

REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE OF DADA IN NEW YORK, 1910-1926

VOLUME I

by

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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

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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SARAH ARCHINO

Adviser: Rose-Carol Washton Long

New York Dada has historically been positioned as incompatible or antithetical to American modernism. This dissertation argues that the Dada spirit in New York not only rejected European conventions of high art, but did so with the nationalistic desire to develop a modern and independent American idiom through the influence of anarchism and vernacular culture. This study traces the influence of anarchism in New York on Alfred Stieglitz, his influential gallery, “291,” and his publication, *Camera Work*, as well as larger anarchistic networks during the early 1910s. In this atmosphere of iconoclastic experimentation, vernacular culture emerged as an alternative strategy to critique the definitions and institutions of fine art.

Whereas most studies of New York Dada focus on the work of Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Man Ray, this study reconstructs the cultural conditions in which they worked. The year 1915 becomes a watershed moment, not simply for the arrival of Duchamp and Picabia, but for the publication of Van Wyck Brooks’s cultural critique, *America’s Coming-of-Age*. This text blamed the dichotomy between the highbrow and lowbrow for the lack of a truly American cultural idiom. I argue that the main character of New York Dada – its enthusiastic adoption of the subjects, styles, and strategies of vernacular culture – attempts to bridge that divide. The

vernacular came to represent a new standard of American identity, a flexible definition that could allow an amateurish aesthetic to coexist with industrial imagery.

This study broadens the scope of New York Dada production to include the work of artists and critics who collaborated in this Dada spirit, but have historically been separated from the Dada movement. In this larger context, canonical works of Dada, especially periodicals such as *The Ridgefield Gazook* (1915), *The Blind Man* (1917), and *New York Dada* (1921) will be reconsidered.

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I have sought to rename the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid. – William Carlos Williams¹

In reconstructing the narrative of Dada in New York, scholars are faced with paradoxical claims by Man Ray: writing to Tristan Tzara in June 1921, he boasted that “All New York is Dada and will not tolerate a rival,” while, towards the end of his life, he confirmed Arturo Schwarz’s assertion that “there is no such thing as New York Dada.”² These statements speak directly to one of the major challenges facing scholars of this movement: there existed no self-proclaimed circle of Dada artists in America, no group exhibitions, no manifesto, no sustained journal. As Gabrielle-Bufferet Picabia later described, “the Zurich Dadas seemed to have a better idea of what they wanted and solemnized in official, well-regulated ceremonies the same cult of unreason which the New York contingent contended themselves with living.”³

Scholarship has, for the most part, conceptualized New York Dada in the mold of its European counterparts, concentrating on aspects of American production which correlate to activities in Zurich, Berlin, or Paris. Furthering this Eurocentrism, many modern scholars date the emergence of New York Dada to the arrival of Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia in 1915, concentrate on their production, along with that of Man Ray, and declare the death of New York Dada in 1921, when all three men had relocated to Paris. But there is a larger, more complete story to be told.

Nineteen-twenty-one marked the first time the term New York Dada was officially used, as the title of a publication edited by Duchamp and Man Ray. Coming five years after the Dada

¹ William Carlos Williams, preface, *In the American Grain* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1925), np.

² Man Ray, letter to Tristan Tzara, undated [8 June 1920 postmark], quoted in Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 205. Man Ray, interview by Arturo Schwarz, in *New York Dada: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1974), 99.

³ Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, “Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp” (1949) reprinted in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1951), 264.

movement was born in Zurich, this little magazine had the unintended result of rerouting the actual history of experimental art in New York and aligning it with European Dada. Beginning in 1951, scholars referred to the years 1915-1921, when Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray converged on Manhattan, as a *sui generis* Dada moment, hence the idea of a New York Dada movement entered the textbooks.

From a historical and historiographical perspective, however, the idea of a “New York Dada” movement is problematic. First, it is an anachronism, a *post-facto* appellation. Secondly, it has created the enduring impression that the two Europeans, Duchamp and Picabia, along with their collaborator, Man Ray, were responsible for instigating activities which were, by any other name Dada in spirit, even if the term Dada had not yet been coined. My dissertation will correct this turn of events by documenting the origins of a Dada sensibility before the arrival of Picabia and Duchamp on American shores. Indeed, as I will show, they even profited from ideas and artistic manifestations that had been in the air – and on the ground – for some time. While some of these pre-World War I, Dada-like, sensibilities in American art and literature had been influenced, in part, by European renegade thought (notably anarchism, the theories of French philosopher Henri Bergson, and Italian Futurism), they were largely derived from a new urban culture and a set of concerns specific to the fashioning of an autonomous American national identity. As Duchamp later reflected “it was parallel if you wish, but not directly influenced. It wasn’t Dada, but it was in the same spirit, without however, being in the Zurich spirit.”⁴

In particular, the search for an authentically non-European, anti-academic, anti-institutional culture led American artists and writers to embrace urban vernacular styles, content, and

⁴ Marcel Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 56.

iconography.⁵ The resulting texts and images, by writers and artists such as Marius de Zayas, Morton Schamberg, and Robert Coady, prefigured the anti-art aesthetic that European Dada would later claim as its own. Hence I will rewrite the narrative of Dada in New York, based on a precise reconstruction of several overlapping networks in Manhattan which operated from roughly 1910-1926. In the process, I will correct the misperceptions over the term New York Dada and establish the existence of revolutionary artistic sensibilities in New York that prefigured both the arrival of Duchamp and Picabia and the invention of Zurich Dada in 1916. This is not to argue that the common usage of the term “New York Dada” should be overthrown, only that it must be made more complicated. For this study, New York Dada will refer to a loose network of artists, gallerists, and critics who rejected the conventions of fine art, based on European academicism, to create a modern aesthetic based in vernacular American culture, working during the 1910s and 1920s. What we have come to call New York Dada has an earlier history, one that sheds light on developments in American modernism even before the 1913 Armory show, and that demonstrates a determined independence from European cultural values. By tracing the markers of this Dada spirit found within the intersecting networks of artists operating in New York during this period, symbiotic elements of the relationship between New York Dada and American modern art will be revealed.

As William C. Agee has noted, histories of New York Dada have sidelined Dada skepticism as it seemed “contrary to the American faith in ‘order, logic, and reason.’”⁶ Indeed, the earliest strains of this Dada spirit in New York were intricately bound with anarcho-individualism and nationalistic impulses. Anarchism encouraged artists and critics of the Stieglitz circle to think

⁵ These elements of anti-academicism, which privileged children’s art, “primitivism,” and the machine aesthetic were not limited to an American context. Indeed, the 1912 publication of Kandinsky’s *Blue Rider Almanac* was a central conduit for transporting such iconoclasm from European sources, as will be discussed in Chapter 1. This dissertation posits that these ideas were present in New York and critical to the formation of a local Dada spirit.

⁶ William Agee, “New York Dada, 1910-1930,” *Art News Annual* 34 (October 1968): 107.

critically about the institutions and traditions of art production and to question the relevance of European academicism to American modern art. The photographer Alfred Stieglitz provided a forum for this experimentalism through his Little Galleries of the Photo Secession (1905-17), commonly known as “291,” and in his journal, *Camera Work* (1903-17).

That this magazine laid critical groundwork for Dada activities in New York is not a novel claim: William Agee, Ileana Leavens, and Jonathan Green, among others, have identified an iconoclastic spirit in its pages.⁷ Still, to better understand the connection between anarchism and New York Dada, it is necessary to recapture the specific iconoclastic nature of Alfred Stieglitz’s publication during the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁸ This dissertation will examine the framework Stieglitz provided for writers such as Henri Bergson, Wassily Kandinsky, Benjamin de Casseres, Sadakichi Hartmann, and Gertrude Stein, who became associated with an anarchist rejection of order and hierarchy.

It is also necessary to explore the nature of anarchist networks in New York during the early twentieth century. A body of scholarship examines elements of anarchism within the larger New York environment, but most addresses single artists or those who worked directly as activists rather than the more diffuse sphere of anarchism discussed in this dissertation. The art historian Francis Naumann traced its influence on individual artists, including Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, and Adolf Wolff, while Allan Antliff focused on the Ferrer Center and its

⁷ William Agee, "New York Dada, 1910-1930" identified the onset of New York Dada to the 1910 essays of Benjamin de Casseres. Ileana Leavens, *From "291" To Zurich: The Birth of Dada* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1983) looked at the influence of *Camera Work*, not on New York artists (she concludes that American Dada never fully formed), but on the artists of Zurich Dada. Jonathan Green, *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1973) used 1910 as a turning point in the evolution of the magazine. See also Geraldine Wojno Kiefer, "Alfred Stieglitz, *Camera Work*, and Cultural Radicalism," *Art Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1992), which related *Camera Work* to the American precedents of John Dewey and William James.

⁸ Among the most comprehensive studies of Alfred Stieglitz are Sarah Greenough, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2000) and Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997).

circle of artists and activists.⁹ Indeed, anarchism has been established as an important component in the development of Dada. Yet a fuller range of anarchistic networks during the 1910s should be examined as anarchistic thought directly connects the activities of the Stieglitz circle to the development of Dada in New York and explains the participation of seemingly incongruous artists like Stieglitz and Marsden Hartley.

Despite this broad range of participants, the standard history of New York Dada revolved largely around the presence of Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, European expatriots who lived in New York during World War I and who frequented gatherings at the home of Walter and Louise Arensberg. Both men arrived in America in 1915 and produced a body of work which included Duchamp's iconic readymades and Picabia's object portraits and first mechanomorphic paintings. Historians have connected them with Man Ray, an American-born artist who was a close collaborator with Duchamp from 1915-18 and again from 1919-21. Thus the contours of Dada in America have largely been limited to their circle, based in the Arensberg salon (1915-21), which has been considered the focal point of New York Dada (due in large part to the presence of Duchamp and Picabia).

This dissertation reconstructs the narrative of Dada in New York, starting at the roots of an experimental spirit which was self-consciously American and which employed deliberate strategies of critique and inquiry even though the very structure of this anarchistic spirit resisted

⁹ Francis Naumann discussed Man Ray's anarchism in "Man Ray and America: The New York and Ridgefield Years: 1907-1921" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Center, CUNY, 1988) as well as in "Aesthetic Anarchy," in *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia*, Jennifer Mundy, ed. (London: Tate, 2008), where he also discussed Picabia and Duchamp. Paul Avrich and Francis Naumann, "Adolf Wolff: 'Poet, Sculptor, and Revolutionist, but Mostly Revolutionist,'" *Art Bulletin* 67 (September 1985): 486-500 addressed the anarchist Wolff. Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001) traced anarchist networks centered around the Ferrer Center and Greenwich Village, but did not address Stieglitz or most of the artists associated with him. Allan Antliff's essay, "Anarchy, Politics, and Dada," in Francis Naumann, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996) related Duchamp's *Fountain* and his readymades to the anarcho-individualist Max Stirner. Stephen Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991) examined the network of anarchism in Greenwich Village, but separates these figures from Dada.

classification. Anarchism charged the very act of art-making as rebellion and inspired artists to look outside the accepted limits of artistic inspiration. Within this anarchistic environment, this dissertation will demonstrate that years of New York Dada were years of cultural debate over the essence of American identity. The boundaries of high and low culture took on special importance in the early twentieth-century debates over American cultural identity. Published in 1915, Van Wyck Brooks's cultural study, *America's Coming-of-Age* pinpointed this stratification as a distinctively native dilemma which precluded authentic cultural expression. The alternative to highbrow culture, based on European academicism, was the vernacular culture of urban America, including popular entertainment, mass media, and industry.¹⁰ This challenge was echoed in the artistic struggle to develop an aesthetic independent of European modernism: in New York, a number of artists worked to incorporate the lowbrow into previously highbrow territory. The experimental subjects and techniques of New York Dada reflected this contemporary fascination with vernacular culture as a distinctive American aesthetic.

New York artists and intellectuals grappled with the question of Americanness, repeatedly citing industrial and popular cultures as potential sources of inspiration. This material, existing outside the traditional artistic canon, can be grouped under the term of vernacular culture.¹¹ Rather than positioning Dada as incompatible or antithetical to American modernism,¹² this dissertation considers Dadaist iconoclasm as a strategy that allowed artists to draw on aspects of

¹⁰ Additionally, vernacular culture provided subject matter for a range of American artists extending beyond dadaist circles, such as Edward Hopper, Guy Pène du Bois, or Yasuo Kuniyoshi.

¹¹ I am drawing here on the example of John Kouwenhoven, *Made in America: The Arts in Modern Civilization* (Garden City: W. W. Norton & Company, 1948).

¹² As detailed above, studies such as Corn's *Great American Thing* and Davidson's *Early American Modernist Painting* categorized the Stieglitz circle as incompatible with Dada. Alternatively, Estera Milman disqualifies much of New York Dada as it did not outrightly reject modernism; she defines Dada as a resistance to modernism in "Dada New York: An Historiographic Analysis," in *Dada/Dimensions*, Stephen C. Foster, ed. (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1985).

local vernacular culture in order to build a national aesthetic and to create critical distance from the dominance of European artistic and cultural standards.

Given the nationalistic cultural climate of the 1910s and the desire to develop a distinctively American aesthetic, artists turned towards the vernacular as a model of Americanness. This vernacular included both an amateur or folk aesthetic and the technical aesthetic found in industry, commercial art, and popular culture.¹³ This not to suggest that American artists were isolationists, many important influences came from Europe, but were then filtered through an American lens. Futurism, for example, was well known by New York artists, even before the Armory Show of 1913. Beginning in 1909, press coverage detailed manifestos and published reproductions of Futurist painting. The Futurist assault on traditional artistic subjects, such as the nude and allegory, and its emphasis on the urban and the industrial, encouraged contemporary American investigations of vernacular culture. Indeed, the blending of foreign influence and local environment is the very essence of the vernacular: in 1948, the American studies pioneer John Kouwenhoven defined American culture as the result of conflict between European tradition and the conditions of the New World.¹⁴

Americanists have oversimplified the complicated and interwoven artistic network of the 1910s into two social groups: the allegedly spiritual and nationalistic Stieglitz circle and the madcap, dadaist, Arensberg salon. While Abraham Davidson admitted that this division into discrete artistic circles was somewhat artificial, his *Early American Modernist Painting 1910-1935* still divided the era into such chapters as “The Stieglitz Group,” and “The Arensberg Circle”; his concession was that certain artists appeared in more than one chapter. In his

¹³ It should be noted that the folk aesthetic was more influential as a model for anarchistic, antiacademic production than for its formal qualities. An important source for American artists was Kandinsky’s *Blue Rider Almanac*, which included reproductions of folk and avant-garde art in an anarchistic context.

¹⁴ John Kouwenhoven, “What is Vernacular?” in *Made in America*, 13-42.

account, Dada was defined in Eurocentric terms and limited to the Arensberg circle, where Americans only responded to Duchamp and Picabia with work “that was ironic and sometimes playful, rather than disturbingly nihilistic.” In contrast, Stieglitz’s 291 gallery was described as “a cloistered shrine.”¹⁵ Wanda Corn has argued that the Stieglitz circle “maintained a polite distance from other modernist expressions and styles (dadaism, Purism, and Precisionism, in particular) and disdained other artists’ tastes for the popular and the everyday (jazz, newspapers, cars.)”¹⁶ Therefore, she, too, considered Dada in New York to be largely limited to Duchamp and Picabia, and their influence on a small circle of American artists, including Man Ray, Stuart Davis, and Morton Schamberg, to be fleeting. In Corn’s view, American modernism remained isolated only tangentially connected to Dada, and Dada was a movement that only chanced to land upon American shores.

Such a definition does not, however, explain the intricate networks revealed through New York Dada publications which document the involvement of others, especially Alfred Stieglitz and his associates, in Dadaist collaborations such as *The Blind Man* (1917) and *New York Dada* (1921). In particular, members of the Stieglitz circle have been dismissed either because their nationalistic interests have appeared incompatible with the Dada aesthetic or because they seemed insufficiently nihilistic. In reconstructing New York Dada in relation to the

¹⁵ Abraham Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting 1910-1935* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 5, 17. The Arensberg Circle chapter begins by contrasting and separating Stieglitz and Arensberg as opposite poles or “different sorts,” even though later he admitted “there was no war between the Stieglitz and Arensberg circles” (74, 80). He later divided the art world into “those who were Cubist-oriented or Expressionist at heart” and those who followed the example of Duchamp and Picabia, delineating that “this division found a focus in the two New York salons catering to the American modernist artists, those of Alfred Stieglitz and Walter Arensberg” (179). The end result is somewhat confused; while Davidson sees isolated examples of overlapping artists, he remained committed to segmenting the New York art worlds. For example, he acknowledged that Stieglitz published essays that contributed to the formation of Dada in New York, yet immediately concluded that “the meaning of Dada and the significance of the art of Duchamp and Picabia and their American followers were apparently beyond his grasp” (80), a point with which Francis Naumann agrees.

¹⁶ Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

contemporary crisis of American identity, the activities of the full network of connected artists working in New York during the 1910s and 1920s can be better understood.

This study will trace the networks of New York Dada, in part through the journals published in the city during the 1910s and early 1920s.¹⁷ The collaborative nature of these projects brought together artists from different styles, schools, and social groups. The lists of contributors are critical in reconstructing the diffuse nature of New York Dada and recovering a fuller network of radicalism, one which extends well beyond the walls of the Arensberg salon to include a broad swath of New York artists. The artists to be discussed in this dissertation were all associated in some with dadaist activity in New York during the 1910s and 1920s, selected from contemporary documents, most especially canonical periodicals associated with Dada, such as Stieglitz's *Camera Work*, Robert Coady's *The Soil* (1916-17), *The Blind Man* (1917) (with contributors including Alfred Stieglitz, Charles Demuth, Walter Arensberg, Beatrice Wood, and Mina Loy), *The Ridgefield Gazook* (1915) (edited by Man Ray and Adolf Wolff), and *New York Dada* (1921) (edited by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray with submission by Stieglitz, Florine Stettheimer and Marsden Hartley, and mentions of Joseph Stella and Loy), as well as Tristan Tzara's 1920 list of Dada presidents, which included most of these figures along with Abraham Walkowitz and John Marin.

New York Dada has been sidelined in studies of American art history, which commonly attribute the iconoclasm of the period to European exiles, limited to the narrow confines of Walter and Louise Arensberg's salon.¹⁸ This approach, which disconnects Dada from a fuller

¹⁷ Previous studies of Dada journals include Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), Emily Hage, "New York and European Dada Art Journals, 1916-1926: International Venues of Exchange," (Ph.D. diss, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, and Victoria Kingham, "Commerce, Little Magazines and Modernity: New York, 1915-1922," (Ph.D. diss, Univesrity of De Montfort, 2009).

¹⁸ Many Americanists have followed the lead of Milton Brown, whose groundbreaking study asserted that "the direction of American art was not changed by the World War. The events of the war found their way into only a fraction of our art and if those years of crisis had any influence it was through the subsequent effects upon our social

range of contemporary social and cultural issue, has marginalized the movement and resulted in the neglect much of Dada's influence on American modernism. In the place of another iteration of European Dada, I offer a reading of New York Dada as the activities of a group consciously searching for a native form of expression.

While the absence of a signature style has hindered studies of New York Dada, this dissertation will posit that an artistic anarchism bound together stylistically divergent artists and allowed them to subvert the traditional confines of high culture without requiring adherence to a specific school or style. This argument builds on Allan Antliff's *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde*, which discussed a range of anarchism among the avant-garde, but focused on artists who were activists or directly involved with political, social, and economic agendas.¹⁹ Anarchism had a broader, more diffuse impact on the development of New York Dada, inspiring artists of this study, who were often otherwise uninvolved with politics, to break with artistic conventions and to explore alternative aesthetics. While international Dada rejected European traditions and cultural norms, in America this rejection took on additional significance as artists sought to create a national cultural identity independent of European influences. What we know as New York Dada was a spirit inspired by a line of anarcho-individualist revolutionaries, descended from Walt Whitman, who replaced European conventions with vernacular elements of American culture. They altered the subject, style, materials, and strategies of fine art to create work which blurred the boundaries between high and low culture. Capitalizing on what were considered to be the distinctively American

and cultural atmosphere. The war years, as far as art was concerned, were merely a hiatus"; *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 71. The war, while not directly addressed by artists, provided a clear contrast between the oppressive traditions of the Old World and the relative freedom of the New. Furthermore, after the Anti-Espionage Act of June 1917, this liberty was curtailed, resulting in a temporary lull in avant-garde activities in New York.

¹⁹ For more information on anarchism in American art circles during the early twentieth century, see Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*. As his study demonstrates, anarchism came to America from various international sources.

components of popular and industrial culture, this compromise allowed artists to attack the elitism of high culture and to create alternative structures for the production and dissemination of art.²⁰

The grass-roots, anti-authoritarian nature of vernacular culture resists a singular definition. As demonstrated by the subjects addressed in gallerist Robert Coady's journal, *The Soil* (1916-17), popular entertainment, mass culture, and industrial design were considered to be representative of a natively American culture. In this influential journal, which enjoyed an enthusiastic audience among the avant-garde community in New York, Coady did not define these phenomena as specifically "vernacular," but applauded their modernity and popular appeal, considering them more potent expressions of American culture than contemporary art. Among the artists who explored these vernacular qualities, a stylistic pluralism emerged, allowing dissimilar work to coexist, including the amateur aesthetic of Florine Stettheimer and Beatrice Wood, the machine style painting of Morton Schamberg, or Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's film, *Manhatta*.

The stylistic pluralism of New York Dada is one factor which has complicated the historical analysis of this period. From the earliest scholarship, New York Dada has been limited by European-based definitions of Dadaism and the consequent emphasis on European artists active in America during the 1910s. From the earliest historical study to characterize New York Dada, the 1951 essay, "The Machine and the Subconscious: Dada in America" by John Baur,

²⁰ Milman noted that American Dadaism often intersected with contemporary popular culture, leading her to claim a "natural" Dada status in New York; the similarities between Dada and daily life, however, do not preclude the intentional use of the vernacular as a deliberate strategy. While Milman cites Katherine Dreier's observation that aspects of American culture abided by the irreverent codes of Dada, Dreier's naming of this "natural Dada spirit" was hardly intended to devalue the activities of the New York avant-garde as some type of accident or haphazard enterprise. In her recent study of American visual culture, Patricia Johnston enumerated five categories which separate low culture from high: subject, medium, quality, audience, and use/function. New York Dada integrated elements of the vernacular culture into each of these areas. Patricia Johnston, "Introduction: A Critical Overview of Visual Cultural Studies," in *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 5-10.

charges that Dada was achieved only after the example of Duchamp and Picabia.²¹ Defining Dada as a machine aesthetic, a style shared by several international movements of the early twentieth-century, Baur described a unique American character which he ascribed to the greater industrialization of this country. Yet, even though he considered artists in the United States to be more familiar with mechanical production and equipment, he ultimately claimed that Dada machine art required the prompting of Picabia and Duchamp to achieve its modern incarnation.²² While he suggested that Dada was connected to the precisionism of American painters like Charles Demuth and Morton Schamberg, he argued that only Man Ray really converted to a Dada mindset. Thus began the common exception of Man Ray as *the* American Dadaist.

Baur's essay associated New York Dada with Surrealism, emphasizing elements of the irrational and the subconscious. He was not the first to create this association (André Breton had first noted Surrealism's origins in Dadaism), but the conflation of the two movements emphasized characteristics of Dada that were more readily apparent in European manifestations. Surrealism reinforced performative and irrational elements of Dada as its essential characteristics and since these were not qualities of New York Dada, the American movement was diminished in comparison.

Therefore, even though earlier scholarship had located dadaist elements in New York, New York Dada came to be considered a minor, and lesser, Dada center. Alfred Barr, Jr.'s *Fantastic Art Dada Surrealism* (1936) claimed a development simultaneous to Zurich, but did not refer to this activity as a separate, New York, branch of Dada.²³ As Barr's *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition had previously decontextualized abstraction, in this second catalogue Barr used a

²¹ John I.H. Baur, "The Machine and the Subconscious: Dada in America," *Magazine of Art* 44, no 6 (October 1951): 233-237.

²² The chronology established in Chapter Two will reveal that claim is problematic.

²³ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., ed, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

similar approach for Dada and Surrealism, separating them from contemporary politics and placing them as part of larger historical trend towards irrationality in art. Ultimately, his inclusion of New York as a Dada center was eclipsed by his emphasis on the Surrealist qualities of Dada.

In turn, William Rubin's *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* unequivocally positioned Dada as the prelude to Surrealism.²⁴ Writing from a formalist position, Rubin gauged the value of Dada objects in aesthetic terms, ultimately finding them wanting. This led him to discount the artistic production of Dada, arguing that objects played "only an ancillary role... as a means of communicating ideas" and were not worthy of "delectation" themselves.²⁵ This approach again defined Dada in terms of Surrealism, placing emphasis on the "gratuitous act," a gesture of randomness and spontaneity, which then morphed seamlessly into Surrealism.

Another common historiographical trend concentrated on the presence of foreign artists seeking refuge from World War One, considering Dada to be a European exercise conducted on American soil to the amusement and/or bewilderment of most New Yorkers. Even as greater weight has been given to New York as a Dada center in recent years, particularly in the scholarship of Francis Naumann, attention continues to center on the Arensberg salon as a gathering place for European exiles, including Duchamp and Picabia.²⁶ Man Ray is often included as the only American to fully and knowingly participate in Dada, as his artistic production is most easily incorporated into the dominant European model of Dada.²⁷

²⁴ William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968).

²⁵ Rubin, 11.

²⁶ The key text in documenting this movement, Francis Naumann's *New York Dada*, is structured around the Arensberg salon. His scholarship is discussed in greater detail below.

²⁷ "Only Man Ray became a full-fledged Dadaist," claimed Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* (Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1975), 5. Other scholars often repeat this claim.

Additionally, his relocation to Paris and association with Dada and Surrealism there allowed scholars to create an alternative narrative that separates him from his American compatriots.

William C. Agee's groundbreaking 1968 article, "New York Dada, 1910-1930" reconstructed the participants of the Arensberg circle and was the first to identify it as a center of New York Dada.²⁸ He argued that the Arensberg salon served as the heart of American Dada from 1915-23, with precedents like Benjamin de Casseres dating to 1910 and antecedents like Arthur Dove extending its reach to 1930. Agee disputed nihilism as the chief characteristic of Dada, writing that such a definition necessarily omitted New York; he presciently cautioned against attempts to define the group through formal similarities. In an important conclusion, he asserted that while Dada had been subsequently interpreted as un-American, it was considered inherently American by its participants.

In 1985, Francis Naumann edited an issue of *Dada & Surrealism* that brought together a diverse collection of essays in an important effort to expand New York Dada.²⁹ This collection was later republished by Rudolf Kuenzli as a 1986 anthology, with an introduction that included a long list of artists affected by Dada ideology, suggesting a diffusion of Dada ideas through several decades of American art,³⁰ yet, much of the volume continued to focus on established Dada artists who were active in the Arensberg Salon, including Man Ray, Duchamp, and the Swiss-born Englishman Arthur Cravan. The compilation also included scholarship on artists considered peripheral to Dada but who demonstrated sympathies to the machine aesthetic, such as Robert Coady or Morton Schamberg.³¹ Thus, this collection of essays slightly broadened the

²⁸ William C. Agee, "New York Dada, 1910-1930."

²⁹ *Dada & Surrealism* 14 (1985).

³⁰ *New York Dada*, Rudolf Kuenzli, ed., (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986).

³¹ See Judith Zilczer, "Robert J. Coady, Man of *The Soil*," and William C. Agee, "Morton Livingston Schamberg: Notes on the Sources of the Machine Images," both in *New York Dada* (1986). These essays connected both figures to Dada, but did not consider either artist to be a full part of that movement.

field of artists associated with Dada, but failed to identify any common thread beyond that of social connections or mere geography.

Francis Naumann has completed the most extensive scholarship on New York Dada, further establishing the Arensberg circle as the center of Dada activity in America and extending the reach of the movement to include a broader range of artists. Beginning in 1980, Naumann explored the dynamics of the Arensberg salon as the locus of a short-lived Dada movement in America from 1915 to 1921.³² In “New York Dada: Better Late than Never,” Naumann established a chronology, outlining the Dadaist events of 1921, especially the eponymous journal published that year. Although Naumann chronicled the Dada activities of New York, he contended that American artists were primarily struggling against the academy and middle-class values rather than adopting Dadaist revolution. As evidence, he quoted a 1921 newspaper article, “Dada Will Get You if You Don’t Watch Out” in which members of the Société Anonyme defined Dada in terms radically different than the European interpretation.³³ Naumann interpreted this as proof that American artists, especially Katherine Dreier, didn’t fully understand the European movement; I will argue that such statements can also speak to the deliberate distinction being made by these New York artists from what they saw emerging overseas.

Naumann’s *New York Dada: 1915-23* continues to be a defining text for the period, providing biographies for the major figures of the Arensberg circle and breaking considerable ground in identifying Dada activities in America. In addition to profiling Duchamp, Picabia, Man Ray and Arensberg, Naumann divided the Arensberg circle into three groups: literary men from Harvard,

³² In 1921, the Arensbergs relocated to California. Francis Naumann, “The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never,” *Arts* 54 no 6 (February 1980): 143-9 and “Walter Conrad Arensberg: Poet, Patron, and Participant in the New York Avant-Garde, 1915-20,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 76 no 328 (Spring 1980): 3-32.

³³ Margery Rex, “Dada’ Will Get You If You Don’t Watch Out: It Is on the Way Here,” *New York Evening Journal* (29 January 1921). This article will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

French artists, and Americans, treating many artists for the first time in Dada scholarship. In addition, his work on the women of Dada, including Beatrice Wood and Florine Stettheimer, has considerably expanded the canon.³⁴

Naumann's study was an introductory examination of the period, setting the stage for further investigation and contextualization, as in his 1996 exhibition catalogue, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*. The featured authors employed new methodologies, including semiological, formalist, and gender studies, signaling the onset of more critical Dada scholarship. In his own essay in the catalogue, Naumann defined New York Dada through humor.³⁵ While humor played an important role in Dada, such a characterization does not capture the full trajectory of the movement; it remains an important lens for understanding individual works, but does not integrate New York Dada with its social, historical, or cultural context. Even as Naumann defined the activities of a Dada group in America, his definition remained based largely on European models of Dada; this led him to doubt that Americans like Alfred Stieglitz would have "willingly lent his name to Dada," a claim which this dissertation questions.³⁶

Possibly the most pervasive, historiographic trend has dismissed New York Dada because of the seeming inconsistencies between the American and European branches of the movement. From the earliest studies of international Dada, New York has alternately been viewed as either proto-Dada (never arriving at a fully-realized state of development) or else as a derivative and considerably weakened manifestation. The roots of this bias can be dated to Robert Motherwell's *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (1951), the earliest English-language collection of

³⁴ Naumann's book included profiles of Beatrice Wood, Clara Tice, Charles Sheeler, Morton Schamberg, Charles Demuth, John Covert, Joseph Stella, Florine Stettheimer, and Katherine Dreier, among others. His 2006 exhibition, *Daughters of Dada* showcased the work of Clara Tice, Mina Loy, Katherine Dreier, and the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, along with Stettheimer and Wood.

³⁵ Naumann, *Making Mischief*.

³⁶ Naumann, *New York Dada*, 196-7.

Dada writings and documents.³⁷ New York Dada was the subject of two short memoirs written by Gabrielle Picabia-Bufferet which referred to the movement as “pre-Dada.” While Picabia-Bufferet may have intended this designation to underscore the primacy of New York in the development of the Dada spirit and its separateness from Zurich, her phrasing encouraged future scholars to interpret New York as a preliminary and unfulfilled Dada center.³⁸

Arturo Schwarz’s 1974 study undermined the legitimacy of New York Dada, claiming that the movement may never have existed in New York.³⁹ Defining Dada as a revolutionary spirit, he argued that America lacked sufficient tradition to make possible such rebellion. Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray were identified as the only artists working in New York in a fully Dada fashion, which Schwarz argued was a nihilistic philosophy imported from Europe. Those artists he considered most reflective of Dadaism in New York – Jean Crotti, the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Edgar Varèse, and Henri-Pierre Roché – were Europeans, further dismissing any influence of American culture. In perhaps the most influential portion of the catalogue, Schwartz interviewed Man Ray, cementing his position as the only American worthy of consideration as a Dadaist. Man Ray embraced this unique status, aggrandizing his accomplishments by claiming that there was no such thing as Dada in New York and that other Americans, including Katherine Dreier, had never truly understood the movement.

Written in 1975, Dickran Tashjian’s *Skyscraper Primitives* asserted that Dada was valuable model for helping American artists to break free from Europe; yet while he traced the activities of a number of artists and writers, including Dove, Sheeler, Man Ray, Demuth, Stella and Davis,

³⁷ Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*. The publication of these essays was linked to the contemporary rising of Neo-Dada and a growing interest in theories of conceptual or “cerebral” art. Reflecting contemporary artistic interests, Motherwell emphasized aspects of performance and conceptual art, privileging Duchamp as the primary artist of New York Dada.

³⁸ Charles Mitchell, “The Ideas of Pre-Dada,” *The Listener* 62 (1959): 867-9 followed this example, comparing the work of Duchamp and Picabia to that of Hans Arp and Max Ernst.

³⁹ Schwarz, *New York Dada*.

he too ultimately argued there was never a school of Dada here.⁴⁰ Maintaining the Eurocentric definition of Dada, which he traced as an import to America by “the circumstances of the War in Europe,” he argued that exiled artists, such as Duchamp and Picabia, “awaken[ed] American artists to their exhibition machine environment [and] fostered a unique primitivism.”⁴¹ He suggested that Dada in America was subsumed into something more unselfconsciously modern and American rather than a deliberate movement reflective of a conscious artistic strategy.

Ileana Leavens focused her 1983 study on the interactions between American and European artists, asserting that New York Dada was closely aligned with Zurich Dada in their shared legacies of Expressionism and Symbolism. Her ultimate concern, however, was to trace the influence of New York artists on the development of Dada in Zurich, prior to its 1916 naming.⁴² Despite identifying the presence of several of what she considered Dada markers, including humor, elitism, and Symbolist tendencies, Leavens denied that New York developed the theoretical or philosophical structure necessary to become fully Dada.

While Estera Milman’s 1985 essay, “Dada New York: A Historiographic Analysis” cautioned against creating a universal definition for all Dada centers, her approach contrasted attitudes towards modernism in Berlin, Zurich, and New York and found the latter to be lacking.⁴³ She concluded that historical New York Dada existed only briefly, the majority of American art production falling under the mantle of “natural American Dada,” an unintentional byproduct of the dominant popular culture of the nation, which she argued infiltrated the work of artists in New York, but did not represent a definitive rejection of modernism.

⁴⁰ Tashjian.

⁴¹ Tashjian, x.

⁴² Leavens.

⁴³ Estera Milman, “Dada New York: A Historiographic Analysis.”

The concept of a natural American Dada, rather than a conscious Dada strategy, informed many of the essays in Martin Gaughan's 2003 anthology, *Dada New York: New World for Old*, which also featured a reprint of Milman's essay.⁴⁴ Milman's analysis, however, which concluded that the continued American interest in modernism disqualified it from being Dada, discounted the possibility of understanding of New York Dada as the constructive formulation of an American aesthetic through the destruction and critique of European highbrow culture and academicism. Other essays in Gaughan's volume touched upon the historiographic issues of New York Dada, yet it ultimately continued to privilege a Eurocentric definition of Duchamp and focus on Duchamp, Picabia, and the Aresnberg salon.⁴⁵

The most comprehensive treatment of international Dada has been the aforementioned 2005 exhibition at the National Gallery in Washington, DC, curated by Leah Dickerman.⁴⁶ Organized around the major Dada centers, the show and accompanying catalogue credited New York as an innovative contemporary to Zurich, emerging during World War One. Michael Taylor's essay claimed that New York had stronger ties to German art than French modernism and that the expatriate community coped with the carnage of World War One by engaging in the hedonistic excesses of New York Dada.⁴⁷ He identified two phases of American Dada (the first, following the arrival of Picabia and Duchamp and then a second, following Katherine Dreier's visit to Germany in 1919 and the introduction of Berlin Dada) and contrasted the cerebral constructions of European exiles in America with the more "poetic" works of Man Ray.⁴⁸ While this approach

⁴⁴ Martin Ignatius Gaughan ed., *Dada New York: New World for Old*, Vol 8, Crisis in the Arts: The History of Dada series, Stephen Foster, ed. (New Haven: G.K. Hall, 2003).

⁴⁵ For example, Martin Gaughan, "The Diagrammatic as Abstractive Representational Mode in New York Dada" in Gaughan.

⁴⁶ Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005)

⁴⁷ Michael Taylor, "New York," in Dickerman, *Dada*.

⁴⁸ Michael Taylor, "New York" opposes Man Ray's readymades with those of Duchamp, arguing that the American always remained concerned with aesthetics (288).

counterbalanced the more typical Franco-centric interpretations of New York Dada, it did not account for the unique conditions of America during the 1910s. Furthermore, while the entire 2005 exhibition was important for its contextualization of the movement, it ultimately reinforced a limited view of New York Dada, reproducing almost exclusively the works of Man Ray, Picabia and Duchamp as representative of American production.⁴⁹

While a greater range of methodologies have been introduced to interpret New York Dada, scholars still tend to approach the movement with a Eurocentric definition of Dada, which privileges production akin to contemporary activities in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris. For example, Jennifer Mundy's recent volume, *Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia*, explored the relationship between these figures, examining the networks between them and their connections to European anarchism, misogyny, and existentialism.⁵⁰ She constructed an intellectual history, tying these artists to philosophical constructs such as Nietzsche and Marx, but restricted the boundaries of her studies to these three men and focused mostly on European influences on their work.

Thus despite the large body of scholarship addressing New York Dada, what remains undone is a reconstruction of the American understanding of Dada as it developed in New York during the 1910s and 1920s. In redefining New York Dada as the strategic development of an American aesthetic based on vernacular culture, the participation of seemingly disparate artists can be better understood. For example, Alfred Stieglitz and the artists most closely connected to him such as Arthur Dove and Charles Demuth have been marginalized in Dada studies, separated into a distinct group which has been characterized in soundly un-Dada terms.⁵¹ Historians have

⁴⁹ Of the sixty-eight plates in Dickerman's catalogue, fifty-four are the work of Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray. Other artists represented include Duchamp's brother-in-law, Jean Crotti (3), Walter Arensberg's cousin, John Covert (3), Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (4), Morton Schamberg (2), Joseph Stella (1), and a cartoon by Richard Boix.

⁵⁰ Mundy.

⁵¹ While Davidson divided his book into discrete chapters on the Stieglitz circle and the Dadaism of the Arensberg circle, Debra Bricker Balken, *Debating American Modernism: Stieglitz, Duchamp, and the New York Avant-Garde*

emphasized this circle's interest in defining an American aesthetic without fully considering the iconoclastic strategies intrinsic to this endeavor, which aligned them with dadaism . Indeed, Tzara himself named Stieglitz and several of his circle among the "presidents of Dada" in 1920.⁵² In April 1921, it was not perceived as contradictory for Katherine Dreier to invite Marsden Hartley to speak at the Société Anonyme's Dada Evening; his lecture, later published under the title, "The Importance of Being Dada," was the first text written by an American artist to engage with Dada philosophy.⁵³

* * *

Chapter 1 of the present study documents the anarchistic and dadaistic spirit of the Stieglitz circle around 1910, paying special attention to the publication, *Camera Work* (1903-17). This journal laid the foundation for the artistic radicalism of the prewar era and will be studied to establish the specific manner in which writings by Gertrude Stein, Wassily Kandinsky, Henri Bergson, and others were framed in terms of anarchistic thought. *Camera Work* introduced European artists and writers to New York in a framework based on American radicalism. Furthermore, this chapter will address a major shift which occurred in 1910, as Benjamin de Casseres, Sadakichi Hartmann, and Marius de Zayas began to openly question the position and function of art in modern society.⁵⁴ Since, from 1910 to 1912, *Camera Work* and Stieglitz's "291" gallery were a driving force of the avant-garde, this chapter will examine how they

(New York: American Federation of the Arts, 2003) more directly positioned Stieglitz and Duchamp as opposing poles in New York. Wanda Corn discusses Duchamp and Picabia at length in her *The Great American Thing*, but ultimately argues that the influence of Duchamp was limited "because his proposal was cloaked in iconoclastic humor, Stieglitz and his artists, like so many others, missed most of Duchamp's sermon and caught only the joke." (80).

⁵² Tristan Tzara, "Quelques Présidents et Présidentes," *Bulletin Dada* (March 1920), 2.

⁵³ Marsden Hartley, "The Importance of Being Dada" in *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville and Poets* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921).

⁵⁴ Green also notes this date as significant.

presented models of anarchistic thought and encouraged the ensuing exploration of vernacular culture.

Moving outward from the Stieglitz circle, Chapter 2 analyzes the various anarchistic influences present in America around the time of the 1913 Armory Show and explores potential interactions with the aesthetic anarchism of the French group Action d'Art.⁵⁵ This chapter examines local centers of anarchism, including the New York Ferrer Center, Greenwich Village, and Stieglitz's "291" to understand artistic interpretations of anarchism in New York during the pre-war period. The American reception of Italian Futurism quickly associated Marinetti's cultural strategies of *épater le bourgeois* with anarchistic thought. This chapter addresses the importance of anarchist ideas to members of the avant-garde in New York and analyzes its affect on the development of institutional critique and the development of an anti-bourgeois anti-aesthetic. This American version of anarchism viewed the act of art-making as iconoclastic revolt, prioritizing individual expression over dogmatic schools, styles, or institutions, and was vital to the development of Dada in New York.

These first two chapters examine the pre-war era and how New York artists and writers reinterpreted European thinking to support the iconoclasm of a burgeoning nationalistic modern art based in vernacular culture. American anarchism provided a structure sympathetic to this exploration, encouraging artists to reject traditional power structures, hierarchies, and conventions. Anarchism and the vernacular both combined a grass-roots evolution with an anti-establishmentarian mindset. This vernacular will be defined in Chapter 3, which then examines the work of canonical New York Dadaists in order to reintegrate their production of this period

⁵⁵ The study of anarchism will build on the example of Avrich and Naumann, "Adolf Wolff: 'Poet, Sculptor, and Revolutionist, but Mostly Revolutionist,'" Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism* and Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism: The "Aestheticization of the Action d'Art Group, 1906-1920," *Oxford Art Journal* 2 (1988) 99-120, 124.

into the cultural atmosphere of New York. European exiles, including Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, were not excluded from this vernacular exploration. While many scholars have commented on Duchamp's choice of an American term, "ready-made" for his iconoclastic series of objects during this period, a range of native influences and attitudes informed the work of these artists.⁵⁶ This chapter connects the work of Man Ray, Duchamp, and Picabia to American vernacular culture and parses some of the difficulties in separating the Dadaists of New York from their European counterparts, a task complicated by the propagandistic work of Tristan Tzara.

Despite overtures by Tristan Tzara, artists in America were reluctant to join the international ranks of Dada; it conflicted with the central drive of the period: the search for an American cultural identity. As part of this rebellion against European hegemony, I contend artists in New York embraced the vernacular, subverting conventional expectations of art with the materials and language of everyday life. Chapter 4 examines the stylistic influence of vernacular culture, the "un-self-conscious efforts of common people," according to Kouwenhoven, which was intrinsically linked to American anarchism in its anti-authoritarianism and its democratic process of evolution.⁵⁷ This vernacular production was not intended to be a form of fine art, but rather to rest in that blurred distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture (to use terms that were popularized in 1915 by Van Wyck Brooks).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ For examples of this scholarship, see Molly Nesbit, "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model," *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 53-64 and Moira Roth, "Marcel Duchamp in America: A Self Ready-Made," *Arts Magazine* 51 (May 1977): 92-96.

⁵⁷ Kouwenhoven, 13.

⁵⁸ Van Wyck Brooks, *America's Coming-of-Age* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1915). The development of these terms is discussed in Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 221-2. Brooks is mentioned in Matthew Baigell, *Artist and Identity in Twentieth-Century America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) as part of the nationalistic drive to discover an American culture, but is not linked to Dada in any fashion. Similarly, Ruth Bohan connects Brooks to *The Soil*, characterizing both as part of the Whitmanesque tradition in Ruth Bohan, *Looking into Walt Whitman: American Art, 1850-1920* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). Wanda Corn

The concept of the vernacular also influenced dadaist attacks on the conventional systems for the dissemination of art. New York artists repudiated the commerce of the art world, mocking its hierarchies, its institutions, and its exhibitions. Rather than producing traditional art, experimental artists worked on the fringes of respectability, creating popular illustrations, advertisements, and satirical little magazines. Chapter 5 addresses how the vernacular influenced artists to explore periodicals and alternative exhibition societies as means to dismantle the conventions of high culture and lay bare the tacit commodification of the gallery system. The illusion of art's highbrow separation from the lowbrow commercial world was exposed by gallerists such as Stieglitz and de Zayas; simultaneously, groups such as The People's Art Guild and the Independent Society of Artists sought new methods to bring high culture into contact with the people and bypass the elitist hierarchies of the traditional market and dealer system.⁵⁹

The final chapter analyzes the tensions which arose between artists in New York and Zurich, and the evolving understanding of Dada in America during the 1920s. Analysis of exchanges between Tristan Tzara and New York artists, along with depictions of Dada from the popular media demonstrates that the movement was understood as a European phenomenon. I will argue that, rather than reflecting the influence of European Dada, the use of vernacular imagery and strategies during the 1920s built upon the precedents of New York works of the 1910s. Stuart Davis, Joseph Stella, Charles Demuth, and Arthur Dove, artists who have been acknowledged as weakened inheritors of the formal innovations of Dada, will be reexamined in relation to this broadened definition of Dada.

completes a more thorough assessment of Brooks's writing her *Great American Thing*, however she links Brooks to American modernism and does not see him as relevant to Dada.

⁵⁹ This was different than the creation of art for the people, a concurrent theme of politically-engaged groups such as *The Masses*. For information on *The Masses* and the socialist networks of artists in New York during this period, see Rebecca Zurier, *Art for The Masses: A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics, 1911-1917* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

Two April 1921 events that have been traditionally understood to reflect the influence of European Dada, the publication of *New York Dada* and Marsden Hartley's address to the Société Anonyme, actually continued trends well established in New York during the previous decade. The only contemporary document to employ the label, *New York Dada* featured a statement permitting the establishment of a New York branch of the movement written by the Zurich Dadaist Tristan Tzara; Tzara's "mock authorization" (to use Man Ray's words) has long been interpreted as revealing a lack of understanding among New York artists. In Chapter 6, I will argue the opposite: publishers Duchamp and Man Ray lured Tzara into providing the authorization, aware that it undermined the anarchic spirit of Dada. In constructing a series of Dada precedents where print media became a forum to criticize artistic and cultural institutions, I ultimately argue that *New York Dada* was not a naïve publication, but a deliberate parody of Tzara and European Dada. The editors and contributors to this single issue publication were quite aware that what had emerged in New York was an anarchistic, anti-institutional spirit that questioned both the boundaries and traditions of art in a deliberately American fashion; they had no intention of shackling themselves to another European "ism."

To remember that in 1919, Man Ray boasted, "all New York is Dada" and in 1974 he asserted, "there is no such thing as New York Dada" highlights the difficulty in chronicling this movement. In the anti-authoritarian spirit of anarchism, New York Dada defied any easy labels or codified organization.⁶⁰ Much of the present-day confusion surrounding New York Dada stems from attempts to define it through the activities of a European framework. A need remains to address Dada in New York from an Americanist point of view.

⁶⁰ Man Ray, letter to Tristan Tzara, 8 June 1921, reprinted in Dickerman, *Dada*, 446.

CHAPTER 1 FOUNDATIONS OF NEW YORK DADA: ANARCHY AND ALFRED STIEGLITZ

The influence of anarchism is critical to understanding the iconoclasm of New York Dada and the resistance of Dada artists in America to being grouped as an identifiable school or movement, which would imply their complicity with the hierarchies and institutions governing modern art. This chapter will trace the broad network of anarchist sympathies among artistic communities in New York, centering around the activities of the photographer, publisher, and gallerist Alfred Stieglitz, and map the influence of his aesthetic anarchism on the development of New York Dada. During the pre-war era, Stieglitz was not only aware of anarchist circles in New York, but closely associated with several key figures and supportive of their causes. In particular, this chapter will address how anarchism was positioned by Stieglitz and understood by the avant-garde in New York.

To understand how this anarchism informed the creation of New York Dada, it is necessary to consider the specific tenor of anarchy in New York of the 1910s. Anarchism was not a monolithic movement in the early twentieth century. The political overtones of European anarchism were subdued in America by federal backlash in response to Alexander Berkman's 1892 attempted assassination of Henry Clay Frick and the assassination of President McKinley by an anarchist sympathizer in 1901. Consequently, anarchism in America tended to be less politically active and more concerned with workers' rights and individual freedoms. Such is not to suggest that there were not more serious anarchist challenges to the political order. Nineteen-thirteen and 1914 were difficult years in America, with labor unrest throughout the country in the face of an economic depression. While the Paterson Silk Strike was perhaps the most well-

known incident,¹ an accident involving three young anarchists brought these tensions into the heart of Manhattan. On July 4, 1914, a large explosion on Lexington Avenue, between 103rd and 104th streets, not far from the Ferrer Center, destroyed three floors of a six-story tenement building.² Arthur Caron, Charles Berg, and Carl Hanson, regulars at the Ferrer Center, were killed instantly when the bomb they were assembling to attack the Rockefeller estate in Tarrytown exploded. The plan was most likely conceived by Alexander Berkman, who had spent fourteen years imprisoned for the assassination attempt against Henry Clay Frick and who advocated the use of necessary violence.³

With his partner and collaborator Emma Goldman away on a lecture tour, Berkman quickly organized a public memorial and published the July issue of their anarchist journal, *Mother Earth* (1907-1917), as a tribute. The issue was an emotional call-to-arms which advocated the anarchist use of direct action to achieve its ends, especially Charles Robert Plunkett's "Dynamite!" which proclaimed: "When Free Speech is suppressed, when men are jailed for asking for food, clubbed for assembling to discuss their grievances, and stoned for expressing their opinions, there is but one recourse – violence."⁴

Among New York anarchists, this was a rare outburst of aggressive discourse and Goldman was dismayed to find such strongly agitational language in *Mother Earth*, as she feared it would attract the sort of scrutiny and oppression which had followed the McKinley assassination by an alleged anarchist in 1901. She wrote in her diary: "I had tried always to keep our magazine free from such language, and now the whole number was filled with prattle about force and dynamite.

¹ The strike is chronicled in Martin Burgess Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Collier Books, 1989).

² Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) both detailed these events.

³ Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 198.

⁴ Charles Robert Plunkett, "Dynamite!" *Mother Earth* 9, no 5 (July 1914), reprinted in *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth*, Peter Glassgold, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), 75-8.

I was so furious that I wanted the entire issue thrown into the fire. But it was too late; the magazine had gone out to the subscribers.”⁵ That Goldman was set against such violence demonstrates the pacifist quality of anarchism in New York.

Stieglitz had a collegial rapport with Emma Goldman, widely considered the most famous anarchist in the United States; theirs was a professional and personal relationship.⁶ In 1915, Goldman wrote to Stieglitz, admiring the concept behind the “What Is 291?” issue of *Camera Work*, explaining she was considering a similar approach to mark the tenth anniversary of *Mother Earth*.⁷ The so-called “291” issue, published in January 1915, had asked affiliates to describe their understanding of the gallery and featured essays by anarchists Hippolyte Havel (who Stieglitz described as “dishwasher, editor of *Revolutionary Almanac*, editor of *Don Quixote*”), Abby Hedge Coryell (“first teacher, Ferrer School”), and Adolf Wolff (“sculptor, poet, anarchist”), who wrote his contribution, “A Letter from Prison,” as he was serving 30 days for breaking parole to attend an event for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an activist and occasionally violent labor syndicate with strong ties to anarchism.⁸

The dominance of Alfred Stieglitz in the development of American modernism has led scholars to downplay the importance of anarchism for him during the early 1910s. Although Stieglitz was a pacifist and generally uninterested in politics, these qualities were not uncommon among New York anarchists of the period. The collectivist theories of the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) or communist ideals of his fellow countryman Peter Kropotkin

⁵ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931) reprinted in *Anarchy!*, 74.

⁶ At Goldman’s invitation, Stieglitz purchased two tickets for a violin concert by her nephew, and even agreed to place an announcement for the show at “291.” Emma Goldman, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 15 January 1915, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

⁷ Emma Goldman, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 11 April 1915, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

⁸ The issue was begun in the summer of 1914, but was not published until early the next year. Adolf Wolff, “A Letter from Prison,” *Camera Work* 47 (July 1914) and “Wolff in Court Again,” *New York Times* (22 August 1914): 9; quoted in Paul Avrich and Francis Naumann, “Adolf Wolff: ‘Poet, Sculptor, and Revolutionist, but Mostly Revolutionist,’” *Art Bulletin* 67 (September 1985): 496.

(1842-1921), while popular in Europe, were less influential in America than the anarcho-individualist theories of the German philosopher Max Stirner (1806-1856).⁹ The interests of local organizations, such as the Ferrer Center, were more social and educational than those of the stereotypical characterizations of bomb-throwing activists.¹⁰

Max Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* (1844) argued that the state and other authorities were the ultimate enemy of the individual. Against these constraints the individual was to rebel, not to create organized revolt, since revolution would only result in the construction of another system of oppression. To avoid simply replacing one system of control with another, resistance could not be collective, but was necessarily an individual movement, based on a person's rejection of any belief system that would control his/her actions. Although written during the nineteenth-century, Stirner's book became newly relevant in both Europe and America during the early twentieth-century, building upon the popularity of Nietzschean models of extreme individualism and social criticism.¹¹ Stirner's book was published in French translations in both 1899 and 1900 and an English translation was published in America in 1907.

In this light, the absence of a formal Dada group in New York was not the result of accident, apathy, or poor organization but was the deliberate outcome of an anarchistic philosophy which rejected such classifications of art. Stieglitz's exhibitions at "291," which included a range of styles, schools, media, and talent, speaks to this pluralistic desire. While he sought to bring modern art to the American public, he did not presume to privilege any single model of

⁹ Emma Goldman cited Stirner as a model in the preface to her *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 51. Another example of the American interest in the philosopher is Max Baginski's essay, "Stirner: The Ego and His Own" *Mother Earth* 2, no 3 (May 1907): 142-51.

¹⁰ Leonard D. Abbott, "The Ferrer Center in New York," *Everyman* 10 (December 1914): 7, quoted in Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 27. The center, named for the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer, was founded in 1911 to provide educational and social services. It quickly became a hub for anarchist activities, offering a day school for children and a wide range of evening classes for adults, in addition to providing meeting rooms and a library.

¹¹ The American reception of Nietzsche is chronicled in Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

modernism. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, artists, including Abraham Walkowitz and Morton Schamberg, voiced their objection to artistic taxonomy, refusing to be coalesced into stylistic movements or schools that merely refreshed old hierarchical models of organization without questioning their operation. In not identifying themselves as a unified group, Dadaists in New York were free to create a new model of artistic production and dissemination that did not just replace their forbearers. Rather than submitting to a singular, representative style or authoritarian voice, they adopted a pluralistic approach. The proliferation of single issue periodicals and short-lived initiatives within New York Dada suggests this intention: they represent the paradoxical desire to establish a platform and a sense of group identity without signifying another codified (and therefore conventional) movement.

The 1910s were a period of experimentation for Stieglitz, one that played out on the walls of his Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (1905-1917), commonly known as “291,” and in the pages of his periodical, *Camera Work*. From his youth, Stieglitz characterized himself as transgressive; he began his gallery career as a passionate advocate for photography, then considered to be anti-aesthetic, which placed him on the fringes of fine art. This boundary-crossing aspect of his career has often been overlooked; scholars tend to focus on his pre-1910 work with European modernists and his later 1930s campaign for American art without sufficient study of the 1910s and early 1920s.¹² In 1912, he described his gallery as “the idea of revolt against all authority in art, in fact, against all authority in everything, for art is only the

¹² For example, in her broad study of American modernism, Wanda Corn acknowledged the two distinct circles around the photographer: pre-war experimentalism and post-war nationalism. Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). This view is contested by Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Secession* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005); still, Bochner claimed “Stieglitz was not a muckraker” and continued to sideline the gallerist from the more revolutionary activities of his time.

expression of life.”¹³ While his biographers often refer vaguely to Stieglitz’s anarchistic philosophy, his direct connection to the anarchistic circles of New York during the 1910s has yet to be fully explored.¹⁴ Instead of an unwitting accomplice, Stieglitz was a knowing participant in artistic anarcho-individualism and transmitted this radicalism through his periodical, *Camera Work*. Indeed, I will show that by 1913, he was personally, politically, and artistically allied with anarchists.

American-born, but educated in Germany, Stieglitz had a strong connection with European theories of decadence and spirituality. His highly individualistic philosophy was informed by his background in Symbolist art, literature, and thought, which was influential to the Dada spirit as it developed in New York.¹⁵ Symbolism was an unstated, but powerful undercurrent of the discussions at “291” and in *Camera Work*, especially in its anti-positivist attitude. The name of the organization founded by Stieglitz in 1902, the Photo-Secession, reveals its debt to nineteenth-century European precedents; the gallery known as “291” was officially titled the “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession.” From its inception in 1902, the Photo-Secession was a loose organization; formed in opposition to the more established, conservative Camera Club, New

¹³ Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in “Some Remarkable Work by Very Young Artists” *New York Evening Sun* (21 April 1912); reprinted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Random House, 1973), 115.

¹⁴ Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), Katherine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) and William I. Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Geographic Society and Little, Brown, 1977) provide a representative sample of this trend. Celeste Connor addresses the American qualities of the Stieglitz Circle in *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Sympathies between Symbolism and anarchism in European art are well-documented. For an overview of the cultural history of late nineteenth-century anarchism, see David Weir, *Anarchy and Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), Allan Antliff, *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), or Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989). In his essay, “Magnetic Fields in Manhattan: Stieglitz, Dada, and the Photography Debate,” in Martin Ignatius Gaughan, ed., *Dada New York: New World for Old* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), Dickran Tashjian claimed, “if Picabia sparked the first burst of what in retrospect was consonant with Dada, Stieglitz provided the tinder.” He credited Stieglitz with creating an atmosphere of experimentation, both with his gallery and his photographs, but concluded by stating “In the end, mining a medium with certain narrow parameters, Stieglitz was avant-garde enough, but hardly Dada.”

York. The Secessionists were wary of becoming another institution themselves.¹⁶ Unlike their European counterparts, Secessionist movements in America were less a revolt against an oppressive academy and more of a rebellion against elitism.¹⁷ Thus, the function of the Photo-Secession and “291” was more philosophical than pragmatic, allowing artists to come together to form a group identity without declaring an allegiance to one particular school or style.

Likewise, *Camera Work* was a forum for discussion and experimentation rather than a mouthpiece for a single viewpoint. This complexity demands a more nuanced examination of the publication and its relationship to Dada. Around 1910, Nietzsche became an important guide for Stieglitz circle critics. While Stieglitz is often credited with setting the stage for New York Dada by publishing Nietzsche-inspired texts by de Benjamin Casseres, Marius de Zayas and Sadakichi Hartmann in *Camera Work*, the scholar Debra Balken has claimed, “these dissenting and critical voices were always balanced by the uplift and positivism of [Henri] Bergson and [Wassily] Kandinsky.”¹⁸ This explanation creates an oversimplified distinction between these philosophical positions, overlooking the contemporary understanding of these latter theorists as destabilizing, anarchistic forces.¹⁹ Recovering the anarchist lens through which Stieglitz presented these European influences demonstrates how Stieglitz and his circle contributed to the

¹⁶ There exists no evidence that Stieglitz was aware of Stirner’s anarchist philosophies at this date, but given that he studied at university in Berlin during the 1880s, it is quite possible; it is also possible that Stieglitz was simply inspired by the Secession movements of the late nineteenth century. His participation in the Munich Secession of 1898 is listed in the chronology of *New York et l’Art Moderne: Alfred Stieglitz et son Cercle*, (Paris: Musée d’Orsay, 2005), 307.

¹⁷ This difference was addressed in Jay Bochner, *An American Lens*, 118-9.

¹⁸ Debra Bricker Balken, *Debating American Modernism: Stieglitz, Duchamp and the New York Avant-Garde* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 2003), 54.

¹⁹ As Gail Levin has noted, the fact that Georgia O’Keeffe reported writing to *The Masses* in 1915 in the hopes of obtaining Kandinsky’s book reveals that Kandinsky was associated with radicalism in America. Georgia O’Keeffe, letter to Anna Pollitzer, August 1915; quoted in Gail Levin, “Kandinsky and the First American Avant-Garde,” in *Theme and Improvisation: Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde*, ed. Gail Levin and Marianne Lorenz (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), 26. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia later remembered that the Stieglitz circle was “perfectly up-to-date with the intellectual life of Europe” and discussed “very anarchistic themes for that time” in Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, *Aires abstraits* (Geneva: P. Cailler, 1957); quoted in Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) as « parfaitement au courant de la vie intellectuelle d’Europe » and « themes fort anarchiques pour l’heure. »

formation of a distinctively American Dada spirit in New York by dismantling academicism and leveling the hierarchies which dominated high culture.

It should be noted that while Stieglitz was central to the formation of this Dada spirit, only rarely did any hint of social criticism or of Dadaism appear in his own photography; satirical works such as *The Way Art Moves* (1920) (figure 1.1) or *Spiritual America* (1923) (figure 1.2) were the exception rather than the rule. His personal aesthetic remained deeply rooted in Symbolism, especially his desire to discover the spiritual “essence” of objects and the means to express equivalent sensations through photography. Throughout his highly influential career as a gallery owner and publisher, however, he fostered an atmosphere of experimentation and iconoclasm which allowed Dada to emerge.

Around 1913, Stieglitz’s connection with anarchism was especially strong, as a new group of artists and writers had begun to frequent the gallery. Among them were the anarchists Abraham Walkowitz, Man Ray, Hippolyte Havel, Adolf Wolff, the poet Alfred Kreymborg, and Emil Zoler, who worked at “291” as a handyman and was “a sort of shadow to Stieglitz.”²⁰ Zoler was a member of the IWW. During the period of the Paterson Strike, Stieglitz was so disturbed by the events that his first wife, Emmeline, later accused the IWW of contributing to the disintegration of their marriage, writing to him: “In the old days, the conditions of your life did not weigh half so heavily as they do now when Zoler, Wolff and Co. are your general companions.”²¹

²⁰ Edward Steichen, *Life in Photography*, np, quoted in Whelan, 307.

²¹ Emmeline Stieglitz, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 2 Sept 1914, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL. Stieglitz’s niece later contended that Stieglitz may have “dramatized his sympathies” for the strikers in an attempt to curb Emmeline’s extravagant spending habits; in Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 178. For more information on the Paterson Silk Strike, see Anne Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

When *Camera Work* contributor Benjamin de Casseres announced his candidacy for the mayoral elections of 1913 with an anarchistic campaign that included the secession of Manhattan and the limiting of the mayor's power to "the preservation of order," Stieglitz was delighted by the idea, writing:

You will certainly get my vote and I'd even be willing to go to jail for ten days if I could get two votes through for you on my own name. Hypocrisy in the guise of PROGRESS is a wonderful commodity in America today. It is on the free list; it needs no protection. It is the one real American product...

Here's to the Mayorship! I offer my services as the head of the Street Cleaning Department.²²

Furthermore, while the literature tends to treat the circle gathered around him as quite insular, Stieglitz was well acquainted with the radicals of Greenwich Village, including Guido Bruno. Bruno, a rather mysterious figure among the avant-garde, published a number of little magazines and books about radicalism in New York.²³ Stieglitz corresponded with him several times, complimenting his coverage of "291" and even taking out advertisements in his periodical, *Greenwich Village*.²⁴ Along with books of poetry, including a collection of works by Oscar Wilde, one of Bruno's Chapbooks was a defense of anarchism, titled simply *Anarchists*.²⁵ In it, he sought to demystify the movement, separating the reality from the romance of movies: "The men and women whom we are accustomed to call anarchists, who are proclaimed as the apostles of anarchism and are supposed to be dangerous individuals recommended to the special care of the police surveyance [*sic*], are in reality harmless creatures living a conventional life." Taking the reader on a tour of the Ferrer Center, Bruno emphasized the intellectual life and civility of the

²² Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Benjamin de Casseres, 9 April 1913, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

²³ The most comprehensive biography on Bruno was written by the gallerist's nephew, Arnold I. Kisch, *The Romantic Ghost of Greenwich Village: Guido Bruno in His Garret* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 1976).

²⁴ Guido Bruno, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 6 April 1915, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

²⁵ Guido Bruno, *Anarchists*, Chapbook no 6. (1915).

institution. Visiting Mazzini's on Bleecker (a reported hotbed of anarchist activity) he derided the "anarchists from lower Fifth Avenue who arrive in their limousines." Finally, Bruno consulted the person he considered the "anarchist of New York," writer and Stieglitz associate Hippolyte Havel, on the definition of anarchism. Havel responded in strikingly apolitical terms:

To be an anarchist means to be an individualist. To be an individualist means to walk your own way, do the thing you want to do in this life and do it as well as you can. You must never impose on your fellowmen; you must never be in their way; you must help everybody as well as you can; the good you derive through your life belongs, in the first place, to you but you have to share it with the world if the world can benefit by it.²⁶

Thus centered around the Ferrer Center and Emma Goldman, New York anarchism maintained a moderate political and social agenda, designed to attract more mainstream support. While isolated incidents of political demonstration and violence did occur, it was fully possible, and indeed the norm, to subscribe to anarchistic beliefs without advocating direct action or violence.²⁷ For the members of the Stieglitz circle, anarchism could be embedded in the production of art, even without overt politicization.

In this vein, the theories of Frederich Nietzsche and Walt Whitman were foundational for the non-conformist attitude and anarchist experimentation of the artists and writers associated with Stieglitz.²⁸ Although Whitman was never directly quoted in the pages of *Camera Work* and only once was Nietzsche was directly quoted, their individualistic philosophies were reflected in the writing of several key contributors, including Benjamin de Casseres, Marius de Zayas, and Sadakichi Hartmann.

²⁶ Hippolyte Havel, quoted in Bruno, *Anarchists*, 9.

²⁷ For more information on the non-violent character of anarchism in New York, see Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).

²⁸ John Weichsel proposed a lecture, intriguingly titled, "Whitman versus Nietzsche" to Caroline Caffin and the Paget-Club Paper Exchange in 1916, but no further documentation on the project exists. John Weichsel, letter to Caroline Caffin, 1 November 1916, John Weichsel papers, Archives of American Art.

In October 1909, *Camera Work* selected a single line, attributed to Nietzsche from an unidentified source: “To the artist who is eager for fame, his work finally becomes but a magnifying glass which he offers to everyone who happens to look his way.”²⁹ The selection of this passage demonstrates how the philosopher was understood by Stieglitz and his associates. In addition to the more popular ideas of the creative overman and the rejection of the status quo, the New York avant-garde also valued an artist’s freedom from the demands of the marketplace. Stieglitz’s anti-commercial attitude was influenced by a Nietzschean disdain for convention and popular opinion. In this one-line passage, the true artist was one who stood alone without regard for personal success; in clamoring for recognition, all claims to the individual uniqueness or power of the artist is lost.

This Nietzschean concept of the artist was frequently echoed in the pages of *Camera Work*, especially around 1910, as the emphasis of the organization shifted away from photography and toward modern art. While contemporaries and historians have both noted Stieglitz’s tendency to proselytize, we must not overlook the Nietzschean tone of this period. An unsigned editorial from that year underscored the perceived divide between the artist and society:

Why is a man who fights for an ideal of humanity, no matter whether a poet, reformer, philosopher or artist, always hooted by the crowd, and pelted with mud, even by his friends! It cannot be otherwise. ... The public has no time to reflect. It is only concerned with the effect. Its esthetic appreciation lives on memories and reminiscences. It admires only what it has seen before. It is always opposed to real originality. The road of novel ideas is too rough for them.³⁰

Camera Work regular contributors Benjamin de Casseres and Sadakichi Hartmann, both influenced by Nietzsche, were interested in social criticism and felt that the artist played a crucial role in leading the masses. Along with de Zayas, their writing guided the avant-garde in New

²⁹ Frederich Nietzsche, “To the Artist who is Eager for Fame,” *Camera Work* 28 (October 1909): 39.

³⁰ “The Fight for Recognition,” *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 22-23.

York in the transition from the Symbolist legacy of the nineteenth century to a modern era of radical experimentation which culminated in New York Dada.

A journalist as well as a critic, de Casseres had founded *El Diario Ilustrado* in Mexico before moving to New York where he wrote for a number of publications, including *Camera Work*.³¹ One of the more nihilistic voices of the Stieglitz circle, he championed the artist as a revolutionary, writing:

The decadent, the revolté: the man with a new vision, the new way a finer perception, is always a danger to the community of dullards, to the stratified hierarchy of saintly academicians and embalmed mediocrities. ...

In this sense, the brain that blossoms with the new idea, the new way – the brain of a Rodin, of a Baudelaire, of a Nietzsche – may be called a decadent brain, for it bears with it a principle of disintegration and dissociation. It provokes pain and life, and the new ideas that germinate here strike again and again at the fat face of Complacency.³²

For de Casseres (who came from a Symbolist background like Stieglitz) the artist was an individualistic thinker who was therefore fated to be alienated from society. From this outside position he was able to critique conventions, which rendered him a danger to the status quo. This was a theme to which de Casseres often returned: the revolutionary potential of the artist was proposed as the only possible means of progress.

In January 1912, de Casseres's "Modernity and the Decadence," proclaimed that "the old ideas that seemed united forever by the power of an indestructible, utilitarian principle have been freed from their eternal liaisons by the minds of the great destructive thinkers."³³ In the modern world thus disintegrated, everything is made individual; everything is isolated and instable,

³¹ Peter Plagens, "The Critics: Hartmann, Huneker, De Casseres," *Art in America* 61, no 4 (July-August 1973): 66-71.

³² Benjamin de Casseres, "Decadence and Mediocrity," *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 39.

³³ Benjamin de Casseres, "Modernity and the Decadence," *Camera Work* 37 (January 1912): 17-19.

allowing for the emergence of new forms. Championing the Symbolist writers Maurice Maeterlinck and Stéphane Mallarmé, who “dissociated language until they brought it back to what it was originally, hieroglyph and bare sound-symbol,” he continued: “unity, broken into an infinite number of shining particles, is to-day being sieved through the brain of genius, and the flat surface of our ancient heavens is crumbling over the world like a rotten ceiling.” To artists, this justified the dismantling of conventions and the exploration of unique, idiosyncratic modes of expression. De Casseres awaited this destruction, since “decomposition is the condition of birth.” Although he did not mention Nietzsche directly, the essay is dependent on the philosopher’s conception of the artist-as-Superman and in the linkage of destruction and creation.

This sentiment broadened into celebratory fervor in his essay “The Ironical in Art,” published in April of 1912.³⁴ De Casseres defined twentieth-century art as an ironic assault on the institutions of academicism, positioning it as a social rather than formal development. Furthermore, he cast modern art as an anarchist, iconoclastic movement, continuing “There is a revaluation going on in the art of the world today. There is a healthy mockery, a healthy anarchistic spirit abroad. Some men are spitting on themselves and their work; and that is healthy, too. ... No ideal is complete until you have smashed it. No art is perfect until the creator of it has caricatured it.”

In this essay, de Casseres joyfully asserted that the chaos of the modern world had created a series of destructive iconoclasts, including among their ranks Maeterlinck, Nietzsche and Whitman, as well as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Filippo Marinetti, and Marius de Zayas, claiming “it is a glorious age and a glorious anarchic world of color, motion vibration and scintillating creative-destructiveness!” In time, he argued, this revolt would yield a new model

³⁴ Benjamin de Casseres, “The Ironical in Art,” *Camera Work* 38 (April 1912): 17.

since “all great movements begin with the gesture of hate, of irony, of revenge.” De Casseres singled out his close friend, de Zayas, as a champion of the absurd, wielding a powerful weapon in the fight against convention.

Marius de Zayas was first introduced to Stieglitz in 1907 and became a trusted colleague and served as Stieglitz’s advisor in Paris during his extended trips of 1909-1910 and 1914.³⁵ A caricaturist, his own work evolved from Symbolist-inspired drawings to abstract object portraits, which will be discussed in chapter 3. De Zayas was a trusted advisor to Stieglitz during the early 1910s, a frequent contributor to *Camera Work*, and an important conduit for transatlantic exchange. Inspired by Nietzsche, he believed that the conventions of art shackled it to dead traditions, and began exploring for new modes of production. While he drew caricatures for both artistic and mainstream commercial audiences, his writing increasingly centered around the question of what did (or did not) constitute “Art.” Similarly, his essays for *Camera Work* were instrumental in moving the periodical away from its Symbolist background and towards Dada.

When de Zayas proclaimed “Art is Dead” in 1912, he built upon a sentiment common among the Stieglitz circle, expressed by Charles Caffin in 1907, that the conventional artist was “only stirring ashes out of which all fire is passed.”³⁶ In this essay, he claimed that it was necessary for artists to adapt to an increasingly scientific world. In a time he described as “chaotic, neurotic, inconsequent and out of equilibrium,” artists needed to experiment to find a new form of expression. Instead of searching for the “Ideal,” which de Zayas linked to an earlier, more

³⁵ For biographical information, see Douglas Hyland, *Marius De Zayas: Conjuror of Souls* (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1981); Antonio Saborit, "Marius De Zayas: Transatlantic Visionary of Modern Art," in *Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis*, ed. Deborah Cullen (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2009); Willard Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius De Zayas," *Art Bulletin* 62, no 3 (September 1980); Willard Bohn, "Marius De Zayas and Visual Poetry: Mental Reactions," *Arts Magazine* 55, no 10 (June 1981); Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*. Francis Naumann, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996); and Wendy Wick Reaves, "Marius de Zayas: Spotlight on Personality" in *Celebrity Caricature in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 72-102.

³⁶ Marius de Zayas, "The Sun Has Set," *Camera Work* 39 (July 1912): 17. Charles Caffin, "Is Herzog Also Among the Prophets?," *Camera Work* 17 (January 1907): 17-22.

spiritual age, the modern artist was urged to pursue “pure objectivity.” His essay was a call to revolutionize the very identity of the American artist, one that took on new urgency after the Armory Show of 1913, which revealed the continuing dominance of European culture.

Within the Stieglitz circle, the Armory Show was both confirmation of its campaign for modern art and a challenge to its exclusivity. Although Stieglitz was not involved in planning the exhibition, as an honorary vice-president and lender, he was supportive of the endeavor, which he considered an extension of his work at “291.” Writing a lengthy article for the *New York American*, the photographer celebrated the “battle cry of freedom” which promised to “help put life into the dead corpse of painting.”³⁷ He refused to categorize the artists into movements, instead stressing their individual natures, quoting Oscar Wilde’s definition of the true artist as one who “begins where imitation leaves off.”³⁸

Indeed, in 1913, Nietzschean destruction took on a newly-charged and specifically constructive potential for American artists and critics: in the destruction of the old guard, new leaders could come to prominence. In one of the last essays by de Casseres to be published in *Camera Work*, Nietzsche was listed with the anarchist Stirner and Francis Picabia as part of “The Renaissance of the Irrational” (1913). This essay declared “The Intellect is bankrupt... the rational, the sure-and-fast is a cock-and-bull story”³⁹ De Casseres offered the intuitive as a path to the elemental, an optimistic opportunity for a new understanding. He continued, “Chance, danger, and the irrational constitute the new Trinity.” At the same moment, in this essay, published in the first issue of *Camera Work* to follow the Armory Show, de Casseres offered the first hope that America could yet produce a vital, modern, culture. He counted Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman as “the three supreme Irrationalists of the age... the fathers of the cubists

³⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, “First Great Clinic to Revitalize Art,” *New York American* (26 January 1913): C5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Benjamin de Casseres, “The Renaissance of the Irrational,” *Camera Work* special number (June 1913): 22-24.

and the futurists, for they reported what they *felt*, not what they *see*.” Describing them as fearless, he claimed that these American thinkers broke with the past and did not rely upon accepted truths.

While less vitriolic in tone, the writing of Sadakichi Hartmann closely mirrored de Casseres’s interest in Nietzschean destruction and in the subsequent construction of a distinctly American culture. Like Stieglitz, and de Casseres, Hartmann was well-versed in Symbolism; his essay “A Tuesday Evening with Stéphane Mallarmé” chronicled his experience at one of the poet’s weekly salons. Hartmann was also acquainted with Maeterlinck and had befriended Whitman, placing him at the center of converging inspirations for the avant-garde. As early as 1904, Hartmann characterized the modern artists as visionaries who stood apart, “car[ing] little for public approval, insisting upon works, not faith, and believing that their share having been done in producing the work, the public must now do the rest.”⁴⁰

One of Hartmann’s primary concerns was the lack of a modern American aesthetic, a subject which he explored in his two-volume *History of American Art*, first published in 1901. He deplored the state of American art in a 1910 essay for *Camera Work*, entitled “Puritanism: Its Grandeur and Shame,” harshly criticizing the puritanical legacy which he felt had strangled native art.⁴¹ With America’s blind adoration of European culture, he felt that “there can be no vital art of any sort until . . . we are unashamed to be what we are, until we are frank enough to let wholesome egotism have its way.” This sentiment stoked the growing nationalistic desire for a native aesthetic.

⁴⁰ Sadakichi Hartmann, “The Photo-Seession Exhibition at the Carnegie Art Galleries, Pittsburg [sic], PA,” *Camera Work*, 6 (April 1904): 47.

⁴¹ Sadakichi Hartmann, “Puritanism: Its Grandeur and Shame,” *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 19. The title of this essay belies the inspiration of Van Wyck Brooks’s 1909 essay, “Wine of the Puritans.” Brooks will be addressed later in this chapter.

De Casseres was also concerned with the development of a national culture, but more directly critical of the “giant conspiracy of mediocrity” which he believed operated to suppress art in America.⁴² Arguing that American culture was indifferent to the beautiful and interested only in what it considered “Respectable,” he wrote:

The average American passes dumbly, hat in hand, before the Accepted Names as though he had entered a fane dedicated to Mammon. In the paradise of cowards, he is the tetrarch.

On the waxed and shining ramparts of this Eden of Indifference struts Conformity dressed like a flunky. Behind him shambles the lackey Hypocrisy, muffled in gold leaf. From beyond the walls, from deep within this laboratory of the vulgar, the stupid, the mediocre, the bourgeois, is blown a sickening odor. It comes from those millions upon millions of beings whose souls are without drainage.

Like Hartmann, de Casseres believed that the result of this indifference was a mindless adoration of the Old Masters. He described the wealthy patrons who “carry their exhausted souls to Europe and buy ‘art objects,’ the great money value of which is the only thing they were made to appreciate.” Ultimately both Hartmann and de Casseres distanced themselves from the Stieglitz circle in the mid-1910s, yet, along with de Zayas, their criticism of European culture and their desire for an American aesthetic were important to the development of Dada in New York. The philosophical anarchism of New York Dada and its employment of the American vernacular had its origins in their critiques of academicism and elitism.

The popularity of Nietzsche in New York was due, in part, to the widespread admiration for Walt Whitman and the vital conception of the heroic man of action.⁴³ Although there exists no evidence that Nietzsche knew the work of Whitman, both men shared an admiration for Ralph Waldo Emerson, argued that the forces of creation and destruction were conjoined, and

⁴² Benjamin de Casseres, “American Indifference,” *Camera Work* 27 (July 1909): 24.

⁴³ Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), 150.

subscribed to an anarcho-individualist rejection of society's confines and expectations.⁴⁴ Ruth Bohan has considered the positive influence of Whitman on individuals such as Joseph Stella or Robert Coady, but the poet's celebration of American vernacular culture was newly relevant around 1915.⁴⁵ In the early twentieth-century, Whitman was widely considered to be the first important American artist, one whose work had embodied an inherent, uniquely native, spirit.⁴⁶ The model presented by Whitman's life and work confirmed contemporary interpretations of Nietzsche and connected them to a specifically American spirit. Thus Whitman provided an important model, as he could be embraced as both an artist of the cosmic or a poet of the mundane.

Indeed, in translating from a Symbolist atmosphere to the modern, urban environment of industrial New York, Whitman became a paradigm for the modern transformation of nineteenth-century ideologies with his passion for the modern, democratic, vernacular forms of American culture. So thoroughly was he identified with a Dadaist, revolutionary spirit that Henri-Pierre Roché invoked the poet in the pages of *The Blind Man* (1917): "May the spirit of Walt Whitman guide the Independents. Long live his memory; and long live the Independents."⁴⁷

Called "the original Futurist" or the "law-giving anarchist," Whitman was valued not only for his poetry, but for his philosophical example.⁴⁸ Unlike poets of earlier generations, whose work operated within traditions of the highbrow, Whitman focused on the real objects which

⁴⁴ C. N. Stavrou, *Whitman and Nietzsche: A Comparative Study of Their Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 2.

⁴⁵ Ruth Bohan, *Looking into Walt Whitman: American Art, 1850-1920* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ Ruth Bohan, *Looking into Walt Whitman*, has extensive analysis of Whitman and the visual arts, although she considered his influence to be more spiritualistic and positive and dissociated him from Dadaism. In "Whitman's 'Barbaric Yawp' and the Culture of New York Dada" in Gaughan, ed., *Dada New York: New World for Old*, she addressed the influence of Whitman on *The Soil*, but argued that "Coady would have undoubtedly rejected the label 'Dada'... considering it just another of the many 'isms' against which he waged continual war."

⁴⁷ Henri-Pierre Roché, "The Blind Man," *The Blind Man* 1 (10 April 1917): 6.

⁴⁸ "A Futurist of the Sixties," *The Living Age* 281 (1914) discussed Whitman as the "original Futurist" and Benjamin de Casseres referred to the poet as the "law-giving anarchist" in "Enter Walt Whitman," *The Philistine* 25, no 6 (1907): 164-5.

surrounded him. *Leaves of Grass* celebrated the vernacular, a quality which was noted in a review of the first edition, published in 1855. Whitman, the reviewer wrote, was a “lover of things,” including “commerce, manufactures, arsenals, steamships, railroads, telegraphs, cities with paved streets, and aqueducts, and police, and gas - ... all the features and processes of the nineteenth century.”⁴⁹ That the review was actually written by Whitman himself, in a self-promotional strategy designed to boost interest in the volume, confirms that the statement provided accurate insights into the intentions of the poet.

“The supreme spokesman of American democracy,” Whitman’s disregard for moral and artistic conventions was adopted as a model for twentieth-century radicalism on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵⁰ Whitman was admired as a paragon of vitality, his individualism an essential characteristic of his American identity.⁵¹ Although a lengthy passage, Max Kozloff’s 1970 analysis of Whitman’s poetry is worth examining as each of his points had a particular resonance for New York Dadaists during the 1910s and 1920s:

- Anxiety and insecurity about the function of art in a democratic society
- Metaphoric overextensions of potency and will, caprice and style, as a means of self-assertion
- Mistrust of collective structures and intellectual traditions as enemies of impulse
- Macaronic confusions between “high” and “low” art
- Mixed sensations of urban and rural experience and messianic aspirations toward a “public” statement

⁴⁹ [Walt Whitman], “Walt Whitman and his Poems,” (1855) *United States Review*, quoted in Francis E. Murphy, *Walt Whitman: A Critical Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 31.

⁵⁰ Winifred Kirkland, “Americanization and Walt Whitman,” *The Dial* 47, no 791 (May 31, 1919): 537. Despite the nationalistic nature of their quest for an American art, the influence of European modernism cannot be denied. This is not necessarily a contradiction: at the same time that Whitman was considered quintessentially American, his work was deemed Futurist, not only by the popular press, but by Marinetti himself, who identified the poet as one of “the five or six great precursors of Futurism” in F. T. Marinetti, “We Abjure our Symbolist Masters, The Last Lovers of the Moon,” *Le Futurisme* (1911), reprinted in *Futurism: An Anthology*, Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Whittman, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 93-5.

⁵¹ Basil de Selincourt provided a contemporary view of the poet’s legacy in *Walt Whitman: A Critical Study* (London and New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914).

- Finally, and conversely, a dedication to artistic effort as labor in which the artist views himself as a blue-collar worker⁵²

Whitman's poetry, which explored the newly industrial world of the mid-nineteenth century, shared anxieties and desires with the visual artist of the early twentieth century. In an era of conflicted sentiments towards technology, nationalism, and aesthetics, artists of New York Dada experienced the contradictory urge of self-expression and the desire to make a public statement. They embraced intuition (impulse) and revolted against institutions that would govern them. They exalted in the special role of the artist, particularly as envisioned by Nietzsche, but also felt a kinship with mainstream culture and remained uneasy about the elitism of art in an age of modern popular culture; they mingled the high and low and rejected constructed hierarchies.

De Casseres himself had foretold the explosion in Whitman's popularity in a 1907 article from *The Philistine*, which championed the poet as "the universal man, the law-giving anarchist," arguing that the extreme individualist, the anarchist, despised the artificial laws of society because of a profound respect for natural law.⁵³ De Casseres also praised the democratic vision of the poet, writing that "what was 'common' to the average man was to Walt Whitman the persistent repetition of a miracle.... [he] found the everyday world around us a familiar substance and he left it a world aureoled in mystery"⁵⁴ The vernacular played a vital role in Whitman's oeuvre; in addition to transcendental subjects, he celebrated everyday people and industrial objects, seeing "in the uncultured... only the benefits accruing to them from their condition of latency."⁵⁵ In this way, Whitman imbued the everyday with profound meaning, a

⁵² Max Kozloff, "Walt Whitman and American Art," in *The Artistic Legacy of Walt Whitman: A Tribute to Gay Wilson Allen*, Edwin Haviland Miller, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 29-30.

⁵³ de Casseres, "Enter Walt Whitman."

⁵⁴ de Casseres, "Enter Walt Whitman," 172.

⁵⁵ de Selincourt, 31.

paradoxical quality celebrated by many modern artists.⁵⁶ As in Whitman's poetry, the vernacular could both celebrate and subvert tradition and American culture.

In his assessment of American culture, *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), Van Wyck Brooks was the first to popularize the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow."⁵⁷ His theories spread quickly: excerpts were published in *Forum Magazine*, which further popularized the definition of highbrow as that governed by academic theory and lowbrow as driven by business and appealing to the tastes of the market.⁵⁸ Originating in the language of the pseudo-scientific field of phrenology, this vocabulary embodied the struggle between idealism and commercialism;⁵⁹ Brooks argued this conflict stymied the development of culture as it demanded a choice between equally unattainable extremes.

Brooks further asserted that the division of culture into "highbrow" and "lowbrow" was an inherently American phenomenon. He wrote:

I have proposed these terms to a Russian, an Englishman, and a German, asking each in turn whether in his country there was anything to correspond with the conceptions implied in them. In each case they have been returned to be as quite American, authentically our very own, and, I should add, highly suggestive.

What side of American life is not touched by this antithesis?
What explanation of American life is more central or more illuminating? ...⁶⁰

The intellectuals, who would be expected to develop American culture, Brooks wrote, were victims of this divide. He considered the theory and education of the academic life incompatible

⁵⁶ Matthew Baigell linked the Stieglitz circle to the "Emerson-Whitman" tradition for their individuality and the willingness "to be inconsistent and to remain open to possibilities" in "American Landscape Painting and National Identity," in *Artist and Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 30-31.

⁵⁷ Brooks's division of American culture was influenced by George Santayana's "The Genteel Tradition in America" (1911) and Henry James. This lineage is discussed in Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 151-4.

⁵⁸ Van Wyck Brooks, "Highbrow and Lowbrow," *Forum* 53 (April 1915).

⁵⁹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 221-2.

⁶⁰ Van Wyck Brooks, *America's Coming-of-Age* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1915), 6-7.

with the vitality necessary to make an independent American culture. The dichotomy in terms of high and low implicitly suggested that the solution lay in the middle, in finding a compromise between the two routes. This was in contrast with the progressive philosophies of an earlier generation, which aspired to raise all culture to a higher level. For Brooks, such “glassy, inflexible priggishness” was not a viable solution; this new society would also require the “certain humanity, flexibility, tangibility” found in the lowbrow.⁶¹ He explained the necessity of compromise:

The very accent of the words “Highbrow” and “Lowbrow” implies an instinctual perception that this is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. For both are used in a derogatory sense. The “Highbrow” is the superior person whose virtue is admitted but felt to be an inept unpalatable virtue; while the “Lowbrow” is a good fellow one readily takes to, but with a certain scorn or him and all his works. ... They are equally undesirable, and they are incompatible; but they divide American life between them.⁶²

Pitting these two branches of American culture against one another, Brooks suggested that the formation of a truly American culture required radical innovation. He identified Walt Whitman as a pioneer and archetype. In a chapter titled, “The Precipitant,” Brooks championed Whitman as the first to unite “the public of theory and the public of action” to create “the rudiments of a middle tradition... a tradition which is just as fundamentally American as either flag-waving or money-grabbing, one which is visibly growing but which has already been grossly abused... something organic in American life.”⁶³

In addition to his poetry, by the twentieth century, Whitman was admired for his lived experience. Brooks recounted a passage from Whitman’s *Specimen Days*, describing the poet’s visits to military hospitals during the Civil War, where, meeting with the veterans, Whitman

⁶¹ Brooks, *America's-Coming-of-Age*, 29.

⁶² Brooks, *America's-Coming-of-Age*, 7-8.

⁶³ Brooks, *America's-Coming-of-Age*, 111-2.

became a “man of the world,” able to declaim literary passages and play “an amusing game called the game of twenty questions,” with equal ease.⁶⁴ Whitman used this broad range of lived experience to challenge the so-called “dignity of American letters,” which Brooks dismissed as a pastiche of borrowed European subjects and form.

Brook’s recommendations on developing a vital national culture echoed the language of anarchism. Referring to the “pre-Darwinian state” of American culture, he called for the destruction of the various “groups which have long ceased to mean anything, which do not stand for living issues, which do not engage personal energies.”⁶⁵ It was necessary for men of action to break free from these divisions and to propose a radical alternative to the status quo. In response to this provocation, an American culture would be defined. Asserting that the creation of “this resisting background must be the first work for our thinkers,” Brooks issued a Nietzschean challenge to the avant-garde to revolt and to create.⁶⁶

America’s Coming-of-Age text has been interpreted as symptomatic of the anti-materialism of the early twentieth century which fed the growth of American Symbolism.⁶⁷ Following the logic of Brooks’s argument, however, Symbolism could not produce a solution; separating the artist from the real world, it only extended this dichotomy into the modern era. Yet this Symbolist heritage meant that Brooks’s theories were philosophically aligned with the artists gathered around Alfred Stieglitz, who had long been concerned with the definition of fine art and the construction of an American culture.⁶⁸ The birth of this new culture was centered in New York,

⁶⁴ Brooks, *America's-Coming-of-Age*, 114-5.

⁶⁵ Brooks, *America's-Coming-of-Age*, 165.

⁶⁶ Brooks, *America's-Coming-of-Age*, 179.

⁶⁷ Charles C. Eldredge, *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting* (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1979), 38.

⁶⁸ Dorothy Norman linked Stieglitz and Brooks, writing that “the slender volume formulated a number of beliefs paralleling those of Stieglitz about the problems and challenges facing the artist in America. Both men protested against unthinking allegiance to outmoded ways of thought, against the pedantic and the puritanical, against the abandoning of artistic conscience in order to reach a wide public for mere financial gain.” Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz:*

the modern American city, which was quickly becoming a world center as World War I threatened European capitols. As Brooks explained, “New York has never possessed dignity,” which better enabled its artists to break free from the constrictive bonds of the highbrow.⁶⁹ The close proximity of the intellectual and the commercial – the highbrow and the lowbrow – gave the city its volatility and its creative potential.

Setting his cultural revolution in the space between the highbrow and the lowbrow and in New York, Brooks established an apt challenge for artists. As a founding contributor to the liberal journal, *The Seven Arts* (1916-17), Brooks circulated among avant-garde circles who enthusiastically received his message of cultural rejuvenation.⁷⁰ The ethos of the magazine rallied against Puritanism and commercialism, championing art as the regenerative source that would create a national culture.⁷¹ They were also careful to note this was not a matter of patriotism or nationalism, but an Americanism that was informed by its immigrants and represented a new social reality, including elements of popular culture best described as the vernacular.⁷²

Brooks wrote of finding a “usable past,” something that could be used to support the formation of American culture. To his contemporaries, the vernacular, emerged as a viable source. Furthermore, the search for a valid compromise, a “middlebrow” culture, coincided with what Miles Orvell has characterized as a shift from “a culture of imitation to one of

An American Seer, 138. Another of Stieglitz’s biographers wrote of the photographer’s admiration for Brooks’s *The Wine of the Puritans* (1909) and of its impact on *Camera Work*, including Sadakichi Hartmann’s 1910 essay, “Puritanism – Its Grandeur and Shame,” in Whelan, 229.

⁶⁹ Eldredge, 55.

⁷⁰ Raymond Nelson, *Van Wyck Brooks: A Writer's Life* (New York: Elsevier-Dutton Publishing Co., 1981), 111-21.

⁷¹ For more information on *The Seven Arts*, see Casey Nelsom Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); James Oppenheim, “The Story of the *Seven Arts*,” *American Mercury* 20 (1930); or Claire Sacks, “The *Seven Arts* Critics: A Study of Cultural Nationalism in America, 1910-1930” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1955).

⁷² *The Seven Arts* also featured Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld among its chief contributors, both of whom also entered the Stieglitz circle during these years.

authenticity.”⁷³ In place of the beaux-arts tradition, acceptable in the nineteenth century for its cultural pedigree, the modern age required a new idiom, one based in the realities of a changed world. The vernacular had the necessary sense of authenticity (Kouwenhoven later defined the vernacular as the “un-self-conscious efforts of common people”⁷⁴). In addition, the industrial nature of the vernacular was intrinsically modern and its democratic, evolutionary character was considered distinctively American.

Early twentieth-century critics believed Whitman’s untraditional structure and language to be developed intuitively and thus to be authentic. The scholar Matthew Baigell has argued that Whitman anticipated elements of Bergson’s philosophy, most notably the importance of intuition and the concept of the *élan vital*. Indeed, these elements were emphasized by the poet’s twentieth-century admirers.⁷⁵ Whitman was lauded for refusing to rely on compositional formulae, instead “the bulk of his work had found by intuition the form which his genius required.”⁷⁶ Through his rejection of these learned, but artificial standards, Whitman was understood to better attain an organic synthesis between subject and form.

Building on Symbolist ideas of equivalence and suggestion, the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) had developed a highly influential theoretical system, popular among both American and European artists of the early twentieth century, which championed the supremacy of intuition over intellect. Influential on Cubism and Futurism, Bergson’s rejection of traditional, positivist, notions of experience was quickly associated with anarchism.⁷⁷ Bergson’s 1913 lectures at Columbia University were so popular that he is credited with creating the first

⁷³ Orvell, xvi.

⁷⁴ John Kouwenhoven, *Made in America: The Arts in Modern Civilization* (Garden City: W. W. Norton & Company, 1948), 13.

⁷⁵ Matthew Baigell, “Walt Whitman and Early Twentieth-Century American Art,” in *Walt Whitman and the Visual Arts*, Geoffrey M. Sill and Roberta K. Tarbell, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 121-141.

⁷⁶ de Selincourt, 91.

⁷⁷ Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) discussed interpretations of Bergson’s theories in Europe.

traffic jam.⁷⁸ His philosophies were well-known within the Stieglitz circle; excerpts were published in *Camera Work* in October 1911 and January 1912.⁷⁹

In *Camera Work*'s "An Extract from Bergson," taken from *Creative Evolution* (1907), intuition is privileged over intellect. Bergson argued that the latter dealt with only a view of reality while intuition entered into the very nature of life.⁸⁰ Thus, the reality determinable through the five senses was considered little more than a symbolic representation of a subject's mental state. To access the *élan vital*, the "intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance,"⁸¹ it was necessary to employ intuition rather than science; true vision required the viewer to look beyond rationality to empathetically reach the subject's essence. This expansion of consciousness beyond the physical senses was a thread common to the artists affiliated with 291 and built upon popular themes of Symbolism.

This selection of Bergson's writing was accompanied by two essays which revealed the effect of his philosophy on American critics. In "The Unconscious in Art," de Casseres privileged unconscious production inspired by "emotions for which there are no corresponding thoughts, emotions that awaken the unconscious alone, and that never touch the brain."⁸² Sharing Bergson's interest in the value of the unconscious mind and its ability to communicate deeper truths, de Casseres declared "the intellect is bankrupt" and thus disrupted the conventional bases for art, traditions of logic and mimesis which stretched back to the Renaissance.

⁷⁸ Geraldine Jonçich, *The Sane Positivist: A Biography of Edward L. Thorndike* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 334.

⁷⁹[Henri Bergson], "An Extract from Bergson," *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911): 20-1 and Henri Bergson, "What is the Object of Art?" *Camera Work* 37 (January 1912): 22-5.

⁸⁰ [Bergson], "An Extract from Bergson," 20.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Benjamin de Casseres, "The Unconscious in Art," *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911):17.

Sadakichi Hartmann's "Structural Units" directly preceded the excerpt from *Creative Evolution* and similarly worked to connect the philosopher to contemporary visual art. He addressed the individualism of the artist whose uniqueness allowed him special insight into a larger, cosmic connectivity. Conventional art was too formulaic to reach such profundity; the artist needed to "dive into some world of shadows where material facts dissolve," to pursue an abstract harmony of the titular structural units: "He must be an iconoclast and shatter the traditions which cling about the relics of former artistic ideals."

Like Nietzsche, Bergson charged the artist with a visionary responsibility. The second excerpt printed in *Camera Work*, here titled "What is the Object of Art?" was taken from the 1900 essay, *Laughter*.⁸³ It began by acknowledging a distance between reality and consciousness, a separation which required the artist to provide a connection. Bergson posited that "between ourselves and our own consciousness a veil is interposed: a veil that is dense and opaque for the common herd, - thin, almost transparent, for the artist and the poet." Out of necessity, most human vision was utilitarian, dealing in classifications and labels, but the artist viewed the world with a "natural detachment" which rendered him able to perceive reality more directly. Through this ironic and individual vision, "art, whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to brush aside accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself."⁸⁴ Using the dramatic arts as an analogy, Bergson explained that upheaval had the potential to bring the viewer closer to elemental truths; it followed that radical art had the same potential to awake

⁸³ Bergson, "What is the Object of Art?," 22.

⁸⁴ *Idem*, 24.

some latent quality in the human soul by reconnecting with a deeper reality than superficial imagery.⁸⁵

The source for the second excerpt, Bergson's *Laughter*, is a foundational text for joke theory. In this essay, Bergson sought to analyze the composition of humor and he determined that its central component was the juxtaposition of mechanistic regularity and the organic flux of human existence. Writing that "the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine," he touched upon a vital concern during this accelerated period of industrialization and Taylorism.⁸⁶ By introducing humor as a natural outcome of this combination and in arguing that humor had the capability to produce liberating change, Bergson provided an important coping mechanism for artists dealing with the tensions of this modern, industrial climate.

Bergson's argument, that humor was a vital element of revolution, capable of overthrowing the hierarchical status quo and replacing it with a more egalitarian society, was of special interest to those in search of a national aesthetic as humor was considered to be a central part of what comprised an American character. Writing in 1915, one critic explained, "humor is more to us than a mere mood. It is the pith of the swift, electric atmosphere that is so distinctively our own."⁸⁷ As Naumann contended in *Making Mischief*, elements of the mechanomorphic qualities suggested by Bergson appeared in the machine aesthetic of Dada in New York.⁸⁸

Bergson's theories on humor were highly influential to the development of Dada in New York. In particular, his emphasis on the leveling effect of laughter, which brought everything to

⁸⁵ This notion would inspire artists of the 1920s such as Charles Demuth and Arthur Dove to bypass conventional "realism" in search of more essential concepts of truth.

⁸⁶ Bergson, "What is the Object of Art?" 22.

⁸⁷ Louis Baurly, "Wanted: An American Salon of Humourists," *Bookman* 40 (January 1915): 525. Francis Naumann has gone further, claiming that humor was the defining characteristic of New York Dada in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996).

⁸⁸ Barbara Zabel, "The Machine and New York Dada," in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Francis Naumann, ed. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), 280-286.

the rank of the commonplace, was vital to the development of the vernacular aesthetic. In both *Creative Evolution* and *Laughter*, artists were encouraged to break with traditions and social conventions in order to draw upon the individual experience. In this way, artists attained an intuitive reaction to an object, thought, or sensation. Combined with anarchism, these theories were a powerful authorization of individualist rebellion against conventional aesthetics.

The radicality of Bergsonian thought was complemented among the Stieglitz circle with widespread admiration for the writings of the Expressionist Wassily Kandinsky. His ability to evoke meaning through abstraction, to create art that was both modern and spiritual, influenced decades of American modernism.⁸⁹ While Americanists have pointed to Stieglitz's interest in Kandinsky as evidence of his spiritual interest, this limited interpretation discounts the influential anarchism of Kandinsky's writings. Rose-Carol Washton Long has demonstrated the importance of anarchism as part of Kandinsky's desire to remake society through an exploration of alternative philosophies.⁹⁰ Gail Levin has studied the influence of Kandinsky's Theosophism on artists in America and analyzed the German painter's first exhibition in the United States, including the characterization by the show's organizer, Martin Birnbaum, that the work was "anarchistic." The present study builds upon her scholarship to examine the specific reception of Kandinsky's work and writings by the Stieglitz circle.⁹¹

During the summer of 1912, Marsden Hartley, who was working in Paris, sent Stieglitz a copy of the *Blue Rider Almanac* and shortly thereafter a copy of *On the Spiritual in Art*.⁹² New York artists could not have overlooked the anarchism of the almanac, which directly spoke to the

⁸⁹ Levin, "Kandinsky and the First American Avant-Garde" discussed the influence of Kandinsky on American painters.

⁹⁰ Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future," *Art Journal* 46, no 1 (Spring 1987).

⁹¹ Gail Levin, "Kandinsky's Debut in America," in *Theme and Improvisation: Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde, 1912-1950*, ed. Gail Levin and Marianne Lorenz (Dayton, Ohio: Dayton Art Institute, 1992).

⁹² Marsden Hartley, postcard to Alfred Stieglitz, summer 1912, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

artist's right to individuality; as one essay from the almanac, "On Anarchy in Music," by Th. v. Hartmann began, "External laws do not exist. If the inner voice does not rebel, everything is permitted. . . . In all the arts, and especially in music, every method that arises from an inner necessity is right."⁹³ This inner necessity was equated to natural law, granting the artist the mandate to revolutionize; aesthetic revolution, it was believed, would eventually lead to greater upheaval. Hartmann's conclusion, illustrated by a Russian folk print of two riders on horseback, spoke to this messianic anarchism, but he warned about replacing one system of authority with another. Encouraging pluralism, he wrote: "The principle of anarchy in art should be welcomed. Only this principle can lead us to a glorious future, to a new Renaissance. But this theory should also not turn its back on other courageous path-finders. By discovering the new laws, art should rather lead to an even greater, more conscious freedom – to different new possibilities."

As Long emphasized, Kandinsky's "On the Question of Form," also printed in the Almanac, directly defended anarchism in the arts:

Many call the present state of painting 'anarchy.' . . . It is thought, incorrectly, to mean unplanned upheaval and disorder. But anarchy is regularity and order created not by an external and ultimately powerless force, but by *the feeling for good*. Limits are set up here, too, but they must be *internal* limits and must replace external ones. These limits are also constantly extended, giving rise to an ever-increasing freedom that, in turn, opens the way for subsequent revelations.⁹⁴

While doubtlessly the spiritual aspects of Kandinsky's writing and his references to Theosophy were of interest to the Stieglitz circle, they were especially drawn to his anarchistic explanation of creativity.⁹⁵

⁹³ Th. v. Hartmann, "On Anarchy in Music," *Blue Rider Almanac*, 113-118. Hartmann was mentioned in John Weichsel's "Cosmism or Amorphism?" *Camera Work* 42-43 (April-July 1913) as an example of anarchist thought.

⁹⁴ Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," *Blue Rider Almanac* (1912), 157-8.

⁹⁵ This relationship is discussed in Levin, "Kandinsky and the First American Avant-Garde."

The *Blue Rider Almanac* was widely discussed among artists of the Stieglitz circle and excerpts from *On the Spiritual* were immediately included in the July 1912 issue of *Camera Work*. The speed of their publication signals the intensity of Stieglitz's interest in Kandinsky. Over the next few months, Hartley and Stieglitz continued to discuss the theories presented in this book, linking them with other contemporary philosophies. For example, in December Hartley wrote: "I am convinced of the Bergson argument in philosophy. That the intuition is the only vehicle for art expression and it is in this basis that I am proceeding. My first impulses came from the mere suggestion of Kandinsky's book."⁹⁶

In America, artists reinterpreted Kandinsky's anarchism, replacing his interest in the collective with a system which privileged individualism. The phrases, "inner need" and "inner necessity" became commonplace in writing by Stieglitz and his artists;⁹⁷ years later, as Stieglitz recounted his career to Dorothy Norman, this language would still direct his thoughts:

I can do nothing because another does it; nothing that is not for me to do because of some deep inner need. I clarify for myself along. I am interested in putting down an image only of what I have seen, not what it means to me... I feel that all experiences in life in any particular form must be an equivalent of any other truly felt experience.⁹⁸

Indeed, so important became Kandinsky, that when his *Improvisation No. 27 (Garden of Love)* (figure 1.3) was shown at the Armory Show of 1913, Stieglitz bought the canvas for \$500, a much larger sum than he customarily spent on purchases of art.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Marsden Hartley, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, received 20 December 1912, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

⁹⁷ As Stieglitz and Hartley would have read the original German edition of Kandinsky's book, the term "innere" would have been more closely aligned with Bergsonian concepts of the *élan vital* than a merely subjective expression; this distinction is discussed by Rose-Carol Washton Long in *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 38-9.

⁹⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in Dorothy Norman, "Introduction to an American Seer," *Aperature* 8, no 1 (1960): 36.

⁹⁹ Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1963), 256.

The section from *On the Spiritual* selected for inclusion in *Camera Work* related to the paintings of Matisse and Picasso, which were chosen to support artists who had already exhibited at “291.”¹⁰⁰ The excerpt began with the still lifes of Cézanne, who liberated form and color from mimetic representation and used them to convey the inner life of his subjects. Matisse was then celebrated for his use of color and Picasso for his use of form; both “to one great goal,” the revelation of this “inner spirit in outer things.”

In an unprecedented move, Stieglitz immediately began planning a special issue, printed in August 1912, which featured only an editorial and two 1909 word-portraits of Matisse and Picasso by Gertrude Stein.¹⁰¹ As Stein’s Paris salon was a gathering place for members of the avant-garde, and although Stieglitz made his last trip to Europe in 1911, several members of his circle could have been responsible for securing the manuscripts, including Steichen, Hartley, Demuth; Stieglitz himself had recently lobbied the publisher Mitchell Kennerley to publish Stein’s *Many Many Women*.¹⁰²

A frequent visitor to the Stein salon in Paris and known anarchist, Hutchins Hapgood wrote an explanation of her word portraits, published in the *New York Globe* in September and reprinted in the October issue of *Camera Work*.¹⁰³ Hapgood claimed that Stein was “the only American living who is trying to do in writing what Picasso and Matisse and others are trying to do in plastic art.” For Stein, this allowed for the use of suggestive references where allusion took the place of straightforward statements.¹⁰⁴ Her portraits were accompanied by the works of both artists, drawing parallels between abstraction in images and in words. Rather than depicting her

¹⁰⁰ [Wassily] Kandinsky, “Extracts from “The Spiritual in Art,” *Camera Work* 39 (July 1912): 34.

¹⁰¹ Gertrude Stein, “Picasso” and “Matisse,” *Camera Work* Special Number (August 1912).

¹⁰² James Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1974), 174.

¹⁰³ Hutchins Hapgood, “A New Form of Literature,” *New York Globe* (26 September 1922), reprinted in *Camera Work* 40 (October 1912): 42-3.

¹⁰⁴ Mabel Dodge compared Stein and Picasso in “Speculations, or Post-Impressionism in Prose,” *Arts and Decoration* (March 1913).

subjects in allegedly objective terms, the essays “set us dreaming about the strenuous inner life of these two artists, and convey the fringe [of consciousness].”¹⁰⁵ One less-sympathetic critic complained of her portrayal of Picasso, “We would not even know from the portrait that Picasso was a painter.”¹⁰⁶

In anarchist terms, Hapgood claimed that Stein “does not formally criticize nor does she even state ideas or conclusions. There is no intellectualism in these essays, no comparisons, no authority or authorities mentioned or implied.” Instead, Stein’s work was praised as childish, lacking the conventions of writing which would be taught, and as evocative. Paired with Kandinsky’s writing on these artists, Stieglitz constructed a framework for avant-gardism which used modern art as a rebellious force and a challenge to academicism.¹⁰⁷ The contemporary language surrounding Stieglitz and his associates firmly connected radical aesthetic experiments with philosophies of anarchism, creating fertile ground for artists to embrace vernacular culture as an alternative source of inspiration. Mirroring Stirner’s anarcho-individualism, Stieglitz’s “291” gallery attempted to operate as a forum for artistic exploration without merely replacing the institutions of the past.

The search for Americanness was integral to the Dada spirit in New York, not antithetical to it. In 1915, this question of national culture or aesthetic became a central point of discussion in America. Conservative and radical institutions alike pondered what might constitute “Americanness,” yet Van Wyck Brooks’s *America’s Coming-of-Age* emerged as the dominant

¹⁰⁵ Hapgood, “A New Form of Literature,” 43.

¹⁰⁶ Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 66-7.

¹⁰⁷ Stieglitz’s literal presentation of children’s art as an anti-academic expression of vernacular culture will be discussed in Chapter 3.

text on the subject, asserting that an American culture had failed to develop because of a native schism existing between the “highbrow” and “lowbrow” culture.¹⁰⁸

In New York, the exploration of a national aesthetic achieved its fullest expression through the vernacular. While scholars have often cited 1915 as the onset of New York Dada because of the arrival of Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia and the formation of the Arensberg Salon,¹⁰⁹ they entered an atmosphere that rejected of the highbrow, celebrated the vernacular, and explored an American aesthetic. By defining the vernacular as a realm of non-art production, both the naïve and the industrial could be accommodated. Dada replaced fine art with either the work of the unprofessional or the commercial artist, both idioms that operated without the hierarchical governance of an academic system.

Taken from the arenas of industry, popular culture, and folk art, the vernacular provided a lexicon for Dada which was inherently modern and American. Pulling from their immediate, commercial surroundings, artists began to cannibalize these aspects of lowbrow, commercial culture, incorporating the idioms of the vernacular into the highbrow world of art to create an alternative culture that was intrinsically American. This, in 1915, we reach a fundamental divide between emergent Dada in New York and in Zurich. In America, Dada was not simply interested in dismantling a corrupt social system, but was actively formulating an American aesthetic based on ideals of anarchist revolt and Nietzschean renewal. What similarities existed

¹⁰⁸ An article written the National Academy of Design president John W. Alexander, “Is our Art Distinctively American?,” *Century Magazine* (April 1914): 826-8 and Robert Coady’s “American Art,” *The Soil* 1 (December 1916) are but two examples. Wanda Corn, “Identity, Modernism, and the American Art after World War I: Gerald Musephy and Americanisme,” in *Nationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Richard Etlin (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1991) discussed the popularity of *Américanisme* in Europe during the 1920s.

¹⁰⁹ William C. Agee and Francis Naumann have written about the centrality of the Arensberg Salon to New York Dada; see Agee, “New York Dada, 1910-1930,” *Art News Annual* 34 (October 1968) and Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994) or “Walter Conrad Arensberg: Poet, Patron and Participant in the New York Avant-Garde,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 76 (Spring 1980).

between Zurich and New York Dada stemmed from their shared interest in dismantling European cultural institutions.

CHAPTER 2 INTERPRETATIONS OF ANARCHISM AND FUTURISM IN NEW YORK

Alfred Stieglitz's encouragement of anarchistic experimentation and anti-academic radicalism during the 1910s was critical to the development of Dada in America. Having addressed the ways Stieglitz created an anarchistic framework for modern art in New York, this chapter will trace the aesthetic impact of this anarchism, including the influence of the Ferrer Center and the French anarchist group Action d'Art. Additionally, it will analyze American interpretations of Italian Futurism, which associated Futurism closely with anarcho-individualism.¹ The Futurist desire for constant renewal and the destruction of tradition enabled artists in New York to move farther away from the conventions of high culture, critical for the development of Dada in New York. Combined with anarchism, these philosophies set the stage for the cultural debates of 1915 and encouraged artists and writers in their exploration of the vernacular.

Hippolyte Havel is a central figure to understanding anarchism in New York during the 1910s.² Havel was a close associate of Emma Goldman, working with her both at *Mother Earth* and various other projects during the 1910s. He also independently published several anarchist periodicals, the most widely-circulated of which was his *Revolutionary Almanac* (1914) (figure 2.1). This journal brought together both American and European anarchists and various political (and apolitical) perspectives in one volume, providing a general overview of the philosophy without trying to reconcile it as a single unity. An important source for understanding the

¹ Italian Futurism also had roots in anarchism, specifically anarcho-individualism and anarcho-syndicalism; see Emilio Gentile, "Political Futurism and the Myth of the Italian Revolution," in *International Futurism in Arts and Literature*. Günter Berghaus, ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000) and Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996).

² As Allan Antliff has demonstrated, Hippolyte Havel has unjustly been dismissed as a peripheral figure in New York; see *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001), 95.

contemporary knowledge anarchism in New York during the period, the *Revolutionary Almanac* was also known to Stieglitz, who mentioned its publication in the pages of *Camera Work*.³ The men were associates and Havel had a particular interest in the role of the artist in an anarchistic society, writing:

The work of the artist, the composer, the painter, the sculptor, or the writer mirrors the reflex of the various struggles, hopes, and aspirations of our social life. The creative artist has the deepest appreciation of the tendencies of his time. He is therefore the fittest exponent of new ideals, the true herald of the coming reconstruction; indeed, he is the prophet of the future social order.⁴

The first section of the *Revolutionary Almanac* was the titular calendar, illustrated by John Sloan, with each day listing a notable anarchist event from history (figure 2.2). Many of these involved events in the history of American anarchism, or historical figures deemed philosophically anarchistic, including the birth of Benjamin Franklin (January 17), the death of Walt Whitman (March 25), and “Alexander Berkman’s attentat against Frick” (July 23). Relevant international events of importance were also listed, such as the execution of the French Bonnot gang (March 28 and May 13), the sentencing of Oscar Wilde (May 25) and the death of Max Stirner (June 27).

A variety of contemporary and historical texts followed, presenting different elements of anarchism, interspersed with inspirational quotations and political cartoons which lampooned government officials. Benjamin de Casseres contributed an essay on religion, calling for the abandonment of Christianity, which “has put a crown of thorns on Pan,” and a joyous return to paganism.⁵ Two paintings were reproduced: Luigi Russolo’s *Revolt* (labeled as *Revolution*) and Carlo Carrà’s *Funeral of Anarchist Galli*, images surely provided by the self-proclaimed,

³ The publication was listed as one of Hippolyte Havel’s accomplishments in the “List of Contributors,” *Camera Work* 47 (July 1914).

⁴ Hippolyte Havel, “Literature: Its Influence upon Social Life,” *Mother Earth* 3 (October 1908): 329.

⁵ Benjamin de Casseres, “The Second Advent,” *Revolutionary Almanac* (New York: Rabelais Press, 1914), 37-8.

“archpriest of Futurism in America,” André Tridon.⁶ The pro-war politics of these paintings in their native Italy were overlooked in this publication; they were paired with a strong current of anarchist protest against the war which ran throughout the almanac, urging readers “Don’t Vote” and “Don’t Become a Murderer!”

While Alfred Stieglitz was one progenitor of Dada in New York, with *Camera Work’s* exploration of anarchist rebellion, he was not the only outlet, but rather was part of a much larger network of anarchism which contributed to the development of the Dada sensibility. Although he is often portrayed as an isolationist, during the 1910s, Stieglitz was involved with neighborhood politics and closely associated with the radicals of Greenwich Village. His 1916 correspondence with fellow gallerist and publisher Guido Bruno demonstrates the intersecting interests between his circle and other anarchist circles. Writing to Bruno to protest the censorship of a novel by Alfred Kreyborg: *Edna, the Girl of the Street*, Stieglitz defended the poet (“I cannot imagine him writing anything which could not be read by the light of day before the whole world”) proceeding to strongly criticize governmental control: “As for the Comstockian Society: all I can say is that the idea underlying it has always given me the creeps. As it must give the creeps to everyone who has the slightest conception of freedom of expression, of art, of intellectual integrity. Of the reality of life itself. . . . Another pseudo cry for Pseudo Salvation!”⁷ He continued, writing irreverently about the recent death of the infamous censor, Anthony Comstock (1844-1915), “I was wondering primarily to whom he had willed that marvelous collection of obscene literature and pictures, which during his life he collected so assiduously. And which, as I so often was given to understand, was one of Comstock’s greatest prides.”

⁶ André Tridon, “The New Cult of Futurism,” *New York Herald* (24 December 1911): 6.

⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Guido Bruno, 26 December 1916, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

The founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1873, Comstock, was, admittedly, an easy target in the teens, his relentless campaign against immorality drawing ire from all sectors of the avant-garde. Responsible for the federal “Comstock Law,” which made the circulation of “obscene, lewd, or lascivious” material punishable by law,⁸ by 1913, he bragged that he had destroyed 160 tons of obscene materials over the course of his career.⁹

While the threat of censorship was a general menace to radicalism in New York, Comstock’s 1915 suppression of an exhibition of drawings by Clara Tice was particularly infamous. The show, which had been arranged in a popular Greenwich Village restaurant, Polly’s Place at 137 MacDougal Street, was the target of a March 13, 1915 raid by Comstock and his agents, who objected to Tice’s humorous drawings of lithe nudes (figure 2.3). In order to prevent the seizure of Tice’s work, the entire collection was purchased by Allen Norton, the poet and editor of the little magazine *Rogue* (1915).¹⁰ The images were then published in the monthly *Vanity Fair* (1914-36), beginning Tice’s professional relationship with the magazine and its editor, Frank Crowninshield.

Polly’s restaurant was closely associated with anarchism (run by Polly Holladay and Hippolyte Havel), and therefore it was a frequent target of Comstock’s attention.¹¹ Tice’s work itself was relatively innocuous: although the caricaturist Carlo de Fornaro called her drawings “a slap at the academy, a silvery laugh at the fossils, the Puritans, the Philistines, a quip and a sally

⁸ Nicola K. Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38.

⁹ Haywood Broun and Margaret Leech, *Anthony Comstock: Roundsman of the Lord* (New York: A & C Boni, 1927), 15-16.

¹⁰ *Rogue* was edited by Norton and his wife Louise, and financed by Walter Arensberg. Running only from March – September 1915, it featured poetry by Kreymbourg and Mina Loy, among other experimental writers. For fuller accounts of this incident, see Francis Naumann, “Clara Tice” in *New York Dada, 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 117-20 and Marie T. Keller, “Clara Tice, ‘Queen of Greenwich Village’,” in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998), 414-441.

¹¹ Gerald MacFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood, 1898-1918* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 197.

to the morose, the dyspeptics, the impotents in art,”¹² the show’s location in an anarchist restaurant was what condemned it. The *New York Times* reported that the raid also resulted in the removal of an advertisement for a department store white sale, featuring a woman clad in a nightrobe – an image which had heretofore been displayed without incident.¹³ The Comstock raid of Polly’s provoked outrage from members of the avant-garde, including Guido Bruno, who offered Tice an exhibition in his nearby gallery, Bruno’s Garret, in May 1915.¹⁴

Anthony Comstock was featured repeatedly in the anarchist Hippolyte Havel’s *Revolutionary Almanac*, where he was caricatured as the grotesque, fig-leaf-clad Saint Anthony, “The Guardian of Morals” (figure 2.4). This drawing was accompanied by an essay, “The Confiscated Picture,” written from the point of view of the “royal chamberlain of governmental morals.”¹⁵ The following page of the almanac satirized the censorship of the arts, with a poem entitled “Comstock Soliloquizes” which projected his moralistic judgments to figures from throughout the history of art. It began:

What, Aphrodite
Not even a nightie
Between you and Hades, my dear?
O Venus de Medici!
I can’t stand for negligee,
Too negligee ladies, my dear!
And your sister of Milo
From her head to her heel, I,
Sets a perfectly horrid example;
Though she’s minus her arms, O,
The rest of her charms, O,

¹² Carlo de Fornaro, in Clara Tice, “How You Looked to Clara Tice That Day on the Meramec,” *Saint Louis Star* (3 July 1921); quoted in Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 118.

¹³ “Clara Tice Lights Guido Bruno Garret,” *New York Times* (11 May 1915).

¹⁴ Bruno also hosted a mock trial of Tice in October, the invitation (designed by Tice herself) promised “She will be tried – and therefore acquitted of the charges of having committed unspeakable black atrocities on white paper, abusing slender girls, cats, peacocks and butterflies. Clara Tice is prepared to show all of you that you are wrong.” Clara Tice artist file, New York Public Library; reprinted in Marie T. Keller, “Clara Tice, ‘Queen of Greenwich Village,’” 418-9.

¹⁵ “The Confiscated Picture,” *Revolutionary Almanac*, 71. The piece had previously been published in *Mother Earth* and was most likely written by its then-editor, Max Baginski, who wrote several satirical essays about Comstock.

Are extremely apparent – and ample.¹⁶

The censorship of Tice's drawings was a flashpoint for artists in New York, confirming their anti-authoritarian impulses and renewing the struggle against such government control and Victorian mores. The same month, March of 1915, Man Ray created the unique number of *The Ridgefield Gazook* (figure 2.5), a small, handwritten publication of four pages which, I believe, parodied contemporary fears of censorship in the wake of the Comstock raid of Polly's Place by hyperbolically censoring its own content.¹⁷ The work drew on anarchist philosophies, naming several followers under punning pseudonyms; only the name of Man Ray, as the sole editor of the *Ridgefield Gazook*, appears without the protection of a clever alias.¹⁸ The result was less a militant anarchist journal than a playful anarchistic take on the art world.

Thus, *The Ridgefield Gazook* was created immediately after and in response to Comstock's censorship of Tice's drawings, although Francis Naumann believes that the work was never actually published or circulated.¹⁹ Active in anarchist circles, Man Ray exhibited his awareness of Greenwich Village art and anarchy, a connection made directly in a poem by Adon La+ (Man Ray's companion, the poet Adon Lacroix): a hymn, titled "to HIM. (figure 2.6)" Written without music, the text chants, "Glory to Comstock... He destroyeth all evil.... He destroyeth all art.... Hell-e-luyah,," before ending "Ahem!" The cover, a crude illustration of two grasshoppers mating, entitled *The Cosmic Urge*, was precisely the sort of puerile illustration that drew the official attention of the censor. Furthermore, Man Ray's assertion that the magazine was "published unnecessarily" suggests his awareness that subversive materials could be removed

¹⁶ "Comstock Soliloquizes," *Revolutionary Almanac*, 72. Although the death of Comstock in September 1915 provided a temporary respite from government censorship, as America neared participation in World War I, there would arise new limits on free speech, to be discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁷ Man Ray would have known Allen Norton, who purchased Tice's drawings, through the Ridgefield community of artists, writers, and anarchists. For more information on this group, see Francis Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism: The Early Works of Man Ray* (New Brunswick: Montclair Art Museum, 2003).

¹⁸ The other figures are identified by Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*, 123.

¹⁹ See Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*, 242, note 13.

from the public sphere. This adversarial sentiment was underscored by the slogan under the masthead which reads, “we are not neutral.”

The back page of the *Gazook* featured “Art Motes” by Kumoff (Manuel Komroff) (figure 2.7), which consisted merely of an ink blot. Perhaps this spot covered an offensive illustration (or was meant to suggest that), or perhaps in its refusal to follow conventional expectations, it was another radical gesture which would require the censor’s intervention. Throughout the issue, Man Ray similarly subverted such censorship and control by simply not providing images to be banned, contributing a shrewd form of unpunishable provocation.

The content (figure 2.8) was divided into three sections, each one a pun on traditional genres of publishing, just as the name *Gazook* played on *Gazette*. Under “Graftsmanship” (craftsmanship), a headline riffed on Gertrude Stein’s self-published volume of 1914, proclaiming, “How to make TENDER BUTTONS itch.” The “text,” by MacKucera (the anarchist Joseph Kucera) was censored with a large black bar, a reference to the unreadability of Stein’s writing and its controversial reception among critics in America.²⁰

Similarly blank was an essay in the “Soshall Science” (social science) section, attributed to the anarchist Hipp O’Havel, (Hippolyte Havel). The headline of this piece exclaimed, “Je m’en fiche!!,” roughly, “I don’t give a damn!!,” with a blank rectangle underneath. Again, the anarchist response was to withhold, to refuse to participate and subject his work to self-censorship. The following page, “Il’litter-ature,” featured two poems, one by Adolf Lupo (Adolf Wolff) and the other attributed to A. Kreamburg (Alfred Kreymborg). Wolff’s “Three Bombs” has received the greatest amount of scholarly attention, as it provides direct reference to Man

²⁰ Stein’s *Tender Buttons* had been self-published the year before, Man Ray’s friend, the poet Alfred Kreymborg had published a lighthearted review of the text, “Gertrude Stein – Hoax and Hoaxtress: A Study of the Woman Whose ‘Tender Buttons’ Has Furnished New York with a New Kind of Amusement,” *The Morning Telegraph* (7 March 1915).

Ray's support of anarchism. Naumann has demonstrated that the three bombs are most likely a reference to the three Ferrer Center anarchists who were killed in the Lexington Avenue accident.²¹ Yet the tone of Man Ray's illustration was not heroic; the bombs were being served on a platter with fork and knife, perhaps a confirmation of his non-violent position and a commentary on the futility of such radical action. The text has been redacted beyond comprehension. Only the poem attributed to Kreymborg is more complete; the title, "Pilz," referred to his "mushrooms," the free form poetry for which he was best known.²² Recently published as a chapbook by Guido Bruno, these short poems were informal verses, which "spring up over night in my heart."²³

Francis Naumann has thoroughly documented Man Ray's association with the Ferrer Center, the center of the anarchist network in New York.²⁴ After hearing Emma Goldman give a January 1911 lecture in Toledo and meeting her in October of that year, Robert Henri began teaching art classes at the center in November 1911, quickly attracting a roster of experimental artists to the school, including Abraham Walkowitz, Man Ray, Adolf Wolff, Carl Zigrosser, and Manuel Komroff, among others.²⁵ In time, Dr. John Weichsel joined Henri, teaching Wednesday evening sessions on aesthetics.²⁶

Weichsel was also an active member of the Stieglitz circle, contributing several important essays to *Camera Work* in 1913 and 1914. In 1915, he expanded upon his work at the Ferrer

²¹ Naumann has written most extensively on Man Ray's anarchism, including "Man Ray and America: The New York and Ridgefield Years: 1907-1921" (Ph.D. Diss., Graduate Center, CUNY, 1988); *Conversion to Modernism*; and "Aesthetic Anarchy," in Jennifer Mundy, ed., *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia* (London: Tate, 2008).

²² Man Ray titled the poem, "Pilz," the German word for mushrooms.

²³ Alfred Kreymborg, "Mushrooms" in *Mushrooms: A Book of Free Forms* (New York: John Marshall Co., Ltd, 1916), 1.

²⁴ The Ferrer Center was documented in Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*; and Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*.

²⁵ Bennard B. Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Work* (New York: Dover Publications, 1990), 155. Emma Goldman recounts their meeting in *Living my Life*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931), 528-9.

²⁶ "Extension of our Art Class," *The Modern School* 1, no 11 (November 1914): 11.

Center to found the People's Art Guild, an exhibition society aimed at circumventing the commercial gallery system (which will be discussed in chapter 5). Basing his aesthetic on interpretations of Wilhelm Worringer's theories of abstraction and representation, Weichsel believed abstract art pointed to an antagonistic relationship between society and nature and argued that modern artists could break free of society only through abstraction. It was necessary to work through the properties inherent to the medium in order to separate oneself from all conventions. Aesthetic autonomy would create an art object bound only to the expression of the artist.²⁷ He called this approach "Cosmism," highlighting the act of individualistic invention, which he likened to the creation of the universe.

Weichsel's ideas became popular among artists of the anarchist Ferrer Center, evidenced in the sentiments expressed by student statements such as that by Manuel Komroff: "Art should never try to be anything outside of itself. It should never tell a story, nor have a moral. It should be itself, and nothing more: and in its being itself it will simplify, yet intensify, its powers."²⁸ Furthermore, as Francis Naumann and Paul Avrich have noted, elements of Cosmism are visible in the works of Adolf Wolff and Man Ray, both of whom were affiliated with the Stieglitz circle and the Ferrer Center in the mid-1910s; thus Cosmism was one artistic ideology that identified abstraction with anarchism, common both to the Stieglitz circle and a larger network of New York anarchists.²⁹

Adolf Wolff, whom Stieglitz described in *Camera Work* as a "sculptor, poet, anarchist,"³⁰ was deeply involved in the activities of the Ferrer Center, as student and instructor; he also served as editor of its journal, *The Modern School*, which published several of his poems in 1913

²⁷ John Weichsel, "Cosmism or Amorphism," *Camera Work* 42-43, (April-July 1913).

²⁸ Manuel Komroff, "Art Transfusion," *The Modern School* 1, no 4 (Spring 1913): 13.

²⁹ Paul Avrich and Francis Naumann, "Adolf Wolff: 'Poet, Sculptor, and Revolutionist, but Mostly Revolutionist'," *Art Bulletin* 67 (September 1985): 486-500.

³⁰ Alfred Stieglitz, "List of Contributors," *Camera Work* 47 (July 1914).

(including one titled “Walt Whitman”).³¹ Part of a community of radical artists and writers in Ridgefield, New Jersey (along with Man Ray and Walkowitz), Kreymborg wrote a review of the young sculptor’s work, clearly allying it with his anarchism:

Wolff is not ashamed of the title Anarchist, nor is he afraid of it... To be an Anarchist, according to this 32-year-old son of Belgium, is ... to have law and order within, not without, to require no government except that of one’s conscience, and to be so strongly individual as to embrace with one’s own mind the well-being of the entire human collectivity. Moreover, to love beauty, material and spiritual, and to hate ugliness, material and spiritual, passionately.³²

The passage rejected conservative criticisms of anarchism as lawlessness and repeatedly emphasized the concept of natural law and order. Like so many artists, Wolff’s anarchism was largely predicated on his insistent individualism. Artistically, his interpretation of natural law expressed itself through the vague concept of “beauty,” an interpretation which reflected the direct influence of Kandinsky’s writing. Although many artists were anarchistic in their aesthetics and in their bohemian way of life while eschewing political activism, Wolff was involved in several incidents. Following an arrest at an April 1914 rally in Union Square, his sentence required him to abstain from political activities. When he was arrested in June for taking part in another protest, the violation of this court order led to a thirty-day sentence, during which he wrote “A Letter from Prison” to Stieglitz, printed in *Camera Work* as part of the “What is ‘291’” issue of January 1915.³³ The letter, a piece of personal correspondence to “My Dear

³¹ Avrich and Naumann, 487 and “Poems by Adolf Wolff,” *The Modern School* 1 no 4 (Spring 1913).

³² Alfred Kreymborg, quoted in “Adolf Wolff’s Definition of Anarchism,” *The Modern School* 2, no 4 (April 1915): 44-5.

³³ “Wolff in Court Again,” *New York Times* (22 August 1914), 9, quoted in Avrich and Naumann, “Adolf Wolff: Poet, Sculptor, and Revolutionist, but Mostly Revolutionist,” 496. Additionally, Wolff designed a number of models for memorials and monuments for anarchist causes, adopting Cosmism, with its blocky, elementary forms, as an appropriate style for revolutionary commemoration. Wolff employed a pyramidal form for the urn he designed in 1914 for the ashes of the three anarchists killed in the Lexington Avenue explosion. This urn was pictured on the cover of *Mother Earth*, 9, no 5 (July 1914) and was reprinted in Avrich and Naumann, 495. In an article written by Weichsel, Wolff described the autonomy of his work: “I bring into existence something that is

Stieglitz,” was then published to contrast the “institutional, uniform, routinal, dogmatic, academic, counted, fastened, barred, and hopeless” atmosphere of the prison with the liberated atmosphere of “291.”³⁴

Weichsel’s theory of Cosmism was influential among the artists of the Ferrer Center, especially Man Ray and Adolf Wolff,³⁵ but he gained wider exposure for his platform in a series of articles published in *Camera Work*. While the formalist and materialistic aspects of Cosmism stood in opposition to some of the more spiritual theories popular among the Stieglitz circle, Stieglitz praised Weichsel’s essay, “Cosmism or Amorphism,” not only publishing the full thirteen pages (one of the longest pieces ever published in *Camera Work*) but planning to print it separately as a brochure to gain wider circulation.³⁶ His enthusiasm for Weichsel’s writing signals the importance to Stieglitz of entertaining conflicting opinions. Many scholars have commented on his policy of printing both positive and negative exhibition reviews in the pages of *Camera Work*, but Stieglitz was equally inclusive when dealing with theory, suggesting that during these years he was less interested in an authoritative voice and more interested in fostering free expression and experimentation.

Weichsel’s “Cosmism or Amorphism,” which critiqued the “logical miscarriage” of Kandinsky-inspired, anti-materialist abstraction as an insufficient method of depicting “conscious universality,” was a specific response to an earlier anonymous essay printed in *Camera Work*, “Vers l’Amorphisme,” of June 1913. It was the only piece ever to run untranslated. The essay – a manifesto of sorts – began with an exposition of the current state of

neither a duplicate nor a representation of anything else.... It is neither representational, illustrative, nor utilitarian. It is just a thing standing by itself.” in John Weichsel, “The Crystalline Sculpture of Adolf Wolff,” *East and West* 1 (February 1916): 323. This autonomy was a deliberate choice to avoid conventional allegory and traditional means of creating meaning; it was a subtle means of revolution.

³⁴ Adolf Wolff, “A Letter from Prison,” *Camera Work* 47 (July 1914): 15.

³⁵ For thorough analysis of the artistic connection between Man Ray and Adolf Wolff to Cosmism, see Avrich and Naumann “Adolf Wolff” and Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*.

³⁶ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to John Weichsel, 27 August 1913, John Weichsel papers, Archives of American Art.

painting, noting the transition from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism and the progressive devaluation of form in favor of “the thing itself.” Moving through “cone-ism,” a play on Cubism, the author brought the reader through Apollinaire’s categories of cubism to the ultimate phase, Orphism, before introducing the next revolution: Amorphism. Moving into the manifesto itself, he declared:

War on form!
Form is the enemy!
This is our program. ...

The author then presented two “illustrations” to demonstrate the superiority of Amorphism: *Woman Bathing* and *The Sea* by Popaul Picador (figures 2.9, 10). In both frames, the image is blank, the claim being that the unknown Picador has rejected the conventions of form and presented an image of pure light.

The essay was, in fact, a reprint from the French anarchist journal, *Les Hommes du Jour*, from May of that year. Originally written by the journalist Victor Méric, the text was most likely sent from Paris to Stieglitz by Francis Picabia.³⁷ In the original context, the intent was satirical, aimed at both bourgeois and avant-garde targets. As Ileana Leavens has detailed, the choice of subjects parodied traditional artists, but the modernists were also mocked for their teleological march towards such a seemingly inevitable and yet ridiculous end result of abstraction.³⁸ It took on an additional level of significance for Stieglitz in the post-Armory atmosphere. Published in a special issue, directly following the Armory Show, its inclusion can be interpreted as a critical commentary upon the faddish fascination with the newest European styles. As numerous new

³⁷ Stieglitz and Picabia had met in 1913, when Picabia traveled to New York for the Armory Show. Following that exhibition, Stieglitz held a show of Picabia’s most recent paintings at “291.” They corresponded from 1913 until Picabia’s return to New York in 1915. William Agee originally theorized that the essay had been written by Picabia himself, but Dickran Tashjian established the original authorship in *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910-1925* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 235. The translation is taken from Jonathan Green, *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Aperture, 1973).

³⁸ Ileana Leavens, *From "291" To Zurich: The Birth of Dada* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1983).

galleries quickly emerged to capitalize on the new interest in modernism, Stieglitz took the marketable post-Armory craze for abstraction to an illogical extreme. Yet, in *Camera Work*, even an anarchist critique such as Méric's did not go unexamined and unilaterally accepted. While Stieglitz recognized the deliberate absurdity of the piece, the essay also prompted serious consideration, notably in Weichsel's response.

The publication of Méric's text also raises questions about the fluid exchange of artistic and anarchistic ideas between Europe and America during the early 1910s. There exists ample evidence of Stieglitz's connection to anarchist activities in New York. Furthermore, it was also during this time that Stieglitz was most likely exposed to the Parisian anarchist group, Action d'Art.³⁹ Although I will focus on several strong possibilities for direct exchange, any number of American artists who were overseas from 1909-1914 could have been aware of this movement. Stieglitz shared with Action d'Art a strong Symbolist background and an interest in Nietzschean individualism. Thus, Action d'Art would have provided an attractive and radical means of rethinking the specific, revolutionary role of the artist.

The genesis for the Action d'Art group was the writing of Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, who coined the term "artistocratie" in his *L'Idéal Humain de l'Art* (1906) and expanded upon it in his *Le Culte de l'Idéal ou l'Artistocratie* (1909). The "artistocrat" was the individualist artist who searched for *beauté* without regard for laws, politics, or morality.⁴⁰ Building upon the Nietzschean notion of the Superman, the artistocrat was elevated by the freedom inherent in the act of creation and able to rebel against the constrictions of society, the *médiocrité* which marked

³⁹ For more information on this group, see Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism: The "Aestheticism" of the Action d'Art Group," *Oxford Art Journal* 21, no 2 (1998): 99-120.

⁴⁰ *La Littérature & l'époque: histoire de la littérature française de 1885 à nos jours*. (Paris: E. Figuière et cie, 1914), 224-31.

the collective. This combat between *artistocratie* and *médiocrité* created a framework for the anarcho-individualist artist, creating an explicitly aesthetic form of anarchism.

In 1913, Lacaze-Duthiers became a founding member of the group Action d'Art, along with Atl (Gerardo Murillo), Banville d'Hostel, André Colomer, Paul Dermée, René Desambre, Manuel Devaldès, Tewfik Fahmy, and Paul Maubel.⁴¹ The members of Action d'Art were non-political anarcho-individualists, who valued art as the means of personal rebellion against the constraints of society. They did not define themselves according to a particular style, but embraced pluralism in the spirit of free, individual expression. Furthermore, they criticized the existing system of galleries and exhibitions, which they believed encouraged artists to produce work according to the external market demands. They began publishing an eponymous journal in February 1913.

The premiere issue included Manuel Devaldes's "Notre vie oeuvre d'art," which underscored the lack of common group identity among the group's membership. He declared that there was no single style linking these artists, only "an absolutely individual criterion, that as individuals we refuse to adhere to any dogma."⁴² Furthermore, in the first issue of the journal, the front page formed a manifesto, reading:

Declaration

Action d'Art brings together Individuals who do not wish to
subject themselves to a group spirit.

.....

But if we do not wish to impose upon ourselves the regulations of
mind, to think and act in commune, we believe, however, that we
have more reasons to work together than most groups of men.

⁴¹ This membership was listed in the first issue, *Action d'Art* 1 (February 1913).

⁴² "un critérium absolument personnel, puisque, individualists, nous refusons toute adhésion aux dogmes" Manuel Devaldes, "Notre vie oeuvre d'art," *Action d'Art* 1 (February 1913), np.

What does it matter if the motives and the methods of our action differ! We must unite to face the solidarity of the unconscious, the only thing that could weigh on our conscience, hinder our personality – *our individuality*.

.....

For us, art is an act of revolution; and each of us will manifest it according to our personality.

Creative or destructive, our acts will always be artistic, for in destroying ugliness we create beauty.⁴³

In this manifesto, the members of Action d'Art outlined their determination not to form a collective, but to remain individuals banding together to fight the forces of *médiocrité*. Those acts motivated by politics or economics were deemed ugly, while those which were motivated by an inner desire for expression, produced beauty.⁴⁴

In “Une orientation s’impose,” the Mexican artist Gerardo Murillo, better-known as Atl, decried the workings of the art market, which he believed forced artists to work in marketable styles and to produce “under the oppression of exploiters.”⁴⁵ Arguing that artists were bound by historicism, he asserted that only industry and science had created truly modern works of art. Given the concurrent debate over the formation of American culture, this would have been an

⁴³ “Déclaration / L’Action d’art associe quelques-uns qui ne veulent pas s’astreindre à un esprit de groupe. / Nous sommes des individualistes et des réfractaires. Chacun de nous veut, d’abord, en toute liberté et *en beauté*, s’épanouir. / Mais si nous ne voulons pas nous imposer des règles de penser, de sentir ou d’agir communes, nous croyons cependant avoir bien plus de raisons d’être ensemble que n’en ont, pour la plupart, les hommes qui se groupent. / Qu’importe si les motifs et les modes de notre action diffèrent! Nous avons pour nous réunir, face à l’inconsciente solidarité grégaire, la seule chose qui ne puisse peser sur nos consciences, entraver nos personnalités, - notre *individualisme*. / Pour exprimer nos rêves, nos pensées, manifester nos révoltes et livrer nos combats, nous fondons le journal et la revue *L’ACTION D’ART*. / Ce que nous entendons par “action d’art”, ce n’est pas seulement une action dans l’art, à propos de telle ou telle, œuvres des “Beaux-Arts” ou des “Lettres”; c’est encore et surtout notre attitude dans la vie, les actes individuels de quelques-uns avides d’une éclosion intégrale et harmonieuse de leur être. / L’ordre social, reposant sur la laideur, agissant par l’Autorité et triomphant par la force aveugle du nombre, écrase nécessairement l’individualité. / Les *Compagnons de l’Action d’Art* ne peuvent se soumettre à ses lois. / Pour vivre notre vie en beauté, nous saurons lutter. Les réfractaires que nous sommes ne veulent pas se résigner. La révolte, pour nous, est de l’action d’art; et chacun de nous la manifestera selon son temperament. / Créatrice ou destructrice, notre action sera toujours de l’art, car détruire de la laideur c’est encore créer de la beauté.” “Déclaration,” *Action d’Art* 1 (February 1913). Author’s translation.

⁴⁴ Antliff, “Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism,” 103.

⁴⁵ “sous l’oppression d’un groupe d’exploiteurs” in Atl, “Une orientation s’impose,” *Action d’Art* 1 (February 1913).

intriguing position for American artists studying in Paris. Valuing industrial and scientific production, both fields of vernacular development, would have legitimized these realms as potential sources of influence. Thus the key tenets of the Action d'Art group were established: the insistence upon the individual and the need for personal expression; the pluralistic embrace of varying styles; the refutation of the art market and its operations; and struggle against bourgeois tastes and traditions. This antagonism towards the market would have also been of interest to Francis Picabia, an artist who had been successful early in his career while painting in an Impressionist style. As the scholar Jennifer Mundy has noted, when Picabia began to explore abstraction, he was dismayed that he received no support from his dealers and collectors, who immediately turned their attentions elsewhere.⁴⁶

That Picabia was aware of the activities of Action d'Art is confirmed by his involvement in a campaign protesting the censorship of Jacob Epstein's memorial to Oscar Wilde in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris (figure 2.11). The second issue of *L'Action d'Art* (1 March 1913) issued a call to action, reacting to the police's decision to place a metal plate over the sculpture's genitalia.⁴⁷ The front page featured the official opinion of the police and a response, written by Atl. The following month, they published a full-page public statement of protest against this censorship, including a list of petitioners.⁴⁸ Included among these signatures were Guillaume Apollinaire, Gino Severini, Max Jacob, Archipenko, Albert Gleizes, and Picabia, all artists who were already, or would shortly become, associated with Stieglitz, Marius de Zayas, and their New York galleries.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Mundy, 18.

⁴⁷ Atl, "A propos du Monument Oscar Wilde au Père-Lachaise," *L'Action d'Art* 1 no 2 (1 March 1913).

⁴⁸ Banville d'Hostel, "Pour la liberté de l'art: Protestation à propos du Monument Oscar Wilde," *L'Action d'Art* 1 no 4 (1 April 1913).

⁴⁹ This protest was also mentioned by Henry McBride in "Epstein's Monument to Oscar Wilde," *The Sun* (30 November 1913), but the text suggests that McBride knew of the controversy through correspondence directly with Epstein.

The *Action d'Art* protest against the censorship of Oscar Wilde's memorial was published on 1 April 1913, during Picabia's trip to New York and while he was working closely with Stieglitz on his post-Armory exhibition at "291." Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Picabia was well aware of the activities of Action d'Art while in America, potentially even corresponding with them,⁵⁰ this at the moment when he was most closely integrated into the Stieglitz circle.

Indeed, the connections between the Stieglitz and *Action d'Art* circles were numerous. Picabia was a direct link, as was Guillaume Apollinaire who also signed the Wilde protest, which was published in Action d'Art's eponymous journal on the same day he published a fictitious essay on Walt Whitman's bacchanalian funeral. Purportedly the account of an eye-witness, Apollinaire described a ribald, largely homosexual, festival attended by 3,500 people who celebrated from dawn to dusk, becoming drunk, eating barbeque, and burying Whitman to the accompaniment of ragtime music.⁵¹ In comparison, Wilde's memorial would have seemed quite tame. It seems likely that Apollinaire's essay was intended to support the anti-censorship movement protesting the government interference with the Wilde memorial. In choosing Whitman, he selected a parallel example of an iconoclastic author, respected among anarchist and revolutionary thinkers. Apollinaire's essay was well-known in New York, as his account was quickly rebutted by several journalists, including Stieglitz associate Sadakichi Hartmann.⁵² Soon after, the French poet's reputation became associated with progressive art criticism in America: his *Les Peintres Cubistes* (1913), which associated modern French artists with anarchistic revolution, emerged as an important text for American artists (first cited by John

⁵⁰ In the 1920s, Picabia would become closely associated with Action d'Art founder Paul Dermée, his scrapbooks also contain a clipping from the post-war iteration of the journal *Action d'Art*, an article "La Peinture" by G. Dehuit. Both the correspondence with Dermée and the clippings are in the Francis Picabia papers, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

⁵¹ "Funérailles des Walt Whitman racontées par un témoin" in *Apollinaire: Œuvres en prose complètes*, Michel Décaudin, ed. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1993), 138-40.

⁵² This exchange is documented in Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 44.

Weichsel in the pages of *Camera Work*), reinforcing the connections between anarchism and the Stieglitz circle.⁵³

That a monument to Oscar Wilde was the target of French censors was fortuitous: the poet was popular among revolutionary circles in Europe and America, who sprung to his defense. Wilde's "The Critic as Artist" had been printed in *Camera Work* (April 1909) and additional selected quotations were published in the following number (July 1909). Hippolyte Havel's *Revolutionary Almanac* published a portion of Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," a poem written after Wilde's release from prison, as part of his introduction to an article written by Emma Goldman.⁵⁴ Wilde's poetry would later be published in *The Soil*, a periodical which will be discussed in chapter 4, which also featured a fictional biographical account of the writer by Wilde's nephew, Arthur Cravan.⁵⁵

In particular, Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891) was a touchstone for anarcho-individualist thought in Europe and America. *Action d'Art* reprinted a lengthy section of this essay, beginning in the 1 April 1913 issue and continuing through the summer. In it, Wilde explicitly linked artistic revolution with social upheaval, as the artist was able to exempt himself from the materialistic concerns which powered bourgeois economic controls. Both Lacaze-Duthiers and Wilde urged the individual to resist classification or dogma, providing a clear alternative to more collectivist theories of anarchy. The reluctance of New York Dada to define itself can be seen as the legacy of this anarcho-individualism.

⁵³ John Weichsel, "Artists and Others," *Camera Work* 46 (April 1914), cited in Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde*, 45.

⁵⁴ Havel, *Revolutionary Almanac*, 55.

⁵⁵ The fictional account by Arthur Cravan, "Oscar Wilde is Alive!" was published over two issues, 4-5, in April and July 1917. The April number also included a lengthy description entitled, "Wilde's Personal Appearance," written "by his sister-in-law" and a selection of Wilde's letters. A previously unpublished poem by Wilde was published in *The Soil* 5 (July 1917): 201. Wilde's *Salome* was also listed in the back pages of every issue, under "Books to be Obtained from 'The Soil'."

In the first issue of *Action d'Art* (February 1913), André Colomer recounted the pedigree of modern anarchist thought, including the nineteenth-century German anarchist Max Stirner among the influential precursors. Indeed, the views of the Action d'Art group were deeply inspired by the writings of Stirner, who had developed a philosophy which dismissed divisions of class in favor of an individualist approach which did not create such collectives.⁵⁶ Colomer developed this lineage in his regular column, “De Bergson à Bonnot,” which also addressed the impact of Bergsonian thought, naming intuition as a critical force for artists.⁵⁷ He differentiated modern anarchist artists from their predecessors, critiquing the art-for-art's-sake aesthetic of the nineteenth century as a “game without consequences.” As in *Camera Work*, the dual influences of Stirner and Bergson influenced experimentation, which in turn fostered dadaism.

There is some dispute over who first became interested in the writings of Max Stirner, but by late 1912, Picabia and Marcel Duchamp were both interested in his *The Ego and Its Own*.⁵⁸ Thus both artists demonstrated an interest in contemporary anarchist thinking before arriving in America, during the period when they were both working in Paris as members of the Puteaux circle and therefore likely aware of the activities of Action d'Art.

Atl's characterization of Futurism also suggests connections between Action d'Art and America. The April 1 issue featured his lengthy review of the 1913 Salon des Independants, in which he called Futurism “another subdivision of art, coming directly from the American ‘Funny

⁵⁶ Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 140.

⁵⁷ Antliff discussed this column at length in “From Bergson to Bonnot: Bergsonian Anarchism, Futurism, and the Action d'Art Group,” in *Inventing Bergson*.

⁵⁸ Duchamp mentioned Stirner's name as an influence, for example, in an interview with the Museum of Modern Art upon the acquisition of his *Three Standard Stoppages*. Jennifer Mundy believed that Picabia introduced Duchamp to the writings of Max Stirner; Francis Naumann detailed how Picabia introduced Duchamp to the writings of Stirner prior to his visit to Munich in 1912, both in Mundy, *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia* (London: Tate, 2008), 60.

Pages’.”⁵⁹ Although, living in Paris, he would have known of Futurism, Atl wrote that American illustrators had first employed the displacement of objects on the picture plane and the use of lines to create a sense of movement and speed. In particular, he cited illustrations in the newspapers, *New York Herald and Sun*, two newspapers that had presented extensive coverage on Futurism. The selection suggests some familiarity with the American press and the possibility of contact with André Tridon, who wrote on Futurism for the *Sun* and occasionally lectured on modern art at the Ferrer Center.⁶⁰

Tridon was known to Apollinaire, who included him as the sole American in his manifesto, “Antitradition Futuriste.” While there has been considerable scholarly debate over Apollinaire’s sincerity in penning this essay, it nonetheless links a number of stylistically unaffiliated artists under the banner of free thought and iconoclasm.⁶¹ The manifesto included a list of associated artists, many of whom were not canonical futurists, but all of whom were associated with anarchist ideals, beginning, “Marinetti, Picasso, Boccioni, Apollinaire” and continuing to include Severini, Archipenko, Gleizes, Kandinsky, Picabia, Duchamp, along with Tridon.⁶²

Action d’Art ended publication in December 1913, however, the activities of the group continued. Of particular interest is the possible connection between Atl and Marius de Zayas. Both were Mexican ex-patriots, having fled the country during the revolutionary turmoil of the early twentieth century and both were living in Paris during 1913-14. While in Paris during the summer of 1914, de Zayas lived with the Picabias, placing him squarely amidst the avant-

⁵⁹ “une autre subdivision de l’art. Il vient directement du ‘Fony Papper’ américain” Atl, “Le Salon des Indépendants,” *Action d’Art* 1, no 4 (1 April 1913): 3.

⁶⁰ There was a New York correspondent listed in the 15 April 1913 edition of *L’Action d’Art*, Dr. Lara Pardo; his address was listed at the Metropolitan Building. *América*, a Spanish-language magazine, financed by the artist’s father, Rafael de Zayas Enrique, was housed in the same building; Pardo wrote for *The Nation*, an independent magazine.

⁶¹ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 97-8, traced the debate over this document.

⁶² Apollinaire, “L’Antitradition Futuriste” (29 June 1913).

garde.⁶³ During this time, de Zayas was closely connected to Apollinaire, working on the pantomime *A Quelle Heure un train partira-t-il pour Paris?*, which was, of course a play highly influential on Dada in Europe, and Apollinaire was directly connected with Atl.⁶⁴

In May 1914, Apollinaire reviewed an exhibition of Atl's paintings and albums at the Galerie Joubert et Richebourg, a show which pioneered the technique of "Atl-color," intended to replace oil painting and create a medium that was less dependent on the private market (figure 2.12).⁶⁵ In his favorable review, Apollinaire underscored his knowledge of the artist's anarchism, praising Atl as "a Mexican artist with lofty aims" whose calling card "bears the words 'World Action' written above his monosyllabic name."⁶⁶ Also, like de Zayas, Atl had an interest in the modern adoption of "primitive" forms of art; Apollinaire notes the artist's interest in combinations of the modern and ancient, quoting: "All new modes of expression, the most advanced theories as well as the most revolutionary principles or the most unexpected discoveries, regardless of their nature, the direction they take, or their form, originate in and are related to previous modes of expression that were lost, intermingled with very remote, extremely diverse antecedents." Atl's interest in primitivism mirrored that of de Zayas, who published the first American treatment of the subject in *African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art* (1916), making their introduction even more likely.⁶⁷

⁶³ Leavens, 33.

⁶⁴ Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man: The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991) discussed this collaboration in detail.

⁶⁵ This desire to create public art would be fulfilled through Dr. Atl's work with the Mexican Muralist movement, the portion of his career for which he is most well-known.

⁶⁶ "The Atl Exhibition," *Paris-Journal* (4 May 1914); reprinted in *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews*, LeRoy C. Breunig, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 371.

⁶⁷ Marius de Zayas, *African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art*. (New York: Modern Gallery, 1916).

Apollinaire's library contained a copy of Atl's *Les Volcans du Mexique*, a small album of prints which was mentioned in the 1914 exhibition catalogue for Atl's show.⁶⁸ The volume, bearing the dedication: "A l'intelligence puissante / à la volonté ferme / à l'espérance de Guillaume Apollinaire [sic] Atl," demonstrates that the men were personally acquainted at this time. It seems unlikely that Apollinaire would not have introduced the compatriot de Zayas to Atl, given their artistic, political, and philosophical similarities.

In addition to their journal, the Action d'Art group also founded the "Librairie de l'Action d'art" in July 1913.⁶⁹ The bookshop, which continued operation after the journal folded, featured texts by Stirner, Wilde, Nietzsche, and Bergson, in addition to Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger's *Du Cubisme* and Apollinaire's *Les peintres cubistes*. The latter texts both cast the artist as a rebel against the forces of bourgeois complacency and tradition. In rejecting the past, the authors claimed that artists were integral to the creation of a new world order, a viewpoint which reflected anarchist thought.⁷⁰ These two texts were also known in America, in part through the efforts of Picabia, who convinced Brentano's to order both books while in New York for the Armory Show.⁷¹ By March 1914, these ideas were further disseminated to a wider American audience by the extensive quotations from these two books, which appeared in Arthur Jerome Eddy's *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*.⁷²

A text well-known to artists in New York, Eddy's book provided a summary of recent European and American art movements. Relying on correspondence from artists and texts purchased abroad he attempted to explain modern art to an American audience. It was closely

⁶⁸ Gilbert Boudar, *Catalogue De La Bibliotheque De Guillaume Apollinaire* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1983), 25.

⁶⁹ First advertised in *Action d'Art* (25 July 1913): 4.

⁷⁰ Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism," 104.

⁷¹ Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde*, 45.

⁷² Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co, 1914).

aligned with the language of anarcho-individualism, particularly in its enthusiasm for pluralism. Rather than justifying a specific movement, Eddy sought to convey the radical break made with academicism and to explain the various reasons for this upheaval. Wrote Eddy: “I should be very sorry if any reader should take up this volume under the impression it is a plea for Cubism or any other “ism” in either art or life. If it is a plea for anything, it is for *tolerance and intelligent receptivity*, for an attitude of sympathetic appreciation towards *everything that is new and strange and revolutionary in life.*” [emphasis original]⁷³

Throughout the text, Eddy compared modern art with anarchism, quoting British art critic Frank Rutter’s *Revolution in Art*: “he [the modern artist] is the counterpart in art of the extremist in politics ... a dangerous man he may be ... if he succeeds in his purpose, as extremists sometimes do, the whipped world at his feet hails him as reformer and benefactor of humanity.”⁷⁴ In presenting Expressionism, he explained “many call the present state of painting ‘anarchy,’ and so they say of music, but this appearance of anarchy, of lawlessness, is due to the workings of spiritual forces that cannot be expressed in old forms, but demand new manifestations.”⁷⁵ Additionally, he asserted that “the Futurists are the anarchists of the art and literary world.”⁷⁶ Eddy’s book, one of the earliest and most comprehensive volumes on modern art published in America, thus linked revolutionary styles of art to a non-political anarchism, capturing the sentiments of artists on both sides of the Atlantic.

A lawyer from Chicago, Arthur Jerome Eddy first became interested in modern art through the International Exhibition of Modern Art, better known as the Armory Show, where he purchased several paintings. Although early press materials for the Armory Show had advertised

⁷³ Eddy, 65.

⁷⁴ Eddy, 3.

⁷⁵ Eddy, 133.

⁷⁶ Eddy, 166.

participation by the Italian Futurists, none of their work was included in the actual exhibition. Reasons for this remain uncertain, but it has been suggested that either the Futurists had already overcommitted themselves to European exhibitions or that the organizers of the Armory were unwilling to provide a dedicated room for them, as requested.⁷⁷ The press may not have noticed the absence, seizing upon the label “futurist” for any work that was unfamiliar or unexpected. Thus studies of Futurism’s reception in America are challenged by the explosive popularity of this term following the Armory Show.⁷⁸

Despite this widespread confusion among the general population, however, members of avant-garde circles were well-informed about Futurists ideals and imagery as early as 1911. The mainstream press provided multiple opportunities to view reproductions of their paintings and read translations of the manifestos; thus even artists who had not been overseas for the exhibitions mounted at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris and the Sackville Gallery in London during 1912 were familiar with the movement.⁷⁹

The earliest account of Futurism in an American publication was a favorable review, published in *The Dial* in July 1909.⁸⁰ This unsigned essay, which quoted extensively from Marinetti’s 1909 “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” welcomed the challenge posed by Futurist rhetoric, the promise to “sweep away the old art, as Nietzsche has swept away the old

⁷⁷ This is discussed in both Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Early Futurism,” *Twentieth Century Italian Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949), 11-12 and Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, (New York: New York Graphic Society), 57-8.

⁷⁸ Groundbreaking work on Futurism in America has been done by Anne d’Harnoncourt, *Futurism and the International Avant-Garde* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1980); John Hand, “Futurism in America: 1909-1914” *Art Journal* 41 (1981): 337-42; Gail Levin, “New York” in *Futurism & Futurisms*, Pontus Hulten, ed. (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, 1986) and Lisa Panzera, “Italian Futurism and Avant-Garde Painting in the United States,” in *International Futurism in Arts and Literature*, ed. Günter Berghaus (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

⁷⁹ The possibility that Hartley would have seen the Futurist exhibition which was held at the Der Sturm Gallery in Berlin from August-October 1914 is a topic for further exploration. The show included work by Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, and Severini and was mentioned in Donald E. Gordon, *Modern Art Exhibitions: 1900-1916*, 2 vols. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1974), 855.

⁸⁰ “Defiance to the Stars,” *The Dial* 47 no 554 (16 July, 1909): 33.

morality, to make way for the new.” The author anticipated the hostility he felt would ultimately greet such radical declarations, writing:

But we are not disposed to go gunning for our cocky Futurists. After all, they are young, and much may be allowed them for that. Their extravagance has a nucleus of sanity, and is not much wilder than the extravagance that has accompanied many of the really important revolutions in taste and artistic practices. Revolt has always been one of the most effective agents of literary advance.

At this point the author listed a number of revolutionary precedents, including Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman. This serious consideration and implied endorsement of Futurism was the movement’s introduction to American artists and critics.

The dominant understanding in America linked Futurism with a specifically individualistic version of anarchy, one based on the writings of Henri Bergson. Allan Antliff has argued that Bergson was an important influence for both anarchists and Futurists, but that they used his philosophy to different ends. In Europe, while anarchists like those of the Action d’Art group used Bergson to promote individualism, the Futurists focused on collective revolt, “seek[ing] to identify with the core of things through the power of intuition, so that one’s Ego will merge with their uniqueness in a complex whole.”⁸¹ While artists and critics in France and Italy differed in their interpretations of simultaneity and the influence of Bergson, Americans tended to simplify this complicated issue: this distinction was simply not part of the understanding of Futurism in the United States, which focused on Bergsonian individuality rather than collectivity. The American interpretation of Futurism increasingly aligned the movement with anarcho-

⁸¹ Carlo Carrà, “Piani plastici come espansione sferica dello spazio,” *Lacerba* 1 (15 March 1913); translated in Ester Coen, “The Violent Urge Toward Modernity: Futurism and the International Avant-Garde” in *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, Emily Braun, ed. (Munich: Prestell, 1989), 54 and quoted in Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 165. Anarchism and Bergson were also important to the Unanimist group in Paris; see Daniel Robbins, “From Symbolism to Cubism: The Abbaye of Creteil,” *Art Journal* 23.2 (Winter 1963-64): 111-116 for general information. In 1918, the Unanimists were linked to the Ferrer Center and their publication, *The Modern School* through Carl Zigrosser; see Allan Antliff, “Anarchist Unanimism” in *Anarchist Modernism*, 167-182.

individualism, most likely due the fact that most early accounts of Futurism were written by André Tridon.⁸²

Two years elapsed before the next American account of Futurist art was published in the *New York Herald* in December 1911.⁸³ Written by Tridon, whose overseas credentials would soon earn him a mention in Apollinaire's "Antitradition Futuriste," the article provided a broad introduction to Futurism, but positioned it less as an artistic movement and more as an iconoclastic approach to life. This argument provided an important model for New York Dada's fascination with the vernacular, as it examined these elements as culturally important and more relevant than fine art. In particular, America's architecture was championed, its literature, cooking, and music were considered fettered to the European past and therefore found lacking. Similarly, an example of Futurist dress was contrasted with traditional evening wear, which was labeled an "atrocious."

The old was to be discarded, according to Tridon, who argued that "our lives are cramped by worshipping the past."⁸⁴ He continued, "We read old authors who bore us to death and we lack the courage to admit it. We prostrate ourselves at the feet of paintings by old masters because a million other fools have done so before us." While the *Herald* article did not feature any reproductions of contemporary painting, it did praise art which Tridon argued created a sensation of movement, including Rodin's *Thinker*, Michelangelo's *Night*, and an original cartoon, drawn in Art Nouveau style (figure 2.13).

On the other hand, academic art was assaulted by mocking commentaries. In the caption accompanying Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, Tridon criticized the subject, form, and facture

⁸² Little is known about Tridon, who left journalism in 1914 for a career as a psychotherapist. Born in France, he moved to America in 1903. He died in 1921. "Tridon Dictates Death Notice, Dies," *New York Times* (23 November 1922).

⁸³ André Tridon, "The New Cult of Futurism," *New York Herald* (24 December 1911): 6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

of the painting, the sort of traditional nude attacked in Futurist manifestos. Echoing charges made by de Casseres in 1909, Tridon complained that this “is the sort of rubbish that Americans, at great expense, copy in Europe,” he asserted that “no modern artist would be guilty of this.”⁸⁵ The modern artist, one whom Tridon called a Futurist artist, would not submit to the tired traditions embedded in such an allegorical work. Freed from these strictures, he worked from an inner sensibility.

Tridon’s call to rebuke the old masters and his disdain for the nude suggested his familiarity not only with Marinetti’s 1909 manifesto, but also the 1910 “Technical Manifesto of Painting.” Although the article did not include reproductions of Futurist painting or sculpture, it did relate Futurist concepts to styles familiar to an American audience. Accompanying a reproduction of an unattributed academic-style painting, *Love Whispers* (figure 2.14), was the following:

Ugh! exclaims Futurism at this. A girl, sweet as a morsel of sickly confectionery, listens to some improbable butterfly Cupids. What is she doing in this most artificial attitude with the ridiculous Cupids near her? Only one thing. She is providing an opportunity for the artist to attract custom by setting a nude in a shop window.

This first American attempt to convey details on a Futurist visual aesthetic also established an antagonistic relationship with the art market, which was blamed for forcing artists to obey the conventions established by bourgeois taste. Thus, the American introduction to Futurist art cast the movement as a broad, modern philosophy. It focused on the Italian desire to remake society and emphasized the need to break from the past. André Tridon emerged as the American expert on the movement; although he may not have yet seen an example of Futurist painting or sculpture, he was obviously acquainted with their general philosophy and manifestos. Tridon

⁸⁵ Tridon’s language was strikingly similar to that of Benjamin de Casseres “American Indifference,” printed in *Camera Work* 27 (July 1909): 24 and discussed in Chapter 1.

linked Futurism to anarchism. Both movements were notably depoliticized in their American incarnations.⁸⁶

In August 1911, *Current Literature* published the next essay on Futurism in the United States. The unsigned, “The Futurist Movement in Italy” featured an abridged, but “authorized translation” of Marinetti’s 1909 manifesto and focused on poetry rather than visual arts without any mention of anarchism.⁸⁷ The first American review of actual Futurist painting was a short and negative mention of the 1912 exhibition in London, an anonymous piece printed in the *New York Sun*. Much more extensive was Tridon’s response, printed the following week in the same paper, “The Futurists, Latest Comers in the World of Art.”⁸⁸ Defending the Futurists, he characterized their art as creating an “entirely new conception of perspective and dynamism,” which allowed them to reproduce the modern sensation of simultaneity.⁸⁹ Tridon quoted at length from the Sackville catalogue, which also focused on the sensation of movement, beginning:

Our growing hunger for truth can no longer be appeased by form and color as they are understood to-day. What we wish to visualize on canvas is no longer one immobilized aspect of the universal dynamism. We aim at translating pictorially dynamism itself.” Not having examples of Futurist sculpture, he again equated this with the sculpture of Rodin, but also to the work of “modern cartoonists... when they endeavor to visualize motion very realistically.

Significantly, the full-page article reproduced four paintings: Umberto Boccioni’s *Laughter* (figure 2.15), Gino Severini’s *A Dancer* (figure 2.16), and Luigi Russolo’s *Remembrances of a Night* (figure 2.17) and *Street Riot (Revolution)* (figure 2.18), a detail of which was reproduced at

⁸⁶ The only politicized review of Futurism was Louis C. Fraina, “The Social Significance of Futurism,” *New Review* (December 1913): 964-70. Printed in a socialist publication, Fraina found the machine imagery of Futurism incompatible with the goals of the movement.

⁸⁷ This article is detailed in Hand, “Futurism in America: 1909-1914,” 47-8.

⁸⁸ André Tridon, “The Futurists, Latest Comers in the World of Art,” *New York Sun* (25 February 1912): sec 5, 9.

⁸⁹ Tridon, “The Futurists, Latest Comers in the World of Art.”

an angle (figure 2.19), to show the viewer how the painter created the experience of the mob in action. These were the first reproductions of Futurist art to be widely circulated in America.

Much of Tridon's article was excerpted in an unsigned essay published in *Current Literature* of July 1912. This 1912 reprint featured several of the same illustrations, replacing Boccioni's *Laughter* with Carlo Carrà's *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* (figure 2.20) and substituting Severini's *The Dance of the Pan Pan at the "Monaco"* (figure 2.21) for his *Dancer*.⁹⁰ The "Manifesto of the Futurist Painters" was included again, along with excerpted reviews from international papers. André Tridon's article from the *New York Sun* was quoted at length:

Such a doctrine should be eminently welcomed in this country. Wherever Americans have forged ahead of the Old World they have done so not by imitating the Old World but by introducing innovations unknown to it.... The sky-scraper fitly represents the type of beauty dear to the Futurists, the beauty of feverish activity, of manifold interests, or simultaneous sensations, of healthy power.⁹¹

While not the author, Tridon provided the majority of the information for the article, was quoted extensively, and given credit for providing the images.⁹²

Thus André Tridon was central in the dissemination and promotion of Futurism in America. As a stockholder in the original *Masses* publication of 1911-12 and later an affiliate of Dr. Weichsel, Tridon's connections placed him in the center of the socialist/anarchist network and solidified the connections between anarchism and Futurism. Tridon was the source for the only reproductions featured in American publications before 1915, including Carrà's *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* and Russolo's *Revolution*, which were also reproduced in Hippolyte Havel's

⁹⁰ "The Challenge Of 'Futurist' Art," *Current Literature* 53 no 1 (1912): 109.

⁹¹ André Tridon, quoted in "The Challenge of 'Futurist' Art," 109.

⁹² It seems likely that anarchist Leonard Abbott, who Allan Antliff has identified as the associate editor of *Current Literature* and who also edited the Ferrer Center's journal *The Modern School*, published the article, given his connection to Tridon. Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism* discussed Abbott's role as editor of *Current Literature* (44).

Revolutionary Almanac in 1914. Tridon's affiliation with anarchist organizations, such as the Ferrer Center, influenced his interpretation of Futurism, conflating the two for his American audience.

Tridon was not, however, the only American with a direct connection to Futurism. Joseph Stella, an artist of Italian birth, first came in contact with the Italian Futurists after attending the 1912 Bernheim-Jeune exhibition.⁹³ While working in Paris, he became friends with Gino Severini around that time. Immediately following the Armory Show, Stella began painting *Battle of Lights, Coney Island* (figure 2.22), perhaps to address the lack of truly Futurist art in the exhibition and provide the public with an accurate example of the style. A canvas of ambitious size, the style of the painting closely resembles that of Severini, whose *Pan Pan at the Monaco* Stella would have seen at the 1912 Bernheim-Jeune exhibition and when it was reproduced in *Current Literature*. Furthermore, since the two men were acquainted, Stella would also have had the opportunity to see similar canvases in progress in Severini's Paris studio.⁹⁴

The earliest studies for *Battle of Lights* (figures 2.23, 2.24) reflected the earlier, Divisionist style of Futurism, itself a departure from the more academic style of Stella's painting prior to his trip to Europe. In these studies, the individual elements of the amusement park can be easily detected, despite the fragmentation of the heavy fracture. The final painting reflects both the work of Giacomo Balla and the post-1911 influence of Cubism, as Stella created a kaleidoscopic effect, adopting the Futurist force lines in the guise of searchlights, Ferris wheel, and roller coaster tracks which intersect along the surface. The composition swirls around the central image of Luna Park's towers, which emerge from the cacophony below. There are suggestions

⁹³ Francis Naumann, "A Lost American Futurist," *Art in America* (April 1994): 105.

⁹⁴ Barbara Haskell, *Joseph Stella* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994), 44.

of individual people, but, like the viewer, they are swept into the activity, merged with the surrounding space in a fulfillment of the Futurist dictate to place the viewer at the center of activity.

Once completed, the painting was the main attraction of a group exhibition at Montross Gallery in 1914, garnering the majority of critical attention from the show.⁹⁵ It was also reproduced in color for the April 1914 issue of *Century Magazine*.⁹⁶ Stella understood the importance of this painting, setting its price at \$2,500, far beyond the market expectations for an American artist at the time. He also included it in the Society of Independent Artist's Exhibition of 1917 and a Philadelphia exhibition of modern art organized by Stieglitz in 1921.⁹⁷

Despite his connection to Futurism, Stella did not consider himself a participant of any movement, writing in 1913 that it was necessary to "paint sincerely without trying to please the Futurists or the Post-Impressionists or to displease the Academicians."⁹⁸ This refusal to identify with a particular style would be a reluctance shared by many of his fellow artists in New York.

For many of her contemporaries, the poet Mina Loy was the embodiment of Futurist disruption and revolution. While living in Florence, she had relationships with both Giovanni Papini and Marinetti.⁹⁹ Loy's American introduction came through the pages of *Camera Work*, courtesy of Gertrude Stein. The two women met in Florence in 1911 and when Stein's portraits of Matisse and Picasso were to be published in the magazine, she promised to send copies to Loy.¹⁰⁰ When *Camera Work* subsequently published Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism" in 1914, it was the first Futurist statement written explicitly for an American publication.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Lisa Panzera, "Italian Futurism and Avant-Garde Painting in the United States," 231.

⁹⁶ "This Transitional Age in Art" *The Century* 87 (April 1914).

⁹⁷ Haskell, *Joseph Stella*, 48.

⁹⁸ Joseph Stella, "The New Art," *Trend* 5 (1913).

⁹⁹ Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 170.

¹⁰⁰ Burke, 134.

¹⁰¹ Mina Loy, "Aphorisms on Futurism," *Camera Work* 45 (January 1914): 13-15.

While the style and format of Loy's "Aphorisms" were modeled after Futurist manifestos, the emphasis was squarely placed on the cultivation of individuality. Statements such as "THE mind is a magician bound by assimilations; let him loose and the smallest idea conceived in freedom will suffice to negate the wisdom of all forefathers" reinforced a disdain for conventions and traditions. Her claim that "CONSCIOUSNESS cannot spontaneously accept or reject new forms, as offered by creative genius; it is the new form, for however great a period of time it may remain a mere irritant – that molds consciousness to the necessary amplitude for holding it" positioned art as a tool for social rejuvenation. The typography, which capitalized the entire first word of each sentence, was hardly radical when compared to Marinetti's concurrent experiments, but it was decidedly novel in America. Her irregular punctuation, which favored dashes to create pauses instead of commas and placed periods at the end of sentence fragments, also challenged literary standards.

Through her social connections, Loy's poetry was well positioned in a number of little magazines, most of them promoting her as a radical young Futurist poet.¹⁰² After moving to New York in 1916, she became a regular at the Arensberg salon. By 1916, she reported that she "already felt more American than English."¹⁰³ So completely would the nature of Loy's poetry become identified with an American spirit, that when the British-born, Jewish poet relocated to New York from Italy, she was described by Ezra Pound as having "le tempérament de l'Américaine... something which would not have come out of any other country."¹⁰⁴ The scholar Marjorie Perloff argues that her American-ness stemmed from her plays with language

¹⁰² Loy's friendships with Mabel Dodge and Carl van Vechten are traced in Burke.

¹⁰³ Burke, 192.

¹⁰⁴ Ezra Pound, "Others" *The Little Review* 4 (March 1918): 56-8. Indeed, the first monograph on Loy was Virginia M. Kouidis's *Mina Loy, American Modernist Poet* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1980).

and willingness to disrupt lingual conventions.¹⁰⁵ In America, Loy became widely known in poetry circles and while her *vers libre* was not widely understood, there was a small audience for her work. As the political context and implications of Futurism in Italy were not relevant to its interpretation in America, Loy's *vers libre* was interpreted more literally as a destruction of traditional syntax, grammar, and the construction of meaning.¹⁰⁶ This anti-academicism was viewed as a model for potentially disruptive artistic activity.¹⁰⁷

In 1913, Loy had rented part of her Florentine studio space to a young American artist, Frances Simpson Stevens.¹⁰⁸ Little is known of Stevens, but she was a student of Robert Henri at the time of the Armory Show, when Henri was teaching at the Ferrer Center, potentially putting Stevens in contact with anarchist circles in New York.¹⁰⁹ This atmosphere would no doubt have primed her for the radicalism of Futurist aesthetics: soon after her arrival in Italy, both Steven and Loy were involved with Futurism in Florence and Stevens began translating their manifestos.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Marjorie Perloff, *Poetry On and Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions*; quoted in Alan Marshall, *American Experimental Poetry and Democratic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 122.

¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, while Futurism would later be connected with Fascism, Marinetti's Symbolist roots made him a politically ambiguous figure in the early years of the century, as many Symbolist poets were allied with anarchism. For a thorough discussion of the Futurist "parole in libert ," see Christiana Taylor, *Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979). For a discussion of how these Futurist techniques were drawn from advertising practices, see Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* and Arthur Cohen, "The Typographic Revolution: Antecedents and Legacy of Dada Graphic Design," in *Dada Spectrum: Dialectics of Revolt*, ed. Stephen C. Foster and Rudolf Kuenzli (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁷ Writing for *The Evening Sun*, the columnist Don Marquis seized upon *vers libre* to define the contours of the avant-gardists, writing that when Alfred Kreymorg wrote a poem, "no one but Mina Loy knows exactly what it means and she never tells anyone but Sadakichi Hartmann. Sadakichi Hartmann is sometimes comprehended by Ezra Pound, but never by himself. When Gertrude Stein writes a book she takes it to Stieglitz, who reads it aloud and Marsden Hartley paints a pictures of the reading, and there are only three people in the world, besides us, who can look at the painting and tell Miss Stein what she thought when she wrote the book, and ever after she is told she does not understand." Don Marquis, *New York Evening Sun* (24 July 1915); quoted in Burke, 197.

¹⁰⁸ Burke, 151.

¹⁰⁹ Francis Naumann, "A Lost American Futurist," and Carolyn Burke and Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, "In Search of Frances Simpson Stevens," *Art in America* (April 1994): 106-14 presented the most extensive surveys of her life and career.

¹¹⁰ Burke, 153.

In 1914, Stevens participated in Giuseppe Sprovieri's International Exhibition of Futurism in Rome (along with Loy), as the sole "nordamericana" among the artists.¹¹¹ Seven of her paintings were included in the show, along with one drawing. However, with the outbreak of the war, by December she was back in New York and frequenting Stieglitz's "291" gallery; she contributed to the special "What is 291?" issue of *Camera Work*, where she praised Stieglitz for having "great clarity of vision," but allowing for free individual expression, writing:

291 has weight and direction – and if you have any balance yourself you will find that these two hold the equilibrium.... If you are able you can look beyond, when you have passed through "291".....to a realization of the vital beauty of today. The beauty of modern direction seen in a fire escape (through the final window of 291)+the weight contrast of modern sculpture.¹¹²

The use of extended ellipses and the mathematical sign for addition suggest her continuing experimentation with Futurist typography as well as Stieglitz's interest in such radical poetic devices.¹¹³

While Stevens did not exhibit at "291," she showed frequently in New York. Debuting in America with a one-person show at the Braun Galleries in March 1916, her work was generally well-received, one reviewer insistent that "there is no joke about it."¹¹⁴ In 1917, she participated in the largest exhibition staged by the People's Art Guild joining the ranks of Picabia, Picasso, Dove, Marin, Walkowitz, and Stella. In March of that year, an exhibition opened at the Penguin Club featuring her work,¹¹⁵ that spring, she also exhibited some of her war paintings with the Society of Independent Artists.¹¹⁶ Her *Dynamic Velocity of Interborough Rapid Transit Station*

¹¹¹ Naumann, "A Lost American Futurist," 105

¹¹² Frances Simpson Stevens, untitled, *Camera Work* 47 (July 1914): 30.

¹¹³ De Zayas had similarly used mathematical notation in his abstract caricatures of 1913, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹¹⁴ "Art Notes: Exhibitions at Macdowell and Union League Clubs - a Futurist," *New York Times* (10 March 1916).

¹¹⁵ Margaret R. Burke, "Futurism in America, 1910-1917" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1986), 184.

¹¹⁶ Naumann, "A Lost American Futurist," 110.

(figure 2.25) was purchased by Walter and Louise Arensberg and is today her only known extant work.¹¹⁷ Influenced by Futurist depictions of movement and machinery, in America this image would have spoken to the growing fascination with the vernacular as a cultural expression. The nearly monochromatic painting creates an industrial atmosphere, combining oil paint and charcoal in a sooty, gestural fashion. The viewer is positioned in the midst of the monumental equipment which powered the subway system, but as Naumann has noted, without a clear orientation of space or scale, the result has a visionary quality, not unlike the architectural drawings of Antonio Sant'Elia.¹¹⁸

When Loy arrived in New York in 1916, it was Stevens who found her an apartment and who introduced her to the Arensbergs. To her contemporaries, Stevens was a modern exemplar, the only woman included in the spread, "Sometimes We Dread the Future," printed in *Every Week* in April 1917.¹¹⁹ Along with Duchamp, Gleizes, Gene [sic] Crotti, Hugo Robus, and Stanton MacDonald-Wright, Stevens was pictured at the center, standing next to her *Battle of Gorizia*, a painting commemorating a particularly gruesome battle of World War One (figure 2.26). From the newspaper photograph, we get a sense of the general composition of the painting – a centrifugal arrangement not unlike the work of Carlo Carrà. By 1917, Stevens's reputation was sufficient for Clara Tice to include her in a cartoon, *Who's Who in Manhattan*, where she was described as a "Futurist Painter and Horsewoman (figure 2.27)."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Stevens also drew three cartoons for *Rogue* magazine, published by Arensberg salon regulars Allan and Louise Norton, which also featured drawings by Clara Tice. Stevens's cartoons are reproduced in Naumann, "A Lost American Futurist."

¹¹⁸ Naumann, "A Lost American Futurist."

¹¹⁹ "Sometimes We Dread the Future," *Every Week* (2 April 1917): 14. Arensberg Archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

¹²⁰ Noted in Burke and Sawelson-Gorse, 106. Stevens's last involvement with the New York avant-garde was a poem which she contributed to the second issue of *The Blind Man*. After the war, she married a Russian prince, spent two years in Siberia, eventually returning to New York in 1923 but she never successfully re-entered the art world. Loy also distanced herself from the Futurists, finally ridiculing them in her 1920 play, *The Pamperers*. As Julie Schmid has demonstrated, this play parodied Futurist language and ideology, ending with these radical devices

Outside of this circle of artists directly influenced by Italian Futurism, a second generation of American artists was indirectly affected by the movement, most of them members of Stieglitz's inner circle. Walkowitz and Marin both adopted the broken planes, dynamic focus, and urban subjects common to the Futurists in the mid-1910s. Furthermore, Abraham Walkowitz and John Marin were both mentioned among Tristan Tzara's "presidents" of Dada in 1920.¹²¹

In addition to four exhibitions of his paintings and drawings at "291" between 1912 and 1917, Abraham Walkowitz was a close advisor to Stieglitz. Beginning in 1911 he worked in the gallery and helped to plan exhibitions, including shows of children's art to be discussed in chapter 4. Walkowitz knew European modernism firsthand, having studied in Paris from 1906-07. It was there that he first saw the work of Paul Cézanne, which he would later recall, saying "I could not see what people had found so revolutionary in his work. I felt at home with his pictures. To me they were simply and intensely human experience."¹²² It was also in Paris that he met Max Weber at the Academic Julien.¹²³ Even after Walkowitz returned to America in late 1907, letters from Weber helped keep him abreast of artistic developments overseas, especially Futurism, as Weber was interested in the fourth dimension and adopting elements of that style himself. From 1912, both men were also regulars at the Ferrer Center.¹²⁴

Walkowitz's first exhibition at "291" was comprised of drawings and paintings, mostly of New York: his skyscraper pictures conveyed a sense of the soaring verticality of the city. While

ultimately becoming adopted and embraced by the bourgeoisie; in "Mina Loy's Futurist Theatre," *Performing Art Journal* (January 1996): 6.

¹²¹ Tristan Tzara, "Quelques Présidents et Présidentes," *Bulletin Dada* (March 1920): 2. Both artists were also included in Margeret R. Burke, "Futurism in America, 1910-1917" and Lisa Panzera, "Italian Futurism and Avant-Garde Painting in the United States."

¹²² Alfred Werner, "Views and Visions," *Jewish News* (1 March 1963): 12; quoted in Theodore Wayne Eversole, "Abraham Walkowitz and the Struggle for an American Modernism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1976), 94.

¹²³ Abraham Walkowitz, interview by Abram Lerner and Bartlett Cowdrey, 8 and 22 December 1958, Archives of American Art.

¹²⁴ Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 150.

we do not have a checklist for this show, Walkowitz's work from this period features a strong linearity, creating the skyline through an assorted network of intersecting vectors, which produced sensations of instability and motion. Paintings such as *Cityscape* (ca. 1913) (figure 2.28) were disorienting and difficult to read, the buildings soaring to the top of the frame, pulling away from the viewer while the foreground is obliterated in a sea of frenetic lines. A common device from this series, the lack of a coherent foreground left the viewer unable to secure a vantage point, instead forcing the eye upward into the space depicted.

The exhibition reviews were mixed, one calling him simply "as weird as the worst of them."¹²⁵ Others immediately connected this Futurist aesthetic with Walkowitz's anarchism. Charles Caffin, member of the Stieglitz circle and art critic for the *New York American* began his review, "No. 291 Fifth Avenue, has become known as an incubator of artistic ideas. Some regard it as a hothouse of artistic anarchy. Possibly it is, and thereby the more desirable and needful."¹²⁶ Reviewing Walkowitz's December 1912 exhibition at "291," Samuel Swift made an explicit point of noting that Walkowitz was "wholly uncommercial; this is the first time he has shown his work, which has been done solely for his own pleasure."¹²⁷ This was done to underscore that the artist was working from a sense of inner motivation rather than from a desire to gain public attention or financial recompense. "Not representation, not the imitation of nature, is the aim of men like this, but rather the portrayal of their own souls."¹²⁸ The refusal to treat art as a commodity, and the distaste for the workings of the art market in general, were typical anarchist sentiments which echoed Tridon's characterization of Futurism and further conflated these schools of thought.

¹²⁵ Arthur Hoeber, "NY Globe," *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 26.

¹²⁶ Charles Caffin, "New York American," *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 29.

¹²⁷ Samuel Swift, "NY Sun," *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 27.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

The anarchism of Walkowitz's style was made clear in *Camera Work's* own notice of the exhibition as well, which introduced

to the New York public the work of an artist in close contact with the social movement of the day. The spirit which urges men to free themselves from the bonds of obsolete laws and conventions permeates his work. But the orderly and dignified tone of his drawings and paintings prove that anarchy does not mean license, but means the right of man to absolute freedom in his life and in his expression, not as a birthright, but as a privilege earned by proving oneself worthy of it.¹²⁹

This statement, most likely written by Walkowitz himself, presented an interpretation of aesthetic anarchism which was not an abandonment of law and order, but rather the refusal of external regulations in favor of personal expression. This ideal was very much a part of the spirit of "291," providing the common denominator among artists who shared little in common stylistically.

It was this broad interpretation of Futurism, as it was understood in America, which can include the work of John Marin, who knew the movement primarily through reproductions and manifestos.¹³⁰ While some scholars have noted similarities between Marin's watercolors, exhibited at "291" in January 1913, and Robert Delaunay's contemporaneous *Saint Séverin* and *Eiffel Tower* series, Marin's statement for the accompanying catalogue was unmistakably Futurist in tone:

I see great forces at work; great movements; the large buildings and the small buildings; the warring of the great and small; influences of one mass on another greater or smaller mass. Feelings are aroused which gives me the desire to express the

¹²⁹ "Exhibition of Drawings and Paintings by Walkowitz," *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 24.

¹³⁰ Wanda Corn referred to Marin as "cubo-futurist" in *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 175. Marin himself contributed a drawing to the 1923 publication *Futurist Aristocracy*, which aimed to illustrate the principles of futurism to an American audience, cited in Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich, *The Little Magazines: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 269.

reaction of these “pull forces,” those influences which play with one another...

While these powers are at work pushing, pulling, sideways, downwards, upwards, I can hear the sound of their strife and there is great music being played.¹³¹

Marin’s statement was strikingly similar to Boccioni’s “The Exhibitors to the Public,” included in the 1912 Sackville exhibition catalogue, a text which Marin would most likely have known.¹³² Marin’s “pull forces” and Boccioni’s “force lines” both evoke the dynamic interplay between elements experienced by the artist and viewer. Boccioni wrote: “every object influences its neighbor, not by reflections of light ... but by a real competition of lines and by real conflict of planes, following the emotional law which governs the pictures,” which is echoed in the “warring of the great and small” in Marin’s essay.¹³³ These oppositional forces also call to mind Kandinsky, further underscoring the use of such conflict as an anarchical motif. As discussed in chapter 1, Kandinsky’s anarchism was known to the members of the Stieglitz circle and would have been supported by these similar statements from Futurist painters, whom the Americans also associated with anarchy.

In *Brooklyn Bridge* of 1912 (figure 2.29), Marin created this dynamic sense of attraction and conflict, distorting the clear linearity of the bridge into a vortex which envelopes the two shadowy figures. The elements of the bridge itself are fractured, splayed across the mid-ground of the painting to create a disorienting sensation.¹³⁴ While the effect was influenced by his

¹³¹ *Camera Work*, Nos. 42-43 (April – July 1913): 18.

¹³² Jean-Pierre Andréoli de Villers, “Duchamp-Picabia et le Cubo-Futurisme: Pénétration de l’Art Moderne aux États-Unis” *Ligeia* (1998): 182-200.

¹³³ Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini, “The Exhibitors to the Public (February 1912)” translated for the Sackville Gallery exhibition, reprinted in *Modernism: An Anthology*, Lawrence Rainey, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2005), 11-15.

¹³⁴ Wanda Corn characterizes the 1910s paintings of Marin, Walkowitz, and Stella as “pictures that spell out Manhattan hieroglyphically as an ultramodern city of incessant energy and herculean architectural achievements. The interpretation is embedded as much in the modern styles of these paintings as in the imagery itself” in “The

exposure to Delaunay's painting, in this Manhattan series, the choice of Marin's subjects reflected his exposure to the Futurist glorification of industry. As the scholar Sheldon Reich has noted, nearly a year passed between Marin's trip to Europe in 1911 and these Futurist-inspired paintings of 1912. That Marin's work is least like his contemporaries in terms of palette suggests that his influence came through reproductions rather than first-hand observation, making Futurism a more direct inspiration than his memories of Orphism.¹³⁵

By 1916, Futurism in America had become synonymous not just with modern art, but with the artist who "has chosen to express himself in a language which is not only exempt from past rules, but is deliberately coined and constructed by *himself alone* [emphasis original]."¹³⁶ This was a distinctly apolitical interpretation, unique to America, and one that associated the style with anarcho-individualism.¹³⁷ To American artists seeking to distinguish themselves from academicism, the Futurist attack on artistic traditions would have appealed.¹³⁸ Filtered through the anarchistic lens of Tridon and allied with revolutionary thinkers like Hippolyte Havel, artists in New York were primarily drawn to an anarcho-individualist reading of the movement, picking up the fascination with movement, dynamism, and force lines and interpreting these interests as modes of representing individualistic states of being.

Artist's New York, 1900-1930," in *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870-1930*, eds. Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994), 293.

¹³⁵ Sheldon Reich, "John Marin: Paintings of New York, 1912," *American Art Journal* 1, no 1 (Spring 1969): 51.

¹³⁶ Mary Cass Canfield, "The Passing of the Futurists and a Word on the Problems of the Subjective Painter," *Vanity Fair* (April 1916): 69.

¹³⁷ The only politicized reaction to Futurism was published in the Socialist *New Review* in December 1913, which dismissed Futurism as a style of art unsuitable for Socialist concerns because of its capitalist devotion to the machine in Fraina, "The Social Significance of Futurism." Conversely, most American anarchists were open to Futurism because they were more interested in personal liberation and anti-bourgeois ideals than political or economic revolt.

¹³⁸ Furthermore, as Jeffrey Weiss has argued, Futurism in Europe was perceived as "American," especially in its vulgarity, commercialism, and hucksterism. If American artists and critics were aware of this characterization, it would have certainly appealed to them; see Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-Gardism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

This individualism was linked to anarchism by none other than the conservative academic, Kenyon Cox, in a lengthy interview published in the *New York Times*. He argued:

The men who would make art merely expressive of their personal whim, make it speak in a special language only understood by themselves, are as truly anarchists as are those who would overthrow all social laws.¹³⁹

To artists seeking to upend the status quo of American art, Futurism seemed an ideal mode of production: thoroughly modern and inextricably revolutionary. The emphasis on individual expression, the rejection of traditional subject matter and academic style, and the interest in themes of modern life provided a stylistic counterpart to American manifestations of anarchy and the two became closely connected. That the most reproduced Futurist painting in America before 1915 was Carrà's *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* would have further cemented this relationship

It is also striking that European artists previously unaffiliated with Italian Futurism, including Picabia, Gleizes, and Duchamp, adopted Futurist rhetoric in their statements when confronted with urban America. As the only European artist to visit New York during the Armory Show of 1913, Picabia became the de facto spokesperson for modernism and his enthusiasm for the city endeared him to the public.

Picabia, Gleizes, and Duchamp were all members of the Puteaux circle of cubists in 1913, but when Picabia proclaimed New York the new center of the modern world, he stated: "You of New York should be quick to understand me and my fellow painters. Your New York is the cubist, the futurist city. It expresses in its architecture, its life, its spirit, the modern thought. You have passed through all the old schools and are futurists in word and deed and thought."¹⁴⁰ Although his use of the term "futurist" may have been absorbed by the general public without

¹³⁹ "Cubists and Futurists Are Making Insanity Pay," *New York Times* (16 March 1913).

¹⁴⁰ Francis Picabia, "How New York Looks to Me," *New York American* (30 March 1913).

further thought, Picabia did not use the term generically; he knew the movement from its exposure in the French press and the 1912 Bernheim-Jeune exhibition.

William Camfield, among others, has noted that Picabia's style changed during this trip.¹⁴¹ Opening immediately after the Armory Show, his solo exhibition at "291" featured a series of watercolors, painted during his visit to America, which increasingly personal, idiosyncratic "impressions" of the world around him. This series of paintings showed Picabia moving away from his cubist roots towards a more dynamic, abstract style that also contained the seeds of a new mechanomorphic style which he continued to develop.¹⁴² Picabia's vision of New York – one which expressed itself through the changing streets and was free from the trajectories of historicism – employed an Americanized interpretation of Futurism. His *New York* (figure 2.30), one of the watercolors completed during the Armory trip, provides no recognizable imagery. Instead of representing the towering skyscrapers or urban grid, Picabia employed color and form to replicate the disorientation of the city and suggest the quick pace of its movement; the palette of warm tones suggested a further sense of noise and energy. While Picabia did not employ explicitly Futurist iconography, to an American audience, that anarchistic individuality – the insistence upon the unique sensation as a valid artistic subject – was just as much a part of Futurism as force lines and fragmentation.

This individualistic approach was reflected in Maurice Aisen's essay which accompanied Picabia's paintings, "The Latest Evolution in Art and Picabia." Published in *Camera Work*, the article spoke to the radicalism of Picabia's painting, which it argued represented psychic

¹⁴¹ William Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1970) provides a comprehensive history of Picabia's life and career.

¹⁴² Willard Bohn discussed the impact of de Zayas's 1913 caricature show on Picabia's object portraits in "Picabia's Mechanical Expression and the Demise of the Object," *Art Bulletin* 67 (December 1985): 673-77. He also discussed de Zayas at length in the text *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 2002).

responses and not merely physical sensations.¹⁴³ By depicting a non-mimetic sense of the subject, the artist presented not a material depiction, but a psychology that required a new language of expression. It was a break from his earlier cubist-inspired paintings and demonstrated a new interest in theories of Symbolist equivalence, itself a concept closely linked with anarchistic thought. Indeed, Picabia's new style was characterized by Aisen as "the real Anarchy, needed and foreseen." While in America, the artist and his wife, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia also began a lasting friendship with Stieglitz, who described the Picabias as "about the cleanest propositions I ever met in my whole career."¹⁴⁴

Although Duchamp discredited canonical Futurism as a personal influence, later stating, "Futurism was an impression of the mechanical world. It was strictly a continuation of the Impressionist movement. I was not interested in that. I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting," upon his arrival in 1915, he also described New York in terms of Futurist dynamism and rebirth.¹⁴⁵ He declared: "New York itself is a work of art, a complete work of art. Its growth is harmonious, like the growth of ripples that come on the water when a stone has been thrown into it." He continued,

and I believe that the idea of demolishing old buildings, old souvenirs, is fine. It is line with that so much misunderstood manifesto issued by the Italian Futurists which demanded, in symbol only, however, though it was taken literally, the destruction of the museums and the libraries. *The dead should not be permitted to be so much stronger than the living. We must learn to forget the past, to live our own lives in our own time.* [emphasis original]¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Maurice Aisen, "The Latest Evolution in Art and Picabia," *Camera Work* special number (June 1913): 14.

¹⁴⁴ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Arthur Carles, 11 April 1913, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

¹⁴⁵ Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Dadas on Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971), 141.

¹⁴⁶ "The Iconoclastic Opinions of M. Marcel Duchamps [Sic] Concerning Art and America," *Current Opinion* 59 (1915).

The promise of America as a land of free individualist expression became even more critical to European artists after the outbreak of war. Gleizes, who had been associated with Action d'Art, credited his ability to work as the result of the freedoms of America. Interviewed by the *New York Tribune* shortly after his arrival in 1915 he lamented the loss of individuality in the face of war:

Art nurtures art. War destroys it. This frightful condition is shared by all Europe. The individual is being crushed, or welded into a vast instrument to be swayed by the despots who control all destiny there today. And art, being essentially an expression of the individual, must be lost in the terrible gulf which is claiming manhood and all the better ideals of civilization.¹⁴⁷

His characterization of the impersonal subjugation of the individual to “the despots” described the freedom of America in a distinctly anarchistic fashion.¹⁴⁸

These statements, made by three of the most celebrated European artists in America further intertwined Futurism in New York with anarchism, as both movements shared ideals of revolution and individual expression.¹⁴⁹ While the Armory Show of 1913 was undoubtedly a major catalyst for New York's avant-garde, the importance of anarchist (and in turn Futurist) ideas were critical, especially for artists associated with “291.” Stieglitz spent the summer of 1913 at Lake George, pondering the next direction for his gallery; the Armory Show had changed the level of discourse for modernism as a number of new galleries began to exhibit progressive American and European artists. De Zayas suggested that they could continue to

¹⁴⁷ "French Artists Spur on an American Art," *New York Tribune* (24 October 1915).

¹⁴⁸ These statements of freedom and respite from the war must be weighted against Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia's recollection that “We believed at first that we had returned to the blessed times of complete freedom of thought and action. This illusion was quickly dissipated. The famous America neutrality was indeed nothing more but seething slag from the furnace that raged beyond the ocean... An enraged propaganda filled the air, both for internationalism and the European crusade.” In Gabrielle, Buffet-Picabia, “Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp” (1949), reprinted in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1951), 259.

¹⁴⁹ Along with Jean Crotti and Frederick Macmonnies, their interviews with an unnamed reporter were published in “French Artists Spur on an American Art.”

shock the public by staging a show of erotica, but instead Stieglitz increasingly chose art that he felt challenged the concepts of modernism itself.¹⁵⁰ Increasingly, his exhibitions featured artists whose work forwarded the anarchistic interest in self-expression or challenged the styles, subjects, and materials which had traditionally defined fine art.

Nineteen-thirteen also brought a marked change in the tenor of *Camera Work*, as the publication became increasingly critical of the status quo, increasingly rebellious in its stance against middle-class tastes. As discussed in chapter 1, *Camera Work* had begun to question the status and function of art prior to the Armory Show. In the wake of the Armory Show and faced with a more informed public and wider interest in European modern art, Stieglitz was no longer the sole conduit for information on artists and activities overseas. Beginning with a special number of *Camera Work*, published in June 1913, the issues began to focus more closely on the specific exhibitions being staged at 291. Not only did Stieglitz print prefaces to each show (often written by the artists themselves) and copious critical responses, but the more theoretical essays responded directly to these exhibitions.

It was not simply that Stieglitz attracted a number of dissidents: he actively sought their input to create an arena for the free exchange of ideas and encouraged them to subvert the status quo. Although he never officially joined the ranks of any political or progressive group, Stieglitz's philosophy was soundly anarchistic. He was disdainful of authority, eager to promote the individual, willing to discard the past and loathe to replace it with new dogma. As he explained to a reporter, his work as a gallerist aimed to "revolt against all authority in art, in fact against all authority in everything, for art is only the expression of life.... Some people accuse us of

¹⁵⁰Marius de Zayas, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 7 September 1913, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

demolishing old theories only to build up new theories of our own. They misunderstand us. We insist on remaining relaxed and not theorizing.”¹⁵¹

Along a similar anarchistic vein, Jean Crotti explained to a reporter from *Current Opinion* that he refused to “arbitrarily classify his work,” a sentiment with which Duchamp agreed. Duchamp elaborated on this refusal to classify his work as “cubist” in a later article of 1915. The reporter noted that he “scorns the word; it is entirely a convenience for designating a certain group of artists in point of time as opposed to other groups. He hates the word; it is a discordant note in any conversation with him. A man is a man; an artist in an artist; if you can catalog him under an ism, he is no longer man or artist.”¹⁵²

This sentiment continued to echo throughout the American avant-garde. On 27 January 1921, Stella gave a lecture on modern painting for the Société Anonyme, which was published in the December 1921 issue of *Broom* as “On Painting.” In this piece, he criticized the classification of art into movements, which he felt limited the artist: “The motto of the modern artist is freedom, real freedom.” In language that closely echoed the fierce independence of both *Action d’art* and Stieglitz, he claimed, “Every declaration of Independence carries somewhat a declaration of a new slavery.”¹⁵³ The proliferation of this sentiment would be a major factor in the rejection of the Dada label, beginning in 1916.

¹⁵¹ “Some Remarkable Work by Very Young Artists” *New York Evening Sun* (21 April 1912).

¹⁵² “The Iconoclastic Opinions of M. Marcel Duchamps [Sic] Concerning Art and America.”

¹⁵³ Joseph Stella, “On Painting,” *Broom* 2 (1921): 119-23.

CHAPTER 3 REEVALUATING THE FOUNDATIONS OF CANONICAL NEW YORK DADA

Accounts of New York Dada usually focus on 1915, the year that Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia arrived in America. After all, it was during the three years Duchamp spent in New York that he rejected the retinal art of paint and canvas for the readymades.¹ Francis Picabia began the mechanomorphic imagery for which he is best known in New York before returning to Europe in 1916.² This chapter will address how the New York production of these canonical Dada artists, along with their associate, Man Ray, related to the vernacular and descended from what New York artists understood as a specifically American spirit of iconoclasm, building on the anarchical networks and associations discussed in chapter 2.³

Anarchism led New York Dada artists to break the barriers of academicism in the search for the middle-ground between highbrow and lowbrow culture – what they believed would create an American aesthetic. Such a definition of Americanness was also a welcome, innovative, and

¹ Duchamp later explained that “I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting... I was interested in ideas – not merely visual products. I wanted to put painting once again the service of the mind.” Quoted in James Johnson Sweeney, “Interview with Marcel Duchamp [1946],” in “Eleven Europeans in America,” *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 13, no 4-5 (1946).

² For general information on Picabia’s object portraits, published in the July-August 1915 issue of *291*, see Willard Bohn, “Picabia’s ‘Mechanical Expression’ And the Demise of the Object,” *Art Bulletin* 67 (December 1985); William Camfield, “The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia,” *Art Bulletin* 47 (September – December 1966); Mariaea Caudill Dennison, “Automobile Parts and Accessories in Picabia’s Machinist Works of 1915-17,” *The Burlington Magazine* 143, no 1178 (May 2001); William I. Homer, “Picabia’s *Jeune Fille Américaine Dans L’état De Nudité and Her Friends*,” *Art Bulletin* 58 (March 1975); or William Rozaitis, “The Joke at the Heart of Things, Francis Picabia’s Machine Drawings and the Little Magazine *291*,” *American Art* (Summer – Fall 1994).

³ In addition to Francis Naumann’s writing on his work, Man Ray’s readymades are specifically discussed in Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1988); Jennifer Mundy, ed., *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia* (London: Tate, 2008); Arturo Schwarz, *New York Dada: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1973); and Barbara Zabel, “Man Ray and the Machine,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3, no 4 (1989). Duchamp’s readymades are discussed at length in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2000); Debra Bricker Balken, *Debating American Modernism: Stieglitz, Duchamp and the New York Avant-Garde* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 2003); William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp/Fountain* (Houston: Houston Fine Art Press, 1989); Moira Roth, “Marcel Duchamp in America: A Self Ready-Made,” *Arts Magazine* 51 (May 1977) among others.

transgressive subject for European artists who relocated to America during World War I. This chapter will demonstrate that the elements of an American anarchism and its related interest in the vernacular were well-established by 1915. This revolutionary spirit was distinctly constructed as American and it influenced the production of Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray. The urban environment of New York was key to the development of an independent American Dada aesthetic, prior to the organization of Zurich Dada. These two groups were in contact as early as November 1916,⁴ yet evidence suggests that the Americans saw their production during this decade as quite distinct from European Dada. Despite this contact, American artists such as Stieglitz and Marius de Zayas did not seek to associate themselves with the Europeans and did not refer to their activities as Dada.

Scholar Francis M. Naumann has argued that the Hungarian poet and Dada organizer Tristan Tzara most likely sent *Cabaret Voltaire*, where the name Dada appears for the first time, to de Zayas, and in turn, de Zayas most likely sent issues of *291* (1915-16) to Tzara.⁵ As Naumann has noted, after the experiments of *291*, the Americans would have found the material sent from Zurich to be comparatively tame;⁶ New York artists in the de Zayas, Stieglitz, and Arensberg circles felt no need to affiliate themselves with the Dada movement, which seemed to be less revolutionary than local activities. As chapter 6 will demonstrate, this initial disinclination

⁴ Ileana Leavens has conducted the most extensive research on the connections between New York and Zurich Dada. Her thesis, however, that the American activities were influential to the development of Zurich Dada, but that ultimately the Dada movement was never truly formed in America, dismisses New York Dada based on a narrow and unnuanced definition of Dadaism. In *From "291" to Zurich: The Birth of Dada* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983).

⁵ Francis Naumann, "The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never," *Arts and Decoration* 54, no. 6 (February 1980): 143. In a letter of 16 November 1916, de Zayas mentioned the inclusion of several examples of *291*: "Je vous envoie quelques exemplaires." Marius de Zayas, letter to Tristan Tzara, 16 November 1916. Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. Duchamp later recalled receiving *La première Aventure céleste de Mr Antipyrine* in late 1916 or early 1917, although his recollection that Tzara "sent it to us, to me or to Picabia" is not entirely reliable. Tzara was corresponding with de Zayas at the time, having yet to meet Duchamp or Picabia. Marcel Duchamp, interview by Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 55.

⁶ Naumann, "The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never," 143.

would evolve into an active resistance of Dada, following Tzara's repeated overtures towards New York.

In order to understand this eventual American resistance to the Dada label, it is important to first address the development of Dada in Europe under Tzara's guidance. While the accounts differ as to how exactly the name was chosen, the label Dada was coined in Zurich, Switzerland during the spring of 1916, in reference to a group of artists, poets, and performers who frequented the Cabaret Voltaire and staged programming and exhibitions there.⁷ These men and women had fled to Zurich to escape the fighting of World War I and found themselves in an international milieu, bound by a mutual disdain for the war and the bourgeois society which they blamed for the conflict.⁸

The center for early Dada activity in Zurich, the Cabaret Voltaire, was a nightclub where Hugo Ball and his partner, Emmy Hennings, staged performances as a means of earning a living. After securing the space, Ball and Hennings circulated notices which announced that the "young artists of Zurich, whatever their orientation, are invited to [make] suggestions and contributions of all kinds."⁹ During the preparations for opening night, Ball and Hennings were joined by the the Alsatian artist Hans Arp and two Romanians, the painter Marcel Janco and the poet Tristan Tzara.¹⁰ Ball's colleague from Germany, Richard Huelsenbeck, joined them soon after.

⁷ Accounts vary as to the exact conditions of Dada's naming. The pioneering work on the subject was John Elderfield, "Dada: A Code for Saints," *Artforum* (February 1974): 42-7. A general overview can be found in Leah Dickerman, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005). Also see Brigitte Pinchon and Karl Riha, eds., *Dada Zurich: A Clown's Game from Nothing* (New York: G. K. Hall, 2005) and T. J. Demos, "The Aesthetics of Exile" in Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky, eds., *The Dada Seminars* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005). Francis M. Naumann's "JANCO/DADA: An Interview with Marcel Janco," *Arts Magazine* 57, no. 3 (November 1982): 80-86 also discusses the event.

⁸ Leah Dickerman, "Introduction" in *Dada* discussed the impact of World War I on the development of Dada.

⁹ Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 2 February 1916 (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 50.

¹⁰ Also joining them were Jules Janco, Marcel's brother, and a businessman by the name of Narcisse Cohen. See Francis Naumann, "JANCO/DADA," 86, note 4.

The Cabaret itself was short-lived, closing in July 1916 after only five months of operation, yet already, in May of 1916, a single issue of *Cabaret Voltaire* had been produced. Organized by Tzara, the publication was intended to spread the range of Dada beyond the isolated geography of Zurich. Although Ball was involved with the production of *Cabaret Voltaire*, he appeared to have reservations about the scale of Tzara's vision and the implications of formalizing the loose band of performers and artists into a codified movement.¹¹ The first to note Tzara's "operation" was Huelsenbeck, whose 1920 text, *En avant Dada* reported that while "The Dadaists of the Cabaret Voltaire actually had no idea what they wanted... Tristan Tzara was devoured by ambition to move in international artistic circles as an equal or even a 'leader.' He was all ambition and restlessness."¹²

Although the word Dada, chosen for its nonsensical sound and infantile connotation, was resistant to a single definition, Tzara recognized the usefulness of the label as a brand. Huelsenbeck later remembered that the poet had "been one of the first to grasp the suggestive power of the word Dada.... He wrapped, pasted, addressed, he bombarded the French and Italians with letters; slowly he made himself the 'focal point.'"¹³ Ball's manifesto of 1916 jokingly drew upon the marketing of an actual hair tonic called Dada, including a line which led like a marketing slogan: "Dada is the world's best lily milk soap,"¹⁴ however, Tzara more

¹¹ Dickerman, "Zurich," in *Dada*, 33.

¹² Richard Huelsenbeck, "En Avant Dada" in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1951), 26. In time, Ball and Huelsenbeck distanced themselves from Tzara in 1917; Ball leaving for Bern and Huelsenbeck returning to Germany. Despite Huelsenbeck's opposition to Tzara, this is insufficient to discount his characterizations.

¹³ Huelsenbeck, "En avant dada," in *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴ Hugo Ball, "Dada Manifesto" (1916), reprinted in Ball, *Flight*, 221. The brand of Dada tonic was rediscovered by Raimund Meyer, "Dada is gross Dada ist schön," in Billinger, *Dada in Zurich*, 25-27, quoted in Dickerman, "Zurich," 33.

earnestly created stationery which used the name as a type of corporate logo, with the return address reading “Administration/Mouvement Dada/Zurich/Zeltweg 83.”¹⁵

The performances and literary works of Zurich Dada garnered the most attention from the international press. In one report of a Dada evening in Paris, printed in the American publication *Art News* (1902-present),¹⁶ the factual account of the events conveyed the merely the absurdity of the program without any explanation to its intentions:

Lectures by the dadaistic philosopher Dr. Serner were announced. The large audience that went to the first lecture displayed by little respect and soon showed displeasure by stamping, whistling and rowdyism. To their surprise Dr. Serner stepped from the platform, took the arm of a moving picture star, Francisco Bertini and began to tango with her. This aroused the anger of the audience who tried to stop the dancers. The dadaist sympathizers interfered and soon a pitched battle ensued in which the public tore the pictures from the wall and destroyed them.¹⁷

Such performance qualities defined the earliest American understandings of Dada: as they were not elements of New York Dada, a gap emerged between the radicalism of American artists and that of their counterparts overseas. When, in 1922, Jane Heap of *The Little Review* (1914-29), published in Greenwich Village, pronounced the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven to be “the only one living anywhere who dresses dada, loves dada, lives dada,” her reference was not to events in New York, but to the scandalous events taking place in Europe, which were being reported by a fascinated press corps.¹⁸

Another major conduit for exchange between the American and the European Dadaists was Francis Picabia, who remained in close contact with Stieglitz and de Zayas after leaving New

¹⁵ Dickerman, “Zurich,” 35. Envelope in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁶ Known today as *ARTnews*.

¹⁷ “A Post-Impressionist Scandal,” *The Art News*, 17 April 1920, quoted in Susan Noyes Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1981). 93.

¹⁸ J[ane] H[eap], “Dada,” *The Little Review* 8, no 2 (Spring 1922): 46.

York in the summer of 1916 for Barcelona.¹⁹ In January 1917, he began the publication of *391*, titled in homage to Stieglitz's gallery and de Zayas's defunct journal. As scholar William Camfield recounts, Picabia had grown restless and, unable to return immediately to New York, he began *391* as a nostalgic way of recapturing its sense of camaraderie and collaborative environment.²⁰ With its gossipy and casual tone, the earliest issues of *391* seem more like a personal project among friends than an attempt to create a formal publication. Gabrielle-Buffer Picabia later recalled, "It was the memory of that happy period [in New York] rather than any logical filiation which led F. Picabia, who was responsible for both the magazine and its title, to invoke this remote parentage... [and] to celebrate the unforeseen reunion, in and atmosphere of boredom and inactivity, of a few specimens of prewar life."²¹

Tristan Tzara contacted Picabia in Switzerland during August of 1918 and invited him to collaborate with the Dadaists in Zurich.²² In the next few weeks, Picabia exchanged copies of various publications with Tzara and began sending images and writing for inclusion in *Dada* magazine, professing: "I will happily collaborate with your review."²³ In late January 1919, Picabia and Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia visited Zurich for three weeks, during which the artist was enthusiastically welcomed.

The first visual record to bring together New York and the Zurich networks was Picabia's *Construction Moleculaire* (figure 3.1), the cover illustration for the eighth issue of *391*, published in Zurich during February 1919. It was the first issue of the magazine to be printed in

¹⁹ The continuing relationship between Picabia, Stieglitz, and de Zayas was the subject of William Camfield, "Du '291' à 391. Alfred Stieglitz, Marius de Zayas et Francis Picabia, un dialogue à trios, 1913-1917," in *New York et l'Art Moderne: Alfred Stieglitz et Son Cercle* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2005), 117-140.

²⁰ William Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1970), 94.

²¹ Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, "Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp" (1949) reprinted in Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, 262.

²² Francis Picabia, letter to Tristan Tzara, 29 August 1918. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

²³ "Je collaborai très volontiers à votre revue." Francis Picabia, letter to Tristan Tzara, 3 September 1918. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

eighteen months. Positioning himself at the forefront of the international avant-garde, Picabia emphasized his connection to both New York artists and Zurich Dada. Inscribed along with Tristan Tzara and Guillaume Apollinaire were the names of Walter Arensberg, Stieglitz, Duchamp and de Zayas. Several New York publications appear as part of the diagram on the cover, such as *Camera Work*, 291, and [The] *Blind Man*, however, at this stage, the entirety is not yet labeled as Dada; the name “Dada” merely appears as one of the squares, alongside the *Soirées de Paris* and *Camera Work*, suggesting that Picabia is referring to the publication *Dada* (1917-21), rather than the general movement.

The name Dada appears more prominently in Picabia’s next schematic diagram, published in *Anthologie Dada* 4-5 in May of 1919. The title, “Mouvement Dada” (figure 3.2), appears as part of a wiring diagram for an alarm system, the apex of a chronology of artists that extends back to Corot and Ingres. Picabia placed himself and Arensberg amidst this roster of agitators while he placed Duchamp, de Zayas, Stieglitz, Tzara, Arp and Janco (among others) upon the face of a wired clock. In this drawing, New York artists were positioned as equally revolutionary and dynamic as the European Dadaists; still, the listing made them no more Dadaists than Ingres, Renoir, or Matisse. Unlike Tzara, Picabia was much less interested in asserting the nature of Dada and more interested in aligning artists working on both sides of the Atlantic without thought to stylistic commonalities or taxonomies.

Man Ray also collaborated with Tzara, sending contributions for a planned “Dadaglobe” project and photographs. Writing to Picabia and Tzara from New York in December 1920, Man Ray sent several photographs of Adon Lacroix, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and himself and promised that contributions “by the two ladies are under separate cover, and I have been asked to

return them, if possible, after you are through with them – the contributions, not the ladies.”²⁴ In this letter, Man Ray pledged his support, concluding, “I shall be glad to help you in any way... Yours for DADA, Man Ray.” At this time, Man Ray was preparing to relocate to Paris, a move he made in June of the following year; assisting Tzara and Picabia was a means of establishing connections before his arrival.²⁵ His close association with Tzara and the Paris Dadaists during the 1920s, as well as his connections to the later Surrealists, has contributed to Man Ray’s exceptionalism as “the American Dadaist,” since he cemented his professional relationships with these artists and therefore related more clearly to a Eurocentric definition of the movement.

The period of Man Ray’s work most commonly associated with Dada begins in 1916. Almost immediately upon seeing Duchamp’s readymades, which were installed in the artist’s studio, Man Ray began working with similar non-art materials. His *Self-Portrait* (figure 3.3) of 1916 reveals the influence of Duchamp in its incorporation of readymade objects, including a non-functional doorbell. Now accepted as a canonical Dada object, this assemblage was a break from Man Ray’s prior Cosmistic paintings and signaled a new period where he experimented with non-traditional means of making art, including airbrushing and readymades.

The materials of *Self-Portrait* are decidedly humble: aluminum paint, two doorbells, and button; Man Ray later explained that people were frustrated by the object’s lack of functionality, explaining to Arturo Schwarz, “They were furious. They thought I was a bad electrician.”²⁶ Interpretations of *Self-Portrait* have focused on its interactive quality, however, in his autobiography, the artist explained that he “simply wished the spectator to take an active part in

²⁴ Man Ray, letter to Francis Picabia and Tristan Tzara, 1 December 1920. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

²⁵ Naumann has called Man Ray, “one of Dada’s most assiduous promoters in New York,” referring to his work in early 1921; see “The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never,” 145.

²⁶ Man Ray, interview by Arturo Schwarz, in *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 136.

the creation.”²⁷ Other works from this period are equally unassuming in their choice of materials, such as *Obstruction* (1920), constructed entirely from clothes hangers, or *Lampshade* (1920), which simply unraveled the titular object. In these works, Man Ray engaged with simple materials without significantly altering their form. Instead, the works transform the viewer’s spatial environment.

The materials of *New York I* (1917) (figure 3.4) are also critical to an understanding of the work and function as an analogy: the irregular profile recreated the jagged contours of the metropolitan skyline. At the same time, the original object was built from simple wooden slats bound by a large clamp, an arrangement which recalled the construction which was literally building the modern city. Instead of interpreting the grandeur of the city, its skyline was brought back down to a literal and lowbrow level of labor.²⁸ In time, Man Ray’s objects became more poetic and surrealist,²⁹ but his earliest constructions transformed commonplace, vernacular components – in this case wood slats – without disguising their original usefulness.³⁰

²⁷ Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), 71. Barbara Zabel read the composition as a female body, to which Man Ray laid claim with his handprint in “Machine Age Portraiture,” 94-5. Mason Klein, “Alias Man Ray” focused on the function of the closed-door composition as a reluctant self-portrait and the physiological suggestions of a human body (30-31). Merry Foresta has noted that the large hand print in the center of the composition can be interpreted as a signature, punning on the resemblance between “main,” French for hand and the artist’s assumed first name in “Introduction,” Merry Foresta, *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 24. In this interpretation, we should consider the possible influence of caricature practices on this type of shorthand. As this chapter will discuss, the drawings of Marius de Zayas employed a range of pictorial and symbolic icons which were used to suggest the subject of his caricature portraits, a strategy based in the vernacular operation of popular caricatures, which rely on recognition and allusion.

²⁸ Barbara Zabel asserted that Man Ray’s assisted readymade, *New York I* (1917), was not Dada. She writes, “If the rakish slant of the work expresses Man Ray’s dada impulse, the C-clamp, which simultaneously squeezes and dwarfs the skyscraper, may comment on the relative ineffectuality of his anarchist spirit in New York.” Since Man Ray continued to be closely aligned with anarchist thought until at least 1919 and his publication of *TNT*, it seems incongruous to read this assemblage as commenting on the ineffectuality of anarchism; if we wish to read a political message in the construction, it may be more timely to read the oppression of such free thinking in the conservative climate of war-time America. Barbara Zabel, *Assembling Art: The Machine and the American Avant-Garde* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2004), xiv-xv.

²⁹ Michael Taylor, “New York.”

³⁰ Robert Pincus-Witten, “Man Ray: The Homonymic Pun and American Vernacular,” *Artforum* 13 (April 1975): 54-59 discussed the naïve quality of Man Ray’s punning titles for his 1950s and 1960s objects, suggesting that they connect with an American vernacular aesthetic.

Man Ray's aerograph paintings from this period also embodied qualities of applied art, which can be considered a facet of vernacular, particularly in their materials and technique. Man Ray began working with airbrushes in 1917, adopting a coloring tool used primarily by illustrators; he later explained that he had happened upon the technique in an office, where airbrushing was "commonly used in commercial work."³¹ In works such as *My First-Born* (1919), this choice of unconventional technique doubled as a formal experiment and a dismissal of the traditions of fine art painting. It was a new approach "where I would no longer need an easel, paint, and all the other paraphernalia of the traditional painter."³²

In June 1921, Man Ray left New York for Paris, where his work was already known. Picabia had reproduced Man Ray's *Lampshade* in an issue of *391* in July 1920 and two photographs, *Man* and *Woman* were included by Tzara in the Salon Dada: Exposition Internationale. Upon arrival, he was greeted by Duchamp and immediately introduced to André Breton, Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, and Jacques Rigaut; by the end of the first evening, an exhibition at Soupault's gallery, Librarie Six, had already been suggested.³³ While building his career in Europe, Man Ray self-consciously used his exotic Americanness to bolster his career. As he explained, "They crave America. So we are making a fair exchange, for I love the mellowness and finish of things here."³⁴

Indeed, in the catalogue for Man Ray's first European exhibition, Tzara concocted a stereotypically American biography for the artist: "Monsieur Ray was born one no longer knows where. After having been successively a coal merchant, several times a millionaire and chairman of the chewing gum trust, he decided to respond to the invitation of the dadaists and show his

³¹ Ray, *Self-Portrait*, 67.

³² Ray, *Self-Portrait*, 66-7.

³³ This is recounted by Mason Klein in "Alias Man Ray," 55.

³⁴ Man Ray, letter to Ferdinand Howard, 28 May 1922; quoted in Elizabeth Hutton Turner, "Transatlantic," in *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*, ed. Merry Foresta (New York: Abbeville, 1988).

latest canvases in Paris.”³⁵ When Man Ray adopted this persona of américanisme,³⁶ he severed his connection to the nationalistic independence which categorized New York Dada and embedded himself in the narrative of Paris Dada and, eventually, Surrealism.³⁷

Returning to the canon of New York Dada, another mainstay in the scholarship is a series of object portraits created by Francis Picabia in the summer of 1915 for publication in de Zayas’s journal, *291* (figure 3.5-3.9). Depicting the editors of the periodical through machine forms which are non-functional and somewhat enigmatic, these drawings have been interpreted as a typically nihilistic Dada blending of man and machine.³⁸ This interpretation, however, overlooks the published forum in which they first appeared as well as their differences from Picabia’s paintings of dysfunctional machines. In comparison to his contemporary paintings, the object portraits are more playful – an insider’s joke among the inner circle of *291*.

Much has been made of a supposed divide that occurred between Stieglitz and de Zayas/Picabia surrounding the fifth issue of *291* (July-August 1915), which featured Picabia’s

³⁵ Tristan Tzara, quoted in Billy Klüver and Julie Martin, “Man Ray, Paris” in Foresta, *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*, 102. “Monsieur Ray est né on ne sait où. Après avoir été successivement marchand de charbon, plusieurs fois millionnaire et chairman du chewing-gum trust, il a décidé de donner suite à l’invitation des dadaïstes et d’exposer à Paris ses dernières toiles.”

³⁶ My use of this term is informed by Wanda Corn’s distinction between Americanness and the European concept of American clichés in Corn, *The Great American Thing*.

³⁷ So complete was Man Ray’s integration into the Parisian avant-garde that a 1966 review would claim, “Man Ray was already a European artist long before his first trip there in 1921.... Indeed it is not so much the success of Man Ray’s complete absorption into the currents of European art that surprises, singular though that success was, but its thoroughness. One searches... in vain for some trace of the American grain beneath the Parisian polish, some irrepressible, unruly native element beneath the European chic.” Philip Leider, “Man Ray, Wandering Knight,” *New York Times* (6 November 1966); quoted in Mason Klein, “Alias Man Ray.” Man Ray would later disparage American art, stating in an interview with Arturo Schwarz that “the Americans were to me like stupid children, even the cleverest painters, except one or two like Henri or Bellows, who painted with a slapdash American arrogance” in Arturo Schwarz, “An Interview with Man Ray: ‘This Is Not for America,’” *Arts Magazine* 51 (May 1977): 117.

³⁸ For more information, see Camfield, “The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia”; Dennison, “Automobile Parts and Accessories in Picabia’s Machinist Works of 1915-17”; Homer, “Picabia’s *Jeune Fille Américaine Dans L’état De Nudité and Her Friends*”; Mundy, ed., *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia*; Rozaitis, “The Joke at the Heart of Things, Francis Picabia’s Machine Drawings and the Little Magazine *291*”; Camfield, *Francis Picabia*; Elizabeth Hutton Turner, “*La jeune fille américaine* and the Dadaist Impulse”; and Willard Bohn, “Visualizing Woman in *291*” in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998).

portraits and several essays which criticized Stieglitz and the “291” gallery.³⁹ The publication of *Ici, c’est ici Stieglitz* (figure 3.5) allegedly severed the Stieglitz circle from Dadaism.⁴⁰ The reality of these relationships is more complicated.⁴¹ Indeed, while essays published in *291* occasionally criticized the elder photographer, Stieglitz remained an active editor and contributor to the magazine, enthusiastic about *291*’s devotion to “the most modern art and satire.”⁴² Rather than alienating Stieglitz, these exchanges extended the spirit of inquiry and critique which marked *Camera Work* in the pre-war period. Indeed, Stieglitz later voiced his disappointment that “eventually it was decided before printing number I, that too much satire, too much truth-telling about how the game of art and its business was played, should not appear in *291*.”⁴³ Built on the anti-art attitudes expounded in *Camera Work*, *291* took on a more playful and experimental tone. That Stieglitz was willing to participate in such a departure is often overlooked. Not only has this split been exaggerated, but this emphasis has overshadowed the

³⁹ See Francis M. Naumann, “Marius de Zayas y Alfred Stieglitz Se Separan: La Publicación de 291 y la formación de Modern Gallery,” in *Marius de Zayas: Un Destierro Moderno* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, 2009), 77-99. Jay Bochner discusses *291* at length in his Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz’s New York Secession* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005). Picabia’s portraits of the editors are discussed in William Rozaitis, “The Joke at the Heart of Things, Francis Picabia’s Machine Drawings and the Little Magazine *291*,” *American Art* (1994). Willard Bohn addressed the poetic innovations of the magazine in Willard Bohn, *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Also see Willard Bohn, “Visualizing Woman in *291*” in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998); Estera Milman, “The Text and the Myth of the Avant-Garde,” *Visible Language* 21 (Summer – Autumn 1987); and Dickran Tashjian, “*291* and Francis Picabia,” in Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* (Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1975).

⁴⁰ Wanda Corn characterizes this portrait as “teasing Stieglitz about being stuck in his ways” and alleged that Picabia intentionally “mocked” the photographer in *The Great American Thing*, 23. Stephen E. Lewis, “The Modern Gallery and American Commodity Culture,” *Modernism/Modernity* 4, no 3 (September 1997): 67-91 saw the relationship between Stieglitz’s anti-commercialism and de Zayas’s commercial gallery as unsustainable.

⁴¹ While some historians separate the Stieglitz circle from the Arensberg Salon, such divisions are artificial. Aside from the considerable overlap in artists, Edith Clifford Williams would later recall that Stieglitz himself was an “enthusiastic but infrequent” visitor to the Arensbergs, tape recording by Malitte Pope Matta, 1 Jan 1976; quoted in William I. Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Geographic Society and Little, Brown, 1977), 182. When Picabia’s *Fille née sans mère* was exhibited at the Modern Gallery in January 1916, it was purchased by Stieglitz, according to Patrick L. Stewart, “The European Art Invasion: American Art and the Arensberg Circle, 1914-1918,” *Arts Magazine* 51 (May 1977): 108-12.

⁴² Sarah Greenough, *Modern Art and America* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 48.

⁴³ Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in Tashjian, 32. The interests of Meyer and de Zayas in the fledgling Modern Gallery may have influenced this decision; the resulting magazine was more cosmopolitan and poetic than satirical.

truly revolutionary aspects of *291* and the associated Modern Gallery, which opened in October 1915.

Publishing its first issue in March 1915, the magazine *291* was an “experiment,” a showcase for modern art and poetry.⁴⁴ Named in honor of Stieglitz’s gallery and published with his blessing and support, the first issue carefully set itself apart from *Camera Work*. Stieglitz allowed the use of his office for *291* meetings and became one of the financial backers for the publication, along with Marius de Zayas, the Stieglitz circle photographer and critic Paul Haviland, and the journalist and wealthy patron Agnes Ernst Meyer.⁴⁵

In 1914, responding to Stieglitz’s “What is 291?” issue of *Camera Work*, Picabia had responded “291 arranges the locks on its forehead, but the flames cannot scorch it; its soul is filled with a life that fills each hour with sunshine; its eye, its ear announce an intelligence; that is why it has been taught neither craft nor art, but it will find its place in the sublime sequence.”⁴⁶ This statement was, no doubt, in de Zayas’s mind as he designed the inaugural cover. The caricature *291 Throws Back its Forelock* (figure 3.10) bears striking resemblance to de Zayas’s earlier caricatured portraits of Stieglitz, emphasizing the double circles of his eyes and glasses, as well as the triangle shape of his mustache. This image suggested that the photographer had found a new incarnation and emerges with energy to face this new set of artistic challenges – hardly the image of a reluctant participant as the scholarship often contends.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Alfred Stieglitz, “291 – A New Publication,” *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 62.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Norman, *291* (New York: Arno Press, 1972): not paginated.

⁴⁶ Francis Picabia, “What Doest Thou, 291?,” *Camera Work* 47 (January 1915): 72.

⁴⁷ The relationship between Stieglitz and de Zayas in 1915-16 has been hotly debated, scholars such as Francis Naumann, “Marius de Zayas y Alfred Stieglitz Se Separan” and Douglas Hyland, *Marius De Zayas: Conjuror of Souls* (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1981) argue that Stieglitz was a reluctant supporter. Debra Bricker Balken sees the formation of both *291* and The Modern Gallery as a “challenge [to] Stieglitz’s primacy” in *Debating American Modernism*, 46-7. Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983) argues that Stieglitz was alienated not by Picabia’s critical object portrait of July 1915, but rather by the operations of the Modern Gallery (200-201). Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997) suggests that the portraits (and de Zayas’s accompanying

The debut of *291* was announced in an issue of *Camera Work* (planned for 1915 but delayed until early 1916). In *Camera Work*, this promotional notice for the new journal was accompanied by essay by de Zayas which emphasized the success of the American vernacular culture and lamented the failures of American artists to similarly break free from European precedents:

In politics, in industry, in science, in commerce, in finance, in the popular theater, in architecture, in sport, in dress – from hat to shoes – the American has known how to get rid of European prejudices and has created his own laws in accordance with his own customs. But he has found himself powerless to do the same in art or literature. For it is true that to express our character in art or literature we must absolutely be conscious of ourselves or absolutely unconscious of ourselves.⁴⁸

The tone of this announcement made clear that the journal aimed to foster experimentation in American art. De Zayas found a clear American style in the arenas of daily life, entertainment, and fashion. He claimed that for artists to achieve the same success, they needed to either be mindful of their Americanness and deliberate in their quest, or else allow themselves to unselfconsciously reflect their surroundings. Either approach advocated by de Zayas suggests a vernacular or a grass-roots model of cultural development.

This statement signaled a break from the elitist aesthetic preferred by some original members of the Stieglitz circle, several of whom were unhappy about *291* and Stieglitz's involvement, feeling that new magazine was "an organ of antagonism" rather than the "old spirit [of] mutual helpfulness."⁴⁹ Sadakichi Hartmann, who had previously contributed to *Camera Work*, lamented that *291* betrayed its Symbolist and Expressionist roots, writing to Stieglitz, "I must confess I

text) were designed to compel Stieglitz in supporting the Modern Gallery or risk fulfilling their claims of impotency (349). Bochner, *An American Lens* finds the schism to be overdramatized, suggesting that *Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz* was "chiding" Stieglitz for considering closing his *291* gallery (144).

⁴⁸Marius De Zayas, "From *291* - July-August 1915," *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 69.

⁴⁹ Charles Caffin, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 6 April 1915, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

never expected to see such an accumulation of balderdash, bombast, rodomontade, gallimaufry, salmagundi and ‘I scratch you on the back if you tickle me’ rant and prattle under one cover.

Das sind ja keine blaue Reiter!”⁵⁰ He continued on a more personal note, “No doubt your intention was to show how many art bums, whirling dervishes, she apes, navel philosophers and free lunch devotees you could induce at one time to sit down and take themselves seriously. You succeeded marvelously.”

A former journalist for the *New York Sun*, Agnes Ernst Meyer provided much of the drive behind the magazine’s formation. As William Innes Homer has demonstrated, she was the first to call an editorial meeting and she wrote the first article in the first issue, as a manifesto of sorts.⁵¹ In “How Versus Why,” Meyer underlined the importance of experimentation to the future of art and lamented that art criticism had become obsolete, “its CLEVERNESS OFTEN CONCEALS ITS LACK OF PENETRATION [capitalization original].”⁵² Meyer argued that the similarities between artistic and scientific evolution had given rise to new demands for criticism. New work had to be judged according to its progress over older models and its success in satisfying the intentions of the artist, rather than the idiosyncratic “likes and dislikes” of individual critics. In this vein, she separated the philosophical questions of “WHY,” which were rooted in ineffable emotions, from the more objective elements of “HOW” art functioned. Setting aside the emotional as an unknowable realm, the artist could conduct experiment in an impersonal, scientific manner, mirroring the progress of the modern era. By emulating scientific progress, which was a vernacular process, art could more accurately reflect a deeper understanding of reality. Not only was this scientific approach to art designed to encourage

⁵⁰ Sadakichi Hartmann, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 20 May 1915, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

⁵¹ William I. Homer, “Picabia’s *Jeune Fille Américaine Dans L’état De Nudité* and Her Friends,” *Art Bulletin* 58 (March 1975): 114

⁵² Agnes Ernst Meyer, “How Versus Why,” 291 (March 1915): not paginated.

experimentation, but Meyer also asserted that this progress would be “NOT THE PRODUCT OF FOREIGN LAWS BUT A LAW UNTO ITSELF.”⁵³ The use of the word foreign was not to suggest geographical isolationism, but rather drew from anarchist ideas of natural law.

In her quest to make art approximate the model of experimentation and evaluation used in scientific and industrial research and development, Meyer’s manifesto paved the way for the varied, multidisciplinary and pseudoscientific pursuits of *291* which built on the “291” gallery’s reputation as a “laboratory” for experimentation. For example, to explore the concept of “Simultaneism” in the first issue, de Zayas did not just provide a definition, but contributed a poem. “At the Arden Gallery, 599 Fifth Avenue” was written as a script to be performed simultaneously, perhaps reflecting his 1914 collaboration with Apollinaire on the pantomime, *A quelle heure un train partira-t-il pour Paris?*⁵⁴ While influenced by Apollinaire, de Zayas’s poem provides commentary specific to the art world of New York and is the work clearly grounded in mundane reality. Indeed, the lines of the poem were merely excerpted fragments of conversation, trivialities spoken amongst visitors to the titular gallery:

At the Arden Gallery, 599 Fifth Avenue
“Oh, come on, let’s go to Maillard’s”
“I sat next Rev. – at Gladys’ luncheon. ”
“Nobody could look human in these full skirts”
“Do you think her husband knows it?”
“She says she’s a neutral but –”
“What don’t they serve tea?”
(All these phrases must be uttered simultaneously)⁵⁵

Willard Bohn interpreted the work to be a “devastating group portrait” as de Zayas depicted society women thoroughly immune to the effects of art.⁵⁶ It is also possible, however, to view

⁵³ Agnes Ernst Meyer, “How Versus Why.”

⁵⁴ Bohn discusses this collaboration in Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man: The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991).

⁵⁵ [Marius de Zayas], “Simultanism,” *291* 1 (March 1915): np.

these lines less a critique of the unsophisticated public than of the gallery system. The poem implied the cultural dichotomy discussed in Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age*. In an accompanying note, de Zayas was careful to make mention of the objects on display, including "paintings, sculptures, furniture, tapestries and textiles from the seventh to the seventeenth century." In the face of traditional European highbrow culture, these women were unmoved, suggesting the need for art that shocks and that challenges. De Zayas also emphasized the specifics of his scenario, the title revealing the precise location of these conversations. In 1915, 599 Fifth Avenue was the new home of Scribner Publishing, a building described as "one of the really choice artistic business structures... [taking] rank with the artistic and dignified buildings of the Knoedler art firm and the Duveen brothers."⁵⁷ In addition to the Arden Galleries, the building was also home to the Museum of French Art. In short, the address was a conservative destination for traditional galleries, itself a newly constructed monument to the commercialization of high art. In demonstrating the ineffectiveness of traditional art to move the public, de Zayas made a case for the radical upheaval of this staid status quo.

It is known that, in accordance with this scientific and experimental spirit, the journal *291* was conceived as a project of limited duration. As de Zayas later explained to Tristan Tzara, "Our review no longer exists. We only intended to publish twelve numbers. It was only an experience."⁵⁸ *Camera Work* halted its production until October 1916; writing in the revived *Camera Work*, Stieglitz explained some of the innovations that had marked the journal which:

amongst other experiments, was a series with type-setting and printing. The experiments were based upon work which had been

⁵⁶ Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 54-5.

⁵⁷ "Fifth Avenue's Old-Time Fashionable Homes Disappearing Rapidly for Trade Purposes," *New York Times* (13 March 1913).

⁵⁸ Marius de Zayas, letter to Tristan Tzara, 16 November 1916. "Notre revue n'existe plus. Nous n'avons eu l'intention que de publier douze numeros. Elle ne fut qu'experience." Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

done with type and printer's ink, and paper, by Apollinaire in Paris and by the Futurists in Italy. No work in this spirit had as yet been attempted in America. The outcome of those American experiments has been a portfolio, consisting of twelve numbers of a publication called '291.'⁵⁹

When Picabia arrived for his second visit to New York in the spring of 1915, abandoning a military assignment en route to Cuba, he was enthusiastic to rejoin the circle around Alfred Stieglitz and to work closely with de Zayas, with whom he had remained in close contact. In August 1915, the fifth issue of *291*, Picabia published five drawings, portraits of himself and his editorial colleagues. In accordance with the rules of caricature, Picabia chose objects that exaggerated and distorted characteristics of his subject, yet Picabia's machine portraits of 1915 adopted the deceptively clear forms and visual language of mechanical drawings.

Picabia's wife, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, would later characterize these images as style-less: "These objects are depicted with the precision and relief of a mail order catalogue, with no attempt at aesthetic expression."⁶⁰ Ultimately, however, Buffet-Picabia's attempt to conceal the aesthetics of the series is unsuccessful, for Picabia's adoption of the graphic language of advertising is replete with implications. Picabia was directly in contact with this kind of industrial aesthetic at the time he undertook the *291* portraits. Buffet-Picabia later recalled that before leaving France, Picabia had purchased discarded blueprints from an engineering school because they had been printed on quality paper, made scarce by the war.⁶¹ Upon his arrival in New York, where such schematics were circulated by the popular press (for example, an detailed

⁵⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, "291 – A New Publication," *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 62.

⁶⁰ Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, quoted in Michel Sanouillet, "Picabia's First Trip to New York," in *Dada New York: New World for Old*, Martin Ignatius Gaughan, ed. (New Haven: G. K. Hall & Co., 2003).

⁶¹ Sanouillet, "Picabia's First Trip to New York."

illustration of a carburetor from the *New York Sun* (figure 3.11)) Picabia began to employ the aesthetic of the technical drawing in these works.⁶²

Picabia's treatment of the images, drawn in stark line and sparse color, recalled a number of sources, including blueprints, electrical diagrams, and drawings from commercial catalogues. In these machine portraits, Stieglitz was represented as a camera, Paul Haviland as a lamp, Picabia himself was shown as a horn, Agnes Ernst Meyer as a spark plug and de Zayas as a wiring diagram, the source of which remains unidentified by scholars.⁶³ The industrial quality of Picabia's mechanistic images was quickly recognized. Writing of the object portraits, one critic claimed "Picabia has fallen in love with the scientific spirit which is America, he thinks. He likes to draw beautifully objects as interesting as steam radiators and Kodaks and to juggle with his drawing until he feels that he has expressed something of the spirit of the man who uses the Kodak (Mr. Stieglitz) or the less famous genius who invented the steam radiator."⁶⁴ In this assessment, the careful suspension between the aesthetic and the utilitarian, the artist and the designer, was clearly expressed.

Among these five object portraits, the image of Stieglitz (figure 3.5) has been analyzed as the most satirical, a biting commentary on an impotent, exhausted man. In addition to the overextended bellows of the camera (which extend towards the "Ideal"), William Innes Homer has identified the accompanying form of an engaged parking brake.⁶⁵ This image was accompanied by an essay by de Zayas which elaborated upon Stieglitz's goals and failures to

⁶² One example, part of a series of such illustrations is "Here is the Motor's Heart – The Carburetor," *New York Sun* (12 March 1915).

⁶³ For a comprehensive study, see Pepe Karmel, "Francis Picabia, 1915: The Sex of a New Machine," in Greenough, *Modern Art and America* or Lewis, "The Modern Gallery and American Commodity Culture."

⁶⁴ "Many Enjoyable Paintings in Modern Gallery – Woman's Work," unidentified clipping in the Picabia papers, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet; quoted in Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 62.

⁶⁵ Homer, "Picabia's *Jeune Fille Américaine Dans L'état De Nudité and Her Friends*." The work is also discussed by Marcia Brennan, "Alfred Stieglitz and New York Dada: Faith, Love, and the Broken Camera," *History of Photography* 21, no 2 (Summer 1997).

bring modern art to the American public.⁶⁶ Yet, while the reception of this portrait has been exaggerated in much of the scholarship, Jay Bochner offers an alternative reading to Picabia's portrait, relating it to a 1922 Dada manifesto written by Picabia and Crotti, which also featured "L'Idéal" at the top of the page (figure 3.12). Bochner argues that the ideal is not a fixed notion, but rather represented creative freedom and anarchical energy.⁶⁷ Despite the unmet ambitions of Stieglitz, who is shown having exhausted his resources (Stieglitz's increasing fatigue and financial worries of 1915 were well-known) Picabia remained respectful of the photographer's effort towards the elusive ideal. Stieglitz would have most likely endorsed such a frank and honorific image.⁶⁸

No record exists of Stieglitz's initial reaction to Picabia's portrait, however, his collaboration with *291* did not end here. Stieglitz's assistant and biographer, Dorothy Norman, confirmed that the photographer enjoyed Picabia's satire and that Picabia remained close to Stieglitz.⁶⁹ Two issues later, the entire number of *291* was dedicated to one of Stieglitz's favorite photographs, *The Steerage*. In July 1916, Stieglitz was still actively involved with *291*, describing to Paul Haviland the process of assembling portfolios of the magazine for subscribers and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁷⁰ In that same month, Stieglitz reported to Paul Haviland, "The Picabias sailed ten days ago – I was at the pier. He seemed a little stronger. I like both of them

⁶⁶ Marius De Zayas, "New York n'a pas vu d'abord," *291* 1 (June 1915).

⁶⁷ Jay Bochner, "Eros Eyesore, or the Ideal and the Ideatic," in Balken, *Debating American Modernism: Stieglitz, Duchamp and the New York Avant-Garde*, 106

⁶⁸ Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* argues that Stieglitz "may not have enjoyed the message of his loss of artistic virility" in the drooping bellows of the broken camera, "but he undoubtedly relished the *double-entendre*" (196).

⁶⁹ Abraham Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting 1910-1935* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 80.

⁷⁰ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Paul Haviland, 5 July 1916; quoted in Katherine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 285.

as much as ever.”⁷¹ The photographer continued to correspond with Picabia through the early 1920s.⁷²

As William Bohn has chronicled, there existed American precedents for Picabia’s object portraits, most directly in a series of drawings produced by de Zayas beginning in 1913, which he referred to as “absolute caricatures.”⁷³ In particular, Bohn has established Picabia’s earliest example of abstract portraiture, a 1913 watercolor, done in New York, *Mechanical Expression Seen Through Our Own Mechanical Expression* (figure 3.13). The timing of this work can be definitely established between March 28 and April 9, 1913 – the precise moment that de Zayas was finishing his absolute caricatures which were put on exhibition at “291” on April 8 of that year.⁷⁴ This influence of de Zayas on Picabia bears further investigation.⁷⁵

Indeed, cartooning and caricature had an important role in the development of Dada in New York. Exhibitions held at “291” regularly questioned the boundaries of highbrow culture and included multiple shows of caricature, a medium which de Zayas characterized as “non-art.”⁷⁶ Stieglitz displayed works by de Zayas and Alfred Frueh, commercial artists who participated in canonical Dada activities in New York, as well as illustrations by the humorist writer Gelett Burgess. The enthusiastic reception of their work by the Stieglitz circle signaled an important current of interest in art outside the canon of high culture and a turn towards art’s more vernacular manifestations.

⁷¹ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Paul Haviland, 5 July 1916; quoted in Hoffman, 285-6.

⁷² Several friendly and conversational letters from Stieglitz are among the Picabia papers at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, including several letters from Alfred Stieglitz to Francis Picabia in 1921.

⁷³ Willard Bohn has done the most extensive work to link together these artists, notably in “Picabia’s “Mechanical Expression” And the Demise of the Object.”

⁷⁴ Bohn, “Picabia’s “Mechanical Expression” And the Demise of the Object,” 676.

⁷⁵ It must be noted that, unlike de Zayas’s absolute caricatures of 1913, Picabia did not abstract the images, but drew each object with a deceptive sense of clarity. This denial of the sensuous and sentimental also contributed to their scientific nature as well as continued the “anti-art” of de Zayas’s caricatures. Another distinction lay in their intended means of circulation. Whereas de Zayas’s 1913 abstract caricatures were produced primarily for exhibition, Picabia’s portraits were created expressly for publication and only later shown in the inaugural exhibition at de Zayas’s Modern Gallery.

⁷⁶ Marius de Zayas, “Caricature: Absolute and Relative,” *Camera Work* 46 (April 1914): 19-21.

Caricature works shown by Stieglitz were no different in style or subject from those de Zayas and Frueh published in the pages of popular newspapers and magazines such as the daily newspaper *New York Evening World*. Bringing such works into the space of the gallery destabilized the division between high and low art. Furthermore, not only were the works exhibited caricature drawings, but most featured stars of cinema and vaudeville, equally lowbrow subjects. In addition to exhibitions of de Zayas's caricatures of socialites, vaudeville stars, and art-world notables in 1909, 1910 and 1912, in November 1912, Stieglitz staged an "Exhibition of Caricatures of Popular American Actors and Actresses" featuring 49 drawings by Al Frueh. In total, of six exhibitions held at 291 during the 1912-13 season, two focused on caricature, marking its importance for this group.

While the caricaturist Alfred Frueh is best known today for his later drawings for *The New Yorker*, the Stieglitz circle enthusiastically accepted his commercial illustrations when they were shown at "291."⁷⁷ Frueh was closely allied with members of the avant-garde in New York and Paris, where he had lived from 1908-09 and 1912-14, but was working as a commercial caricaturist.⁷⁸ Known for his sparsely-drawn style, the show featured a selection of his theater and vaudeville images. Their exhibition in an art gallery revealed the institutional challenges issued by Stieglitz and his associates. While the notice in *Camera Work* referred to Frueh as an American artist and credited his drawings as the representations of "an individual and characteristic manner," the reader was warned that they were "not to be considered as a

⁷⁷ For information on Frueh, see Wendy Wick Reaves, "Al Frueh: The Quintessential Summary" in Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America*, 103-127.

⁷⁸ Frueh's obituary noted that he "had been a friend of Matisse and Braque" and the diaries of Henri-Pierre Roché reveal that the men were sparring partners at a Paris boxing club. Brendan Gill, "Alfred Frueh," *New Yorker* (1968). and Henri-Pierre Roché papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin. In the United States, Frueh was an active member of the Society of Independent Artists and the People's Art Guild, anti-authoritarian societies which will be discussed in Chapter 5; John Weichsel papers, Archives of American Art.

contribution to the advancement of modern art.”⁷⁹ The ambivalence about the role of these works is clear; they resided in the uncertain territory between high and low culture and instead, they were presented as “a refreshing relaxation... from the tension of New York life.” Such a characterization spoke to Stieglitz’s interest in expanding the realm of the gallery, the boundaries of art, and his willingness to explore a purely commercial, more vernacular form of production.

Throughout his career, de Zayas produced illustrations for mainstream newspapers and magazines, depicting the social and theatrical circles of the city. His earliest works were celebrated for their lyrical and simple style, revealing the influence of fin-de-siècle caricaturists he knew from his travels to Paris, including Leonetto Cappiello and Max Beerbohm.⁸⁰ The first exhibition of de Zayas’s caricatures in January 1909 paired his drawings with the autochromes by photographer and art critic J. Nilsen Lauvrik. The match highlighted the aesthetic similarities between the photographs and de Zayas’s soft tonal approach, advancing the comparison between photography and abstract art by showing that both artists had interpreted their subject to create an image.

Indeed, the process of caricature, of framing and refining a subject to create a portrait that was abstracted yet recognizable, was positioned as very similar to the photographic process. Without the need for illusionistic likeness, caricature was another means to capture a portrait subject, one that relied on Symbolist equivalence and suggestion. In a caricature, success relies on the public recognition of well-known characteristics; exact likeness is not intended, instead the image is meant to suggest or evoke the subject. As Gombrich wrote in *Art and Illusion*, “the invention of portrait caricature presupposes the theoretical discovery of the difference between likeness and

⁷⁹ “Exhibition of Caricatures by Alfred J. Frueh,” *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 24. Even still, they were described in aesthetic terms, having “a pictorial sense of line and color, an ability to seize the significant characteristics of each individual... [and] a gentle, if sometimes mordant, irony.”

⁸⁰ Douglas Hyland, *Marius de Zayas*, 15-6.

equivalence.”⁸¹ Also, like photography, contemporaries assumed that caricature maintained a level of objectivity, “imply[ing] no moral judgment on its subject.”⁸²

Caricature was not simply a lowbrow form of production because of its association with the popular media: its association with the commercial and the fashionable meant that its very functionality relied on the vernacular. Not only were the pared-down aesthetics and comic overtones of cartoons and caricature borrowed from the language of advertising, but they operated in the same manner: drawing on elements that were instantly recognizable and which constituted a sort of brand that needed to be recognized for the work to be effective.

Caricature was also an inherently ephemeral style. As Wendy Wick Reaves has noted, caricature in America was largely free from the political charge of nineteenth-century European examples.⁸³ Instead, here it grew out of popular interest, with seemingly endless demand for drawings of famous figures and celebrities. Thus, while caricature presented the characteristics of its subjects as indelible and eternal markers, these identifying idiosyncrasies existed in the public memory only for a short while. Then as now, as fashions changed, celebrities were made and forgotten. Thus, it was necessary to continually reinvent, making caricature a foil for the permanence and timelessness ascribed to high art.

Much like their model Whitman, the dadaist avant-garde in New York struggled for a balance between experimentation and legibility. Caricature was an ideal forum for this experimentation, as the genre expected some level of encoded identity. It was necessarily suggestive, operating through equivalence and non-mimetic likeness. It operated outside of the traditional canon, so the caricaturist could employ humor. Part of a vernacular tradition, caricature could challenge

⁸¹ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 343.

⁸² Max Beerbohm, "The Spirit of Caricature," *Pall Mall Magazine* (January-April 1901): 123.

⁸³ Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America* provides a brief history of caricature in Europe and America (3-11).

high art while experimenting with critical new aesthetic theories. The combination of suggestion and humor, the investigation of identity, and the commercial quality of popular caricature made it intrinsically modern.

While a complete list of the caricatures from de Zayas's exhibition of January 1909 does not survive, several works are generally assumed to have been included, among them a caricature of Alfred Stieglitz entitled *L'Accoucheur d'Idées (Midwife to Ideas)* (figure 3.14). In this Symbolist work, a solitary figure is surrounded by darkness, except for the moon above, which bathes him in a halo of light suggestive of divine illumination. At the same time, a second level of meaning exists, the moon as a symbol of fertility, an interpretation supported by the title of the work.

This show also most likely included the caricature of Benjamin de Casseres (figure 3.15), who had been a friend of de Zayas while both men lived in Mexico City. De Zayas highlighted the angular features and thin, bony hands of the writer and revolutionary, who stares at an empty glass beaker. Douglas Hyland has suggested that this is suggestive of de Casseres's well-known nihilist tendencies and his belief that existence was meaningless.⁸⁴

Little is known of de Zayas's second show at 291, held in April 1910, but it marked a departure from the 1909 exhibition. An installation titled *Up and Down Fifth Avenue: A Social Satire* (figure 3.16) assembled over two hundred and fifty caricatures of New York society, parading them in front of the Plaza Hotel. The result operated more like a society newspaper cartoon than a traditional art exhibition. One of the most successful shows ever staged at "291,"

⁸⁴ Hyland, 70.

it had lines running around the block waiting to get in; while it related directly to popular entertainments, it was also largely popular with the critics.⁸⁵

Several critics of the Stieglitz circle, notably Sadakichi Hartmann and Benjamin de Casseres, wrote reviews of the show which suggested that it contained a measure of social satire and criticism ignored by the general public. Both critics allied de Zayas's caricatures with the larger cultural critique which had been foreshadowed and debated within the Stieglitz circle. Published in *Camera Work*, de Casseres's article, "Caricature and New York" claimed that "Caricature is the art that is 'beyond good and evil' – to use the pregnant phrase coined by Nietzsche... The caricaturist comes to slit your mask of smugness and conformity and create mirth in your brain. To him morals are myths." While de Zayas's drawings "sting and bite," their humorous quality and lowbrow execution were considered destructive to the conventions of high art.⁸⁶ Hartmann commented on the show's "protest against the smug and equalitarian organization of life, against the monstrous stupidity of conventions, parades and badges, and the hypocrisy of morals."⁸⁷ For both Hartmann and de Casseres, a critical feature of the caricature was its ability to destroy the "smug," which we can interpret as both bourgeois morality and academic tradition. We see here a turn towards irreverence and satire, qualities which became increasingly overt as the decade progressed.⁸⁸

Even when the subjects treated were not overtly political, caricature was understood to be a powerful tool in anti-authoritarian resistance. For example, caricature was a powerful tool of anarchist journals, such as the *Revolutionary Almanac*. In an unsigned profile of de Zayas from

⁸⁵ Marius De Zayas, *How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, Francis M. Naumann, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), x.

⁸⁶ Benjamin De Casseres, "Caricature and New York," *Camera Work* 26 (April 1909): 17-18.

⁸⁷ Ileana Leavens, *From '291' to Zurich*, 84-5.

⁸⁸ We do not have records of de Zayas's intentions for or reactions to the installation, as he left for Paris before the show ended and the work was dismantled and subsequently lost. It is only known through fragmentary photographs and descriptions in the press, so an objective determined of the nature and level of social commentary is difficult to reconstruct.

1908, the author indicated that “evil conditions that must spring up in every powerful government; political evils, sanitary evils, sociological evils, can all be fought silently and cheerfully by the well-drawn, finely sensitized caricature.”⁸⁹ The drawings were a tool of anarchist disruption of the conventional social and political order.

Returning to New York in the fall of 1911 after nearly a year-long stay in Paris, de Zayas worked ever more closely with Stieglitz as his writing began to reflect a more philosophical approach to aesthetics. Still, he continued to produce these representational caricatures for the popular press (figure 3.17) even as he developed an abstract style, described as his “philosophical collection,”⁹⁰ which included such works as *Alfred Stieglitz* (1913) (figure 3.18). These abstracted caricatures, which eliminated likeness, also marked a new experiment with pseudoscientific systems of representation. Describing in his later writings the genesis for the absolute portrait of Stieglitz, de Zayas related an encounter with a soul catcher in an ethnographic museum as the incident which inspired this work as it suggested both the physical presence and spiritual resemblance of the photographer.⁹¹ Indeed, the recorded repetition of the circles does suggest the simplification of a face with intense eyes and eyeglasses. Other, more cubist, influences are apparent in this portrait of Stieglitz, including the fragmentation of identifiable aspects of his physical form and the repeated facial features.⁹²

In creating these abstract portraits, which he called “absolute caricatures,” de Zayas created a closed and private system of symbols, a strategy which he associated with modern means of

⁸⁹ "Marius De Zayas: A Kindly Caricaturist of the Emotions," *Craftsman* 13 (1908).

⁹⁰ Marius de Zayas, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 7 March 1911; quoted in Willard Bohn, *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 36.

⁹¹ de Zayas, *How When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 80. This episode is also described by others, including Greenough, *Modern Art and America* and Hyland.

⁹² Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius De Zayas" analyzed the abstract caricatures and states that the triangle in the lower left portion represents Stieglitz's characteristic mustache, the large oval shapes are his eyebrows and the two dark circles his eyes. In addition to representing the basic shape of the soul catcher, the repeated circles suggest Stieglitz's eyeglasses and provide the trajectory of the portrait.

abstract representations. For example, writing of Picasso, de Zayas had claimed “each one of his paintings is the coefficient of the impressions that form has performed in his spirit.”⁹³ De Zayas’s use of the term “coefficient” to describe Picasso’s methodology points to another critical influence for de Zayas’s work, the pataphysical writings of the Symbolist poet Alfred Jarry.⁹⁴ Admired in twentieth-century Paris as a proto-anarchist, Jarry’s writing was known among American artists, especially those who, like de Zayas, had spent time in France. Indeed, Jarry’s chief pataphysiological work, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien*, was published during de Zayas’s visit to France and his close association with Apollinaire, who was also publishing excerpts of Jarry’s writing in his *Soirées des Paris*.⁹⁵ While Jarry’s most in-depth explanation of pataphysics, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien*, was completed in 1898, yet it was not published until 1911.⁹⁶ The 1911 publication of *Faustroll* was not a major literary event and indeed, the only published review was written by Apollinaire, who called it the most significant publication of the year.⁹⁷ De Zayas would mostly likely have read a text so enthusiastically received by his colleague. As Roger Shattuck has discussed, Jarry was instrumental for French artists in overthrowing logic and reason in the artistic process;⁹⁸ through de Zayas, his influence can also be extended to America.

Like de Zayas’s abstract caricatures, which expressed abstract concepts as strings of algebraic and geometric symbols, Jarry exploited math and logic to create pataphysics, a pseudoscience

⁹³ Marius de Zayas, “Pablo Picasso,” *Camera Work* 34/35 (April-July 1911): 66.

⁹⁴ Bohn connected Jarry and Picabia in Bohn, “Picabia’s ‘Mechanical Expression’ And the Demise of the Object,” as did Bochner in *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz’s New York Secession*, 142-3

⁹⁵ Richard Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 285.

⁹⁶ Keith Beaumont, *Alfred Jarry: A Critical and Biographical Study* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 180.

⁹⁷ Claude Schumacher, *Alfred Jarry and Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 33.

⁹⁸ Shattuck.

which claimed to study “the laws that govern the exceptions.”⁹⁹ Through pataphysics, Jarry created an entrance into another dimension, however hermetic and private. In words that could also describe de Zayas’s absolute caricatures, he defended his complicated and contradictory system, writing that “simplicity need not be simple, but condensed and synthesized complexity.”¹⁰⁰ *Faustroll* was not a traditional novel; from the onset, the narrative is interrupted and shaped by pseudoscientific data.¹⁰¹ Denying the positivist nature of traditional science, the final line refuses to make a conclusion and instead leaves the reader adrift: after summing up that “±God is the shortest distance between 0 and ∞ , in one direction or the other. Therefore, definitively: God is the tangential point between zero and infinity,” Jarry concludes: “Pataphysics is the science....”¹⁰² The text ends here, along with any possibility of reconciliation or solution.

The pataphysics of Jarry was also connected to the anti-rational philosophies of Bergson, with whom he had studied while a student at university.¹⁰³ From his teacher, Jarry absorbed mechanomorphic theories of comedy as well as picked up on a growing anti-positivist critique of science. By the 1890s, such criticism had spread among Symbolist artists and writers, many of whom believed that science could lead not to descriptions of reality, but to representation by a system of symbols and equations. The individualism of pataphysics was encouraged by the Symbolist emphasis on the subjective and personal imagination.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Alfred Jarry, quoted and translated in Keith Beaumont, *Alfred Jarry: A Critical and Biographical Study* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 194.

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Jarry, quoted and translated in Linda Klieger Stillman, *Alfred Jarry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 17.

¹⁰¹ For example, Doctor Faustroll is introduced as “a man of medium height, namely, to be absolutely accurate, of $8 \times 10^{10} + 10^9 + 4 \times 10^8 + 5 \times 10^6$ atomic diameters...” Translated in Beaumont, 181.

¹⁰² Translated in Beaumont, 200.

¹⁰³ Shattuck, 193.

¹⁰⁴ Beaumont, 181.

Another element, first seen in the absolute caricature of Stieglitz and repeated in subsequent drawings, is the use of the aforementioned algebraic equations to symbolize the spirit of the subject. Bohn has demonstrated how these numerical expressions were used to convey additional information about the sitters, the complexity of the algebraic equations proportionate to de Zayas's evaluation of the complexity of the subject.¹⁰⁵ De Zayas positioned his abstract caricatures of 1913 as an objective means of representation, one that expressed personality through formal and mathematical devices that operated independently of emotion or whim. This new style was coined "non-art," by de Zayas himself, who saw it as an expression of objective truth through pictorial means and a move away from the subjective nature of traditional caricature.¹⁰⁶ In his comprehensive study of modern art, Arthur Jerome Eddy described these 1913 abstract caricatures as "the most *modern* expression of the human portrait."¹⁰⁷

De Zayas's third show at "291" (April-May 1913) featured eighteen caricatures, evenly divided between his older style and these radical "absolute" caricatures. The exhibition opened immediately after Picabia's post-Armory "291" exhibition in the spring of 1913. Drawing on known sitters (identified in titles), de Zayas abstracted the subject beyond the depiction of physical or environmental characteristics. His earlier works had been representational, but here we see a composition of lines, geometrical shapes and mathematics formulas, resulting in a portraiture that divorces the picture from the appearance of the subject.

In this system, Alfred Stieglitz is portrayed with a highly complex equation and Francis Picabia (figure 3.19) is represented by a relatively simple one, combined with a series of strong diagonals, sharp shapes and high contrasts that represent his energy and great physical

¹⁰⁵ Willard Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas"

¹⁰⁶ Marius De Zayas, "Caricature: Absolute and Relative."

¹⁰⁷ Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.), 213.

presence.¹⁰⁸ De Zayas scholar Douglas Hyland states that this difference was meant to suggest Picabia's simple spirit: he was considered more self-indulgent and carefree than the serious and restrained Stieglitz.¹⁰⁹

This language could be used both to celebrate sympathizers and as a potent tool of critique. De Zayas's caricature of Theodore Roosevelt (figure 3.20) attacks the former president as a blustering bigmouth; the forms surrounding the vortex recall a combination of sharp jagged teeth, and Roosevelt's characteristic moustache. Missing is the dynamic trajectory found in his other abstract caricatures, rather the emphasis of this work is on circularity and a lack of progress. Most biting, however, is the algebraic formula that runs across the image. Although written incorrectly (the way it is stated is a mathematical impossibility), de Zayas undoubtedly meant infinity divided by zero is zero. This completed, balanced equation, one of the few in these works, reiterates the lack of dynamism of the subject as well as belittles him. Roosevelt is characterized as a large zero, which compared to the might of the infinite universe, was absolutely nothing.

Despite attempts to explain his work, the critical reception of this show was largely confused. Most writers attributed the change in de Zayas's popular style to a joke, a reaction which was only made better by his insistence that these were serious portraits. Although outside critics were overwhelmingly negative, within the Stieglitz realm, the caricatures were enthusiastically received and their influence can clearly be seen in the work of Francis Picabia. Yet, the use of such equivalents, or icons, to both satirical and representational ends in the Stieglitz circle even predated de Zayas's abstract caricatures.

¹⁰⁸ Naumann suggested that the extremely abstracted and removed nature of this work referred to the complexity of Picabia's work completed while in New York in *New York Dada, 1915-1923*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Hyland, 106.

In November 1911 Stieglitz exhibited a series of illustrations by the humorist Gelett Burgess which lampooned elements of Symbolist painting. Best known today for his comic poem, “Purple Cow” and for his cartoon “goops,” a cartoon strip he created in the 1920s, Burgess had traveled to Paris and written “The Wild Man of Paris: Matisse, Picasso, and Les Fauves,” a review of the 1908 Salon des Indépendants.¹¹⁰ Burgess was one of the earliest Americans to write about Cubism, and while humorous in parts, his essay dealt seriously with the formal and philosophical dimensions of the movement and featured interviews with Matisse, Braque, Dérain, Picasso, [Béla] Czobel, Othon Friesz, [Auguste] Herbin, and Metzinger as well as illustrations of their recent work. In the end, Burgess counseled the viewer “Let’s regard their art as we regard Debussy’s [*sic*] music, and Les Fauves are not so mad, after all.” He proceeded to defend their unconventional approach as one

which justifies Nietzsche’s definition of an ascendant or renascent art. For it is the product of an overplus of life and energy, not the degeneracy of stagnant emotions. It is an attempt at expression, rather than satisfaction; it is alive and kicking, not a dead thing, frozen into convention. And, as such, it challenges the academicians to show a similar fervor, an equal vitality. It sets one thinking; and anything that does that surely has its place in civilization.

It is in this critical context that we must consider Burgess’s exhibition at “291,” where Burgess presented twenty-five satirical images as “Essays in Subjective Symbolism.”¹¹¹ Playing on the pretences of modernism with hyperbolic devices and parodically lofty themes, the artist began the public explanation of his theory of symbolism, a lengthy article in the *New York Times*: “I do not think I can paint. I know I cannot.”¹¹² Faced with a stale allegorical tradition, his illustrations

¹¹⁰ Gelett Burgess, “The Wild Man of Paris: Matisse, Picasso, and Les Fauves,” *Architectural Record* (May 1910).

¹¹¹ Burgess’s famous quatrain, written in 1895 reads: “I never saw a Purple Cow, / I never hope to see one; / But I can tell you, anyhow, / I’d rather see than be one.” First published in his little magazine, *The Lark* (1 May 1895), it was reprinted in *A Nonsense Anthology*, Carolyn Wells, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915).

¹¹² Gelett Burgess, “Gelett Burgess Invents a New School of Art,” *New York Times* (26 November 1911).

did not claim to subjectively capture emotions. Instead of the pretenses of academic imagery, such as “good old Mrs. Industry, in her nightie and Greek helmet, surrounded by scrolls and globes, surveying the distant railroad train lighted by a setting sun,” Burgess created a cartoon icon, or a literal symbol, which he called a “liverbone,” to represent the protagonist.¹¹³ The brochure which accompanied the exhibition, reprinted in *Camera Work* explained, “the mind or soul being an abstraction, it has been here represented by an abstraction, a conventional symbol rather than by a human figure”¹¹⁴

Therefore, in depicting *Memory*, which he hyperbolically subtitled *An Attempt to Overtake a Part That Moves Heroic in Our Mind, Which Can Never Again Be Real* (figure 3.21), Burgess compared his liverbone to an unattainable cosmic ideal in the skies, while *Fancy: Behold My Ego Leaping to the Moon in its Free Flight Denying the Gravity of Reason* (figure 3.22) places the liverbone perched upon the moon. Working in a literal fashion, he “endeavored to show, by the relation of this ego to its environment, some picturesque analogy to the action of the mind under the dominance of the emotions.”¹¹⁵ Burgess maintained his sincerity, yet he acknowledged that his attempts would draw laughter. While the images are humorous and admittedly superficial, he accepted the cartoonish nature of his paintings and positioned his work in terms of unprofessional and commercial art, explaining that “like the mediaeval [*sic*] artists who painted tavern signboards with real lions or black horses or Turks’ heads, for the benefit of those who could not read the lettered name, so I put the philosophy of aesthetics in familiar, natural graphic guise.”¹¹⁶ In likening his images to the vernacular production of shop signs,

¹¹³ Gelett Burgess, “Essays in Subjective Symbolism,” reprinted in *Camera Work* 37 (January 1912): 46.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Burgess provides an important early precedent for the irreverence of later production in New York.

To compensate for his professed lack of skill, Burgess relied on the conventions of vernacular art. Not unlike the creation of a brand logo, he adopted the icon or symbol as an expedient means of expression and employed a cartoon style which avoided the techniques of academic execution. The result thoroughly confounded elements of the highbrow and lowbrow, the humorous tone assured the viewer that Burgess did not aspire to create Symbolist art. Instead, he intended to lampoon such conventions, grounding them through his approach to create a middlebrow parody. Shown in 1911, this series of drawings was perhaps the first precedent within the Stieglitz circle of the deliberate contamination of high art with low-brow elements, one that has been overlooked in the scholarship in favor of de Zayas's 1913 abstract caricatures and Picabia's machine images.

The American precedents for Picabia's 1915 object portraits, and indeed his mechanomorphic style, extend beyond the illustrations of de Zayas and Burgess. Although Picabia is often credited with pioneering the artistic interest in industrial imagery in America, there is also precedent for this in the work of Morton Schamberg. William Camfield has dated a telephone painting by Schamberg to early 1915, predating mechanistic images by Picabia and signaling that Schamberg arrived at this choice of subject independently.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Constance Rourke's biography of Charles Sheeler recounted his recollection that Schamberg, "talked constantly about pictures he was going to paint in which mechanical objects were to be a major subject, describing them in detail down to the last line and nuance of color. He had, as it turned out, only a half dozen more years to live."¹¹⁸ As Schamberg died in 1918, even if Sheeler's recollection is

¹¹⁷ Camfield discussed *Telephone*, shown at the Montross Gallery in March-April 1915 in *Francis Picabia.*, 107.

¹¹⁸ Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler: Artist in the American Tradition* (New York: Harcourt, 1938), 37.

not exact, it dates Schamberg's interest in machine images prior to the first machine images of Picabia. Indeed, in *The Cubies' ABC*, a satirical account of the Armory Show included, "S is for Schamberg's fair dame at her 'phone," suggesting he was including mechanical forms in his paintings before 1913.¹¹⁹

The machine paintings of Schamberg have been addressed most thoroughly by William C. Agee, but have been somewhat marginalized within Dada studies because they lack nihilistic quality of contemporary mechanomorphic images by Picabia or Duchamp.¹²⁰ The formal aestheticism of Schamberg's machine paintings have led scholars to distance his work from Dada.¹²¹ They exemplify one manifestation of the vernacular aesthetic, however: marked by painterly restraint, industrially-inflected crispness, and mechanical imagery, these paintings were celebrated as highly iconoclastic by Schamberg's contemporaries.¹²²

For his extensive series of abstract machine paintings from 1916, Schamberg isolated industrial equipment, selecting a number of machines which would have been commonplace in

¹¹⁹ Mary Mills Lyall and Earl Harvey Lyall, *The Cubies' ABC* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1913), 42; quoted in William Agee, "Morton Livingston Schamberg: Notes on the Sources of the Machine Images," in *New York Dada*, Rudolf Kuenzli, ed. (New York: Willis Locker & Owens Pub., 1986). The book has been reprinted by Readymade Press, New York, with an introduction (hors text) by Francis M. Naumann.

¹²⁰ Schamberg's photography of the assemblage *God*, constructed by the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven formed the basis of most discussion of his relationship to Dada. For a time, it was believed that the work was a collaboration between the artists, but recent scholarship argues that Schamberg merely photographed the sculpture. See Margaret A. Morgan, "A Box, A Pipe, and a Piece of Plumbing," in Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity*, 48-81.

¹²¹ Jay Bochner wrote: "An American artist whose work seems to resemble Picabia's was Morton Schamberg. But there is no Dadaist mockery in Schamberg, and less humor than fancy and delight. His machines retain beauty in their poise and a proposal of usefulness" in *An American Lens*, 149. Agee argued that Schamberg shared more with the Purism of Leger than Dada "mockery and irony," yet conceded that the paintings do relate to "a distinct pictorial branch of Dada" in "Morton Livingston Schamberg (1881-1918): Color and the Evolution of His Painting," *Arts Magazine* 57, no. 3 (1982): 108-19. Davidson suggested that Schamberg "seemed unaware of the mechanical implications of sexuality, the suggestions of animistic states, the passages from one condition to another, that occupied Duchamp and Picabia in their depictions of the machine"; Schamberg's work is exempted from Dada as it does not follow a closely prescribed model. Abraham Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting 1910-1935* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 98.

¹²² Walter Pach, "The Schamberg Exhibition," *The Dial* 66 (17 May 1919): 505.

printing, bookbinding, and the manufacturing of hosiery.¹²³ Refined over time to perform specific functions, in painting these machines Schamberg selected the epitome of vernacular design – equipment that has been refined in response to a specific set of needs, with a utilitarian, efficient language. His 1916 *Painting VIII (Mechanical Abstraction)* (figure 3.23) and *Painting IX* (figure 3.24) isolate a wire stitching machine against a softly painted blank space, bringing the viewer’s attention to the specialized equipment. Crisp lines and cool palette suggest the mechanical, yet create an image of formal beauty. While the curving forms suggest the potential for a whiplash motion, both paintings are quiet with a timeless quality. The form is revealed and classicized, yet its factual quality is left evident.

The operation was a subversive one: Schamberg appropriated the machine image and reclaimed it for revolutionary purposes. Decidedly anti-war, Schamberg may well have harbored anarchist sentiments which would have supported such an upending mingling of genres and social realms.¹²⁴ Placing the machine at the center of his work, Schamberg transgressed the boundaries of fine art by depicting base elements of materialistic industry. Choosing to aestheticize the machine and adopt an industrial style, Schamberg rejected the European academicism that had been co-opted by the mass media as well as the techniques and subject matter considered appropriate for fine art.

After Schamberg’s death during the influenza epidemic of 1918, Walter Pach eulogized the young artist, celebrating “the vigor of his new outlook, the exhilaration of handling a perfectly

¹²³ William C. Agee was the first to identify this source in “Morton Livingston Schamberg: Notes on the Sources of the Machine Images,” in Rudolf Kuenzli, ed., *New York Dada* (New York: Willis Locker & Owens Pub, 1986), 66-80.

¹²⁴ Schamberg’s anarchism is briefly discussed in Michael Taylor, “New York” in Dickerman, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, based on an interview in Toni Mergentime, *Morton Livingston Schamberg: First Comprehensive Study* (unpublished manuscript) which indicated that Schamberg wanted his paintings sold upon his death to benefit the Irish Republican Army. Although Sheeler conveyed these wishes to Schamberg’s family, they did not comply. See Taylor, 298, notes 55 and 56 for more information. While the specifics of his politics remain uncertain, they suggest at least a sympathy towards anarchism.

fresh subject being supported rather than checked by the self-control that was native and natural with him.”¹²⁵ In addition to rejecting the outward appearances of academicism, Schamberg resisted any label that placed him within a limited or artificial artistic category.¹²⁶ As he explained after the Armory Show, “I belong to no school or organization, I accept this classification – post-impressionism – only under protest. But since the public must have some handle whereby to take hold of pictures, this one seems at least unobjectionable, as it has no significance other than a chronological one.”¹²⁷ In resisting the urge to classify his work, Schamberg’s anarchist sympathies are revealed in terms similar to those of the Action d’Art group and the protests of Duchamp, Picabia, and Gleizes, all members of the Puteaux circle; his iconoclasm participated in the rejection of artistic hierarchy and institutional authority in favor of absolute independence.¹²⁸ Adopting specifically American forms of industrial production suggested a rejection of European academic traditions which had long served as the basis for American high culture; replacing nihilism as a requirement for Dada with an interest in vernacular imagery allows artists such as Morton Schamberg to be properly reintegrated into the narrative.

This industrially-inflected exactness of execution, the roots of the machine aesthetic was seen as intrinsically American;¹²⁹ the adoption of mechanistic imagery reflected the desire to create

¹²⁵ Pach, “The Schamberg Exhibition,” 505.

¹²⁶ Modern scholarship links Schamberg with the emergence of Precisionism in the 1920s; this is not unfair, although, Precisionism has been cast as the utopian side of machine aesthetics, the counterpart to Dada, a separation which oversimplifies both, as they share a sense of emotional detachment and fascination with industrial form. The selection of canonical Precisionist subjects such as Demuth’s grain elevators or Sheeler’s River Rouge Plant paintings required an initial break with the themes traditionally considered appropriate for art, as well as the painterly approach and techniques accepted as markers of high culture.

¹²⁷ Morton Schamberg, “Statement,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (19 January 1913), quoted in Ben Wolf, *Morton Livingston Schamberg* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1963), 26-7.

¹²⁸ See note 112 for information on Schamberg’s anarchism.

¹²⁹ Even looking to historical subjects, an American streamlined aesthetic was noted as a national characteristic. Writing about John Singleton Copley, Marsden Hartley noted the artist’s cool sense of detachment as inherently American: “those metallic, almost dissonant harmonies and highly incised acrid rhythms and designs could only have been produced by an American temper and American sensibility... it is exactly this coldness that makes him

an art relevant to modern society. This mechanistically sparse style replaced both academic and expressionist brushwork in many works by New York artists. Machine imagery was understood by contemporaries as an emblem of the vernacular (especially in the design of commercial objects and the development of a streamlined modern aesthetics). Thus, the poet William Carlos Williams could write, “A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words... pruned to a perfect economy. As in all machines its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character.”¹³⁰

While Picabia drew upon the American vernacular in terms of both subject and style, he did introduce new elements reflective of his personal interests and explorations. For example, we cannot dismiss the significance of Picabia’s decision to create dysfunctional machines. Other studies have focused on deciphering their idiosyncratic imagery, but this approach has often obscured the connections which existed between Picabia and his contemporaries. As art historian Karen Lucic has argued, “Picabia and Duchamp’s thematic treatments of the machine are curiously difficult to decipher within the context of their time.”¹³¹ Similarly, scholarship on Duchamp has most often characterized him as *sui generis*, rather than contextualizing his New York production in relation to immediate American precedents. The machine aesthetic had a native pedigree.¹³²

attractive.” He continued, “In other words, Copley never ‘slopped’ over. If he had any excess at all, and I do not feel that he had, it was on the side of restraint and reserve, of discretion, of cutting down to the last his simple appreciation of his material and [he] permitted no trace of flourish to mar his performances.” Marsden Hartley, “Copley’s Americanism,” in Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville and Poets* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921), 172.

¹³⁰ William Carlos Williams, “Author’s Introduction” to *The Wedge*, quoted in Henry M. Sayre, “American Vernacular: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetic of the Machine,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 35, no 3 (Autumn 1989): 313.

¹³¹ Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 31. For more bibliography on these images, see note 3.

¹³² Among the individual sources for Duchamp and Picabia listed above, please see Mundy, ed., *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia*; Peter Gaffney, “Demiurgic Machines: The Mechanics of New York Dada” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006); or Barbara Zabel, “The Machine and New York Dada,” in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Francis Naumann and Beth Venn, eds. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996).

The interest of Picabia and Duchamp, along with Man Ray, in industrial styles, techniques, and materials, was doubtlessly influenced by the urban environment of New York.¹³³ No discussion of the Dada attack on fine art would be complete without a consideration of Duchamp's readymades. This series has been the subject of numerous scholarly endeavors; the present study introduces them merely to underscore the central nature of the vernacular to the Dada spirit in New York.

It is well-documented that Duchamp first conceived of his readymades while still in Paris, constructing his first, *Bicycle Wheel* (figure 3.25), in 1913.¹³⁴ Yet, he did not settle upon the name of "readymade," an American term used to describe the least expensive registers of the commercial world, nor did he exhibit his readymades in a public forum until he arrived in New York. This transition of the readymade from a private studio experiment to gallery exhibit suggests that Duchamp found in America a spirit which he believed conducive (or at least sympathetic) to this maneuver. Both Duchamp's mechanistic works and the readymades can be viewed as his evidence of his interest in the vernacular which he celebrated as the triumph of American culture.¹³⁵ As discussed in chapter 1, when Duchamp arrived in New York he entered an atmosphere of cultural debate. Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age*, published that year (1915), called for a compromise between highbrow and lowbrow culture as a means of

¹³³ David Hopkins, "Anti-Kantian Reflexes: Duchamp's New York Readymades Re-examined," in Martin Ignatius Gaughan, ed., *Dada New York: New World for Old* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 159-174 discussed the American qualities of these New York readymades, especially their connection to movement and transmutation.

¹³⁴ Roth discusses this chronology in "Marcel Duchamp in America: A Self Ready-Made." Michel Butor addressed the "American" quality of the objects Duchamp selected in Michel Butor, "Reproduction Interdite," *Critique (Paris)*, no 334 (March 1975): 270-2. The topic is also addressed in David Hopkins, "Anti-Kantian Reflexes: Duchamp's New York Readymades Reexamined."

¹³⁵ Moira Roth discussed the adoption of Duchamp's personas as Rose Sélavy and as an engineer as his reaction to American culture in Roth, "Marcel Duchamp in America: A Self Ready-Made," yet she interpreted the readymades as disparaging American art and that Duchamp completed his Large Glass in America because he felt that it would not be readily understood by an American audience and therefore could remain hermetic and mysterious. Helen Molesworth and Molly Nesbit have also examined Duchamp's interest in commercial culture; see Helen Molesworth, "Rose Sélavy Goes Shopping," in *The Dada Seminars*, Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky, eds. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005) and Molly Nesbit, "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model," *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 173-190. These treatments will be examined further in Chapter 6.

defining the American spirit with which Duchamp was so enamored. Doubtlessly, as he was learning about America, Duchamp would have been exposed to (and perhaps intrigued by) these cultural debates.

Duchamp arrived in America in June 1915, where he was greeted at the pier by Walter Pach, an artist and critic who had first met Duchamp when organizing the 1913 Armory Show.

Duchamp, despite his claim to Pach that “I do not go to New York, I leave Paris,” enthusiastically embraced his new home upon arrival.¹³⁶ In his first American interview, in addition to praising American women and skyscrapers, he lamented, “If only America would realize that the art of Europe is finished – dead and that America is the country of the art of the future.”¹³⁷

During the spring of 1916, Duchamp began to exhibit his readymades, showing *Pharmacy* (figure 3.26) at Montross Gallery and two unidentified readymades, possibly *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (figure 3.27) and either *Traveler’s Folding Item* (figure 3.28) or *Hat Rack* (figure 3.29), at the Bourgeois Galleries.¹³⁸ Although they garnered little critical attention, Duchamp’s decision to show them outside of the context of his studio suggests that he had found a correlation between American culture and his readymades. The universal obsession (whether fascination or dismay) with commercial objects and the fetishization which occurred through modern American advertisements had infiltrated public life. Only the sanctified space of the gallery remained, and this became the ground for Duchamp’s assault.

In December 1916, shortly after Duchamp first unveiled his iconoclastic readymades to scant public notice, Robert Coady issued a statement that defined “American Art” as: “The Panama

¹³⁶ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Walter Pach, 27 April [1915], Walter Pach papers, Archives of American Art. Also quoted in Francis Naumann, “*Amicalement, Marcel: Fourteen Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Walter Pach*,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 29, no 3-4 (1989): 40.

¹³⁷ “The Nude-Descending-a-Staircase Man Surveys Us,” *New York Tribune* (12 September 1915).

¹³⁸ The Bourgeois exhibition is discussed in Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 228, note 35.

Canal, the Skyscraper and Colonial Architecture. The East River, the Battery and the ‘Fish Theater.’ The Tug Boat and the Steam Shovel.”¹³⁹ The list, spanning a total of five pages over two issues (and ending “to be continued”) listed stars of vaudeville and movies, dime-store novels, sports figures, Krazy Kat, industrial laborers and their tools – with nary a mention of an American artist. With this declaration, Coady introduced his periodical, *The Soil* (1916-17), to the New York public.

One quality united the elements in Coady’s definition of American Art: these phenomena were all reflective of ordinary and commercial elements of vernacular American culture. While some of the items listed had roots in European precedents, they had been altered, adapted, or refined to satisfy uniquely national needs and desires. Coady’s embrace of the vernacular, however, extended beyond his celebration of popular culture; it was embodied in the structure of the magazine itself and the abrupt, journalistic tone of its writing. Ruth Bohan has noted that *The Soil* functioned as a “composite work of art.”¹⁴⁰ This quality was not lost on his audience, the magazine quickly gained notice, with Henry McBride’s review proclaiming, “I love the new publication from start to finish. I wouldn’t have a thing in it altered. I consider it the most perfect art journal I have ever seen.”¹⁴¹ Considering that Coady’s definition of American art had included anything but, it is clear that his iconoclasm found a receptive audience. An estimated 5,000 copies of *The Soil* were circulated to readers in America and abroad.¹⁴² Contemporaries read *The Soil* and found in its pages an assertion of distinctively anarchical American values. Alfred Stieglitz wrote to Mabel Dodge, “Yes, *The Soil* is a queer one... I enjoyed it probably

¹³⁹ Robert Coady, “American Art,” *The Soil* 1 (December 1916) and 2 (January 1917).

¹⁴⁰ Ruth Bohan, however, considers *The Soil* part of the positive Whitman legacy which unconditionally celebrated American industry in *Looking into Walt Whitman: American Art, 1850-1920* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

¹⁴¹ Henry McBride, “The Soil, a Magazine of American Art,” *New York Sun* (17 December 1916).

¹⁴² Robert Alden Sanborn, “A Champion in the Wilderness,” *Broom* 3, no 3 (October 1922): 174-179.

more than Coady himself.”¹⁴³ In 1917, Henri-Piere Roché counseled the readers of second and final issue of *The Blind Man* (which he edited with Duchamp and Beatrice Wood): “Every American who wishes to be aware of America should read *The Soil*.”¹⁴⁴

The Soil was a provocative journal has been mentioned in previous studies of the period, but consistently linked with the energy and vitality of the Whitman legacy or else categorized as weakly proto-Dada because of a perceived lack of nihilism.¹⁴⁵ This is more of a problem in defining Dada than a lack on the part of Coady. His primary concern was the development of an American culture, which necessarily required the demolition of elitist, European traditions. Despite scholar Ruth Bohan’s categorization of *The Soil* as “more than an absurd Dada gesture,”¹⁴⁶ subversive elements appear throughout, creating a critical tone which bubbles beneath the surface of this optimism. The anxieties and doubts expressed in these pages echoed larger concerns among American culture-makers, transforming his prose and his pranks into critical attacks on the aesthetic status quo. The vernacular was presented as an alternative, a way to refuse the broken traditions and to reinvigorate art by pruning its dead branches. Although *The Soil* only produced five issues, it was a significant forum that challenged the conditions of artistic production in the United States.

¹⁴³ Alfred Stieglitz, undated letter to Mabel Dodge [December 1916?], Luhan Archive, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, YCAL.

¹⁴⁴ Henri-Pierre Roché, *The Blind Man*, 1 (10 April 1917): 5-6. This little magazine will be discussed at length in chapter 5.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Zilcer doesn’t see Coady as Dada because she thinks he is more meaningful than that – not just “an absurd Dada gesture,” Robert J. Coady, Man of *the Soil*,” in *New York Dada*, ed. Rudolf Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1986), 37. She saw Coady as closer to the Precisionists and Pop “than to the iconoclasm of European Dadaists.” She argued he was different in his interest in primitivism and his interest in American life was not influenced by Ashcan artists, as Tashjian suggested in *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* (Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1975). Jay Bochner addressed the relationship between Arthur Cravan and Mina Loy through their involvement with *The Soil* and *Rogue* magazine in “The Marriage of *Rogue* and *The Soil*,” in *Little Magazines & Modernism: New Approaches*, Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007): 49-66. Wanda Corn briefly discussed Coady in *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*, but continued to privilege a European concept of Dada, charging that “Duchamp and Roché appropriated Coady more as an American primitive than as an equal” and characterized Coady’s writing as “crude,” “meandering, eclectic, and highly personal” (85).

¹⁴⁶ Zilcer, “Robert J. Coady, Man of *The Soil*,” 37.

Little is known of Coady's social and political circle; Duchamp later reported to his sister Suzanne that "our friend Coudy [*sic*] has disappeared from the circuit."¹⁴⁷ Theories about his personal politics are based upon his writing and artistic activities. *The Soil* was not Coady's first foray into the art world; working with the sculptor Michael Brenner, their Washington Square Gallery opened in the wake of the Armory Show in 1914. Following the example of Stieglitz's 291, this gallery staged exhibitions of children's art and primitive sculpture, as well as examples of European modernism. A photograph printed in *The Morning Telegraph* in December 1914 (figure 3.30), reveals how the gallery displayed a range of modern and "primitive" art in a shared space. This ahistorical appreciation was carried into the pages of *The Soil*, the first issue of which featured a Greek urn on the cover (figure 3.31). Henry McBride explained, "Mr. Coady holds, like Walt Whitman, that American art should be all embracing. Therefore he begins the review with a superb drawing from a Greek vase and a superb chapter from the Book of Job..."¹⁴⁸ This inclusivity, which McBride linked to Whitman, also suggested the influence of American interpretations of Futurism by figures like the anarchist André Tridon, who had recently claimed, "Whatever has survived of ancient art, whatever of the paintings and sculptures of the past centuries still has a strong appeal for modern art lovers and modern mobs alike is whatever expresses a living life."¹⁴⁹

The pages of *The Soil* freely mixed high and low culture, contemporary and ancient production: Gertrude Stein's "Mrs. Th——y", shared the same space as the first installment of "The Pursuit of the Lucky Clew," a dime-store novel by "Nicolas Carter," the author using a fictional character from the popular *Detective Story Magazine*, created by former Ferrer Center

¹⁴⁷ "notre ami Coudy [*sic*] a disparu de la circuit." Marcel Duchamp, letter to Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp, 20 October [1920], Jean Crotti papers, Archives of American Art.

¹⁴⁸ McBride, "The Soil, a Magazine of American Art."

¹⁴⁹ André Tridon, "The Futurists, Latest Comers in the World of Art," *New York Sun* (25 February 1912): sec 5, 9.

director and anarchist John Coryell as an alias.¹⁵⁰ That first issue also illustrated ancient Greek art, Poussin's *Adam and Eve* "South Sea Island Sculpture," and Picasso's *Violin* (1912-13). Alternatively, dressmaking was extolled as "sculpture carried to a high degree." Despite the assertion that "no art today excites so general an interest," the unnamed author criticized "our academies [which] have forbidden us to regard dressmaking as an important art and have led us to standards which have little or nothing to do with life."¹⁵¹

While Coady sought a native artist who could measure up to this dynamic spirit, he consistently located the American cultural center outside of fine art production. An article on the Sheepshead Bay rodeo claimed it was "one of the most remarkable exhibitions of art," where, despite the absence of critics or philosophers, "tens of thousands felt the big spirit of the west."¹⁵² This article, written by Coady, was illustrated with three photographs of Jess Stahl (figures 3.32, 3.33), captioned "He has no ism to guide him," "It takes guts to do that," and "Not among the art notes." Stahl was meant to inspire artists to similarly break free from highbrow conventions and to take part in the vital energy of America. Also in this first issue, the vaudeville and movie stars Charlie Chaplin and Bert Williams were profiled, as was the clown Toto, "the most creative artist that has visited our shores in many a day."¹⁵³

Coady turned to the vernacular as an exemplar for American art, not simply out of an admiration for the machine aesthetic, but because he felt it was an innately national mode of expression. The first issue claimed that "another hopeful sign for Art in this country, for Democracy one might say, and for real American Culture, is the advent of the Engineer."¹⁵⁴ Commonplace items were created out of true necessity, and refined to satisfy needs which

¹⁵⁰ Jay Bochner, "The Marriage of *Rogue* and *The Soil*," 62, note 26.

¹⁵¹ F.M., "Dressmaking," *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 26-30.

¹⁵² R[obert] C[oady], "Stampede," *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 24-5.

¹⁵³ R[obert] C[oady], "Toto," *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 31.

¹⁵⁴ George W. Vos, "Art and Machinery," *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 16-18.

existed on a local level. Photographs of industrial equipment ran throughout *The Soil* (figure 3.34, 3.35), which Coady billed as the “Moving Sculpture Series”; these images foretell the illustrations Kouwenhoven used to later define the vernacular (figure 3.36). The first issue explained, “As machines develop, they are simplified. They become better balanced, more slightly, because only that which is useful and essential is left. Every piece which enters into the construction must have its reason for being. That is why some of our bridges are truly beautiful.”¹⁵⁵ Craftsmen – engineers, builders, window dressers – they were tapped into an energy which seemed lacking in the modernist, European-tinged works of contemporary painters. More than any other voice, Coady demanded a truly independent approach to art: the democratic American experience, free from the expectations and guidelines of any stylistic movement. In this context, Duchamp’s readymades resonate within a larger series of cultural debates which center around a vernacular idiom.¹⁵⁶

During the mid-1910s, print became an important media for New York Dada. Publications such as *The Soil* and *The Blind Man* brought together a wide range of subjects, styles, and images and often employed satire as a means of critique. The adoption of print media also allowed artists in New York to exploit the distinctively American language of advertising. Exploring commercial and advertising practices, artists could create an ironic distance from both high and low culture by using the vocabulary of mass marketing to promote an art which inherently resisted the market. Coady published several phony notices in the pages of *The Soil*, camouflaged amongst the paid advertising found there. He used the vernacular form and language of advertising to lampoon these movements: in one, the reader was promised an

¹⁵⁵ Vos, “Art and Machinery.”

¹⁵⁶ Whereas Molly Nesbit has discussed Duchamp’s educational background of working from drawing manuals, the readymades were often distinctly vernacular objects; for example, the snowshovel, *In Advance of a Broken Arm*, was an American object not typically used in Paris (where light snowfalls required little more than a broom).

“Exhibition of The Freedom of Movement in Light and Space,” (figure 3.37) a claim echoing the ideals of Futurism or Synchronism, to be fulfilled with a visit to the Aquarium in Battery Park. Housed in the present-day Castle Clinton, a trip to the aquarium brought the reader into the heart of New York City’s harbor, within sight of the Statue of Liberty and surrounded by the bustling marine traffic, not to mention the acrobatics of the fish on display. In another, “100 Claude Lorrains” (figure 3.38) were offered on view every morning on the East River – a ridiculous merging of Claude’s pastoral vision and the extremely industrial, heavily-trafficked waterway. Juxtaposing the art world with the labor and function of the modern American city, European art inevitably paled in comparison.

Coady also wrote scathing reviews of modernist work that he found unsuccessful in breaking from the conventions of the past. Even while Coady’s gallery was an outpost of modernist art, the pages of his journal questioned its relevancy. Coady often used an artist’s words to expose his pretensions and unsubstantiated claims. For example, juxtaposing Stanton MacDonald-Wright’s *Organization 5* with a window display of hats (figure 3.39), both photographs were accompanied by “artist’s statements.” Coady contrasted MacDonald-Wright’s highbrow description of the “necessity for a formal climax which, though being ever in mind as the final point of consummation, would serve as a *point d’appui* from which the eye would make its excursions into the ordered complexities of the picture’s rhythm”¹⁵⁷ with the concrete, productive language of the window-dresser. The latter values his freedom to experiment with visual forms and abstract elements to create a dynamic impression on the viewer (indeed, this experimentation and novelty was already a hallmark of modern advertising and salesmanship), but his experiments are conducted with the viewer as the goal – rather than the expression of the

¹⁵⁷ S[tanton] Macdonald-Wright, statement on *Organization 5* from the *Forum Exhibition Catalogue* (1916), reprinted in *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 16.

personal and subjective, he aims to connect the viewer “with more reality than a mountain of words can.”¹⁵⁸ While MacDonald-Wright’s statement was taken directly from the Forum Exhibition catalogue of 1916, isolated from its original context, the text reads as a parody of art writing. The criticism is clearly implied; while the language of modern art is lofty, its goals were more directly and more successfully addressed by the commercial designer; the window dresser’s work had far more impact on the average viewer.

Throughout *The Soil*, modern art that did not reflect contemporary life or create a sufficiently significant break with academicism was severely rebuked and ridiculed. In 1916, the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi received a good deal of press in America, accompanying a solo exhibition of his work at “291.” As part of this coverage, *Vanity Fair* published a series of articles on the sculptor, and in October, the magazine published an image of Brancusi’s *Newborn* (figure 3.40). In his answer to the deadly seriousness of Brancusi’s reductive sculpture and the treatment his work had received in the press, Coady recreated a similar photograph, which he published in January 1917 (figure 3.41).¹⁵⁹ He posed a single egg on an empty countertop and, lighting it dramatically, outdid Brancusi’s attempt at something organic, integral, and generative, titling the work *Invention - Nativity*. The title reinterprets the simple function of the egg, lending it metaphorical suggestions of the cosmic or the religious which mock what Coady considered to be the overblown assertions of modernism. To make sure the joke was understood, he then credited the work to the artist “A. Chicken” and reprinted the artist’s statement, which simply read “Cluck, cluck.” The highmindedness of Brancusi was deflated with this absurd gesture, which allowed for little rebuttal other than laughter.

¹⁵⁸ Gilbert McGowan, statement on window dressing, *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 17.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Coady, *The Soil*, 2 (January 1917): 69.

The metaphysical pretensions of modernism were also lampooned by Coady in series of cartoon-like ink blots, each one depicted in a traditional-looking carved frame and labeled as the n th +1 degree of a popular concept (figures 3.42, 43, 44). Thus, leafing through *The Soil*, the reader encountered images of “The three hundred and sixty-first degree,” the “evening of the three hundred and sixty-sixth day of the year,” and “The Fourth Primary.”¹⁶⁰ Raising the commonplace to the level of the absurd, the result is a parody of transcendental representations of the “fourth dimension.” Rather than unveiling higher levels of consciousness, these inkblots literally obscured vision in a juvenile, but humorous, fashion.

Coady was also highly critical of those he suspected of charlatanism, for example taking issue with the *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* by Jean Crotti (figure 3.45) when it was shown at the Montross Gallery in April 1916. The popular press had taken note of the exhibition, a group show, and popularly referred to Gleizes, Metzinger, Duchamp, and Crotti as the Four Muskateers. Historically, the show was important as the first public display of Duchamp’s readymades, but these objects were largely overlooked by the contemporary press.¹⁶¹ Much more attention was paid to a sparse wire sculpture by Crotti which employed a piece of thin metal and two artificial eyes to suggest the figure of Duchamp. The bust met with mixed critical reviews; while Charles Caffin thought it revelatory of the “empty-headedness” of the entire show, others found its verisimilitude reassuring.¹⁶² Yet another reviewer described how the work “violates all previously known rules of art.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ These inkblots would later be echoed in Picabia’s *Le Saint Vierge* (1920), an inkblot which was published in the March 1920 issue of *391*.

¹⁶¹ The sparse critical reaction to the readymades is recorded in Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 228, note 35.

¹⁶² “The Climax of Audacity in the Modern Art Revolution,” *Current Opinion* 60, no 6 (June 1916): 431.

¹⁶³ “Current News of Art and the Exhibitions,” *New York Sun* (9 April 1916), quoted in William Camfield and Jean-Hubert Martin, *Tabu Dada: Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1983), 12.

As a result of its unconventional use of materials, Crotti's work received a great deal of attention, earning the artist coverage in *Vanity Fair* and *The World Magazine*.¹⁶⁴ In an open letter sent to the latter magazine, Crotti explained that the sculpture was "an absolute expression of my idea of Marcel Duchamp. Not my idea of how he looks, so much as my appreciation of the amiable character that he is."¹⁶⁵ Coady, however, used the forum of *The Soil* to publicly interrogate Crotti, revealing how the portrait was not a meaningful break from the traditions of sculpture and accusing the artist of pursuing innovation for the sake of novelty.

Coady began his critique by reprinting Crotti's original statement *The World Magazine*, then responding: "Mr. Crotti, this may be a good description of your method of doing something and your reasons for doing it."¹⁶⁶ Continuing, however, Coady rejected this private interest as meaningless for the general public and therefore insufficient to generate a work of art: "Now that it is done, the American public would like to know what its value is as a work of Art. What it possesses or contains which makes it a work of Art and how it justifies you as an artist – a big artist – one of 'The Big Four.'"

For Coady, modern art was not a matter of materials or abstraction, but a relationship between the work and the modern world. Without proper justification, Crotti's use of modern materials and assembled components suggested insincerity and the pursuit of novelty for the sake of attracting the press. Since the sculpture had been so successful in establishing Crotti's reputation, it was especially suspect to Coady. Reproducing a photo of the portrait next to a Greek sculpted bust, Coady asked a direct question, "What is the aesthetic advantage gained by

¹⁶⁴ The reception of the sculpture is traced in Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter, eds., *Dada in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 92-6.

¹⁶⁵ Jean Crotti, letter to *The World Magazine* (27 August 1916), quoted in *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 32.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Coady, open letter to Jean Crotti, *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 32-34.

using soft metal and fine wires instead of the conventional and commonplace materials of sculpture?”

Despite his personal and professional interest in promoting modern art, Coady desired a certain transparency in the production of works and argued that decisions should be based on experimentation or deduction, rather than individual whim. Since Crotti called his portrait an “absolute expression,” Coady demanded to know on what authority the artist spoke – “how does it differ,” he asked, “from the absolute expression of a plumber?” Coady repeatedly prodded Crotti to defend the terms of his statement in *The World Magazine*, particularly the notion of “absolute expression.” This vague language was, to Coady, modern art continuing to remove itself from the real world, maintaining the veil of academicism to elevate it above every day life.

Coady wanted a complete upheaval of artistic operations in America, to reflect the local modern culture without a reliance on European or academic precedents. The vernacular, which he considered to be a uniquely American strength, was to be the model for that revolutionary change; it realigned native cultural production with the successes of the realms of industry and entertainment. His critique of the art world bore much in common with Duchamp’s readymades.

While Coady was innovative in harnessing the popular press for his campaign, his desire for an American aesthetic was not entirely new. We must consider the possible influence of a 1909 essay by Robert Henri, which was published in *The Craftsman*.¹⁶⁷ In this text, Henri previewed many of the concepts which became central to Coady’s mission. Henri’s opening paragraph explained that “a national art is not limited to a question of subject or technique, but is a real understanding of the fundamental conditions personal to a country, and the relation of the

¹⁶⁷ Robert Henri, "Progress in Our National Art Must Spring from the Development of Individuality of Ideas and Freedom of Expression: A Suggestion for a New Art School," *The Craftsman* 9, no 4 (January 1909). The connection between Henri and Whitman is explored in Matthew Baigell, "Walt Whitman and Early Twentieth-Century American Art," in *Artist and Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

individual to these conditions.”¹⁶⁸ He continued, “And so what is necessary for art in America, as in any land, is first an appreciation of the great ideas native to the country and then the achievement of a mastery freedom in expressing them.”

At the time of this essay, Henri was crusading on behalf of the so-called Ashcan school of artists, focused on American realism, yet, the name of Coady’s magazine may have been taken from the lines of this essay. Henri explained, “It is not possible to create an American art from the outside in. . . . For the successful flowering it demands deep roots, stretching far down into the soil of the nation, gathering sustenance from the conditions of the soil of the nation.” Coady’s writing was based on this position, only strengthened in the aggressive tone of its rhetoric. *The Soil* was conceived as a sourcebook for modern American arts, gathering the elements of a native culture which Coady specifically located in the vernacular.

¹⁶⁸ Henri, "Progress in Our National Art," 388.

CHAPTER 4 THE VERNACULAR AS STYLE, SUBJECT, AND TECHNIQUE

The canonical New York Dada production of Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray shared a machine aesthetic which has been used to characterize the movement since the earliest scholarship in 1951.¹ Building upon the Futurist fervor for machine culture and an anarchist rejection of traditional subject matters, techniques, and materials, this mechanical imagery is certainly one important manifestation of vernacular culture in Dada art. It does not, however, capture the full range of the vernacular aesthetic in New York Dada. As one cross-section, consider the contributors to the second issue of *The Blind Man* (May 1917), a publication universally cited in Dada literature: we find a broad range of work by artists who cannot be classified solely under the machine aesthetic including Florine Stettheimer, Charles Demuth, and Alfred Stieglitz.² This chapter will explore alternative understandings of vernacular, moving beyond the industrial to examine how the idiom became a stylistic device during the teens and how Dada artists in New York exploited the multiple registers of its definition to create art which simultaneously attacked European traditions and contributed to the formation of an independent American culture.

As cultural critics of the 1910s praised the fields of industrial, commercial, and amateur design, these realms became important sources for artists wishing to attack high culture and

¹ The characterization of New York Dada as a machine style was pioneered in John I. H. Baur, "The Machine and the Subconscious: Dada in America," *Magazine of Art* 44 (October 1951): 233-37. A relationship between the machine style and sexual anxiety was addressed in Barbara Zabel, "The Machine and New York Dada," in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, ed. Francis Naumann and Beth Venn (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996). Zabel also addressed the machine aesthetic in American art in *Assembling Art: The Machine and the American Avant-Garde* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2004) and "Man Ray and the Machine," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3, no 4 (1989).

² Contributors to the two issues of *The Blind Man* also included Beatrice Wood, Mina Loy, Clara Tice, Louise Norton, *Vanity Fair* editor Frank Crowninshield, and Walter Arensberg.

create an American idiom. Spurred by anarchistic philosophies to move beyond established conventions of art and provoked by nationalist desires to form a modern American culture, New York Dada adopted the loose contours of the vernacular to bridge the gap between the highbrow and the lowbrow. In the category of the vernacular, we can include both the work of the amateur artist and the professional, salaried commercial artist: both were categories of inspiration for New York Dada. Of particular interest is the work of women artists, including Clara Tice, Beatrice Wood, and Stettheimer, who were excluded from the mainstream, a status that allowed them greater freedom to develop an irreverent, satirical style. These women rejected their academic training to embrace amateur aesthetics and lowbrow culture.

The study of vernacular culture and its relationship to early twentieth-century American art was pioneered by American studies scholar John Kouwenhoven in the 1940s, with his groundbreaking book, *Made in America* (republished in 1967 as *The Arts in Modern American Civilization*).³ In this text, Kouwenhoven argued that American identity was the result of conflict between inherited European traditions and the local conditions of the New World. Concerned primarily with industrial design, Kouwenhoven defined the outcome of this conflict as the vernacular, a style characterized not by any single aesthetic, but by the grass-roots quality of its genesis, as American designers focused on the utility of objects and dismissed the restrictive conventions of traditional or European design.

Writing in 1960, the anthropologist Margaret Lantis further conflated the concept with a specifically urban experience, defining the vernacular as a means of capturing the “generic

³ John Kouwenhoven, *Made in America: The Arts in Modern Civilization* (Garden City: W. W. Norton & Co., 1948).

characteristic of metropolitan life.”⁴ In her study, she, too, explained that this vernacular culture was defined locally without standards created by a governing body. Historically, the vernacular has referred to “anything not obviously the product of an upper-class, avant-garde, aesthetic movement.”⁵

Given its fluid definition, the vernacular serves as a rewarding lens to reevaluate our understanding of what material can be understood as New York Dada, including work that demonstrates the use of commonplace materials, the adoption of lowbrow styles and techniques, and the embrace of commercial products and mass media. It is important to restate that the vernacular does not connote simply the machine aesthetic; the term represents the contemporary fascination with a range of alternatives to the fine art, all of which subverted the elitist traditions of highbrow culture. This definition corresponds most closely to the understanding of artists during the 1910s and 1920s. William Carlos Williams referred to vernacular culture as the “American idiom,” signaling its identification with a specifically indigenous expression.⁶ Although the term “vernacular” was not used by dadaist artists or critics in New York, such as Robert Coody, the cultural elements which they selected for emulation, ones that insistently existed outside the traditional canon of fine art production, can be best described in this fashion. The vague nature of its definition allowed artists to interpret the term at will, accommodating a wide range of works drawings on nearly any source that existed outside of the artistic canon, and which could be understood as authentic in some anti-academic fashion.

⁴ Margaret Lantis, "Vernacular Culture," *American Anthropologist* 62, no 2 (April 1960): 202. An anthropologist, Lantis was primarily concerned with the social interactions governed by vernacular cultural expectations and how these locally-built systems dictated appropriate behavioral standards.

⁵ Dell Upton, "The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture," *American Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1983): 263.

⁶ William Carlos Williams, quoted in Henry M. Sayre, "American Vernacular: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetic of the Machine," *Twentieth Century Literature* 35, no 3 (Autumn 1989): 313.

Four dadaist approaches to the vernacular will be discussed in this chapter, with each one defining an operation more than a particular style. The first is the emulation of vernacular art as an amateurish aesthetic with models that included folk art, children's art, and craft. This will be examined in the work of Beatrice Wood and Florine Stettheimer. Similarly, several members of the Arensberg circle, including Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, and the Arensbergs themselves were interested in early American design, especially that of the Shaker communities of Pennsylvania, which similarly reflected an antiacademic tradition.

The second operation consists of artists who presented the figure of the marginalized artist as a representative of the vernacular, producing work that existed outside of academicism and conventional ideals of beauty and training.⁷ Even though the actual business of vaudeville was a highly organized business enterprise, the performers populated the fringes of society and could be interpreted as a distinct community that operated separately from the bourgeois world of the spectator, a sentiment first expressed in Marinetti's 1913 manifesto on "The Variety Theater."⁸ In his 1921 *Adventure in the Arts*, Marsden Hartley described the vaudevillian as a hero in this fashion.⁹

The third operation of the anarchistic vernacular style reclaimed the industrial imagery of big business and corporations to create a machine style which appropriated these mechanisms and

⁷ Into this category, we could place the great number of Dadaist portraits. As Beth Venn noted, many Dadaists completed portraits of fellow sympathizers. A number of artists, including Alfred Stieglitz, Florine Stettheimer, Beatrice Wood, Francis Picabia, Arthur Dove, and Charles Demuth contributed to a network of images which created a sense of group identity with no formal declaration of allegiance. These portraits often broke with conventions of portraiture to create coded levels of interpretation, not unlike the abstract caricatures of Marius de Zayas, discussed in chapter 3. Furthermore, the more popular caricatures of de Zayas and Alfred Frueh can be included in this grouping, as they frequently depicted another group of marginalized performers, vaudevillians. See Beth Venn, "New York Dada Portraiture: Rendering Modern Identity," in Francis Naumann, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996).

⁸ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Variety Theatre" (1913), reprinted in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, eds. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 253-256.

⁹ Note the subtitle of Hartley's text, Marsden Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville and Poets* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921).

aestheticized them. In this manner, the hierarchical boundaries between art, craft, and industry were blurred or obliterated. The machine paintings of Schamberg fall into this category, as does the work of Paul Strand and Sheeler. The use of non-art materials invigorated high culture with the physical elements of everyday life. Building on this intersection between art and industry, a fourth Dada manifestation of the vernacular was the development of a body of objects that resided in this liminal space. Duchamp's readymades could be placed into this category of art/object,¹⁰ along with the work of several American artists, such as Mina Loy and Alfred Frueh.

In any of these modes, the fine art adoption of the vernacular was a powerful tool for dadaist disruption, as it undermined the bourgeois expectations of artistic production. In 1930-31, Marsden Hartley encouraged the study of native folk art, recommending it to "anyone who is weary of the hocus-pocus of intellectualism in art, who seeks relief from the everlasting interrogation of the subject, who tires most of all of the greatest bore among the phrases of well-worn speech, namely, 'What is Art.'"¹¹ Where previously such production had been considered more craft than art, such expressions of American culture became newly relevant. Praising the collection of folk art held by the Newark Museum of Art, Hartley claimed

What a fortunate time it was when these artists were living in the flush of their desires and were not impelled by absurd attempts at professionalism, as most of us are today. ... There are no amateurs today, everyone is a professional, no matter what the field of expression may be, and the ingratiating charm of amateurship is gone from our midst, forever, and there can be no childish impulses today, for everyone is expected to assume adult wisdom and adult superficiality.¹²

He continued, explaining that the character he truly admired in such folk art was the willingness to experiment, saying "these primitive artists are seldom at a loss to invent a technique which

¹⁰ As discussed in Chapter Three, Duchamp began the readymades in Paris, but first exhibited them in New York, suggesting that he found fertile terrain for them upon reaching America.

¹¹ Marsden Hartley, "American Primitives," in *On Art*, ed. Gail R. Scott (New York: Horizon Press, 1982), 186.

¹² Hartley, "American Primitives," 186.

will express what they wish to envisage.”¹³ This innovative and intuitive quality that would have been considered unacademic and “lowbrow” was a defining characteristic of the vernacular.

The roots of this anti-institutional interest with the vernacular aesthetic also had precedents in Stieglitz’s “291” gallery. Credited with importing European modernism in the pre-Armory period and changing his emphasis to American artists after 1913, Stieglitz actually underwent a dramatic shift in 1910.¹⁴ The 1910 International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York was a culmination of his efforts to legitimize photography as fine art. Once achieved, Stieglitz began to turn his attention to other forms of artistic production, transgressing the boundaries of fine art with increasing frequency.

Concurrent to the Buffalo show, “291” exhibited Post-Impressionist lithography, including works by Cézanne, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec. They were accompanied by a small display of oil paintings by Henri Rousseau, loaned by the artist Max Weber. This exhibition provides an example of the multiple manifestations of the vernacular, even at this early date. Rousseau’s famously self-taught and non-illusionistic style represents a definition of the vernacular based upon the conceit of amateurism, while the lithographs point toward more commercial production. Although strikingly different in style, both rooms were unified by the non-mimetic quality of the work and its anti-academicism.

While certainly the economies of shipping and sales affected the work Stieglitz imported from Europe for display in his gallery, even when showing American artists, he often favored illustrations, drawings, and lithographs, all media typically excluded from the canon. His choices were catholic. Throughout his career, Stieglitz remained dedicated to his role as

¹³ Idem, 188.

¹⁴ Standard biographies such as Katherine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) often divide the chronology according to the Armory exhibition. While a monumental event, Stieglitz demonstrated anti-institutional impulses well-before this show.

gallerist, but was unwilling to conceive of his gallery as a traditional operation. He never referred to himself as a dealer and legions of stories exist of him denying sales to those he felt were unworthy. As the pages of *Camera Work* once declared: “It should be remembered that the Little Gallery is nothing more than a laboratory, an experimental station, and must not be looked upon as an art gallery in the ordinary sense of the word.”¹⁵

Indeed, Stieglitz’s very conception of his gallery space as a laboratory suggested a radical departure from the traditional conception of the dealer; no single style or school was represented, creating a highly pluralistic approach to modern art. Instead of issuing authoritative declarations, a dialogue was created. Decades later, Marsden Hartley explained that “the 291 idea was never meant to be anything but an experiment, “laboratory” is his favorite word ... it let a few personalities develop in the way they believed in, and find the way to develop of themselves.”¹⁶

In this spirit, during the same 1912-13 season which included shows of caricature by de Zayas and Frueh, Stieglitz and Abraham Walkowitz organized an exhibition of art made by children, aged 2-13. In all, with the assistance of Walkowitz, who obtained some of the works from a settlement house on the Lower East Side,¹⁷ Stieglitz held four shows of children’s art, in 1912, 1914, 1915, and 1916 and published their poetry in *Camera Work*.¹⁸ The last exhibition featured paintings by his “unguided and untaught” 10-year-old niece Georgia Engelhard (figure 4.1).¹⁹

While the illustrations in Kandinsky’s *Blue Rider Almanac* most likely served as inspiration,

¹⁵ *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 48.

¹⁶ Marsden Hartley, “291 and the Brass Bowl,” in *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait*, Frank Waldo, ed. (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co, 1934), 121.

¹⁷ Walkowitz is commonly credited with gathering the drawings from settlement houses on the Lower East Side, yet as Sarah Greenough noted in *Modern Art and America* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2000), Gail Levin has found mention in Josephine Nivison’s diaries that the works came from her students; this is published in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 154.

¹⁸ Greenough lists exhibitions of children’s art in April 1912, February 1914, April 1915 and November 1916.

¹⁹ Charles Caffin in the *New York American*, quoted in *Camera Work* 49-50 (June 1917): 34. Stieglitz also planned an issue of *Camera Work* for 1916 which would be dedicated to children and art, in collaboration with Dr. A. A. Brill, the translator of Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* among other works. The two men met at one of Mabel Dodge Luhan’s salons, and although the issue never came to be realized, the plans point to the centrality of this idea to Stieglitz during this period; see Balken, 56.

Stieglitz disagreed with the use of children's art as a model for the modern artist; as he told one reporter who asked about such a possibility, "that is impossible... you can't do that because you are not a child."²⁰ Instead, these works were admired as an alternative to professional art practices.

It is clear from Stieglitz's introduction of the first exhibition of children's art, reprinted in *Camera Work*, that the show intended to challenge the boundaries of fine art. The show received considerable press: an article in the *Sunday New York Daily Tribune* declared them "The Future Futurists" and Stieglitz granted an interview to the *New York Evening Sun*, which characterized the show as representative of the gallery's revolutionary, anti-authoritarian operations and "a reflection of the social unrest of the whole country."²¹

The celebrated ahistorical quality of the children's art was achieved by selecting works that did not reflect traditional artistic training. Indeed, subsequent shows made this point very clearly. The announcement of the second exhibition of children's art, printed in *Camera Work* described the drawings as "by children who had received no guidance in the use of brush or pencil" and in a forward that accompanied this and the following children's art show, their teachers explained:

These drawings were made, after school hours, and when their time was their own, by children of one of the city's public elementary schools... of that active direction which is commonly advocated in children's textbooks, in teachers' manuals, and in school curricula, syllabuses and courses of study, there has been none. The goal to which prevailing art instruction aspires is the attainment of a collective mediocrity.²²

²⁰ Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in "Some Remarkable Work by Very Young Artists," reprinted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Random House, 1973), 115.

²¹ "The Future Futurists – Things Artistic Revealed to Babies That are Hid from the Wise and Prudent," *Sunday New York Daily Tribune* (clipping undated) and "Review of Children's Art at 291," *New York Evening Sun* (27 August 1912). Stieglitz scrapbook, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

²² Joseph Cohen and Eda L. Puckhaber, quoted in "The Third Exhibition of Children's Drawings," *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 9.

Stieglitz's exhortation: "Give a child a brush and a paint box and leave him alone. Don't bother him with theories, don't attempt to confine his genius within established limits"²³ closely echoed the pedagogical attitudes of anarchist educators, such as those active at the Modern School, part of the Ferrer Center. Indeed, a primary interest of the Ferrer Center was the establishment of a day school for children. Opening in June 1911, the school's director, Bayard Boyesen published a pamphlet which described its mission: "The personality of the child, during the sensitive and hazardous years of early youth, must be kept free from the intrusive hands of those who would mould and fashion it according to preconceived models, who would thwart this quality and divert that, in order to fit the child into the ideals of the teacher."²⁴ That Stieglitz and Walkowitz chose to exhibit the art of children, displaying works from a settlement house, reflects a similar anarchistic appreciation for individualistic expression. Stieglitz was not alone in staging this type of exhibition in New York during the teens. While his four exhibitions of children's art were both groundbreaking and record setting, fellow gallerist Robert Coady also held exhibitions of children's art in his Washington Square Gallery and reproduced their works in *The Soil*.

With the first exhibition of children's art at "291," *Camera Work* published a review by Hartmann in which he noted the "fresh and exquisite virility" of the "honest, humble toil of these little draughtsmen."²⁵ Hartmann paid special attention to the process by which they worked, writing:

Children draw when they feel the impulse. . . . the little craftsmen stop as soon as they feel bored. . . . And after that performance is done and shown to the person nearest in reach, the piece of paper is carelessly tossed aside. It has become valueless in their eyes; it is

²³ "Some Remarkable Work by Very Young Artists." Both American and European anarchists were interested in these educational ideals.

²⁴ Bayard Boyesen, *The Modern School in New York* (New York: Francisco Ferrer Association, [1911]), 1-2.

²⁵ Sadakichi Hartmann, "The Exhibition of Children's Drawings," *Camera Work* 39 (July 1912): 45-6.

forgotten like the incidents of a nursery game. It is treasured only by sober “Olympians” who take a pride in the cleverness of their offspring.²⁶

In this passage, Hartmann set the actions of the child artist as a model to be emulated. Driven by inner passion, the artist should operate without predetermination and without thought to a final conclusion. The child was likened to a worker, not a creator, nor the artist seeking eternal fame. In fact the child-artist was celebrated for understanding the ephemeral nature of his work. The child was the consummate anti-professional, who worked without thought of reputation, audience or market. Thus in the United States children’s work and folk art presented a native, vital, and undervalued non-academic tradition upon which artists could draw.²⁷ Stieglitz’s exhibitions of children’s art celebrated its lack of artistic professionalism and indifference to history, tradition, and permanence – the vernacular in action.

Children’s art was one manifestation of the New York Dada appreciation for vernacular culture and the proliferation of an amateur aesthetic like that which had already been made infamous by the cartoonish nudes of Clara Tice. During the mid-1910s, Beatrice Wood and Florine Stettheimer also rejected the academic training of their youth for a loosely drawn, more idiosyncratic style; this is not to suggest they were drawing directly from the unskilled efforts of folk artists, but rather that they recognized the anti-academic to possess a certain artistic authenticity. Furthermore, with its perceived lack of sophistication, this aesthetic was well-suited to satire and parodies of highbrow culture.

Beatrice Wood’s first attempt at anti-academic drawing, *Mariage d’une Amie* (figure 4.2), was reproduced in *Rogue*. The magazine, edited by Louise and Allen Norton, had also published

²⁶ Hartmann, “The Exhibition of Children’s Drawings.”

²⁷ The concept of “urban folk” was addressed by Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* (Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1975) as an operation of modernist primitivism, however, he remained more interested in the machine aesthetic and did not address the work of artists like Florine Stettheimer; his distinction was more philosophical than formal.

Clara Tice's drawings after the March 1915 Comstock raid.²⁸ Invited by Duchamp to share his studio, Wood began producing images which chronicled the events of the Arensberg salon, caricaturing informal gatherings such as *Soirée* (1917) (figure 4.3) in which cartoonish stick figures are carefully labeled Duchamp, Picabia, Gleizes, and "Tango." The style is sketchy; abbreviated outlines form the figures and the barest suggestion of furniture. Little verisimilitude exists, instead Wood conveyed a general sense of her subjects, creating lithe or rotund contours to suggest her colleagues.

While the looseness of execution could be attributed to the intimate and documentary nature of the subject, Wood employed this same technique in imaginatively composed and more finished images, such as *Béatrice et ses douzes enfants!* (figure 4.4), which features the artist as an overwhelmed matriarch.²⁹ Seated in the center of the composition, Wood appears, cradling one of four "Pierres" (Henri-Pierre Roché) while Duchamp, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Joseph Stella, and Arthur Cravan play nearby. Drawn in pen and ink and accented with watercolor, the resulting image appears ephemeral; the illogical family floats like a dream in an idyllic landscape suggested by a few balloon-shaped trees in the distance.

Several drawings from the 1910s hint that Wood was well in command of her technique; that this simplistic style was one of several which she affected during her career. Wood had studied at the Academie Julien, and as some of her academic drawings attest (figure 4.5), she was trained and capable of more traditional standards of execution;³⁰ instead she chose the more fashionable, unschooled quality of cartoon. She rejected the learned conventions of chiaroscuro and volume in favor of a lowbrow aesthetic which suggested an intuitive rather than trained approach. Wood

²⁸ Paul B Franklin, "Beatrice Wood, Her Dada... And Her Mama," in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 109.

²⁹ Wood's approach to portraiture is addressed in Beth Venn, "New York Dada Portraiture."

³⁰ Wood's academic training was discussed in Francis Naumann, "The Drawings of Beatrice Wood," *Arts Magazine* (March 1983).

continued to modify her style of drawing to serve different purposes, such as *Dieu protège les amants* (1917) (figure 4.6), which commented on the love triangle between herself, Duchamp, and Roché, and was perhaps completed after learning of Roché's betrayal.³¹ In this more cynical work, she adopted a harsher line and strong shading which calls to mind the abstract caricatures of de Zayas. Emphasizing a geometric quality to her figures, they emerge as cryptically labeled ciphers; a series of intersecting lines penetrate the surface and draw them together. *Scene conjugal... au Boche style* (1918) (figure 4.7) included two blockish forms, solidly drawn within an interior space. Aside from the anti-German sentiment of the title, not uncommon during the post-war era,³² she again altered her style to use a thick line which echoed the leaden heaviness of the "lovers" depicted. In the 1920s, her style shifted again, implementing a more broadly drawn contour line that only partly developed her subjects and which integrated elements of art deco.³³

During the 1910s, however, she worked in a wandering, loose line, not unlike that of Clara Tice. Wood created drawings that were delicate and whimsical, capturing real events in an atmosphere of fantasy, often veiled in washes of watercolor. This amateurish, cartoon style of drawing was a conceit, which she employed both for these informal sketches and more finished works such as *Un peut d'eau dans du savon* (figure 4.8), which she submitted to the 1917 Society of Independent Artists Exhibition and which will be discussed in chapter 5.

Verisimilitude and illusionism were sacrificed in favor of an idiosyncratic playfulness, as well as

³¹ This love affair is recounted in her autobiography, Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1985), 34-6

³² While Kenneth Silver has traced the prevalence of anti-German sentiment among French art of the post-war period in *L'esprit de corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), little scholarship has addressed the current of anti-German work among artists in America. Poster and propaganda campaigns featured popular competitions which produced work such as George Bellows's *The Germans Arrive* or Edward Hopper's *Smash the Hun*. For more information, see Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

³³ Francis Naumann, *Daughters of Dada: Beatrice Wood, Clara Tice, Mina Loy, Katherine S. Dreier, Florine Stettheimer* (New York: Francis Naumann Fine Art, 2006), np [1].

to create the impression of a naïve, unprofessional artist; she referred to her own drawings as “scrawls.”³⁴

Similarly, the work of Florine Stettheimer falls outside of any particular contemporary style. Scholars have classified her work as decorative or rococo, what Linda Nochlin has called “camp sensibility,” for its overly feminine and fanciful technique.³⁵ Yet this aesthetic was the result of deliberate, informed evolution which rejected academicism in favor of a more organic (and seemingly unschooled) approach.³⁶ That Stettheimer was aware of the conventions of folk art is apparent in *Portrait of André Brook* (1915) (figure 4.9), where she adopted the tradition of painting pendant “portraits” of an estate.

Hosting a popular salon with her sisters, Carrie and Ettie, Florine Stettheimer was a central figure among the New York avant-garde. These gatherings brought together a wide range of artists, writers, and performers, and as frequent guests, both Duchamp and Stieglitz were portrait subjects for Stettheimer during the 1920s.³⁷ While her choices of subject were conventional, including portraits and flower paintings, Stettheimer’s style appeared auto-didactic.³⁸ Like Wood, her paintings were linear, retaining the first touches of the drawn sketch. Her contemporary and close friend McBride used the word “calligraphic” to describe her line, but the effect, although lyrical, retained a fleeting, inconsequential quality.

³⁴ Beatrice Wood, quoted in Naumann, “The Drawings of Beatrice Wood.” Wood’s dismissal of her drawings is compared to Duchamp’s nonchalance when asked about his readymades in Jenni Sorkin, “Beatrice Wood: Readymade,” in *Beatrice Wood: Career Woman* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2011), 6-13.

³⁵ Linda Nochlin, “Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive,” *Art in America* 68, no 7 (1980): 64-83. While Rococo art itself was highbrow, the opulence and decorative abundance associated with the style made it well-suited as a foil for Stettheimer.

³⁶ Barbara Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 62.

³⁷ For more information on the influential Stettheimer salon, see Emily Braun, “The Salons of Modernism,” in *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation*, Emily Braun and Emily Bilski, eds. (New York: Jewish Museum, 2005).

³⁸ Elizabeth Sussman, “Florine Stettheimer: A 1990s Perspective,” in Elisabeth Sussman and Barbara Bloemink, *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995) used the term “cartoon” in reference to Stettheimer’s figures (48).

While her style appeared naïve or untrained, Stettheimer studied art in both America and Europe. Enrolled for a time at the Art Student's League in New York, she worked with Kenyon Cox, who emphasized the Old Masters and believed that the modern artists needed to extend, not eviscerate these traditions.³⁹ Thus, well-versed in the history of art, Stettheimer chose to place her work in opposition to this academy. She reported that while she had “lots and lots” of art training, she was “rather glad it didn't” take.⁴⁰ In general, she held an iconoclastic attitude towards high culture, writing:

Oh horrors!
I hate Beethoven
And I was brought up
To revere him
Adore him
Oh horrors
I hate Beethoven⁴¹

Her exposure to European art inspired skepticism rather than reverence. Although an early work such as *Flora* (1907) (figure 4.10) originated as an adaptation of a much-admired Botticelli, Stettheimer quickly realized the futility of this academic study.⁴² Writing shortly after its completion, “My Flora is kitsch,” she acknowledged that by merging the classical with the contemporary, clothing the goddess in a modern dress with high-heeled shoes, she had transformed her into a popular commodity or worse, an advertisement.⁴³ This painting and her characterization, however, signaled Stettheimer's awareness of the registers of high and low

³⁹ Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 16-7.

⁴⁰ Dorothy Dayton, “Before Designing Stage Settings She Painted Composer's Portrait,” *New York Sun* (24 March 1934); quoted in Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 243.

⁴¹ Florine Stettheimer, *Crystal Flowers* (Pawlett, VT: Banyan Press, 1949), np.

⁴² Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* discussed this work as a parody of Botticelli (35).

⁴³ Florine Stettheimer, quoted in *Ibid.*

culture. She came to freely mingle these categories in her mature paintings, even making these disparities the subject of her work.⁴⁴

With the onset of war in Europe, the Stettheimer family was forced to return to New York in 1914. The shock and excitement of this relocation was expressed in a poem which celebrated the city for its vernacular, lowbrow entertainments, including

... dance marathons and poultry shows
soulsavings and rodeos
gabfests and beauty contests
sky towers and bridal bowers
speakeasy bars and motor cars
columnists and movie stars.⁴⁵

Working in New York, Stettheimer began creating paintings that mingled high and low conventions, such as her *Self-Portrait* (1915-16) (figure 4.11).⁴⁶ Drawing from a lineage of reclining female nudes, most specifically Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and Manet's *Olympia*, Stettheimer updated the genre, most daringly by casting herself as the central figure. This detail was so shocking that it was left unmentioned by her contemporaries. Carl Van Vechten referred to it only as "the huge Robert Henri period classical nude she always kept hanging on the most prominent wall of her studio."⁴⁷ Yet, as Bloeminck has demonstrated, the likeness is unmistakable when compared with contemporary photographs and other painted self-portraits. Stettheimer's willingness to transgress the boundaries of social propriety was too daring for her peers to admit in print.

⁴⁴ Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive" addressed this aspect of Stettheimer's style, but concentrated on her later *Cathedral* series.

⁴⁵ Stettheimer, *Crystal Flowers*, np.

⁴⁶ Barbara Bloeminck expands on this idea, citing the links between Stettheimer's famous *Cathedrals* series and Italian Renaissance painting in "Visualizing Sight: Florine Stettheimer and Temporal Modernism," in Sussman and Bloeminck, *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, 89-92.

⁴⁷ Carl Van Vechten, foreword to Parker Tyler, *Florine Stettheimer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1963), xii.

In 1916, Knoedler Galleries held the only solo exhibition of Stettheimer's work during her lifetime. Over the course of the show, she tracked its success in her diary, where it became the most written-about event in her life.⁴⁸ The lack of sales, which she noted in her diary on the closing day, has been cited as the reason she never repeated the endeavor, yet she demonstrated uncertainty about the exhibition before the show ever opened.⁴⁹ Stettheimer had not sought a public venue for her work: she was approached by Marie Sterner, whom the gallery had hired to stage exhibitions of contemporary art. Upon meeting Roland Knoedler, owner of the gallery, she was dismayed to find he cared little about her work and later she noted that she received better treatment once Knoedler learned she was related to the wealthy Seligman family.⁵⁰ It was a harsh awakening to the thoroughly commercial interests of the traditional gallery system. That Stettheimer was unaccustomed to such fiduciary matters is corroborated by the fact Knoedler himself needed to remind her (on the morning of the opening) that she had not provided a price list.⁵¹

Stettheimer's discomfort with the commercial atmosphere of the gallery is also reflected in her extensive efforts to redecorate the exhibition space; she altered the gallery space to more closely mimic the domestic interior where her works were usually housed. White muslin covered the walls and a cellophane canopy echoed the shape of her own bed.⁵² By claiming her paintings as decorative, she strengthened their anti-academic claim. In this installation, her work, while in the gallery, remained literally outside of the traditional system of exhibition. The hanging also allowed her to underscore the decorative quality of her work.

⁴⁸ Stephen Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 259.

⁴⁹ Florine Stettheimer diary, 14 October 1916, quoted in Tyler, 28.

⁵⁰ Florine Stettheimer diaries, quoted in Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 71, 74.

⁵¹ Florine Stettheimer diary, 16 October 1916, quoted in Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 74.

⁵² Watson argued that this was done to "minimize[e] the distance her painting travelled into the world" (259).

The critical response to the show was mixed; although some reviewers credited her with “a pleasant sense of humor and fantasy” or “a bold and confident brush,” the painting which received the most attention was *Flora*, the work which Stettheimer had described as kitsch. Her more inventive, original work was passed over for a painting which rehearsed the tropes of fine art, an admitted pastiche. Presumably disappointed by the unappreciative audience and the commercial atmosphere, Stettheimer never again showed her work in this fashion, although she continued to participate in group exhibitions, including the Society of Independent Artist shows (1917-1926), a war benefit at Knoedler Gallery in 1918, and the first Whitney Biennial in 1932.⁵³ She occasionally sold works to friends and acquaintances, but she did not market her paintings. They were also a presence in the social space of her salon.⁵⁴ Not only did they fill the walls of the family apartment, but she also decorated her studio space in the Beaux Arts building to resemble a bedroom which she used to show her work to a select audience (figure 4.12). On some level, she considered her work decorative; aside from hanging it on the walls of her home and the reception areas of her studio, she also participated in shows such as the Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art, held at the Art Institute of Chicago, where her flower paintings were shown alongside decorative objects.⁵⁵

While Stettheimer’s style spoofed the conventions of highbrow art, including academic form and finish, she did not consider herself to be an amateur. Although she did not exhibit or market her work, she maintained a studio separate from her home and consisted depicted herself as a

⁵³ Henry McBride, “At the Art Galleries,” *The Evening Post Saturday Magazine* (21 October 1916): 20.

⁵⁴ Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, xi.

⁵⁵ Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 153. Her greatest public success would come in 1934, with her set and costume designs for Gertrude Stein’s “Four Saints in Three Acts.”

professional artist in self-portraits.⁵⁶ As the art critic Henry McBride described, “Although she took all the license of a *primitive* she was by no means one herself.”⁵⁷

Contemporary artistic and philosophical debates informed and reinforced Stettheimer’s amateur aesthetic, as seemingly-naïve techniques, like the use of continuous narrative, were also connected to influences like Henri Bergson. According to Bloeminck, Bergson was an important influence on Stettheimer, as many of her paintings concerned memories and nonlinear narration. Stettheimer had attended Bergson’s lectures at the Collège de France with her sister Ettie in 1912.⁵⁸ Furthermore, as an admirer of the Ballet Russes, Bloemink argued that Stettheimer would have seen the correlation between the emotional register of the company’s choreography, the “overlapping layers of information” of the dances and Bergsonian theory.⁵⁹

Duchamp himself categorized Stettheimer’s paintings in Bergsonian-inflected, anti-academic terms, writing that “‘Group’ is an excellent designation for the type of paintings that you have made. Group has nothing to do with the irksome ‘composition.’” He continued, explaining that the works seem to lack a rigid order but suggest multiple possible arrangements and a sense of mobility, or what he called *multiplication virtuelle*, surpassing literal narration to create a fourth-dimensional sense of duration.⁶⁰

Duchamp’s *multiplication virtuelle*, similar to Bergson’s theories of duration, was depicted through Stettheimer’s use of continuous narrative. A narrative device associated with the early Italian Renaissance, continuous narrative suggested an artistic naïveté. As one example, it was used in *La Fête à Duchamp* (figure 4.13), which commemorated a celebration of the artist’s

⁵⁶ Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 15.

⁵⁷ Henry McBride, *Florine Stettheimer* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 13.

⁵⁸ Bloeminck discussed the influence of Bergsonian philosophy on Stettheimer’s work in *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*. Her attendance at Bergson’s lecture is noted in the chronology listed in Sussman and Bloemink, 120.

⁵⁹ Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 52.

⁶⁰ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Florine, Ettie, and Carrie Stettheimer, 3 May [1919], Stettheimer papers, Collection Joseph Solomon, New York, quoted in Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 152.

birthday. As the work unfolds, Duchamp enters the scene twice: appearing in Picabia's red sports car and walking through the arch in the foreground; he also sits among the guests in the background.⁶¹ Like the drawings of Beatrice Wood, many of Stettheimer's later paintings recorded gatherings of friends and family, uniting elements of the real and the imagined.

Images such as *New York* (1918) (figure 4.14) also drew upon contemporary events and were replete with realistic details, made unreal through their uncanny replication and juxtaposition. Merging her experience of sailing into New York harbor with the contemporaneous arrival of Woodrow Wilson (pictured at a lectern), Stettheimer created an image which was both specific and dream-like. Bloeminck has identified the buildings, including the modern Woolworth Building, nineteenth-century US Customs House, and Grant's Tomb, yet it is important to add to this list the scaffolding that Stettheimer depicts in the foreground, just right of center.⁶² Her vision of the city was not strictly limited to the skyscraper, rather she freely mixed contemporary and classical architecture to creating an arrangement pleasing to the eye. Thus, the painting combines memory and reality, compressing the actualities of time and space. Neither is the work confined to a two-dimensional plane, but it extends into space by means of the elaborate painted frame and gilded eagle, along with the three-dimensional relief of the Statue of Liberty in the foreground.

This blend of specificity and universalizing fiction defined Stettheimer's mature style. From individual images, such as her portraits of Marcel Duchamp, *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* (figure 4.15), or *Portrait of Henry McBride, Art Critic* (figure 4.16) to group genre scenes, she carefully captured the likenesses (both physical and spiritual) of her friends, her family, and herself. These works often included sly references to the more storied traditions of art, but refused

⁶¹ Description from McBride, *Florine Stettheimer*, 12.

⁶² Barbara Bloeminck, "Visualizing Sight," 72-3.

academicism for an idiosyncratic style. For example, *Soirée* (figure 4.17) included a number of recognizable people alongside a seated Harlequin which appears on the right margin.⁶³ As in real life, they share the space with her Titian/Manet-inspired *Self-Portrait*, yet the figures levitate in an interior space left undefined.⁶⁴ As Bloeminck described, “Stettheimer’s paintings, poetry, and design after 1917 have a distinctly modern flavor. With the combination of blithe naïveté and audacity considered by Europeans such as [Siegfried] Bing so characteristically ‘American,’ she played in the history of art.”⁶⁵

As Stettheimer’s interest in folk art demonstrates, the vernacular was not tied solely to modern life, but had roots stretching back into American history. At a moment when artists were searching for national identity, the vernacular allowed the industrial and the artisanal to coexist. While Sheeler scholar Karen Lucic has claimed, “the fact that early twentieth-century artists like Sheeler so ardently sought out preindustrial objects as models for their modernist works is one of the era’s most intriguing paradoxes,” the paradox only exists if his subjects are considered outside of their shared nature as functional objects.⁶⁶ Sheeler himself explained that he “sought neither the quaint or the historical.”⁶⁷ In the notes for his autobiography, he elaborated on this point, explaining:

Forms created for the best realization of their practical use may in turn claim attention of the artist who considers an efficient working of the parts toward the consummation of the whole of primary importance in the building of a picture. Evidence of this accomplishment aroused my interest in the early barns ... in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Their shapes were determined by their

⁶³ For descriptions of this and other group portraits, see McBride, *Florine Stettheimer*.

⁶⁴ Bloeminck, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* noted the presence of the Harlequin, as well as an allusion to Velazquez in the visible stretched canvas which appears on the easel in the left foreground.

⁶⁵ Bloeminck, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 235.

⁶⁶ Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler in Doylestown: American Modernism and the Pennsylvania Tradition* (Allentown, PA: Allentown Art Museum, 1997), 11.

⁶⁷ Charles Sheeler, quoted in Frederick S. Wight, "Charles Sheeler," in *Charles Sheeler: A Retrospective Tradition* (Los Angeles: Art Galleries, University of California, 1954). 27.

practical use and by the combination of materials, wood, stone,
plaster...⁶⁸

These subjects were not chosen innocently. Sheeler was well-connected to the avant-garde operating in New York and while his paintings might appear straightforwardly realist, as a contemporary reviewer wrote: “we soon discover, however, that the realism is of a highly selected order, that choice, elimination, selection are the dominating factors in the design.”⁶⁹ The pared-down aesthetics of the vernacular object converged with the aesthetics of modern art.

At the same time that critics pointed to the influence of cubism and modern abstraction on Sheeler’s pared-down images of barns, scholars have noted that these works bear strong resemblance to the paintings of folk artists such as Edward Hicks.⁷⁰ During the 1910s, Charles Sheeler rented a cottage in Doylestown, located in rural Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Sharing the house with Schamberg, Sheeler was inspired to collect local vernacular objects, which he integrated into his photographs and paintings to create images which were grounded in both traditional structures and modern abstraction. His first uncommissioned series of photographs, the *Doylestown* photographs (and the related paintings) (1917) (figures 4.18, 19), signaled a change from his earlier landscapes, which had been painted to “communicate his sensations of some particular manifestation of cosmic order”⁷¹ to a less transcendental approach. Selecting sixteen interior and exterior views of the cottage and “using dramatic lighting, spatial distortions, and unconventional framing, Sheeler focused on seemingly mundane features of the house, such

⁶⁸ Charles Sheeler, “Autobiographical Notes,” Charles Sheeler papers, Archives of American Art.

⁶⁹ Forbes Watson, “Charles Sheeler,” *Arts* 3 (May 1923): 335-44.

⁷⁰ Henry Sayre, “American Vernacular: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetic of the Machine,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 35, no 3 (Autumn 1989): 310-42 discussed the similarities between Sheeler’s *Bucks County Barn* and Hicks’s *Cornell Farm* at length.

⁷¹ Charles Sheeler, *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters* (New York: M. Kennerley, 1916), 70; quoted in Carol Troyen and Erica Hirshler, *Charles Sheeler: Paintings and Drawings* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 64.

as doors, windows, staircases, a cast-iron stove, and an empty mirror.”⁷² These photographs were exhibited at de Zayas’s Modern Gallery in December 1917.

Sheeler was not alone in collecting Shaker furniture and domestic objects, as other members of the Arensberg salon also admired the style.⁷³ In an undated letter, Charles Demuth encouraged Walter Arensberg to examine some such furniture, writing: “There is a woman here who has several very good early American pieces. Can’t you motor up & see them? That is better really than seeing photographs. As by train is only 3 ½ hours. That is if you want any more pieces. There is a very good small blue table, pine.”⁷⁴ Speaking to this shared interest, Sheeler’s *Barn Abstraction* (1917) (figure 4.20) was purchased by the Arensbergs and displayed in their living room, as seen in Sheeler’s photographs of their apartment from 1918 (figure 4.21). In its sparse treatment of the lines and surfaces of the rural structure, Sheeler transformed a traditional, thoroughly vernacular object into a modernist composition. The vernacular served as a conjunction between American history and America’s future.

The function and the practicality of these structures generated Sheeler’s interest in them as subjects; he was drawn to these preindustrial structures and found beauty in their artlessness. In an interview, he explained:

The community built the barns for the individual and they always had first of all its utility in mind; and that wasn’t accidental because they knew... how the barn had to function for their purpose; they weren’t building a work of art. If it’s beautiful to some of use afterwards it’s beautiful because it functioned – the functional intention was very beautifully realized.⁷⁵

⁷²Lucic, *Charles Sheeler in Doylestown*, 20.

⁷³Mark Rawlinson, *Charles Sheeler: Modernism, Precisionism, and the Borders of Abstraction* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 2008), 25.

⁷⁴ Charles Demuth, letter to Walter Arensberg. Not dated, but prior to 1921. Reprinted in Charles Demuth, ed., *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883-1935* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 10-11.

⁷⁵ Charles Sheeler interview by Martin L. Friedman, 18 June 1959, Charles Sheeler papers, Archives of American Art.

The earliest scholarship on Sheeler, written by his friend William Carlos Williams and the American scholar Constance Rourke, emphasized this as an American quality of his work. Sheeler's choice of vernacular architecture, especially the Shaker examples which dotted the Pennsylvania countryside, indicated his appreciation for this local tradition and his desire to incorporate it into a modern vision.⁷⁶ At the same time, Sheeler believed that his objects expressed their American qualities through means other than their literal history, explaining "I don't like these things because they are old but in spite of it. I'd like them still better if they were made yesterday because then they would afford proof that the same kind of creative power is continuing."⁷⁷

Similarly, by 1919, Demuth was painting the vernacular architecture of his native Pennsylvania, albeit with cubist faceting and futurist forcelines.⁷⁸ An historical but industrial town, Demuth could directly juxtapose these two notions of vernacular architecture. Occasionally, he even combined old and new structures, as in *Box of Tricks* (figure 4.22), where Demuth united a processing factory and the East Gloucester Church into a single building. In doing so, he collapsed the space between the contemporary and the historical; the clean lines of both structures spoke to a shared architectural spirit that did not depend merely on historicity to claim them as American. While Karal Ann Marling views his title as ironic, it could also

⁷⁶ Writing in 1938, Constance Rourke referred to these buildings as "urformen," calling them "source forms" which "were basic in American creative experience." Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler: Artist in the American Tradition* (New York: Harcourt, 1938), 69.

⁷⁷ Rourke, *Charles Sheeler*, 136.

⁷⁸ Betsy Fahlman, *Pennsylvania Modern Charles Demuth of Lancaster* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983) discussed Demuth's enigmatic titles as related to the Dada wordplay of artists like Duchamp. For a general overview of Demuth, see Barbara Haskell, *Charles Demuth* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1987).

indicate his awareness that his choice to paint such archetypical buildings relied on the then-developing tropes of American identity.⁷⁹

Demuth's friendship with Duchamp and their shared interest in punning titles has formed the focus of scholarship connecting him to Dada,⁸⁰ yet iconoclasm and a fascination with vernacular culture marks a much wider portion of Demuth's oeuvre. Underscoring the notion that Demuth was working against the traditional expectations of high art is a statement he made to Thomas Cravan in 1922. He explained, "With few exceptions, artists think of themselves too constantly as "artists" or men of genius – we should always be children and fools."⁸¹ While Naumann has interpreted this statement to imply that Demuth considered himself one of the exceptions, it can also be interpreted as a refusal to think of art in such strictly hierarchical terms.⁸² By acting as "children and fools," the artist was freer to experiment and less constricted by the institutions which dictated what were appropriate subjects and styles.

During the 1910s, Demuth began to document his interaction with the hoi polloi entertainments of vaudeville, cafés, clubs, and the baths in a similarly loose, amateurish style which differed from his contemporary paintings of other subjects; the style and subject of these watercolors were drawn from the vernacular. With these subjects, Demuth crosses into the second manifestation of the vernacular aesthetic, the depiction of the cultural outsider.

Vaudeville fascinated the avant-garde for its unabashed celebration of the contemporary.⁸³ While popular with a mass audience, New York Dada artists expressed an admiration for the unconventional performers, who were often depicted as marginalized figures, excluded from

⁷⁹ Karal Ann Marling, "My Egypt: The Irony of the American Dream," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (Spring 1980). Other scholars, such as Fahlman have pointed to Demuth's friendship with Duchamp as the source of his interest in punning and satirical titles.

⁸⁰ For example, see Marling.

⁸¹ Charles Demuth, quoted in Thomas Craven, "Charles Demuth," *Shadowland* (December 1922): 11.

⁸² Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 133.

⁸³ The impact of vaudeville on American art is best discussed in Patricia McDonnell, *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

mainstream culture. In his *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville and Poets* (1921), Marsden Hartley celebrated the acrobat and vaudeville star alongside Whitman and Cézanne as solitary visionaries and “prophets of the new time.”⁸⁴ Demuth’s vaudeville watercolors reflect an interest shared by many members of the avant-garde in New York: Stieglitz conscientiously kept a scrapbook of programs from the performances he attended while de Zayas contributed the illustrations for Caroline Caffin’s 1914 book, *Vaudeville*.⁸⁵

While the business of vaudeville was corporate and therefore hardly anarchistic, the performers themselves were romanticized by the avant-garde as the representatives of an alternative subculture. This was particularly true during the 1910s, when the less polished acrobatic routines and eccentric performers were being replaced by more reputable and professional acts. In “The Twilight of the Acrobat,” Marsden Hartley noted the disappearance of lowbrow entertainers in favor of more genteel performances, writing: “Where is our once charming acrobat – our minstrel of muscular music? What has become of these groups of fascinating people gotten up in silk and spangle? Who may the evil genius be who has taken them and their fascinating art from our stage, who the ogre of taste that has dispensed with them and their charm?”⁸⁶ These figures were being replaced by “the ever present singing lady who is always telling you who her modiste is, sings a sentimental song or two and then disappears.”⁸⁷ He continued, “The circus notion has been replaced by the parlor entertainment notion.”

In his essay, “Vaudeville,” Hartley again complained that the old-fashioned entertainers were being sidelined in favor of more polished performers; he wrote of his desire to highlight these acrobats and vaudevillians, although as he explained: “I have no doubt that if I attempted to

⁸⁴ “Whitman and Cézanne,” in Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts*, 35.

⁸⁵ Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe archives, YCAL. Caroline Scurfield Caffin, *Vaudeville* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley Press, 1914).

⁸⁶ Marsden Hartley, “The Twilight of the Acrobat,” in Hartley, *Adventures*, 155.

⁸⁷ *Idem*, 158.

establish these ideas with the artists whom I spend so much time in championing, they would no doubt turn aside with the word ‘highbrow’ on their lips.”⁸⁸ Listing several acts which he found particularly worthy, Hartley concluded, “They are, therefore, among the greatest artists.”⁸⁹

Vaudeville represented “the theater of the people, its brassy assurance a dig in the nation’s ribs, its simplicity as naïve as a circus.”⁹⁰

Vaudeville was understood to be a native cultural phenomenon. According to the playwright Edwin Milton Royle “The Vaudeville Theatre is an American invention. There is nothing like it anywhere else in the world. It is neither the Café Chantant, the English music hall, nor the German garden.” He continued, underscoring the modern qualities of the genre, “The vaudeville theatre belongs to the era of the department store and the short story. It may be a kind of lunch-counter art, but then art is so vague and lunch is so real.”⁹¹ Capturing the pace and rapid vision of the urban experience, vaudeville interpreted modern life and crossed cultural boundaries of high and low.⁹² In 1913, the Italian Futurists had praised “The Variety Theatre” in a manifesto which was “lucky in having no tradition, no masters, no dogma, and . . . fed by swift actuality.”⁹³ This sentiment parallels the nation of the American avant-garde’s fascination with vaudeville, and the manifesto may have been known from its publication in Italian, French, and British sources.

⁸⁸ Marsden Hartley, “Vaudeville” in Hartley, *Adventures*, 164

⁸⁹ *Idem*, 174.

⁹⁰ Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Dover Publications, 1940), 3.

⁹¹ Edwin Milton Royle, “The Vaudeville Theater,” *Scribner’s Magazine* 26 (October 1899): 485-95, reprinted in Charles W. Stein, ed., *American Vaudeville as Seen by Its Contemporaries* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 33.

⁹² Patricia McDonnell, “American Early Modern Artists, Vaudeville, and Film,” in *On the Edge of Your Seat*, 3-44.

⁹³ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Variety Theatre” (1913), reprinted in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, eds. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 253-256.

Demuth's series of acrobats and performers, started in 1915, joined this celebration of a distinctly American entertainment.⁹⁴ A work such as *Vaudeville Musicians* (figure 4.23) captured the dynamic sense of movement and contemporaneity of the stage, as the precariously perched musicians played while acrobats performed nearby. The asymmetrical composition created a sense of imbalance, giving the viewer the same sense of anxiety which an audience member would have felt – will the pair topple or will the act be a success? The stage lights revealed a simple backdrop behind the performers, beyond that the bare gray walls of the theater signaled the itinerancy of these musicians and their humble surroundings.

Demuth was well-aware of these implications in his depictions of lowbrow theater and entertainments, so popular among New York intellectuals. A native of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Demuth's first contact with the iconoclasm of Greenwich Village came during the summer of 1914, when he lived in Provincetown, sharing a room with Stuart Davis at Polly Holliday's boarding house.⁹⁵ Holliday's Manhattan restaurant, Polly's Place, was a hotbed of anarchist activities and the location for the Comstock Raid on Clara Tice's exhibition. In the fall of 1915, Demuth rented an apartment at 45 Washington Square South, where he joined a decidedly bohemian social circle.⁹⁶ In later interview, Duchamp recalled socializing with Demuth, attending a masquerade ball at Webster Hall and visiting bars in Harlem. "Very interested in Negro music, ragtime [and] jazz," they attended performances, which inspired paintings such as *Negro Jazz Band* (1916).⁹⁷

⁹⁴ The series is discussed in detail in Laural Weintraub, "Charles Demuth's Vaudeville Watercolors and the Rhythm and Spectacle of Modern Life," in *On the Edge of Your Seat*, yet Weintraub maintained that "Charles Demuth was hardly a Dada personality" (107).

⁹⁵ Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 55.

⁹⁶ Demuth, ed., *Letters of Charles Demuth, American Artist, 1883-1935*, xv.

⁹⁷ Marcel Duchamp, interview by Emily Farnham, in *Charles Demuth: Behind a Laughing Mask* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 103. Jazz, another vernacular form of entertainment, was considered an American form of art, especially by Europeans. The American relationship between music and art is discussed in

During the winter of 1915, Demuth frequented a number of disreputable clubs, including The Hell-Hole, which he commemorated in a 1919 watercolor, *At the Golden Swan* (figure 4.24). The small image includes a rare self-portrait seated with Duchamp. Although McBride publically defended these images as studies “in the interests of higher morality,” in actuality, Demuth’s paintings make no such judgments: they revel in the antics and activities of this bohemian underworld.⁹⁸ A homosexual artist, albeit closeted, several studies have documented Demuth’s interest in the libertine culture of this social climate; his paintings of bathhouses and vaudevillian actors have been mined for their explicit and implicit sexual content.⁹⁹ Yet, the fact that he documented these locales in his paintings and showed them in galleries reveals a desire to import the liberated spirit of these marginalized subcultures into the world of art.

The machine aesthetic represents perhaps the most direct translation of vernacular culture into artistic practice through the literal incorporation of the machine; it is in this fashion that the style of New York Dada has been most commonly defined, as it seemingly encapsulated the shared territory of Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray.¹⁰⁰ Yet the machine aesthetic appeared in a broader range of American art and the same operation of paring down and streamlining which governed the vernacular development of industrial equipment came to be seen as a specifically American idiom. Industrial design, developed through innovation and the willingness to disregard tradition, developed directly in response to local needs and therefore was inherently native.¹⁰¹ Although

Judith Zilczer, "Synaesthesia and Popular Culture: Arthur Dove, George Gershwin and the 'Rhapsody in Blue'," *Art Journal* 44 (Winter 1984): 361-6.

⁹⁸ Henry McBride, "An Underground Search for Higher Moralities," *The New York Sun* (25 November 1917).

⁹⁹ Gerard Koskovich, "A Gay American Modernist: Homosexuality in the Life and Art of Charles Demuth," *The Advocate* (25 June 1985): 50-52 and Jonathan 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) were among the earliest scholarship to address the sexuality of Demuth and its impact on his artistic production.

¹⁰⁰ This is true from the earliest scholarship on New York Dada: Baur, "The Machine and the Subconscious: Dada in America."

¹⁰¹ John Kouwenhoven, "What is Vernacular" in *Made in America*, 15.

the machine aesthetic is not overtly anarchist, it became an object of admiration amongst anarchists for this irreverence towards inherited traditions.

Open admiration for American machinery was professed by the anarchist hero Oscar Wilde in his 1883 lecture, "Impressions of America," in which he declared that beauty only existed "where the American has not attempted to create it."¹⁰² While American art and literature were found lacking, he continued, "There is no country in the world where machinery is so lovely as in America. I have always wished to believe that the line of strength and the line of beauty are one. That wish was realized when I contemplated American machinery."¹⁰³

Political differences aside, shared territory existed between industrialists like Henry Ford and the iconoclasts of New York. While Stieglitz and Ford have been set up as polar opposites, this divide accentuates the artificial separation of cultural strata. Indeed, their respective positions demonstrate the complicated social and industrial developments of the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁴ While Ford was no anarchist, his fervent capitalism produced similar iconoclastic declarations, such as his comments to the *Chicago Tribune*: "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that's worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today."¹⁰⁵ As an icon of American industry, Ford's rejection of tradition and history positioned this ideology as a national characteristic.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Oscar Wilde, "Impressions of America" (1883), quoted in John Kouwenhoven, "Space and Chance," in *Made in America*, 173.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Karen Lucic, "Charles Sheeler and Henry Ford: A Craft Heritage for the Machine Age," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 65 (1989), 37.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Ford, quoted in Robert Lacey, *Ford: The Men and the Machine* (New York Ballantine Books, 1986). Reprinted in Lucic, "Charles Sheeler and Henry Ford."

¹⁰⁶ The factories of Henry Ford were considered the embodiment of the industrial world of the twentieth century; his Highland Park plant opened its doors in 1910; beginning in 1913, its innovative assembly line ushered in a new era of productivity but also increased the mechanization of labor. For more information, see Ray Batchelor, *Henry Ford: Mass Production, Modernism, and Design* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

Artists working in America likewise understood that the quest to capture contemporary life meant engaging with new subjects, notably the industrial infrastructure spreading across the country.¹⁰⁷ Mechanistic forms infiltrated nearly every aspect of daily life, particularly in cities such as New York, making them an integral part of the urban experience. In this respect, the evolutionary development of industrial tools could be likened to the grass-roots nature of anarchism. Co-opting this industrial imagery and aestheticizing it, Dada artists reclaimed the machine as a tool for anarchist disruption.

While much has been written about the dysfunctional machines of Dada, particularly those illustrated by Picabia,¹⁰⁸ artists also depicted machine imagery in order to integrate these new forms into a modern aesthetic, bringing together the lowbrow lived experience and the highbrow realm of artistic production such as in the work of Morton Schamberg. His machine paintings selected machines developed for specific purposes which had been the result of vernacular evolution and then depicted them in a crisp, but aestheticized style, which merged the artistic with the industrial in its technique. As Marsden Hartley argued in 1930-31, “the quality that makes Copley, Audubon, Earl, and the other Americans what they are to us, is the same quality that tempers all these primitive pictures, they are essentially cool, restrained and brittle, and they are happily devoid of extraneous showmanship.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Judith Zilczer, "Machine as Metaphor, Model, and Microcosm: Technology in American Art," *Arts Magazine* 57, no. 4 (1982) and Richard Guy Wilson, *The Machine Age in America, 1918-1941* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1986) discussed this emergence of the machine as a motif in American art.

¹⁰⁸ See Willard Bohn, "Picabia's 'Mechanical Expression' And the Demise of the Object," *Art Bulletin* 67 (December 1985); William I. Homer, "Picabia's *Jeune Fille Américaine Dans L'état De Nudité and Her Friends*," *Art Bulletin* 58 (March 1975); Caroline A. Jones, "The Sex of the Machine: Mechanomorphic Art, New Women and Francis Picabia's Neurasthenic Cure," in *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (New York: Routledge, 1998); William Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1970); or Peter Gaffney, "Demigurgic Machines: The Mechanics of New York Dada" (Ph.D. diss, University of Pennsylvania, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ Hartley, "American Primitives," 191.

Similarly, while straight photography has been excluded from traditional definitions of Dada, it stemmed from the same interest in a vernacular style. Both rejected romanticized subjects for a more objective approach to both subject and medium and overturned the expectations of more traditional styles.¹¹⁰ Existing between these spheres, photography was an artistic medium that operated without an academically-derived norm of “good taste” and which, therefore, was inherently lowbrow.¹¹¹ Thus, straight photography can be interpreted as a vernacular idiom, developed through the refinement of the process of recording and developing images in order to suit changing needs.¹¹²

In an essay of 1913, de Zayas had claimed photography as both “not Art” and as the future for artistic expression in the modern age. He projected that, as the modern artist became more scientific, the objectivity of the camera would more accurately reflect his vision than the subjectivity of painting, drawing, or sculpture.¹¹³ This was a commonly held opinion, Hartley’s characterization of cool detachment as a historically American parallels Stieglitz’s passionate rhetoric of 1916 which promoted straight photography (a move which signaled the continuing

¹¹⁰ Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* addressed the relationship between straight photography and the vernacular. Also, Henry Sayre included straight photography in his discussion of vernacular influences on American art in “American Vernacular: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetic of the Machine,” 315. Sayre, however, does not limit his study to Dada, but examines the international influence of the machine on post-WWI art movements and focuses largely on American Precisionism.

¹¹¹ Writing much later, Pierre Bourdieu characterized photography as an inherently “middle-brow” form of art, stating “the position of photography within the hierarchy of legitimacies, half-way between ‘vulgar’ practices ... explains, as we have seen, the ambiguity of the attitudes which it provokes.” Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 97. Bourdieu differentiated photography from the forms of high art, which had developed “legitimate authorities of legitimation,” (such as universities or academies) and also from more fashionable realms of design for which the criteria of judgment were arbitrary, including fashion and “other everyday aesthetic choices” (96).

¹¹² Furthermore, despite the relatively traditional nature of Stieglitz’s work, Joanne Lukitsh discussed how the medium of photography itself was of “low cultural character in “Alone on the Sidewalks of New York: Alfred Stieglitz’s Photography, 1892-1913,” in Patricia Johnston, ed., *Seeing High & Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 210-227.

¹¹³ Marius de Zayas, “Photography and Artistic-Photography,” *Camera Work* 42-43 (April 1913).

evolution of his anti-academic attitude).¹¹⁴ The last issue of *Camera Work* was dedicated to Paul Strand and the new vision suggestion by this new photographic style.

Further complicating such classifications, Sheeler and Strand both produced commercial work that intersected with their artistic production; indeed, Sheeler's commissioned commercial photographs were included in an exhibition at the Modern Gallery in March 1917, along with works by Schamberg and Strand.¹¹⁵ While formal concerns continued to interest Stieglitz, Sheeler, and Strand, their straightforward and documentary approach (using the machine of the camera with a commercial technique and claiming the results to be artistic) transgressed the boundaries of fine art. Emphasizing the mechanistic properties of the camera allied straight photography with the sparse aesthetic of machine paintings and drawings.

The relationship between Sheeler's photography and painting has been the subject of several texts.¹¹⁶ His near-transcription of photographs into paintings toyed with the boundaries of each medium, a subject which drew critical debate throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Consider his photograph *New York, Park Row Building* (1920) (figure 4.25) which was transformed into the drawing *New York* (figure 4.26) and the painting *Skyscrapers* (figure 4.27). Sheeler confounded the already troubled distinctions between painting and photography, refusing to follow convention. The critic Edwin Alden Jewell later derided these paintings as "tinted

¹¹⁴ Eugenia Parry, "999 Degrees of Will," in *The Photography of Alfred Stieglitz: Georgia O'Keeffe's Enduring Legacy*, ed. Therese Mulligan (Rochester, NY: George Eastman House, 2000) contended that Stieglitz's own photography bordered on the vernacular, writing "To those viewing American photography from outside American circles, notably Europe, and particularly France, Stieglitz's camera work does not always command the admiration that viewers from his own country seek to grant it. Many find the pictures merely pleasing exercises by an intelligent amateur." She based this assertion on "many conversations I have had for some thirty years with European colleagues." (41, note 54).

¹¹⁵ In addition to photographing buildings for architectural clients in Pennsylvania, Sheeler was hired as the commercial photographer for de Zayas's Modern Gallery in 1915. Dickran Tashjian, *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), 77.

¹¹⁶ Dickran Tashjian's essay "Precisionism," in *William Carlos Williams* addressed the exchange between these two media. See also Charles Brock, *Charles Sheeler: Across Media* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

photographs.”¹¹⁷ While the scholar Susan Fillin-Yeh has distanced Sheeler from Dada aesthetics, his close relationship with the avant-garde during the 1910s cannot be discounted in his choice of vernacular imagery or the development of his machine-inspired Precisionist style.¹¹⁸

What remained constant in this series, however, are the ordinary vistas Sheeler selected. Rather than depict iconic buildings of the New York skyline, he chose an unremarkable array of buildings and shot them from the rear to enhance their anonymity. Like his Doylestown pictures, Sheeler focused on ordinary elements of useful construction, using dramatic lighting and vantage points to enhance otherwise uninteresting details. When *New York, Park Row Building* was published in *Vanity Fair* in 1921, a caption explained,

The artist felt, in the subject before him, the beauty of the architectural forms that have been created in New York to meet the fundamental necessity of providing buildings with the greatest cubic area upon the smallest possible base. He feels that, because our skyscrapers and loft-building have been created with the adequate solution of a necessity in mind, they ... are our most vital contribution to architectural progress.¹¹⁹

The decision to depict modern skyscrapers was not driven by mere historicity, aesthetics, or the newness of the structures, but by their function: they were beautiful because they were designed in response to a real need. Although Sheeler’s paintings and photographs have been historicized as early stages of Precisionism for their streamlined design and detached execution, his appropriation of the vernacular and confounding of medium specificity suggests a closer alliance with the anti-academic and subversive qualities of New York Dada.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Edwin Alden Jewell, quoted in “Modern Museum Enshrines Charles Sheeler,” *Art Digest* 14 (15 October 1939): 6, reprinted in Brock, *Charles Sheeler: Across Media*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Although Susan Fillin-Yeh discussed the similarities between Sheeler’s work and Dada, she ultimately characterizes him as “hardly a Dada personality” in “Charles Sheeler’s 1923 “Self-Portrait,”” *Arts Magazine* 52, no 5 (1978): 106-9.

¹¹⁹ [Sheeler photo spread], *Vanity Fair* 15 (January 1921): 72.

¹²⁰ Wolfgang Born coined the term Precisionism in *Still Life Painting in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947) and expanded upon it the following year in *American Landscape Painting: An Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

Sheeler's 1920 partnership with Paul Strand on the movie known as *Manhatta* or *New York the Magnificent* (figures 4.28, 29) reflects a similar confounding of vernacular media and imagery.¹²¹ Working together, Sheeler and Strand had conflated high and low culture with their film project, which documented the city in moving images that were not unlike prior photographic efforts by both men. Due to this carefully composed quality, *Manhatta* has traditionally been examined from a formalist perspective, the similarities between its imagery and contemporary photographs have been noted.¹²² Indeed, filmed with Strand's newly acquired Akeley movie camera, which he later used for commercial work (including other documentary films for the mainstream media) *Manhatta* employed dramatic camera angles and dynamic lighting, pioneering development within the film industry.¹²³

The imagery is that of the city at work, unknowingly performing for the voyeuristic camera. It has been noted that nearly every scene includes billowing plumes of smoke, evidence of the energy generated by the masses of machines and laborers.¹²⁴ *Manhatta* was only loosely narrative. The film roughly captured the passage of one day, opening with the exhilarating onrush of commuters and ending with a view over the harbor to Staten Island. The purpose was experiential: by filming the dynamic vectors of the city, Sheeler and Strand created an image which captured some of the dizzying effects of the metropolis. There was no climatic scene, no center of attention. Instead, the daily life of the city was simply recorded.

¹²¹ Filmed in 1920, the film is one of the earliest examples of American production to be associated with Dada. Duchamp's interest in the movie industry may have influenced his decision to screen the movie at a 1922 Dada evening in Paris. In proper vernacular fashion, Duchamp selected the popular medium of movie-making rather than a work of painting or sculpture. Duchamp's choice to represent America to the Paris Dadaists through this film suggests that he considered its commercial quality to be representative of an American aesthetic. For Duchamp, this was an unusual level of involvement with the European Dadas and represents a curious moment of collaboration with Paris Dada.

¹²² Karen Lucic interprets *Manhatta* as Sheeler's most optimistic take on American industry in *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). Sarah Greenough discusses the project in *Paul Strand: An American Vision* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990).

¹²³ Jeanne Horak, "Modernist Perspectives and Romantic Desire: Manhatta," *Afterimage* 15 (November 1987): 14.

¹²⁴ Scott Hammen, "Sheeler and Strand's *Manhatta*: A Neglected Masterpiece," *Afterimage* 6 (January 1979): 7.

In America, Sheeler and Strand premiered the film in 1920 at the Rialto Theater on Broadway, a mainstream movie house. It was not billed as a feature, but included among the line-up of newsreels and shorts which preceded the main attraction.¹²⁵ During the seven-minute duration, it was reported that the orchestra played popular music, which was greatly enjoyed by the audiences.¹²⁶ Passages (most, but not all, taken from Walt Whitman's "Manhatta") were interspersed with the images.¹²⁷ The insertion of these title cards has been interpreted as detracting from the film's avant-garde status, making it more comprehensible, and therefore more marketable to an audience. But such an interpretation dismisses the populist intention of the film's creators, who carefully selected the Whitman quotations to underscore their film work.¹²⁸ Despite the avant-garde nature of the film, these title cards maintained accessibility for the general public, creating a successful compromise between the highbrow and the lowbrow.

Furthermore, while the alleged romanticism of Whitman's poetry has led some scholars to discredit the film's avant-garde qualities, this position dismisses the radical implications of Whitman for artists in the 1910s and 1920s.¹²⁹ A popular model of anarchist thought and art, the choice of Whitman implied a celebration of the vernacular, the ordinary aspects of urban life which formed the focus of the film. Additionally, Strand and Sheeler did not conceive of the movie as an artistic production. They attempted to find a commercial distributor for the film,

¹²⁵ In *Motion Picture News* 24, no 7 (6 August 1921): 756, cited in Horak, 9.

¹²⁶ *New York Evening Journal*, (25 July 1921): 8, cited in Horak, 9.

¹²⁷ Ruth Bohan, *Looking into Walt Whitman: American Art, 1850-1920* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). Bohan has written extensively on Whitman, although she considers his influence to be more spiritualistic and positive and dissociates him from Dadaism. In "Whitman's "Barbaric Yawp" and the Culture of New York Dada" in Martin Ignatius Gaughan, ed., *Dada New York: New World for Old* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). 35-57 she addresses the influence of Whitman on *The Soil*, but argues that "Coady would have undoubtedly rejected the label 'Dada'... considering it just another of the many "isms" against which he waged continual war."

¹²⁸ Hammen claimed that these titles were added after the completion of the movie, by the theater. This most unlikely theory is not repeated in other scholarship and is disputed by a letter from Paul Strand to Richard Shales that Sheeler had "proposed that we might make a kind of experimental film carried along by the titles which we took from Walt Whitman's poem." Paul Strand, letter to Richard Shales, 13 March 1975; quoted in Horak, which treats the title cards as an integral part of the film.

¹²⁹ Typical of this approach is Hammen, "Sheeler and Strand's *Manhatta*: A Neglected Masterpiece."

only to learn that most of the large movie houses had already compiled similar documentary projects.¹³⁰

Paul Strand's photographic images of the city similarly combined straight photography with mundane urban forms, replacing more heroic or romantic precedents, such as Stieglitz's 1910 *The City of Ambition* (figure 4.30).¹³¹ Beginning around 1914, Strand composed a series of images, including *City Hall Park, New York* (figure 4.31) and *Wall Street, New York* (figure 4.32). Finalizing his split from pictorialism, Stieglitz exhibited Strand's photographs in 1916 and published them in *Camera Work*. Introducing these photographs in the last issue of that journal, Stieglitz explained that Strand worked without a style: "The work is brutally direct. Devoid of all flim-flam; devoid of trickery and of any "ism;" devoid of any attempt to mystify an ignorant public," these photographs were the "direct expression of today."

In the essay, "Photography," Strand differentiated his work from the pictorialist aesthetic, which he characterized as "the expression of an impotent desire to paint."¹³² While Strand carefully separated straight photography from more traditional media as an objective yet artistic means of representing "Life," he also classified straight photography as inherently native and vernacular.¹³³ He argued that in exploring the mechanical process of photography, photographers had unconsciously discovered a modern, American idiom. In these works, he explained, "America has really been expressed in terms of America without the outside influence of Paris art schools or their dilute offspring here." Continuing, Strand explained the

¹³⁰ Paul Strand, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 3 August 1921, Center for Creative Photography; quoted in Horak, 13.

¹³¹ Greenough noted that Stieglitz altered his own style around 1916, beginning a new series of city photographs which were less romantic than his series of 1910; this change was most likely in response to the challenge issued by Strand's work. Sarah Greenough lecture, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 30 January 2011.

¹³² Paul Strand, "Photography," *Camera Work* 49/50 (1917): 3. Before this essay was published in *Camera Work*, it originally appeared in *The Seven Arts* as part of that magazine's cultural and revolutionary agenda.

¹³³ Strand, "Photography," 3.

development of straight photography in terms of a vernacular evolution in response to local conditions:

a small group of men and women worked with honest and sincere purpose, some instinctively and few consciously, but without any background of photographic or graphic formulae much less any cut and dried ideas of what is Art and what isn't; this innocence was their real strength. Everything they wanted to say, had to be worked out by their own experiments: it was born of actual living. In the same way the creators of our skyscrapers had to face the similar circumstance of no precedent, and it was through that very necessity of evolving a new form, both in architecture and photography that the resulting expression was vitalized.

Strand's exhibition at 291 also included photographs of people on the street which he had captured with a hidden camera (figures 4.33, 34). Although these shots were still composed (Strand was able to peer sideways into a viewer), the resulting images were less carefully controlled than those taken with traditional equipment.¹³⁴ Furthermore, as the subjects were unaware of the camera, they were unposed. When they were published, rather than sentimental titles, each one was simply labeled, "Photograph."¹³⁵ They were much more closely related to documentary or journalistic photographs than to fine art; by exhibiting them as such, Strand tested these distinctions. Furthermore, Stieglitz, who famously guarded the quality of photographic reproductions in *Camera Work*, explained that Strand's pictures were not printed on the usual tissue, "not because of economy, but because the tissue proofs we made of them introduced a factor which destroyed the directness of Mr. Strand's expression. In their presentation we have intentionally emphasized the spirit of their brutal directness."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Malcolm Daniel, *Stieglitz, Steichen, Strand* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), 16.

¹³⁵ Sarah Greenough discussed the implications of exhibiting these photographs in *Paul Strand: An American Vision* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 37.

¹³⁶ Alfred Stieglitz, "Our Illustrations," *Camera Work* 49/50 (1917): 36. Joanne Lukitsh pointed to a series of 1907 photographs, titled *Snapshot – From My Window, New York*; *Snapshot – From my Window, Berlin*, and *Snapshot – From the New York Central Yards* as early evidence of Stieglitz's interest in vernacular or commercial photography, given the amateur associations of the term "snapshot" in "Alone on the Sidewalks of New York: Alfred Stieglitz's

The focus on materiality with Strand's photographs presented them as objects in their own right rather than mere representations. Another influence of the vernacular on New York Dada production was in this awareness of materiality: the treatment of art objects as actual objects. Blurring the lines between the commercial and the artistic, a number of artists, including Mina Loy and Alfred Frueh, experimented with nontraditional materials or even with constructing objects that were nearer to craft than to fine art. Artists created goods that were intended for a mass or commercial market, which they then showed in an artistic context. This combination was not entirely new (Marius de Zayas had pursued his abstract caricatures while continuing to produce traditional images for newspapers and magazines), yet, around 1915, a number of New York artists began creating items that more directly mingled the commercial world and the realm of fine art.

Alfred Frueh, the caricaturist whose drawings had been exhibited at 291 in 1912, began producing a number of non-art objects, which he showed in galleries and to the general public. These included a series of mechanical toys, which were activated by springs as well as inventive paper sculptures and metal silhouettes of animals (figures 4.35, 36). His folded paper sculptures were reproduced in *Vanity Fair* in February 1915, where they were pronounced a "true work of art";¹³⁷ their first exhibition took place at the Montross Gallery in the spring of 1915. Indeed, throughout the teens, he created commercial art which he increasingly exhibit in galleries and alternative spaces. His folded animals received a great deal of critical attention for their "deft cubistic methods of folding;" made simply of paper they were still considered as "'sculptures'

Photography, 1892-1913," in Patricia Johnston, ed., *Seeing High & Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 210-227.

¹³⁷ *Vanity Fair* (February 1915): 30; quoted in Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America*, 119.

that will stand alone, and that have all the planes, angles, shadow modeling and volume of the third dimension that a statuette carved in the round has.”¹³⁸

While Frueh’s untraditional objects were enthusiastically received by the avant-garde, he also intended for his products to be available to a popular audience. Thus, in 1915 he debuted his folded paper animals at Montross (the gallery where Duchamp’s readymades debuted the following year), but in December of that year he filed a patent for the technique, intending to market them commercially. The Ullman Manufacturing Company produced a set of craft kits for children with colored papers printed with the folding patterns for various animal sculptures, conflating art and commerce.¹³⁹

Frueh designed children’s furniture as well, including painted wooden lamps based on fairy tales and a cradle, which he exhibited in the 1919 Society of Independent Artists show under the title *Camouflage* (figure 4.37). A combination of a carriage and a cradle, the structure was well-received. The *New York Times* reported that “it put the adult spectator at once in the wondering and curious mood of the infant,” although the critic also allowed that it was “a trifle ugly and vicious in spots.”¹⁴⁰ In the 1920s, artists of the Bauhaus created objects that merged fine art and craft, including a cradle (figure 4.38); however Frueh’s cradle was designed for a popular audience and was not concerned with design as a means of social reform in the manner of the German school. The essential structure of the object remained the same, his intention was to create a dynamic object that would brighten a nursery and appeal to the mainstream market.¹⁴¹

The poet Mina Loy also embraced the idea of creating products for a commercial market, designing household items for sale to the general public. Even as she was published in avant-

¹³⁸ Reviews from the *Boston Evening Transcript* (17 April 1915) and *Christian Science Monitor* (9 December 1915); reprinted in Thomas P. Bruhn, *The Art of Al Frueh* (Storrs, Conn: William Benton Museum of Art, 1983), 9-11.

¹³⁹ Bruhn, 13.

¹⁴⁰ “Notes on Current Art,” *New York Times* (30 March 1919).

¹⁴¹ Review from *The Philadelphia Record* (5 April 1919); reprinted in Bruhn, 13.

garde poetry magazines such as *Rogue* and *Others* and commonly named as an exemplar of the iconoclastic artist, she also created and sold handmade lampshades, setting up a workshop to facilitate their production.¹⁴² Attaching cut forms of sailing ships around the perimeter of the shade, when illuminated the silhouettes created the illusion of movement (figure 4.39). Juliette Gleizes later recalled that they “had a fairy-tale feeling, like their maker.”¹⁴³ Later incarnations, including birdcages and floral arrangements, were shown in decorative arts exhibitions; when they were photographed for *Arts and Decoration* in 1927, they were misattributed to “Nina Loy,” and no mention of her artistic or poetic background was mentioned.¹⁴⁴ The lampshades were valued for their inventiveness and commercial potential, not for their association with her fame (or notoriety).

At the height of her painting career, in 1916, Loy’s friend, the Futurist painter Frances Simpson Stevens began creating a series of papier-mâché heads which functioned as hat stands, but which were painted with hair, make-up, clothing, and accessories (figure 4.40). Stevens used the ordinary form of the hat stand, a basic piece of showroom equipment, to conflate elite socialites with the base materialism responsible for their wealth. Predating similar works by Sophie Taeuber-Arp (figure 4.41), they reveal an interest in the mechanomorphic form of the mannequin, yet unlike the later Dada mannequins of Berlin, they were not intended to suggest the destructive dehumanization of war.¹⁴⁵ While Taeuber-Arp’s *Dada Head* remained a relatively private portrait of her husband, Stevens’s examples were created for a public audience in a commercial atmosphere. Like de Zayas’s popular *Up and Down Fifth Avenue* panorama of

¹⁴² Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 224

¹⁴³ Juliette Gleizes, letter to Carolyn Burke, 5 April 1977; quoted in Burke, 224.

¹⁴⁴ "Prize Lamp Shades from Nina [*sic*] Loy of Paris," *Arts and Decoration* (July 1927): 56.

¹⁴⁵ For a brief overview of the mannequin in European Dada, see Annabelle Turkis, “Poupées/Mannequins/Marionnettes,” in Laurent Le Bon, Leah Dickerman, and Anne Umland, eds., *Dada* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2005), 816-819 or Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

1910, Stevens's work bore the features of society ladies and gentlemen, offering a light critique of high society.¹⁴⁶

Stylishly clad and bearing wide smiles, Stevens's heads were employed in shop windows, "for the use of haberdashers, hatters, and hair-cutters."¹⁴⁷ *Vanity Fair* satirically recommended that the heads could have served as models for society photographers who spent their evenings capturing the comings and goings of this fashionable group.¹⁴⁸ *Cartoons Magazine* also profiled the series, underscoring the vernacular lineage of this form of figural decoration: "French sailors of the old school used to shape the ends of beams to hold their full-dress caps in shape, and for decoration they would sometimes cut pictures of faces from the newspapers and paste them on the beams," explains the article.¹⁴⁹ It continued, adding, "The same idea was adopted by the French soldiers recently, when, to relieve the monotony of their groundhog life, they carved heads from solid chunks of wood and painted them." These amateur carvings were credited as the inspiration for Stevens's papier-mâché versions, which literally brought together elements of high culture and craft.

In these objects, which straddled artistic and commercial realms, artists subverted the expectations of fine art with the use of common materials and craft techniques. Although they were occasionally shown in the context of galleries, the work of Frueh, Loy, and Stevens was also designed to appeal to a mass market. This strategic challenge to the elitist channels for the distribution of fine art was another influence of the vernacular, to be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁶ The development of the mannequin form in French art is traced in Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man: The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif* (London: Associated University Presses, 1991).

¹⁴⁷ "Miss Frances Stevens' Latest Modelings of Notable New Yorkers," *Vanity Fair* (1917): 63.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ "A Young Lady Who Makes Faces," *Cartoons* 12 (1917): 115.

CHAPTER 5 THE VERNACULAR AS STRATEGY

Based upon the anarchist criticisms of the elitist art market, New York Dada worked to subvert the traditional gallery system, creating outlets that employed the effective tools of the vernacular mass media and popular entertainment. Critics like Robert Coody, Alfred Stieglitz, and Marius de Zayas recognized that for a truly American culture to emerge, the methods used to disseminate art needed to be revolutionized. The anarchistic cultural spirit in New York envisioned significant transformations in the production and circulation of art. Its contours spread beyond the canonical Dada of Duchamp, Picabia, and Man Ray, to include the networks of artists, galleries, and critics who attempted to reimagine the art world. These artists, writers, and gallerists turned to methods of circulating lowbrow culture, notably the popular press and unconventional exhibitions, which took place outside of the traditional gallery space, as a means of revitalizing the relationship between art and the general public.¹

The ideal medium for Dada in New York was the periodical, which mirrored significant aspects of the urban experience: ephemeral, radical, and limited to a select audience, it replicated the quick-moving inner circles of the New York art world. Most were cheaply printed, refusing commodification, but others were carefully reproduced and hand-colored on expensive stock, then printed in large quantities which kept them from becoming precious. Complicating traditional notions of uniqueness and multiplicity, many were single issues, created only to be

¹ Dada periodicals are the subject of Dawn Ades, ed., *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006); Emily Hage, "New York and European Dada Art Journals, 1916-1926: International Venues of Exchange" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2005); and Victoria Kingham, "Commerce, Little Magazines and Modernity: New York, 1915-1922" (Ph.D. Diss., University of De Montfort, 2009).

swept away by the next iteration. These Dada publications did not proselytize to attract a new audience, but were performative pieces of art in themselves, often circulated within an insular avant-garde community. Adopting the look and the language of the mass media, even exploiting the very American aesthetic of advertising, allowed artists to earnestly connect with the commercial vernacular, but still employ a level of irony to subvert identification with the traditional press and to critique high culture.

“In the development of the vernacular, the most serviceable vehicle of all was journalism,” explained John Kouwenhoven. “No literary vehicle is more flexible... and none responds more directly to the tastes and preferences of its readers.”² Revolting against the traditional gallery system and its elitist approach to exhibiting highbrow art, New York Dada artists sought alternative means of producing and distributing art. Creating a series of little magazines, they found an affordable option which also bridged the gap between highbrow and lowbrow culture. In matters of style and syntax, their publications drew more from the popular media than from the traditional fine art magazine.

To these activists, the gallery system was a target of much disgust, as it seemed a covert and corrupt connection between commercial and artistic interests: for them, dealers became taste-makers, status wars drove prices, and prices dictated tastes.³ The entire system perpetuated a bourgeois approach to art that relied on historicism and taste. As a protest to galleries that sold traditional fine art based on European and academic standards, new gallery spaces, such as Marius de Zayas’s Modern Gallery and Robert Coady’s Washington Square Gallery, formed to expose the blatant commercialism which tacitly existed among the supposedly ivory tower,

² John Kouwenhoven, “To Make All Things New” in *Made in America: The Arts in Modern Civilization* (Garden City: W. W. Norton & Company, 1948), 130.

³ Some examples of the disdain for the fine art market include Benjamin de Casseres, “The Art ‘Puffer’,” *Camera Work* 28 (Oct 1909): 31 and Paul Haviland, “Art as a Commodity,” *Camera Work* 34/35 (April – July 1911): 68.

conventional networks of galleries and collectors. As alternative exhibition societies, including the People's Art Guild and the Society of Independent Artists, sought to reintegrate art into popular culture, critics and gallerists who sought to isolate fine art from everyday life and to create new hierarchies of modern art, such as Willard Huntington Wright's 1916 Forum Exhibition, came under dadaist attack.

While the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition was an attempt to redefine the exhibition space with its alphabetical hanging system and mantra of "No Jury -- No Prizes," it still produced perhaps the most famous example of censorship during this period - the suppression of Duchamp's *Fountain* (figure 5.1).⁴ Modeled on the French Salon des Independants "as nearly as the changed conditions of this country will allow," the Society of Independent Artists was founded to encourage experimentation and foster new discoveries.⁵ The groundwork for the Society of Independent Artists was laid by a coalition of American and European artists; led by Walter Pach, they included William Glackens, Maurice Prendergast, Jacques Villon, Schamberg, Picabia, Gleizes, and Duchamp.⁶ The anarchist sympathies of many of these figures (especially the latter four) informed their efforts to establish an exhibition society unfettered by conventions or rules.

The episode of Duchamp's *Fountain*, has become a centerpiece of Dada studies, however, its notoriety has overshadowed considerations of how the environment of New York Dada influenced its aborted exhibition and its ultimate dissemination through *The Blind Man*. When

⁴ Francis Naumann has written most extensively on the Society of Independent Artists exhibition of 1917 in two articles, "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independents, Part I," *Artforum* 17, no 6 (February 1979): 34-39 and "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independents, Part II," *Artforum* 17, no 8 (April 1979): 49-53. For the most comprehensive treatment of Duchamp's *Fountain*, see William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp/Fountain* (Houston: Houston Fine Art Press, 1989).

⁵ Henry McBride, "News and Comments in the World of Art," *The Sun* (17 December 1916): 12.

⁶ Clark S. Marlor, *The Society of Independent Artists: The Exhibition Record, 1917-1944* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1984), 3.

the show opened in April, the existence of *Fountain* was known only to the conspirators, the board of directors, Alfred Stieglitz and a select few sympathizers. There are several accounts of how the urinal, submitted under the pseudonym Richard Mutt of Philadelphia, was received and rejected among the board of directors; its ultimate fate is unknown. We do know, however, that on 19 April 1917 the *Fountain* was safely housed at the 291 Gallery, where Stieglitz invited the critic Henry McBride to see both the object and his photograph of it (figure 5.2).⁷ While Stieglitz probably remained unaware of the true identity of Mr. Mutt, he knew that Duchamp was involved, along with Henri-Pierre Roché, John Covert, and Beatrice Wood.⁸ Wood later remembered that Stieglitz was “amused” by the exercise and believed that it would help to fight narrow-mindedness and bigotry among American audiences.⁹ The *Fountain* would not become truly public until it was published in the second issue of *The Blind Man* (May 1917).

In addition to analyzing several key exhibitions, staged in New York during the 1910s, this chapter will examine the Dadaist use of little magazines, periodicals, and the mainstream press. This activity was not confined to the art world, but often spilled into the mainstream media; thus, while Robert Coody voiced his cultural critique in the pages of *The Soil*, he also often wrote open letters to Henry McBride, the art critic for the *New York Sun*. In these exchanges, Coody deliberately sought a larger and more mainstream audience than the circulation of his own magazine could provide. For Coody, attacking the present was a necessary stage of demolition, a need recognized by sympathetic critics. McBride, who often championed Coody in his columns, defended the publisher, writing: “The fact is, the *Soil* is constructive as is no other art publication

⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Henry McBride, 19 April 1917, Henry McBride papers, Archives of American Art.

⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Georgia O’Keeffe, 19 August 1917, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

⁹ Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1985), 30.

upon this side of the water.”¹⁰ The poet Alfred Kreymborg wrote of Coady, “He is attempting and actually doing as dangerous a bit of propaganda as any man, in his particular field, in this sleepy town of ours, or for that matter, our sleepy country.”¹¹ This chapter will explore how these debates moved beyond the gallery and into mainstream culture by adopting the techniques employed by non-art enterprises.

This experimental spirit encouraged gallerists to rethink the relationship created between exhibited art and the public. For example, as a complement to Stieglitz’s “291” gallery, Marius de Zayas and Agnes Ernst Meyer embarked on another experimental venture in 1915: the opening of the Modern Gallery.¹² Unlike the anti-commercial spirit of “291,” the Modern Gallery was intended to compete directly with the numerous galleries that had emerged in the post-Armory period. Stieglitz was a notorious difficult and fickle dealer, so de Zayas’s gallery was to provide a blatantly commercial outlet. The gallery also allowed Stieglitz to focus on American artists, while de Zayas imported work from war-torn Europe through his contacts, and those of his partner Paul Haviland.

A comparison of the physical spaces of the Modern Gallery and “291” supports the divide between the commercial and laboratory atmospheres (figures 5.3, 4, 5). Stieglitz’s gallery was located on the fourth floor of an older building, contemporary photographs reveal a calm, muted gallery space.¹³ In contrast, de Zayas’s Modern Gallery was located on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street, the intersection of two major thoroughfares and across from the New York Public Library. Furthermore, the Modern Gallery was dominated by a large row

¹⁰ Henry McBride, “News and Comments in the World of Art,” *The Sun* (11 March 1917): 12.

¹¹ Alfred Kreymborg, “The New Washington Square,” *New York Morning Telegraph* (6 December 1914).

¹² Agnes Ernst Meyer and her husband, Eugene, provided financial support for the gallery.

¹³ Gabrielle-Bufferet Picabia described the location in “Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp” (1949) reprinted in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1951), 262.

of windows that opened to the street below and suggesting a more open commerce between the spheres of art and daily life.

The Modern Gallery opened with the cautious blessing of Stieglitz, whose reservations were financial rather than philosophical. In his correspondence with de Zayas, Stieglitz repeatedly discussed the financial burden of operating a gallery, warning, “As for the new gallery the vital question to be considered is first, second & third – How much will it cost & where will the money come from.”¹⁴ Despite his concerns, during the early months of the gallery, Stieglitz came during his lunch hour to mind the business.¹⁵ It seems likely that Meyer encouraged de Zayas to split with Stieglitz after the final issue of *291* in February 1916, but that this clear division never truly came to pass.¹⁶ Although the friendship between de Zayas and Stieglitz eventually waned, they remained cordial.¹⁷

Stieglitz publically promoted the opening of the Modern Gallery. While the magazine *291* published a short announcement of the gallery, which merely stated that it continued the work of “291,” *Camera Work* printed a longer statement, which explained the distinction between the

¹⁴ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Marius de Zayas, 26 August 1915, reprinted in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, Francis Naumann, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 352.

¹⁶ A central point in scholarship on this division is based on an undated letter written by Agnes Meyer to de Zayas. In sharp language she wrote, “My advice to you is: Have nothing more to do with Stieglitz. Never see him, never think of him. That chapter should be closed for all of us. To have known S. is very beneficial, to let him hang on is sure destruction,” reprinted in Ileana Leavens, *From "291" To Zurich: The Birth of Dada* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1983): 125. Ileana Leavens has dated this letter to 1915, which cannot be, since the letter suggests a split between the Modern Gallery and “291”; the Modern Gallery did not open its doors until November 1915 and relations between the two galleries were collaborative for the first few months. While the relationship eventually cooled between de Zayas and Stieglitz, this appears to have begun well after the Picabia’s object portraits were published.

¹⁷ Francis M. Naumann, “Marius de Zayas y Alfred Stieglitz Se Separan: La Publicación de 291 y la formación de Modern Gallery,” in *Marius de Zayas: Un Destierro Moderno* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, 2009), 77-99. The publication ended its run in February 1916; the Modern Gallery would struggle to survive until 1918, in part closing because de Zayas was lax in his accounting and sales were slow. Doug Hyland, *Marius De Zayas: Conjuror of Souls* (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1981), 48-9. The remaining copies of the defunct *291* were offered for sale in the final 1917 issue of *Camera Work*, before being sold to a rag picker. Alfred Stieglitz, letter to American Waste Paper Co., 12 April 1917, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

two spaces and joined them together in the promotion of modern art in America. Contemplating the work of the 291 gallery, it claimed, “We have already demonstrated that it is possible to avoid commercialism by eliminating it.”¹⁸ Continuing, it read:

But this demonstration will be infertile unless it be followed by another: namely, that the legitimate unction of commercial intervention – that of paying its own way while bringing the producers and consumers of art into a relation of mutual service – can be freed from the chicanery of self-seeking.

... It is the purpose of the Modern Gallery to serve the producers of these works by bringing them into business touch with the purchasing public on terms of mutual justice and mutual self-respect.¹⁹

The concept of “mutual justice and mutual self-respect” recalls the language of Action d’Art and their attempts to subvert the elitist gallery system by bringing artists and the public together in an open commercial exchange. Given the potential for de Zayas’s recent contact with the anarchist group Action d’Art, it is entirely possible that the Modern Gallery was inspired by the guild “Les Forgerons.”²⁰ Founded in 1911 by members of the Action d’Art, this group was intended as a means to disseminate art to the masses in a blatantly commercial environment, as opposed to the conventional gallery system. In February 1913 they held their first public exhibition. It is possible that de Zayas would have heard of the guild while in Paris or through his contacts there. The aim was twofold – the liberation of the artist from the exploitative structure of traditional galleries and the “elevation of people through art.”²¹

An undated manuscript for this announcement further explained the commercial necessity of the Modern Gallery:

¹⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, “291’ and the Modern Gallery” *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Paul Desanges, “Chronique D’une Communauté Militante: Les Forgerons (1911-1920),” *Le Mouvement social* 91 (April – June 1975) : 35-58.

²¹ “Un jeune foyer d’Action d’Art: La Guilde ‘Les Forgerons’,” *Action d’Art* (1 March 1913): 4.

... the purpose is not only to serve the public but also, (having determined that it is possible to avoid commercialism, we are now going to see what frank commercialism can accomplish) through the material assistance of modern artists of merit to further the development of contemporary art both here and abroad.²²

In this unpublished section, the author (presumably de Zayas or Stieglitz) acknowledged the need for “frank commercialism” for the benefit, not only of the public, but also the artist. In this new model of exhibition and dissemination, activists like de Zayas desired a greater transparency about the relationship between artists, their work, and the buying public. The open commercial spirit of the Modern Gallery was intended to dispel the distinction between highbrow art and lowbrow marketing, as is reflected in this statement.

A similarly frank and innovative exhibition venue also opened in 1915, when John Weichsel founded the People’s Art Guild to circumvent the commercial gallery system altogether.²³ Weichsel believed that under the status quo, “The public, in the main, follows the critics; and the art galleries, which are commercial institutions, adhere to public taste;”²⁴ if left to govern itself, the art market hinged upon the opinions of a few critics, who were typically conservative in their aesthetic judgments. The Guild formed as an alternative to these traditional galleries, bringing avant-garde art into the settlement houses and tenements of the Lower East Side with the aim of exposing a new population to interesting art and providing artists with direct contact to new markets. Membership was open to any artist who paid his/her dues.²⁵ The organization mirrored

²² Marius de Zayas papers, Columbia University, New York.

²³ The anarchist sympathies of John Weichsel are discussed at length in Chapter 2.

²⁴ John Weichsel; quoted in Willard Huntington Wright, “The Aesthetic Struggle in America,” *The Forum* 55 (1916): 201.

²⁵ In November 1915, Alfred Stieglitz wrote to Weichsel, “I would love to help you not only through my personality, but with what is even more necessary, through the aid of actual cash.” He apologized that his debts prevented him from contributing then, but added in a postscript, “Perhaps after the first of the year I may be able to join the society, to prove, if proof is necessary, that I have courage besides sympathy.” Alfred Stieglitz, letter to John Weichsel, 8 November 1915. John Weichsel papers, Archives of American Art. At some point Stieglitz did join the Guild, as he exhibited with them in 1917.

the process of vernacular design: it evolves from the ground-up and was highly pluralistic in style. It was anarchistic in spirit, if not explicitly political, with the express purpose of bringing “art to the people.”²⁶ The Guild was not unlike the Ferrer Center (where Weichsel taught evening classes). As its prospectus explained, part of its mission was the creation of “art-classes, study-groups and workrooms in schools, settlements and artists’ studios, all of which will ultimately find an organic harmony through a sufficient number of art centers located near the homes of the people.”²⁷

Between 1915 and 1918, the People’s Art Guild organized small exhibitions which were held throughout the immigrant ghettos of the Lower East Side.²⁸ The largest show of the Guild’s history took place in May 1917, at the Jewish Daily Forward building on East Broadway. The show was part of a larger fund-raising campaign to establish the East Side Art Center, which was to become an exhibition space, art school, and studio for artists and members of the community.²⁹ Bringing together a wide range of artists, the show included works by Joseph Stella, John Sloan, Stanton MacDonald-Wright, Robert Henri, Alfred Stieglitz, Marsden Hartley, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Marin and others. In a time of increased xenophobia, the Forward exhibition was decidedly global in scope, bringing together “every one of the nationalities composing our body politic, for the greater glory of its civilization... as a token of reverence to the traditions of the district, and as an expression of love for living art.”³⁰ The

²⁶ Theresa Bernstein, *William Meyerowitz: The Artist Speaks* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1986), 9.

²⁷ “The People’s Art Guild: A Prospectus [1916],” The John Weichsel papers, Archives of American Art.

²⁸ John Weichsel, “The People’s Art Guild” (M.A. Thesis, Hunter College, 1965).includes a comprehensive list of these shows. This MA thesis by Weichsel’s grandson is a comprehensive source of information; a copy appears in the Archives of American Art papers.

²⁹ John Weichsel, brochure for The Exhibition at the Forward Building, John Weichsel papers, Archives of American Art.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

exhibition was a popular success, drawing some 500 visitors daily.³¹ One contributor remembered seeing “long lines of workers patiently waiting, after long hours in the sweatshops, to see the paintings by American and immigrant artists.”³² In addition to bringing the largely immigrant residents of these settlement houses into contact with modern art, the Guild hoped to open new markets to progressive artists, especially through the sale of affordable artworks and prints.

An important aspect of this mission was the organization of lectures and workshops which brought the artists into the community; since “people are better judges of human nature and strength of personality than they are of pictures,” these events gave people the “opportunity of hearing ideas from the painters themselves instead of reading them in the distorted articles of our journalists.”³³ A series of Sunday afternoon lectures and discussion sessions accompanied the Forward exhibition, hosting critics such as Henry McBride, Charles Caffin, and Frederick Gregg.³⁴ The intent was to bring criticism, as well as art, into direct contact with the masses. The Forward Exhibition of May 1917, however, was one of the last major shows organized by the People’s Art Guild and plans to construct the East Side Art Center were abandoned.

At no time, however was the Guild organized as a Progressive social aid society. Its intent was to enrich both high and low culture by bringing them in closer contact, as confirmed by Weichsel’s grandson: “The Guild was never intended as a reform movement, for example, nor did it ever function as such. ... In fact, it was implicitly critical in its policy statement about reformist art programs, as supported from ‘above’ by wealthy ‘benefactors’.”³⁵ The anarchistic

³¹ John Weichsel, letter to Albert J. Kennedy, 19 October 1919; quoted in Gail Stavitsky, "John Weichsel and the People's Art Guild," *Archives of American Art Journal* 31 (1991): 17.

³² Abbo Ostrowsky papers, Archives of American Art; quoted in *Ibid.*

³³ Wright, "The Aesthetic Struggle in America," 203

³⁴ Weichsel, "The People's Art Guild," 34-5.

³⁵ *Idem*, 46.

disdain for the top-down, authoritarian charity of reform societies is made clear. Weichsel's grandson explained that "There is no evidence of political affiliation on the part of the Guild, nor is there indication even of political sympathy or aligned. This is not to say that Weichsel himself was unconscious of the political and social currents of the time."³⁶

While the People's Art Guild was socially conscious in its drive for alternative spaces to exhibition art, political motivations were not a necessary component of this anti-institutional impulse. The Guild sought a middle ground between highbrow culture and the lowbrow elements of daily life. If art was to remain relevant in the modern era, it needed to adapt to the modern condition – it needed to openly accept its commercial aspects and participate in popular culture. Sadakichi Hartmann had presaged this in 1912, writing: "there is something wrong in the present distribution of art products." He suggested that movies held potential for artists, who could bring new artistry to the medium and exploit its popularity to reach a broader audience: "Exhibitions are naught but battlefields for the survival of the fittest, and museums the morgues for pictures that are unsuitable or too unwieldy for private possession. Pictures and books should be owned by the people."³⁷

Another alternative to the gallery system was proposed by Frances Simpson Stevens in the pages of *Vanity Fair*.³⁸ "On the Renting of Pictures" proposed a system of patronage and dissemination which eliminated private ownership, with a percentage of the rental fees being perpetually the claim of the artist-owner. Stevens believed this change would "kill off bad artists and help struggling good ones to success." Since collectors "are proud of what they own often

³⁶ Idem, 43-4. The political context of the mid-1960s must be weighed into our consideration of this statement; in the height of the Cold War, Weichsel protected the legacy of The People's Art Guild by not directly attributing it to a radical political agenda.

³⁷ Sadakichi Hartmann, "The Esthetic Significance of the Motion Picture," *Camera Work* 38 (April 1912): 19-21.

³⁸ Frances Simpson Stevens, "On the Renting of Pictures," *Vanity Fair* (August 1916). This proposition has not previously been discussed in the literature on Stevens.

for reasons which have little or nothing to do with aesthetic sense,” they would be replaced by renters who would choose paintings in order to be better educated and who would be more likely to take risks on new styles. Artists would have the opportunity to circulate their work to different markets and would be able to guard their own self-interest, while galleries would continue to sell the “works of painters about whom there is no controversy, the makers of the pretty things out of which the greater part of the profits is procured.” As a result, good art would be available to a wider audience, and short-term ownership would be affordable for a greater percentage of the population, allowing people to develop a more contemporary taste, independent of institutional dictates.

Guido Bruno provided another alternative forum for art in his “Garret,” a small exhibition space on Washington Square which operated from 1914 until November 1916 above a candy shop;³⁹ the store was infamous for its loud advertisements which included billboard signs plastered to the exterior. These placards were deliberately conceived as overtly commercial advertisements and designed to attract an audience unaccustomed to visiting galleries. In order to get them to “Stop and look!,” Bruno explained, such measures were necessary.

The huge signs on the part of the garret which faces Washington square were pointed out to me as undignified and unaesthetic... But the knocker would never sound if I did not tell them all in big legible letters that there is a Bruno’s Garret and that they are invited to come in.⁴⁰

³⁹ The closing of the gallery was announced by Bruno in “The Passing of Bruno’s Garret,” in *Fragments from Greenwich Village* (New York: Guido Bruno, 1921), 94-5. This self-published anthology republished a collection of essays from his various defunct magazines.

⁴⁰ Guido Bruno, “My Garret,” *Greenwich Village* 2, no 1 (23 June 1915). The most extensive scholarship on Bruno was completed by his nephew, Arnold I. Kisch, *The Romantic Ghost of Greenwich Village: Guido Bruno in His Garret* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 1976), 36.

While Bruno was derided as the “Czar of Charlatanism,”⁴¹ he was thoroughly engaged with a broad swathe of the avant-garde in New York and his exhibition practices were informed by his political sympathies; as discussed in chapter 2, he published a number of inexpensive chapbooks which introduced socially radical writers and critics to the public, including Alfred Kreymborg and Oscar Wilde.⁴² These progressive tendencies also extended to his gallery schedule, which opened with the Comstock raid sketches of Clara Tice. Other unconventional shows included the etchings of Bernhardt Wall, the “postcard king” designer of souvenir postcards and an exhibition of several hundred bookplates.⁴³ Like Stieglitz’s 291 Gallery, Bruno’s interest was not financial: the works were not offered for sale. In an early notice, a reporter for the *New York Times* explained that the gallery was

a home for the drawings of villagers which do not appeal to more commercialized tastes... there is a legend that a rich man from Fifth Avenue, who came down in a limousine with the object of purchasing the collection wholesale, was gently but firmly refused admission.⁴⁴

This anti-commercial attitude was doubtless influenced by Bruno’s anarchist sympathies and the example of Alfred Stieglitz, who congratulated him for his efforts.⁴⁵ Like the People’s Art Guild, Bruno intended to create populist shows that appealed to a general audience while

⁴¹ Cited by Jan Seidler Ramirez, “The Tourist Trade Takes Hold,” in *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture*, Rick Beard and Leslie Cohen Berlowitz, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 375-6.

⁴² Bruno eventually published at least seven different magazines, including *Bruno’s Weekly*, *Bruno’s Chapbook*, *Bruno’s*, *Bruno’s Bohemia*, *Bruno’s Review of Two Worlds*, and *Bruno’s Review of Life, Love, and Letters*, in addition to the more well-known *Greenwich Village*. Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich, *The Little Magazines: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947). The authors claimed “no other man has actually begun and edited so many little magazines, or done so with such wholesale disregard of the proprieties of the publishing world” (28).

⁴³ Kisch, 37.

⁴⁴ “Clara Tice Lights Guido Bruno Garret,” *New York Times* (11 May 1915).

⁴⁵ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Guido Bruno, 25 February 1915, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL. Stieglitz bought several copies of *Greenwich Village* to send to friends in New York and abroad, writing “The number looks very much alive and I look forward to reading it at the first opportunity I get.”

exposing the masses to the principles of modern art.⁴⁶ He explained, “The museum is a mausoleum of art. The art objects there seem to be buried forever in costly catacombs, with beautiful monuments and tombstones, but buried away from our world, separated from life forever; yet the beautiful things done by past generations should be a part of our own throbbing life.”⁴⁷ Further underscoring the outsider nature of his gallery, he frequently exhibited the work of unknown or unprofessional artists: he later claimed that of the fourteen exhibitions during the 1915-16 season, “none of the exhibitors had put their works of art on exhibition before.”⁴⁸

Rather than the elitist space of the gallery or museum, Bruno sought to demystify art by showing its intersection with the commercial or lowbrow elements of daily life. As one reporter wrote:

One of Mr. Bruno’s pet ideas is the spreading of good pictures among the commonest people by getting prints of the best works hung in grocery stores, cigar stores, shoe-shining stands, barber shops, and other places where the proletariat go constantly and where their eyes usually meet at present only cheap and worthless lithographs or reproductions of pictures of no value.⁴⁹

Similarly, Robert Coady sold inexpensive reproductions in his Washington Square Gallery with the same intention of reaching an audience that were unable to afford the original artwork on sale. Selling copies of works by unknown artists (as well as old masters) “for a ridiculously low sum,” Coady hoped that students would study both historical and contemporary art and to teach themselves without relying on academic instruction.⁵⁰ In the space of the gallery, “the student ... is encouraged to be his own critic. Academic standards, even of the latest cut and description are eliminated, and with academic standards, academic influences.” Akin to the

⁴⁶ Kisch, 34.

⁴⁷ Unknown clipping, quoted in Kisch, 34.

⁴⁸ Guido Bruno, “Greenwich Village Attacked,” in *Fragments from Greenwich Village*, 88-90.

⁴⁹ Unknown clipping from *New York Times*, quoted in Kisch, 36.

⁵⁰ Kreyemborg, “The New Washington Square.”

artistic endeavors of the anarchist Ferrer Center, it was hoped that aesthetic experimentation would lead to further revolution. Readers of the *Morning Telegraph* were urged: “Take down your copies of Whistler and Manet, and Velazquez, if only for a time, and air your walls with a few Rousseaus. They are an inspiration even in reproduction.”⁵¹

In Coady’s view, the American spirit could not be strictly defined by the limits of geography or chronology.⁵² Thus, in the first issue of *The Soil* (December 1916), Coady paired an excerpt from Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” with a contemporary pendant, written by Arthur Cravan:

... New York! New York! I should like to inhabit you!
I see there science married
To industry,
In an audacious modernity,
And in the palaces,
Globes,
Dazzling to the retina
By their ultra-violet rays;
The American telephone,
And the softness
Of elevators....⁵³

In this text, Cravan defined the experience of New York through its vernacular elements, not unlike the poetry of Florine Stettheimer discussed in Chapter 4. Cravan had been fascinated with America and American culture since his travel experiences as a young man. Indeed, in 1909, his first published piece of writing was an essay entitled “To Be or Not to Be... American:” a text which listed the required attributes for “citizenship,” most of which were based upon physical prowess. For Cravan, as for many Europeans who came to America during the 1910s,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Jay Bochner does a disservice to Coady in alleging that Arthur Cravan “dominate[d] the pages of *The Soil*” in *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz’s New York Secession* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 181.

⁵³ Arthur Cravan, “New York,” *The Soil* 1 (December 1916): 36.

Americanness was something that could be assumed or assembled, not a matter of citizenship or birthright.

In its coverage of popular culture and its emphasis on the vernacular culture which was developing in America, *The Soil* sought to bring these elements to the attention of the critics and the avant-garde. McBride, ever sympathetic to Coady's mission, explained that the magazine celebrated a emergent grass-roots culture as a source of American identity. "Its text," wrote McBride in the *New York Sun*, "specializes upon the significant things that the masses of the people themselves are ratifying as beautiful in advance of the critics. The *Soil* has no objection to the movies, it has no objection to boxing matches, to department stores, to skyscrapers, cabarets, machines and speed in general."⁵⁴

This affirmation of vernacular and popular culture informed Coady's criticism of traditional exhibitions as an elitist and falsely authoritarian means of disseminating art. It is important to note that not all modern artists and gallerists participated in the revolutionary spirit of New York Dada. The controversy which arose over the Forum Exhibition provides a useful counterexample to dadaist exhibition strategies.⁵⁵ Known as the "Forum" Exhibition because it was sponsored by *Forum* magazine, the show opened at the Anderson Galleries on 13 March 1916, and brought together a range of American artists, selected by the art committee of Willard Huntington Wright, Dr. Christian Brinton, Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Henri, Dr. John Weichsel, and W. H. de B. Nelson, the editor of *International Studio*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ McBride, "News and Comments in the World of Art," 12.

⁵⁵ Dennis Raverty, "A Split among the Moderns: Avant-Garde Paradigms at the Time of the Forum Exhibition of 1916," *Rutgers Art Review* 15 (1995): 59-63 provides a chronicle of the debate between Wright and Coady which was waged through the press without considering the Dada nature of Coady's objections.

⁵⁶ *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters*, William Huntington Wright, ed. (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1916).

Initial press for the exhibition positioned the group as anti-establishment, *The Sun* reporting that “there is the prevalent suspicion, too, that this group may be the long heralded opposition society to the academy,” since the majority of the committee was “widely known as standing for almost anything in art.”⁵⁷ Yet, Wright’s role as the generating force behind the show was an early indicator that the Forum Exhibition would be guided by more traditional notions of taste, albeit with modern examples hung on the walls. Shortly before the opening, Wright had published an article in *Forum* which lambasted “artistic anarchy” and charged that the open pluralism of the People’s Art Guild was depriving modern art of serious consideration.⁵⁸ To counter this radicalism, he recruited six experts, who were presumably independent judges of contemporary production. In the ultimate formation of the show, however, Wright’s vision dominated, as he was responsible for securing *Forum* as a sponsor (he also reviewed the exhibition for the magazine), wrote both the introduction and the lengthiest foreword to the catalogue, and edited the statements submitted by the artists.⁵⁹

Wright’s introduction to the catalogue, “What is Modern Painting,” established his intention to create a system of judgment for modern art, and having established such criteria, legitimize modernism.⁶⁰ This institutionalization was not only counter to the emergent Dada spirit in New York, it created tension between Wright and the anarchistic members of the selection committee. Wright linked these modern American painters to a lineage which consisted entirely of European Old Masters, with no investigation of local influences on their work. This desire to import modern art into the ranks of acceptable artistic production, without challenging the parameters of

⁵⁷ Henry McBride, “Current News of Art and the Exhibitions” *The Sun* (12 March 1916): 8.

⁵⁸ Wright, “The Aesthetic Struggle in America.”

⁵⁹ Raverty, 62.

⁶⁰ Willard Huntington Wright, “What is Modern Painting?” in *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters* (New York: M. Kennerley, 1916), 14.

what defined fine art or how art should be circulated or disseminated, clearly distinguished Wright from the anarchist or Dadaists tendencies of many participants.

These tensions arise in the catalogue, for which each of the six art committee members wrote a foreward. Dennis Raverty has argued that, with the exception of Stieglitz, the judges were sympathetic to Wright's intention,⁶¹ however, this discounts the radicalism of both Weichsel and Henri. Wright's foreward, like the press materials for the exhibition, emphasized the sincerity of the selected artists and defended them as

adequately representative of the best work being done by the modern men in America... Not one man represented in this exhibition is either a charlatan or a maniac; and there is not a picture here, which, in the light of the new ideal, is not intelligible and logically constructed in accordance with the subtler and more complex creative spirit which is now animating the world of art.⁶²

His was the only essay which did not refer to the contemporary world or the political tensions of World War I. Wright also retained a clear separation between art and life. While Christian Brinton's essay also addressed the formal evolution of color and volume, he turned his attention to the public, writing: "We have so long been taught that the chief function of art was to make a thing look at much as possible like itself that we have supinely accepted this uninspired viewpoint."⁶³ W. H. de B. Nelson similarly condemned the public for applauding only that which it expected to see. In his view, the Forum Exhibition was an opportunity for artists to place their work before the public in an "impartial hearing," while maintaining the need to "separate the wheat from the tares," so as to avoid overwhelming an audience unable to yet make such distinctions.

⁶¹ Raverty.

⁶² Willard Huntington Wright, "Foreward," in *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters*, 39.

⁶³ Christian Brinton, "Foreward," in *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters*, 28.

The most provocative essays were written by Henri, Weichsel, and Stieglitz, all men with demonstrated anarchist sympathies who were less committed to the authority of the critic and the hierarchy of the traditional gallery space.⁶⁴ Acknowledging the Forum Exhibition as a unique opportunity to place modern art before a larger public, Weichsel argued that the show was “a strong protest against the customary blinding of our vision by everlasting flaunting before our eyes the overfurnished halo of traditional art.”⁶⁵ On a similar note, while Henri participated in the jurying of the exhibition, he reported that he was “opposed to the finality of practically all art criticism and feel disposed to defend the picture against the critic whether he praises or whether he condemns.” Thus, despite his opposition to “any man or any body of men who assume the authority to pick, choose, and settle the question of what is good,” Henri ultimately conceded that the Forum Exhibition was a platform from which he could advocate for artistic freedom and to allow the public an opportunity to see contemporary art.

The shortest foreword, written by Stieglitz, critiqued the very nature of the Forum Exhibition. He acknowledged that, at present, American art was to society “what the appendix is to the human body” and proposed that art could not truly be appreciated until the public realized its importance.⁶⁶ In the meantime, it was necessary to support artists with “moral support backed up by sufficient means to live reasonably decently,” adding, “This holds good for all other workers besides artists.” In the interest in protecting his artists and giving them exposure, he explained, “this particular exhibition received my co-operative support because the men represented in it should be given an opportunity to develop – to continue their experiments.” He was unwilling to

⁶⁴ Robert Henri’s connection with the Ferrer Center and anarchism is a common point in scholarship, including Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) and Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001).

⁶⁵ John Weichsel, “Foreward,” in *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters*, 36.

⁶⁶ Alfred Stieglitz, “Foreward,” in *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters*, 35.

deprive his artists an opportunity which might gain them public recognition, but remained convinced that “the system now in vogue of bringing the public into contact with the painting of to-day is basically wrong. The usual exhibition is nothing but a noise maker.”

Anticipating the opening of the exhibition and aware of the organizational agenda of Wright, Robert Coady wrote an open letter to Henry McBride, the art editor of the *New York Sun*, in which he posed the following questions to the Forum committee:

Why are these 200 paintings ‘the very best examples of modern American art? ...

Why are they American; what element or elements, quality or qualities do they possess that make them American? ...

Do you mean ‘by guaranteeing, as its were, the authenticity and conscientiousness of the paintings shown’ that you guarantee these paintings as works of art?

Will you really make the buyer who is interested in the more modern manifestations in painting feel secure by guaranteeing the permanent market value of these paintings?

At the end of five years will these 200 paintings, or any part of them, be worth the same price to you that is being asked for them today, and will you legally guarantee it?

I challenge all of you and each of you to back to your ‘critical selection’ with proof.⁶⁷

Coady’s insistence on the monetary aspect of the exhibition belied his suspicion of the covert art market, as several of the artists included were protégés of the selection committee. He suggested that, if financial interests played a factor in the selection of artists, such plans to ensure the market value of these artists should be made public. Coady’s frank discussion of the art market was at odds with the more aesthetic and ascetic intentions of the show; Wright’s response: “Thus we prostitute art,” revealed his conservative understanding of the relationship

⁶⁷ Robert Coady, in “Current News of Art and the Exhibitions,” *The Sun* (12 March 1916): 8.

between artists, dealers, and the public, one that viewed overt commercialism as incompatible with fine art.

An advertisement for Coady's own gallery appeared on the same page of the *New York Sun* as his scathing commentary on the Forum Exhibition. Advertising the availability of "ancient and modern art" and "interior decorations," the text concluded: "The Art Value and the Market Value of each work permanently guaranteed."⁶⁸ Treating his gallery like a department store, this guarantee called into question the function and authority of the Forum committee, whose relationship with the market was murky, at best.

Coady's inquiries were answered by Wright in *The Sun* the following week, in a letter which stated: "all that is claimed for the forum exhibition pictures is that they are among the best examples of the more modern American spirit." Wright explained that this judgment was based on their "sensibility to order, composition, texture, design and color harmony" and the "expression of the inherent beauty for which all great painters strive."⁶⁹ In this response, Wright maintained the need for order and hierarchies and revealed how the Forum Exhibition intended to update, not revolutionize, the exhibition of modern art in America. In a second letter to *The Sun*, Coady charged, "At the first inquiry into the truth of their position they immediately become humble and change their first statement from 'the very best example' to 'among the best examples.' To this I reply that the worst are usually 'among the best' and that word juggling does not help to sustain their contentions."⁷⁰

At the heart of Coady's objections was his belief that the Forum Exhibition did not adequately alter the conditions of art to express the Americanness of the participants and instead merely

⁶⁸ Advertisement for The Coady Gallery, *New York Sun* (12 March 1916): 8.

⁶⁹ The correspondence between Coady and Wright was published in Henry McBride, "Current News of Art and the Exhibitions," *The Sun* (19 March 1916).

⁷⁰ Robert Coady, "Reply to W. H. Wright," *New York Sun* (19 March 1916).

provided space to artists who conformed to Wright's Eurocentric, modernist taste and were American in nationality alone. Despite the stated intention to create an appreciation for native talent, the art committee was unable to clearly elucidate what constituted an American aesthetic. Therefore, argued Coady, "If there is only a superficial and not a basic difference between modern American art and modern European art, why turn public attention from the really good examples of modern European art, since this is to be the first and only comprehensive exhibition whose aim is to 'create an appreciation of art.'"⁷¹

Coady believed that the Forum Exhibition retarded the development of a uniquely native style by accepting American interpretations of European modernism as the work of truly American artists. He charged that the selection committee was "blind to the big spirit here that has grown out of the soil and through the race and has already expressed itself in terms of art that rank with the great European epochs. It is just such committees that have prevented American contributions to art."

The sponsor of the Forum Exhibition, *Forum* magazine was published by Mitchell Kennerley from 1910 until June 1916. The show was one of the last major undertakings under this publisher. During the Kennerley years, *Forum* "was devoted to the ushering in of a newer and freer age," drawing on Bergson and Van Wyck Brooks for its enthusiastic celebration of the modern.⁷² This spirit changed in July 1916, when the magazine was returned to its original owner, Isaac Rice.⁷³ Upon this change, *Forum* immediately adopted a markedly different conservative, pro-war tone, which mirrored the changing political climate of the country. This change provides an important insight into the atmosphere prior to America's involvement in

⁷¹ Coady, "Reply to W. H. Wright."

⁷² Henry F. May, *The End of Innocence: A Story of the First Years of Our Own Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 295.

⁷³ Beginning with the July 1916 issue of *Forum*, the masthead listed Rice's wife as Secretary-Treasurer and his daughter, Muriel, as Vice-President

World War I. In the first issue under Rice's management, *Forum* adopted two new slogans: "Public Service" and "America First" and printed a scathing condemnation of those who tolerated "radical dissent."⁷⁴

In the essay, "Americanism," Federal Attorney Roger B. Wood demonstrated the growing conservative sentiment would curtailed anarchist, socialist, and iconoclastic activities. He declared,

... Those aliens who enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and wealth in this land, without renouncing allegiance to the land of their nativity, owe the people of the United States a very high duty. I cannot conceive that they have the right even to criticise [*sic*] anything that the authorized officers of our government may say or do. They are living here by sufferance almost, and since they do not care to assume the obligations of citizenship, they are in duty bound to suffer what they do not like in silence. When they take it upon themselves to give vent to their displeasure, it is time for them to go elsewhere.⁷⁵

Wood concluded with a quotation from the Democratic platform, which accused anyone who "by arousing prejudices of a racial, religious, or other nature creates discord and strife among our people" of treason. Similar sentiments were expressed by the chairman of the Republican National Committee, who wrote: "*The war abroad has taught us that our population is not united and that it does not always consider "America first."* [*italics original*]"⁷⁶ In the months prior to American invention in World War I, such rhetoric became increasingly common, culminating in the 1917 Espionage Age, passed on June 15. The anarchist Emma Goldman was arrested on 16 June 1917, sending a clear message to radicals in New York and beyond that open dissent would no longer be tolerated.⁷⁷ In April 1917, *The Little Review* printed a blank page,

⁷⁴ Ownership of *Forum* was transferred back to the Rice family in July of 1916. These slogans first appeared in November 1916.

⁷⁵ Roger B. Wood, "Americanism," *Forum Magazine* (October 1916): 456-458.

⁷⁶ William R. Willcox, "Why Hughes Should be Elected," *Forum Magazine* (October 1916): 433.

⁷⁷ This chronology provided by Bochner, *An American Lens*, 182-3.

captioned only “We will probably be suppressed for this” as a response to the war and acknowledging the current climate of suppression.

In the increasingly politicized atmosphere of World War I, it became necessary to encode radical or disruptive behavior. The avant-garde used humor to express their dissent and disillusionment, but only to a select audience. By adopting the outward appearance of the mainstream press, these artists were able to avoid detection (and potential censorship). Only the initiated would register the difference and decode the message. Assuming the appearance of the institution, they eroded its authority from within.

It is in this xenophobic wartime climate that the Society of Independent Artist’s first exhibition must be considered. Although planning for the show began in December 1916, the opening came four days after the official American declaration of war.⁷⁸ The *New York Morning Telegraph* made clear the connection in its review, “Your Country’s Art Calls You.”⁷⁹ Including an overview of the exhibition excerpts from *The Blind Man*,⁸⁰ the author concluded with an acknowledgement of its emphatically democratic approach to art, paraphrasing an essay by Henri-Pierre Roché’s from *The Blind Man*: “As Russia is having her political revolution, we in New York are having an artistic one, and that takes us back to the call of the hour – recruit for Art’s sake. Keep the treasures in this country. Shoulder a gun for your favorite ‘indep,’ and go to it with a laugh.” Davidson has argued that in response to the war, “the public saw in this freedom of the arts a counterpart to America’s struggle on behalf of democracy.”⁸¹

The Society of Independent Artists spanned the various strains of avant-gardism in New York: William Glackens was named President, with Charles J. Prendergast (brother of the

⁷⁸ For scholarship on the inaugural Society of Independent Artists exhibition, please see note 4.

⁷⁹ Theodora Bean, "Your Country's Art Calls You," *Morning Telegraph* (15 April 1917).

⁸⁰ The article positioned several statements from Beatrice Wood as part of an interview and scholars have generally described them as such, yet Wood’s words were actually excerpted from *The Blind Man*.

⁸¹ Abraham Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting 1910-1935* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 179.

Ashcan painter Maurice) as Vice-President and Walter Pach as Treasurer. John Covert was named Secretary and his cousin, Walter Arensberg, became the Managing Director. The group began by drawing up provisions for annual exhibitions. Bylaws were established to allow a wide range of professional and amateur artists to show their work. Article II, section 3 clearly stated that "Any artist, whether a citizen of the United States or of any foreign country, may become a member of the Society upon filing an application therefore, paying the initiation fee and the annual dues of a member, and exhibiting at the exhibition in the year that he joins."⁸² Thus, by paying a relatively small amount of money, any entrant could secure a place in the show.

This policy drew some criticism from the press and the public, who feared the result would be mediocre at best. In a private letter Walter Pach confessed, "What a mixture one finds there: the best and worst of our older artists, the best and worst of the younger men, those whom no exhibition – no museum, almost – would refuse, those whom no other exhibition would admit."⁸³ Ultimately, the exhibition of 1917, which included 2125 works by 1235 artists, included scores of contributors who would not have met with the approval of a jury, but who were included in the democratic spirit of the organization.⁸⁴

As the head of the hanging committee, Duchamp devised a system that eliminated grouping by style, technique, or favor: the works were to be arranged alphabetically. To avoid prejudice, it was suggested that a letter be selected randomly as the starting point; the letter "R" was chosen.⁸⁵ While many were confused, annoyed, and outraged, Morton Schamberg admired the arrangement of the exhibition, believing that not grouping the works according to styles or

⁸² Cited by Marlor, *The Society of Independent Artists: The Exhibition Record, 1917-1944*, 81.

⁸³ Walter Pach, "The Independents," *The Dial* (22 March 1919): 308.

⁸⁴ Figures quoted in Thierry de Duve, "Given the Richard Mutt Case," in *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996).

⁸⁵ Naumann has documented a wide range of critical response which decried the alphabetical hanging order in "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independents, Part II."

schools forced “the visitor to at least give himself the opportunity of looking at every work shown instead of concentrating upon those he has decided beforehand he is going to like.”⁸⁶

Francis Naumann has documented the critical reaction to the exhibition, noting that both conservative critics like Royal Cortissoz and liberal writers like Forbes Watson, interpreted the hanging system to be “democratic.”⁸⁷

Continuing this democratic approach to the arts, the Society attempted to avoid emphasizing the traditional media of painting and sculpture. To this end, they explicitly courted more vernacular forms of production; even the legal Certificate of Incorporation began by stating that, “The particular objects for which the corporation is to be formed are (1) to hold exhibitions, whether annual or periodical of contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, architecture, engravings, drawings, cartoons, water colors, pastels, miniatures, stained glass, enamel, porcelain, and faience.”⁸⁸ While the number of entries beyond painting and sculpture remains unknown, a number of events were planned to accompany the 1917 show and broaden the range of the exhibition. As was explained in the foreward of the catalogue,

Conditions of time and difficulties always attendant on the organization of a great society have been the only factors that have deterred the Directors from including as fully as they would wish all the arts together in the Society’s first exhibition. A beginning is made by the presentations of literature, music, acting, the cinematograph, etc. which are scheduled for the Lecture Hall on the mezzanine floor. It is the purpose of the Society to become a common ground for the free expression of all the arts.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Morton Schamberg, quoted in Henry McBride, “More on the Independents,” *The Sun* (13 May 1917); reprinted in Henry McBride, ed., *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 129.

⁸⁷ Cited in Naumann, “The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independents, Part I.” Cortissoz’s review was critical of this arrangement, writing that “not art, but democracy is in charge” while Watson applauded the democratic approach.

⁸⁸ Marlor, 53.

⁸⁹ Foreward to the Exhibition Catalogue; quoted in Marlor, 9.

In this egalitarian spirit, a series of lectures and presentations were planned to supplement the exhibition of paintings and sculpture.⁹⁰ The most infamous of these was Arthur Cravan's lecture, "The Independent Artists of France and America." The evening was chronicled by Gabrielle Buffet, who reported that Cravan arrived late and drunkenly began removing his clothing and insulting the audience until the police intervened.⁹¹ The drunken exploits of Cravan have been embraced as a Dada performance, they were, however, the isolated actions of a known provocateur. Invited to speak by Duchamp, the event paralleled *The Fountain* in its challenge to bourgeois tastes and expectations, but was not intended to mirror Dada performances in Zurich.⁹²

Also as part of the Society of Independent Artists exhibition schedule, Dr. Elmer Ernest Southard, a psychiatrist and frequenter of the Arensberg Salon, was commissioned to give a lecture entitled, "Are Cubists Insane?" While the text for this event does not survive, his preparatory notes suggest that the title was deliberately provocative and that the talk related styles of modern painting to various psychological conditions.⁹³ Poetry was also integrated into the exhibition in a staged reading which was held on April 18. A number of avant-garde poets, participated, including Alfred Kreymbourg, Mina Loy, and Allen Norton. William Carlos Williams read "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives."⁹⁴ The evening concluded with an invitation for members of the audience to read their own poetic contributions.⁹⁵ The democratic fashion of this exchange removed the authoritarian relationship between the typical performer and audience.

⁹⁰ Stephen Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991).

⁹¹ Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, "Arthur Cravan and New York Dada," in Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1951).

⁹² It is doubtful that the Dadaists in New York would have known of the Dada performances in Zurich at this early date; so far, their only contact had been through issues of *Cabaret Voltaire* and possibly *La Première Aventure céleste de Mr. Antipyrine*. Coverage of Dada performance would not appear in the mainstream press until 1919.

⁹³ Frederick P. Gay, *The Open Mind: Elmer Ernst Southard, 1876-1920* (Chicago: Normadie House, 1938), 252-3.

⁹⁴ Bochner, *An American Lens*, 155

⁹⁵ Watson, 316.

Robert Coady hosted a screening of two movies, *A Daughter of the Gods* and *The Honor System*, bringing the popular entertainment of the nickelodeon into the exhibition space. Projected onto a 50' screen, *A Daughter of the Gods* was the first motion picture reported to have cost \$1 million dollars to film, and it starred the popular swimmer Annette Kellerman in the first-ever nude scene (figure 5.6).⁹⁶ Now lost, according to contemporary newspaper accounts, the film employed a number of academic tropes, including an Orientalist harem and that of the goddess Venus, to justify lengthy scenes where “Miss Kellermann [*sic*] wanders disconsolately through the film all undressed and with nowhere to go.”⁹⁷ Despite the attractions of the comely star, the movie was ultimately found bland and lacking drama.⁹⁸

Alternatively, *The Honor System*, a exposé of the prison system was proclaimed, “motion picture pretty near at its best.”⁹⁹ The director, Raoul Walsh, had reportedly stayed in an actual prison to better understand the subject, and the film agitated for prison reform. The comparison of banal academicism with real world crises reinforced the message of *The Soil*. In these movies, Coady once again underscored the emptiness of academicism and its irrelevance to the modern world. The choice of *The Honor System* also reflects an anarchistic sympathy; agitators like Alexander Berkman had previously protested the abuses of the penal system in America. The movie screenings were followed by another evening which featured speakers from Sing Sing prison who spoke about their incarceration.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Kellerman, dubbed the “Perfect Woman” for her physical similarity to the Venus de Milo, was a swimming star of movies and vaudeville. She was best known for wearing one-piece bathing suits, scandalous attire for the period which resulted in her arrest on a Massachusetts beach in 1907. Emily Gibson and Barbara Firth, *The Original Million Dollar Mermaid: The Annette Kellerman Story* (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2006).

⁹⁷ “Kellermann [*sic*] Film Shown at the Lyric,” *New York Times* (18 October 1916).

⁹⁸ “Kellermann [*sic*] Film Shown at the Lyric.”

⁹⁹ “The Honor System’ Shown; Stirring and Ingenious Prison Reform Picture at the Lyric,” *New York Times* (13 February 1917).

¹⁰⁰ Watson, 317.

Despite this involvement with the Society of Independent Artists, Coady was highly critical of the exhibition in the July 1917 issue of *The Soil*. While the Society aimed to bring new artists to public notice, Coady was skeptical of its reliance on a precedent borrowed from the Parisian Independents. He questioned the basic assumption of the exhibition, which implied that “there is real art in our world which cannot come to light through the various means of personal effort, friends, appreciators, impresarios, academies, dealers, clubs, groups, etc., and that it can come only through the free and open exhibition, and that this exhibition will bring more art into being, because all this has happened before in France.”¹⁰¹ Instead of providing exhibition space, Coady felt it was necessary to first cultivate a culture which supported art. He explained, “Art does not drop from the clouds; on the contrary, I think, it begins with planting potatoes.... If the society is to bring forth and develop art, its first consideration should be to adjust itself to the source of that art, to the life from which it is to come.”

Where most contemporary commentary focused on the spectacle of the exhibition itself, Coady followed his general criticism with specific reviews of a selection of individual artists. Highly irreverent in tone, his “Notes on the Exhibition” totaled twenty-one pages of commentary and illustration. Amid the reproductions, Coady printed a street scene photograph of shop windows (figure 5.7), which he compared to Joseph Stella’s then-famous *Battle of Lights: Coney Island* to debate which provided a better sense of life, movement, and dynamism. Without reprinting Stella’s picture, he featured a double-page-spread of the “real ‘battle of lights’ at Broadway and Forty-second street.” He lauded the “visible order” of the shop windows and

¹⁰¹ Robert Coady, “The Indeps,” *The Soil* 5 (December 1917): 202.

suggested that “our modern genius could learn a lot from this remarkable example of solid common sense.”¹⁰²

Reprinting Coady’s criticism in *The Sun*, McBride asserted that “The same new stimulants in the atmosphere over here since the war produced both the Independents and him, and consequently he can say things to the Independents that an older critic wouldn’t dare venture upon,” even defending him: “He means to do the Independents good and it will be the Independents’ own fault if they do not gulp down their medicine nicely and profit by it to the full.”¹⁰³ Like Duchamp’s *Fountain*, Coady’s review recognized the failed potential of the Society of Independent Artists and sought to reveal its incomplete mission of democratizing art and creating a national idiom. While the exhibition drew upon notions of democratic openness and freedom, ultimately it was an exercise based on fairly conventional ideas of exhibition and criticism. The periodicals which responded to the exhibition, especially *The Soil* and *The Blind Man*, revealed the vernacular publication an inherently a more modern and iconoclastic forum for the dissemination of art. Both Coady and Duchamp understood the power of the press in their attacks.

Drawing upon expectations that an unknown genius would emerge from the field and the media speculation which swirled around him as an infamous provocateur, on opening night Duchamp declared two paintings to be outstanding: *The Claire Twins* by Dorothy Rice (figure 5.8) and *Rose-Marie Calling (Supplication)* by Louis Eilshemius (figure 5.9).¹⁰⁴ Neither artist was completely unknown, but their paintings belonged to neither the realm of the academic nor

¹⁰² Robert Coady, “Notes from the Exhibition,” *The Soil* 5 (December 1917): 209-210.

¹⁰³ Henry McBride, “News and Comment in the World of Art,” *New York Sun* (8 July 1917).

¹⁰⁴ The choices were announced in Henry McBride, “News and Comment: Opening of the Independents” *The Sun* (15 April 1917). The episode is recounted in Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 183.

the avant-garde. Both paintings were crudely executed and revealed both the limited formal training of their makers and a dependence on learned tropes of Old Master painting.

The portrait of the obese *Claire Twins*, by virtue of the artist's last name, had been one of the first paintings encountered by visitors to the exhibition and had received considerable attention by the press, most of it declaring the work grotesque.¹⁰⁵ Henry McBride described Rice's work as a welcome, albeit shocking, change from the rest of the exhibition.¹⁰⁶ Now lost, the painting featured the eponymous twins, posed side-by-side in a three-quarter length portrait; their obese forms filled the six-foot long canvas. The result suggests a familiarity with dwarf paintings by Velazquez (figure 5.10), however, larger than life, the crudeness of the execution renders them ridiculous. Although Rice had studied briefly with William Merritt Chase and Robert Henri, she later described how

I decided that the only way I could ever learn was to teach myself. I took a room at home and commenced to paint. I didn't bother with models, anatomy, or precedent: when I got to a part of the subject I couldn't guess, such as hands or knees, I worked in a dress or a chair. I specialized in the exotic, fully robed. I developed a style. And then I decided to have an exhibition.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, Louis Michel Eilshemius was an art-world outsider whose work was thoroughly independent; his work did not fit into any school or stylistic grouping. Although Eilshemius had received formal training at the Art Students League and the Academie Julien, and had shown twice at the National Academy of Design, by the time of the Independents Show, he was

¹⁰⁵ The location of Rice's painting is described in Naumann, "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independents, Part I," 35.

¹⁰⁶ He wrote as "you are wondering whether deep down in your heart you really care a pin for art, suddenly you stumble upon that stupendous production by Dorothy Rice, the portrait of the 'Clare Twins,' and are waked up so effectually that you find yourself forgiving the neighboring half dozen commonplaces before you realize that you shouldn't forgive them." Henry McBride, "Opening of the Independents," *New York Sun* (15 April 1917); reprinted in McBride, ed., *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride*, 121-125.

¹⁰⁷ Rice's artistic training is discussed in her autobiography, Dorothy Rice Sims, *Curiouser and Curiouser, a Book in the Jugular Vein* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), 79-81.

working without a dealer or a gallery.¹⁰⁸ Beginning in 1911, he had abandoned the Corot-inspired style of landscape painting which had won him early recognition in favor of a visionary technique which he referred to as “soul painting.”

Supplication, with its Rubenesque nude and mythological undertones, was a typical subject for the painter, who is estimated to have painted as many as one thousand female nudes during his career.¹⁰⁹ He was especially fond of the landscape-nude, which he felt connected him to the tradition of French history painting. At the same time, he drew source material from pornographic photographs, as his biographer, Paul Karlstrom has demonstrated. Thus his work formed a bridge between the respectable past and the sordid present, which Duchamp doubtlessly appreciated.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Duchamp seems to have chosen two artists which were truly “Independent” as the standouts from the Society of Independent Artists. Writing later, Duchamp noted that Eilshemius “developed a conception entirely devoid of the teachings of any of the art schools of the movement. He was a true individualist, as artists of our time should be, who never joined any group... He painted like a ‘Primitive’ – but was not a primitive.”¹¹¹

At the time of Duchamp’s selection, the critic Henry McBride accused him of being influenced by the exorbitant prices fixed by these artists, \$5,000 and \$6,000 respectively. It remains rather likely that it amused Duchamp to judge fine art based upon the prices demanded.¹¹² Considering Duchamp’s fascination with American advertisement and public relations, McBride was likely partially correct: the audacity to ask such prices for the paintings reflected a self-promotion strategy which Duchamp would have understood to be fully

¹⁰⁸ Marcel Duchamp, “Louis Eilshemius,” in *Collection of the Société Anonyme: Museum of Modern Art 1920* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1950), 154-55 and de Duve, “Given the Richard Mutt Case,” 201.

¹⁰⁹ Paul J. Karlstrom, “Eilshemius Redux,” in Steven Harvey, *Louis Michel Eilshemius: An Independent Spirit* (New York: National Academy of Design, 2001), 41.

¹¹⁰ Paul J. Karlstrom, *Louis Michel Eilshemius* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1978), 92.

¹¹¹ Marcel Duchamp, “Louis Eilshemius.”

¹¹² Henry McBride “News and Comment,” *The Sun* (15 April 1917).

American. That the works being sold were not the product of established artists, but of two unknowns, only made the gesture more daring. The relationship between Eilshemius and Duchamp has been scrutinized and often characterized as a cruel joke perpetrated by the French artist.¹¹³ This conclusion, however, overlooks Duchamp's selection of *The Claire Twins* and Dorothy Rice. It has been assumed that Duchamp was insincere in his admiration, yet his choice of artists may have been influenced precisely by the untrained technique and marketing bravado demonstrated by these two artists.

We must consider the public persona of each artist: both were relentless self-promoters and attention-seekers. By 1917, Eilshemius was known throughout the artistic community in New York, although it was mostly for the repeated missives he sent to various newspapers, lambasting the public for failing to recognize his genius. This rampant self-promotion included his self-appointment as "Maharajah" or the "Mahatma, the Supreme Spirit of Spheres."¹¹⁴

Rice is a less familiar figure today, but was relatively notorious during the 1910s for her daredevil activities. She was an archetypical American woman, as described by Duchamp in his first New York interview as one who "knows what she wants and therefore always gets [it]."¹¹⁵ Born to an upper-class family (her father, Isaac Rice, was the publisher of *Forum* magazine and a chess expert),¹¹⁶ Dorothy Rice had broken free from her upper-class background to become the first woman in New York to ride a motorcycle.¹¹⁷ In 1916, she garnered further attention when

¹¹³ Thierry de Duve, for example, argues that "Eilshemius's rehabilitation was the exclusive and cruel work of Marcel Duchamp," in de Duve, "Given the Richard Mutt Case," 202.

¹¹⁴ Karlstrom (92) and Harvey (9) look at how the artist represented himself.

¹¹⁵ "The Nude-Descending-the-Staircase Man Surveys Us," *New York Tribune* (12 September 1915).

¹¹⁶ While no direct record of Duchamp's involvement with the Rice Chess Club could be found, the organization was well-known during the period. As his daughter later recalled, her father "financed about every chess venture and chess player that needed it. ... he was a chess patron." Rice Sims, 61. Alfred Kreyborg, a friend of Duchamp's from the Arensberg Salon, recalled several occasions where he played at the Rice Chess Club during the early years of the twentieth century in his autobiography, *Troubadour* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925).

¹¹⁷ Frank Lirbey Valiant, "Motor Cycling Fad Strikes Fair Sex," *New York Times* (15 January 1911): C5.

she became one of few women aviators, making not only the newspapers but the newsreels.¹¹⁸ Her exploits were well-documented, as she later recalled, “Whenever I felt in need of a special life, I’d speed up a bit, get picked up by the cops, wisecrack the judge, and make the first page of every yellow sheet in town.”¹¹⁹ Duchamp’s selection of Rice and Eilshemius may have been more about their commercial zeal and promotional genius than any talent displayed upon the canvas.

Indeed, among the thousands of paintings, some artists did employ gimmicks to attract attention to their work. Mina Loy reportedly was disappointed that a neighboring artist had affixed real jewelry to his painting, which caught the viewer’s eye more effectively.¹²⁰ Beatrice Wood’s assemblage, *Un peut d’eau dans du savon* drew a great deal of attention. The grammatically incorrect title, scrawled upon the surface of the painting would have been insult enough.¹²¹ The highly unacademic female nude, a contoured cartoonish form shown against a seascape was itself an iconoclastic interpretation of the traditional bather theme;¹²² yet the ultimate challenge rested in the actual bar of soap, which Wood affixed to the surface in a gesture of false modesty. The result was labeled, “the keynote of childish whim, the unbridled extravagance, the undisciplined impudence and immature ignorance and even derangement.”¹²³

¹¹⁸ Rice Sims, 105-7.

¹¹⁹ Rice Sims, 8.

¹²⁰ Henry McBride reports advising Loy to attach her own earrings to her painting, *Making Lampshades*; her reply was “I could not do that. It would be plagiarism”; reprinted in McBride, ed., *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride*, 124. The episode is recounted in Naumann, “The Big Show: The First Exhibition of the Society of Independents, Part I.”

¹²¹ Although written incorrectly to read “a little water in some soap” instead of the more logical “a little soap in some water,” Wood spoke French fluently. In her autobiography, she explained that it was a mistake, which Duchamp insisted that she keep.

¹²² Paul Franklin claimed the painting is a parody of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* in “Beatrice Wood, Her Dada... And Her Mama,” in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed. (Cambridge: 1998), 115.

¹²³ Harvey M. Watts, “‘Greatest Ever’ in Art Shows,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (10 April 1917): 5.

The work, which recalled Botticelli's images *Venus*, instantly subverted this Old Master connection with its anti-academic style, irreverent attitude, and use of untraditional media.

Another untraditional art object associated with the exhibition was the publication of a small guidebook edited by Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Beatrice Wood: *The Blind Man*.

Intended to serve as an unofficial guide to the show, Roché explained, "The Blind Man will be the link between the pictures and the public – and even between the painters themselves."¹²⁴ The pamphlet was to put the viewer in the proper mindset to visit the exhibition, to create a sort of mental guide rather than the authoritative voice expected in a traditional catalogue, which exerted some organizing principle over the show. In an interview with James Johnson Sweeney, Duchamp later explained that he wanted to create a "nonartistic journal," in effect, a vernacular guide.¹²⁵

The title of *The Blind Man* suggested that the public was not fully prepared to see the exhibition. *The Blind Man* could refer to either the elitist viewer who was unwilling to entertain unconventional art, or to the uninitiated public. While the published essays provided guidance and encouragement to an unprepared audience, the cover illustration (figure 5.11) depicted the typical middle-class urbanite, mustachioed with hat and cane, as a blind man being led by his guide dog. The dog walks with his nose to the ground, the man walks with his nose upturned. Thus both the highbrow and lowbrow are both unseeing as the framed female nude thumbs her nose at the procession. The work of the caricaturist Al Frueh, the cartoon was no departure from his professional, mass-media style or content, but rather represented a popular brand of humor which was embraced by New York Dada.

¹²⁴ Henri-Pierre Roché, "The Blind Man," *The Blind Man* 1 (April 1917): 4.

¹²⁵ Marcel Duchamp, interview by James Johnson Sweeney, in "A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp...[1955]" Excerpts from this interview were printed in Michel Sanouillet, *Marchand du sel: écrits de Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Le Terrain vague, 1958). The phrase "nonartistic journal" is taken from an account of this interview in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2000), 585-6.

The choice of Frueh to illustrate the cover stemmed from personal and professional affiliations. Frueh had first met Roché around 1909 when both men were living in Paris and frequenting the Louis Doerr gymnasium.¹²⁶ The two men were sparring partners, Frueh illustrating his letters with comical self-portraits (figure 5.12). When Roché came to the United States in late 1916, they became reacquainted, Roché recording in his diary, “Frueh came to visit, ‘always the same’ and so much the better.”¹²⁷ During the mid-1910s, Frueh was becoming increasingly active in alternative exhibition organizations; while he continued to work for the commercial market, his drawing had been shown at Stieglitz’s 291 gallery and numerous shows organized by the People’s Art Guild. This populist attitude was complimented by the proclamation at the bottom of the page: “The second number of *The Blind Man* will appear as soon as YOU have sent sufficient material for it.”

The lengthiest entry in this first issue was a statement on the Society and the exhibition, written by Roché and organized into a series of numbered articles in the manner of a manifesto or a constitution. It began “*The Blind Man* celebrates to-day the birth of the Independence of Art in America.”¹²⁸ Quoting from the official exhibition program, Roché continued, explaining the juryless system and broad range of artworks was “full of surprises and dangers.” Article Five hoped that “New York, far ahead in so many ways, yet indifferent to art in the making, is going to learn to think for itself, and no longer accept, mechanically, the art reputations made abroad.”

This emphasis on the native quality of an American art ran throughout Roché’s remarks. He argued that the Independents exhibitions in Paris had helped to formulate a modern French culture and that American art now faced the same potential, provided that the public would

¹²⁶ Carlton Lake and Linda Ashton, eds., *Henri-Pierre Roché: An Introduction* (Austin: Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, 1991), 44.

¹²⁷ Henri-Pierre Roché papers, Carnet, 4 March 1918, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. “Visite de Frueh chez moi, “toujours le meme” et tant mieux.”

¹²⁸ Henri-Pierre Roché, “*The Blind Man*,” *The Blind Man* 1 (April 1917): 4.

participate. To encourage this open-mindedness, *The Blind Man* proposed itself as philosophical encouragement, rather than a traditional guidebook, posing a series of questions designed to prompt independent thinking in the reader. These included the expected: “Which is the work you prefer in the Exhibition? And why? The one you most dislike? The funniest? The most absurd?” but also challenged readers to guess “the highest price paid for a single picture” or to write “a dream story of less than one hundred words.”¹²⁹ The result was a new approach to catalogues and an attempt to change the way viewers approached exhibitions of art. Rather than justifications and explanations, readers were repeatedly reminded that initial reactions against the unknown could be “the first step of their conversion.”

In this essay, the Independents show was cast as an American process of cultural development. Roché concluded, “Russia needed a political revolution. America needs an artistic one. Your ‘little theatre’ movement has come. ‘291’ and ‘The Soil’ have come. Every American who wishes to be aware of America should read ‘The Soil.’ May the spirit of Walt Whitman guide the Indeps. Long live his memory, and love live the Indeps!”¹³⁰

The following three essays were short pieces written by Beatrice Wood. The first, “Why I Come to the Independents,” was a daring, first-hand account explaining that she visited the exhibition to be shocked and amused. “I expect to see wheels and one-eyed monstrosities,” she wrote. “I am not searching for soul yearnings.” Instead the exhibition was billed as a site of

¹²⁹ Henri-Pierre Roché, “The Blind Man,” 4-5.

¹³⁰ This runs counter to the argument proposed in Menno Hubregtse, “Robert J. Coady’s the Soil and Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain: Taste, Nationalism, Capitalism and New York Dada,” *RACAR, revue d’art canadienne (Canadian Art Review)* 34, no 2 (2009), which argues that *The Blind Man* satirized the nationalistic sentiments of Coady and *The Soil*. While I agree with Wanda Corn’s characterization of the relationship between Duchamp and Coady as “kindred spirits” in Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935.*, 81-89, I disagree with her conclusion that Duchamp and Henri-Pierre Roché appropriated Coady as a primitive rather than an equal. In a 1921 letter to Jean Crotti and his sister Suzanne, Duchamp would refer to “our friend Coudy [sic]” without any sense of sarcasm or patronization. Marcel Duchamp, letter to Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp, 20 October [1920], Archives of American Art.

excitement and thrills, a break with the conventions of proper society. She suggested that there was value in the attendance of even those who came to marvel at the spectacle and laugh at the most radical works. Like Roché, she implied that exposure, even if skeptical, created progress and that merely the unconventional attitude of the exhibition held promise for the future of American art, writing:

The emotions of a jeune fille can be acquired at home. I am out for red blood. I want to return to the ecstasy and wild imaginings of childhood! Therefore, I come to be amused, to chuckle softly.... If not, - why the Independents! To laugh is very serious. Of course, to be able not to laugh is more serious still.¹³¹

Wood's other two essays were dream sequences, such as those which Roché had encouraged the reader to write, in which she imagined herself in the guise of a picture hanger at work and in dream. The humor of each hinges on the alphabetical arrangement of the exhibition, lamenting over the large number of painters named Schmidt. In the "Dream of a Picture Hanger," Wood merged herself with her *Un peut d'eau dans du savon*, becoming "a piece of soap with nails in my back stuck on a canvas."¹³² The worker's inner monologue in "Work of a Picture Hanger" was more direct and pragmatic, telling the story of moving countless numbers of paintings by Schmidt. Consumed with the task of hanging the exhibition, the worker explained, "Mentally I was not spelling art with a capital A," the reality of the exhibition was more mundane and laborious than the elite gallery world would like to admit.¹³³

The final article in this first issue of *The Blind Man*, written by Mina Loy, took a strikingly anarchist and fatalist tone about the prospects of the exhibition.¹³⁴ In bringing together the artist and the public, she admitted while both shared their lived experiences in common, "the educator"

¹³¹ Beatrice Wood, "Why I Come to the Independents," *The Blind Man* 1 (April 1917): 6.

¹³² Beatrice Wood, "Dream of a Picture Hanger," *The Blind Man* 1 (April 1917): 6-7.

¹³³ Beatrice Wood, "Work of a Picture Hanger," *The Blind Man* 1 (April 1917): 6.

¹³⁴ Mina Loy, "In ... Formation," *The Blind Man* 1 (April 1917): 7.

had trained the public to dismiss its personal experience in favor of artistic conventions. “Education in recognizing something that has been seen before demands an art that is only acknowledgeable by way of diluted comparisons,” she explained. Thus while the public “knew before the Futurists that Life is a jolly noise and a rush and sequence of ample reactions,” they were unable to appreciate these qualities in art. Education, the “unnaturally acquired prejudice,” left them unable to locate these qualities in modern painting: “They [artists and the public] like the same drinks, can fight in the same trenches, pretend to the same women; but never see the same thing ONCE.” This disdain for education as an “unnatural” process reflected an anarchistic opinion of the conventional schooling and academic tastes which would have informed most viewers’ opinions of the exhibition.

The first issue of *The Blind Man* emphasized the potential shock which the editors felt the Independents exhibition might provide to the static world of high culture in New York. The iconoclastic nature of the magazine may have prompted its three editors, to take steps to protect their identities. The back cover printed the notice, “In preparation P · E · T,” identifying the editors by aliases: others have deciphered P and T to represent Henri-Pierre Roché’s initial and his nickname for Duchamp, Totor (short for Victor).¹³⁵ The “E” has proved more difficult to decipher, but might have been an attempt to preserve the reputation of Wood, or perhaps to keep her parents from learning of her involvement. Most likely, the “E” creates an alias for Wood, whose first major acting role was that of Eglantine in a production of *Les Deux Sourds* in

¹³⁵ Henri-Pierre Roché, *Victor: Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Centre national d’art et de culture Georges Pompidou, 1977).

December 1916.¹³⁶ Roché credited her as a full partner in his diaries, writing on April 9 that he was “at the printer’s with Bea, heroic times, Frueh’s drawing...*The Blind Man* is written.”¹³⁷

Such questions of propriety became increasingly problematic in the days following the official declaration of America’s entry into World War I. Even prior to the passage of the 1917 Espionage Act, a bill which allowed any expression of dissent or critique to be interpreted as anti-war agitation, openly subversive publications came under censorship. Beginning June 15, these transgressions were considered treasonous, a crime for which foreign citizens automatically faced deportation. In May 1917, Roché and Duchamp were sufficiently concerned that publishing the second issue of *The Blind Man* might be dangerous as alien residents to look for an alternative means of distribution.¹³⁸ Beatrice Wood agreed to publish and mail the work under her name, a plan which was aborted when her father found the copies ready to be mailed. He forbade her to send them through the Post Office, where they would be subject to the scrutiny of censors, arguing “there are words in there no young girl should ever know. If it goes through the mail you will tangle with the law and be put in prison.”¹³⁹ According to Wood, it was *Vanity Fair* editor Frank Crowninshield, who explained that “my father was an honest, bon bourgeois, and if he reacted so violently to the whole affair, maybe it would shock other good citizens, and that thereby it might be unwise to send it through the mails.”¹⁴⁰ She remembered, “Crowninshield and I reread the proofs, decided that since some well-known names were connected with it, it would be better to protect them from criticism.” Crowninshield devised the

¹³⁶ Wood was well-received by critics and acted for two years in the theater, under the stage name “Mademoiselle Patricia.” Garth Clark, *Gilded Vessel: The Lustrous Art and Life of Beatrice Wood* (Madison, WI: Guild Publishing, 2001), 72.

¹³⁷ Henri-Pierre Roché papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Carnet. (9 April 1917): “chez l’imprimeur avec Bea, temps heroiques, dessin Frueh... le Blind Man est ecrise.” Author’s translation.

¹³⁸ Watson, 320.

¹³⁹ Wood, *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood*, 31-2.

¹⁴⁰ Beatrice Wood, letter to Arturo Schwarz, February 1964; reprinted in Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 649.

solution: “*The Blind Man* was given out by hand to friends, art collectors and galleries” to avoid interference from the postmaster general. It was not an unreasonable precaution: the socialist magazine *The Masses* had been banned from newsstands on the elevated trains beginning in January 1916. In August of 1917, an issue of *The Masses* was ruled “unmailable,” sparking a long and financial disastrous legal battle for the little magazine.¹⁴¹

The first issue of the periodical *The Blind Man* had promised that “The second number of *The Blind Man* will appear as soon as YOU have sent sufficient material for it.” Ultimately, Duchamp provided the impetus for the second issue, which mounted a defense of the *Fountain* after its “rejection” by the board of directors of the unjuried Independents exhibition. This second issue of *The Blind Man* has been considered in numerous Dada studies. Among its pages are impassioned defenses of the object – both from aesthetic and theoretical points of view, including Stieglitz’s carefully arranged photograph.¹⁴²

De Duve points out that Duchamp’s *Fountain*, an unexhibited object, became a work of art through the strategies of public relations and marketing, but the distinctively American quality of the operation needs to be taken into consideration.¹⁴³ Other scholars have written about Stieglitz’s role in transforming the urinal into an object of art – placing it before Marsden Hartley’s *Warriors* and photographing it so as to bring out its aesthetic qualities.¹⁴⁴ It has been suggested that Stieglitz was an unwitting accomplice in photographing Duchamp’s *Fountain*, a

¹⁴¹ Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich, *The Little Magazines*, 30.

¹⁴² General information on *The Blind Man 2* can be found in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978); Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp/Fountain*; and Andreas Bern, *New York Dada Magazines, 1915-1921* (Siegen: Forschungsschwerpunkt Massenmedien und Kommunikation an der Universität, 1986).

¹⁴³ de Duve, “Given the Richard Mutt Case.”

¹⁴⁴ This episode is discussed in detailed in Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp/Fountain*. and Jay Bocher, “Eros Eyesore, or the Ideal and the Ideatic,” in Debra Bricker Balken, *Debating American Modernism: Stieglitz, Duchamp and the New York Avant-Garde* (New York: American Federation of the Arts, 2003).

claim which dismisses the photographer's record of iconoclasm.¹⁴⁵ Stieglitz's participation was, however, a necessary component for the success of Duchamp's gesture. Stieglitz's carefully aestheticized photograph, now the only remnant of the original object, was precisely calculated to make the protest appear entirely sincere. These calculations were not unlike his earlier portrait photographs of artists and colleagues, whom he also carefully posed in front of works of art.

Furthermore, Stieglitz contributed a second work to this issue of *The Blind Man*, a letter to the editor which spoke directly to the operation at play in *Fountain*. In part, the rejection of the urinal was attributed to the pseudonymous nature of the artist, as Katherine Dreier later admitted to Duchamp.¹⁴⁶ The name Richard Mutt immediately suggested to some that the submission was a practical joke. Only when Duchamp's involvement was revealed did others begin to examine the implications of his choice. In his letter, Stieglitz suggested that the Society eliminate all names from the following exhibition, only to reveal them on the last day of the show. He explained:

In thus freeing the exhibition of the traditions and superstitions of names the Society would not be playing into the hands of dealers and critics, nor even into the hands of the artists themselves. For the latter are influenced by names quite as much as are the public and critics, not to speak of the dealers who are only interested in names. Thus each bit of work would stand on its own merits. As a reality. The public would be purchasing its own reality and not a commercialized and inflated name. Thus the Society would be

¹⁴⁵ Their relationship is characterized in this fashion in de Duve, "Given the Richard Mutt Case." The structure and argument of Balken's text is based on an opposition between the two men. Francis M. Naumann agrees in "The Blind Man: *Fountain* de R. Mutt photographiée par Stieglitz," in *Alfred Stieglitz et son cercle: New York et l'art moderne* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2004), 155-65 and "Fountain" in *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life, and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Readymade Press, 2012), 70-81. Similarly, Wanda Corn positions them in separate camps in her *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*. To the contrary, the men were friends; Stieglitz visited Duchamp's studio with Georgia O'Keeffe at least once, (O'Keeffe declared that "the place looked as though it had never been swept,") which suggests a collegial quality to their relationship. Georgia O'Keeffe, quoted in *Marcel Duchamp*, Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 212-13.

¹⁴⁶ Katherine Dreier, letter to Marcel Duchamp (13 April 1917), Katherine S. Dreier/Société Anonyme papers, YCAL; quoted in Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 156-7.

dealing a blow to the academy of commercializing names. The public might gradually see for itself.¹⁴⁷

In closing, Stieglitz amended the Independent's slogan to read: "NO JURY – NO PRIZES – NO COMMERCIAL TRICKS." This last portion could refer to Duchamp's gambit or to any of the gimmicks which were employed by artists to gain recognition or dealers and critics to promote their favorites. As a gallery owner, Stieglitz worked against his own interests to further the cause of true artistic autonomy.

Louise Norton's article, "Buddha of the Bathroom," built upon Mina Loy's anarchist-inspired essay from the first *Blind Man*, defending the *Fountain* as beautiful to the "innocent" eye: only those who were educated as to the object's original function found it offensive and were unable to appreciate its "chaste simplicity of line and color."¹⁴⁸ She lamented, "It was a sad surprise to learn of a Board of Censors sitting upon the ambiguous question, What is ART?" and to find that this definition was reliant on the past, rather than the present.¹⁴⁹

This challenge was echoed in a poem by Demuth, dedicated "For Richard Mutt." Like Norton, he juxtaposed professed admiration for the alleged wisdom of judgment (such as that abused by the board of directors) with disrespect for the traditions upon which that wisdom was constructed. In a style inflected by the example of Gertrude Stein, his poem valued experimentation and anti-authoritarianism:

One must say every thing, - then no one will know.
To known nothing is to say a great deal.
So many say that they say nothing, - but these never really send.
For some there is no stopping. Most stop or get a style
When they stop they make a convention
That is their end.
For the going every thing has an idea.

¹⁴⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, Letter, printed in *The Blind Man 2* (May 1917): 15. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁸ Louise Norton, "The Buddha of the Bathroom," *The Blind Man 2* (May 1917): 5-6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The going run right along.
The going just keep going.¹⁵⁰

Often credited to Duchamp, Beatrice Wood was the author of the infamous statement which accompanied Stieglitz's photograph of the *Fountain*, including the emphatic claim: "As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges."¹⁵¹ While calculated to shock, the statement doubtless contained elements of the truth, among the avant-garde in New York, the admiration for American industrial infrastructure certainly outweighed any admiration for conventional American art. Wood echoed sentiments which had been vigorously argued in *The Soil* and which were further underscored in a supportive letter written by *Vanity Fair* editor Frank Crowninshield.

In a letter titled, "From a Friend," Crowninshield praised the first issue of *The Blind Man* for "the fostering and encouragement of a truly native art."¹⁵² It was praise which he lavished not upon the exhibition itself, but which was addressed to the magazine itself: "Dear Blind Man:-" He encouraged the editors to continue pushing artists and critics to consider work that was closely connected to modern life, "however morbid, however hurried, however disorganized [*sic*], however nerve-racking that time may be." Opposed to the traditional conventions of art, Crowninshield argued that art required a specific spiritual connection to its age, "even if that age is one of telephones, submarines, aeroplanes, cabarets, cocktails, taxicabs, divorce courts, wars, tangos, dollar signs." His litany of the characteristically sinful elements of modern life suggests that it was important for art to capture times of uncertainty and flux as well as periods of classical calm and balance. Meaningful art was to be constructed from the artist's immediate

¹⁵⁰ Charles Demuth, "For Richard Mutt," *The Blind Man* 2 (May 1917): 6.

¹⁵¹ Wood revealed herself to be the author in her autobiography, *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood*, 30-31. Naumann noted the real identity of the author in *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 239, note 28.

¹⁵² Frank Crowninshield, "From a Friend," *The Blind Man* 2 (May 1917): 10.

cultural environment, including the vernacular objects and activities of daily modern life. Its attempt to make art accessible to the public and to eliminate elitist distinctions of fine art, *The Blind Man* demonstrated how the critique of New York Dada was intertwined with the development of a new, American cultural idiom.

Following the defense of *Fountain*, the debate over the function and validity of modern art continued. The next two-page spread (figure 5.13) was headed by a pair of poems, written by Walter Arensberg: “Axiom” and “Theorem.” Terms from mathematics, they refer to two types of knowledge and recall Agnes Ernst Meyer’s distinction between the “HOW” and the “WHY,” from *291*. An axiom is a statement which is accepted as truth, but which cannot be proved; it is a proposition alleged to be logical and thus considered accurate.¹⁵³ This poem was accompanied by a “Letter from a Mother,” a fabricated protest contributed anonymously by Beatrice Wood.¹⁵⁴ In declaring “People without refinement, cubists, futurists, are not artists. For Art is noble. And they are distorted,” she issues an axiom, a statement intuitively accepted but which cannot be conclusively confirmed. Alternatively, a theorem is a statement which can be proven through a logical series of steps, one that operates through the scientific principles of hypothesis and conclusion. This poem was accompanied by Joseph Stella’s *Coney Island*, which appeared as the result of this scientific approach to modern art, arguably the result of a logical process of determination, not the sort of distorted madness which was feared by the hysterical “Mother.”

Demonstrating the broad range of the Independents, one other painting from the exhibition was reproduced in *The Blind Man: Eilshemius’s Supplication* illustrated an interview conducted

¹⁵³ The Oxford English Dictionary defines an axiom as “a self-evident proposition, requiring no formal demonstration to prove its truth, but received and assented to as soon as mentioned” and “a proposition (whether true or false). In contrast, a theorem is defined as a statement “not self-evident (thus distinguished from an axiom), but demonstrable by argument.” Second edition, 1989; online version June 2011. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/14045>>; accessed 20 July 2011. Earlier version first published in New English Dictionary, 1885.

¹⁵⁴ The identity of “A Mother,” is revealed in Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, 38.

with the artist by Mina Loy.¹⁵⁵ Without facetiously admiring the style of his painting (the title of the interview is, after all, “No Comment!”) Loy did celebrate his work as truly independent, writing: “Eilshemius has not evolved, he has just grown to scatter seeds hap-hazard but at will to blossom in the amazing variations of his pictures, which, outside of every academic or unacademic school, untouched by theory or ‘ism,’ survive as the unique art form that has never been exploited by a dealer, never been in fashion!”¹⁵⁶ Printed in a forum moderated by Duchamp, this iconoclastic interpretation of Eilshemius underscored the sincerity of his appreciation for the outsider.

The second issue of *The Blind Man* would be its last. To settle the competition between the magazine and Picabia’s own periodical, *391*, then being published in New York, Picabia and Roché played a game of chess. Roché’s loss determined that *391* would survive.¹⁵⁷ Several months passed before Roché, Duchamp, and Wood created a new journal, *Rongwrong*.¹⁵⁸

Published in July 1917, the cover (figure 5.14) featured the title (originally *WrongWrong*, it was accidentally misspelled by the printer) above a photograph of a matchbook; in turn, the matchbook was illustrated with a drawing of two dogs, sniffing each other’s posterior. This arrangement has prompted several theories. Naumann believes the title and illustration work together as a pun, the welcoming activities of the two dogs being inappropriate or “wrong.”¹⁵⁹

David Hopkins has argued that the interaction between the dogs was meant to suggest the

¹⁵⁵ de Duve, “Given the Richard Mutt Case” identifies Loy as the author of this essay, although it is argued that Duchamp was an important influence in its writing.

¹⁵⁶ Mina Loy, “Pas De Commentaires! Louis M. Eilshemius,” *The Blind Man* 2 (May 1917): 11.

¹⁵⁷ The transcript of this game would be reprinted in the only issue of *Rongwrong*.

¹⁵⁸ Séverine Gossart, “RongWrong,” in *Dada*, Laurent Le Bon, Leah Dickerman, and Anne Umland, eds. (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2005), 854.

¹⁵⁹ Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 46-47.

continued friendship between Picabia and Duchamp.¹⁶⁰ Appearing after the demise of *The Blind Man*, it could also be a direct statement from the editors to their small circle of readers.

“Greetings” suggests a comfortable level of familiarity and lack of pretense.

The timing of this issue, during the summer of 1917, also suggests the possibility that, unlike previous New York Dada periodicals, *RongWrong* was conceived for a European, not American audience. Given its creation shortly after the American intervention in World War I, the pacifists Duchamp and Picabia may have chosen the name as a critique of this engagement; although America was allied with France, two wrongs do not make a right.¹⁶¹ Perhaps intended as a sign of solidarity with colleagues overseas, Duchamp and Picabia created a publication best suited for overseas exchange. This would explain the sudden disconnect from an American public, as much of the issue was printed in French and seemingly aimed at a European audience: indeed, Apollinaire would comment on the photograph of Edith Clifford Williams’s sculpture designed to be experienced through touch in “L’art tactile,” soon after.¹⁶² The Americanist scholar Dickran Tashjian considers *RongWrong* to be a “pale blague,” or joke, which “had no cause, no roots in the American situation.”¹⁶³ Whereas *The Blind Man* had addressed itself toward an American audience, *RongWrong* was a more private, art-world enterprise aimed at friends and correspondents in war-torn Europe.

The playful tone of the cover resonated throughout the rest of its eight pages. The inside cover featured a lengthy letter, written by “Marcel Douxami,” which thanked the reader for

¹⁶⁰ This is discussed in David Hopkins, *Dada’s Boys: Masculinity after Duchamp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹⁶¹ My thanks to Emily Braun for suggesting a closer examination of this war-time chronology.

¹⁶² Guillaume Apollinaire, “L’Art tactile,” *Mercure de France* 125.472 (16 February 1918): 751-3. Reprinted in *Apollinaire : Œuvres en Prose Complètes*, Michel Décaudin, ed. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1993), 270-1.

¹⁶³ Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* (Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1975), 56.

several issues of *391*.¹⁶⁴ The letter, which boasted a New Brunswick dateline but was written in French, playfully invoked Duchamp's collaborator and rival. Tongue in cheek, he wrote: "I don't want to speak too badly of your friends, but the work of a certain Picabia particularly bothered me. Is he the same painter, who has thus evolved, or a madman who has taken his name?"¹⁶⁵

Yet, the following page featured two poems, presumably by Picabia; one was signed by him and dedicated "to Douxami but above all to those who know," the second was attributed to the Marquis de la Torre.¹⁶⁶ A French nobleman, the Marquis had been convicted of funding his lavish lifestyle by stealing from hotel rooms and murdering a close friend.¹⁶⁷ The second poem, "A Chinese Night in New York," also invoked the pseudonym Pharamousse, which Picabia had previously employed in *391*. Finally, the page featured the transcript of the fateful chess match, in which Roché lost the right to publish *The Blind Man*. The bilingual *Rongwrong* was a semi-private, joking exchange between Duchamp and Picabia which was circulated to a small, insider audience. It was not the type of public and populist production which characterized production truly reflective of vernacular culture and New York Dada.

With the 1917 declaration of American involvement in World War I, the closure of Stieglitz's 291 Gallery and the folding of *Camera Work*, came a lull in Dada activity in New York. With some artists enlisting for military service and others fleeing conscription, others remaining in the city were forced to abandon their prior radicalism (either because outlets such as *The Masses* were suppressed, because of economic pressures, or to avoid official attention, censorship, and

¹⁶⁴ Douxami suggests deux ami (two friends), underscoring the playful banter between Duchamp and Picabia which marked this journal. Picabia was the editor of the journal, *391*.

¹⁶⁵ Marcel Douxami [Marcel Duchamp], *rongWrong* (1917): 2. The original text reads, "Je ne voudrais pas dire trop de mal de vos amis, mais les œuvres d'un certain Picabia m'on particulièrement irrité. – Est-ce bien le peintre d'autrefois quo évolue ainsi, ou serait-ce un fou qui a pris son nom ?"

¹⁶⁶ « à Douxami mais surtout à tous ceux qui savent »

¹⁶⁷ "Marquis was a Burgler," *New York Times* (9 November 1902).

possible deportation). Few major undertakings were possible during the remainder of the decade. The atmosphere of wartime America is often overlooked in art historical studies, but critical or radical activities were suspended upon the increased pressure and official oversight. As historian Richard Abrams described, “In the course of 1919 and well into 1920, many American communities experienced a virtual reign of terror. Government agents conducted massive raids on various radical organization headquarters, invaded private homes, rounded up thousands of ‘dangerous agitators’ ... Constitutional guarantees of personal liberties went begging for aliens and citizens alike whenever federal or local agencies tarred them as ‘undesirables.’”¹⁶⁸

Still, the conflation of the vernacular medium, anarchism, and the avant-garde in New York came together again in the pages of a small magazine, *TNT*, issued in March 1919 by Man Ray and Adolf Wolff.¹⁶⁹ Man Ray characterized the periodical as “a political paper with a very radical slant.... We were all mixed up with the anarchist group. It was anarchism rather than anything else.”¹⁷⁰ The title reflects this anarchist sympathy, however its tone suggested a violence that had been decidedly absent from the more mainstream activities of the Ferrer Center. The blast, then, is intended to disrupt the activities of the art world, rather than to suggest social upheaval. Indeed, the submissions included are firmly artistic and thoroughly disconnected from social or political issues. Whereas the *Ridgefield Gazook* may never have been printed, *TNT* was published; yet it was not a commercial product, as he later recounted in an interview with Arturo Schwarz, “It wasn’t made to attract attention; it wasn’t even circulated.... It was given away to a few friends, and then we left the whole thing.”¹⁷¹ Given the imminent deportation of anarchists Emma

¹⁶⁸ In Richard M. Abrams, *The Burdens of Progress: 1900-1929* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1978), 125.

¹⁶⁹ Few copies of *TNT* survive, but the full text is reprinted in *New York Dada*, Rudolf Kuenzli, ed. (New York: Willis Locker & Owens Pub, 1986).

¹⁷⁰ Schwarz, *New York Dada: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia*.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Goldman and Alexander Berkman to Russia under the 1918 Anarchist Exclusion Act, the political climate would not have tolerated the public circulation of a magazine with such overt anarchist connections. By the time of *TNT*'s publication in 1919, Man Ray was carefully cultivating contacts with the Dadaists in Europe, perhaps anticipating his move to Paris in 1921.

The years following World War I saw a suspension of avant-garde activity in New York and the scattering of its participants. By 1919, Picabia had returned to Barcelona; Duchamp had left wartime New York for Buenos Aires and Europe; Stieglitz, having closed his 291 gallery, ceased publication of *Camera Work*, and left his wife for Georgia O'Keeffe, was spending more time at his family home on Lake George. Thus, it is likely that Man Ray intended *TNT* to be for an international audience, as a statement of his position among the avant-garde in Europe and America. He included radical examples of non-traditional art, which helped to position Man Ray as both an innovative pioneer and as part of a larger interest in artistic alternatives. Man Ray's bid for international acclaim was rewarded; Tristan Tzara referred to *TNT* as "the latest magic" in his "Zurich Chronicle 1915-1919."¹⁷²

In the construction of modern American culture, New York Dada employed the strategies of vernacular culture, including direct marketing, open commercialism, and techniques of the mainstream press, to critique the traditional structures of elite power and to cultivate and encourage an engaged public. Adopting self-consciously American idioms, these artists embraced the lowbrow, vernacular quality of the American press, which was used to critique European modernism, and even Zurich Dada, as passé.

¹⁷² Tristan Tzara, "Zurich Chronicle 1915-1919" in Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1965), 223-8.

REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE OF DADA IN NEW YORK, 1910-1926

VOLUME II

by

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CHAPTER 6 DADA IN NEW YORK DURING THE 1920s

Two events: the Société Anonyme's Dada evening and the publication of *New York Dada* suggest 1921 as a watershed year for Dada in America, seemingly signaling an alliance with European Dada.¹ Upon closer examination, however, this alliance becomes more complicated. The activities of the 1920s in New York, including the founding of the exhibition group, the Société Anonyme, were based upon local precedents rather than overseas Dada influences. Despite the earlier contact between New York and Zurich, American artists continued to resist being subsumed into yet another European movement. The codified Dada movement remained a foreign entity, while artists in America, including Duchamp and Man Ray, continued their refusal to organize their activities into a coherent group. This does not mean, however, that what we now group as New York Dada did not have a significant legacy in the 1920s. The iconoclasm of Dada in New York influenced a series of artists in this decade, who, in turn, used it to reinvigorate their own work and to continue the search for an American mode of expression, including Stuart Davis, Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella, and Arthur Dove.² It is important to emphasize that these artists were primarily influenced by New York Dada irreverence and anti-

¹ Francis Naumann, "The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never," *Arts* 54, no 6 (February 1980): 143-9 looks at the events of this year.

² The scholarship on these three men often makes passing mention of the formal influence of Dada, without further investigation; however Dada became an important model because of its emphasis on local vernacular culture. As a basic resource for Stuart Davis see William Agee, *Stuart Davis (1892-1964): The Breakthrough Years 1922-1924* (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc., 1987) and Ani Boyakian and Mark Rutkoski, eds., *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). For Charles Demuth, see Barbara Haskell, *Charles Demuth* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1987). For Joseph Stella, see Barbara Haskell, *Joseph Stella* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994); Irma B. Jaffe, *Joseph Stella's Symbolism* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994); and Joann Moser, *Visual Poetry: The Drawings of Joseph Stella* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Press, 1990). For Arthur Dove, see Debra Bricker Balken, *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1997) and Ann Lee Morgan, *Arthur Dove: Life and Work with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984).

art principles, not international models of the movement. There is a considerable difference between what contemporaries in New York considered to be Dada and what has been historicized under this label.

This chapter begins by tracing the evolving nature of European Dada in the 1920s, especially in the way the movement was understood by American artists and the popular press before re-examining the legacy of New York Dada in the 1920s. American Dadaists of the 1920s revitalized their work by adopting elements of vernacular culture which were understood to be specifically American. During these years of transition, Dada shifted away from its anarchical roots, which had already been severely repressed during the wartime era. The dadaist vernacular spirit now became directly associated with Americanness.

The post-war period needs to be reconstructed if we are to comprehend the full and ultimate trajectory of New York Dada. In its pursuit of “Americanness” and its concurrent, iconoclastic rejection of European culture, New York Dada sensibilities influenced American modernism of the 1920s in ways that have been lost to scholarship. Milton Brown’s assessment that “the direction of American art was not changed by the World War.... The war years, as far as art was concerned, were merely a hiatus,” has had a lasting impression on studies of American art.³ For example, Susan Platt Noyes’s *Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism* dedicated only ten pages to Dada, most of which focuses on the Société Anonyme (an exhibition organization founded in 1920 by Duchamp and Katherine Dreier with Man Ray) and American press coverage of European Dada events, with little mention of American art production.⁴ While Société Anonyme presented European Dada to

³ Milton Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 71.

⁴ Susan Noyes Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981).

an American audience, especially in debuting the work of Kurt Schwitters, it was never conceived of as a Dada organization. The later historical labeling of Duchamp and Man Ray as Dada artists has obscured some elements of the early work of the Société Anonyme under the mantle of being “typically Dada,” and that the involvement of these two artists “virtually assured that the mocking irreverence of Dada would penetrate the group’s early activities.”⁵ As this chapter will demonstrate, what have been considered “indications,” of a European Dada quality to the society,⁶ upon closer examination become extensions of precedents found in New York during the 1910s.

Indeed, the evidence most often cited as proof of Dada’s late adoption by American artists, the single issue of *New York Dada* (figure 6.1) published by Duchamp and Man Ray in April 1921, is itself suspect. It was the first and only time that contemporary American artists referred to themselves by this label. Previous studies of Dada in New York have accepted the publication as sincere, but misguided, both in its embrace of the Dada label and the role of Tristan Tzara as an authorizing presence. The possibility that the publication, like so many precedents in New York, was a satirical jest has not yet been examined.

The title *New York Dada* built upon a public fascination with the Dada movement abroad. The popular press became aware of Dada as early as 1918, when the *New York Tribune* published an article, “What is Dadaism?” on July 9.⁷ The reporter, quoting from a German newspaper, provided a vague definition of the movement and fixed it as a European phenomenon, potentially dangerous to American sovereignty in its rejection of logic and order.

⁵ Ruth Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 33-35. Statements from the Société’s directors were also used as evidence of Dada activities in Estera Milman, “Dada New York: An Historiographic Analysis,” in *Dada/Dimensions*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1985).

⁶ Ruth Bohan, “Katherine Sophie Dreier and New York Dada,” *Arts Magazine* 51 (May 1977): 97-101.

⁷ “What is Dadaism?” *New York Tribune* 9 July 1918, quoted in Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 195.

Not until the spring of 1919 did the *New York Times* begin its coverage of Dada with an excerpt from Tzara's "Dada Manifesto 1918," explaining "Dada doesn't mean anything."⁸ Printing a poem, "The Cow Boy on a Violin String Crosses the Ohio," the author declared the Dadaists to be "no more eclectic or unintelligible than many other contemporary coteries of literature and art." In June, another account wrote a sympathetic account of a Dada performance, proclaiming that "Dadaists have their own idea of beauty."⁹ In both articles, the movement was defined as European; not until 1921 did the press raise the possibility of an American Dada. In, "'Dada' Will Get You if You Don't Watch Out It is On Its Way Here," Margery Rex warned that "Dada is a literary movement. It has attacked Paris with lunacies, jibes, and insulting ironies, but Paris has nonetheless capitulated to Dada. New York has sympathetic souls awaiting Dada."¹⁰

Returning to New York from Paris in January 1920, Duchamp became aware of this American fascination with the Dada movement. Soon after, he began to consider the publication of the periodical *New York Dada*.¹¹ In his autobiography, *Self Portrait* of 1963, Man Ray remembered:

Duchamp was in correspondence with the young group of poets and painters in Paris: the Dadaists, who asked for contributions to their publications. Why not get out a New York edition of a Dada magazine? We went to work. Aside from the cover which he designed, he left the rest of the make-up to me, as well as the choice of the contents. Tristan Tzara, one of the founders of Dadaism, sent us a mock authorization from Paris, which we translated. I picked material at random – a poem by the painter Marsden Hartley, a caricature by a newspaper cartoonist, Goldberg, some banal slogans, Stieglitz gave us a photograph of a woman's leg in a too-tight shoe; I added a few equivocal

⁸ "The Dadas," *New York Times* (30 March 1919).

⁹ "Intolerance at Zurich," *New York Times* (8 June 1919).

¹⁰ Margery Rex, "'Dada' Will Get You If You Don't Watch Out: It Is on the Way Here," *New York Evening Journal* (29 January 1921).

¹¹ Naumann dates the beginning of this project to the spring of 1920 in *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 196.

photographs from my own files. Most of the material was unsigned to express our contempt for credits and merits.¹²

In April of 1921, a single issue of *New York Dada* was published. I contend that Man Ray and Duchamp created the magazine to expose and undermine Tristan Tzara's desire for an international Dada, an organizational impulse that ran counter to the alleged non-programmatic stance of the movement. Naming their periodical *New York Dada* was not intended to signal an alliance with the European Dadaists, it was a satirical, overly emphatic, adoption of the label. The journal was designed to unveil the myths of Dada's nihilistic attitude, which were currently being debated in the mainstream press, and to position the American artists as even more transgressive than Tzara's Dada, as a group that rejected all institutions – including those of Dada. Printed once, the issue was not intended for wide circulation, but was distributed among those who would decode the satire and understand the joke being played.¹³

In his reminiscences, Man Ray revealed that the cover of *New York Dada* was designed by Duchamp.¹⁴ The label New York Dada repeats over and over, endlessly chanting the name. The red ink sears into the page, creating a sense of brand identity - New York Dada is literally being branded (albeit turned upside-down).¹⁵ Against this field is centered the picture of New York Dada's cover girl, Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy; as Duchamp himself designed the cover, this arrangement demands a more thorough investigation. In assuming a female persona, Rose suggests that appearances can be deceiving, that naming something does not simply make it so. Duchamp created an inverse to his readymades, questioning the nominative power of the artist

¹² Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), 100-1.

¹³ Speaking of *TNT*, Man Ray later remarked the circulation was "Like *New York Dada*, which was neither distributed nor sold. It was given away to a few friends, and then we left the whole thing." Man Ray, interview by Arturo Schwarz, *New York Dada: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1973), 96.

¹⁴ Séverine Gossart, "New York Dada," 756.

¹⁵ Several landmark lawsuits over trademark infringement took place during the 1910s and 1920s, including a decade-long battle to protect the *Coca-Cola* brand, which is detailed in Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989); see also Michelle Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

and complicating the notion of concrete identity: the sort of claim to identity which is so insistently underscored by the repeated words “New York Dada.”

Pushing this complication forward, we must assess this particular depiction of Rose; she does not appear in a straight-forward portrait, but as an advertisement or product, her picture pasted on a bottle of perfume. *Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette* (figure 6.2) was created by Man Ray and Duchamp in the spring of 1921, Naumann reports that its publication on the cover of *New York Dada* was the public debut of the work.¹⁶ The pseudo-alluring image of Rose Sélavy sends up the stereotypical marketing tropes used in cosmetics: Duchamp becomes a mysterious seductress and a model. In 1922, Duchamp called Tzara the “traveling salesman” of Dada, claiming that his “publicity campaign would stagger the mightiest American drummer. Heinz 57 Varieties, Smith Brothers’ Cough Drops, Carter’s Little Liver Pills, the Ingersoll Watch – these and other countless familiars might learn much from Dada.”¹⁷ Coming from the famously anti-commercial Duchamp, his distaste for Tzara’s marketing tactics is unmistakable in this statement and parodied in Rose’s campaign.

In publishing *New York Dada* in 1921, Duchamp and Man Ray obtained from Tzara a manifesto which clearly revealed his rather un-Dada intentions to codify the movement and institutionalize it (figure 6.3).¹⁸ The text of his authorization was largely concerned with asserting the importance of Dada and with promoting his forthcoming book *Dadaglobe* – a never-realized project which would have published an international anthology of the movement. This authorization was the punch line of the publication – for to quote Tzara’s essay, if “There is nothing more incomprehensible than Dada. Nothing more indefinable,” then how could anything

¹⁶ Francis Naumann, “Lot Description: Lot 37/Sale 1209,” Christie’s: Collection Yves Saint Laurent et Pierre Bergé (23 February 2009).

¹⁷ Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Alfred Kreymborg, “Dada and the Dadas,” *Shadowland* 7 (1922): 43.

¹⁸ Tzara titled it “Cache-Oeil Cache-Art Cache-Corset/Authorisation,” which Duchamp translated into “Eye—Cover Art-Cover Corset-Cover Authorization.”

possibly be authorized in its name? Tzara's text, however, grants this permission and then proceeds to an advertisement.

Aside from the cover, *New York Dada* reproduced photographs by Alfred Stieglitz (figure 6.4) and Man Ray (figure 6.5), as well as a cartoon signed "Rube Goldberg (figure 6.6)." Francis Naumann has suggested that, in hindsight, the cartoon depicts a kind of mapped trajectory of Dada – that after making its way through Europe, it arrived in New York with its force diminished;¹⁹ I would argue that this is precisely the goal of the New York group. In this contorted mechanism, the ridiculousness of marketing and exporting Dada is exposed. Hardly the forces of nihilist Supermen, in this cartoon, the Dadaists are pictured as a bunch of tottering old men who aim a gun at a young boy, bound and held captive.

The choice to reproduce a cartoon by Goldberg, who had no prior connection to Dada in New York, is provocative. That this cartoon does not appear in the Goldberg archives has led Naumann to doubt its authenticity;²⁰ if the drawing is a forged fabrication by Duchamp and Man Ray, then the choice to attribute it to Goldberg is indicative of some pointed meaning. At the time, Goldberg was the world's most financially successful cartoonist, made rich by the syndication of his work in papers across the country;²¹ by 1920, his annual income was \$185,000.²² This choice of artist by Duchamp and Man Ray mocked the sort of international

¹⁹ Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 203.

²⁰ In conversation, Francis Naumann has suggested that this cartoon might not have been the work of Goldberg at all, but rather a forgery of the artist's recognizable style, based on his discussion with the leading authority on Goldberg, Maynard Frank Wolfe. If this is so, then such a critical reading of the cartoon would be even more plausible. Intriguingly, Wolfe only referred briefly to the cartoon, stating "Boob McNutt frame (right) was exhibited (but not by Rube) at the landmark show of the Dada artists in the United States in 1921. Such Dada legends as Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Man Ray also shared Rube's interest in technology and satire [emphasis mine]." In *Rube Goldberg: Inventions!* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 33. My thanks to Francis Naumann for sharing this insight with me.

²¹ Goldberg was earning more than \$1000 a week in 1915; the following year he married the daughter of the owner of the White Rose supermarket chain. Stephen Becker, *Comic Art in America: A Social History of the Funnies, the Political Cartoons, Magazine Humor, Sporting Cartoons and Animated Cartoons* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 96.

²² P.C. Marzio, *Rube Goldberg: His Life and Work*, 94.

Dada franchise being suggested by Tzara and his Dadaglobe project. Huelsenbeck documented Tzara's success in promoting Dada to an international market, writing: "Tzara began to publish the magazine *Dada*, which found its way into every country in Europe and was widely purchased. We saw it in Germany, and it impressed us as a commercial art and nothing else."²³

Underneath the cartoon, but printed upside down, was a message from Dadataxi, Limited, a pseudonym adopted by Duchamp and used only in this instance.²⁴ Titled "Ventilation," Duchamp merely reprinted a standard notice found in New York City taxicabs: "On the question of proper ventilation opinions radically differ. It seems impossible to please all. It is our aim, however, to cater to the wishes of the majority. The conductor of this vehicle will gladly be governed accordingly. Your cooperation will be appreciated."²⁵ The text, while meaningless on its own, becomes intriguing when considered as a parody of Tzara's Dadaglobe: despite the possibility of opposing opinions, the conductor of the Dadataxi appears to acquiesce to the wishes of the majority. Yet the effect of this defeat was mitigated by the patronizing tone, offering support to the theory that *New York Dada* spoofed Tzara's desires for a legitimate New York branch of Dada. The signature, "DADATAXI, Limited," referenced the commercial world of corporations and copyrights, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

In these pages, not only were the European Dadaists depicted as cultural marketers, their activities were characterized as absurd posturing for the public. Mimicking reports of Dada events in Paris, *New York Dada* chronicled an evening reminiscent of Tzara's antics. In an episode most definitely untrue, the "pug debs" Joseph Stella and Marsden Hartley were to be

²³ Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada* in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1951), 34.

²⁴ Séverine Gossart, "New York Dada," *Dada* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2005), 756. This nickname demonstrates that Duchamp was aware of Dada nicknames among his European counterparts and suggests another example of parody.

²⁵ Dadataxi [Marcel Duchamp], "Ventilation," *New York Dada*, April 1921: np. The text was considered a "printed ready-made" by Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2000), 586.

introduced to society as part of the “grand socking cotillion.”²⁶ In this coming-out party at Madison Square Garden, “everybody who is who will be who-er [*sic*] than ever” as the men, wearing boxing gloves, jeweled slippers, and silk tights, would climb into a “Renaissance period [ring] with natural wood splinter,” as “flocks of butterflies [were released] ... from their cages.” Making fun of the Dada events, which were increasingly receiving attention in the American press, the spectacle of the “Pug Debs” would have ultimately been meaningless, not nihilistic, but simply silly.

The involvement of Stieglitz in *New York Dada* has been marginalized, yet in viewing the journal as a mocking rejection of European dominance and foreign attempts to institutionalize the New York avant-garde, his participation becomes wholly logical. Stieglitz contributed to the publication, submitting his photograph of *Dorothy True* (figure 6.4). This double exposure was utterly unlike any other work by Stieglitz and reused an image of Dorothy True (figure 6.7) which had originally been printed in 1919. While this double exposure could be interpreted as an attempt to harness the forces of chance which had been a focus of Zurich Dada, it could also be a send-up of these processes. When coupled with the caption “Watch Your Step!,” the photograph seems to serve as a warning. Sarah Greenough has noted that True steps onto mount board, literally treading upon the tools of Stieglitz’s art.²⁷ Below appears a printed price tag, 25 cents, suggesting that even “Dadynamic stuff” was marketable – and for sale.

Man Ray’s characterization of Tzara’s letter as a “mock authorization” has often been interpreted to mean that Tzara was manipulating a group of earnest American artists, naïve to the

²⁶ Hartley’s homosexuality and Stieglitz’s pairing of his *Warriors* with Duchamp’s *Fountain* are addressed in Paul Franklin, “Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* and the Art of Queer Art History,” *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 23-50.

²⁷ Sarah Greenough, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 298.

full meaning of Dada and the absurdity of such permission.²⁸ Yet, given the precedent for practical jokes in New York Dada, we must consider that perhaps Tzara was the target rather than the instigator of the prank. Assuming that the New York desire for Tzara's permission was sincere, scholars have often cited Alfred Stieglitz as the naïve seeker of Tzara's authorization, claiming that he was sincerely interested in gaining permission for the movement.²⁹ Stieglitz, however, seems to have been unaware of the true identity of the authorization's author, writing in enthusiastic response to the publication of *New York Dada*: "It's quite a marvel – the N. Y. Dada. – The cover is a delight. That Dada – just a wonder. – The skit – Hartley – Mina Loy – Stella most amusing – and Francis's letter a real message – It's all good. – Heartiest congratulations."³⁰ While Stieglitz seemed to be pleased with the overall concept of the magazine, he credited the authorization to Francis Picabia rather than to Tzara. Naumann has also implicated Gabrielle Picabia-Buffet in this request, as she actually corresponded with Tzara in 1920.³¹

Two letters, however, suggest that Duchamp was directly involved with the "authorization." In an undated letter to Picabia, Duchamp reported that Man Ray and "one of our friends, Bessie Breuer, would like to make a New York Dada appear – would you be kind enough to ask Tzara

²⁸ Estera Milman, "Dada New York: An Historiographic Analysis," in *Dada/Dimensions*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1985), 173.

²⁹ Since Stieglitz had not corresponded with Tzara, scholars point to an April 1920 letter from Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia to Tristan Tzara, in the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, alleged that "Stieglitz a tres envie à faire paraître un Dada anglaise – Americain – et je suis charge de vous demandez l'autorization." My thanks to Francis Naumann for sharing this letter with me.

³⁰ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, 17 April 1921. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

³¹ Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 196-7. Francis Naumann claimed that Stieglitz asked Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia to write to Tzara, a letter from her dated 2 March 1920 is in the Tzara papers at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, quoted in Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 196. Naumann notes that Marc Dachy's claim that Duchamp and Man Ray initialized the request is not explained in his text, *The Dada Movement 1915-1923* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990). Mason Klein repeated the claim that Duchamp and Man asked for the "tongue-in-cheek" authorization in *Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 55. Michel Sanouillet used the exchange to suggest that "Tzara was on excellent terms with Duchamp. On request from the latter, Tzara had just sent to Man Ray the 'authorization' which, translated into English, is featured in *New York Dada*" in Michel Sanouillet, *Dada À Paris* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965), 280.

for a short written authorization, which would be put in the magazine?"³² In the same letter, Duchamp relayed the sale of several copies of "Dadas 391 et des livres," enclosed a check for the proceeds, and promised further receipts from Man Ray, who was also selling the publications. Both men were therefore involved with Tzara's work in propagating Dada in America and would have been conscious of his program. In a second undated letter to Picabia, Duchamp added a note to Tzara "I will probably translate your authorization so that everyone here will 'comprehend' [punctuation original]."³³ We should consider the possibility, though, that Duchamp was not entirely sincere in his support of Zurich Dada and that his request was designed to reveal the programmatic intentions of Tzara.³⁴

To understand the tension between the New York Dadaists and Tzara requires some discussion of their prior relationship. Although contact was made between New York and Zurich in November 1916, artists in America, including the Stieglitz and Arensberg circles, had consistently resisted Tzara's repeated invitations to join the Dada fellowship. With the exception of Man Ray, they did not send works for gallery shows in Europe, nor did they refer to themselves as Dadaists. Yet, Tzara insistently included the Americans among his associates, especially as he prepared to move from Zurich to Paris in 1920.³⁵ Since the post-war world looked to New York as a beacon of modernity, it became important for him to align his movement with the iconoclasm attributed to the city. Thus, in his first flyer for distribution in

³² "Man Ray et une de nos amies Bessie Breuer, vont faire paraître un New York Dada – voulez-vous être assez gentil pour demander à Tzara de faire une courte autorisation d'imprimer, qu'on mettrait sur le magazine." Marcel Duchamp, letter to Francis Picabia, nd. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

³³ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Francis Picabia, nd. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

³⁴ Even upon his return to Paris, Duchamp only sporadically cooperated with Tzara and the Dadaists.

³⁵ In a 1916 letter to Tzara, de Zayas did offer an exhibition of American art, however he made it clear that such a European show was already being planned for Paris and would merely continue to a venue in Zurich; it was not intended as a Dada exhibition. "Prochainement j'aurai dans ma galerie une exposition d'Art Abstrait en Amérique et j'ai idée de l'amener à Paris. Seriez vous intéressés à avoir cette exposition à Zurich ? Depuis quelques temps je travaille à établir des relations artistique entre l'Europe et l'Amérique, car je crois que le seul moyen d'arriver à maintenir le program évolutive des idées modernes, c'est par le commerce d'idées entre tous les peuples." Marius de Zayas, letter to Tristan Tzara, 16 November 1916. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

the Parisian journal *Littérature*, as Tzara compiled the names of the international Dadaists, he included among them the American collector and poet Walter Arensberg and Charlie Chaplin (figure 6.8).³⁶ The following month, in *Bulletin Dada*, he expanded the list to name 76 “presidents” of Dada, including Arensberg along with Mabel Dodge, Alfred Stieglitz, John Marin, and Abraham Walkowitz (figure 6.9).³⁷ Of the artists and writers listed, fourteen were either American or had been active in America during the 1910s, comprising nearly twenty percent of the roster and signaling Tzara’s interest in creating the illusion of a broad American base of support for Dada.

Named in both lists, Walter Arensberg was another point of contact between America and the European Dadaists. He was interested in the activities in Zurich in Paris and his papers contain an undated newspaper clipping describing an April 1919 Dada soirée in Zurich. When the painter Louis Bouché traveled to Europe in 1920, Arensberg asked him to seek out Dada magazines and bring them back to New York.³⁸ Yet, there was a measure of reserve: Arensberg was interested in understanding Dada, not participating in the movement.

In 1920, Tzara wrote to Arensberg, requesting that the collector write a manifesto on American Dada. In response, Arensberg submitted a puerile pun: “The cable which I prepared to send you in answer to your letter read as follows – ‘benez [*sic*] tous d’avoir le mal de merde dans les mouvement kaka.”³⁹ Enclosed was a sheet of white paper printed only with the words “Dada est Américain.” In a move reminiscent of the blank images of Amorphism and the censored bars

³⁶ Tristan Tzara, insert for *Littérature* (February 1920). While Chaplin was not an American citizen, he was primarily associated with the American movies that had propelled him to international stardom.

³⁷ Tristan Tzara, “Quelques Présidents et Présidentes,” *Bulletin Dada* (March 1920): 2. That Tzara would select these figures suggests a certain loose understanding of the avant-garde in New York, most likely gleaned from back issues of *Camera Work*. All these figures were part of the Stieglitz orbit around 1913, making them an outdated assortment by 1920 (for example, Mabel Dodge had moved to New Mexico in 1919 and Marin was increasingly working in Maine).

³⁸ Naumann, “The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never,” 145

³⁹ Tzara papers, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, undated, but Naumann *New York Dada 1915-1923* dates to the spring of 1920 (197).

of the *Ridgefield Gazook*, Arensberg omitted any support for his claim that “Dada is American.” In May 1920, however, a manifesto appeared in *Littérature*, whereby Arensberg’s letter contained references to an international Dada: “DADA is American, DADA is Russian, DADA is Spanish, DADA is swiss, DADA is german...” The text was supplied by someone other than Arensberg, who disavowed the letter. Naumann has characterized this as a “willful misunderstanding of Arensberg’s gesture”;⁴⁰ indeed, a facsimile of the letter appears to be written in a hand other than Arensberg’s (figure 6.10).⁴¹

Thus, *New York Dada* intended to undermine Tzara’s proselytizing. As a single issue, it was never intended to create a legacy or to legitimize the movement. Tzara and European Dada were the targets of a practical joke. Despite his recent attempts to retroactively reassign the recent activities of New York artists under the aegis of Dadaism, Tzara’s authorization warned the reader, “Be on your guard, and realize that a truly dada product is a different thing than a label.”⁴² Given the playful approach Duchamp took with such labels on the cover of the issue, it seems that the irony of Tzara’s proclamation was not lost on the editors of *New York Dada*. Rather than marking the beginning or the end of Dada in New York, *New York Dada* marks America’s final refusal to join the international ranks of the party. Using the distinctive language of American vernacular journalism and advertising, the journal positions the avant-garde in New York as more iconoclastic than its European counter-part.

Little is known about the circulation of *New York Dada*; Man Ray remembered “The distribution was just as haphazard and the paper attracted very little attention. There was only

⁴⁰ Francis Naumann, “The New York Dada Movement: Better Late Than Never”; translated in Ades, 191.

⁴¹ François Chapon suggested that it was written by Germaine Everling, Picabia’s mistress at the time; see Naumann, “New York Dada: Better Late Than Never,” 149, note 19 or *New York Dada*, 240, note 22.

⁴² Tristan Tzara, “Authorization,” *New York Dada*: np.

one issue. The effort was as futile as trying to grow lilies in a desert.”⁴³ Henry McBride published a review of the issue, in which he proclaimed Duchamp “a genuine dadaist, if not the first and original one. . . . So anything dadaistic from him has as much authority as anything from any one else.”⁴⁴ What is notable is the lack of a reaction from Tzara himself, who had previously commented on American production.⁴⁵ Although we cannot be certain that his commentary has not been subsequently lost, the absence of a public announcement of the journal is significant; either the journal was not circulated to European audiences, or else Tzara understood the gesture.

Duchamp’s DADATAXI, Limited signature in *New York Dada* suggests his interest in brand marketing and commercial practices, which he pursued in additional contemporary projects. For his *Fresh Widow* (1920) (figure 6.11), completed in New York shortly after returning from a six-month trip to France, the model of a French window was actually manufactured by a carpenter, as has been discussed by Arturo Schwarz and Molly Nesbit.⁴⁶ Duchamp then covered the window panes with panels of leather, disrupting its function. The signature, which was also not hand-crafted but created from paper-tape letters, read “FRESH WIDOW COPYRIGHT ROSE Sélavy 1920.” As the first work signed by Duchamp’s female alter-ego, it is unclear whether the copyright was intended to protect the object or the creation of its creator, but Duchamp was clearly mindful of the copyright process and the protections extended to preserve the uniqueness of commercial entities.⁴⁷

⁴³ Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, 108.

⁴⁴ Henry McBride, “New York Review Appears in New York,” *New York Herald* (24 April 1921): 11.

⁴⁵ For example, Tzara called *TNT* the “latest magic” when it was released in 1919. Tristan Tzara, “Zurich Chronicle 1915-1919” in Richter, *Dada*, 226-8; quoted in Milman, 14.

⁴⁶ Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 678, and Molly Nesbit, “Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model,” *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 173-190.

⁴⁷ See Francis M. Naumann’s entry on this object in *American Modernism: The Shein Collection*, Charles Brock and Nancy Anderson, eds. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2010). Helen Molesworth, “Rose Sélavy Goes Shopping,” discussed the linkages between the commercial and artistic worlds, especially department stores and copyrights, and their relation to the readymades in *The Dada Seminars*, Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky, eds. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005). Nesbit linked *Fresh Widow* to the drawing

In 1922, Rose Sélavy (Duchamp added the second “R” in 1921) also copyrighted the format of the book, *Some French Moderns Say McBride* (figure 6.12). Published by the Société Anonyme, the book was a compilation of essays written by the critic for the *New York Sun*.⁴⁸ While the unusual format of the book, printed in increasingly large type and bound with index tabs, which Duchamp described as “in the fashion of these alphabets in offices in dustproof files,” has been the focus of scholarly analysis, little has been said about the choice of essays reprinted within.⁴⁹

The text began by reprinting an essay on Cézanne, in which McBride had originally reviewed Vollard’s text on the artist and analyzed the hostile reaction to such innovation. Printed in very small type, the Cézanne review fills nearly two pages with text that requires close reading. This was followed by a review of Matisse that expounds on the impossibility of explaining art. “Did you ever hear a Cook’s guide explaining the Puvis de Chavannes style to a party of Nebraskan schoolma’ams in the Pantheon?” he asked an academician. “Did you ever read Ruskin’s art made easy guide for dull intellects? Explanations that do not explain! When a picture can be explained, it’s already en route for the garret.”⁵⁰ Reviews of Rodin and Cubism were also forums for explaining the progress of modern art, arguing that “the public for ‘modern art’ grows every day.”⁵¹

instruction Duchamp would have received as a student. She argued that such a design would have been considered an industrial good and therefore not eligible for copyright protection, adding another level of interpretation to this maneuver in "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model."

⁴⁸ The project is included in Ann Temkin, Marcel Duchamp, and Rose Sélavy, "Of or By," *Grand Street* 58 (Autumn 1996), which studied the dual authorship of works by Duchamp and Sélavy. It is also discussed in Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*.

⁴⁹ Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 55 briefly discusses the project and quotes Marcel Duchamp, letter to Henry McBride. The letter is undated but Naumann estimates it to June 1922; Henry McBride papers, Archives of American Art.

⁵⁰ Henry McBride, “Matisse” in Marcel Duchamp, *Some French Moderns Say McBride* (New York: Société Anonyme, Inc., 1922), np.

⁵¹ Henry McBride, “Rodin,” in *Idem*.

The next passage, an essay on Gauguin's letters, appeared in slightly larger type. McBride's undated account of a missed appointment with Picasso was printed in an even larger font, which continued to grow in size as he retells an exchange over Picabia's work. Speaking with a young gallery assistant, McBride defended Picabia's work as "daring" to use the shapes of the modern world.⁵² When the young man quickly acquiesced, McBride concluded, "He had yielded to my opinion precisely as he had previously yielded to the arguments of his unprogressive family. It really is one of the most difficult things in the world to induce people to think for themselves on the subject of art." The following essay on Van Gogh, which was printed even larger, positioned the artist as a "stumbling block, even to those who in the snobbish wish to be up to date swallow any strange dish that is set before them."⁵³ Essays on Redon and Marie Laurencin continued to grow even larger, the text eventually becoming so large that it becomes difficult to follow.

The final essay, which discussed the dressmaking of Poiret, was printed so large that not even three words can be printed on any single line. The essay rose to a typographical crescendo as it explained that one must "acquit Paul Poiret of any deliberate intention to acquire oceans of free advertisement" from the interested mass media, before immediately returning to the original, miniscule type to conclude with the dangers of such overexposure.

None of the excerpts are dated and Duchamp most likely arranged their order to suit his own agenda. He was solely responsible for the selection of the specific reviews to be reprinted and the repeated emphasis on the difficulties of discussing art constitutes a deliberate message: throughout the anthology, McBride continually undermined his own authority as an art critic. For example, on Dufy's paintings at the Carroll Gardens, he wrote: "Aren't they charming? And do you know why? I don't? That is, I know why, but I'm not going to tell... But I mustn't help

⁵² Henry McBride, "Picabia," in *Idem*.

⁵³ Henry McBride, "Van Gogh," in *Idem*.

you. You must learn to think for yourselves...”⁵⁴ In this way, the compilation questioned the authority and position of art criticism.

Duchamp entered the commercial realm in January 1922, following another visit to France. After partnering with the artist Leon Hartl, he wrote to Tzara, “I am a teintre.”⁵⁵ While the pun between “teintre” and “peintre” has been remarked upon, Duchamp had truly begun working as a fabric dyer. He explained to Man Ray, who was then working in Paris, “I am a businessman. Hartl and I bought a dye shop. He dyes and I keep the books. If we are successful, we don’t know what we’ll do.”⁵⁶ The venture ended shortly thereafter. It was not Duchamp’s first consideration of a professional career; while in Paris during November of 1921, Duchamp had written to the Arensbergs that he wanted to return to New York and find work as an assistant cameraman in the movie industry.⁵⁷

Duchamp did become involved in the foundation of a new exhibition organization when, in 1920, it became clear that a new, noncommercial, venue for the exhibition of modern art was needed in New York. Duchamp and Man Ray began a collaboration with Katherine Dreier (who had previously served on the board of directors of the Society of Independent Artists) and the Société Anonyme came together in 1920.⁵⁸ As Marsden Hartley explained, the society was “to continue what was so well begun... at 291.”⁵⁹ It must be noted that, despite the involvement of

⁵⁴ Henry McBride, “In the Museum: Dufy, Signac, Cross, Segonzac, Gleizes, Villon, Duchamps [sic],” in Idem.

⁵⁵ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Leon Hartl, undated, quoted in Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923*, 55.

⁵⁶ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Man Ray, undated. Naumann dates to the summer of 1922. Original letter, collection Codognato, Venice, Italy; quoted in, *Affectusement Marcel. The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, Francis Naumann, ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 121.

⁵⁷ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Walter Arensberg, 15 November 1921. Walter and Louis Arensberg papers, Archives of American Art.

⁵⁸ In his dissertation, John Angeline, “Reassessing Modernism: Katherine S. Dreier and the Société Anonyme” (Ph.D. Diss., Graduate Center, CUNY, 1999). Angeline defended Dreier’s reputation as an unwitting accomplice to Duchamp’s maneuvers, writing that “her reputation for being antagonistic to Dada or incapable of appreciating its projects is undeserved.” The relationship between Duchamp and Dreier is discussed in Eleanor S. Apter, “Regimes of Coincidence: Katherine S. Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Dada,” in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* (Middletown: 1975), 61.

Duchamp and Man Ray, that the Société Anonyme never identified itself as a Dadaist group, nor did they privilege Dada over any other group of modern artists. Scholarship has presupposed, however, that the involvement of Duchamp and Man Ray was either ironic or indicative of a Dadaist agenda and has not considered how the organization evolved from local precedents of the 1910s.⁶⁰

Rather than seeing the Société Anonyme as a Dadaist organization operating in New York, it should be noted that the group had no affiliation with any single style or school. The relationship between the Société Anonyme and Dada has been oversimplified. This section will examine several incidents which have been traditionally discussed through a Eurocentric understanding of Dadaism and demonstrate that these activities were, in fact, a continuation of the pre-1916 activities of the New York avant-garde. As the guiding forces of the organization, Dreier and Duchamp issued a challenge to traditional institutions of patronage and exhibition.

Consider Richard Boix's often-reproduced cartoon of a Société Anonyme event, usually cited as an indicator of Dada activities in America (figure 6.13). While little is known of Boix,⁶¹ he was an illustrator who created caricatures of Man Ray and Duchamp in 1920, but does not appear to have been associated closely with either artist, or with the Société Anonyme. His best-known image, called *New York Da-Da* after the label inscribed, has troubled scholars who attempt to view it as a group portrait of Dadaism. Indeed, it is not an image of a Dada event at all. Art historian Ruth Bohan has dated the gathering depicted to a 1921 Symposium on the

⁶⁰ The two major sources for the Société Anonyme, Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982) and Jennifer Gross, *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) focus more closely on the exhibition of European artists. As previously discussed, Dreier's statements have often been used to discredit New York Dada, such as in Estera Milman, "Dada New York: A Historiographic Analysis," although Dreier never claimed to represent a Dada position.

⁶¹ Some newly discovered biographical information is included in Francis M. Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life, and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Readymade Press, 2012), 228, note 1.

Psychology of Modern Art and Archipenko, held on February 16.⁶² That Boix associated this group with Dada most likely reflects some confusion about the radical art being exhibited and the group's press announcements for the upcoming Dada exhibition, planned for the following month.

Bohan considered the naming of the Société to be a Dadaist operation. Plans for the Société Anonyme began in January 1920, when Man Ray suggested the name, allegedly without realizing that the result was not an anonymous society, but the French term for incorporated.⁶³ Certainly Duchamp realized the humor implicit in such a name, especially after the organization filed the appropriate paperwork with the State of New York to become the Société Anonyme, Incorporated. The explicit, overt identification of the exhibition society as a corporation or business entity, combined with the fact that the works shown in their exhibitions were not offered for sale, would have undermined the expectations of a traditional gallery. The absurdity of this pun, essentially "Incorporated Incorporated," has been widely discussed in the scholarship, but a level of critique exists as well: this name parodically linked the group to the commercial world which it was constructed to avoid. The effect is an ironic contrast. As Dreier later explained, "We took as our emblem the head of a laughing ass to show that we, too, could laugh at ourselves."⁶⁴

Bohan also claimed the first exhibition of the Société Anonyme, which opened on April 30, 1920 in a rented gallery space on East 47th Street, to be a Dadaist installation. Duchamp designed the installation, which included both European and American work of a wide variety of styles. Henry McBride described how the artist "covered the walls with a pale bluish oilcloth

⁶² Ruth L. Bohan, "Joseph Stella and the 'Conjunction of WORLDS.'" in Jennifer Gross, *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, 17.

⁶³ Man Ray, *Self-Portrait*, 77.

⁶⁴ Katherine Dreier, "'Intrinsic Significance' in Modern Art," in *Three Lectures on Modern Art*, Katherine Dreier, James J. Sweeney, and Naum Gabo, eds. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 6.

than which nothing could be purer, and tinted the fireplace and woodwork to match. The floor covering is of grey ribbed rubber. It seems to have been chosen for its quality of texture and color, and not at all with the idea of insuring firmer foothold for tottering Academicians who drift into these precincts in search of ideas.”⁶⁵ As for the paintings, they were uniformly framed “in strips of lace paper.” The use of lace recalls Stettheimer’s 1916 exhibition at Knoedler Gallery as well as her arranged displays of art in her lace-decorated studio space. Both strategies designed to complicate the division between public (commercial) and private space and to disperse the institutional authority of the gallery space by feminizing and domesticating it.

Bohan also recounted Man Ray’s address on modern art to a Société Anonyme gathering as evidence of the group’s Dadaism.⁶⁶ In his autobiography, Man Ray described how he began by telling a story.⁶⁷ While fantastic and illogical, the narrative was not unlike the dream sequences of Beatrice Wood or Alfred Stieglitz which had been printed in *The Blind Man*. Concluding this narrative, Man Ray then “broke into a tirade against dealers, collectors, and critics, defended the integrity of the artist, questioned the motives of those who were out to please, who were confusing issues; then I ended abruptly by condemning exhibitions in general.”⁶⁸ Far from an original outburst, Man Ray lecture echoed themes of Robert Coady’s criticism of the 1916 Forum Exhibition, or even Benjamin de Casseres’s “The Art ‘Puffer’,” or “American Indifference,” published in *Camera Work* in 1909.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Henry McBride, “News and Views of Art, Including the Clearing House for Works of the Cubists,” *New York Sun and Herald* (16 May 1920): 8; quoted in David Joselit, “The Artist Readymade: Marcel Duchamp and the Société Anonyme,” in Gross, *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, 39.

⁶⁶ Bohan, *The Société Anonyme’s Brooklyn Exhibition*, 34-5.

⁶⁷ Ray, *Self-Portrait*, 84-5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ See Robert Coady, “Letter to the Sun,” *New York Sun* (12 March 1916) and “Reply to W. H. Wright,” *New York Sun* (19 March 1916) or Benjamin de Casseres, “The Art ‘Puffer’,” *Camera Work* 28 (October 1909): 31 or “American Indifference,” *Camera Work* 27 (January 1909): 24.

Dreier's early writings reveal a similarly disillusioned (albeit still elitist) attitude towards the commercial networks of galleries and demonstrate her vision for the Société Anonyme as a corrective to the market forces of the art world.⁷⁰ As she explained:

Most of us want to own picture other people know about. Half the pleasure in ownership is the envy it arouses in others. To own pictures few understand contains little pleasure for the average person. It is not a good business proposition therefore, for dealers to bring over the works of new men unknown in this country, for which no one cares and no market exists.⁷¹

This anti-commercial attitude reflected the legacy of Stieglitz's gallery and the People's Art Guild, the anarchism of the New York avant-garde more than European dadaism. All of these activities were completely consistent with the anti-institutional, anarchical theories of the previous decade.

Indeed, the original intention of the Société Anonyme was not to purchase or to sell art, but merely to provide a forum for exhibition and education.⁷² With strong ties to the European avant-garde, the society was not aimed at fostering an American aesthetic, but in a broader promotion of modern art. Although strained finances required the society to close this gallery space in 1921, the group continued to stage exhibitions in venues around the area.

Only in 1923, when John Covert donated his work to the Société, did they begin to make purchases.⁷³ As Jennifer Gross noted in her analysis of the Société Anonyme's collection (later gifted to Yale University), "Dreier and Duchamp amassed it [the collection] without

⁷⁰ Angeline, "Reassessing Modernism: Katherine S. Dreier and the Société Anonyme," reclaimed the role Dreier played in the presentation of modern art and the Société Anonyme from a museological perspective. Her biography is discussed in John Angeline, "Dreier the Painter," *Art in America* 94, no 6 (2006): 101-7; Robert J. Levy, "Katherine Dreier: Patron of Modern Art," *Apollo* 113 (1981): 314-7; and Aline B. Saarinen, "Propagandist: Katherine Sophie Dreier," in *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, 1958).

⁷¹ Dreier, "The Modern Ark – A Private Museum" n.d. Katherine S. Dreier Papers/Société Anonyme Archive, YCAL.

⁷² As Duchamp described in a letter to his sister, Suzanne, "La Société Anonyme est une galerie où on expose sans vendre." 20 October [1920], Jean Crotti papers, Archives of American Art.

⁷³ Jennifer Gross, "An Artists' Museum" in Gross, *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, 10.

consideration of renown, nationality, or alignment with a particular movement; their criterion was individual merit.”⁷⁴ Rather than a top-down direction, many artists were added to the collection upon the recommendation of colleagues and other artists. The result was not a traditional museum collection, instead the Société created a network of international exchange. This pluralism reflected a continued resistance to categorization and academic hierarchies. On January 27, 1921, Stella gave a lecture on modern painting for the Société Anonyme, which was later published in *Broom* as “On Painting.” In this piece, he criticized the classification of art into movements, which he felt limited the artist: “The motto of the modern artist is freedom, real freedom.”⁷⁵

In her desire to bring modern art to an American audience, Dreier returned to Europe in 1919, traveling to Germany. During this visit, she sought out modern art, bringing her into contact with the Dadaists operating there. She visited Cologne in 1919 and Berlin during the First International Dada Fair of 1920. In her 1923 text, *Western Art and the New Era*, she described the Dadaists as “the Bolsheviks in art” and framed them as revolutionaries: “They are the tillers of the soil, the men who are trying to prepare the ground for future development ... though cynical, they do not wish only to destroy, for at the bottom they are constructive.”⁷⁶ She attempted to arrange American venues for both exhibitions, although ultimately neither materialized. Unable to secure loans for Berlin or Cologne Dada, Dreier was able to import a series of paintings and collages by Kurt Schwitters, introducing the artist to an American audience. His work was first shown as part of a group exhibition in November 1920 and then in another group show in the spring of 1921. Initially, this second exhibition was intended to

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Joseph Stella, “On Painting,” *Broom* 2 (1921): 119-123.

⁷⁶ Katherine Dreier, *Western Art and the New Era* (New York: Bretano's, 1923), quoted in Bohan, “Katherine Sophie Dreier and New York Dada,” 100.

include work from the Berlin Dadaists, as the flyer for the show advertised “The Dadas have come to town!”. Ultimately, this did not happen and Schwitters’s work was shown with several examples of German Expressionism.⁷⁷

Schwitters, operating in Hannover, had been rejected by the Berlin Dadaists and charged with remaining too connected to Expressionism. Through this contact, however, the Société Anonyme came to be understood as an outpost closely connected to European Dada, a link to the avant-garde overseas.⁷⁸ Thus, as the American press began to take interest in the activities of Dadaists in Switzerland, Germany, and France, they turned to the Société Anonyme for an informed opinion.

Margery Rex’s January 1921 article, “Dada Will Get You if You Don’t Watch Out: It Is on the Way Here” reprinted poems by Louis Aragon, Paul Morand, and Pierre Albert-Birot.⁷⁹ The article was illustrated by Duchamp’s earlier *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (1912), and Picabia’s *Saint-Vierge* (1920) and *Portrait of Tristan Tzara* (c. 1919) by Picabia. She directly defined Dada as a literary movement, located in Paris, but making its way through London and on to New York. Her knowledge of European activities was credited to “the November Chapbook,” most likely the third number of *Dada*, which included the “Manifesto Dada 1918,” as she quoted Tzara at length.

To explain the Tzara’s statements, Rex visited the Société Anonyme and asked them to explain the meaning of Dada – with famously divergent results. Rex did not identify them as Dadaists, merely as the “moderns of the moderns,” who were most likely to understand Dada. Duchamp, who had recently been in Paris, offered the longest response, in part: “Dada is

⁷⁷ Michael Taylor, “New York,” in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 292-3.

⁷⁸ In time, the Société Anonyme would collect a broader range of Dada production.

⁷⁹ Rex, “‘Dada’ Will Get You If You Don’t Watch Out: It Is on the Way Here.”

nothing. For instance, the Dadaists say that everything is nothing; nothing is good, nothing is interesting, nothing is important. It is a general movement in Paris, relating rather to literature than to painting.” These comments confirm that New York continued to view Dada as a European movement, unconnected to contemporary activities in New York. Although Duchamp had witnessed Paris Dada firsthand, he separated himself and his New York colleagues from those activities. The rest of the Société Anonyme’s directorship followed suit in their responses to Rex: Man Ray was more interested with artistic production, but also linked Dada to European modernism, claiming it to be “the tail of every other movement – Cubism, Futurism, Simultaneism.” Joseph Stella and Katherine Dreier addressed its more philosophical nature, Dreier defining Dada as “irony” and Stella explaining “Dada means having a good time... it is a movement that does away with everything that has always been taken seriously.”

Stella’s statement is most closely related to the next major American statement on Dadaism, made by Marsden Hartley, secretary and chairman of publicity for the group, who on April 1, 1921 delivered the talk “do you want to know what a dada is?” (figure 6.14) for the Société Anonyme.⁸⁰ This lecture has been cited as an example of canonical Dada activity in New York. It was, however, intended to be an informative evening, not a Dada performance. It was timed to coincide with the Société’s second exhibition of Schwitters’s work, in spring 1921. Dada was presented not as the guiding force of the Société Anonyme or its directors, but as one facet of contemporary art in Europe.

Hartley’s talk, published later that year in *Adventures in the Arts*, was a decidedly American interpretation of a European movement that declined to address its political stance,⁸¹ but rather

⁸⁰ Townsend Ludington, *Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 154.

⁸¹ The text of Hartley’s talk is analyzed in Estera Milman, “Dada New York: A Historiographic Analysis” as a statement on liberation and the constructive power of humor..

focused on its ability to conduct institutional critique through the use of humor. Hartley responded to the Dadaist impulse to remove art from its traditional pedestal and to deny it the status of idol. In reevaluating art and divorcing it from dead traditions, Hartley saw great potential, claiming that Dada could “release art from its infliction of the big A, to take away from art its pricelessness and make of it a new and engaging diversion, pastime, even dissipation.”

In choosing to focus on this aspect of Dada philosophy, Hartley selected the elements which were most closely aligned with the iconoclasm of American artists in their search to construct a native culture, free from the conventions and pretensions of European academicism. Throughout the 1910s, the Dada spirit in New York had steadily taken aim at the uniqueness and genius associated with high art, favored popular entertainment, and questioned the authority of respected cultural institutions. Hartley emphasized these qualities in European Dada, underscoring a sympathy while maintaining the independence of American artists. In calling Alfred Stieglitz an “artistic idol of the Dadaists,” he even implied that the European movement was somewhat derivative of activities already taking place in New York.⁸² Hartley’s address confirms that, in April 1921, the New York avant-garde understood Dada to be a movement similar to recent American activities, but quite distinct. Duchamp himself echoed this separation, later reflecting that “it was parallel if you wish, but not directly influenced. It wasn’t Dada, but it was in the same spirit, without however, being in the Zurich spirit.”⁸³ This separation has been lost in subsequent scholarship

Those activities of the Société Anonyme which have been considered Dadaist were not a reflection of any association with European Dada, but the continuation of American practices established during the 1910s. Similarly, works such as Duchamp’s false advertisement for the

⁸² Marsden Hartley, “The Importance of Being Dada,” in *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville, and Poets* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921).

⁸³ Marcel Duchamp, in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 56.

“Archie Pen Co.,” (figure 6.15) from *The Arts* (February – March 1921) played upon the precedent of false advertisements in *The Soil* as well as Coady’s humorous deflation of modernist rhetoric. Coinciding with an exhibition of Archipenko’s work, his first solo show at the Société Anonyme, this prank served as a tongue-in-cheek advertisement for the exhibition and a pun on the artist’s name. Duchamp transformed Archipenko’s name into an informal-sounding American corporation.⁸⁴

The full-page spread repurposed one of Archipenko’s sculptures, adding a nib and text which echoed the hype and salesmanship of its real commercial counterparts.⁸⁵ Emphasizing the machine aesthetic of Archipenko’s work, Duchamp played into the comparison, exaggerating the mechanization of intellectual labor. “It thinks for you,” the text declared. Promising to “draw automatically a line of accurate length,” the pen was proclaimed a favorite among architects and draftsmen. Although the same issue of *The Arts* featured a lengthy review of the sculptor (and the editor required a disclaimer, which appears at the bottom of the page) Duchamp dubiously claimed that the Archie Pen was so successful in marketing its benefits that one man fell victim to the prank and wrote to request further information.⁸⁶

In addition to Archipenko, the Société Anonyme was responsible for introducing a wide range of artists to an American audience, due in large part to the social and professional connections of both Duchamp and Dreier. The resistance to Tzara’s Dada movement should not imply that artists were not influenced by Europeans. The exhibition of Schwitters’s *Merz* collages and assemblages was particularly influential for American artists. The used quality of his materials

⁸⁴ The episode is discussed in Bohan, “Katherine Sophie Dreier and New York Dada,” 22.

⁸⁵ Contemporary advertising practices are detailed in Strasser.

⁸⁶ Two letters of inquiry are in the Société Anonyme archives, from C. F. Boswell, 20 April 1921 and Alma Warr, 16 March 1921; they are discussed in David Joselit, “The Artist Readymade: Marcel Duchamp and the Société Anonyme,” in Gross, *The Société Anonyme*, 35.

attracted attention and after seeing Schwitters's collages, Joseph Stella began producing similar compositions from discarded papers.

Stella was an active participant in the Société Anonyme, and was credited as such in the group's annual report of 1920-1921.⁸⁷ He served as a member of the exhibition committee, giving a gallery talk, and donating a group of Futurist publications to the society's library.⁸⁸ Although Stella's collage works used many different types of paper as raw material, a number featured advertisements in various stages of legibility. Works like *Gas Stations* (figure 6.16) included a partial ad for Esso while *Collage Number 3* (figure 6.17) features Chicklets gum, respectively. Composed of the debris of modern life and were intrinsically the by-products of industrialization, they also maintained an organic quality; the titling of his collages as *Macchine Naturali* (usually translated as natural constructions) reflected this idea. Yet, in her study of Stella's collage works, Joann Moser points out that of the sixty-five pieces Stella made, only two were reproduced: *The Bookman* (figure 6.18) and *Study for Skyscraper* (figure 6.19), in the experimental journal *The Little Review* (Autumn 1922) when they dedicated an entire issue to the artist.⁸⁹ The remainder of the series, which he continued to produce through the 1940s, was never exhibited during his lifetime.

Instead of the collages, in 1923 the society debuted Stella's monumental *New York Interpreted*, a series of five panels designed to hang together in a vast, horizontal sweep that measured over 20' and soared larger than life. As Wanda Corn has written, the scale of this painting was a vital component, as Stella reinterpreted the Renaissance altarpiece and the

⁸⁷ "Report 1920-1921" in *Société Anonyme (the First Museum of Modern Art: 1920-1944): Selected Publications*. (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

⁸⁸ Ruth L. Bohan, "Joseph Stella and the 'Conjunction of WORLDS'" in Gross, *The Société Anonyme*, 22.

⁸⁹ Joann Moser, "The Collages of Joseph Stella: Maccie/Macchine Naturali," *American Art* 6, no 3 (Summer 1992): 58-77. She also noted that Stella signed most of the collages, which suggests that they were not merely experiments but rather an important body of work. Tashjian interpreted these works as a "perhaps bitter commentary on an urban America bent on progress. A far cry from the idealized *New York Interpreted*" (194).

nineteenth-century panorama to create a paean to the modern metropolis and the tourist sites most commonly visited by Europeans and newcomers.⁹⁰ Yet we can also interpret its scale in terms of the American billboard. Specifically during the 1910s, a number of civic organizations arose to fight the proliferation of large-scale advertisements throughout the city (figure 6.20).⁹¹ Unlike figurative depictions of the city, such as those of the so-called Ashcan school, Stella focused on vernacular elements, the working components of the city, which did not require a human presence to animate them.

Like Stella, Stuart Davis began to explore collage in 1921 and while the example of Schwitters may have been an influence, Davis's use of materials was more straightforward and focused more closely on the machinations of the corporate realm and marketing.⁹² In 1922, Davis wrote a note to himself:

Loosen up. It is now that we draw in paint taking for granted all we have learned in the last two years. – Our purpose is now to paint with as much bragdashio [*sic*] as our training will permit. Good luck. Starting now I will begin a series of paintings that shall be rigorously logical. American not French. America has had her scientists, her inventors, now she will have her artist.⁹³

In singling out the American advancements of scientists and inventors, Davis echoed the language of the 1910s praising these areas of vernacular innovation. While the stylistic developments of 1910s Europe, including Cubism and collage techniques, were important to Davis's formal development, the early 1920s were a period of self-reflection and determination.

⁹⁰ Corn, 138-50 discusses this series; it is also the subject of her article, Wanda Corn, "Joseph Stella and *New York Interpreted*," *Portfolio* 4 (January – February 1982): 40-45.

⁹¹ The formation of civic groups such as the Municipal Art Society and the Fifth Avenue Association, along with their campaigns against public billboards is traced in Michele Helene Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 89-105.

⁹² Barbara Zabel, *Assembling Art: The Machine and the American Avant-Garde* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2004) devoted a chapter to Davis in her exploration of collage as a medium intrinsically reflective of the industrialization of the machine age.

⁹³ Stuart Davis, *Journal 1920-1922*, quoted in "Stuart Davis: An Overview" by William C. Agee and Karen Wilkin in *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 63.

Like so many other artists working in the United States, Davis was interested in pursuing a native aesthetic and finding local subjects. Based on his work with Henri, these subjects were not limited to the conventional American landscape. Instead, as he wrote in his journal, he wanted to “‘Copy Nature,’ only copy the nature of the present days – photographs and advertisements tobacco cans and bags and tomatoe [*sic*] can labels.”⁹⁴

Davis’s *ITLKSEZ* of 1921 (figure 6.21) suggests the costume of a vaudevillian, the abbreviated and linear style recalls theatrical posters and advertisements. The stenciled letters of the title, cut and pasted along the bottom, have been translated as “it looks easy,” a reference perhaps to the deceptive ease of such vaudevillian entertainment. Zabel suggests it could be a dismissal of American modernism or the collage technique;⁹⁵ I suggest it is intended to combat criticism that held that such a medium was simple to manipulate. Anti-illusionistic art was often charged with being simple to execute, here Davis defends himself and his colleagues against the charges of such philistinism, although he does this in a manner which was unlikely to be deciphered by these critics. Davis, along with Stella and Dove, was familiar with the work of the Dadaists, who he referred to as “European jugglers with whom we have been acquainted in vaudeville for some years.”⁹⁶ While his art engaged with American vernacular culture, Davis recognized a separation between this radical quality and Dada, which he identified as specifically European.

Although not a member of the Stieglitz or Arensberg circles, as a student and young artists, Davis was informed about experimental art and anarchism of the 1910s in New York. As he later explained:

⁹⁴ Stuart Davis, journal entry, 12 March 1921, *Journal, 1920-1922*, reprinted in Mark Rutkoski and Earl Davis, “Chronology of The Life of Stuart Davis” in *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 130.

⁹⁵ Zabel, 11.

⁹⁶ Stuart Davis, *Journal, 1920-1922*, 39.

the two dominant forces in my early art education were the teachings of Robert Henri whose school I attended and the Armory Show of modern European art in 1913. These influences were foremost in forming my ideas and taste about what a modern picture should be. Both were revolutionary in character, and stood in direct opposition to traditional and academic concepts of art.⁹⁷

While Davis enrolled in Henri's own art school, not the Ferrer Center, his artistic education was still heavily inflected with anarcho-individualist thought: "It took art off the academic pedestal and, by affirming its origin in the life of the day, developed a critical sense toward social values in the student. If there may have been a tendency toward anarchistic individualism, any preconceived ideas about racial, national, or class superiorities could not thrive in its atmosphere."⁹⁸ Davis described the approach as one which emphasized an individualist approach, experimentation, and connection to the real world, holding that "any subject matter, even that commonly regarded as ugly, was fit material for the artist."⁹⁹ Davis's early work drew literally from the urban environment, resulting in work that echoed the Ashcan school. He also became involved with the radical politics of *The Masses*. From 1913 to 1916, he drew illustrations for the socialist publication, even producing a cover, before resigning in protest.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, Davis spent the summers of 1914-16 in Provincetown, where he was surrounded by a community of experimental artists and writers.

Although younger than many of the artists active in the 1910s, Davis was included in both the 1913 Armory Show and the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists. Affiliated most closely with Henri and *The Masses*, rather than the Stieglitz or Arensberg circles, he was

⁹⁷ Stuart Davis, "How to Construct a Modern Easel Picture," lecture delivered at the New School for Social Research, 17 December 1941; quoted in Diane Kelder, ed., *Stuart Davis* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 3.

⁹⁸ Stuart Davis, "Stuart Davis, Robert Henri's School, 1945," excerpt from autobiographical monograph, *Stuart Davis* (New York: American Artists Group, 1945) np; reprinted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 524.

⁹⁹ Stuart Davis, "How to Construct a Modern Easel Picture," 4.

¹⁰⁰ Several artists resigned in 1916, when the editorial staff of the magazine began printing their work with captions. This is discussed in Rebecca Zurier, *Art for "The Masses" (1911-1917): A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1985).

well-read and well-informed of the iconoclasm of the avant-garde in New York. Davis's proclamation that "We can enjoy the art of the Greeks as much to-day as any modern work, and from that it is only logical to suppose that a piece of work made today as good as that made by the Greeks would be equally entertaining,"¹⁰¹ suggests that he was aware of revolutionary rhetoric, such as the Futurist writing of André Tridon; indeed Davis's 1925 publication, *The Paint Rag* featured an exchange entitled, "Futurism" which recounted a dialogue between two critics:

First Critic: I have a suspicion of the man's work.
Critic: But you just admired his painting here!
First Critic: Yes, but I'm afraid of what he *might* do.¹⁰²

In addition to his familiarity with the radical politics of *The Masses*, Davis also read *The Soil*, where he would have absorbed Coady's fascination with popular culture and distaste for the stale conventions of academicism.¹⁰³ In a 1962 interview, Davis mentioned that he had admired Coady.¹⁰⁴ Later in his career, when Davis wrote about "things which have made me want to paint, outside of other paintings," the list sounded similar to Coady's litany of "American Art"; Davis included a number of elements which had served as the vernacular subjects for Dada:

American wood and iron work of the past. Civil War and skyscraper architecture; the brilliant colors on gasoline stations, chainstore fronts, and taxi-cabs; the music of Bach; synthetic chemistry; the poetry of Rimbaud; fast travel by train, auto, and aeroplane which brought new and multiple perspectives; electric signs; the landscape and boats of Gloucester, Mass; 5 & 10 cent store kitchen utensils; movies and radio; Earl Hines hot piano and Negro jazz music in general.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Stuart Davis, "ART," 30 December 1922; quoted in *Stuart Davis*, Kelder, ed., 33-4.

¹⁰² "Futurism," *The Paint Rag* (5 August 1925): np.

¹⁰³ Corn, 345.

¹⁰⁴ Stuart Davis, interview by Harlan B. Phillips, in *Stuart Davis Reminisces: As Recorded in Talk with Dr. Harlan B. Phillips* (New York: Archives of American Art, Brandeis University, 1962), quoted in William C. Agee, "1920-1926" in *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Stuart Davis, "The Cube Root," *Artnews* 41, no 18 (1-14 February 1943): 33-34, quoted in Agee and Wilkin, 38.

The early 1920s were a period of experimentation for Davis, as he worked through changes in both style (moving away from Ashcan-school realism) and subject (moving towards a celebration of vernacular, commercial, American culture). Following his experiments with collage proper, Davis began a series of paintings which replicated that additive technique with the painted image. His *Tobacco* series focused on a commodity which was identified with a specifically urban form of modern life.¹⁰⁶ Beginning in 1921, Davis created a series of paintings which featured cigarette wrappers in a simulated collage format: works such as *Lucky Strike* (figure 6.22) and *Cigarette Papers* (figure 6.23), replicated the fracture and juxtapositioning of commonplace objects found in collage and assemblage works of the 1910s. For Davis, who had been struggling to find a modern idiom, this collage aesthetic was a transitional tactic.¹⁰⁷ Their debt to the cubist collages of Picasso and Braque cannot be discounted, particularly in the use of trompe-l'oeil details, such as the string which appears at the bottom of *Cigarette Papers*; yet in the choice of markedly American products, where modern marketing techniques had revolutionized the industry, a fascination with native popular culture is revealed.

Diane Kelder has noted that the diaries from this period reflect an admiration for the “irreverent approach to subject matter” demonstrated by New York Dada, which encouraged him to “experiment with untraditional materials.”¹⁰⁸ While cubist collage was a powerful influence for Davis, to attribute his interest in American advertisements and commercial packaging as being reflective of European models underscores the way in which the indigenous precedents

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Zabel, "Stuart Davis's Appropriation of Advertising: The Tobacco Series, 1921-1924," *American Art* 4, no 5 (Autumn 1991): 56-67. The cultural implications of the cigarette in the era of World War I are discussed in Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) which quoted a *New York Times* editorial of 1925: “Short, snappy, easily attempted, easily completed or just as easily discarded before completion – the cigarette is the symbol of a machine age in which the ultimate cogs and wheels and levers are human nerves.” “Going Up in Smoke,” *New York Times*, 24 Sept 1925: 198.

¹⁰⁷ Agee, *Stuart Davis (1892-1964): The Breakthrough Years 1922-1924* discussed this transitional period.

¹⁰⁸ Diane Kelder, “Stuart Davis and Modernism: An Overview,” in *Stuart Davis, American Painter*, Lowry Sims, ed. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 23.

have been ignored.¹⁰⁹ In one journal entry, he affirmed his interest in vernacular consumer culture as an effective means of communication, writing: “imitation is sentimentality Let us rather use an alphabet of letters, numbers, canned goods labels, tobacco labels, in a word, let these well-known, purely objective things be used – to make a direct impression on the spectator.”¹¹⁰

At the same time that Davis was exploring the iconography of modern cigarette advertisements, he was commissioned to complete a mural for the Nut Shop, a business in Newark, New Jersey (figure 6.24).¹¹¹ Working in a thoroughly commercial setting, Davis’s painting reads as a typographical experiment, employing various texts to create a visual pattern which also functioned as the store’s menu. It was not his first commercial painting; in a later interview, Davis recalled creating a large sign for Polly’s Place, the anarchist restaurant in Greenwich Village in 1918.¹¹² This earlier commission not only signals that Davis’s interest in commercial art was not limited to friendly favors, but also that he was familiar with anarchist circles in New York.

Writing in his *Journal* from 1920 to 1922, Davis revealed his interest in creating art that was more directly connected to daily life, writing: “Pictures of this kind should be self-supporting. They should be sold in stores like newspapers and magazines.”¹¹³ The Dadaist interest in little

¹⁰⁹ Representative of this scholarly trend is this description: “During the mid-1920s, Davis shifted his attention from packaging to ordinary domestic objects, lifting them from their familiar surroundings, as he had cigarette packs, and isolating, enlarging, and altering them. Again, he was taking his cue from the European artists he admired.” Karen Wilkin, “‘Becoming a Modern Artist’: The 1920s,” in *Stuart Davis, American Painter*, 49.

¹¹⁰ Stuart Davis, notebook entry 11 March 1921, quoted in Agee, *Stuart Davis (1892-1964): The Breakthrough Years 1922-1924*. While Agee cautioned against placing too much emphasis on Davis’s choice of subject matter, arguing that the labels related more to structural formal concerns, given the cultural debates taking place in New York, the selection was hardly innocuous.

¹¹¹ This commission is discussed in Lewis Kachur, “Stuart Davis’s Word-Pictures,” in Sims, ed., *Stuart Davis, American Painter*, 97-108.

¹¹² Stuart Davis, interview by Harlan B. Phillips, in *Stuart Davis Reminisces: As Recorded in Talks with Dr. Harlan B. Phillips* (unpublished transcriptions of interviews with the artist, New York: Archives of American Art, Brandeis University 1962). 84, quoted in William C. Agee, “1920-1926” in *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 59.

¹¹³ Stuart Davis, *Journal 1920-1922*, 39-40.

magazines and periodicals appealed to Davis as a means of circulating art and removing the taint of elitism. Davis's involvement with a new satirical journal, *Playboy – A Portfolio of Art and Satire* (1919-1926), can be understood in this context. The first issue of January 1919 featured reproductions by Abraham Walkowitz, Al Frueh, and Stuart Davis, among others, mixing the older generation of anarchists and iconoclasts with new artists like Davis. The revolutionary spirit of the 1910s was thus carried forward. *Playboy* intended to provide a forum for experimental artists and writers; the second issue featured a call for submissions:

Artists! Writers! Playboy is an open forum. It is not published in the interests of any group or clique. We want people with *individuality* to make this their magazine. If you are unknown you are doubly welcome. If you have become famous writing stuff that sells, here is the place to print you *good* stuff, and save your soul. Use an assumed name if necessary, but for Heaven's sake get that big idea of your chest before you die! We want art! We want satire!¹¹⁴

Another Dadaist venture was a collaboration between Stuart Davis, Theresa Bernstein, William Meyerowitz, and Eben Comins, which resulted in the single issue of *The Paint Rag* (figure 6.25).¹¹⁵ Published in Gloucester, Massachusetts on 5 August 1925, it reflected a careful study of the strategies and humor of Dada periodicals in New York, drawing upon Bernstein and Meyerowitz's friendship with Duchamp (the men were chess partners) and the vernacular strategies of New York Dada.¹¹⁶

None of the individual contributions were signed, suggesting that the editors viewed the publication as a completely collaborative effort. Not unlike the playful pseudonyms used by

¹¹⁴ *Playboy – A Portfolio of Art and Satire*, 1 (January 1919): 24.

¹¹⁵ Mentioned in Mark Rutkoski and Earl Davis's chronology in *Stuart Davis: A Catalogue Raisonné*. Only Davis, Bernstein, and Meyerowitz are named as editors. However, Eben Comins not only appears in an advertisement, alongside the aforementioned artists, he is also lampooned with them in the review, "The Lady of the Piazza." Given that four pseudonyms are listed in the masthead, it is likely that he was involved in the production of this issue.

¹¹⁶ For information on Meyerowitz's friendship with Duchamp, see Theresa Bernstein, *Journal* (Cranburg Press: Associated University Press, 1991).

Man Ray in his *Ridgefield Gazook*, the second page begins with a masthead of invented figures. The staff is composed of an editor-in-chief, “B. B. McPhooff,” with assistant editor, “L. U. Mullenpop.” The art director was “A. N. Giffles” and the business manager, “H. K. Backbone.” The choice of initials created an acrostic: reading the columns created we find “B.L.A.H.” and “B.U.N.K.” The officers of the newspaper were merely the literal components of an office, including “Office Boys, Stenographers, Waste-Baskets, Desks, Telephone, Etc.”

Like *The Blind Man*, the genesis for *The Paint Rag* was an exhibition. The Gloucester Society of Artists staged a show, which echoed the Society of Independent Artists in its mantra, “No Jury – No Prizes.”¹¹⁷ The front page explained the need for such unjuried shows and decries the academic systems of prizes, claiming:

The prize system is absolutely a menace to all exhibitions. Prizes are like kisses – they are given by favor – and as far as it can be discovered, usually the prize winners have a relative on the jury, or are in need of money, or the fellows give it to the artist out of charity – or it is “his” or “her” turn, usually being fixed in a mysterious way like horse racing or stock speculation.¹¹⁸

The suspicion with which the editorial described the covert process of selecting prize winners echoed the anarchist language of the Action d’Art group, as well as American endeavors to lay bare the commercial processes of art, including the People’s Art Guild and the Modern Gallery. With connections to Duchamp and Henri, the editors were aware of these sources. The cover illustration, *An Ideal Jury* (figure 6.26), recalls the message of the 1917 *Blind Man*, bringing together an assortment of fools who are led by an ancient bearded man. The judges were portrayed as hopelessly incapable of evaluating modern art, they were are only able to applaud the mindless repetition of academicism.

¹¹⁷ “Editorial,” *The Paint Rag* (5 August 1925): np.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

A second, unsigned, essay, “Today and Yesterday,” printed on the second page similarly defended the experimental artist. It began: “In the streets of Ephesus, some two thousand years ago, an itinerant preacher was proclaiming a new gospel which taught that the idols of gold and silver for which Ephesus was famous were not endowed with divine power, but were only piece of metal made by the artisans of that city and sold for profit.”¹¹⁹ Upon this revelation, the town silversmith (who “had grown rich from the money received by his works”) attacked the preacher and led the townspeople in stoning the man. With such strong overtones of Christian persecution, the author extended the scenario to present day, writing: “If the real artist venture to propose a new method of inspiring beauty, the silversmith still cries from the streetcorner, ‘By what right does this pestilential fellow destroy the rule which has brought us so much profit Tear up his canvases and break his statue into bits.’”

The plight of the struggling artist was also the subject of a short script, titled simply, “A Tragedy.” In language which closely mirrored the complaints of Alfred Stieglitz, the playwright bemoaned the reluctance of collectors to support the work of emerging American artists:

Young Artist (*after looking about*): “Hm! Do you ever buy works of the younger artists?”

Collector: “We-ll-ll, when an artist is brought to my attention by exhibition, invitation to galleries, or newspaper notices, I come to his first one-man show. I find him pretty good (*pause*), don’t misunderstand me, I don’t buy him – I watch him! I go to his second exhibition. I find he has improved – again, I don’t buy his work. How do I know whether his work is going to live after his death?”¹²⁰

Echoing the frustrations repeatedly voiced by Stieglitz as so many of his circle struggled to earn a living, the young artist protested, “you may be able to wait – but can the artist?” Ultimately, however, the young artist succumbed to the system, unable to overcome a system of private

¹¹⁹ “Today and Yesterday,” *The Paint Rag* (5 August 1925): np.

¹²⁰ “A Tragedy,” *The Paint Rag* (5 August 1925): np.

patronage. The gallery system, fueled by dealers and collectors who purchased for prestige, was charged with stunting the development of modern art and inherently suppressing creative experimentation.

The *Paint Rag* included a faux society column, penned by “The Lady of the Piazza,” which offered a selection of observations about Gloucester life and the happenings of the local residents.¹²¹ As befitted a woman of her presumed social standing, “The Lady,” reviewed the exhibition of the Gloucester Society of Artists. While certain artists were praised for works which are “nice and Gloucestery,” Stuart Davis and the other editors gave themselves scathing reviews which parodied the worst criticisms their work had received. For example, “Now take these crazy pictures; those crazy tables, I think his name is Davis. They are atrocious. They are an insult to art, and I ought to know, I studied in art school three months, and I have gotten a diploma.” The Lady continued, “I don’t see why Theresa Bernstein sent that funny picture of people dancing on the deck of a ship to another exhibition. It ought to have been in the crazy show.”

There was a humorous quality throughout to *The Paint Rag*, including small asides, not unlike the marginalia found in *The Soil*. In one instance, a personal notice is printed, a correspondence between two colors which implored: “Rose Madder – All is forgotten. Write at once,” and was signed “Emerald Green.” Several limericks and silly poems were published, including “A Gloucester Limerick”: “There was an old lady in Gloucester,/Who asked what a picture would cost her,/When they told her the news,/She let out some mews,/And said, “Oh, you naughty imposter.”¹²²

¹²¹ “The Lady of the Piazza,” *The Paint Rag* (5 August 1925): np.

¹²² “A Gloucester Limerick,” *The Paint Rag* (5 August 1925): np.

The *Paint Rag* featured advertising among its four pages; undoubtedly used to support the publication, it brought together a wide range of artistic and commercial enterprises. Those advertisements purchased for Cape Pond Ice Co.'s "pure ice" were positioned alongside more traditional notices for art supplies and frames. Although typographically uniform, many of the ads employed the hyperbolic language synonymous with modern marketing. "1000 Satisfied Customers Dine Each Day at Gorman's Restaurant" one reads. Another enticed, "If you want to be beautiful go to Laura Agnes Walker." Even Davis himself used such practice in advertising his services as an instructor: promising that the "study of Ultra-Modern Painting Method is likely to increase the power of your work. Private instruction by Stuart Davis."

Few copies exist of *The Paint Rag* and its circulation outside of Gloucester is unknown.¹²³ Yet it provides an important example of the continuing influence of the satiric art-world journalism of 1910s New York Dada. Although Davis only experimented with Dadaist techniques and the other editors maintained a more realist style in their own production, the degree of skepticism and the irreverence towards the institution were inspired by the activities of the 1910s.

While *The Paint Rag* was quietly being developed in Gloucester, a more public debate over Dada was being waged. While living in Paris, the American poet Matthew Josephson had become acquainted with the Dadaists and proposed that American culture could best be propagated through the model he found in what he considered to be the exuberant work of Tzara, Louis Aragon, and Phillipe Soupault, among others.¹²⁴ Believing Europe was becoming

¹²³ One copy is owned by the William Meyerowitz and Theresa Bernstein Foundation, New York. Thanks to Dr. Gail Levin and my involvement with her on a forthcoming exhibition on Theresa Bernstein, I was able to gain access to this rare document.

¹²⁴ The most thorough analysis of Matthew Josephson and his work for *Broom* and *Secession* is in Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde*; indeed the title of this text was taken from *The Dial's* coverage of their Futuristic tendencies. For biography, see David E. Shi, *Matthew Josephson: Bourgeois Bohemian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

Americanized, Josephson urged American artists to use “a strategic advantage. They need only react faithfully and imaginatively to the brilliant minutiae of her daily existence in the big cities, in the great industrial regions, athwart her marvelous and young mechanical forces.”¹²⁵ A student during the 1910s, Josephson had not participated in the cultural debates of Americanness during the decade.¹²⁶ He believed the Paris Dada usage of American culture to be a radical innovation, which suggests that an American urban cultural idiom had not only developed, but was recognized as significantly different from European culture.¹²⁷

Arriving in Paris in 1921, Josephson was enthusiastically welcomed into Dada circles,¹²⁸ he saw their energy and irreverence as innovative and powerful tools with which an American culture could be constructed. Echoing Coady and *The Soil* (although without crediting this source), Josephson began to argue that Dada was a method by which American artists could learn to appreciate their modern environment. As he noted “France was passionately concerned with the civilization of the U.S.A., and stood in fair way to be *Americanized*. [italics original]”¹²⁹ For Josephson, the importation of Dada to Paris brought not foreign ideals but an awareness of a dynamic culture which he felt was unappreciated in its homeland.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Matthew Josephson, “Apollinaire: Or Let Us Be Troubadours,” *Secession* (Spring 1922).

¹²⁶ Shi, 22-3. Gorham Munson would later recall, “He seemed to have escaped the muddle and ferment of 1916-1921 by excluding the elements of the muddle. He had no interest in liberalism, no interest in Brooks and the social approach to literature, no interest in philosophy” in “The Fledgling Years, 1916-1924,” *Sewanee Review* (January-March 1932): 29.

¹²⁷ The European fascination with American culture in the post WWI era is addressed in Wanda Corn, “Identity, Modernism, and the American Art after World War I: Gerald Musephy and Americanism,” in *Nationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Richard Etlin, *Studies in the History of Art* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1991) and *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹²⁸ Josephson’s name appears on the cover of the single issue of *Le Coeur a Barbe* of 1922 as the only American contributor.

¹²⁹ Matthew Josephson, letter to Malcolm Cowley, 5 December 1921; quoted in Shi, 58.

¹³⁰ Matthew Josephson, “After and Beyond Dada” *Broom* (July 1922) celebrates Soupault, Aragon, and Paul Eluard, writing of their “strong leaning for purely American elements in the new literature. The contemporary American flora and fauna are collected, in an arbitrary fashion, out of the inimitable films, the newspaper accounts, the jazz band, on the hunch that the world is on its way to being Americanized in the new two decades.”

Josephson first became associated with a new Parisian magazine, *Secession*, which championed Paris Dada as energetic and dynamic without considering the social or political origins of their source material. In the first issue, Josephson's "Apollinaire: Or Let Us be Troubadours" championed Apollinaire and Tzara for writing poems that "employ all the instruments of the time, the streetcar, the billposter, the automobile, the incandescent light, etc."¹³¹ While he argued that these technologies were most visible in America and called for American artists to adopt them as the subjects of art and literature, Josephson consistently argued that these resources could best be tapped through following the example of the Dadaist poets of France, who "sought a mood of humor instead of pathos, aggression instead of doubt, and complete freedom of method for the restriction of the previous age."¹³²

By 1922, Josephson's loyalties had shifted to *Broom*, another little magazine being published by American expatriots in Paris. As Wanda Corn has noted, *Broom* also took critical cues from Coady's *The Soil* in celebrating popular culture as the best expression of American civilization. The editors championed these elements *for* their vulgarity and commercialism – the things which differentiated them from the European tradition.¹³³ In the November issue of *Broom*, Josephson's "The Great American Billposter" argued that "America will never enjoy an indigenous art, if, led by intellectuals, it adopts approved European methods of living or painting or writing."¹³⁴ Given the ever-widening range of human expression, he argued that an understanding of culture cannot be limited to fine art. Since "the advertisements contain the fables of the people," these billposters must be considered source material for the modern artist or poet. He presented several texts, taken directly from advertisements from automobiles and

¹³¹ Matthew Josephson, "Apollinaire: Or Let Us Be Troubadours," *Secession* (Spring 1922).

¹³² Matthew Josephson, "Made in America," *Broom* (May 1922): 269.

¹³³ Corn, 214. Tashjian traced the battle between these magazines and their ever-shifting positions, alliances, and staffs.

¹³⁴ Matthew Josephson, "The Great American Billposter," *Broom* (November 1922): 304-12.

household goods, complete with typography, to demonstrate how the sentiments expressed appeal to the market by reflecting the qualities of the American consumer. Calling these short, passionate verses “the most faring and ingenuous literature of our time,” he compared Keats with a line from a pitch for Campbell’s soup; yet Josephson continued to promote the French Dadaists as the poets who best understood this American spirit.

While Josephson tapped into American vernacular culture, he reached this conclusion through a European example and privileged the work of the French Dadaists. Working primarily in Europe, he was disconnected from New York Dada and was not aware that such activities were already underway in America. Ultimately, *Broom* was overshadowed by the (Paris) Dadaist antics of Josephson, which included several published feuds and public brawls.¹³⁵ Yet while Josephson was positioned at “at the opposite pole to the Sherwood Anderson, Russian-realism, American soil spirit,”¹³⁶ Stieglitz was not only aware of the younger poet, but in 1923 remarked that he was “certainly youthful and very important.”¹³⁷ During this time, Stieglitz’s commitment to developing an American aesthetic was still very closely connected to vernacular culture and the legacy of *The Soil*.

Scholars have often assumed that the nationalistic and spiritualistic writings of Sherwood Anderson and Waldo Frank consistently expressed Stieglitz’s philosophy, yet this is not entirely the case, especially in the early years of the 1920s. For example, Frank’s *Our America*, published in 1919, opposed Robert Coady’s celebration of vernacular culture, arguing, “American is a joyless land and nowhere is this so crying-clear as in the places of New York –

¹³⁵ After struggling financially for several issues, the magazine finally folded after a story by Kenneth Burke was censored by the postmaster general.

¹³⁶ Harold Loeb, “Foreign exchange,” *Broom*, 179; quoted in Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 215.

¹³⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Hart Crane, (27 October 1923), quoted in Shi, 83

Broadway, the ‘movies,’ Coney Island – where Joy is sought.”¹³⁸ While Frank praised Stieglitz as an alternative spirit, Stieglitz continued to promote Coady’s conception of American culture until his *Seven Americans* exhibition of 1925.

Little is known of Stieglitz’s activities after the closing of “291” gallery in June 1917. Although he continued to “hold forth” with artists in a smaller space in the same building, it was a time of reflection and doubt. Surrounded by the war and accompanying anti-German sentiment, as well as diminished finances, he wrote to Arthur Dove, “The worst of it all is that I see no future.”¹³⁹ In correspondence with Picabia, then in Paris, he remarked, “‘291’ is closed permanently although I still have a small room there which is virtually nothing more than a letterbox.”¹⁴⁰ The following year, Stieglitz thanked Picabia for sending various Dada magazines from Paris, writing: “I do want you to know that I have not lost any interest in the goings-on in the ‘Art’ world – nor in any other part of the world.”¹⁴¹ He continued, “I have no plans for the future – every day is a complete thing in itself – My direction is the same as before – a fight for the right to be free & to work as an American freeman – a worker of the World – It seems to be an endless struggle.”

When Stieglitz reentered the art world after the end of the war, he gathered a new circle around him. This new phase has often been characterized in stark contrast to his experimentation

¹³⁸ Waldo Frank, *Our America* (1919); quoted in Tashjian, 119.

¹³⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Arthur Dove, 24 May 1917; quoted in Ann Lee Morgan, ed., *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 54. The anti-German sentiment was so vehement during the war that, along with many school districts, the state of California banned the teaching of the German language as “a language that disseminates the ideals of autocracy, brutality, and hatred,” from Louis Paul Todd, *Wartime Relations of the Federal Government and the Public Schools, 1917-1918* (New York: Teachers College, 1945) and a politician from Iowa claimed that “ninety percent of all the men and women who teach the German language are traitors.” Both quotations reprinted in David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 57. Kennedy also discussed the “slacker raids” which swept through many major cities to find and detain men of draft-age, “often apprehended at bayonet-point in ball parks, restaurants, or on street corners and made to show their Selective Service documents” (166). It was in this atmosphere that many artists and writers left New York in 1917 and 1918, including Paul Haviland, Edward Steichen, Paul Strand, and Marsden Hartley from the immediate Stieglitz circle, as well as Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp, Mabel Dodge, Arthur Cravan and Mina Loy.

¹⁴⁰ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Francis Picabia, 19 August 1919. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

¹⁴¹ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Francis Picabia, 2 April 1920. Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

of the early 1910s as one of strict nationalism and spirituality.¹⁴² The formation of a national style of art was, however, not a new issue. Undoubtedly Stieglitz's work of the 1920s had roots in the vernacular as a particularly American idiom. When, in 1921, Stieglitz first reentered the public art world by staging an exhibition of his own photographs at the Anderson Galleries, Paul Rosenfeld wrote a lengthy review for *The Dial* which drew from the example of Whitman and Coady, to report the universal quality of Stieglitz's photographs of "wheelrims and the sides of carts, sign-painted walls, the storm-light of a feverish August afternoon in New York, rippling lake-water and raindrops, typewriters and paper packages and pipe stuffed with burning tobacco, all sorts of common materials, all sort of rough clothing."¹⁴³ While Rosenfeld (in his characteristic purple prose) continued to position Stieglitz as an American pioneer, his attention to these vernacular objects (especially when the exhibition most famously debuted the nude photographs of Georgia O'Keeffe) spoke to the continued centrality of these mundane objects to the construction of American culture.

Introducing the photographs in a written catalogue statement, Stieglitz asserted, "I was born in Hoboken. I am an American. Photography is my passion. The search for Truth my obsession. Alfred Stieglitz."¹⁴⁴ He continued at the bottom, adding

Please note: In the above STATEMENT the following, fast becoming "obsolete", [*sic*] terms do not appear: ART, SCIENCE, BEAUTY, RELIGION, every ISM, ABSTRACTION, FORM, PLASTICITY, OBJECTIVITY, SUBJECTIVITY, OLD MASTERS, MODERN ART, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AESTHETICS, PICTORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY, DEMOCRACY,

¹⁴² As Greenough characterized it, "After the war, Stieglitz's model was more communal, even familial and intimate, with growing spiritual overtones: he endeavored to nurture, protect, and promote a community of American artist, photographers, writers, poets, and critics, whose collective voice, he believed, would enrich a spiritually deprived nation. Less rebellious, more constructive, Stieglitz no longer sought to challenge the status quo, but rather to build up a foundation for American art." (279). This dissertation argues that such a dichotomy is false – to build an American aesthetic was itself a challenge to the status quo and a disruption of conventional art practices.

¹⁴³ Paul Rosenfeld, "Stieglitz," *The Dial* 70 (April 1921): 397-409; reprinted in *Photography: Essays and Images*, *Photography: Essays & Images*, Beaumont Newhall, ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 209-218.

¹⁴⁴ Alfred Stieglitz, "Statement" (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1921), np; reprinted in Newhall, 217.

CEZANNE, “291”, PROHIBITION. The term TRUTH did creep in but may be kicked out by any one.

The statement which Stieglitz published for this show revealed his continued commitment to the development of an American aesthetic, the rejection of artistic conventions and stylistic schools, and a kind of irreverent pragmatism against obfuscation. On the back of the exhibition notice, Stieglitz wrote to Picabia, “It is a great pity that you are not able to see this exhibition... It is creating a real sensation because of the life-force expressed in a direct way – and through the machine – without an ‘ism’ of any kind – I know would you surprised could you but see what I have accomplished in the last two years.”¹⁴⁵

Stieglitz continued to experiment in the 1920s, both with photographic processes and unusual subject matter. At the same time he was photographing O’Keeffe and beginning his *Equivalents*, he was also producing irreverent works such as *The Way Art Moves* (1920) (figure 1.1) a literal depiction of sculpture being transported in an ordinary wooden cart, and *Spiritual America* (1923) (figure 1.2), a closely-cropped image of a gelded carriage horse. His other venture, the short-lived publication *Manuscripts (MSS)* (1922) was a collaboration with Paul Rosenfeld and Herbert Seligmann to publish a literary and satirical magazine.¹⁴⁶ The premise was that that the magazine would be supported cooperatively by the contributors and that no submission would be edited. Subscriptions were irreverently advertised: “ten cents a copy if you like it, or Subscribe One Dollar for Ten Numbers to be issued in Ten Days – Ten Weeks – Ten Months – or Ten Years. The risk is yours. Act at once if you want to be One of the First 100,000 Subscribers.”¹⁴⁷

In 1925 Stieglitz staged another exhibition which purported to express an American aesthetic, the much larger and more comprehensive *Alfred Stieglitz Present Seven Americans:*

¹⁴⁵ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Francis Picabia, [1921], Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

¹⁴⁶ The plans for *MSS* are discussed in Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 430.

¹⁴⁷ *Manuscripts (MMS)* 1 (1922).

159 Paintings, Photographs, and Things, Recent and Never Before Publicly Shown by Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Charles Demuth, Paul Strand, Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz. The show, also held at the Anderson Galleries, opened in March and presented the seven artists as “an integral part of America to-day.”¹⁴⁸ Many of the works exhibited drew upon New York Dada and vernacular culture, as did the catalogue, which featured a lengthy essay by the German sculptor Arnold Rönnebeck. In this essay, Rönnebeck explained that while the “European conception” of American culture consisted of “skyscrapers, Jack Dempsey, the Five-and-Ten-Cent Stores, Buffalo Bill, baseball . . .,” these elements were superficial; he argued that it was necessary for American artists to look deeper for a national essence. Rönnebeck’s list has often been compared to Coady’s manifesto, “American Art,” but the two compilations have an important difference: Coady’s list was disparate, but drawn from what he perceived to be part of the “big American spirit,” things which had been developed and which organically reflected the nation of their creation; in contrast, Rönnebeck openly acknowledged that his list reflects European stereotypes. His essay encouraged artists not to simply adopt American tropes as sufficient expression of a national character.

Throughout the period, debates continued over what constituted an American aesthetic, and vernacular subjects continued to dominate the consensus. Increasingly, however, it was acknowledged that the mere content of a painting was insufficient, as Dove wrote: “When a man paints the El, a 1740 house or a miner’s shack, he is likely to be called by his critics, American. These things may be in America, but it’s what in the artist that counts.”¹⁴⁹ He continued, “What do we call ‘American’ outside of painting? Inventiveness, restlessness, speed, change. Well,

¹⁴⁸ *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans*, (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1925), 2.

¹⁴⁹ Arthur Dove, quoted in Frederick S. Wight, *Arthur G. Dove* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 62 and William C. Agee, “Arthur Dove: A Place to Find Things,” in Sarah Greenough, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2000) 433.

then a painter may put all these qualities in a still life or an abstraction, and be going more native than another who sits quietly copying a skyscraper....” In this regard, Dove rallied against isolationism, which he considered to be a false conceit, “The American painter is supposed to paint as though he had never seen another painting.... The French come and go freely through the history of art, back and forth... taking what stimulates, adding, discarding, absorbing.”

Following the success of the “Seven Americans” show, Stieglitz opened the Intimate Gallery. This new enterprise is often assumed to break with the more experimental and cosmopolitan practices of “291,” but this division is overly simplistic.¹⁵⁰ The iconoclastic, anti-commercial spirit of the 1910s remained in the basic organization of the new gallery as Stieglitz arranged the finances of the Intimate Gallery to be a cooperative that “belongs to artists.”¹⁵¹ In language which recalled the frank dealings of Les Forgerons in France, or the People’s Art Guild and Modern Gallery in New York, the gallery was “a Direct Point of Contact between Public and Artist,” and Stieglitz himself “receive[d] no remuneration in any shape directly or indirectly for the role I play.”¹⁵² The goal of the gallery space was to secure a living wage for the artists shown, who were then expected to contribute a portion of their sales to the common Rent Fund.

Among the key artists of this new phase were Stieglitz circle members Charles Demuth and Arthur Dove, both of whom had personal circumstances which interfered with their art production in the early 1920s. This delayed the manifestation of dadaist influences in their work. By 1924, however, both men had recommitted to their art, beginning with work that drew from the artistic developments of the past decade. In the *Seven American* show, they both debuted dadaist images which differed from their 1910s work: Demuth showed his “portrait posters” and

¹⁵⁰ Most chronologies use this as a critical point of division, including Greenough.

¹⁵¹ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to the New York State Tax Commission, 22 June 1928, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archives, YCAL.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Dove included a series of collages and assemblages.¹⁵³ Both innovations depended on the mixture of vernacular imagery, drawn from advertisements and the commercial world, and a private symbolism which transformed the commonplace into something more significant. For both artists, this period would be a critical transition from their European-inflected early styles, to a mature, deliberately American idiom.

In early 1924, Demuth wrote to Stieglitz that he was “having a lot of fun – as much as I can have, at present, with the “posters.” G’Keeffe’s [*sic*] is well on the way, - Dove’s and Marcel’s are started. I will send you G’Keeffe’s when it is finished. The work on them seems endless.”¹⁵⁴ The posters, a series of abstract portraits of friends and colleagues, represented a departure from Demuth’s usual cubist-inspired style. While his most famous of this portrait series, *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold* (figure 6.27), was painted in oil, the majority of these posters adopted lowbrow materials, using tempera poster paint on board.¹⁵⁵ This allowed him to achieve the bright colors and flatness associated with advertisements and commercial posters, visually connecting his project to these elements of American vernacular culture.

In hanging the “Seven Americans” show, Stieglitz chose Demuth’s poster portraits to create a sense of group identity, installing his depictions of Dove, O’Keeffe and others (figures 6.28, 29) in the entrance to the exhibition, where they greeted the viewer and set an iconoclastic tone. Stieglitz signaled his continued interest in the American vernacular as a means of national identity by showing an art form more associated with vaudeville and advertising into the gallery space. While this was tempered with Ronnebeck’s warning about American subjects, Stieglitz’s

¹⁵³ As Sarah Greenough noted, these works are commonly known as poster portraits, but Wanda Corn has demonstrated that Stieglitz referred to them as “portrait posters” when they were shown in the *Seven Americans* exhibition; see Greenough, 522, note 16 and Corn, 383.

¹⁵⁴ Charles Demuth, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 16 January 1924; reprinted in *Letters of Charles Demuth: American Artist, 1883-1935*. Bruce Kellner, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 59.

¹⁵⁵ The most famous of Demuth’s portraits, this work was the subject of Edward Aiken, “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold: Charles Demuth’s Emblematic Portrait of William Carlos Williams,” *Art Journal* 46 (Fall 1987): 179-84.

enthusiastic support of Demuth's posters suggests that he saw in them an American spirit, not just American subject stereotypes. The portrait subjects he selected were all American artists, writers, or performers, suggesting that he was deliberately pairing this style to match.¹⁵⁶

In the portrait of Dove, an arching sickle denoted his career as a farmer throughout the teens, as well as his connection to the earth through his abstract landscapes, which had earned him much of his fame. Tied around the sickle was a red ribbon, often thought to symbolize Dove's second wife, nicknamed Reds.¹⁵⁷ In addition, both the sickle and the red ribbon carried notions of revolution, possibly referring to the revolutionary nature of Dove's early work. The undulating landscape recalled elements of Dove's work and the still-life beneath reinforced his debt to the land, underlined by the presence of the grapes and pinecone.¹⁵⁸

As Davidson has noted, the arrangement of the images in the poster portraits also has significance to Demuth's understanding of his subject.¹⁵⁹ Thus, the objects in *O'Keeffe* were arranged in an "austere" and stable pyramid, suggesting her character. At the same time, the arrangement of these letters revealed a lighter, personal reference for Demuth, whose letters to Stieglitz spelled her name with a variety of configurations of Fs and Es, never remembering the correct order.

After the *Seven Americans* exhibition closed, Demuth wrote to Stieglitz about the series, indicating his intention to "finish the posters, too. Almost everyone has told me what a great mistake I made showing them without explaining that they were made for my own amusement! I'll do three, or more, more and show them all next winter. I'll make them look at them until

¹⁵⁶ For detailed analysis of the poster portraits, see Abraham Davidson, "Demuth's Poster Portraits," *Artforum* 17, no. 3 (November 1978): 54-57 and Robin Jaffee Frank, *Charles Demuth Poster Portraits, 1923-1929* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1994).

¹⁵⁷ Davidson, "Demuth's Poster Portraits," 56. Although little is known of either Dove's or Demuth's political sympathies, this symbol would have been provocatively associated with Bolshevism and revolution by the 1920s.

¹⁵⁸ Corn, 232.

¹⁵⁹ Davidson, "Demuth's Poster Portraits."

they see that they are, so called, pictures.”¹⁶⁰ Despite mixed reviews,¹⁶¹ Demuth continued this project and completed a total of posters eight or nine posters, including *Marin* (1926) (figure 6.30) which repeats the patriotic palette of *Dove* and integrates the direct language and graphic clarity of advertisements.¹⁶² *Marin* was included, along with several new posters, in Demuth’s solo exhibition of the following year, along with portraits of Marin and Bert Savoy; these paintings were also included in solo shows at Stieglitz’s gallery in 1929 and 1931.¹⁶³

Arthur Dove also created a number of abstract portraits of his colleagues during the 1920s, many of them among his collages and assemblages of this decade. Forced to give up art for financial concerns in the mid-1910s, Dove had resumed painting in the summer of 1921; leaving his wife, Dove moved to a houseboat on Long Island Sound. While liberating, it was several years before he could truly paint full-time in 1924.¹⁶⁴ From 1924 to 1928, Dove produced 27 constructions, which he commonly referred to as *things*.

Dove’s *things* were a turning point in his oeuvre, spanning his early abstractions which first gained fame (or infamy) in the early 1910s, and his mature style. Following his initial success in abstraction, Dove retreated to a farm in Connecticut and several years passed of limited artistic production.¹⁶⁵ Emerging from a double failure (his marriage and an attempt at farming), Dove found that the activities of the New York avant-garde had radically reconfigured the trajectory of American art. Like Rönnebeck, Dove believed that a concerted effort was necessary to create

¹⁶⁰ Charles Demuth, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 5 July 1925, reprinted in *Letters of Charles Demuth: American Artist, 1883-1935*, 69.

¹⁶¹ Barbara Haskell reported that “even his close friends were puzzled by his multivalent approach to portraiture and his experimentation with compositional devices” in Haskell, *Charles Demuth*, 179.

¹⁶² Because of the highly veiled symbolism of some of the portraits, here is some uncertainty as to their number. See Davidson, “Demuth’s Poster Portraits.” Corn notes the similarities between *Marin* and the visual language of advertising, *The Great American Thing*, 233.

¹⁶³ Greenough, 368.

¹⁶⁴ Agee in Greenough, 422.

¹⁶⁵ For basic information on Dove, see Balken, *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective* or Morgan, *Arthur Dove: Life and Work with a Catalogue Raisonné*.

work which was American in a modern, spiritual and emotional way, not one simply connected with the superficial visual culture.

Among the first assemblages produced by Dove was a *Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* of 1924 (figure 6.31). As Picabia had portrayed the photographer through the instrument of his craft, here Dove actually appropriated parts of the machine in his portrait. Against a cream-colored sheet of paper, Dove attached a lens hovering above a photographic glass plate; layered on this plate, a metal spring suggests another lens positioned behind. A piece of steel wool, perhaps recalling Stieglitz's mustache, completed the ensemble. Thematically, all the elements can be linked together and associated with Stieglitz. The photographic plate provided a mysterious depth of space that suggested the aspects of interiority and spirit that so occupied both men.

In contrast to his dealer, friend, and supporter Stieglitz, Dove also created a portrait of the conservative critic Royal Cortissoz. *The Critic* (figure 6.32) has long been touted his most Dadaesque assemblage due to its satirical quality. The elements are drawn from newspapers, the realm of the critic. Balancing on a pair of roller skates, the egg-headed critic carries with him a vacuum cleaner, used to as one contemporary stated, "pick up the 'dirt' and blow it, through his column, at the public."¹⁶⁶ The columns to either side are comprised of notices for more academic shows of which Cortissoz would have approved.

Dove's connection to New York Dada is best shown, however, through chronological study of his earliest collages, as the first three relied most heavily on the inclusion and juxtaposition of mass-produced and unaltered, readymade objects. They were most closely related to the Dadaist

¹⁶⁶ Gail Levin noted that the assemblage originally featured an egg for the critic's head, a delicate detail since lost; conversation with Levin, 5 April 2012. Contemporary review quoted in Tashjian, 199.

constructions of the post-war era, and show Dove working through the medium to determine his own voice.¹⁶⁷

In October 1924, Dove wrote excitedly to Stieglitz that his new work had “certainly broken through something.”¹⁶⁸ This was immediately after he completed *Miss Woolworth* (figure 6.33), the first assemblage. This work deteriorated quickly and is no longer extant – we have only black and white photographs of it. Crafted from a variety of gloves, stockings, fake pearls and a plastic mask, she garnered much of the critical response from the 1925 *Seven Americans* show in which she debuted. As the critic from the *Brooklyn Eagle* wrote, one “wanted to laugh but did not dare.”¹⁶⁹ Not a specific portrait, this work was a character study of modern woman as consumer, constructed entirely from mass-produced items.

In his attempt to capture the essence of the spectacle, Dove eliminated physical likeness and the constraints of identity. It is not a wholly serious work; there is a mocking quality, as Miss Woolworth cocks her head to regard the viewer. There is a clear social commentary on the construction of female identity through consumption – even her masked face is caked with makeup to suggest a façade. While the representation of her body is abbreviated, the accessories are carefully included to present a woman of a certain social class – from her beaded purse to the diamond ring placed on her gloved hand.

Dove’s second assemblage was *Ten-Cent Store* (figure 6.34), a combination of artificial and real flowers, labeled with a price tag. The natural beauty of the real, but faded, grass and leaves is trumped by the permanent color and false vitality of the silk flowers and the entire assemblage has a price placed on it by the marketplace giant, Woolworth’s. We are faced again with a

¹⁶⁷ For a complete chronology, see Sarah Archino, “The Collages and Assemblages of Arthur Dove: A New Way to Work through *Things*” (M. A. Thesis, Hunter College, CUNY, 2005).

¹⁶⁸ Arthur Dove, letter to Alfred Stieglitz, c. 3 October 1924, reprinted in Ann Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 107.

¹⁶⁹ “Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans” *Brooklyn Eagle* (15 March 1925).

commentary on modern commerce and artificiality: what is immediately beautiful is false; we have to look more deeply to discover the authentic.

Huntington Harbor (figure 6.35) displays the spectacle of the summer social scene on Long Island, exploding with color and activity. This light-hearted look at the tourist life on the island contrasts sharply with the harsh reality of Dove's year-long residence on the water. The viewer is separated from the leisurely yachts by a mesh fence, clearly dividing the two worlds. The oversized flowers and illogical placement of the shell add to the falseness of the scene. The framing rope further sets the image off as a contrived entity, not a natural occurrence and reasserts that we are viewing a constructed image. Strongly establishing the nature of the frame enhances the separation of the viewer from the world portrayed.

In these early assemblages, artificiality reigned: woman as mere consumer, the subjugation of nature to cheap plastic and cloth flowers, and the conviviality of the summer social set on Long Island Sound. Created in a three-week blitz in October 1924, these works were among Dove's most satirical and biting. From the entirely machine-manufactured elements comprising *Miss Woolworth*, Dove progressed to include organic material in *Ten-Cent Store* and finally in *Huntington Harbor*, he inserted his hand and altered the ground with paint. When Dove's assemblages were included in the 1926 International Exhibition of Modern art, organized by the Société Anonyme and hosted by the Brooklyn Museum, Dreier called him "the only American Dadaist. An American artist of rare distinction."¹⁷⁰ Like other American modernists, however, this revolutionary view of work produced in the 1920s has been overshadowed by the scholarly emphasis on their Americanness, heretofore considered incompatible with any spirit of true Dadaism.

¹⁷⁰ "Modern Art," *Société Anonyme (The First Museum of Modern Art: 1920-1944): Selected Publications* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 93. Dreier was most likely comparing his assemblages with Picabia's *Midi*, a playful landscape constructed of feathers, macaroni, and leather, which was included in the exhibition.

EPILOGUE

Even as Dove began his experiments with collage and assemblage, the cultural atmosphere in New York was shifting. Thus, a brief case study of historiography of Dove's work is useful in tracking how subsequent histories misunderstood and underestimated the legacy of New York Dada. At the time of their creation, Dove's collages and assemblages were understood to derive from Dada examples from both America and Europe. Indeed, upon seeing Dove's assemblages for the first time, Stieglitz's reaction was to exclaim, "Wait until Duchamp sees them."¹ When, in 1926, Katherine Dreier included *Goin' Fishin'* (figure 7.1) in the Société Anonyme's International Exhibition of Modern Art held at the Brooklyn Museum, the catalogue claimed, "he is the only American Dadaist. An American artist of rare distinction."²

One of Dove's most well-known assemblages, *Goin' Fishin'* has undergone a major transformation in the critical literature. At the time of its creation in 1925, it was recognized as a progressive composition, hailed as Surrealist "before that doctrine reached our shores."³ It combined a variety of formal and stylistic influences that ranged from Futurist movement and interpenetration to Dada non-art materials and Dove's most recent character studies. The work was more than a simple compilation of the items associated with a man fishing. It operated, in part, through the combined meanings of the original elements – the bamboo suggesting the fishing rod, the worn wood reminiscent of a weathered dock. On a formal level, arrangement

¹ Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Arthur Dove, October 1924, quoted in Ann Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 51-2.

² The assemblage was first exhibited under the title, *The Nigger goes a-fishing*, which Dove later changed. The use of this slang term can be interpreted as another level of the vernacular, with language use typically unsuited for highbrow culture. Quoted in "Modern Art," *Société Anonyme (the First Museum of Modern Art: 1920-1944): Selected Publications*. (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 93.

³ Elizabeth McCausland, "Dove: Man & Painter," *Parnassus* 9 (December 1937): 5.

created a sense of dynamic rhythm, a Futurist-inspired depiction of movement: arching above, the rod extended and cast across the surface, silhouetted against water and sky; shades of blue ripple along the background, like the shimmering waters of Long Island Sound. The shirt sleeve blended into the painted background, suggesting a subtle human presence. While the arrangement appeared natural, it was not an accumulation of real artifacts. The suggested story was a fictional construction: the shirt was named in the diaries as one of the purchases made in Huntington, chosen expressly for this assemblage.⁴ The cigarette burn was then deliberately inflicted by Dove to create the illusion of a human presence. The burn provides the shirt, and in turn the implied fisherman, with a past, present and future established in another dimension of time.

The earliest Dove scholarship, mostly written by Stieglitz-circle critics Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld, began to disconnect these works from their Dada roots and dismantled the network of contemporary art which informed them. Beginning in the 1920s, both men sought to establish a distinctly American mode of artistic production and therefore they cast Dove as a naïve man-of-the-soil.⁵ Following years of international turmoil and the increasingly complex ramifications of industrialization, a nostalgia for a time of unspoiled, natural American life was emerging. The rhetoric of this period impacted the reception and interpretation of Dove's assemblages and collages, beginning a tradition of separating his work from its Dada precedents and portraying him as a naïve outsider.

In the years after 1921, as Stieglitz gathered a new circle around him, critics such as Frank and Rosenfeld argued for the need for a spiritual reconnection with the American soil. In his

⁴ Arthur and Helen Torr Dove papers, Archives of American Art.

⁵ Paul Rosenfeld, "Arthur G. Dove," in *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924) and Waldo Frank, "The Art of Arthur Dove," *The New Republic* 45 (27 January 1926) are two examples of these panegyrics.

essay for the 1925 *Seven Americans* catalogue, the show where Dove's assemblages made their debut, Sherwood Anderson introduced an alternative to a vernacular culture in creating an American aesthetic. In a nearly messianic tone, he called for artists to create work that was inspired by the touch of nature, the feel of the native land to rescue the "city dwellers" from their dehumanized and exhausting existence.⁶ For them to admit any cosmopolitan influence was paramount to tainting the artist's accomplishments and so Dove was distanced from Dada activities of the 1910s and early 1920s.

When *Goin' Fishin'* was acquired by Duncan Phillips in 1937, it subsequently fell victim to mythologizing. What was originally hailed for its use of repetition, movement, and abstraction was subsequently described as the tragic story of a young boy, whose drowning Dove had witnessed. Originally, Dove was insistent that there was no actual fisherman who had inspired the composition; it was not a portrait, but rather the suggestion of an experience.⁷

Correspondence between author Elizabeth McCausland and Dove over her 1930 manuscript, "Dove: Man and Painter" points to this resistance to ascribe narrative subjects for these character studies.⁸ By the mid-1930s, Dove's correspondence reveals that he had ceased to correct these narrative projections and, indeed, encouraged such populist interpretations of his work, perhaps realizing the marketing value this type of art.

Further clouding the scholarship is the lasting influence of dealer Edith Halpert. Working with Helen Torr Dove (Reds) and Bill Dove, his son from his first marriage, Halpert was successful at integrating Dove's work with the growing popularity of American art in the 1950s. Aside from an interest in modern American artists, Halpert had a distinct interest in American folk art, which was quite profitable to her gallery enterprise. Acknowledging in a letter to Bill

⁶ Anderson Galleries, Inc. *Seven Americans*. exh. cat. (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1925).

⁷ Elizabeth McCausland papers, Archives of American Art.

⁸ Ibid.

Dove, the difficulty of continually exhibiting the work of a deceased artist and of keeping the work new and relevant, in 1955 she decided to exhibit the Dove collages alongside a number of nineteenth-century folk, displaying seventeen assemblages along with various folk constructions.⁹ Her thesis was that Dove, having grown up in Victorian Geneva, a town in upstate New York, drew from these examples for his works, sharing a simple joy of inventiveness and creation with his predecessors.¹⁰

The 1955 exhibition of these collages was intended to link Dove's work with a distinctly and uniquely American past, but not to suggest that any connection with a naïve aesthetic was an avant-garde operation. While the vernacular had pulled upon the example of folk art to create a modern, amateur and anarchistic idiom, this interpretation minimalized that iconoclasm and emphasized quaint formal similarities. All efforts were made to dissociate the assemblages from the urbane, irreverent idea of New York Dada, even to the extent that in the listing for *Long Island*, careful mention was made of the natural elements of the assemblage, but the magazine cutout of the car was omitted.¹¹ Contemporary critics, however, were unconvinced: one writer for *Arts Magazine* commenting that "the materials he chose to work with seem ... related to dada."¹²

Despite the crucial skepticism, this connection with nineteenth-century folk art was reinforced, even after Seitz's exhibition, by a 1967 exhibition at the University of Maryland Art

⁹ Downtown Gallery Records, Archives of American Art.

¹⁰ Aside from my belief that Dove did not share the Victorian folk interest in representation, his biography does not support this thesis. While Dove's hometown would have provided him plenty of opportunity to view these works during his childhood, there is no record of him traveling to Geneva, New York (a place for which he felt no nostalgia) during the 1920s. He was aware, however, of more avant-garde interpretations of folk art, both through his association with "291" gallery and Kandinsky's *Blue Rider Almanac*, a copy of which he owned.

¹¹ Downtown Gallery. *Collages, Dove: November 1-26, 1955*. (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1955).

¹² LaVern Georges, "In the Galleries: Arthur Dove," *Arts Magazine* 30 (November 1955): 50.

Gallery curated by Dorothy Rylander Johnson, with the support and direction of Halpert.¹³ To date, this is the most comprehensive exhibition of Dove's assemblages and the only publication to focus solely on this part of his career. While Johnson conceded that Dove's collages did not relate to folk art constructions in his formal exploration of textures, colors and composition, she posited that the shared vocabulary of non-art objects combined in a whimsical and amateurish manner recalled nineteenth century works which also "ignored irrelevancies."¹⁴

* * *

Given the broad base of radical activity which took place in New York during the 1910s and 1920s, how was New York Dada defined to isolate the movement from Americanist narratives? The first scholarship on New York Dada was completed in during the years of Neo-dada, as the example of Marcel Duchamp gained new relevance. In turn, Duchamp became the cornerstone for the first critical scholarship in New York Dada.

While a valuable sourcebook of Dada information, Robert Motherwell's *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (1951) endangered the status of New York Dada.¹⁵ The earliest English-language collection of Dada writings and documents, Motherwell's preface recounted that the original purpose of the anthology was to translate the "principle histories of dada from a literary viewpoint," including Georges Hugnet's *The Dada Spirit in Painting*, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes's *History of Dada*, and Richard Huelsenbeck's *A History of Dadaism*. The project was then expanded by "ask[ing] the dadas in New York, as I would find them by chance browsing in Messrs Wittenborn and Schultz' bookstore" about their suggestions. The

¹³ Dorothy Rylander Johnson, *Arthur Dove: The Years of Collage* (College Park: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1967).

¹⁴ Johnson, 9.

¹⁵ Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: G. Wittenborn, 1951). The publication of these essays was linked to the contemporary rising of Neo-Dada and a growing interest in theories of conceptual or "cerebral" art. Reflecting contemporary artistic interests, Motherwell emphasized aspects of performance and conceptual art, privileging Duchamp as the primary artist of New York Dada.

section which included information on Dada in New York, named here “pre-Dada” was credited to the suggestion of Duchamp himself, who argued that “dada did not arrive in Zurich as a ‘bolt out of the blue,’ so to speak, but had been ‘in the air’ a long time before.”¹⁶

Coverage of New York Dada was mostly provided through two essays written by Picabia’s wife, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia. They were both primarily biographical in nature: the first, a profile on Arthur Cravan, followed a reprint of Cravan’s famous “Exhibition at the Independents” essay, a review of the 1914 Paris exhibition.¹⁷ In this essay, Cravan viciously attacked the avant-garde painters of Paris. Buffet-Picabia’s elaboration, “Arthur Cravan and American Dada,” was written in 1938 and recounted Cravan’s infamous address at the Society of Independent Artists Exhibition of 1917. Yet, her primary focus was Cravan, not New York. She traced his activities from pre-war Paris to New York to his eventual disappearance in Mexico. As for the “American Dada” of the title, she explained this was due to the presence of European artists such as Cravan, Duchamp, and her husband, Picabia. Thus, what she described as the “revolutionary spirit in the domain of the arts and letters which, later on, became crystallized in Europe under the name of *Dada*,” linked dadaist activities in New York with the presence of European artists and suggested a philosophical connection to European Dada.¹⁸

Similarly, Buffet-Picabia’s second essay in the Motherwell anthology, “Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp” was written decades after the movement, in 1949.¹⁹ Again, her intention was largely biographical, following the friendship and activities of Picabia and Duchamp as they moved from Paris to New York and then returned to Europe. She concluded with Picabia’s publication, *391*, and their relationship with contemporary experimental artists,

¹⁶ Motherwell, xvii.

¹⁷ Arthur Cravan, “Exhibition at the Independents” (1914), in Motherwell, 3-12 and Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, “Arthur Cravan and American Dada” (1938), in Motherwell, 13-16.

¹⁸ Buffet-Picabia, “Arthur Cravan and American Dada,” 13.

¹⁹ Buffet-Picabia, “Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp,” in Motherwell, 253-267.

including the Dadas of Zurich. It is worth noting that, in this essay, Buffet-Picabia used the term “Dada” only in reference to the activities in Switzerland and refrained from labeling work from New York by that name.

Thus, while New York Dada was present in Motherwell’s anthology as the subject of two short memoirs, it was heavily biased by the European identity of the author and her biographical approach to her European subjects. It is perhaps unfortunate that Buffet-Picabia called attention to the chronological development of Dada, which placed many American activities prior to the official naming of the movement in Zurich. Characterizing New York (correctly) as “pre-Dada” encouraged future scholars to interpret New York as a preliminary, but unfulfilled, Dada center, even if that was not her intent.

By 1963, when Duchamp received his first retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum, there was greater interest in relating his readymades and installations to contemporary art (indeed, Duchamp’s retrospective followed such shows as the 1962 exhibition, *New Paintings of Common Objects*), than in situating Duchamp’s work and his artistic strategies as part of their original, historical moment. Moreover, these examinations did not attempt to understand Duchamp’s work in relation to an American art history and contented themselves with seeing Dada as the import of Duchamp and his fellow European exiles.

At the same time, the critical discourse surrounding American modernism had been heavily influenced by the 1920s and 1930s criticism of writers like Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld. In the isolationist post-war atmosphere of these decades, American experimental painting, especially by those artists associated with the Stieglitz circle, had been consistently divorced from the perceived taint of European influence. Artists like Arthur Dove were presented as naïve

Americans, working from an inner spirit and American rootedness, which gave them special insight into a native spirit.

Given the spiritual or transcendental connotations of American modernism in place by mid-century, it was more useful for the Neo-dadaists and Pop artists to study Duchampian strategies and constructions as autonomous experiments rather than as a culturally-specific body of work. The reputations of New York artists such as Dove, Florine Stettheimer, and Alfred Stieglitz had been established as nationalistic and/or naively American and thus were seemingly incompatible with the stereotypical notions of Dada as absurdist or nihilistic. Their participation in Dadaist activities was categorized as either aberrant or unwitting, without further examination.

The willful dissociation of American modernism from Dada allowed the American iteration of the movement to be lost. In its place arose a narrative that fit more closely with the Dada characteristics established overseas. By returning to the roots of New York Dada in the Stieglitz circle around 1910, we can begin to complicate our understanding of the Dada spirit in the United States during the 1910s and 1920s. With no group manifesto or even group exhibitions to mark New York Dada as a cohesive group, the local flavor of the movement was subjugated and replaced with a Eurocentric model which privileged the work of Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Man Ray. The influence of the American environment was minimized, at best. The elements of vernacular culture were assumed to be a natural Dada environment rather than a deliberate operation and the iconoclastic construction of an American culture narrative was reinterpreted as a purely nationalistic and isolationist endeavor. The anarchistic sensibility created a Dada spirit in New York which resisted codification, yet the success of this individualistic philosophy has been problematic for histories of New York Dada.

It was not by accident that no New York Dada group was ever codified – it was the result of a conscious and anarchist desire to avoid such organization. Their rejection of European conventions, academicism, and even modernism, places them in sympathy with Dada, however, their desire to reject these elements in order to formulate an independent American aesthetic places requires us to review Dada’s position in American art history.

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, artists working in America sought to distinguish themselves from European modernism. In a time of nationalistic development, the drive to establish an American aesthetic was pervasive. Rejecting the inherited models of art, the hierarchies and traditions that were imported from an academic past, New York Dada built upon what had successfully been developed in their country: the vernacular. Although, *post-facto*, we can now interpret their iconoclasm as Dada, for them, it was purely American.

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