

Art at Hull House, 1889-1901: Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr

MARY ANN STANKIEWICZ

An early newspaper account of Chicago's first settlement, Hull House, informed that one specialty of the settlement was "the exaltation of art for the benefit of the masses."¹ Jane Addams, the legendary reformer whose name has long been associated with Hull House, gave her friend Ellen Gates Starr credit for directing the multifaceted aesthetic activities.² More modest than "Saint Jane,"³ Starr and her contributions to the aesthetic life of the settlement have been ignored in the glare of Addams's halo. The issue of Hull House's aesthetic commitment is complex and centers on the two women's varying interpretations of the relationship of art to labor. Although Starr initially shared the British Arts and Crafts reformers' vision that art could be a means of radical social change, she eventually recognized the futility of trying to return workers to craft-based methods of production. On the other hand, Addams developed programs in the arts at Hull House that sought to make workers' lives more pleasant rather than to change the conditions that oppressed them.

EARLY ART EXPERIENCES

Both Jane Addams (1860-1935) and Ellen Gates Starr (1859-1940) were exposed to art in their youth. Jane's older sister, Alice, was enrolled in the Department of Drawing and Painting at Illinois's Rockford Female Seminary, graduating in 1872, five years before Jane entered the school. Rockford was typical of many early female seminaries in its emphasis on the moral and religious component of women's education and in the place it accorded the arts.⁴ Drawing, painting, and needlework had been taught at Rockford since 1854; in 1860, a Department of Fine Arts was established under the leadership of George J. Robertson, a Scot who had studied in London at the Royal Academy. The curriculum included drawing and oil painting from nature, because, according to the catalogue:

Few perhaps realize the benefits of this Art, in cultivating the habit of observation, in refining the taste, and increasing the love for the beautiful in nature, thus lifting the heart upward with devout reverence for the Creator, who made the beautiful for our admiration and to symbolize to us the perfect and unattained in the spiritual life.⁵

If art and nature study enhanced religious sentiment and if young women were to be entrusted with the spiritual welfare of their future families, then art had an important role in female education. Nonetheless, art remained peripheral to the seminary curriculum. Students could enroll in art and music courses without pursuing collegiate or academic studies. Separate fees were charged, making

art education a luxury beyond the means of some students.

When Jane Addams entered Rockford in 1877, Robertson still headed the art department. The following year he was assisted by Miss Emeline E. Kirk and Miss M. Eva Perry; the latter gave a series of eight lectures on art history in the winter of 1879. An editorial note in the school magazine suggested that students were interested in the subject because it was the fashion and, more important, because painting and sculpture were languages for the moral and aesthetic nature.⁶ There is no record of Addams attending these lectures, but she did study watercolor painting in her senior year.

As far as can be ascertained, Starr took no art courses at Rockford, but she came from a family interested in art and feminism. Her paternal aunt, Eliza Allen Starr (1824-1901), had studied art in Boston and Philadelphia and established her own auditorium in Chicago, where she gave illustrated lectures on the history of art. Aunt Eliza also was an active member of the more literary and conservative Chicago women's clubs.⁷ Ellen Starr's father actively supported female suffrage and women's rights as well as equal access to education for all; her mother was known for the beauty of her landscape gardening. Her older sister, Mary, was sent to Boston to live with another aunt to receive the benefits of an Eastern education. Mary studied art there and in Europe, where she achieved modest success as a portrait painter before her marriage. Her older brother William traveled in Europe with Aunt Eliza, then studied sculpture in Boston and Rome, also with her support.

Ellen, the third of four children in the family, did not have these advantages. Born after the family had moved from Deerfield, Massachusetts, to an Illinois farm, she grew up watching her paternal grandmother spinning and weaving, in a practical revival of almost forgotten crafts. When Starr attended Rockford during the 1877-78 academic year, she and Addams became close friends. Starr left the seminary after one year to teach at a rural school. After that school closed she taught literature and art history in fashionable private girls' schools in Chicago from about 1880 through 1889, her first year at Hull House. While teaching, she prepared herself for admission to Radcliffe College but never enrolled.⁸ Even though employed, Starr, like Addams, sought a way of life that would enable her to contribute more directly to social betterment. She pitied rather than envied the rich girls she taught; they contributed their fathers' money to charity but really wanted more to do with their lives.⁹ Starr wrote her cousin in 1889 that she was "tired to death of art for art's sake."¹⁰ Hull House would offer her a means to combine her interests in art and social reform.

SOURCES FOR THE SETTLEMENT HOUSE

Although the settlement movement arose from a need felt by young, college-educated women and men to extend the benefits of democracy, culture, and society to those less fortunate, the movement met less idealistic, more personal needs as well. Sources for the role of art in the settlement can be found in the work of English art critic John Ruskin, in 19th-century women's colleges, in traditions of cultural philanthropy, and in women's clubs. Starr taught Ruskin's art and social gospels at Hull House and frequently quoted from his writings in her lectures and articles. Because he advocated both radical social reform and traditional gender roles, Ruskin's works were often part of the women's college curriculum. Starr and Addams first had read Ruskin at Rockford, which, like other colleges that supported the settlement movement, among them Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith, evidenced a parallel mix of tradition and reform: they included art in their early curricula, taught what Barbara Welter has called "true womanhood," and emphasized student autonomy and advanced social thought.¹¹

Chicago, like many other American cities, had both men's and women's charity and cultural organizations. Through social service and charity work, women of leisure contributed to the moral control of disorderly, stressful cities, often using art as a vehicle.¹² While the men of Chicago might found an art institute, the cultural philanthropy undertaken by women reduced art, according to historian Kathleen McCarthy, "to a harmless pastime to while away the hours, [through which] artistry was privatized, domesticated, and miniaturized to a distinctly feminine scale."¹³

Although the rhetoric of Ruskin's moral aesthetic might justify women's charitable uses of art, the artistic activities they engaged in and their visible results differed little from traditional female pastimes. These philanthropies began from a position of noblesse oblige and were frequently directed to the "deserving poor," i.e., lower-middle-class, native-born citizens. Although Addams claimed that a settlement was "neither a school nor a philanthropy, nor yet a philanthropic school or a scholarly philanthropy," charity work became an acceptable activity for upper-middle-class women.¹⁴

Cultural and social philanthropy often were undertaken by the same women who led women's clubs. Many 19th-century women developed public-speaking and organizational skills through club work; others cultivated interests in art and literature. Starr knew a number of Chicago club women through her teaching. When she and Addams sought support for a settlement house, they approached the Chicago Woman's Club, which decided that the new scheme should be supported by women rather than men, and invited Starr and Addams to become members of the club. The Chicago Woman's Club provided both financial support and volunteers for Hull House.

The early art history classes, literary reading groups, collections of reproductions, and tableaux vivants at Hull House reflected the activities common in women's clubs. Historian Karen Blair has pointed out that through their work in women's clubs, women

expropriated the previously male world of literature and the arts as their own, feeling they possessed a special humanistic sensitivity which provided an alternative to the acquisitive and competitive goals of men in an industrializing America.¹⁵

Addams frequently set settlement values in opposition to commercialism. With the settlement's participation in the Arts and Crafts movement, feminine artistry demon-

strated through traditional crafts became an accepted creative process.¹⁶

The first settlement house art exhibits sought to improve the lives of the poor by introducing ideals of beauty and models of good design.¹⁷ The fact that these exhibits appealed more to women and children than to men confirms their roots in both the feminized aesthetic of Ruskin and women's charitable and social activities. Art and craft classes were offered as worthwhile leisure activities and sometimes as vocational training; they provided continuity with handicrafts traditional to neighborhood ethnic groups and reached out to children as well as to recent immigrants. Gradually, exhibits by the settlement house's neighbors supplemented or replaced earlier exhibits of fine-art reproductions. Often the settlement introduced educational experiments such as manual training classes before the public schools did.

ARTWORK DONE BY HULL HOUSE

In *Twenty Years at Hull-House* Addams told of her 1888 trip to Europe with Starr and Sarah Anderson (a Rockford teacher), during which she decided to establish an American settlement house modeled on Toynbee Hall in London. The trio, of course, also visited cathedrals and art galleries and purchased reproductions of art works for themselves, for Rockford, and for Starr's school. When Addams and Starr found their "large house in the midst of all the horrid little houses,"¹⁸ they hung their prints and reproductions in the newly painted rooms. Starr made many of the decorating decisions, choosing an "artistic" terra cotta for walls to "make things as pretty as we can."¹⁹ Large photographs of madonnas by Raphael and casts of works by Donatello and Della Robbia were hung in the Hull House day nursery.²⁰ Starr organized a lending library of reproductions, with the expectation that in time they would replace the printed scarves, paper flowers, and wax funeral wreaths on their neighbors' walls.²¹ By October 1896 the *Hull-House Bulletin* reported a collection of 100 reproductions and photographs, each of which was available for a two-week loan.²²

Starr organized reading groups in art history and literature at Hull House. During that first autumn her class read George Eliot's *Romola* and studied Florentine art. Later classes read Shakespeare, Browning, Dante, Ruskin, and William Morris. Starr's Aunt Eliza lectured on Florentine artists during Hull House's first year, and in the fall of 1890 Starr taught art history as a college extension course. When Hull House began its Rockford Summer School in July 1897, course offerings included Browning and art history, both taught by Starr. The chief audience for these courses was working-class students preparing to elevate themselves professionally.

In 1890 the first addition to Hull House was planned. Starr had persuaded Edward B. Butler, a local businessman, to donate money for a library and an art gallery. Reverend Samuel Barnett, one of the founders of Toynbee Hall, spoke at the opening reception, explaining the role of art exhibits in the London settlement house. Barnett spoke, too, of the value of fine pictures in comforting and inspiring the poor. In an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, he was reported as saying that

pictures were invaluable for poor people whose lives fall in the sadder places of existence, because they inspire them and suggest the thoughts of great men and beautiful and beneficent ideas. He told of instances how people had been comforted by the pictures of Watts and others, or aroused by the paintings of heroic deeds and led to realize beauty in what at first seemed common to them.²³

As Barnett told his audience, art in the settlement would raise the poor "to a sense of 'something kindlier, higher, holier.'" ²⁴ The first loan exhibition at Butler Gallery opened in late June 1891; 4,079 people attended the ten-day exhibit.

Among the Butler Gallery exhibits organized by Starr the following winter was one of reproductions and photographs collected for school use. She also spoke informally several times on "The Use of Pictures in Education and the Manchester [England] System" and afterward founded the Chicago Public School Art Society, a branch of the Chicago Woman's Club that collected and distributed photographs and reproductions to schools. Like the loan exhibits of the Butler Gallery, the work of the Public School Art Society was based on an English model. T. C. Horsfall, whom Starr had met when visiting the Barnetts in England during the spring of 1892, had established, with encouragement from Ruskin, similar collections for schools in Manchester. Like Horsfall, Starr argued that urban children needed to see pictures in order to recognize cows and trees and to be introduced to basic ideas of beauty in the forms of art. She quoted Ruskin's gospel on the potential of reproductions to purify the heart of the poor child. ²⁵ With Starr as president, the women of the society raised money to purchase reproductions, selected appropriate pictures, made recommendations for tinting schoolroom walls, and advised teachers, school districts, and woman's clubs in Chicago and across the country about the use of pictures in education.

Among Hull House's first offerings were Wednesday-night drawing classes taught by a Mr. Sammons from the Art Institute of Chicago's faculty. ²⁶ Sammons's class included twelve children who already had some knowledge of drawing, either from the public schools or, in at least one case, from study in Italy prior to emigration. Mrs. Mary Wilmarth, a staunch friend of Hull House, paid Sammons's salary.

As early as 1890 classes in clay modeling, basket weaving, and other craft and manual training activities were offered. Addams, who had earlier taught industrial art at a Chicago missionary training school, distinguished such industrial education classes from the fine arts, but in practice the distinction was blurred, perhaps because both fine-art and craft classes functioned primarily as recreation. In 1891 sculptor Lorado Taft gave a series of clay modeling classes. In January 1896 the manual work classes included drawing, painting, clay modeling, embroidery, and cooking. From 1893 until her death in 1942, Enella Benedict was in charge of the studio art classes that continued to be a regular feature of the Hull House program. Tableaux vivants of famous paintings were presented as part of the Christmas programs.

During its early years Hull House also supported summer vacation schools to keep poor children off the streets and out of mischief. The curriculum featured visual arts, music, crafts, and manual training. Hull House also sponsored a lecture series. Several on art were given by Starr's aunt, and in 1892, Mrs. Hart, Rev. Barnett's sister-in-law, spoke on the philanthropic development of a cottage industry in textiles in Donegal, Ireland. ²⁷ This lecture marks one of the first indications of interest at Hull House in the British Arts and Crafts movement, an interest that grew during the next decade.

ARTS AND CRAFTS INFLUENCES

According to the April 1897 *Hull-House Bulletin*, the usual spring exhibit at the Butler Gallery included "a small arts and crafts exhibit, designed to illustrate the difference

between the machine manufactured, commercial articles and things which are made by hand and bear the mark of interest and pleasure in the maker." ²⁸ The following October the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society was established during a meeting at Hull House. Its membership was composed of local (mostly male) artists, architects, and artisans; among the few women were Addams and Starr, who had just begun her work as a bookbinder. The society's aims were wide ranging: cultivating in its members and others a sense of beauty, encouraging beauty in articles produced for everyday use, influencing the manual-training movement and the design and decoration of both useful and ornamental objects, encouraging handicrafts, studying factory conditions with a view to reducing the dominance of the machine, and holding exhibits and founding centers for crafts activities. ²⁹ The society sponsored lectures on topics such as art education, the Arts and Crafts movement, the role of art in society, and specific crafts and held an annual exhibit, usually in November. Perhaps the society's best-known lecturer was member Frank Lloyd Wright, who spoke March 6, 1901, on "Art and the Machine," concluding that art was needed to give a soul to the machine. Although more men than women belonged to the society, work by women dominated its exhibitions.

Starr had begun bookbinding with the goal of unifying mental and manual labor and contributing in some small way to the beauty of objects. ³⁰ She spent a total of 15 months—12 in 1897 and 3 in 1899—at Doves Bindery in England, where she was one of the few American women to apprentice with T. J. Cobden-Sanderson. A discriminating craftswoman, she took two or three weeks to bind a book and limited her teaching to no more than three pupils at one time. Following the ideals of her teacher, Starr believed that only books of lasting value were worth hand binding. There was a certain irony, not unnoticed by Starr, in the establishment at Hull House of a private bindery for books only the wealthy could afford.

Starr not only incorporated the technical knowledge taught by her mentor but also looked to him for guidance on the social value of art. Known for having given the Arts and Crafts movement its name, Cobden-Sanderson saw society as a potential work of art and crafts as a means to reach that end. ³¹ While Cobden-Sanderson did not dismiss the machine, he valued handwork as a means to lift the worker "into harmony with the universal order." ³² He believed that the union of imagination, spirit, and manual labor was the most important goal and followed socialist ideals in establishing the working environment at Doves Bindery. Responding to a letter from Starr describing a proposed labor museum at Hull House, Cobden-Sanderson expressed "sympathy with the proposal to enlarge the horizons of the artisan's life from the point of departure of the tools & material & processes of his own craft." ³³

When it opened in November 1900, Hull House's Labor Museum sought more to change the worker's attitude than the structure of industry. Each Saturday night Hull House's neighbors were invited to demonstrate and teach their traditional skills. The Labor Museum showed process, product, and producer in an effort to illustrate the value of handwork. A visitor to the museum might see local boys learning woodworking; a German potter throwing a vase on the wheel; a display of the constituents of common foods; and Irish, Russian, Syrian, or Italian women spinning. ³⁴ Starr's bindery and the manual training shops were incorporated into the museum early on.

The enterprise was called a museum rather than a school to attract older visitors and to emphasize its entertainment value. The museum itself was officially open only on Saturday evenings, but the craft shops were busy throughout the week as young people and adults engaged

in metalwork, pottery, woodworking, and weaving for themselves or for items to sell in the Hull House shop.³⁵

ART AS AMMUNITION OR ANODYNE

Art-related activities at Hull House prior to 1900 had roots in Ruskin's moral aesthetic, in an idealistic view of the spiritual benefits of art, and in women's experiences with college, club, and charity. As the century turned, the settlement residents' view of art shifted from an attempt "to reproduce the college type of culture" in the urban worker to an attempt

to work out a method and an ideal adapted to adults who spend their time in industrial pursuits. They [settlement classes] hope to promote a culture which will not set its possessor aside in a class with others like himself, but which will, on the contrary, connect him with all sorts of people by his ability to understand them and by his power to supplement their present surroundings with the historic background which legitimately belongs to them.³⁶

Material from the Labor Museum illustrated these new courses. The *Hull-House Yearbook* made it clear that the new courses differed from Starr's literary classes, which were modeled on the old-fashioned literary society. While Starr continued to teach her classes on Browning, Morris, and Ruskin and to work with a few apprentices in her bookbinding, the record of her presence in Hull House diminishes during the years after the First World War. One explanation for this may be her increasing interest in labor reform and socialism. Not only did Starr become active in supporting strikers, she also joined the socialist party.

Addams, unlike Starr, never sought dramatic social change. Numerous authors have commented on the strength of traditional values in her overtly reformist writings; some have argued that her conception of the settlement and its educational function sought, perhaps unconsciously, social control. Educational historian Paul Violas writes that for Addams, the "primary purpose of art . . . was to provide an opiate for the masses that would modify the divisiveness wrought by their protest movements."³⁷ Addams clearly valued art for its affective power and constructive use of leisure time rather than for any effective power to bring about changes in working conditions.

Starr, on the other hand, viewed the industrial worker as laboring in a state of siege. The task of the settlement as she saw it was both "to pass to him the things which sustain his courage and keep him alive" and to give ammunition that might be used to raise the siege.³⁸ She gradually realized, however, that contrary to Ruskin's and Morris's preaching, art was not a viable means toward social reform. After about 1910 her art became a personal pursuit, a labor of love through which she could merge her interests in art and literature. Her political activity also increased. She participated in the 1910 Hart, Schaffner, and Marx strike, was arrested during a restaurant workers' strike in 1914, and joined another textile workers' strike in 1915. In 1916 Starr ran for alderman on a socialist ticket. These years of radicalism were followed by conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1920. Although increasingly drawn toward the Catholic Church after her aunt's death in 1901, Starr did not complete her conversion until her doubts about the church's position on social reform were overwhelmed by her desire for the unity, discipline, and authority of its doctrine.³⁹ Paralyzed after a 1929 operation, Starr lived her final decade at the Convent of the Holy Child in Suffern, New York, painting flowers in watercolors and exercising her spiritual life as an Oblate of the Third Order of St. Benedict.

It is difficult to reconcile the socialist Starr with the

spiritual pilgrim and the aesthete. Starr embraced, if only briefly, a vision of art as a means to complete social reform. When that failed, she turned to art as private expression, then to political activity, and finally to religion to meet her needs. Her late flower paintings suggest that in some respects she never transcended a feminized Victorian aesthetic. Although Addams's motives were also complex, her programs at Hull House encouraged women to extend their traditional maternal role to the larger community, to provide worthwhile activities without challenging the underlying social structure. Since she made no attempt to undermine women's traditional role or the established order, she was the more celebrated of the two. For Addams, art at Hull House was to be nonthreatening but socially valuable, offering a modernist view: everyone can be an artist; art relaxes tensions and nurtures healthy self-expression. While art in Addams's view was politically impotent, it made life in the city more tolerable. •

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3. For a biography separating the myth from the reality of Addams's life, see Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (New York: Oxford University, 1973).
4. See Lucy Forsyth Townsend, "The Gender Effect: A Comparison of the Early Curricula of Beloit College and Rockford Female Seminary" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1986), and "The Education of Jane Addams: Myth and Reality" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Society for Educational Biography, Chicago, May 1986).
5. Rockford College Archives [RCA], Rockford Seminary Catalogue, 1861-62, 20.
6. RCA, *Rockford Seminary Magazine* (April 1879), 104.
7. SSC, Starr Papers. Among them was the Fortnightly Association, a club based on the ideals of John Ruskin.
8. Her reasons for not attending Radcliffe are not known. See Elizabeth H. Carrell, "Reflections in a Mirror: The Progressive Woman and the Settlement Experience" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1981).
9. SSC, Starr Papers, box 1, folder 3. Starr to Mary Houghton Starr Blaisdell [sister], February 23, 1889.
10. SSC, Starr Papers, box 7, folder 70. Starr to Mary Allen [Deerfield cousin], September 15, 1889.
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17. Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads of Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University, 1967), 41-50.
18. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York: New American Library, 1910), 21.
19. SSC, box 1, folder 1. Starr to Blaisdell, February 23, 1889.
20. Jane Addams, et al., *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1895), 225.
21. Addams, "Art-Work Done by Hull-House," 615-16.

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23. UICC, JAMC. "Chicago's Toynbee Hall," *The Chicago Tribune*, June 21, 1891.
24. UICC, JAMC. "Lectured on Toynbee Hall," *Chicago Globe*, June 22, 1891.
25. RCA. Ellen Gates Starr, untitled pamphlet (The Use of Pictures in Education and the Manchester System), October 29, 1892.
26. Jane Addams Papers [JAP], reel 2; original in Indiana University, Lilly Library, Mrs. S. A. Haldeman mss. Jane Addams to Sarah Alice Addams Haldeman, October 8, 1889, Chicago. The teacher was probably English-born artist Frederick Harrington C. Sammons (1838-1917), who was a skilled restorer as well as a painter, according to Mantle Fielding, *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers* (1926) (Green Farms, Conn: Modern Books and Crafts, 1983), 813.
27. On Mrs. Hart and the Donegal Industrial Fund, see Anthea Calen, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870-1914* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 116.
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29. UICC, JAMC. *Hull-House Bulletin* (December 1, 1897), 9.
30. Ellen Gates Starr, "Hull House Bookbinding," *The Commons* (June 30, 1900), 5.
31. Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, *Four Lectures*, John Dreyfus, ed. (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1974), 4.
32. Cobden-Sanderson, *Four Lectures*, 49, quoted from his lecture on bookbinding.
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35. Jessie Luther, "The Labor Museum at Hull House," *The Commons* (May 1902), 8.
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38. Starr, "Art and Labor," in *Hull-House Maps and Papers*, 178.
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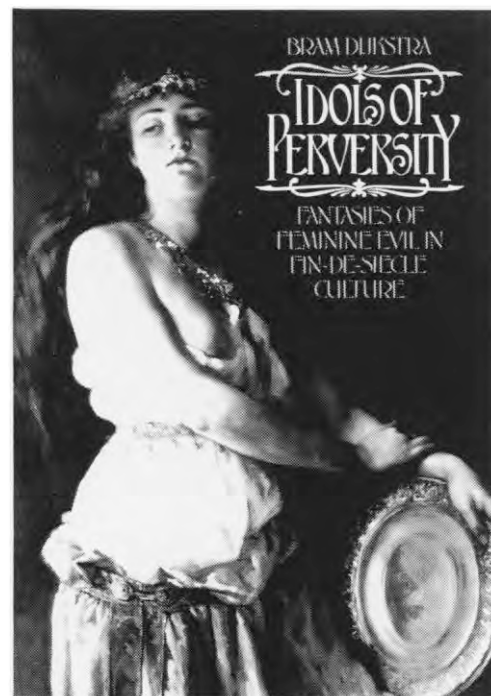
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LECTURE

“Early Years and Avant Garde Ideas The Little Review in Chicago”

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While severe floods created widespread disaster in Illinois in the Spring of 1913 established cultural circles in Chicago battled a flood of another type, coming not from natural forces, but from the artistic world of New York: the International Exhibition of Modern Painting, known in Chicago as the Post Impressionist Exhibition, invaded the staid bourgeois cultural circles of the city. A self respecting matron and mother, reported to the director of the Chicago Art Institute, Mr. William French, who had left town for the duration of the fracas, that a distinguished "alienist," (expert in insanity) had visited the exhibition declared the art to be the work of a. distortionists b. psychopathologists and c. geometric puzzle artists. Of the three threats to society the least frightening appeared to be the last. The matron was concerned, she confided in Mr. French, for the moral and mental well being of her daughter.

Yet even as the bourgeois sector of Chicago feared for their lives and those of their offspring, another dimension of Chicago's cultural scene was enlivened and invigorated by this same exhibition. I refer not to the students at the Art Institute (many of whom violently opposed the exhibition as suggested by their burning of Henri Matisse in effigy) but to the literary and political avant-garde of Chicago in 1913. The avant garde art of the Post Impressionist exhibition invigorated and inspired this alert group of writers, poets, and playwrights, led by the radical, socialist editor of the Friday Literary Review, Floyd Dell, 1911 symbolically naked as Adam as he launched the new world of culture in Chicago.

Floyd Dell, confident, young editor and focal point for new ideas in Chicago in the Spring of 1913, wrote of the Post Impressionist show that it exploded like a bombshell within the minds of everybody who could be said to have minds. For Americans it could not be merely an aesthetic experience, it was an emotional experience which led to a philosophical and moral revaluation of life. But it brought not one gospel, it brought a half-dozen at least, and from these one could choose what one needed.

“(p.238-Homecoming)

In his newspaper supplement, Dell remarked

A man with a grievance was in our office the other day. "Why," he demanded, with a bitter gesture, "do the people who go to the Art Institute to see the new pictures boast so loudly of their ignorance"? Why do they so proudly parade the fact that they cannot understand what they see? One would think that ignorance was a rare and valuable thing, instead of being really quite common. They seem to imagine that it is they who are being put on public exhibition, instead of the pictures.

He said other things too, with bitter gestures, but
we will let it go at this. (April 4, 1913)

Dell was encouraged in his support for the exhibition by one of the few post impressionist artists in Chicago, B.J.O. Nordfeldt. Nordfeldt painted this portrait of Dell around the time of the exhibition, his most avant garde work to that time, showing a suggestion of a fauve palette in its green face. Dell was transfixed by the experience of being painted by a post-impressionist commenting that "the arts do fertilize each other; they liberate each other from their own tradition... The artistic effects characteristic of one medium of expression awakens a fruitful envy in the imagination of workers in another medium." (Apr. 4, 1913) .

Another enthusiastic response to the Post Impressionist exhibition was from the writer, Sherwood Anderson then newly arrived in Chicago, from the small Ohio town from which he had broken away to find himself as a writer. Anderson soon to be famous as a major modernist wrote

of the exhibition a year later in an article called "The New Note,"

"... a cult of the new has sprung up and doddering old fellows, yellow with their sins, run here and there crying out that they are true prophets of the new just as, every age-sick American painter began hastily to inject into his own work something clutched out of the seething mass of new forms and new effects scrawled upon the canvases by the living young cubists and futurists. (p. 23 *Little Review* March 1914)... Something has happened in the world... Old standards and old ideas tumble about our heads. In the dust and confusion of the falling of the timbers of the temple many voices are raised.

Thus Anderson, like Dell, considered the exhibition as a sign of upheaval in all areas, not just painting. Sherwood Anderson attended the exhibition accompanied by his brother Karl, who was one of its sponsors as well as an artist himself. Karl was holding a one person show simultaneously with the Post Impressionist exhibition at a nearby gallery. An image reproduced from a review reveals that the artists' work was mild and academic. The impact of the exhibition was stronger on his writer brother. Not long after Sherwood Anderson began writing Wineburg, Ohio his first great modern short story employing the expressive psychological realism that would be characteristic of his work for the rest of his career..

Shortly after the exhibition, and with the encouragement of Floyd Dell, Sherwood Anderson began participating in a small interdisciplinary avant-garde community. Located in old storefronts remaining from the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893 at 57th and Stony Island Avenue (they were demolished in the 1960s) it had since the fair been used by artists, including B.J.O. Nordfeldt as early as 1903. In the Spring of 1913, just after the Post Impressionist exhibition, the community centered around Dell and his wife Margery Currey who moved there in April for an amicable separation. It also included Maurice and Ellen Browne, founders of the first little theatre in America. Dell has left a description of his bohemian life on 57th st. : " I have just returned ... to my ice cold studio, where I have built a fire with scraps of linoleum, a piece of wainscoting and the contents of an elaborate filing system of four years creation. ... My room contains one bookcase and nine Fels -Naptha soap boxes full of books... a typewriter stand, a fireless cooker, . . . and a couch with a mattress and a blanket." Others who visited the community, although they did not live in its ascetic ruggedness, were various professors from the University of Chicago, as well as the poets, Edgar Lee Masters, who was about to embark on his classic book Spoon River

Anthology, Vachel Lindsay, just emerging into prominence after selling his poems for bread across the country, Carl Sandburg, whose brother in law Edward Steichen was active in the visual arts scene, and Alexander Kaun, émigré Russian writer and sometime futurist. Also on the scene were Cornelia Anderson, Sherwood's wife, and Tennessee Mitchell who started as Master's wife, later became Sherwood's. She also achieved some prominence as a sculptor in the 1920s, particularly in an introductory portfolio for Sherwood Anderson's *Triumph of the Egg*. Other peripheral figures included Theodore Dreiser, who, although settled in New York, frequently returned to Chicago and Harriet Monroe, founder of *Poetry* magazine the year before. She was a veteran of the advanced cultural circles of Chicago since the World's Columbian Exposition of 1892 for which she had composed an ode sung with a chorus of a thousand voices. In 1913 Monroe was a supporter and writer of avant-garde poetry as well as one of the few informed critics in Chicago, the latter career pursued purely for income. Also joining this informal avant-garde of the Spring of 1913, and also brought there by Floyd Dell was Margaret Anderson. (no relation of Sherwood). It was Margaret Anderson who would take up the torch lighted by Dell and create a focus for the avant-garde energy that Dell had supported, particularly after his departure for New York later in the summer of 1913.

In the lively, freewheeling and responsive environment of the 57th St. colony, brought to a frenzy of excitement by the Post Impressionist exhibition, Margaret Anderson announced plans to found a *Little Review* that would present the newest tendencies in art, drama, literature and dance. On the night when she announced her magazine, in Margery Currey's studio most of the members of the group who would contribute to her review were present to cheer her on and support her endeavor.

The *Little Review* was to become the publication of the youth of modernism in the arts in Chicago in 1913-1914. The magazine would be a permanent record of the first ephemeral outpouring of exuberant creativity which later scholars have come to call the Chicago liberation, also dubbed the "Robin's Egg Renaissance" by Sherwood Anderson (p. 199 *Memoirs*), because it ended so quickly.

Margaret Anderson emerged as among the most charismatic people who participated in the 57th st. colony; she responded to the vigorous polemics in favor of the need for a new order of the world. Her extraordinary personality and style enabled her to launch the magazine. Rebelling against bourgeois roots in the Midwest, rebelling against the dead, traditional life she saw around her Margaret Anderson made a stand for art and life, as a matter of life and death. In the Spring of 1913 Margaret Anderson had been in Chicago since 1908. Like Sherwood Anderson she had come there to break away from a boring, staid life, in her case in a small city in Indiana. Since 1909 she had worked as literary editor for *The Continent*, a religious magazine for which she sometimes was asked to write almost four hundred and seventy five reviews in one fall, worked for the *Dial* where she had been chased by its editor, and been an occasional reviewer for the *Friday Literary Review*, the publication edited by Floyd Dell. In addition to literary reviewing, Margaret Anderson was also an avid piano player: throughout the *Little Review* years, no matter how impoverished she always wangled a grand piano to play, even if she had no other furniture. Sherwood Anderson later described Margaret Anderson's arrival on the avant-garde scene somewhat fancifully:

“

In Chicago, when you came there, you were most needed. You came. You appeared out of the most absurd of all possible places. I think it was Floyd Dell who first told me of you. "She exists," he said, "a woman who will start a magazine here." ... But she will be taken up by some particular crowd here. ... "Wait and See" Floyd said. And so I did wait and see. I saw men and women of our unreal world become real to each other for a time. I saw men and women standing together. I saw belief springing up. ... You gave a lot of queer isolated people a quick and sudden sense of each other. Something started. You walked about, being personally beautiful, as I dare say you are now. ... You got us all together. (*The New Republic*, June 11, 1930, p. 104)

And so the *Little Review* was spawned, taking up the vital interdisciplinary focus of Floyd Dell's *Literary Review*. It supported feminism, post impressionism, anarchism, socialism and every other manifestation of the new order. Its title echoed the avant-garde experimental "Little Theatre" of Maurice Browne which was creating a new stage, and set design, a new modernity in the theatre that would impact on a whole generation of theatrical experiment. Similarly, the *Little Review* of Margaret Anderson would have an impact on a generation of writers and artists. In contrast to *Poetry*, the magazine of Harriet Monroe, the *Little Review* always had a casual, but flamboyant style. Monroe and Anderson have both been characterized by the poet, dancer, artist Mark Turbyfill in his unpublished memoirs. He was transfixed by Margaret Anderson:

"I saw her hair glowing like a Burne-Jones aureole, her eyes opening wider in sapphire astonishment at my blindness... She lifted her hand creatively into the air, brushing lightly the flower that nested on her blouse, and in that moment I saw the space above us gleaming, replete with the effulgence of the archetypal rose. It was the secret, the vision I longed for "(p. 15)

Monroe, on the other hand, according to Turbyfill, spoke only of business "Now Mark," she was saying, almost impatiently, "will you please sign this agreement at once.?" (p. 22). Monroe obtained subscribers before launching her magazine, Anderson had sporadic individual donors, with consequently erratic finances. She worked primarily on charm and enthusiasm. This contrast of personalities in no sense discounts the importance of Monroe's magazine, a major contribution to the publication of poetry in America. But it does suggest that Margaret Anderson's extraordinary personality, enthusiasm and intensity, resulted in a magazine to which all the avant-garde thinkers of the Chicago scene gladly donated their ideas, and writings, prize money from Poetry magazine, and even in one case, Eunice Tietjens, a diamond ring. (p. 68).. The conclusion of Margaret Anderson's editorial in the first issue of the *Little Review* suggests her effusive energy and youthful belief that she could change the world. Her particular, emotional style emerges most clearly in the conclusion of her editorial: If you've ever read poetry, with a feeling that it was your religion, your very life; if you've ever come suddenly upon the whiteness of a Venus in a dim, deep room; if you've ever felt music replacing your shabby soul with a new one of shining gold; if in the early morning, you've watched a bird with great white wings fly from the edge of the sea straight up into the rose-colored sun- if these things have happened to you and continue

to happen till you're left quite speechless with the wonder of it all, then you'll understand our hope to bring them nearer to the common experience of the people who read us." (March 1914)

Margaret Anderson took an office in the Fine Arts Building not far from the Little Theatre. Modernism appeared in the pages of the Little Review in many formats: reproductions of art by post impressionists like Jerome Blum, the young Raymond Jonson, then working for the Little Theatre and Stanislaw Szukalski . A futurist manifesto by Marinetti titled "War, the Only Hygiene of the world" appeared in the Fall of 1914 as well as an essay by Alexander Kaun, on "Futurism and Pseudo-Futurism," . It also celebrated the writing of Kandinsky, both overtly, by advertising The Art of Spiritual Harmony just translated into English in November 1914, and more subtly in essays by Anderson which celebrate the "innermost". Anderson wrote: "Our culture -or what little we have of such a thing-is clogged by masses of dead people who have no conscious inner life. ... after one has chosen highly ... his real struggle-and his real joy-begins. And only on such a basis is built up that intensity of inner life which is the sole compensation one can wrest from a world of mysterious terrors... and of ecstasies too dazzling to be shared." (p. 3,5, Oct. 1914). In addition quotes from Clive Bell's recently available book Art, appear occasionally. These quotes are provocative and in tune with Margaret Anderson's program of cultural revolution." The least that the state can do is to protect people who have something to say that may cause a riot. What will not cause a riot is probably not worth saying-" (p.\31 - Oct. 1914 ck)

In addition, all the poets, and writers of the 57th St. colony, Sherwood Anderson, Vachel Lindsay, Eunice Tietjens, and even Cornelia Anderson, Sherwood's wife, who had no previous literary experience contributed their work. Also in the literary area Anderson supported the poets known as "Imagists", a brief transitional movement sponsored by Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell that reacted against the traditional cadences and content of nineteenth century poetry, proclaiming free verse and immediate images instead. Yet, to consider modernism only in the context of familiar names from the visual and literary arts is a radical violation of the spirit of Margaret Anderson's enterprise at the Little Review . Modernism also appeared in other guises.

An important part of modernism in Chicago in the early teens (as it was part of the German expressionist scene in Germany in the early twentieth century as demonstrated recently by Rose Carol Washton Long)were certainly the ideas of the anarchist Emma Goldman. Goldman was heavily supported in the magazine, both in editorials and essays, her ideas seen as applicable to the arts by Margaret Anderson in an article titled "Art and Anarchism":

"An anarchist is a person who realizes the gulf that lies between government and life; an artist is a person who realizes the gulf that lies between life and love. The former knows that he can never get from the government what he really needs for life; the latter knows that he can never get from life the love he really dreams of." (p. 3 March 1916, Floyd Dell had also supported)

The *Little Review* also supported the idea of birth control, giving prominent coverage to Margaret Sanger's visit to Chicago. Margaret Anderson described her commitment in the first issue: "Feminism? A clear thinking magazine can have only one

attitude; the degree of ours is ardent!" (March 1914) In an early issue she ran an ad for Floyd Dell's first book of 1912, *Women as World Builders: Studies in Modern Feminism* in which he promoted the most prominent feminists of the day, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Isadora Duncan, Emmeline Pankhurst, Jane Addams and of course, Emma Goldman, most of whom were taken up by Margaret Anderson. In every editorial Anderson demonstrated her full commitment to the idea of a new, alive world. Her flamboyant style, moreover, fascinated the Chicago avant-garde scene, with such antics as publishing the magazine from the shores of Lake Michigan because she ran out of money to pay the rent on her office of the Fine Arts Building (partly because of her public stand in favor of Emma Goldman.) When advertisers refused to buy space, she created spaces in which she wrote: "Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company ought to advertise something, though I don't know just what. The man I interviewed made such a face when I told him we were "radical" that I haven't had the courage to go back and pester him for the desired full-page. I think they resent even having to keep pace with the change in fashions." (*Little Mag*, p. 56)

By the spring of 1916 as she wrote the words on anarchism her desire for an even greater sense of change led to the second stage of the magazine, a stage which has only a brief history in Chicago. That second stage ultimately led to the *Little Review's* historic activities in New York from 1917-1929.

Yet, the second stage of the *Little Review* does also have its roots in the Chicago cultural scene of 57th st.. One of the participants of the Little Theatre performances was an art student named Jane Heap. Heap had attended the Art Institute School at the turn of the century studying most frequently with the academic, but proficient and well respected painter Carolyn Wade. Heap had come to the Art Institute from Kansas, where she had grown up on the grounds of an insane asylum, where her father had been an engineer. Thus her inclinations were unique, her training traditional and her commitment in the mid teens was to the avant-garde.

Margaret Anderson met Jane Heap in the Spring of 1916; she was immediately fascinated by her conversation. Heap's impact on the magazine was drastic and immediate. She and Margaret spent a summer talking in California, an experience recorded in some flamboyant cartoon like drawings by Heap that appeared in the Fall 1916 issue. That same issue contained the famous blank pages, in response to Anderson's desire for a more meaningful tone for the magazine in response to Margaret Anderson's decision to print nothing, rather than fall short of being creative. The appearance of the magazine changed immediately from its drab brown cover, to brilliantly colored jackets, and bolder typefaces as well as photographically reproduced art. More quotes from Bell and Kandinsky appeared, and the contents of the magazine were often written by Heap either with the initials jh or anonymously.

In addition, in the winter of 1917 and of profound long term importance, the magazine acquired a foreign editor, Ezra Pound. Pound had been affiliated with Poetry magazine since its inception in 1912, but frustrated with Harriet Monroe's style, he went over to the *Little Review* in 1917. In the spring of 1917 Heap and Anderson also decided to move to New York. Much of the activity of the 57th St. group had already dissipated by then, many of the writers moving to New York and, clearly, the magazine needed a new base of creative input in order to survive. With Pound as foreign editor and its new location in New York the *Little Review* began a new phase, that of the first

publication of *Ulysses*, by James Joyce . This publication, a courageous and almost unbelievable act on the part of the editors made the *Little Review* the center of a controversy, first in the courts, where it was censured for publishing obscenity and the magazine seized by burned by the Post Office and then, by way of support, from the avant-garde community of Paris. By 1921, the *Little Review* became the conduit for the avant-garde community in Paris into New York, publishing frequently for the first time the work of Picabia, Breton, Chirico, the Russian Constructivists and many others during the 1920s. So what began as a protest to the status quo supported by the interdisciplinary and youthful avant garde of Chicago , ultimately became an important magazine of the international avant-garde. From mirroring the post impressionism futurism and expressionism of the nascent Chicago modernist scene in the visual arts, theatre and literature, the *Little Review* ultimately engaged the central issues of the avant-garde literary and visual arts scene of Paris in the 1920s. bringing those issues to the attention of its American audience. The last issue of the *Little Review* appeared in 1929 with a series of letters from all of its subscribers in response to a complex catechism about what the *Little Review* meant to them. It was a long and exciting journey, but without the exuberant idealism spawned in Chicago in 1912, it never would have even begun.

CHAPTER 2

WE WERE PART OF THEM

E. N. FRENCH fired Gwendolyn Brooks after she turned down a promotion to “assistant minister,” but her four months at the Mecca had shown her more than despair. “In the Mecca,” she would write, “were murder, loves, lonelinesses, hates, jealousies. Hope occurred, and charity, sainthood, glory, shame, despair, fear, altruism. Theft, material and moral.” Nor were broken windows and statistics the full reality of Black Chicago. If Chicago was the crossroads of America, Black Chicago was the crossroads of Black America, the natural home for the National Negro Congress in 1936, the Nation of Islam, the American Negro Exposition of 1940, the National Baptist Convention, and despite their name, the Harlem Globetrotters. Most major black press outlets—the *Associated Negro Press*, *Negro Digest*, *Negro World*, *Ebony*, and *Jet*—would be born here. “Chicago is the city from which the most incisive and radical Negro thought has come,” wrote Richard Wright; “there is an open and raw beauty about that city that seems either to kill or endow one with the spirit of life.” This oldest section of the Black Belt around the Mecca had a name bestowed by reporter James Gentry: Bronzeville.

Segregated as it was, Bronzeville shared White Chicago’s gargantuan energy for making money, and had used its segregation to consolidate capital and power. Real estate mogul and banker Jesse Binga had started

the Binga State Bank in 1921 across the street from the Mecca and built a protomall of shops and offices called the Binga Arcade in 1929. Anthony Overton's empire combined cosmetics and newspapers, and Supreme Life Insurance was the country's largest black-owned insurance company. Civil rights pioneer Ida B. Wells lived here, as did heavyweight champ Joe Louis and Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, who performed the first open-heart surgery. Though the name Bronzeville referred originally to the neighborhood around the Mecca, it came to embrace all the Black South Side, including places like Woodlawn and South Parkway, where successful professionals owned mansions. Middle-class black families pitied the poor whites and Chinese on the other side of the Rock Island tracks in Bridgeport, Back of the Yards, and Chinatown: "We had no idea that we couldn't live there because we never wanted to," said one resident. But restrictive covenants held working-class "Respectables" and the underclass close enough to the "Strivers" to keep a constant tension rippling.

More than money, though, what divided Black Chicago was New and Old, the tastes and values of the southern migrants versus the settled lives of those raised in the North, such as Gwendolyn's father, David Brooks, who'd come from Kansas in 1908. A true "Old Settler," his job as a janitor provided his family with propriety and an enviable security, both of which the *Defender* had tried to encourage during the beginning of the Migration: its "Wise Old Owl" columns offered strict advice about dress and behavior, as had the Urban League, with flyers listing do's and don'ts for newcomers: "Do not loaf. Get a job at once. . . . Do not carry on loud conversations in street cars and public places." Old Settlers weren't necessarily wealthy, but they'd enjoyed certain privileges back when black Chicagoans had flown under the radar, and they resented losing them now because of the new arrivals. The migrants, on the other hand, pushed back against northern mores and traditions that to eyes fresh up from Mississippi looked pretentious.

As a girl, Gwendolyn had seen herself as very much a part of that Old Settler world, puzzled at school by the country behaviors of the new kids in class. When she was seven, her mother, Keziah, read some snippets of

her verse and at that moment created her daughter's rarified destiny: Gwendolyn, she declared, would become "the lady Paul Laurence Dunbar." Thereafter Keziah, a former teacher, tended and watered her gifted bloom. While Gwendolyn read the Harvard Classics, dreamed of living in the country, and produced at least one poem a day, her parents gave her an orderly, comfortable childhood in their house on South Champlain, summers in the backyard sandbox, and Christmases bright and busy with cozy rituals. Gwendolyn was assigned fewer chores than her brother Raymond so she could write, mooning "freely, often on the top step of the back porch—morning, noon, sunset, deep twilight."

Well into high school, shy Gwendolyn remained dreamy, blaming her lack of popularity on stupid boys who preferred lighter skin. Mostly, though, it was the insularity of her childhood that held her back socially. "I had not brass or sass," she would say; "I was timid to the point of terror, silent, primly dressed. AND DARK." So she bounced from school to school unhappy until Englewood High, where at last she found friends and wrote much, regularly placing poems in the school newspaper as well as the *Defender*. Unfortunately Gwendolyn had selected a poorly paid craft. When she graduated in 1935, the fortunes of the Brooks family were sagging, leaving her no choice but to enroll for a two-year degree at Wilson Junior College. An interview with Robert Abbott, founder of the *Defender*, came to naught. Domestic service next, but it was a poor match for someone who'd been given a pass on chores so she could compose; she walked out of each job after a day or two. E. N. French was the end of the road for Brooks; Old Settler pride, it seemed, didn't put bread on the table. Both the Mecca and Gwendolyn hit bottom, left to the mercies of the bigger white world.

Hoping to draw out the young poet, a friend convinced Brooks to join the NAACP Youth Council, where she marched for the Scottsboro Boys alongside energetic John Johnson, just out of his teens but already on his way up as a young editor and entrepreneur. Another marcher was her old classmate from Englewood High, artist Margaret Taylor, a self-described "young radical," petite, unstoppable, and constantly creative, equal parts

Nina Simone and Frida Kahlo, with enough brass and sass for both of them. It was Taylor who introduced Brooks, still dark, no longer so awkward but possessed of a blazing smile, to writer Henry Blakely, a man whose talents, quiet certitude, and lack of a big break mirrored her father, David. When he caught Gwendolyn's eye at a Youth Council event, Taylor shouted over, "Hey, boy, this girl wants to meet you." They married in 1939, and their son Henry Jr. was born a year later as they scraped by in a kitchenette on Champlain.

And it was Taylor who pulled Brooks into the center of the post-Richard Wright Chicago Black Renaissance. The Communist Party had publicly expelled Wright in 1937, literally pushing him out of the May Day parade, so he'd moved to New York, where Margaret Walker wrote him long letters full of gossip and hinting at her affections. Wright hadn't bitten on that score, but he'd asked her to send as many clippings as she could find about the Robert Nixon "sex moron" case—he was fascinated by a young black man driven to such violent extremes with so little visible remorse. The groups Wright had belonged to in Chicago carried on in his absence: the Mid-West Writers Group, for one, a North Side group that Algren attended, hosted by Lawrence Lipton, who'd later hook up with the Beats in San Francisco; and the Hyde Park salon of Ed and Joyce Gourfain—all integrated and politically oriented.

At the Youth Council, Taylor and Brooks started their own group, the Cre-Lit Club, which attracted young black intellectuals as well as the protective interest of South Side Writers' Group veterans Edward Bland, Margaret Walker, and Langston Hughes, then writing a series of columns for the *Defender*. With their help, Brooks began to make sense of being an Old Settler in the Mecca.

MORE THAN LITERATURE, though, popular music signified the social divisions in Black Chicago. Jazz was the establishment music. It had come up from New Orleans to the South Side, where Freddie Keppard, King Oliver, and Louis Armstrong evolved the improvised solo and the floor

show; Armstrong's first Chicago gig had been at the Grand Terrace, a few blocks from the Mecca. The strip of clubs and theaters up and down that length of State Street (particularly the stretch between 31st and 35th that the Armour Institute now had its eye on) became "The Stroll," where the Pekin Inn and the Dreamland Ballroom offered the biggest names in jazz. Though the leading creative edge shifted to Kansas City and New York, Chicago remained the capital of live jazz, with the Regal and the Savoy, high-end white clubs like the DeLisa and the Rhumboogie, and countless neighborhood joints on the South and West sides. The hotels and nightclubs downtown featured white jazz, either the sweet stuff or the hyperactive Austin High brand.

If you weren't dancing to jazz on a Saturday night, you were in a joint like Smitty's Corner on 35th Street, grinding to the blues of Big Maceo, Big Bill Broonzy, Sunnyland Slim, or Tampa Red. The roots of the blues had simmered away in the South until W. C. Handy adapted them and sold them north in the 1920s. Despite all the visions of old bluesmen plucking away on guitars in cotton fields, the blues evolved as a call-and-response between North and South, especially between the Delta and Chicago, which became the center of blues recording. As the industry all but died during the Depression and migration slowed, the blues in the North turned toward the "Bluebird" sound, a jazzier style featuring barrelhouse piano and horns and favored by Lester Melrose, the A&R man for Columbia, Okeh, Bluebird, and Vocalion. Good times in 1930s Bronzeville called for the Bluebird sound, the hip-hop of the era, complete with thudding beats about booze and getting laid, while down south Charley Patton, Son House, and Robert Johnson kept developing the country blues, their anxious loneliness very much a product of the modern age. In either form, Old Settlers considered the blues distinctly low-class music.

Sunday mornings, churches like Greater Salem Baptist, Pilgrim Baptist (once Kehilath Anshe Ma'ariv Synagogue, designed by Louis Sullivan with three finished sides and a plain brick back facing onto the alley so that it looks as if it should be plugged into a wall), and Ebenezer Baptist echoed with gospel music, a form born and raised in Chicago largely by

two giants, Thomas A. Dorsey and Mahalia Jackson. Back in the 1920s when he had been Ma Rainey's sideman, Dorsey had flipped between the sacred and the profane—"If You See My Savior" in 1926; "It's Tight Like That" with Tampa Red a couple years later—but ultimately God got the upper hand. In 1932 he established a gospel chorus at Ebenezer Baptist with Theodore R. Frye and when he returned from a trip later that year to find both his wife and infant son dead, the shattered Dorsey wrote the classic "Take My Hand, Precious Lord." Not long after, he moved the chorus to Pilgrim Baptist. As W. C. Handy was to the blues, Dorsey now became gospel's great popularizer and another Chicago mediator; as established black churches in the North struggled to come to terms with the thousands now arriving from the rural South, he set old-time communal suffering and hope to an urban beat.

Nobody lived that North-meets-South gospel life more than Mahalia Jackson, who'd arrived in Chicago from New Orleans on a freezing day back in December 1927, a sixteen-year-old girl only recently baptized in the waters of the Mississippi. Raised—and methodically abused—by her aunt Duke, she'd come north to her aunt Hannah's to start a new life, but the city was just too big and too cold for her, and she missed familiar faces. Lonely to her bones, she stayed in bed for a week in the apartment at 30th and Prairie Avenue until Hannah, who'd heard her incredible voice, coaxed her out to audition for the choir at Greater Salem Baptist. Mahalia's stomping, swaying version of "Hand Me Down a Silver Trumpet, Gabriel" shocked the church, but she very quickly established herself in the growing gospel community with her style—tall, thin, and dark, she growled and shouted in a voice crackling with an ecstasy that expressed a bit too much of the pleasures of this world for the comfort of conservative parishioners of the AME churches. (The temptation was more than abstract; according to one fan, she was notorious "for her hollering and getting happy and lifting her dress.") After days of cleaning hotel rooms or diapering white folks' babies, she'd sneak out and listen to Fatha Hines and Louis Armstrong for a taste of the Louisiana she missed. Her first recording in 1937, "God's Gonna Separate the Wheat from the Tares," didn't take off in

Chicago, but it hit big in New Orleans. Mahalia made no attempt to hide her dislike of “society negroes,” who looked down on her for bringing the raw style of the Holiness denomination north. When a pastor once publicly accused her of blasphemy, she shot back: “This is the way we sing down South!”—a call, long before the Black Arts Movement, to keep it real.

Though Louis Armstrong begged her to join his band, instead she married Ike Hockenhull, a Fisk-trained chemist whose sad eyes expressed how he felt about working at the post office; his days at the track kept his mind off failure, while Mahalia found herself no less lonely despite the ring on her hand. Convinced his wife was wasting her talent, Ike begged Mahalia to audition for the lead in *Swing Mikado*, a jazzy adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan set in the South Pacific, to be produced in 1938 by the Negro Unit of Chicago’s Federal Theatre Project, run by dancer Katherine Dunham. Herself the product of an Old Settler family, Dunham had studied anthropology at the University of Chicago with some of the greatest names in the field, including Melville J. Herskovits, whose *The Myth of the Negro Past* established that African Americans had carried over, preserved, and adapted African cultural forms in the New World. Founder of the first black ballet company, Ballet Negre, Dunham’s choreography “established for the modern dancer a new vocabulary of movement for the lower body”; African American dance began with her.

Against everything in her heart, Mahalia crept shyly into the Great Northern Theatre. Out of work, still tall but no longer thin, and way over her head among all the lithe, light-skinned girls, she walked onstage as if on her way to the guillotine. When she handed over her copy of *Gospel Pearls*, the pianist gave her a sour look, so Mahalia dashed out to Lyon & Healy on Wabash and spent a much-needed fifty cents on the sheet music for “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” Last up, she stepped forward to face the dark theater, frightened and alone. The pianist changed the arrangement the first time around, so that Mahalia didn’t know where to come in. On the next try, “I had it in my mind and I sang. And honeyyy, I forever more sang it, ‘cause I *felt* it.” While her final notes faded in the balcony, Mahalia dashed out, positive that she’d blown the audition, but

when she arrived home, Ike was grinning ear to ear the way he did when he hit a long shot at Sportsman's—she'd gotten the part. Sixty dollars a week. Sick at heart from bringing her talents to bear in the secular world, she'd also hated not being in control. Mahalia turned down the role and never considered secular music again.

Swing Mikado turned out to be the biggest hit of the 1938 season and the inspiration for a subsequent rash of blacked-up versions of Gilbert and Sullivan, like *Hot Mikado* and *Tropical Pinafore*. George Balanchine brought in Dunham when he couldn't figure out what he wanted from his black dancers in 1940's *Cabin in the Sky* (though that didn't stop him from taking billing as the choreographer). Today it's regarded as the first Broadway show to use modern dance, before Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse, or Agnes de Mille. Mahalia, meanwhile, went her own way, teaming up with Thomas Dorsey, who taught her "how to . . . shake at the right time; shout at the right time." The two went on the road together almost every weekend until 1942, when Mahalia was named director of the choir of St. Luke Baptist Church. Ike and Mahalia split up.

ONE WEEK AFTER Mies's Red Lacquer Room debut, October 25, 1938, white gallery owner Peter Pollack and officials from the Art Institute put some young artists—led by, of course, Margaret Taylor—around a table with black elites that included attorney Earl Dickerson. Their task was to explore the idea of a WPA arts center in Bronzeville. Interest in the visual arts had bloomed there alongside literature; the School of the Art Institute, especially instructor Kathleen Blackshear, had recruited painters such as Eldzier Cortor, Charles White, and Elizabeth Catlett on scholarship. Cortor specialized in long, smoldering paintings of black women reminiscent of Modigliani, while Catlett's best-known works were politically charged woodcuts of the poor. Charles White did similar subjects but in rich charcoals; he and Catlett would later marry, and White would study the murals of Diego Rivera in Mexico for the WPA.

The same interracial cooperation found in the writers' groups of the day fueled the artists. Around the corner from Nelson Algren and Rat Alley on Cottage Grove stood a "huge Louis Sullivan house [probably the Stearns House], run as a cooperative, . . . home to a collective of actors, painters, literati, mavericks and radicals, many of whom worked for the WPA," among them Simon Gordon, who taught art in the black community with WPA funding. Gordon introduced his students—including the young Margaret Taylor—to black history in the days before Black History Month and mentored Chicago's finest black artist of the period, sculptor Marion Perkins. Pensive, handsome, and natty, jailed at least once for distributing radical literature, when Perkins wasn't making change at his newsstand at 37th and Indiana, he carved sturdy, Brancusi-like figurative forms out of wood and stone recovered from the dilapidated buildings around his home. So as Margaret Taylor was getting the Cre-Lit Club off the ground, she was also there for the birth of the final hub of the Chicago Black Renaissance, the South Side Community Art Center (SSCAC) at 3821 S. Michigan.

"Margaret," wrote her friend Gwendolyn, "*lived up from the root.*" Her opinions could be blunt: "Art itself should be used as a weapon . . . every artist or every writer, whatever they say should be a statement for the total, complete liberation of our people." Not everyone in the community was quite so strident. As soon as the doors of the Savoy Ballroom opened in October 1939 for the first Artists' and Models' Ball, held to match the WPA subsidy, the annual party became the prime social occasion of the city's black elites; debutantes sashayed in fabulous costumes with themes such as "Pan-Americana" and "Below the Border" while top-tier musicians played. Meanwhile Taylor, Gordon, and the starving artists stood on street corners with tin cans, begging dimes from passersby. Eventually the SSCAC collected enough to buy the mansion of Charles Comiskey, late owner of the White Sox, for \$8,000, but clearly the socialites would be running things. The 1940 American Negro Exposition at the Coliseum, celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Emancipation

Proclamation with a show of black writing, music, and art, further stoked enthusiasm for black arts in general, so even as signs pointed to the end of federal funding for the WPA, renovations moved forward.

In the middle of all this, in March 1940, Harper & Brothers published Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and Margaret Walker suddenly understood why he'd wanted all those clippings about the Robert Nixon case. *Native Son* tells the story of Bigger Thomas, young, poor, black, and violent, much like Nixon, who accidentally murders the daughter of the Prairie Avenue white family he drives for. More than 200,000 copies were sold within three weeks, and the Book-of-the-Month Club named it a main selection; establishment tastemakers such as Clifton Fadiman and Malcolm Cowley lavished praise. Suddenly Wright was the most successful African American author ever and Black Chicago's main topic, but the fact that "we" had a best-selling book that Orson Welles was taking to Broadway tended to obscure the social issues Wright raised. Many resented his portrayal of black youth in the form of a violent rapist, and while he brought the work of the Chicago School of Sociology to life, Bigger's profound moral flaws blurred the book's call for justice. By lining up near sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who argued that white America had all but destroyed black society and left it with no culture of its own, Wright seemed, to some, to present blacks as helpless, lending unintended credence to the paternalism with which the MHPC often coated its efforts. To Langston Hughes and W. E. B. Du Bois, Bigger Thomas was more stereotype than sociology; to White Chicago, he just inspired fear. The deepest impact of Wright's success, though, was that he'd achieved it without the Rosenwald Fund, the NAACP, or any of the other institutional sources that usually supported black artists. It made him into a wild card, but James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and the next generation of independent black thought followed in his steps.

On May 7, 1941, the top ladies of black society in their Sunday hats filled the main room of the completed SSCAC, along with precise little Alain Locke in his derby and cape, singers Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith, Daniel Catton Rich from the Art Institute, and First Lady Eleanor

Roosevelt, who cut the ribbon before being whisked off to a banquet. On behalf of the artists, Margaret Taylor-Goss (she'd married Bernard Goss by then) read some notes, in part: "As young black artists, we looked around and recorded in our various media what we saw. It was not from our imagination that we painted slums and ghettos, or sad, hollow-eyed black men, women and children. They were the people around us. We were part of them. They were us."

More than fifty thousand people visited the SSCAC that first year for its shows and classes, following from the idea that everyone could benefit from the arts. Young photographer Gordon Parks set up a darkroom in the basement, while upstairs the SSCAC hosted writers' groups. Inez Cunningham Stark—Mies's friend, who as president of the Renaissance Society had brought Prokofiev, Léger, and Le Corbusier to America—led a poetry workshop attended by Gwendolyn Brooks. Impressed by Stark's courage in venturing to the Black Belt, Brooks imagined the socialite's Gold Coast friends peppering her with insults: "You'll be raped." "You'll be killed." "They are savages." And yet every Wednesday at six, Stark came "tripping in, slender, erect, and frosted with a fabulous John Fredericks hat, which was as likely to sport vegetables as fruits, flowers or feathers. Her arms would be loaded with books."

Poverty, though, battered Gwendolyn and Henry. Unable to find a regular paycheck, they moved from bad apartments to dreary kitchenette, down to one with so many mice that Henry, then in the National Guard, marched them out "in droves." Seeing *The Wizard of Oz* one night reduced Gwendolyn to tears; those childhood days swinging in the hammock on Champlain seemed far away, but torn out of her middle-class upbringing, that foreign stench of the Mecca becoming her own, Brooks also met her muse. Under Stark's rigorous attention and with the encouragement of librarian Vivian Harsh at the George Cleveland Hall Branch Library, the back-porch dreamer took a harder, technical look at her work, focusing more on the city around her. "If you wanted a poem," she wrote, "you had only to look out of a window." The influence of Langston Hughes ("Mightily did he use the street") as well as Taylor-Goss and her concern with "the

people around us" are evident in works such as "kitchenette building" and "obituary for a living lady." Stark urged everyone in the workshop to enter contests, but it was Brooks who won the Midwestern Writers' Conference award in 1943.

An editor from Knopf contacted her. And there were more parties; the best, according to Brooks, hosted by Evelyn Ganns (at 42nd and Drexel Boulevard) and by Taylor-Goss, who "served cheap red wine, tea and coffee, with black breads and cheese. Infrequently there would be a Creole or a spaghetti dish. . . . The talk was fantastic—and it might survive not only the dawning, but the next day's breakfast and lunch." Gwendolyn and Henry, despite their empty cupboards and radiators full of mice, were also famous hosts, including a memorable party they threw for Hughes, with a hundred people jammed into their two rooms, blues on the record player, and enough ham hocks, greens, and sweet potatoes on the table for all comers.

In 1942 FDR traded in the New Deal for "Win the War," and the gears of industrial Chicago lurched into action, creating jobs that put more money in black pockets, expanding the black middle class, and bringing a second wave of migrants north that deepened and complicated the divisions within the Black Belt. The lines between old and new, rich and poor, increasingly blurred: when Mahalia put together enough cash to buy an apartment building, she now had "tenants to move in, move out, make toe the line on the garbage and the trash. 'Don't you people want something nice?'" she would ask, sounding very much like an Old Settler herself. WPA projects wound down. Many leftist artists slipped away from Chicago, while those who stayed, like Brooks, Algren, Terkel, and Perkins, missed not just the funding but the community and the public respect the WPA had established for their work in a city with limited tastes. Margaret Taylor-Goss became an elementary school teacher. In November 1944 the SSCAC and the Abraham Lincoln Centre, a leftist community center housed in a striking red-brick Frank Lloyd Wright building on Oakwood Boulevard, held the Interracial South Side Cultural Conference, with a

keynote by the literary editor of the *Chicago Sun*, A. C. Spector. The event served as a coda for the years of "Black and White, Unite and Fight."

Profound as its intellectual and artistic interactions had been, the Chicago Black Renaissance never dented the city's consciousness the way the Harlem Renaissance created a mythic Black New York. Harlem had been all about style and fashion and drinking in tuxedos—fun, white-friendly qualities that piqued curiosity more than fear. Chicago's Renaissance went unknown to most whites, and later, during the war and the McCarthy era, its connections with Communism and the WPA would make it easier, even necessary, to forget. There were no drawings in *Vanity Fair*, no embrace—Inez Cunningham Stark aside—from Chicago's wealthy white elites. So even as black Chicagoans factored on a national and international level, the city never found a place for them in its identity, never called Bronzeville by its name.

Whatever presence Bronzeville had on the city's grid, it meant competition for the only valuable resource to be found in the swampy patch of onions that was Chicago: land. Southern blacks coming north to work had nowhere to live, and black Chicagoans figured out that *they* were, in fact, what the city's businessmen and officials meant when they spoke of "blight." IIT, in the guise of battling blight, was making a land grab, bulldozing homes and looking for ways to take down the Mecca, even as Black Chicago grew more desperate for room. Increasingly, judges were refusing to enforce restrictive covenants, so the black middle class began to push out into white neighborhoods. Mayor Ed Kelly wished away the rising tensions with comments such as "There is no race trouble in Chicago." The 1942 election of William Dawson as the Black Belt's first black congressman seemed a positive sign, but a spate of firebombings in 1944 led the mayor to create the city's Committee on Race Relations and host a conference with all the usual sociologists and race spokesmen. Robert Taylor summed things up from a black perspective: "The race relations problem of Chicago resolves itself around the question of living for Negro citizens." But perpetually divided Black Chicago, which valued pragmatism over

ideals, couldn't assemble a coherent leadership to confront the situation, while the conference moderator, columnist Herb Gaffis, expressed the typical white sentiment: "It would be a lovely thing for this community if the people could be sent on boat excursions and the South Side of Chicago could be very abundantly bombed. Then we could start with a rebuilding program that would have some sense to it."

SOME OF THE only places where blacks and whites lived together in relative peace were the city's few housing projects, where Chicagoans of both races lined up for units whenever they became available. Two strains of thought had evolved in the 1930s, as the Depression put people out of their homes and sped the decay of the nation's post-Civil War building stock. On one side, the old progressives simply wanted the New Deal to provide housing for the poor; on the other, reformers saw an opportunity to change America's housing system through the creation of nonprofit, working-class communities similar to those in England and Europe. A Modernist approach to design would keep costs low and might also defetishize housing from proof of one's station to a setting for an active, democratic life. The federal Housing Act of 1937 straddled the fence, and the seeds of its failure can be found right there. To appease the real estate industry, worried that everyone would suddenly abandon the private market for low-cost public housing, the law charged cities with the absurd task of building buildings that no one should want to live in. Cheap, stripped-down designs constructed with the lowest-grade materials let the government appear to throw a bone to the Modernists; the general public considered the structures ugly, while the imposed income limits guaranteed they'd become dumping grounds, federally mandated to inflict a stigma on their residents. No one had any incentive to maintain them.

It's doubtful that Mayor Ed Kelly had developed a sincere concern over the plight of Black Chicago (he still used the word "Hottentots" around City Hall), but his decision to keep the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)

clean, despite all the corruption in the rest of his administration, made political sense—the Machine needed black votes. He supported the election of African American Robert Taylor as its chairman and worked well with executive secretary Elizabeth Wood. Born in Japan to missionary parents, the schoolmarmish Wood had taught poetry at Vassar, served as a social worker in Depression-era Chicago, then was named executive director of the MHPC. Unashamedly liberal and integrationist, she agreed with the wholesale clearance approach favored by people like Henry Heald and fought attempts by Illinois state senator Richard J. Daley to create a nonprofit housing corporation to buy, renovate, and resell viable buildings in blighted areas. Like most involved in the creation of public housing, Wood saw rehabilitation plans like these as a half-measure and a sop to crooked landlords; she wanted slums leveled, period.

Even with all the built-in pitfalls of housing policy, what Elizabeth Wood and the CHA created in the 1930s and 1940s succeeded. For those, white and black, coming out of kitchenettes, these first projects were a godsend, clean and safe, with playgrounds for the kids and health clinics on-site. “We felt it was just paradise,” said one resident. Wood and her staff of social workers established each project as “an engine for upward mobility and an incubator of the middle-class.” Tenants were carefully screened, and inspectors made annual visits to enforce a list of rules and fines. “If the grass needed cutting and you didn’t cut it, they cut it and they charged you,” recalled residents of Altgeld Gardens. At the same time, positive behavior was reinforced. “If I’d see a man out shining his windowsills,” recalled a manager, “. . . I’d send out a letter to the whole project congratulating him.” The CHA gave out free seeds and lawnmowers, held yearly contests for prettiest lawn and prettiest flowers, and encouraged participation in sports teams, clubs, picnics, parades, and dances. “‘Project people’ was a term of pride,” Wood later said. “. . . Our problem was preventing the tenants from becoming snobbish.” Wood wasn’t afraid of social engineering. All public housing was supposed to follow the existing “neighborhood composition,” and through custom and rule, the first projects

maintained segregation; but during the war she began mixing people no matter their race, language, or religion. The projects urbanized black migrants from the Deep South even as their communal, primarily religious, values helped bind divisions. The Cabrini Homes on the North Side even picked up some of the bohemian vibe from Towertown a few blocks east, becoming “the center of a kind of left-wing cultural and intellectual activity. . . . At the community center, people like Win Stracke, the Pete Seeger of Chicago, would be there regularly.” Though racial tensions did erupt within the projects from time to time, Wood and the CHA saw integration as the only long-term solution.

The war squeezed construction standards down, and the federal government imposed an income limit that forced upwardly mobile tenants to either lie or be thrust back out into the private market, where they’d soon find themselves homeless again. Since the federal law required slum clearance along with new building, the CHA actually destroyed more units than it created during the war, and in a regrettable misstep, it gave no preference to those already living in the project neighborhood. The housing shortage only grew more desperate for both whites and blacks. By 1945, when the city most needed the CHA, Chicago was growing increasingly wary of it.

GWENDOLYN BROOKS STAYED in Chicago. Knopf rejected her poems, so she sent her next batch to Harper & Brothers, which bought the collection in 1944 that would become *A Street in Bronzeville*. Originally she’d planned to explore “a personality, event, or idea representing each of thirty houses on a street,” and while the final book swerves from that plan, it stays true to the intention. In poems like “the mother” and “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith,” Brooks no longer shouted her own feelings—she lent her voice to those with no words for their pain, their loneliness, their befuddlement, and their anger at a world so casually vicious. She’d become a witness to Bronzeville. “Abortions will not let you

forget" opens "the mother," as a woman who has aborted any number of her own wonders at what's been lost; in "Queen of the Blues" a singer has a lonely onstage realization as to the real value of her fame; "Gay Chaps at the Bar" confronts the bitterness of the black war experience and is dedicated to Edward Bland, killed in action during the Battle of the Bulge. A book about common people, to be read by common people, *A Street in Bronzeville* is a first draft of that dream to "touch every note in the life of this block-long blockwide building."

As Brooks waited for copies of her book, Richard Wright published his autobiographical *Black Boy*, a huge hit that would sell upward of 600,000 copies in its first six months, and Harcourt, Brace brought out *Black Metropolis*, a many-layered, exhaustive, and brutally honest study of mid-century Black Chicago, conceived by Horace Cayton, built out of research he'd led for a WPA project in the late 1930s. The grandson of Reconstruction senator Hiram Revels, Cayton had studied sociology at the University of Chicago after knocking around as a reform school inmate, a ship's mate, and a policeman in Washington State; it was Cayton who had pointed Wright toward the Chicago sociologists and away from Communism. A tortured soul, Cayton was trapped between the white academic world, where he felt most comfortable, and his allegiance to the black community, where he ran the Parkway Community House. He would eventually flame out to alcoholism and depression, but for its scholarship and its examination of black society without reference or deference to white norms, *Black Metropolis* remains a landmark.

A week into August, Gwendolyn Brooks read her first review, a rave that launched her career:

My husband and I, returning from yet another Saturday night movie, bought the early *Tribune* and ripped it open to the book pages. "For heaven's sake!" My Reputation! Henry and I read the entire review on the midnight street, then waited in ecstasy (forgive me, students whom I've

cautioned against the use of that weak word) for the bus. My husband looked at me meticulously. "Gwendolyn, tell me EXACTLY how you feel at this moment."

Exquisite and circumspect, she kept her words their secret. But *A Street in Bronzeville* announced shy, simple Gwendolyn as a challenger to Langston Hughes as the nation's premier black poet. Her mother had been right after all.

CHAPTER 3

WASHED UP ON A FAVORABLE SHORE

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY LOVED light. He loved to see it move, dreamed of it painted onto passing clouds. A year before Mies arrived, August of 1937, this spry Hungarian in his early forties, a patch of white in his black hair, peered through his rimless glasses into the gloam outside the Art Institute. To the north, on the last building on Michigan Avenue, a beam of light swooped in circles, guiding fliers safely home to Municipal Airport, off in the brownlands to the west. It took fifteen or so hours now to fly across America. Moholy latched onto the beacon coming from a building near his hotel, up in the neighborhood called Towertown, and started briskly toward it.

He hadn't rested well since he'd arrived. Fire trucks. Police sirens. Hoppy jazz from every radio. Cars racing up and down Michigan Avenue with often tragic results; you didn't need a license to drive in Illinois, so the same number of people died in car wrecks in Chicago as in New York but with only half the drivers. He'd never have come here if not for this job. Miss Norma K. Stahle and the Association for Art and Industry had invited Gropius to open a new design school "along lines Bauhaus." Gropius had declined, then pointed them toward Moholy, in London at the time making educational films and designing window displays—increasingly, distressingly underemployed for the man who'd been Gropius's right hand

at the Bauhaus. Since then Moholy had been meeting red-faced rich men who insisted on knowing his first name, pumping his hand, showing him around their big houses full of French antiques. In Europe only a lover addressed a man by his first name; why would they want to call him "Laci"?

Moholy crossed the new bridge connecting the Loop to the other side of the Chicago River and its unconsidered mix of warehouses, storefronts, vacant lots, wooden shacks, nickel bars, and burlesque houses, all under a string of atrocious skyscrapers: the Tribune Tower, with its flying buttresses and bits of other, better buildings stuck to its skin; the Medinah Athletic Club, sporting a Moorish dome; and a few blocks north the Allerton Hotel, a thirty-seven-story faux Italian Renaissance palazzo. Gropius loved Chicago; he called it a *toller Brodelkessel*, a "mad, bubbling cauldron." Literally so, in some places; the few hundred yards of Bubbly Creek boiled with gases from the shit and blood poured into it by the Stockyards.

The beacon spun again on the Palmolive Building. Everything in Chicago, even the names of buildings, seemed to involve selling, and yet the Palmolive was the best new building Moholy had seen here, lean and strong. Everything here wanted to be something great, even if it didn't know what, or how, or why. Chicago had achieved nothing yet, but it had built the set for all that it wanted to become, and it was selling tickets. More than anything, Chicago *yearned*.

A few weeks before he'd written his wife back in London:

DEAREST SIBYL,

If I didn't have to uphold my reputation as a valiant male before you I'd say that my heart sometimes sinks below the gray pavement of this strange town. I've never felt so alone. It all looks familiar but when you investigate it, it is a different culture—it is no culture yet, just a million beginnings.

Like, for example, the empty car barn he passed across from the Water Tower, where dozens of students and artists lived together, Bauhaus-style.

Towertown, the Greenwich Village of Chicago, harbored mad geniuses, bomb throwers, and advocates of free love—the kinds of people Moholy liked. In the evening, thousands sat in front of the bandshell in Grant Park. The fascist rebels were continuing their assault on Madrid, the Japanese were laying siege to Peiping, and in Munich, Hitler had opened his House of German Art. Here in Chicago (pronounced “schikago,” he explained to Sibyl), children worried about nothing, and Moholy had two daughters. Gropius and Marcel Breuer were already at Harvard. All he had to do was say yes.

At the Palmolive Building, he walked on to the beach and the lake, dotted with the lights of a few boats content to float along the horizon. He'd written Sibyl about Lake Michigan: “But what a lake, oh Darling, what a lake! Its color changes constantly, and it remains calm and moving at the same time. No limitation. An endless aspect to a very limited civilization.”

He turned. The white lights of the cars poured at him on the left; a stream of red dots rolled away on his right. Moholy was hypnotized.

There's something incomplete about this city and its people that fascinates me. It seems to urge one on to completion. Everything seems still possible. The paralyzing finality of the European disaster is far away. I love the air of newness, of expectation around me. Yes, I want to stay.

In mid-August Moholy signed a five-year contract and announced, with no teachers on staff, no curriculum on paper, that in two months the New Bauhaus would be ready for students.

IN ALMOST ALL WAYS, László Moholy-Nagy was the opposite of Mies, who could not stand him. Where Mies stood thick and stolid, lithe Moholy bounded with energy; when together, they reminded one “of a sturdy elephant brushing off a high-spirited puppy.” If Mies was, as his biographer

Franz Schulze once said, “a black hole,” sucking those around him into his gravity, then Moholy sent everyone off on their own chosen orbits, a man blasted apart, forever following his fragments. Born in rural Hungary in 1895, László Weisz had been only two when his parents separated. Mrs. Weisz gave her three sons to their uncle in Mohol, whose name László took. Like his uncle, he studied law until he enlisted into the Austro-Hungarian army in 1915. While Mies drank much beer and sat behind a desk, the Great War shattered László; a blaze of his black hair soon turned white. Stationed in Galicia, he survived the Brusilov Offensive in 1916, which all but decimated the Austro-Hungarian army—at one point, László saw his entire battery killed around him—but he was wounded the next July during the Kerensky Offensive. His drawings from then appear at first to be just masses of frantic lines until a dying soldier emerges, or a field of barbed wire.

Demobbed, László moved to Budapest, where he supported the Communist government until it fell, then wandered as a refugee from Szeged to Vienna and finally Berlin, his law career over. In Berlin he joined the same artistic circles as Mies; they had friends in common; and like Mies, he worked through the movements passing across the city like storms. He made Dada collages, created a cameraless form of photography called photograms, and performed arguably the first example of conceptual art, when he called in a description of a painting to an enamel factory that then produced the finished work. He did his best easel painting during these years, precise, geometric abstracts influenced by El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich. But where Mies ultimately chose to *express* the times, Moholy aligned himself with the Soviet Constructivists who believed art should *change* the times by using technology to unite art and everyday life. Long before Margaret Taylor-Goss, Moholy thought of art as a weapon, an offer of a clean new life. Constructivism let him explode within a confined space, paint lines and planes shooting off into endless dimensions, and yet still feel grounded to the collective effort of creating a better world.

In 1923 Mies's old office mate Walter Gropius hired Moholy to come to

the Bauhaus, which he'd opened four years earlier as a reaction against mindless industry. The school's first years in Weimar had been a rage against the machine, full of bright colors and a strong Expressionistic, nearly mystical bent with Klee and Kandinsky on the faculty, and Johannes Itten in monk's robes, compelling students to practice an obscure cleansing discipline (created, incidentally, in Chicago) called Mazdaznan that involved breathing exercises and eating only raw vegetables. But Gropius soon realized there was no fighting technology, so he shifted from Expressionism to Constructivism and charged the Bauhaus with bringing industry to heel by creating well-designed objects for mass production. The key to that shift was Moholy. At twenty-eight the school's youngest professor, he took over Itten's mandatory Foundation Course (*Vorkurs*) and directed it toward the limited palette and straight Constructivist lines that would form the lasting image of the Bauhaus. By the time the Bauhaus moved to Dessau in 1925, Gropius, savvy administrator and politician, ran the show, as Moholy in his workman's overalls beat the drums. An enthusiastic and inspiring teacher, he rejected the title "Master" called for by the rigid German school system.

In 1929 his artistic theories gelled in his book *The New Vision*. Like Mies, Moholy was aiming at things of the spirit, and *The New Vision* links him to Rudolph Carnap, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the Vienna Circle philosophers who tried to reduce all aspects of human experience to their most essential terms in order to find their ultimate unity. Moholy tried something similar in *The New Vision*, breaking down the arts to their most essential materials and forms, but not for the sake of art. "Not the product," he announced, "but man, is the end in view." Art isn't an expression of the divine or something to hang on museum walls; it's just one of the biological necessities of human life. "Everyone is talented," he said later, a phrase that would become central to his thought. Everyone needed to encourage and develop their creative energies to realize their *Gesamtwerk*, their "total design." It was a revolutionary idea that transcended the socialist rhetoric it had grown out of, and it breathed life into the

nihilistic, intellectual forms European art had taken in the chaos since the war. Art was all about the making, and in Moholy's eyes it was now progressing past the easel, toward light, space, and motion. Beneath his dreams of light shows projected onto clouds are the beginnings of modern media theory. Walter Benjamin famously quoted him in "A Short History of Photography": "The illiterate of the future will be the man who doesn't understand photography."

Moholy left the Bauhaus with Gropius in 1928, spending the next few years doing graphic design, creating theater sets for the experimental director Erwin Piscator, and playing with short films. On one of these films he met Sibyl Pietzsch, a minor actress turned movie dramaturge. Moholy once boasted that he'd slept with a thousand women. In Sibyl, though, he met his match. Fiery, stubborn, if not brilliant then fully convinced that she was, horsey Sibyl was not especially attractive, but as in so many other areas in her life, she seemed to make herself so out of sheer force of will. Ravished by Moholy's constant energies in the arts and otherwise, she became his muse and then, against his wishes, the mother of his child. Theirs would be a tempestuous marriage.

When Hitler took control in 1933, Moholy settled in England near Gropius where he was accepted with a wan handshake into the Hampstead circle, concentrating mostly on photography and film, with some window design for Simpsons Department Store to pay bills. The English were bemused by all that amateur's energy but found Moholy ever so slightly, you know—*flimsy*. Plus, some unpleasant accusations had floated over the Channel. Josef Albers, later of Black Mountain College, who considered himself the top "Moholy hater," accused him of taking credit for aspects of the *Vorkurs*; Naum Gabo thought he'd stolen ideas, too. Man Ray challenged his claim to inventing the photogram, and it must be said that Moholy's sets for Alexander Korda's 1936 film of H. G. Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come* did bear an uncomfortable similarity to Mies's model for the Glass Skyscraper. Even among artists, the English class system demanded that everyone know exactly what you are and that, for Moholy, was nearly impossible to say. A quick trip back to Berlin to film the 1936

Olympics brought him face to face with former students now in SS uniforms. The telegram from Miss Norma K. Stahle came in spring 1937.

AND SO BACK to Chicago, with its soot and slums and meat on the hoof. As early as 1934, *American Magazine of Art* published an article, "Wanted: An American Bauhaus," and Chicago seemed the right place for one, despite being, as Moholy wrote, a very limited civilization. In the late nineteenth century, Chicago had embraced the Arts and Crafts Movement, even boasting its own William Morris showroom, and had then taken the next step with the Prairie School of Frank Lloyd Wright, whose 1901 speech at Hull House, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," announced the Machine Age twenty-five years before the Bauhaus. Given the impact both Wright's Wasmuth Portfolio and the Chicago School had on the Werkbund, Germany's craft association (whose members had included Behrens and Mies), continuing the Bauhaus in Chicago looked like a kind of homecoming. The city of very limited civilization also seemed prepared philosophically for the Bauhaus. Rudolph Carnap had come as an émigré to the University of Chicago, whose philosophy department focused on establishing the essential connection between all the sciences. At Gropius's urging—"Chicago seems to me the right place to be," he wrote—Moholy made his choice. The school would be called the New Bauhaus. The two discussed the name in their letters, and Moholy plainly stated in the first catalog, "Because of Dr. Gropius' confidence that Professor Moholy-Nagy and his faculty will continue and extend the best Bauhaus tradition he has granted permission that the School of Design be called The New Bauhaus."

Sibyl disagreed; as usual vehemently. With Hitler gearing up for war that summer, she felt a German name was a terrible idea. In fact, she was wary about the whole enterprise, especially this "Marshall Field" that Miss Stahle had cabled about, marching around the prairie—why would they have to be involved with the military? Unswayed, Moholy instructed his wife to sell everything and come to Chicago, where she saw that their

benefactor was not a field marshal but millionaire Marshall Field III, who'd donated his three-story, twenty-five-room family mansion at 1905 S. Prairie Avenue to be the school's home, as part of his left turn into philanthropy. Ironically, it had been designed by Richard Morris Hunt, the "frenchified Yankee" most responsible for the spread of the Beaux-Arts in America and architect of the grotesque Vanderbilt mansion at 660 Fifth Avenue in New York that Louis Sullivan had mocked in *Kindergarten Chats* as a "Château de Blois."

Undaunted, Moholy furiously cobbled together his school. Working day and night, he sketched out a curriculum that basically replicated the entire Bauhaus system; when Gropius told him it was overly ambitious, he smiled and admitted that the catalogs had already been printed. The Field mansion was gutted, brocade torn off the walls, woodwork replaced with flat white paint, and Moholy added his own light fixtures, big spheres of glass hanging down on chrome rods. Staffing was a particular challenge. He asked Frank Lloyd Wright to join but had to be satisfied with Hin Bredendieck and György Kepes, the only Bauhaus alumni, who despaired at the "absolutely corroded sight of the South Side of Chicago, . . . the colored area. Dante's Inferno was really happening in comparison." James Johnson Sweeney pulled out at the last minute; Herbert Bayer couldn't get a visa in time. Photographer Henry Holmes Smith and sculptor Alexander Archipenko came aboard ten days before the school opened. Carnap introduced Moholy to University of Chicago philosopher Charles Morris, who, seeing the link to his Unity of Science movement, convinced the school to allow him and two other professors to teach at the New Bauhaus uncompensated.

Moholy now spread the Bauhaus idea through the city at large with long and occasionally incoherent speeches that fell on rocky soil. "We were among Philistines then," wrote Katharine Kuh, owner of what was then the city's only gallery of modern art. The Armory Show of 1913 had drawn mocking crowds to the Art Institute, where it had been the students and faculty who'd hung Matisse in effigy, and little had changed since. The *Tribune's* art critic, Colonel McCormick's great-niece Eleanor

Jewett, a former agriculture major who'd quit school to avoid having to witness the wickedness of breeding animals, lent her support to a vigilante group run by Art Institute trustee Mrs. Frank Logan called "Sanity in Art"; its righteous blue-haired members harassed visitors to Kuh's gallery. The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago and the Arts Club had the courage to present modern artists, but their small shows were geared toward cognoscenti, while Daniel Catton Rich and the Art Institute spun in the breeze, pushed in one direction by his good taste and intentions, and the other by the whims of its board. Chicago's most important art critic, the lively, inquisitive, and morbidly obese C. J. Bulliet, balanced out the lunacy. Before he began writing for the *Chicago Daily News*, he'd built up a large following as editor of the *Chicago Evening Post's* weekly art section, generally welcoming new trends in art.

At last, on October 18, 1937, Moholy opened the doors to his first class. By the time Gropius arrived a month later, for a grand opening tea and dedication banquet, the school was already falling apart. Moholy's Bauhaus lacked the Germanic *Ordnung* that in Dessau had provided a stage for his free-form pedagogy. Here *everything* was free-form: board members walked the halls, giving their two cents; classes and schedules were in constant flux. Lectures by the likes of Bulliet and Sigfried Giedion made first-rate minds available to students but didn't add up to an accredited academic path. "The school," Kepes later admitted, "was not really clearly defined in its targets." Factions quickly formed. Those who believed in Moholy, such as Nathan Lerner, found themselves

totally immersed in a program of sculpture, graphics, poetry, sciences, photography, industrial design and even music made on instruments of student construction, performed by our own orchestra. We were given strange exercises: picking up objects, feeling them, then drawing them; cutting and folding paper; shaping blocks of wood until we liked how they felt. This was all very mysterious and confusing until we realized objects and images we made were

not to be judged by faculty but were meant to reveal what was happening to us, what we were absorbing, how we were growing.

On the other side, a fringe of more experienced, fine-arts-oriented students were angry that they had to go through the basic material explorations of the *Vorkurs*, unhappy, according to Lerner, with Moholy's philosophy that "art was stuff and something to do with the world and people and matter."

Miss Norma K. Stahle was unhappy too. Described by those who knew her as an unlikely Lady Macbeth, cold and uncommunicative, Stahle began plotting Moholy's demise within weeks of the school's opening, enlisting Hin Bredendieck, teacher of the Preliminary Course. Gropius squelched the coup, but then the board notified Moholy that the double-dip had forced them to unload their holdings at a deep discount, costing the school its entire \$100,000 endowment. When news of Mies's pending arrival spread to Prairie Avenue, Moholy approached the Armour Institute about a merger, an idea Heald immediately rejected. Moholy remained resolute. Buoyed by excellent reviews of the June student show, he barnstormed across America to raise money. While he was gone, the Association of Arts and Industry closed the New Bauhaus. Lawsuits ensued. Moholy won but got only the mortgage on the Field mansion instead of back pay and had to endure embarrassing headlines such as "Bauhaus Head Branded Flop," just as he and Sibyl toasted Mies at the Red Lacquer Room. The Association of Arts and Industry faded away, and Miss Norma K. Stahle—"a first rate gangster," according to Moholy—ended up decorating windows at Marshall Field's, but his reputation had been dented. Vindication came, as usual, from Gropius, who included a selection of works by Moholy's students in the big Bauhaus show at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in fall 1938, officially extending its lineage to Chicago. W. W. Norton published a new edition of *The New Vision* with Moholy trumpeted on the cover, bittersweet, as the director of "The New Bauhaus American School of Design."

Stranded in America, one of the key names in modern art now settled for a consulting job with the Spiegel mail-order catalog. This much was certain: he didn't want to leave Chicago, even if he'd just been cooked in the *toller Brodelkessel*. "Chicago is not only an unfinished canvas," he wrote Sibyl. "It is a smeared-over sketch which I have to clean up and set straight." He declined further help from Gropius. "I have to manage my life without bothering my friends," he wrote. "America was always a country of pioneers." Charles Morris provided Moholy with a letter of introduction to John Dewey, America's most influential philosopher, who'd fueled turn-of-the-century progressivism with a midwestern common sense and his driving impulse to experience, experiment, and connect. Dewey was especially popular in Chicago, where he'd founded the University of Chicago philosophy department, worked closely with Jane Addams, and started the Lab School to advance his theories on education. Moholy's brief meeting with him that November opened his mind to the potential of America, not just for its money and material but for its native philosophy. The *new* New Bauhaus—the School of Design—would be an American institution, not a European transplant, merging the Dewey-style pragmatism Chicago exemplified with Moholy's belief that artistic talent is innate.

Like Mies, Moholy removed socialism from Modernism, but he attached his understanding of it to populist strains of American thought. Embracing individualism and tolerating capitalism, the School of Design would create "universal designers," young men and women prepared to use aesthetics in service to the world, able, in Dewey's words, to "put the maximum of consciousness in whatever is done." With Sibyl happy to see light in her husband's eyes, Moholy convinced seven of his former faculty to teach for free and lined up a board of advisers that included Dewey, Gropius, Joseph Hudnut of Harvard, publisher W. W. Norton, and Alfred H. Barr, director of MoMA. The next issue was space. As Moholy and his crew wandered in search of a new home, Robert J. Wolff spied a series of dark windows on the second floor of an industrial building on the Near North Side. Taking a chance, he walked upstairs into a huge empty loft

space that had once belonged to a now-bankrupt bakery chain. The next day, washing, painting, and hammering began at 247 E. Ontario. Walk-in refrigerators became darkrooms; massive bakery ovens would store plywood and heat plastics. All they needed now was money.

For that, Moholy turned to Walter Paepcke, owner of the Container Corporation of America (CCA). Paepcke's father had made a fortune providing crates to Chicago's great mail-order firms and department stores such as Montgomery Ward and Sears, and though not an émigré himself, prownosed Walter, product of a buttoned-down German family, had much of the Old World about him. His wife, the striking blonde Elizabeth Nitze, nicknamed "Pussy," thought him something of a philistine; her father was chairman of Romance languages at the University of Chicago, so Pussy had grown up surrounded by the world's intellectual high society. Prodded by his wife, Walter in 1936 pulled a minor version of what AEG did with Peter Behrens, using famous designers to sell CCA as a corporate good neighbor amid the Depression. As top Chicago socialites and patrons to some of the world's leading artists, the Paepckes had supported the New Bauhaus, but they'd shrugged off Moholy's touch. Now the Hungarian talked his way into dinner at the Paepckes' apartment at 999 Lake Shore Drive. "I have to be the advertisement," Moholy told Sibyl, and that night he spun a web, laying out his vision for the School of Design and all the other great Bauhauslers, such as Walter Gropius, who'd surely love to know a genial, German-speaking millionaire willing to put his money behind their art. Paepcke "did not want the world's most famous school of modern design to breathe its last breath in Chicago," but with business as bad as it was, he only had \$8,000 socked away. "Valter," Pussy reported Moholy saying, "kann you help uss?" For the first of many times to come, Paepcke opened his wallet for Moholy.

The School of Design opened to eighteen students on Washington's Birthday 1939, the whole scene even more chaotic than the New Bauhaus. Wolff hadn't noticed that the space he'd found was below the practice floor of the Chez Paree nightclub—if the penniless students weren't distracted by chorus girls tap-dancing overhead, the smells coming from the club's

kitchen did the job. The Preliminary Course remained, but no grades, no tests. In 1940 the talented and unpaid faculty included a young composer deeply influenced by *The New Vision* named John Cage who conducted "Sound Experiments." Moholy's followers were as fanatical as Mies's; one referred to him as "my Christ." "He . . . had a million ideas a minute," recalled Katharine Kuh, "but his students got a great deal from him. He revolutionized their thinking." "At the bottom of the infinite faith we had in Moholy," wrote painter and sculptor Richard Filipowski, "was the fact that he never criticized the work of a student in terms of good or bad." The result was "an electric atmosphere which is almost overwhelming," said the *Chicago Sun*. His daughter Hattula remembered him going to work every day in a lab coat over his suit, a black metal lunchbox in hand.

With housing tight, most of Moholy's students lived hand to mouth in that dodgy area just west of North Michigan Avenue, the center of North Side bohemia known as Towertown. "Chicago at that time had a seminal environment," said architect Bertrand Goldberg, who lived in what he referred to as a "commune" in the Stables, the coachhouse of the Farwell mansion on Michigan and Pearson, a block away from Mies, owned by muralist Edward Millman, art director of *The Chicagoan* magazine, and home to *Life* photographer Wallace Kirkland. Painters such as Richard Florsheim, who lived in the Tree Studios on Wabash, would chip in fifteen cents toward a communal stew, though Mary Lynch, owner of the restaurant behind the Stables, fed artists for free. The Allens, at 645 N. Michigan, owners of one of the last mansions on the street, rented rooms to students from both the School of Design and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and held regular "evenings." Towertown, home to an estimated 1,500 dice girls, 1,000 priests and nuns, 3,000 art students, and 500 strippers, had the city's highest concentration of bars, strip joints, and hotels, and the fewest cops on patrol.

Chicago's North Side bohemia had political roots that reached back to the 1860s, when a friend of Karl Marx had tried to organize the city's German laborers. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Chicago collected anarchists, socialists, and freethinkers who promoted the

cause of labor as a radical impulse native to the soil. Pre-Bolshevik Reds, they drew as much inspiration from Walt Whitman as from Marx. Radicals like to talk, so they gravitated to the half-acre park in front of the Newberry Library at Walton and Dearborn officially named Washington Square but better known as Bughouse Square. Here miners and hoboes, free-love advocates and out-and-out nuts all gave speeches to crowds that sometimes numbered in the thousands. They battled hecklers, analyzed Kierkegaard, rabble-roused, and most of all entertained, because this was free theater, full of passion, improvisation, and humor, and everyone understood the game. Smaller speakers' clubs opened throughout the area, already a seedy part of town "lined with cheap hotels, the winter quarters of carnival and cheap circus people, burlesque queens and comics, stars of the Chautauqua circuit and pitch artists and grifters," to let the conversation continue into the night and through the bitter winters.

Of all these clubs, the most famous appeared at Michigan and Pearson. The first description of the Dil Pickle Club, in 1914, calls it a tearoom "on the dry end of Pearson Street," but it came to fame when its founder, a former union saboteur with mangled hands named Jack Jones, moved the show west a few blocks to a hole in the wall at 18 Tooker Alley, where they went on a search "to find Chicago's great soul." Through its door, painted with the motto "Step Down. Stoop Low. Leave Your Dignity Outside," visitors crouched along a passage (it really *was* a hole in the wall) into Chicago's version of Cabaret Voltaire, a place Jones called "the world's greatest university, where all isms, theories, phantasies and other stuff can have their hearing." Coffee, tea, and snacks were on the menu, but no alcohol; the talk provided all the excitement. Along with crackpots, Wobblies, and anarchists, the visitors and speakers into the 1920s included Carl Sandburg and the Andersons, both Sherwood and Margaret, William Carlos Williams, Djuna Barnes, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, Clarence Darrow, Ring Lardner, Dorothy Day, Katherine Dunham, and the young Kenneth Rexroth; professors from Northwestern and the University of Chicago; and anyone changing trains with an expertise in human sexuality, the topic that drew the best crowds. The speaker would give their

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speech, and then the assembled Picklers would have at them with comments and arguments and insults that went through the night. It was Chicago Dada, an intellectual free-for-all, part cabaret, part poetry slam, part performance art. "We of the Dil Pickle believe in everything," began its manifesto. "We are radicals, pickpockets, second story men and thinkers. Some of us practice free love, and some, medicine. Most of us have gone through religion and have tired of it. Some of us have tired of our wives."

Then Al Capone muscled in. By forcing liquor into the place, he turned the coffeehouse into a bar, and by the late 1920s it had devolved into radical chic, a stop on the tour of decadent Chicago. Tourists jammed out the old Wobblies, and the Dil Pickle died of popularity. Jones shut it down for good in 1933 to concentrate on his invention, a metal toy duck called the Du-Dil Duck.

Though gentrification had already begun to boost prices on the area's grungy sprawl of cheap lofts and storefronts, Towertown maintained that spirit of a separate place just across the river from the Loop, in no small part from the Dil Pickle imitators throughout the Near North Side, like Rexroth's favorite, Green Mask at Grand and State, various "at home" salons, and bars such as the College of Complexes and Riccardo's, Chicago's version of Café de Flore. In the 1940s veterans would move to Towertown, "a haven," wrote one, "for the broken soul as well as the earnest and rebellious. The drug addict, the petty thief, the sex deviant and the alcoholic are generously mixed in among the sincere and aspiring. . . . There are call girls and crowds of visiting firemen, second hand clothing stores and smart shops, pawn brokers and art supply stores," all drawn by an indefinable pickle-tinged scent of homegrown intellectual freedom. As housing activist Catherine Bauer once said, any sensible city planner doing a new town would always include a good slum. Towertown was a very good slum.

Moholy, then, had landed in the perfect spot for a chaotic school of design based on leftist principles, Dewey-esque philosophy, and faith in the abilities of the common man. "Art is a community matter," he declared

at every opportunity, and “Everyone is talented”—a philosophical balancing act suited to his adopted hometown, at once fiercely individual, community-oriented, and identical to that of the SSCAC. Instead of pulling up the drawbridge, as Mies did at IIT, Moholy saw the way Chicago’s bohemia worked, or at least wanted to see itself—as a function of the community. “He intended to create communities of artists in Chicago that would be as cohesive as the one he had experienced in Dessau,” said John Walley, director of the WPA Design Workshop, who once brought the Hungarian in for a speech to the nearby Artists Union that turned into an all-night debate at a bar. Walley and Moholy collaborated on an industrial arts manual for the Chicago public schools that would have offered Bauhaus-style training to every child in the system. Through Walley’s offices, the School of Design did the SSCAC renovation Margaret Taylor-Goss had collected dimes for in 1940.

Then the WPA shut down and the war began. Moholy scrambled to keep the school open. Lectures by Fernand Léger, Richard Neutra, Charles Eames, and others couldn’t hide Moholy’s inability to pull in any great Bauhaus names for faculty. “Things would get terribly gloomy,” said one student, “and everyone would know there wasn’t any money in the bank, and then Moholy would go out and persuade someone to buy one of his paintings.” He gave speeches and sat with the ubiquitous Inez Stark on whatever committees he could; Mayor Kelly put him in charge of camouflage for the city, as he stood next to Bears coach George Halas and Archbishop Samuel Stritch in the line of famous older men signing up for the draft. In doing all this, his sincere enthusiasm took on a craven edge—he assumed the role of what Sibyl called the “prooofessor” around prospective donors, most of whom were skeptical of the whole “design for life” concept. “He wears rimless glasses,” reported the *Tribune*, “and talks with such an accent that he is difficult sometimes to understand.” The *New York Herald Tribune* said terms such as “painting with light” and “kinetic sculpture” had a “cultist ring.” “I think he was friendly and fond of me in a way,” said Kuh, “but mainly he saw me as a conduit. I think he saw everyone more or less that way.” Paepcke aside, Moholy valued Chicago’s

businessmen by how much they gave. When meeting new people, he was “known to pull Paepcke aside and inquire all too audibly: ‘Tell me Valter, how much ar’ zey vert?’” Worse, he continued to take credit for the work of others, though maybe Moholy was simply ahead of his time in believing that content was free. According to Sibyl, all that mattered to him was spreading ideas; the details of ownership were secondary. Then as now, that reasoning sounds thin.

Over countless games of chess, Walter Paepcke and Moholy became close friends. Paepcke lent him a run-down farm in the village of Somonauk, two hours outside Chicago, where the school held summer classes while his two daughters, Hattula and Claudia, got some sun. “I know what little interest you have in expressions of thanks,” Moholy wrote in 1942, “but allow me to say that our life here in America would have been sometimes very dark without your and Pussy’s friendship.” Walter’s voluminous correspondence badgering friends for contributions and fairly blackmailing CEOs into sending men to night classes at the school attest to a profound commitment, yet even he found things disorganized. As the first class graduated in May 1942, Paepcke again tried to convince Henry Heald at IIT to take in the School of Design. Heald was intrigued, but there did “seem to be some difficulty in connection with the personalities involved.” Which meant, Mies said no.

No one hated Moholy-Nagy and the School of Design more than Mies van der Rohe. According to Katharine Kuh, Mies “thoroughly disliked Moholy’s methods, didn’t admire at all the way he operated and found him too aggressive. But those weren’t the real reasons.” Though Moholy and Mies had come out of the same Modernist trunk, they’d grown in opposite directions; Mies applied the Bauhaus method to one field of study, while Moholy applied it to every aspect of life. When it came to power and money, Mies had arrived already connected to institutions, whereas Moholy was a permanent supplicant, Paepcke’s pet cause; his unsightly begging surely repelled Mies, who considered him more a charlatan than a threat. That Moholy was a teetotaler and Mies a functional alcoholic didn’t help, but the real reason for Mies’s animosity was that Moholy had,

according to Mies, stolen the word *Bauhaus*, which he considered his own property, through Bauhaus bylaws after the school's closing in 1933. In this case, though, Moholy's sticky intellectual fingers hadn't come into play; Gropius himself had insisted he use it, and if anyone had claim to the word *Bauhaus*, it was its founder. In 1967 Mies actually "gave" the word back to Gropius, an acknowledgment that it wasn't his in the first place.

Moholy wasn't always popular at home, either. Tight money had forced him to move his family from a large apartment on exclusive Astor Street to something cheaper on Lakeview Avenue. He worked six days a week, gone before his daughters woke and back home after they'd crawled into bed. A difficult, demanding husband, he was dismissive of Sibyl's writing career, and the little they had belonged to the Paepckes, from whom she couldn't escape "the definite feeling that in [Pussy's]—oh so pretty—blue eyes we are just Schnorrers." Yet as much as Sibyl feared and resented Moholy, she loved him, "a total man" with "a voracious appetite for strong sex and strong food, and there was absolutely nothing he permitted as obstacle in his reach for fulfillment."

By 1944, the school was on the verge of collapse, and so was Moholy, doing everything and none of it well. Paepcke issued an ultimatum: the School of Design had to change from a one-man show into a structured institution that worked with industry: the Institute of Design (ID). He'd serve as chairman of the board for this new ID, and he'd enlist power hitters such as William Patterson, the president of United Airlines, and E. P. Brooks of Sears to sit on the board. For his part, Moholy would have to create a more coherent curriculum. "So, let me repeat once more," Paepcke wrote him in April 1, "that everybody expects you to be a leader, educator, and creative artist and not an individual doer of a thousand and one miscellaneous relatively unimportant mechanical duties."

The story of the three iterations of Moholy's school is as simple as the typefaces on their letterheads. The name "new bauhaus" had always been set in all-lowercase sans serif, a direct link to the Weimar original. "School of Design" had been written in elegant script, artsy and fanciful, maybe a

little too dreamy and delicate for its own good. "INSTITUTE OF DESIGN," though, was written in block letters, all caps. The ID, like all of postwar Chicago, would mean business. Still, Moholy's humanist ethos would weave itself into the city's most important creative currents and constitute one of its greatest artistic legacies.