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Toward a technological imagination: Avant-garde, technology, and the creation of an American art

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University of Hawaii, 1990
TOWARD A TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGINATION:
AVANT-GARDE, TECHNOLOGY,
AND THE CREATION OF AN AMERICAN ART

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IN

AMERICAN STUDIES

DECEMBER 1990

By

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Floyd Matson
Wimal Dissanayake
To my parents,
Yun-Hwa Yang and Yong-Ah Kim
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the completion of the present work and, in fact, for my entire graduate work, I owe so much to so many people—my family, my friends, and my teachers, all very dear to me. I am quite frustrated at my inability to express properly my gratitude to them for all their support and love.

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ABSTRACT

The present work examines the debate among post-World War I American artists and writers concerning the creation of an indigenous American art in the age of machine technology and their opposing ideas on the relationship between art and the reality of mechanical mass production.

The debate on the high art tradition which had dichotomized art and life and the subsequent avant-garde attempt to reintegrate the two realms goes beyond specific American conditions to involve the general ideology of the historical avant-garde movement. The present study focuses on Dada, which had a vital influence on the post-World War I American avant-garde as Americans strove to construct their own indigenous art, which would be viable in the highly technologized environment of modern American mass society.

As European Dadaists launched an anti-art rebellion against the tradition of high art and culture, which they found excessively restrictive and self-isolating from life itself, they turned to the American scene of machine technology to find the materials for constructing an alternative culture which would bring art and life together. In this context, the present work examines how Americans themselves, more specifically, those who formed
two opposing groups in the pages of Broom and Secession, responded to the Dadaists' craze for American modernity in their own debate surrounding the creation of viable American culture.

The present work examines the main debate between Broom and Secession groups as an ideological confrontation of avant-garde and modernism on the nature of art in the age of machine technology. Furthermore, it employs the antithetic ideologies of Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin on art and technology and thus attempts to place the American debate in a larger socio-cultural framework of opposing ideologies of post-World War I avant-garde and modernism.
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INTRODUCTION

The present study examines the debate among post-World War I American artists and writers concerning the creation of an indigenous American art in the age of machine technology and their opposing ideas on the relationship between art and the reality of mechanical mass production. While the creation of an American art independent of European tradition has been historically a deep-rooted major cultural concern for Americans, the debate on the high art tradition which had dichotomized art and life and the subsequent avant-garde attempt to reintegrate the two realms goes beyond specific American conditions to involve the general ideology of the historical avant-garde movement.1

The various movements which come under the category of the historical avant-garde share fundamentally anti-aesthetic ideologies with one another. In the present study I focus on Dada, which had a significant influence on the post-World War I American avant-garde as Americans strove to construct their own indigenous art, which would be viable in the highly technologized environment of modern American mass society.

As European Dadaists launched an anti-art rebellion against the tradition of high art and culture, which they found excessively restrictive and self-isolating from
life itself, they turned to the American scene of machine
technology to find the materials for constructing an
alternative culture which would bring art and life
together. In this context, I aim to examine how
Americans themselves, more specifically, those who formed
two opposing groups in their modernist versus avant-garde
ideas on art and technology, responded to the Dadaists' 
craze for American modernity in their own debate
surrounding the creation of a viable American culture.

After examining Dada's anti-aesthetic ideology in
general and the nature of post-World War I American
avant-garde activities which were closely related to
Dada, I follow in detail the American debate surrounding
machine aesthetics in the pages of Broom and Secession,
the two main opposing voices in the matter. The anti­
aesthetic stance of Broom follows the line of historical
avant-garde ideology, while Secession expresses the
traditional modernist insistence upon the separation of
art from daily life. The Secession group saw machine
technology mainly as an instrumentality for material
production. It was from this perspective that it opposed
the avant-garde's attempt to incorporate machine
technology into the realm of aesthetics.

Thus, I examine the main debate between the Broom
and Secession groups as an ideological confrontation of
avant-garde and modernism on the nature of art in the age
of machine technology. I employ the antithetic ideologies of Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin on art and technology and attempt to place the American debate in a larger socio-cultural framework of opposing ideologies of post-World War I avant-garde and modernism.

As Hans Richter, a participant and a chronicler, has maintained, Dada originated in Zurich, Switzerland, where conditions early in 1916 provided the catalyst for ideas that were still inchoate elsewhere. According to Richter, "The peculiarly claustrophobic and tense atmosphere of neutral Switzerland in the middle of the Great War supplied an appropriate background." "It was here," he continues, "in the peaceful dead-centre of the war that a number of very different personalities formed a 'constellation' which later became a 'movement.' Only in this highly concentrated atmosphere could such totally different people join in a common activity." Dada thus emerged in a haven of peace, surrounded on all sides by a senseless war, which the Dadaists condemned as "a manifestation of the ultimate insanity of the European bourgeois." Dada cast itself in opposition to the prevailing cultural setting, thereby launching its own war against the structural underpinnings of the established order of bourgeois culture itself.

The anti-art stance of Dada was based upon the
belief that the tradition of fine art served the standing official order. Dada maintained that by falsely sanctifying ‘art’ by separating it from life itself, the representatives of the genteel tradition rigidified human creativity and, therefore, contributed to the bankruptcy of Western culture. Thus, the anti-art of Dada sought to free creativity charged with a new power to illuminate the human situation. In their attempt to release the individual from artificial restrictions in order to explore new realms of expression, the Dadaists insisted upon a negative view of traditional art to affirm a positive view of artistic creativity.

Attempting to overcome the art/life dichotomy and to make art relevant to reality, the Dadaists turned to their experience of an increasingly technologized life. While technologies of mass production and mass consumption were substantially transforming everyday life, the Dadaists attempted to integrate the reality of technology and the technological imagination into the production of art by giving artistic expression to the experience of technology. Peter Burger has argued correctly that from Dada on, the avant-garde movements distinguished themselves from preceding movements such as impressionism, naturalism, and cubism not only in their attack on "art as an institution," but also in their radical break with the referential mimetic aesthetic and
Indeed, by bringing technology into art, the avant-garde liberated technology from its instrumental aspects and, therefore, undermined both traditional bourgeois notions of technology as a means of material progress and art as 'natural,' 'autonomous,' and 'organic.'

Following its birth in Zurich, Dada spread rapidly throughout Europe. While conditions in America were different from those in Europe for absorbing this movement, America was not immune to this avant-garde atmosphere. In fact, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, two leading French Dadaists, were in New York intermittently for several years beginning in 1913, even before the term 'Dada' was invented in 1916. Some active discourse took place between the two Europeans and contemporary American avant-gardists, who were eager, to say the very least, to learn about the European avant-garde art to which Americans were first introduced through the Armory Show in 1913. After World War I, moreover, a number of young Americans stayed or went abroad to become 'expatriates.' There was no better place than Paris, with all the Dadaists congregated there, for Americans to gain firsthand experience. Indeed, the development of Dada in Paris, transmitted by Tristan Tzara from Zurich, was crucial to those young American expatriates in search of their own identity.
Hailed by The New York Times as "the leading spirit in the New Movement...the latest 'Thing' in modern French art," Francis Picabia proved to Americans that the machine and the skyscraper environment of New York City were the materials for a new art. Picabia's machinist drawings, which were mainly published in 291, were conceived as anti-art. By depicting the machine, he utilized subject matter that had been traditionally considered unsuitable for fine art. His spare use of color, as well as the mechanical precision of the drawings, emphasized a denial of recent modern painting, which favored the sensuous qualities of the medium. Sexual overtones made his drawings distasteful to the arbiters of the genteel tradition, who dominated and administered mainstream American 'art.' Picabia declared, "France is almost overplayed. It is in America that I believe that the theories of the New Art will hold most tenaciously." Following this belief, Picabia asserted that America and modern art, which for him was synonymous with anti-art, were compatible, particularly given the primacy of the machine in America.

Marcel Duchamp also saw America as imbued with avant-garde ideals. Deploiring Americans' reverence for European art, he asked, "Why this adoration for classic art?" As Picabia had done earlier, Duchamp posited the mythical dichotomy between
If only America would realize that the art of Europe is finished--dead--and that America is the country of the art of the future, instead of trying to base everything else she does on European traditions!

Declaring that what New York lacked in the way of modern art was redressed by its mechanized environment, Duchamp, along with Picabia, was one of the first of the twentieth-century artists to treat the machine in his work.

According to Henri Pierre Roche, "Duchamp was the toast of all the young avant-garde of New York." As an acknowledged French avant-gardist and the friend of Matthew Josephson and William Carlos Williams, Duchamp assumed leadership among relatively provincial young Americans such as Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella, Man Ray, and Charles Sheeler, many of whom had just become fully aware of the European revolution in art. Duchamp's anti-art attitude was evidenced in his introduction of mechanically reproduced readymades such as a bicycle wheel and a toilet bowl into the realm of art. Obliterating preconceived cultural notions about art, the readymade invalidated the arbitrary separation between art and life. By means of ordinary articles of life mechanically reproduced, he attempted to bring the
aesthetic process to the realm of mechanized modern life.

It is not that Americans were passively waiting for the impact of Dada to fall upon them. Many were in the process of breaking away from academic values to embrace new sensibilities, techniques, and assumptions about art. Dada saw the possibilities in American machine technology of creating a new culture while it attacked what many considered to be the bankruptcy of Western culture. In the process, Dada encouraged American writers and artists, who were consciously trying to create an indigenous American art to cope with modernity. Their environment was construed by Dadaists and Americans alike to be peculiarly American, probably because of America's rising leadership in the technological revolution after World War I.

As for the American avant-garde activities, one cannot overemphasize the role Alfred Stieglitz played in imbuing the new spirit into the American art scene by championing the cause of photography and modern art in his magazine, Camera Work, and at his gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue. Stieglitz is an important figure in American avant-garde history. The camera, another product of the technological revolution, became crucial in the dissemination of avant-garde attitudes and values through Stieglitz's advocacy of straight photography.14

Neither Camera Work nor Stieglitz ever overtly
embraced Dada. Yet, Stieglitz and his followers upheld straight photography for its scientific anti-art values, challenging the academic pretensions of the pictorial mode in painting. Their insistence upon the scientific nature of straight photography was meant to underscore a unique freedom from any artificial interference aimed at making it 'artistic' and thus 'authentic.' Their concern was to uphold the independence of photography from the fine art tradition and to maintain its scientific integrity as a viable medium capable of visualizing a rapidly mechanizing world.15

The subsequent debate among Americans on the aesthetics of machine technology was most expressively presented in the pages of so-called 'little magazines,' which provided the main outlet for the rebellious voices of artists and writers of the younger generation to whom the major publishing community had shut its door. As the name "little magazines" implies, these publications were quite ephemeral, not many of them surviving for more than a year. Yet, their short life span should not overshadow the importance of the contribution they made to the history of post-World War I American art and literature.

Robert Coady and his magazine Soil pursued seriously for the first time the subject of the creation of American art and the adoption of machine aesthetics for that purpose. Following Coady's lead, in the pages of
Contact, William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon tried to come up with an answer to the seemingly historical dilemma of an American artist who endeavored to break free from the hold of western European traditions of high art, yet at the same time harbored quite serious doubts about mass art.

The two major concerns of these Americans--creation of an indigenous American art and integration of realms of art and life in the technological age--found a full-fledged expression in the pages of Broom and Secession. Under the leadership of Matthew Josephson, those affiliated with Broom voiced adamant support for bringing machine technology into the realm of aesthetics. Employing the creations of the machine age as materials for aesthetic expression, they argued that they could break the traditional dichotomy between art and life and create a genuine American art for the people, not just for the few self-proclaimed guardians of high culture. In short, they embraced machine aesthetics for anti-aesthetic purposes to bring art and life together. In doing so, they argued, Americans would free themselves from the western European tradition of high art, which historically had controlled their aesthetic consciousness, and create an indigenous American art which would be viable in the technologized modern mass society.
For the Gorham Munson and Waldo Frank group of Secession, the machine and technology posed a serious threat to genuine artistic expression. It was total nonsense to create an art employing the materials which were made possible by modern technology. For them, this was not integration of art and life, but surrender to the gross materialism of contemporary America. Therefore, they insisted upon the rejection of modern technological culture and the adoption of nationalistic spiritualism along the lines of the modernistic retreat to the sacred realm of art.

The opposition to the anti-aestheticism of the Broom group, for whom modern technology was the most powerful symbol of contemporary American life, drew upon a longstanding attempt on the part of American artists to assert their own artistic freedom from cultural bondage to Europe. Insofar as the American avant-garde artists gathering around Broom insisted upon the need to create an indigenous American art, the Secession group with its modernistic stance agreed with them. However, these modernists could not go along with the avant-gardists' utopian faith in mass culture. Moreover, in embracing a spiritual nationalism they maintained that post-World War I American avant-gardists were just following the Europeans' craze for American machine technology. Thus, they dismissed the Broom group's campaign for a popular
culture based upon the reality of machine technology as another example of American artists' following the latest trend in European art.

However, the Broom group's position does not deserve the simplistic judgment of the modernist camp. While the post-World War I American avant-gardists were greatly influenced by the contemporary historical avant-garde movement in Europe, and were well aware of the Europeans' craze for American technology and its potentialities for a new art, they were not simply following the Europeans' lead. More importantly, there was the issue of how to create an indigenous American art in the age of machine technology. They had to deal with their dual identities of being 'avant-garde' artists in Post-World War I America and being 'American' artists.

The Broom-Secession debate can be examined in terms of the different aesthetic views of the 'avant-gardists' and 'modernists.' While the two terms have been too often used inconsistently, the general aesthetic ideologies of the two groups can be distinguished clearly enough to justify categorizing the Broom group as avant-gardists and the Secession group as modernists.

Artists and even scholars have been confused about the meaning and use of the two terms 'avant-garde' and 'modernism.' When critics refer to the patterns of
formal innovation in recent art and literary history, they rarely distinguish in any clear way between the two. For example, in his important book _The Theory of the Avant-Garde_, Renato Poggioli uses the concept of avant-garde to define the basic aesthetic sensibility of the modern period. To him, all major formally innovative writers--Rimbaud and Eliot, Marinetti and Pound, Apollinaire and Joyce, the Dadaists and Proust--are avant-gardists. Alternatively, Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane adopt the term 'modernism' for the title of their collection of essays on the international movement of innovative literature while slighting the term 'avant-garde.' More commonly, however, critics speak of the avant-garde and modernism interchangeably, as exemplified by John Weightman's _The Concept of the Avant-Garde_, which is subtitled _Explorations in Modernism_.

While many writers and artists shared the need to create self-consciously innovative works, there were significant differences among the representative figures. Certainly, both modernism and the avant-garde point to the modern writer's awareness of inescapable 'modernity.' Along with avant-garde writers, exemplary 'modernist' writers created dramatically innovative works, which have influenced later generations of innovative writers. In general, however, their sensed alienation from modern
culture and their concern about the loss of the traditional bases of art led them to seek—even within their innovations—to sustain a tradition of high art that would transcend or devalue the apparently disruptive social and historical changes taking place. Thus, Matei Calinescu makes the following point:

As for modernism, whatever its specific meaning in different languages and for different authors, it never conveys that sense of universal and historical negation so characteristic of the avant-garde. The anti-traditionalism of modernism is often subtly traditional. 19

Conversely, the avant-garde writers not only believed that the world they inhabited was essentially modern and that they needed to find an aesthetic language to express this newness; they also sought to alter the nature and social functions of art itself, in order to go beyond the generally hermetic aesthetic boundaries that the modernists assigned themselves. Modernists such as T. S. Eliot and Ortega y Gasset emphasized time and again that it was their mission to salvage the purity of high art from the encroachments of urbanization, massification, and technological modernization—in short, from the threat of modern mass culture. The avant-garde of the early decades of the twentieth century, however, attempted to subvert art’s autonomy, its artificial separation from life, and its
institutionalization as 'high art.'

Thus, while modernists insisted on the dignity and autonomy of art, the iconoclastic and anti-aesthetic aims of the avant-gardists attempted to break the institutionalized dominance of high culture through a fusion with popular culture and to integrate art into life. The aesthetic ideology expressed in the pages of *Secession* generally embraced the modernist position, while the writers and artists associated with *Broom* advocated an avant-garde ideology by embracing anti-aesthetic and mass cultural assumptions, which were amply exhibited in their works and in their appropriation of the language and ideology of machine technology.

This debate finds a superb theoretical framework in the discourse on art which Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin elaborated through their own debates concerning the dialectic of avant-garde art and the utopian hope for an emancipatory mass culture and the status and function of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. The aesthetic ideas of Adorno and Benjamin help to place in a larger socio-historical framework Dada's sensibilities and subsequent attempts by the *Broom* group to incorporate popular cultural forms as genuine American art forms.

In the broadest sense, the views of Benjamin and Adorno are diametrically opposed. Adorno insisted that the culture industry in a modern capitalist society is
totally manipulated, and concluded that high art has to maintain an autonomy of negation. Benjamin believed that the new artistic techniques of the avant-garde, fostered by the acceleration of machine technology, might lead to an elimination of bourgeois high culture and bring about a genuine mass culture based upon the fusion of art and reality.

As Andreas Huyssen has rightly pointed out, Adorno is the theorist par excellence of a "construct modernism," while Benjamin speaks for the historical avant-garde. Adorno insisted upon a presumably necessary and insurmountable barrier separating high art from popular culture in modern capitalist societies. The political impulse behind his theory of modernism was to save the dignity and autonomy of the work of art from the totalitarian pressures of fascist mass spectacles, socialist realism, and an ever more degraded commercial mass culture in the West. The latter issue was explored in his influential condemnation of the American culture industry for its contributions to the allegedly totalitarian directions of modern capitalist society.

Unlike Benjamin, Adorno scorned avant-garde movements such as futurism, Dada, and surrealism, and he acidly rejected the avant-garde's various attempts to reintegrate art and life as a dangerous regression from aesthetic autonomy to the trap of the culture industry.
For Adorno, aesthetic autonomy represented the last remaining 'negative' in an otherwise homogenized modern industrial society. Hence his insistence on an autonomous space within which works of a critically-minded art might be created. According to Adorno, the avant-garde's attempt to integrate art and life represented the annihilation of this pocket of resistance.21

In his famous essay "The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,"22 Benjamin took issue with Adorno's insistence upon a separate sphere for high art and his condemnation of the impact of technology upon art. Here he first made the point that it was precisely mechanical reproducibility which had radically changed the nature of art in the twentieth century, transforming the conditions of reproducing, distributing, and consuming art. He argued that this phenomenon destroyed what he called the traditional art work's aura, that aura of authenticity and uniqueness which constituted the work's distance from life. What Benjamin conceptualized here can be easily witnessed in Marcel Duchamp's exhibition of a mass-produced urinal as a fountain sculpture. Indeed, in another essay, Benjamin pointed out that the intention to destroy this aura was inherently embedded in the anti-aesthetic practice of Dada.23
Both essays by Benjamin made valuable references to Dada. He found the "revolutionary strength of Dada" in its testing of art for authenticity: by using new means of artistic production, the Dadaists proved that the criteria of traditional bourgeois aesthetics had become obsolete. According to Benjamin, "The Dadaists attached much less importance to the sales value of their work than to its uselessness for contemplative immersion.... What they intended and achieved was a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations...." Benjamin recognized that Dada had been instrumental in destroying the bourgeois concept of an autonomous and eternal art. In its incorporation of the techniques and materials of machine technology and the process of mechanical reproduction itself, Benjamin believed, was a promise of an emancipatory mass culture. Furthermore, he saw great potential in the 'Americanism' introduced into Germany in the 1920s, while Adorno never overcame his deep mistrust of anything American.

In short, in opposition to Adorno, Benjamin upheld a positive view of modern technology as it was applied by the historical avant-garde art. Criticizing Benjamin's "revolutionary optimism concerning the proletariat and technology," Adorno adamantly insisted upon the autonomy of high art safe from "contamination" by popular art through the process of mechanical reproduction,
which he saw as an organ of the totalitarian culture industry.

As has been often pointed out, neither Adorno's thesis concerning the total manipulation of culture in a modern capitalist society, nor Benjamin's optimistic belief in the revolutionizing effects of reproduction technologies upon modern mass society, offers a completely satisfactory explanation for the phenomena of the avant-garde and mass culture. And yet, their highly elaborate discourse on the condition of art in the age of technological revolution provides a most valuable theoretical framework for the post-World War I American debate between the Broom and Secession groups concerning the role of machine technology in creating an indigenous American art. While attempting to interpret their opposing stances mainly in terms of the aesthetic ideologies of avant-garde and modernism, the present study seeks to explore the following: why and how the European historical avant-garde—in the present case, Dada—and the post-World War I American avant-garde attempted to overcome the art/life dichotomy; how they conceptualized and put into practice the radical transformation of the conditions of producing, distributing, and consuming art; in what way the ethos of Dada informed the work of the early American avant-garde, and to what extent the Americans' desire to create an
indigenous American art became part of their avant-garde efforts.

NOTES

1. The term "historical avant-garde" was introduced by Peter Bürger in his Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). It includes mainly Dada, surrealism and the post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde.


5. Bürger uses the term, "art as an institution," to define the institutional framework in which art works were produced, distributed, and consumed in bourgeois society. See Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 22.

6. There are several studies which, based upon the author's own participation in the avant-garde scene, elaborate upon the nature of the communication between American expatriates and Dadaists. See, for example, Michel Sanouillet, Dada à Paris (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), pp. 25-26.; Malcolm Cowley, Exiles


8. Ibid.

9. The idea that vernacular art based upon machine and mechanical design is a unique American tradition is well pursued by John A. Kouwenhoven in his important study of modern American art, The Arts in Modern American Civilization (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1948). Kouwenhoven expresses his admiration for the machine aesthetics revealed in the contemporary technological environment of America: "[A]utomobiles...happen to be among the most beautiful objects which modern civilization has produced....Along with the skyscrapers, the grain elevators, the suspension bridges, and the huge transport planes, they are among the most aesthetically satisfying products of technology..." (p. 178).


11. Ibid.

12. The caption and comment under a photograph of Duchamp summarized Duchamp's ideas on America in the most striking way: "HE IS TRYING TO WAKE US UP: Marcel Duchamp, who painted that notorious nude coming downstairs, is of the opinion that America may conquer the world of art; but we must learn to forget the past and stop worshipping the dead in matters artistic and esthetic. We must, the brilliant young Frenchman declares, create new values in art--values scientific and not sentimental." (Ibid., p. 347.)


14. In straight or 'pure' photography, the photographer meddles neither with his subject nor with any of the intermediate processes that lead to the final print, whereas in pictorial or 'art' photography, he feels justified in intervening in any way he sees fit in
order to produce a print that would be considered "artistic," that is to say, one that most closely approximated a painting in appearance: an image soft in tone, "impressionistic," so to speak, and preferably depicting a genteel scene.

15. For instance, in 1909 the art critic Charles H. Caffin maintained that "photography is itself a scientific process, lending itself at every turn to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. That it is scientific is at once the significance and the measure of its value." ("Some Impressions from the International Photographic Exhibition, Dresden," Camera Work, No. 28 [October 1909]: 34.)


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 296.


In 1936, Walter Benjamin published an important essay entitled "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In that essay, Benjamin claimed that it was mechanical reproducibility that had radically changed the nature of art in the twentieth century, transforming the overall conditions surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of art. In the context of cultural and social theory, Benjamin elaborated upon the destruction of what he called the traditional art work's "aura," that atmosphere of authenticity, uniqueness, and natural and organic beauty which constituted its distance from everyday life and which set the aesthetic realm apart from reality.

In the light of the impact of modern technology upon the aesthetic realm, Benjamin attempted to explore "the fate of art" under contemporary conditions. He wrote to Max Horkheimer in a letter of October 1935 that it was "a question of specifying the precise place [of art] in the present":

The hour of fate of art has... sounded for us, and I have set forth its signature in a series of preliminary reflections which carry the title, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." These reflections make an attempt to give questions about the theory of art a truly
Benjamin argued that the fate of art in the nineteenth century, which was the theme of his earlier Arcades Project, could only be fully understood in terms of a correct comprehension of the contemporary fate of art. Thus he wrote to Gershom Scholem: "These reflections [in "The Work of Art" essay] anchor the history of art in the nineteenth century in an understanding of the situation of art as it is experienced by us in the present."³

While in the Arcades Project Benjamin attempted to trace the fragments of a process of de-aestheticization in nineteenth-century art, he now claimed that the full comprehension of the process would be possible only through an attempt to project back onto the earlier stage an understanding of the process in its mature form in the age of mechanical reproduction.⁴ In other words, the incipient impact of industrialization on art in the nineteenth century would become comprehensible through exploring the nature of the full-fledged process of de-aestheticization in the twentieth century. While the present era witnessed the decay of auratic art, the signs of the ultimate fate of traditional art had already existed in the nineteenth-century art scene. This was, according to Benjamin, most notably so in the works of Baudelaire.
In "The Work of Art" essay, Benjamin defined the aura of traditional art and linked the decay of this aura to the impact of technology upon the realm of aesthetics. The quality of unapproachability was an essential element in an art work's aura, and the unique halo surrounding an original work of art could not be preserved once the work of art was reproduced for mass distribution. For Benjamin, the invention of photography and the eventual development of film had drastically transformed the entire nature of art. Film, he maintained, was an ultimate art form attuned to the age of mechanical reproduction. Mechanical reproduction was a fundamental factor inherent in the very technique of film production. Film dispelled the traces of 'aura' in traditional art, which had been built up through its successive historical functions as a ritual--first magical, then religious, and eventually "the secular cult of beauty." With the final decay of the aura under the influence of mechanical reproduction, the function of art as a potential instrument in the enterprise of emancipating the masses could be explored.

The aura was essential to the historical role which works of art had played in legitimizing traditional social relations. The historically dependent status of art lay therefore in the ritual or cultic function of works of art. The primary rationale for their existence,
he maintained, belonged to their contribution to the process of social integration: "[I]t is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function." Consequently, it was the reality of mechanical reproduction that emancipated the work of art from its "parasitical dependence on ritual" by bringing about the decay of auratic art.

Emphasizing that it was the nature of the technical production of art that defined its historical meaning in a given period, Benjamin insisted that the technological reproducibility of photographs, prints, and particularly film destroyed the 'aura,' the sense of uniqueness, unapproachability, authenticity, and rootedness in cultural tradition of high art. According to Benjamin, auratic art acquired the sense of unapproachable authority through its cultic formulation:

Distance is the opposite of closeness. The essentially distant object is the unapproachable one. Unapproachability is indeed a major quality of the cult image. True to its nature, it remains "distant, however close it may be." The closeness which one may gain from its subject matter does not impair the distance which it retains in its appearance.

Benjamin saw in Renaissance painting the beginning of the process by which the traditional ritualistic basis of the work of art was replaced by the secular cult of
beauty. This created a sense of approaching crisis, and the struggle for the autonomy of art began, reaching its pinnacle in aestheticism, the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*. Defined as "a theology of art"\(^{11}\) by Benjamin, the *l'art pour l'art* movement attempted to restore the aura within the sanctuary of aesthetic autonomy. While it is commonly believed that the *l'art pour l'art* movement came as a reaction against the process of commodification under nineteenth-century capitalism, Benjamin related it to an awareness of impending crisis brought about by the introduction of photography, "the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction," and the rise of socialism.\(^{12}\) What Benjamin called "a negative theology" upheld in the idea of 'pure' art was an attempt to keep the aesthetic realm away from utilitarian interests through the denial of any social function of art.

Defining 'aura' as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close [an object] may be,"\(^{13}\) Benjamin related the disappearance of the aura to the increasing importance of the masses in contemporary life. Indeed, he wrote that the masses are "a matrix from which all traditional behavior toward works of art issues today in a new form."\(^{14}\) In light of the emergence of the masses, two circumstances led to the contemporary decay of the aura: "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly," and their "just as
ardent...bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Their ever growing "urge...to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" revealed the sense of equality which they espoused:

To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" had increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.

For Benjamin, the decay of the aura of art work in the age of mechanical reproduction is "a symptomatic process" whose significance goes beyond the realm of art. The adoption of new technical means in the process of production and reception of works of art was the single most significant reality for twentieth-century art. And the decline of the aura was what accompanied the new reality. The reality of mechanical reproduction replaced the unique existence of art work with the inexhaustible plurality of copies, thereby destroying the basis of auratic works of art. Works of art could not continue to have the singular existence in time and space which had been the source of the authenticity of auratic art. Now that works of art were reproduced, their originality lost its importance. Thus, Benjamin remarked: "From a photographic negative, for example, one
can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense."\textsuperscript{18}

As the work of art ceased to be a ritual or cult object through the disappearance of its aura, it lost its "cult value" and took on a new function through its "exhibition value." According to Benjamin, mechanically reproduced art enabled the original work of art "to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record."\textsuperscript{19} By allowing the listener or the viewer to experience the reproduced art work in his or her own environment, the reproduction technique "reactivates" the reproduced object.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, "The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room."\textsuperscript{21}

Benjamin maintained that these changes in the production and reception of art brought about by the processes of mechanical reproduction marked a radical break with tradition. And this break introduced the political function of art in place of the traditional cultic or ritual function. Therefore, Benjamin wrote:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice--politics.}\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}
In this "tremendous shattering of the tradition" was the potential for the "renewal of mankind" which was manifested in contemporary mass movements. While the uniqueness of a work of art was inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition, the decay of the aura of a work of art welcomed by the masses represented the destruction of the aesthetic tradition on their part.23

Singling out film as the art form most attuned to the age of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin pointed out how radically film was transforming the nature of traditional art and consequently dispelling its "auratic" traces. He saw in film the ultimate realization of the montage technique, since film was the end result of a compilation of a series of fragmented shot sequences, and he therefore proclaimed film the "most powerful agent" of the contemporary mass movements. For Benjamin, the social significance of film lay in its "destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage."24 Given the collective nature of the production and reception of film, it was a major challenge to the subjective, solitary, and private nature of the production and reception of autonomous bourgeois arts such as the novel and painting.25 Moreover, in this sense, film was an ideal medium for propagating a political cause. Benjamin
considered the very mechanism of film production inherently progressive, even while acknowledging that economic interests determined the nature of cinematic art in capitalist society.

As one aspect of the disappearance of the aura in film, Benjamin elaborated upon the vanishing of the actor's aura in film in contrast to the traditional theatre. His presence in film and the discontinuous montage of fragmented performances constituting the edited and highly constructed film "role" contributed to the decay of the actor's aura. 26

As for the mode of participation by which the masses viewed film, Benjamin rejected the traditional critique of the audience's absent-minded reception of film. As an example of "the same ancient lament," he referred to Georges Duhamel, who in his opinion detested the film and knew nothing of its significance:

> What [Duhamel] objects to most is the kind of participation which the movie elicits from the masses. Duhamel calls the movie "a pastime for helots, a diversion for uneducated, wretched, worn-out creatures who are consumed by their worries..., a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes no intelligence..., which kindles no light in the heart and awakens no hope other than the ridiculous one of someday becoming a 'star' in Los Angeles. 27

In contrast to the traditional view which maintained that "the masses seek distraction whereas art demands
concentration from the spectator,"  

Benjamin emphasized the positive value of the less concentrated and more distracted state of mind in which the mass audiences enjoyed cinema, as distinguished from the more individualized contemplation of paintings or novels.  

"The distracted mass absorbs the work of art," he wrote, whereas "[a] man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it." The audience cannot accomplish mastery of skills and the tactile appropriation of the world mainly through contemplation. Noticing the object in incidental fashion, in an almost absent-minded state of distraction, the public could tactily appropriate the material as a matter of habit:  

[T]he tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation. The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit.  

Rather than creating an absence of knowledgeable understanding, this was to Benjamin a new form of expertise in which the critical and receptive attitudes of the audience coincided. As with sports, Benjamin emphasized that "It is inherent in the technique of the film...that everybody who witnesses its accomplishments
is somewhat of an expert." He contended that an active awareness was combined with visual and emotional enjoyment in the moviegoing masses when watching a film, and this unity made the popular reception of film inherently progressive. Influenced by Bertolt Brecht, who was optimistically articulating the revolutionary character of film, Benjamin wrote:

Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert....With regard to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide.

As Eugene Lunn has pointed out, Benjamin's awareness of the contemporary dangers to the Jews might have contributed to an "acute sense of the end of tradition." However, Benjamin himself said more emphatically that it was World War I and its social and cultural aftermath that had destroyed any sense of an organically unified, continuously transmitted culture or body of "experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth". In "The Storyteller," he wrote:

Every glance at a newspaper demonstrates that [experience] has reached a new low, that our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were
never thought possible. With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then....For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.35

The highly technologized modern warfare manifested throughout the First World War36 led to Benjamin's view of the "aestheticized violence" of late bourgeois society.37 While embracing nihilistic and anarchistic attitudes toward bourgeois society in the years following the First World War, Benjamin was attracted to the relentless attack launched by the Dadaists against traditional discourse and logic and their revolutionary experiments with words. In his "Critique of Violence," written in 1920, Benjamin upheld "revolutionary" violence over "lawmaking" violence.38 To borrow Jurgen Habermas's interpretation of the concept, lawmaking violence is the "structural violence set loose in war and civil strife, which is present latently in all institutions."39 Revolutionary violence, like mythical violence, "manifest[s] itself." It is the "highest manifestation of unalloyed violence in humans."40 What makes

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revolutionary violence "divine" and lends it its "purity" is its freedom from the attributes of the "instrumental" and "purposive rationality." In the Dadaists rebellion, Benjamin found the expression of what he had conceived as pure, revolutionary violence. In the anarchistic, nonsensical acts of the Dadaists, revolutionary violence was translated into expressive activity.

Benjamin saw the "revolutionary strength" of Dada, most of all, in its testing of art for "authenticity":

Still lifes put together from tickets, spools of cotton, cigarette butts, that were linked with painted elements. The whole thing was put in a frame. And thereby the public was shown: look, your picture frame ruptures time; the tiniest authentic fragment of daily life says more than painting. Just as the bloody fingerprint of a murderer on the page of a book says more than the text. Much of this revolutionary content has gone on into photomontage.

Employing new means of aesthetic production, the Dadaists proved that the traditional criterion of bourgeois aesthetics--the authenticity of art--had become obsolete.

More fundamentally, Benjamin argued, Dada had been instrumental in destroying the bourgeois concept of an autonomous, unique, and eternal art. Contemplative immersion, which had been traditionally considered a part of the process of appreciating a work of art, had served
to undercut any attempt to bring the experience of reality into the realm of aesthetics. However, during the decline of bourgeois society, "contemplation became a school for asocial behavior." And it was the Dadaists who exposed this problem in their experimental works. Elaborating upon their war against the bourgeois notion of art based upon the allegedly subjective and independent private self, Benjamin pointed out Dada’s instrumental contribution to the decay of the aura:

The Dadaists attached much less importance to the sales value of their work than to its uselessness for contemplative immersion. The studied degradation of their material was not the least of their means to achieve this uselessness. Their poems are ‘word salad’ containing obscenities and every imaginable waste product of language. The same is true of their paintings, in which they mounted buttons and tickets. What they intended and achieved was a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations, which they branded as reproductions with the very means of production.

In short, through their efforts to destroy the ‘distance’ in the production and reception of art, and to transform art from an unapproachable and uniquely authentic object of worship to a collection of seemingly banal materials from everyday life, the Dadaists "assured a rather vehement distraction by making works of art the center of scandal." Emphasizing that the foremost requirement in the
Dadaists' activities was "to outrage the public," Benjamin wrote that Dada specifically promoted film through its attempt to change the mode of the audience's reception of art from "contemplation" to "distraction." He thought the distracting element of film was based upon "changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator." Thus he compared the film with the painting in the following manner:

The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested....The spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind.

For Benjamin, therefore, film produced a "physical shock effect," while Dada effected a "moral shock effect." Andreas Huyssen has rightly observed that Benjamin regarded shock as a means to transform the psyche of the recipient of art and as "a key to changing the mode of reception of art and to disrupting the dismal and catastrophic continuity of everyday life." The shock effect of film through adopting the principle of montage required a specific mode of reception, which was different from the passive and contemplative conditions.
of reception characteristic of conventional bourgeois auratic art. While the traditional bourgeois mode of reception was a passive absorption in the work of art, film demanded an active and critical response from the viewer by producing an alienating or distracting effect through its shock-creating nature.

In Benjamin's eyes, shock functioned to disrupt not only the established patterns of rational discourse but also those of "sensory perception." He held that this disruption was inevitable when one faced the ever changing reality of modern life, and that the film provided the masses with shock effects which would familiarize them with the revolutionary reorganization of that life:

The film is the art form that is in keeping with the increased threat to his life which modern man has to face. Man's need to expose himself to shock effects is his adjustment to the dangers threatening him. The film corresponds to profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus--changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic, on a historical scale by every present-day citizen.

In fact, throughout his works, Benjamin explored the possibility of a historical transformation in the "apperceptive apparatus." In his essays on the masses, mass culture, and mass media, as well as in his entire Arcades study, Benjamin developed major concepts
regarding sensory perception such as the decay of the aura, shock effects, and experience. In essence, he related the change in sensory perception to new experiences in everyday life in the big cities, a change in reproduction techniques in art, and the nature of commodity fetishism in twentieth-century capitalism.

In this context, Benjamin embraced the montage technique as more than simply an anti-aesthetic device employed in the avant-garde’s rebellion against the bourgeois high-art tradition. To him, montage was a superbly expressive means appropriate to the experiences of highly technologized and urbanized daily life in modern mass society. It was through its creation of shock from unexpected fusion effects that montage excelled in presenting the modern metropolitan sensitivity.

Benjamin stressed the effectiveness of montage in presenting the multi-faceted urban experience without the interference of authorial subjectivity which, he held, created the auratic distance between a work of art and the viewer. Indeed, the significance of the montage technique was the eclipse of the aura of distance in terms of time and space as well as between art and the material existence of everyday life. This disappearance of distance, as examined earlier, was a basic desire of the metropolitan masses.
In the first two completed parts of his study of nineteenth-century Paris, the Passagenarbeit, Benjamin employed the montage technique. The first part, completed in 1935, was an overview of the whole project. Entitling the study "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,"^51 he attempted to provide a spatial metaphor for a period of time. Revealing his fascination with the appearance of new technologies such as the daguerreotype, gas lighting, and the iron-supported commercial arcade in mid-nineteenth-century Paris, Benjamin created a montage in which the myriad aspects of the commercialized culture of Baudelaire's metropolis were radically juxtaposed.

In the extended essay "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," completed in 1938,^52 Benjamin constructed correspondences and metaphorical relations between Baudelaire's poetry and the political, social and economic milieu of his time, putting together an immense amount of material data. Apparently, this construction of a montage through a web of metaphorical comparisons succeeded in embodying the way Baudelaire's own imagination worked. Furthermore, Benjamin employed Baudelaire's own technique of making surprising connections between antiquity and the most banal experiences of everyday modern life as a part of his own "correspondences." Throughout the essay, he managed to present constellations of metropolitan experiences by
gathering an immense amount of factual material on Parisian topography, ragpickers, strolling flaneurs, apaches, dandies, conspirators, gas lanterns, urban detectives, feuilleton journalism, the wine tax of the Second Republic, and numerous other subjects. Also, in this way, Benjamin intended to illuminate the material residues left in Baudelaire's works as social and cultural motifs.

In 1929, several years before he conceived the Passagenarbeit project, Benjamin wrote an essay entitled "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia." Disapproving of the bourgeois obsession with the private self, he upheld in this study the surrealists' claim of public space within the allegedly subjective domain of private self. Also, Benjamin regarded the surrealists, in their relentless war against bourgeois culture, as having broken the rules of the commodified society through their "materialistic" or "profane illumination" of the "enslaved" face of objects. While examining the surrealist experience of Paris, "a little universe," he constructed visual images of the metropolis, employing the montage technique. The presentation of urban shocks in Louis Aragon's Le Paysan de Paris, completed in 1926, provided Benjamin with the "decisive impetus" for his Arcades project.
Regarding Benjamin's presentation of ideas by constructing words in the manner of a montage to produce the shock effects, Charles Rosen has noted:

The idea must appear to arise solely from the juxtaposition of words as they reflect each other....The independent initiative of the words is ensured by systematically weakening the linear movement, the flow of the sentence traditionally cultivated in literary style. It is in language emancipated from communication that Benjamin placed the representation of the ideas....As Mallarme treats words Benjamin treats ideas: he names them, juxtaposes them and lets them reflect off the other. Renouncing direct argument, he relies upon the ideas through language to produce their own cross-meanings: his arrangements are material for contemplation, they force the reader himself to draw the meaning from the resonances of the ideas....Like Mallarme's poetry, Benjamin's criticism is allusive, not coercive. Where it goes beyond Symbolism is in the more modern Surrealist use of shock,...the yoking-together of incongruities....The extremes are juxtaposed with little or no mediating comment, and the Idea arises in the silence between them."

In The Origin of German Tragic Drama, completed in 1925, Benjamin described his conception of the critical process as the construction of a mosaic of quotations from which "Ideas" would emerge from their relative placements--a kind of montage of "found objects." In the introduction to the book he spelled out his methodological strategies. While defining the "things" or the factual phenomena of history as intentionless
"stars," he attempted to construct an historical "constellation" by juxtaposing stars previously isolated from each other. In the process, historical objects of the past which had been isolated and unfulfilled were "redeemed" through the interventions of the present which brought out truth and ideas. Thus, as the diffuse and discrete elements of reality are reorganized and come to signify new meaning in a new historical constellation, those elements, now combined together, present an idea.\(^{58}\)

Describing the primordial mode of comprehending words as symbolic not communicative, Benjamin declared that one renews the primordial mode in constructing "Ideas" through arranging fragments, minute details, and quotations. "Ultimately this is not the attitude of Plato," he wrote, "but the attitude of Adam."\(^{59}\)

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* Benjamin compared German baroque drama of the seventeenth century to eighteenth-century classical literature. According to him, unable to grant meaning to fragments and ruins in their usual natural setting and haunted by the idea of catastrophe, the baroque dramatists perceived history as a landscape of decay and death and historical time as an ever-growing pile of debris. Therefore, while the classical writers held to the harmony of nature and antiquity as organically whole and living models, the baroque allegorists conceived
both as fragmented and decayed.  

Benjamin thought that the political, military, and social atmosphere of the post-World War I era had much in common with that of the seventeenth century following the Thirty Years’ War. While the twentieth-century avant-garde artists used the montage technique to present an era of fragmentation and discontinuity, German baroque dramatists produced melancholic allegorical plays in contrast to the classical literature of the eighteenth century.

In short, for Benjamin montage was an "inorganic" way to signify meanings in contrast to the presumably authentic "organic" way of traditional discourse. The inorganic and fragmented mode of montage, he declared, is superbly expressive of an age of fragmentation, catastrophe, and discontinuity such as the twentieth century.

Like Dada’s rejection of the dominant presence of authorial subjectivity in a traditional work of art, Benjamin’s approval of montage was related to his attempt to unlock the poetic power of objects while extinguishing the subjective intervening role of the one unlocking them. Along with the montage technique, his fascination with old books, juxtaposed quotations, architectural ruins and fragments, and the new technologies of photography and film was part of a rejection of authorial
subjectivity as a medium for providing meaning to objects. Benjamin's exploration of the Baudelarian obliteration of the individual's traces in the big city crowd, and his recurrent interest in "the art of straying" in big cities such as Paris, also manifested his denial of the power of authorial subjectivity.

While rejecting the aesthetic of self-expression in the bourgeois tradition of high art, he welcomed Dada's employment of the mass-produced objects of daily life as superb materials in its anti-aesthetic endeavors. What is clear in the avant-garde ideologies of both Benjamin and Dada is their understanding of highly technologized and urbanized modern mass society and their effort to create a viable mass art to express the new experiences of daily life.

NOTES


4. As for Benjamin's view that an understanding of the present condition of art held the key to the comprehension of past art, i.e., nineteenth-century art, Richard Wolin rightly points out that Benjamin’s statement sounded quite close to Marx’s dictum that the key to the comprehension of the anatomy of the ape is human anatomy. See Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 186.

5. Martin Jay maintains that in regard to the mass reproducibility of an art work, Benjamin referred more to the plastic arts rather than to music or drama. However, Jay’s argument is not substantiated, given Benjamin’s enthusiasm for film as a truly modern medium intrinsically requiring mechanical reproduction, in contrast to the traditional theatrical performance. Also, Benjamin’s remark upon the music reproduced for audiences at home in the form of phonograph records is diametrically opposed to Adorno’s subsequent critique of the situation of the music in the age of mechanical reproduction. See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 210.


8. Ibid., p. 224.


10. By employing materials for the first time both for their artistic and for their scientific value, Benjamin maintained, Renaissance painting brought secular elements into the realm of art, causing the
decline of the ritualistic basis of the auratic art:
"The incomparable development of [Renaissance
painting] and its significance rested not least on
the integration of a number of new sciences, or at
least of new scientific data. Renaissance painting
made use of anatomy and perspective, of mathematics,
meterology, and chromatology." See Benjamin, "The

11. Ibid., p. 224.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 222.
14. Ibid., p. 239.
15. Ibid., p. 223.
16. Ibid. Benjamin related this "sense of the universal
equality of things," which in an attempt "[t]o pry an
object from its shell, to destroy its aura," levels
out the uniqueness of an object in the realm of
perception, to the increasing importance of
statistics in the theoretical sphere.

17. Ibid., p. 221.
18. Ibid., p. 224.
19. Ibid., pp. 220-21
20. Ibid., p. 224.
21. Ibid., p. 221.
22. Ibid., p. 224.
23. Ibid., pp. 221-23.
24. Ibid., p. 221.
25. Wolin maintains that the superiority of film in
presenting objective reality forced the traditional
bourgeois art forms such as painting and the novel to
seek out and turn toward even more subjectivistic
190.

26. While admitting that the movie industry resisted the
decay of the actor's aura by making up the star
'personality' artificially outside the studio,
Benjamin thought that, on the other hand, this was an attempt to resist the implications of its own mode of production. Ibid. pp. 229-31.


28. In fact, as will be examined later, this is one of the points that Adorno found objectionable in Benjamin’s essay. Faced with Benjamin’s positive view of the audience’s distracted state of mind, Adorno insisted upon concentration as a requirement for genuine aesthetic reception.

29. Rolf Tiedmann, one of Adorno’s students, insisted upon an affinity between Benjamin’s argument concerning collective reception in a state of ‘distraction’ and the ‘totalitarian’ art policy of the Nazi state, where, he believed, individuals were manipulated in a mass and eventually lost the ability to form an autonomous thought. Yet, optimistically dismissing the possibilities of such manipulation, Benjamin affirmed the constructive function of the ‘distracted’ mass reception. On the other hand, Helmut Lethen, an orthodox Marxist, defended Benjamin’s sanguine view of mass reception in opposition to Adorno. See Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 156n.


31. As for the casual expertise achieved in the state of distraction, Benjamin wrote: "This is obvious to any one listening to a group of newspaper boys leaning on their bicycles and discussing the outcome of a bicycle race for their delivery boys. These arouse great interest among the participants, for the victor has an opportunity to rise from delivery boy to professional racer. Similarly, the newsreel offers everyone the opportunity to rise from passer-by to movie extra. In this way any man might even find himself part of a work of art...." See ibid., p. 231.


33. Ibid., p. 234.

35. Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in Illuminations, p. 84. The essay was originally published in Orient und Okzident in 1936.

36. Benjamin had been exempted from military duty as "a victim of palsy." Gershom Scholem described the situation surrounding Benjamin's presenting himself as a palsy victim at his military physical examination. See Scholem, Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), pp. 11-12, 17-18.


45. Ibid., p. 238.
46. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
50. Huyssen maintains that the issue of historical change in sensory perception is "one of Benjamin’s most interesting and yet undeveloped ideas." See Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, pp. 13-14.
54. Ibid., p. 179ff.
55. Ibid., p. 183.


59. Ibid., pp. 36-37.

60. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 139-40, 224-25, 177-79. Richard Wolin has elaborated upon Adorno's theoretical indebtedness to Benjamin; Adorno saw history as "an inescapable, mythical and rigid continuum of fate, as it presents itself...to mankind under the iron laws of commodity society," following Benjamin's interpretation of history in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* as one condemned to "a fate of transience and decline." See Wolin, Walter Benjamin, pp. 166-68.

61. Peter Bürger comments upon this inorganic, fragmented nature of avant-garde art manifested in the montage technique. See Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 73-82.

62. Lunn points out that at the time Benjamin finished *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, he wrote about his "over 600 quotations, very systematically and clearly arranged." Quoted in Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism*, p. 186.


CHAPTER II
THEODOR W. ADorno:
ART AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

Theodor W. Adorno dissented from many of the major theses which Walter Benjamin presented in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Writing from London on March 18, 1936, Adorno agreed that the "aural element of the work of art is declining." However, this was due, not to the mechanical reproducibility of art as Benjamin declared, but to the technical self-liquidation of its aura brought by the "fulfillment of its own 'autonomous' formal laws" as manifested in modernists' works. Adorno objected to the "sublimated remnant of certain Brechtian motifs" which he found "disquieting" in Benjamin's interpretation of the decay of the aura: "[Y]ou now casually transfer the concept of magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art' and flatly assign to the latter a counter-revolutionary function."2

To Benjamin's view of the autonomous work of art as magical, illusionary, and auratic, Adorno responded that artists such as Kafka and Schoenberg were transforming seemingly hermetic art into a technically "planned" work.3 Through this process, Adorno maintained, the mythical, fetishized qualities were being diminished in the modernists' productions. While criticizing Benjamin for exploring the nature of the autonomous work of art
mainly in the light of the magical aura, Adorno emphasized the dialectical nature of the autonomous work of art:

I need not assure you that I am fully aware of the magical element in the bourgeois work of art (particularly since I constantly attempt to expose the bourgeois philosophy of idealism, which is associated with the concept of aesthetic autonomy, as mythical in the fullest sense). However, it seems to me that the centre of the autonomous work of art does not itself belong on the side of myth...but is inherently dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom.

Therefore, he continued, "the autonomy of the work of art...is not identical with the magical element in it." Claiming that the alienated division of labor in capitalist culture caused the isolation and reification of a "great work of art," Adorno argued that autonomous art dialectically juxtaposes the magical element with a "state of freedom." For him, the modernists' "uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art" brought it into the realm of freedom, not into a realm of a taboo or fetish, revealing how a work of art can be "consciously produced and made." He found a supporting voice for his "materialistic programme" in Mallarmé's definition of a work of literature as "something not inspired but made out of words." Thus, Adorno declared that it was an "anarchism" to denounce a
great work of art in the spirit of Brechtian "immediate use-values" because in the process the transcending and truly progressive elements as manifested in the modernists' works were destroyed.

In a later work *Asthetische Theorie* Adorno pursued his argument on the process of consciously executed destruction of the aura in modern art.

"[D]esubstantialization of art," he claimed, "is not only a stage in the liquidation of art but the logical development of art." Refuting Benjamin's argument that extrinsic factors, such as the arrival of new machine technology and the increasing significance of the masses, brought about the end of traditional art, Adorno argued that the auratic qualities of traditional art were eroded from within through the technical development of an art work, a result which occurred through conscious efforts on the part of modernist artists.

Opposing a Brechtian politicized art or the affirmative culture industry, Adorno saw the primary function of art in its negation of a completely instrumentalized world:

In actuality, art's role in a totally functional world is precisely its afunctionality. It is sheer wishful thinking to assume that art might have any impact, either directly or indirectly, on the course society is taking. To instrumentalize art is to undercut the opposition art mounts against instrumentalism. The only way in which art
can unmask the irrationality of instrumental reason is by warding off attacks on its immanence.\textsuperscript{12}

A genuinely free society, Adorno said, might not need such negative "autonomous" art, but at present the real danger lay in the absorption of functionalized art into a totally instrumentalized world: "It is not inconceivable that mankind, once its ideals have been actualized, will have no use for a closed, self-sufficient culture. Now, however, the demand for the abolition of culture is spurious and can only lead to barbarity."\textsuperscript{13}

In his letter to Benjamin of March 1936, Adorno charged that there was a total lack of "dialectics" in Benjamin's argument, especially in regard to "dialectical penetration of the 'autonomous' work of art which is transcended by its own technology into a planned work."\textsuperscript{14} Defining popular art such as film and photography as "dependent art" in contrast to "autonomous art," Adorno also accused Benjamin of overestimating the technical qualities of dependent art while underestimating those of autonomous art.\textsuperscript{15} According to Adorno's experience at the film studios of Neubabelsberg, montage and the other "advanced" techniques that Benjamin preferred were very little employed in actual film-making: "rather, reality is everywhere constructed with an infantile mimetism and then 'photographed.'"\textsuperscript{16}

Rejecting Benjamin's approval of film as a new art
form devoid of a distance-creating aura, Adorno wrote that film, if anything, has an "aural" character "to an extreme and highly suspect degree." He was not convinced by Benjamin's theory of distraction regarding the audience's reception of film. "The laughter of the audience at a cinema," he wrote, "is anything but good and revolutionary; instead it is full of the worst bourgeois sadism."17 He declared even more simply that "in a communist society work will be organized in such a way that people will no longer be so tired and so stultified that they need distraction."18 Adorno labeled as "anarchistic romanticism" Benjamin's affirmation of the critical functions of the "distracted" state of mind: "[T]he idea that a reactionary is turned into a member of the avant-garde by expert knowledge of Chaplin's films strikes me as out-and-out romanticization."19

Adorno urged the "complete liquidation" of the Brechtian motifs in Benjamin's work.20 He criticized Benjamin's Brechtian faith in the proletariat, and the romanticism of the appeal to "the actual consciousness of actual workers who have absolutely no advantage over the bourgeois except their interest in the revolution, but otherwise bear all the marks of mutilation of the typical bourgeois character."21

Adorno concluded his letter by commenting on his own recent essay on jazz which, in fact, turned out to be the
starting point of his extended criticism of the "culture industry": "It arrives at a complete verdict on jazz, in particular by revealing its 'progressive' elements (semblance of montage, collective work, primacy of reproduction over production) as facades of something that is in truth quite reactionary. I believe that I have succeeded in really decoding jazz and defining its social function."22

Adorno's 1936 essay "Über Jazz" was the first of his works to examine the ideological significance of various forms of popular culture in regard to the ways in which they were both constructed and received by the audience.24 Written mainly during Adorno's stay in England, the essay was published under the pseudonym "Hektor Rottweiler."25 He had not yet visited America and thus had had no first-hand experience of jazz, or of any forms of American culture for that matter. Nevertheless, he had already formed a relentless animus toward jazz and American mass culture which he never really overcame. As Martin Jay points out, Adorno's assertions in the essay were sometimes "outrageous," and were made "less to persuade than to overwhelm" in a totally uncompromising manner, eventually provoking disagreement from the members of the Institute of Social Research themselves.27

Rejecting the allegedly free and spontaneous nature
of jazz, Adorno saw in its performance and reception the liquidation of the autonomous individual in a commodified capitalist society, in which aesthetic activities were collectivized under the control of the culture industry. The "breaks" which were supposedly improvised by a jazz soloist or "subject" had no integral significance, being merely decorative, in the overall constructive development of the music. While the breaks seemed to be free from the "choruslike repetitions" of conventional music, they did not accomplish any function in relation to the development of the whole: "[T]hey go nowhere and merely confirm the sacrifice of the individual to an abstractly preformed collective." Adorno found this so-called "virtuosity of adapting" also in the syncopation of the rhythms. For him, the syncopation of jazz was "purposeless" and "arbitrarily revoked," in contrast to Beethoven's:

[The syncopation of jazz] is not like that of Beethoven, its opposite, which rises up against the existing law until it produces from out of it a new one. It is purposeless; it leads nowhere, and is arbitrarily revoked through a dialectical, mathematical conversion of time-counts which leaves no remainder. [I]t is merely coming-too-early, just as anxiety leads to premature ejaculation, as impotence expresses itself in premature and incompetent orgasm.

For Adorno, the "virtuosity of adapting" reflected
the "pseudofreedoms" of individuals in late capitalist society. While jazz's alleged primitiveness or "naturalness" was considered a revolt against modern mechanized civilization, this was not the return of liberated "nature" but of repressed nature. Thus, "[w]hat appears to be a liberating harnessing of the archaic is in fact its subordination to modern commercial logic: the apparently wild agitation, feigning the unexpected, is rooted in a rigid and timeless immobility, the repetitive sameness of the exchangeable commodity form which must appear always to be new."  

While the structural nature of jazz reinforced the absorption of the individual into the collective, Adorno claimed, jazz spatialized musical movement instead of temporalizing it. It substituted static and mythic repetition for real historical development: "In jazz, one substitutes the immobility of an ever-identical movement for time."  In fact, the decay of temporality was connected with the liquidation of individuality since "temporal development was a crucial attribute of individuality."  

Adorno found in the audience's reception of jazz another evidence of the destruction of individuality in jazz. He asserted that the audience experienced jazz as dance or background music rather than actually listening to it directly. Instead of requiring active
apperceptional participation on the audience's part jazz
induced masochistic passivity. 33

In his study Adorno adopted a "socio-
psychological" 34 approach, rejecting a purely aesthetic
analysis of jazz. Thus, he employed the Freudian
elements of "obedience and superiority, protest and
conformity" in his attempt to explain the liquidation of
the individual subject in submission to authority. 35

Regarding the origins of jazz in slavery, Adorno saw the
slaves' "sadomasochistic" 36 submission to slavery, not
their rebellion against the institution. In this context
the ideological function of jazz as a popular culture
form was implicit in its slavery origins.

In another essay on jazz, written much later, Adorno
summed up very effectively his Freudian critique of jazz
in regard to its ultimate submission to the oppressive
powers of the status quo:

However little doubt there can be regarding
the African elements in jazz, it is no less
certain that everything unruly in it was
from the very beginning integrated into a
strict scheme, that its rebellious gestures
are accompanied by the tendency to blind
obeisance, much like the sadomasochistic
type described by analytic psychology, the
person who chafes against the father-figure
while secretly admiring him, who seeks to
emulate him and in turn derives enjoyment
from the subordination he overtly detests.
This propensity accelerates the
standardization, commercialization and
rigidification of the medium. It is not as
though scurrilous businessmen have
corrupted the voice of nature by attacking
it from without; jazz takes care of this all by itself.37

For Adorno the promise of sexual liberation induced by the varieties of "hot" jazz, was only illusory, hiding an actual fear of castration: "If anything, the sexual message of jazz was castration, combining the promise of liberation with its ascetic denial."38

A year after he wrote "Über Jazz," Adorno remarked upon his first impression of the word, "jazz":

I remember clearly that I was horrified when I read the word "jazz" for the first time. It is plausible that [my negative association] came from the German word Hatz (a pack of hounds), which evoked bloodhounds chasing after something slower.39

The initial negative impression never dissipated. No matter how impressionistic his first response might seem to be, the initial negativity induced by jazz’s verbal association with the German language reveals an ethnocentric aspect of Adorno’s view of popular cultural forms. As Martin Jay and Eugene Lunn maintain in their respective studies of Adorno, his overall perceptions of popular culture were generally conditioned by a narrow provincialism bounded by the traditions of European high culture. Hans Mayer, Adorno’s acquaintance since 1934, commented upon Adorno’s apparent narrow-sightedness which did not look beyond his own environment:
Adorno, as far as I see, never took a trip out of the simple desire to see. Europe sufficed for him entirely. No India or China, no Third World, not the people’s democracies and not the workers’ movement. Even in his needs for life experience, he remained a citizen—and sovereign—of a small state.

Thus, it may be argued that ethnocentric provincialism contributed to Adorno’s failure to differentiate the more genuine form of jazz, rooted in black culture, from the commercial varieties. And while he made many revealing points about jazz, much of his blunt insensitivity and apparent misunderstanding, displayed in his denial of the black contribution to jazz, resulted from this failure to make a critical distinction between the two.

Adorno’s critique of mass culture and the culture industry was continued in his first essay written in America. Published in 1938, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" was a general criticism of the American cultural environment, from which he attempted self-consciously to keep a critical distance throughout his exile’s existence. Continuing his earlier critical evaluation of contemporary music such as jazz, Adorno challenged Benjamin’s optimistic view concerning the influence of technology upon the hitherto sacred realm of aesthetics and the subsequent development of popular culture. While in the essay Adorno dealt mostly with phenomena in the sphere of
music, his analysis of the nature of musical production and reception under the control of the culture industry was generalizable enough to be applied to other modes of aesthetic endeavor. 44

Rejecting Benjamin’s optimism concerning the influence of technology upon the arts, Adorno examined the rampant commodification of aesthetic activities and the disappearance of the true aesthetic experience in the age of the liquidation of individuality. He considered these phenomena to be characteristic of the sad reality revealed in the situation of music and the arts in general under the culture industry of advanced capitalism.

Adorno saw commodification or the fetishization of commodities as an organized process, in which aesthetic endeavors were divested of their traditional primary status through their "use value" as objects of aesthetic experience only to become subsequently dominated by their "exchange value" as commodified objects whose nature and significance were determined by their relation to the market. As shown in the phenomenon of the cult of musical 'stars,' which resulted from a totally artificial and manipulative contrivance on the part of the music industry, the intrinsic quality of individual pieces of music did not matter any more in the marketplace. People sought after certain music just because of the name of
the artist. Thereby art became a commodity, fetishized for its cult value and purchased for its status resulting from its commercial success or popularity, not for its intrinsic qualities as an aesthetic object. 45

Declaring that "all contemporary musical life is dominated by the commodity form," Adorno, following Marx, argued that fetishism was a fundamental element of alienated capitalist culture. In a culture dominated by exchange value rather than use value the fetishism of the commodity was manifested in the "veneration of the thing made by oneself" as a reified object which "as exchange value, simultaneously alienates itself from producer to consumer." The blind veneration of the commodified object was well manifested in the market through the price one paid for possession of the object. Thus, Adorno said, "The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert. He has literally 'made' the success which he reifies and accepts as an objective criterion, without recognizing himself in it. But he has not 'made' it by liking the concert, but rather by buying the ticket." 46

Adorno described the extent of the culture industry by arguing that even so-called 'serious' music, not to speak of "light" music, was dominated by the exchange value of the marketplace: "Whoever still delights in the
beautiful passages of a Schubert quartet or even in the provocatively healthy fare of a Handel concerto grosso, ranks as a would-be guardian of culture among the butterfly collectors." The differences between serious music and light music, Adorno claimed, no longer had any significance, while both of them were manipulated for "reasons of marketability." Thus, "The hit song enthusiast must be reassured that his idols are not too elevated for him, just as the visitor to philharmonic concerts is confirmed in his status."48

In the total commodification of music as a fetishized object, the true understanding of the music as an organized aesthetic whole lost its significance in relation to the audience's reception of it.49 Instead, the invasion of the music by the 'capitalist ethos' was completed by the use of various technical gimmicks to secure the largest possible market through an appeal to "as wide a spectrum of listeners as possible" who had been trained to crave them. To illustrate the techniques used for the purpose of commodifying music, Adorno listed the emphasis upon arrangements rather than actual compositions; the frequent use of coloristic effects; the revival of past musical styles for their sentimentally nostalgic value; the "totalitarian" obsession with "stars" in both serious and popular music; and the standardized hit tunes, all written according to a
formula for easy listening.50

Facing the reality of a contemporary musical scene
totally dominated by the flood of techniques employed by
the industry for easy listening and larger sales, Adorno
declared that hope lay only in that music which did not
succumb to "commodity listening." Refusing to make
itself ever more saleable in the market, "[t]he advanced
product has renounced consumption." Therefore, Adorno
described the "sign of advanced art" in asceticism as
"the strict exclusion of all culinary delights which seek
to be consumed immediately for their own sake."51 As his
model, he took Viennese classicism since "the coloristic
parsimony of Haydn or Beethoven" presented "the
predominance of the principle of construction over the
melodic particular springing in brilliant colors out of
the dynamic unity."52 Also, he approved of the difficult
music of Schoenberg and Webern because it gave form to
the "anxiety" and the "terror" resulting from the
destruction of individuality--a reality which was evaded
by others.53

The decay of individual subjectivity was the main
theme of Adorno's critique of the commodification of
music and art in general. For him, "[t]he liquidation of
the individual is the real signature of the new musical
situation."54 Without true subjectivity a genuine
aesthetic reception of the music became impossible under
the domination of the totalitarian culture industry.

The eclipse of individuality in the field of music was manifested through the various forms of regression of listening. By "regression," Adorno did not mean a relapse of listening to the mode of an earlier musical period. Rather, contemporary listening had regressed to and become arrested at "the infantile stage." Thus, "[n]ot only do the listening subjects lose, along with freedom of choice and responsibility, the capacity for conscious perception of music, which was from time immemorial confined to a narrow group, but they stubbornly reject the possibility of such perception."55

Dominant in the infantile state of listening was the passive dependency of the listeners. They were docile and hostile to anything different from the familiar. The "childish" regressed listeners could respond only to the familiar repetition of what they had already heard before. Therefore, Adorno maintained, "their primitivism is not that of the undeveloped, but that of the forcibly retarded." In the infantile mode of reception, he saw sado-masochistic passivity:

Whenever [the listeners] have a chance, they display the pinched hatred of those who really sense the other but exclude it in order to live in peace, and who therefore would like best to root out the nagging possibility. The regression is really from this existent possibility, or more concretely, from the possibility of a
different and oppositional music. 56

The loss of the capacity of the subject to respond to anything other than the most standardized, programmed, and manipulated forms of music was naturally tied to the process of production and consumption. Advertising, Adorno argued, especially had a fundamental significance in controlling the audience's reception of music, and as a result of the dominance of commodification, caused the regression of listening. He wrote:

Regressive listening is tied to production by the machinery of distribution, and particularly by advertising. Regressive listening appears as soon as advertising turns into terror, as soon as nothing is left for consciousness but to capitulate before the superior power of the advertised stuff and purchase spiritual peace by making the imposed goods literally its own thing. 57

In the face of the inescapable power of advertising, the masses were trained to crave the imposed commodities as an individual 'taste' and thus to deny the apparent liquidation of the individual. This was clearly manifested in the collective dependency upon the manipulated need and response:

The sacrifice of individuality, which accommodates itself to the regularity of the successful, the doing of what everybody does, follows from the basic fact that in broad areas the same thing is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods. But the commercial necessity of concealing this identity leads
to the manipulation of taste and the official culture's pretense of individualism, which necessarily increases in proportion to the liquidation of the individual... The fiction of the relation between supply and demand survives in the fictitiously individual nuances.

Therefore, the masses made "a commodity recommended to them" through advertising "the object of their own action." They "need and demand what has been palmed off on them. They overcome the feeling of impotence that creeps over them in the face of monopolistic production by identifying themselves with the inescapable product." In short, the almighty capitalist machinery of production and consumption inevitably created the consumers of mass culture whose "masochistic" character corresponded to "the behavior of the prisoner who loves his own cell because he has been left nothing else to love."

Just as he dismissed Benjamin's enthusiasm concerning the supposedly progressive reception of the film by the masses in their distracted state of mind, Adorno rejected as illusory the "special capacities of the regressive listeners," who appeared in Benjamin's essay as the audiences in a movie theatre. Adorno saw in the frantic jitterbugger frustrated sexuality, which in turn expressed the repressed hostility of the masochistic listeners. Yet, at the suggestion that the masses' masochistic passivity of forced self-abnegation might
become "destructive rage turned outwards," he was pessimistic about the actual revolutionary power of repressed anger. While Benjamin was optimistic about the revolutionary potential of the masses and emphasized the affirmative aspect of mass art in the age of mechanical reproduction, Adorno staunchly clung to his fundamental belief in the power of subjective individuality in the face of the all-encompassing monolithic dominance of commodification, which, he lamented, was creating a totally manipulated collective consciousness among the masses. "In music, too, collective powers are liquidating an individuality past saving," he concluded, "but against them only individuals are capable of consciously representing the aims of collectivity."  

Adorno continued his analysis of mass culture in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," a chapter within Dialectic of Enlightenment, which he wrote with Max Horkheimer in 1944. As Richard Wolin maintains, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" provided the thematic and methodological basis for the culture industry chapter. The authors saw the culture industry as having an extremely important and, as it turned out, very effective function in developing and maintaining the allegedly totalitarian directions of modern capitalist society. They posited the term 'culture industry,' rather than
'mass culture,' which they thought evoked an illusory sense of spontaneous popularity:

In our drafts we spoke of 'mass culture.' We replaced that expression with 'culture industry' in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art. From the latter the culture industry must be distinguished in the extreme.68

In his study of the culture industry Adorno examined the "liquidation of the individual" in modern Western society in which the culture industry administered "a no...spontaneous, reified, phony culture rather than the real thing"69 in an attempt to aid the machinery of late capitalism by keeping a false appearance of harmony within society as a whole. His disapproval of what passed for mass culture was based upon his belief that it was a carefully planned and administered package imposed upon the masses from above, as opposed to the conservative "mandarin" claim that "the temples of culture" had been violated by the revolt of the masses. For Adorno, therefore, the cultural situation of late capitalism was not cultural anarchy, but "tight regimentation and control."70

Yet, the carefully calculated cultural domination of the culture industry did not employ the crude, sometimes
violent, methods of domination practiced in earlier periods. Instead, it succeeded in controlling the psyche and behavior of the masses in far more subtle and effective ways, attempting to present a "pseudodemocratic" image of "prearranged harmony" in society as a whole. The false harmony between the collective whole and particular individuals imposed by the culture industry was highly manipulative and more sinister than any violent clash between opposite poles in social relations because "the false identity of the general and the particular" succeeded in inculcating in its victims illusory contentment and passive acceptance.

Thus, as "the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success" and insist upon "the very ideology which enslaves them," Adorno maintained, the administered system of late capitalism of the twentieth century was managing to smooth out nineteenth-century contradictions between capital and labor, society and the individual, and high and low culture. Indeed, the whole machinery of late capitalist society functioned not through the "cunning of the authorities" but through "the misplaced love of the common people for the wrong which is done them." As for the conformity subtly enforced upon the masses, Adorno supported Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis of the conformist nature of mass society and quoted from the latter's Democracy in America:
The analysis Tocqueville offered a century ago has in the meantime proved wholly accurate. Under the private culture monopoly it is a fact that 'tyranny leaves the body free and directs its attack at the soul. The ruler no longer says: You must think as I do or die. He says: You are free not to think as I do; your life, your property, everything shall remain yours, but from this day on you are a stranger among us.'

Just as the ever-innovative modern technology served the culture industry, modern industrial society succeeded in administering its socio-cultural system and its populace as an homogenized whole. Under the system which promoted by subtle manipulation the false harmony of the collective and the particular, every facade of contemporary life became identical and, thus, interchangeable, just like mass-produced and mass-consumed products.

In this flood of homogenization, producing exchangeable people and classes, not to speak of those products of mass-production and consumption such as commodities, popular hit tunes, and films, Adorno deplored the betrayal of the last remaining critical and relatively autonomous space. Here, 'negative' resistance against the 'affirmative' culture was possible as those 'contradictions' were still left to their own realms before the arrival of imposed false harmony.

Primarily, Adorno saw negative space as, to borrow
Eugene Lunn's expression, "pockets of resistance" within which individualistic 'negative' aesthetics might create a critically-minded art in resistance to a collective 'affirmative' art. For Adorno, any hope of structural transformation or, at least, the transcendence of present society could be materialized only through the process of the dialectical mediation of opposites, such as the general and the particular, object and subject, and society and art. Facing the dominance of the monolithic homogenization of the culture industry, Adorno lamented the erosion of the negative space which had been possible in confronting opposites/contradictions. Aesthetics, which had been traditionally separated from, and critical of, the reality experience, had been divested of its autonomous space within which it could function as a negative conscience resisting the ever-pervasive dominating force of "instrumental reason." Under the dominance of 'instrumental reason' the individual consciousness became homogenized into a passive consumer collective.

For Adorno, the "stylized barbarism" of mass culture, whose dominant driving force was consumerism, had made obsolete the traditional distinction between high and low culture. Jay sums up very succinctly Adorno's critique of the destruction of the critical functions of negative art by the culture industry: "Even
the most 'negative' examples of classical art had been absorbed into what Marcuse was later to call its 'one-dimensional' facade. Tragedy, which once meant protest, now meant consolation. The subliminal message of almost all that passed for art was conformity and resignation."

In the highly "rationalized" society of late capitalism, Adorno maintained, the culture industry existed to facilitate the functioning of an extremely manipulative social and cultural mechanism. Highly individualistic nineteenth-century high culture and the contemporary modernists attempted to resist the emotional and mental poverty of their societies by protesting through "aesthetic sublimation," the secret of which was "its representation of fulfillment as a broken promise." In contrast, the culture industry sold the illusory image of "pseudosatisfactions" which promoted desire but did not fulfill it. In short, "Works of art are ascetic and unashamed; the culture industry is pornographic and prudish. Love is downgraded to romance." As the genuine aesthetic pleasures of true art for individual subjectivity gave way to such manipulated illusory pleasures for a homogenized collective whole, the captive consumers of mass society became tied ever more closely to the administering machinery of the culture industry through their imposed
As intellectual exiles from Nazi Germany, Adorno and Horkheimer saw a remarkable resemblance between the American culture industry and the meticulously coordianted Volksgemeinschaft of Fascism. Their perspective was greatly influenced by their native culture and their exile, as Lunn observes; and their analysis of modern industrial society and mass culture was, to a certain extent, biased by their failure to differentiate liberal capitalism from fascism. In this context, it is not surprising that Adorno and Horkheimer wrote of the near identical role of radio in America and Nazi Germany:

In America [radio] collects no fees from the public, and so has acquired the illusory form of disinterested, unbiased authority which suits Fascism admirably. The radio becomes the universal mouthpiece of the Führer; his voice rises from street loud-speakers to resemble the howling of sirens announcing panic— from which modern propaganda can scarcely be distinguished anyway .... the inherent tendency of radio is to make the speaker’s word, the false commandment, absolute. A recommendation becomes an order.

Just as modern technology served to tighten the control of totalitarian governments in Europe, technology was an integral factor in the functioning of the culture industry in America. Radio, Adorno and Horkheimer claimed, was to Fascism what the printing
press was to the Reformation.84

NOTES


2. Ibid., p. 121.

3. Ibid., p. 124.

4. Ibid., p. 121.

5. Ibid., p. 123.

6. Adorno elaborated upon the separation of "serious" from "popular" art which he maintained was caused by capitalism: "Both [serious and popular arts] bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change (but never, of course, the middle-term between Schoenberg and the American film). Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one to the other, either as the bourgeois romanticism of the conservation of personality and all that stuff, or as the anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the historical process--a proletariat which is itself a product of bourgeois society." See ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 122.

9. Ibid., p. 123.


11. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 117.

12. Ibid., p. 442.

13. Ibid., pp. 441-42.


15. Adorno declared that Benjamin's overestimation of the progressive technicality of mass art forms was his "main objection" to the ideas presented in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." See ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p. 123.

18. Ibid. As for the general tone of Adorno's response to Benjamin in the letter of March 18, 1936, Eugene Lunn maintains that Adorno might have been taking a more "revolutionary" tone than he otherwise meant, in an attempt to pull away Benjamin from Brecht's influence. See Eugene Lunn, Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 156.


20. At the end of the letter in which he debated Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay, Adorno expressed once again his disapproval of Brecht's influence upon Benjamin: "Indeed I feel that our theoretical disagreement is not really a discord between us but rather, that it is my task to hold your arm steady until the sun of Brecht has once more sunk into exotic waters. Please understand my criticisms only in this spirit." See Aesthetics and Politics, p. 126.


27. Ibid., p. 186. For instance, Herbert Marcuse defined jazz and blues as the artifacts of the "new sensibility" which questioned the affirmative culture of the status quo. See Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 38.


32. Ibid.

33. To the essay "Über Jazz" Adorno wrote in 1937 a supplement, "Oxford Nachtrage." In the supplement Adorno remarked upon the lack of active apperception in the audience's reception of jazz. See Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, p. 187.


37. Ibid. The essay shows that Adorno's original evaluation of jazz did not change at all after his emigration to America. His critique of jazz in the later essay was as severe as ever. Indeed, a short time before his death, Adorno mentioned that in the original essay "Über Jazz," he had been too optimistic in his estimation of jazz's spontaneous nature, due to his "naivete" about the American situation, even though it is almost impossible to sense Adorno's alleged optimism in the original essay. In any case, emphasizing "freshness of judgement" on his part, Adorno discussed his pre-emigration essay of 1936 in recollection: "I certainly knew what monopolistic capitalism and the great trusts were; yet I had not realized how far 'rationalization' and standardization had permeated the so-called mass media and thereby jazz, in whose production they had such a great role. I actually still considered jazz to be a spontaneous form of expression, as it so gladly represented itself, and did not perceive the problem of a calculated and manipulated pseudo-spontaneity, a second-hand kind, which then dawned on me in my American experience and which I later, tant bien que mal, endeavored to formulate." Adorno, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," in The Intellectual Migration, pp. 340-41.


47. Ibid., p. 272.
48. Ibid., p. 276.

49. Ibid., p. 281.


52. Ibid., p. 282.

53. Ibid., pp. 298-99.

54. Ibid., p. 276.

55. Ibid., p. 286.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., p. 287.

58. Ibid., p. 280.

59. As Jay has maintained, Adorno's idea on the passive dependency of the masses in the face of the indoctrinating dominance of the culture industry has a precedent in Erich Fromm's article, "The Feeling of Impotency." See Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, p. 190.


61. Ibid., p. 280.

62. Ibid., p. 296.


64. Ibid., p. 299.

65. Lunn points out that Adorno and Horkheimer were already discussing writing Dialectic of Enlightenment at the time of Adorno's critique of Benjamin in the late 1930s following the publication of the latter's "Work of Art" essay. See Lunn, Marxism and Modernism, p. 160.


70. Jay, Adorno, p. 119.

71. Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 126.

72. Ibid., p. 121.

73. Ibid., pp. 133-34.


75. Lunn, Marxism and Modernism, p. 161.

76. This is the basis of Adorno's opposition to the historical avant-gardists' attempt to unify the traditionally separated realms of art and life. To him, the separate realm of aesthetics was an autonomous space where, existing away from society, serious art functioned as a critical voice.


78. Adorno and Horkheimer, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 140.

79. Ibid.


81. In fact, as Jay shows in his study of the Institute of Social Research, in the 1930s and 1940s, the Institute produced numerous works which analyzed


84. Ibid.
CHAPTER III
THE BENJAMIN-ADORNO DEBATE

In "The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin wrote that "[T]he uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition." Therefore, the end of 'auratic' art through the introduction of the technique of reproduction meant not only the disappearance of the uniqueness of an aesthetic object but also "the end of Erfahrung (experience rooted in tradition)." Adorno and Benjamin agreed that modern society was going through a cultural crisis, due to the disappearing significance of tradition in contemporary experience. However, they disagreed in terms of their assessment as to what the critical cultural transformation brought by the advent of mechanical reproduction might represent.

Adorno saw a primary regression in modern culture in the transformation of the political function of art from the 'negative' force to the 'affirmative' one. He argued that traditionally genuine art had presented a promising hope for a better--utopian--society which was invalidated by the dismal conditions of the present one. In opposition to this 'negative' function of art in resisting the present order of society, Adorno feared that what passed for art in the era of mechanical...
reproduction, that is, mass art, had an 'affirmative' role to reconcile the masses to the status quo. For Benjamin, however, the contemporary "tremendous shattering of tradition" offered potentials for the "renewal of mankind." The decay of traditional auratic art presented progressive possibilities for politicized collective art for the masses, which would reintegrate the traditionally isolated experience of aesthetics with that of reality.

In his "Paris--the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Benjamin offered an optimistic view of the building of a utopia based upon the tremendous productive forces unleashed by modern industrial technology. His utopia was a classless society, a return to a prehistorical Golden Age. He elaborated upon this concept of a return to a past utopia in the form of a modern classless society in his Arcades Project in the following manner:

To the form of every new means of production, which to begin with is still dominated by the old (Marx), there correspond images in the collective consciousness in which the new and the old are intermingled. These images are wish-images, and in them the collective seeks not only to transfigure, but also to transcend, the immaturity of the social product and the deficiencies of the social order of production. In these wish-images there also emerges a vigorous aspiration to break with what is outdated—which means, however, with the most recent past. These tendencies turn the image-fantasy, which
gains its initial stimulus from the new, back upon the primal past. In the dream in which every epoch sees in images the epoch that is to succeed it, the latter appears coupled with elements of pre-history—that is to say, of a classless society. The experiences of this society, which have their storeplace in the collective unconscious, interact with the new to give birth to the utopias which leave their traces in a thousand configurations of life, from permanent buildings to ephemeral fashions.

Benjamin thus saw wish-images arising in the "collective consciousness" from the fragments of modernity. In these wish-images were reflected elements of the primal past, which the collective unconscious had accumulated over the centuries. The visions reflected through the collective unconscious were images of a prehistorical utopia—a classless society, which were released from their unconscious state through the interaction between old and new.

Benjamin claimed that the fragments of modernity, which Baudelaire displayed in his poems and transformed into lyrical subjects, suggested a network of connections with prehistory. And he viewed these connections as a stimulating sign of the new utopia of a classless society. Thus, Benjamin saw in the tremendous productive power of industrial capitalism real possibilities of creating a modern utopia. While maintaining that the actual realization of utopia was hindered by the regressive state of production relations in capitalism,
he thought that, for the first time, the dream of utopia was no longer merely a dream. The fragmentary, yet concrete, traces abounding in the modern era and the rational form of production/distribution relations of a socialist society would eventually fulfill the dream of utopia.

Benjamin declared that it was specifically through the interactions of old and new in the modern age that those utopian wish-fantasies, originally deposited in the collective unconscious, tended to be released. For it was the productive forces of industrial capitalism that made the dream of utopia not a mere fantasy but potentially realizable. Therefore, the tendency for the modern to have recourse to prehistorical elements was not regressive, but rather a pre-envisionment of utopia--the awakening of the collective unconscious to the memory of a prehistoric classless society.

To Benjamin, the enormous productive capacities of industrial capitalism were shackled by the deficient state of production relations under capitalism. These resulted in an increasingly unfair distribution of wealth and the resulting exploitation of the masses. The collective social longing for utopia emerged from the apparent contradiction between the potential for a society of fair abundance and the actuality of the inequitable distribution of social wealth under private
control. Not surprisingly in this connection Benjamin frequently referred to the writings of Saint-Simon and Fourier.9

In his letter of August 2, 1945, Adorno responded to Benjamin’s theses in the Paris essay. Benjamin romanticized not only the potentially utopian aspect of commodity production, but also prehistory as a Golden Age. To Adorno, both modernity and prehistory represented hell rather than utopia. Thus, pointing out the methodological weakness of Benjamin’s "de-dialecticization" of the relationship between modernity and prehistory, Adorno challenged the view of prehistory as a Golden Age:

[Y]ou construe the relationship between the oldest and the newest, which was already central to your first draft, as one of Utopian reference to a "classless society." Thus the archaic becomes a complementary addition to the new, instead of being the "newest" itself; it is de-dialecticized. However, at the same time, and equally undialectically, the image of classlessness is put back into the mythology instead of becoming truly transparent as a phantasmagoria of Hell. Therefore the category into which the archaic coalesces with the modern is far less a Golden Age than a catastrophe.10

For Adorno, in mythologizing the relationship between "the oldest and the newest" as "a Utopian reference to a 'classless society,'" Benjamin neglected to examine the negative side of the new. The newness
manifested in the phenomena of "modernity" represented to Adorno only a perpetuation of the rudiments of prehistory. In the apparent phantasmagoria of modernity, the dazzling array of commodities and inventions, he saw the regression of the modern to the level of prehistory. The inexhaustable proliferation of commodities, which were becoming an indispensable part of the urban experience under nineteenth-century capitalism, represented in reality a regression to the notion of mythical repetition, because the alleged novelties were totally interchangeable. Thus, Adorno saw a reversion to a Great Myth in full-scale commodity production under capitalism, since the capitalist production system was inevitably geared toward reproducing always-the-same commodities under the clever guise of producing the perpetually new.\textsuperscript{11}

As for the relationship between the modern and the archaic, Adorno rejected Benjamin's view of the new as a return to a lost utopia. The alleged novelties were, according to Adorno, in fact merely a new kind of mythical spell, and here lay the affinity between the new and the archaic. He criticized the actual perpetuation of traditional relations of domination under the illusory power of the ever expanding array of perpetually new commodities. For Adorno, this distracted the consumer's attention from the true nature of the exploitative
Adorno scorned Benjamin's faith in a prehistoric classless society, a mythical utopian community where "use-value" reigns supreme. Not to mention the impossibility of returning to some kind of Golden Age, the allegedly idyllic nature of archaic society exceeded any plausible relation to historical facts. Therefore, the exploration of the commodity fetishism of bourgeois society required a historical review of socio-economic forces:

The specific commodity character of the 19th century, in other words, the industrial production of commodities, would have to be worked out much more clearly and materially. After all, commodities and alienation have existed since the beginning of capitalism--i.e. the age of manufactures, which is also that of baroque art; while the 'unity' of the modern age has since then lain precisely in the commodity character. But the complete 'prehistory' and ontology of the 19th century could be established only by an exact definition of the industrial form of the commodity as one clearly distinguished historically from the older form. 12

For Adorno, what was needed was not a Benjaminian return to an earlier stage of civilization ruled by use-value, but the transcendence of capitalism. Its nature could be explored only by an understanding of the actual socio-economic historical forces at work in a given era.

In his attempt to view the relationship between the
modern and prehistory as a catastrophe rather than utopia, Adorno relentlessly reminded Benjamin of his own earlier conception of history as a continuum of disasters which had been presented in his study of Baroque drama. Yet, in the Arcades Project, Benjamin offered a materialistic perspective which emphasized the progressive emancipation of mankind through the mechanism of class struggle. As Adorno rightly sensed, Benjamin's Marxist point of view in the Arcades Project resulted, to a certain extent, from Brecht's influence.\(^\text{13}\)

Given Adorno's doubts concerning collective power in contrast to the individual subject, it is understandable that he rejected Benjamin's optimistic reliance upon the concept of the collective consciousness. For Adorno, this was unfortunately indistinguishable from the reactionary views of Jung and Klages;\(^\text{14}\) and he criticized in Benjamin's work the tendency to "mythical thinking"--i.e., the mythologization of history. Adorno maintained that commodity fetishism was manifested in individual subjects, "not in an archaic collective ego, but in alienated bourgeois individuals."\(^\text{15}\)

According to Adorno, Benjamin's use of the concept of a mass ego exposed him to the dangers of hyphostatizing archaic images of the mythical collective subject and eventually obscuring the actual origins of commodity fetishism in the material relations of production.
Invoking some archaic, mythical collective consciousness would not correct the evils of commodity fetishism, while the possibility of a capable, real collective ego was being compromised by the actual social divisions disguised safely behind commodity fetishism. In short, by invoking the notion of collective consciousness, Benjamin made a regressive ideological mistake. His viewpoint neglected actual historical sufferings by appealing to an illusory, totally mythical vision of harmonious solidarity envisioned through utopian archaic images. Thus, Adorno succinctly stated:

"[A] mass ego exists only in earthquakes and catastrophes, while otherwise objective surplus value prevails precisely through individual subjects and against them. The notion of collective consciousness was invented only to divert attention from true objectivity and its correlate, alienated subjectivity. It is up to us to polarize and dissolve this 'consciousness' dialectically between society and singularities, and not to galvanize it as an imagistic correlate of the commodity character. It should be a clear and sufficient warning that in a dreaming collective no differences remain between classes."

Adorno saw another trace of Brecht's influence in Benjamin's tendency to hypostatize such concepts as 'collectivity,' 'proletariat,' and 'mass' in an instantly positive way. In doing so, both Brecht and Benjamin neglected the fundamental task of exploring the real
historical forces at work which created actual fragmented conditions. Adorno rejected what he considered their naive confidence in the innate revolutionary potential of the masses and their enthusiastic trust in the intrinsic capacity of a technological apparatus such as film, theater, or radio to produce revolutionary results. His primary criticism of the Arcades project was its falsifying positivity, which was in essence distinctively Brechtian.

Benjamin’s embrace of collective mass-art forms for a modern mass society was based upon the aesthetic judgment that the new reality in the age of mechanical reproduction required the inevitable de-aestheticization of traditional aesthetic activities. The traditional bourgeois aesthetic forms, whose production and reception fundamentally relied upon subjective individuality, were no longer effective in a highly technologized modern mass society. Benjamin rightly pointed out the crisis of the arts in the particularly bourgeois aesthetic forms of painting and the novel. According to him, the new representational mode, which was objective and collective as revealed in photography and film, had replaced the subjective and individualistic representation of the external world in traditional bourgeois aesthetics.

Benjamin did not accept a separate realm for aesthetics. Works of art were matters of social
significance, no matter how sublime or abstract. The mode of aesthetic production and reception was determined by the level of technological development in a given period. Therefore, Benjamin emphasized the conditions of art which he understood as fundamentally relative to the material realities of production. By stressing the social or material basis of aesthetic activities, he attempted to reveal the materially determined historical nature of works of art. Thus, he succeeded in demystifying the conventional bourgeois appreciation of art in terms of supposedly absolute aesthetic categories such as sublimity, beauty, and genius.

Rejecting traditional concepts of aesthetics, Benjamin successfully argued that, for better or worse, it was an undeniable reality of the twentieth century that technological forces had become an integral part of the process of aesthetic production and reception. The very concept of art had changed inevitably, resulting in the decay of the auratic qualities traditionally considered to be aesthetic. Art had taken on a new identity as a medium for communication rather than remaining a cultic or ritual object.

From his fundamentally modernist point of view in contrast to Benjamin’s more progressive avant-garde perspective, Adorno objected to Benjamin’s seemingly uncritical approval of mechanically reproduced art and
his unqualified rejection of autonomous art as "counter-revolutionary." Also, he found the approach in "The Work of Art" essay completely undialectical, for it neglected a 'dialectic of rationalization' with regard to autonomous art which could be compared with the 'dialectic of technique' in the case of mechanically reproduced art. Through the dialectical process of rationalization, Adorno believed, autonomous art divested itself of the aura and its uncritical affirmative attributes. Thus, he wrote:

Dialectical though your essay may be, it is not so in the case of the autonomous work of art itself; it disregards an elementary experience which becomes more evident to me every day in my own musical experience--that precisely the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art changes this art and instead of rendering it into a taboo or fetish, brings it close to the state of freedom, of something that can be consciously produced and made.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Adorno chose Schoenberg and Kafka as representatives of twentieth-century autonomous art. They manifested in their work the truly advanced and radical nature of autonomous art in its rejection of the regressive and complacent characteristics conventionally associated with autonomous art. There was no trace of the aura affirmatively endorsing the social structure of the status quo. On the
contrary, the fragmentary and dissonant structure of their works had a fundamentally negative function which resisted the dominant culture, and, by doing so, put them in a position against, not for, bourgeois socio-cultural norms.

Hence, Adorno insisted upon authentic autonomous art as a rejection of the aestheticism of the nineteenth-century *l'art pour l'art* movement. The radically experimental works of modernists such as Schoenberg and Kafka challenged the conventional notion of autonomous art as an organic entity, which was closed to everyday reality by its mystifyingly self-sufficient totality. For Adorno, the modernists' experimental works achieved an authentic autonomy from the pressures of the status quo by means of their fragmented, ever-evolving nature.

Adorno criticized Benjamin's excessive eagerness to embrace the supposedly progressive potential of mechanically reproduced art while repudiating too simply the revolutionary function of autonomous art. Granting revolutionary qualities to film and the movie-going masses lacked factual foundation. In fact, the reality of the culture industry presented a completely different picture of mechanically reproduced art. In its manipulative hands, film had taken on a fake aura manufactured in the board room of a gigantic Hollywood film studio.
In Adorno's opinion, any genuine potential in film to be a truly revolutionary medium of unsurpassed objectivity had been dissolved in illusion. Because of the all-powerful culture industry the significance of film lay in its function as mass entertainment or momentary cultural diversion. The political dimension of film as a mass-art form resulted in the phenomenon of totalitarian manipulation of the masses to solidify the dominant social system. Following in the footsteps of Brecht, Benjamin exhibited a blind faith in the intrinsically revolutionary nature of the masses, and an apparently uncritical fetishization of the powers of technology, while naively ignoring the grim side of the story—the employment of the same technology for the manipulative socio-cultural ends of controlling the masses.

Despite his various objections, Adorno did not reject completely Benjamin's account of the decay of the aura. In fact, he agreed about the effects of technology upon the realm of aesthetics. Yet, while Benjamin upheld mechanically reproduced art as inherently emancipatory and revolutionary, Adorno saw in the argument for de-auraticized, mechanically reproduced art a total lack of negativity, for the art which is mechanically reproduced for the purpose of mass distribution is manipulative rather than emancipatory. Adorno feared that
mechanically reproduced art could be all too easily manipulated for the purpose of coopting and integrating the masses within the structure of the status quo. On the other hand, Benjamin failed to recognize the revolutionary aspects of authentic autonomous art, manifested in its voluntary rejection of conventional aaurarity surrounding bourgeois art.

As is clearly manifested both in Adorno’s 1936 letter in response to Benjamin’s "The Work of Art" essay, and in his own "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," Adorno was deeply concerned with how completely the aesthetic activities of the post-World War I era had come under the control of commodification and the market economy. The pre-capitalist environment of genuine aesthetic production and reception had become a matter for nostalgia, no longer a reality. Thus, Adorno contended, even folk art, not to speak of high art, had been much better off in the socio-cultural environment existing before the triumph of modern capitalism. Those who did not have access to the aesthetics of high culture had once relied upon folk-art forms to express their feelings and emotions. However, as the hegemonic interests of the culture industry succeeded in marketing folk art itself as a commodity, it had lost its genuine and integral function as a vehicle of aesthetic expression for the populace.
Adorno insisted that the reification of culture inevitably caused the total liquidation of the individual. As the totalitarian grip of the market economy made culture itself something concrete, something packageable, to be sold in the market place, individuals became collective objects for the endless supply of commodities. In an important sense, the liquidation of the individual constituted an integral part of this process. For all that was necessary for mass-produced commodities was mass consumers. As indistinguishable as the commodities themselves, the crowd in the market place was easily manipulated to accept a false sense of equality. In short, through the process of cultural indoctrination by the culture industry, well-planned, standardized, ready-made tastes were being forced upon the masses at the expense of autonomous subjective reception by individuals.

For Adorno, modern technology had played an indispensible part in this process of the reification of culture. Benjamin saw in the advent of technology in the realm of aesthetics great potential for the birth of genuine, liberating art for the masses. To Adorno, it was only to manipulatively enslaving ends that technology contributed to the field of aesthetics. The process began "as soon as advertising turns into terror, as soon as nothing is left for consciousness but to capitulate
before the superior power of the advertised stuff and purchase spiritual peace by making the imposed goods literally its own thing." In opposition to Benjamin's uncritical optimism about the introduction of modern technology into the realm of aesthetics, Adorno concluded:

Whether a technique can be considered progressive and "rational" depends on this meaning and on its place in the whole of society as well as in the organization of the particular work. Technical development as such can serve crude reaction as soon as it has established itself as a fetish and by its perfection represents the neglected social tasks as already accomplished.

To be sure, neither Adorno nor Benjamin presented a complete diagnosis or prognosis concerning the impact of modern technology on the realm of aesthetics. Benjamin's enthusiasm for mechanically reproduced, de-aestheticized and appropriately fragmented art for the masses neglected the danger of the co-optation of any resistance against the totalitarian power of the status quo. Moreover, in an attempt to re-integrate the aesthetic realm into everyday reality, Benjamin ran the risk of relinquishing any genuine element of aesthetic autonomy to the utilitarian interests of the market place.

On the other hand, Adorno's nostalgia for the nineteenth-century past, which had fundamentally contributed to nurturing the tradition of high art, was
to a certain extent anachronistic. Along with his highly elitistic view of mass culture, Adorno’s staunch defense of autonomous art in the tradition of the pre-capitalist production and reception of aesthetic activities seriously neglected the reality of any aesthetic activities in a highly technologized mass society. Adorno’s insistence upon respect for a genuinely higher art form threatened to alienate the majority in a highly technologized mass society, causing a general feeling of resentment. For the most subjective and privatized modernist art, as exemplified in the work of Schoenberg, could be appreciated by only a few chosen ones, all in the name of the autonomy of genuine aesthetics.

NOTES


3. Adorno, along with some members of the Institute of Social Research, had always considered art to have a political function. The political nature of art was inherent in their understanding of art. For them,
art presented "a foretaste of the 'other' society
denied by present conditions."  See Jay, The
Dialectical Imagination, pp. 210-11.

4. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical
Reproduction," in Illuminations, p. 221.


6. From the late 1920s until his death in 1940, Benjamin
worked with consistency on the cultural study of
nineteenth-century Paris. While the study commonly
referred to as the "Arcades Project" (Passagenarbeit)
was still incomplete, Benjamin wrote three separate
works at different stages of his work on the original
project. They are "Paris--the Capital of the
Nineteenth Century," completed in 1935 as an expose
or draft of the Arcades project; "The Paris of the
Second Empire in Baudelaire" was completed in 1938;
and completed in 1939, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire"
was the result of a critique by Adorno of "The Paris
of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," whose main part
it was intended to replace.

7. Benjamin, "Paris--the Capital of the Nineteenth
Century," in Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the
Era of High Capitalism, trans. from the German by
The paragraph follows a quotation from Michelet's
Avenir!  Avenir!: "Chaque epoque reve la suivanté."
('Every epoch dreams its successor.')

8. In this sense, Benjamin viewed Baudelaire as playing
a unique role for having implicitly sensed the modern
nature of the relation between "decadence" and
"emancipation."  See Richard Wolin, Walter Benjamin:
An Aesthetic of Redemption (New York: Columbia

9. Ibid., pp. 157-60, 164-66.  The first part of the
essay is entitled "Fourier or the Arcades."

10. Adorno, letter to Benjamin, Hornberg, Black Forest,
August 2, 1935, in Aesthetics and Politics, p. 112.

11. Ibid., pp. 111-14.

12. Ibid., p. 114.

13. Benjamin attempted to assuage Adorno's misgivings
concerning Brecht's influence: "I know that it is the
language of most genuine friendship...which moves you
to the conviction that you would consider it a true misfortune if Brecht should gain influence on this work [the Arcades Project]." Benjamin, *Briefe* 2:663. Quoted in Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 173.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Adorno, letter to Benjamin, March 18, 1936, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 121. Detecting the Brechtian influence again, Adorno protested Benjamin's apparently single-handed rejection of autonomous art as reactionary: "I now find it disquieting—and here I see a sublimated remnant of certain Brechtian motifs—that you now casually transfer the concept of magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art' and flatly assign to the latter a counter-revolutionary function." See ibid.


20. Ibid., 296.
CHAPTER IV

HIGH ART VERSUS MASS CULTURE:
ON THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE

Remarking upon the problematic relationship between high art and mass culture since the mid-nineteenth century, Andreas Huyssen has captured the nature of modernism in the notion of an "anxiety of contamination," which dominated its insistence upon high art:

Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of modernism as an adversary culture derive from that fact. Not surprisingly, this anxiety of contamination has appeared in the guise of an irreconcilable opposition, especially in the l'art pour l'art movements of the turn of the century (symbolism, aestheticism, art nouveau) and again in the post-World War II era in abstract expressionism in painting, in the privileging of experimental writing, and in the official canonization of "high modernism" in literature and literary criticism, in critical theory and the museum.1

The oppositional ideologies of high art and mass culture are well represented in the aesthetic ideas of Adorno and Benjamin. Adorno spoke for modernism through his insistence on the autonomy of art and its separation from daily experience, his skepticism toward mass culture, and his assertion of genuine art's critical distance from any political, social, and economic
concerns. On the other hand, Benjamin's enthusiasm for the decay of auratic high art and his optimism about mass culture in the age of mechanical reproduction were an avant-gardian attempt to destabilize the traditional opposition between high and low arts.²

In the early twentieth century, the isolationist aesthetics of high culture was seriously challenged by the members of the historical avant-garde movement. Having experienced World War I and finding themselves in a modern mass society, highly technologized and urbanized, the historical avant-gardists attempted to redefine the relationship between art and life to accommodate the new socio-cultural reality. In short, the historical avant-garde's effort to reintegrate the traditionally separated realms of art and life rejected modernism's nostalgia for high art in the face of the emergence of mass society and accepted the totally changed nature of aesthetic production and reception in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Modernism and the avant-garde have been defined in relation to the dichotomy between traditional bourgeois high culture and vernacular or popular culture, which has become modern commercial mass culture. A modernist aesthetic discourse attempts to protect the presumably genuine aesthetics of high art from the barbarian encroachment of mass culture. Adorno's aesthetic theory
best represents the modernist stance in that it insists upon the inevitable and necessary separation between high art and popular culture in a modern capitalist society. Adorno's theory of modernism was developed in the late 1930s. As commonly understood, his demand for the separation of high art and mass culture resulted from his cultural and political concern for the dignity and autonomy of art in the face of the totalitarian pressures of fascist mass spectacles, socialist realism, and an ever more commodified modern mass culture in the West, specifically represented by the American 'culture industry.' Probably Adorno's concern was at the time well grounded upon cultural and political reality. In addition to this aesthetic concern, the theory reveals historical and political factors and reflects a fear of the degradation of arts by politics. The historical avant-garde's effort to reintegrate art and life and create a truly revolutionary mass art had been manipulated to support the totalitarian political agenda of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. Adorno's ardent support for modernism and his critique of modern commercial mass culture culminated in his discourse on the American culture industry.

By contrast, Benjamin rejected the insistence upon the presumably necessary separation of high art from mass culture. He shared with the historical avant-garde an
enthusiasm for the new age of technological innovation. In the technological modernization of society and the arts through the new means of reproduction, the historical avant-garde saw the potential for achieving their revolutionary goals in politics and aesthetics as well. Therefore, technology played an integral part in its revolt against the high art tradition of aestheticist modernism as it emphasized new modes of aesthetic production and reception, and optimistically envisioned constructing a truly liberating mass culture.

The concept of the avant-garde first gained prominence following the French Revolution (1789-1799). In France, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the writings of the utopian socialists, especially those associated with Saint-Simon and Fourier, envisioned the union of the artist with other progressive factors of the society. Yet, as Matei Calinescu has observed, the term 'avant-garde' had been already introduced in 1794, shortly after the French Revolution, in the pro-Jacobin military journal L'Avant-garde de l'armée des Pyrénées orientales, which had declared as its watchword "La liberté ou la mort."^4

The original military implications of the concept reveal quite accurately the subsequent attitudes and characteristics of the avant-garde which, as Calinescu points out, are based upon the general "consciousness of
modernity." He enumerates some of the characteristics of the avant-garde which relate to the sense of modernity: "a sharp sense of militancy, praise of nonconformism, courageous precursory exploration, and, on a more general plane, confidence in the final victory of time and immanence over traditions that try to appear as eternal, immutable, and transcendentally determined."5

To borrow Charles Russell's definition, the military avant-gardists were those "special troops who advanced before the main body of their army into enemy lines, serving as shock troops to disrupt the enemy's forces, and, usually with great loss to themselves, insuring the success of those who followed." As Russell has noted, the military metaphor suggests the idea that the avant-garde artists would explore the unknown realm of the future. Several decades later, the idea was adopted by utopian socialists such as Saint-Simon and his followers.6

In Saint-Simon's *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles*, published in 1825, the artist was given a vanguard role in building an ideal state and bringing about the Golden Age.7 For Saint-Simon and his followers, the vanguard artist, along with the scientist and industrialist, led society into the future. Saint-Simon saw the artist as a man of imagination and attributed to him the capacity not only
of predicting the future but also of creating it. Therefore, De l'organisation sociale (1825) pictured the artist as leading the triumphant march toward the Golden Age:

...in this great undertaking the artists, the men of imagination will open the march: they will take the Golden Age from the past and offer it as a gift to future generations; they will make society pursue passionately the rise of its well-being, and they will do this by presenting the picture of new prosperity, by making each member of society aware that everyone will soon have a share in enjoyments which up to now have been the privilege of an extremely small class; they will sing the blessings of civilization, and for the attainment of their goal they will use all the means of the arts, eloquence, poetry, painting, music; in a word, they will develop the poetic aspect of the new system.

Accordingly, the artist's role in creating a new society lay in the articulation of the "blessings of civilization" to be achieved through cooperation among scientists, industrialists, and socialists.

Calinescu found that it was Olinde Rodrigues, one of Saint-Simon's disciples, who first used the term 'avant-garde' in situating the artist in the forefront of the movement toward constructing a new society. In his dialogue, "L'Artiste, le savant et l'industriel," which was published in Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles, Rodrigues remarked upon the artist's role in propagating socialist ideas for a better future:
It is we, artists, that will serve as your avant-garde; the power of the art is indeed the most immediate and the fastest. We have weapons of all sorts: when we want to spread new ideas among people, we carve them in marble or paint them on canvas; we resort to the lyre or the flute, the ode or the song, history or the novel; the theatre stage is open to us, and it is mostly from there that our influence exerts itself electrically, victoriously. We address ourselves to the imagination and feelings of people: we are therefore supposed to achieve the most vivid and decisive kind of action; and if today we seem to play no role or at best a very secondary one, that has been the result of the arts' lacking a common drive and a general idea, which are essential to their energy and success.  

As Calinescu has rightly pointed out, Rodrigues saw the artist mainly as a propagator of new ideas, while common socialist aims determined more or less the artwork. Nevertheless, for the first time, artists were assigned an integral role in social struggle and the utopian integration of artist and society was envisioned as a reality. Moreover, the concept of an avant-garde was inextricably connected with the idea of material progress brought about by scientists and industrialists. To Saint-Simon and his followers, avant-garde artists, scientists, engineers, and industrialists were to collaborate to create the emerging technological-industrial bourgeois society, "the world of the city and the masses, capital and culture." Since that time, as Huyssen maintains, the concept of an avant-garde has been
firmly bound up with the idea of progress through an endless succession of industrial and technological innovations. 12

Throughout the nineteenth century, starting with Saint-Simon's utopian blueprint, the concept of the avant-garde was not limited to art alone but related to political radicalism as well. Through the utopian socialist ideology of Charles Fourier, the idea of the avant-garde was incorporated into socialist anarchism and subsequently into the ideology of the bohemian subculture at the turn of the century. Donald Egbert believes that the attraction of Fourierism to the avant-garde artist was the fact that Fourier's political ideology verged upon anarchism. "This strong element of individualism," Egbert writes, "made Fourierism and anarchism alike appeal to some of those romantic individualists of the artistic avant-garde who subscribed to the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' and then to symbolism." 13

Saint-Simon and Fourier and their followers thus established the tradition of assigning a political role to the artist in social movements and, in the process, popularized the term 'avant-garde' in artistic and literary circles by the mid-nineteenth century. By the 1860s, the idea of the self-proclaimed avant-garde artist was employed frequently in the political language of radicalism. Here, according to Calinescu, the term
'avant-garde' tended to indicate a certain type of political commitment exhibited by an artist who saw his role mainly as propagandist.  

Interestingly enough, repulsed by the military metaphor of the avant-garde, Baudelaire disdained the "littérateurs d'avant-garde" who flaunted a military term to describe their aesthetic role. His attitude originated in his understanding of the seeming paradox of the avant-garde, that its much-vaunted nonconformism was in fact rooted in a military discipline and, even worse, collective conformity. Baudelaire wrote derisively about the "Frenchman's passionate predilection for military metaphors":

In this country every metaphor wears a moustache. The militant school of literature. Holding the fort. Carrying the flag high....More military metaphors: the poets of combat. The littérateurs of the avant-garde. This weakness for military metaphors is a sign of natures that are not themselves militarist, but are made for discipline—that is to say, for conformity—natures congenitally domestic, Belgian natures that can think only in unison.  

In the 1870s, the term 'avant-garde' was used to describe the technical innovations of the impressionist painters. By that time, in France, the concept was taking on a more aesthetic, rather than political, meaning. Therefore, without losing its political
significance, the avant-garde became a word to categorize the small group of artists and writers in whose works the spirit of radical socio-political critique was transferred to the realm of aesthetics. For this new, more aesthetically-minded stance of avant-garde artists of the 1870s Arthur Rimbaud provided a succinct statement in his "Lettre du voyant," addressed to Paul Demeny on May 15, 1871. Here, Rimbaud was delineating the visionary avant-garde when he wrote that poetry "will be in advance," and that "the newcomers are free to condemn the ancestors." Thus, the poet should become a seer, reaching toward the unknown and inventing a new language.

This primarily aesthetic concept of the avant-garde continued to develop through the turn of the century and the First World War. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the avant-garde had become a standard concept to describe a succession of innovative writers and artists with their respective, sometimes overlapping, aesthetic innovations and social outlooks.

While the idea of the socially active avant-garde artists was a product of the French Revolution and the first decades of the nineteenth century watched socialist idealism combining with the Romantic movement in the arts to bring out a socially and aesthetically involved avant-garde art, it was not until the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries that the major avant-garde writers and artists came on to the scene.\textsuperscript{20} Peter Bürger, who introduced the term 'historical avant-garde' in his \textit{Theory of the Avant-Garde},\textsuperscript{21} argued that the appearance of those artists was possible only after the 'art for art's sake' movement of late-Romanticism, which was essentially anti-Romantic, had emerged in France during the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{22}

As conceived by Théophile Gautier and his followers, \textit{l'art pour l'art} in mid-nineteenth century France was not a fully developed aesthetic theory, but rather a protest launched by a group of artists against the abstract humanitarianism of Romanticism and bourgeois mercantilism and utilitarianism. The aestheticism of the movement rejected the utilitarian function of art, which was detected in both the bourgeois notion of art and the socialists' revolutionary vision of art. Opposing the subservience of art to popular entertainment or to a socially or culturally ameliorative plan, the aestheticists insisted upon the absolute autonomy of the art work from any instrumental reasoning and the superior integrity of the aesthetic form. Significantly, their legacy of a hermetic approach to art survived in a succession of later modernisms.\textsuperscript{23}

As for the insistence of \textit{l'art pour l'art} and later modernisms upon the separation of the aesthetic realm
from the reality of daily life and upon art as a specialized form of autonomous imagination, Charles Russell has commented that the aesthetic autonomy they upheld to insure a critical distance indispensable for the aesthetic imagination was "the obverse of the alienation" that they had to endure. Raymond Williams also has argued:

[T]he positive consequence of the idea of art as a superior reality was that it offered an immediate basis for an important criticism of industrialism. The negative consequence was that it tended, as both the situation and the opposition hardened, to isolate art, to specialize the imaginative faculty to this one kind of activity, and thus to weaken the dynamic function (which Shelley proposed for it.)

Drawing upon the critical Marxist tradition, especially upon Benjamin and Adorno, Peter Bürger argues in his Theory of the Avant-Garde that the historical avant-garde movements such as Dada, surrealism, and the post-1917 Russian avant-garde attempted to reintegrate art and life praxis and to close the gap between art and reality that the modernist aestheticism asserted. That gap, which had become so evident in late nineteenth-century aestheticism, was an inevitable, logical development of art in a bourgeois society. In its endeavor to close the gap, Bürger continues, the historical avant-garde attempted to destroy "art as an
institution." By "art as an institution," he means "the productive and distributive apparatus" and "the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works."^26

Both Russell and Huyssen have warned against the marginalization and alienation of artists implicit in the assertion of an autonomous art.\(^27\) Bürger has also remarked upon the ironic effects of the aestheticist movement in the nineteenth century, during which the ever-increasing trend of separating art from reality and the assertion of the autonomy of art, resulted in the marginalization of art and artists. This followed the freeing of art from what Benjamin called a "parasitical" relationship with church and state\(^28\) and its independence of any utilitarian function. Therefore, having started as a radical break with the bourgeois industrial society, the l'art pour l'art movement ended up at a dead end.

What the historical avant-garde attempted was to change this passive isolation of l'art pour l'art into active rebellion through the integration of aesthetics and reality. Bürger maintains that the phenomenon of the historical avant-garde is a manifestation of bourgeois aesthetics' finally having reached the stage of self-criticism. For it was not simply the aesthetics of the previous generation, but the very "art as an institution" as it had been steadily established within the bourgeois
social system since the eighteenth century that the historical avant-garde rejected. 29

While modern technology for Benjamin had transformed everyday life experience drastically in the twentieth century, the reality of technology and the whole system of mass production and mass consumption also had a tremendous impact upon the transformation of the nature of aesthetics. Technology was an indispensable factor in the avant-garde's attempt to integrate art with life and make it a productive force in the transformation of everyday life.

Echoing Benjamin, Bürger emphasized that starting with Dada, the historical avant-garde tried to establish a radical break with traditional, referential mimetic aesthetics and the notion of auratic art as autonomous and organic. 30 This effort, along with the attack on "art as an institution," is what distinguished the historical avant-garde from earlier movements such as impressionism, naturalism, and cubism, the main concern of which was to criticize "schools that preceded" them. 31

In the historical avant-garde's endeavor to break away from the traditional aesthetic mode, technology was the single most important factor because it opened up a new source of imagination by providing artists with a different way of perceiving their surroundings and a new set of aesthetic materials. Indeed, through the
destruction of traditional notions of what constituted aesthetic objects and the introduction of the technological imagination, technology radically transformed the core of the art work itself through such new artistic techniques as collage, assemblage, montage, and photomontage. The ultimate expression of the technological imagination was photography and film, the aesthetic forms that, as Benjamin pointed out, were not only born in the age of mechanical reproduction, but were also designed specifically for mechanical reproducibility.32

In "The Work of Art" essay, Benjamin noted that mechanical reproducibility had changed the whole system surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of art and had brought about the decay of the aura surrounding traditional art works. In another essay, "The Author as Producer," Benjamin particularly acknowledged Dada's contribution to the disappearance of auratic art.33 Indeed, its conscious attempt to destroy the aura was clearly manifested in artistic practices employing mass-produced commodity items as art objects.

More than a decade before Benjamin theorized about mechanical reproducibility and the subsequent decay of auratic art, Marcel Duchamp, one of the leading Dadaists, had started to produce exemplary works of avant-garde art based upon mechanical reproducibility. Duchamp's
L.H.O.O.Q., shown in 1919, used a reproduction of the Mona Lisa as an object of iconoclasm. In 1917, for his Fountain, Duchamp exhibited a urinal, a mass-produced item, as a fountain sculpture. In doing so he accomplished Dada's goal of destroying what Benjamin called the 'aura,' the atmosphere of unreachable authenticity and uniqueness which separated the art work from everyday life.

Concerning the new experience of technology which fueled the avant-garde, Huyssen describes two poles of the new experience: "the aestheticization of technics" since the late nineteenth century, taking such shapes as world expos, garden cities, and the cité industrielle on the one hand; and "the horror of technics" fueled by the war machinery of World War I on the other. The bipolar experience of technology in the bourgeois world, Huyssen claims, was given expression finally by the post-1910 historical avant-garde through its attempt to integrate technology as instrumental means and technology as aesthetic material. Here lies the importance of Dada as a response to the new experience of technology.

The Dadaists' revolt was rooted in the experience of the highly technologized warfare of World War I. While this war was glorified as a liberation by the Italian Futurists, it was condemned by others as the ultimate manifestation of the insanity of European bourgeois
society. Having witnessed the destructive power of
technology in war, the Dadaists brought technology into
art. By doing so they launched a war against bourgeois
high culture, the guardians of which were after all those
same people who were responsible for the war.

Dada’s use of technology against the hegemonic
tradition of bourgeois high culture was a radical
rejection of the view of technology as an instrument for
achieving industrial and economic well-being within the
bourgeois system. Thus, the critical aspect of Dada’s
revolt against the dominant bourgeois cultural tradition
was its desire to liberate technology from its secondary
instrumental function by integrating it into the realm of
aesthetics. On the nature of this revolt against the
bourgeois subordination of technology to material wealth,
Huyssen remarks:

Dada’s radical and disruptive moment
becomes even clearer if we remember that
bourgeois ideology had lived off the
separation of the cultural from industrial
and economic reality, which of course was
the primary sphere of technology.
Instrumental reason, technological
expansion, and profit maximization were
held to be diametrically opposed to the
schoner Schein (beautiful appearance) and
interesseloses Wohlgefallen (disinterested
pleasure) dominant in the sphere of high
culture.36

In its attempt to integrate art and reality, as
Huyssen has rightly pointed out, Dada did not simply
bring the reality experience into the realm of aesthetics. In fact, Dada rejected the bourgeois conceptions of reality and autonomous high art themselves. In other words, the Dadaists did not accept the two basic concepts supporting the separation of art from reality in a bourgeois society: the 'reality principle' as distinct from the 'pleasure principle'\(^{37}\) and 'affirmative culture,'\(^{38}\) to borrow Herbert Marcuse's terms.

In his essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture," Marcuse criticized classical bourgeois art for separating itself from everyday realities and for producing a world of beautiful illusion, a supposedly autonomous realm of aesthetics where longings for a better life and other human needs and wants which could not find any place in everyday reality were fulfilled only in an unreal and illusory sense:

> The cultural ideal assimilated men's longing for a happier life...[These] are either internalized as the duty of the individual soul (to achieve what is constantly betrayed in the external existence of the whole) or represented as objects of art (whereby their reality is relegated to a realm essentially different from that of everyday life). There is a good reason for the exemplification of the cultural ideal in art, for only in art has bourgeois society tolerated its own ideals and taken them seriously as a general demand. What counts as utopia, phantasy, and rebellion in the world of fact is allowed in art. There affirmative culture has displayed the forgotten truths

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over which "realism" triumphs in daily life. The medium of beauty decontaminates truth and sets it apart from the present. What occurs in art occurs with no obligation.\textsuperscript{39}

By incorporating technology into the realm of aesthetics, Dada liberated it from its instrumental function by which it had been totally confined within the reality principle. Through the integration of technology and art, therefore, Dada seriously undermined the bourgeois practice of separating the reality principle from affirmative culture. It criticized bourgeois culture for separating art from life and glorifying technology only as an instrument in the realm of reality, while sanctifying art as an affirmation, even though totally illusory, of longings and hopes for a better life. The avant-garde's critique was evidenced in numerous paintings, sculptures, and other art forms such as photography, in which the human body was depicted in the form of various machine parts. In Francis Picabia's 'machinist painting,' for instance, the principle of bourgeois enlightenment and its ever intensifying exploitation of, and dependence upon, technological instrumentality was criticized by the presentation of humans as machines, puppets, and mannequins, often with hollow, faceless, heads, while some machine parts depicted parts of the human body. These machinist depictions of humans in Picabia's works were not intended
rather, they presented the avant-garde's rebellion against the bourgeois technological instrumentality and the totality of the control that the reality principle wielded over technology and humans alike in a bourgeois society.

Marjorie Perloff comments that the historical avant-garde movement of the 1910s and 1920s was "by definition anti": "their informing spirit was one of rupture and reversal, of negation in defiance of the art of the dominant culture." For Dada, the act of negation in its rebellion against the bourgeois cultural system was its inclusion of machine technology, which was "anti-aesthetic" according to the aesthetic standards of the bourgeois high-art tradition. By bringing machine technology into the realm of art, Dadaists launched a positive, aggressive campaign of negation against the dominant culture. Instead of withdrawing themselves further into the already marginalized space of art in society by denying the new realities of the technologized modern mass society, Dadaists expanded the definition of art and the domain of aesthetic practices through their attempt to "situate the work [of art] in its actual context" of modern life.
NOTES


Pointing out the endurance of the opposition between high art and mass culture, Huyssen maintains that it is not a qualitative question whether works of high art are superior in quality to those of mass culture. He declares that "to reduce all cultural criticism to the problem of quality is a symptom of the anxiety of contamination. Not every work of art that does not conform to canonized notions of quality is therefore automatically a piece of Kitsch, and the working of Kitsch into art can indeed result in high-quality works" (Ibid., p. ix). Thus, Huyssen attempts to probe into historical and theoretical factors in the enduring separation of high art and mass culture. He christens as "the Great Divide" the historical distinction between high art and mass culture. See Huyssen, After the Great Divide, Chapters 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10.


Ibid., p. 95.


7. On the ideas about avant-garde artists and their vanguard social role expressed in Saint-Simon’s Opinions, see Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity, pp. 100 ff.

8. Saint-Simon, De l’organisation sociale, in the
general collection, Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et
d'Enfantin, XXXIX, (X), pp. 137-38. Quoted in
Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity, pp. 102-03.

l'industriel," in Saint-Simon, Opinions littéraire,
philosophiques et industrielles (Paris: Galerie de
Bossange Pere, 1825), pp. 331 ff. Quoted in
Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity, p. 103.

10. Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity, pp. 102-06.

11. Donald Drew Egbert wrote that artists' claiming an
integral role in a social movement was a product of
the French Revolution. See Egbert, Social Radicalism
and the Arts--Western Europe (New York: Knopf, 1970),
p. 20 ff.

12. Huyssen, After the Great Divide, pp. 4-5.


15. Charles Baudelaire, My Heart Laid Bare, trans. Norman
188-89.


17. Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity, p. 112.

18. Arthur Rimbaud, Complete Works, Selected Letters
(French-English), trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: The

Commenting upon the twentieth-century aesthetic
avant-garde groups, Calinescu maintains that their
aesthetic agenda was defined, in general, by "their
rejection of the past" and by "the cult of the new."
Yet, he does not fail to see that those two
characteristics are after all two sides of the same
coin in the sense that "novelty was attained, more
often than not, in the sheer process of the
destruction of tradition." Thus, Calinescu applies
Mikhail Bakunin's maxim, "To destroy is to create,"
to most of the activities of the twentieth-century
avant-garde. See Calinescu, ibid., p. 117.

20. Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, pp. 20 ff.;
Russell, Poets, Prophets,
21. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated from the German by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). By the 'historical avant-garde,' Bürger means mainly Dada, surrealism and the post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde. He starts with the so-called death of the avant-garde, and that is why he calls the avant-garde 'historical.' Bürger uses the Marxian concepts of criticism and self-criticism, which imply that the negation and sublation of the bourgeois 'institution art' is based upon the transformation of bourgeois society. The transformation having never occurred, the avant-garde was doomed to fail in its attempt to integrate art and life. Hence the failure or death of the avant-garde. See ibid., p. 109; Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p.8.


26. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 22. Bürger thinks that Kant's and Schiller's aesthetic ideas upon the necessary autonomy of all aesthetic creation presuppose art as an autonomous realm detached from life, and that the detached aesthetic realm is what was attempted in the process of "the historical crystallization of art as an institution" in a bourgeois society. See Bürger, ibid., p. 26.


37. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse discussed Freud's distinction between the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle,' which is, in Marcuse's view, the crucial concept in Freud's metapsychology. According to Marcuse, the transformation of the pleasure principle into the reality principle means "the subjugation and diversion of the destructive force of instinctual gratification, of its incompatibility with the established societal norms and relations" and also "the transubstantiation of pleasure itself" (p. 13). Under the guidance of the reality principle, the person learns to distinguish "what is useful" (p. 14) and a socially approved activity from what is socially defined as harmful and forbidden. In this way, one develops one's rational faculties, becoming "a conscious, thinking subject, geared to a rationality which is imposed on him from outside" (ibid.). Therefore, "neither his desires nor his alteration of reality are...his own: they are now 'organized' by his society. And this 'organization' represses and transubstantiates his original and

38. By 'affirmative culture,' Marcuse eant: "[the] culture of the bourgeois epoch which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilization of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilization. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed; a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet realizable by every individual for himself 'from within,' without any transformation of the state of fact. It is only in this culture that cultural activities and objects gain that value which elevates the above the everyday sphere. Their reception becomes an act of celebration and exaltation." See Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in Negations: Essays in Critical Theory, translated from the German by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 95.


CHAPTER V

DADA

The origins of Dada and the meaning of its name are debatable; and quite a few people claimed a role in its founding. To be sure, there was a certain avant-garde impulse shared by writers and artists throughout the several key urban centers of the Western world in the midst of World War I. In his study on Dada, John D. Erickson has called into question the idea of the supposedly "involuntary" nature of the formation of Dada. Erickson rejects the argument that, as Albert Gleizes puts it, Dada "is not the voluntary work of individuals; it is the fatal product of a state of affairs."\(^1\)

In his "Declaration," Richard Huelsenbeck wrote that "Dada" means "nothing"; "Dada" is "nothingness": "Dada was found in a dictionary. It means nothing. It is significant nothingness, in which nothing means something."\(^2\) On the other hand, in "The First Dada Manifesto" written on July 14, 1916, Hugo Ball provided the word "Dada" with dictionary definitions:

Dada comes from the dictionary. It is terribly simple. In French it means "hobby horse." In German it means "good-by," "get off my back," "be seeing you sometime." In Romanian: "Yes, indeed, you are right, that's it. But of course, yes, definitely, right." and so forth.\(^3\)
In his "Dada Manifesto 1918" Tristan Tzara provided his own definition:

DADA MEANS NOTHING

If you find it futile and don’t want to waste your time on a word that means nothing....The first thought that comes to these people is bacteriological in character: to find its etymological, or at least its historical or psychological origin. We see by the papers that the Kru Negroes call the tail of a holy cow Dada. The cube and the mother in a certain district of Italy are called: Dada. A hobby horse, a nurse both in Russian and Rumanian: Dada. Some learned journalists regard it as an art for babies, other holy jesusescallingthelittlechildren of our day, as a relapse into a dry and noisy, noisy and monotonous primitivism.4

In February 1916 Hugo Ball released a press notice to announce the opening of a cabaret in Zurich:

Cabaret Voltaire. Under this name a group of young artists and writers has been formed whose aim is to create a center for artistic entertainment. The idea of the cabaret will be that guest artists will come and give musical performances and readings at the daily meetings. The young artists of Zurich, whatever their orientation, are invited to come along with suggestions and contributions of all kinds.5

Cabaret Voltaire opened on February 5th and among its regular members were Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Marcel Slodki, Tristan Tzara, the brothers Marcel and Georges Janco, Jean Arp, and Richard Huelsenbeck.6 Their
activities were mostly adventurous and spontaneous. In his press notice, Ball defined the aim of Cabaret Voltaire simply as "artistic entertainment," without any specification of its artistic direction. Ball was inviting artists of any "orientation" whatsoever and "suggestions and contributions of all kinds." Thus, what eventually developed at Cabaret Voltaire was, not surprisingly, quite an eclectic gathering without any apparent emphasis or coherence.

Commenting upon the founding membership and the nature of activities there, Hans Richter called the Cabaret Voltaire a "six-piece band." By six, Richter meant Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Jean Arp, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Richard Huelsenbeck, whom Richter considered the original members. To describe their heterogeneous and individualistic characters, Richter adopted the metaphor of a "six-piece band":

The Cabaret Voltaire was a six-piece band. Each played his instrument, i.e. himself, passionately and with all his soul. Each of them, different as he was from all the others, was his own music, his own words, his own rhythm. Each sang his own song with all his might—and, miraculously, they found in the end that they belonged together and needed each other. I still cannot quite understand how one movement could unite within itself such heterogeneous elements. But in the Cabaret Voltaire these individuals shone like the colours of the rainbow, as if they had been produced by the same process of refraction.
Zurich provided an environment that no other place could have offered for the birth of Dada. With the outbreak of World War I, the city found itself flooded with international refugees and human varieties set adrift by the war. Being crowded with "conspirators, spies, revolutionaries, conscientious objectors, draft evaders, singers, musicians, scholars, scientists, philosophers, traffickers in war materiel, speculators, informers, and propagandists,"8 Zurich became the center for international politics, culture, and art. It was a "bewitched world."9

"The peculiarly claustrophobic and tense atmosphere of neutral Switzerland in the middle of the Great War," Hans Richter noted, "supplied an appropriate background" for the birth of Dada.10 It was pointed out in an article in the Times Literary Supplement of October 23, 1953 that "[t]he fact Dada began life in Zurich and not in New York or Paris is significant, for the movement owes many of its characteristics to the peculiar atmosphere prevailing in that city at that time."11 Indeed, it was only in the highly concentrated and tense atmosphere of "the peaceful dead-centre of the war" that such a variety of people could form a "constellation" and join in a common activity. Thus, Richter rightly observed: "It seemed that the very incompatibility of character, origins and attitudes which existed among the
Dadaists created the tension which gave, to this fortuitous conjunction of people from all points of the compass, its unified dynamic force.\textsuperscript{12}

Huelsenbeck noted the common experiences and feelings of those who gathered in Zurich: "We had all left our native lands, we all hated war, we all wanted to accomplish something in the arts."\textsuperscript{13} In short, Zurich provided the integral meeting ground for all the personalities who contributed to the emergence of Dada. While the war was at its peak, the city was a strangely isolated center of Europe, safe from man's insanity otherwise known as the Great War.

Huelsenbeck described retrospectively the founding of Zurich Dada as the "'spontaneous' feat of a group of 'young people of the most heterogeneous nature.'"\textsuperscript{14} As Roy F. Allen has observed, while the manner in which the various activities and gathering of diverse associates surrounding Cabaret Voltaire developed was indeed spontaneous and based upon chance occasions, the heterogeneity of the group seems to have been intentionally sought.\textsuperscript{15} That Ball was consciously aiming at diversity was clearly manifested in his call for artists "whatever their orientation." Also, Huelsenbeck wrote in his autobiography that Ball and Hennings had wanted the cabaret "to be a gathering place for all artistic trends, not just modern ones." They had in mind

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mainly "living artists," Huelsenbeck added, "not only those who took part in our cabaret, but others as well all over Europe."16

In his foreword to Cabaret Voltaire, Ball stressed the "independence" of mind which had drawn participants together:

When I founded the Cabaret Voltaire, I was sure that there must be a few young people in Switzerland who like me were interested not only in enjoying their independence but also in giving proof of it....The Cabaret Voltaire...had as its sole purpose to draw attention, across the barriers of war and nationalism, to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals.17

As Roy F. Allen has pointed out, by intellectual "independence" Ball meant the opposition to the war shared by the Dada participants at the cabaret.18

Dadaists often declared that Dada had no program, and furthermore that by its nature it was opposed to any systematic program.19 One of the Dadaists, Hans Richter, recalled:

Dada not only had no programme, it was against all programmes. Dada's only programme was to have no programme...and, at that moment in history, it was just this that gave the movement its explosive power to unfold in all directions, free of aesthetic or social constraints. This absolute freedom from preconceptions was something quite new in the history of art....This freedom might (and did) lead either to a new art--or to nothing.20
Throughout the Cabaret Voltaire period, Ball and Huelsenbeck were adamantly opposed to any attempt to "organize" Dada into a "school."\textsuperscript{21} Ball disapproved of the "intellectualizing" and "rationalizing" tendency of contemporary "art, philosophy, music, and religion." For him this was based upon the same intellectual orientation which was responsible for the machinery of World War I.\textsuperscript{22} In his farewell letter to Tzara, which was written on September 15, 1916, Ball criticized Tzara's suspected attempt to lead Dada in a specific aesthetic direction, calling it "the worst form of bourgeois mentality": "I have become even more mistrustful. I herewith declare that all forms of Expressionism, Dadaism, and other 'isms' are the worst manifestations of the bourgeois mentality. It's all bourgeoisie, all bourgeoisie."\textsuperscript{23}

While the founding members of Dada shared in general Ball's objection to making it into another organized and dogmatic 'movement,' they were open to any creative efforts within modern art and literature. Commenting upon Cabaret Voltaire, the first cooperative publication of the cabaret group, Ball noted the aesthetically eclectic nature of the book: "In [thirty-two] pages it is the first synthesis of the modern schools of art and literature. The founders of expressionism, futurism, and cubism have contributions in it."\textsuperscript{24}

With the common experience of World War I as a
catalyst, Dada evolved from the interaction of distinctively diverse minds who brought with them various aspects of the European avant-garde tradition. As Werner Haftmann observed, Dada owes its various techniques and formal innovations to the previous art movements. Thus one discerns a Futurist influence in Dada's stage performances, which were largely based upon improvisation and provocation of the audience. The Futurists had already employed the 'manifesto' as a literary genre, while Hugo Ball's phonetic poems were modeled on the parole in liberta of the Futurists. The Cubist influence was manifested in collage, in the cardboard costumes used in Dada stage performances, and its experiments with simultaneity. Dada's free, experimental use of color, especially in the works of Hans Richter, Marcel Janco, and Jean Arp, originated in the Expressionist emphasis upon the significance of color. 25

While it is true that Dada borrowed from the earlier avant-garde movements, its originality and significance lay in the way in which it consciously put together these various techniques and experiments to voice the common experience of World War I and present an alternate aesthetics. Haftmann maintains:

Examined in isolation, the various techniques used by Dada invariably show a link with one or other of the pre-war stylistic movements. Even so, Dada has its own place in history and its own
originality. In Dada, these isolated elements formed a unity for the first time. Dada took up all these separate ideas, assembled them and established them as a unified expression of experiences and emotions that were wholly of the present. 26

The importance of Dada lay in its questioning of the institutionalized practice of aesthetics in a bourgeois society, which had just displayed its ultimate destructive capabilities in World War I. While elaborating upon the importance of the historical avant-garde movement as the self-criticism of art in a bourgeois society, Peter Burger has made an important observation concerning Dada's contribution. He sees it as "the most radical movement within the European avant-garde." In Dada, the avant-garde finally went beyond the level of mere criticism of the aesthetic techniques of preceding schools. The target of its attack was art as a 'social subsystem' in a bourgeois society. Thus, Burger writes, Dada criticizes "art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society." 27 Indeed, it was its rejection of the way in which a work of art was produced and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy and the distance from the praxis of life that constituted Dada's originality and significance in the history of avant-garde movements. 28

In agreement with Burger, John D. Erickson finds the
importance of Dada not just in its artistic achievements, which were again a 'collage' of those previous experimental materials, but, more importantly, in its validity as an "idea expressed through diverse means." Dada took the form of "unsystematic revolt, pure and simple." Its revolt was "'against conventionalism, against a sated middle class crammed full of Victorian half-values, against the liberalism of intellectuals, against good people, against rabbit-fanciers in philosophy, against the members of church-women's organizations." Therefore, Erickson declares, "[I]ts value lies in its imperviousness to being assigned value, defined function, or meaning."32

Taking the form of unsystematized and unorganized revolt does not mean at all that Dada was completely devoid of any conscious agenda. Writing for Littérature, André Breton presented it as a state of mind which was devoted to artistic, absolute freethinking: "Dada devotes itself to nothing, neither to love nor to work. It is inadmissible that man should leave a trace of his passage on the earth. Dada, only recognizing instinct, condemns explanations a priori. According to Dada we can keep no control over ourselves. We must cease to think about these dogmas: morality and taste."33 However, the revolt had a moral aspect to it. It was essentially against the system which maneuvered to launch the Great War, against
the bourgeois society which practiced barbarity and greed in the guise of a social harmony which was in fact based upon utter exploitation. This sentiment, fundamental to Dada's revolt, is well expressed in a statement made by Jean Arp in his "Dadaland":

In Zurich in 1915, losing interest in the slaughterhouses of the world war, we turned to the Fine Arts. While the thunder of the batteries rumbled in the distance, we recited, we versified, we sang with all our soul. We searched for an elementary art that would, we thought, save mankind from the furious folly of these times. We aspired to a new order that might restore the balance between heaven and hell....Is it surprising that the "bandits" could not understand us? Their puerile mania for authoritarianism expects art itself to serve the stultification of mankind.  

Hugo Ball shared Arp's observation on the nature of the Dada revolt in relation to the whole bourgeois social order and the catastrophe of World War I. In April 1916, he wrote:

The ideals of culture and of art as program for a variety show--that is our kind of Candide against the times. People act as if nothing had happened. The slaughter increases, and they cling to the prestige of European glory. They are trying to make the impossible possible and to pass off the betrayal of man, the exploitation of the body and the soul of people, and all this civilized carnage as a triumph of European intelligence.  

As articulated in Ball's statement, the activities at the
Cabaret Voltaire were intended to expose and criticize bourgeois social and cultural ideals in the name of which, they thought, World War I had been staged, promoted, and glorified. The cabaret was a medium to awaken an audience that was complacent about the destructive, exploitative nature of the bourgeois cultural system. Therefore, Ball declared, Dada intended to deconstruct the value system of bourgeois culture: "Our cabaret is a gesture. Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least this one thing: that this humiliating age has not succeeded in winning our respect. What could be respectable and impressive about it? Its cannons? The grandiose slaughter and cannibalistic exploits? Our spontaneous foolishness and our enthusiasm for illusion will destroy them."

Richard Huelsenbeck also interpreted Dada's anarchistic activities as an attack on the whole bourgeois social order and its war culture: "Art should altogether get a sound thrashing, and Dada stands for the thrashing with all the vehemence of its limited nature....Our best instrument consisted of the big demonstrations at which everything connected with spirit, culture, and inwardness was symbolically massacred."\

The Dadaists' rebellion resulted from their sense of mission to free the captive audience from hypocritical cultural illusions and myths. If they were notorious for
their obfuscations and outrageous, scampish capacity for provoking bourgeois audiences, this was a tactic employed against complacency. "We had lost confidence in our 'culture.'" Marcel Janco reported, "Everything had to be demolished. We would begin again after the tabula rasa. At the Cabaret Voltaire we began by shocking the bourgeois, demolishing his idea of art, attacking common sense, public opinion, education, institutions, museums, good taste, in short, the whole prevailing order." 38

The Dadaists adopted the 'shock' tactic deliberately and succeeded in outraging the public through their constant and conscious breaking of the traditional cultural norms. Hans Arp, another Dada participant and chronicler, also commented upon this aspect of Dada:

The bourgeois regarded the Dadaist as a dissolute monster, a revolutionary villain, a barbarous Asiatic, plotting against his bells, his safe-deposits, his honors. The Dadaist thought up tricks to rob the bourgeois of his sleep. He sent false reports to the newspapers of hair-raising Dada duels, in which his favorite author, the "King of Bernina," was said to be involved. The Dadaist gave the bourgeois a sense of confusion and distant, yet mighty rumbling, so that his bells began to buzz, his safes frowned, and his honors broke out in spots.39

Thus, Tzara defined Dada's task as "a great negative work of destruction" aimed at the total bankruptcy of European culture:
We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the hands of bandits, who rend one another and destroy centuries. Without aim or design, without organization: indomitable madness, decomposition.

Dada's rejection of the bourgeois definition and practice of aesthetics followed naturally from its rebellion against bourgeois culture as a whole. What it attempted to call into question through its anti-art perspective was the separation of art from reality and the exclusivity of art manipulated to legitimize the prevailing social and political ideology and system.

Dada should not be dismissed simply as an anarchic and nihilistic gesture of rejection, as many have contended. Against those who categorize it mainly in terms of negative force, Erickson defends it as "metadiscourse," by which he means a "discourse upon the reductionist, negative discourse of traditional Western art and modes of thinking." Moreover, "In all of its manifestations Dada exercises a positive life-preserving force, in reaction to the humbug of social, political, and artistic systems that determinedly delimit and destroy."41

Dada's revolt was fundamentally against a system dominated by the rule of commerce and industry which, in turn, increasingly depended upon the efficient control of
modern technology. Its anti-art attempted to integrate art and the praxis of life and liberate technology from its instrumental role, and thus to subvert the fundamentally exploitative bourgeois mentality by positive efforts to construct a truly liberating art in a modern mass society. Hugo Ball saw it as "an opportunity for true perception and criticism of the times." 

Hans Richter contended that the Dadaists were all united "in a search of new meaning and substance in art." For them "art as an 'industry'" had lost all its meaning. Therefore, they tried "to make art a meaningful instrument of life" by deconstructing the traditional boundary separating art and life. In his journal entry of May 5, 1917, Ball commented:

We discussed the theories of art current in the last few decades, always with reference to the mysterious nature of art itself, its relationship with the public, with the race and with the cultural environment of the moment. It is true that for us art is not an end in itself; we have lost too many of our illusions for that. Art is for us an occasion for social criticism, and for real understanding of the age we live in. These are essential for the creation of a characteristic style.

Dada art sought to escape the conventional system of aesthetic comprehension based upon a pre-conditioned way of looking at objects and their collectivized
representability. By presenting the object in such a way as to resist the conventional mode of representation, Dada succeeded in liberating the viewer or audience from the control of an institutionalized perceptual mode. In the process, it also offered a "liberation from ritual and cult conditioning that inhibit the participation of the beholder."45 Raoul Hausmann, the Berlin "Dadasoph,"46 once observed that "if one wants to break conventions, one should not fall into the conventional."47 Critiquing the dominance of the exterior sign system of bourgeois culture, Hausmann rejected the belief in truthful representation in a bourgeois aesthetic tradition based upon its own cultural sign system:

Old art is construction, summary, absolutistically arranged around a center; a new art is de-centering, destruction of the center, a dissolution. It will lead either to the complete end of art or to a completely new art, in which the presently current concepts, the presently naive longing to validate the world through the human will as human representation and to equate this representation with the truth will be invalid, ineffective.48

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin described the "parasitical" status of art traditionally based upon its ritual or cultic function in a given society. He viewed avant-garde art as replacing a socially institutionalized response with
the unconditioned, spontaneous participation of the audience. In the same essay he dealt with the audience’s response to surrealist art, a response applicable to Dada art as well: "The same public which responds in a progressive manner toward a grotesque film is bound to respond in a reactionary manner to surrealism."49 Grotesqueness is familiar and digestible, because its representability has become a part of the institutionalized mode of sensory production and reception. However, he contended, Dada or surrealist objects totally lack any "recognizable reference points" in the traditional mode of production and reception and thus cause on the part of the audience a pre-conditioned and totally predictable reaction.50

The machine played an integral role in Dada for its aesthetic technical manifestations and in the critique of the bourgeois socio-cultural system. In the traditional bourgeois practice of separating aesthetics from reality, the machine had only an instrumental function; it was something whose sole function was to achieve or produce a specific material end. By incorporating the machine into the realm of aesthetics, which had been safely guarded as something noble transcending everyday life, the Dadaists destroyed bourgeois elitist notions of aesthetics and machine technology as two completely separate entities. Thus, Marcel Duchamp’s bachelor machines presented in
Bride and Large Glass and Francis Picabia's Young Girls Born Without Mother, rejected the conventional instrumental or equipmental identity of the machine, which was basically related to the function of industrial production and consumption.51

Picabia's Fantasy (1915) was subtitled Man Created god in His Image, and its origin was in illustrations of a steam engine of the mid-nineteenth century.52 Through its reproductive powers and its manipulation of physical forces, Picabia's 'god' seemed to present the potential of "human liberation from the fatalism of history and nature": "Man, through the machine, was seen as having the potential of becoming the master of his own destiny."53 Man became the emulator of God through his miraculous invention of the machine, and so re-enacted the Creation in a secular, materialistic setting.54

The Dadaists found the ultimate environment for machine technology in the urban landscape of America, complete with skyscrapers and full of dynamic energies while remaining eventually outside the Western cultural tradition. As America emerged as a new world power through its role in World War I, it became the indisputable symbol of the machine technology's potential for energy and liberation in a modern mass society. Because Dada's enthusiastic embrace of machine technology was not a mere capitulation, the machine had a
significance which went much deeper than a simple preoccupation with machine-produced commodities.

Dada’s machine art aimed at challenging traditional bourgeois aesthetic discourse. Dada’s anti-art ideas opposed the dominant aesthetic norms of the bourgeois system, whose ultimate function was to legitimize and totalize the ideologies of the status quo. Dada’s machine art engaged itself in the process of "reappropriation and neutralization," deconstructing the utilitarian definition of machine technology in a bourgeois cultural system. Thus, Dada liberated the machine from its instrumental function and bestowed upon it a new identity as aesthetic material.

NOTES


3. Hugo Ball, "The First Dada Manifesto" in Flight Out


5. Ball, Flight Out of Time, p. 50.


11. Quoted in ibid.

12. Ibid.


19. Differentiating Dionysian logic from Cartesian logic, John D. Erickson defines Dada art as Dionysian for its being "peripheral," "decentered," and "elusive," while traditional Western practices of art and criticism are based upon the Cartesian "programmatic reductionism." Erickson writes, "Dada, in all of its
expressions--its poetry, plastic arts, performances, and manifestoes--has attempted to obviate that type of programmatic reductionism which traditional Western art and criticism are so prone to valorize." See Erickson, "Preface," Dada.

20. Richter, Dada, p. 34. For Dada's rejection of any organized or programmed efforts, also see Tristan Tzara, Seven Dada Manifestoes and Lampisteries, trans. Barbara Wright (London: John Calder, 1977), pp. 5, 112.


22. Ibid., p. 43.


26. Ibid., p. 218.

27. Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, p. 22. By "art as an institution," Bürger means "the productive and distributive apparatus" and "the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works." See ibid.

28. Ibid. It was not only against conventional, representational art but also against some avant-garde movements that Dada launched its attack. The Dadaists claimed that some avant-garde practices were endearing themselves to the bourgeoisie. Therefore, Tristan Tzara declared in his "Dada Manifesto 1918": "We have enough cubist and futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas. Is the aim of art to make money and cajole the nice bourgeois? Rhymes ring with the assonance of the currencies and the inflexion slips along the line of the belly in profile. All groups of artists have arrived at this trust company after riding their steeds on various comets. While the door remains open to the possibility of wallowing in cushions and good things to eat." Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918," in The Dada Painters and Poets, ed. Robert Motherwell, p. 77.
29. Erickson, Dada, p. 115.

30. Ibid.


32. Erickson, "Preface" in Dada.


36. Ibid., p. 61.


38. Marcel Janco, "Dada at Two Speeds," in Dadas on Art, ed. Lucy R. Lippard, p. 36.


41. Erickson, "Preface" in Dada.

42. Ball, Flight Out of Time, entry of April 5, 1916.

43. Richter, Dada, p. 48.

44. Quoted in ibid.

45. Erickson, "Preface" in Dada.


50. Erickson compares the conditioned reaction of the audience toward avant-garde objects to "an atavistic response resembling totemism or hysteria in its effect, the symptoms of which disappear 'once we are persuaded to doubt that it is possible arbitrarily to isolate certain phenomena and to group them together as diagnostic signs of an illness, or of an objective institution...'" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Totemism [Boston: Beacon Press, 1963], p. 1). See Erickson, "Preface" in Dada.

51. Erickson makes a distinction between the mechanical and industrial aspects of the machine. He maintains that it was the industrial aspect of the machine that the Dadaists rejected. Erickson defines the ultimate function of the industrial aspect of the machine as the production of consumer goods: "Industry, directed by an equipmental view of being, turns machines to a specific end through the utilization of natural forces (gravity, combustion, etc.)--namely, the production of consumer goods." In this light, he quotes Lyotard: "The industrial is the inhuman side of the mechanical" (Jean-François Lyotard, Les TRANSformateurs Duchamp [Paris: Galilee, 1977], p. 24). See Erickson, Dada, p. 107.


53. Erickson, Dada, p. 109.

54. Ibid., p. 108.
CHAPTER VI
NEW YORK DADA

Painting versus Straight Photography

In 1905, Alfred Stieglitz opened the Photo Secession Gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue. It was Stieglitz who began a solitary crusade for the cause of the avant-garde in America from the turn of the century. Most importantly, he pioneered photography as a modern aesthetic medium, the mechanically reproducible art form that Dada found so fascinating. In the emergence of New York Dada,¹ Stieglitz was crucial because he promoted the avant-garde cause and encouraged young artists in various aesthetic media. He was "the friend, the counselor, apostle of bigger and better camera work."²

The potential that Stieglitz saw in photography was not the exact reproduction of objects and scenes but the presentation of external contextual reality in its own right, without any artificial interference in a vain attempt to make objects in real life 'artistic.' For him, the reality which photography presented was "free of anecdote and cheap sentiment."³

The group of avant-garde artists and writers gathered at Stieglitz’s Photo Secession Gallery, which later came to be called "291" after its address on Fifth
Avenue. The gallery became a major venue for avant-garde art in America, introducing contemporary artists of various media such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Rodin, Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso, and Brancusi as well as a group of promising young American artists. Stieglitz thus acted as an indispensable intermediary between European and American artists.

Stieglitz saw America as an artless world, completely lacking any aesthetic endeavor and appreciation for aesthetic activities. "There is certainly no great art in America today," he commented in 1911, "what is more, there is, as yet, no genuine love of it." Among young American artists who gathered around him were Charles Demuth, Abraham Walkowitz, Morgan Russell, Marsden Hartley, Joseph Stella, Max Weber, John Marin, Arthur Dove, and Walter Pach. These men were well aware of the avant-garde trend in Europe. They frequently crossed the Atlantic to experience what was happening in the major European cities. It was Paris, however, that attracted most American artists and writers in the pre- and post-World War I period. While their stopping place was the apartment of Gertrude Stein at 27 rue de Fleurus, the center of their activities in America was Stieglitz's gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue.

The moment of awakening for the artless world of America and its public came in 1913. The occasion was
the Armory Show. With Arthur Davies and Walt Kuhn as the main organizers, the Association of American Painters and Sculptors gathered over 1,500 works of art for the show at the 69th Infantry Regiment’s armory on Lexington Avenue in New York. While those gathering around Stieglitz were familiar with avant-garde art in Europe, the sheer number and the whole gamut of works of diverse aesthetic media exhibited at the Armory Show were so unprecedented that they shook completely the general public as well as the aesthetically-minded.

Among all the renowned modern artists whose works were exhibited as the Armory show, it was Marcel Duchamp who caused the greatest commotion with his *Nude Descending a Staircase*. While Dada did not have even a name at that time, *Nude Descending a Staircase* was probably one of the first Dada works introduced to the general American public. Another important Dadaist who exerted a significant influence upon the American avant-garde scene was Francis Picabia.

Although Stieglitz continued to support Dada’s aesthetic innovations and worked closely with Duchamp, Picabia, and the other members of New York Dada, He did not embrace Dada’s aesthetics and practices in their entirety. Also, he expressed his disappointment over Dada’s apparent lack of or interest in organization. Stieglitz was not quite comfortable with the "three-ring
circus atmosphere⁶ surrounding Dada. While still upholding controlled art over avant-garde art based upon chance, he continued to be a friend and mentor to Dadaists, even though they insisted upon pure chance and creative destruction as their anti-art ideology.

Stieglitz had shown European and American avant-garde art and African art⁷ prior to the 1913 Armory Show in an effort to introduce the avant-garde to America. It was not just the American public, who still remained quite provincial and reactionary about aesthetics, that Stieglitz had in mind. The exhibitions were mainly for American artists, who needed firsthand knowledge of what European avant-garde artists were trying to achieve by breaking away from the repressive bourgeois aesthetic tradition.

As a precursor for New York Dada, Stieglitz presented his anti-art stance in his arguments for photography. He advocated so-called "straight photography," which was pejoratively considered in the traditional art community as something pretending to be aesthetic but quite far from it. Stieglitz attempted to make a case for straight photography as a modern aesthetic form, which, while utilizing modern technology in a traditionally anti-aesthetic manner produced works of pictorial art far superior to traditional paintings.

The conventional judgment concerning photography was
that it could never be a fine art form. This resulted from an uneasy feeling on the part of supporters of traditional painting about the unexcelled representational capacity of photography. Painting could not achieve the same fidelity as a photograph in depicting a scene. Also, the mechanical nature of the photograph, according to traditional aesthetic criteria, disqualified photography as a genuine art form. It was a simple mechanical process, completely dependent upon a machine, the camera. While this appealed to Dadaists as an element which made photography an anti-aesthetic avant-garde medium, the same mechanical element served as a vital point of resistance on the part of supporters of high art to accepting photography as a modern aesthetic form.

The assumed superiority of painting to photography was shared even by some of the photographers themselves. By applying some cosmetic touches to photographs to make them look more like paintings, they tried to compensate for their mechanical nature. These attempts produced what came to be known as 'pictorial photography.' A pictorial photograph involved manipulating negative and print in an attempt to bring out a softly focused image as in an Impressionist painting. In addition, the subject matter of pictorial photographs was carefully chosen not to offend suspicious genteel sensibilities.
Therefore, pictorial photographs usually were of pleasant scenes such as cultured domesticity and pleasant natural landscapes. In contrast, the urban landscape of crowded and often littered streets and the working masses was considered to be crude, ugly, or unsuitable.

Conversely, straight photography did not allow any manipulation of either negative or print. The image finally produced was supposed to be what a photographer saw through the camera lens. Straight photography sought to reproduce the image directly, without any intervention in the process, and in this attempt emphasized the mechanical nature of photography. Having a mechanically produced fidelity, which was ultimately superior to that of the human eye, a photograph reproduced an object in a way that no representational painting could match. With no intention of creating painting-like effects, straight photography liberated itself from the influence of the dominant pictorial mode and claimed to be an independent, new aesthetic medium in its own right. Clearly, the idea of straight photography involved the anti-art stance of avant-garde aesthetics. Straight photography set itself in opposition to painting of the high-art tradition and to pictorial photography, which allied itself with that tradition by assimilating the pictorial mode of representational painting.

For its advocates, straight photography liberated
both painting and photograph from the burden of imitating each other. By utilizing its infinite representational capacity rather than trying to imitate the pictorial mode of traditional painting, straight photography could become a new aesthetic form in the age of machine reproduction. On the other hand, painting could leave the task of representation to straight photography and experiment with other techniques, such as expressionism, for which the traditional pictorial mode was better suited than photography.

Stieglitz’s own anti-art statement, which was not essentially different from Dada’s, was well expressed in his advocacy of ‘straight photography.’ Furthermore, he regularly published Picabia’s iconoclastic, anti-art statements in his magazine, 291, which succeeded Camera Work in 1915. While it was not exactly a Dada review, 291 was an important expressive venture for American Dada.

Among those in the Stieglitz group was Marius De Zayas, who attempted to clarify and articulate the group’s avant-garde aesthetic ideas and practices in a manner more consistent and focused than that of anyone else. De Zayas sought to explore and synthesize all the implications and controversies surrounding primitivism, straight photography, and painting in the age of machine technology. In the article entitled "The Sun Has Set,"
which was published in Camera Work in 1912, he declared that art was dead: it simply reiterated the past. By 'art,' he meant academic art, which was rooted in the European high-art tradition.

De Zayas saw straight photography as a supreme means of expressing the outer world of objective form. Picabia's machine paintings, he maintained, utilized and revealed the mechanical ability of straight photography to reveal objective forms. In fact, De Zayas himself made an attempt at such paintings. He collaborated with Picabia on a piece entitled Voilà Elle, which was presented in the November 1915 issue of 291. For De Zayas, straight photography and Picabia's machine paintings were the product of a new twentieth-century version of primitivism, which rejected 'art' in the traditional sense to portray instead the modern world of machine technology.

Charles Sheeler was one of the major American avant-garde figures who embraced the anti-art ideology as manifested in straight photography. Having been in touch with Stieglitz even before moving from Philadelphia to New York in 1919, Sheeler was a familiar figure in the Stieglitz group while working at De Zayas' Modern Gallery. With his strong interest in straight photography, Sheeler integrated the two different media, painting and photography, in his urban landscapes of
America, especially those of northeastern urban and industrial centers.

One of Sheeler's major attempts to capture in an 'affirmative' manner the landscape of urban mass society was his 1920 project of filming New York City, for which he collaborated with Paul Strand, another disciple of Stieglitz's. The two adopted lines from Walt Whitman's poetry to accompany visual images of the city. Lines from these poems reinforced the two artists' positive view of the highly technologized urban mass society. Entitled Manhatta, the documentary film received a sensational response at a Dada festival in Paris held at the Théâtre Michel in 1923.11

Having rejected the highly decorative style, in the European high-art tradition, of William Merritt Chase, his teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, Sheeler found in straight photography an ideal way to depict the urban landscape transformed by modern technology and capture its objective externality. Eventually, he transferred the elements of straight photography onto canvas in a series of meticulously recreated urban landscape. Commenting upon his photograph-like representation of the cityscape, Tashjian remarks that the impersonality of the painting denied the authoritative presence of the artist:

With his subdued palette, his meticulously
hidden brushstroke, and a reliance on external structure for his pictorial composition, Sheeler worked to conceal the artist in a rational image, supremely precise in its detail and clarity, and above all else impersonal.  

The absence of the artist's subjective authority and the focus upon objective externality reflected Dada's disapproval of the presence of the artist in the end product. The individual subjectivity of the artist was understood by Dada and Walter Benjamin as a false source of aurality which separated art from the domain of reality.

Primitivism and American Technology

One of the main concerns of New York Dada was the impact of modern technology upon art. While America emerged through its role in World War I as the new leader of the Western world, its achievements in the field of modern technology captured the imagination of those Europeans who saw the end of their own civilization in the war. When Picabia and Duchamp came to America, they brought with them the Europeans' fascination with American technology. Tashjian notes: "The technology was there, and Duchamp arrived in 1915 to celebrate it."  

However, what Duchamp, Picabia, and other Dadaists attempted was not a simple celebration of material
progress in a modern industrial state. Their responses to modern technology in terms of cultural and aesthetic ideology were highly complex and reflected Dada's avant-garde stance and the American concern for creating a genuine American culture.

The way European Dadaists understood and embraced American technology exhibited a twentieth-century version of 'primitivism.' Tashjian has cited Robert Goldwater's study of so-called 'primitivism' in modern art, which still provides a valuable insight into the subject. While Goldwater did not specifically deal with the post-World War I American avant-garde, his ideas on primitivism offer a revealing view of the nature of the "skyscraper primitives" of New York Dada. He sees primitivism in modern art as a set of ideas and attitudes which European artists had toward any aesthetic or cultural practices outside of the western, that is, European, cultural system. He points out that the concept of the primitive differed among groups and changed over time. Nevertheless, all the various versions of primitivism were based upon the assumption that the simplicity of primitive culture was more desirable than the complexity of overwrought European culture. The search for simplicity led one's attention outside Europe toward an uncomplicated, unknown culture which hopefully would offer simple art forms to replace
the exhausted, artificial aesthetic tradition of European bourgeois culture.  

What was involved in this process was "a contrastive aesthetic." Whatever European artists defined as primitive art was consciously and in highly favorable terms contrasted with European aesthetics. The respective characteristics of the primitive and European arts were played off against each other. While works of the European high art tradition seemed excessively complicated and refined, primitive art represented something simple, powerful, and energetic, if sometimes crude. It was in terms of this contrasting mode of perception that European Dadaists saw American culture and its aesthetic forms, and here they found an alternative aesthetics to replace the high art tradition of the Old World.

The embrace of primitive culture can be seen as an anti-art defiance of contemporary bourgeois aesthetics. In this sense machine technology was 'primitive,' as well as anti-art, material which existed outside the bounds of traditional bourgeois aesthetics. Goldwater maintains that "primitivism tends to expand the metaphor of art." However, what Dada aimed at was more than an expansion of the definition and materials of aesthetics. Dada’s anti-art efforts were directed at the essential elements of the bourgeois system in which aesthetics, like everything
else, was subjected to and controlled by the dominant interest in maintaining that system. What Dada saw in American modern technology was another version of primitive art, this time a highly modern one. The art which Dada envisioned in American technology was 'primitive' in the sense that America itself had always represented to Europeans something crude and uncultivated, something not in the fashion of Western European civilization; a foreign, exotic culture with which Europeans were unfamiliar. Exuding crude, raw energy, modern technology was an unknown entity in terms of its modernity, its ever-transforming and expanding capacity, and its intriguing impact upon art.

For European artists who were disenchanted with their own bourgeois aesthetics, America’s modern technology and its popular culture offered a primitivistic alternative to the overwrought, outmoded, and completely bankrupt aesthetic forms of the European high art tradition. The 'primitivism' which Dada saw in American modern technology thus served the anti-art crusade against the dominant bourgeois aesthetic. Its hostility to the existing social system was revealed in its celebration of the simple and more equitable social system for the masses wrought by modern technology.

The image of America as an exotic country was evident in the Dada imagination from the start. Dada,
the Zurich Dada magazine, published in its third issue (December 1918) pieces on the American cowboy, the West, New York and its skyscrapers, and Niagara Falls. In European minds, "America was a vast land with monumental buildings to match its natural grandeur."17 Also, the people of America themselves represented virile energy matching their natural environment, a youthful dynamism which Europeans lacked. Arthur Cravan, a legendary figure considered to be outrageous even in the Dada community,18 presented a specially romanticized description of Americans in his nostalgic retrospection of his early years in America:

There are...young Americans over six feet tall with fine shoulders, who know how to box and come from the lands watered by the Mississippi, where swim Negroes with snouts like hippopotamuses; lands where beautiful girls with hard buttocks ride horseback; who come from New York with its skyscrapers, New York on the banks of the Hudson where sleep torpedo boats charged like clouds. There are also fresh young American girls, oh poor Gratteciella!!19

Having nothing but contempt for the so-called "man of subtlety or refinement" who was "almost always nothing but an idiot," Cravan was appalled by the world filled with such effeminate self-proclaimed artists:

The Salon, seen from the outside, appeals to me, with its tents that give it the air of a circus set up by some Barnum; but what ugly mugs of artists are going to fill it: hordes of them....Lord have mercy, there
are artists a-plenty! Soon you won't see anyone but artists in the street and the one thing you'll have no end of trouble in finding is a man.20

In its celebration of American virility and raw energy in contrast to the artificial sophistication and refinement of Europe, Cravan's picture of America was based more upon his wishful retrospective imagination than upon actuality. In the conclusion of his article, he repeated his absolute preference for crude simplicity over refined complexity: "I do not want to be civilized."21

The fascination of Europeans with America, which was based upon their own simplistic and sometimes illusory understanding of it and its culture, was again expressed in "The 'U.S.A.' Cinema," one of the articles that Philippe Soupault wrote for Broom. Interestingly enough, Soupault began his argument by criticizing the stereotypical views of America long entertained by Europeans: "In this world of ready-made images the United States still remains the country of Fenimore Cooper's redskins, of Bufalo Bill's cowboys, of millionaire uncles. New York means skyscrapers; Chicago, factories and meat-packers."22

While deploring the fact that "an immense majority of Frenchmen still cling to these childish illusions,"23 he accepted the romanticized version of America presented
in American movies, the medium which was itself a representative American novelty: "On the screen appeared the smile of Pearl White--that almost ferocious smile which announced the revolution, the beginning of a new world."24 Soupault saw the prime virtue of film as a new aesthetic form in its seeming simplicity: "][I]t was all done so simply, so naturally, so unaffectedly, that one scarcely noticed it."25 In its simplicity and lack of the aesthetic pretension which traditional European high art had always claimed for its separation from life, the American film represented "one of the most definite qualities of the American influence...the close relationship between art and life."26

Remarking upon the European Dadaists’ seemingly naive understanding of America, Tashjian points out the motivating force behind the cultural stereotyping practiced by the Dadaists:

We might smile in retrospect at the naivete of the Dadaists in promoting cultural stereotypes about America. But that was precisely the point: they wanted to believe, or stimulate belief, in a world that was a fresh alternative to their own. They were not to be disappointed.27

The romanticized preconception of America resulting from Europeans’ frustration with their own cultural heritage exerted a considerable influence upon their thinking. At the same time, however, Americans themselves had long
promoted an image of themselves as a primitivistic people whose virility, dynamic energy, and raw environment had not been corrupted by the influence of the Old World. For instance, Tashjian notes, "When Audubon went to England to supervise the engraving of *Birds of America* and to solicit subscriptions, he exploited the costume of the frontiersman in his sales pitch."28

To European eyes, indeed, the primitivistic simplicity of America had always been inseparable from the country's natural environment. The wilderness of the American West, frontiersmen, Indians, all these represented to Europeans an American primitivism closely rooted in its raw, yet-to-be cultivated setting. In time the image of boundless wide-open spaces waiting to be populated could not longer be easily sustained as the nation increasingly became a modern industrial society. Thus earlier European primitivist views were transformed into a twentieth-century version of primitivism, which took on a whole new set of characteristics. While the concept of primitivism in the age of modern technology might seem at first glance highly paradoxical, primitivism renewed itself in Europeans' minds under the new conditions of machine technology, which created a modern American landscape filled with factories, skyscrapers, and the urban masses.

In this altered context, the emphasis upon American
simplicity in contrast to European overwrought complexity
did not decrease. The pure novelty of technology, and
its unexplored nature so filled with potential, were
tapped by Dada's anti-art machine aesthetics, producing a
modern version of American primitivism rooted in the
urban sensibility of the machine age.

As Dadaists were extolling America in its
'uncivilized' shape full of raw energy and crudity,
American avant-gardists responded ambivalently. In their
desire to create an American art free from European
influence, to subscribe to what Dada, a movement of
European origin, had to say about their culture posed
real problems. Tashijian explains this ambivalence in
terms of the "traditional double consciousness" of
Americans toward the European cultural heritage:

The traditional double consciousness of
American artists already had some
inconsistent permutations. Whitman's
"barbaric yawp" was one of them, affirming
an American identity over and above Europe.
The other permutation directed American
artists to Europe for their aesthetic
standards.29

American avant-gardists greeted Duchamp and Picabia, the
two leading European figures of Dada, with respect. At
the same time, Americans were suspicious of the assumed
leadership of the two men. Their prominent presence in
New York at the center of the American avant-garde scene
seemed to undercut the goal of achieving cultural independence from European influence.

Having been close friends from their Paris days, Duchamp and Picabia shared similar attitudes toward art and life. Their work manifested the commonality of their aesthetic ideas and inspiration. As William Copley mentioned, "To know Duchamp without knowing Picabia is to know only half the story." According to Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, despite the difference in their characters and personal styles, Duchamp and Picabia "emulated one another in their extraordinary adherence to paradoxical, destructive principles, in their blasphemies and inhumanities which were directed not only against the old myths of art, but against all the foundations of life in general." It was this attitude toward art that made possible the profound, lifelong friendship between the two.

Tashjian has defined the role that the two European Dada figures took upon themselves respectively:

Picabia assumed the European role of the missionary who, in true Dada fashion, went native and "married" America. Duchamp took the other European role, that of the anthropologist, the participant-observer, whose readymades comprised an inventory of American artifacts and their neglected aesthetic possibilities.

While Duchamp and Picabia exerted a great influence upon
New York Dada, it is also true that the American experience significantly shaped the work of the two Dadaists. It is, therefore, important to examine what they brought with them to the New York avant-garde, what they saw in American culture, and how their experience of New York affected their Dada practices.

Francis Picabia and Machine Paintings

Among the works exhibited at the Galerie Wolfsberg in September 1918 was a series of Francis Picabia’s machine paintings. Dating from 1914 and earlier, the works presented realistic-looking, but functionless machines with ironical inscriptions such as Amorous Procession; Ici, c’est Stieglitz; Paroxysme de la douleur; and Machine Tournez Vite. In Picabia’s machine pictures, human body parts and emotional attributes were intermingled with mechanical contrivances. In such a manner Picabia attempted to make an anti-art statement by incorporating the machine into the realm of aesthetics, thus destroying the bourgeois high-art tradition of separating aesthetics from the experiences of daily life. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia has rightly observed Dada’s rejection of a bourgeois definition of the machine as an industrial and mechanical object whose primary and sole raison d’être consisted in its instrumental function:
These [machine] objects are depicted with the precision and relief of a mail order catalogue, with no attempt at aesthetic expression. They are distinguished from catalogue representations only by their isolation and by the intentions with which they are charged. They mark the first symptoms of the crisis of the object (denatured objects, divested of their specific raison d'être) which raged in Dada...  

Having started out rather mildly in Barcelona, 391 picked up momentum when it arrived in New York in 1917. With regard to the "gratuitous" and "spontaneous" nature of 391, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia asserted: "[391] never had any program, method, or articles of faith....Without other aim than to have no aim, it imposed itself by the force of its word, of its poetic and plastic inventions, and without premeditated intention it let loose, from one shore of the Atlantic to the other, a wave of negation and revolt which for several years would throw disorder into the minds, acts, works of men."  

During his visit to the United States in 1915, Picabia realized the potential of machinery for Dada's anti-art endeavor. In an interview with the New York Tribune upon his arrival, he observed that the machine reflected "perhaps the very soul of human life." Deeply drawn to the plasticity and symbolic qualities that he found in the machine, Picabia continued, "I mean to simply work on and on until I attain the pinnacle of
mechanical symbolism." Starting with his arrival in New York in 1915, his so-called 'mechanomorphic' period, which was also the period in his career most related to Dada, continued through the early 1920s.

Mechanical symbolism in Picabia's machine paintings was employed to make analogies between human and mechanical properties. The titles themselves were denotatively direct cues for what Picabia meant to present in his paintings. Many titles reveal an overt sexuality: Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity (1915), Sweetheart of the First Occupant (1917), Universal Prostitution (1916-1917), and Amorous Parade (1917). For some paintings, Picabia provided annotations which signify sexual and reproductive functions. Contraptions in The Marquesas Islands (1916-1917) are labelled "penis" and "the female egg awaits." Furthermore, he reinforced the motif of sexuality through his adoption of 'male' and 'female' machine parts. Machine Turn Quickly (1916-1917) depicted intermeshing cogwheels, the smaller wheel being labelled 'woman' and the larger one 'man.' Also, Picabia used various bolts, pistons and cylinders for The Saint of Saints (1915), pistols and targets for Here She Is (1915), and rods and springs, plugs and sockets for De Zayas! De Zayas! (1915).

For these machine paintings, Picabia found
inspiration in actual machines or mechanical devices such as portable electric lamps, spark plugs, wiring diagrams, cameras, engines, automobile parts and revolvers. However, his machines did not function properly as revealed, for instance, in the case of the camera in Here, this Is Stieglitz (1915). Situating the machine in a totally nonutilitarian setting, Picabia rejected the equipmental definition and the bourgeois use of the machine. In doing so, he provided a new, anti-industrial identity for the machine, which now crossed the boundary traditionally separating art from life.

Picabia's machines in his drawings were entities freed from the tradition-bound, customary context assigned by the bourgeois cultural system, that is, the function dedicated to industrial, utilitarian material production. While deconstructing the referentiality of the machine as an object determined by the ruling bourgeois ideology, Picabia's machines were "manifestations of otherness" which encourage the viewer to experience them from a new, non-instrumental perspective. Picabia succeeded in presenting through his machine paintings the dynamic elements and rhythms of modern mass life transformed radically by machine technology. As for his mechanomorphic presentation of modern life "unimpinged by moral and social suasion," Erickson observes the influence of "the Picabia ethos of
unbridled pleasure": "The Picabian machines metamorphose mechanical process into pleasure process and in so doing attack the myths of romantic love, social responsibility, and consumerism."42

As Picabia's work Danses à la source (1912) was to be exhibited in the Armory Show in February 1913, he and his wife, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, arrived in New York in January 1913. He met Stieglitz and his avant-garde followers and soon became a central figure in the New York avant-garde scene, "a motley international band which turned night into day, conscientious objectors of all nationalities and walks of life living in an inconceivable orgy of sexuality, jazz and alcohol."43 However, it was his firsthand experience of America, especially New York, with its modern technology, skyscrapers, and general aspect of urban mass culture, that excited Picabia and led to his creation of a series of works which reflected the shape and sound of New York.

Upon his arrival in New York, Picabia was hailed as one of the most important figures in modern art in France. In an interview with the New York American, which was entitled "How New York Looks to Me," Picabia defined New York as "the only cubist city in the world."44 Dada's fascination with America as the New World, in contrast to Europe, was clearly manifested in his description of the city: "The spirit of your New York
is so unseizable, so magnificently, so immensely atmospheric, while the city itself is so concrete, that it is difficult for me to describe by words alone the effect it has on me."45

Picabia was well aware of the frustration that the viewers frequently felt in being unable to discern familiar forms. Like other Dadaists, he rejected traditional mimetic art. For him, the new art was "a painting without models." Filled with emotion, it refused to be subjected to the conventional visual reference system. He claimed that Americans, especially those living in New York, should appreciate the new avant-garde art because New York was the city which offered an optimal environment for the new art: "Your New York is the Cubist city, the Futurist city. It expresses modern thought in its architecture, its life, its spirit. You have bypassed all the old schools, and you are futurists in words, acts and thoughts." Picabia also attempted to present the spirit of the modern city through his pictorial presentation: "[my paintings] express the spirit of New York such as I feel it and the crowded streets of your city such as I feel them, their swell and surge, their agitation, their shops, the charm of their atmosphere." In his endeavor to capture the spirit of the new age, he confessed, his art had passed beyond the phase of Impressionism and Cubism: "I no
longer even call myself a Cubist. I came to realize that one cannot always succeed in expressing through cubes the brain's thoughts, the soul's sensations."  

Fascinated by the urban landscape of New York, Picabia tried to capture the 'sensations' of the modern age. Commenting upon the nature of his work in those years just before World War I, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia saw its main impetus in his search for "the disintegration of the concept of art, and the substitution of personal dynamism, of individual forces of suggestion and projection, for the codified values of formal beauty. These effects [jeux] of prospecting on an inaccessible dimension and in unexplored regions of being, this climate of invention never recaptured since, appears to me to have contained all the seeds of what eventually became Dada..."  

Soon after his second visit to New York in 1915, Picabia published five of his machine paintings in the July-August 1915 issue of 291. Three were portraits of his friends, Stieglitz, De Zayas, and Haviland; one was of himself; and the fifth one, Portrait d'une jeune fille Américaine dans l'état de nudité, pictured a spark plug, on which "For-Ever" was written.  

For the same issue, De Zayas wrote an essay to accompany Picabia's machine paintings. In the essay, De Zayas elaborated upon Picabia's renderings of American
culture and society through these paintings. Pointing out that they were a major departure from the bourgeois high-art tradition, De Zayas saw in them Picabia's rejection of Europe and his acceptance of America as it was, complete with pervasive commercialism and an unfavorable cultural environment for aesthetic endeavors. America existed in the present, ahistorical moment which was dominated by machine technology and cut off from any bondage to tradition. This was the America that Picabia had discovered and accepted. Remarkably upon his undaunted and unreserved acceptance of America with all its flaws and vulgarity, De Zayas wrote: "He has married America like a man who is not afraid of consequences," and what followed was the female born without a mother (Fille née sans mère). 50

Much as he was attracted to the urban landscape of New York, Picabia was, at the same time, inspired by the African music and American jazz frequently played around Harlem and Greenwich Village. To him, just as to other European avant-gardists who thought World War I marked the end of traditional European culture, these 'primitive' artifacts in American culture presented the potential for a return to simpler, purer, and therefore happier forms of life and art. 51 When the first American exhibition of African art was held in 1914 by Stieglitz and encouraged by De Zayas, 52 the African and Polynesian
artifacts fascinated Europeans by their simplicity, purity, and freshness; that is, by all the aesthetic assets which symbolized dynamic, natural energy unshackled by artificial, tradition-bound cultural codes.

In his works on New York, Picabia revealed his fascination with the products of modern technology, such as skyscrapers, and with the dynamics of urban life as presented in Animation (1914) and a series of studies, New York (1913). Also, as De Zayas pointed out, the titles of Picabia's drawings, like Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity and Daughter Born Without a Mother, illustrated the artist's understanding of American machine culture free from any traditional bondage. It was the primitive energy surrounding American machine technology that Picabia strove to capture in his anti-art machine drawings.

Marcel Duchamp and Readymades

In 1911, Duchamp painted Sad Young Man in a Train. In this piece, Duchamp revealed a prefiguration of the Nude Descending a Staircase. The first version of the Nude series appeared also in 1911. In the painting, Duchamp presented abstract human figures, interlocked successively in motion. He discarded the traditional representational mode of depiction in an attempt to
express kinetic energy. In fact, kinetic energy involved in motion plays an important part in Duchamp's work. 54

When Duchamp entered his second version of Nude in the 1912 Salon des Independants exhibition, he was asked to withdraw his painting, or to come up with a new title. Apparently the show's Cubist organizers were disturbed by the explicitness of its title. Duchamp chose to withdraw his painting from the exhibition. 55

When Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase was exhibited in the Armory Show in New York in 1913, the work received a wide range of reviews. One critic called it "an explosion in a shingle factory," while others claimed that they saw in the painting only "a collection of saddlebags," or "leather, tin and a broken violin." One Chicago critic advised viewers to prepare themselves for the painting by eating "three Welsh Rarebits and sniff[ing] cocaine...." 56

It was the American painter Walter Pach who, while visiting Paris, invited Duchamp to come to New York. Exempt from military duty, Duchamp came to find that he was some sort of celebrity because of the notoriety that his Nude had caused at the Armory Show. Like Picabia, Duchamp found metropolitan New York extremely fascinating with its modernity and dynamic energy unshackled by the conventionality of the Old World.

During those festive months of 1915, Duchamp became,
socially as well as professionally, a central figure in the avant-garde community in New York. In addition to Stieglitz's gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue, the main gathering place for the avant-gardists was the apartment of Walter and Louis Arensberg. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia called it "a little isle of grace...where the life of arts and the spirit had been preserved and where, aloof from official circles and activities, it developed an exceptional revolutionary activity."57 The Arenbergs' was, she recollected, the place where "at any hour of the night one was sure of finding sandwiches, first-class chess players, and an atmosphere free from conventional prejudice."58

In America Duchamp continued to work on his readymades. One is a plain snow shovel, which after having signed it and suspended it from the ceiling, Duchamp entitled In Adventure of a Broken Arm (1915). Another piece, Trap or Trebuchet (1917), is a coatrack nailed to the floor so that people would trip over it. However, it was in Fountain that Dada's anti-art rejection of traditional aesthetics reached its culmination.

Duchamp entered Fountain, an ordinary porcelain urinal, as a piece of anti-art work in the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1917 under the name of R. Mutt, a manufacturer of sanitary hardware. Annoyed by the
apparent effrontery of the piece, the organizers refused to exhibit it. Duchamp then withdrew from the organizing committee and presented his objections in the *Blind Man*, which was financed by Walter Arensberg and Henri-Pierre Roche with Duchamp himself serving as an editor.\(^{59}\) In the article entitled "The Richard Mutt Case," Duchamp argued:

> They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.
> Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.
> What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:--
> 1. Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.
> 2. Others, it was a plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.
> Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.
> Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view--created a new thought for that object.
> As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.\(^{60}\)

Duchamp's urinal neutralized the traditional understanding of aesthetic objects as distinguished from instrumental or utilitarian objects. The seeming incongruity of a urinal displayed as a work of art in an art exhibition defied any effort to understand based upon
conventional bourgeois aesthetics.

Erickson has observed a model of Dada anti-art in the "perversity" of Duchamp's work, "its refusal to be coopted, expropriated, or reduced."61 As Erickson has rightly pointed out, Duchamp's works, such as *The Large Glass*, are inscrutable to the viewer whose perception and understanding of 'art' are based upon the Western representational mode. Regarding an object or a thing which does not present "recognizable relationships with and [is not] imitative of the beholder's world," Erickson continues, a viewer experiences "an intransigence, an obdurateness, an imperviousness."62

In his study of Duchamp, *Les TRANSFormateurs* Duchamp, Jean-Francois Lyotard points out that the 'objects' Duchamp employed in his works are not objects in any conventional sense. He calls them "object-transformers": "There is no art, since there are no objects. There are only transformations, redistributions of energy."63 Duchamp's object-transformers challenge and, as a result, disrupt the "relationships established between the object and its contextual systems, from which the object emerges."64 By rejecting any preconceived reference to conventional norms and definitions, Duchamp's objects, like Dada objects in general, focus not upon the object itself but upon the transformed relationships between the object and the contextual
system. Through a dynamic process involving the transformation of the conventional way of viewing, Dada works undercut any attempt to understand based upon the conventional mode of representative assimilation. From this confrontation results "an incongruity or discontinuity between the work and its context, thus producing an alienation effect." 65

Like Picabia, Duchamp rebelled against the old myths of art and launched Dada’s anti-art attack against the separation of aesthetics from life. In 1913, Apollinaire said of Duchamp that "perhaps it will be the task of an artist as detached from aesthetic preoccupations, and as intent on the energetics as Marcel Duchamp, to reconcile art and the people." 66 Indeed, bringing elements of life into the realm of art, thus removing the boundary separating art from life, was what he achieved in his readymades.

Duchamp attacked bourgeois aesthetics by rejecting the traditional concept of the artist, which separated him from reality and put him on some kind of pedestal. Thus Duchamp tried to remove the finished work of art from the auratic presence of the artist which defines and dominates the work. His The Large Glass, for instance, revealed well the rejection of the artist’s authoritative subjectivity in a work of art. He employed glass as the main aesthetic material and the technique of
draftsmanship for its "impersonality of the ruler."

During the period 1912-1914, Duchamp started to make studies for his composite work, The Large Glass. For certain parts of it, he employed chance configurations obtained by dropping pieces of thread onto a canvas and fixing them with varnish in the shape in which they had originally landed. His chance configurations were much like those Arp was making with pieces of paper in Zurich. Duchamp once made a comment that "Your chance is not the same as mine, just as a pure throw of the dice will rarely be the same as mine." For him, chance was not only an anti-art technique, but also an expression of total freedom from the artificial, predetermined codes of bourgeois aesthetics.

Duchamp found in readymade objects useful materials for his anti-art endeavor against what had traditionally been defined and practiced as aesthetics. In 1914, Bicycle Wheel, the first of Duchamp's anti-art works using readymades, appeared in the form of a bicycle wheel on its forks and a kitchen stool upon which the wheel was mounted upside down. Also, Bottlerack (1914) presented an iron rack which was used to dry wine bottles. Duchamp had purchased the iron rack at a department store that year. All he did to make the plain ordinary readymade object a so-called 'work of art' was to sign his name on it, transforming an ordinary, mechanically reproduced
commodity into a work of art in the traditional sense, but, more accurately in the Dada sense, into a work of anti-art.

Duchamp's readymades revealed his fundamental rejection of the auratic authority assigned to the artist. Most importantly, they exposed how arbitrary were traditional aesthetic criteria and how superficial was the process of 'artistic creation.' An artist simply picks up any object and puts upon it a seal of aesthetic sanction by signing his name. From that moment, the object stops being an ordinary commodity object and becomes an exhibition item in an art gallery. The readymade object loses its original utilitarian function and is confined within the boundary of aesthetics.

Duchamp succeeded in integrating art and ordinary life by adopting readymades in his anti-art attempts. In the process he revealed his Dadaistic aesthetic indifference toward conventional aesthetic codes which had controlled arbitrarily all aesthetic endeavors within bourgeois society while isolating art from daily experiences. In a talk which he gave at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961, Duchamp clearly stated his rejection of traditional bourgeois aesthetic assumptions:

A point that I want very much to establish is that the choice of these Ready-mades was never dictated by aesthetic delectation.
The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with a total absence of good or bad taste.\textsuperscript{69}

Indeed, his anti-art ideology was characterized by a profound rejection of the arbitrary aesthetic standards of the bourgeois high-art tradition. His work, mainly readymades along with chance configurations, manifested the integral concept in his anti-art ideology: the "beauty of indifference."\textsuperscript{70}

In 1918 Duchamp left America for a nine-month stay in Buenos Aires, and then went to Paris in 1919. In early 1920 he returned to New York. After another visit to Paris in 1921, he finally moved back to New York for good in January 1922. Erickson believes that by that time New York Dada was essentially over "to the degree that it had ever existed." The American avant-garde artists and writers were now more concerned about creating a 'native American' art rather than participating in the international avant-garde movement, specifically Dada activities.

Creating native American art free from the Western European tradition of bourgeois aesthetics was first seriously discussed in the pages of The Soil and Contact by such figures as Robert Coady, Marsden Hartley, William Carlos Williams, and Robert McAlmon.\textsuperscript{71} Yet, it was Broom and Secession that, representing respectively Dada's avant-garde aesthetic ideology and a more conservative
modernist view, launched the major debate concerning the nature of art in the age of machine technology and its implications for the creation of a genuine American art.

NOTES

1. Employing the name "New York Dada" to describe the post-World War I American avant-garde activities which were influenced by Dada, Erickson adds a parenthetical comment that "New York Dada" was "a loose affiliation named after the fact." See John D. Erickson, Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art, p. 15.


6. Quoted in Erickson, Dada, p. 17.
It was Stieglitz who presented the first exhibition of African art at his Photo-Secession Gallery (or "291") in November 1914. According to Dickran Tashjian, it was the idea of Marius De Zaya, a Mexican caricaturist who had seen African sculpture in 1911 in Paris. Tashjian considers African sculpture a key factor in the primitivistic approach toward painting and photography. See Dickran Tashjian, "New York Dada and Primitivism," in Dada Spectrum: The Dialectics of Revolt, eds. Stephen C. Foster and Rudolf E. Kuenzli, pp. 126-27.

At another time, De Zayas maintained that "Art is devouring Art. Conservative artists, with the faith of fanaticism, constantly seek aspiration in the museums of art." See "Photography," Camera Work, No. 41 (1913): 17.


At one point, De Zayas referred to the word 'art' as "that idiotic word." See De Zayas, untitled essay, 291, Nos. 5-6 (July-August 1915), n. p.


Ibid., p. 119.


Tashjian, "New York Dada and Primitivism," in Dada Spectrum, p. 121. Tashjian maintains that "In its permutations, primitivistic art, that which Europeans themselves attempted, involved a contrastive aesthetic in a double vision. European artists were aware of their own civilization while they sought another."

Goldwater, Primitivism in Modern Art, p. 260. Goldwater points out that it was not until the second decade of the twentieth century, and then only by a few people in the art community, that ethnological art which was readily associated with primitivism came to be considered art by Europeans. See Goldwater, ibid., p. 38.


20. Ibid.


23. Ibid.


25. Ibid., p. 17.

26. Ibid., p. 20.


28. Ibid., p. 125.

29. Tashjian, "New York Dada and Primitivism," in Dada Spectrum, p. 143. As a good example, Tashjian comments upon how the opponents as well as proponents of genteel tradition in America looked to Europe for guidance in the matter of creating a genuine American art. See ibid., p. 144.

30. In 1911 at the Salon d'Automne, Picabia met Duchamp. Picabia also met Apollinaire. They all became fast friends. Once Picabia mentioned: "Apollinaire would certainly have been Dada, like Duchamp and myself, if he had not died so prematurely." Picabia, "Guillaume Apollinaire," Esprit nouveau, no. 26 (October 1924). Quoted in Erickson, Dada, p. 19.


34. Erickson maintains that Picabia is "one of the least known of major twentieth-century artists," in spite of the originality of his art and his important role in experimenting with and propagating Dada aesthetics. Picabia was born in 1879, descended on his father's side from a branch of the Spanish nobility, the Della Torre y Picabia of Galicia. Picabia's grandfather had moved to Cuba. Having been born in Antilles, Picabia's father moved to France and married a wealthy Parisienne. See Erickson, Dada, p. 18.


37. Picabia, "French Artists Spur on American Art," New York Tribune, 24 October 1915, part iv, p. 2. Some of Picabia's earlier works adopted mechanical abstraction, which was suggestive of machinelike precision and unity as observed in Etaonisl (1913) and I See Again in Memory My Dear Udnie (1914). In these paintings, Picabia employed discernable pastiches of machine parts such as levers, pistons, and drive shafts, among many others. See William A. Camfield, Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 57-70.

39. Ibid., pp. 82 ff. As for the titles and annotations and the symbolic machine parts which were used in his paintings, Picabia offered his own explanation: "In my work the subjective expression is the title, the painting is the object. But this object is nevertheless somewhat subjective because it is pantomime—the appearance of the title; it furnishes to a certain point the means of comprehending the potentiality—the very heart of man." See 291, no. 12 (February 1916).

40. Speaking of Dada's employment of the collage technique, André Breton asked if "in depriving ourselves of a system of reference, in disorienting ourselves in our memory—that is what provisionally holds us [...]—who knows if, in that way, we are not preparing ourselves to escape some day the principle of identity." André Breton, Preface to the Max Ernst exhibition, May 1920, reprinted in Les Pas pérdus (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 87-88. Quoted in Erickson, Dada, p. 113. Erickson maintains that it was "the principle of identity" that Dada rebelled against, to free art from "a principle of neutralization or reduction arranged around a fixed center," or, in other words, a historically given definition, Erickson concludes that "Dada art was seeking, in effect, to escape the principle of identity, through both the elusiveness of the art object itself and the artist, whose growing anonymity increased the play of that art object." See Erickson, Dada, p. 113.

41. Erickson, Dada, p. 109.

42. Ibid., p. 110. In contrast to Duchamp's disciplined and detached character, Camfield makes a point of Picabia's tendency toward physical gratification. Thus, Camfield characterizes the two main Dada figures: "Duchamp possessed uncanny discipline and objectivity; Picabia was an utter hedonist." See Camfield, Francis Picabia, p. 87.


45. Ibid.

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46. Ibid., p. 19-20.


48. At the end of his first visit to New York in 1913, Picabia had gone back to France. When World War I broke out, he managed to receive a commission to purchase molasses in Cuba for the army. On his way there in 1915, he made his second visit to New York. Having decided to abandon his mission, at least for the time being, Picabia became actively involved in Dada activities in New York. See Erickson, *Dada*, p. 21.

49. In January 1916, the same machine drawings were exhibited for the first time at the Modern Gallery, which was newly opened at the time by De Zayas.

50. De Zayas, Untitled Essay, 291, Nos. 5-6 (July-August 1915), n. p.


52. Erickson, *Dada*, p. 20.


54. Denying the Futurists' influence upon his earlier works, Duchamp maintained that he was in fact influenced by Jules Etienne Marey's chronophotographs of the 1890s. Marey's chronophotographs showed human figures in motion, using multiple exposures. See Erickson, *Dada*, p. 23.

55. Erickson, *Dada*, p. 23.


58. Ibid.

59. Duchamp collaborated with Man Ray to edit *Blind Man* and *Rong-Wrong*. The two also cofounded the Society of Independent Artists. In 1915, Duchamp met Man Ray in Ridgefield, New Jersey. When he was asked whether New York Dada was born when he met Duchamp, May Ray's
answer was "No." "It existed already," he said, "I had it in me, and my contacts with the Dadaists and Surrealists only strengthened my attitude and opinions." "Interview with Man Ray," in Arturo Schwarz, New York Dada (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1974), p. 88.


61. Erickson, Dada, p. 104.

62. Ibid.


64. Erickson, Dada, p. 105.

65. Ibid.


67. Ibid., p. 34.

68. Quoted in ibid., p. 35.


70. Ibid.

CHAPTER VII
THE BROOM-SECESSION DEBATE

From the Red Man to Skyscraper Primitives

A concern for creating a genuine American art free from the influence of the European high-art tradition provoked among American avant-gardists a primitivist interest in native American Indian culture. Marsden Hartley wrote several important articles on the subject, based upon his extensive travels throughout the southwest. "Tribal Aesthetics" was published in The Dial in 1918; "Red Man Ceremonials: An American Plea for American Aesthetics" in Art and Archaeology in 1920; and "The Scientific Esthetic of the Redman" in Art and Archaeology in 1922.

In the final paragraph of "Red Man Ceremonials," Hartley emphasized the proud task of creating America’s own culture and the significance of Native American culture:

Our soil is as beautiful and as distinguished as any in the world. We must therefore be the discoverers of our own wealth as an esthetic factor, and it is the redman that offers us the way to go.  

He saw the natural environment of America as a great asset for American art. Supporting the idea of ‘contact’
with the authentic natural environment presented in the pages of *Contact*, Hartely shared with William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon a view of the environment as a point of departure for the creation of genuine American art. Hartely maintained that it was the American Indian who had known the importance of the land before anybody else realized it. He was the one who showed Americans "the significance of the poetic aspects of our original land."² For Hartley, as "the only esthetic representative of our great country up to the present hour,"³ the American Indian had symbolized in his religious and aesthetic practices the splendid beauty and meaning of the natural environment of America:

> Americans of this time and of time to come shall know little or nothing of their spacious land until first artistic relative. The redman is the one truly indigenous religionist and esthete of America. He knows every form of animal and vegetable life adhering to our earth, and has made for himself a series of striking pageantaries in the form of stirring dances to celebrate them, and his relation to them.⁴

The idea of creating an American art through contact with the land and the local scene was what prompted William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon to stress 'contact' as the main theme of their magazine *Contact* in the early 1920s. Tashjian notes: "Contact most literally involved touch and most ideally a kinaesthetic immersion
in immediate experience. Experience without barriers had a *primitivistic directness* about it."⁵ In this sense, Hartley's extensive trip to the southwest was his genuine, 'primitivistic' effort to make firsthand contact with the native environment and the culture of the Native Americans.

For those American avant-garde artists and writers whose main concern was the creation of a genuine American art, Dada proved a complex matter. Their ambivalence toward it was typified by Williams. The way in which he responded throughout years of contact with various Dadaists, American as well as European, revealed conscious efforts to break away from any kind of European cultural influence and, at the same time, an attraction toward Dada's anti-art ideology.

While Williams never called himself a 'Dadaist,' he was one of the central figures of New York Dada. Through his part in *Contact* and his idea of 'contact' he articulated its ideology and concerns. He was no stranger in the Stieglitz circle, having met Stieglitz through friends such as Charles Sheeler, Marsden Hartley, and Charles Demuth. Although he had felt put down by Duchamp for some time,⁶ Williams never lost the admiration for Duchamp as a leading Dadaist which he had felt ever since he had first seen *Nude Descending a Staircase* at the Armory Show. And, of course, there was
the quite amazing episode of his relationship with another Dadaist, the outrageous Baroness Else Von Freytag-Loringhoven, who painted her shaved head with enamel.7

Williams was tremendously intrigued by the chance that Dada offered for rebelling against the art scene in America. The provincialism of American writers and artists, and the colonial mentality revealed in their imitation of and veneration for anything English, were aspects of the American cultural scene which Williams disliked. These factors made Dada quite appealing for its potential to provide a basis for the creation of a genuine American art. However, Dada's European origins bothered Americans whose primary concern was the creation of an American art. How could they create a genuine American art by becoming followers of a European avant-garde movement? Williams was thus concerned about the prospect that America might fall again under the influence of European art.

Against this possibility, Williams held up the idea of contact, which asserted the primary importance of America's natural environment for the creation of a genuine American culture. Throughout the 1920s, Williams tried to adopt Dada to an American context. Kora in Hell (1920), Sour Grapes (1921), Spring and All (1923), The Great American Novel (1923), and In The American Grain
all attempted to balance the search for a genuine American art and an acceptance of the anti-art avant-gardism of Dada.

The implications of Dada in a specifically American setting were extensively debated and articulated in the pages of *Broom* and *Secession*, two of the magazines commonly referred to as 'little magazines' published during the 1920s. Like most of these magazines, both *Broom* and *Secession* started in Europe, taking advantage of the highly appreciated value of the American dollar abroad. Men like Harold Loeb, Matthew Josephson, Malcolm Cowley, and Gorham Munson, who served as editors for the two magazines, were all expatriates in Europe at one time or another where they interacted with European Dadaists. A sizable community of American expatriates had formed in Paris. Naturally, quite a few American writers and artists came into contact with the Parisian Dadaists, who were among the livelist and the most vocal of the avant-garde community in Europe.

While the young American avant-gardists were fascinated by European Dadaists, they soon realized that the fascination was mutual, that they themselves intrigued the Europeans, because they were Americans, a new people with a new technology. Against the backdrop of the centuries-old European high-art tradition, which they considered stultifying, European Dadaists celebrated
the advent of the new machine-age aesthetics in American popular culture, as manifested in American films, advertising, and popular music and dance.

In the issue of *Broom* published in September 1923, Philippe Soupault wrote an article entitled as "The 'U. S. A.' Cinema." The article revealed Soupault's enthusiastic response to American popular culture and its "close relationship between art and life." Soupault recorded the shock he and his friends had felt at the appearance of American movies in Paris:

Then, one day we saw hanging on the walls great posters as long as serpents. At every streetcorner a man, his face covered with a red handkerchief, leveled a revolver at the peaceful passerby. We imagined that we heard galloping hoofs, the roar of motors, explosions, and cries of death. We rushed into the cinemas, and realized immediately that everything had changed. On the screen appeared the smile of Pearl White--that almost ferocious smile which announced the revolution, the beginning of a new world. At last we knew that the cinema was not merely a perfected mechanical toy, but a terrible and magnificent reflection of life.9

While enthusiastically embracing contemporary American art, which was a "magnificent reflection of life," Soupault criticized European art in general for its affected distance from life and lack of the vitality which he found in American art: "One might note that European art exists on a misunderstanding. It escapes
from life in order to return to it by a detour. This is a symptom of age and a warning of decadence." The article revealed a stereotypical contrast between the art of the New World and that of the Old World. For Europeans, American popular cultural forms represented a new age, in which the art of the New World would break free from the control of the Old World. And European Dadaists urged Americans to look at American popular culture and adopt its various elements as models for a new aesthetics of the machine age.

In this sense, European Dadaists helped the American avant-gardist become aware of the significance of American popular culture and its machine aesthetics and appreciate what America had to offer in the new age of machine technology. In effect, the Europeans' enthusiasm for the various elements of American popular culture intrigued American avant-gardists, whose main concern was to create an American art while subscribing to the anti-art ideology of Dada. Matthew Josephson, for instance, repeatedly asserted that Americans should embrace machine-age popular culture as a distinctly American art. His position, set forth mainly in the pages of Broom, was countered by Gorham Munson in his magazine Secession. The two debated the value of popular art as an aesthetic practice in a modern mass society in which machine technology was an integral aspect of reality. For men
like Munson who could not accept popular cultural forms as 'art,' Josephson represented a group of machine-age primitivists whose excitement over the wonders of modern technology was reminiscent of the reactions of men who earlier had gone to the South Pacific in search of idealized primitive cultures and aesthetics. Hence the title, "skyscraper primitives" for the Josephson group.11

The Emergence of the Debate

Initially, Broom did not picture itself as an avant-garde voice, propagating Dada aesthetics in an American setting and dealing with issues pertaining to contemporary American society and culture. At the outset, in fact, it shared Waldo Frank's opinion that machine technology had a general dehumanizing impact, and that only the cultivation of, and reliance upon, spiritual values could prevent total control by machines.12 It was not until Matthew Josephson's arrival on the editorial scene of Broom that the magazine directed itself toward Dada and machine aesthetics.

Financing the publication of the magazine, Harold Loeb also shared editorial tasks, first with Alfred Kreymborg and later with Matthew Josephson. As revealed in its subtitle, "An International Magazine of the Arts," Broom had been published first throughout Europe13 before
the office was moved to New York in 1923. From November 1921 to September 1922, Broom was published in Rome; from October 1922 to March 1923, in Berlin; and from August 1923 to January 1924, in New York. ¹⁴

Having gone from the conservative anti-machine ideology of The Seven Arts through the anti-art, nationalistic arguments of The Soil, Broom distinguished itself as a major post-World War I avant-garde magazine after Josephson joined the editorial team. Josephson met Loeb in the winter of 1922. As they became close friends, Josephson recorded, they agreed that "instead of pursuing an education function, as others, such as The Dial, were then doing, Broom should become in essence a tendenz magazine, expounding a militant modernism¹⁵ in literature as well as in the plastic arts. We would become a 'fighting organ,' sponsoring the avant-garde of postwar Europe, the German as well as the French experimenters, and the youth of America."¹⁶ Loeb and Josephson directed the magazine toward Dada and its relevance to the creation of an American art.

Kreymborg's objection to Loeb's alleged interest in extreme avant-garde activities at home and abroad led to his resignation from the editorship after the fourth issue. For the fifth issue of Broom Jean Epstein wrote an essay, "The New Conditions of Literary Phenomena," which explicitly rejected the anti-technological,
spiritually-oriented views of Waldo Frank. This essay cleared the way for Dada publication by Matthew Josephson, Malcolm Cowley, William Carlos Williams, E. E. Cummings, and others. While some of them were committed expatriates at one time or another after World War I, they were all very familiar with the avant-garde movements in Europe.

Secession made its first appearance in the spring of 1922, and was published for eight issues from Spring 1922 to April 1924. Like Broom and most of the other little magazines of that time, Secession was published throughout Europe, from Vienna through Berlin to Paris. Initially, it embraced Dada; its approval was clearly manifested by Matthew Josephson's dominant presence in the first issue.

When Gorham Munson grew skeptical of Dada aesthetics and its influence upon American art and literature, Josephson accepted Loeb's offer of the editorship of Broom. Just one month after his change of allegiance, he published "Instant Note on Waldo Frank," which openly challenged the anti-Dada and anti-technology position of Waldo Frank and Gorham Munson. Affirming Dada and its machine aesthetics, Josephson also asserted the importance of creating a genuine American art and literature which would reflect the spirit of America and its mass living in the age of machine technology. As
Broom became the explicit voice of Dada, Munson took up Waldo Frank's nationalistic anti-Dada stance. Conflict between the two magazines finally broke out when Waldo Frank made an announcement, "For a Declaration of War," in the winter of 1924.17

In the editorial of the first issue of Broom, which was published in November 1921, Loeb explicitly stated that the magazine would not adopt an allegiance to any specific art or literary camp. The role of Broom was defined as "a sort of clearing house where the artists of the present time will be brought into closer contact."18 Its intention was to publish unknown artists and authors as well as the renowned and established. Its interests also included American as well as British and European art and literature. Attempting to achieve some kind of balance while eager to introduce new artists and writers along with avant-garde ideas and practices to the public, Broom put its initial emphasis upon contemporary, living artists, not those established figures customarily venerated in the European high-art tradition.19

While Loeb's opening editorial and the manifesto in the first issue of the magazine clearly stated the avant-garde direction which Broom planned to take, its avant-garde stance was also revealed in the title itself, which came from a passage in Moby Dick reprinted on the back cover of the magazine:
Taking the magazine's title and its motto from an American work clearly revealed the significance of an American literary tradition to its agenda. The image of a broom implied a humble posture for the little magazine. Yet, at the same time, its radical aim "to get a broom and sweep" traditional art and literature away and welcome the advent of the avant-garde era could not be missed in the quotation's apparent yet subtly subversive obedience to authority.

As stated earlier, Broom's Dada posture or, more specifically, its focus upon young American writers and artists who explored Dada aesthetics in an American setting did not become dominant until later. During its initial year, in fact, the editorial voice of the magazine was unmistakably hostile toward Dada and its potential influence upon American avant-gardists. Kreymborg once called Dada a "European disease." Even Loeb himself joined the group in rejecting Dada:

Although I was glad to run the Dadaists because there was life in them and a great earnestness, I thought of Dada as an
expression of defeat, as post-war disillusionment with French ideals and values, perhaps appropriate in France after centuries of intellectual and moral ferment, but largely irrelevant in America. 21

The anti-Dada sentiment was articulated by Emmy Veronica Sanders in the first issue of Broom. Her article, "America Invades Europe," voiced a general concern about the suspected influence of the French avant-garde, especially the Paris Dadaists, upon Americans. While noting the eclectic nature of the first issue of the magazine, due to the absence of any definite editorial policy, Loeb later maintained that Sanders' article had expressed "the nearest thing to an editorial viewpoint" at the time. 22

Attacking the overzealous enthusiasm of American avant-garde writers, whom Sanders defined as "the extreme left wing of literary America," 23 for the Paris Dadaists, she rejected the literary values of Dada. The Dadaists' "innovations and literary caperings are possibly less signs of new life than the death spasms of a movement." 24 While urging Americans to broaden their vision beyond Paris Dada to the rest of Europe, Sanders emphasized the value of truly American materials for the creation of an American art and the need to guard against any kind of foreign influence. 25

As for the Dadaists' enthusiasm for American
technology, Sanders expressed her doubts about the aesthetic potential of the interaction between Dada's nihilism and the machine which was "interesting, ingenious, valuable in its way--but limited." She saw neither aesthetic possibilities nor humanistic values in the machine aesthetics of Dada. As an alternative Sanders recommended the works of Randolph Bourne, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, and Waldo Frank. She was certain that from these "the modern European world will get a better understanding of the new America's contact with herself, of her self analysis, self criticism, self transformation, than from all the ultra modern followers of France combined."26

The second issue of Broom, published in December 1921, continued the anti-Dada thrust of the first issue. In his article "Notre Amérique" Leon Bazalgette, who translated Thoreau and Whitman into French,27 found Waldo Frank's Our America "of inestimable value" as a revelation of the "true America."28 The essence of this "real America"29 was a spirituality which would open the door for the "religion of art and humanity."30

According to Bazalgette, Frank's vision of the "real America" replaced the commonly accepted superficial and totally misleading impression of America. The book went beyond the confines of "superficial appearance, the easily perceived and in consequence the spurious phases
of the American scene" and "the impression of a melting pot":

where everyone is cast in the same mold of a huge workshop in which the flowering of life and of art could never dream of unfolding in any other pattern but the accepted one.  

Against this stifling picture of America, Frank offered "A promise and a dream." "It is the affirmation, the discovery of a man; that is why it is so beautiful and so moving," Bazalgette asserted.

Frank had indeed put a fundamental emphasis upon spirituality as an antidote to the totalitarian encroachment of machine technology upon contemporary American life. In Our America, his anti-technology stance led to the grim conclusion that machine technology and uncurbed industrialism would inevitably bring about the death of spirituality. For Frank, the machine was nothing but a negative force causing destruction, fragmentation, and spiritual waste. Looking at the various facets of contemporary America dominated by machine technology, he declared that "America is a joyless land."

Not surprisingly, New York was the special target of Frank's criticism, because it epitomized for him every aspect of the joyless land. "[N]owhere is this so crying-clear as in the places of New York--Broadway, the
movies,' Conoy Island--where Joy is sought." Against these elements of popular culture in the age of machine technology, Frank evoked the mystic spirits of Americans such as Lincoln and Whitman. Within Frank's ideological framework, accordingly, only certain writers were respected, including Sherwood Anderson, who succeeded in bringing about the "impalpable marriage of substance and of human spirit which is art," in an attempt to transcend the grim realities of contemporary America. It was the Midwest, in Frank's view, that would preserve spirituality for America against the widely spread "industrial Despair," the stultifying end product of machine technology which was most visibly displayed in urban centers throughout the country.

Loeb expressed his doubts indirectly about Frank's emphasis upon spirituality and his mysticism through his criticism of Paul Rosenfeld, Frank's protege and a member of his anti-Dada and anti-machine technology camp. In an editorial "Comment" in the fourth issue, Loeb rejected Rosenfeld's criticism as "an offense to American criticism and a calumny on American art." Blaming American critics and their misguided criticism for the chaotic and sorry state of contemporary American literature, Loeb implicitly criticized Frank's spiritual, even mystical, approach. Frank considered the spiritual nature of a work of literature the main criterion for
evaluating it. Therefore, as long as a work had enough spiritual elements in it, form or style matters should not matter much. Loeb argued that the subjective content of a work should be dealt with in a "communicable form."35

As mentioned earlier, Broom's major break from Frank and his group over machine technology and its aesthetics came with Jean Epstein's article, "The New Conditions of Literary Phenomena," published in April 1922. Epstein saw machine technology as a major condition of modern American literature. She accepted technology as a reality which affected one's perception. For Epstein, the machine was a new extension of man, and it did not have to be a destructive force.

Epstein found the nervous pace of life in the modern age healthy and natural:

Man has never seemed to me so beautiful and so capable and so energetic as this day in which I live. But in truth, it is undeniable that he has changed, and today the most important factor in the change is the intensely cerebral, intensely nervous life of humanity, a life which normally, logically, evidently, inevitably entails fatigue, a fatigue corresponding to the nervous expenditure, that is to say cerebral and intellectual. A light fatigue, universal in the measure that civilization is universal, not pathological, since it is not exceptional in the new state of health.36

By contrast Frank found the rhythm and pace of life in
New York unbearable. It was "too high-pitched, its throb too shattering fast. Nerves and spiritual fiber tear in such a strain."^{37}

Epstein saw the modern spirit and its accompanying phenomena as major shaping forces of modern literature. Thus, he embraced "spatial speed, mental speed, multiplication of intellectual images and the deformations of these images, extension of auto-observation and of the importance given to the interior life, cerebral life and the fatigue that results from it."^{38} They are "the most important conditions under which the contemporary literary phenomenon comes into being." Because man's concept of reality and his perception of his surroundings were changed by machine technology, Epstein defined it as a part of man, not a dead object:

All these instruments: telephone, microscope, magnifying glass, cinematograph, lens, microphhone, gramophone, automobile, kodak, aeroplane, are not merely dead objects. At certain moments these machines become part of ourselves, interposing themselves between the world and us, filtering reality as the screen filters radium emanations. Thanks to them, we have no longer a simple, clear, continuous, constant notion of an object.^{39}

Thus in this article machine technology emerged as an undeniable reality of the modern age. With its arrival, a whole new set of perceptual and behavioral patterns
appeared, and, modern literature was not immune to this new force. With the publication of Epstein's article, Broom started to direct its attention unambiguously toward the possibilities of machine technology for art and literature.

Not long after Broom had shifted its attention from Frank's anti-technological mysticism to Dada's machine aesthetics, Gorham Munson brought out in the spring of 1922 the first issue of Secession, which would soon become the arch-rival of Broom. Munson cited as a major inspiration for his little magazine an article written by Malcolm Cowley, "This Youngest Generation," which had been published in The Literary Review of the New York Evening Post in October 15, 1921. In a letter to Cowley on December 6, 1921, Munson had written: "Your essay, 'This Youngest Generation,' in the Literary Review has impressed me with the feasibility of operating a review which will provide a forum for just those writers and their kin whom you mention."40

In his article, Cowley maintained that a new generation of American writers had emerged with a new and radically different agenda. Instead of blaming Puritanism for whatever expectations American literature had not fulfilled as an earlier generation had done, this generation of American writers turned to French literature:
One can safely assert that they are not gathered in a solid phalanx behind H. L. Mencken to assault our tottering American Puritanism....[Instead, they were turning to French literature] from Baudelaire and Laforgue down through the most recent and most involved Parisian schools. Atym

Cowley was actually outlining the aesthetic ideology and practices of his own circle, those roughly referred to as the "Malcolm Cowley group." As expatriates, they turned to Europe, especially to France, for guidance about avant-garde literature. As they came into direct contact with the latest literary ideas and practices beyond the confines of the relatively provincial American scene, they found equally unacceptable both the conservatism of literary academia and the literary and cultural criticism of H. L. Mencken. The latter was considered radical by the literary establishment and the public alike, while the already outdated naturalism of Theodore Dreiser was viewed as avant-garde in Mencken's literary criticism.

In a circular that Munson sent out to publicize the forthcoming appearance of his little magazine, he declared the aim of Secession to be "the first gun for this youngest generation," repeating the theme of Cowley's article. Secession would scrutinize and attack the literature of the previous generation and bring about a new era of American writing. Exposing the "criticism,
insults, and vituperations" of young American avant­
gardists and European Dadaists, Secession would reveal to
the public the "hidden sins and secret history" of
conservative mainstream magazines such as The Dial.
Munson's aggressive tone forshadowed in a way the
subsequent literary debates. Indeed, he himself attested
to the consciously belligerent nature of his magazine in
his retrospection: "Mars was ceratinly present at the
birth of Secession. In fact, it was invoked. The review
was to be intransigent, aggressive, unmuzzled. The
contributors were to handle everybody, including each
other, without kid gloves."43

Munson cited in his circular various young Parisian
Dadaists such as Louis Aragon, André Breton, Paul Eluard,
and Philippe Soupault. Munson remembered a decade later
that at Tzara's encouragement he "dashed off three Dada
'poems,' making use of multiplication tables and the
mention of forbidden things, and being properly idiotic."
When Munson made this statement, to be sure, he had
broken with Dada and wanted to highlight what he
considered its frivolous aspects, in contrast to his own
ensuing efforts at allegedly authentic and serious
mainstream literary criticism. Yet, apparently he could
not dismiss Dada as absolutely nothing: "Of course, I
attached no importance to this little stunt, but dadaism
as a movement continued to interest and puzzle me."44
In the *New York Tribune* in February 1921, Kenneth Burke wrote an article, "Dadaism Is France’s Latest Literary Fad," describing the chaotic nature of Dada. Burke understood correctly its nihilism and unbounded enthusiasm for creation, two seemingly paradoxical facets of Dada. He saw Dadaists as people with a childish temper who were eager to be—and enjoyed being—in the spotlight through their outrageous provocation of the contented public. At the same time, however, he recognized their nihilism as something not so easily dismissable. Originating in the World War I experience, the fundamental nihilistic element extended to art, strangely enough, in the form of a very affirmative spirit. He wrote: "These men have discovered a fluctuating aesthetic. Their byword is ‘rien,’ which means nothing." However, he continued, "the joy of creation is here unlimited; it is carried to the extent of anarchy."45

It was the affirmative and liberating aspect of Dada, not its nihilism, that Josephson attempted to explore to its fullest extent. David Shi correctly summarizes Josephson’s own understanding of Dada:

Josephson drew a distinction between the Dadaists’ nihilistic public behavior and their artistic purposes. To the casual observer Dada represented the culminating attempt by artists to seek the freedom of the completely detached personality. But such a view was deceiving, Josephson
believed, for the Dadaists were genuinely involved in the society they so heartily condemned. He eagerly embraced both their spirit of nonconformity and their active contact with society. The world was not to be ignored...instead it was to be 'fought, insulted, or mystified.'

Josephson was well aware of the nihilistic side of Dada, which, as he correctly surmised, had resulted from the World War I experience. He, however, consciously underplayed Dada's war-induced nihilism when he attempted to bring it to the American scene. For him the socio-cultural contexts of Europe and America provided two completely different stages for Dada activities.

Josephson recognized that the World War meant something very different to Americans at home and abroad than it did to the French Dadaists who experienced it all. Much later he wrote, "Though the impact of World War I upon American destiny was immense, it is nonsense to hold that a generation of American youth were 'lost' or driven to despair as a result of that brief war." Josephson might seem to have dismissed too easily the nihilistic side of Dada. Yet, without firsthand experience of the horrors of war and the subsequent nihilistic revolt against the bourgeois system which was held responsible for the war, he could not possibly have reacted to the war experience in the same way as the young Parisian Dadaists did.

As Josephson came into direct contact with the
Paris Dada circle, mainly through his friendship with Louis Aragon, he became familiar with its work. In addition to his more genuine literary interest in Dada writings, Josephson, as an "American recruit," took part in Dada's apparently outrageous public attack on the false pieties of complacent bourgeois life and the pretentious gentility of Victorian culture. Years later, looking back upon those Paris days with the Dadaists, he reminisced:

I also felt the excitement of danger as I found myself being drawn into the absurd and scandalous enterprises of the Dadaists, as their American recruit. There were risks in this business, but there were special satisfactions too. At last we writers would leave our sedentary lives in our studies, cafes, or the parlors where we used to read our poems to old ladies, and go forth into the streets to confront the public and strike great blows at its stupid face.

At the same time, Josephson did not lose sight of what he was looking for in his allegiance to Dada. He saw the potential for the serious literature of the next generation. Defending the French Dadaists, he wrote to Cowley in December 1921 that "these young men, when they break away from the rubbish of Dada will be the big writers of the next decade. They are working at more or less the same problems that we are, although they abjure technique, and accuse each other in turn
of toadying to the Academy."  

Josephson's conscious attempt to minimize the nihilistic side of Dada was well revealed in one of his major articles on Dada and its impact upon American literature. For the first issue of *Secession* in the spring of 1922, he wrote "Apollinaire: Or Let Us Be Troubadours." Rejecting the commonly held notion of Dada as fundamentally nihilistic, he presented a view of Dadaists as full of positive and creative energy:

[The French Dadaists] are not exhausted, these young men who have survived 1914-1918. Witness the excellent morale of the writers of the avant-garde in France, who, in isolation from the rest of their countrymen, have completely forgotten the war. Talented, extravagant, intolerant, fun-loving, these young writers whether of Dada affiliations or not have broken with the direct line of French literature.

In writers such as Breton, Aragon, and Soupault Josephson noticed "an unexpected sincerity, a desperate willingness to go to any lengths of violence in opposing the old regime." Revealing his faith in these young writers, he wrote that "they are inventive to an extreme degree and are utterly without blague or snobbery. They are bent frankly on unbounded adventures and experiments with modern phenomena."

While Josephson defined the French Dadaists as troubadours of the contemporary world, he saw Apollinaire
as a predecessor of the Dadaists. Apollinaire’s influence was apparent in his urging Dadaists "to be at least as daring as the mechanical wizards who exploited the airplane, wireless telegraph, chemistry, the submarine, the cinema, the phonograph, whatnot." Linking contemporary poets with the "mechanical wizards" in the age of machine technology, Josephson proclaimed technology the new aesthetic material from which "the modern poet [might] create the myths and fables which are to be realized in succeeding ages." 

Josephson chose Tzara as an example of contemporary poets as "mechanical wizards." Tzara’s poems were, "as naturally expressive of the beauty of this age as Herrick’s are of the 17th century. With an utterly simple and unaffected touch they employ all the instruments of the time, the streetcar, the billposter, the automobile, the incandescent light, etc." However, it was not the endless enumeration of the products of machine technology, Josephson emphasized, that reflected the spirit of the time in a contemporary work. Reiterating the point that William Carlos Williams had made, he went on to praise the effectiveness of the Dada techniques to capture the modern age in its full vitality. Thus, he wrote, "the poems are not modern because they indicate: ‘I was riding in the tramway’ (instead of a diligence), but because the tramway gets
into the very rhythm, form and texture of the poems."54

The Creation of an American Art

While Josephson elaborated at length upon the French Dadaists and their work and showed his respect for their accomplishments, he also revealed his concern over America's cultural independence from Europe. Pointing out the spreading influence of America in Europe, he emphasized the value of the experience of everyday life in contemporary America as aesthetic material. There is no need to follow the lead of Europe, he argued. The urban, industrial scenes of contemporary America are the materials with which to build a genuine American art integrated with life:

Americans need play no subsequent part in this movement. It is no occasion for aping European or Parisian tendencies. Quite the reverse, Europe is being Americanized.... The complexion of the life of the United States has been transformed so rapidly and so daringly that its writers and artists are rendered a strategic advantage. They need only react faithfully and imaginatively to the brilliant minutiae of her daily existence in the big cities, in the great industrial regions, athwart her marvelous and young mechanical forces.95

In the second issue of Broom, which appeared in May 1922, Loeb wrote an article entitled "Foreign Exchange." Opposing Waldo Frank's visionary view of America, Loeb
proposed that Americans should accept the Europeans' enthusiastic assessment of America and its culture with all its industrial and urban reality. In the picture that Europeans drew, the simple, dynamic vitality of industrial America was fully revealed and accepted without nostalgic sentiment or idealized spirituality. Loeb argued that Americans could create a truly American art by appreciating urbanized and industrialized realities and incorporating materials from modern life into the realm of aesthetics, just as the Europeans urged them to do.56

While Loeb's article seemed to ask Americans to listen to what Europeans had to say about America and follow their lead, Josephson rejected the idea that American expatriates in Paris had freshly rediscovered America through the eyes of the French. In the article "Made in America," published in the June 1922 issue of Broom, he discussed the expatriate scene in Paris. He maintained that there was no general consensus about anything among Americans in Paris. They formed diverse groups among themselves, and their intercourse with French artists and writers was varied. Even in the avant-garde community there were many camps, which could not easily agree upon issues with one another.

Nevertheless, Josephson picked the Dadaists as one important group to pay attention to. He saw in their
work "a mood of humor instead of pathos, aggression instead of doubt, and complete freedom of method from the restriction of the previous age." As for Dada’s creative response to machine technology, Josephson again described avant-garde artists as the "mechanical geniuses of the age." He wrote, "A strong impetus has been given to unlimited experiment with form, to a greater daring and a more penetrating humor.... To be at least as daring as the mechanical geniuses of the age which has attained the veritable realization of the materials forecast in primitive fables. To be prophets alike, the fable-makers for the incredible ages to come!"

Declaring that "the machine is not 'flattening us out' nor 'crushing us!'", Josephson insisted upon the significance of machine technology as a new aesthetic material in a new era. At the same time, however, he revealed another major concern, creating a genuine American art independent of any European influence. He defined machine technology as uniquely American in its nature, and so asserted that the new aesthetics of machine technology was not foreign in origin, but an American accomplishment rooted in its own technological environment. He declared, "The machine is our magnificent slave, our fraternal genius. We are a new and hardier race, friend to the sky-scraper and the subterranean railway as well." Here he sought to
stress America's cultural independence by pointing out that it had no debts to Europe in the matter of the new aesthetics of machine technology.

What Josephson had in mind when he warned against European influence upon American writing was French naturalism, which, deplorably, American critics used as a criterion to judge contemporary writing. In this context, Theodore Dreiser and H. L. Mencken became the targets of Josephson's criticism. Recognizing the unexplored potential for American writing and art to adopt materials from new technological developments, he rejected the rigid aesthetic criteria rooted in the European high-art tradition. Instead, he advocated more open-minded, creative, and innovative aesthetic ideology and practices and welcomed various kinds of experimentation and the exploration of new media such as film.60

Josephson's warning against the European influence upon American art was reiterated in Loeb's article, "The Mysticism of Money,"61 which appeared in the September 1922 issue of Broom. Loeb disapproved of Americans' effort to imitate European art, which he defined as basically decadent in its overly complicated nature. His rejection of European art was based upon the stock differentiation between the New World and the Old World. According to him, New World culture consisted of the
"archaic expressions of less sophisticated races." He called American culture "a conceptual system...not known as religion, and which expresses itself in diverse forms, not recognized as art" within the traditional aesthetic framework.62

Loeb selected the 'mysticism of money' as the fundamental factor in American culture. This was manifested in various cultural phenomena, such as the machinescape, to which, like Robert Coady, Loeb referred as "moving sculpture"; jazz, the musical presentation of the rhythm of modern industrial civilization; and the mass media, a product of modern technology. Indeed, through these cultural phenomena, he argued, the "mysticism of money" manifested itself as "a revitalizing force to meet aesthetic expressions" of the New World, which could not be accomplished in the context of the European aesthetic tradition.63

As if to acknowledge his effort in the pages of Broom to continue Robert Coady's attempt to create an indigenous American art, Loeb published a tribute to Coady, who had died in 1921, in the issue of Broom which appeared in October 1922. In an essay entitled "A Champion in the Wilderness," Robert Alden Sanborn, Coady's former associate, asserted, "It is especially important now when we are close to the event of Coady's death to examine his message in order that we may take up
those threads laid down by him that may seem worth weaving into the muddled aesthetic pattern of our national art." Sanborn continued to ask, "Who dares put on the shoes and gloves of this dead champion and take his fighting place in the wilderness of [the] age?"64 The answer to the question seemed to be quite obvious, considering Broom's insistent quest for an indigenous American art.

Loeb's celebration of American technology as aesthetic material was also reflected in the October issue of Broom. For the issue, Enrico Prampolini, the Italian Futurist, drew a cover in which he used a photomontage to picture enormous factory turbine wheels and coglike letters of the magazine's title intertwined among the wheels. In addition to his photomontage, Prampolini wrote an article to express his recognition of the machine as a source of art. In "The Aesthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art," he asked, "Is not the machine today the most exuberant symbol of the mystery of human creation? Is it not the new mythical deity which weaves the legends and histories of the contemporary human drama?" He continued, "The Machine in its practical and material function comes to have today in human concepts and thoughts the significance of an ideal and spiritual inspiration."65

The aesthetics of machine technology and especially
the cultural phenomena in contemporary America which were the products of this technology were celebrated again in the next issue of Broom, which was published in November 1922. In the article, "The Great American Billposter," Josephson welcomed wholeheartedly contemporary American culture, and, by doing so, challenged Waldo Frank’s dismal view of industrial civilization. While Frank deplored the anti-art nature of American culture, Josephson accepted it positively as Robert Coady had done in his magazine, The Soil. Josephson’s celebrated America was a place "where the Billposters enunciate their wisdom, the Cinemas transport us, the newspapers intone their gaudy jargon; where athletes play upon the frenetic passions of baseball crowds, and skyscrapers rise lyrically to the exotic rhythms of jazz bands which upon waking up we find to be nothing but the drilling of pneumatic hammers on steel girders."66

In his aesthetic vision of technology, Josephson called for "poets who have dared the lightning, who come to us out of the heart of this chimera; novelists who express for us its mad humor."67 For him American advertising was real poetry:

The terse vivid slang of the people has been swiftly transmitted to this class of writers, along with a willingness to depart from syntax, to venture sentence forms and word constructions which are at times breath-taking, if anything, and in all cases far more arresting and provocative.
than 99 per cent of the stuff that passes for poetry in our specialized magazines. He considered copywriters the avant-gardists of American literature. Furthermore, they were an inspirational source for conventional writers. In response to Josephson's article, Waldo Frank wrote a letter to Loeb, dated December 13, 1922. Here he referred to the piece as the "silly Billboard article." In his apparently conscious effort to belittle the writer and his argument, Frank defined Josephson as "simply another young man whose head has been turned by the cerebrations of certain French artists he does not understand." Josephson retaliated with an "Instant Note on Waldo Frank" for the following issue of the magazine. He included Frank among "a group of American Impulsionists...the exponents of mystical unconscious behavior such as James Oppenheim and Sherwood Anderson." In contrast to the terse, dynamic language of copywriters, Josephson declared, Frank's vocabulary was "vague and flaccid." From the start of the publication of Secession, Gorham Munson displayed uneasiness with what Dada advocated in terms of machine aesthetics and its implication for an American art, about which he was equally as concerned as Josephson. For the first issue of Secession published in Spring 1922, Munson wrote "A
Bow to the Adventurous," in which his detached attitude toward Dada was well exhibited. He examined Tzara's poetry as representative of Dada and was critical of the tendency of Dada poetry to espouse a "sign esthetic," which upheld an abstract language void of all symbolic meaning. He made clear his allegiance to Frank through his embrace of the kind of fiction which dealt with socio-psychological themes. However, Munson was not yet explicitly against Dada. In the article, he seemed to give Dada the benefit of the doubt. In fact, no matter how skeptical he was, he was at the same time prepared to concede that "In some periods what a writer says is of supreme importance to the esthetic emotion, in others the evasion of the grandly serious is the most provocative."71

Louis Untermeyer rightly summarized Munson's conciliatory response to Dada in an article in The New Republic in December 1922, several months after the appearance of Munson's first article on Dada in Secession. "Gorham Munson," Untermeyer wrote, "accepts Dada's exploration of the materials created by the machine's impact on human life but rejects its arbitrary symbols and elaborate formlessness."72 The rejection of the arbitrary and seemingly coincidental nature of Dada aesthetics was affirmed some time later in Munson's own article for The New Republic. In "A Specimen of Demi-
Dadaism, he accepted Dada's anti-art rebellion against the institutionalized system of aesthetics in a bourgeois society as of revolutionary value in itself. Nevertheless, he could not bring himself to accept the accidental and chaotic nature of Dada. Like Waldo Frank, Munson as a modernist was seeking an aesthetic order to cope with the changing technological realities of contemporary American society.

For the Winter 1924 issue of Secession, Waldo Frank wrote "For A Declaration of War." Of course, by "War," Frank meant the war between the modernist group associated with Secession and the avant-garde group centered around Broom. He considered the war "wider than America and deeper than the issue of our generations: a war vastly more important than any clash of states or social orders...a war of a new consciousness, against the forms and language of a dying culture."

The article revealed Frank's misgivings about the modern age, in which the basic assumptions of western civilization were disintegrating. To counter the fragmentation which touched every aspect of contemporary life he searched for a meaningful aesthetic order. In his quest for stability in the face of fragmentation and disintegration Frank insisted upon the permanence of the essential principle, of "unity" as a stabilizing force leading toward order. Thus, he declared, "Unity is
truth. This is a universe, not a multiverse.75

Frank sought a modernist credo with regard to the nature and functions of aesthetics and literature in an age of disintegration. He thought that art was a major intellectual medium through which the hidden spiritual mysteries of life manifested themselves. The function of criticism was to bring understanding to the mysteries of life. But criticism could fulfill its function "only when it contacts the work of art on a common plane of spiritual and philosophical conviction." Without religious spirituality, Frank maintained, criticism would be "idle, irrelevant, impotent, and anti-social." He formulated his idea of an aesthetics and a criticism which was fundamentally religious in an attempt to cope with a disintegrating and secularized cultural and social climate.76

In 1923, Munson published a monograph on Waldo Frank's Our America, entitled Waldo Frank: A Study. Munson clearly stated his position toward Dada and technology and his allegiance to Frank. While Munson did not share Frank's negative view of technology, nevertheless, he had nothing but praise for Frank's work in general. According to Munson, there were two ways to deal with the machine. One was an escape to nature, which he did not approve. The other was "the acceptance of Machinery as a necessary evil...and the creation of
anti-bodies to offset its ravages, as Our America does." While Frank deplored the effect of machine technology in contemporary American society, for Munson the machine was not "a necessary evil."

Instead, Munson wanted to relate to the machine in a positive way. He saw in Dada an alternative way to deal with the machine, "to relate man positively and spiritually to Machinery as well as to nature." What Dada accomplished was "a series of mechanized art, one capable of carrying intellect, courage, humor, aggressiveness, tension, speed, of giving minor esthetic thrills." However, like Frank, Munson emphasized that it would be only after the cultivation of spiritual resources found in their own culture that Americans could integrate machine technology into the realm of aesthetics. After combining Dada and Frank in this manner, Munson declared: "We are in the childhood of a new age, we are, by the chronological accident of our birth, chosen to create the simple forms, the folk-tales and folk-music, the preliminary art that our descendants may utilize in the vast struggle to put positive and glowing spiritual content into Machinery."

Munson's positive, if ambivalent, view of Dada's acceptance of machine technology as the source of an avant-garde art, which had made him declare "we must make the Machine our fraternal genius," was hard to detect
by the time of his article, "The Skyscraper Primitives," for the March 1925 issue of another little magazine, The Guardian. He called Josephson and others who aligned themselves with Dada pejoratively the "skyscraper primitives." Yet, there was one exceptional "skyscraper primitive," who had had genuine zeal for the creation of an American art and an ability to lead Americans toward the realm of a new aesthetics which would integrate the realities of contemporary American society. This was the late Robert Coady who, as a "skyscraper primitive," "would have become a leader for Young America. Like Guillaume Apollinaire in France, Coady in America was the first spokesman of certain new impulses, and his death, like that of Apollinaire, deprived the oncoming movement of a directive stand."80

Munson claimed that the potential that the "skyscraper primitives" had exhibited was gone with Coady's death. Now, all he saw was the unfulfilled promise:

I have the temerity to write about a literary school which has had an origin, yet never achieved an existence. But rays of energy from its source are much in the air today: they have inspired certain pimply manifestations by two or three of our youngest writers in the now defunct Broom: they stimulate the critic to make theatrical programs for an unborn school of poets and fictionists.81
"An Imaginary Conversation"

The debate between the Matthew Josephson group and the Gorham Munson group was well captured by Edmund Wilson in an article published in April 1924 in The New Republic. Entitled "An Imaginary Conversation: Mr. Paul Rosenfeld and Mr. Matthew Josephson," the article dramatized the various aspects of their respective aesthetic ideologies by representing the two groups at war.

Two years earlier, Wilson had written an article concerning Dada and American culture. In "The Aesthetic Upheaval in France," published in Vanity Fair in February 1922, Wilson noticed the French Dadaists' fascination with contemporary America. He himself did not approve of that culture, or Dada either, for that matter. While not as explicit as Waldo Frank, Wilson nevertheless expressed clearly his reservations about Dada and America:

The electric signs in Times Square make the Dadaists look timid; it is the masterpiece of Dadaism, produced naturally by our race and without premeditation which makes your own horrors self-conscious and which makes them offend our taste doubly because we know that they first offended yours. Our monstrosities are at least created by people who know no better. But yours are like risque stories; told by well-bred girls to show off their sophistication; they sadden even the ribald; they make even
the barbarian wince!82

In the 'imaginary' dialogue between Rosenfeld and Josephson, Wilson presented unambiguously what both sides stood for. He obviously understood the heart of the debate when he contrasted Rosenfeld's loyalty to the fine art tradition with Josephson's ardent advocacy of popular culture. Throughout the dialogue, Josephson's enthusiasm for Dada with its playful wit and for machine technology and its potential for modern aesthetics were placed in opposition to Rosenfeld's allegedly old-fashioned impressionistic criticism and his faithful respect for the genteel tradition.

Rosenfeld opened the conversation by commenting upon Josephson's "Poets of the Catacombs," a review of Elinor Wylie's poetry published in Broom. He had criticized Wylie as a tradition-oriented poet unable to cope with modern American society.83 Josephson understandably disagreed when Rosenfeld cited both Eliot and Joyce as representatively 'modern' writers who chose to follow tradition even though they were fully 'modern' and capable of dealing with the post-war era. Josephson reversed Rosenfeld's examples to prove his own point:

You are like all Americans who think themselves modern; you have the thrill of doing something sensational and the virtuous glow of doing something bold when you come out for The Waste Land or Ulysses. But the one is only the last spasm of naturalism as the other is the last gasp of
romantic poetry.84

Both Eliot and Joyce, he argued, looked back to the romanticized and idealized past in terms of a frustrated genteel sensibility. Through their work they attempted to escape to the past, where they felt safe.85

While Josephson found traditional aesthetics invalid in the modern cultural environment, Rosenfeld responded that "The life of feeling is always real." The "language of the heart" had survived different civilizations and eras to prove itself something immutable and universal, transcending time and space. Josephson found the "language of the heart" obsolete in the age of machine technology and considered Rosenfeld's ideas anachronistic in their nostalgia for the pre-modern era.86

Thus Josephson accused Rosenfeld, "You still think yourself living in the early nineteenth century. I am sure that you read Goethe in the subway and sing Schubert in the shower." Yet as far as Josephson was concerned, "the subway and the shower are more magnificent poems than anything Goethe or Schubert has for us." They were the "monstrous poetry" representing the dynamic energy of the modern technological environment: "A giant obus of steel charged with human beings shot a hundred miles under earth! A gleaming canopy that at a touch of the hand sends down a cascade of crystal needles!"

"What does the shower or the subway train care about

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the language of the heart?" Josephson asked, undoubtedly thinking that people living in the contemporary environment "have learned to do without the heart; their life is all in the joy of action." Machine technology elicited a new sensibility which could not appreciate the traditional mode of aesthetic practices. "You will never be able to interest them in what you call literature again. Or music. Or plastic art," Josephson confidently predicted:

A bad patriotic monument and a silly landscape the size of a playing-card in a gallery like a mausoleum which only a handful of people in New York will ever see and which the millions of the rest of the country will never even hear about! How can you put this up against the electric signs which thousands of people see every day—a triumph of ingenuity, of color, of imagination!

Thus he asserted, "[C]ulture so-called is finished; the human race no longer believes in it."87

Life, like art, was "a serious matter," for Rosenfeld; to Josephson, it was "only a game." As for Dada and its anti-art ideology and practices, Rosenfeld saw only the "point of their pointlessnes." Thus, he reaffirmed a faith "beyond the nonsense of events." To him "the imagination of Europe," the "fatherland of Bach and Goethe, of Shakespeare and Wagner and Moussorgsky," was the only true reality:
You keep talking about this or that lacking reality or not representing anything real, but for me the artistic life of Europe, the life of feeling which it makes articulate, is the only reality.

Countering Rosenfeld's insistence upon European high art as the only art form worth saving, Josephson declared that Europe had been defeated, and "America is its defeat." Rosenfeld romantically idealized the dying tradition of European high art, and, by doing so, Josephson insisted, ignored the vital signs of the burgeoning genuine American culture. He criticized Rosenfeld for having a nineteenth-century European sensibility while living in the twentieth-century mass society of America. Like Elinor Wylie, Rosenfeld hid behind a hothouse sensibility because of an inability to cope with modernity:

You have no ears for the popular voices. You speak of vulgarity with loathing. For you life must be thinned and refined and laid away in an elegant score before you can consent to come in contact with it. You talk about the desolation of a people who have relegated music to the concert hall. But I, all new to the States as I am, hear the people dancing to their music everywhere and I respond to its prodigious joy. There is no desolation in that music—only the drunkenness, the vertigo of life—vulgar life, unrestrained, taut-nerved, hurtling out with howling trombones in its great gaudy circus parade into the unknown mechanical future.

It is significant that Wilson let Rosenfeld end the
imaginary conversation with his grim picture of contemporary art and artists. For him, there was no space for a genuine aesthetics or true artists in the "great gaudy circus parade into the unknown mechanical future." While he seemed to admit the inevitability of social and cultural transformations, still he would not give up a losing battle and yield to the "monster":

If there is to be a defeat, you will be among the victims. You are a poet, like Elinor Wylie; you are a critic, like me. And you can never march with that procession: they have no places for critics or poets. You can only prostrate yourself before the monster in amazement and sweat his strength. But if you choose to pretend to enjoy it, that is your own affair.90

Wilson dramatized the issues which occupied the attentions of the two disagreeing groups of Broom and Secession concerning the nature and functions of art and artists in the age of machine technology and the creation of a genuine American art. Wilson kept a third-person distance in his imaginary dialogue between Rosenfeld, representing the genteel tradition, and Josephson, speaking for popular culture. The protagonists did not function as his disguised mouthpieces.

It is nevertheless significant that Wilson closed the dialogue with Rosenfeld's negative depiction of the helplessness of artists and the fine arts tradition in an
environment which Rosenfeld found extremely vulgar and hostile to genuine aesthetic practice. Wilson seemed to support Josephson's advocacy of popular culture as a truly independent American cultural form. Yet, he did not share Josephson's insistence upon the obsolescence and invalidity of the fine arts; instead, like Rosenfeld, he admitted the inevitability of cultural transformation with the advent of machine technology and the helplessness of the fine arts in the face of this reality.91

For the first issue of The American Mercury, which was published by H. L. Mencken92 in December 1923, Ernest Boyd wrote the "Aesthete: Model 1924," a devastating attack on those American avant-gardists who aligned themselves with Dada. Boyd's composite picture of Josephson and his company was hostile, stereotypical, and superficial. According to him, the "aesthetes" of the Josephson group were middle-class social conformists despite their anti-establishment cultural ideology. They were good-for-nothing nondoers, isolating themselves from society within a cliquish enclave. More significantly, following Waldo Frank, Boyd criticized them for their lack of social consciousness. Boyd labeled Josephson's advocacy of the popular arts as a kind of "aesthetic mysticism," the very same criticism that Josephson had
earlier used against Frank. In short, the American Dadaists were just following the latest literary fashion. Just doing "the right thing to do"\textsuperscript{93} was an easy way out.

In response Josephson and his group--including Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, Slater Brown, Hart Crane, Allen Tate, and William Carlos Williams--produced \textit{Aesthete 1925}. Burke contributed "Dada, Dead or Alive," in which he defined Dada as "perception without obsession." Apparently referring to Wilson's imaginary dialogue between Rosenfeld and Josephson, he claimed that both "supernal beauty AND the brass band" should be accepted as potential aesthetic materials. To Frank's assertion that America, being itself fundamentally Dada, needed some fundamental correction,\textsuperscript{94} Burke replied that "Whatever we do, let it be done, not by counter-Dada but by Dada aggrandized."\textsuperscript{95}

For the major target of its attack \textit{Aesthete 1925} featured "Mencken Promotion Society." Adopting Dada's advertisement frame and typography, the Society satirized Mencken and his views by advertising them as a commodity. Thus it urged "Get Self-Respect Like Taking a Pill/MENCKENIZE!" Of Mencken's subtle conservatism it wrote, "Mencken expresses the conservatism of revolt." It asserted that he did not really denounce American cultural values but rather represented them: "It is said that Mencken is shaping public opinion. This is a DIRTY
LIE. Mencken is voicing public opinion.\footnote{96} For the cover of Aesthete 1925, Charles Sheeler produced a pen-and-ink drawing of skyscrapers, representing the integration of art and life by utilizing modern technology as aesthetic material. Ghost edited by Walter S. Hankel, whose model was Gorham Munson, the book contained essays by Kenneth Burke, Corey Ford, Slater Brown, John Wheelwright, E. E. Cummings, Josephson, and Cowley.

Cowley began to write the chronicle of the "Lost Generation" in the pages of The New Republic in the fall of 1931, creating waves of controversy in the art and literary communities. In 1934, parts of his essays were eventually collected under the title of Exile's Return to become an official record of the ideological journey of post-World War I American avant-gardists.

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\section*{NOTES}


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Ceremonials: An American Plea for American Aesthetics" which was originally published in Art and Archaeology in 1920.


5. Tashjian, "New York Dada and Primitivism," in Dada Spectrum, pp. 136-37. Emphasis is mine. Once Williams wrote that "The moderns seek a simplicity that cuts away a good deal of culture in order to gain firmness of understanding and clarity of insight— if they get it" (Williams, Letter to John Riordan, October 12, 1925, University of Virginia Library). Quoted in ibid., p. 137.


10. Ibid.


12. During World War I, Waldo Frank frequently expressed his anti-machine technology argument in the pages of The Seven Arts. It was his Our America, which was published in 1919, that presented Frank's idea in the most fully developed form.

13. Like other little magazines of the post-World War I period which were published in Europe, Broom took advantage of the international currency rate. For a detailed study of how Americans took advantage of the strong dollar rate overseas at the time, see Warren Irving Susman, Pilgrimage to Paris: The Background of
14. In *The Little Magazine*, one of the few works which study little magazines of the post-World War I period, Frederick J. Hoffman examines briefly Broom and Secession. He follows the development of the two magazines through the change of locale of publication rather than through the shifting editorial policy. As Dickran Tashjian has rightly pointed out in his *Skyscraper Primitives*, Hoffman's approach is rather arbitrary and tends to assign too much importance to the geographical changes in periodizing the process and the nature of the transformation of the two magazines. See Chapter 6 "The Tendenz Magazine," in Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946); Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives*, pp. 255-56.

15. Here is an example of Josephson's undifferentiated and interchangeable use of the two concepts, 'modernism' and 'avant-garde.'


18. A manifesto on the back inside cover. Emphasis is mine.


22. Ibid., p. 76.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., pp. 76-77.


26. Ibid., 92.

Harold Loeb (Kennebunkport: Milford House, Inc., 1969), p. ix. Loeb recorded his first meeting with Bazalgette when he and the Kreymborgs were visiting Paris in June 1921. For Broom, which was still then at the stage of conception, according to Loeb, Bazalgette "offered" to do an article on Frank's Our America.

29. Ibid., p. 79.
30. Ibid., pp. 78–79.
31. Ibid., p. 76.
32. Ibid.
34. Frank, Our America, pp. 10, 175, 181, 143, 147.
35. Broom 1 (February 1922): 381–82.
37. Frank, Our America, p. 172.
39. Ibid., 6.
44. Ibid., 28-29.


47. Josephson, Life among the Surrealists, p. 7.


52. Ibid., 9-10.

53. Ibid., 10-11.

54. Ibid., 12-13.

55. Ibid., 13.


58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 270.

61. As for Loeb's argument in the article which seemed to share fundamental ideas of The Soil and Contact concerning the creation of an American art independent of European influence, Malcolm Cowley pointed out the continuity of the themes through those magazines: "There was a clear set of ideas, ideas which are fresh to American literature and
which ought to revitalize it. Of course in Soil they were explicit, but you have drawn the implications out of Soil. Here is Broom's set of principles; all that remains is to apply them." See Loeb, The Way It Was, p. 135.


63. Ibid.


67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., 309.

69. A letter dated December 13, 1922, from Waldo Frank to Harold Loeb (Harold Loeb Papers). Quoted in Tashjian, Skyscraper Primitives, p. 130.


73. Gorham Munson, "A Specimen of Demi-Dadaisme," The New Republic (April 18, 1923), p. 219. As for the quest for an aesthetic order which seems to have preoccupied American modernist writers in the post-World War I era, Fredrick Hoffman writes, "The concern with form was basically a concern over the need to provide an aesthetic order for moral revisions." See Frederick Hoffman, The Twenties, pp. 434-38.


75. Ibid., 8.
76. Ibid., 14.
78. Ibid., p. 25.
79. Ibid., p. 24.
81. Ibid., 164.
82. Edmund Wilson, "The Aesthetic Upheaval in France," *Vanity Fair* 17 (February 1922): 100.
85. "Joyce," Josephson continued, "tries to brace himself to his dreary task of reporting bar-room conversations by playing a game with the structure of Homer just as Eliot, fleeing from a world he can not face, seeks refuge in the Elizabethans." See ibid., 179-80.
86. Ibid., 180.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., 182.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Several years after he had written the imaginary dialogue between Rosenfeld and Josephson, Wilson wrote a novel entitled *I Thought of Daisy*, which was published in 1929. There he depicted an artist's struggle to create a work of true art in a vulgar modern environment.
92. While being often pictured as an iconoclast by ultra conservative literary people, Mencken was a conservative, especially from the avant-garde.
perspective of Dada. He preferred the literary naturalism of Dreiser to the experimentation of the younger generation.


96. Ibid.
CONCLUSION

It was the presence of Picabia and Duchamp that inspired New York Dada and the American avant-gardists who aligned themselves with Dada. Yet more important is the fact that after World War I, when American expatriates started to come back to America, they brought with them the avant-garde sensibility that they had acquired in Europe through the first-hand contact with the European avant-garde movement. It was especially the young American avant-gardists who were associated with Broom and Secession who brought a new spirit into the American avant-garde scene as a result of their interaction with the Dadaists in Europe.

While The Soil and Contact had occupied themselves with Dada aesthetics and the creation of a genuine American art, it was mainly in the pages of Broom and Secession that Dada was fully examined in the contemporary American cultural context. Mainly for financial reasons, Broom and Secession, like other little magazines of that time, came to an abrupt end soon after making an ambitious start as leading avant-garde voices. Besides factional tensions, difficult financial realities contributed to the dissipation of the initially energetic spirit of the American avant-garde.

By the end of October 1923, three months before the
end of Broom, Matthew Josephson revealed his diminishing enthusiasm for the avant-garde venture because of financial pressures. Malcolm Cowley returned to New York in July 1923 with the intention of taking an active part in American avant-garde activities. The debate between Broom and Secession, in particular, occupied his attention when Broom started showing signs of diminishing spirit. When he suggested a grand finale for Broom to end factional tension in preparation for a new little magazine venture, Josephson withdrew from the project. Reporting in a letter to Harold Loeb on the American avant-garde scene, Josephson made clear his position regarding further ventures:

Cowley believes Broom should have a spectacular end. Poor Cowley. He turned up rather tardily and insisted on taking a hand at this juncture. He has some great ideas, such as calling a meeting of all the friends and enemies of Broom for a grand powwow out of which he hopes the air might be cleared, and perhaps another magazine...Moi, je m'en fiche. I am looking for a job as ever.¹

Cowley’s plan for a meeting between the Broom and Secession factions materialized on October 19, 1923, "a turning point," according to Josephson, "for scholars of the History of Literature in America."² Writing to Loeb about the meeting, he was more specific about the pressing realities of financial hardship: "I may not be
able to write you so often any more, will be much involved in everything. I am to be either a financial reporter or the manager of a branch bank. I am more convinced than ever that a career in business with independent and detached position in literature is my cue." Just as economic realities made William Carlos Williams decide to become a full-time medical doctor and a part-time poet, they led Josephson to withdraw from the frontline of the avant-garde activities.

As Europe recovered from the shock of World War I, other avant-garde movements followed Dada, incorporating its fundamental anti-art ideology. Still, the aesthetic appeal of American technology was never emphasized in any other movement as strongly as in Dada. On the American scene, as the twenties' euphoria gave way to the Great Depression, the aesthetic concerns surrounding the separation between fine art and popular culture were overshadowed by a political debate about the economic disaster.

The American avant-gardists' encounter with Dada brought to light the question of 'American' identity, which had long concerned American artists. The problem had been deeply embedded in the history of American art, which had been unquestionably European in its origin. From the beginning, therefore, American artists had been challenged to define what constituted the uniquely
American character of a work of art.

At the same time many continued to look to Europe for the definition and forms of aesthetic practices. An implicit respect for the European aesthetic tradition and the expectation of sharing a common cultural tradition long remained important. Both the art of the American academy and that of dissenters had their origins in Europe, where most American artists received much of their training. Ironically, the Armory Show of 1913, which supposedly represented a major break in American art between academy art and modern vanguard art, was in fact another instance of following the lead of European art. The Armory Show was a repetition of the traditional patterns of cultural discourse between America and Europe. Although the paintings exhibited at the Armory Show were intended as protests against the aesthetic norms of traditional academy art and, as expected, were greeted with the disapproval of both the American academy and the public, the event so much celebrated for its historical importance and its radical nature as a rebellion against status-quo art was actually well within the tradition.

The concern about an American art acquired an intensity greater than ever before during the post-World War I era as America suddenly emerged on the world stage. Such prominence caused thoughtful Americans to become
extremely aware of their dependence upon Europe in cultural and aesthetic matters and, thus, to call for cultural independence.

In this cultural atmosphere, the American response to Dada was complex and ambivalent. While the Armory Show introduced the whole gamut of modern art to the relatively provincial American art scene and the public, Dada was the first European avant-garde movement in the twentieth century with which Americans came into close contact. Its anti-art ideology and its revolutionary machine aesthetics inspired the imagination of the younger generation of American artists. To Americans eager to express their independent national spirit as a new world leader Dada offered a view of American technology and its popular cultural forms as something unique and fundamentally progressive. Yet, its European origin and its internationalism caused problems for Americans whose main concern was the creation of a genuine American art independent of any European influence. They were intrigued by what Dada saw in America, but, at the same time, they resisted the tradition of following European patterns.

It is ironic that Dada brought back to America those American artists who constituted 'the lost generation.' Disillusioned and frustrated by what they had perceived as the philistine character of the American social and
cultural scene, the 'lost generation' had turned to Europe and become expatriates. Dada's enthusiasm for contemporary American culture encouraged these expatriates to turn back to their own culture. Even though their main concern was the creation of an American art utilizing uniquely American materials, they were still aware of the risk of falling into the traditional pattern of American discourse with Europe. This became evident in the prominence of the two leading European Dadaists in New York and in the enthusiastic acceptance of the sanction that the two gave to America's cultural potential.

The complexity surrounding the American discourse with Dada resulted, in part, from the way in which the European Dadaists perceived America. America and its cultural forms symbolized their own rebellion against the European cultural tradition. In their disillusionment following the experience of World War I, they embraced America mainly because the New World was not part of the Old World of Europe. The popular cultural forms of contemporary America seemed perfect anti-art material, at the same time that they were non-European in their 'primitivistic' nature and origin.

The general ideology behind Dada's primitivistic appreciation of America and its culture of machine technology revealed clearly the deeply rooted
stereotypical understanding of America. For European Dadaists, it was still an exotic land. Its fresh simplicity as a New World contrasted with the decadent complexity of Europe as an Old World. In this sense, Dadaists reaffirmed centuries-old cultural stereotypes, the origins of which could be traced back to the discovery of America.

The characteristics sought after in earlier versions of primitivism, prior to the advent of modern technology, were mainly those which countered the overwrought, stultifying nature of traditional European high art. Thus, primitivism affirmed simplicity, dynamism, innocence, spontaneity, and freshness, in contrast to the complexity, sedentariness, pretentious sophistication, and decadent extravagance of European art.

In the eyes of Dadaists, the popular art of the New World, energized by modern technology, manifested every virtue idealized in primitivism. Here they found the simple, direct energy they were looking for, in the hope of rejuvenating European life as well as art after World War I. Thus, Dadaists imposed the values of a nineteenth-century primitivism onto a twentieth-century environment of machine technology and popular art.

A compound problem ensued from the Dadaists' conception of America as a symbol of their own rebellion against the European cultural tradition. What the
Europeans thought they found in American culture, in their rebellion against their own cultural heritage, did not necessarily coincide with what Americans were looking for in their quest for a genuine American art. In a way, the Dadaists' revolt against the European cultural tradition, which had formerly provided directions for American artists to follow, had an initially disorienting effect upon American artists. When Dadaists rejected all the familiar aesthetic standards that Americans had depended upon, Americans were left in a cultural vacuum in which the old norms had been suddenly discarded and the new ones had yet to become meaningful.

The disorienting situation in which Americans found themselves resulted partly from the fact that they did not experience World War I with the same intensity as Europeans did. Thus they did not fully share the conviction behind the European Dadaists' despair and their revolt against European cultural norms. Even as American artists turned to Europe, shunning their native country which they believed hostile to genuine cultural and aesthetic activities, Europeans were filled with enthusiasm for America and its contemporary cultural forms.

For the American avant-gardists whose main concern was the creation of a genuine American art, Dada had to offer something pertinent to specific American
conditions. Otherwise, its appeal would have been lacking in effect and quite superficial. When Dada expressed its fascination with American popular culture and machine technology, it showed Americans what their own culture had to offer and directed their attention back to the American scene.

After the initial shock of their discovery of European optimism concerning the potential of America for contemporary avant-garde aesthetics, American avant-gardists soon realized the value of the indigenous materials that contemporary American society had to offer. By stressing the significance of machine technology for modern aesthetics and advocating popular culture as the source of genuine American art forms viable in the age of machine technology, the American avant-gardists who aligned themselves with Dada affirmed an integral part of twentieth-century American culture.

It is in this context that the American Dadaists' celebration of popular culture as the basis of genuine American art, led by Matthew Josephson and Broom, should be understood. It was in the same context that Waldo Frank and Gorham Munson with his magazine *Secession* launched their modernist attack against the *Broom* group. Their modernist sensibility was well revealed in their support for the fine arts tradition, their insistence upon the separation of the aesthetic realm from life, and
their denial of the aesthetic potentials of machine technology.

While Dada’s avant-garde aesthetics and the creation of American art and literature were issues debated by many more people than those involved with Broom and Secession, it was the two magazines that, through their expression of opposing views, clarified and fully explored the complexities surrounding European avant-garde aesthetics and Americans’ conscious effort to achieve cultural independence following World War I. While Americans’ ambivalence concerning the European avant-garde ideology played a significant part in the debate, it was the issue of integrating machine technology into the realm of aesthetics that was really behind the opposing views. In response to Secession’s rejection of machine technology as aesthetic material and popular art as an authentic art form, Broom explored the positive implications of Dada for American artists and writers, championing American machine technology as important material for contemporary American art and literature.

The debates surrounding Dada’s anti-aesthetic ideology and its declaration of popular art as an alternative art form in a technologized modern society were brought into the American cultural scene again in the 1960s. Indeed, the 1960s’ so-called "counter-
culture" movement took on the ethos of the earlier historical avant-garde ideology while the earlier avant-garde anti-aestheticism was being revisited in the form of Pop art.

Like all avant-gardes since Saint Simon and the utopian socialists and anarchists up through historical avant-garde such as Dada, surrealism, and the post-revolutionary art of Soviet Russia in the 1920s, the "counter-culture" in America during the 1960s rebelled against tradition. Not coincidentally, the revolt took place at a time when the whole society was experiencing going through political and social turmoil. The promise of the New Frontier gave way to the social conflicts of the civil rights movement, urban riots, and the anti-war movement. Indeed, the name "counter-culture" explicitly projected an image of an avant-garde leading the way to an alternative, utopian society, just in the way the earlier avant-garde movements envisioned themselves in that role.

In terms of art, Pop art fought abstract expressionism and opened the way to a series of art movements such as Op, Fluxus, Concept, and Minimalism, filling the American art scene in the 1960s with creative and aggressive energy. Living Theatre came out with a new style of theatrical performance. It sought to bring out new forms of immediacy and spontaneity in performance.
and audience's response, and thus attempted to bridge the gap between stage and audience. The participatory ethos in the arts and in the theatre were easily associated with the sit-ins and teach-ins and their protest agendas. The rigid canon and interpretive practices of the New Criticism were attacked by a new sensibility which embraced the creativity and autonomy of a work of art.

Leslie Fiedler announced the "Death of Avant-Garde Literature" in 1964. While he called it avant-garde, he was really attacking modernism. What he was presenting was in fact the anti-aesthetic ideology of the historical avant-garde, a rekindling of the 1920s' avant-garde ethos which had captured the imagination of the skyscraper primitives. As the vision of popular culture had fascinated earlier avant-gardists from Benjamin, Duchamp, Picabia, through Josephson, Fiedler wanted to validate popular culture and thus challenge the increasing institutionalization of high art. In "Cross the Border—Close the Gap" (1968) he attempted to eliminate the distance between high culture and popular culture and by doing so reaffirmed precisely the historical avant-garde's project to reintegrate the traditionally separated realms of culture.

The energetic comeback of the ideology of the historical avant-garde and the enthusiastic reception that it received in the various counter-cultural forms of
the 1960s was much more striking in America than in Europe. This fact points to an important social and political difference between America and Europe with regard to the emergence and reception of the historical avant-garde movement in the 1920s and the 1960s’ counter-cultural movement.

The historical avant-garde of the earlier decades of this century posited the reintegration of art and life as its major goal as the 19th-century bourgeois society, especially in Italy, Germany, and Russia, was going through a major transformation. It was the social and political ferment of the 1910s and 1920s that served as the breeding ground for avant-garde radicalism in art, literature, and politics. The elimination of traditional forms of domination and the liberation of repressed energies was again promised by "counter-culture" in America in the 1960s. Like Europe in the 1920s, America in the 1960s was experiencing social and political turmoil from which the "counter-culture" emerged and was enthusiastically received as the latest avant-garde movement.

America and Europe responded in distinctive ways to the avant-garde in the 1920s and in the 1960s. Despite the importance of Picabia’s and Duchamp’s presence and their activities in New York and what European Dadaists were envisioning in contemporary American scene, New York
Dada did not meet much public success and remained a marginal phenomenon in American culture. Consequently, Pop, happenings, Concept, experimental music, and performance art in the 1960s and 1970s looked more original and novel than they actually were. The audience's expectation and reception of these avant-garde forms in America were fundamentally different from those in Europe. What was received as déjà vu by Europeans was experienced as something totally new in America.

The marginal status of and the passive response to New York Dada in the 1920s, furthermore, explains why Americans in the 1960s, Dadaists or not, were primarily concerned with the creation of a genuine American art, not with the transformation of the dominant system. As Peter Bürger has argued, the major goal of historical avant-garde was to undermine and transform the bourgeois "institution art." The iconoclastic attack on cultural institutions and traditional aesthetic modes made sense only in the countries where "high art" had established itself as an official art and thus played an essential role in legitimizing and solidifying the system of bourgeois domination. In the 1920s America did not have an official high art tradition. Indeed high art was struggling to gain wider legitimacy and control. The fledgling status of high art in America explains why major American writers from Henry James to T. S. Eliot,
Willam Faulkner, and Wallace Stevens were drawn to the constructive aesthetic sensibility of modernism rather than to the iconoclastic, anti-aesthetic, anti-traditional ideology of the European avant-garde.

Once Benjamin wrote, "In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it." Had he lived long enough to witness Dada’s works becoming precious pieces of a permanent museum collection, he might have felt called upon to acknowledge that Dada itself had become tradition, and, furthermore, that Dada’s anti-traditional and anti-aesthetic ideas and practices had become an integral part of the mainstream contemporary Western art scene. Or he might simply have agreed with Adorno that the culture industry of late capitalism had coopted even that art which more than any other had challenged the values and traditions of the bourgeois cultural system.

Even though the active period of New York Dada was short and its membership was more or less confined to a small rebellious art community, its recognition of the aesthetic potential of machine technology and its advocacy of popular art in America should be appreciated for its progressive foresight. Dada enabled American artists to find aesthetic materials in modern American technology and its environment. Through their advocacy
of popular culture based upon modern technology, Josephson and his fellow American avant-gardists aligned with Dada envisioned boldly, if not without naïveté, art for the masses in the age of machine technology.

The American avant-gardists recognized the need to create an American art which would be attuned to the technologized mass society of modern America in terms not of subject matter alone, but of contextual materials and formal techniques. The anti-aesthetic, anti-elitist, and anti-bourgeois ideologies of the 1960s' pop culture in America, which in fact marked the beginning of postmodernism, clearly manifest the way the undercurrent of Dada had revitalized the American art scene in the 1960s. Given the proximity and continuity between American Pop culture and Dada in terms of formal experimentation and anti-traditional ideologies and values, the American avant-gardists of the 1920s gave a voice to a movement which was inevitable and irreversible. For that much they deserve credit.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Loeb, The Way It was, p. 194.
2. Ibid., p. 195.

3. Ibid., p. 197.


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