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THE AVANT-GARDE IN AMERICA 1911-1917: A STUDY OF *THE MASSES, LADIES' HOME JOURNAL* AND *COLLIER'S* MAGAZINES

By

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ABSTRACT

THE AVANT-GARDE IN AMERICA 1911-1917:
A STUDY OF *THE MASSES*,
LADIES' HOME JOURNAL
AND *COLLIER'S* MAGAZINES

By

Aimée Marcereau

During the late nineteenth century, the literary and artistic avant-gardes merged in France. Radical artists and writers alike joined in the spirit of revolt, which took its most apparent form in politically charged graphic magazines. This study is an attempt to assert the continuance of an avant-garde manifestation from the graphic imagery of the European avant-garde in the later nineteenth-century to the radical American graphic magazine *The Masses* , published between 1911-1917.

Politically and stylistically, *The Masses* was aligned with its European avant-garde precursors, supporting two of the avant-garde's basic tenets of stylistic and political radicalness. Yet for the publication to be considered avant-garde in America, it necessitates a comparison of some of its American graphic contemporaries. Using *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's* magazines as specific examples, this study will assert that *The Masses* could be considered avant-garde among them as well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To any scholar writing on *The Masses* after 1988, much of the ground work has been covered by Rebecca Zurier in her comprehensive text *Art for The Masses: A Radical Magazine and its Graphics*, 1911-1917. I too owe her a great deal as she says much of what I say, although earlier and albeit different conclusions.

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Introduction

Fostered by the ideal of liberalism, the avant-garde is based on the idea of social renewal by cultural challenge.[1] Therefore the imagery associated with an avant-garde possesses a power to rise above the sediment of the iconic imagery of its contemporaries. This study is an attempt to assert the continuance of an avant-garde manifestation from the graphic imagery of the European avant-garde in the later nineteenth-century to the radical American graphic magazine *The Masses* which ran from 1911-1917. These years were politically charged as the world unconsciously prepared for and participated in the largest disaster in history. The cultural renegades of the European avant-garde were in the thick of protest that took its most apparent form in politically charged graphic magazines. This form of protest followed in a similar tradition in America. The radical beliefs of artists who respectively illustrated for European and American magazines, were reinforced by their use of the graphic medium. The crayon line characteristic of these radical publications took on political significance as a stylistic rebellion against the fine-line bourgeois illustration of their graphic contemporaries.

To assert the existence or continuance of an avant-garde, I must first define the term since it is laden with multiple readings gleaning bits from the Hegelian notion of "progress" and Marxist ideology as well as from theories of artistic production that have been developed outside academia, as literary criticism. In recent post-modern scholarship, with its re-evaluation of the dialectics of modernism and the avant-garde, "vestiges of old avant-gardist

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1 Robert Hughes, The Shock of The New, 2nd ed., (New York:McGraw Hill Inc., 1991) p. 365, 372.

quarrels" (to use a phrase of Robert Hughes) were played against the new, thus creating additional parameters from which to assess the theory. Nevertheless, in this study I am not attempting to present a theoretical pastiche of avant-garde scholarship, I choose instead to deal with it as a phenomenon focused on two of its basic tenets: stylistic and political radicalness. In this study I work from these tenets, tracing them to their literary origins in mid nineteenth-century France and to their crossover into the visual medium in America in the twentieth-century. As many recycled discourses on the avant-garde tend to be subjective, I concentrated on original source material whenever possible and strove to provide a firsthand study of these documents.[2]

Through a comparative analysis of style and politics or ideologies, between *The Masses* and its European graphic counterparts, I contend the continuance of an avant-garde from Europe to America in the graphic medium. Then, with a comparative analysis between *The Masses* and its American graphic contemporaries, using *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's* magazines as specific examples, I also assert that *The Masses* could be considered avant-garde among them as well. This assertion would pre-date the American avant-garde of the 1940's with the Abstract Expressionists which will serve as a future project.

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2 I have utilized as much primary source material as possible to eliminate the reading of other scholars. With any research undertaken if the sources are no longer available for comment, their original remarks are as subjective as some of those imbued by secondary readings.

> The question then is how, against the provincial background of America, and given American Art as it existed up until 1946-47, that it became possible to achieve such a radical transformation - not only of art itself but of the American role in art- how it was possible not only to join the "mainstream" but to go beyond it and revolutionize it ....[3]

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3 Bernice Rose, as quoted by Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modernism, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 15.

Chapter 1

The Evolution of Revolution: The Avant-Garde in Europe

The history of modern art is the history of its avant-garde, as claimed by Howard Fox in the introduction to his book on the avant-garde in the 1980s,[4] though the history of the avant-garde is much more than a century older.[5] The militaristic derivation of the word implies 'in front of,' in French or 'before' the remainder of the "garde" or troops marching into unknown territory. Its meaning holds similar implications for art, being stylistically as well as politically 'in front of,' or 'before' the cultural mainstream. The term was originally used in the criticism of literary styles and publications as Charles Baudelaire observed in the personal notebook he kept from 1862-1864.[6] Although, it was probably used as early as the 1840's[7] and was associated specifically with writers who were ideologically on the left as a radical shift from the conservative mainstream. In the plastic arts of Baudelaire's time, naturalism was viewed as a seditious departure from the rigid, posed styles of the Academy. The historical joining of these radical phenomena - leftist politics and stylistic naturalism - will hereafter denote political and stylistic radicalness. This pairing occurred in the pages of the independent little magazine, aptly entitled *La Revue Indépendante,* founded in 1880, which "gathered fraternally...the rebels of politics and the rebels of art."[8]

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4 Howard Fox, Avant-Garde in the Eighties. (L. A. County Museum of Art, 1987) p. 9.

5 As noted by Renato Poggioli, the avant-garde had its origins in literature and "it is rather rare to find the concept or term outside political literature in the 1870's (and) nearly impossible in the preceding decade," as quoted from The Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968) p. 9-10.

6 Ibid., p. 10.

7 In an informal interview with Professor Eldon VanLiere, June 30, 1995, he asserted that Baudelaire most definitely used this term in the 1840's.

Thirty years later and across the Atlantic, a similar phenomenon occurred in the pages of another independent graphic magazine entitled *The Masses* which ran from 1911 until it was suppressed by the United States government in 1917. However, prior to examining this publication, it is first important to understand the European environment in which the avant-garde arose.

As noted above, the avant-garde is rooted in European literary traditions and is inherent to certain social contexts that fostered its existence. Though it originates in this tradition, art historians concerning themselves with high art examples cite Gustave Courbet, with his work of circa 1850, as one of the first avant-garde artists. For that to bear out, Courbet is considered to have been stylistically innovative and politically subversive. Following the Revolution of 1848, France was politically unstable. In attempts to abate further overthrow, the government reacted with severe acts of suppression on the visual arts.[9] Had they been successful, Courbet's revolt would not exist, or at least we would not know it had existed. Similarly, if the revolution would have resulted in total anarchy, without reprise, Courbet's revolt would not exist either. Hence, in both cases, he would not have been considered avant-garde.[10] "Avant-garde art is by its nature incapable of surviving not only the persecution, but even the protection or the official patronage of a totalitarian state and a collective society, whereas the hostility of public opinion can be useful to it."[11] Of course there is always the

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8 Poggioli, p. 11.

9 In their respective studies, Robert Goldstein and Jane Clapp reveal that with every revolution in France it was followed by the enactment and reenactment of suppression laws. Goldstein, Censorship of Political Character in Nineteenth-Century France, (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989) Clapp, Art Censorship: A Chronology of Proscribed and Prescribed Art, (New Jersey:Scarecrow Press, 1972)

10 T.J. Clark talks extensively about this and the climate that gave rise to Courbet in Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic, 1848-1851 (Greenwich CN: New York Graphic Society, 1973)

11 Poggioli, p. 95.

prospect of revolution for revolution's sake, but that is not the issue here, I am merely attempting to delineate the determinants that give rise to the phenomenon of an avant-garde.

The cultural climate in France that gave rise to Courbet and to the late nineteenth-century radical publications which would prove influential to *The Masses*, contained the necessary ingredients to foster an avant-garde. The democratic government in France at this time was neither totalitarian nor anarchist and for the most part, fairly caught up in the visual tradition espoused by the French Academy. The environment therefore provided the 'social hostility' necessary for artists going against this tradition as shown in the innumerable radical graphic publications of the mid-to late nineteenth century, such as *L'Assiete au Beurre* and *Le Rire* - two publications that were influential to *The Masses*. This is evidenced by the works of Théophile Steinlen and Jean-Louis Forain who illustrated for these magazines (as well as others) and preceding them, Honoré Daumier, all of whom I will also prove were influential on the artists of *The Masses*. These French artists "were unable to accept the conditions of that society and were forced to choose between reactionary or revolutionary doctrines...."[12] They used the publications they worked for as forums of exchange for their radical beliefs as well as their innovative graphic style and techniques. Therefore, it stands that these European magazines, deemed subversive in both style and political affiliation, subsisted in an environment in which the phenomenon of an avant-garde could exist.

These magazines served to "denounce with neither fear, digression, nor mercy, the social inequities and their perpetrators...."[13] Not only were they

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12 Eugenia W. Herbert, The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898 (New Haven:Yale University Press, 1961) p. 101.

stylistically radical, they had political agendas as well. Many of them were politically to the left or right of center and all of them seemingly called on the artists to emerge from isolation and join the masses in their revolt, whatever it might be. Regardless of political affiliation, they were "allied in their attack against the republican status quo, [for them] it was the focus of the myriad and contradictory complaint against the middle of the road government of the bourgeoisie."[14] This attack is visually represented through the rough coarse crayon technique that all three French artists used.

Neither this type of argument, nor Théophile Steinlen, Jean-Louis Forain and Honoré Daumier's choice of medium is revolutionary, only the way in which their work is executed deems them stylistically radical to their contemporaries. Prints arose in the early fifteenth century in order to elucidate for the common person the personalities and events of political, social, military and religious life as the 'common person' was illiterate and could understand through images only.[15] Hence prints have been aligned with the people's cause and as Robert Phillipe continues "bit by bit (they have) constructed the iconography of a social Bible as pictures could at least render justice to the meek."[16] In addition, the nature of a print, unlike painting, allows for its mass production, therefore it is an affordable medium and has the ability to reach a wide audience, thus it is the ideal method for communicating messages.

As Ralph Shikes indicates, "the starkness of a black-and-white print unlike painting, is often more appropriate for social message than is the sensuousness

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13 Phillip Dennis Cate, ed., The Graphic Arts and French Society; 1871-1914 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 1988) p. 160.

14 Herbert, p. 102.

15 Much of this summary on prints is extracted from Robert Philippe, Political Graphics: Art as Weapon, (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1982) p. 2.

16 Philippe, p. 2.

of color...."[17] Throughout history social artists such as Max Klinger and his protégé Käthe Kollwitz supported this sentiment as both chose the graphic medium above any other to deliver their social intent. This significance of the association with black-and-white imagery and social message becomes greater as all the images in *The Masses* were black and white with the exception of the covers,[18] as were those executed by Steinlen, Forain and Daumier.

As for his subject matter, Steinlen shared an interest with *The Masses* artists in powerful depictions of life and laborers in the pages of several socialist publications with the intent of "shocking the oppressed out of their ignorance and into political education and action."[19] He is often referred to as "The Millet of the Streets,"[20] as "there is a pervasive expression of humanity and fraternity in much of his work."[21] In contrast, Jean-Louis Forain's satirical pen attacked and his "acrid political and social satire seized on the scandals of the government hypocrisy of the dominant classes...."[22] Mediating between these two artists in intent and style is Honoré Daumier. Steinlen shared his "savage wolfish quality"[23] in the coarseness of some of his works like *The Argument*, while Forain shared his satirical bite (Figures' 1 and 2). Daumier himself stands alone in both form and content. Pre-dating the artistic activity of Steinlen and Forain by

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17 Ralph E. Shikes, The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) p. xxiv.

18 The covers actually were black and white and only "obtained" color upon the addition of a second plate.

19 Cate, p. 160.

20 Shikes, p. 227.

21 Ibid., p. 227.

22 Herbert, p. 194.

23 Shikes, p. 231.

FIGURE 1 "The Argument" ; Théophile Steinlen

FIGURE 2 "The Unwed Mother" ; Jean-Louis Forain

nearly half a century, Daumier served as mentor to all those revolutionary graphic artists who followed him and derived inspiration from his reductive form, spontaneous line and ability to capture the life around him (Figure 3). Daumier's ability led the critic Charles Baudelaire to champion him in his essay "A Painter of Modern Life." Baudelaire venerated Daumier as well as another graphic illustrator Constantin Guys, for their ability to capture, and in the case of Daumier, comment on the modern life around them with biting humor and satire.[24]

French artists that began commenting on the life around them felt the necessity of doing so as a result of feeling a certain sense of alienation from their academic contemporaries who exalted the past. Alienation from the mass urbanization that was rising up around them, alienation in its social-economic, cultural-stylistic, and historical-ethical variants, all which serve as antagonists, or rather as catalysts for the formation of an avant-garde.[25] Feelings such as these gave rise to the subsequent formation of magazines that were deemed radical toward the fin-de-siècle and by which the artists and writers of *The Masses* were most influenced.

As Steinlen, Forain and Daumier experienced a disenchantment with their environment, so too did the artists and writers of *The Masses* magazine. They shared with their European precursors, a sense of alienation from the political

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24 Louis Boe Hyslop, Baudelaire: Man of His Time, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) p. 34-46.

25 Poggioli, p. 143. These factors serve as nominalistic proof for the formation of an avant-garde. Though Poggioli continues in this line of reasoning and cites the fauves or the Independants as examples, I assert it can be applied to any group experiencing alienation in this form and from these determinants.

Figure 3 "Ratapouil" ; Honoré Daumier

and stylistic mainstream of America in the early twentieth century and the subsequent desire to break stylistically from the past.

Chapter 2

Across the Atlantic: The Avant-Garde in America

The spirit of revolt was ripe in the years leading up to and encompassing World War I as America witnessed the fervent activity of artists and writers alike caught up in the cultural heyday of New York's Greenwich Village. The Village symbolized a "beacon to those dissatisfied with midwestern towns where cultural life was limited to Booster Clubs and potluck suppers in the church basement."[26] Man's discovery of his inner self came alive in the haven of creativity found in New York, as it "offered the proto-avant-gardists(s) nothing but the impetus to revolt."[27] These sentiments recall a certain naiveté prevalent during this period which explains contemporaneous critic Genevieve Taggard's reflection upon the spirit of the times. She stated that "there was so much to be said, done, thought, seen and tried, as the youth of the land was getting out of doors and all winter taboos were being broken! ...the age hadn't come to grips with anything much more serious than the problems of rancid meat."[28]

The "youth of the land," as Taggard refers to, were the lot that strove to break away from the preceding generation's tight grasp of Victorian ideals. These were held by the older generation, as they were traditional and safe in a world that was changing daily. The fear felt at the fin de siècle by the old garde was being replaced by a new breed of utopianism among the youth in America, all which was flowering under the political leadership of Woodrow Wilson. Its effects upon society "encouraged the growth of a social, cultural, and political

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26 Steve Watson, Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991) p. 15.

27 Ibid., p. 15.

28 Genevieve Taggard, May Days (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc. 1925) p. 3.

radicalism which had as its object the recovery of primitive modes of being, the lost innocence of the race."[29] Author, Christopher Lasch comments that "the recovery of the secret self was seen not only as something desirable in itself but as a means of bringing about far-reaching social changes as well...."[30] The writings of John Dewey, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and radical village writers like Randolph Bourne were exposing the "evils" of society and proposing plans of reform to overcome the ills created by those in power, mainly the government and the church. The radicals were rebelling against the genteel traditions of the conservatives and attempting to break down the Victorian cult of domesticity carried over into the twentieth-century by conservatives and politicians. At this time, these factions were one and the same and reflected mainstream values that were subsequently repeated in commercial publications of the day. "The new radicalism led to an attack on social problems ...the radicals could speak of the need to liberate the creative energies of humankind and in the same breath, talk of "adjusting" humans, as Jane Addams wrote, "in healthful relations" to one another."[31] Radicalism took the form of a new sort of politics in the early twentieth century (Socialism) and according to Lasch, rests on a two-fold discovery, that of "the dispossessed by men who themselves had never known poverty from prejudice, and the mutual self-discovery of the intellectuals." The combination of the two, Lasch continues:

> ... accounted for the intensity with which the intellectuals identified themselves with the outcasts of the social order: women, children, proletarians, Indians, and Jews. [32]

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29 Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in America (1889-1963) The Intellectual as a Social Type (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965) p. 144.

30 Ibid., p. 144.

31 Ibid., p. 145-6.

The intellectuals felt displaced by society and felt a sort of kinship with other "social outcasts." Collectively, they felt isolated from society and within this collective they gained the strength and hope to fight the conservative mainstream. Subsequently, these are the conditions that gave rise to the formation of the radical Socialist publication, *The Masses*, and their protest was indigenous to American radical life in early twentieth century America.

The Masses began in Greenwich Village in 1911 and its history chronicles the experience of a generation of radical American intellectuals and sheds light on the relationship of their politics and art in the early twentieth century. Cooperatively run, *The Masses* was a monthly publication associated with the Socialist party, dedicated to the working class and to serving the conscience of a radical generation. At ten cents a copy, the magazine was launched during the "golden era" of magazine publishing "where more than six thousand periodicals covering every conceivable subject for almost every audience"[33] appeared during the first decade of the twentieth century. *The Masses* oversized format was printed on newsprint with a heavier bond cover, and it addressed topics its American contemporaries shunned or ignored, some of which eventually led to the magazine's ultimate governmental suppression in 1917. Though the publication was short lived, it stood at the cultural crossroads of important political and cultural currents, mediating not only between the avant-garde and the establishment, but also between literary and political milieus.

The Masses was the first publication of its kind in America to combine radical art with radical politics effectively.[34] This was undoubtedly aided by its

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32 Ibid., p. 147.

33 Rebecca Zurier, Art for The Masses: A Radical Magazine and its Graphics, 1911-1917 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) p. 30.

34 Carl Zigrosser, a leading American writer on the graphic arts, wrote about *The Masses* which appeared in a short article found in the collection of John Sloan's papers. The article is

impressive list of contributors, who epitomized the revolutionary spirit in America during the early part of this century. Its masthead read like a roll call of some of the most popular young cultural renegades, including regular writers John Reed, Randolph Bourne, Upton Sinclair, Mary Heaton Vorse, and Max Eastman, with occasional contributions from Emma Goldmann and Mabel Dodge. Some of its poets were Amy Lowell, Louis Untermeyer, Ezra Pound and Vachel Lindsay, with early works of William Carlos Williams and e.e. cummings. The artists consisted of many well-known illustrators like Boardman Robinson, Robert Minor and Art Young, as well as feminist artist Cornelia Barns and many Ash-Can painters such as John Sloan, George Bellows, Arthur B. Davies and a young Stuart Davis[35] whose early style drastically departs from his later abstract works. These artists and writers stood for the struggle of social, economic, institutional and moral liberty and believed in direct versus political action and free verse versus meter. They set out to puncture the pious hypocrisies and double standards of conventional morality through their articles and illustrations and created what became one of the authentic mouthpieces of their era.

Although the magazine dealt with serious issues, humor was an important aspect of *The Masses* [36] during the years 1912 - 17 and aligns it with its European radical influences. *The Masses* sardonic sense of humor gnawed at mainstream America and its values. It was different from its mainstream contemporaries light humor, for it was an intelligent humor, a humor infested with truth. Through its

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identified only by author with no date or source of publication if any. From this point forward, all references of Zigrosser's (and John Sloan's) are from this source and will be identified by box number only. Carl Zigrosser, misc. notes from 1913-17 in John Sloan Collection file *Illustration*, box 192. John Sloan Trust, Delaware Art Museum, Willmington, DE.

35 Rebecca Zurier notes these artists involvment with *The Masses* throughout her text Art for The Masses, as does Carl Zigrosser in the source cited above.

36 In the exhibition of "The American Salon of Humorists," out of twenty-three exhibitors, twelve were regular contributors to *The Masses*.

use of humor, it enabled some " to see the grinning soul of the whole system of exploitation" [37] that its contemporaries only served to propagate. Humor was something more than a mood, "it (was) the very pith and essence of that swift, electric atmosphere which (was) so particularly our own ..."[38]

It was important for *Masses* staff to claim something of 'their own,' as they were trying to set themselves apart from the current generation. They sought spiritual guidance from radicals of the past to overcome the fears and uncertainties of the age in which they lived. In An Apology for the Intelligentsia, *Masses* managing editor, Floyd Dell, wrote that:

> in the time when we were growing up, the human imagination was a chaos, filled with the wreckage of a century-long conflict of which we were unaware, between utopian ideals and machine-made facts...we were living in the debris of an age that had gone spiritually to smash. [39]

The contributors to *The Masses* were essentially all children of the Civil War, Dell continued, who "heard of heroism on their grand dad's knee...," but "too much heroism palls."[40] In attempts to recapture some of that 'lost spirituality,' not taught in their schools, they sought the writings of transcendentalist's like Thoreau and Whitman, whom they considered "freed us from whatever chains most irked: "[41]

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37 Edmond McKenna, "Art and Humor," *Masses* 6 1915, p. 10.

38 "Sad and Serious Reflections on the First Salon of American Humorists," June 1915, as found in the Kenneth Russell Chamberlain Papers, reel 291 and also the Stuart Davis Papers, reel N584, frame 36, Archives of American Art, Washington D.C.

39 Floyd Dell, Intellectual Vagabondage - An Apology for the Intelligentsia. (New York: George H. Brown Co., 1926) p. 109.

40 Ibid., p. 116.

41 Ibid., p. 117.

> We were spiritual vagrants seeking the true road... if in doubt, Whitman appeared to us saying 'Don't be afraid camerado .'[42]

The marginality associated with the transcendentalist's was reflective of the philosophy of *The Masses*, and diametrically opposed to its mainstream commercial contemporaries. This is evidenced in its masthead written in 1913 by John Reed, which appeared on the inside cover in subsequent issues:

> A Revolutionary and not a Reform magazine; a Magazine with a Sense of Humor and no Respect for the Respectable; Frank; Arrogant; Impertinent; Searching for the True Causes; a Magazine Directed against Rigidity and Dogma wherever it is found ... a magazine whose final Policy is to do as it Pleases and Conciliate Nobody, not even its Readers - there is a field for this Publication in America, Help Us Find it.[43]

The Masses did not have to "conciliate" anyone as it was economically independent from corporate sponsorship. In turn it acted as a sort of American Salon des Independants "print(ing) what (was) too Naked or True for a Money-making press."[44] It is evident that *Masses'* staff believed in what the magazine stood for, as the artists and writers offered some of their best works gratis.[45] John Sloan, art editor and one of the key illustrators of *The Masses*, admits in his personal notebooks that he submitted countless drawings to *The Masses* , when it was during a period in his life in which he could have earned $300 - $500 for his commercial drawings.[46] Sloan recalled that it "was the opportunity to get one's

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42 Ibid., p. 117.

43 Inside front cover. *Masses* 5 Oct 1913 p. 2.

44 Ibid., p. 2.

45 Sloan stated that he contributed to the cause without pay from 1909-17 in a letter he wrote to John Black dated February 2, 1950. Found in John Sloan Collection, box 164 containing information on printed matter and socialism. Delaware Art Museum, Willmington, DE. All subsequent information on Sloan unless otherwise noted is from The John Sloan Trust collection, or Helen Farr Sloan's verbatim notes of John Sloan, both of which are housed at the Delaware Art Museum and will hereafter be denoted by box number and appropriate set of notes.

(more creative and perhaps controversial)[47] works published that drew (them) together," not the money and besides, "it was an honor to be published in *The Masses*.[48] Though it never gained the wide spread popularity of other mainstream publications, it effected or perhaps infected those whom it did reach.

It caused outrage among many conservatives however, as the magazine was an integral part of the Greenwich Village radical scene. It was epitomized by Mabel Dodge's Salon[49] on lower Fifth Avenue where intellectuals gathered at her soirées to discuss political and economic issues like birth control, pacifism, women's suffrage and other aberrations from the conservative norm. Carl Zigrosser admits that one could not help being emotionally involved in these revolutionary issues at this time . "There was ferment in the air," he conceded, "stirrings not only of political revolt but also social and cultural revolt."

The political revolt Zigrosser referred to was the Socialist party, dominant among many New York radicals in the early part of the twentieth century. Leftist politics were against mainstream American politics and therefore, by association, *The Masses* shared with their leftist European precursors, the political radical tenet of the avant-garde. Though *The Masses* appeared united in its socialist aims, with the exception of the hard-core socialists Maurice Becker (1889-1975) and Art Young, many of its contributors - such as William Glackens, Stuart Davis, (1894-1964) Glen Coleman and John Sloan, were not full-fledged party members.[50]

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46 Helen Farr Sloan verbatim notes of John Sloan, box 192, p. 1.

47 My personal addition. As it did not monetarily benefit the artists and writers to submit their work to *The Masses*, many of them sold their more conservative drawings to other magazines for money.

48 Helen Farr Sloan verbatim notes of John Sloan, box 192, p. 3.

49 Zurier, p. 6.

50 Though Sloan was an active member of the Socialist party since 1909, he became disillustioned with it during the outbreak of WWI, though he kept his faith in socialism as an

Regardless of who was or who was not socialist, all left-wing political activity at this time in America was highly suspect and was regarded by many as opposed to the best interests of the US in relation to World War I.[51]

The magazine's involvement with radical politics, which at its onset served as a vital aspect of its existence, eventually served as its demise. This was due in part to its second editor, Max Eastman, who used Socialism as a platform for propaganda. Prior to this, *The Masses* was gathered together under the editorial guise of the Dutchman Piet Vlag,[52] who modeled the magazine on some of the worker cooperatives he experienced during his youth in Holland.[53] The magazine ceased publication in August 1912 after failing to gain the notoriety and circulation its financier expected. It began again in December that year by newly "elected"[54] editor Max Eastman who subsequently carried the magazine until its governmental suppression in 1917. It was under Eastman's reign that the magazine changed its format from right to left Socialism and "announced its break with the earlier magazine and with almost everything else."[55] With these

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idea, this as well as the other artists political leanings are taken from Helen Farr Sloan verbatim notes of John Sloan, box 192, p. 2.

51 Julian F. Jaffe, Crusade Against Radicalism: New York During the Red Scare, 1914-1924 (New York: Kennikat Press, 1972) p. 1.

52 Piet Vlag's tutelage occupied the innocent years before World War I, when "the pink of the intelligentsia" in their sandals, burning candles and writing scandals met in the basement of the Rand School for Social Sciences to discuss the magazine's monthly contributions. Carl Zigrosser, misc. notes from 1913-1917 in John Sloan Collection file *Illustration*, box 192. The article is identified only by author with no date or source of publication if any.

53 These pubications were *La Cooperation* and the daily *Le Peuple*, published by the worker-organized cooperative, *La Maison du Peuple* in Brussels. Vlag hoped to provide a similar exchange in America and thus launched *The Masses* with this in mind. Rebecca Zurier gives a solid account of the magazines' history in chapter one of her text beginning on p. 29.

54 Eastman was "elected" editor, for "no pay," at an emergency meeting held by Art Young, following the demise of the publication in 1912. Rebecca Zurier, Art for The Masses; a radical magazine and its graphics, 1911-1917 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) p. 35.

55 Zurier, p. 35.

changes, the magazine joined in the ranks of "the militant class struggle [as it] was more to the taste of the times than the cooperative stores, it was more to the tastes of the artists and poets."[56] This act aligned the publication in the spirit and tradition of French avant-garde graphic magazines such as *L'Assiete au Beurre, Le Rire,* and other radical publications[57] from the preceding century. *The Masses* under the editorial years of Max Eastman serves as an American manifestation of these in both its political agenda and ideology, as well as its views on art and aesthetics, yet it was unique among its own American contemporaries.

As noted, *The Masses* was a Socialist publication. Rather than preaching at their readers about the ills of society and capitalism, as Vlag had done, under Eastman, *Masses'* contributors , meant to "appeal ... to the masses" (both Socialist and non-Socialist) in a lighter tone and inject satire which had been scant or non-existent in the publications' early days, due in part to the early graphic style.[58] Rebecca Zurier notes that "the magazine also attempted to move away from its former editor and financier's desire to use it to promote a specific line of thought, and that this new emphasis on non doctrinaire Socialism was important to Eastman, at least at the outset of his editorship.[59] What the unsuspecting *Masses*

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56 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Living, p. 401.

57 *The Masses* was also influenced by Germany's *Jugend* and *Simplicissmus*, England's *Punch* and some of the socialist publications in Belgium. For a complete listing of *Masses* influences, see Rebecca Zurier, p. 35.

58 The tenor of the early *Masses* seemed condescending as every drawing was accompanied with a lengthy text explaining its inherent meaning and how it served Socialism. Heavily influenced by art nouveau, the majority of *Masses* drawings and illustrations under Vlag appeared sentimental and soft, depicting doe-eyed working class children. This style was mainly the result of Charles Winter and his wife Alice Beech Winter who contributed regularly to *The Masses* in its early days. Their images combined fine line with an almost mawkish quality that proved ineffectual in garnering support for the cause or the magazine. They were not the only artists contributing to the magazine, however their style was the most prevalent in *The Masses* early days.

59 Zurier, p. 36.

staff did not know, was that the creative outlet and free exchange of ideas they sought, which were the very reasons these artists and writers gathered together, would be what eventually became jeopardized by the propagandistic aims of its newly elected editor which would surface with World War I.

Max Eastman was the type of man that insisted humans could shape their environment and used his position as editor of *The Masses* to achieve his goals. Eastman's insistence reflects his propagandistic spirit which eventually surfaced and created a rift between he and fellow *Masses'* contributors. His romantic sentiments expressed through *The Masses* however, seem unfounded,[60] as he had recently quit a teaching position at Columbia University where he was formerly invited by John Dewey, with whom he also studied. Despite this pairing, Eastman's sentiments overpower his academic training.

Although Eastman was an academic and a writer, and literary editor of *The Masses*, he felt that the art contribution to the magazine expressed a "new insurgency with great effectiveness, possibly more so than the literary contributions, (in fact, he) considered art the most provocative and successful aspect of the monthly."[61] It served his propagandistic purpose and he wanted to unite it with propaganda.[62] This union took the form of editorial captions added to drawings after they were submitted, therefore changing the meaning or in

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60 Dewey invited Eastman to teach logic at Columbia University, though Eastman believes Dewey wanted him there more as a student of his than as a teacher. Eastman eventually completed enough coursework to obtain a Ph.D. in philosophy with a concentration in psychology but he never took the degree . He was satisfied in knowing he completed the requirements, he did not need the piece of paper to prove this task. Milton Cantor, The Divided Left: American Radicalism, 1900-1979. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) p. 47.

61 Louis Untermeyer, From Another World; The Autobiography of Louis Untermeyer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939) p. 60.

62 Incidentally, Eastman's realization of the power of imagery as a means for propaganda is not a revelation, it follows in the tradition of Daumier and other radical artists in Europe which were influential upon *The Masses*.

some cases simply giving meaning to the graphics when there was none intended. These captions served Eastman and the other hard-core socialists aims, however, they were considered propagandistic by those less politically engaged.

Founded as a cooperative, the majority of its artists and writers, felt *The Masses* should remain as such. Eastman along with contributing artist Art Young had a different aim in mind. Eastman saw art as the perfect means for propaganda and felt that it could and for that matter, should *communicate* a specific social message, whereas other contributors, namely, John Sloan disagreed.[63] This was the chief difference between Eastman and Sloan, though they both thought art in its visual form, should communicate life. Eastman felt that "the defining function of the artist was to cherish consciousness,"[64] and to "live life and communicate it."[65] He thought radicals and artists alike could find strength for their lives of action through the medium of art and when art reflected that life, "it's very being (would be) brought to consciousness...."[66] Eastman took this line of thinking too far in promulgating *Masses* art to the level of propaganda. What he did not consider however, was that many of *The Masses* radical artists fought for personal free expression, not the expression of a someone else's, i.e. Socialism's agenda.

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63 Though Sloan spoke favorably of Eastman, referring to him as a friend, he stated that Eastman's latter writings on *The Masses* reflected a false ideology to suit his "current" beliefs. Sloan was referring to Eastman's statements about fighting against "bohemianism" when the issue was drawn between propaganda and social satire. Sloan claims these statements were untrue as Eastman and Young wanted their way all the time, as they kept a steady hammering at the ideology of Socialism. John Sloan Trust, box 192, p. 2.

64 Eastman, Art and the Life of Action, p. 72.

65 Ibid., p. 76.

66 Ibid., p. 74.

Rather than propaganda, Sloan saw art as an ideograph, if an artist was not making ideas, he was not making art.[67] He thought art should communicate, as Eastman did, but the primary difference was that Eastman insisted on attaching political meaning to art work, whereas Sloan felt social satire was what made the magazine successful. "It had been our theme in starting the magazine and we wanted a hint of humor to remain... our position was out-voted, (however, as) the original policy was to represent the points of view of (all the) contributing editors, not the majority rule."[68] Sloan, who was an original member of the magazine before Eastman was elected editor, stated that the purpose of the magazine "was to educate through humor and to reach new groups...as soon as the magazine became strictly partisan, it lost its flavor."[69] After August of 1914, Sloan stopped making political cartoons and after 1915 he had "lost interest in the magazine as it was no longer a cooperative thing," and in 1916, he led a walk out of artists. [70] Sloan, along with the other artists that walked out with him did not believe the idea that art should serve the contemporary generation in the form of propaganda as their fellow editor Max Eastman advocated.

Not only did Eastman promote the amalgamation of art and politics, he had his own idea of what constituted 'beauty' and the role of the artist and it was in sharp contrast to the conventional and usually idealized beauty found in commercial publications. Within Eastman's theory on beauty, he included

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67 Helen Farr Sloan verbatim notes of John Sloan, box 192, p 2-3.

68 Ibid., p. 1.

69 Ibid., p. 1.

70 Sloan stated that even after he left in 1916, Eastman kept some of his drawings on hand and continued to publish them. Helen Farr Sloan, verbatim notes of John Sloan; lectures, 1931. *Illustration* box 192, p. 2.

"distinctly unbeautiful" and even "unpleasant objects," as life he asserts "has a thirst after experience which is very general and is willing to suffer a good deal of pain for the sake of tasting reality."[71] This philosophy was reflected in the pages of *The Masses* during Eastman's editorial reign, though not reflected in the pages of its 'pop' contemporaries.

According to Eastman in his text Journalism Versus Art , commercial artists were not depicting the life around them, but rather an idealized or conventionalized form. He felt that aside from the many 'incidental tasks' that artists may fulfill, their major and defining function was to live life and communicate it and if they lived small lives, their communications would be small and vice versa. Eastman associated communication with active forms and felt artists should draw from the world around them spontaneously, not from the stagnant forms found in their studio. Eastman thought these forms lacked communication and therefore were 'passionless.' This aesthetic theory (if it could be called that) was alien to popular publications; however, one newspaper critic recognized the merit of *The Masses* efforts as he considered them "noble and praiseworthy for an artist to uphold" and questioned that "if art has found inexhaustible inspiration in the visionary and impossible Christian idea of redemption, why can't it find suitable material in a logical, possible and human one?"[72] What he was suggesting was that art needed to turn to a new means and why not the communication of contemporary life. Eastman's sentiments, reflect those of John Sloan's former teacher and prophet Robert Henri, who exclaimed "Truth over beauty!" to Sloan and other students. This exclamation resulted in a

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71 Eastman, Journalism Versus Art, p. 9.

72 G.D. Gregorio, "Can't art serve a noble purpose?," *Vita*, New York, September 1, 1915. Kenneth Russell Chamberlain Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. Reel 291.

style that Sloan explained as realism, or rather the 'realization' of realism, and can be traced back beyond Henri, to Charles Baudelaire, who, like Henri, championed Honoré Daumier in answering his call for a "painter of modern life." Henri also served as the link between Daumier and *The Masses* via John Sloan, as expressed in a letter dated November 5, 1899 from Henri to Sloan:

> Are you interested in the work of Daumier? --I am sending you by mail in a paper a few drawings (lithographs) by him -- They came out in the "Charivari"...Daumier was a great painter as well as draughts man...there was one of his pictures "En troisieme Class" with wonderfully drawn and interpreted characters -- most masterfully painted (none of the modern so highly esteemed clever smartness - but great solid simple painting) It is a picture that ranks at least with the best of Millet's -- and if they were side by side I might say more---[73]

Sloan was reported to have accepted the prints and hung them in his studio and referred his future students to "look to Daumier" for style and inspiration.

If one concerned oneself with the communication of contemporary events, as did Daumier, Steinlen, and Forain, such as religion, politics, psychological or political truths, he or she would avoid the "sentimental aestheticism" seen in many of the works of Salon artists and the illustrations found in mainstream magazines of the day. Artists should concern themselves with everyday life and not rely on the forms and modes of the past to convey their message. Eastman quotes noted philosopher Clive Bell, who firmly believed that artists needed to have something to "get in a passion about," which was not found in posed studio pictures or still life's.[74] Eastman took Bell's sentiments a step further in claiming that Bell denounced "beauty" as an aim of art and maintained that "genius

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73 Robert Henri, Henri Correspondance to John Sloan. Beinecke Rare Book and Mss Collection, Yale University. Zurier also mentions the connection between Henri and Daumier and Sloan, p. 129, although she does not quote the entire passage I have.

74 Zurier hints at this connection, p. 154, although it is further outlined in Eastman's own text cited below.

worship" (of the previous era) was the infallible sign of an uncreative age.[75] It is significant that Eastman is in accord with Bell's major line of reasoning, as he was a prominent figure in early twentieth-century thought, however, Eastman, unlike Bell was not entirely convinced that one could define 'beauty' nor was he certain that it was even important to do so. What he did feel was important was for people to remember, refine and philosophize about the distinction between all the immediate values, which he felt have their certification in themselves and those mediate, or moral, or practical values which look to some ulterior[76] benefit to certify them.[77]

The "ulterior" benefit Eastman most likely was referring to was the commercial aims of mainstream publications. Editors' tastes, he felt were subject to economic interpretation which he asserted resulted in a publication with a little bit of everything that would sell.[78] Eastman believed that artists learned to draw pictures that would sell, hence they were usually banal and conservative. His diagnosis of published art in America was that it was "business art," as its only aim was to achieve profits. The aim of the money-making magazine he therefore asserted was "neither to give intense pleasures nor displeasures to a few, but to please everybody a little all the time."[79] This is evidenced in many of the magazines publishing art in America in the early twentieth-century including

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75 Eastman, Art and the Life of Action p. 74.

76 Contemporaneous spelling for 'alterior.' See page reference in following footnote.

77 Eastman, Journalism Versus Art, p. 8.

78 Eastman, "What is the Matter with Magazine Art," *Masses* January 1914, p 12. This article first appeared in the *Masses*, but eventually was expanded and formed into the text Journalism Versus Art.

79 Eastman, Journalism Versus Art, p. 23.

those I offer for comparison and contrast, namely *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal.*

As a publication, *The Masses* opposed its commercial contemporaries in its attitudes towards audience and financial dependency. While the goals of their more popular contemporaries, *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's*, were increased publication and public curiosity,[80] *The Masses* on the other hand "conciliated no one, not even its readers."[81] Ideologically and visually, *The Masses* stood alone in its whole-hearted rejection of the type of bunk allegedly perpetrated by mainstream publications. Therefore, *The Masses* philosophy serves as a foil against that of *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's* which were selected as the corollaries for dominant stylistic and political conventions in early twentieth-century America.

The Ladies' Home Journal and *Collier's* claims were in direct opposition to *The Masses* and this was due in part to their dependency on funding solicited to offset printing costs.[82] Concerned with their readership, *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's* were intentionally shaped as "'high class' magazines for people aspiring to respectability." [83] This in turn attracted merchants who wished to market their goods to this type of audience and readership. As a result, they often contained as many advertisements as they did stories and illustrations, with the advertisements invading the space of the publication breaking up articles mid-sentence. The monthly *Ladies' Home Journal* contained the most

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80 Edward Bok, The Americanization of Edward Bok; The Autobiography of a Dutch Boy Fifty Years After.... (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1921) p. 377.

81 Inside back cover, *Masses* 5 October 1913.

82 Zurier, p. 30.

83 Richard Ohmann, "Where Did Mass Culture Come From? The Case of Magazines," *Berkshire Review 16*, 1981 p. 91.

advertisements out of the three publications. This is probably why it could afford to sell at fifteen cents a copy, contrasted with *Collier's* weekly which at five-cents a copy added up to be the most expensive of the three at twenty-cents a month. In contrast, the ten-cent *Masses* monthly contained only two pages of advertisements from those who supported its cause, one on the inside front cover and the other on the inside back cover.[84] Economically independent from corporate sponsorship, *The Masses* relied solely on private funding solicited from wealthy patrons, which barely covered its printing costs. As a result, artists and writers of *The Masses* did not have to conciliate anyone and the publication was allowed the freedom to offer a forum of radical exchange for its artists and writers. This set it apart from its commercial contemporaries, whose style remained inoffensive in order to attract the largest number of readers. *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal's* bland conservatism was the marked result of a corporate dependency which the radical *Masses* did not share. *The Masses* promised to be a publication "for the release of socially conscious anti-capitalist literary and artistic expressions for which there was hardly any demand by the well printed newsstand variety of magazine."[85] This is reflected in the number of subscriptions it received in contrast with its commercial contemporaries. Though no records of circulation for *The Masses* remain, it is estimated that at its peak, it claimed 40,000 subscribers, compared to the nearly two million subscribers to The *Ladies' Home Journal* and presumably a similar number for *Collier's*.[86]

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84 Most of the advertisements appearing in *The Masses* were those advertising books and literature. Among them were Margaret Sanger's pamphlets on birth-control, Carl Jung's book, Psychology of the Unconscious, socialist anti-war publications and Russian experimental theatre productions.

85 Art Young, Art Young: His Life and Times, (New York: Sheridan House, 1939) p. 271.

86 Phillips Wyman, Magazine Circulation: An Outline of Methods and Meanings, (New York: McCall Company, 1936) p. 6.

Phillips Wyman of *McCall's* magazine notes that "the larger the circulation of a magazine, the more representative is the reader group of people in general and the more diverse is the range of buying habits, the publication therefore must cater to these buying habits just like the producer of any other product."[87] *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* fulfilled Wyman's expectations. They nurtured the habits of a "moneyed readership," to use Richard Ohmann's term, as evidence of a break down of occupations for newsstand buyers. General executives, professionals, managers and outside salespeople comprised the nearly seventy percent of magazine consumers of general weeklies like *Collier's* and women's magazines such as *The Ladies' Home Journal*, followed by clerical workers, laborers and the unemployed making up the remaining thirty percent.[88] Such magazines therefore became a commodity, marketed to the masses, in direct contrast to *The Masses*, which really did not represent the masses at all.

As both *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* were extremely commercial, depending on the financial backing and solicited advertisements of big business to keep themselves in print, they also propagated the sentiments of the mainstream culture and the government in their visual representations. *The Masses* recognized its contemporaries' plight, yet did not concede to the pressures or the format of their competition. In fact, on the relatively young cultural soil of America, the visual representation and artistic philosophy of *The Masses* artists' was considered alien to the established aesthetic concepts of the time. Not only was their style alien, but the way in which they utilized the graphic medium was also against the slick styles of their contemporaries.

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87 Ibid., p. 22.

88 For the specific figures and complete table on occupations of newsstand buyers, see the above cited, (Wyman) p. 36.

Prints and the graphic medium historically hold deeply set social implications, even the very language of printmaking is indicative of its intended social nature; the "acid" and "bite," in an etching, the "cut" in a wood block all make up part of the language of attack.[89] Despite the use of the graphic medium by the other two publications I am comparing, *Masses' artists* utilized this medium to assert their message of individuality and freedom directly assaulting the 'artificiality' of commercial art.[90] They disdained their French and American Academy predecessors whose highly posed pictures seemed stagnant and passionless, yet they also could not relate to the abstraction of the Modernists who had invaded New York via the Salon des Independants in 1908 followed by those exhibiting at the Armory Show of 1913. *The Masses* style, like their French avant-garde precursors, Honoré Daumier, Théophile Steinlen and Jean-Louis Forain tends more toward what the French call naturalism.

Masses artists were constantly striving to achieve this naturalist style through their technical reproductive process. They wanted to achieve the look of the active coarse crayon technique of Daumier, Steinlen and Forain, yet unlike the French, who eventually refined the techniques of Gillotage and zincograph[91] for this purpose, American printers still found it easier to work from pen-and-ink drawings.[92] The photo-engraving or line cut which was widely used in America in the 1880's allowed artists to work in pen-and-ink among other mediums such

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89 Shikes, p. xxiv.

90 Zurier, p. 139.

91 Gillotage is a type of mechanical photography for reproducing line drawings and zincograph is a method of printing from zinc plates smilar to lithography, the drawing or decoration is made on the plate, processed and printed, sometimes a relief plate is made by etching a zinc plate. Encyclopaedia of the Arts, eds. D. Runes and H. Schrickel (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946)

92 The information on *The Masses* print and reproductive processes is largely drawn from Rebecca Zurier, p. 132.

as crayon and charcoal on a variety of textured papers. Following the initial drawings, they were then photographed and the negatives printed on chemically treated light-sensitive zinc or copper plates. The plate could then be etched in acid and show only the artists' original lines. The medium offered great freedom and was used by commercial illustrators like Charles Dana Gibson, however, it was not used to mimic the coarseness of Daumier's line. The half-tone engraving was another process developed around the same time as the photo-engraving and line cut. It allowed the reproduction of a full range of grays which were transmitted into tiny black dots upon photographing the image onto a metal plate through a finely cross-lined screen. While this technique achieved a full range of tones, it was costly and worked better for paintings rather than crayon drawings, because as Zurier asserts, "the paper on which the sketch was made showed up as a gray background, making the lines appear muddy and indistinct.[93] John Sloan refined the zinc plate process as recalled in *The Masses* experiments with medium as he noted in his personal notebooks housed in the Delaware Art Museum:

> *Masses* illustrators could not afford to spend money on half-tone cuts, so they experimented with graphic textures that could be reproduced by linecut, which was achieved in placing thin paper over canvas or a pebbly surface and combined with pen work. This procedure made for more spontaneous variety of texture than normally achieved with Benday mechanical textures[94]

It also allowed the images to assume a more autographic quality. In the same section of his notebook, John Sloan credits Steinlen for inventing this scheme of placing paper over a textured surface, which he adopted after he stopped

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93 Zurier, p. 132.

94 Helen Farr Sloan verbatim notes of John Sloan, box 192, p. 2-3.

drawing directly on the lithograph stone for his illustrations in French magazines.[95]

John Sloan not only concerned himself with the technical processes' of *The Masses'* style, line was very important to he and other *Masses'* illustrators. Sloan said that it was the line rather than the literal symbol that was important and that "line significance is a fundamental necessity."[96] He continued, "we cut loose from a sort of tight type of illustration current at the time... instead of depending on posed models we drew with more freedom, imagination, (and) emotional intent."[97] This is invoked in the spontaneity of line and quick sketch-like quality of illustrations found in *The Masses* in contrast to some of the calculated fine lines and the more mechanical appearance of the images found in their mainstream contemporaries. The *Masses* imagery suggests the spontaneity in which it was executed and again links it with its French graphic precursors.[98] *Masses'* artists "discerned the significance of Daumier and his fellow caricaturists who in truly depicting their own time, broke through romantic and personal barriers of artistic isolation."[99] They 'broke through' because their drawings exuded an immediacy not found in their more commercial contemporaries. As Rebecca Zurier has observed, the immediacy this technique imbued, broke down traditional barriers between the artist and viewer.[100] There was a certain power

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95 Ibid., p. 2-3.

96 Ibid., p. 2.

97 Ibid., p. 2-3.

98 It is significant to note than the majority of *Masses* artists were formerly newspaper illustrators and therefore trained in capturing the moment, or rather the essence of their subject. This may explain their penchant for the style of Steinlan, Forain and Daumier.

99 Francine Tyler, "The Impact of Daumier's Graphics on American Artists: c.1863-1923 "*Print Review* 11, 1980, p. 109.

100 Zurier, p. 138.

in the rough images this technique produced as they challenged our perceptions of reality and although they were somewhat realist in style they pushed the boundaries of our expectations of realism.

The term realism as roughly applied to the style of *The Masses'* artists, is not to denote the photographic realism often seen in popular publications of their day. *The Masses,* which, in (some of) its utter rawness, allowed the artists' direct feelings to come through in their work, unlike illustrations found in most mainstream magazines including those I am comparing. Max Eastman felt the imagery found in these types of publications contained mechanical precision as a result of their commercial nature. Eastman likened this type of magazine artist to a reproducing machine, one who could reproduce anything, "except (the) human perception"[101] exposed on *The Masses* pages. Artists in the early twentieth-century strove for likeness. Eastman felt that gave people satisfaction. Many of *The Masses* artists drew a more personal perception of their subjects and this is what enraged most of the critics at the time when they viewed sketchy figures with "unfinished" hands or feet, or disproportionate limbs in relation to the main body as evidenced in this image by Art Young (Figure 4). Eastman commented upon this phenomenon professing "it (was) a progress away from *knowledge about* things toward *experience of things,* (original emphasis) away from abstraction toward concrete perception."[102] *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's* magazine did not go much beyond mere likeness of images for recognition, they were safe, commercially acceptable, deemed artistic and au currant among other popular magazines.

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101 Eastman, Journalism Versus Art, p. 26.

102 Ibid., p. 31.

FIGURE 4 "I' gorry, I'm tired..." ; Art Young for *The Masses*

Artists submitting to these commercial magazines and other such publications, reflected their editors' needs and not their own, as markets tend to impose a certain uniformity of presentation on objects and the choice of medium was therefore considerably influenced by market expectations. Invariably, this aspect played a major part in the resulting style of graphics in *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's* magazines. Studies prove that the graphics in commercial magazines were aimed at consumers and thus they employed whatever tactics were necessary to induce consumerism, such as idealized images and color. As a result, *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* ran frequent color drawings, most of which were reproductions of paintings or advertisements, inevitably it was a material good they wanted to sell not a social message. The black-and-white images *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* did contain, lacked the strong linearity and high contrast of black against white of those images found in *The Masses*. In comparison, it made those images in *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* seem negligible.

Thus far, I have established that *The Masses* ideological and stylistic transplantation from their European contemporaries was in marked contrast to their popular American counterparts. The theoretical discourse on ideas and ideologies in support of *The Masses* continuance of an avant-garde, will be supplanted with a visual analysis of the three magazines respective imagery. All three publications were oversized with color covers, yet this is where their similarity ends. On the basis of type face, style and subject matter, a study of three respective covers from 1916 is indicative of their different contents and ideologies. *The Ladies' Home Journal,* with its "thin" scripted lettering, muted colors and depiction of a 'career girl' dreaming of a man reflects its contents of idealized women, and romance stories, (Figure 5) whereas the stockier

FIGURE 5 *Ladies' Home Journal* Cover, 1916

block-print of *Collier's* with its subheading 'The National Weekly' demonstrates firm, solid values and the publisher's belief in its ability to speak for the nation (Figure 6). This perception is emphasized by the cover image of a strong soldier-like youth breaking out of the picture plane, quite appropriate during this time of uncertainty regarding this country's involvement in World War I. *The Masses* cover of June 1916, however, through its unique possibly hand-lettered type-face of thick and thin letters in varying shapes and sizes, represents the diversity of its contributors (Figure 7). Its subject depicts a grimacing one-eyed soldier broken by battle, with an oversized sling emphasizing the appendage that most likely held a weapon responsible for killing. *The Masses* cover shows the reality of war and of life in the revolutionary style of Francisco Goya's Execution, Third of May, 1808, while the other two publications, like those images of Goya's predecessor Jacques Louis David, show the idealized or exalted.

While a comparison of the style and techniques of these three respective publications may seem evident in a cover study alone, their differences become more apparent in assessing the subjects and thematic material within which they dealt. I will concentrate on the artistic contributions of *Masses' artists*, Robert Minor (1884-1952) and Art Young, (1866-1943) as well as feminist artist Cornelia Barns, (1888-1941) John Sloan (1871-1951) and a young Stuart Davis (1894-1964) to prove that artistic radicalism within *The Masses* was central from the start. [103] The artistic submissions chosen from *The Masses* commercial contemporaries have been selected on the basis of commonalty of style as reflective of the subject matter. Consistently, the illustrations from *The Masses*, *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, essential for inclusion in this study, share a triad of broad interests:

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103 Robert M. Crunden, Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920 (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982) p. 110.

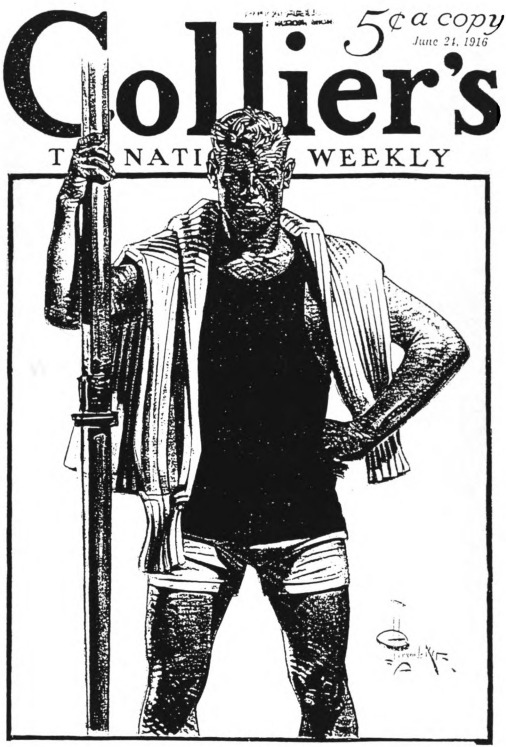

FIGURE 6 *Collier's* Cover, 1916

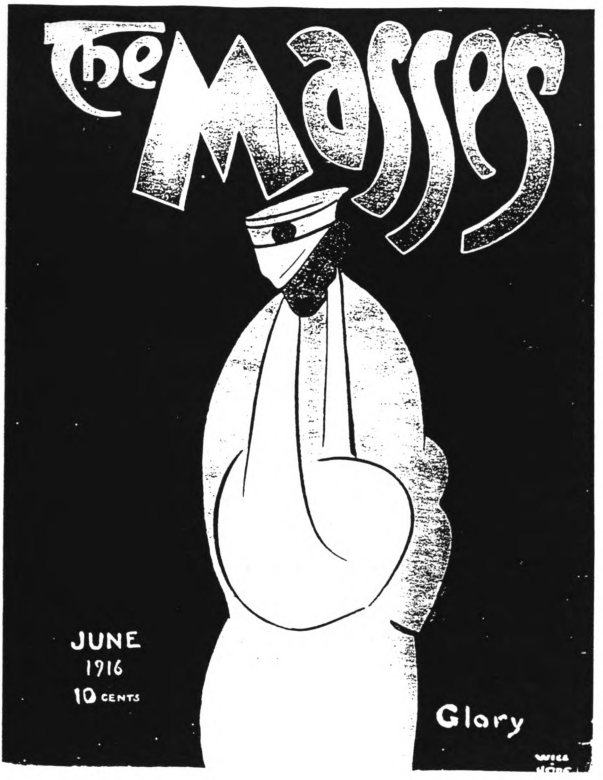

FIGURE 7 *Masses'* Cover, 1916

women, other minorities, and a combination of images representing church and state. These works also reflect changes in the way their creators perceived themselves, (specifically *Masses*' artists) as their social and professional roles and stylistic and formal concerns evolved.[104]

One example of this difference in the treatment of the subject of women among the three graphic magazine is the idealization of women and the portrayal of women as passive, beautiful, fragile creatures, which was a direct remnant of the nineteenth century Victorian cult of domesticity as still evidenced in early twentieth-century magazines. Publications like *Collier's* and especially *The Ladies' Home Journal* continued this tradition and though one might find an occasional 'suffrage' article, "those" women were usually depicted as 'hags' or less than ideal, as this is how society viewed women who stepped out of their sphere.

Typically, the commercial magazines played out to women as consumers, while "educating" them in the ways of the world. Jeanette Eaton, offers her insightful response to women's magazines in a contemporaneous article she wrote for*The Masses*:

> ...they have glorified the work-basket and the egg-beater and have infinitely stretched women's belief in the miracles which may be wrought with them.... [These magazines have taught women] ...the right way to puff her hair, care for her baby and why she should win her daughter's confidence. [Aside from teaching women these valuable skills, these types of publications offered a] great service for America today...it is a service to men, a fundamental service to the established order. [The existence of traditional women's magazines propagating the myth of 'women's sphere existing in her home' were viewed by many emancipated

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104 In contrast to contemporary belief, Sloan (or other *Masses* illustrators) never pitied the subjects they drew, or idealized them or sought to propagandize about poverty. Sloan recalls that he "felt with them, but didn't think for them...Sympathy for the people, I am all for that, but not ideology." John Sloan Trust, *Illustration*, box 192.

> women as not only man's best friend, but as] ...the final hope of our chivalric civilization. [105]

In response to this, *The Masses* ran complete editions dedicated to women's issues which were equally charged with word and picture as the back cover of the November 1915 Women's Citizenship number reflects. In it, Kenneth Russell Chamberlain (1891-1984) responds to the myth about women and their supposed sphere existing only in the home. His picture is of a spotlight on the earth set against the cosmic backdrop of the solar system with a caption reading 'Women's Sphere..." Regardless of *The Masses* efforts, the social relationship between the sexes was continually being 'constructed' via forms of visual imagery more widely disseminated than their own; art, film, newspapers, cartoons and advertisements. "Construct(ed), because sexual identification is neither biologically determined nor fixed, but rather made and remade under historical circumstances."[106] One cannot expect to see the visual representation or emancipation of women during a time in which that was not expected. John Stuart Mill writes in the end of the nineteenth century, that "we accept whatever *is* as natural,"[107] if women were expected to appear as the idealized Victorian model, corseted and demure, then that is expected. In other words, "the thing that determines what we grow up to be is the natural expectations of those around us,...If society expects a girl to become a fully developed, active and intelligent individual, she will probably do it...likewise, if society expects her to remain a doll-baby all her life, she will make a noble effort to do that..." of course

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105 Jeannette Eaton, "The Woman's Magazine," *Masses*, November 1915, p. 19.

106 Ellen Wiley Todd, The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) p. 26.

107 John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women" (1869) in Three Essays by John Stuart Mill, World's Classics Series, London, 1966, p 441, as cited in Linda Nochlin's article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News* January 1971, p. 22.

there are hereditary limitations, "but the responsibility of the main trend of the result is with the social conscience."[108]

An illustration by W.B. King for *The Ladies' Home Journal* affirms the social conscience of the era and it appears as if women were relegated to "doll-babies" (Figure 8). King's illustration depicts a women directly out of the Beaux Arts tradition from France. She appears as an object, corseted and demure in her ruffled gown and bonnet, seated erectly on her pedestal. The two men in the image cast their gaze as if upon an objet d'art. This depiction of women was standard in commercial magazines and was selected because it represents the style and in a sense, the consciousness of illustrators during that period. *The Masses* however, contradicts this supposed consciousness, for during the same time span as the revered "Gibson Girl," John Sloan's drawing of Adam and Eve depict the couple of original sin, only in reversed roles. Eve appears ungainly and disheveled and a giant compared to Adam. She is seen in a series of depiction's washing him and hunting and protecting him from danger (Figure 9).

Cornelia Barns was another graphic illustrator for *The Masses*, whose body of work concentrating on the depiction of women challenged mainstream conventions. Although she never achieved the fame that Sloan and the others did, Carl Zigrosser, foremost authority on prints in the early twentieth century whose scholarship spans six centuries of the history of prints, recognized her talent, and includes her in the circle of Peggy Bacon, Mabel Dwight, and Caroline Durieux.[109] Her scenes rely on humor, not merely as an element of a whole, in her illustrations, humor predominates. Artists during this time usually

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108 Maurice Becker Papers, (regular artistic contributor to *The Masses*)Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., reel 128, frame taken from November 1915 issue of *Masses*, p. 8.

109 Zigrosser, box 192, p. 1.

FIGURE 8 "Untitled" ; W.B. King for *The Ladies' Home Journal*

FIGURE 9 "Adam and Eve, The True Story...." ; John Sloan for *The Masses*

misspent their time drawing pictures of the "follies, fashions and foibles of the immature American female - until Barns came along."[110] Barns set down her illustrations as a warning to women and men alike. The words of a fellow *Masses* contributor attest to her sentiments stating that she viewed the young American male as "callow, sallow, and silly." In this illustration she depicts an upper middle-class couple as noted by their attire in a small rowboat that appears barely afloat (Figure 10). The woman sits at the stern of the boat, her end nearly submerged, while her thin, weak mate struggles to keep the boat above water level with two oars. Behind him, she looks directly at another boat apparently in no danger and filled with a family whose stocky man returns her glance with a tilt of his cigar. Her thin mate knowing he has "failed her test," quips "Honestly, Julia, Which Do You Prefer - Brain or Brawn?"[111] In direct contrast, an illustration selected from *The Ladies' Home Journal* depicts how women were viewed by mainstream America. Unlike Barns portrayal of Julia's weak mate, the man in Arthur William Brown's illustration overpowers the female, who appears to shrink under his intense stare and firm grip (Figure 11). Her eyes and frail stature affirm his power. Countless other comparisons could be made between the art depicted in *The Masses* as opposed to that in *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, yet one need go no further than the cover of these magazines. In the former, the "dreamy-eyed" woman decked out in the latest attire clutches her purse, propagating the stereotype of woman as consumer (Figure 12), while in the latter, the coifed woman with the "far-away look" is consumed with the opposite sex (Figure 13). In sharp contrast to these "pretty-girl" cover illustrations, Stuart Davis drew a picture for *The Masses* of two working women

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110 Edmond McKenna, "Art and Humor," *Masses* 6 1915, p. 11.

111 Cornelia Barns, *Masses* 5 Sept 1914, p. 9.

FIGURE 10 "Honestly Julia,....?" ; Cornelia Barns for *The Masses*

FIGURE 11 "Untitled" ; Arthur W. Brown for *The Ladies' Home Journal*

FIGURE 12 *Collier's* Cover, depicting women

FIGURE 13 *The Ladies Home Journal* Cover, depicting women

from Hoboken who challenge the conventions of beauty standard to that era with their intense penetrating eyes unlike the far off look of those women usually portrayed by commercial magazines (Figure 14). Davis acknowledges their surprise in the added caption, "Gee Mag, Think of Us Bein' on a Magazine Cover!" which further emphasizes Davis' awareness of breaking tradition. Davis was not the only one aware he did something different, his cover caught the attention of one reviewer for the New York Globe:

> The cover...shows two girls' heads, not Gibson girls, nor Howard Chandler Christy girls, but girls from over Eighth avenue way....Most cover designs don't mean anything. But this one does.[112]

The artists of *The Masses* were directly responding to their need for free and independent expression and for the realistic depiction instead of the idealistic imagery of their more capitalist contemporaries.

Another subject which set *The Masses* apart from their contemporaries was in their depiction of minorities other than women, both foreign and domestic. Traditionally, if *Collier's* or *The Ladies' Home Journal* depicted these groups at all, they appeared oppressed, heads hung low and in the case of immigrants, looking every bit the gypsy as their stereotype insisted (Figure 15). Another popular motif in depicting minorities was to exoticize their heritage as the Academy painters had done in Europe. Again, social circumstances must be taken into consideration as to what was expected, yet *Masses* artists were approaching these subjects in a different way.

Masses artists like Stuart Davis and John Sloan represented the minorities they depicted as emancipated. On the outset, their style is often viewed as extremely stereotypical crossing over into the derogatory. Yet through humor,

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112 Book of the Week section, *New York Globe*, May 24, 1913, as found in Stuart Davis Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., reel N584, frame 30.

FIGURE 14 "Gee, Mag...." Stuart Davis for *The Masses*

FIGURE 15 "Gypsies" ; as appeared in *Collier's*

that unique device in which *The Masses* artists were known, they surpass their contemporaries through style and wit. In Davis' illustration he depicts the stereotypical 'big black mammy' as evidenced in countless advertisements such as Aunt Jemima found in commercial publications (Figure 16). Davis makes the woman larger than life emphasizing her stereotypical attributes. In a contemporaneous commentary on Davis' style in depicting African Americans, the critic remarks that "Davis draws the 'Negro' vigorous and graphic and human and lovable, he draws him just as he is...It is a great joke on the American people, but it is not to laugh ...There is an incongruous aspect to Davis' work...."[113] Eastman also came to Davis' defense in claiming that he "portrays the colored people he sees with exactly the same cruelty of truth with which he portrays the whites."[114] Much like Davis, John Sloan's portrayal of the African American also played upon their stereotypical representation. However, there is a subtle twist to this stereotype in his illustration entitled "Race Superiority" (Figure 17). Rebecca Zurier notes that Sloan attacks white racism while incorporating its own racial stereotypes.[115] In this drawing, Sloan shows a care-free (grinning) black boy sitting on a fence eating watermelon, while a thin white family passes by noses in the air, on its way to factory jobs. Clearly, Zurier admits, the black child is portrayed as superior in vigor and happiness to his white counterparts. Though Sloan and Davis' images may seem to play on stereotypes, their material is drawn from real life, from the streets and back alleys of Greenwich Village. Unlike their commercial contemporaries, Sloan and Davis embrace issues their contemporaries depict safely, or ignore all together.

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113 McKenna, p. 11.

114 Zurier, p. 16.

115 Ibid., p. 17.

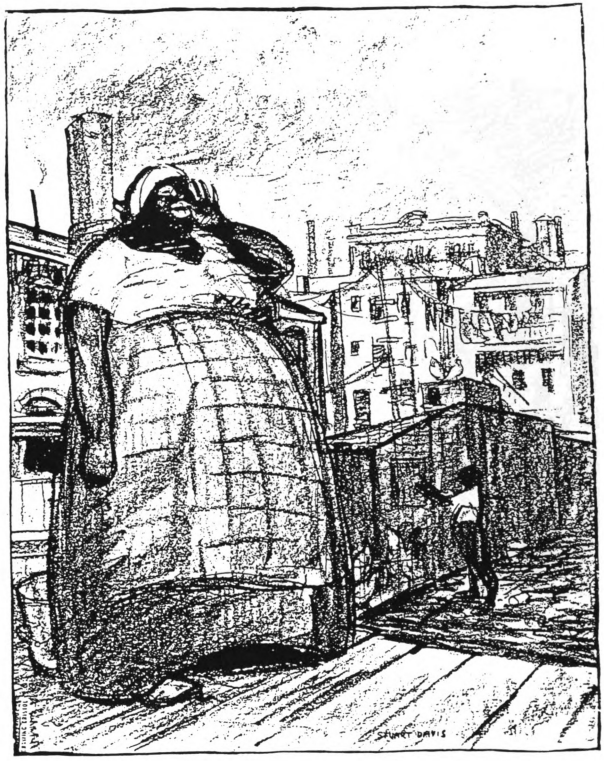

FIGURE 16 "Untitled" (Shouting Woman) ; Stuart Davis for *The Masses*

FIGURE 17 "Race Superiority" ; John Sloan for *The Masses*

"Professors think these things should be harmonizing, modifying and blending, that is art, they say...(if so) Davis [and Sloan] make [their] pictures out of what the artist ignores."[116] In ignoring a risky subject altogether, like emancipated women and minorities, one does not run the risk of public dissent, yet that is what *The Masses* thrived upon. If one is going to "chance" running pictures of a risky subject matter, the depiction most likely will be a stereotyped preconceived notion of that particular subject. An example of this is found upon a search for the representation of African Americans in *Collier's* and The *Ladies' Home Journal* during the same time span as *The Masses* run (1911-1917). Not only is their representation scant, when they were depicted at all, both *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* portray them as primitive and tribal, or subservient as evidenced in their many advertisements. This type of representation is aptly seen in an April, 1915 edition of *Collier's*, in an illustration accompanying an article entitled "The Stranger Who Walked by Night" (Figure 18). Aside from these stereotyped illustrations depicting African Americans, both publications included photographs of African tribes to their supposedly primitive origins.

Once again, "printing what was too naked or true for a money-making press,"[117] the artists and writers of *The Masses* continued to depict subjects that their contemporaries would not attempt, or if so, would only attempt with a much more conservative slant. "Whether the artists (of *The Masses*) realized it or not, they were creating pictures almost without precedent in American visual culture."[118] In their depiction of the political tenor of the time, *Masses* artists and writers tried to inform the American public about the atrocities of war

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116 McKenna, p. 11.

117 Extracted from *The Masses'* masthead, as penned by John Reed in 1913.

118 Zurier, p. 153.

FIGURE 18 "The Stranger Who Walked by Night" ; as appeared in *Collier's*

and the realities the government hid. *The Masses* staff, opposed the war, and did everything it could to expose its evils. In an article "Concerning War," Max Eastman begins, "War is beautiful...it is most beautiful to the savage who is naked of moral or intellectual trammels and to whom the organic shock of bloodshed is not sickening."[119] The pictorial representation of these sentiments about war are aptly reflected in an illustration by Robert Minor entitled "The Perfect Soldier," which depicts a half-naked headless brute, muscles bulging off its massive frame (Figure 19). "Perfect," because it could not think and because it could not think it could kill and carry out its mission as a machine does, without any sort of consciousness. With arms folded, this complacent killing machine epitomized what *The Masses* fought against and that was social or political organizations or practices. In contrast, *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* gave a different message, these magazines exalted the soldier to hero-like status, typically represented in this illustration found in *Collier's* magazine, although similar illustrations were represented in other mainstream publications (Figure 20). *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* wholeheartedly supported their country via their own brand of bombastic articles and illustrations (Figure's 21-22). They were nationalistic to the core yet fell into what Clive Bell considered "sentimental aestheticism."[120] Though they were depicting war scenes, mostly through photographs, their drawings elevated the soldier to god-like status, even though these soldiers were going against their Holy Father's Commandments. In a passionate drawing by *Masses* artist George Bellows, he comments on the irony of this situation (Figure 23). In a dank cell, Bellows' shackled figure hangs his

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119 Max Eastman, "Concerning War," article from *The Masses* as found in Maurice Becker Papers, reel 128.

120 Eastman, Art and The Life of Action p. 74.

FIGURE 19 "The Perfect Soldier" ; Robert Minor for *The Masses*

FIGURE 20 *Collier's*; Images of War; general

FIGURE 21 *Collier's*; Images of War

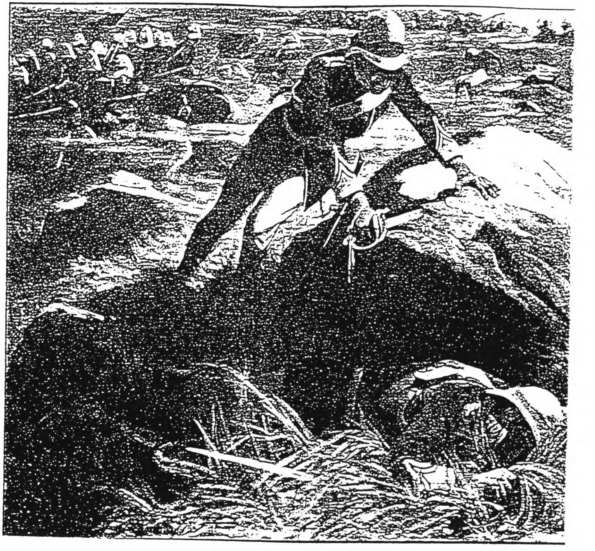

FIGURE 22 *The Ladies' Home Journal*; Images of War

THIS man subjected himself to imprisonment and probably to being shot or hanged

THE prisoner used language tending to discourage men from enlisting in the United States Army

IT is proven and indeed admitted that among his incendiary statements were—

THOU shalt not kill

and

BLESSED are the peacemakers

FIGURE 23 "This man subjected himself...." ; George Bellows for *The Masses*

head low, while he awaits judgment. Bellows alludes to the Christ figure in placing his own figure in the pose of the crucified Christ as he hung nailed to the cross, Bellows furthers this symbolism in placing an elliptical-shaped brick which can be read as a halo directly above the figure's head. This Christ-like imagery was common among *Masses'* artists and can be seen in the work of several other contributors,[121] as can other subjects which were eventually deemed "treasonable" by the United States Post Office upon the passing of the Espionage Act in June of 1917.[122]

Before the onslaught of World War I, *The Masses* enjoyed the freedom to create in its own style and language with little or no retribution, yet with America's entrance into the war, the romanticism America enjoyed was forever vanquished. The war not only served to bring untimely death to thousands of young American soldiers, but to *The Masses* itself. *The Masses* was never a "harmful" publication as it did not incite or support violence or total overthrow of the church and state. Yet, during World War I, America tightened the system and formed the Espionage Act of 1917, under which *Masses* artists eventually were tried for their alleged anti-American sentiment and the magazine was suppressed, thereby forcing an end to the ideological flexibility of *The Masses* period.[123]*The Masses* artists pushed the extremes of established culture and played upon the antiquated beliefs of mainstream America which they considered dogmatic. It was precisely this avowed freedom from dogma that

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121 See specifically the works of Boardman Robinson, Maurice Becker and Robert Minor.

122 Zurier, p. 59.

123 Richard Fitzgerald, Art and Politics: Cartoonists of The Masses and Liberator, (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1973) p. 535.

allowed *The Masses* to separate itself from its graphic contemporaries'*Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal.* [124]

From the outset, these three publications demonstrate their apparent differences in a graphic study alone, although when combined with *The Masses* history of radical politics in addition to their radical style, it is evident that the views expressed within this publication were unquestionably those of the minority. Therefore, its commercial contemporaries in the United States provided *The Masses* an impetus for revolution and the environment necessary for the existence of an avant-garde which can be seen as a continuance of that phenomenon transplanted from France.[125]

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124 Eastman is specifically referring to the dogma surrounding the struggle for racial equality and women's rights, intelligent sex relations as well as birth and population control, Enjoyment of Living, p. 419.

125 Though *The Masses* was put to rest, the issues and art it embodied were not dead. It found new life in *The Liberator* (1918-1924) which was Max Eastman's attempt at providing a similar forum of radical exchange after *The Masses* was suppressed. Art Young also formed *Good Morning* and eventually in 1926, even *The Masses* was re-formed under the name *The New Masses* (1926-44) Communism was replacing Socialism in the pages of these reformist magazines as they dealt with the problems of daily life in relation to social change. See Zurier for complete history or Milton W. Brown, American Painting From the Armory Show to the Depression, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955)

Chapter 3

The History of Art and The Avant-Garde

"A thing that is finished is dead..."

Robert Henri 1910

The history of modern art is the history of its avant-garde according to Howard Fox, as noted in the beginning of this study. The caveat for my intended use of the term avant-garde will now be relinquished as it is necessary to turn once again to the theory of the avant-garde to bring this study back into form. It is important to note that the avant-garde is not and more importantly was not a homogeneous entity. The concept or notion of an avant-garde was different during the early twentieth-century than it is today and anyone attempting to understand the avant-garde must account for certain historical considerations. That is why a historico-philosophical analysis of the situation is necessary to bring to light what often times is only labeled avant-garde *a posteriori.*

A relevant example is found in the contemporaneous criticism of the Armory Show in 1913. Art historians' often reflect that the Armory Show was the turning point for art from recognizable or tangible subject matter to non-objective subject matter and consider it to be one of the most influential exhibitions in the history of modern art aside from the *Salon des Independants* in 1908. However, contemporaneous criticism of the Armory Show assumes a different tone. One newspaper columnist whose article appeared in *The International Studio* in April 1913, less than one month after the Armory Show closed,[126] considered the show

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126 The Armory Show ran from February 17 to March 15, 1913, and was held in New York at the Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory. Brown, p. 47.

to be a house of primitive art and that the style was only an 'evolution' from cave art and not anything revolutionary at all:

> The principle upon which this seemingly radical and ultra-modern work is founded is one of the oldest existent esthetic principles, one which, to the best of our knowledge, has been practiced since the Paleolithic age, some fifty thousand years ago. It is, in sum, the principle of simplification.[127]

Still other critics relegated the art exhibited at the Armory Show and the new trends in general to something of a freak occurrence tending on madness:

> Bizarre effects attract the eye - but may be absolutely lacking in artistic quality. Frequently they do not even have the semblance of anything in nature or sane imagination but are the expression of an assumed madness - an unintelligent reaching out for novelty.[128]

Although there were some positive reactions to the art exhibited at the Armory Show, the general consensus among the mainstream was negative.[129] Artistic taste today has swung full circle since the days of the early twentieth-century when most Americans preferred the realistic style of the Hudson River School and later, gradually accepted the Impressionist style. The artists whose styles were considered "mad" are the same artists that are more well known than their realist contemporaries today. This comparison of the concept or notion of an avant-garde and the contemporaneous criticism of some of the artists that it comprises is relevent because a similar situation occurred for artists of *The*

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127 Christian Brinton, "Evolution Not Revolution in Art," *The International Studio*, (Vol 49, April 1913) p. 28.

128 Alexander M. Hudnut, "Tendencies of Modern Art," *The International Studio*, (Vol 64, June 1918) p. 118.

129 A positive reaction to the Armory Show, despite its initial negative slant can be found in the article by Brinton quoted above in *The International Studio*. It admits "That (what) we as a nation above all else need is a more robust and decisive racial consciousness in matters artistic. And it is this lesson that the current exhibition despite the incidental crudity and incoherence of its presentation, manifestly inculcates." See Brinton, p. 35. Other sources for contemporarneous criticism can be found in "Post Impressionism Arrived," *The Literary Digest*, (March 1, 1913) and "The Mob as Art Critic, *The Literary Digest*, (Vol 46 March 29, 1913) pp. 708-9.

Masses. These artists did not receive credit for their revolutionary graphic style during the reign of the magazine, and are not considered avant-garde among art historians today. Rebecca Zurier, the scholar who has written the most comprehensive study of *The Masses* to date, states that "*The Masses* presented an art that was contemporary but hardly modern - radical, perhaps, but not avant-garde."[130] Vis à vis fine art in the early twentieth century, Zurier is correct, however among *The Masses* graphic contemporaries the publication and its graphics could be considered avant-garde.

Throughout the body of this work the avant-garde possesses other characteristics aside from the two tenets of radical style and radical politics previously discussed, which contributing artists to *The Masses* magazine upheld. These characteristics include the program of change which is inherent in any avant-garde, and the American cult of youth of the early twentieth century, both discussed by Antonio Poggioli in his text The Theory of the Avant-Garde.

The program of change Poggioli and other scholars - namely Robert Hughes and Howard Fox referred to, allowed the avant-garde to exist in America. For Hughes, he views the phenomena of the avant-garde as a pendulum, swinging from one change to the next stating the 'isms' of art were becoming the 'wasms.'[131] While Fox asserts that this program is no longer applicable as it has become change-for-change sake and that (some people he believes, feel that) "art is sliding into a dismal philistinism unworthy of the heroic struggles of modernism... and that the avant-garde position, to challenge and provoke, has been corrupted by an omnivorous audience too eager for novelty..."[132] Poggioli contends that this constant swing of new replacing old

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130 Zurier, p. 161.

131 Hughes, p. 365.

creates a 'father-son' antithesis, which gives rise to an "....aesthetic radicalism often expresse[d] by opposing that special category of society called the old generation, the generation of the fathers."[133] These are among countless examples that arise in art criticism to support this statement of the cyclical nature of the avant-garde and its need for individuality and therefore progress.

Individuality and progress in relation to the members of *The Masses* magazine are evidenced in Floyd Dell's sentiments quoted earlier in chapter two, which offer one example of the young artists of his generation wanting to claim a 'lot of their own.' [134] These young radical artists wanted to separate themselves from the antiquated beliefs held by the majority of those of the previous generation. Similar views were also expressed by other members of *The Masses* as noted in a letter Adolph Dehn wrote to his mother in 1917:

> If one is not disgusted at things he does not progress - dissatisfaction makes one strive harder - forces one to bigger things.[135]

Masses' artists were disgusted with their surroundings and became emotionally involved with individuals who preached progressive action rather than regressive action as noted by the topics they addressed and the company they kept in contradistinction to their mainstream contemporaries.

This spirit of revolt as a by-product of progress aligns *The Masses* with the European avant-garde. The spirit was coincidentally expressed during the optimistic youth of many contributors which they later realized and 'grew out

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132 Fox, p. 10.

133 Poggioli, p. 34.

134 See Floyd Dell, Intellectual Vagabondage..., p. 109.

135 Adolph Dehn Papers, (contributed one illustration to *The Masses* however he contributed regularly to its successors, *The Liberator* and *The New Masses*) Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., reel 2938, frame 124-5.

of.' Several of the *Masses* ' contributors became affiliated with the cause (Socialism) out of these same reasons. Most of them were involved with the movement more on a personal level rather than the political and began to loose interest, as John Sloan had when the movement turned toward violence.[136] Regular *Masses' contributing* artist, Kenneth Russell Chamberlain links the idea of radicalism and youth in a postscript found among his papers in the Archives of American Art:

> As you get older you get more gentle, you try to get more humor in it, or you try to see a little of the other side sometimes. Everybody goes through that.[137]

Chamberlain further supports the idea of the cult of youth and the avant-garde in a statement about Max Eastman and other radicals:

> Eastman and most former radicals have just outgrown their youthful enthusiasm. Radical artists wearied because of well, just age. As you get older you lose that flash of youthful enthusiasm.[138]

Poggioli also asserts the connection between the cult of youth and the avant-garde which he in turn relates back to the idea of progress.

The avant-garde authenticated change and therefore appealed to the young. According to Robert Henri, if there were no changes in art, it would stagnate.[139] *The Masses* possessed these characteristics of an avant-garde that

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136 Helen Farr Sloan verbatim notes of John Sloan, box 192, p. 2.

137 Miscellaneous unpaginated postcript found within Kenneth Russell Chamberlain Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.,

138 Ibid.

139 The quote at the beginning of this chapter was quoted in the margin of Strange Bedfellows..., by Steve Watson, although for a general overview on Henri's artistic philosophy see Milton Brown, American Painting..., pp. 12-13.

essentially would not resurface in America until Abstract Expressionist art of the 1940s. What is left to assert is formulated in a question by Kirk Varnedoe:

> Can the things people make in one set of circumstances communicate anything useful to other people in other times and places, without some explanatory lexicon?[140]

The avant-garde is always changing, yet it is based on some of the same underlying principles wherever and in whatever form it exists. It is a phenomenon that should be realized everywhere and serve as inspirational to artists of generations to follow.

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140 Kirk Varnedoe, A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern, (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 1990) p. 19.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I concentrated upon two of the avant-garde's basic tenets of stylistic and political radicalness asserting that *The Masses* could be considered avant-garde, not only as transplanted from their European radical precursors, but avant-garde as well among its American graphic contemporaries. When one considers the history of an avant-garde, one tends to think first of painting, hence the link with Abstract Expressionism mentioned in the introduction. In this study I have acknowledged the presence of other avant-garde artists, however given the literary and graphic origins of the avant-garde, it is necessary not to overlook *The Masses* magazine and the artists who contributed to its pages.

In attempting to assert the existence of an American avant-garde that predated that of the 1940s with the Abstract Expressionists, I can only briefly entertain how *The Masses* might link up with them. To fully explore this assertion would require another study. On the outset, there may appear to be more differences than similarities among the two groups. Abstract Expressionist art is considered art for artist's whereas *Masses* art was art for the masses. The Abstract Expressionists were not politically aligned with any party, however some consider their apolitical stance to be a political affiliation.[141] *The Masses*, as I have shown, was associated with the Socialist Party. In as much as *The Masses* contended to be for the working classes, its publishers were not overly concerned with its 'mass appeal.' Similarly, the Abstract Expressionists created art for themselves, they reflected an inward expression, which happened to catch the

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141 In an informal interview with Professor Sada Omoto, June 28, 1995, he asserted this point of view existed among some scholars.

eye of the art market and later, the public. Though the Abstract Expressionists became famous, unlike the graphic art of *The Masses*' artists, both groups went against the tradition and what was the established style in their respective times.

The radical artistic style of *The Masses* was linked with the spirit of youth and revolt against the older generation which occurred in early twentieth century America. In chapter three, I outlined the history of art and the history of the avant-garde and asserted that the study of the two is intrinsic to the truth content or rather the validity of an avant-garde. This in turn necessitated an analysis of the historical situation during which the artists in question lived and worked. Issues like birth-control, pacifism and Socialism, which consumed many of the artists and writers of *The Masses*, can only be understood in relation to the political tenor of the times and how divergent the ideology of *The Masses* was in contrast to that of its mainstream American contemporaries.

Artistically, *The Masses* artists support the avant-garde's credo of individualism. As the illustrations I have selected are evidence of their autographic choice of medium, style and graphic reproduction processes', not only do they align themselves with their French avant-garde counterparts, they defy their American mainstream graphic contemporaries'. The coarse crayon style afforded *Masses* artists' the freedom of expression illustrators of *Collier's* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* did not have. The tight, often idealized fine-line drawings of these commercial magazines reflected the Victorianism of the previous century whereas the loose, uninhibited and un-corseted images of *The Masses* echo their French predecessors Honoré Daumier and later Théophile Steinlen and Jean-Louis Forain.

Although *The Masses* magazine was published during a time when various movements of modern art abounded in the early twentieth-century, "there was perhaps none so revolutionary as the phenomenon of the avant-garde

itself...inspired by an ideal of deliberate progress in art."[142] The avant-garde with its program of change has come a long way from claiming naturalism as stylistically innovative and the commercialization of advertising today has forsaken the magazine as a forum for radical art and literature, however, it is significant that the avant-garde is rooted in this tradition and gives claim to this study.

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142 Fox, p. 9.

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