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Source: *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4, Revising Cubism (Winter, 1988), pp. 284-295

Published by: [College Art Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/776979>

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# Modernism, Formalism, and Politics: The “Cubism and Abstract Art” Exhibition of 1936 at The Museum of Modern Art

By Susan Noyes Platt

The *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition, held at The Museum of Modern Art in New York City during the spring of 1936 (Fig. 1) and subsequently in six other cities, marks a watershed in the historiography of early-twentieth-century modernism. Earlier, the critical analysis of modern art had been complex, individual and often contradictory. Interpretations in America—by such writers as Katherine Dreier, Alfred Stieglitz, and Walter Pach, for example—depended on a combination of personal prejudices and sporadic interaction with European and American publications and artists. These early critics developed categories, styles, and motives anew for each publication.<sup>1</sup>

*Cubism and Abstract Art* together with the widespread dissemination of its influential catalogue, established Cubism as the central issue of early modernism, abstraction as the goal. It made Cubism and what it characterized as its descendents into a completed history. At the same time, in a significant contradiction, it removed Cubism from its own historical, social, and political context. These ideas dominated understanding of the early-twentieth-century developments in modernism for decades. It affected later histories of early modern art written by European as well as American critics. The effectiveness of the exhibition and its catalogue from the perspective of our jaded, satiated late-twentieth-century art world is startling. Yet, when the contents of the exhibition, the basis for the interpretations it pro-



Fig. 1 View looking northeast on 53rd Street of The Museum of Modern Art with Alexander Calder mobile made for the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Photograph courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

posed, and its development within the context of the political events of the 1930s are subjected to scrutiny, the reasons for its impact emerge clearly.

As visitors entered the exhibition, they were immediately confronted with Picasso's *Dancer* (1907) juxtaposed to an African figure (Fig. 2). In another room, Boccioni's bronze *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* was paired with a

plaster cast of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* (Fig. 3).<sup>2</sup> These juxtapositions of modern art and its purported sources were intended to educate viewers to the revolutionary development of modern art as well as to its historical roots in the familiar art of the classical era.

Alfred Barr, the curator of *Cubism and Abstract Art*, presented there an apparently absolutely systematic version of the development of Cubism. This grand scheme was epitomized in an evolutionary chart that traced the ancestry and descendents of Cubism (Fig. 4). The chart was posted throughout the exhibition and used on the dust jacket of the catalogue. Divided into five-year periods, the chart presented a genealogy of modern artistic styles. At the top it demonstrated that Redon, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, Seurat, and Rousseau generated Fauvism and Cubism, whose non-European and nonart sources were set off in red boxes. About midway through the chart, Cubism was shown as the progenitor of Futurism, Purism, Orphism, Neoplasticism, Suprematism, and Constructivism, with Fauvism, less centrally, as the direct ancestor of Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism. Finally, these styles evolved into just two directions: “geometrical abstract art” and “non-geometrical abstract art.”

The thesis and structure of the chart was reflected in the order and sequence of the installation. Here for the first time Cubism was displayed as a historically completed style with demonstrable



**Fig. 2** Installation view of the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Photograph by Beaumont Newhall, courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York



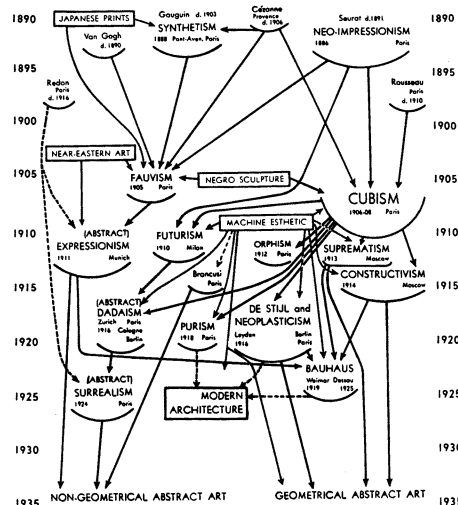
**Fig. 3** Installation view of the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Photograph by Beaumont Newhall, courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York

derivation from earlier sources and inevitable progeny in the later styles of abstraction. On the first floor, immediately after the entryway with the *Dancer* and the African figure, Barr grouped his designated precursors in a source room. Next came a step-by-step development of early Cubism, with Cubist works paired with appropriate works of African sculpture (**Fig. 5**) and Cézanne (**Fig. 6**). Later Cubism was represented with works such as Picasso's *Table* (**Fig. 7**) along with Futurist examples, early Delaunay, and Léger's *Luncheon*. This section culminated with Picasso's *Studio* (**Fig. 8**) and *The Painter and His Model*, which were given entire walls to themselves. Barr divided Cubism distinctly and unequivocally into two phases: "Analytic" and "Synthetic." These were terms that had appeared frequently in literature on Cubism almost since its inception, but with varying connotations.<sup>3</sup> Here, for the first time, those terms were used with capital letters to define clear-cut stylistic stages in the history of Cubism. Other sections of the exhibition included the Orphism of Delaunay, the development of Neoplasticism in the work of Mondrian, Suprematism (Malevich's *Black Square* and *Red Square* was hung upside down

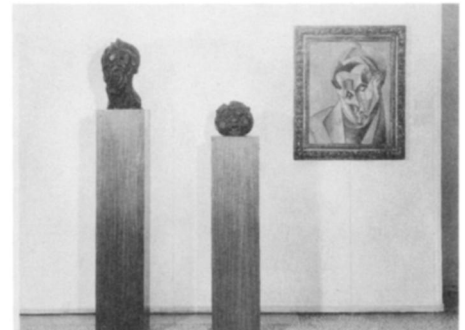
and reproduced that way in the catalogue), and the Constructivism of Tatlin and Popova, represented by photographic reproductions. Finally, "Abstract Expressionism," the term Barr used for the works of Kandinsky, appeared near the end of the exhibition, as did "Abstract Dadaism" and "Abstract Surrealism."

In addition to the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture, the exhibition featured abstract film, photography, and the application of the modern vocabulary to architecture, chair design, and small household objects such as plates and cups. In all, nearly 400 objects were exhibited. Barr enhanced the dignity of the work by his spare installation. Such touches as the exhibition of Malevich's *White on White* between two windows on which the white window shades had been lowered exactly halfway made a point about the painting and underscored its inherent elegance.

In the exhibition catalogue, Barr systematically and factually laid out a history of Cubism. The emphasis throughout the essay, as in the chart, was on the development of the styles of modern art, rather than on details of the individual artists' careers. Barr repeated the juxtapositions of the installation in the catalogue, filling in works that did not appear in the exhibition, such as the *Demaiselles d'Avignon*, for which the *Dancer* was probably the stand-in. Each style was given a chronology, a summary, and pictorial documentation. The book concluded with a list of the works, carefully catalogued as to size and source, and a bibliography compiled by Beaumont Newhall, who also took the installation photographs.



**Fig. 4** Chart of Modern Art by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Photograph courtesy, The Museum of Modern Art, New York



**Fig. 5** Installation view of the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Photograph by Beaumont Newhall, courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The theoretical principles and models used to explain the development of modern art in *Cubism and Abstract Art* were in some ways the distillation of many years of thought for Barr. In other ways, the essay was a significant departure from his earlier writings, a departure generated by the political pressures of the mid 1930s. Examination of his earlier essays reveals the moment at which politics began to affect Barr's concerns as an art historian.

As Director of The Museum of Modern Art from its founding in 1929, Barr formulated preliminary versions of *Cubism and Abstract Art* in the early 1930s. Even before he became Director, he had frequently combined teaching with modern-art exhibitions. But in the mid thirties a sudden and brilliant amalgamation of his earlier experiences as curator and teacher found expression in the startling clarity of the 1936 exhibition. Seeking to educate the public in the art of their own century, he used the established methodologies of traditional art history to validate it.

Barr received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Princeton in 1922 and a Masters degree in 1923. His attitude to an instructional survey of modernism was the product of his training in the methodologies of art history as they were practiced in the early 1920s, when the focus was formalist. The historians who influenced Barr's approach to the 1936 exhibition—Charles Rufus Morey and Frank Jewett Mather<sup>4</sup>—were among the founders of the disciplines of art history and connoisseurship in America.

Morey, in particular, influenced Barr throughout his career. Two aspects of Morey's approach had particular importance for Barr. First, he impressed on Barr the idea that all the expressions of art had validity no matter what medium was used, a perspective that was at variance with traditional notions of the



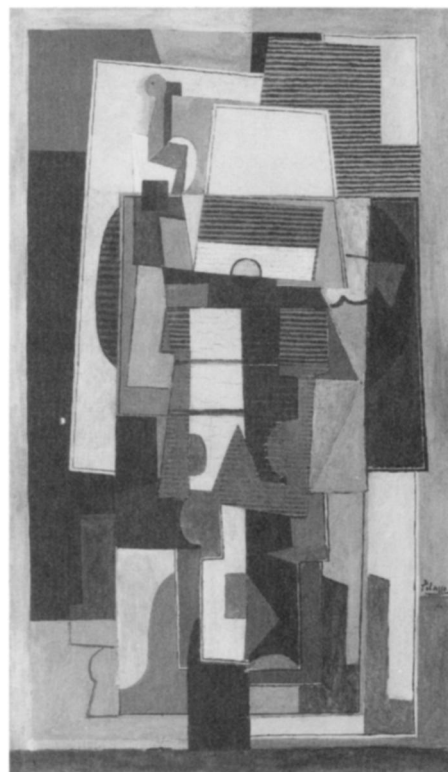
**Fig. 6** Installation view of the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Photograph by Beaumont Newhall, courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York

superiority of painting and sculpture. Morey's courses included the so-called minor arts as well as painting, sculpture, and architecture. Barr's catalogues would later include film design as well as painting and sculpture. Second, Morey, who was a classical archaeologist before he turned to medieval art, held the classical tradition in high esteem. Yet, influenced by Alois Riegl, the theorist of late Roman art, Morey also subscribed to the principle of a biological model for the history of art—growth, flowering, and decay.<sup>5</sup> Morey characterized art as an abstract flow of form, which existed independently of the individual artists. He strongly influenced Barr to conceive of art history as a detached event with its own internal development rather than as a phenomenon subject to social, political, and personal pressures.

In Mather, Barr encountered a professor of art history engaged with contemporary criticism, as well as with earlier art. Mather's background was in literature rather than art history. His historical study echoed the chatty, informal approach to art criticism as it was often practiced in the teens. Yet his less scholarly approach was as instrumental to Barr's development as was Morey's more analytical approach, although Mather was less obviously an intellectual role model.<sup>6</sup>

Barr began doctoral study at Harvard University in 1924. Among the professors who most influenced his later work was Paul J. Sachs. Connoisseurship, the direct examination and evaluation of the work of art without regard for its author-

ship, was the particular emphasis of Sachs's courses. His close friend and even mentor was Bernard Berenson,<sup>7</sup> whose role as the formulator of the methodology of connoisseurship is crucial to an understanding of Barr's later writing.



**Fig. 7** Pablo Picasso, *Table, Guitar and Bottle (La Table)*, 1919, oil on canvas, 50 × 29 1/2". Northampton, Mass., Smith College Museum of Art.

In an early work, *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art* (1901), Berenson explained his methodology:

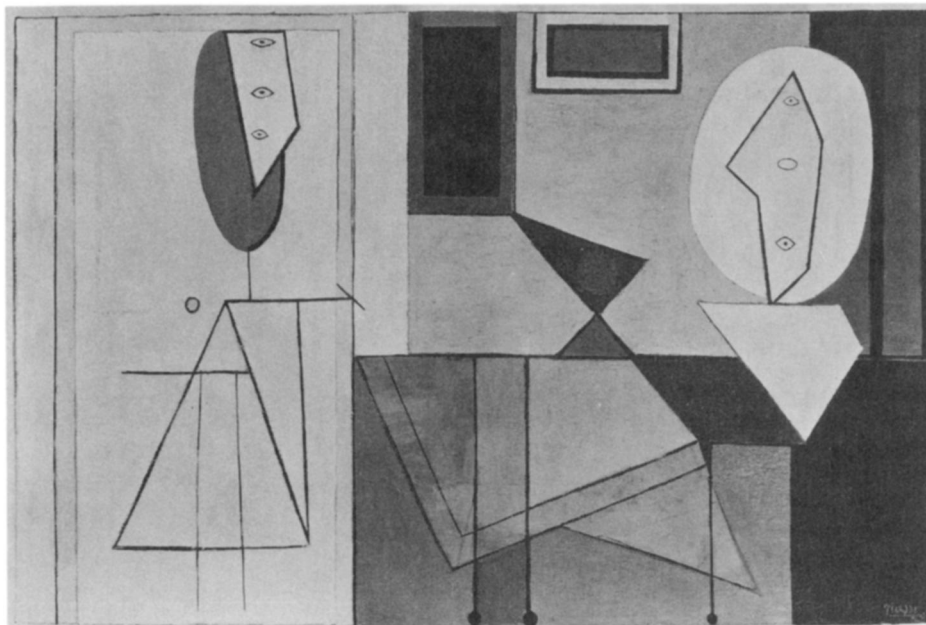
The history of art should be studied much more abstractly than it has ever been studied and freed as much as possible from entangling irrelevancies of personal anecdote and parasitic growths of petty documentation. . . . [T]he world's art can be, nay should be, studied as independently of all documents as is the world's fauna or the world's flora. The effort to classify the one should proceed along the line of the others. . . . Such a classification would yield material not only ample enough for the universal history of art, but precise enough, if qualitative analysis also be applied, for the perfect determination of purely artistic personalities.<sup>8</sup>

Berenson built on the scientific approach of the pioneer of connoisseurship, Giovanni Morelli, but added to that writer's quantitative approach "the element of quality."<sup>9</sup> It was in this scientific, rational, yet subjective determination of quality that Sachs trained his students at Harvard. In a seminar presentation for Sachs's course on the history of engraving and drawing, in the spring of 1925, Barr attempted for the first time, as far as is known, to adapt the methodology of connoisseurship to modern art:

If all artists painted or drew Madonnas as they once did, how conveniently we could compare them—but they don't. So I will show you a series of portraits. . . . I will be emphasizing neither personalities nor chronologies, nor nationalities. I will merely propose a series of comparisons from which you must draw your own conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

Barr then presented an overview of modern engraving and drawing by connecting the works on the basis of such style elements as line. He thus created an anonymous stylistic history of modernism based on qualitative differences he perceived in the works themselves.

At the same time, Barr created, in an exhibition that accompanied the lecture, sequences and juxtapositions of images to suggest stylistic developments; lengthy wall labels explained how the works related to earlier, contemporaneous, and later works. They also provided a rudimentary explanation of Cubism and its background:



**Fig. 8** Pablo Picasso, *The Studio*, 1927–28, oil on canvas, 59 × 84". New York, The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr., 213.35.

[Picasso] began with Steinlen . . . played with negro sculpture; with Braque created Cubism; and deserted that for a return to nature and to Ingres. . . . Cubism was the invention of Picasso and Braque but it was inspired by Cézanne who pointed out that natural forms if simplified to geometrical essentials become cubes and cylinders. This was the first stage of Cubism. Having reduced the form to cubes and cylinders and spheres, it is not a difficult step to juggle them somewhat to combine in one picture the front and back of the same figure, to substitute the concave for the convex and to do all of these things according to the aesthetic sensibility of the artist.<sup>11</sup>

Barr arranged the prints in the exhibition in what he called "an almost mathematical progression from Impressionism to Cubism." Analyzing individual Cubist works in the tradition of the connoisseur, he emphasized their formal elements, treating the line, plane, and shape of the works very much in the way he had been trained to analyze Renaissance painting. He indicated that Cubism had been abandoned for a return to Ingres, but an Ingres "simplified and continuous in contour, based . . . on profound knowledge."<sup>12</sup>

Even in this rudimentary student exercise Barr revealed his dual allegiance to the current critical dialogue on Cubism and to the methodologies of connoisseurship and art-historical analysis. In that spring of 1925, as Barr was

presenting his report and exhibition, the prevailing attitude in American criticism was that Cubism was finished. The development of the so-called neoclassical style by Picasso was seen as an indication that, as one critic put it, the "game is about up." The critics of art celebrated what they saw as a return to sanity and realism.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, some writing on recent modern art was available in New York by 1925: three surveys of modern art had appeared in 1924, as well as an English translation of Apollinaire's "Aesthetic Meditations."<sup>14</sup> Thus Barr as a young art historian focusing on the scholarly approach in which he had been trained had literary sources on which to draw. And although he was aware that Cubism was considered already a completed event, unlike the more reactionary critics, he could appraise and analyze the tradition itself with his scholarly tools.

Following graduate school, Barr arranged an exhibition in conjunction with teaching a course in modern art at Wellesley in 1927. His first exhibition with a printed catalogue and extensive explanations, it bears a close relationship to his activities at The Museum of Modern Art in the early 1930s. The title of the exhibition, *Progressive Modern Painting from Daumier and Corot to Post Cubism*, reflected the principle of situating Cubism in relation to earlier developments of the mid nineteenth century. This historical approach continued in later exhibitions; even the emphasis on Corot and Daumier as ancestors of

modernism was again propounded in early individual exhibitions for each of these artists at The Museum of Modern Art—a lineage for modernism very different from today's proposal of Manet and Courbet as progenitors. Also to reappear later is the categorizing of groups and tendencies, and the filling in of blanks left by crucial works that do not appear in the exhibition by means of accompanying remarks.

Cubism, although only skimpily represented—by Juan Gris, Jean Metzinger, Fernand Léger, and Marie Laurencin—was acknowledged as a central event with Futurism and Expressionism in what Barr referred to as Period II. The wall label for Juan Gris treated the nature of Cubism by formal analysis of the painting. Although the work was a collage, the term "Synthetic Cubism" did not appear in the discussion. Most important in light of later developments, Cubism was viewed as a prewar movement that was followed by "Period III," which was compartmentalized into "The Neo-Realists," "the Neo-classicists," "The Constructivists," and "The Super-realists."<sup>15</sup>

In his modern-art course, too, Barr allotted much more space to the range of approaches in modern art than to the rôle of Cubism. The course studied all the directions outlined in the sections of the exhibition as well as "industrial architecture . . . appliances [and] graphic arts. . . . Various recurring themes are stressed, the appreciation of primitive and barbaric art, the psychology of expressionism, the discipline in Cubism and constructivism and the importance of the machine."<sup>16</sup>

In 1927–28 Barr went to Europe, supported by a small grant from Paul Sachs, in order to research his dissertation. On that trip Barr met a number of contemporary artists through letters of introduction given to him by the German art dealer I.B. Neumann. Neumann, who had immigrated to New York in 1923, had been Barr's close friend and supporter from his earliest years of teaching. Through Neumann's letters, Barr met most of the major figures of German contemporary art, such as the Bauhaus group, the Neue Sachlichkeit, and the dealers and critics that supported them.<sup>17</sup> But he went beyond even Neumann's contacts by visiting Russia in the spring of 1927. There he met Diego Rivera as well as members of the Russian avant-garde. His introduction to the extremely politicized artists in Russia had a permanent effect on his awareness of the interaction of art and politics. Thus Barr became an amalgam of the detached

connoisseur-theoretician and the engaged art critic aware of the impact of Marxism and politics in general on the arts. During that sojourn in Russia, he not only met with revolutionary artists but also undertook a pioneering study of the anonymous Byzantine icons of Russia.<sup>18</sup>

After his return from Russia, Barr resumed teaching at Wellesley. In a five-part lecture series in the spring of 1929, Barr presented his more fully developed analysis of modern art:

Modern Painting: The Ideal of a "Pure" Art. The important tendencies in painting of twenty years ago: the neo-renaissance in Derain; the decorative in Matisse; the cubistic in Picasso. The formalist attitude toward Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque painting. The immediate antecedents of cubism: Degas, Gauguin and the "angle shot"; Seurat and the theory of pure design; Cézanne's natural geometry; abstraction in primitive art. The development of cubism in Paris. Kandinsky and abstract expressionism in Germany. The final purification of painting: Mondriaan in Holland; the suprematists in Russia. André Lhote and the new academic. The influence of abstract painting upon architecture, the theatre, the films, photography, decorative arts, typographical layout, commercial art. Conclusion: the "demon of the absolute."<sup>19</sup>

Following this section were four more parts: "The Disintegration Since Cubism"; "Modern American Painting"; "The Bauhaus"; "The Lyef Group in Moscow." Cubism was thus buried in the early stages of the lecture series, followed by many subsequent developments. Part I would become the prototype for *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

Illie P. Bliss, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, and Mary Sullivan founded The Museum of Modern Art in the spring of 1929; Paul Sachs recommended Alfred Barr as its first Director. Between 1929 and 1936, Barr arranged more than twenty exhibitions. Several had specific references to Cubism, and some can be seen as preliminary versions of the 1936 exhibition.

The first exhibition to outline the history of early-twentieth-century art was the 1930 *Painting in Paris from American Collections*. As in the Wellesley exhibition of 1927, the disparities between what Barr perceived as the central issues and artists and the actual artists who were available in American

collections were compensated for in the introductory essay. As both connoisseur and historian he suggested that even as he created order in modern art with the exhibition, the final document was the work of art itself. At the same time he demonstrated his greater awareness of recent art in his introductory statement:

Ten years ago it might have been possible to generalize about modern art. In fact, even at present there are some who are courageous—or blind—enough to declare that modern art has one dominant characteristic such as the belief in pure self-expression, or an exclusive interest in form, or a contempt for natural appearances but the truth is that . . . contemporary art . . . is merely so extraordinarily complex that it defies generalization. . . . Any attempt to classify modern artists must lead to treacherous simplification. But it may not be too misleading to suggest a chronology and some description of terms, trusting that the paintings themselves will contradict inevitable error.<sup>20</sup>

His systemization included Fauves, Cubists, and Surrealists. Cubism was traced from its beginnings in mere simplification through ten years when it

passed through three or four distinct phases each more complicated in appearance and in explanation. But by 1917 a distinct clarification occurs. . . . The influence of cubism has been immense, but its nearly complete elimination of naturalistic imitation has brought about equally extreme reactions. . . . It is noteworthy that almost without exception the original members of both the *fauve* and cubist groups have in their recent work given far more recognition to the values of objective representation.<sup>21</sup>

Barr's attitude towards contemporary art and his thoughts about the direction in which it was moving were most clearly stated in his next words: "[The] puritanical exclusion of all sentimental and 'human' values by the cubists of 1908 . . . has induced in the last generation a reaction which has produced painting of extraordinary originality . . . [s]urrealism."<sup>22</sup> In 1930, thus, Barr held the opinion that Surrealism was the most interesting dimension of contemporary art. He devoted more than a page to its concerns and artists.

In the spring of 1932 Barr organized *A Brief Survey of Modern Painting*,

which was divided into several parts that echoed the subdivisions of the 1927 Wellesley exhibition, but expanded them. The historical part included: "Painting Fifty Years Ago: French and American" and "Cézanne and the Post Impressionists." Twentieth-century painting was divided into subcategories: Section III, which included "Expressionism," "Psychological and Decorative," "The 'Wild Animals,' The 'School of Paris'"; and Section IV, which included "Picasso and Cubism, Futurism, Abstract Design, Super-realism." Cubism was still presented here as a gradual "removal from realism . . . until there were few traces of any recognizable objects in their pictures. [T]heir chief interest is in the design, in aesthetic qualities of line, color, texture."<sup>23</sup>

The catalogue in a significant contrast to the earlier statements also claimed that

the principles of *Cubism* and *Abstract Design* [Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Rodchenko] spread all over the world and influenced many of the artists in this exhibition, for example, the Germans, Marc and Klee, the Americans, Marin, Demuth and Dickinson, the Italians, Chirico and Severini. Cubism and Abstract Design have also had an immense influence upon 'modernistic' furniture, textiles, architecture, painting and advertising.<sup>24</sup>

Even more significant was Barr's statement that the Surrealists or, as he called them, the "Super-realists," "came as a violent reaction to the Cubists' exclusive interest in the problem of aesthetic design and color. The Super-realists asserted the value of the astonishing, the fantastic, the mysterious, the uncanny, the paradoxical, the incredible."<sup>25</sup> Barr concluded the exhibition with recent painting in which many different directions were developing at the same time but in which a "gradual, but widespread return to the realistic representation of nature has been in progress since the War."<sup>26</sup> Barr's statement expanded on the earlier essays: it gave Cubism and "Abstract Design" more emphasis, but it gave equal coverage to "Super-realism" and a multifaceted realism.

In the summer of 1933, while Barr was on leave in Germany, the trustees of the Museum arranged an exhibition, *Modern European Art*, which Barr summarized in the *Museum Bulletin* the following October.<sup>27</sup> A subtle shift had now occurred in Barr's discussion of the historical survey of modern art, perhaps as a reaction to Hitler's rise to power



and the beginning of the oppression of the avant-garde in Germany. Barr now praised the "Abstract paintings" including the Cubists, Kandinsky, and Mondrian as "the most striking." He spoke of Klee and Chirico, also included in the show, as pioneers against "pure design," and as part of the "Romantic Reaction." Finally, he spoke of the "Superrealists . . . who insist fanatically upon the exclusive validity of the imagination." Barr here introduced a negative judgment in the discussion of Surrealism.<sup>28</sup> This exhibition once again relied on American collections, but Barr promised future shows of "'Cubism and Abstract Painting' illustrating prototypes and analogies, sources, development, decadence, influence and recent revival" and "'Post War Romanticism' illustrating Dadaism, Superrealism and other movements concerned with the mysterious, fantastic or sentimental together with their ancestry and analogs."<sup>29</sup>

Thus by the fall of 1933 Barr was granting Cubism central importance in relation to a major group of artists. One year later the Museum celebrated its fifth anniversary with the exhibition *Modern Works of Art* (November 1934–January 1935). It was accompanied by a much longer essay by Barr, and included works of sculpture and examples of American, as well as European, art. All works exhibited, like those in previous exhibitions, came from private collections in New York. Barr now analyzed the development of Cubism much more thoroughly:

Under the influence of Cézanne and primitive negro sculpture they [Braque and Picasso] had begun about 1907 to reduce landscapes or figures to block-like forms with surfaces of flat planes. Two years later they had broken up these block-like forms, shifting their planes about, mingling the planes of foreground objects with the background. . . . Gradually in this process of disintegration and reintegration, cubist pictures grew more and more abstract, that is abstracted from ordinary resemblances to nature. . . . As a natural consequence of the elimination of subject they began to vary the surface of the painting by pasting on bits of newspaper.<sup>30</sup>

This was the first instance in Barr's treatment of Cubism that focused on the use of pasted paper, what would in *Cubism and Abstract Art* become the important phase of "Synthetic Cubism." Barr went on to comment that "Meanwhile outside of Paris, cubist ten-

dency towards geometric form has been carried to an extreme by the suprematists. . . . Abstract art flourishes in London. Davis and Gorki [*sic*] lead the cubists in New York. Bauer thrives in Berlin. Even futurism has won official recognition."<sup>31</sup> He spoke of "Post-War Painting" as having more "traditional" styles, "[which] to the extreme advance gardists . . . seemed, as indeed they were, reactionary."<sup>32</sup> No longer does Barr embrace the idea that realistic currents were primary and Cubism finished; now he proposes that Cubism had led to abstraction, a vital tradition throughout the world. Barr still concluded, however, that there were many other tendencies in contemporary painting; they included Surrealism, Romanticism, and mural painting.

The essay for the *Modern Works of Art* catalogue was the last published prelude to the greatly expanded treatment of Cubism and abstract art in the 1936 exhibition, an exhibition that also included Dada and Surrealism as the descendents of Cubism. But there survives, in an undated and unsigned memorandum from the advisory committee to the trustees, one other interim draft proposal. In it Cubism was directly linked to industrial design: "The thesis might end at this climactic point or it might continue with an account of the various paths by which painters of abstractions emerged from their blind alley into other kinds of painting, dadaism, constructivism, counter-relief, purism, compressionism, architecture, photography, photomontage, typography, etc."<sup>33</sup> The argument was then made that the American public needed an exhibition of Cubist artists because commercial galleries rarely exhibited them. Although this memorandum did not issue from Barr himself, it did provide one interesting argument used to create the exhibition. One other archival document, an undated chart in Barr's handwriting (*Fig. 9*), places Cubism at the top of a genealogical chart with three immediate descendents, Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Malevich. Several steps lead to Cubism's final progeny: typography, stage arts, and architecture.<sup>34</sup> Thus Cubism was not one stage of modern art that was concluded, but the linchpin of all aspects of early-twentieth-century art.

The catalogue for *Cubism and Abstract Art* began with a general statement that differed in character from those of Barr's earlier essays. Barr identified the nature of early modern art as an obsession with "a particular problem"; that of abstraction. Barr com-

pared this obsession to the desire of Renaissance artists to achieve realism and linear perspective:

In the early twentieth century the dominant interest was almost exactly the opposite. . . . The more adventurous and original artists had grown bored with painting facts. By a common and powerful impulse they were driven to abandon the imitation of natural appearances. . . . Resemblance to natural objects, while it does not necessarily destroy these esthetic values, may easily adulterate their purity.<sup>35</sup>

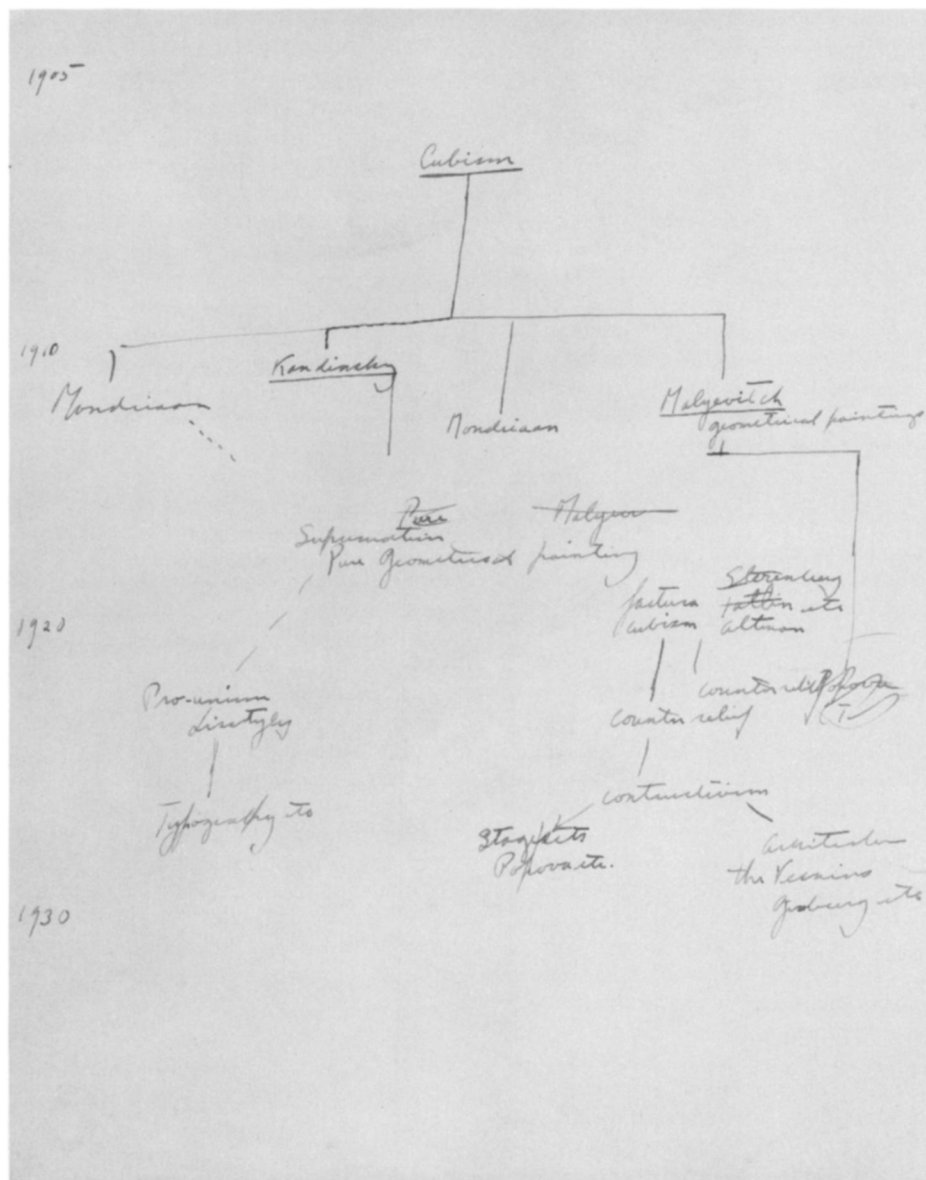
Even as he laid out these important principles that were to become the canon of contemporary art for many years, Barr suggested some ambivalence towards them by admitting that giving up references to nature led to impoverishment by "an elimination of the connotations of subject matter, the sentimental, documentary, political, sexual, religious, the pleasures of easy recognition and the enjoyment of technical dexterity . . . but the abstract artist prefers impoverishment to adulteration."<sup>36</sup>

In the section on Analytic Cubism, Barr reiterated some of the ideas of the *Modern Works of Art* catalogue. The new section on Synthetic Cubism expanded on the earlier explanation:

Their texture . . . adds to [the] independent reality so they may be, considered not a breaking down or analysis, but a building up or synthesis . . . [p]asting strips of paper . . . was a logical culmination of the interest in simulating textures and a further and complete repudiation of the convention that a painter was honor-bound to achieve the reproduction of a texture by means of paint rather than by the short cut of applying the texture itself to his canvas.<sup>37</sup>

This detailed discussion of individual Cubist works established with a new clarity the terminology of Cubist discussion and the idea of abstraction as a goal of twentieth-century artists. Barr's bias towards the post-Cubist return to realism, so clearly spelled out in earlier stages of his writings on Cubism, altered in 1936 to emphasize specific analysis of Cubist work, and the establishment of its legacy, abstraction, as a dominating aspect of the contemporary scene. Moreover, the catalogue and the exhibition specifically excluded realism, even when it was a logical aspect of a style, as in Dadaism and Surrealism.

The exhibition itself, as a comprehensive collection of loans, was also of a



**Fig. 9** Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Handwritten Chart, n.d. Museum of Modern Art Archives, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers. Photograph courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

different type from all but one of the previous displays at the museum: it drew on the work from the artists' studios, private European collectors, Paris art dealers, and other new sources, rather than exclusively from the New York collections that had been the centerpiece of most of the previous exhibitions.<sup>38</sup> Thus Barr's show was a campaign and a carefully ordered strategy to present what he called in a letter to Jerome Klein, a young art historian, "an exercise in contemporary art history with particular reference to style." Yet in the same letter, astonishingly, he went on to say: "I was very much interested in Cubism and abstract art ten years ago, but my interest in it has declined steadily since 1927."<sup>39</sup>

But if Barr had lost interest in Cubism, if he considered it a completed

stage, why was he now claiming for it and its heirs a continued vitality? One possible explanation lies in Barr's plan of a series of exhibitions that would consider other aspects of modernism.<sup>40</sup> But that series of exhibitions does not explain the radical change in the nature of his support for Cubism and abstract art. Perhaps he himself offered the clearest answer:

This essay and exhibition might well be dedicated to those painters of squares and circles (and the architects influenced by them) who have suffered at the hands of philistines with political power.<sup>41</sup>

**I**n 1936, as Barr was writing the catalogue the forces of Stalinism and Nazism were becoming increasingly

virulent in their attacks on avant-garde writers and artists.<sup>42</sup> More specifically, though, as early as 1927, and again during his year in Germany in 1932–33, Barr himself had witnessed first hand the danger that totalitarianism posed to the avant-garde artist.

Barr's trip to Russia in the spring of 1928 took place shortly after Joseph Stalin had expelled Leon Trotsky from the Communist party. This act publicly repudiated Trotsky's commitment to avant-garde art as a part of the Revolution and replaced it with the Stalinist dictum that art was a propaganda tool that had to use realistic images to celebrate his economic policies. Barr experienced one blatant example of the suppression of avant-garde visual art when he attempted to visit the Museum of Abstract Art in Moscow and found it closed. Guides referred to the modern art that it contained as examples of bourgeois decadence.<sup>43</sup> Even more disturbing was Barr's experience in 1932–33, when he lived in Stuttgart, while on leave from the Museum. There he was confronted with the early days of the rise of Hitler and its immediate effect on the visual arts. Margaret Barr described these early events with frightening clarity in her recently published memoir. The article details the sudden enthusiasm for Hitler among the residents of the pension where the Barrs were staying, primarily as a result of the power of the radio. It further recounts the sudden disappearance of a Schlemmer exhibition, the addition of gables to modern flat roofs, and the derogatory labeling of modern art works in art museums.<sup>44</sup> Alfred Barr, angered with these events, wrote a series of articles entitled "Hitler and the Nine Muses" in order to call the American public's attention to the then little-known events in Germany with respect to the dangers to the avant-garde. Only one of these articles was accepted for publication.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Barr, sooner and more clearly than many other Americans, recognized the threat to avant-garde art that totalitarian regimes posed. On his return to America in late 1933 he observed also in the United States the widespread resurgence of realistic styles, particularly those of regionalism, because realism was seen as more appropriate to the desperate economic conditions of the Depression. In December 1933 the Federal Arts Projects began to support realism.<sup>46</sup> In the fall of 1933, just as these attitudes towards realism were coalescing throughout Europe and America, Barr began increasingly to emphasize Cubism and abstract art, and to downplay realism. He promised a comprehen-



sive exhibition of Cubism and Abstract Art.<sup>47</sup>

With the intervention of the Fifth Anniversary Exhibition—*Modern Works of Art*—in 1934–35 and the first major Van Gogh exhibition in late 1935, it took almost two years to assemble *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Barr arranged most of the loans in the summer of 1935 during a trip to Europe, in which he met with European collectors, critics, and writers, and visited Henry Moore, Miró, Mondrian, Giacometti, Léger, Braque, and Picasso, among others. Most dramatic was the emotional reunion with Larionov and Gontcharova: they had emigrated from Russia since Barr last saw them in Moscow in 1927,<sup>48</sup> another indication of the spreading repression during the early years of the Stalinist regime. Perhaps fueled by his anger at the situation for avant-garde artists in Europe, Barr approached more artists more directly than he had for any earlier exhibition. He frequently circumvented the dealers, who had been a considerable obstacle in earlier efforts to organize exhibitions of the established European modern artists, such as Picasso.<sup>49</sup>

*Cubism and Abstract Art* was finally assembled in the art season of 1935–36. Barr wrote the catalogue in only six weeks. He drew on his training in detached scholarship for his genealogical approach, anonymous treatment of style, and lucid connoisseurship of particular works. But he also drew on his concern for the threatened condition of the avant-garde. The combination of these circumstances gave the exhibition its breadth, universality, clarity, and permanence. More than just another exhibition of modern art, *Cubism and Abstract Art* was a vehicle for propaganda for a threatened cause.

**B**arr's sense of timing about the urgency of the situation was correct. Following its New York venue, the exhibition opened in San Francisco in the summer of 1936, just as the infamous display of Nazi power at the Berlin Olympics was taking place. In Moscow, on August 15, 1936, the Stalin trials began, trials that would last for two years and ultimately and systematically destroy all vestiges of the revolutionary generation in Russia, as well as its intellectual leaders. As the heroes of the Russian Revolution recanted their actions and declared themselves traitors to their country, American intellectuals, sympathizers with both the political and cultural programs of this revolutionary generation, were thrown in disarray. By 1936–37 both Hitler and Stalin had virtually completed the repression of

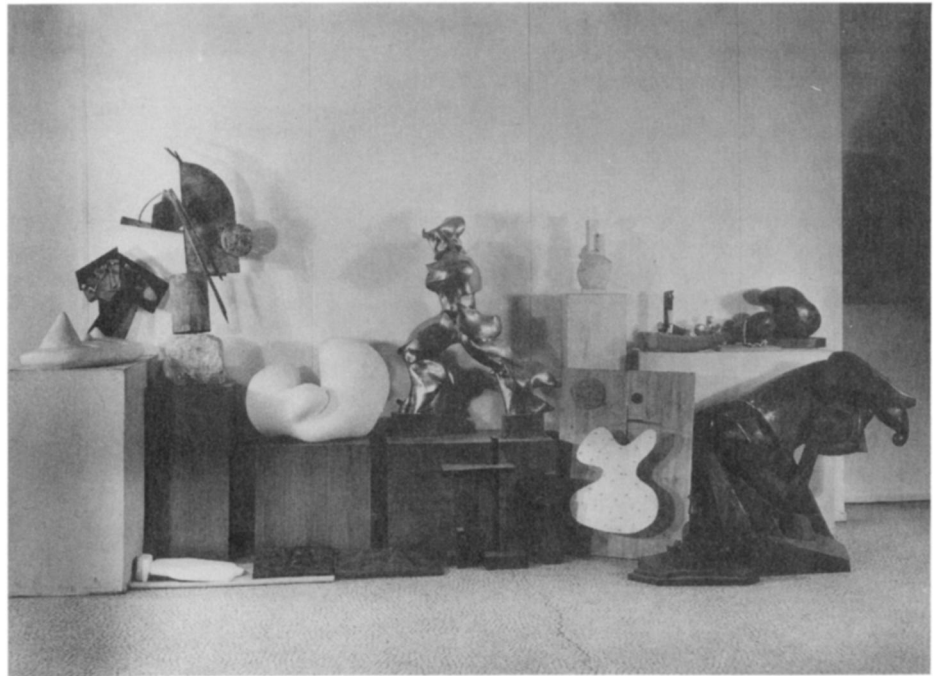
avant-garde art and even the extermination of that art in favor of the more easily comprehensible Socialist Realist style. In the United States the massive Works Progress Administration spread American-scene realism across the country. The leftist *Art Front* called for an art that responded to conditions of life, while the regionalists demanded an art that reflected the American scene. As documented by his articles written in Germany in 1932–33, Barr was acutely aware of economic, political, and artistic events and concerned about the preservation and protection of modern art and artists. One obvious instance of that concern in 1936 appeared in the publicity he gave to the holdup at customs of much of the abstract sculpture for *Cubism and Abstract Art*. The *Museum Bulletin* prominently featured this event, and Barr also made a specific reference to it in the catalogue (*Fig. 10*).<sup>50</sup>

The full resources of The Museum of Modern Art promoted the exhibition of *Cubism and Abstract Art*. The itinerary took the exhibition to San Francisco, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Baltimore, Providence, and Grand Rapids; Paramount Pictures included it in the Movietone news. The sophistication of the Museum press apparatus by 1936 insured widespread coverage throughout the country. The critical response varied widely according to the predilections of the critics: the more-informed critics supported the show, the less-

informed ridiculed it, just as they had ridiculed modern-art exhibitions since the Armory show.<sup>51</sup>

More significant than the journalistic criticism, with respect to later developments, was its effect on artists and historians. Laying out a history of modernism was a significant educational resource for artists at all stages in their development. Such a mature artist as Hans Hofmann, for example, made many visits to the exhibition.<sup>52</sup> That the impact on his thinking was significant is documented by a comparative study of his lectures from the early 1930s and the late 1930s. Hofmann's heavy emphasis on Cubism and abstraction subsequently shaped Clement Greenberg's understanding of modernism and that critic's promotion of certain formalist issues.<sup>53</sup>

The astonishing omission from the exhibition of all twentieth-century American art with the exception of Alexander Calder and Man Ray had major consequences. Barr justified this omission by pointing out that the Whitney Museum had just exhibited American abstract art in 1935.<sup>54</sup> The reasons are, in fact, far more complex. They have to do first with Barr's perception that the geometric abstract style of the American abstract artists was a played-out direction. He believed that non-geometric abstract art was a more significant development in the mid 1930s. Also influencing Barr's decision to omit American art was certainly the Mu-



*Fig. 10* Nineteen sculptures, intended for exhibition in *Cubism and Abstract Art*, that were refused entrance to the United States as works of art by customs examiners, 1936. Photograph by Beaumont Newhall, courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York,

seum's peculiar history with respect to the exhibition of contemporary American art, a history marked by much confusion and many confrontations.<sup>55</sup> The heated political situation in the American art world of the mid 1930s would have also deterred Barr from displaying American art, given his powerful plan to create a definitive statement that rose above politics. Omitted American artists working abstractly, such as George L.K. Morris, who had even been involved in the creation of the exhibition as part of the Museum's advisory board, immediately began to show in other New York galleries. Albert E. Gallatin, Director of the Gallery of Living Art, organized an exhibition of five American abstract artists whom he called "concretionists," which appeared concurrently with *Cubism and Abstract Art*.<sup>56</sup> Other exhibitions of abstract art held in April 1936 in New York were the work of Hilaire Hiler, Carl Holty, and Joseph Albers, the last newly arrived from Germany.<sup>57</sup> In the fall of 1936 the American Abstract Artists group formed and began plans for a regular program of exhibitions.<sup>58</sup>

The exhibition catalogue generated its own series of results. Barr mailed a copy to all the artists included in the exhibition, as well as to dealers, collectors, and libraries. Preserved in the Barr archives are various responses to the catalogue by contemporary artists and dealers. These letters range from precise corrections of dates and chronologies to sweeping analyses of Barr's methodology. Most comprehensive were Kandinsky's letters, and appropriately so, since he was misrepresented in the exhibition as simply a descendent of Gauguin and Cubism.

Kandinsky began by complimenting Barr on the "purely scientific" method of tracing the development of art but complained that he stressed outside influences at the expense of the more important inner influences.<sup>59</sup> He objected to being considered as part of a deterministic march to abstraction, since, in fact, he painted realistic and abstract paintings at the same time.<sup>60</sup> Kandinsky hit on crucial issues here. First, he questioned the validity of the idea of a common impulse towards abstraction. Second, he criticized the principle of an anonymous, purely formal, determination of art's development. By omitting any consideration of religious context, Barr radically misunderstood Kandinsky, as art historians now know.<sup>61</sup> Barr's idea of the outward, collective impulse towards abstraction was based on his understanding of the nature of style as he had studied it in his

graduate work. Similarly his formalist bias resulted from the adaptation of his training in the connoisseurship of Renaissance art to the art of the twentieth century. These sources took him a long way from Kandinsky's reference points.

Moholy-Nagy corrected Barr's chronology of Constructivism, as well as the interpretation of his own sources, which, he emphatically stated, were more related to Cubism and Frank Lloyd Wright than to Constructivism. More pointedly though, Moholy-Nagy spoke, as did Kandinsky, to Barr's methodology, criticizing him for finding a single, central place for each style, when actually events occurred simultaneously throughout Europe. He therefore found fault with Barr's discussion of certain artists as eclectic.<sup>62</sup>

The letter of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the dealer most intimately connected with the early events in Cubism, and author of his own book on its development, wrote to Barr respectfully, acknowledging Barr's book as the most serious study of modern art he had read, while adding that he himself saw "Cubism as a much more 'realistic' movement."<sup>63</sup> Other surviving letters, with corrections primarily to Barr's chronologies and terminologies, came from Hans Richter, Anton Pevsner, Auguste Herbin, Leonce Rosenberg, and Georges Vantongerloo.

One art historian, Meyer Schapiro, attacked the book for its reliance on an autonomous dynamic of style as the driving energy of art. Schapiro also sharply criticized the idea of the dialectic of realism and abstraction as two purified absolutes separated from experience.<sup>64</sup> These letters and articles provide invaluable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of both the catalogue of the exhibition and Barr's methodology for the exhibition itself. They offer perspectives that in many cases have been only recently considered.

Barr, in response to these letters and others, wrote courteously and deferentially of his appreciation of their comments. He spoke of a proposed revision of the catalogue, something that never occurred.<sup>65</sup> The catalogue in all its reprintings up to the present time has continued to incorporate the original perspectives and errors of the 1936 edition.

Yet, despite criticism of the book and the exhibition, both had immense influence on later art history. The catalogue became a widely used source on the history of modernism for generations of students. Standard texts incorporated its interpretations of the signifi-

cant artists and events as well as its impersonal approach to style that fit so easily with the methodologies of earlier periods of art history. The development of modern art, as it is widely taught, is still descended from the analysis of Barr, although later scholars have broadened and deepened those central outlines. Even in as recent an exhibition as *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890–1980* of 1986 the heritage of Barr's exhibition is present.<sup>66</sup> Although the catalogue of the 1986 exhibition provided major new insights into the roles of symbolism and mysticism as central concerns of early-twentieth-century artists, the exhibition's arbitrary title limiting those insights to the "abstract" owes its bias to the interpretations of *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

Although Barr established the traditions of Cubism and abstraction as timeless and universal, he himself viewed art as more than an autonomous stylistic event. In the midst of World War II, he wrote of Picasso's *Guernica*:

Picasso employed these modern techniques not merely to express his mastery of form or some personal and private emotion but to proclaim through his horror and fury over the barbarous catastrophe which had destroyed his fellow countrymen in *Guernica*—and which was soon to blast his fellow men in Warsaw, Rotterdam, London, Coventry, Chungking, Sebastopol, Pearl Harbor. . . . [T]he work of art is a symbol, a visible symbol of the human spirit in its search, for truth, for freedom, for perfection.<sup>67</sup>

At that time, too, he expanded the options of art to include the plurality of styles obscured by the creation of the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition and catalogue. Shortly after, Barr was asked to step down from the position of Director at The Museum of Modern Art for complex reasons.<sup>68</sup>

*Cubism and Abstract Art* immortalized one particular model for freedom in art. An accident of history caused the exhibition and the catalogue to fall on fertile ground, at a seminal moment in the political and artistic development of America. Ironically, the association of abstraction with freedom, progress, and purity was a concept taken up first by art critics, then adopted by politicians as an instrument of propaganda in the Cold War of the 1950s.<sup>69</sup> Abstraction ultimately became a prison for contemporary artists and critics, from which they escaped only in the 1970s with the reestablishment of a plurality of styles.

Today, our perceptions are closer to Barr's of the late 1920s, in which Cubism was regarded as only one event. Historians no longer accept the model of a history of style and form that evolves neatly in an autonomous development. Barr's scientific order, based on nineteenth-century principles of evolution and the possibility of scientific objectivity, has broken down. The idea of confining a discussion of modern art to purely formal, linear, or even dialectical terms is now recognized as arbitrary, and limited. Furthermore, social, religious and political issues are no longer seen as extrinsic to Cubism and abstract art but as an integral part of them. Realism has regained validity; it has recovered from its association with Fascism and totalitarianism. References to the visual world are no longer considered simply as a monolithic regression from the progress of art.

In *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Barr provided the first compelling model of formalist discussion and stylistic ordering for early-twentieth-century art. His contribution to the discourses of art history survives not only in his writings but also in the permanent display of the order and even many of the works from that exhibition in the Alfred H. Barr Galleries at The Museum of Modern Art. Reproductions of many of the works have become the definitive examples for a particular phase of modern art in classrooms. We can do nothing less than honor the brilliant, analytical work and connoisseurship of Alfred Barr in creating such a durable model of the history of modernism and its major monuments, even as we alter, expand, and contradict it.

#### Notes

I should like to acknowledge the support of a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., in the preparation of this article. I am grateful also to Rona Roob, Archivist, The Museum of Modern Art; Alfred Hamilton Barr, Jr., Papers, for her invaluable assistance in locating documents in the archives and to Donald Kuspit for his encouragement at various stages. A preliminary version of this article was presented as a lecture, "Modernism in the 1930s: The 'Cubism and Abstract Art' Exhibition of 1936," at the National Museum of American Art, Fellows Spring Lecture Series, May 1987. For preparation of that lecture I should like to acknowledge the support and suggestions of Lois Fink, Research Curator, Office of Research and Grants, The National Museum of American Art, Washington D.C.

1 See, for example: Katherine Dreier, *An International Exhibition of Modern Art Assembled by the Société Anonyme*, exh. cat., Brooklyn, The Brooklyn Museum, 1926. This exhibition was the most comprehensive effort to show modern art up to that time, and included

Eastern as well as Western European art. The book was organized around six categories invented by Dreier. For a complete study of this exhibition, see: Ruth Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America*. Ann Arbor, 1982. Walter Pach, *Masters of Modern Art*, New York, 1924, included chapters on "After Impressionism," "Cubism," and "Today." Although Stieglitz has been widely discussed as a sponsor of modern and American art and as a photographer, his complex critical principles and those of his entourage are still to be thoroughly examined. A few preliminary comments are in Susan Noyes Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s*, Ann Arbor, 1985, pp. 45–58.

2 Henry McBride, "Exhibition of Abstract Art at the Museum of Modern Art," reprinted in *The Flow of Art, Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride*. ed. Daniel Catton Rich, New York, 1975, pp. 333–36; the review originally appeared in *The New York Sun*. March 7, 1936.

3 Lynn Gamwell, *Cubist Criticism*, Ann Arbor, 1980, pp. 33–35, 95–100, carefully outlines the various usages of these terms in the early literature. By the mid 1930s they were widely known. See, for example: Maud Dale, *Picasso*, New York, 1930, p.1, in which Picasso's work is divided into analytic and synthetic phases; and James Johnson Sweeney, *Plastic Redirections in Twentieth-Century Art*, Chicago, 1934, p. 28, where the terms are used as adjectives and with lower-case letters to apply to Cubism in its development. Sweeney, in 1935, arranged an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art. Thus, he was part of the circle in which Barr worked and his book would have been easily accessible to Barr.

4 For an account of Barr's early experiences with these professors, see: Rona Roob, "Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: A Chronicle of the Years 1902–1929," *The New Criterion*, special issue (Summer 1987), pp. 2–4.

5 Charles Rufus Morey, *Medieval Art*, New York, 1942, p. 21.

6 Barr's lifelong devotion to both Morey and Mather was reflected in the dedication of his monograph on Matisse to them as well as to Paul Sachs (Alfred H. Barr, *Henri Matisse*, New York, 1951).

7 Paul Sachs, unpublished autobiography, "Tales of an Epoch," Archives of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., p. 276. See also: Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Connoisseur*, Cambridge, Mass., 1979, p. 171; and *The Berenson Archive: An Inventory of Correspondence*, Nicky Mariano, compiler, Cambridge, Mass., 1965, p. 86.

8 Bernard Berenson, *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art*, reprint ed., London, 1903, pp. vi, vii.

9 *Ibid.*, p. viii.

10 The Museum of Modern Art Archives: Alfred Hamilton Barr, Jr., Papers, unlabeled lecture

notes for seminar report (dated on internal evidence to Spring 1925.)

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 "Arch Cubists Recant?" *American Art News*, 19(June 12, 1920) p.1. For more information on American criticism of Cubism in the early 1920s, see: Platt (cited n. 1), pp. 5, 79–83, 87–90.

14 Guillaume Apollinaire, "Aesthetic Meditations," *The Little Review*, 8 (Spring, 1922), pp. 7–19; "Aesthetic Meditations II," *The Little Review*, 9 (Autumn 1922), pp. 41–59; "Aesthetics Meditations II (continued)," *The Little Review*, 9 (Winter 1922), pp. 49–60. The three surveys are: Sheldon Cheney, *A Primer of Modern Art*, New York: 1924; Katherine Dreier, *Western Art and the New Era*, New York, 1923; Pach (cited n. 1). Earlier surveys include Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Postimpressionism* Chicago, 1914; Willard, Huntington Wright, *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning*, New York, 1915; and Jan Gordon, *Modern French Painters*, New York, 1923. Of all these books, Wright's seems to have been the most direct source for some of Barr's comments.

15 Wall labels, Archives (cited n. 10). Part I was Cézanne, Renoir, Degas, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Les Fauves, and Die Brücke. Barr corresponded with Katherine Dreier, Director of the Société Anonyme, an authority on modern-art exhibitions. He even tried to get part of Dreier's modern-art collection for display at Wellesley College, a project that fell through owing to cost and logistical problems. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to Katherine Dreier, February 7, February 27, and March 1, 1927, and Katherine Dreier to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., February 19, March 4, 1927, Archives of the Société Anonyme, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

16 "Wellesley and Modernism," *Boston Transcript*, April 27, 1927, n.p. This article also mentions that color reproductions were used for study; color reproductions of art were becoming available for the first time in the late 1920s.

17 Neumann is the subject of a forthcoming book by Lily Harmon. His friendship with Barr is recorded in the letters from Barr to Neumann preserved in the I. B. Neumann Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington D.C., and was central to Barr's early years. That relationship is reflected in his collaboration with Barr in the exhibition of German art at The Museum of Modern Art in 1931, for which he was curator and Barr the writer of the catalogue. A. H. B[arr], Jr., *German Painting and Sculpture*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1931.

18 See: "Russian Diary" (reprinted from *October* [Winter 1978]), in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, ed. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman, New York, 1986, pp. 103–37. Barr wrote several articles as a result of this Russian trip: "The Researches of Eisenstein," *Drawing and Design*, 4, pp.

- 155–56; “The ‘LEF’ and Soviet Art,” *Transition* 13/14 (Fall 1928), pp. 267–70; “Sergei Michailovitch Eisenstein,” *The Arts*, 14 (December 1928), pp. 316–21; “Notes on Russian Architecture,” *The Arts*, 15 (February 1929), pp. 103, 144, 146; “Otto Dix,” *The Arts*, 17 (January 1931), pp. 234–51. In addition to these articles on modern art, Barr wrote “Russian Icons,” *The Arts*, 17 (February 1931), pp. 296–313, 355–62.
- 19 Archives (cited n. 10). The lecture series is reprinted in Sandler and Newman (cited n. 18), pp. 67, 68.
- 20 A[lfred] H. B[arr] Jr., “Foreword,” *Painting in Paris from American Collections*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1930, p. 11. For an interesting discussion of the importance of *Painting in Paris* with respect to Picasso, see: Eunice Lipton, *Picasso Criticism, 1901–1939 The Making of an Artist Hero*, New York, 1975, pp. 335–36
- 21 Barr (cited n. 20), pp. 13, 14. The idea of several stages for the development of Cubism was common in the early literature on the style. See, for example: Gordon (cited n. 14), p. 137, which outlines eight stages.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 14. The same essay appeared in a catalogue for an exhibition shown in Detroit in the spring of 1931: A. H. B., Jr., “Introduction,” *Exhibition of Modern French Painting*, exh. cat., Detroit, The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1931. The exhibition apparently included the same group of works.
- 23 A[lfred] H. Barr, Jr., *A Brief Survey of Modern Painting*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art [1932], n.p. This exhibition consisted of color reproductions rather than original works, thereby allowing Barr more flexibility in the selection of works.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 No documents survive on Barr’s specific role in the choice of works for the exhibition, but given his detailed correspondence with Frank Goodyear on other aspects of the museum activities during his leave, he probably had some influence. See: Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to Frank Goodyear, March 23, 1934, Archives (cited n. 10).
- 28 A[lfred] H[amilton] B[arr] Jr., “Summer Show,” *The Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art*, 1 (October 1933), p. 2.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 4
- 30 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Modern Works of Art,” *Modern Works of Art*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1935, p. 15.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 33 “Report to the Trustees from the Advisory Committee: An Exhibition ‘Towards Abstraction.’” May 3, no year, prepared by Mrs. Russell. The proposed exhibition had five parts: Part I Tendency Toward Abstract Design in Painting 1850–1900; Part II Tendencies Toward Abstract Painting 1900–1910; Part III The Emergence of Abstract Design 1910–1914; Part IV The Cul de Sac of Pure Geometry 1914–1920; Archives (cited n. 10).
- 34 Archives (cited n. 10). Other proposed titles for the exhibition also in the Archives were “Out of Cubism,” and “Abstract Design in Modern Art.” The chart was probably prepared in conjunction with his teaching at Wellesley and probably dates from 1929, just after Barr’s return from Russia. The fact that it appears in the archives in the middle of all the documents on the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition, and is catalogued with them, suggests that Barr referred to it at that time. It appears to correspond to the first part of the lecture series of 1929, which, as was discussed above, was followed by many more chapters in 1929.
- 35 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Introduction,” *Cubism and Abstract Art*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1936, p. 11.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- 38 The other major exhibition prior to *Cubism and Abstract Art* with a large group of loans from European collections was the Van Gogh exhibition of the previous fall. That exhibition had been a major change for the Museum, with its record breaking crowds and admission charges. Organized during the same summer as *Cubism and Abstract Art*, some of its background is recounted in Margaret Scolari Barr, “Our Campaigns,” *The New Criterion*, special issue (Summer 1987), pp. 40–43.
- 39 Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to Jerome Klein, July 19, 1936, Archives (cited n. 10).
- 40 The idea for a series has been mentioned in a number of places. One such is in A[lfred] H. Barr, Jr., “Preface,” *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1936 p. 7, which characterizes that exhibition as second in a series of which *Cubism and Abstract Art* was the first. In M. Barr (cited n. 38), p. 44, the series is stated to include *Masters of Popular Painting* (1938), *American Realists and Magic Realists* (1943), and *Romantic Painting in America* (1943). This corresponds with Barr’s early 1930s treatments of the complexity of realism, although none of these exhibitions were curated by Barr, nor were they stated to be part of the series. Furthermore, Dorothy C. Miller, “Foreword and Acknowledgment,” *American Realists and Magic Realists*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1943, p. 5, states that that exhibition is part of a different series that began with *18 Artists from 9 States*, in 1942, a contemporary survey.
- 41 Barr (cited n. 35), p. 18.
- 42 See: *The Muses Flee Hitler*, ed. Jarrell Jackman and Carla Borden, eds., Washington, D.C., 1983, esp. pp. 29–44. The literature on the impact of politics on art in the 1930s is extensive. For an illuminating group of essays, see: *Theories of Modern Art*, ed. Herschel Chipp, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 456–500.
- 43 Dwight Macdonald, “Profiles: Action on West Fifty-Third Street—1,” *The New Yorker* (December 12, 1953), p. 82; see also: Vladimir Kemenov, “Aspects of Two Cultures,” reprinted in Chipp (cited n. 42), pp. 490–96.
- 44 M. Barr (cited n. 38) pp. 31–32.
- 45 The article that was published appeared as “Notes on the Film: Nationalism in German Films.” *The Hound and Horn*, 7 (January/March 1934), pp. 278–83. The journal was edited by Lincoln Kirstein, a friend of Barr’s. Even this article was published on a back page. The other articles were simply refused by the five publications to which they were submitted; see: Sandler and Newman (cited n. 18), p. 102. No archival documents on this incident are currently available.
- 46 Examination of the art of the Public Works of Art Project, the Painting and Sculpture Division of the Treasury Department, and the Works Progress Administration is still in an early stage. One valuable publication is Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists*, Princeton, 1973. He summarized the attitude of one director; “The kind of art he sought gave him ‘the same feeling I get when I smell a fresh ear of corn,’” p. 57. See also: Francis V. O’Connor, *WPA, Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, Boston, 1973, based on a report first conceived in 1936. One dissertation examines the New York murals: Greta Berman, *The Lost Years: Mural Painting in New York City under the WPA Federal Art Project, 1935–1943*, (New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1978), Garland. The type of art actually produced by the artists, although commissioned to present scenes of American life, varied widely stylistically, according to the training of the artists and the location of their work.
- 47 Barr (cited n. 28), p. 2.
- 48 M. Barr (cited n. 38), pp. 31–32.
- 49 Earlier in his career as Director, Barr had had much difficulty obtaining loans; see for example, documents relating to his effort to create a Picasso exhibition in 1930, when he was still a young director of a little-known museum, Archives (cited n. 10).
- 50 T.D.M. “The Government Defines Art: The United States Government and Abstract Art,” *The Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art*, 3 (April 1936), pp. 2–6. The works held up at customs were by Jean Arp, Alberto Giacometti, Henri Laurens, Georges Vantongerloo, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Julio Gonzales, Umberto Boccioni, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, and Joan Miró. See also: Barr (cited n. 35), p. 18. A record of some of these controversies is to be found in *The Art Front*, the organ of the Artist’s Union. See especially the issues of November 1934, January 1935, and April 1937. Barr’s correspondence during these years contains occasional references to his concern for the economic situation resulting from the

- Depression, as well as the political situation of the mid thirties in the art world. He praised the *Art Front* and ordered eight copies for The Museum of Modern Art Library, Alfred H. Barr Jr., to *Art Front*, February 19, 1935, Archives (cited n. 10). He was invited to attend meetings but apparently did not do so, Artists Coordination Committee to Alfred Barr, January 1, 1937, Archives, (cited n. 10). He refused to sign petitions even when in sympathy with the cause, because of his position at the Museum, Alfred Barr to Milton Horn, March 5, 1937. His correspondence contains only brief references to the economic exigencies resulting from the Depression, mainly in his efforts to obtain positions for close friends in art history. Barr, as conveyed in available archival letters from the 1930s, is removed from the day-to-day battles of the thirties, Archives (cited n. 10).
- 51 See, for example: Edward Alden Jewell, "Academicism on the Left," *The New York Times*, (March 8, 1936), n.p.; James W. Lane, "Current Exhibitions," *Parnassus*, 8 (1936), pp. 26–28; Balcomb Green, "Abstract Art at the Modern Museum," *Art Front*, 3 (April 1936), pp. 5–7; "Modern Museum Opens Show Despite Ignorance of U.S. Martinets," *The Art Digest*, March 15, 1936, p. 10. An example of conservative criticism is that of Royal Cortissoz in the *Herald Tribune*: "A Useful Book upon a Not at All Useful Phase of Painting," *Herald Tribune* (April 26, 1936), and "Why call the Results Art?" *Dayton Ohio Journal*, n.d. Frank Goodyear Scrapbooks, The Museum of Modern Art.
- 52 Lawrence Campbell in conversation with Susan Platt, Art Students' League, February 1987.
- 53 I am examining the relationship of Greenberg's principles to those of Hofmann and Barr in a forthcoming article. For Greenberg's well-known reference to the importance of Hofmann in his early development, see: Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Art and Culture*, Boston, 1961, p. 7.
- 54 Barr (cited n. 35), p. 9. The exhibition at the Whitney was itself controversial for the compromised definition it gave to the term "Abstract." In fact, most of the artists were part of the Whitney Museum tradition of a type of compromise style between realism and abstraction. Whitney Museum of American Art, *Abstract Painting in America*, exh. cat., New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1935.
- 55 In 1951 The Museum of Modern Art finally filled part of this gap in their literature with Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America*, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1951.
- 56 The "concretionist" exhibition included Charles Shaw, Alexander Calder, George Morris, Charles Biederman, and John Ferren. Melinda Lorenz, *George Morris, Artist and Critic*, Ann Arbor, 1982, makes brief reference to Gallatin's exhibition as a "counter exhibition," p. 42. She also discusses some of the early stages of the American Abstracts Artist Group, pp. 49–52. The role of Morris as an intermediary between the Museum and the American Abstract Artists Group is also briefly touched on by Lorenz, pp. 37–42. In the early 1930s Gallatin was an important competitor of Barr's and a much better known collector-artist; they were rivals but respected each other, Alfred Barr to A. E. Gallatin [1937], A. E. Gallatin Scrapbooks, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.
- 57 Lane (cited n. 51), p. 28.
- 58 The most complete source on the American Abstract Artists Group is Susan Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists Group: A History and Evaluation of Its Impact upon American Art," PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1975. Another response among American artists may be the writing and publication of John Graham's *Systems and Dialectics in Art*, New York, 1937.
- 59 Wassily Kandinsky to Alfred H. Barr Jr., June 22, 1936, and July 16, 1936. Archives (cited n. 10). Quoted by permission. These and the other letters from Kandinsky are filled with poetically stated insights into the differences between his approach to art and Barr's interpretations.
- 60 *Ibid.*, July 16, 1936.
- 61 There is some possibility that Philip Johnson influenced Barr in his underrating of Kandinsky. A critical letter (undated) from Johnson to Barr derides Kandinsky's sense of his own importance, Phillip Johnson to Alfred H Barr, Jr., Archives (cited n. 10). The literature on Kandinsky in the last decade has reinterpreted both his sources and his intentions; see, most recently: Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia in Germany," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890–1980*, exh. cat., Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986. See also *idem*, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, Oxford, 1980.
- 62 Laszlo Moholy-Nagy to Alfred H. Barr Jr., May 23, 1939, Archives (cited n. 10). Although the letter is dated a few years later, the discussion is based on the *Cubism and Abstract Art* catalogue.
- 63 Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., May 6, 1936, Archives (cited n. 10). See also: Gamwell (cited n. 3) pp. 86–88; Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *The Way of Cubism*, (New York, 1949) (English translation of *Der Weg Zum Kubismus*, Munich, 1920). Also interesting is the letter from Jay Leyda to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., May 23, 1936, Archives (cited n. 10) describing the excited response of Vladimir Tatlin to the exhibition catalogue. In a second letter, Leyda reported that Tatlin wanted to trade one of his works for a Harley Davidson motorcycle without sidecar, Jay Leyda to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., June 11, 1936, Archives (cited n. 10).
- 64 Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art," *Marxist Quarterly*, 1 (January–March 1937), pp. 78–97, republished as "Cubism and Abstract Art," *Modern Art: Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*, New York, 1978, pp. 185–211. See also: *idem*, "The Social Bases of Art," *Artists against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists' Congress*, ed. Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, New Brunswick, NJ, 1986, pp. 103–13. Barr regarded Schapiro's perspective as also valid, Alfred Barr to Jerome Klein, July 19, 1936, Archives (cited n. 10). Schapiro and Barr were, in fact, congenial and respected each other. As their correspondence demonstrates Barr occasionally participated in a study group on the issues of modern art that Schapiro organized in the mid 1930s. See, for example; Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to Meyer Schapiro, December 10, 1936, and Meyer Schapiro to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., December 17, 1936, Archives (cited n. 10). Schapiro has told me that the exhibition was of immense importance as the first time that all the modern movements were laid out for the New York art world, telephone conversation, Meyer Schapiro and Susan Platt, March 1987.
- 65 Alfred H. Barr to Moholy Nagy, May 26, 1939, Archives, (cited n. 10). See also: Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to Wassily Kandinsky, July 12, 1936.
- 66 The chart from *Cubism and Abstract Art* is reproduced in the front of the catalogue (cited n. 61), p. 18.
- 67 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *What is Modern Painting*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1943, p. 41. Later editions of the book added a concluding section on postwar abstraction and more statements on the connection of abstraction and freedom; see: *idem*, *What is Modern Painting*, Boston, 1974, pp. 42–46; revised 1952, 1953, 1956.
- 68 Irving Sandler, "Introduction," in Sandler and Newman (cited n. 18), pp. 28–30. See also: Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern*, New York, 1973, pp. 240–63.
- 69 Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans, Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, 1983. For articles on this subject, see: Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," *Artforum*, 13 (May 1973), pp. 45–54; and Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, 12 (June 1974), pp. 39–41.

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