become an acrobat.<sup>2</sup> William Glackens and his older brother Louis embarked on a short-lived stage “career” while still in their teens. Sloan, according to his wife Helen, had “vivid recollections” of the Glackens brothers performing a vaudeville act in which they did pantomime and sketched humorous cartoons before the student body of Philadelphia’s Central High School.<sup>3</sup>

Sloan himself seems to have enjoyed more serious solitary pursuits as a youngster. He claims that there were two phases of intense reading in his early life: one between the ages of nine and twelve during which he read “all of Dickens, Thackeray, Shakespeare, etc.” and one in his late teens, when he was working for the Philadelphia book publisher Porter and Coates.<sup>4</sup> However, from the early 1890s on, he seems to have joined wholeheartedly in the more raucous activities enjoyed by Henri’s young followers. After 1892 Sloan took part regularly in the amateur theatricals organized in Henri’s studio. By December of 1894 he had the honor of playing the title character (the leading lady) in C. S. Williamson’s “Romantic drama” entitled Twillbe, which was produced as the “Third Grand Christmas Effusion of the P.A.F.A. Students.” He had female roles in at least two subsequent Williamson plays—Eileen in The Widow Cloonan’s Curse and Gwendoline Evelina Caddle in Silvester Warren Atkinson, or Soaked in Sin. As Sloan once explained

<sup>2</sup> Shinn alludes to this early goal repeatedly in his correspondence and other writing. See, for example, his letter to Anna W. Olmstead, director of The Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts, 20 June 1949, and part one of his unpublished autobiography (“Boyhood”), Everett Shinn Papers, HFSL.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Farr Sloan, “The Philadelphia Four and Their Friends,” in City Life Illustrated, 10. Apparently, George Luks also teamed up with his brother as a vaudeville act in the early 1880s. The duo, billed as “Buzzy and Anstock,” prefigured, according to Bennard Perlman, the comedy teams of Mutt and Jeff and Laurel and Hardy. See Perlman, The Immortal Eight: American Painting from Eakins to the Armory Show, 1870-1913 (Westport, Conn.: North Light Publishers, 1979), 55.

<sup>4</sup> John Sloan, notes for a 1946 New Yorker profile, John Sloan Collection, HFSL. See also, John Butler Yeats, “The Work of John Sloan,” Harper’s Weekly, 22 November 1913, 21. Yeats alludes to Sloan’s early enthusiasm for reading and describes his boyhood habit of spending every Saturday at the Philadelphia Public Library.

in an interview, “I was always leading lady because until I was over fifty I had a baritone, a fairly good tenor and could always sing falsetto.”<sup>5</sup> Apparently, all of these plays, which were farcical dramas or “burlesques” of the melodramatic form, were performed or rehearsed in the studio at 806 Walnut Street that Henri first occupied in the fall of 1892. Henri himself took part in these productions along with Glackens and Shinn, E. Wyatt Davis, Alexander S. Calder, James Preston, and others.

Of Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn, the last seems to have had the most sustained and intimate involvement with both amateur and professional entertainment. Not long after he became active in New York in the late 1890s, he made a series of acquaintances that would lead him to the heart of the city’s theatrical milieu. By 1899 he had met the celebrated actress Julia Marlowe, the popular playwright Clyde Fitch, and the legendary impresario David Belasco. These connections would help to advance Shinn’s artistic career as well as to establish further his place in the entertainment sphere.

By the early 1910s Shinn himself seemed determined to be an entertainment producer. In order to realize this goal, he built his own little theater in a courtyard behind his Greenwich Village studio. There he produced his own plays—farces in the vein of Williamson with titles like Hazel Weston, or More Sinned Against Than Usual and Lucy Moore, or the Prune-Hater’s Daughter. Shinn also designed and created the sets for and acted in these plays. In addition, he invited a number of other artists—including his wife Florence Scovel, James Preston, and William Glackens—to join him as actors upon the stage. Shinn apparently abandoned this activity in 1912, the year he was divorced by Scovel. The experience of producing his own amateur theatricals, however, prepared him for entry into the professional arena. For example, he was able thereafter to sell his plays for use as vaudeville material.<sup>6</sup> Also, beginning in 1917, he had the opportunity to put to use in a professional setting the scenic design skills he had developed as an amateur. In that year he was hired as an art director by Goldwyn Pictures. This was the first of several positions that Shinn would have with film production companies in the 1910s and 20s.

<sup>5</sup> John Sloan, “Notes,” John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

<sup>6</sup> Ira Glackens, William Glackens and The Eight: The Artists Who Freed American Art, rev. ed. (New York: Horizon Press), 142-44.

### Influence of European Art and Culture

Exposure, both direct and indirect, to the contemporary art and culture of Europe may have had a significant influence on the realists' perspective on entertainment. John Sloan, for one, never studied in Europe; however, as a young man he absorbed a good deal of European art and popular culture through books and magazines. By 1900, if not before, Sloan was assiduously following developments in fine art and illustrations in England, France, and Germany.<sup>7</sup> As an aspiring freelance illustrator, Sloan apparently first began to amass materials for a resource collection. In the late 1890s and early 1900s he added numerous European "reference books" to this collection, including Die Frau in der Karikatur by Fuchs and Langen (Munich, 1906) and Les Maîtres de la caricature française au XIX siècle by Armand Dayot (Paris, 1888). In addition, he acquired and saved many issues of Punch, or the London Charivari and other humorous publications. Apparently, the British cartoonists John Leech and his successors Charles Keene and George Du Maurier were a great inspiration to Sloan when he was just starting out as an illustrator and was seeking appropriate models. Moreover, he may have felt even more of an affinity with Du Maurier once acquainted with his literary work. In the early 1890s Du Maurier wrote two very popular illustrated stories for Harper's Monthly. The second, entitled "Trilby," began appearing in installments in January 1894. This narrative, which was later adapted for the stage, was based quite closely on Du Maurier's own youthful experiences in Paris, where he studied for a year in the studio of Gleyre.<sup>8</sup> Williamson's farce entitled Twillbe, in which Sloan played the title role, was based on Du Maurier's work.

The French illustrator Théophile Alexandre Steinlen was also an important early influence on Sloan and his colleagues as well. Sloan once noted that Steinlen was an artist for whom he and his associates had "the greatest regard," and he pointed to a clear relation-

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<sup>7</sup> According to his notes, Sloan began to follow European developments after seeing some of Aubrey Beardsley's work in The Yellow Book, an illustrated quarterly published in London from 1894 to 1897. John Sloan, "Notes," John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

<sup>8</sup> The Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 22 (1901; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1921-22), s. v. "Du Maurier, George Louis Palmella Busson (1834-1896)," by Alfred Ainger. The writer of this biographical entry was a personal acquaintance of Du Maurier and had heard him tell of his adventures in Paris long before "Trilby" was written.

ship between Steinlen's work and Glackens's, Coleman's, and his own.<sup>9</sup> In 1899 Sloan acquired a small volume entitled Dans la rue in which the illustrations of Steinlen complement the songs and monologues of the popular performer Aristide Bruant.<sup>10</sup> This volume must have reminded Sloan once again of the possibility of an agreeable relationship between illustration and popular entertainment. (He had previously seen the Glackens brothers make humorous sketches on stage as part of their vaudeville act.) Actually, Sloan may have encountered indications of an implicit connection between the cartoonist's art and variety entertainment in Punch as well. A cartoon by Du Maurier, which Sloan clipped from the November 10, 1877 issue, shows two men engaged in conversation (Fig. 18). This cartoon represents almost an exact analog of a live comedy act: the two comedians stand opposite each other as they would on the stage and deliver an abbreviated version of a typical comedy routine. Sloan would have encountered this cartoon format often in the pages of Punch and in other illustrated publications.

Unlike Sloan, both Glackens and Shinn traveled to Europe during the formative stages of their careers, and both painted popular entertainment subjects during their earliest trips abroad. Glackens sailed for France in 1895, ahead of Shinn, who did not make the trip until 1900. Glackens apparently went primarily to broaden his knowledge and experience of European art, while Shinn was sent by a sponsoring gallery. Arriving in fin-de-siècle Paris, both discovered a city that was no less than an entertainment mecca. Not only were Parisians themselves avid consumers of entertainment, but hordes of visitors flocked to the city to enjoy the gaiety of its public life and the spectacles of its stages.<sup>11</sup>

Glackens's first paintings of any popular entertainment subject were completed during his first European sojourn. These were two different versions of the same subject, the Bal Bullier, a popular Parisian dance hall located in the Latin Quarter. Unlike the more famous Moulin Rouge, which by circa 1900 was frequented mostly by tourists, the Bal

<sup>9</sup> John Sloan, "Notes," John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

<sup>10</sup> Sloan's copy of Dans la rue is in the John Sloan Collection, HFSL. It is inscribed "J. S. 1899."

<sup>11</sup> Eugen Weber, France, Fin de Siècle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 159.

Bullier provided an amusement outlet primarily for local residents.<sup>12</sup> Behind a façade like “the proscenium of a toy theater,” lay a beautiful garden adjoining a large ball-room, both of which were below street level and had to be reached by a broad wooden stairway. The view of the ball-room itself was apparently stunning: with its “dazzling display of colors and lights and animation,” it was a scene of visual splendor.<sup>13</sup>

Even before his first trip to Europe in 1900, Shinn showed some tendency to treat entertainment phenomena as artistic material. In his first large one-man show at Boussod, Valadon and Co. in New York, which was held just prior to his departure, he showed over forty pastels, at least four or five of which represented live stage, theater exterior, or moving picture subjects. Unfortunately, one can only deduce the content of these works, most of which are lost or untraceable today, from the titles given in the catalogue of the exhibition. The Lime-light was most likely an interior scene, while The Theatre and Fourteenth Street Theatre may have represented either interior or exterior views. During the Biograph, in all likelihood, showed spectators watching a film, and Union Square very possibly included some reference to the entertainment establishment in this popular theater district.

In January of 1901, several months after returning from Europe, Shinn had a second large one-man show at Boussod and Valadon, which included many works executed in London and Paris. A number of these works--pastels with titles like Along the Seine, London Street (Chelsea) and On the Boulevard--were apparently city views executed in the same spirit that Shinn had earlier captured Washington Square, Fifth Avenue, and Twenty-third Street in New York. There were many more entertainment and/or leisure subjects in Shinn's 1901 exhibition, however, than there were in his earlier show. The evidence suggests that while abroad, and especially while in Paris, Shinn was determined to seek out and represent all the common diversions enjoyed by the urban public. This conjecture is supported by a contemporary source: a critic mentions in an article published in May 1900 that Boussod and Valadon had arranged with Shinn “for a sojourn abroad to

<sup>12</sup> F. Berkeley Smith, The Real Latin Quarter (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1901), 53. Smith observes that “few French ever go to the ‘Moulin Rouge,’ but every American does on his first night in Paris.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-60.

make pictures of the street scenes and typical life of Paris.”<sup>14</sup> While abroad, it seems, Shinn did his best to capture in his work all the diverse manifestations of “typical life” in the French capital. Apparently, he spent a great deal of time sketching in the Luxembourg Gardens where, according to F. Berkeley Smith, an American artist residing in Paris at the turn of the century, artists and students of the Latin Quarter typically enjoyed “breathing space” amid the throng of bourgeois pleasure-seekers.<sup>15</sup> Shinn showed half a dozen views of Luxembourg Gardens in his 1901 exhibition, including one that represented the merry-go-round and one the Punch and Judy show. The latter, especially, was a popular spectacle and a principle attraction of the gardens.<sup>16</sup> Shinn’s exhibition also included a number of ballet, theater, music hall, and dance hall subjects. All told, scenes of leisure and entertainment were represented in almost one third of the forty-six pastels Shinn exhibited in 1901.

Three of the popular Parisian entertainment spots we know for certain that Shinn visited and recorded were the Bal Bullier, the Folies-Bergère, and the Gaîté-Montparnasse. Each represented a very different aspect of popular entertainment in fin-de-siècle Paris. The Bal Bullier, which Glackens also discovered, was the most bohemian rendez-vous of the three. In contrast, the Folies-Bergère, Paris’s oldest music hall, was by the time of Shinn’s visit a high-profile establishment that drew huge crowds with its international star attractions. First established in the 1860s, the Folies would survive twenty years before beginning its ascendancy. This occurred in the late 1880s, under the management of Edouard Marchand, who put together the most extraordinary programs ever seen in Paris. Among the sensational attractions he introduced were a snake-charmer, Zulus from Africa, a boxing kangaroo, a tattooed man, acrobats, jugglers, and strongmen. At the same time, Marchand added sex-appeal to the program to further its popular appeal. Female dancers, appearing singly or in groups, became a regular entertainment feature. One of the Folies-Bergère’s most celebrated performers was the dancer Loïe Fuller, who debuted there in 1892. She remained the star of the Folies for a period of about ten years; thus her presence

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<sup>14</sup> Armstrong, “New Leaders of American Illustration,” 250.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, The Real Latin Quarter, 155 passim.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

must still have been felt there at the time of Shinn's arrival.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the Gaîté-Montparnasse, at number 24, rue de la Gaîté, was a neighborhood *concert* with a reputation outside the district. Flanking it, at number 20, there was the locally popular Bobino and at number 6, the still more modest Fantaisies-Montparnasse. The Gaîté, apparently, had more than a slight edge on these other establishments in terms of its broad popularity. The Gaîté offered music and comedy and eschewed the more fantastic offerings of the variety/music hall stage. Petits bourgeois, neighborhood merchants and their families, working-class folk, and local riff-raff were loyal patrons of the Gaîté, as were many amateurs of its genre of popular entertainment from outside of Montparnasse.<sup>18</sup>

Shinn's observation of leisure and entertainment seems to have been almost constant during his several months in Paris. One senses, however, that it was not his personal taste that led him from one entertainment form to the next, but rather his practical ambition, for Shinn had a sponsor to satisfy. Surely, Boussod and Valadon would not have instructed him to bring back pictures of the street scenes and typical life of Paris if these were not marketable commodities. The vogue that urban imagery enjoyed in popular magazines at the turn of the century no doubt influenced the outlook of Shinn's supporters, as most of the pastels he exhibited in his first show at the gallery were, according to Regina Armstrong, sold to illustrated publications.<sup>19</sup>

### Experience as Illustrators

Popular entertainment stories appeared frequently in illustrated magazines in the late 1890s and early 1900s, and Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn were each called upon at one time or another to illustrate such articles. Working as artists in direct contact with popular entertainment, these men were no doubt encouraged to look upon vaudeville, motion pictures, and the like as potential material for paintings. However, there were more subtle associa-

<sup>17</sup> André Sallée and Philippe Chauveau, *Music-hall et café-concert* (Paris: Bordas, 1985), 154-57.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-60.

<sup>19</sup> Armstrong, "New Leaders in American Illustration," 249.

tions between entertainment and illustration that may also have come into play. An illustrator was, after all, called upon to produce a “visual spectacle,” to satisfy popular taste, and to entertain the public. In addition, the demonstration of skill involved in drawing could, indeed, be viewed as a “performance.”<sup>20</sup> The entertainment subject, we may assume, had special meaning for Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn, because entertainment was linked, on several different levels, with their work in illustration.

Sloan was perhaps more deeply aware than his colleagues of the broad significance of the visual spectacle in the culture of his day. The moving picture screen was just one source of visual stimulation or “spectacular” entertainment available to the urban masses. The splendid array of illustrations found in contemporary newspapers and magazines was also a source of visual excitement. In addition, there were stage spectacles. And, as we have seen, the city itself offered endless entertainment for the avid consumer of “sights.” Sloan, an eager sightseer of the urban scene, was keenly aware of the “spectacular” environment of the city; in addition, he seems to have understood the general lust for visual excitement that characterized the age. A 1908 drawing by Sloan, which depicts spectators watching a billboard artist, provides evidence of this understanding (Fig. 19). In this drawing Sloan records an audience’s spontaneous, yet total, captivation with the “performance” of a visual artist. Here, the general urban environment figures as a context for “spectacular” entertainment, and the entertainment itself is pictorial. The actors in this public drama have roles that are clearly defined: the artist, his back to the crowd, focuses on his work, while the spectators cluster and stare in fascination. We may, with some caution, interpret this drawing as a reflection of Sloan’s self-image as an illustrator. An illustrator, like the billboard artist depicted, had to perform, perhaps unwillingly, for a clamoring general audience. He or she was, in a sense, an entertainer whose success depended substantially on the satisfaction of the crowd.

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<sup>20</sup> Artists were, in fact, sometimes booked as vaudeville attractions. One such performer who appeared in New York vaudeville theaters in the early 1900s went by the name of “Chalk” Saunders. Epes W. Sargent (“Chicot”), vaudeville critic for the New York Daily Telegraph, describes a similar act performed by an artist named Paul Primier in a review dated 26 April 1898. See scrapbook of miscellaneous vaudeville programs for 1894-1905 and scrapbook of Epes W. Sargent, The Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

#### **4. The Popular Entertainment Subject in Realist Painting and Prints, Circa 1900-1913**

##### The Vaudeville Subjects of William Glackens

William Glackens's attraction to popular entertainment as source material for painting was not sustained throughout his career. Around 1900, he experienced a rather brief but nonetheless intense involvement with popular entertainment subject matter, then later, in the 1910s, performers and stage scenes reappear in his painting, but these elements assume a different form and meaning in his later work.<sup>1</sup> Glackens's early interest in entertainment imagery seems to have followed from his eagerness to explore themes prominent in French Realist and Impressionist painting as well as his experience as an illustrator. On the one hand, he found inspiration in French depictions of "modern life"; on the other hand, he was inspired by direct contact with the world of popular entertainment, which came through his work as an illustrator.

The culminating work of Glackens's early period of interest in popular entertainment is his oil entitled Hammerstein's Roof Garden, which was produced when he was just around thirty. We may view the period of approximately ten years leading up to

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<sup>1</sup> As no catalogue raisonné of the paintings of Glackens yet exists, I have relied upon the Inventory of American Paintings compiled by the National Museum of American Art, print-out of 3 March 1990, pp. 10255-10295, for an overview of Glackens's painting oeuvre.

this moment as the formative phase of his early career. Glackens's critical development of this early phase, from the standpoint of this inquiry, is his gradual assumption of a modern French ("Impressionist") outlook on subjects drawn from "modern life."

It is almost certain that prior to 1890 Glackens had had limited exposure to the contemporary art of France. A very large exhibition of some three hundred French Impressionist paintings--the first ever in the U. S.--had been presented by Durand-Ruel at the American Art Association in New York in 1886, and subsequent smaller exhibitions had been on view in New York and elsewhere. But Glackens was only a teenager in the late 1880s; moreover, he lived in Philadelphia. As a student at Central High School, he did, however, have Albert C. Barnes as a companion and fellow art enthusiast; together, these two young men might have traveled outside of Philadelphia to see a noteworthy exhibition of recent French art.<sup>2</sup>

By no later than 1892, Glackens had made the acquaintance of Robert Henri.<sup>3</sup> (Henri had been in Europe from 1888 to 1891.) If Glackens was unaware of Impressionism at the time, he must have learned something about it soon after this meeting, for Henri himself worked in an Impressionist mode in the early 1890s, though he abandoned it before the middle of the decade.<sup>4</sup> As John Sloan recalled, his Philadelphia colleagues generally did not put much stock in Impressionism as a style. As he put it, they were "opposed to Impressionism" in the 1890s "because it seemed 'unreal'." Rather, Manet, Goya and Hals--among European painters--were embraced as the essential models.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, by early 1895, when Glackens was preparing to embark on his first trip to Europe, he knew something about recent French art and looked forward to increasing his knowledge while abroad. Actually, he had a significant opportunity to do so even prior to his departure. In

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<sup>2</sup> See Howard Greenfeld, The Devil and Dr. Barnes: Portrait of an American Art Collector (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 8. Greenfeld writes that "Barnes' interest in art . . . was nurtured at Central High through his friendship with a classmate and teammate--both played baseball at school--William J. Glackens. For Barnes painting was a pastime . . . ; but for Glackens, who already showed a remarkable talent as a draftsman, it was a passion."

<sup>3</sup> Richard Wattenmaker, "The Art of William Glackens" (Ph.D. diss., New York University Institute of Fine Arts, 1972), 78.

<sup>4</sup> Homer, "Life and Work in Philadelphia, 1891-1895," chap. in Robert Henri and His Circle, 68-73, 82-83.

<sup>5</sup> John Sloan, "Notes," John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

March 1895, just shortly before his June embarkation, a major exhibition of Manet's work was mounted at Durand-Ruel in New York.<sup>6</sup> Given that Manet was so highly regarded by the Philadelphia realists, it seems unlikely that Glackens would have neglected to see this exhibition.<sup>7</sup>

The Durand-Ruel showing of Manet's work included a number of paintings that captured modern life on display in public gathering places throughout the city of Paris: for example, at the Bal de l'Opéra, at the bar of the Folies-Bergère, and at an outdoor concert in the Tuileries. Glackens executed at least one painting in 1895 depicting a crowd of people enjoying themselves in an outdoor setting that was clearly inspired by Manet, and by his Music in the Tuileries in particular (Fig. 20). In both Glackens's Figures in a Park (Fig. 21) and Manet's Music in the Tuileries, a dense arrangement of figures is arrayed against a forest backdrop. Glackens makes more use of the foreground, however, so that his painting looks almost like a detail of Manet. In the years that followed, Glackens gradually assimilated Manet more fully. When, in 1900, he prepared for Harper's Weekly a full-page illustration of "A Typical New York Beer Garden," he almost certainly had Manet in mind (Fig. 22). In both Music in the Tuileries and Glackens's "Beer Garden" the foreground is tightly packed with figures of diverse and distinctive character that are juxtaposed, it seems, to accentuate contrasts--between youth and age, elegance and dowdiness, hauteur and familiarity. Even the distribution of standing and seated figures in Glackens's "Beer Garden" is reminiscent of the arrangement of figures in Manet's work. Glackens's evocation of the setting itself is also similar in terms of the vertical rhythm of tree trunks (and lampposts in Glackens's work) and in its ambiguous handling of deeper space.

The work of Degas, in addition to that of Manet, exerted a powerful influence on Glackens just before the turn of the century. This influence is particularly striking in a

<sup>6</sup> Françoise Cachin et al., Manet, 1832-1883, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Harry N. Abrams, 1983), 537.

<sup>7</sup> Wattenmaker asserts that Glackens "had scrutinized [the art of Manet] in March 1895 when the Gallery Durand-Ruel in New York presented an exhibition of fifteen of Manet's major compositions." See Wattenmaker, introduction to William Glackens: The Formative Years, exh. cat. (New York: Kraushaar Galleries, 1991), n. pag. In letter to author, 14 February 1995, he indicates that however likely it may be that Glackens did attend the Durand-Ruel exhibition, "there is no way of absolutely documenting [it]."

drawing entitled Café Scene, which Glackens made for Everett Shinn around 1899, when Shinn was employed as art editor of Ainslee's Magazine (Fig. 23).<sup>8</sup> As Richard Wattenmaker has observed, the isolated and forlorn subjects of Glackens's Café Scene are very reminiscent of the lonely drinker in Degas' L'Absinthe of 1875-76 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Obviously, Glackens intended an allusion to Parisian café society, for the highly legible masthead of Le Figaro clearly identifies the drawing as such. Wattenmaker further suggests that certain depictions of popular entertainment by Degas, such as Café Concert des Ambassadeurs (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyons), may have inspired Glackens as well.<sup>9</sup>

During Glackens's first European sojourn of fifteen months, between mid-1895 and late 1896, he spent most of his time in and around Paris. The evidence suggests that while abroad he was interested in drawing and painting the natural landscape as well as urban scenery. He sketched in the countryside outside of Paris with Canadian artist James Wilson Morrice;<sup>10</sup> he painted views of the Seine, the Luxembourg Gardens, and La Villette; and he represented pleasure-seekers in Parisian cafés and dance halls. In addition, Glackens visited the Salons,<sup>11</sup> saw paintings by Rembrandt and Hals on an excursion to Holland,<sup>12</sup> and presumably saw what he could of contemporary art in the galleries and museums of Paris.<sup>13</sup>

In late 1896, following his return from Europe, Glackens settled in New York, where his friend from Philadelphia George Luks had already achieved success as a comic

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<sup>8</sup> Information about the drawing's provenance is found in a note signed by Shinn and attached to the drawing itself.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Wattenmaker, "The Art of William Glackens," (Ph.D. diss., New York University--Institute of Fine Arts, 1972), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Ira Glackens, William Glackens and The Eight, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Wattenmaker, "The Art of William Glackens," 90.

<sup>12</sup> Ira Glackens, William Glackens and The Eight, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Glackens most likely knew of the famous Caillebotte bequest of Impressionist paintings to the nation of France, which was finally accepted in part in 1895, approximately one year after Caillebotte's death. It is uncertain, however, whether or not Glackens might have seen the works accepted--38 paintings and pastels by Monet, Pissarro, Degas, Sisley, Renoir, Manet and Cezanne--prior to leaving Paris. Germain Bazin indicates that the first exhibition of the Caillebotte collection opened in early February of 1896. See Bazin, Impressionist Paintings in the Louvre (London: Thames & Hudson, 1958), 47. Cf. Kirk Varnedoe, Gustave Caillebotte (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 198. Varnedoe indicates that the accepted collection was put on view in early 1897, in a newly built annex of the Musée du Luxembourg.

illustrator. Glackens got his first job in New York through Luks: he was hired to make humorous drawings for the Sunday supplement of the New York World, the paper Luks himself drew for. Within less than a year, Glackens had more-or-less abandoned newspaper illustration. From that point on, he endeavored to devote more time and attention to his fine art career while subsisting on what he could earn doing freelance illustration work for various magazines.<sup>14</sup>

Glackens's work as a commercial illustrator was to influence significantly his future orientation as a painter. As he was called upon to illustrate stories by Theodore Dreiser, Lincoln Steffens, Stephen Crane, and Abraham Cahan, among others, Glackens was required to peruse, whether he cared to or not, some of the most progressive fiction-writing and journalism of the day. Much of this writing dealt realistically with conditions peculiar to the urban environment, and Glackens's exposure to it no doubt served to enhance his interest in the city and its characteristic phenomena. Moreover, drawing for the magazines often meant going out "on location"—to a vaudeville theater, for example, if this is what the story demanded. Glackens's interest in popular entertainment as a subject for painting was unquestionably reinforced by this contact made with vaudeville through his work as an illustrator.

Between 1899 and 1901, Glackens published over two dozen illustrations depicting aspects of popular entertainment. His first published sketches of vaudeville appeared in Scribner's in October 1899, as illustrations accompanying Edwin Milton Royle's profile entitled "The Vaudeville Theatre." In this article, Royle, a vaudeville performer himself, offers an engaging insider's view of a phenomenon that he refers to as "an important part" not only of the amusement world, but also of "national life." He emphasizes the distinction of American vaudeville, setting it apart from the Café Chantant, the English music-hall, and the German beer garden. And he stresses its wholesome character.<sup>15</sup>

Glackens's illustrations of Royle's article have the immediate, spontaneous quality of rapid sketches; most represent individual figures or performing pairs without stage

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<sup>14</sup> Ira Glackens, William Glackens and The Eight, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Edwin Milton Royle, "The Vaudeville Theatre," Scribner's 26 (October 1899): 485-95.

setting or even ground plane indicated. The few more fully developed images were apparently inspired by the text; however, this does not appear to be the case with Glackens's more minimal drawings. Among the individual figures and performing pairs he represents are a female ballad singer, several dancing couples, a saucy pair of singing soubrettes, a monologist, a pair of Irish comedians, a pair of German dialect comedians, and several other solo female performers. It appears that Glackens exercised considerable independence in creating his pictorial accompaniment, for most of these individuals and pairs do not figure specifically in Royle's account. Such independence is significant in that it suggests that Glackens may have been developing an agenda of his own as he observed the features of vaudeville.

Glackens's illustrations allude to several of the most distinctive aspects of vaudeville. For example, his illustrations of ethnic comedians (Irish and German) point to the fact that ethnic identity was the basis of much of vaudeville comedy (Fig. 24). Almost invariably, ethnic character was represented in grossly stereotypical fashion on the vaudeville stage. Royle alludes to this phenomenon in his article in noting that the comedian in black-face will never make "the lightest pretense to negro characterization, under the delusion that the black face and kinky hair and short trousers are necessary badges of the funny man."<sup>16</sup> This sort of mockery, however popular, was not acceptable to all, and some groups sensitive to stereotyping made their objections known. The Associated Rabbis of America, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, the Ancient Order to Hibernians, and United Irish Societies of New York were among those organizations that attempted, between 1900 and 1920, to rid the vaudeville stage of acts offensive to their groups.<sup>17</sup>

Glackens also describes, in more than one illustration, a particular female type--the "soubrette"--a coy, somewhat frivolous feminine character that often appeared in American light entertainment (Figs. 25 and 26). The soubrette of American vaudeville was, in a way,

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 495.

<sup>17</sup> John DiMeglio, *Vaudeville U. S. A.* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973), 44-45. For overview of ethnic variety in New York City vaudeville, see Snyder, *Voice of the City*, 43-46, 104-29 *passim*.

analogous to the Parisian *cocotte* in that each type represented a popular image of femininity in her recent national culture. In France, Manet captured the essence of the *cocotte* in his Bar at the Folies-Bergère, a painting which, according to Novelene Ross, represents the culmination of the artist's long-standing preoccupation with the public character of Parisian women as observed, especially, in popular gathering places like cafés, cabarets, and beer halls. The Bar at the Folies-Bergère, Ross argues, represents Manet's "personal interpretation of the Parisian *cocotte* as an authentic cultural heroine, a symbol of the unique sophistication and *élan vital* of nineteenth-century Paris."<sup>18</sup> Clearly, Glackens's small sketches are not in any way equivalent to the sort of consummate achievement that is represented by Manet's celebrated painting. Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to suggest that his singing and dancing soubrettes are cultural heroines as authentic in the American context as Manet's *cocotte* is in the French.

The typical vaudeville soubrette was a coquettish young woman, and Glackens portrays his singing and dancing soubrettes in precisely this manner. With their short skirts, pertly cocked heads, and hands placed saucily on hips, they appear playful and eager to please. Unlike the French *cocotte*, however, the soubrette did not generally have the air of easy virtue. The purity and wholesomeness of the American type was apparently part of her charm. Norman Hapgood observed in 1901 that the female performer in light entertainment, the vaudeville "artiste," as he calls her, "whose business it is to please the taste of sporty men," often leads "a life of ordinary gaiety and frivolity," though, he points out, there are "plenty . . . among the women of the vaudeville stage who are sound and even domestic in habits," and they are among those "whose popularity with the chief pleasure-seekers of the music-halls is greatest."<sup>19</sup>

In one fanciful depiction of vaudeville, Glackens went so far as to cast his own wife-to-be Edith Dimock in the role of vaudeville "artiste" (Fig. 27). The drawing, which appeared at the head of a story entitled "A Vaudeville Turn" that Glackens illustrated for Scribner's in 1901, shows three sprightly cancan dancers performing in a row. A placard

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<sup>18</sup> Novelene Ross, Manet's Bar at the Folies-Bergère and the Myths of Popular Illustration (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Hapgood, "The Life of a Vaudeville Artiste," Cosmopolitan 30 (February 1901): 396.

at the corner of the stage identifies them as “The Sherwood Sisters.” Ira Glackens explains that at the time his mother was attending the New York School of Art and was living with two other female students in the old Sherwood Studios at 58 West Fifty-seventh Street, close to the school. One of her roommates was May Wilson, whose future husband James Preston arrived to visit one day early in 1901 with William Glackens in tow. Glackens subsequently felt moved to characterize the three spirited roommates as a “sister act,” which was very typical vaudeville fare.<sup>20</sup>

By the time “A Vaudeville Turn” was published in September of 1901 it seems certain that Glackens had already begun to conceive the idea of using a vaudeville subject as the basis for a painting. His widely reproduced work known as Hammerstein’s Roof Garden survives as the unique product of this development (Fig. 28). The painting must be recognized as a milestone in Glackens’s early career, for it is the one work from this period that most perfectly represents the intersection of his pursuits in fine art and illustration.

In late 1899, Glackens was, apparently, still somewhat uncertain about the proper course to take as “fine artist.” It was reported by Regina Armstrong, in an article appearing in November 1899, that he proposed to do “‘big work,’ portraits, murals and church decorations.” Ira Glackens suggests that if this was his father’s ambition in 1899, he changed his mind soon afterward.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, Glackens was doing more and more illustration work for the magazines. Following the success of a series of drawings representing the Spanish-American War done on assignment for McClure’s in 1898, he was recognized as a “front-rank” illustrator.<sup>22</sup> Thereafter, he began illustrating for many more of the popular periodicals, including Collier’s, Harper’s Weekly, Saturday Evening Post, and Scribner’s. Between late 1899 and late 1901, he illustrated popular entertainment

<sup>20</sup> Ira Glackens, William Glackens and The Eight, 36-37. The drawing is one of several by Glackens that accompany Cyrus T. Brady, “A Vaudeville Turn,” Scribner’s 30 (September 1901): 351-55.

<sup>21</sup> Regina Armstrong, “Representative Young Illustrators,” The Art Interchange, November 1899; quoted in Ira Glackens, William Glackens and The Eight, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Everett Shinn, “William Glackens as Illustrator,” in William Glackens: A Catalogue of His Book and Magazine Illustrations, compiled by Nancy E. Allyn and Elizabeth H. Hawkes (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1987), 8.

subjects twice for Harper's Weekly and twice for Scribner's.<sup>23</sup> Coincidentally, during this time, he moved his studio to 13 West Thirtieth Street, close to the heart of mid-town entertainment.<sup>24</sup> It is possible that his new surroundings, along with his illustration work, helped to inspire a new direction in his painting.

In general, Glackens's illustrations of the period establish a precedent for the style as well as the subject of Hammerstein's Roof Garden. A comparison of the painting with a nearly contemporaneous illustration, such as the one captioned "I'm so glad you've found me. Oh, take me away!" that appears in "A Vaudeville Turn," serves to demonstrate this point (Fig. 29). "I'm so glad . . ." is unlike the small rapid sketches that Glackens used to illustrate Royle's "The Vaudeville Theatre" and other stories and articles. Like his earlier illustration of "A Typical New York Beer Garden," "I'm so glad . . ." is a complete picture with multiple figures arranged in depth within a well-defined space. Moreover, it offers a comprehensive view of the vaudeville environment, including its architecture, performers, and audience. With an illustrator's eye for detail and variety, Glackens has indicated the ornamentation of the interior and the distinct character and presence of each audience member. The image has a specific focus as well as architectonic unity. The drawing is a "composition" in the fullest sense of the word. Hammerstein's Roof Garden has the same sort of structural clarity. It is a painting conceived graphically, with careful attention to linear precision and articulation of space. In it, the painter's craft is subordinated to that of the illustrator, and thus color is subdued and painterly expression is minimal.

It is tempting also to compare Hammerstein's Roof Garden to a nearly contemporaneous work by Thomas Eakins, Between Rounds, one of several boxing and wrestling subjects depicted by Eakins just before the turn of the century (Fig. 30). Completed in 1899, Between Rounds was shown in the annual exhibition of the

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to "A Typical New York Beer Garden," which Glackens drew for Harper's Weekly, and drawings accompanying Royle's "The Vaudeville Theatre" and Brady's "A Vaudeville Turn," which appeared in Scribner's, Glackens made illustrations for "Whence the Song," a story by Theodore Dreiser about popular music publishing in New York, which appeared in Harper's Weekly, 8 December 1900, 1165-1166a.

<sup>24</sup> Ira Glackens, William Glackens and The Eight, 27.

Pennsylvania Academy held early in 1900.<sup>25</sup> It is quite possible, therefore, that Glackens actually saw the painting and garnered inspiration from it. Between Rounds does, in fact, represent a subject analogous to vaudeville: both the boxing match and the vaudeville performance are spectator events. Thus each artist had to work with similar elements; each had to arrange an audience around a central subject. Glackens, unlike Eakins, placed spectators in the foreground who, in a sense, serve as stand-ins for viewers outside the frame. Still, his basic composition is very similar to that of Eakins. In each case, the canvas is divided into horizontal bands, which serve to establish the principal divisions of the composition. The thinner lines of the ropes (in Eakins's work) and the railing (in Glackens's) softly echo these bolder elements. In both paintings, the horizontal layers are knitted together by a vertical spine. In Eakins's work, the dominant vertical rises just left of center from the seated figure upward through the large corner post above his head. In Glackens's painting, the ladder that supports the tightrope functions in a similar way.<sup>26</sup> Glackens's similar approach to composition is perhaps evidence enough of Eakins's influence. Actually, his work resembles that of Eakins in yet another significant way: each artist adopted a tonalist approach to color in his work. While Eakins principally employed brown tones, Glackens used mostly grey. It seems very likely, then, that Glackens not only observed and assimilated the striking lesson in design put forth in Eakins's painting but adopted his approach to color as well.

The subject of Hammerstein's Roof Garden is, of course, the very conspicuous novelty of "vaudeville"—wholesome variety entertainment with decidedly mass appeal. The painting depicts a recognizable locale—the roof-top stage of Hammerstein's Victoria theater, which was located at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Forty-second Street. The Victoria itself first opened in 1899 as a legitimate theater. On June 26, 1899, Hammersteins opened the theater's first roof garden, the Venetian Terrace, which was given over to vaudeville

<sup>25</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, 2:156.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2:286. Speaking generally of the formal order of an Eakins painting, Goodrich describes Eakins's characteristic design of "round forms in deep space" where "all elements of the painting [relate] to the picture plane." He likens Eakins's composition to a three-dimensional world possessing "a unity within which all elements [are] contained, and out of which forms [do] not project nor space recede." In such a composition, he maintains, background is "not just vacant space but the ground on which forms [are] constructed."

fare.<sup>27</sup> In early June, Epes W. Sargent (“Chicot”), vaudeville critic for the New York Daily Telegraph, had announced that four roof gardens had already opened that season.

Hammerstein’s new roof garden, with its “unique stage,” would be one of several others open by the end of the month. Hammerstein’s roof was unique in that it had a stage in the center with audience on all four sides. As a result, “dumb acts,”--that is, visual performances that did not rely heavily on sound--proved to be the most successful. The program for the Venetian Terrace for the week of August 7, 1899, for example, lists Russian dancers, a juggler, grotesque acrobats, a pony circus, performers on bicycle, etc.<sup>28</sup>

Apparently, the Venetian Terrace was very popular. On July 7, 1899, Sargent wrote, “The prediction was once made that a stage which would permit the use only of dumb acts would draw small patronage, but the reverse seems to be the case . . . .” Nonetheless, when the roof garden reopened in the summer of 1901, a “regulation stage” had been installed in place of the “old squared ring.” At the same time, the name of the roof-top theater was changed from the “Venetian Terrace” to the “Paradise Gardens.”<sup>29</sup>

A photograph in the the Byron Collection of the Museum of the City of New York shows the Paradise Roof Garden as it appeared with its “regulation stage” (Fig. 31). The photograph itself was apparently taken from the stage looking out over seats arranged in standard rows. The back of the theater is open, and a stairway leads to the roof of the adjacent Republic Theatre, where a model farm and Swiss dairy, live animals, and a costumed milkmaid served as intermission attractions (Fig. 32). A comparison of the architecture as it appears in the photograph with the interior depicted in Glackens’s painting reveals some notable similarities. The painter’s rendering of the upper balconies, the stout piers, and the arched openings at ground level, however simplified, distinctly recalls the actual appearance of the roof garden theater. Nonetheless, there is an important difference:

<sup>27</sup> The Victoria only survived for a few years as a legitimate theater; in early 1904, it, too, opened as a vaudeville house. See Loney Haskell, “The Corner, I: Reminiscences of Hammerstein’s Victoria,” New Yorker, 13 December 1930, 38.

<sup>28</sup> Scrapbook of Epes W. Sargent, BRTC, and program for Hammerstein’s Victoria Venetian Terrace Roof Garden, week of 7 August 1899, Theatre Collection, Museum of the City of New York. Sargent mentions the opening of the Venetian Terrace in reviews appearing in the Telegraph on 11 June and 28 June 1899.

<sup>29</sup> Scrapbook of Epes W. Sargent, BRTC, reviews dated 19 July 1899, 2 June 1901, and 30 June 1901.

it seems clear that Glackens has depicted the original central stage described by Sargent and not the “regulation stage” that was later installed. The evidence, therefore, suggests that Glackens made at least preparatory drawings for his painting prior to 1901, for by the summer of that year the interior of Hammerstein’s Roof Garden had already been transformed.<sup>30</sup> The Venetian Terrace, the original Hammerstein’s Roof Garden with central stage, was only open for two seasons: summer of 1899 and summer of 1900. Thus, the conclusion seems inevitable that Glackens had at least formulated the essential scheme of the painting by the middle of 1900.

Glackens may have been a regular patron of Hammerstein’s.<sup>31</sup> However, he had gone there on assignment as an illustrator as well. The evidence for this is an illustration of his that accompanies an article entitled “New York’s Charm in Summer,” which appeared in Harper’s Bazar on August 18, 1900.<sup>32</sup> The drawing, captioned “A Summer-Night Relaxation,” shows a trio of spectators watching some sort of performance (Fig. 33). As in the painting, Hammersteins’s Roof Garden, the spectators are viewed from the back; the master of ceremonies occupies a central position; and the audience seems to surround the stage. Upon close examination, it becomes obvious that the composition of the drawing is identical to that of the central foreground of the painting. There is, of course, a striking difference in the overall effect of the two images. In the drawing, the spectators are the principal focus: they occupy at least the lower two-thirds of the frame. In the painting, on the other hand, the stage, along with the apparatus and performers that occupy it,

<sup>30</sup> The exact date of this painting has long been uncertain. See Patterson Sims, Whitney Museum of American Art: Selected Works from the Permanent Collection (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; W. W. Norton & Co., 1985), 21. Sims notes that the date of the painting is “not firmly set,” but the style of the work—“its monochrome tonality and uncontrived, cut-off composition”—connect it with the paintings Glackens executed around 1901-03. Ira Glackens, however, believed that the work was completed somewhat later. In a letter he sent in 1974 to Margaret McKellar at the WMAA he expressed his conviction that the date of c. 1901 was wrong: “Once a mistake is made in a catalogue it goes on forever,” he wrote. “I’m sure the canvas is a little later than 1901.” Letter from Ira Glackens to Margaret McKellar, 20 February 1974, copy in Cataloguing Department, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

<sup>31</sup> When Edith Glackens identified the painting after her husband’s death, she clearly recalled the location and the name, “Hammerstein’s Roof Garden,” which suggests that the Glackens’s may have gone there fairly frequently. See letter from Ira Glackens to Stanley F. Ruby, 20 February 1974, copy in Cataloguing Department, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

<sup>32</sup> Ada Sterling, “New York’s Charm in Summer,” Harper’s Bazar, 18 August 1900, 971-77.

dominates the picture. It is actually quite difficult to tell exactly what sort of performance is indicated in the drawing. However, there is one important clue: the diagonal segment of a ladder that appears in the top left corner. This must be the same ladder that appears uncropped in the related painting. Both the drawing and the painting, it seems, were inspired by the same event. The relationship between the two images remains somewhat puzzling, however. It almost appears as if Glackens completed the painting first, then based his illustration on the lower central part of the completed canvas. However, there is no hard evidence to suggest that the painting was executed first. Typically, a drawing, even one intended for use as an illustration, would precede the painterly conception. Of course, the drawing and painting alike may have been based on another sketch done on the spot that included all the elements of the roof garden setting that ultimately appear in the painting.<sup>33</sup> In any case, the publication of the drawing late in the summer of 1900 further supports the suggestion made earlier that Glackens had formulated the basic scheme for a painting of Hammerstein's Roof Garden by the middle of that year.

The article in Harper's Bazar, in which the drawing mentioned above appears, is one that focuses on the diverting aspects of New York City life, particularly in the summer. Other drawings by Glackens that accompany the piece depict such subjects as "A Morning Scene on Riverside Drive," "Waiting for the Swan Boats in Central Park," and "The Boulevard at Dusk." Significantly, Hammerstein's Roof Garden is the first painting by Glackens of a typical New York City scene. Without a doubt, he, like his fellow illustrators Sloan and Shinn, was influenced by the general climate of interest in urban imagery fostered by the popular magazines. In Glackens's case, this influence appears remarkably direct, given the correspondence between his illustration work for Harper's Bazar and his conception of Hammerstein's Roof Garden. Moreover, Glackens was surely aware that around this time Henri was at work on "a series of studies of city scenes," that he planned very soon to exhibit; and this knowledge may have led Glackens further to

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<sup>33</sup> Glackens's notebooks of the 1890s may serve to clarify the relationship between the painting and the illustration. The Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which owns the Glackens notebooks, has, for the present, denied my request for access to the material.

consider concentrating, in his painting, on “city life” subjects himself.<sup>34</sup>

It is difficult to account for the time lag between Hammerstein's and later works by Glackens that depict public gathering places, social life, and leisure activities in the the city of New York. Glackens, it seems, only began to focus on this category of subject around 1905, after his marriage to Edith Dimock. The first element of the city to capture his attention around this time was Central Park, a subject he depicted in at least four different paintings executed in a relatively short period.<sup>35</sup> Also in 1905, Glackens painted Chez Mouquin (The Art Institute of Chicago), which was set in the Café Francis in New York and was obviously conceived to emulate the Parisian café subjects made popular by artists in France. Prior to the landmark exhibition of “The Eight” in 1908, Glackens painted at least two more canvases representing the lively New York scene: The Shoppers (Chrysler Museum at Norfolk, Virginia) and Winter, Washington Square (formerly in the collection of Mrs. John F. Kraushaar; present location unknown), both of 1907. Obviously, Glackens produced many more paintings after 1904, the year of his marriage, than he did in previous years. There may have been several reasons for this; however, one significant factor to consider is that Edith Dimock came from a wealthy family, which apparently gave generously to the newlywed couple. As a result, Glackens suddenly acquired a degree of financial security that he had not previously known and with it, the freedom to devote far more time to his non-remunerative painting activities.<sup>36</sup> If Glackens had thought of concentrating on “New York City life” subjects as early as 1900, then perhaps he was forced to wait until relatively free from other obligations before dedicating himself to the task.

It is also possible that whatever inclination Glackens felt to represent New York City life in his painting developed gradually, as his awareness and experience of the urban

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<sup>34</sup> The announcement of Henri's endeavor is made in a New York Times article, 7 September 1901. Clipping preserved in John Sloan Archives, vol. 1 (1894-1905), The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. This volume also contains another clipping from an unidentified New York newspaper, dated c. 1900, announcing that Henri is at work on studies of street scenes.

<sup>35</sup> Glackens's known depictions of Central Park c. 1905 are Central Park, Winter (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), The Drive, Central Park (Cleveland Museum of Art), May Day, Central Park (M. H. De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco), and Grey Day, Central Park (exhibited in 1908 exhibiton at Macbeth Gallery, New York; now lost).

<sup>36</sup> Wattenmaker, “The Art of William Glackens,” 50 n. 1.

scene was altered through his ongoing work in illustration. Following his first assignment for Harper's Bazar in the summer of 1900, for example, Glackens illustrated two subsequent articles about aspects of New York City. The first, entitled "Autumn Days in Central Park," appeared in November 1900 and included seven separate views of New Yorkers at their leisure on the Ramble, feeding the swans, riding horses, and strolling in the park.<sup>37</sup> A subsequent piece, entitled "New York's Christmas Atmosphere," appeared about a month later, featuring several illustrations by Glackens depicting the happy, snowy, crowded streets of New York during the winter holiday season.<sup>38</sup>

Glackens's awareness of the particular distinction of New York was enhanced further a few years later through his involvement with Metropolitan Magazine, which, beginning with its issue for April 1903, assumed a new "urban" focus. This was also the first issue of the magazine to feature Glackens's drawings. In a "Salutory" statement at the front of the issue, the announcement is made that henceforth The New Metropolitan (as it was then called) would "devote its pages largely to a consideration of interesting and entertaining phases of Metropolitan life, as these are to be found in the City of New York."<sup>39</sup> The new mission of the magazine, it is later stated, will above all be "to depict the human side of Metropolitan life."<sup>40</sup> The statement continues,

It is of people, of men, women and children that we intend most often to speak, for these are so much the soul of the city as to constitute its essence. They are the city, and without them and their joys and miseries, their toilings and their playings, even so majestic a material thing as New York has come to be, would be an insensate clod, a bit of lifeless clay unworthy of a moment's thought. The hurly-burly, the business activity and the swirl of society in the large are known to all, but underneath the thing that appears to be New York is another, in which notes of tender-

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<sup>37</sup> An oil painting by Glackens entitled Autumn in the Park (date unknown) apparently passed through New York's Kennedy Galleries in the late 1970s. See Inventory of American Paintings, National Museum of American Art, printout dated 3 March 1990, p. 10258.

<sup>38</sup> John J. à Becket, "Autumn Days in Central Park," Harper's Bazar, 17 November 1900, 1813-19; John J. à Becket, "New York's Christmas Atmosphere," Harper's Bazar, 15 December 1900, 2073-79.

<sup>39</sup> "Salutory," New Metropolitan 18 (April 1903): 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

ness, of pathos, of humor and tragedy are sounded, and the vibrations of these will find a chord to strike upon our pages.

Illustrations by Glackens appeared in conjunction with five installments of a serial by William Dean Howells, entitled "Letters Home," that appeared in the Metropolitan Magazine between April and August of 1903. Howells's story consists of a series of fictitious letters written by characters residing in New York to friends and relatives elsewhere. Many of these letters extol some aspect of the city: Central Park, Broadway, a particular restaurant, the theater, or picturesque denizens. One correspondent is so overwhelmed with the radiance and majesty of the city that he is moved to make it the subject of poetry. "I ache to get it all in verse," he writes to his brother in Iowa, "I want to write the Epic of New York."<sup>41</sup> Glackens was most certainly aware of the sentiments of the editors of the magazine, and his association with their "mission" undoubtedly served to focus his attention on the uniqueness and vitality of New York.

Even prior to the landmark exhibition of "The Eight" in 1908, Glackens had begun to redefine his relationship to the realist tradition along with its subjects and its style. His break with the realism of Manet and Henri was "conscious," according to Wattenmaker. Thereafter, Glackens deliberately modified his style toward Impressionism by using a much brighter palette and strongly textured brushwork. In addition, he painted many more natural landscape subjects as he concentrated on the effects of light.<sup>42</sup> Even so, he did not abandon the urban scene completely. Between 1910 and 1912, in particular, he produced a number of urban subjects, including pastels entitled Bus, Fifth Avenue, 1910 (Mead Art Gallery, Amherst College, Massachusetts) and City Scene, c. 1910 (The Brooklyn Museum, New York) and an oil entitled Skaters, Central Park, c. 1911-12 (Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts). He also completed at least two paintings of vaudeville subjects during this period: Pony Ballet and Music Hall Turn (Figs. 34 and 35).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> William Dean Howells, "Letters Home [Pt. 1]," New Metropolitan 18 (April 1903): 98.

<sup>42</sup> Wattenmaker, "The Art of William Glackens," 143-44.

<sup>43</sup> The Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, which owns Music Hall Turn, does not record a date for the painting.

In late 1909 or early 1910, Glackens once again had an assignment to illustrate a story about vaudeville, this time for McClure's.<sup>44</sup> The story, entitled "In Vaudeville," is set in a theatrical boarding house. Pandemonium occurs in the house when an Italian performer named Garibaldi arrives to stay with eight members of his company, who happen to be chimpanzees. The several drawings by Glackens that accompany the piece depict the interior of the boarding house and several of its guests, not the vaudeville stage nor any performance. Thus, it is impossible to establish a direct link between this illustration assignment and Glackens's subsequent paintings of vaudeville subjects. Nonetheless, his exposure to the story may have helped rekindle his interest in vaudeville subject matter.

Glackens began work on Pony Ballet, or a painting very similar to it, by the end of 1910.<sup>45</sup> In an article appearing in the New York Sun in December of that year, it was reported that Glackens had in his studio "a large canvas, a study of some girls, possibly vaudeville 'artistes,' on which he daily practices his colored scales, trills and arpeggios."<sup>46</sup> Wattenmaker states that around 1910, when Glackens was at work on Pony Ballet, he produced "several other large pictures of similar inspiration," which were "either left unfinished or completed in an unsatisfactory manner."<sup>47</sup> Music Hall Turn is roughly as large as Pony Ballet. The former, a horizontal canvas, is 32 inches high and 48 inches wide, while the latter, which is oriented vertically, measures 48 by 32 inches.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the two works have similarly "kaleidoscopic" color.<sup>49</sup> Of the several large pictures inspired by vaudeville that Glackens is said to have inaugurated circa 1910, Music

<sup>44</sup> Helen Green, "In Vaudeville," McClure's 34 (February 1910): 392-97.

<sup>45</sup> Pony Ballet is actually undated. However, it should be noted that The Barnes Foundation, which owns the painting, has assigned a date of 1912.

<sup>46</sup> "Seen in the World of Art," New York Sun, 18 December 1910, sec. 3, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Wattenmaker, "The Art of William Glackens," 195 n.1.

<sup>48</sup> These dimensions are recorded by Vincent J. De Gregorio in his catalogue of the work of William Glackens in "The Life and Art of William Glackens" (Ph. D. diss., Ohio State University, 1955), 2:505, 585.

<sup>49</sup> Wattenmaker, who obtained permission to see Pony Ballet prior to completing his dissertation in 1972, gives an extended description of the color of the work, which he terms its "most striking feature" ("The Art of William Glackens," 195-96). Unfortunately, the painting is presently inaccessible, as The Barnes Foundation is closed for renovation. Nor is the work reproduced anywhere in color.

Hall Turn and Pony Ballet appear to be the only two surviving examples.

Pony Ballet and Music Hall Turn are, however, strikingly different in composition: while the former offers a fragmentary view of the subject, the latter gives a full view of the stage. Thus, in Pony Ballet, far more than in Music Hall Turn, Glackens appears interested in abstract shapes and in their dynamic arrangement in two dimensions. For example, the central figure in Pony Ballet is cropped at the knees, and her body fits tightly into the lower right portion of the picture. As in certain figure studies by Matisse, tension is created between the curving outline of the figure and the crisp rectangle of the frame. Moreover, the central shape is positioned diagonally, suggesting movement to the left. Halfway up, this diagonal line intersects a horizontal line that slices clear across the center of the canvas. This horizontal, implied by the alignment of elbows and shoulders, also has directional value. Together, these shapes and the movement they imply create a dynamic composition. Music Hall Turn, on the other hand, uses what would normally be thought of as more conservative composition. The entire stage is visible, and none of the figures is cropped. Even so, Music Hall Turn may have been an experimental study in its own right. The composition appears to represent the viewpoint of the "ideal" spectator. The stage is shown as it would appear from the exact center front of the auditorium. In other words, the edge of the stage is perfectly parallel to the bottom of the picture plane, and the vantage point is low. Moreover, the composition appears to have been designed so that the opening of the proscenium is defined by the picture frame itself.

The treatment of composition as well as the handling of color in both Pony Ballet and Music Hall Turn suggest that these works developed as modern painterly conceptions, and this, principally, is what sets these later works apart from Hammerstein's Roof Garden, which is so closely tied to the aesthetics of realism and the practice of illustration. In the later two works, as in Hammerstein's, the vaudeville subject is drafted into a dialogue between fine art and popular culture. However, the terms of that dialogue change significantly between the first and second decades of the century. As an artifact of American Realism, Hammerstein's reflects the particular values associated with that historical trend. Not only does the painting represent an aspect of popular entertainment,

but it represents it in a “popular” style, that is, the style of illustration. Pony Ballet and Music Hall Turn, on the other hand, are executed in a manner than conspicuously alludes to the “high” style of European modernism. Nonetheless, the vaudeville subject matter retains its “popular” resonance.

### City Life and Popular Entertainment in Paintings and Etchings of John Sloan

Though Sloan maintained that “the real artist finds beauty in common things,” he also felt that it was the artist’s task to transform the common subject through personal poetic interpretation.<sup>50</sup> Art, in Sloan’s view, was above all an individualistic and spiritual endeavor through which an artist transcended the commonplace. Moreover, the products of this sort of ardent, searching method were not meant to have “democratic” appeal. Toward the end of his life, he commented that he didn’t believe in “painting down” to satisfy the “movie-level interest” of the contemporary public.<sup>51</sup> He suggested that instead of bringing art “down” to the masses, the masses might be elevated through art. “Why not hope that every great factory would have creative art workshops,” he wrote in 1949. “where working people could have the satisfaction of making things for themselves instead of going to the movies. Why not have classes in music and theatre and dancing and writing instead of so much concern for spectator sports.”<sup>52</sup> As a young man aspiring to be an illustrator, Sloan took his “calling” seriously. But once inspired to paint, he discovered a “higher” calling. Painting, for Sloan, was inherently noble, regardless of subject matter.<sup>53</sup> Even the imagery of popular entertainment could serve such exalted aims.

<sup>50</sup> John Sloan, Gist of Art: Principles and Practices Expounded in the Classroom and Studio, comp. Helen Farr (New York: American Artists Group), 41.

<sup>51</sup> John Sloan, “Interview on Realism.” KVSF Radio, Santa Fe, 11 August 1946, transcript, John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

<sup>52</sup> John Sloan, “Notes--A,” 1949, John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

<sup>53</sup> Sloan states in Gist of Art (41) that “the subject may be of first importance to the artist when he starts a picture, but it should be of least importance in the finished product. The subject is of no aesthetic significance.”

In paintings Sloan executed during his first decade in New York, the moving picture theater--rather than the vaudeville stage--appears as emblematic of the urban entertainment experience. Sloan apparently considered painting live vaudeville acts as well. In early 1909, for example, he made the following entry in his diary: "At 14th St. we followed the crowd into the Dewey Theatre moving picture show. Saw some right good films and one very amusing 'yeller gal,' buck and wing dancer, a very interesting type. I'd like to try to paint her as I saw her then. . . ."<sup>54</sup> As far as we know, Sloan never actually depicted this dancer nor any other vaudeville performer. He only brought to fruition, it seems, his plans to paint movie subjects. The first of these, Movies, Five Cents, was completed in 1907. Two subsequent paintings, Carmine Theatre and Movies, were completed in 1912 and 1913 respectively. Though these works number only three, their significance is considerable when viewed in the expanded context of Sloan's career between circa 1890 and 1913. When considered in this way, these paintings appear emblematic of larger themes that animate a good portion of Sloan's work from this period. Specifically, Sloan's moving picture subjects are an extension of his very early interest in theater subjects in general; also, they represent a major declaration of his evolving interest in the phenomenon of spectatorship as a whole.

Sloan's initial aspiration after leaving high school in 1888 was to prepare himself for freelance work in commercial design and illustration. While working full-time during the day, he pursued his own independent course of preparation. He taught himself to etch; he took night classes in freehand drawing; and he began to study and collect numerous examples of the work of established illustrators. In the beginning, Sloan seems to have concentrated his attention on American illustration. Only later, after meeting Henri, did his focus shift to the graphic art of Europe.

One American illustrator in particular, Edwin Austin Abbey, served as an inspirational model. A native of Philadelphia, Abbey had his first drawing published by Harper's Weekly while still in his teens. In 1871, when he was nineteen, he moved to

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<sup>54</sup> John Sloan, John Sloan's New York Scene: From the Diaries, Notes and Correspondence, 1906-1913, ed. Bruce St. John (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 283.

New York, where he remained until 1878, when his employer, Harper and Brothers, sent him to work in England, where he eventually settled. Just before sailing in '78, Abbey was commissioned by Scribner's to illustrate Sheridan's eighteenth-century comedy School for Scandal, an assignment which inaugurated what was to become his specialty, the illustration of plays.<sup>55</sup> In the mid- to late-1880s, Sloan began assiduously to collect specimens of Abbey's work. An early scrapbook of his contains numerous clippings of Abbey's illustrations of Shakespeare's plays and other dramatic texts, which clearly inspired some of his own earliest illustration efforts.<sup>56</sup> For example, an 1891 drawing by Sloan, which he apparently executed while attending night school at the Spring Garden Institute, illustrates a scene from Othello (Delaware Museum of Art).<sup>57</sup>

Another American illustrator that interested Sloan in the 1890s was Joseph Pennell. Also from Philadelphia, Pennell, like Abbey, eventually made his home in England, where he fulfilled commissions from American magazines. A series of illustrations depicting London music halls that Pennell executed for Harper's New Monthly Magazine in the early 1890s, in particular, garnered Sloan's attention. He clipped and saved two of Pennell's illustrations of music hall interiors: one representing the stage from a distant point of view near the center of the audience and another showing an oblique view of the stage with orchestra and audience in profile (Figs. 36 and 37).<sup>58</sup> Since Sloan had in mind at the time to attempt to illustrate theatrical subjects, it seems likely that he would be interested in exploring the various ways he could represent the stage. Thus these clippings may be linked, on the one hand, to Sloan's contemporaneous effort to illustrate plays, such as Othello, and, at the same time, taken as evidence of his expanding interest in entertainment subjects.

<sup>55</sup> Allen Johnson, ed., Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), s. v. "Abbey, Edwin Austin."

<sup>56</sup> "Scrapbook #1," John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

<sup>57</sup> "Spring Garden Institute" is inscribed in pencil in the lower right corner of the drawing.

<sup>58</sup> F. Anstey, "London Music Halls," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 82 (January 1891), 190-202; clipped illustrations (Figs. 36 and 37) in folder labeled "owned by JS 1890s," John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

Encouraged by Henri, Sloan began in the late 1890s to devote more and more attention to painting. In the early stages of this transition, he was infected by Henri's enthusiasm for what Rowland Elzea refers to as "bas genre" subjects observed in the city streets.<sup>59</sup> Sloan's first painting of a city subject was The Philadelphia Stock Exchange of circa 1897-98 (Delaware Art Museum). Over the next several years, he depicted a number of other celebrated buildings and public spaces in the heart of downtown Philadelphia, including the old Walnut Street Theatre (1900), Independence Square (1900), and City Hall (1901). In most of these paintings, the genre element of the subject is subordinated to an imposing architectural façade. In Walnut Street Theatre, the building façade is certainly prominent, but still there is more attention given to "street-life" in this work than in any other painting in the group (Fig. 38).

The old Walnut Street Theatre, located at 9th and Walnut, first opened in the 1770s.<sup>60</sup> However, the theater building that appears in Sloan's painting was actually constructed about fifty years later. Designed by John Haviland, the neoclassic structure was an architectural as well as a cultural landmark in Philadelphia, and therefore Sloan probably associated it with other significant buildings he painted at the time.<sup>61</sup> Throughout the 1800s, many celebrated actors—including Lily Langtry, Mrs. Fiske, Julia Marlowe, and Maurice Barrymore—appeared at the Walnut Street Theatre in full-length dramatic performances. After 1900, the theater presented vaudeville entertainment as well as full-length plays.<sup>62</sup> In his painting, Sloan depicts a crowd of people assembled before the dimly lit façade of the building, which is shown almost parallel to the picture plane. Though numerous figures are represented, they appear as a somber mass that is largely

<sup>59</sup> Rowland Elzea, John Sloan: Spectator of Life, exh. cat. (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1988), 14.

<sup>60</sup> The theater apparently celebrated its centennial in the early 1870s. See John Bouvé Clapp and Edwin Francis Edgett, Players of the Present, Part Two (New York: The Dunlap Society, 1900), 290-91.

<sup>61</sup> See Irvin R. Glazer, Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z: A Comprehensive Descriptive Record of 813 Theatres Constructed Since 1724 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 234-36. The building designed by John Haviland dates from 1828. Glazer characterizes Haviland as "the most exalted architect of his period" (234). In 1986, the Walnut Street Theatre was the oldest theater in the U. S. in point of continuous operation.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

devoid of gaiety and animation. In this painting, as in Sloan's nearly contemporaneous depiction of a café environment in The Rathskeller of 1901 (Cleveland Museum of Art), the evocation of the "human element" of the city is decidedly low-key and reticent. This subdued treatment of the lively aspect of city life will recur, to some extent, in Sloan's later paintings of movie theaters and other urban subjects.

"I emerged into real interest in the life around me, with paint in my hand, *after* I came to New York," Sloan once remarked.<sup>63</sup> At the time of his definitive move to New York in the spring of 1904, Sloan was already a seasoned observer of the urban scene; however, once he was permanently settled in New York he began to devote more time and attention to studying and interpreting the myriad sights of the great metropolis. By September of 1904 he and his wife Dolly had settled into an apartment at 165 West Twenty-third Street, a major cross-town thoroughfare and the center of New York City vaudeville around the turn of the century.<sup>64</sup> There were at least two major vaudeville outlets near the Sloan's new residence: Proctor's Twenty-third Street Theatre just west of Sixth Avenue, and Koster and Bial's Music Hall on Twenty-third Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway. Each of these houses had some claim to fame. F. F. Proctor identified his Twenty-third Street establishment as "the leading vaudeville theatre in America" and claimed that it offered "the most varied and original" programs in New York.<sup>65</sup> Koster and Bial's, on the other hand, owned a different sort of notoriety. A premiere performance of the Vitascope—an early form of the motion picture—at Koster and Bial's at Herald Square on April 23, 1896 created an enormous stir in the popular entertainment world and inaugurated a move to make motion pictures a standard feature of vaudeville.<sup>66</sup> In fact, in late 1904,

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<sup>63</sup> John Sloan, quoted in Van Wyck Brooks, John Sloan: A Painter's Life (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1955), 37.

<sup>64</sup> Snyder, Voice of the City, 85.

<sup>65</sup> "F. F. Proctor's Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Jubilee Celebrated at Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre the week of April ninth--nineteen hundred and six," pamphlet, n. pag., Theatre Collection, Museum of the City of New York.

<sup>66</sup> Robert C. Allen, Vaudeville and Film 1895-1915: A Study in Media Interaction (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 91-92, 192. According to Allen, the pioneering role of Koster and Bial's makes it a rival of the nickelodeon for the distinction of "most famous theatre in which motion pictures were shown prior to 1914."

when Sloan first settled on Twenty-third Street, movies could, by and large, be seen by New York City residents only in vaudeville theaters.<sup>67</sup>

At the time Sloan moved to New York, he was still working on illustrations for an English-language publication of the works of French novelist Charles Paul de Kock, a project with which both Glackens and Shinn were also involved. Sloan completed a total of fifty-three etchings to accompany the De Kock series. This accomplishment, which represented “his first artistically significant work” in the printmaking field, prepared him for his next important etching project, his New York City Life series.<sup>68</sup> In this series of etchings completed in 1905 and 1906, Sloan for the first time alludes to the current fascination with “moving pictures”; also for the first time, he explores, in a fairly sustained and consistent manner, the phenomenon of spectatorship as an aspect of contemporary life.

That Sloan was a self-conscious spectator himself is fairly clear. In several places in Gist of Art he likens the artist to a somewhat distanced observer, a disinterested “spectator of life.” “To be a spectator one does not need to have experiences,” he asserts. Ultimately, he claims, the artist “maintains a spectator’s attitude toward life.”<sup>69</sup> In preparing several of the etchings that make up the New York City Life series, Sloan went beyond being a spectator. Three of the prints—The Woman’s Page, Turning Out the Light, and Man, Wife, and Child—illustrate indoor scenes that Sloan observed through windows in the neighborhood of his studio. Sloan himself acknowledged the voyeurism inherent in these representations. About The Woman’s Page, which depicts a semi-dressed woman and child in the sordid interior of their cramped apartment, Sloan once remarked: “The

<sup>67</sup> Allen maintains that storefront motion picture theaters—or “nickelodeons”—devoted exclusively to motion picture presentation date back to 1896, though apparently not many were established until around 1906. The nickelodeon phenomenon is not even mentioned in the New York trade press until March 17, 1906, when it is noted in Variety that several storefront theaters have recently opened along main thoroughfares in New York. See Robert C. Allen, “Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan, 1906-1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon,” in Film Before Griffith, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 165.

<sup>68</sup> E. John Bullard, “John Sloan: His Graphics,” in John Sloan, 1871-1951, exh. cat. (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 1971), 29.

<sup>69</sup> Sloan, Gist of Art, 14, 20, 189.

psychologists say we all have a little peeper instinct, and [this print is] a result of peeping--the life across from me when I had a studio on 23rd street."<sup>70</sup>

The majority of the etchings that make up the New York City Life series, however, represent public as opposed to private views of the common life of the city. Five of the ten prints that make up the original set depict street scenes, and one--the first etching of the set--shows an indoor public space, that of an art gallery (Fig. 39).<sup>71</sup> When Sloan initiated the series, he had in mind to depict "connoisseurs," or those who look and criticize in the art galleries and on the streets of New York. The first etching he did, entitled Connoisseurs of Prints, shows a number of avid critics closely and intently examining art works on the wall of a gallery.<sup>72</sup> The second, entitled Fifth Avenue Critics (also referred to as Connoisseurs of Virtue or Une rue à New-York), illustrates the sort of ogling that typically occurred on New York's fashionable Fifth Avenue (Fig. 40). When Sloan undertook to complete the third etching in the series, entitled The Show Case (or Connoisseurage or Critics of Form), he had not yet abandoned his original plan to develop a series on "connoisseurs" (Fig. 41). His third print once again takes up the theme of studied attention: the girls that make up the central group examine the corset on display with as much serious intent as the connoisseurs of prints devote to art and the connoisseurs of virtue direct to other passersby. However, while the earlier two prints illustrate the function of the critical gaze, The Show Case does not. Instead of looking and criticizing, the girls who admire the corset are simply looking for pleasure. When Sloan commented on this print in 1945, he acknowledged a departure from his original intent: "Already it is apparent," he remarked, "that the Connoisseurs motive was fading."<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> John Sloan and W. S. Hayter, on NBC television program, 13 May 1949, recording and transcript, John Sloan Collection, HFSL; quoted in Peter Morse, comp., John Sloan's Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings, Lithographs, and Posters (New Haven: Yale University Press), 141.

<sup>71</sup> Sloan completed the original set of ten prints in 1905 and 1906; then, in late 1910 and early 1911, he completed three additional etchings, which he considered to be part of the series. See Morse, John Sloan's Prints, 134.

<sup>72</sup> The space depicted is actually that of the old American Art Galleries on 23rd Street. See comments by John Sloan in John Sloan Paintings and Prints, exh. cat. (Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth College, 1946), 34, quoted in Morse, John Sloan's Prints, 135.

<sup>73</sup> John Sloan, [Notes], 1945, John Sloan Collection, HFSL, quoted in Morse, John Sloan's Prints, 138.

After completing The Show Case, Sloan added to the series three additional prints that represent spectatorship in the context of the street. One, entitled Man Monkey, illustrates a street performer surrounded by a number of onlookers who exhibit various degrees of surprise, delight, and interest in the amusing spectacle of a one-man band (Fig. 42). Another, entitled The Little Bride, shows newlyweds receiving an elaborate send-off as they head down the steps of a church; from the street, several passersby watch the scene with obvious pleasure (Fig. 43). A third etching, entitled Fun, One Cent, illustrates another form of spectatorship that focuses on “moving pictures” rather than human performers (Fig. 44). In 1945 Sloan identified the attraction depicted in this etching as “hand-cranked moving photographs” and the location as 14th Street near Third Avenue.<sup>74</sup> Beginning in the mid-to-late 1890s, “hand-cranked moving photographs” were exhibited in arcades, like the one depicted in Sloan’s etching, as well as in railway stations, at seaside piers, and even in gentlemen’s lavatories.<sup>75</sup> The device that made this possible was called the Mutoscope. The Mutoscope was a large standing cast-iron contraption designed to exhibit a series of consecutive photographs, which flashed before the eyes of the viewer like a shuffled deck of cards. The photographs, which were paper prints often made from the negatives of films presented in theaters, were actually mounted to a cylinder which revolved past a stop that halted each image for an instant. The flashing sequence produced in this way created the illusion of “moving pictures.” The young women who gather in front of the Mutoscope machines in Sloan’s print are obviously delighted with this illusion and take great pleasure in looking. In Sloan’s subsequent work, he will further develop the theme of “pleasure in looking” in paintings and drawings that address the motion picture craze and other urban phenomena.

Within a few short blocks of Sloan’s studio/residence on West Twenty-third Street there were numerous amusement outlets that Sloan himself began to investigate some time

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., quoted in Morse, John Sloan’s Prints, 140. Sloan’s recollection, however, may have been faulty. Morse notes that two of the proofs of the etching bear inscriptions indicating alternative locations: “23rd Street near 7th Avenue” and “23rd Street near 9th Avenue.” The former, which appears on a proof for John Quinn in the John Sloan Collection (HFSL), apparently dates from around 1911; therefore, it may be the most reliable.

<sup>75</sup> Barry Anthony, “Shadows of Early Films,” Sight & Sound 59 (Summer 1990): 194.

after his move to New York. In the diary he maintained between 1906 and 1913, he mentions over and over again his outings to neighborhood vaudeville and movie theaters. In one entry he made in 1907, for example, he refers to “our familiar 6th Ave. picture show,” which suggests that at that time movies were for Dolly and himself a regular diversion.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, one must question the consistency of Sloan’s enthusiasm for movie entertainment. It has already been noted that he expressed toward the end of his life a pronounced disdain for the lowbrow “movie-level interest” that informed contemporary taste. This attitude was actually foreshadowed early in his career. In 1896 Sloan’s extended commentary on the new phenomenon of moving pictures appeared in a publication known as The Chap-Book. His statement, which is striking in its vehemence, is quoted here at length:

How I want to smash The Vitascope. The name of the thing is in itself a horror, but that may pass. Its manifestations are worse. The Vitascope, be it known, is a sort of magic lantern which reproduces movement. Whole scenes are enacted on its screen. La Loie dances, elevated trains come and go, and the thing is mechanically ingenious, and a pretty toy for that great child, the public. . . .

In a recent play called The Widow Jones you may remember a famous kiss which Miss May Irwin bestowed on a certain John C. Rice, and vice versa. Neither participant is physically attractive, and the spectacle of their prolonged pasturing on each other’s lips was hard to bear. When only life-size it was pronouncedly beastly. But that was nothing to the present sight. Magnified to Gargantuan proportions and repeated three times over it is absolutely disgusting. All delicacy or remnant of charm seem gone from Miss Irwin, and the performance comes very near being indecent in its emphasized vulgarity.

Such things call for police interference. Our cities from time to time have spasms of morality, when they arrest people for displaying lithographs of ballet-girls; yet they permit night after night a performance which is infinitely more degrading. . . .<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 142. This reference occurs in a letter to Dolly dated 16 July 1907.

<sup>77</sup> John Sloan, “Notes,” Chap-Book, 15 July 1896, 239-40; issue preserved in John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

In 1896, when Sloan first witnessed the Vitascope, the motion picture medium was yet in its earliest infancy. Moving pictures were still a curiosity, and technology had not advanced sufficiently to allow for any polished effects. Moreover, films were exceedingly short. North states that the average length of a motion picture between 1896 and 1900 was a mere fifty feet, which would translate into a projection time of probably not more than a minute. Nonetheless, content was somewhat varied; there were scenic and topical films as well as films based on “prearranged scenes.” However, the limited length of these early productions made it impossible to develop any subject in depth, so there was no question of presenting a “story.”<sup>78</sup> Gilbert Seldes, who would eventually champion the art of the moving picture, was, if not as antagonistic as Sloan, equally unimpressed with the nascent form of the medium. He believed that “nothing whatever of interest” was accomplished by motion picture producers prior to 1903, and North asserts that his was not a minority view.<sup>79</sup>

By the middle of the first decade of this century, the motion picture form had evolved considerably. A boom period in motion picture production had begun around 1905 following the advent of the “Nickelodeon,” the first “official” movie theater to open in the United States.<sup>80</sup> As more and more nickelodeons opened across the country, the audience for motion pictures grew, and this expanding consumer group demanded greater variety as well as quality in the entertainment product. After 1905, the industry began to mass-produce one-reel “story” films modeled on the example of Edwin S. Porter’s highly successful “The Great Train Robbery” of 1903. At the same time, competitive producers sought to increase the quality of their films by more often engaging “specialists” to take part in the creative process. Thus, experienced writers began to be hired to adapt stories for the screen, and professional actors were increasingly engaged to perform.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For overview of motion picture production between 1895 and 1900, see Joseph H. North, The Early Development of the Motion Picture (1887-1909) (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 99-147.

<sup>79</sup> Gilbert Seldes, An Hour With the Movies and the Talkies (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1929), 20, quoted in North, Early Development of the Motion Picture, 184.

<sup>80</sup> The first Nickelodeon, which opened in McKeesport, Pennsylvania in November of 1905, was a converted storefront outfitted with discarded furnishings from the local Grand Opera House.

<sup>81</sup> For discussion of various aspects of the mass production of motion pictures, which began circa 1905, see North, Early Development of the Motion Picture, 256-79.

It appears that Sloan wasn't drawn into the motion picture craze himself until early 1907. In all of his diary entries for 1906, he does not mention a single outing to a motion picture theater.<sup>82</sup> His first reference to such an excursion occurs May 17, 1907:

In the evening, after dinner, Dolly and I walked out to Miner's Eighth Avenue Theatre and found all the reasonable priced seats were sold out. It is "Amateur Night" and we declined to spend more than 50¢ each on places. . . . On our way back Sixth Avenue, we stopped in the "Manhattan Theatre" which is soon to be torn down for some of the underground railroad work, and upon the stage where once appeared Mrs. Fiske, we saw a cheap (10 cents) moving picture show.<sup>83</sup>

By the end of the following month, Sloan had developed a new and more focused interest in moving pictures. On June 29, 1907, he wrote, "Walked out in the evening alone. Went into a five cent show of Kinematograph pictures on 6th Avenue. Think it might be a good thing to paint. . . ." Late in the afternoon of the next day, he began to paint "the interior of Moving Picture Show."<sup>84</sup>

The painting that Sloan ultimately produced, which is now known as Movies, Five Cents, depicts the simple interior of a small nickelodeon theater (Fig. 45). A movie screen appears unobtrusively in the upper left corner of the canvas, while the audience occupies its entire bottom half. A harsh light emanates from the screen and serves to illuminate the features of scattered figures in the audience. As a whole, the crowd appears riveted to the screen; there is one female spectator, however, who turns her head toward us; her bright and animated features are emblematic of the "pleasure in looking" enjoyed by the entire audience. The group of spectators in this painting actually appears more significant than the spectacle itself. Sloan does more here than recognize the audience to be an essential component of the entertainment milieu: he makes it the key element of the composition.

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<sup>82</sup> Nor was Sloan apparently a great fan of vaudeville at the time. In his diary entry for 23 June 1906 (New York Scene, 43) he describes an evening out with friends that culminated in a visit to Hammerstein's "crowded" roof garden. He comments, "Strange to see New Yorkers paying big money to see such a miserable show."

<sup>83</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 129.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-39.

It is significant that the composition of Movies, Five Cents differs markedly from that of a drawing which is presumed to be a preliminary study for the final work (Fig. 46). In the drawing, the movie screen appears more-or-less parallel to the canvas surface and slightly off-center to the left. Sloan apparently made this drawing while seated in the audience himself. From this position, he was able to observe some of the spectators in profile, and in his drawing he accentuates their silhouettes for comic effect. By and large, this study is remarkably similar to Joseph Pennell's illustration of the interior of the "Royal Standard" in London, which Sloan clipped and saved in the 1890s (Fig. 36). The two drawings represent approximately the same point of view, both have a roughly "triangular" order, and both use standing figures and figures in profile to create similar effects. Sloan may have realized at some point that any view of the audience from the rear was likely to yield little evidence of group character or expression, for the extreme adjustment he made in the composition of the final painting allowed him to portray more fully the engagement and delight of the audience. Sloan, it seems, sought to focus more attention on the audience in order to make the phenomenon of spectatorship a more prominent theme in the painting.

The nickelodeon theater was just one of several "bas genre" subjects that Sloan discovered on Sixth Avenue not far from his studio. In Sloan's own words, "Sixth Avenue had a Coney Island quality in 1907. It was the Fifth Avenue of the poor and furnished similar facilities at lower rates."<sup>85</sup> Sloan obviously found charm in the pleasures of the less advantaged residents of the city. Months before he began concentrating on Sixth Avenue subjects, he observed "happiness rather than misery in the whole life" of the East Side and that "Fifth Avenue faces [were] unhappy in comparison."<sup>86</sup> He apparently discovered a similar quality in the vigorous life observable on Sixth Avenue, which he began to capture in paintings in 1907.

In addition to Movies, Five Cents, Sloan completed four other paintings in oil in 1907 which depicted the humble amusements and spontaneous diversions of that segment of the New York population that found its pleasures on Sixth Avenue. Two of these

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<sup>85</sup> Sloan, Gist of Art, 213.

<sup>86</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 13.

works--Hairdresser's Window and Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street--were begun prior to Movies, Five Cents (Figs. 47 and 48). However, all three paintings, it appears, were completed within less than a month. Sloan first began work on Hairdresser's Window on June 6, 1907; he apparently started on Sixth Avenue just one week later, on June 13; he began Movies at the end of the month and presumably completed it by the first of July.<sup>87</sup> Sloan stated years later in Gist of Art that the second painting in this group, Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street, had "surely caught the atmosphere of the Tenderloin; drab, shabby, happy, sad, and human."<sup>88</sup> Certainly, one could extend that description to Hairdresser's Window and Movies, Five Cents as well. All three paintings depict enthusiastic pleasure-seekers of humble, yet wholesome, mien. In Hairdresser's Window a crowd gathers to observe the amusing spectacle of a "bleached blond hair dresser bleaching the hair of a client";<sup>89</sup> in Sixth Avenue pedestrians in the street and on the sidewalk derive pleasure in ogling one another; and in Movies, of course, a crowd delights in the spectacle of moving pictures. Each of these paintings refers to spectatorship in one way or another, and each illustrates the pleasure of looking.

Toward the end of 1907 Sloan painted The Haymarket (The Brooklyn Museum) and Election Night (Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester), both of which depict sites along Sixth Avenue. (The Haymarket, a "notorious" dance hall, was located near Thirtieth Street; Election Night depicts a crowd gathered in Herald Square at Sixth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street.) Though neither of these paintings appears to address "spectatorship" as pointedly as do the Sixth Avenue subjects Sloan painted earlier in the year, there is other evidence to suggest that Sloan continued to be preoccupied with this aspect of human behavior throughout 1907 and into the following year. In November of 1907 he began work on yet another street scene, which he entitled Picture Store Window

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 135, 138, 139. Rowland Elzea states that Sloan probably finished Movies, Five Cents on July 1, 1907 because he does not mention it again in his diary after that date. See Elzea, John Sloan's Oil Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 1:79.

<sup>88</sup> Sloan, Gist of Art, 214.

<sup>89</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 133.

(Fig. 49).<sup>90</sup> Sloan discovered the scene depicted in this work on West Twenty-third Street, not far from his studio.<sup>91</sup> However, the painting illustrates a subject “closer to home” in another sense: here Sloan chose to focus on an incident more directly relevant to the fine artist’s experience than were the subjects he found on Sixth Avenue. One is immediately struck by the similarity between this image of passersby gazing at pictures through a window and Sloan’s earlier etching of the connoisseurs of prints. In Picture Store Window, as in the earlier print, the theme is “art appreciation”: Sloan focuses, in each case, on a number of spectators who are actively examining works of art, and he makes their condition, as captivated spectators, the principal point of interest in the scene.

It wasn’t until August of 1908 that Sloan finally got Picture Store Window “into very good shape,” and soon after that he began working on an etching that was related in theme.<sup>92</sup> Copyist at the Metropolitan Museum, which Sloan first began work on early in September of 1908, depicts a substantial group of onlookers surrounding a female copyist endeavoring to replicate “a sheep picture,” as Sloan refers to it, in one of the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 50).<sup>93</sup> The interest of the group is extraordinary; the children, especially, appear totally enthralled by the amazing feat of the copyist. Only Sloan himself (pictured at the far left with his wife Dolly) appears inclined to forego the amusement. Like Connoisseurs of Prints and Picture Store Window, this etching illustrates the habit of looking at pictures on display in galleries and in museums. As a group, these three works represent just one aspect of the spectatorial habit, which Sloan attempted to explore through other subjects as well. Sloan apparently understood that the spectatorial habit was one that carried over from one phase of life to another. The habit of looking, whether exercised in an art gallery, in a movie theater, or on any street corner, was basically the same behavior. A comparison of Copyist at the Metropolitan Museum and Movies, Five Cents lends credence to this argument. The “subject” in each case is

<sup>90</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 168. Sloan first mentions this painting in his diary on 26 November 1907, when he refers to it as a “new canvas.”

<sup>91</sup> Sloan, Gist of Art, 216.

<sup>92</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 235.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

essentially the same: a crowd of spectators is captivated by an image (or sequence of images) set off on the wall by a rectangular frame.

By early 1909 Sloan's attitude toward the urban scene had, it seems, begun to alter somewhat due to his increasing pessimism with regard to municipal administration as well as political leadership on the national level.<sup>94</sup> Sloan abhorred the hypocrisy of those in positions of power who would presume to regulate the lives of others. He deplored, for example, the revival of "blue laws" restricting Sunday activities, which New York city officials attempted to effect in December of 1907. It was a "queer state of things in a metropolis like [New York]," he noted in his diary on December 8, 1907: "The church virtuous ones who are mostly shams, knowing and unknowing, forcing all to abstain from amusement. . . ."<sup>95</sup> He expressed contempt for those in power at the federal level as well. He voted for William Jennings Bryan in the presidential election of 1908, not because he was a Democrat, but because he felt that the "rotteness" in the Republican administration had to come to an end. By late 1908, Sloan was convinced of the need for political change in the United States, "for the operating knife when a party rots in power," and he was ready to invest further in the cause.<sup>96</sup>

Discouraged by Bryan's defeat, Sloan turned hopefully toward the Socialist movement, which had by then become quite moderate in its principal aims.<sup>97</sup> According to Melvyn Dubofsky, the New York Socialist Party organization, in particular, pursued a "distinctly reformist, non-revolutionary program" and thus was able to gain the sympathy of reform-minded individuals of various political persuasions.<sup>98</sup> Sloan was not exactly a reformer himself, though he was moved by the plight of the people. He claimed to be

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<sup>94</sup> See Joseph J. Kwiat, "John Sloan: An American Artist as Social Critic, 1900-1917," Arizona Quarterly 10 (Spring 1954): 53-54. Kwiat alludes to a shift away from "uncritical optimism" toward "a more critical spirit" in Sloan's work around this time.

<sup>95</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 171.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>97</sup> In the early years of its existence--that is, from 1901 to roughly 1904--the American Socialist Party had incorporated a "revolutionary" left wing, but by circa 1907, militancy was no longer a factor. See Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1968), 201ff.

<sup>98</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, "Success and Failure of Socialism in New York City, 1900-1918: A Case Study," Labor History 9 (Fall 1968): 374.

“more interested in the human beings themselves than in the schemes for betterment.” He even wondered, somewhat callously, whether the disadvantaged would be as interesting when they were “all comfortable and happy.”<sup>99</sup> In addition to emphasizing reform, moderate socialists tended to advocate change through the election process, and for this reason, proselytizing was a vital part of their organizing effort. Apparently, several of Sloan’s socialist friends encouraged him to join the party. Charles Wisner Barrell, for example, who was to write on Sloan’s work for the Craftsman, had become a socialist in 1908. In December of that year, he encouraged Sloan to attend an upcoming meeting. By this time, Sloan was just about convinced of the worthiness of the socialist effort. “I believe my next vote will go to their candidates,” he wrote on December 7.<sup>100</sup>

Sloan’s new political consciousness would not, he firmly maintained, find expression in his work in fine art. Toward the end of his life, he said that he never intended “to put in [his painting] any ideological social significance.” He simply “liked to observe the life of the people. It did not strike [him] that they were unhappy, groaning with oppression.” However, later, after he’d become actively interested in socialism, he found that it “disturbed [his] selection of subject matter.” Thus, if there was “some element of preaching in a subject,” he made a cartoon or etching. But he avoided such subject matter in painting.<sup>101</sup> Of course, Sloan’s own statements cannot be discounted entirely. Nonetheless, it may be argued that his new political perspective did, in some respects, affect his artistic sensibility.

One indication of such an altered point of view was his willingness, at the time, to accept that his work be interpreted as social criticism analogous in style to that of contemporary naturalist and realist fiction. Barrell’s article entitled “The Real Drama of the Slums, As Told in John Sloan’s Etchings” appeared in the Craftsman in February of 1909. The art of John Sloan, Barrell writes, “comes down to such bald realities as we find in the stories of Jack London and of the late Frank Norris, showing, in all its native tragedy and

<sup>99</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 305-6.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>101</sup> John Sloan, “Notes,” 1948, John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

grotesqueness, the life of that part of humanity which to most of us is known only vaguely as the 'other half.'"<sup>102</sup> Barrell is especially taken with an oil by Sloan entitled The Coffee Line which represents a group of unemployed workers waiting in line behind a hot coffee wagon in Madison Square on a cold and windy night. "It is as great a depiction and biting commentary upon the social system of our big cities," he writes, "as Stephen Crane's unforgettable prose sketch entitled 'The Men in the Storm,' or one of Gorky's poignant little masterpieces."<sup>103</sup> Prior to its publication, Barrell brought the article to Sloan for his approval. Except that Barrell classed him with Eugene Higgins, Sloan was pleased with the piece.<sup>104</sup>

As the year progressed Sloan seems to have become more and more conscious of the "social ills" of the metropolis, and as a result, his frequent strolls through mid- and lower Manhattan were no longer undertaken simply to observe and enjoy the myriad sights of the city. In the spring of 1909 he discovered Jefferson Market night police court on one of his walks, a subject through which he would eventually express his new awareness of oppression, injustice, and evil in the urban sphere. Apparently, Sloan stopped by the night court for the first time on May 25, 1909. In his diary entry for that date he describes his reaction to the proceedings he observed: he felt sorry for the "poor little women, habitual drunkards," whom he saw summarily fined and dismissed by the judge. Later, in describing his experience to a companion, he was "full of rancor of what [he] had felt in the Night Court," and he "shot a lot of Socialistic . . . resentful noticings" of his at his friend who, Sloan supposed, must have thought him a "radical fool."<sup>105</sup> Sloan dropped into the night court again the following week, this time in the company of Barrell.<sup>106</sup> Then, in early 1910, after formally joining the Socialist Party, he returned at least one more time to spend a full two hours observing a spectacle he found "more stirring . . . in every way than the

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<sup>102</sup> Charles W. Barrell, "The Real Drama of the Slums as Told in John Sloan's Etchings," Craftsman 15 (February 1909): 559.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 563.

<sup>104</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 282-83.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 315-16.

great majority of plays.”<sup>107</sup> It wasn’t until a year later that Sloan actually began work on a painting that would depict children playing around the Jefferson Market Police Court Building, a theme he’d “had in mind for a couple of years.”<sup>108</sup>

The oppression of poor and disadvantaged people must have seemed to Sloan especially heinous when enforced in a court of law, in the name of “justice.” It is reasonable, therefore, to interpret his image of the Court Building in Jefferson Market Jail, Night of 1911 to be a symbol of the oppression which he so vehemently abhorred (Fig. 51). However, there are other elements of this work that may also be understood to reflect a critical intent on the part of the artist. It is surely noteworthy, for example, that Sloan has brought together two contrasting—one might say, antithetical—subjects in this work: an imposing, ominous-looking public building and anonymous children who frolic on the sidewalk after dark. When Sloan first observed this combination of elements, he thought it was a “fine thing.”<sup>109</sup> However, within a few months he’d come to look at children’s games in a different light. After observing a parade of school children from the window of his apartment in the fall of 1909, he wrote, “Crowds of children merry-making always make me sad . . . perhaps it is the thought of this youth and happiness so soon to be worn away by contact with the social conditions, the grind and struggle for existence—that the few rich may live from their efforts.”<sup>110</sup>

The artificial illumination of the scene is also something that initially caught Sloan’s attention and which he sought to emphasize in his painting. The sidewalk in front of the Court Building where the children run and play is harshly lit by an electric street lamp, while the dark building forms in the background are punctuated by sharply contrasting spots of light in the vertical row of barred windows, on the two visible faces of the clock tower, and in the distant storefronts at the left. Sloan was quite interested in innovations in street lighting, and he very likely opted to paint certain night scenes in order to try out

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 504.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 338.

special lighting effects in his work. On August 7, 1910 he refers in his diary to “the new big yellow arc lights [that] throw a fine rich glare over these teeming streets.” He notes at the time that “they are few (in front of moving picture theatres) . . .”<sup>111</sup> Under certain circumstances, however, the artificial glare of city lights could provoke in Sloan a feeling of malaise. On December 5, 1910 he wrote, “The glaring advertising electrical displays are the most noticeable feature of Broadway at night and they [strike] me as a clear demonstration of the vulgar commercialized age we live in. This electrical lighting of the street might be done for light and beauty instead of clash and clamoring of tradesmen.”<sup>112</sup> For Sloan, the harsh illumination of a night scene such Jefferson Market Jail might have served to convey at least a note of something sinister or unwholesome about the city.

During the latter half of 1911, Sloan began two subsequent paintings of New York at night that appear to have much in common with Jefferson Market Jail: Wet Night in the Bowery and Tammany Hall, New York (Figs. 52 and 53). Like Jefferson Market Jail, these later works are night scenes that represent, both literally and figuratively, the darker aspect of urban experience. Sloan began Wet Night in the Bowery on August 26, 1911. As was typical for Sloan, the scene was painted from memory. In this case, Sloan’s impression of the subject was distinctly negative: “Started a picture of Bowery, rainy night--memory of a walk I took last night,” he noted in his diary. “Saw a poor wretch drunk, decrepit and drivelling mouth dripping strings of saliva, hat off, in a cracked cackle cheering the ‘stars and stripes’ hung out over a cheap eating house. . . .”<sup>113</sup> Whereas before, Sloan had perceived pleasure and gaiety in the lives of the poorer residents of the city, now he was more inclined to see wretchedness and degradation. The Bowery, as Theodore Roosevelt noted at the time, was “haunted by demons as evil as any that stalk through the pages of [Dante’s] Inferno.”<sup>114</sup> Sloan was now aware of this evil, and this awareness was reflected in his art.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 447.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 484.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 560.

<sup>114</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Dante and the Bowery,” Outlook, 26 August 1911; quoted in Peter Conn, The Divided Mind: Ideology and Imagination in America, 1898-1917 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 259.

Sloan's vision of the sordid aspect of the urban environment is perhaps expressed most explicitly in Tammany Hall, New York, which he began early in November of 1911. Moreover, in this work Sloan implicates certain forms of popular entertainment in his critique of urban life. He was first inspired to paint the "pleasure zone" along Fourteenth Street between Third Avenue and Union Square on November 1: "Took a look at 14th St. opposite Tammany Hall," he recorded in his diary. "All sorts of shows, moving picture and vaudeville, diseases of men museums. Social ills walk the street and old Tammany Hall, red brick, glares at it all."<sup>115</sup> In the painting the Tammany Society Building, with its arched window openings, symmetrical façade, and elaborate parapet with sculptural motif at center, is depicted on the right. Barely visible at the left-hand side of the building is a vertical sign that says "Olympic," which marks the site of a vaudeville theater located within Tammany Hall itself. The "Olympic" sign is electrically lit as are several signs on buildings across the street. The artificial lighting from combined sources in this area is apparently strong enough to illuminate brightly the entire façade of the building. In his diary entry for November 2, the day he actually began work on the painting, Sloan describes the scene depicted as "a picture of Night, Fourteenth Street--Tammany Hall lit by glare from moving picture theatres."<sup>116</sup> Thus we may assume that he meant specifically to evoke in this work the intensity of the emanation of light from movie theaters. Such garish lighting, Sklar suggests, might have been accompanied by equally garish posters, a barker with a megaphone, or blaring phonograph music. This combined assault on the senses might very well produce, in a sensitive observer, a distinctly unsettling effect.<sup>117</sup>

It is quite certain that Sloan meant Tammany Hall, New York to be a critical commentary on moral decay in the city and on the complicity of the Tammany Hall administration in this evil. In light of Sloan's known contempt for "glaring advertising electrical displays," it is fairly safe to interpret his use of artificial illumination in this work as a signifier for the vulgar and degraded element of the urban milieu. That he specifically

<sup>115</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 574.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>117</sup> Robert Sklar, Movie-Made America (New York: Random House, 1975), 16.

identifies the source of illumination as the glare from moving picture theaters is significant. For as much as Sloan enjoyed movie entertainment himself, he remained highly critical of the more popular products of the industry. Thus, he regarded the ascendancy of the motion picture medium with distinct ambivalence. He expressed his negative feelings toward this popular genre of entertainment quite clearly in several written statements; Tammany Hall, New York is perhaps the only painting of his in which he appears to express the same attitude in visual terms.

Sloan's attitude toward moving pictures had changed significantly between 1907, the year he painted his first movie subject, and the early 1910s, when he returned to the subject once again. During the latter part of 1907, Sloan had gone a number of times to local movie houses, having been drawn initially to the nickelodeon as a potential subject for a painting. He made several forays for the purpose of "research"; afterward, however, he apparently went simply to enjoy the show. Sloan was not prone to criticize the films he saw during this period: he does not mention in his diary that any of the films he saw at the time was particularly good nor bad. The first sign that he is developing a more critical outlook appears in his diary in April of 1908: after a Chinese dinner one evening, he stops in at the moving picture show on Twenty-third Street and is "edified," he writes, "by several very stupid sets of films."<sup>118</sup> After this point, Sloan becomes much more critical of the films he sees. Whether he is pleased or disappointed, he makes his position known. After mid-1908, he becomes increasingly critical of American movies in particular. His negative regard for the domestic product becomes especially acute once he discovers French Film d'Art in June of 1909.

In 1907 there had occurred within the French cinema a move to create an alliance between film and theater. In that year the Film d'Art production company was founded for the purpose of elevating film by bringing to it artistic (that is, theatrical) values. The company aimed to present "recognizably highbrow (though not avant-garde)" material to an upper middle class audience with somewhat elitist tastes.<sup>119</sup> The first Film d'Art

<sup>118</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 216.

<sup>119</sup> Alan Williams, Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 63.

production that Sloan had the opportunity to see was a “moving picture play” called The Reckoning. He found it “very finely done” with “splendid acting” and more satisfying than theater “with words.”<sup>120</sup>

Sloan mentions several other Film d’Art productions in subsequent diary entries in which he contrasts French and American movies. On August 7, 1909, for example, he records his impression of a Film d’Art work entitled Tragedy of Meudon: it was a “splendid production,” he thought, one that made American movies “look silly and worse than amateurish by comparison.”<sup>121</sup> Later, he implies that the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures of New York City, in acting ostensibly to insure the “moral safety” of moviegoers, was aiding the success of inferior American films. The censors, he suggests, lend their stamp of approval to “American films with bad acting of poor common vulgar ideas,” and in so doing validate their banality and vulgarity. Sloan apparently viewed the authority of the Board of Review as threatening to the higher cultural values that he himself admired in Film d’Art. The censors, he feared, might “succeed in keeping out the superior French films” that he found “so much better for the most part in pantomime and plot” and “so much more interesting in pace.”<sup>122</sup> Sloan’s very favorable response to Film d’Art is indicative of his “middle class” perspective: Sloan, like most of his middle-class contemporaries, recognized a clear distinction between what was vulgar amusement and what was “legitimate” entertainment. The Film d’Art productions that he so admired had been created expressly to appeal to audiences of such discriminating taste.

By 1911 or 1912, some enterprising movie producers in the United States had begun to recognize that many American moviegoers, like Sloan, favored longer narrative films with more serious content than one was likely to find in most one-reel and two-reel

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<sup>120</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 319. Williams states in Republic of Images (65) that “the most striking characteristic of all the [Film d’Art] company’s ‘art’ films is their restrained, efficient, and expressive acting. Gestures are economical--certainly more restrained than they would have been on the stage--and they have been carefully planned for the camera.”

<sup>121</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 327.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 420. The National Board of Review of Motion Pictures of New York City worked “cooperatively” with motion picture producers. See Sklar, Movie-Made America, 31-32; and May, Screening Out the Past, 54-60.

American movies. One of the most important pioneers in producing such films was Adolph Zukor, who in 1912 launched his own version of Film d'Art, the Famous Players Film Company, which began operation with Edwin S. Porter as head of production. There were others that soon followed Zukor's lead. D. W. Griffith, working under contract for the Biograph Company, produced his first feature film, Judith of Bethulia, in 1913.<sup>123</sup> Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn) also got his start at this time when he teamed up with his brother-in-law Jesse L. Lasky, a vaudeville manager, and actor and would-be director Cecil B. DeMille to form the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company. Once a move was underway to "upgrade" American movies, the next step was to upgrade the theaters in which they were shown. In 1913, the first theaters built especially for motion picture exhibition began to open in New York City. S. L. "Roxy" Rothapfel, "the first great showman of motion-picture exhibition," was hired to oversee the outfitting of several of these early movie "palaces."<sup>124</sup> Thus, by the early 1910s, when Sloan was drawn once again to movie subjects, not only had his own attitude changed, but also had the nature of the subject itself. His Carmine Theater of 1912 and Movies of 1913 must, therefore, be interpreted in light of these altered conditions.

Once Sloan had embraced Socialism, he had, he claimed, conscientiously struggled to safeguard his painting from the taint of political propaganda. For this reason, he had to endure a "crisis of conscience" that lasted several years. Between 1909 and 1912, Brooks records, Sloan "was so concerned about socialism that he very seldom 'saw pictures,' and for two or three years he almost ceased to paint, for his purpose in painting was virtually paralyzed."<sup>125</sup> Sloan had apparently come to find the urban scene, from which he had drawn subject matter so easily before, problematic as a source of inspiration. His new awareness of the plight of the urban masses made it difficult, if not impossible, for him to re-experience the innocent pleasure he had earlier found in observing the life of the city. Nonetheless, he did not abandon the urban scene completely, and in several of the urban

<sup>123</sup> The film was not released until late 1914.

<sup>124</sup> Sklar, Movie-Made America, 42-44.

<sup>125</sup> Brooks, John Sloan: A Painter's Life, 100.

subjects he depicted at this time his “crisis of conscience” appears manifest. The several night scenes he painted in 1911, for example, seem to reflect an attempt to address antithetical elements of the urban milieu as well as the conflict within himself. By the time he began work on Carmine Theater in January of 1912, the crisis may have been resolved, for this painting betrays none of the ambiguities that are present in his night scenes of the previous year (Fig. 54).

The scene Sloan depicts on Carmine Street, unlike the one he painted on Fourteenth Street just a few months earlier, is illuminated by natural sunlight which, in contrast to the garish electric light of evening, lends a distinctly benign aspect to the subject. The theater itself is obviously closed. As January 25, 1912, the day he first observed the subject, was a Thursday, we may conclude that it is early in the morning, and the theater has not yet opened for business. Sloan actually began work on the painting the following day; however, it almost certainly reflects his initial impression of the subject, for he refers to the scene in his diary entry of January 26 as a “memory of yesterday.”<sup>126</sup> As vivid as his recollection might have been, he apparently relied as well on a sketch, probably executed on January 25, when he set out to paint the scene (Fig. 55).<sup>127</sup> In the sketch there are four figures indicated: a stout hooded (female?) figure left of center, a male in knee-length coat and cap right of center, and two smaller figures, apparently children, at the vertical center and slightly below the horizontal mid-point. Also indicated very sketchily are trash cans and a scavenging dog to the left of the hooded figure. In addition, Sloan has made color notes in several places, which correspond to the colors he used in the final painting: “red-brick” at the top, “red” at the far left, “gr. grey” at the bottom, and “green” in the right central column of the façade. The sketch very likely served primarily as a color key, for Sloan was, at the time, especially interested in exploring color harmonies through application of the Maratta color system, to which he was first introduced by Henri in 1909. In retrospect, Sloan would observe that his city life pictures were “like the color quality of the places.” He was, he claimed, “able to analyze the color of a place, come home and plan

<sup>126</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 597.

<sup>127</sup> Elzca, John Sloan's Oil Paintings, 114.

a palette from the color notations [he] had made on a little pencil sketch."<sup>128</sup> In this case, it appears that Sloan considered his color harmonies first and then his composition. For, as we shall see, the number, placement, and character of figures in the final painting differ significantly from what is indicated in the preliminary drawing.

In composing the final painting, Sloan, it appears, sought to balance, both formally and thematically, the principal signifying elements of his subject, which may be identified as the theater façade, the group of children, the nun, and the scavenging dog and trash cans. The figures present in the final painting--from which the man in coat and cap appearing in the sketch is conspicuously absent--are arranged in two complementary groups. The children clustered near the façade of theater form one of these groups, and the stout female, now clearly identified as a nun, together with the scavenging dog and adjacent trash cans, form the other. A clear axial relationship between these two groups is indicated and is emphasized by the sharp dividing line separating light and shadow that falls diagonally between them across the surface of the pavement. These figure groups not only balance each other in terms of visual weight but complement each other thematically as well. The children, obviously, are drawn to the theater; they belong to its domain. The nun, on the other hand, appears far removed from her immediate surroundings. Certainly, the religious establishment that she represents was, at the time, quite firmly opposed to any sort of leisure-time activity that dissipated the moral character of the working classes. Religious groups as well as Christian reformers of the era, like Jane Addams and others, tended to regard movie theaters, no less than dance halls, saloons, and other sordid amusement outlets, as dangerous breeding grounds of vice and corruption.<sup>129</sup> Though it's quite impossible to read disapproval on the nun's face, her distracted look does suggest that she belongs to another world from that of the children. It is difficult to deduce exactly what Sloan intended in creating this rather obvious opposition; however, it is safe to say that he was interested in the contrast it produced. That he was interested in emphasizing contrasts

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<sup>128</sup> John Sloan, "Notes," 1944, John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

<sup>129</sup> For discussion of efforts to "redeem" the movies as part of a larger Progressive era crusade to rescue the morally threatened lower classes in major cities, see May, Screening Out the Past, 43-59..

seems particularly certain in light of a more jarring juxtaposition within the composition: that of the nun and the scavenging dog.

Given the prominence of the trash/scavenging image in the lower left corner of the canvas and its conspicuous juxtaposition with the nun, one is tempted to guess that Sloan meant it to serve in some way as an emblem. Such an image might be readily understood then, as well as now, as a symbol of urban squalor. However, within the context of early twentieth-century realism, it may have had more specific meaning. In 1906 one writer implied that Henri and his followers were able to see “character and meaning and even beauty in a crowd of east side children after a street piano or hanging over garbage cans.”<sup>130</sup> It is possible that Sloan felt inclined to use the “ash can” emblem in this particular painting in order to indicate a particular attitude toward art, beauty, and the urban scene.

Sloan depicted the Carmine Theater again in 1913, most likely in the latter half of the year, following the Armory Show and its immediate aftermath.<sup>131</sup> Movies of 1913 shows the Carmine Theater as it appears after dark with artificial illumination (Fig. 56). The lackluster façade in the earlier painting is now transformed: brilliant arc lights shed an intense glow that enlivens not only the façade itself but also the scattered crowd of patrons before it. Rather than representing the crowd “as a bulk, a chunk of form,” as he recommended in Gist of Art, Sloan seems to have taken pains to isolate small groups of figures, creating many separate formal units.<sup>132</sup> Almost every unit has its own distinction. There’s one single gentleman near the corner of the façade and a male and female pair near its entrance; in the foreground, one finds a trio of children, a pair of women, and a pair of men. It is noteworthy that Sloan’s treatment of figures in this work suggests the diversity of the movie-going audience. By 1913, movies had become a truly mass form of entertainment in the U. S. in that they drew attendance from all sectors of the American

<sup>130</sup> Izola Forrester, “New York’s Art Anarchists.” New York World, Magazine Section, 10 June 1906, 6. Perlman maintains that this is the first time an explicit association between the realists and “Ashcan” subject matter appeared in print (Immortal Eight, 202n).

<sup>131</sup> Sloan does not mention this painting in his diary, which he left off writing in late May of 1913; the Armory Show closed the previous March.

<sup>132</sup> Sloan, Gist of Art, 78.

public. With censorship and licensing of theaters, movies had become acceptable, above all, to the broad middle class, a large segment of which would have shunned them only a few years earlier.<sup>133</sup>

Regardless of its patronage, the Carmine Theater itself, by 1913, represented a bygone era, that of the neighborhood “nickelodeon” theaters. By 1908, according to Douglas Gomery, two-hundred-seat converted storefronts were giving way to “real” movie theaters in cities throughout the U. S. This transition occurred quite rapidly in New York where splendid theater buildings built for vaudeville were transformed into movie houses.<sup>134</sup> After 1908 movie entertainment spread increasingly to affluent neighborhoods, while few new theaters opened in the poorer parts of the city where nickelodeons first appeared.<sup>135</sup>

With Movies of 1913, Sloan seems once again to capture the smiling aspect of the urban scene and thus to vindicate his earlier style. The humble little theater itself appears a remnant of a happier time, when the city streets were teeming with spectacles, and simple pleasures were available to all. When Sloan painted Movies, he was nearing the end of the first “New York phase” of his career, and the painting seems to reflect back on principles he had endeavored to maintain during the period. Movies presents an uncomplicated, almost mythic, view of urban experience. Sloan’s treatment of the subject was perhaps disingenuous, for he was certainly well aware of the harsh realities of urban life. Yet he chose to banish ambiguities in order to make a simple, clear, and positive statement, thus foreshadowing the tendency of other artists who would later represent the American scene.

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<sup>133</sup> May, Screening Out the Past, 64.

<sup>134</sup> Gomery, Shared Pleasures, 32.

<sup>135</sup> May, Screening Out the Past, 64.

### The Vaudeville Subjects of Everett Shinn

“Versatile” is an epithet often used to describe the artistic character of Everett Shinn and to commend his achievement. Shinn not only distinguished himself as a painter and illustrator, but also as a scenic designer, an interior decorator, and, to a more limited extent, as a writer and producer of farcical plays. One enthusiastic critic, Louis H. Frohman, who wrote about Shinn in the 1920s, thought that “in temperament he must resemble those masters of the Renaissance who found no task too colossal and considered no bit of artistry too small to be worthy of their most serious effort.”<sup>136</sup> Ira Glackens looked upon Shinn’s achievement somewhat differently. He saw Shinn as an artist of “too much ability” who was unfortunately compelled to disperse his talents in too many different directions. Moreover, Shinn was unlike his father or Henri or Sloan in that he so readily adapted his talents to the demands of the “fashionable” world. Shinn was “stagestruck,” according to Glackens, “dazzled by the glamour of the footlights . . . , the only one of the five original ‘Ashcan’ painters who succumbed to that artificial life.”<sup>137</sup> Sloan was even harsher in his assessment of Shinn. He maintained that “Shinn’s work really belonged to the Charles Dana Gibson school. He never observed people and places, but drew with a kind of sentimental flair. [It was] an accident that he was included in *The Eight*.”<sup>138</sup> Yet by virtue of his Philadelphia background and his experience as a newspaper illustrator as well as his personal and professional ties with members of “*The Eight*,” Shinn’s story is linked inexorably with theirs. Certainly, his temperament was different from that of the other realists: unlike Sloan, who was thoughtful and withdrawn, and Glackens, who was genial but shy, Shinn was very much a “public” figure, a sort of dandy who cultivated a dashing persona. His paintings, one might argue, have an analogous sort of superficial sparkle. Nonetheless, they represent the unique achievement of an artist whose career strongly reflects the interplay of fine art and popular culture and who may aptly be called “a figure in his time.”

<sup>136</sup> Louis H. Frohman, “Everett Shinn, the Versatile,” *International Studio* 78 (October 1923): 89.

<sup>137</sup> Ira Glackens, introduction to *Everett Shinn, 1873[sic]-1953*, exh. cat. (Trenton: New Jersey State Museum, 1973), 8.

<sup>138</sup> John Sloan, “Notes,” 1944-51, John Sloan Collection, HFSL.

Shinn was just one of many talented young men and women who distinguished themselves as graphic artists between 1890 and 1920, a period often referred to as the "Golden Age of American Illustration." Before this period of time, illustrations were not a conspicuous feature of most general-interest periodicals. In the late nineteenth century, however, the situation changed significantly, when several interrelated developments led to a dramatic reorientation of the magazine-publishing industry. One critical factor influencing this change was the advent of new technologies that allowed for better and cheaper reproduction of images. This meant not only increased use of illustrations, but lower cost as well, so that magazines could be sold to a wider audience. In addition, by the 1890s, an efficient enough network of nationwide transportation existed to permit the rapid and widespread distribution of periodical literature. Magazine circulation grew by "leaps and bounds" during these years, reaching a broad consumer base that advertisers were eager to influence. With the increased support of advertisers, pictorial content was often augmented, and prices dropped even lower. By the turn of the century, illustration had come to be regarded as an essential element of popular journalism. As a result, illustrators commanded more respect and received more money for their work. A few illustrators, such as Gibson, who could command \$1,000. or more for a single magazine cover, became celebrities, while illustration itself gained status as a vital contemporary form of democratic art.<sup>139</sup>

Shinn worked as a newspaper illustrator in Philadelphia and continued to draw for the papers after moving to New York in 1897. But for him, as for other aspiring young illustrators of the period, newspaper work was only a stepping stone to the more glamorous world of the magazines. While still in Philadelphia, Shinn dreamt of "that day when [he] would live in the same city where Charles Dana Gibson wielded [sic] his magic pen." In his dreams, "there would go Edwin A. Abbey, Howard Pyle, Albert Wenzell, Frederick Remington, Smedley, Rhinehart [sic], and . . . Gibson . . . on their way to a banquet of pages at Harpers Magazine." Unworthy as he felt at the time, he envisioned a

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<sup>139</sup> James J. Best, American Popular Illustration: A Reference Guide (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), 6-7. See also Frank L. Mott, "The Magazine Revolution and Popular Ideas in the Nineties," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, n. s., 64 (1954): 195-214.

day when he would take his place “at their table.”<sup>140</sup> One might question whether Shinn was really as awestruck by these men as he suggests in his autobiography. Apparently, his admiration was genuine. In the 1940s he wrote in a copy of Theodore Dreiser’s The Genius, which Joseph Kwiat had asked him to annotate, that he, like Dreiser’s fictional hero, a graphic artist named Eugene Witla, had looked at framed illustrations by Gibson, Smedley, and others in the offices of the major magazines and had felt his “presumptuousness” in imagining his own work similarly displayed.<sup>141</sup> While Shinn might have adopted an ironic tone for his autobiography, it is unlikely that he would have written his commentary on The Genius in a similarly disingenuous style. Thus it appears safe to assume that Shinn was truly impressed by the fashionable illustrators and sought eagerly to emulate their success.

Shinn began submitting his art work to magazine editors in New York in 1898 and succeeded in publishing his first illustration in September of that year.<sup>142</sup> Affiliations with Ainslee’s Magazine and The Critic soon followed; the latter association, in particular, afforded him an opportunity not only to further his career as an illustrator, but to pursue his interest in the theater as well. His first illustration to appear in The Critic was a portrait of the British actor Sir Henry Irving, whom Shinn had observed and sketched in the title role of “Robespierre” during a performance of the play.<sup>143</sup> Soon afterward, his sketches accompanied an article describing a stage production from behind the scenes, and a pastel

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<sup>140</sup> “Harpers Weekly,” chap. in the autobiography of Everett Shinn, typescript, n. pag., Everett Shinn Papers, HFSL.

<sup>141</sup> Joseph J. Kwiat, “Dreiser’s The ‘Genius’ and Everett Shinn, the ‘Ash-Can’ Painter,” PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association 67 (March 1952): 21. Dreiser himself confirmed the use of Shinn as a model for Witla. See Robert H. Elias, Theodore Dreiser, Apostle of Nature (New York: Knopf, 1949), 328 n.12. Shinn offered his own point of view in a letter to Kwiat: “I see myself in many places [in the book],” he wrote, “and feel that I was alone in interpreting New York as he describes it . . . and with no wish to claim Witla as being something of me I nevertheless feel that Dreiser looked on my work and the magazines I worked for as fitting material for his character . . .” Everett Shinn to Joseph J. Kwiat, 7 September 1948; reprinted in Kwiat, “Dreiser’s The ‘Genius’,” 18.

<sup>142</sup> “Revenge Enough,” Harper’s Monthly 97 (September 1898): 661.

<sup>143</sup> “Sir Henry Irving as Robespierre,” Critic 35 (December 1899): frontispiece.

portrait he had made of the fashionable playwright Clyde Fitch appeared a few years later.<sup>144</sup>

Shinn's greatest ambition in the late 1890s, however, was to "break into" the sacred sphere of Harper's Weekly, a large-format publication that often featured spectacular illustrations. In 1898 he began calling weekly at the offices of Harper's. Every Friday for fifty-two weeks, he claims, he mounted the spiral stairway to the art department above the offices on the main floor. With him he brought a portfolio bulging with drawings of New York scenes: evictions, street brawls, police raids, a night court, the bread line, battered tenements, and other unlovely subjects. Shinn, as he himself put it, "had gone to a house of delicacy and refinement with a bucket full of swill." Even though raw depictions of the sort that he presented were rejected by Harper's as a matter of policy, he still persisted in his effort.<sup>145</sup>

Finally, Shinn's persistence paid off, and he earned the reward that he coveted: the honor of having his art work reproduced on the double center page of Harper's. His assignment was to create a picture of Broadway in front of the Metropolitan opera house with snow, a matinee crowd, cabs, hansoms, and trolley cars included.<sup>146</sup> The publication of this commissioned illustration in the February 1900 issue of the magazine represented for Shinn a major breakthrough. Eventually, he created eight center pages in all, sold the reproduction rights to Harper's (not all were actually used), and when the originals were returned to him, sold them as unique works of art.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> William W. Ellsworth, "Behind the Scenes at 'Ben Hur,'" Critic 36 (March 1900): 245-49; "Mr. Clyde Fitch in His Study," Critic 43 (November 1903): 400. Apparently, Shinn became a favorite of the editor of The Critic, Jeannette Gilder, who sent him to do portraits of Mark Twain and William Dean Howells as well. The portrait of Twain appeared as the frontispiece of the March 1900 issue. Bennard Perlman relates Shinn's account of his meeting with Twain in "Memories of Everett Shinn," in Everett Shinn, 1873[sic]-1953, exh. cat. (Trenton: New Jersey State Museum, 1973), 13. In a letter to his daughter, Howells describes his encounter with Shinn. See William Dean Howells to Mildred Howells, 5 March 1900, in W. D. Howells, Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, ed. Mildred Howells (1928; reprint, New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 2:126-27. Apparently, the portrait of Howells was never reproduced in the magazine. Van Wyck Brooks wrote Shinn ca. 1939 to ask, "Did you do the pastel of Howells? And what became of it?" Van Wyck Brooks to Everett Shinn, ca. 1939, Everett Shinn Papers, HFSL.

<sup>145</sup> Shinn, "Harpers Weekly," Everett Shinn Papers, HFSL.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. See "A Winter's Night on Broadway," Harper's Weekly, 17 February 1900, 154-55.

<sup>147</sup> Shinn, "Harpers Weekly," Everett Shinn Papers, HFSL.

Shinn began showing his work in New York just as he was making his entry into magazine illustration. In fact, his first major one-man show in New York was mounted by Boussod, Valadon and Co. in February 1900, the same month his first center-page illustration appeared in Harper's. Shinn showed only pastels in this exhibition, which included a broad range of New York subjects. There were scenes depicting the fashionable parts of New York—Fifth Avenue, for example—as well as the docks, the foundry, and the river front. A number represented storm scenes (snow, rain, and unspecified); in addition, there were theater subjects and theatrical portraits. In short, intentionally or not, Shinn had presented an exhibition of potential illustrations. Ultimately, he did sell pastels from this exhibition directly to the magazines,<sup>148</sup> though it is possible—perhaps even likely—that he had altogether different objectives. As Linda Ferber points out, the pastel medium, which was popular with the Impressionists, may have been equally identified with “high art” pursuits at the turn of the century.<sup>149</sup> It is perhaps significant that Shinn told William Dean Howells, whom he met during the run of the exhibition, that he couldn't sell anything “so queer” as the work he had on display.<sup>150</sup> He may, at the time, have regretted that his pastels—though marketable—had not been received as he had expected, that is, as works of “fine art.”

Shinn was, without a doubt, more eagerly responsive to the unique opportunities of his time than were most of his realist colleagues. While hoping to obtain recognition as a painter, that is, within the context of fine art, he was just as anxious to succeed as an illustrator within the realm of popular culture. For him there was no apparent conflict in this

<sup>148</sup> Armstrong, “New Leaders in American Illustration,” 249.

<sup>149</sup> Linda S. Ferber, “Stagestruck: The Theater Subjects of Everett Shinn,” in American Art around 1900: Lectures in Memory of Daniel Fraad, ed. Doreen Bolger and Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 52. Around 1910, Shinn became a member of “The Pastellists,” a group created by artists working in pastels and wishing to encourage artistic appreciation of the medium. The group exhibited together for the first time in January 1911. Other members were Jerome Myers, William Glackens, Colin Campbell Cooper, Mary Cassatt, Paul Cornoyer, George Bellows, Thomas Dewing, J. Alden Weir, and Albert Sterner. See A. E. Gallatin, “The Pastellists,” Art and Progress 2 (March 1911): 142-44.

<sup>150</sup> William Dean Howells to Mildred Howells, 5 March 1900, in Howells, Life in Letters, 2:127.

dual endeavor, and thus he readily adapted to the circumstances of his time.<sup>151</sup>

In his catholic taste in subject matter, as well as his ability to adapt his talents, Shinn demonstrated his versatility. Apparently, he was just as comfortable, for example, representing the elegant aspects of New York as he was its seamier side. Just as he treated the subject of New York in a comprehensive manner, so he applied the same catholicity to his choice of entertainment subjects. The range of his signature performance themes--which includes the ballet, legitimate stage, vaudeville, and the circus--is indicative of his broad interest in entertainment themes. Shinn represented in his paintings most of the broad spectrum of contemporary entertainment options--from "high" to "low"--and in so doing established an implicit parity among them.

As we know, Shinn himself responded readily to the glamor, the glitter, and the alluring spectacle of the stage. An artist of great technical skill, he was moreover able to translate with considerable facility the brilliance of the spectacle into works of pictorial art. Shinn's contemporary A. E. Gallatin linked his success to the same sort of "decorative instinct" that guided artists identified with the French Rococo sensibility, such as Watteau, Lancret, Pater, Boucher, and Fragonard. In the same vein, he praised Shinn's "brilliant and rapid brush work" and the "abundance of gayety and charm, light, air, grace and clear colour" that emanated from his work.<sup>152</sup> At the same time, Gallatin dissociated Shinn from his more recent French antecedent, Degas, whom he nonetheless acknowledged as an influence:

Everett Shinn . . . is the possessor of an art presenting many different aspects and showing influences that proclaim widely diverging sympathies. There is the manner first of all in which he affects Degas, and finds his inspirations in the

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<sup>151</sup> See Ferber, "Stagestruck," for an alternative assessment of Shinn's early career that emphasizes his fine art affinities. Ferber cites, for example, Shinn's habit of maintaining two record books--one listing primarily pastels, oils, and decorative commissions and the other, his and his wife's work as illustrators--as evidence of his desire to distinguish between his illustration commissions and his more autonomous work (65 n. 14).

<sup>152</sup> A. E. Gallatin, "The Art of Everett Shinn," in *Whistler; Notes and Footnotes and Other Memoranda* (New York: The Collector and Art Critic Co., 1907), 82-83. According to a newspaper article that appeared in 1905, Shinn--as an interior decorator, at least--considered himself "a disciple of Watteau, Fragonard and Boucher." See "The Transformed Piano," *New York Sun*, 15 October 1905, sec. 2, 6.

glamour of the music hall. Its glare of conflicting lights and its outward appearances he has faithfully recorded, but his gaze is much less penetrating than that of the master draughtsman, and we do not see the same unflinching realism, brutality and cynicism which underlies the art of Degas.<sup>153</sup>

Gallatin was not the only contemporary critic to compare Shinn's work unfavorably to that of Degas and other recent French artists. In a review of the exhibition of "The Eight" that appeared in the New York Tribune, Royal Cortissoz remarked that in Shinn's work, the French style "wears . . . the air of a derivative thing." "A man of such ability," Cortissoz felt, "ought surely to be doing fresher and finer things."<sup>154</sup> Criticism of Shinn's superficiality thus began with his contemporaries, many of whom--like Gallatin--were biased toward a more rigorous style of realism than Shinn tended to display in his entertainment subjects. However just the charge of superficiality may be in Shinn's case, his career remains intriguing, for such criticism apparently proved no impediment to his success in the first decade of the 1900s. During this period, Shinn found an audience that responded favorably to his work--to his entertainment subjects in particular--and this reinforcement served to sharpen his focus and help determine his future path.

In 1899, approximately two years after he first began working as an illustrator in New York, Shinn had an opportunity to expose several of his pastels depicting theater scenes to a small group of influential persons involved directly or indirectly with the theater. The event was a private showing that took place in mid-November in the home of Elsie de Wolfe, the famous decorator, whom Shinn had met earlier in the year. Three of the five pastels he exhibited at that time depicted subjects related to entertainment.<sup>155</sup> The architect Stanford White was invited to view the work, found it impressive, and proceeded to sponsor Shinn. On November 14, 1899, he wrote to George A. Glaenzer at Boussod, Valadon and Co. about "a young artist whom Mr. Wolff [sic] is interested in." His name I

<sup>153</sup> Gallatin, "The Art of Everett Shinn," 80.

<sup>154</sup> R. C. [Royal Cortissoz], "Art Exhibitions: New Pictures by American Artists and Some Old Prints," New York Tribune, 5 February 1908, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Everett Shinn, Record Books, 1898-1911, Everett Shinn Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. The three pastels were entitled "Scene--Julia Marlowe," "Fourteenth St. Theatre," and "Interior Keith's."

think is Shinn, and he does pastels. I saw them yesterday and it seems to me that the young fellow has unquestionably talent."<sup>156</sup> Shinn immediately sent a number of pastels to Glaenzer on approval and within months was given a major show. In an interview in the early 1950s, Shinn claimed that over half the works presented in his first show in New York were sold to Mrs. Gould and Mrs. Astor and Mrs. Vanderbilt--"everybody social." White, he believed, had convinced his friends--perhaps even "told 'em"--to purchase the work.<sup>157</sup>

Apparently, White also gave Shinn decorating projects: according to DeShazo, Shinn was hired to create murals for some of the houses he built and did decorative work in White's own home as well.<sup>158</sup> There is no evidence that White ever acquired Shinn paintings for himself, however. In September 1903, in what appears to be his last correspondence with Shinn, White suggests that he might buy one of his works, "if [he] could afford it." As for accepting one as a gift, he warns Shinn not even to think of offering.<sup>159</sup> That White responded favorably at all to Shinn's work is certainly telling. White was a devotee of the theater and popular entertainments himself and, according to his biographer Paul R. Baker, preferred paintings with "decorative qualities."<sup>160</sup>

As Ferber points out, Shinn was known from 1900 to 1904 almost exclusively as a pastellist and an illustrator.<sup>161</sup> He did produce several oils during these years, though it was not until around 1902 that he began to focus consistently on entertainment subjects in

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<sup>156</sup> Stanford White to George A. Glaenzer, 14 November 1899, copy book vol. 23, Stanford White Papers, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>157</sup> Aline B. Louchheim, "Last of 'The Eight' Looks Back," New York Times, 2 November 1952, sec. 2, 9.

<sup>158</sup> Edith DeShazo, Everett Shinn, 1876-1953: A Figure in His Time (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1974), 89, 156.

<sup>159</sup> Stanford White to Everett Shinn, 17 September 1903, copy book vol. 29, Stanford White Papers, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library.

<sup>160</sup> Paul R. Baker, Stanny: The Gilded Life of Stanford White (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 244. For discussion of White's role as art patron, see Baker, "The Business of Art," chap. in Stanny, 231-45.

<sup>161</sup> Ferber, "Stagestruck," 56.

his work in oil and to establish his standard repertoire of entertainment themes.<sup>162</sup> Shinn, it seems, began to concentrate on entertainment subjects in his work in oil not only because of personal interest but also in response to an eager audience for such depictions at the turn of the century. Fortunately, Shinn maintained a record of works he exhibited and sold during roughly the first decade of this century, which may serve as the basis for further speculation on the impact of factors related to patronage on his development as an artist.<sup>163</sup> Shinn had several successful exhibitions of pastels prior to the end of 1902, from which, according to his record book, he sold a number of stage subjects to individual collectors, including Edith Dimock, who purchased a “ballet girl” by Shinn in 1901. The work that Dimock purchased was apparently one of six “Extra ballet girls” ultimately included in Shinn’s exhibition at Boussod and Valadon early that year. The list of “Extra ballet girls” that appears in Shinn’s record book suggests that these additional works were placed on exhibition in anticipation of demand and with the hope of augmenting sales.

All of Shinn’s oils from 1902-3 that are extant and traceable today depict entertainment subjects, though interestingly enough, none of these represent the ballet. Subsequently, Shinn did, of course, render ballet subjects in oil, ultimately including two of them—The White Ballet of 1904 (Private Collection) and Rehearsal of the Ballet (exact date and location unknown)—in the 1908 exhibition of “The Eight” at Macbeth Galleries. Around 1902, however, music hall and variety entertainment subjects appear to take precedence. The majority of Shinn’s extant oils from this time depict entertainment subjects of European distinction, reflecting a lingering bias toward European “culture” at all levels. The principal works that reflect this period are London Hippodrome, 1902 (Fig. 57), The Vaudeville Act (after Gaiété Montparnasse?), 1902-3 (Fig. 58), and Spanish Music Hall,

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<sup>162</sup> According to the Inventory of American Paintings compiled by the National Museum of American Art, print-out of 3 March 1900, Shinn’s earliest extant oil painting of a theater subject is In the Wings of 1898 (Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables). The Inventory also lists a work entitled The Balcony, in oil on board, from around 1900 (Private Collection).

<sup>163</sup> See Shinn, Record Books, 1898-1911, Everett Shinn Papers, AAA.

1903 (Fig. 59).<sup>164</sup> The Vaudeville Act and Spanish Music Hall are similar in conception. In each case, the performing pair occupies a plane roughly parallel to the surface of the painting, and a narrow band including the orchestra and/or spectators is set off below the larger rectangle of the stage. In each painting, one or two spectators turns to face the audience. In Spanish Music Hall, more than in The Vaudeville Act, these figures dominate the lower half of the composition and formally complement the figures on stage. In terms of color, paint application, and the balancing of deep shadows against intense highlights, these two works are closely linked to one another as well as to London Hippodrome, which otherwise remains distinct. The latter is an entirely different order of composition, in which the principal elements--specifically the balcony edge, the group of spectators, and the trapeze performer--are unified by a broad sweeping diagonal that gently descends from left to right. The general "subject" of London Hippodrome also differs somewhat from that of the other two works: while Spanish Music Hall and The Vaudeville Act both primarily represent the role of the performer, London Hippodrome represents the role of spectators. In other words, its subject is the audience in the context of entertainment rather than the entertainment itself.<sup>165</sup>

Around 1903 Shinn seems to have begun to develop his illustration work and his painting in tandem. About this time he began to promote an illustration "package" of theater subjects. In 1903 he sent Scribner's five drawings entitled "Behind Scenes," "Playwright in Front Curtain [sic]," "Rehearsal," "Dress Rehearsal," and "First Night" that were meant to accompany an article called "The Playwright" by Rodman Gilder. Scribner's

<sup>164</sup> The extant work known as The Vaudeville Act is almost identical to a contemporaneous(?) oil by Shinn that was apparently included in the exhibition of "The Eight". The work was reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, in a full-page announcement of the exhibition in The World Magazine, in a review of the exhibition that appeared in The Craftsman and elsewhere. The painting seems to have been, in all of these instances, identified as "The Duet." Assuming that the painting was actually in the exhibition, it must have been shown as Gaiété Montparnasse, for that is the only title listed in the catalogue that appears appropriate. Catalogue of "The Eight" exhibition reprinted in Perlman, Immortal Eight, 157-73; "New York's Art War and the Eight 'Rebels' . . ." World Magazine, 2 February 1908, clipping in Everett Shinn Papers, AAA; Giles Edgerton, "The Younger American Painters: Are They Creating a National Art?" Craftsman 13 (February 1908): 526.

<sup>165</sup> There is at least one other Shinn oil that may date from 1902--The Singer (illustrated in Sale Cat., Mrs. George Arden Collection, Christie's, New York, 28 May 1992). Another extant oil--Winter Garden, New York--is supposed to date from 1903; however, this is problematic, given that the theater named did not open until 1911.

apparently refused the material, as did Harper's about a month later. Several years after that, it seems, Shinn was still trying to sell his "playwright idea."<sup>166</sup> In early 1905 Shinn had his first large exhibition of oils in New York at E. Gimpel and Wildenstein. Over twenty oil paintings were exhibited over half of which were theatrical in subject. Several of these oils appear to have been directly linked to his contemporaneous work in illustration. One entitled "Rehearsal" would seem to be related to his "Playwright" series. Another entitled "Funny Man" was very likely conceived in conjunction with an illustration of the same title that Shinn submitted to The Critic in 1904 but apparently was never published.<sup>167</sup>

Shinn's reputation as a painter of theatrical subjects seems to have been established by the end of 1905. By this time he had acquired the patronage of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney (née Gertrude Vanderbilt), an accomplished sculptor herself who had also benefited from the sponsorship of White.<sup>168</sup> In the middle of 1904, Mrs. Whitney had decided that in addition to expressing herself in writing and in sculpture, she would also "express herself in patronage."<sup>169</sup> In the middle of the following year, she acquired an oil by Shinn--French Music Hall--after its exhibition to New York and promptly loaned it to the Worcester Art Museum in the summer of 1905.<sup>170</sup> In late 1905 Shinn sent three oils--all entertainment subjects--to the Carnegie Institute and another large oil called The Ballet to the Art Institute in Chicago. In mid-1906 the Worcester Art Museum, which had borrowed French Music Hall the year before, apparently requested London Hippodrome for exhibition. Soon afterward, London Hippodrome and an oil entitled Ballet Rehearsal were sent, upon request, to the Art Club in Philadelphia. In early 1907 the Corcoran Gallery of Art asked to borrow the same two works.

Between 1905 and 1907 Shinn seems to have achieved a certain degree of self-consciousness as a producer of "museum-quality" art. Most of his earlier theatrical

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<sup>166</sup> Theodore Dreiser to Everett Shinn, September(?) 1906, Everett Shinn Papers, AAA. Dreiser wrote Shinn from the Editorial Office of The Broadway Magazine to ask, "Can you come in and see me about this playwright idea of yours[?]"

<sup>167</sup> Shinn, Record Books, 1898-1911, Everett Shinn Papers, AAA.

<sup>168</sup> Baker, Stanny, 240.

<sup>169</sup> B. H. Friedman, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1978), 213.

<sup>170</sup> Shinn, Record Books, 1898-1911, Everett Shinn Papers, AAA.

paintings had been conceived largely as illustrations in oil: his subjects were directly observed and his compositions often loosely structured. During this period, Shinn apparently attempted to break out of the illustrator's mode by directly borrowing composition from Degas.<sup>171</sup> Certainly, Shinn was aware of Degas's work well before 1905; however, he appears to have begun to study the work of his French antecedent more carefully once his own work had gained recognition. It seems almost certain that Shinn rediscovered Degas at a large exhibition of American and European paintings organized by the Society of Art Collectors and held at the Galleries of The American Fine Art Society in New York in late 1904. The ensemble was referred to as Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art, and it included close to two hundred paintings by about seventy different artists. Only two works by Degas were shown: Musiciens à l'Orchestre (Fig. 60) and Chevaux de Course. The former, however, must have captured Shinn's attention, for he adopted it as a model for future work. In 1906 and 1907 he produced at least two works--one pastel and one painting in oil--that were based directly on Degas's example. The oil painting, which is entitled The Orchestra Pit, Old Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre and is dated circa 1906-7 (Fig. 61), may have been executed first, for it conforms somewhat more closely to its model than does the related pastel (Fig. 62). In both painting and pastel, Shinn, like Degas, juxtaposes extreme foreground and background figures and eliminates the middle ground. A view of the orchestra, as seen from the rear, dominates the lower part of the picture and performers and stage occupy a third or less of the upper frame. In Shinn's oil, the principal background figure--the dancer at far right--is similar in appearance to the dancing figure that occupies the same position in Degas's work. In the pastel, Shinn substitutes a male comic figure for the dancer and eliminates minor figures from the left of the stage.

In addition to looking more closely at Degas's work after 1904 or 1905, Shinn, it seems, also turned his attention to Whistler, whose career had ended in 1903. There were huge memorial exhibitions of Whistler's work in London and Paris in 1905; and in New

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<sup>171</sup> Adolph Karl has flatly asserted that Shinn does not use "architectonic" composition as Degas did. Rather his approach is "personal, romantic, [and] unconscious of formal relationships." See Karl, "The New York Realists" (Ph.D. diss., New York University Institute of Fine Arts, 1953), 227.

York, it seems, the Society of Art Collectors saw fit to honor Whistler as well, by including ten paintings of his--significantly more than any other artist--in its Comparative Exhibition of late 1904. One of Shinn's subsequent entertainment subjects, Keith's Union Square of around 1906, appears to owe a great deal to Whistler and, at the same time, to represent a departure from his earlier work (Fig. 63). In Keith's, Shinn uncharacteristically allows the backdrop to overshadow the performer; the large area surrounding the figure is developed tonally, as Whistler might have done, using cool colors--mostly blue and green--and thin applications of paint. Either Nocturne--Blue and Silver--Bognor or Nocturne--Blue and Silver--Battersea Reach, which Shinn most likely saw in New York in 1904, might have inspired his handling of Keith's (Figs. 64 and 65).<sup>172</sup>

By the time of the opening of the exhibition of "The Eight" in February 1908, Shinn had made his reputation as a painter of theater subjects, and the exhibition, in which he showed entertainment subjects exclusively, afforded him the opportunity to showcase his recognized work. The subjects he depicted had, at the time, a powerful resonance in American culture. In subsequent years, the vitality of Shinn's subjects, their relevance to the spirit of the times, and his reputation itself would decline. By the late 1920s, Shinn's special interest in popular entertainment would seem quaint to at least one admirer, who noted how rare it was for an artist of Shinn's ability to depict vaudeville performers and the "very curious phase of life" to which they belong. Was Shinn still interested, his correspondent wondered, in the subjects he had painted so long ago?<sup>173</sup> As Shinn's body of work and statements indicate, his interest in the theater transcended the times and "went deeper than merely drawing its action."<sup>174</sup> Shinn continued to paint theater subjects throughout his career, often reprising his earlier themes, which still had meaning for him though their popular vogue had ended.

<sup>172</sup> Whistler's Harmony in Blue--The Duet (Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design) actually appears more closely linked to Keith's in subject matter and composition. However, it is impossible to determine when and how Shinn might have seen this work.

<sup>173</sup> Edward E. Hale to Everett Shinn, 25 October 1928, Everett Shinn Papers, AAA.

<sup>174</sup> Everett Shinn, "Recollections of The Eight," in The Eight, exh. cat. (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1944), 20.

### Stuart Davis: On the “Cusp” Between Realism and Modernism

After the first generation of the so-called “Ashcan School,” to which Sloan, Glackens, and Shinn belonged, there came a second generation of younger artists who were introduced, as students of Henri, to the realist ethos of the group.<sup>175</sup> Stuart Davis, the most prominent member of this second generation, was not yet seventeen when, in 1909, he began to study with Henri. In his autobiography of 1945, Davis explains that, unlike other young aspiring artists, he had few obstacles to overcome before gaining the opportunity to study, as both of his parents were artists. His father, in particular, had ties to Henri’s New York following of former newspaper illustrators, whom the elder Davis had once supervised on the Philadelphia Press. With the support and encouragement of his parents, Davis began his education early and was soon devoting full-time to art. According to Sloan, Davis was, at the time, an “ambitious eager young artist.” By 1910, Davis claims, he was already painting every day. By April of that year, he had begun to exhibit his work and within months had received his first critical attention.<sup>176</sup>

As Henri placed a great emphasis on “anti-artistic” subject matter, he encouraged his students to look outside of museums and the classroom for subjects that sparked their interest. He instructed his students to make sketches of “everyday life in the streets, the theater, the restaurant, and everywhere else,” to bring these sketches to class, and to use them as the basis for paintings. Henri also spoke of literature in class and encouraged his

<sup>175</sup> See Robert Hunter, “The Rewards and Disappointments of the Ashcan School,” in Stuart Davis: American Painter, by Lowery Stokes Sims et al., exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 31-35.

<sup>176</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 394; Stuart Davis, “Stuart Davis Reminisces--As Recorded in Talks with Dr. Harlan B. Phillips,” typescript, p. 227, AAA. Davis exhibited his work for the first time in the Exhibition of Independent Artists held in New York in April 1910. Guy Pène du Bois was apparently the first critic to write about Davis; in an addendum to a 1910 review of a large watercolor exhibition, du Bois wrote several paragraphs in praise of Davis’s work, which was “to be seen at the Henri School of Art.” See Guy Pène du Bois, “New York Water Color Club Opens 21st Annual Show,” New York American, 31 October 1910, 19.

students “to get involved with it”; and he made them aware of contemporary theater as well. According to Davis, Henri not only encouraged his students to broaden their experience, but also to draw from their diverse experiences when choosing subjects to paint.<sup>177</sup>

At the time Davis entered the Henri School, he was already predisposed to seek out the sort of raw experience that most of his contemporaries were likely to shun. Davis apparently felt right at home in the roughest of neighborhoods and the most unwholesome of gathering places; more importantly, he had learned at an early age to appreciate the honest spirit and rude vitality inherent in the amusements of marginalized groups. His taste for African-American entertainment, in particular, had been formed early on and was strongly influenced by that of his father, a Southerner who appreciated “colored talent” and took his son to see “colored shows.”<sup>178</sup> Soon after Davis began to attend the Henri School he met Glenn O. Coleman, another young artist and student of Henri who shared his disposition. At the time they met, Coleman had already established his reputation as an artist in touch with and sensitive to the “undercurrents” of New York life.<sup>179</sup> Coleman was especially keen on representing the diversions of the underclasses; and, as Davis discovered, he enjoyed ragtime and jazz music as well. Their friendship established, the two of them began together to explore the diverting aspects of immigrant and African-American life.

After a relatively brief period of interest in landscape around early 1910, Davis began to focus his attention primarily on the city. Though most of his early urban studies were executed in watercolor rather than oil, he did produce at least one major oil painting of a distinctly urban subject—the music hall—before the middle of 1910. An oil entitled Music Hall was, according to Hunter, included at the last minute in the Exhibition of Independent

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<sup>177</sup> Stuart Davis, Stuart Davis (New York: American Artists Group, 1945), n. pag.; “Stuart Davis Reminisces,” 30, 32-34. Henri apparently spoke to his students about Isadora Duncan and the “Irish Players,” a troupe from Dublin’s Abbey Theatre that made its first New York appearance at the Maxine Elliott Theatre in November of 1911. The troupe performed plays by William Butler Yeats, John Synge, Lady Gregory, and Lennox Robinson to a mixed audience of rabble and genuine admirers. According to Davis, “the whole class went to see the Irish Players three or four times [after Henri mentioned them]” and witnessed the bombardment of vegetables hurled at the actors on stage.

<sup>178</sup> Davis, “Stuart Davis Reminisces,” 41.

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, “Undercurrents of New York Life Sympathetically Depicted in the Drawings of Glenn O. Coleman,” Craftsman 17 (November 1909): 142-49.

Artists held in April 1910 and, therefore, went unlisted in the catalogue. The Music Hall (Fig. 66), which now belongs to Earl Davis, is presumed to be this work.<sup>180</sup>

In his autobiography of 1945, Davis listed “the Music Halls of Hoboken” among the places he went with Coleman and Henry Glintenkamp on tours of New Jersey cities. Glintenkamp, who was several years older than Davis and a resident of Hoboken, very likely introduced his two companions to the Hoboken amusement scene. Glintenkamp had, in fact, discovered it and depicted it himself several years before the trio was formed.<sup>181</sup> In the early 1960s, Davis recalled that

Hoboken had a waterfront that had a lot of German ships come in . . . and as a result they had a lot of German-type . . . cafes . . . with tables on the sidewalks, dancing girls and little shows inside, food, so it had some atmosphere . . . [on] this block or two of waterfront you could even imagine that you were in Hamburg, Germany, because they catered to these guys right off the ships . . .<sup>182</sup>

It is extremely likely, though impossible to confirm, that The Music Hall does represent one of the “German-type” variety theaters that Davis indicates were located on the Hoboken waterfront. A German-style variety house would typically serve beer; the establishment represented in Davis’s painting apparently did so, as one conspicuous figure at the lower right clutches a frothy mug. The general atmosphere of the place is dark and dusky; and the clientele appears exclusively male.

The sort of variety entertainment represented in Davis’s The Music Hall is the unredeemed sort--crude entertainment for working men--not the new high-profile variety (vaudeville) reclaimed for middle-class audiences. Even so, Davis did, apparently, allow depictions of respectable vaudeville to influence his conception. Prior to early 1910, when

<sup>180</sup> Hunter, “Rewards and Disappointments,” 42 n.8. Assuming this is correct, Davis apparently produced a second painting of a similar subject immediately after the exhibition. John Sloan wrote in his diary on May 25, 1910 that Davis had come that day to show him two of his paintings--one of Doyer St., Chinatown, and the other a music hall (New York Scene, 425).

<sup>181</sup> An oil by Glintenkamp entitled Little Coney Island, Hoboken and dated 1908 was lent by Mrs. Lewis Denison to The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1910, Delaware Art Center, Wilmington, 1960.

<sup>182</sup> Davis, “Stuart Davis Reminisces,” 55-56.

he produced The Music Hall, he had almost certainly looked closely at Shinn's work. His friend Coleman, in fact, who is pictured in the painting,<sup>183</sup> actually studied for a while with Shinn. Though Davis's The Music Hall bears a strong generic resemblance to Shinn's Spanish Music Hall of 1902, he would not necessarily have had to see this work in particular, for its composition is somewhat formulaic and hardly unique in Shinn's oeuvre. Davis, like Shinn, develops his composition in two planes, the foreground plane of the audience and the more distant plane of the performance. The audience is strongly present in both works; in each case, at least one figure among the spectators directly confronts the viewer. Davis seems to have emphasized the distinctive character of his audience more so than has Shinn and relies less on painterly flourishes. He appears, nonetheless, to have adopted Shinn's strategy of heightening the visual effect of a stage scene by accentuating the harshness of stage lighting.

After completing The Music Hall in early 1910, Davis, as far as we know, did not return to a similar subject for a period of almost two years. Once his interest in depicting stage subjects was renewed, his emphasis shifted primarily to burlesque entertainment. In the 1910s, vaudeville and burlesque were separate classes of amusement, though they both followed a variety format. At the time, vaudeville and burlesque were related in other ways as well. Burlesque was often a training ground for vaudeville talent, and during the heyday of the latter, it flourished as a high-profile alternative to more family-oriented entertainment.<sup>184</sup> In the early twentieth-century, burlesque was an entertainment form geared primarily toward working-class males.<sup>185</sup> In the 1910s, however, nudity was still limited (the strip-tease didn't become a standard feature until the mid-twenties); there were, in fact, a number of crusaders at the time who advocated "clean burlesque." Certainly, the

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 54-55. Harlan Phillips, Davis's interviewer, mentions that Coleman, "a cadaverous looking fellow," is pictured in The Music Hall.

<sup>184</sup> See Irving Zeidman, The American Burlesque Show (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), 11-70 passim. Burlesque enjoyed a period of ascendancy beginning before 1910, during which a number of theaters built expressly for burlesque productions opened across the U. S.

<sup>185</sup> For discussion of the very different nature of burlesque in the nineteenth century, see Robert C. Allen, Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

absurdity of any effort to “clean up” burlesque was immediately apparent to less high-minded observers. One of them, Sydney Wire, writing for Billboard in 1913, estimated that ninety percent of those who attended burlesque shows went “to see the girls.”<sup>186</sup>

In early 1912 Davis developed a fascination with a particular burlesque performer known as Mademoiselle Babette. He represented her, it seems, at least three times, in two watercolors and one oil. The oil painting, referred to as Babette (Fig. 67), is dated February 23, 1912, and the watercolors, most likely, were executed around the same time. One of the watercolors, which is also called Babette, bears the performer’s name in block letters in the top right corner of the canvas, so there can be little doubt about the identity of the subject (Fig. 68). The other watercolor, entitled (mistitled?) The Vaudeville Show, is not so clearly labeled; however, the central figure is posed and attired very much like Babette in the oil painting, making it extremely likely that the subjects are the same (Fig. 69). Babette, according to her notices, was a “petite little burlesque queen” who adhered to a policy of “better burlesque.”<sup>187</sup> While typical female performers in burlesque were full-figured and imposing, Babette had the dainty stature of a “soubrette” and was therefore wholesome enough to attain some prominence and respectability. Babette also displayed French mannerisms and advertised a French pedigree, which added to her prestige. She would eventually graduate to vaudeville. Even so, as a burlesque star, Babette appeared on stage somewhat more scantily dressed than was customary for women in vaudeville. In 1914, for example, a favorable critic described her show as “top-notch” burlesque entertainment with bare legs “the hit of the show.” This particular reviewer was especially impressed with the back-up group of twenty-six chorus girls that performed on stage with the headliner: they wore very short skirts with legs bare from their trunks down and made a “tremendous hit.” Babette appears in the watercolor entitled The Vaudeville Show with an entourage of dancers more scantily dressed than she is. As the star of the show, she was apparently entitled to retain more modesty; the chorus, on the other hand, had to offer the display of flesh the customers came to see.

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<sup>186</sup> Sydney Wire, “Will Burlesque Always Prosper?,” Billboard, 22 March 1913, 24.

<sup>187</sup> All contemporary references to Babette are culled from “Mlle. Babette” clipping file, BRTC.

Unlike the oil, both watercolors offer a close-up view of the stage with a narrow strip of the orchestra and the conductor's upper body at the bottom of the frame. Once again, it appears that Davis has derived some inspiration from Shinn's work: The Vaudeville Show, especially, is reminiscent of a pastel by Shinn entitled Julie Bonbon (1907), which pictures a somewhat related subject (Fig. 70). Julie Bonbon, "a typical French girl," was a character that had been created for the polite stage by an actress named Clara Lipman. The character was modified ("exaggerated somewhat") by Mlle. Babette for the burlesque stage in 1911.<sup>188</sup> While the line of the stage and the positioning of the star performer and the musician are the same in both works, Davis modifies the scene entirely by picturing Babette against a dense background of bold and animated figures. There is no sense of coordinated movement in the scene, which suggests, somehow, the rough and tumble spirit of the amusement. A similar effect is achieved by Toulouse-Lautrec in a lithograph entitled Une redoute au Moulin-Rouge, which Davis may have been familiar with at the time (Fig. 71).<sup>189</sup> In addition to one other burlesque subject, Babe La Tour, a watercolor from 1912 (Fig. 72), Davis appears to have executed at least two other "authentic" vaudeville images by early 1913 (Figs. 73 and 74). For his vaudeville subjects, as well as his burlesque subjects, Davis very frequently followed compositional patterns that Shinn typically used for his theater scenes.

It seems quite clear that the youthful Davis was inspired, to some degree, by the manner of Shinn; however, it is also quite obvious that he more-or-less rejected his broadly inclusive approach to the subject matter of entertainment. Instead, Davis chose to focus on some of the more obscure and less "respectable" aspects of contemporary entertainment. In choosing to represent the social life of marginalized groups, Davis identified himself with a particular trend in realist painting and illustration that came to fruition with the second generation of "Ashcan" artists. Luks alone, among the artists of the first generation, had

<sup>188</sup> "Big Banner's Success," New York Star, 28 January 1911; in "Mlle. Babette" clipping file, BRTC.

<sup>189</sup> In 1912 Davis had, he claimed, a book of Toulouse-Lautrec reproductions that had been printed in Germany ("Stuart Davis Reminisces," 172). The lithograph mentioned appears on page 27 of Hermann Esswein, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (Munich and Leipzig: R. Piper & Co., 1904), the only book on Lautrec I've been able to identify that was published in Germany by 1912.

consistently elected to paint the “low” life of the city, which he did without sentimentalizing his subjects or depriving them of their dignity. In some of his best-known works, for example, The Spielers of 1905 (Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts) and Hester Street, also of 1905 (The Brooklyn Museum), he portrayed the brightness and exuberance of “low” society and the vigorous character of immigrant life. Luks’s contemporary Jerome Myers, though not generally identified with the “Ashcan” group, was another artist who concentrated, for the most part, on representing the diversions enjoyed by immigrants in New York in the early years of the century. The subjects depicted by Luks and Myers may have been judged unartistic in their time, but there is no evidence to suggest that any political agenda was ever linked to their work. In the second decade of the century, when Davis began his career, images of poor working-class and immigrant subjects could no longer be viewed as simply picturesque; with socialism a growing force in the U. S.--and especially in New York--such images almost inevitably conveyed some political meaning.

In the early 1910s, when Davis first began to depict entertainment subjects, he chose categories of entertainment that were, in effect, “loaded” with social significance. As has already been suggested, he was influenced in this direction by his older colleague Glenn O. Coleman. Apart from this association, however, there were other factors that influenced Davis’s developing social conscience. His own father, according to Sloan, had “the Socialist idea.”<sup>190</sup> Moreover, Sloan himself was becoming increasingly involved in Socialism at the time Davis began seeking his guidance toward the end of 1909. Davis saw Sloan regularly during the years he attended the Henri School; he apparently followed the development of Sloan’s career and depended on him for advice. Davis claimed many years later that Sloan was a “definite influence” on him but “not necessarily in painting.” Rather, Sloan had “ideas and values” that strongly impressed his younger colleague.<sup>191</sup>

By 1910, the New York Call, a socialist newspaper that gave considerable space to the arts, began to reflect, albeit somewhat ambivalently, an interest in the social life and

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<sup>190</sup> Sloan, New York Scene, 559.

<sup>191</sup> Davis, “Stuart Davis Reminisces,” 60.

cultural diversions of the lower and marginal classes. In early 1910 a serial feature appeared in the Call entitled "Plain Tales of the City." The appearance of the series followed Coleman's exhibition of "Scenes from the Life of the People" by only a few months, and at least one of its installments was directly related in content to Coleman's pictorial essay. A segment entitled "After the Show" describes a conversation among men in a smoking room. One is "gushing about his latest Burlesque Girl." Another tells about his recent exposure to the heart-breaking sight of an elderly woman--drunk--dancing in the street for an audience of factory workers. Those who listen to this tale find it distressing. As show girls go, one declares, he prefers the burlesque girl.<sup>192</sup> Like Coleman's drawings, the story illustrates differing aspects of entertainment in the rougher areas of the urban environment. The story, however, unlike Coleman's drawings, makes the poor "entertainer" an object of pity. Her sad condition is explicitly depicted in an illustration that accompanies the story; the drawing, coincidentally, was contributed by John Sloan (Fig. 75).

Throughout the early 1910s, the Call published periodic essays on "Socialism and Art" and "Art and the People" which, though not entirely consistent in point of view, all tended to advocate some form of "art for man's sake" as opposed to "art for art's sake." As early as 1913, one contributor, Eugene Wood, recognized the relevance of African-American expression to an emerging proletarian culture. In his article, Wood posed the question, "Who will make for us . . . Socialist songs in proletarian form?" He went on to suggest that such a contribution must come from the black race, "the only one now in America that is producing true folk song [sic] . . ."<sup>193</sup> A couple of years later, the Call published a piece entitled "Night Life in Newark" by Emanuel Julius, which describes a trip taken by the author to see Negro tenderloin sites in Newark in the company of Davis, Coleman, and a poet named Clement Wood. Coleman's words of praise for one of the musicians heard are quoted. Julius, however, was apparently unconvinced of the virtue of what he had witnessed: in his words, "the lowest of the most oppressed of peoples as they got what they innocently called 'pleasure.'"<sup>194</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Sonia Ureles, "Plain Tales of the City: After the Show," New York Call, 20 February 1910, 9.

<sup>193</sup> Eugene Wood, "Socialist Songs," New York Call, 27 April 1913, 12.

<sup>194</sup> Emanuel Julius, "Night Life in Newark," New York Call, 30 May 1915, 9.

It seems quite certain that Davis had a social conscience sufficiently developed by 1915 to make him sensitive to the sociological, if not political, ramifications of the subjects he chose to depict. His choice of subject matter, therefore, may be understood to reflect not only his personal taste in entertainment but also, to some degree, a sense of the developing character of popular culture and its relation to socialist values.<sup>195</sup>

Davis was drawn to what were considered exceedingly “low” forms of amusement by the majority of cultured, educated, and ordinary middle-class persons of his day. He therefore paid limited attention to vaudeville which, by the 1910s, was generally established as a “respectable” form of entertainment for men, women, and children of the middle and working class. For this reason, it might seem inconsistent with the stated purpose of my inquiry to examine the entertainment subjects of Stuart Davis. As I’ve already attempted to demonstrate, Davis’s early depictions of lowly music hall and burlesque subjects were, at least, related compositionally to Shinn’s more “respectable” theatrical imagery. However, if we look at another important segment of his early production—his African-American entertainment subjects—other considerations arise that are, perhaps, more relevant to the broader purpose of my dissertation, which is to explore the relationship between fine art and popular culture during the first two decades of this century. Between 1913 and 1915, Davis produced at least one oil painting of a “Negro saloon” in Newark, New Jersey, and a number of related drawings, several of which were published in The Masses. These works were created during a period of controversy surrounding the issue of non-European—and, in particular, African—influence in American popular culture. It is difficult to argue that, in producing these works, Davis was attempting to take a stand on the issue; nonetheless, his African-American entertainment subjects—his dance hall depictions, specifically—appear to reflect not only an awareness of

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<sup>195</sup> Davis was also aware at the time of Robert Coady’s art gallery activities and of his unique vision of American culture. When interviewed by Harlan Phillips in the early 1960s, Davis did not recall Coady’s name, but he did remember his Washington Square Gallery (and another “up opposite the public library on Fifth Avenue”) as well as the “unique character” of his little magazine, The Soil. Davis remembered Coady as “quite an important man,” “very American and yet at the same time universal” (“Stuart Davis Reminisces,” 149). I discuss Coady’s role in promoting awareness of American popular culture at length in Chapter Five.

the contemporary controversy, but some understanding of the dynamics of suppression and denial that prevailed at the time against African culture and its manifestations in the U. S.

In the early 1910s New York experienced an extraordinary dance craze that thoroughly distressed and dismayed the more conservative element of society. Many of those who objected to the recent outburst of enthusiasm for dances such as the Turkey Trot, the Bunny Hug, and the Tango were probably either unaware of or not necessarily concerned with the specific origins of the dances. On the other hand, there were those who denounced the popular dance craze specifically because it represented the embrace and validation of forms of expression that were considered “barbaric” and alien to European culture. The Rev. Dr. Joseph (Rabbi) Silverman, for example, declared in a sermon cited in the New York Times that “modern dancing indicates more clearly than anything else the degraded and vicious state of civilization in certain quarters, because ‘modern’ dancing was not invented by persons of culture and refinement, but by the barbaric peoples of Southern nations.”<sup>196</sup> While a denouncer of the dance craze might cite the non-European origin of the trend as evidence to support his opposition, a proponent of the new dances might deny this heritage in order to defend his own interests, as did one British enthusiast in 1913, who claimed that the Tango was “neither negroid nor nasty.”<sup>197</sup> Individuals who approved of the dance craze as well as those who opposed it, it seems, found it difficult, if not impossible, to recognize the positive contribution of African-Americans to an extraordinary contemporary phenomenon in American popular culture.

In the early 1910s Davis spent a great deal of his own leisure time listening to ragtime and jazz music in the “colored saloons” of Newark, New Jersey. The saloons that Davis visited were rough places frequented by poor and outcast individuals, but the musicians who performed in them were often talented and ambitious. By and large, the

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<sup>196</sup> “Denounces Modern Dances—Rabbi Silverman Says They Indicate a Degraded State of Civilization,” New York Times, 2 March 1914, 5.

<sup>197</sup> A debate was launched in the London Times in 1913 following the publication of a letter from a “Peeress” named Lady Middleton protesting the new dances, which she characterized as “horrors of American and South American negroid origin.” Lady Middleton’s letter and letters written in response to it quoted in “Lady Middleton, ‘Peeress,’ and Others Write Letters Against the Invasion of So-Called American Dances,” New York Times, 24 August 1913, sec. 5, 5.

sort of music that Davis preferred could only be heard in the the Negro tenderloin, hence his initial attraction to this environment. In 1913 Davis rendered, possibly for the first and only time, a black tenderloin subject in oil. The painting, entitled The Back Room, includes two musicians at the far left: a drummer in front and a piano player in white shirt behind him (Fig. 76). Though the room contains a number of other people, little activity is implied. Moreover, the minimal action that is suggested appears ambiguous and slightly sinister: an awkward-looking couple embraces in the harsh spotlight at the center of the picture, a man behind them lunges forward, and an obscure figure at the far right appears to stagger forward and out of the frame. A contemporaneous drawing entitled Jackson's Band, which was eventually published in The Masses, appears to represent the same locale and includes a similar reference to the saloon's musical entertainment: a pianist at an upright piano and a drum, this time without the drummer (Fig. 77).<sup>198</sup> The composition of the drawing differs significantly from that of the painting; in each case, however, the occupants of the saloon appear detached and forlorn in a harsh and dreary environment.<sup>199</sup> The two works thus convey a similar mood despite their formal differences.

After the Armory Show, Davis appears to have abandoned entertainment subject matter almost altogether as the basis for painting in oil. He did, however, continue to produce drawings of black entertainment subjects, several of which were reproduced as illustrations. Depictions of African-American subjects by Davis and other illustrators frequently appeared in The Masses which, according to Rebecca Zurier, "abounded in dialect jokes and cartoons based on racial and ethnic stereotypes."<sup>200</sup> Many of these illustrations would appear offensive to modern eyes; in their day, however, opinion was

<sup>198</sup> "Life's Done Been Gettin' Monotonous Since Dey Bu'ned Down Ou'Ah Church," Masses 5 (February 1914): 20.

<sup>199</sup> The rendering of architectural space and the placement of figures in the drawing may have been inspired by works of Lautrec reproduced in Esswein's 1904 publication, in particular Dans les Couloirs (40) and En Promenade (34-35). It is very likely that Van Gogh's Bal à Arles (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which was included in the Armory Show and was reproduced on a postcard at that time, had some influence on Davis's conception of the painting. Davis describes the impact of seeing Van Gogh's work in the Armory Show in Stuart Davis, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1945), 9.

<sup>200</sup> Rebecca Zurier, Art for "The Masses" (1911-1917): A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 148.

rather strongly divided as to the propriety of such images.<sup>201</sup> Nonetheless, there is little doubt about the good intentions of the editorial board of the magazine. Typically, drawings that appear to be caricatures of African-Americans now, as they did to some back then, were accompanied by captions that reflected pro-African-American sentiment. This sort of irony was a common strategy in the writing as well as in the drawings that appeared in The Masses. The strategy appears, for example, in a short piece entitled “Another Negro Outrage,” which was written in response to racist statements made during hearings of the Federal Commission on Industrial Affairs: “The worst offence of the Negro in the South . . . is that he won’t work. He won’t go to a factory at six in the morning and work until six at night for 50 or 60¢ a day . . . . No, uncivilized creature that he is, he prefers to sit in the shade and eat watermelon.” The uncredited author of the piece goes on to state that clearly the Negro is “utterly incorrigible” because “he objects to working except under decent conditions.” Finally, he condemns, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, those who “pretend to think that the Negro is a valuable racial element in civilization.”<sup>202</sup>

Though many of Davis’s drawings of African-American subjects from the mid-1910s appear to represent unfortunate stereotypes, they must anyhow be interpreted in light of the curious combination of satire and advocacy that informed the heart of The Masses and inspired its contributors. All of the three extant drawings of Negro dance hall subjects that Davis produced in 1915 might be said to contain “stereotypical” images. In one drawing published as “Jersey City Portrait” in The Masses, July 1915, a forlorn-looking male figure shuffles aimlessly across the dance floor (Fig. 78). In another, now in the collection of The Newark Museum, the hulking form of the male figure in the foreground is somewhat absurdly “dandified”: his huge feet, ill-fitting jacket, and inappropriately small hat betray the incongruity of the man and his adornment (Fig. 79). In both of these drawings, as well as in a third in the estate of the artist (Fig. 80), there are female dancers shown from either the back or the side with buttocks thrust out aggressively. Unfortunately, these images seem to represent a particularly vicious stereotype of the

<sup>201</sup> For discussion of The Masses and ethnic cultures, see Leslie Fishbein, introduction to Art for “The Masses”, by Rebecca Zurier, 15-20.

<sup>202</sup> “Another Negro Outrage,” Masses 5 (July 1914): 20.

African-American woman as loose and sexually aggressive. Certainly, Davis may have been influenced, at least unconsciously, by the stereotype, but it is unlikely that he intended purposefully to represent it in his drawing. If we begin by assuming that Davis never intended to demean the subjects he depicted, we may at least attempt to view them in another light.

Hallmarks of the new dance styles of the early 1910s were freedom and earthiness of expression, qualities that were noted, for example, in the original Turkey Trot, a dance rooted in the vernacular expression of Southern African-Americans.<sup>203</sup> The original Turkey Trot of 1911-12, noted one observer in early 1914, “smacked strongly of the Dahomey-Bowery-Barbary Coast form of revelry.”<sup>204</sup> By around 1913, the Turkey Trot had been modified (“toned down”) and its name had been changed to the One-Step. Most participants in the dance craze, thereafter, denied any connection between the One-Step and less “refined” forms of popular dance. For the next few years, dancing remained the social activity of choice for vast numbers of urban Americans. Afternoon dancing parties became the rage, taking the place of afternoon tea or bridge parties for the ladies. In town, restaurants and hotels hosted afternoon *thés dansants* or “tango teas,” making it convenient for shoppers to stop off for a few hours of dancing and for businessmen to take a break from the office.<sup>205</sup> In the midst of all this enthusiasm for dancing, there was, of course, almost no positive acknowledgement of the relationship between the current popular phenomenon and the source of its inspiration, that is, non-European, and principally African-American, vernacular dance. For Davis, who was keenly aware of and in touch with contemporary African-American culture, the denial of this connection would, it seems, be painfully obvious. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched, therefore, to interpret his Negro dance hall scenes as “documentary” in nature. Despite his recourse to caricature, Davis captured the authentic mood and spirit of the Negro dance hall milieu; he represented what he knew and observed: a vital element of American culture that the vast majority of his

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<sup>203</sup> Beverly Armstrong Chapman, “New Dance in New York, 1911-1915” (M. A. thesis, The American University, Washington, D. C., 1977), 18.

<sup>204</sup> “All New York Now Madly Whirling in the Tango,” New York Times, 4 January 1914, sec. 5, 8.

<sup>205</sup> Chapman, “New Dance in New York,” 26, 28, 53-54.

contemporaries deemed either non-existent or unrepresentable.<sup>206</sup> With an ironic twist akin to the sort so often employed in The Masses, Davis gave the title Thé Dansant to one of the Negro dance hall scenes he showed in the exhibition of the American Salon of Humorists held at the Folsom Galleries in 1915 (Fig. 79). Like so much of the ethnic humor reflected in The Masses, the irony here may seem cruel and demeaning. On the other hand, it is very possible that Davis was aware of the true relevance of the title, which, for one sympathetic to the subject, would make the irony that much keener.

Between 1910 and 1915 Davis underwent a radical transformation as an artist. He began by embracing realism and adopting Henri's emphasis on subjects relevant to contemporary life. After seeing the work in the Armory Show, however, he became at least "vaguely aware" of the limitations inherent in relying on "the vitality of subject matter" and gave up his earlier aims.<sup>207</sup> He set out to be a "painterly" painter in the aftermath of the Armory Show and began by emulating Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Matisse.<sup>208</sup> The subjects he was personally drawn to and had previously attempted to paint survived briefly in his work in illustration. Even with this transformation, however, Davis never abandoned his enthusiasm for "American" subjects, especially subjects linked with popular culture. In this respect, he remained, even after his "conversion," a realist in the guise of a modernist.

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<sup>206</sup> About a work by Davis entitled "Negro Saloon" that was included in his Sheridan Square Gallery exhibition of 1917, one critic wrote, "Not a ray of saving grace creeps into the picture to lighten the gloom of it. Doubtless it is truth, but it is horrid truth, and quite inexcusable in a picture." W. G. Bowdoin, "Modern Work of Stuart Davis a Village Show," New York Evening World, 13 December 1917; clipping in Stuart Davis Scrap Books, AAA.

<sup>207</sup> Davis, Stuart Davis, n. pag.

<sup>208</sup> Davis, Stuart Davis (exh. cat.), 9.

## 5. "Culture" in the 1910s: Manifestations of Change

### American Culture Reassessed

A number of factors contributed to the rather urgent reassessment of American culture in the decade of the 1910s. By this time, individuals born in the U. S. to immigrant parents were becoming prominent scholars and teachers, writers, artists, political activists, and community leaders. Having little invested in older traditions, they invented new ones, and through their efforts, prevailing hierarchies of cultural value in anthropology, literature, drama, and the visual arts were challenged and transformed. At the same time, young men of Anglo-Saxon heritage, like Van Wyck Brooks, who rebelled against their Protestant upper-middle-class conditioning, contributed their share to the radical reassessment of culture in America. Questions surrounding the nature of culture in the United States became urgent in the 1910s. According to Henry May, the movement of challenge and revolt that escalated during these years--the "Liberation," as he calls it--"loved culture, though it found it everywhere *except* in the Anglo-American nineteenth century."<sup>1</sup>

The new avant-garde outlook on culture that emerged with the Liberation was related, if only indirectly, to corresponding changes in other sectors of the American milieu. In the field of anthropology, in particular, a few far-sighted individuals advanced non-racist theories of culture to counter evolutionary models that had developed in the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917 (New York: Knopf, 1959), 220.

century, and in doing so promoted the idea of equality among world cultures, and by extension, the equality of all forms of cultural expression. As Daniel Singal has observed, there occurred with the demise of gentility and the advent of what he calls the “culture” of Modernism a breakdown in the rigid polarities that were pervasive in Victorian thought, such as the notions of civilization and savagery. He surmises that “the most influential stirrings of the new [Modernist] culture in America” might be discovered in the work of the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942), founder of the department of anthropology at Columbia University (1896), and the scholars he taught and influenced.<sup>2</sup>

For artists and literary intellectuals, “culture,” however, meant something different than it meant for anthropologists; and not surprisingly, many liberal, well-educated individuals outside of anthropology continued to promote some version of Euro-American culture over any non-European tradition. In 1920 the two poles of the argument were addressed explicitly by D. H. Lawrence and Walter Lippmann, in complementary articles appearing in The New Republic. Lawrence, of course, wrote from the perspective of a European, one who, moreover, was apparently sated with the tradition in which he was immersed. If America has no tradition comparable to that of Europe, so much the better, Lawrence implies: “Let Americans turn to America,” for they will never draw sustenance from the “lovely monuments” that belong to Europe’s past.<sup>3</sup> According to Lawrence, the true heritage of the New World had to be discovered in its own ancient past, that is, in the spirit of the “dark, aboriginal continent.” Lippmann responds with adamance, if not derision, to Lawrence’s claim: the author of Sons and Lovers is “plainly in the Noble Savage phase,” he suggests, for he idealizes what no longer exists and ignores the fundamental realities of the present.<sup>4</sup> In Lippmann’s view, the indigenous civilizations of America are not a viable root source of American culture. An artist might occasionally

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism,” American Quarterly 39 (Spring 1987): 18.

<sup>3</sup> D. H. Lawrence, “America, Listen to Your Own”, New Republic, 15 December 1920, 68-70.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Lippmann, “The Crude Barbarian and the Noble Savage,” New Republic, 15 December 1920, 70-71. Walter Pach expressed a point of view similar to Lippmann’s in his essay on “Art” in Civilization in the United States, ed. Harold Stearns (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), 227-28. “It is unlikely,” Pach declares, “that even our present-day interest in the exotic arts will bring about any important influence from the Indians . . . .”

borrow a motif from what survived from the precolonial past, but he could not derive a culture “by starting from Montezuma.” As far as Lippmann is concerned, the United States have a living past linked inexorably with that of Europe. The crisis, as he sees it, does not concern the source of American culture as much as it does the unfavorable climate that surrounds it. Tell the mass of Americans “to ignore the European past,” he laments, and “they will hear you gladly.” Lippmann recognized that the sort of “high” culture that he valued was largely unsupported in contemporary America. However, this was just one sign of the crisis at hand.

While the aboriginal cultures of America’s past had minimal vitality in the present, there were myriad ethnic traditions carried on by European immigrants in the U. S.; and these traditions were extant and often thriving in the present. A number of observers and critics of American culture in the 1910s began to recognize the value these ethnic cultures had for American society as a whole. The most urgent arguments in favor of the immigrant contribution to American culture were advanced at mid-decade by men who deplored the increased narrowness of the national outlook that developed in reaction to the outbreak of war in Europe. Two critics--Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne--were particularly influential. Each pleaded for a slightly different variation of a condition that Kallen would, a few years later, refer to explicitly as “cultural pluralism.”<sup>5</sup>

Both Kallen and Bourne objected to the homogenization of American culture and dismissed the “melting-pot” ideal.<sup>6</sup> Kallen actually reached his conclusions a little before Bourne and helped inspire the latter’s position; moreover, Kallen’s vision of healthy diversity was less traditional than Bourne’s concept of a multi-faceted yet unifying culture. “At the present time there is no dominant American mind,” Kallen wrote in 1915.<sup>7</sup> “Our spirit is inarticulate, not a voice, but a chorus of many voices each singing a rather

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<sup>5</sup> Horace M. Kallen, Culture and Democracy in the United States (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1924), 43.

<sup>6</sup> Discussion of the “melting-pot” concept was first ignited in the U. S. in 1908 by the presentation of a play by Israel Zangwill, entitled The Melting-Pot, that dealt with the process of assimilation in America. See Philip Gleason, “The Melting Pot: Symbol of Fusion or Confusion?” American Quarterly 16 (Spring 1964): 22. Zangwill’s play, copyrighted 1914, was published in New York by Macmillan in 1932.

<sup>7</sup> Horace M. Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot, Part Two,” Nation, 25 February 1915, 217.

different tune. How to get order out of this cacophony is the question for all those who are concerned about . . . justice, the arts, literature, philosophy, science. What must, what *shall* this cacophony become—a unison or a harmony?” Kallen saw “Americanization” as a process that initially involved economic assimilation; however, once material comforts had been attained, self-definition became increasingly important for the immigrant subject. At this point, “the arts, life, and ideals of the nationality become central and paramount,” he wrote, and “ethnic and national differences change in status from disadvantages to distinctions.”<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Americanization served to promote the development of distinct and equal ethnic cultures and to foster separateness and diversity rather than bland—or worse, vulgar—sameness. Cultural unity was neither possible, nor desirable, in Kallen’s view. Instead, he envisioned a “harmony” of different cultures achieved by providing conditions under which all the varied ethnic expressions could survive and flourish.

Bourne also saw cultural diversity in the United States as a tremendous boon, but not as an end in itself. He believed that the non-English element in America lent impetus toward a greater goal—the achievement of a “cosmopolitan ideal” that would serve to elevate the United States to global prominence as “the first international nation.”<sup>9</sup> As he saw it, cosmopolitanism would prove to be not only a cohesive and vitalizing force in American culture, but an example for the world. The contribution of America will be “an intellectual internationalism,” he stated in 1916, the underlying motive of which will not be satisfied “until it has got at the heart of the different cultural expressions.” The sort of intellectual sympathy that informed this outlook would, Bourne imagined, transcend division and create unity out of diversity.

The ideal of cosmopolitanism, Hollinger argues, informed the minds of a number of leading American intellectuals of the 1910s and 20s.<sup>10</sup> Jewish intellectuals, in particular, who exerted their first real influence in American culture at this time, impressed their

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 218-19.

<sup>9</sup> Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916): 86-97.

<sup>10</sup> David A. Hollinger, “Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism and the Emergence of the American Liberal Intelligentsia,” *American Quarterly* 27 (May 1975): 133-51.

colleagues with their ability to assimilate traditions not originally their own. According to Hollinger, “what mattered most about the Jewish immigrants was not their ethnicity, nor even their inherited devotion to learning, but their impatience with the limitations of ethnic particularism.”<sup>11</sup> This refusal of ethnic particularism, according to Hollinger, gave cosmopolitanism its breadth and meaning.

The general crisis in American culture that many perceived in the 1910s was, perhaps, most urgently addressed by one for whom the limiting conditions of the American experience were a source of great personal frustration. Van Wyck Brooks had resolved very early on to be a writer, and after his graduation from Harvard in 1907 embarked for England, where he made some tentative efforts to enter into English literary life. Within six months or so, he had begun writing his first book, The Wine of the Puritans, which attacked the narrow materialism of the original American settlers and lamented the limitation this heritage represented for American culture. With the publication of this book in 1908, Brooks had launched his mission to expose the source of his own frustration and that of his nation’s present cultural dilemma.

By 1910 Brooks was working in New York and making important contacts there with other struggling artists and writers. Through John Butler Yeats, he met Sloan and Henri, two men of “artistic conscience” whose ideas about American art were to influence him significantly.<sup>12</sup> Brooks found Henri’s pronouncements concerning art and life especially provocative, for, as he saw it, the principal fault in American culture resided in the dissociation of these two terms. Throughout the 1910s he would address this schism repeatedly in his various published writings. His most forceful and influential statement was published in book form in 1915 as America’s Coming-of-Age. This relatively concise yet comprehensive text would serve to inspire a number of younger intellectuals in the U.S. and to promote its author to the national vanguard of cultural criticism.

In America’s Coming-of-Age, Brooks describes two contrasting poles of American experience that correspond with two opposing mentalities, which he calls “Highbrow” and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>12</sup> James Hoopes, Van Wyck Brooks: In Search of American Culture (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), 73-74.

“Lowbrow”:

So it is that from the beginning we find two main currents in the American mind running side by side but rarely mingling—a current of overtones and a current of undertones—and both equally unsocial: on the one hand, the current of Transcendentalism, originating in the piety of the Puritans, becoming a philosophy in Jonathan Edwards, passing through Emerson, producing the fastidious refinement and aloofness of the chief American writers, and . . . resulting in the final unreality of most contemporary American culture; and on the other hand the current of catchpenny opportunism, originating in the practical shifts of Puritan life, becoming a philosophy in Franklin, passing through the American humorists, and resulting in the atmosphere of contemporary business life.<sup>13</sup>

The unfortunate split that Brooks perceived between high idealism, on the one hand, and practical materialism, on the other, could be remedied: there was hope for culture in America, he believed, if its exponents could discover some “middle ground” that would “mitigate, combine, or harmonize” the two extremes.

Like Kallen and Bourne, Brooks recognized the vitality of immigrant traditions in the U. S.; however, as he saw it, the “ferment in the immigrant folk” could hardly begin to remedy what he saw as “the American problem.”<sup>14</sup> “To get civilization out of the Yankee stock” was, for him, the most pressing challenge. Brooks spoke in America’s Coming-of-Age “as a thorough-going Yankee to other thorough-going Yankees” and addressed a conflict that was unique to well-educated men whose heritage was similar to his own. Though a “cultural radical,” Brooks, like most other progressive critics of his time, refused to abandon the idea of culture as ennobling and uplifting.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, he believed that a new and vital national culture had to be related “organically” to governing conditions in the U. S., particularly to the egalitarian (democratic or socialist) ideal and to commerce. As Hoopes points out, Brooks never doubted “that while culture should be related in a

<sup>13</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, America’s Coming-of-Age (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1915), 9-10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-62.

<sup>15</sup> See James Hoopes, “The Culture of Progressivism: Croly, Lippmann, Brooks, Bourne, and the Idea of American Artistic Decadence,” CLIO 7 (Fall 1977): 91-111.

meaningful way to the real, it had to depend for its values on contact with the ideal.”<sup>16</sup> Culture ought to be relevant to the American experience, Brooks maintained, but not debased to the level of lowbrow self-interest.

Brooks did not invent the opposition of highbrow and lowbrow, as Raymond Nelson points out, but he did establish its “cultural resonance and continuing popular currency.”<sup>17</sup> Apparently, the adjectives highbrow and lowbrow had been used to describe the differences between superior and common taste since at the least the 1880s.<sup>18</sup> During the first two decades of this century, the terms appeared from time to time in American popular fiction—for example, in Henry S. Harrison’s novel Queed of 1911—as well as in popular magazines, like Collier’s and the Saturday Evening Post. Brooks essentially elevated these terms from the vernacular and made them key points of contention in the escalating cultural debate of the 1910s and 20s.

Brooks could hardly have threatened the stolid image of the lowbrow by contrasting his nature with that of the idealistic highbrow; he could and apparently did, however, cast some doubt on the presumed superiority of the latter. At some point in the late 1910s or early 1920s, a decidedly pejorative use of the term “highbrow” emerged in both conservative and progressive criticism. The aging but still vigorous Brander Matthews, one of the literary establishment’s most powerful figures in the 1910s, actually used the word to characterize negatively the group of Young Intellectuals with which Brooks himself was identified. In his review of Harold Stearns’ America and the Young Intellectual (1921), Matthews charges that the author, a member of the coterie in question, is inclined to take himself much too seriously. Stearn’s attitude is “so immitigably top-lofty,” “so chillingly high-and-mighty,” Matthews alleges, that other “juvenile highbrows” will find it

<sup>16</sup> Hoopes, Van Wyck Brooks: In Search of American Culture, 104.

<sup>17</sup> Raymond Nelson, Van Wyck Brooks: A Writer’s Life (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 103. Significant contributors to the further definition and analysis of highbrow and lowbrow, as well as middlebrow, sensibilities have been Virginia Woolf, in an unpublished letter to the editor of the New Statesman entitled “Middlebrow” and included in The Death of the Moth and Other Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 113-19; Russell Lynes, “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow,” chap. in The Tastemakers (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 310-33; and Herbert J. Gans, Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> The earliest citation under the entry for “highbrow” in The Oxford English Dictionary, 2d ed. dates from 1884. All succeeding references listed in The OED, s. v. “highbrow” and “lowbrow.”

difficult to surpass his contempt.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, the pejorative use of the term “highbrow” also occurs in a collection of essays edited by Stearns and published in 1922 as Civilization in the United States. The contributor who writes on music, Deems Taylor, states that the “self-styled music-lover” in the U. S. “is likely to be a highbrow (defined as a person educated beyond his intelligence), with all the mental obtuseness and snobbishness of his class. He divides music into ‘popular’—meaning light—and ‘classical’—meaning pretentious . . . . In general, he [the highbrow] is the faithful guardian of the Puritan tradition . . . .”<sup>20</sup> There is yet another irony in this general assault on the “highbrow”: Taylor’s characterization of the type as “educated beyond his intelligence” apparently originated with Matthews.<sup>21</sup>

Hoopes maintains that Brooks, for whom the word “culture” was synonymous with “high culture,” would have disagreed that such usage necessarily excluded popular culture. As Hoopes states, Brooks “came to believe that for a high culture to have significance in the U. S. it must also be popular, meaning that . . . it must work to a democratic purpose.”<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Brooks’s followers did not always envision quite the same sort of reconciliation between high art and democratic values. They, for the most part, were crusaders of a different stripe. Harold Stearns, for example, believed that the key to cultural vitality in the U. S. was individual creative achievement. “It is through art, and art alone, that we can regain any individualism worthy of the name,” he wrote.<sup>23</sup> For him, any cultural product that was “standardized and moulded to a shape recognisable by all equally”—be it artistic, musical, literary, decorative, or dramatic—represented a debasement of the cultural ideal. Lewis Mumford, who wrote on “The City” for Stearns’

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<sup>19</sup> Brander Matthews, “America and the Juvenile Highbrows,” review of America and the Young Intellectuals[sic], by Harold Stearns, New York Times Book Review and Magazine, 29 January 1922, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Deems Taylor, “Music,” in Civilization in the United States, ed. Harold Stearns (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), 208-9.

<sup>21</sup> Lynes, “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow,” 311. For further discussion of Matthew’s role in American culture during the period, see Lawrence J. Oliver, Brander Matthews, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Politics of American Literature, 1880-1920 (Knoxville: The U of Tennessee Press, 1992), 164-95.

<sup>22</sup> Hoopes, preface to Van Wyck Brooks: In Search of American Culture, xi.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Stearns, “Through Art to Individualism,” chap. in America and the Young Intellectual (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1921), 154-55.

1922 Civilization in the United States anthology, also made explicit his condemnation of popular manifestations of “culture.” “The movies, the White Ways, and the Coney Islands . . . are means of giving jaded and throttled people the sensations of living without the direct experience of life,” he declared.<sup>24</sup> Mumford, like Stearns, deplored the commercial or “lowbrow” element of the American experience. Brooks, on the other hand, had at least seen some value in a dialogue between “high” and “low” factions.

### Popular Entertainment and the Cultural Critics

Among “cultural radicals” of the 1910s and 20s, there was, by and large, little inclination to accept popular culture as a legitimate and worthy reflection of American society and values. Even Kallen and Bourne, who were so forthright and committed in their high regard for ethnic cultures, were rather disparaging of the thriving element of popular culture, in which all groups participated and that all enjoyed. Kallen, for example, identified popular culture with mass communications in general—“the devices of the telegraph and the telephone, the syndication of ‘literature,’ the cheap newspaper and the cheap novel, the vaudeville circuit, the ‘movie,’ and the star system,” all of which served to enforce a uniform or “standardized” (and by implication, poor and inadequate) set of cultural values.<sup>25</sup> The imposing aspect of certain forms of popular culture—movies and vaudeville, in particular—made it almost impossible for the conscientious cultural critic to ignore them, however; and when progressive critics addressed the fate of American culture, they made reference frequently to movies and vaudeville. Among the primary vehicles of this type of cultural criticism in the 1910s were several of the little magazines that had their

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Mumford, “The City,” in Civilization in the United States, ed. Harold Stearns, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot [Part One],” Nation, 18 February 1915, 193. Bourne saw that once immigrants abandoned their own vital traditions, they adopted “only the most rudimentary American—the American culture of the cheap newspaper, the ‘movies,’ the popular song, the ubiquitous automobile.” See Bourne, “Trans-National America,” 113.

birth and demise during the decade,<sup>26</sup> magazines such as The Seven Arts and The Soil, which embodied the sentiments of men yearning to discover “aesthetic vitality” in America.<sup>27</sup> Critics associated with The New Republic, a liberal journal first published in 1914, also embraced cultural nationalism as they grappled with questions surrounding highbrow and lowbrow sensibilities in American culture and the role of democracy in art.<sup>28</sup>

The New Republic, more than The Seven Arts or The Soil, explicitly addressed the inherent conflict between highbrow and lowbrow interests in contemporary American culture. Neither self-conscious highbrow-ism nor lowbrow-ism was viewed as desirable, and neither escaped criticism. “No one really wants to be considered a highbrow,” wrote Francis Hackett, the magazine’s literary editor, in 1916.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the “deliberate” or “professional” (as opposed to genuine) lowbrow, “the sycophant of democracy,” according to a 1915 editorial probably written by Bourne, was a type to be despised.<sup>30</sup> In a review of the 1915 Ziegfield Follies, however, Hackett found a way to reconcile the two sides. Would ‘great men’ such as Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, George Washington and Marcus Aurelius have enjoyed musical comedy, he wonders. Yes, he decides, with Bert Williams (a tremendously popular black comedian), “they would have found themselves at home.”<sup>31</sup>

Reviews of musical comedy (a form related to vaudeville) were rather sporadic in The New Republic; however, the movies were more frequently addressed. Initial articles by Hackett and Bourne, published in May and July 1915 respectively, were not

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<sup>26</sup> The designation “little” magazine came into use during World War I to identify magazines with “a limited group of intelligent readers.” The first American magazine of this type, The Dial, was actually published in the 1840s. See Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich, The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947; reprint, New York: Kraus Reprint Corp., 1967), 3, 7.

<sup>27</sup> George Soule, “Irrelevant Art,” New Republic, 28 April 1917, 374.

<sup>28</sup> For discussion of cultural nationalism in The New Republic and The Seven Arts, see Arthur Frank Wertheim, “The Cultural Nationalists,” chap. in The New York Little Renaissance: Iconoclasm, Modernism, and Nationalism in American Culture, 1908-1917 (New York: New York University Press, 1976); and Charles C. Alexander, Here the Country Lies: Nationalism and the Arts in Twentieth-Century America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 72-82.

<sup>29</sup> F. H. [Francis Hackett], “William James as Highbrow,” New Republic, 23 September 1916, 184.

<sup>30</sup> “The Professional Lowbrow,” New Republic, 10 April 1915, 248-49.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Hackett, “Musical Comedy Evolves,” New Republic, 31 July 1915, 336.

wholeheartedly receptive. Hackett wrote: "Popular though they [the movies] are, the conservatives are justified in contemning[sic] them. Incapable of assimilation, they are, for the most part, mental chewing gum."<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, he goes on to state that the conservatives are mistaken in that "they fail to appreciate the illimitable artistic, the illimitable social, possibilities of the moving picture." Bourne also saw virtue in the popularity of movies but bemoaned their lack of artistry. "As a would-be democrat," he wrote, "I would like to believe passionately in the movies."<sup>33</sup> Though disappointed in their content, however, he still somehow admired the overwhelming force of their lowbrow appeal. "I feel even a certain unholy glee," he admitted, "at this wholesale rejection of what our fathers revered as culture." Still he concluded that "the stale culture of the masses" and "the stale culture of the aristocrat" ought both to be resisted.

Despite the reservations of Hackett and Bourne, The New Republic went on to publish articles on the movies that were increasingly positive in tone. In September 1915 Harold Stearns wrote favorably about the technical aspects of The Birth of a Nation (carefully avoiding any consideration of content) in an article entitled "Art in Moving Pictures."<sup>34</sup> By the end of 1915, Vachel Lindsay, a former student of Robert Henri who made his reputation as a "New Poet" in the 1910s, had published his treatise entitled The Art of the Moving Picture, and Hackett had written an enthusiastic review.<sup>35</sup> Lindsay, as Hackett saw it, had "undertaken the fundamental brainwork necessary to an understanding of the moving picture art"; he had "articulated a theory of beauty" that "[took] first place as an interpretation of the greatest popular aesthetic phenomenon in the world." In early 1917, Lindsay began to contribute movie reviews to The New Republic, and he continued to do so until the middle of the year. His first contribution, a review of The Wharf Rat,

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<sup>32</sup> Francis Hackett, "The Movies," New Republic, 1 May 1915, 329.

<sup>33</sup> Randolph Bourne, "The Heart of the People," New Republic, 3 July 1915, 233.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Stearns, "Art in Moving Pictures," New Republic, 25 September 1915, 207.

<sup>35</sup> Francis Hackett, "A Poet at the Movies," review of The Art of the Moving Picture, by Vachel Lindsay, New Republic, 25 December 1915, 201-2. Lindsay studied with Henri at the New York School of Art from 1903 to 1908 after spending several years as a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. For discussion of his lifelong interest in and involvement with the visual arts, see Ann Massa, "Picture and Symbol," chap. in Vachel Lindsay: Fieldworker for the American Dream (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).

appeared January 13, 1917 and opened as follows: "Let all those who put themselves above the twenty-five thousand film theatres in America, who, when they would disport, go to grand opera, or read the Atlantic Monthly--let all such children of enlightenment give attention. Let us take the tin horn in hand to toot the glories of a movie."<sup>36</sup>

The New Republic's editors and contributors found nothing inherently wrong with popular culture, only that its forms were poorly developed. As Hackett observed, the trouble with musical comedy was not the form itself but the course of its development.<sup>37</sup> Insofar as popular entertainment forms such as musical comedy and motion pictures were judged to have "higher" potential, they were worthy of consideration by critics such as Hackett and Stearns. This attitude held especially with regard to the motion picture form, which was new and invited speculation. Several of the critics associated with The New Republic--Vachel Lindsay most notably--believed that the form would prove not only democratic but also worthy to be considered an "art."

The little magazine The Seven Arts, which first appeared in November 1916, was, like The New Republic, committed to fostering a national cultural agenda. The Seven Arts, however, was far more eclectic than The New Republic; it published poetry (including poetry in translation) and fiction, book, theater, music and art reviews, as well as the criticism of Brooks and Bourne. The Seven Arts published Marsden Hartley's essay entitled "The Twilight of the Acrobat" in its third issue (January 1917), but vaudeville and popular theater in general were not reviewed. The movies, on the other hand, had a regular reviewer, Kenneth Macgowan, who enthusiastically embraced "screen art."

Macgowan's initial article, which appeared in the magazine's second issue, was not a review but rather a frank declaration of the author's joyful feeling for the art of the screen. The movies captured his imagination despite their flaws, Macgowan explained, so that he found "satisfaction in the humblest of movie art."<sup>38</sup> "And," he asserted, "this is the truth for an amazingly wide audience," including "poets, professors, high-brows and uplifters,

<sup>36</sup> Vachel Lindsay, "The Movies," New Republic, 13 January 1917, 302.

<sup>37</sup> Francis Hackett, "The Trouble with Musical Comedy," New Republic, 16 June 1917, 181.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Macgowan, "Beyond the Screen," Seven Arts 1 (December 1916): 166.

the aristocrats as well as the democrats of art.” Macgowan contributed but three more articles on the movies to The Seven Arts before the magazine’s demise in late 1917. By mid-1917, however, the editors of The Seven Arts had apparently come to accept that the movies were more-or-less equivalent in value to the literary, musical, theatrical and plastic arts. Beginning in July 1917, Macgowan’s reviews of current films began to be included in “The Seven Arts Chronicle,” a section intended to survey what was noteworthy in the contemporary arts.

The Soil was a unique and rather successful though short-lived little magazine that, like The Seven Arts, which made its initial appearance just one month earlier, expressed an idealistic yearning for cultural renewal in America. Robert Coady, art editor of The Soil, was, in a sense, more of a visionary than other cultural critics of the day. Independent and farsighted, he championed the notion of an indigenous American art rooted in American popular culture.<sup>39</sup>

Coady, who was an artist and a gallery director in the 1910s, was much closer to the contemporary plastic arts than were most other critics who broadly addressed national cultural issues during the decade, and he influenced the artistic avant-garde in New York through his gallery activities as well as The Soil. In the spring of 1914 he opened his first commercial gallery on Washington Square South in partnership with Michael Brenner, a fellow artist with whom he had been friendly for several years. The Washington Square Gallery showed mostly modern European art and carvings from Africa, plus some ancient art and other non-Western examples. After the gallery relocated to 489 Fifth Avenue in 1917, Coady expanded his exhibition program even further by mounting a large selection of paintings and drawings by African-American children. Coady’s gallery activities

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<sup>39</sup> Relatively little has been written about Coady, though Judith Zilczer claims he deserves recognition equal to that of Stieglitz, Arthur B. Davies and Walter Arensberg for his pioneering role as a champion of modern art, primitive art and popular culture in the United States. See Zilczer, “Robert J. Coady, Forgotten Spokesman for Avant-Garde Culture in America,” American Art Review 2 (September-October 1975): 77-89; and, by the same author, “Robert J. Coady, Man of The Soil,” in New York Dada, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), 31-43. Dickran Tashjian has also given substantial attention to Coady in Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910-1925 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975): 71-84 especially. However, Zilczer gives a far more thorough and reliable account of Coady’s career.

attracted the attention of a number of individuals who exerted their own influence in other segments of the art world; among them were the prominent art collector John Quinn, the art critic Henry McBride, and the celebrated hostess of the avant-garde Mabel Dodge. By the time The Soil was conceived in 1916 Coady had a small but significant following receptive to his innovative exhibitions and his fresh and original ideas. Henry McBride, for one, found the magazine delightful. In a review of the first issue, he called it “nothing less than an answer to a prayer,” “a great light,” “the most perfect art journal [he had] ever seen.”<sup>40</sup> McBride observed that The Soil was devoted to “real art, the art of the present and future.” “The Soil is ours,” he wrote. “It is American.” Something will come out of it, he assured his readers, “mark my words.” Henri Pierre Roché, co-creator with Marcel Duchamp and Beatrice Wood of another little magazine, The Blind Man, had a similar reaction. In the lead article he wrote for the first number of The Blind Man, Roché stated that “every American who wishes to be aware of America should read ‘The Soil.’”<sup>41</sup> Others were less enthusiastic but took note nonetheless.<sup>42</sup> At the height of its “popularity,” The Soil sold 5000 copies,<sup>43</sup> substantial for any little magazine.

“There is an American Art,” Coady announced in the first issue of The Soil: “Young, robust, energetic, naive, immature, daring and big-spirited. Active in every conceivable field.”<sup>44</sup> Some of the elements of American life Coady believed to be germane to this American art were the Panama Canal, the skyscraper, the steam-shovel, the steel plants and the bridges; Indian beadwork; Jack Johnson, Charlie Chaplin, Rag-time, syncopation and the Cake-walk; the cigar-store Indians; the motor boat and the automobile; the clowns, the jugglers, the bareback and the rough riders; Coney Island, the shooting galleries, Steeplechase Park and the beaches; Krazy Kat and Nick Carter. At the same time, he recognized the equivalent value of “Sculptures, Decorations, Music and Dances,” Mount

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<sup>40</sup> Henry McBride, “News and Comment in the World of Art,” New York Sun, 17 December 1916, sec. 5, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Henri Pierre Roché, “The Blind Man,” Blind Man no. 1 (10 April 1917): 6.

<sup>42</sup> George Soule, for example, found The Soil “rebellious and as yet irrelevant.” See Soule, “Irrelevant Art,” 374.

<sup>43</sup> Gorham H. Munson, “The Skyscraper Primitives,” Guardian 1 (March 1925): 164.

<sup>44</sup> Robert J. Coady, “American Art,” Soil 1 (December 1916): 3-4.

Washington Church and the Church of All Souls, Whitman, Poe, Howells and Gertrude Stein. Coady was, perhaps, the only proponent of American culture in the 1910s to envision the practical synthesis of “high” and “low” impulses in contemporary American art, something Van Wyck Brooks himself, given his particular background and formation, could never fully accept. In a 1925 tribute to Coady, Gorham Munson wrote,

Van Wyck Brooks said that highbrow and lowbrow divided American life between them, and left no common middle ground of usable experience. Coady apparently did not believe in that thesis. . . . [Rather,] Coady was alert in perceiving the creative by-products of an essentially acquisitive drive, and he knew that the qualities of life contained in these by-products constituted the first plane of usable experience common to all Americans.<sup>45</sup>

Intensely nationalistic and remarkably socially progressive for his time, Coady championed a new American art that was inclusive of all that was vital and meaningful in American life.

The Soil reflected Coady’s eclecticism in that it published everything from reproductions of South Sea Island sculpture and Egyptian painting to interviews with popular entertainers, the poetry of Wallace Stevens to dime novel fiction, the modernist prose of Gertrude Stein to profiles of American prize-fighters. Robert Alden Sanborn, who wrote most of the boxing stories that appeared in The Soil, observed, in a memorial tribute to Coady, that “it was to the play-spirit, the humor and sport of the American people, rather than to the attenuated and diluted imitations of continental schools of art” that Coady looked for “suggestive cultural factors” awaiting the “developing hand” of the American artist.<sup>46</sup> Coady himself apparently never felt torn between highbrow and lowbrow interests. American culture, as he saw it, could incorporate almost any addition, from the formal lessons of Cézanne to the personality of Bert Williams. Coady did not reject the “highbrow” in favor of the “lowbrow”; however, he was clearly aware of being perceived in some quarters as a “lowbrow” insurgent. Occasionally, he even implied that “highbrows” were working against him. For example, in a note to his readers that

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<sup>45</sup> Munson, “The Skyscraper Primitives,” 166.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Alden Sanborn, “A Champion in the Wilderness,” Broom 3 (October 1922): 176.

appeared in the third issue of The Soil, he suggested that someone dedicated to “the uplift of human taste and refinement” was spreading a false rumor about his magazine.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the cultural critics of the 1910s not only recognized the existence of competing highbrow and lowbrow factions in contemporary American culture but found both sides demanded attention. For some of these critics the situation was galling. Bourne, for example, spoke of “lowbrow snobbery” in one instance; in another, he, or a like-minded colleague of his, alluded to lowbrow-ism as a “modern cult.”<sup>48</sup> Several of Bourne’s colleagues on The New Republic and The Seven Arts as well as Robert Coady could—by 1917, at least—agree about one thing: the artistic value of motion pictures. “It is time it were generally recognized that the aim of the motion picture is in the main one with that of the other arts, namely, an aesthetic one,” Coady wrote in late 1916.<sup>49</sup> Drawing motion picture art into the critical discourse on American culture was the joint achievement of the disparate members of this vanguard group.

#### Popular Entertainments Viewed as Art

As new perspectives on American culture evolved in the 1910s, so did attitudes toward popular entertainment forms that had developed and matured since the previous decade. Though vaudeville was taken seriously by some intellectuals before 1910, none, it seems, were inclined to view this entertainment form as Art in the elevated sense. Rather, such proponents of vaudeville tended to admire the “lowly” qualities of the medium and to celebrate it as an alternative to supposedly more edifying diversions. Motion pictures remained, to a significant extent, a component of vaudeville during this time. However, after the Nickelodeon craze of around 1905 the movies were increasingly seen as an independent phenomenon and thus were treated to separate scrutiny. While critics of a

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<sup>47</sup> “To Our Readers,” Soil 1 (March 1917): 101.

<sup>48</sup> Randolph Bourne, “The Heart of the People,” 233; “The Professional Lowbrow,” 248.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Coady, “Censoring the Motion Picture,” Soil 1 (December 1916): 38.

reformist bent advocated higher standards of movie-making in order to effect a positive improvement in the moral constitution of the movie-going masses, the industry itself, for reasons of its own, mobilized to produce more attractive, higher quality films. The heyday of vaudeville occurred in the 1910s, as did the apotheosis of the American silent film.<sup>50</sup> With these developments there occurred a dramatic shift in the perception of these popular entertainments: by the mid-1910s a number of critics were prepared to admit that vaudeville and motion pictures might be viewed, at least potentially, as legitimate forms of art.

William Dean Howells, one of vaudeville's most distinguished patrons in the early 1900s, found much to praise in continuous variety performance. In his regular "Editor's Easy Chair" column in Harper's Monthly he wrote in 1903, "I am an inveterate vaudeville-goer, for the simple reason that I find better acting in vaudeville, and better drama, on the whole, than you ever get, or you generally get, on your legitimate stage."<sup>51</sup> He further contrasts vaudeville and the legitimate stage in a later passage: "the influence of the vaudeville has on the whole been so elevating and refining," he contends, "that its audiences cannot stand either the impurity or the imbecility of the fashionable drama."<sup>52</sup> Worse still, he maintains, "the fine intellectual superiority of the continuous performance is beginning to suffer contamination" from 'playlets' derived from the legitimate drama and added to the variety bill. Howells apparently admired the stunts performed in vaudeville--the "cornet solo on a revolver," for example--more than anything else. Therefore, his allusions to the elevation, refinement, and intellectual superiority of vaudeville can hardly be taken seriously. It appears, rather, that Howells appreciated vaudeville precisely because it eschewed these qualities. His position seems clear by the end of the article: to elevate vaudeville would be to destroy it.

<sup>50</sup> Sklar, Movie-Made America, 46-47. According to Sklar, "World War I completed the process of making American motion pictures a giant business." Before the war, French and Italian films had been considered superior; however, with the outbreak of war both France and Italy were forced to curtail film production drastically (as were England and Germany). As a result, American motion-picture exports increased almost fivefold between 1915 and 1916. By the end of the war, the U. S. was said to produce some 85% of films shown abroad and 98% of those shown domestically.

<sup>51</sup> William Dean Howells, "On Vaudeville," Harper's Monthly 106 (April 1903); reprinted in American Vaudeville as Seen by Its Contemporaries, ed. Charles W. Stein (New York: Knopf, 1984), 70.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 75 (emphasis added).

While Howells may be allowed to represent the older literary realist's perspective on vaudeville at the turn of the century, Hutchins Hapgood may be allowed to represent the perspective of the younger Bohemian at the turning point of around 1910. In his book Types from City Streets, which was published in 1910 and includes illustrations by Glenn O. Coleman, Hapgood presents himself as an "intellectual and aesthetic adventurer" with a taste for what is commonly called 'low' life. The stories he presents are meant to highlight the charm of the "'ordinary' person—careless, human, open, democratic."<sup>53</sup> Vaudeville is one of the principal diversions of the "ordinary person" posited in Hapgood's text, which includes descriptions not only of Bowery 'bums,' ex-thieves, Tammany men and 'Spieler' girls, but of Bohemians and artists as well.

As did Howells, Hapgood recognizes in vaudeville the will of the people, the principle of democracy in action. If the "average man" is bored at a vaudeville performance, Hapgood asserts, he protests vigorously:

There is no shadowy art tradition to induce him to wait for a climax, as he will weakly do whenever he enters a regular theater. There is no reason why he need split his head with an effort to decide whether what he sees is elevating, intelligent, or reposing on intellectual or artistic principles. In the popular music-halls he [the 'average man'] will defer to no authority.<sup>54</sup>

Vaudeville, Hapgood continues, is "mixed" ("and here we have the sense in which it is vulgar"), it "puts together what does not fit," and therefore lacks finish and refinement. However, to dismiss vaudeville as vulgar and unrefined, he suggests, would be a mistake. Vaudeville "can be treated [as an art], to be sure," he maintains, "but its significance is human, not artistic":

To speak of it generally as something 'low' points to the inessential refinement which is liable to lead to a disagreeable 'superior' cant about art. The charm of vaudeville lies in its health and naturalness, the result of being determined by that healthy aristocrat, the common man. Only the 'real thing' is represented, and

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<sup>53</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, Types from City Streets (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1910): 9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

consequently the average man and the philosopher find in the vaudeville stage their common account.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike Howells, Hapgood pointedly addresses the status of vaudeville as “an art.” Moreover, his argument suggests that the term art itself is an unstable signifier in a field of shifting cultural values. In short, Hapgood’s appraisal of vaudeville, unlike that of Howell’s, is informed by a certain awareness of the dialectic of ‘high’ and ‘low’ elements in contemporary American culture.

Hapgood questions the ‘low’ estimate of vaudeville and, at the same time, characterizes as ‘disagreeable’ an elevated or ‘superior’ attitude with respect to art. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, he recognizes the simplicity and naturalness of vaudeville to appeal equally to the sophisticated taste of the ‘philosopher’ and the common instincts of the ‘average man.’ Elsewhere in Types from City Streets, Hapgood states that “when a man has climbed as high as he can get . . . or when he has not climbed at all, he understands the desirability of simple, social life, and he then sympathizes with, or shares, the pleasures of the common laborer . . . .”<sup>56</sup> Even so, ‘high’ and ‘low’ remain valid social distinctions for Hapgood, who goes on to suggest the desirability of a “better sifted” society with “more definite [social] classes.” Despite this social “sifting” that Hapgood envisions, the highest class will maintain a definite affinity with the lowest “because of the similarity in taste existing between the two social extremes.”

In the 1910s vaudeville continued to garner the attention of outside observers fascinated with its popularity and also inspired, to some degree, by its artistic potential. One of these observers was Caroline Caffin (wife of the art critic and Stieglitz circle member Charles H. Caffin), who, in 1914, published a book on vaudeville with illustrations by Marius de Zayas. Caffin, it appears, accepted vaudeville to be a fact of contemporary life. In the conclusion of her text she states, “We cannot escape from its influence. The echoes of its songs are in our streets, our homes, our ballrooms, we hear them at our parades and public ceremonies . . . .”<sup>57</sup> However, as much as she appreciated

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>57</sup> Caroline Caffin, Vaudeville (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), 227.

vaudeville, she was still somewhat reserved in her praise. For example, she indicates in her text that she is quite taken with “living pictures,” an act involving stereopticon projection on the body of a model dressed in white. The stunt is “very ingenious,” she allows, and “sometimes beautiful” as currently performed; nonetheless, she hopes it may achieve “a higher degree of artistic merit” with further development.<sup>58</sup> A similarly reserved critical stance was adopted by Constance Rourke in 1919. In a article appearing in The New Republic, Rourke admitted that “vaudeville can and sometimes does make a broad and vivid pattern of fun and grace and dexterity; and the lightness, color, and surprise which it approximates have their own character and even an artistic integrity.”<sup>59</sup> Rourke, like Caffin, was not lavish in her praise of vaudeville but did suggest that it had potential.

Apparently, the issue of vaudeville’s artistic status was not finally resolved until the early 1920s. In 1922 the most forthright declaration ever of vaudeville’s legitimacy as an art form was made by Mary Cass Canfield in an article appearing, once again, in The New Republic. In the first paragraph of her piece, Canfield poses the question of “what, if any, is the great American art?”<sup>60</sup> Many paragraphs later, she concludes that

the only American art, the escape of everyman, discouraged by bleakness, worn by rush and machinery, into the blue of enchantment and rhythm and laughter, the art with Dionysian frenzy in it, the valid, the great American art, so far, is to be found on a blazing stage, full of shapes acrobatically dancing to the exact beat of drums and the seductively insincere moan of saxophones.<sup>61</sup>

In short, according to Canfield, vaudeville was “the great American art.” This extravagant claim may have been tenable for the moment, but it could not be supported for long.

Within two years, Gilbert Seldes had established for posterity the limits of vaudeville’s legitimacy and the precise nature of its “art.” Seldes, like Howells and Hapgood before him, abhorred any attempt to elevate vaudeville. In The Seven Lively Arts, he observes that “about every ten years the corrupt desire to be refined takes hold of vaudeville,” but

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>59</sup> Constance M. Rourke, “Vaudeville,” New Republic, 27 August 1919, 115.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Cass Canfield, “The Great American Art,” New Republic, 22 November 1922, 334.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 335.

fortunately, “it dies out quickly and vaudeville remains simple and good.”<sup>62</sup> In his appraisal of vaudeville, Seldes does not attempt to compare it with anything else; he simply accepts it for what it is and what it is not. Seldes recognizes a clear distinction between the major and minor arts and plainly identifies vaudeville with the latter group.<sup>63</sup> It is, he suggests, a significant component of American experience and an important element of contemporary culture. Nonetheless, for Seldes and for critics that follow, it is strictly within the “minor” ranks of the folk and popular arts that vaudeville finds its distinction.

The majority of vaudeville’s fans within the intellectual community appreciated its ‘lowly’ virtues and applauded its democratic appeal. These critics seemed to recognize that vaudeville excelled on its own terms. Therefore, it was useless, even absurd, to evaluate it according to traditional standards of art. Motion pictures, however, were perceived somewhat differently. The motion picture was a sensational novelty and a technological marvel. Unlike vaudeville, it was a completely modern invention, a youthful, unformed medium with a promising, though uncertain, future. Moreover, motion picture technology was highly flexible; it could be used to reproduce exotic locales, newsworthy events, and vaudeville stunts, as well as legitimate drama. Because of these conditions, there was much speculation about the eventual fate of the medium among critics in the 1910s, many of whom hoped to see it emerge as a full-fledged legitimate art form.

One of the first critics in the U. S. to recognize the artistic potential of the motion picture was Sadakichi Hartmann, who contributed frequently to Stieglitz’s Camera Work in the 1910s. As Camera Work existed primarily to promote photography as a fine art, it was perhaps inevitable, given the natural association of photography and moving pictures, that there would be some interest in the artistic potential of the latter among its contributors.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Gilbert Seldes, The Seven Lively Arts (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924), 250.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 250. Vaudeville, Seldes states, is “the most immediate of the minor arts.”

<sup>64</sup> As early as 1909, there appeared in a New York Times review of D. W. Griffith’s version of Browning’s “Pippa Passes” (released in October 1909) a favorable comparison of the film’s photographic effects to those achieved by the Secessionist photographers. See Russell Lynes, The Lively Audience: A Social History of the Visual and Performing Arts in America, 1890-1950 (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 258.

In most of Hartmann's writings--as in most of Camera Work--the category of art is treated as a narrowly exclusive domain. Hartmann asserts in a review published in 1910, for example, that art is a commodity produced "by the few for the few" and that its enjoyment "demands superior sensibilities."<sup>65</sup> Hartmann, at this time, completely rejects the notion of democracy in art, calling it "the most illogical formula of reformatory ideals." Therefore, when he does recognize the "esthetic significance" of the motion picture a few years later, he appears to downplay (without ignoring completely) the virtue of its popular appeal.

By 1912 Hartmann recognizes the motion picture to be "something that touches the pulse-beat of time . . . that interests a large number of people and in a way reflects their crude esthetic taste."<sup>66</sup> He himself, unlike other "cultivated people," admits that he does take the movies "seriously" and does discern in them some "trace of art." Hartmann sees the motion picture medium as primarily a visual art and thus responds most favorably to its vivid moving effects, such as those produced by a galloping horse, fluttering hair and clothing, rushing water, etc.; he is not interested at all in the narrative aspect of the medium. "As long as dramatic action, story telling or records of events will constitute the principal aim," he asserts, "it will remain imitative of the stage. Only when poetic and pictorial expression become the main object will it develop in esthetic lines."<sup>67</sup> Films will only become more aesthetic, he suggests, when produced by capable artists in full command of "the laws of composition, color and chiaroscuro" essential to painting. The result he envisions would be "like a series of paintings, one perfect picture after the other, linked together by action." Such an art, he claims, would not only equal painting in beauty, but surpass it in "intricacy" and in relevance to contemporary life.

Hartmann's published article appeared several years before a groundswell of enthusiasm for the potential art of the moving picture. By the mid-1910s there were numerous advocates of motion picture art in various related disciplines, all anxious to

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<sup>65</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "That Toulouse-Lautrec Print!" Camera Work 29 (January 1910): 36-38.

<sup>66</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "The Esthetic Significance of the Motion Picture," Camera Work 38 (April 1912): 19.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

accord “fine art” status to the nascent medium.<sup>68</sup> Recognition by the art community of the importance of the new medium was signaled by the presentation of moving pictures in conjunction with the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in the spring of 1917. Robert Coady was apparently responsible for this adjunct to the exhibition. According to Steven Watson, he showed two films, A Daughter of the Gods and The Honor System.<sup>69</sup> The former—a vehicle for Annette Kellerman, the champion swimmer turned popular performer—was initially released in 1916. A Daughter of the Gods, according to a review in Variety, was a “‘million dollar’ film production” that consisted of 9 to 10 reels of the 200,000 feet alleged to have been taken by the director.<sup>70</sup> (A film of so many reels would run close to two hours.) From the standpoint of production, A Daughter of the Gods was, according to this review, “without question one of the most stupendous exhibitions of pageantry ever shown.” It had thousands of extras, “huge battle scenes, beautiful mermaids, wonderfully effective waterfalls, gnomes, nymphs” and more to “fairly spellbound” its audience. The Honor System, on the other hand, was a serious drama, “a fine photoplay” and “one of the season’s film super-masterpieces,” according to contemporary reviews. The film was based on a true story of the recent fight for prison reform in the state of Arizona and was filmed on location at Arizona State Prison. The Honor System, according to one reviewer, does the world “great service in exposing prison abuse” and at the same time “stands shoulder to shoulder with” The Birth of a Nation and Intolerance. Like A Daughter of the Gods, The Honor System was an unusually long film that took “two full hours to exhibit.”<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, the prominent drama critic George Jean Nathan maintained that any improvement in motion pictures would be useless in elevating the medium “even one-

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Henry A. Phillips, The Photodrama (Larchmont, N. Y.: Stanhope-Dodge Publishing Co., 1914); W. M. Hannon, The Photodrama: Its place Among the Fine Arts (New Orleans: Ruskin Press, 1915); and Vachel Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture (New York: Macmillan Co., 1915).

<sup>69</sup> Steven Watson, Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 316.

<sup>70</sup> Review of A Daughter of the Gods (1916), produced by William Fox, Variety, 20 October 1916; reprinted in Variety Film Reviews, vol. 1 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983), n. pag.

<sup>71</sup> Miscellaneous reviews of The Honor System (1917), produced by William Fox and directed by Raoul A. Walsh, clippings in The Robinson Locke Collection of Dramatic Scrapbooks, ser. 2, vol. 66, pp. 204, 208, 210, BRTC.

six hundredth of a peg up the ladder of even a pseudo-art."<sup>72</sup> But even Nathan found something to praise in motion pictures. A well-made slapstick comedy--for example, a Chaplin film--was, he had to admit, "a perfectly sound and estimable work." Nathan expressed positive regard for the work of Chaplin, as did many discriminating critics of the period. Some, however, went much further than he did in extolling Chaplin's work. There were those, in fact, who saw Chaplin's individual creative achievement as "artistic" in the finest sense and pinned their hopes for the art of the film on his example.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> George Jean Nathan, The Popular Theatre (New York: Knopf, 1918), 128-29.

<sup>73</sup> See Minnie Maddern Fiske, "The Art of Charles Chaplin," Harper's Weekly, 6 May 1916, 494; Harvey O'Higgins, "Charlie Chaplin's Art," New Republic, 3 February 1917, 16-18; and Elie Faure, The Art of Cineplastics, trans. Walter Pach (Boston: Four Seas Co., 1923), 46-63.

## **6. The Popular Entertainment Subject and Sensibility in Art Objects and Performance, Circa 1913-1920**

### The Subjects of American Modernism

For the realists, subject matter was of paramount importance, for the forceful novelty of their work resided in the subjects they depicted. In contrast, Man Ray, while absorbed in the possibilities of modern abstraction in the mid-1910s, dismissed the role of subject matter altogether (see p. 184). Nonetheless, a number of his works of the latter part of the decade have distinctive subjects with specific relevance to contemporary urban phenomena. In many ways, American modernism, as it evolved, sustained and augmented an iconography of urban subject matter that had existed since the turn of the century. Wanda Corn advanced this view in her pioneering article of 1973, "The New New York," in which she argued that "all the important elements" of the "modern New York iconography" present in the abstract urban imagery of the 1910s were first given expression in the previous decade. Citing examples of late Impressionist and Tonalist painting as well as realist painting and Secessionist photography, Corn observed that the pre-modernist images appear "timid, sentimental and overly literal when compared to those of the early modernists."<sup>1</sup> Taken together, however, both modernist and pre-modernist

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<sup>1</sup> Corn, "The New New York," 59.

works attest to a developing artistic consciousness of New York's uniqueness and modernity.

One subject that represented New York's and, by extension, America's modernity and uniqueness perhaps better than any other was that of the skyscraper. Regarded with some ambivalence in even advanced artistic circles between 1900 and 1910, the skyscraper became one of the most potent symbols of American modernism to emerge in the following decade.<sup>2</sup> As the 1910s progressed, American artists turned increasingly to architectural and industrial subjects, which found expression not only in painting but also in less traditional forms of art. For instance, around the same time that Joseph Stella began work on a series of paintings representing the Brooklyn Bridge, Man Ray used found objects to render a more tongue-in-cheek tribute to American engineering in his assisted ready-made entitled New York (1917; original now lost). (The latter consists of wooden strips of varying length held together with a carpenter's clamp. When resting on a flat surface, it resembles a leaning skyscraper.) To some degree, modern subjects, like the skyscraper, went hand-in-hand with abstraction in early modern American art. At the same time, however, the depiction of distinctly American subjects served to express a strongly national cultural identity.

The skyscraper may have been the most conspicuous emblem of modernity in American art of the 1910s, but it was not the only subject that served to represent the distinction of American culture. Certain forms of American entertainment also served to represent modernity and to embody a nationalistic spirit. National pride had been associated with American amusements since at least the previous decade. In 1905 one observer remarked that "it would be commonly agreed that the prevalent habit of amusing oneself in public, of dining in restaurants, of doing things for and before the gallery, [is] very largely an outgrowth of American fashions."<sup>3</sup> According to this writer, this "system of amusement in vogue all over the world," if not precisely an American invention, is so widely pursued in the U. S. and closely identified with American customs that "it is

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<sup>2</sup> See Merrill Schleier, The Skyscraper in American Art, 1890-1931 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 41-68.

<sup>3</sup> "The Point of View: Our Amusement Spirit," Scribner's 38 (December 1905): 762.

generally associated with the American name.”

In recognizing the uniqueness, vitality and modernity of certain forms of American entertainment, artists in the U. S. responded, at least in part, to cues from their European colleagues (local pride in the American “amusement spirit” notwithstanding). Francis Picabia, who made his initial appearance in New York in early 1913, was the first European modernist to bring his influence to American soil; and at least one aspect of the example he offered drew attention to American entertainment. Soon after his arrival in New York, Picabia began a series of watercolors. He embarked on this effort partly to record his impressions of New York and partly because he had been asked to do so by the editor of the New York Tribune, who wanted to stage an exhibition that juxtaposed Picabia’s abstract images with more traditional images of New York.<sup>4</sup> Two of the watercolors he produced represented his initial exposure to “an American negro sing[ing] a ‘coon song,’” an experience he had one evening at a restaurant in New York.<sup>5</sup> The ‘coon song’ was a typical sort of vaudeville number. African-American entertainers often performed these songs, which derived from their own vernacular; however, white performers did them as well, possibly in black-face, using appropriate dialect. The ‘coon song’ was an exceedingly popular and highly distinctive element of early twentieth-century American entertainment.

Max Weber had represented popular entertainers in abstract works before 1913, that is, prior to Picabia’s visit (see, for example, Fig. 106). Just after the Armory Show, however, Joseph Stella chose a popular entertainment subject for his first major abstract effort, Battle of Lights, Coney Island (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut), which he completed before the end of the year. This painting was not only Stella’s first thoroughly modern work; he also referred to it as his “very first American subject.”<sup>6</sup> When Battle of Lights was reproduced in The Century magazine in April 1914.

<sup>4</sup> William Camfield, Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 47.

<sup>5</sup> “Mr. Picabia Paints ‘Coon Songs,’” New York Herald, 18 March 1913, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Stella, “Discovery of America: Autobiographical Notes,” Art News 59 (November 1960): 65. It wasn’t until 1918 that Stella “seized the other American theme that inspired in [him] so much admiration,” the first erected Brooklyn bridge (ibid.).

it was described as “an attempt to express the brilliance and the dynamic energy of modern life so evident in America.”<sup>7</sup>

By the late 1910s, Man Ray and Charles Demuth were surely both aware of the specifically “American” connotations of the entertainment subjects they depicted. They did not, however, attach equal importance to fostering in their work a recognizable American identity. Unlike Man Ray, who identified himself more with international modernism, Demuth was, for a time, at least, specifically concerned with national expression in his work.<sup>8</sup> In the 1920s, Demuth expressed his nationalist partisanship through his depictions of the industrial landscape as well as through his poster portraits, which paid homage to contemporary Americans. Through his writing of this period, he also implicitly linked his vaudeville series, inaugurated in the previous decade, with modern American culture. Duchamp, as a European, had a relationship to American culture that naturally differed from that of either Man Ray or Demuth. Though an outsider, he had an unusually avid interest in American culture and a highly optimistic vision of America’s future as a world leader in contemporary art. Above all, Duchamp immersed himself in American popular culture, especially movies and vaudeville. His feminine alter ego Rose Sélavy represents one striking example of how American vaudeville influenced his “work.”

#### “In Vaudeville” Series and Related Works by Charles Demuth

Those who knew Charles Demuth described him as a bon vivant, an aesthete, and a man of distinct, yet eclectic, tastes. In a 1931 article, Rita Wellman, a friend of Demuth’s from his student days at the Pennsylvania Academy, listed “horses, movies (when they contain Charlie Chaplin and Marlene Dietrich), wine, Marcel Duchamp, swans, Diego di

<sup>7</sup> Century 87 (April 1914): color plate following page 852.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Naumann suggests that Demuth was influenced by the nationalist ideas of William Carlos Williams, particularly when he began to address the forms of America’s industrial landscape around 1920. See Naumann, “Charles Demuth,” chap. in New York Dada, 1915-23 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 133. Cf. Corn, “Identity, Modernism, and the American Artist,” 149. Corn notes that when Demuth wrote Stieglitz in 1929 that he was sending him a new painting, I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold (which is, of course, based on a poem by Williams), he described it as “almost American.”

Rivera [sic], Marcel Proust, prize fights [and] Robert Locher” as significant among his preferences.<sup>9</sup> A conspicuous dandy, Demuth apparently struck some as overly fastidious and lacking in “social conscience”: William Carlos Williams, for example, concluded that Demuth “disliked the vulgar” and “had no feeling for the squalid and poor.”<sup>10</sup> Marcel Duchamp, on the other hand, praised Demuth for his incessant curiosity, his lack of pettiness, his sense of humor, and his spirit of fun. It was Demuth who introduced Duchamp to New York night life, and Duchamp later recalled this phase of his experience with considerable fondness: “it was fun to be with Demuth,” he told Emily Farnham in 1956, “because he didn’t care where he belonged or was in the social scale.”<sup>11</sup>

As Marsden Hartley suggests, Demuth was drawn, by virtue of temperament, to the stimulating environment of popular amusements.<sup>12</sup> Demuth, of course, was not alone in this predilection in the 1910s. Hartley himself was, throughout his life, a habitu —one might even say, “student”—of vaudeville and entertainment in general, and though he never painted such subjects, he wrote many essays that paid tribute to performers of all kinds.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, pleasure-seeking was a significant priority of the Greenwich Village crowd with which Demuth associated in the later 1910s. This hunger for pleasure was felt at the time in Provincetown as well, where, according to Hartley, leisure hours were spent in “tiger-like stalkings after amusement.”<sup>14</sup>

Demuth may have begun to record visually his perceptions of the entertainment

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<sup>9</sup> Rita Wellman, “Charles Demuth: Artist,” *Creative Art* 9 (December 1931): 484. Demuth met Robert Locher, also of Lancaster, in 1909, and the two remained friends for life. Locher inherited all of Demuth’s unsold watercolors and eventually (that is, after the death of Demuth’s mother) the Demuth family home.

<sup>10</sup> William Carlos Williams, Reply to Demuth Questionnaire, in Emily Farnham, “Charles Demuth: His Life, Psychology and Works” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, Columbus, 1959), 3:958.

<sup>11</sup> Marcel Duchamp, Interview by Emily Farnham, 21 January 1956, in Farnham, “Charles Demuth,” 3: 974. See also, Marcel Duchamp, “A Tribute to the Artist,” in *Charles Demuth*, by Andrew Camduff Ritchie, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1950), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Marsden Hartley, “Farewell, Charles,” in *The New Caravan*, ed. Alfred Kreymborg (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1936), 557-58.

<sup>13</sup> Hartley wrote tributes to the juggler Enrico Rastelli, Louise Weber (“La Gouloue”—dancer at the Moulin Rouge and favorite subject of Toulouse-Lautrec), Eleanora Duse, George M. Cohan, and a number of other performers. Most of these essays were never published; however, the manuscripts were saved by Hartley’s niece and are now preserved as part of the Berger Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>14</sup> Hartley, “Farewell, Charles,” 557.

world as early as 1907, during his first extended European sojourn. However, only one such depiction has been linked to that period and then with not much certainty (Fig. 81). This watercolor, entitled Revue in Paris (location unknown), bears an inscription on the reverse side by Demuth's legatee Robert Locher that reads, "Paris Music Hall Review/Probably 1907." However, there is evidence that the work more likely dates from 1912-13.<sup>15</sup> Unlike most of Demuth's other watercolors of entertainment subjects, which are based on pencil drawings, this earlier work was apparently executed in watercolor alone. The principal figures--a standing "cave man" and a kneeling semi-nude woman--are outlined in broad general strokes, while background and shadows are executed in fluid wash. In the "Catalogue of Works" included in her 1959 dissertation on Demuth, Farnham lists several extant or believed to be extant watercolors of stage entertainment subjects that are actually dated 1912.<sup>16</sup> There are two that represent a woman and bird act, one a comédienne, and another dancers in a musical comedy. Among these works dated 1912, there is--in The Comédienne, at least--some suggestion of the ultimate style as well as content of Demuth's work of the later 1910s, when his concentration on entertainment subjects was greatest. This work, unlike Revue in Paris, has fine but conspicuous outlining in ink or pencil with watercolor applied over the outlined figures.<sup>17</sup>

By all indications, it seems that Demuth had developed his own independent interest in entertainment subject matter prior to his first encounter with Hartley in Paris in 1913. The camaraderie that developed between the two in Europe would further develop in New York and Provincetown after Hartley's return to the U. S. at the end of 1915; and it appears that this subsequent phase of their relationship may have been more significant than the first in terms of mutual influence. In the meantime, Demuth had another significant encounter

<sup>15</sup> Revue in Paris was deaccessioned by the Hirshhorn Museum in 1987 and sold at auction by Christie's, New York on December 4 of that year. Catalogue entry indicates that notes in the Hirshhorn Museum files suggest a probable date of 1912-13. See Christie's, New York, Sale Catalogue no. 6512, 4 December 1987, 145.

<sup>16</sup> Farnham, "Charles Demuth," 2:413ff.

<sup>17</sup> The Comédienne is illustrated in "Watercolors and Paintings by Charles Demuth, Part Two [Final] of the Collection Belonging to the Estate of the Late Richard W. C. Weyand," Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, Sale no. 1804, 5 February 1958, p. 8. [check if illus.: Woman with Parrots, #43 in P-B auction cat., Oct. 16, 1957]

with a much younger artist who had been pursuing entertainment themes on his own for several years. Demuth met Stuart Davis for the first time in Provincetown during the summer of 1914. Davis has acknowledged the importance this meeting with the older, more sophisticated Demuth had for him; the impact of Davis on Demuth can only be surmised.<sup>18</sup> Davis had been depicting vaudeville and burlesque subjects since around 1910, when he first began attending the Henri School, and more recently had begun to represent the “Negro saloons,” where he went often himself for amusement. The youthful Davis was a habitué of the black “resorts” of Newark, New Jersey, in particular; these were “low dives,” for the most part, but the music was often brilliant. Davis went regularly to hear the ragtime and early jazz performers in these places and often took friends along.<sup>19</sup> It seems unlikely that Demuth would have remained ignorant of Davis’s enthusiasm for black performers after their encounter in 1914. In any case, it is noteworthy that in the first year or two that Demuth began to concentrate on vaudeville and entertainment subjects in general, that is, in 1915-16, he produced several watercolors depicting black entertainers.

Beginning in 1915, Demuth began to divide his time between New York, where his friends were, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where his mother maintained the family home. His concentration on vaudeville and other entertainment subjects begins during this period. Between roughly 1915 and 1920 Demuth executed as many as ninety vaudeville and related circus and cabaret subjects in the medium of watercolor.<sup>20</sup> Demuth’s close friend in Lancaster, Robert Locher, recalled in 1956 that Demuth used to go every week to see vaudeville at the Colonial Theatre, a short distance from his mother’s house.<sup>21</sup> Both Locher and his companion Richard Weyand have maintained that all of Demuth’s vaudeville

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<sup>18</sup> Davis, “Stuart Davis Reminisces,” 70.

<sup>19</sup> Davis once alluded to an outing he made with Demuth to a speak-easy in New York that was apparently a very rough place (though he didn’t say that it was a black establishment). See Davis, Interview by Emily Farnham, 20 January 1956, in Farnham, “Charles Demuth,” 3: 972.

<sup>20</sup> A. E. Gallatin estimates that Demuth produced “some 80 or 90” vaudeville subjects. See Gallatin, *Charles Demuth* (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1927), 5. Farnham, however, only lists about seventy-five extant (location known) and presumed to be extant (location unknown) in her “Catalogue of Works” (“Charles Demuth,” 2:413ff.) which is based on an inventory compiled by Richard Weyand, companion of Demuth’s legatee Robert Locher.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Locher, Interview by Emily Farnham, 5-18 January 1956, in Farnham, “Charles Demuth,” 3:961.

and circus subjects, as well as his illustrations and flower paintings, were done in Lancaster.<sup>22</sup> It is possible, however, that Demuth created finished works in Lancaster from preliminary drawings made in Lancaster and New York.

Demuth's vaudeville and other entertainment subjects are a fascinating group of works in that they reflect simultaneously the general enthusiasm for lively amusements that prevailed in the 1910s and Demuth's own intensely personal, even idiosyncratic, interest in entertainment subjects. As Ritchie observes, Demuth's night-life scenes "hold an endless fascination not only in themselves but as records of a phase of American life . . . ."<sup>23</sup> At some point, Demuth himself must have recognized the significance of his own work as such a "record," for in the text of an unpublished play entitled "You Must Come Over," he acknowledges the vital role of popular entertainment in contemporary American art and life. One of the two characters in the short play wishes to speak for the "state of art" in America but declines to discuss painting. He proposes instead to discuss "American musical shows, revues,--the people who act in them, (--have acted in them), and dance." "They really are our 'stuff,'" he tells his partner, "they are our time . . . ."<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, then, Demuth's corpus of vaudeville and other entertainment subjects may be viewed as at least the partial record of a vital phenomenon in American culture; nonetheless, this record remains a highly idiosyncratic one. In tending to focus narrowly on the figure, in emphasizing androgynous features, and in using conspicuous doublings and reversals, Demuth created a highly subjective record of vaudeville and related entertainments in the 1910s.

In 1915, when Demuth began to concentrate in earnest on entertainment subjects, he embarked on two distinctly different paths. In certain works he tended to evoke the total environment of the subject in a realistic manner, while in others he focused much more

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.* and Richard Weyand, Interview by Emily Farnham, 5-18 January 1956, in Farnham, "Charles Demuth," 3:966.

<sup>23</sup> Ritchie, *Charles Demuth*, 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Demuth, "'You Must Come Over' A Painting: A Play," undated, Ms transcribed (and possibly emended) by Richard Weyand, in Richard Weyand Scrap Book, 1:82-83 (location unknown); text of play included in Farnham, "Charles Demuth," 3:929-31; and published in Barbara Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 41-42. The title of the play was a signature phrase used by the celebrated female impersonator Bert Savoy, to whom Demuth dedicated an oil painting of 1926 entitled *Calla Lilies (Bert Savoy)*. Savoy, a popular vaudeville entertainer, died tragically in 1923.

narrowly on isolated figures and used abstract or generic settings. Demuth's Negro Girl Dancer (also known as Negro Jazz Band) of circa 1916 would represent the first approach: the several performers, in this case, are tightly arranged in the narrow rectangular space of the painting, the four figures overlap one another, and there is tension implied in their angular forms (Fig. 82). Though details of the setting are admittedly minimal, the composition as a whole suggests the close space and the physical intimacy of the environment as well as its highly-charged atmosphere. Though the locale represented in this work cannot be precisely identified, some tentative conclusions may be drawn. It is relatively certain that it is not the celebrated restaurant of the Marshall Hotel on West Fifty-third Street, which Demuth depicted for the first time in 1915 and at least once again thereafter. The Marshall Hotel, according to Jervis Anderson, was predominantly a social and residential center for successful black entertainers, and its restaurant was therefore quite elegant.<sup>25</sup> The setting for Negro Girl Dancing was more likely to have been discovered in Harlem or in Manhattan's midtown tenderloin, where settings were not so elegant. The location might have been Barron Wilkins's café on West Thirty-fifth Street, which was a favorite amusement spot of Demuth's at the time.<sup>26</sup> Demuth depicted at least one scene at Barron Wilkins's place (not Negro Girl Dancing) that Henry McBride was quick to scorn: "How revolting . . . must not have been 'Baron Wilks's' [sic] establishment?" he wonders, for "it has been closed by the police some time since."<sup>27</sup> Not long after the closure that McBride mentions, it seems, Barron Wilkins's moved to Harlem. In the mid-1910s, Harlem was just emerging as the new center of Manhattan's black population, and consequently, "Black Bohemia," which was once contiguous with the midtown Tenderloin, was also relocating uptown. In Harlem, as in the tenderloin, ragtime

<sup>25</sup> Jervis Anderson, This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950 (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982), 30-31. See also, James Weldon Johnson, Black Manhattan (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 118-19.

<sup>26</sup> Duchamp, "A Tribute to the Artist," 17. Duchamp implies in his statement that Barron Wilkins's was located in Harlem in 1915-16; however, this seems not to have been the case.

<sup>27</sup> Henry McBride, "An Underground Search for Higher Moralities," New York Sun, 25 November 1917, sec. 5, 12. Johnson, in Black Manhattan (75), identifies Barron Wilkins's as a "professional club" as opposed to a honky-tonk but also observes that "the border line between the honky-tonks and some of the professional clubs was very thin."

venues were typically modest. The one essential fixture was the piano (with piano player), around which singers, dancers, and other musicians performed.<sup>28</sup>

Another of Demuth's entertainment subjects from 1915 entitled On Stage (Fig. 83) is suggestive of the second, ultimately dominant strategy in his work of this period, that of isolating and focusing almost exclusively on the figure. The two figures that appear in On Stage are not identified with a specific setting. They are character types--an "odd couple"--comedians, perhaps. The image serves to represent one of the characteristic partnerships or pairings of the vaudeville stage and to contrast the distinctive forms of the individual entertainers. Below the hem of the dress of the female performer falls a realistic bit of shadow that serves to establish the plane of the ground. Beyond that, however, the setting is unidentified. The smudge-like passages of wash that surround the figures have little to do with the reality of the stage; rather, Demuth has invented "shadows" that served to set off the principal forms.

It is important to note that in Demuth's vaudeville and related entertainment subjects, his preoccupation with the figure is a constant feature, regardless of his treatment of the setting. For example, in an undated watercolor from around 1917 entitled At Marshall's--or alternately, Negro Dancing (Fig. 84)--Demuth locates the dancer within a specific setting, that of the restaurant of the Marshall Hotel, where, according to Anderson, black performers came "to eat, drink, talk, and try out ideas for their work."<sup>29</sup> It is easy to imagine that, in the midst of the dance craze of the 1910s, new dance steps were often discussed by the patrons of Marshall's. The dancing figure represented in Demuth's work may very possibly have been giving a demonstration. Though, in this case, the dancer is linked with a specific setting, still the form of the individual figure--its looming, angular shape--is the principal focus of the work. Both the curious appearance of the subject and its topicality must have appealed to Demuth. Vigorous, athletic dances were becoming popular in the 1910s, and their vogue was linked directly to black participation in popular culture. As Anderson points out, the moral spokesmen for the African-American

<sup>28</sup> For further description of "Black Bohemia," see Anderson, This Was Harlem, 13-20.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, This Was Harlem, 31.

community were as appalled by this development as was anyone else. Writing in 1914 for Age, then the major black newspaper in New York, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. lamented that “the Negro race [was] dancing itself to death.”<sup>30</sup>

By around 1916 or so, Demuth had begun to develop his watercolors in two separate stages. In the first stage, he worked in line only and, almost certainly, directly from the figure. In the second stage, he produced composed paintings in which figurative motifs were enhanced by color and setting. A comparison of In Vaudeville: Two Acrobats #1 of 1918 and the undated pencil drawing that preceded it is helpful in illustrating this two-stage process (Figs. 85 and 86).<sup>31</sup> In the preliminary drawing, Demuth records the shape of each individual figure and establishes the relationship between the two forms. These elements, which are fixed in the preliminary drawing, are retained with hardly any modification in the final painting which uses color, of course, as well as additional drawing in the detailed stage design created for the figures. Demuth’s stage design is almost sheer invention: its undulating lines serve principally to echo the long, curving lines of the human forms. As a result, the figurative motif remains the focus of the work, and little about the actual theater environment can be deduced from the elaborate background. A preliminary study for Acrobats, 1919 in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York is also extant, and a similar two-stage process may be deduced from these related works as well (Figs. 87 and 88). There is additional corroborating evidence in that Demuth occasionally produced multiple “variations” on the figurative themes established in his preliminary drawings. In one instance, he appears to have made three or more different versions of a subject based on a single figural composition. The rather curious motif of two female acrobats, one holding the other aloft, first appears in 1916 in a work executed in watercolor, gouache and pencil (Fig. 89). Though Demuth employs color in this work, he has yet to develop the background. In two subsequent works, Tumblers of 1917 (Fig. 90) and In Vaudeville: Acrobats of 1918 (Fig. 91), the same configuration of female figures

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> The pencil drawing bears an inscription on back by Robert Locher that indicates a date of 1916; Alvord Eiseman, however, assumes the drawing was produced in 1918, the same year Demuth created the related watercolor. See Betsy Fahlman, Pennsylvania Modern: Charles Demuth of Lancaster, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983), 31.

is employed again, but in each case the setting is developed differently. The combined evidence of preliminary figure studies and multiple “variations” of figural themes serves strongly to support the argument that Demuth was not terribly interested in representing his vaudeville subjects in their appropriate “context”; he was far more interested in the fascinating display of human figures, the intriguing formal qualities of which he sought, above all, to portray.

Demuth’s extensive vaudeville series includes images of diverse performers, including musicians, dancers, and comedians, as well as acrobats; however, acrobats appear more often than any other type. In 1916, for example, when the acrobatic figure emerges as a principal theme in Demuth’s work, half or more of the artist’s vaudeville watercolors are devoted to the subject. Demuth’s special interest in the acrobat was almost certainly linked in some way to Hartley’s own concurrent interest in these picturesque performers. Demuth and Hartley spent a great deal of time together in 1916. Having just returned from Europe, Hartley spent most of the early part of the year in New York City; Demuth also resided in New York during this period, having rented a studio on Washington Square. In the summer of 1916 the two were both in Provincetown and remained there together as house mates until the mid-fall. Sometime during the year, very likely early on, Hartley wrote an essay entitled “The Twilight of the Acrobat,” of which Demuth was almost certainly aware. In this essay, which was first published in early 1917, Hartley laments what he perceives to be the diminished role of the acrobat in American light entertainment.<sup>32</sup> “I suspect the so-called politeness of vaudeville,” he writes, “of the elimination of our once revered acrobats. The circus notion has been replaced by the parlor entertainment notion. Who shall revive them for us, who admire their simple and unpretentious art [?].”<sup>33</sup> In a later article on vaudeville written after his sojourn in the American Southwest in the late 1910s, Hartley reasserts his admiration for the acrobat. “I return with glee,” he writes, “to the ladies and gentlemen and pet animals of the stage, including the acrobats. Is there one who cares for these artists and for their rhythmical

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<sup>32</sup> Marsden Hartley, “The Twilight of the Acrobat,” *Seven Arts* 1 (January 1917); reprinted in Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, 155-61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

gesture more than myself? I cannot think so.”<sup>34</sup> Acrobatic performers were, as Hartley suggests, closely identified with the circus; however, they appeared in vaudeville as well as part of the sequence of attractions that made up the variety bill. Demuth discovered some of his acrobatic subjects at the circus, for example, those depicted in Circus of 1917 (Fig. 92), but most he found in vaudeville.

Demuth almost always represents his acrobats in pairs. This occurs, for example, in one of his earliest treatments of the subject, Acrobats of 1916 (Fig. 93). In this early instance, the background is not elaborated. This image of two male figures artfully arranged against a plain background appears, once again, to reflect Demuth’s formal preoccupations. Hartley, too, appreciated the “remarkably devised patterns of body” that acrobats and other performers created upon the stage. Further, he advocated maximizing the visual effect of artfully arranged figures through the provision of “large plain spaces” for acrobatic and other performances.<sup>35</sup>

Demuth tended to represent not only his acrobats in pairs, but other performers as well. Male-female pairings occur occasionally, as in On Stage and in Soldier and His Girlfriend of 1915 (Fig. 94); however, same-sex pairings are far more frequent. Moreover, when two performers of the same sex are depicted in Demuth’s work, the pairing is often more suggestive of the doubling of one than the partnership of two unique entities. This phenomenon is especially striking in a 1916 watercolor entitled “Many Brave Hearts are Asleep in the Deep”, in which two identically-clad male performers stand side-by-side, similarly posed, facing the audience (Fig. 95). Certainly, Demuth did not simply fantasize such distinctive pairings. Identical pairs may have been, to some extent, promoted by vaudeville managers to satisfy the public demand for attractions quaint, novel, and curious. In publicity photographs produced in the 1910s, for example, the Dolly Sisters, who had one of the most successful acts in vaudeville (and were, in fact, identical twins), appear in identical costumes and poses (Fig. 96). Whether this doubling effect was common or rare in vaudeville is difficult to determine. In any case, Demuth seems, either

<sup>34</sup> Marsden Hartley, “Vaudeville,” Dial 68 (March 1920); reprinted in Hartley, Adventures in the Arts, 162.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-63.

consciously or unconsciously, to have used such doubling as both a pictorial strategy and a vehicle for subjective expression.<sup>36</sup>

Where Demuth links the doubling strategy with a conspicuous mirror-like reversal or inversion of figures, the effect appears at once highly artificial and greatly over-determined in the psychological sense.<sup>37</sup> In composing the two figures in In Vaudeville: Two Acrobats #1, for example, Demuth's effort appears to have extended well beyond a mere interest in "remarkably devised patterns of body." The two identically-dressed performers are arranged in a way that seems contrived almost as if to represent a visual metaphor of "inversion," for inevitably, one reads the upside-down figure as an inversion of the other (or vice-versa). It is hardly irrelevant that homosexuality was commonly referred to as sexual "inversion" in the early twentieth century. Whether or not Demuth sought purposely to develop such a visual pun, it does not appear that this type of "inversion" was a consistent ploy in his figural compositions. Yet it is also suggested to a degree in his treatment of a particular cycling stunt--as in Acrobats of 1919--where one figure is seated on the bicycle and the other performs a handstand on the handlebars (Fig. 87). Another watercolor in Demuth's vaudeville series--his Dancers of 1918--incorporates another sort of reversal altogether (Fig. 97). Instead of opposing his two figures like the twin images on a face card--that is, from top to bottom--in this case, Demuth creates a somewhat more elegant opposition of dancing figures placed side-by-side. The two men depicted in this work seem to be performing a circle dance: one animated figure faces outward and the other faces inward, and similar movements are implied. Here the two figures are differently attired, but their identities fuse nonetheless. Not only do their shapes

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<sup>36</sup> Demuth's entire oeuvre demands thoroughgoing analysis by scholars well-versed in psychoanalytic theory and theories of homosexual identity. Farnham did attempt to initiate this sort of discussion in her 1959 dissertation (see "Charles Demuth," 1:227ff). Using Freudian theory as a guide, she sought to interpret a number of the unusual aspects of Demuth's handling of the figure, including his tendency to reverse or "invert" forms and his apparent fascination with androgyny, aspects of his work I propose to address myself in the following paragraphs. In recent years, Jonathan Weinberg has been the first seriously to analyze the expression of homosexual identity in Demuth's creative art. See Weinberg, Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avant-Garde (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> For overview of psychoanalytic approaches applicable to the visual arts, see Laurie Adams Schneider, Art and Psychoanalysis (New York: Icon Editions/Harper Collins, 1993). Adams provides a model relevant to the present investigation in her psychobiographical assessment of Caravaggio (291-303).

match, but their gazes link, adding an acute psychological dimension to the pairing.

Many of Demuth's performing pairs are juxtaposed in a manner that, while not explicitly erotic, is suggestive of a sort of intimacy that is at once physical and deeply psychological. As for the physical aspect of this intimacy, Weinberg has alluded to the suggestive, and in effect "coded," nature of certain forms of physical intimacy in Demuth's depictions of two or more figures.<sup>38</sup> Weinberg has also addressed the "deeply psychological" aspects of a number of Demuth's illustrations of the 1910s, which, as it happens, were executed during precisely the same period that he produced his vaudeville depictions. There are undoubtedly aspects of Demuth's figural compositions that were subconsciously motivated and may be at least partially explained in light of psychoanalytic theory. Nonetheless, a degree of caution is in order. Though it is undeniable that parts of Demuth's oeuvre forcefully represent his homosexual identity, his sexual orientation should not be considered the sole factor, nor even necessarily the principal factor, informing his artistic expression.<sup>39</sup>

Curiously enough, the most obvious psychological projections that occur in Demuth's corpus of vaudeville depictions involve "female" or ostensibly female subjects. Apparently, this phenomenon occurs elsewhere in Demuth's oeuvre, for example, in his series of illustrations for Emile Zola's naturalistic novel describing the rise and fall of an ambitious woman of the demimonde, Nana. In Demuth's Nana series as well as in a number of his vaudeville depictions, there are female figures that appear to have distinctly masculine characteristics (Fig. 98). Weinberg describes the figure of Nana in Count Muffat's First View of Nana at the Theatre as follows: she stands "absolutely erect" with her nude body facing into the picture, so that the "signs of her sex" are hidden; her back is

<sup>38</sup> Weinberg, Speaking for Vice, 23. Weinberg compares George Bellows's 1917 lithograph entitled Shower Bath to Demuth's 1918 watercolor entitled Turkish Bath Scene with Self-Portrait: in Demuth's work alone the feet of the naked men are allowed to touch. Weinberg explains that "although the peculiar unwritten rules of heterosexual male bonding allow for a whole range of physical contacts . . . the touching of bare feet is not among the acceptable intimacies of straight American men."

<sup>39</sup> Weinberg acknowledges this danger in Speaking for Vice (50): it is unfortunate, he implies, that "discussion of Demuth's sexuality comes only at the cost of leaving the impression that virtually all of Demuth's works are somehow expressions of his deviance."

“arched and muscular”; she has “the power and allure of both sexes.”<sup>40</sup> Weinberg characterizes Nana as she appears in this particular scene as “androgynous,” an assessment which, though accurate empirically, may belie the true psychological significance of the masculinized female form. It is no doubt telling that while Demuth appears to have had this tendency to endow women with masculine physical traits, his work shows no corresponding inclination to depict men with feminine characteristics. My discussion of the subconsciously motivated element of fantasy or projection in Demuth’s vaudeville subjects will therefore focus on female pairs.

At the time of his initial fascination with acrobats in 1916, Demuth appears to have taken up a special sub-fascination with female acrobatic pairs. In 1916 he produced Female Acrobats, a work that appears somewhat tentative due to the absence of any background whatsoever (Fig. 89). The exclusive focus of this work is on the pair of female performers—one stout and apparently quite strong, and the other seemingly flaccid and doll-like. An acrobatic act involving two female performers would not be unheard of in vaudeville, although it certainly would be rare. In vaudeville, there were groups of men and boys that performed acrobatic stunts; there were husbands and wives and entire families that performed together; and there were occasionally women who worked alone. But a female acrobatic duo would have been less likely than any of these combinations. In other words, it is possible that Demuth actually observed such an act as he depicts in Acrobats of 1916 on the vaudeville stage. However, it is also possible that he “invented” the same-sex combination to suit his personal needs. There is extant another watercolor of his from 1916 also entitled Acrobats that depicts a similar stunt with a male in the “supporting” role (Fig. 99). It seems quite possible that Demuth adapted the configuration found in the latter work cited in order to meet the urgent demands of his own creative subconscious. Unquestionably, the same-sex configuration held more interest for him, as he repeated that version several times but apparently produced the male-female version only once.

Together, Female Acrobats of 1916, Tumblers of 1917, and In Vaudeville: Acrobats of 1918 (Figs. 89, 90 and 91) attest to Demuth’s fascination, over a period of several

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 66.

years, with an unusually loaded image of two women. In the several works cited, the same figurative motif recurs with little variation, though details surrounding the figures differ significantly. Apart from the strange pairing of two females in such an acrobatic pose, there are several other curious aspects of the basic figural composition. There are alarming distortions, especially, in the form of the woman held aloft: her limp, rubbery legs wave forlornly over the head of her companion, her mid-section appears to have collapsed, and her body wraps bizarrely around that of the standing figure. By and large, the body of the woman held aloft contrasts markedly with that of her partner. While the former appears utterly feeble and almost lifeless, the latter is sturdily built and stands powerfully erect carrying the weight of the other almost effortlessly. Even though Demuth seems to have exaggerated a certain physical contrast between the two women, he has at the same time emphasized their shared identity. Not only do the women have similar costumes, hairstyles, and facial features, but their torsos are juxtaposed in an unnatural way that once again implies the sort of doubling and mirror-reversal seen elsewhere in Demuth's work. These two women are therefore the same and yet different. They are ostensibly the same sex, yet one is made to represent "masculine" strength and the other "feminine" weakness. Clearly, they are denizens of a world of fluid sexual identities.

Psychoanalytic interpretations of (male) homosexuality, as well as heterosexuality, tend to refer back to primal relations between the subject and parental figures. Freud himself had, according to Kenneth Lewes, four separate theories of homosexuality; but he seemed to favor the notion that the homosexual male refuses to abandon his first love object, his mother, and, in order to maintain his bond with her, selects future love objects that resemble himself.<sup>41</sup> Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel has further stressed that the homosexual "will always, in one way or another, search to realize the fantasy that underlies the theory of phallic monism in infantile sexuality: that is to say, the twofold negation of the difference between the sexes and the generations."<sup>42</sup> Demuth's psychic reality, then, might be de-

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<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Lewes, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Male Homosexuality (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 36ff.

<sup>42</sup> Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Perversion, Idealization and Sublimation," International Journal of Psycho-Analysis 55 (1974): 354-55.

scribed as follows: failing for one reason or another to relinquish his primitive belief in and attachment to the phallic mother, he refused to accept that his own mother—or any woman, for that matter—was fundamentally different from himself. In Demuth’s art work, ostensibly female subjects are rendered manly and therefore fetishized and made acceptable to his homosexual ego. At the same time, these images appear to reflect an effort to reinstate the phallic mother and to promote the dual-sexed matron as a kind of “womanly ideal.” As Duchamp once remarked in an interview, “the relationship between Demuth and his mother was what you call a Freudian relationship. . . . He was very devoted to his mother.”<sup>43</sup>

Confusion of gender types occurs elsewhere in Demuth’s vaudeville series with performers other than acrobats. In a watercolor dated 1917, for example, Demuth depicts a pair of comediennes as a curiously ambiguous “couple” (Fig. 100). The woman on the left—with her full figure, blond curls, rosy complexion, and dainty features—appears thoroughly feminine in her physical form as well as in her attire. Her companion on the right, however, appears in manly guise. The manly-looking woman in shorter and slimmer than the other and has narrow hips and a flat chest. Over her skirt she wears a manly tailored jacket with a shirt and tie beneath. On her head she sports what looks like a man’s hat; her dark hair is either cut short or hidden beneath the hat. The woman on the right touches the arm of her companion; though the precise meaning of the gesture is unclear, it serves nonetheless physically to link the two women. Here, once again, Demuth has taken the opportunity to explore the fluidity of gender identity. Even so, this particular image does not assert itself so strongly against the grain of ordinary expectations as does the image of acrobats previously discussed. That the performers are identified as comediennes and that the humor of their act is manifest helps to mitigate the effect of the pairing. Comedians, we all understand, enjoy a certain license; permission is implicitly granted them to overstep conventional boundaries. Demuth effectively evokes the comic milieu in Vaudeville Comediennes and thus naturalizes its subversive content.

The most conspicuous instance of “gender confusion” in Demuth’s vaudeville series occurs in a watercolor from 1918 entitled Vaudeville Dancers (Fig. 101). One might guess,

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<sup>43</sup> Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Emily Farnham, Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 133.

on first glancing at this work, that the dancers are female impersonators, so jarring is the clash of masculine and feminine attributes in the subjects pictured. The two performers depicted in the work are very similar in appearance, yet there are subtle differences between them. They are roughly the same size and shape; their dress is identical except for color; and their facial features are similarly exaggerated and artificial. Moreover, both seem to have unusually long and muscular arms and a thick waist and neck. In other words, both of these ostensibly female figures have conspicuous masculine features. However, each has a distinctive character. Though neither figure is very weighty nor grounded, the one on the left is more so. She has more stability and focus and appears to bolster her weaker sister. The torso of the figure on the left is also somewhat more manly: the upper arm is more muscular, the back seemingly broader, and the chest revealed by the deep V-cut in the front of the dress somewhat flatter. The essential difference between the two subjects appears to be marked by their differing hair color: dark hair for the more “masculine” dancer on the left and fair hair for the more “feminine” partner. In addition to the mixing of gender attributes, the positioning of the figures is also striking. The two dancers appear “joined at the hip,” forming a single two-part entity. These two dancers are probably more closely identified than any other pair of performers in Demuth’s vaudeville repertoire and more so than any other seem to represent the related fantasies of narcissistic fusion and undifferentiated sexual being that surface more subtly throughout this segment of his work.

In the late 1910s Demuth worked simultaneously on depictions of vaudeville and related circus, café, and nightclub subjects, on illustrations for selected novels, and on works alluding to, if not explicitly describing, homoerotic activity (specifically, his Eight O’Clock series of 1917 and his Turkish bath series of 1915-1918). Together, these projects represent the acme of his preoccupation with the figure, which devolved from his earlier academic training in Philadelphia and his subsequent studies in Paris. Though Demuth’s diverse figurative works are related in significant ways, each project seems to have served for him a slightly different purpose. In his illustrations, as well as in his Turkish bath and Eight O’Clock series, he explored personal issues related to sexual behavior and its social environment. In his depictions of the contemporary scene he was

able to address these issues more-or-less directly, while in his literary illustrations, he found, as Weinberg puts it, “an indirect way to explore . . . the primacy of sex in human relations.”<sup>44</sup> Neither his depictions of the marginal element of contemporary social life nor his literary illustrations apparently were meant, at the time, to be shared with the general public. His vaudeville series and most of his other entertainment subjects, though often inflected with sexual meaning, were, it seems, exhibited and sold without much caution or subsequent ado.<sup>45</sup> In the late 1910s and early 1920s Charles Daniel apparently sold through his gallery a substantial number of Demuth’s vaudeville depictions, many of which were purchased by Albert C. Barnes. Unlike Demuth’s other figurative work of the period, his vaudeville series was a commercially viable artistic endeavor. Nonetheless, the series also served as a vehicle for self-reflection. Above all, it allowed Demuth to explore difficult and necessarily private issues behind a veneer of innocuous play. In his vaudeville series, as in his contemporaneous work, Demuth addressed themes related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Only his vaudeville subjects, however, could easily “pass” as acceptable in the mainstream of the heterosexual world.

### Man Ray’s Rope Dancer of 1916:

#### It’s Genesis and Consequence in Man Ray’s Oeuvre

In order to understand and to appreciate fully Man Ray’s works addressing popular entertainment themes, one must begin by examining the development of his art and philosophy prior to 1916. Between roughly 1913 and 1916, Man Ray was able to resolve a number of key issues relevant to his practice as a visual artist. The resolutions he made during this time bore equally on the form and content of his work. Essentially, his work was evolving toward a kind of total artistic expression that was meant to incorporate the

<sup>44</sup> Weinberg, Speaking for Vice, 63.

<sup>45</sup> Demuth exhibited “vaudeville drawings” for the first time in his third exhibition at the Daniel Gallery in December 1916 and again the following year in a two-man show with Edward Fiske. Daniel Gallery exhibition catalogues reproduced in Farnham, Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask, from originals in Demuth file, New York Public Library.

dynamic elements of music, literature, and dance and the static elements of architecture, painting, and sculpture within the limits of two dimensions. Man Ray, it seems, first began conscientiously to explore the possibilities of art in two dimensions in the aftermath of the Armory Show. As Karin Anhold Rabbito has convincingly argued, he freely borrowed from a number of other modernists--including Marsden Hartley, Max Weber, and Abraham Walkowitz--during this period of exploration.<sup>46</sup> Eventually, in 1916, he announced his own agenda in a short treatise he published himself, A Primer of the New Art of Two Dimensions.<sup>47</sup> Man Ray's celebrated oil painting of 1916 entitled The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows was, therefore, executed at the same time that he came to formulate a precise set of objectives that were unique to his own modern work.

As Man Ray became less inclined to represent the natural world of three dimensions, so did he begin to renounce the "inspiration of nature" when choosing subjects to paint. His initial move to abandon natural subjects actually occurred while he was still living in the natural setting of Ridgefield, New Jersey. His ultimate resolve occurred on a camping trip "into the wild country up the Hudson," which he undertook with a group of friends in the fall of 1914. During the course of that trip, Man Ray recalls in his autobiography, he told his friend Alanson Hartpence that he would make some imaginary landscapes inspired by the trip but would no longer paint from nature. Increasingly, from that point on, the "man-made" and cultural environments would become important to him as sources of inspiration.<sup>48</sup>

One of the principal themes that emerges in Man Ray's work after he becomes disaffected with nature is that of the dancer. His earliest extant renditions of dancing figures date from 1914. It is difficult to determine the precise source of these images as all of them are very abstract. Man Ray still resided in Ridgefield at the time these works were produced and therefore, we may assume, had to travel to observe professional performers.

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<sup>46</sup> Karin Anhold Rabbito, "Man Ray in Quest of Modernism," Rutgers Art Review 2 (January 1981): 59-69.

<sup>47</sup> Man Ray, A Primer of the New Art of Two Dimensions (New York: By the author, 1916); reprinted in Francis M. Naumann, "Man Ray and America: The New York and Ridgefield Years, 1907-1921" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate School of The City University of New York, 1988), 2:472-74.

<sup>48</sup> Man Ray, Self-Portrait, rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), 52.

Any model, however, could suggest the movements of a dancer. It is also quite possible that the dancers that Man Ray represented at this time were “imaginary” figures culled from the artist’s memory. He was, after all, painting imaginary landscapes at this time. He might have done other imaginary subjects as well.

Man Ray’s dancers, whether imaginary or depicted from life, were inspired, at least in part, by artistic example. Matisse’s famous composition for Dance (versions I and II) is unquestionably a key source for at least two of the groups of dancing figures Man Ray depicted in 1914.<sup>49</sup> The work closest to Matisse’s example is an untitled drawing in ink and wash that represents seven or eight figures in two tiers against a flat but modulated background (Fig. 102). The figures, some of which clasp hands, dance in two lines or possibly a ring. Though the composition is highly reminiscent of Matisse’s, the figures themselves are handled quite differently. Man Ray has replaced Matisse’s round and natural forms with strange blank hooded figures with truncated arms and legs. These violent distortions (especially the severing of hands and feet) may have been consciously imposed by Man Ray in an effort to depart from nature. Another untitled work in water color and pastel represents more naturalistic figures in a composition that derives more loosely from Matisse (Fig. 103). In this example, Man Ray establishes a very definite and very low ground plane and locates his dancers upon it. The dancers’ forms are flat, and the space they occupy is very shallow; moreover, their large figures appear pinched and cramped within the frame of the picture. Man Ray may well have been trying purposefully to create spatial tension in this work as he explored the possibilities of art of two dimensions.

In 1915 Man Ray produced what was apparently his first oil painting of a dance-related subject. The canvas, originally entitled Dance Interpretation, was one of thirty works included in his first exhibition at the Daniel Gallery in the late fall of 1915 (Fig. 104). By this time, Man Ray was thoroughly absorbed in his formal investigations. Many

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<sup>49</sup> Man Ray may have seen a reproduction of Matisse’s “The Dancers”--“Design for Decoration of Prince Tschonkine’s [sic] Palace at Moscow”--that accompanied a review by James Huneker of the Tenth Autumn Salon in Paris. See Huneker, “Decade of the New Art Movement Shows Big Changes,” New York Times, 10 November 1912, sec. 5, 12.

of the works he showed at this time were simply titled Study in Two Dimensions or Wall Decoration. Others were called River Interpretation, City Interpretation, Moonlight Interpretation, etc.<sup>50</sup> Dance Interpretation, in particular, embodies a resolution of the formal issues that Man Ray began to address in his dance subjects of the previous year. No longer do his dancers appear to circle in three-dimensional space; instead, the several figures are superimposed.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, their forms are disjointed and transparent, adding further to the layering effect.

Man Ray was departing further and further from nature at this point, on the eve of his departure from Ridgefield. At the end of the year he would leave behind his “Romantic-Expressionist-Cubist period,” return to Manhattan, rediscover there the inspiration of the city, and start to explore “pseudo-mechanistic forms.”<sup>52</sup> The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows (Fig. 105), which he began work on soon after his move to Manhattan, represents, on the one hand, a distillation of the static and dynamic principles that he had come to associate with the new art of two dimensions. The large flat color planes, the carefully balanced use line, and the sense of rhythm that unites these elements all seem to suggest a clear emphasis on formal objectives on the part of the artist. On the other hand, the painting also seems to represent a new attitude toward subject matter.

Man Ray had given the works he exhibited at the Daniel Gallery in late 1915 “general titles” that, for the most part, said very little about the subjects depicted. In early 1916, he still maintained that formal considerations were absolutely paramount in his work. In his statement printed in the catalogue of the Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters, held in March 1916, he declared,

The creative force and the expressiveness of painting reside materially in the color and texture of pigment, in the possibilities of form invention and organization, and in the flat plane on which these elements are brought to play.

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<sup>50</sup> Naumann, “Man Ray and America,” 2:499.

<sup>51</sup> Naumann indicates that the work was meant to be read as “multiple visions of the same dancer” (ibid., 1:175).

<sup>52</sup> Man Ray, Self-Portrait, 59.

Furthermore, he claimed that

the artist is concerned solely with linking these absolute qualities directly to his wit, imagination and experience without the go-between of a 'subject.' Working on a single plane as the instantaneously visualizing factor, he realizes his mind motives and physical sensations in a permanent and universal language of color, texture and form organization. He uncovers the pure plane of expression that has so long been hidden by the glazings of nature imitation, anecdote and other popular subjects.<sup>53</sup>

Nonetheless, his painting of the rope dancer suggests this attitude was changing, for not only did he specifically identify the subject of "the rope dancer" in the title he gave to the painting, but he put the title on the canvas itself.

The Rope Dancer of 1916 was, according to Man Ray, a subject discovered in vaudeville.<sup>54</sup> It cannot be known for certain that the dancers he depicted earlier were also vaudeville performers; however, it does seem likely that Man Ray was well aware by 1914 of vaudeville as, at least, a potential resource for his work. Certainly he must have been aware that several of his realist antecedents had focused on aspects of entertainment, especially on contemporary vaudeville. Between roughly 1909 and 1916, Max Weber also observed dancers in various settings--including vaudeville and burlesque--and rendered their images in abstract compositions that reflected his own preoccupation with patterns of color and movement (Fig. 106).<sup>55</sup> In addition, there were eager vaudeville enthusiasts in Man Ray's own immediate milieu. Alfred Kreymborg, for one, may have influenced Man Ray's outlook on vaudeville. The two initially became acquainted during the late spring and summer of 1913, when Kreymborg shared with Man Ray and Halpert the house they had rented at Ridgefield. Kreymborg indicates in his autobiography that vaudeville was, in

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<sup>53</sup> Man Ray's statement from the catalogue of the Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters, held in New York 13-25 March 1916, is reprinted in its entirety in Naumann, "Man Ray in America," 1:211.

<sup>54</sup> Man Ray, Self-Portrait, 60.

<sup>55</sup> See Percy North, "Max Weber: The Cubist Decade," in Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910-1920, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1991), 26-29.

the 1910s, his “favorite type of theatrical entertainment.”<sup>56</sup> Duchamp, whom Man Ray met in the summer of 1915, was also a vaudeville enthusiast. Kreymborg himself reported in an article appearing in the Boston Transcript in September 1915 that Duchamp had found his “New York haunts: one or two out-of-the-way French restaurants, one or two vaudeville houses, one or two groups of people.”<sup>57</sup> Man Ray apparently shared Duchamp’s delight in popular amusements during the years they were friends in New York. In the spring of 1922 Man Ray, who was then in Paris, received a letter from Duchamp in New York: “‘Say it with Music,’ is the fashionable song here,” Duchamp reported. “Had you seen ‘Shuffle Along’ before leaving New York?” he asked. He had lately seen Charlie Chaplin’s Pay Day, he told Man Ray, and found it “funny but too short.”<sup>58</sup> During the latter part of the 1910s, and very likely due to the influence of Duchamp, Man Ray became especially attracted to certain popular amusements—especially, vaudeville and motion pictures. As we shall see, his participation in popular culture during this period is abundantly reflected in his work.

Among man Ray’s dancing subjects, The Rope Dancer is unusual in that it appears to represent an aerial performance. Though traditionally identified with the circus, high wire and trapeze performers continued to be popular in vaudeville in the 1910s and were also treated as movie-material during the period. At least one film, released by Pathé in early 1910, depicted an aerial performance.<sup>59</sup> In Man Ray’s painting, the dancing figure

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<sup>56</sup> Alfred Kreymborg, Troubadour: An Autobiography (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), 182. Moreover, Kreymborg asserts that “if one was interested in the theatre arts and hoped to find some expression of the native character of the day, one journeyed to vaudeville.” This assessment is, of course, retrospective in nature; therefore, one might suspect that it reflects the climate of the 1920s as much or even more than that of the teens.”

<sup>57</sup> Alfred Kreymborg, “Why Marcel Duchamps [sic] Calls Hash a Picture,” Boston Transcript, 8 September 1915, 12; quoted in “Ephemerides,” in Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life, ed. Pontus Hulten, n. pag.

<sup>58</sup> Marcel Duchamp to Man Ray, undated, but based on internal evidence, spring 1922, Collection of the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin; transcribed and translated in Naumann, “Man Ray and America,” 2:462-63. Original text reads, “‘Say it with music’ est la chanson à la mode ici--Avais tu vu ‘Shuffle Along’ avant de quitter N. Y. . . . J’ai vu un dernier Charlie Chaplin ‘Pay Day’ qui est amusant mais trop court.”

<sup>59</sup> The film, entitled “An Aerial Acrobat,” was released January 19, 1910. A short description of it appears in Moving Picture World, 5 February 1910, 181.

appears at the very top of the composition and is bisected by a scalloped horizontal line that extends almost the entire width of the canvas. This scalloped line, we may assume, represents the high wire, while the other straight and curving lines that attach to the waist and hands of the dancer may represent safety wires and/or rope props used in the aerial performance. Essentially, the performance subject depicted here is the same one that Glackens depicted realistically in Hammerstein's Roof Garden over fifteen years earlier.

The title given the work is one of its most intriguing aspects. That Duchamp somehow inspired Man Ray's decision to place the title on the canvas itself is generally acknowledged, as Duchamp himself had previously opted to display his own titles in a similarly prominent manner. Also, Man Ray's reference to "shadows"—indicating the irregular colored shapes beneath the figure of the dancer—seems to suggest the influence of Duchamp who was also preoccupied with shadow imagery during the latter half of the 1910s. The identification of the figure as a "rope dancer" is perhaps the most puzzling element of the title. The type of performer that Man Ray depicts was generally referred to at the time as a "wire" performer, as in "high wire," "tight wire," or "slack wire." The variant of "rope dancer" was almost unheard of except as a direct and unidiomatic translation from a language other than English. The German word Seiltänzer, for example, might be rendered in English as "rope dancer," as it was in English translations of Nietzsche's Also Sprach Zarathustra that appeared during the period. By the same token, the French words danseur or danseuse de corde might be similarly translated.

In her article entitled "The Tightrope Walker: An Expressionist Image," Janice McCullagh has convincingly demonstrated the relevance of Nietzsche's writing in Zarathustra to the iconography of German Expressionism.<sup>60</sup> In "Zarathustra's Prologue," the prophet arrives in a market place where a "rope dancer" is about to perform and announces that "Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman—a rope over an abyss."<sup>61</sup> Thus the figure of the rope dancer assumes a powerful symbolic meaning.

<sup>60</sup> Janice McCullagh, "The Tightrope Walker: An Expressionist Image," Art Bulletin 66 (December 1984): 633-44.

<sup>61</sup> Oscar Levy, ed., The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916), vol. 11, Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans. Thomas Common, 9.

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, which includes Thomas Common's translation of Zarathustra, went through four printings between 1909 and 1916, so clearly there were plenty of Americans who continued to peruse the German philosopher even while his reputation became increasingly tarnished with the growing menace of German militancy. However, there is no reason to believe that Man Ray, who was principally interested in French authors and who, moreover, was Jewish, would find Nietzsche attractive. It appears far more likely that the words "rope dancer" in Man Ray's title, like his reference to "shadows," were inspired by Duchamp, who, we can easily imagine, would have recognized the figure as a "rope dancer," or, in his own native idiom, as a danseuse de corde.

The image of the dancer in Man Ray's painting is illuminated by comparison with several drawings Man Ray executed around the same time. Only one of these, however, has been identified as a sketch for the painting of the rope dancer (Fig. 107).<sup>62</sup> The sketch illustrates three similar figures in short ballet skirts. The wedge-like shape of the skirt is repeated in the painted figure as are the stick-like legs and arms and hatchet shape of the head, the latter most conspicuous in the larger figure in the right hand corner of the sketch. The figures are of diminishing size, and the larger one on the right appears to occupy the foreground, while the other two dance behind her. A steep floor plane is implied by the use of diminution and the overlapping of figures; and energetic movements are suggested that recall the dynamic nature of balletic dance. The sketch thus appears initially to be an impression of the ballet.<sup>63</sup> However, the two vertical posts at the far right and the horizontal streak adjacent to them may serve as reminders of the aerial apparatus on which the dancer performed.

Man Ray's ultimate rendition of the dancer as a mecanomorph is already suggested in his preliminary sketch. The skirts, for example, are stylized in a manner that suggests

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<sup>62</sup> Naumann, "Man Ray and America," 2:591. Naumann indicates that this drawing "has been identified as the only surviving sketch for Man Ray's The Rope Dancer."

<sup>63</sup> See Francis M. Naumann, "Man Ray, 1908-1921: From the Art of Two Dimensions to the Higher Dimension of Ideas," in Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray, by Merry Foresta et al., exh. cat. (Washington, D. C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 68. Naumann observes that Man Ray made a number of quick sketches for The Rope Dancer "recalling the movements of a ballerina."

the rigidity and regularity of mechanical forms. Man Ray apparently used drafting tools to render the figure in the final painting: the components of the body are standardized, and the outlines are smooth and uniform. Another pair of drawings in the estate of the artist--images of a Spanish dancer, both from around 1916 (not illustrated)--indicates the process of transformation that culminated in Man Ray's thorough embrace of "pseudo-mechanistic" forms. The drawings are very similar; however, one clearly represents a greater degree of mecanomorphosis than does the other. In what we may assume is the earlier drawing, the figure is slightly rounder and softer, especially in the shoulders and arms. The hems of the dancer's petticoats appear somewhat frilly in the earlier drawing; in the later one they have been transformed into a series of concentric ovals that correspond with the hem of the skirt. Finally, the two drawings illustrate Man Ray's move to a greater emphasis on line in his mecanomorphic imagery: in the lines of the costume, in the outline of the figure, and in the rendering of the features of the face, this growing emphasis is manifest.

Two works that were, without a doubt, created by Man Ray after he painted The Rope Dancer also shed light on the rope dancer theme and its formal rendition. The earlier of the two is an ink drawing entitled Ballet-Silhouette, which is dated 1916 (Fig. 108). The other is an airbrush painting--also known as The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows--which is dated 1918 (Fig. 109). These two subsequent works suggest that beginning in early 1916 Man Ray may have begun to develop his ballet and rope dancer themes in tandem.

Ballet-Silhouette, which is unquestionably a final drawing as opposed to a sketch, is clearly related to the ink sketch identified as a study for the painting, The Rope Dancer. Moreover, Ballet-Silhouette and the painting have common features. Most notably, the three ballet dancers in Ballet-Silhouette are almost identical to the three superimposed images of the rope dancer. Even the legs are similarly positioned: four point straight down, one points up at the left, and one is lifted at the right. The two works are further linked in that the dancers in Ballet-Silhouette are also accompanied by shadows.

Nonetheless, despite their striking similarities, Ballet-Silhouette and the painting, The Rope Dancer, represent distinctly different themes. Ballet-Silhouette must be read as a

stage performance: floorboards are suggested, an orchestra is alluded to, and the highly-placed shadows imply the presence of footlights. The Rope Dancer, as I have already indicated, represents an aerial ballet or tightrope performance. This identification appears to be confirmed by the existence of the 1918 airbrush painting, which bears the same title as the painting. In the airbrush painting, the lone performer is an abstract figure; however, the details of the setting are realistic and exact. The dancer performs on a slack wire suspended between upright poles; four spotlights shine upon her, creating four seemingly accurate shadows on the ground below.

Though it might be hasty to conclude that Man Ray's rope dancer and ballet themes devolved from a single source, the suggestion is certainly warranted. For example, Man Ray might have observed an aerial ballet performance that inspired his dual interest. There was such a performer whom Man Ray might have seen in vaudeville in late 1915 or early 1916. "Queen of the Wire" Bird Millman, a celebrated aerial artist and a "vaudeville favorite," returned to the vaudeville stage in late 1915, after several seasons with the circus. An image of the performer that appeared in the September 8, 1915 issue of the New York Star is highly suggestive.<sup>64</sup> The picture indicates that Ms. Millman performed on the wire in toe shoes, which must have been somewhat unusual. Like Man Ray's rope dancer, too, she wears a skirt that falls just below her knees and carries a parasol. Of course, Man Ray's purpose was not to represent the unique character of any individual performer. His image of the rope dancer, therefore, is not entirely consistent from one work to the next. For example, in the painted version of the rope dancer, the performer has no parasol. However, in the later airbrush painting, he uses the shapes of the parasol and the shadows it creates as the basis for his formal invention.

Man Ray's desire to synthesize elements borrowed from the various arts was further reflected in the increasingly experimental work (in terms of medium) that he executed following his painting of The Rope Dancer. From this time on Man Ray's references to music, theater, cinema, and dance become more and more pointed and specific. Between late 1916 and 1919 Man Ray produced a number of works--mostly

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<sup>64</sup> References to Bird Millman culled from Bird Millman clipping file, BRTC.

airbrush paintings--with explicit entertainment subjects. Some of these subjects--such as the rope dancer--were reprisals of earlier themes. Others were apparently new: allusions to contemporary cinema, for example, first occur in his work at this time.

An unusual collage that Man Ray created in late 1916 appears to represent a unique effort to address the related phenomena of vaudeville, motion pictures, and popular dance (Fig. 110). Entitled Transmutation, the collage--which consists of an entire newspaper page on which various marks and symbols have been pasted and drawn--is remarkably similar in conception to a 1913 pastel on newsprint by Max Weber that Man Ray may have seen in New York (Fig. 111). Man Ray chose for the ground of his collage a page from the entertainment section of the New York Sun for Sunday November 12, 1916. Very likely he found something on this page of newsprint that was relevant to his artistic concerns. For example, one of the less obtrusive articles on the page, which begins at the bottom center, describes Hawaiian and Spanish dancing. Several of Man Ray's drawings, a painting, and an airbrush work of circa 1916-1919 attest to his fascination with Spanish dancing, hence the likelihood of his interest in the piece. Of course, one might suspect that he also found some significance in the prominent heading at the top of the page--"Cinema Ideas to Have a Chance"--in the piece on vaudeville and burlesque, or in the total combination of features. In large cut-out letters pasted down the center of the "Cinema Ideas" article Man Ray wrote "THEATR," an umbrella term (sometimes assumed to be the title of the work) for all the popular performing arts alluded to on the page.

Sometime after he began his collage experiments, Man Ray adopted another novel approach to image-making that would hold his interest for several years. He was doing commercial work on a part-time basis at the time and had recently installed airbrush equipment in his office. Once he had become "quite adept" in the use of airbrush, he thought he might try using it for his "personal" work.<sup>65</sup> Man Ray became fascinated with this technique, which he later characterized as "almost automatic painting," and "a pure cerebral activity."<sup>66</sup> The images that resulted from his experiments ranged from the

<sup>65</sup> Man Ray, Self-Portrait, 66-67.

<sup>66</sup> Man Ray, quoted in Arturo Schwarz, Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 39.

relatively concrete--as in The Rope Dancer of 1918--to the highly abstract--as in Jazz of 1919 (Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio). However, all apparently began with a "definite subject."<sup>67</sup>

In the course of his experimentation with the airbrush technique, Man Ray explored a variety of subjects, including the traditional nude--as in his first effort, entitled Nudes or Preconception of Violetta of 1918 or 1919 (Private Collection)--and machinery--as in My First Born of 1919 (known only through reproduction in Man Ray's magazine, TNT). Subjects related to the performing arts, however, seem to have had for him a special attraction. As has already been noted, the theme of the "rope dancer" resurfaces in an airbrush painting of 1918; others allude specifically to Spanish dancing, jazz music, and the cinema.

Man Ray invented new imagery in the course of his airbrush experiments, but he also reused figures and motifs that had been prominent in his earlier paintings. A drawing from 1918 entitled Memo for Aerographs indicates just how faithful he remained, not only to selected images, but to whole compositions (Fig. 112). Superimposed in the drawing are explicit notations for three of Man Ray's previous works, all of which have dance-related subjects. The outlines of Ballet-Silhouette are visible on the lower half of the page; the "rope dancer" with four spotlights on her from above crosses the slack wire at the middle of the page; and elements of Spanish Dancers, an oil painting on board from 1918 (Private Collection), are present at the top. As far as we know, Man Ray never executed a single airbrush painting that combined the elements of Ballet-Silhouette, The Rope Dancer, and Spanish Dancers. However, he did reproduce the latter two paintings in two separate airbrush works, The Rope Dancer and Seguidilla (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D. C.).

Man Ray produced most of his airbrush paintings--including Jazz, Seguidilla and Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematographe (Fig. 113)--in the year 1919, after which his interest in the unconventional medium began to wane. Afterward, he would use other mechanical means of image-production--specifically, photography and film--to

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<sup>67</sup> Man Ray, Self-Portrait, 67.

communicate his ideas. Prior to these experiments, he used the airbrush method, he said, “to express an idea almost photographically.”<sup>68</sup> His airbrush paintings, therefore, appear to represent his first definite departure from painting *per se*; they belong, as Man Ray himself put it, to “a period of reaction to sensuous painting, leading into the dada spirit.”<sup>69</sup>

Man Ray’s first direct involvement in a film-making project occurred, apparently, sometime after Duchamp’s return to New York in January 1920. Duchamp was, at the time, interested in three-dimensional optical effects, which he had already attempted to produce—in Hand Stereoscopy, 1918 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)—using still photography. After his return to New York, he enlisted Man Ray’s help in realizing a somewhat more ambitious goal—the production of a 3-d movie. Using two movie cameras joined “with gears and a common axis,” Duchamp and Man Ray shot about fifty feet of film and then attempted to develop it in two makeshift tanks. The process was not very successful—the film got tangled and swollen and stuck together—and only two small pieces were saved. These two pieces of film were, according to Man Ray, matching strips which, when viewed through an old stereopticon, did actually produce the effect of three dimensions.<sup>70</sup> Presumably, it was one of these strips—showing the Baroness von Freytag Loringhoven with shaved pudenda—that Man Ray attached to a letter he sent Tristan Tzara in June 1921, which he signed, “Most Cordially, Man Ray, directeur du mauvais movies.”<sup>71</sup>

Before 1920, however, there already existed a good deal of interest in movies and movie-making in the avant-garde circles to which Man Ray and Duchamp were connected, and they were not the first among their colleagues to attempt to produce a film. In an article that appeared in the third issue of 391 (1 March 1917), Gabrielle Buffet had observed that

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<sup>68</sup> Man Ray, Response to Questionnaire, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1954, in Accession File for Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematographe, Department of Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Man Ray, Self-Portrait, 86-87.

<sup>71</sup> Man Ray to Tristan Tzara, undated but postmarked 8 June 1921, Papers of Tristan Tzara; transcribed in Naumann, “Man Ray and America,” 2:446.

the cinema had become “an essential element of modern life.”<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, she had argued that American films were superior to Italian, Scandinavian, Spanish, Swiss and even French films (the latter deriving their best effects from the American cinema). There had been presentations of the cinematograph in conjunction with the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in April 1917. And in 1918 Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand had begun collaborating on a film called “Mannhatta,” which would achieve a certain success and notoriety following its release in 1921.<sup>73</sup> Duchamp was apparently aware of this project from its inception, for he was present at the Arensberg’s place on January 11, 1918 when Sheeler told Roché that he had a plan to make movies.<sup>74</sup> By 1919, then, when Man Ray executed Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph, there was a definite trend toward the embrace of the art of cinema within New York’s artistic avant-garde, and this may have influenced his choice of reference in the title of the work.

The two principal figures in Admiration are parasol-like and bear a striking resemblance to figures found in Man Ray’s Rope Dancer and in other related works. Moreover, these figures are set off by “spotlights,” the complement of shadows. The third major element of the composition is a vertical ladder-like structure at the far left, framing a series of numbers that Man Ray has identified as “the progressive ratio in the development of a spiral.”<sup>75</sup> Coincidentally, the ladder shape suggests the frames of a film strip. There are two short sequences of words that are part of the composition as well: the title, which appears in neat script at the lower left, and the phrase “ABANDON OF THE SAFETY VALVE,” which appears at top right in small block letters forming a flexible band that recedes into the depth of the painting. With its silvery gray tonality and its suggestions of light and shadow, Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph is highly evocative of the cinematic medium to which the title alludes.

<sup>72</sup> Gabrielle Buffet, “Cinematographe,” 391, no. 3 (1 March 1917): 4; reprinted in Michel Sanouillet, ed., 391: Revue publiée de 1917 à 1924 par Francis Picabia (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1960), 28. Original text reads, “le cinéma est devenu un élément essentiel de la vie moderne.”

<sup>73</sup> Constance Rourke, Charles Sheeler: Artist in the American Tradition (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1938), 89.

<sup>74</sup> “Ephemerides,” in Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life, ed. Pontus Hulten, n. pag.

<sup>75</sup> Man Ray, Response to MoMA Questionnaire.

When asked in 1954 to comment on the work, Man Ray indicated that his intention had been to render abstract forms suggested, as he recalled, “by an old-fashioned phonograph horn, which in turn suggested a morning glory.”<sup>76</sup> The cinematograph and the orchestrelle, apparently, were not to be found in the picture, for the title, *Man Ray* maintained, was merely “a poetic addition,” and in no way described the painting. Though the title *Man Ray* gave this particular airbrush painting may not reflect the content of the work, it is still significant in itself. In apparent homage to Duchamp, Man Ray named the painting for ‘bride’ and ‘bachelor’ machines that functioned in the realm of contemporary cinema. Both words, significantly, sound French: cinematograph(e) was simply another word for “moving picture”—imported from France, but commonly used in the U. S. as well—and an orchestrelle was a kind of organ, which was either hand-operated or played automatically and provided musical accompaniment for movies. Clearly, the phrasing of the title implies an amorous relationship between the orchestrelle (the bride?) and the cinematograph (the bachelor?). Man Ray’s title refers directly and specifically to the mechanical means of movie presentation, while the silvery gray painting itself alludes more subtly to cinematic imagery. In these respects, as well as in its debt to Duchamp, the painting prefigures the hands-on movie-making efforts by Man Ray and Duchamp that would begin the following year.

Man Ray apparently never felt much nationalistic feeling whatsoever nor, does it appear, did he ever declare an overriding interest in the peculiar aspects of the “American context.” However, in the latter half of the decade of the teens he did, at least, demonstrate his awareness—most likely stimulated by his European colleagues—of the existence of a distinct category of “American subjects,” an awareness reflected, for example, in his 1917 assisted readymade, New York, which resembles a leaning skyscraper. It was during this period of heightened sensitivity to American subjects that references to the popular entertainments that were so enjoyed and extolled by his contemporaries, both European and American, became conspicuous in many of his works.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

### Reflections of Vaudeville in Dada "Performance": The Case of Rose Sélavy

Of all Marcel Duchamp's curious and challenging inventions, the character of Rose (or Rose) Sélavy probably occupies the most anomalous place in any catalogue of his "artistic creations." Despite the inevitable awkwardness in attempting to treat a quasi-mythical transvestite figure as any sort of "work of art," scholars, beginning with Robert Lebel, have generally acknowledged Rose Sélavy to be an essential component of Duchamp's oeuvre. Rose was the initial form of the name of Duchamp's feminine alter ego who went public for the first time in 1920, when her name appeared in big block letters adjacent to the copyright symbol on the base of an assisted ready-made by Duchamp given the title Fresh Widow (Fig. 114). This gesture was motivated, Duchamp later claimed, by his wish for a change of identity.<sup>77</sup> Prior to Duchamp's departure from New York in the early summer of 1921, Rose first manifested herself in physical form. In early 1921 Man Ray photographed Duchamp in feminine garb, then collaborated with his subject to produce a photographic collage meant to resemble the label of a French perfume. The collage appeared subsequently on the cover of New York Dada (1921) and was also reproduced and affixed to an actual bottle of perfume by Rigaud (Figs. 115 and 116). Rose became Rose in late 1921 and carried on her peculiar career.<sup>78</sup> When Duchamp and Man Ray were united once again in Paris, they briefly resumed the project undertaken earlier in New York of photographing Rose Sélavy. This time, it appears, Duchamp sought to emphasize further the feminine aspect of the subject by hand-retouching her image (Fig. 117).<sup>79</sup> Thereafter, Rose went underground for a number of years, though her name would resurface occasionally. Her final physical appearance occurred in 1938 at the International

<sup>77</sup> Duchamp made this claim in more than one interview. See, for example, Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, 64.

<sup>78</sup> Duchamp added the second r to the name in order to produce a pun--"En 6 qu'habilla rose Sélavy"--which he inscribed in 1921 on Francis Picabia's painting, L'oeil cacodylate.

<sup>79</sup> Arturo Schwarz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969), 484.

Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, in which instance she assumed female mannequin form and donned masculine (actually Duchamp's) clothing.

Rose Sélavy has unquestionably represented a challenge for Duchamp scholars, who have sought to explicate her meaning in the context of his life and work. For decades it has been assumed that Rose must have a *raison d'être*. Only recently, however, have scholars begun to attempt to establish her *raison d'être* by looking beyond the artist and his work and examining the cultural environment in which Rose came to exist.<sup>80</sup> Moira Roth was perhaps the first to suggest that New York afforded Duchamp the right setting for the cultivation of personality and that the genesis of Rose was somehow linked to this environment. In her 1977 article, "Duchamp in America: A Self Ready-Made," she argues that

much of Duchamp's imagination during his first 1915-1918 New York visit (and his two later visits of 1920-1921 and 1922-1923) focused upon a conscious expansion and transmutation of his personality and intensification of the Dandy's 'cult of self,' both in his real life behavior and in his various artistic *personae* culminating in Rose Sélavy.<sup>81</sup>

In adopting the persona of Rose Sélavy, Roth suggests, Duchamp represented himself as a *Femme Fatale*, a feminine type from popular culture. Roth juxtaposes a photograph of Rose taken by Man Ray in Paris with a photograph of Greta Garbo by Edward Steichen. Though she does not make the point explicitly, the implication is clear: Duchamp's feminine alter ego is somehow linked to popular culture.

Since the early 1990s there has been a far greater impetus in art historical scholarship to look for possible links between manifestations in avant-garde art and events

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<sup>80</sup> The pioneers in Duchamp scholarship, Robert Lebel and Arturo Schwarz, both attempted to establish the meaning of Rose by linking her "androgyny" with the artist and his oeuvre. Lebel first suggested somewhat tentatively that the photographic images of Rose taken by Man Ray might indicate Duchamp's "inherent androgyny in the manner of Leonardo da Vinci," especially in light of Duchamp's contemporaneous transformation of the *Mona Lisa* into an androgynous subject. For Schwarz, the element of androgyny in Duchamp's work was, it seems, more of a symbolic factor than a psychological one. Schwarz saw Duchamp's artistic practice as a modern extension of the esoteric tradition of alchemy, a central goal of which was the reconciliation or union of opposites. He therefore saw Rose Sélavy, an androgynous figure in which opposing male and female principles are united, as a potent and apposite emblem for the totality of Duchamp's work. See Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Paragraphic Books, Grossman Publishers, 1959), 46; and Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 485.

<sup>81</sup> Moira Roth, "Duchamp in America: A Self Ready-Made," *Arts* 51 (May 1977): 92.

in popular culture. For example, Dawn Ades, in her 1992 article, "Duchamp en femme," makes the point very clearly that Duchamp represented himself as Rose in very much the same manner that fashionable women--actresses and models--were pictured in contemporary magazines.<sup>82</sup> In comparing Rose to contemporary females, both Roth and Ades overlook, however, a crucial aspect of "her" character. Rose Sélavy was not a woman at all, but a theatrical illusion--a man (more-or-less) disguised as a woman. So far, it seems, Francis Naumann has been the only scholar to have grasped this fundamental fact of Rose. In an article that appeared in 1991, Naumann asserted that "although it has not been previously noted in the vast literature on Duchamp," Rose may have been inspired by the appearance in a film called A Woman (1915) of Charlie Chaplin in drag.<sup>83</sup> Naumann, I believe, is very much on the right track. Nonetheless, if one accepts his assertion that Rose's appearance was actually "styled after" that of Chaplin in the movie, one must also account for the time lag between the release of A Woman in 1915 and the advent of Rose five years later. The appearance of Rose Sélavy may not have been inspired directly by the Chaplin character at all, for such a personification was hardly unique in current popular culture. I would argue instead that Rose Sélavy had multiple models, for female (and male) impersonation was exceedingly common in vaudeville, even more so than in the movies. Given this fact, Rose Sélavy may be seen as a product of Duchamp's interest and immersion in American popular culture.

In a retrospective article written in 1956, George Freedley observed that "female impersonation in the theatre is an ancient art which has been treated respectfully at one period, reviled in another and ridiculed in yet another."<sup>84</sup> In early twentieth-century American vaudeville--as well as in its European counterparts--the art of female

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<sup>82</sup> Dawn Ades, "Duchamp en femme," Creative Camera, no. 318 (October-November 1992): 13. For the most part, however, Ades, in her feminist analysis, treats Duchamp's masquerade, not as a response to popular culture, but as "a deliberate display of socially constructed, artificial sexual difference" that occurred in response to "contemporary socio-political and psychological debates about gender and identity" (15).

<sup>83</sup> Francis Naumann, "Marcel Duchamp: A Reconciliation of Opposites," in The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 43.

<sup>84</sup> George Freedley, "History of Female Impersonation," New York Times, 16 December 1956, sec. 2, 5.

impersonation achieved its apotheosis.<sup>85</sup> Julian Eltinge, whom Anthony Slide has characterized as “without question, the most famous female impersonator of all time,” made his New York vaudeville debut in September 1907.<sup>86</sup> By 1911 he had achieved “star” status.<sup>87</sup> According to Freedley, it was exactly at this point that the art of female impersonation in American vaudeville “really came into its own.” Following Eltinge, Bert Savoy, a female impersonator whom we know was a favorite of Demuth’s, created a different kind of sensation. Unlike Eltinge, who conveyed an image of elegance and beauty, and whose act was described as “artistic,” Savoy and his partner Jay Brennan emphasized the comedy angle. Savoy and Brennan teamed up in 1913 and after 1916 appeared regularly at The Palace, the grandest of New York’s vaudeville theaters. In 1920 they were featured for the first time in The Greenwich Village Follies, in which they continued to appear for the next three years (Fig. 118). The partnership ended with Savoy’s tragic and untimely death—he was struck by a lightning bolt at Long Beach, Long Island—in 1923. Savoy’s outrageous “camp” appealed to a wide audience that included artists and intellectuals. After his death, the journalist and literary critic Edmund Wilson wrote the following tribute:

One instrument in the great jazz band of New York has suddenly been silenced: Bert Savoy is dead. But the comic character he created will never be forgotten by those who saw it. When he used to come reeling on to the stage, a gigantic red-haired harlot, swaying her enormous hat, reeking with the corrosive cocktails of the West Fifties, one felt oneself in the presence of the vast vulgarity of New York incarnate and made heroic . . . .<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Anthony Slide, The Vaudevillians: A Dictionary of Vaudeville Performers (Westport, Conn.: Arlington House, 1981), 50-53; and Robert C. Toll, “Only Skin Deep: The Impersonators,” chap. in On with the Show: The First Century of Show Business in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 239-63. Toll states that performers impersonating the opposite sex “numbered among the most popular and most highly paid stars in American vaudeville. Never before or since have impersonators achieved such prominence or stature” (239-40). For overview of cross-dressing in popular entertainment that focuses on British tradition, see Peter Ackroyd, “Transvestism as Performance,” chap. in Dressing Up, Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 89-140.

<sup>86</sup> Slide, The Vaudevillians, 46.

<sup>87</sup> Freedley, Slide and Toll all seem to agree that Eltinge achieved stardom when he appeared in “The Fascinating Widow,” a musical comedy about a man who had to disguise himself as a woman or women, which opened at the Liberty Theatre in New York on September 11, 1911.

<sup>88</sup> Edmund Wilson, “The Theatre,” Dial 75 (August 1923): 205.

Calla Lilies (Bert Savoy) of 1926 is Demuth's pictorial tribute to the celebrated performer (Fig. 119).<sup>89</sup> "Charles thought Bert Savoy was wonderful," claimed Robert Locher, who once escorted Demuth backstage to see Savoy in his dressing room.<sup>90</sup> Both Duchamp and Man Ray, for reasons that perhaps differed from Demuth's, were also fascinated with cross-dressing performers. Apart from Rose Sélavy, there is, unfortunately, scant evidence of any explicit response on the part of these two artists to this phenomenon during the time they collaborated in New York. However, there is more evidence of this fascination revealed in their activities and in the activities of colleagues, such as Francis Picabia, in Paris in the early 1920s. Such evidence is present, for example, in the short film entitled Entr'acte, which was shot by René Clair but conceived by Picabia and intended for presentation during the intermission of his ballet Relâche. In one scene of this humorous non-narrative film, a ballerina appears. Initially, the subject is viewed from below (the camera is beneath a glass floor); in a subsequent shot, the dancer appears full-length in front of the camera, and we discover that "she" has a beard (Fig. 120).<sup>91</sup> At approximately the same time that Entr'acte was created, Man Ray produced a series of photographs of one of France's most popular cabaret stars of the 1920s, an American-born female impersonator who went by the name of Barbette (Fig. 121). Barbette, who performed as a trapeze artist, presented his solo act for the first time in New York at the Harlem Opera House in 1919 and quickly gained notoriety.<sup>92</sup> Toward the end of 1923, he performed for the first time in Paris. It is very likely that both Man Ray and Duchamp had at least heard of Barbette in New York by circa 1920. Very shortly after his solo debut in New York, Barbette, it seems, became famous "all over the U. S."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The image appears to be related to similar floral subjects that Demuth produced throughout his career. However, he may have intended originally to complete it in the manner of the poster portraits he executed around the same time. See Locher, Interview by Emily Farnham, in Farnham, "Charles Demuth," 3:961. Locher states that the painting was "originally conceived as a poster portrait of Bert Savoy."

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Duchamp and Man Ray appear in another scene in Entr'acte: they are playing chess on a roof top, and Picabia disrupts the game by turning a hose on them.

<sup>92</sup> Slide, The Vaudevillians, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Francis Steegmuller, "A Visit to Barbette," in Le numéro Barbette, ed. Francis Steegmuller (Paris: Jacques Damase, 1980), 59.

Stegmuller suggests that it was the “surprise element” that, at least initially, contributed most to his success: he perfectly sustained the feminine illusion until the end of his act, when he pulled off his wig with a flourish to reveal that he was a man.

I would by no means wish to suggest that Rose Sélavy was simply a response to the phenomenon of female impersonation in vaudeville and American movies and nothing more. For one thing, it seems abundantly clear that Duchamp made a number of attempts during the 1910s and 20s to transform his personal identity and that he made such attempts, moreover, both before and after the advent of Rose. His crediting of “R. Mutt” as the creator of Fountain might qualify as such an instance, as would other “self-modifications” that occurred in the 1920s—for example, his appearance as the wanted man “George W. Welch, alias Bull, alias Pickens . . .” (known also as Rose Sélavy) in a rectified ready-made of 1923 (Fig. 122). Duchamp’s many efforts to transform himself seem to represent a pattern of experimentation, if you will, that has intriguing psychological implications. Thus Rose may, perhaps must, be seen to reflect a salient aspect of Duchamp’s psychology. Nor are vaudeville and motion pictures the only environmental factors that may have inspired Duchamp’s alter ego. Weinberg, for instance, has suggested that the popularity of masquerade balls in the 1910s and 20s may have had something to do with Duchamp’s decision to represent himself in drag.<sup>94</sup> Looking at the larger picture, one might perceive that the masquerade balls and the impersonators in vaudeville were actually related phenomena, insofar as both reflected the “Liberation” psychology. Both dressing up and cross-dressing represented challenges to conventional form; both arose from the rejection of paralyzing social constraints; both activities celebrated the individual freedom that was so vital an aspect of the period.

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<sup>94</sup> Weinberg, Speaking for Vice, 206. Although most masquerade balls were organized for general attendance, they did afford an outlet for “gay” expression, insofar as they legitimized cross-dressing. Thus Weinberg contends that “by publicly wearing [or being pictured in] women’s clothing, Duchamp was borrowing from the gay subculture of his period its most public form of expression.”

## 7. Conclusion

Between 1900 and 1920 the progressive faction in American art centered in New York transformed itself from a locally-based and tight-knit contingent into a cosmopolitan cast of mobile and shifting characters. Despite this transition, the art of the period remained, apart from isolated exceptions, consistently linked through its iconography to the contemporary urban scene. The artists that lived and worked in New York in the first two decades of the century witnessed the flowering of a new urban culture to which they bore a dual relationship, as consumers as well as contributors. Each of the several artists whose work I have highlighted in the previous pages was, for a time at least, an avid consumer of urban amusements. Several of these men pursued such pleasures with a degree of urgency and relish that would probably be thought unseemly in the climate of today.

My objective throughout this study has been twofold. I have sought to evaluate the critical response to the “lowbrow” element in American culture after 1900 and, at the same time, illuminate a segment of contemporaneous American art that reflects “lowbrow” alternatives to “highbrow” culture. As the case studies I’ve presented have indicated, Sloan, Glackens, Shinn, Davis, Demuth, Man Ray and Duchamp each responded uniquely to the popular amusement environment of early twentieth-century New York. Their responses ranged from detached interest to gleeful immersion in vaudeville and movie phenomena. Sloan, at one end of the spectrum, remained an aloof observer of the burgeoning amusement scene; Duchamp, at the other extreme, borrowed his most notorious artistic persona directly from contemporary vaudeville. Duchamp, no less than

Sloan, recognized the lowly, even vulgar, aspect of the currently ascendant forms of popular amusement. While Sloan ultimately rejected the “lowbrow” element in twentieth-century American culture, Duchamp fondly embraced it.

Though the various artists discussed here responded differently to movies and vaudeville, they were all undoubtedly aware of the “lowbrow” identification of these popular amusements. Distinctions between “high” and “low” in contemporary culture were clearly drawn by critics of the period; moreover, movies and vaudeville were almost always classed as “low” forms of cultural expression. American movies and vaudeville so distinguished themselves as brilliant, successful and, above all, popular, forms of entertainment in the early twentieth century that some critics found them threatening in that they distracted intelligent people from more serious thought about “culture” in America. For others, however, American popular culture represented a vital alternative to a tradition of high culture, which was largely an inheritance from Europe.

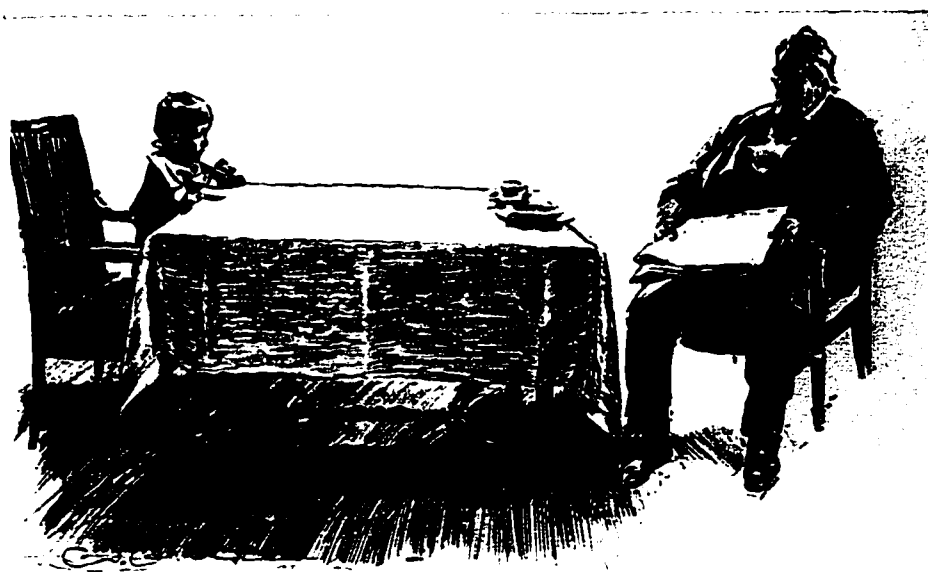
The art works I’ve presented here reflect the “lowbrow” sensibility in contemporary American culture without necessarily challenging or dismissing the distinction between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” taste. The realists, after all, recognized painting as a “higher” calling, regardless of its relationship to popular illustration; the modernists, though they rejected tradition, only absorbed elements of popular culture in order to forge a new avant-garde style. Nonetheless, the ascendancy of American movies and vaudeville between 1900 and 1920 contributed greatly to the recognition and appreciation of the American “lowbrow” sensibility among artists and intellectuals in the U. S. as well as in Europe. The imagery of popular entertainment, so conspicuous in the art work of the period, reflects the peculiar dynamics of this unique phase of cultural history.



1. William T. Smedley. "Easter Sunday on Fifth Avenue, New York," n. d.  
(published in Bookman, February 1909)



2. Arthur Lumley, "Caught in the Act--A Scene on Broadway," 1873  
(published in Bookman, February 1909)



Breakfast--Oatmeal and the Morning Paper.

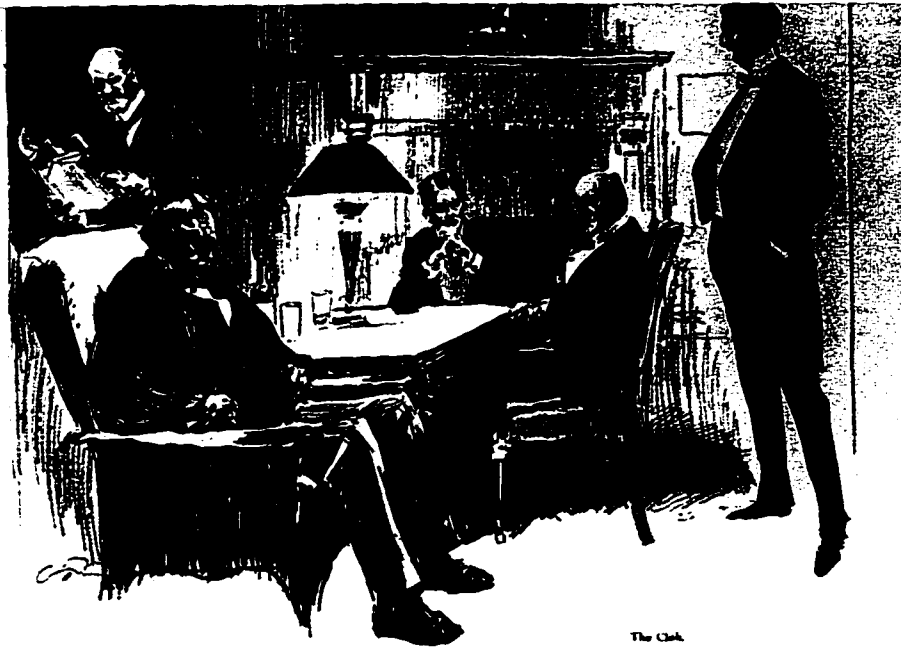
3. Charles Dana Gibson, "Breakfast--Oatmeal and the Morning Paper," n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, June 1898)



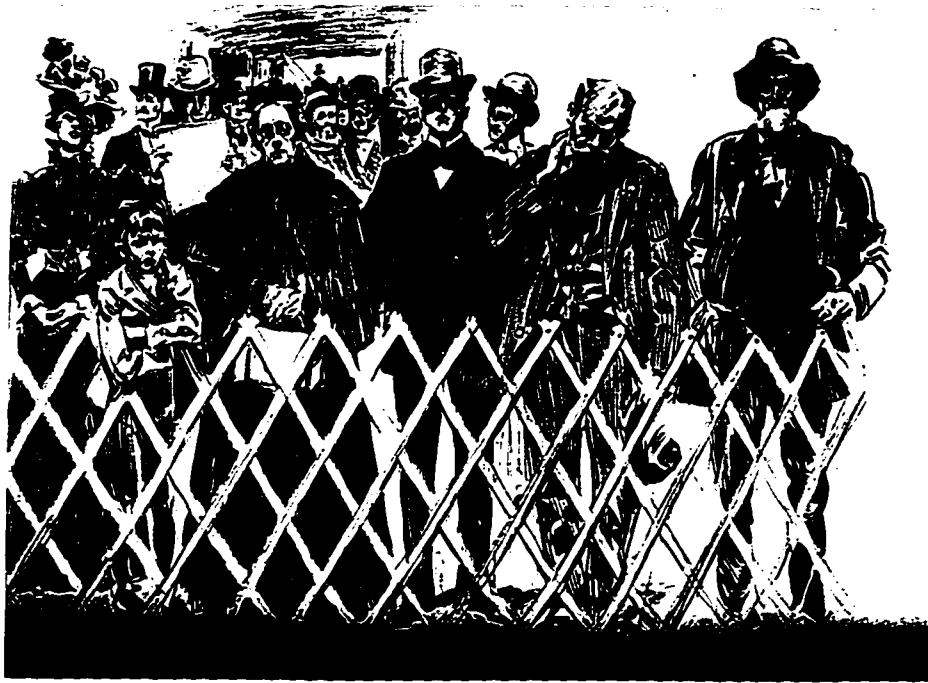
4. Charles Dana Gibson, "The Tenth Inning," n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, October 1898)



5. Charles Dana Gibson, "The Musician," n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, November 1898)



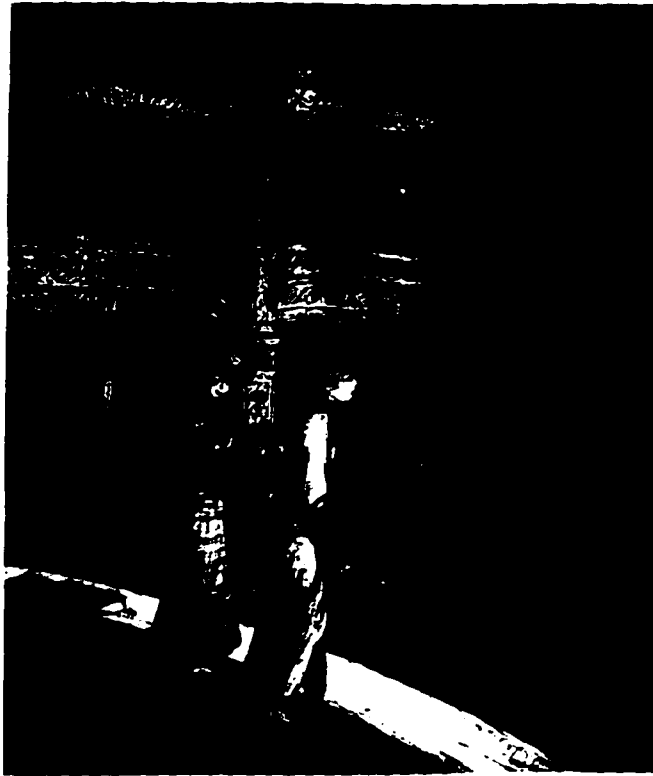
6. Charles Dana Gibson, "The Club," n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, November 1898)



7. Charles Dana Gibson, "On the Ferry." n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, June 1898)



8. Charles Dana Gibson, "Outside Fleischmann's Bakery, Broadway--  
Waiting for Bread," n. d. (published in Scribner's, June 1898)



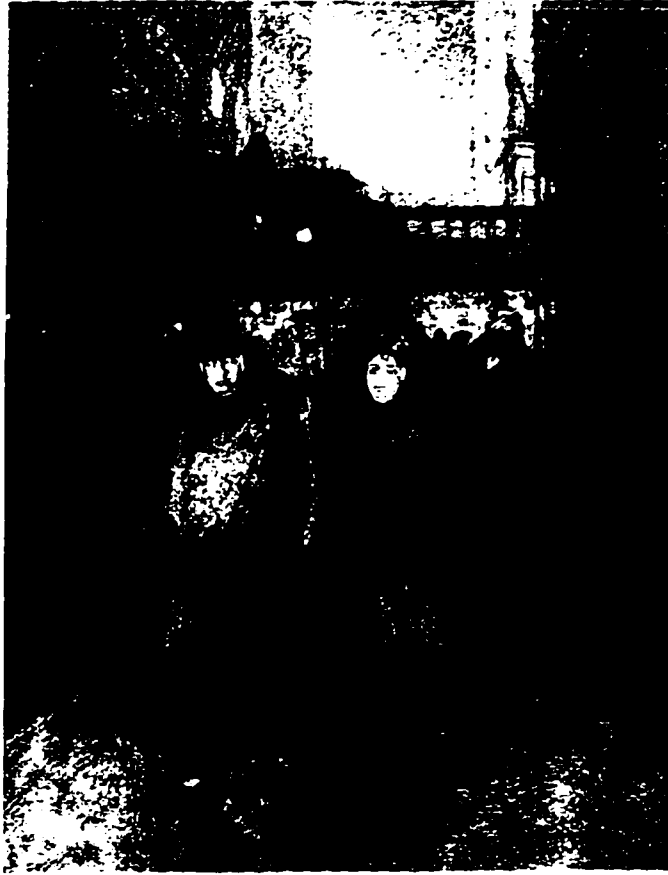
9. Glenn O. Coleman, "Amateur Night on the Bowery." n. d.  
(published in Craftsman, November 1909)



10. Glenn O. Coleman, "Future Chorus Girls." n. d.  
(published in Current Literature, March 1910)



11. Glenn O. Coleman, "Union Square, New York." n. d.  
(published in Craftsman, November 1909)



12. Glenn O. Coleman. "Forty-Second Street." n. d.  
(published in Craftsman, November 1909)



13. Glenn O. Coleman, "The Shop Girl at Home," n. d.  
(published in Craftsman, November 1909)



14. Eastman Johnson, Old Kentucky Home, Life in the South, 1859



15. George Caleb Bingham, Jolly Flatboatmen, 1846



16. William Sidney Mount, Dance of the Haymakers, 1845



17. Thomas Eakins, The Pathetic Song, 1881



18. George du Maurier, "Our Countrymen Abroad," n. d.  
(published in Punch, or the London Charivari, 10 November 1877)



19. John Sloan, Spectators Watching Billboard Artist, 1908



20. Edouard Manet, Music in the Tuileries, 1862

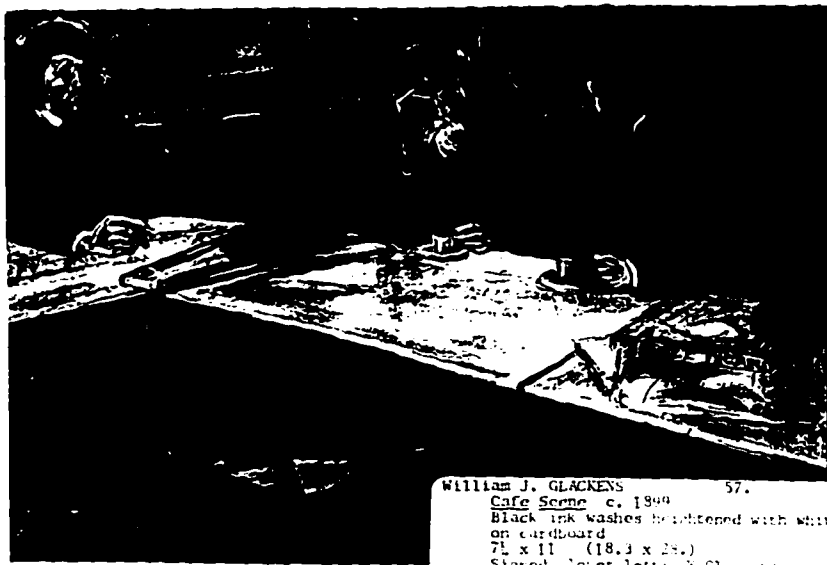


21. William Glackens, Figures in a Park, 1895



A TYPICAL NEW YORK BEER-GARDEN.

22. William Glackens, "A Typical New York Beer Garden," n. d.  
(published in Harper's Weekly, 21 July 1900)



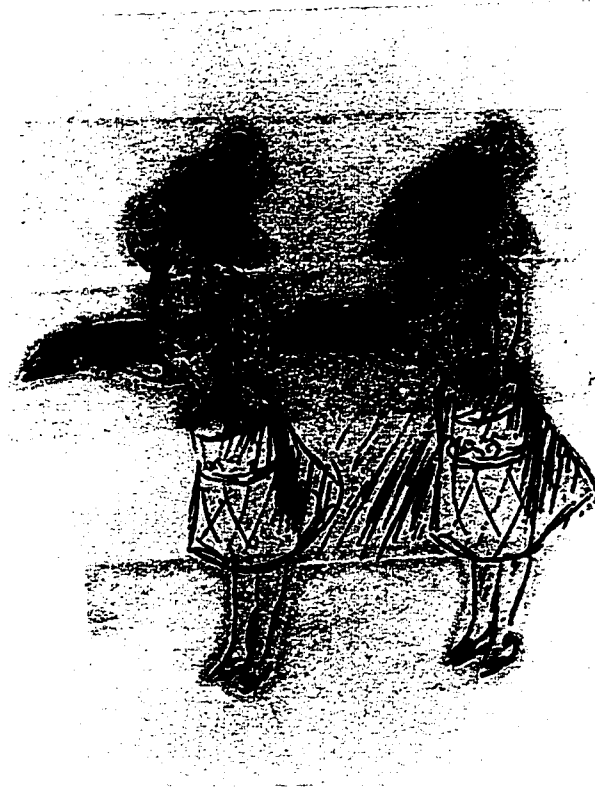
WILLIAM J. GLACKENS 57.  
 Café Scene, c. 1899  
 Black ink washes brightened with white  
 on cardboard  
 7 1/2 x 11 (18.8 x 28.1)  
 Signed, lower left: W. J. Glackens

*This drawing by William J. Glackens was made for me when I was Art Editor of  
 Scribner's Magazine - The drawing, later was given to me  
 Everett Ruess*

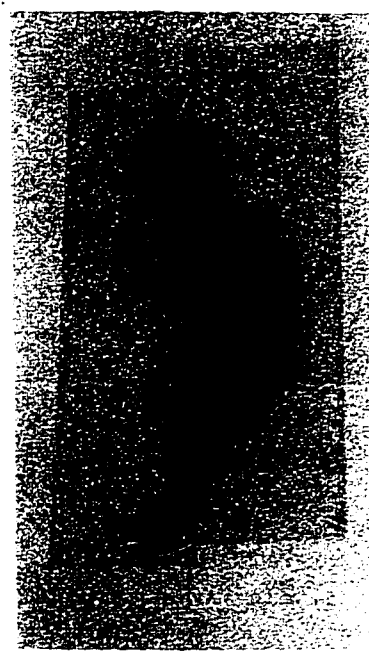
23. William Glackens, Café Scene, ca. 1899



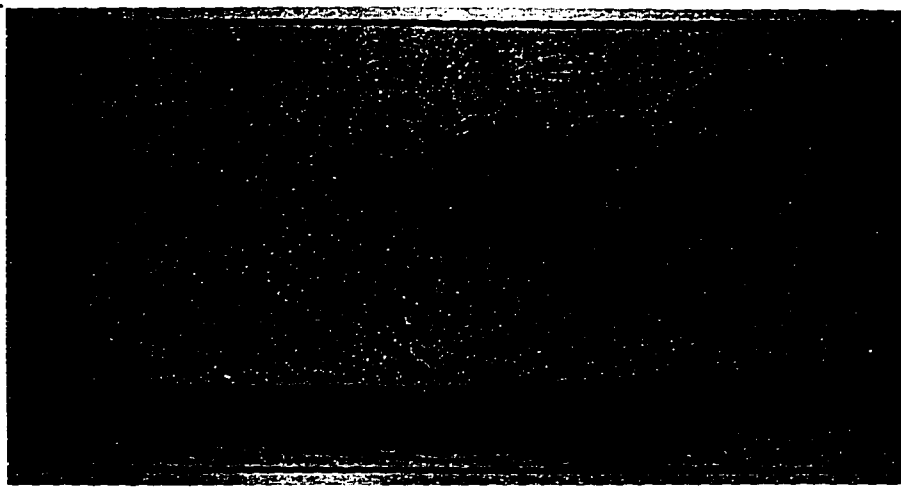
24. William Glackens, "Irish Comedians," n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, October 1899)



25. William Glackens. "Singing Soubrettes." n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, October 1899)



26. William Glackens, Untitled, n. d. (published in Scribner's, October 1899)



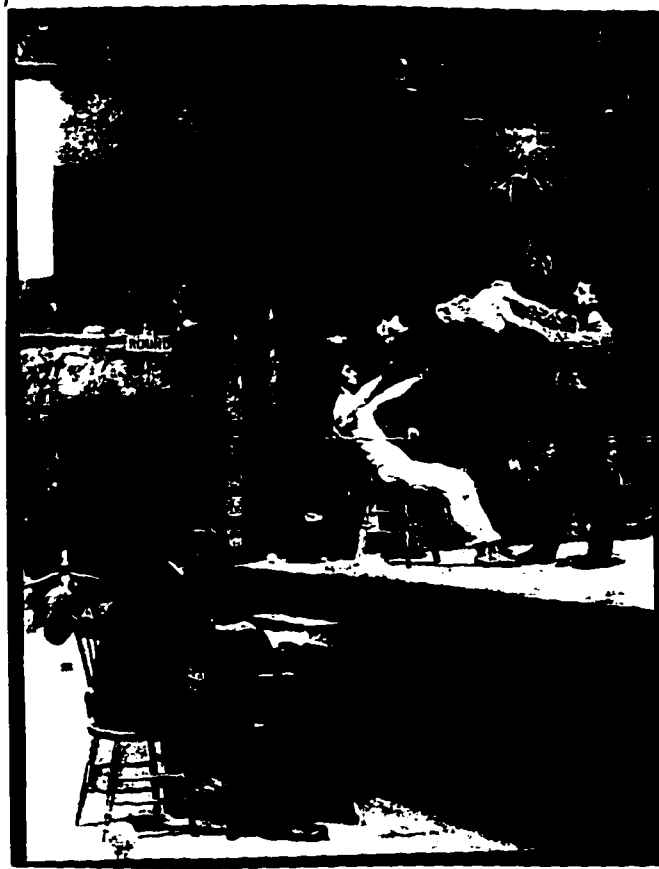
27. William Glackens, Untitled, n. d. (published in Scribner's, September 1901)



28. William Glackens, Hammerstein's Roof Garden, ca. 1901



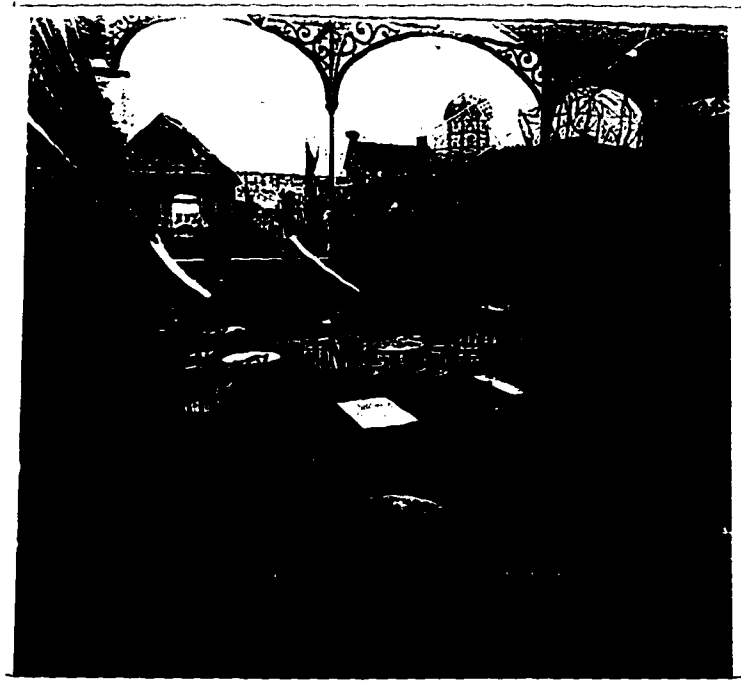
29. William Glackens, "I'm so glad you've found me. Oh, take me away!" n. d.  
(published in Scribner's, September 1901)



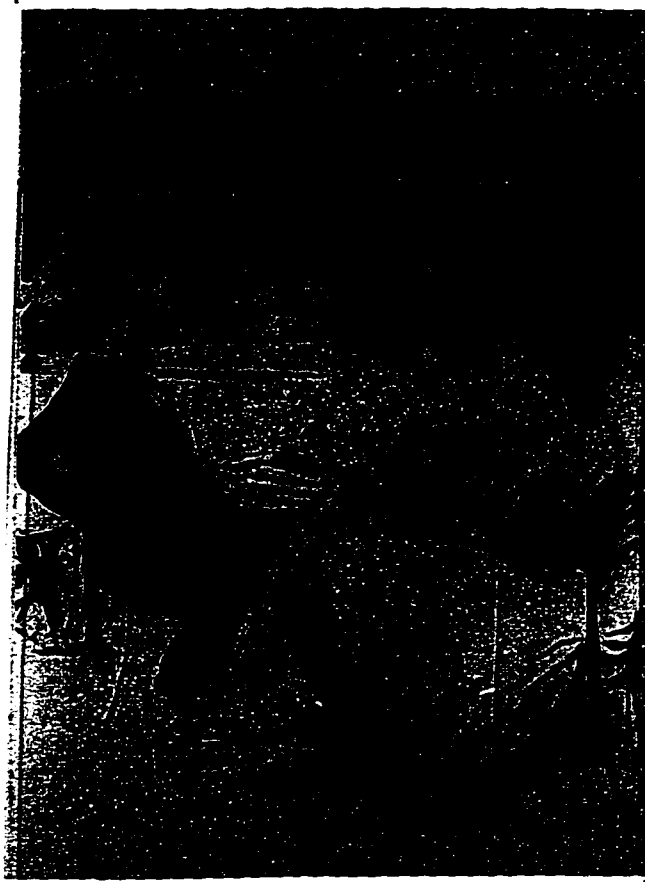
30. Thomas Eakins, Between Rounds, 1899



31. Paradise Roof Garden, photograph by Byron, n. d.



32. Paradise Roof Garden, photograph by Byron. n. d.



33. William Glackens. "A Summer-Night Relaxation," n. d.  
(published in Harper's Bazar, 18 August 1900)



34. William Glackens, Pony Ballet, 1912



35. William Glackens, Music Hall Turn, ca. 1910-12



THE UNRIVALLED NIGGER OF THE "ROYAL STANDARD."

36. Joseph Pennell, "The Unrivalled Nigger of the 'Royal Standard'." n. d.  
(published in Harper's New Monthly, January 1891)



A LION COMIQUE AT THE OXFORD.

37. Joseph Pennell, "A Lion Comique at the Oxford," n. d.  
(published in Harper's New Monthly, January 1891)



38. John Sloan, Walnut Street Theatre, 1900



39. John Sloan, Connoisseurs of Prints, from the series New York City Life, 1905



40. John Sloan, Fifth Avenue Critics, from the series New York City Life, 1905



41. John Sloan, The Show Case, from the series New York City Life, 1905



42. John Sloan, Man Monkey, from the series New York City Life, 1905



43. John Sloan, The Little Bride, from the series New York City Life, 1906



44. John Sloan, Fun, One Cent, from the series New York City Life, 1905



45. John Sloan. Movies, Five Cents, 1907



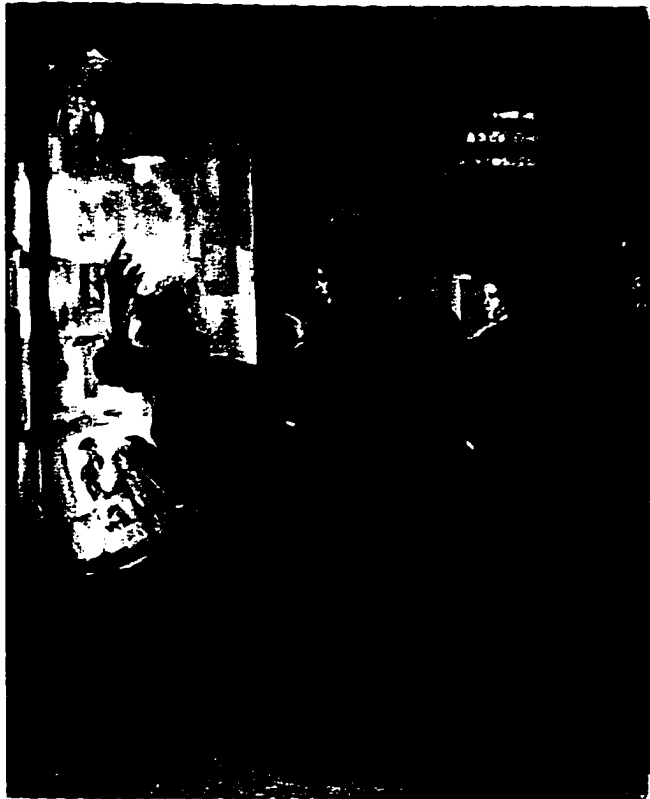
46. John Sloan, Drawing for Movies, Five Cents, 1907



47. John Sloan, Hairdresser's Window, 1907



48. John Sloan, Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street, 1907



49. John Sloan. Picture Store Window. 1907



50. John Sloan. Copyist at the Metropolitan Museum. 1908



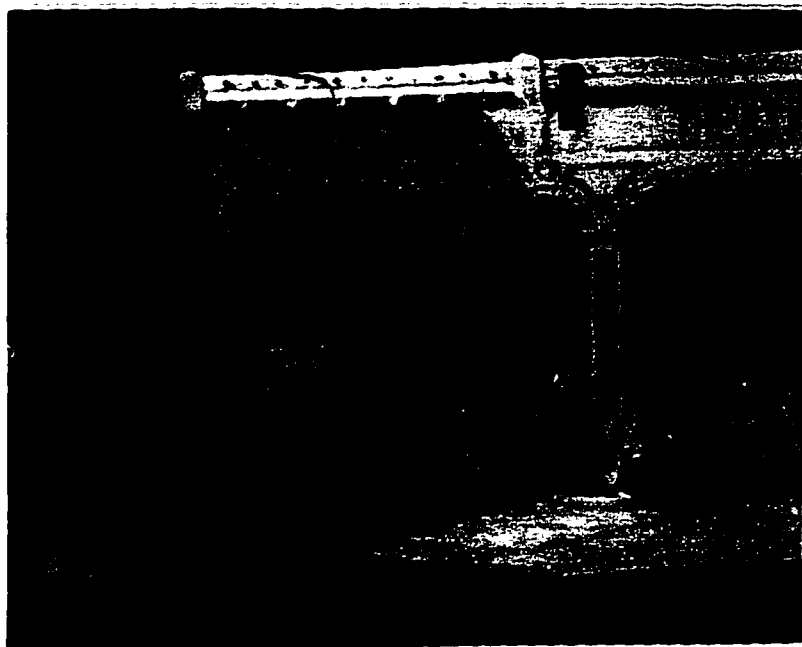
51. John Sloan. Jefferson Market Jail, Night. 1911



52. John Sloan, Wet Night in the Bowery, 1911



53. John Sloan, Tammany Hall, New York, 1911



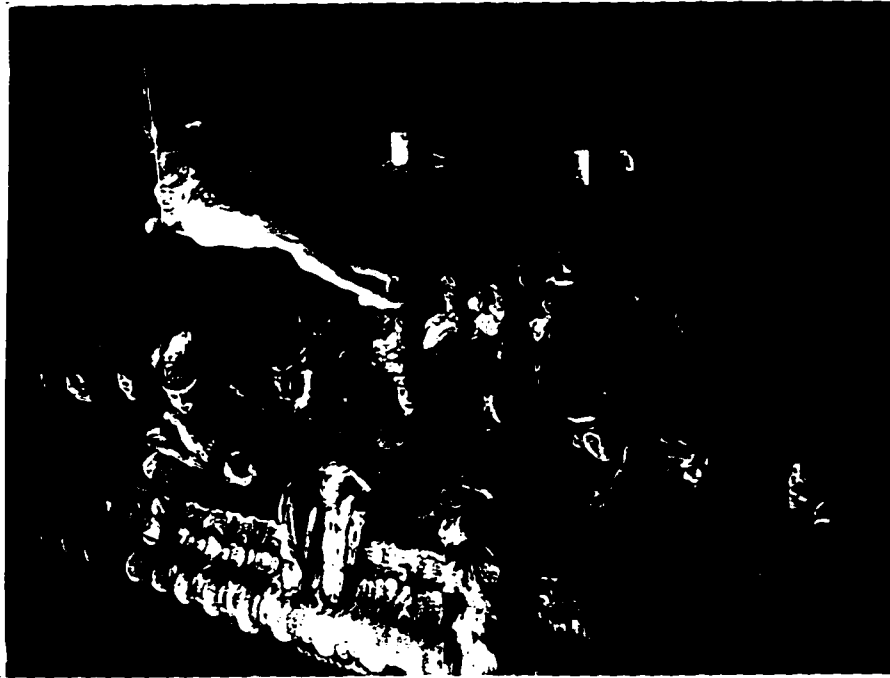
54. John Sloan. Carmine Theater, 1912



55. John Sloan, Drawing for Carmine Theater, 1912



56. John Sloan, Movies, 1913



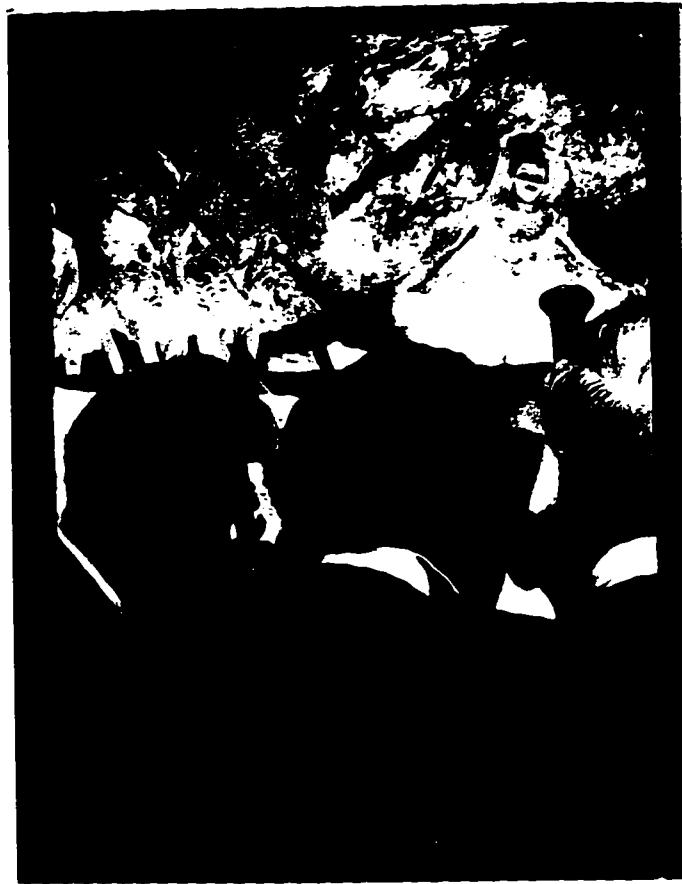
57. Everett Shinn. London Hippodrome, 1902



58. Everett Shinn, The Vaudeville Act, 1902-3(?)



59. Everett Shinn, Spanish Music Hall, 1903



60. Edgar Degas, Musiciens à l'Orchestre, ca. 1870-71 (reworked ca. 1874-76)



61. Everett Shinn, The Orchestra Pit, Old Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre, ca. 1906-7



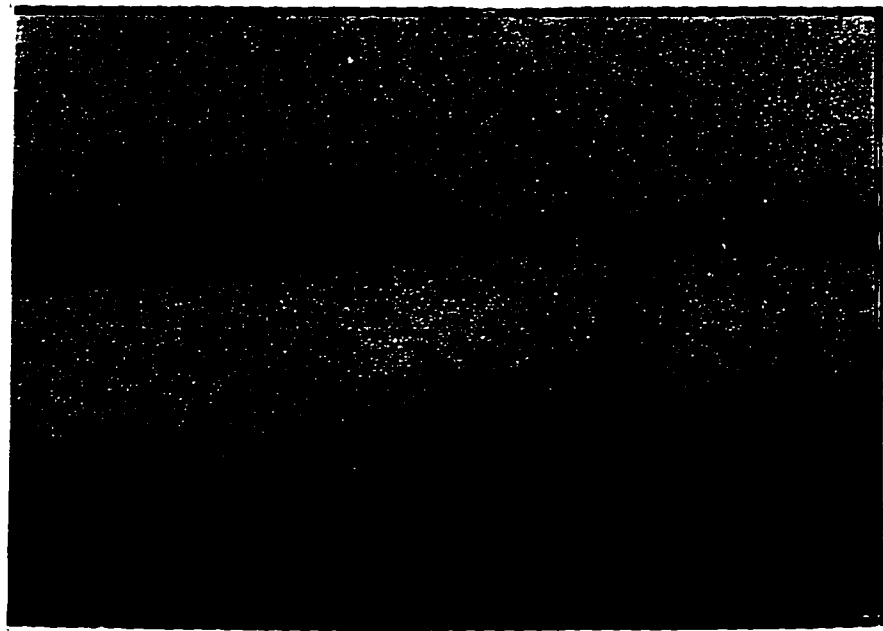
62. Everett Shinn, The Orchestra Pit, 1907



63. Everett Shinn, Keith's, Union Square, ca. 1906



64. James A. McNeill Whistler, Nocturne--Blue and Silver--Bognor, ca. 1871-76



65. James A. McNeill Whistler, Nocturne--Blue and Silver--Battersea Reach, ca. 1870-75



66. Stuart Davis, The Music Hall, 1910



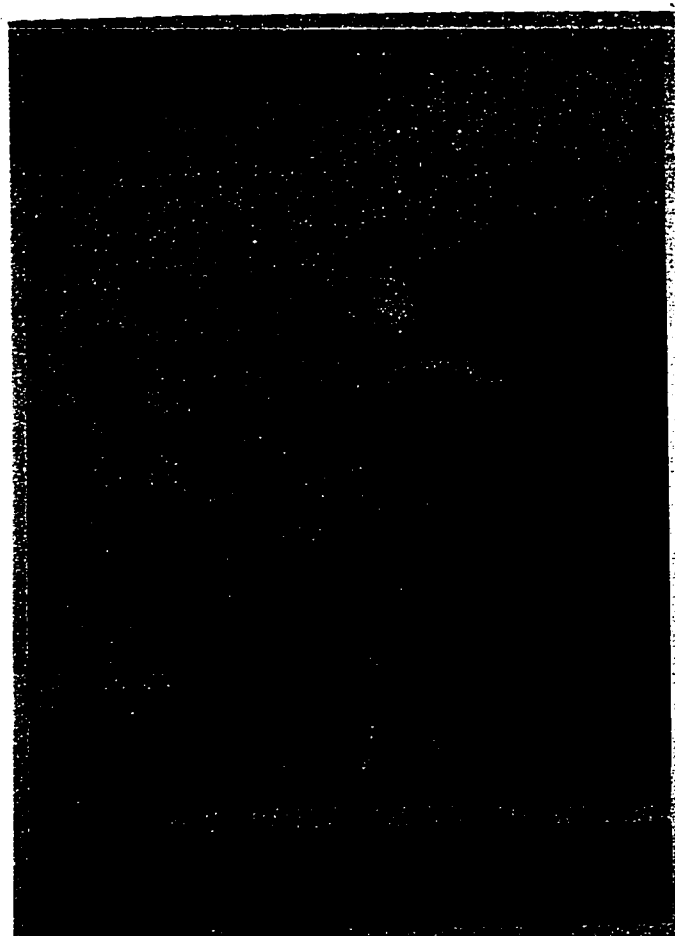
67. Stuart Davis, Babette, 1912



68. Stuart Davis. Babette, 1912



69. Stuart Davis, The Vaudeville Show, 1912



70. Everett Shinn, Julie Bonbon, 1907



71. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Une Redoute au Moulin-Rouge, n. d.



72. Stuart Davis, Babe La Tour, 1912



73. Stuart Davis, At the Theater, 1912



74. Stuart Davis. Untitled. 1913



75. John Sloan, Untitled, n. d.  
(published in New York Call, 20 February 1910)



76. Stuart Davis. The Back Room. 1913



77. Stuart Davis, Jackson's Band, 1913



78. Stuart Davis, Negro Dance Hall, 1915



79. Stuart Davis, Negro Dance Hall (alternate title: Thé Dansant), 1915



80. Stuart Davis, Negro Dance Hall, Newark, 1915



81. Charles Demuth, Revue in Paris, 1907(?)



82. Charles Demuth. Negro Girl Dancer (alternate title: Negro Jazz Band), ca. 1916



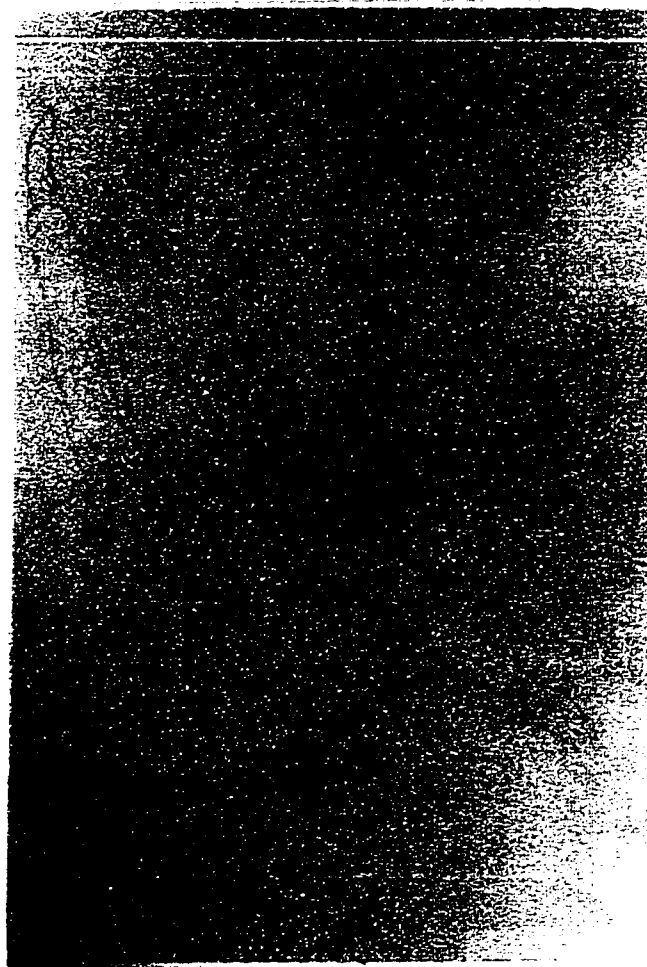
83. Charles Demuth, On Stage, 1915



84. Charles Demuth. At Marshall's (alternate title: Negro Dancing), ca. 1917



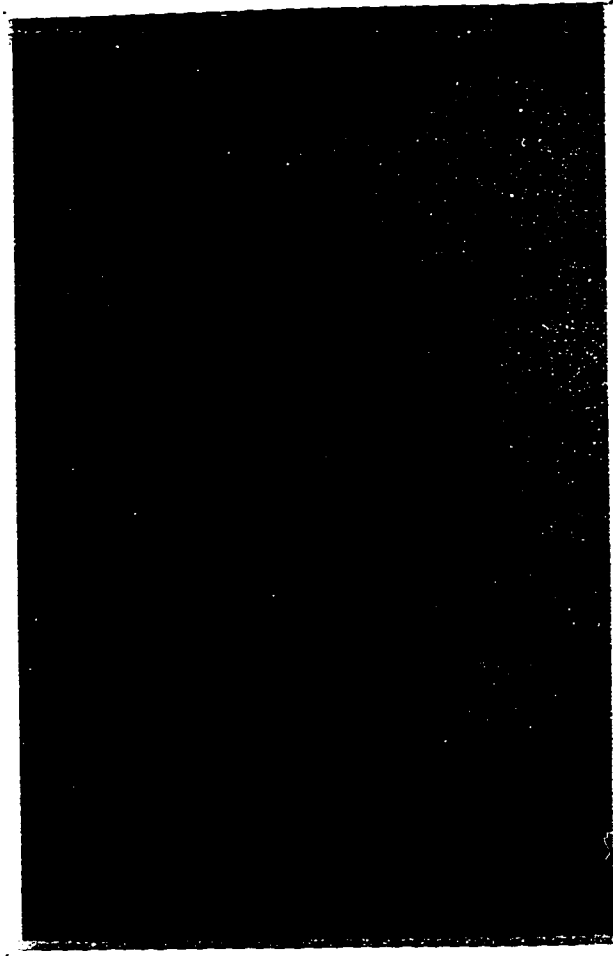
85. Charles Demuth, In Vaudeville: Two Acrobats #1, 1918



86. Charles Demuth, In Vaudeville: Acrobats, 1918(?)



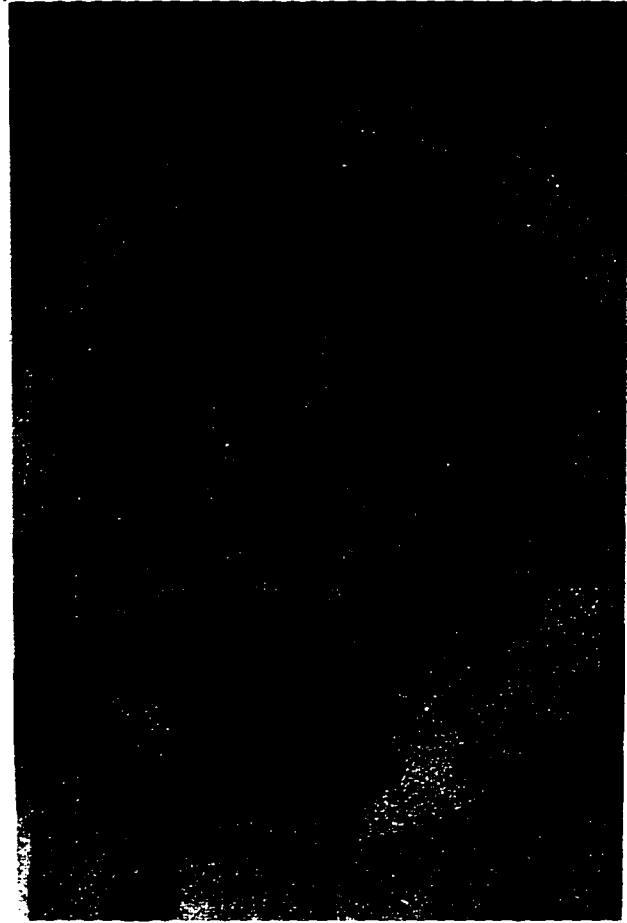
87. Charles Demuth, Acrobats, 1919



88. Charles Demuth. Study for Acrobats, 1919



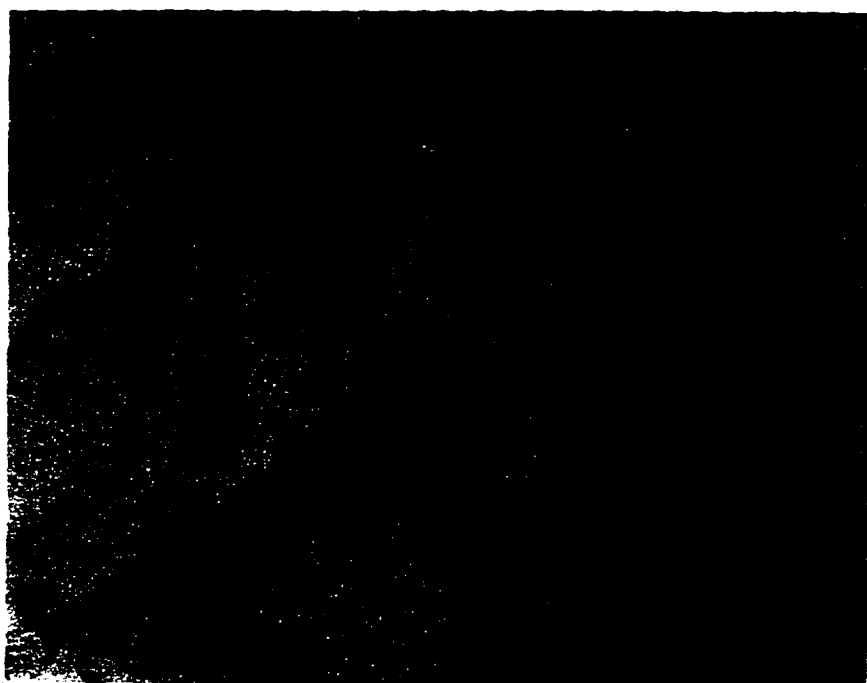
89. Charles Demuth, Female Acrobats, 1916



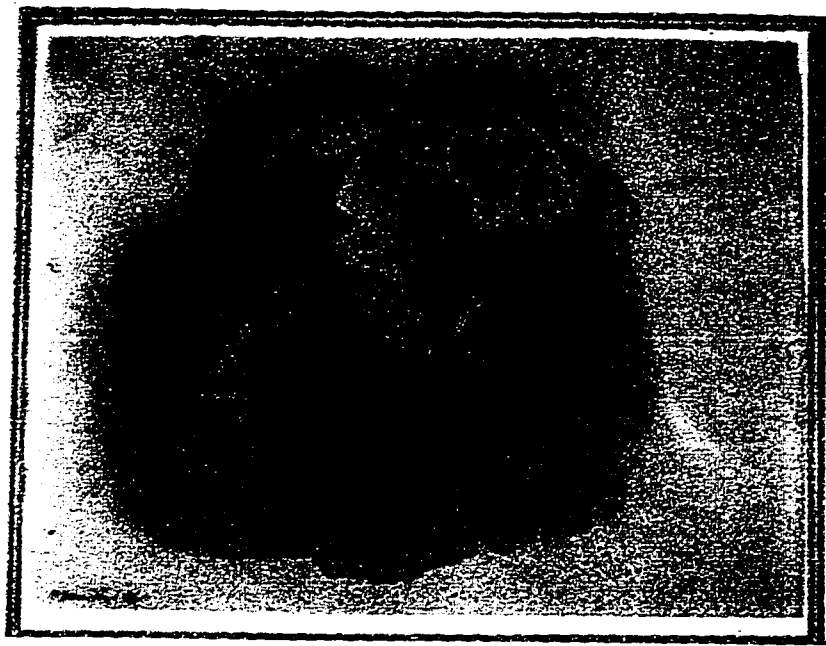
90. Charles Demuth, Tumblers, 1917



91. Charles Demuth, In Vaudeville: Acrobats, 1918



92. Charles Demuth, Circus, 1917



93. Charles Demuth, Acrobats, 1916



94. Charles Demuth. Soldier and His Girlfriend. 1915



95. Charles Demuth, "Many Brave Hearts are Asleep in the Deep", 1916



96. The Dolly Sisters, publicity photograph. 1918



97. Charles Demuth, Dancers, 1918



98. Charles Demuth. Count Muffat's First View of Nana at the Theatre, 1915



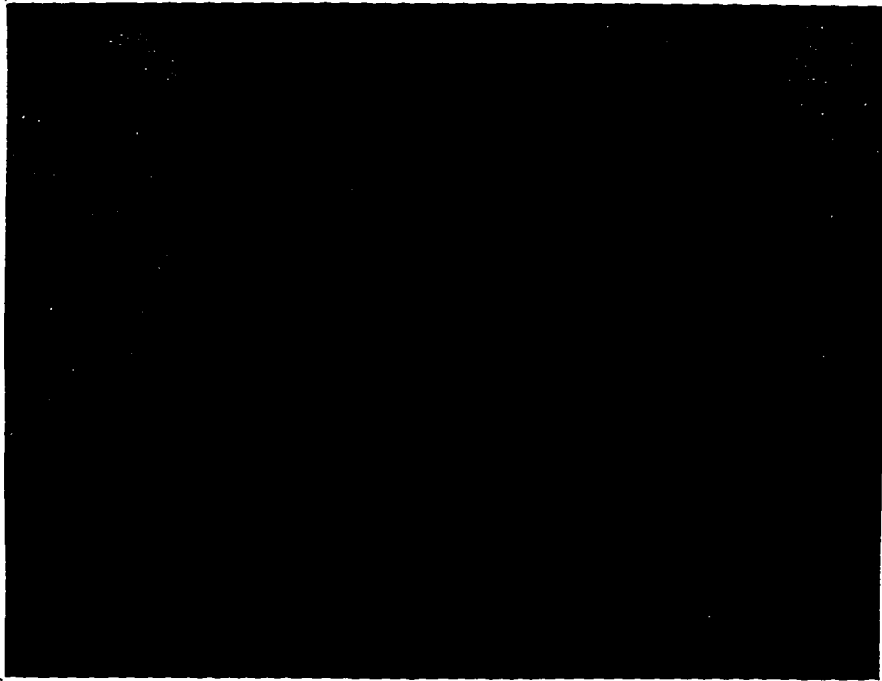
99. Charles Demuth, Acrobats, 1916



100. Charles Demuth. Vaudeville Comediennes. 1917



101. Charles Demuth, Vaudeville Dancers, 1918



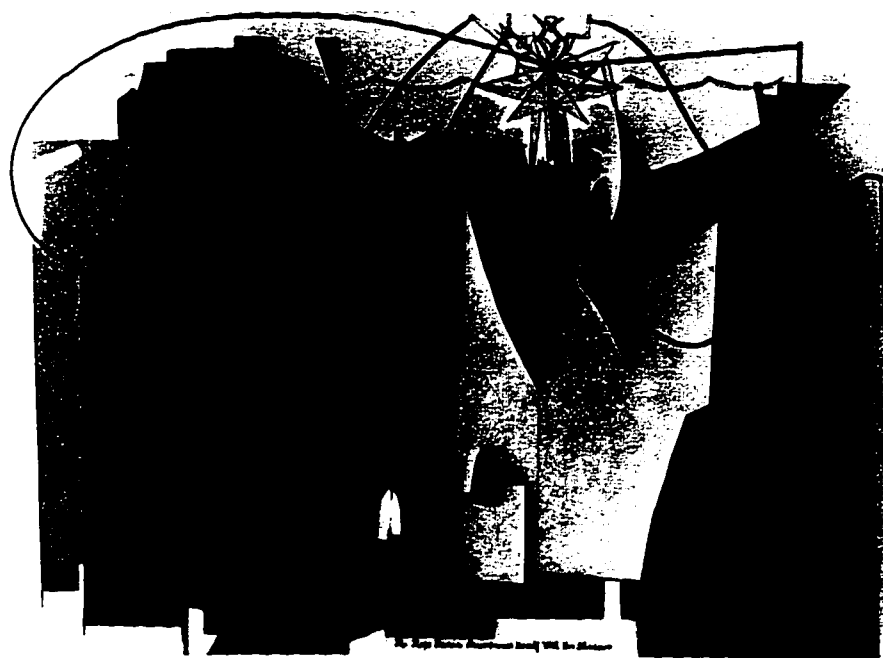
102. Man Ray, Figures in a Dance, 1914



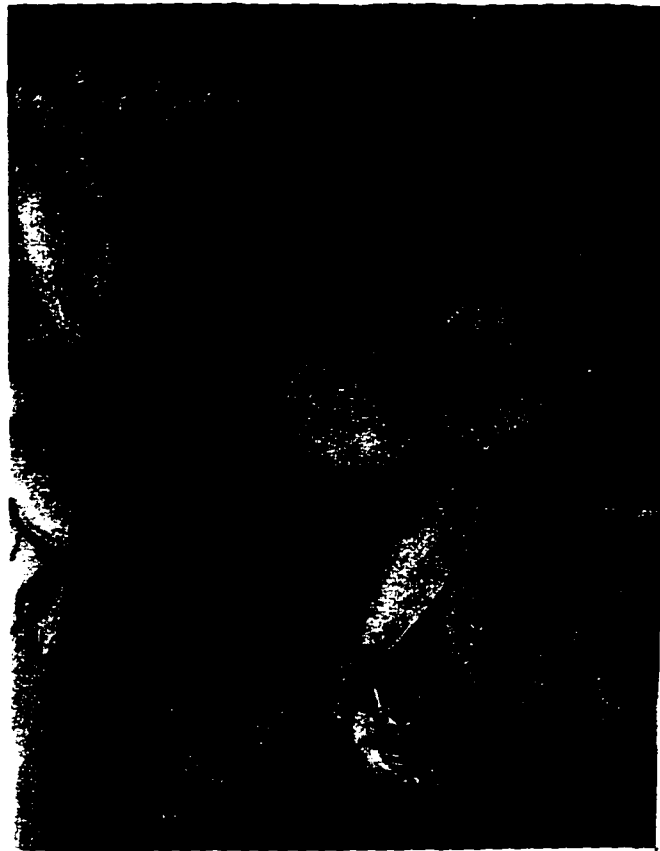
103. Man Ray. Untitled [dancing figures], 1914



104. Man Ray, Dance, 1915



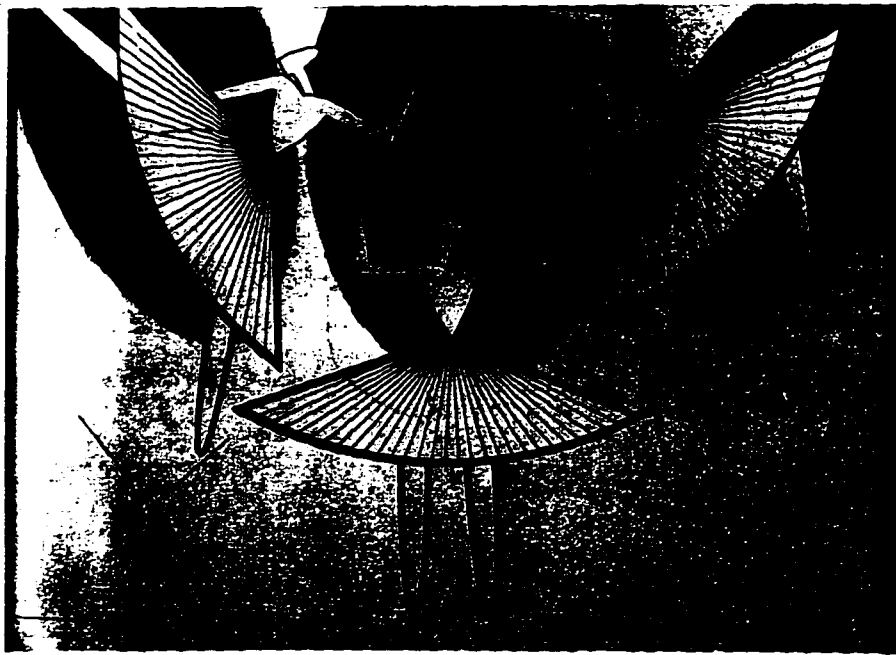
105. Man Ray. The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows. 1916



106. Max Weber, Dancers, 1912



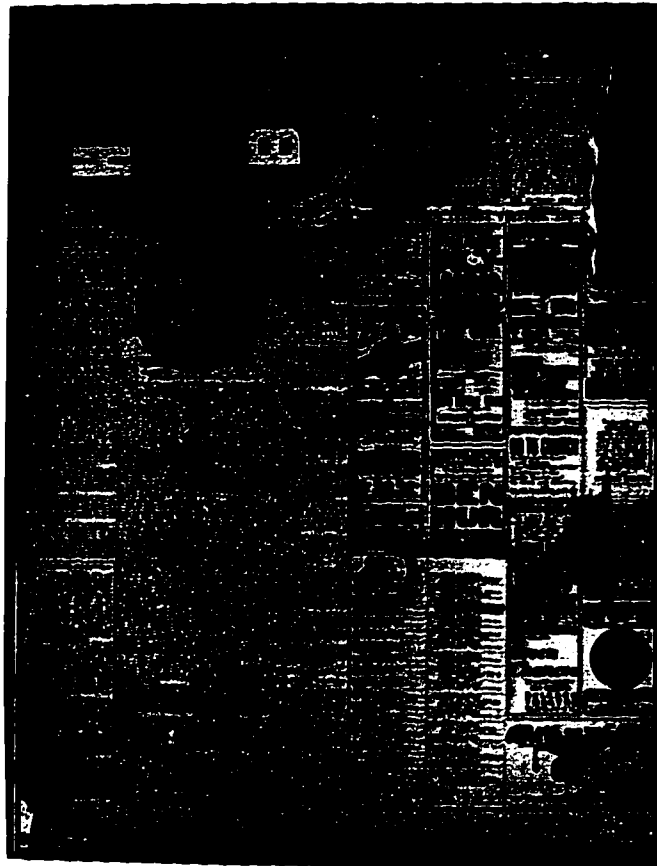
107. Man Ray, Study for The Rope Dancer, 1916



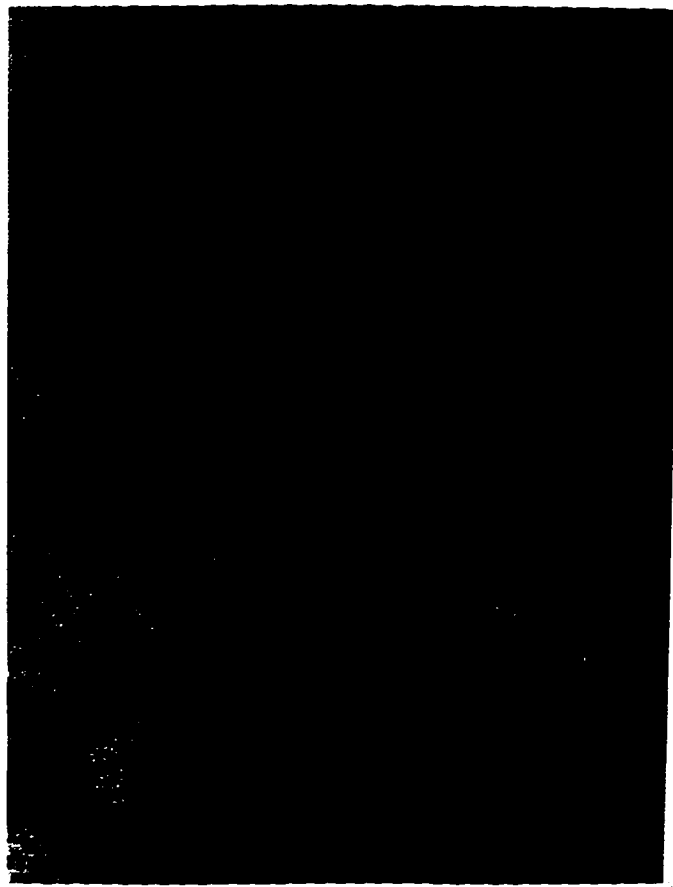
108. Man Ray, Ballet-Silhouette, 1916



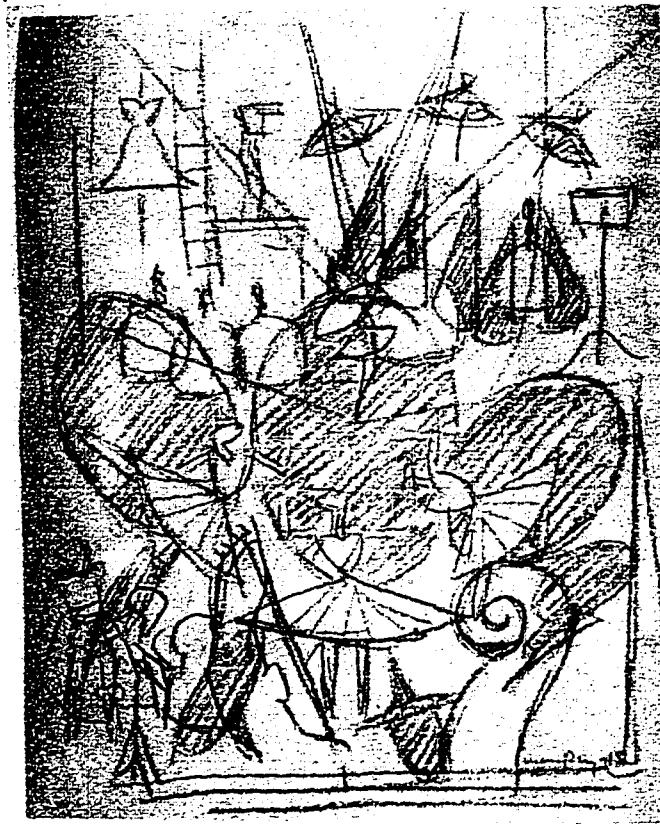
109. Man Ray. The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows, 1918



110. Man Ray. Transmutation, 1916



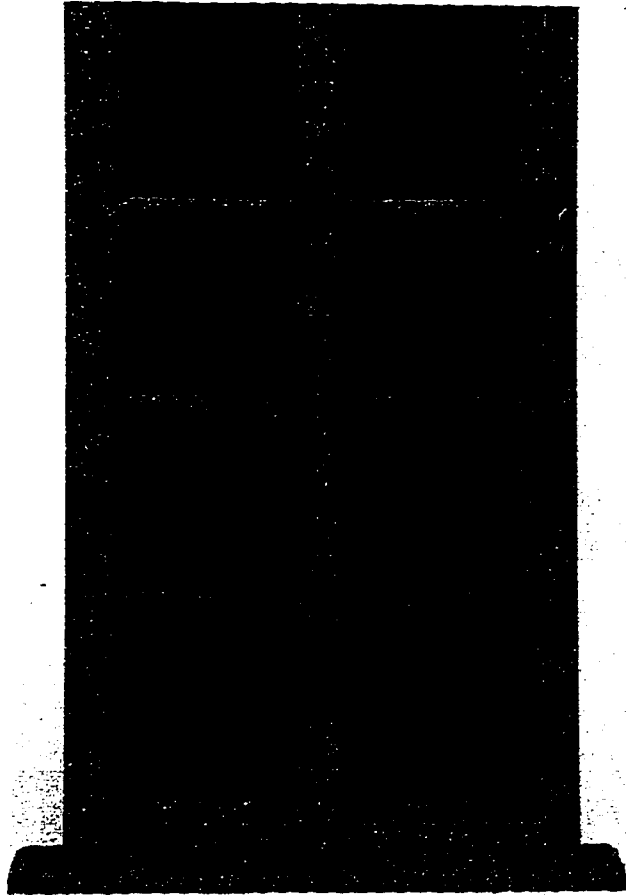
111. Max Weber, Sunday Tribune, 1913



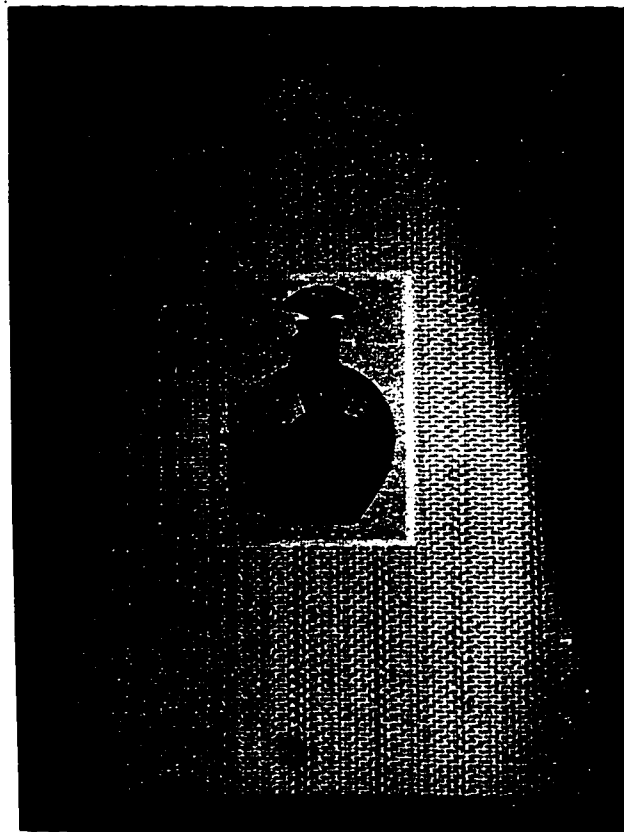
112. Man Ray. Memo for Aerographs. 1918



113. Man Ray, Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph, 1919



114. Marcel Duchamp, Fresh Widow, 1920



115. Cover of New York Dada, 1921



116. Marcel Duchamp, Beautiful Breath, Veil Water, 1921



117. Marcel Duchamp, Rose Sélavy by Man Ray, 1921



118. Savoy and Brennan in *The Greenwich Village Follies*, publicity photograph, ca. 1920



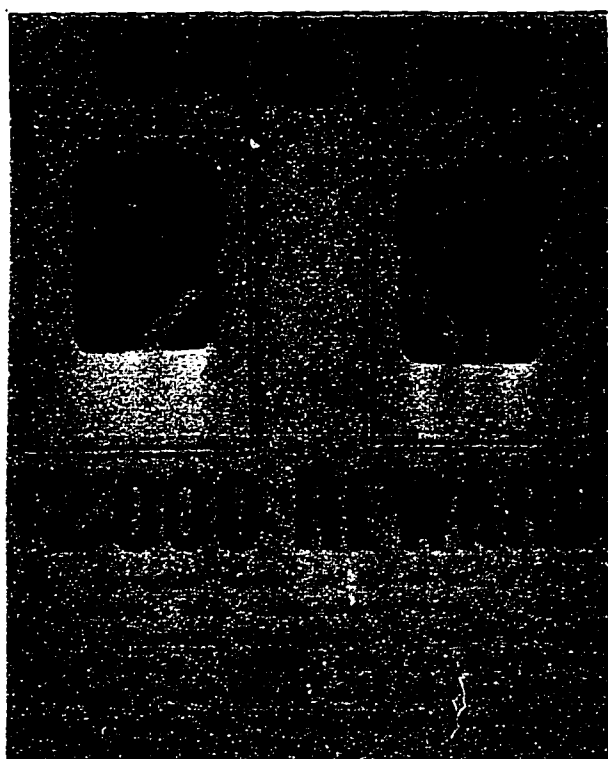
119. Charles Demuth, Calla Lilies (Bert Savoy), 1926



120. Bearded ballerina, scene from Entr'acte, 1924



121. Man Ray, Barbette, n. d.



122. Marcel Duchamp, Wanted/\$2,000 Reward, 1923

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The following list of sources is divided into three sections. The first section below lists archival collections. The specific components of the collections listed that have been most useful to me are identified in the footnotes accompanying the text. Note that archives and research collections that are frequently cited are, after their initial mention, identified by the abbreviations indicated. The second section lists published and unpublished book-length works, including dissertations, theses, and exhibition catalogues. The third and final section lists articles and parts of books. The following is by no means an exhaustive bibliography. Rather, I've listed only the sources I've found most essential in exploring the issues specific to my work.

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