

New Races, New Media:  
The Struggle For A Modern American Art, 1890-1925

by

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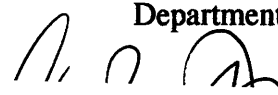
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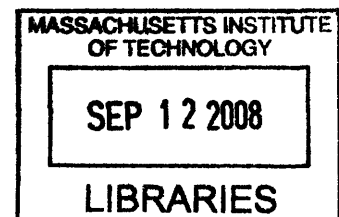


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**ABSTRACT**

American modernism was formulated at the turn of the twentieth century, when artists and intellectuals became newly self-conscious of their aesthetic strategies in a rapidly urbanizing United States. During that same period, new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe poured into the U.S., native-born black and white Americans undertook internal migrations to northern cities, and advances in the technology of image making – photography, film, and even improvements in the graphic reproduction of caricature in newspapers – provoked uncertainty in the art world. This dissertation explores the intersections of these two trajectories in period artworks and debates about artistic medium, examining how notions of America as a diverse nation operated at an aesthetic and a cultural level.

The immigrant critics and practitioners at the center of my study – Japanese-German critic Sadakichi Hartmann, Mexican-born artist Marius De Zayas, and English-Sri Lankan curator Ananda K. Coomaraswamy – each formed conflicted partnerships with the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz. These allies attacked America's homogeneous arts, positioning themselves as critical hybrid outsiders, and identifying marginal media as means by which to devise and theorize a new art in the U.S. This dissertation examines three episodes in their formulation of American modernism, arguing that each aesthetic breakthrough informed and was informed by a double debate: one occurring in the political and cultural sphere, and a parallel discourse about artistic media themselves. Part one traces the origins of "straight" photography in relation to the nascent philosophy of cultural pluralism (1895-1907); part two explores caricature's role as a hybrid medium for negotiating between African and modern European art (1907-1917); and part three examines how the motion picture served to engage both popular white nativism and avant-garde celebration of ethnic spiritualism (1917-1925). With independent expressive properties, each art form could restructure the artistic canon and enable the formulation of what I term a "composite" American modernism.

Formalist criticism has used medium specificity to isolate the study of art from other modes of history-writing, but this dissertation restores a crucial historical context for modernist media theory to reveal that the ongoing American dilemma of integrating difference lies at the heart of American modernism.

Thesis Supervisor: Caroline A. Jones  
Supervisor Title: Professor of the History of Art



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And as long as we...sit in snow up to our navels, and torment ourselves with conscientious scruples we have no candor, no fire and dash in any intellectual act. We will remain a grey race, our passions will be cold, and a petty pallid taste will pervade our world of art and letters.

– Sadakichi Hartmann, “Puritanism, Its Grandeur and Shame,” October 1910

## Preface and Acknowledgements

In a 2001 essay Judith Zilczer, a pioneering curator and historian of art in turn-of-the-twentieth-century America, rehearses the questions that frequently haunt the study of early U.S. modernism; “The definition of modernism seems to be inseparable from its genealogy: Where and how did it originate? Who were its progenitors and who are its legitimate heirs?”<sup>1</sup> Zilczer turns to argue that, although the avant-garde used such models of aesthetic progress to justify itself in the face of attacks on modern art, this genealogical approach is no longer productive. To explain the nuances of modernist art she suggests we should consider it as an inclusive ecosystem instead of a single, branching, splitting tree.<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation I follow Zilczer in protesting that early American modernisms are not simply teleological precursors to later influential mid-century art movements. However, rather than simply discarding the genealogical model, I seek to theorize this very emphasis on genealogy, tracking how the artistic avant-garde related aesthetics to pressing turn-of-the-century discourses of race and immigration, of lineage, evolution, and descent occurring in the wider social and political sphere.

This dissertation is a critical history of the early American modernism developed around the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz in the period from 1890 to 1925. It aims to situate Stieglitz’s canonical modernist group within the wider frame of modernity at the turn of the twentieth century, when artists and intellectuals became newly self-conscious of their aesthetic strategies in a diverse, rapidly

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Zilczer, “Beyond Genealogy: American Modernism in Retrospect,” *American Art* (Spring 2001): 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

urbanizing United States. New media, such as photography, threatened diversity would expand beyond the social into the realm of high art. By pursuing the historical intersection of two discourses, theories of racial diversity and of aesthetics, I synthesize the work of several important, but heretofore marginalized, critics. In weaving together these coterminous debates this dissertation presents an argument for a new way of thinking about American modernism.

This project was inspired initially by one such marginal critic, the Japanese-German American immigrant Sadakichi Hartmann, and his arresting statement in “Puritanism, Its Grandeur and Shame” on the “pallid” aesthetic tastes of the American “grey race” (cited in the epigraph).<sup>3</sup> I first discovered this eloquent, frequently florid, critic of American art in my study of Douglas Fairbanks’ 1924 *The Thief of Bagdad*, a film in which Hartmann played the Chinese Prince until asthma and tuberculosis (and likely his alcoholism) forced him off the project. My research on Sadakichi Hartmann, an interesting name and a fascinating character, led me back to the familiar Alfred Stieglitz, the photographer with whom the critic alternately collaborated and fought for the half-century from 1890 until both died in the 1940s. I reexamined the influential groups of critics and artists around Stieglitz attuned to “strangeness,” looking for the “foreignness” that Hartmann so well exemplified. Thus, in this dissertation I focus on the canonical Stieglitz circle, but on its lesser-known and under-theorized members: Hartmann, the Mexican-born caricaturist Marius de Zayas, and the English-Sri Lankan American curator Ananda Coomaraswamy. The drama of their modernizing confrontation with the arts of America’s homogenized bland Puritanical “grey race” is at the core of my dissertation.

Rereading histories of early American aesthetic modernism I found so many influential global émigrés and immigrants (only some of whom the constraints of space and my argument allow me to present here) that early in this project I set out to craft an expansive new periodization for American art between 1882 and 1943 – an epoch referred to by historians of immigration to the U.S. as America’s “Era of Exclusion” to describe the beginning of federal immigration restriction. This period, marked by the pressures of regulating immigration and global flows of people, objects, and ideas, is situated between

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<sup>3</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “Puritanism, Its Grandeur and Shame,” *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 17-19.



established categories of American art, between the Hudson River Valley landscapes of Manifest Destiny and Abstract Expressionism as evidence of America's Cold War super power status. It spans the Gilded Age, Progressive Era, Great War and Jazz Age, and the Depression, charting the transition from the Victorian Era to the Modern Age. I still think my original idea is productive, but the problems inherent in grand narratives, which frequently obscure more than they reveal about the nuances of history, led me to the realization that this larger picture is best built in details. I locate this dissertation as a pivotal case in the history of what I now term "composite modernism."

I will go into more detail of this "composite modernism" and its definition in the introduction, but in this preface I intend to clarify the scope and limits of my study. Suffice it to say here, I consider composite modernism to be a modernism that engaged with the interplay of modernity's heterogeneity, one that theorized not only refinement within a medium, but also the differentiation and proliferation of mediums. In defining, theorizing, and historicizing this modernism I do not intend to argue for the superiority of so-called marginal media over painting or sculpture, or for their essential "Americanness," but I will examine their particular adaptation to the issues and problems of modern life in the United States. Similarly, I do not intend to perpetuate the obsession with difference in the culture of composite modernism but to offer one critical historical analysis, examining the way theories of race that were articulated in the period may restructure our view of formalism, exposing new aspects of medium specificity's origins and its meanings to different audiences at different moments.

In addition to my inspiration in researching Hartmann, I also came to this topic from an interest in contemporary new media and post-colonial theory. I hope this dissertation contains insights applicable to our own context, but, to my mind, it is important to note that I envision it as a retelling of the origins of modernism much more than as a prehistory of our own postmodern period. I have tried to build up a texture of debates in the turn-of-the-century period in a way that carefully maintains differences between the early modern (or what some have termed pre-modern) and the postmodern period. Even as many of the promises and problems discussed in this dissertation have been resurrected in a multicultural age, the early modern period remains in most ways distant and strange from our own postmodern context. I aim to

theorize “composite modernism” as a usable construct by locating it as a historical phenomenon and theorizing it as a category of inquiry.

Concentrating on the U.S. context, I have not addressed transnational questions of racial difference in early twentieth century that might allow or constrict the application of “composite modernism” outside the American sphere. In the introduction I have only suggested a few ways in which race theories, frequently imported from Europe, became further instrumentalized to keep some people out and keep certain problems at bay in the U.S. Central to this dissertation are disciplinary claims about art history. Devising a method to grapple with both ideas and forms simultaneously, I assume that history and theory, the close reading of period artworks and of culture, must proceed in concert, each supporting and informing the other. I follow, for example, recent studies placing formalism under pressure from feminist studies focused on the figure of the “new woman,” changing gender roles, Georgia O’Keeffe, and the Stieglitz circle after the First World War.<sup>4</sup> My work privileges race not because I believe that race “trumped” the importance of gender and class, but rather because it conditions our views of the world in complex ways alongside those other markers of identity.<sup>5</sup>

Stieglitz’s own identity has frequently been constructed as a powerful and polarizing figure in the history of American modernism and photography. Instead of contributing to the further hagiography or demonizing of Stieglitz or his associates, I have tried to stay neutral on my subjects in order to place canonical work in new light, theorize the aesthetic modernisms advanced by Stieglitz’s circle, and show how, when, and why they worked in the New York art world. Mine is not an interest in personal biography per se, but in the self-conscious intertwining of life and art so prevalent in the Stieglitz circle, as well as the constant reconstructing and repurposing of this biography. Following the example of Kathleen Pyne’s recent work on neglected female artists of the Stieglitz circle, I aim to give the

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<sup>4</sup> One recent example includes, Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>5</sup> I take this language from Martin A. Berger who simply asserts that “race always trumped gender and class” in his recent essay on Carelton Watkins’ Yosemite photographs. Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 58.

marginalized immigrant figures on whom I focus back their voices, allowing them to speak occasionally at the expense of Stieglitz.<sup>6</sup>

Examining race as a historically circulating ideological and social construction at the turn of the century demonstrates fractured debates about racial difference (from physiognomy to quotas). In my argument, the presence of this conflicted discourse was not merely incidental but was constitutive of views about modernism in American art.<sup>7</sup> Although scientists today agree that no biological markers exist to distinguish “race,” it exists discursively. I have been tempted to clarify my ideological commitments in terms of contemporary politics, yet disavowing the now obviously racist statements of the period runs the danger of obscuring the past with concerns of the present. I have occasionally injected the present in order to distance my own voice from that of my subjects, but I am much less interested in locating racism in the early twentieth-century images than in discovering the complexities involving racial discourses frequently occluded in histories of modernist medium specificity. Although personally engaged in contemporary projects for racial and economic justice, I do not believe, as art historian Martin A. Berger has recently argued in his study of race in nineteenth-century visual culture, that “by unearthing both the operational logic of race and its manner of guiding the interpretation of our visual world we may come to comprehend, and potentially dislodge, its power in American culture.”<sup>8</sup> I do not believe that race ever operates according to a single logic, but by reexamining history we can find new, exciting, and engaging ways that the complexities of race operate within the disciplinary language of modernist art history. In this venue my commitment is expanding the interpretive tools of art history rather than curing racism in our present society.

I want to clarify that I take the engagement with the diversity of what I term “composite modernism” to be a dominant discourse of the early modernist period, but do not aim to supply a new,

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<sup>6</sup> Pyne, Kathleen. *Modernism and the Feminine Voice: O’Keeffe and the Women of the Stieglitz Circle*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Santa Fe: Georgia O’Keeffe Museum; Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2007, xxxii.

<sup>7</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* tells us the origins of the word are obscure. The term entered the English language in the sixteenth century to apply to species (i.e. race of Mankind) then in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century it was redefined to indicate differences within species (i.e. Tatar race). But, even the dictionary entry for race notes, “the term is often used imprecisely; even among anthropologists there is no generally accepted classification or terminology.” “race, n.” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) (hereafter *OED*)

<sup>8</sup> Berger, *Sight Unseen*, 8.

sweeping characterization of the national art world. I have deliberately chosen a period that spans the years before and after the 1913 Armory show, which has frequently been regarded as *the* event that ushered in America's artistic modernism. I hope to take part in the project of interrogating this very notion of singularity. Other artists and groups reacted differently to the conditions in turn-of-the-century America in ways that I will occasionally gesture to here, but that will for the most part fall outside of my focus. In the history I present here, I hope to aid in the project of rethinking and restructuring the meanings of aesthetic formalism as a discursive paradigm at the same time as the work contributes to the study of race within the history of American art. In doing so this dissertation develops a new interpretation of the frequently studied Stieglitz circle.

Each chapter explores a specific group of theorists and a specific medium, but this dissertation is not merely a series of case studies intended to encourage an expanded view of formalist medium specificity. I aim to call for a new mode of interpretation for the multifarious work of these artists and critics. Focusing on the canonical Stieglitz circle in hopes of a wide-ranging impact, this dissertation is not a comprehensive survey, but serves instead as a companion to and polemicizing adjunct to the many other studies of Stieglitz and his circle. I often propose alternative readings of canonical works by examining them formally in relation to period race theories and pressures of immigration, using these discourses to productively force us to see art in new ways. My work unites examinations of texts and images with a historical and contextual approach in order to advance a new axis in considerations of conflicted national identity at the turn of the century, relating social and political change to questions of aesthetic transformation. But the connections and consequence of these discourses should not cloak their real differences. The art world's distinctions amongst media are not the same as the separations amongst groups of people enacted in the legal, bureaucratic, and cultural spheres. To be apprehensive about the role of new media in the art world is not necessarily to worry about the role of new immigrants in the nation or vice versa. Still, using and expanding on the tools of critical art history with this case of elite cultural immigrants I want to claim that formalism can open itself under pressure from social history to examine its very exclusions as cultural acts. Indeed, I argue that to understand its functions it is essential

to acknowledge that modernist formalism and medium specificity were theorized and exist within a sometimes loaded historical context.

In addition to close looking at canonical and more marginal art objects my work largely traces metaphors in criticism and aesthetic theories, examining the ways in which arts and mediums are compared to races, animals, or individuals. New art forms and new artworks seem to call forth such metaphors at the turn of the century. Throughout this dissertation I will point to the ways in which language from debates about race in the social and political sphere operated to explain and enforce differences in the aesthetic. Peter Henry Emerson, champion of “pure” photography, for example, wrote that retouching a photograph by hand to mimic the artistry of painting resulted in “a hybrid, and is intolerable to any artist.”<sup>9</sup> Stieglitz’s ally and protégé Paul Strand asserted that along with such retouched “bastard photographs . . . went an equally vast and foolish discussion as to whether photography was or was not an Art.”<sup>10</sup> These manipulated photographs of illegitimate parentage and uncertain breeding reduced the status of photography as an artistic medium. I aim to engage these metaphors uniting arts and peoples critically. The obsessive drive to metaphor, I argue, achieves a representative and theoretical ambition, deferring attempts at stability and facilitating play between terms and categories. The metaphor creates what author David Lodge has referred to as “a relationship of similarity between dissimilars.”<sup>11</sup> Metaphor works discursively by transferring concepts from one realm to another.

I feel it is important to point out that this play among realms is historically constrained. For example, the word straight (used by Hartmann to describe photography, as I will discuss in the second chapter of this dissertation) did not take on the slang meanings of respectable, heterosexual, and sober until the 1940s; the term WASP, signifying the group White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, although it has been

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art & The Death of Naturalistic Photography* (New York: Arno Press, 1973, c. 1899), 123.

<sup>10</sup> Italics added. Paul Strand, “Photography and the New God,” *Broom*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1922, 252-58. reprinted in *Photographers on Photography*, 141.

<sup>11</sup> David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing, Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature*, Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1977. Linguist and literary critic Roman Jakobson framed metaphor and metonymy as the two fundamental types of signification. In metaphor, substitution of one term for another is based on similarity, while in metonymy, such a substitution is based on contiguity. The metaphor relies on relationships, whereas the metonym signifies by adjacency and proximity.

applied by some historians to the late nineteenth century, was not invented until 1962.<sup>12</sup> Metaphors are also multivalent in ways the argument of this dissertation rarely and reluctantly occludes for its own rhetorical purposes. The term “white” is never far from race, but it also encodes other ambivalences – an empty page and a combination of the full light spectrum, the virgin purity and the pallor of the tuberculosis patient. I do not insist that its racial meanings are always predominant, only that they are always present. The notion of “whiteness” in the late nineteenth century was itself even racially unstable. From 1790 until 1952 only “white persons” could become naturalized Americans and many court cases were brought to determine if “white” could apply to Armenians (yes), to Hawaiians (no), to Syrians (maybe), as well as many others.<sup>13</sup> Thus when I invoke whiteness I mean to problematize the term as what postcolonial scholar Okwui Enwezor has called “an ideological fantasy.”<sup>14</sup>

As is perhaps suggested by this discussion of whiteness and its problematic piecemeal expansions, debates about immigration and race overlap, but they do not always coincide. It is not immediately obvious that nativist protests against immigration are about color in a way that is related to racial division of black and white in the U.S. In his 1903 collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk*, civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois famously and definitively proclaimed, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.”<sup>15</sup> In his lesser-known essay “The Black North in 1901,” Du Bois traced the ambiguous course of this delineation, which he describes as the “baffling windings of the color line.”<sup>16</sup> Mapping and investigating the black population of America as they moved into Northern cities,

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<sup>12</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* notes the invention of the term WASP. “1962 E. B. PALMORE in Amer. Jnl. Sociol. LXVII. 442/2 For the sake of brevity we will use the nickname ‘Wasp’ for this group, from the initial letters of ‘White Anglo-Saxon Protestants’.” “Wasp, n<sup>2</sup>,” *OED*. For one such anachronistic uses of the term, see Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 108.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 1-3.

<sup>14</sup> As post-colonial scholars have pointed out, “To be WHITE is in many senses an ideological fantasy.” Okwui Enwezor, “Reframing the Black Subject,” *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, ed. Kymberly N. Pinder (New York: Routledge, 2002), 373. Other recent examinations of whiteness include David R. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) Theodore W. Allen’s *The Invention of the White Race* (1997) Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color: European immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998) and Karen Bodkin’s *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* (1998).

<sup>15</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1931, c1903), vii.

<sup>16</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Black North in 1901: A Social Study” (1901) reprinted in *W.E.B. Du Bois On Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 141

Du Bois referred to these relocated individuals as “new immigrants” and “black immigrants.”<sup>17</sup> Du Bois thus argued for implicit solidarity with those Italians, Poles, and Jews who had also flooded the American city. Integrationist leader Booker T. Washington, on the other hand, attempted to shift race hatred by targeting those Southern European immigrants who could cause “a racial problem in the South more difficult and more dangerous than that which is caused by the presence of the Negro.”<sup>18</sup> Although the contested whiteness of “new” immigrants was defined precisely against African-American blackness, I want to point out that here that the fate of “new” immigrants and migrating southern blacks was linked.<sup>19</sup>

In his 1897 essay “The Conservation of Races,” Du Bois introduced his famous theory of double consciousness. Intriguingly, he framed black negotiations of dual identity – the dilemma that would become central to his influential theory – in terms of white immigrants, asking:

What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? ... Does my black blood place upon me any more obligation to assert my nationality than German, or Irish or Italian blood would?<sup>20</sup>

Although I have yet to find a direct historical link between Du Bois’ double consciousness and the composite modernism of the early Stieglitz circle, the historical synchronicity of the two is provocative in suggesting the ways in which arguments of race were connected to those of immigration, with new media providing an anxious lens through which to see such conjunctions.

In this dissertation I have struggled to argue that the influx of new bodies into the urban sphere was profoundly destabilizing to all Americans (despite ideological celebrations of the “melting pot”), while acknowledging that the fate of immigrants and marginal white avant-gardists were always separate from that of black African Americans. That American intellectuals also experienced this dilemma of

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-44.

<sup>18</sup> Booker T. Washington, “Races and Politics,” *Outlook*, XCVIII (1911), 264, as quoted in Higham, *Strangers in the Land* 169. For many Northern eugenicists, blacks were a secondary problem to immigrants, so long as the former remained in the south. They were more concerned with “dingy white” immigrants than with black folks.” Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2001), 9.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Trying to make sense of the resurgence of violent racism in the South after Reconstruction, historian Thomas Gossett proposed its cause was not an increase in Southern racism, but rather a decline in Northern opposition. Gossett, *Race*, 265.

<sup>20</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races,” *American Negro Academy, Occasional Papers*, no. 2 (Washington, D.C. 1897) 5-15, citation to text anthologized in *W.E.B. Du Bois On Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 244.

recognizing the differences within difference during the period of my study has provided me with both comfort and confusion. In the early 1920s, white Ohio-born author Sherwood Anderson formed a conduit between Stieglitz and influential figures in the Harlem Renaissance, such as Alain Locke and the editors and staff of *Crisis* magazine. Anderson wrote of the U.S. in the teens and twenties:

As far as I myself could understand the feeling of separateness was common to all Americans ... There was the South with its concern about the Negroes, the Far West and its orientals (sic), the whole country a little later with its sudden hatred of the Germans and in the Middle West all sorts of little cross-currents of race hatred as factory hands came into the towns from all over Europe. No American ever met another American without drawing a little back. There was a question in the soul. 'What are your people? Where did they come from? What kind of blood flows in your veins?'<sup>21</sup>

Anderson's reading of America's race problem self-consciously eliminated the nuances of difference to make it a feeling borne equally by all Americans.

Focusing narrowly in the hopes of opening large questions about race and media, I want to make it clear this dissertation does not deal directly with Du Bois or the Harlem Renaissance that emerged from his calls for "a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals."<sup>22</sup> However, in my work on immigrant critics and artist I have considered Du Bois' notion of the power of doubleness as a form of insight, what Paul Gilroy following Richard Wright has called the "dreadful objectivity which follows from being both inside and outside the West."<sup>23</sup> Following subsequent thinkers, such as Gilroy and Toni Morrison, I take the turn-of-the-century confrontation with the insights of transatlantic hybrid identities and alterity to be the foundation of what I call "composite modernism" in the American avant-garde's early modernism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Sherwood Anderson, "A Story Teller's Story" (University of Michigan Press, 2005, c1924), 396. For more on Anderson's complicated engagement with the Harlem Renaissance see Mark Helbling, "Sherwood Anderson and Jean Toomer" *Negro American Literature Forum*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Summer, 1975), 35-39. In her recent study of racial passing in literature, Kathleen Pfeiffer has argued that the "sense of disconnect between interior and exterior worlds reflects a discourse of subjectivity that also frames American individualism" at the most general level, operating for both blacks and whites. Kathleen Pfeiffer, *Race Passing and American Individualism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>22</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," 233-4.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 137. Toni Morrison has also called for study of "the way an Africanist idiom is used to establish difference or, in a later period, to signal modernity." *Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 52.



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I do not see why photography, water colors, oils, sculptures, drawings, prints ... are not of equal potential value. I cannot see why one should differentiate between so-called 'major' and 'minor' media ... It is as if there was a great Noah's ark in which every species must be separated from the other species, so that finally, they are all placed in their separate cells, they grow so self-conscious that finally, if one were to take them out and put them together they would all fall upon one another and kill each other.

– Alfred Stieglitz, recorded between 1927 and 1946, printed in *Twice a Year*, 1947

## 1 “Ellis Island Art”

Americans at the turn of the twentieth century grappled with diversity. New immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe poured into the U.S., native-born black and white Americans undertook internal migrations to the nation's urban centers, and advances in the technology of image making – photography, film, and even new modes in the graphic reproduction of cartoons and caricature in newspapers – provoked uncertainty in the art world. Diverse populations tested the bounds of national inclusion in the American melting pot as the emergence of new art forms threw aesthetic hierarchies into conflict, bringing to the fore issues of differentiation always present in a nation of immigrants and an art world divided by medium and genre. Artists and intellectuals became newly self-conscious of their aesthetic strategies in a rapidly urbanizing, modernizing United States. Did the diverse melting pot of America have the capacity to produce its own autonomous modern art? Could its mechanically reproduced images be that art?

This dissertation explores New York's early modernist avant-garde, examining how notions of America as a diverse immigrant nation operated at an aesthetic and a cultural level, as revealed in specific works of art and in theoretical debates about mediums and what they should express. Tracking images positioned as part of the foundational canon of modernism in addition to more marginal artworks and theories, I trace the formulation of American modernism at the turn of the twentieth century as a product of ethnically marked artists and intellectuals who became newly self-conscious of their aesthetic

strategies in a rapidly urbanizing, modernizing United States. Concentrating on immigrant critics and practitioners of the circle around the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, I open aesthetics to the simmering discourse about U.S. immigration and race to show how anxieties regarding marked bodies were linked in order to shed new light on theories of medium specificity, abstraction, spirituality, and “purity” of vision in the modern art that emerged in the years between 1890 and 1925.

Prioritizing the shifting boundaries of categories in an era of diversity when the truths of physical appearance and visibility itself were under pressure, I examine conflicts over diversity in social and racial sphere, as artworks and art criticism partook of and resisted, gave expression to and helped contain, ideologies of race and difference. After decades of fighting for photography to be taken on its own terms and treated as art, Stieglitz nonetheless objected (as cited in my epigraph) to seeing media as separate species isolated on board a Noah’s ark. He forecast that pressure built in isolation would make the media themselves self-conscious and ready to kill the one another. The boundaries between “major” and “minor” media he urged should be dissolved and all of art’s species should instead be considered equally valuable.

I examine three episodes of negotiation among media in the formulation of American modernism. In each chapter I study how aesthetic breakthroughs informed and were informed by a double debate: one occurring in the political and cultural sphere, and a parallel discourse about artistic media themselves. In this first introductory chapter I will set the stage for more focused, in depth discussions that follow by outlining ideas of race, media and the broad interaction of the two in the U.S. art world at the turn of the twentieth century. The second chapter traces the concept of medium specificity as it emerges from the promotion of “straight” photography by the Japanese-German American critic Sadakichi Hartmann, and discusses how such celebrations of a medium’s unique, inherent properties related to the nascent philosophy of cultural pluralism espoused by Horace Kallen (1890-1907). In the third chapter I explore the Mexican-born artist Marius De Zayas’ important role in formulating caricature as a hybrid medium for a dialectical synthesis between photography and painting, and between the abstractions of African and modern European art, which would result in a new type of American “plastic

expression” (1907-1917). The fourth chapter investigates Stieglitz’s attempts, inspired by new allies such as the English-Sri Lankan American curator Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, to adapt the photograph to a serial aesthetics of gesture and symbolic form – alluding to the aesthetics of film to advance an abstraction that would defer de Zayas’ synthesis and maintain in tension both popular white nativism and a new ethnic spiritualism (1917-1925). These artists and critics, each of whom formed conflicted partnerships with Stieglitz, confronted the arts of what Hartmann called the “grey race,” America’s homogenized bland Puritans, with a more complex aesthetic, positioning themselves as critical hybrid outsiders, and identifying marginal media as the means by which to devise and theorize a new art in the U.S. The unquestioned medium of painting became over the course of the first two decades of the century, pressured by difference, becoming “media” and pluralizing what art (and artists) could be. Photography, caricature, and film were celebrated as media with their own sets of independent expressive properties, each able to open the aesthetic horizon in ways that could restructure the artistic canon and formulate what I term a “composite” modernism for the American context.

### *Composite Modernism*

I take the term “composite” from a description of “The Physiognomy of the New Yorker,” authored by Philadelphia-born “Spanish-Hebrew” poet Benjamin de Casseres and published in Stieglitz’s journal *Camera Work* in 1910.<sup>25</sup> Close friend of caricaturist de Zayas, de Casseres probed the racial and facial composition of New York in his essay, describing the New York face as “a *composite* creation, embodying the spirit of the Great Republic.” Within New York (figured as “a rough-cast of America-that-shall-be”) the very faces of urban inhabitants revealed America as a cosmopolitan nation being built of diverse foreign immigrants.<sup>26</sup> Was the city producing a new American race? How would this composite be created?

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<sup>25</sup> De Casseres proudly traced his ancestry to the Sephardic Jews of Iberia. Howard Willard Cook, *Our Poets of Today* (New York: Moffat, Yard, and Company, 1918), 143.

<sup>26</sup> Italics added. Benjamin de Casseres, “The Physiognomy of the New Yorker,” *Camera Work* 29 (Jan. 1910): 35.

Using the term “composite” in the pages of *Camera Work*, De Casseres invoked three distinct discourses and definitions that set the frame for what I am terming “composite modernism.” First, he drew on the word’s common dictionary definition as “a material made from two or more physically different constituents each of which largely retains its original structure and identity.”<sup>27</sup> Secondly, de Casseres evoked connotations of “composite photography,” the famous late nineteenth-century photographic experiments of British statistician, inventor, and founder of eugenics Francis Galton.<sup>28</sup> In naming his experiment this way, Galton utilized a meaning for composite that contradicted its common connotation of heterogeneous patchwork to argue for a fully mingled result of layered unity: “combining the typical or essential characteristics of individuals making up a group.”<sup>29</sup> Finally, in addition to these two models of difference, articles in New York’s popular press during the period envisioned the “composite type” as the inevitable outcome of American social and racial diversity. The warning “your grandchildren will marry their grandchildren” suggests this “composite” American would result from a transformative synthesis of different types and adds a third layer to the meaning of composite by signifying mixing at the sexual and genetic level.<sup>30</sup> To summarize, composite suggested objects or individuals could be (1) pushed together while maintaining difference, (2) layered to reveal their sameness or (3) synthesized (frequently through sexual reproduction) into something new. In this dissertation I will put these definitions of “composite” in historical play to argue for a modernism that ceaselessly troubled emerging aesthetic hierarchies by asserting the importance of putatively “minor” arts,

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<sup>27</sup> OED.

<sup>28</sup> Galton’s principle of layered images became subsequently popular in the U.S. Photographer W. Curtis Taylor for example presented the work at the American Philosophical Society in 1885. W. Charles Taylor, “On Composite Photography,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 22, No. 120, Part IV (Oct., 1885): 360-362. In the photographic world. Stieglitz would call his photographs of O’Keeffe “composite portrait” Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Aperture, 1990), 119 (Hereafter *American Seer*).

<sup>29</sup> This definition is not given in the OED, but only in Merriam-Webster. “composite, adj.,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1996). Alan Sekula has traced the way that Galton’s work aimed to “visualize the generic evidence of hereditarian laws.” Alan Sekula “Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter, 1986): 19.

<sup>30</sup> “Looks for a New American,” *New York Times*. March 15, 1909, 15. This article, with the subtitle “Dr. Eaton thinks there will soon be a composite of many nationalities,” for example, recounted a sermon by “Rev. Dr. Charles A. Eaton, at the Madison Avenue Baptist Church in Thirty-first Street,” which “analyzed the character of the New American, the composite type that will spring up in a generation or two from the many nationalities taking root in the soil of the United States.” Eaton asked: “You can keep your fence up while the new arrivals speak Lettish or Hungarian and we talk English, but your grandchildren will marry their grandchildren...” “What will the New American be like? Will he take away the artistic sense of the Italian and leave behind his love of revenge? Will he take away the German steadiness and leave only brutality and drunkenness? Will he take away the keenness of French intellect and leave only the sensuality of that nation? Will the people we have received from foreign shores absorb only our political corruption and sensationalism?”

mediums that were frequently analogized at the time to bodies in new combinations. In tracing how this modernism created, captured, layered, and combined dissonance in the relationships among diverse media to make aesthetic heterogeneity productive, I argue that composite modernism involves a generative negotiation of difference that is sublimated in dominant theories of medium specificity as a process of internal refinement.

### *From Pluralism to Fordism*

The first episode of my dissertation begins in 1890, the year that the photographer Alfred Stieglitz returned to New York from Germany, and the year that the regulation of immigration was first placed under federal control. By focusing on the early work of Stieglitz, as well as writings by allied critic Sadakichi Hartmann, I demonstrate how the aesthetic concerns of photography as an artistic medium, often later positioned as apolitical, actually functioned in close relation to contemporaneous issues of race and nationality, taking part in a nascent debate between two cultural models of integrating difference – assimilation and pluralism. Hartmann’s definition favored the latter, establishing photography on its own unique, inherent terms rather than on those supplied by paintings, figuring the city and the world of art as a heterogeneous patchwork. I trace the criticism, the images, and conflicts that led to Hartmann’s 1904 theorization of photographic medium specificity in the word “straight.” Although a now canonical term used to characterize photographs that are sharply focused, crisply printed, objective representations, this chapter explores straight photography’s unstable historical origins, recovering lost links between subject, method, and rhetoric, as well as the larger context in which they were forged. It follows, for example, Hartmann’s objections to the influential studio photographer and Stieglitz circle member Gertrude Käsebier, whom he deemed regressive because she did not embrace the unique expressive properties of photography in the bustling city, but closed herself off in her studio to concoct photographs patterned after paintings. This chapter claims that Hartmann’s model of medium specificity aimed both to situate photography within the canon of art, and in the street of immigrants – intending to create a set of modernist aesthetics that could also operate as a unique tool through which to conceptualize modernity’s

political and cultural questions about languages, races, and nations.

The second section of my dissertation begins in 1907, the year that the Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (the exhibition space known as 291 for its address on Fifth Avenue) began to exhibit works in non-photographic media and the year that the Mexican caricaturist Marius de Zayas arrived in New York. In this chapter I explore de Zayas' early exhibitions of his own caricature at Stieglitz's gallery 291, and then turn to investigate his role as importer and theorist of European modernism for the U.S., focusing on the 1911 Pablo Picasso show he organized at 291. Returning to de Zayas' own caricature, I examine the theory and formal characteristics of his breakthrough, abstract "absolute" caricature displayed at 291 in 1913, before shifting to his role as curator of the landmark 1914 New York show of African sculpture, and concluding with his 1915 manifesto for a hybrid American modern art. In calling for hybridity, DZ asserted the third form of the composite, a radical synthesis into a new compound. De Zayas' own work as a caricaturist culminated in a new method that promised to depict the individual by synthesizing body and spirit, hybridizing photography and painting, and mediating between the abstractions of African and modern European art. This synthetic resolution would result in a new type of American "plastic expression" that moved beyond even art. Caricature, here, complicates Stieglitz's self-mythologizing narrative of the autonomous straight photograph and helps us understand the function of abstract modern art and representational photography as components that might be synthesized into a "composite" modernism.

The third episode of my dissertation chronicles a dramatic turn during the First World War, already recognized as marking the transition between the "first" and "second" Stieglitz circles. Beginning in 1917 and closing in 1924, I examine the "second" Stieglitz circle's response to the growing nativism and isolationism of post-WWI America that would result in the 1924 institution of permanent quotas to regulate immigration. The high art norms of painting had been dismissed by Hartmann and synthetically amalgamated by de Zayas, but for these artists working at the dawn of the era of "mass media" (a term that emerged in the advertising industry around 1923), composite modernism would take yet another form. Particularly in Stieglitz's practice of this time, cinema seemed to offer a model for "transparency"



that might allow a new mode of photographic abstraction and provide the avant-garde access to a popular audience.<sup>31</sup> Central to this chapter are works of serial photography and film, including Stieglitz's photographs of Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Sheeler's and Paul Strand's film *Manhatta* (1920), and the little known photographs and films of Ananda Coomaraswamy, the curator of Indian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts who arranged the collection of Stieglitz's work in 1924 as the cornerstone of the first major American museum collection of photography as art. I trace Stieglitz's attempt to adapt photography to the serial aesthetics of gesture and symbolic form by alluding to the aesthetics of film in order to advance a photographic abstraction that would defer de Zayas' synthesis and hold its terms in dialectical tension. During the 1920s Stieglitz was eager to participate in both the definition of American art being canonized around native-born white painters, such as O'Keeffe and Charles Sheeler, and join in the creation of a universal spiritualized modernism championed by "ethnic" intellectuals, such as curator Ananda Coomaraswamy, and authors Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld.<sup>32</sup> Serial photography, for example the images of O'Keeffe that Stieglitz called his "composite portrait," offered no secure resting point, no decisive moment of singular identity, but maintained white nativism and ethnic spiritualism in tension.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of "composite modernism," the first episode of my dissertation follows the first definition of composite outlined above, with Hartmann treating mediums and immigrant groups as inherently separate and equal entities existing in the same art world and the same city, deposited in a "straight" photograph. In this early period Stieglitz agreed with Hartmann, going so far as to argue that photographers must have the patience to wait for hours in order to capture the single definitive image,

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<sup>31</sup> Common in the specialized discourse of advertising the expression "mass media" did not come into common usage until the 1950s. "media, n.<sup>2</sup>", *OED* and John Ayto, *Movers and Shakers: A Chronology of Words that Shaped Our Age* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 70.

<sup>32</sup> As Kathleen Pyne has recently pointed out, O'Keeffe's "natural" unitary womanly essence was similarly fractured and contrived," so was this status as white. Pyne, *Modernism and the Feminine Voice*, xxix.

<sup>33</sup> Norman, *American Seer*, 119. Norman simply writes that Stieglitz called the series a "composite portrait." The fact that this phrase was originally Galton's has, to my knowledge, gone unremarked upon in voluminous literature on the O'Keeffe portrait. Yet, Stieglitz would have known would have known Galton's work through a variety of sources in the turn-of-the-century photography world. For example, Stieglitz early mentor Peter Henry Emerson mentioned Galton's portraits, calling them false "chimera" (and making serious objections to his lenses and methods of exposure), in the 1890 version of his *Naturalistic Photography*. Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890).

positioning the method of straight photography against Galton's multiple exposures and layering. By contrast, de Zayas' arguments can be seen as examples of the fully hybrid composite, following his calls for a biological and genetic model of integration that proposed to resolve the differences between races and media through a sexualized union. Finally, the later Stieglitz circle rejected this hybrid, nativizing de Zayas' composite and at the same time sublimating its sexual component into a spiritualism that could be assumed by the still "ethnic" Stieglitz. Pulling apart the terms of de Zayas' dialectic, Stieglitz created a new serial portrait of O'Keeffe that kept each layer of this composite separate. Positing each image in series and in tension, Stieglitz courted both the heterogeneous patchwork and the layered unity of composite modernism. Creating images that could be fused only in the mind of the viewer (as in cinema), Stieglitz's "composite portrait," I argue, redressed Galton's racist practice to suggest strands of difference that would never cohere to stereotype – in effect, a melting pot in which difference was never fully melted, an art world in which the pluralism of difference could be held in productive tension with the nativist's eugenic attempts to produce homogeneity.

To trace end state of composite modernism as it has been canonized by art history, I briefly discuss the 1925 celebration of the "essentially American" artwork of the group of "Seven Americans" with whom Stieglitz would work for the remainder of his career. This show flattened the obvious discourse of racial and immigrant bodies that had characterized the most productive phase of composite modernism, but reinstated the productive dialectic between mediums: Stieglitz kept painting and photography separate, but framed the exhibition to reveal the common Americanness of artworks in both mediums. Culminating these developments are Sheeler's 1927 photographic project at Henry Ford's River Rouge Plant, which I use as a foil to Stieglitz's residual composite practice. I examine Stieglitz's continuing attempt to combat the standardization of industrialists like Ford with spirituality, comparing it to Sheeler's project, which I in turn read alongside Ford's own immigration rituals and well-known anti-Semitism. After exploring the turn away from heterogeneity by Sheeler's new generation of American modernists, I briefly consider the way races and media were subsequently connected along an axis of purity and homogeneity by Thomas Craven, Thomas Hart Benton, and Clement Greenberg. I argue that

these later critics sublimated modernist medium specificity's intersection with the bodily and the social, channeling it into a purity that explicitly disavowed both the heterogeneity of bodies and the explicit source of "spiritualism" in Stieglitz's Judaism. Finally I suggest the way a heritage of composite modernism persists in reactions against Greenberg's high modernism, such as Robert Rauschenberg's collage and artworks in our own multicultural new media age.

## 1.1 The Evolution of Media

Francis Galton attributed the inspiration of his composite photography to Herbert Spencer, a British positivist philosopher who was immensely popular in the U.S. at the turn of the century and whose views on evolution form an important context for my study.<sup>34</sup> Kathleen Pyne's 1996 book, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late-Nineteenth-Century America*, traces the vital way Spencer's interpretation of evolution as a philosophy of human progress enabled Americans to come to terms with Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin challenged "American self-identity as God's chosen people," but Spencer allowed Americans to reconcile the new science with their national self-image.<sup>35</sup> Historian Jackson Lears documents Spencer's important role in easing modern anxieties by making America's progress and heterogeneity seem "inexorable and beneficent."<sup>36</sup> In the context of art history Pyne addresses the importance of Spencer's Lamarckian Environmentalist vision of evolution to the late-

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<sup>34</sup> Spencer, according to Galton, had made his own tracings of several heads onto transparent paper, intending "to impose optically the various drawings and to accept the aggregate result" as typical. John Arthur Thomson, *Herbert Spencer* (New York: E.P. Dutton & co., 1906) 56. Francis Galton, "Composite Portraits, Made by Combining those of Many Different Persons into a Single Resultant Figure," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, November, 1878, printed as *Composite Portraits*, London: Harrison and Sons, 1878.

<sup>35</sup> Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 2. Michael Leja's book also contains a helpful discussion of Spencer and reception of impressionism in the U.S. Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 107-11

<sup>36</sup> Spencer's famous phrase "survival of the fittest," Lears argues, invoked "evolutionary optimism" rather than conflict. The pursuit of individual self-interest led not to Hobbesian chaos but to Spencerian harmony as militant conflict gave way to industrial peace." Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 21. This is a later interpretation of Spencer based on J.D.Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer: the Evolution of a Sociologist* (New York, 1971) and Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia, 1979), that formed a dramatic reinterpretation of Spencer from that one given in Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston, 1955), which cast Spencer as a "Social Darwinist" defender of laissez-faire capitalism, and according to Lears "exaggerates the popularity of Darwinian notions of struggle among American middle and upper classes." Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 327. Spencer celebrated social interdependence while maintaining a philosophy of liberal individualism. *Ibid.*, 38.

nineteenth-century American art world. If environment and not natural selection was the determiner of character, arts could assist in evolutionary progress by reshaping the cultural environment. Pyne focuses on the work of American tonalists and impressionists, tracing how their “evolutionary paradigm” aided elite North-Eastern Anglo-Americans “in reproducing their hegemony through the proliferation of cultural forms.”<sup>37</sup> Pyne examines “the complicity of artists in defending the Anglo-American establishment against the potential threats to its dominance posed by the newly arrived immigrants” through their creation of a culture of aestheticism that looked to beauty as an escape from the problems of modern life. In addressing the pervasive penetration of “the language of evolutionary science” into the aesthetic realm my work follows Pyne’s, but I examine how this rhetoric also supplied the early-twentieth-century avant-garde with a way to talk about new media.<sup>38</sup>

Important to my study is Spencer’s use of diversity in artistic media to support his claim that increasing complexity and heterogeneity in social and political structures was a sign of progress. As he argued: “the evolution from homogeneous to heterogeneous is displayed ... in the separation of Painting and Sculpture from Architecture and from each other.”<sup>39</sup> Spencer identified the U.S. as a prime example of recent social progress evidenced by increasing heterogeneity, and located photography as a new artistic generator of aesthetic complexity. Spencer became extremely popular in Gilded Age America, with the heterogeneous nation and the rapidly proliferating medium of photography cited as indications of global progress.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, in her recent book, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for*

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<sup>37</sup> Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> In general Pyne traces American art of the generation that preceded the Stieglitz circle, Sadakichi Hartmann figures in in both our projects. Pyne cites Hartmann’s 1893 article on the painter Thomas Dewing which describes the way “pictures of women that might stand for the ‘ideal American’ type” *Ibid.* Although Pyne does not discuss this passage Hartmann makes the stakes of physiognomy obvious, by writing of these women: “Nude they are perfect images of the American female composite figure made by H.H. Kitson, after the measurements of Prof. D. Sargent.” Sadakichi Hartmann, “Thomas W. Dewing” (1893), “anthologized in Sadakichi Hartmann, *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist*, ed. Jane Calhoun Weaver (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 240.

<sup>39</sup> “We have, in the Anglo-Americans, an example of a new variety arising within these few generations...The change from the homogenous to the heterogeneous is displayed in the progress of civilization as a whole, as well as in the progress of every nation; and is still going on with increasing rapidity.” Herbert Spencer, “Progress: Its Laws and Cause,” first published in *The Westminster Review*, April 1857, citation to version anthologized in *Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative*, vol. 1, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891), 19. Increasing complexity engenders more complexity “the hints of all kinds of pictorial art are deriving from Photography.” *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>40</sup> I do not intend to suggest a return to such positivistic art criticism, but considering Spencer’s popularity will allow us to rethink modernity as a process of sameness and standardization or sudden revolution. Although Pyne does not site his work, in 1960s art historian and aesthetic philosopher, Thomas Murno interestingly argued for a return to Spencer as a progressive method for

*National Distinctiveness*, American literature scholar Carrie Tirado Bramen locates Spencer near the origins of the shared American belief that “diversity provides the distinguishing mark of national uniqueness,” distinguishing America from and elevating it above other nations. She points out that “long after Herbert Spencer’s views on Social Darwinism became unpopular among liberal intellectuals such as William James, Spencer’s notion of modernity as heterogeneous and urban still held sway.”<sup>41</sup> As Bramen perceptively argues, the national discourse of diversity in the modernizing U.S. functioned to contain two seemingly oppositional fears: “concerns about the crisis of individuality due to the encroaching homogeneity of modernity” and “concerns about the excessive heterogeneity of the metropolitan centers.”<sup>42</sup> Spencer’s description of evolution as a movement from the incoherent and homogenous (confused sameness) to the coherent and heterogeneous (clearly differentiated multiplicity) relied on a process of differentiation and integration that rang true for many Americans.<sup>43</sup> Here I chronicle swings between the dialectical poles of heterogeneity and homogeneity, coherence and incoherence, to chart modernism as the interplay of these terms in which media was theorized through not only a language of refinement (coherence), but also one of differentiation and proliferation (heterogeneity).<sup>44</sup>

The word “medium” has a clear derivation from the classical Latin, and occurs in English as early as the thirteenth century. The plural form – “media” – is the regular Latin plural; in addition to the Anglicized plural “mediums” it is found from the seventeenth century. Free variation occurs at the turn of the twentieth century between these two plural forms to describe persons or things that act as

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understanding art. I want to make it clear that in describing Spencer’s role at the turn of the twentieth century. Thomas Munro, “Evolution and Progress in the Arts: A Reappraisal of Herbert Spencer’s Theory” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Mar., 1960), pp. 294-315 and a version would appear in his *Evolution in the Arts, and Other Theories of Culture History* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, and H. N. Abrams, 1963)

<sup>41</sup> Carrie Tirado Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americans and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 18. Frank Giddings, Fiske and other Americans also followed Spencer. Diversity has become so easily invoked as to seem natural, but Bramen argues its celebration needs to be historicized and aims to “trace the genealogy of American diversity as the *sine qua non* of national modernity.” *Ibid.*, 5.

It is important to point out that although he argued for heterogeneity Spencer opposed the “mixture of human races extremely unlike,” which he asserted it had been shown “produces a worthless type of mind,” capable of living the life of neither parental race, such an offspring would have “a mind out of adjustment to all conditions of life.” Hebert Spencer, “II – The Comparative Psychology of Man,” *Mind* Vol.1, No.1 (January 1876), 7–20.

<sup>42</sup> Bramen, *The Uses of Variety*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> This was the general law of evolution according to Spencer: “the entire mass is integrating, and simultaneously differentiating from other masses... Evolution is definable as a change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity.” Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (1864) (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), 371

<sup>44</sup> Bramen’s account focuses on the dialectical tensions in William James’ thought that offered hope variety and unity could be combined, but these insights are also applicable to Spencer’s theory. Bramen, *The Uses of Variety*, 34-35.

intermediaries – from the substances “through which impressions are conveyed to the senses,” to means of exchange such as money. With these other definitions in mind, I focus in this dissertation on media’s signification of “the varieties of painting or drawing as determined by the material or technique used” and its use to describe the burgeoning methods of mass communication.<sup>45</sup> As is perhaps suggested in this free play between material and technique, what constitutes a medium could become highly contested.

To define medium in the Stieglitz circle at the turn of the century necessitates stepping back to examine the proliferation of how the group used the term, destabilizing our own constricted definition by applying it to aesthetic categories we might call genre or style. Defending Picasso’s work to a German photographer, for example, Stieglitz even invoked the word medium to describe the method of abstraction itself, calling it “a new medium of expression – the true medium.”<sup>46</sup> For Stieglitz photographs mimicking painting were to be avoided, but importantly, media did not have to be kept away from each other like animals engaged in deadly contest (as cited in the epigraph); comparing photography to other art forms, he wrote, allowed the discovery of his own medium’s specific “possibilities and limitations.”<sup>47</sup> It was only in comparison with another medium that the limitations of mediums and the divisions between them would progressively be found (i.e., a photograph was not truly a photograph if it looked like or used the techniques of a painting). In 1907 Stieglitz began exhibiting non-photographic work in a variety of what we might define as genre or styles, including caricatures, Japanese prints, children’s drawings and Cubist charcoals.<sup>48</sup> However, responding to some photographers’ complaints, he published an article positioning each of these categories as a medium – declaring that these shows were essential because photography could only be sure of its position among the arts by avoiding isolation and “standing the test of

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<sup>45</sup> “media, n.<sup>2</sup>,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). *Oxford English Dictionary*, on-line edition. 1923 the term “mass media” is coined within the realm of advertising, but the use of medium to describe a “channel of mass communication” dates from 1850. “medium, n.,” *OED*.

<sup>46</sup> “Just as we stand before the door of a new social era, so we stand in art too before a new medium of expression – the true medium (abstraction).” Alfred Stieglitz, Letter to Heinrich Kühn, October 14, 1912, quoted in *Alfred Stieglitz, Photographs & Writings*, ed. Sarah Greenough, Juan Hamilton. Wash.: National Gallery of Art, 1983.

<sup>47</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “Our Illustrations,” *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 47.

<sup>48</sup> Stieglitz argued that artists in non-photographic media must be “non-photographic in their attitude, and the Photo-Secession can be said now to stand for those artists who secede from the photographic attitude towards the representation of form.” Alfred Stieglitz, “Photo-Secession Notes” (1910) as cited in Sarah Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries*, ed. Sarah Greenough (Washington [D.C.]: National Gallery of Art; Boston: Bulfinch Press 2000), 38

comparison with other media.”<sup>49</sup> Uncertainty about divisions among proliferating mediums paralleled uncertainty about the application of the terms “medium” and “media.” Old classificatory schemes for both people and works of art seemed inadequate to the challenges of New York. Explaining the evolution of art forms and methods, the Stieglitz circle crafted a structural relationship between race and media, which eventually built to comparisons among media that generated productive contrasts for defining a nation and a national modern art.

This definition departs from dominant accounts of artistic medium specificity in the modern era, which trace their origins to the eighteenth-century German author Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s firm division between painting and poetry in his 1766 essay *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (although, significantly, Lessing also analogized the relation between media – one medium and another – to national relations – between one people and another).<sup>50</sup> In the chapter that follows I will discuss Lessing’s theories more fully and chart how, at the end of the nineteenth century, practitioners and critics of photography had begun to celebrate photographic “heterogeneity” (in Spencer’s model) as opposed to “homogeneity” of an art world with only painting and sculpture. No longer would they attempt to emulate painting through blurred focus or handwork on negatives, choosing instead the modernist precept of medium specificity. As early as 1889, the influential English photographer Peter H. Emerson referred to photographs that relied only on the techniques of their medium as “pure.”<sup>51</sup> These tenets of “purity” began to be reframed as “straight” photography roughly a decade later, first coherently theorized in 1904 by the subject of the next chapter – Stieglitz circle critic Sadakichi Hartmann, an immigrant of mixed origins who viewed “heterogeneity” in a markedly different way.<sup>52</sup> Hartmann

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<sup>49</sup> P.B.H., “The Photo-Secession and Photography,” *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 42.

<sup>50</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* [original German version 1766], translation by Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962). Lessing’s treatise continued and revised the Italian Renaissance literary form of *paragone* in which authors championed individual arts as different from and superior to all other forms. Leonardo da Vinci famously celebrated painting. *Ibid.*, 91. W.J.T. Mitchell has argued that Lessing’s argument introduced a variety of oppositional properties that included race and nationality, equating painting with “French ‘refinement’” and poetry with “German and English ‘manliness’.” W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 110.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889; third edition New York: The Scovill and Adams Company, 1899; reprint of this third edition New York: Arno, 1973).

<sup>52</sup> The stakes of straight photography often took on a moral dimension in which any manipulation was equated with falsehood. The first usage of the term “straight” to describe photography generally seems to have occurred in the first volume of *Camera*

borrowed Lessing's basic association between media and peoples, but advocated Spencer's growing complexity in both social and aesthetic relations.

It is important to acknowledge here that not everyone in the teens and twenties was convinced that such expansion of the art world was to be celebrated. For example, in this roiling 1910 context, the Harvard professor and American literary critic Irving Babbitt directly referenced Lessing and debates about medium specificity with the title of his book *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*. For Babbitt the contemporary loosening of boundaries between the arts and the generation of new media each proved "merely a special aspect of the more general malady," an aesthetic confusion that sprang from the fact that "men of the present have no centre" (sic).<sup>53</sup> Heterogeneity in the arts was directly affected by, was indeed a mirror of, instability in the social sphere.<sup>54</sup> Babbitt considered the role of biological difference in defining artistic categories, but he rejected the model of "biological analogy" advanced by Spencer, cautioning that to take the relationship between "natural genus and the literary genre [as] anything more than a useful metaphor, at once falls into pseudo-science" because while artistic genres obey laws created by man aiming at "perfection...unity, measure, purpose," nature's law is "endless flux and relativity."<sup>55</sup> Babbitt terms the relation a metaphor and analogy, yet his description seems instead to position "pure" medium specific artistic genres as the Platonic ideal instantiated by the less than ideal equivalent of race in the natural world. Using the arts as a buttress against the composite nature of modernity, he considered each medium in isolation, and related its purity analogically to biological difference. For Babbitt the important boundaries between arts that Lessing had laid out seemed crucial to preserve us from social confusion.

Other critics in the teens and twenties also struggled with new arts, casting them in terms of the perils and promises of immigration. Royal Cortissoz, art critic for the *New York Tribune*, connected

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*Work*, which although dated 1903 was actually released in later 1902. Alfred Stieglitz (signed Editors), "Pictures in this Number," *Camera Work*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1903): 63.

<sup>53</sup> Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 185.

<sup>54</sup> In Babbitt's book aesthetic preference for medium specificity also functioned as an indicator of personal purity; he explained, "a clear-cut type of person, a person who does not live in either an emotional or an intellectual muddle, will normally prefer a clear-cut type of art or literature ... He will desire each art and every genre to be itself primarily." Italics in original. *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>55</sup> Babbitt allowed "because genera and species evolve and run together in this way on the physical plane, it is easy to take the next step and assume that the literary genres evolve and run together in the same way." *Ibid.*, 215-216.



changing aesthetics and demographics in one 1923 article, identifying the work of early American modernists as “Ellis Island Art.” The conservative Cortissoz was not celebrating this racialized composite modernism. Even as temporary quotas were reducing immigration, he opined:

There is something in this art situation analogous to what has been so long going on in our racial melting pot. The United States is invaded by aliens, thousands of whom constitute so many acute perils to the health of the body politic. Modernism is of precisely the same heterogeneous alien origin and is imperiling the republic of art in the same way. It began, as our excessive immigration began, in an insidiously plausible manner.<sup>56</sup>

Cortissoz’s rhetoric of a strange new imported modernism was a response to the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art mounted by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors at the New York Armory (more commonly known as the Armory Show), which brought the latest in European modern art to the U.S. The international exhibition did grab headlines and spur public debate about a national modern art, but as previous examples indicate, this language conflating confusion in the social and aesthetic spheres existed well before 1913.

William Glackens, an organizer of Armory show, was quoted using rhetoric similar to Cortissoz’s in 1923 (but making the opposite argument) to retrospectively explain the absence of American art at the exhibition: “Our own art is arid and bloodless. It is like nothing so much as dry bones...Perhaps it is a reflection of the racial characteristic come down to us from Anglo-Saxon forefathers.” Describing the problem of Puritanism’s “grey race” in 1923 as Hartmann had in 1910, Glackens suggested America’s English heritage of emotional restraint was a “racial” trait that deterred the country from developing a national art. To account for the predominance of the French art at the Armory Show, he suggested, “Perhaps it is inevitable that the Gauls, who put no masques over their emotions, should become the leaders, pointing the way to us, infusing a little of their fire into our dead wood.”<sup>57</sup> Critic and supporter of the Stieglitz circle critic Charles Caffin, seconded the notion that an infusion of new races might be needed to inspire Americans’ appreciation of art, proclaiming in 1913, “A new nation is in the melting pot

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<sup>56</sup> Royal Cortissoz, *American Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1923), 18.

<sup>57</sup> William Glackens, “Interview with William Glackens,” *Arts and Decoration*, March 1923, anthologized in Barbara Rose, *Readings in American Art Since 1900*, 72. Rose writes that this interview with the Chairman of the domestic committee on the American section of the Armory show was ghostwritten by critic Guy Pène du Bois.

and Puritanism is being fused with other elements: the spiritual and emotional ardor of the Celt, the appetite for life of the Scandinavian, the Latin love of concrete beauty and the idealism of the Slav...There is an awakening consciousness of the Desirability and Need of Beauty.”<sup>58</sup> Cortisoz, Glackens, and Caffin are only three examples of a pervasive trope used by critics of the period uniting concerns about race to debates about modern art that both preceded and followed the Armory Show. Cortisoz’s comments are easily dismissed as evidence of the backward state of the American art criticism, aesthetic conservatism or nationalist racism, but in fact similar metaphors were used even by avant-gardists to argue for or against a new national modern art. In sum, we need to take this “Ellis Island Art” seriously.

In following the influence of art critics and calling into question the Armory Show as a singular moment of aesthetic importation, I follow recent work by JoAnne Mancini. In her book, *Pre-Modernism: Art-World Change and American Culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show*, she examines the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, reframing the U.S. roots of modernist aesthetics and the emergence of cultural hierarchy. Mancini interrogates the idea that the 1913 New York Armory Show precipitated a dramatic revolutionary rupture in the art world, arguing instead that “modern art was neither an isolated collection of works and makers nor the mere byproduct of social and political radicalism, but a mutually constitutive set of institutional practices and aesthetic beliefs, deeply rooted in the immediate context of the American art world.”<sup>59</sup> In her argument this broadly defined art world was made up of artists, publishers, museum builders, and critics, who frequently operated as “canny entrepreneurs whose *strategic* resourcefulness facilitated and enhanced their ability to pursue *creative* goals.”<sup>60</sup> Intertwining arguments for strategy and creativity, Mancini productively uncovers the importance of critics, professionalization, and print media (including Stieglitz’s journal *Camera Work*) within the turn-of-the-century art world, breaking with a history that locates the importance of critics as

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Caffin, *Art for Life’s Sake* (Norwood MA: The Plimpton Press, 1913), 93-94.

<sup>59</sup> JoAnne Marie Mancini, *Pre-modernism: Art-world Change and American culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

commencing only decades later with Clement Greenberg.<sup>61</sup> I follow Mancini in believing that “Aesthetics do not just proceed from artworks; they also precede them” as “critics both produce judgments and build systems,” but I focus on one particular circle in order to examine closely the reaction of artists to these critic/theorists/viewers and the connections of ideas circulating in the art world and with those in the wider social world.<sup>62</sup>

Another treatment of early American modernism, Wanda Corn’s *The Great American Thing*, comes perhaps closest to articulating the importance of the cosmopolitanism dismissed by Cortisoz to the discourses of “Americanness” and early twentieth-century foundations of U.S. modernism, giving precedent to neither “the transatlantics” nor “the rooted.” Focused on the extended Stieglitz circle, Corn counsels for a recognition of foreign voices as influential in the formulation of American modernism just as “Americanism” is crucial for European modern art. In the preface to her book however, Corn acknowledges a pervasive racial whiteness in the group central to her study, claiming “The first [Stieglitz] circle was notably large, eclectic, open-ended, international and experimental ... The second circle, then, was small, closed, white, mostly male, middle- to upper-class, and exclusively East Coast American.”<sup>63</sup> In tracing the transition between what Corn identifies as the first and the second circle, I argue the post-WWI second circle used the terms set by this diverse earlier group, placing their apparent bodily whiteness in tension with an ethnic spiritualism.<sup>64</sup> I examine the historical record closely to argue that the second circle’s demographics were neither incidental or inevitable, but rather were produced deliberately in response to social pressures – just as Corn’s own choice to identify this second “white” group as American artists as opposed to a first group seen as “international” – whatever their citizenship might be.

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<sup>61</sup> Arguing that “the primary villains in this tale were not primarily entrepreneurs in either the non-profit sector or in the commercial world of image publishing, but the critics who sought to wrest professional control over the interpretation of art from both of them – and from their audiences.” *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

<sup>63</sup> The later group, Corn writes, discouraged participation through a “lack of commitment to any social program that might have encouraged artists of color.” Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>64</sup> In my own work I have come to see at least three dramatic changes in direction and personnel within the Stieglitz circle. I have separated them in my own three chapters, but here I maintain Corn’s influential periodization of first and second (instead of attempting to argue for calling establish Corn’s a division between a second and third circle) in order to argue none of Stieglitz’s circles can be considered in isolation from any other.

Examining the eclectic, international, “Ellis Island art” as the foundation of American modernism, I have also been influenced by Marcia Brennan’s recent book on this second circle’s “embodied formalism,” *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics*. I begin asking how race and its conflicts operated across both Stieglitz circles and in the transition between them. In other words, I extend Brennan’s claim that “conceptions of embodiment” based on “actual and symbolic bodies” were used to understand “abstract painterly forms,” in order to bring in the unexamined impact of theories of race on photographic production.<sup>65</sup> I continue Brennan’s project of tracing the way “formalist criticism was crucially heightened and concretized by being rooted in the body and, ultimately, sustained by the fluid promise of its own rhetoric” by examining responses to pressure from mediums other than painting.<sup>66</sup> By shifting the focus from gender and painting to race and so-called “minor” media, we see how bodies within the Stieglitz circle also became profoundly racialized in the attempt to create an abstract American art.

## 1.2 New Races and Diversity

It is important at this juncture to make clear that I intend to explore what Cortisoz termed “Ellis Island Art,” and not art *of* Ellis Island or art *depicting* Ellis Island. The national concerns about race, immigration, and urbanism at the turn of the century have been frequently examined at the level of subject matter. For example, alongside the Stieglitz circle in New York a group of American realist painters known as “The Eight,” and later as the Ashcan school, pursued the modern city as subject. Late in his life Stieglitz remembered showing with this group, which included William Glackens, at New York’s National Arts Club in 1908. Calling the “line, form, and color” of their paintings “mediocre,” Stieglitz claimed he had parted with the Eight because “I could not feel committed to what was mere literature, just

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<sup>65</sup> Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 271.

because it was labeled social realism.”<sup>67</sup> Although it is unclear what paintings Stieglitz saw in 1908 (or even if he was accurately remembering the event and his feelings about it decades later), perhaps he responded to George Luks 1905 *Hester Street*, which foregrounded clear vignettes of picturesque life in the city’s immigrant neighborhoods (fig. 1.1).<sup>68</sup> As art historian Rebecca Zurier has pointed out, many of The Eight worked as illustrators in the popular press.<sup>69</sup> Yet, Stieglitz articulated his departure from this group carefully, not objecting simply in terms of its ties with popular art, its social agenda, or its technical mediocrity, but rather because of its clear violation of the principal tenets of medium specificity – its painting was “mere” literature.<sup>70</sup> How could the new races of New York be depicted in the visual arts? Would it require a new way of seeing? Would the challenge call for a new medium altogether?

Certainly the new photographic medium seemed to lend itself to racialized projects. The photographic depiction of New York’s urban poor has been well explored by historians, who study how American photographers such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine depicted the squalid lives of immigrants in attempts to provoke social reform.<sup>71</sup> Such scholars (especially those focused on social and cultural histories) have often faulted Stieglitz as a photographer because he did not engage in this reform-driven

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<sup>67</sup> However, Stieglitz’s early narrative European scenes, such as *A Good Joke* and *The Letter Box*, actually do rather resemble these Ashcan vignettes, Norman, *An American Seer*, 67. For a discussion of narrative within the Ashcan School see Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), especially “The Storyteller’s Vision: John Sloan and the Limits of Visual Knowledge,” 249-304.

<sup>68</sup> Although interesting comparisons might be drawn between Luks’ painting *In the Steerage* (1900) and *The Steerage*, Stieglitz recalled only the Ashcan school’s literary leanings.

<sup>69</sup> Luks, for example took over the narrative comic *Hogan’s Alley* in 1896. Luks took over from the cartoon’s creator, Richard Outcault. He was born into an upper class family in Philadelphia, but liked to depict himself as “workmanlike,” hard drinker. Zurier, *Picturing the City*, 214.

<sup>70</sup> Several studies of turn-of-the-century American literary realism have informed my understanding of the period. I have tried to integrate their insights into the chapters that follow without overlooking the differences (here by Stieglitz clearly articulated) between narrative literature and the visual arts. In an era and genre (many texts for example address the literature of racial passing) in which visibility was under pressure such disparities seem particularly important. Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Carrie Tirado Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americans and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Kathleen Pfeiffer, *Race Passing and American Individualism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Linda Joyce Brown, *The Literature of Immigration and Racial Formation: Becoming White, Becoming Other, Becoming American in the Late Progressive Era* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004); Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995). In addition, although my study has also been informed by those focused on the subject matter of the Stieglitz circle (such as, for example, Donna Cassidy’s exploration of Marsden Hartley’s German themes that included Nazism blended with an indigenous white nativism), I do not explicitly cite these works except where they intersect directly with my study of media. Donna M. Cassidy, *Marsden Hartley: Race, Region, and Nation* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005).

<sup>71</sup> For more on Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine see also: Keith Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Walter Rosenblum, Naomi Rosenblum, and Alan Trachtenberg, *America and Lewis Hine* (New York: Aperture, 1977); and Michael Sundell, “Golden Immigrants at the Gold Door: Lewis Hine’s Photographs of Ellis Island,” *Social Text*, no. 16. (Winter, 1986-1987): 168-175.

agenda. Most notably, American studies scholar Alan Trachtenberg, in his widely read and cited essay “Camera Work/Social Work,” claims Stieglitz and his circle acted to “defeat and transcend the factual report” of photography in their struggle to transform the medium into art. In this regard, Hine’s 1905 Ellis Island photograph *On the Ferry Boat Leaving Ellis Island, Italian Family* is often compared to Stieglitz’s famous image *The Steerage* (fig. 1.2 and 1.3). Although Hine’s representation portrays a clearly defined family unit identified by ethnicity and destination far removed from Stieglitz’s ambiguous multilayered image, it needs to be said that neither photograph is more decisively factual than the other. Crafting a narrative of arrival, Hine aimed for sympathetic portraits that would provoke social change; even narrativizing the assistance of social organizations directly in his *A Representative from One of the Churches (a Social Worker) Helps the Immigrants in Many Ways, Ellis Island* (1915) (fig. 1.4). In contrast, Stieglitz’s one word title is tersely nominal: *The Steerage*. By creating a body of work “isolated from social practices, cultural patterns, and institutional forms,” Stieglitz actually “narrowed the range of aesthetic possibility,” argues Trachtenberg, separating the aesthetic and social function of photography.<sup>72</sup> But this view looks at photography from a late twentieth-century vantage point – at the beginning of the century, were aesthetics really so easily separated from the social?

My claim is that connections between aesthetics and demographics are not made only on the level of the photograph’s depicted content, but also at the theoretical and structural level of medium specificity. Could photography provide ambiguous glimpses of diversity as a new pluralist model of Americanness, rather than acting as a tool for posed narratives illustrating the need for assimilating social change? Was a narrative of assimilation to American norms the only social function of photography? By asking questions such as these I try to destabilize the dominant narrative of the Stieglitz circle as elite aesthetes out of touch with modern life.

I have briefly discussed Stieglitz stated goal of breaking down barriers between “major” and “minor” media on board art’s Noah’s ark, but here it is useful to examine another image of a ship,

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<sup>72</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, “Camera Work / Social Work,” *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Noonday Press, 1990, c1989) 174-75.

Stieglitz's 1907 *The Steerage* (mentioned above), which recurs throughout this dissertation (1.1). As Stieglitz narrated the making of the image: after three days of sitting in a deck chair and "feeling completely out of place" onboard a "fashionable" transatlantic steamer he fled from the boring "nouveau riche" first-class passengers and walked to the very limit of the first-class deck. At this border Stieglitz "stood alone," looking across a gulf at the men and women in the steerage.<sup>73</sup> A gangway separated the classes, "glistening in its freshly painted state...long, white, and...untouched by anyone." Instead of crossing this threshold into the steerage, Stieglitz stood "spellbound," seeing "a picture of shapes" – circular hat, funnel, stairway, mast – "and underlying that the feeling I had about life...the feeling of ship and ocean and sky and the feeling of release that I was away from the mob called rich." The photograph he took of this scene originated in a discourse of "straight," unmanipulated, unposed, medium specific photography, but it has also come to be seen as a sort of modernist abstraction.<sup>74</sup> When Stieglitz first showed the image publicly in 1911, he published it in *Camera Work* alongside a Cubist drawing by Pablo Picasso (fig. 1.5.). But in 1924 Stieglitz allowed *The Steerage* to be reprinted in the popular upper-class magazine *Vanity Fair* under the title *Beyond the Quota – in the Steerage* (fig. 1.6).<sup>75</sup> This new title reflects that in the same year the U.S. Congress had passed the National Origins Act, instituting the nation's first permanent quota-based set of immigration regulations that attempted to fix the demographic balance of the nation. Yet, in his 1942 narrative account of making *The Steerage* (which I will explore further in the chapters to follow), Stieglitz maintained that the image was not a comment on immigration, but a visualization of a complicated jumble of passengers and mechanical elements reduced to just a few shapes – modernist, abstract forms, equivalents to his own emotions. Stieglitz's discourse, as well as the black and white medium itself, attempted to abstract the image, to extricate it from its subject matter, but

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<sup>73</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, "How *The Steerage* Happened," *Twice A Year* 8-9 (1942) as anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Notes and Essays*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 197.

<sup>74</sup> He ended his narrative of making the photograph by writing "I said one day, 'If all my photographs were lost and I'd be represented by just one, *The Steerage*, I'd be satisfied.' I'm not sure that I don't feel very much the same way today."

<sup>75</sup> "Beyond the Quota—in the Steerage," *Vanity Fair* (August 1924): 54. A viewer familiar with the original image immediately notices the unsettling blurring of faces, which I will return to in the conclusion to this dissertation. Sarah Greenough has argued Stieglitz did not immediately recognize *The Steerage* as a modernist masterpiece, allowing it to be reproduced on a 1912 cover of *Saturday Evening Mail* immediately after the sinking of the Titanic. Sarah Greenough, ed. *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set; The Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), xxxi and Iv. (Source hereafter referenced as *The Key Set*.)

it is not coincidental that this landmark photograph depicts immigrants.<sup>76</sup> Artistic modernism is not purely formalist. Reading aesthetic forms of twentieth-century U.S. modernism alongside the political and cultural debates about race and immigration that roiled around them, I argue that formal strategies and debates about media were crucially linked in the minds of artists and critics of the period – a link that must be restored if we are to understand the distinct modernist aesthetic of early twentieth-century New York.

Stieglitz's photograph *The Steerage* is often taken as an illustration of immigration to the U.S., but the passengers depicted in it were actually headed back to Europe. The speed and relative comfort afforded by advances in the design of steamships made it possible for transatlantic traffic to move both ways. In fact, by 1907 this temporary immigration had become a fractious political and cultural issue.<sup>77</sup> Most scholars now agree it was the technical invention and improvement in transportation that allowed individuals from the laboring classes to travel back and forth, but to many Americans at the turn of the century it seemed to be the immigrants themselves who were different.<sup>78</sup>

In 1907, the same year Stieglitz photographed *The Steerage*, the U.S. Congress established an Immigration Commission to examine “the changed character of the immigration movement to the United States during the past twenty-five years.” This investigation, chaired by Vermont senator and advocate for immigration restriction William Dillingham, determined that nearly forty percent of the recent immigrants returned to Europe, two thirds staying there permanently.<sup>79</sup> To account for changes such as these the Commission began a study, which took three years, cost approximately one million dollars, and produced forty-one expansive volumes with tables and charts. They finally concluded that seventy percent of new arrivals to the U.S. were from the nations of Southern and Eastern Europe, while only twenty percent

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<sup>76</sup> That these individuals were actually headed back to Europe, as I will discuss in the following section, only makes the image more pertinent to contemporary issues of race.

<sup>77</sup> Worries about transient laborers and their channeling of capital out of the U.S., which had begun even earlier as biases against Asian laborers on the West Coast, were here turned on European immigrants.

<sup>78</sup> Major breakthroughs in the design of steamships came in the 1870s, becoming widespread by the turn of the century. “No sooner had the Atlantic crossing become regular, fast, and tolerably comfortable than a substantial transient movement set in. ...Great numbers began to go out to the United States each spring with the fixed intention of returning in the fall.” Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 160

<sup>79</sup> *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 1, Abstracts (61 Cong., 3 Sess., Senate Document No. 747) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 24.



came from countries of the North and West; two decades before, in the 1880s, the ratio had been just the opposite.<sup>80</sup> Describing this demographic shift with the term “new immigration,” the commission defined “newness” through a multiplicity of differences, from “race” and language to changes in duration of residency, economic status, and labor skills. Fundamentally the issue was racial assimilation. Old immigrants had moved west to farm, quickly learned English, and “the racial identity of their children was almost entirely lost and forgotten.” New immigrants, instead, were “unskilled laboring men,” industrial workers who avoided agricultural labor and “congregated together in sections apart from native Americans and older immigrants to such an extent that assimilation has been slow.”<sup>81</sup>

The Commission found their investigation of these new immigrants was itself frequently slowed by the fact that, “the true racial status of many of them was imperfectly understood.”<sup>82</sup> The Bureau of Immigration’s practice of recording an immigrant’s country of birth, rather than race had been sufficient prior to 1880 (the commission judged that classifying immigrants from “northern and western Europe the country of birth as a usual thing also fairly established the racial status”), but with new immigration “country of birth alone indicated practically nothing of the racial status.” As the Commission pointed out, “as many as 12 different races, all indigenous to the country, are represented among immigrants from Austria-Hungry.”<sup>83</sup> To combat this uncertainty they created a “Dictionary of Races and Peoples,” which attempted to systematize the confusing assembly of new races in America (fig. 1.7).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Statistics on expenditure and productions from Thomas Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration, 1820-1930* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 126.

<sup>81</sup> *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 13-14. Franz Boas’ study that the children of immigrants physically developed “in such a way that they differ in type essentially from their foreign born parents” was also included in the commission’s report. *Ibid.*, 44 presents an abstract of Boas’ study which was volume thirty eight of the report.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 17-19. For the 1910 census the Immigration Commission requested “the foreign-born should be recorded by race as well as by place of birth.” This bill to identify race was defeated by objections to the words “Hebrew” and “Jewish,” “by several prominent Hebrews, who contend that the Jews are not a distinct race in an ethnological sense, and that the terms ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Jewish’ rightly refer to a religious sect and not to a race.” Yet, as the commission itself pointed out, the Jewish community itself was split on the topic, with Zionists notably claiming precisely that the Jews were a race.

<sup>84</sup> The dictionary acknowledged the number of races and standards of racial division were in great dispute. “The number of chief divisions or basic races of mankind is more in dispute at the present time than when Linnaeus proposed to classify them into 4, or Blumenbach into 5, great races. Some writers have reduced the number of such basic races to 3, while others have proposed 15, 29, or even 63.” Dr. Folkmar, the dictionary’s author, intended the work to assist “the student of immigration,” thus he used a classification of five main races because it was “familiar to Americans.” Expediency also led him to classify groups largely based on language, for although “physical characteristics” used by ethnologists might be the ideal way of organizing a racial classification, “it is manifestly impracticable to use such classification in immigration work or in a census.” In his introduction Dr. Folkmar left open the possibility his dictionary might be flawed; its racial organization was, he wrote, not the “ultimate

A seemingly obscure government document, the Commission's dictionary compressing and instrumentalizing theories of race largely imported from Europe received notice in the popular press, including a *New York Times* article heralding its publication. Entitled "The Races that Go Into the American Melting Pot" and subtitled "For the First Time the Government Tries to Find Out, Not What Nations But What Races are Pouring Into America, and It Reaches Some Conclusions That Will Make the Average Man Stare," the account described the racial dictionary as "authoritative," and characterized the previous method of identifying immigrants by nationality as "unintelligent." This disparity between race and nationality had the capacity to shock the general reader who would be surprised "to learn that there are 270,000 Croats in the United States. He may not even know what a Croat is. There is no nation of Croats; they come from six different countries." The dictionary would provide the "ordinary American citizen" a new insight into the ones that went into the melting pot; "He will get a clearer idea of what America is doing for the nations of the world—and of what they are doing to her. For the pot as well as the melted is going to be profoundly affected if not transformed."<sup>85</sup> This story was illustrated by posed photographic portraits of immigrants in exotic national dress that made difference clear and visible (fig. 1.8). Like the dictionary, these photographs both produced and contained anxiety about racial ambiguity. What would happen if these immigrants removed their native dress? How would they be identified when they went to work in urban factories? If no one had previously known the Croat existed, how would individuals of this new race be identified? Would they melt or transform the pot?

Although a variety of factors led to the shift that threw these racial categories into confusion, the Immigration Commission concluded that steamship lines, as part of their commercial strategy, were responsible for recruiting these immigrants, explaining "the steerage business which originates in southern and eastern Europe is peculiarly attractive ... as many of the immigrants travel back and forth, thus insuring east-bound as well as west-bound traffic."<sup>86</sup> The study implied that these new immigrants

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word" but only the current state of the field; new races and racial divisions might easily emerge. "Dictionary of Races and Peoples," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 209-211.

<sup>85</sup> Anon., "The Races that Go Into the American Melting Pot," *New York Times*, May 21, 1911, SM2.

<sup>86</sup> *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 25. Many of the conditions lead to shifts in immigration were external to the U.S.

(with their propensity to head back to Europe) were not outcasts fleeing oppression at home or self-possessed pioneers eager for a new life, but were lured to America by commercial interests. However, social critic Randolph Bourne celebrated these temporary immigrants in his influential 1916 essay “Trans-National America,” arguing they represented “not the parasitic alien, the doubtful American asset, but a symbol of that cosmopolitan interchange which is coming.” For Bourne (influenced by Horace Kallen’s philosophy of social pluralism I will discuss at greater length in the chapters that follow), these immigrants were key to America’s future as “a transnationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors.”<sup>87</sup> Opposing the assimilation to the Puritan “grey race,” Bourne called for a pluralistic cosmopolitan fabric of diverse threads that could not be dyed “any one color,” celebrating the individuality of each nation and race.<sup>88</sup>

In recent years literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels has controversially argued Kallen and Bourne’s pluralism ultimately made cultural differences synonymous with race, transforming the idea of culture into a form of racism.<sup>89</sup> It is vitally important to point out that pluralism (considering each immigrant culture in isolation) was not the only model considering diversity as an asset. Stieglitz’s ally, the author Waldo Frank, dismissed pluralism in 1929, even as he recognized the importance of maintaining differences between identity groups. Frank described the origins of pluralism: “I believe the best impetus of the cultural pluralists has derived from the Jews who, rejecting the absurd ideal of the melting pot, have tried to rationalize their need of being both Jews and Americans....”<sup>90</sup> Believing this

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After 1890 thanks to industrialization German agriculture experienced a labor shortage and made efforts, including land reform, that aimed to keep people from emigrating. Britain attempted to divert immigration toward her own colonies. Russia banned Jewish businesses in the east.

<sup>87</sup> “Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision.” Bourne pointed out that even if immigrants return “they return with an entirely new critical outlook, and a sense of the superiority of American organization to the primitive living around them.” “They are no longer masses of aliens, waiting to be ‘assimilated,’ waiting to be melted down into the indistinguishable dough of Anglo-Saxonism. They are rather threads of living and potent cultures, blindly striving to weave themselves into a novel international nation, the first the world has seen.” Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 118 (July 1916), 86-97.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 288.

<sup>89</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995)

<sup>90</sup> Waldo Frank, *The Re-discovery of America: An Introduction to the Philosophy of American Life* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), 260-261. In a footnote to his chapter “The Symphonic Nation” Frank wrote of pluralism “this school proceeds on a strangely unmusical idea of the symphonic form: it presumes that a lot of instruments playing their own perpetual tune will somehow make a music together if they leave each other alone and smile during their pauses, which they express and variate according to their individual scales and timbres, can play a symphony.” Frank added the question of specifically racial difference that troubles Michaels, objecting “Also I do not see why a group such as I envisage should be exclusively or predominately of a

need to be valid, if improperly interpreted by the pluralists, Frank suggested one could be both Jewish and American, with each identity being transformed by being held alongside under the influence of the other. Multiple identities could, according to Frank, be held in a productive dialectical tension within composite individuals.

Marius de Zayas offered an earlier (and more confusing) argument against pluralism and for diversity as the wellspring of an American modern art. This fascinating, if now little known, untitled 1915 modernist manifesto in the experimental journal *291* (which I will discuss further in Chapter 3) theorized the composite by figuring the breeding imperatives of evolution as humorous double-entendre.<sup>91</sup> He represented New York as a woman who used borrowed intellectualism to avoid “assimilating the spirit of modern art...a seed that would have found a most fertile soil” in America. De Zayas blamed native-born intellectuals who mimicked foreign ideals for America’s artistic infertility, charting their consistent failures to impregnate America, which proved them impotent “geldings,” “cold blooded animals,” and “homosexuals” instead of the fertile “stallions” they imagined themselves to be. The diversity of American made it impossible for art to be created from “the synthesis of the beliefs of peoples” as it had been throughout history. Yet, according to de Zayas, this diversity gave the nation an advantage in creating modern art: “America has the same complex mentality as the true modern artist.”<sup>92</sup> It was not sufficient that these various strands be left in tension or harmony as a Cultural Pluralist such as Bourne might celebrate. Stieglitz, de Zayas offered, had come closest to synthesizing them and creating a modern

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single ethnic source. Why should not a number of farmers, miners, students, artists, etc., conjoin as creatively as Scandinavians or Negroes?”

<sup>91</sup> All quotations from this essay Marius de Zayas, untitled (but often cited based on the work’s first sentence - “New York did not see at first”), *291*, v-vi, July-August, 1915, 6. It was later reprinted “From 291,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub. Oct. 1916), 69-70. The *291* version included the text in much larger lettering in French with an English translation below, while *Camera Work* only reprinted the English version. This poetic manifesto followed and is in start contrast to a 1913 book *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression*, which theorized evolution in largely Spencerian terms. The introduction published in *Camera Work* is rather dry and confusing, referencing Spencer and Gustave le Bon, a French sociologist and psychologist who focused on national traits and racial superiority, as well as anthropologist’s accounts of art by British Alfred Court Haddon (although de Zayas gives his initials as P.A.) and German Ernest Grosse. “Man has proceeded in regard to form, as in regard to everything, from the simple to the complex.” “The Evolution of Form – Introduction,” *Camera Work* 41 (Jan. 1913): 46.

<sup>92</sup> In French de Zayas uses the term Gougnotte, which is a “derogatory slang” for lesbians as defined by Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (W. W. Norton & Company) 2005, 161. Other sources suggest the word comes from street or jail cultures “a term of dialectical origin meaning friends or girlfriends.” Jeffrey Merrick, Bryant T. Ragan, *Homosexuality in Modern France* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 179. Still another traces the slang term for lesbians to the Franc-Comtois dialect. Christophe Marcq et Cuneo, *Le petit Madame H illustré*, (Editions Du Phare Blanc, 2004), 102-105.

art, but he had “employed the shield of psychology and metaphysics” and thus failed. The word “capote” used in the original French, though translated in 291’s English version of the essay as “shield,” I argue, is most accurately rendered into English in this context as “condom.”<sup>93</sup> So, although De Zayas’ exhortation was translated as “in order to attain living results, in order to create life—no shields!,” I would suggest a translation that makes the evolutionary breeding imperative explicit: “no condoms!” De Zayas proclaimed the producer of a robust American modernism would be a manly conquistador who would do “as did Cortez.” Connecting the U.S. art world with his native Mexico, de Zayas invoked the Spanish conqueror and forecast an artist like Cortez who had been the wellspring of the mestizo Mexican race because he did not “shield” himself, but “married America like a man who is not afraid of the consequences.” American ripe with cultural currents from across the earth, needed to fuse with those bearing the “seed” of modern art (implicitly, de Zayas, the author of the essay).

With its geldings, homosexuals, and condoms, de Zayas’ manifesto seems at first to be a plea for free sexual drive of the Freudian id into consciousness.<sup>94</sup> Playing directly on fears of emasculation operating during a period in which President Roosevelt used the specter of “race suicide” to castigate those advocating the legalization of birth control in the U.S., de Zayas’ manifesto was received by the American avant-garde largely with uncomfortable silence.<sup>95</sup> The text represents an odd attempt to make a manifesto out of evolution. Accelerating Spencer’s long progressive history by injecting the short time of fractured modernism into the long time of evolution, de Zayas hoped to synthesize the dialectics of American diversity through sexual mixing into a modern American “plastic expression” in art.

In creating a unified nation through sexual mixing de Zayas drew on a particularly American trope. Although its Greek roots make the term appear ancient, the word miscegenation was coined in America in 1863. The seventy-two-page pamphlet entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the White Man and Negro* argued that the nation’s vitality sprang “not from its

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<sup>93</sup> This slang term is derived from *capote*’s use to describe a long usually hooded overcoat.

<sup>94</sup> In fact, Freud did oppose the condom because he worried it cuts down on sexual pleasure and endangered sexual release.

<sup>95</sup> *Lears, No Place of Grace*, 30. The Comstock law in 1870s banned the sale of condoms and other forms of birth control. There was great public dispute in 1914 and 1915 when activist Margaret Sanger was indicted, but the law was not overturned until 1932.

Anglo-Saxon progenitors, but from all the different nationalities,” and concluded “all that is needed to make us the finest race on earth is to engraft upon our stock the negro element; the blood of the negro is the most precious because it is the most unlike any other than enters into the composition of our national life.”<sup>96</sup> Stimulating fears of both blacks and immigrants by calling for a complete opening of the nation’s borders, the paean to racial hybridity was written as a political hoax by two anti-abolitionist Democratic New York journalists who hoped to embarrass abolitionist Republicans by championing unbridled racial mixing.<sup>97</sup> *Miscegenation* hit a nerve by suggesting the solution to the problems of emancipation and immigration was actually racial amalgamation.<sup>98</sup> Despite the Democrats’ provocations, Republicans won that election, as well as the Civil War, and began Reconstruction in 1865.

The years that followed brought increased anxiety on the topic of diversity, which I will briefly trace. Little attention was paid to immigration until 1882, when a law was designed to bar entry into the U.S. from China. Many of the arguments used by those on the West Coast against the Chinese proved useful on the East Coast against Italians, Jews, Poles, Serbians, Hungarians, and Greeks. These “new immigrants” were said to be unfamiliar with industrial society, lured to the country by unscrupulous capitalists, and willing to accept a low wage intolerable to native-born Americans. The establishment of the Federal Office of Immigration in 1890 and the 1891 Immigration Act took the power to regulate immigration away from the individual states and began to institute a comprehensive nationwide policy.<sup>99</sup> The steps toward nativism and immigration restriction were incremental – until the First World War fanned the fires of a new exclusionism. A literacy test, first passed by Congress in 1896 and vetoed by

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<sup>96</sup> Sidney Kaplan “The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864” originally published *Journal of Negro History* 34.3 (July 1949): 274-343, citation to text anthologized in *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*, ed. Werner Sollors (Oxford University Press, 2000), 222.

<sup>97</sup> Eva Saks points out such interracial sexual relations have been criminalized since the early colonial period. (A 1661 Maryland statute outlawing intermarriage between blacks and whites appears to be the first such law.) Eva Saks, “Representing Miscegenation Law,” *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*, ed. Werner Sollors (Oxford University Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>98</sup> The pamphlet was revealed to be a hoax in London, but the news got to the U.S. after the election. Kaplan, ““The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864,” 253.

<sup>99</sup> The 1891 law also regulated white immigration by denying entry to paupers, polygamists, and the diseased. An expansion in 1903 excluded others including epileptics and anarchists, while in 1907 imbeciles and a clause on moral turpitude banned others. In addition to these categories, laws also raised the head tax from 50 cents in 1882 to four dollars in 1907 and increased enforcement.

three presidents, was finally enacted in 1917.<sup>100</sup> Retreating after WWI into isolationism and protectionism, Congress instituted a quota-based system for regulating immigration. In an attempt to reduce dramatically the number of “new” immigrants the annual entry limits were set at two percent of the existing U.S. population from each foreign nation, as recorded in the census of 1890.

Historian of race Joel Williamson has called this period between 1850 and 1920 the “grand changeover in race relations in America.”<sup>101</sup> Focused on the status of African Americans, Williamson points out that in the years leading up to and just after the Civil War there was an intricate system of racial classifications for blacks dependant on racial mixture, from mulatto to octoroon.<sup>102</sup> But in 1892, Homer Plessy, a man with one-eighth black ancestry and appearing white, was jailed when he refused to identify simply as black and declined to sit in the segregated black section of a train in Louisiana. Despite his claim that his fourteenth amendment rights had been violated, Plessy lost the Supreme Court’s 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson case – the court’s decision upheld racial segregation as constitutional, thereby consolidating the de facto Jim Crow era.<sup>103</sup> One drop of “black blood” and an individual was black; with the advent of this so-called one-drop rule and its enforcement by a system of segregation, racial mixtures no longer counted and visibility was no longer the primary marker of racial identity.<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately Martin A. Berger’s recent book *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* ignores the nuances and uncertainties of vision pointed to in the dramas of mixed-race blacks passing as white, and in the growing American fear of new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe

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<sup>100</sup> Literacy Bill sponsored by Henry Cabot Lodge was passed in both houses of Congress in 1896, 1913, and 1915; Presidents Cleveland, Taft, and Wilson each vetoed it, but in 1917 the Congress was able to overwhelm Wilson’s veto.

<sup>101</sup> Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 61, see also F. James Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation’s Definition* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

<sup>102</sup> Williamson, *New People*, 62.

<sup>103</sup> As one sociologist wrote in 1918: “The opinion of the best thinkers of the race is coming more and more to be that if the Negroes desire really to reach a full manhood they must reach it by being Negroes rather than by being weak imitations of white people.” Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed Races Throughout the World*, (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1969, c. 1918), 389. “Of the social problems before the American people for solution, there is none perhaps of more fundamental importance than that created by the presence of some ten million persons of a race and color different from that of the major part of the country’s population.” *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>104</sup> The census of 1920 was the last to count mulattos. Williamson, *New People*, 114. Interestingly, art historian Martin Berger ties the instability of race to devious appearances such as trompe l’oeil painting. Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), especially the chapter “Genre Painting and Modern Race.” Mark M. Smith had also recently suggested non-visual sensory ways in which race is described. Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

during the period from 1850 to 1920. In his provocative (if frequently self-contradictory) investigation of the visual culture of whiteness Berger simply asserts: “By the end of the nineteenth century, the perspective that came with being white was sufficiently engrained in the European-American mind that it consistently structured whites’ interpretation of the visual world.”<sup>105</sup> Without footnote or historical justification to refute those who see this period as one in which racial divisions had only begun to be institutionalized, only begun attempting to contain ethnic anxiety, Berger’s book presumes a uniform subject and audience, a self-contained monolithic body of whiteness, anachronistic to the period he studies.<sup>106</sup>

In the first pages of his book Berger locates his own choice of subject as ideological, claiming he has focused on white viewers and subjects in order to “mitigate the dangers associated with white scholars’ making a subject of racial otherness.” Comparing these studies of otherness to the blackface minstrel show Berger cites studies by Eric Lott and Michael Rogin, two white scholars who suggested that the minstrelsy “expressed both fear and desire, disavowal and identification,” and reintroduced modern day audiences to the ambivalence and conflicts in minstrel show’s complex cultural functions.<sup>107</sup> Berger uses this nuanced work to argue that because nineteenth-century white abolitionists enjoyed minstrel performances and blacks did not, present-day white scholars should consider our own interest in the representations of other cultures to be multivalent. While this caution is perceptive, Berger continues

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<sup>105</sup> Berger positions his work against a disciplinary privileging of sight and artworks, asserting “off-the-shelf methods...all possess deficiencies for the analysis of race...At their best, our standard methods serve as a blunt tool for examining race, at their worst, they simply confirm the impression of most Americans that nothing new or remarkable can be learned about individuals labeled as white.” Berger, *Sight Unseen*, 14. Here, and elsewhere, Berger seems to use whiteness to stand for all analysis of race, arguing that because we begin from visual evidence and are blind to whiteness we fail to see race in artworks that contain only whites or that contain no figures at all. In another contradiction: Berger’s initial analysis “images do not persuade us to internalize the racial values and structures embedded within them, so much as they confirm meanings for which the discourses and structures of our society have predisposed us.” *Ibid.*, 1. However, this proves a difficult position for him to hold, as he later argues artworks themselves have frequently changed society in ways that make it difficult for us to understand how they operated for a period audience. (His chosen example of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and his subsequent assertion of other books that have “conditioned” our reaction to images gives the impression that he is willing to assign texts a more productive role than images.) Thus although I agree with Berger’s argument that art historians should prioritize the “discourses circulating outside art objects,” I do not believe that these discourses circumscribe works’ significance. *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>106</sup> For example, Lears has argued “By the end of the nineteenth century, the self seemed neither independent, nor unified, nor fully conscious, but rather interdependent, discontinuous, divided, and subject to the play of unconscious or inherited impulses.” Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 38.

<sup>107</sup> Berger, *Sight Unseen*, 2-3. Berger later explains reading period commentary for “what strikes us as ambiguous, confused or even banal” will reveal invisible discourses that have faded from view, but out of these ambiguous slippages he makes the definitive claim that while audiences may not have “seen” race, they “responded to the works in ways that betrayed their investment in being white.” *Ibid.*, 29.



to argue because analysis of racial “others” by whites may have multiple or unintentional meanings studying whiteness in isolation is the *only* progressive position for a (white) historian.<sup>108</sup> Reviewer John Ott concisely frames this final accusatory turn in Berger’s argument as “no more helpful or credible than recriminations that the recent growth of whiteness studies provides ‘cover’ for those invested in consolidating an eroding lily-white canon.”<sup>109</sup> Thus while my work follows Berger’s attempts to focus on the ideologies of race by selecting works specifically “for their conspicuous distance from the politics of race” (by which he means works depicting only whites or those “containing no human beings at all” and by which I mean canonical “artistic” photography and abstraction), I do not believe that this is the *singular* way to study the impact of racial theories in artwork.<sup>110</sup> In fact, in spite of his ideological claims even Berger cannot sustain his problematic conceit that whiteness must be studied in isolation, turning in the final chapter to consider images of African Americans, writing “we cannot make sense of whiteness without considering what blackness meant to European-Americans in the Gilded Age.”<sup>111</sup>

A more nuanced recent study of vision in America at the turn of the century is art historian Michael Leja’s recent *Seeing Askance: Skepticism in American Art from Eakins to Duchamp*. In this book Leja examines the uncertainties of vision in New York in a way that ostensibly has nothing to do with race, arguing that living in New York at the turn of the twentieth century meant “learning to see skeptically.”<sup>112</sup> He chronicles the contradictory ways that vision was being destabilized by a culture of advertising that offered fraudulent deceptions and by a scientific culture that promised vision could become more exact.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>109</sup> John Ott, Review of *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture*, by Martin A. Berger. *caa.reviews* (June 5, 2008), doi: 10.3202/caa.reviews.2006.97, <http://caareviews.org/reviews/893>.

<sup>110</sup> Berger, *Sight Unseen*, 14.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 133. Historians have argued that the normative American whiteness expected of pioneers and arriving immigrants was defined against enslaved populations of blacks and Native Americans. Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990). Focused on enforcing these divisions during the eighteenth century, burgeoning European theories of racial divisions between whites (Teutonic, Aryan, Saxon, etc.) did not penetrate widely in the U.S. Gossett, *Race*, 84. Yet, as John Higham traces in his groundbreaking account *Strangers in The Land: Patterns of American Nativism*, in the 1840s some Americans turned to nativism and began opposing immigration. John Higham, *Strangers in The Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1955), 4. By the 1850s many worried about the alien allegiances immigrants might be bringing with them – such as Irish Catholic immigrants allegiance to the Pope. Gossett, *Race*, 288. Although Berger does not address this nuance, Gossett argues that in the early period of the nation’s history, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the “heathenism” of blacks and Indians, not their race allowed their enslavement. In fact, our own word ethnic is derived from the Greek word for heathen. Gossett, *Race*, 29-31.

<sup>112</sup> Leja, *Looking Askance*, 2.

According to Leja, “Modern life was coming to be distinguished by a gaping separation between appearance and truth.”<sup>113</sup> As viewers grew attuned to subtle discrimination and distrusted taking things at face value, seeing skeptically in modern New York, I want to suggest, also owed its origins to uncertainties about race. Although Leja sees Stieglitz as an opponent of this skeptical way of seeing, I draw on his account of a broad “historically conditioned practice of looking” to examine particular ways in which the uncertainties of vision, as well as the instabilities of social and aesthetic categories, produced a modern art.<sup>114</sup> Rather than an era that codified stable definitions or visions, early modernism can be defined precisely by its heterogeneous and composite nature.

The importance of diverse modes of vision and mediums in early American modernism has been overshadowed in later statements of medium specificity. Most dominant perhaps, are the theorizations of the critic Clement Greenberg, who published his essay “Toward a Newer Laocoon” in 1940, arguing for painting’s self-critical historical progression toward abstraction, flatness, and purity. As I will examine in more detail in the concluding chapter, by positioning each medium as independently progressing independently along its own particular evolutionary arc (with painting as the most advanced) Greenberg substituted homogeneity for early modernism’s heterogeneous art world motivated by comparison among media.<sup>115</sup> Perhaps to escape or to metabolize the pervasive influence of Greenberg, by the 1960s a plural form of medium – media – was coming to use in the aesthetic sphere to signify something quite different from the unique specificity of material and technique celebrated by Greenberg. In his 1964 book *Understanding Media*, communications theorist Marshall McLuhan argued that in the era of the mass media (a singular to describe the entire communication industry) it was the medium (the means of

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. “Stieglitz campaigned tirelessly toward this end – to make art a refuge from the skeptical seeing practiced in daily life.” *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>115</sup> For example, photography, according to Greenberg, because it was a new medium was not driven to become abstract, but ought to be “literary.” Greenberg claimed, “Photography is closer today to literature than it is to the other graphic arts” and counseled “The final moral is: Let photography be literary.” Clement Greenberg, “The Camera’s Glass Eye: Review of an Exhibition of Edward Weston,” 1946, in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945–49*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago, 1986), 61–62. In 1964, Greenberg argued “The photograph has to tell a story if it is to work as art.” Clement Greenberg, “Four Photographers: Review of *A Vision of Paris* by Eugène-Auguste Atget; *The World Through My Eyes* by Andreas Feininger; and *Photographs by Cartier-Bresson*, introduced by Lincoln Kirstein” (1964) *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’Brian, Vol. 4. 183.

communication itself) that was the message delivered to society.<sup>116</sup> New media theories based on McLuhan's ideas have formed technologized countercurrents to Greenberg's theories since the 1960s. Opening new ways to think through issues of medium and mediation, recent scholars have analyzed precedents at the turn of the twentieth century to trace the origins of our own twenty-first-century "post-medium" age of intermedia and new media heterogeneity.<sup>117</sup>

Formalist criticism and the technologized language of new media have employed the issue of medium specificity to isolate the study of art from other modes of history-writing, but this dissertation demonstrates that the struggle to define mechanically reproducible media as art occurred in earlier debates that were deeply engaged with the wider social sphere. Restoring a crucial historical context for modernist media theory reveals that the ongoing American dilemma of integrating difference lies at the heart of this turn-of-the-century art world struggle. I trace the roots of our current age of proliferating new media that is sometimes termed 'postmodern.' I show that grappling with diversity has a long history rooted deep in the culture of modernity and in national values of diversity.

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<sup>116</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* records that in recent history the new singular media has arisen, quoting "The use of media with singular concord and as a singular form with a plural in -s have both been regarded by some as non-standard and objectionable." The *OED* gives quotation "1966 Amis, Kingsley William in *New Statesman* 14 Jan. 51/3 The treatment of media as a singular noun...is spreading into the upper cultural strata." "medium, n." *OED*. Other recent theorists of media have emerged to combat Greenberg's long shadow. Niklas Luhmann, for example, argues the work of art is not framed by its material constraints, but that form is constitutive of media rather than the modernist proposition of the versa, Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Rosalind Krauss continues her long engagement with Greenberg's ideas in Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea" *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (Thames and Hudson, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> See for example: Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

**Figures**



Fig. 1.1 George Luks, *Hester Street*, 1905. Brooklyn Museum.

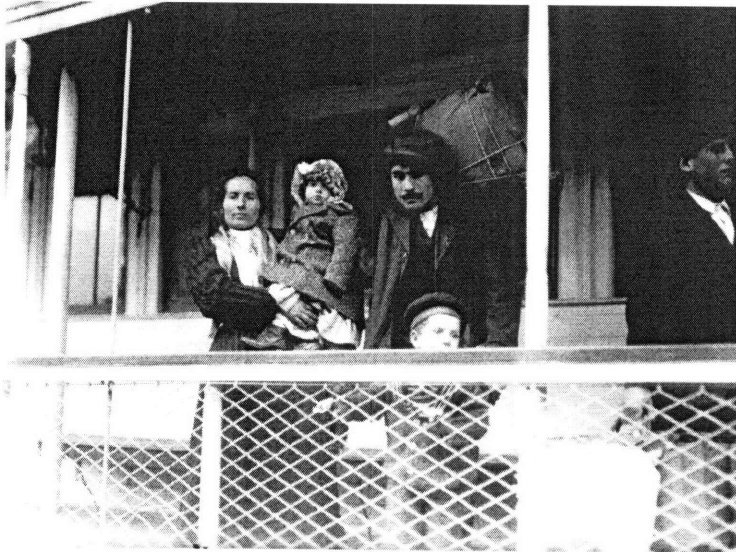


Fig. 1.2 Lewis Hine, *On the Ferry Boat Leaving Ellis Island, Italian Family*, 1905. George Eastman House.



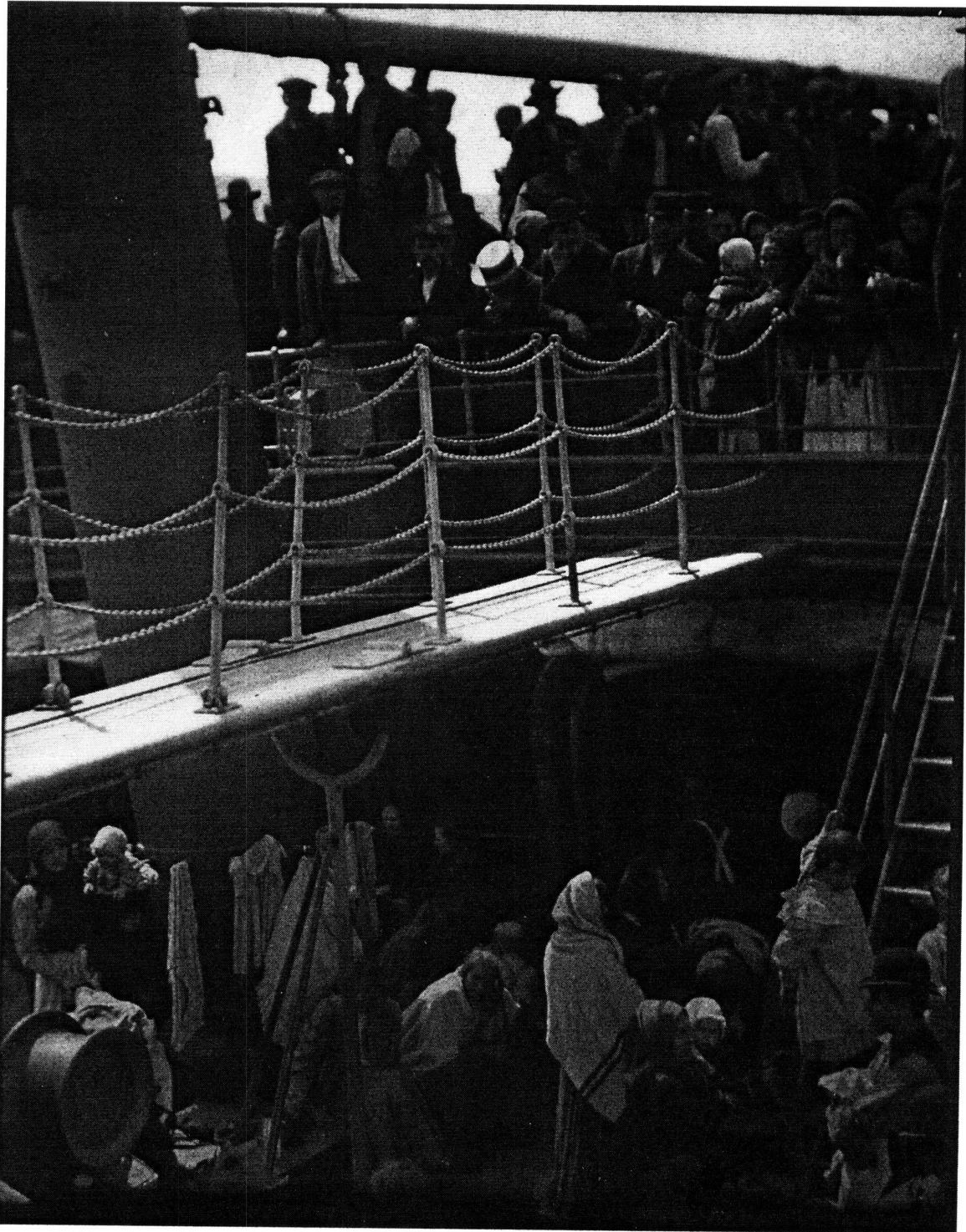


Fig. 1.3 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907. National Gallery of Art, cat. 310. All Stieglitz's photographs reproduced here are published in the National Gallery of Art's 2002 "Key Set" Catalog (edited by Sarah Greenough). My captions will include each photograph's catalog number so that more information may be easily found in that publication.





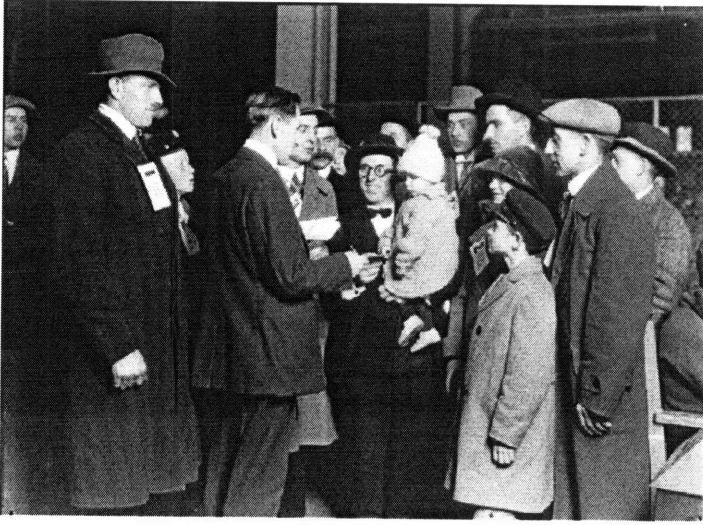


Fig. 1.4 Lewis Hine, *A Representative from One of the Churches (a Social Worker) Helps the Immigrants in Many Ways, Ellis Island, 1915*. George Eastman House.

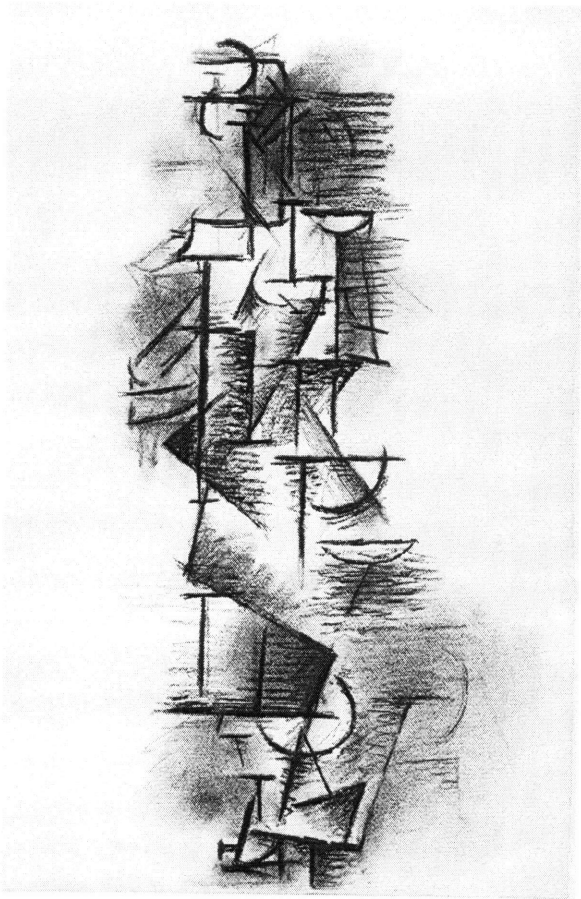


Fig. 1.5 Pablo Picasso, *Standing Female Nude*, 1910. Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art.





### Beyond the Quota—in the Steerage

A Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, Pioneer among the Artist Photographers of America

Fig. 1.6 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907, as published in “Beyond the Quota—in the Steerage,” *Vanity Fair* (August 1924): 544. New York Public Library.



For convenience the author of the dictionary adopted the following classification of races or peoples:

TABLE 1.—Comparative classification of immigrant races or peoples.

Based on Brinton (cf. Keane).			People.	Ripley's races, with other corresponding terms.		
Race.	Stock.	Group.				
Caucasian.	Aryan	Teutonic	Scandinavian:	I. TEUTONIC.		
			Danish.....		H. Europæus (Lapouge).	
			Norwegian.....		Nordic (Deniker).	
			Swedish.....		Dolicho-leptorhine (Kohlmann).	
			German (N. part).....		Germanic (English writers).	
			Dutch.....		Reihengräber (German writers).	
			English (part).....		Kymric (French writers).	
			Flemish.....			
			Lettic.....		Lithuanian.....	
					Scotch (part).....	
		Celtic.....	Irish (part).....			
			Welsh.....	Part Alpine.		
			Russian.....			
			Polish.....			
			Czech:			
			Bohemian.....	II. ALPINE (OR CELTIC).		
			Moravian.....			
			Servian.....	H. Alpinus (Lapouge).		
			Croatian.....	Occidental (Deniker).		
			Montenegrin.....	Disentis (German writers).		
	Slovak.....	Celto-Slavic (French writers).				
	Slovenian.....	Lappanoid (Fruner-Bey).				
	Ruthenian.....	Sarmatian (von Hölder).				
	Dalmatian.....	Arvernian (Beddoe).				
	Herzegovinian.....					
	Bosnian.....					
	Illyric.....	Albanian.....				
	Armenic.....	Armenian.....				
		French.....	Part Alpine.			
		Italian (part).....	Part Mediterranean.			
		Roumanian.....				
	Italic.....	Spanish.....	III. MEDITERRANEAN.			
		Spanish-American.....	H. Meridionalis (Lapouge).			
		Mexican, etc.....	Atlanto-Mediterranean and Ibero-Insular (Deniker).			
		Portuguese.....	Iberian (English writers).			
	Hellenic.....	Greek.....	Ligurian (Italian writers).			
			Part Mediterranean.			
	Iranic.....	Hindu.....	Part Teutonic.			
		Gypsy.....				
	Arabic.....	Arabian.....				
	Chaldeic.....	Hebrew.....	Part Mediterranean.			
		Syrian.....				
	Caucasic.....	Caucasus peoples.....	Doubtful.			
	Euskalic.....	Basque.....				
		Finnish.....				
		Lappish.....				
	Sibirc.....	Magyar.....				
		Bulgarian (part).....				
	Tataric.....	Turkish, Cossack, etc.....				
	Japanese.....	Japanese, Korean.....				
	Mongolic.....	Kalmuk.....				
		Chinese.....				
	Sinitic.....	East Indian (part, i. e., Indo-Chinese).....				
		Pacific Islander (part).....				
Malay.....		East Indian (part).....				
Ethiopian.....		Negro.....				
American (Indian).....		American Indian.....				

Fig. 1.7 Classification Table, "Dictionary of Races and Peoples," Reports of the Immigration Commission, 1911.



# THE RACES THAT GO INTO THE AMERICAN MELTING POT

For the First Time the Government Tries to Find Out, Not What Nations But What Races Are Pouring Into America, and It Reaches Some Conclusions That Will Make the Average Man Stare.



A Roumanian Immigrant.

**A**n Immigrant's Dictionary is about to be published by the United States Government. No. 11 is not a dictionary compiled to aid immigrants to understand the American language, nothing of the sort. It is an authoritative work of the kind on the different races which send immigrants to this country. It cuts loose from the arbitrary division of immigrants by nationality, and groups them according to race.

In the unenlightened old way of grouping them by nationality a Pole coming from Austria was set down as an "Austrian," and his brother or son, coming from Russia, was labeled a "Russian." In this work both of them are described as Poles. From it we can learn, not how many "Austrians" or "Russians" are coming here; and what sort of people they are and what sort of a contribution they are likely to make to the melting pot, but how many Austrians, Jews, Germans, Moravians, Lithuanians, Finns, Roumanians, or Bohemians are coming here, and what they are like at home.

This book, "The Dictionary of Races and Other Immigrant Races of Peoples," is about to be published by the Immigration Commission, of which Senator Dillingham of Vermont is chairman. Its author who was employed for the purpose by the Commission, is Dr. Daniel Fogelmar. It is intended primarily as a discussion of the various races and people immigrating to the country furnishing the present immigration movement to the United States, or which may become sources of future immigration.

Until 1909, when the Bureau of Immigration first classified arriving immigrants according to the race or people to which they belonged, practically all population statistics respecting the foreign-born in the United States were recorded only by country of birth. Previous to the adoption of the improved method of recording immigration statistics the Bureau of the Census had attempted in some instances to distinguish among the various evil European peoples in the population, and as a result of this effort reports of recent censuses include more or less accurate data relative to the Polish and Bohemian elements in the population.

In the first mentioned case this grouping accomplished by regarding for census purposes the former Kingdom of Poland as a geographical entity instead of provinces of Austria, Prussia, and Russia, as Poland has been politically for more than a century. In the same way Bohemia is considered as a geographical unit instead of a part of Austria. With these exceptions, however, census reports make no distinction between the many important ethnic factors to be found among natives of eastern European countries resident in the United States.

All of which shows the novelty as well as the importance of the Commission's "Dictionary."

It will be a good deal of a revelation to the ordinary American citizen, who talks vaguely of the "melting pot," but has no idea just what it is being melted. He is disposed to think in a general way of immigrants as coming from Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, Russia, and perhaps a few other countries. It is only when his schoolboy son mentions casually the name of some playmate with an utterly unpop-



Armenian Immigrants Just Arrived Here.

Spanish American ..... 10,000  
 Greek ..... 7,000  
 East Indian ..... 5,000  
 Pacific Islander ..... 2,000

It will be observed from the table that nearly 4,000 Armenians arrived in this country in the twelve years. Under the system of recording immigrants by nationality instead of by race, the number appeared much smaller. For Dr. Fogelmar says:

"Only a fraction of the Armenians are found in their own country; Armenia, perhaps 200,000 out of a total population estimated at from 2,000,000 to 3,000,000. Over 1,000,000 live in Russia, in the Transcaucasus, nearly 200,000 in Czecho-Slovakia, about 150,000 in Persia, about 150,000 in near Hungary, and also in India and Africa. Large numbers of those who have migrated did so because of the persecution of the Turks and Kurds directed against them.

"The word 'Austrian' is not used by the Immigration Bureau. There is no Austrian race in the sense in which we use the terms French, German, Italian, Hebrew, or Bohemian. The term 'Austrian' simply means an inhabitant of Austria.

"Austria contains more different races or peoples than any other country of Europe, except Russia.

"The Czech population of Austria-Hungary amounts to 7,750,000. Outside of the dual monarchy there are probably less than 200,000 Czechs in Europe. "An immigrant the Czechs come to America at about the same rate per 1,000 of population as the Lithuanians of the Netherlands of Austria-Hungary; that is, more rapidly than most Slavic races, although only one-third as rapidly as the Hebrews.

"The high rate of Czech immigration is mainly due to the Slovaks, whose rate of immigration, according to the population, is the highest of any race or people. The Bohemians and Moravians on the other hand come at the exceedingly low rate of about 2 per 1,000 of population.

"With less than a third of the Czech population, the Slovaks sent 37,500 immigrants to the United States in the twelve years, 1900-1910, as against 100,100 Bohemians and Moravians combined. In other words, the small Slovak people stands eighth among immigrant races in arrival, while the Bohemians and Moravians stand nineteenth."

Dr. Fogelmar declares that the long contact of the Bohemians with the Germans has profoundly modified their civilization. If not their physical type, and even their language. "They are the most nearly like the Western Europeans of all the Slavs. It may fairly be said that they are the most advanced of all."

"This is in great part due to their native endeavor as Slavs. Their weight of brain is said to be greater than that of any other people in Europe."

as a steady and important source of future immigration. In immigration statistics Croats and Slovenians are counted together. During the twelve years 1900-1910, 33,315 immigrants of both races were admitted to the United States.

"The Serbo-Croatian is a distinct and homogeneous race, from a linguistic point of view, but not an ethnic unity in physical characters and descent. It is separated into Croats, Servians, Montenegrins, Dalmatians, Herzegovinians and Montenegrins.

"The savage manners of the last century, says Dr. Fogelmar, are still met with among some Serbo-Croatians of today. Armed conflicts are not uncommon. Political feuds are especially bitter.

"Murders resulting from private vendettas occur frequently in some localities. Illiteracy is prevalent and civilization at a low stage in retired districts.

"Yet some points like Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, are centers of literary activity and art of all that makes up western civilization. Their religion is mainly Greek Catholic.

"The Czech immigration," says the dictionary, "has been larger in recent years than that of most races of small population. It is practically confined to the Western Finns, or Finns proper. These are Caucasian rather than Mongolian in appearance, while the Eastern, or Volga-



Roumanian Shepherds That Are New Americans.

Hebrews were admitted to the United States.

Of the twenty races or peoples now contributing the chief tide of immigration to America, the Hebrew and the Slovak stand at the head as regards the rate per cent of population at which they come. In 1907 each of these races sent about eighteen immigrants to each 1,000 of the European population. The Croatian-Slovakian group came next with 13 per 1,000; then the Irish, the Norwegian, the Italian, and certain elements of southeastern Europe with from 8 to 9 per 1,000.

Future Hebrew immigration, however, could not long continue numerically with that from Italy, because there are less than 2,000,000 Hebrews left in Europe as against 15,000,000 Italians. As it will be known Jewish immigrants settle almost altogether in the cities or towns. New York City has the largest Jewish population of any city in the world, now estimated at 1,000,000.

Italy, and it is from the South of Italy that we get the bulk of our Italian immigration.

"These two groups," he adds, "differ from each other materially in language, physique, and character. The former may be defined as including those Italians who are natives of the basin of the Po (comprising of Switzerland, and of all of Austria) and the descendants of those of Southern Italy, Campania, Sicily and Calabria, and South Italian. Every town is South Italian, and every man is South Italian.

"The Apennine chain of mountains forms a geographical line which corresponds to the boundary between north and south Italy. The people to the north of this line are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. The people to the south are shorter, stockier, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. The people to the north of this line are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. The people to the south are shorter, stockier, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race.

"All of Italy south of the Apennines and all of the adjacent islands are regarded as a long-headed dark. This is the case with the people of the north, the south Italian, however, are dark, and of the type of the Iberians of Spain and the Hebrews of Northern Italy.

"Berg, these, their origin is not known. The people of the north must have come from the north, and the people of the south from the south. The people of the north are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. The people of the south are shorter, stockier, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race.

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to approximate quite closely to our own. They are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. They are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. They are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race.

It is not generally understood that the language of the modern Greeks is really the language of the ancient Greeks. The difference is only dialectal. The literary language of to-day is but a continuation of the main literary dialect of ancient Greece, the Attic, as modified in passing through the Hellenistic period.

Nine-tenths of our Jewish immigrants come from Sicily territory. Jewish immigration now exceeds in number annually that of any other race with the exception of the South Italian, who are sharply distinguished from the North Italian by the immigration officials and in this dictionary.

The Serbo-Croatian in 1907 totaled about 33,315; in 1908 it was more than 35,000; and in 1909 it was 36,000. In the twelve years 1,057,443 immigrants of both races were admitted to the United States.

"The average manner of the last century, says Dr. Fogelmar, are still met with among some Serbo-Croatians of today. Armed conflicts are not uncommon. Political feuds are especially bitter.

"Murders resulting from private vendettas occur frequently in some localities. Illiteracy is prevalent and civilization at a low stage in retired districts.

"Yet some points like Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, are centers of literary activity and art of all that makes up western civilization. Their religion is mainly Greek Catholic.

"The Czech immigration," says the dictionary, "has been larger in recent years than that of most races of small population. It is practically confined to the Western Finns, or Finns proper. These are Caucasian rather than Mongolian in appearance, while the Eastern, or Volga-

Italy, and it is from the South of Italy that we get the bulk of our Italian immigration.

"These two groups," he adds, "differ from each other materially in language, physique, and character. The former may be defined as including those Italians who are natives of the basin of the Po (comprising of Switzerland, and of all of Austria) and the descendants of those of Southern Italy, Campania, Sicily and Calabria, and South Italian. Every town is South Italian, and every man is South Italian.

"The Apennine chain of mountains forms a geographical line which corresponds to the boundary between north and south Italy. The people to the north of this line are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. The people to the south are shorter, stockier, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race.

"All of Italy south of the Apennines and all of the adjacent islands are regarded as a long-headed dark. This is the case with the people of the north, the south Italian, however, are dark, and of the type of the Iberians of Spain and the Hebrews of Northern Italy.

"Berg, these, their origin is not known. The people of the north must have come from the north, and the people of the south from the south. The people of the north are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. The people of the south are shorter, stockier, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race.

"The people of the north are tall, thin, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race. The people of the south are shorter, stockier, and habitually a very broad-headed and tall-boned race.

Fig. 1.8 Popular press account of the "Dictionary of Races and Peoples" in the Reports of the Immigration Commission. "The Races that Go Into the American Melting Pot," New York Times, May 21, 1911.





Why use any language but one's own to express one's feelings and one's fancies? As well address a fellow countryman in some foreign tongue. The artist who has anything worth saying must say it in an original manner – that is, unlike anyone else; for if in the course of his expression he should allow himself to employ methods that are not original with him, but merely adopted and adapted, it will mean what he had to say was really not worth the trouble saying.

– Sadakichi Hartmann, “Gertrude Käsebier: A Sense of the Pictorial,” May 1900

## **2 Defining Straight Photography: “As Well Address a Fellow Countryman in Some Foreign Tongue” (1890-1907)**

This chapter argues for hitherto unacknowledged discursive traffic between debates over images and bodies in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century United States by exploring specific controversies over the place of immigrants and photographs. It contends that questions about what type of people could be integrated into American culture engaged in silent conversation with questions about what types of media could be accepted into the canons of high art. Within modernism formalist aesthetics have long been considered as a self-contained isolationist discourse. By focusing on the early writings and images produced by Alfred Stieglitz, as well as by allied critics and photographers, I demonstrate that the aesthetic concerns of photography as an artistic medium, although often later positioned as apolitical, initially functioned in close relation to contemporaneous issues of race and nationality, taking part in a nascent debate between two cultural models of integrating difference – assimilation and pluralism.

Understanding the foundations of American modernism requires a reconsideration of the ways in which immigration and aesthetics met on the wider rhetorical terrain where photography was to be defined as art. New theories of photography's medium specificity, its unique qualities of expression, enabled the production of machine-made images to qualify as avant-garde modernist arts practice. At the end of the nineteenth century, practitioners and critics of photography had begun to set aside attempts to emulate painting with blurred focus or handwork on negatives in order to put forward the modernist precept of medium specificity. As early as 1889, the influential English photographer Peter H. Emerson

had referred to photographs that relied only on the techniques of their medium as “pure.”<sup>118</sup> These tenets of “purity” began to be reframed as “straight” photography roughly a decade later by the Photo-Secession, a group of U.S. photographers brought together by Alfred Stieglitz in 1902.<sup>119</sup> This shift in terms, from “pure” to “straight,” seems to add particular connotations of Americanness – of outspoken and unreserved straight talk, of bold and steady straight looks, of fairness in trade and upright manliness. It even echoed the national colloquialism for undiluted spirits – all while maintaining the signification of virtue, honesty, and unmixedness.<sup>120</sup> Although a now canonical term used to characterize photographs that are sharply focused, crisply printed, objective representations, straight photography had unstable historical origins. Used by Stieglitz in his publication *Camera Work* as early as 1903, the term was first coherently theorized in 1904 by an immigrant of mixed origins, the Japanese-German American critic (and notorious inebriate) Sadakichi Hartmann.

The series of chronological alignments in the spheres of U.S. photographic aesthetics and national immigration politics is striking. Leaving Germany, Hartmann had arrived in the U.S. in 1882 at precisely the moment that mounting worries about immigration resulted in the first federal regulation – the Chinese Exclusion Act – banning the immigration of laborers from China. Piecemeal state enforcement of immigration laws gave way to the foundation of the federal Immigration Service in May of 1891, just six months after photographer Alfred Stieglitz returned from studies in Germany to begin his work advocating for the acceptance of photography into the realm of high art. And during 1907, a peak year for immigration to the U.S. (nearly 1.3 million arrivals), when mounting political pressure forced the Congress to convene a Special Commission to study the impact of immigration on the nation, Stieglitz

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<sup>118</sup> Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889; third edition New York: The Scovill and Adams Company, 1899; reprint of this third edition New York: Arno, 1973).

<sup>119</sup> Although it had been previously used in technical discussions of photographic microscopy. The first usage of the term “straight” to describe photography generally seems to have occurred in the first volume of *Camera Work*, which although dated 1903 was actually released in later 1902. Alfred Stieglitz (signed Editors), “Pictures in this Number,” *Camera Work*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1903): 63.

<sup>120</sup> The stakes of straight photography often took on a moral dimension in which any manipulation was equated with falsehood. It is not clear that these other connotations were intentionally invoked to explain the shift in terms from “pure” to “straight.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives these as definitions for “straight,” but I can find no articulated reasons for the shift in terms. The *OED* also notes that the slang meanings of conventional, heterosexual and sober did not come into use until the 1940s. “straight, adj.,” *OED*.

photographed his signature shipboard “straight” photograph *The Steerage*. I do not bring these conjunctions to the fore in order to argue that an essentialized national identity permeated all realms of American thought.<sup>121</sup> Rather by considering the progression from Stieglitz’s early little-known slum image *Five Points* (1893) (fig. 2.1) to the photograph of immigrants that would become his modernist masterpiece, *The Steerage* (1907) (fig. 2.2), I trace the way that the particular challenge of representing the new urban immigrant – whether legally, socially or aesthetically – became a marker for the success of the new medium of “straight” photography.

Such links between photography and national concerns about immigration are obvious at the level of subject matter, and have been well explored by scholars who study how photographers such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine used the medium to depict – and change – the squalid lives of immigrants.<sup>122</sup> In fact, recent critics (especially those focused on social and cultural histories) have often faulted Stieglitz because he did not engage in this reforming type of photography. Most notably, American studies scholar Alan Trachtenberg, in his widely read and cited essay “Camera Work/Social Work,” claims Stieglitz and his circle acted to “defeat and transcend the factual report” in their struggle to transform the photograph into art. By creating a body of work “isolated from social practices, cultural patterns, and institutional forms,” Trachtenberg argues Stieglitz actually “narrowed the range of aesthetic possibility,” separating the aesthetic and social function of photography.<sup>123</sup> In “making art” out of “the city’s darker realities,” Trachtenberg suggests Stieglitz’s images softened “the city’s discordant realities” into pleasant consumable images.<sup>124</sup> However, examining Hartmann’s essays on photographing the city alongside those on straight photography demonstrates that the Stieglitz circle critic anticipated Trachtenberg’s concerns. Better known today for his discussions of the new structure of the modern city in essays, such as his “The

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<sup>121</sup> At a larger level my work engages critically with the drive to identify a transhistorical exceptionalist American essence that has, until recently, often dominated histories of U.S. cultural production.

<sup>122</sup> For more on Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine see also: Keith Gandall, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Walter Rosenblum, Naomi Rosenblum, and Alan Trachtenberg, *America and Lewis Hine* (New York: Aperture, 1977); and Michael Sundell, “Golden Immigrants at the Gold Door: Lewis Hine’s Photographs of Ellis Island,” *Social Text*, no. 16. (Winter, 1986-1987): 168-175.

<sup>123</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, “Camera Work / Social Work,” *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York : Noonday Press, 1990, c1989) 174-75.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

Flat Iron Building – an Aesthetical Dissertation,” Hartmann repeatedly framed New York’s urban immigrant neighborhoods as sites in which the modern medium of photography might make its greatest contribution to the arts. Hartmann’s emerging definition of straight photography aimed deliberately at facilitating a novel pluralist appreciation of New York’s “other half,” and at celebrating the city’s “discordant realities” as a new model of Americanness, which, I will demonstrate, was an aesthetic project integrally linked to issues in the social, cultural and institutional sphere.<sup>125</sup>

To demonstrate the historical amnesia involved in positioning the birth of American photography’s artistic avant-garde as apolitical, I examine the development of the definition of straight photography by Stieglitz, a first-generation American whose use of the term initially included the pictorialist work of commercial photographer (and pioneer Daniel Boone’s great-niece) Gertrude Käsebier, and compare this to the word’s definition by immigrant Hartmann who called for Käsebier’s exclusion in the name of aesthetic particularism. This negotiation took place on three levels; at the level of subject (would photographs be of Native Americans? ethnic immigrants? or deserted city streets?), at the level of method (would photographs be taken on crowded sidewalks or in the studio? would negatives be retouched? cropped? or printed directly without manipulation?), and at the level of rhetoric (would the term “straight” signify formally and technically unembellished? stylistically inartistic? or aesthetically unmixed?). This chapter recovers these lost links between straight photography’s subject, method and rhetoric, and the larger context in which they were forged, arguing that this model of medium specificity did not aim only to situate photography within the canon of art, but hoped to create a set of modernist aesthetics that could also operate as a unique tool through which to conceptualize modernity’s political and cultural questions about languages, races and nations.

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<sup>125</sup> Hartmann would likely have agreed with Allan Sekula, who ended his essay on photography’s discursive function by comparing Hine and Stieglitz, stating, “The celebration of abstract humanity...is the final outcome of the appropriation of the photographic image for liberal political ends; the oppressed are granted a bogus Subjecthood when such status can only be secured from within, on their own terms.” Allan Sekula, “On the invention of photographic meaning,” *Artforum* v. 13 (January 1975): 43 and 45.

## 2.1 At the Frontiers and the Centers

### *Specificity of Medium and of Nation*

As discussed in the introduction, art historical descriptions of medium specificity frequently begin with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1766 essay *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, which differentiated painting and poetry by demanding that a work of art should utilize only the characteristics of its own medium. Lessing analogized the relation between media (one medium and another) to national relations (between one people and another). Painting and poetry, he wrote should behave "as two equitable and friendly neighbors" who avoid

unbecoming liberties in the heart of the other's domain, yet on their extreme frontiers practice a mutual forbearance by which both sides make peaceful compensation for those slight aggressions which, in haste and from force of circumstance, the one finds himself compelled to make on the other's privilege.<sup>126</sup>

Media, like nations, might mix at their furthest frontiers – in minor genres or colonial expansions – while still remaining pure at their center.

Well acquainted with German language and literature from his childhood in Hamburg, Sadakichi Hartmann frequently cited Lessing in his own essays on art in the turn of the century U.S., often using *Laocoön* to fault photographers more concerned with likeness than with their medium's formal qualities.<sup>127</sup> However, for Hartmann, commencing his career as an American art critic in the 1890s, Lessing's description of media and international relations belonged to another continent and a previous century. Hartmann borrowed Lessing's basic association between media and peoples, but the growing importance of new media such as photography threw the once stable binary of painting and literature into question, as nationally Americans reconsidered the boundaries of the frontier and the "purity" of the center.

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<sup>126</sup> Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* [original German version 1766], 91. W.J.T. Mitchell has argued that Lessing's argument introduced a variety of oppositional properties that included race and nationality, equating painting with "French 'refinement'" and poetry with "German and English 'manliness'." W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 110.

<sup>127</sup> For example, Sadakichi Hartmann, "Portrait Painting and Portrait Photography," *Camera Notes* 3, no. 1 (1899): 4.

Demographic shifts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century proved problematic for the self-definition of the U.S., a country whose identity as a frontier haven for immigrants had been monumentalized in 1889 with the dedication of the Statue of Liberty. The most influential theorization of this crisis, historian Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," asserted the frontier had been the site responsible for producing the U.S. as a coherent nation from an immigrant mixture. The open land was, Turner wrote, "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" for "the wilderness masters the colonist," transforming the immigrant from European to American. In "the crucible of the frontier," he wrote, "the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race."<sup>128</sup> But by 1893 the frontier was no longer the primitive site on which immigrants could be reborn as loyal assimilated citizens. Citing the 1890 census, Turner announced that the U.S.'s Western frontier was becoming ironically too civilized to do its assimilating work.<sup>129</sup>

Accompanying his lament for the lost frontier was Turner's passionate opposition to more immigration. The challenge of integrating immigrants had only been increased by so-called "new" immigration, an escalating influx of arrivals from the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe beginning in the 1880s.<sup>130</sup> As the open lands of the West "filled," there appeared to be no room left for new immigrants except in the nation's growing metropolitan centers. Although it was not until 1920 that the urban population of the U.S. outnumbered its rural one, this trend had become clear by 1890 when one in

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<sup>128</sup> Turner additionally argued that "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." He wrote it was "to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom-these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier." Frederick J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, DC, 1894). For an excellent survey of further discussions of this influential thesis see William Cronon, "Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Apr., 1987): 157-176.

<sup>129</sup> Turner noted "in a recent bulletin of the Superintendent of the Census for 1890 appear these significant words: 'Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it can not, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports.' This brief official statement marks the closing of a great historic movement." *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the term "new immigration" was popularly used to describe shifts in immigration demographics around 1880. It was authoritatively defined in the *Report of the U.S. Immigration Commission* through a variety of factors, including changes in immigrants' geographic origins, economic status, labor skills, and duration of residency.

every three Americans lived in a city.<sup>131</sup> In these burgeoning cities, and especially in New York, new arrivals frequently clustered with countrymen in their own ethnic enclaves based on economic necessity, leading Turner and many other Americans to fear they would remain forever unassimilated. With this increase in urban immigration, the city became a composite jigsaw puzzle, a mosaic of foreign ghettos whose residents seemed to retain far too much of their hereditary culture, refusing to “melt” into America as they had appeared to when living in the Western territories. Some agreed with Turner’s suggestion of barring immigration from certain foreign groups, while others suggested the U.S. needed to expand into an imperial nation in order to maintain at least some frontier. Americans of the 1890s worried. How could Lessing’s “unbecoming liberties” be kept from the heart of their country?

These political arguments about immigration and national expansion paralleled contemporaneous debates occurring in the aesthetic realm as photography’s advocates began campaigning for its position in the pantheon of fine arts. Lessing had compared media to nations with distinct frontiers, but the immigrant art critic Sadakichi Hartmann suggested a new way of conceiving medium specificity for the photographic era. Departing from the pervasive aesthetic opinion that artistry could only be achieved through the subjective intervention that the machine-made straight photograph lacked, as quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, Hartmann argued that the true photographer did not need to borrow from any other arts, asking rhetorically in the epigraph with which this chapter began “why use any language but one’s own to express one’s feelings and one’s fancies? As well address a fellow countryman in some foreign tongue.”<sup>132</sup> This pluralistic critical analogy that suggested each media and each language had a unique merit and usefulness, an understanding that was in contrast to both prevailing aesthetic arguments, which held that photography would only become art through a resemblance to painting, as well as to cultural arguments that asserted speaking only English would ease immigrants’ assimilation into

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<sup>131</sup> Joshua Freeman, ed., et al., *Who Built America?*, vol. 2 (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 13.

<sup>132</sup> This opinion was championed by Peter Henry Emerson, who called for a subjective approach emphasizing soft focus and selective blurring rather than all-over sharp focus, Leon Robert Demanchy, who invented and experimented with new expressive printing techniques, and Edward Steichen, who was both a photographer and a painter. Sadakichi Hartmann, “Gertrude Käsebier: A Sense of the Pictorial,” *The Photographic Times* 32, (May 1900): 198-99.

American life.<sup>133</sup> Instead, Hartmann, who worked as a regular columnist writing in German for the German-American press, contended photographers should embrace the unique qualities of their medium, just as he communicated with his fellow immigrant countrymen in their shared native language.

Hartmann's incipient analogical ideas would be termed "cultural pluralism" in 1924 by Harvard-trained philosopher Horace Kallen, himself a German-Jewish immigrant to the U.S.<sup>134</sup> In his earlier 1915 text "Democracy or the Melting Pot" Kallen presented many of the ideas that he would summarize as cultural pluralism. In this essay he seconded Hartmann on the importance of immigrants retaining native languages, writing, "English is to us that Latin was to the Roman provinces" for the majority "a *lingua franca* necessary less in the spiritual than the economic contacts of the daily life."<sup>135</sup> Although the common language was English, "each nationality expresses its emotional and voluntary life in its own language, in its own inevitable aesthetic and intellectual forms."<sup>136</sup> Kallen speculated it was through this profusion of languages and cultures that "American civilization' may come to mean the perfection of the cooperative harmonies of 'European civilization' ... a multiplicity in a unity, and orchestration of mankind."<sup>137</sup> In a pluralist American society, Kallen proclaimed, "each ethnic group is the natural instrument...the range and variety of the harmonies may become wider and richer and more beautiful."<sup>138</sup>

Kallen's arguments were deployed against conceptions of America as Melting Pot, as visualized in the 1889 illustration from the American humor magazine Puck "The Mortar of Assimilation—And the One Element that Won't Mix" (fig. 2.3). Opposing to this image depicting an angry savage Irish man

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<sup>133</sup> While the literacy tests proposed to bar the uneducated immigrant could be taken in any language, the ability of immigrants to speak English was thought to be "one of the most important indications of the degree of their assimilation," and "homes where English has been adopted as the language commonly used by the family" enabled children to perform better in school. *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 1 *Abstracts* (61 Cong., 3 Sess., Senate Document No. 747, Washington, 1911), 474 and 43 respectively.

<sup>134</sup> As a student of William James, Kallen built on James' work *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), reprinted in *William James: Writings 1909-1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: Anchor Books, 1993).

<sup>135</sup> Horace Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," in *Culture and Democracy in the United States: Studies in the Group Psychology of the American Peoples* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), 67-135. Reprinted from *The Nation*, February 18 and 25, 1915, citations to reprint in *Readings in Social Problems*, ed. Albert Benedict Wolfe (Boston: Ginn, 1916), 358.

<sup>136</sup> Eventually as the immigrant's "cultural abjectness gives way to cultural pride." *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 370. He hypothesized "the waste, the squalor, and the distress of Europe" would be eliminated in the U.S. Kallen asked "What do we *will* to make of the United States – a unison singing the old Anglo-Saxon theme "America," the America of the New England school, or a harmony, in which that theme shall be dominant perhaps, among others, but only one among many, not the only one?" *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 370-371. Although in 1915 Kallen had not yet begun to use the word "pluralist."



refusing to be stirred into the America pot and instead dancing wildly on its edge, Kallen and Hartmann called for a celebration of those who wouldn't mix.<sup>139</sup> Hartmann claimed that photographers should consider the aesthetic possibilities in immigrant neighborhoods that had been foreclosed by the "official camera" deployed by groups aiming to provoke social change through their images (reforms of tenements or labor standards, for example). Kallen again put the argument more succinctly, writing that behind campaigns for assimilation through progressive social change in immigrant neighborhoods "What troubles so many Anglo-Saxon Americans is not really inequality; what troubles them is difference."<sup>140</sup> By proposing that the "artistic" camera could be deployed to represent the picturesque quality of this urban difference, Hartmann provocatively defined the picturesque as a celebration of pluralism and variety. This characterization would prove vital for formulating both the definition of straight photography and the medium's potential for cultural work.

Neither Hartmann's figuring of urban difference as "picturesque" nor pluralism's frequently essentialist celebrations of ethnic groups (above individuals and groups defined by other types of difference) are unproblematic alternatives to reform photography's project of assimilation. In her study the origins of the picturesque in late eighteenth-century British painting art historian Ann Bermingham points out that the picturesque artist relied on mechanisms of distancing to render the poverty and difference of peasants aesthetically appealing to a genteel audience – a device of separation between classes that forms part of a larger aestheticizing system of the picturesque, which can be connected to the contemporaneous, bureaucratic system of rural poor relief.<sup>141</sup> Meanwhile, literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels has drawn attention to pluralism's hazardous tendency to transform all difference into a subset of essentialist racial difference and reduce all culture to a form of racism.<sup>142</sup> In his treatment of the picturesque, pluralist city, Hartmann himself seems to have suspected these shortcomings, pointing to the

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<sup>139</sup> The image by C.J. Taylor, was printed in *Puck*, New York: Puck Publishing Co. (June 26, 1889). Kallen explicitly celebrated "the Gaelic movement, the Irish theater, the Irish Art Society." Kallen, "Democracy *versus* the Melting Pot," 363.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>141</sup> She also suggests that picturesque paintings both celebrated the landscape of an age before the industrial revolution and justified its transformation into an efficient locus of production. Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 69.

<sup>142</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

men delivering goods to sweatshops as representatives of the “dark side of Jewtown,” of problems unsolved by laws or philanthropy, before breezily turning back to the (now rather destabilized) mode of aesthetic guide to write: “but we have no time to follow them to the qualmy rooms of the sweatshops, the pictures there are too dreary and we are only in search of the picturesque.”<sup>143</sup> Implicitly acknowledging the enormous shortcomings of this mode of urban voyeurism, Hartmann nonetheless deployed pluralism and the picturesque strategically to carve out a space for photography in the art world. Unlike Lessing and others who had theorized medium specificity with a focus on painting, Hartmann suggested that attempting to assimilate and adopt the language of dominant culture (using only English instead of German or the techniques of painting instead of straight photography) would eliminate unique and valuable forms of expression. Hartmann’s built on Lessing’s connection of the strict boundaries of media with those of nationals and peoples, but called for an aesthetic pluralism that relied on the birth of a nascent ideal of cultural pluralism. In a nation grappling with the issues of assimilation, boundaries and languages, Hartmann advanced a new notion of photography’s medium specificity that engaged this flux of categories to argue for an expanded boundary of the realm of fine arts.

### *The Pioneer and the Immigrant*

The new multi-lingual urban immigrants seemed locked in struggle with the older models of citizenship, especially the category of frontier pioneer. Used normatively by Turner, these loci of identity – western pioneer versus urban immigrant – were articulated within the Photo-Secession, Stieglitz’s avant-garde circle of affiliated photographers. Here, shifts in national myth played out in individual terms, casting Gertrude Käsebier, Hartmann and Alfred Stieglitz as exponents of American identity categories, in a conflation of aesthetics and biography. Käsebier, an upper-class grandmother, had little in common with Hartmann, the impulsive self-proclaimed King of Bohemia, but both were full participants in

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<sup>143</sup> Sidney Allan [pseudonym Sadakichi Hartmann], “Picturesque New York in Four Papers: The Esthetic Side of Jewtown,” *Camera Notes*, no. 3 (October 1902): 147.

Stieglitz's photographic movement.<sup>144</sup> Käsebier and Hartmann shared an urge to publicize their identity by monumentalizing their early childhoods. In spite of her German surname acquired through marriage, at the turn of the twentieth century Käsebier took photographs that referenced her widely celebrated upbringing in a Western pioneer family, while Hartmann called for urban images of America's newcomers and strategically employed his complex Japanese-German immigrant heritage. Stieglitz, a first-generation American from a German Jewish family, negotiated the often-conflicted space between them, writing his own self-defining statement – "I was born in Hoboken. I am an American." – only in 1921.<sup>145</sup> As Stieglitz struggled with a definition of American photography, these personal identities seemed to bleed into aesthetic categories during this early period. Would it be based on the frontier pioneer or on the urban immigrant?

Gertrude Käsebier was born Gertrude Stanton to an old American Quaker family in Fort Des Moines, Iowa on May 18, 1852.<sup>146</sup> Eight years later she and her family traveled into the newly opened Colorado Territory.<sup>147</sup> Their journey west was marked by repeated Indian attacks, but upon arriving in Colorado she became "the first white child that had ever been in that state, and she was made much of."<sup>148</sup> She recalled fondly her playtime, when Native Americans even once borrowed the novel white baby Gertrude from her parents.<sup>149</sup> Although her family relocated to Brooklyn during the Civil War when Gertrude was twelve, she later claimed, "I was born and brought up among the Indians and never got over

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<sup>144</sup> Guido Bruno's magazine *Greenwich Village* devoted an entire issue to Hartmann in November of 1915, cementing his reputation as self-proclaimed "King of Bohemia." Stieglitz published Hartmann's attacks on Käsebier's photographs, but Hartmann accused Stieglitz of lacking the "courage" to invite him to the Secession dinners because Käsebier hated him and considered his presence uncivilized. Hartmann to Stieglitz, August 1904, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Collection of American Literature, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn (hereafter referred to as YCAL).

<sup>145</sup> I will discuss this declaration in more detail in Chapter 4. Alfred Stieglitz, "A Statement" from *Exhibition of Stieglitz Photographs* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1921), citation to text anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 226-8.

<sup>146</sup> Gertrude's father John W. Stanton came from Ohio, while her mother Muncy Boone Stanton was born in Kentucky. Käsebier got her German name through marriage at 22 to Eduard Käsebier, a successful shellac importer from Germany. For a more general biography see Barbara L. Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier: The Photographer and her Photographs* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1992).

<sup>147</sup> Colorado Territory had been created in response to the 1859 gold rush that brought the first large influx of white settlers into the area. The Käsebier family's migration must have been shaped by the period ideology of "Manifest Destiny," the belief that the U.S. was destined to fill the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

<sup>148</sup> In her notes compiled for an unpublished biography of Käsebier, the photographer's granddaughter Mina Turner recorded many conversations with Käsebier and family stories of their frontier lifestyle, many of which were used to publicize her photography. Gertrude Käsebier Papers, University of Delaware, Newark, Del. (henceforth designated as GKP).

<sup>149</sup> GKP, "Mina Turner's Biographical notes of Gertrude Käsebier," folder 8.

it.”<sup>150</sup> Käsebier and the press used her frontier heritage as a narrative frame for both her personality traits, such as the independence necessary to start a lucrative photography business as a female, and for her interest in Native Americans as photographic subjects.<sup>151</sup>

Käsebier’s much discussed birth in the pioneer West was also tied to her exploration of the new frontier of photography.<sup>152</sup> This connection was made most explicitly in an article written for the American Arts and Crafts journal, *The Craftsman*, which called artistic photography “one of the interesting discoveries” of the twentieth century.<sup>153</sup> The author claimed the medium had evolved as artists left other too crowded domains, such as painting and music, upon confronting the possibility that there was “little further opportunity for variation” remained in those traditional fields.<sup>154</sup> Like trailblazers on a new frontier, artists who chose the camera quickly “all but originated a new method of expression,” with Käsebier characterized specifically as “a *pioneer* in creating what the world must agree to recognize as a new art.”<sup>155</sup> Tracing her artistic inspiration to her grandmother, a weaver and a “splendid, strong, *pioneer* type of woman,” Käsebier used her Western genealogy to bolster her position as an aesthetic frontierswoman.<sup>156</sup>

Hartmann’s early life could scarcely have been more different. With much about his own birth clouded in mystery, Hartmann managed to create and strategically mobilize his very complicated biography. He seems to have been born Carl Sadakichi Hartmann in 1867 on Dejima, an island in the harbor of the Japanese city Nagasaki devoted to housing the compound of foreign European residents. After the early death of Hartmann’s Japanese mother, his German father took the infant Carl to Hamburg

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<sup>150</sup> GKP, “Material taken down by a woman who once wanted to write Granny’s life,” folder 7.

<sup>151</sup> Gertrude’s father John Stanton was originally from Ohio, while her mother Muncy Boone Stanton was born in Kentucky. GKP, “Autobiographical notes by Gertrude Käsebier,” folder 2.

<sup>152</sup> Readers were reminded of Käsebier’s childhood memories of the West most often during discussions of her the series of Native America portraits, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter. For example, the extended article in the popular *Everybody’s Magazine*, familiarized a large audience with Käsebier’s background and work. Anon. “Some Indian Portraits,” *Everybody’s Magazine* 4, no. 17 (Jan, 1901): 2-24. I consider this article’s articulation of the nostalgic aims of Käsebier’s photography in greater depth later in this chapter taking into account Elizabeth Hutchinson’s reading of Käsebier’s studio in relation to gender. Elizabeth Hutchinson, “When the “Sioux Chief’s Party Calls”: Käsebier’s Indian Portraits and the Gendering of the Artist’s Studio,” *American Art* 16, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 40-65.

<sup>153</sup> Mary Fanton Roberts [Giles Edgerton], “Photography as an Emotional Art: A Study of the Work of Gertrude Käsebier,” *Craftsman* 12 (April 1907): 80.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. The author allowed that Claude Monet and Richard Strauss represented exceptions in their respective fields.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 93. emphasis added.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

to stay with his wealthy grandmother and uncle.<sup>157</sup> At fourteen, after running away from the German Naval Academy, young Hartmann was sent to Philadelphia to stay with his extended German family. As an adult he would often explain his erratic self-destructive behavior by referring to his early feelings of loss at his mother's death and his rejection by his father. In addition to his story's Freudian aspects, Hartmann's entrance into the U.S. also had direct links to concurrent discussions of identity in national terms. As previously noted, his arrival in 1882 coincided with the beginning of national immigration restrictions, when anti-Asian sentiment made its first inroads into U.S. legislation with the Chinese Exclusion Act barring the immigration of laborers from China. The law did not directly impact Hartmann, a half-Japanese German citizen, but his beginning in America must have been informed by prevalent debates about racial categories and national identity.<sup>158</sup> Hartmann's mixed heritage, his place within Philadelphia's German immigrant community, and the rarity of Asians in the city in the 1880s made it nearly impossible for him to be recognized as specifically Japanese.<sup>159</sup> Yet, those who met him invariably commented, often publicly, on his strange appearance, recording it as exotic or even demonic.<sup>160</sup>

Moving to Boston in 1887, Hartmann began to identify and mobilize his Japanese heritage. In his unpublished autobiography he recounted his strategic pose "as Eurasian, which was a newly coined

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<sup>157</sup> For a biography of Hartmann see Jane Calhoun Weaver, "Introduction," in *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1-48, and her more extensive "Sadakichi Hartmann: Herald of Modernism in American Art," (Ph.D. diss., University North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1986), as well as Harry W. Lawton and George Knox, "Editors' Introduction," in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre: Selected Critical Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1978). Hartmann also compiled notes for his own unpublished autobiography held in the Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, Special Collections Library, University of California, Riverside (henceforth designated as UCR). Scholars agree that Hartmann's mother was likely his father's maid, but Hartmann had a variety of theories about her. Generally willing to strategically reposition his heritage around WWII at the height of anti-Japanese sentiment Hartmann began to claim that his mother might have been a Korean dancer, UCR.

<sup>158</sup> The most virulent agitators for regulation were on the West Coast where immigration of Chinese laborers had been most prevalent. It largely spared Japanese citizens who had only recently been allowed by their own government to immigrate to the U.S., but increasing Japanese immigration was later stopped by the so-called "Gentleman's Agreement" of 1907-8 in which the Japanese government agreed to stop issuing passports to those wishing to work in the continental U.S. For more information on Asian immigration see Eliot Mears, *Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast: Their Legal and Economic Status* (New York: Arno Press, 1978 [c1928]) and Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

<sup>159</sup> Hartmann claimed that Walt Whitman was the first American immediately able to identify his Japanese ethnicity, befriend him specifically because of this unusual identity. Sadakichi Hartmann, *Conversations with Walt Whitman* (New York, E.P. Coby & co., 1895).

<sup>160</sup> Hartmann's hybrid identity attracted attention from critics and artists, including James G. Huneker who wrote in a review "He is tall, he is angular; he has a Japanese face with a German expression; and he walks like a man dazed." "His visiting card looks like a devil out on a furlough. He is weird, is Hartmann with the funny first name." James G. Huneker, *Musical Courier*, March 2, 1898, as quoted in Arnold Schwab, "James Gibbon's Huneker's 'An Early Estimate of Sadakichi Hartmann,'" *Sadakichi Hartmann Newsletter* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 4-5.

concept.” Embracing the new racial type used to identify the hybrid offspring of an Asian mother and a European father, Hartmann dropped the Carl from his name, becoming Sadakichi at what he called “just the right moment for it.”<sup>161</sup> His new hometown, Boston, led the country in the appreciation of Japanese art with several important residents founding a collection devoted to it at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Hartmann’s newly minted Japanese pose must have seemed especially novel in Boston during the 1880s; a city that he wrote was at the time “delightfully free from foreign invasions.”<sup>162</sup> The budding author differentiated himself from those such as Harvard-trained zoologist Edward S. Morse who had studied art in Japan, purposely striving instead to be what he termed “a kind of living impression of this sentiment.”<sup>163</sup> Although he had little memory of his infancy in Japan or his maternal family there, Hartmann chose to adopt aristocratic Japanese dress for his Boston lectures, becoming the exotic embodiment of the foreign culture recently popular within the artistic sphere that he hoped to join (fig. 2.4).<sup>164</sup>

Hartmann’s immigration was framed by a general increase in arrivals to the U.S. from those countries once considered exotic. Moving from Boston to New York and becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1894, Hartmann was soon featured as “the Oriental representative” in the *Sunday Journal*’s imagining of the ethnic combination producing the “New Yorker of 1895.” The “breed,” which the author allowed “looks all right,” incorporated Hartmann’s contributions: “qualities of restless ambition, adaptability and vivacity” from his “complex ancestry—the pilgrim from the land of

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<sup>161</sup> From his unpublished autobiography, Hartmann papers, UCR. Eurasian defined as “The offspring of a European father and an Asiatic mother” in Herbert Allen Giles, *A Glossary of Reference on Subjects Connected with the Far East*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1900), 83.

<sup>162</sup> “Boston Toward the End of the Eighties” selection from Hartmann’s unpublished autobiography held at UCR and anthologized in Sadakichi Hartmann, *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist*, ed. Jane Calhoun Weaver (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 51.

<sup>163</sup> Hartmann was well aware of the contemporary interest in Japan, recording in his unpublished autobiography “Professor Morse had written a book on their architecture and was one of the first collectors of Japanese poetry...and the Boston Art Museum became deeply interested in the art of the Far Orient.” To that end Hartmann acknowledged, “I talked a lot about possible Japanese relatives that I did not know, while neglecting my German ancestry which was worthwhile and which I knew well.” Unpublished autobiography, Hartmann papers, UCR.

<sup>164</sup> Hartmann’s pose can be read in dialog with what postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak has called “strategic essentialism.” Rather using essentialism to establish group solidarity for social or political gain as Spivak’s term connotes, Hartmann embodied the essentialized category, largely physically absent from the US during the period, to speak from that position for personal gain. Unfortunately for Hartmann, his erotic play—*Christ*—was a misstep in this strategy, landing him in jail and forcing him to leave Boston.

Chrysanthemums.”<sup>165</sup> In New York, Hartmann once again deployed varied aspects of his heritage, becoming an eccentric character in the emerging Bohemian arts scene in Greenwich Village and writing in German about New York sites including Ellis Island and ethnic ghettos under pen names including “Chrysanthemum” as columnist for the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*.<sup>166</sup> Ever attentive to the strategic possibilities of identity, when editors seemed reluctant to deal with the exotic, often self-destructive and temperamental author Sadakichi, he also took on the professional name of Sidney Allan.<sup>167</sup>

Perhaps Hartmann modeled his pseudonymous personality on his friend of the reversed initials – Alfred Stieglitz. It was through “Allan” that Hartmann wrote the type of technical articles about photography for which Stieglitz had become known. Stieglitz’s position as economically secure, socially respectable, assimilated first-generation German Jewish immigrant would no doubt have been attractive to Hartmann who with all his strategizing was never quite financially secure nor socially at ease.<sup>168</sup> In an early essay on photography written for the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* Hartmann identified their shared national heritage, calling Stieglitz as “a German name” belonging to “the most outstanding art-photographer in the U.S.”<sup>169</sup> Tied to German culture by more than just his name, Stieglitz had attended school and received his photographic training in Germany after his father decided to use the money he had made in America to return to his homeland with his family in 1881. Although the younger Stieglitz claimed to have defended his native country to his German colleagues, upon returning to the U.S. in 1890 he was devastated by the predominance of business over culture.<sup>170</sup> Photography, he felt was not understood as it had been in Europe. Instead of a vibrant scene of dedicated artists, he found only dull

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<sup>165</sup> Other racial representatives included Anglo-Saxon Thomas A. Edison, German Henri Villard, and Russian Count Olarovsky, *Sunday Journal*, “New Yorker of 1895,” November 10, 1895 contained in Scrapbook: *Revelations Tome 1*, Hartmann papers, UCR. The chrysanthemum was associated with Asia due to its origins in China.

<sup>166</sup> Hartmann was a columnist from 1898 until 1902, from 1899 responsible for a weekly column and a bi-weekly Sunday feature. Weaver points out that Ottendorfer, the editor of *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, personally supported Hartmann and likely was responsible for his long run at the paper. Weaver, “Sadakichi Hartmann,” 128.

<sup>167</sup> Hartmann began using the pseudonym consistently in *Camera Notes* in July 1902 concurrent with Stieglitz leaving the journal. Weaver speculates the last name likely come from Edgar Allan Poe. Weaver, “Sadakichi Hartmann,” 171.

<sup>168</sup> Hartmann frequently pestered various figures in the world of arts and letters for monetary loans, including Stieglitz, Gorge Santayana, Mrs. Thomas Eakins, Douglas Fairbanks, Charles Freer, and Ezra Pound, among many others. Hartmann Papers, UCR, Correspondence Files.

<sup>169</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “Die Kunst Photographie in ihrer Beziehung zur Malerei” (Art Photography and Its Relationship to Painting), *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, January 30, 1898, citations to text anthologized in Hartmann, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, 96.

<sup>170</sup> So he recounted years later in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 31-32.

professionals. Throwing himself into amateur photography, uniting the two clubs devoted to the medium in New York, Stieglitz struggled to strike a balance between his patriotic Americanism and his urbane devotion to European culture.

Unlike Hartmann who challenged national and racial categories, Stieglitz was part of New York's elite. Although Jewish, his father had stopped practicing the faith when he immigrated to America. This rejection has often been framed as a triumph of rationality on the part of his parents unable to abide by the superstitious qualities of religion, but their distance from tradition also importantly served to separate these uptown, assimilated, German-Jewish immigrants from the many Russian and Eastern-European Jews arriving in New York's Lower Manhattan ghettos during the 1890s.<sup>171</sup> The presence of established Germans and poverty-stricken Eastern Europeans threw the definition of American Judaism into tension at this moment. With the influx of these "new" immigrants, once problematic older groups seemed positively American. Stieglitz's eventual father-in-law, for example, owned a brewery, but where earlier stereotypes of German immigrants saw their drinking habits portrayed as an affront to Puritanical values, now the profitable business allowed his family entry into New York society. Although Stieglitz later claimed his idealist love of humanity had been offended by American racism upon his return from Germany, he did little to call for social change.<sup>172</sup> In fact, he acknowledged that Civil War memories might be resurrected with his 1902 naming of the Photo-Secession – "The idea of 'Secession' is hateful to Americans. People will be thinking of the Civil War." But Stieglitz claimed instead to use the word in its European sense, where "Secessionist" described those groups most closely associated with modernity.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Like many a Jew of German extraction at that time, Stieglitz was uncomfortable with his ethnicity and even identified Jewishness as what was most vexing about him. In the 1920s, after Waldo Frank has heralded him as a Jewish mystic Stieglitz wrote "I never much thought of myself as a Jew or any other particular thing. But I'm beginning to feel it must be the Jew in me that is after all the key to my impossible make up." Biographer Benita Eisler claims that Stieglitz often focused on the German aspect of his heritage to deny his Jewish background. Benita Eisler, *O'Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 44.

<sup>172</sup> Stieglitz also remembered being disturbed "I found that a difference was made between the white man and the dark, the white man and the yellow, although what has always been of interest to me is the human being." Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 1990, 32.

<sup>173</sup> Even at the establishment of the group he hoped would be dedicated to specifically American photography Stieglitz appears conflicted, choosing to derive meaning from the European art world over U.S. national heritage. "So the Photo-Secession hitches up with the art world. There is a sense of humor in the name." *Ibid.*, 49.



For several years Stieglitz managed to hold together the diverse and conflicted group he had named the Photo-Secession in a loose coalition including both Hartmann and Käsebier; his skillful managing of the varied tempers of those close to him was essential to the group's impact. However, his conflicted position as an outspoken American whose ideals often seemed European eventually came to annoy both Käsebier and Hartmann. Over time, the personalities as well as the competing definitions of straight photography articulated by Hartmann, the new urban Eurasian immigrant, and by Käsebier, the old frontier pioneer, could no longer be mediated by Stieglitz. As the implicit leader of the artistic photography movement in the U.S., Stieglitz vacillated for several years, but eventually chose to follow the pluralist new medium specificity advanced by Hartmann.<sup>174</sup> American avant-garde photography claimed for itself the status of art based on the medium's capacity as an entirely new form, a straight photography focused on fixing the confusing modern urban present, rather than taking its inspiration from painting to nostalgically recreate the nation's frontier past.

## 2.2 Stieglitz's Practice of Photography from Fifth Avenue to Five Points

### *Clearing Vistas on Fifth Avenue*

Hartmann's first known article on the medium of photography focused on the international scene and was written for the German-American daily *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* in 1898.<sup>175</sup> In the essay he faulted the model of American art that took "the imitation of foreign models" as a "legitimate... goal,"

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<sup>174</sup> Regard for Hartmann's importance in the early history of American art criticism and the Stieglitz circle has been more prevalent since the publication of Weaver's collection of his works in 1991 and the anthology *Valiant Knights of Daguerre* edited by Lawton and Knox in 1978. Weaver notes in her Ph.D. dissertation the way that many authors have marginally treated Hartmann's impact on American art criticism. She illustrated this "puzzling dichotomy" by interrogating William I. Homer's treatment of Hartmann in his canonical *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977). The book records in a footnote Homer's discussion with Dorothy Norman in which she recalled that Stieglitz himself "acknowledged only two individuals had strongly influenced his thinking about art—Sadakichi Hartmann and Max Weber," but Homer himself fails to take Hartmann so seriously in the body of his own text. Weaver, "Sadakichi Hartmann," iv. Disappointingly Jay Bochner's recent book on the Stieglitz circle contains only one mention of Hartmann in a footnote and even this renders his first name incorrectly as "Sadaki" in *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Secession* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 351. Though Sarah Greenough's important account of Stieglitz's career has no index entry for Hartmann, she considers the influence that the critic had on encouraging Stieglitz with his praise to continue making photographs of the city after *Winter Fifth Avenue*. Sarah Greenough, *The Key Set*, xxi.

<sup>175</sup> Hartmann, "Die Kunst Photographie in ihrer Beziehung zur Malerei" (Art Photography and Its Relationship to Painting"), *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, January 30, 1898, citations to text anthologized in Hartmann, *Sadakichi Hartmann*.

drawing his reader's attention to the few praiseworthy exceptions: photographers Alfred Stieglitz and Rudolf Eickemeyer (both members of the German-American community to whom *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* appealed).<sup>176</sup> Hartmann did not celebrate the two as Germans, but as Americans, singling out Stieglitz's *Winter – Fifth Avenue* (fig. 2.5), a photograph taken during a 1893 blizzard, as especially outstanding because it had been made "completely technically without any retouching."<sup>177</sup> In his first extended essay on photography Hartmann began his campaign for medium specificity. Although he did not yet use the term "straight," he wrote that if photography would only use "its means according to its purposes, then the way is open for raising it from an amusement for dilettantes to a self-sufficient art."<sup>178</sup>

In a second essay on photography, a review of Stieglitz's 1897 portfolio *Picturesque Bits of New York*, also written by Hartmann in 1898, the critic further clarified just why Stieglitz's work was so outstanding. It was the photographers' unique method that did not pose subjects, but forced him to be willing "to wait for years" to make a single exposure at the exact moment in which the composition's components aligned that made Stieglitz the leading American artistic photographer.<sup>179</sup> Hartmann again commended *Winter–Fifth Avenue*, above all, for its "realistic expression of an everyday occurrence of metropolitan life under special atmospheric conditions, rendered faithfully and yet with consummate art."<sup>180</sup> Describing a mundane city scene depicted both naturalistically and artistically, Hartmann acknowledged that *Winter–Fifth Avenue* might not even seem pictorial to a painter. Yet precisely this strong difference from expressions in other media set it above Stieglitz's other photographs, making it

<sup>176</sup> Hartmann continued "...rather than the development through independent thought, of new means of expression for the needs of a new time." Hartmann, "Art Photography," 97.

<sup>177</sup> Although he compared Stieglitz to French academic painter Bonnat, an association he would eschew in his later objections to painterly photographers. *Ibid.* Even in this essay, Hartmann's earliest on photography, the author demonstrated such fully formed ideas on the medium that some scholars believe earlier unlocated articles on photography authored by Hartmann may exist. Lawton and Knox, "Editors Introduction," 10. Although these speculations may prove correct, Hartmann's precocious understanding of the medium may also be explained as extensions of his earlier arguments made in Boston on behalf of a national art. Hartmann's call for self-sufficiency and specificity in photography paralleled his earlier arguments for an American art.

<sup>178</sup> As briefly mentioned earlier, among the first appearances of this term seems to have been the first issue of *Camera Work* published late in 1902. Hartmann, himself, was the first to coherently theorize the practice of "straight" photography with his article "A Plea for Straight Photography" in 1904. In this first article Hartmann reports without objection on techniques, including use of retouching with oil paint, which he would later vehemently denounce. His specific recommendations with regard to subject matter would remain consistent, calling for the photographer to only create "the images of life in the actual world which surround him." Hartmann, "Art Photography," 95-97.

<sup>179</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "Alfred Stieglitz: An Art Critic's Estimate." *Photographic Times*, 30 (June 1898): 257-262, citations to text anthologized in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre*, ed. Harry Lawton and George Knox, 276.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-2. The image was included in a portfolio of photographs by Stieglitz entitled *Picturesque Bits of New York and Other Images* in 1897. The photograph was also the grand-prize winner of the Bausch and Lomb photographic contest in 1898.

“more original and individual than the others because it reminds one of nothing else.”<sup>181</sup> Hartmann celebrated *Winter–Fifth Avenue* as a photograph that used the unique qualities of its medium to turn a quotidian urban scene into an artistic expression impossible by any other means. This photograph of New York was, as Stieglitz himself later wrote, “the beginning of a new era,” in terms of photography’s subject, its method and its rhetoric.<sup>182</sup>

In her authoritative catalog *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set*, Sarah Greenough speculates that Stieglitz continued focusing on urban scenes specifically in response to Hartmann’s praise of *Winter–Fifth Avenue*.<sup>183</sup> The sparsely populated foreboding street scene of *Winter–Fifth Avenue* represented a massive departure for Stieglitz from the image that had catapulted him to the center of the international photography world, his 1887 photograph *A Good Joke* (fig. 2.6), which captured a group of boisterous laughing peasant children in Venice.<sup>184</sup> A 1896 article in the *Photographic Times* quoted Stieglitz’s own description of his inspiration in making his European photographs, “nothing charms me so much as walking among the lower classes, studying them carefully and making mental notes. They are interesting from every point of view. I dislike superficial and artificial, and I find less of it among the lower classes.”<sup>185</sup> Hartmann’s review wildly celebrated the originality of *Winter–Fifth Avenue*, but tersely dismissed another award-winning Stieglitz photograph among the lower classes, *The Letter Box* (fig. 2.7). An image of two German peasant girls that shared compositional techniques with *A Good Joke*, Hartmann deemed it “merely a genre study, an attempt at storytelling that arouses no special interest.”<sup>186</sup> In this criticism, Hartmann indicated photography’s new direction, its “special interest,” would be based on unique non-narrative content and method.

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<sup>181</sup> Hartmann, “Alfred Stieglitz,” 281.

<sup>182</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “Notes Made By Stieglitz,” *Twice A Year* 1, (Fall-Winter 1938), citations to text anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, 24.

<sup>183</sup> She considers the influence that Hartmann’s praise might have had on convincing Stieglitz to continue making photographs of the city after *Winter Fifth Avenue*. Sarah Greenough, *The Key Set*, xxi.

<sup>184</sup> The prize was awarded by the journal *Amateur Photography* by P.H. Emerson who called the image the only spontaneous photograph submitted.

<sup>185</sup> Anon., “Alfred Stieglitz and His Latest Work,” *Photographic Times*, 28 (April 1896): 161.

<sup>186</sup> Hartmann, “Art Critic’s Estimate,” *Sadakichi Hartmann*, 279. The photograph featured two girls from southwest German region of Bader and had won a silver medal in London in 1898. Charles De Kay, “The Photographer as Artist,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1899. De Kay was also director of the *National Arts Club* and would assist Stieglitz in mount “An Exhibition of American Photography arranged by the Photo-Secession” in 1902. Norman, *Introduction to An American Seer*, 1960, 19.

Other critics agreed with Hartmann's enthusiastic assessment of *Winter-Fifth Avenue*, stating that "Mr. Stieglitz is opening up new vistas" beyond the stereotypical view of straight photography as mechanical, calling the composition specifically a "success in a pioneer effort."<sup>187</sup> This figuring of Stieglitz in the taking of *Winter-Fifth Avenue* provided a synthesis of the domains of western pioneer and urban immigrant, reconfiguring the upper class area of Fifth Avenue into the West through the hardship of weather and depicting him as a photographer who cleared vistas in the city like a frontiersman felling trees.

The much-repeated tale of the making of *Winter-Fifth Avenue* reinforced the analogy with the American West. The photographer claimed to have taken his brand new hand camera (a small device recommended by the manufacturer for taking quick snapshots in full sun) into the cold and lingered hours during a huge icy blizzard until he got just the perfect shot.<sup>188</sup> In the photograph, Stieglitz claimed to have proven (contrary to the manufacturer's directions) that the small camera worked in adverse weather conditions.<sup>189</sup> Stieglitz counseled fellow photographers to attain a similar understanding of their equipment, in order to be able to ready their tools "while his mind and eyes are fully occupied with the subject before him."<sup>190</sup> Stieglitz also outlined the ideal way to frame this subject with the mind and eyes, first selecting a scene devoid of figures, then studying "the lines and lighting" of its structure, and finally waiting patiently for unruly moving inhabitants to achieve compositional balance. Of course it was possible, Stieglitz allowed, that the correct components would never arrive and the picture would never align.<sup>191</sup> Describing his own freezing self-reliant hunt fused with his machine for the single specific instant of alignment in *Winter-Fifth Avenue* (instead of posing an image or photographing many frames at

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<sup>187</sup> Charles McCay, "The Photographer as Artist," *New York Times*, June 4, 1899.

<sup>188</sup> The experience paralleled the account of an even more dangerous experience in taking *Icy Night* in 1898, where he spent time in the cold while he had pneumonia and was supposed to be confined to bed. Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: American Seer*, 35 and 43.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 35. Stieglitz, "The Hand Camera—Its Present Importance" in *Stieglitz on Photography*, 67.

<sup>190</sup> "to become intimate with it that it will become a second nature," Stieglitz, "The Hand Camera," 67.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

random) Stieglitz gave the medium of photography a frontier character in which the urban pioneer patiently stalked his shot, waiting for his moving inhabitants, in spite of all obstacles.<sup>192</sup>

The figure captured by Stieglitz in *Winter—Fifth Avenue* envisioned the bustling urban space of New York's main commercial thoroughfare into a frozen landscape desolate except for a hansom cab, evoking a Western stagecoach.<sup>193</sup> Stieglitz transformed the shadowy coachman into an abstracted fusion of the frontiersman and urban immigrant. Stieglitz drew conceptual parallels between this man's struggle to drive through snow and his own plight as beleaguered artist, constructing a symbolic identification with his own abstracted image of the difficult labor of New York's working class. Stieglitz's photographs of New York in harsh weather (as well as others taken at night) created a new visualization of labor in the city. Unlike the famous early urban photographs in Jacob Riis's 1890 book *How The Other Half Lives* (a sensationalist attempt to provoke progressive reform that I will soon discuss in greater depth), in *Winter—Fifth Avenue* Stieglitz eschewed the technology of the explosive flash pan that exaggerated the dirty and disjointed qualities of life in the metropolis, preferring a long exposure that yielded a picturesque soft-focus landscape and darkened central figure.<sup>194</sup> Stieglitz also shifted the subject of New York photographs from subterranean slum dwellers to genteel hansom cabs.

Yet, even if the hansom cab was employed by the gentry, it was manned by the underclass. Unlike Riis' pathetic and/or criminal slum dweller, *Winter—Fifth Avenue* rendered the city inhabitant as a single heroic figure. But, lurking in *Winter—Fifth Avenue* was the anxiety over the place of the immigrant and his labor in its modern urban visualization.<sup>195</sup> The central silhouetted black form against the white sky

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<sup>192</sup> "My picture, 'Fifth Avenue, Winter' is the result of a three hours' stand during a fierce snow-storm on February 22nd 1893, awaiting the proper moment. My patience was duly rewarded. Of course, the result contained an element of chance, as I might have stood there for hours without succeeding in getting the desired pictures." *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>193</sup> This photograph might also be productively compared to Frederic Remington's contemporaneous stagecoach nocturnes, such as *Old Stage Coach—Coach of the Plains*, 1901. In his controversial consideration of Remington's art Alexander Nemerov has pointed out the connections in images such as this one between the pioneer West and the issue of immigration in his *Frederic Remington & Turn-of-the-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>194</sup> For an account of the way Riis became involved in reform photography, as well as an interesting discussion of the aesthetics of this photography see Peter B. Hales, "The Hidden Hand: Jacob Riis and the Birth of Reform Photography," *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984) 163-217.

<sup>195</sup> I use the masculine pronoun because this labor was rather relentlessly figured as masculine. Jay Bochner has suggested a general connection between the 1893 photograph of New York and the zeitgeist of transportation labor struggles with reference to the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago, the 1892 Homestead strike in Pennsylvania and even the 1894 Chicago Pullman strike.

obscured ties to a contemporaneous debate flaring over the demographic shifts of workers in service professions. In the same year *Winter–Fifth Avenue* was taken, for example, Booker T. Washington worried over the fate of African-Americans in the service industry, writing, “some are claiming that colored men are being supplanted also as coachmen, restaurant waiters, etc., because they haven't the energy and quickness of the [immigrant] whites.”<sup>196</sup> Guides for gentlemen eager to start their own stables corroborated Washington’s concern, urging, “good foreign servants are better than the democratic born talent.”<sup>197</sup> Accounts in the press of high profile hansom cab accidents underscored the physical and social danger of choosing an inappropriate driver.<sup>198</sup> The hulking form of Stieglitz’s backlit driver, as well as the position of the photographer and viewer directly in the carriage tracks, suggested the perils of relying on strange others in the increasingly anonymous urban sphere, but this anonymity covered other anxieties. Unlike Stieglitz’s genre scene *The Letter Box*, which showed its subjects dressed in their regional peasant costumes, *Winter–Fifth Avenue* refused the driver any particular characteristics or nationality by constructing an abstract and idealized struggling worker, avoiding the challenge of depicting the urban immigrant directly.

The labor that Stieglitz did not abstract in *Winter–Fifth Avenue* he eliminated. The white drifts on either side of the street suggest the labor of New York’s municipal workers who shaped the urban landscape by clearing the snow. In an uncropped print of the image (fig. 2.8) men are shown at the same distance from the camera as the coachman, working on either side of the street shoveling this snow, yet these individual laboring figures are cut out of Stieglitz’s final image of the city. Although these men, their faces barely discernable, may appear abstracted and anonymous to a contemporary viewer, at the

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Jay Bochner, “The Coming Storm of Modernism (1893)” in *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz’s New York Secession* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

<sup>196</sup> The way immigrant groups such as the Irish took over work traditionally done by African Americans is explained at greater length in Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>197</sup> An English servant was considered the optimal choice according to James Albert Garland, *The Private Stable: Its Establishment, Management, and Appointments* (Boston, 1899) 314.

<sup>198</sup> A month before Stieglitz took his photograph, for example, Gertrude Vanderbilt’s coach ran over a messenger boy. The boy was only bruised but the story was prominently featured in the news. *New York Times*, “Run Over by a Coachman,” Jan 3, 1893. *New York Times*, “Mr. Vanderbilt’s Coachman Bailed,” Jan. 4, 1893. There was also much coverage of the accident of Peter Garland, the coachman for Alfred P. Mead a wealthy grocer, *New York Times*, “Run Down by Coachman Garland,” Feb. 18, 1893.

time of Stieglitz's photograph New York's Commissioner in charge of Street-Cleaning had just publicly noted his conference on snow removal with "the Italian old guard" and announced the city would be using "400 extra men, mostly Italians" to clear the enormous 1893 blizzard.<sup>199</sup> In Stieglitz's picturesque bit of New York these extra Italians were cropped from Fifth Avenue. To open up vistas in the city with straight photography, it seemed, would require urban immigrants to be abstracted or eliminated.

### *Finding Himself in Five Points*

Yet, in the late 1890s Stieglitz continued to attempt enlisting lower class subjects and a romantic discourse of their authenticity, although he faced difficulty in transforming the modern city of New York into the picturesque bits of his European photographs. He recalled leaving the offices of his floundering New York printing business to stroll in the area around the East River, including the Tombs (the city's jail) and its most notorious nineteenth-century immigrant slum, Five Points. Capturing some of his earliest images of America during these wanderings in New York's poorest neighborhoods, Stieglitz remembered he had "loathed the dirty streets" but also been "fascinated." In the poor he saw compositions ready made. On these walks, he wrote, "wherever I looked there was a picture that moved me – the derelicts, the second hand clothing shops, the rag pickers, the tattered and the torn." Stieglitz made a connection with these individuals and sites through his camera, viewing them as pictures that stirred his emotions. Rather than experiencing pity or indignation, Stieglitz recalled envying these urban derelicts, believing romantically that the poverty-stricken subjects around him were "better off" than he was, because "there was a reality about them lacking in the artificial world" of businessmen in which he was forced to live. Stieglitz claimed that after returning from Europe in 1890, it was only through these

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<sup>199</sup> *New York Times*, "Carting the Snow Away," Feb. 20, 1893. The Commissioner also noted that the clearing of Fifth Avenue did not begin until a day after Lower Broadway and the "main arteries" of the city were cleared. The commissioner also noted while he was supervising the work where Stieglitz remembered taking the photograph, on Upper Fifth Avenue, "The Italian old guard was up there with me." "Storm Flying Eastward," *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1893. The same storm even blew down fifteen buildings described as "ramshackle" in Brooklyn, on Troy Ave between Park Place and Butler Street. *New York Times*, "The Storm in the City," Feb. 21, 1893. Stieglitz's recollection in Stieglitz, "Notes Made By Stieglitz," *Stieglitz on Photography*, 23.

photographic wanderings through the immigrant slum that he succeeded in “finding myself in relationship to America.”<sup>200</sup>

Although Stieglitz would emerge as the father of modern American art photography, these early attempts to develop a relationship to his native country resulted in ambiguous and unwieldy images. His photograph not only departed from nineteenth-century sensationalist accounts and Riis’s views, but also from bohemian artists, like Lincoln Steffens who wrote that he found in the Lower East Side ghetto what others had found out West, “adventure, perils, brawny comrades.”<sup>201</sup> Even Stieglitz had provocative difficulty in positioning a few of his images within his oeuvre. His 1893 photograph of the slum *Five Points, New York* (fig. 2.1), for example, deemed important enough for inclusion in the 1934 book *America and Alfred Stieglitz* and in the Key Set of photographs donated after his death to the National Gallery of Art, was not first exhibited until 1932, nearly forty years after its taking. Stieglitz did not include *Five Points, New York* or any of the photographs made on his wanderings in America’s immigrant neighborhoods along with *Winter–Fifth Avenue* in his portfolio 1897 *Picturesque Bits of New York and Other Studies*. However, his placement of these problematic images prominently at the foundation of his “relationship to America” suggests that Stieglitz acknowledged them as important within his early career, even if (or, perhaps because) they could scarcely be called a picturesque bits.

*Five Points, New York* was photographed barely three miles south east of the corner of Fifth Avenue and 35<sup>th</sup> Street where Stieglitz captured *Winter–Fifth Avenue*, but the two works present images of urban life worlds apart. Certain episodes in the former seem to aim at the picturesqueness of the latter – the little girl whose running steps through the grey soot-covered snow formally align with the slanting shadow in the in the lower left foreground, or the wash hanging from windows in the alley stretching diagonally off on the right. But these vignettes are quickly foreclosed, the picturesque remaining disturbingly just out of reach. The young girl turns her back to the camera, running away from the viewer to join an undifferentiated human mass, a row of mostly men bundled against the cold in nearly identical

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<sup>200</sup> Norman, *An American Seer*, 38.

<sup>201</sup> Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York : Metropolitan Books, 2000) 33.



dark coats that stretch in a horizontal line foreclosing visual entry to the alley on the image's right or even to the scene generally. With its nearly motionless orderly scene, Stieglitz's *Five Points* avoided the conventions depicting the area as a den of inequity and a hot bed for action packed vice. Compared to frontal disposition of laughing characters in Stieglitz's *A Good Joke* this lack of relation to the inhabitants of Five Points is even more striking. Although the faces of a few passers are visible in profile, the men in the central group stand and look anxiously into the darkened space of the clothing house, facing away from the camera. The turned backs in the foreground of *Five Points* create a stilled scene from which the viewer is entirely barred, the community and its possible contribution to American life remain invisible. Even the snow, a pleasant white haze in *Winter-Fifth Avenue* is in the foreground of *Five Points* a plowed, dirty, trampled, grey undifferentiated mass stretching the length of the image, compositionally mimicking the line of immigrants.

What made photographing *Five Points* so unwieldy for Stieglitz? Unlike Fifth Avenue, an address that connoted privilege, the geographic designation Five Points suggested the slum living of poor immigrants recently arrived in the U.S., an association Stieglitz made explicitly in an alternate title for the image – *A New Importation*.<sup>202</sup> Contemporaneous movements in painting offered a model for the depiction of New York's lower class urban life. But Stieglitz called "line, form, and color" of the American Realist paintings of the Ashcan school's "mediocre," claiming of the group "I could not feel committed to what was mere literature, just because it was labeled social realism."<sup>203</sup> Although his narrative European scenes, such as *A Good Joke* and *The Letter Box*, actually resemble these Ashcan vignettes, comparing Stieglitz's 1893 *Five Points* to George Luks' 1905 painting *Street Scene (Hester Street)* (fig. 2.9) demonstrates the degree to which the photographer went in this transitional image to eliminate traces of narrative in his depiction of the nearly identical scene. An undifferentiated mass of people fill the street in the upper portion of Luks' painting, yet briskly rendered foreground vignettes

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<sup>202</sup> A lantern slide of the image held at the Art Institute of Chicago is inscribed with the alternate title "A *New Importation*, New York, 1893," linking the photograph explicitly to issues of immigration. Greenough, *The Key Set*, 47.

<sup>203</sup> Norman, *An American Seer*, 67. For a discussion of narrative within the Ashcan School see Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), especially "The Storyteller's Vision: John Sloan and the Limits of Visual Knowledge," 249-304.

(including a man demonstrating a toy to a group of children, a conversation between a butcher and his customer, two Jews with long beards strolling and conversing, and a man watching the scene on the painting's left) inject narrative and humanize the subjects. Stieglitz's photograph, in contrast, seems to struggle consciously to eliminate such posed markers of narrative, but remains uncertain of what to add in their place.

With the human figures in the scene turned away from the camera, the most dynamic and commanding element in the photograph is the sign positioned centrally in the upper left of the image. The dark gaping space below the black billboard, a black maw that threatens to engulf the figures beneath it, further highlights the white words. The text "Five Points Clothing House / The Cheapest Place In the City / Give Me A Trial / Sol. Fineberg. Prop." seems to title the image it is deployed within.<sup>204</sup> Unique among Stieglitz's photographs for the attention it devotes to an advertisement, the sign throws the image into further conflict. What is the relation Stieglitz had found to America in this part of the city? Do we read the sign as calling the ghetto the cheapest in the city? Or as calling on us to give the unique neighborhood a trial? Did Stieglitz identify with Sol. Fineberg the Jewish merchant? Or does the image depict the assimilated German Jew mocking this newly imported Eastern European? It is important to note that the photograph and its questions came in the larger context of modernizing Manhattan, as many, including reforming photographer Jacob Riis, called for the razing of this crowded Five Points neighborhood.<sup>205</sup> In its obscurity Stieglitz's *Five Points* remains intriguing and complicated. Does it call for pluralism or assimilation, for artistic appreciation or social reform? It poses problems of relating to America through straight photography that Stieglitz and the critic Hartmann would continue attempting to solve.

Read beside *Five Points, New York (A New Importation), Winter-Fifth Avenue*, one of Stieglitz's most famous and canonical modern images, can be seen to have presented only one partial solution for the relation of Stieglitz and straight photography to America. It abstracted and eliminated the issues of immigration and poverty that disturbed the urban picturesque, transforming the city into a heroic almost

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<sup>204</sup> This use of text also operates in his picture of *The Dock* included in *The Key Set*. The upper left includes the word Dock.

<sup>205</sup> This plan was partially carried out with the conversion of Mulberry Bend into a park in 1897.

frontier setting. Yet, the questions posed in the slums of Five Points – of visualizing the role of this “new importation” – still lurk just outside the edges of *Winter–Fifth Avenue* and would return in Hartmann’s criticism. How could the inhabitants of America’s urban environment become picturesque subjects? Should the troublesome diversity of new urban population be celebrated, abstracted, or repressed? Should it simply be remade in the genre of European peasants or could American images escape tired conventions? Would a new method of photography be necessary? Along with his celebration of Stieglitz’s urban photography Hartmann began to offer other answers – an emerging ideal of unmanipulated straight photography that engaged with many boundaries, only some of which were aesthetic.

### *Writing Photographs of New York*

In his essay, “A Plea For the Picturesqueness of New York,” published in 1900 in *Camera Notes*, the journal of the New York Camera Club edited by Stieglitz, Hartmann argued explicitly that the city was the ideal subject for photography. He articulated challenges specific to photographers, who often had special difficulty realizing that art was best when it was “most clearly the outcome of the time of its production,” not when it made rehashed references to past classics in other media. Some recent scholarly attention has focused on these general calls for depicting the new speed and crowds of the city, but the nuances of Hartmann’s claim that the true goal of the photographer should be to “give art the complexion of our time” have been lost.<sup>206</sup> Focusing on the neighborhoods recalcitrant to modernization, Hartmann suggested it was in these areas where the old world crashed into the new where the modern photograph could produce the most striking unique understanding of people in the composite, plural nation and city.

In cataloging potential subjects for the artist across the city, Hartmann provided a clear notion of the desirable “complexion of our time.” He found scenes in the urban center from across the globe,

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<sup>206</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “Plea for the Picturesqueness of New York,” *Camera Notes* 4 (Oct. 1900): 91-97, citations to text anthologized in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre*, 56.

including: the waterfront's "confusion of square-rigged vessels;"<sup>207</sup> "Paddy's market on Ninth Avenue or the Bowery;"<sup>208</sup> the North and East rivers with "graceful four-masted East Indiamen that anchor in the bay;"<sup>209</sup> slums with almost Parisian qualities in "Jewtown," "the village (East Twenty-ninth Street), or Frog Hollow;"<sup>210</sup> and the Fulton fish market "at its best on a morning during Lent" when mobbed by Catholic immigrants from Italy and Ireland.<sup>211</sup> In a second article Hartmann advised photographers should take "journeys of exploration" with the artistic camera "into all the different foreign colonies of our metropolis," and called for opening "vistas" of alleys and for portrayals of the tenements on Roosevelt Street as "one of the most picturesque sites the city affords."<sup>212</sup> As Carrie Tirado Bramen and other authors have pointed out, the equation of picturesqueness and immigrant neighborhoods was a common trope in representations of the late nineteenth-century city that diverted anxiety over foreignness into the less threatening category of picturesqueness.<sup>213</sup> Hartmann occasionally acknowledged the limits of the picturesque in understanding these poor communities, but his calls for urban voyeurism can occasionally be jarring to today's reader.<sup>214</sup> Yet in locating these specific urban neighborhoods the realm within which straight photographs recognizable as art would finally be created, Hartmann implied that it was precisely in capturing the subjective uncertainty and anxiety over the "complexion" of twentieth-century America that the straight photograph would create art. Speaking from authority as a fixture in the emerging

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<sup>207</sup> Hartmann added details that made the boats particularly picturesque "with their rusty sides and the sun burnt faces peering from the deck," Hartmann, "A Plea for the Picturesqueness of New York," 56.

<sup>208</sup> An immigrant market in Hell's Kitchen of mostly Irish, Greek, and Italian merchants. *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> He emphasized the particular exoticism of the boats "laden with spices which recall even in these northern climes quaint Oriental legends, of indolent life under tropical suns," *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>210</sup> Although Hartmann offered many of the same subject captured by Riis, including this list of picturesque sites as photographs in a portfolio he claimed "would teach us better than any book 'how the other half lives.'" *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>212</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "Subject and Treatment," *Camera Notes* 5, no. 3 (January 1902): 177-187 citations to reprint in *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist*, ed. Jane Calhoun Weaver (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 133-134. His list in this article included the Italian, Romanian, and Armenian quarter, as well as Chinatown and again "above all else Jewtown, with its overcrowded sidewalks, peddlers and perambulating stores and cellar shops."

<sup>213</sup> Carrie Tirado Bramen, "The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of Americanization," *American Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2000): 444-477.

<sup>214</sup> Hartmann did write of the occasional sighting of "men, groaning under heavy burdens of unsewn (sic) garments," who disappeared into tenements. After pointing out these representatives of the "dark side of Jewtown," of problems unsolved by laws or philanthropy, Hartmann breezily turned back to an ironic mode of guide, "but we have no time to follow them to the qualmy rooms of the sweatshops, the pictures there are too dreary and we are only in search of the picturesque." Unlike many who wrote about New York's ethnic ghettos as picturesque sites for promenades, Hartmann acknowledged the gaping shortcomings of describing urban life only in such terms. Sidney Allan [pseudonym Sadakichi Hartmann], "Picturesque New York in Four Papers: The Esthetic Side of Jewtown," *Camera Notes*, no. 3 (October 1902): 147.

Greenwich Village bohemian scene, Hartmann provided a guide that pointed his *Camera Notes* audience of white, native-born, upper-class amateurs into diverse New York immigrant markets and residential areas to make images that were artistic, American and straight.<sup>215</sup>

Hartmann's new artistic method located the subject of photography in the immigrant neighborhoods of the city and called for a new visualization of that urban environment. Leaving the studio, Hartmann allowed, required a new method of working. The "snap-shots" that would be called for when exploring the metropolis threatened "the majority of artistic photographers ... still addicted to studio photography and long exposures." The critic suggested "another grateful field for the artistic photographer would be those parts of the city which at present are explored by the official camera of the Tenement House Commission."<sup>216</sup> Hartmann's offering of "artistic" photography in opposition to the "official camera" is provocative, suggesting (along with later mentions of the photographer Jacob Riis explicitly by name) that Hartman positioned his call for the artistic exploration of immigrant ghettos against the muckraking work done by reforming photographers. Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*, an 1890 exposé of tenement conditions that used photographs made on missions through the slums accompanied by bright flashes and the police, seems to epitomize Hartmann's definition of the "official" camera. A Danish immigrant, Riis cataloged the diversity of New York's Lower East Side, but rather than celebrating his list of resident foreign groups à la Hartmann, Riis deemed the plural community un-American, calling the population of New York tenements a "queer conglomerate mass of heterogeneous elements...the once unwelcome Irishman has been followed in his turn by the Italian, the Russian Jew, and the Chinaman."<sup>217</sup> In deploying the artistic as an alternative to the official Hartmann again presaged

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<sup>215</sup> Hartmann offered not only the strange component complexions of these neighborhoods, but also their mixture as a source of artistic subject matter, noting that each day thousands of New Yorkers streamed through the city "reflecting in their varied appearance all the classes of society, all the different professions, the lights and shadows of a large city, and the joys and sorrows of its inhabitants." Occasionally he seemed more ominously concerned about the consequences of America's political structure, lamenting there are "no historic edifices, scarcely even masterpieces of modern architecture lift their imposing structures in our almost alarmingly democratic land," Hartmann, "A Plea for the Picturesqueness of New York," 57-58.

<sup>216</sup> Hartmann, "Subject and Treatment," 133-34.

<sup>217</sup> Riis wrote for example, "one may find for the asking an Italian, a German, a French, African, Spanish, Bohemian, Russian, Scandinavian, Jewish, and Chinese colony. Even the Arab...The one thing you shall vainly ask for in the chief city of America is a distinctively American community." Chapter 3 (first paragraph) *How the Other Half Lives: studies among the tenements of New York* (New York : Penguin Books, 1997).

philosopher Horace Kallen, who would argue against Riis's pleas for the immigrant's assimilation in his 1915 "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," calling the photographer "more excessively and self-consciously American than the Americans."<sup>218</sup> Another investigative photographer Lewis Hine, whose representations of the city have been taken by recent scholars as foils for Stieglitz's, actually worked for the Tenement House Commission in the years following Hartmann's essay. Hartmann's separation of such "official" images with the artistic parallels the categories of Trachtenberg's influential comparison of Hine and Stieglitz as producers of "Social Work" and "Camera Work" discussed earlier in this chapter. However, Hartmann reverses Trachtenberg's valuation, offering artistic photography not as a way to "improve" immigrant neighborhoods, assimilating them to norms recognized by upper-class Americans, but as a superior method by which to reveal the unique contributions of newcomers to their adopted nation.

Three years after publishing his plea for photographing New York Hartmann expanded his treatment to focus on one immigrant group, writing "Picturesque New York in Four Papers: The Esthetic Side of Jewtown," his most in depth study of a foreign neighborhood, under his less obviously foreign (but possibly Semitic) pseudonym Sidney Allan.<sup>219</sup> "Allan" here began with a series of questions – "What a strange part of the city have we strayed to? Are we really in New York, at the beginning of the twentieth century, or have we suddenly been conveyed to some European town of the medieval times?" After dislocating the reader and the Jewish neighborhood in both time and space, Hartmann further suggested an overwhelming confusion at the sight of Hebrew letters and the sound of Yiddish. Calling the latter "the queer jargon of the street," the critic seems to have exaggerated its strangeness for effect, since as a native German speaker he likely understood much of the language. Writing from the perspective of a wealthy Christian for his audience at the Camera Club, Hartmann attempted to mimic its members' reaction:

To the Gentile, the aristocratic uptowner, this scene is like a nightmare. It reminds him involuntarily of some cheap dining-room of vast dimensions, which being open night and day is still warm and greasy from

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<sup>218</sup> Horace Kallen, "Democracy *versus* the Melting Pot," 350.

<sup>219</sup> The article was part of a four article series that ended prematurely with this single essay in *Camera Notes*' penultimate issue. It was written under Hartmann's pseudonym Sidney Allan, "Picturesque New York in Four Papers: The Esthetic Side of Jewtown," *Camera Notes* vol. 6, no. 3 (October 1903): 143-148.

the previous meal, its huge tablecloth in the form of paving stones covered with remnants and refuse. A restaurant, where the orders to clear away are never given, and where a broom and clean linen are unknown things.<sup>220</sup>

Likening the ghetto to a dirty restaurant, Hartmann suggested that visitors could master and consume the neighborhood with their photography, although he cautioned the meal might not agree. Crowded and strange the dense traffic of Jewtown, like its remnants and refuse, “threatens to reach the neighboring districts and inundate all New York.”<sup>221</sup> In Hartmann’s first paragraphs Jewtown assaults and subsumes the reader with unhygienic impenetrable sights and sounds (even imagined warm greasy tastes), threatening to spill over its borders and into the domain of his *Camera Notes* readers. What could possibly protect them? Their cameras!

With his initial description, Hartmann likely left his audience so overwhelmed the neighborhood must have seemed almost sublimely disgusting. Yet “straight” photography was available, precisely, to mediate and tame these overwhelming effects into a picture. Hartmann continued in the pages that followed to describe the neighborhood as “the most *picturesque* part of New York City, *i.e.*, the one which lends itself most easily to artistic interpretation.” Shifting from his graphic depictions of filthy confusion (due in part to substandard city services here), Hartmann celebrated the area’s “esthetic side,” potentially overlooked, he suggested, by those who only visited the streets where photographer Jacob Riis had previously concentrated, Baxter and Ludlow.<sup>222</sup> Artistic photography, unlike Riis’ “official” photography was not about provoking assimilating social change but about preserving variety photographically. The originator of the term “cultural pluralism,” Kallen (himself the son of an Orthodox rabbi), praised the Jews as “the most eagerly American of the immigrant groups [and] the most autonomous and self-conscious in spirit and culture.”<sup>223</sup>

New York’s Jewish neighborhood was specifically the perfect subject for the photographer, who, Hartmann forecasted, able to capture the “instantaneous fragments of life” would become “the first to

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<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>222</sup> Hartmann gives George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* and Israel Zangwill’s *Children of the Ghetto* as other unsatisfactory textual modes of exposure to the ghetto. *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>223</sup> Horace Kallen, ‘Democracy *versus* the Melting Pot,’ 365.

conquer this domain” by representing it in visual terms. Here, Hartmann wrote, “the settings for a picture are ready at every moment of the day. They surround you on all sides. You never need to wait for a composition. The crowd takes care of that. You only need to look into your finder and let the restless stream of humanity pass by.”<sup>224</sup> With wording that recalled Eastman’s slogan claiming the photographer need only push a button to make a picture, Hartmann identified the immigrant neighborhood as an unfailing natural subject for the artistic photographer.

Instead of the blurred focus or retouching that some painterly photographers relied on to create picturesque scenes with the camera, it was the persistent “dinginess and squalor” that allowed harmonious pictorial generalizations to emerge in the “straight” representation of the (possibly at first repulsive to experience) scene. The very filth and the frenzy of the neighborhood allowed the photographer to capture and abstract this urban reality with his exposures and “reveal the true character of the children of the Ghetto.”<sup>225</sup> “Filth,” Hartmann wrote, “is the great harmonizer in the pictorial arts, the wizard who can render every scene and object – even the humblest one – picturesque.” Crediting this rule to great artists such as Rembrandt, Hartmann made a rare reference to the way photography could take a cue from painting. His citation of the Dutch master had special relevance in the art world of early twentieth-century American art, where progressive critics had begun to celebrate Rembrandt as a Realist who rejected the academic grandeur of Greeks and Italians in favor of “the real types of poor Jews in the Ghetto, or Jew-quarter, of Amsterdam.”<sup>226</sup> Hartmann used Rembrandt to urge photographers into the streets of New York’s Jewish ghetto with their cameras, suggesting that in doing so the American photographer might surpass the master Dutch painter. Although he began his essay with a fearful depiction of the refuse-covered crowded streets, Hartmann argued that “straight” photography – simply looking through the finder to still and abstract the surrounding flow of humanity – was an ideal tool of cultural and aesthetic pluralism by which to grasp and celebrate the unique qualities of both the neighborhood’s inhabitants and

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<sup>224</sup> Hartmann, “Picturesque New York,” 146.

<sup>225</sup> Although there was a vibrant Jewish literature, Hartmann claimed there was no corresponding visual art. Hartmann discusses literature like Shaikevitch, Bernstein and Abraham Cohen. Artists in “the east side art leagues, with *localism* as their aim, consist of too young an element to have shown much more than enthusiasm.” *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>226</sup> Charles Caffin, *A Guide to Pictures for Beginners and Students* (Garden City, Doubleday, first edition 1908, citation to 1913 edition), 241.



the medium of photography itself.<sup>227</sup> How would “straight” photographers translate the lessons of Rembrandt?

### 2.3 Photographing “Man”: Käsebier and Stieglitz in the First Issue of *Camera Work*

By February of 1903, when “The Esthetic Side of Jewtown” was published, Stieglitz had already begun a new group to further photography’s acceptance as an art, the Photo-Secession. In the premier issue of the circle’s sumptuous publication *Camera Work* dated January 1903 (and actually released late in 1902), Stieglitz wrote that the journal was making “its appearance as the logical outcome of the evolution of the photographic art” to spread and support “faith in photography as a medium of individual expression” with “the sole purpose of furthering the ‘Cause’ of pictorial photography.”<sup>228</sup> No longer beholden to the Camera Club’s members who often resisted his exacting standards for photographers and authors, Stieglitz positioned his new journal, with a focus on “modern photography” and a strict admission policy, as a radically new independent voice.<sup>229</sup> Yet, ironically, this first issue of *Camera Work* was by Hartmann’s standard regressive.

#### *The Red Man*

As Hartmann celebrated Stieglitz for his unique vision of the city, he chastised pictorialist photographer Gertrude Käsebier in a 1900 article in *The Photographic Times* for her failure to consider the urban subjects or sites that surrounded her. He lamented “nothing that is going on around her in this

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<sup>227</sup> He observed stereotyped picturesque characters in his essay—the old men, who look like chapters in the bible; the old women, who resemble witches; the young, who “are very beautiful beneath their coating of filth”; and the children, who “overflow the streets and make a crowd wherever there is an empty spot.” Jewtown provided opportunities for spotting people unavailable elsewhere, including “five types found nowhere on American ground save in the Ghetto”—the candle woman, the installment peddler, the Thora teacher, the Schatchen and the Chasen (i.e., prayer leader). In addition to these picturesque generalizations analyzing the appearances of these strange inhabitants would also allow the observant viewer to better understand the community in which they photographed to “learn to differentiate between the orthodox Jews ... and the young bucks of Jewtown” through cues of dress and habit. *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>228</sup> Editors, “An Apology,” *Camera Work* 1 (Jan. 1903): 16-15 reprinted in *Stieglitz on Photography*, 151-152.

<sup>229</sup> The introduction cautioned readers that only three reasons would guarantee publication “evidence of individuality and artistic worth,” or “technical merit” or “some treatment worthy of consideration.” The journal would be “devoted to the furtherance of modern photography.” Alfred Stieglitz, “*Camera Work* Prospectus,” 1902, citations to text anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, 149.

great city seems to interest and excite her.”<sup>230</sup> Instead, she worked in her studio avoiding the most basic methodology of Hartmann’s nascent definition of the “straight” photographic medium – a work’s genesis in observation of a scene and the unposed figures within it. In vigorously decrying Käsebier for her confusion of media, Hartmann departed from Stieglitz who celebrated her background as a painter, hoping that use of photography by artists in canonical media would lead to the medium’s acceptance as art.<sup>231</sup> Because she was able to control all the elements in her studio, Hartmann accused Käsebier of using this space to indiscriminately mimic the compositions of a wide variety of past painters. From her manipulations of the sitter’s pose through her alterations of the negative during development and printing, he wrote, her work was not directly related to observation of the subject or even to her own intrinsic vision, but cycled through the work of previous artists seemingly at random.<sup>232</sup> Her “almost obtrusive” and “superficial” originality lacked a synthetic unity of its own, marking her work as deficient because it could be “analyzed, and traced to various origins.”<sup>233</sup> Hartmann derided Käsebier’s photographs because they were neither specifically American nor photographic; she aped a variety of painting’s precedents in both subject and method, exhibiting a nostalgia for the painter’s studio of the past while ignoring the diverse, unique pictorial possibilities of the urban present.

Elizabeth Hutchinson has convincingly argued in her study of Käsebier in relation to “the gendering of the artist’s studio” that Hartmann disapproved of the photographer’s practice because he failed to acknowledge her studio as a site for “remaking” the outside world rather than simply rejecting it.

<sup>230</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “Gertrude Käsebier: A Sense of the Pictorial” *The Photographic Times* (May 1900): 198-99.

<sup>231</sup> The Käsebier and Hartmann feud also transcended national boundaries. Enest Juhl added a footnote defending her when Hartmann called her a second-rate photographer in an essay published in Germany. Sadakichi Hartmann “Ueber die Amerikanische Kunstphotographie,” *Photographische Rundschau* 14, (May 1900): 93 as pointed out in Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 66. Stieglitz and Hartmann also differed over the work of members of the photo-Secession Eduard Steichen and Joseph Keiley. Hartmann started trouble with a review of Joseph Keiley’s exhibition “Through Semi-Japanese Eyes” *Camera Notes* 4 (July 1900): 46-7. He even attempted to continue the feud in an English journal, claiming “my articles, ‘What is Legitimate,’ and ‘J.T. Keiley, a Japanese Photographer,’ in which I brandished him as a freak, were refused by the editors of the ‘Camera Notes’ and ‘Photographic Times. They all saw something in Keiley which I failed to see.” Sadakichi Hartmann, “American Photography at Russell Square,” *The British Journal of Photography* 67, no. 2117 (3 November 1900): 76-77.

<sup>232</sup> Although Hartmann allowed she might not be “a plagiarizer” purposefully, “the old master and other phrases and formula of art are so deeply ingrained in her whole system that she [could] not help herself” and invariably fell to using painterly compositions and techniques. “If I go to her studio to-day, she may make a Holbein or me, to-morrow it would be a Rembrandt, or a Mary Cassatt.” Hartmann, “Gertrude Käsebier: A Sense of the Pictorial,” 196.

<sup>233</sup> Her work was influenced by “certain movement in modern art” that he also deemed faulty and derivative, led by American painters “H.W. Ranger, A.B. Davies, and Pamela Smith, etc., all of whom are remarkably clever, but lack concentration. They feed upon the past and are influenced by every suggestion they receive within the limited sphere of their environment.” *Ibid.*, 195.

Hutchinson asserts quite correctly, I think, that this refusal to celebrate the studio as an “exciting exploration of femininity” can be seen as misogynist or as anti-commercial. Yet, further examining Hartmann’s arguments against Käsebier’s portraits also suggests that his objection to her use of the studio was part of a more expansive debate over the definition of “straight” photography’s medium specific qualities. As I have argued, in comparing her work to “address[ing] a fellow countryman in some foreign tongue,” Hartmann chose an analogy particularly relevant to the diversity of the turn-of-the-century New York environment that he was encouraging Käsebier to explore.<sup>234</sup> Transforming his own position as a multi-lingual multi-national urban dweller into an analogy for “straight” photography, Hartmann positioned this figure of the immigrant as crucial component, not only to the emerging rhetoric of “straight” photography, but also in defining the subject and method of the medium’s own native language.

Hartmann clarified his objections to Käsebier and her studio photography further in his 1902 article “Subject and Treatment.” The essay was a diatribe against those content to “tolerate” photographs that were merely “pretty in a trivial sense” because “modern taste holds that a good etching, a tasteful lithograph, or even a Käsebier print, is to be preferred to the ordinary ‘Society’ watercolor, or the average ‘Academy’ oil.”<sup>235</sup> All works in the reproducible media of etching, lithography and photography, Hartmann argued, were not essentially more “modern” than oil paintings, and “modern taste” must thoroughly shun any artist who forsook her modern medium’s specific properties by emulating the “pretty” subjects and techniques of outdated painting genres. After personally attacking Käsebier, Hartmann critiqued her old master inspired choice of subjects and counseled condescendingly that the photographer must select differently than the painter (whose brushstrokes could add interest to boring compositions).<sup>236</sup> He argued the best subjects for the photographer were those “to which spontaneity of expression would do fullest justice,” urging that “there the work of the lens would stand unrivaled if its

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<sup>234</sup> “The artist who has anything worth saying must say it in an original manner—that is, unlike anyone else; for if in the course of his expression he should allow himself to employ methods that are not original with him, but merely adopted and adapted, it will mean what he had to say was really not worth the trouble saying.” *Ibid.*, 198-99.

<sup>235</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “Subject and Treatment,” *Camera Notes* 5, no. 3 (January 1902): 177-187 citations to reprint in *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist*, ed. Jane Calhoun Weaver (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 129.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 131. In contrast to studio portraits like Käsebier’s, Hartmann complemented a photographer, Miss Mathilde Weil of Philadelphia, who goes to the homes of her subjects to create portraits. *Ibid.*, 135.

manipulators could forget all the laws of composition and merely try for the vastness and vitality of the scene.” It was not any lack in the city or in nature, “but an intense tediousness in the seer” that, Hartmann wrote, encouraged the “commonplace realism” of photographers such as Käsebier who preferred “their lurid, stifling studio atmosphere to the urban environment outdoors.”<sup>237</sup>

The inaugural issue’s focus on Käsebier almost perversely revived the debates over her work that had been staged in *Camera Notes* three years earlier when Stieglitz had pitted laudatory articles by art educator Arthur Wesley Dow and amateur photographer Joseph T. Keiley against negative criticism by Hartmann.<sup>238</sup> The first issue of *Camera Work* in contrast contained only celebratory articles, sidelining Hartmann’s critical voice to focus instead on building an expansive, inclusive and ambiguous notion of “straight” photography.<sup>239</sup> With an initially less rigorous definition than Hartmann, Stieglitz wrote Käsebier’s works had been “produced from the original negatives, which, by the way, are absolutely straight photography, being in no way faked, doctored or retouched.” In this description of “straight” (using the phrase “by the way” as if to introduce the troublesome issue casually) Stieglitz focused

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<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>238</sup> *Camera Notes*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1899.

<sup>239</sup> Käsebier was introduced in this issue of *Camera Work* by critic Charles Caffin, and by her friend, female photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston. Both authors praised her as a successful artist and commercial photographer. Dispute occurred only outside the pages when Eduard Steichen, to whose work Stieglitz planned to devote the second issue of *Camera Work*, challenged the inaugural choice of Käsebier because given her commercial success he felt she did not need the exposure as much as he did. Stieglitz stood by his initial decision, reportedly justifying it with the maxim “ladies first.” According to a story in her family, Käsebier overheard a conversation between Steichen and Stieglitz who took her to be too deaf to hear them on a train. Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 88. This is supported by Mina Turner’s “Material from Col. E. J. Steichen,” included in Gertrude Käsebier papers, UD and a letter from Steichen to Stieglitz, nd. (c. 1902) YCAL.

Stieglitz did publish an article by Hartmann in the first issue of *Camera Work*, but selected an essay on Japanese art written during a period in which the critic (generally reliable for pithy insult) would later claim he had intentionally continued his disruptive argument for “straight” photography in a concessionary “round about way.” Although it was not meant or framed as a rethinking of photography, Stieglitz may have chosen the essay “Repetition, with Slight Variation” because, when read literally as a condemnation of the Western search for originality, it could be construed as an apology for Hartmann’s previous attacks on Käsebier’s failure to generate new formulas or treat modern subjects Sadakichi Hartmann [Sidney Allan], “Repetition, with Slight Variation,” *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903): 30. Hartmann made the claim that during this period he was “continued to write on art topics—that have but little to do with photography—simply for old association’s sake.” in Alexander S. Horr, “Sadakichi Hartmann as a Photographic Writer,” *Photo-Beacon* 16, 10 (October, 1904): 309.

Even the contentious argument on the boundary between a “faked” print and a “straight” photograph was reframed as a humorously impossible opposition by both Steichen and Otto Beck, a professor lecturing on composition at Pratt. The two suggested alternatives to the term “faked” whose poor connotations made unavoidable photographic manipulation appear unseemly. Steichen articulated a sarcastic wish for a machine which will roll along, chose a subject, and frame it “compose its motif, expose the plate, develop, print, and even mount and frame the result of its excursion” leaving the photographer only to submit the print to competition and reap the awards. Eduard Steichen, “Ye Fakers,” *Camera Work* 1, 48. Beck wrote “in time ‘good straight photography; will be but the preliminary step to be followed up by ‘treatment,’ possible only by the hand of the art-trained man.” The question was important because photography could prove the most useful method by which to “mold the taste of the masses” because photography coincides with their “scientific mental attitude.” Otto Beck, “Composition in Photography,” *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903): 49.

exclusively on the photographic negative and ignored Hartmann's criticism of Käsebier's subject and method, which included manipulation of her sitters in her "stifling" studio. Although Stieglitz's rhetoric claimed Käsebier's work as "straight" like his own, her photographs also presented an excellent foil for his recent experiments. Comparing her photograph *The Red Man* (fig. 2.10) with his *The Hand of Man* (fig. 2.11) demonstrates the radically different conceptions existing within the Photo-Secession about how the image of "Man" should be captured photographically.<sup>240</sup> Käsebier's staged portraits of her frontier childhood memories in the studio were dramatically different from Stieglitz's renderings of the urban commonplace. Both produced in 1902, these contemporaneous images presented two eventually irreconcilable ideas of what "straight" photography should achieve as a medium and Stieglitz's juxtaposition of them suggests with hindsight that Hartmann's criticisms and calls for medium specificity lurked just below the surface – a brewing issue that would become the divisive disagreement within the Photo-Secession.

In describing Käsebier's prints, Stieglitz suggested the specific audience most in need of their lessons, arguing "the scoffer at modern pictorial photography may find food for reflection in these examples of 'straight' work." *Camera Work* also included one of Käsebier's famous gum prints (fig. 2.12), but Stieglitz excused its texture for falling far short of the original. The group of Käsebier's "straight" photographs was given the journal's most prominent location filling *Camera Work*'s opening pages.<sup>241</sup> In publishing both a manipulated gum print and "straight" prints Stieglitz encouraged readers to understand the pictorial photographic scene as diverse, but by privileging the latter he made a strong and controversial argument that artistry was possible in a photograph unretouched by the subjective human hand. Käsebier biographer Barbara Michaels has pointed out the diversity even within these photographs identified as "straight," noting that the first four images of the series, portraits and scenes of white femininity (fig. 2.13, 2.14, 2.15, 2.16), were printed on fragile white Japanese tissue while the final

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<sup>240</sup> This pictorial juxtaposition was the only site for argument. Considering Alan Sekula's argument that "*Camera Work* treated the photograph as a central object of the discourse while inventing, more thoroughly than any other source, the myth of the semantic autonomy of the photographic image," it is perhaps less surprising that debates invisible in the text unfolded in images. Alan Sekula. "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning." *Artforum* v. 13 (January 1975) 39.

<sup>241</sup> The gum print, in contrast, appeared alone on page 24 inserted among text.

portrait of Native American masculinity was placed apart from the group by a blank page and reproduced on a heavy tan paper (fig. 2.10).<sup>242</sup> Set off alone the dark closely cropped portrait, *The Red Man*, departed in content, appearance, and even material from the others.<sup>243</sup> Michaels calls these paper choices “compatible” with their subjects, but they can also be read as a mechanism for maintaining a visual separation between the white women and *The Red Man*.<sup>244</sup>

Käsebier had published some Native American portraits predating *The Red Man* as a group in a 1901 feature for the popular *Everybody's Magazine* that included a lengthy essay situating the photographs. The article explained the portraits had been prompted by a “Wild West” parade” passing under Käsebier’s New York studio window, which stimulated images of her childhood among “the bands of roving red men, still free to come and go at will, with never a thought of ‘reservations.’”<sup>245</sup> Käsebier, however, did not rush down the stairs to capture the parade, whose “spontaneity of expression” Hartmann might have celebrated. Instead she remained in her studio where this glimpse of the procession was quickly cut off by the “inexorable brick walls” of the city. Her childhood memories of “when nature was on every side” impelled her to quickly write Buffalo Bill Cody to ask if “some of his Sioux braves might be allowed to pay a call on an old friend of their tribe.”<sup>246</sup> Although *Everybody's* article at first suggested Käsebier took the opportunity of this visit to document a “new phase of the Sioux,” the anonymous author quickly turned to stereotypes of the Native Americans’ “naïveté and cunning simplicity,” even quoting Käsebier’s own nostalgic desire “to see a real *raw* Indian for a change...the kind I used to see when I was

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<sup>242</sup> Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 81.

<sup>243</sup> Elizabeth Hutchinson has argued, I think correctly, that this image was more avant-garde because of its close framing which blocked shots of the studio. Elizabeth Hutchinson, “When the ‘Sioux chief’s party calls’: Käsebier’s Indian Portraits and the Gendering of the Artist’s Studio,” *American Art* 16, no. 2, (2002): 40-65.

<sup>244</sup> Although in 1902 most Americans, from Native American activists to U.S. federal policy makers, saw “the future of the Red Man” in mixture with the white world, Käsebier showed *The Red Man* set apart. The federal Dawes Act of 1887, for example, aimed specifically at integration, providing Native Americans with citizenship provided they abandoned the reservation model and take personal allotments. In that year Pokagon Simon (1830-1899) Chief of the Potawatomis of southwestern Michigan unenthusiastically allowed integration appeared the only remaining option “The Future of the Red Man,” *Forum*, August 1897. “I am frequently asked, ‘Pokagon, do you believe that the white man and the red man were originally of one blood?’ My reply has been: ‘I do not know. But from the present outlook, they surely will be. The index finger of the past and present is pointing to the future, showing most conclusively that by the middle of the next century all Indian reservations and tribal relations will have passed away. Then our people will begin to scatter; and the result will be a general mixing up of the races. Through intermarriage the blood of our people, like the waters that flow into the great ocean, will be forever lost in the dominant race; and generations yet unborn will read in history of the red men of the forest, and inquire, ‘Where are they?’”

<sup>245</sup> As the first reservation was created by the 1851 Indian Appropriations Act, Käsebier seems to be referencing her childhood through a veil of nostalgia.

<sup>246</sup> Anon., “Some Indian Portraits,” *Everybody's Magazine* 4, no. 17 (Jan, 1901): 3-4.

a child."<sup>247</sup> The essay concluded by urging other artists to look for "material" not in the modern lives of Native American performers, but in what were considered the "fast-vanishing life and customs of Western tribes."<sup>248</sup> Käsebier's photographs displaying the rare "raw Indian" of her youth were positioned as portraits of members of a dying race she remembered from her childhood, the complications of their subject's status as performers imported to the modern city of New York by a showman ignored.<sup>249</sup>

Many of Buffalo Bill's performers came to Käsebier's studio to be photographed, but her granddaughter recalled, "they never wholly relaxed when the camera was there," apprehensive due to their "superstitious fear" that "the soul left the body and was transferred to the picture" during the making of a photograph.<sup>250</sup> This discomfort made it difficult for Käsebier to capture the Native American personality as well as she could capture those White subjects she regarded as more rational, and of her many Native American portraits she wrote that *The Red Man* was most successful. In it, after many uninspiring visits by the performers, "finally, one of them, petulant, raised his blanket around his shoulders and stood before the camera. I snapped and had it."<sup>251</sup> The formal qualities of the resulting image, the close cropping, tight focus, and even the white stripe of the blanket that continues down the subject's forehead and nose bisecting the picture plane, seem to mark this image as an archetypical

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<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 and 7.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>249</sup> This interweaving of performance and reality, nostalgia and current events was a large part of the appeal of the popular touring Wild West Show itself. An article publicizing the 1901 tour in New York guaranteed the authenticity of the show by asserting the Indian performers shared their race's historical characteristics of "fierce visage, vindictive, untamable humanity," but that these were "repressed" on- and off-stage by Buffalo Bill. Many parts of the show were said to be planned by the Native American performers and in historical reenactments Cody's publicity man claimed, they "never seem to mind being on the losing side every time. In the siege of Tien-Tsin, Indians take the part of the Chinese. They, of course, are beaten back, and are the unpopular ones, but they enjoy it. In this they differ from the Mexicans, who took the part of the Spaniards in the charge on San Juan Hill. The crowds used to hiss the 'Spaniards,' and the men from beyond the Rio Grande didn't relish this at all." *New York Times* April 21, 1901. Although recent historians have revealed publicity men for the Wild West Show often obscured the complex negotiations taking place behind the scenes, in Buffalo Bill's performance the "Indian problem" appeared solved—the Native American of his show reenacted their active "repression" becoming the docile signifier of otherness. For further accounts see, Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill" in *Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7-65.

<sup>250</sup> Gertrude Käsebier Papers, UD, folder 8.

<sup>251</sup> Walter Chambers, "Called the Greatest Woman Photographer, Gertrude Käsebier Is Now Cripple," *New York Telegram* (Jan. 25, 1930): 2 from the *New York Sun* morgue file on Käsebier at the New York Public Library Annex as cited in Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 30, "Artists Receives Indians" *New York Times*, April 14, 1901. Her granddaughter recorded another account of the taking of *The Red Man*, during which Käsebier waited until the "curious" but frightened Indian "partially dropped his blanket from his face—then she took the picture which shows so well the character of the Indian." Gertrude Käsebier Papers, UD, folder 8.

modernist “straight” photograph. Käsebier’s story also seems to position the photograph as a candid snapshot. But, although she used the same rhetoric of training and patience that Stieglitz’s had employed in his narrative of *Winter–Fifth Avenue*, Hartmann identified her work as fundamentally opposed to the true mission of photography due to its method’s reliance on the studio as a site where she controlled the depiction of her subject. Käsebier’s granddaughter inadvertently articulated the effects of this manipulation, recollecting *The Red Man* as an index of stereotypical characteristics of the Native American race; “The secretiveness of the wrapped blanket, the cunning of the eyes, the cruelty of the mouth, the strength of the bone structure, and the love of ornament caught by the highlight on the earring.”<sup>252</sup> The earring, the blanket’s function as a sort of shawl, and the superstitious fear that motivated the image also served to make *The Red Man* appear feminized, the “cunning” eyes captured by the camera rendered docile by both Buffalo Bill and Käsebier’s studio portraiture.<sup>253</sup>

Hartmann, concerned with direct observation, scarcely approved of the way Käsebier used the modern invention of the camera to control her subject and to regress in time, allowing her to eliminate the urban landscape’s “inexorable brick walls” and capture her nostalgic fantasy of childhood playtime on the frontier. In his previously discussed essay “Subject and Treatment,” for example, Hartmann counseled photographers to take to the city even for their portraits of Native Americans, pointing out that among the many “foreign colonies” of New York was a “small Indian settlement at West Broadway” with residents including “Sioux and Iroquois chieftains in war dress, and their bead-embroidering squaws.”<sup>254</sup> In this essay Hartmann also explicitly identified these Native Americans as performing subjects to be retained “at studio prices for fifty cents per hour.” Rather than utilizing such direct street observation celebrated by Hartmann that might have depicted the Native Americans’ place in a pluralistic vision of the city, or even addressing the financial enticements offered by studio photographers, Käsebier credited her childhood memories and her “psychic powers” for the connection she perceived with Native Americans. As an

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<sup>252</sup> Gertrude Käsebier Papers, UD, folder 8.

<sup>253</sup> Hutchinson points out *The Red Man* was much more successful than the other Native American portraits at gaining acceptance as artistic because it eliminated any evidence of the studio. Hutchinson, “When the ‘Sioux chief’s party calls’: Käsebier’s Indian Portraits and the Gendering of the Artist’s Studio,” *American Art*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 61.

<sup>254</sup> Hartmann, “Subject and Treatment,” 134.



example of this power, Käsebier claimed that when Zitkala-Sa, a young female Sioux activist training in Boston as a violinist, came to her to be photographed, she entered a visionary trance and, explaining what she had seen reduced her subject to tears. Zitkala-Sa told the photographer she had just described her home and Indian chief father, prompting the young violinist to spontaneously decide she was leaving Boston and “going back to her people.”<sup>255</sup> Although Käsebier in her own narrative lamented, “I’ve ruined her career. Isn’t that terrible,” her photographic vision of Native Americans encouraged such retreats from the modern.<sup>256</sup>

### *The Hand of Man*

Stieglitz’s own photograph *The Hand of Man* also published in the inaugural issue of *Camera Work* presented a quite different notion of “straight” photography. Unlike Käsebier’s vision of authentic humanity stymied by the metropolis, Stieglitz found his image of Man in a New York train yard. He described the photograph in the journal as “an attempt to treat pictorially a subject which enters so much into our daily lives that we are apt to lose sight of the pictorial possibilities of the commonplace.”<sup>257</sup> Its compositional structure shares much with Stieglitz’s own earlier photograph *Winter–Fifth Avenue*. Yet, although both images capture an approaching vehicle with tracks that reach out of the frame toward the viewer, Stieglitz’s brief note on the verso of the railroad image – “original negative 4x5 made from back of train / Long Island City 1902” – sheds new light on this much discussed picture and helps explain his method and what prompted him to call this new photograph a “milestone.”<sup>258</sup> With its symbolic, even biblical title, *The Hand of Man* has been read both as a celebration of progress and a condemnation of the increasingly industrialized landscape of human life.<sup>259</sup> Close examination of the representation and the

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<sup>255</sup> Gertrude Käsebier Papers, DEL, folder 27.

<sup>256</sup> Although as Michaels points out, Käsebier’s politics on gender are quite liberal. Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 82.

<sup>257</sup> Editors, “The Pictures in this Number,” *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903): 63. Sarah Greenough credits this text to Stieglitz in her authoritative bibliography in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000): 256-268.

<sup>258</sup> The inscription is on the photograph in the Key Set of photographs left to the National Gallery. Sarah Greenough hypothesizes the photograph was taken as the train was pulling into the freight yard. Greenough, *The Key Set*, 165.

<sup>259</sup> Steichen for example called the photograph “a sinister image that was very impressive.” Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, (Published in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963) unpaginated.

narrative of its making reveals not only a depiction of humanity's impact on nature, but also a visualization of "straight" photography's entrance into the art world – the black locomotive barreling out of a darkened foreground.

Like *Winter–Fifth Avenue*, *The Hand of Man* can be situated within the pictorial history of the expanding American West. The dark plume of smoke bisecting the image recalls an earlier trope in American painting, exemplified by George Inness's *Lackawanna Valley* (fig. 2.17) that used railroads to show the gap between the edenic pastoral past and the industrialized future.<sup>260</sup> However, Stieglitz's image departed from this tradition by depicting only the urban present, marked by crisscrossing electrical lines and buildings encroaching from either side. The subject of Stieglitz's photograph, not an expansive landscape but a rail yard in Long Island City, further emphasized "straight" photography's break from such canonical painted images.<sup>261</sup> In addition to its divergence from this nineteenth-century painting, I would also point out that among Stieglitz's affluent artistic peers Long Island City was best known as the West End terminal where passengers arriving by ferry from Manhattan boarded the trains to artistic colonies on the opposite end of the island.<sup>262</sup> The Long Island City train terminal was considered the beginning of an aesthete's vacation from the city, not a destination. Unlike other artists vacationing on Long Island, including fellow pictorial photographer Steichen who just a few years later would create famous atmospheric landscapes on the island's eastern end (fig. 2.18), in *The Hand of Man* Stieglitz did not wait for a scene traditionally considered pictorial, but used "straight" photography to explore the new expanded possibilities offered by common experiences in urban modern life. *The Hand of Man* followed Hartmann's calls for the picturesqueness of New York. Instead of the blur of snow that rendered the city pictorial in *Winter–Fifth Avenue*, Stieglitz here used the dirt, filth, and locomotive's black smoke to

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While Wolfgang Kemp considers the work a positive representation, writing "a locomotive energetically spewing black smoke as it moves toward the spectator – an image intended to express the power of progress." Wolfgang Kemp, trans Joyce Rheuban "Image of Decay: Photography in the Picturesque Tradition," *October*, vol. 54, Autumn 1990): 119.

<sup>260</sup> For more information on American depictions of trains from 1850-1950 see Susan Danly and Leo Marx ed., *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change* (Cambridge, MA: 1988).

<sup>261</sup> Long Island City was, at the time, the largely industrial home to a community of German immigrants, as well as the factories that were run by them such as the Steinway and Sohmer Piano Factories.

<sup>262</sup> Such destinations included William Merritt Chase's Shinnecock art school founded in Southampton in 1891, for more information see Ronald Pisano, *Long Island Landscape Painting: 1820-1920* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985).

eliminate “pictorial discord” just as Hartmann had advised. The scene of the metropolis in Stieglitz’s image, however, gave up on human subjects entirely, eliminating them to an even greater extent than had *Winter–Fifth Avenue* in order to introduce a new solution to the challenge of artistically photographing of the American city.<sup>263</sup>

Stieglitz discussed *The Hand of Man* briefly in a tutorial he wrote on photographic composition, advising photographers interested in producing such powerful images to “guard your originality as the one precious possession which may save you from turning out machine-made work.”<sup>264</sup> Stieglitz’s deployment of this common attack on “straight” photography as “machine-made” in the context of *The Hand of Man* is instructive, for it was in embracing and remaking the train yard’s mechanical landscape, by using the moving train itself as a site from which to photograph, that Stieglitz negotiated the terms of his “mechanical art.” In taking his photograph from the back of a moving train, Stieglitz eliminated much of the method celebrated in *Winter–Fifth Avenue*. In fact, this method of composition seems to emphasize the elimination of as much of Stieglitz’s own subjective hand as possible. Aligned entirely with the speed of modern New York, Stieglitz could not wait hours for the perfect shot to align, but was carried along a fixed railroad track. A photographic portrait of a rail yard shot from the back of a train, *The Hand of Man* implied that an understanding of the overwhelming and expanding mechanized urban landscape could be attained by using another mechanical production – the “straight” photograph – to still and transform it.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> By conspicuously eliminating the human body, Stieglitz’s image foregoes Hartmann’s conviction that “straight” photography could capture the spirit of new types of urban inhabitants as well as their industrial landscape. However, in the case of Long Island City, the expanding railway heralded by Stieglitz’s image was intended to transform the largely industrial center of the Queens borough (incorporated into New York City only in 1898) into a destination for Manhattan workers fleeing the problems of the tenement house – or so a 1903 study of the New York housing problem suggested. When the rail tunnel begun in 1902, the same year *The Hand of Man* was created, replaced the undependable ferry across the East River “very cheap lands in Queens” would be within commuting distance of Manhattan. This would help to alleviate part of the tenement house problem, an issue that was considered “intimately tied to immigration,” by allowing some better-paid workers to flee dense Manhattan for small houses in the suburbs. Thus, photographed in Long Island City just plans for this new commuter tunnel began circulating, Stieglitz’s image can be seen to forecast the coming of immigrants and the spread of the city. DeForest, Robert W. and Lawrence Veiller, ed., *The Tenement House Problem*, vol. 1, (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1903) 336. “The subject of immigration is intimately connected with the tenement house problem in this city.” *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>264</sup> Stieglitz also urged them to avoid books on composition (such as implicitly the one by Kodak they were reading). Alfred Stieglitz, from *The Modern Way of Picture Making*. Rochester, New York: Eastman Kodak Co., 1905, citations to text anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, 187-88.

<sup>265</sup> Hartmann used the photograph as an example of archetypical straightness but acknowledged Stieglitz had darkened the rails, but “only where it is indicated by the negative and not willfully wherever it happens to look well.” Sadakichi Hartmann “A Pler for Straight Photography,” *American Amateur Photographer* 3 (1904): 101-108, citations to text anthologized in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre*, ed. Harry Lawton and George Knox, 111.

Scholars have argued over whether Käsebier's Indian portraits are empathetic or patronizing and racist, but comparing Käsebier's *The Red Man* to Stieglitz's *The Hand of Man* suggests Käsebier's fault in the eyes of prescient avant-gardists (like Hartmann) lay in the way she used her studio to avoid the city's "inexorable brick walls" and its challenges. While Käsebier remade modern performers into her own nostalgic frontier characters, Stieglitz discovered the urban "pictorial possibilities of the common place" only by avoiding the human subjects that had proven so difficult in *Five Points*.<sup>266</sup> How could Hartmann's pleas for depicting the "complexion of our time" be heard?

#### 2.4 "Artistic, but Only In Legitimate Ways"

Whereas Stieglitz attempted to use a permissive interpretation of "straight" photography in the first issue of *Camera Work* to join photographers in his new movement, Hartmann's definition was a prelude to separation. In 1904, Hartmann wrote his often-anthologized manifesto, "A Plea for Straight Photography," the first explicit theorization of the term "straight" photography. It was exactly at this moment that his relationship with the Photo-Secession became increasingly antagonistic. In the essay Hartmann interrogated a recent exhibition that had included Käsebier's work, writing of the pictorialist photographers, "Are those people not doing injustice to a beautiful method of graphic expression, and at times debasing the powers which sixty years of photographic research and progress have established?"<sup>267</sup> He compared photography to etching; a medium that although generally used to imitate other arts had its own particular qualities of sketchy linearity. Legitimate "straight" photography, Hartmann argued, likewise could be a "great expressional instrument for a straightforward depiction of the pictorial beauties of life and nature, and to abandon its superiorities in order to aim at the technical qualities of other arts is

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<sup>266</sup> Her granddaughter's explanation seems poised to defend Käsebier, arguing the photographer "was interested in them as interesting people – not as freaks or wild men." *Ibid.*, folder 8. In addition to Michaels and Hutchinson other scholars who have written about the portraits include: Deborah Jane Marshall, "The Indian Portraits," *A Pictorial Heritage: The Photography of Gertrude Käsebier*, ed. William Innes Homer (Newark: University of Delaware, 1979), 31-32; Judith Fryer Davidov, *Woman's Camera Work: Self/Body/Other in American Visual Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 96-101; Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 203-11; Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 177-208.

<sup>267</sup> Hartmann "A Plea for Straight Photography," 109-10.

unwise because the loss is surely greater than the gain.”<sup>268</sup> By avoiding methods used by photographers often regarded as “artistic,” such as painting in backgrounds, excessively retouching, or drawing on the negative, Hartmann pleaded for creations that would actually be “*more artistic*, but only in legitimate ways.” Photography would gain its welcome into the pantheon of fine arts by making a distinct contribution of its own, by utilizing only the “straight” technical qualities and subjects unique to its medium.<sup>269</sup>

This article formed a catalyst for Hartmann’s spectacular break with the Photo-Secession in late 1904. He wrote letters and published articles explaining why he was completely fed up with Stieglitz. He exiled himself from the group, returning only in 1908, as we shall see, after the feud over “straight” photography had been resolved in his favor.<sup>270</sup> In the intervening years Hartmann continued his crusade for photography and American art on a lecture tour across the U.S.<sup>271</sup> As other influential members of the Stieglitz circle, such as Edward Steichen, went to study and work abroad, Hartmann championed close observation of local subjects and preached that American artists had no need to go to Europe. Focused on calling for the particular, specific virtues of both the medium of photography and American art, Hartmann became the clear winner over Käsebier in the contest over the definition of “straight” photography in terms of subject, method, and rhetoric. The exile became a prophet, as it turned out.

Käsebier’s relations with the Stieglitz circle had chilled permanently in 1907 as part of a renewed split over the course of photography (which after Hartmann’s departure followed his earlier criticism more closely than ever). As before the split widened between those who believed in strictly “straight”

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<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-11.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>270</sup> Hartmann wrote Stieglitz in August of 1904, “You may want to know why I have wheeled over to the other side. The following statement will throw some light upon the question. Money had nothing to do with it. I simply got tired of your dictatorship (sic). For years you imposed upon me, and as I never resented it, your attitude towards me grew worse from year to year, until I could not stand it any longer.” He then provided a list of bulleted points that included seven social and financial slights. Hartmann to Stieglitz, YCAL. Joseph Keiley amateur photographer, editor of *Camera Work*, and close friend of Stieglitz, took perhaps the dimmest view of Hartmann. Perhaps the “King of Bohemia” offended him. As a professional Wall Street lawyer Keiley was often personally offended by Hartmann, whom he called “an ingrate, blackguard and cowardly cur.” Keiley to Stieglitz, August 11-12, 1904, YALE.

<sup>271</sup> An article about his tour reads “No need of Going Abroad... ‘Let Wisconsin artists paint Wisconsin.’” clipping from Hartmann, *Revelations: Tome 1*, UCR. Handwritten on face of newspaper: “Sat. nite 9/1/07.”

photography and those who favored the manipulated print.<sup>272</sup> Charles Caffin, the very critic who had enthusiastically praised Käsebier in *Camera Work*'s first issue, attacked her in October of 1907 by portraying a thinly disguised Käsebier-type who had transformed her sitter into "a victim of gum-emotionalis," her subjects affected by their painterly depictions in gum-bichromate prints with a strain of delirious emotional disease.<sup>273</sup> An article by Käsebier's friend, photographer Joseph Keiley, also printed in the same 1907 issue of *Camera Work* framed Käsebier's vision of the Native American as that of "a child... who came to look upon the Indian as part of that wild nature whose beauty she knew, whose brutality she was too young to grasp."<sup>274</sup> Although some credit Keiley's article with a somber celebratory tone meant to offset Caffin's barbs, the critic's words also imply that Käsebier had begun to seem naïve and nostalgic. Hartmann was likely gladdened as the Stieglitz circle turned on Käsebier, but the triumph of his vision of "straight" photography is most clearly articulated by an image, *The Steerage*, taken by Stieglitz just months before Caffin embalmed pictorialism's victims once and for all in *Camera Work*.

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<sup>272</sup> Michaels speculates that the wrath of the Photo-Secession may also have been stimulated by Käsebier's joining of the Professional Photographers of New York in May of 1907. Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 122.

<sup>273</sup> Charles Caffin, "Emotional Art (After Reading the 'Craftsman,' April, 1907)," *Camera Work* 20 (October 1907): 32-34. Caffin's essay was a spoof of *The Craftsman* article "Photography as an Emotional Art," that recounted his imaginary experience with a photographer named "Mr. Binney," who although he changed the name and gender, would have been identified by the title as Käsebier. Caffin made a long list of unflattering characterizations of Mr. Binney, an artist who when creating emotional art "fairly slobbered" in his own gum, and who claimed to be a "rebel against the conventions by which painting is shackled," preferring "the freer atmosphere of irresponsibility that photography permits." Waiting anxiously for Mr. Binney to finish his portrait, Caffin worried a beautiful print might lead him, like several other sitters, into frightful "delirium." He was thus relieved when the "emotionalist handed me a straight platinum print" indicating with "reproach...you would not respond except in blobs and blurs and blotches. You're so average a person that you are immune from even my art-emotionalism." Käsebier was deeply upset when she realized, "I am 'Mr. Binney'," the character the essay which she called "that vulgar Mr. Binney article" in a December 1907 letter to Frederick Holland Day, as cited in Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier*, 124. Although Michaels is likely correct that it was the personal attacks on her husband, patrons, and herself that most offended Käsebier, rather than Caffin's championing of the "straight" photograph.

<sup>274</sup> The article by Keiley in the issue began with an imagined conversation in which Käsebier's mother said, "I don't see why Gertrude likes Indians so much now...I can not help feeling, from my own knowledge and experience, that the only good Indian is a dead one." Joseph Keiley, "Gertrude Käsebier," *Camera Work* 20, (October 1907): 30. The essay was actually a reprint of an article that had been published in London three years earlier in *Photography* (London) March 19, 1904, 21. Keiley also wrote an article specifically devoted to attacking the prevalence of easy and unproductive negative personal criticism in the art world. "Under the semblance of criticizing a picture, its maker is held up to ridicule through the medium of, sometimes clever, almost always vulgar, personal attack." Joseph Keiley, "Ad Infinitum," *Camera Work* 20 (October 1907): 45. Keiley himself would go on to attack Käsebier in 1911 with "The Buffalo Exhibition," *Camera Notes* 33 (Jan 1911): 27. Gail Levin chapter "American Art" 457 – describes Keiley's October 1907 article as a discussion of "Käsebier's sympathetic attitude to her Indian subject." Gail Levin, "American Art,"

*"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: affinity of the tribal and the modern*, edited by William Rubin (New York : Museum of Modern Art ; Boston : Distributed by New York Graphic Society Books, 1984) 457.

## *Rembrandt Returns*

Stieglitz wrote *The Steerage* had “opened up a new era of photography, of seeing.”<sup>275</sup> It was in this famous image, capturing the steerage-class passengers of two transatlantic steamer decks, that Stieglitz finally followed both of Hartmann’s calls – to photograph immigrants and to shoot them straight. In 1942 Stieglitz wrote “How *The Steerage* Happened,” a story of how he came to take the photograph so frequently celebrated as a modernist masterpiece and a primary exemplar of “straight” photography. Since then many scholars have touched on this textual work, unraveling Stieglitz’s retrospective account as highly problematic.<sup>276</sup> One problem is that the account has made the image resistant to interpretation because Stieglitz’s text so relentlessly informs the viewer/reader what to think. A much more obscure, ambiguous and private textual account of *The Steerage* accompanied its first printing in *Camera Work* in October of 1911. Stieglitz inscribed the issue to his friend Mitchell Kennerly of Anderson Galleries, writing, “To make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, they say is an impossibility. ‘Impossibilities’ have always allured me. In making this book I have not entirely succeeded in realizing the silk purse - but remember the ‘impossibility’ I am attempting.”<sup>277</sup> Although there is little in Stieglitz’s 1942 account to explain this reference to the impossible transformation from “sow’s ear” (was it the difficult subject matter? The marginal medium? The lower class subjects?) to “silk purse” (was it the resultant image? photography’s acceptance as art? The uplifting of the lower classes?), it is in the disjoints and the breaks in the narrative and within the image where new readings of *The Steerage* will emerge. Stieglitz’s own claim late in his life that the subject matter of *The Steerage* was rendered irrelevant by its transformation into shapes whose only relations were formal, gives way to my assessment of the image as a canonical

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<sup>275</sup> Stieglitz also located *The Steerage* in relation to the “milestones” of *Car Horses* (1893) and *The Hand of Man* (1902), “which had opened up a new era of photography, of seeing.” Stieglitz, “How *The Steerage* Happened,” 195. As James Terry has noted *The Steerage* follows a pattern where the work of art is produced from “unpromising materials.” James Terry, “The Problem of Steerage,” *History of Photography*, vol. 6, no. 3, (July 1982): 212.

<sup>276</sup> James Terry’s essay questions Stieglitz’s story of the making of *The Steerage* pointing out there is no mention of the image in his letters of the period nor was the account published along with the image in October of 1911. James Terry, “The Problem of Steerage,” 211.

<sup>277</sup> The inscription in an issue of *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911) held at the George Eastman House Library from Stieglitz to Mitchell Kennerly of Anderson Galleries reads “To one who has suffered and understands-To my friend Kennerly-Alfred Stieglitz New York June 6/12”.

artwork made from a “straight” view of the immigrant’s domain that signaled Hartmann’s critical triumph.

Stieglitz commenced his mythic recollection of *The Steerage* with the trope of “once upon a time,” beginning, “Early in June, 1907, my small family and I sailed for Europe.” Even this seeming matter of fact has been disputed by Sarah Greenough who suggests Stieglitz sailed instead two weeks earlier on May 14, 1907.<sup>278</sup> Does it matter? The exact date of his departure allows us to contextualize Stieglitz’s actual trip, and his own status among the ship’s “*nouveau riche*” first-class passengers onboard the “fashionable” *Kaiser Wilhelm II*. As the photograph’s vantage point suggests, Stieglitz had to look across a gulf to see the lower class passengers in steerage.<sup>279</sup> Further, in the middle of May 1907, just days before the Stieglitzs’ trip, clashes between the striking longshoremen and the strikebreakers were front-page news in New York as the union hoped to advance its fight for increased wages by delaying the departure of transatlantic liners such as the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*. This plan did not succeed, but police were still needed to escort important passengers such as Andrew Carnegie to their ships.<sup>280</sup> Boarding the *Kaiser Wilhelm II* in this charged atmosphere, the Stieglitzs likely threaded their way past the President of the United States Steel Corporation, who had just scandalously divorced his wife in order to marry an actress.<sup>281</sup> *The Steerage* acknowledges neither the much photographed protesting strikers nor of the fabulously wealthy personalities whom journalists hounded up the gangplank. Could his chronological lapse have been a way of forgetting the immediate and politically fraught nature of the divide between classes existing just outside the frame of *The Steerage*?

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<sup>278</sup> This date is corroborated by sailing schedules published in the *New York Times*. Greenough uses this discrepancy only as evidence of inaccuracies in Stieglitz’s narrative. Greenough, *The Key Set*, lv.

<sup>279</sup> Although Stieglitz himself wrote that he looked down on the steerage, in fact both upper and lower deck in the image belonged to the steerage passengers.

<sup>280</sup> Strike of the largely Irish union of longshoremen, from May 6 until June 14, 1907 against several transatlantic lines. Led by Union leader “Pat” Connors, 25,000 longshoremen went on strike in New York and Hoboken. This number was soon reduced as only the trans-Atlantic lines refused to settle with workers. “Coastwise Lines Strike Settled,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1907. North German Lloyd Line explicitly asserted that their *Kaiser Wilhelm II* would sail on time without bowing to the strikers’ demands. Of which 600 employees were on strike. “4,000 Strikers Out on Water Front,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1907. “Strikers Riot on Water Front,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1907. In the end the strike was a failure, running for 37 days with no concessions from the ship lines. “Longshore Union Calls Off Strike,” *New York Times*, Jun 14, 1907. assisted by “around 200 Italian strikebreakers.” “Strike Didn’t Halt Atlantic Liners” *New York Times*, May 12, 1907.

<sup>281</sup> William Ellis Corey infamously divorced his wife to marry Mabel Gilman.



As discussed in Chapter 1, the first paragraph of his narrative, Stieglitz also chronicled the oppressive atmosphere of first class. He claimed he sat for three days on his steamer chair “with closed eyes” (to avoid seeing faces), feeling “completely out of place” in first class with “those voices and that English.”<sup>282</sup> Perhaps inspired by desires similar to those which prompted his escape from the artificial world of business (resulting in the earlier photograph *Five Points, New York*) Stieglitz walked “as far forward on deck as I could” to flee first class.<sup>283</sup> At the very limit of the first-class deck, he “stood alone, looking down” at “the men and women and children on the lower deck of the steerage.” Stieglitz was again “fascinated” (as he had been in *Five Points*) enviously wishing to “join those people,” but he noted the forbidding gangway that separated the classes “glistening in its freshly painted state...long, white, and...untouched by anyone.” As Allan Sekula argues this passage in the text converts the image to “pure symbolist autobiography,” a scene made up of two worlds, one that entraps and one that liberates and a gang plank which separates them.<sup>284</sup> Whereas in *Five Points* the viewer is visually barred from the image by turned dark backs, the easily entered pictorial space of *The Steerage* requires a supplement – Stieglitz’s story – to enforce the separation of classes, and to quell the anxiety prompted by the appearance of “new immigrants” on board.

Perhaps it is what recent scholars have identified as the central irony that reveals the most about *The Steerage*. Although often taken as a portrait of immigrants arriving to the U.S., the *Kaiser Wilhelm II* was actually returning these passengers to Europe. Some have speculated that those depicted must have been turned away at Ellis Island, but statistically this is unlikely given only about two percent of all immigrants were denied entry in 1907.<sup>285</sup> Generally about one quarter of all U.S. immigrants returned to

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<sup>282</sup> Stieglitz, “How the *Steerage* Happened,” 195

<sup>283</sup> Stieglitz remembered *The Steerage* as being taken on the third day of his voyage, but Newhall suggests the photograph was made not three days after he left New York when the boat was driving into a brisk wind, but most likely six days later when it was moored and relatively motionless in Plymouth England. Beaumont Newhall, “Alfred Stieglitz: Homeward Bound,” *ARTnews* 87 (March 1988): 141-142.

<sup>284</sup> Allan Sekula, “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning,” 41.

<sup>285</sup> “It is even possible, much as this might disconfirm our expectations, that some of Stieglitz’s back-migrants were returning *because they wanted to*.” Stephen Fender, *Sea Changes: British emigration & American literature* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

their home countries for various reasons.<sup>286</sup> By 1907, the relatively comfortable and speedy steamship had become ubiquitous, making it possible for skilled artisans to commute in two-year cycles between Europe and America.<sup>287</sup> Many authors have seen irony in the fact that Stieglitz's canonical image of immigrants' journey to America actually depicts their return to Europe, but perhaps it is instead strategic. The way for Stieglitz to picture immigrants as an artistic photographer was after they were no longer immigrants at all, no longer compelled to choose between becoming assimilated citizens in the adopted countries or remaining tied to their native land. Positioned precisely in the ocean between, shorn of the stereotypes of regional identification that were the studio photographers stock in trade, Stieglitz's image presages a modern, pluralist, transnational citizen.<sup>288</sup>

At the end of his account of making *The Steerage* Stieglitz recalled being very disappointed at the unenthusiastic reaction of the first person with whom he shared the image. His friend, Wall Street lawyer and photographer Joseph Keiley protested, "but you have two pictures there, Stieglitz."<sup>289</sup> Although it seems unlikely that Stieglitz would truly have hidden his image simply because his friend objected, Keiley's comment perceptively frames the issues of *The Steerage*. His critique seems aimed at the separation of the upper and lower decks depicted in the image, and indeed the scene's formal bifurcation has come to be seen as part of the photograph's modernist viewpoint. Yet Keiley's binary description operates on several registers: *The Steerage* is effective as a "straight" photograph of American immigration because it *is* two pictures – a photograph depicting its subject, its maker, and its "straight"

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<sup>286</sup> Financial panic in October of 1907 triggered a depression. It is estimated that of the sixteen million immigrants that arrived to the U.S. between 1900 and 1930 a quarter returned in the same period, Oscar Handlin, *Race and Nationality in American Life* (NY: Anchor Books, 1957), 103.

<sup>287</sup> Richard Whelan points this out "it was the steamship and not the shift in the source of immigration, that was responsible for the beginning of temporary European immigration to the United States. No sooner had the Atlantic crossing become regular, fast, and tolerably comfortable than a substantial transient movement set in. . . . Great numbers began to go out to the United States each spring with the fixed intention of returning in the fall." Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a biography* (Boston : Little, Brown, 1995), 160. Thus the transatlantic steerage traffic became for the first time a two-way movement. There were even times during the long American depression of the seventies when the eastbound movement exceeded that in the opposite direction." Steerage in which most immigrants traveled was hardly luxurious, but the passage was safe. For more information see Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American immigration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 116 and Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 103.

<sup>288</sup> Stieglitz would go on to suggest other alternating readings of this image as both an expression of formalism and of a profound nationalism as I will explore in the chapters which follow. The term "transnational" would be coined less than a decade after Stieglitz photographed *The Steerage* in Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America" from *Atlantic Monthly*, 118 (July 1916), 86-97.

<sup>289</sup> Stieglitz, "How the *Steerage* Happened," 196-97.

medium as poised between past and future, foreign and familiar, common poor and nouveau riche, inhabitants and structure, Europe and America, technical rhetoric and empathetic subject.

In front of this bifurcated scene Stieglitz was “spellbound.” He narrated the experience, giving a much-quoted list of its formal elements. These shapes of circular hat, funnel, stairway, mast, etc., became equivalent with his feelings – “I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life.” The structure of the scene in the story is largely described in terms of the ship’s inanimate elements, but the compositional triangle created in the image by the mast highlighted in the text is inverted by another triangular shape created by the heads of the three infants on board. The structure of the ship and the human elements of passengers are intimately linked, playing against and with one another. The photograph’s formal structure acts as a machinery of the containment of its subject matter: immigrants.

Yet the image belies Stieglitz’s narrative subordination of passengers to shapes and inanimate structure. Comparing Stieglitz’s canonical masterpiece *The Steerage* to his obscure *Five Points, New York* suggests that the solution to the challenges of the latter can be found in the composition of the former. The hanging wash and the girl in the lower right playing on the ladder seem to mimic the picturesque vignettes of *Five Points*, but in *The Steerage* those frontally facing figures create an occasionally disjointed scene of many more such episodes: differentiated glimpses of the interaction between mothers and children, of conversations, and even of solitary contemplation engaged in by the central passengers (the upper white hatted man and the lower blond haired woman) in steerage. Rather than only being viewed by Stieglitz, turning their backs and foreclosing the scene as in *Five Points*, *The Steerage*’s figures have space to make their own world, facing frontally, looking at each other and towards the viewer. Although Stieglitz’s narrative only devotes attention to the man in the circular hat looking down at passengers below, just as interesting are the gazes of everyone else on the upper deck of the steerage who look inquisitively and authoritatively back at Stieglitz and his camera. Whereas in the slum of *Five Points* Stieglitz rendered immigrants into an undifferentiated mass with relentless horizontal sameness, in *The Steerage* the scene unfolds on two levels, creating a dynamic vertical composition in which subjects interact with each other, and with “us,” the viewers of their image.

The figures in *The Steerage* manage, in spite of their stillness, to transcend the strange static quality of *Five Points*. The calm of the image also functions differently than the frozen stillness of *Winter-Fifth Avenue* or *The Hand of Man* when fast moving objects were hunted and captured by the camera. Instead, in Stieglitz's account of *The Steerage*, the photographer "raced" to his cabin in dire fear that someone would shift the shapes of the scene, returning to find that miraculously none of the passengers had moved. Rather than a controlled patient wait for the image he celebrated in *Winter-Fifth Avenue*, here, pushed to the edge of the deck of one of the largest and fastest new transatlantic steamers, Stieglitz built on the lessons he had learned while carried along a fixed railroad track photographing *The Hand of Man*. With the addition of the human element in *The Steerage* Stieglitz relied on fellow passengers, figures who by remaining in place seem to participate in the making of their own image.<sup>290</sup>

The drama of Stieglitz's race to his cabin continues with his story's announcement that (even although he was at the beginning of his journey) he had only one plate left, one chance to photograph the scene. Even after exposing the plate and recording the image, the photographic process remained fraught, with Stieglitz's search for a darkroom in which to develop his image on arriving in Paris (he was traveling to the city to visit the photographer Edward Steichen). This extension of the narrative to all aspects of the photographic process emphasizes the straightness of the image. As Beaumont Newhall has pointed out *The Steerage* differs from Stieglitz's earlier theorization of the importance of cropping, by rejecting even this minimal intervention and using the entire shot.<sup>291</sup> Formally, the image pushed the boundaries of "straight" photography with small hats floating at the bottom of the frame to emphasize the uncropped view. After finding a darkroom in which to develop the image in Paris, Stieglitz discovered "the negative was perfect in every particular. Would anything happen to it before I got to New York?"<sup>292</sup> After four months of protecting the image, he claimed even on his return to New York he had been "too nervous to

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<sup>290</sup> One account of this story claims it reveals "his own persistent fascination with the productive tension between stasis and motion, between order and disorder, between creation and destruction." Miles Orvell, "Stieglitz and the Destructive Element," *History of Photography*, v. 20, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 334.

<sup>291</sup> Newhall makes this point in his "Alfred Stieglitz: Homeward Bound," 1988. Stieglitz claimed his "negatives are all made with the express purpose of enlargement" in his essay "The Hand Camera - Its Present Importance," 68.

<sup>292</sup> "I had but one plate holder with one unexposed plate. Would I catch what I saw and felt? Finally, I released the shutter. My heart thumping. I had never heard my heart thump before." Stieglitz, "How *The Steerage* Happened?," 195. Hartmann writes of this worry over the plates in his Sadakichi Hartmann, "The Broken Plates," *Camera Work*, no. 6, (April, 1904).

make a proof of the negative.” Stieglitz continually brings the reader back to an extended account of the artistic process of “straight” photography, from discovery of the image, to its framing, to the plate’s transportation, development and printing.

Stieglitz narrated his decision to race back to his cabin for his camera to “try to put down this seemingly new vision” of “people, the common people, the feeling of ship and ocean and sky and the feeling of release that I was away from the mob called rich.” He wrote that at just this important juncture between making and not making the image, between the rich arrivées and the common people, at the cusp of deciding to capture his feelings and the subject in an image, “Rembrandt came into my mind and I wondered if he would have felt as I was feeling.”<sup>293</sup> The text’s juxtaposition of Stieglitz’s new modernist photographic vision with Rembrandt seems initially contradictory.<sup>294</sup> Devoid of the lighting effects or rich brown tones of dirt for which the Dutch master was so famous, *The Steerage* does not seem especially Rembrandtesque. Stieglitz’s reference relies on the understanding of Rembrandt offered by early twentieth-century progressive American art critics. As previously noted, Charles Caffin celebrated of Rembrandt’s use of “real types” drawn from the streets of Amsterdam. The critic also lauded the lack of “grandeur,” which that separated Rembrandt from the neo-Classical Italians, arguing, “whatever may be the idealism in the picture, it does not depend on form.”<sup>295</sup> Caffin’s contemporary, art historian John Charles Van Dyke also celebrated Rembrandt’s avoidance of classical and academic forms. Although Rembrandt’s scenes were “squalid,” his depictions of peasants made viewers “conscious of the man’s [Rembrandt’s] deep feeling. His *technique*, of course, is marvelous; but so is his insight and his capacity to feel.”<sup>296</sup> According to Caffin, Rembrandt was a “realist” and “idealist” who represented “the way of modern artists” by creating an artistic method that combined the two without reliance on form or

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<sup>293</sup> “A round straw hat; the funnel leaning left, the stairway leaning right; the white drawbridge, its railing made of chain; white suspenders crossed on the back of a man below; circular iron machinery; a mast that cut into the sky completing the triangle.” Stieglitz, “How *The Steerage* Happened,” 195.

<sup>294</sup> Typifying the reception is one scholar’s statement that Stieglitz “oddly enough” references Rembrandt. James Terry, “The Problem of the Steerage,” 212.

<sup>295</sup> Charles Caffin, *A Guide to Pictures for Beginners*, 241.

<sup>296</sup> Van Dyke added “If it were not so we should gain little pleasure from his subjects.” John Charles Van Dyke, *The Meaning of Pictures Six Lectures Given for Columbia University* (C. Scribner’s Sons 1903), 105.

technique.<sup>297</sup> Rather than citing a strict compositional influence, by citing his thoughts of Rembrandt Stieglitz alluded to contemporaneous understandings of the Dutch master as the prototypical modern artist and pointed his reader/viewer to Hartmann's prior deployment of the painter in "Picturesque New York in Four Papers: The Esthetic Side of Jewtown" as a model for the artistic possibilities of pluralist photographic depictions of new immigrants.

In his narrative of *The Steerage*, which I will explore further in the chapters that follow, Stieglitz famously made a modernist equation between the scene's formal elements and his own emotions. Yet he failed to cite the influences of Cubism or any other modern art movements that permeate this reading. Scholars have explained his mention of Rembrandt as only part of the photographer's strident denial of influence.<sup>298</sup> Yet Stieglitz's invocation of Rembrandt points his reader/viewer to an occluded early definition of straight photography explored in this chapter, to Hartmann's pluralist mission for the medium and to Stieglitz's own earlier image in Five Points. Through Rembrandt Stieglitz reveals his modernist image originated as another attempt to transform the painter's lesson into a "straight" photographic language, to depict the specific picturesque conditions of immigrants and to show the possibilities of cultural and aesthetic pluralism. Although "straight photography" has become canonized within the history of photography in apolitical formal and technical terms, at stake in the historical discourse on its medium specificity as a vehicle for modernist objectivity is also our modern dilemma of integrating difference.

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<sup>297</sup> Caffin, *A Guide to Pictures for Beginners*, 244.

<sup>298</sup> Stieglitz's story denies the connection to contemporaneous art movements with "Stieglitz's sudden arrival at the 'new Vision' alone and earlier than any other modernist." James Terry, "The Problem of the Steerage," 220. For views of immigrants with more pathos see photographs such as William Rau's taken for the immigration service, c. 1890, reproduced in Ann Cook et. al. *City Life 1865-1900: Views of Urban America* (Praeger, New York 1973) and the Byron's photograph of 1893 reproduced in Maldwyn A. Jones, *Destination America* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976). For an example of an interpretation of *The Steerage* as a social statement see Jerome Mellquist, *The Emergence of American Art* (Charles Scribner and Son's New York, 1942).

## Figures

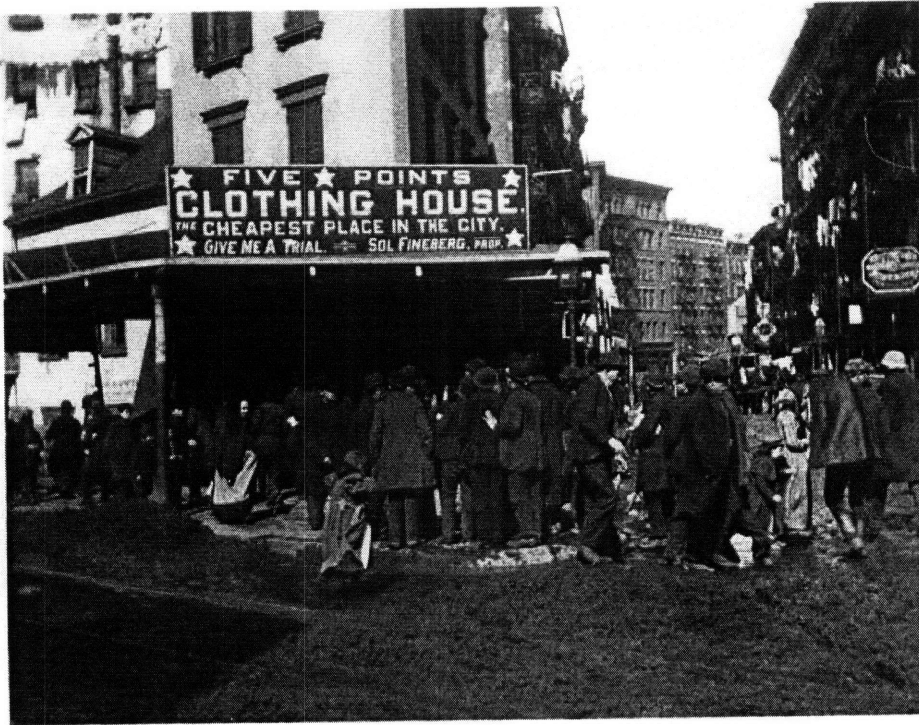


Fig. 2.1 Alfred Stieglitz, *Five Points, New York*, 1893. National Gallery of Art, cat. 81.

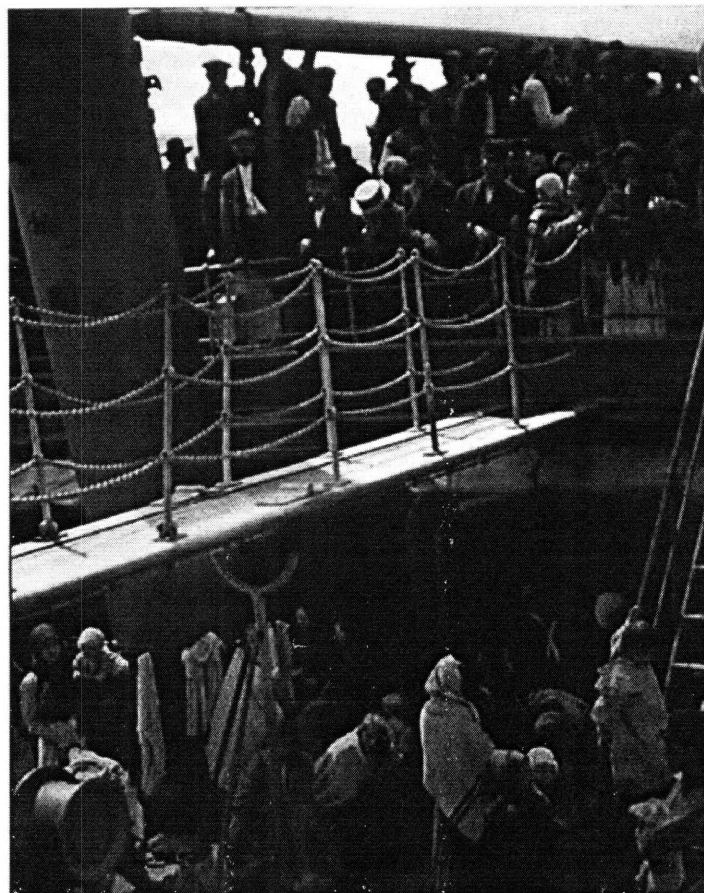


Fig. 2.2 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907. National Gallery of Art, cat. 310.







Fig. 2.3 C.J. Taylor, "The Mortar of Assimilation--And the One Element that Won't Mix," published in *Puck*, New York, 1889.



Fig. 2.4 Photograph of C. Sadakichi Hartman, 1889. UCR.

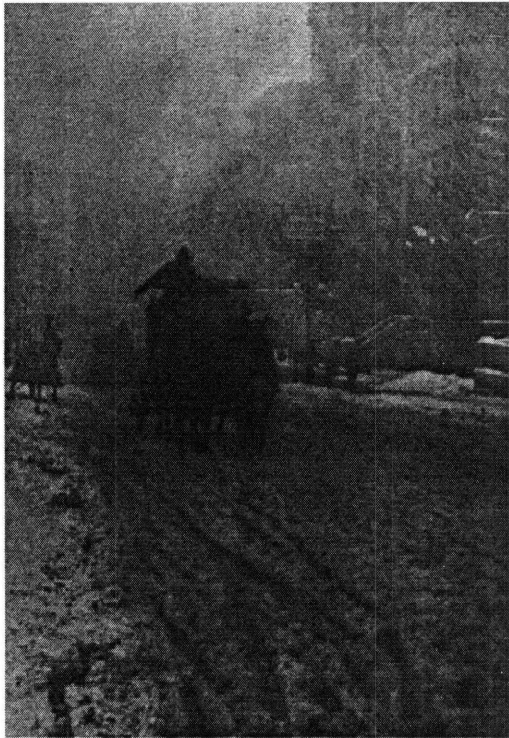


Fig. 2.5 Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter-Fifth Avenue*, 1893. National Gallery of Art, cat. 84.



Fig. 2.6 Alfred Stieglitz, *A Good Joke*, 1887. National Gallery of Art, cat. 55.



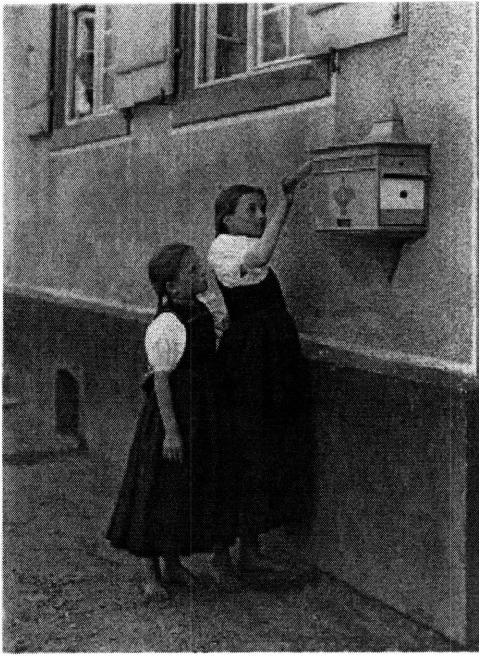


Fig. 2.7 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Letter Box*, 1894. National Gallery of Art, cat. 181.



Fig. 2.9 George Luks, *Hester Street*, 1905. Brooklyn Museum.



Fig. 2.8 Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter-Fifth Avenue* photograph uncropped, 1893. National Gallery of Art, cat. 86.



Fig. 2.10 Gertrude Käsebier, *The Red Man*, 1902. This photograph and the six that follow published in *Camera Work* (January 1903).



Fig. 2.11 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Hand of Man*, 1902. National Gallery of Art, cat. 277.



Fig. 2.12 Gertrude Käsebier, *Serbonne*, 1901-1903.



Fig. 2.13 Gertrude Käsebier, *Flora*, c. 1897.

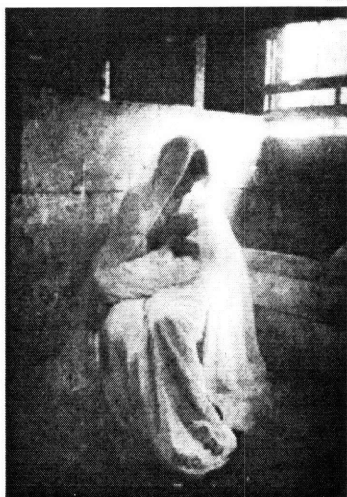


Fig. 2.14 Gertrude Käsebier, *The Manger*, 1899.



Fig. 2.15 Gertrude Käsebier, *Blessed Art Thou Among Women*, 1899.

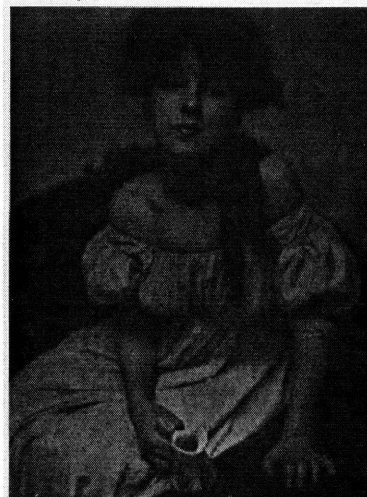


Fig. 2.16 Gertrude Käsebier, *Portrait (Miss N.)*, c. 1903.





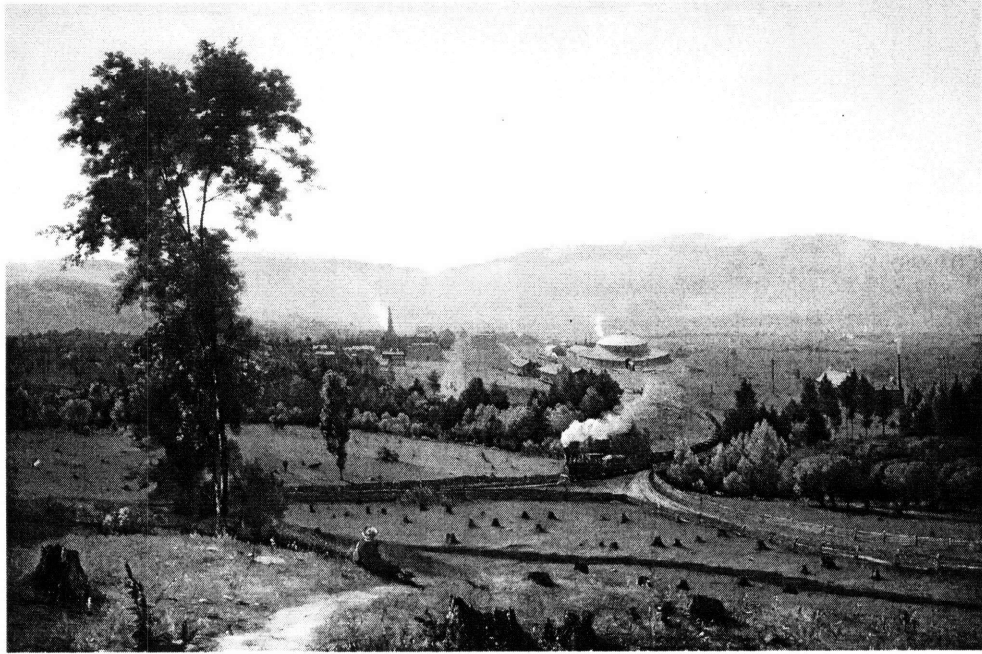


Fig. 2.17 George Inness, *Lackawanna Valley*, c. 1856. National Gallery of Art.



Fig. 2.18 Edward Steichen, *Moonlight: The Pond*, 1904 published in *Camera Work*, April 1906.





We like our dogs to be thoroughbreds, to inherit physical traits from similar physics, to have pure blood. It may be folly to demand that men's minds be kept pure, that the children of their minds be thoroughbreds. It seems to me that the children of Brancusi's mind, part ancient and part modern, savage and civilized, European and African, black and white, are not thoroughbreds. That may be the fault, at the same time we must not forget that the breed of the grayhound [sic] was improved by the introduction of the blood of the bulldog.

– René Guy DuBois, review of “Statuary in Wood by African Savages—The Root of Modern Art” at Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 Gallery, *Arts and Decoration*, 1914

### 3 “The Caricaturist’s Way”: Marius de Zayas, Abstraction, Thoroughbreds, and the Melting Pot (1907-1917)

Late in his life Stieglitz claimed that he immediately recognized his photograph *The Steerage* was a masterpiece (fig. 3.1). The photographer maintained he created the image by visualizing the complicated jumble of passengers and mechanical elements reduced to just a few shapes – forms he described as equivalents to his own emotions. In the previous chapter I explored the unlikelihood that Stieglitz immediately and independently discovered these principles of modern abstraction aboard a ship sailing to Europe in 1907. The photographer’s self-mythologizing “sudden arrival at the ‘new Vision’ alone and earlier than any other modernist,” most historians agree, attempted to eliminate the connections to other modern artists and critics that clearly informed his own eventual appreciation of the image.<sup>299</sup> Although *The Steerage* was made in 1907, Stieglitz did not show the photograph publicly until 1911 when he published it in his journal *Camera Work* along with the 1910 Picasso drawing *Standing Female Nude*, which he had recently exhibited and purchased (fig. 3.2). Stieglitz famously described this analytic cubist charcoal as “a sort of intellectual cocktail,” a phrase that points to his understanding of the heavily shaded yet linear drawing as a heterogeneous concoction – a mixed drink, a non-thoroughbred racing

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<sup>299</sup> James Terry, “The Problem of the Steerage,” *History of Photography* 6, no. 3 (July 1982): 220.

horse, or a dangerous combination of chemicals.<sup>300</sup> His 1911 publication of *The Steerage* signals Stieglitz's desire to create his own cocktails, mixtures that would bridge the gap between "straight" photography and abstract modern art to offer a new, composite American modernism – which depended on the arrival of diverse, new, immigrant artists and critics in the Stieglitz circle around 1907.

As discussed in the prior chapter, when explaining the making of *The Steerage*, Stieglitz claimed he had been so demoralized by his friend's reaction, pictorial photographer Joseph T. Keiley's failure to "see" *The Steerage* that he had "hesitated to show the proofs to anyone." Then, he wrote, "finally in 1910 I showed them to [Paul] Haviland and Max Weber and [Marius] de Zayas and other artists of that type. They truly saw the picture."<sup>301</sup> The final artist in Stieglitz's list, Mexican caricaturist Marius de Zayas, became Stieglitz's most constant and closest aesthetic ally during the period. Stieglitz's confidant Edward Steichen even attributed the discovery of the modernist photograph exclusively to the caricaturist, explaining, "It was de Zayas who found among Stieglitz's proofs a 'Steerage' picture, which Stieglitz had overlooked."<sup>302</sup> Nonetheless, Stieglitz's list of three artists (along with unnamed others) insightfully characterizes a moment of innovation in the Stieglitz group, a period between 1907 and 1917 in which Stieglitz made new aesthetic breakthroughs in American modernism by surrounding himself with a new group of international artists and critics working in a wide range of media.

In the cosmopolitan city of New York and even within the Stieglitz group de Zayas was scarcely alone in his immigrant ancestry. Stieglitz also credited the Russian-born Paris-trained American cubist

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<sup>300</sup> Stieglitz as quoted in the *New York Sun*, 3 March 1913, and reprinted in *Camera Work* 42-43 (April-July 1913): 47. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives these three definitions for cocktail, as well as a few others that all involve mixing. "cocktail, n.", *OED*. Interestingly Alfred Barr also described this figure by Picasso as a composite, describing it as "the counterpoint of straight line edges, vertical and horizontal, with curved contours of cross-sections – architecturally speaking, a combination of plan and elevation in one drawing." Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 42.

<sup>301</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, "How *The Steerage* Happened," *Twice A Year* 8-9 (1942) as anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Notes and Essays*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 197.

<sup>302</sup> Although some scholars have credited Russian-born American painter Max Weber with pointing out *The Steerage* to Stieglitz, Steichen wrote that "Max Weber was the first one to argue Stieglitz into seeing that Stieglitz's early work was much better than his later 'pictorial' work. De Zayas took up this argument further..." Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (New York: MoMA, London: W.H. Allen, 1963), unpaginated. James Terry credits Weber with discovering the photograph in "The Problem of the Steerage," 211. Terry cites Alfred Werner's catalog on Weber, but that book only claims that Stieglitz "availed himself of Weber's sharp eye and sense of composition by asking the younger man to accompany him on photography excursions." Stieglitz's 1907 European trip could not have been (nor is it implied by Werner to be) one of these excursions. Alfred Werner, *Max Weber* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 42. Richard Whelan also states (incorrectly) that Steichen recalled Weber had brought the photograph to Stieglitz's attention in 1911. Whelan, "Notes on 'How *The Steerage* Happened,'" in *Stieglitz on Photography*, 197.

painter Max Weber for helping him discover *The Steerage*, as well as photographer and critic Paul Burty Haviland, the representative of his French father's porcelain factory in New York (who volunteered to pay the gallery's rent in 1908).<sup>303</sup> In addition to these three named artists many other interesting and diverse characters with complicated stories also came into Stieglitz's orbit during this period. For example, Benjamin de Casseres, a Philadelphia-born "Spanish-Hebrew" poet, critic, and journalist, often contributed to *Camera Work* and was likely responsible for introducing de Zayas to Stieglitz, having worked with the caricaturist on a sensationalist newspaper begun by New York veterans of the Hearst papers in Mexico City.<sup>304</sup> Pamela Colman Smith, a symbolist illustrator, who created the first non-photographic work displayed at Stieglitz's gallery 291 (formerly known as "The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession"), was born in New York, but her expatriate childhood in Britain and Jamaica, her propensity to dress in West African costume, and her work as a storyteller of Jamaican and Celtic folktales, frequently prompted Smith's contemporaries to comment on her physiognomy and speculate on her racial origins.<sup>305</sup> Franco-Spanish-Cuban artist Francis Picabia befriended the circle when he visited New York for the 1913 Armory Show, becoming close collaborator with de Zayas.<sup>306</sup> Pablo Picasso, a Spaniard living in France, also became friends with de Zayas when the Mexican visited Paris. Sadakichi Hartmann (whose formative theorization of photography's medium specificity is discussed in the previous chapter) finally returned to the circle. Even 291's elevator was operated by a West Indian immigrant,

<sup>303</sup> For a discussion of Stieglitz's relationship with Weber, including their falling out in 1910, see Percy North and Alfred Stieglitz, "Turmoil at 291," *Archives of American Art Journal* 24, no. 1 (1984): 12-20.

<sup>304</sup> De Casseres' ancestors were likely part of the first, small and often forgotten wave of Jewish immigration to America, which originated with Sephardic Jews in Iberia. "De Casseres traced his lineage to Spinoza," Howard Willard Cook, *Our Poets of Today* (New York: Moffat, Yard, and Company, 1918), 143. For more information on the Mexican paper, which was started by two Italian journalists trained in New York, Ernesto Simondetti and Carlo Fornaro, the latter of which was an interesting caricaturist in his own right, see William English Carson, *Mexico, Wonderland of the South* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 144-46. De Casseres ran for mayor of New York in 1913 on a Secessionist ticket that called for an independent state of Manhattan to be supported by gambling, prostitution and drinking. Stieglitz volunteered to be "head of the Street Cleaning Department." Stieglitz to De Casseres, April 9, 1913, De Casseres papers in the New York Public Library Special Collection.

<sup>305</sup> For example, a 1899 letter from J.B. to W.B. Yeats: "Pamela Smith and father are the funniest-looking people, the most primitive Americans possible, but I like them much... She looks exactly like a Japanese. Nannie says this Japanese appearance comes from constantly drinking iced water." *J.B. Yeats: Letters to his son W.B. Yeats and Others 1869-1922*, edited by Joseph Hone (E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc. New York, 1946). For more information see Melinda Boyd Parsons, "The Rediscovery of Pamela Colman Smith," MA University of Delaware, June, 1975 which was reprinted as the catalogue *To All Believers—The Art of Pamela Colman Smith* (Newark: University of Delaware, 1975) and Melinda Boyd Parsons, "Pamela Colman Smith and Alfred Stieglitz," *History of Photography* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 285-292.

<sup>306</sup> Francis Picabia's mother was French, but his paternal heritage was from Spain and Cuba.

Hodge Kirnon, who was to become an influential activist journalist in Harlem during the 1920s.<sup>307</sup> The Stieglitz circle was itself becoming a microcosm of this new diverse urban population, what de Casseres would term the “composite creation” of New York.<sup>308</sup>

De Zayas arrived at Ellis Island in February of 1907 on a ship that could never have been confused with the one photographed by Stieglitz in *The Steerage*. The manifest for de Zayas’ vessel, the mail ship *Merida*, listed only nine other passengers, including eight Americans and de Zayas’ father, Rafael de Zayas Enriquez.<sup>309</sup> The elite de Zayas family (Rafael had been Mexico’s poet laureate) fled their country to escape the repressive dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. An exceptional immigrant, Marius the caricaturist proved able to offer new insights on the creation of an American modernism, “steering” Stieglitz to renounce pictorialism in favor of abstraction. In so doing, de Zayas not only “found” *The Steerage*, but also organized exhibitions and helped interpret European modernism and African sculpture, framing diverse aesthetic forms for an American audience. Operating between the U.S. and Europe, between painting and photography, yet belonging to none of these terrains, de Zayas and his caricature practice acted as crucial intermediaries between abstraction and representation, reproduction and originality, low and high, primitive and modern, and even between racial classifications of black and white.<sup>310</sup>

To trace the new blend of American modern art de Zayas advanced, this chapter unfolds in a series of episodes examining his influence as both caricaturist and theorist, as well as the reactions of period critics and the wider American art world. Following a brief framing of caricature as a modern

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<sup>307</sup> In her contribution to “What 291 means to me,” Anne Brigham describes the journey up to 291 in an elevator “with a six-foot African in command.” Noting that when she arrived to the top “I know the dark brother in the elevator was watching through the grill, and I felt like Brer Rabbit,” she continued her essay writing in exaggerated southern black dialect. Anne Brigham, “What 291 means to me,” *Camera Work* 48 (dated July 1914, published Jan 1915):17. For more on Kirnon see the biographic entry in Howard A. Fergus, *Gallery Montserrat: Some Prominent People In Our History*, (Barbados: Canoe Press, 1996).

<sup>308</sup> Benjamin de Casseres, “The Physiognomy of the New Yorker,” *Camera Work* 29 (Jan. 1910): 35.

<sup>309</sup> De Zayas’ friend and collaborator Carlo de Fornaro provides and account of the political punishment for dissidents. Carlo de Fornaro, *Diaz, Czar of Mexico: An Arraignment* (Philadelphia: International Publishing Co., 1909), 46-47. The oppression and uncertainty of the Porfiriato lead many to leave Mexico for the U.S. Statistics indicate a dramatic increase around the time of de Zayas’ arrival. From 1871 to 1880, 5,162 individuals immigrated to America, while in the period between 1901 and 1910 there were 49,642 arrivals. John E. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 217.

<sup>310</sup> This theorization of caricature as intermediary utilizes Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity as a “third space” with the potential for dislocation. Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 218.

medium, I explore de Zayas' early exhibitions of his own caricature at Stieglitz's gallery 291, and then turn to investigate his role as importer and theorist of European modernism for the U.S., focusing on the 1911 Pablo Picasso show he organized at 291. Returning to de Zayas' own caricature, I examine the theory and formal characteristics of his breakthrough, abstract "absolute" caricature displayed at 291 in 1913, before shifting to his role as curator of the landmark 1914 New York show of African sculpture, and concluding with his 1916 manifesto for a hybrid American modern art. Stieglitz's 1915 photograph *Marius de Zayas* visually encapsulates the integral position of the caricaturist and caricature in modern American art as a third choice between categories of photography and painting, and between the aesthetics of Europe and Africa (fig. 3.3). De Zayas stands against a dark wall, at the center of the image, in front of his own charcoal caricature.<sup>311</sup> The white frame of the drawing and its strong abstract forms call attention to his face, as he stares dispassionately out at the camera smartly dressed in a three piece suit with pocket square and shined shoes. De Zayas' cane, grasped in his left hand, cuts across the framed etching of Picasso's *The Frugal Repast* (1904) that rests on the gallery's floor. The caricaturist's right elbow, jutting jauntily at his side, comes to rest just inches from a mask created by the Bete People of Africa's Ivory Coast. With his body, his artwork, and his art theory, de Zayas connected those aesthetic forms considered most modern and those thought to be the most ancient – a Mexican poised between Europe, Africa and America.<sup>312</sup>

Not everyone in early-twentieth-century America would celebrate the unification of such diversity. De Zayas' arrival in the U.S. corresponded with growing tension over the myth of America as

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<sup>311</sup> The caricature behind de Zayas depicted painter and poet Katherine N. Rhoads. Sarah Greenough suggests this photograph was likely taken at de Zayas' own Modern Gallery, begun in 1915 as the commercial arm of 291. The image on the upper right is unidentified. Greenough, *The Key Set*, 252.

<sup>312</sup> Although these masks are now known to date from the nineteenth or early twentieth century, their origin was unknown to most early twentieth century collectors who assumed that the works were much older. Picasso's friend André Salmon wrote mistakenly in the 1920s "a number of the most beautiful pieces [of African art] that have come down to us are much older than the Christian era." André Salmon, "L'Art nègre" (1920) in his *Propos d'ateliers* (Paris: C. Grès et Cie, 1922), 116, 123, 128 as quoted in William Rubin, "Picasso," in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Boston: Distributed by New York Graphic Society Books, 1984), 1:243. De Zayas himself participated in this discussion as a critic, and also as an artist, complicating the view that his caricature was the quintessence of European modernism by stating that his brief artistic education in Paris was subordinate to his "real artistic inspiration" in the native arts of Mexico and in the "the mysterious treasure-houses of ancient Aztec art." Anon., "Marius de Zayas: A Kindly Caricaturist of the Emotions," *The Craftsman* (Jan. 1908): 390. Mexican theorists such as José Juan Tablada, De Zayas' childhood friend, would clarify this connection associating caricature with the grotesques of pre-conquest sculpture. José Juan Tablada, "Caricature that Stings," *Shadowland* 8, no. 2 (April 1923): 55 and 77.

an assimilating “Melting Pot,” a phrase popularized as the title of the 1908 hit play by Israel Zangwill.<sup>313</sup> At the moment it became most popular, the idea expressed in Zangwill’s title came under attack, both by the cultural pluralists discussed in the previous chapter and by American eugenicists such as Madison Grant. *The Passing of a Great Race*, Grant’s immensely popular 1916 tract, systematized his long-held position against assimilation based on a theory of inherent white supremacy. In his widely read book, Grant cited a 1910 Congressional report by immigrant anthropologist Franz Boas’ “proving” that the shape of immigrants’ skulls physiognomically changed, evolving over a single generation into a larger, more shapely phrenological norm.<sup>314</sup> Boas’ scientific claims in favor of assimilation rang false to Grant; “What the Melting Pot *actually* does in practice,” Grant argued, “can be seen in *Mexico*.”<sup>315</sup>

De Zayas’ nation, according to Grant, had been reduced to “the racial mixture which we call Mexican and which is now engaged in demonstrating its incapacity for self-government,” a fatal revolutionary outcome of commingling Spanish and Native blood. Grant, and under his popular influence many Americans, took Mexico as a cautionary tale supposedly illustrating the fact that “the result of a mixture of two races, in the long run, gives us a race reverting to the more ancient, generalized and lower type.”<sup>316</sup> This poisonous idea of racial mixing as essentially degenerative fueled Grant’s campaign to outlaw immigration. U.S. segregationists also frequently used Grant’s theories in attempts to criminalize the intercourse of native-born blacks and whites. Notions of race as a gradation including mulattos and other named and differentiated racial mixtures eventually gave way, as I discussed in Chapter 1 and will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, to the “one-drop rule” according to which a person had to be

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<sup>313</sup> Theodore Roosevelt was an admirer of the play whose hero proclaimed “America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all races of Europe are melting and reforming!” Zangwill adopted the concept from a larger discourse. The French-American writer John Hector St John de Crèvecoeur appears to have been the first suggested the term in his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, insisting Americans were unique because “Here individuals of all nations are melting into a new race of men.” St. John Crèvecoeur, John Hector. *Letters from an American Farmer* [1782]. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. In 1858, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote “We are the Romans of the modern world...the great assimilating people.” Maldwyn Allen Jones, *Destination America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976), 143.

<sup>314</sup> Franz Boas, “Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 61 Cong., 2 Sess., Senate Document No. 208, Vol. 38 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911).

<sup>315</sup> Madison Grant, *The Passing of a Great Race; or, The Racial Basis of European History* (New York, C. Scribner, 1916), 17.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. Mexican theorist also grappled with issues of miscegenation during the period. Porfirio Díaz’s government actively encouraged European immigration, which he thought would improve Mexico by mixing with native populations and leading to a national “whitening.” José Vasconcelos famously rethought this notion of Latin America as mixture in his 1925 *La raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race).

definitively labeled black or white.<sup>317</sup> Yet, De Zayas arrived from Mexico in New York in 1907 as an immigrant exceptionally able to negotiate this turbulent context, an elite intellectual artist from a racially mixed country creating works in the composite form of caricature.

Quickly gaining fame as a caricaturist in New York's avant-garde and popular press, de Zayas was described by his friend, the French-born tonalist painter Leon Dabo, as "racially Spanish, natively Mexican, residentially American, temperamentally universal."<sup>318</sup> This qualified list suggests the complexity with which de Zayas positioned himself and was positioned as an immigrant artist, born in Mexico to a family carefully distinguishing itself as originally European (rather than Grant's fearful *mestizo*), and currently exiled in America. With this politically avant-garde and upper class pedigree, de Zayas achieved a global ("temperamentally universal") character. This status seemed to allow him privileged insight into modern New York life, both in the domains of avant-garde (including the Stieglitz circle and the Vagabonds literary group) and popular art (as caricaturist for Joseph Pulitzer's newspaper the *New York World*). In both these venues, he was recognized as an entirely new type of caricaturist, demonstrating a "marked susceptibility to the subtle variation of characteristic that dominate the many races, which furnish literary and artistic interest and charm to New York."<sup>319</sup> The articles on immigration he was asked to illustrate in the *New York World* generally depicted foreigners attempting to integrate themselves within New York life (fig. 3.4). De Zayas was further applauded for his sophistication in depictions of "a half dozen different nationalities" – "Russian, Swedish, French, English, the cosmopolitan Mexican and the essentially metropolitan New Yorker, all dissected and depicted ..." with a deep understanding of New York made all the more remarkable by the fact that he had just arrived in the city.<sup>320</sup> This cosmopolitan vision of the Mexican ran precisely counter to Grant's claim of the mixed

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<sup>317</sup> Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980), F. James Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991). As long as the Negro remained in the South he was not a "live issue" for Grant. As late as 1927 he urged Stoddard to ignore blacks, changing his mind only in 1930. Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 63.

<sup>318</sup> Leon Dabo as quoted in Anonymous, "Marius De Zayas: A Master of Ironical Caricature," *Current Literature* (March 1908): 281.

<sup>319</sup> Anon., "Marius de Zayas: A Kindly Caricaturist of the Emotions," *The Craftsman* (Jan. 1908), 389.

<sup>320</sup> Anon., "Marius de Zayas," *The Craftsman*, 390.

nation as degenerate. By lifting physiognomic traits from stereotype to “subtle variation,” from functionality to art, de Zayas offered a new mode of American caricature that represented urban diversity by means of cosmopolitan abstraction instead of exaggeration.

Stieglitz soon appeared unannounced at the caricaturist’s rented studio and began looking around at his works. De Zayas later described these as illustrations for the *New York World* and “pictures for myself.”<sup>321</sup> When Stieglitz finally asked if de Zayas wanted an exhibition of his personal work the caricaturist said no, but on Stieglitz’s insistence eventually replied, “keep all of it.”<sup>322</sup> This narrative recounted many years later by both Stieglitz and de Zayas depicts the caricaturist as a modest worker, his production of little artistic value except to the patron gallerist who (perhaps because of his own crusade for photography) was uniquely able to recognize the artistry in such mass media forms.<sup>323</sup>

Caricature with its reputation for exaggeration and deformation was perhaps the archetypal non-photographic media, best able to act as productive “other” to photography whose mechanical vision was deficient specifically in respect to what caricature did best – singling out the salient detail, creating the perceptive exaggeration, or, in the hands of De Zayas, moving towards abstraction. Concerns about immigration created the context for caricature’s importance as a medium able to represent exterior and interior, a capacity that in turn motivated its migration from a popular to an avant-garde form. De Zayas transformed caricature from right-wing reaction into a vital avant-garde art that found essences in the individual rather than in the “type,” and prepared the view for modernist abstraction. De Zayas’ own work as a caricaturist culminated in a new method of absolute, abstract caricature that offered a synthesis between straight photography and abstract art. His work as a curator culminated in the ground-breaking New York show of African sculpture, which critics credited with revealing modern arts to be “part ancient and part modern, savage and civilized, European and African, black and white...not

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<sup>321</sup> De Zayas’ first caricature appears in the *New York World* in March of 1907 just two weeks after his arrival in the US, suggesting that he had a prior relationship with the newspaper, possibly established by a friend Fornaro, who he had met working on the Mexico City paper *El Diario*. De Zayas recalls that he was working for the *Evening World*, but many more of his drawings actually appear in the *New York World*’s Metropolitan section.

<sup>322</sup> Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1990), 82.

<sup>323</sup> This account closely resembles the story of Stieglitz’s meeting with the caricaturist Al Frueh years later.



*thoroughbreds*.”<sup>324</sup> One reviewer of the show even speculated that Stieglitz should have passed the ancient sculptures off as productions by a young Harlem boy before revealing the truth to stunned and destabilized American art critics. Speculations on hybridity were uneasily confined to the aesthetic; their implications expanded across the changing racial geography of New York.<sup>325</sup>

This connection between the racial and the aesthetic, as well as the ethnic ambiguities possible in “composite” New York, were crucial components of new modern art’s function in Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession: an “antidote” to the exclusively white, rarefied, often upper-class pretensions of photographic pictorialism and academic European oils. Steichen’s crediting of the *caricaturist* de Zayas (instead of the *painter* Weber or *photographer* Haviland) with the discovery of *The Steerage* raises the questions about medium central to this dissertation. Caricature, I want to argue here, complicates Stieglitz’s self-mythologizing narrative of the autonomous, “straight” photograph and helps us understand the function of abstract modern art and straight photography as components of a “composite” (not thoroughbred) modernism.

### 3.1 Beyond Photography’s “Mere Externals”

Physiognomy and the new “science” of phrenology offered ways of understanding immigrants from unfamiliar countries, helping to tame pressing anxieties about racial mixing in early twentieth-century America. Caricature, once a primary visual representation of physiognomy, was thrown into conflict with other ways of knowing strangers as photography gained widespread acceptance.<sup>326</sup> For example, in late nineteenth-century England, Francis Galton, who coined the term “eugenics,” also invented composite photography to allow generalization of certain traits across a series of particular

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<sup>324</sup> René Guy DuBois’ review in *Arts and Decoration*, reprinted in “291’ Exhibitions: 1914-1916,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub October 1916): 14, emphasis added.

<sup>325</sup> Henry McBride, *New York Sun*, reprinted in “291’ Exhibitions: 1914-1916,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub October 1916): 16. In 1916 Harlem was only beginning to become the center of New York’s African American community, remaining home to immigrant communities from Russia, Ireland, Italy, and Germany.

<sup>326</sup> Tom Gunning, for example, writes, “The physiologies were accompanied by the growth in the art of caricatures, which were frequently used to illustrate them. But with the advent of photography the human face became less a realm described in generalities... than a zone of intense scrutiny on an individual basis.” Tom Gunning, “In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film,” *Modernism/modernity* 4, no. 1 (January 1997): 2-6.

photographs. In France, Alphonse Bertillon's system of criminal photography allowed similar layering of multiple individuals, offering to reveal physical commonalities that would expose certain kinds of criminals by appearance alone. These layering systems were required because "straight" photography had difficulty in filling the role of caricature, a medium that depends on quickly perceiving and schematically illustrating the personality based on discerning analysis and amplification.

Modern life also presented new challenges to judgments based on external appearance alone. As the late nineteenth-century American guide *Heads and Faces, and How to Study Them: A Manual of Phrenology and Physiognomy for the People* pointed out, a photograph of a woman with styled hair radically distorted her head's shape, throwing phrenologists into confusion (fig. 3.5).<sup>327</sup> An advertisement in the *New York World*, the paper for which de Zayas worked as a caricaturist, documents another challenge to knowledge based on exterior observation – the new prevalence of plastic surgery that allowed doctors to change the face (and thus the apparent race) of a patient (fig. 3.6).<sup>328</sup> Even clothing offered a challenge to physiognomists seeking to read the body as essentially racialized. For example, an article in the New York press reported a visit by President Woodrow Wilson to Ellis Island, focusing on "a young Swedish girl in her native costume [who] presented striking contrast to the Americanized sister in a neat tailor-made gown." Reports such as these demonstrated the visual power of assimilation. The old exterior markers of identity were vanishing as the melting pot molded immigrants into citizens. Such observations, in addition to the tests for health and literacy immigrants underwent, reinforced the notion that mere external representation, simple surface appearance (the realm of straight photography), was no longer a sufficient basis on which to judge foreign strangers.

In his famous review of the 1913 Armory Show (which perhaps not coincidentally was published in the very same newspaper on the very same day as the above Ellis Island story), Stieglitz urged audiences to cease their "habitual worship of eternal repetitions of mere externals of people," counseling artists to

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<sup>327</sup> Nelson Sizer, *Heads and Faces, and How to Study Them: A Manual of Phrenology and Physiognomy for the People* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1896, c1885).

<sup>328</sup> Such cosmetic surgery only became feasible with the invention of anesthetic and the development of a sterile technique in the late-nineteenth century. Sander Gilman examines the way such plastic surgery was used to help patients, especially Jews, to "pass" in white American society. Sander L. Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

avoid doing what the photographer could do better.<sup>329</sup> As individuals could change from native costume to tailor-made gown, disguise the shape of their head with a new hairstyle, or alter the very features of their face with surgery, externals of people decreased in knowledge-value. With what could they be replaced? Caricature, with its potential for abstraction, could also be utilized to make difference (of individuals or type) visible and comprehensible.

The increased popularity of caricature in later nineteenth and early twentieth-century U.S. corresponded to enormously disorienting social change. Recent studies from the field of English literature have interrogated the ways caricature mirrored and reframed conflicts over race and ethnicity, connecting the medium to other modes of representation.<sup>330</sup> In 1870s U.S., after the Civil War's end freed Southern slaves and as immigration from poverty-stricken Ireland increased, caricaturists such as Thomas Nast registered the anxiety around the African-American and the Catholic as new types of citizens (fig. 3.7). Nast's racist and classist caricature *The Ignorant Vote – Honors are Easy* drew an equation between poor immigrants in the North and poor blacks in the South, suggesting the votes of these "others" would cancel each other out and save the political influence of native-born Protestant whites. The 1880s and 1890s saw a steadily increasing volume of caricature, stimulated in part by advances in printing technology in both the U.S. and Europe, but primarily fostered by unprecedented growth in immigration (especially of "new" immigrant populations from Southern and Eastern Europe) and the migration of southern blacks to northern cities.<sup>331</sup> Physiognomic guides became wildly popular ways of knowing these new urban others during the early twentieth century in America.

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<sup>329</sup> There has been some debate about how deeply Stieglitz was involved in the writing of this article. I follow Sarah Greenough's citation in "Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas," n. 54, 486. Stieglitz, as paraphrased in "The First Great 'Clinic to Revitalize Art,'" *New York American*, January 26, 1913.

<sup>330</sup> Such as Henry Wonham, *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>331</sup> Wonham points out that advances in print reproduction during the second half of the nineteenth century enabled magazines like *Harper's Monthly* to become copiously illustrated. "Caricature flourished in this unique climate of transition," as its reliance on the artist transformed it from "the crudest of the arts." By the 1890s the zinc etching process enabled artists to draw directly on blocks, which made caricature's simple line drawings an effective way to continue publishing hand drawn work. Wonham, *Playing the Races*, 14-16.

During the golden age of French caricature, when caricature first came to the fore as an artistic medium, such drawings were necessitated by the arrival of new people who transformed nineteenth-century cities into “landscapes of the unknown.”<sup>332</sup> Into this confusion stepped the codebooks of physiognomy—such as the artist’s manual for depicting personalities and moods composed in the seventeenth century by Charles Le Brun (a painter raised to nobility and named *Premier Paintre du roi* by King Louis XIV). The treatise written in the eighteenth-century by Swiss pastor Johan Caspar Lavater developed Le Brun’s logical system, presenting physiognomy as a modern science for “deciphering the mysterious inner world through bodily signs.”<sup>333</sup> Art historian Judith Wechsler points out these physiognomists believed in the direct correspondence between outer appearance and inner character. Books of *physiologie*, offering “objective observation of a *type*” based on “classification by stereotype” and often illustrated by caricatures, became immensely popular in the period.<sup>334</sup> Wechsler compares drawings by Daumier and Le Brun to show how directly the physiognomist’s method influenced important caricaturists of nineteenth-century France (fig. 3.8 and 3.9).<sup>335</sup> Baudelaire explicitly claimed that his friend “Daumier combined the freedom of an artist with the accuracy of a Lavater.”<sup>336</sup> The caricaturist used and modified the system of physiognomy to create images that helped viewers navigate the new urban sphere.

### *Caricature as Composite*

Caricature began to be theorized as an artistic medium in mid-nineteenth-century France where renowned father of modern art criticism, Charles Baudelaire, called his friend Honoré Daumier “one of

<sup>332</sup> Richard Sennett, “Foreword,” in Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in 19th Century Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 7.

<sup>333</sup> Tom Gunning, “In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film,” 4. Gunning cites accounts of physiognomy in Patrizia Magli, “The Face and the Soul,” in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body: Part Two*, ed. Michael Feher (New York: Zone, 1989), 86-127; Jurgis Baltrusaitis, “Animal Physiognomy,” in *Aberrations: An Essay on the Legend of Forms* trans. Richard Miller (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 1-57; Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>334</sup> Wechsler, *A Human Comedy*, 34.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-6.

<sup>336</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “Some French Caricaturists” [1857] in *The Essence of Laughter, and Other Essays, Journals, and Letters*, edited, selected, and introduced by Peter Quennell (New York, Meridian Books, 1956).

the most important men, I will not say only of caricature, but further of modern art.”<sup>337</sup> More recently scholar of caricature Werner Hoffman has also discussed Daumier as the archetypal caricaturist, particularly examining his image “Le chêne et les roseaux” (fig. 3.10). Hoffman notes the subject’s “composite unity,” focusing on the “hybrid” part-man, part-animal creatures in the image.<sup>338</sup> Caricature’s creation of such composites had made it difficult for authors before Baudelaire to understand the medium as art, thinking such hybridizations simply too ugly. For Baudelaire it was the very multiplicity of caricature, its ability to combine and hold several positions at once, which made caricature the most modern form of art.<sup>339</sup> The hybridity of caricature enabled a *dédoublement*, “power to be at once self and other,” so essential to the artist of modernity.<sup>340</sup>

One specific example of Baudelairean dualism (as visualized in Stieglitz’s photograph of de Zayas) was the perception that caricature’s origin was split between the modern and ancient world.<sup>341</sup> Against previous writers who had traced the low art form to ancient “primitive” cultures, Baudelaire argued “pagan antiquity” actually had no conception of caricature or comedy.<sup>342</sup> For Baudelaire, the comic consisted in finding oneself in a better position than the object of humor; it resided in the superiority of the observer. “Antiquity” in its innocence, he claimed, had lacked this notion of superiority. Humor might have been derived from a “primitive” expression, but for Baudelaire only modern man, with

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<sup>337</sup> “Je veux maintenant parler de l’un des hommes les plus importants, je ne dirai pas seulement de la caricature, mais encore de l’art moderne” quoted in Michel Melot, “Daumier and Art History: Aesthetic Judgment/Political Judgment,” *Oxford Art Journal* 11, no. 1. (1988): 4.

<sup>338</sup> Werner Hofmann, “Ambiguity in Daumier (& Elsewhere),” *Art Journal*, 43, no. 4 (Winter, 1983): 361.

<sup>339</sup> As French literature scholar Michèle Hannoosh perceptively explains, the comic offered Baudelaire a “model of unity in dualism and the relativity of the absolute...at once diabolical and divine, real and ideal, ugly and beautiful, temporal and enduring, inferior and superior.” Michele Hannoosh, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 315 and 3.

<sup>340</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “Quelques caricaturistes français,” *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-76) 1:543, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>341</sup> Early twentieth-century connoisseurs of African art like de Zayas believed such masks to be ancient although it is now known that they were produced during the nineteenth or even twentieth century. Here I put both temporal terms primitive and modern within quotation marks in the hopes of suggesting at the outset how strongly the two relied on each other for meaning. For a consideration of the arrival of African objects in the West, see Jean-Louis Paudrat, “From Africa,” *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, 125-175.

<sup>342</sup> Baudelaire claimed that even the existing humor of somewhat civilized past eras was tinged with “a touch of barbarity” that differentiated their laughter from that of modern man, further explaining, “Les idoles indiennes et chinoises ignorent qu’elles sont ridicules; c’est en nous, chrétiens, qu’est le comique.” [“Indian and Chinese idols are unaware that they are ridiculous; it is in us, Christians, that their comicality resides.”] Charles Baudelaire, “On the Essence of Laughter” [1855], in *The Mirror of Art*, tr. & ed. Jonathan Mayne (London, Phaidon Press Ltd., 1955), 155. For treatment of Baudelaire’s “De l’essence du rire” in relation to irony and the “*dédoublement*” characteristic of self-reflective activity, see Paul de Mann, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983), 211-217.

his sophistication, was capable of transforming it into comedy. Caricature registered the dawn of the modern era precisely by reconfiguring its own “primitive” roots as savage scrawl.

Photo-historian Anne MacCauley has explored the distinction between caricature and photography, positioning the “explicit” information of the photograph in “complete opposition” to caricature’s “implicit” information that relies on the “condensation and exaggeration of form” the camera avoids.<sup>343</sup> Baudelaire also made such distinctions between the two mediums, as his appreciation of caricature was matched only by his loathing of photography and the “thousand hungry eyes” eager for the anti-art of nature’s exact reproduction.<sup>344</sup> For Stieglitz, however, comparing photography to other art forms allowed the discovery of his own medium’s specific “possibilities and limitations.”<sup>345</sup> He staked out new territory for his Photo-Secession group, which had once fought only for the acceptance of photography as art, by displaying a variety of arts from Japanese prints to children’s drawings.<sup>346</sup> When some Photo-Secession members complained that 291 no longer showed photography, Paul Haviland responded that photography could only be sure of its position among the arts by “standing the test of comparison with other media” and avoiding isolation, encouraging photographers eager to advance their work to follow “the modern evolution of media.”<sup>347</sup> Caricature and photography existed in opposition, relying on and providing radically different forms of information; in the Stieglitz circle this conflict

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<sup>343</sup> McCauley makes this statement in her discussion of the simultaneous practice in both mediums by figures such as Nadar. Anne McCauley, “Caricature and Photography in Second Empire Paris,” *Art Journal* 43, no. 4, (Winter, 1983): 355.

<sup>344</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “On Photography from the Salon of 1859,” *The Mirror of Art*, Jonathan Mayne editor and translator (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1955).

<sup>345</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “Our Illustrations,” *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 47.

<sup>346</sup> A review of the 1909 Japanese prints show at 291 framed the works specifically in relation to caricature, noting that the portraits of actors from the late eighteenth century demonstrated that “over a hundred years ago the Japanese were masters in the use of the intelligent line, which is the basis of modern caricature.” Caricaturists like De Zayas had “not copied the Japanese but reached practically the same method of expression through independent study.” Anon., “Notes,” *Camera Work* 28 (October 1909): 51. Stieglitz argued that artists in non-photographic media must be “non-photographic in their attitude, and the Photo-Secession can be said now to stand for those artists who secede from the photographic attitude towards the representation of form.” Alfred Stieglitz, “Photo-Secession Notes” (1910) as cited in Sarah Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries*, ed. Sarah Greenough (Washington [D.C.]: National Gallery of Art ; Boston : Bulfinch Press 2000), 38

<sup>347</sup> P.B.H., “The Photo-Secession and Photography,” *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 42. This statement interestingly followed directly the short review “Caricatures by Marius de Zayas.” He wrote they would make more progress in this way “than by watching eternally their own bellies like the fakirs of India.” Haviland claimed exhibitions of non-photographic media at 291 were attempting to shift photographers’ views away from self- contemplation to diversity (employing the odd analogy of the ascetic Indian holy men to photography as a closed medium unwilling to follow the science of “modern evolution”).

became a productive one. Caricature with its exaggerations and deformations became the archetypical non-photographic media, acting as productive “other” to photography.

### 3.2 De Zayas Arranges the “Incoherentific” with Caricature

De Zayas’ first show at 291, Stieglitz’s New York gallery, provoked his friends in the Vagabond literary group to praise his portraits in their journal *The Bang* by writing, “I was an incoherentific [sic] rambler before Marius de Zayas, mapping my soul on cardboard, arranged me.”<sup>348</sup> The 1909 show included caricatures of this literary avant-garde as well as “well-known people about town” including New York socialites, members of the Photo-Secession, and the theater world. These diverse individuals were each represented with “curiously subtle discrimination,” but they were also mapped in groups – society portraits placed on the main wall, with each of the other groups on one of the surrounding walls.<sup>349</sup> De Zayas took the social tumult of New York as his subject, organizing the “incoherentific” city and its strange inhabitants into taxonomies of self-fashioning.

De Zayas’ portraits focused particularly on characters, such as Benjamin de Casseres, Madame Hanako, Ruth St. Denis, and Mrs. Brown Potter (fig. 3.11, 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14), who represented a cosmopolitan blend of cultures; all but Madame Hanako had been born in the U.S., but each gained fame by dramatically refashioning their identity via foreign cultures.<sup>350</sup> De Zayas’ drawing of Ruth St. Denis, who was born Ruth Dennis in New Jersey and toured Europe and America under her French-inspired stage name, showed the dancer’s turbaned head and elastic body twisted into one of her trademark exotic poses. The famous actress Mrs. Brown Potter, who had left her rich New York husband while in England to pursue the disreputable occupation of acting, was shown with her ornate dress blending into the background in the charcoal drawing whose dark tones, along with the other caricatures, surprisingly recall the pictorialist photography of the Photo-Secession against which they were strategically mobilized by

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<sup>348</sup> Untitled review of de Zayas’ 1909 exhibition, *The Bang* 4, no. 17, (New York, Jan 25, 1909) clippings preserved in the Stieglitz Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature (hereafter referred to as YCAL), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

<sup>349</sup> Anon., Untitled Notes, *Camera Work* 26 (April 1909): 37-36.

<sup>350</sup> Although the exact works displayed in de Zayas’ 1909 show remain unclear, four of the drawings from the exhibition were printed a year later in *Camera Work* 29 (Jan. 1910): 41-47.

Stieglitz. Perhaps the most provocative image depicted dancer and actress Madame Hanako, who had toured Europe and America, dancing at the Colonial Exhibition in 1906 (for which she was denounced in her native Japan). Unlike Rodin who also sculpted Hanako and remarked on her uniquely lean, non-European anatomy, De Zayas depicted the dancer enveloped in a circle of fabric that hovers strangely around her body. Suggesting unresolved issues with non-European elements of this “composite creation,” these folds make Hanako appear nearly hunchback and the creases resemble claws. De Zayas’ subjects were individuals who were already “caricatures” – unique characters set apart by their international personae, performing their “composite,” cosmopolitan identities with aesthetic flair.

Following De Zayas’ first show, essays began to appear in *Camera Work* addressing the topic of caricature theoretically. In his article “Caricature and New York,” the critic de Casseres attempted to account for the medium’s limited popularity in the U.S.<sup>351</sup> The very premise of this article contradicted the numerous positive reactions to de Zayas’ exhibition at 291 and betrayed the literati’s uneasiness with de Zayas’ drawings in the *New York World*, a newspaper that used images specifically because they boosted circulation, especially among immigrants unable to read English easily.<sup>352</sup> Instead of acknowledging the mass cultural appeal of caricature, de Casseres positioned the medium as a persecuted and hence avant-garde art. De Zayas’ work, he wrote, insisted the caricature was not simply a disposable newspaper illustration but a “unique way” equal to painting or sculpture. The main obstacle for such a caricaturist in America was, de Casseres wrote, his sin against “the Anglo-Saxon injunction: Thou shalt not commit irony!”<sup>353</sup> With apparently un-Anglo-Saxon mores, the caricaturist was endangered because “New England morality” objected to the form’s Nietzschean position “beyond good and evil.” De Casseres evocatively rejected this requirement, proclaiming, “the caricaturist comes to slit your mask of smugness

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<sup>351</sup> Benjamin de Casseres, “Caricature and New York,” *Camera Work* 26 (April 1909): 17.

<sup>352</sup> Pulitzer, the *New York World*’s publisher, often had to defend his innovative use of illustration. “We are very proud of our pictures.” Pulitzer replied to a subscriber who objected to their use. “We observe that the populace appreciated them, and that there is always an extra demand for the *World* when it is illuminated, so to speak. A great many people in the world require to be educated through the eye, as it were... We shall continue our illustrations.” Pulitzer in the *New York World*, Feb. 21, 1884, 4 quoted in George Juergens, *Joseph Pulitzer and the New York World* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1966) 94. For a full-color reproduction of some of the *New York World*’s Sunday pages see Nicholas Baker and Margaret Brentano, *The World on Sunday : graphic art in Joseph Pulitzer's newspaper (1898-1911)* (New York : Bulfinch Press, 2005).

<sup>353</sup> Benjamin de Casseres, “Caricature and New York,” 17.



and conformity and create mirth in your brain. To him morals are myths.” The medium’s amoral depiction of the “fantastic and grotesque” was not an exaggeration, but simply the way the modern world appeared from the viewpoint of an intelligent observer.<sup>354</sup> According to de Casseres, American ambivalence to caricature stemmed from the majority’s mindless popular deployment of the medium, and from the pure and puritanical Anglo-Saxon New England morality that blinded the country to the higher truth the medium could reveal.

Expanding his search for caricature’s ideal audience and subject, de Casseres probed the racial and facial composition of the city itself in a 1910 *Camera Work* essay, “The Physiognomy of the New Yorker.” In the essay he celebrated “The New York face!” proclaiming “there is no face like it in the world.” Referring to the New York face as “a rough-cast of America-that-shall-be,” de Casseres argued that its physiognomy was destiny. As mentioned in Chapter 1, he described it as “a *composite* creation, embodying the spirit of the Great Republic,” suggesting that New York displayed America’s status and future as a cosmopolitan nation built on diverse foreign immigrants.<sup>355</sup> Although the Anglo-Saxon New England elites might have been hesitant to embrace caricature, the medium would prove ideal for envisioning the city of New York, America’s new composite center.

### *Declassifying the Individual*

De Zayas’ next show at 291, “Up and Down Fifth Avenue, A Social Satire,” ended the 1910 season with “a peal of laughter,” as *Camera Work* reported. On its specially built, nine-foot by fifteen-foot “stage,” diverse groups of recognizable individuals from New York’s public life, “well known New York characters” rendered as six to twelve inch cardboard cutouts, mixed, and traveled up and down the avenue. Alfred Vanderbilt’s coach full of theatrical stars was deemed “the feature of the show.”<sup>356</sup> The Stieglitz circle rationalized the exhibition’s popularity, both in terms of high attendance and extensive

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<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>355</sup> Italics added. Benjamin de Casseres, “The Physiognomy of the New Yorker,” *Camera Work* 29 (Jan. 1910): 35.

<sup>356</sup> “From the theatrical world and the world of arts and letters, and prominent people from the social world were represented on silhouettes cut out of thick cardboard.” The show stretched from April 26<sup>th</sup> of 1910 until November of that year. Anon., “Caricatures by Marius De Zayas,” *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 42.

press coverage, partially by the public's desire to see itself humorously represented, "and for the greater part because of the more legitimate interest in the thoroughly artistic conscience."<sup>357</sup> This brief clarification articulated the challenges posed by considering caricature as a fine art. The medium's appeal to both vanity and humor could easily become distractions from the deeper aesthetic values that 291 attempted to impart, but these appeals could also assist the medium in fulfilling its aesthetic mission.

Sadakichi Hartmann, the German-Japanese American critic, reviewed 1910's show of theatrical caricature with an essay entitled simply "De Zayas." Hartmann clarified caricature's specific artistic qualities, writing that de Zayas' drawings departed from the "ordinary records of distortion" by displaying an "artist's irony...[a] savage style at once correct and individual." Hartmann connected irony, a hallmark of caricature, explicitly to the "savage," and went on to link de Zayas' style to French influences in the U.S. and to Japanese calligraphy. In his treatment of these simultaneously savage and cosmopolitan caricatures, Hartmann reinforced the physiognomist's message that "each man has some external characteristic, an appearance, gesture, attitude, which reveals the essence of his personality."<sup>358</sup> He also claimed the new caricaturist's interest was "not in the actor but in the role the particular Thespian plays," underscoring the theatrical aesthetic parlayed by many of de Zayas' subjects, as well as inviting the new urban American (the subject implied by caricature) to take a performative relation to her composite identity.<sup>359</sup>

Identity no longer seemed to be a fixed essential attribute, but offered dynamic possibilities of mixing, passing, and transforming. According to Hartmann, de Zayas' focus on the variety of identity was the primary importance of his caricature. By opposing illustrations of the generic types that had been popular subjects for caricatures, Hartmann wrote, de Zayas' drawing "describes only the individual, it desires only the unique. It does not classify. It declassifies." Underscoring the modern tension between individual and mass, Hartmann called de Zayas' caricature "a protest against the smug and equalitarian

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<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.* As art historian Charles Brock points out, de Zayas's show was "one of the most popular exhibitions ever mounted at 291, it drew thousands of visitors." Brock, "Marius de Zayas," *Modern Art and America*, 145.

<sup>358</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "De Zayas," *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 31-32.

<sup>359</sup> This notion of performativity is in addition to highlighting De Zayas' interest in the stage, as suggested in the survey of de Zayas' career in Wendy Wick Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America* (New Haven: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in association with Yale University Press, 1998), 72-102.

organizations of life,” such as conventions and parades; they exposed instead “the hypocrisy of morals—a wonderful synthesis of the grandeur and shame of the large city.”<sup>360</sup> For Hartmann and others in the New York avant-garde, de Zayas’ savage and cosmopolitan style offered an antidote to the types proffered by bureaucracies of immigration and ethnic stereotype, creating through caricature a synthesized world of performative individuals.<sup>361</sup>

### *Mixing Photographic “Cocktails”*

Photo-historian Sarah Greenough has suggested that during the early teens Stieglitz became newly interested in photographic portraiture; I propose this new project triggered by the caricaturist’s arrival. Stieglitz’s photograph of de Zayas between an African mask and a Picasso etching, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, is only one of Stieglitz’s large series of portraits from the period. Two of Stieglitz’s 1913 photographs, one of de Zayas in front of his charcoal caricature *John Marin and Alfred Stieglitz* and another of the painter John Marin in front of the same drawing, suggest caricature’s ability to open new ways of seeing and new methods in photographic practice (fig. 3.15 and 3.16). Greenough argues the compositional technique of Stieglitz’s earlier portraits (such as the 1912 photograph of Arthur Dove, a single figure emerging out of a dark field [fig. 3.17]) to photographic pioneers from the 1840s such as David Octavius Hill and Robert Abramson, arguing that by invoking medium specific precedents Stieglitz intended this series to differentiate between photography and other forms of portraiture.<sup>362</sup> Two photographs taken in 1913 in front of de Zayas’ caricature *Marin and Stieglitz* must be seen as another direction, this one based on caricature, which created composite portraits integrating the human subject with an expressive image in another medium. I take these images as evidence that in view of other forms

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<sup>360</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “De Zayas,” *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 31-32.

<sup>361</sup> A second essay by Hartmann entitled “Visions of the Nude” appeared in *Camera Work* alongside his commentary on De Zayas and generalized the modern relationship of individual and group. The essay was a meditation on the difficulties satisfying “our passions” for the classical nude while obstructed by an absurd puritanical morality that dictated, “now we must look through spy holes to see the nude.” Using “fragments of the ideal human type that nature scatters here and there among the multitudes of mediocre and defective forms,” to make a perfect composite whole from parts was the only hope for moderns. Sadakichi Hartmann, “Visions of the Nude,” *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 29-31.

<sup>362</sup> Sarah Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” *Modern Art and America*, 35.

of portraiture, specifically caricature, Stieglitz found the heritage of “straight” photography lacking, and grappled to provide the medium with a new representational strategy.

In these photographic portraits with caricatures, Stieglitz utilized the background plane as an active layer of non-photographic representation. For example, the way in which Stieglitz positioned de Zayas’ head in the frame located him between his two caricatures of Marin and Stieglitz and creates a new trio. In contrast, the painter John Marin stands directly in front of his drawn self in the caricature, his photographic portrait replacing its charcoal image. Although Stieglitz continued to photograph against dark backgrounds, he pursued the strategy of these caricature photographs by systematically juxtaposing portrait subjects against works of modern art, such as the 1915 photographs of painters *Charles Demuth* and *Alfred Maurer* (each depicted their subject’s heads framed by Picasso’s 1912 drawing *Head of a Man*) and of his daughter in *Kitty at 291* and of 291’s secretary in *Marie J. Rapp* (each shown in front of Picasso’s 1909 *Head of a Woman*) (fig. 3.18, 3.19, 3.20 and 3.21). Sometimes the art with which subjects were posed was their own, as in a 1915 photograph of French painter *Francis Picabia* (1915) (fig. 3.22). The amalgamation of photographic and non-photographic modes of representation in Stieglitz’s work, which began with these caricature photographs, culminated with the image that is often regarded as the first of his famous photographic series of Georgia O’Keeffe, which depicted the painter centered in the arching forms of her watercolor *Blue I* (fig. 3.23).<sup>363</sup> Unlike pictorial photography, which encouraged painting on the negative, Stieglitz’s new method included paintings as expressive subjects within a “straight” photographic representation. Stieglitz found a new photographic “cocktail,” enabling him to create complex portraits in his “straight” representational medium, using images in non-photographic mediums to depict aspects of the subject’s personality invisible in the mere externals of body alone.

Although this series of photographic portraiture has been understood as a precursor to Stieglitz’s famous, closely cropped images of O’Keeffe’s body and hands, the layered photographs, I argue, actually propose an entirely different theory of photographic representation. These complex, layered images

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<sup>363</sup> I do not include Stieglitz’s renowned 1917 photograph *The Fountain*, which aestheticized Duchamp’s urinal by placing it in front of Mardsen-Hartley’s painting *The Warriors*, because it is a portrait of an object.

relied, not on a synecdochical relationship of part standing for whole, but rather on a dialogue between independent parts, suggesting a strategy of modernist photography that has been overlooked by scholars. In following Haviland's exhortation that photography would only be sure of its position among the arts by "standing the test of comparison with other media" and by following "the modern evolution of media," Stieglitz's photographs sidestep two traps.<sup>364</sup> They continue his rejection of the straightforward appropriation of another medium's methods (he does not paint on the negative, for example), but they also avoid privileging only an insistence on purity and thus the risk of isolating the medium. The medium's purity, Stieglitz seemed to realize, might make photography an art form, but it would not make it a modern art. His photographic investigation of the complicated dialogue between art objects and representational strategies forces us to recognize that there were other possibilities and impulses in "straight" photography than a teleological path toward formalist purity.

### 3.3 Cubism, Caricature, and the Spaniard Picasso

In 1910 de Zayas traveled to Paris, where his theoretical and adventurous view of modern art quickly made the caricaturist a valuable new emissary of, and informant to, New York's 291 group.<sup>365</sup> In his first article sent from the capital of modern art, "New Art in Paris," de Zayas described the prevailing aesthetic currents in Europe. The caricaturist and budding critic reported on the Cubist theories of Jean Metzinger (enclosing a magazine reproduction of the painting *Nu*), but expressed his disappointment at discovering Metzinger was actually the imitator of "a Spaniard," a painter that the caricaturist planned to meet through Paul Haviland's brother, Frank.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> P.B.H., "The Photo-Secession and Photography," *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910): 42.

<sup>365</sup> Art historian and pioneer of research on the early Stieglitz circle, William Innes Homer writes "More than any other writer before the Armory Show, De Zayas tried to fathom the complex aesthetic problems of modern art." William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (New York: Graphic Society, 1977), 54.

<sup>366</sup> "The theory of this gentleman," De Zayas explained to Stieglitz, "is that he sees everything geometrically... To him a head represents a certain geometrized figure, the chest another, and so forth. The fourth dimension was not enough for him so, he applied the whole geometry." De Zayas to Stieglitz, October 28, 1910, YCAL. One small still-life painting by this "Spaniard," Pablo Picasso, had already been introduced to New York by Max Weber in 1909. Steichen was also acquainted with Picasso, although unenthusiastic about his work, and as noted by de Zayas, Frank Haviland was Picasso's good friend. Despite previous links, it was the caricaturist's arrival in Paris that brought the work of this "Spaniard" Picasso to the center of the Stieglitz circle.

De Zayas' position as a fellow Spanish-speaking immigrant facilitated his quick friendship with this "Spaniard," Pablo Picasso. An early article on Cubism published in the U.S. described Picasso in stereotypical physiognomic terms with which de Zayas may have been able to identify: "Picasso is a devil. I use the term in the most complimentary sense, for he's young, fresh, olive-skinned, black eyes and black hair, a Spanish type, with an exuberant, superfluous ounce of blood in him."<sup>367</sup> Although Spain was not explicitly cited by Madison Grant as an example of the dangers of miscegenation (as Mexico had been), Picasso's olive skin seemed to suggest that there was something superfluous (the concurring Moor?) lurking in the artist's European heritage.<sup>368</sup>

American expatriate poet Gertrude Stein located Picasso's national identity at the center of his art.<sup>369</sup> Picasso's Spanish heritage, she argued, legitimized the painter's use of African forms.<sup>370</sup> She reminded the reader:

one must never forget that African sculpture is not naïve, not at all, it is an art that is very very conventional, based upon tradition and its tradition derived from Arab culture. The Arabs created both civilization and culture for the negroes and therefore African art which was naïve and exotic for Matisse was for Picasso, a Spaniard, a thing that was natural, direct and civilized.<sup>371</sup>

As far as American avant-gardes were concerned, Picasso and de Zayas shared this Latin heritage. Poised between Europe, the New World, and even Africa, these Latins therefore operated as potent agents in the cosmopolitan world of modern art.

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<sup>367</sup> Gelette Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," *Architectural Record* 27 (May 1910): 401-414.

<sup>368</sup> This was also suggested in France as well, Apollinaire, for example, described Picasso in 1905 as "ethnically more of a Latin, rhythmically more of an Arab." Guillaume Apollinaire, "Young Artists: Picasso the Painter," *La Plume*, May 15, 1905, anthologized in *Apollinaire on Art*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 16.

<sup>369</sup> "Picasso was always possessed by the necessity of emptying himself, of emptying himself completely...he can never empty himself of being Spanish." Gertrude Stein, "Picasso," originally published in 1938 by B. T. Batsford, Ltd., London, citations to essay anthologized in Gertrude Stein, *Writings, 1932-1946* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 520.

<sup>370</sup> He was able to "assimilate the Orient without imitating it, he can know Arab things without being seduced, he can repeat African things without being deceived." *Ibid.*, 521. The geography of Spain was also important in Stein's reading of Picasso's work "And also one must never forget that Spain is the only country in Europe whose landscape is not European, not at all, therefore it is natural that although Spaniards are Europeans even so they are not Europeans." *Ibid.*, 523.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 512. The primitivism of the Spanish is also evidenced by their responses to photographs. "Picasso at this period often used to say that Spaniards cannot recognize people from their photographs," he supported this claim with the story that when men went to do military service their families were sent a stock photograph, either of a clean shaven man or a bearded one, and they found it quite convincing. *Ibid.*, 507.

### *Picasso's First Exhibition In New York*

Picasso's exhibition at 291, his first in the U.S., opened in New York on March 28, 1911. De Zayas had arranged the show only five months after his arrival in Paris. Edward Steichen, who had previously been Stieglitz's primary contact in the European art world, worried about Picasso's new work, describing it to Stieglitz as "certainly 'abstract'—nothing but angles and lines that has got [to be] the wildest thing you ever saw."<sup>372</sup> Although Stieglitz would buy and celebrate one of the wildest, most controversial drawings displayed, the intellectual cocktail *Standing Female Nude*, even he did not expect his New York audience to understand Picasso's latest drawings instinctively. The exhibition was planned to make the watercolors and drawings accessible by highlighting the technical proficiency of the early work and providing an introductory catalogue authored by de Zayas.<sup>373</sup>

De Zayas' text was actually a translation of an essay written for the Spanish-language New York-based magazine *América* that articulated Picasso's theory and method based on a series of Paris interviews.<sup>374</sup> Stieglitz slightly abridged the text (eliminating many of the passages that seemed aimed particularly at a Spanish audience, such as elaborate emphasis on Picasso's nationality) and distributed the article as a pamphlet at the show and in *Camera Work*. De Zayas explained Picasso's artistic process:

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<sup>372</sup> Steichen wrote Stieglitz after the 1911 show had been arranged "Picasso was a man I never could see...I admire him but his is worse than greek (sic) to me...Picasso may be a great man but it would be rank snobbery for me to say I see it now." Thus, although Steichen was the first to urge Stieglitz to show works in non-photographic media, arranging the show of Rodin's drawings in 1908, his judgment of Picasso's "wildness," as well as his assertion that he could not yet understand Picasso's importance, underscores de Zayas' importance as a translator and importer of the new phase of European modern art. Steichen to Stieglitz, undated [Jan or Feb 1911], YCAL. If Steichen was involved in selecting the works shown in Picasso's exhibition remains a bit unclear. Paul Haviland wrote they had been "selected by de Zayas, Steichen, Frank Burty Haviland and the artist himself." Paul Haviland, "Photo-Secession Notes," *Camera Work* 38 (April 1912): 36. While Steichen recalled years after the fact that "Gertrude Stein was instrumental in softening Picasso for us," but "the actual selection of Picasso's contribution for the exhibition in New York was made by the Mexican caricaturist Marius de Zayas" and Picasso's friend the Catalan sculptor Manolo. Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, unpagged.

<sup>373</sup> Although no photographs or exhibition checklists exist of the show, its large, easily overwhelming, scale is clear from letters and press reviews. Eighty-three works were sent from Paris to New York. Thirty-four were available to viewers upon request and forty-nine others were displayed on the walls of the small gallery.

<sup>374</sup> De Zayas to Stieglitz, March 7 1911, YCAL. The original essay in Spanish was published as Marius de Zayas, "Pablo Picasso," *América: Revista mensual ilustrada* (May 11, 1911): 363-65. The article was translated by de Zayas and reprinted with slight abridgement Marius de Zayas, "Pablo Picasso," *Camera Work* 34-35 (April-July 1911): 65-67. The Picasso essay's initial publication in the New York based journal *América* suggests the way the foreign-language press may have worked as a venue for discussing new European art along with journals like *Camera Work*. Although portions of De Zayas' essay specifically addressed an audience mainly concerned with Spain's artistic supremacy over France, it also appealed to Americans like Stieglitz. Spanish and English version reprinted in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, ed, Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 213-221.

the artist first received “a direct impression from external nature,” acting almost as a sort of sensitized photographic plate. In the second step of his creation he “analyses, develops, and translates” this “direct impression.” De Zayas’ choice of verbs positioned the abstract painter as a kind of scientist / photographer / linguist, who only after these interim steps finally “executes it in his own particular style.” Vivaldi, Picasso aimed to represent not the “physical manifestation” of form, but the “psychic one,” not through subject matter, but rather by the “manner in which he expresses.” De Zayas advised the confused viewer to examine only “the emotion or the idea generated from the spectacle and not the spectacle itself.” This process – beginning from nature, but aiming to communicate the idea or emotion originally provoked in the artist by the subject, had clear resonance with photography and with de Zayas’ own caricature (and reviewers did not hesitate in finding Picasso’s work similarly humorous). In fact, in the original Spanish version of the essay, de Zayas explicitly referred to his own medium, writing, “let it be kept in mind that when I make a caricature I don’t say to the public: ‘this is how so-and-so is,’ but this is how I see so-and-so through my caricaturist’s lens.”<sup>375</sup> Rather than aiming to express exactly the physical exterior world, the modern artist, the caricaturist, and even the photographer each interpreted the world through a medium-based personal lens.

De Zayas also argued that the radical innovations of Picasso’s work, such as deformations of conventional systems of perspective and shadow, were actually simply the evolution of previous artistic developments. He explained Picasso’s belief that all races fundamentally “pursue the same artistic ideal, with a tendency similar to his own [Picasso’s] technique.”<sup>376</sup> Although his forms appeared extremely unfamiliar, de Zayas claimed Picasso’s drawings were simply part of art’s evolution throughout history and across races. He did not explicitly state that Picasso was inspired by African sculptural logic in his essay, but having visited the artist several times in his studio de Zayas was well aware of Picasso’s

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<sup>375</sup> Stieglitz excised a section of de Zayas’ essay that read “Sometimes, prompted by my good-humored spirit, I may have joked upon considering a painting or a statue, the same way that I joke with a pencil when I make a caricature. But, let it be kept in mind ...” in Spanish: “Algunas veces, llevando por mi espíritu de buen humor, habré bromeado al considerar un cuadro ó una estatua, lo mismo que bromeo con el lapis al hacer una caricatura. Pero téngase presente que cuando hago una caricatura no digo al publico: ‘así es fulano,’ sino así es como veo á fulano á través de mi lente de caricaturista.” De Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 213-218.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.



collection of African pieces. Early in 1911, he visualized their influence in a caricature of the painter with sculptures forming the background (resembling the compositions of Stieglitz's composite photographs); African deities crowd Picasso, watching him and seeping into and out of his mind (fig. 3.24).<sup>377</sup> De Zayas positioned Picasso's work not as a radical departure from previous artistic production, but rather as an evolutionary, formal hybrid of races and mediums.

### *Critics' Reactions*

New York critics were infuriated by the strange Picasso show and by the caricaturist's bizarre text. At a loss for ways by which to judge these new works, they relied heavily on de Zayas' statement of Picasso's evolutionary theories, particularly focusing on the use of "primitive" racialized forms. Many reviewers composed lists of past cultures and the attributes they seemed to impart to Picasso's work.<sup>378</sup> Although a few considered the drawings and watercolors on display as interestingly evolutionary, most angrily understood Picasso to negate the very idea of progress in his return to the primitive.<sup>379</sup> Art critic Joseph Edgar Chamberlain, who emphasized Picasso's Spanish origin by using the honorific Señor, argued "it would be an error to apply to Señor Picasso's method any term that implied progress, or advance, or development...these things of Picasso's are neo-African." Chamberlain, known for his support of the Ashcan school of New York painters, explained the drawings were "supposed to be the result of a sort of geometrical obsession in the soul of the artist," but averred he could see only "a rude, primitive attempt to represent the human and figure as blocks and slabs." Picasso's "Neo-Africanism," he concluded (enlisting de Zayas' language of personal and geometrical vision), "jars our 'personal motives'

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<sup>377</sup> Astute viewers of the 291 show also likely made the connection between de Zayas' statement about diverse races and Africa, based on Gelette Burgess's 1910 article on Cubism published in the American journal *Architectural Record*. To understand Picasso's work Burgess claimed to have "studied the gargoyles of Oxford and Notre Dame...the art of the Niger and of Dahomey...Hindu monstrosities...and many other primitive grotesques." Gelette Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," *Architectural Record* 27 (May 1910): 401-414.

<sup>378</sup> For example, critic James Huneker wrote "obsessed by the Egyptians, Picasso has deserted his earlier linear suavity for a hieratic rigidity," and Israel White argues Picasso had pushed beyond the "plane geometry" of Japanese art Mr. James Huneker of the *NY Sun* and Mr. Israel White of the *Newark Evening News*, reprinted in *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911): 52-3.

<sup>379</sup> "When, like Picasso, they hark back to primitive symbols for the expression of their exceedingly sophisticated feelings and ideas, they are merely wearisome in their lack of anything like true originality." Miss Elizabeth Luther Carey of the *NY Times*, *Ibid.*, 51.

and we think it jars the personal motives of 9,999 out of every 10,000 Americans and Europeans.”<sup>380</sup> The quick shift from formal to racial terms argued that the works’ abstraction covertly referenced a return to Africa that would be unsettling to any American or European (white) viewer. Although it is distressingly racist, this reaction is not a misunderstanding of de Zayas’ text. In introducing Picasso’s work the caricaturist had attempted to minimize the jarring of *newness* by positioning it as an evolution, thus determining that what was to be unsettling in the U.S. was not the frequently theorized modern shock of the *new*, but the shock of *racial* and *cultural* difference. The aesthetics and implied social implications of composite modernism, although frequently wrapped by de Zayas in the theoretical language of cosmopolitan refinement, also had the potential to jar.

### *Cubism’s Creole*

Neither American nor European, de Zayas remained dedicated to creating a coherent theory of African art’s important influence on modern art.<sup>381</sup> In April of 1911, he wrote to Stieglitz, remarking on “the influence of the African negro art” obvious at the Exhibition of the Artists Independents in Paris, and complaining that most artists had “merely copied it, without taking the trouble to *translate* it into French.”<sup>382</sup> The caricaturist interrogated the issue of influence, of copy versus translation, further in a 1912 *Camera Work* article that began with the confrontational claim “Art is dead;” its demise due to the death of a common culture.<sup>383</sup> An artist’s ideas, de Zayas argued, were “inalienably related to the race, the time and the place,” but modern artists (such as Picasso) born of confused, multiple races and places found no inspiration in their age. They became instead “eclectic in spirit,” muddled up individuals who

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<sup>380</sup> Mr. J. Edgar Chamberlin in the *Evening Mail*, *Ibid.* Rebecca Zurier, *Metropolitan Lives: the Ashcan Artists and their New York* (Washington, D.C. : National Museum of American Art in association with W.W. Norton, New York, 1995), 211.

<sup>381</sup> Marius de Zayas, *African Negro Art: Its Influence On Modern Art* (New York: Modern Gallery, 1916).

<sup>382</sup> Emphasis added. De Zayas to Stieglitz, April 21, 1911, YCAL.

<sup>383</sup> Contemporary art is not an evidence of life or even death throws, but is “the mechanical reflex action of a corpse subjected to a galvanic force.” Marius de Zayas, “The Sun has Set,” *Camera Work* 39 (July 1912): 17.

went back to “past epochs for their inspiration.”<sup>384</sup> De Zayas implied modernists must instead redeploy these forms, must *translate* them into French to force the “primitive” into a new progressive hybridity. Later De Zayas explicitly argued for a sexualized racial hybridity over intellectualized eclecticism, writing in 1916 that Picasso “began by Africanizing his forms and succeeded after a short time in making his art the *legitimate child* of the most intensely impressive of all arts, namely Negro art.”<sup>385</sup> De Zayas theorized Picasso’s successful abstract art specifically as a composite, a hybrid “legitimate” offspring of two parents – European and African art.

Picasso’s work has, of course, long been a site for theoretical discussions of the relationship between “primitive” or “tribal” art and modern art’s formal abstraction.<sup>386</sup> The 1984 show at the Museum of Modern Art, “*Primitivism*” in *Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, organized by William Rubin, attempted to craft a canonical story of the interaction. In his article on Picasso, Rubin actually attempted to eliminate the “primitive” influence, claiming the “low” art of caricature as the true inspiration for works such as Picasso’s modernist landmark *Les Femmes d’Alger*.<sup>387</sup> Rubin argued Picasso owed much more to the popular art form than to African art by citing French critics of the picture,

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<sup>384</sup> Faulting this search for new ideas in old forms, de Zayas sarcastically narrated the quests of the so-called “geniuses” who produce “epidemics of ‘Naïve-Mania,’ ‘Primivolatry,’ and ‘Savageopathy’ by “rummaging about in ancient cemeteries, looking for the artistic truth.” *Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> Emphasis added. De Zayas, “Cubism,” *Arts and Decoration* (April 1916): 284-286, 308-31, quotation from version reprinted in de Zayas, *How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 34.

<sup>386</sup> A brief list includes: Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (New York, Vintage Books, 1967 [first published in 1937]); Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); E.H. Gombrich’s posthumous *The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art* (London ; New York: Phaidon, 2002); Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (New York : Thames and Hudson, 1994); Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Francis S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725-1907* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>387</sup> MoMA curator William Rubin has become infamous for his refusal to contextualize primitive art in any terms other than the formal. Rubin cites the modernist master Picasso as an authority for this view, recounting “Picasso once said to me that he never read anything about African art: he said ‘everything I need to know about Africa is in those pieces.’” William Rubin, Commentary, “William Rubin” section, in Susan Vogel, ed. *Perspectives: Angles on African Art* (New York: Abrams/Center for African Art, 1987), 51-52. Torgovnick uses this quotation to illustrate that Rubin has not “repented” for ignoring the political and ethnographic questions prompted by the exhibition in her *Gone Primitive*, 123. Forced to allow that the painter of *Les Femmes d’Alger*, likely had some relationship with African objects (what he terms an “undoubted absorption of elements from African morphologies”), he argues this rapport was motivated by Picasso’s association of Africa with “a primal physicality so enveloping and so instinctual that it overcomes the inhibitions and controls that inhere to the Western psyche, thus tending to erase the distinction between human and animal.” William Rubin, *Les Femmes d’Alger: a special issue* (New York: Museum of Modern Art : Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 1994), 108. In his essay “Picasso” Rubin also associates the African with references to venereal disease: “they conjure something that transcends our sense of civilized experience, something ominous and monstrous such as Conrad’s Kurtz discovered in the heart of darkness,” William Rubin, “Picasso,” 254.

and ignored the contemporaneous criticism of Americans who, as we have seen, clearly associated Picasso's art with *both* caricature and African forms.<sup>388</sup> In his theorization of caricature's importance, Rubin also drew on the theory of his student Adam Gopnik, who in his 1983 article "High and Low: Caricature, Primitivism, and the Cubist Portrait" positioned the Western art of caricature, instead of African forms, as supplying Picasso's compositional language.<sup>389</sup> Calling caricature the West's "indigenous anti-mimetic strategy," Gopnik asserted artworks often understood as "primitivist," such as Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein, should actually be seen as "a kind of *creole*, a language that assimilates an alien vocabulary to a familiar syntax."<sup>390</sup> Unfortunately, Gopnik undercut the logic of this interesting creole theorization by further arguing caricature's move from a "low" popular form to a "high" art was achieved through the "Trojan horse of primitivism." This framing negates the importance of non-Western forms by considering them only a disguise for the real content – caricature. Gopnik's understanding of the relationship as a *creole* is productive, but his vision of caricature and African art as radically separate (a vocabulary of African forms simply inserted into the grammar of caricature) must be reconsidered in light of more current linguistic theories of creolization.<sup>391</sup> Current theories prove more apt than the ones Gopnik drew upon: they suggest that in the formation of a creole the superstrate and substrate languages intertwine in deep and complex ways to create an entirely new independent language – the kind of "composite" I have been arguing is the characteristic modernism of the American arena.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Such as the critic Félix Fénéon who on seeing "*Les Femmes d'Alger*" counseled Picasso to concentrate on caricature. Picasso later responded the advice was 'not so out of place, given all good portraits are, in a way, caricatures.' in Roland Penrose *Pablo Ruiz Picasso* (Paris 1982), 160, cited in Rubin, "Picasso," 285. Although Rubin does cite an American when making the specious claim that "Burgess saw Picasso's women less as borrowings from African sculpture than as 'caricatures of them.'"

<sup>389</sup> Adam Gopnik, "High and Low: Caricature, Primitivism, and the Cubist Portrait," *Art Journal* 43, no. 4 (Winter, 1983): 371-376. Quoted at length in Rubin, "Picasso," 285. This claim is repeated in Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High & Low: modern art [and] popular culture* (New York : Museum of Modern Art : Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 1990), 125.

<sup>390</sup> Gopnik, "High and Low," 371 and 374. Gopnik even makes an additional puzzling comparison to culinary history, inadvertently underscoring the models of consumption inherent in discussions of the colonial encounters from which Picasso's primitivism and most creoles spring.

<sup>391</sup> Gopnik simply dismisses those who have seen the two categories as intertwined, calling, for example, Thomas Wright's 1865 *History of Grottesque and Caricature* an early source that suffered from the misidentification of "the recent and sophisticated tradition of the caricature with forms of *Urkunst*." *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>392</sup> See for example, the work of pioneering linguist Michel De Graff, such as his "Linguists' Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism," *Language in Society*, 34.4, 2005.

Although subsequent scholars have largely neglected Gopnik's theorization of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O.K. R. Version) as a creole (likely due to his confusion of analogies and association with the much derided 1984 MOMA show), the formulation offers a vision of hybridity that does resonate with larger debates. American studies scholar Sieglinde Lemke has examined the reciprocal, hybrid relationship of modernism and primitivism, following the cultural historian Paul Gilroy in arguing that this creole hybridity is itself a marker of modernity.<sup>393</sup> Alfred Barr called the painting "a transitional picture...a battlefield."<sup>394</sup> In 1905 (before *Les Femmes d'Alger*) Apollinaire called Picasso's paintings "hybrid beasts."<sup>395</sup> American critics of the 1911 Picasso show at 291 often seemed intent on finding strange subjects in the most abstract work, for example, calling the charcoal cocktail *Female Standing Nude* a fire escape. Although these latter identifications often aimed to mock Picasso's work, they also suggest Cubist hybridity exists at the broadest level of subject and representation and reception.

The lengthy art historical conversation about race and cubism has focused on the formal, on the visual evidence of "primitive" influence in objects, ignoring that the very theoretical matrix through which we understand Cubism's representations rests on a notion of hybridity. In the canonical 1936 catalog *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Alfred Barr addressed the multiplicity contained within Cubism as a more general category; "a cubist painting," he wrote, "is a near-abstraction, and offers an impure and ambiguous enjoyment to which the title is a guide."<sup>396</sup> Picasso's dealer Kahnweiler also emphasized the importance of titles to Cubism in his book *The Rise of Cubism* (c. 1915-20). He argued that because Cubist works relied both on formal abstraction and on their relationship to subject matter in the world, the

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<sup>393</sup> "Black cultural expressions are necessarily 'modern' because they have been marked by their hybrid creole origins." Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) as cited in Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism*, 15. In her argument for acknowledging the complex relation of the mutually constitutive categories of primitive and the modern, Lemke asserts that accounts of the quest for self-reflexivity in modern art often neglect "the fact that this particular style was first conceived through a formal encounter with non-European art." Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism*, 41.

<sup>394</sup> Helen M. Franc, ed. *An Invitation to See: 125 paintings from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn. 1973), 47.

<sup>395</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, "Young Artists: Picasso the Painter," *La Plume*, May 15, 1905, anthologized in *Apollinaire on Art*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig. Trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 16. Art historian Frances Connelly suggests the two women on the right can be read as "hybrid figures... Africanized masks [placed] directly on to bodies to which they obviously do not belong." Based on observations of Leo Steinberg "Philosophical Brothel" *Art News* 1 (October, 1972): 21, Francis S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European art and Aesthetics, 1725-1907* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 107. emphasis added.

<sup>396</sup> Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 14.

artwork's "unity" was established only in the spectator's mind.<sup>397</sup> Kahnweiler allowed that the novelty of current Cubism's formal expressions might hamper the viewer's ability to unify the painting.<sup>398</sup>

Descriptive titles would serve to assist viewers and prevent them from perceiving the image as a pure abstraction. Hovering between representation and abstraction, for the Stieglitz group, Cubism's status as "impure and ambiguous" seemed to offer the cocktail needed to invigorate American art.

Kahnweiler credited the "great step" made by Picasso in the art of painting to a summer in Spain when the painter "pierced the closed form." By puncturing this form Picasso, Kahnweiler wrote, rejected "objects as contained by their own surfaces, viz. the skin." Cubism thus departed from previous attempts to only "paint this 'skin' as the contact point between the body and light where both merge into color." It aimed beyond the creation of illusions based on the surfaces of objects (mere externals), attempting to "represent" subjects at a deeper (subcutaneous) level.<sup>399</sup> Other critics also discussed Picasso's Cubist work in relation to skin, transforming the argument to pertain not only to the skin of objects, but also to the skin of humans. In 1930 a French critic echoed Kahnweiler's claim, extending the metaphor to describe Picasso's "barbaric" still life paintings, which "generate the fearful unease of a nudity more than total, like that of a man who had shed both his shirt and his skin."<sup>400</sup> Dutch critic Cornelis Veth objected to Picasso's painting in 1912, counseling the artist, "Anything would be preferable ... to your pinching cuirass [leather armor] around a dead body."<sup>401</sup> Accusing Picasso of using the dead skin of animals to encase and deform the skin of the human body, Veth described Picasso's Cubist heads as reminiscent of subjects afflicted with a skin disease. More recently William Rubin has also theorized that the skin lesions

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<sup>397</sup> Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's book *Der Weg zum Kubismus* was published in Munich in 1920, but the first four chapters appeared in *Die Weissen Blätter*, Zurich and Leipzig, in September of 1916. quotations from the English translation, *The Rise of Cubism*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York, 1949), 12.

<sup>398</sup> "As with any new mode of expression in painting, the assimilation which leads to seeing the represented things objectively does not immediately take place when the spectator is unfamiliar with the new language." *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>400</sup> The essay is attributed to the French Socialist deputy Georges Monnet, but Levi-Strauss claimed he had actually written it, "Picasso and Cubism," Georges Monnet; Dominic Faccini, *October*, Vol. 60. (Spring, 1992), 51-52, from *Documents*, Vol. II, no. 3 (1930). Echos and further dramatizes Apollinaire's comment that "A Picasso studies an object the way a surgeon dissects a corpse." Guillaume Apollinaire, "On the Subject in Modern Painting," *Les Soirées de Paris*, February 1, 1912, anthologized in *Apollinaire on Art*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 198.

<sup>401</sup> C. Verth, "Open bried aan de cubisten," *Elevier's Geillustreerd Maandshrift* 22 (1912) nr. 44, 492. As quoted in Jan van Adrichem, "The Introduction of Modern Art in Holland, Picasso as pars pro toto, 1910-30," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 21, no. 3. (1992): 162-211.

and facial deformations of advanced syphilis inspired Picasso's depiction of the squatting woman in *Les Femmes d'Alger*.<sup>402</sup> Although Rubin intends for syphilis to displace African art as the formal inspiration to Picasso's painting, the grotesque medical photographs he reproduces as footnotes can also signify at other levels. They can remind us that Cubism is theoretically based on uncertainty about the boundaries of bodies and the importance of their external appearances. Cubism's ambiguous creole representations emphasize the vulnerability of skin in a way that questions the putative impermeability of discrete media and races – categories that intertwine and battle in Picasso's work to give birth, as de Zayas put it, to a "legitimate" modern heir.

### 3.4 The Arrival of De Zayas' Abstract "Absolute" Caricature

Locating and depicting the essence of personality beneath the skin had long been the goal of caricature. Writing in 1912 in *Camera Work*, de Casseres united the artistic practice of Picasso and de Zayas through his argument of caricature's self-reflexivity. Contending that the irony used by great modern artists like Matisse, Picasso, and de Zayas was "the supreme method of perception" that enabled art's progress, de Casseres positioned caricature as integral to art's evolution and crucial to modernism's self-reflexive and self-critical modes.<sup>403</sup> He claimed, "no ideal is complete until you have smashed it. No art is perfect until the creator of it has caricatured it." Becoming an influential critic of modern art and befriending its practitioners, de Zayas began self-reflexively reformulating his own practice in caricature.

The caricaturist wrote Stieglitz from Paris that he was storing up "a tremendous amount of impressions," and although he had not yet discovered how to channel them, he promised "they might fecundate in my brains and I will be able to deliver in a healthy way, or may be I will only get an indigestion [sic] and will have to vomit. In either case I will do something."<sup>404</sup> A few months later, de Zayas confided that in spite of feeling quite physically ill he had begun caricatures for a "philosophical

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<sup>402</sup> William Rubin, *Les Femmes d'Alger: Special Issue* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 1994).

<sup>403</sup> Acclaimed artists of the modern era, represent, according to de Casseres "Art doubling on itself, thought and feeling archiving a sublime mockery of itself." He continued by proclaiming, "All great movements begin with the gesture of hate, of irony, of revenge." Benjamin de Casseres, "The Ironical in Art," *Camera Work* 38 (April 1912): 17.

<sup>404</sup> De Zayas to Stieglitz, Dec. 22, 1910, YCAL.

collection.”<sup>405</sup> The use of the word “philosophical” to identify this new group suggests that de Zayas was in the midst of working through a new rational investigation of caricature’s truths and principles. Although he would have preferred to stay in Paris, de Zayas’ illness forced him to return to New York in November of 1911.<sup>406</sup> The percolating ideas he brought along with him would culminate in a new method of abstract caricature that provided the dialectical synthesis between straight photography and abstract art, and attempting to craft a manifesto for composite modernism.

### *Theorizing a Place in American Art*

To find a place for himself and his new caricature in America, de Zayas began creating a new taxonomy of arts. He commenced with an article on photography that began – “Photography is not Art.”<sup>407</sup> Coming in the pages of *Camera Work* this statement must have seemed in striking opposition to the journal’s historic mission of forcing photography’s acceptance as fine art. Yet, Stieglitz himself supported de Zayas’ ideas, writing to one correspondent that with the caricaturist’s article “the meaning of photography as a medium of expression is finally getting its place.”<sup>408</sup> De Zayas separated Photography from Art, calling the former “the plastic verification of a fact” and the latter “the expression of the conception of an idea.” This medium specific separation of idea and fact was crucial. Photography’s “material truth of Form” would be the perfect expression for the modern “epoch of fact,” a new materialist vision of reality – a “state of perfect consciousness” – made possible through the independent machine.<sup>409</sup> Instead of the “emotional or intellectual truth” promised by Art (or artistic photography), the “straight” mechanical photograph provided “the material truth.” The caricaturist repositioned

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<sup>405</sup> De Zayas to Stieglitz, March 7, 1911, YCAL.

<sup>406</sup> In July of 1911, de Zayas wrote Stieglitz that he would prefer not to return to America, a country “where stupidity prevails” and where he would be forced into a “perpetual war fighting that powerful enemy.” Praising Stieglitz, he admitted, “I don’t have either the character nor the strength that you have.” De Zayas to Stieglitz, July 10, 1911, YCAL. A month later however, de Zayas reported he had fallen gravely ill, and in November of 1911 he returned to New York.

<sup>407</sup> De Zayas, “Photography,” *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913), 21.

<sup>408</sup> Sarah Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” 39. Stieglitz to R. Bayley, April 15, 1913, YCAL.

<sup>409</sup> De Zayas, “Photography and Artistic-Photography,” *Camera Work* 42-43 (April-July 1913), 13-14.



photography, not as Art, but as the newest evolution of form able to usher in an “epoch of fact” facilitated by mechanical expression.

Striving to locate caricature between the poles of Art and Photography – “emotional truth” and “material reality” – De Zayas co-authored *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression* with Paul Haviland. The authors set out to explain modern art by dropping the word “art” entirely. They attempted to come to terms with modernism by claiming the real difference between old and new expression was not the turn to abstraction per se, but rather the “direction” in which inspiration flowed. Instead of depicting his own feelings and spirit, the modern creator, according to de Zayas and Haviland, took “a purely receptive attitude; he lets the outer world come to him ... analyzing the reaction of the world on his personality.”<sup>410</sup> De Zayas seems to analogize the modern maker to a photographic plate, receiving and registering the outside world. By formulating modern art as the *analysis* of reactive emotions registered by the “receptive attitude,” rather than the *expression* of the artist’s internal emotive state, de Zayas also marked the convergence between this modern expression, caricature, and photography. Although it did not explicitly address caricature, the study implied its probative, physiognomic mapping as a model for analyzing emotions and revealing the desired truth of contemporary life by “the reaction of the world on his personality,” modern persons imprinting on his receptive template.

The shifting relations between media analyzed by de Zayas achieved national prominence with the opening of the landmark New York Armory Show in February of 1913. Stieglitz (who participated only by lending the works of other artists in his collection, such as his Picasso cocktail) distinguished between the aims of photography and the other arts in his newspaper review of the show. He celebrated the Armory Show for exposing viewers to the work of “a score or more of painters and sculptors who decline to go on doing what the camera does better.”<sup>411</sup> To drive home the power of the camera in displacing those artists and audiences content with strictly representational work, Stieglitz mounted his

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<sup>410</sup> Marius de Zayas and Paul Haviland, *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression* (New York: Gallery 291, 1913), 36.

<sup>411</sup> Stieglitz as paraphrased in “The First Great ‘Clinic to Revitalize Art,’” *New York American*, 26 January 1913, 5-CE.

own retrospective, showing “the straightest kind of straight photography” at 291 during the month-long Armory Show.<sup>412</sup> Following Stieglitz’s photography at the gallery, an exhibition of abstract post-cubist studies by Francis Picabia (de Zayas’ friend, who had become the controversial star of the Armory Show as the only French artist to attend the event) amazed New York audiences.<sup>413</sup> These two important shows, of American straight photography and European abstract painting, were soon followed, and I argue hybridized, by a third – the premiere of de Zayas’ new mode of caricature. Writing to his old friend Sadakichi Hartmann, Stieglitz called Picabia and de Zayas’ shows “the last words of abstraction in plastic form ... Heaven knows what the future has in store for us. It is all very wonderful and yet very logical and very sane, although to most people the quintessence of insanity.”<sup>414</sup> Mounting exhibitions of photography, abstract modern painting, and caricature, Stieglitz acknowledged a new kind of emerging philosophical logic linked these diverse works.

### *De Zayas’ New Caricature*

De Zayas set out to image and explain this new logic in his *Exhibition of Caricatures, Absolute and Relative*, which opened at 291 on April 8, 1913. The show included a combination of eighteen charcoal caricatures divided into equal groupings of the absolute and relative modes announced by the title. Each of the nine representational, relative drawings and the nine abstract, absolute works shared the same material (charcoal on paper) and the same dimensions (little over twenty-four by eighteen inches). Situating the newest abstract, absolute caricatures within the evolution of his previous relative, representational work through similarities in material and size, de Zayas presented them not as a break, but as a further investigation of the true expressive potential of his medium. The new mode enveloped the old, creating composites of multiple, layered representational strategies.

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<sup>412</sup> “Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz,” *Camera Work* 42-43 (dated April-July 1913, pub. November, 1913): 19.

<sup>413</sup> One anonymous critic linked Picabia’s discernment with race – the subtitle to an article on Picabia’s cubism read “Negro Song in Purple / French Artist Guessed Right Away the Darky’s Favorite Color.” Anon., “New York by Cubist Is Very Confusing,” *The Sun*, March 18, 1913, in Stieglitz Clipping File, YCAL.

<sup>414</sup> Stieglitz to Hartmann, May 5, 1913, YCAL.

De Zayas theorized his own new works in a text, "Caricature: Absolute and Relative," that was published as an exhibition pamphlet and in *Camera Work*.<sup>415</sup> Focusing largely on his strange new abstract, absolute mode, de Zayas theorized the process through which he could represent invisible things (beyond externals) objectively in visual form. His drawings were based firmly in his long experience as a caricaturist. Through this practice (which he scientifically termed his "experimental analysis") he had determined:

the facial expressions and the expressions of the body of a man reveal only his *habits*, his *social customs*, never or at any rate very seldom, his *psychological self*, and absolutely never his *specific value*, place or significance in relation to existing things.<sup>416</sup>

Self-reflexive theorist of his own artistic practice, de Zayas explained he had been forced to evolve his style because traditional drawing focused only on the material self (externals of the body) was only able to represent limited components of individuality, forcing the caricaturist to constantly repeat himself. A new mode of caricature focused not only on physical matter, but also on the spirit, and the very "idea of man" would create a wider and more meaningful realm for his medium.<sup>417</sup> How could this absolute caricature be achieved? How could the skin be pierced and invisible (subcutaneous) markers of identity be visualized?

Matter and spirit were inextricably linked, de Zayas argued, and thus both must be captured in any thorough, complete representation of an individual. Yet, because a subject's body and soul "constitute two different entities" the caricaturist could not represent them in the same manner.<sup>418</sup> Previous caricaturists had tried this method, forcing feelings and emotions into "concrete form" through grimaces

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<sup>415</sup> Marius de Zayas, "Exhibition Marius de Zayas," *Camera Work* 42-43 (dated April-July 1913, pub. Nov. 1913): 20-22 and republished as "Caricature: Absolute and Relative," *Camera Work* 46 (dated April 1914, pub. October 1914): 19-21. This 1914 publication of de Zayas' article was published along with reproductions of images from the show and another account of his method and impact by De Zayas' friend and collaborator Paul Haviland, "Marius de Zayas - Material, Relative, and Absolute Caricature," *Camera Work* 46 (dated April 1914, pub. October 1914): 33-34.

<sup>416</sup> De Zayas, "Caricature: Absolute and Relative," 19.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>418</sup> This argument followed from his earlier objection to the confusion of modern art's depiction of concrete thoughts in abstract forms. De Zayas and Haviland, *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression*, 34. Picabia, who had become de Zayas' close friend, deemed the new mode of caricature "the psychological expression of man's duality" - a complete portrait that was a rigorously composite image, a representational depiction of matter joined with an abstraction of spirit. Picabia as quoted in Haviland, "Marius de Zayas," 34. Picabia was also quoted as deeming de Zayas "greater than any of the French producers of 'graphical and plastic synthesis of the analysis of individuals.'" Anon., "Drawings by Marius de Zayas," *American Art News*, xi, 28, (April 26, 1913): 2.

or outsized smiles, but modern art opened the door to more complete representation through “material equivalents—abstract form.”<sup>419</sup> Acknowledging the limited sign of difference that could be mapped on the body, de Zayas offered the new parameter of abstraction, counterintuitively, as the method for representing the true composite nature of modern individuality.

How exactly were abstract caricatures to reveal composite identity? De Zayas articulated the new caricature’s components in his explanatory essay through a series of scientifically numbered sub-points. His work visualized “(1) The spirit of man by algebraic formula. (2) His material self by geometrical equivalents, (3) and his initial force by trajectories within the rectangle that encloses the plastic expression and represents life.”<sup>420</sup> Within his statement de Zayas did not reference specific works, but for the sake of clarity I will examine how these three components were depicted in specific works of de Zayas’ new abstract mode of “absolute” caricature.

(1) The new method called first for the use of immaterial algebraic symbols: spirit, which could only be represented by the “abstract equivalents” of mathematics.<sup>421</sup> Curator Douglas Hyland (who organized a retrospective of de Zayas’ work in 1981) investigated these equations in depth, suggesting that the complexity of the algebraic formulas used in each portrait corresponded to De Zayas’ judgment of the complexity of the subject’s intellect.<sup>422</sup> For example, the convoluted algebraic formula used in the Stieglitz caricature corresponded to Stieglitz’s speculative intellectual nature (fig. 3.25). The very simple addition problem in Picabia’s, by contrast, suggested the “child’s play” of the artist’s fun-loving sensualist persona (fig. 3.26). The caricature of Theodore Roosevelt, representing his spirit with an equation that reduced to zero, drew on mathematics to insult the ex-president. The equations are occasionally nonsense interpreted strictly in terms of mathematics (in the case of Roosevelt, de Zayas even made a mistake in his algebra that was quickly pointed out by a reviewer of the 1913 show). A better caricaturist than mathematician, de Zayas’ idea of algebra should be understood in his terms as an

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<sup>419</sup> De Zayas, “Caricature: Absolute and Relative,” 19.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>421</sup> He called mathematics a language that was “essentially symbolical.” *Ibid.*

<sup>422</sup> Douglas Hyland, *Marius De Zayas: Conjurer of Souls* (Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, 1981), 104, 106, 108, 114.

“abstract equivalent” (a word that would surface again in Stieglitz’s 1922-1935 series of cloud photographs).<sup>423</sup> De Zayas’ abstract mathematical expressions opposed the phrenologist and physiognomist, whose numerical systems mapped the physical regions of the head, the body and the ratios between them as equivalent to the psychological inner self. De Zayas’ symbolic method can also be conceived of as contesting the simmering pressure for immigration regulation based on simple mathematical national quotas through its use of complex formulas to represent the *individual* spirit abstractly.

(2) De Zayas interestingly listed the second element of his representations, caricature’s traditional representational realm of the material self, squarely between his new abstracted components. This representational component, ostensibly a straightforward physical resemblance to the subject, has proven the most perplexing for art historians. Taking the image *Alfred Stieglitz* (fig. 3.25), for example, where can we see the physical body? The glasses found in the central darkened circles? The mustache created by the striped triangle in the lower left?

In fact, it is for *Alfred Stieglitz* that de Zayas provided the most clues, recalling the inspiration for this, the first of his radically abstract works, in his 1940s memoir. He explained that the composition had come to him when traveling back to the U.S. in 1911. Stopping in London to study the ethnographic collections at the British Museum, he saw an object from Pukapuka (an isolated island in the southern Pacific) that the museum label identified as a “trap for catching souls” (fig. 3.27).<sup>424</sup> The circles of rope and their use, de Zayas wrote, reminded him of Stieglitz both “physically” and “spiritually,” suggesting the theory of abstract caricature. Scholars have taken this account of inspiration quite literally, but given de Zayas’ own commentary on primitivism we must look at *Alfred Stieglitz* not simply as appropriated copy of the Pukapukan spirit catcher, but as its *translation* into the native language of caricature and filtration through “philosophical” abstraction.

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<sup>423</sup> As art historian Charles Brock argues, “by interjecting, however obtusely, the concerns of mathematics, de Zayas succeeded in substantially broadening and complicating the notion of what a modern portrait could be.” Brock, “De Zayas,” 148.

<sup>424</sup> De Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 80. Although in his book De Zayas wrote this event occurred in 1914. Willard Bohn has convincingly traced de Zayas’ exposure to October of 1911. Willard Bohn, “Abstract Vision of Marius De Zayas,” *The Art Bulletin* 62, no. 3 (September 1980): 437.

The physical resemblance of the abstract caricature to the Pukapukan spirit-catcher may be greater than the drawing's similarity to Stieglitz's own appearance (although the catcher too has been importantly modified).<sup>425</sup> This likeness has led art historian Willard Bohn to take de Zayas' narrative about the origin of his abstract caricature quite literally, arguing that because the Stieglitz drawing used the intermediary step of the spirit catcher in its depiction, each of the ensuing caricatures must also represent the abstraction of an object that de Zayas considered a physical and spiritual equivalent of the person. Bohn's approach has caused great difficulties in the interpretation of de Zayas' images, leading him – when unable to find an intermediary object – to call most of the abstract caricatures hermetic. Even more damaging, Bohn's theorization removes the subject's physical body from the absolute caricatures in spite of de Zayas' explicitly claim the portraits integrated *both* matter and spirit.

In his memoir, De Zayas connected his drawing of Stieglitz not only to the Pukapukan spirit-catcher, but also to an earlier "relative" caricature of Stieglitz captioned "L'accoucher d'idées" (1912) (fig. 3.28). Both "relative" and "absolute" caricatures attempted to show Stieglitz's fecund relationship to ideas and souls, and used the formal device of alternating light and dark circles. This formal and conceptual similarity suggests that de Zayas' absolute caricatures were not based on intermediary objects, but instead on bodily physical resemblances – often as rendered in his own antecedent caricatures. This interpretation is supported by visual analysis. Although Bohn connects the teacup-like shape of Haviland's abstract caricature (fig. 3.29) to his role as representative of his family's porcelain business, I argue the image is more compellingly linked to a previous caricature of Haviland by de Zayas (fig. 3.30 and 3.31). The first charcoal drawing depicts the subject in profile, both arms fused to the body at the elbow with right hand curving into an awkward semicircle, while in the second caricature both arms form symmetrical curves extending from the body and returning through hands on hips. These resemblances suggest de Zayas' abstract caricatures depict Haviland's physical body (perhaps vaguely teacup-like) as distilled in earlier caricatures. The absolute abstract caricature of journalist and Photo-Secession intimate

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<sup>425</sup> As Bohn points out, one set of rings has been removed to make the object symmetrical, and the central set of rings has been darkened. Bohn, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas," 444.

Agnes Meyer also closely resembles one drawn years earlier by de Zayas, with the curving line on the right of the abstract caricature mimicking the curve of Meyer's back in the prior work (fig. 3.32 and 3.33).<sup>426</sup> Finally, reading de Zayas' two modes of caricature in relation to each other allows us to identify the anonymous subjects of the caricature entitled *Two Friends* as an abstraction of the relative caricature *Rodin and Steichen*, sharing semi-circular eyes in the upper right and zigzag beard in the lower left (fig. 3.34 and 3.35).<sup>427</sup> Acknowledging this formal resemblance is vital to understanding de Zayas' caricature. His high abstraction of spirit retained the representative components of bodies, rendering its subjects in a hybrid composite of the material fact and the abstract idea.

(3) The final, most complicated component of de Zayas' theory of caricature was the simplest in graphic representation: "the initial force" that "binds the spirit and the matter together and makes them actuate." This force took form as a linear representation of a subject's path through life, a force line that de Zayas explained also "related to the evolution of humanity," mapping the progress of individuals in relation to that of humanity as a whole.<sup>428</sup> In de Zayas' caricature of Stieglitz, for example, the rising trajectory of the straight vertical line, cuts dramatically through the center of the image and is met by an upward curving line in the lower right. These upward tending lines of "initial force" suggest Stieglitz's continually improving evolution. De Zayas linked this evolutionary line with the discipline of chemistry, deeming its compositional work a combination reaction that bound the spirit and body together, resulting in a new "third definite psychological or metaphysical entity."<sup>429</sup> Simple lines visualized the more general

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<sup>426</sup> Bohn suggests Meyer's portrait looks "suspiciously like an airplane." *Ibid.*

<sup>427</sup> The identity of these individuals has long been in dispute, although to my knowledge no one has previously suggested reading this image as Rodin and Steichen. Hyland, for example, suggests it depicts Picabia on the left and Agnes Myer on the right. Douglas Hyland, *Marius de Zayas*, 110.

<sup>428</sup> De Zayas' text examined the five possible types of evolution. In the first group de Zayas placed those who "have no beginning and no end" who "contribute to the general progress without arriving at a conclusion." These individuals are produced by "atavism" and have "a tacit, or unacquired knowledge of the general progress up to the time when they begin to actuate." In the second group were those who "have no beginning, but have an end." De Zayas claims these are "born under the same circumstances" as the first group, but that they arrive at the end. The third group is those that "have a beginning but no end" they have "acquired knowledge of the general process" although they arrive at no conclusions. In the fourth group are those that have a beginning and an end. They acquire knowledge and arrive at a conclusion. The final group is "inerts or statics" that "do not move with the general progress." De Zayas, "Caricature: Absolute and Relative," 19-20.

<sup>429</sup> De Zayas clarified the difference between "relative" caricature that depicted the subject's "real self" in a single moment or mood, and the "absolute," with its visualization of force lines as a trajectory, that demonstrated how "the individual influences time by the whole of his actions."

phenomena of “universal progress,” and unified the composite individual by bonding together the representational and the abstract, matter and spirit, body and soul.<sup>430</sup>

De Zayas traced the origins of his abstract mode of “absolute” caricature to his previous study of this “universal progress” in the arts of “primitive races.” Although in 1940 he identified a specific ethnographic work (the Pukapukan spirit-catcher) as his formal source of inspiration, he described a more conceptual link when first describing his new caricatures. These “primitive” arts, he wrote in 1913, represented abstractly what early peoples took to be “supernatural elements” external to the individual, but that modern science has proven to exist naturally within the individual. De Zayas’ absolute caricature was inspired by ethnology’s accounts of envisioning the invisible, but his practice *translated, analyzed,* and hybridized them into mathematical and chemical equations for representing the modern individual. De Zayas claimed to use contemporary science to give abstract form to animist spiritual ideals, making his art not simply a copy of primitive morphologies, but a practice that translated influence scientifically for the modern age. He used abstraction as a mathematician and a chemist. Unlike other moderns who pursued abstraction for its formal purity, for de Zayas it was a tool by which the hybridity of modern identity and experience could finally be represented. De Zayas’ composite caricatures married modes of depiction – “primitive” and modern, abstract and representational, material and symbolic – in their attempt to go beyond the skin in visualizing an individual’s body and spirit.

### 3.5 Saying the Last Word with African Sculpture

De Zayas returned to Paris in May of 1914, receiving favorable reviews in France for his new absolute caricature.<sup>431</sup> Yet, as war broke out across Europe, he returned to New York after just four months; “retreating,” he wrote “with all the honors of war.”<sup>432</sup> As art markets closed in Paris, dealers were suddenly eager to send their works across the ocean to the U.S. This increased traffic from Europe to

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<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>431</sup> Several of his caricatures, including ink versions of Picabia and Stieglitz, as well as new drawings of Apollinaire and Ambroise Vollard, were published in the Paris avant-garde journal *Soirées de Paris*.

<sup>432</sup> De Zayas to Stieglitz, September 13, 1914, YCAL.



America coincided with a period in which, photography historian Sarah Greenough suggests, new avant-garde periodicals such as *The Soil*, *Seven Arts*, and *The Little Review*, as well as new arts patrons such as Mabel Dodge and the Arensbergs made Stieglitz feel that he was becoming only “one among many.”<sup>433</sup> To avoid losing his privileged place in the New York avant-garde Stieglitz requested de Zayas bring pieces from Europe that would “make the next season [1914-1915] at ‘291’ a very live one.”<sup>434</sup>

In his luggage de Zayas brought a large collection of artworks to show in New York, including pieces by Picasso, Braque, Picabia, and “fifteen of the best negro things that has [sic] even been brought to the civilized races (?)”<sup>435</sup> Upon arriving in the U.S. the caricaturist wrote Stieglitz:

I left France and especially Paris in a very bad condition. Since the war started it seemed that all intellectuality had been stamped out. I believe that this war will kill many modern artists and unquestionably modern art. It was time, otherwise modern art would have killed humanity. But what satisfies me is that at least we will be able to say the last word.<sup>436</sup>

With the war in Europe the stakes had risen in the American art world. The last satisfying word on modern art was about to be said.

The “very live” season at 291 opened on November 3, 1914 with a show entitled “Statuary in Wood by African Savages—The Root of Modern Art.” De Zayas had been campaigning for such a show since his first extended trip to Paris in 1911. Stieglitz deemed the exhibition “possibly the most important show we have ever had,” and celebrated it as the first anywhere of African sculpture as art.<sup>437</sup> Although the show displayed African sculpture as art, it did so using the word “Savages” (which I will discuss in more detail below), and with the explicit intention of documenting the progression of art in Europe by exploring its primitive root. As de Zayas’ essay introducing the show explained, African art had returned

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<sup>433</sup> Sarah Greenough “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” 42.

<sup>434</sup> Stieglitz to de Zayas, 3 June 1914, YCAL.

<sup>435</sup> De Zayas to Stieglitz, September 13, 1914, YCAL. De Zayas’ general account of the period, De Zayas, *How, When and Why* . . . , 94. It was during a visit to Paris in 1909 that Stieglitz had first seen African art, when he visited the Musee de Trocadero at the suggestion of Max Weber. In the summer of 1911 Stieglitz returned to Paris and was escorted by de Zayas to Picasso’s studio where there is little doubt he saw more African masks first hand and perhaps *Les Demoiselles*. Helen M. Shannon, “African Art, 1914: The Root of Modern Art,” *Modern Art and America*, 173. De Zayas had even hoped to bring some additional works, including paintings by Rousseau, but reported being simply unable “to carry any more bundles.”

<sup>436</sup> De Zayas to Stieglitz, September 13, 1914, YCAL.

<sup>437</sup> Stieglitz to Dove, New York, 5 November 1914, YCAL. In fact, there had been a prior show of African art along with other pieces of art around the world in the gallery on Washington Square run by Robert Coady and Michael Brenner. Shannon, *African Art, 1914*,” 170.

artists to a “sensibility obliterated by an education.”<sup>438</sup> For de Zayas, African forms seemed to open ideals beyond those taught at art academies, returning Europeans (and implicitly offering to return Americans) to the primordial stimulation of sensation through abstraction.<sup>439</sup>

In de Zayas’ theorization, African art’s very power came from its savagery; he celebrated its status as the creation of “a mentality full of fear and completely devoid of the faculties of observation and analysis.”<sup>440</sup> There is no way to defend this racist view, but neither should we ignore it. De Zayas’ vision of the life of early man (the “African savage” assumed to be the creator of the sculptures displayed) as “full of terror because what happened in the exterior world was wholly unintelligible to him” was shared by many of the period’s scholars. German art historian Wilhelm Worringer in his 1908 *Abstraction and Empathy*, for example, argued these supposedly terrified artists found art to create a stable center in a world of flux.<sup>441</sup> Fleeing from Europe where he had witnessed “all intellectuality had been stamped out by war,” de Zayas likely identified (at least unconsciously) with this fearful worldview. The caricaturist shared the racial prejudices of his peers in the early twentieth century, but we must ask, what was the role of such views in building a modern art that would be “the last word” in the new world?

For de Zayas, this “Land of Fright” was seen to be *racially* necessary for the fully hybrid form of modern art to emerge. Depriving Africans of observation or analysis, of course, left those jobs to European-identified mestizos such as de Zayas. In the catalog for the show, he explained modern art by scientifically studying its evolution over the span of civilizations and by tracing “Form” to the “three anthropological groups of the evolution of man,” with the “Black” corresponding to the “Imaginative

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<sup>438</sup> De Zayas, “Modern Art in Connection with Negro Art,” *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 7.

<sup>439</sup> As Colin Rhodes writes, the exhibition at 291 presented African art “as a kind of psycho-cultural *aide-memoire*.” Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 14. The ideas of inspiration and reinvigoration de Zayas presented by the 291 show suggest a relationship between African art and modern art in New York that prefigures the cultural model of the 1920s advanced by historian Ann Douglas, in which the black “other” played the role of a virile example to reinvigorate American masculinity. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (London: Picador, 1995). Sieglinde Lemke contends Douglas’ claim that modern American culture must be conceived of as biracial can only be formulated in our own contemporary era. Yet although Lemke argues persuasively that Douglas’ biracial modernism may have proved difficult in the 1920s in the actual spaces of Jim Crow segregated New York, in the early part of the 1910s the visual evidence of modernist hybridity was explicitly acknowledged in the America with regard to ancient African and modern European art. Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism*, 16-17.

<sup>440</sup> De Zayas, “Modern Art in Connection with Negro Art,” 8.

<sup>441</sup> Ernst Gombrich writes that Worringer had learned from Darwin that the life of early man must have been full of terror because he did not have any understanding of what motivated events in the outside world. Wilhelm Worringer *Abstraction and Empathy*, 1918, as cited in Gombrich, *Preference for the Primitive*, 221.

Form,” the “Yellow” corresponding to the “Fantastic Form,” and the “White” corresponding to the “Realistic Form.”<sup>442</sup> The racism appears egregious to us today, but these racialized theories need to be examined in light of their capacity for cultural work. Deploying form in racial terms allowed New York artists and critics to create a space for their non-thoroughbred, composite new forms. The 1914 African exhibition (especially as redesigned by Steichen who set the sculptures against geometric displays of brightly colored paper) made the link between modern and African art explicit in both textual and visual terms (fig. 3.36). In his catalog De Zayas called for a return to synthesis in modern art, writing, “The ‘old’ art did not analyze its synthesis. The ‘new’ art, as yet, has not synthesized its analysis.”<sup>443</sup> Crucially, it was precisely by translating, synthesizing, and hybridizing aspects of the “Black” geometrical and the “Yellow” fantastic that a composite avant-garde art and theory could be produced, one that could evolve past the limitations of “White” realistic tropes into a new abstract and hybrid modernism. As he had in his absolute caricatures, De Zayas forecasted a dialectic between modes that would have to be synthesized in order for visual expression to reach its highest evolutionary form.<sup>444</sup>

### *Critics’ Reactions*

Recent accounts of de Zayas’ contribution to the study of African art have often identified him as a critic or simply as an artist, effacing any connection between his interest in African art and his own caricatures.<sup>445</sup> However, in 1914 New York, critics noted the integral role de Zayas played in the

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<sup>442</sup> Marius de Zayas “The Evolution of Form – Introduction,” *Camera Work* 41 (Jan. 1913): 45.

<sup>443</sup> Marius de Zayas, “Modern Art – Theories and Representations,” *Camera Work* 44 (dated Oct. 1913, pub. March 1914): 19.

<sup>444</sup> This use of the term synthesis interestingly points back to the history of Cubism. Since Alfred Barr’s 1936 *Cubism and Modern Art*, historians have periodized Cubism evolution with the terms invoked here by de Zayas – analysis and synthesis. Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, 78. The following chapter will further explore the shifting importance of these terms in the Stieglitz circle. In his historiographic survey of the use of Cubist terms “analytic” and “synthetic,” art historian Daniel Robbins suggests that a comment by the French painter Juan Gris in 1925 – “analysis of yesterday has yielded to the synthesis of today” – may be the inspiration of Barr’s idea. However, it seems more likely given Barr’s relationship with de Zayas that the periodization suggested by the caricaturist, (which predated Gris’ by a decade) may have served as the origin for Barr’s theorization of the progression from analysis to synthesis. Daniel Robbins, “Abbreviated Historiography of Cubism,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4, Revising Cubism (Winter, 1988), 281. Barr and de Zayas corresponded throughout the 1930s and it was Barr who suggested the caricaturist write the account of modern art in the U.S. during the early 1900s, what Barr described as the “pioneer’ days” that would become de Zayas’ *How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York*.

<sup>445</sup> For example, Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 13. Perhaps the most interesting overlooking of de Zayas’ career as caricaturist occurs in Rubin’s “Introduction” to the MoMA catalogue *Primitivism*. Instead of enlisting de Zayas to support his and Gopnik’s claim for the importance of caricature in Picasso’s work, Rubin vehemently attacks de Zayas, identifying his role in the

exhibition and specifically identified him as a caricaturist. Long-time friend of the Photo-Secession, critic Charles Caffin, wrote of his conversation with de Zayas, “the well-known caricaturist, who for many years has been studying ethnology in relation to art with the view of discovering the latter’s root idea.” Caffin explained how de Zayas envisioned the exhibition as an opportunity to challenge art historians who looked for art’s origins in early white civilizations, instead of tracing civilization back to its origins in Africa. Inspired by his conversation with de Zayas, Caffin characterized African ritual objects formally by “the purely objective way in which the carver approached his subject. He set out to make his public see just what he saw in the object. But the way in which he saw it is entirely opposed to the photographic way. It was not representation, as in the case of white savage art; it was rather what we today call the caricaturist’s way.”<sup>446</sup> Caffin’s discussion of African art framed de Zayas’ caricaturist’s way as the modern legacy of the ancient wellspring of African art. Caffin further clarified with a specific example of the African art on display at 291 that employed protruding pegs to depict fierce bulging eyes, arguing the work used “not representation, but suggestion to secure its objective reality.”<sup>447</sup> According to Caffin, suggestion through abstraction (instead of mimetic representation) characterized the caricaturist’s way, while the later “white savage” vision of objective “representation” found its modern instantiation in photography. Here Caffin situated urges exemplified by the marginal media of caricature and photography at the primordial origins of art itself. It remained for a new composite modernism to bring these two races and mediums of objectivity together and give birth to a new hybrid art for the “epoch of fact.”

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African art exhibition at 291 as that of “go-between” and calling de Zayas’s *African Art: Its Influence on Modern Art* “pervasive crackpot racism.” The later criticism seems especially odd given Rubin’s willingness to excuse such racism in the case of Picasso. Rubin escalates his vehemence to claim that de Zayas stole the credit for the article “Picasso Speaks,” identifying himself as its author to Alfred Barr who published the text in 1939. Rubin claims the true author was Florent Fels who published a version of the interview in August of 1923. Yet, the article was first published anonymously identified only a translation from an interview in Spanish in *The Arts* 3, no 5 (May 1923): 315-26. Rubin neglects the fact that de Zayas was associated with *The Arts* through his friend Charles Sheeler, and was in Paris during 1923, thus making the caricaturist the likely anonymous author of the article. To pursue his argument that Picasso had not “imitated African figures or masks,” Rubin attempts to write de Zayas friendship with Picasso out of history and suggest that the two were enemies. Rubin, “Introduction,” 260 and n. 60-64, 336.

<sup>446</sup> Charles Caffin of the *New York American*, reprinted in “291 Exhibitions: 1914-1916,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub. Oct 1916): 13.

<sup>447</sup> De Zayas wrote, “If through European art we have acquired the comprehension of form, from the naturalistic point of view, arriving at mechanical representation, Negro art has made us discover the possibility of giving plastic expression to the sensation produced by the outer life, and consequently, also the possibility of finding new forms to express our inner life.” “291 Exhibitions: 1914-1916,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub October 1916): 7.

Earlier shows at 291 that had tied abstract modern art and African art together (such as the previously discussed exhibition of Picasso's work, as well as those of Brancusi and other European moderns) paved the way for the acceptance of these African works in the U.S.<sup>448</sup> However, one critic detected a "sardonic grin" on Stieglitz's face, and speculated that the exhibition of African sculpture aimed to embarrass viewers already fond of the modern artists frequently displayed at 291 by revealing (as my epigraph cites), "that the children of Brancusi's mind, part ancient and part modern, savage and civilized, European and African, black and white, are *not thoroughbreds*."<sup>449</sup> Having previously taught audiences to celebrate abstract modern art, the display of African art seemed designed to unveil the hybridity of that art. With this revelation one critic found his appreciation of African art increased, while his "interest in the work of Brancusi, who happens to be a European, was entirely destroyed." Yet, using an explicitly genetic metaphor, this reviewer allowed that the lack of pure breeding might not *always* be negative, remarking, "we must not forget that the breed of grayhound [sic] was improved by the introduction of the blood of the bull dog."<sup>450</sup> We can guess which race exemplified the bulldog and which the greyhound. Rather than high-minded discussions of artistic influence, the notion that art might be bred like an animal, stronger (or weaker) in its mixture, demonstrates that eugenic anxieties about New York's

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<sup>448</sup> The African objects that had been so strange and had so "disquieted modernists" in France and Germany at their "discovery" around 1906, arrived in New York at the end of 1914 "already validated as aesthetic objects, framed with a more distanced, 'objective,' formal view." Helen Shannon, "African Art, 1914," *Modern Art and America*, 179. One critic of the 1914 show recognized the connections and actually favored the "primitive" over the modern strongly, writing "wild African tribes...are real artists, expressing a definite idea with great skill—inherited, traditional skill." After lauding the "African Savages" of the title, the reviewer critiqued Picasso who "enamored by their success...has adopted their limitations – and produced merely curious, not an admirable, result." J. Edgar Chamberlin of the *N.Y. Mail* reprinted "291' Exhibitions: 1914-1916," *Camera Work* 48 (pub October 1916): 14.

<sup>449</sup> René Guy DuBois' review in *Arts and Decoration*, reprinted in "291' Exhibitions: 1914-1916," 14, emphasis added. The choice was fitting given that 291 had shown the first original Brancusi sculptures in the U.S., as Paul Haviland pointed out the sculptures shown at the Armory Show had been only plaster casts. Paul Haviland, "Exhibition of Brancusi, March 12-April 4," *Camera Work* 45 (dated Jan 1914, pub June 1914): 19. This sardonic grin agrees with Michael Leja's recent thesis in *Looking Askance* that art audiences' worries about humbug, fraud, swindle penetrated into their viewing of art.

<sup>450</sup> René Guy DuBois, 14. This was actually a more progressive view than Forbes Watson's mocking reaction in the *N.Y. Evening Post* that 291's description of the works "as 'the root of modern art...might be admitted in the same sense that the family of apes might be called the root of modern man.'" Forbes Watson of the *New York Evening Post* reprinted "291' Exhibitions: 1914-1916," 15. De Zayas' used of similar genetic metaphors, arguing, for example, "The abstract representation of modern art is unquestionably the *offspring* of the Negro Art, which has made us conscious of a subjective state, obliterated by objective education. And, while in science the objective truths are the only ones that can give the reality of the outer world, in art it is the subjective truths that give us the reality of ourselves." Marius de Zayas, *African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art* (New York: Modern Gallery, 1916), 41.

hybridizing melting pot lurked even – or perhaps especially – in the domain of aesthetics. Distinct from the context of colonialism in Europe, President Woodrow Wilson’s 1913 order introducing federal segregation formed the background for African art’s introduction into the U.S.

The presentation of African sculpture at 291 went out of its way to distance the sculptures in geography and history, situating them as ancient although they were (likely unknown to de Zayas) made in the early twentieth century. Nonetheless, a review by modernist critic Henry McBride tied the exhibition to the contemporaneous African-American population of New York. Reimagining the African exhibition an explicit joke on critics, McBride suggested Stieglitz should have identified the sculptures as “the work of a little colored boy named Ratus Johnson, who lived at 137<sup>th</sup> street and Lenox Avenue.” He then hypothesized that there would have been an enormous “fuss,” with audiences deeming Harlem resident Ratus “an impudent little upstart” until Stieglitz embarrassed all the critics by revealing the sculptures’ actual origin in ancient Africa.<sup>451</sup> Assuming the public would celebrate such ancient foreign work, McBride urged Stieglitz to use the sculpture to destabilize the position of New York’s art critics and the canons they cherished by placing the African art in relation to the contemporary social conditions of the city. Even considering Africans only in the timeless “primitive” past, the Stieglitz circle jarred many white New Yorkers and Americans by pointing to the racial hybridity at the heart of lofty domain of aesthetics.

Stieglitz asserted that the 1914-15 season, which included the African art show, had “brought to a close the definite series of experiments begun at ‘291’ some years ago.”<sup>452</sup> Recently, art historian Helen M. Shannon has examined a photograph likely made at the close of these experiments, and arranged, she suggests, by Stieglitz and de Zayas, which groups together work by Picasso with African art and adds a wasps’ nest to the mix; she makes the provocative argument that the image should be considered as a

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<sup>451</sup> Of course, in actuality, these sculptures were most likely from the late nineteenth century. During this period Stieglitz had mounted a few shows of children’s drawings, making McBride’s suggestion less far fetched than it initially seems. Henry McBride’s review in the *New York Sun*, reprinted in “291’ Exhibitions: 1914-1916,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub October 1916): 16. As anthropologist Johannes Fabian’s *Time and the Other* (1983) has explored, time the sense of progress it imparts “is unequally distributed among human populations of the world.” Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: how anthropology makes its object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 22-23.

<sup>452</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “291’ Exhibitions: 1914-1916,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub. Oct. 1916): 8.

“test” of avant-garde theory (fig. 3.37).<sup>453</sup> She argues “the act of bringing these disparate objects together as equals became an exercise in canon reformation,” a document of “the idea that form is the subject of modern art.”<sup>454</sup> However, the photograph is not only a set of forms, but is itself a site for the juxtaposition and hybridization of composite modernism that Stieglitz and de Zayas struggled to bring about. Each of the forms contained within the image was created in its own medium and embedded with its own meaning. Period reviews of the 1914 African art exhibit suggest the canon reformation of the image had repercussions beyond the formal. De Zayas had brought the wasps’ nest of racial relations between Africa and Europe, black and white, into the center of the gallery and the new world of art.<sup>455</sup>

### 3.6 De Zayas’ Final Word on Racial Hybridity: “Sans Capote!”

In March of 1915, de Zayas, Haviland, and journalist Agnes Meyer started a new journal, an experimental alternative and supplement to *Camera Work*. With Stieglitz’s support and not daring to step too far from his shadow, their new publication was named after the address of Stieglitz’s gallery. They vowed *291* would provide the best in diverse types of modern art to American and European audiences. War in Europe quickly set the nihilistic mood for a dour view of an isolated, unthinking U.S. culture. In the magazine’s first issue a short anecdote used the math of de Zayas’ abstract caricatures to mock the public’s inability to judge art, noting “Stieglitz has had two exhibitions of Matisse’s work and he also says ‘The Masses laughed.’ And he adds that Masses = M asses = 1000 asses.”<sup>456</sup> Stieglitz later recalled this enthusiasm of the journal *291* had sprung from his long-held hope for an American magazine “devoted to true satire,” a genre he thought neglected by America’s “M asses,” and from a desire to provide a venue for de Zayas and other of the younger artists to circulate and develop their work.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> It is possible that Steichen was also involved in framing the photograph. It is now generally agreed that is not documentation of any particular exhibition, but a posed shot based on the fact that Picasso’s works are not hung on the wall, but simply propped. Shannon, “African Art,” *Modern Art and America*, n. 29, 503.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>455</sup> Although, as I noted in the preface, the term WASP was not coined until the 1960s.

<sup>456</sup> *291* 1, (March 1915): unpagged.

<sup>457</sup> Here Stieglitz echoed de Casseres’ claim that satire was unpopular, meaning that it was not popular for the right reasons among the right populations.

Not everyone was amused by 291's true satire. Hartmann wrote to Stieglitz having read the journal "for the first and last time" in May of 1915:

I must confess I never expected to see such an accumulation of balderdash, bombast, rodomontade, allimaufry, salmagundi and 'I scratch you on the back if you tickle me' rant and prattle under one cover. *Die sind ja keine blaue Reiter!* 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.<sup>458</sup>

Hartmann was of course correct, the heart of the avant-garde was no longer innocent, ideal, and spiritual as the group of German artists *Der Blaue Reiter* had been. The composite modernists no longer aimed at purification of art and its categories, but at a nihilism and devotion to the shocking "truth" created in seemingly irrational juxtapositions and hybrid forms (a proto-Dadaism). Picabia drove the death of German idealism home by using Gothic script to form the word "Ideal" in his famous machine portrait-caricature of Stieglitz published in 291 in July-August of 1915 (fig. 3.38). In the image Picabia accused Stieglitz of remaining in the dead European past by continuing to strive for the ideal, ironically the very concept Hartmann accused Stieglitz of killing off by betraying his German idealist roots with a bunch of art bums.<sup>459</sup>

The birth of Dadaism in the machine portraits Picabia published in 291 signaled a triumph of "the caricaturist's way" (regardless of which way inspiration flowed in the much debated relationship of Picabia and de Zayas). Locating the portraits as caricatures within a satirical periodical also refocuses debates about the drawing's supposed animosity or celebration of Stieglitz.<sup>460</sup> In Picabia's machine caricature of Stieglitz, the flaccid camera bellows do not attain the "ideal" because the task was impossible for photography. As de Zayas put it in his proclamation "Photography is not Art" and in his response to Stieglitz's questionnaire "What is 291," "[291 is] Not an Idea or an *Ideal*, but something more

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<sup>458</sup> *They are no Blue Riders!* Emphasis added. Hartmann to Stieglitz, May 20, 1915, YCAL.

<sup>459</sup> Art historian William Camfield describes a type of "Dada Complex" by which the machine portraits came to be seen by later scholars as unexplainable works. William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1970), 23.

<sup>460</sup> The camera's bellows is drooping, the gearshift is in neutral, and the brake lever in park, critics have interpreted the image as a symbol of impotent exhaustion. Wanda Corn, for example, writes, "Representing Stieglitz as a driving and seeing machine, a visionary. Picabia also represented him as aging and exhausted, the phallic bellows of the Kodak camera having lost its erection." Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 23. See also Marcia Brennan, "Alfred Stieglitz and New York Dada," *History of Photography* (Summer 1997).



potent, a *Fact*.”<sup>461</sup> Learning from de Zayas, Picabia aimed his drawing as a corrective, reminding Stieglitz and other photographers of the caricaturist’s claim that the camera’s productivity lay not in depicting the ideal, but in capturing fact and material truth. With the transition to *291* and the death of modern art in Europe, the singular “Ideal” had to be willingly abandoned for composites made from the objective truths of (white) representational photography and (black) suggestive abstract caricature.

Accompanying this sexualized machine drawing of Stieglitz as a flaccid camera was a text by de Zayas on Stieglitz and American modern art. As discussed in Chapter 1, the untitled essay reads as an extended dirty joke on the breeding practices that would produce such a hybrid. In it (as in Picabia’s caricatures) sex is figured as both humorous double-entendre and part of an evolutionary process of natural selection.<sup>462</sup> The caricaturist’s essay figures New York as a “circumspect young girl or a carefully married woman” who used borrowed intellectualism as a contraceptive against “assimilating the spirit of modern art,” rejecting in the process “a seed that would have found a most fertile soil” in America. De Zayas blamed native-born intellectuals for America’s infertility, addressing them as “messieurs” and blaming the failure of their seduction efforts on their mimicking of French ideals.<sup>463</sup> “Not products of their country,” these confused men were unable to impregnate America, proving impotent geldings, instead of the fertile stallions they imagined themselves to be.<sup>464</sup>

Thus, de Zayas claimed, “America remains to be discovered.” This national self-discovery had long been Stieglitz’s goal, yet de Zayas was not willing to give the photographer full (sexual) power. Unfortunately Stieglitz had “employed the shield of psychology and metaphysics” in his pursuit and thus failed. The word “*capote*” that de Zayas used in the original French, translated in *291*’s English version of

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<sup>461</sup> “What is 291?,” *Camera Work* 47 (dated July 1914, pub Jan 1915): 73. Picabia and De Zayas rendered men as machines in order to produce laughter, which Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud both theorized as a corrective to incorrect behavior. This explains why Stieglitz would willingly participate in caricaturing his viewing public as a thousand asses, happily laughing at Matisse’s rational abstractions.

<sup>462</sup> Caroline A. Jones has discussed “the sexing of machines” in Picabia’s work from this period, “The Sex of the Machine: Mechanomorphic Art, New Women, and Francis Picabia’s Neurasthenic Cure,” in *Picturing Science, Producing Art* (New York: Routledge, 1998) as has Pepe Karmel in “Francis Picabia, 1915: The Sex of a new Machine,” *Modern Art and America*, 207.

<sup>463</sup> All quotations from this essay Marius de Zayas, untitled (but often cited based on the work’s first sentence - “New York did not see at first”), *291*, v-vi, July-August, 1915, 6. It was later reprinted “From 291,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub. Oct. 1916), 69-70. The *291* version included the text in much larger lettering in French with an English translation below, while *Camera Work* only reprinted the English version.

<sup>464</sup> Stieglitz would later attempt to shift the blame to spirituality and American’s puritanical religious tradition in his photograph of a gelded horse *Spiritual America* (1923).

the essay as “shield,” is, as I argued in the introduction, properly rendered into English as “condom.” So, although De Zayas’ exclamation is translated in 291 as “in order to attain living results, in order to create life—no shields!,” I would emphasize the proper translation, which makes its evolutionary breeding imperative explicit: “no condoms!” The American virgin (or proper matron), ripe with cultural currents from across the earth (most significantly, from a “primitive” Africa), needed to fuse with those bearing the “seed” of modern art (implicitly, de Zayas, the author of the essay, and Picabia, the author of the images). Old, foreign intellectual forms of psychology and metaphysics (the now-to-be-abandoned “Ideal”) had acted as an unhelpful prophylaxis against evolution toward a composite modernity.

De Zayas’ literalization and sexualization of the melting pot ideology specified exactly how a modernist stock was to be bred in the new world – where the masculine “seed” was to be planted, and whose feminine body would give birth to the new composite creation. A simple importation of “pure” European theory would never succeed in creating an American art. Instead, mobile and already hybrid outsiders (such as de Zayas and Picabia) willing to depart from the European tradition must become part of the New World by physically seeding the new world stock.

Stieglitz’s attempt to produce a modern art, de Zayas explained, had been much less fecund than his admirably productive photography.<sup>465</sup> Although Americans had succeeded in creating distinct contributions to many fields from photography to sports, they had so far failed in art and literature. De Zayas characterized these latter fields as needing “absolute conscious” and “absolute unconscious,” qualities that American intellectuals, largely educated abroad, could never achieve. Another obstacle lay in the lack of shared American culture. De Zayas emphasized that art always derived from “the synthesis of the beliefs of peoples,” adding that “in America this synthesis is *all but* an impossibility, all beliefs exist here together.”<sup>466</sup> The tiny window of possibility in that “all but” would be the site for a synthetic composite modernism to emerge uniquely on American soil.

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<sup>465</sup> In his 1940 memoir De Zayas included the essay adding a apology: “But I was wrong and unjust in saying all those things. As far as artists are concerned, the Photo-Secession had results or at least one result in John Marin.” Marius de Zayas, *How, When and Why Modern Art came to New York*, 87.

<sup>466</sup> Emphasis added.

Crucially, the solution to the impossibility of a shared (but specific) culture lay precisely in miscegenation – the unbridled hybridization and composite compositions that de Zayas had called for with sexual tropes at the beginning of his essay. The “complex mentality” that resulted from the multiplicity and lack of “general sentiment” in the U.S. paradoxically gave the country an advantage in creating modern art. The potential elements were all around for the necessary hybridization to take place. Unfortunately, American artists were “cold blooded animals” with borrowed, outmoded European aesthetics that set them apart from other Americans and condemned them to “the mentality of homosexuals.” The only hope of robust hybridity had to come from a new type of manly conquistador. De Zayas explicitly articulated the model (which could, of course, include himself): “of all those who have come to conquer America, Picabia is the only one who has done as did Cortez. He has burned his ship behind him.”<sup>467</sup> In these striking sentences de Zayas connected the U.S. art world with his native Mexico by invoking the Spanish conqueror. In de Zayas’ essay, Picabia, like Cortez who had been the wellspring (along with his Aztec mistress Malinche) of the meztizo Mexican race, did not “shield” himself, but “married America like a man who is not afraid of the consequences.”<sup>468</sup>

In his mechanical portrait of de Zayas, Picabia returned the compliment of unshielded fecundity, depicting the caricaturist as a sexual-mechanical hybrid in *De Zayas! De Zayas!* (fig. 3.39). Picabia’s image does not depict its subject as a discrete (albeit modified) mechanical object, but departed from his other machine portraits by creating an elaborate *composite*. De Zayas is an empty corset connected to an electrical diagram that seems to join an impossible hand-cranked system linking both the heart and the sex. The inscription in the upper right, “*J’ai vul/ et c’est toi qu’il s’agit*” identified this automatic seducing

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<sup>467</sup> Cortez did not actually burn his boats upon arrival in Mexico, but he did beach them to make it more difficult for his men to return to Spain and ensure that they would finish their mission. For more on how the myth of burning began see Winston A. Reynold, “The Burning Ships of Hernán Cortés,” *Hispania* 42, No. 3. (Sep., 1959): 317-324 and John Dowling, “A Poet Rewrites History: Nicolás Fernández de Moratín and the Burning of Cortés’s Ships,” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 41, No. 4. (Nov., 1976): 66-73.

<sup>468</sup> These fecund proto-Dadaist bodies present a contradiction to Marcia Brennan’s claim that “unlike the unique and ostensibly fertile forms that critics repeatedly found embodied in Stieglitz circle artworks, Dada ‘bodies’ characteristically were sterile, industrial inspired and interchangeable.” Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 47.

machine as de Zayas and suggests that the caricaturist was indeed able to mate with America and produce a new art as his offspring.<sup>469</sup>

De Zayas and Picabia called on Stieglitz directly for a hybrid, composite modernism by driving wildly from New York to see the photographer on vacation at Lake George, arriving at 2 a.m. to propose a new “Modern Gallery,” a commercial exhibition space.<sup>470</sup> Announcing the new gallery, De Zayas allowed Stieglitz’s 291 had “demonstrated that it is possible to avoid commercialism by eliminating it,” but he argued the demonstration would “be *unfertile*” unless it was followed by a “commercial intervention” that would force art’s producers and consumers into a “relation of mutual service.”<sup>471</sup> As the language of fertility and fecundity extended into the display and marketing of art, the caricaturist and the photographer grew increasingly estranged.

Perhaps to cleverly reassure Stieglitz of his own fecundity, the next edition of 291 (published in October as the Modern Gallery opened) printed an enlargement of Stieglitz’s favorite photograph *The*

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<sup>469</sup> The quotation underscores the meaning of the whole, and as Mariea Dennison argues, “hinges on the visual representation of starting.” Mariea Caudill Dennison, “Automobile Parts and Accessories in Picabia’s Machinist Works of 1915-17,” *The Burlington Magazine* 143, No. 1178 (May, 2001): 278. The other inscription on the De Zayas portrait, in the lower left, “De Zayas! De Zayas! / Je suis venu sur les ravages du pont-euxin,” has been read by historians as biographical. In its very syntax, the quotation evokes classical epic, referencing caricature’s position between the ancient and the cosmopolitan modern. William Homer suggests that this citation of Ovid show that both Picabia and De Zayas felt sorrow in their exile to America, isolated from their native lands as Ovid was in Tristesa, while Willard Bohn traces the quotation to the *Anabasis* and argues that Picabia welcomed De Zayas as Xenophon’s soldiers welcomed the Black Sea, as an indicator of home. Following this argument, Bohn traces the phrase “De Zayas! De Zayas!” to Xenophon’s soldiers’ joyful exclamations of “Thalassa, Thalassa!” a reference available to Picabia in the pink pages of his *Petite Larousse*. William I. Homer, ‘Picabia’s ‘Jeune fille américaine...’ and Her Friends,’ *Art Bulletin* 57., no. 1 (March 1975): 111 and Bohn, “The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas,” 449. But a more proximate source for the quotation from Xenophon may have been Jules Verne’s own appropriation of the *Anabasis* in his book *Kériban-le-têtu*. Verne’s book places the quotation within in a humorous, if at times perilous, journey more closely paralleling the experiences of Picabia and De Zayas than ancient Greek voyagers. (Picabia may have known Verne from his fascination with the writings of Raymond Roussel who was himself obsessed with the early science fiction novelist.) *Kériban-le-têtu* frames quotations from Xenophon with a series of confusions involving seduction and burlesque, through its account of a very stubborn merchant, Kereban, who, determined not to pay the tax on crossing the Bosphorus, evades the collectors by traveling all the way around the Black Sea while incurring much larger financial expenses on the way. The text repeats many incidents from Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, including the exclamation “Le Mer! Le Mer!,” yet in Verne’s book the party’s happiness is not generated by anticipations of coming home, but by finding themselves closer to the end of one absurd journey and the beginning of another. Picabia’s caricature of De Zayas can productively be considered, not only as a reference to alienation and homecoming, but also as a mobilization of an ancient source invoked to convey the black humor of an absurd modern journey around borders and between nations in a perilous time. It should also be noted that the cry of “De Zayas! De Zayas” is above a schematic reproduction of the sea and that Picabia’s ocean trip to the U.S. was commemorated in numerous works from *Transatlantique* to *Undnie*.

<sup>470</sup> De Zayas to Paul Haviland, Aug 25, 1915, Letters sent to Paul B. Haviland, 1915-1918 in the Getty Research Institute, Library Special Collection (GRI).

<sup>471</sup> The announcement was enclosed in a letter from De Zayas to Haviland, October 6, 1915, GRI. The announcement was published by Stieglitz in *Camera Work* 48 (pub. Oct. 1916): 63-64. De Zayas protested behind the scenes against Stieglitz’s reservations that such a gallery aimed “only to fight commercialism with commercialism,” writing to Haviland that the Modern Gallery would feed artists “with something more positive than hot air.” De Zayas to Haviland, October 6, 1915, GRI.

*Steerage*. An essay by Haviland expanded on the sexualized relationship of man and machine, epitomized by the composite modernism of Stieglitz's photograph. Calling the mechanical camera the photographer's "daughter born without a mother," Haviland explained the two depended on each other, for the superior machine lacked thought and needed man's direction. It was "through their mating" that "they complete one another." One of the "the fruits of this union" of man and machine was, of course, the photograph.<sup>472</sup> The fertile photographer joined with his mother/daughter camera to produce a hybrid photographic offspring, *The Steerage*.

Haviland's symbolic celebration of Stieglitz as the very embodiment of the machine age was in tension with de Zayas' more restrained celebration. De Zayas described *The Steerage*, which he pointedly mentioned had been taken nearly a decade earlier in 1907, as Stieglitz's "verification of a fact." By thus representing the objective exterior world, photography "in which the genius of man leaves to the machine its full power of expression" allowed art to break with conventional beauty. After apparently praising Stieglitz for his wisdom in simply getting out of the way of the machine, de Zayas added the compliment – "Stieglitz comprises the history of photography in the United States. 'Camera Work' bears witness to this." A follow-up letter from de Zayas to Stieglitz suggests that the photographer (possibly now additionally bothered by the increasingly independent Modern Gallery) found this acclaim insulting, since it pointedly removed the man from any "fecund" role in relation to this machine. Only de Zayas' side of the discussion remains, so we must draw our conclusions from the caricaturist's attempt to appease his patron:

I don't see how my meaning could be misunderstood. When I say "Stieglitz represente l'histoire de la photographie aux Etats Unis. 'Camera Work' en est le temoignage." (I copy the French text because I wrote it originally in French and I am not responsible for the translation) By that phrase I meant that the work you have done for Photography represents the history of Photography in the United States...I don't believe I was wrong in saying that you represent or comprise the history of photography in the United States.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Paul Haviland, untitled entry in 291 7-8 (September-October, 1915): unpagued.

<sup>473</sup> De Zayas to Stieglitz, Dec 17, 1915, YCAL.

It seems unlikely Stieglitz was asking for recognition for others. Was he upset to have his photographic contribution located exclusively in the U.S.? Or dismayed to be identified as history, annoyed to be depicted, yet again, as a flaccid machine stalled in its fecundity?

### *The Shield of Isolationism*

Picabia's wife Gabrielle Buffet arrived in New York in October of 1915 to force her husband back into his military position and to close his part in this story of American composite modernism. Picabia scholar William Camfield has speculated this "shielding" of her husband from punishment for desertion may be why Picabia caricatured his wife as an automobile windshield in *Gabrielle Buffet. She Corrects Manners Laughingly (Elle carriage les moue's en rant)* of 1915 (fig. 3.40).<sup>474</sup> But it was also she who acted as a shield in de Zayas' sense of the term – a "capote" or prophylactic against her husband's continued productive mating with America. With Picabia gone and relations with Stieglitz fraying, de Zayas struggled alone to impregnate America with his particular hybrid strain of modernism.

De Zayas had called his trip back to New York a "retreat...with all the honors of war," yet the effects of the conflict in Europe followed him to the U.S. By 1915 America was further retreating into nationalism, and by the 1920s, into isolationism. With war raging in Europe calls for racial and cultural conformity in the U.S. reached their peak. Idealizations of America as melting pot into which de Zayas could insert his own particular idealization of composite sexualized hybrids, gave way to calls for the "One Hundred Percent American" who refuted composite, multiple identities. A new nationalism swept the country with America's entry into the war in 1917. The influence of this overriding desire for unity and homogenization were far reaching. As American historian John Higham writes, "with the passing of faith in the melting pot there perished the ideal of nationality as an unfinished, steadily improving,

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<sup>474</sup> William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1970).

cosmopolitan blend.”<sup>475</sup> After his return from war-torn Paris in 1914, de Zayas produced no more caricatures. Had he felt the door closing on the composite that for him had held the unique promise of modern art in America? Did de Zayas understand his radical abstract composite caricature could go no further in an era of the “pure American”?

Sarah Greenough suggests that it was De Zayas’ assertion that a true American art would only be produced by a Cortez-inspired mating of foreigners that drove Stieglitz, “confident in the ability of his countrymen,” to find authentic American artists who could prove De Zayas wrong. It was “perhaps not coincidentally,” she argues, that Paul Strand and Georgia O’Keeffe debuted at 291 following de Zayas’ article, just months apart in the spring of 1916.<sup>476</sup> De Zayas had opened the door for formally composite modern art, linking it with racial and cultural evolution, just as American animosity toward that diversity surged. His promise of a composite American modernism would be delayed. Stieglitz had found in O’Keeffe and Strand young native-born American artists, and in celebrating them he began to distance himself from de Zayas and the crucial enabling premise that America’s particularity was formed from “an unfinished, steadily improving, cosmopolitan blend” of races and media.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> John Hingham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1955), 301. The Espionage act of 1917 made it a crime to assist the nation’s enemies, and was quickly followed by the Sedition Act of 1918 that made it illegal to utter, write or publish anything disloyal to the United States’ form of government.

<sup>476</sup> The hagiographic biography by Dorothy Norman describes Stieglitz as feeling “And then, even as early as 1915, when he became suspicious that European ‘modern art’ was, itself, in danger of becoming blindly accepted, he again ‘seceded.’ Again he shifted his ground, this time to champion work by certain younger—and as yet unknown—American artists, developing their own modes of highly sensitive expression...” Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: Introduction to An American Seer* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1960), 21. Greenough deems the first exhibitions of O’Keeffe and Strand “a bit premature.” Sarah Greenough, “Paul Strand, 1916: Applied Intelligence,” *Modern Art and America*, 249.

<sup>477</sup> Hingham, *Strangers in the Land*, 301.

## Figures



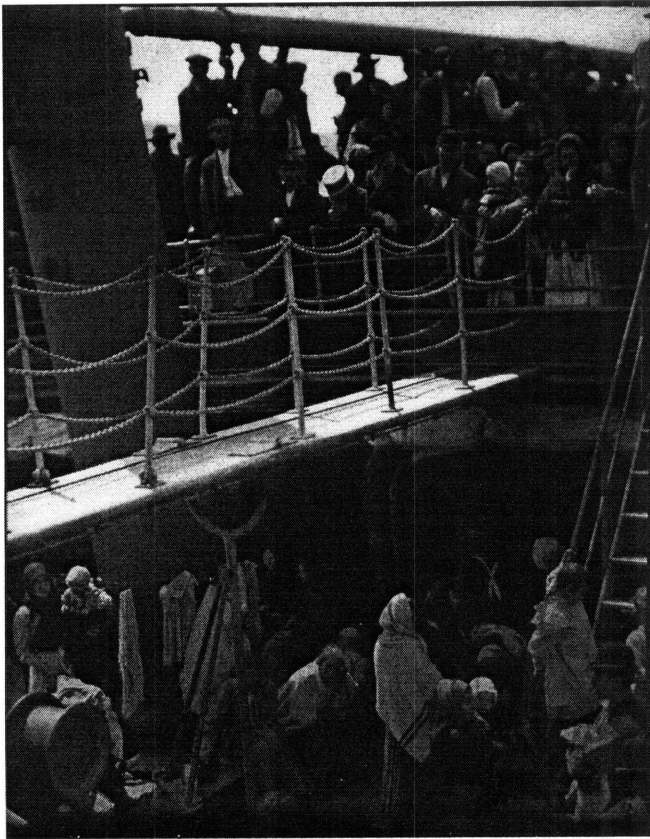


Fig. 3.1 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907. National Gallery of Art, cat. 310.

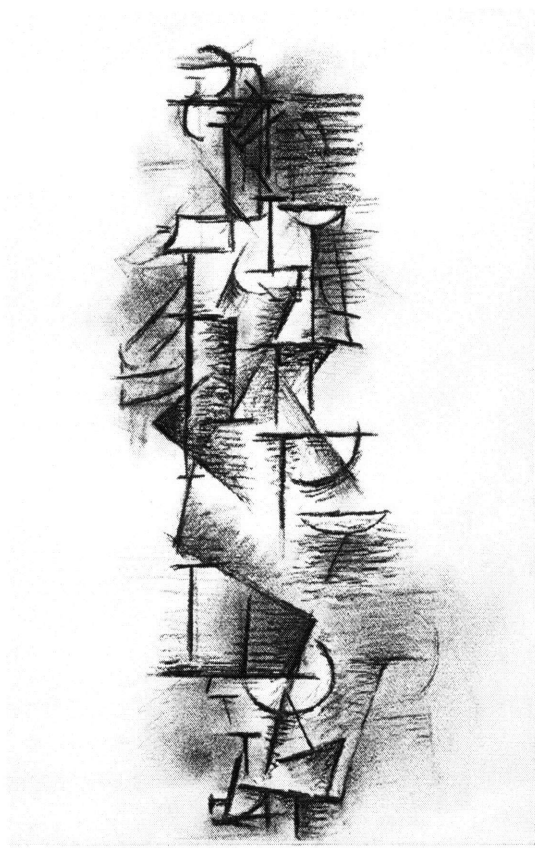


Fig. 3.2 Pablo Picasso, *Standing Female Nude*, 1910. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 3.3 Alfred Stieglitz, *Marius de Zayas*, 1915.



A CITY SCHOOL WHERE MORE THAN TWENTY LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN!

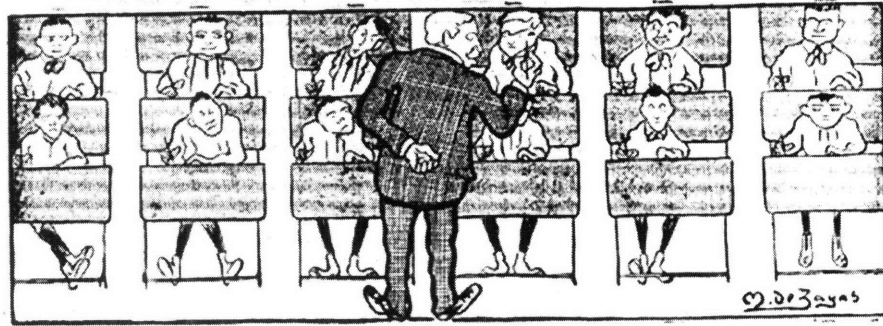


Fig 3.4 Marius de Zayas, "A School Where More Than Twenty Languages are Spoken," Caricature for *New York World*, 1907.

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HEADS AND FACES: HOW TO STUDY THEM.

satisfactory for this purpose. The lady whom this picture represents had received



FIG. 256. DRESSED FOR A PARTY.

proper instruction how to have pictures taken for the purpose of phrenological



FIG. 258. FRONT VIEW OF 257.

examination, and having, as set forth in a circular called the "Mirror of the Mind," followed the directions for the most advantageous taking of the pictures, the result is seen in Figs. 257 and 258.



FIG. 257. SIDE VIEW OF 256.

One would hardly suppose it was the same person as seen in Fig. 256; the hair in Fig. 257 is laid smoothly to the head and twisted, and is held under the chin by the right hand. This shows a perfect outline of the head from the root of the nose to the back of the neck; then the length from the ear forward, its height from the opening of the ear upward, and its length backward show the form of the head. Then, in the front view, Fig. 258, we get an indication of the great width, fullness and roundness of the side-head. We get the shape of the top-head from the center line each way, and we see, also, the breadth and fullness of the side-head, the breadth of the forehead, and especially the width between the eyes, which shows talent for cutting, fitting, modeling, and mechanism. The broad side-head shows strength, power, force of character, prudence, policy, desire for property, taste for the beautiful, very fine mechanical talent, and good musical ability. Without instruction as to what

Fig. 3.5 Page from Nelson Sizer, *Heads and Faces, and How to Study Them: A Manual of Phrenology and Physiognomy for the People*, (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1896, c1885).

## Your Nose

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Can Never Be Equalled by Any Similar Institution.

<p><b>We Perfect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unhappy Noses,</li> <li>Outstanding Ears,</li> <li>Drooping Eyelids,</li> <li>Hollow Cheeks,</li> <li>Buggy Skin,</li> <li>Red Nose.</li> </ul>	<p><b>We Remove</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pimples and Blackheads,</li> <li>Wrinkles and Scars,</li> <li>Smallpox Pitting,</li> <li>Freckles,</li> <li>Warts and Moles,</li> <li>Superfluous Hair.</li> </ul>	<p><b>We Correct</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Falling Hair,</li> <li>Frowns and Frowns,</li> <li>Enlarged Pores,</li> <li>Dandruff,</li> <li>Sallow Skin,</li> <li>Double Chin.</li> </ul>
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Fig. 3.6 Advertisement in *New York World*, May 12, 1907.



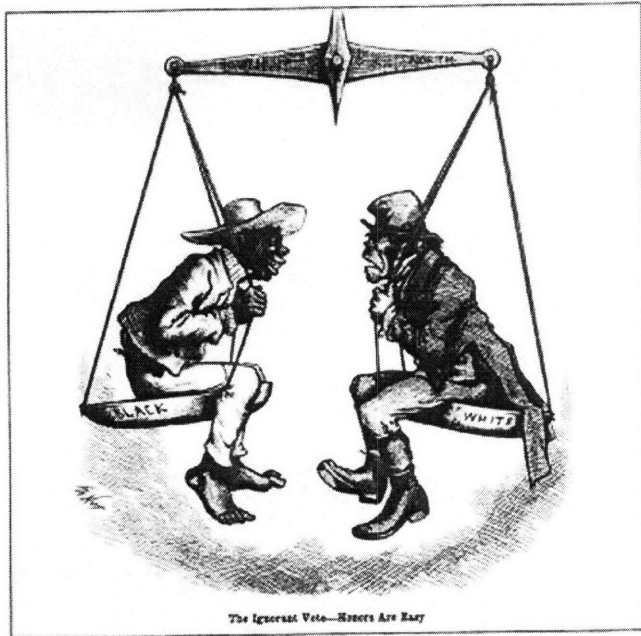


Fig. 3.7 Thomas Nast "The Ignorant Vote – Honors Are Easy," *Harper's Weekly*, December 9, 1876.



Fig. 3.8 Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), *Oxen*. in Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 160.



Fig. 3.10 Honoré Daumier, "Le chêne et les roseaux," *Le Charivari*, October 5, 1834. In Werner Hofmann, "Ambiguity in Daumier (& Elsewhere)," *Art Journal* 43, no. 4 (Winter, 1983): 361.



Fig. 3.9 Honoré Daumier, "Interior of a bus. Between a drunk and a butcher," *Parisian Types*, 1839. in Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 160.





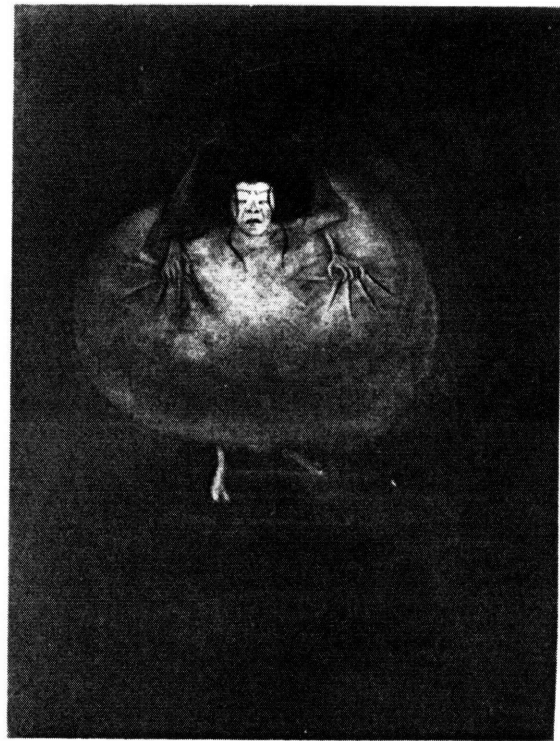
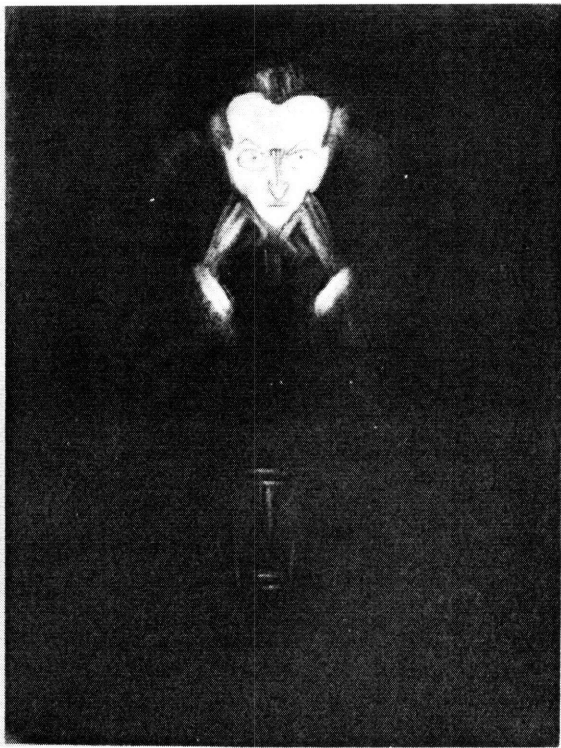


Fig. 3.11 (upper left) Marius de Zayas, *Benjamin de Casseres*, 1909.

Fig. 3.12 (upper right) Marius de Zayas, *Madame Hanako*, 1909.

Fig. 3.13 (lower left) Marius de Zayas, *Ruth St. Denis*, 1909.

Fig. 3.14 Marius de Zayas, *Mrs. Potter Brown*, 1909.

All four published in *Camera Work*, Jan. 1910.





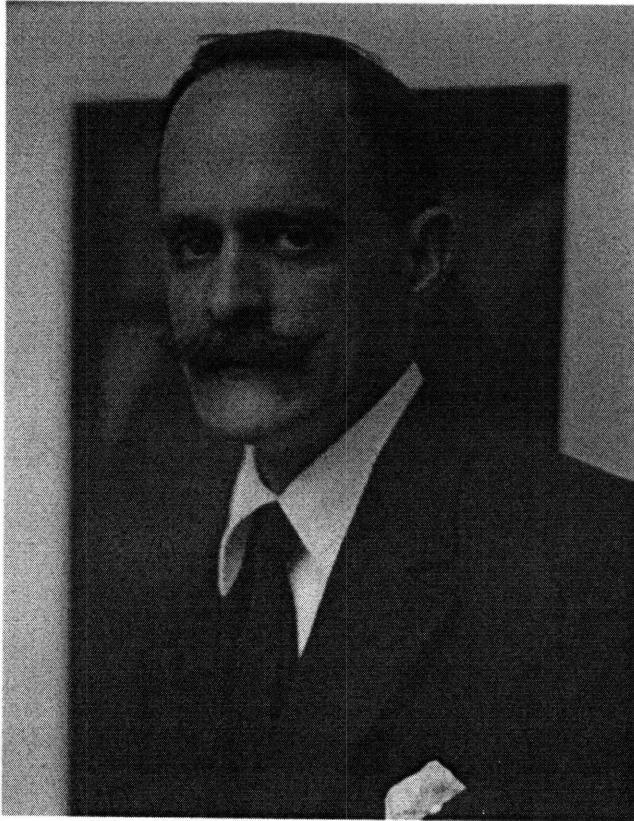


Fig. 3.15 Alfred Stieglitz, *Marius de Zayas*, 1913.  
National Gallery of Art, cat. 384.

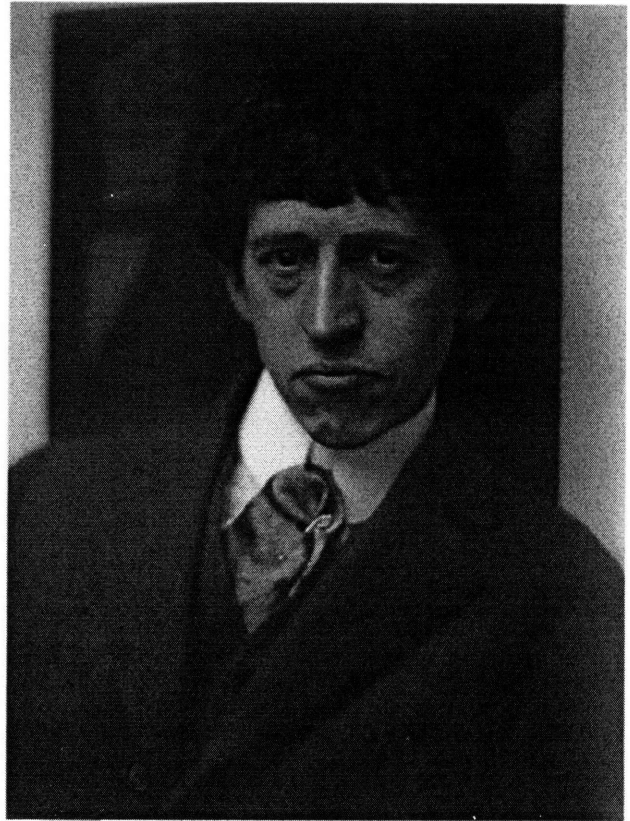


Fig. 3.16 Alfred Stieglitz, *John Marin*, 1913.  
National Gallery of Art, cat. 385.



Fig. 3.21 Alfred Stieglitz, *Marie J. Rapp*, 1915. National Gallery of Art, cat. 400.



Fig. 3.22 Alfred Stieglitz, *Francis Picabia*, 1915. National Gallery of Art, cat. 407.

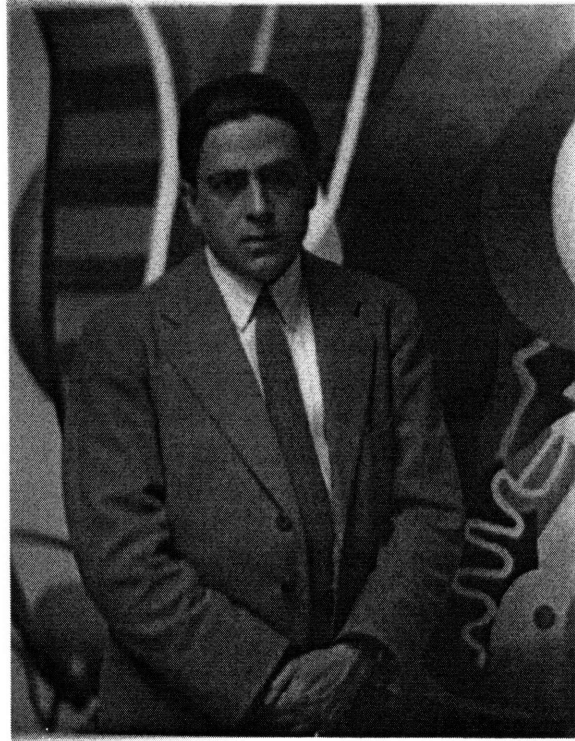


Fig. 3.23 Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1917. National Gallery of Art, cat. 457.



Et se me le monde autour de moi je fin admiraire les plus belles  
 un capitaine de l'art de nos jours, le quelle nous a fait passer  
 l'homme idéal

Fig. 3.24 Marius de Zayas, *A Visit to Picasso or The Influence of Ambiance*, one of eight drawings, c. 1911. in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, ed, Francis M. Naumann. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 215.



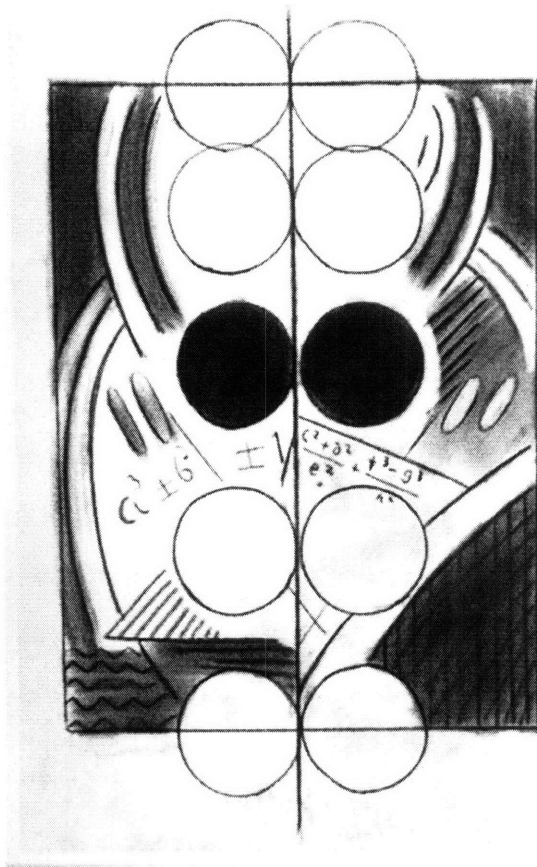


Fig. 3.25 Marius de Zayas, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1913, published in *Camera Work*, April 1914.



Fig. 3.26 Marius de Zayas, *Francis Picabia*, 1915, published in *Camera Work*, April 1914.

Fig. 3.28 Marius de Zayas, *L'accoucher d'idées*, published in *Camera Work*, July 1912.

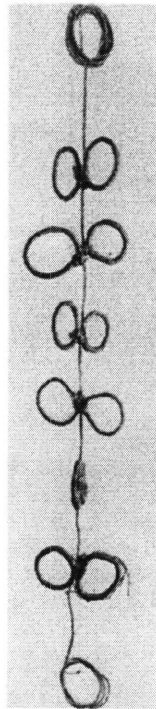


Fig. 3.27 Spirit Catcher, Pukapuka, Cooks Islands, London: British Museum, published in Bohn, "Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas," 1980.





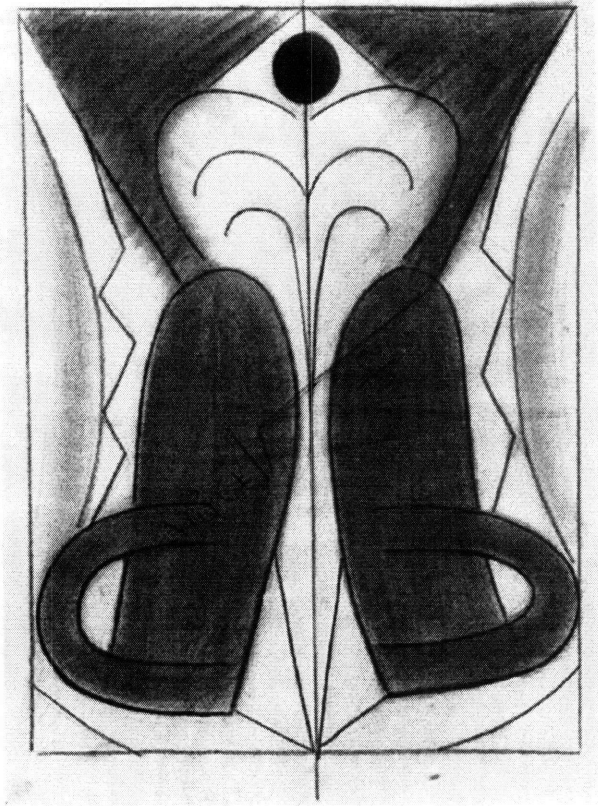


Fig. 3.29 Marius de Zayas, *Paul Haviland*, c. 1912-1913, published in *Camera Work*, April 1914.



Fig. 3.30 Marius de Zayas, *Paul Haviland*, c. 1910, National Portrait Gallery.



Fig. 3.31 Marius de Zayas, *Paul Haviland*, c. 1912-1913, in Douglas Hyland, *Marius De Zayas: Conjuror of Souls* (Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, 1981).





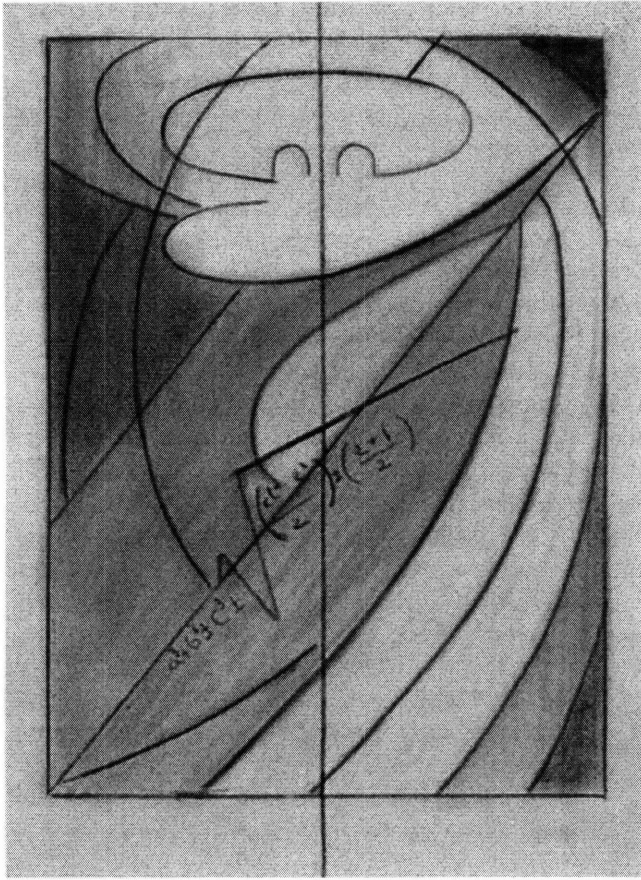


Fig. 3.32 Marius de Zayas, *Agnes Meyer*, c. 1912-1913, published in *Camera Work*, April 1914.

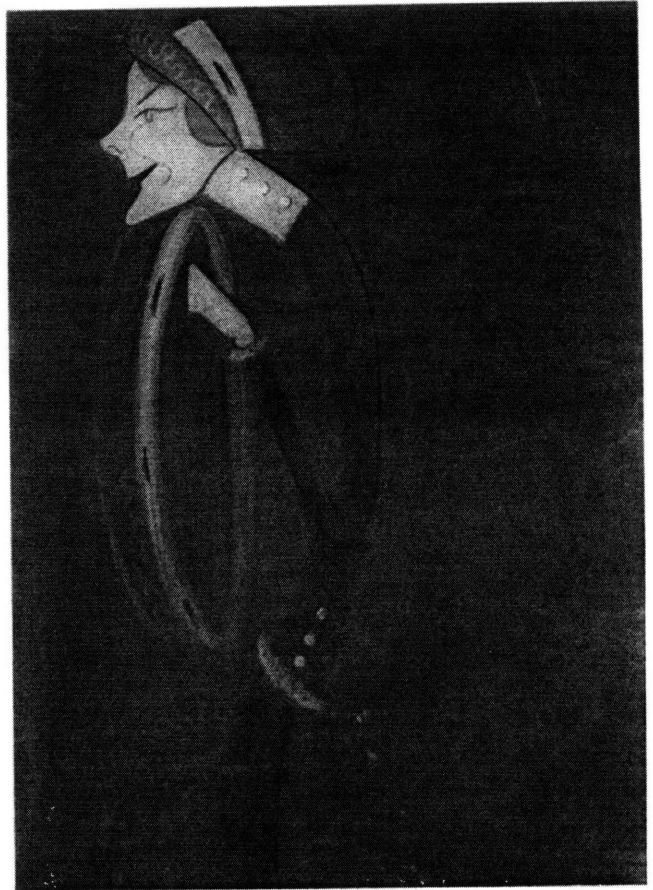


Fig. 3.33 Marius de Zayas, *Agnes Meyer*, c. 1912-1913, in Douglas Hyland, *Marius De Zayas: Conjuror of Souls* (Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, 1981).



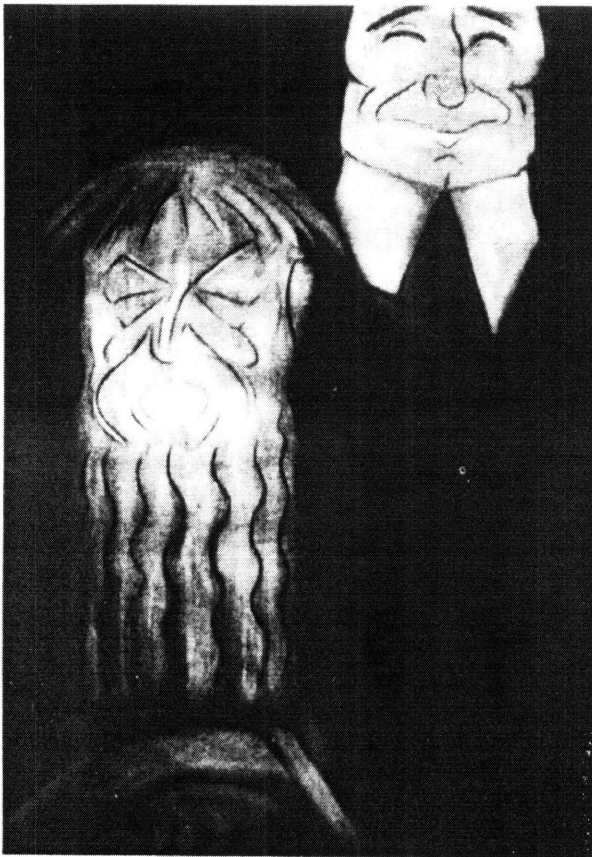


Fig. 3.34 Marius de Zayas, *Rodin and Steichen*, c. 1912-1913, published in *Camera Work*, April 1914.

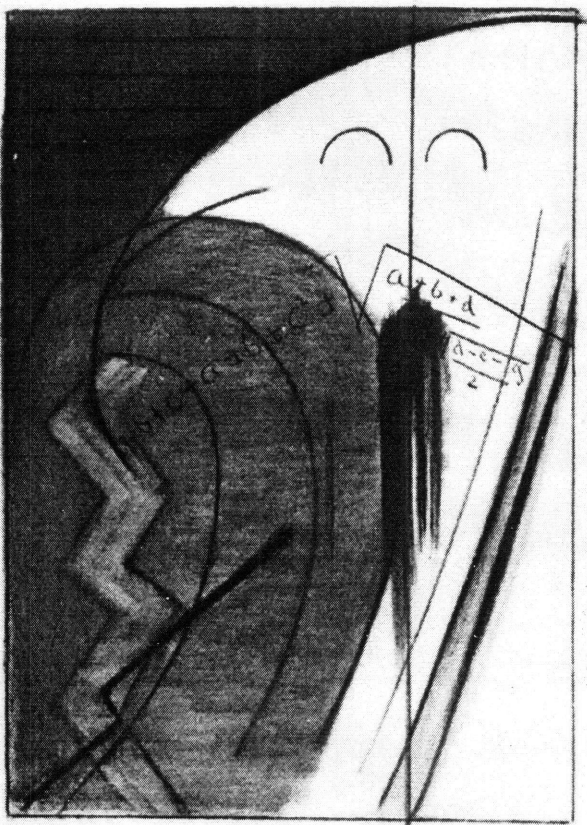


Fig. 3.35 Marius de Zayas, *Two Friends*, c. 1912-1913, published in *Camera Work*, April 1914.





Fig. 3.36 Alfred Stieglitz, Installation view, “Statuary in Wood by African Savages –The Root of Modern Art” at 291 Gallery, 1914, published in *Camera Work*, October 1916.



Fig. 3.37 Alfred Stieglitz, *291–Picasso–Braque Exhibition*, 1915. National Gallery of Art, cat. 393.



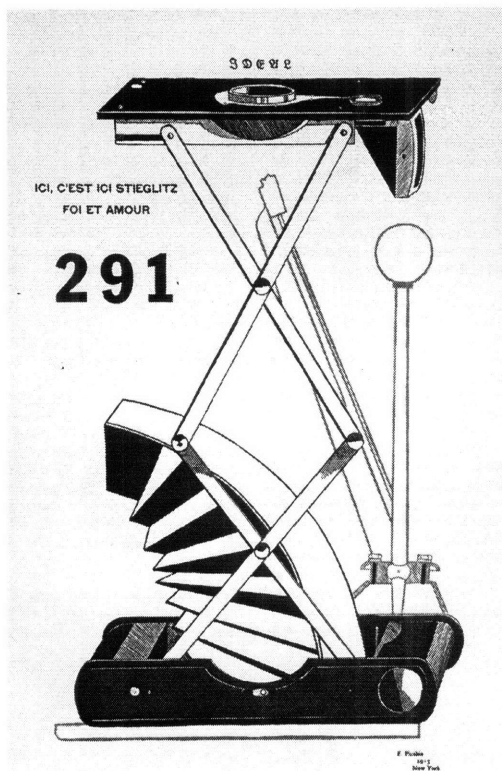


Fig. 3.38 Francis Picabia, *Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz*, published in *291*, July-August 1915

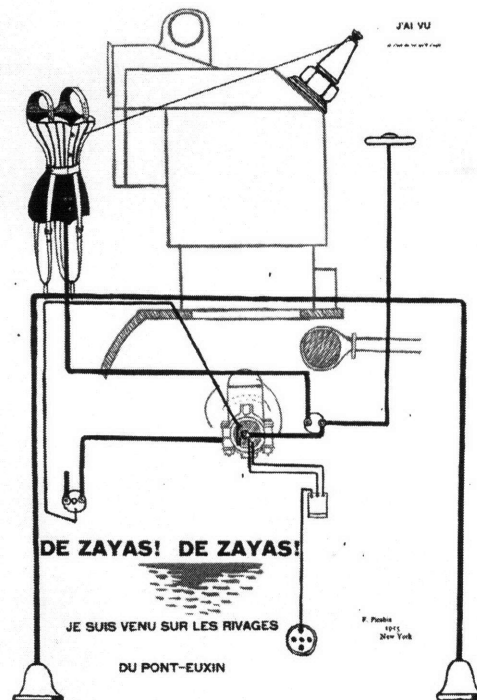


Fig. 3.39 Francis Picabia, *De Zayas! De Zayas!*, published in *291*, July-August, 1915.

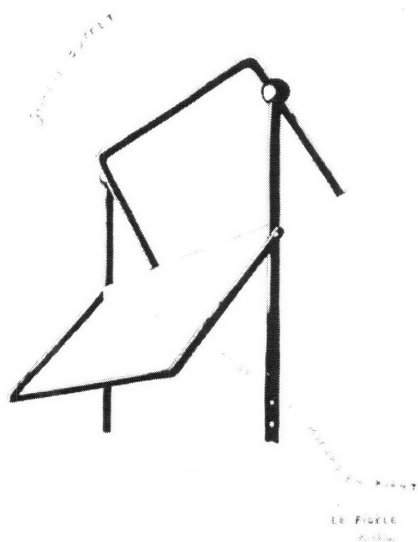


Fig. 3.40 Francis Picabia, *Gabrielle Buffet. She Corrects Manners Laughingly (Elle carriage les moue's en rant)*, 1915, published in William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1970).





Stieglitz replied that for twenty-five years he had been dreaming of making a motion picture, that he wanted to take the clouds and the human body and the machine as he understood them and put them all together, harnessed, in a motion picture so that anyone, sophisticated or ignorant, young or old, coming in and seeing it would recognize the thing going on, relate it to life.

– Herbert J. Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes from Some of His Conversations, 1925-31*

Photography is not an art. Neither is painting nor sculpture, literature nor music. They are only different media for the individual to express his aesthetic feelings; the tools he uses for his creative work.

– Alfred Stieglitz, “Is Photography a Failure?” *The Sun*, March 14, 1922

#### **4 “Harnessed in a Motion Picture” Cinema and the Second Stieglitz Circle (1917-1927)**

When Stieglitz closed his 291 gallery in 1917 he called a “rag picker” to dispose of the eight thousand remaining copies of the experimental journal *291* he had been instrumental in beginning just two years earlier. During wartime the value of paper was high and Stieglitz recalled receiving “five dollars and eighty cents for the lot, including the wonderful Imperial Japan *Steerage* prints.” He gave the money to his secretary Marie Rapp to buy a pair of gloves. In his narrative Stieglitz identified his discarding of *291*, a journal created by an international group of modern artists, with the irony of caricature, writing, “perhaps my gesture was a satirical one.”<sup>478</sup> Yet, his implicit mourning for his lost prints makes it clear the photographer could scarcely bring himself to embrace Dada’s playful nihilism. Nonetheless, this story of clearing out the gallery, focused as it is on his attention to Rapp’s hands, points us toward the work that would return Stieglitz to the dark room – his famous portraits of the painter Georgia O’Keeffe in which closely cropped pictures of her hands and other body parts redefined photography as a collection of serial images.

Stieglitz linked his new series of portraits directly with cinema, writing that demands for “a complete portrait of any person” in a single image were “as futile as to demand that a motion picture be

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<sup>478</sup> Even in his recollection Stieglitz complained, “Associates wondered why I did not give the gravures away if I made them available at so low a price. But wasn’t I giving them away, in setting the price as I did?” Single issues of *291* sold for ten cents a copy, in 1916 *Camera Work* announced the entire run of *291*, with box, could be obtained for twelve dollars, the deluxe edition for thirty-five.” From Dorothy Norman, “Introduction,” *291* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), unpaginated.

condensed into a single still.”<sup>479</sup> Yet, in making the case that Stieglitz sought to harness the example of the motion picture for his own art, I depart from the generally accepted reading of the photographer’s relationship to film. As Beaumont Newhall, the founding director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art, wrote in 1938 “the moving picture creates its own time; the still photograph stops time, and holds it for us.” Yet, even so: “the moving picture is one of the purest forms of photography” because its myriad frames cannot be retouched or cropped. Though the methods of the photographer and the cinematographer differed, the former making “a single critical exposure” and the latter “a whole series of exposures,” beginning in the late teens Stieglitz explored a new understanding of photography that opened the way for a rapprochement between of the two media – in the form of series production.<sup>480</sup>

Stieglitz’s personal engagement with film began in 1912 with the publication of one of the earliest theorizations of cinema as art; Sadakichi Hartmann’s essay “The Esthetic Significance of the Motion Picture,” published in his *Camera Work* journal. Hartmann, the very critic who had defined straight photography a decade earlier, began his investigation of film’s aesthetics by writing of its popularity: “It contains some element that appeals to the masses, and whenever I see one of these auditoriums packed to standing room only, I become conscious that I am in the presence of something that touches the pulse-beat of time.” In the modern world, Hartmann observed, an artwork’s appeal rests only on its possession of a “‘buck-eye’ element,” on which “the average mind can seize,” an element the “motion picture possesses to an almost alarming degree.”<sup>481</sup> Studying fine art was “too much intellectual

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<sup>479</sup> Alfred Stieglitz as quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: Introduction to an American Seer*, 35.

<sup>480</sup> Beaumont Newhall, *Photography: A Short Critical History* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 88-90. Based on this relationship of stillness and motion Roland Barthes would later famously psychologize the photograph to represent death in contrast to the film’s animated life. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

<sup>481</sup> Hartmann implied that film was eclipsing photography as a popular American art. As much as the Stieglitz circle complained about the craze of amateur photography at the turn of the century, they seem also to have recognized popular appeal as an asset. Sadakichi Hartmann, “The Esthetic Significance of the Motion Picture,” *Camera Work*, 38 (April 1912): 19. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* “Buck-eye” was a colloquialism for a cheap but often showy product. “buck-eye”, *OED*. The “buck-eye” returns in the triumph of American painting, with Greenberg tracing the “‘buck-eye’ element” in Still’s painting. Greenberg identified it as a “stale, prosaic kind of painting to which Barnett Newman has given the name of ‘buckeye,’” called it “probably the most widely practiced and homogeneous kind of painting seen in the Western world today.” Looking for formal effects, not simply popular appeal, Greenberg wrote, “I cannot understand fully why [these effects] should be so universal and so uniform, or

exertion” for most audiences, and after all, Hartmann asked, why should the public care about “works of art so high priced they are beyond the means of the middle class.” Ignoring upper-class prejudice against the cinema, Hartmann found an aesthetic “in harmony with our present life’s philosophy.” Film was a medium that would appeal widely and be “truly artistic,” if only it would give up its artifice and simply “reveal action in a series of perfect pictures.”<sup>482</sup>

Could the “esthetic significance of the motion picture,” its possession of “some [‘buck-eye’] element that appeals to the masses” be the path to a national modern art? As discussed in the previous chapter, caricaturist Marius de Zayas impugned America’s capacity to find its national art without impregnation from abroad, in his 1915 untitled essay published in the magazine *291* with Picabia’s caricatures. De Zayas emphasized that art always derived from “the synthesis of the beliefs of peoples,” adding that “in America this synthesis is all but an impossibility, all beliefs exist here together.”<sup>483</sup> To refute this claim Stieglitz looked to emerging “mass media,” a term itself coined by the advertising industry around 1923.<sup>484</sup> Engaging with the culture of advertising in an attempt to synthesize the beliefs of diverse peoples, Stieglitz looked to the motion picture for inspiration.

In 1917, estranged from de Zayas, Stieglitz began producing the “series of perfect pictures” Hartmann had suggested – his portrait of Georgia O’Keeffe. Exhibiting these serial photographs in 1921 Stieglitz aimed at extending his own appeal to cinema’s “standing room only” audience. Staging photographs in themes that functioned like intertitles – “A Woman,” “Hands,” “Feet,” “Hands and Breasts,” “Torsos,” and “Interpretations” – although his images did not reveal unfolding action specifically, he emphasized the multiple frames and succession of images that linked with filmic

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the kind of painting culture behind them.” Still puts these effects in abstract painting. As quoted in T. J. Clark, “In Defense of Abstract Expressionism,” *October*, Vol. 69. (Summer, 1994): 22-48.

<sup>482</sup> Hartmann claimed “The Americans excel only when they put aside cheap studio interiors, go into the open and handle realistic episodes of modern life.” He called for the depiction of “fragmentary bits of life, or merely scenery, with the animating spirit of motion as main attraction.” His ideas included “a rider galloping along a mountain path, a handsome woman with hair and skirts fluttering in the wind, the rushing water of a stream, the struggle of two desperate men in some twilight atmosphere.” Still seemingly unconvinced that this was possible Hartmann allowed, “Some literary theme will always be necessary to support the action, but it could be the theme of a painter that is stage managed by a poet or vice versa.” *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>483</sup> Marius de Zayas, untitled (but often cited based on the work’s first sentence - “New York did not see at first”), *291*, v-vi, July-August, 1915, 6. It was later reprinted “From 291,” *Camera Work* 48 (pub. Oct. 1916), 69-70.

<sup>484</sup> Although it did not come into use outside the ad industry until 1950, John Ayto, *Movers and Shakers: A Chronology of Words that Shaped Our Age* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 70.

strategies. Stieglitz proclaimed in the exhibition catalogue he would also strive to put his art within the economic means of a wide audience: “my ideal is to achieve the ability to produce numberless prints from each negative...and to be able to circulate them at a price not higher than that of a popular magazine, or even a daily paper.”<sup>485</sup> Experimenting with photographic series and with inexpensive printing in the 1920s, Stieglitz strived to find a popular audience, to give his work the appealing “buck-eye’ element.”

In my reading of Stieglitz’s photographic series I differ from recent scholars who argue the Stieglitz circle took an anti-technological and anti-popular stance during the 1920s. Wanda Corn, for example, cites a passage from Stieglitz’s correspondence to support this view, a 1924 letter in which he complained “as long as there are dividends & the ‘help’ is happy owning Fords & Victrolas & Radios & can go to movies of which Eastman has the film monopoly why the Hell should any one care about the quality of a postal?”<sup>486</sup> This provocative passage has been widely quoted, but it has not been placed enough in context; the question with which Stieglitz ends has been everywhere left unanswered. Yet, to understand Stieglitz’s nuanced opposition to both industrialists and the “help,” it is essential to know that it was the photographer himself who cared, quite deeply (as he explains in the long letter), about the quality of “a postal” – the unit of precut inexpensive photographic cardstock offered by the Eastman company. I argue it was, in fact, with the postal that Stieglitz made experiments for his own mass production. Printing on postal stock in hopes of realizing his new ideal of series and series of affordable photographs, Stieglitz aimed to put his art within the economic reach of an audience devoted to Fords, Victrolas, Radios, and the movies.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “A Statement,” *Exhibition of Stieglitz Photographs* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1921), citation to version anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 226.

<sup>486</sup> Wanda Corn has dominated the discourse by deeming Stieglitz’s second circle “particularly skeptical of, sometimes downright hostile to, the growing enthusiasm for new technologies and popular art forms associated with ‘the modern,’” including film. Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 23. Although Stieglitz was no doubt often guilty of cultural elitism, here and elsewhere he attacks both the rich, content with their dividends, and the poor, content with factory products. Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson, Aug. 7, 1924, YCAL, quoted in Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 20.

<sup>487</sup> Julia Thomas notes that Stieglitz began making “‘postal card’ prints on Artura paper ‘for the fun of it and for a certain kind of exercise.’” Julia Thomas, “Chronology of Process and Techniques,” *The Key Set*, vol. 2, 947. Although to my knowledge no other scholar has commented on or theorized Stieglitz’s serious further experiments with postal paper, accounts from within the Stieglitz’s circle support my assertion that many photographs from the *Equivalents* series were printed on postal paper. For example, Herbert Seligmann records: “‘Do you know what they are?’ said Stieglitz then. ‘They [*Equivalents-Cloud Music*] are snapshots of clouds made with a hand camera and printed on ordinary postal-card paper.’” Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, 63.

In the same letter to Anderson, Stieglitz confided, “I feel I am a failure – because I have been unable to make people see sufficiently to have them up in arms against this insidious poisoning going on in their own midst...” To make people see Stieglitz turned to series photographs and a new aesthetic theory during the late teens. Rather than positioning the serial images in his O’Keeffe series as photographs with inherent, medium specific qualities, he remarked proudly that viewers of the best photographs did not feel conscious of any medium whatsoever.<sup>488</sup> In these successful photographs, which Stieglitz (following Leo Stein) termed “synthetic,” the viewer instead achieved a transcendent, unmediated experience that was at once “straight” and “abstract.”<sup>489</sup>

Film offered a model for this seemingly transparent experience. During the teens critics from the Midwestern experimentalist-symbolist poet-performer Vachel Lindsay to the Harvard psychology professor Hugo Munsterberg studied film’s appeal and attempted to characterize its ability to connect with audiences (deemed by Hartmann “almost alarming”). In his celebratory 1915 book on film, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, Lindsay explained that movies operated as an easily read symbolic pictorial language – a modern universal hieroglyphic.<sup>490</sup> Unlike de Zayas’ abstract scientific language of mathematic and chemical symbolic equivalents, Lindsay saw film as a universal language of archetypes (a duck, a sieve, a bowl, a lioness, a mouth).<sup>491</sup> A year after Lindsay’s book, Munsterberg, in his 1916 *The Photoplay*, described the way the motion picture’s structure transparently mimicked human mental processes with shifting attention visualized in cuts, close-ups, and flashbacks.<sup>492</sup> Lindsay and Munsterberg have been largely eclipsed by later European theorists of cinema as culture industry, but their early notions of film as a means of transparent universal communication were influential in the U.S. of the

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<sup>488</sup> Stieglitz to Sadakichi Hartmann, April 27, 1919, YCAL.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>490</sup> Although she uses the word “transparent,” focused on the embodied formalism of painting Brennan does not focus on Stieglitz’s attempt to make his own photographs transparent. Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 2002.

<sup>491</sup> This list is drawn from Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Liveright, 1970, c1915), part 2.

<sup>492</sup> Munsterberg described the cinema as suggesting “the outer world itself became molded in accordance with our fleeting turns of attention or with our passing memory ideas...The photoplay obeys the law of the mind rather than those of the outer world.” Hugo Munsterberg, “Inner Development of the Moving Pictures,” in *Hugo Munsterberg on Film: The Photoplay-A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, edited by Allan Langdale (New York: Routledge, 2002), 90-91.

teens and twenties. Figured as a universal language or as an extension of the human sense, film achieved both popular and critical acceptance as medium uniquely capable of delivering unmediated experience.<sup>493</sup>

Stieglitz wrote O’Keeffe just weeks before she arrived in New York and he began her photographic portrait, uncharacteristically using a piece of “scrap” paper – an angry letter from his once-close friend de Zayas.<sup>494</sup> Stieglitz simply crossed out the complaint and wrote O’Keeffe a short note on the back.<sup>495</sup> This letter marked the break scholars have subsequently recognized between his first circle, the international group of critics and artists (including de Zayas) with whom he associated before World War One, and his second circle, the small group of American-born artists (including O’Keeffe) to whom he would devote himself after 1917.<sup>496</sup> Yet, this scrapping was not quite the same as casting off the past with a rag picker. De Zayas’ ideas and his objections still circulated, even as Stieglitz, depressed by the impending closure of his 291 gallery, urged the young watercolorist to visit New York, asking O’Keeffe, “I wonder if the White hand is warm enough to warm mine that are frozen”<sup>497</sup>

Many previous authors have noted Stieglitz’s use of the term “White” as a compliment, signifying such positive characteristics as purity, goodness, and spirituality. Overlooked or explicitly

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<sup>493</sup> Miriam Hansen traces the way film itself may have participated in the whitening of its immigrant audience, teaching them valuable lessons about American life by relying on visual communication rather than on verbal language. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 65-77. As Peter Decherney succinctly explains the “universal language metaphor” likely helped increase the size of the motion picture audience by attracting a higher class of viewer, but this idea “that Hollywood spoke clearly to everyone also gave rise to new attempts to bring film production and filmgoing under the control of noncommercial authorities.” Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 31. For example, “Film has all of the fascinating charms of youth. It belongs to the new order. It thrills with the latest creative impulses. It is democracy. It speaks the universal language and belongs to all classes, all races, and all nations. Someone has said that the last century discovered electricity, and that this century would discover life.” Frederick Palmer, *Palmer Plan Handbook: An Elementary Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Photoplay Scenario Writing*, (Hollywood: Palmer Photoplay Corporation, 1922), 1:9, as cited in Laurence Goldstein, *The American Poet at the Movies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>494</sup> Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, April 16, 1917, Alfred Stieglitz Archives, Collection of American Literature, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter referred to as YCAL). Even with the high price of paper I have found no other occasion in which Stieglitz used scrap paper in his voluminous correspondence. De Zayas had written to protest Stieglitz’s negative depiction of the Modern Gallery (a new venture ostensibly run by the caricaturist as a commercial arm of Stieglitz’s 291 gallery), demanding a retraction “because I don’t want to believe that for your own satisfaction you have given the public a false statement with a felonious motive.” De Zayas wanted Stieglitz to clarify that he had been mistaken in attributing to the caricaturist the phrase “business in New York and ‘291’ are incompatible.” Though Stieglitz wrote to O’Keeffe “I see I’ve been writing on the back of a copy” no other version of de Zayas’ letter remains. His archived correspondence with de Zayas breaks off between November of 1916 and April of 1917. This angry letter is not included in the anthology of Stieglitz–De Zayas correspondence published in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, edited by Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 156-211.

<sup>495</sup> The note explained that he was so “topsy-turvy” he had accidentally mailed her letters out of the order in which he had written them.

<sup>496</sup> O’Keeffe arrived in New York the next month to make a visit that Stieglitz wrote her had “made it easier for me to close the place [291].” Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 1, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>497</sup> Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, April 16, 1917, YCAL.

disavowed are the term's racial connotations.<sup>498</sup> However, as Richard Dyer has argued in his book *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, there is often, if not always, a slippage between the symbolic and racial significations of "whiteness."<sup>499</sup> In the second Stieglitz circle this whiteness functioned racially as a corollary to nationality in Stieglitz's attempt to position himself at the origin of American avant-garde modern art and his new attempt to connect with the "masses." At the close of the previous chapter, I followed Sarah Greenough in framing Stieglitz's celebration of both O'Keeffe and Paul Strand as a counter to de Zayas' insistence that an American avant-garde art would never develop autochthonously. Bram Dijkstra, in his account of early modernism, further speculates that Stieglitz may also have been persuaded to search for an "American" art by the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. more generally during the 1920s.<sup>500</sup> With the rise of anti-Semitism and American nativism, being born in New York to Jewish immigrant parents (as both Strand and Stieglitz had) was not necessarily enough to signify authentic Americanness, a concept that had come to hinge also on Puritanical whiteness. Stieglitz's own conscious cultivation of Americanness – his famous assertion "I was born in Hoboken. I am an American" – occurred (not coincidentally this chapter argues) in the catalogue for the 1921 public debut of his serial portrait capturing the "White hand" of O'Keeffe, alongside his promise of inexpensive prints.

Stieglitz's self-conscious attempt to define himself, a fifty-seven-year-old German-Jewish internationally-renown intellectual, as American born must be contextualized within the shift toward

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<sup>498</sup> Sarah Whitaker Peters, for example traces the use of the term to symbolism, writing "Mallarmé regarded white—the presence of light and the sum of all colors—as the nothingness of Truth... Similarly, Stieglitz thought it the highest form of approbation to call someone, or something, white. White has had a long history as a symbol of purity, a symbolism that was particularly popular in turn-of-the-century literature and painting in both America and Europe." In her notes Peters gives examples from Stieglitz's correspondence: "At the post office there was an unusually big mail for me... [that] happened to be very white from very white people" and "Georgia is a wonder... if ever there was a whiteness she is that." Though Peters clarifies "The use of white in this context obviously has nothing to do with skin color," she does not explain how she can be so certain given that both examples refer to the color of people. Sarah Whitaker Peters, *Becoming O'Keeffe: The Early Years* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991) 68 and n. 12, 317.

<sup>499</sup> He also identifies the multiple meanings of whiteness as hue, color and symbol and discusses this slippage extensively. Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997) 45 and 61-70. A number of recent studies have begun interrogating the silent assumption that racial whiteness is normative, an assumption that renders whiteness implicit and unnecessary to name. Examples include Dyer's book, (which focuses on television and film) and Martin A. Berger's recent *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (which explores the investments in whiteness visualized in popular art forms such as genre painting and silent movies) Since the early 1990s film scholars have begun to address whiteness in popular narrative film, its role in such non-fiction avant-garde and experimental productions remains largely unexplored. One of the first anthologies on this topic was *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

<sup>500</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Georgia O'Keeffe and the Eros of Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 165.

nativism in the U.S. during the 1920s. Membership in nativism's most virulent organization, the Klu Klux Klan, reached its peak in this decade. Congress passed laws dramatically restricting immigration (the 1921 Emergency Quota Act and the 1924 Immigration Act), as well as a constitutional amendment enforcing puritanical morality regarding a habit long associated with "new" immigrants (the Eighteenth banning alcohol in 1920). Interestingly, in 1921, alongside his identification as "an American," Stieglitz listed "prohibition" in an inventory of terms he considered "obsolete."<sup>501</sup> However, New York art critic Henry McBride rebuked the photographer in his review, writing, "Why 'prohibition' should be regarded as an obsolete word is not quite clear. I find it an invaluable term myself to describe present day effects."<sup>502</sup> Thus, if the second chapter of this dissertation emphasized the photographic medium at the turn of the century as "straight," and the third framed modern art of the 'teens as a "cocktail," this chapter's keyword is "prohibition" – the restrictions of the late 1910s, 20s, and 30s that were one tactic of a larger nativist movement whose overwhelming power penetrated even into the nation's modernist avant-garde.

Negotiating with and pushing against this drive for assimilation to Puritanical standards, Stieglitz nonetheless rejected de Zayas' call for a new impregnation by Europe. During the 1920s the photographer inhabited two diverging positions – eager to participate in the definition of American Art being canonized around native-born white painters, such as O'Keeffe and Charles Sheeler, *and* to create the spiritualized modernism championed by ethnic intellectuals, such as curator Ananda Coomaraswamy, and authors Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld. O'Keeffe fulfilled most of the visible requirements of nativists' demands for "whiteness," but Stieglitz also strategically deployed her ethnic heritage (with a father who was an Irish lapsed-Catholic – O'Keeffe – and a mother who was Hungarian – Tutto).<sup>503</sup> When a woman

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<sup>501</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, "A Statement," *Exhibition of Stieglitz Photographs* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1921), citation to version anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 226.

<sup>502</sup> Henry McBride, "Photographs by Stieglitz," *The New York Herald*, February 13, 1921 reprinted in *Henry McBride, The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride*, ed. Daniel Catton Rich (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1975), 163.

<sup>503</sup> He recalled when seeing a painting of her, "I said: 'That's a swell head. Hasn't the girl of whom it is painted some Indian blood?' It turned out that the portrait was by Speicher, of O'Keeffe." March 3, 1926, Herbert J. Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of his Conversations, 1925-1931*, (New Haven, Yale University Library, 1966), 67. Of course as post-colonial scholars have pointed out, "To be WHITE is in many senses an ideological fantasy." Okwui Enwezor, "Reframing the Black Subject," *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, ed. Kymberly N. Pinder (New York: Routledge,



looking at O’Keeffe’s paintings protested, “No one of American blood could have painted in such colors...Stieglitz explained that O’Keeffe has Irish and Hungarian revolutionist ancestry.”<sup>504</sup> Frank celebrated Stieglitz as a “Jewish mystic,” and Stieglitz accepted this new role of transforming photography by splitting it from its rationality and associating it with a new spiritual realm. The spirituality we have come to associate with Stieglitz’s modernism was conflicted. On the one hand, he attempted to assert his own personal Americanness – to transform his grey into white – through his relationship with O’Keeffe and his attempt at mass appeal. On the other, he attempted to infuse the rapidly standardizing and industrializing America with a cocktail of authentic spiritual force, drawn from his ever-more salient Judaism – an assimilation of both Hartmann and de Zayas that allowed him to discard the marked bodies of these theorists. These contradictory goals converged in Stieglitz’s search for a “‘buck-eye’ element” with “transparent” appeal, and in his attempt to connect film with photography and take “mass media” as a tool for his creative work.

#### 4.1 “Synthetic” Serial Photography

After first photographing O’Keeffe, Stieglitz fantasized about a series of images, writing his muse days after she left New York “I think I could do thousands of things of you—a life work to express you.”<sup>505</sup> In this new ideal of multi-part representation Stieglitz was not alone. Simultaneous with his O’Keeffe project, both Charles Sheeler and Ananda Coomaraswamy also embarked on photographic projects aiming to compose a single portrait through varied views. A close reading and comparison of these three projects frames the cinematic sense of this shift and its varied implications.

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2002), 373. Other recent examinations of whiteness include David R. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) Theodore W. Allen’s *The Invention of the White Race* (1997) Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color: European immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998) and Karen Bodkin’s *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* (1998).

<sup>504</sup> February 12, 1926, Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, 50. Another viewer announced O’Keeffe must have “Irish or Jewish ancestry to give expression to spirituality.” April 3, 1926, *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>505</sup> Stieglitz wrote O’Keeffe about her hands: “I could make 1000 photographs of them—all different—yet all the same,” and after mounting the prints he realized, “They are really proof... They’ll shock you—that is you’ll wonder whether they are at all like you.” Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 6, 1917, YCAL.

## *Stieglitz and the White Hand*

Enthusiastic and fantasizing “thousands” of images, Stieglitz was nonetheless anxious about his new portrait project. He wrote O’Keeffe in 1917, wondering if the photographs he had taken during her visit to the city would “give the slightest trace of” her. In hoping that they would, Stieglitz deemed himself “foolish enough to want something... Something that can’t be photographed.”<sup>506</sup> Despite his worries the medium would be unable to create the total portrait to which he aspired, just days later Stieglitz heralded his success to O’Keeffe, writing “Leo Stein was here—liked immensely one of the hands I did of you [(fig. 4.1)] – called it ‘Synthetic’ – I guess so.”<sup>507</sup>

Stein’s notion of the “synthetic” quoted by Stieglitz likely originated in the discourses on modern art circulating in Paris. In his near contemporaneous description of Cubism, Picasso’s dealer and critic Kahnweiler used the word to describe how modern painting could create a “synthesis of the object, or in the words of Kant, ‘put together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in one perception.’”<sup>508</sup> Though Alfred Barr would appropriate “synthetic” in the 1930s to periodize the later collaged phase of Cubism, in 1917 the term described an image in which multiple phases of temporality layered to create an instantaneous vision, a new attempt to represent multiplicity, simultaneity and relativistic points of view.<sup>509</sup> Kahnweiler’s account of how such synthetic images were created by the Cubist’s use of the basic pure geometrical forms is worth quoting at length for its correspondence to the “transparent,” “unmediated” qualities Stieglitz would attribute to his “synthetic” photographs:

The unconscious effort which we have to make with each object of the physical world before we can perceive its form is lessened by cubist painting through its demonstration of the relation between these

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<sup>506</sup> Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, May 31, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>507</sup> Based in its subject and date, I conclude that this is the photograph that Stein celebrated. Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 4, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>508</sup> This understanding is opposed to analytical description. David-Henry Kahnweiler’s book *Der Weg zum Kubismus* was published in Munich in 1920, but the first four chapters appeared in *Die Weissen Blätter*, Zurich and Leipzig, in September of 1916. This quotation is from the English translation, *The Rise of Cubism*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York, 1949), 12.

<sup>509</sup> The fact that the series became a widespread mode of photographic production just as cinema became of interest to the avant-garde is hardly coincidental. Leo Stein’s sister Gertrude Stein compared her own modernist avant-garde writing to the repetition of varied images that added up to a motion picture. Yet, writing in this way before she had ever been to the movies she regarded this resemblance as the effect of the era’s “inner time-sense” living in the “period of the cinema and series production.” Gertrude Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” *Lectures in America*, citations to version anthologized in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 294. For a recent study of the relationship between Cubism and film see *Picasso, Braque and Early Film in Cubism*, ed. Bernice B. Rose (New York: Pace Wildenstein), 2007.

objects and these basic forms. Like a skeletal frame these basic forms underlie the impression of the represented object in the final visual result of the painting; they are no longer 'seen' but are the basis of 'seen' form.<sup>510</sup>

Looking at a Cubist painting, Kahnweiler's theoretical spectator received only the impression of the subject and no longer saw the pure geometrical forms that composed it. Viewers of a Cubist image may feel the subject announced in the title is discovered only with difficulty in disjointed lines and shapes, but for Kahnweiler's ideal viewer the composition's use of basic forms instead rendered the work of perception more efficient. The Cubist image was actually easier to see, through this "synthetic" quality – its painted abstraction more transparent than the object in the world.

From his tentative "I guess so" endorsement of Stein's description, Stieglitz began himself to use the term "synthetic" to celebrate and define his accomplishment, establishing a link between American photography and the latest theories of modern European abstract painting. He explained to O'Keeffe that the photograph Stein admired (fig. 4.1) was also his own "favorite – the only *synthetic* one of you – Really You as I feel you."<sup>511</sup> Employed by Stieglitz the description "synthetic" indicated the image did not just resemble or depict O'Keeffe, but rather *was* the experience of her as Stieglitz (photographer, viewer, lover and eventual husband) *felt* her with all the connotations of that word. In the portrait singled out as "synthetic," O'Keeffe stands dressed in black in front of a white field (maybe one of her own watercolors).<sup>512</sup> Her head, the conventional marker of identity, remains outside the photographic frame. The viewer sees only her gesturing exposed white hands; at the very center of the image her left hand presses between her breasts against the black dress' white collar, heightening the whiteness of her almost eerily smooth hands. Feeling (of whiteness, of femininity, of sexuality) in this mechanical medium would be synthesized from layered multiple viewpoints, simultaneity and relativity.

Though it is unlikely that Stieglitz knew the intricacies of Kahnweiler's theory of Cubism, he began to define successful photographs as those that captured every aspect of O'Keeffe in images whose

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<sup>510</sup> Kahnweiler wrote of these geometrical forms, "When we direct our view on the outer world, we always demand those forms but they are never given to us in their purity." Kahnweiler, *Rise of Cubism*, 14.

<sup>511</sup> Stieglitz to O'Keeffe, June 18. 17, YCAL. Italic emphasis added.

<sup>512</sup> In the other three photographs taken during this first photographing session O'Keeffe is clearly shown in front of her watercolor that hung in the Stieglitz gallery.

photographic medium were no longer seen by the viewer. At first Stieglitz used synthetic to describe just one particularly successful image, but soon he celebrated success in the profusion of “synthetic,” “transparent” images. Layered multiple viewpoints became literally multiple, when Stieglitz sent O’Keeffe a collection of photographs of her and explained, “I know how you feel when you look at them—you don’t see them—can’t [,] it is the feeling in them—the marvelous expressiveness of them.”<sup>513</sup> However, it was not only O’Keeffe who could not see the photographs. Stieglitz divorced seeing and looking (much as Kahnweiler had separated the “seen” and the “basis of ‘seen’ form”) to argue that any viewer of his new work would perceive only feeling, not the physical/material medium of photograph. In a 1919 letter Stieglitz described his recent images to his old friend Hartmann, who had plead for “straight” medium specific photography a decade and a half earlier. Stieglitz explained:

all who have seen the work say it is a revelation. – It is straight. No tricks of any kind. – No humbug. – No sentimentalism. – Not old nor new. – It is so sharp that you can see the pores in a face – & yet it is abstract. – All say that they don’t feel they are conscious of any medium.<sup>514</sup>

Stieglitz proudly listed the contradictory qualities of his new photographic series. The work was technically “straight,” created mechanically and without tricks, but it was also a revelation, something disclosed by divine or supernatural means. It existed outside of time, “not old nor new.” It was simultaneously “sharp” and “abstract.” Most importantly, photography itself disappeared for viewers who experienced the image unconscious of any medium. The specificity and abstraction of these “straight” photographic portraits, according to Stieglitz, combined to result in an unmediated image. How could straight qualities of medium specificity render an image unmediated?

The proliferation of images in Stieglitz’s O’Keeffe series has been frequently connected with the motion picture. Photography historian Anne McCauley links Stieglitz’s 1919 image first exhibited as *The White Hand* (fig. 4.2) (now known by the title *Georgia O’Keeffe–Hand and Breast*) specifically to an emerging cinematic use of bodily fragments in close-ups to communicate details important to the plot.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 9, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>514</sup> Stieglitz to Sadakichi Hartmann, April 27, 1919, YCAL.

<sup>515</sup> She allows the photograph’s straightforward closely framed depiction of breasts was “unprecedented.” Anne McCauley, “Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O’Keeffe–Hand and Breast, 1919,” *The Folio Society Book of the 100 Greatest Photographs*, ed. Mark

In this image O’Keeffe’s pose is almost identical to the 1917 synthetic portrait, a repeated gesture – left hand pressed between breasts – that suggests a filmic language of pantomimed gestural symbols.<sup>516</sup> *The White Hand*’s study in white values and tones demonstrates Stieglitz’s technical skill. Delicate shadows trace the edges of the composition’s elements, but scarcely indicate depth. In the diffuse light and long exposure O’Keeffe’s slightly blurred fingers and her white robe appear to be the same white color. Her right breast grazes the bottom of the frame and her robe echoes the print’s vertical edges, further compressing the frame around her body, as if the subject self-consciously acknowledges the edges of the frame. The photograph’s whiteness becomes both field and ground as the image’s collapsed space and its subject become identical to the picture plane. Yet what now define as a modern consciousness of medium and its specificity – an identity of object with the flat picture plane – enabled the viewer, as Stieglitz told Hartmann, to establish as Munsterberg theorized in the filmic close-up an *unmediated* relationship with the image.

Stieglitz associated with O’Keeffe with a very specific (and symbolic) vocabulary of whiteness, which I earlier argued has racial resonances with the ascendance of American nativism during the period. After O’Keeffe’s first visit to 291 in the spring of 1916, Stieglitz encouraged her to return to New York, writing her in Texas “it would be fine to hear the Voice – + to see the Whiteness once again – in actuality.”<sup>517</sup> Although whiteness commonly symbolizes virginity, for Stieglitz it also took on sexual connotations as he wrote her musing plaintively “a pair of very White Hands. – I wonder if they’d touch

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Haworth-Booth (London: The Folio Society, 2006), 98. Stieglitz entitled the work *The White Hand* when he donated it to the MFA in 1924. The MFA retained this title when the photograph was shown in Cambridge in 1930. The title was likely altered to align it with the rest of the O’Keeffe series and to eliminate its most obvious symbolist connotations. As Dryer points out whiteness had (and still, of course, has) a variety of connotations. In events contemporary with the production of the image, *White Hand* was the name of several national groups, a rival Irish gang to the Italian “Black hand” and an Italian alternative to the “Black Hand” that worked to clean up and police neighborhoods. The “White Hand Society” was the name of a white supremacist group in South Brooklyn that targeted Blacks from 1907 to 1925. These groups are well documented in contemporary articles in the *New York Times*, for example, “Not to Blame Brenner Says, Did All He Could to Prevent Attacks on Brooklyn Negroes.” *New York Times*, May 15, 1906.

<sup>516</sup> Several scholars have pointed out these specific images recall Titian’s *Mary Magdalene*. But in fact O’Keeffe’s body is arranged in the verso of Titian’s iconic pose, using her left hand in a subversion of the traditional Western symbolism favoring the right hand. O’Keeffe’s gesture is familiar but evidences ambivalence about strict notions of the symbolic. This inner conflict is evidenced in Stieglitz work and in a 1917 letter to O’Keeffe in which he wrote, “You seem to be a symbol for me—Much more than just a person.” But, later in the same letter he reconsidered, noting, “I wrote you this morning that you were a symbol to me—not a person. I have to laugh—a symbol—spirit—woman—so many things that names seem stupid.” Altering the title of this canonical work has eliminated Stieglitz’s own conflict over his photography’s relationship to symbolism. Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 10, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>517</sup> Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, April 9, 1917, YCAL.

me.”<sup>518</sup> Yet, this multivalent whiteness could also function to redeem O’Keeffe from the later public controversy over her extramarital affair with the photographer. Fellow Stieglitz circle member Marsden Hartley identified O’Keeffe with the chaste St. Theresa in his 1920 essay “Some Women Painters,” contrasting her with femme fatales (such as Lucrezia Borgia), and writing “Georgia O’Keeffe ... wears too much white: She is impaled with a white consciousness.”<sup>519</sup> That Hartley linked O’Keeffe’s whiteness with her gender should not be surprising; scholars of race argue such anxieties often focus on white women’s role as the carriers of inviolate racial identity. However, whiteness is also part of a system of signification with racial implications. Here for Hartley, a painter famously obsessed with German culture and ostracized during WWI for this sympathy with the enemy, O’Keeffe was actually overly white. Nativist whiteness had “impaled” her.<sup>520</sup>

Once O’Keeffe moved to New York permanently and committed herself to a relationship with Stieglitz (the two finally married in 1924), the photographer frequently referred to her as “white” in comparison to himself, writing for example, “You clean bit of lovely whiteness. That’s what you are - I really am nothing so clean.”<sup>521</sup> He also associated his wife with whiteness outside of their private letters, as critic Herbert Seligmann recorded in his book of conversations with Stieglitz, “He had felt her as white, himself as grey by comparison.”<sup>522</sup> Stieglitz’s grayness was not of the type that Sadakichi

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<sup>518</sup> Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 24, 1917, YCAL. The correspondence suggests that the hands, in addition to their role in celebrating O’Keeffe as artist, functioned as a transference site for sexual desire. Stieglitz wrote for example “Your body must be quite remarkable—somehow it comes into my mind—I don’t know why—not at all in a sensuous way. Just from—expression—like the hands— and mouth— and eyes— and hair— and ears— neck— it’s all you” asking, “let me have the hands.” Stieglitz is known to have purchased Havelock Ellis’s *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in 1911, as noted in Anne McCauley, “Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O’Keeffe—Hand and Breast*, 1919,” 98.

<sup>519</sup> This comparison to Mother Theresa may have also aimed to legitimate O’Keeffe’s Catholic heritage. Marsden Hartley, “Some Women Painters,” *Adventures in the Arts* (Boni and Liveright, 1920). Stieglitz republished an excerpt in “Alfred Stieglitz Presents One Hundred Pictures Oils, Water-Colors, Pastels, Drawings by Georgia O’Keeffe American,” January 29 to February 10, 1923.

<sup>520</sup> “The history of Georgia O’Keeffe is a unique one— she was born and raised on a Wisconsin farm— in a small settlement known by the attractive name of Sun Prairie— Hungarian revolutionary stock on the maternal side— the maternal grandmother having held the position of aide-de-camp to Louis Kossuth of well known Hungarian revolutionary fame. The strain on the father’s side being, of course of Irish origin— no small order in the hereditary sense— to bring together into plausible harmony, tempers of such curious and varying qualities.” In a footnote “Since writing the above— I have received further documents from O’Keeffe as to her ancestral background which are very important. Her maternal grandmother was of Dutch origin— dating back to sixteen hundred and thirty-eight— making her one of the first Dutch settlers in America.” Marsden Hartley, “Georgia O’Keeffe: A Second Outline in Portraiture” *Georgia O’Keeffe: Exhibition of Recent Paintings, 1935* January 4-February 27, 1936 New York: An American Place, 1936. p. 3.

<sup>521</sup> Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, September 9, 1923, YCAL.

<sup>522</sup> Herbert Seligmann, recorded this conversation on February 26, 1926 in his *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of his Conversations, 1925-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Library, 1966), 64. Stieglitz repeatedly referred to O’Keeffe as White in

Hartmann had earlier attacked, not a Puritan bloodlessness; instead his own words suggest anxiety over his “unclean” heritage, channeling a contemporaneous ascendance of anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic hatred.<sup>523</sup> The alternation of white and grey in Stieglitz’s description of his relationship with O’Keeffe offers a new interpretation for her famous description of the series as Stieglitz “always photographing himself.”<sup>524</sup> His repetitive, serial portrait aimed not only to capture O’Keeffe synthetically, but also to recast himself. To secure space as simply “an American,” a necessary precursor to his creation of a national art, Stieglitz felt pressure to become “clean,” “white,” racially unmarked. Historian of the Stieglitz circle Marcia Brennan credits the obvious sexuality in Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe with “restoring the photographer to a position of potency and originality.”<sup>525</sup> But the revelation of racial whiteness in these images, and the photographer’s affiliation with it, also inspired in him an increasing confidence in his work as indigenous American art.

However, this revelation of racially white, transparent photography in Stieglitz photographs of O’Keeffe was conflicted. Identity is synthesized into a legible statement, but its multiplicity re-erupts in the very obsessive accumulation of these images. O’Keeffe was white, but she was also Irish and Hungarian. In his shift to seriality, Stieglitz relinquished the definitive moment of straight photography and the secure “other” of *The Steerage* and Hartmann’s “Jewtown,” suggesting instead that perhaps there could be no single statement. In his abstract caricatures, De Zayas had exposed the multiplicity of spirit and body, trying to bind them together, but in serial photography the multiplicity could become literal.

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letters, “You are just as White as ever to me – and there is no other way of expressing myself.” Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, May 2 1922, YCAL. “To me you are just the same Whiteness you have ever been. You can’t be anything but that – and Whiteness means as much to me today as ever – possibly more if such a thing is possible.” Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, September 8, 1923, YCAL.  
<sup>523</sup> “In a society on the whole hostile to Jews—and that situation obtained in all countries in which Jews lived, down to the twentieth century—it is possible to assimilate only by assimilating to anti-Semitism also.” Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: Life of a Jewish Woman*. For more see Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

<sup>524</sup> Sanford Schwarz, “Georgia O’Keeffe writes a Book,” *The New Yorker* 54 (28 August 1978): 93, as cited in Alfred Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz, Photographs & Writings*, ed. Sarah Greenough, Juan Hamilton (Wash.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 231.

<sup>525</sup> Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 71. In May of 1919, Stieglitz’s estranged friend de Zayas spent three hours looking at Stieglitz’s photographs and O’Keeffe’s paintings. Soon after, presumably on de Zayas’ advice, collector Walter Arensberg and Charles Sheeler also visited Stieglitz’s studio. The latter, soon after the visit, began his own photographic series of Katharine Baird Shaffer, who was to become his wife in 1921. The abstract undulating shapes of Katharine’s voluptuous body are in striking contrast to O’Keeffe’s taut frame, further emphasizing the latter’s status as an exemplar of the controlled restricted body of whiteness discussed by Richard Dyer in *White*. Sheeler also used a working method very different from Stieglitz’s; actually printing his photographs from a reel of motion picture film he had shot of Katharine dancing a striptease, but these private photographs remain inspired by and derivative of Stieglitz’s work, which even Sheeler seems to have acknowledged by never showing them publicly.

Whiteness, and identity more generally, was never fully secure. His photographs demanded a new type of attention from the viewers, who would continuously rebuild himself as a new type of subject, the unstable sutured self of cinema.

### *Sheeler and Side of White Barn*

In contrast to Stieglitz's *The White Hand*, Charles Sheeler's *Side of White Barn, Bucks County* (c. 1914-1917) (fig. 4.3) does not immediately suggest such conflicts about identity.<sup>526</sup> Part of a larger series of barn photographs, *Side of White Barn*, has been celebrated by recent scholars as "perhaps the first photograph in which the subject is absolutely identified with the picture plane," and even "the first time abstraction appears to be consubstantial with the subject itself."<sup>527</sup> Critics in the 1920s recognized this correlation between the medium's structure (the picture plane) and the subject (side of barn) in Sheeler's photography, but they interpreted this link quite differently. In a 1923 review, critic Forbes Watson, claimed that Sheeler aimed to depict only "the fundamental character of the natural object and to permit the medium to interfere as little as possible with the spectator's vision of the pictorial result."<sup>528</sup> This rhetoric of noninterfering medium aimed to reconcile Sheeler's work in two mediums (photography and painting) implying that the material limits of each could allow the depiction of the same objects and the achievement of the same pictorial results. Sheeler's photographs were technically straight (he did not paint on them), but their medium specificity was quite different from Hartmann's earlier identification of

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<sup>526</sup> Only seven of Sheeler's views of Bucks' county barns still survive, just how many he initially made for the series is unknown. Karen Lucic "Bucks County Barns," *Charles Sheeler in Doylestown: American Modernism and the Pennsylvania Tradition* (Allentown, Penn.: Allentown Art Museum, 1997). The date of Sheeler's barn photograph is in some dispute. In his 1987 catalog Theodore Stebbins dated the image based on stylistic grounds to 1917, but in his more recent 2002 catalog Stebbins suggests Sheeler's own annotation of 1915 is likely correct. Theodore E. Stebbins, *Charles Sheeler: The Photographs* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987) and Theodore E. Stebbins, Gilles Mora, and Karen E. Hass, *The Photography of Charles Sheeler: American Modernist* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002).

<sup>527</sup> "Until 1915, no photographer had been deliberately capable of such an act. Sheeler was the first to consciously carry it out" Gilles Mora, "Charles Sheeler: Radical Modernism" in Stebbins, *The Photography of Charles Sheeler*, (2002), 80. and Carol Troyen and Erica E. Hirshler as quoted in Thomas E. Stebbins, "Sheeler and Photography," *The Photography of Charles Sheeler, American Modernist*, (2002), 8. In this recent catalog Stebbins also calls the photograph "as blank and unforgiving as any Duchamp," arguing it "immediately placed him [Sheeler] at the forefront of the young field" of photography." *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>528</sup> Forbes Watson, "Charles Sheeler," *Arts*, vol. 3, no. 5 (May 1923), 344. One 1917 reviewer noted Sheeler's emphasis on materiality seemed even to destabilize the sensory address of the image, claiming "so clearly are the plaster values represented that one's imagination is simulated to feel that one can actually touch them as well as see them." From *New York American*, December 25, 1917 as quoted in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, 37.



photography with its own urban subjects and settings. In fact, Watson's argument for Sheeler's painting and photography – that ideally the medium should not enter into the perceiving act of the viewer – is strikingly similar to Stieglitz's own claims that viewers of his new photographs did not feel "conscious of any medium."<sup>529</sup> As we have seen in Stieglitz's description of his own serial photographs, what we now define as a modern consciousness of medium and its specificity (an identity of object with the flat picture plane) viewers in the 1920s perceived as enabling the viewer's unmediated relationship with the image.

While for Stieglitz this transparency took on the spiritual overtones of "revelation," in Sheeler's case scholars have identified the straightforward quality with his experience as a commercial photographer, capturing architecture, art, and even products such as typewriters. His work in advertising (mass media) taught the artist to work architectonically and frontally (allowing "the medium to interfere as little as possible").<sup>530</sup> In *Side of White Barn*, Sheeler positions the plate of film parallel to the plane of the barn's surface, so the structure's side crowds the resulting frame of the photographic image. A flat grid of lines dominates the closely cropped subject. The shadows and crisp focus of bright daylight emphasize the white surface and the vertical striping of board-and-batten siding, whose perfection is interrupted by uneven widths, knots in the planks, and cracked plaster. The closed doors and black window of the barn further close access to the interior space. A shadow from the barn's horizontal roof delineates the upper edge of the image, while the lower edge provides a contrast that emphasizes the flatness of the rest of the image with a wandering chicken and a fence that extends out from the image's lower right. Though their subjects differ wildly, Sheeler's small (9"x7") image shares the frontality, compressed plane, and technically virtuosic tones of white with Stieglitz's comparably sized *The White Hand*. Perhaps the similarity is why the 1918 jury, which Stieglitz headed, awarded Sheeler a prestigious Wanamaker prize for this print and another from his later Doylestown series (fig. 4.4)<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Stieglitz to Sadakichi Hartmann, April 27, 1919, YCAL.

<sup>530</sup> Maria Morris Hambourg, *Strand, Circa 1916* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art: Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1998). Obviously, this is not the only lesson commercial photographers learned during the 1920s. Man Ray for example discovered something else entirely from his experience.

<sup>531</sup> *Side of White Barn* won the fourth prize in the competition, while Sheeler's *Open Window* placed first. Sheeler wrote to Stieglitz "someone on the Wanamaker jury must have been prejudiced in my favor, I am convinced. For that which happened would not have happened otherwise." Sheeler to Stieglitz, March 8, 1918, YCAL. Stieglitz enjoyed Sheeler's house pictures so

Historians have frequently cited a 1918 review of the Wanamaker prize competition that identified photographers Strand, Sheeler, and Morton Shamberg as a “Trinity of Photography” anointed by Stieglitz. But in fact it was Mexican caricaturist and champion of composite hybridity Marius de Zayas who brought the three photographers together in a three-man show at his Modern Gallery early in 1917.<sup>532</sup> In preparation for the exhibition Sheeler wrote Stieglitz to express his excitement that de Zayas, whose inventory focused internationally, was willing to display works by Americans. Stieglitz replied with a thinly veiled critique of his former friend’s gallery and a question about his patriotism. He noted that de Zayas had in fact “made no special effort to have American work during the last year” and called his Modern Gallery “nothing more than applications of 291 in diluted form, often called practical.”<sup>533</sup>

Sheeler wrote Stieglitz about the work he planned to show at de Zayas’ gallery, consciously constructing the Doylestown group as a set of twelve serial photographs.<sup>534</sup> He understood these images of a simple Pennsylvania house in Bucks County (where he had also had photographed *Side of White Barn*) declaring, “I decided that because of something personal which I was trying to work out in them that they were probably more akin to drawings than to my photographs of paintings and sculptures.” Departing conceptually from his prior professional practice photographing products for corporations and artwork for galleries, Sheeler positioned his serial photographs oddly as personal drawings. Trained as a painter, Sheeler blurred the conceptual boundaries of medium, even as his techniques remained straight.

When the Doylestown series debuted at de Zayas’ Modern Gallery in late in 1917, de Zayas framed Sheeler’s series in terms of international currents in artistic modernism, calling the photographs “actual proof of the truths fundamental in Modern Art,” evidence that “cubism exists in nature,” and

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much that Sheeler proposed an exchange of one Stieglitz print for several of his own house series. Sheeler to Stieglitz, Dec. 1, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>532</sup> W.G. Fitz, “A Few Thoughts on the Wanamaker Exhibition” *The Camera* 22 (April 1918), 201. The exhibition at de Zayas’ gallery ran from March to April and was entitled “Photography by Sheeler, Strand and Schamberg.” Sheeler exhibited three studies of sculpture, an obsidian mask from Mexico, a wood carving female figure from the French Congo, and Brancusi’s marble *Head of a Child*, and a photograph of a New York building. List from reviews quoted in De Zayas, *How, When, . . .*, 113-114.

<sup>533</sup> This lack of attention to America was, Stieglitz wrote, “because of various reasons, no particular ones.” Though de Zayas’ gallery might be successful, Stieglitz wrote he “fear[ed] success for 291 more than anything else in the world. It has often come dangerously close to being a success. Its friends want it to be a success. That is why I so often lose friends.” Stieglitz to Sheeler, Dec 1, 1916, YCAL. The Modern Gallery was financed by Francis Picabia, Paul Haviland, and Eugene Meyer, while De Zayas’ 1919 venture the De Zayas Gallery was supported by Walter Arensberg.

<sup>534</sup> Sheeler to Stieglitz, Nov. 22, 1917, YCAL.

finally suggesting Sheeler was “influenced by Negro Art.”<sup>535</sup> Yet, when other critics compared Sheeler to Picasso, they voiced relief at being able to recognize the photographer’s subject – an iconic Pennsylvania agrarian building in the case of *Side of White Barn*.<sup>536</sup> Set in a quintessentially American place (the rural landscape of Bucks County, one of William Penn’s original Pennsylvania colonies and the site from which George Washington famously crossed the Delaware River for the attack that turned the course of the Revolutionary War) Sheeler’s photographs joined modern art with an increasing appreciation of the national vernacular and a folk art revival.<sup>537</sup> The bucolic subject of Sheeler’s image runs exactly counter to the representations of potentially frightening diversity of New York for which Hartmann had pleaded in 1902. Though framed as Cubist by de Zayas, Sheeler’s work profited by its association with rustic Americana, which also made implicit reference to his own birth in Philadelphia and his status as an unproblematically “white” American.<sup>538</sup>

The overlay of modern aesthetic forms and popular American symbols and themes established Sheeler’s trademark. Art historian Karen Lucic historicizes Sheeler’s reception as “a synthesis of Bucks County tradition and modernist aesthetic expression,” which compellingly joined the two to create “an

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<sup>535</sup>As quoted in de Zayas, *How, When ...*, 151, 34, and 131. The reference to African art is supported by Sheeler’s participation as photographer in de Zayas’ book project *African Negro Wood Sculpture* in 1917. As the show at de Zayas’ gallery opened, Stieglitz asked Sheeler to lend him some negatives for publication in *Camera Work*. Sheeler offered his Doylestown photographs, but *Camera Work* folded before the photographs could be published. Stieglitz to Sheeler, March 1, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>536</sup>“There is never any doubt in the mind of the beholder as to the subject...this is not always the case in regard to the paintings of Picasso.” *New York Sun*, December 10, 1917, as quoted in de Zayas, *How, When...*, 35.

<sup>537</sup> In fact, it was Henry Mercer, an early influential collector of pre-industrial Americana who had helped Sheeler to secure the rental of the Doylestown house in the first place. By situating his work in relation to an American past, Sheeler allowed “a new way of thinking about American machine age aesthetics.” Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 308. Corn goes on to compare Sheeler’s paintings to period rooms that were entering major museums in the postwar. A revival in folk art that was spearheaded by Sheeler’s eventual dealer Edith Halpert, for more on Halpert’s attempts to control the market in early American art after the stock market crash in 1929. Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery: Edith Gregor Halpert and The Making of the Modern Art Market*, “Packaging the Primitives,” (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 123-145.

<sup>538</sup> Although it is possible to view Sheeler’s choice of Bucks County as symbolic reference to the infancy of his nation or to his childhood vacations from Philadelphia, Sheeler adamantly distanced himself from the symbolic, demanding his work be regarded as “purely visual,” its abstraction or tactility unsullied by the significance of his subject matter. Later in his life he positioned his work in terms of artists within the Stieglitz circle, saying, “There’s a large element of symbolism in O’Keeffe’s work, as you can readily see, and none whatever in mine. It’s a purely visual thing. What you see is what you intend to see and no overtones of symbolism.” “Interview: Charles Sheeler Talks with Martin Friedman” interview conducted June 18, 1959, printed in M. Friedman and Charles Sheeler, *Archives of American Art Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1976), 17. Though Sheeler and Friedman here discuss Sheeler’s paintings, the clarification holds for his photography as well. In discussing Sheeler’s refusal of symbolism I differ with J. Maroney, who failing to cite this interview, argues for Sheeler’s deployment of a “personal symbolism” motivated by his supposition that to discover “what a painting or photograph means...we must ask what the picture may have meant to its creator.” James H. Maroney Jr., “Charles Sheeler Reveals the Machinery of His Soul,” *American Art*, Vol. 13, No. 2. (Summer, 1999), 32. Sharon Corwin has interestingly further framed the ways in which Sheeler and his Precisionism were figured specifically as American. Sharon Lynn Corwin, “Selling ‘America’: Precisionism and the Rhetoric of Industry, 1916-1939” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley 2001): 163 and 170.

independent identity for the American vanguard."<sup>539</sup> But what allowed (and still allows) Sheeler's Bucks County photographs to hover between tradition and modernity, Americana and abstraction? The answer: Whitewash. Others have cited the simple construction methods and truth to materials found in America's building traditions, suggesting that Sheeler's enlistment of these barns might be regarded as a species of primitivism. Although this is no doubt true, it is vital to acknowledge the primitivism employed here dramatically differs from primitivism's evocation of the foreign or exotic. It substitutes white for black. Formally, it is the overall white surface treatment that makes the geometrical surface gridding so visible in the photograph, suggesting the association with Cubism. It seems unlikely Sheeler tackled the challenge of repainting the entire barn himself, but he is known to have whitewashed the interior of the Doylestown house before photographing it.<sup>540</sup> While de Zayas attempted to inject African art into the cocktail, viewers of the Doylestown house photographs saw only a clean white covering produced by a thrifty, traditionally agrarian means (that even referenced the popular fiction, American Tom Sawyer). Interpretations of American modernism could then be projected on Sheeler's white, assumedly neutral, plane. The color white operates here as the unifying substance, displacing Hartmann's earlier discussion of Rembrandtian filth as the great pictorial unifier in the straight photograph. With *Side of White Barn* and his Doylestown series, Sheeler offered a purification of de Zayas' hybridity (Cubism and African art) with his photographs ("akin to drawings") of Americana.

#### *Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Bloch*

While Pennsylvania-born favorite son Charles Sheeler claimed one side of Stieglitz's attention during the teens and twenties, the other side would shift dramatically to the British-Sri Lankan Ananda Coomaraswamy. A historian and collector of Indian art, Coomaraswamy arrived in the U.S. in 1916 and worked to connect burgeoning modernist tendencies to his own interest in Indian forms. Born in Sri

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<sup>539</sup> Karen Lucic "Bucks County Barns," *Charles Sheeler in Doylestown: American Modernism and the Pennsylvania Tradition* (Allentown, Penn.: Allentown Art Museum, 1997).

<sup>540</sup> Charles Brock, *Charles Sheeler: Across Media* (Washington: National Gallery of Art; Berkeley: In association with University of California Press 2006), 26.

Lanka (then colonial Ceylon) to a Sri Lankan legislator and his British wife, Coomaraswamy was raised in Britain after his father's early death. Returning to his country of birth as an adult, Coomaraswamy (who began his career as a geologist) commenced the study and collecting of Indian art that was to be his life's work. His participation in the movement for Indian nationalism and his campaigns for native arts made Britain politically uncomfortable for Coomaraswamy, while instability in India dashed his hopes of donating what was by then an extensive art collection to an Indian national museum.<sup>541</sup> So

Coomaraswamy joined his wife, the British singer and *raga* specialist Ratan Devi (née Alice Richardson) on a 1916 U.S. concert tour. Much like de Zayas (and Picabia) before him, Coomaraswamy was adept at self-publicity and soon embarked on his own lectures. He also began a series of articles for *Vanity Fair*, a "smart magazine" aimed at America's urban leisure class, to introduce himself and Indian art to an American audience.<sup>542</sup> After less than a year, Coomaraswamy had convinced the cultural elite; by 1917 much of his collection had been purchased by Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) trustee Denman Ross, and the MFA offered him a permanent position as its first curator of Indian art.

In his advocacy Coomaraswamy confronted U.S. audiences who stereotyped Indian art as mechanical, created with rules so systematized the artist's personality could not enter (a criticism similar to those leveled against photography). Yet, Coomaraswamy argued for an "essentially mystic" art whose "subject matter is universal," which had an "Artistic sisterhood to 'Modernist' Art."<sup>543</sup> In his *Vanity Fair* series, Coomaraswamy also cautioned modernists that enduring arts could not be created by novelty, but

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<sup>541</sup>He had begun collecting art and artifacts when he returned to Sri Lanka around 1908, and Britain was also socially uncomfortable due to his hasty divorce from his first wife and marriage to Ratan Devi. For more on Coomaraswamy's biography see Roger Lipsey, *Ananda Coomaraswamy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1977). For more on Coomaraswamy's first involvement in the New York art scene during the teens see Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>542</sup>George H. Douglas, *The Smart Magazines: 50 Years of Literary Revelry and High Jinks at Vanity fair, the New Yorker, Life, Esquire, and the Smart Set* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1991). A May 1916 profile of Coomaraswamy in *Vanity Fair* played on popular exoticism introducing him as "the great Buddhist scholar and art critic," noting that he traced his ancestry to "a member of the old warrior or Kshatriya caste, a Tamil of high rank and dignity." Anon., "Ratan Devi: Indian Singer," *Vanity Fair*, vol. 6 no. 3 (May 1916): 79.

<sup>543</sup>Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Rajput Painting: And Its Artistic Sisterhood to 'Modernist' Art," *Vanity Fair*, vol. 6 no. 5. July 1916, 29 and Ananda Coomaraswamy, "The Cave Paintings of Ajanta: An Almost Unique Type of Classical Indian Art which Appeals Strongly to Modernists," *Vanity Fair*, September 1916, 67 and 198.

only by a mystical truth “clearly and repeatedly expressed in a manner comprehensible to everyone.”<sup>544</sup>

Attempting to make such truths more widely comprehensible, Coomaraswamy co-translated a classic Indian text on dancing, using photography to capture and illustrate the movements and symbolism of the gestures (fig. 4.5). These unattributed photographs published in his 1917 *The Mirror of Gesture*, likely Coomaraswamy’s own, aimed to make symbol and custom as a universally comprehensible language.<sup>545</sup> Examining the closely cropped photographs of a hand gestures from this book against Stieglitz’s *The White Hand*, suggests both Stieglitz’s and Coomaraswamy’s hands (white and not so) can be understood as offering complimentary languages of symbolic abstraction.<sup>546</sup>

Much better known for his expertise on Indian art, Coomaraswamy deserves study as a photographer. His artistic endeavors demonstrate an alternative way to work through the symbolic systems on which his scholarship focused.<sup>547</sup> Coomaraswamy viewed photography’s functions as manifold, documenting objects as an art collector, curator, and scholar, but also creating images he deemed artistic in their own right (fig. 4.6). His interest in photography and its possible use for art culminated in serial photographs of his third wife Stella Bloch, a Polish-born Jewish dancer famous for her performances of Javanese dance.<sup>548</sup> His portrait series of Bloch shares much with Stieglitz’s famous

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<sup>544</sup> Listing the examples of Japanese No or Indian Nautch, Coomaraswamy argued “the inspiration of great art has always been fundamentally religious (in all essentials, rather than the formal meaning of the word) and philosophic,” adding “it is from the gods, too, that human art is learnt; it is designed to reveal the true and essential meaning of our life.” Ananda Coomaraswamy, “Oriental Dances in America—And A Word or Two in Explanation of The Nautch,” *Vanity Fair*, no. 3 vol.8 (May 1917): 61.

<sup>545</sup> Nandikesvara, *The mirror of gesture, being the Abhinaya darpana of Nandikesvara*, tr. into English and with introduction by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1917). Coomaraswamy cites the sources for four plates that do not originate with him, leading to the assumption that others may have been photographed by him, plates I, II, IV and V, *ibid*, 10.

<sup>546</sup> Coomaraswamy arrived in New York just as Stieglitz’s 291 gallery was closing. The two did not finally meet until 1923. Norman, *Introduction to an American Seer* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1960), 48. More information about Coomaraswamy’s involvement with Stieglitz and Norman is provided in Smithsonian Archives of American art, Interview with Dorothy Norman. Conducted by William McNaught, at the artist’s home in East Hampton, New York, May 31, 1979.

<sup>547</sup> The slide and photographic library at the MFA played a vital role in Coomaraswamy’s attempts to explain Indian art forms to an audience who could not see the works in person. The MFA’s large collection of glass plate negatives has since been transferred to the Harvard Visual Studies Department. He quickly came to regard at least some of his works as artistic productions in their own right, entering a photograph in a 1919 amateur photo contest, and donating another to the MFA in 1924. Possibly it was self-promotion that introduced Coomaraswamy to the notion of artistic photography, having his portrait used to announce his 1916 American lecture series shot by Stieglitz’s one time ally, pictorial photographer A.L. Coburn. He sent the printed flyer including his picture to the MFA in 1916, microfilm MFA archive (hereafter referenced as MFA).

<sup>548</sup> Coomaraswamy’s relationship with Bloch facilitated this interest in photography. Not only was she a willing subject, but her cousin, the photographer and cinematographer Mortimer Offner, assisted him with technical details providing advice on equipment and techniques. In his correspondence Coomaraswamy demonstrated a passing awareness of Camera Work as early as 1920, in Coomaraswamy to T. Cook and Sons, Aug. 18, 1920, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Bloch Papers, Princeton University Rare Books and Special Collections (hereafter referenced as PSC).

series of O’Keeffe. Letters between Coomaraswamy and Bloch indicate that they (like Stieglitz and O’Keeffe) began their relationship in April of 1917 by exchanging drawings and photographs.<sup>549</sup> Fewer than twenty of Coomaraswamy’s photographs of Bloch appear to have survived, but Coomaraswamy considered the images part of a large collection, writing his subject, “It does not suit my constitution to be away from you. I often look [at] your photos and study them (over 300!).”<sup>550</sup> In November of 1917, he described his own interpretation of his photographs to Bloch, writing,

I think your hands are particularly charming. It often impresses me how exactly you exemplify some of the classical similes of Indian poetry – such as, arms like the stalk of a water lily, hands like lotus flowers, hair like a black snake (hanging in one long line, not falling loose), and sidelong glances like arrows.<sup>551</sup>

As in the photographic series Stieglitz was undertaking at the same moment, Coomaraswamy prized his model’s hands, but he understood the images entirely through ancient Indian symbols. Coomaraswamy embraced symbolic systems as developed in poetry, finding them illustrated in his own images.

Coomaraswamy’s photograph and his description of it bear comparison to Stieglitz’s of O’Keeffe (fig. 4.7 and 4.2). His photograph of Bloch depicts her left hand pressed between her breasts in much the same position as O’Keeffe in Stieglitz’s *The White Hand*. Coomaraswamy as photographer stands to the side, depicting a three-quarter view of the female form with dark shadows under her arm and hand. The skew between the subject and the picture plane, as well as the close cropping, gives the twisted portrait an aura of mystery that differentiates it from the direct depiction of O’Keeffe. Even more strikingly Bloch wears a large domed ring on one finger and a small patterned band on another. Stieglitz’s photograph of O’Keeffe presented her White Hand as unmarked, devoid of such particularizing ornamentation, but Coomaraswamy’s photograph aimed to present a portrait resplendent with cultural symbols.<sup>552</sup> Yet,

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<sup>549</sup> “I will give then give you back some of your photographs, if you let me keep a few,” with marginal note on the top, “It would please me very much to be lent the films of those outdoor dancing pictures of yours if you have them.” Coomaraswamy to Bloch, October 28, 1917, PSC. The two were married in 1922 but continued to live apart (he in Boston and she in New York) for the duration of their marriage, which ended in 1930.

<sup>550</sup> Coomaraswamy to Bloch, Oct 9, 1921, PSC.

<sup>551</sup> Coomaraswamy to Bloch, Nov 19, 1917, PSC.

<sup>552</sup> A strategy also employed in the illustrations published in *The Mirror of Gesture*, which included cultural markers in the form of bracelets and flowing saris. Jewelry historian Yvonne Markowitz suggests that during the 1920s wearing multiple rings was a mark of self-conscious bohemianism. Personal communication, email, 6/27/2007.

defamiliarizing Stieglitz's serial photographs of O'Keeffe we can begin to see that whiteness itself is highly symbolic. It is through very symbolism of whiteness that *The White Hand* becomes (falsely) universal, introducing a language of transparency and spiritualization to photography along with the powerful popular appeal of the "buck-eye" element."

#### 4.2 "All Races are Here"

Itself inspired by the "esthetic significance of the motion picture," the photographic series also prepared the way for these photographers to make films in the 1920s. Fictional narrative epics were becoming increasingly dominant in the U.S. during the period, but many non-fiction short films also achieved popular success. Cinema historian Scott MacDonald has identified two dominant genres of filmic non-fiction in the era. Representations of "distant 'exotic' cultures" represented one pole (taken up in the Stieglitz circle, as explored in this section, by Coomaraswamy), while depictions of "the modern, mechanized city" represented the other (also undertaken within the Stieglitz circle by Strand and Sheeler). Along with the disparate sites in which these films took place, MacDonald makes conceptual distinctions useful for understanding the promises cinema offered the Stieglitz circle. The exotic films distanced audiences from the idea of nations, presenting a global boundless world of images and symbols. The city films pictured modernity as "a place of precise and rigid boundaries," where happiness and order came with the "compartmentalization of experience."<sup>553</sup> This section will explore how the transformation from straight photographic medium to "transparent" media took place in relation to film and these two non-fiction genres.

##### *Coomaraswamy and the Rational Gesture*

Inspired by his own passion for cinema, Ananda Coomaraswamy lugged a motion picture camera and photographic equipment on a tour around the world in August of 1924. Intent on recording the dances

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<sup>553</sup>Scott MacDonald, "The City as the Country: The New York City Symphony from Rudy Burckhardt to Spike Lee," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 2. (Winter, 1997-1998), 3.



of East and South Asia the curator took on the role of cinematographer informed by portraits of dance in the commercial films he watched and collected.<sup>554</sup> Traveling, his project progressing, Coomaraswamy was enthusiastic about showing these filmed dances publicly upon his return to the U.S. He wrote his wife Stella Bloch from Angkor Wat (after shooting over 400 feet of film) that he planned “to organize a really good show of oriental dance films when I get back, it will be exciting.”<sup>555</sup> However, the curator met resistance before he even returned to America. Although the museum expressed gratitude for the still photographs Coomaraswamy collected and sent to the MFA’s library, Associate Director Dawes complained of the inconvenience encountered when one of the curator’s films had been “detained by the Post Office and had to be run off to prove that the subject was not pugilistic.”<sup>556</sup> With upper-class prejudice against the motion picture (of just the sort bohemian Sadakichi Hartmann urged putting aside) Dawes dismissed Coomaraswamy’s cinematic venture. Opening the film cans, he claimed to have been “disappointed that they did not contain pound cake!”<sup>557</sup>

Coomaraswamy’s own understanding of the cinema could scarcely have been more different from Dawe’s dismissal. The curator never wrote professionally on film or explained his own practice, but he was a devoted cinephile who theorized the medium in his letters to Bloch, writing, “I sometimes think they [films] correspond (in a sense) to epic drama—representing quite idealized characters. Also using formulas (symbols), much more than the stage does. Also they are much more definitely American than stage plays (which always more or less try to be artistic).”<sup>558</sup> Linking cinema to a tradition of dramatic

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<sup>554</sup> Coomaraswamy also wrote Bloch about specific directors, shots and close-ups, especially recommending to her travel movies featuring dancing that might inspire her. “Cannot delay to write and tell you I saw a pretty good travel movie by Horton (Prizma Co) of Bali! You should see it if you can—there is a fair amount of dancing, and a good picture of the Regent of Granjar,” Aug. 15, 1923, Coomaraswamy to Bloch, PSC. As his interest in films increased, Coomaraswamy began projecting movies at home and speculating on how such filmic records might assist his study of dances. Outlining, for example the impossibility of describing Asian dances, Coomaraswamy wrote “The degree of scholarship that would be required for such a study as this—even when supported by all available photo and phono-graphic apparatus—well nigh baffles the imagination.” Ananda Coomaraswamy, “Notes on the Javansese Theater,” *Rupam a Journal of Oriental Art*, July 1921, no. 7, 10, PSC.

<sup>555</sup> Many of his photographic negatives from Angkor were unfortunately flawed when developed. Coomaraswamy to Bloch, Nov. 15, 1924, PSC. After his return Coomaraswamy told Bloch he was planning a lecture “with a movie which is keeping me quite busy.” Coomaraswamy created intertitles for his own films, suggesting that he may have intended to show them without live interpretation, possibly aiming at some level of distribution. “Did I tell you the titles I made so far turned out very well.” Coomaraswamy to Bloch, Aug 17, 1925, PSC.

<sup>556</sup> Dawes to Coomaraswamy, November 18, 1924, MFA Archive.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>558</sup> Coomaraswamy to Bloch, March 27, 1923, PSC. This observation was prompted by a Cecille de Mille film.

epics, Coomaraswamy celebrated its use of idealized characters and symbolic formulas. Although the reference to epic drama evokes his studies of the subject in India, Coomaraswamy made the specific claim that films belonged to the U.S., offering the American nation its very own type of traditional epic. This ability to represent national essence was, Coomaraswamy theorized, the result of giving up self-conscious attempts to be artistic in order to embrace the formulas of a medium with wide appeal. As straight photographers had rejected self-consciously painterly techniques, film also rejected artistry and became specifically American. Perhaps this is why, when planning new presentations of East and South Asian dance to American audiences, Coomaraswamy looked to the appeal of film and its facility with drama. No ephemera or reactions to these presentations have come to light.<sup>559</sup> Fortunately, however, many of the films have survived to chronicle their maker responding to and departing from the popular commercial genre of the travelogue and the dance film.<sup>560</sup>

Coomaraswamy's extant silent films focus almost exclusively on dances, frequently performances cut and spliced with mass-produced travelogues from his collection of commercial movies. Often grainy, frequently overexposed, and edited with jump cuts, some of Coomaraswamy's films record entire performances (including Japanese Noh dramatic theater and Cambodian Khmer classical dance), while in others single dancers perform simply accompanied by a musician. This latter type show gestures in spare, simple settings with no apparent audience, costumes, or spectacle. With just a mat on the ground and a dancer (sometimes two) accompanied by musicians, these performances seem staged for the cameraman alone, despite the fact that the dancers rarely acknowledge his presence. Textual intertitles created by Coomaraswamy instruct unfamiliar viewers on each episode. For example, in one untitled film a woman sits on a mat in a building or shaded space, gesturing with her hands as a woman playing music and a child sit behind her. The series of shots, seemingly taken in quick succession (the sun creeps closer to her as the film progresses), are identified by intertitles: "Theme: The Ten Avatars of Vishnu," "The Tortoise Avatar," the "Krishna's Flute," "The Great Bird Garuda Vishnu's Vehicle" (fig. 4.8-4.10). In the latter

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<sup>559</sup> Indeed, it is uncertain if Coomaraswamy ever made his planned presentations.

<sup>560</sup> These films are available at the Human Studies Film Archives, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

tow the symbolic gestures are easily read. She holds her spread hands out extended from her mouth as a flute. Her wrists cross to create a birdlike shape, and she puts her hand around her mouth to cradle a call. The final shot of this film, the intertitle explains, is an entire narrative “The Infant Krishna steals first the curds then the churned butter; looking anxiously about lest he be seen by his mother” (4.11). Following this text the dancer inhabits all the roles covering her face to hide, gesturing angrily, finally seeming to cover her eyes and ears in a closely shot sequence of her face. In a second example, Coomaraswamy filmed the dances of two women outdoors in an open grassy area (4.12). Musicians accompany these women and passers-by cross frame in the background. Devoid of built structures the setting shares a generality with the first, seeming to aim to be encyclopedic over exotic.

Coomaraswamy’s own large collection of commercial films depicting dance give us some idea of other conventions of filming dance, and also help us understand why he carried along his heavy motion picture camera. Compare the two previously discussed untitled films, each shot on location with intertitles framing the action (fig. 4.8-4.12), to a commercial film of native Hawaiian dancing. In the latter, the performer twirls against a black backdrop on a large woven mat lit by spotlights. Clearly on a stage set, this female dancer flirts with the implied audience as she dances. Devoid of explanation of her actions, the film’s “‘buck-eye’ element” is enticing, but not informative (fig. 4.13). Another film in Coomaraswamy’s collection, this one by Burton Holmes, captures the dances of the Maoris of New Zealand (fig. 4.15). Its intertitles are informative, but they exoticize the people rather than explaining their actions. Framing the dancers in a line in front of the particularizing setting of their meetinghouse, the intertitle refers to the film’s subjects as “warriors of this one-time cannibal tribe wielding their battle clubs and spears.” Coomaraswamy’s films more closely resemble the excerpts of dance he collected from travelogues in which (before his intervention) genre where in which national dances form one episode in a panoply of local sights (fig. 4.14). These picturesque others of the travel film conjure Hartmann’s 1902 plea with straight photographers to discover New York’s own picturesqueness. Filming only dance elements Coomaraswamy aimed not to provide a tantalizing glimpse of another place, but sought to understand the language of gesture by creating a filmed archive of the dances of several countries.

Coomaraswamy's works must be positioned more generally during this period in which gesture and dance became powerful components of experimental cinema. Filmmakers invoked the "primitive" gesture of ethnographic subjects as a "purer" form of visual communication to counter the mass consumerism they thought contemporaneous narrative spectaculars deliberately engendered. Dance was among ethnographic film's most popular subjects, understood as a bodily expression that exposed the "the physical, irrational nature of language" (fig. 4.13-4.15).<sup>561</sup> This understanding and philosophy of dance as irrational personal expression was also popularized in the U.S. by "modern" dancers (Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Loie Fuller).<sup>562</sup> Coomaraswamy, as previously noted, publicly disapproved of these irrational "modern" dancers, whom he felt relied too heavily on their own novelty instead of traditional dance practices. For his films Coomaraswamy concentrated on dancers who trained vigorously in traditional forms – practice in which dances suggested not the irrationality of language, but precisely its rationality. Instead of picturesque others, Coomaraswamy attempted to unearth a case of transnational "idealized characters" and "formulas (symbols)," making them universally legible through his film.

### *Sheeler, Strand and Manhatta*

Pursuing the city genre of non-fiction cinema, Sheeler and Strand embarked on a 1920 collaboration, often regarded as the first American avant-garde modernist film: the cinematic depiction of New York we now know as *Manhatta*.<sup>563</sup> Eager to apply the lessons of the photographer to film, the

<sup>561</sup> Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, (Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 1996), 63, and for an account of dance in ethnographic film see also Assenka Oksiloff, *Picturing the Primitive: Visual Culture, Ethnography and Early German Cinema* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>562</sup> Their physical movements suggested "the body could reveal itself once again as a primal site of expression." Rony, *The Third Eye*, 131.

<sup>563</sup> Perhaps because it was lost until 1950, the film had been neglected in early accounts of modernist avant-garde cinema. In 1979 Scott Hammen asserted *Manhatta* belonged in the canon. Scott Hammen, "Sheeler and Strand's 'Manhatta': A Neglected Masterpiece" *Afterimage*, 6-7. More recently Jan-Christopher Horak has argued that instead of celebrating the film as a modern work, we should regard it as a "heterogeneous text," both "modern and anti-modern." Jan-Christopher Horak, "Modernist Perspectives and Romantic Desire: *Manhatta*," *Afterimage* 15, no. 4 (November, 1987): 9. For more on *Manhatta* see also: Jan-Christopher Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*," *Lovers of Cinema, : The First American Film Avant-garde, 1919-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 267-286; Naomi Rosenblum, "Strand and Sheeler's *Manhatta*," *History of Photography* 18, no. 3 (fall 1994): 291; "Charles Brock, "Manhatta and the Cityscape, 1920," *Charles Sheeler: Across Media*, 42-52; See also Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives, Dada and the American Avant-garde, 1910-1925* (Middletown,

partnership seems to have evolved based on Strand's knowledge of the city (having grown up on the Upper West Side) and Sheeler's knowledge of filmmaking (having recently purchased an expensive French-made "Parvo" camera).<sup>564</sup> Little more is known for certain about the movie's inspiration, but the film itself survives in the form of a print shown in London in 1927 and rediscovered in the vaults of the British Film Institute in 1950. This print had the title *Manhatta*, likely a simplification of Walt Whitman's poem "Mannahatta," but the original title under which the film was released in New York City on July 24, 1921 was *New York the Magnificent*.<sup>565</sup> I will use this much more overtly celebratory and civic-minded title as a way to frame the film and its intended viewer.

*New York the Magnificent* premiered at the Rialto Theater on Broadway, identified as part of the established commercial genre of "the scenic."<sup>566</sup> Initially aiming at a popular audience, Strand's letters to Stieglitz describe the scenic only as a beginning, an "entering wedge" into the field of film.<sup>567</sup> Indeed, Strand wrote a press release for the movie's premiere that cited the filmmakers' art world credentials to rouse interest. He claimed "the intention of the photographers has been to apply their special knowledge gained from experiments in still photography, to the motion picture," in order to express "the spirit of

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Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 221-223, and Karen Hass, "Charles Sheeler and Film," *Antiquities* (Nov. 2002): 122-29.

<sup>564</sup> Although it is unclear exactly what motivated his purchase of a Debie L'Interview (type E) 35mm Parvo movie camera, Horak points out it proved to be "extremely lightweight, easily threaded and operated," the perfect tool for photographing the city. Horak "Modernist Perspectives and Romantic Desire," *Afterimage*, 9.

<sup>565</sup> The film did not come to be known as *Manhatta* until its second showing in New York on April 27, 1926 by the International Film Arts Guild at the Cameo Theater. Brock, *Charles Sheeler*, 45. Until the end of their lives, Strand referred to the film as "the scenic" and Sheeler kept a group of stills printed from the film that he labeled "New York moving." *Ibid.*, 18. Neither artist commented reliably on the choice of passages from Whitman, it seems most likely that the two were responsible for choosing the passages, while the Rialto provided the technical assistance necessary to create the professional title frames. Horak's interpretation of the film relies on the titles and makes reference even to the image of the city, which it seems was probably provided by the Rialto. Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*," 278. Brock, on the other hand, disregards the titles entirely as unimportant. Brock, *Charles Sheeler*, 45.

<sup>566</sup> On the exact date of the release see Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*," *Lovers of Cinema*, 269. The scenic, *New York the Magnificent* was shown along with a newsreel and a dance film before the feature Western comedy. as part of a program that included "Overture: Selections from 'Manon' / Current Events: 'Rialto Magazine' (newsreel) / Ballet: 'Danse Orientale,' presented by Lillian Powell / Scenic: New York the Magnificent / Vocal: Ceasare Galletti singing 'Celeste Aida' / Feature: The Fall Guy." The feature was a western comedy short Harriet Underhill, *Motion Picture News* 24 no. 7, 6 Aug 1921: 756, as quoted in Horak, "Modernist Perspectives and Romantic Desire," *Afterimage*, 10. Posner has suggested that the film had precedents in numerous single-subject, often single-take, "scenics" of various cities created by the Edison, American Mutoscope and Biograph studios. Posner's claim should not be taken to devalue *Manhatta*'s, but rather should instead help examine how the film moved within a larger cultural world. Chris Chang, "*Manhatta*," *Film Comment*, Sept-Oct, 2003.

<sup>567</sup> Strand added to Stieglitz "I fear we will not be able to distribute it generally. Apparently everybody has been making a reel of New York. Educational, which is the largest company, have done so and I have seen announcements of other smaller concerns. Naturally, they will use their own materials." Strand to Stieglitz, Aug. 3, 1921, YCAL.

New York, of its power and beauty and movement.”<sup>568</sup> What was the special knowledge the still photographers brought to motion picture? What was the spirit of New York the two would express?

Strand and Sheeler’s film opens with an intertitle reading “City of the world (for all races are here) / City of tall facades of marble and iron/ Proud and passionate city,” an excerpt from Whitman’s poem “City of Ships,” that suggests the film will be a portrait of New York defined by its diversity and architecture (fig. 4.16). Following this intertitle, however, the filmmakers captured views from the Staten Island Ferry. Various scholars have noted this opening scene introduces a kinesthetic film in which the sensation of traveling is created by means of a mobile camera, but none have considered what type of riders were accompanying the camera with Strand and Sheeler on the ferry. This sequence departs from Whitman’s vision of the U.S. as fundamentally a “nation of nations” and asks the residents of Staten Island, historically the least diverse and most suburban of New York’s boroughs, to stand in for “all races” of the city (fig. 4.17).<sup>569</sup>

On one level such limited focus was part of the film’s goal; Strand’s press release claimed that the film would rely on “conscious selection” and depict only “the towering geometry of lower Manhattan and its environs.” Selection was, Strand argued, the special knowledge of the still photographer forced by his medium to be adept at deciding what to include in a limited frame. The film concentrated only on the financial district around Wall Street, fastidiously avoiding the adjoining lower Manhattan immigrants and their diverse residential neighborhoods. In its selection Strand and Sheeler’s film eschews differentiations among the classes on the street, shutting out discrepancies to create the appearance of harmonious unitary city. Shot from a carefully chosen vantage point high above its bustling subject, the film celebrates the

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<sup>568</sup> He identified Sheeler as “one of the younger modern American painters and a photographer of distinction” and himself as “an experimenter in photography.” Strand’s Press Release for *New York the Magnificent*, 1921, CCP.

<sup>569</sup> Staten Island was the most suburban of the five boroughs that had been consolidated into New York in 1898, Manhattan was actually fifty times more densely populated than Staten Island. In 1920 it had just over 100,000 people, as compared with over two million in Manhattan and a density of over 100,000 people per square mile, compared to Staten Island’s 2,000. The Staten Island became a municipal ferry in 1905. In 1904 the immigration service took over the regular service between Ellis Island and White Hall. For more on ferries see Brian J. Cudahy, *Over and Back: The History of Ferryboats in New York Harbors*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 205.

efficiency of labor in the postwar context (fig. 4.18).<sup>570</sup> In contrast to Hartmann's calls for photographers to go into immigrant neighborhoods to still their difference to picturesqueness, Strand and Sheeler focused on the financial district, depicting only the busy motion of interchangeable office workers.

Strand and Sheeler's use of another one of photography's tools – exposure – also operates within the film to reduce individuality and produce their film's image of a harmonious, undifferentiated urban subject (and intended audience). Literally, overexposure of those departing the Staten Island ferry creates “whiteness” – blank white faces without features (fig. 4.17). In contrast the brief scene of manual laborers is generally lit so that race is indecipherable, framed in low light digging a foundation (fig. 4.19) and backlit while working on the steel frame (fig. 4.20). The man on the lower right in the former (fig. 4.19) might be African-American, but it is impossible to be certain in the low light. The high contrast backlighting on the other workers turns them into silhouettes joined to the structure they are creating.<sup>571</sup> These scenes of the city's inhabitants give way after less than four of the film's ten minutes to a long series of architectural portraits, in which the skyscrapers of lower Manhattan are lovingly detailed with long tracking shots (fig. 4.21).

The 1919 account of New York by Stieglitz circle member Waldo Frank, his book *Our America*, resonates with the separation of urban workers and buildings in *New York the Magnificent*. Quoting a Parisian who told him that she loved New York but could not stand New Yorkers, Frank explained that while European cities and their citizens were unified, in New York there was obvious disparity between the urban architecture and its inhabitants. Frank averred that the contemporary New Yorker was no longer a “true pioneer,” tracing a history of the city in which the pioneer “race came first. Then came the city

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<sup>570</sup> Strand would only much later claim his 1916 photograph Wall Street, which captured an identical scene to the one in the film, aimed to depict the windows as “a great maw into which the people rush.” Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photography* (Millertown, N.Y.: Aperture, 1976). Another passage in the film that has been read as disturbing, of workers passing through the Trinity Church Graveyard, though initially morbid, also highlights the presence of the Church representing the spiritual Anglican values underlying lower Manhattan.

<sup>571</sup> Based on these two brief scenes of labor introduced by an intertitle that reads “the building of cities, – the shovel, the great derrick, the wall scaffold, the work of walls and ceilings,” film historian David Gerstner has identified *Manhatta* a depiction in which “the artist and city laborers (the artist-craftsman) work as co-equal builders of the city.” David Gerstner, *Manly Arts: Masculinity and Nation in Early American Cinema* (Durham : Duke University Press, 2006), 157. Gerstner suggests these dimly and backlit men are intended to be the heroes of the film, identified with the artists themselves, but their very brief appearance (less than a minute) seems to suggest otherwise.

that was its product. And now another race that is the product of the city.”<sup>572</sup> Frank separated New York’s architecture – “Its high white towers are arrows of will...a lofty, arrogant, lustful city, beaten through by an iron rhythm” – from its “lowly...driven...drab” inhabitants.<sup>573</sup> The men and women who lived in Manhattan during the late 1910s and 1920s were not the city’s productive builders, but its debased products. Studies of Strand and Sheeler’s film have identified the blind eye it turned toward “urban squalor” as romantic, but this neglects to identify how the film’s vision of a structured, productive, clean white city becomes crucial to an emerging vocabulary of American modernism. This contextualization belies our contemporary readings of the film as a portrait of the modern city of alienation and begins to connect *New York the Magnificent* to the tumultuous reinvention of New York pushed by period advertising professionals and business leaders. Clean modern skyscrapers and office workers replaced crime, poverty, and immigrants as the city’s public face.<sup>574</sup>

The “whitening” work of modernism is evident in the unfolding of *New York the Magnificent*. Although the film begins with hurried people, it quickly turns to celebrate the structure of the city: following the smoke of buildings, trains, boats, and finally just clouds (nature’s smoke?). Frequently regarded as a visual marker of urban productivity, this smoke also acts formally to provide a diegetic way for the city to dissolve into white at each transition (fig. 4.22).<sup>575</sup> The long takes of drifting dematerialized white smoke suggested that the productive white towers created their own white offspring more interesting than the drab inhabitants. The climax to this series is a sequence of shots of the luxury ocean liner the *Aquitania*, one of the few ships that would continue to profit in transatlantic travel by catering to rich passengers even after the imposition of restrictions on immigration (fig. 4.23). The famous final shot of clouds over the harbor at sunset (captured from the Equitable Building looking back towards Staten

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<sup>572</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 174.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>574</sup> Urban historian Angela Blake argues for the historical shift in the image of New York. Angela Blake, *How New York Became American 1890-1924* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

<sup>575</sup> In fact this smoke theme is so prevalent that the film premiered in Paris in 1922 under the title *Fumée de New York* (Smoke of New York). In views of the city’s roofs white smoke fills the frame. The harbor views focus on boats with white smoke, and the railroad scene shows a black locomotive spewing more white smoke. During the extended scene (which takes up one and a half minutes of the ten minute long film) of the liner approaching New York, the steamship produces a mixture of grey smoke, while one of the tugs that helps move it spews black smoke, but a lengthy shot shows this white and black smoke mixing and culminating in whiteness.



Island [fig. 4.24]) demonstrates the seemingly willful elimination of the Statue of Liberty from the scene – as is evident in comparison with a contemporaneous photograph (fig. 4.25).<sup>576</sup> *New York the Magnificent* depicts a unified city and the buildings of pioneers while eschewing immigration and the issues it provoked.

Intent on popular appeal Strand's press release also placed the film in an international arena, stating it aimed to do "with natural objects what in 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' has attempted with painted sets."<sup>577</sup> With natural objects substituting for painted sets the still photographer would achieve the seemingly incongruous aim of expressionist plasticity with photography. Strand's reference to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* can be contextualized by Robert Allerton Parker's lauding of *New York the Magnificent* in a 1921 issue of *Arts and Decoration*. Here, Parker too mentioned German expressionist artists' use of the new film medium, contrasting the celebration of these imports to the American artistic community's reverse snobbery about U.S. national production. He complained praise for German expressionism had overshadowed this American film, and speculated, "perhaps these critical gentlemen can register only the merits of imported art and of the demerits of domestic."<sup>578</sup> American productions could patriotically rival German cinema; for if *Caligari* was an expressionist portrait of a deranged mind in postwar Germany, photographers Strand and Sheeler created proud and productive portrait of the American city at work.

Harriet Underhill, film reviewer for the *New York Tribune*, also praised Sheeler and Strand's scenic, calling it far more interesting than the other elements of the program it was included with at the Rialto because it showcased "what every New Yorker thinks is the greatest city in the world." During the film, she reported, the orchestra played "all of the old favorites" – Tin Pan Alley songs that included "Annie Rooney" (a song about a poor orphaned girl popularized by the performer known as the Bowery girl), "Sidewalks of New York" (a theme song celebrating urban New York), "She May Have Seen Better

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<sup>576</sup> Henry Collins Brown, *New York of to-Day* (New York: Old Colony Press, 1917). I remain unsure if this attribution of the view is correct, but I suspect it is footage taken from the building and accidentally reversed.

<sup>577</sup> Strand wrote the film would distill its subjects into geometric forms, capturing the city's spirit without "any artifice of diffusion, photographic trickery or superficial picture-making...[and]...reduce through the most rigid selection, volumes, lines and masses, to their intensest terms of expression." Paul Strand, Press Release for *New York The Magnificent*, 1921.

<sup>578</sup> Robert Allerton Parker, "The Art of the Camera: An Experimental 'Movie,'" *Arts and Decoration* (October 1921): 369.

Days” (an account of a fallen woman in the slums and the dangers of the city), and “My Mother was a Lady” (the tale of a young woman who traveled to the city to find her brother, becomes a waitress, is sexually harassed and then redeemed). Each song had been a vaudeville hit of the 1890s, celebrations and warnings to those arriving in New York. In her review Underhill speculated that the music and *New York the Magnificent* had almost moved the audience to a sing-along outburst of civic boosterism, writing “two minutes more of it and there would have been community singing – a few intrepid souls were tuning up, as it was.”<sup>579</sup> Strand and Sheeler’s film seemed to have something of the “‘buck-eye’ element” of mass appeal, even if the audience and theater supplied a hybridity that injected the disorderly city of immigrants the filmmakers had worked to whiten and modernize.

Preparing for the film’s 1921 international debut in a program including Eric Satie’s and Guillaume Apollinaire’s poems, de Zayas suggested the filmmakers re-edit their work, advising them to “...select certain shots of purely plastic interest, increase their length and arrange them without titles plastically.”<sup>580</sup> Still closely allied with the European avant-garde, de Zayas urged them to eliminate the conventions tying the film to the commercial genre of the scenic. A worried Strand asked Stieglitz for advice, confiding he did not “quite trust” de Zayas.<sup>581</sup> Stieglitz replied he only worried that Strand would not get the credit he deserved for the collaboration: “It’s one of those ticklish questions when one of two is an ‘artist’ and the other only a photographer!”<sup>582</sup> Scholars have suggested Stieglitz disliked film, fearing Strand would abandon photography for the newer medium, but it was Strand who began the uneasy discussion based on his anxiety about de Zayas. The caricaturist’s attempt to ally the film with European abstraction, threatened the work’s role as an “entering wedge” into the popular American film market.

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<sup>579</sup> Harriet Underhill, *Motion Picture News* 24 no. 7, 6 Aug 1921: 756, as quoted in Horak, “Modernist Perspectives and Romantic Desire,” *Afterimage*, 10.

<sup>580</sup> Strand to Stieglitz, Sept. 5, 1921, YCAL. It seems that the two did not remove the intertitles or if they did that print does not survive. The fact that this suggestion was made by de Zayas suggests the filmmakers had some investment in the intertitles. Although in 1924 Sheeler argued in a review that motion picture would only become “a new channel for the expression of visual forms” if it was “detached from plots and captions.” Charles Sheeler, “Pictorial Beauty on the Screen (Victor O. Freeburg),” *The Arts*, vol. V, no. 5 (May 1924): 293.

<sup>581</sup> Strand to Stieglitz, Sept. 5, 1921, YCAL.

<sup>582</sup> Stieglitz to Strand, Sept. 13, 1921, YCAL.

Stieglitz was, in fact, quite supportive of Strand's work on *New York the Magnificent*, writing for example, in August of 1920, as production on the film was still underway, Stieglitz wrote: "Your summer's work – or rather your year's work – will have a power a big one by the time 1921 knocks at the door. Undoubtedly you are doing some fine work where you are. A new field."<sup>583</sup> Stieglitz was also excited by Strand's next planned cinematic venture with Sheeler that was to slow down and analyze athletic motion. Strand explained, "The educational side of the 'movies' has not been scratched. But the athletic phase interests me tremendously – is really so beautiful and *the cleanest thing* in the country."<sup>584</sup> To this proposal Stieglitz responded with enthusiasm; "Your movie idea is capital. I do hope something will come out of it. It is [too] tantalizing not to connect."<sup>585</sup> Although Strand and Sheeler never found financing for this sports venture, Strand's description, an almost stereotypical one, of clean (implicitly white) bodies engaged in educational physical pursuits, should inform our readings of *New York the Magnificent / Manhatta*. Cinema offered a medium through which to reach a popular audience with a newly universal, "transparent" modernist vision, celebrating clean whiteness of bodies and the city.

### *Stieglitz the Showman*

Fueled by his desire for art with the "'buck-eye' element" Stieglitz also hatched plans to make a filmic version of his serial photographs.<sup>586</sup> For example, when Charlie Chaplin visited the studio and

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<sup>583</sup> Stieglitz to Strand, Aug 24, 1920, YCAL. This appreciation of the film was likely why he had such trouble concealing his jealousy, writing Strand in response to his report on the film's first showing "am glad Arensberg + De Zayas were so pleased. I'm sure the film was way above the 'usual' thing. But I do hope you + Sheeler will get more out of it than the applause of Arensberg+ De Zayas...in a way it's just as well I did not see it. – I hope to see it sometime soon. – Yes, one must become more + more critical of one's work otherwise one is apt to fool oneself. – No criticism can equal one's own. – not if one really creates." Stieglitz and Strand, October 27, 1920, YCAL. Because recorded discussion of the film by its makers was so minimal, much speculation has focused on a limited number of quotations from Strand's correspondence with Stieglitz. Historians eager to attribute the film to Sheeler note Stieglitz's question to Strand "Do you see much of Sheeler? Is he continuing his abstract movie?" Aug 9, 1920, YCAL. However, in focusing only on this letter, they neglect Stieglitz's repeated inquiries in other letters to Strand "I hope you'll be through with your 'movie' soon so as to have it off your mind" and "I wonder did your movie materialize," July 21, 1920 and July 19, 1921. Stieglitz claimed Sheeler had previously asked him to view the film, "I suppose in my state of physical irritation it was just as well I didn't see it. – Yet, I think I have a pretty good picture of it without the actual seeing. – Queer." Stieglitz to Strand, July 21, 1920.

<sup>584</sup> Italics added. Strand to Stieglitz, August, 3, 1921.

<sup>585</sup> Stieglitz to Strand, Aug. 4, 1921, YCAL.

<sup>586</sup> Stieglitz was aware of the blossoming avant-garde cinema movement, admiring Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* – "Stieglitz said today of a motion picture made by Marcel Duchamp that it was the first thing made by another person which he had ever wished he had done himself." December 18, 1926, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, 118.

looked at Stieglitz's portraits of O'Keeffe in 1931, the photographer identified the series as "a prelude" to a film of a woman's body in close ups – "a woman's eyes, their changing expressions, the hands, feet, lips, breasts, mons veneris, all parts of a woman's body" – a film he claimed to have been planning for twenty years. Stieglitz described the work he imagined in detail as showing "the development of a life, each episode alternated with motion pictures of cloud forms on the same theme [inspired by the series *Equivalents* he had begun in 1922], always re-sounding the main theme, all without text, without actors, sprung from life."<sup>587</sup> In this unrealized plan lies the cinematic core of Stieglitz's serial imagery. Speaking of his film in a 1926 conversation with the reporter Ralph Flint (as the epigraph cites) Stieglitz articulated his goal more explicitly. He hoped to unite the subjects and formal vocabulary of his serial photographs in a motion picture "so that anyone, sophisticated or ignorant, young or old, coming in and seeing it would recognize the thing going on, relate it to life."<sup>588</sup> Cinema appeared to Stieglitz a tool for transparent, direct communication to the newly "universal" American audience.

Although Stieglitz never made his fantasized films, their seeds are present in the strategies utilized in his serial photographs. As discussed earlier, at Stieglitz's 1921 exhibition of photography (his first solo show since 1913) forty-five of his new images of O'Keeffe were displayed as "A Demonstration of Portraiture" in thematic sections that that functioned like intertitles – "A Woman," "Hands," "Feet," "Hands and Breasts," "Torsos," and "Interpretations." Emphasizing the multiple frames and the serial succession of images that linked his work with filmic strategies, Stieglitz's titles also treat O'Keeffe as an anonymous, abstract, symbolic, "white" generality.<sup>589</sup> In the catalog for the show, Stieglitz famously and tantalizingly blurred the line between artistic and social daring asserting that: "Some important prints of this period are not being shown, as I feel that the public is not quite ready to receive them." The way that Stieglitz deployed his photographs – specifically his framing of the sexuality "between the frames" in

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<sup>587</sup> Although Chaplin celebrated Stieglitz's idea, calling it "a symphony, a new form," the photographer lamented that due to the expense he would probably never be able to create it, nor would anyone else. For, as the film professional Chaplin pointed out, making such a movie would require, "a special little theatre, and a studio... would all cost him half a million dollars." March 6, 1931, Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, 138-9.

<sup>588</sup> This was a response to Ralph Flint's claim that motion pictures had ruined the theater for him April 10, 1926, Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*, 76.

<sup>589</sup> By 1923 O'Keeffe's identity was known in the art world.

O’Keeffe’s canvases and in the (unshown) parts of his serial nude portraits of her – provoked modernist patron Mabel Dodge Luhan to disapprovingly deem the photographer a “showman.”<sup>590</sup>

Stieglitz’s showmanship, his attempt to conceptualize the appeal of his photographs to a wider audience, was intensely conflicted. His 1921 catalogue introducing the show culminated in a declaration: “I was born in Hoboken. I am an American. Photography is my passion. The search for Truth my obsession.”<sup>591</sup> Though this passage is among Stieglitz’s most frequently cited utterances, he did not make this proclamation of nationality based on birth until he was fifty-seven years old. Stieglitz’s attempt to establish his national identity based on birth was part of a wider shift toward nativism occurring in the U.S. during the early 1920s. It was in 1921 that the first temporary immigration quotas were put into effect, dramatically changing the nature of what it meant to be American by reducing and regulating the number of newcomers allowed. As his nation retreated into itself, Stieglitz self-consciously asserted his own Americanness.<sup>592</sup>

After the signature to his statement Stieglitz, attempting to affect a carefree modern persona added, “Please Note: In the above STATEMENT the following, fast becoming ‘obsolete,’ terms do not appear: ART, SCIENCE, BEAUTY, RELIGION, every ISM, ABSTRACTION, FORM, PLASTICITY, OBJECTIVITY, SUBJECTIVITY, OLD MASTERS, MODERN ART, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AESTHETICS, PICTORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY, DEMOCRACY, CEZANNE, “291”, PROHIBITION. The term TRUTH did creep in but may be kicked out by any one.” Reparsing the statement and eliminating all words deemed obsolete, it seems all that remains unambiguous is Stieglitz’s identification with America and Photography – nation and medium. Yet this inventory of obsolete terms had not been

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<sup>590</sup> Although it is unclear O’Keeffe ever read Luhan’s text she would depict Stieglitz as an ad replacing Scientific American in her *The Radiator Building*, 1927. Mabel Luhan, “The Art of Georgia O’Keeffe,” likely written in 1925 was never published, in the Mabel Dodge Luhan papers at Yale Beinecke Library and reproduced in Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 291-293. A bit more crassly Anna C. Chave has written Stieglitz “successfully marketed O’Keeffe’s art as a kind of soft-core pornography.” Chave, “O’Keeffe and the Masculine Gaze,” in Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy, eds., *Reading American Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 363.

<sup>591</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “A Statement,” *Exhibition of Stieglitz Photographs* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1921), citation to version anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 226.

<sup>592</sup> As he deemed the characteristic that would seem to define such American mass appeal, “democracy”, also obsolete, we might consider it a clarification of just what type of appeal he aimed at. His plan to reduce the cost of a print to that of a newspaper might introduce a photographic system in which a few producers appeal to many consumers, recalling the vertical integration of the film industry that was fast becoming America’s art form.

eliminated, but rather subsumed into the two categories that remained. Photography had grown to be both art and science, both abstraction and form, while America achieved both democracy and prohibition through the universal subject, the “average mind” implied by whiteness.

Caroline Jones has astutely identified Stieglitz’s obsessive search for Truth in 1921 as a sort of pragmatism in the American philosophical tradition, but we must also be careful to note the pragmatism Stieglitz advanced was spiked with a spiritual symbolic inflection.<sup>593</sup> Waldo Frank in his anxious considerations of the ethnic “mind” of immigrant populations traced the intellectual impact of Jewish immigrants in America. Frank deemed the pragmatists’ notions dangerous for their result in the “anaesthetic Jew,” who “discovered Pragmatism and reduced it to its most acrid and cynical dogmas of utilitarian supineness.”<sup>594</sup> Stieglitz, in Frank’s estimation, was an exception. He was to be celebrated for investigating the mystical Truth that was his (racially) Jewish birthright. Stieglitz – notably unobservant – was reluctant to take on this mantle, identifying himself only as “American” and deeming “religion” obsolete.<sup>595</sup> Instead of kicking TRUTH out entirely as Stieglitz advised, perhaps it was precisely Stieglitz’s conflict over a racialized or universalized spiritual Truth versus a white Americanness had become his obsession by the early 1920s.

Stieglitz’s Americanness was itself as an uneasy search to join the normative “masses,” to find the “‘buck-eye’ element” for the “average mind,” by uniting photography with film as a “mass media.” As always Stieglitz’s 1921 statement proclaimed the exhibition “photographic throughout,” but he seemed to vacillate on exactly what this meant. Would the photograph focus on its straight medium

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<sup>593</sup> Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>594</sup> Frank, *Our America*, 88.

<sup>595</sup> Stieglitz is said to have famously remarked “I never much thought of myself as a Jew or any other particular thing. But I'm beginning to feel it must be the Jew in me that is after all the key to my impossible make up.” citation to AS to Waldo Frank, April 3, 1925, YCAL in Benita Eisler, *Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz*, 229. Stieglitz’s religion also provoked comment in New York’s Jewish press: “The New Wahrheit,” March 14, 1925. Waldo Frank, *Our America: Alfred Stieglitz*. “only a very few of the associates of Stieglitz are Jews. Stieglitz himself never goes to synagogue, and very seldom have I heard the word God pass his lips. Yet I believe that the Prophets would have recognized this man. They would have seen in his devotion to the creative life the essence of their religion...” Clarence I. Freed, “Alfred Stieglitz—Genius of the Camera,” *The American Hebrew*, 305. January 18, 1924. Went to see Stieglitz in his New York studio. “The statement that Stieglitz is a Jew needs qualification. He is not consciously Jewish. It is doubtful if he has ever identified himself with so-called Jewish activities. Referring to his creed in a letter that he wrote to the interviewer, arranging for an appointment, he said: ‘Please note that I’m not proud of being a Jew – nor am I ashamed of being one, although I confess to no creed except my own.’” Stieglitz Clipping file, YCAL.

specific properties, or would it become a transparent popular media? Explaining his work, Stieglitz first suggested that photography made expressions such as his possible for anyone, but then quickly added that each photographic print was laboriously produced, precious, and rare. However, even while stressing his avoidance of mechanized reproduction, Stieglitz envisioned a seemingly contradictory new direction for his work, proclaiming “my ideal is to achieve the ability to produce numberless prints from each negative, prints all sufficiently alive, yet indistinguishably alike, and to be able to circulate them at a price not higher than that of a popular magazine, or even a daily paper.”<sup>596</sup> Positioning his work in two incommensurate ways, Stieglitz claimed each print was its own laborious artistic problem, and ideally infinitely reproducible. He was caught between the specific, immiscible, straight photograph and a new ideal of universal media, publicly shifting his aim to an uncharacteristic and oddly self-contradictory goal of artistic mass production.

In arguing that Stieglitz was inspired by the aesthetic, the Americanness, the transparency, and the newness of the motion picture as media during the 1920s I depart from the established view that his later circle opposed such new technologies. As I suggest earlier in this chapter, analyzing Stieglitz’s tirade against Eastman’s monopolistic control of photography in context clarifies that Stieglitz’s objection was not to modern technology per se. Stieglitz’s frustration was with the market-driven limitations built into the very (inexpensive and highly commodified) paper with which he had hoped to achieve his own mass production, his own transition to media.<sup>597</sup> At the heart of Stieglitz’s complaint against the industrialist was the fact that during the 1920s Kodak postal paper had become a central tool in the photographer’s experimental attempts to establish a broader American audience by dramatically increasing production (the series) and reducing his prices. Throughout the 1910s the Eastman Kodak Company had offered a wide range of cards coated in a variety of emulsions (fig. 4.26). When Stieglitz wrote his complaining

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<sup>596</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “A Statement,” *Exhibition of Stieglitz Photographs* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1921).

<sup>597</sup> In his letter to Anderson, Stieglitz acknowledged his inability to make other people angry about the degrading film stock and with no redress he wrote, “God knows murder comes into one’s blood.” After trying to adapt and turn make the product “into something living by instilling it with my own life blood those monsters will be ready to sink their own standard a little lower for the good of the people – & for the bonuses of their workmen!” “Finally out of sheer despair I felt I’d use Eastman’s postal card paper as a basis for all my work. That at least would pay him – & was ‘common’ enough – I had been using platinotype for 30 years – I’d turn it into a living thing of beauty to ‘prove’ my case!” Stieglitz to Anderson, Aug 7, 1924, YCAL.

letter to Anderson, around 1924, they had discontinued all but one – a gaslight paper (so called because it did not require a darkroom, but could be easily developed in the dim light of a gas lamp).<sup>598</sup> Stieglitz worried that Eastman’s single remaining option was less chemically stable. As the photographer explained to Anderson through analogy to his friend’s textual medium,

suppose you wrote with a pen or pencil & felt that within a day or week everything you had put down had become blurred or disappeared – faded away – would you write as you write now? You might use a typewriter & feel free. Suppose you found the same people controlled the typewriter who controlled your pencil – & that the typing ink also faded away – & the paper was shriveled into nothing – just fell apart – they too owning the paper mills.<sup>599</sup>

Stieglitz’s long-running adversarial relationship with Eastman rested on his view that any market-driven change in material challenged both the autonomy of photography and its potential to appeal to “masses.” No medium or media could be reduced to the material.

Stieglitz told Anderson he had hoped to make a thousand prints over the summer – but Kodak’s new “inferior stock” made this impossible. The papers’ decreased quality made it impossible to maintain his artistic standards, as this new material provided only “a gray superceding a rich black – a dirty white replacing a sparkling white.” The photographer’s real complaint was not against modern mass reproduction technologies (precisely what he wanted to access), but was a specific opposition to the constriction of photographic means and artistic standards of independence. Stieglitz’s attempt to prove his own Americanness by creating a wide national audience, his ability to create images that were unmediated revelations of universal truth, were both thwarted by the alterations of American capitalism. Changes in the medium to achieve commodity status had thwarted his ambition to achieve a near cinematic reach. His attempt to assert his own whiteness by achieving popular acclaim was reduced to tones of grey and “dirty” white.

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<sup>598</sup> Kodak Catalogs, George Eastman House.

<sup>599</sup> “Stieglitz to Anderson, Aug. 25-24, 1924, YCAL.



### 4.3 Equivalent to Whom?

In April of 1923 Stieglitz opened a new exhibition of what would be his final subject. He rendered white clouds in bright skies (a group that he later titled *Equivalents*) in series entitled *Music - A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* and in another entitled *Songs of the Sky*. The series of clouds that would alternate in episodes with O'Keeffe in Stieglitz's dreamed film. It is the small size of *Songs of the Sky*, which connects them to Stieglitz's popularization project, suggesting they were printed on postal paper before the introduction of "inferior stock." The intimate form (three and a half inches by four and a half inches) of these prints is only slightly squared from the standard postal card surface (three and a half by five and a half inches).<sup>600</sup> In light of his 1921 comments, the scale of Stieglitz's images begins to suggest he aimed these works – the epitome of high abstract, "white" artistic photography – to capture a the "average mind."

Significantly Stieglitz's 1923 account of how he came to begin his photographic series of clouds focuses on the proponent of Jewish mysticism Waldo Frank. The photographer accused Frank of attributing his portraits' impact to his putative "powers of hypnotism." The "hypnotism" thesis had been published in a 1922 issue of the magazine *MSS*, edited by Paul Strand and devoted to the question "Can Photography Have Significance as Art?"<sup>601</sup> Frank's article did not explicitly use the word "hypnotism," but suggested Stieglitz's personal relationship with the subjects of his photographic portraits were a great part of the artistic work.<sup>602</sup> Feeling betrayed by Frank's attribution of the photograph to his subjects, Stieglitz took the author's prior compliments of him (the complex praise of a Jewish mysticism) shifting

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<sup>600</sup> In his 1924 letter to Anderson Stieglitz wrote: "And so the prints of the last years came to pass & all marveled how 'postal card' paper could be turned into such beauty!" This is a distinction from the earlier *Music* series, which is more than twice as large at nine and a half by seven and a half inches. It is difficult to ascertain if the postal paper was used for these images, because its hallmark is size, not emulsion or surface appearance.

<sup>601</sup> The journal *MSS* had been started by Stieglitz circle members Paul Rosenfeld and Herbert Seligmann.

<sup>602</sup> Stieglitz protested this description first by invoking the word "hypnotism," then by wondering where Frank thought the power of other non-portrait subjects, "street scenes—the trees, interiors" came from. Finally he reacted with the cloud photographs that were his "annoyed" reaction to this "lax statement coming from one professing himself profound and fair thinking, and interested in enlightening." Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds," (1923) citation to version anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 235. Frank's assessment of Stieglitz's relationship to his sitters recalls critic Henry McBride's assessment of the photographs as "essentially aristocratic and expensive. He spends an immense amount of time making love to the subject before taking it. His impressions are always printed luxuriously upon the rarest papers to secure a richness of effect that must always lie beyond the appreciation of the multitude." Editor's notes on Stieglitz, "A Statement," in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 228.

the vocabulary to hypnotism, with its connotations of showmanship, accusation of (ethnic) vulgarity, and the debased sort of spiritualism.

Stieglitz wrote that he aimed “through clouds to put down my philosophy of life – to show that my photographs were not due to subject matter – not to special trees, or faces, or interiors, to special privileges, clouds were there for everyone.” The subject matter was widely available, but, of course, not everyone could make these photographs. Stieglitz pointed out that he had been thinking about clouds since the very beginning of his photographic studies. He envisioned his new photographs as a test of what he had learned over his forty year career for “clouds were the most difficult to photograph—nearly impossible.” Stieglitz also identified them as “straight photographs, all gaslight paper, except one palladiotype. All in the power of every photographer of all time.”<sup>603</sup> Acknowledging the medium only to dismiss it, Stieglitz allied himself with amateur photographers only to proclaim that neither the technology of photography nor its subject were responsible for his breakthrough, rather it was his own skill and spiritual vision.

Aiming to communicate his “philosophy of life” in the cloud photographs, Stieglitz’s use of the word “Sequence” in the title of the *Music* series suggests these images self-consciously allied themselves with the motion of film. This association is carried through formally by the arrangement of *Songs of the Sky in Five Pictures* (No. 1-5), a series Stieglitz donated to the MFA in 1924 (fig. 4.27).<sup>604</sup> The first image shows a dark sky with white feathery forms that cross the frame from the upper right to lower left, leaving dark masses in both lower corners. Although there is a greater brightness in the lower left, the exact location of the sun (source of that brightness) is unclear. In the second image the sky becomes increasingly dramatic; a black form stretches across the center rimmed by grey, lit by only a small bright white spot of what we intuit to be the sun. In the third photograph the entire circle of the bright sun is shown, casting light in the lower quarter, while the remainder of the vertical image remains in darkness.

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<sup>603</sup> In the early history of photography the medium was extremely sensitive to blue, so the sky was frequently overexposed. The palladiotype substituted palladium for the platinum of a platinotype *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>604</sup> He also donated one image *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs (No. 1)*, part his first series of cloud photographs that he began in 1922. These *Music* images differed from *Songs of the Sky* by often including a ground plane. Interesting irregularity. On the verso of the original backing board Stieglitz had written “in Six Pictures” but then crossed on the six to substitute five.

With the fourth image the white disc of the sun jumps to the upper right, casting light through a diffuse and clouded sky. The final, culminating, fifth image lacks the extreme contrast of the others. Sunlight is ultimately dispersed through the photograph as the values and subtle gradations seem to blend into one another, from a light gray in the upper left to a dark gray in the lower right. By arranging these works in a sequence, like a filmstrip, Stieglitz positioned his series as a progressive narrative of the sun's emergence – an advance toward light and whiteness.

Reporting viewers' reactions to the 1923 debut of these images, Stieglitz noted several pictorial photographers thought that the images could not be art because they "look like photographs." The pictorialists were not worthy of the abstract progression towards whiteness – they "seemed totally blind to the cloud pictures." Replacing his explanation of earlier images that called attention to purely photograph techniques, here, in the clouds, pure photography made the images disappear. In a tactic contrary to his long (self-aggrandizing) battle to convince pictorial photographers to see photography, here he did not call on them to open their eyes to the proper techniques of their medium. He did not plea to them for straight photography as Hartmann had. Instead, in photographing clouds Stieglitz developed a new rhetoric that differentiated between seeing and looking: "My aim is increasingly to make my photographs look so much like photographs that unless one has *eyes* and *sees*, they won't be seen – and still everyone will never forget them having once looked at them."<sup>605</sup> In refuting the accusation that his photographs depended on his relationships with subjects – that they were the results of hypnosis – Stieglitz internalized the hypnotist's model of subliminal suggestions, a dematerialization of the photograph in which even the "unseen" image would have impact on any viewer.

But, what exactly was it that viewers of Stieglitz's photographs would never forget? Describing the cloud photographs to the poet Hart Crane, he wrote, "All are affected greatly & forget photography entirely – several people feel I have photographed God. May be."<sup>606</sup> Stieglitz's wording strikingly recalls

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<sup>605</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds," 238.

<sup>606</sup> In his letter to Crane, Stieglitz also positioned his work in terms of a wider art market, adding, "I also know that there is more of the really abstract in some 'representation' than in most of the dead representations of the so called abstract so fashionable

his 1919 claims to Hartmann of his O’Keeffe photographs, but post-Frank, the photographer injected spirituality overtly into the unmediated revelation.<sup>607</sup> Stieglitz also specified he had “wanted a series of photographs which when seen by Ernest Bloch (the great composer) he would exclaim: Music! Music! ... and would say he’d have to write a symphony called ‘Clouds.’ Not like Debussy’s but *much, much more*.”<sup>608</sup> God, the forgetting of photography, and Ernest Bloch’s music all combined in Stieglitz’s photographs of clouds.

Stieglitz’s reference to a composer and *Songs of the Sky*’s direct reference to music invokes a frequent strategy in early abstraction used by the several artists the photographer had once championed, from Pamela Colman Smith to Wassily Kandinsky. However, Stieglitz’s identification of Bloch over the famous modern composer Debussy points to a departure from, for example, Kandinsky, who identified Debussy among the modern composers who create “a spiritual impression.”<sup>609</sup> Significantly, Bloch had achieved fame specifically as a Jewish composer.<sup>610</sup> Music historians have pointed out that opponents of America’s “grey race,” its neutralizing puritanical culture of the teens and twenties, interpreted Bloch’s compositions through the lens of his (Jewish) identity. Those period critics, including Waldo Frank, understood Bloch’s Judaism, as much as they heard the innovations or dissonances of his musical compositions, as exotic and revolutionary.<sup>611</sup>

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now.” Stieglitz to Hart Crane, 10 December 1923, as quoted in Alfred Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz, Photographs & Writings*, ed. Sarah Greenough, Juan Hamilton (Wash.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 208.

<sup>607</sup> A reporter from *The American Hebrew* wrote about Stieglitz’s invocation of God when showing the images: “...He [Stieglitz] raises himself to his full height as he speaks: ‘Do you know what a lady said when she first saw the picture?’ There is a dramatic pause. ‘She said that it looked like God.’” Clarence I. Freed, “Alfred Stieglitz—Genius of the Camera,” *The American Hebrew*, 305. January 18, 1924, Stieglitz clipping file, YCAL.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>609</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, “Introduction,” *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

<sup>610</sup> Born in Switzerland, Bloch arrived in New York in 1916 with a letter of introduction from French author Romain Rolland to Waldo Frank, who in turn introduced the composer to the Stieglitz circle. In 1929, Bloch received a commission from the Emanuel Congregation in San Francisco and began to study liturgical Hebrew. Returning to Europe in the 1930s he completed the commission *Sacred Services* in 1933. Bonnie Ford Schenkenberg, “Introduction,” *Ernest Bloch Archive* (Guide Series Number One, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 1979), 9. Charles Brotman, “The Winner Loses: Ernest Bloch and His America,” *American Music*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter, 1998): 421.

<sup>611</sup> Charles Brotman, “The Winner Loses: Ernest Bloch and His America,” 420. Brotman argues that Bloch’s assault on Anglo-Saxon cultural norms came to rely on racial stereotypes. Historian of music Klára Móricz argues for a transformation of Bloch’s music from his initial ideal of a universal Jewish style to his invocation of clichés and stereotypes of Jews and their music, which lead to his popularity in the U.S. and Europe. She reads this as assimilation to the norms of anti-Semitism. Klára Móricz, “Sensuous Pagans and Righteous Jews: Changing Concepts of Jewish Identity in Ernest Bloch’s *Jézabel* and *Schelomo*,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 54, 2001, 31. Much like Stieglitz’s idealization of the lower class I discussed in the second chapter, both Móricz and Brotman points out that Bloch often referred to an ideal Judaism that existed nowhere in the real world.

Bloch and Stieglitz became associates through their shared alliance with Frank, who celebrated both as specifically Jewish intellectuals.<sup>612</sup> Describing the moment captured by Bloch's music, Frank's protégé and Stieglitz circle ally Paul Rosenfeld, made a leap between "other" points of view and a newly modern experience:

European life in breaking away from the old tribal and communal sanctions had prepared the hour for the resurrection of the Jewish spirit. Industrial civilization had made everyone have the psychology of the Jew, the psychology of the homeless man, and now in his turn the Jew was able to teach people how they might live as citizens of the world.<sup>613</sup>

Bloch's symphony and Stieglitz's sequences of cloud images taught the same lesson – creating the feeling of instability that was both the "Jewish spirit" and the pervasive modern psychology of the homeless.

Recent critics have experienced overwhelming ambiguity and uncertainty in Stieglitz's cloud photographs. Rosalind Krauss describes the way the cropped abstract images evoke intense feelings of vertigo and dislocation.<sup>614</sup> Though the cloud images are for Krauss the epitome of medium specificity, Stieglitz celebrated the viewers who saw, not photography, but God. Invoking the Jewish composer Stieglitz suggested that his photographs of clouds were not merely a riposte to Frank's implication to "hypnotism," but were in fact homages to his influential friend's ideas. In these images, with their small (postal) size and their intended spiritual force ("Not like Debussy's but *much, much more*"), Stieglitz provided an account of the way he could become, as Frank had hoped, like union organizer Bill Haywood, able to appeal with his philosophy to a wide American public.

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<sup>612</sup> Bloch deemed Stieglitz's work was an example of "the greatest Art because all signs of technique have disappeared for the sake of the Idea." Here Bloch mirrored Stieglitz's own understanding of his work as expressing an idea without apparent technique, engaging in an unmediated connection with the viewer. Bloch wrote of Stieglitz, "every picture of Stieglitz embodies an idea and makes one think. It exceeds usual photography as far as a great artist exceeds a mechanical piano." Bloch to Strand (who was the guest editor Manuscripts [MSS] number four, 1922), photocopy in the CCP archive quoted in published Bonnie Ford Schenkenberg, "Introduction," *Ernest Bloch Archive* (Guide Series Number One, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 1979), 8, also collected in the "Can Photography have Significance as Art" issue of *MSS*, 1922.

<sup>613</sup> Paul Rosenfeld, *Modern Tendencies in Music*, in *Fundamentals of Musical Art*, ed. Edward Dickinson, 20 vols. (New York: Caxton Institute, 1926-1928), XVIII, 86. In this Rosenfeld argued Bloch was different than the Russian composers who had prepared the way for his compositions. These Russians seemed to alternate between Europe and Asia, while "in the music of Bloch there seem no longer to be either a Europe or an Asia, and only an amalgam of the two." He wrote of Bloch, "being a Jew, and true to what is racial in the Jew" his specific combination with "their origin in the deserts of the east of the Mediterranean. For such an amalgamation, the times were right." According to Rosenfeld, Bloch's series of Jewish works was "expressive of what is racial in the Jew," *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>614</sup> Rosalind Krauss reads the cloud images as symbolic, hieroglyphic and distinctly photographic, identifying them as "symbolism in its deepest sense, symbolism as an understanding of language as a form of radical absence—the absense, that is, of a world and its objects, supplanted by the presence of the sign." Rosalind Krauss, "Stieglitz/Equivalents," *October*, Vol. 11 (Winter, 1979): 135.

*Charles Sheeler's Material Preciousness*

Charles Sheeler did not see this deeper spirituality, Jewish or otherwise, when he reviewed Stieglitz's 1923 show for *The Arts*, a journal founded by painter and early American folk art collector Hamilton Easter Field. In his first written assignment for the journal where he had been working as photographer, Sheeler began with comments about the technical material of photography. He compared the use of platinum in photographic printing to the "material preciousness...of gold leaf in Italian painting" and matched Stieglitz's new cloud works favorably with the landscapes of the Italian Renaissance artist Andrea Mantegna (fig. 4.28).<sup>615</sup> Sheeler's largely positive, flattering review of how Stieglitz's photographs surmounted the deprivations of platinum during the World War (when the material that had been essential to his prints was regulated as a strategic metal) concluded with praise for his new experimentation in (post-platinum) silver printing. In complimenting the photographer's use of silver, Sheeler had reminded Stieglitz that he had still failed to make the dramatic reduction in his prints' prices to the level of a popular newspaper – as he had promised in 1921. Though less expensive than platinum, the silver prints in the show were not within the economic reach of most Americans. And if Luhan had accused Stieglitz of being a showman, Sheeler characterized him as an interrogator. Writing that Stieglitz's camera would have had "inestimable value at the time of the Inquisition," he likened the photographs of O'Keeffe to courtroom exhibits (though he added that they often "achieve a beauty of

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<sup>615</sup> Charles Sheeler, "Recent Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz," 345. Sheeler wrote of Stieglitz that "having achieved the High Renaissance in photography through his earlier platinum prints, conditions outside of his control necessitated experimenting in another medium, the various silver papers and adapting them to his need. The necessity has introduced new blood, the pulse has quickened." This odd notion of blood for the medium also suggests this discourse is parallel to one on bodies.

Sheeler's reference to the painting of Mantegna suggests Stieglitz's photographs might be productively read alongside the art theory of Hubert Damisch, who cites the Renaissance painter in his 1972 book *A Theory of /Cloud/ : Toward a History of Painting*. In this work Damisch suggests that linear perspective, unable to include all visual experience, generated and interacts dialectically with the cloud. The cloud's interest rests not on its outline, but on the contrary to whatever it is about it that defies the regime of delineation and pertains to its material nature, its 'matter' aspiring to 'form.'" Pertinent to this treatment of *Equivalents* as a type of Jewish mysticism, Damisch also productively connects the cloud to depictions of spirituality: "Not only does the *cloud* liberate those whom it supports from the laws of gravity, but at the same time it shows how profane space may open onto *another* space, which imbues the former with its truth...cloud is the obligatory accompaniment – if not the motor – of ecstasy and all other forms of ascent or rapture." Hubert Damisch, *Theory of /Cloud/ : Toward a History of Painting* [1972], trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 35 and 43.

form relations independent of their human content”).<sup>616</sup> In comparing Stieglitz’s images to rare religious art and cool clinical forensics Sheeler may have been trying to save Stieglitz for a new realm of whiteness. Though the moment is ambivalent, it was highly charged. In focusing on the materials of Stieglitz’s images and their purely evidentiary status, Sheeler also seemed to reduce Stieglitz’s transcendent, unmediated Truth to base material reality. The Stieglitz circle (specifically Sheeler’s collaborator Paul Strand) cried foul – loudly.<sup>617</sup>

Strand’s and Stieglitz’s disagreement with Sheeler’s article was no doubt fueled by their objections to another piece in this same issue of *The Arts*, a profile of Sheeler by the journal’s editor, influential progressive art critic Forbes Watson. Sheeler was used to exemplify an outstanding American artist, proof that the nation was finally realizing itself through artists who turned away from imitations of foreign modernism. Dismissing pro-French “anti-Puritan nonsense,” an almost unmistakable barb against Stieglitz’s 291 years, the article ignored the important influence of Stieglitz and de Zayas on Sheeler’s work. Painting based on theory, according to Watson, would fail “unless one had the *particular racial characteristics* of those who enjoy muddling their paint with philosophy.”<sup>618</sup> The authentic American artist succeeded because “good taste is his native inheritance,” evidenced by the designs of American architecture and decorative arts. Watson suggested that a return to the national birthright of simplicity would be possible with the rejection (not mingling) of imported modernism – muddled rootstock that had

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<sup>616</sup> “Again we may be abruptly halted by the portrayal of the tortured, sandaled feet of one who, in order to escape the grueling, may be confessing to a crime she never committed.” Charles Sheeler, “Recent Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz,” 345.

<sup>617</sup> The disagreement escalated and eventually resulted in a break separated Sheeler from Stieglitz permanently, and from Strand until the 1950s, ruining their close friendship and aesthetic partnership. Several scholars have attempted to explain this intense reaction to Sheeler’s article. In his recent catalog on Sheeler, curator Theodore Stebbins synthesizes previous discussions and calls the break between Stieglitz and Sheeler inevitable. Stebbins cites Corn’s claim that the Stieglitz group never adjusted to the modernity of new technologies, and argues that Sheeler combined photography and painting “in bold and, in what Stieglitz would have thought, very dangerous ways.” Stebbins, *Charles Sheeler* (2002), 16. Yet, as we have seen Stieglitz did not suffer from a blanket aversion to technology, and it was Sheeler himself who expounded extensively on the difference between photography and painting, cautioning against using either medium to imitate the other. “Photography has the capacity for accounting for things seen in the visual world with an exactitude... which no other medium can approximate. When it is made to imitate work in media of painting and drawing it is at the disadvantage of any imitation and is failing to make the most of its own possibilities.” From excerpt from Sheeler’s autobiography reprinted in Stebbins, *Charles Sheeler* (2002), 187. As O’Keeffe wrote of Sheeler “He has done things with photography that he could not do with paintings and vice versa.” Georgia O’Keeffe, “Can Photography Have Significance as Art,” *MSS*, 1921. Instead, the disagreement between Sheeler and the Stieglitz circle, I contend, sprang from weighty differences over what constituted Truth and Americanness in an age of great anxiety about medium specificity and ethnic assimilation.

<sup>618</sup> italics added. Watson compared the proclivity of the theoretical French to other nations, “even as the English enjoy muddling their paint with literature.” Watson, “Charles Sheeler,” 344.

confused the U.S. art world for too long. Watson wrote “great deal of anti-Puritan nonsense had been directed against the steel ribs of American art by trying to show that refinement and attenuation are synonymous.” Associating American art with skyscraper a la Stand and Sheeler’s *Manhatta*, Watson gave all the credit for championing steel ribs to Sheeler.<sup>619</sup>

Strand launched protests to Watson, editor of *The Arts*, and to the popular newspaper the *New York Sun and Globe*.<sup>620</sup> Objecting first to Sheeler’s passing comparison of Stieglitz’s photographs to painting, Strand directed the debate to issues of medium specificity, but then quickly turned to the material. He argued platinum made the photograph permanent and that the mineral’s high price was only due to its wartime designation as strategic.<sup>621</sup> In failing to disclose these facts, Sheeler encouraged artists’ “deprivation” of materials. Strand personalized his objections to the review by insulting Sheeler’s own use of inexpensive and easy to handle gaslight paper, which “make[s] one unpleasantly aware of the material first and content second.” Rejecting the medium specificity in which the material properties of the photograph (the texture of its paper or the sharpness of its tones) predominate, Strand set aside Stieglitz’s earlier technical experiments in straight photography at the turn of the century. Continuing with a manifesto, Strand announced, “no one material is the material,” and argued, “the real menace in the use of materials is not preciousness but standardization.”<sup>622</sup> The disappearance of any printing method would negatively affect the photographic field through constriction. Both the autonomy of photography and its capacity to express a “philosophy of life” demanded it not become synonymous with a material. As we have seen, Stieglitz saved his wrath on this topic for Eastman, but Strand expended his anger on his one-time friend Sheeler.

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<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>620</sup> Strand claimed to have written to the newspaper at Herbert Seligman’s suggestion, to second a letter by amateur photographer Arthur Boughton, “Photography as an Art: Photographers Themselves do not Appreciate its Possibilities,” *The Sun and The Globe*, June 20, 1923.

<sup>621</sup> Even after the war ended platinum remained expensive and prepared papers vanished. Interests in Platinum shifted from Russia to Columbia, but a political disagreement with Columbia quickly also upset that supply. The jewelry industry voluntarily curtailed its use of platinum, as interestingly explored in Richard L. Lael and Linda Killen, “The Pressure of Shortage: Platinum Policy and the Wilson Administration during World War I,” *The Business History Review*, Vol. 56, 4 (Winter, 1982): 545-558.

<sup>622</sup> Paul Strand, “Photographers Criticized; Support for View That They Do Not Understand Own Art,” Letter to the Editor, *New York Sun and The Globe*, June 27, 1923, 20. Strand states the letter was written at the suggestion of Herbert Seligmann in Strand to Stieglitz, June 1923, YCAL.



Sheeler responded to Strand's letter, in a private letter accusing the young photographer of acting as Stieglitz's mouthpiece, but ending on a conciliatory note: "differences of opinion are more interesting than agreement."<sup>623</sup> Beck Strand wrote Stieglitz that she thought her husband had lost Sheeler's friendship for good.<sup>624</sup> Stieglitz responded that he hoped the two would remain friends, warning of Sheeler, "I fear his head may be becoming swollen in the fashion of his most ungainly belly..."<sup>625</sup> Sheeler's faults manifested bodily in Stieglitz's joke about Sheeler's swelling critical acclaim by the new face of the American art world. Beck replied that she and her husband were convinced Sheeler's wife Katharine hated them, "Paul says he bets she is calling him a 'dirty Jew.'"<sup>626</sup> Stieglitz's body metaphor of a ballooning white body exploded for Strand into anxieties of racial enmity. The Strands attributed this slur to Sheeler's wife (though nothing in the historical record indicates she was more anti-Semitic than her husband), citing Katharine to connect (perhaps unconsciously) the revival of Puritanism with the familial and social system, which secured Sheeler's newfound fame as a racially authentic American.

Stieglitz commiserated with Strand's anger, writing that Sheeler had run away cowardly from the fight, "taken his fame, femme... off to his Pennsylvania hut aesthetique to add to art in the form of more 'suspended form in a Vacuum'."<sup>627</sup> This phrase, which Strand too had used in a prior letter, made reference to another recent celebratory profile of Sheeler in which the art critic Thomas Craven, quoted Sheeler's remark that his aimed at "the absolute beauty we are accustomed to associate with objects suspended in a vacuum."<sup>628</sup> In his article Craven cited Sheeler's early interest in Robert Henri, but

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<sup>623</sup> Sheeler to Strand, June 22, 1923, YCAL. Enclosed in letter to Stieglitz. Doing little to make one think he was not at least attempting to act as Stieglitz's mouthpiece, Strand enclosed the letter of June 25, 1923 he had sent to Sheeler to Stieglitz. Strand to Stieglitz, June 26, 1923, YCAL. This letter to Sheeler read, "Your suggestion that Stieglitz has taken exception to your article, through me, is as unworthy of you as it is unfounded in fact." Though he professed to personally admire Sheeler, Stieglitz responded to Strand's letter that "If Sheeler could only hear what every one who has read his article says about it he'd know that something must be wrong with it and that I have nothing to do with that." Stieglitz to Strand, June 28, 1923, YCAL.

<sup>624</sup> Rebecca (Beck) Strand to Stieglitz, June 26, 1923.

<sup>625</sup> Stieglitz to Beck Strand, June 29, 1923

<sup>626</sup> Beck Strand to Stieglitz, July 2, 1923, YCAL. Interestingly, the final letter in the correspondence file between Stieglitz and Sheeler pertained to Judaism. Sheeler to Stieglitz, December 6, 1922, YCAL. "Following our conversation yesterday, I found the enclosed clipping. I am passing it on to you." The included clipping was "Notable Achievements of Jews in Public Service, Art and Science, told in 'Who's Who of U.S. Jewry,'" *The Evening World*, December 5, 1922, 8.

<sup>627</sup> Stieglitz to Strand, July 12, 1923, YCAL.

<sup>628</sup> Sheeler used this phrase to describe his own work, as quoted in Thomas Craven, "Charles Sheeler," *Shadowland*, vol. 8, 1 (March 1923): 71. Craven wrote each simple and direct form was emphasized by backgrounds "generally an uncovered space of flat white, and the structure emphasized by sharp black-and-white contrasts," *Ibid.*, 71. Though Craven acknowledged there was a

completely ignored the artist's much more lasting association with Stieglitz and de Zayas. A decade later Craven would publish his anti-Semitic attacks on Stieglitz, but here the critic was laying the groundwork for his "neutral" (vacuum-like) nativist interpretation of American art.<sup>629</sup> Instead of Frank and Bloch's homeless dislocated subjects of urban modernity, Sheeler and Craven constructed a modern world of stable nations and subjects, suspended in whiteness like objects in a vacuum. To create this vacuum, of course, the early Stieglitz circle needed to be ejected as too decadent, international, theoretical, French, and Jewish – "anti-Puritan nonsense" that had to be discarded in order for the nation to construct a nostalgic Puritanism legacy for an art still directly indebted to Stieglitz's 291 years. This celebration of Sheeler – as unproblematically American, white racial heir to a native good taste, drove home the possibility that Stieglitz would never be enough "whiteness" for the new campaign to purify and nativize American art. The cocktail days appeared over, with the spirits of "others" fully arrogated as the birthright of the native sons.

### *Coomaraswamy's Revelation*

But if whiteness was overtaking the view ahead, the dream of spiritual cocktail could still be found. Indeed, Stieglitz's reaction to Sheeler may have been tempered to private letters by the acclaim he was concurrently receiving in another circle. After giving a preview of his 1923 show to Ananda Coomaraswamy at the end of February, Stieglitz received a letter from the Boston curator at the beginning of March that called his photographs "a revelation and totally different from all others!"<sup>630</sup> With this "revelation" (the word itself recalling Stieglitz's own descriptions of his photographs to

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danger that this work could give unaesthetic primacy to material, he concluded Sheeler was too great of an artist to allow such a thing. *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>629</sup> In this later book he called Stieglitz "a Hoboken Jew without knowledge of, or interest in, the historical American background, [who] was – quite apart from the doses of purified art he had swallowed – hardly equipped for the leadership of a genuine American expression." Thomas Craven, *Modern Art: The Men, the Movements, the Meaning* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1940, c1934), 312.

<sup>630</sup> Coomaraswamy to Stieglitz, March 4 1923, YCAL and also MFA. Coomaraswamy's letter to his friend Rothenstein suggests he had met Stieglitz because of his own amateur photography "... I have taken up photography pretty thoroughly, In this connection I have come to know and greatly admire Alfred Stieglitz and have been the means of incorporating 27 of his photographs in our Prints Department." Coomaraswamy to Rothenstein. March 14, 1924, William Rothenstein collection, Houghton Library, Harvard Special Collection.

Hartmann and Crane) Coomaraswamy worked to institutionalize Stieglitz's modern spiritual universalism.<sup>631</sup> A Boston "Brahmin" in the heart of Puritan self-fashioning, Coomaraswamy made the unprecedented step of arranging a donation by Stieglitz to the Museum's Prints Department, establishing the first such collection of photograph as art in a major American museum. He wrote Stieglitz in April he had been able to interest the museum in adding a dozen photographs to its collection "in spite of the fact that photography as art is rather unfamiliar to most of our trustees."<sup>632</sup> The acceptance of photography by these trustees was based on an educational campaign by Coomaraswamy about the medium of photography that mirrored his previous efforts on behalf of Indian art, writing articles for and forming alliances with an upper class East Coast American audience – the literal scions of Puritan stock.<sup>633</sup>

In a 1923 article introducing the photographic collection to readers of the MFA's quarterly *Bulletin*, Coomaraswamy acknowledged photography's dual use "as a means of making accurate records of appearances and as a medium for the artistic expression of states of mind."<sup>634</sup> Coomaraswamy was intent on amplifying the "medium" (rather than the "means") as artistic, arguing that photography, "in representing nature (landscape, portrait, figure, still life, etc.) as seen through the artist's mind, it is manifestly an art." He continued by referencing the world of amateur photographers, positioning photography as "one of the few living arts." This celebration of a widely practiced, popular form was in keeping with the arguments he often made for the living arts and traditional crafts of India, but in the case of photography, he clarified that even though an amateur's personal "snapshot" was rarely artistic, the process of its making could be aesthetically instructive.<sup>635</sup> Consequently, the curator explained, the

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<sup>631</sup> Coomaraswamy is said to have positioned the photographs as "in the greatest tradition. In his work, precisely the right values are stressed. Symbols are used correctly." This is Dorothy Norman's recollection of Coomaraswamy's description of Stieglitz. Dorothy Norman, *Introduction*, 48 and in Archives of American Art interview.

<sup>632</sup> Coomaraswamy to Stieglitz, April 25 1923, MFA.

<sup>633</sup> The acquisition of Stieglitz's photographs closely paralleled the process Coomaraswamy set in motion for Indian art less than a decade earlier, relying on the support of wealthy patron Denman Waldo Ross.

<sup>634</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Photographs in the Print Department," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, vol. 21, no. 128 (December 1923): 79. The former, photography as means was already represented in MFA library's photographic study collection, which allowed Bostonians to examine art and architecture not in the collection. In addition to the reference collection in the library, by 1919 visitors could also purchase photographs of objects in the museum from the Publications and Photographs department. *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, XLII, (1919): 68.

<sup>635</sup> Coomaraswamy argued that examining photographic journals and salons provoked "a widespread interest in problems of composition, lighting, and so forth." It was, he wrote, "through photography that very many persons are brought in contact with

Museum had decided to begin a small collection starting with photographs donated by “Mr. Alfred Stieglitz, who may well be regarded as the *doyen* of American photographers.”<sup>636</sup> Coomaraswamy introduced Stieglitz to MFA audiences with specific reference to his age and long experience, as if to reassure them that, although it derived a portion of its value from its popularity, photography would not prove a passing fad.

Coomaraswamy made Stieglitz’s art a widely relevant example by positioning the photographer within a tradition, linked to but differentiated from the medium’s popular practice. Crafting a theory of photography that connected the rational and the symbolic, Coomaraswamy offered Stieglitz a universal, non-sectarian resolution to the conflict of the material and the mystical in American Judaism, as it had been advanced by Waldo Frank; in this way he could overcome the materialism espoused by Sheeler. Using the rhetoric he had honed in his role as propagandist for Indian art, Coomaraswamy paved the way for Stieglitz to be welcomed into the heart of the Puritan Anglo-Saxon establishment; in turn he gave Stieglitz the tools to assimilate de Zayas’s synthesis for himself.

Behind the scenes Coomaraswamy proposed to the MFA’s director that a collection be expanded from Stieglitz’s gift, promising he would secure around one hundred fifty prints “by invitation and without cost” from various photographers. Coomaraswamy convinced the trustees to approve his proposal for a “severely limited” photography collection, agreeing to the conditions that it would be kept in the Prints Department (rather than the library), exhibited for at least two weeks every five years, and that reproductions would be made only for illustrations of Museum publications.<sup>637</sup> As these rules for the first American museum collection of photography sketched out its place its place within the institution, Stieglitz negotiated other conditions with Coomaraswamy that seem calculated to set his photographs

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the specific problems confronting the artist.” Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “Photographs in the Print Department,” *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, vol. 21, no. 128 (December 1923): 79.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.* Coomaraswamy’s next essay in the *MFA Bulletin* made a complicated explanation of photography that hewed more closely to Stieglitz’s own. “Mr. Stieglitz makes few prints from his negatives. It is an error to suppose that an indefinite number of equally perfect prints can be made from any one negative.” Coomaraswamy allowed the negative itself did not degrade, but argued “so much vitality, such closely coordinated reaction is necessary for the production of wished-for results in printing, that human energy does not permit of many repetitions of the process.” A.K.C. “A Gift from Mr. Stieglitz,” *MFA Bulletin*, XXII, (April 1924): 14.

<sup>637</sup> “Record of the Meeting of the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston,” October 18, 1923, MFA.

apart from those other photographs. He refused to send his work unframed, or to print the photographs to fit within the museum's standard sized mats, asserting it would be "impossible" because he had "through years of experience worked out such a right way of making my prints and mounts so that changing anything in the relative sizes changes the spirit and robs my work of its life and significance."<sup>638</sup>

Coomaraswamy explained the museum's intention – "like even our most valuable prints, they would have to be kept in file boxes (from which they are always available to students on demand) when not on exhibition."<sup>639</sup> Stieglitz argued because "Photography is still in trial" its needs should be put before the institution's.<sup>640</sup> The curator eventually agreed to Stieglitz's conditions, and his matted and framed photographs would be stored differently and separately from the other prints, positioned as independent and possibly even more precious.<sup>641</sup> Negotiations with another art museum might have broken down over such a point, but at the MFA, Coomaraswamy was motivated by his respect for Stieglitz's "revelation" – and difficulties were eased.<sup>642</sup>

As the work of other photographers he had solicited began to arrive, Coomaraswamy wrote his wife that he found he did not like the pictures by her cousin Mortimer Offner nearly as much as he had expected, and discovered he "hardly like [d] Clarence White's pictures at all!"<sup>643</sup> This comment combined with the fact that White's pictures were not accessioned into the MFA's collection until the 1970s, suggests Coomaraswamy was himself quite reticent about expanding the MFA's photography collection

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<sup>638</sup> Stieglitz to Coomaraswamy, MFA.

<sup>639</sup> Coomaraswamy to Stieglitz, MFA.

<sup>640</sup> Stieglitz continued, "unless the prints are in the Museum right they are worse than wrong. This work of mine is really something new." His work was, he wrote, "the beginning of photography as expression and not merely photographs or pictures in the 'pictorial' sense," and attempted to leverage the fact that the "thoroughly comprehensive and representative" group he has assembled was valued at over \$5,000. Stieglitz to Coomaraswamy, Dec 31 1923, MFA.

<sup>641</sup> Coomaraswamy replied to Stieglitz's letter, "I do not need to tell you that I fully appreciate the considerations put forward in your letter. We shall be glad to accept mounts of your size, the longer size being preferable." Coomaraswamy to Stieglitz, November 17, 1923, MFA.

<sup>642</sup> On February 7, 1924 the photographs arrived at the museum. Stieglitz inquired "naturally I'm curious to hear whether your friends will feel that you have overstated the 'case.'" Coomaraswamy quickly assured him that those at the Museum were "properly impressed." Coomaraswamy to Stieglitz, Feb 7, 1924, MFA. Although a month later he took back his offer to have Stieglitz deliver a lecture to the MFA as "the Trustees opposed to Photographs might feel themselves being too much pushed and the final result be adverse!" Coomaraswamy to Stieglitz, March 7, 1924, MFA.

<sup>643</sup> Coomaraswamy to Bloch, Feb 3, 1924, PSC. Coomaraswamy had announced in the *MFA Bulletin* that White would donate *Factory Town in Winter*, *In the Orchard*, and *The Four-Poster Bed*, but these works were not accessioned into the MFA collection until rediscovered in the prints department more than half a century later. Ananda Coomaraswamy, *MFA Bulletin*, xxii, 28, June 1921, no. 131. Days after discounting White's photographs Coomaraswamy wrote Bloch "Stieglitz's 27 prints came and I am glad to say everyone seems to be properly overwhelmed." Coomaraswamy to Bloch Feb 9, 1924, PSC.

much beyond Stieglitz. Though Coomaraswamy continued to take photographs himself (marrying fourth wife photographer Zlata Llamas in 1930), his interest in building a collection of photography for the MFA seems to have flagged upon finding no other photographers whom he admired as much as he did Stieglitz. Without Coomaraswamy pushing the photographic collection, it failed to grow. Stieglitz's work alone convinced the curator with its revelation of universalized spirit. On December 30, 1929, Stieglitz wrote Coomaraswamy to relay the good news "The Metropolitan Museum has opened its sacred halls to Photography. –22 of my photographs have performed the miracle! – I suppose Boston helped pave the way."<sup>644</sup> The photographer's invocation of sacred halls and the performance of miracles referenced the very spirituality that made his work so important to Coomaraswamy.

It is perhaps proof of Stieglitz's and Coomaraswamy's skill at positioning the photographer in the heart of America's elite museums that even the spirituality of his *Equivalent*s series has been framed in national terms. In a recent article art historian Kristina Wilson traces the works to an American tradition of Transcendentalism and Theosophy, the transnational metaphysical philosophy interpreting Eastern religions espoused by the Theosophical Society founded in 1875 in New York City.<sup>645</sup> Though Wilson's account mentions the French author Romain Rolland's 1930 book *The New Prophets of India*, she does not cite Stieglitz's more direct relationship to Coomaraswamy, whose *Introduction to Indian Art* was printed by the Theosophy Publishing House in 1923.<sup>646</sup> Wilson mentions Waldo Frank and even *Our America* quite frequently, but never the particular status Frank had given Stieglitz as a "Jewish mystic" or his direct connection of the *Equivalent*s series with the composer Ernest Bloch.<sup>647</sup> This blindness to some of the sources for the spiritual influences (and in the case of Frank, even perhaps, pressures) on Stieglitz outside a vocabulary of normative whiteness, demonstrates both the way that Coomaraswamy's and

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<sup>644</sup> Stieglitz to Coomaraswamy, December 30, 1929, MFA.

<sup>645</sup> This influential group was founded by Russian-German Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and New Jersey born, Columbia educated Henry Steel Olcott.

<sup>646</sup> Coomaraswamy to Stieglitz, March 7, 1924, MFA. Coomaraswamy sent Stieglitz his *Dance of the Siva*, with an introduction by Romain Rolland, and *Introduction to Indian Art* (Adyar, Madras, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1923). Both these books as well as *The Portfolio of the Indian Art at the Museum of Fine Arts* that Stieglitz also likely received from Coomaraswamy are still in the collection at the Georgia O'Keeffe Library.

<sup>647</sup> Kristina Wilson, "The Intimate Gallery and the "Equivalent": Spirituality in the 1920s Work of Stieglitz," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 85, No. 4. (Dec., 2003): 746-768.

Frank's spiritual cocktail would be subsumed in whiteness, as well as the way in which O'Keeffe's "White hand" eventually did warm Stieglitz's.

Exhibiting his work in March of 1924, Stieglitz boasted in the exhibition catalogue: "The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, recently acquired a comprehensive collection of 27 photographs by Alfred Stieglitz." Though the exhibition focused on cloud photographs, the checklist was bookended by Stieglitz's old favorite *The Steerage* (1907) and his new photograph *Spiritual America* (1923) (fig. 4.29). Yet, neither of these images was included in Stieglitz's gift to the MFA nor to the Metropolitan.<sup>648</sup> Was the photograph of immigrants too controversial? Was the ironized, "spiritual" detail of a harnessed gelded horse's absent reproductive organs too likely to incite animosity?

Entitling this latter image, *Spiritual America*, Stieglitz suggested that America's puritanical religiosity had equated spirituality with the sexual repression of castration for so long that that American spiritual life of the 1920s was itself unproductive.<sup>649</sup> Yet, thinking through the image – the gelding process makes an animal sexually unproductive, but also more easily turned to labor. Thus this image was both the complaint about the "castrated" spiritual life of the normative "grey race" in America, and also that manifesto for labor that Frank had summoned when connecting Stieglitz and Bill Haywood. The harness, its strong dark lines vital to the composition of *Spiritual America*, might return us to the quotation with which I began this chapter, namely, Stieglitz's desire to unify his serial photographs, to "put them all together, harnessed, in a motion picture so that anyone...coming in and seeing it would recognize the thing going on, relate it to life." Although for Frank the entertainments of film had provided only examples of "automata ... wooden, devitalized," for Stieglitz the medium held a more utopian promise. If the moving picture could be used as a standardized entertainment that harnessed Americans (like the horse in *Spiritual America*) productively to economic labor, had a "'buck-eye' element" also been found to deliver Stieglitz's own spiritual message? Even with his photographs safely ensconced as art in the

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<sup>648</sup> *The Steerage* was accessioned into the Metropolitan in 1933 and *Spiritual America* only in 1949. Both images came to the MFA in 1950.

<sup>649</sup> For example, Sarah Greenough has argued that this image "so bluntly conveyed, that American spiritual life in the early 1920s was effectively dead." Sarah E. Greenough, "From the American Earth: Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Apples," *Art Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1, (Spring, 1981): 48.

American museum, going forward Stieglitz would face challenges in a modernity that increasingly prized standardization of products and people. As the nation turned against cosmopolitanism and embraced nativism, the power of ethnic diversity once stilled and transformed into picturesqueness by the straight photograph, then celebrated and hybridized by caricature, came to be subsumed and finally harnessed by the values of whiteness. The cocktail days had ended in prohibition.



## Figures



Fig. 4.1 Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe—Hands*, 1917. National Gallery of Art, cat. 460.



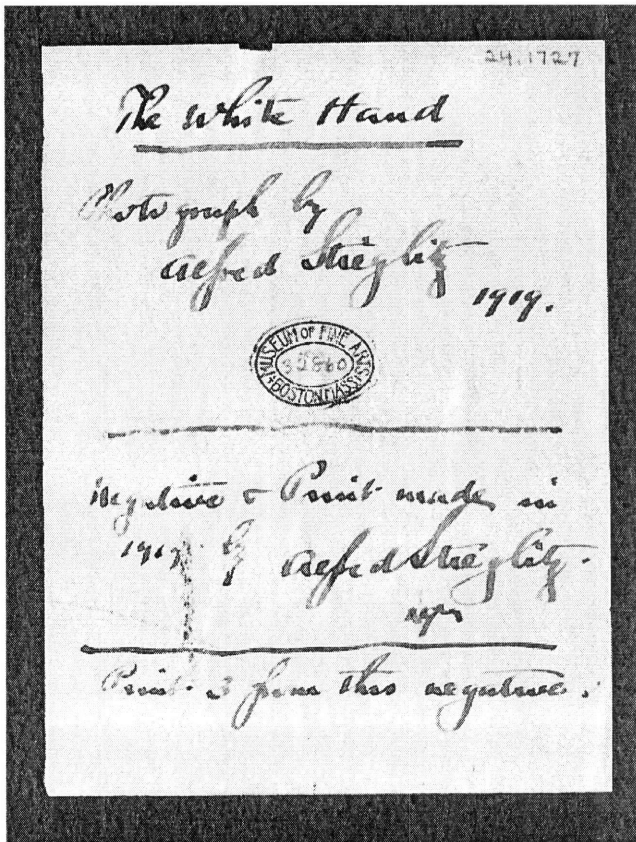


Fig. 4.2 Alfred Stieglitz, *The White Hand* (now known as *Georgia O'Keeffe-Hand and Breast*), 1919. National Gallery of Art, cat. 576.

And original backing board with title from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



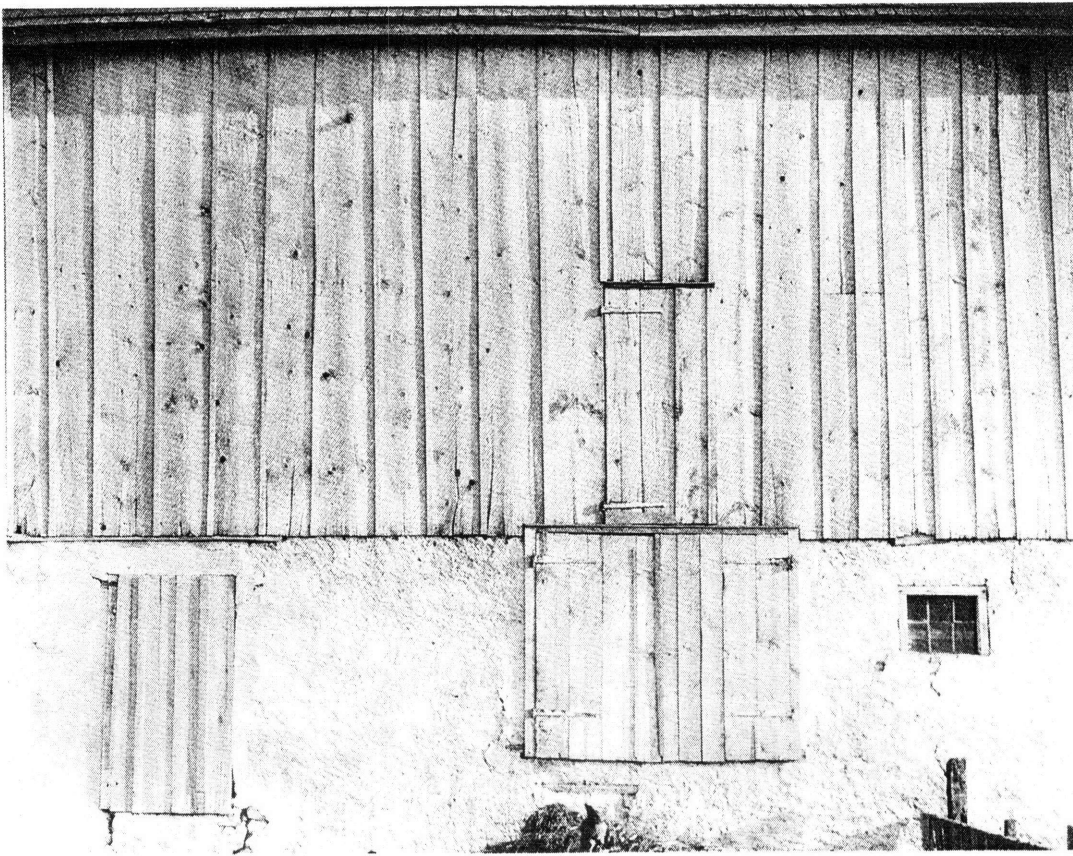


Fig. 4.3 Charles Sheeler, *Side of White Barn*, c. 1914-1917.

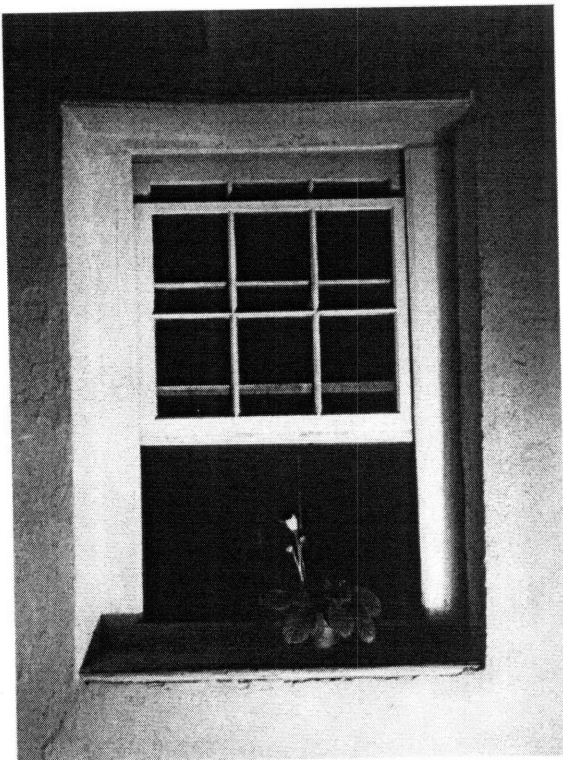
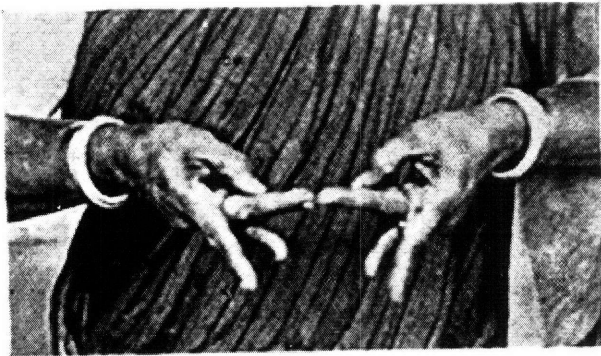


Fig. 4.4 Charles Sheeler, *Open Window*, 1916-17.





Fig. 4.5 Photographs (likely by Ananda Coomaraswamy) of gestures for combined hands published in Nandikesvara, *The Mirror of Gesture, Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara*, Tr. And Introduced Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1917).



B. A BED



C. THE FISH (Avatar of Vishnu)  
of Vishnu)



THE TORTOISE  
(Avatar of Vishnu)



E. GARUDA  
(Vehicle of Vishnu)

COMBINED HANDS







Fig. 4.6 Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Railroad Yard*, c. 1922, donated to the MFA in 1923. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

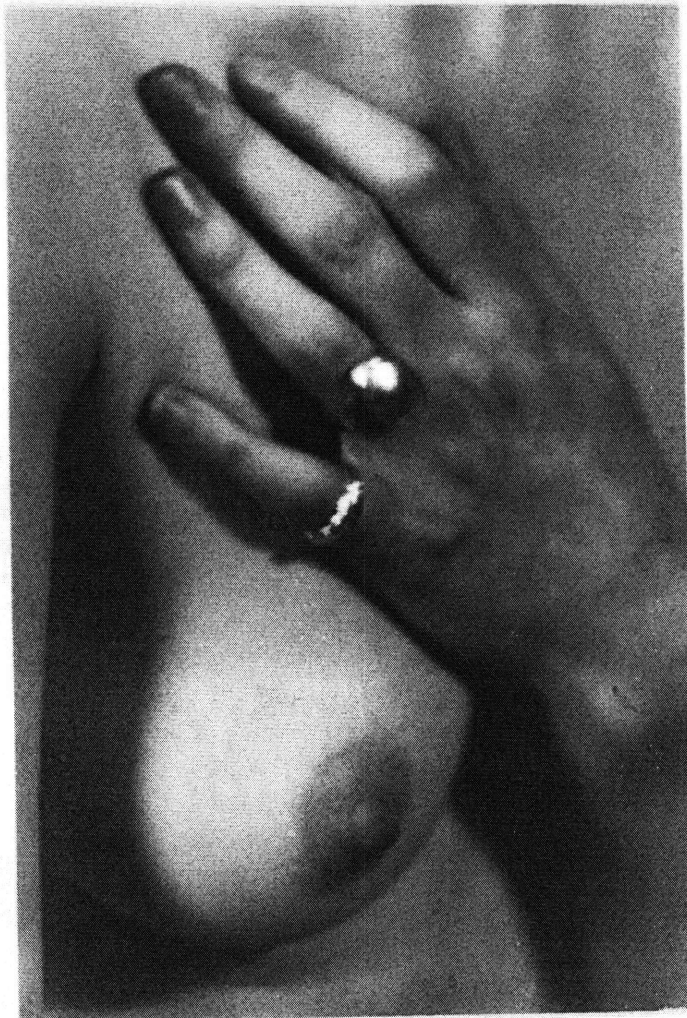


Fig. 4.7 Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Stella Bloch*, c. 1920. Philadelphia Museum of Art.





Fig. 4.8 Stills from Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Miscellaneous India*, c. 1924. Human Studies Film Archive, Smithsonian Institute.



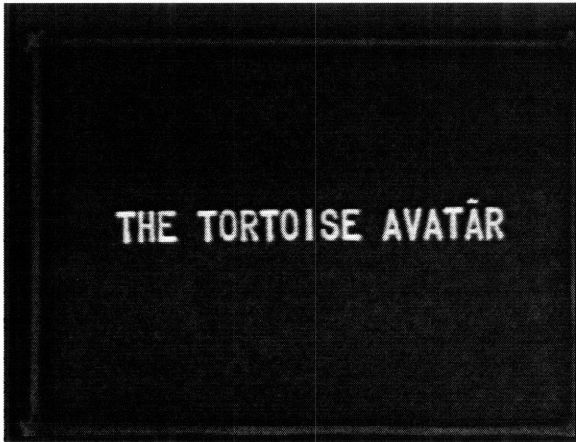


Fig. 4.9 Stills from Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Miscellaneous India*, c. 1924.





Fig. 4.10 Stills from Ananda  
Coomaraswamy, *Miscellaneous India*,  
c. 1924.







THE INFANT KRISHNA  
STEALS FIRST THE CURDS,  
AND THEN THE CHURNED  
BUTTER; LOOKING ANX-  
IOUSLY ABOUT LEST HE  
BE SEEN BY HIS MOTHER

Fig. 4.11 Stills from Ananda Coomaraswamy,  
*Miscellaneous India*, c. 1924.





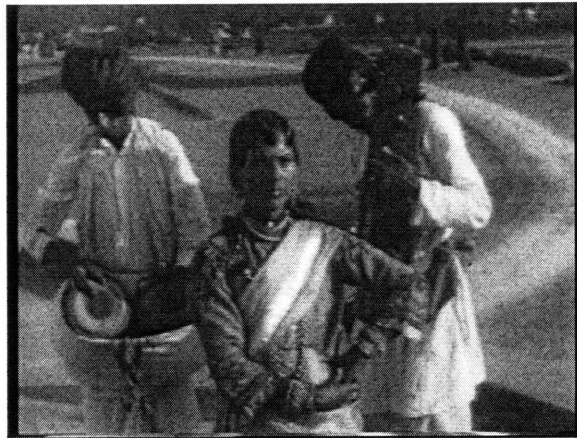


Fig. 4.12 Stills from Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Miscellaneous India*, c. 1924.



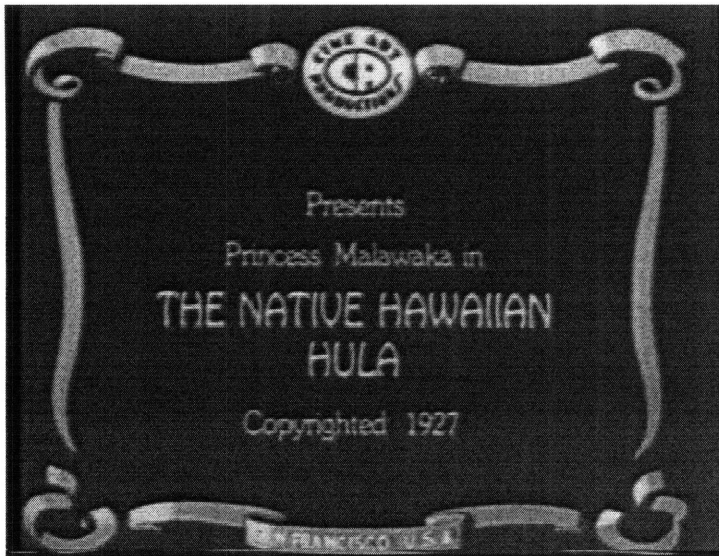


Fig. 4.13 Stills from *The Native Hawaiian Hula* (Cine Art, 1927) in the collection of Ananda Coomaraswamy.







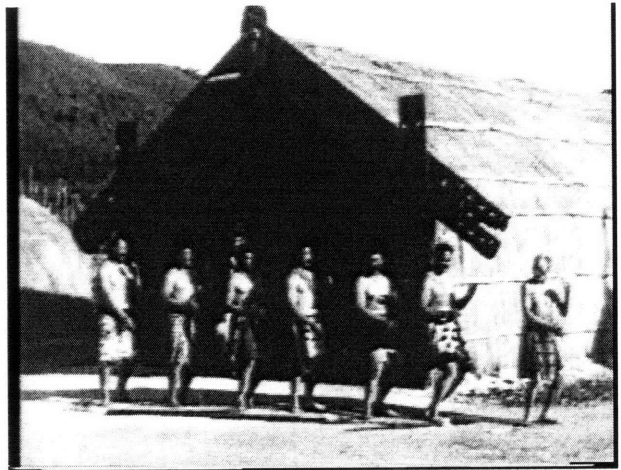
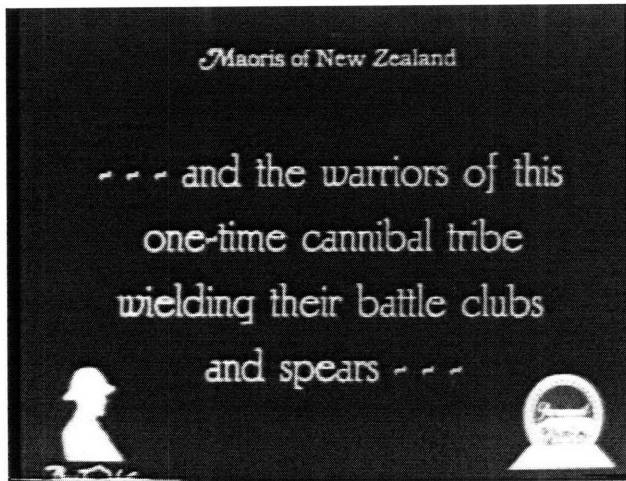


Fig. 4.15 Stills from *Maoris of New Zealand* (Paramount-Burton Holmes, c. 1921) In the collection of Ananda Coomaraswamy.

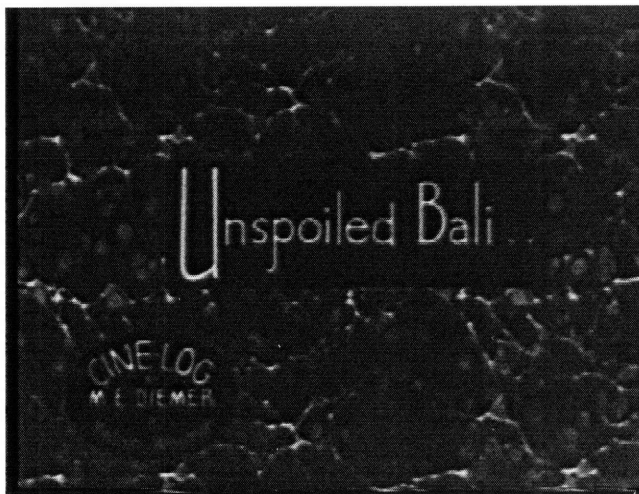


Fig. 4.15 Stills from *Unspoiled Bali* (Cine-Log, c. 1924) In the collection of Ananda Coomaraswamy.





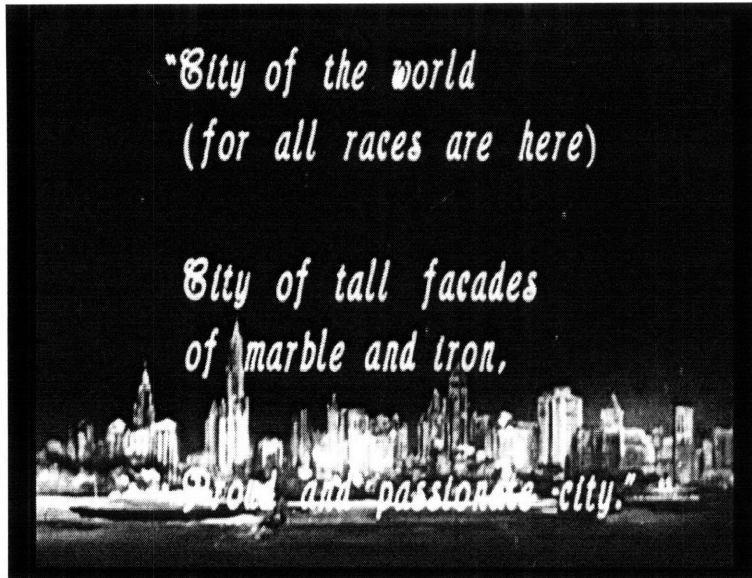
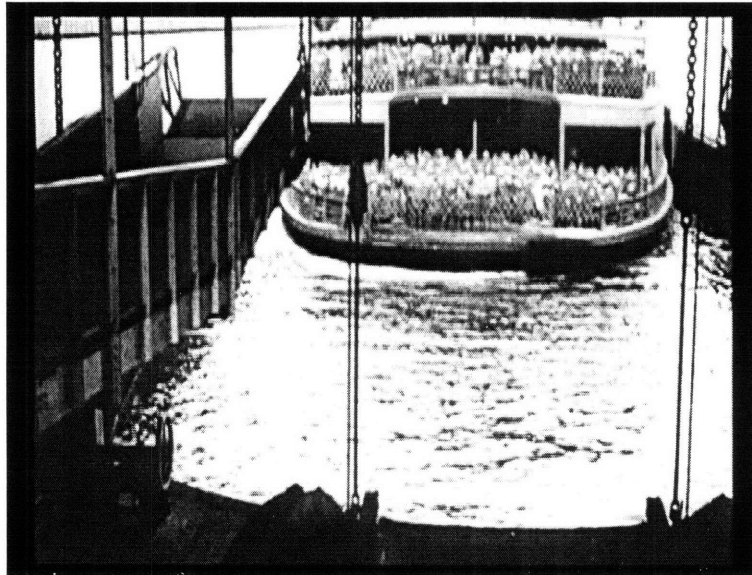
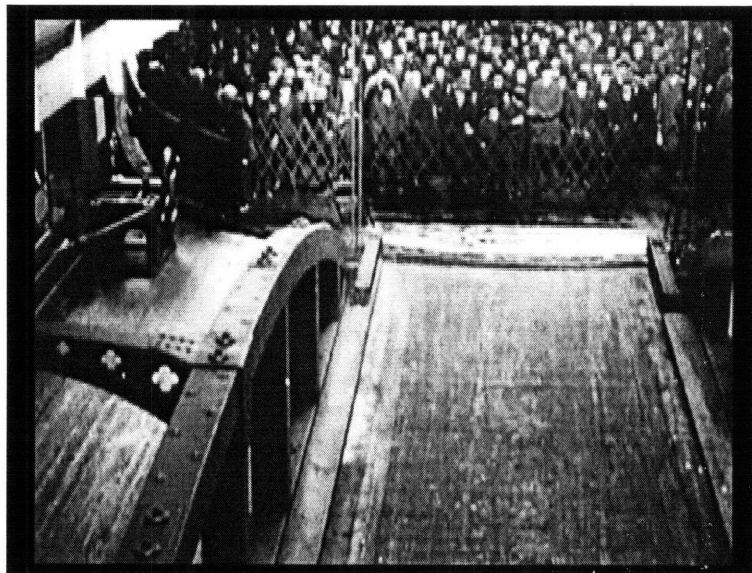


Fig. 4.16 Still from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.



4.17 Still from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.





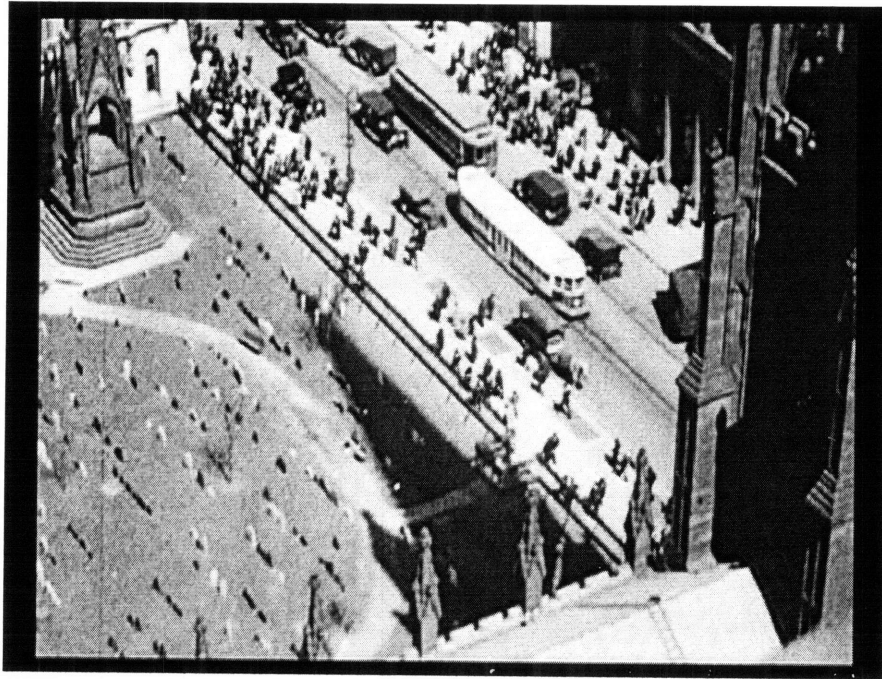


Fig. 4.18 Still from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.





Fig. 4.19 Still from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.



Fig. 4.20 Still from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.

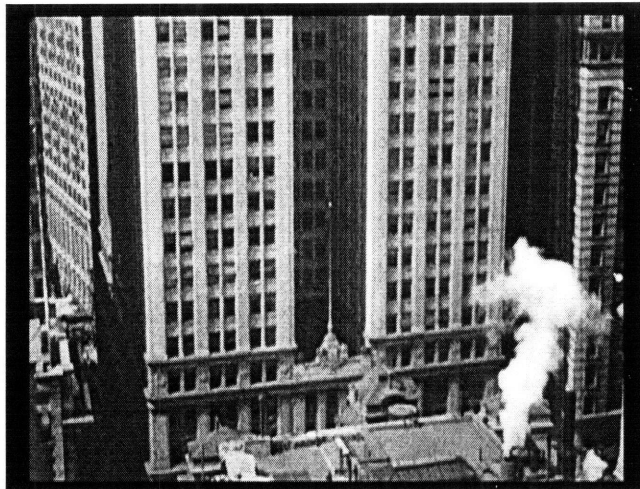


Fig. 4.21 Still from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920. Beginning and end of long tracking shot up the Equitable Building.



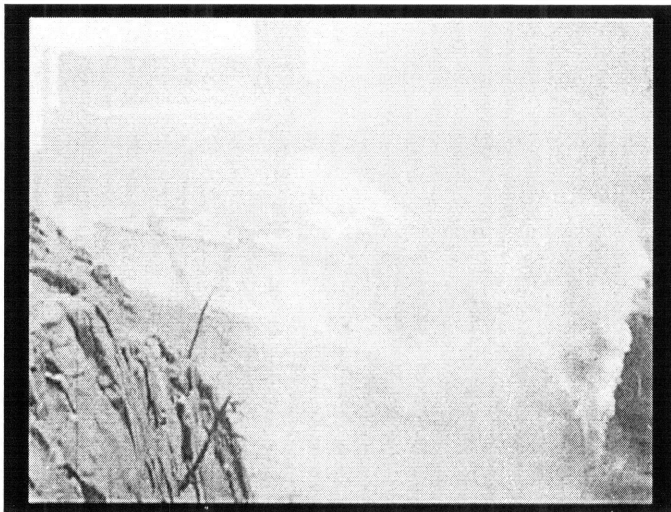
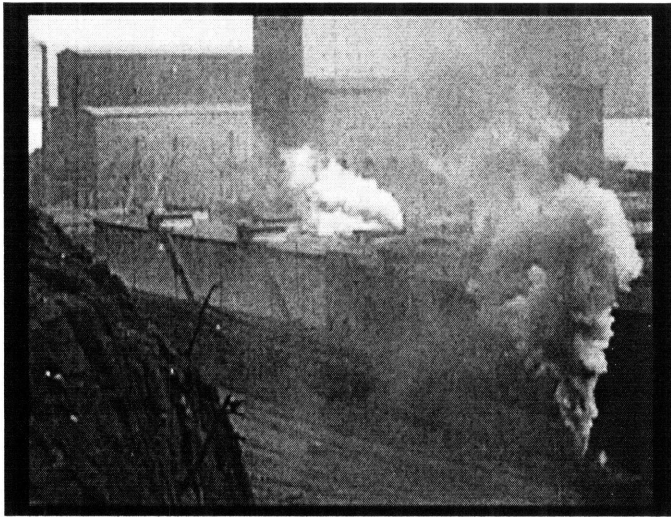


Fig. 4.22 Stills from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.





Fig. 4.23 Stills from Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.

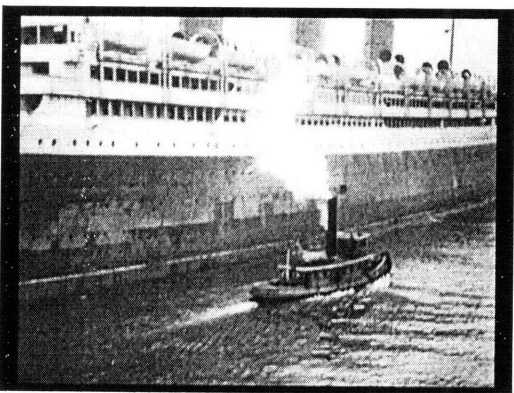
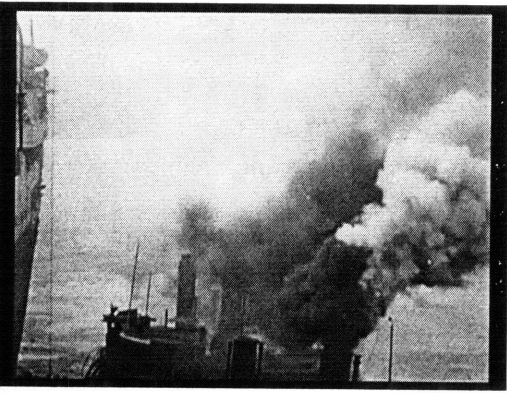
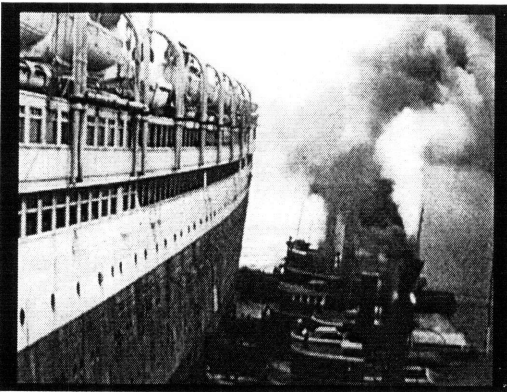
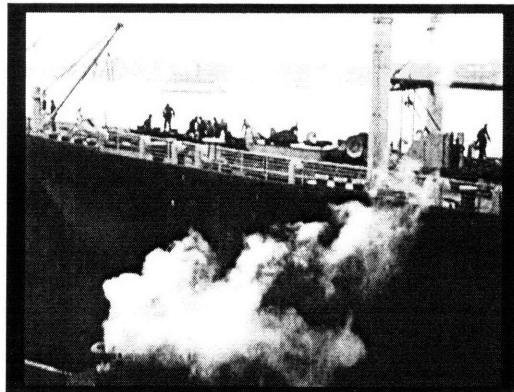
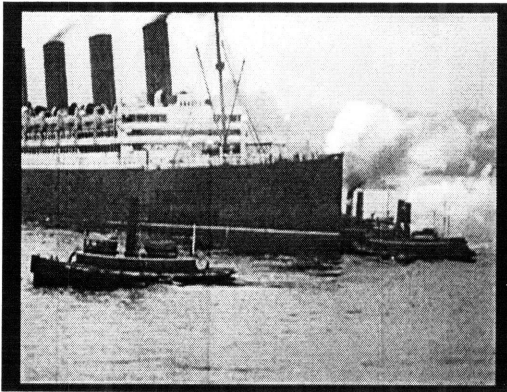
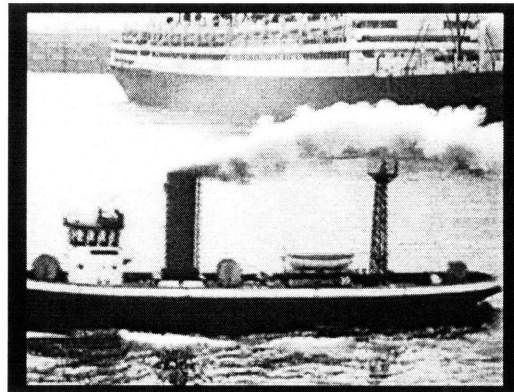
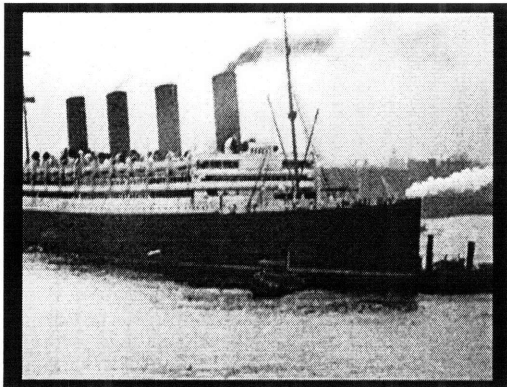






Fig. 4.24 Stills from final scene of Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, *Manhatta / New York the Magnificent*, 1920.

Fig. 4.25 Photograph reproduced in Henry Collins Brown, *New York of to-Day* (New York: Old Colony Press, 1917). Statue of Liberty visible in the upper right.



PHOTO PICTORIAL NEWS CO  
New York Bay—Governor's Island; Erie Basin, Brooklyn; Statue of Liberty and Staten Island in the distance; Singer Building in foreground.



## Post Cards.

All Post Cards are coated on double weight stock, cut to 3½ x 5½ inches, and printed on one side to conform with the latest postal regulations.

### Artura Post Cards.

Non-Curling, Carbon Black, Carbon Green, smooth, semi-matte surface.

Gross, \$2.00. Box of 500 cards, \$5.00.

### Velox Post Cards.

Velvet (Special and Regular); Portrait (Special); Royal (Special and Regular), and Glossy (Special and Regular).

Doz.	Half Gross.	Gross.	500
\$ .20	\$1.10	\$2.00	\$5.25

### Azo Post Cards.

A (Carbon), Soft, Hard and Hard X; C (Glossy), Soft and Hard; D (Semi-Gloss, Pensé), Soft and Hard; E (Semi-Matte), Soft, Hard and Hard X; F (Glossy), Hard X.

Doz.	Two Doz.	Half Gross.	Gross.	500.	5000 Case.
\$ .15	\$ .25	\$ .75	\$1.35	\$3.50	\$26.25

### Solio Post Cards.

Solio Post Cards are coated with the regular Solio emulsion.

Solio Post Cards, per dozen,	:	:	:	\$ .15	Solio Post Cards, per gross,	:	:	:	:	\$1.35
" " " per two dozen,	:	:	:	.25	" " " per 500 .	:	:	:	:	3.50
" " " per half gross,	:	:	:	.75						

### Velox, Kodak Velvet Green, Azo and Solio Double Post Cards.

The Double Post Card is just twice the length of the ordinary card, measuring 3½ x 11 inches. Packed flat.

Velox.				Azo and Solio.			
Doz.	Half Gross.	Gross.	500	Doz.	Half Gross.	Gross.	500
\$ .40	\$2.20	\$4.00	\$10.50	\$ .30	\$1.50	\$2.70	\$7.00

### P. M. C. Bromide Post Cards.

For use where speedy delivery is essential. Two grades Matte and Semi-Gloss.

Doz.	Two Doz.	Half Gross.	Gross.	500	5000 Case.
\$ .15	\$ .25	\$ .75	\$1.35	\$3.50	\$26.25

Fig. 4.26 Page of Postal Paper from Kodak Catalog, 1910. George Eastman House Library.  
4 "Harnessed in a Motion Picture"





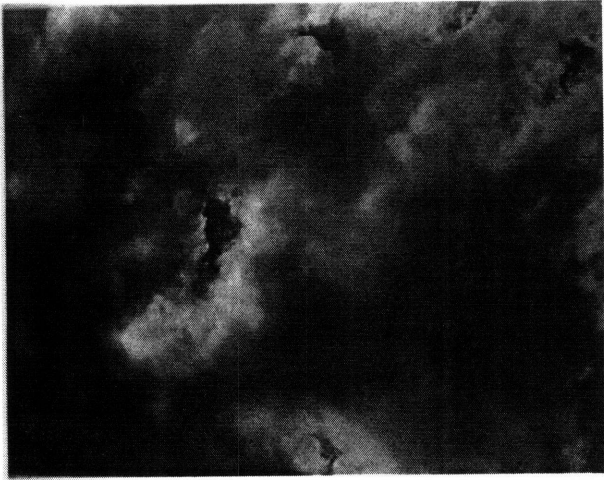


Fig. 4.27 Alfred Stieglitz, *Songs of the Sky* (1-5), 1923. numbered in vertical columns from upper left. National Gallery of Art, cat. 921, 922, 907, 942, 912. These photographs also remain at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.





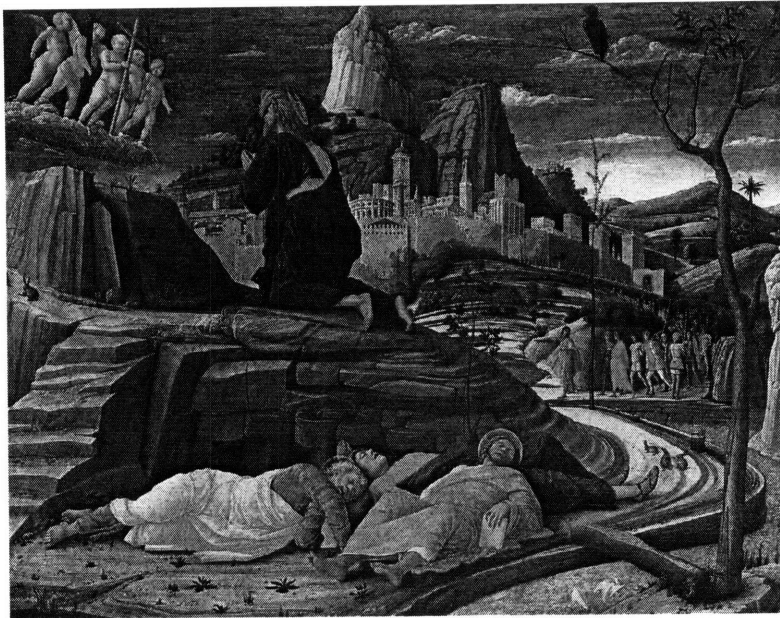


Fig. 4.28 Andrea Mantegna, *Agony in the Garden*, 1455. The National Gallery, London, England.

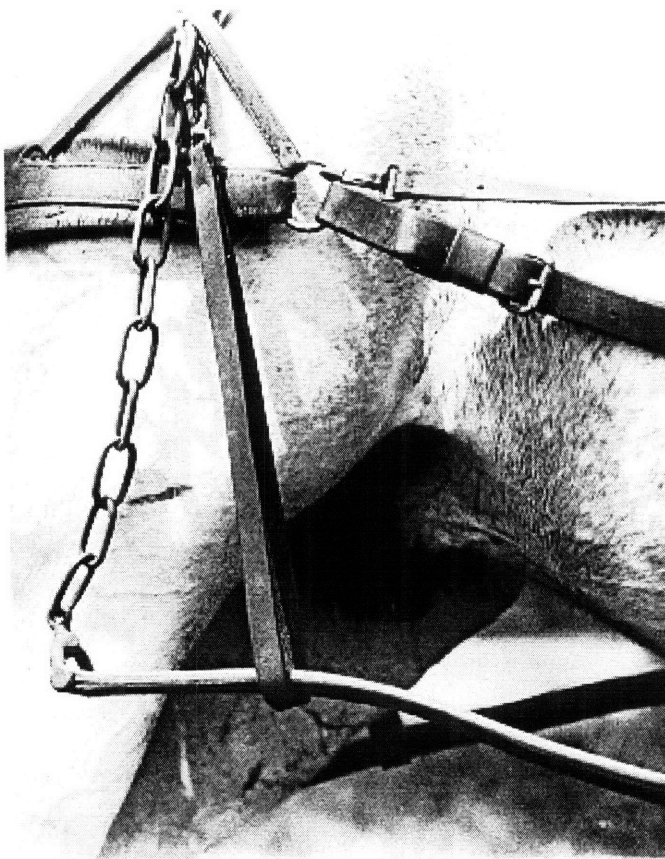


Fig. 4.29 Alfred Stieglitz, *Spiritual America*, 1923. National Gallery of Art, cat. 889.



Suddenly I noticed a Chinaman sitting opposite myself, serene and solemn, deeply meditating, like a personification of Buddha himself.

Far East! Sublime spirituality!

But – his jade-like hands were holding the Wall Street Journal, and he chewed gum ...

Was this “Americanization”? Was it true that every nationality, every profession in this country yields to the money-making business spirit with the hope for quick “prosperity”?

It seemed to me that I had just discovered the contrary—at least in the work of a few artists. Most of the pictures in Room 303 are – to me – *essentially American* in more than the geographical sense ... In this work nothing has been ‘Americanized.’ Everything *is* American ...

– Arnold Rönnebeck, “Through the Eyes of a European Sculptor,” published in the exhibition catalog for *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans* at New York’s Anderson Galleries, March 1925

## 5 Conclusion: “Americanized” or “Essentially American”

Stieglitz did not include his “milestone in photography” *The Steerage* in the collection of twenty-seven photographs he donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in 1924.<sup>650</sup> Although it at first seems odd that he would not include his important image in this first museum acquisition, the photograph’s contemporaneous 1924 appearance in *Vanity Fair* sheds light on why Stieglitz may have left *The Steerage* out. Frank Crowninshield, *Vanity Fair*’s editor, wrote Stieglitz in February, asking, “Why can’t I publish something of yours? One smashing full page picture,” and followed up specifically in April requesting a series of cloud photographs and “a print of your photographic masterpiece entitled ‘The Steerage, 1907’.”<sup>651</sup> Although the two had initially agreed to publish the cloud photographs – part of Stieglitz’s attempt to get these “unmediated” images an increased viewership with mass media – arranging the series aesthetically on a single page proved too difficult.<sup>652</sup> Instead, *The Steerage* was featured in the August

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<sup>650</sup> This was the way Stieglitz described the photograph in Alfred Stieglitz, “How *The Steerage* Happened,” *Twice A Year* 8-9 (1942) as anthologized in *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Notes and Essays*, ed. Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture, 2000), 197. *The Steerage* donated to the MFA in 1950 by Georgia O’Keeffe.

<sup>651</sup> Frank Crowninshield to Stieglitz, Feb 23, 1924, YCAL. Crowninshield to Stieglitz, April 14, 1924, YCAL. A month earlier the editor asked the photographer “where in the devil are all those cloud photographs that you were going to send me? I wish you would go to a business school, or an efficiency college, and learn card-indexing, double entry bookkeeping, charting and mapping, filing, and accounting.” Crowninshield to Stieglitz, March 25, 1924, YCAL.

<sup>652</sup> Crowninshield told Stieglitz, the photographs “look like the devil as soon as you put five or six of them on a page” and regretted that he could not give them the several pages he would like to be able to. Crowninshield to Stieglitz, August 28, 1924, YCAL. On Sept 2, 1924 the two agreed to talk over possibility of giving one cloud photograph a full page. Stieglitz’s better-

1924 issue of the magazine (fig. 5.1).<sup>653</sup> Stieglitz, notoriously exacting about the reproduction of his photographs, seems to have been pleased, and continued to discuss publishing the cloud photographs with Crowninshield. Yet, upon close examination Stieglitz's pleasure at this publication of *The Steerage* in seems peculiar, since the mass mediation and captioning produced a far less "transparent" result than what the photographer had claimed to intend for his images in the 1920s.

Through text printed below the photograph, *Beyond the Quota – in the Steerage*, Stieglitz's modernist "masterpiece" of formal relations was reframed in *Vanity Fair* as an image of immigrants rejected by America.<sup>654</sup> Its subject was no longer what it had been in 1907 – an image of a new cosmopolitan race. It became instead racialized ejecta – a photograph of those who had exceeded the recently permanent quotas of the 1924 National Origins Act. The *Vanity Fair* text is odd, but the alterations to the image are even stranger. The faces clearly detailed in Stieglitz's *Camera Work* printing of *The Steerage* are here blurred. Given the level of detail in other parts of the print and in other photographs printed in the magazine, this effacement of the passengers' returned gaze appears to have been deliberate.<sup>655</sup> Framed in this way *The Steerage* was not a statement about the relationship between photography and other modern art media, nor a portrait of pluralist cosmopolitanism or composite hybridity. Instead, it became an image of the faceless masses against which the nation had to be defended; it was a goad to isolationism.

This begins to explain the exclusion of *The Steerage* from the gift to the MFA, which showcased new serial portraits and cloud photographs – images with the symbolic spiritual overtones Stieglitz knew

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known opposition to reproduction seems to have originated in the 1930s. For example, "in 1931 when Stieglitz was asked by a certain publication for permission to reproduce his photographs, he wrote, 'My photographs do not lend themselves to reproduction. The very qualities that give them their life would be completely lost in reproduction. The quality of *touch* in its deepest living sense is inherent in my photographs. When that sense of *touch* is lost, the heartbeat of the photograph is extinct. In the reproduction it would become extinct – dead. My interest is in living. That is why I cannot give permission to reproduce my photographs.'" Dorothy Norman, Alfred Stieglitz: Introduction to an American Seer (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1960), 56.

<sup>653</sup> "Beyond the Quota—in the Steerage," *Vanity Fair* (August 1924): 54.

<sup>654</sup> This 1924 law made the temporary quotas of 1921 permanent.

<sup>655</sup> As if to drive the point of isolationism home, on the page facing *The Steerage* an article advised Americans of their relationship to Europe. The article sarcastically encouraged all visitors to "stay at the best hotels, and go to all the places where Americans go. The other is the 'little place no Americans know about' line." Lucien Bluphocks (an alias of Gilbert Seldes), "How to be Frightfully Foreign: A Timely Bit of Advice to Americans Who Are Going Abroad." *Vanity Fair* (August 1924): 55.

were favored by Coomaraswamy.<sup>656</sup> By 1924, *The Steerage*, especially as a portrait of rejected immigrants, scarcely fit. Stieglitz would later frame the photograph as entirely personal aesthetic masterpiece of abstract forms, minimizing the importance of steerage passengers as subjects in his 1942 account, yet the 1924 publication of *The Steerage* in *Vanity Fair* first signaled the rejection of new races from the nation and from the canonical aesthetics of modernism in terms clearly influenced by the politics of the day.

By 1924, other relationships with immigrants from the earlier Stieglitz circles had ended. Sadakichi Hartmann, champion of pluralist straight photography, had left New York, moved to Southern California to recuperate from illness, and landed the role of the Chinese Prince in Douglas Fairbanks' Orientalist Hollywood epic *The Thief of Bagdad* (fig. 5.2). Unfortunately, his health proved too delicate; the costume and heavy make-up (the artifice of the movie) aggravated his "weird combination of asthma and T.B."<sup>657</sup> This wry comment comes from Hartmann's own account of his experience, complaining about the lack of artistry in the motion picture and impugning the aesthetic significance he had attributed to the popular medium decades earlier.<sup>658</sup> The early advocate of straight photography as a medium for depicting urban diversity wondered if film's problem might lie with who controlled the industry, ominously suggesting "the Semitic gesture in all art matters is invariably downward."<sup>659</sup> In a country turning anti-Semitic and xenophobic, the Japanese-German critic joined the crowd, yet ended his years isolated. Hartmann wrote to Stieglitz in 1930, explaining that because he was trying to write a final account of modern art, "I have to sit down everyday for a few hours and pound the typewriter instead of drinking myself to death, which would be much more esthetic and to the point."<sup>660</sup> This "esthetic" existence proved stubbornly elusive, and adding insult to injury, the FBI attempted to intern Hartmann

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<sup>656</sup> In fact the 1924 gift included only two of Stieglitz's early images in the city – *The Hand of Man* and *The Terminal*.

<sup>657</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "My Experiences at the Fairbanks' Studio," "Camera!" *The Digest of the Motion Picture Industry*, February 2, 1924. The article was republished in *The Curtain*, IV, no. 37 (January 1925) and became a recurring series.

<sup>658</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>659</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, "From a Hollywood Studio," *The Curtain*, No. 59 (December, 1926), 160.

<sup>660</sup> Hartmann to Stieglitz, October 25 1930, UCR.

along with the other 110,000 Japanese Americans sent to relocation camps after the US entered the Second World War.<sup>661</sup>

In the 1920s and the decades following, the caricaturist and champion of hybrid, composite modernism Marius de Zayas was also shunted to the margins of modern art (if less spectacularly than Hartmann). He had ceased making his caricatures in 1915, and in 1921 he closed his New York gallery and moved to France. Writing to Stieglitz in 1922, de Zayas lamented his conclusion: “America is too young and Europe is too old to produce art.”<sup>662</sup> Not yet entirely able to put art aside, in the 1930s and 1940s de Zayas began painting in the oddly nostalgic mode of analytic cubism (fig. 5.3). Returning to the U.S. after the end of World War II, he lived in Greenwich, Connecticut until his death in 1961.

Even Stieglitz’s ally in the production of spiritualized modernism, Ananda Coomaraswamy, grew increasingly estranged from modern art. He particularly disliked abstraction, writing in 1943 “Our abstract art is not an iconography of transcendental forms, but that realistic picture of a disintegrated mentality.” Coomaraswamy lamented the destruction of “the vocational and artistic foundations of whatever traditional cultures our touch has infected.”<sup>663</sup> Although he had convinced the MFA that Stieglitz’s abstract photographs of clouds were art, the painted abstractions of the New York School in the 1940s seemed something altogether different. Finding no “transcendental forms” or glimmers of tradition, no gesturing hands or recognizable forms from nature, Coomaraswamy turned away from the American modern art scene.

Stieglitz, on the other hand, had successfully reinvented himself. Continuing his serial photography of clouds and women, he repositioned himself in a succession of New York galleries devoted to “Seven Americans.”<sup>664</sup> The photographer surrounded himself with painters (and one other photographer) in a continuing collision of media, yet the goals of composite modernism were abandoned.

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<sup>661</sup> Hartmann’s difficulties align with Ann Eden Gibson’s observation of the way in which white Abstract Expressionists could “strip themselves in the eyes of others of adopted alliances with the so-called ‘primitive’” in a way that artists of color found impossible. Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), xxvii.

<sup>662</sup> Marius de Zayas to Stieglitz, 1922, YCAL, as cited in Marius de Zayas, *How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, ed. Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>663</sup> Coomaraswamy “Symptom, Diagnosis, Regimen” *College Art Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Part 1 (May, 1943), 122.

<sup>664</sup> These seven Americans were Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Hartley, Marin, O’Keeffe, Strand, and Stieglitz. Stieglitz displayed their work over the next twenty years at The Anderson Galleries, The Intimate Gallery, and An American Place.

In a letter to his friend and frequent confidante Sherwood Anderson, Stieglitz congratulated the author (who had been involved with the Harlem Renaissance in New York) on his move to New Orleans.<sup>665</sup> Stieglitz lamented, “For years I’ve been ‘dreaming’ of photographing some colored folks. But it has never come about. I can’t photograph what I don’t fully live – but may be some day...”<sup>666</sup> Stieglitz’s ideals of photography had changed radically from earlier decades when he produced an image of Venetian peasant children while on vacation (*A Good Joke*, 1887), found his relationship to America in the early 1890s when escaping his business and strolling in the ghetto of Five Points (*Five Points, New York*, 1893), or finding modern abstraction in photographing the immigrants of the steerage from first class (*The Steerage*, 1907). The whitening of spiritual America meant that by the 1920s, Stieglitz photographed only what he was comfortable living, passing the remaining years of his life and artistic career in New York City and at his childhood vacation house on Lake George.

“Sublime Spirituality” or the “Money Making Business Spirit”

In 1925 Stieglitz organized an exhibition at New York’s Anderson Gallery, under the lengthy title “Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans: 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.” Stieglitz pointed out in this show’s catalog that it was being held on the twentieth anniversary of the founding of his first gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue.<sup>667</sup> The title’s list enumerated the small group of native-born artists that would form the foundation of Stieglitz’s circle for the next two decades until his death in 1946. Given the insistent and repeated assertions of the Americanness of these artists it is at first surprising that the exhibition catalog included an essay by a European artist. Arnold Rönnebeck, a German sculptor recently arrived in the U.S., positioned himself

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<sup>665</sup> Sherwood Anderson wrote his 1925 novel *Dark Laughter* about New Orleans. The book was described on its jacket as “an intense love story superimposed upon a background of dark laughter, the mysterious, detached, strange laughter of the negro, the earth and the river...” Sherwood Anderson, *Dark Laughter* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925).

<sup>666</sup> Stieglitz to Anderson, Aug 7, 1924, YCAL.

<sup>667</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans...*, New York: Anderson Galleries, March 1925, 14

explicitly as an outsider to the nation, describing the exhibition and the New York experience more generally under the title “Through the Eyes of a European Sculptor.”<sup>668</sup> This outsider’s brief article drew on the cosmopolitan circles of Stieglitz’s past, but it enlisted the immigrant’s insights to new ends.

As cited in the epigraph, Rönnebeck text recounted his ride on the New York subway seated across from a “Chinaman.” At first Rönnebeck regarded this man as the “personification of Buddha himself” and celebrated his “Far East! Sublime spirituality!,” until he noticed the man’s “jade-like hands were holding the Wall Street Journal, and he chewed gum.” Rönnebeck positioned this man as a victim of “Americanization,” which put everyone in the “money-making business spirit with the hope for quick ‘prosperity’.” For Rönnebeck, this Americanization was in jarring contradiction to the spirituality initially evoked by the man’s Far Eastern appearance, indeed the “business spirit” seemed to displace the once genuine spirituality of tradition, even as the harness in Stieglitz’s “Spiritual America” replaced the goal of sexual reproductive labor to the transferred reproduction of economic horsepower.

This example of “Americanization” was posed in opposition to the artwork by the “Seven Americans” on display in the exhibition. Instead of “Americanized,” Rönnebeck deemed the work of this Stieglitz circle to be “*essentially American* in more than the geographical sense.” Defining Americanness as an essential attribute, Rönnebeck suggested it was something intrinsic and inherent. In the previous chapter we saw how the categories of “white” and “ethnic” came to operate precisely because of the tension in their dialectic that allowed them to be held together but not synthesized within the term American, but here in using the word “essential” Rönnebeck seems to position “American” as a unified genuine quality in tension with the standardization of (economic) Americanization. Yet, interestingly, Rönnebeck himself offered no coherent statement to define the “essentially American,” enumerating only a series of symbols, such as Henry Ford, baseball, skyscrapers Buffalo Bill, “and perhaps even Wall Street,” which in his “European conception” signified America as “ingenuity, action, business and adventure, exploiting discovery.” It was these symbols, he wrote, that had been used by Stieglitz’s Seven

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<sup>668</sup> All quotations from Arnold Rönnebeck, “Through the Eyes of a European Sculptor” in *Alfred Stieglitz Presents Seven Americans...*, New York: Anderson Galleries, March 1925, 5-7. Rönnebeck moved to New York in 1924 and was introduced to the Stieglitz circle by Marsden Hartley. He also became good friends with Coomaraswamy,



Americans “to *build* universal reality out of the ‘reality’ which my Subway-Buddha had so intensely *acquired*.”<sup>669</sup>

In his essay Rönnebeck, the immigrant could define the American only with examples acquired through an outsider’s observation (as the gum-chewing habit of the Chinaman had been acquired). It fell to “Americans” to create these symbols and build this reality from within their (white) nativist world. In fact it was through “creative self-discovery” by each of the Seven Americans that Rönnebeck forecast America would establish its “independent role in the History of Art.”<sup>670</sup> The immigrant sculptor did not offer particular insights, instruction, or even criticism from his outsider perspective as immigrants and outsiders had in earlier Stieglitz circles. His essay was a pure celebration. Rönnebeck’s bristling at Americanization coincided exactly with Stieglitz’s objections to Eastman when the pressures of the market (the “money making business spirit”) decreased the quality of the postal paper on which Stieglitz printed his *Equivalents*. Rönnebeck offered only confirmation that the Americanizing “spirit of business” displaced “sublime spirituality” – a claim that *Spiritual America* had already made into an image. In his essay Rönnebeck presented a welcome framing of Stieglitz’s 1925 exhibition precisely because he differentiated what appeared to be American to outsiders (“money-making business spirit”) from what was “essentially American” (an unnamable spirit). He subtly made the case that “essentially American” art could not be acquired from or even described by European observers, but could only be built in self-discovery by the Seven (native born, white) Americans.

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<sup>669</sup> italics added.

<sup>670</sup> Locating America “the country without Roman ruins, the country of keenest progress in mechanical technic and invention, the continent where the spirits of all peoples meet freely,” as the birthplace for “*an art of to-day*,” Rönnebeck suggested it was America’s lack of history, its invention, and its diversity that made it particularly suited to producing modern art. While this might seem initially similar to the terms of de Zayas’ manifesto, vitally America is characterized by the meeting “spirits of all people,” not de Zayas’ mating bodies.

Every time I see a Ford car something in me revolts – I hate the sight of one because of its absolute lack of any kind of quality feeling. And I try to persuade myself I’m prejudiced even though I know I’m not. – They are just ugly things in line & texture.  
– Alfred Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson, July 5, 1924

“*Something in Me Revolts*”

The above passage from a 1924 letter from Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson mentioning his revolt against the Ford car has been cited frequently as evidence for Stieglitz’s failure to become truly modern, his assessment of the Ford car compared to Sheeler’s 1927 River Rouge series of aestheticizing photographs of Ford’s factory.<sup>671</sup> Yet, perhaps the “anti-modernism” we attribute to Stieglitz was instead the last gasp of a *composite* modernism he wanted for America, his reactions against the automaker functioning as a negative manifesto against the pressures of Americanization and standardization in favor of an effectively composite spirituality. The comment about Ford also needs to be put into the context of its intended recipient, Sherwood Anderson. Anderson had written publicly against the automaker in his 1924 collection *A Story Teller’s Story*: “Ford in Detroit has done more than any other man of my day to carry standardization to its logical end,” concluding that “[Ford would] also come to be looked upon as the great killer of his age.”<sup>672</sup> The left-leaning occasional socialist Anderson cited discussions with WWI veterans who told him “before the war standardization had been carried to the highest pitch by the Germans,” asking why, with Germany defeated, America could not reject the standardization of Ford and aim at new goals.<sup>673</sup> Anderson explicitly offered Stieglitz, Waldo Frank, Paul Rosenfeld and other artistic Jewish intellectuals of New York an acceptable alternative to the “middle-western anti-Jewish crusader

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<sup>671</sup> Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 23.

<sup>672</sup> Although I have not found clear evidence that Stieglitz read Anderson’s collection before writing his letter, the two frequently exchanged work and it seems quite likely that Anderson would have shown Stieglitz his laudatory essay prior to the book’s publication. Sherwood Anderson, *A Story Teller’s Tale* (University of Michigan Press, 2005 c. 1924), 195-196.

<sup>673</sup> “May it not be that we Americans have all along been intended by God to be the nation that will carry highest the banner of the New Age?” *Ibid.*, 197. For more on Anderson’s politics see David D. Anderson, “Sherwood Anderson and the Coming of the New Deal,” *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 5, Papers of the Midwest Modern Language Association, no. 2. Criticism and Culture (1972), 88-96.

Henry Ford.”<sup>674</sup> Reading Stieglitz’s self-conscious disavowal of his own *prejudice* in his letters about cars suggests more than an aesthetic of anti-modernism fueled his rejection of Ford.<sup>675</sup> Sheeler’s are undoubtedly modernist images, but what do they tell us about modernism? Stieglitz’s verbal image of the standardized products of the notoriously anti-Semitic industrialist describes their ugly line & texture. Do Stieglitz’s own images of the Ford car suggest an alternative, a final rallying cry for the revelation of spiritualization and diversity over standardization and sameness? As America’s borders closed against new races and photography entered museum collections as art a close comparison of Stieglitz’s and Sheeler’s Ford images reveals much about the shared fate of images and bodies.

Although Ford’s anti-Semitism has been well explored by historians, within art history the topic has been delicately put aside. Here I will provide a brief outline of Ford’s ongoing campaign for (racial as well as industrial) standardization as a context for Sheeler’s photographs – and Stieglitz’s rejections of the Fordist project. Henry Ford’s goals for “standardization” were not merely applied to sheet metal and assembly lines. The Ford Company of the 1910s hired private investigators to visit all workers’ homes and ensure their acculturation to American standards.<sup>676</sup> During the graduation ceremony from the automaker’s compulsory English education courses, non-native English speakers entered a giant black cauldron labeled “Melting Pot” holding signs indicating their origins and dressed in the costumes of their homelands, and emerged dressed in standardized “American” clothes waving American flags (fig. 5.4).<sup>677</sup> The patronizing home inspections and the eccentric melting pot celebration took on more sinister overtones when the automaker purchased a small town newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, as a venue for his incendiary racial views. Into the late teens and twenties Ford would become more overtly suspicious of immigrants, explaining in the *Independent* of February 22, 1919 on “Ford’s One Page” that not all could be transformed: “What of the Melting Pot? The problem is not ... with the pot so much as it

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<sup>674</sup> Anderson generalizes any specific Semitism in the Stieglitz circle as simply a specific case of underlying lack of standardization – a “the feeling of separateness of life was common to all Americans.” *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>675</sup> Stieglitz to Anderson, July 5, 1924, YCAL.

<sup>676</sup> With increases in pay Ford claimed to have been worried the workingman would “make a fool of himself” so began a social department to enforce standards of living – aiming, for example, to rid “evil custom among many of the foreign workers of taking in boarders.” Henry Ford, *My Life and Work*, in collaboration with Samuel Crowther (New York, Arno Press, 1973, c1922), 129.

<sup>677</sup> Historian of immigration John Higham gives an extensive account of the ceremony in his *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1967, c1963), 238.

is the base metal. Some metals cannot be assimilated, refuse to mix with the molten mass of the citizenship, but remain ugly, indissoluble lumps. How did this base metal get in? ... What about those aliens who have given us so much trouble, these Bolsheviki messing up our industries and disturbing our civil life.”<sup>678</sup>

In May of 1920, Ford began publishing what would become a long running series, “The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem.”<sup>679</sup> Requiring that the *Independent* be sold alongside his cars, Ford allocated a certain number of subscriptions to each of his sales agents throughout the U.S, and watched as circulation for the paper climbed from 300,000 in 1922 and 700,000 in 1925.<sup>680</sup> The *Independent* reported that Jewish greed was to blame for WWI and for the general global “decline” of culture. It supported this case with the weekly publication of the so-called *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion* – historical forgeries the paper passed off as confirmation of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy.<sup>681</sup> Although Stieglitz and Sheeler may not have come into direct contact with the *Independent*, the automaker’s views were well known in New York. Ford gave the first public interview espousing his anti-Semitism in the *New York World*, stating, “The international financiers are behind all war. They are what is called the international Jew ... Here [in America] the Jew is a threat.”<sup>682</sup> The industrialist quickly became one of the most public faces of a surge in anti-Semitism that paralleled and fed the anti-immigration movements of the 1920s.

The attacks in Ford’s paper slowed briefly when he considered running for the presidency in 1923, but when Calvin Coolidge won the nomination the assaults began again. In 1924 and 1925, the

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<sup>678</sup> *Dearborn Independent*, Feb. 22, 1919, as quoted in Neil Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews: the Mass Production of Hate* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 17.

<sup>679</sup> Ford bought the weekly paper in 1918 and for the first sixteen months ran “cliché-ridden” stories about rural American values. Howard Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 311. “Into the camp of this [Anglo-Saxon-Celtic] race comes a people that has no civilization to point to, no aspiring religion, no universal speech, no great achievement in any realm but the realm of ‘get,’ cast out of every land that gave them hospitality, and these people endeavor to tell the sons of the Saxons what is needed to make the world what it ought to be.”

<sup>680</sup> A large percentage of these were sold in rural areas. *Ibid.*, 314-315.

<sup>681</sup> *The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion* had its “roots in a political satire on Emperor Napoleon III of France, which had been written in 1864.” It was published in 1917 by “a group of former Russian Czarist officers living in Berlin.” Then “it was brought to the U.S. by some White Russian immigrants.” Ford’s employee Ernest Lieopold discovered the text and published it in installments weekly for two years beginning in 1920 and then on and off for another five. Elinor Slater & Robert Slater, “Ford Sponsors Hate Literature,” *Great Moments in Jewish History*, (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1998), 191.

<sup>682</sup> J.J. O’Neil of the *New York World*, 1920 as quoted in Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America*, 311 and Albert Lee, *Henry Ford and the Jews* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 13.

*Independent* targeted the supposed exploitation of the American farmer by Jewish labor organizers. Finally, in 1925, general counsel for the American Farm Bureau Federation Aaron Sapiro sued Ford for libel.<sup>683</sup> When the two settled the million-dollar lawsuit out of court in 1927, Ford issued a public retraction and apology. He claimed he had been too busy with his company to directly oversee the content of his publications, and had only learned with regret that he was regarded as an anti-Semite. Reading the articles in the *Independent*, Ford declared in print that he would never have allowed their publication, and that he was “deeply mortified.”<sup>684</sup> The public apology was well received, in spite of the fact that many believed the ghost-written essay to be an opportunistic attempt to ready the market for the debut of his new Model A.

The “Jewish problem” was only one limit to standard Americanism, in Ford’s worldview. In his own autobiography *My Life and Work* published in 1922, Ford blamed the deterioration of “standards” on “a nasty Orientalism which has insidiously affected every channel of expression.”<sup>685</sup> The bottom line was assimilation: “If they are as wise as they claim to be, they will labor to make Jews American, instead of laboring to make America Jewish.”<sup>686</sup> Whether or not the 1927 disavowal of these ideas was genuine, it was in that year the *Dearborn Independent* ceased publication, the Ford Company prepared to launch their Model A, and Henry Ford brought Sheeler to the River Rouge Factory. Even as Sheeler began his photographic project in October, (intended for advertising of the new cars), Aaron Sapiro made news by publicly denying that Ford’s apology was only part of a scheme to sell cars.<sup>687</sup>

In his influential study of the River Rouge project, art historian Terry Smith concludes that Sheeler was hired “to create a glamorous image for the Ford Company by touting the aesthetic side of

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<sup>683</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 327.

<sup>684</sup> The apology had actually written by America Jewish leader Louis Marshall. In it Ford admitted “the so-called *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*” were forgeries, and promised “I deem it my duty as an honorable man to make amends for the wrong done to the Jews as fellow-men and brothers, by asking their forgiveness for the harm that I had unintentionally committed, by retracting so far as lies within my power the offensive charges laid at their door by these publications, and by giving them the unqualified assurance that henceforth they may look to me for friendship and good will.” Reprinted in Albert Lee, *Henry Ford and the Jews*, 80-81.

<sup>685</sup> Ford acknowledged that what he termed his “Studies in the Jewish Question” others called “‘the attack on the Jews,’ ‘the anti-Semitic pogrom,’ and so forth.” Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* (1922), 250-251.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>687</sup> Charles Sheeler to Walter Arensberg, October 25, 1927 and “Denies Ford Recanted to Boost Car Sales” *New York Times*, October 21, 1927.

industry.”<sup>688</sup> Although the earlier Model T had been aimed at the pocketbook of the working man and priced as inexpensively as possible, Smith notes that the Model A was advertised in *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* to get the car in the best garages and families. Productively framing Sheeler’s photographs within the commercial realm in which they were intended to operate, Smith quotes an advertising executive from Ford explaining, “sell to the classes, the masses will follow.”<sup>689</sup> This elite audience was the very one at which Ford had aimed his apology for the *Independent*’s anti-Semitism (and the one Stieglitz identified with in his rejection of the Model T’s crass functional lines). When Sheeler’s *Criss-Crossed Conveyors* appeared as a full page illustration in *Vanity Fair* in February of 1928, the caption below the image positioned the plant as “the most significant public monument in America,” comparing it to the United States Capitol, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Statue of Liberty.<sup>690</sup> Providing a statistical accounting of Ford’s productivity, the text proclaimed the River Rouge Ford Plant in Dearborn America’s center. The automaker and his mass production displaced symbols of government, art, and America’s polyglot immigrants, subsumed by the editor’s hope that the sophisticated *Vanity Fair* audience would be pulled along by Sheeler’s monumentalizing image.<sup>691</sup>

Without depicted laborers, the title given Sheeler’s image in *Vanity Fair* – “By Their Works Ye Shall Know Them” – suggested at first that only Ford and Sheeler produced works worth knowing. Yet the religious operations in the caption to Sheeler’s image edged toward unease, even possible sarcasm, noting that some called the River Rouge plant the “American altar of the God-Objective of Mass Production. But it is simply one man’s monument to his own organizing and merchandising genius.”<sup>692</sup> *This* “spiritual America” was the very one Stieglitz had ironized, with the god of capital and productive

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<sup>688</sup> Terry Smith argues they are different from his other images because they are a set, which is not true given that Doylestown was a set. Terry Smith, *Making the Modern*, 113. Susan Filin Yeh traces Sheeler’s connection with the advertising agency in Susan Filin Yeh, “Charles Sheeler, Industry, Fashion, and the Vanguard,” *Arts Magazine*, Feb. 1980.

<sup>689</sup> Smith, *Making the Modern*, 103-104. Terry Smith positions Sheeler’s celebration of the automaker alongside others in the avant-garde citing a “mocking, but nonetheless awestruck, [1923] paean to Henry Ford,” in the journal *Broom* that joined Ford’s Presidential campaign with a series of slogans emphasizing his totalizing efficiency, including the phrase “Ford means standardization.” *Ibid.*, 110. October 1923 issue of *Broom*, editor Matthew Josephson as quoted in, *Ibid.*, 111. The article was not a celebration, but a dry farce aimed against Ford, as Matthew Josephson, *Broom*’s editor would make more explicit in his book tracing negative effects of the “machine civilization” on art. Matthew Josephson, *Portrait of the Artist as American*, 1930.

<sup>690</sup> Photographs from the series also appeared in photography magazines such as *Transition* and *Creative Art*, in the Film und Foto show in Stuttgart in 1929, and distributed more broadly in *Life* and *USA*.

<sup>691</sup> *Vanity Fair*, February 1928, 62, reproduced in Smith, *Making the Modern*, 114.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*

labor replacing the life of the body and its spiritual needs. *Vanity Fair* published Sheeler's photograph, but balked at the title's attempt to claim God for the genius of mass production. Yet, the religious implications of these images go still deeper. Sheeler's images, Smith claims, promised "an industry without producers, process, or product" that allowed Ford to stand for "American, indeed modern, industry in general terms."<sup>693</sup> Sharon Corwin has made a valiant attempt to reintroduce bodies into Sheeler's work by reading photographs against the grain, identifying these images with the threatened corporeality of the machine age.<sup>694</sup> But Sheeler's effacement of laboring bodies also works to efface Ford's troubles with other bodies – Semites and immigrants. Historian of immigration John Higham has noted that American anti-Semitism focused on economic rather than religious themes, demonizing an unproductive race that grew rich only by manipulating money and not by making things. This view certainly drew on European stereotypes (generated by centuries of laws prohibiting Jews from owning or working the land), but the force of its specific emphasis on production and labor is attributed by Higham to an American agrarian tradition.<sup>695</sup> "New" immigrants from Eastern Europe, by contrast, only made money with their low-priced bodily labor. By creating an aesthetic temple to Ford's work and production, with problematic immigrant labor eliminated by the machine, Sheeler produced the final justification for Ford's anti-Semitism and ruthless standardization of immigrant bodies. Sheeler, the automaker, and their machines were the only ones capable of productive American labor, spiritualized into a cathedral of capital.<sup>696</sup>

Interviewed about his photographic series in 1931, Sheeler celebrated the beauty of forms created to fulfill their function, the machine's "infallibility which precludes human competition." In the Ford

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<sup>693</sup> Smith, *Making the Modern*, 115 and 126.

<sup>694</sup> Sharon Lynn Corwin, "Selling 'America': Precisionism and the Rhetoric of Industry, 1916-1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley 2001): 90.

<sup>695</sup> John Higham, *Send These to Me*, 1975, 161-2. Higham separates American anti-Semitism into three periods, arguing that in the early nation they were part of a diverse religious society, supported by Protestants "primarily a consequence of the unobstructed sway of a capitalistic way of life." *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>696</sup> Ford bragged, "There is no manual handling of material. There is not a single hand operation. If a machine can be made automatic, it is made automatic." Henry Ford, *My Life and Work*, 90. Sitting uneasily with this view of anti-Semitic totalitarianism is the fact that the architect of the Ford plant, Albert Khan, was himself Jewish. Yet Sheeler's images famously avoid celebration of the plant's architectural innovations. The series is a celebration of the plant's machinery, not its designer. Sheeler's images of the plant avoided depiction of the assembly line or of any connection between parts of the plant. Smith, *Making the Modern*, 115. see also Grant Hildebrand, *Designing for Industry: The Architecture of Albert Khan* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 123.

plant, Sheeler concluded, “one is witnessing the workings of an absolute monarchy. It confirms the preference for that type of government with the proviso that the monarch be of the caliber of Henry Ford.”<sup>697</sup> Ford could replace democratic government, even as he had replaced religion in Sheeler’s frequently cited claim that in the modern era, since “industry concerns the greatest numbers,” the factory could substitute for the “gothic cathedral.”<sup>698</sup> On the strength of the Rouge project Sheeler was invited to Stalinist Russia to make similar industrial studies, but he declined the offer because of what art historian Martin Friedman termed Sheeler’s “fundamental xenophobia” and his “moralistic commitment to American subject matter.”<sup>699</sup> Sheeler’s River Rouge project is not visibly anti-Semitic or anti-immigrant, but in the context of the “whitening” then being accomplished by nativist modernism there is a demonstrable connection between the virulent (racial) and more successful (industrial) modes of “standardization.” Sheeler’s specific aestheticizing abstraction of Ford’s modern industry (the elimination of labor and the spiritualizing of capital), accomplish exactly what Ford intended. We, elite audiences, absolve him of his deeply held racism, and place him (along with his prejudices) back at the heart of American modernity.

Despite being himself “prejudiced” against Ford, Stieglitz did take photographs of Georgia O’Keeffe with her black Ford Model A sedan when she returned from New Mexico in 1929 (fig. 5.5).<sup>700</sup> These images appear as part of the shift from composite modernism to a play of contrasts – the standardization of a spiritualized capitalism (still suspect in Stieglitz’s mind) is tamed by O’Keeffe’s even more spiritualized “whiteness” and individuality. Stieglitz used the camera to still and fragment the new Ford car, creating with the once “ugly” object a new work with “quality feelings.”<sup>701</sup> In Stieglitz’s image,

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<sup>697</sup> “From the huge machine which cuts steel plates at a pressure of a thousand pounds to the square inch to the gauges which measure thousandths of inches, efficiency of function and its accompanying beauty is evident.” *Fortune* (March 1931): 57 as quoted in Smith, *Making the Modern*, 127.

<sup>698</sup> “It may be true as has been said, that our factories are our substitutes for religious expression.” Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler: Artist in an American Tradition* (1938), 131.

<sup>699</sup> Martin Friedman, *Charles Sheeler* (New York: Watson-Guption Publication, 1975), 71. The architect of the plant, Albert Khan, on the other hand, would go to work for the Soviet Union.

<sup>700</sup> Stieglitz also photographed O’Keeffe in 1933 with her newly purchased V8 convertible.

<sup>701</sup> It was the Ford Model T that Stieglitz referred to as ugly in his 1924 letter and the later Model A that he photographed in 1929. I remain unsure if Ford’s redesigns caused Stieglitz to change his mind on Ford’s ugliness. His use of only the back window in the 1929 photograph suggests it did not. However, after 1933 he would take what seem to be more celebratory portraits of O’Keeffe’s Ford V8’s tires and hubcap insignias.



the painter leans against the glossy black hatchback of her Ford, her chin resting on her hand, her body slightly turned away from the photographer, but her face looking back at him, framed just off center by the flat gray of the rear window. The image of O'Keeffe and her Ford began a series of its own, *Equivalent O*, which also included seven cloud studies (fig. 5.6 - 5.12). The sky is dark (like the black car), with highlights on clouds that formally echo the reflections of the sun and sky on the Ford's polished paint and chrome. Enlisting the Ford car as a component of the continually evolving spiritual message I traced in the previous chapter, Stieglitz attempted to force "standardization" into a dialectical relationship with "spiritualization." This series again demonstrates that Stieglitz did not simply turn against new modern technologies, but attempted to engage them, here reconsidering Ford's standardized production as a series of multiples that celebrated the varied forms of O'Keeffe and clouds. In fact, these 1929 harnessings of a woman, clouds, and the Ford come close to Stieglitz's dreamed film that would communicate his ideals to any viewer. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that Stieglitz's actual film was never made, that he never sold photographs for the price of a newspaper, that he grew increasingly frustrated by changes to commercially available photographic materials (especially the postal paper with which he hoped to make those inexpensive prints). Stieglitz frequently failed in his attempts to engage modern technologies and imbue them with "spirit" and "quality feelings," but he participated actively in widespread anxieties about the effect of standardization on American life and art.

In the 1920s many others also saw the increasing emphasis in America on standardization as problematic. Writing in 1927, French political scientist André Siegfried claimed standardization affected not only the products but also the producer: "'Fordism,' which is the essence of American industry, results in the standardization of the workman himself." Per Siegfried, although Americans were aware of the dangers of standardization, they prized production and "material advance" over "individual refinement and art." It was thanks to "Fordism" that "modern America has no national art and does not feel the need of one." Yet, it was not only the U.S. that might be threatened; according to Siegfried, "France has the same instinctive fear of American methods as symbolized by Ford as she did of the

German system on the eve of the War.”<sup>702</sup> Stieglitz’s 1924 reference to the Ford car as “ugly” is thus situated amidst the nuances of these period fears of standardization – yet his serialized images were treading precisely on such terrain. The link between serialization, standardization, and the cinematic was made explicit in 1925, when the American poet Vachel Lindsay, (whose 1915 book on film had suggested cinema was a universal language of symbolic hieroglyphs), compared the Ford car with the motion picture, writing ominously:

None of us has perhaps realized how closely akin is the motion picture to the all-conquering Ford car. The most inert soul in the world once learning to drive a car, even a Ford, is swept relentlessly past his own resolutions and convictions. He who hated all speed maniacs will himself run down chickens on the road, the dogs and cats, and finally his own fellow man. Nothing but jail will slow him down. The motion picture does the same thing to the human mind. To the inevitable speeding-up process of the motion picture has quite recently been added the speeding up of all other things in America. The whole nervous psychology of the entire American race has thereby been completely revolutionized. More and more hieroglyphics, and more and more speed, are making one nation of all the tribes and tongues under this government, and really making them one separate tribe. And the rest of the world looks on aghast.<sup>703</sup>

The “entire American race” had entered Ford’s Melting Pot. A common culture had finally been created to unite “all the tribes and tongues” of the nation, but it relied on an obsession with speed and a willingness to run down anything from a chicken to a fellow man. Maybe America could claim it no longer looked to Europe and its “ruins of History,” but Europe increasingly looked at its (Ford’s and Hollywood’s) “standards” with fear.

### *Conclusion of Composite Modernism*

Examining both Sheeler’s and Stieglitz’s Ford photographs sheds light not only on the production of whiteness in the realm of modernist imagery, but also on the circulating issues of media. Sheeler worked in both photography and painting. His 1930 painting of the Ford factory used photography as the basis of painting, a sort of pictorialism in reverse. But this radical trajectory made art writers nervous.

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<sup>702</sup> André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age: A French Analysis* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company 1927), 350-351.

<sup>703</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies: A Second Book of Film Criticism* (1925), Myron Lounsbury, ed. (Metuchen, N.J. : Scarecrow Press, 1995), 235.

Celebrating Sheeler's Ford photographs in *Creative Art* in 1931, the critic Samuel Kootz traced the "origin" of these photographs not to the machines of the plant, or to the mechanism of the camera, but to Sheeler's "painting history."<sup>704</sup> This inversion of Sheeler's actual practice (matched by dealer Edith Halpert's reluctance to show or sell the photographs) had the effect of blunting the emerging discourse of photography's uniqueness as an art. Praising the impact of Sheeler's painting on his photography, Kootz's assessment was an exact inversion of Hartmann's turn-of-the-century anger at Edward Steichen and Gertrude Käsebier for applying their training as painters to their photography. Kootz's compliment was also radically different than the ideal of Stieglitz and Strand, who foregrounded their experience exclusively in the medium of photography.<sup>705</sup> Anxiously negotiating the effect of Sheeler's photography on his painting could only restore the "minor" status to the photograph, a status that the first Stieglitz circle worked so long to contest. Kootz, in his 1930 book *Modern American Painters*, criticized the "'peculiar primness and bridled quality' of Sheeler's recent paintings (he reproduced *Upper Deck*). This he blamed on 'the cameraman's care for detail ... for an eager exactness,' which yielded works that he found 'too coldly scientific.'"<sup>706</sup> Probably stung by such criticisms and abetted by his gallerist Halpert, Sheeler soon gave up photography to focus on his painting, reinforcing the normative hierarchies of media and the policing of their boundaries.

Was it the memory of composite modernism's lessons and aesthetic advances that made Stieglitz one of the few artists who resisted the dominance and separation of painting from the new media of the age? He continued to show alongside painters even as influential artistic movements of American art during the 1930s – f.64 in photography and the Regionalists in painting – prided themselves on their

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<sup>704</sup> Samuel M. Kootz, "Ford Plant Photos of Charles Sheeler," *Creative Art*, vol. 8, 1931, 266. Celebrating Sheeler's photographs, Kootz used a language of nativism: "no sentimental overtones," "crisp," "plainspoken," "unspoiled, unchanged, untouched," "pure, unornamented, faithful to its utilitarian purposes." The plant seems to have represented the best of both feminine and masculine America, its "forms, at times slender, straight, virginal, change with rapid tempo into brutal, clutching, crushing symbols of power."

<sup>705</sup> "...I have never painted. I never felt the urge to be a painter, and maybe that is why I have created endless numbers of photographs which really enjoy a life of their own." Stieglitz to Heinrich Kühn, 15 August 1923, Collection of Lotte Schönlitzer-Kühn, Tirol, Austria. As quoted in Alfred Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz, Photographs & Writings*, ed. Sarah Greenough and Juan Hamilton (Washington: National Gallery of Art; New York: Callaway, 1983), 205.

<sup>706</sup> As quoted in Carol Troyen, "Photography, Painting, and Charles Sheeler's View of New York," *The Art Bulletin*, (Dec, 2004): 41. This essay more deeply explores Sheeler's dual practice.

commitment to a specific medium. The photographers of f.64 positioned themselves as inheritors and reinventors of Hartmann's definition of "straight," "pure" photography, while the Regionalist painters called for representational painting that would depict an exclusively "nativist" set of motives. In 1931 a champion of Regionalism, critic Thomas Craven, resurrected the language Marius de Zayas had used to censure nineteenth-century American intellectuals and turned it on the second Stieglitz circle itself. Craven called their abstraction "a hothouse product nurtured in little pots of imported soil," and compared the American members of this avant-garde to "little stables of thoroughbred horses." Condemning the "purification of painting," Craven might at first be imagined to be looking back to the first Stieglitz circle, celebrating the ethnic mixing and aesthetic diversity that de Zayas put forth with Francis Picabia in 1915.<sup>707</sup> But Craven aimed at more nativism, not less. His isolationist modernism infuriated the American avant-garde with that 1934 reference to Stieglitz as "a Hoboken Jew without knowledge of, or interest in, the historical American background."<sup>708</sup> Shifting from ethnicity to medium, Craven suggested that Stieglitz became involved with media outside photography and befriended painters because he "saw a golden opportunity for photography which, as a reproductive agent, might usurp the time-honored position of painting in rendering the real world." But this "golden" opportunity was not a praise-worthy search for pluralist specificity, synthetic hybridity, or dynamic tension; instead it was a very perversion of the "normal" role of painting as representational. Craven saw in Stieglitz a self-interested huckster who "threw himself whole-heartedly into the march of the painters toward 'purity'," art purged of its representational element, so that representation could be secured by photography alone.<sup>709</sup> Craven cautioned that this "purity" of painting could "not prevent its degradation into complete vulgarity."<sup>710</sup> In this anti-Semitic gloss on an old story, it was clearly yet another international plot in which the "Hoboken

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<sup>707</sup> Thomas Craven from *Men of Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1931), 506. Craven's *Men of Art* begins disconcertingly with 1927 celebration of Italian Fascists in Rome, calling Mussolini the new Caesar. *Ibid.*, 1. At the end of his introduction He counsels the reader not to assume "another Renaissance would sweep the world if wealthy experts like Mussolini, Khan and Ford would only organize a chain of guilds and put a picture in every home." *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>708</sup> Thomas Craven, *Modern Art: The Men, the Movements, the Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940 c1934), 311.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.* Craven celebrated Stieglitz's photographs, but wrote: "The photograph, however disguised or altered, remains a mechanical record. It contains scant evidence of mind and imagination." 377.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*, 322. Schools of modern art "were born in Paris; they had their day of publicity; they died. They were transported to America where, by artificial propagation, they flowered prematurely and passed away." *Ibid.*, Xix.

Jew” had fooled American artists into believing that painting should be pure, saving the best (representation) for his medium of photography. Craven thus called for a return to representation in painting to defeat this un-American impulse.

Of course, the irony was that in his *Equivalents* series Stieglitz attempted to challenge straight photography’s limits as only representational in order to introduce a language of abstraction for his own medium. Nonetheless, the connection between medium specificity and suspect foreign elements forms a thread throughout the criticism of the period, contributing to the nativist turn of Stieglitz himself. The foremost Regionalist painter Thomas H. Benton reiterated Craven’s judgment in his review of *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (a 1934 celebration of Stieglitz published on his seventieth birthday). Here Benton also referenced the “empty purity” of American modernism, and accused the avant-garde of being “so fastidiously afraid of contamination that it starts the construction of personal hot houses.”<sup>71</sup> But Benton’s review did more than rehearse Craven’s arguments. The painter argued (with an element of sarcasm) that it was Stieglitz’s religiosity, his pretensions to being a “seer” and a “prophet” that brought him paradoxically closest to being authentically American, for America produced more cults than any other nation on the globe. Pointedly, Benton equated Stieglitz with black minister Father Divine – who distributed books of practical psychology and *The Life and Teachings of Masters of the Far East* to his followers – and with the female evangelist Aimee McPherson – the first to use modern technologies such as the automobile and radio to spread her religious message. The techniques of these spiritual leaders, assimilating new technologies and diverse Western and Eastern sources to create a multi-ethnic and transcultural American spiritualism, could indeed be linked to Stieglitz’s aspirations for spiritual “revelations” through serial photography and *essential* Americanism. But, as Benton pointed out, the photographer had failed to gain a popular following with his use of media.

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas H. Benton, “America and/or Alfred Stieglitz,” *Common Sense* (January 1935), 22. Marcia Brennan has pointed out the theory of Regionalism was contradicted by its artwork: “Benton’s notion of regionalism was itself problematic, given the highly uniform and excessively manner character of his ostensibly heterogeneous regional subjects.” Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 206. For more on Craven’s relationship with Benton, specifically on the question of anti-Semitism see Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 97-100.

Stieglitz's late notion of photography as an "unmediated" and "transparent" conveyor of meaning finally found a champion in the father of canonical modernist medium specificity, critic Clement Greenberg, who himself haunted Stieglitz's gallery in the 1930s. Although Greenberg shared the disparagement of Stieglitz circle painters as "hothouse weeds," he learned much at the gallery he knew as An American Place.<sup>712</sup> Undoubtedly through the experience of Stieglitz's work, Greenberg came to call photography "the most transparent of the art mediums devised or discovered by man." Yet Greenberg upheld medium specificity by paradoxically condemning photography to the task of representation, writing that photography, "because of its superior transparency and youth," did not have to struggle, but could embrace naturalism and focus on "explicit subject, anecdote, or message."<sup>713</sup> He urged photographers to pursue the literary qualities that Stieglitz claimed to have rejected in the turn-of-the-century Ashcan school, the literariness that the photographer had attempted to purge from his modernism in *Five Points, New York*.<sup>714</sup> Greenberg reversed the claims of Craven, arguing that painting must focus on abstraction and leave representation for the younger, transparent art of photography. While the transparency of this new media seemed to Stieglitz to allow abstract revelation to be conveyed *unmediated* to the audience, for Greenberg it required the acknowledgement of subject matter. Photography was again a young medium, forced to draw its significance from the world as Hartmann had urged nearly half a century earlier. Art historians comparing Stieglitz and Greenberg on the terrain of painting have traced the way the latter purged the feminine from abstraction to create a new modernist

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<sup>712</sup> Greenberg referred specifically to O'Keeffe as a "hothouse weed" in a 1932 letter to Harold Lazarus as discussed in Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 163.

<sup>713</sup> Greenberg claimed, "Photography is closer today to literature than it is to the other graphic arts" and counseled "The final moral is: Let photography be literary." Painting had to reduce subject matter to the impersonal or "become abstract, for a number of reasons, historical, social, and internal, that hardly touch photography at its present stage." The photographer could use the "still so relatively mechanical and neutral a medium, to identify the 'human interest' of his subject as he cannot in any other medium." Clement Greenberg, "The Camera's Glass Eye: Review of an Exhibition of Edward Weston," 1946, in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-49*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago, 1986), 61-62.

<sup>714</sup> In 1964, Greenberg argued the photographer "ought to be thankful for that—who wouldn't rather be a literary than an abstract artist, so long as he did not have to sacrifice ambition or quality?" "The photograph has to tell a story if it is to work as art." In the same essay he reduced photography to technology, arguing, "This speed and ease have radically expanded the literary possibilities of pictorial art. All visible reality, unposed, unaltered, unrehearsed, is open to instantaneous photography. But it is only within the last thirty years or so—with the perfecting of the miniature camera—that more than a very few ambitious photographer-artists have concentrated on the snapshot." Clement Greenberg, "Four Photographers: Review of *A Vision of Paris* by Eugène-Auguste Atget; *The World Through My Eyes* by Andreas Feininger; and *Photographs by Cartier-Bresson*, introduced by Lincoln Kirstein" (1964) *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, Vol. 4. 183 and 187.

formalism for a subsequent generation of painters.<sup>715</sup> Following these studies I would also suggest Greenberg purged bodily notions of race as well in his sublimation of media's diversity into the purity of painting's privileged medium specificity.

In 1943, three years before his death, Stieglitz wrote to the wealthy collector and Washington gallerist Duncan Phillips: "It has been a terrific struggle for 54 years to keep the 'WALLS WHITE' I think you will understand the significance of that. And by 'WALLS' I mean the basis of all relationships."<sup>716</sup> Yet, Stieglitz exaggerated. The walls of modernism had not always been those of the white cube; whiteness had not always been the basis of relationships. There had been gray bloodless Puritans, gray "unclean" ethnics, and there had even been flashes of composite modernist color.

This dissertation has offered pivotal cases of these polychromatic sparks in the Stieglitz circle's formulation of modernism, transforming the complex aesthetic Royal Cortissoz termed "Ellis Island Art" from an insult into a usable category of composite modernism. I hope this framing of early modernism might yield a useful interpretive tool for works that have been particularly reticent to interpretation. Could composite modernism, for example, shed light on Arthur Dove's collage *Goin' Fishing*, originally entitled *Nigger Fishing*, purchased at a record price by Duncan Phillips in 1937? In a rare footnote to his recollections of Stieglitz, Herbert Seligmann (interestingly also the author of a progressive 1920 book on race issues entitled *The Negro Faces America*) noted of Dove's title: "It should be stressed that the title of Arthur G. Dove's painting "Nigger Fishing" was given in accordance with the colloquial use at the time. I have not felt warranted in changing the title, although personally I should not use a word to which colored people seriously object. Both Dove and Stieglitz were entirely free of color prejudice."<sup>717</sup> Can this title's

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<sup>715</sup> Clement Greenberg has been deftly compared to the Stieglitz circle on the terrain of painting. Maria Brennan focuses on Stieglitz circle's "corporeal transparency" as giving way to Greenbergian formalist aesthetics. Marcia Brennan, "The Contest for 'the Greatest American Painter of the Twentieth Century': Alfred Stieglitz and Clement Greenberg," *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 232-271. Caroline Jones has traced Greenberg's complicated rejection of O'Keeffe and Stieglitz. Caroline A. Jones, "Sweating out Cubism," *Eyesight Alone*, 144-202.

<sup>716</sup> Stieglitz to Duncan Phillips, April 16, 1943, as cited in Celeste Connor, *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 72.

<sup>717</sup> "The condition of public feeling with regard to race is one of disease. The past lives on unconquered and poisons the present. Slavery is legally abolished, but neither white men nor Negro men are free of a constant preoccupation with color." 1 "In a world composed for the most part of colored races, fully embarked on new adventures toward autonomy, America had to be reminded not only by a great northward migration of colored people during the war, but by race riots, chiefly in 1919, that new movements and aspirations were stirring on their own continent. It was blood-letting in the streets of American cities that accomplished

troublesomeness be read productively in relation to the diverse media (bamboo and denim shirt sleeves) and techniques of collage that Dove used to make the work itself? Can its composite form rebuke a later obsession with medium specificity?

How might the later famous painting of the Stieglitz circle fit within the history I have outlined? Might we consider their use of the “minor” media of watercolor, pastel, and collage to create “essentially American” art to be a sublimation of the racial connotations of composite modernism? Did O’Keeffe, Hartley, and Demuth redirect the power of diversity into the gendered terms many scholars have used to theorize their paintings?

I hope this history of composite modernism has applications to the further study of early American modernism outside the Stieglitz circle as well. How, for example, might de Zayas’ notions of hybridity operate in the Harlem Renaissance portraits by German-born Winold Reiss or the caricatures of Mexican Miguel Covarrubias? What might the reception of de Zayas’ exhibitions of African sculpture tell us about the reception of the visual arts of the Harlem Renaissance? Does a reconsideration of Ford offer anything to the interpretation of Sheeler’s Precisionist painting or later nativist interiors?

Examining the function of composite modernism beyond early modernism one can trace its sublimation in Greenbergian formalism, which diverted the power of modernism’s early intersection with aesthetic, social, and bodily diversity to define medium specificity as a process of internal refinement and hierarchization holding painting and its evolution in isolation from the other arts. Art historians such as Ann Eden Gibson have begun to interrogate the homogeneity of Abstract Expressionist artists’ race and gender that has canonically accompanied the formal purity, suggesting that the practice of Abstract Expressionism may reveal that a troublesome composite lurked behind Greenberg’s theories of purity. Continuing to trace the lineage of composite modernism I suggest that the sublimated heritage of composite modernism reemerges in reactions against Greenberg’s high modernism, such as Robert

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anxious heart-searchings that were long overdue.” 4 (*Alfred Stieglitz Talking* 18) (ft note on a Jan 23, 1926 story. Stieglitz associate Herbert J. Seligmann described his working method this book: “With the knowledge and assent of Stieglitz, to whom I showed most of them, I made a series of notes, writing down from memory as soon as possible after the event, sometimes the same night, sometimes the next day, what I had seen and heard....In a very few cases, Stieglitz had penciled on my manuscript an alternate wording which he felt more clearly expressed his intention. In every case the changes he suggested were adopted.” *Ibid*, vi-vii.



Rauschenberg's collage and assemblage sculpture, which opened the cages that isolated media from each other and made aesthetic heterogeneity productive. Finally, we can see the traces of composite modernism as transformed and reaching a new level of postmodern potency in the multimedia, mixed medium, new media of our own multicultural and transnational age.

## Figures



### Beyond the Quota—in the Steerage

A Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, Pioneer among the Artist Photographers of America

Fig. 5.1 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907 as published in “Beyond the Quota—in the Steerage,” *Vanity Fair* (August 1924): 544. New York Public Library.



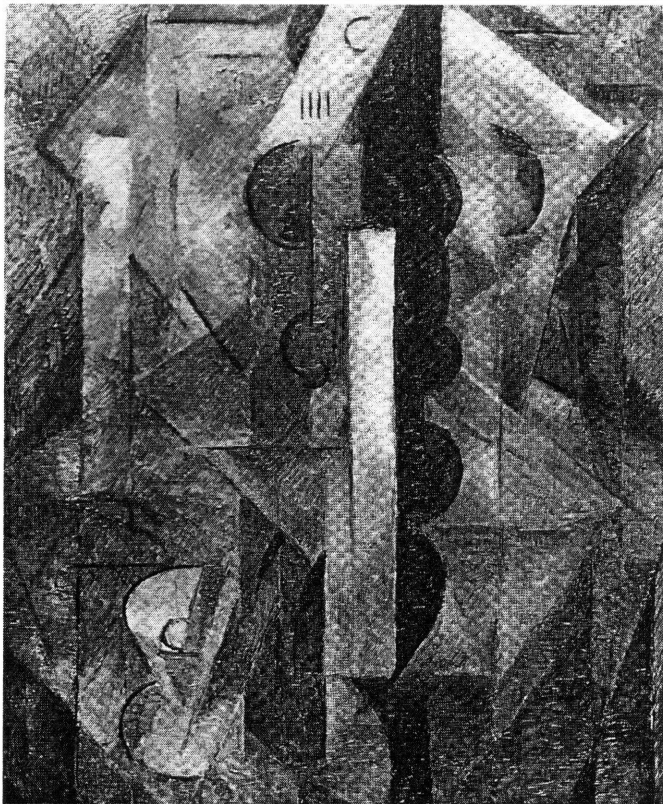
Fig. 5.1 Detail







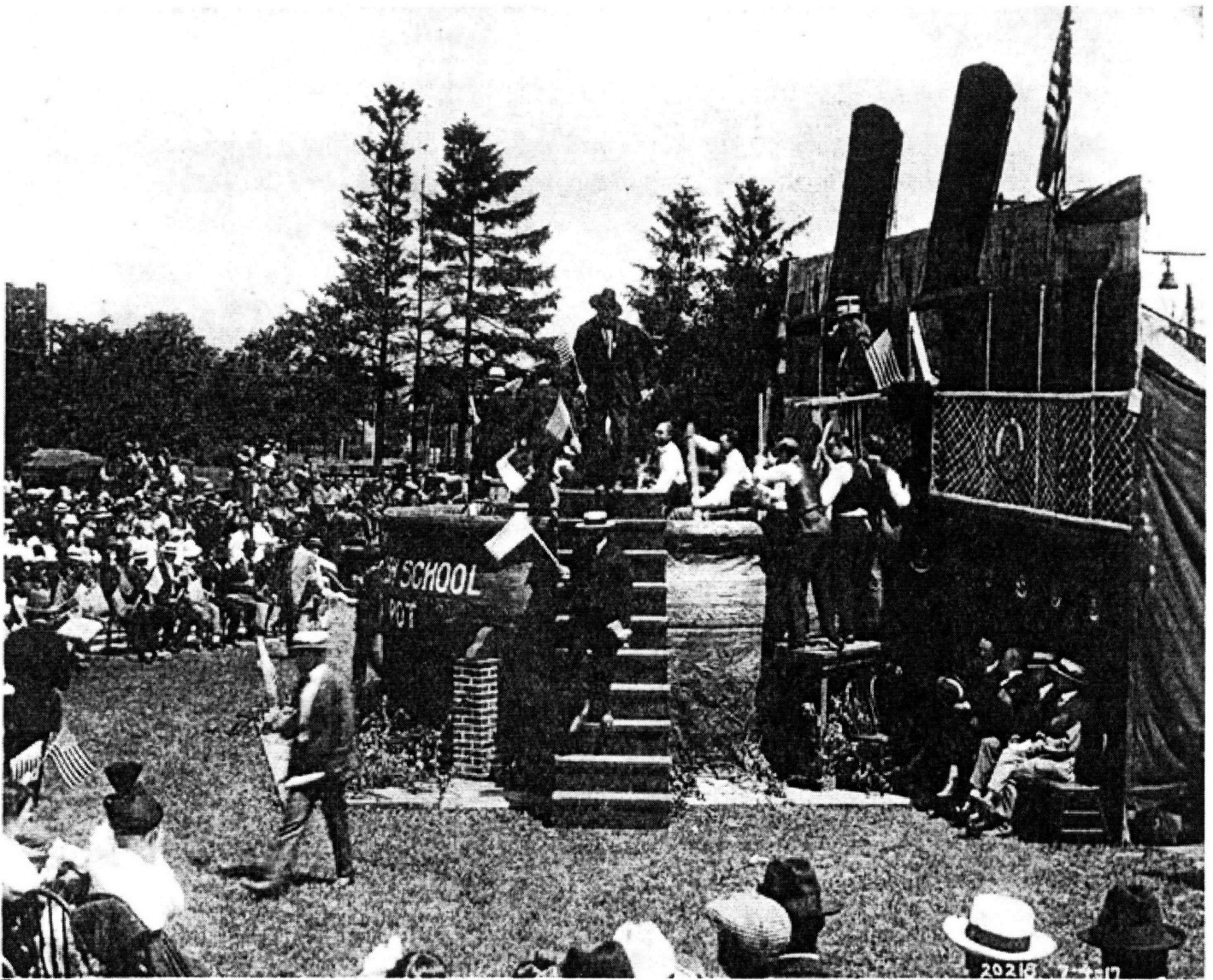
5.2 Sadakichi Hartmann as the Chinese Prince in *The Thief of Bagdad*, 1924. UCR.



5.3 Marius de Zayas, *Still Life (with African Sculpture)*, c. 1942-1943, published in Marius de Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, ed, Francis M. Naumann. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 130.





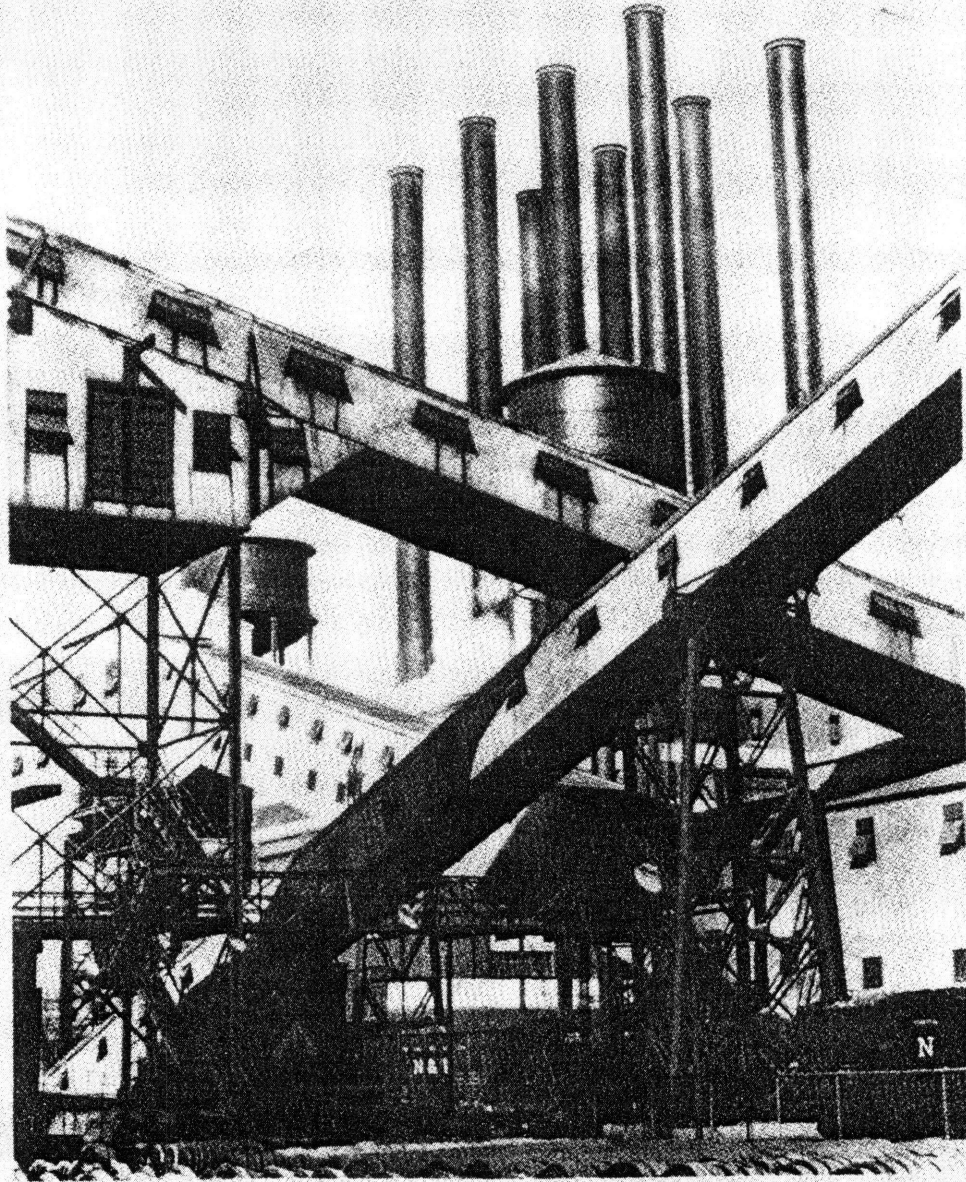


From the Collections of The Henry Ford

5.4 Graduation Ceremony from Henry Ford English education program, c. 1915.



5.5 Charles Sheeler, *Criss-Crossed Conveyors*, as reproduced in *Vanity Fair* (February, 1928), 62, published in Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 114.



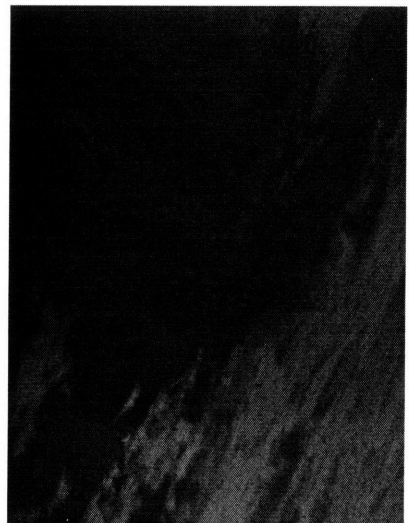
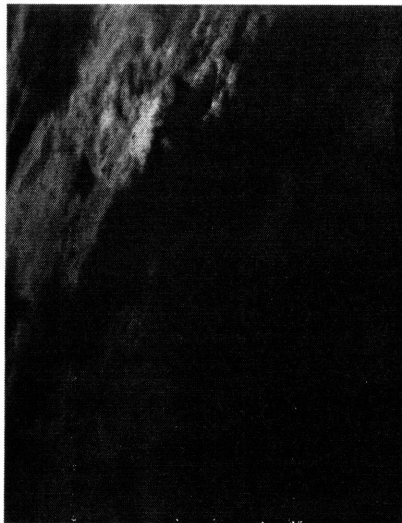
CHARLES SHEELER

## By Their Works Ye Shall Know Them

THE Ford automobile factories in Detroit, of which the view above shows a segment of its chutes, elevators and power-house stacks, may justifiably lay claim to being the most significant public monument in America, dwarfing in shadow across the land probably none so widely and more intimately than the United States Senate, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Statue of Liberty, or even the novels of Harold Bell Wright. In hyperbole and mysticism it has been compared, typically, reverently, vindictively, to the central ganglion of our nation, to an American altar of the God-Obsessive of Mass Production. But it is simply one man's monument to his own organizing and merchandising genius. The gross

magnitude of that achievement is a national by-word: 9,500 cars per day of the old Model "T" Ford; 12,000 cars per day, it is expected, of the new Ford, 90,000 employees in Detroit and the total to be doubled in the coming year; and a vast hive of fully developed corollary industries. Surely Henry Ford, the name of the present-day Colossus of Business, an almost divine Master-Mind, in a landscape where size, quantity and speed are the cardinal virtues, it is natural that the largest factory turning out the most cars in the least time should come to have the quality of America's Mecca, toward which the pious journey for prayer

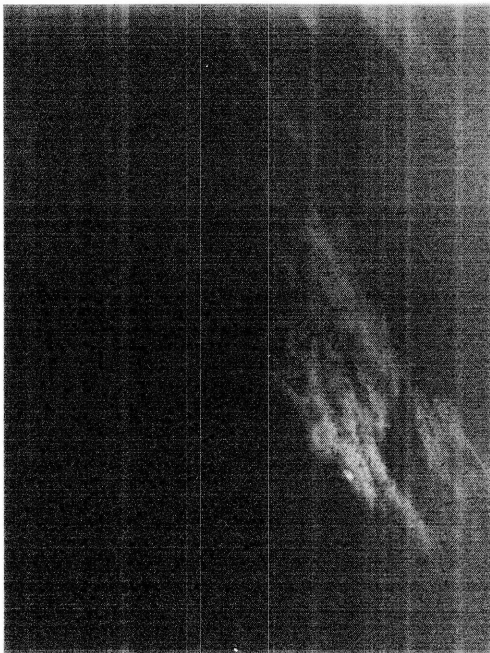
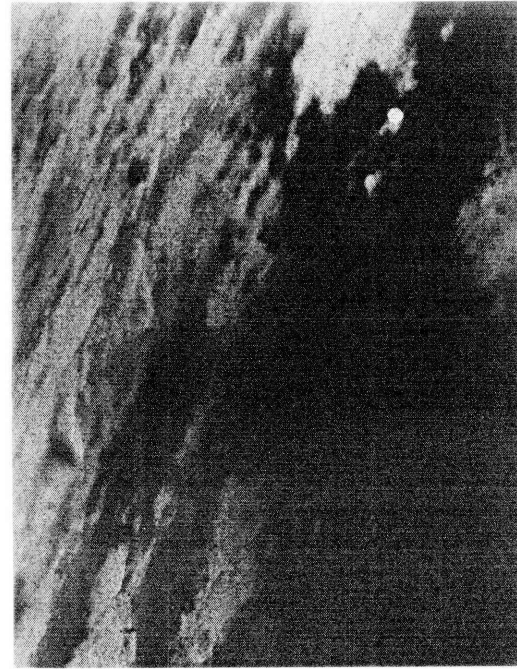
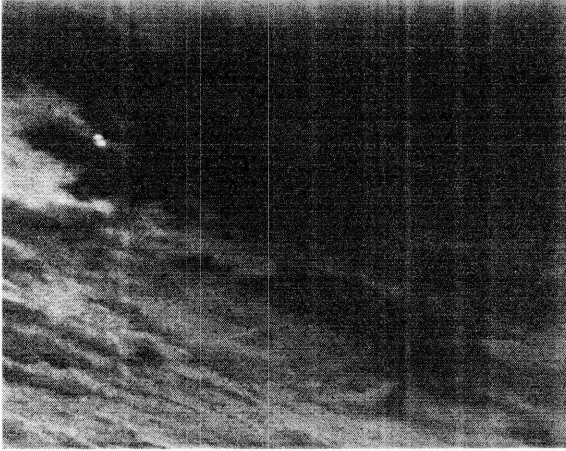




- 5.6 (upper image) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>1</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1306.  
5.7 (lower left) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>2</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1264.  
5.8 (lower middle) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>3</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1265.  
5.9 (lower right) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>4</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1266.







- 5.10 (upper left) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>5</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1267.  
5.11 (upper right) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>6</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1268.  
5.12 (lower left) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>7</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1269.  
5.13 (lower right) Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent O<sub>8</sub>*, 1929. National Gallery of Art, cat. 1270.





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