

**Progressive Nostalgia: Alfred Stieglitz, his  
Circle and the Romantic Anti-Capitalist  
Critique of Modernity**

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### **Declaration**

I, Catherine Berger, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.  
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has  
been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the involvement of Alfred Stieglitz – photographer, editor, art collector, impresario, talker – and his circle in the development of American modernism in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Through the analysis of photographs and artworks in other media by the Stieglitz group, the journal *Camera Work*, the gallery 291, a vast correspondence and art theory, criticism and social thought of the period, Stieglitz and his circle are situated in the context of an international debate about modernism. Notably, the Stieglitz strand of American modernism is considered in terms of a dialogue with German culture and philosophy, constellations that, it is claimed, proved formative for Stieglitz. The thesis argues that underlying all of his various endeavours is a specific unifying structure of thought: the romantic critique of capitalism. Romantic anti-capitalism was particularly current at the time in Central Europe as an emotional response to modernity that drew its values from the past. Most poignantly, Georg Lukács expressed it in his early, pre-Marxist writings, such as the essay collection, *Soul and Form* (first published in German in 1911). It is equally the aim of this thesis to theorise the interpretive category of romantic anti-capitalism, to investigate it as a *Weltanschauung*, an ideology and a type of discourse. As a period term itself, the category of worldview, poses a problem in its overlap with the topic of the study. It is hence treated both as a method and as an object of enquiry. Romantic anti-capitalism as a whole, neither clearly progressive nor reactionary in political terms and inherently ambiguous, allows us to disentangle the myths that have been reiterated in many previous studies of Stieglitz and his circle and define his outlook with new precision.

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146 Francis Picabia, *Here, This is Stieglitz Here*, 1915, ink, graphite, and cut-and-pasted painted and printed papers on paperboard, 75.9 x 50.8cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

147 Alfred Stieglitz, *Fountain* (photograph of assisted readymade by Marcel Duchamp, 1917. Gelatin silver print, 23.5, 17.8cm. Collection Jacqueline Matisse Monnier.

148 Marsden Hartley, *The Warriors*, 1913, oil on canvas, 121.29 x 120.65cm. Curtis Galleries, Minneapolis.



## Introduction

Alfred Stieglitz is well known in the history of art as a photographer, editor, gallery owner, art dealer, collector, sponsor of artists, impresario, letter-writer, talker, husband and promoter of Georgia O'Keeffe and as a self-proclaimed anarchist. The labels are so numerous that any one convincing single characterisation seems impossible. Hence this multi-facetedness has been interpreted as a compliment to a person who managed to resist contemporaneous and subsequent pigeonholing of his manifold endeavours. However, as Stieglitz scholars in general are well aware, it is advisable to take a distance from Stieglitz who was adept at shaping his own persona and reception of it. It is surprising in this regard that no serious analysis of the ideological implications of Stieglitz's activities has ever been undertaken. As a result of such an ideological study,<sup>1</sup> I propose, we end up with one label that pertains to all of Stieglitz's efforts, to all of his activities, to what he said and did, despite the ubiquitous ambiguity in all those matters: Alfred Stieglitz was a romantic anti-capitalist, one on a mission to spread his view of the world.<sup>2</sup>

It is widely agreed that the Stieglitz circle produced a major strand of American modernist discourse during the early years of the twentieth century. In this thesis, I take a critical angle on that claim, firstly by situating Stieglitz and his allies in relation to larger international cultural tendencies of the period (and avoiding the trap of American exceptionalism), and secondly by enriching the discussion about early twentieth-century modernism through consideration of its romantic component. As a result, a fuller picture of American modernism emerges that neither limits the content of this cultural phenomenon to a formalist concern with particularities of media, nor to an affirmative, undialectical relationship with modernity characterised by an enthusiastic embrace of everything that is new. Modernism, in its historical and artistic formation, incorporated sceptical, frustrated and anxious responses to the present just as much as its pictorial language had roots in the nineteenth-century

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If not otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

<sup>1</sup> The idea of the individual subject having a unifying ideology has to be justified. I take my model of this from Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1980), see below.

<sup>2</sup> Romantic anti-capitalism as an interpretative category for art history has for example been employed in: Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Temptation of Saint Redon: Biography, Ideology, and Style in the Noirs of Odilon Redon* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 17; 86-88 and in David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent during the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 136-141.

Romantic and Symbolist currents. The phenomenon of romantic anti-capitalism does not only help to explain Stieglitz's ideology but also the modernist idioms of his circle; for instance, it accounts for the differences in photographic style between Stieglitz and artists he collaborated with such as Edward Steichen or Gertrude Käsebier, and the discrepancies between their vision of the camera as an expressive and emotive tool and its mechanical nature.

Discussions of Stieglitz's relationship with modernism are often limited to the second decade of the twentieth century, when he exhibited the work of Parisian avant-garde or modernist artists at his gallery 291. However, the deeper roots of Stieglitz's thinking cannot be comprehended simply in terms of the practices and ideology of the Parisian art scene. In particular, it is a German-language sensibility, I argue, that underlay Stieglitz's view of the world. Romantic anti-capitalism, although a phenomenon that spread across the capitalist world in the period, was in its most acute manifestations a specifically Germanic constellation. Stieglitz's romantic orientation is not only characteristic of a strand of modernism as a whole, but it also offered him, the son of first-generation German-Jewish immigrants to the United States, a position from which he could express his opposition to what he perceived as the "philistine" and spiritually impoverished society of the United States.

### **Romantic anti-capitalism**

In my use of the category of romantic anti-capitalism I am indebted to one book in particular: *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* by Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy (the English translation appeared in 2001, the French original, *Révolte et mélancolie: le romantisme à contre-courant de la modernité*, in 1991). In their quest for a definition of romanticism (after so many attempts had failed), Löwy and Sayre look at various forms of art and at politics with equal measure as sites where romanticism manifests itself and identify romanticism as a critique of capitalist modernity that draws its values and objectives from the past. But, as a critique of the present from within the system, it is itself a modern phenomenon, thus constituting

modernity's self-criticism.<sup>3</sup> All romantic utterances have in common their opposition to the social characteristics that the German sociologist Max Weber identified as the disenchantment of the world, its quantification and mechanisation and the predominance of instrumental reason.<sup>4</sup> The nostalgic attitude maintains that what is lacking in the present once existed in the past. What qualifies the past (more or less distant) as "better" is nothing except its remoteness, its difference from the present.<sup>5</sup> In essence, all negative characteristics of the present are results and manifestations of capitalism. The revered past, therefore, is the pre-capitalist past and romanticism is revealed as a form of anti-capitalist thought.

Such anti-capitalist sentiment is not "conscious, implicit, and mediated" in all romantic utterances to the same degree.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes its proponents may be aware of the economic exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, but this is by no means the rule. The anti-capitalist critique focuses on those aspects of capitalism whose negative effects are experienced as impoverishment by members of all social classes. Romanticism principally criticises reification as it was identified by Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, that is the dehumanisation of life, the transformation of human relations into things as a sign of the generalisation of exchange value. Reification is entailed in Weber's definitions of disenchantment, quantification and instrumental reason. The critique is aimed at the relations of production (in capitalism centred on exchange value, quantitative monetary relations), the means of production with scientific underpinnings (technological means) and the state and the modern political apparatus that governs the social system and is governed by it.

Romanticism, however, is not only a negative critique but also offers positive propositions for amending the wrongs of modernity. Löwy and Sayre identify three main strands of positive action. The first is the "poetization" or "aestheticization" of the present, for example through the creation of an aesthetic state (Schiller) or the romanticising of daily life by "heightening" the ordinary and familiar (Novalis) or through the manifestation of the supernatural, the fantastic or the sublime in works of

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 29-39.

<sup>5</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 20.

art. These actions remain on the imaginary level. Rather than bringing the romantic to life, life is brought to the romantic artwork. The work of art thereby plays the role of a utopian model, in which it is possible to combine real life and romantic longing, and as such it serves as a source from which the desperate can drink.

Secondly, on the level of the real, paradise can be discovered through the transformation of one's immediate environment within the confines of bourgeois society. Examples are aestheticism, dandyism, the creation of a community of likeminded individuals in utopian experiments (such as artists' colonies) – or simply falling in love.

Löwy and Sayre's third option for a positive romantic quest requires leaving bourgeois society behind, for instance through abandoning the city for the more sparsely populated countryside, or emigration to exotic countries. In short, through abandoning centres of capitalist development for an "elsewhere" that keeps a more primitive past alive in the present. This third tendency holds the preceding solutions to be illusory, or in any event merely partial; it embarks on the path of authentic future realisation.<sup>7</sup>

Ambivalence is central to the definition of romanticism. Romanticism is contradictory in its position on personality and notably in its political orientation. Löwy and Sayre have drawn up a typology, illustrating the category's whole political spectrum ranging from restitutionist, conservative, fascistic, resigned and reformed strands on the right and reformist, revolutionary and utopian tendencies with their sub-tendencies of Jacobin-democratic, populist, utopian-humanist socialist, libertarian (anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist) and even Marxist progressive expressions on the left. Romanticism is thus defined neither as reactionary nor revolutionary, but it is a resource for both sides of the spectrum in expressions of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Romanticism does, however, differ from the centre of the political spectrum, in particular from liberalism. In its recognition of the contradiction between the individual agency that capitalism promises and the reality of a limit to the execution of such "free play," romanticist individualism is distinct

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<sup>7</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 23-24.

from liberal individualism, which does not register the contradictory position of the modern individual in the face of the modern world.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Weltanschauung***

Löwy and Sayre's all-encompassing account of romanticism, as neither an artistic movement nor a political ideology, but as both and more, is based on their methodological category of *Weltanschauung*. *Weltanschauungslehre*, the study of worldviews, was developed in Germany around the turn of the century as a philosophical discipline. The term *Weltanschauung*, or less often *Weltansicht*, was coined by the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). It was part of his project to separate the humanities and natural sciences – in German the *Geistes-* and *Naturwissenschaften* – into interpretative and calculative disciplines in order to free the former from their subordination when judged by the positive methods of the latter. *Weltanschauung* was the result of Dilthey's conclusion that all philosophical systems had failed so far and will always fail to explain reality and that only in combination with the historical dimension can anything of truth be gained from the big metaphysical schemes. Dilthey took philosophy itself as his object of philosophical inquiry and arrived at the conclusion that metaphysical systems are nothing but instances of worldviews that emerged and developed over the course of time. Unlike the philosophical systems, worldviews do not claim to be universally valid, but acknowledge their own limited effectiveness as bearers of truth and explanations of the world. No worldview can prove its supremacy over the others and the contradictions between them remain insurmountable.

Like romanticism, the category of worldview contains an element of critique of the existing (in its case of philosophical systems) and an element of an active quest. The term *Weltanschauung* embodies two aspects: the thought system with which to comprehend the totality of reality as outlined above and also the longing for a *Weltanschauung* as a unifying structure of thought and feeling that underlies a collective of people and acts as the basis for the formation of a community. This connotation of “search for *Weltanschauung*” has been largely lost in the English

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<sup>8</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 25.

language adoption of the word, hence my preferred usage of the German term as a loanword throughout this study.

*Weltanschauung's* account of the category of totality is its main advantage. A concept of totality, linking consciousness to historical facts, is a natural ally of the romantic critique's sweeping distaste for capitalism and for modernity as a whole: the value that romanticism opposes to fragmented modernity is its own unity.<sup>9</sup> Romanticism posits the unity of the self with two all-encompassing totalities: the entire universe, or nature, on the one hand, and the human universe, collectivity, on the other.<sup>10</sup> In addition, totality helps to understand the redemptive function that modern theories accorded to art as it links the non-reality of artistic utopias with the actual world. It connects the present of non-fulfilment and longing with a better existence in the future and with the past from which romantic anti-capitalism draws its inspiration. *Weltanschauung* as a method allows me to talk about connections that cannot be defined in terms of cause and effect relationships. It licenses homologies and it seems particularly sympathetic to the kind of interpretative problems artworks pose.

But the method has its shortcomings. Romanticism as a *Weltanschauung* is too all-encompassing as a category when questions about the emergence of certain strands of thought in a particular historical and social environment are raised. Löwy and Sayre do not seem to see this problem. For them, romanticism is a continuing strand of thought that maintains its original critical force throughout its existence, which for them is coterminous with that of capitalism itself. For Lukács (1885-1971) however, whose early writings are arguably paradigmatic of romantic anti-capitalism (and who dismissed it on "Marxist" grounds after the political shift signalled by his "Blum Theses" published in 1928), romanticism in its latter days lost what oppositional force it might once have had. Related to the counter-revolution, Lukács claims, original Romanticism, too, had mostly reactionary tendencies.<sup>11</sup> The great merit of the early Romantics was that as opponents of capitalism they could better describe the emergent phenomenon of capitalism "as a definite, historical era of human

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of *Weltanschauung*, however, is not always linked to romanticism. Richard Hamann, for example, used it to analyse liberal capitalism in *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst* (Cologne: Dumont, 1907).

<sup>10</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> To make the distinction clear I capitalise "Romanticism" when referring to the early-nineteenth-century movement.

development” than its proponents.<sup>12</sup> But once the capitalist order was firmly established, when even counter-revolution was coming to terms with it (as during the Restoration in France), no critical insights could issue from romanticism anymore as it was tied to the bourgeoisie, which for Lukács lost all its revolutionary credentials after 1848. Under the new circumstances romanticism could only stand for reaction. The democratic strands that were part of romanticism before now turned into their opposite.<sup>13</sup> I want to distinguish between the original Romantic Movement, as a particular outcome of early-nineteenth-century life in the industrialised world on one hand and on the other the later adaption or transformation of this style of thought around the turn of the century when the motors of modernisation and their socio-economic consequences had changed and intensified in various ways. This, too, is particularly important in relation to art, as artistic forms are contingent on social developments in a similar way.

Löwy and Sayre’s persuasion about the ongoing nature of romanticism is a corollary of the fact that their method of *Weltanschauung* is confined to the sphere of consciousness. Although it claims to link thought to the circumstances of life, this life is not qualified with any specificity. In Dilthey’s account there is no concept of sociology as a detailed analysis of the social structure out of which worldviews emerge, or of discourse as a systematic theory of statements and their possibility, both of which would clarify in more detail the motors behind historical development. Further, *Weltanschauungslehre* is itself an expression of romantic anti-capitalism, which means an overlap with the object of my study. And lastly, *Weltanschauung*, like romantic anti-capitalism, departs from the conflicted presumption of subjectivity.

Since I cannot in all cases decide if the positive value of *Weltanschauung*’s totality makes up for its deficiencies as an all-encompassing and socially and historically vague category, I try to work both within and outside this concept, using it both on its own terms and as an object of historical enquiry. To complement *Weltanschauung*, I also draw on sociological analysis inspired by period sources such as the writings of Karl Mannheim and later models provided by Raymond Williams, the social histories of art of Arnold Hauser and T.J. Clark and the concept of discourse as laid out in Michel Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

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<sup>12</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1962), 26.

<sup>13</sup> Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 178.

Mannheim adopted the term *Weltanschauung* from Dilthey and also his insight that some experiences elude theorisation (the concept of the “atheoretical”). But in the essays collected in *Ideology and Utopia*, the *Sociology of Knowledge* and *Sociology of Culture*, Mannheim works with a more distinct sociological category for the social derivation of meaning than Dilthey, looking not only at worldviews as available vistas, but as responses motivated by a particular situation.<sup>14</sup> Mannheim is particularly interested in art as a carrier of worldviews. His approach in the essays on *Weltanschauung* and historicism guides Hauser’s concept of the social history of art.<sup>15</sup> But in the *Sociology of Culture*, Mannheim further revised his method, particularly in respect to art history.<sup>16</sup> It is this revision – the rejection of intuitive analogies between form and content in works of art which license vulgar Marxist approaches that treat artworks as reflections of social relations in a reductionist account of ideology – that influenced Clark.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Clark extends his materialist method and interest in questions of class, ideology and power through notions of totality and discourse that allow for the structure of artistic production, forms and reception to be examined and understood as a whole.

Whereas *Weltanschauung* lacks a detailed account of life, the method of ideology critique explicitly seeks to identify relations between forms of consciousness, class interests and political power. However, a narrow view of ideology as genetically tied to any one of the classes of the Marxist scheme according to the traditional base-superstructure model or indeed as “false consciousness” would not provide many insights for the analysis of romantic anti-capitalist thought in a particular historical period. Such a definition of ideology has been long discarded in Western Marxism. Instead, ideologies are now widely acknowledged to be related to their social bases in paradoxical ways. An open view of ideology can accommodate a phenomenon

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Essay on the Sociology of Culture*, ed. Ernest Mannheim in cooperation with Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 1999); Karl Mannheim, “Beiträge zur Theorie der Weltanschauungs-Interpretation” and “Historismus,” in *Wissenssoziologie*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Berlin and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1964), 91-154 and 246-307.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Mannheim, “Digression on Art History,” in *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*, 32-33.

<sup>17</sup> T.J. Clark, “On the Social History of Art,” in *Image of the People: Gustav Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 9-20. In the preface to the second edition, Clark writes that he regrets “the ironic courtesy intended to Arnold Hauser” in his title. See T.J. Clark, “Preface to the New Edition,” in *Image of the People: Gustav Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 6.



such as romantic anti-capitalism and its collective character, which transcends boundaries of classes and class fractions.

In his *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*, the Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn embraces the contradictoriness of ideologies. Therborn argues that ideologies work like discourses by interpellating subjects in both meanings of that term: as the “subjugated to something and in the sense of creators of something.”<sup>18</sup> This account of how ideology transforms individuals into subjects derives from Louis Althusser, whom Therborn revises by renaming the process of interpellation “subjection-qualification.” Therborn insists that there is no perfect coincidence between these two aspects of interpellation: the requirements of qualification would dictate the forms of subjection. The correspondence between these two is itself part of the power struggle inherent in the formation and choice of ideologies. The specific analysis of subject formation through subjection-qualification shows that this process does not follow a homogenous path and that therefore general claims about the effects of ideologies have to be abandoned and replaced by a concept of a multitude of contradictory and intersecting subjectivities. Not all subjectivities are class-determined; Therborn respects the equal importance of gender, for example. It follows from this that classes, too, are not unified subjects – a notion that is of importance for my project since I often have to look at class fractions within the dominant class in order to account for possibly contradictory cultural requirements within it.

Therborn’s account, which rejects possible idealist remnants in the form of transcendental truths and pre-existing, natural states not only offers an advanced definition of ideology, it also solves the problem of subjectivity inherent in *Weltanschauung*. Dilthey doubted the existence of a universal truth and human access to it and consequently revised the Enlightenment understanding of a self-contained subject as the origin of all knowledge and experience by adding a historical dimension and by replacing positivist tactics with the method of interpretation. Yet the result was merely a plurality of pictures of the world, not the realisation that subjectivity itself is multi-faceted, fragmented, constructed and

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<sup>18</sup> Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1980), 15-17.

entangled in the constitution of power of discourse, as Foucault most notably has argued.

The fact that Foucault conceived his theory as a criticism of the Marxist theory of ideology does at first seem an obstacle to a simultaneous acceptance of both methods. But Foucault's understanding of ideology depended on a vulgarised version of false consciousness and a simplistic base-superstructure model. Despite its shortcomings, discourse theory offers useful conceptions about the relationships between textuality and knowledge. Foucault's method in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* forms a break with previous totalising accounts of history with their stress of long-term continuities and linear development including in the realm of concepts. Instead, Foucault proposes the notion of discontinuity as the central tool of the historian, particularly in the field of knowledge and ideas. Consequently, for literary analysis neither the spirit of a period, nor groups, schools, generations or movements, nor the personality of the author serve as a unity, but only the particular structure of a given *oeuvre*, book or text. Organising documents, establishing series, working within the document (instead of interpreting it) are now the tasks of the historian. It is to some extent this which I attempt in my bringing together of the various sources of Stieglitz's work, photographs, magazines, galleries, letters and relationships. Yet in contrast to Therborn, and along with Dilthey, Foucault's account lacks a concept of social totality in which material production and the interests it generates have a determining effect. Therborn's scheme, despite its level of indeterminacy between ideology and social position, respects this, as does Williams's cultural sociology.

A methodological approach as outlined above, merging ideology, discourse and *Weltanschauung*, allows me to take seriously claims such as that of the autonomy of art, to analyse them for their wider function and without merely dismissing them as false consciousness. When modernists such as Stieglitz built their artistic concepts on the conviction of the existence of an autonomous aesthetic realm, they were not simply deluded. If we want to understand the function and implications of concepts such as utopia or the redemptive power of art, we have to acknowledge the complexity that the idea of art's separateness played in that discourse, on the surface, even if artists like Stieglitz ignored the grounds on which such an assertion could be made and its consequences. If we want to understand how exactly art participated in society, how Stieglitz perceived and envisaged its role and function, then we need to

acknowledge and understand the premises on which he did it. Such an approach at times requires long detours through intellectual history that may seem disconnected from the story of the Stieglitz circle but are necessary to establish the ideological universe Stieglitz and his group inhabited.

### Points of Critique

The various activities of Alfred Stieglitz and the role he played in shaping the American discourse around modernism have elicited a large number of studies. The first to examine the artistic production of the Stieglitz circle as a group project at book length was W. I. Homer in his 1977 study *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde*.<sup>19</sup> With a chronology limited to the years prior to the American entry to the First World War, Homer only considers what subsequent scholars have called the “first Stieglitz circle”: the years when Stieglitz’s focus was on the gallery 291 and the journal *Camera Work*. Homer’s study, which is essentially biographical in organisation, narrates the story of Stieglitz’s formative years in Germany, the founding of the Photo-Secession and his introduction of European modernism to New York. Homer’s main interest, however, lies in the American artists Stieglitz began to promote, exhibit and support financially, namely John Marin, Arthur Dove, Max Weber, Abraham Walkowitz and Marsden Hartley; it is this group that Homer calls “the first American avant-garde.”

This attribution of avant-garde status – based on a black-and-white picture of all previous American art as academic, provincial and produced for an uncultured public<sup>20</sup> – leaves out any sociological and other connotations the term bears at least since the appearance of Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* in 1974, which limits the proper usage of “avant-gardes” to three historical movements: Dadaism,

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<sup>19</sup> William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> Art played a considerable role in American society before the turn of the century, as the prominence of the art exhibition at the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 demonstrates, see Carolyn Kinder Carr and George Gurney (eds.), *Revisiting the White City: American Art at the 1893 World’s Fair*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, National Portrait Gallery, 1993). Much of what has been seen as innovative in modernism was the result of longer processes that started in the nineteenth century. See Joanne Marie Mancini, *Pre-Modernism: Art World Change and American Culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Surrealism and Constructivism. It is partly this claim to have identified the first American avant-garde that makes Homer's book problematic – even more so since this catch phrase was adopted by subsequent scholars without further reflection.

Most later studies of the Stieglitz circle lack a proper theoretical framework too. This criticism extends to the exhibition catalogue of the National Gallery in Washington, *Modern Art and America* (2000), edited chiefly by Gallery's curator of photography, Sarah Greenough. Taking artists' statements literally, as Greenough does, is especially problematic in the case of Stieglitz, who was acutely aware of the power of discourse. Greenough adopts his carefully constructed and disseminated image as a revolutionary iconoclast and selfless fighter for ethical ideals uncritically and repeatedly attributes Stieglitz's impact to the special composition of his character, ignoring the context and external circumstances. As a result, she misses the fluidity of Stieglitz's views, shaped over the course of his life by the changing socio-economic conditions both in the American polity writ large and in the New York art world.

Greenough acknowledges that there was a backward moment in Stieglitz's modern ambitions and that his view of modern art as expressive was rooted in Symbolism. She sees the retrograde element confirmed in Stieglitz's 291 exhibitions which not only showed the works of Rodin, Picasso, Rousseau, Matisse, Cézanne, Marin, Hartley and English theatre designer and theorist Edward Gordon Craig but also lesser known and more conventional artists such as Willi Geiger, a German painter who studied with Franz von Stuck, Donald Shaw MacLaughlin, a Canadian etcher, and Eugene Higgins, an American painter influenced by Millet who depicted labour and the poor.<sup>21</sup> Greenough explains this conservative element in the 291 exhibitions in terms of the practical considerations of Stieglitz and his associate, the photographer and painter Edward Steichen, to draw more people to the gallery. However, her essays lack the theoretical frame that would prompt her to study these ambiguities further. Greenough is eager to convey the notion of a group project and

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<sup>21</sup> Sarah Greenough et al. (eds.), *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries*, exh. cat. (Washington: National Gallery of Art and London: Bulfinch Press, 2000), 29. Greenough does not mention that Gordon Craig was among the most radical and influential theatre theorists in the twentieth century and that this choice is another instance of Stieglitz's eye for the radically new.

thus, like Homer, she constructs an image of an avant-garde movement. This is reinforced by comparison of the circle with Parisian avant-garde groupings.

More widespread is the tendency to ignore any retrograde elements and to attribute to Stieglitz an unambiguous modernity. Arising from the concern to create a linear history of American modernism that starts before World War Two – and the weight given in such narratives to Cubism and abstraction (and their mutual entanglement) – various efforts have been made to discern Cubist elements in the Stieglitz circle's work. Although he acknowledges that such tendencies did not occur in American modernist art before the Armory Show in 1913, Milton Brown is sure that "of all the modernist styles Cubism was unquestionably the most influential" and that the rationalism of Cubism appealed to the American artist who, "esthetically naive and inhibited," "required a rational explanation for his departure from convention."<sup>22</sup> Brown's limited understanding of Cubism as simply "rational" and formal surprises in the light of his 1955 book *American Painting: From the Armory Show to the Depression* which is otherwise a very informative and convincing study of early twentieth-century modernism in America that understands art as a social phenomenon.

Cubism's formal devices for suggesting pictorial space, including a flattened picture plane, fragmentation, geometric shapes and an attenuated relation to the actual world, can without doubt be found in the Stieglitz circle's works, mainly perhaps in those by Hartley, Marin, O'Keeffe and Paul Strand. But from an ideological perspective, the Stieglitz circle's works are closer to the Expressionist current of modernism, which in its concern with emotion and personality corresponds with the romantic critique of capitalism. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Wassily Kandinsky argued for art's capacity to resonate with the innermost recesses of the human soul and thus for the artist's function as a leader towards a better society where all the human faculties are respected. Such theories of *Ausdruckskunst* (expressive art) as the central characteristic of modern art may not be seen as the opposite to abstraction (nor to theory as such), as Kandinsky's own example shows.

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<sup>22</sup> Milton Brown, *American Painting: From the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 103-104.

In period criticism, such as the influential German books on Expressionism by Hermann Bahr and Paul Fechter (which Stieglitz certainly knew), no clear distinction was made between the various modernist movements, although there is a strong sense of the dialectical evolution of styles in opposition to each other.<sup>23</sup> As Geoffrey Perkins remarked, the apologetics of Expressionism in the period were more concerned with analysing the particular “Expressionists situation” that motivated the art, the feeling of the meaninglessness of the world, of the alienation of man from nature.<sup>24</sup> These were broadly speaking anti-capitalist sentiments.

A symptom of this was the Expressionists’ interest in non-Western art and cultures. The “primitive” served various ends: it was a locus of retreat from modern society, it gave impulses with which to salvage humankind from the degenerative effects of civilisation and it served as a counterpart to modern man himself who was perceived to have become wild again.<sup>25</sup> The interest in the “primitive” shows that modernity and accordingly modernism were complex and dualistic, torn between looking backward and forward. It gave artists a means with which to articulate this experience of contradictoriness.<sup>26</sup> The concept of the idealising of social simplicity has its origins in Romanticism. In its continuation early in the twentieth century, it was a form of romantic anti-capitalism. This category extends the discourse of which primitivism was a part to an analysis of the conditions which caused such utterances.

A critical approach using a concept of expressiveness was not limited to the German Expressionists but was widespread in American criticism of the period and beyond as a model for interpreting modern art. Besides Stieglitz, it was also the strategy of Katherine S. Dreier, co-founder together with Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray of the Société Anonyme whose collection of modern art is now located at the Yale University Art Gallery. Although Dreier is often stylised in the literature as Stieglitz’s opponent or the symbol of the end of his reign as the most important

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Fechter, *Der Expressionismus* (Munich: Piper, 1913); Hermann Bahr, *Expressionismus* (Munich: Delphin, 1916). Bahr counts among the Expressionists, besides Marc, Pechstein or Kokoschka also Picasso, Matisse and the Italian Futurists, who all have in common their fight against the naturalism of Impressionism and their new, internal definition of seeing, 54-56.

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Perkins, *Contemporary Theory of Expressionism* (Bern and Frankfurt: Herbert Lang, 1974).

<sup>25</sup> Bahr, *Expressionismus*, 128.

<sup>26</sup> Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), vi-vii.

spokesperson for European modernism in New York, the two figures had much in common. Like Stieglitz, Dreier was the child of German immigrants and committed to infusing American society with culture as a remedy for its crass commercialism. Dreier saw it as an innate human drive “to reach an understanding and a knowledge of spiritual laws,” and this search as nowhere more clearly expressed than in the arts.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, art can foster the mutual understanding of people with each other, across class boundaries, a concern that resonated with Dreier’s interest and dedication to social reform of the progressivist type.<sup>28</sup> In her vision of the spiritual forces of modern art she was influenced, again in parallel to Stieglitz, by Kandinsky as well as theosophy.

In his 1934 book *Expressionism in Art*, the critic Sheldon Cheney situates the concept of art in the sphere of the spiritual and intuition, opposed to the intellect. Art, for Cheney, includes a degree of mysticism. He regards it as a particularly modern characteristic to admit that there are spheres in the world as yet unknown.<sup>29</sup> This recognition includes the statement that art’s essence lies neither in beauty nor in mimesis, but in mystery. Modern art is distinguished from its imitational and reasonable predecessor by its irrationality. Such views build on the modernist conception of the role of art as occupying a separate sphere in society, that is, on the claim to autonomy, which simultaneously implies a critical stance of art towards social reality. In accordance with the romantic anti-capitalist worldview, art with its autonomous privilege has the duty to provide for the spiritual needs endangered in modern reality. This dualism of modernist autonomy and the feeling that these spiritual faculties were properly addressed once in the past illustrates the seemingly contradictory nature of romantic anti-capitalism. In line with the romantic longing for pre-capitalist values, Cheney sees art as going in cycles, and the evolution of modernism not as a break with, but a return to art’s vital tradition in pre-capitalist times.<sup>30</sup> Cheney offers evidence of a more flexible view of the terms of Cubism and Expressionism that got lost in later art history’s dual view, which was decidedly influenced by formalist writing. I analyse in the second chapter how the modernist,

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<sup>27</sup> Katherine S. Dreier, *Western Art and the New Era: An Introduction to Modern Art* (New York: Brentano, 1923), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Greenberg, “Art as Experience: Katherine S. Dreier and the Educational Mission of the Société Anonyme,” in *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*, ed. Jennifer R. Gross, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Sheldon Cheney, *Expressionism in Art* (New York: Liveright, 1934), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Cheney, *Expressionism in Art*, 14-15.

formalist focus on medium is related to a romantic anti-capitalist critique that believes in an impact of works of art beyond their own realm and also how both tendencies are related to the aestheticist dictum of art for art's sake.

Cheney posits naturalism as the opposite of modernism, as an outdated and bygone form of art. He shares this view with most surveys on early twentieth century American modernism, which offer a narrative divided between the backward Realism of the Ashcan School on one side and the progressive modernism of the Stieglitz circle on the other. But it is misleading to present the Ashcan School Realism as representing merely an obsolete aesthetic, especially since it had reverberations in later American artistic practices, including the Social Realism of the Great Depression and the art practices which built on everyday objects and signs of American modernity, including billboards, skyscrapers or cars. Furthermore, it is similarly narrow to see all of the Stieglitz circle's art as unambiguously new, despite the experimental formal vocabulary. In their pictorial language, the Ashcan School and the Stieglitz circle might differ. But in their content and motivation, they come very close. Both groups sought an adequate way to visualise the essence of modern – especially urban – life; both believed in the artist's duty to use their medium as a means of communication and that the artist's unique personality could be a social force and both saw capitalism and its effects as the main negative aspects of modern reality.

It has become commonplace for historians to situate Stieglitz and his circle in relation to the cultural radicals active in New York prior to 1917, and especially to Waldo Frank and Paul Rosenfeld, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne and Lewis Mumford, who clustered around the magazine *The Seven Arts*, a short-lived affair, published for only one year from 1916 to 1917. Such an angle of enquiry sheds light on Stieglitz's artistic project in relation to the intellectual tendency of the period. Edward Abrahams in his *Lyrical Left* (1986) vividly describes the of New York's Greenwich Village who, alienated from capitalism and genteel mainstream American bourgeois society, believed people could liberate themselves by combining radical politics and modern culture. This optimism was expressed in both cultural and political terms by people such as John Reed, Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Hutchins Hapgood and Eugene O'Neill. The hint of nostalgia in Abrahams's narrative itself already implies that a romantic worldview united these people, although he does not



name it. Abrahams's book also makes clear why the Great War invalidated these beliefs and illustrates the widespread view that the pre-war years of the twentieth century shared the optimist belief in progress of the nineteenth century, and that with the impossibility of such naïve views after the war, the disillusioned twentieth century really begins.

The comparison of Stieglitz with the Lyrical Left, Cultural Radicals, Young Americans, Greenwich Village or by whatever name they are referred to, is most interesting when it comes to the politics of this group, the differing nuances of their ideologies. The dominant opinion is that the cultural criticism had only a very limited political message and was chiefly concerned with questions of personality. As Casey Nelson Blake argues, this conclusion is a mistake, grounded in earlier historians' inability to understand the political connotations of romanticism as a critique of capitalism and the industrial division of labour that is "far removed from the categories of conventional liberal and socialist politics in the twentieth century."<sup>31</sup> Blake avoids the separation of the Young Americans' cultural criticism from their political writings and from their autobiographical musings, thus providing a holistic account including work, activity, discourse, ideology and social background like that I wish to establish for Stieglitz.

Besides the cultural radicals of Greenwich Village and the Stieglitz circle, a third revolutionary force acted in pre-World War One New York: a vital movement of actual political radicalism, in which anarchists were especially prominent. A juxtaposition with these radicals is especially relevant with regard to Stieglitz's claims to be a "philosophical anarchist" and it is surprising that an in-depth analysis of the various ideologies of these factions has never been undertaken. I aim to fill this gap in the third chapter.

Whereas most accounts of the pre-war Stieglitz circle are content to provide a survey, more recent studies – which are more often dedicated to his later career – usually have a more sophisticated character. They sometimes consider the wider social and political factors of the time and have some theoretical pretensions. However, often these books' main objective is to establish a coherent history of twentieth-century

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<sup>31</sup> Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticisms of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 3.

American art by finding sources for post-World War Two developments, especially Abstract Expressionism. This has a curious result that some of the authors in question seem to echo the twenties' nationalist concern with an "authentic" American art.

An example would be Wanda Corn's *The Great American Thing* (1999), which was motivated by the desire to study early twentieth-century American modernism as an art in its own right, not as a second-rate copy of European developments, thereby contesting the view that American modernism only entered the international stage after World War Two.<sup>32</sup> But exactly in this goal also lies a major problem of Corn's book. Corn is aware that American exceptionalism has been discredited as a concept. Nevertheless, wishing to uncover the roots of the exceptionalist discourse, which she locates in the Stieglitz circle, Americanness is still the main organising principle of *The Great American Thing*. Its author remains attached to the exceptionalist view of America as one big middle-class society with minimal class tensions and a special predilection for modernity.

Anxious to establish an account of a transatlantic dialogue, Corn writes that the development of American modernism was significantly spurred by the presence of European artists who sought exile in the United States during both World Wars, and that the quest for an American art was not only motivated by the Americans themselves, but to a big extent was also driven by the wish of some European artists who feared for the continuing existence of culture in war ravaged Europe. But in this narrative she overemphasises the distinction between the interest of European exiles such as Duchamp and Picabia in a machine aesthetic and the spiritual concerns of American artists, omitting the fact that the Expressionist model of the Stieglitz circle had European precedents and counterparts and that, as Andrew Hemingway shows in *The Mysticism of Money*, American artists, even some who were temporarily associated with Stieglitz, did explore the imagery of urban industrial America and that, indeed, their motivation came from a form of romantic anti-capitalism.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2013).

It is also the aim of Celeste Connor's *Democratic Vision: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (2001) to oppose a Greenbergian history of American art and to offer an alternative to the perceived European framework of Stieglitz's modernism, posited against an American one.<sup>34</sup> The most striking claim that Connor makes in relation to previous views of Stieglitz is that his project was democratic. She does this on the premise that democracy, as an inherent American cultural ideal reaching back to Walt Whitman, would enhance the Americanness of the Stieglitz circle's art. Connor claims that it was Stieglitz's aim to produce an American art that took into consideration all of the various parts of American society and create a common national identity for them. But Connor's common identity only accounts for the mass immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe as the main constituents of this plural society, ignoring the internal migration of African Americans from the South to the North and from the country to the city as well as the situation of Native Americans. Connor's confusion in terms of race is repeated with the category of class, which she does not recognise as an impediment for Stieglitz's alleged striving to create equality in American society. This limited view of the pluralism of American society derives from the problematic (not so say profoundly ideological and uncritical) conception of democracy that underlies Connor's study. Only on such a naïve basis is the assertion that the Stieglitz group's art was democratic possible. Further, there is no account of how the Stieglitz circle's art was actually received by a wider public, a necessary ingredient for an account that wants to prove the democratic credentials of any type of art production.

Connor sees an anti-modernist element in what she terms the Stieglitz circle's abandoning of modernism for a "New Realism" after the First World War which she ties to the emergence of the landscape as an important symbol in the art of Hartley, Marin, O'Keeffe and others. In contrast to the optimist belief in progress of the pre-war years signified by the city, the landscape stands for a retreat from the materialism and consumerism that defined the American city after the war. Connor describes this romantic or anti-modernist moment thus: "for the artists of the Stieglitz group, disenchanted as they were becoming with the urban scene and its clamoring, competitive marketplace, the lure of untouched, sparsely populated land proved

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<sup>34</sup> Celeste Connor, *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

irresistible.”<sup>35</sup> Nature holds an important position in the romantic worldview as a place for retreat from disenchanted reality. But expression of such feelings does not presuppose a naturalistic style and, in turn, romantic tendencies in the Stieglitz group did not only surface after the Great War. As the example of Stieglitz’s *The City of Ambition* (fig. 1) illustrates, even pre-war the pictures express a certain discomfort with modern reality and an awareness of modernity’s negative sides. A modernist idiom must not be equated with optimism about the present and future (nor is anti-naturalism or abstraction its only formal marker). I see a different trajectory. In the pre-war production, an optimistic belief in the possibility that things could change for the better prevails; after the war, with the advent of the pro-business Republican administration of the 1920s, certainty about the persistence of capitalism motivated the retreat into the country and issued in a romantic anti-capitalist critique that was formulated as an alternative to the reality rather than as a challenge. Yet both were instances of critique all the same and were expressed in the modernist idiom. A romantic anti-capitalist worldview and a modernist style are consistent features of the Stieglitz project throughout its existence. The critique of modernity in Stieglitz’s art and that of the members of his circle follows no simple path of development, but is in fact a complex dialectic.<sup>36</sup>

Like Connor and Corn, in her *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory* (2001) Marcia Brennan is concerned with establishing a history of American modern art that starts with the Stieglitz circle.<sup>37</sup> Whilst her attempt to reconcile Stieglitz and Greenberg is not convincing, her claim that Stieglitz’s criticism was influenced by the critic James Gibbons Huneker’s concept of aesthetic transparency, and the consequent identification in both Huneker’s and Stieglitz’s ideas of Symbolist and aestheticist sources, makes sense.

Brennan’s main thesis is that Stieglitz very consciously controlled the public reception of the circle’s works and personalities by steering the discourse around a

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<sup>35</sup> Celeste Connor, *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>36</sup> Such an account of continuity goes with the argument that the structures of corporate capitalism emerged already in the Gilded Age and not only after America entered the First World War. See Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001).

certain interpretative category, which Brennan terms “embodied formalism”: a characterisation of the “symbolic forms and abstract, painterly structures of their group’s artworks as aestheticized analogues of the artists’ own gendered presences.”<sup>38</sup> Stieglitz’s close critical ally, Paul Rosenfeld figures prominently in Brennan’s argument. He was the chief vehicle through which Stieglitz spread his embodied formalist readings and influenced other prominent critics of the day, such as Henri McBride.

The main advantage of Brennan’s interpretation lies in the fact that it seeks to identify a common trait in the group project, despite the differences in the works by the various artists.<sup>39</sup> Brennan claims that Stieglitz and Rosenfeld derived their sexual theories from two sources: firstly from the British sexologist Havelock Ellis and from Sigmund Freud and secondly from Hunecker’s method of “aesthetic transparency.” She recognises that the Stieglitz circle discourse of embodied formalism was “in part a polemic against perceived inhibitions and restrictions of bourgeois society,” but this difficulty with bourgeois values is reduced to questions of sexuality.<sup>40</sup> I agree with her findings on Stieglitz’s conscious directing of the aesthetic discourse around the group and with the claim that sexual liberation thus addressed reveals an opposition to bourgeois values. But there is more at play. This sexual aspect is only one facet of a much bigger discontent with modern bourgeois values that can be traced to a specific kind of anti-capitalism.

A recent study of Stieglitz, if not of his circle, that impresses with its diligence and wealth of historical detail is Jay Bochner’s *An American Lens* (2005).<sup>41</sup> I agree with the importance Bochner attributes to Secessionism in Stieglitz’s career (which is his guiding theme although he abstains from analysing the Photo-Secession itself), yet his elaborate writing style and the originality of his “impressionistic” method cannot make up for the fact that the author’s approach to Stieglitz, whom he wishes less to

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<sup>38</sup> Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Secession* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2005).

criticise than to make the protagonist of a lyrical story, results in a uncritical restatement of existing mythology.<sup>42</sup>

## Questions

Identifying Stieglitz's romantic anti-capitalist worldview as his main motivation, I aim to provide a critical approach to the attribution of avant-garde status to the Stieglitz circle, an extended definition of its particular kind of modernism and an account of it that acknowledges the international sources for Stieglitz's art and discourse as opposed to a concentration on an Americanised history of modern American art.

The terms "avant-garde" and "movement" are more usefully linked to a dissident attitude much stronger and more all-encompassing than that of the Stieglitz circle. In addition to Peter Bürger's seminal study, Raymond Williams's social morphology of cultural formations is enlightening. According to Williams, the oppositional attitude of modernism has both its target and its source in art's autonomous existence in fragmented capitalist society.<sup>43</sup> The leading modern artistic production is characteristically in the hands of self-organised cultural formations – schools, independents, breakaway groups and specialising groups – opposed to official institutions in various degrees.<sup>44</sup> Only the specialising, the least challenging groups fit into a pluralist or open model of society. The alternative and oppositional group formations are inevitably in conflict with the status quo of social structures. According to Williams, this is because of the development of the "idea that the practice and values of art are neglected by, or have to be distinguished from, or are superior or hostile to the dominant values of 'modern' society."<sup>45</sup> Yet the actual possibility of establishing effective independent formations depended, obviously, on general social conditions. Bourgeois hegemony was never culturally monolithic. Different capitals (financial or industrial, for example) could distinguish class

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<sup>42</sup> For a thorough review of Bochner's book see Barnaby Haran, "Modernism into America," review of Jennifer R. Gross (ed.), *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America* and of Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Secession*, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2007): 334-338.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 71.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 72.

fractions whose cultural or religious views and needs were not necessarily reflected by established official institutions. These class fractions, themselves alternative or oppositional towards the main cultural tendencies of the ruling class they are part of, could act as potential supporters of dissident artists.

I regard Stieglitz's photography, as well as the works of the artists he associated with, including the pictorialists of the Photo-Secession or the American painters he exhibited at his various galleries, as examples of modernism. This attribution is grounded in a definition of modernism that extends the usual formalist focus on self-definition of the medium and, in relation to the romantic critique (which itself is a modern phenomenon), includes retrograde elements. "Modernist" and "romantic" need not to be understood as opposites; quite the contrary. This is perfectly in line with the thinking of Löwy and Sayre, who write that the Romantic critique of modernity "can be expressed through a multiplicity of artistic forms."<sup>46</sup> Romanticism, understood as a worldview, does not denominate an artistic style; nor did style define the original Romantic Movement. Romantic anti-capitalism does not only describe nineteenth-century naturalistic visual idioms, but can account for modernist ones, including abstraction. Since "the Romantic artist wages a battle against modernity on many levels, including the levels of form," modernism can be argued to provide the perfect idiom with which to express the Romantic experience.<sup>47</sup> I follow this critical account of modernism as an artistic form and discourse throughout the thesis. Yet it is in the last chapter, dedicated to Stieglitz's photographs of clouds, that the question is most pointedly posed in relation to the label of abstraction that these works are usually given. This formal quality stands in sharp contrast to these pictures' nostalgic content. Just as the romantic worldview relativises easy attributions of left and right in the political spectrum, Stieglitz's modernism makes one question too rigid categories of old and new.

In my view, the big paradox of the Stieglitz circle that has not been properly addressed to date is the ambivalence that lies in the modern forms of their art – especially in Stieglitz's own photographs – and the retrograde tendencies of their views as expressed in *Camera Work*, Rosenfeld's *Port of New York*, several catalogue texts and Stieglitz's correspondence. The concept of romantic anti-

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<sup>46</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 27.

capitalism, going back to Lukács and developed by Löwy and Sayre, provides the theoretical base to address this paradox. Stieglitz has to be studied in an international context. Whilst there is no denying that the question of “America” played an important role in early twentieth-century American art and that the age was characterised by nationalist sentiments and politics, modernism was inherently and essentially an international phenomenon. It is therefore necessary to study Stieglitz in an international context, even if one with nationalist expression, and look for sources other than American ones (Whitman is a favourite in the literature in that respect) that shaped his project. Other than the Parisian experimentations that undoubtedly influenced the modernist vocabulary of the Stieglitz circle, I would argue that it was German culture, German philosophy and social thought of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, that informed Stieglitz’s ideology and which is the main source for in his romantic anti-capitalist views. In the first chapter I attempt to demonstrate this connection in relation to Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession.

The concern with German-language sources also pervades the second chapter, where I look at the theoretical sources that underlay the effort to create an art that mattered in modern life. The early writings of Lukács in particular express hopelessness in the face of modernity and also point a way to its redemption. I will not claim that Lukács influenced Stieglitz directly; indeed I do not believe that Stieglitz read Lukács, despite his fluency in German. Instead, I see the congruencies as an instance of a simultaneity of thoughts, an example for the existence of epistemes. Even without a direct link, the similarity of Lukács’s and Stieglitz’s feelings (although the former expressed them on a theoretically much superior level) is another example of the rootedness of Stieglitz’s ideology in a Central European mindset.

I mentioned Williams’s sociology of culture because it is important to see Stieglitz in the larger context of his time, and, crucially, not to neglect the defining effects of social class. Alfred Stieglitz, born into a bourgeois family, was both part of the hegemonic class and due to his German-Jewish background part of a class fraction with differing cultural aims. Was he, as a gallery owner, a sponsor and as a photographer, a dissident artist? It is not only the modernist idiom of his photographs and the paintings he exhibited that licenses art historians in their assumption that Stieglitz was the leader of an avant-garde movement. Stieglitz’s discourse and his choice of vocabulary can prompt the same conclusion. He acted against the art



establishment of America and complained about the deep hostility to culture and the “inertia” of American society as a whole. This position definitely marks a dissent from official conventions. But Stieglitz’s ideal world is not the result of a radical break with traditions. Despite being interested in new content for art, his conception of the relation of art and society was not revolutionary. As an analysis of his ideology shows, he never aimed at overturning the existing conditions, but was in fact building a sanctuary within them. Unlike the historical avant-garde movements, Stieglitz never aspired to a realignment of art and life and the sublation of the category “art.”<sup>48</sup>

Stieglitz’s external relations are to be defined as alternative. The internal organisation of his circle was not based on formal membership. It was at times “organized around some *collective public manifestation*, such as an exhibition, a group press or periodical”: the galleries 291, the Intimate Gallery and An American Place and the journal *Camera Work*.<sup>49</sup> But *Camera Work* collected different ideological views from an array of contributors, many of whom had no direct affiliations to the actual Stieglitz circle. This was Stieglitz’s explicit goal. Thus, the internal organisation of the group may be categorised with Williams’ third type, a group not based on formal membership whose association rests mainly on a conscious group connection. But there are still some points of contact with radicalism, in particular with anarchism, as I show in chapter 3. Stieglitz’s qualified support for the emerging Dada movement in New York, in the persons of Duchamp and Picabia, is testimony to Stieglitz’s own anarchist claims and to his openness to forms of radical thought.

The many Stieglitz studies, of which those discussed above are only a small selection, have still not produced an account that has the theoretical optic required to confront the complex phenomenon of Stieglitz as a whole. The artistic production of the Stieglitz circle has to be studied in relation to the ideological structures accompanying it and it has to be placed in the cultural as well as socio-economic context of the specific historical moment of its existence. The interpretative category of romantic anti-capitalism allows us to bring together all strands of Stieglitz’s

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<sup>48</sup> See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>49</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 68 [emphasis in the original].

endeavour, even his buying and selling of works of art – a commercial affair! It is a way of inserting art into the daily business of modern life.

## Chapter 1: Secessionism

In 1902, Alfred Stieglitz, a photographer ardent to be recognised as an artist, staged an exhibition of his work at the National Arts Club in New York, and titled it “An Exhibition of American Photography arranged by the Photo-Secession.” Stieglitz had taken up photography in Berlin, where he studied at the Technical University during the 1880s and quickly advanced to some fame through the available channels of exhibitions and the amateur photographic press. When family circumstances forced his return to America, he encountered a vital amateur scene with clubs and exhibitions in his home country too. Intent on making his mark, Stieglitz joined the *American Amateur Photographer* and used his editorial position as well as the distribution of his photographic work as a strategy to critique the existing photographic organisations. From 1887 to 1894, the “Joint Exhibitions,” staged by the photographic societies of Boston, New York and Philadelphia, dominated the public showing of photographs. These salons promoted what the organisers considered the best in artistic as well as scientific and technical photography. They were open to all photographers, foreign and American, and a jury awarded diplomas and medals. For four years (1898 to 1901), the Philadelphia Photographic Society also collaborated with the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in order to foster artistic tendencies at annual salons.

Emerging tensions between traditionalists and progressives among the photographers caused these salons, as well as the various Camera Clubs and Photographic Societies, to decline. Stieglitz, firmly positioned in the progressive camp, was not alone in his concern for photography as art. A group of American photographers, who were to be known as the practitioners of “pictorialist photography,” had found their own idiom – a fuzzy, moody, soft-focus aesthetic – making them stand out in exhibitions at home and abroad. Together with his pictorialist friends, in 1901 Stieglitz boycotted the Philadelphia salon. This disagreement culminated in the founding of the Photo-Secession one year later.

The group of the later Photo-Secession started to evolve in and around *Camera Notes*, the journal of the New York Camera Club. When Stieglitz took over as editor, he developed the magazine from little more than a one-page information sheet concerned with club internal affairs to a high standard quarterly with photogravure reproductions

of work by future Secessionists, including Gertrude Käsebier, Clarence White, Frank Eugene, Joseph Keiley and Eva Watson Schütze. Sophisticated articles on photography as an art, art theory, and the technical aspects of photography written by the new associate editors Joseph T. Keiley, Dallet Fuguet and John Francis Strauss (all themselves photographers) and the critics Charles Caffin and Sadakichi Hartmann matched the high standards of the pictures.<sup>1</sup> The ideals and aims in *Camera Notes* were the same as those of the yet-to-be-founded Photo-Secession: exhibitions should have a strict jury, award no medals or prizes and be international in scope. The access to the international community of art photographers should be facilitated and the artistic quality such that it could compete at an international level. As Stieglitz raised the stakes in *Camera Notes*, opposition within the Camera Club arose. Occasionally, a conservative voice made itself heard in an article, for example lamenting the craze for the modern, especially in the guise of Impressionism.<sup>2</sup> Stieglitz had to put a note in *Camera Notes* to acknowledge that the magazine did not represent all the opinions of the club members.<sup>3</sup> Finally, on October 25 1900 Stieglitz and eighteen of his allies called for a special meeting of the club.<sup>4</sup> This time the dispute was settled in Stieglitz's favour and a resolution was made to stand behind the magazine as a club.

But the tensions remained and efforts to promote photography as an art were also taken up elsewhere. Competing plans with Boston-based photographer F. Holland Day finally forced Stieglitz to put up a show in New York to maintain his status.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The English-born Charles Caffin, already an established art critic in America by the time he joined *Camera Notes*, must have influenced Stieglitz's views and *vice versa*. Caffin's numerous articles, and above all his first book, *Photography as a Fine Art*, can be read as statements for Stieglitz's cause. See Sandra Lee Underwood, *Charles H. Caffin: A Voice for Modernism, 1897-1918* (Epping: Bowker, 1983). Sadakichi Hartmann wrote extensively on photography and modern art in general, and with his eccentric personality became an important figure in the emerging avant-garde circles in New York in the early twentieth century. See Sadakichi Hartmann, *Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings*, ed. Jane Calhoun Weaver (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel K. Young, "The Other Side – A Communication," *Camera Notes*, No. 2 (October, 1898): 46-49.

<sup>3</sup> Publication Committee, "Free Speech," *Camera Notes*, No. 1 (July 1899): 23.

<sup>4</sup> The minutes of which were later published in *Camera Notes*: John Francis Strauss, "The Club and Its Official Organ: Special Meeting of the Club," *Camera Notes*, no. 3 (January, 1901): 153-161.

<sup>5</sup> For Homer, the rivalry of two men – Stieglitz and the Boston-based photographer F. Holland Day – played a crucial role in the development of American pictorialism. Like Stieglitz, Day had gathered around him a group of amateurs, winning, amongst others, the loyalty of Stieglitz-friends White and Käsebier thanks to contracts he made with them on the jury of the Second Philadelphia Salon in 1899 See William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983) 41.

When Charles de Kay of the National Arts Club offered his rooms to Stieglitz, the latter seized the opportunity, and he selected the work of his favourite American co-workers including Steichen, Käsebier, Eugene, Keiley and White, to show alongside his own. The aforementioned title, “An Exhibition of American Photography arranged by the Photo-Secession” appealed to him, it seems, mainly because of its striking character. The photographers in question knew nothing about their affiliation before the opening of the show.

### **Amateur Photography in Europe**

It is obvious that in his ambitions for the artistic standards of photography, Stieglitz found a model in developments in Europe. It was in Germany that Stieglitz first came in contact with photography, although a community of amateurs did not yet exist when he arrived in 1881. The term “amateur” was crucial in Stieglitz’s quest. When he complained about photographic hobbyists, he did not call them amateurs. He reserved that term for the most serious pursuers of photography: the possible artists.<sup>6</sup> It meant the freedom from commercial, industrial or technological applications, which stood in the way of photography being accepted as an art. In this understanding, Stieglitz followed a tradition of which the title of the leading British photography journal, *Amateur Photographer* (which later had an American version of which Stieglitz was editor for some time) is another sign. The term meant not a lack in skill or dedication, rather the opposite. Deriving from the Latin word for “love,” it meant the purest appreciation of the photographic medium. This serious engagement presupposed an independent income. Photography was not a cheap hobby; as well as expensive cameras and printing materials it required as a lot of time if pursued seriously.<sup>7</sup>

In 1887, Hermann Wilhelm Vogel, Stieglitz’s teacher, finally formed a society of amateur photographers – the *Deutsche Gesellschaft von Freunden der Photographie*. At the end of the decade that group mounted a major photographic show in Berlin

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<sup>6</sup> See Alfred Stieglitz, “A Word or Two About Amateur Photography in Germany,” *Amateur Photographer*, No. 5 (February 25, 1887), reprinted in: *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, ed. Richard Whelan, preface by Sarah Greenough (New York: Aperture and London: Robert Hale, 2000), 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “A Word or Two About Amateur Photography in Germany,” 9.

with an art section providing an international sampling of amateur photography.<sup>8</sup> Another impetus for the development of artistic photography in Germany came from a group of photographers based in Hamburg around Ernst Juhl, who founded a society and organised international exhibitions at the local Kunsthalle.<sup>9</sup> Foremost in art-photographic matters was the *Club der Amateur-Photographen* of Vienna, founded in the late 1880s. It presented an exhibition of artistic photography in 1891 that served internationally as a model for future shows of this kind. The Viennese did not mix pictorial works with scientific, professional and other non-artistic categories of photography, and there was a strict jury.

This show prompted a number of British photographers around George Davison, Henry Peach Robinson and Alfred Horsley Hinton to secede from the conservative-minded Photographic Society of Great Britain (from 1894 the Royal Photographic Society) and to found The Brotherhood of the Linked Ring, which soon admitted foreigners to its ranks, among them Stieglitz. The Linked Ring was elitist in conception and election was a great honour. However, no distinction was made between professionals and amateurs, and straight photographers as well as those using “manipulative” methods were admitted. The Linked Ring organised annual Photographic Salons in London from 1893 to 1909 with stringent standards of acceptance and with no prizes or awards. The standards of display were high: wider spacing between pictures, no heavy frames, simple glass covers and prints presented in harmony with each other and with the interior of gallery. Similar clubs and salons were established in France and Belgium, whilst informal photographic societies formed in the Scandinavian countries, Australia, Canada and India during early twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 31-32.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Harker, *The Linked Ring: The Secession Movement in Photography in Britain, 1892-1910* (London: Heinemann, 1979). Since 1886 the Kunsthalle was directed by Alfred Lichtwark who collected the works of various German Secessionists and who was an important proponent of modern art in Germany. Although the degree of the collaboration between Juhl and Lichtwark is not clear, this is still an instance of the closeness of the German Secessions, who were interested in opening up the classical canon of accepted artistic media, and the emerging movement of artistic photography.

<sup>10</sup> Harker, *The Linked Ring*, 67.

Early on and continuing once back in America, Stieglitz exchanged letters with German and Austrian photographers.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, these writings do not display the aloof, aggressive and unfriendly tone of his American communications. This is an indicator that towards his continental European friends and allies Stieglitz did not feel the need to behave as a leader, perhaps because he felt that his merits were partly due to theirs. In contrast to this stands the equally vast correspondence with British photographers. Although Stieglitz praised their leading role in the pictorial movement, his relationships with the members of the Linked Ring became strained over the years. Stieglitz was very eager for America to be at the forefront of the pictorial photography movement, but curiously his sense of competition did not apply to Germany. He felt indebted to this country's culture in so many ways that he did not want to see it as a competitor. This points towards his own familial background, but also to the growing political and economic rivalry between Britain and Germany. He may well have shared the views of many contemporary Germans that Britain was a nation without "*Kultur*" – a gross utilitarian economic powerhouse – despite that fact that Germany had overtaken Britain industrially and economically by 1900.

### **The Secessions and German Social Thought**

The European groups of artist-photographers must have been inspired in turn by the widespread phenomenon in late nineteenth-century Western art to form "Secessions." Usually characterised as formations of a proto-avant-garde type standing at the intersection of academic art and emergent modernism, the phenomenon of Secessionism deserves more attention than it has received to date. We need a "theory of Secessionism" that takes into account aesthetic, stylistic, ideological and sociological aspects of the phenomenon, crossing borders of nations and of media. Such a critical analysis, as a result of an analysis of power structures, of the art world and of the social shifts influencing both at the turn of the century, can serve as a conceptual and international framework for interpreting the Photo-Secession.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A vast collection of Stieglitz's correspondence is held at the *Stieglitz-O'Keeffe Archive*, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (YCAL).

<sup>12</sup> The term "Secession" initially connoted the "*secessio plebis*," the mass exodus of the Roman people from Rome as a reaction against the politics of the senate. In America, the most common association must have been with the Civil War, 1861-1865.

The initial group associated with the term was the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*, which seceded from the *Société des Artistes Françaises* in 1890. This act, it is assumed, was in turn inspired by the structural model of the exhibition society *Les XX*, founded in Brussels in 1884.<sup>13</sup> In England, the Grosvenor Gallery represented a Secessionist manifestation of comparable importance. In 1877, years before Stieglitz founded the Photo-Secession, a group of American artists seceded from the National Academy of Design to form the Society of American Artists.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it was the German examples, I argue, that provide the clearest and most illuminating model for the phenomenon and corresponding with the Germanic variant of modern sensibility that underlay Stieglitz's Secessionist efforts. In fact, Secessionism was the specific German modern art tendency in the 1890s. Despite its evident "modernity," however, the art concerned was by no means comparable to contemporaneous innovations in France. I attribute this fact to the underlying principle of reform – as opposed to revolution – that unites the Secessions with larger social developments in the German-speaking world at that time, including the ideological category of romantic anti-capitalism.

For Stieglitz, Germany was not only the model for modern art, but for culture per se. For him, Germany was the antithesis to the rise of an American mass culture of which he was deeply suspicious. He revealed romantic leanings both in his nostalgia for the past and in his admiration for a culture in which, as he believed, this past was still alive and where his romantic anti-capitalism was shared by many. The main proponents of this worldview in Germany were scholars of the humanities. Although by definition not the ideology of a particular class or social category, it is symptomatic for romantic anti-capitalism to be expressed by this group as a reaction to their socio-economic condition in the period. Intellectuals as producers of ideology are inherently sceptical of capitalism and thus predisposed to voice romantic anti-capitalist sentiments.<sup>15</sup> This was true for the "German mandarins," university

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<sup>13</sup> Philip Ursprung, *Kritik und Secession: "Das Atelier": Kunstkritik in Berlin zwischen 1890 und 1897* (Basel: Schwabe and PhD Diss. Berlin, 1996), 94.

<sup>14</sup> Fink, Lois and Joshua Taylor (eds.), *Academy: The Academic Tradition in American Art: An Exhibition Organized on the Occasion of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Academy of Design, 1825-1975*, exh. cat. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Collection of Fine Arts, 1975).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: NLB, 1979). For Löwy this is a petty bourgeois characteristic. Romantic anti-capitalism particularly applies to what Gramsci calls the "traditional intellectuals": the group that remains left over from previous social regimes: Antonio Gramsci, "The Intellectuals," in



professors of the *Geisteswissenschaften* in particular, who under the peculiar conditions of the university and administrative systems in feudalist Germany had gained remarkable official powers.<sup>16</sup> As industrial capitalism and its corollaries were being solidified, the mandarins' power, social status and the hegemony of their values of personal cultivation and disinterested learning, were waning. Romantic anti-capitalism served as an expression of this loss of power.<sup>17</sup> As a result of their disappointment and feeling of alienation in modern society, the mandarins turned to the tradition of German romanticism's anti-rational, anti-utilitarian, anti-positivist and anti-egalitarian critique of Enlightenment.

The romantic anti-capitalist critique found its expression around the turn of the century for example in the theory of *Weltanschauung*. Wilhelm Dilthey defined worldviews as sets of collective outlooks that were rooted in the experience of life and consequently historical.<sup>18</sup> In their recognition that consciousness was not autonomous, as Enlightenment Idealists wanted to believe, but that it was itself subject to the conditions of historical change, the proponents of the study of worldview were kin to the newly emerging discipline of sociology. But whereas the sociologists responded to the actual conditions of the age, *Weltanschauung* was only a symptom of these problems. The concept remained anchored in the academic environment, conceived primarily as a new philosophical insight and a methodological strategy to preserve the humanities from the growing influence of the methods of the natural sciences that were in part employed in sociology. *Weltanschauungslehre* opposed the human-scientific method of intuition or interpretation to the nomocentrism of the natural sciences. According to consciousness the central role in the course of historical progress, it is a type of idealism – a fact that points to the romantic quality of the anti-capitalist sentiments of its proponents. Manifest in the theory is the search for worldview, the longing for a common outlook to life, a totality that was thought to be in a process of vanishing in modernity. Out of this situation came a specific set of research topics, such as the study of

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*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

<sup>16</sup> Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: the German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). Other authors also use the term.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Kegan Paul, 1936), 156.

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 8, Weltanschauungslehre: Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Philosophie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1931).

*Weltanschauung*, and in fact this approach even inspired a particular, Germanic kind of sociology that was developed as an antithesis to the Anglo-French positivist school.<sup>19</sup>

A striking proportion of German intellectuals embracing the revolutionary, libertarian version of the romantic critique were assimilated Jews. Libertarian romanticism and Jewish messianism both embody a dialectical relationship between a restorative current, concerned with the reinstatement of a past harmony, and a utopian current, which imagines a radically new future.<sup>20</sup> When in the nineteenth century some restrictions against Jews were lifted, many found the university provided the most feasible path to respectability and honour. By definition lacking nostalgia for a specifically German past, which was part of mainstream romantic anti-capitalism, they invented their own version of an ideal past in Jewish messianism.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, this turn to religion answered the romantic anti-capitalist need to fill the void secularisation had left in these peoples' experience: "The paradox was that, through German neo-romanticism, these young Jewish intellectuals rediscovered their own religion."<sup>22</sup>

Artists share aspects of their socio-economic conditions with the intelligentsia. In the period in question, they reacted to the unprecedented situation with a new self-definition, evident in the discourse of modernism. Modernism, at least when understood in terms of Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), addresses the same questions the romantic critique poses. Art in bourgeois society – modern art – is characterised by the function of autonomy, its separation from practical reality. This autonomy could establish itself when the economic and the political systems

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<sup>19</sup> Noticing that something fundamentally human, the sphere of the spiritual, emotional or (quasi-) religious was in danger of being lost in modernity, German and other Central European theorists including Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel, Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Mannheim turned against sociology's specific characteristic. See David Kettler, Volker Meja, Nico Stehr, "Karl Mannheim and the Besetting Sin of German Intellectuals," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 95, No. 6 (May, 1990): 1441-1473. They maintained that sociology as a science had to account for the irrational domains that were present in modernity. German sociologists around the turn of the century and during the Weimar Republic analysed present societies as well as pre-modern, pre-capitalist social organisations, using the knowledge gained to critique the present.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe: A Study of Elective Affinity*, trans. Hope Heaney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 116.

<sup>21</sup> Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, p. 35.

were separated from the cultural one and art had lost its connections to ritual.<sup>23</sup> According to Bürger, the difference between socially functionless modernism (itself unaware of its powerlessness) and the historical avant-garde lies in the latter's attempts to supersede the separation of art and life. Modernism communicates an awareness of and regret about the separation but offers no suggestions how to change it. Modernism thus understood both contains a romantic longing for past unity and is cognate with the romantic manifestation of resistance in building alternatives. At the same time, however, just as the romantic critique of capitalism means the positive acquisition of immanent criticism, modernism has its positive antithesis in the new acquisition of independent aesthetic experience.<sup>24</sup>

The first Secession in a German-speaking city was set up in Düsseldorf in 1892 as the *Vereinigung bildender Künstler Düsseldorfs*.<sup>25</sup> In the same year, the *Verein bildender Künstler Münchens*, soon to be called *Münchner Secession* was founded. It was this latter group that arguably provided the model for all the German Secessions founded in the 1890s. Dresden had its Secession in 1894, the same year as Weimar. Karlsruhe followed suit two years later. In 1897 artists seceded in Vienna and finally, in 1898, in Berlin, too. The new German capital had its Secessionist predecessors in the *Gruppe der Elf* (1892), as in the *Freie Vereinigung* (1893), which organised in the same year a *Salon der Zurückgewiesenen* (salon of the refused) under the title “*Freie Berliner Kunstausstellung*.”<sup>26</sup> In 1904 a national umbrella organisation for Secessions was founded, and after the turn of the century many “new Secessions” – Secessions within Secessions – were proof of the former's alignment with the establishment.

The seceding artists rebelled against the conservative academies that regulated exhibition and education of German artists. The reasons were practical: these artists wanted more and improved opportunities to show their work in public. The situation of art academies in nineteenth-century Germany was complex. United only in 1871,

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 12. Bürger quotes Jürgen Habermas in this respect.

<sup>24</sup> Bürger *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 33. Bürger's theory is analysed from the perspective of a materialist aesthetic theory by a number of authors in W. Martin Lüdke (ed.), *Theorie der Avantgarde: Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976). Although all contributions in this book are theoretically solid and highly critical of Bürger's study, none engages with the romantic anti-capitalist element of his account of modernism.

<sup>25</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 218.

<sup>26</sup> Ursprung, *Kritik und Secession*, 94.

most former separate German kingdoms kept their own academies. Most academies had originally been founded during the eighteenth century; they were based on Enlightenment values and promoted classicism.<sup>27</sup> During the nineteenth century, they were reformed in line with the critique of classicism expressed by *Sturm und Drang* and Romanticism. But by the time the changes were completed, this progressive orientation had mostly died out and the structure of the academies remained largely the same.<sup>28</sup> Yet the academy was not the Secessions' only focus. The groups seceded from the national art association (*Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstgenossenschaft*) with its local sub-branches, part of the intricate structure of various official bodies and institutions, national and local chapters, which, in conjunction with the academies, organised access to training and exhibitions. The degree of these institutions' self-governance and attachment to the state and the relationship of art association and academy varied regionally.

In most cases, as in the three I want to focus on now, Munich, Berlin and Vienna, there was one concrete event that triggered the Secession. In Munich, differences over the inclusion of foreign artists at the annual salon of the Munich art association in 1891 caused the resurgence of tensions between modernists and traditionalists that had begun with the inception of annual salons two years earlier. Whereas the majority of Munich painters worked in conventional academic modes, some modern-minded artists experimented with variants of Symbolism and Naturalism and were interested in French Impressionism, the most modern direction at the time. The conventionalists felt doubly threatened by the foreign and modern inclusion in the salon. Within the *Münchener Kunstgenossenschaft*, two camps formed: those concerned with an egalitarian exhibition practice and the protection of local artists, and those who supported international modern art.

Similar events occurred in Berlin. The members of the *Berliner Kunstverein*, the local chapter of the national art association and a particularly close ally of the academy, had invited Edvard Munch to exhibit at their salon. But once confronted with his art, the conservative members asked for immediate termination of the exhibition and for Munch's expulsion from the association. About seventy artists in favour of Munch decided to form a free association of artists – without resigning from the *Verein*. This

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<sup>27</sup> On academies, see Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*.

<sup>28</sup> Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, Chapter V: "The Nineteenth Century."

was called “Secession” by the local newspapers, but it only lasted for a short time and did not lead to further actions. Another near-Secession was the group of the “Eleven”, an informal exhibition society founded by artists around Franz Skarbina and Max Liebermann who had achieved some local recognition as representatives of modern tendencies. Their exhibitions were fairly successful with the buying public.<sup>29</sup> For the 1898 salon, the jury rejected the contribution of Walter Leistikow, a founding member of the Eleven: his Impressionistic interpretation of the *Grunewaldsee*, a favourite local spot of the Kaiser’s (fig. 2) was considered offensive. Leistikow took this as an opportunity for action and founded the Berlin Secession together with like-minded artists. A constitution was drawn up and Liebermann was elected president.

In Vienna, the Secession was the last instance of a series of struggles between modern-minded artists and the official institutions. Despite the extraordinarily prominent role culture played for both aristocracy and bourgeoisie in the Austro-Hungarian capital, the dominant artists’ association of the *Künstlerhaus*, backed by the emperor, was responsible for a conservative artistic atmosphere in the 1890s. A group of artists dissatisfied with the jury’s continued ill-treatment of the Austrian artist Theodor von Hörmann (1840-95), a *plein-air* town- and landscape painter who had studied in France,<sup>30</sup> founded the “Society of Austrian Artists” or “Vienna Secession.” Again, the immediate events were only the eruption of disagreements that dated way back. The seceding artists in all cases felt superior to the large number of artists represented by the *Künstlerhaus*, which they thought did not support them to the degree they deserved.

The Vienna Secession under Gustav Klimt’s leadership developed something of a common style termed *Sezessionsstil*, characterised by its ornamental rendering and sexualised interpretation of the crisis in contemporary society. Among the members of the Secessions of Munich and Berlin, stylistic pluralism was declared the intention – to provide a setting in which various artists could develop and advance their own individual styles. Crucially, the Secessions were not gatherings of young, emerging talents, but of already established artists who felt that their success merited a special treatment unavailable in the existing art associations. Most of the artists of the

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 38.

<sup>30</sup> Carl E. Schorske, “Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Trio,” in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 113.

Munich and Berlin Secessions painted in variants of Naturalism and Symbolism, and some were interested in Impressionism.

Realism combined with Symbolist themes of retreat and pessimism is the hallmark of the work of Leopold von Kalckreuth of Munich (*Summer*; fig. 3). Symbolism also influenced the brooding and melancholic landscapes of Walter Leistikow in Berlin. More conventionally Symbolist was the co-founder of the Munich Secession, Franz von Stuck, who embraced eroticism and the subject of the femme fatale, as in *Sin*, (fig. 4). Influences of French Impressionism were most visible in the work of Berlin Secessionist Max Liebermann, but he remained always attached to a pronouncedly naturalistic version of it, with a central role his compositions reserved for the human figure, for example in his pictures of bathing boys, *Badende Knaben* (fig. 5).

Most prominent in Liebermann's oeuvre, however, are paintings of everyday working-class and peasant subjects, which were also frequent in the paintings of Fritz von Uhde of Munich. These works stand for a specific type of Naturalism that I will call "Socially Conscious." This category should not be subsumed under Naturalism or politically inspired Realism but merits attention on its own terms. With its *plein-air* style, contemporary subject matter and social awareness it forms a distinct strand of modernism. Akin to the Realist tradition, Liebermann declared marginal subjects, particularly the working classes, as worthy of depiction. More clearly than Realism, Naturalism thereby defined itself by the empirical objectivity of its pictorial mode.<sup>31</sup> Liebermann's paintings *Women Plucking Geese* (fig. 6) from 1871-72 or *Canning Factory* (fig. 7) from 1879 are two examples. Both paintings show groups of women fulfilling menial and repetitive tasks with limited interaction between the different individuals. These are not genre paintings. Nothing anecdotal, dramatic or humorous, literary or ethnographical detracts attention from the detached depiction of a real situation. Liebermann defended his choice of subject matter with a concern for *l'art pour l'art*: the banal content would allow him utmost artistic freedom and concentration on form. Yet, as Angelika Wesenberg has argued, even if this was

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Naturalismus*, Deutsche Kunst und Kultur von der Gründerzeit bis zum Expressionismus, vol. 2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959), 7: Hamann and Hermand identify this type of painting as a conscious reaction against the "heroisation" of individuals in the art of the *Gründerzeit*. They see Realism as the expression of a compact, fulfilled *Weltanschauung*, whereas Naturalism comes up in epochs of change. In such transitional societies, Naturalism is a progressive art, which exposes the ideology of the dominant art forms.

Liebermann's motivation, these works cannot be analysed from a formal viewpoint only, since the contemporary audience found the proletarian subjects shocking and offensive – and brought them into the context of social democratic politics.<sup>32</sup>

With its claim to scientific truth and its foregrounding of the downsides of capitalism, Realist and Naturalist practices are often associated with socialism.<sup>33</sup> But Liebermann's paintings are not examples of Social Realism; this was not a proletarian art. It was the product of a bourgeois conception. The anti-capitalism clearly apparent in these pictures is not of the socialist type, despite the awareness of class. Rather than the labour of a modern proletariat, the types of work depicted are pre-capitalist and despite their monotonous and tedious nature the notion of alienation is limited. *Flachsscheuer in Laren* (*Flax Barn in Laren*, 1887; fig. 8) suggests the alienation of the young women from their work and from each other. Yet the workers' traditional dress and the wooden architecture of the relatively small room seem pre-modern. Not even the children powering the spinning wheels on the left of the painting change the mood of communal, pre-industrial work. These are not the strains of modern factory labour as depicted in the dynamic composition of Adolph von Menzel's *Eisenwalzwerk* (*Iron Mill*, 1875; fig. 9).

The mode of Socially Conscious Naturalism allowed Liebermann and other artists to present something as "the truth" based on the positivist terms of optical registration. Yet the choice of social subject matter does not justify these paintings' claim to be objective representations of social reality. The themes of simplicity, devotion and hard work apparent in them are expressions of bourgeois values and reveal Socially Conscious Naturalism as a bourgeois art. The depiction of the working classes is distanced not only in terms of Naturalist detachment. It is the detachment of a bourgeois from the actual conditions of proletarian labour. The paintings express sympathy for less fortunate beings, a sympathy that can be identified as a strain in romantic anti-capitalism. It is a progressive type of romantic anti-capitalism that comes close to Liebermann's liberal politics. Rather than proletarian appeals for class

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<sup>32</sup> Angelika Wesenberg, "Max Liebermann, der Kaiser, die Nationalgalerie," in *Im Streit um die Moderne: Max Liebermann. Der Kaiser, Die Nationalgalerie*, ed. Angelika Wesenberg und Ruth Langenberg, exh. cat. (Berlin: Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, 2001-2011), 21.

<sup>33</sup> For example by Hamann and Hermand, *Naturalismus*.

struggle, these pictures are bourgeois expressions of sentimentality, paternalism and reform.<sup>34</sup>

The alignment of Naturalism with its positivist characteristics and romantic anti-capitalism, which rejects all forms of scientism, may surprise. Yet it is exactly romantic anti-capitalism's preference for the spiritual, the rejection of positivist claims of access to knowledge that can expose Socially Conscious Naturalism as a form of myth-production. The ambiguity of anti-positivist content and objective pictorial mode allows the artists to tie together contradictory elements in an apparently convincing whole. In fact, such an interpretation was already uttered at the time by Herman Helfferich in *Kunst für Alle*, who identified the Naturalist mode as an expression of desperate individuals who cannot bear the "godlessness" of their age and therefore mythicise types of labour that align humans with nature.<sup>35</sup>

The openness to various styles was a guiding principle of the Secessions. Despite their break with some traditional academic rules such as the preoccupation with narrative and historicism, most works were relatively conventional. More than by stylistic or iconographical concerns, the artists were united in a quest to move art away from the ideological and the political to an alternative public sphere made-up of a self-critical bourgeoisie and to make personal expression of the artist its main purpose.<sup>36</sup> As Peter Paret remarks, this had its own political implications in the atmosphere of Berlin around the turn of the century, where the distinction between innovative and traditional art was extended to political extremes. And it presented the audience with new problems of appreciation and comprehension. Impressionist influences particularly disturbed the German public. In its seeming annihilation of established naturalistic conventions and dissolution of form into colour and atmosphere, Impressionism confirmed anxieties about the ambiguity and instability of the physical environment and of social and political conditions. Furthermore, its

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<sup>34</sup> The exception to this are the Social Realist works by (later) Secessionists Käthe Kollwitz, Hans Baluschek and Heinrich Zille.

<sup>35</sup> Herman Helfferich, "Studie über den Naturalismus und Max Liebermann," *Die Kunst für Alle* (1887). Quoted by Wesenberg, "Max Liebermann, der Kaiser, die Nationalgalerie," 23.

<sup>36</sup> This removes the possibility of art serving the function of social criticism. Despite the general lack of politics in Berlin Secessionist art and its bourgeois character, some members expressed political concerns in their work. Käthe Kollwitz and Zille, whose work made an actual political statement by depicting without false glorification the misery of the working class, were the exception.



association with Germany's recently defeated enemy – which still had claims on some of its territory – made Impressionism suspicious.<sup>37</sup>

Exhibition practice and design played the key role in Secessionist aesthetics. Contrary to the mass events of the salons, Secession exhibitions were limited to a much smaller number of works, which were hung in uncrowded arrangements, in an intimate and discreet setting. Having one's work hung, and having it hung in a prominent place, at the official salon was crucial for any ambitious artist in the late nineteenth century. Thus the Secessions' motivations were partly economic since they set a select group apart from the large mass of artists working in German centres at the time – the art proletariat (*"Kunstproletariat"*). The Secessions held the academies responsible for the excess of artists. For the Secessionists, who had always cooperated with the gallery system, the large number of struggling artists was not only an obstacle to quality production; it was also the antithesis of true art. The emerging dealer system in the arts regulated this surplus labour according to the principles of the free market. Although later than in England, France or Holland, by the end of the nineteenth century this system was firmly in place in Germany and would eventually replace the academy as the source for validating art.<sup>38</sup>

The Secessions were quick to adapt to the dealer system. They sought professional help from gallery owners for their exhibitions. Most well-known is the relationship of the Berlin Secession with the cousins Bruno and Paul Cassirer, who became the group's official business managers in 1899. The Cassirers owned the most modern gallery in town and a publishing house that distributed the journals *Pan* and *Kunst und Künstler*, both observers of the Berlin Secession.<sup>39</sup> This collaboration acknowledged of the artist as belonging to a modern profession, with bureaucratic and business concomitants.<sup>40</sup> And it undermined the power of the crown or state in art

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<sup>37</sup> Paret, *The Berlin Secession*, 88.

<sup>38</sup> Carol Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," in *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 186.

<sup>39</sup> Paret, *The Berlin Secession*, 71-72.

<sup>40</sup> Yet these "small-scale middlemen thrived only briefly during the transitional moment at which capital began to realize steady profits from speculations but before serious expenditure by big business found out small investors." See Nicholas Green, "Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformation of the Artistic Field in France during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," in *Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: An Anthology*, ed. Mary Tompkins Lewis (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2007), 36.

matters and thereby played into the hands of the new bourgeois elites.<sup>41</sup> What at first seems like a set of purely capitalist market relations in fact could only work in conjunction with specific discourses or ideologies. The dealer system relied on the cult of individualism that had its first prominence in the Romantic era and then became central for bourgeois ideologies and a capitalist selling point. This is another instance, like their stylistic pluralism and the fact that the artists were not young, that reveals Secessionism as a manoeuvre to reform existing structures of artistic production, distribution and reception.

### **The Photo-Secession**

The Photo-Secession in New York, too, incorporated the dealer system and a reformed exhibition practice and design. In 1905 Stieglitz and Steichen opened the “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession,” an exhibition venue in a small apartment on 291 Fifth Avenue. “291,” as it came to be known, had a commercial side – although Stieglitz was very careful to downplay this aspect. In his correspondence of the Photo-Secession years, exhibitions are one of the most prominent topics and it is on this stage where the fight for the recognition of photography as an art was carried out. From 1905 on the most important Photo-Secession members received solo shows at the Little Gallery. The members were also prepared to participate in exhibition of other societies as long as some conditions were met.<sup>42</sup>

The European Secession organisations had formal requirements for membership and published lists of their members.<sup>43</sup> They were hierarchical organisations with presidents and boards. Whilst the organisation of the Photo-Secession was very strict, Stieglitz, its president, had the freedom to judge an applicant’s suitability.<sup>44</sup> Despite these peculiarities, the Secessions fit into Williams’s intermediate category of internal organisation, between the type with formal membership with a constitution and that

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in fin-de-siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 174-175.

<sup>42</sup> The conditions were: “moral assurance of the good faith and high intentions of the management,” the “right to send a collection which would be accepted as a whole without submission to a jury,” that the Photo-Secession’s collection was hung as a unit catalogued as “Loan Exhibition of the Photo-Secession” and that the inviting party would meet the shipping expenses. Alfred Stieglitz, “The Photo-Secession – Its Objects,” *Camera Craft* (1903) Vol. VII (August, 1903), in Stieglitz’s Scrapbook No. 5, YCAL.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> *Camera Work*, No. 3 (July, 1903).

with no formal membership or sustained group manifestation, only conscious group identification. Besides formal membership some form of collective public manifestation is characteristic for the intermediate type of artistic formation. Most Secessions had their own purpose-built exhibition venues, and most also had access to publications of the periodical type, as with *Camera Work* in the case of the Photo-Secession. The Secessions did not publish manifestos of the kind of later modernist movements and avant-garde groupings, but Stieglitz's "pamphlet" (a published collection of letters to be analysed in more detail below) or the Berlin Secession's exhibition catalogues can be seen as pointers in that direction.

The definition of the external relations is more complex. The Secessions were premised on criticisms of the practices of the existing artists' organisations. The main objective was the creation of a different or supplementary type of exhibition space. Not only were the German Secessionists' artworks in most cases stylistically not that far removed from the work of the academicians and members of the art association, some also carried on exhibiting at the salon, as did some Photo-Secessionists. The Secessions were not founded to replace existing structures, but as a supplement, or alternative to them: again, this fits into Williams's intermediary stage. By focusing on the personal and by effectively ignoring large sections of society, the Secessions were alternatives for small elites, not oppositional organisations that aimed at an ultimate change of the situation on a larger scale. They could not bring to fulfilment the redeeming function which their romantic anti-capitalism accorded art. Instead their ultimate inadequacy only made the feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness of the art and artists in modern society more acute.

The external relations of the Secessions were defined not only by their immediate clashes with existing art institutions, but by also their dissonance with society at large. In Germany, populists, extreme conservative and anti-Semitic factions met the Secessions with scorn. The Secession as the agent of a dangerously cosmopolitan modernism became a staple in the demonology of the radical right, which converted the simple distinction between innovative and traditional art into a confrontation of corrosive and healthy ideologies.<sup>45</sup> Williams confirms the fact that even the alternative stance of the Secessions was oppositional to a certain degree: Only specialist groups fit easily into the familiar categories of an open, plural society.

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<sup>45</sup> Paret, *The Berlin Secession*, 2.

Alternatives, too, go beyond a free association within a generally accepted cultural diversity.<sup>46</sup>

The Secessions cannot be ascribed to a class fraction quite as easily as in Williams's example of the Bloomsbury Fraction in London.<sup>47</sup> Their availability for parts of the bourgeoisie was not a matter of class origin but of affiliation. I stated above that artists and intellectuals shared a specific position in the modern social structures around the turn of the century that made them prone to a critique of capitalism of a romantic kind. Artists and intellectuals cannot easily be located in either bourgeoisie or proletariat. As Erik Olin Wright points out, as middle-class individuals, partly exploiting and partly exploited, they inhabit contradictory locations within the capitalist class structure.<sup>48</sup> In the class struggle, they have as individuals a range of possible affiliations with one of the two main classes.<sup>49</sup> The Secessionists aimed at affiliation with the bourgeoisie by producing art that served this group as a means of exercising their power. With this strategy, their art, although originally conceived by and for a small elite, could affect society as a whole through the mediation of the class that controlled the important functions of society such as industry, education and communication.<sup>50</sup>

The question has to be posed, however, why these artists did not mobilise their discontent, expressed in their romantic anti-capitalism, to try to alter the existing structure of society. The concept of contradictory locations indicates that a variety of alternative positions of opposition to the capitalist system are possible in addition to that of the proletariat. According to this theory, artists could potentially contribute to a change in social reality.

One element of Wright's explanation of why this emancipation did not happen is to be found in the relative indeterminacy in the relationship of class structure and class

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<sup>46</sup> Williams, *Culture*, p. 71.

<sup>47</sup> Raymond Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 2005), 165-189.

<sup>48</sup> Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London and New York: Verso, 1997). Wright develops a model for capitalist societies that includes the middle classes whilst respecting the Marxian category of exploitation as the defining element of class formation. This concept has been criticised, see Erik Olin Wright et al. (eds.), *The Debate on Classes* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), in particular Peter F. Meiksins, "A Critique of Wright's Theory of Contradictory Class Locations," 173-183. I do not reject either Wright's account or the critiques in favour of the other, but find the various suggestions useful for my problem.

<sup>49</sup> Wright, *Classes*, 124.

<sup>50</sup> Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 180.

formation.<sup>51</sup> According to Peter Meiksins, however, who criticised Wright's concept, this is the case for all employees. It can hence not serve as a distinctive characteristic of and proof for the existence of contradictory class locations and consequently cannot explain a particular presence or absence of working-class consciousness by members of that group.<sup>52</sup>

Wright identifies the exploiting factor of contradictory class locations in the field of skill, this being one of the variety of exploitative relations that exist in addition to the capitalist kind. This distinction from proletarians and capitalists alike predestines contradictory locations to form a proto-ruling class of a future system within the existing one: skill exploitation would determine the class structure of socialist societies (albeit with a reduced scale of social inequality in comparison with capitalism).<sup>53</sup> This prospect would logically point towards the mobilisation of artists' and intellectuals' anti-capitalist sentiments. Yet here Meiksins criticises Wright's theory asserting that the various forms of exploitation are difficult to distinguish from each other and that, lastly, they are all subordinate to capitalist exploitation. As a result, the contradictory locations do not realise their revolutionary potential. Historically, intellectuals, together with similarly "contradictory locations" of middle managers and bureaucrats have been attracted to a modified form of capitalism with greater state planning, but their position was rarely distinctly anti-capitalist. Instead, empirical and theoretical evidence shows, firstly, that workers have more often desired skill barriers as a measure against the cheapening of their labour and secondly, that capitalist control of skilled workers was easier than of the unskilled. Skill rather divides than unites and, importantly, the ideology of skill, reward and merit is not at all incompatible with that of capitalism.<sup>54</sup>

The example of Secessionism supports the claims to the limited identification of the skilled with working class consciousness. Secessionism established the skill credential of membership as a means to restrict access to the augmented value of artistic products. It built on the particular type of skill found in "natural talent," which has a counterpart in the (bourgeois) ideology of individualism. Rather than a group on its own posing a threat to capitalism, Secessionists have to be seen as part of the

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<sup>51</sup> Wright, *Classes*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Meiksins, "A Critique of Wright's Theory of Contradictory Class Locations," 181-183.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, *Classes*, 70-76.

<sup>54</sup> Meiksins, "A Critique of Wright's Theory of Contradictory Class Locations," 179-180.

occupational group of all artists, even those forming the *Kunstproletariat*. Instead of uniting with their counterparts, they used their superior skill credentials to affiliate with the bourgeoisie. Romantic anti-capitalism was a way of accommodating individual dissatisfaction with a disenchanted modernity whilst at the same time allowing the individuals in question to adapt to and perform in a modern art market. Secessionism was a materially motivated attempt at collectivisation, but a limited one. The anti-capitalist factor of the romantic critique did not outweigh related non-material interests: the concern for free expression dominated overall and for this, it was perceived, an association with the working class that could have led to actual changes of the conditions of artistic production, was not beneficial.

These characteristics of the romantic critique of modernity and of the Secessionist exploitation of skill credentials were present in Stieglitz's Photo-Secession. In an explanatory text for *Camera Craft*, he is eloquent about artistic standards, but remains silent on what these standards are. The one sentence that mentions the imitation of painting, the main objection the Secessionists had against other photographers, is very vague.<sup>55</sup> The absence of any aesthetic or stylistic guidelines or principles, of any elaboration on these superior artistic standards, suggests that the Photo-Secession did not expect from its members a particular style. This is in line with the practices of the Secessions in Central Europe, although again the dominant aesthetic orientation was towards Naturalism, Symbolism and Impressionism. The main criterion was that the work was expressive: that the camera was used as an emotive tool, not a documenting one. This was a vision rooted in a romantic conception of art and the artist.<sup>56</sup> The Photo-Secessionists had one common aesthetic motive, the promotion of "pictorial photography," a term lacking clear definition. Used to distinguish photography with artistic intent from other declared purposes of the medium, it also, more specifically, denominated photography that was "manipulated" and thus imitative of other pictorial arts. Stieglitz and his associates distanced themselves from the latter, although Stieglitz's notoriously laborious and exacting approach to printing his own negatives added an element of manipulation. The Photo-Secessionists simply used the term "pictorial photography" to refer to photography that was seen as expressive and therefore art.

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<sup>55</sup> Stieglitz, "The Photo-Secession – Its Objects."

<sup>56</sup> See: M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 22.

The interest in immediate expression and a direct connection to the innermost recesses of the artist's personality presented for the Photo-Secessionists no contradiction with the mechanical medium of the camera and the scientific character of the photographic process. If anything, this medium allowed artists to fix their visions instantly in an image. This balance between accepting technology to express what is wrong with an age defined by technological change is reminiscent of the contradictory character of the romantic critique, which both dismisses modernity and is a result of it. New media were generally a characteristic of Secessionism. Mainly under the influence of British and French artists, drawing, watercolour or pastel, formerly associated with female dilettantism, sketches and studies as well as graphic reproduction techniques were increasingly tolerated at art exhibitions.<sup>57</sup> Secessionism gave a home, too, to the applied arts. In this respect of tolerating media outside the high-art canon, Stieglitz's campaign for photography was a typical phenomenon of Secessionism.

Stieglitz's work during the Photo-Secession period can roughly be placed in two stylistically and chronologically distinct categories: his pictures made in Europe and his early American photographs. Both exemplify photography as art, both are motivated by romantic anti-capitalism, and both can be analysed in part through the contemporary theories of Peter Henry Emerson, with whom Stieglitz was in personal contact since 1887 and whose book, *Naturalistic Photography*, he sought to translate into German (but no publisher could be found). Emerson's main dictum is that art photography is distinct from scientific or industrial uses of the medium through its expressive quality. In particular, Emerson promoted the Naturalist school of art photography, by which he meant that an artist depicts natural subjects in a way that conveys the personal emotion raised by these subjects in the artist.<sup>58</sup> As Emerson writes, "the artist's work is no idealizing of nature; but through quicker sympathies and training the good artist sees the deeper and more fundamental beauties, and he seizes upon them [...] and renders them on his canvas, or on his photographic plate, or in his written page."<sup>59</sup> It is likely, furthermore, that Stieglitz also modelled his style as a polemicist on Emerson, whose theories and controversial behaviour similarly

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<sup>57</sup> Robin Lenman, "Painters, Patronage and the Art Market in Germany 1850-1914," *Past and Present*, No. 123 (May, 1989): 122-123.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (London: Sampson Low, 1889), 23.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography*, 23.

divided opinions.<sup>60</sup>

Stieglitz's European pictures, mostly showing peasants at work, belong to the category of Socially Conscious Naturalism of which Liebermann's early work was characteristic, as the identical subject choices of Stieglitz's *Net Mender* (1894; fig. 10) and Liebermann's *Netzflickerinnen* (1887-89; fig. 11) illustrate.<sup>61</sup> This choice of subject matter also shows a kinship with Emerson's pictures of pre-industrial Norfolk life. *The Net Mender* depicts a woman seated on the ground, her lower body merging with the earth, her upper body and head, dressed in a traditional bonnet, silhouetted in a clear line against the sky. As if performing her devotions, the woman fixes a net; there is no trace of industrial time pressure. Stieglitz pictured members of the working classes as human beings, highlighting not their plight, but their own particular "beauty." In Stieglitz's works, the romantic anti-capitalist element of this genre is even more pronounced than in Liebermann's. Naturalism can be defined as the depiction of human subjects as products of their economic and sociological circumstances.<sup>62</sup> Stieglitz transcended these positivist notions. Writing about his preference for rural subjects, particularly in the Dutch fishing village of Katwijk and the German black forest village of Gutach, he mentioned the shaping of the local people by their natural surroundings.<sup>63</sup> In formulations reminiscent of Ferdinand Tönnies, Stieglitz describes his appreciation for these peasant people and their intimate connectedness to their surroundings, forming a *Gemeinschaft*, a community, as the antithesis to the distance of individuals from each other in modern societies.<sup>64</sup> The connection is expressed in the people's traditional dress, the way they do their work and even in their physique. The landscape is untainted by industrialisation and technology and provides the organic lines the artist is looking for. Stieglitz sets this in

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<sup>60</sup> See R. Child Bayley, "Photography Before Stieglitz," in *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait*, ed. Waldo Frank et al., new, revised edition (New York: Aperture, 1979), 101.

<sup>61</sup> The similarity between the two pictures was mentioned in *Camera Notes* as an instance of the common judgement that photography imitated painting. It was asserted that Stieglitz had not used Liebermann as a model. *Camera Notes*, No. 3 (January 1900): 108.

<sup>62</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Naturalismus*, 143.

<sup>63</sup> Alfred Stieglitz and Louis H. Schubart, "Two Artists' Haunts," in *Photographic Times*, No. 26, 1895; reprinted in *Stieglitz on Photography*, ed. Whelan, 51-58.

<sup>64</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Abhandlung des Communismus und des Socialismus als empirische Culturformen* (Leipzig, 1887). Ferdinand Tönnies separates the organic community of the past (*Gemeinschaft*) from the modern mechanistic, impersonal society (*Gesellschaft*).



direct contrast to America, where rectangular lines and uniform people provide no subjects for art.

In New York City, no such bucolic scenes could be found. Still looking for scenes of labour in 1893, he found *The Asphalt Paver* (fig. 12) or *The Rag Picker* (fig. 13) – both of decidedly urban character. In different formal terms, Stieglitz's concern with Socially Conscious Naturalism persisted. Stieglitz still idealised his subjects and was mainly concerned with the harmonious composition of the picture. It is further characteristic of these pictures, including also *Net Mender*, *The Terminal* (1893; fig. 14), *Winter – Fifth Avenue* (1893; fig. 15) and many more, that the focus is on one person, working alone. In *The Hand of Man* (1902; fig. 16), Stieglitz managed to see decorative beauty even in an industrial scene when the intertwining train tracks appear as independent from the content forming an ornament reminiscent of the art of the Vienna Secession. In *Winter – Fifth Avenue*, Stieglitz sets his own practice parallel to the subject of his photograph, so that his intuitive method could arrive at maximum insight into actual conditions. Perseverance and technical expertise were a prerequisite in order to photograph a snowstorm. Just like the photographer, the coachmen that are the subject of this photograph had to work under adverse conditions. Stieglitz was analysing labour, not just aestheticising it. He had always been interested in the technical side of photography. He came to the medium on the scientific route and many of his articles in *Camera Notes* deal with technical questions regarding the best papers, lenses, chemicals for developing or the benefit of lantern slides. At the same time as these the technical challenges like photographing at night and in snowstorms were experiments with the medium and as such characteristics of modern art. Being a master of the medium would not only enable the photographer to achieve autonomy from the painter or printmaker, it would also facilitate the perfection of photography as an expressive medium.

The complex relationship between medium and content clarified in Stieglitz's conception of photographic art is parallel to the ambivalence between truthful optical registration and sentimental content present in Socially Conscious Naturalism. Given the technological quality of the photographic process and the medium's indexical truth claim, this contradiction is even more pronounced in photography than in Liebermann's paintings. The message of modernity's complexity is thus arguably even clearer. Stieglitz and his peers used photography against the grain of the

medium. They revealed that technology could be put to good use when it was in the hands of the artist-genius. Realist and Naturalist practices in the nineteenth century were always also a way of concentrating on form instead of content. Through this strategy, the social appeal of the works is lessened rather than heightened. Blake Stimson argues for such a practice in photography: when Jacob Riis took pictures of the poor, he did not humanise them, but through this act of aestheticisation he created on part of the beholder an “experience of distance from the slum dwellers and the squalid conditions in which they live rather than that of transforming them into ‘human beings’ on par with the viewing audience.”<sup>65</sup> The medium of photography with its “bright surface sheen” additionally augmented the distance between the viewers and the subjects.<sup>66</sup> If Liebermann’s motivation of *l’art pour l’art* was at odds with the politicised reception of his works, this was mainly due to the medium of painting and its conventions. Photography was a new medium for art without the same baggage of rules of appropriateness. A photographic picture of a socially conscious type could thus function not only as a vehicle for a romantic and nostalgic message that was distinct from the socialist type, but it could also easily be assimilated into the discourse of art.

Stieglitz amalgamated his interest in the medium’s properties and expression in *The Steerage* from 1907 (fig. 17). Structural elements of a ship form diagonal and intersecting lines that create the dynamic of the photograph. Within this structure of crossing lines, two groups of people fill the picture, with white patches of their clothes constituting highlight effects. Abstracting the subject to lines and shapes is, according to Emerson, the essence of the photographic medium: “The great habit to cultivate for the artistic photographer is to think in values and masses, the mind has to constantly analyse nature into masses and values”, since “strong pictures leave the impression of a few strong masses.”<sup>67</sup> The artist takes this external appearance as a symbol for his own emotion towards life.

Indeed Stieglitz later reported how, confronted with this scene on his journey to Germany, he felt urgently compelled to fix the array of shapes and lines in a photograph, as it mirrored how he felt about life. This corresponds with Emerson’s

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<sup>65</sup> Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World: Photography and Its Nation* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2006), 44.

<sup>66</sup> Stimson, *The Pivot of the World*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography*, 148.

theory of the artist who takes external reality as a symbol for his own emotion towards it in his work and with its corollary of the artist as a special human being with the gift of seeing things more truly than everyone else, which associates Stieglitz with the Symbolism of his Photo-Secession peers, although with a different stylistic outcome. It has social implications: The people on the upper deck form two neat rows, in contrast to the disorderly mass of people and their modest belongings on the steerage. The horizontal partition of the picture is one of class too. Stieglitz could have the superior viewpoint of the artist only from his elevated standpoint on the upper deck, looking down on the working classes from the secure position of the bourgeois. Nevertheless, the social reality is an essential feature of the picture and it would lack its modernity did it not engage with contemporary issues.

In the work of most Photo-Secessionists, the concern for expression translated into a Symbolist aesthetic. White's triptych *Spring* from 1899 (fig. 18) is reminiscent in content, style and format of the Viennese *Sezessionsstil*, while Steichen's *The Pond – Moonrise* (1904; fig. 19) exudes the hazy mood of Symbolist painting. In comparison, Stieglitz's *Flatiron Building* (fig. 20) and Steichen's photograph of the same subject (fig. 21) convey quite different atmospheres. In Steichen's picture from 1904, *The Flatiron – Evening*, the filigree tree branches that obstruct the view, the wet ground, as well as the people seen from behind add to an otherworldly mood and make an unreal scene. This quality is further emphasised by the adding of colour pigment suspended in a solution of gum Arabic and potassium bichromate to the platinum print. In Stieglitz's image, the bare tree in the foreground, the flattening of the picture, as well as the vertical, heightened format of the whole photograph are reminiscent of the *Ukiyo-e* tradition. This allusion to Japanese woodblock prints is less a sign of dependence on another medium or a stylistic nod than it is a statement that photography is the medium best suited to convey formal qualities, to modernise the visual medium as a whole in the West. Stieglitz's photograph presents a play of contrasts, an assembly of different planes and shapes into which he reduces the appearances of external reality, both man-made and natural. The frame crops them in a way that makes it unmistakable that they form parts of a picture following its own laws, which, in turn, are under scrutiny and open for revision just as the shape of the flatiron puts into question existing conventions of architecture. Whereas Steichen was more interested in finding moments of enchantment in the present, Stieglitz engaged

with the manifestations of modernity, trying to find a new aesthetic principle with which to contain them.

Stieglitz was motivated by a very strong sense of justice and the quest for truth, and an absolute belief in his cause. In his correspondence, Stieglitz stressed countless times that he had dedicated his whole life to “the cause” or “the fight” and counted the years he was in its service. Assuring his opponents of his honest efforts, his absolute dedication seemed for him the best method to convince doubters of the rightness of his views or to brand opponents as his enemies. His faith in art’s redeeming powers was deeply felt, and when others could not share or understand this it made him sad and aggressive. Almost pathological egomania fed into this behaviour too. Some of the other members certainly shared Stieglitz’s convictions, but none of the Photo-Secession members could match Stieglitz’s weight in photographic circles.<sup>68</sup> None dedicated his or her entire life to the struggle as much as Stieglitz did – partly because many of them were not in the position to do so, not least financially. The opposition that the Photo-Secession evoked, therefore, was always tightly connected with Stieglitz’s person.

Stieglitz described the reasons for the Photo-Secession’s existence as foremost lying in the hands of others: it was an act of self-protection against opposition from outside as well as a protection of the standards for photography. Underlying this was a fundamental difference in quality of work (and ambitions) that caused the separation of the Secessionists. Even enemies admired Stieglitz for his pictures: in correspondence with him they stated their respect for his work in combination with the fiercest attacks on his person and behaviour. Steichen, Käsebier and the others were the uncontested stars of each exhibition they took part in. Yet it was the Secessionists’ certainty of their own superiority and their corresponding arrogance that infuriated the other photographic amateurs. Much more than seceding from the mainstream of the photographic world – which would mean leaving it as it is – the Photo-Secession constructed a hierarchy in it, placing itself squarely at the top. They could not do completely without the others, at least for practical purposes, as the continued use of the Camera Club’s dark room by Photo-Secession members testify.

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<sup>68</sup> Although Steichen claimed his work to be of similar or even superior quality in many instances. Eventually, the two photographers ended their collaboration and friendship.

Some of the misunderstandings around the Photo-Secession arose from its programmatically vague and ill-defined nature. Its loose organisation as well as its focus on a particular “spirit” made it suspicious to contemporaries. On several occasions, Stieglitz made efforts to enlighten non-members about the nature of the Photo-Secession in published statements. But these only added further to the controversy – something that was probably intended by their author. In a *Camera Work* statement, written in the plural “we,” the group responds to the need for clarification, giving details about the “nature and aims of the Photo-Secession and requirements of eligibility therein.”<sup>69</sup> They state their aims as “to advance photography as applied to pictorial expression; to draw together those Americans practicing or otherwise interested in the art, and to hold from time to time, at varying places, exhibitions not necessarily limited to the productions of the Photo-Secession or to American work.” The main objects of the Secession, according to the statement, are about photography as an art, building a community and organising exhibitions. In this, there was so far nothing or hardly anything that could awake opposition. On the contrary, there was a general openness: others were welcome to participate in the Secession’s exhibitions.

A statement by Stieglitz on the Photo-Secession in *Camera Craft* in June 1903 was prompted by various accusations that it was a secretive and mysterious organisation, whose objects and rules were only known to the initiated, bound together, as Stieglitz writes sarcastically, “by some ironclad oath.”<sup>70</sup> Its exclusivity and elitism were the main causes for opposition from outside, mainly due to the fact that eligibility criteria appeared non-transparent. Instead of giving a clear statement of what these criteria were – as he had done around the same time in his own journal *Camera Work* – Stieglitz now avoided the challenge by minimising the existence of any organisation: “as a matter of fact, there is but the slightest semblance of organization to be found in its body, and its members are free to do as they deem best.” As well as an answer to the question about the nature of the group formation, this is also a response to allegations that he was the strict leader of the group. He claimed that the founding of the Photo-Secession was merely giving a name to something that had existed well before, meaning that the group was not the result of an abstract set of rules, but that it grew organically over time, balancing the various members’ aims with the existing

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<sup>69</sup> *Camera Work*, No. 3 (July, 1903).

<sup>70</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “The Photo-Secession – Its Objects.”

conditions of the photographic and artistic establishments.

This suggests that the main reason for coherence was the common aim, not personal friendship, which might explain why there were not many meetings and the communal aspect of the group was limited. It was a means to an end and members did not see any inherent value in the collective as such, apart from being united against outsiders – despite the romantic anti-capitalist longing for community that motivated its existence. It was, however, through the addition of a collective element that the fight for photography succeeded. Stieglitz acknowledged that the American pictorial photographers insisted on their individual efforts, but at the same time subordinated themselves and their individual work to the common cause of the acceptance of pictorial photography as a form of art.<sup>71</sup> Through the subordination of the individual to the communal cause, the individual, in turn, “was enabled to achieve a far greater distinction than could ever have been his portion if he had been compelled to rely upon his unaided effort.”<sup>72</sup> This contradictoriness mirrors the ambiguity between lost community and modern individualism characteristic of romantic anti-capitalism.

It seems that Stieglitz had his friends elsewhere. He corresponded regularly with photographers and photographic clubs in Europe, such as R. Child Bayley of the Linked Ring, Alfred Horsley Hinton, Henry Snowden Ward, the German collector, patron and critic of photography Ernst Juhl, the *Camera Club Wien*, Fritz Mathies-Masuren, who was responsible for German art photography at the St. Louis Exposition and the Austrian photographer Heinrich Kühn, to name only a few. Stieglitz found in these men not only knowledgeable and enthusiastic photographers who shared his concern for high standards and for international collaboration. These letters are also testimonies of warm friendships, built on mutual respect and common interests and ideals. Especially in Kühn (1866-1944), a prominent figure of the Viennese photographic scene, Stieglitz found a confidant.<sup>73</sup> Almost Stieglitz’s exact contemporary, Kühn’s early photographic development was very similar to Stieglitz’s

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<sup>71</sup> Stieglitz quoted in R. Child Bayley, “Pictorial Photography,” *Camera Work*, No. 18 (April 1907): 23-28.

<sup>72</sup> Stieglitz quoted in Bayley, “Pictorial Photography,” 26-7.

<sup>73</sup> See: Ulrich Knapp, *Heinrich Kühn. Photographien* (Salzburg and Vienna: Residenz, 1988) and more recently: *Heinrich Kühn and his American Circle: Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen*; ed. Monika Faber, with preface by Ronald S. Lauder and foreword by Renée Price, trans. Steven Lindberg (Munich: Prestel, 2012) and *Heinrich Kühn: Die vollkommene Fotografie*, ed. Monika Faber, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010).

own. In the last decade of the nineteenth century the two men shared an interest in rural landscapes and people (for example Kühn's *Landscape*, *Winter Landscape* and *On the Dunes*; figs. 22-24). Although Kühn did not embrace urban and formally modernist pictures in the same way as Stieglitz, his *Harbour of Hamburg* (fig. 25) is comparable in its aesthetic and subject matter to Stieglitz's New York pictures such as *City of Ambition*, *The City Across the River*, or *Lower Manhattan* (figs. 1 and 26-27). Both photographers exhibited at the 1898 Munich Secession exhibition and four years earlier in Milan. Yet they only began corresponding in 1899. Stieglitz visited Kühn in 1904 when they spent a holiday in Tirol together with their families. From this point onwards, Stieglitz not only shared his artistic happiness and frustrations with his friend, but also found in Kühn an addressee for many complaints about his personal life.

Letters were a popular medium for Stieglitz to carry out what he called his "fight." His language is full of distinguishing and stratifying expressions. At times, he was very straightforward about his contempt, calling other photographers "photographic penny-a-liners" and "inkspillers." This also illustrates Stieglitz's belligerent and aggressive style. His biting and often personally insulting letters, which he did not hesitate to publish in his magazine or as letters to the editor in others, determined a large part of Photo-Secession history. Illuminating the role of correspondence in "the fight" is a collection of letters Stieglitz published in 1910 and that he subsequently referred to as "the pamphlet." As a preface Stieglitz wrote:

Self-seeking and jealousy are the root of virtually all intrigue. In no field of activity is this truer than in that of photographic ambitions. The five letters – with the exception of the one to Mr. Fraprie – herewith published were not intended for publication, but in the view of the petty intrigue that has been going on continuously for some years in the photographic world, I feel that in justice to the Photo-Secession, to "Camera Work," and, above all, to myself, these letters should be circulated amongst those who are interested in the truth. The letters speak for themselves. Alfred Stieglitz

By selecting letters as the form to illustrate the case of the Photo-Secession, Stieglitz chose a medium in which controversies and agonies were apparently unfiltered and immediate. The letters in the "pamphlet" deal with two occasions, an exhibition organised by the Photo-Secession at the Albright Art Gallery of Buffalo in 1910 and the incident of a foreign magazine that had reproduced without permission pictures

by Anne Brigman from *Camera Work*. It unites two of the Photo-Secession's most prominent manifestations – exhibitions and the journal – and identifies Stieglitz's main opponents. The first letter was to Frank Roy Fraprie, editor of *American Photography*, and deals with Fraprie's accusation that the Photo-Secession was "antiquated" and did not represent "the modern spirit of American photography."<sup>74</sup> In reply, Stieglitz challenged Fraprie to a face-off of exhibitions. It is telling that Stieglitz proposed a challenge with money involved while at the same time accusing Fraprie of having entered "the field of photographic literature as a means of livelihood." Stieglitz revealed his distaste for the linking of photographic art to financial profit, but at the same time he showed an acceptance of the money as a currency to measure artistic success.

The second letter in the "pamphlet" was addressed to Walter Zimmermann, chairman of the Print Committee of the Philadelphia Photographic Society. It reveals that for Stieglitz the Photo-Secession exhibition at the Albright Gallery in Buffalo meant the ultimate confirmation that photography was accepted as an art. The policies of the Albright Exhibition become clear in the next letter, again addressed to Zimmermann: the Photo-Secessionists were certain that they did not act for themselves, as it was perceived by others, but they were fighting for the acceptance of photography as an art for all photographers, whether members or not. Stieglitz was "working for a universal principle which is an obvious one and which you make it seem is beyond your vision."<sup>75</sup> He believed he had shown his faith in talent outside the Secession when he made the Albright exhibition an open one, encouraging other photographers to enter their work to be judged by the Albright Gallery and the Photo-Secession.<sup>76</sup>

The last two letters in the "pamphlet" deal with the controversy issuing from reproductions of Annie Brigman's work in the English *Amateur Photographer*. These letters are an example for Stieglitz's particular kind of anti-commercialism. Money, Stieglitz assured Mortimer, editor of the *Amateur Photographer*, would not rest the case for the Photo-Secessionists. His and Brigman's photographs as well as *Camera Work* owed their special quality to the fact that none was ever interested in making a

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<sup>74</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Fraprie, 11 August 1910, in *The Photo-Secession and its Opponents – Five Recent Letters*, YCAL.

<sup>75</sup> Stieglitz to Fraprie, 1 August 1910, in *The Photo-Secession and its Opponents – Five Recent Letters*, YCAL.

<sup>76</sup> Stieglitz to Fraprie, 1 August 1910, in *The Photo-Secession and its Opponents – Five Recent Letters*, YCAL.



profit. Stieglitz claimed to have “never prostituted art either directly or indirectly, for personal gain.”<sup>77</sup> This kind of anti-commercialism did not analyse the fundamental workings of capital as a system premised on social inequality. Viewed from Stieglitz’s romantic position, the negative effects of modern capitalism were foremost on spirit, a central topic in his discourse. As mentioned above, the principles of the Photo-Secession were very vague. Some rules existed, but essentially the solidarity of its members rested on the basis of a common “spirit.” For Stieglitz, art fulfilled the spiritual function of filling a void in modern materialist societies. Stieglitz’s chief motivation for founding the Photo-Secession was his strong feeling of distaste for modern society. Like the Secessionists in Munich, Vienna and Berlin, he felt that the present was essentially dominated by positivism, materialism and a “calculating spirit,” leaving no place for spiritual, emotional and personal concerns. For Stieglitz, this negative development was even more pronounced in the United States, where he felt that the lack of a civilisation that had been built over millennia on the foundation of a steadily developing culture made it particularly easy for the new materialism to take hold. Like the Secessionists in the German-speaking countries, Stieglitz believed that in order to save modern society from completely falling prey to negative values, art must be strongly posited as its spiritual-emotional, even quasi-religious antithesis. Stieglitz was convinced, like the Romantics, that artists possessed some special gift that would allow them to translate their inner despair and guide the way for the spectator and everyone else. It was for this reason that he regarded personal expression as the most important function of art.

### **Secessionism and Modernism**

The Secession exhibitions in Germany attracted a large audience and critical acclaim from the beginning. This was not solely due to the fact that many Secessionists still cooperated with the establishment – Max Liebermann even became president of the academy eventually – nor only because the styles of the works on display were hardly shocking. The immediate success of the Secessions points towards the functionality of Secessionist ideology for a fraction of the dominant social groups in German society. It is not surprising that a particular modern art phenomenon had occurred in

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<sup>77</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to F. J. Mortimer, 12 April 1910, in *The Photo-Secession and its Opponents– Five Recent Letters*, YCAL.

Germany, considering that that country is usually regarded as having had an exceptional relationship with modernity and its corollaries of capitalism, bourgeois hegemony and democracy. A widespread argument is that since German capitalism took hold late and then industrialisation happened rapidly, these developments were not accompanied by the usual ideological counterparts of bourgeois revolution and liberal parliamentary democracy. The bourgeoisie's passivity meant that the aristocratic social group of the landed estate owners, the Junkers, remained the most powerful elite in the country and the bourgeoisie in turn had adopted aristocratic values.

But revisionist social historiography from the 1970s onward has corrected this view of a passive German bourgeoisie. Historians such as Richard Evans, Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn refute the persistence of the old regime.<sup>78</sup> Far from negating the tenacity of pre-modern ideologies and politics, they find explanations of how post-1871 Germany, still pervaded by the old order, nevertheless was transformed under bourgeois and proletarian pressure into a modern, liberal, democratic, capitalist state. Blackbourn and Eley refuse the existence of an ideal type for the correlation of industrial and bourgeois revolution.<sup>79</sup> Emphasising the difference between political power and "real power" in capitalism, they develop a specific account of revolution that explains the behaviour of the German bourgeoisie and the results of bourgeois hegemony in forming an industrialised and unified nation state. Evidently, the "real power" of the capitalist mode of production in civil society – in the spheres of property relations, the rule of law and associational life – was strong enough so that a more drawn out bourgeois struggle for political power was simply not necessary.<sup>80</sup> This was possible because of the stage of development of industrialisation when it reached Germany.

In Blackbourn and Eley's argument, the working class was the actual motor of change that has erroneously been attributed to the bourgeoisie. The labour movement brought the necessary pressure for the establishment of democracy and a nascent welfare state. Mass democracy is not a bourgeois goal per se, but a compromise the

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<sup>78</sup> Richard J. Evans (ed.), *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London and New York: Croom Helm and Barnes & Noble, 1978) and David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>79</sup> Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*.

<sup>80</sup> Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 16.

bourgeoisie was willing to make under proletarian pressure.<sup>81</sup> Yet the proletariat could only pose a real threat to the bourgeoisie once that class had achieved effective hegemony. The strong labour movement in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany is a sign of the bourgeoisie's power. For the bourgeoisie, the threat from below (including revolts from petty bourgeoisie and peasantry) posed an opportunity as well: the fast success of Germany's later-comer capitalism allowed them to displace the struggle with the proletariat directly onto the less meaningful political level.<sup>82</sup> This is why it was possible for the Social Democratic Party to be the largest single party in the country, against which all other parties had to combine and measure their interests.<sup>83</sup> The bourgeois forces were able to make these concessions to the working class since its dominance in the sphere of "real power" was secured. On the immediate level of the workplace, company welfare and paternalism were instated and kept industry independent of political intervention. This separation allowed for fierce anti-unionism especially in the more traditional and right-wing heavy industry to exist at the same time as the SPD's membership numbers grew. The conclusion to draw from Blackbourn and Eley's studies is that a kind of bourgeois revolution did take place in Germany, and it had the usual outcomes. This also brings the observation that revolutions do not necessarily have to be progressive.<sup>84</sup> For this reason, the term "reform" is perhaps more appropriate.

The almost immediate embrace of the German Secessions by the establishment seems congruent with this process. The Secessions' success points to the power of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic force in Germany: the Secessionist values of personal expression, experimentation and the detachment of art from politics were useful ideological tools for the dominant parts of the bourgeoisie. The changes in art happened in parallel to those of the society at large. Not as revolution in both society and artistic style, but as reform. The remaining controversy surrounding the Secessions point to another fact, namely that the bourgeoisie as a dominant class was not monolithic. It was made up of fractions differentiated by types of production and exchange that had distinct cultural and ideological predilections as well as distinct economic interests (the intelligentsia was one such group). This correlates with the emergence of the phenomenon of cultural formations in the late nineteenth and early

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<sup>81</sup> Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 80-81.

<sup>82</sup> Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 121-122.

<sup>84</sup> Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 99.

twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> Despite their inherent opposition to the capitalist order, the new formations were not always defensive. Their degree of opposition depended upon the possible support of class fractions.<sup>86</sup> The Secessions emerged at a time when the class structure in industrialised nations was changing, for which indeed they were a sign. Secessionist art – although in its inception construed as an alternative to existing conditions – became useful in this process for the new elites, precisely because of the alternative character of modern art. The Secessions were not as radical as they pretended to be. Their action was not a complete break with the academy. Conservative values, such as the desire for an art with a stronger regional character, a result of local patriotism set against the synthetic patriotism generated by the Prussian-dominated Reich, played a role in their establishment too.<sup>87</sup>

Such insight is the outcome of ideology critique, based on analysis of the material conditions. When focusing on the field of art more specifically, through analysing the conditions of artistic production, distribution and reception, one arrives at the conclusion that Robert Jensen, for example, has drawn: the Secessionists wanted to create an alternative to the established channels of academic exhibitions and state or court patronage, and by doing so, they were revolutionary neither in their ideology nor in their aesthetics, but rather motivated by financial and popular success.<sup>88</sup> Sociological analysis and ideology critique – and conventional art historical analysis – show that the Secessions were not stylistically innovative, that they were consonant with the dominant ideology, that they served capitalism and the bourgeoisie more than that they opposed them, that their group structures were hierarchical and formal and that they were elitist.

Indeed, romantic anti-capitalism was not only embraced by the majority of artists even beyond the Secessions and by the German mandarins, but this *Weltanschauung* also appealed widely to sections of the broader German population at the time. In the German situation, more than the obvious values of personal freedom and individualism voiced by the Secessions, the romantic anti-capitalist ideals of retreat,

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<sup>85</sup> The cultural formations, in turn, emerged at the conjunction of the declining patronage system and the increasing definition of art by its oppositional characteristic. See Williams, *Culture*, 72.

<sup>86</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 73-74.

<sup>87</sup> Susanne Himmelheber and Mirko Heipek, "Der Karlsruher Künstlerbund," in *Kunst in Karlsruhe, 1900-1950*, exh. cat. (Karlsruhe: C. F. Müller, 1981), 20-26.

<sup>88</sup> Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in fin-de-siècle Europe*, chapter 6.

of a silent non-revolutionary alternative to the present order, of more or less undefined concepts such as the “soul” or “unity” were those that spoke to the bourgeoisie at large and could contain more dangerous contestations coming from the direction of the labour movement.

The Secessions played a role in the establishment of the discourse of modernism. Even if not overtly so in style (their members merely experimented with modern styles that were already established), the Secessions were instrumental in setting up the parameters under which art was produced and received for decades to come. Part of this was that they did not last. Although formally some of them continued to exist, they quickly lost their original force. The influence of prominent artists within the groups made it difficult for younger artists to establish themselves. As a consequence, younger artists, seceding from the Secessions, formed their own groups, which were often even more elitist and exclusive than their predecessors. This development of generational antagonisms is central for modernism. The Secessions did not only help to establish organisational tools such as group formation, independent exhibition venues and a certain type of affiliation with the speculative market that would all determine the course of modernist art, they also created the ideology of the ever new, of the displacement of recognised styles with new ones, of the revolt of “sons” against their “fathers.” Part of this discourse was also financial success. Modernism, with its restless change and succession of movements, provided capitalism with a valuable service. Indeed, the discourse of progress and development, which was established in art critical rhetoric at the time, is itself a capitalist characteristic.

The Secessions show the complex dialectic between opposition and incorporation, anti-commercialism and the wish to adapt to the new reality, romanticism and liberalism. In this light, the point is not so much to identify the Secessions as pre-modernist or not radical, but rather to reveal the fact that modernism itself is often overestimated as an oppositional practice. It was opportunity for creating new hierarchies and to gain power, even in the discourse of the market, that convinced Stieglitz of the usefulness of Secessionism as strategy. And there was room for a new artistic medium. However, as much as Stieglitz’s personal success depended on photography, and its newness in turn on technological innovation, as I have shown this aspect was more downplayed than celebrated by the Photo-Secession. This is revealing too for how modernism worked: the mechanical medium, used for nostalgic

content, shows that straightforward analogies between aesthetic form and ideological content in modernism are problematic. The category of romantic anti-capitalism provides paths to answers and solutions to these complexities. It reveals what sort of questions the Secessionists were posing about the nature of capitalist modernity and the role the human subject could play in it.

Many authors identify the Secessionists' dominant ideology as liberal.<sup>89</sup> Yet an analysis of the artists' *Weltanschauung* as evident in their works and their utterances brings out a more complex picture. Some, like Liebermann, might have seen themselves as liberals. But around the turn of the twentieth century, this politics was a form of nostalgia for a time when the bourgeoisie was progressive and reveals a by no means unambiguous relationship with the present. Secessionism is then unmasked as the discontent of a particular group of people under the pressures of modernity. Stieglitz's adherence to German culture, taken as a whole, was not a case of direct influence. It came about because of certain coincidences in all capitalist countries, a development of socio-economic structures that was increasingly international. Yet as such it was not only an ideology, bound up with social classes and notions of power. The similar efforts of Stieglitz and his associates and the Secessionists in Central Europe to make sense of modernity, to create something that would give one's experience meaning, was also intuitional in character (as is the method of *Weltanschauung*, which emerged out of the same conditions). Art was uniquely suited for that task. It was for this reason that people like Stieglitz, or Liebermann, were artists, and not mainly because they wanted to sell pictures and receive public honours. And with Secessionism, they devised a useful institutional model for their project.

Romantic anti-capitalism as an outlook played its own particular role in this project. The artists discussed felt that something essential had been taken away from them, but at the same time they could also see the sublimation of this negativity: they cherished the new values of individual freedom and artistic experimentation, the availability of new media for art and the possibility of economic success. The awareness of this ambiguity differentiates late-nineteenth century romantic anti-capitalism from the original Romantic Movement. Some of the force of the belief in a possible return to pre-capitalist conditions, a motor of original Romanticism, is lost in

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<sup>89</sup> For example: Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in fin-de-siècle Europe*.

the later version. Yet at the same time, romantic anti-capitalism – if it could go beyond its focus on providing an alternative – also gained a source of dissident strength through the certainty of the persistence of capitalism in one form or another. Knowledge of capitalism’s defining characteristics leads not only to stagnation and resignation, but, dialectically, can be the basis of a more tangible view of its necessary sublation. The only problem with romantic anti-capitalism is that this *Aufhebung* is limited to the sphere of thought. Yet, as Löwy shows, the “free-floating intellectuals” (to use Mannheim’s term) could bring important elements to the proletarian struggle if they chose to affiliate with this class.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, 20-22.

## Chapter 2: Aestheticism

In January 1903, not long after he had founded the Photo-Secession, Alfred Stieglitz published the first issue of a journal that was to be closely associated with the group, but not, as he insisted, its “mouthpiece”: *Camera Work*. Although a variety of different viewpoints and approaches was programmatic, there are clear indications as to how Stieglitz envisaged the link between photography as an art and a society that would be hospitable to its role as such – even if they are not formulated in politically clear terms. Art is supposed to play a major role in life; it should function as a redeeming power but on the basis that it is separate from practical life. This idea builds on the isolation of art from life as proposed by aestheticist theories whilst at the same time it voices a critique of the powerlessness of art that results from such views. This critique, which points to the ambivalent relationship with modernity and its signifiers, is typical of the romantic anti-capitalist worldview. In this chapter, I look at the complex tensions around the work of art and its role in American modernity. This analysis reveals how a modernist and professional artistic project, such as Stieglitz’s *Camera Work* needed to look, and the contradictions that needed to be reconciled in its discourse.

An issue of *Camera Work* is a work of art in itself. The design of the cover by Edward Steichen (fig. 28) is simple, understated, elegant, distinctively unobtrusive. Silver-grey letters in a typeface that anticipates Art Nouveau state the journal’s name, its association with photography and Alfred Stieglitz and the respective number of the issue in Latin numerals. Behind the cover, the pages are of thick white paper, sparingly printed with text. Tissue paper protects the pages containing photographs. These are halftone reproductions and photogravures. When printed from the original negative, Stieglitz insisted they count as originals – a fact he was very proud of, pointing out that no expense was spared for the quality of the photographic reproductions. The photograph thus gained a value not only as a picture, but also as an object in itself: an object of art and a commodity.

In the discourse of *Camera Work*, the combination of formal qualities with the expression of a particular sentiment is what makes the work of Photo-Secessionists special. With the example of photographer Eva Watson-Schütze, Joseph Keiley – author, photographer and associate editor of *Camera Work* – describes this sentiment



as “a certain delicacy,” which permeates her work and her life.<sup>1</sup> Her life and work are one, part of the same sensibility and the same “aspiration toward the infinite.” Her work is a “poetic appreciation of a higher order,” in sympathy with a delicate and hidden beauty of nature, it is the “groping after something still beyond,” a “troubled search.” Watson’s work is too subtle and delicate to appeal to the many who are “voluptuous and material and selfish.” It sets something against this, contrasts with it by holding the mirror to the present in idealised pictures of femininity such as *Head of a Young Girl* (fig. 29) or in landscapes that show the power of nature as in *Storm* (fig. 30).

These themes could find manifestation in the photograph because the picture was at the same time – and in the first place according to Watson-Schütze herself – an exploration of formal laws.<sup>2</sup> Within the confinement of the artwork, harmonies of form and content can create an example of beauty that expressed what an ideal life, far removed from actual reality, should look like. Such an aestheticist cult of beauty is characteristic of *Camera Work*. The term harmony has a twofold meaning in Watson-Schütze’s usage. It points to the internal pictorial order on one hand and on the other to the harmonious world beyond that, which is the content of the idea that has to be expressed. A work of art has an emotional and an intellectual message: they are interlinked and complement each other. It is photography’s advantage that it can bridge the gap between the two better than any other medium, according to associate editor, Dallet Fuguet.<sup>3</sup>

Sadakichi Hartmann was a particularly productive contributor. Uniting his interests in French Symbolism, German philosophy, Japanese art and pictorial photography was his conviction that a new culture was acutely needed to remedy the problems of a society in decline and his belief that such an art had to centre on the spiritual, emotive faculties of human beings to counter the materialist and positivist tendencies of an age hostile to culture. Hartmann discredited Impressionism for being too scientific and insufficiently beautiful and for not putting forward a vision of the ideal (not an unusual response to the style in America). He advocated instead a “suggestive” art of poetic mysticism and psychological intensity, embodying a poetic idea, imaginative subject matter, delicate colours and sketchy form. Above all,

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph T. Keiley, “Eva Watson-Schütze,” *Camera Work*, No. 9 (January 1905): 23-26.

<sup>2</sup> Eva Watson-Schütze, “Signatures,” *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 35-36.

<sup>3</sup> Dallet Fuguet, “Our Artistic Opportunity,” *Camera Work*, No. 8 (October 1905): 26-28.

Hartmann emphasised that a meaningful art should rest on canons of ancient oriental art that called for a repetition of both subject and images painting with “slight variations,” as opposed to the “craze for originality” of the western tradition.<sup>4</sup>

*Camera Work*'s premise that art be an exploration of formal laws in order to express an idea presupposed a certain kind of personality to execute it. Articles about individual photographers, in most cases members of the Photo-Secession, accompanied their works and served as means to build an image of the photographic artist. These characterisations illuminate what the authors considered photographic art. Gertrude Käsebier, for example, is praised for portraits such as *Dorothy* (fig. 31) and *Miss N.* (fig. 32), reproduced in the same number, in which she is applauded for having captured the character of the sitter in one brief moment as opposed to the several sessions at the disposal of the painter.<sup>5</sup> Her personal qualities as well as her technical skills allow her to put her subjects in a comfortable state of mind so that no nervousness conceals their true selves. What makes Käsebier's pictures art, according to Charles Caffin, author of the text, is that they express true sentiment and are worthy as pictures themselves, through their schemes of light and shade, tone and texture. Whilst Käsebier excels in the portrait, Clarence White's strength, according to Caffin, is the domestic genre.<sup>6</sup> Just like the Dutch masters of still life and genre, White selects domestic and rural subjects as in *Illustration to “Eben Holden”* (fig. 33) or *Winter Landscape* (fig. 34) “not for their intrinsic value as such,” but as means to solve artistic problems: the formal language of pictures and the technique of photography.<sup>7</sup> Formal laws and technique, however, are in turn solely means to express “his own attitude of mind,” which renders the arrangements completely personal – and their social content irrelevant.

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<sup>4</sup> Sidney Allan (Pseudonym for Sadakichi Hartmann), “Repetition with Slight Variation,” *Camera Work* (January 1903): 30-34; Sadakichi Hartmann, *Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings*, ed. Jane Calhoun Weaver (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Caffin, “Mrs. Käsebier's Work – An Appreciation,” *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 17-19.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Caffin, “Clarence H. White,” *Camera Work*, No. 3 (July 1903): 15-17.

<sup>7</sup> “Eben Holden” was the central character in Irving Bacheller's novel *Eben Holden: A Tale of the North Country* (1900). The theme of the story matches that of romantic anti-capitalism too.

Keiley characterises the artist as possessing the qualities of sincerity, feeling, taste, technical skill and imagination.<sup>8</sup> Technique as the “art-language” takes its place among the other criteria, which all point to the inner life of a person. The simultaneity of the recurring theme of technical expertise in *Camera Work* (especially in relation to the mechanical and chemical medium of photography) with terms such as “soul” constitutes an important moment of the ambiguous discourse of the magazine. Eduard Steichen is portrayed as such an artist type.<sup>9</sup> Practicing both painting and photography does not prevent him from respecting and seeking out each medium’s particular qualities, according to Charles Caffin.<sup>10</sup> Selecting only essential facts, Steichen simplifies his subject, and “translates the confusion of color into the creative simplicity of graduated blacks and whites, darks and lights.” It is the quality of the camera that it can easily reach that simplification, making apparent the central pictorial category of form. Sidney Allan (a pseudonym used by Sadakichi Hartmann) stresses Steichen’s romantic qualities. Upon a visit to Steichen’s studio, in “orderly disorder” in a “sort of gipsy fashion” he found in the photographer himself with his “pallid, angular face,” his “dark, disheveled hair, and his steady eyes,” “the air of some classical visionary.”

Hartmann and Caffin agreed that Steichen’s most remarkable quality was his ability to bring out in photographic portraits the innermost essence of his sitter, as shown in his portrait of Auguste Rodin (fig. 35). Caffin describes the picture, which shows Rodin darkly silhouetted against the gradations of black and white of a plaster cast of his *Hugo* statue, as a “contrast of masses and tones,” a “generalisation” of colour contrasts, a “dark mass of grey.” Yet the picture succeeds because it uses the photographic and pictorial means to suggest the force and “introspective depth” of its subject, the “genius of Rodin.” For Hartmann, the portrait “is a whole man’s life condensed into a simple silhouette.” He goes even further than Caffin, stating that *Rodin*, and similarly Steichen’s portrait of Lenbach, suggest not only the personalities of these men with formal means, but also sum up their art. *Lenbach* (fig. 36), just like the art of this “*storm and stress*” painter, as Hartmann identifies him,

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Keiley, “Notes by the Way,” *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 62.

<sup>9</sup> Steichen later anglicised his first name but in *Camera Work* it always appears in the German spelling.

<sup>10</sup> Caffin’s name is besides Hartmann’s the most frequent in *Camera Work*.

combines the “light effects of an old master” with the “copious detail bristling with intellectuality.”<sup>11</sup>

For both Caffin and Hartmann, it is the task of the artist to bring “soul” into the soulless modern world, to supply mysticism, vision, “as we peer through the prison-bars of modern life.”<sup>12</sup> There is an elitist component in bringing “the clarity and incentive of the elevated air to the cloggier atmosphere of the plain.”<sup>13</sup> The artist fulfils a social function, but this is cast in such idealist terms that any true sympathy for people is lacking, any sense of their own agency. Lilian Steichen repeats the claims that artists are personalities “whose experiences are of surpassing nature,” who have to make life “richer and fuller” for all, who have to express themselves but cannot possibly do this in ordinary ways. Only through sympathetic understanding of the artist’s original emotions behind creation can the audience gain from the engagement with art.<sup>14</sup>

### **Formalism: The Theories of Konrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrand**

The interest in formal qualities in *Camera Work*, the autotelic character ascribed to artworks, has a corollary in late-nineteenth-century German art theory. Motivated by the wish to legitimise the existence of art as an independent discipline, theorists such as Konrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrand sought for the particularity of the visual medium. They found it in visibility (“*Anschauung*”), maintaining that the perceptual power of the artist constituted the highest development of human perception, to be cultivated only in works of visual art and nowhere else. Artistic knowledge differs from all other spheres of human knowledge. It is parallel to but distinct from conceptual knowledge and it can only be communicated by form, which is hence the essential characteristic of works of art. In form, the content of art is manifest and exposed as nothing else but formation (*Gestaltung*) itself. The origins of artistic creation are in the artist’s urge to pictorially apprehend visible, transitory natural appearances, and in this process of formative becoming to transform unshaped inner artistic images to clearly perceptible form creations. The goal of art is not to

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<sup>11</sup> Sidney Allan, “A Visit to Steichen’s Studio,” *Camera Work*, No. 2 (April 1903): 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> Allan, “A Visit to Steichen’s Studio,” 26.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Caffin, “Eduard J. Steichen – An Appreciation,” *Camera Work*, No. 2 (April 1903): 24.

<sup>14</sup> Lilian Steichen, “Of Art in Relation to Life,” *Camera Work*, No. 2 (April 1903): 30.

represent nature, but to transform it with the force of the artist's own imagination, in which the natural object is stripped of its fleeting material appearance and made to last. Artworks are not natural products, but the results of human activity. Therefore they are only legible via the intention that the artist had during the act of creation and all other possible readings are non-essential.<sup>15</sup>

In their focus on art as a cognitive function, these theories reach back to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. But they simultaneously present a critical engagement with the tradition of classical German Idealism. Fiedler and others before him revised Kant so as to get rid of the "scandal" of the thing-in-itself. In this process, they accommodated Kantian philosophy to the spirit of the positivist age.<sup>16</sup> They were less interested in the relationship between aesthetic and other forms of knowledge that occupied Kant than with grounding a theory that took the sphere of aesthetic as its own object, without connections to other spheres. As a result, the argument takes on an elitist shape. Art is separated from everyday life and constitutes an activity absolutely apart.<sup>17</sup>

Fiedler and Hildebrand start their argument about the special character of aesthetic cognition from the perspective of the artistic subject. This marks a radical difference from Kant and the tradition of aesthetics in general, and is in some ways even a reversion to theories of art from before the invention of aesthetics as a philosophical subdiscipline. It is from the standpoint of the artist that Fiedler and Hildebrand argue that aesthetic knowledge has no parallel elsewhere in human cognition and that the artist unites the acts of perception and creation. If Fiedler equates artistic creation with cognition, and maintains that this kind of cognition is superior to all others, this is achieved on the grounds that artistic cognition unites sensual and conceptual cognition and that it is based on the visual sense, which is declared superior to all other sensory organs. Thereby, Fiedler's focus, in contrast to Kant, is not cognition as such, but a theory that argues for the supremacy of sensual over conceptual cognition and against a separation of the sphere of thought from that of confused

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<sup>15</sup> Konrad Fiedler, "Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Kunst" (1876), in *Conrad Fiedlers Schriften über Kunst*, ed. Hans Marbach (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1896), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Gottfried Boehm, "Einleitung," in Fiedler, Konrad, *Schriften zur Kunst*, Nachdruck der Ausgabe München 1913/14 mit weiteren Texten aus Zeitschriften und dem Nachlass, einer einleitenden Abhandlung, einer Bibliographie und Registern, ed. Gottfried Boehm (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1971), xxiii. Schopenhauer was also an influence, but Kant is central.

<sup>17</sup> Boehm, "Einleitung," xliii.

sensory perception. This differs from Kant's interest in the cognitive viewpoint of the beholder. It is also what makes it possible for such a formalism to provide a basis for aestheticism.

There are significant differences between Fiedler's and Hildebrand's concepts of form. As a sculptor, Hildebrand developed a more practically oriented theory than Fiedler, who had no practical experience. For Hildebrand, the aim was an artwork that is in itself complete and as such equal to nature. The artwork should achieve this status by employing the same strategies as nature. In doing so, it still stands in relation to nature and its specific limitations, and external reality is still a point of reference for the work of art and its form. However, this does not mean that the principal function of art has to be imitation; it is not. For Fiedler, by contrast, who did not admit to the existence of a reality existing independently from human perception, form was central because it testifies to the fact there were no pre-existing objects that served as inspiration for the human spirit. Form is entirely the result of the creative capacities of the human imagination. Hence form and content are, in Fiedler's view, the same thing.<sup>18</sup>

Fiedler and Hildebrand's emphasis on the autonomy of art corresponds with certain strands of thought in *Camera Work*. Most significantly, it underlies the efforts to promote photography as a form of art based on the particular benefits of the medium. Arguments for the quality of photographic work often run along the lines of a "straight" versus a "manipulative" approach.<sup>19</sup> Any intervention during the process of exposure or developing would align the photographer with the painter as well as with non-artistic practitioners of the trade such as the hobbyist or the commercial photographer. But the border between manipulated and straight photography is not clear, as Steichen himself acknowledges in an article. Some intervention is unavoidable: "In the very beginning, when the operator controls and regulates his time of exposure, then in the dark-room the developer is mixed for detail, breadth, flatness or contrast, faking has been resorted to."<sup>20</sup>

*Camera Work* contributors are likely to have been familiar with the theories of Fiedler and Hildebrand, which were at the forefront of art theory in the west.

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<sup>18</sup> Boehm, "Einleitung," xxv-xxvi.

<sup>19</sup> For example, it is stressed that Käsebier practiced a rigorously straight approach: Editors, "The Pictures in this Number," *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 63.

<sup>20</sup> Steichen, "Ye Fakers," *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 48.

Stieglitz read and spoke German fluently. His ties with Germany were strong not only due to his residence in Berlin as a student during the 1880s, but also through his lively correspondence with photographers in Germany and Austria. The trio of Austrian pictorial photographers, Hugo Henneberg, Heinrich Kühn and Hans Watzek, who were considered the leading forces in the German-speaking photographic art movement, received substantial attention in *Camera Work*. A text by painter, writer, promoter and collector of art photography, Fritz Mathies-Masuren, translated from the German, accompanies the reproduced pictures by the “*Kleeblatt*.”<sup>21</sup> Mathies-Masuren displays an elitist conception of the role of the critic as middleman between artist and audience and relies heavily on formalist notions about the nature of art. He views making pictures as essentially a question of understanding the “true relation between light and colour,” the softening “of sharp lines,” and the modification of details, in order to arrive at “breadth and unity of pictorial effect” for which absolute technical expertise is key. The artistic imagination acts as a “superadded” power to create “an art which still is of nature”: “the aim of the artist is to recreate the impression which the aspect of nature produced upon him.”<sup>22</sup> For Fiedler, too, although the picture was an entity in itself, a creation parallel to nature, nature always remained a referent.

### **Aestheticism and its Critique**

Formalist theory alone does not explain the views in *Camera Work*. The magazine’s discourse paid less attention to cognitive aspects than to notions of the separation of art from life and the cultivation of individual sensation as the central object of experience in order to provide an opportunity of escape from an unbearable present. These are the hallmarks of the *l’art pour l’art* doctrine of aestheticism, which in turn reached back to the Romantic period. Extracts by “Sebastian Melmoth” (probably attributable to Oscar Wilde) and by James Abbott McNeill Whistler are reprinted in *Camera Work*.<sup>23</sup> They stress that art should maintain a distance from middle-class

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<sup>21</sup> Watzek, Henneberg and Kühn were widely known as the “cloverleaf.”

<sup>22</sup> Fritz Mathies-Masuren, “Hugo Henneberg – Heinrich Kühn – Hans Watzek,” trans. from German by George Herbert Engelhard, *Camera Work*, No. 13 (January 1906): 21-41.

<sup>23</sup> Sebastian Melmoth, “Extracts”, *Camera Work*, No. 8 (October 1904): 58; “Extracts,” *Camera Work*, No. 10 (April 1905): 41. Oscar Wilde had used the name as a pseudonym since 1897. Sadakichi Hartmann, “White Chrysanthemums,” *Camera Work*, No. 5 (January 1904): 19-20. Reprinted in the same number is an extract of Whistler’s “Ten O’clock

mediocrity through concentration on form and beauty alone. The preservation of beauty in art should serve as the basis for a profound experience that provides solace from the ills of the world. Aestheticists went beyond Fiedler's solipsistic viewpoint because the experience instigated through formal means was more than cognitive. It had the wider implication of providing an opportunity to lose oneself in the work of art and the world it created apart from the sphere of external appearances. The idea of the autonomy of art was invented neither by the formalists nor by the aestheticists, and it meant different things at different times. Around 1900, it provided the rationale for withdrawal from a life of which people such as Whistler or Stieglitz did not properly feel a part, a life in which they saw their central values diminished and threatened.

The *Camera Work* authors, foremost Hartmann, admired Whistler, mainly for his opposition to Realism and in his advocacy of a norm of beauty both modern and rooted in tradition.<sup>24</sup> They agreed with Whistler that art should not be about narrative, nor about sentiment, that it should reject "ut pictura poesis" and the didactic notion of art central to the humanistic theory of painting and sculpture since the Renaissance that was codified in academic theory.<sup>25</sup> Instead, it should strive for beauty through the harmonious treatment of colour and line. This beauty, although or because it is fleeting, is responsible for the holistic experience that the contemplation of works of art constitutes, an experience that goes beyond the artistic object as such. But at the same time, in a more negatively inflected sense, the fact that experience of beauty can only ever be individual and not collective is a sign of the absence of a common denominator, of a *Weltanschauung* in modernity, as Hartmann implies. Beauty can exist, but only for short moments, and only a few individuals are able to see it. Hartmann, like Whistler, doubted that the public at large could be expected to share in the appreciation of what demanded long study and the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility. Yet for the chosen few, their ability to spot beauty brought solace from the ugliness of the present. They had to actively look for it and in objects

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Lecture," delivered in Oxford, Cambridge and London in 1855. "In the beginning man went forth...the perfection of harmony worthy a picture is rare, and not common at all." Full lecture: James McNeill Whistler, "Mr. Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock' (1885)," in Joshua Taylor (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 502-513.

<sup>24</sup> Hartmann and Whistler shared an interest in Japanese art, see: Hartmann, "White Chrysanthemums."

<sup>25</sup> See Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (December 1940): 197-269.



of art, in a sphere separate from the normal world; and then they could perpetuate it for others and for prosperity if they could find the right form. Although Hartmann is not explicit, such a form has to be stripped down to its own specificity excluding all elements from outside in order to avoid contamination with worldly ugliness.

The contradictions of art for art's sake become apparent in *Camera Work*. A close reading of the magazine's issues from the beginning up until around 1908 (when other concerns became central), suggests that for most of the writers, form could neither be an end in itself nor was the social possibility of art exhausted with the notion of retreat. Although in some articles the phrase "art for art's sake" is rejected outright, in most cases this is not a moment in a conscious critique but rather a search for the terms for a new and meaningful role for art in modernity.<sup>26</sup>

The benefit of engaging with art for the audience is a spiritual enrichment that goes beyond form and creative empathy and beyond the notions of a function of art in its relationship with morality, however weighted, as Friedrich Schiller implied it in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.<sup>27</sup> This is evident from the fact that some authors criticise the difficulty of access of modern art. It is less the working-class individual who is lacking the sensibility necessary to enjoy art than the "philistine" bourgeois with his concern for mercantile values and social formalities. But artists are criticised for their "indifference towards the world."<sup>28</sup> For Caffin, "[T]here is only one sader [sic] thing than the world's indifference toward the artist, and that is the artist's indifference toward the world. If he be unsuccessful, he rails at it; if successful, he despises it."<sup>29</sup> Caffin had no tolerance for a hermetic art that speaks only to the select. He was confident that artists inspired by society's ideals and accomplishments would create an art that was comprehended and needed by a public educated in the principles of art.<sup>30</sup> He believed that in a new society, art would represent new forms and a new relationship between art and its publics would

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Caffin, "Of Verities and Illusions," *Camera Work*, No. 12 (October 1905): 26. Here Caffin praised Whistler for overcoming the traditional western preoccupation with "means" (which he calls "art for art's sake") with an attention to "universality" influenced by Japanese art. His use of the term is associated with craft and technical skills.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, in einer Reihe von Briefen, in *Schillers sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1860), 1-118.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Caffin, "As Others See Us," *Camera Work*, No. 10 (April 1905): 25-27.

<sup>29</sup> Caffin, "As Others See Us."

<sup>30</sup> Sandra Underwood, *Charles H. Caffin: A Voice for Modernism, 1897-1918* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 27. Caffin repeats these concerns in his book *Art for Life's Sake* (1913).

emerge. Although Caffin saw a reason for the problem of access in the artists' egotism, he was not prepared to let go of the Romantic and aestheticist fixation with the figure of the artist. He saw Stieglitz's major quality precisely in the fact that he was the "arch too much egoist." This personality trait was necessary for the integrity and sincerity of his efforts to oppose the arrogance and intolerance that spread in photographic circles.

Charles Caffin, as a writer and public lecturer, was a highly visible figure in modern arts circles in the United States.<sup>31</sup> His theories form a logical whole, with progressive tendencies visible from the beginning and recurring themes such as the analogies between the visual arts and music and the influence of oriental art on western culture. Caffin's writings prove that he was conscious of historical continuities, not defining modernism as a radical break with the old. Like Fiedler and Hildebrand, Caffin attributed a central role to the artist in his theory. He proclaimed that the intuition of the artist must be respected as a guide to the understanding of artistic work. For this, like Hartmann, he saw the suggestive quality of modern art as central, which, in turn, was a sign of the artist's heightened sensibility and spiritual nature. Caffin believed in the existence of a specific and independent aesthetic language with symbol, suggestion and abstractive association as its means and the evocation of the sphere of the ideal and emotive as its end. He approved of Realism, Naturalism and Impressionism but distanced himself from decadence and Symbolism.<sup>32</sup>

There is an anti-bourgeois element in Caffin's criticism. He explicitly uses the term "bourgeois" to denote what is negative in traditional art, namely the absence of feeling and the concentration on external appearances, especially in portraiture.<sup>33</sup> He favoured landscape as a medium in which a "quiet detachment" from external reality and hence "a communion with things larger and better than oneself" could be achieved "out of which good art may grow."<sup>34</sup> In advocating Japanese art as a model for the art of the west and by directly pointing towards the "communism" of land and

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<sup>31</sup> Like Stieglitz and Hartmann, Caffin was foreign-born. He came to America from England when he was already 38 years old.

<sup>32</sup> Underwood, *Charles H. Caffin*, p. 17

<sup>33</sup> Western art which is "not of feeling, *bourgeois*" (Caffin's italics): Charles Caffin, "On Verities and Illusions," *Camera Work*, No. 12 (October 1905): 27. Caffin uses the term "bourgeois" again in his "On Verities and Illusions – Part. II," *Camera Work*, No. 13 (January 1906): 43: "intellectually and spiritually unimpressive, *bourgeoise* [sic]."

<sup>34</sup> Caffin, "Of Verities and Illusions," 27.

labour founded by Confucius and rooted in Taoist and Buddhist philosophy as its anti-bourgeois element, Caffin uses the term “bourgeois” in direct relation to individualism.<sup>35</sup> He implies that bourgeois art can never be spiritual because of the bourgeoisie’s preoccupation with external appearances and its attachment to material reality.<sup>36</sup> Capitalism, I interpret Caffin as saying, does not allow a vision that goes beyond the individual and the material. To this, art poses an antithesis. This is not identical to the aestheticist position of an alternative to the world, a retreat, but presupposes the possibility that art might have a real influence on other spheres.

It is remarkable how frequently in *Camera Work* the desire for a broadened reach of culture is voiced – yet all the while elitist conceptions prevail. The authors sensed that the interest in formal aspects and art for art’s sake could not be the final goal of the encounter with artworks. They questioned Fiedler and Hildebrand’s concept that the reception of works of art finds its end in a formal understanding that led to an empathetic repetition of the artist’s original emotions. Art had to communicate more than that. The notion of art as a retreat, as a means to turn one’s back on the world as proposed by the aesthetes was not satisfactory either. The benefit from engaging with art for the audience is a spiritual enrichment that, it is implied, has a bearing for modern society at large. For example, Fuguet suggested that art’s focus on sentiment constituted a counterpart to the dominance of logic and rationality.<sup>37</sup> But engagement with art requires effort, preparation. This is what makes it so exclusive: in order to fully benefit from an encounter with art, one has already to possess a certain knowledge and a certain state of mind. These were political problems sitting below the surface and were never openly addressed.

### **Georg Lukács and *l’art pour l’art***

The critique of aestheticism in *Camera Work* is reminiscent of the early writings of the Hungarian philosopher and sociologist of literature, Georg Lukács. Lukács addressed the theories of Fiedler and Hildebrand in his lecture “Formproblem der

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<sup>35</sup> Caffin, “Of Verities and Illusions,” 29.

<sup>36</sup> Caffin, “On Verities and Illusions,” 27.

<sup>37</sup> Fuguet, “On Art and Originality Again,” 26.

Malerei” from 1913.<sup>38</sup> According to the pre-Marxist Lukács, it is not the formal organisation of a picture alone that decides its character. On the basis of subject matter, the visual arts are to be differentiated further than Fiedler and Hildebrand’s concept of visibility allows. In *Camera Work*, the significance of subject matter is not neglected either; Stieglitz’s photograph *The Hand of Man* (fig. 16) is singled out for its content. Locomotives were popular as a subject among the “button-pressers,” the non-artistic amateur photographers. By using it for an art photograph, applying artistic formal criteria to his handling of the steam and smoke in the composition, Stieglitz directly challenges them.<sup>39</sup> If he had abstained from such a “common” subject, his superior aesthetic qualities could not be shown. At the same time, he directs us to the “pictorial possibilities of the commonplace” in our daily lives.<sup>40</sup>

By choosing this subject, Stieglitz proposed an alternative solution to the out-of-focus aesthetic of his companions in the photography-as-art project. Most of the Photo-Secessionists thought that by appropriating a hazy look and blurring the subject matter, by drawing the focus of a picture away from subject matter and nearer to its form, the art status of a photographic picture would become apparent. Stieglitz complicated the matter by choosing everyday subjects, on the grounds prepared by Realist and Naturalist artists in the nineteenth century. Edgar Degas or Gustave Flaubert included banal subjects to demonstrate the equality of all subjects but also to draw attention to formal experiments. The interest in art for art’s sake was related to an engagement with the socio-economic conditions of modernity, supporting Lukács’s claim in the “Formproblem” lecture: a combination of form and subject matter defines art, not form alone. The focus on form would not have been possible without drastic changes in the realm of subject matter in modern art. The comparison of the later *Steerage* (fig. 17), where contemporary subject matter coexists with a formal aesthetic that highlights the qualities of the photographic medium, and the earlier *Hand of Man*, with its combination of everyday subject matter and allusions to the blurred pictorialist aesthetic, reveals Stieglitz’s path to modern art photography. Romanticism plays a role in this trajectory. Just as the

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<sup>38</sup> “[D]er Vortrag konnte mithin nicht vor Ende 1913 fertiggestellt werden,” see: György Márkus, “Nachwort,” in Georg Lukács, *Heidelberger Ästhetik (1916-1918)*, ed. György Márkus and Frank Benseler, Werke, Vol. 17 (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974), 278.

<sup>39</sup> William A. Cadby, “A Chat on the London Photographic Salon,” *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 24.

<sup>40</sup> Editors, “The Pictures in This Number,” *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 63.

doctrines of Realism and *l'art pour l'art* were closely intertwined in nineteenth-century France, so Romanticism, too, was enmeshed in this artistic debate and network of people. Théophile Gautier – who is usually seen as the first to enunciate the *l'art pour l'art* doctrine, in the preface to his 1835 novel *Mlle de Maupin* – was also a central figure of the French Romantic movement. Charles Baudelaire, too, has to be understood in some respects as a Romantic poet as well as in relation to aestheticism and Realism in his interest in contemporary themes. The Realist concept of the artist is still essentially a Romantic one. Aestheticism, like Romanticism, comes tied up with a whole set of other attitudes. Sometimes it is associated with *il faut être de son temps* and sometimes with a flight from the present.

For Lukács and in *Camera Work*, art extracts the essence from external appearances by transferring it into expression and thus corresponding to an inner human need.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps this is a formulation of “the idea” often referred to but never explicitly defined in *Camera Work*, the non-material essence inside external appearances and the content of artworks. The aesthetic connects humans, essentially soulful beings, to each other and to the material world in which they live. Lukács relates this observation to the portrait. There, “the external expresses the internal, the soul” and humans can catch a glimpse of themselves, in another human. Each portrait is a self-portrait, expressing the soul of the artist and of the beholder, for whom the subject acts as a substitute.<sup>42</sup> This is echoed in accounts of portraiture in *Camera Work* that stress the importance of the artist’s own personality to their ability to grasp the sitter’s soulfulness. The countless portraits in *Camera Work* by photographic artists of other artists or poets, such as Steichen’s portrait of Clarence White (fig. 37), exemplify this.

Lukács links the notion that external appearances have to mirror the internal to the postulate that the visual arts are capable of penetrating all objects and creating a world in which the interior is completely in accordance with the exterior.<sup>43</sup> This line of thought is present in *Camera Work* too. Caffin complains that (western) painting, preoccupied with surface appearance and superficial sentiment, has not the same spiritual potential as music or poetry. To gain this “abstract” quality, western art

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<sup>41</sup> Georg Lukács, “Das Formproblem in der Malerei (Eine Vorlesung und zwei Entwürfe),” in *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, 238-239.

<sup>42</sup> Lukács, “Formproblem,” 239.

<sup>43</sup> Lukács, “Formproblem,” 234.

could learn from the Japanese *Kokoro*: “that portion of the universal life or spirit manifested in the material,” meaning the essence that makes plants grow or the essence of chivalry in the sword that cannot be summed up by the material of metal alone.<sup>44</sup>

Fiedler formulated the concept of visibility as the specific moment of visual art, the origin of unity and capable of ordering the chaos of the world. It has this force because visibility itself is at the same time the moment of conceiving and actually producing a work of art. In this conflation, Lukács finds unaddressed the function of art that goes beyond the cognitive. In contrast to Fiedler, he is convinced that art stands in a relationship with a profound human need that cannot be summed up in empirical, individual or even aesthetic terms. In contrast to formalists and aestheticists, Lukács posits the self-contained world of the artwork in relation to an empirical world outside. It is not merely part of a wider totality, but, because of its self-containment, it is a real existing totality itself and serves as a guarantor for the possibility of totality at all. In other words, the artwork is an existing utopia. The work of art, as a totality, can function as an example for the possibility of totality as such and exert a real influence on the life of people – precisely through the concentration on its own specificity.

The simultaneity of social consciousness and privileging of art manifest in this position betrays a predominantly pessimistic view of the world that holds that the developments of modernity have negatively affected society and culture. “Modernity” – calculating spirit, disenchantment of the world and instrumental rationality – is the world shaped by the conditions of capitalism. Lukács’s position and that apparent in *Camera Work* offer an idealist, nostalgic and cultural critique of these conditions; it is a romantic form of anti-capitalism. In a way similarly to Fiedler and Hildebrand, scholars such as Lukács, Wilhelm Dilthey, Karl Mannheim or Georg Simmel were convinced that there are timeless laws of art. But they related form to notions of social unity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Charles Caffin, “On Verities and Illusions, Pt. II,” *Camera Work*, No. 13 (January 1906): 41-45.

<sup>45</sup> One can interpret Fiedler’s position as a defensive response to the conditions of the *Gründerzeit* in which the critique of modernity is not overtly articulated, but expressed in a displaced form.

The question “works of art exist, how are they possible?” guided Lukács’s study of culture. The preoccupation with culture was for him always a philosophical and a sociological one. Yet in his first book, *Soul and Form* (1911), Lukács is torn between the aestheticist promises of separation and maintenance of totality elsewhere on one side, and on the other the knowledge that such a claim to totality can never have any value, as it is from the beginning fraught and untrue.<sup>46</sup> Lukács voiced the suspicion that he was afraid his own work was just as incapable of creating or expressing a unifying culture as all the other productions of the age.<sup>47</sup> He was torn between the hope and desperation of modernity in general.<sup>48</sup>

Despite his disdain for liberalism and its ethos of progress, Lukács was attracted to modern literature and art. The son of a liberal father, an assimilated Jew (for whom capitalism and liberalism provided the opportunity for economic and social success, a situation comparable to Stieglitz’s), Lukács represented a generational revolt too. The moderns offered not only expression of one’s own ambivalent feelings towards modernity – which could have easily been read by the older generation as ingratitude – but also the opportunity of protest. Culture was also appreciated by the liberal fathers, particularly in Central Europe, where for the old bourgeoisie (Lukács uses the term “*Spätbürgertum*”) liberalism and ideas of progress went hand in hand with the notion of a *Kulturnation* and a relative appreciation of the qualities of disinterested learning. Thus the targets of the protest were not the liberal parents so much as the newly powerful bourgeois fractions associated with big industry and growing nationalist sentiments.<sup>49</sup> If the old (liberal) bourgeoisie did seem to embody all that was negative about modernity, in the face of the new bourgeoisie’s rise around the turn of the century, their values seemed worthwhile. The struggle between old and new bourgeoisie – and his own complex position in it – is at the heart of Lukács’s *Soul and Form*.

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<sup>46</sup> *Soul and Form* appeared first in Hungarian but was soon published as an extended version in German too, pointing to Lukács’s orientation towards German scholarship at this early stage in his career. See Georg Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen: Essays* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1911).

<sup>47</sup> Georg Lukács, “Ein Brief an Leo Popper,” in *Die Seele und die Formen: Essays* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and his Generation, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 107.

<sup>49</sup> This world is represented by the leading character, Diederich Heßling, in Heinrich Mann’s novel *Der Untertan*: Heinrich Mann, *Der Untertan* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1919).

*Soul and Form* is a collection of essays. For Lukács, the essay, breaking with conventions, held the promise of novelty and the possibility to make art or literary criticism itself a form of art, distancing it from all forms of science. An aversion to aestheticism's pretentious detaching of art from life permeates each essay – yet the solution that Lukács proposed to solve the separation of art and life is itself rooted in a mode of thought that privileges art over life, viewing the social problems of capitalism as essentially cultural ones. Lukács was searching for form as a “basic principle” standing for a complete and unifying *Weltanschauung*.<sup>50</sup> Form for Lukács is *Weltanschauung* and thus also represents the circular argument of simultaneously coming out of life and forming life, as the form of the essay chosen for this book demonstrates too. The aim was to write myths relevant for the present as a way to search for the truth, without any claims for finitude.

Alfred Stieglitz similarly avoided the form of the theoretical treatise. Even *Camera Work* should not be the place for theoretical and scholarly debate but offer a space for various, even contradictory, opinions to coexist side by side. Stieglitz's preferred textual medium was the letter: there he found adequate means to express his concerns unfiltered and immediately, unhindered by conventions and postulations of more conventional forms. But even more, Stieglitz was a talker. In his struggle against the instrumentalisation of discursive modes of thought, the spoken word allowed him to resist the inevitably reifying processes when ideas take final textual form.

Lukács and Stieglitz's paradoxical aversion to theory reflects a contradiction inherent in aesthetics: the attempt to find a theoretical expression for something that is a priori atheoretical, aesthetic philosophy succumbs to the same tendency towards specialisation that it is supposed to counter.<sup>51</sup> Reverting to textual modes other than the theoretical treatise, Stieglitz and Lukács sought to preserve the specific quality of the aesthetic. The same motif is at the ground of Fiedler and Hildebrand's efforts. The latter tried to rationalise the uniqueness of aesthetic cognition, yet in their form of discourse they were indebted to empiricist formulations of Enlightenment debates against which the romantic critiques of Stieglitz and Lukács were directed. In line with the historical method of *Verstehen* (intuition) that Wilhelm Dilthey promoted

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<sup>50</sup> Lukács, “Leo Popper,” 15.

<sup>51</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 2-3.



for the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the essay form is an immanent form of criticism that does not borrow from methods alien to its subjects. The limiting of these subjects to one particular discipline, however, relied in turn on the efforts at separation made by aestheticist thought in the first place.

This aversion to theory had a corollary in the literary forms of German romantic anti-capitalism. Right-wing authors such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Paul de Lagarde and Julius Langbehn, passionately “condemned and prophesied, rather than expository or argued, and all their writings showed that they despised the discourse of intellectuals, depreciated reason, and exalted intuition.”<sup>52</sup> This is also true for Friedrich Nietzsche, who, like the populist authors mentioned above, enjoyed great popularity during the period. All opposed the role model of the intuitive artist and a holistic conception of man to that of reason and liberal party politics, and they connected this to a discourse of the strengthening and purification of German culture.<sup>53</sup>

Lukács’s disappointment with art for art’s sake culminated in his conclusion in the essay on Theodor Storm that this doctrine is just the other side of bourgeois life itself.<sup>54</sup> Modern (aestheticist) art and modern (bourgeois) life are part of the same totality, he claims. A separate art as proposed by aestheticism was not attainable under the circumstances of modernity. The autonomy of art itself was not a consequence of the separation of art from life but an instance of the application of the same laws to both spheres. The formulation is even more pronounced in the essay “Aesthetic Culture” where the problem is clearly stated as one of culture, which Lukács defines as a centre that unites people and through this unity makes their lives meaningful.<sup>55</sup> The conditions of modernity are inherently inimical to culture. Modernity tries to replace culture with civilisation and it stands in the way of true culture by applying its petty ethics to the sphere of art, which should not be connected to a distorted type of life but to the soul.

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<sup>52</sup> Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), xiv.

<sup>53</sup> Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, 165-168.

<sup>54</sup> Georg Lukács, “Bürgerlichkeit und l’art pour l’art: Theodor Storm,” in *Die Seele und die Formen*, 119-169.

<sup>55</sup> Georg Lukács, “Aesthetic Culture,” in Arpad Kadarkay (ed.), *The Lukács Reader* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 146.

The category of form as such is not the target of Lukács's attack. It is its bourgeois substitution with technique. True form, which is the sign for *Weltanschauung*, cannot exist in such art. It requires resistance from other spheres in order to fully develop its unifying powers, a resistance which bourgeois life through the separation of spheres did not provide. Art that only focuses on technique can only be meaningful to other artists. It loses its urgency for the majority of people or, at best, is perceived as leisure or therapy. In the absence of a communal centre, art becomes elitist and privatised. Thus, when Lukács criticises aestheticism, he similarly attacks the bourgeois way of life (in which intellectuals like him were themselves enmeshed). Efforts to separate art from life as well as the romantic anti-capitalist hope that an autonomous art could affect life positively were part of an anxious attempt to protect culture against the threat of modernity.

### **Art and Work**

For Lukács, bourgeois life is summed up by its work ethic.<sup>56</sup> The bourgeois ethic of system, regularity, order and duty finds its fullest expression in the profession or occupation and in this shared code, bourgeois society creates a rare sense of community.<sup>57</sup> Aestheticist art follows the same principle of professionalism. The supposed autonomy of art is not the result of a "violent separation," but of the faith in work for its own sake that guarantees the functioning of bourgeois society by preventing its members from asking for the meaning or end of anything.<sup>58</sup> For Lukács, this was not entirely negative when it was a natural matter of course (*Selbstverständlichkeit*) in the early stages of bourgeois hegemony. But in the present, the existence of the work of art, where brilliance is preserved, is only the sign that all brilliance has vanished from everyday life, rendering it fragmented and soulless. Life is only a mask, its own negation.<sup>59</sup> It is its supposed opposite, art, that preserves life. Such art is far from meaningless and without end. In addressing all human faculties, including the soul, it is more real than life itself.

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<sup>56</sup> Lukács follows Max Weber in that regard.

<sup>57</sup> Lukács, "Theodor Storm," 125.

<sup>58</sup> Lukács, "Theodor Storm," 121.

<sup>59</sup> Lukács, "Theodor Storm," 123.

In his *Keywords*, Raymond Williams explains that whilst the term “work” originally referred to nothing more specific than “doing something” or “something done,” by the twentieth century it had taken on a predominant meaning of “regular paid employment.”<sup>60</sup> This modification was directly linked to the development of capitalist productive relations and thus it expressed a social relationship.<sup>61</sup> Stieglitz’s choice of title for his journal is interesting in this context, as is the fact that he and his associates often referred to themselves as “workers” and to their art as “work.” Whilst this usage implies the pervasiveness of the bourgeois work ethic in Stieglitz’s circle, it also expressed the hope that art and life eventually would become one, that artistic work, like other forms of work, should be an acknowledged and respected component of modern society. It was an effort to go beyond the modern meaning of work, back to one that was more inclusive and unaffected by capitalist relations. This approach had a predecessor in the romantic anti-capitalism of John Ruskin, who criticised industrialism for creating spiritual as much as physical poverty, robbing humans of their pleasure in work, stripping industrial workers of their full humanity and making capitalists and tradesmen distort their own human nature. Even worse off, so Ruskin, were people of leisure, including aristocrats, and the unemployed, who were entirely cut off from the vital source of humanness constituted by work.<sup>62</sup>

Ruskin and even more so William Morris and the spokespeople for the Arts and Crafts movement advocated a unity of aesthetic, moral and practical experience embodied in a creative production process that resisted industrial alienation. This implied not only no separation between the creative and industrial processes, but also a lack of distinction between the applied and fine arts. The Arts and Crafts movement was a typical outcome of the phase of industrial capitalism. By the turn of the twentieth century, the heyday of romantic anti-capitalism, the face of capitalism itself had changed and posed new problems in its individualistic, monopoly and corporate guises. Industry alone was not the source of all evil anymore.<sup>63</sup> Capitalism came to be seen as penetrating society in a much more pervasive way. A reformation of the industrial process alone, as proposed by the Arts and Crafts movement, could

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<sup>60</sup> Raymond Williams, “Work,” *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 334-335.

<sup>61</sup> Williams, *Keywords*, 335.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Löwy, Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 140.

<sup>63</sup> Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

not suffice as a remedy. A genuine alternative (either formulated in terms of *l'art pour l'art* or in a romantic-sociological version of it) seemed like the only possible way to come to terms with the given circumstances. At the same time, arguably, in its monopoly form it also lost some of the chaotic disunity that had so troubled the intellectuals.

The Arts and Crafts sensibility also has a corollary in Hildebrand's theory:

The idea which informs the artist's creation is one thing, the process of creation is another. The true connection between these two could scarce be understood except when placed at the end of the treatise. An insight into this connection seems all the more imperative since technical progress and factory work of our day have led us to lose our appreciation of the manner in which a thing is made, and have caused us to value a product more for itself than as a result of some mental activity.<sup>64</sup>

Like Lukács, Hildebrand complains that the present was preoccupied with results. There is a nostalgic longing in both accounts. And although Hildebrand differs from Fiedler who does not distinguish between artistic imagination (visibility) and creation, Fiedler too, like Lukács and Hildebrand, estimates the process of making, however constituted, higher than the result of the finished artwork. This also is in line with his focus on the artist and not on the beholder.

This is distinct from the aestheticist doctrine, as the dispute between William Morris and Whistler reveals. Although Morris did not directly mention the name, his speech "Of the Origins of Ornamental Art" was a direct reply to Whistler's "Ten O'Clock" lecture.<sup>65</sup> Both examined the origin of art in primitive societies, yet whereas Whistler had insisted on the artist as an individualist "dreamer apart," unappreciated by society, and on art as an ideal practice beyond the understanding of the common herd, Morris argued that art is essentially popular, that it can be pursued by all under the right economic circumstances and fulfil an essential function in communities. Both shared a distaste for contemporary Victorian art, but for different reasons. Morris

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<sup>64</sup> Adolf von Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (New York and London: Garland, 1978), 15.

<sup>65</sup> I suspect the following sentence was a direct insult of Morris, who lived in the London district of Hammersmith, on the part of Whistler: "And so, for the flock, little hamlets grow near Hammersmith, and the steam horse is scorned." James Abbott McNeill Whistler, "Ten O'clock Lecture," in Joshua Taylor (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1987), 504.

accused capitalism of producing conditions in which humans could not experience totality, the prerequisite for generating a truly good and popular art. Whistler, instead, saw precisely its popularity as the main deficiency of Victorian art and in this a proof that art can never be for the many.<sup>66</sup> Whilst Whistler uses the “primitive” to justify his reasoning, Morris sees a dialectical path in history. He invokes earlier times in order to highlight the innate human striving towards socialism that will reach fulfilment despite regular throwbacks throughout history.<sup>67</sup> Another instance of Morris’s dialectical utopian thinking is his envisioning of the art of the (socialist) future as no longer recognisable as such, but sublated into life. It is the same aim as that of the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century.<sup>68</sup> Overall, Stieglitz and *Camera Work* fit better into Whistler’s account. But, as shown above, aspirations for art to play a wider role in society were also expressed, although the solution was never sought in the sphere of handwork or popular art, let alone in a socialist structure fostering both.

The Arts and Crafts movement had found many adherents in the United States. William Morris’s products, readily fitting into bourgeois aspirations of home decorating, found eager buyers among wealthy Americans, who were willing to pay a premium for quality and originality.<sup>69</sup> That Morris’s products were meant as a critique of the social inequality thus expressed and tied to a socialist politics was not as widely known in the United States as in Britain. Instead, the American Arts and Crafts movement became aligned with bourgeois philanthropy, and handwork was

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<sup>66</sup> Whistler, “Ten O’clock Lecture”; William Morris, “The Origins of Ornamental Art,” in Norman Kelvin (ed.), *William Morris on Art and Socialism* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), 158-174; E. D. Le Mire, “Morris’ Reply to Whistler”, in *Journal of William Morris Studies* 1:3 (Summer 1963): 2-10.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Eisenman, “Communism in Furs: A Dream of Prehistory in William Morris’s *John Ball*,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (March 2005): 92-110. For Morris’s primitivism see also Caroline Arscott, *Interlacings: William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), Chapter 6: “Morris: The Primitive,” 127-149.

<sup>68</sup> This becomes evident in Morris’s *News From Nowhere* (1890), see: Steve Edwards, “The Colonisation of Utopia,” in David Mabb (ed.), *William Morris* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 2004), 37.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Harvey, and John Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 139-140. For contemporary sources on the American Arts and Crafts movement, see Oscar Lovell Triggs, *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), first published in Chicago in 1902 and Thorstein Veblen, “Arts and Crafts,” in *Essays in our Changing Order*, ed. Leon Ardzrooni (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964), 194-199, first published in *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. XI (December 1902).

practiced in settlement houses and recommended for immigrants as an “uplifting activity” and the acquisition of marketable skills.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the nostalgia for pre-industrial forms of production inspired efforts to preserve native-American craft traditions. However, the politics of such efforts were not as developed as that they could be consciously linked to American progressivism (more on which below).<sup>71</sup> The world of philanthropy was not Stieglitz’s, but he was certainly aware of home furnishing in a Victorian style, as pictures of his summer home, established by his parents at Lake George, prove. Despite similarities between his romantic anti-capitalism and that of the Arts and Crafts movement, Stieglitz adhered to a principle of fine art, for which detachment and withdrawal from daily life were central.<sup>72</sup>

Alan Trachtenberg criticises Stieglitz for only giving a “distanced and aestheticized” account of the dirty reality of labour in early-twentieth century America.<sup>73</sup> This assessment ignores Lukács’s realisation that art and life in modernity are part of the same totality and the constructive element in the wish for realignment implied in this acknowledgment. As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, Stieglitz often stressed his own sense of kinship with workers when spending long hours in the snow with his camera. Paralleling his art with work was an ideological strategy Stieglitz employed. However, Stieglitz’s alignment of art and work and the implied heightening of the category of work should not be misinterpreted as identification with the proletariat. If there is sympathy, this is part of the larger anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist tendency of Stieglitz’s discourse. Typical of the romantic kind of anti-capitalism, an awareness of class structural inequality as fundamental to capitalist modernity is absent in this position. Like Ruskin, who felt sorry for leisured people cut off from the vital human need for work, Stieglitz did not want to fall into this category and emphasised the professional character of his art.

A better comparison than the Arts and Crafts movement for Stieglitz’s view of the function of art in modern society is provided in the work and persona of the German Symbolist poet Stefan George, to whom Lukács dedicated one of the essays in *Soul*

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<sup>70</sup> Compare to T.J. Jackson Lears’s concept of the “therapeutic worldview” discussed below.

<sup>71</sup> Wendy Kaplan, *“The Art that is Life”: The Arts & Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920*, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), 55-60.

<sup>72</sup> Veblen argued that in its contradictoriness with modernity, the Arts and Crafts movement could only flourish as an un-democratic culture for the rich and could only survive in “the shelter of decadent aestheticism.” Veblen, “Arts and Crafts”, 197.

<sup>73</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, “Camera Work: Notes Towards an Investigation,” *Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 19. No. 4, Photography (Winter, 1978): 836-837.

*and Form*. For Lukács, George was exemplary of the modern poet in his “coldness,” the aestheticist distance arising from non-understanding between poet and audience. The resulting elitism on the part of the poet is a sign for the lack of a total and unifying culture, a *Weltanschauung*. Not able to understand the content, the reader focuses exclusively on form.<sup>74</sup> George, in turn, compensated for the lack of an empathetic audience by focusing on his own interiority, exacerbating the disconnection further. Experience becomes abstracted and symbolic and loses meaning even for the poet himself and frustration and loneliness remain the only possible contents of modern poems. This message is condensed in a form that speaks to the soul directly, not revealing its message to the intellect.

Lukács argues that George’s poems speak of the vain search for a soulmate. In this light, his is not a poetry of isolation, but of human relationships, of souls approaching each other. George gathered around himself a small group of poets in a circle that relied on relatively formal criteria for membership – criteria, however, that depended on categories that defy any rational access criteria. The circle was a quasi-religious cult with the sociological features of a sect, that worshipped George and a few others as godlike spiritual leaders. Stefan Breuer associates the George circle with the trend for quasi-religious forms of spirituality in Germany in the period, which had its roots in a philosophising reinterpretation of religion since the eighteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Part of this general phenomenon was an “art religion” (*Kunstreligion*) that similar to romantic anti-capitalism accorded art not only the function of elevating humans over the everyday, but also of redeeming them from the bleakness of life and healing the wounds afflicted by modernity.<sup>76</sup>

Stieglitz saw the same ills in modernity as George but did not respond in the same quasi-religious way, probably because he was less aware of the precedents of *Kunstreligion*, which was not available in America. Still, Stieglitz was attracted to the role of the “prophet” and adopted it as a prototype of leadership. Stieglitz not only initiated the Photo-Secession (in 1902), he decided who could be a member, spoke for it and was the main organiser of its exhibitions. With *Camera Work*, he

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<sup>74</sup> Georg Lukács, “Die neue Einsamkeit und ihre Lyrik: Stefan George,” in *Die Seele und die Formen*, 177.

<sup>75</sup> Stefan Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus: Stefan George und der Deutsche Antimodernismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995).

<sup>76</sup> Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus*, 14-16.

started the Photo-Secession's journal and with 291 its own gallery. However, these two institutions also widened the scope of its original founding body. The contributors to *Camera Work* acted on a freelance basis, yet the set of recurring names indicates that there was a more or less consistent number of people who were putting together the magazine at regular quarterly intervals.<sup>77</sup>

The people gathering around Stieglitz not only offered him an opportunity to disseminate his interest in photography and art, they also presented a chance to escape the narrow confines of bourgeois life and marriage. Stieglitz was quite advanced in age when he started his photographic career, having spent ten years at university and a few more as an unsuccessful businessman. He remained on close terms with his family as a son and brother throughout his life, continuously relying on their financial support (and that of his first wife's family). But paradoxically, Stieglitz's authority within his circle depended at least partly on his greater age, a fact that again finds a parallel in Stefan George. Stieglitz's independent financial means certainly played a role. Yet his authority cannot be explained in practical terms alone. It relied on the category of charisma, as analysed at the time by thinkers such as Max Weber, who distinguished between traditional, legal and charismatic authority.<sup>78</sup> The Charismatic type could take the place of traditional authority in circumstances when the latter is not firmly defined – as in the United States. Stieglitz seized this opportunity.

George attempted to turn his eye from society to such an extent that he was only concerned with himself and his circle. For Stieglitz, the cause of the diminished role that culture played in capitalist society lay more with the audience than with the artists themselves. He might have welcomed a larger audience for his art but felt that under the given circumstances this was not possible. Stieglitz's views of society – its mechanisms and structure – were limited and not sociologically grounded. But the number of articles in *Camera Work* that dealt with the question of art and society is testimony that the category of the social must at least have existed for him as a conscious problem. Whilst he was aware that it was not necessarily an individual

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<sup>77</sup> Stieglitz's paid them according to what sum he estimated they required based on their financial need and to how valuable he deemed the article for *Camera Work*. See for example correspondence with Hartmann.

<sup>78</sup> See: Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr), Chapter III, "Typen der Herrschaft," 122-176.



recipient's fault if she or he could not enjoy the photographic art promoted in *Camera Work*, Stieglitz would have never gone so far as to employ concepts such as social classes or groups to explain that problem, thinking as he did in completely idealist terms. Still, he was vaguely aware that in a society that is horizontally structured by a category antithetical to culture – money – cultural producers were inevitably creating forms of art that expressed this mismatch. An art that was premised on a utopian vision of the past could never be meaningful to all parts of society. Stieglitz's position as an intellectual provided the critical distance that allowed him to sublimate the category of money into an ideationally charged essence without the social grounding it actually had.

### **Kulturkritik**

The way that Stieglitz identified culture simultaneously as that which is under attack in capitalist society and as the only possible force that can restore a balance has a corollary in the contemporaneous discourse of "Kulturkritik," which held that those components that are neglected in modern industrialist society could be preserved in culture and that culture itself was missing in such a society. For Stieglitz, the lack of culture was a specifically American problem. In the Germany of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States stood as the epitome of soulless materialist modernity. The German term should not distract from the fact that this critical discourse was widely current all over Europe since the late eighteenth century. Stieglitz's version of Kulturkritik is an example of its international validity and in turn his version is a sign of his allegiance to and familiarity with thought of German origin.

For the English social critic, Matthew Arnold, "culture" provided the authority desperately required in mid-nineteenth century Britain as a normative value against threatening commercialisation (which he, too, explicitly associated with an American influence) in the absence of valid models from existing classes. Like German turn-of-the-century *Weltanschauungslehre*, Arnold sought in culture an amending facility against modern fragmentation, a sign of wholeness and the means towards unification. In a turn comparable to the romantic anti-capitalist paradox, Arnold too did not identify technology and industrialisation as the principal evils of modernity;

not arguing for a reversal he merely asked “continually to recognise interests that go beyond the personal, beyond the sectarian, beyond the class struggle to the idea of the status as a whole.”<sup>79</sup> The present, for Arnold, was a time when culture was endangered, but it was also favourable for its realisation as a far-reaching quality because the old social, political and religious doctrines were weakening and room was made for the new. Clinging on to the past could present a hindrance to culture’s development and spread.<sup>80</sup>

Despite Kulturkritik’s international manifestations, the distinction of positively valorised culture versus negative civilisation that lay at its basis was grounded in a particularly German susceptibility. Ultimately going back to Kant and to Johann Gottfried Herder, the dichotomy became more pronounced from the mid-nineteenth century both in national conflicts and in internal class struggles between middle-class intellectuals and the courtly nobility. “*Kultur*” was thereby the specifically Germanic quality of accomplishment, distinct from political activity or property and instead gained through intellectual, scientific or artistic endeavours. Culture came to subsume all that was missing in the industrial and capitalist present but was thought to have once existed in the past. Dilthey and many others saw it as the task of intellectuals to reinstate the natural relationship between art, criticism and a debating public.<sup>81</sup> Culture is simultaneously the object and the (ideal) subject of discourse and in this lays a claim to power. Culture, not politics, it was argued, functions as the necessary bearer of truth in society and should thus be granted foremost authority.<sup>82</sup> From this it follows that intellectuals and artists, as the representatives and makers of culture, should occupy a locus of power in society. For Stieglitz, as becomes clear in his correspondence and actions, this was always coupled with a claim to financial profit too.

Williams argues that the emergence of the idea of culture as a privileged, abstract and absolute term of evaluation must be understood as a critical actor in the

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<sup>79</sup> Ian Gregor, “Introduction,” in Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, ed. and with introduction by Ian Gregor (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), xxiv.

<sup>80</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 35.

<sup>81</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, “Die drei Epochen der modernen Ästhetik und ihre heutige Aufgabe” (1892), in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 7, Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 242.

<sup>82</sup> Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), xix.

remaking of social meanings that attended it.<sup>83</sup> It merged two general responses: “the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society” and “the emphasis of these activities, as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgement and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative.” In this, culture was not directed against new methods of production, but located in the possibility of personal and social relationships in modernity that were tied up with the notions of democracy and the intensified problems of social class. There is also a reference back to “an area of personal and apparently private experience which was notably to affect the meaning and practice of art.”<sup>84</sup> Beyond pointing to a certain habit of the mind, intellectual and moral activities, culture now also came to stand for the whole way of life, one of its central functions for the romantic anti-capitalists. It is the transition from original Romanticism to romantic anti-capitalism that Williams points towards in his analysis of how the discourse of culture turned from a critique of presently existing society to “the lament for an irrecoverable past.”<sup>85</sup> Related is the new meaning of art. Once denoting “skill,” it came to be capitalised as Art, pointing to particular set of creative and imaginative skills, a special, imaginative kind of truth, and the artist as an exceptional and gifted person.<sup>86</sup> The romantic roots of this concept of art are obvious, as are the relations to aestheticism.

By attributing some critical insight to the early stages of Kulturkritik in Romanticism, Williams agrees with Lukács, who similarly saw an initially critical Romantic value lost as the bourgeoisie ceased to be a progressive class.<sup>87</sup> Contrary to prevailing opinion, Romanticism did not rigorously separate between art and life. Although the idea of a gap between the two has its origin in that epoch, it is only through later permutations, in response to the actual social developments, that the original force of Romanticism as a critique of the present turned into nostalgia and longing.<sup>88</sup> By breaking with the representational hierarchies of classicism, by declaring present matters – not so much in terms of actual historical events as in terms of the

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<sup>83</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), 17. See also: Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture*, 65.

<sup>84</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture*, 66.

<sup>86</sup> Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture*, 15.

<sup>87</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1962), 26.

<sup>88</sup> The Romantic Movement was not as a whole and from the start a conservative reaction against the progressivism of the French Revolution.

individual's reaction to them in the sphere of emotion – Romantic painting and poetry did not separate art and life, but attempted to bring the two closer to each other. The Romantic artists, by seeing the divine everywhere in nature, by depicting historically and individually indistinct personas, sought to infuse life with art and bring it into the domain of art. In the German context, the turning towards one's own culture included an interest in the medieval and its myths. This is a form of reverence for the past, but at the same time a focus on the immediate surroundings and a break with existing hierarchies of representation.

The same is the case in Romantic philosophy. According to Terry Eagleton, the Romantic philosophers Schelling and Fichte identified aesthetics as addressing the whole man in contrast to philosophy and other forms of theory, which are too lofty to do so.<sup>89</sup> Fichte and Schelling's sublation of art originated in the notion that the aesthetic can join people to the world they live in and to each other, expressed by Kant and also at the basis of Fiedler and Hildebrand's argument for the special character of epistemological aesthetic activity and of Lukács's and Stieglitz's reason for the importance of art in modernity as a counterbalance to the effects of capitalism. It also has a corollary in Dilthey's method of intuition. However, in contrast to Fiedler and Hildebrand, who stress the difference between aesthetic activity and all other forms of knowledge, Schelling and Fichte regarded the aesthetic as a form that can constitute access to conceptual knowledge for everyone. It is this "for everyone" that is of interest to me. It explains Stieglitz's social consciousness – or lack thereof. It seems that like Fichte and Schelling, Stieglitz confused the "whole man" and "all people." Stieglitz probably held the wish to address "all people" with his art. But he was ignorant of the material conditions underlying unequal access to art (both institutionally and conceptually) and condescending in his unwillingness to see the masses as capable of understanding and enjoying art. Schelling and Fichte's example shows that this confusion has its roots in German Romantic Idealism. This, besides nostalgia, is an explanation of why Stieglitz's anti-capitalism is romantic. Such a reading of Romantic philosophy shows that the separation of art and life is not a Romantic phenomenon. In Fichte and Schelling's thinking, philosophy, art and life are still part of the same totality. It is only with theories such as those Fiedler and Hildebrand that art and life are without mutual influence on each other. This is

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<sup>89</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 130-136.

motivated by the wish to found artistic theory as a separate discipline which itself is an outcome of material developments and confirms Lukács's judgment that aestheticism and bourgeois life are two sides of the same coin.

In his essay on Novalis in *Soul and Form*, Lukács describes how this poet and his young, naïve, reckless and restless friends in Jena at the end of the eighteenth century wanted to create a "new, harmonious, all-embracing culture" out of the chaos of bourgeois uprising, of bloody and political battle.<sup>90</sup> Their efforts were entirely in the realm of spirit because this was the only possible revolution under German circumstances. This did not diminish the revolutionary fervour of their project, as spirit is equally part of life, not more and not less than the practical sphere that was addressed in the revolution in France. Thus Schlegel's revolutionary philosophy and the thought of Fichte were not at all abstract, but indeed an objective observation of life itself. In Germany, the sphere of spirit was the more real one and this kind of revolution had further reaching consequences. Its downside was that it did not reach all to the same degree and could only end up in isolation.<sup>91</sup> "All" must be understood in terms of all spheres of life and of all people in society. For a part of the population, this kind of revolution remained without effect. Therefore, as Lukács writes, at the end of the eighteenth century the thinkers in the lonely heights of spirit turned to the only form of communality on offer: the forming of relationships with each other, which were fragile because of the tragic realisation of their necessarily transitory nature. Painfully the young thinkers experienced their coming together as no more than a "big literary salon," which was not the eradication of the boundary between art and life they had envisaged.<sup>92</sup>

### **The Intelligentsia in Germany and America**

The displacement of actual material conditions into the sphere of ideas is typical for intellectuals. It is related to their marginalisation when capitalist market relations solidified. Yet as much as it spoke of their frustration, the flight into an idealist mode of thought also ratified the intelligentsia. The awareness of their separation as a

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<sup>90</sup> Lukács, "Zur romantischen Lebensphilosophie: Novalis," in *Die Seele und die Formen*, 93.

<sup>91</sup> Lukács, "Novalis," 95.

<sup>92</sup> Lukács, "Novalis," 97-98.

social category motivated their attack on the bourgeoisie as “philistines” in the name of culture, the one good that the intelligentsia was certain to still possess. And despite their feeling of social and political isolation, intellectuals continued to influence the constitution of a public around the turn of the century. While the situation in Germany in particular was advantageous for the formulation of a theory of “alienation” and modernity, the thought of scholars including Lukács, Karl Mannheim, Georg Simmel, Max Weber and Alfred Weber was not confined to the intellectual sphere alone. Some of their ideas expressing a distaste for capitalist modernity and its corollaries, inspired by and formulated in terms of Romanticism and Idealism, found resonance in wide parts of the German public and led to shifts in the social sphere. It was in these circumstances that Stieglitz positioned his ambitions as a photographer and as a cultural entrepreneur. The ambiguity of past and present, reaction and reform or revolution is even more acute in his dual habitation of the old and the new worlds. Stieglitz’s position as an American, a German and a Jew put him in a position to experience the changes of modernity both on the margins and right in the centre. His choice of medium in combination with the adherence to conventional ideals of art mirrors that.

In America, the idea of culture in crisis and as a potential unifying force (which in the American context included an idea of the unity of classes) attracted not only immigrants with a German background like Stieglitz.<sup>93</sup> Despite a different history and the absence of structures equivalent to the European ancien régime, the intellectual as a social type developed in the late nineteenth century in the United States too and, again as in Europe, intellectual self-consciousness was bound up with frustrations of loss of status, feelings of betrayal and injustice, an undervaluing of ideals of disinterested personal cultivation under the hegemony of material progress and capitalist relations. The result was a retreat into “culture” and anti-modern sentiments. As the writings of Henry Adams illustrate, the mood of romantic anti-capitalism was an international phenomenon that emerged everywhere where the effects of capitalism prevailed.<sup>94</sup> The American situation was not as straightforward as is often assumed. Around 1900, traditional liberal American politics struggled to

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<sup>93</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 141-142.

<sup>94</sup> Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918).

account for a quickly changing, dynamic society. With growing inequality, the limits of the old promise of liberty as the highest ideal became apparent.<sup>95</sup>

The American philosophical tradition habitually tended towards a more practical – pragmatic – interpretation of things that contrasts with traditional German Idealist thought. In its insistence that “*Geist* must not be asked to descend from the realm of theory in order to involve itself in practice,” the idealist background of academic freedom for the new social sciences in Germany seems to still have separated them from action.<sup>96</sup> American social reform, by contrast, attempted to marry theory and practice.<sup>97</sup> On both sides of the Atlantic, however, scholarly reflection on human nature and the human condition resulted in the recognition of an estranged and alienated existence under modern conditions. When social reformer Jane Addams or progressive philosopher John Dewey expressed the view that the inner self represented above all a fund of natural affection and sociability, that humans were essentially social beings and taught to think egoistically, this was in the end the same observation as Tönnies had made in Germany: Modern “society” was not adequate to the human condition, which would only be addressed in pre-modern “communities.”

The German ideal of “disinterested learning,” as promoted during the *Aufklärung* (dissimilar to Western Enlightenment in several aspects) declared that pure education and contemplation of the good and true were the principal human vocation and creative labour of the mind was the only valid meaning in life. The same conflation of education, personal development and morality had a counterpart in the American progressivist trends of educational reform and social work. Progress, in the dominant nineteenth century understanding, was based on a combination of evolution theories and classical economics that should demonstrate that universal improvement was inevitable and any interference with the “natural” course would be delirious. But by the early 1910s, this kind of thinking lost its hold and a second meaning of “progress” prevailed: an eternal drift upward in an evolution in which humans took a hand, a conscious effort to reach a better world which could be glimpsed, or at least imagined, in the future. This was the thought of progressivism. Progress was still

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<sup>95</sup> Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap, 1991), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 111.

<sup>97</sup> Even though in the end educational reform projects were almost without effect. This stands in sharp comparison to the results of working-class activism in Germany.

natural, but it could be speeded up.<sup>98</sup> Contrary to the idealism of the German notion of disinterested learning, American reformers such as Edward Bellamy, Josiah Royce, Jane Addams, Charles Horton Cooley or Mary Parker Follett combined the romantic belief in the authority of creative imagination – an aesthetic category – with the political notion of a republican conception of citizenship. Thus the progressivist project merged two traditions, a romantic idea of community, religious faith, handicraft traditions and face-to-face interaction and a republican ideal of participation in civic life with each other.<sup>99</sup>

The social bases of progressivism are difficult to determine. But they certainly include intellectuals with their personal experience of the shortcomings of the dominant ideology of free-market individualism. The Progressives were inspired by the pragmatist philosophy of Dewey who worked against the nineteenth-century seclusion of philosophy in a formal realm. The readiness to feel empathy for others is characteristic of progressivist social work and it is a typically intellectual category that also emerges in the writings of the German sociologists Mannheim, Simmel, Max and Alfred Weber. This facility depends on the intellectuals' own relatively loose integration in the social structure that allowed them to see and understand the situation of others, namely the poor and immigrants, and forge the cross-class alliances that the Progressives used as a strategy in their project to remake the liberal state. However, their intellectual distance revealed the class affiliation of the Progressives with the bourgeoisie and with this their hope to restore social harmony without overturning the foundations of private property or family life.<sup>100</sup> It further bore the danger of remaining a simply aesthetic interest. Obviously, progressivism as a whole was partly motivated by a desire to contain revolutionary socialist currents, which tried to answer the same questions with different means.

The intertwining of romantic anti-capitalist tendencies in the United States with the project of capitalist accommodation is the focus of T. J. Jackson Lears's *No Place of Grace*. The author argues that particularly in their transformed, therapeutic guise, anti-modern tendencies replaced Protestantism as the guiding ideals in the United

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<sup>98</sup> See: Henry May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study in the First Years of Our Time, 1912-1917* (New York: Knopf, 1959), 20-21.

<sup>99</sup> Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>100</sup> Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 99.



States. Writing that “[T]he quests for authenticity eased their own and others’ adjustments to a streamlined culture of consumption,” Lears identifies the same mechanisms at work as Lukács.<sup>101</sup> Both recognise that the apparent separation of art and life in aestheticism is ideological and that art is just another element in the all-encompassing dominance of the bourgeois work ethos.

Correspondingly, aestheticism and modernism alike face difficulties in their opposition to growing mass culture. In the United States, anti-modernist anxieties fed into an interest in psychoanalysis and therapy, manifest in the generation of a “therapeutic worldview” that stretched beyond the pathological aspects of psychoanalysis and reached into the sphere of everyday life. The therapeutic worldview worked in capitalism’s favour; it could easily be turned into consumerism. It was the “old bourgeoisie,” described by Lukács in the Storm essay as clinging on to pre-modern, pre-capitalist structures, whom the therapeutic worldview and the “simple life” discourse of the dignity of work helped to accommodate to the corporate capitalism of a newly powerful class fraction.

According to Lears, anti-modernism entailed more than anti-capitalism; it was a critique of modern culture applicable to all secular, bureaucratic systems, whether socialist or capitalist. This explains the distance between romantic anti-capitalists and socialists. Further, for Lears, anti-capitalist sentiments within the American bourgeoisie expressed in terms of culture, the spiritual and authentic experience point to the difficulties that capitalism’s internal shifts and constant redefinition posed even for the hegemonic groups. It signified the inability of traditional liberalism to account for the new problems of growing inequality, conflicts between classes, ethnic groups and the sexes. Anti-modernism was an answer to the same issues that progressivism confronted too. Only in this case the answer was cast in spiritual and cultural terms rather than in social scientific ones. It was probably this notion of the spiritual that appealed to so many people in turn-of-the-century America and the spiritual focus was also a more pronounced departure from the optimism of liberalism, especially since it was coupled with fears of human decadence and over-civilisation. However, this critique of liberalism did not reach as deep in the United States as it did in Europe, especially in Germany. If in Europe liberal culture was

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<sup>101</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), xvi.

sometimes openly rejected (even while, contrary to common opinion, it remained dominant), in America it was more often revitalised and transformed. The basic tenet of liberalism, its focus on the individual, was never openly challenged. Similarly, the faith in the ultimate beneficence of material progress has always been central to modern American culture and therefore anti-capitalist sentiments never really left the sphere of the personal. Even many labour leaders and socialists adhered to the belief: they attacked misdistribution, not the fundamental beneficence of economic growth and they accepted the conventional link between technological development and national greatness.<sup>102</sup>

Stieglitz, I would argue, resisted the therapeutic impulse, of which he was well aware. He managed to maintain the aestheticist separation of art from uses as therapy and enjoyment by techniques such as the constant reinvention of modernism and restricting circulation of his ideas to a small circle of kindred spirits. His hostility to the middle classes is outspoken in his letters and other writings. They were “snapshotters,” misusing culture; indeed, they had no culture. He wanted to distinguish himself and his followers from them as much as from the captains of industry. Obviously this constituted a paradox in relation to Stieglitz’s simultaneous ambition to foster a more widespread American culture. Yet it was in line with his romantic anti-capitalism with aestheticist characteristics. Despite the realisation that comes through in *Camera Work* that the aesthetic can never be a completely separate sphere, the views of Stieglitz and his associates betray an origin in eighteenth-century German Idealist aesthetics. It was consistent in so far as it believed in a (social) function of the aesthetic only if it remained separate. Again, in line both with the aesthetic as a category and with romantic anti-capitalism, this entails the paradox that the ideological function of the aesthetic in bourgeois society was both one of assisting the bourgeois struggle for hegemony and one of inspiring its counter currents. In contrast to the widespread middle-class view of culture in America, Stieglitz proposed a more separated assessment of everyday life and culture that was inspired by continental European concepts and precedents.

The role of culture and the anti-capitalist or anti-modern sentiments attached to it in American society was in fact more complex than the models of accommodation through therapy or of working-class manipulation suggest. Stieglitz, who was famous

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<sup>102</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 8.

and influential, provided another exemplar. He spoke for a different kind of bourgeoisie or bourgeois class fraction that also had a claim to (cultural) authority. It is that of the intellectual, but also the immigrant, particularly the immigrant from Central Europe, and the Jew. Fritz Ringer has maintained that in Germany intellectuals inhabited a locus of social authority in a period of social restructuring.<sup>103</sup> It could be argued that power was more readily available for intellectuals in the United States because of a less rigid structure of society. American society was hierarchical, with an elite made up of families that traced their ancestry back to longstanding wealth and property. But distinctions between high and low were more permeable in the United States than in Europe, and also people such as Stieglitz were forming the measures of distinction.<sup>104</sup> Stieglitz took from both the German and the American positions. He deeply distrusted capitalism; nevertheless he benefited from it. In America, with its less fixed class boundaries (although ethnic boundaries were just as fixed, in relation to Native and African Americans even more so than in Europe) at least in the nineteenth century and more open possibilities for individual development, he had arguably more opportunities to make art matter. Although European-style cultural institutions were established in the major American cities in the decades after the Civil War, Stieglitz still had freedom to partly shape such structures himself. The romantic anti-capitalist posture was also a unique selling point: it gave weight to his cultural persona, making him appear as a serious artist and cultural impresario.

But part of this project and his claim to power as a German immigrant was also a neglect of the American cultural past that did exist. His complaint that art suffered a marginal existence in American society and repeated assertions that there was no cultural base to work with was not entirely correct. Post-Civil War major cities acquired the accoutrements of European civilisation: art museums, Renaissance-style buildings, major public libraries and classic and popular musical culture. As noted

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<sup>103</sup> Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins*. See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>104</sup> On American elites and the role of the arts in their formation see: *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Helen Horowitz, *Culture and City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Paul DiMaggio, *Managers of the Arts: Careers and Opinions of Senior Administrators of U.S. Art Museums, Symphony Orchestras, Resident Theaters, and Local Arts Agencies* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks, 1988), Frederic C. Jaher, Frederic C., *The Rich, The Well Born, and the Powerful: Elites and Upper Classes in History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973).

above, it was common for intellectuals even in regions with a long cultural history (such as Germany) to complain about the absence of culture in the conditions of modernity. In the fear expressed by the German mandarins over the assault of capitalism on culture, for them the highest human good and the sign of unity of humans and their surroundings, Stieglitz found the paramount instance of a cultural position. He imitated the German discourse in order to give weight to his own authority as a person of culture, an intellectual, in America by disqualifying others from the ability to judge – and to align himself with a growing internationally defined cultural elite. His occupation, although not salaried and thus not a profession in the strict sense, was only possible as part of a wider framework of class fractions, popular discourse around culture, status anxiety and institutional change – and also the growing intellectual notion that America was the worst place for culture to flourish.

## **Modernity**

Stieglitz's enterprises, *Camera Work* and from 1905 also the gallery 291, have to be understood as efforts at authority. The concerns he voiced about America were concerns about modernity in general. He had used pre-industrial and peasant motifs in his early photographs (for example *Ploughing*; fig. 38) to visualise his uneasiness with the Industrial Revolution and its effects. These pictures served as memories for another time (and place, since they were taken in Europe and not in the United States). The reproductions of works by David Octavius Hill, the Scottish pioneer of photographic art in the nineteenth century, in *Camera Work* 11 (July 1905; for example *Dr. Munro* or *Mrs. Rigby*; figs. 39 and 40) and the accompanying appraisal by J. Craig Annan can be seen in the same instance as an acknowledgment of past models of artistic photography on one side and as a statement for the possibility to evoke pre-modern qualities with this modern medium on the other. By contrast, Stieglitz showed a pronouncedly modern sensibility in the subject matter of his New York pictures, such as *Snapshot – From My Window, New York* (fig. 41). However, there are formal similarities between the *Ploughing* and *Snapshot – From My Window, New York*. A diagonal line is the dominant compositional factor in both pictures; it is simultaneously the path along which humans walk, away from the viewer, guiding them through their worlds, constructed and obstructed by tall

buildings in *Snapshot* and contained by mountains fading into the distance in *Ploughing*.

Such an ambiguous response to modernity is apparent in articles in *Camera Work*. There is the opinion, expressed by for instance by Dallet Fuguet, that for revitalisation western art should look to its own past.<sup>105</sup> Directly inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, Fuguet longs for an art that shows the signs of handicraft, not the “deadly regularity” of the machine, itself the sign of the ubiquity of the philistine standard in all spheres of art – as Lukács had also noted. Artistic production, argues Fuguet, has to bear the trace of a human being “whose heart is in his work”; only in this way can perfect and beautiful things be made. Fuguet’s distaste for the machine does not apply, however, to the camera. It is the effort of artistic photography to humanise the machine, when following the “laws of art” and when the human behind the machine reclaims agency and supremacy. Besides its enunciation of a positive past, this article is an example of intra-class tensions. It was not the working classes that deserved scorn for being uncultured, but the “philistines,” the non-intellectual, capitalist members of the middle class.

Hartmann wrote that in the present, “capacity for poetic insight into another man’s work” is rare.<sup>106</sup> This is not only due to the conditions of the “mercenary age and country,” but also due the artists themselves. It is a sign of a general disunity in modernity that the author lamented. For Hartmann, in contrast to Fuguet, it does not follow from the fact that most people cannot understand the art of the present that the art of the past was superior. To the contrary, he argues that art has to constantly evolve and move with the times and not repeat itself. It is the fault of artists to separate themselves, of the public to not try hard enough and of the critics to be mostly ignorant and to blame either the artists or the public of failure to rise to their task. All three parties are subjected to external circumstances. Hartmann’s awareness of the importance of external circumstances is even clearer in the article “On the Lack of Culture.”<sup>107</sup> American artists are not to blame that they lag “twenty years behind the rest of the world,” but the lack of effective art institutions in the country, which leads to intellectual isolation. Hartmann was aware that in order to cultivate

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<sup>105</sup> Dallet Fuguet, “Notes by the Way,” *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 62. Fuguet in this article refers to Allan’s “Repetition with Slight Variation.”

<sup>106</sup> Hartmann, “On the Vanity of Appreciation,” *Camera Work*, No. 5 (January 1904): 21-23.

<sup>107</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “On The Lack of Culture,” *Camera Work*, No. 6 (April 1904): 19-22.

his inner world, exterior factors have to be respected too. This article, like many of Hartmann's writings, is a compelling testimony of the author's capacity to look at things from different angles. Not only does he deliver a balanced account of the interior and exterior factors, he similarly analyses the role of the United States as being uncultured on the one hand and as predestined to be the prime site of modernity and modern art on the other. He sees value in this polarity as the basis for culture, which he defines as "accumulated knowledge."

Motivated by Stieglitz's photograph (fig. 20), Hartmann wrote about the necessary connection of visual forms to their time in connection to the Flatiron Building in New York.<sup>108</sup> In one article, he argues that a modern subject alone would not make a picture a work of art; the interest of Stieglitz's photograph is in its formal quality.<sup>109</sup> But a few pages later, in the same issue of *Camera Work*, Hartmann (on both occasions writing under the pseudonym Sidney Allan) praises the building as thoroughly a work of modern architecture, following utilitarian principles before anything else. As such, it is "typically American in conception and execution."<sup>110</sup> Allan stresses that America has to be leading in new developments in art, it is inherently modern, possesses the "vitality of youth" and a "primitive strength." The modernity of America, denoted as its most negative property elsewhere, is a positive asset here. Modernity can be beautiful, because just like the demands of a certain time, the idea of beauty itself is subject to a *Zeitgeist*. A time will come, Hartmann asserts, when people will realise that art has to change with all other spheres and the Flatiron building is deemed more beautiful than the desolate historicism currently admired by the "philistines."<sup>111</sup>

The juxtaposition of Stieglitz's *Flat-iron* and Arthur E. Beecher's *Moonlight* (fig. 42) illustrates the contrasting views of modernity in *Camera Work* No. 4. Beecher, with the strategies of Photo-Secession pictorialism, visualises the power of the aesthetic in modernity as a counter current to what is perceived as capitalist empiricism by avoiding tonal contrasts and stark compositional elements. Like Steichen, Beecher experimented with colour photography for this end. In order to prove the art character of his photography, Steichen alluded to other pictorial

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<sup>108</sup> Sidney Allan, "The 'Flat-Iron' Building. – An Esthetical Dissertation," *Camera Work*, No. 4 (October 1903): 36-40.

<sup>109</sup> Allan in response to a letter by Maeterlinck, *Camera Work*, No. 4 (October 1903): 35-36.

<sup>110</sup> Allan, "The 'Flat-Iron' Building."

<sup>111</sup> The Flatiron is still in important ways a historicist building in its stylar decorations.

mediums not only through imitation, but also by producing a type of photography that overtly negated any type of content or function that was exterior to the category of the aesthetic. The misty, unreal atmosphere of his photographs separates the object of art from known and perceptible reality and focuses all attention on the formal language of photography itself. This strategy relies on the supposed possibility of the separation of art and life and has a corollary in Symbolist poetry. It illuminates how the aesthetic is an epistemologically different sphere from everyday reality and, in turn, depends on a conception of art as essentially expressive (and not mimetic) that reaches back to the Romantic period. A photograph such as Beecher's thus represents the imaginative human faculties as at the origin of the picture in the first place as opposed to the external world. Because of the particular quality of the visual medium, this alternative reality is concretely made visible. Through the tactic of the symbol it is possible to create new forms without precedent in external reality. The pictorialist reasoning is that if photography is capable of creating this kind of expressive and symbolic image (and can negate its indexical relationship with the world), it must be a form of art.

Stieglitz's photographs, by contrast openly engaging with the material manifestations of modernity, complicate this conclusion. Their obvious relationship with external reality points not only to the fact that modernity cannot be ignored, but also to the properties of the photographic medium. They constitute a different kind of expressive and symbolic photography. As Charles Taylor remarks, in expressive art, content and medium are interlinked, "the 'matter' [...] should be entirely taken up in the manifestation; and reciprocally, what is manifested ought to be available only in the symbol, not merely point to as an independent object whose nature could be defined in some other medium."<sup>112</sup> Stieglitz's works employ the mode that Taylor associates with the twentieth century, where "the locus of epiphany" has completely shifted from the contents to the work itself.<sup>113</sup> But this understanding of the function of the work of art too has its origins in the aesthetics of Kant and Schiller and was taken up by the Romantics. It exemplifies the on-going interest of such theories not only in aestheticist and formalist accounts, but also beyond that in what we commonly term "modernism."

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<sup>112</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 379.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 419.

The distaste for the bourgeoisie, the present, and the mechanical is contrasted with three different models in *Camera Work*: geographical (mostly drawn from eastern Asia) or temporal, either with the past or with the (near) future. Fuguet's article sets the past as a model for the present, mostly as the handicraft mode of artistic production. Keiley dreams about landscape as an escape from the city that holds captive the people and is alien to myth.<sup>114</sup> Yet the opposite is also found in the journal. Hartmann agrees with Fuguet (and his own statement in "Repetition With Slight Variation") that "[A]ccuracy is the bane of art" – because it is not modern.<sup>115</sup> The term is used in a very positive way in this article, in contrast to others. The "love for exactitude is Philistine," but there are some artists working in the present – Allan mentions John Singer Sargent, Cecilia Beaux, Winslow Homer and Mary Cassatt – who do not copy nature mechanically but welcome accident, for example in the lighting, into their pictures.

Although anti-capitalist sentiments are expressed in *Camera Work*, the relationship with capitalism is not always straightforward. Charles Caffin praises Gertrude Käsebier as an exceptional artist because she rigidly separates her art and related business matters, whilst duly maintaining highest standards for both.<sup>116</sup> The notion of distance, itself the social reality of intellectuals in their relationship to the locus of power, is at play here. In relation to *Camera Work* and Stieglitz's practice, the question of distance is interesting too. The magazine as a whole is a manifestation of distancing from mainstream society. Yet the value-increasing method of including photographic prints that have the status of originals represent an accommodation to the capitalist market. In other words, *Camera Work* had an ambivalent relationship with modernity that is at the heart not only that of romantic anti-capitalism – and of the discussion around social-scientific methods in turn-of-the-century Germany – but that is also constituent of a much wider discourse of "culture." What is crucial about this discourse is that culture must be an active principle. And it is the task of people such as Lukács, Arnold and Stieglitz as they see it to provide this. Culture is not as separate as the debate might suggest – but only by being separate can it fulfil its task in the debate.

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<sup>114</sup> Joseph P. Keiley, "Landscape – A Reverie," *Camera Work*, No. 4 (October 1903): 45-46.

<sup>115</sup> Sidney Allan, "The Value of Apparently Meaningless and Inaccurate," *Camera Work*, No. 3 (July 1903): 17-21.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Caffin, "Mrs. Käsebier's Work – An Appreciation," *Camera Work*, No. 1 (January 1903): 17-19.



It becomes apparent that for Stieglitz, market relations as such were not entirely despicable; indeed they could, as numerous other instances in *Camera Work* and Stieglitz's career in general prove, even serve as a reference point for artistic quality and success. It is the separation of art and market (as a part of "life") on the first stage that is crucial in order to protect the former's disappearance under the dominance of the latter. For the sphere of art to stand up to that of life, however, a concept of the aesthetic is invoked that acts as an assurance that an intuitional feeling of unity between self and world can exist, if only momentarily. Eagleton suggests that in this view, which goes back to Kant, the aesthetic can "be understood as a glimpse of the possibility of a reverse of the commodity" – and the work of art in turn is itself "a kind of spiritualized version of the very commodity it resists."<sup>117</sup>

In accordance with this view, Stieglitz believed that the work of art could be a commodity, as long as it was a spiritualised one. The various instances of the antithesis of art and capitalism in *Camera Work* with a simultaneous evidence of deep adherence to the values that were partly generated by capitalist relations suggest that Stieglitz was an actor in the market for art not despite but because of his anti-capitalist sentiments. He dialectically engaged with the market to use it as a tool with which to spread the critique of capitalism and to demonstrate how the workings of capitalism were constant, how it evolved to subsume counter currents such as modernism in its own folds. However, one may question whether this process for Stieglitz was a conscious one, or if it did not, more likely, remain on an intuitive level.

The negotiation between market structures and romantic anti-capitalist sentiments, and the seeming opposites of nostalgic romantic anti-capitalism and present-affirming modernism, are not clearly in contradiction with each other in *Camera Work*. Neither were they for Lukács in 1911. Nor indeed was Stieglitz prepared to go as far as the avant-gardes (in Peter Bürger's sense) in following the principle of art for art's sake through to its ultimate dialectical turning point where the separation of art and life would be so complete that totality could again emerge as a consequence of the disappearance of art.<sup>118</sup> Neither Stieglitz, nor Lukács abandoned the postulate

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<sup>117</sup> Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 78.

<sup>118</sup> By contrast, in the Marxist vision of art (later to be embraced by Lukács) art would not be autonomous as it would be meaningful to all members of society. *Tendenzkunst* – whether understood as emblematising and dispersing the proletarian ideology or as a historical-

of artistic autonomy; rather they simultaneously accorded art the capacity to originate change on a larger scale, whilst always restricting this to the sphere of consciousness. They believed in a redeeming power of culture that depended on the notion of an autotelic work of art and, in turn, was also always anti-aestheticist because it showed a concern with the social functions of art, which aestheticism negates or declares alien to the aesthetic sphere. But even the concern for the social was rooted in the realm of consciousness; it was idealist. As a consequence, this view ratified the existing social order of capitalist class society, of which Idealist philosophy is the metaphysical form in its separation of necessity and beauty.<sup>119</sup> Still, there remained the progressive moment that “the materialism of bourgeois practice is not the last word and that mankind must be led beyond it.”<sup>120</sup> Although Idealism served the preservation of the bourgeois order, it was also a remnant of the progressive stage of that class. The Idealism of the German Enlightenment with its progressive credentials and the neo-idealism of Dilthey, Mannheim, Simmel and the Lukács of *Soul and Form* are parallel to Romanticism’s original fervour and the updated version of it in later romantic anti-capitalism.

The fact that his modern sensibility was a personalised and private one weighs against the social value of Stieglitz’s project. Pictures such as *Snapshot* (fig. 41) are highly subjectivised visions of the contemporary urban scene, as the title “from my window” indicates. This is not the city as seen from a universal perspective, but rather through the eyes, through the window, through the lens of the camera of one particular individual. The geometrical lines in the picture stand for the sense he makes for himself of the scene of the city. They are a search for order from Stieglitz’s perspective, possible because of distance and looking down. He is part of the city by being in it in order to take the picture, but at the same time he is also not in it. He does not have to carry an umbrella to shield himself against the falling snow on his way to work. He does not have to go to work when most others do. He is simultaneously excluded and part of the life in the city. He is distanced and uses this

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materialist interpretation of traditional bourgeois art – is thereby only a transitional phase that would lead to a purely proletarian art as a complete part of life, without any separation. See Tanja Bürgel (ed.), *Tendenzkunst-Debatte 1910-1912, Dokumente zur Literaturtheorie und Literaturkritik der revolutionären deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987).

<sup>119</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “The Affirmative Character of Culture,” in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, with translations from the German by Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1968 and MayFlyBooks, 2009), 69.

<sup>120</sup> Marcuse, “The Affirmative Character of Culture,” 73.

distance to try to make sense of the world because he is still interested in its processes. But the distance also serves as a claim to power: The aesthetic, the picture, the camera give the photographer a means with which to order the chaos of the world.

Aspects of formalism and aestheticism within the dominant *Weltanschauung* of romantic anti-capitalism contributed to the discourse established in *Camera Work* and this is testimony that Stieglitz found all these concepts useful for his project of cultural authority in the United States of the turn of the century. All are dependent on a conception of an autonomous and autotelic art. Formalism and aestheticism understand the meaning of art as completed in this autonomy. Stieglitz and his friends found some use in these concepts since they provided tools with which to separate the sphere of culture from that of market relations – the dominant aspect of “life” – thus acting as a protective shield. Formalism and aestheticism offered a critical vocabulary of modern life, particularly of modern bourgeois life. However, for Stieglitz and his associates this resulted in a powerless separation. Perhaps they feared what Lukács formulated so poignantly: a separation of art and life in modernity is impossible because aestheticist art and bourgeois life are part of the same totality. For Stieglitz’s project of cultural authority, art must have a bearing that reached beyond its own sphere. The vocabulary of both formalism and aestheticism was not sufficiently directed against the particular source of modern ills: capitalism.

The dual account of capitalist market relations in *Camera Work* – on one side the sign of and reason for the underestimation of art in the present, and on the other side a valid criterion for successful cultural activity – points to Stieglitz’s complex relationship with modernity. My analysis reveals him as a cunning actor in emergent American modernist culture and its corollary, the growing market for modern art. Stieglitz used the means at his disposal – photography, the elaborately produced art periodical, the group of like-minded individuals and the discourses of romantic anti-capitalism and *Kulturkritik* – to gain for himself, and his art, a position of authority and influence. In the fear expressed by the German mandarins over the assault of capitalism on culture, Stieglitz found the basis for a cultural position. In other words, he imitated the German discourse in order to give weight to his own authority as a cultural person in America by negating others’ ability to judge – and to align himself with a growing internationally defined cultural elite. He sensed that cultural authority as such in the United States of the first decades of the twentieth century was not

possible without some concessions to the dominant capitalist ideology. And Stieglitz played the market value of a certain kind of romanticism and aestheticism for all it was worth: because these were, for him, not capitalist exchanges.

### Chapter 3: Anarchism

In the artistic discourse of his time, it was recognised that Alfred Stieglitz's cultural efforts were a sort of politics, that they were motivated by his distrust of the dominant commercial views and his preference for past states of individual freedom and creative expression. However, without the benefit of hindsight, these opinions were not interpreted as romantic anti-capitalist. Instead, many contemporaries saw them as the corollary of current radical politics, particularly of anarchism. Perhaps curiously, such a reading of Stieglitz's politics has persisted in more recent times – most prominently in Allan Antliff 2001 book, *Anarchist Modernism*.<sup>1</sup>

But from a closer view, Stieglitz was not only not an anarchist, he was also not political as such. If there were parallels between his views and actions and those of anarchists at the time, it was not because Stieglitz had anarchist sympathies, but because, in the uniquely fruitful atmosphere of pre-war New York, the romantic anti-capitalist opinions that characterised Stieglitz's social outlook were also embraced by some radicals who combined them with more practical, and indeed more political, viewpoints. Yet in the cases of these individuals and groups too, the designation “anarchist” was habitually based on self-definition, and as such is often problematic. In this chapter I will revise the category of anarchism in the early twentieth century by rigorously analysing these rebels' views and relating them to the Stieglitz circle themes of photography, modernism, to the theory in *Camera Work* and the artists whom Stieglitz supported at that period, particularly Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove. I will trace anarchism as a discourse in *Camera Work* and look for personal overlaps between individuals associated with Stieglitz and his journal and radical leftist organisations at the time, such as the American Communist Party and the International Workers of the World.

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<sup>1</sup>Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Marc Antliff, too, is preoccupied with relations between art and anarchism, as is Patricia Leighton in her books *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

## Photography

Invoking formalist and aestheticist concepts and a romantic anti-capitalist notion of art's importance as a counterbalance to the dehumanising effects of modern experience, *Camera Work's* authors used the journal in its early years as a platform to vindicate photography as a form of art. They promoted it as the adequate twentieth-century medium for the production of an art meaningful for modern life. Beginning around 1908, Stieglitz began to change his course. In 1913 he wrote to the *Amateur Photographer* that he had for some years been dissatisfied with photographic magazines.<sup>2</sup> In another letter he remarked: "I do not keep in touch with these endless photographic exhibitions," "[P]icture making as such has its place in the world, but I am interested in ideas and movements."<sup>3</sup>

Important photographic bodies, often founded as Secessions around the turn of the twentieth century, began to dissolve towards the end of its first decade. George Davison of the renowned London-based Linked Ring warned Stieglitz that the Photo-Secession was in danger of the same fate.<sup>4</sup> Yet to Stieglitz, who had noticed that many art photographers and their organisations had begun to follow commercial interests, this development presented an opportunity.<sup>5</sup> In October 1910, Stieglitz felt compelled to deliver an explanation for the end of photography's monopoly in his magazine and at his gallery. The practice in recent years to alternate at 291 between exhibitions of photography and artworks in other media was entirely in keeping with the purpose of the Photo-Secession, he assured the readers; only through direct comparison with other arts could photography take its rightful place among them. This approach was nothing but a practical test for photography, which thereby still took centre stage.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to the *Amateur Photographer*, 1913. *Stieglitz-O'Keeffe Archive*, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (YCAL).

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Imogen Cunningham, 1914, YCAL.

<sup>4</sup> George Davison to Alfred Stieglitz, 7 December 1909, YCAL.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to George Davison, 27 April 1912: "I fear that a great many of the Secessionists are becoming somewhat commercial, they do not see why they should give something for nothing, as they term it. You know there are not many of my type floating around in America; the genuine d—n fool is becoming extinct." Stieglitz made similar remarks in his letters to the Kodak Company, which he blamed the company for instigating commercialism among Secessionist photographers. YCAL.

<sup>6</sup> "Our Illustrations," *Camera Work*, No. 32 (October 1910): 47.

At the “Little Gallery of the Photo-Secession” at 291 Fifth Avenue, opened in 1905 to showcase the work of this body in an art gallery setting, displays of photography became rarer over time. In January 1907, drawings by the English artist Pamela Colman Smith occupied the walls, their undulating shapes, black outlines and esoteric subject matter resonating with the Symbolist mode of most pictorial photography shown at the place hitherto (for example *The Blue Cat*; fig. 43).<sup>7</sup> For the rest of the 1907 season, the gallery returned to showing photographs, but in the next year it opened with an exhibition of drawings by Auguste Rodin. During 1908, bookplates by the German artist Willi Geiger and etchings by Donald Shaw McLaughlan, more drawings by Colman Smith, and drawings, lithographs, watercolours and etchings by Henri Matisse solidified the turn towards the graphic arts. Photographs by Secession members continued to be exhibited, but caricatures by Marius de Zayas, sketches in oil by Alfred Maurer, watercolours by John Marin and monotypes and drawings by Eugene Higgins steadily pointed to the direction that Stieglitz was going to take: to exhibit American moderns alongside their European counterparts.

In March 1910, a show entitled “Younger American Painters” introduced the audience in addition to Marin to D. Putnam Brinley, Arthur Carles, Arthur Dove, Laurence Fellowes, Marsden Hartley, Max Weber and to Steichen as a painter. Many of these artists subsequently became regular members of Stieglitz’s circle. In 1911, the work of Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso was exhibited and in the following year, sculptures by Matisse and by Manuel Manolo further enlarged the range of media. A first exhibition of watercolours and pastels by children was staged in April and May 1912. The only considerable photographic show during the 1910-1915 period was an exhibition of Stieglitz’s own work in 1913, to coincide with the Armory Show. For a moment in 1916, an exhibition of Paul Strand’s work presented a new photographer and a new type of photography. But painting as a medium predominated until the gallery’s closure after the spring season of 1917. The same was not true of *Camera Work*, where photographs continued to constitute the majority of the image material. The modernist works and non-western artefacts on show at the gallery were only occasionally reproduced in installation photographs. A few examples of reproduced

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<sup>7</sup> This picture was not published in *Camera Work* but it is kept with Stieglitz’s papers at the Beinecke Library, Yale University and is thus likely to have been shown at 291.

paintings and drawings aside, photography as a medium still dominated and the overall appearance of the magazine changed only slightly.

For Stieglitz, his exhibition schedule never meant a shifting of priorities. He stressed that the art in other media was a continuation of his “fight,” which included but was not exhausted by the fight for photography as an art. Stieglitz had one last trump up his sleeve: a retrospective exhibition of pictorial photography at the Albright Gallery in Buffalo, New York in 1910. The high importance Stieglitz attached to this exhibition is evident in his many letters dedicated to the subject. Writing to the photography collector Ernst Juhl in Hamburg, for example, Stieglitz (in faultless German) boasts about the quality of the Albright gallery, praising it as “the most beautiful gallery in America,” and “one of the most important.” For Stieglitz this exhibition meant fulfilment of the dream he had had since 1885 in Berlin: “the fullest recognition of photography,” these words underlined twice and three times.<sup>8</sup> He saw the recognition confirmed by the high sales prices that were paid for some of the exhibits. In *Camera Work*, critics Charles Caffin, Sadakichi Hartmann and photographer Joseph Keiley all asserted that with the Albright exhibition, the artistic status of photography was an established fact.<sup>9</sup> They believed that photographic prints were now ubiquitously considered beautiful for what they were and capable of individual expression, all evidence of the growth of a sophisticated audience.<sup>10</sup>

However, Buffalo was the end of Stieglitz’s fight for pictorialist photography. Noticing the contrast between his own ambitions to create an art that engaged with the rhythm of modern urban life and his colleagues’ daydreams in muted light, he concluded that photography could only be a viable medium for art if it keeps pace with the progress manifest in the new developments of painting.<sup>11</sup> Thus the Albright exhibition ended some of his most trustful alliances. It led to his split with his longstanding friend and collaborator, Clarence H. White, who was frustrated by the unequal way Stieglitz dealt with his Secessionist peers in the organisation of the

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Ernst Juhl, 6 Jan 1911, YCAL.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Caffin, “The Exhibition at Buffalo,” *Camera Work*, No. 33 (January 1911): 21-23; Joseph Keiley, “The Buffalo Exhibition,” *Camera Work*, No. 33 (January 1911): 23-29; Sadakichi Hartmann, “What Remains,” *Camera Work*, No. 33 (January 1911): 30-32.

<sup>10</sup> Hartmann, “What Remains,” 32.

<sup>11</sup> Maria Morris Hambourg, “From 291 to the Museum of Modern Art: Photography in New York, 1910-1937,” in Maria Morris Hambourg and Christopher Phillips (eds.), *The New Vision: Photography Between the World Wars*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 7-8.



Albright exhibition, accusing him of negligently handling their works and forgetting to return them or only with great delay. White asked Stieglitz to either divide their collaborative prints (a series of nudes made by White and Stieglitz in 1907, including *Torso*; fig. 44), with their names removed, or to destroy them altogether.<sup>12</sup> Personal differences, the falling apart of his alliances, should not be underestimated as an impetus behind Stieglitz's new artistic orientation. As the Group Theatre director Harold Clurman argued, Stieglitz managed to convey his view of the world in his photographs, but he did this in a mythical and individualist way that was misunderstood by his contemporaries, and as a consequence he failed to mobilise the message in his artworks as a basis for a true community with others.<sup>13</sup>

When the Photo-Secession dissolved, Stieglitz directed his attention to new acquaintances such as the Mexican caricaturist Marius de Zayas, who arrived on the New York artistic scene in 1907 and caught Stieglitz's eye with his cryptic caricatures, (including portraits of Stieglitz, see figs. 45 and 46). De Zayas became a prolific contributor to *Camera Work*, with his treatment of hallmark themes of early-twentieth century modernism such as the fascination with "primitive" art and also with the new ways he proposed to explore photography's modernist potential. Perhaps it was de Zayas's talent to put into words what Stieglitz was preaching himself, as Stieglitz's enthusiasm for his articles suggests.<sup>14</sup> Photography as such is not art, de Zayas provocatively states in an article. Photography means taking a picture of the sphere of facts and thus it is entirely concerned with objective reality. But this is only true on the surface. Photography, even when non-artistic, is "the experimental science of Form." Its aim is to find the objectivity of form in external reality, and forms, by definition, always create emotions, sensations and ideas. Photography is not the domain of (preconceived) ideas, but of an open position towards the world of facts, which, through formal intervention, they render accessible as a personal idea. In this way, photography acts as a means of expression and is art. Other types of photography represent the external surrounding of humans,

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<sup>12</sup> Clarence H. White to Alfred Stieglitz, 15 May 1912, YCAL.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Clurman, "Alfred Stieglitz and the Group Idea," in Waldo Frank, et al. (eds.), *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1934), 267-79.

<sup>14</sup> For Stieglitz's enthusiasm for de Zayas's writings, see for example the following letters: Alfred Stieglitz to the *Amateur Photographer*, YCAL; Alfred Stieglitz to R. Child Bayley, 1913, YCAL.

whereas artistic photography visualises their inside. Objectivity is always key, but in artistic photography it is enveloped with a subjective idea.<sup>15</sup>

## Modernism

The Photo-Secession came effectively to an end in the aftermath of the Albright exhibition of 1910. Nevertheless, Stieglitz continued to use the terms “Photo-Secession” or “Secession” for his endeavours throughout his career. He still envisaged the direction of modern art along the lines laid out by Secessionism, but this was mainly a rather self-serving tactic on his part, one that concealed ruptures and contradictions. He presented the new developments in the graphic arts as directly related to photography: “the logical deduction was that the other arts could only prove themselves superior to photography by making their aim dependent on other qualities than accurate reproduction.”<sup>16</sup> The Photo-Secession, still true to its original principles, now stood for “those artists who secede from the photographic attitude toward representation of form.”<sup>17</sup> However, a look at the various forms of painting in which Stieglitz was interested shows that not even he believed that painting must move from figuration towards abstraction just because of the intervention of photography. The fact that the fight for photography alone did not sum up his project, and, simultaneously, that the fight for modernism was not separated from the one for photography, testifies that Stieglitz’s project was of a larger nature, not to be summed up by narrow concerns of media or styles. It was about a worldview or an ideology, about a position towards the modern experience. With his photographs, Stieglitz had productively addressed the tensions between the realm of facts and that of ideas, between what de Zayas called objective and subjective impressions and expressions, between a personal and a collective experience. This was carried out internally in the image in terms of finding a form with which to convey these messages, and externally in the struggle for the acceptance of photography as a form

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<sup>15</sup> “Photography and Artistic-Photography,” *Camera Work*, No. 42-43 (April-July 1913, published November): 13-14. Besides “Photography and Artistic-Photography,” de Zayas wrote two other important articles on photography: “Photography,” *Camera Work*, No. 41 (January 1913) and an untitled article which he wrote for number 9 of his own magazine, published in collaboration with Francis Picabia and Agnes Ernst Meyer and titled *291* in reference to Stieglitz’s gallery.

<sup>16</sup> “Photo-Secession Notes,” *Camera Work*, No. 30 (April 1910): 54

<sup>17</sup> “Photo-Secession Notes,” 54.

of art. On a larger stage, it was an effort to create a role for art per se in modern society – and for an individual like Stieglitz.

Stieglitz attempted to establish a dialogue between European and American modernism, with himself as the intermediary versed in both, the necessary mediator between the two. The status of Paris as a centre of all things new in art was not questioned. Stieglitz's financial support for his protégés, including Hartley, Marin, Dove and Walkowitz, primarily funded their extended stays in the French capital. The variety of modernism on show at 291 suggested that artists on both continents were united by a common direction despite a certain stylistic variety, noted by the critics. James Huneker in the *New York Sun* (reprinted in *Camera Work*) saw that Max Weber, like Cézanne and Matisse, reduced all forms to geometrical shapes and broke with past traditions of art by avoiding a mimetic relationship with nature.<sup>18</sup> Israel White in the *Newark Evening News* saw that a radically new use of colour united all artists. And almost all critics related such observations to radicalness or revolution: "Revolutionists" Huneker termed the artists, "very, very radical," wrote White. A comparison with modern reality was not far off. Hartmann wrote:

There is a scientific pessimistic trend in man's thought today. Life is hard on all men with unselfish, esthetic or intellectual pursuits. Not that life has grown more material, but that we are more conscious of the fact. The masses have been awakened, they grumble, growl and snarl, they try to throw off the fetters of poverty, and there is a general crowding, jostling and groping in the ranks for a more gracious humane existence.<sup>19</sup>

There already existed a tradition for a criticism that related art to insurrection and the social issues of the day. It was established in the criticism of the Ashcan School, their subject matter and art world tactics.<sup>20</sup> Only the focus on formal aspects was a new characteristic and the hallmark of reviews of artists associated with Stieglitz. As noted in the previous chapter, a social dimension of art was crucial for the *Camera Work* authors, but the notion of the socio-political realm remained vague. Although aware of working-class unrest and political mobilisation, and of the reason why art

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<sup>18</sup> "'The Young American Painters' and the Press," *Camera Work*, No. 31 (July 1910): 43.

<sup>19</sup> "'The Young American Painters' and the Press," 49.

<sup>20</sup> Virginia M. Mecklenburg, "Manufacturing Rebellion: The Ashcan Artists and the Press," in *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, ed. Rebecca Zurier, Robert W. Snyder, Virginia M. Mecklenburg, exh. cat. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1996), 191-213.

might not be the worker's foremost interest, Hartmann immediately took his focus back to the artists-intellectuals and their own aesthetic and socio-economic concerns. Because an artist (particularly in the United States) receives little intellectual and material encouragement, it only remains to "express what is dearest to his heart." Naturally the painters turn to colour for that end, "[F]or color is the soul of painting." The "glorification of color" in contemporary painting is a statement that painting should not be about technique, nor stand in the service of powerful institutions, but it should entirely serve the self-expression of the artist. Returning to the rhetoric of battle and struggle, Hartmann equated the artist's experience with that of the workers: "This is the war cry."<sup>21</sup>

This type of artistic struggle is linked to another dominant element in *Camera Work* criticism, the notion that the spiritual should dominate over the rational, exemplified by reviews of two exhibitions in the 1911 October issue. After Max Weber's compositions had challenged the reviewer to analyse the relationships of masses and lines, of parts to the whole (in pictures such as *Composition with Four Figures*; fig. 47), a display of watercolours by Marin of the Tyrolean Alps and of the "vicinity of New York" were "like a breath of fresh air or a field of flowers to one who has just left the classrooms after working out an arduous problem of trigonometry."<sup>22</sup> The critic welcomed that the scenes were recognisable, allowing the spectator to relax.<sup>23</sup> Two Tyrol pictures were even reproduced in a later number of *Camera Work* (No. 39, 1912), giving Marin, who also received the most solo shows at 291, the privilege of being one of only two American painters whose works were reproduced in the magazine.

In his watercolours of the Tyrol (*In the Tirol – No. 13*; fig. 48 and *In the Tirol – No. 23*; fig. 49), Marin uses the Alpine subject matter to explore harmonies and contrasts of colours and planes. The pastel pink morning or evening sky in the second painting contrasts with the powerful brushstrokes of an intense red in reflections of the sunlight on the snowy mountains, obscuring a direct reference to the physical world. Marin's colours visualise his feelings towards a particular natural atmosphere. The theme of the Alps was a long established topos for this end, since the eighteenth

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<sup>21</sup> "'The Young American Painters' and the Press," 49.

<sup>22</sup> "The Exhibitions at '291,'" *Camera Work*, No. 36 (October 1911): 29.

<sup>23</sup> "The Exhibitions at '291,'" 29.

century enthralling spectators as “the vast, the grand, the Sublime in external Nature.”<sup>24</sup> Marin’s trip to the Alps can be seen as a historical re-enactment of a Romantic practice by an artist living in twentieth-century New York, twice removed from the original aim of Romantic longing.

But it was the city to which Marin turned next.<sup>25</sup> Fourteen cityscapes, among them *Woolworth Building, No. 28, No. 31* (both 1912; figs. 50 and 51), and *No. 32* (1913; fig. 52), were exhibited at his solo show in January and February 1913, opening just two days before the Armory Show. In the catalogue, Marin articulated his vision of the city as a place with “great forces at work; great movements [...] pushing, pulling, sideways, downwards, upwards, I can hear the sound of their strife and there is great music being played.”<sup>26</sup> Marin renders the shapes and colours of the city according to his subjective viewpoint, leaves the ground blank where it suits him, without regard for naturalistic depiction. In his free play with the convention of painting, ignoring the straight and angular shapes of skyscrapers, the pictorial means of perspectival construction and the natural colour of their material and appearance, Marin is signifying that his pictures need to be understood as expressions of his own emotions as aroused by the sight of New York’s buildings. Yet expressiveness as a concept, the assumption that there are natural resonances between emotions and the possibilities of the medium of painting such as colour and shapes, is problematic. As Ernst Gombrich points out, such resonances are never completely natural, but based on context, in Marin’s case the existing structure (and convention) of the visual medium.<sup>27</sup>

Marin starts off with man-made structures, erected by capitalism, a constant presence reminiscent of modern alienation. Georg Lukács writes in *The Theory of the Novel* that modernity is characterised as the age of “transcendental homelessness,” where the human habitat is a man-made, inorganic conventional construction, a system of a “second nature.” The human subject is conscious that it is estranged from its

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<sup>24</sup> Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, foreword William Cronon (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>25</sup> This move brings to mind Whistler’s early etchings of Paris.

<sup>26</sup> John Marin exhibition catalogue, reprinted in *Camera Work*, Nos. 42-43 (April-July 1913): 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, “Expression and Communication,” in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse: And Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1963), 56-69.

environment, that the totality no longer exists. Modern artistic form has to express that: “the fissures and dents inherent in the historical situation” should not be disguised.<sup>28</sup> In the novel this is the searching psychology of the hero; Marin’s cityscapes show fissures and dents in the omissions and empty patches as well as in the city’s emptiness of the people who built and inhabit it. Yet Marin’s utopian projections only function in a laboratory space without inhabitants. In their patchiness and through their medium of watercolour, they are selections within the selective frame of the picture. By constructing the picture, Marin shows that all surroundings are similarly constructed, immediately as buildings and more generally as a system of coherence based on stagnant and increasingly meaningless conventions. Haviland noted in *Camera Work* that Marin’s works require the public’s preparedness to see their city in a new way. This is a request to see things in a different light more generally, to be able to envisage alternatives.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Camera Work* Theory**

Simultaneously involved in a process of learning and serving as educators for others, modernism forced the Stieglitz circle to refer to theory, despite their aversion to systemic thought. The theories they chose were consequentially ones that rejected an empiricist or overly rational approach, such as the writings of Henri Bergson who, like Dilthey, sought for alternatives to the static nature of empiricist thought.<sup>30</sup> In a more direct lineage to the intuitional strand of German Idealism that paralleled Stieglitz’s romantic anti-capitalist *Weltanschauung*, were the writings of Wassily Kandinsky. An extract from Kandinsky’s *On the Spiritual in Art* appeared in *Camera Work* in July 1912.<sup>31</sup> The passage chosen by Stieglitz combines the formal motifs of

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<sup>28</sup> Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans: Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der grossen Epik* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1920), 49-50.

<sup>29</sup> In the same number of *Camera Work* that carried reviews of Marin’s exhibition, Stieglitz reproduced sixteen of his own photographs, including *The Flatiron* (1902), *Old and New New York* and *The City of Ambition* (both 1910), putting them to the test of direct comparison with the modernist work he was so fond of talking about. “The Exhibitions at ‘291,’” 35.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> It appeared before the official English translation by Michael Sadler had been published. It is likely that Stieglitz himself chose and translated the passage for his magazine. See for example: *Stieglitz and his Artists: Matisse to O’Keeffe: The Alfred Stieglitz Collection in The*

Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso with a spiritual or metaphysical discourse of modernism, revealing Stieglitz's own understanding of modernism as spiritual self-expression through a concentration on the essence of being, for which in turn the focus on the medium of painting was only a prerequisite, never an aim in itself. With the authority of Kandinsky's selection of these three artists, Stieglitz also affirmed his choices in relation to the Armory Show, where their works were also on show. He established himself as the prescient inventor of a canon of modernism in New York who had first exhibited them.

Kandinsky's theory is eclectic: he summarises and manipulates sources including Tolstoy, Marx, the theosophy of Helena Blavatsky, Nietzsche, Claude Debussy, Richard Wagner, Picasso and Goethe into what appears as a unified argument: the foregrounding of the spiritual in art.<sup>32</sup> Among these figures, particularly Goethe (whose *Farbenlehre* underlay Kandinsky's concept of colour) and Wagner (his category of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was a Romantic expression of Kandinsky's interest in synaesthesia) were important for Stieglitz too. The political implications of Kandinsky's thesis correspond with the view of society as propagated in *Camera Work*. Both are hierarchical and opposed to socialism, which Kandinsky associates with blind godlessness, positivism and an uncreative and dogmatic understanding of art.<sup>33</sup> Yet both Kandinsky and *Camera Work*, despite the elitist undertones, convey a sense of artistic responsibility to lead the rest of society towards the truth. This sense of duty is related to a general prevailing mood of uncertainty, of a lack of stable guidelines in the present and the need for new ones.

Stieglitz's views also find a corollary in an untitled extract by the German theorist Julius Meier-Graefe, published in *Camera Work* in January 1912. This is a complaint about the fact that in the present, art is no longer collectively meaningful, but "has become the expression of our terrible class distinctions."<sup>34</sup> Being related to

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*Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Lisa Mintz-Messinger, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum and New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 24.

<sup>32</sup> For an analysis of Kandinsky's theoretical sources see: Sixten Ringbom, "*The Sounding Cosmos*": A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting, *Acta Academiae Aboensis*, Ser. A, Humaniora, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1970) or Christopher Short, *The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky, 1909-1928: The Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. and with introduction by M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), 11.

<sup>34</sup> Julius Meier-Graefe, untitled text, *Camera Work*, No. 37 (January 1912): 42.

“individual greed,” art belongs to a moneyed elite and, additionally, is only accessible for those who possess the necessary preliminary education to enjoy it. This text was taken from the English translation of *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (which was itself a revised text, omitting some parts of the 1904 German original), a lavishly illustrated monumental international history of art, permeated with its authors pessimistic, dismissive, desperate judgement of the present, where the separation of art from ritual deprived it from its use value for a majority of society and consequently enabled its status as a commodity on a speculative market.<sup>35</sup>

Meier-Graefe’s *Camera Work* text reveals a romantic anti-capitalist position in its search for a unifying worldview lost in the present: “art had ceased to play a part in the general organism.”<sup>36</sup> Meier-Graefe’s formalism and interest in the moral and psychological aspects of the artist’s personality chimed with the mood of the first half of *Camera Work*. Stieglitz, in his interest for Picasso, Cézanne, Matisse et al. went one step further. Meier-Graefe never endorsed these artists nor the German Expressionists and eventually became a conservative voice in art criticism.<sup>37</sup>

The use of German art theory in *Camera Work* suggests not only the extent of its influence in the early twentieth century, but also that for Stieglitz it provided the grounds on which he could establish his romantic anti-capitalist vision of modernism as the conveyor of a new worldview that addressed the spiritual and stood as the antithesis to dominant material and commercial interests. But German modernism was absent from 291. Stieglitz saw and promptly purchased Kandinsky’s only painting at the Armory Show: *Improvisation No. 27 (Garden of Love)*; fig. 53), explaining his decision to the artist: he “was so insenced [sic] at the stupidity of the people who visited the Exhibition, and also more than insen [sic] at the stupidity of most of those in charge of the Exhibition, in not realizing the importance of your

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<sup>35</sup> Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst. Vergleichende Betrachtung der bildenden Künste, als Beitrag zu einer neuen Aesthetik*, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1904). In English as *Modern Art, Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*, 2 vols., trans. Florence Simmonds and George W Chrystal (London: William Heinemann and New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908). The English edition omits the general judgment on German art headed “Die beiden Pole,” Vol. 2, 405-7.

<sup>36</sup> Meier-Graefe, untitled text, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Kenworth Moffett, *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic* (Munich: Prestel, 1973), 107.



picture that I decided to buy it.”<sup>38</sup> Stieglitz proposed a Kandinsky exhibition at 291, but the start of the war and ensuing logistical difficulties cut the plan short.<sup>39</sup> The absence of the Germans at 291 coincides with the exhibition programme of the Armory Show and the dominant opinion in the United States that the German (and English) moderns were derivatives of the French.<sup>40</sup>

### **Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove**

Among the artists in Stieglitz’s circle, Marsden Hartley had the closest relationship with German modernism. During his European sojourns between 1912 and 1915, he found the art scenes of Munich and Berlin more inspiring than that of Paris. In Germany, Hartley found his own visual language, for which, he claimed, Kandinsky only provided the initial stimulus.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Hartley was critical of Kandinsky, whom he deemed “a fine theorist first and a good painter after.”<sup>42</sup> Hartley similarly criticised Meier-Graefe for being too much rooted in the genre of literature, failing to write innovative criticism that truly recognised the nature of the visual arts.<sup>43</sup>

For Hartley, expression was key to art, and the expressive quality had a communicative ability, bypassing language and other learned means of

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<sup>38</sup> YCAL and quoted in: Gail Levin and Marianne Lorenz (eds.), *Theme and Improvisation: Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde*, exh. cat. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), p. 12

<sup>39</sup> Stieglitz and Kandinsky corresponded over a possible exhibition at 291. Kandinsky was very interested in exposure of his work in the United States, motivated primarily by his financial interest. He was anxious that his large canvases would not be appropriately showcased in Stieglitz’s small rooms and suggested sending small works, pastels and small oils. Wassily Kandinsky to Alfred Stieglitz, n. d. YCAL. Magdalena Dabrowski in *Stieglitz and his Artists: Matisse to O’Keeffe* suggests that Kandinsky drew out of the arrangement because of a lack of prospective sales. “Of course as we are not a business I can promise you no sales, but what I can promise is that your work will be introduced in the proper spirit and with understanding.” Alfred Stieglitz to Wassily Kandinsky 26 May 1913, YCAL, also quoted in Kristina Wilson, *The Modern Eye: Stieglitz, MoMA, and the Art of the Exhibition, 1925-1934* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 210.

<sup>40</sup> Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (Greenwich, CT: Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1963), 185. In a letter to the critic Israel White, Stieglitz claimed that he only bought the Kandinsky painting because he thought the picture was representative of a certain phase of painting and therefore he wanted to secure it for America. Alfred Stieglitz to Israel White, 18 March 1913, YCAL.

<sup>41</sup> Marsden Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, n. d. (received December 20, 1912), *My Dear Stieglitz: Letters Between Marsden Hartley and Alfred Stieglitz, 1912-1915*, ed. James Timothy Voorhies (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 46.

<sup>42</sup> Hartley to Stieglitz, n. d. (received December 20, 1912), *My Dear Stieglitz*, 46.

<sup>43</sup> Marsden Hartley, “A Painter’s Faith,” *The Seven Arts*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1917-1918): 502-506.

communications bound to social privileges. In his paintings, he expressed his sympathy for Germany and his response to the outbreak of the war. This was not an antipathy towards the Germans – common among Americans whipped up by wartime propaganda and the press – but a deep disappointment in modernity through realising the eternal cruelty of man. Paintings like *The Aero* (1914; fig. 54) were formally inspired by Cubism in the layering of planes within pictorial space and of shapes with minimal naturalistic cues. But the palette of strong, unmixed primary colours is entirely Hartley's own. Kandinsky also favoured primaries, yet his reds with a pink undertone contrast with Hartley's stark vermilion and whereas Kandinsky's blue veers towards purple, Hartley's is a deep Prussian blue. In contrast to Kandinsky's turquoise-green, Hartley prefers a seemingly unmixed emerald shade. Kandinsky uses black only for lines, washed down to a degree that reduces to grey. In Hartley's works, for example *Painting No. 49, Berlin (Portrait of a German Officer or Berlin Abstraction)* from 1914-1915 (fig. 55), black is a colour equal to red, yellow, blue and green, not limited to the use as outline. Black forms the background of *Painting No. 47, Berlin* (1914-1915; fig. 56), and simultaneously constitutes part of the German flag, the waving lines of which divide the picture horizontally in a lower and upper part and establish multiple levels of draperies spatially on top of each other. The multiple use of black in background, as part of the German and another flag, consisting of black and white checks, again obfuscates the different layers and underscores the impression of flatness. Black is used in a similar way in *Abstraction (Military Symbols)*; fig. 57).

After the death in October 1914 of his lover Karl von Freyburg, the horror of the war overshadowed Hartley's initial enthusiasm for military visual splendour. Hartley painted a reminiscence of von Freyburg in his large canvas *Portrait of a German Officer* (fig. 58), employing his Cubist-inspired layering technique and his strong colour palette. Von Freyburg is portrayed through the symbols of his military and national affiliations: the Bavarian and German flags, the officer's cross, personal indices such as his initials in the lower left and his age, 24, in the lower right of the painting. Despite the use of abstractions and symbols, the overall composition evokes the shape of a human body, the round shape at the top of the painting indicating the head, the waving white and black lines the chest and ribcage, and the rounded shape of tassels and helmet towards the lower end of the painting outlining the hips. The draping of the flags thereby inevitably let us think of a dead body

wrapped in such insignia for a state funeral. The impersonal character of such a funeral might underline Hartley's sense of distance from his lover buried far away near Amiens.

In the "German Officer" series, Hartley employs metonymy for a different kind of engagement with the expressive and communicative functions of painting than the abstraction Kandinsky and others were grappling with at the time. Hartley uses military insignia and other symbols such as flags to stand in for the deceased von Freyburg in order to explore qualities that lie beyond the superficiality of external appearances (and for motives which lie beyond concerns with the medium's properties).<sup>44</sup> Fred Orton argues that the use of metonymy reveals a "desire to effect or to represent a strangeness and distance" between the artist and his audience.<sup>45</sup> When Hartley worked on *Portrait of a German Officer* in the autumn of 1914, he was still trying to make his home in Germany. Yet with the death of his closest confidant and the increased difficulties of transferring money from the United States, this project stood on increasingly shaky ground. Feeling left alone in both places, and anticipating problems with the reception in America, he encrypted his experience, not only about his admiration for Germany, but also his likely love for another man.<sup>46</sup>

Although it was Hartley who met Kandinsky, it is another member of the Stieglitz circle whose painting style is usually compared to that of Kandinsky: Arthur Dove, who has been credited as the first American to paint non-objectively. Yet his use of abstraction defies a linear narrative in terms of formalist self-criticism. Compared to very early works, such as *Abstraction No. 1* or *Abstraction No. 2* (1910-11; figs. 59 and 60), the structures in later works, including the pastels of the "Ten Commandments" series, resemble vegetal shapes more closely, as do the colour

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<sup>44</sup> Forty years later, Jasper Johns would use the American flag in a similar way as a metonymy for his own person: see Fred Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns* (London: Reaktion, 1994), chapter 2: "A Different Kind of Beginning."

<sup>45</sup> Fred Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns*, 104.

<sup>46</sup> For an assessment of the role Hartley's homosexuality played in his art see Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), especially chapter 7: "German Warriors," 141-162. Hartley's admiration for German military culture has to be understood in relation to his homosexuality and the relative openness with which he could live it in Berlin. "In Germany he found a culture that was heavily male-oriented – it possessed what amounted to a cult of male beauty." 147.

range with its dominating browns and greens.<sup>47</sup> In addition, numbers made way for titles referring to nature. Dove's intent was not to create purified paintings, formations of geometric shapes without a palpable reference to an external realm. Instead, he examined the reality of the painting simultaneously with that of nature, or, more precisely, nature's spirit and his personal response to it. As the artist stated in relation to *Nature Symbolized No. 2* or *Wind on a Hillside* (fig. 61) or *Plant Forms* (fig. 62), the picture was an attempt to fix and visually capture the feeling he had towards the nature that surrounded him:<sup>48</sup> "The colors were chosen to express the substance of these objects and the sky. These colors were made into pastels, carefully weighed out, and graded with black and white into an instrument to be used in making that certain painting."<sup>49</sup> The three colours that Dove chose for his composition were taken from nature or his impression of it, whilst the "abstract" non-colours black and white added a dimension that removed the painting as such from its natural point of reference and emphasised its character as a picture. The direction in Dove's work in the 1910s towards a natural, biomorphic kind of abstraction continued in his work after the exhibition at 291 in 1912, when the line is used more freely and as a tool to leave illusionistic three-dimensionality even further behind and instead to emphasise the surface of the picture plane, as in *Cow* (fig. 63).<sup>50</sup> In this painting, too, Dove examines the natural subject and pictorial properties. Starting from the patterning of the cow's fur as it is, he creates quasi-abstract shapes of colour with seemingly no point of reference.

Dove sought a pictorial language that would engage visually with the appearances of nature without copying its external appearances. He felt that only a similarity not based on external likeness could depict nature and life and his response to them. This led to an abstract pictorial language, but any resulting formalist explanation, such as the elimination of illusionistic space, was secondary and mistook the interest in "essence" for a concern with media specifics. It was less abstraction than extraction

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<sup>47</sup> See: Homer, William Innes, "Identifying Arthur Dove's 'The Ten Commandments,'" *American Art Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1980): 21-32.

<sup>48</sup> "Then one day I made a drawing of a hillside. The wind was blowing. I chose three forms from the planes on the side of the trees, and three colors, black and white. From these was made a rhythmic painting that expressed the spirit of the whole thing. (...)," Ann Lee Morgan (ed.), *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 106-107.

<sup>49</sup> Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 106-107.

<sup>50</sup> Morgan, Ann Lee, *Arthur Dove: Life and Work*, with a Catalogue Raisonné (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984), 46.

of his theme's essence that Dove was working on. Natural phenomena served as symbols with which he created personal signs for his own feelings and emotions. Anthropomorphic forms support this argument: Dove felt that essentially, humans and nature belonged together. His self-expression served thus as a means of communication:<sup>51</sup> From there it was only a small step to extend the universal human self to nature.

In this context it is not surprising that as an occupation to support him with an income, Dove chose farming. Soon after his critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful solo-exhibition at 291 in 1912, he settled with his family on Beldon Pond Farm in Westport, Connecticut. The life of a small-scale farmer did not bring the desired cash; instead it meant hardship and robbed Dove of time and energy to paint. The occupation of farming as a money-making activity poses an odd contradiction between this old profession and the very modern one of magazine illustration, which Dove had pursued before.<sup>52</sup> Rather than an occupation that as an alternative to painting would guarantee an income, Dove's turn to small farming seems like an idealistic, even naïve decision that made a statement about a pre-industrial life-style that corresponded with the interest in nature manifest in his paintings. Dove's farming was a means of escaping modern industrial, commercial and urban society, a return to the human essence through self-sufficiency and a close connection of man and earth.

### **Radical Rhetoric**

Such reasoning is characteristic of romantic anti-capitalism, the closest thing to a political position in the Stieglitz circle. Yet despite the conspicuous absence of politics per se, certain terms were borrowed from that field. There was much talk about the break with the past and the revolutionary character of modern art in *Camera Work*; departures were highlighted in each individual artist's work.<sup>53</sup> Yet

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<sup>51</sup> Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 22.

<sup>52</sup> I presume Dove's farm was small on the basis of a letter to Stieglitz about saving Strand from impending conscription: "Don't get his hopes up on farming. It is a damn sight harder than the trenches unless it is done on a large scale." Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 56.

<sup>53</sup> For example in Hartley's work: "Exhibitions at '291,'" *Camera Work*, No. 45 (January 1914, published June): 16-17.

terms such as “revolution” seem to be invoked merely to lend some weight to the discourse, with the political connotation only a colourful resonance and nothing more. Stieglitz himself did not consider himself non-political. He referred to himself as a philosophical anarchist, meaning that although not directly active in the struggle, he embraced anarchism’s larger goals.

Stieglitz’s self-characterisation as an anarchist has been taken surprisingly seriously in the literature, both at the time and since, for example by Allan Antliff, who claims “not just that there are affinities between anarchist political practices and some kinds of modernist art, but that without serving any immediate political end, artistic practices can stand as anarchist acts in themselves through their repudiation of conventional ways of thinking and free manifestation of individuality.”<sup>54</sup> Not only does such an assertion diminish the actions of real existing political radicalism, overemphasise the political power of art, simplify art’s particulars as well as those of leftist ideology by terming all political credentials of art “anarchist”, it also posits a simplified reading of Stieglitz’s project. As Andrew Hemingway explains, for Stieglitz, considering his comfortable lifestyle and relative financial security (and despite his anti-commercialism), “anarchism” seemed like a “low-cost commitment compared with what it meant for, say, activists such as Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, or the Haymarket Martyrs.”<sup>55</sup> Still, although flawed in its particulars, there are period foundations for Antliff’s conclusion.

The American critical response linked Kandinsky with anarchism and this assessment remained a fixed point in the reception of abstract and modernist art in general.<sup>56</sup> I sketched the socio-political implications of Kandinsky’s treatise above, and these seem incompatible with any political form of anarchism, at least of a communistic kind. Similar to Stieglitz, however, Kandinsky may have embraced a philosophical anarchism, understood along the lines of Nietzsche or Stirner, of individuals tearing down the old making room for the new.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, even

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<sup>54</sup> Andrew Hemingway, “Individualism and/or Solidarity? ‘Anarchist Modernism’ in the United States,” review of Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde*, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2002): 165-170.

<sup>55</sup> Hemingway, “Individualism and/or Solidarity?,” 167.

<sup>56</sup> *Stieglitz and his Artists: Matisse to O’Keeffe*, 25; 314 and Levin and Lorenz, *Theme and Improvisation*, 10-11.

<sup>57</sup> According to Kandinsky, Nietzsche shook science and morality, which prompted man to “turn his gaze from externals in on to himself,” a “spiritual revolution” which is first felt in

anarchists at the time seemed to agree that modernist art – Stieglitz’s in particular – and anarchism were related. The New York-based anarchist activist Hippolyte Havel claimed:

Among the bombthrowers I am acquainted with, Alfred Stieglitz stands without doubt in the foremost rank. He is a most dangerous agitator, a great disturber of the peace; more than any other man he has helped to undermine old institutions; he has helped to kill venerable beliefs, and to destroy sacred traditions. An iconoclast in the realm of art, he has succeeded in shocking cruelly the moral guardians of classicism. At 291 he has created a social center unique in character, a battlefield for new ideas, where every sinner’s confession is accepted at its own value.<sup>58</sup>

Several people associated with Stieglitz and *Camera Work* moved in anarchist or other radical circles as well. Among them were Weber,<sup>59</sup> Hapgood, Hartmann and, most poignantly, Benjamin de Casseres, frequent contributor to *Camera Work*, regular at the anarchist-led Ferrer Center and candidate in the 1913 elections for mayor of New York. As a “secessionist,” de Casseres promised to legalise prostitution, gambling and betting at race tracks, the sale of alcohol twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week and to limit the mayor’s duty to “seeing that order is preserved,” abstaining from meddling with any citizen’s private morals, all being part of “a plea for the recognition and legalization of human weaknesses.”<sup>60</sup> Stieglitz assured de Casseres of his vote.<sup>61</sup> He also corresponded with the artist,

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literature, music and art, they lead the light towards an again soulful life. Kandinsky valued this type of egoistical anarchism, but he had no faith in the revolutionary power of the masses and communistic anarchism. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> *Camera Work*, No. (July 1914): 67. For this number, dedicated to the question of what 291 means, Stieglitz invited various people, his regulars and acquaintances, to contribute. Among them was Havel, who is described as “Dishwasher, editor, ‘revolutionary almanac,’ editor ‘Don Quixote.’” Also quoted in: Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 153-154.

<sup>59</sup> Stieglitz recalled being told that Weber had become “a violent anarchist,” “tremendously interested in the IWW (and) intimate with (William) Haywood and with Emma Goldman.” Alfred Stieglitz, “The Story of Max Weber,” YCAL. See also: Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> “Platform of Benjamin de Casseres, Candidate for Mayor of New York,” YCAL.

<sup>61</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Benjamin de Casseres, 9 April 1913 (carbon copy), YCAL: Stieglitz had received the announcement that de Casseres was running for mayor. He assures him that he would “even go to jail for ten days if I could get two votes through for you on my own name.” “Hypocrisy in the guise of PROGRESS is a wonderful commodity in America today. It is on the free list: it needs no protection. It is the one real American product which seems to thrive everywhere in spite of tornados and floods, Roosevelts, Gaynors. Not to forget all the ministers of the Gospel and all the teachers, and publishers and practically everybodyelse [sic].” To which de Casseres replied: “Platform made a big hit. If I can find a backer I’ll

anarchist and Ferrer Center activist Adolf Wolff. From his prison cell, Wolff compared 291 to the ideal world, with its “spirit of freedom,” “self-expression,” art, and “life in the highest and deepest.”<sup>62</sup> Thus people moving in anarchist circles took Stieglitz’s spiritualism seriously as a form of revolt.<sup>63</sup> Stieglitz also exchanged a small number of letters with Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, the foremost anarchist activists in the United States at the time. It has even been passed down that “Big Bill” Haywood, leader of the IWW, had visited 291 – although reportedly he did not think much of it.<sup>64</sup>

Stieglitz claimed to be a philosophical anarchist. According to David Miller, philosophical anarchism can be understood as a formulation of a problem with the concept of authority. This is connected to anarchism proper and its negation of state and government, but is not identical with it. Philosophical anarchists can even appear as more thorough or radical than “real” ones, Miller argues, on the paradoxical premise that their theory would never be tested in practice. But most of the time, philosophical anarchists refrain from proposing a particular theory or strategy as a means to achieve their aim and also do not posit definite visions of how the society they aspired to would be constituted.<sup>65</sup> It is obvious that such characteristics would appeal to intellectuals and artists such as Stieglitz.

According to George Woodcock, anarchism is always ultimately concerned with social change, which presupposes an attitude of “social condemnation” and a method of “social rebellion, violent or otherwise.”<sup>66</sup> Anarchism is a system of thought, not a plan for action, yet the action leading towards “the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of non-governmental cooperation between free individuals” is still the defining moment.<sup>67</sup> Anarchism can never be purely philosophical because this would mean the absence of this one fundamental characteristic: the conviction

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smash the Old Régime! Meantime I’m in the hands of shylocks and printers. My next pamphlet will be on the Eternal alliance, Respectability & Craft (?)”, Benjamin de Casseres to Alfred Stieglitz, 25 April 1913, YCAL.

<sup>62</sup> *Camera Work*, No. (July 1914): 67.

<sup>63</sup> Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 33.

<sup>64</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, “Bill Heywood (sic) at 291,” *Twice A Year*, Nos. 5-6 (Fall-Winter 1940, Spring-Summer 1941): 137; Hemingway, “Individualism and/or Solidarity?,” 167.

<sup>65</sup> David deLeon, “Anarchism,” in Mari Jo Buhle et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, (New York and London: Garland, 1990), 36-38.

<sup>66</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 11.

<sup>67</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 14.



that action has to be taken. Furthermore, anarchism without some form of positive action turns into nihilism, simple destruction without any moral principles.<sup>68</sup> And despite the outspoken distaste for all *political* struggles, the consciousness of the need for practical steps renders anarchist activism always political.

De Zayas employed an oppositional and provocative rhetoric in his texts and caricatures that borrows from politics. He was familiar with political dissent from a young age: the family had to leave Mexico because of the critical stance towards the regime of de Zayas's father, Rafael de Zayas, a prominent journalist, novelist, dramatist, poet and politician. Provocatively proclaiming that "Art is dead," de Zayas points towards the avant-garde aim of the sublation of art and signals the definite end of aestheticist longing and escapism.<sup>69</sup> This revolutionary mood coexists with elements of romantic anti-capitalist nostalgia. The present conditions, "rarefied and exhausted," with "passive fear of the unknown" and "religious hope" vanishing under the reign of the positivist spirit, do not constitute an environment in which art could remain necessary to humanity, de Zayas asserts. He was sceptical about individualism: "Individualism kills inspiration, since it tends to eliminate the conception of the ideal."<sup>70</sup> True works of art are collective ideas, not individual: collective ideas condensed and synthesised by individual genius.<sup>71</sup> Individualism was usually cherished by modernists and anarchists alike. For instance, the artist Adolf Wolff claimed that "[T]he only thing truly our own, the only thing that is sacred private property, is our individuality."<sup>72</sup>

De Zayas criticised industrialism, capitalism and positivism for making philosophy and art succumb to "political economy and industry, striving for the Real."<sup>73</sup> The old, pre-modern ideas are still alive deep down somewhere; some artists are now uncovering them and keeping art alive. Modernism is thus not completely new, but the recovery of something that has been forgotten or was suppressed by modernity. He understands Rodin's sculptures as analysing human walking like Egyptian

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<sup>68</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 15.

<sup>69</sup> Marius de Zayas, "The Sun Has Set," *Camera Work*, No. 39 (July 1912): 17-21.

<sup>70</sup> De Zayas, "The Sun Has Set," 17.

<sup>71</sup> De Zayas, "The Sun Has Set," 18.

<sup>72</sup> Adolf Wolff, "The Art Exhibit," *The Modern School*, No. IV (Spring, 1913): 12, quoted by Francis M. Naumann and Paul Avrich, "Adolf Wolff: 'Poet, Sculptor and Revolutionist, but Mostly Revolutionist,'" *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (September 1985): 494.

<sup>73</sup> De Zayas, "The Sun Has Set," 18.

sculptures, Matisse's art reminded him of Greek vases, Hindu and Cambodian idols or religious paintings of earliest Christians; Picasso and the Cubists are spiritual and morphological reincarnations of Africans as yet unaffected by civilisation. All are motivated by the search for artistic truth; they gather disciples around them to teach their findings. The model past, for de Zayas, reached further back than the Middle Ages, right to the early stages of human civilisation, which he still thought to be alive in certain non-European peoples.<sup>74</sup> These "primitives" still understood the abstract idea of expression in form without reference to the imitative representation of likenesses, which, based on observation and analysis, meant the disappearance of imagination and creativity, the principal laws of art.<sup>75</sup> De Zayas's rhetoric seems deliberately provocative. He understood modernism as a means to wake people up, to challenge notions of art's social passivity. He analysed art as ideology, its complacency in the creation of false realities.<sup>76</sup> To this end, he borrowed from the vocabulary of contemporary political radicalism.

Many of the bohemians gathering in Greenwich Village in the period believed in a similar way that any change in the socio-economic basis had to go hand in hand with a revolution of consciousness. Radicals such as Floyd Dell, Max Eastman, John Reed or Randolph Bourne experimented with new forms of life, including the renunciation of middle-class comfort. Although their views may seem muddled now, they were motivated by a real desire for change. If they wanted revolution, reform was the most Stieglitz could administer. Stieglitz never experienced the threat of real poverty and generally had little intercourse with the Greenwich Village intelligentsia. 291, located in a small attic and difficult to find, did not lend itself as a meeting place either. Decorated like a tasteful private apartment (see fig. 64), it was, rather, modelled on the precedent of Sir Lindsay Coutts's Grosvenor Gallery in London. The Grosvenor regulars were not bohemians, but members of the aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie who enjoyed the arty behaviour and atmosphere and to whose

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<sup>74</sup> Marius de Zayas, "Photography," *Camera Work*, No. 41, 17.

<sup>75</sup> De Zayas, "Photography," 18.

<sup>76</sup> De Zayas, "Photography," 18-20. De Zayas here made a distinction between photography and other media: "art" is idealist, teaching us to feel the emotions of the artist, photography, by contrast, is materialist, making us feel our own emotions.

disinterested pursuit of beauty the bohemian artist lent credibility.<sup>77</sup> This model was close to the Secessionism that Stieglitz had practiced earlier in the century.

The Bloomsbury fraction in London is another example of a group of dissenting individuals who were in fact associated with the hegemonic class. Raymond Williams's analysis of the group shows how through dissent of the reformist and not the revolutionary kind the members of Bloomsbury anticipated what was to become the general direction of their class. The same is the case with the Stieglitz circle. The modernism they promoted was soon seamlessly integrated into the very commercial and capitalist structures that partly provoked its inception in opposition. Some of the values that defined Bloomsbury, their candour and liberal contact with each other, disregard for rules of conduct and the standards of the previous generation and their wish to build a new society "which should be free, rational, civilized, pursuing truth and beauty" also appealed to bohemians or anarchists.<sup>78</sup> But in the Bloomsbury context, these values were not radical at all (at least not in political terms – the group's sexual mores might suggest otherwise).

The Stieglitz circle and the Bloomsbury set similarly positioned themselves at the intersection of bohemia and the mainstream, yet always close enough to the locus of power, even if Bloomsbury's liberal ideology distinguished it from the Stieglitz circle's romantic anti-capitalist one. Stieglitz's position towards society is exposed like that of the Bloomsbury fraction a "social conscience," not a consciousness. "Social conscience," the sympathy for the victimisation of lower class subjects, according to Williams, presupposes no abandonment of a distinguishing line between the classes and, as a result, political action could only ever remain at the level of reform.<sup>79</sup> Stieglitz's alignment with the lower classes was sympathetic at most, never politically affiliated, as it was for some of the Greenwich Village bohemians, who were themselves of middle-class origin too. The social conscience of both

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<sup>77</sup> Paula Gillett, "Art Audiences at the Grosvenor Gallery," *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, ed. Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 41-42. Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>78</sup> Raymond Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 170.

<sup>79</sup> Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," 173.

Bloomsbury and the Stieglitz circle differed markedly from the social consciousness of a self-organising subordinate class.<sup>80</sup>

A fuller immersion in bohemia and radical politics for Stieglitz would have meant giving up aspects of his comfortable lifestyle. It would have also likely brought him to the edge of respectability and even legality, forcing a conflict with his artistic endeavours. His bourgeois social position was not only necessary for the funds that he needed for his project, it also helped in liaising with his clientele. But in equal measures he cultivated a certain radical credibility. The romantic anti-capitalist position allowed for both: he could stay within the discursive parameters of middle-class society, express his distaste for its shortcomings and at the same time create and foster an art that was new and interesting, sincere and saleable.

### **The Real Radicals**

Anarchists were prominent among the leftist activists in America in the period. Anarchism in the United States was strongly linked to immigrant culture, to groups of German, Eastern and Southern European origin. Anarchist ideas found their way to America as early as the 1850s, mainly through the distribution of Proudhon's writings among French immigrants in the aftermath of the failure of the 1848 Revolution. Benjamin R. Tucker translated Proudhon into English and combined his ideas with an American tradition of extreme individualism as expressed by Stephen Pearl Andrews, Lysander Spooner and Josiah Warren.<sup>81</sup> Bakunin and Kropotkin's ideas soon entered American consciousness too. In the late nineteenth-century anarchist activism made news and spread fear among the bourgeoisie until the highly visible Haymarket incident led to suppression of the movement and anarchism was reduced from a mass culture to a number of radical groupings and publications at the margins of society.<sup>82</sup> However, among these marginal groups that believed government was both harmful and unnecessary, violence was the preferred tactic of only a minority (but made prominent by the assassination of president McKinley and also by Berkman's attempt to kill the businessman Henry Clay Frick). Also, the

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<sup>80</sup> Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," 174.

<sup>81</sup> David deLeon, "Anarchism," 36-38.

<sup>82</sup> David deLeon, "Anarchism," 36-38.

rejection of government did not equate with the rejection of society per se, but rather with the view that the social order should be organic rather than systemic.<sup>83</sup>

Emma Goldman was the most vociferous anarchist in the United States in the early twentieth century.<sup>84</sup> Born in 1869 in the Russian Empire (present-day Lithuania) to a family of petty bourgeois Jews, she experienced restrictions in her life choices based on her class, gender and religion. She emigrated to America in an act of liberation, but soon realised that similar limitations applied in the new world. If the boundaries of religion and gender may have been weaker, that of class was arguably even stronger in the United States – and class distinctions weakened the ethnic solidarity that Goldman had experienced in the Ghettos of Russia. The Haymarket incident spurred her radicalisation. Goldman herself described her discovery of and conversion to anarchism as a revelation, a sudden quasi-religious epiphany. She became a member of the anarchist scene in New York gathering around Johann Most, a revolutionary of German origin who published the magazine *Die Freiheit*.

Goldman was not a systematic thinker. Like most New York anarchists initially drawn to the writings by Bakunin, she soon turned towards Kropotkin who proposed to replace authoritarian hierarchies, the coercive political state and super-naturalistic religion with a warm humanism, based on “mutual aid.” Motivated by resentment against the state and a quest for a healthy inner life free from psychological, sensual and sexual alienation and restrictions, Goldman also read the writings of Henrik Ibsen, Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche. American sources including Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman also found their way into her eclectic thought, giving an American gloss to European ideas.

Goldman’s attraction to continental European culture resembles the interests of Stieglitz who, like her, frequently saw Wagner’s operas and admired the actress Eleonora Duse. His disregard for theory seems to have a counterpart in hers, yet this was a question of degree. Whilst Goldman complained about the theoretically

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<sup>83</sup> *The Anarchist Reader*, ed. George Woodcock (Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1977).

<sup>84</sup> Sources on Goldman include: Emma Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Schocken, 1982); Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, with biographic sketch by Hippolyte Havel, third revised edition (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association and London: A. C. Fifield, 1917); Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, introduction and notes by Miriam Brody (New York and London: Penguin, 2006). The most recent biography is: Vivian Gornick, *Emma Goldman: Revolution as a Way of Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

underdeveloped nature of American anarchism, her own multifaceted anarchism was seen by some of her comrades as diluting their common project. But it permitted Goldman to be active in a wide range of causes. She spoke for sexual freedom, birth control and marriage reform and defended experimentation in the arts, all as corollaries to her overarching aim: the right to think and speak freely. Her relationship with the rest of the anarchist groupings is reminiscent of Stieglitz's situation within his circle. At first clearly attached to one cause – photography – he alienated former associates when he entered on a new direction with his interest in modernism. In both Stieglitz's and Goldman's cases, their separateness from their groups, as vital as joining up with others was for both their projects, was not entirely undesired by these strong personalities. Both could only belong to a form of movement when their role was that of the leader.<sup>85</sup>

Like Stieglitz, Goldman ventured into publishing. Stieglitz supported her journal, *Mother Earth* (1906-1917) – although this was the opposite of the pricey and precious object that was *Camera Work*.<sup>86</sup> *Mother Earth's* subtitle, "Social Science and Literature," implies that if the journal was understood as a means in the struggle, literature – art – was a weapon too. Indeed, art was taken seriously in its pages. Goldman wrote about her appreciation of *Camera Work* to Stieglitz and even planned to take inspiration from his idea of a number dedicated to the question "What does 291 mean to me?" for her own magazine.<sup>87</sup> The articles on political issues of the moment in *Mother Earth* outnumbered those dedicated to cultural concerns, but this does not diminish the important role that the arts played in the magazine – and that correspondingly they must have played in the anarchist movement at large. Visually, the journal did not offer much. A drawing of Adam and Eve in the nude under a blossoming tree, with broken chains nearby, was on the cover of the first issue, (fig. 65); thereafter the covers showed only plain text, probably to lower production costs. Sometimes, drawings by Jules-Félix Grandjouan, Adolf Wolff, Man Ray (figs. 66-68), Manuel Komroff, and Robert Minor (fig. 69) adorned the covers. All of these artists were associated with the Ferrer Center, an anarchist cultural institution in New York. Only one political cartoon, by Luduvico

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<sup>85</sup> For Stieglitz as a leader see: Clurman, "Alfred Stieglitz and the Group Idea," 267-79.

<sup>86</sup> Emma Goldman to Alfred Stieglitz, 11 April 1912, YCAL.

<sup>87</sup> Emma Goldman to Alfred Stieglitz, 13 February 1915, YCAL.

Caminata, was ever printed (October 1912) and two photographs, accompanying an article by Hippolyte Havel.<sup>88</sup> A poem in every issue represented the literary arts.

Max Baginski wrote about how art mattered for politics.<sup>89</sup> In a characteristically idealist view of anarchism, this author describes the dull reality of ideological art production and the sad position of the truly creative artist within this system, whose individuality, under the demands of authoritative power and the market, cannot find expression. Baginski's views and vocabulary are reminiscent of Stieglitz's. Like him, he had little faith in the masses and regarded the majority of people as mediocre and ignorant. But in contrast to Stieglitz, Baginski had a clear strategy to restore individualism: abolition of private ownership of land, organised opposition, trade union activity, abolition of wage labour and in their place the emergence of new forms of society and production, based on voluntary cooperation and self-organisation in free unions, production for need, not profit.<sup>90</sup> Such measures would restore a life that is worth living, with "Truth and beauty" in accordance with "the necessity of procuring the means of existence in a co-operative organized manner." Individuality could thus prosper on a solid social foundation and would fertilise art, literature and science.<sup>91</sup> Only then would art for art's sake be possible: an art free of any ideological constraints.

The passionate writing style characteristic of *Mother Earth* surely mirrors the fervour of Goldman's speeches.<sup>92</sup> But as a balance, there were articles in a clear, factual style, more concerned with rational argument and the conveying of information than enraging the readers. Berkman wrote many articles in this vein. For example, the historian Max Nettlau argued in a rational tone that people should not be preoccupied with the economic basis of an anarchist society, but instead embrace a philosophical approach, individualistic and communistic at the same time, in line with the deeper

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<sup>88</sup> Hippolyte Havel, "Long Live Anarchy!," *Mother Earth*, Vol. V, No. 12 (February 1911), reprinted in *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth*, ed. and with commentary by Peter Glassgold (New York: Counterpoint, 2000), 49-51.

<sup>89</sup> Max Baginski, "Without Government," Vol 1, No. 1 (March 1906), reprinted in *Anarchy!*, 8-13.

<sup>90</sup> Baginski, "Without Government," 11.

<sup>91</sup> Baginski, "Without Government," 12.

<sup>92</sup> Hippolyte Havel, Sadakichi Hartmann's friend, wrote passionately about the death of Japanese journalist and translator of Western socialist and anarchist literature, Denijiro Kotoku: Hippolyte Havel, "Long Live Anarchy!," *Mother Earth*, Vol. V, No. 12 (February 1911), reprinted in *Anarchy!*, 49-50.

aims of anarchism “which appeal as a beautiful ideal to many.”<sup>93</sup> Although different in tone, his arguments resonate with those of the Stieglitz circle.

Accounting for elements that anarchism has in common with other forms of thought, such as the romantic, nostalgic rejection of capitalism, does not minimise the specifics of this direction. To the contrary, such a historically and ideologically specific approach takes seriously what is particular about anarchism, allowing for a nuanced view of both the Stieglitz circle and the anarchists around Goldman. A simple equation between anarchism and modernism, as in Antliff’s account, misses that the two idea complexes remained separate entities, related by a third element. To reduce Goldman’s anarchism to romantic anti-capitalism is similarly to miss the point. It would diminish the political and activist elements of Goldman’s project as much as it would mean to neglect the complexity of romantic anti-capitalism, which contains conservative aspects not easily reconciled with Goldman’s viewpoints. This mixture of anarchist and romantic viewpoints was not a particularly American occurrence. In Germany, the anarchist Gustav Landauer, who was murdered by the Freikorps in 1919, propagated a similar vision of an alternative social structure of small, self-governed communities based on his nostalgic, intellectual and cultural-minded ideal.

### **The Left and the Stieglitz Circle**

The currency of a romantically inspired radicalism in the United States at the time was partly due to the lack of alternatives available on the Marxist left. Artists and intellectuals felt alienated by the Socialist Party of America, which in their view declared everything central to their worldview a “bourgeois luxury” – even free speech. If the socialism propagated by the Second International was generally dry and unimaginative, this was arguably even more the case in the United States, where Marx’s theory had been drained of all its metaphysical elements and reduced to a crude scientific and positivist creed. The party leaders Morris Hillquit and Victor Berger built on scientific socialism as a necessary prerequisite to make the masses fit to rule. Utopianism, by contrast, “was the stigma they attached to visions of a

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<sup>93</sup> Nettlau, “Anarchism: Communist or Individualist? – Both,” reprinted in *Anarchy!*, 80.



stateless future with complete equality and to the egalitarian, spontaneous industrial politics of the unskilled.”<sup>94</sup> The only positive cultural means that socialism provided in the period was a vivid local and multilingual alternative press.<sup>95</sup>

It is no surprise that alternative leftist radical organisations attracted followers, in particular the International Workers of the World, an industrial union not based on craft which spoke to all those who were excluded from the AFL unions: women, non-whites, immigrants, migrant workers and the unskilled.<sup>96</sup> The IWW did not define itself as anarcho-syndicalist, contrary to what is often claimed, but welcomed radicals of all sorts in their ranks. With their successful efforts to eradicate sexual, ethnic and racial barriers within the working class and with the inspiring songs and graphics in the *Little Red Songbook* that they spread, the IWW also addressed concerns close to the heart of some culturally minded radicals. When America entered the war, the IWW in contrast to the right of the Socialist Party (the SPA formally opposed the war) retained their antimilitary stand and opposed U.S. involvement – a position that should have resounded with the pacifism of the Greenwich Village bohemia too.<sup>97</sup> Yet there was widespread anti-intellectualism among the Wobblies as in the American Socialist Party.<sup>98</sup> Only for a short time, around 1912 when both the IWW and cultural radicalism (and Stieglitz’s modernism) were at the height of their power, were Greenwich Village intellectuals and IWW leader Big Bill Haywood in regular touch, for example when they collaborated in staging of a pageant for the Paterson strikers. But when the influence of the IWW waned, and Haywood moved to Chicago, the bonds with Greenwich Village came to an end. The bohemians realised that this organisation was in many ways no less positivistic than the SP.<sup>99</sup> The “cultural rebels” interest and belief in the IWW was not only short-lived, it also went beyond the organisation’s basic syndicalist principles and actions and was solely attracted to the general social force and radical visibility represented by the apex of its achievement.

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<sup>94</sup> Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1987), 95.

<sup>95</sup> Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, 90.

<sup>96</sup> Joyce Kornbluh (ed.), *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), 2.

<sup>97</sup> Buhle et al., *Encyclopedia of the American Left*.

<sup>98</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, “Big Bill” Haywood (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 68.

<sup>99</sup> Dubofsky, “Big Bill” Haywood, 82-83.

If the alignment of Greenwich Village bohemians with the organised left was uneven and short-lived, personal overlaps between the cultural realm and the politically engaged did exist, and so did they between modernists and anarchist activists. Hutchins Hapgood, cultural critic, author and friend of Stieglitz, is an example. He used his public voice to highlight parallels between modernist artists and anarchism, for instance in the case of Arthur Dove.<sup>100</sup> According to Antliff, Dove himself argued in this conversation with the journalist that his abstract paintings mirrored the rising tide of radical politics, stating that the intensities in art and in politics were indistinguishable inasmuch as both penetrated to an “essence” through simplification.<sup>101</sup> The article was published on the occasion of Dove’s first one-man exhibition at 291, showing ten works in pastel based on landscapes, architecture and boats later subsumed under the series “The Ten Commandments” (see figs. 61 and 62). Hapgood used his review to praise the growing labour radicalism in the United States, in particular that of the IWW,<sup>102</sup> making it unmistakeably clear that the particular link between modernism and anarchism was the focus on individualism and free expression in both.<sup>103</sup> In another article (which was reprinted in *Camera Work*), Hapgood asserted that “Post-Impressionism is as disturbing in one field as the I.W.W. is in another. It turns up the soil, shakes the old foundations, and leads to new life, whether the programs and ideas have permanent validity or not.”<sup>104</sup> In yet another text, Hapgood characterised several modernists as anarchists, including Stieglitz favourites Rodin, Picasso, Weber and Dove; they were radicals and insurgents who swept away the rule of conventions with their “primitive” approach to art in their wish to return back to essential human basics.<sup>105</sup>

However, in Hapgood’s estimation of links between artistic and political unrest, Stieglitz’s artists were not at the forefront. Hapgood’s assessment of the radicalism of modern art contains a critical moment that can be read as part of a search for a socially useful art. “Art and Unrest” is a review of three exhibitions in New York: Jo

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<sup>100</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, “The Trend of the Time,” *New York Globe* (12 March 1912): 4. Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 36.

<sup>101</sup> Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 36-37.

<sup>102</sup> Hapgood, “The Trend of the Time,” Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 37-38.

<sup>103</sup> Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 33, pointing towards Hutchins Hapgood, “What is Anarchism,” *New York Globe* (October 14, 1911).

<sup>104</sup> Hutchings Hapgood, “Art and Unrest,” *New York Globe*, reprinted in *Camera Work*, Nos. 42-43 (April-July 1913): 43.

<sup>105</sup> Hutchings Hapgood, “The Insurgents in Art,” *New York Globe* (24 Oct 1911): 6, Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 34.

Davidson at Reinhardt's, Alfred Maurer at Folsom's and John Marin at 291. All three artists do not perfectly represent the comparison between "Post-Impressionism" and socio-political agitation, Hapgood argues. But out of the three, it is Stieglitz protégé Marin who stands the test the least. Promising in terms of technique and content, Marin lacked "life-experience"; he had not yet sorted out what he wanted to say, and if there were elements of a struggle, it was not on a larger social scale, but an internalised struggle of the artist with his own personality and with his art. For Hapgood, this also meant that if Marin "succeeds at all, he probably will succeed more substantially," revealing the author's own adherence to a form of socio-political dissent that is fought out in the sphere of consciousness.<sup>106</sup>

Hapgood, born in Chicago in 1867, was a well-educated member of the American WASP elite who questioned not only his own privilege but also the system on which it rested. He looked toward a new kind of society based more on human worth than personal privilege, thus remaining at the centre of radical intellectual life.<sup>107</sup> Hapgood was an intellectual caught between classes. His books speak of his sympathy for the margins of early twentieth-century American society: the working classes and radicalism (*The Spirit of Labor* and *An Anarchist Woman*) or the Jews of the Lower East Side (*Spirit of the Ghetto*). His engagement with social issues offers parallels with the German sociologists of the period such as Georg Simmel or Karl Mannheim. Aware of the inequalities in modern society, their efforts at rational understanding mingled with feelings of sympathy and an awkward aestheticising interest in the oppressed in their writings whereby they always remained safely in the realm of bourgeois learning. But what is most obvious from these books is Hapgood's preference for the spiritual. I would argue that it was this, not a common stake in anarchism, that formed the basis for his and Stieglitz's friendship.

Stieglitz and Hapgood corresponded from at least 1912 until Hapgood's death in 1944.<sup>108</sup> The letters are full of talk of "spiritual energy," the quest for truth, intuition, of the aesthetic picturing of truth. Politics is almost absent as a topic. In 1922, writing that he voted for Debs "as the only candidate with a spiritual personality," Hapgood admitted "I don't think that political action has much importance today."

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<sup>106</sup> Hapgood, "Art and Unrest," 44.

<sup>107</sup> James R. Barrett, in Hutchins Hapgood, *The Spirit of Labor*, introduction and notes James R. Barrett (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), xi-xiii.

<sup>108</sup> The folder in the archive contains letters from 1912-1944, YCAL.

Instead, he believed in “direct action” as the only viable route in this age to bring about a “new economic basis.”<sup>109</sup> He also thought that “[T]he Bolsheviks are doing a great work by destroying these economic grafts which create and use political government and make what we call democracy a farce and worse – a blind and a gag to the people.”<sup>110</sup> This is reminiscent of anarchism’s proclamation of direct action and its denunciations of the political action of socialists. Stieglitz did not enter this political discussion, but he assured Hapgood of their mutual agreement – on the spiritual level. If Hapgood had any hopes in an alliance of the intelligentsia and the (radical) workers, Stieglitz certainly did not.

Among the artists associated with Stieglitz, Abraham Walkowitz was the one most closely associated with radicalism.<sup>111</sup> His first mention in *Camera Work*, antedating his affiliation with the Stieglitz circle, was in a reprinted review by Hutchins Hapgood of a group exhibition that focused on New York’s Lower East Side.<sup>112</sup> The review of this show was probably only republished in the magazine because in it Hapgood also reviewed Max Weber at the Murray Hill Gallery and Hartley’s Show at 291. The subject of the Lower East Side lent itself to Hapgood’s proclivity to interpret modern art as a plea for freedom, “esthetically and mentally,” a corollary to political and social upsurge and a support for the “insurgent and unconventional.” The link to Stieglitz is obvious for Hapgood: Stieglitz, too, nurtured such an art and mentality of freedom, because he felt “beauty and form directly, without an undue regards for convention, tradition, and authority.”<sup>113</sup> Hapgood found Weber superior in analytical quality, in the struggle with form that brings to the fore the inner character of objects, but Hartley, while less brilliant formally, was nevertheless more “serious” in his efforts. Walkowitz was “personal and sincere” too. By mentioning then-Stieglitz-circle-member Weber and not-yet-member Walkowitz in the same review, Hapgood worked to bring the two tendencies of formalist modernism and

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<sup>109</sup> Hapgood to Stieglitz, Nov 7, 1920, YCAL.

<sup>110</sup> Hapgood to Stieglitz, Nov 7, 1920, YCAL.

<sup>111</sup> Not many authors have published on Walkowitz. An exception is Martica Sawin, who devoted her MA dissertation specifically to Walkowitz’s 201 years: *Abraham Walkowitz, The Years at 291: 1912-1917*, MA Diss. (New York: Columbia University, 1967) and who also wrote an exhibition catalogue: *Abraham Walkowitz 1878-1965*, exh. cat. (Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 1974).

<sup>112</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, “Hospitality in Art,” *New York Globe*, reprinted in *Camera Work*, No. 38 (1912): 43-44.

<sup>113</sup> Hapgood, “Hospitality in Art,” 43.

politically ambitious art together. By showing at 291, Walkowitz would make this connection even clearer.

Walkowitz's first two solo exhibitions at 291, from December 1912 to January 1913 and November 1913 to January 1914, were reviewed in the radical magazine *Revolt* and Walkowitz's radical sympathies were a topic of the reviews at least for the first exhibition, where he showed watercolours and drawings in various media. The subjects included a portrait "of a large eyed man" (probably *The Poet* fig. 70) subtle and unobtrusive, but with a character so "arresting" that he is noted among the pictures "which glorify the heroic in physical movement and dynamic force."<sup>114</sup> Further, there were subtle and delicate drawings of a dancing mother and child (fig. 71), a conductor and orchestra scene (fig. 72), a man and a woman kissing (fig. 73), a nude (*Sigh*; fig. 74) and abstracted shapes of dancing nudes (*From Life to Life No. 1* and No. 13; figs. 75 and 76).<sup>115</sup> According to one reviewer, Walkowitz's formal analysis allowed him to express his deep understanding of mankind in a psychological and sympathetic way.<sup>116</sup>

In relation to Walkowitz, the writer of the "Photo-Secession Notes" found that "[T]he spirit which urges men to free themselves from the bond of obsolete laws and conventions permeates his work."<sup>117</sup> Yet *Camera Work* discourse would not get closer to the radicalism of the time than that. No comment or personal view was offered, only a general sense of sympathy that, however, betrayed more than anything that the two struggles, for social justice and modern art, were separate. The term anarchy was used: "the orderly and dignified tone of his drawings and paintings prove that anarchy does not mean license, but means the right of man to absolute freedom in his life and in his expression, not as a birthright, but as a privilege earned by proving oneself worthy of it." This view could serve as a definition of Stieglitz's "philosophical anarchism": a depoliticised, elitist definition of anarchism, lacking any mention of a possible organisation of society, instead referring only to a general human character. However, although the hierarchic argument that the right of freedom should be earned runs counter to the egalitarian ethos of communistic

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<sup>114</sup> Samuel Swift, *The New York Sun*, reprinted in *Camera Work*, No. 41 (January 1913): 27.

<sup>115</sup> No catalogue of the exhibitions remains, but these seven works were reproduced in *Camera Work*, No. 44 (October 1913, published March 1914) and remain in the Stieglitz Collection at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

<sup>116</sup> Swift, 26-28.

<sup>117</sup> "Photo-Secession Notes", *Camera Work*, No. 41 (January 1913): 24-30.

anarchism, it is compatible with Stirner's egoistical variety of the doctrine. It reveals an elitist view in that at the same time as negating the idea of "absolute freedom" as a "birthright," it is a critique of any stratification based on inborn privileges.

Such a licentious interpretation of anarchism and casual use of the term makes evident why it was this form of radical politics that Stieglitz and his associates aligned with. Lacking a clear political or organisational system, anarchism lends itself to such an open use, which more rigorously theoretical forms of socialism would not tolerate. As in the case of Walkowitz, "anarchism" in *Camera Work* is immediately brought into a formal artistic context. The association of Walkowitz with anarchy and the radical social movements of the day was not *Camera Work's* invention; his work also illustrated in *The Masses*. The artist was concerned with the life of working-class communities, and some kind of association with the left predated his involvement with Stieglitz. The *Camera Work* writers used an established frame of reference for an artist who showed at 291 for the first time. Their favourable position towards anarchism is noteworthy nonetheless, despite the interchangeability of "anarchism" and "modernism" as terms for individual freedom and self-expression. The argument was not that Walkowitz was a good artist because he was an anarchist and visualised anarchist arguments in his drawings, but that anarchism was an acceptable political position because an artist who created formally interesting pictures adhered to it.

Sequentially, *Camera Work* focused on one particular group of works by Walkowitz, his drawings of Isadora Duncan (figs. 77-83 are in Stieglitz's collection at the Metropolitan Museum). These were not only reminiscent of drawings by Rodin shown earlier at 291 and reproduced in *Camera Work* No. 34/35 in 1911 (figs. 84 and 85), with his focus on dance, Walkowitz also emphasised a special aspect of the relationship between abstraction and music that had occupied the Stieglitz circle and added a bodily dimension to it. Anarchism is not too far off if Goldman really made the famous remark that it was not her revolution if she could not dance. Modern dancers such as Duncan or Ruth St. Denis combined a modernist impulse with ideas of spiritual, physical and sexual freedom, an idealised natural world based on spontaneous and instinctual expression, which it was believed would undo the stifling effects of civilisation. This quality of modern dance was acknowledged in bohemian and radical circles, most explicitly in the journal *Modern Dance* under the

editorship of the left-wing socialist Louis Fraina.<sup>118</sup> Regular *Camera Work* contributor J. Nilsen-Laurvik elaborated on the relationship of dance and modernism in a review in the *Boston Transcript*, reprinted in *Camera Work*: “The rhythmic flow of human emotions, made manifest in expressive, natural gestures, is here recorded with a simplicity and intensity that evoke pleasurable memories like the remembrance of some untainted happiness. It is a sort of liberating art, that strikes down to the depths of your being and sets your own emotions free.”<sup>119</sup> Anarchists made similarly vague arguments for freedom of expression, understanding liberation not as from the constraints of an economic system or social hierarchy, or necessarily in terms of breaking formal conventions in art, but rather as freeing the soul and human emotions from any boundaries.

Even Caffin, *Camera Work* critic of the first hour and not usually political, invoked “anarchy” in relation to Walkowitz: 291 is “known as an incubator of artistic ideas. Some regard it as a hothouse of artistic anarchy. Possibly it is, and thereby the more desirable and needful.”<sup>120</sup> Yet Caffin distances himself from anarchism’s political resonance by asserting that “[I]t is a good thing for any community to have a ‘chief among us.’”<sup>121</sup> The leader of anarchist-modernist criticism, Hutchins Hapgood, however, did not mention the word anymore. Instead, he assures us of his own indebtedness to Walkowitz for showing him the beauty of his soul, visions of his spiritual character.<sup>122</sup> This was to become the dominant theme in Walkowitz criticism. In the manner of earlier *Camera Work* issues that each focused on the work of one Photo-Secession member, a whole issue was devoted to Walkowitz, coinciding more or less with his second 291 exhibition, which ran from 19 November 1913 to 10 January 1914, and included drawings, pastels and watercolours.<sup>123</sup> The reviewers were now silent on the subject of anarchism. According to Haviland, Walkowitz’s abstract works that made up his second show had no social connotations but were an insight into his personality, his emotional

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<sup>118</sup> Paul M. Buhle, *A Dreamer’s Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/Lewis Corey (1892-1953) and the Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1995).

<sup>119</sup> Nilsen-Laurvik in *Boston Transcript*, reprinted in *Camera Work*, No. 41 (January 1913): 28.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Caffin in the *N. Y. American*, reprinted in *Camera Work*, No. 41 (January 1913): 29.

<sup>121</sup> Caffin, *Camera Work*, No. 41 (January 1913): 29.

<sup>122</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, *N. Y. Globe*, reprinted in *Camera Work*, No. 41 (January 1913): 41.

<sup>123</sup> *Camera Work*, No. 44 (October 1913). This issue officially ran as October 1913 but was in fact published in March 1914.

sensibility. The work “has become less austere while remaining just as human.”<sup>124</sup> Walkowitz had successfully been accommodated into the Stieglitz circle and its ideology, whilst spicing it up with a portion of radical credibility. Yet he was never a member of the inner circle. His correspondence with Stieglitz is far smaller than those of Stieglitz with Marin, Hartley or Dove and the tone is always superficial. In one letter, Stieglitz acknowledges the receipt of *The Masses*, which Walkowitz had probably arranged to be sent. However, there is nothing to indicate whether or not Stieglitz approved of the magazine or if he had even read it.<sup>125</sup>

Stieglitz’s relationship with Walkowitz offers certain parallels with his conduct towards Max Weber, another artist at the margins of the circle with radical sympathies. Walkowitz and Weber, like Goldman, Berkman and a remarkable number of radicals and intellectuals, were first-generation immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe. Their ghetto background (and possible association with the secular socialist organisation of the Jewish Labour Bund) was antithetical to Stieglitz’s own – albeit also Jewish – German-bourgeois origins. Walkowitz, Weber and Goldman had revolted against both the restrictions of the faith they were born into and against the hardship of working-class existence. Stieglitz’s parents, though from petty bourgeois origins, entered the United States with an accumulation of cultural capital that easily allowed transformation into material wealth under the conditions of the new world as the foundation for a life that was in every aspect rich: in art, education, material possessions and leisure. In his acquaintance with members of that inferior group, Stieglitz could never completely shed the class prejudice that came with such an upbringing in particular against those people of the same faith whose increased presence threatened the respectability of arrived Jews like him.

Oscar Bluemner, an artist, writer and architect of German descent, compared Walkowitz to Kandinsky – and also offered a clue why the Russian-born Walkowitz was often associated with radicalism.<sup>126</sup> He writes that Walkowitz was not “loud” like the Russian radicals, rather he fostered a quiet “affection for humanity, for the labouring, sorrowing, struggling millions which throng the east side, or frolic in arks

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<sup>124</sup> “Photo-Secession Notes,” *Camera Work*, No. 44 (October 1913): 39.

<sup>125</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Abraham Walkowitz, 31 Aug 1917, YCAL.

<sup>126</sup> Oscar Bluemner, “Walkowitz,” Extract from “Kandinsky and Walkowitz,” *Camera Work*, No. 44 (October 1913): 25-26; pp. 37-38. Although this text was announced as an “extract”, *Camera Work* never printed a longer piece on this topic by Bluemner.



and on the seashore”.<sup>127</sup> Bluemner qualifies this affection as “Tolstoian” – revealing that he thought of Walkowitz less as an anarchist than as one who sympathised with the oppressed based on Tolstoy’s type of anti-capitalism: that is, a romantic one. The complement to this idealist ideology was that Walkowitz’s interest in pictures is primarily formal but combined with the prerequisite of draughtsmanship. His pictorial structures, neither decorative nor copies of nature (albeit not completely abstract either), stood for their own reality and as such were entirely personal documents, following an inner necessity of the artist while observing the internal laws of his medium. This article not only contains the familiar claim that Kandinsky was too intellectual for the Stieglitz circle, but is also reminiscent of *Camera Work* criticism of the first years in its parallels to the theories of Konrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrand. The text makes clear that in all the references in *Camera Work* to “anarchism” what was really meant is “romantic anti-capitalism.” This phrase brings Stieglitz’s view of modernism to the point: not political in straightforward terms, but not a merely formal category either. Lacking any social vision that is more specific than a wish for a society that would accommodate the artistically inclined individual, and not undertaking any action that went beyond the confines of the small room of 291 and the few subscribers to *Camera Work*, Stieglitz and his circle were clearly separated from their contemporaries in Greenwich Village and elsewhere who fought for their ideals, whether using violence or not, with considerable personal engagement and risk.

John Weichsel, who wrote for *Camera Work*, was active at the Ferrer Center, spoke in Robert Henri’s art class, and founded the People’s Art Guild, a body dedicated to forging a relationship between modern artists and the working classes – as he argued, the social stratum from whence most of them came.<sup>128</sup> This artist-run organisation staged exhibitions in settlement houses and middle-class reform institutions in New York’s poorer districts and sought to bypass the dealer system in order to enable

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<sup>127</sup> Bluemner, “Walkowitz,” Extract from “Kandinsky and Walkowitz.”

<sup>128</sup> Stieglitz wrote to Weichsel about the People’s Art Guild: He had heard much talk about it, and he wishes he could help, with his personality or with cash. But he mentions immediately that he has no spare money at his disposal since money is what everybody constantly wants and expects from him: Alfred Stieglitz to John Weichsel, 8 Nov 1915 (carbon copy), YCAL. In turn, Weichsel mentioned that he was interested to exhibit Stieglitz’ work at the Guild and also asked Stieglitz for assistance with a Cézanne traveling exhibition that he was working on. Weichsel to Stieglitz, 1 Dec 1915, YCAL.

artists to earn the full profits and to make art available to the lower social strata.<sup>129</sup> But Weichsel's texts in *Camera Work* speak another language. His writing style is complicated and cryptic. He was not looking for a truly popular art, but for a society in which the effects of industrialisation are unmade so that the spiritual can reign again. He was writing against traditions and conventions that dictated what artists had to do as much as against group dictates in the present that did the same.

Weichsel's contributions to *Camera Work* may constitute a reaction against the dominance of Kandinsky-type spiritualism in *Camera Work*. Instead of "amorphic" spiritual self-expression, he saw "cosmism" – a "stylistic" abstraction without any ties to spheres outside of aesthetics, including politics as well as metaphysics and mysticism – as the motivation for the non-figurative art of Picasso, Picabia, Kandinsky et al.<sup>130</sup> But Weichsel's quotation from Fiedler in German that artists should not express the contents of their time, but that they should rather give a content to their time again attests the search for a *Weltanschauung*, for new values that are universal and thus guiding for society.<sup>131</sup> Weichsel, like Fiedler, preferred to imagine that great minds worked independently of their age; furthermore, art must not be subservient to its time as a reflection of it, but in turn an epoch must find its distinctiveness through the "racial light revealed in untrammelled art." Weichsel also identified an economic cause to the Zeitgeist fashion: in an economy that reduces everything to the practical, the claim of the social usefulness of everything extended

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<sup>129</sup> Stieglitz helped with People's Art Guild exhibitions as did George Bellows and other artists associated with the Ferrer Center.

<sup>130</sup> John Weichsel, "Ecce Homo," *Camera Work*, Special Number (June 1913): 58-59. This text was a direct reaction to an unsigned manifesto (probably written or co-authored by Francis Picabia) published in *Camera Work*: "Vers l'amorphisme" including "Manifeste de l'école amorphiste," from "Les Hommes du Jour," *Camera Work*, Special issue (June 1913), no page number. Also in the spring of 1913 Weichsel published his article "Cosmism or Amorphism," *Camera Work*, Nos. 42-43 (April-July 1913): 69-82. Antliff thinks that it is an attack on the manifesto. Celebrating the rejection of naturalism in favour of form and colour, the manifesto called for artists to purify painting still further to its most essential quality – "light." Two blank canvases illustrated the piece, which cast modernism as self-destructive by taking it to its logical conclusion: totally conceptual "painting": Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 57. Weichsel responded that, indeed, "amorphists" such as Kandinsky, Picasso and Picabia were on the road to the blank canvas, because they gave primacy to the artist's state of mind over the materiality of painting.

<sup>131</sup> "Die Künstler sollen keinen Inhalt der Zeit zum Ausdruck bringen, sie sollen vielmehr der Zeit erst einen Inhalt geben": John Weichsel, "The Rampant Zeitgeist," *Camera Work*, No. 44 (October 1913): 20-24.

the practical view even to art. When art is in this materialistic spirit reduced to a means to an end, the soul, which art should feed, is neglected.<sup>132</sup>

Like Fiedler and other formalists, Weichsel held that art should be a creation independent of and equivalent to all other spheres, even to nature. Akin to the romantic anti-capitalists, Weichsel believed that as a separate entity, art could provide meaning in times in which other spheres fail to do so. This aligns him with the dominant theories of modernism propagated in *Camera Work* – those of Meier-Graefe or de Zayas. They all propagate modern art as a social force whilst depending on a formalist logic which visually leads to abstraction and conceptually relies on a separation of art's development from the actualities of place, time and social structure of its making. In all aspects, these theories are a continuation of the romantic anti-capitalist amendment of formalist and aestheticist theories that had shaped the discourse in *Camera Work* in the first half of its existence.

### **Pedagogical Efforts**

Anarchists believed in the redeeming power of culture. A group of American anarchists founded a school free of state and religious constraints based on the ideas and principles of the Spanish educational reformer and teacher Francisco Ferrer, celebrated as a martyr since his execution in Barcelona in 1909. Building on a long European tradition of pedagogical reform that reached back to eighteenth-century rationalism and early-nineteenth-century Romanticism, Ferrer was convinced that state education served as a hegemonic means for the existing powers.<sup>133</sup> Instead of fostering free, individual and spontaneous thinking in children, it made them submissive and uncreative. Art was one focus in the curriculum, represented through musical recitals, readings by well-known writers, lectures on art and art courses – all of which opened the arts to a wide section of society otherwise excluded from them. The Ferrer Center, open every day and evening, constituted an important educational

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<sup>132</sup> Weichsel, "The Rampant Zeitgeist," 21.

<sup>133</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 8.

and cultural gathering place for immigrant and freethinking communities in New York, including anarchists, socialists, IWWs and syndicalists.<sup>134</sup>

Nowhere more prominently than at the Ferrer Center could such variegated viewpoints as anarchism, the liberal reformist critique of capitalism and a romantic anti-capitalism that favoured the ideal sphere of culture over all others, coexist in relative harmony. Cultural experimentation and social insurgency were seen as two sides of the same coin. Art was considered a revolutionary force and a powerful instrument of change. The revolution envisaged by all involved would similarly address social and aesthetic concerns.<sup>135</sup> The Ferrer Center's openness to aesthetic radicalism was paralleled only by *The Masses*, whose editors depended on both text and image to spread the call for a new social order that would not only bring economic equality but also foster artistic freedom and liberated thinking in general. In contrast to the cartoons inside the magazine, the covers represented not only the Realist vein of the Ashcan School, but also a distinctly modernist, Post-Impressionist style.

In their quest for arguments with which to attack the established order, many Ferrer Center activists turned to Nietzsche and Ibsen as a source of independent, emancipatory ideas, as well as to the writings of Sigmund Freud, Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis (whose books Stieglitz read too), Walt Whitman and Maeterlinck.<sup>136</sup> The Ferrer Center's own journal, *The Modern School* (1912-1922), was not only informative, but also a beautifully produced "little magazine." It presented the whole range of literary, artistic and educational ferment of the period. Especially under the editorship of Carl Zigrosser from 1917 on, the journal illustrated its attack on the genteel tradition in the arts with an ambitious aesthetic.<sup>137</sup> Joseph Ishill, who was responsible for the printing, has been compared to William Morris. The Ferrer Center in the period prior to World War I was simultaneously a hotbed for radical political

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<sup>134</sup> Avrigh, *The Modern School Movement*, 90.

<sup>135</sup> Avrigh, *The Modern School Movement*, 138.

<sup>136</sup> Avrigh, *The Modern School Movement*, 139.

<sup>137</sup> Avrigh, *The Modern School Movement*, 161-162. Contributors included Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, Maxwell Bodenheim, Witter Byner, artists Rockwell Kent, Max Weber, Man Ray, Raoul Dufy, writers Mike Gold, Konrad Bercovici, Rabindranath Tagore and Padraic Colum. Kent also designed the cover of Zigrosser's pamphlet *The Modern School*, which depicting a boy and frog, became emblem of Modern School Association of America. Avrigh, *The Modern School Movement*, 162.

action and a laboratory for artistic innovation. But as productive as this coming together of different strands is, it is important to make ideological distinctions.

With its valorisation of individual freedom, innovation and experimentation, and its jettisoning of old standards and conventions, anarchism was a natural ally of modernism. Anarchists were also less tempted to set rules for artistic creation than other radical groups.<sup>138</sup> These corollaries were identified by the contemporaries on both sides and used for pro-modernist criticism in *Camera Work* and elsewhere. The Ferrer Center attracted modernists, who might otherwise not have shared the political opinions of the anarchists who gathered there. The experimental Realists Robert Henri and George Bellows taught regular art classes at the centre. Their political commitment, although subject to change in their lifetimes, was at least as real as Stieglitz's, and probably more so. Henri and Bellows were motivated by a desire to make art accessible to society at large. They taught a class primarily directed at adults two evenings a week without pay, alternating with one another.<sup>139</sup> Both Henri and Bellows served on the advisory board of the Ferrer Association and donated paintings in support of the IWW-led Lawrence Textiles strike of 1912. This is one form that artistic action could take; Stieglitz did nothing of the sort.

Both Henri and Bellows, however, were also attracted to philosophical anarchism – especially Henri, who like Stieglitz advanced an intuitionist aesthetic and emphasised individual expression.<sup>140</sup> Although in conventional terms a Realist, Henri advocated an art that started from the outside world as a means with which to convey the artist's personal impressions, memories and feelings. Like Stieglitz, he invoked for this the trope of the artist as a person with a special calling. "Realism," as Rebecca Zurier remarks, in this concept referred more to the participation of the

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<sup>138</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 136.

<sup>139</sup> Among these attending were range of artists, including Realists, caricaturists, and modernists: John Sloan, Rockwell Kent, Man Ray, Max Weber, Abraham Walkowitz, Samuel Halpert, Adolf Wolff, William and Marguerite Zorach, William Gropper, Niles Spencer, Helen West, Martha Gruening, Paul Rohland, Jean Liberté, Andrée Ruellan. Sol Wilson, Robert Brackman, Moses Soyer, Harry Wickey, Ben Benn, Robert Minor and Kenneth Russell Chamberlain. Another famous pupil, as Henri's diary reveals, was Leon Trotsky, who lived for two months in NY in early 1917, before returning to Russia. Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 149-150. Smaller children received art instruction during regular hours from Amy Londoner, Adolf Wolff and William Zorach.

<sup>140</sup> Henri, who again like Stieglitz, was primarily a talker, collected his studio talks in *The Art Spirit: Notes, Articles, Fragments of Letters and Talks to Students, Bearing on the Concept and Technique of Picture Making, the Study of Art Generally, and on Appreciation*, compiled by Margery Ryerson (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott, 1923).

artist with the world for the end of the former's individual expression, and less to the quasi-positivistic Naturalism of, for example, Thomas Eakins.<sup>141</sup> Antliff predictably takes Henri's individualism and openness to artistic experiment, together with his anti-academic position, his contemporary subject matter, his involvement at the Ferrer Center and contact with Goldman, as manifestations of anarchism.<sup>142</sup> By contrast, Ashcan artist John Sloan was a committed socialist and party member and fell out with Henri over the latter's anarchism. Yet Sloan, too, insisted on the autonomy of the aesthetic – as his resignation from *The Masses* board during the “artists’ strike” illustrates.<sup>143</sup>

Thus the Realists, too, were partly drawn to the Ferrer Center by artistic and aesthetic reasons. Their use of working-class subject matter was motivated by a contempt for *l'art pour l'art* and a sympathy for the exploited, which betrayed their disappointment in their own predominantly middle-class antecedents and their yearning for a life fuller of experience. The Ashcan artists were close in their views to those middle-class and American-born individuals, such as Hutchins Hapgood, who felt attracted to anarchism and immigrant culture as a counterpart to the Victorian sobriety of their own social environment.<sup>144</sup> The tolerance of a diversity of viewpoints and backgrounds at the Ferrer Center was remarkable. Only under such conditions could some of the people also associated with Stieglitz be regulars too. Among them was Sadakichi Hartmann, probably attracted to the Center more because he found a measure of tolerance for his eccentric behaviour (and alcoholic excesses), than because of his political viewpoints. He found an audience for his readings of literature and poetry, pantomimes, psychedelic light shows and perfume concerts.<sup>145</sup> Hartmann was interested in anarchism, he met Kropotkin, and, as a friend of both Goldman and Berkman, he contributed to *Mother Earth* and other anarchist publications. But he remained on the periphery of the anarchist movement

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<sup>141</sup> Zurier, Rebecca, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006), 107.

<sup>142</sup> Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 27-30. Zurier interprets the same tropes of individuality and experimentation as corollaries to the contemporaneous pragmatist ideas of the Progressive Era: Zurier, *Picturing the City*, 117-118.

<sup>143</sup> Rebecca Zurier, *Art for the Masses: A Radical Magazine and its Graphics, 1911-1917*, with an introduction by Leslie Fishbein and artists' biographies by Elise K. Kenney and Earl Davis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 52-53.

<sup>144</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 115.

<sup>145</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 125-127.

and was a sympathiser rather than activist, being too cynical to believe in successful libertarian revolution and a stateless society.<sup>146</sup>

The romantic anti-capitalism of the Stieglitz circle differed from the liberalism of other middle-class intellectuals at the Ferrer Center, for instance Leonard Abbott. Romantic anti-capitalism is not necessarily without any progressive orientation. A combination of the certainty that an ideal state of humankind had once existed in the past and may possibly reappear in the future defines most romantic anti-capitalist thought. The main difference between the worldview of people such as Abbott and romantic anti-capitalists is that the former believed in the benefits of the Enlightenment. Romanticism itself was a reaction against the primacy of rationalism that was the Enlightenment's legacy. Stieglitz was sceptical of a faith in progress based on rational analysis and technical innovation. He believed in the possibility of progress only insofar as a new or recurrent importance of "the soul" could be assured. In this, he differed from liberals and stood closer to anarchists such as Goldman who similarly rejected a rationalist and materialist path towards a better society (the method employed by socialists who they disapproved of). A distinction is to be made between the romantic anti-capitalism of Stieglitz's views – which was also present in the *Weltanschauung* of some of the anarchists gathering at the Ferrer Center – and the extreme libertarian liberalism of some middle-class intellectuals. This does not mean that I accept the label of "philosophical anarchist" for Stieglitz. What ultimately distinguished the activists who also valued the aesthetic component of social rebellion and the modernists around Stieglitz, was the comfortable bourgeois position of the latter (albeit different from the WASP privileges Hapgood enjoyed), which prevented them from seeing the socio-economic necessity of revolutionary change and instead let them displace their dissatisfaction into the ideal sphere of culture.

Engaged with instruments of power, with ideology, education was an important concern for anarchists. They tried to grasp the problem of society at its roots, inspiring young children never to become the rule-observing individuals who would thoughtlessly reproduce the system. With its gradual effects, education was a mechanism of reform, rather than of revolution. This viewpoint has an equivalent in modernism and in *Camera Work*. Stieglitz and his friends were concerned with the

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<sup>146</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 127.

spreading of modernism, which also meant the facilitation of its understanding among their audiences. This tendency clashes with the elitism displayed elsewhere in the journal. It involved efforts to show that modernism was more than just a question of style, and that its attitude of renewal and self-expression could transcend the boundaries between the different arts – not just the conventional fine arts and photography, but also music, literature and poetry. Surprisingly, despite the immediacy of the visual medium, it was in the written word that Stieglitz thought the character of modernism would reveal itself most poignantly to the audience. Their audience was a privileged minority from the start, by no means representing society at large. It is telling that Stieglitz only ever undertook to deploy his efforts in such a protected environment – only in a laboratory of the real.

In a Special Edition of *Camera Work* in 1912, Stieglitz published two recent texts on Picasso and Matisse by Gertrude Stein.<sup>147</sup> Introduced as a key to the representative paintings of the two artists reproduced in the same number, the texts themselves were “revolutionary, radical or absurd” and thus modernist in themselves.<sup>148</sup> Whilst modernism is usually understood, and was proclaimed by Stieglitz, as a form of art that was distinguished by its immediacy, connecting with essential human qualities without the aid of conventions and preconceived ideas of what art should and could be, Stieglitz’s introduction of Gertrude Stein’s work as a “key” to understanding pictorial modernism is evidence for the opposite. Stieglitz claimed that “the average observer” could not understand a modernist work of art without further introduction. But the training required to understand modernism consisted in un-training that which had been taught as the necessary approach to art.<sup>149</sup> Stein’s prose as well as Picasso and Matisse’s pictures were “absurd, unintelligible and radical” not only to the untrained eye, but they were so for a purpose. This was their very nature and quality. Even “a laugh” as a first reaction was acceptable and a desirable starting point of encounter.

Such undoing of the flaws of institutional education paralleled the programme of the Ferrer School. Ideologically, this approach was a corollary to the fact that anarchism

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<sup>147</sup> *Camera Work*, Special Number (August 1912).

<sup>148</sup> “An Extra Number of *Camera Work*,” *Camera Work*, No. 37 (January 1912), no page numbers.

<sup>149</sup> “Editorial,” *Camera Work*, Special Number (August 1912), no page numbers. I presume that Stieglitz wrote the editorial.



as a philosophy and politics did not follow a strict political or economic programme. However, it also was a romantic anti-capitalist effort to cleanse humankind of the defects of civilisation and reach back to an unspoilt, essential human nature. Libertarians were perhaps the first educational theorists to defend the rights of children, whom they regarded as fundamentally equal to adults, with the same need for freedom and dignity. As Bakunin said, “[C]hildren belong neither to their parents nor to society. They belong to themselves and their future liberty.”<sup>150</sup> Schooling according to Ferrer’s principles would address the child as pure, unspoilt by society and civilisation. Stieglitz paralleled this idea at his gallery when in spring 1912 he staged the first of three exhibitions of children’s work. Hartmann claimed that these drawings, in their rapid and somehow abstracted character, were the result of keen observation, the joy of bright colours as well as of the pleasure of making them.<sup>151</sup> Their non-purposive character and corresponding remoteness from any commercial interests was their main quality.

The years prior to World War I accommodated a productive mix of different radical and aesthetic concepts, fostering the growth of bohemian-radical subcultures. For a short moment, the spirit behind a project almost mattered as much as concrete action and was shared by all those who were ready to experiment in the arts, politics and in personal life in the spheres of sexuality, friendship and marriage. In the days before the First World War (or even before the United States’ entry in 1917) and the Russian Revolution, the different radical ideologies were not yet clearly defined within the left and beyond. In this context, a worldview as ambiguous in its conservative and progressive guises as romantic anti-capitalism could contribute productively and credibly to a range of reform projects.

Gaps between practice and theory were typical at the time, for real anarchists such as Emma Goldman, for bohemians in Greenwich Village and for modernists such as those of the Stieglitz circle. Goldman idealised motherhood yet refused to have a child; many Greenwich Village radicals declared their allegiance to feminism yet practiced sexism daily in their own lives; anarchists employed a violent rhetoric yet did not personally throw bombs. An ambivalent relationship with American society

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<sup>150</sup> Quoted in Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 12.

<sup>151</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “The Exhibition of Children’s Drawings,” *Camera Work*, No. 39 (July 1912), 45-46.

and politics was common, too; it was detested for its open commercialism yet praised for its freedom and opportunities. As Vivian Gornick explains, at stake was an experiment with the competing claims of idealism and real experience:

The turn-of-the-century moderns were admirable in that many of them, when forced to look squarely at things, chose to honour the evidence of their senses, even thought that inevitably meant the beginning of the end, not necessarily of ideals, but of a rhetoric. On the other hand, it takes a certain kind of mad courage to reject the claims of experience as superior to that of idealism, and to go on insisting, against all odds, that ultimately the ideal will work because it must work, because it is not acceptable that it does not work.<sup>152</sup>

Still, I am sceptical about such an overarching conclusion. Some radicals indeed frowned upon Stieglitz's endeavours. In 1940, Stieglitz remembered a visit to 291 by "Big Bill" Haywood, leader of the IWW. Apparently, Haywood did not even spare a look at the pictures before he dismissed the gallery as an unimportant "dinky little place."<sup>153</sup> Obviously the fact that we only know this story through Stieglitz's own retelling is problematic (and it may tell us as much about Stieglitz in 1940 as about Haywood in the teens, as Edward Abrahams suspects), but Haywood's lack of interest in 291 is remarkable nevertheless.<sup>154</sup> It shows that even during a phase in which Haywood, as a syndicalist, mingled with the anarchists around Goldman and Berkman as well as the cultural radicals in Greenwich Village, he made a distinction between the Greenwich Village bohemians and Stieglitz's circle, finding absolutely no radical potential in the latter. For the leader of a body that was active at the grass roots of the industrial struggle, the talk of a bourgeois in his little Fifth-Avenue attic was irrelevant indeed.

Stieglitz may have some credentials as a philosophical anarchist if this position is defined solely as someone's refusal to accept state authority but entails no readiness for action against it.<sup>155</sup> But in actual political terms, there was a wide gap between Stieglitz's behaviour and the actions of the anarchists and other labour activists at his time. Stieglitz's endorsement of the war was in stark contrast to anarchist (and

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<sup>152</sup> Gornick, *Emma Goldman*, 80.

<sup>153</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, "Bill Heywood (sic) at 291"; Hemingway, "Individualism and/or Solidarity?," 167.

<sup>154</sup> Edward Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left: Randolph Bourne and Alfred Stieglitz and the Origins of Cultural Radicalism in America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 230-231.

<sup>155</sup> Hemingway, "Individualism and/or Solidarity?," 167.

socialist) responses in the United States in 1917. In Stieglitz's papers a few letters exchanged with the US Army Signal Corps from 1917 testify how far Stieglitz's support for the war really went.<sup>156</sup> He was not only a tacit approver of U.S. intervention, but made several attempts to offer the army his skills as a photographer, even getting an unidentified friend to write on his behalf, stressing the "preeminent position" Stieglitz enjoyed internationally in art photography and his exceptional skills as a "powerful leader of men."<sup>157</sup> This correspondence is especially significant because it is evidence for the fact that Stieglitz in 1917 was willing to fight for America and against Germany, which he called his spiritual home until the end of his life. Goldman and Berkman, by contrast, went to prison and were eventually exiled because of their anti-war activities. *The Masses* was closed down by government action and its editors were taken to court under the Espionage Act; *The Seven Arts* had to end publication because its wealthy backer withdrew her support based on the editors' anti-war position. Stieglitz, by contrast, was convinced by the common opinion that the war would serve as a useful purgative. Hartley reacted in a similar way, questioning the impression German war pageantry left on him only after the death in battle of his close friend. Only detached middle-class intellectuals could act in this way. Stieglitz's only personal sacrifice during the war was that he did not travel to Europe.

Distinctions between ideologies have to be made in order to avoid the creation of myths and legends such as that of modernist radicalism that operate as ideologies themselves, displacing engagement into the removed sphere of art as a substitute for real life struggles. Stieglitz's anti-commercialism, in combination with his comfortable lifestyle, elitism and nostalgia are more productively identified as romantic anti-capitalism than as "philosophical anarchism." This *Weltanschauung* accounts for the strange mixture of ideas we find in *Camera Work's* pages, without dismissing its achievements. Romantic anti-capitalism not only describes Stieglitz's politics, or non-politics, but also his understanding of modernism. Neither political agitation nor formal self-criticism of the medium, but self-expression was his definition of modernism. This builds on formalism but it also has a political aspect in its interest in the free unfolding of the individual, which had a corollary in the views

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<sup>156</sup> YCAL, folder 1187.

<sup>157</sup> "PB/MJR" to War Dept. (Col. Engel, photographic Division), 19 Dec 1917 (carbon copy), YCAL.

of Greenwich Village rebels and the anarchists around Emma Goldman. Stieglitz employed his apoliticalness, dressing it up with political accents, as a unique selling point for modernism. Shying away from the consequences and realities of political activism, he leaned back in the modernist armchair. As a bourgeois, he could not properly affiliate with the anarchists and radicals in New York, although other middle class individuals, such as Henri, found ways to do so. Stieglitz, like Marin, Hartley, Dove or Walkowitz in their pictures, preferred to displace their antipathy to the real world into the sphere of consciousness and the aesthetic.

## Chapter 4: Escapism

When the United States entered the Great War in 1917, the possibilities to express dissent and radical political opinions dwindled and with them many of the institutions and groupings that made New York and in particular Greenwich Village such a fertile site for cultural experiment. America became a society obsessed with control. Under these circumstances, Stieglitz's projects were crushed too. With dwindling funds and a turn of international relations that complicated contacts with artists in Europe, prevented the shipment of artworks necessary for the gallery and reproductions for *Camera Work* from being produced in Germany, 291 closed and the journal ceased publication. Stieglitz now had more time for his own art: he returned to photography as his main means of communication and expression. Spending more and more time at his family's property at Lake George, in the company of his new partner, Georgia O'Keeffe, he turned to a natural subject matter. Starting in the summer of 1922, Stieglitz looked up in the sky. The period between 1918 and 1937 (when he stopped taking photographs) was an incredibly productive one: more than 1100 photographs from this period survive in the "key set"; the large majority of which are pictures of the sky, of clouds.<sup>1</sup>

In the first cloud series of 1922, Stieglitz worked with an 8 x 10-inch camera and a tripod. The following year he moved to a smaller and more flexible hand-held Graflex camera, which produced negatives 4 x 5 inches in size.<sup>2</sup> The small format of the resulting prints stands in a striking contrast to the largeness of the subject matter. The cloud photographs owe many of their qualities to their printing in the gelatin silver technique. In comparison with the photogravure, which Stieglitz had favoured before, gelatin silver printing allows for a clearer, sharper result with a wider variety of shades of black and white, adding to an overall more dramatic effect. The surface materiality of these prints, matte but with small illuminating particles, corresponds with the subtle tonality of the subject matter and stands in interesting contrast to the illusion of depth created by the pictures' content (for example *Equivalent*; fig. 86).

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Greenough, "Essay: The Key Set," in *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set: The Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs*, 2 vols., ed. Sarah Greenough (Washington: National Gallery of Art and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Stükelberger, *Wolkenbilder: Deutungen des Himmels in der Moderne* (Munich: Fink, 2010), 195.

Among the first pictures in which clouds are central to the composition are two photos of birds sitting on telephone or electricity lines (entitled *Birds* and *Bird*; figs. 87 and 88). The black lines of the cables and the dark spots of the birds and the contrast they form with the haziness of the clouds attract the viewer's attention. Yet rather than the formal play of light and dark, clear lines and blurred atmosphere, it is the gaze upwards that seems central. It obfuscates the modern, technical and secular quality of the cable and instead emphasises the ethereal character of the scene. The birds act as a substitute for the move away from the earth and up into the sky that the photographer would wish to enact himself: to leave the earthly sphere.

In other early sky photographs, the line of a hill, visible at the bottom of the picture, performs a similar function to the birds to provide orientation in space, as in *Songs of the Sky* (fig. 89). Soon, this aid would vanish too and Stieglitz focused on the sky exclusively. The viewing experience then becomes one of disorientation and it is easy to find in the clouds shapes a reminiscence of something else, for example a flying bird in the above example. Showing that objective shapes did not only have one fixed meaning, that charged with subjective emotion their meaning could change, had always been one of Stieglitz's main dicta in relation to his photography. If forms of external reality now resembled other things, this happens as part of the effort to free the image from fixed visual and cognitive associations.

The gradations of grey in the cloud photographs are in some instances reminiscent of the pictorialism of Steichen, White et al., where a straightforward array of themes (nudity, virginity, femininity, flowers, Greek goddesses, brass bowls) stood as cyphers for a nostalgia for pre-modern ideals, a quality which is also present in Stieglitz's cloud photographs, yet in different terms. The clouds do not work as signals for any particular historical time; rather, they are timeless, located in a sphere beyond human imagination and power, completely unaffected by human-made changes. In this way, they can serve as a means through the contemplation of which the individual, weary of modernity, can find solace. Many of the clouds (for example *Equivalent*, Set C2 No. 1; fig. 90) are very dark in tone. There is drama not unlike that in Romantic paintings seeking for the sublime. The darkness is also a familiar feature in Symbolist art, where it stands for the unknown, the dangerous, as in the

“noirs” of Odilon Redon, which Stieglitz surely knew.<sup>3</sup> Darkness is symptomatic of the ambivalent experience of modernity. The experience of the dark unknown, a sphere not researched and understood, is not merely negative; it is also what is longed for.

I have argued that it was a rejection of the dominance of the capitalist worldview, with its corollaries of positivism, materialism and commercialism that motivated Stieglitz. The logical answer to defy capitalism’s hegemony would certainly be action in the social or political fields, in the sphere of labour, where capitalism’s exploitative and self-contradictory character expresses itself most clearly. But this was not Stieglitz’s choice or reasoning. He did not detect capitalism’s main deficiency in the exploitation and alienation in the workplace; for him, capitalism’s effects reached deeper. Alienation, he sensed, was operating everywhere in modernity, right down to the human essence. Consequently, the expression of such a persuasion was most convincing and effective in the arts. Since the preservation of the imperative role of culture was so central to the argument, the case was most effectively made in that sphere.

In the course of his career, Stieglitz combined many endeavours and he expressed his romantic anti-capitalism in various guises. Yet primarily, he was a photographer. The visual was Stieglitz’s main and preferred means of expression. Hence his romantic anti-capitalist *Weltanschauung* has to be analysed in relationship to this fact: as a visual or aesthetic category. When I describe particular visual tropes as romantic anti-capitalist, I do not mean to imply that the latter is a visual concept per se. Romantic anti-capitalism is a variegated ideological formation that got attached to a range of different visual forms. Neither do visual signs have fixed ideological correlates except sometimes in specific historical circumstances.<sup>4</sup> There was a special affinity between the modernist and the romantic anti-capitalist sensitivities; and the photographs of clouds exemplify this claim. We have to take seriously not only the romantic persuasion as an expression of anti-capitalism, but also what could

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Eisenman interpreted Redon’s noirs through romantic anti-capitalism: Eisenman, Stephen F., *The Temptation of Saint Redon: Biography, Ideology, and Style in the Noirs of Odilon Redon* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> See on the verbal sign: Valentin Nikolaevich Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 19-21.

be characterised as Stieglitz's escapism after the First World War, which in turn goes hand in hand with the self-referentiality of modernist art.

In the art historical literature, the cloud photographs are praised for a singular factor: the solution of the problem of abstraction in the medium of photography and the visualisation of the characteristics of photography. Rosalind Krauss argued that the photographic specificity is manifest in the crop, repeated in the picture by the cutting lines the clouds create, and in the trace, again visualised through the clouds and particular to photography simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> The photographs' small format further adds to the abstract effect. When only presented with a small selection (crop) of a motif, we are less likely to identify the object. In addition, these photos have a painterly quality, reminiscent of brushstrokes. This contrasts with their utter sharpness. The pictures can be seen as exemplars of the classical aesthetic concept that is concerned with visibility and perception and leads to the ideal of an autonomous artistic creation, specifically, the Kantian notion of a disinterested perception of form.<sup>6</sup> Photographic technique is used to create an illusion of depth with just one colour and its gradations.

Sarah Greenough, too, sees Stieglitz's main achievement in the twenties and thirties as the reconciliation of photography and abstraction. Yet she puts the focus of abstraction as a means of expression, relying on a theory of empathy and thus acknowledging the relationship of the clouds – simultaneously as abstract and representational – with Symbolism.<sup>7</sup> This approach comes closer to the interpretation I wish to advance but still places too much emphasis on photographic abstraction as an achievement per se, without any further ideological or contextual implications. Abstraction as a pictorial mode is significant for the cloud photographs. But a proper analysis of abstraction has to look beyond a purely formalist and deterministic approach. I want to look more closely at what kind of abstract imagery it is that Stieglitz created and why he did it. For these pictures are not abstract in a strict sense. They do not completely eliminate reality, but speak a language that refers to reality in coded terms. The titles – *Music, Equivalents* – facilitate such a reading.

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<sup>5</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Stieglitz's 'Equivalents,'" *October*, Vol. 11, Essays in Honor of Jay Leyda (Winter 1979), 129-140.

<sup>6</sup> See the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and 'The Idea of Photography,'" in Sarah Greenough and Juan Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writings* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 11-32.



In *Equivalent* (fig. 91), for example, there is a clear concentration of form, a motif even, in the centre of this photo: one cloud is divided into three parts, it is reminiscent of a female body, reduced from top left to bottom right into depth. The upper two parts could also be read as a dancing figure. Abstraction, at least when understood in a formalist way, is not about the finding of shapes and similarities. But with regards to Stieglitz, it is not all that far-fetched. The bodily associations point towards transcendence of the body into discarnate substance. The cloud could even stand for that elusive category of the soul. Such interpretations are awkward, but of some value, as they point to that metaphysical, spiritual side of romantic anti-capitalism that is furthest away from political associations (and hence the reason why for many romantic anti-capitalism is not a useful category *tout court*) but that are part of the worldview and thus enjoyed some popularity with Stieglitz and others in the period. It was those undefined, importantly immaterial elements – the soul, the spirit – that they missed in modernity. In their coexistence in the cloud photographs with the concerns about form and medium, which can either be seen as a contradiction or as a fertile synchronicity, lies one of the most interesting moments of this body of work. To see the formal modernity solely as the seminal quality of these works is to miss a crucial point. It reduces Stieglitz exactly to that kind of functional narrative that he was fighting against when he called himself a “revolutionist” or an “anarchist” (labels that of course have to be refuted or qualified, but which were intrinsic to his identity as a romantic anti-capitalist).

### **Romantic anti-capitalism: A Visual Category?**

Stieglitz was romantically pessimistic about the potential of culture in modernity, and he strove to mobilise this frustration to amend the situation within the sphere of culture itself. The modernist idiom, in its characteristic isolation and self-confinement, lent itself to the task of critical reflection, yet it also bore the risk of ineffectiveness in the real world. Are romantic anti-capitalism and modernism that easily compatible? If Löwy and Sayre’s key assumption – that romanticism is a critique of capitalist-industrial civilisation, that this civilisation (modernity) still exists, although in modified form, and that certain social groups conveying the romantic worldview are also still in place – is accepted, then, they assert, it is

reasonable to assume that romanticism, or romantic anti-capitalism, continued to play a key role even into the period when the dominant artistic mode had changed.<sup>8</sup>

The capitalist economy, based on the omnipotence of exchange value, constantly evolves but it still – or increasingly – dominates society. The sociological facts of social strata and categories have undergone change between the rise of the original Romantic Movement and this day: among other things, the scale and importance of the industrial proletariat has increased and declined, employment in the service and white collar sectors has risen as has the permanent presence of large numbers of the long-term unemployed. But these were changes within a constant framework and society is still divided into classes. At least for the period under consideration, artists continued to inhabit the contradictory location in the capitalist class system identified by Erik Olin Wright and their economic position remained broadly the same.<sup>9</sup> It is hence not illogical that innovative practices such as modernist technique or photography could be appropriated by this worldview that defines itself most convincingly as a reaction against capitalist conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Yet romanticism and modernism are two distinct categories: one is a *Weltanschauung*, the other an artistic stylistic category with multiple variants. Most distinctly, however, modernism is a movement culture, fragmented and not unified. It cannot be taken as a whole, which means that the relevance of romanticism to understanding any one modernist movement is unlikely to be replicated in relation to modernism as a whole. Indeed, as a stylistic category modernism has multiple variants partly because it covers a range of rather different ideological responses to the conditions of modernity. Modernism is unified by its historical coincidence and its stylistic attitude of rebellion against previous academic styles. All modernists, in various guises, found problematic the characterisation of their time by the values of capitalism. The lack of unity of modernism as a whole is in turn again a sign and symptom of the inherent divisiveness, fragmentation and possessive individualism of capitalist society.

Assigning Stieglitz to a particular modernist movement is not straightforward. He had much in common with the Expressionists' views of what art should be and do,

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 149.

<sup>9</sup> Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London and New York: Verso, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 150.

especially those of the *Blaue Reiter*. But formally, he also revealed Cubist sensibilities, as in the famous *Steerage*. His earlier works are best understood in relation to Impressionism and Naturalism. This difficulty of affiliation complicates the definition of movement culture further. It points to the fact that style alone did not define a movement, and also towards the resistance of many artists to being counted as members of a particular direction, a resistance which was the other side of the importance that group affiliation posed for artists at the time.

Despite the differences between Romanticism as a *Weltanschauung*, a structure of feeling, and modernism as a non-unified artistic style category, there is still some value in their juxtaposition in relation to Stieglitz's *Equivalents*. In their form, the photographs are modernist, rejecting previous conventions of style and medium. But their content expresses the romantic critique of capitalism of their maker. The tight correlation between those two factors makes these pictures effective. Even if Löwy and Sayre would agree that the category of romantic anti-capitalism could be applied to Stieglitz's modernism, their focus is too general in terms of art.<sup>11</sup> They see it as the advantage of their theory that it is not solely geared towards art – visual and otherwise – but that it treats romanticism as a phenomenon straddling several cultural as well as political and philosophical realms: as a *Weltanschauung*. Their points of reference for modernist or twentieth-century romantics are therefore figures from the wider realm of politics or social critique, such as Charles Péguy or Ernst Bloch. Löwy and Sayre are more concerned with the paradoxical character of the romantic anti-capitalist worldview itself than with how this was expressed in particular cultural forms. Their concept is useful for the content, the ideological dimension of Stieglitz's photographs, but it does not provide the categories that allow a productive discussion of form, which constitutes a factor equally as important, particularly in the *Equivalents*.

### **Symbolism and Synaesthesia, or the Specific Total Work of Art**

Stieglitz's first encounters with the sky in the 1920s were in portraits, a genre that had occupied him from the very beginning. At first photographing strangers as types with individual traits in the rural settings of European countries (for example *Leone*

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<sup>11</sup> When Löwy and Sayre write about art, their focus is on literature.

from *Bellagio*; fig. 92), he later engaged with the portrait form using the people surrounding him at 291 as models. Stieglitz was always interested in capturing the character in an individual's face, underlined and emphasised by carefully chosen backgrounds in the form of works of art such as de Zayas's caricature of Stieglitz and Marin (fig. 93) for his own portrait (fig. 94), Picabia's painting *This Has to Do with Me* (fig. 95) for his (fig. 96), and *Head of a Woman* by Picasso (fig. 97) in a portrait of 291's secretary, Marie Rapp (fig. 98). All these works were shown at 291 and their composition juxtaposed with the face and human form of the sitter completed Stieglitz's own pictures to form a harmonious whole. For example, when placing sitters in front of drawings by Picasso, Stieglitz adapted their Cubist strategies for his photograph, thus, as Greenough argues, demonstrating "how he could turn life into art and force representation and abstraction, fact and idea, modern photography and modern painting, to confront and engage one another on equal visual and conceptual plane."<sup>12</sup> These portraits united subject, setting and formal elements as well as gesture and expression to convey Stieglitz's understanding of the subject's personality.<sup>13</sup> Stieglitz extended the format of the portrait to include more than one picture with his composite portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe, spanning several years, including photographs of O'Keeffe's face and various parts of her body, clothed or in the nude, with particular attention to her hands (figs. 99-102). It seems a logical step from there, or a part of this composite project, to portray the person, O'Keeffe, without relying on the convention of likeness with her physical appearance at all.<sup>14</sup>

This brings to mind a comment by Waldo Frank that is often reiterated in the literature as defining the motivation for Stieglitz's engagement with clouds. Frank is supposed to have said that Stieglitz was moulding, manipulating his human subjects through his charismatic influence, making them fit his expectations of the picture he

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<sup>12</sup> Greenough, "Essay: The Key Set," xxviii. In her footnote, Greenough mentions a diverging interpretation of the influence of modern art on Stieglitz: John Szarkowski, *Alfred Stieglitz at Lake George*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 20. Szarkowski argues against any decisive influence by modernist artists including Picasso and Matisse on Stieglitz's work.

<sup>13</sup> Greenough, "Essay: The Key Set," xxxii.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Demuth in his poster portraits employs a similar strategy. See for example Robin Jaffee Frank, *Charles Demuth: Poster Portraits, 1923-1929* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

wanted to create rather than the camera relying on what was there.<sup>15</sup> In order to prove that he did not exert such influence, nor need it in order to produce interesting pictures, Stieglitz turned to nature. According to this aetiology, the cloud photographs are pictures of what Stieglitz saw, and nothing else. But a duality of existing vision and personal interpretation or response is still present. Rather than minimising his idiosyncratic tactic, as he claimed, Stieglitz's photographic interpretation of natural appearances, the way these photographs are conceived and the way they look, allowed him to be even more frank about himself and his sitters than about anything else. This is the case because the natural subject speaks universally to the viewer, subconsciously perhaps, but through an effect completely planned and desired by the photographer.

To a sequence of photographs of clouds, Stieglitz gave the title *Portrait of Georgia* (1923; figs. 103-105). Only the first photograph of the series shows O'Keeffe's face. Stieglitz did not portray O'Keeffe, the artist, or Georgia, his partner, but his own interpretation of her whole being. This has the effect that the individual becomes interchangeable. Around the same time Stieglitz created another composite portrait of a woman using the sky, Katherine Rhoades (*Portrait - K. N. R. - Songs of the Sky*; figs. 106-109). It seems that these pictures are not about the women, both of whom he was emotionally involved with at the time, but about Stieglitz's relationship with them, even with womanhood as such, and his possessive claims to their subjectivity.<sup>16</sup> The Rhoades photographs contain trees as well as clouds, they show one treetop, a poplar, and how the wind, visualised by the clouds, plays with it. The tree sways to the left (No. 1; fig. 106), to the right (No. 2; fig. 107), stands still and tall (No. 4; fig. 108), or almost seems to lie down flat under the strong wind (No. 5; fig. 109). The clouds as such do not tell us anything about the wind's strength or temperature. In Nos. 1 and 3 the branches sway to one side. But in Nos. 3 and 5, where the angle is most acute, the branches are still. The photographer might have

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<sup>15</sup> Greenough, "Essay: The Key Set," xli-xlii. Greenough lists the following original sources: Waldo Frank, "A Thought Hazarded", *MSS* [Manuscripts] 4 (December 1922): 5; Alfred Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds," *The Amateur Photographer and Photography* 56 (1 September 1923): 255.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Marcia Brennan in her *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory* (2001), does not write about the *Equivalents*, although she is concerned with Stieglitz's control over the interpretation of the works of the artists in his circle, foremost of that of Georgia O'Keeffe. See: Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001).

just held his camera at an angle, pointing it in different directions. The wind symbolises Stieglitz himself who plays with, manipulates the woman, thus in effect even with the natural subject matter doing the same thing as he was accused of doing with human sitters.

Stieglitz also created sky-portraits of a place, his beloved summer home at Lake George (figs. 110 and 111). These photographs depict hills and clouds and other landscape elements such as the lake and its tree-lined shores. Yet the sky is the most important part. The sky, not the physical place itself, is why Stieglitz was so attached to Lake George. He liked the place because there he could observe the sky.

The question of Stieglitz's relationship with women (as interesting as it is) or of a particular place is not the focus here. These examples should merely point out how the natural motif allowed Stieglitz to express himself in a photograph: that the cloud pictures were about his views of things. When they miss the marker of a distinct person or place, the pictures contain the whole world: they constitute and manifest a *Weltanschauung* in the literal sense of the word. But Stieglitz's photographs are the opposite of the usual association of worldview with a birds' eye perspective over a vast landscape taking in its complex and variable features (although in some cases, as in *Songs of the Sky K3 or H3* (fig. 112), the illusion of an aerial picture of the world occurs). The photographs are taken from the ground and rooted there, producing a subjective view of the world that is a psychological perspective and the opposite of the omnipotent gaze.

The cloud photographs are part of reality; they act as synecdoches that imply a larger whole from the viewpoint of an individual. A crucial factor in this control of vision was Stieglitz's mastery of the photographic medium, which allowed him, even with a subject as independent, arbitrary and in flux as the sky, to be in control from the start. He carefully composed each picture, by selection of motif, of camera type, camera angle and exposure time, through cropping and decisions in the developing process and the type of paper, and he determined the final effect of each picture through its grouping it with others. Through series of photographs, Stieglitz created sequences like that of the movements of a musical symphony. But also on the level of each picture, Stieglitz strove for a synaesthetic experience on part of the viewer. If

“air is the basic medium through which we perceive sound,” Stieglitz’s cloud photographs can even be understood as a visualisation of that element.<sup>17</sup>

The writer and music critic Paul Rosenfeld, who was closely associated with Stieglitz in the 1920s, described the cloud photographs in musical terms in his *Port of New York*:

The tiny scale between black and white is distended in these prints to an immense keyboard of infinitely delicate modulations. Black and white become capable of registering in strong and subtle relations a universe of ecstasy and dream and anguish. The delicious variations of light utter exciting rhythms and many-voiced speech like the modern orchestral machine’s. Rich brushing of the darker strings is in his deep softly flowing shadowings. The smoothness of the flutes is in the broad creamy passages; the nasal whirligigs of the other reeds in many a sinuosity. And the fiercely burning points of illumination have the pierce of the brass; impact of the horns, jagged cutting of the trumpets. Nevertheless the lucent keyboard of the photographer is better comparable perhaps to an orchestra of tones electrically generated; capable of subtler shadings than the one which we to-day possess, and abler therefore to approach more closely the dark wet quick in man. Though his machinery, Stieglitz has been able to produce a gamut more delicate than the hand can draw.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, music was the prime reference point for Stieglitz’s clouds, at least in the early days. The first cloud series in the key set, probably made between August and October 1922, is titled *Music - A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs, Nos. I-X* or *Clouds in Ten Movements, Nos. I-X* (1922; figs. 113-117). The Rhoades-series carries the additional title *Songs of the Sky*, which Stieglitz kept using as a title for many cloud pictures – until he started to name them “*Equivalents*” at some point in 1923. This nod to music in a synaesthetic approach to art is consistent with Stieglitz’s theory of modern art as self-expression of the artist, which was developed in *Camera Work* and in his collection of works of art and inspired by artists such as Kandinsky. The conception of music that fits the cloud pictures is one of instrumental music as “absolute music,” which had its origins in the Romantic era

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<sup>17</sup> Patrizia Di Bello and Gabriel Koureas, “Introduction: Other than the Visual: Art, History and the Senses,” in Patrizia Di Bello and Gabriel Koureas (eds.), *Art, History and the Senses: 1830 to the Present* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns*, with an introductory essay by Sherman Paul (Urbana and London: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 239.

and reached a new meaning and dominance in the early twentieth century. Around 1800 “absolute music” turned its back on words, language and the world; it also turned away from sight. For the first time, instrumental music became paradigmatic not only for other types of music, but for other branches of cultural endeavour, principally philosophy and the other arts. Musicality was the goal, as music was believed to contain thought and truth, and listening became a way of knowing, in the words of Walter Pater, the “condition to which all arts aspire.”<sup>19</sup> It was also in the Romantic epoch when musical sequence, manifest in the form of the symphony for orchestra with clear beginning, middle and end, became important as a means to create a sense of progression akin to emotional experience.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, as Simon Shaw-Miller points out, the Romantic concepts of absolute music and of synaesthesia are opposites, as E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Kreisleriana* demonstrate. In contrast to the concept of synaesthesia, absolute (instrumental) music is music becoming dematerialised, signifying a loosening of the bond with the other arts, a retreat into an unknown, invisible realm. At the same time, one particular Romantic work, Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*, can make visible the infinite within the finite bounds of the symphony. As Mark Evan Bonds argues, Hoffmann noticed the shift from an Enlightenment understanding of music as language, linked to the principles of rhetoric, to the Romantic perception of music as a source of truth, through which it became a philosophical concept.<sup>21</sup> Shaw-Miller additionally asserts that for Hoffmann, this involved the synaesthetic method, which reconnects music to the discourses of other arts. Once transcendence is achieved, music and image become interlinked with all the senses: “This was part and symptom of the romantic attraction to paradox, a longing for synthesis of opposites and perspective that hoped for recognition of two wholly contrasting points of view that could be both equally valid and mutually reinforcing.”<sup>22</sup> The attraction to paradox was not only a characteristic of Romanticism proper, but of all romantic anti-capitalism.

Like Kandinsky, and many artists of the earlier Symbolist generation, Stieglitz and Rosenfeld admired the music of Richard Wagner, in the narrative and form of which

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<sup>19</sup> Simon Shaw-Miller, “Disciplining the Senses: Beethoven as Synaesthetic Paradigm,” in Di Bello and Koureas (eds.), *Art, History and the Senses*, xvii.

<sup>20</sup> Greenough, “Essay: The Key Set,” xlii-xliii.

<sup>21</sup> Shaw-Miller, “Disciplining the Senses,” xviii.

<sup>22</sup> Shaw-Miller, “Disciplining the Senses,” xviii.



they believed they had found a new myth.<sup>23</sup> In particular, it was the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – which aims to achieve the most intense possible experience on the part of the beholder through its destruction not only of the boundaries between the various arts but also between artwork and reality and in its quest for unity – that satisfied the romantic longing to connect humans with each other and with nature. The Symbolist poets emulated the structures of music in their work and also frequently chose musical titles. The argument has often been made that literature and music (both time-based) share a particular affinity. In the visual arts, abstraction (which ostensibly does not need the detour via language) and titles alluding to music (for example Georgia O’Keeffe’s painting *Blue and Green Music*; fig. 118) aimed at creating the synaesthetic effect that the artists credited Wagner with realising in his music-dramas.

Shaw-Miller claims that the understanding of music as direct, as speaking of and to the soul, was the character of the Romantic musical revolution. But in order to access this invisible world, music had to perform a disappearing act, it had to vanish behind what Theodor Adorno characterised as “windowless monads”; it had to turn itself into an art of “nothing but tones.”<sup>24</sup> It could not grant access to the *noumenon* if it was in an intermediate state itself; it had to essentialise itself to become absolute and complete in its own identity, and for this end instrumental music alone was seen as the most absolute possibility of music.<sup>25</sup> This has its equivalent in the visual arts. In the same tradition that spanned from Romanticism to aestheticism, art was in constant struggle between its efforts to stay true to itself and to express a truth larger than that. Modernist art was still grounded in this duality, which proves that it was not a break with all that came before and that a romantic anti-capitalist conception was still vital for it. It has to do with the specificity of the aesthetic, not in terms of music or the visual arts only, but with the aesthetic as a philosophical and epistemological category. Modernism must be extended to this for pictures such as Stieglitz’s clouds to be fully understood.

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<sup>23</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Rückblicke* (Bern: Benteli, 1977), 14-15. Kandinsky names three experiences that drastically shaped his conception of art and the world: seeing Monet’s *Haystack* in Moscow, hearing Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, and learning about the disintegration of the atom.

<sup>24</sup> Shaw-Miller, “Disciplining the Senses,” xx.

<sup>25</sup> Shaw-Miller, “Disciplining the Senses,” xx.

Predecessors for Stieglitz's approach can be found among Symbolist artists. Whistler, for instance – a frequent point of reference in *Camera Work* – chose musical titles for many of his paintings, including “arrangement,” “caprice,” “harmony” and “variation.” Michelle Facos describes how in his *Nocturne: Silver and Opal – Chelsea* (1882; fig. 119) it is the brushwork rather than colour or line that delineates the minimal visual differences between sea and sky, and the prevailing mistiness suggests that the painting may represent a memory or mirage; a desire to evoke rather than to describe resulted in compositions that were radically simplified in form and colour.<sup>26</sup> This is reminiscent of Stieglitz's cloud pictures. If Symbolism, as Facos suggests, is “characterized by (1) an artist's desire to represent ideas and (2) a manipulation of color, form, and composition that signals the artist's relative indifference to worldly appearances,” then Stieglitz's clouds can be seen in this tradition.<sup>27</sup> They allowed him to show his indifference to the world by taking its appearances as a starting point, but then transforming them in order for the original belonging to the world to be blurred and complicated, so that the resulting works were not parts of the world any longer but signifiers of the artist's own ideas and of the autonomy of art. Worldly appearances are used in order to delineate a hidden realm, one that is not part of the superficial materiality of external things. In addition to this, abstraction provides a different key. It makes it possible to convey the Symbolist message through an updated, modernist visual idiom that further emphasises the gap between the dominance of the material in the present and an ideal, transcendent realm, which can only be realised in the autonomous work of art.

Stieglitz's interest in the visual forms of sensory perception was formed by the aesthetic discourse of the period. Late-nineteenth-century art theorists such as Fiedler and Hildebrand had established optical perception (as opposed to representation or narrative) as the specific domain of the visual arts. This has to be put in the context of increased specialisation of intellectual life in modernity.<sup>28</sup> Georg Simmel analysed the social construction of this aesthetic phenomenon in his “Soziologie der Sinne” (Sociology of the Senses).<sup>29</sup> Simmel, who was ambivalent about modernity and in

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<sup>26</sup> Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2009), 55.

<sup>27</sup> Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> See the second chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> My comparison of interest in the senses in art and Simmel's text is inspired by: Di Bello and Koureas, “Introduction,” 1-17.

some ways has to be considered a romantic anti-capitalist, regarded sensual interaction, the first form of contact between individuals, as the very ground for human community. Sensory perception establishes subjectivity and objectivity alike and creates bridges between the two.<sup>30</sup> In Stieglitz's view, a work of art achieves the same in a beholder's interaction with it. He thus put the experience of works of art, despite their materiality, on equal footing with interaction between humans, where sensory perception is reciprocal and not, as Simmel writes, of objects, where the sentiment is always one-sided and the opposite element can never fully be sensed.

Among the sensory organs, Simmel privileges the eye: the fullest and purest form of sensual interaction happens in eye contact between two individuals. A glance reveals a person's individuality and essence.<sup>31</sup> Again, Stieglitz puts the intensity in the glancing of a work of art on the same level. But not only in relation to the artwork do Simmel's comments relate to Stieglitz, but also in terms of the clouds themselves: just like the human face, they are exposed to different influences (the weather) and express this in their gestalt.<sup>32</sup> For Simmel, seeing is also a sensory quality that is particularly required in modernity, in the vast space of the modern city, with its manifold but impersonal human interactions such as in public transport.<sup>33</sup> But the privileging of one sense results in a general experience of disorientation and fragmentation – those characteristics of the modern experience that Stieglitz expressed with his clouds. The importance of seeing in modernity is also testified in the constitution of masses, such as that of the workers, which are abstractions, based on the visual conglomeration of many individuals under one common category, a common space in which they converge.<sup>34</sup>

Although the reciprocal look of two individuals is unique to the optical sense, the sense perception of hearing, Simmel writes, is more capable of uniting people, as it can, for example in a musical concert, convey a particular emotion to a larger number of people.<sup>35</sup> Again, there is a corollary to the subject of the cloud: only the sun or the sky, Simmel believes, can effect a similar unifying sensual experience in

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<sup>30</sup> Georg Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," in *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Leipzig: von Duncker & Humblot, 1908), 646.

<sup>31</sup> Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," 649-650.

<sup>32</sup> Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," 650.

<sup>33</sup> Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," 651.

<sup>34</sup> Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," 656.

<sup>35</sup> Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," 654.

the realm of the visual as music or other aural sensations can. Modern living conditions forced sensual perception in general to become more refined, the distinctions between pleasurable and disagreeable repugnant sensual experience became more pronounced.<sup>36</sup> This, for Simmel, results in the modern (middle-class and educated) individual's difficulties in forming lasting bonds with other humans.<sup>37</sup> Stieglitz sought to reverse this through the unifying sensual experience the viewing of his cloud photographs provided. For this project, he had to prioritise the visual, following the model of the Romantic composers of instrumental music and building on the theories of visual perception as autonomous access to knowledge as well as autonomous creation, in order to reach a state of "purity" that would then allow him to reconnect to the other senses again – and ultimately to life. Although I have no evidence that Stieglitz was directly influenced by Simmel's ideas, there certainly is a homology between Simmel's theory and Stieglitz's project.

If Stieglitz's cloud pictures are evocations of something not seen, are they, as a consequence, not particularly visual but rather a statement for equivalence and, correspondingly, against the uniqueness of one particular medium? In their negotiation of abstraction, of the photographic medium, they interrogate the category of the visual. But Stieglitz did not stop there. His interest in synaesthesia, stimulated by one particular sensual experience such as the visual in the case of photography, points in another direction. And even beyond that, and more strongly I think, the photographs are manifestations of the irrational. Since 1800, this was mainly the domain of music. As a consequence the visual arts aspired to a similarly absolute and immediate status through concentration on their unique and intrinsic properties. Stieglitz applied this strategy to the visual, through photography. But his aims were larger: he wanted to create works of art that were, in their seclusion, in some way socially efficient. It was abstraction that achieved for the visual medium the formal self-critique, which was necessary in order to allow a full art-experience, where the medium as such does not matter, but an experience that is separate and parallel to external reality is realised as fully as possible. It was Stieglitz's goal to create something independent of and parallel to external, positive reality that acted concretely as an antithesis to the modern world of market relations. He was still trying to infuse the world with spirit through his art. Abstraction provided him with

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<sup>36</sup> Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," 657.

<sup>37</sup> Simmel, "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," 658.

an efficient vehicle to this end. Modernism achieved a stripping-down, a purification of the visual medium that finally allowed pictures to speak the absolute language of music. The motif of the sky allowed Stieglitz to relate to the world whilst simultaneously stating pictorial and artistic independence from it. He turned his back on the world of everyday reality, showing his dissatisfaction with it, but he did not choose the route of complete escape either, as the aestheticists had proposed earlier. As a romantic anti-capitalist, Stieglitz was convinced that the world could be changed, and that an idealist path such as the one of art would be successful to this end.

### **Equivalence**

In his cloud pictures, Stieglitz aimed at finding visual equivalents for personal views and experiences. In this way, *Spiritual America* (fig. 120), the picture of a gelding in harness that symbolised America for Stieglitz, is also part of a series of *Songs of the Sky*, otherwise comprised of clouds only (figs. 121 and 122). Although the fragment of reality he started with for this photograph was very different from clouds, the strategies applied were similar. A part of the horse is cropped out from the whole, simplified and complicated at the same time in order to create disorientation in relation to reality and an independent pictorial language.

In his obsession with clouds, Stieglitz experimented with all registers of pictorial composition: darkness, light, stark contrasts or such that are hardly to be perceived at all; big, lumpy clouds or small dishevelled ones; antagonistic movement, movement in a single direction or stasis; horizontality and verticality; furious or lovely cloud formations; clouds that draw the eye into deep space or clouds as flat and vertical as a wall (figs. 123 and 124). Stieglitz combined technical expertise with those means that served him to create a photographic picture that stood on its own: horizontal and vertical lines, different gradations of grey, depth and flatness, cropping, play with light, dark, bright, vivid shapes or silent ones. The pictures were about photography as much as they were about Stieglitz's view of the world. This is a tactic had been employed by other former Photo-Secession members too – for instance in Alvin Langdon Coburn's *Decorative Study* from *Camera Work* 15 (July 1906; fig. 125). In this picture of a tree in the snow, the fluffy whiteness of the snow, which takes up

most of the composition, obfuscates what is depicted and creates an effect of two-dimensionality.

The range of moods that the clouds could convey was part of the message. Their mutability served as an equivalent to the plethora of Stieglitz's emotions and of human emotions in general. The whole range of human feelings can only be reached when humans are not stripped of their essence by external factors, reduced to a machine-like state of being. At stake is an interplay of reality and picture. By experimenting with structures on the level of a picture, Stieglitz models a way of being in the world. In this context, the pictures are about more than just abstraction, and also about more than just a concern with the visual medium. Stieglitz was eager to find a way to use photography in order to extend its sensual range and to go beyond a rationalistic approach to it by making the technology serve a spiritual purpose. Abstraction is an important mark on the route, but it is not an end in itself. It serves the same purpose as instrumental music had in the Romantic period for claims of the absolute and of truth.

All of this is contained in the last series title Stieglitz gave to his cloud photographs, and the one that stuck: *Equivalents*, reminiscent of the Symbolist theory of equivalence, which was widely discussed in the Stieglitz circle. In the theory of equivalence, an abstract shape or pure colour is equivalent to an abstract thought or sensation.<sup>38</sup> The photographs reflect this change of title: they become more abstract, reference points to external reality vanish altogether, and the feeling of disorientation increases, as does awareness of the photographs as photographs, in their material reality and the photographic picture-making process. Without in any way altering the scene in front of the camera, without manipulating the process of photography, Stieglitz photographed reality so as to represent it as an abstract construction, resulting in an autonomous work of art.

Yet achieving the status of autonomy in photography could not have been Stieglitz's final goal. If a romantic anti-capitalist dissatisfaction with the marginalisation of culture and of idealist expression was his motivation to create art, the world needs to come back into the argument. Taking the term *Weltanschauung* literally, why was the world for Stieglitz now up in the sky? Surely he could have found other instances

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<sup>38</sup> Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and "The Idea of Photography,"" 24.

in nature than clouds that would have served his purpose if that had only been to create abstract photographs. Paul Strand for example also made abstract photographs at the time, but with very different subject matter. As had Coburn. Clouds take on a wide range of appearances in Stieglitz's series. They can be fuzzy (*Songs of the Sky*; figs. 126 and 127), create a quiet and peaceful atmosphere with dim contrasts (*Songs of the Sky/Equivalent*, fig. 128), they can appear like gauze fabric, like feathers or down (figs. 129 and 130) or like waves in water (fig. 131). Always, the materiality of clouds themselves is put into question.

### **The Conquest of the Air**

In the pictorial theme of the sky, a natural-scientific worldview and spiritual interests are juxtaposed at a time when the conquest of the air brought about one of the greatest paradigm shifts in human thinking about the natural environment. This development brought a change of perspective in terms of what was possible for human innovation and technology and also in terms of perception. It meant an end for the human line of vision from the earth upwards. Photography from the air from balloons had been possible for a while, but the aeroplane greatly expanded photography's aerial scope. Stieglitz illustrated his own photos of *The Aeroplane* and *A Dirigible* in *Camera Work* No. 36 in 1911 (figs. 132 and 133). The sky filled with clouds dominates both pictures. In *The Aeroplane*, the machine flies towards the viewer, in front of a backdrop of a bright strip of clouds that contrasts to the dark atmosphere of the rest of the composition, seemingly coming out of it. *A Dirigible* is horizontally partitioned into three layers: thick clouds at the bottom, thinning in front of the sun whose rays manage to come through in the middle and at the top cloudless sky. There, in a perfect black oval shape, the dirigible hovers. In its contrast to the backdrop, it has the unreality of a UFO or a constructed photograph. Both photographs, despite their modern subject matter, have a similar feel to the later *Equivalents*.

Advances in human flight had happened quickly in the second half of the nineteenth century. From controllable lighter-than-air airships, it did not take long for inventors to come up with successful designs for heavier-than-air machines. Ever faster and longer flights were possible in the early years of the twentieth century and the circus

of flying, part of a discourse of scientific advancement, danger and international competition, enjoyed huge popularity with a mass audience. Improvements in aircraft technology soared during the First World War. All the major powers – Britain, Germany, France and later the United States – had entered the war with relatively primitive airplanes employed solely for observation duties. But soon the pilots were throwing bombs and new inventions were quickly assimilated for military use.<sup>39</sup> During the twenties, aerial navigation successfully took on ever more complex and exhilarating challenges: flight over lands, seas and even oceans were successfully accomplished.

In the *Equivalents* Stieglitz chose to maintain the earth-bound perspective of the sky, free from the products of human technology. But other artists at the time, such as the Italian Futurists with their characteristic optimism for a future defined by human self-assertion and technological innovation, adopted the new perspective and developments into their programme. In 1929, F.T. Marinetti wrote in the *Manifesto dell'Aeropittura*: “As aeropainters and poets we go out more and more to teach how to love looking down from above on that surprisingly lavish and many-shaped population of clouds which Leopardi and Baudelaire have taught us to love looking up in melancholy.”<sup>40</sup> *Aeropittura* comprises not just the representation of aeroplanes, but of a scene observed from an airborne perspective, as in Fedele Azari's *Perspectives of Flight* (1926; fig. 134), where modern high-rise buildings are seen from above, protruding into space sideways and upwards.<sup>41</sup> The sense of movement created by the force lines energises the whole picture plane and also the space, which illusorily fills it. The polycentric composition exudes boundless optimism. Another example is Marisa Mori's *Nocturnal Aerial Battle* (1932), a picture of air space

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<sup>39</sup> For the history of aviation see for example: Phil Scott, *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: A History of Human Flight to 1919* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1995). There were many period sources too, including: John Alexander, *The Conquest of the Air: The Romance of Aerial Navigation* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1902); Alphonse Berget, *The Conquest of the Air: Aeronautics, Aviation, History, Theory, Practice* (London: William Heinemann and New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909); A. Lawrence Rotch, *The Conquest of the Air or the Advent of Aërial Navigation* (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1909).

<sup>40</sup> F.T. Marinetti's preface to the catalogue of the XIX Venice Biennale (1934), see Renato Miracco, “Futurist Skies; or, The Turns, Ups and Downs of Aeropainting,” in Renato Miracco (ed.), *Futurist Skies: Italian Aeropainting*, exh. cat. (London: Estorick Collection of Italian Art, 2005), 11.

<sup>41</sup> This painting was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1926. See *Futurism in Flight: “Aeropittura” paintings and sculptures in Man's conquest of space (1913-1945)*, ed. Bruno Mantura, Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris and Livia Velani, exh. cat. (London, Accademia Italiana delle Arti e delle Arti Applicate, 1990), no page numbers.



verging on abstraction.<sup>42</sup> In keeping with the Futurist rhetoric, these works celebrate danger, energy, fearlessness, courage and speed, war, patriotism and absolute contempt for the past. The Futurists' appeal to burn library shelves is a stark contrast to Stieglitz's admiration of Goethe.<sup>43</sup> Whilst Futurist *Aeropittura* developed only after 1927 and cannot be considered as an influence on Stieglitz's photographs, but rather as a parallel phenomenon, he could have known the aerial pictures of an artist close to Italian Futurism, the English painter C.R.W. Nevinson that were exhibited at the Bourgeois Galleries in New York in 1920 (similar to fig. 135).<sup>44</sup>

Despite the contrasts, Stieglitz and the Futurists shared some outlooks. The Futurists, too, were interested in the spiritual, they only weighed it differently: theirs was a different kind of romanticism. Also for the disenchanted Futurists the sky stood for infinity and provided a space for retreat from reality, making their choice of topic a corollary of the reverence for rural life by artists in previous decades.<sup>45</sup> A kind of mysticism emanates from Fillia's (Luigi Enrico Colombo), *Aerial Mystery* (1931). After all, Stieglitz too had faith that man could bring the spiritual back into a machine, the camera. And the Futurists' turning to the sky was also a retreat from the ugly reality of war akin to nineteenth-century artists' escapist interest in rural life styles.<sup>46</sup> In 1919 Alcock and Brown made the first non-stop transatlantic flight. Stieglitz's photos could be seen as an assertion of the spiritual significance of the heavens at this moment when the conquest of the air by the machine was widely heralded as another great accomplishment of technology.

Coburn, too, explored technological experimentation and photographic abstraction. The former Photo-Secessionist's Vortographs are often praised as the first abstract photographs (fig. 136).<sup>47</sup> The prime reference point for these photographs of crystalline, shiny shapes with hard angles and geometric structures is the Vorticist

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<sup>42</sup> Miracco (ed.), *Futurist Skies*, 56.

<sup>43</sup> Michael J. K. Walsh, *C.R.W. Nevinson: This Cult of Violence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 44.

<sup>44</sup> "The Old and the New: Exhibition of Paintings, Etchings, Lithographs and Woodcuts by C.R.W. Nevinson," Bourgeois Galleries, New York, 1920. Walsh, *C.R.W. Nevinson: This Cult of Violence*, 109.

<sup>45</sup> Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), 246; Miracco (ed.), *Futurist Skies*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 246.

<sup>47</sup> Coburn had also depicted clouds in *The Cloud*, 1917 and an aeroplane, in *Death Glide*, 1916.

movement, led by Wyndham Lewis in London in 1913-1915. Indeed Coburn was attached to the group of artists and critics, foremost to Ezra Pound, who wrote prefaces for Coburn's exhibition catalogue. The path to abstraction Coburn took is very different from Stieglitz's a few years later. With their hard lines, the Vortographs rely more on pattern, geometry and design than Stieglitz's clouds, although both practices achieve an effect where the orientation of the print is equivocal. But the main difference was in the way they were made. In contrast to Stieglitz's straight photography, Coburn attached a triangular mirrored tube to his lens to achieve the desired effect, which acted as a prism splitting the image formed by the lens into segments.

Despite the Vortographs' association with the Vorticist aesthetic and the critical discourse around them, they are still related to Coburn's former Pictorialist style and also to an interest in the non-material present in the Stieglitz circle, not simply because of Coburn's use of a soft-focus, "Semi-Achromatic" lens.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, after the Vortographs, Coburn moved away from photography to dedicate himself entirely to his spiritual and religious interests. Dematerialisation or idealisation was also his aim in the Vortographs, which can be understood as cyphers of importance only to himself. For Mike Weaver, Vorticism marked the moment when Coburn briefly despaired of being able to consider outer phenomena as anything other than distorted aspects of an ideal geometry.<sup>49</sup> However, the mystical fads of the epoch to which Coburn subscribed – spiritualism, freemasonry, Theosophy – were not to Stieglitz's liking. The popularity of those movements can be seen as a corollary or symptom of romantic anti-capitalism, but in Stieglitz's work it is the latter, as a critique of modernity that understood more of the source of the evil, namely capitalism, than attempts to escape or trivialise it could.

### **The Depictions of Clouds**

John Constable's cloud studies such as *Study of Clouds at Hampstead* from 1821 (fig. 137) constitute an expected reference point for the more recent photographs of the

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<sup>48</sup> Tom Normand, "Alvin Langdon Coburn and the Vortographs," *The Vorticists: Rebel Artists in London and New York, 1914-1918*, ed. Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2010), 87-88.

<sup>49</sup> Mike Weaver, *Alvin Langdon Coburn: Symbolist Photographs, 1882-1966: Beyond the Craft*, exh. cat. (New York: Aperture, 1986), 64.

sky. The studies were part of a larger Romantic interest in the depiction of clouds – Constable himself made careful pencil copies of the typology of clouds devised by Alexander Cozens. Constable explained his interest in the sky and its effects as part of the effort to follow nature, to perfectly portray it.<sup>50</sup> Two types of cloud studies predominate in the painter's oeuvre: as in Stieglitz's series, some pictures have a small fringe of trees or a piece of scenery at the base while others are filled with sky exclusively. Overall, they have a remarkably self-contained quality and were not studies for paintings as such. They are a pictorial form associated with landscape painting but distinct from it. The studies, together with Constable's letters from the period, testify to the Romantic painter's complex attitude to his art as it was developing around questions of painting from nature, studio work and various pictorial categories in relation to exhibitions.<sup>51</sup> Constable was interested in reassembling the landscape and in the clouds' ability to serve pictorial means, foremost those of chiaroscuro.<sup>52</sup> But more than that, for this artist the sky was "the chief organ of sentiment," a prime means of expressing a mood – "[P]ainting is but another word for feeling."<sup>53</sup> Such remarks resonate with Stieglitz's.

Constable inscribed the back of his sky sketches with meteorological details. Accordingly, the studies have been analysed in relation to eighteenth-century natural philosophy. The accuracy of Constable's observations has been confirmed, but it is his "ability to differentiate in paint a variety of cloud types, to suggest the pace and direction of their movement and to give them convincing three-dimensional forms without losing their lightness and brightness that speaks most for his understanding."<sup>54</sup> It is known that Constable read pioneering meteorological studies of his day by Luke Howard or Thomas Forster. Yet his interest in clouds is more complex than that. Constable was a devout Anglican who saw nature as a grand machine in which god's handiwork was everywhere present. The cloud studies stand for the way in which he regarded natural philosophy and Christian cosmology as inseparable.

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and his Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 133.

<sup>51</sup> Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and his Landscape*, 137.

<sup>52</sup> Edward Morris, "Introduction: Constable's Clouds and the Chiaroscuro of Nature," in *Constable's Clouds: Paintings and Cloud Studies by John Constable*, ed. Edward Morris, exh. cat. (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland and Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 2000), 9-11.

<sup>53</sup> Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and his Landscape*, p. 137.

<sup>54</sup> *Constable*, ed. Leslie Paris and Ian Fleming-Williams, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 1991), 228.

The German Romantics, too, studied the sky. The Munich-based painter Johann Georg von Dillis, beginning around 1800, created some 150 cloud studies, using white and sometimes black chalk on blue laid paper.<sup>55</sup> The coarse texture of the coloured paper stands in contrast to the delicate touches of chalk that visualise the fleeting quality of the clouds. The blue paper (see for example fig. 138) limited the intervention of the artist's hand similar to the way in which Stieglitz's camera allowed him to reduce his own subjectivity in the face of nature. Dillis's blue paper and white chalk create pictures with minimal internal framing, emphasising instead their quality as having been cut out from the vastness of the sky, which renders these drawings almost as abstract and accidental in character as Stieglitz's *Equivalents*. It is questionable whether Stieglitz was aware of the forerunners of his own works by the English and German Romantics.<sup>56</sup> But it is striking that a preoccupation with clouds was such a feature of the Romantic Movement and that Stieglitz – probably unwittingly – reworked it in modernist form.

But there was another tradition that Stieglitz could not have been unaware of. The subject of clouds had a history particularly in the medium of photography in relation to science. Meteorological photographs of the sky were produced in the photographic amateur culture that Stieglitz had been part of combined with a scientific appropriation. It was part of the discourse of photography and its supposed ability to tell the truth, which made it a natural ally for the empirical sciences. Yet in their studies of clouds and lightning, the meteorological photographer-amateurs equally borrowed their visual practices and ideologies from landscape artists and it is from the sphere of art, including for instance the work of Constable, that they largely derived their interest in extraordinary natural phenomena<sup>57</sup> As Jennifer Tucker writes, meteorological photographers and their proponents “used both the scientific

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<sup>55</sup> On Dillis see for example: Hardtwig, Barbara, *Johann Georg von Dillis (1759-1841): Die Kunst des Privaten* (Munich: Lenbachhaus and Cologne: Wienand, 2003) and *Johann Georg von Dillis: 1759-1841: Landschaft und Menschenbild*, ed. Christoph Heilmann, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> Among the art histories of the period that Stieglitz knew, Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Kunst*, zweite umgearbeitete und ergänzte Auflage mit mehr als 600 Abbildungen, 3 vols (Munich: Piper, 1914) does not mention Constable's clouds, but they figure in Richard Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Carl P. Chryselius'sche Buchhandlung, 1920), 348 and prominently in C.J. Holmes, *Constable and his Influence on Landscape Painting* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1902), 86; 120. Holmes was a landscape painter, director of the National Gallery in London, and supporter of Post-Impressionism and Stieglitz was probably aware of his book.

<sup>57</sup> Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 126.

language of mechanical objectivity (which eliminated the observer) and the pictorial language of the picturesque (which asserted the artist) to recruit participants.”<sup>58</sup>

Cloud photography was considered difficult, requiring maximum technical skills on part of the photographer as well as special equipment, such as yellow colour screens to reduce the intensity of the blue and violet parts of the spectrum, a rectilinear lens and a Nichol prism for the photography of thin, cirrus clouds. In developing negatives of clouds, great care had to be taken with the printing process; otherwise blue of sky appeared black and delicate halftones in higher lights were lost.<sup>59</sup> Stieglitz was no stranger to such considerations. His earlier work, including the photographs taken during snowstorms and at night, was praised for its command of such techniques. It is thus not surprising that examples of early cloud photographs, such as those in the 1860s *Amateur Photographic Exchange Album* (fig. 139) or from the Scottish astronomer Charles Piazz Smyth’s album *Cloud-Forms* (fig. 140), are comparable to Stieglitz’s later *Equivalents* in their subject matter and also to a certain extent their aesthetic.<sup>60</sup> It is the art category that places Stieglitz’s works in a different context.

## Romanticism and Science

The methods of the natural sciences, responsible for the disenchantment of the world, are part of the predominance of quantitative values that romanticism opposes. Yet only when seen in conjunction with capitalism does the opposition between science – or rather the style of thought behind it – and the romantic worldview make sense. Furthermore, at the time of the original Romantic Movement, science and art were not as separated as they are today.<sup>61</sup>

Romanticism was part of a rebellion against the dominance of the scientific or materialistic worldview that intensified around the turn of the century and was expressed in the efforts to distinguish between the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the

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<sup>58</sup> Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, 153.

<sup>59</sup> Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, 152.

<sup>60</sup> Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, 145.

<sup>61</sup> “[T]he romantic reaction was not against physics, say, but against scientific metaphysics: the seeing of the world as mechanism rather than organism, a seeing that has for correlative a quest for mechanical power.” Edward Proffitt, “Science and Romanticism,” *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring 1980): 57-58.

*Naturwissenschaften*. It was not the style of thought of the natural sciences within the field of the academy that was the defining momentum, but the socio-economic system, with its relationship to positivism, quantification and specialisation (which affected everyone in a very direct and palpable sense) that was the main point of attack for the Romantics in the eighteenth century as well as for everyone inspired by this type of thought at any time since. What matters is less what happened in the sciences as such than that the worldview of the hard sciences – positivism, rationalism, quantification – has spread and become more and more dominant.

Although the members of the Vienna Circle had not formulated the rigid notion of logical positivism at the time Stieglitz photographed clouds, a hardening of the scientific worldview in the direction of such positivism was well underway. The development of capitalism intensified its essence of fragmentation, inequality and injustice as well as its domination of all fields. It thus increased, and in some instances modified romantic thought as expressed by early-twentieth-century romantic anti-capitalists. And in the same way, the clarification of the scientific worldview towards rationalism and positivism had its effects on the intensification and adaptation of the romantic worldview. Science in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had forgotten that it posited a fragmented picture as the model for the whole.<sup>62</sup> It was itself subject to and a result of the modern process of fragmentation; this particular kind of science flourished because it coincided with the dominant socio-economic system of capitalism. Science as such was not really dominant; it was only dominant as a concomitant of capitalism. The authority of such a worldview in a field different from its own only serves the ends of the larger category. Opposite views (including romanticism in this case) are dangerous because not only do they reveal the hegemonic views as contingent and ideological, but also because, as part of the content of such views, they promote change as really possible.

In this regard it is interesting to note that even the Theosophists and other occultists in Stieglitz's period *de facto* saw themselves as scientists. Many of the spiritualist movements in the late nineteenth century were not simply a reaction against materialism. Instead, a dialectical relationship connected the two. It had long been one of spiritualism's interests to provide empirical evidence for the afterlife. Theosophy and similar movements sought material proof of the immaterial, forming

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<sup>62</sup> Proffitt, "Science and Romanticism," 63

a kind of positivistic mysticism that should counteract the dispiriting effects of the ideological dominance of scientific materialism.<sup>63</sup> In the field of art, spiritualism and science were central for Kandinsky and his development of abstract art. The artist recounted the profound effect that scientists' discovery of the disintegration of the atom had on his view of the world, which as a consequence was fragmented and immaterial too and prompted him to create an art that reflected the disappearance of matter by renouncing the impulse for mimesis.<sup>64</sup> Sixten Ringbom, however, has argued that Kandinsky and his interpreters alike have exaggerated the status of natural science in the artist's thinking.<sup>65</sup> Ringbom claims that Kandinsky's interpretation of chaos and disintegration signified a crass misunderstanding of the scientific developments, which were in fact not mysterious or irrational, but by contrast for the adept proved the value of empirical methods and rational reasoning.<sup>66</sup> Kandinsky's "apologetic gloom," rather, reflected the teachings of Theosophists and other spiritualistic interpreters of the scientific discoveries at the time.

Stieglitz did not take part in spiritualist séances or call himself a Theosophist. Yet his clouds, too, assert that ideas and feelings are real, that they can be represented in a picture. His pictures are not spirit photographs, where the medium's indexical truth claims are used as evidence for the existence of non-matter and the extrasensory. More like Kandinsky's compositions, they are one step removed, claiming instead that mediated by the specially gifted individual, forms for feelings can be found which do not depend on likeness with the external world.

### **The Ideologues: Paul Rosenfeld and Waldo Frank**

The themes of the cloud photographs are a dominant feature in Stieglitz's correspondence of the time, particularly in the letters he exchanged with Waldo

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<sup>63</sup> Matthew Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia: Utopian and Science Fictions at the Fin de Siècle* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 174-175.

<sup>64</sup> Kandinsky, *Rückblicke*.

<sup>65</sup> Sixten Ringbom, "The Sounding Cosmos": A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting, *Acta Academiae Aboensis, Ser. A, Humaniora*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1970). John Gage quotes Kandinsky's own assertion that it was not "positive science" but "empirical-spiritual experience," which inspired his colour theory, but Gage also emphasises that these two notions, and indeed that of synaesthesia were widely discussed in experimental psychology in those years. See John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 207-209.

<sup>66</sup> Ringbom, "The Sounding Cosmos," 35.

Frank and Paul Rosenfeld, the chief ideologues of the Stieglitz circle in the 1920s and 1930s. Both writers were associated with several of the “little magazines” of the period, most importantly with *The Seven Arts* and the *Dial*, and both were considerably younger than Stieglitz. The age gap is important for the relationship. Although the influence was reciprocal, Stieglitz was careful, as he had been with the painters and gallery visitors in the previous decades, to maintain a connection with Frank and Rosenfeld that secured his position as the teacher, the elder. He used his letters (many of them of considerable length) as a form to discuss his ideas with them and to shape their *Weltanschauung* in the image of his own. But the letters, as the only form of the written word Stieglitz used in this period, also served as a way for him to elaborate on this thought and practice. His “pupils” then went ahead and put Stieglitz’s ideas into printed form, most poignantly in Rosenfeld’s *Port of New York* (1924) and Frank’s contribution to the anthology *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (1934; co-edited together with Rosenfeld, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman and Harold Rugg).

In some letters, the cloud photographs are specifically referred to, always in the context of Stieglitz’s zealous recounting of his observation of the weather. The correspondence is most frequent during the summer months, which Stieglitz used to spend at Lake George. Comparing, for instance, the weather in July of one year to the last reassured Stieglitz that the world was still moving in a fixed and continuous cycle, despite the rapid movement of technological and economic change, and the political chaos that was going on around him. Thus, he wrote to Rosenfeld in 1923: “not much ‘rest’ in the world to-day. – This morning here a bleak N. Easter is blowing hard. It’s cold. – Yesterday was one of those marvellously clear – what I call – days. One of those days one could sit + look at the “weather” for hours + never cease to wonder.”<sup>67</sup> That he identified with the weather, and in particular with clouds, as a mirror of his own state of mind is testified in the following statement to Rosenfeld: “And to reproduce the essence of my things means to reproduce their quality above all, for, without that inner singing in the prints the reproductions become primarily subject matter. And that is opposed to the very thing I’m doing.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Rosenfeld, 5 September 1923, *Stieglitz-O’Keeffe Archive*, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (YCAL).

<sup>68</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 4 September 1930, YCAL.



Rosenfeld and Frank understood and reciprocated Stieglitz's metaphysical leanings. For both, their feelings of isolation and loss in the contemporary world were directly linked to their economic situation, the precariousness of the life of the artist-intellectual. Both were aware, as was Stieglitz, that the progress of capitalism was only solidifying this fate. All three felt that being a true artist was a corollary to being critical of capitalism. And for all three this included in the twenties an escapist turning away from present affairs. But for Rosenfeld and Frank, as members of a younger generation, the life of the artist presented them with hardships unknown to Stieglitz with his comfortable bourgeois upbringing. Neither Frank nor Rosenfeld were from a working-class background and had enjoyed many bourgeois privileges whilst growing up.<sup>69</sup> Like Stieglitz, both were Jews.<sup>70</sup> Frank, in *Our America*, named a root of their thought as a crisis that was perceived among assimilated, second-generation sons and daughters of Jewish immigrants, who were conflicted both by their parents' compromising religiosity and by the pressure of scientific theories that undermined religions doctrine.<sup>71</sup>

Stieglitz had experienced a similar conflict, but during his adolescence the crisis was not as acute. In his case, the wealth emigration to America made possible for his parents, coupled with their old-world cultural predilections that imprinted on daily family life provided the basis for his endeavours. Rosenfeld and Frank saw their writing as an art. But it was also their trade, a profession, and they were acutely aware of the compromises they had to make as a consequence. They tried to distinguish between the two sides, tried to keep the art separate from commercial, money-earning work, but this separation was always combined with strain and

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<sup>69</sup> Both Rosenfeld and Frank studied at Yale University.

<sup>70</sup> An incidence of family relations illustrates that Rosenfeld and Stieglitz were of similar social background: Rosenfeld's maternal grandmother was the sister of Stieglitz's first wife's mother. Both were heirs of a brewery business in Brooklyn established by their father, Samuel Lieberman. Rosenfeld's grandfather and Stieglitz's father-in-law were set up with their own breweries, but both suffered losses during the Prohibition and Depression, influencing both Stieglitz's and Rosenfeld's projects. See: Hugh Potter, *False Dawn: Paul Rosenfeld and Art in America, 1916-1946* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1980), 11-12.

<sup>71</sup> Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 29.

financial hardship.<sup>72</sup> Although Stieglitz replied to the younger men's complaints that he understood and shared their situation, from the comfort of his summer residence at Lake George these assurances appear somewhat thin. The financial cushion that was necessary for an art and lifestyle governed by aestheticism, as was Stieglitz's, became rarer as the twentieth century progressed.

Both Rosenfeld and Frank frequently complained to Stieglitz about the magazines they were involved with, among them the *Dial* and the *New Republic*. Although these journals offered the writers an outlet for their thought as well as a source of income, the professional constraints of word limits, deadlines and the necessity of editorial approval often made publication all but a chore, and one that stood in the way of full development of their creativity, for which complete artistic freedom was required.<sup>73</sup> The life of an artist, for Rosenfeld, was incompatible with the pursuit of material comfort: "I am beginning vaguely to perceive that one either lives in the imagination or not at all, and the problem will always remain for me, either I get my life out of my work, or loose [sic] it."<sup>74</sup> He described his feelings of forlornness and isolation, and complained that his psychological criticism was not understood. Frank, too, was weary of having to write for money, which crushed the cultivation of the spirit: "All the world seems to conspire enthusiastically to jockey me into analysis [hack writing], into discussion, into a journalism however glorified – and away from the one true purpose of my life, which is creation."<sup>75</sup> For Frank, this was America's fault. It was typical for these "Young Americans" – including Frank and Rosenberg but also van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne and Lewis Mumford – to criticise the deficiencies of the capitalist present on a personal level. They accused modernity of failing to give meaning to their individual lives.<sup>76</sup> Frank was a novelist of some note and considered this the main field of his aspiration. His complaint about the conditions of artistic writing has to be understood in this context.

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<sup>72</sup> The tension between independence and economic pressure is the typical condition of modern artists since Romanticism; see Raymond Williams, "The Romantic Artist," *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), 30-48.

<sup>73</sup> Rosenfeld on the *New Republic*: Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 3 July 1933, YCAL. By 12 July the relationship was better again. But on 27 Sept 1934 Rosenfeld declared that he was definitely disappointed in the *New Republic*, in the staff's lack of gratitude to someone like himself who worked hard for the sake of the work itself.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 23 Aug 1921, YCAL.

<sup>75</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 14 June 1925, YCAL.

<sup>76</sup> Blake, *Beloved Community*, 3-4.

The writers knew that Stieglitz was not subject to the same pressures. Rosenfeld wrote in August 1918, whilst he was working temporarily in an insurance department as part of his army service:

Often, I think of you and all the men around you and the lovely things you are doing. I know that you are spending your time in the pursuit of the only thing that matters, and that I would give much to be able to do the same. And yet, I think of you without envy and bitterness, which I might have done otherwise. [...] I have lived, even if it is only a little, and had as many of my wants satisfied. I need not say that no small part of it is due to you.<sup>77</sup>

It is not jealousy (also not of the visual artists whom Stieglitz supported) that speaks through these lines, but admiration. For Rosenfeld, Stieglitz was pure. He was living the life that he himself longed to live, but which was out of his reach due to the course the world had taken. Thus, to Rosenfeld Stieglitz was a remnant of the past, a representative of an earlier type. As such, he could deliver consolation: “the bigger you really are – the more lonely you will feel as the years go by.”<sup>78</sup> The admiration the younger generation fostered for the older man was itself an example of romantic anti-capitalist nostalgia. But this nexus also worked the other way around: younger men such as Rosenfeld and Frank represented for Stieglitz the present and his link to it. Despite Stieglitz’s retreat after the war he was still eager to play a role as an arbiter of cultural affairs; his association with these younger writers lent credibility to that effort.

Frank and Rosenfeld shared Stieglitz’s escapist attitude to the present. Both travelled to Europe in search of a more inspired and idealist life but realised that there, too, capitalist relations penetrated the cultural sphere. As a consequence, they grasped that inspiration came not from a place, but only “out of oneself.”<sup>79</sup> The escape from the present is into the self. The imagination was the only real space for these idealists. It was possible to make this aspect of life experience real through works of art,

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<sup>77</sup> Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 12 Aug 1918, YCAL.

<sup>78</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 5 November 1928, YCAL. Stieglitz replied to Frank’s declaration of loneliness in his search for the spirit. Stieglitz goes on: “But aloneness - loneliness - go with a certain type of struggle.” Also interesting in this letter is that Stieglitz confesses that he does not listen to radio news, does not even plan to do so on the next day, which is election day. He only reads the *Daily* (?) and the *New Republic*, no other newspapers.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 13 June 1921, YCAL.

created in parallel to external reality.<sup>80</sup> Their ideal place was not distant in geography or chronology; it was a different sphere in the present. As with Stieglitz's clouds, the counterpart to defective reality had to be found in an immaterial, altogether different category. In this context, Stieglitz and his acolytes spoke about real places as "unrealities" (Rosenfeld's term), and in turn the real reality was thought to exist between people, whose relationships created places more real than reality itself.<sup>81</sup> The positive materiality of actual places such as Lake George could be transcended. Relationships, not material but ideal, charged real places with their energy and their spirit. By inviting his friends regularly to his holiday residence, Stieglitz built something of an artists' colony, an endeavour reminiscent of his earlier attempt at artistic self-organisation in the form of a Secession. Travelling abroad was not considered necessary anymore. The artists attempted to build their own paradise in the here and now, through relationships of kindred spirits. Stieglitz even related this to a divine feeling; he experienced nature as infused with god, in a synaesthetic experience, when writing about a walk he took with a group of friends:

It was beautiful. Too alive. Too religious. It was as if God were truly amidst us – a Human Being. [...] The moon came over the hills seen through the trees – a peculiar sensation not quite knowing where one was – [...] it was all so beautiful that I couldn't believe, that the moon was really the moon – the night not a dream – the people near me not my imaginings – + that I was anybody or anything or was anywhere – Music – why isn't a fellow a composer + poet + sculptor, painter.<sup>82</sup>

Lake George, the relationships with people that bloomed there and the spirituality it fostered substituted for the past community of 291. And nature played a major role in this:

It contains – whatever it may be' [...] 'It's like "291" at its livest [sic] carried into life itself with nature as a witness – instead of art – Nature the contactor instead of Pictures – And no thesis – no academic discussions – no intellectualization – good food – much laughter – nothing rigid – a bursting intensity.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 23 Aug 1921, YCAL.

<sup>81</sup> Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 10 Sept 1921, YCAL.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 14 Oct 1924, YCAL.

<sup>83</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Rosenfeld, 27 Oct 1924, YCAL.

In the early twentieth century, an ecological discourse, the consciousness that humans and industrialisation destroy the precarious natural balance of the planet Earth, which they do not own, started to take hold. Writings in this vein, such as Ludwig Klages's collection of essays written in the teens, *Mensch und Erde*, clearly were the fruit of romantic anti-capitalist thinking.<sup>84</sup>

Another theme in Stieglitz's correspondence with Frank and Rosenfeld is a new infatuation with America. This may be considered an instance of that affirmative relationship with the present commonly attributed to modernism. The younger writers integrated Stieglitz into this discourse, made him the ideal type of an American artist in their essays and reviews, in *Port of New York*, and *America and Alfred Stieglitz*. This has to be seen in relation to a post-war anti-European sentiment and a new American self-confidence, a disappointment with European modernism and a romantic anti-capitalism that did not cut clear lines between past and present, there and here. Thus Rosenfeld in Paris enjoyed the beauty of the past, but recognised that New York offered more inspiration for the present.<sup>85</sup> When in Europe, Frank sensed that that continent was "inevitably past its climax," the "light goes out in colors marvelously intricate and fair of gleaming," "[A]nd all America rises as a superb and tragic promise."<sup>86</sup> In Madrid, Frank realised that "all my awareness for European power & spirit seems merely to fortify my faith in the unique worthwhileness of our people, in their colossal role in the actual human drama."<sup>87</sup> The positive reception of his work in Spain he read as a "definitive expression of America's recent present and of America's spiritual, anti-materialistic promise."<sup>88</sup>

Stieglitz shared these emotions. He began to stress the Americanness of his art and that of his circle as never before. In this context, his clouds should be seen as examples of his interest in American landscape, inspired by the writings of Rosenfeld, Frank et al., but also by the art of Dove, Hartley, Marin and O'Keeffe, who all used landscape motifs as a symbol of Americanness – American soil as a

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<sup>84</sup> Ludwig Klages, *Mensch und Erde: Fünf Abhandlungen* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1927). Diederichs was probably the key publisher of romantic anti-capitalist literature in Germany in the early twentieth century.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Rosenfeld to Alfred Stieglitz, 13 June 1921, YCAL

<sup>86</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 29 Sept, YCAL.

<sup>87</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 15 July 1921, YCAL.

<sup>88</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 15 July 1921, YCAL.

geography that imprints itself on the psyche. Stieglitz shared in the discourse of American youth, energy and a certain kind of cultural rhetoric that asserted that the American environment could itself invigorate art and give it qualities that were a counterweight to the decadent products of a Europe in decline. Yet his assertions of his faith in and love for America always have a shallow flavour. He vigorously stated: “I know the fascination of Europe – but the fight here is the one that is mine.”<sup>89</sup> But despite this, and despite the fact that he never travelled outside America after the war, in carefully selected moments he made no secret that his former German sympathies had not vanished altogether. His on-going correspondence with the Vienna-based photographer Heinrich Kühn, an old friend from pre-Photo-Secession days, is revealing in this context.

Frank was delighted by the translation of his book *The Dark Mother* into German and about the publication of an article in the German journal *Der neue Merkur* in Munich. This reminded him of the “great spiritual health” of that country.<sup>90</sup> Hearing the news, Stieglitz reminded Frank of his own German connections:

You know I started my real work in Germany – Berlin & Munich. – And that I have a “soft” spot for both Berlin & Munich. – Virginal memories. Not at all sentimental. Then too Germany does mean something very definite to me. – And its intelligent appreciation of work has a real value. –<sup>91</sup>

Frank definitely perceived Stieglitz in this German-spiritual context, enthusing over the public showing of Stieglitz’s portrait of him, he wrote in German: “Endlich, endlich Du vollkommener Geist!”<sup>92</sup> The interest that Frank’s books, including *Our America*, triggered in Germany is testimony that even after the war members of the Stieglitz circle tried to maintain cultural relationships between the United States and Germany.

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<sup>89</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 1 July 1921, YCAL.

<sup>90</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 31 Jan 1921; Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 29 Jul 1921, YCAL.

<sup>91</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 18 Aug 1921, YCAL.

<sup>92</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 16 Jan 1921, YCAL (“Finally, finally, you perfect spirit!”).

Stieglitz's enduring rootedness in German culture is also revealed in his recurrent references to his favourite author, Goethe.<sup>93</sup> Frank's lack of appreciation of Goethe by Frank even caused Stieglitz to doubt their mutual bond.<sup>94</sup> But Frank did value Goethe for his scholarly completeness (Frank was interested in higher mathematics and even thought about going back to university to study the subject) and for the role Goethe played in German culture writ large. Frank hoped to have a similar effect on the social life of America.<sup>95</sup> Stieglitz's admiration for Goethe has to be seen in the larger context of the role that the poet played as a monument for German culture. A man of letters who also won power in the realm of politics is an obvious role model for a nation that prided itself as a land of thinkers and poets, which was resisting the subordination of culture to politics.<sup>96</sup> What Goethe particularly stood for, and what impressed Stieglitz so much, I believe, was that Goethe was a writer first and a politician second: only because of his literary successes was he called to Weimar in the role of a writer and statesman.

More up to date, Stieglitz and his friends frequently discussed Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, which was published in German in two volumes in 1918 and 1923 and appeared in an abridged English translation as *The Decline of the West* in 1926. The book with its popular presentation and tone was marked by a nationalist and proto-fascist desperation; it glorified ill-founded Germanic values and as such is an example of romantic anti-capitalism in its most retrograde aspect. Frank confessed that the book "helped to crystallize my own Weltanschauung."<sup>97</sup> He saw deficiencies in Spengler's writing skills, but applauded his efforts to serve the state with his art, like Goethe – longing for a time when the work of intellectuals and artists still mattered for a country's fate. Stieglitz read the German edition soon after publication, but decided that in its populist approach it was not for him, although

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<sup>93</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 25 Aug 1925: re-reading *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, never tired of Goethe, like the sky; Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 15 July 1926, reading Goethe; Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 28 Aug 1928, believes today is Goethe's birthday. YCAL.

<sup>94</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 27 May 1935, YCAL. Stieglitz bought a volume of Goethe's writings to send to Frank, but it was never the same, since "[Y]ou say he has never meant much to you & to me he has been a definite integral part of my life."

<sup>95</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 11 Aug 1926, YCAL.

<sup>96</sup> While this attitude was not unique to Germany, but characteristic for the bourgeoisie in the 19th and 20th centuries all over Europe, it played a more central role in Germany than in other countries. However, the veneration of culture and idealism over politics was not a German "*Sonderweg*" that inevitably led to Nazism. Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5-6.

<sup>97</sup> Waldo Frank to Alfred Stieglitz, 11 Aug 1926, YCAL.

“it’s a book worth while”<sup>98</sup> and “as a starter to the ‘many’ even if the book is full of gross blunders – & endless repetitions which may be necessary.”<sup>99</sup> This suggests that he did not disagree with the argument as such, but merely felt himself to be above the need for Spengler’s simplifying approach and pandering to the masses. Stieglitz also admired the hugely popular *Travel Diary of a Philosopher* by Hermann Keyserling,<sup>100</sup> another author who took a non-scholarly course for his critique of modern civilisation, using his own experience and stereotypes for his West-to-East travel diary to propound an elitist and reactionary politics.<sup>101</sup>

The new fascination with America and the persistence of a German ideal in Stieglitz’s thinking have to be seen as corollaries; both are expressions of romantic anti-capitalism. Before the war, looking to a German tradition of idealism, of the dichotomy of culture versus civilisation, to the nation of “poets and thinkers,” served as an antidote to the blatant commercialism of the United States. That Germany too was rapidly industrialising and that capitalist structures quickly took hold there at that time was largely ignored by the Stieglitz circle; as was German militarism and the fact that in the aftermath of the Great War Germany was under the dominance of American capital. In a desperate attempt to adapt to modern circumstances, Germans tried to assimilate to a pragmatic and objective way of thinking that they thought was American.<sup>102</sup> However, when anti-German feelings marked the official opinion in the United States, the model of a better place, still rooted in pre-modern conventions, was no longer productive. New sources for projection of romantic anti-capitalist sentiments had to be found. The hope for spiritual and cultural renewal was as acute as ever among the American intelligentsia and in their search they turned to their own land, looking for a “usable past” again with a distorted and idealised concept of history and facts. American vigour was contrasted with European decadence. Intellectuals such as Brooks and Bourne, Rosenfeld and Frank hoped that deep immersion in their own national past would nourish “the intuitive values of the soul

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<sup>98</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 13 Aug 1926, YCAL.

<sup>99</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Waldo Frank, 9 Sept 1926, YCAL.

<sup>100</sup> Hermann Keyserling, *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, 2 vols., trans. J. Harold Price (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925).

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Heminway *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2013), 68-69; 219.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Berg, *Deutschland und Amerika: Über das deutsche Amerikabild der zwanziger Jahre* (Lübeck and Hamburg: Matthiesen, 1963), 83-144.



rather than the cold calculation of commerce.”<sup>103</sup> The fascination with America can be interpreted in line with the modernist romantic anti-capitalism of Stieglitz’s work of the twenties. It contains the same ambiguity about here and now and about the possibilities of escape, as is evident the cloud photographs.

The theoretical framework for this still came from Germany. It was just a version of the romantic anti-capitalist search for a *Weltanschauung*, as a unifying, shared consciousness that had been formulated by German philosophers and social thinkers around the turn of the century. Interestingly, German intellectuals themselves now became interested in American culture. As mentioned above, Frank’s writings enjoyed some success in Germany. Walt Whitman, arguably the most crucial figure for American romantic anti-capitalist intellectuals, was also newly discovered in Germany at that time.<sup>104</sup> Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Whitman was received in Germany from various ideological, methodological and aesthetic perspectives as a truly democratic, human and ethical poet, who managed to find a new lyrical form for the representation of modern man, even a substitute for religion. Germans found “pathos” in Whitman, a search for a totality in human life: *Weltanschauung*.<sup>105</sup> During and especially after the war, at the time of the 1918 revolution, Whitman served as a model for reinvigoration; he gave hope for a new community based on real democracy that would equally value individuality. In Germany, conservatives, social democrats, anarchists and other radicals (Gustav Landauer translated some works), as well as German nationalists all instrumentalised Whitman for their own beliefs, united only by a romantic dissatisfaction with present conditions. They all looked to the American poet in the hope of finding either a return to old certainties, mostly expressed in a rootedness in nature, or for new ideas of equality and personal fulfilment in spirituality, but also a new lyrical form. This was possible because of Whitman’s own romantic anti-capitalism, but also because

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<sup>103</sup> Blake, *Beloved Community*, 72.

<sup>104</sup> For an overview of translations of Whitman’s works into German and reception, see Walter Grünzweig, *Constructing the German Walt Whitman* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995) or Monika Schaper, *Walt Whitmans “Leaves of Grass” in deutschen Übersetzungen: Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Lang, 1976). There is also Harry Low-Robertson, *Walt Whitman in Deutschland*, Giessener Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie, ed. O. Behagel, A. Götze and K. Viëtor, XLII (Giessen: Verlag von Münchowsche Universitäts-Druckerei Otto Kindt, 1935), which is informative but problematic because of the national-socialist orientation of its author.

<sup>105</sup> Grünzweig, *Constructing the German Walt Whitman*, 6.

of his essential modernity.<sup>106</sup> This example shows not only that German and American intellectuals shared similar anxieties and that in both countries nationalism was seen as an answer, but also that by the end of the First World War, the effects of capitalism had reached all of the Western world and threatened established cultural norms.

## Utopia

It was a particular kind of romantic anti-capitalism – beyond the types defined according to political persuasion by Löwy and Sayre – that Stieglitz expressed in his clouds. It contained a utopian principle. It is when aestheticism constitutes a dominant reference point for Stieglitz, as it did during the first years of publication of *Camera Work*, and again in the twenties, that the utopian element (which is always present in romanticism) in its literal meaning as a non-existent good place became more pertinent. Especially after the First World War, as the revolutionary wave subsided and capitalist “normalcy” consolidated, an escapist element seemed the only viable option for romantic anti-capitalists. With regard to Stieglitz, it is important to understand utopia as a serious force, not to dismiss it either as categorically impossible or concomitant of totalitarianism.<sup>107</sup> Matthew Beaumont identifies utopia “as occupying a shifting, often contradictory space between the utopian and the ideological, between fantasy and reality,” between “impossibility and practicability.”<sup>108</sup> It is not that the solutions that utopia offers to the problems of the present are unrealisable per se, but that under the given historical circumstances, they are not practicable at that particular time. The definition of utopias is subject to ideological conditions. But this does not discredit the category of utopia, as its

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<sup>106</sup> Grünzweig, *Constructing the German Walt Whitman*, 48-49.

<sup>107</sup> According to Matthew Beaumont, the assumption now prevails that “if utopia remains utopian, in the dismissive colloquial sense of the term, it is perfectly acceptable; and that if it acquires an ideological force, and can no longer be dismissed as hopelessly unrealistic, because it is deemed to have encroached on politics, it is unacceptable.” There were people on the left and the right who during the second half of the twentieth century conflated all forms of utopianism with totalitarianism and hence dismissed utopian thought. Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia*, 2.

<sup>108</sup> Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia*, 2.

specificity lies precisely in that non-reality.<sup>109</sup> Its interstitial status is not utopia's handicap, but its force.

At the time when Stieglitz made the *Equivalents*, the German philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote about utopia in *Geist der Utopie*,<sup>110</sup> which reeks of his deeply felt, romantic anti-capitalist disappointment in present civilisation: neither proletariat, nor youth, nor religion, nor romanticism could bring redemption. The only hope for justice Bloch found lay in Marxian socialism.<sup>111</sup> But with its ground for reality removed, it was difficult to put into practice, or even to be seen in a practicable context. A socialist world, Bloch imagined, would be better in social and economic terms as well as being an ideally, intellectually and spiritually fuller one. Under the present conditions, turning inwards remains the only way out. Real thought has to be preserved in that domain, in art and music, "the world of the soul" that then has a real effect on the "*external, cosmical* function of utopia."<sup>112</sup>

Throughout the book, Bloch manages to refrain from defining utopia, but it is clear that art plays an important role, an art whose central topos is expression.<sup>113</sup> Bloch speaks against the formalism that dominated the art theory of his time, but, like Lukács in *Soul and Form*, he acknowledges form as a crucial element to make the idea or expression present.<sup>114</sup> Art is not itself utopia, but can express or connect to

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<sup>109</sup> Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* first appeared in 1918 and then again in a new version in 1923. The main difference between the editions is that whilst in 1918 Bloch still believed in the possibility of restitution, this faith vanished in 1923. The 1918 edition is more pronouncedly romantic anti-capitalist in character and hence serves my point better. The English translation follows the 1923 version, which is less pertinent to my argument, hence I am quoting in the original German: Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>111</sup> Löwy and Sayre see this as a fruitful combination of a reactionary and melancholic *Kulturpessimismus*, the sober and resigned Weberian analysis of modernity as instrumental rationality, and an optimistic revolutionary perspective. Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 172.

<sup>112</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, Bearbeitete Neuauflage der zweiten Fassung von 1923 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964), 13 [emphasis in the original]. The Foreword is longer in the 1923 edition. Bloch very sensitively understood the character of the neo-romanticism that was so popular with the intellectuals of his day, his cultural pessimist writing at times has an ironic tone and thus he cannot be thrown in the same pot, despite the parallels in his thinking.

<sup>113</sup> Löwy and Sayre find the thoughts on art "an excessively long digression about the philosophy of music," Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 173.

<sup>114</sup> "Gewiss, was nicht geformt ist, ist nicht da." Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (Munich and Leipzig: von Duncker & Humblot, 1918), 43. Bloch and Lukács met and became friends when they both studied with Simmel in Berlin, Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 171.

utopia and provide a real place for the soul.<sup>115</sup> The prime art form with this function is music. Music inhabits a special and separate sphere, as it is not subject to the *Zeitgeist* like literature or the visual arts – it is more purely soul.<sup>116</sup> This is of special importance and resonance in modernity, this “godless epoch without transcendence”, where the soul has a difficult standing. Bloch’s belief in the redemptive possibility of the art is coupled with his modernist persuasion: “*Der neue Ton ist an sich schon der bessere.*”<sup>117</sup> Only the new can truly mean something to humans at the time, although artistic production in Bloch’s view is not contingent on an epoch’s superficial objectivations. And no art form is as essentially modern as music. Not only is it less historically conditioned, it also offers the utmost possibility for the expressive individual. More than the other arts, music as such is more abstract, more anarchistic: it is *per se* utopic.<sup>118</sup> The modern visual arts are striving towards that quality and character. Music still embodies its original impetus, which was in endless singing (“*im endlosen vor sich Hinsingen*”) and in dance. This is where the nostalgic subject aims to return.<sup>119</sup> As for so many others at the time, Bloch’s interest in art was cognate with his antipathy towards the natural sciences. Art, together with philosophy, has to remedy what the sciences destroyed. It is about a definition of reality, which cannot be grasped with the empirical method that leads only to a succession of “dead presents,” without any organic shaping by the experiencing and utopic individual.<sup>120</sup>

For Bloch, Kant had brought suffering with his claim that reality cannot truly be known. At the same time, the philosopher had revealed that the collection of experience was not just the result of the accumulation of appearances, but in order to constitute a wholeness it needed to include more than can be objectively perceived. This frees us to hope. It shows us that as thinking and feeling subjects we can imagine the world of the future beyond that which we perceive in the present.<sup>121</sup> Bloch was an heir to such idealism.<sup>122</sup> His understanding of utopia points towards the

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<sup>115</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 47.

<sup>116</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 89.

<sup>117</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 92 (“The new tone as such is preferable”).

<sup>118</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 94-98.

<sup>119</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 99.

<sup>120</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 334.

<sup>121</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 273-4.

<sup>122</sup> Bloch posits idealism against the philosophers of his time, who, in their psychologism, he sees as just veiled natural scientists, deaf towards the metaphysical. Bloch explicitly mentions Simmel in this regard.

futility of rationalism alone, it assures the reality that can be created with ideas, for which art is a symbol.

At the centre of Bloch's theory is the individual who has not only the possibility, but the responsibility to act and to shape the world. It is people's task to bring to fulfilment their history: the past is not gone if its objectives had not been completed. We can wake it up again to invigorate the present: the promises of the past can be the future.<sup>123</sup> This is where utopia lies. It is, as Beaumont puts it, "the intrusion into the present of a future whose historical possibility has been suppressed by the ideological limits that shape the political imagination."<sup>124</sup> A similar concept of temporality defines the *Equivalents*: their visual mode and medium are of the present, the sky they depict in the absence of man-made objects could be of the past, but overall they convey an impression of eternity and, with the implied movement of clouds, also the eternal passage of time. Bloch's strongest conviction of his argument for an eternal and non-linear temporality is his belief in transmigration. It is also a confirmation of his idealism, as it stresses the immortality of spirit and the nullity of matter.

Bloch's utopian concept of temporality illuminates a possibility of a romantic anti-capitalist view: it is not a distinct epoch that has to inspire romantic nostalgia, as the Middle Ages did for Ruskin, Morris and others. Bloch's notion of temporality is trans- or supra-temporal. It is not the capitalist present as such that we must exit, but the confines of time and history and society as such. A similar feeling underlies the *Equivalents*. Capitalism, in its fragmentation and oppositeness to totality, in such thinking is the starting point for a growing antipathy towards everything material. That Bloch was definitely motivated by anti-capitalism is testified by the last chapter of *Spirit of Utopia*, dedicated to Marx, whom Bloch reads in a decidedly idealist way. The basic problem of humankind is private property and the related conditions of labour and social inequality. Only once socialism has abolished private property can

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<sup>123</sup> "Was niemals vergehen konnte, muss zerschlagen werden, was niemals ganz zu sich kam, muss gelöst und das nie ganz Geschehene in neuen Atemzügen vollendet werden." Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 334-335. But Bloch also insists that, for reasons that are no less historical and material, the present is non-contemporaneous with itself because it contains intimations of post-capitalist relations - in the shape of participatory forms of democratic association for example.

<sup>124</sup> Beaumont, *The Spectre of Utopia*, 4.

the soul develop again.<sup>125</sup> In this context, Bloch mentions the sky: “Either one stays here and leaves the sky to the sparrows and angels, as capitalists and communists alike do, or one points, weakly, fleeing the world, incoherently, without any of the old fire, to the place where our final mundane final earthly work customarily means nothing.”<sup>126</sup> These are the options if one does not acknowledge the importance of the ideal. But they have to be accorded the force to change things. Stieglitz’s pictures of the sky thus symbolise that the sky should not be “left to the sparrows and angels,” but is the utopic space where humans can realise their ideas – which, however, for Stieglitz has nothing to do with building machines that allow humans to physically fly up in the sky.

The *Equivalents* are at the same time more optimistic (about utopia) and more pessimistic (about the actual world) than Stieglitz’s previous works. In the cloud photographs Stieglitz accepted the technology of the camera and the printing process in a new way, separating it from a worldly sphere of likeness to material appearances and attempting to dematerialise its outcomes. But at the same time he also introduced nature again, and he left the people behind. Photography thus offered a new route for escape. The turning away from the earth in this instance shows the same ambiguity that is as pronounced in modernism as it is in romantic anti-capitalism. Both are utopian ways of dealing with the frustration and fragmentation of the modern experience. But this conclusion only works with a revised definition of modernism, one that includes its ambiguous moments and acknowledges the place of aestheticism and Symbolism in its development. It also presupposes a revised definition of abstraction, going beyond self-referentiality to seek a way in which artworks seemingly about nothing can still be meaningful for the modern experience.

Part of this disposition towards retreat was also Stieglitz’s exhibition concept of the 1920s: the Intimate Gallery. It consisted of just one room Stieglitz rented within the Anderson Galleries in New York. 291 had been a hidden and an elitist affair, but at least for the people who belonged to the circle, it was supposed to be a place for open discussion and for new contacts with new art. The Intimate Gallery circle of people

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<sup>125</sup> The last chapter is titled “Karl Marx, der Tod und die Apokalypse” (“Karl Marx, Death and the Apocalypse”)

<sup>126</sup> “*Man bleibt entweder hier und überlässt nach dem ebenso kapitalistischen wie kommunistischen Wortlaut den Himmel den Engeln und den Spatzen oder weist unkräftig, weltflüchtig, zusammenhanglos, doch ohne alles alte Feuer hinüber, wo unsere irdisch finale Arbeit nichts mehr zu bedeuten gewohnt ist.*” Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 431.

was even smaller than that at 291, both in terms of artists who exhibited their work and of people who came to see it. The gallery leaflets contained the cryptic phrase that “[A]ll the not overtired will be welcome,”<sup>127</sup> or “[A]ll but Time-killers are welcome.”<sup>128</sup> Further, “[H]ours of silence” were announced – reminiscent of church services or occultist meetings.<sup>129</sup> The strong vision that Stieglitz had for this place – with the appearance of a corporate identity – was manifest in the consistent design of exhibition announcements and in the numbering of the single exhibitions. Each show thus functioned as one utterance of a larger statement that Stieglitz wanted to make. Even more than before, the strategies applied by Stieglitz allowed him to have utmost control over the showing and reception of the works of the now even smaller, and more clearly defined, group of artists he supported, which included Marin, O’Keeffe, Dove and Hartley. He would not let the works of art speak for themselves. As at 291, he was always present to talk to visitors, and each exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, sparse and minimalist in design, without pictures, but containing texts about the works on show. In the words of Kristina Wilson, “[I]n Stieglitz’s ideal view, visitors would have revelations that not only would assert their oneness with a spiritual universe but would more particularly yield to a sensation of oneness with the small universe that was the Intimate Gallery.”<sup>130</sup> This, as Wilson states, has its corollary in the *Equivalents*.

Bloch, despite his nostalgia, believed in the art of his time. Expressionism in particular fulfilled in his view the need for a spiritual counterpart to the impoverished modern reality: it used its medium in an agitational way, centred around artist’s own visions and their realisation. The form found is often abstract, yet only seemingly so, only in relation to the surface natural appearances of the represented object. Expressive abstraction is thus just another form of naturalism.<sup>131</sup> The question of how romantic nostalgia and modernist affirmation of the new go together is also of importance for Stieglitz’s photographs. As the *Equivalents* show, a modernist

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<sup>127</sup> For example announcement of “1<sup>st</sup> John Marin Exhibition” at Intimate Gallery, starting 7 Dec 1925, YCAL.

<sup>128</sup> For example announcement of “3<sup>rd</sup> exhibition, Fifty Recent Paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe,” 11 Feb-11 Mar 1926, YCAL.

<sup>129</sup> For example announcement of “7<sup>th</sup> Intimate Gallery exhibition: Gaston Lachaise,” 7 March-3 April 1927: “Hours of Silence: – Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 10-12 A.M.” YCAL.

<sup>130</sup> Kristina Wilson, “The Intimate Gallery and the ‘Equivalents’: Spirituality in the 1920s Work of Stieglitz,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (December 2003): 763.

<sup>131</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), 180.

aesthetic can convincingly convey a nostalgic outlook. Modernism is not a unified style concept, therefore, as a whole in its diversity, it engages with modernity in a dialectical manner. *Songs of the Sky* DD1 (fig. 141), for example, reduces the appearance of clouds to geometric shapes, like a Cubist painting, in clear black and white tones: a white square, a black circle, black framing devices. Similarly in *DD2* (fig. 142), the focus is on triangle in the centre of the composition, which only upon a second look reveals itself as entirely formed by clouds. The image appears as one flat wall of clouds, strongly vertical, all white and light grey. It required Stieglitz's skilful developing and printing to reveal this triangular composition so clearly. Still, what he wanted to show was that everything was there in nature, if only one knew how to look.<sup>132</sup> The hard edges and geometry might at first seem less ephemeral or metaphysical. But do these photographs not appear even more ephemeral or metaphysical because of their higher degree of abstraction of the real world? The photographs embody the structures of modernity, without relying on the tactic of resemblance. Stieglitz's clouds not only have in common with Cubism their focus on shapes and planes, but also their hermetic reference to external reality. Like Cubist paintings or collages, the clouds, as photographs, had internalised modernity rather than depicting it.

Stieglitz's pictures would have never been possible without the self-critical attitude underlying them, both in visual and ideological terms. Self-criticality, as is well known, is a characteristic of modernity. The paradox of simultaneous affirmation and negation of the present is inherent in modernism and it also defines romantic anti-capitalism's nature as a critique that draws its objectives from the past whilst itself being of the present. Both modernism and romantic anti-capitalism signal the acquisition of a new critical subjectivity, but on the basis of the previous experience of subjective fragmentation.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> He described this process in relation to *The Steerage*, which similarly reduces a scene of the real world to geometric shapes and which hence is said to have impressed Pablo Picasso. When de Zayas showed *The Steerage* to Picasso, the latter is supposed to have said: "This photographer is working in the same spirit as I am." See Alfred Stieglitz, "The Magazine 291 and The Steerage," in *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, ed. Richard Whelan, with Sarah Greenough (New York: Aperture, 2000), 217.

<sup>133</sup> Perry Anderson elaborates on Marx's phrase that "all that is solid melts into thin air" by defining modernity as the destruction of old certainties, the "immense clearing operation of cultural and customary debris" and the corollary of individual emancipation. But this also creates "a brutally alienated and atomized society, riven by callous economic exploitation



The *Equivalents* embody both aspects. They are unthinkable without the expansion of the possibilities for self-expression and imagination, yet they also reiterate the experience of disorientation by refusing to define a standpoint for the onlooker and the absence of conventional markers of pictorial depth. As the creations of an emancipated and critical modern individual, they are incapable of providing another person, let alone a group of people, with the orientation and means for identification much needed in a time of perceived disintegration. This may seem to contradict Stieglitz's own nostalgia, which is also part of the pictures, but as a completely individual affair. Gone are earlier attempts to form a community. But as an idealist and not a decadent nostalgic, who sought the to reverse the bleak state of contemporary affairs and believed in the power of art to achieve this,<sup>134</sup> Stieglitz was after the First World War still anchored in a turn-of-the-century sensibility, when the contradictoriness of the modern experience was still fertile.<sup>135</sup> Yet at the same time, the cloud pictures show that Stieglitz did not subscribe to the earlier Romantic view that machines had destroyed craftsmanship. He knew that such an argument would be meaningless in the twentieth century, despite all his nostalgia. Through the use of the photographic medium Stieglitz shows that modern innovation, even technology, can come up with the means to redeem itself. This makes the *Equivalents* (perhaps together with the latest skyscraper series) his most strikingly modernist pictures – precisely because of their romantic anti-capitalism.

In the *Equivalents* Stieglitz exploits the fact that clouds are changeable and dynamic, and lack a fixed form. By definition, clouds are matter, a coming together of different elements in various states of aggregation – ice, dust, water, air and steam. Yet this natural-scientific presentation stands in a precarious imbalance with the aesthetic unsteadiness of clouds. Their outer appearance, viewed from the distance of the earth, permits a contradictory conclusion about their real substance. I

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and cold social indifference, destructive of every cultural or political value whose potential it has itself brought into being.” Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” *New Left Review*, Series 1, No. 144 (March/April 1984): 98.

<sup>134</sup> For this distinction between decadents and idealists, see Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (2009), 91.

<sup>135</sup> This was the case with the Greenwich Village radicals as described in chapter 3, both their politics and culture. Marshall Berman distinguishes between three phases of modernity: Stieglitz's sensibility would belong to the second phase of modernity, a sense of living in two world simultaneously, when the old world was still in living memory. In the twentieth century, the idea of modernity loses much of its vividness, and people as a consequence either respond in wholesale affirmation or rejection. Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 16-17.

believe that this was Stieglitz's starting point. Photography always depends on the outward appearance of things. With clouds, Stieglitz had found a subject that looked as if it were immaterial, even if in actual fact it was not. Thus it served him to both create abstract photographs and to visually express his conviction that all matter can be transcended.

As a consequence, these pictures asserted that even a world dominated by the materialist worldview could be transcended. The way of looking at the world proposed by capitalism and its corollaries is just one out of many. Reality itself, like clouds, is constantly in flux, moving and it cannot be grasped from one viewpoint only. On the same ground Stieglitz could make a portrait using clouds rather than the likeness of someone's body. He showed that physical matter was not the only certainty. In this, he was an heir to the Romantics' point that access to truth is not as straightforward as the natural sciences claim. The Romantics rejected causality and attempted to replace the old, mechanistic science by a new and in their view, superior set of assumptions and methods.<sup>136</sup> Even if their own proposals to amend the shortcomings of science were nonsensical, such thought has value. It points in same direction as art, and also of anarchism's rejection of positivistic and materialist analysis and shows the rootedness of both in Romanticism: irrationalism has its value, imagination is important, without being able to think difference and change, real difference and change are not possible.

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<sup>136</sup> Hans Eichner, "The Rise of Modern Science and the Genesis of Romanticism," *PMLA*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (January 1982): 24.

## Conclusion

My claim has been to advance scholarship on the Stieglitz circle by extending the discourse on modernism and demonstrating within it the presence of a retrograde, nostalgic or romantic element. This is not identical with the theme of “primitivism” in modern art, which was only one symptom of the larger feeling of alienation and despair at the period and the consequent search for renewed authenticity based on the model of remote and past cultures and styles. I also promised to critically evaluate the definition of the Stieglitz circle as “the first American avant-garde,” to look at the group from an international perspective and to question the level of radicalism that is part of the rhetoric around modernism in general and around Stieglitz in particular. I have argued that the romantic anti-capitalist outlook, which I identified as Stieglitz’s ideology or *Weltanschauung*, motivated all his endeavours. It is this interpretative category that helps to answer the questions I have posed.

Stieglitz was dissatisfied with modern life, which he felt confronted him as an all-encompassing whole dominated by three factors identified by Max Weber as the markers of modernity: disenchantment of the world, quantification and instrumental reason. These realities collided with Stieglitz’s own mental predispositions. He felt that in order to be whole, modern life required the balance of the above factors with their opposite: culture. His activities as a photographer, a gallery owner, editor and supporter of artists constituted a positive romantic quest to achieve such a balance.

In his photographs, Stieglitz aestheticised the present in a way that remains on the imaginary level, whether, as in the early exemplars of his photographs of rural and urban labour, based on an aestheticisation of the real world, or on an abstracted level in the *Equivalents*. His various group activities – the Photo-Secession, the group of artists around 291 and his affiliations with artists and writers such as Frank and Rosenfeld after the war, but also the journals he edited and published and the galleries he established – constituted instances of the transformation of his environment on the level of the real according to his romantic views, whilst remaining in the bourgeois sphere. These measures could never replace the systematic structures of social reality; they constituted alternatives.

Stieglitz never actually abandoned the bourgeois, capitalist world, into which he was born, for a complete “other.” The closest he came to this was the period when he

spent most of his time at Lake George, and also when during the last years of his life, he lived high up in a skyscraper. Both these locations were notably available to him only through class privilege. Nor did he attempt to transform the real world according to his ideals, which is not commonly the goal or task of romantic anti-capitalists, but certainly that of real political radicals, such as Emma Goldman who, as we have seen, was motivated by elements of the romantic *Weltanschauung* too. The wish to transform the real world according to one's wishes, and with one's own specific means, was not limited to the social and political spheres, but was also attempted in the world of art at Stieglitz's time by the avant-garde.

### **The Avant-Garde**

According to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*, the meaning of individual works of art is determined in equal measure by their content and by the institution of art, defined as "the productive and distributive apparatus" also including "the ideas about art that prevail at a given time."<sup>1</sup> In modernity, art's meaning evolves around the prevailing idea that art is autonomous. Art has achieved this status as a result of its development in bourgeois society, whose basic ideology of fair exchange left no place for art in life itself: in daily social life and the economic and political spheres (*Lebenspraxis*). While earlier art was embedded in life through ritual, art in bourgeois modernity was pushed to the margins as an apparently functionless remnant of a previous state. However, as various aesthetic theorists from Schiller to Marcuse asserted (on whose work Bürger builds), art thereby acquires the function of a vessel for all those qualities that have no room in bourgeois society but which it nevertheless needs to maintain for at least a seeming totality. As part of this development, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, the balance of form and content in works of art was increasingly weighted towards the former and the formal aspect became to constitute "the aesthetic in the narrow sense."<sup>2</sup>

This development reached its conclusion in aestheticism, when the *l'art pour l'art* doctrine declared a work's form for its content. At this stage, the institutional frame and the content of individual works coincided. With this culmination of art's

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 19.

differentiation as a separate realm, as the “crystallization of a distinctive sphere of experience, i.e., the aesthetic,” the other side of this process became clear too: art’s social ineffectiveness.<sup>3</sup> But the aestheticists did not formulate this development in negative terms, but rather presented as an emancipation. With art’s detachment from the praxis of life and the corresponding lack of social impact, the conditions were ripe for the social subsystem of art to enter the stage of self-criticism. Its realisation was the achievement of the historical avant-garde movements.

No longer content with the separation of art and life (and with art’s lack of effect), avant-garde artists aimed at a negation of the separation, a goal that they intended to achieve through the sublation of art in life: the disappearance of art as we know it in life, its preservation in a new state. The historical avant-garde movements launched an attack on the condition of art in bourgeois society. They negated not a previous style, but the institution of art itself as one detached from the life praxis. The sublation of art in life would not happen in the content of single works, which would then be meaningful again, but it extended to the institution of art, its function in society.<sup>4</sup> Stieglitz’s *Equivalents* illustrate this aspect, or rather, the moment just before this recognition. They are unthinkable without the expansion of the possibilities for self-expression and imagination, yet they also reiterate the experience of disorientation in their refusal to define a standpoint for the onlooker and the absence of conventional markers of pictorial depth. As the creations of one critical modern individual subject, they are incapable of providing another person, let alone a group of people, with the guide to orientation and means for identification much needed in a time of perceived disintegration.

Modern art has been defined as a destruction of the category of the artwork. Bürger questions this. He claims that the avant-gardes did not destroy the category of the work, but merely reacted against a particular historical occurrence or form of that category: that of the “organic work of art.” An organic work of art is symbolic; it takes as its measure the reality of the world we live in, for which it symbolically stands. The organic work of art unconditionally proclaims its unity, both in terms of its form and content and in terms of the relation of its parts to the whole. The avant-garde movements reacted against the organic conception of the work of art, and this,

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<sup>3</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49.

in turn, was part of their protest against an institution of art that propagated this type of artwork as the only relevant one.<sup>5</sup>

To the organic conception of the work of art the avant-garde opposed that of the nonorganic, or allegoric work of art.<sup>6</sup> As an allegory, the work is evidently a fragment, without the appearance of totality. Disparate fragments of reality, as such meaningless, are put together in order to be given new meaning in a new type of unity as a work of art.<sup>7</sup> However, the artwork's appearance of unity never obliterates the essential character of its fragmentation. A precondition for such works of art was the free disposability of the means of art (*Kunstmittel*), another stage that was reached with the historical avant-gardes.

Stieglitz's photographs are organic works of art. Despite the relative novelty of medium (at least in terms of fine art) and despite the often contemporary subject matter, these works do not reveal the fragmentation of the present. Rather, they oppose their own unity – achieved not least through the black-and-white colour spectrum of photography – against a world that has lost this quality. They fulfil Schiller's ideal that artworks serve as repositories for humanity. This motivation is straightforward when Stieglitz photographed remnants of rural labour and community in the last years of the nineteenth century, but it also underlies his various photographic engagements with the cityscape of New York. Even his choice of clouds as subject matter was not due to the possibility for abstraction this subject gave him; rather, it was the sky as such that fascinated Stieglitz. The photographs of the sky act as symbols – not completely removed from reality – for the world that is, but in a better state. With the elements of reality not purified of every remnant meaning as in avant-garde works, Stieglitz's photographs, by still leaving the world whole, are the symbol of a totality that he still thought possible in the existing world, even if through the reinstating of a past state. Works of art both detached from and part of the real world would bring this earlier stage around again. Stieglitz did not arrive at the conclusion, as the avant-gardists had, that only fragmentation could sublate fragmentation. He still believed that reality could be formed.

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<sup>5</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Chapter 4.1 "On the Problem of the Category of 'Work,'" 55-59.

<sup>6</sup> For this, Bürger looks to Walter Benjamin's remarks on allegory (despite the fact that Benjamin had constructed this for Baroque literature), see Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 69-70.

According to Bürger, the avant-garde aimed at the destruction of the institution of art. As if taking the term literally (which, as we have seen, is not Bürger's understanding), Stieglitz attempted to build his own institutions, in the form of the Photo-Secession and his several galleries. But unlike the avant-garde movements, Stieglitz did not destroy the established institution; he simply expanded it. He was in correspondence with museums, libraries and publishers throughout his career. He did not limit his manoeuvres to American institutions, but also contacted European cultural functionaries, particularly in Germany. This reveals his continued reverence for Central European culture and is proof of his determination to establish his renown.

Throughout his lifetime, Stieglitz made preparations for his legacy. He announced his intention to give his collection to an important institution and also kept an eye on what he had already placed there, that it was handled according to his parameters.<sup>8</sup> Apart from the Albright Gallery in Buffalo, the first placement of a part of his collection in a national American institution was a compilation of twenty-six pictorialist photographs that he sold to the National Museum of American History in Washington.<sup>9</sup> The selection contained four of his own prints – *The Terminal*, *The Hand of Man*, *A Wet Day on the Boulevard, Paris*, and *New York Central Yards, Winter* (figs. 1, 14, 143 and 144) – as well as a portrait of himself by Frank Eugene (fig. 145). In 1924, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts received another group of works. But the target of his main attention had always been the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Precisely because of the Metropolitan's conservatism, its acceptance of photographic and modern art meant the ultimate affirmation of his efforts to Stieglitz.<sup>10</sup> Yet hard as he tried, he did not succeed in dictating the terms under which photography entered the art museum quite as much as, for example, Jay Bochner believes.<sup>11</sup>

Attempts in 1902 to persuade director General Luigi Palma di Cesnola to accept a collection of photographs and hang it alongside other art failed. Six years after a

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<sup>8</sup> For example when the New York Public Library kept a set of *Camera Work* in the department for photography instead of that of art. Alfred Stieglitz to New York Public Library, 1913, YCAL.

<sup>9</sup> See: Carolyn Ureña, "The Alfred Stieglitz Collection at the National History Museum of American History," *History of Photography*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2011): 388-393.

<sup>10</sup> For the history of the Stieglitz collection at the Metropolitan Museum see Malcolm Daniel, "Photography at the Metropolitan: William M. Ivins and A. Hyatt Mayor," *History of Photography* (Summer 1997): 110-116.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Secession* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2005), 27-50.

photography department was finally established in 1922, Stieglitz placed twenty-two of his own works at the Metropolitan. Throughout the process, Stieglitz underlined both the non-marketability of his work and the prints' status of unique works of art, despite their mechanical reproducibility. One year after a further, large donation in 1933, Stieglitz saw the first special exhibition at the Metropolitan dedicated to his work and collection. But when O'Keeffe offered the bulk of Stieglitz's own photographs to the Metropolitan after his death in 1946, the museum was unwilling to fulfil her and Stieglitz's demand to keep the size of original mounts and mats. She gave the collection, to become known as the "key set," to the National Gallery in Washington instead.

When the avant-gardes confronted the double-edged sword of artistic autonomy and social inefficiency, the object of their attack was aestheticism and its proclamation that functionlessness itself was the function of art. But according to Bürger, they continued aestheticism too: the life they envisaged as the result of art's sublation with life had less to do with real life as it existed than with the life in art as promoted by aestheticists. This amounts to a one-sided dialectic: life is built out of art and not art out of life. That the separation was thus always maintained is further clarified by the fact that the rationale of Bürger's claim that the avant-gardes were effective depends on their specificity as a historic episode and under the condition of their eventual failure. If the project to merge art and life was doomed from the start, the question of its particular strategies requires no further attention. This perspective was the dominant theme in the critique of Bürger's book.<sup>12</sup> It can be identified as a consequence of Bürger's Paris-centred vision.

If one takes into consideration movements that are not on Bürger's list but may count as avant-garde due to their combination of activism in relation to art and life –

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<sup>12</sup> The critique in the English language focused on Bürger's remarks on a neo-avant-garde, see Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996), 10-20; Benjamin Buchloh, "Theorizing the Avant-Garde," *Art in America*, Vol. 72, No. 19 (November 1984). Bürger replied in the English translation of his book: "Preliminary Remarks," Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, xlviii and more recently, Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of 'Theory of the Avant-Garde,'" *New Literary Review*, Vol. 41, No. 4, What is an Avant-Garde? (Autumn 2010): 695-715. The German reception, at least as grouped in W. Martin Lüdke (ed.), *Theorie der Avantgarde: Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976) more thoroughly assesses and criticises Bürger's methodological strategies, in particular the way in which he combines his claims of a critical theory, a materialist aesthetics and their framework of a progressive politics.



Futurism, De Stijl, Expressionism – then another aspect of avant-gardism comes into view. The aestheticist notion of separation and the formalist one of a self-consciousness of the medium are less pronounced in Expressionism, De Stijl and most of all in Italian Futurism. F.T. Marinetti, Futurism's leader and principal theorist, equally found his sources in the cultural-philosophical field as in that of politics and economic theory and he conjoined his intellectual and artistic subversion (in terms of the institution of art and the content of his works) with his activism in the streets.<sup>13</sup> Art and politics were inseparable, particularly in the field of performance and theatre, where political and artistic agitation merged and produced new forms for both.<sup>14</sup> Futurism or German Expressionism<sup>15</sup> stand as examples of avant-gardes that merged political and artistic radical action in a way that did not leave much room for questions of artistic autonomy in the act of artistic self-critique that is so important for Bürger's theory; instead, their proponents tried out activism in this life, the real life of politics and social action.

What distinguishes Stieglitz from the avant-garde, more clearly than Bürger's theory with its own distaste for real life can, is his reluctance to accept real life as it was and to take action there. As a romantic anti-capitalist, Stieglitz rejected capitalist modernity and its alienating effects upon the soul. The historical avant-gardes, as described by Bürger, had a similar goal. Bürger's concept, concerned with how art can become meaningful again for life, thus also has romantic traits, as Burkhardt Lindner has recognised. Lindner points out that Bürger fails to analyse the strategies with which his avant-garde movements aimed at the sublation of art.<sup>16</sup> Surrealism, for example, emerged in a place without the perspective of actual social change, and thus its revolutionary discourse essentially remained within the framework of the bohemian and romantic outlook of an earlier time. Its element of destruction was limited to liberation of the unconscious on a psychoanalytic model.<sup>17</sup> Löwy has also

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<sup>13</sup> Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Emma Goldman too regarded the theatre as the main stage where art could influence politics: Emma Goldman, "The Drama: A Powerful Disseminator of Radical Thought," in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, with an introduction by Richard Drinnon (New York: Dover, 1969), 241-271.

<sup>15</sup> Seth Taylor, *Left-Wing Nietzscheans: The Politics of German Expressionism 1910-1920* (Berlin and New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Burkhardt Lindner, "Aufhebung der Kunst in Lebenspraxis? Über die Aktualität der Auseinandersetzung mit den historischen Avantgardebewegungen," Lüdke, W. Martin (ed.), *Theorie der Avantgarde: Antworten* (1976), 72-104.

<sup>17</sup> Lindner, "Aufhebung der Kunst in Lebenspraxis," 80.

noticed the proximity of Surrealism to romanticism.<sup>18</sup> Romantic anti-capitalism not only permeated aestheticism, but also the concept of the avant-garde as outlined by Bürger. Thus it is less aestheticism, as Bürger suggests, than a romantic rejection of capitalist reality that unites all the avant-garde movements. The consequence is not that the Stieglitz circle was an avant-garde movement, nor that Bürger's theory is not useful, but that such a conclusion reinforces the claim of the on-going importance of the romantic theme from its late eighteenth-century origins all the way through modernity.

### **Modernism and Romanticism**

If the avant-garde rejected more than a previous style, the modernist movements restricted themselves to just that. This designation implies, according to Perry Anderson, its powerlessness as a social movement – and its contentedness with that fact. For Anderson, modernism is an empty cultural category, which has no “describable object in its own right at all: it is completely lacking in positive content.”<sup>19</sup> It is only a label uniting a wide variety of very diverse – indeed incompatible – aesthetic practices. This is why revolution, and the genuine socialist culture following upon it, would, in Anderson's view, end modernism. I take modernism to mean more than just formal specialisation. I also do not think it is summed up by an attitude towards the present or the future that is particularly positive and unambiguous. Such a qualification is not crucial for the identification of Stieglitz's photographs as modernist, as in their avoidance of imitation of other arts most of them conform to the standards of formal purification of the medium and also to an affirmative relationship with the present if from such a perspective the latter is a corollary of the former. But the qualification is necessary if the photographic production is considered part and parcel of the wider network of his activities: in short his discourse, his worldview, or his ideology.

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<sup>18</sup> Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 214-219 and Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, intr. Donald LaCoss (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” *New Left Review*, Vol. 1, no. 144 (March/April 1984): 112-113.

Stieglitz, I have argued, was content with using his artistic endeavours to create an alternative to the present reality. This is both a modernist principle and a romantic one. If in the Romantic era art was first contained in a separate sphere with a high degree of autonomy and the dialectic of simultaneous autonomy and ineffectiveness came to a climax in the historical avant-garde movements, was modernism then just a station on the road? Situated in the middle and alongside, its complex temporality becomes apparent. Modernism pointed back to the past (whether distant and pre-modern or just the recent past of Romanticism) and it pointed to the future too, as it already contained the grounds on which the avant-gardes would attempt their sublation of art and life. It was not clear to a modernist like Stieglitz that the social effectiveness he bestowed upon art would not function at his moment in time through aesthetic separation (as an alternative to life praxis). Stieglitz was already on a stage when contradictions inherent in the status of art in bourgeois society, as they had become manifest in aestheticism, were unbearable. He knew that the institution of art had something to do with it (hence his founding of the Photo-Secession, *Camera Work* and the galleries), and that the works as such had to change (hence his enthusiasm for a new medium and his interest in new forms, leading towards abstraction). But he was not prepared to go all the way.

Anderson identifies space and time of modernism as differential, in accordance with the process of modernity itself. European modernism in the first years of the twentieth century was in limbo between “a still usable classical past, a still indeterminate technical present, and a still unpredictable political future” as between “a semi-aristocratic ruling order, a semi-industrialised capitalist economy, and a semi-emergent, or -insurgent, labour movement.”<sup>20</sup> For this diagnosis, Anderson relies on the argument made by Arno Mayer that European modernity was by no means unequivocally progressive, but instead marked by the perseverance of the old feudal powers. It is this persistence of the anti-modern forces in modernity that the category of romantic anti-capitalism brings to the surface too.<sup>21</sup> More than other doctrines, the romantic anti-capitalist sensitivity (as distinct from earlier Romanticism

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<sup>20</sup> Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” 105.

<sup>21</sup> There are problems with Mayers’s book however. His argument is sweeping and generalising and understates the complexity of bourgeois hegemony in the nineteenth century. See Geoff Eley, “Review of *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* by Arno J. Mayer,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (March, 1982): 95-99.

proper) acknowledges this differentiability in its own ambiguities. In addition, modernism and romantic anti-capitalism have in common a certain relationship with the concept of revolution

I am not aiming to replace the existing definitions of modernism in relation to medium specificity, newness and anti-academicism with one of romantic anti-capitalism. Rather, the two need to be seen as connected to each other. There is a productive element in an approach to modernism that takes its nostalgic, in some instances even retrograde aspects into consideration in order to articulate the modern experience that is reflected in such cultural products. For modern experience, the experience of living under capitalist conditions is one of that system's tension with qualitative values and its extraordinary success at turning every utterance of discontent into a commodity, as both history and the emptiness of concepts such as modernism (and also post-modernism, for that matter) show. Only on the grounds of a new social order can a truly new – and meaningful – art flourish. Stieglitz had no concept of socialism or other alternative economic and social systems. But, on a subconscious level, his romantic anti-capitalism meant similar things, at least in terms of a moment of refusal. It was not clear in what exactly the refusal consisted. This was due to and the reason why Stieglitz chose to mediate his concerns through works of art: because his concerns were mainly cultural and because he never questioned the social privileges on which this project inevitably rested. And if Stieglitz, too, wanted to show that modernity was nothing more than “the blank passage of time” (Anderson's phrase), what better way to show it than to photograph, again and again, the movement of clouds?

The clearest component of Stieglitz's worldview is his romantic anti-capitalism. That is, as Löwy and Sayre demonstrate, a romanticism that defines itself through its anti-capitalist element. But despite the strength of this motivation, this structure of feeling is by no means always effective in the construction of an actual anti-capitalist reality. Alternatives, on the advanced stage of capitalist consolidation of the early twentieth century, had very limited effects. The component “romantic” then not only signifies the continuity with an earlier moment of the same, but also discontinuity: it shows how quickly things in capitalism change, and as such it is also a signifier of that order which first brought it into being, calling for it as a reaction. But the other side of this

is that modernism, as a form of reaction prone to incorporate a latter-day romantic ineffectiveness, was equally prone to be prey to the forces of capitalism.

### **New York Dada**

There is a vast literature on the proto-Dada activities that took place in New York during the First World War, when several European artists lived in the United States as émigrés, among them the Frenchmen Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp. It has become commonplace to assert that the currents of influence flowed in both ways, that the French artists picked up ideas from the Americans as much as vice versa. Whereas Duchamp found friends in the circle around the collector Walter Arensberg, it was Picabia who was close to Stieglitz and his group. However, it was not so much Stieglitz himself who attracted Picabia's attention, but Marius de Zayas. Picabia was critical of Stieglitz and regarded his influence as diminishing, as the broken camera in his machine portrait of Stieglitz implies (*Here, This is Stieglitz Here*, 1915, fig. 146). Together with Agnes Ernst Meyer and de Zayas, Picabia issued a magazine, whose title nevertheless still indicates Stieglitz's importance: *291*. Stieglitz scholars have argued over the extent to which Stieglitz was supportive, dismissive or indifferent towards this new publication, just as much as it is open to debate to what degree he disagreed with de Zayas's plan to open a gallery with clearly commercial purpose (The Modern Gallery). However, these incidences, as well as the growth of alternative gathering places and social organisations for modern artists in New York such as the Arensberg's salon, meant a waning influence of Stieglitz's pre-eminence as cultural arbiter.

Yet the narrative of New York Dada cannot help but come back to the old impresario eventually. When the Society of Independent Artists, founded in 1916 as a democratic and unjuried exhibition society, rejected the contribution for its April 1917 exhibition of the urinal titled *Fountain*, signed by "R. Mutt" but to be attributed to Duchamp, Stieglitz seized his opportunity. The object was taken to 291, where Stieglitz photographed it (fig. 147). With the original lost soon afterwards (it is unclear how), it was through Stieglitz's photograph that this object could first be apprehended visually by the public at large. As if aware of this, Stieglitz's photographic interpretation can be read as a veiling of the work with his own

worldview. This can be taken literally, because in the photograph, the shiny, hard and cold surface of the urinal appears softened, its outlines at the same time sharply distinguished from and merging into the background. Stieglitz chose this background carefully: it is a painting by Marsden Hartley, *The Warriors* (fig. 148). The mandorla-like shape that structures the composition (and that together with its colouring and subject matter gives it its medieval atmosphere) repeats the outlines of the urinal turned around and by ninety degrees in front of it. Through this choice of background Stieglitz not only aligned a manifestation of the avant-garde with the art of one of his own protégés; he also, with the aid of his photographic technique, reduced the bathroom fixture to its formal qualities and appropriated it for his own “fluid” aesthetic. In other words, with this photograph, Stieglitz not only produced the only visual record of *Fountain* his contemporaries had, but he also gave it a spiritualised, anthropomorphic form. He directed its reception. Even a renaming happened in the process, *Fountain* became the “*Madonna in the Bathroom*.”

Whilst it is true that Stieglitz never fully embraced the nihilism and playfulness of Dada, let alone its machine-aesthetic, and it is likely that at the time of Dada’s emergence in New York he felt as an outsider, there are nevertheless corollaries. Stieglitz was not the only one to appreciate *Fountain* foremost as an aesthetic object. According to the diary of Beatrice Wood, a close associate of Duchamp, Walter Arensberg, too, understood the object as an individual artist’s act of freeing an object from its functional purpose and thus revealing its beauty.<sup>22</sup> The art critic Carl Van Vechten stated that *Fountain* looked “like anything from a Madonna to a Buddha.”<sup>23</sup> The formal approach was not exceptional to Stieglitz at the time, but the most common response or approach to modern art.<sup>24</sup> From there it is not far to the irrationalist, mysterious overtones, which were Stieglitz’s speciality and for the purpose of which Stieglitz-associate Hartley’s picture was uniquely suitable. But is

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<sup>22</sup> William Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917,” in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1989), 70.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*”, 75.

<sup>24</sup> Camfield lists the following among Duchamp’s friends for whom an aesthetic response was the rule: Beatrice Wood, Louise Norton, Jean Crotti and Guillaume Apollinaire. Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*,” 79. In later scholarship too, the form of *Fountain* was usually abstracted from what the object actually was: a urinal. By contrast, Paul B. Franklin analyses the work as the object it really was in relations to the implications of homosexuality in the metropolis that come with it: Paul B. Franklin, “Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* and the Art of Queer Art History,” *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 23. No. 1 (2000): 23-50.

not Dada irrational too, if in a different way? What united Duchamp and Stieglitz was their “mutual faith in intuition, instinct, feeling and common distrust of the intellect, logic, and rationality.”<sup>25</sup> They all believed that art was the sphere where a battle positing their values against those of bourgeois society could be fought out. Duchamp must have known what he was in for when he approached Stieglitz. Even Picabia spoke about the soul: To Picabia “[T]he machine has become more than a mere adjunct of human life. It is really a part of human life – perhaps the very soul.”<sup>26</sup>

It cannot be a coincidence that it is through photography that one of the first readymades became known. As William Camfield writes: “Our visual knowledge of *Fountain* depends on photography, an art form created by artists who do not *make* their subjects but *select* them.”<sup>27</sup> Thus with Duchamp’s commission, Stieglitz had another opportunity to prove the artistic and progressive character of his medium. After all, photography too had its base in the machine, the urinal’s mode of production. By making this case, Stieglitz could stage his own endeavours as a preliminary narrative to Duchamp’s.<sup>28</sup> Thus, with this one photograph, Stieglitz gained two major advantages: he proved the worth of photography and that he was still the first to understand (at least among the Americans) and to be tolerant towards the new art. This provides testimony for Stieglitz’s anarchist claims. There is a corollary between Dada’s iconoclasm and the anarchist will to destroy the old to make room for the new. There was also a kinship between anarchism and Dada in

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<sup>25</sup> Hugh Potter, *False Dawn: Paul Rosenfeld and Art in America, 1916-1946* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1980), pp. 56-57.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in: Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-23* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 60.

<sup>27</sup> Camfield. “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*,” 78 [emphasis in the original]. Camfield mentions other authors who stressed that Duchamp intended this: Duchamp in unpublished interview with Peter Burnell in 1961; Jean Clair in *Duchamp et la photographie* (Paris, 1977) says that readymades are three-dimensional snapshots.

<sup>28</sup> Both Naumann (1994) and Dickran Tashjian in his *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975) argue that some texts in *Camera Work* betray an iconoclastic attitude towards traditional aesthetics and can be read as sorts of Dadaist anti-art manifestoes. The writings of Benjamin de Casseres are often mentioned in this respect. By contrast, I interpret de Casseres’s statements as expressions of his romantic anti-capitalism or his adherence to aestheticism. This seems a thin basis to establish a politics, and as Naumann writes, too, politically de Casseres was a “spiritual nihilist,” not an anarchist.

their mutual kinship with writings of the nihilist philosophies of Nietzsche, Stirner and Schopenhauer.<sup>29</sup>

Direct links between Dada and anarchism existed, for example, in the person of Man Ray, whose participation in Henri's art classes at the Ferrer Center and close friendship with the anarchist poet and artist Adolf Wolff instigated feelings and convictions that he would later channel into his Dadaist art.<sup>30</sup> As much as a break with previous conventions, Dada represented a continuity of the various modernist attempts immediately preceding it to create a new art. Stieglitz's choice of Hartley's painting for his photographic background suggests that he indeed saw this continuity between his own art and that of his protégés. But nevertheless the differences, the radicalism of *Fountain* as a pure avant-gardist act (Bürger is not the only one for whom this work has a high importance), have to be clear. As should the differences between all artistic radicalism and radicalism in the social field. Hartley and Stieglitz were not anarchists, nor was Duchamp. For Allan Antliff, the link between modernism, Dadaism and anarchism is to be situated in individualism.<sup>31</sup> Duchamp may have read Stirner, yet Stirner's *Ego and His Own* was not anarchist political theory as such, nor was it a call to action. Similarly, the discourse of generic modernism, such as that of the Stieglitz circle, although evolving around the individual and its expression, does not have its final goal there. In Stieglitz's Expressionist variant in particular, individual expression is only a vehicle that serves an ultimate aim of community. In the end, Stieglitz's openness towards Duchamp and his spiritualising photograph of *Fountain* are nothing more than another testimony to Stieglitz's belief in art's capacity to change the world (pointing towards the avant-garde), but also of his failure to go far enough into the social sphere to at least come close to this ambition.

The story of early Dada in New York serves to illustrate several aims of this thesis. It shows the importance for modernism of international exchange and the futility of

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<sup>29</sup> Naumann, *New York Dada*, 14. Naumann actually attributes the kinship with Stirner, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer to de Casseres, but the claim can certainly be made for Stieglitz too.

<sup>30</sup> Francis M. Naumann, "Man Ray and the Ferrer Center: Art and Anarchy in the Pre-Dada Period," in *New York Dada*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), 10-30.

<sup>31</sup> Allan Antliff, "Anarchy, Politics, and Dada," in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, ed. Francis Naumann and Beth Venn, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 209-213.



attributing national origins to certain ideas. In this respect, it demonstrates how individuals such as Stieglitz, whose identity was made up of at least three cultural contexts, Germany, the United States and Judaism, could become actors in this modernist discourse. It further reveals that, if we are speaking of national contexts, that one source is often neglected in narratives of (American) modernism, namely that of Germany – present in the philosophies of German origin of Stirner and Nietzsche, read by Stieglitz circle and Dadaist artists and omitted in art-historical accounts for reasons that lay in the way history progressed. In this regard, it is the element of nostalgia, the retrograde face of modernism, the antithesis to the often-dominating narrative of progress and rupture, which is important: romantic anti-capitalism, the *Weltanschauung* that drove Stieglitz and that, in turn, is evidence for his cosmopolitan identity. Like modernism itself, romantic anti-capitalism is ambiguous. It is difficult to clearly distinguish between anarchism, Dadaism, modernism and romantic anti-capitalism. This is not to say that one should not try, but it is to say that separation tends to lead to oversimplification. Perhaps the best solution is to acknowledge that certain structures of thought (as well as practices) cannot be easily named, nor can their individual components be easily separated out. But romantic anti-capitalism, as a category that has ambiguity at its very heart, can help. Furthermore, because it is not a category of medium or of style, it allows the locating of these ambiguities in the place where they originate: in the social sphere.

## **Dealership**

One of the romantic anti-capitalist Stieglitz's areas of work was art dealing. In order not to risk his carefully built reputation of sincerity and real interest in the cause, he had to disguise his commercial activities. He veiled the fact that he was involved in art as a commercial enterprise. The exhibition methods at 291 were an effort to challenge the commercial and professional status that photography still had at the time. To prove the photographs' artistic credentials, he locked them safely away in a temple of art. When he later included other media in his galleries, Stieglitz maintained the principle of keeping art spatially in a sphere of its own. There are countless examples in his correspondence of his attempts to downplay his character as a dealer. When *Art Annual* listed 291 under the "dealers" category, he insisted that the Photo-Secession was even less a business than the existing art museums or other

institutions in the United States: it was an “experimental station in which life is analysed.”<sup>32</sup> But some years later, he wrote to the Bourgeois Gallery in Cologne about “our profession as art-dealers.”<sup>33</sup> We have learned that ambiguity is at the centre Stieglitz’s identity. But in this case, his simultaneous anti-commercial views and activity as an art dealer cannot be a coincidence. It was, as he wrote to his friend Oscar Bluemner, part of his lonely fight “against the rich” that he learned how to deal with them, how to “handle them.”<sup>34</sup>

In the period, the art market – a large dealer network, a nationally and internationally integrated private market, in which next to private patrons (often leaders of industry and commerce) museums, the state and critics all played a role – was firmly established.<sup>35</sup> For many artists, this meant a constant struggle against their dealers’ control and interests. This was the case with Stieglitz too: he used money to make his artists dependent on him by only handing their profits to them when needed. In fact, Stieglitz acted as a sort of banker.<sup>36</sup> The artists depended on dealers for their own financial survival. This is why many independent artists’ organisations, including some Secessions, eventually aligned themselves with an experienced dealer. The art market meant a professionalisation of artists and dealers in the modern, capitalist sense of specialisation. One tactic of Stieglitz’s to overcome specialisation was in his simultaneous activity as a dealer and an artist.

How cunningly he played the market is illustrated by the case of the “\$6000 Marin” in 1926 (then the highest price ever paid for a watercolour by a living American artist), which illustrates Stieglitz’s knowledge of the art market’s workings by taking risks in setting a price and then refusing to go below it, and the importance of monopoly.<sup>37</sup> Timothy Rodgers has argued that collectors of modern art in the period were more than just that, that in fact they established artists’ reputations and built the

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<sup>32</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to *Art Annual*, 1917, YCAL.

<sup>33</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Bourgeois Gallery, Cologne, 23 January 1929, YCAL.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred Stieglitz to Oscar Bluemner May 1927, YCAL.

<sup>35</sup> See for example Robin Lenman, “Painters, Patronage and the Art Market in Germany 1850-1914,” *Past & Present*, No. 123 (May 1989): 109-140.

<sup>36</sup> George Heard Hamilton, “The Alfred Stieglitz Collection,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 3 (1970): 378.

<sup>37</sup> See: Timothy Robert Rodgers, “Alfred Stieglitz, Duncan Phillips and the ‘\$6000 Marin,’” *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, *Manifest Destiny* (1992): 54-66. On this point, I reject Bochner’s argument, which ignores Rodgers’ study and maintains that Stieglitz was not playing a commercial game but instead maintained his purely idealist position. See: Bochner, *An American Lens*, 30-31.

canon. Through his involvement in the financial quantification of works of modern art, Stieglitz steered their purchase with his prize politics, manipulating collectors' purchasing decisions. Thus he too could contribute to that discourse of value – at the same time as he claimed he was dealing with objects above value – something that was at the very heart of his endeavours throughout his life.<sup>38</sup>

He mixed into his mercenary communication aspects of the rhetoric that I have identified as his nostalgia and anti-commercialism: he claimed to protect “innocent artists,” to act in the interest of the American people, who were not capable of seeing what was good for them but who would surely thank him later for his role as a seer and prophet.<sup>39</sup> It was a power struggle between capital and culture, played with the means and by the rules of capital but with the incalculable “spirit” in the mix too; however, in the act of transaction this was brought down to the measure of capital. What this shows, too, is that capitalism itself has an irrational side. Perhaps Stieglitz knew that the capitalist proclamation of fair exchange, of calculability and positivism, was and is only one side of the dialectic: that this discourse was deeply ideological. Art produced under bourgeois conditions fitted well into this ideology not only as a special preserve for those values that capitalism presumably excluded, but also because capitalism itself worked with methods that are incalculable and irrational. The categories of mercenary exchange and aesthetic criticism are deeply intertwined in modernity. Stieglitz's artistic work came out of capitalist conditions. Given this fact, consciously or not, Stieglitz could not be consistent in his anti-capitalism. Not unless he was willing to be an anti-bourgeois too, to fight the class struggle and change the conditions of artistic and all other productions at its root. Since he was not prepared to take this step, he could – and must – be a romantic anti-capitalist and an art dealer. It was the ineluctable consequence.

This should not be taken to mean that Stieglitz was in art only for his own financial gain. He did not need to be because he was lucky enough to have independent means (which originated in the industrial and capitalist activities of his forebears) at least until his divorce and the start of the war. But this fact is even more testimony that his art dealings, although disguised, were an essential part of his whole enterprise. He knew the capitalist world. His simultaneous rejection of the capitalist model and

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<sup>38</sup> Rodgers, “Alfred Stieglitz, Duncan Phillips and the ‘\$6000 Marin,’” 55.

<sup>39</sup> See for example extract from letter quoted by Rodgers, “Alfred Stieglitz, Duncan Phillips and the ‘\$6000 Marin,’” 57.

embrace of it is analogous to romantic anti-capitalism's nostalgic content and its own identity as a modern critique. Stieglitz's mingling in the market points to a way he saw opening for a possible sublation of art in life.

Romantic anti-capitalism was a reaction against the way capitalism transformed society in modernity that focused on remedying the disenchantment of the world. From the viewpoint of classical aesthetics, Stieglitz's story is just another example of the attempt to mobilise imagination as a means in the struggle against these factors with art as the vehicle in which the imagination, or creativity, is most clearly at work.<sup>40</sup> Modern aesthetic theory since the Enlightenment regards the creative imagination, or fantasy, as contained and preserved – or safely stored away – in a separate and autonomous realm. The Romantics were the first to despair of this separation, but they did not manage to free imagination from its confinement. They simply issued imagination with a positive connotation, related to their view of the genius. This status was maintained throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only the historical avant-garde movements tried to sublimate it. But their strategy, too, was based on the concept of autonomy. The imagination or irrationality at large still played the same role as attributed to it by the Romantics. The Dada movement serves as an example, as does Surrealism. It is the story of art and its presupposed capacity to transport the subject to a utopian freedom.<sup>41</sup>

Stieglitz was aware that the corollary of capitalism's ideology of rationality was the system's own irrationality, and his art dealing in conjunction with his anti-commercial rhetoric suggests such a conclusion. Max Weber's characteristics of modernity are only the ideology of capitalism, true and false in equal measures. Therefore the historical avant-garde's attempted sublation could not work. It came

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<sup>40</sup> Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Imagination and Modernity: Or the Taming of the Human Mind," *Cultural Critique*, No. 5, Modernity and Modernism, Postmodernity and Postmodernism (Winter 1986-1987): 23-48. Jochen Schulte-Sasse's essay delivers a history of the suppression of imagination in modernity and reactions against this fact from Romanticism to the historical avant-garde movements.

<sup>41</sup> This story is recounted in different versions and with different emphases by theorists from Schiller to Schlegel to the early Lukács to the Frankfurt School to Jacques Rancière: Friedrich Schiller, "Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen," in *Schillers sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1860), 1-118; Friedrich Schlegel, *Ästhetische und Politische Schriften*, ed. Michael Holzinger (Berlin, 2013); Georg Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen: Essays* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911); Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 7* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972); Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. and with introduction by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

out of the same totality. Not radical enough, modern works of art risked their instrumentalisation in the capitalist discourse despite and because of their apparent autonomy. Particularly what Bürger defined as the organic work of art, through its lack of fragmentation in its own structure, could serve therapeutic functions for the fragmented modern individual and be reduced to the purpose of decoration. The latter clearly implies the artwork's inclusion in the market. The avant-garde work does not serve this therapeutic function as easily. Duchamp's *Fountain*, for example, is not as easily reconciled with a modernist approach that can be both therapeutic in the universal emotions it addresses (in abstraction, but not only there) and within a decorative discourse. But with Stieglitz's photograph, it is taken back into that function.

Jochen Schulte-Sasse stresses the continuity that runs from early Romanticism through to the historical avant-gardes. The Romantics first tried to secure reason from its reduced function as instrumentality in capitalist ideology. They were also the first to "ascribe a deconstructive-anarchic function to art" in an act to free reason and to positively revalue the imagination.<sup>42</sup> This confirms that if there are anarchist impulses in Dada, they expose Dada as a continuation of a project started by the Romantics. Already Friedrich Schlegel wrote: "Once fantasy has gained victory over human thinking [*menschliche Reflexion*], then humanity will have arrived at perfection."<sup>43</sup> It must be a view as expressed in this quote from Schlegel (and similar passages in his writings) that inspired Stieglitz to his "philosophical anarchism." That type of anarchism is the original romantic concept. If this kind of libertarian impulse (as well as Stieglitz's own) had little in common with the political radicalism of anarchists, this merely points to the two different directions that the original anti-Enlightenment and anti-bourgeois impulse took: it could either be contained within the aesthetic sphere or liberated via political theory into radical action.

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<sup>42</sup> Schulte-Sasse, "Imagination and Modernity: Or the Taming of the Human Mind," 38-39.

<sup>43</sup> The German original of sentence 2090 in full reads: "Die Unvollendung der Poesie ist nothwendig. Ihre Vollendung=das Erscheinen des Messias, oder die Stoische Verbrennung. Hat die Fantasie den Sieg davongetragen über die Reflexion, so ist die Menschheit vollendet." Friedrich Schlegel, *Literarische Notizen, 1797-1801*, *Literary Notebooks*, ed. with introduction and comment by Hans Eichner (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin and Vienna: Ullstein, 1980), 211. English quote: Schulte-Sasse, "Imagination and Modernity: Or the Taming of the Human Mind," 44.

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