

“One Term is as Fatuous as Another”: Responses to the Armory Show Reconsidered

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If the picture, the *Nude Descending the Staircase*, had not had that title, it would never have attracted any attention at all. It was the title.¹

At that moment in history, art and politics came together. . . . Everything one wanted stood together at the end of a single perspective and everything one hated stood together in the opposite direction.²

Perhaps because of its familiarity to students of American culture, the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art is an event whose meaning has remained peculiarly impervious to serious reevaluation. The exhibition, better known as the Armory Show, was the first large-scale exhibition of modernist art in the United States. It was arranged under the auspices of the American Association of Painters and Sculptors, a loosely organized group of artists who had decided by 1911 that there were too few exhibition opportunities in the United States, and masterminded by Arthur B. Davies, Walt Kuhn, and Walter Pach, who negotiated the display of approximately 1300 works, more than a third of them European, in order to show Americans what was new and exciting in the world of art. The show was a success in terms of sales and attendance; nearly \$45,000 worth of art—including works by the likes of Picasso, Matisse, and Gauguin—changed hands, and approximately 275,000 people came to see it during its two months in

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New York and Chicago, many of whom were drawn by the thrill of controversy.³

If the minutiae of the Armory Show are familiar, so is its legend. Over the past three quarters of a century, it has assumed talismanic proportions in America's collective historical memory, not only of the early days of modern art, but of twentieth-century culture generally. In academic literature as well as in the more familiar textbooks read by secondary and college students, the Armory Show has come to stand as the singular moment at which the "new" vanquished the "old" in American culture with a single and stunning revolutionary blow,⁴ a habit well-set by the 1952 publication of Meyer Schapiro's seminal essay within a volume entitled *America in Crisis*—a volume which tellingly ranked the Armory Show alongside "John Brown's Private War" and the Dust Bowl as one of "Fourteen Crucial Episodes in American History."⁵

Although much recent scholarship on early twentieth-century American art has emphasized the Armory Show's location in a series of art-world activities which, from the turn of the century, prepared the way for the emergence and acceptance of modern art in the United States—Alfred Stieglitz's exhibits at "291," American artists' pilgrimages to the Paris salon of Gertrude and Leo Stein and other hotbeds of European modernism, the collecting forays of John Quinn⁶—historians continue to veil the Armory Show in the language of crisis, and particularly in the language of political crisis. Often explicitly associating the "radicalism" of the new art with concurrent upheavals in manners, morals, and politics, historians have been all too willing to attribute modernism's emergence to political transformations, without interrogating the explicit relationship between modernist aesthetics and "modern" culture.⁷ Mistaking superficial or non-generative connections between the two as evidence that "modern" politics and modernist aesthetics shared the same parentage, scholars have forgotten that aesthetic politics are generated as much by internal transformations within the art world itself, and by socio-political changes which, on the surface, seem to have very little to do with the "spirit" of particular art works, as by those political transformations which seem to have an obvious representational similarity to contemporary cultural productions. In this essay, I will argue that American visual modernism owes its parentage as much to the legacy of professionalization, which in many ways had a far wider impact on turn-of-the-century America than

radical politics, and which struck the art world as surely as it did medicine, the law, and other fields of endeavor.

It is true that many American artists embraced modernism's break from nineteenth-century aesthetic traditions because they believed that aesthetic revolution would bring about democratic social change.⁸ Nevertheless, it is important to remember that not all participants in the American art world were persuaded by this connection between aesthetic and political liberation, and that not all defenders of modernism were motivated by revolutionary fervor. The seemingly violent clash over modern art waged in the wake of the Armory Show, thus, must not be read solely or uncritically as an episode in the wider struggle by workers, women, and others for liberation in the first decades of the twentieth century, but also as a chapter in a much less democratic struggle by an emerging art-world elite to limit and police access to artistic knowledge and the art world itself.

As historians, most of us are a little nostalgic for the Armory Show and the world that produced it. Upon looking back, 1913 seems like a time when radical politics were still possible, a time, moreover, when artistic experimentation still had meaning. We are not alone in this belief. A three-quarters-of-a-century-long modernist tradition of self-description, motivated by political as much as aesthetic desire, pleads modernism's case to us, promising personal and political liberation as the certain reward for those who abandon themselves to the modernist impulse. Like our modernist forebears, we believe that the world that produced the Armory Show was a world in which art and politics not only spoke to each other, but joined together to break the shackles of convention and conformity—whether these shackles were the stifling bonds of Victorian manners or, in a later generation, the crushing censorship of totalitarian uniformity.

This longing for a lost past of cooperation between artistic and political radicals permeates even recent analyses of the Armory Show. In a work pairing the Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant, for example, Martin Green writes that:

the spirit of 1913 was an aspiration to transcend what most people accepted as ordinary and so inevitable. It was the ordinariness of capitalism and liberalism and class hierarchy, in the case of the IWW strike; and in the case of the Armory Show, it was old forms of art, appreciation, and beauty. But the radicals in both cases said no to certain 'facts of life.' One might even

suggest that what they said no to was ultimately the same in both cases—in one important sense, it was ultimately the nineteenth-century bourgeois state.⁹

In coupling modernist revolt with a broad array of social and political transformations, historians' accounts of the Armory Show duplicate and magnify not only the chronology of crisis inherent in accounts of the modern's ascendance, but their characterizations of the two eras at odds in the Show—the bourgeois "Victorian" and the radical "Modern." Like those broader accounts, they depict two separate and unmixable universes, constructed along inherently conflicting principles. Expressed most frequently by shorthand—"convention" versus "revolution," "White City" versus "skyscraper," "moral indignation" versus "experimentation" or "freedom," "tradition" versus "new spirit"—these two descriptive nexuses have become so embedded in historical accounts of the emergence of twentieth-century culture that they forbid alternative modes of explanation.

It is indisputable that the Armory Show did, in fact, mark an important transition in American culture. But in our haste to distance ourselves from those who would have stood in the way of revolution, we have failed to understand what, aside from sheer pigheadedness, could have motivated such an outcry. Believing as we do that the Armory Show was a radical, crisis-like event, we look for further evidence of radicalism to explain it—the personal relationships which clearly did exist between certain promoters of modern art and political radicals,¹⁰ or the growth of "radical" artist organizations, critical of the authority of the National Academy of Design and other, older institutions—which easily confirms what we already believe.¹¹ And when we do encounter the voices of those who questioned the Show, we are inclined either to discount them entirely or to use their vehemence as evidence, again, that the struggle to promote modernism must have been radical indeed.

This is nowhere so evident as in historians' accounts of the supposedly uniform and monolithic denunciation of the exhibition by art critics,¹² who variously have been described as "genteel," "conservative," and "provincial,"¹³ and whose motivation has been attributed generally to a selfish desire to defend the interests of a dying elite.¹⁴ With the exception of a few critical "seers," historians have argued,¹⁵ a conservative army of critics condemned the show unilaterally as not only an insult to the aesthetic norms of academic "classicism,"¹⁶ but as

an affront to moral decency, thereby poisoning public sentiment against modern art for decades to come.¹⁷ Historians have thus allowed the highly publicized views of a few critics—most frequently, painter and writer Kenyon Cox—to stand for critical opinion *per se* and have argued that art critics, like the small-minded throngs who mobbed and mocked the exhibition in New York and who attempted to burn Matisse in effigy in Chicago,¹⁸ failed to comprehend either the most significant artistic transformation of the era or the social and political transformations it accompanied.

Like all legends, this “story of the Armory Show” is partially grounded in truth. Cox and others like him did construct Post-Impressionism as the final, horrible consequence of a half-century of aesthetic decadence, a decadence which to him symbolized, fed from and in turn nourished a more wide-reaching social and moral decline.¹⁹ Writers such as editor of the American Federation of Art’s journal *Art and Progress* Leila Mechlen joined Cox in deliberately linking modern art to dangerous trends in politics and manners, comparing “the ‘Post-impressionists,’ or the ‘Modernists’ or ‘Expressionists,’ whatever they may choose to call themselves” to “profligate[s],” “bomb thrower[s],” “defamer[s] and lunatic[s],” and demanded that a parallel system of discipline be devised to curtail artistic subversives, just as the law controlled political radicals.²⁰ By their hysterical response, critics such as Cox and Mechlen created in the public mind an association between artistic iconoclasm and political and social radicalism that has remained to this day, even though that association itself has come to be seen in an entirely different light.

This conceptualization of the critical response to the Armory Show as a monolithic screed against the new is misleading, however. In many ways, critical evaluations of the Armory Show, and the causes for critical opposition to it, were more complicated than historians have acknowledged. With the notable exception of Cox and Mechlen, very few writers condemned the show categorically. Most responses were mixed, and demonstrated critics’ profound appreciation of the changes taking place not only within the American scene at large or in art itself, but within the American art world. Critics’ primary preoccupation in evaluating the show, in fact, was not the fate of American politics and morality or the future of painting and sculpture in a purely aesthetic sense, but the future of the art world. While critics of the show’s Post-Impressionist contingent did fear that unbridled change had caused

European artists to slip into aesthetic decadence, the main cause of their concern was not the display of dangerous works *per se*, but the impact the new art—and the critical apparatus that was emerging to support it—would have on the art world, the public, and the very role of art in the American republic. Despite their distaste for many of the works displayed in the show, many of its most famous detractors argued that ultra-progressive European art, while unlovable in itself, had and would continue to have an indisputably positive effect on American artistic production, and expressed a far greater resistance to the “propaganda,” secrecy, and exclusive expertise of modern art’s “champions,” who explained Post-Impressionist art works in unfamiliar, unintelligible terms. “Conservative” critics’ fears of the show, thus, were grounded not in mere conservatism or opposition to change, but in a deep suspicion of the interpretive machinery that accompanied the new art, which seemed to shake the very foundations of the American art world.

In order to understand this fear, which permeated critical responses to the Armory Show, it is important to consider the art-world context in which most early twentieth-century critics wrote, rather than to link them to a vaguely defined Victorian past. Since the Civil War, criticism had promoted tirelessly the development of museums, art schools, and other organizations within the art-world infrastructure.²¹ In this capacity, it had served as a catalyst in a massive organizational transformation within the American art world in the last third of the nineteenth century, a transformation which brought about not only the development of dozens of individual institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, but which provided the organizational topography for metropolitan high culture in the United States both at the turn of the century and beyond.²²

Institution-building critics in the Gilded Age promoted more than the development of museums, schools, or journals, moreover, but the creation of a broad-based public for art in the United States. Representing the public as the ultimate and proper arbiters of taste in a democratic nation, Gilded Age critics portrayed their own role as that of educators in the general principles of art and promoters of public-friendly arts institutions. Thus, most critics in the Gilded Age held a very different understanding of criticism from that which is currently practiced, eschewing the evaluative interpretation of art works and focusing their attention on the meaning and value of art in American culture, rather than on the significance of individual art objects. As one

critic insisted in the mid-1870s, “the only safety is in a multitude of counselors [. . .] our faith in the average perceptions, the average taste of the world at large is strong, and we think the critics are more like in the end to come round to the average opinion than the average opinion is to give up to the critics.”²³ Although it is clear from the venues in which most Gilded-Age criticism appeared that this notion of a public for art was limited, for the most part, to the educated middle and upper classes, it is also crucial to note that it was relatively expansive in another important respect, in the sense that it was not intended to be limited to art-world initiates, but to all with basic access to magazines and libraries.²⁴ While critics suggested that access to museums, art schools, and other largely metropolitan institutions would serve a crucial role in the formation of a public for art, they insisted that the circulation of information about art, as well as reproductions in books and magazines, could serve much the same function. Their job, then, was to encourage public awareness and enthusiasm for such publications, as well as for other venues for the display of art, as well as to provide basic information on the history and principles of art. Most critics in the decades after the turn of the century retained this conception of criticism, seeing themselves as educators and institution-builders whose purpose was to spread enthusiasm for and generalized knowledge about the arts, rather than to present highly developed evaluations of individual art works.

Doubtless, the desire for power and prestige must have motivated certain institution-building critics to affiliate themselves with the developing cultural powerhouses of the art world. Art’s relatively recent elevation to the status of a national concern promised that critics would capture the public eye in a way never before witnessed; at a time when civic reform was at the height of public consciousness, moreover, the role of cultural missionary must have seemed appealing to critics eager to play their part in America’s urban renewal.²⁵ At the same time, however, it must be pointed out that institution-building critics never saw interpretive expertise as the source of any power they might derive from their status as critics, and that most critics legitimately believed in the creation of a critically-informed, art-loving public which would assume the mantle of criticism for itself.²⁶ With its demand for specialized, difficult modes of explanation—a demand which the Show’s most vocal supporters eagerly met—the Armory Show, and modernism in general, presented to these critics a dangerous turn

towards a new, more exclusive art world in which experts, rather than the public, held the keys to the kingdom of American art.

Like their opponents, critical supporters of the Armory Show owed a great deal to the art-world context in which they looked and wrote. Although their commentary often masked the importance of art-world concerns, unabashedly modernist supporters of the Show developed their understandings of art in response to the changing conditions of artistic production, as much as in response to the visual presence of works themselves. And, like modernism's institution-building detractors, supporters of the show drew upon critical practices developed in the previous generation. While most Gilded-Age critics conceived of criticism as a didactic and institution-building enterprise, they were challenged by a small but increasingly powerful group of critics who focused their attention on building a critical profession and on re-orienting criticism towards the analysis and evaluation of art objects. Alongside and sometimes in antagonism to their institution-building peers, these critics, including Clarence Cook and Mariana Van Rensselaer, worked to build a critical profession both through the organization of the art world along professional lines, and through linguistic appeals to their own expertise.²⁷ Primarily to consolidate their authority within a turbulent and rapidly changing art world, art writers promoted professionalism as a new standard for art-world activity as early as the 1870s and 1880s. Comparing art-world disciplines to recognized professions such as the law, medicine, and the clergy, professionalizing critics used their writings to create a special and authoritative identity for themselves and their fellow practitioners. This general plea for art-world professionalism allowed these critics both to marginalize their chief competitors for critical authority—institution-building amateurs and the public—while gaining respect for their own activity by posing a parallelism between artistic creation and criticism. Moreover, their emphasis on specialization within the art world, as well as on artists' inability to live up to the professional standards of *criticism*, provided critics with some opportunity to push artists out of the critical sphere as well.

Aesthetics proved to be a powerful discursive weapon in this struggle. In addition to making direct claims about their own critical authority, professionalizing critics promoted new and more esoteric criteria of aesthetic value which bolstered their position as analysts and evaluators of art works. In particular, these critics developed a

professional language centrally concerned with issues of representation, authenticity, and abstraction, and used it to devalue both the common-sense knowledge that nourished most Americans' judgments about art and the amateurs who claimed, through their institutions, to augment public knowledge. With Clarence Cook's assertion that "every art has its own independent field of work, and . . . nothing is gained by trying to imitate in one process the legitimate results of another," and Mariana Van Rensselaer's definition of etching as the "translation into expressive linear language of something which has shown no similar lines in nature," professionalizing critics sowed the seeds of a modernist aesthetic in America that would, by the middle of the twentieth century, firmly locate the search for the boundaries and limits of individual artistic media at the center of the artistic project and would relegate representation to a marginal position. Moreover, with their suggestion that professional critics had a special capacity to comprehend and evaluate art works which followed these new principles, the professionalizing critics of the Gilded Age set the stage for a radical reconsideration of the role of criticism and the public in the American art world. Claiming that, "as etching is an art where freedom is especially prized, and where from the strictly interpretive nature of the method, the public may find it difficult to distinguish between an almost arbitrary yet truthful and brilliant interpretation of nature . . . and a 'free' but meaningless scribble on the copper,—it [is] to be feared that our young etchers might fall into sins of a careless or pretentious sort," Van Rensselaer suggested that there might be a cultural danger in the public's unaided effort to comprehend art of an abstract nature, akin to the dangers posed by unlicensed forays into other professional spheres of activity.²⁸ The role of critics, then, was to police the boundaries of the art world, saving America from both lazy artistic charlatans who would use abstraction as a mask for poor effort and the untrained audiences whose lack of professional vision would allow such fakery to flourish.

The generation of critics who supported modernism after the turn of the century followed in the footsteps of these critics, putting a heightened emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of art works at the expense of art-world concerns, and using their claims to expertise to defend and promote a gatekeeping, as well as an aesthetic, agenda. The controversy over the Armory Show, which represented a head-on clash between the inheritors of the amateur, institution-building critics of the

Gilded Age and their professionalizing rivals, was as much a struggle for power within the developing American art world as it was a debate about the merits or morality of art works. Although institution-building critics vastly outnumbered their modernist counterparts, in the end it has been the views of modernists that have persisted, along with their vision of artistic production and the public's diminished role in it inherited from the professionalizing critics of the Gilded Age. The Armory Show did not produce this conflict, and it did not settle it; it merely provided the spark.

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1. *Skeptics*

The first element that must be considered in re-evaluating the Armory Show's significance is the fact that most critics hardly opposed the Armory Show as a whole. Frank Jewett Mather, for example, whose critical imperative and reason for supposedly denouncing the show was recently described as "keeping art pure and society safe,"²⁹ greeted the show with enthusiasm and praise in two reviews in the *Nation*.³⁰ Although Mather described the attention garnered by the most recent European works as "the *succès de scandale* of the Post-Impressionists and Cubists," he defended the work of Van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin. Perhaps as an attempt to prevent more narrowly-based critiques of their work, Mather suggested that the selection chosen to represent these artists in the show was "far from superlative" and was quick to mention admirable traits he had witnessed elsewhere in their work, such as Gauguin's "classic serenity and monumental effect" and Cézanne's "immediate and primal sense of mass."³¹

Mather was not alone in his praise for the Armory Show. Many critics believed that the show contained fine examples of both European and American art, providing important evidence of American art's improvement over the preceding half-century³² and pointing the way beyond "stereotyped and fossilized standards" and "simpering, self-satisfied conventionality."³³ Many of those who were skeptical of the show saw a silver lining in it, arguing that even displeasing works

served a useful purpose by providing a needed contrast to more worthwhile productions.³⁴ E. H. Blashfield, who defined the “‘advanced’ artist” as “the *intransigent* [sic], the uncompromising man who enounces dangerous precepts” and who joined the show’s angriest critics in denouncing the declining spiral away from “correct proportion, correct form, and correct values,” still refused wholly to condemn either the show or the new movement. “I believe that the new movement is potential [sic] for great good,” he wrote, “in its concentration upon color and light, its development, through experiment, of effects produced by broken color and the novel manipulation of material.”³⁵ Even Royal Cortissoz—who generally and vociferously condemned the new art—praised Van Gogh’s enthusiasm for painting and “solving technical problems.” The painter was “passionately in love with color,” Cortissoz suggested, and in “groping toward an effective use of it in the expression of truth, he gives you occasionally in his thick impasto a gleam of sensuously beautiful tone.”³⁶

Although critics like these praised the show for bringing specific *stylistic* innovations to light, many more critics praised it for its breadth and scope, arguing that the Association’s organizational activities as an exhibiting body outweighed its predilection for controversial works. Thus, although Mather’s review contained assessments of certain individual artists and works represented in the show, his primary evaluative criteria were organizational. Thus, he celebrated the “miracle of good taste and good management” that had allowed the organizers to set up a highly effective exhibition space, and softened his critique of the selection of foreign art by writing that “it is the fullest America has yet seen” and that “a consistent principle has been followed.”³⁷ Indeed, Mather lauded the show’s organizers for refusing to allow it to remain a mere “gorgeous family affair” of self-congratulatory American display. Far from condemning the exhibition as a threat to public safety, Mather held up the Armory Show as a model to be emulated by the National Academy of Design, which he feared represented only “a respectably obscure parochialism.”³⁸

To a reviewer in the *Outlook*, thus, the eventual verdict on Post-Impressionism was not only inscrutable, but irrelevant to considerations of the show’s merit. For, while the public, critics and artists locked horns over that judgment,

the Association's effort has already accomplished two welcome results for which we should be duly appreciative. It has shown conclusively that a large, interestingly selected lot of pictures attracts many observers, and, second, that when those pictures are selected to demonstrate certain theories they provoke instant, vivacious, and helpful discussion. That the present exhibition will be useful in popularizing painting no one can doubt, even if it does not popularize the latest tendencies in painting.³⁹

To the *Outlook's* critic, the mere fact of organizing large-scale exhibitions which presented works in a coherent historical arrangement served the public interest not because it converted audiences to a particular line of development within painting, but because it converted them to painting itself. According to this critic's logic, thus, the production and presentation of new and controversial styles served not as the harbinger of art's ultimate decline, but as the wellspring for public interest, manifested in hearty and enthusiastic debates among art-world participants and the public alike.

Critical willingness to embrace the Armory Show as an organizational contribution to the enlargement of the American art world can also be seen in a review of the show in *Current Opinion*. While punchy editorials in the journal proclaimed "'Bedlam in Art'" and "Art Madness Recaptured,"⁴⁰ a longer review put the show in broader perspective, praising it for its scale and its breadth in representing "all the modern 'schools,' from Ingres to the Cubists and Futurists."⁴¹ The scale of the exhibition alone, however, did less to convince the reviewer of its importance than its similarity to "another historic moment, over thirty years ago." At that moment, "the Paris art dealer, Durand Ruel, brought to America and hung in the galleries of the staid old National Academy of Design a collection of landscapes by the French Impressionist, Claude Monet," thereby integrating American viewers and buyers into the international contemporary art market for the first time in the nation's history.⁴² The critic argued that, like the current show, Durand-Ruel's exhibition had produced its fair share of nay-sayers at first, but warned off Armory Show skeptics by reminding them that Monet's canvases now brought "large prices." "In the spirit of the old adage that history repeats itself," the critic mused, "is it utterly extravagant to prophesy that some of the works of Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, and Picasso may become historic?"⁴³

The critic's choice of Durand-Ruel's impressionist exhibit as the basis for making the Armory Show (and artistic change in general)

comprehensible to readers is significant. To the critic, the development of institutions for the display of art played as great a role in the direction and shape of artistic change as any internal qualities of works themselves. Thus, the critic praised the show not for the works contained therein—his breathless praise for the show’s success hardly mentioned them, in fact—but for its similarity to an epic moment in the history of art-world institution-building in the United States. Despite a crack at the “staid” Academy, indeed, the critic avoided a more inflammatory comparison between the Show and the Salon des Refusés, emphasizing not the “revolutionary” character of the Association but its hierarchical and institutional qualities, and pointing out that “the selections were made by Arthur B. Davies and Walt Kuhn, President and Secretary of the Association.” By accentuating the contrast between initial critical responses to Impressionism and its ultimate market value, moreover, the writer suggested that the critic’s role was not to evaluate new styles as they emerged, but to promote institutions of display which would allow the market, acting as the agent of the public, to make final assessments of good and bad. While ephemeral critical evaluations might be seen as ridiculous in a generation, the reviewer suggested, critical support for exhibitions and the organizations that enabled them to take place was certain to retain its value.⁴⁴

Another writer who made sense of the Armory Show by placing it in the context of the history of American art organizations was John W. Alexander, president of the National Academy of Design. Although Alexander accused individual works within the show of “having offered us a few wholly indefensible sensations,” he refused to condemn either the show’s organizers or the spirit that had driven them to mount the exhibition.⁴⁵ Although Alexander doubted that “men who collected and selected this interesting exhibition” would appreciate the comparison, he equated the American Association of Painters and Sculptors with the Society of American Artists, who had challenged the Academy a generation before. “The creation of this society did for its day very much the same service that the Independent Exhibition has done for ours,” he wrote, “and the freshness of the note it struck was quite as much an innovation and a breaking-away from accepted convention.”⁴⁶ Reminding readers that the SAA had been absorbed by the Academy after “having done its work of regeneration,” Alexander mused that the time would come when even Duchamp’s controversial *Nude Descending a Staircase* would seem commonplace.⁴⁷ Alexander’s

motivation for praising the show to the degree he did, thus, had less to do with his opinions of particular works than with his understanding of the nature of the American art world. In Alexander's view, the show demanded critical recognition not just because it offered a glimpse into the stylistic future of American art (although it did do that), but because it provided powerful evidence of the art world's continued organizational innovation, a factor which critics since the Gilded Age had seen as crucial to the advancement of art in America. "Reactions against the academy's sober and restrained methods are not only inevitable," he wrote, "but necessary and very much to the interest of both the academy and those who, for want of a milder term, we must call rebels."⁴⁸

Alexander's focus on the organizational aspects of the show, rather than on concentrated formal analysis of the objects displayed therein, was not accidental. In large part, the criticism practiced by many "conservative" writers who responded to the Armory Show was geared more toward building American interest in art through the general promotion of art-world institutions than toward legislating taste or interpretation for readers, and as such represented a continuation of the Gilded-Age critical project. Like their Gilded-Age predecessors, most critics who responded skeptically to the Armory Show conceived of criticism not as a pulpit for the espousal of particular evaluative viewpoints, but as the art world's institution-building institution.⁴⁹ As such, essays like Alexander's encouragement to the exhibition's organizers belonged to a critical context heavy with articles promoting art-world development and examples of journals' own attempts to serve as institutions for the promotion and dissemination of art,⁵⁰ as well as pleas for government support of American art and arts institutions.⁵¹

The art writing that surrounded the Armory Show owed a debt to the institution-building criticism of the Gilded Age in another respect—critics' attachment to a referential style of reporting which directed readers to further sources of commentary through the use of direct quotes from competing writers, which echoed Gilded Age critics' eager and frequent recommendation that readers consult the views of competing authors and journals. While critics sometimes used these writings as a source of legitimacy for their own interpretations—or as fodder for ridicule—they often simply threw them upon the page without commentary.⁵² By including these outside views and by identifying the institutional affiliation of their promoters, critics suggested to readers that art criticism was a communitarian venture which crossed not only

the boundaries of individual opinion, but the divisions between institutional and commercial entities.

As a result, many critics who assessed the show vocally adhered to the dictum that “the public will make up its own mind” and bluntly refused to cast their comments in terms of evaluation. Instead describing their task as the interpretation or explanation of contemporary art-world events, writers such as the reviewer in the *Times* insisted that the ease of providing a simple transcript of one’s personal response to the Armory Show should not be allowed to tempt the critic to stray from his or her “less simple,” though more important task. “For the critic,” the reviewer wrote,

there is no such thing as taking sides. . . . He can heartily and with all his emotional being detest the eccentricities of a Matisse, and he can find his soul moved to something approaching ecstasy by the serene and noble rhythms of Puvis de Chavannes, but so can any one of us. His more dispassionate, although less simple, task is to try to discover what addition each of the innovators in the various schools has made to the sum of artistic achievement, what change each one has made in the prevailing taste of his time, and what step he has taken to broaden our perceptions.⁵³

What set critics aside, the reviewer thus suggested, was not their evaluative acuity, but their willingness to forswear passion in the name of duty—the duty to act as mediums for the expression of public opinion, which could only be ascertained by sifting through the mass of heated and contrary opinion. Side-taking on “such a polyhedron as modern art” produced little benefit to readers, “any one of” them as capable of evaluation as the critic.

The sense that criticism used as a vehicle for the expression of opinion could work to produce undesirable fragmentation within the art world also pervaded E. H. Blashfield’s contribution to the *Century*’s roundtable on “This Transitional Age in Art,” in which the critic expressed some irritation at having been asked to express his *opinion* on contemporary art.⁵⁴ “Talk is so easily accomplished,” he charged, adding that any criticism that unconditionally condemned particular styles “is hurtful, and above all is bewildering to the public.”⁵⁵ Explaining that he had only agreed to write the article because he believed that his views were shared by many others, he insisted nonetheless that “it is of little importance what I or Mr. Advanced Progressive may *love* or *hate*. The important, very *important* point is,

does the expression of our love or hate do harm? Does it retard the general knowledge and appreciation of art? Does it hinder development?"⁵⁶ The unbridled critical pursuit of a particular evaluative agenda, Blashfield suggested, could have horrible consequences for the art world, fracturing the structure that criticism was meant to create and undermining the very future of art.⁵⁷

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2. *Antagonists*

Despite the proliferation of positive critical assessments of the Armory Show's art-world impact, it would be foolish to suggest that the Armory Show engendered a critical love-fest. Writers did disagree sharply over the show's merits, and in condemning it some demonstrated the willingness to abandon moderation that historians have long associated with the show's critical respondents. While many of those who believed that the right to evaluative judgment ultimately resided with the public declined to promote their own personal assessments of the show as law, some offered thinly veiled screeds against modernism under the guise of "letting the public have its say." Cox, for one, offered the following advice: "Do not allow yourselves to be blinded by the sophistries of the foolish dupes or the self-interested exploiters of all this charlatantry . . . you are not infallible, but your instincts are right in the main, and you are, after all, the final judges."⁵⁸ Cox's intemperate condemnations of the Armory Show have rightly gained him the reputation of a man who feared and hated change. Despite their cartoonish vehemence, however, the contours of Cox's tirade bear some affinity to the objections of more thoughtful observers, and point the way to a more complete explanation of the sources of critical fear surrounding the Armory Show. Although the extreme tone of Cox's rant and the somewhat disingenuous manner in which he urged readers to be their own judges (as opposed, of course, to simply following his lead) disguise this affinity, Cox's nervousness about modernism had similar roots to that of many of his less vociferous contemporaries, whose fears were driven as much by the way in which modernism was being interpreted as by the simple fact that new and different works were being produced. Indeed, it was this nervousness about the art-

world implications of modernism—what its ascendance would mean for audiences, critics, and institutions—that linked Cox to more moderate critics who criticized the show, rather than Cox’s aesthetic agenda. For, as his own work as an artist shows, Cox was committed to a kind of classicism that would have hardly moved some of his critical compatriots, some of whom were much more sympathetic than he was to the aesthetic changes represented by modernism. What united writers who criticized the show, thus, was not a unified aesthetic agenda, but a common attitude towards the art world, and in particular towards the role of critics and the public within that art world.

Many writers who voiced objections to the new art and to the Armory Show did so not on aesthetic grounds or on aesthetic grounds alone, but on the basis of the critical shroud that they believed had come to envelop modern art. Describing the proliferation of heated evaluative and interpretive commentary as “cant” and “propaganda,” many critics disapproved of fellow writers’ handling of modern art as a misappropriation of their position as critics. The adoption of an overtly partisan and evaluative criticism that relied on obscure language and reasoning, many writers argued, represented a dangerous turn for criticism to take, and threatened to undermine the crucial relationship between critics and the public and to divide the art world dangerously. It was this threat to the delicate balance between educative, institution-building criticism, an active, judgment-forming public, and an aesthetic which valued common knowledge over specialized art-world expertise, rather than any challenge to public decency or even to specific stylistic norms that most worried critics of the Armory Show and that provoked their most heated condemnations of the new art.

In his lengthy attempt to expose “The Post-Impressionist Illusion,” Royal Cortissoz frequently abandoned his discussion of the art displayed at the Armory Show in order to turn a wrathful eye towards the commentary that surrounded it. Like his many peers who condemned “the flood of recrimination” spilled by fellow critics, Cortissoz tellingly insisted that his own remarks on Post-Impressionism “sought merely to clear the ground of the cant which often encumbers it,” a move which he felt was necessary to enable readers even to begin a meaningful examination of the new art. The unrestrained venting of partisan opinions on the show, he suggested, had so distorted it as to render it unintelligible to the public—had transformed it, even, into an entirely

new entity. He thus promised to “look at Post-Impressionism for what it is, regardless alike of its acolytes and its equally furious opponents.”

Despite his promise, however, Cortissoz spent little time *looking* at all, devoting most of his attention to the ways in which the new art had been interpreted. Before examining the work of a single artist, Cortissoz first attempted to discern the underlying principles of Post-Impressionism as a movement—as expressed in writing, not in paint—as the best way to “find out what the Post-Impressionists are driving at.”⁵⁹ But Cortissoz found it difficult to locate a clear interpretive scheme he could relay to his readers, a situation which led him to conclude that Post-Impressionism’s proponents had deliberately thwarted public comprehension of the new art as a way not only to guarantee the ascendance of the work itself, but to solidify their own position as its interpreters.⁶⁰ Deriding most critical decodings of the new art as a “sea of ecstatic but muddled exposition,” and complaining that “there [wa]s a touch of mumbo-jumbo”⁶¹ in even relatively helpful explanations like that given by English critic Roger Fry, Cortissoz suggested that critics had deliberately made the “Post-Impressionist hypothesis” seem much more complicated than it really was, in order “to further the propaganda” surrounding modernism.⁶²

Cortissoz’s objections to Post-Impressionism’s critical scaffolding only gathered strength as his analysis progressed, and deeply colored his assessment of the movement itself. He complained that “invertibrate and confusing” thinking on the part of Post-Impressionist artists had “led them to produce work not only incompetent, but grotesque,” and threw in the charge of insolence for good measure.⁶³ While this pronouncement is in itself relatively uninteresting, Cortissoz supported it with an astonishing choice of evidence. Turning not the analysis of this “work” but again to its interpretation by critics, he wrote,

if these seem hard words, let me recall an incident of the Post-Impressionist exhibition in London two years ago. Mr. Roger Fry, writing in defense of the project, cited various persons who were in sympathy with it, and named among them Mr. John S. Sargent. In the course of a letter to the London ‘Nation’ that distinguished painter said, “Mr. Fry may have been told—and have believed—that the sight of those paintings had made me a convert to his faith in them. The fact is that *I am absolutely skeptical as to their having any claim whatever to being works of art*, with the exception of some of the pictures by Gauguin that strike me as admirable in color, and in color only.”⁶⁴ (The italics are mine.)

In the end, Cortisoz's hostility to Post-Impressionism as a movement turned out to be as deeply rooted in his irritation at the conduct of its critical supporters as in any particular objections to the art itself. While he found Fry's misappropriation of Sargent's authority particularly disagreeable, he clearly believed that the rise of a modernist "gospel" had produced a wider crisis of interpretation, led by "Post-Impressionist impresarios and fuglemen [who] insolently proffer us a farrago of super-subtle rhetoric."⁶⁵

As Cortisoz's outcry suggests, one of the elements critics found most disturbing about interpretations of the show and Post-Impressionist art generally was their tendency to use obscure language, language which blocked the access even of educated readers familiar with the history of art. For their own part, most of the Armory Show's less friendly critics adopted a plain linguistic style with which to record their impressions of the show, eschewing complicated or specific art terminology along with elaborate discussions of individual objects. Of course, the style adopted by these writers was itself limited by the boundaries of the middle-class press—critics only occasionally pretended to speak to those outside the boundaries of their educated readership—but within these boundaries, it did not work deliberately to exclude readers on the basis of their lack of professional, insider knowledge of the art world, an exclusion which many saw the new modernist criticism as performing. Like writers who condemned partisanship, some critics with doubts about the new art worked to distance themselves from their critical peers who concentrated on the minute analysis of individual objects. Alexander, for example, self-consciously distinguished his commentary from the "existing mass of purposeless and superfluous criticism,"⁶⁶ insisting that his purpose was "merely to review briefly the different phases through which our art has passed under his personal observation, mentioning names and individual work as rarely as is consistent with making himself fairly intelligible to his readers."⁶⁷ In championing the generality of his own criticism, Alexander elucidated many fellow writers' eagerness for an educative, plain style of criticism that provided comprehensive and intelligible overviews of subjects of interest to American readers. More importantly, Alexander deliberately eschewed the analysis of individual objects, arguing that it served the interests neither of intelligibility nor of the progress of American art.

Critics sometimes coupled this plain style of speaking with a self-consciously amateur persona, offering their own transparency as a form of protection to the public against cabalistic and self-interested criticism. Theodore Roosevelt adopted this strategy in his “layman’s” comments on the exhibition, referring to modernism’s supporters as “the champions of these extremists” and describing Cubist paintings as Barnum-esque hoaxes. Derisively writing that “there are thousands of people who will pay small sums to look at a faked mermaid; and now and then one of this kind with enough money will buy a Cubist picture,” Roosevelt hinted that his outsider’s analysis might warn away at least a few willing dupes.⁶⁸ This was necessary, Roosevelt implied, because many critics preferred to promote shamelessly obscure interpretations of modernist art works, such as those of Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s *Kneeling Woman*. Complaining that the sculpture barely resembled a woman at all, Roosevelt questioned the sincerity of critical admirers who described it as “‘full of lyric grace,’ as ‘tremendously sincere,’ and ‘of a jewel-like preciousness.’” Suggesting that these words might just as easily represent “a conventional jargon” as the sincere views of critics, Roosevelt complained that the use of these phrases might in itself lead to an interpretive fracture between what critics saw and what they said. “In any event,” he concluded, “one might well speak of the ‘lyric grace’ of a praying mantis, which adopts much the same attitude.”⁶⁹ In this way, Roosevelt insisted that common experience, and not “inscrutable” critical whimsy, must guide the interpretive project.

But critics’ frustration with modernism stemmed not only from its critical supporters, but from the artists themselves. Perhaps the most intense locus for critical suspicion of the interpretive and discursive practices surrounding modernism was the adoption of seemingly referential titles to describe works and movements which did not live up to the promise of straightforward explanation. One writer in the *Outlook*, thus, mockingly referred to the creator of an especially enigmatic cubist work as “zees coob” (“this cubist”), contrasting the wholesome American skepticism of a policeman who exclaimed, “‘Aw, gwan wid yer, . . . what er yer kiddin’ us?’” to the Frenchified defenses of those who claimed to explain it.⁷⁰ Critics objected to linguistic obscurity on the part not only of fellow writers, but of artists, whom critics acknowledged as playing an important role in the interpretation of art.⁷¹ Among the many “Layman’s Views” expressed by Theodore Roosevelt in his now-infamous account of the show was his casual denunciation of self-consciously named movements:

There is no reason why people should not call themselves Cubists, or Octagonists, or Parallelopipedonists, or Knights of the Isosceles Triangle, or Brothers of the Cosine, if they so desire; as expressing anything serious and permanent, one term is as fatuous as another.⁷²

Ignoring the fact that the identification of each fragmentary movement according to the method it promoted owed as much to the antagonism of European critics as to self-conscious naming on the part of participants, many critics shared Roosevelt's exasperation at what they saw as a foolish, indulgent, and ultimately unhelpful practice.⁷³

Critics' objections to the naming of movements stemmed from a wider suspicion of the deep interpretive chasm that separated the pictures they saw from the titles and descriptions they read and heard. To many critics bred on an overwhelmingly representational style of art works—and, more important, on an educative, referential and descriptive mode of criticism—one of the primary satisfactions of looking at pictures lay in their ability to convey information, both physical and intellectual, to the viewer. The questions critics asked of art works (when they looked at individual art works at all) most often had to do with the works' fidelity to truth—not necessarily to bare physical fact, but to truth in a more general sense. Did paintings of new and unseen geographical sensations such as the Grand Canyon match with literary descriptions—or, for that matter, with current notions of the special meaning of the American landscape? Did historical scenes and portraits convey lasting truths about the American nation, or about the American character, as well as provide a record of events?⁷⁴ It was in this context that institution-building critics envisioned art's audience in broadest terms, suggesting that certain kinds of representation could offer something useful even to the least aesthetically literate and indifferent viewers, who at the very least could learn important lessons from paintings or even reproductions, without recourse to criticism at all. The new pictures, with their obscure visual content and with their seemingly random and perverse titles, failed to offer this essential payoff.

The frustration critics faced at this situation can be seen in the comments of the reviewer in the *Outlook*, who complained that one painting:

was only a jumble of cube-like forms. One is told that this and its neighbors represent "A Dance" or "A Procession;" that they depict "Paris" or "Seville." One may have visited Paris and Seville and be fairly familiar with processions and dances, but one looks and looks and makes nothing at all out of "zees coob."⁷⁵



Fig. 1. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase*. 1950–134–59. Oil on Canvas. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

Here, as elsewhere, the critic's objections to the purely visual aspects of the work—that "it was only a jumble of cube-like forms"—played only a part in his or her resistance to it.⁷⁶ Instead, the critic seethed at being "told" its meaning by interpreters claiming special insight. Titles which referred to potentially familiar events and places provoked special hostility, moreover, not only because they brought home the growing disparity between the visible world and the visual content of modernist painting, but because they suggested that the experience of non-expert viewers was in itself somehow different from that of modernists. By assigning seemingly comprehensible titles to inscrutable images, modernism's interpreters appeared to call into question not only the quality of amateur judgments which were based on everyday experience, but the quality of that experience itself.

The painting that most often produced this sense of interpretive dissonance and loss of control—and that, not coincidentally, aroused the most frequent and vehement outcries from critics—was Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* (fig. 1). Observers of the Armory Show have focused a great deal of attention on the conflict the *Nude* provoked, commonly describing all those who expressed reservations about the painting as the “‘explosion-in-a-shingle-factory’ school of commentators.”⁷⁷ Most assessments of this “school” assume that the inability to recognize the merits of the work’s formal qualities produced the now-infamous outpouring of critical hostility surrounding the piece.⁷⁸

Although many writers turned an undeniably prejudiced eye towards the piece, their biases against it turned not on mere incomprehension at its stylistic innovations, but on their unwillingness to accept the disjunction they perceived between work and title. Theodore Roosevelt famously compared the painting to “a really good Navajo rug” he had in his bathroom (a contest in which the rug readily won), and complained that:

if, for some inscrutable reason, it suited somebody to call this rug a picture of, say, “A well-dressed man going up a ladder,” the name would fit the facts just about as well as in the case of the Cubist picture of the “Naked man going down stairs.” From the standpoint of terminology, each name would have whatever merit inheres in a rather cheap straining after effect.⁷⁹

Although Roosevelt insisted that the Navajo rug was superior to the modernist painting on aesthetic grounds, this was not his central preoccupation in condemning the work. What concerned Roosevelt most was not the relative “artistic merit” of the two works, but the ability of titles or interpretations of works to “fit the facts,” an issue which also guided his discussion of modernist criticism.

Thus, critics did not reject the *Nude* simply because it looked like “an explosion in a shingle factory,” but because it wasn’t *called* “explosion in a shingle factory.” For Adeline Adams, the problem with “the new school of emotion-painters who forswear representation, but label their pictures” was not their lack of obvious realism or referentiality *per se*, but the interpretive discomfort produced by their labels.⁸⁰ Recounting her own response to the *Nude*, Adams wrote that:

that curious splinter-salad—made an unusually direct appeal to me, for the reason that it came upon me when I did not know it was there—in fact, when I was seeking something else; and, therefore, I would like to state what the

appeal was. With my paleolithic bias toward representation fortified by an acquired taste for decoration, I found myself looking at I knew not what. My “emotional response” was rapid, for me. My mind asked, *method-madness? lost architect?* No! A drift of veneers piled up in the shop of a maker of musical instruments. That idea swiftly brought me the memory of a beautiful old man I once knew, a violin-maker, now dead; and with his image, as always, came crowding only elemental things, such as simplicity, home, pastoral country. It made me wish to find a human being in the canvas.⁸¹

Adams’ fanciful interplay was quickly cut short, however. While the opening of interpretive space produced by the work’s lack of clear representational content had at first liberated Adams to make her own meanings of the work—within, as she admitted, the confines of her own prejudices, experience and canonical expectations—her freedom turned to “amusement-anger” upon seeing the work’s title. This anger was two-fold. In part, it derived from Adams’s self-conscious feelings of exclusion; of the words that came to her mind upon seeing the title, two were “*épater*” and “bourgeois,” both in clear reference to Baudelaire’s well-known description of the bohemian project and in clear conflict with Adams’s understanding of her own place within both the art world and the larger culture. Yet the title’s interpretive power provoked the greater portion of Adams’s ire because it censored exactly the free play of meaning that had allowed her to enjoy the work in the first place. Although Adams tried to recapture this freedom within the narrower boundaries of interaction with the titled work, the result left her unfulfilled and anxious with self-doubt. “What was there to do but laugh at myself, entrapped sentimentalist assuming another person’s burden of proof?” she asked, more convinced than ever of her relative lack of authority as a viewer in the face of modernism’s tightening interpretive grip.⁸²

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3. *Champions*

If the Armory Show’s skeptical, institution-building commentators belonged to a critical tradition produced by Gilded-Age amateurs, its strongest defenders owed their critical practices to a different legacy of the Gilded Age art world. Inheritors of the professionalizing criticism of the decades following the Civil War, modernist critics relied on an

aesthetic and an approach to criticism which emphasized the fracture between everyday experience and interpretation and valorized the integrity and irreducibility of art objects. While critical defenders of modernism celebrated what Armory Show impresario Walter Pach called “the fecund principle of making [a] picture a reflection not of the outer world, but of the domain of the mind,”⁸³ they also shared their professional forbears’ ambivalent relationship to the public, using the evolving modernist aesthetic—and the esoteric critical language that attended it—to consolidate their own position as special and expert interpreters of the new art.

The dividing line between amateur and professional did not, it must be admitted, map exactly upon the division between defenders and detractors of modernism. Show organizer Walter Pach, for instance, clearly embraced large-scale organization as the most effective means of jump-starting modernism in the United States. Yet, even those rare critics who, in promoting modernism, followed an institution-building approach, and who approached the public with some sympathy, were careful to distinguish between modernists and outsiders, experts and “laymen” or “amateurs.”⁸⁴ In his defense of modernism in the *Century*, Pach himself divided art’s audience into two camps, contrasting “those who oppose all change in the forms of art” to those who “break still further with the superstition that a picture must look ‘just like nature.’”⁸⁵ Although he relished the public’s new-found willingness to give the new art a try, this enthusiasm belied an undercurrent of suspicion towards non-expert viewers. Remarking on the hostility Cézanne’s work initially had met, for instance, Pach expressed near disbelief that “the esthetic and expressive phases of the work of art” had come to be appreciated by “even the laymen.”

However, most of the show’s support came from critics whose writings bore a strong rhetorical similarity to those of the professional critics of the Gilded Age, and most of its disapproval from critics in the amateur, institution-building tradition. It is not difficult to see why many institution-building critics feared that the interpretation of art had come under the spell of a propagandistic cabal of modernist insiders with little interest in making art available to a broad audience. D. W. MacColl’s lengthy defense of the exhibition in the *Forum*, for instance, contained this “explanation” of abstract art, which surely did little to stem the unease of critics who feared the total demise of cooperative institution-building as criticism’s primary aim:

An abstraction, I find in my dictionary, is “the name of a quality apart from the thing,” and a quality is “that which makes a thing what it is.” From which I infer that an abstraction is “the name of ‘that which makes a thing what it is’ *apart* from what it is,”—it is the name of that which makes a thing what it is Not what it is. It is a name: it is Not the thing. How really well established and settled in practice this is. And when we want to personify—quite a different matter—one of these names of things which will make, as we think, a thing what it is not what it is, when we really feel that we dare to call one of them from the vasty deep in which they abound, it is quite true: we must arouse ourselves from our timidities of mental habit; we must make a movement of our lips—a pass of our hands or feet. Men see that there has been a quickening. The name has become the thing. It has become what it is. IT is IT, and everyone else is a believer or an unbeliever.⁸⁶

If MacColl’s highly opaque, almost parodic language did not alienate observers used to plain and pedagogical accounts of aesthetic principles, his absolute partition of viewers and makers into believers and unbelievers—the aroused and the merely timid—was certain to be felt by critics who still believed that judgments about art ultimately should derive from the long-term distillation of collective and public opinion.

Modernist critics deliberately shunned this public-oriented position, offering their own vision of how aesthetic opinions were formed. In some cases, modernists developed anti-public rhetoric in imitation of their European counterparts, for whom an “anti-bourgeois” attitude was an essential component of the modernist identity. Yet, American critics who adopted this language did not necessarily do so for the sake of promoting European art, and were not necessarily any less nationalistic than their institution-building peers. Like his Gilded-Age predecessors who had appropriated the authority of European art while distancing themselves from it, Willard Huntington Wright evoked European critiques of the bourgeoisie while simultaneously promoting the American Synchronists as the true progenitors of abstraction. “While lacking a sense of rhythm,” he wrote, “[Matisse] has a tremendous feeling of form in the static sense and a genius for color opposition which, while rare and delicate, is to the bourgeois shocking and savage. (All harmony to the untutored mind must be dark gray and black with but slight tone contrast.)”⁸⁷

While Wright distinguished between modernist and bourgeois taste without explaining how those tastes were formed, other critics were more explicit. In a companion piece called “The Painting of Tomorrow” whose title clearly referred to Blashfield’s “The Painting of To-Day,” Ernest Blumenschein outlined his own conversion to modernist

aesthetics, an account which reads more like an initiation into a secret society than the assimilation of common norms.⁸⁸ Describing his own furtive attempts to discern the meaning of various “passwords” overheard during his first untutored immersion in the salons of the “sanded anarchists” and “disciples” of modernism,⁸⁹ Blumenschein suggested not only that aesthetic obscurity was an acceptable habit for Americans to adopt but that the job of getting to the meaning of new art and new aesthetics fell squarely on the unconverted outsider, rather than on critics and others who explained it and that this conversion necessarily preceded any meaningful art-world participation. Under the pressure of a common aesthetic, Blumenschein complained, he “had always vaguely felt the bit in my mouth,” and argued that in his own experience as an artist “the necessity of making my details thoroughly intelligible to the public often blocked my path when I was nearly at the goal.”⁹⁰ Thus the modernist’s main challenge as Blumenschein represented it was having the “courage to be different from our fellow-sheep” in the face of “derision,” “contempt,” and, in the case of artists, “a diminished income.”⁹¹

It would be unfair to suggest that pro-modernist supporters of the Armory Show chose their language purely for its obscurity or that mere obscurity was the only purpose it served. If Armory Show skeptics had inherited their amateur predecessors’ belief in the knowability of art, and their compelling interest in a style of criticism which stressed the pedagogical and the transparent, modernism’s most vocal proponents tended to marginalize common experience as a guide to the interpretation of art, suggesting that aesthetic experience could be neither understood nor explained in conventional terms. According to MacColl,

the appeal which [modernist art works] make is so direct and so personal that it removes life to another court by referring it not to any past experience of life, but exactly to a sense, a recognition of new life, new art. They give us something that was not in our life, that was not in the art of painting before, and it appeals to us with all the power and the charm of a quickened consciousness of the value and meaning of life itself.⁹²

Similarly, Willard Huntington Wright suggested that modern art’s sources differed significantly from those of previous forms, describing Synchronism as a style in which “painting becomes almost entirely subjective and wholly creative,” and in which works need only contain “that requisite leaven of the ‘real.’”⁹³

While modern art's liberation from common experience held out the promise of "quickened consciousness" and new creativity for critics like MacColl and Wright, it also presented them with a problem, in that it was extremely difficult to develop a plain way of speaking about an art which was hard for even its admirers to understand. A sense of the peculiar unknowability of modern—and particularly abstract—art affected modernist critics' decisions about how to express their judgments about art as much as it affected their judgments themselves. In response to this, many pro-modernist writers chose a new and self-referential critical language which allowed them to focus on art objects as art objects, a decision which freed critics from making comparisons between objects and the external world. While jargon could be used to suit the professional needs of criticism, the turn to obscure language also marked critics' real struggle to express what they believed was incommunicable and, to a certain degree, unknowable.

Modernist critics' narrowing focus on art's aesthetic qualities also allowed them to abandon amateurs' concern with the institutional sources of artistic change, providing them with an explanatory framework which gave them greater power as experts and which helped them to distinguish themselves both from the past and from the public. Wright's analysis, thus, was not merely concerned with the relative significance of the subjective and the observed in modern painting, but contained a larger argument about the meaning of such narrowly aesthetic issues in the broader scheme of things. Of Impressionism, for example, he wrote:

color juxtaposition is the main issue. Color had always been used merely for dramatic reinforcement or for decorative effects. These new men opened the eyes of all serious-minded artists to an entirely new conception in the making of a painting. *The struggle to carry on this idea has been the history of painting for the last thirty years.*⁹⁴

Abandoning all mention of institutional developments within the art world, Wright named a particular aesthetic innovation (and a relatively narrow innovation, at that) as the most significant accomplishment of the past generation. Indeed, Wright crowded the entire history of painting during the period into this development, thus displacing all non-aesthetic developments and all art-world participants who did not contribute directly to it from that history. By accentuating "most people's" simplistic attachment to easily grasped technical innovations

“of secondary consideration,” moreover, Wright further marginalized non-experts from meaningful participation in the production and judgment of art.

This decontextualized vision of artistic production was also promoted by Christian Brinton, who described artistic change in terms of aesthetic, rather than organizational developments. Although Brinton insisted that “Evolution, Not Revolution” powered artistic change, he depicted America’s artistic “awakening” as a series of cataclysms enacted upon an empty landscape. He wrote,

We are indeed a fortunate people. Separated from Europe by that shining stretch of sea which has always so clearly conditioned our development—social, intellectual, and esthetic—we get only the results of Continental cultural endeavor. We take no part in the preliminary struggles that lead up to these achievements. They come to our shores as finished products, appearing suddenly before us in all their salutary freshness and variety. The awakening of the American public to the appreciation of things artistic has, in brief, been accomplished by a series of shocks from the outside rather than through intensive effort, observation, or participation.⁹⁵

To Brinton, as to Wright, the art-world development that had consumed the attention of a generation of critics and which still motivated so many writers to applaud the Armory Show for its institution-building qualities meant nothing.

While the desire to elaborate a non-referential and object-based aesthetic may have driven pro-modernist accounts of the Armory Show and the new art in general, it is impossible to separate the purely aesthetic motivations that allowed certain critics to accept modernism from the broader trend towards an expert-driven, exclusive criticism begun in the Gilded Age. Like their professionalizing predecessors, America’s first critical supporters of modernism adopted a criticism which placed the interpretation and evaluation of discrete art objects ahead of the promotion of wider art-world goals, and which disparaged those art objects whose referential character allowed their meanings to be unlocked through appeals to common experience alone. And, like their predecessors, modernist critics also expressed this emphasis on distinct and non-referential art objects in an exclusive, esoteric discourse which served to further diminish public participation in the emerging modernist art world. It was to this potent combination of interpretive territorialism and obscure, clubbish language, as much as

to the look or moral content of modernist art works, that institution-building critics who responded to the Armory Show most violently reacted.

4. *Conclusion*

Like their Gilded-Age forbears, institution-building critics in the period of the Armory Show deliberately and purposefully shunned elaborate evaluative or purely object-based criticism. Their resistance to a style of criticism which we take for granted as the style proper to professional critics should not be taken, as some scholars have suggested, as a sign of criticism's impoverishment before the second decade of the twentieth century but rather as evidence that evaluative, object-centered criticism is itself historically bounded and that it serves the needs of certain interpretive communities better than others. The "story of the Armory Show" that has not been told is the story of this criticism's continued ascendance after 1913 and of the subsequent passing of a style of criticism which valued the expansion of the art world over the exclusive promotion of particular aesthetic norms.

This is a particularly good time to reconsider the debates surrounding the Armory Show, in that the outcries of the past decades over arts funding demonstrate that the issue of who is best suited to judge and evaluate art has not gone away, and indeed has become more contentious than ever. For the most part, the temptation of academic and art-world participants in these debates has been to see and represent these debates, like the conflict over the Armory Show, as purely a battle over morality, propriety, and censorship; overblown pronouncements on the right concerning the risk of "scandalous" art to the nation's moral health, as well as fanatical warnings on the left about the death of free speech have only served to encourage this interpretation.

There are dangers in this interpretation, however. First, the emphasis on the First Amendment produced by it hides the fact that these debates are also very much about the conflict between a model of art-world criticism and judgment in which important decisions about which art flourishes, and on what grounds, is put in the hands of art-world professionals, and models in which other publics, such as the electorate

or its representatives, are left in charge of such judgments. While there are certainly First Amendment implications to this conflict, it is wrong to assume that, simply because “public” rejection of particular art works is frequently based on “moral” considerations of their “content,” that such judgments are more censorious than the rejection of art works by professionals on the basis of their “quality” or “standards.” If we consider the denial of public funding to be an act of censorship, then it hardly matters what the justification for that denial is. By insisting, moreover, that judgments made on the basis of the “content” of an art work are less valid (or more censorious) than judgments based solely on a work’s aesthetic merits, we are enforcing a distinction which would have been meaningless before the emergence of modernism and the rise of a professionalized modernist criticism which insisted that art must be evaluated on the basis of its supra-representational aesthetic qualities—“solely on its own terms,” in Clement Greenberg’s words.⁹⁶ In turn, we reinforce the continued power of this model of criticism, which, despite the much-vaunted death of modernism in actual artistic *production*, continues to be the dominant mode of *judgment* to this day. By refusing to challenge our own adherence to a professional and modernist model of judgment which values the internal qualities of the art object above all other considerations, we blind ourselves to the public’s legitimate frustration at its lack of say in the world of art, exemplified not only in highly publicized censorship cases, but in the reaction to less ideologically-charged situations such as the controversy surrounding Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* in the 1980s.⁹⁷

The second danger stems from the first and has more practical implications. It is that our rigid defense of professionalized judgment, and of the First Amendment as a disguise for professionalized judgment, plays right into the hands of those on the right who would prefer to abandon arts funding altogether by allowing them to claim to be the only ones who are interested in the public’s opinion. It is much easier for most people to see how their own interests are directly protected by an attack on indecent art than by the somewhat nebulous argument that the funding of controversial art is the only thing that ensures a future in which radical ideas will still exist to challenge and enlighten us, particularly when most people feel disconnected from the arts in the first place. The only way to build a future for the arts in the United States is by building a public for them. The only way to do this is by getting the public involved in the art world, as viewers and as makers,

and not simply by giving them pre-measured doses of what we as experts know is good for them. Perhaps it also means worrying as much about audiences as we do about artists, and caring as much about the art world as we do about art works.

NOTES

1. Man Ray, qtd. in Man Ray and Arturo Schwartz, "An Interview with Man Ray: 'This is Not for America,'" *Arts Magazine* 51 (May 1977): 119.

2. Martin Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York, 1988), 4.

3. For general information on the show, see Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (Greenwich, Conn., 1963); *1913 Armory Show 50th Anniversary Exhibition* (New York, 1963); *The 1913 Armory Show in Retrospect* (Amherst, Mass., 1958); and Walt Kuhn's privately printed pamphlet, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York, 1938).

4. See, for instance, Bernard Bailyn, et. al., *The Great Republic: A History of the American People* (Boston, 1977), 1027–31. This schematic representation of the Armory Show and its consequences is not limited to textbooks. In his recent monograph on Wallace Stevens, for instance, Glen MacLeod writes of the Armory Show that "from that date we can trace the development of modernism in all the arts in America, and more particularly the rapid growth of the New York avant-garde." Glen MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism* (New Haven, 1993), 3.

5. Meyer Schapiro, "Rebellion in Art," in Daniel Aron, ed., *America in Crisis: Fourteen Crucial Episodes in American History* (New York, 1952), 203–42. The Armory Show has also determined the chronology of many histories of American art, even those that do not focus on the show itself. See, for example, Milton Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton, N.J., 1955); Lloyd Goodrich, *Pioneers of Modern Art in America: The Decade of the Armory Show, 1910–1920* (New York, 1963); Bennard Perlman, *The Immortal Eight: American Painting from Eakins to the Armory Show, 187–1913* (New York, 1962).

6. See, for example, Robert M. Crunden, *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernism, 1885–1917* (Oxford, 1993); Charles C. Eldredge, "The Arrival of European Modernism," *Art in America* 61 (July–Aug. 1973): 34–41; Judith Zilzer, "The Armory Show and the American Avant-Garde: A Reevaluation" *Arts* 53 (Sept. 1978): 126–30.

7. Zilzer, for instance, argues that "the simultaneous impact on American culture of two such different events as the First World War and the Armory Show undermined the lingering genteel tradition of the late nineteenth century. That tradition could not sustain the byproducts of urban industrialization—global political commitments, immigrant migration, socialism, and feminism." Zilzer, "The Armory Show," 126.

8. This is true not only of visual artists, but of literary figures who attended the show in New York and at its other stops in Chicago and Boston. The exhibition provided young Harvard student John Dos Passos, for example, with a heady dose of enthusiasm for modernism which altered his reading habits and ultimately influenced his work. See

Townsend Ludington, *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey* (New York, 1980), 55–57.

9. Green, *New York 1913*, 7.

10. The relationships between impresario Mabel Dodge and both radicals and artists/critics alike, for example, is well known. For a fine study of the complex relationships within the New York art world at the turn of the century, see Crunden, *American Salons*.

11. A great deal of ink has been spilled about the role of the Academy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which, despite its weakness in America, has been scorned as the final barrier to modernism. What is important to remember is that the National Academy of Design never enjoyed the kind of power and prestige that its counterparts in Europe had; although criticism of the Academy by artists was continuous throughout the nineteenth century and later, and although uneasiness with its clubbishness and lack of flexibility led to the emergence of numerous splinter groups such as the Society of American Artists in the 1870s, the relative ineffectiveness of the Academy as an art-world force contributed to a situation in which conflict between the Academy and its rivals never reached the fever pitch it did in Europe with the establishment of the Salon des Refusés and the various Secession movements. As for their part, critics in the Gilded Age and later frequently chastised the Academy as well, criticizing its inward-looking juries, lackluster shows, and clubbish hanging committees; in general, it seems that critics believed that the Academy, like other art-world institutions, could play a positive and useful role, but its lack of flexibility had kept it from living up to its potential. Thus, far from attacking them, critics generally welcomed the emergence of groups like the SAA as a sign of organizational innovation. For evidence that it has become second nature for Americans to portray the Academy as a barrier to artistic progress and to modernism in the period of the Armory Show, see William Innes Homer, “Progressives vs. The Academy at the Turn of the Century,” in *Avant-Garde Painting and Sculpture in America 1910–1925* (Wilmington, Del., 1975), 9–10.

12. David Minter, *A Cultural History of the American Novel* (Cambridge, 1994), 50.

13. Not to mention “implacably hostile” and the “rear guard of the nineteenth century.” Rudi Blesh, *Modern Art USA: Men, Rebellion, Conquest, 1900–1956* (New York, 1956), 50–51.

14. Moira McLoughlin, “Negotiating the Critical Discourse: The Armory Show Revisited,” in Larry Gross, ed., *On the Margins of Art Worlds* (Boulder, Colo., 1995), 17–38; Sue Ann Prince, “‘Of the Which and the Why of Daub and Smear’: Chicago Critics Take on Modernism,” in Sue Ann Prince, ed., *The Old Guard and the Avant-Garde: Modernism in Chicago, 1910–1940* (Chicago, 1990), 95–117.

15. The contrast Prince draws between these knowing supporters of modernism and its opponents is instructive, in that it posits the ability to recognize and truthfully represent aesthetic “facts” as the main difference between modernism’s defenders and its detractors. Prince constructs the show’s detractors as “non-arts writers” motivated by “sensationalism” and “moral outrage” (as opposed to aesthetic concerns) who made “relatively frequent” “mistakes in names, designations, and historical facts.” To this she contrasts Chicago’s three early critical defenders of modernism, whom she constructs as “thoughtful, complex, and sophisticated.” Lena May McCauley, for example, “discussed the lives of the post-impressionist painters objectively, in contrast to other writers whose accounts twisted the facts into exaggerated, sensationalist stories”; Harriet Monroe’s writings demonstrate “her ability to think analytically and independently.” In this account, the taste for “academic” aesthetics is motivated by social concerns—the desire for elites to retain power as arbiters of culture—but the

taste for modernism is portrayed as free of extra-aesthetic value. This account serves to reproduce participants' own naturalizing accounts of the origins of modernist aesthetics in the guise of historical analysis. Prince, "'Of the Which and the Why,'" 95–101 and *passim*.

16. Barbara Rose, for example, portrays the Show's detractors as either mouthpieces for the Academy (Cox) or imbeciles blinded by "the honest bewilderment of the man on the Street" (Roosevelt). "The Armory Show: Success by Scandal," in Barbara Rose, ed., *Readings in American Art Since 1900: A Documentary Survey* (New York, 1968), 72–87.

17. Prince, "'Of the Which and the Why,'" 95–98 and *passim*; Schapiro, "Rebellion in Art," 236–37.

18. Prince, "'Of the Which and the Why,'" 98.

19. Kenyon Cox, "The 'Modern' Spirit in Art: Some Reflections Inspired by the Recent International Exhibition," *Harper's Weekly* 57 (15 March 1913): 10.

20. [Leila Mechlen], "Lawless Art," *Art and Progress* 4 (Apr. 1913): 940–41.

21. A few examples of this include William C[rary] Brownell, "The Art-Schools of New York," *Scribner's Monthly* 16 (Oct. 1878): 761–81; James Jackson Jarves, "Museums of Art," *Galaxy* 10 (July 1870): 50–59; George P. Lathrop, "The Study of Art in Boston," *Harper's Monthly* 58 (May 1879): 818–39; Charles C[allahan] Perkins, "American Art Museums," *North American Review* 110 (July 1870): 1–29.

22. On the history of the museum and of the development of cultural institutions in the late nineteenth century, see Nathaniel Burt, *Palaces for the People: A Social History of the American Art Museum* (Boston, 1977); Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America," in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991): 374–97; Neil Harris, "The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement," *American Quarterly* 14 (winter 1962), 545–66; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Culture and the City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington, Ky., 1976).

23. "Art at the Capitol," *Scribner's Monthly* 5 (February 1873): 494.

24. Of course, there is almost by definition a reason to be suspicious that the construction of the Gilded-Age art public also entailed a degree of coercion on the part of critics, who, despite their real or imagined desire to distill some purified "public opinion" out of the views of the "multitude," still spoke on behalf of a "public" which did not always have the opportunity to speak for itself. More than that, both Lawrence Levine and Paul DiMaggio have provided ample evidence that the development of the Gilded-Age art world *in general*, including the rise of "legitimate" museums, theatres and orchestras, narrowed the parameters of audience participation in the arts, and the contours of audiences themselves, by proscribing new and more limited norms of behavior for listeners and viewers. Yet this dominant view of the Gilded Age as the fountain of "cultural hierarchy," however compelling, must be balanced against other evidence that it was inclusive in some important respects. Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship."

25. This can be seen in discussions of the industrial arts, which many Gilded-Age commentators saw as a promising venue for the amelioration of social and labor ills through practical artistic training. Despite the best intentions of such critics, it is clear that even an infinite number of night-school classes in draftsmanship could do little to ease the underlying social and economic upheavals caused by rapid capitalist expansion after the Civil War.

26. The frequent anonymity of Gilded-Age art critics supports this point, suggesting that these writers, at least, did not expect to accrue any status from their critical opinions, notwithstanding any behind-the-scenes power they might have enjoyed.

27. For biographical information on Cook and Van Rensselaer, see Lois Dinnerstein, "Opulence and Ocular Delight, Splendor and Squalor: Critical writings in Art and Architecture by Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer," (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1979); Cynthia D. Kinnard, "Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer: America's First Professional Woman Art Critic," in Claire Richter Sherman, ed., *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1920–1979*; John Peter Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth-Century America," (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1952).

28. Mrs. Schuyler [Mariana Griswold] Van Rensselaer, *American Etchers* (1883; New York, 1886), 14.

29. Minter, *A Cultural History*, 50.

30. Throughout his career, Mather vacillated between journalism and academia. At the time of the Armory Show, he was a professor at Princeton and a regular contributor to the *Nation*. On Mather, see H. Wayne Morgan, "Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.: The Critic as Humanist" in Morgan, *Keepers of Culture: The Art Thought of Kenyon Cox, Royal Cortissoz, and Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.* (Kent, Ohio, 1989), 103–49.

31. Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., "Old and New Art," *Nation* 96 (16 Mar. 1913): 240–41.

32. John W. Alexander, "Is Our Art Distinctively American?," *Century* 87, n. s. 65 (Apr. 1914): 827.

33. Theodore Roosevelt, "A Layman's Views of an Art Exhibition," *Outlook* 103 (29 Mar. 1913): 719.

34. "Lawlessness in Art: The Exploitation of Whimsicality as a Principle," *Century* 86 (May, 1913): 150; Adeline Adams, "The Secret of Life," *Art and Progress* 4 (Apr. 1913), 932; "History of Modern Art at the International Exhibition Illustrated by Paintings and Sculpture," *New York Times* (23 Febr. 1913): sec. 6, 15.

35. Edwin. H. Blashfield, "The Painting of To-Day," *Century* 87, n. s. 65 (Apr. 1914): 837–40.

36. Royal Cortissoz, "The Post-Impressionist Illusion," *Century* 85, n. s. 63 (Apr. 1913): 809.

37. Mather, "Old and New Art," 240, 241.

38. Mather, "The Academy Exhibition," *Nation* 96 (27 Mar. 1913): 317. See also H. Wayne Morgan, *New Muses: Art in American Culture, 1865–1920* (Norman, Okla., 1978), 131.

39. Editorial, "The Old and the New," *Outlook* 103 (1 Mar. 1913): 467.

40. Editor, "Bedlam in Art," *Current Opinion* 54 (Apr. 1913): 316; Editor, "Art Madness Recaptured," *Current Opinion* 54 (Apr. 1913): 316.

41. "The Greatest Exhibition of Insurgent Art Ever Held," *Current Opinion* 54 (Mar. 1913): 230.

42. "The Greatest Exhibition," 230.

43. *Ibid.*

44. See also "Art Revolutionists on Exhibition in America," 442.

45. Alexander, "Is Our Art Distinctively American?," 827.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Id.*, 828.

48. *Id.*, 827.

49. Critics self-consciously promoted the capacity of periodicals to effect art-world change. An article praising the artistic potential of billboards and other commercial work, thus, praised the Berlin club which published "Das Plakat, which is devoted entirely to graphic work," as "the most definite educative movement, . . . which aims

to place advertizing upon the plane of a true art." "The New Art of Advertizing—Or the Redemption of the Billboard," *Current Opinion* 54 (May 1913): 407.

50. The *Century*, for example, presented both reproductions of works either by Americans or in American collections, like that of John Singer Sargent's *Nonchalance*, as well as originally commissioned works on paper by American artists. "The Century's American Artists Series," *Century* 86, n. s. 64 (1913): 44, 110, 264; "Timothy Cole's Wood Engravings of Masterpieces in American Galleries: Une Dame Espagnole by Fortuny," *Century* 86, n. s. 64 (May, 1913): frontispiece; "The Grand Cañon of the Colorado: Six Lithographs drawn from nature in 1912 for the Century by Joseph Pennell," *Century* 86, n. s. 64 (June 1913): 202–7. See also Ernest Knaufft, "What the Morgan Art Collection Means," *American Review of Reviews* 47 (Mar. 1913): 321–26; "What an Academy Could Do," *Current Opinion* 54 (Mar. 1913): 227; "Objections to the Academy," *Current Opinion* 54 (Mar. 1913): 227; Editorial, "The Study of the History of Art," *Outlook* 103 (Feb. 8, 1913): 291; Editorial, "How to Popularize Art," *Outlook* 104 (28 June 1913): 411.

51. Editorial, "A Tax on Beauty," *Outlook* 104 (5 July 1913): 491–92; Editorial, "A Tax on Beauty," *Outlook* 104 (2 Aug. 1913), 727–28; Editorial, "Free Art For the People," *Outlook* 105 (27 Sept. 1913): 161–63; Editorial, "Tariff and Art," *Outlook* 105 (4 Oct. 1913): 242; "The American 'Immortals,'" *Current Opinion* 54 (Mar. 1913): 227.

52. "Art For Life's Sake," *Current Opinion* 54 (Feb. 1913): 149; "The Greatest Exhibition of Insurgent Art Ever Held," *Current Opinion* 54 (Mar. 1913): 230–32; "Artistic Aspects of the Skyscraper," *Current Opinion* 54 (Apr. 1913): 321–23; "Matisse and Picabia Compared," *Current Opinion* 54 (Apr. 1913): 316; "New Tendencies in Art," *American Review of Reviews* 48 (Aug. 1913): 245; "A Sculptress Who Has Caught the American Rhythm," *Current Opinion* 55 (Aug. 1913): 124–25. "A Great Artistic Interpreter of the Frozen North," *Current Opinion* 55 (Oct. 1913): 274–75; "Leon Bakst and the Renaissance of Color," *Current Opinion* 55 (Nov. 1913): 350–51.

53. "History of Modern Art," sec. 6, 15.

54. Blashfield, "The Painting of To-Day," 837.

55. Blashfield, "The Art of To-Day," 837.

56. Blashfield, "The Painting of To-Day," 837. Emphasis in original.

57. This sentiment was echoed by a writer in *Current Opinion*, who criticized Edmond de Goncourt's ceaseless promotion of one particular Japanese artist, Hokusai. While the critic excused Goncourt's preference as a matter of taste, he condemned the French writer for having caused the European public's failure both to appreciate other Japanese artists and to understand their historical relevance to French art. "Toyokuni: The Japanese Father of French Post-Impressionism," *Current Opinion* 55 (Dec. 1913): 435.

58. Cox, "The 'Modern' Spirit in Art," 10.

59. Cortissoz, "The Post-Impressionist Illusion," 806.

60. This inability to locate a comprehensible theory of modernism also plagued one of Cortissoz's more sensationalistic peers, who exclaimed that "the exploitation of a theory of discords, puzzles, uglinesses, and clinical details, is to art what anarchy is to society, and the practitioners need not so much a critic as an alienist." "Lawlessness in Art," 150.

61. Of Émile Bernard's description of the new art as "'the manifestation of the eternal idea,'" for instance, Cortissoz asked, "could anything be more . . . vague?" Cortissoz, "The Post-Impressionist Illusion," 806–7.

62. *Ibid.*, 807.

63. *Id.*, 810

64. *Id.*

65. Id., 815.

66. Alexander, "Is Our Art Distinctively American?," 826.

67. Ibid.

68. Roosevelt, "A Layman's Views of an Art Exhibition," 718.

69. Ibid., 719

70. Again, in his or her elevation of the skeptical cop as the authentic voice of American taste, this critic echoed Gilded Age critics' insistence on the safety in a "multitude of counsellors" in deriving opinions about art. Although this comment can be read as a ploy to capitalize on readers' suspicions of European decadence, and it is far from likely that the critic actually spoke for the interests of policemen, the comment is insightful in showing that institution-building critics were at least interested in staking a claim to a wider audience than their opponents, whom they saw as representing the voices only of the French and art-world insiders. "An Opportunity to Study New Art Tendencies," 466.

71. Indeed, critics sometimes suggested that artists had made critics their willing dupes. Cortisoz, for example, wrote that "George Eliot speaks in one of her novels of the credulity in a guard which permits an interloper to get past him on the flimsiest pretexts, and she adds, 'There are some men so stupid that if you say, 'I am a buffalo,' they will let you pass.' I have thought of this when I have gone hunting for the line and rhythm of Matisse, and have marveled at those critics who have, so to say, let them pass." Cortisoz, "Post-Impressionist Illusion," 812.

72. Theodore Roosevelt, "A Layman's Views of an Art Exhibition," 719.

73. See also Adeline Adams, "The Secret of Life," 926-27.

74. An interesting discussion of late nineteenth-century critics' search for an art which conveyed these truths about the American nation can be found in Linda Jones Docherty, "A Search for Identity: American Art Criticism and the Concept of the 'Native School,'" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1985). For a study of one painter's lifelong effort to produce such an art, see Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, N.J., 1983).

75. "An Opportunity to Study New Art Tendencies," 466.

76. A similar dynamic was at work in Cortisoz's assessment of the Futurist exhibit at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery. While he had admired Van Gogh's use of color to solve purely technical problems, Cortisoz balked at the Futurists' attempts to combine such problem-solving with claims about external reality. He griped, "the Bernheim-Jeune gallery was thronged every day with people who came to see how the trick was done. What they saw was a series of canvases bearing intelligible titles, but otherwise resembling patchworks of color." Cortisoz, "Post-Impressionist Illusion," 813.

77. The quote is from Eldredge, "Arrival of European Modernism," 35, but similar comments can be found in MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens*, 7; and Prince, "'Of the Which and the Why,'" 97-98.

78. I should note, however, that MacLeod does suggest that the work's title did provoke the lion's share of viewers' anger. Yet, while he mentions the frustrated expectations produced by the work's whimsical title, his brief explanation of why the title caused such consternation is not entirely fulfilling. According to MacLeod, this hostility derived not from thwarted expectations about the relationship between representation, the "real," and interpretation, but from viewers' mainly moral concerns about the place of the nude in painting. Thus, viewers objected not to the fact that they could not recognize a nude in the painting, but to Duchamp's placement of a nude in an inappropriate setting. Although he does not express the connection directly, MacLeod thus portrays the painting as a latter-day version of Manet's *Olympia*. In this case, however, it is not clear why Duchamp's painting created more havoc than

Gauguin's depictions of unclothed women of color who had previously been little represented in Western painting, or than Matisse's frank *Blue Nude*, a more direct descendant of Manet's controversial canvas which later caused a public outcry in Chicago.

79. Roosevelt, "A Layman's Views," 719.

80. Adams, "The Secret of Life," 931.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Id.*, 932.

83. Walter Pach, "The Point of View of the Moderns," *Century* 87, n. s. 65 (Apr. 1914): 861.

84. Despite his declaration that the Armory Show was intended solely to bring new art to the American public, thus, Frederick Gregg undercut the authority of that public to appreciate the works it had before it, citing as a "worthy comment" the following remark, made by "a man prominent in art and literature in Berlin": "'The amateur always searches among the imitators for the 'new greatness'; the independent searcher he passes by; the collector of the imitators of the French moderns, [are] the very men who formerly bought pictures by Kiesel and Defregger.'" Frederick James Gregg, "A Remarkable Art Show," *Harper's Weekly* 57 (15 Feb. 1913): 13, 20.

85. Pach, "The Point of View of the Moderns," 852.

86. W. D. MacColl, "The International Exhibition," *Forum* 50 (July 1913): 32–33. Emphasis in original.

87. Wright, "Impressionism to Synchronism," 765.

88. Ernest L. Blumenschein, "The Painting of To-Morrow," *Century* 87, n. s. 65 (Apr. 1914): 845–50.

89. Blumenschein, "The Painting of To-Morrow," 847

90. *Ibid.*, 848.

91. *Id.*, 847.

92. MacColl, "The International Exhibition," 25.

93. Wright, "Impressionism to Synchronism," 770.

94. *Ibid.*, 759. Emphasis added.

95. Christian Brinton, "Evolution Not Revolution in Art," *International Studio* 49 (Apr. 1913): xxvii.

96. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," (1939) in Clement Greenberg, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago, 1986), vol. 1, 8.

97. I am referring to the case in which, after dozens of complaints on the part of local residents and workers, and after years of legal wrangling, Serra's publicly-commissioned sculpture *Tilted Arc* was removed from its location in downtown Manhattan in 1989. Serra and others resisted its removal on the grounds that, as a site-specific work whose location was integral to its overall aesthetic (was, in fact, part of the boundaries of the work itself) it could not be removed without being "destroyed," an act which violated the artist's First Amendment rights. For information about the Serra controversy, see W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago, 1990).