

German Encounters with  
Modernism, 1840–1945



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To  
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## Modernism and the “Alien Element in German Art”

In 1913, the anti-Semitic writer Philipp Stauff issued the second volume of his biographical dictionary of Jews and their gentile associates, friends, and supporters in Germany. An introduction denounced the Jewish threat to German culture as expressed in one area of the nation's life – the art world. The eleven-page essay, “The Alien Element in the Fine Arts in Germany, or Paul Cassirer, Max Liebermann, etc.,” opened with the pronouncement that “Dealers, critics, and painters, who are strangers in our land and to our blood, stand today at the apex of the fine arts.”<sup>1</sup> Cassirer, a prominent art dealer and publisher, and Liebermann, one of the best-known German painters of the time, personified for Stauff “the Jewish enemy within,” the cause of the cultural crisis that was engulfing the country. They and their followers, he charged, were driven by the innate Hebrew motives of greed and cultural hate. They wanted to become rich and penetrate the upper levels of German society; and they intended to destroy the native values by which – presumably – Germans had lived since the Teutonic tribes first confronted the Romans. But Jews were merely the first, not the only, target of his indictment. Stauff also attacked the quality of much of the art that Jews were imposing on the German public. To praise the “boring, unnatural, egg-like faces” of El Greco's figures as inspirations for the modern artist was merely an attempt to drive up prices of his work; van Gogh's paintings were “childish”; admittedly some French impressionists had produced good

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paintings, but “very bad Renoirs and weak Monets” were being palmed off on German buyers. In any case, the great German realists of the preceding generation were the equals of any foreign master. The pamphlet's third target were Germans who had given in to Jewish seduction.

Stauff took a broad view of Jewish identity. Anyone whose great-grandfather a century earlier had converted to Christianity and married a gentile remained as much a Jew in his eyes as did a recent arrival from the shtetl, and was more dangerous, because he might pass as authentically German. But with equal fervor he denounced gentiles who had married Jews, like Lovis Corinth, or whom he suspected of having acquired Jewish relatives through the marriage of a sibling or other relation, like Henry van de Velde; who worked for a Jewish publisher, like the editor and critic Karl Scheffler; or who had Jewish friends, like the collector Harry Count Kessler or the museum directors Hugo von Tschudi and Alfred Lichtwark. Either as deluded victims or as men who had sold out, he charged, they belonged to a vast conspiracy, which in the fine arts propagated one form or another of a diseased modernism that expressed international rather than national values.

Stauff's fantasies, which fifteen years later Goebbels reformulated into effective propaganda, were generally dismissed as the rantings of an extremist, even by many Germans who drew a dividing line between themselves and their Jewish fellow citizens. But absurd though it was, in one respect his tract reflected reality. The majority of modernist artists and their supporters were not Jews. Had Stauff limited his attacks to Jews – even to those who fell within his expansive definition of Jews, like Franz Marc, whose paternal great-grandfather was Jewish – he would have had difficulty making a case for their overwhelming cultural power. Stauff also sensed correctly that Jewish assimilation had progressed further in the fine arts, literature, and music than in most areas of German life and that in modernism, with its often self-conscious rejection of tradition, it had found a particularly favorable environment.

Stauff's biographical dictionary, too crudely violent to be accepted in polite society, nevertheless gave voice to widely held concerns, which were discussed in more measured tones throughout society: the

threat of Judaization of German life. The term *Verjudung* – the German word sounds more brutal than its English equivalent – expressed two fears: that Jews, except in such areas still largely closed to them as the officer corps and the senior judiciary, were gaining too much influence. And, even worse, that the long process of Jewish emancipation and assimilation was infecting the ideals and attitudes at the core of German identity. The complex history of Central Europe made it difficult even for cultural nationalists like Stauff to define this identity and separate it clearly from that of its neighbors. They would not accept that German culture, though recognizably different from that of other peoples, was the product of alien as well as native forces. But to the extent that they sensed the problems of definition, the urgency of a precise separation increased, and the fear that the mythic substance of Germanness was now endangered further intensified. They were in no doubt, however, about the nature of the threat. It came from neighboring nations with their particular values, and from subversive elements within the German community, of which none was more alien and therefore more dangerous than the Jews.

Anxiety over the loss of old verities and the unknown future was further increased by the conflicts that shook middle- and upper-class society at the beginning of the twentieth century. The bourgeoisie especially had once found its core values in Christian faith, in allegiance to the local and regional environment and its traditions, in the popularized forms of German idealism in philosophy and literature, and in the concept of *Bildung*. These values were being displaced by beliefs and attitudes responding to the demands of the nation and of industrial society. Self-criticism for abandoning the old ideals and failing to create viable alternatives was prominent in the new Reich, and it is probable that some Germans transferred their sense of guilt to a despised minority, which they accused of threatening what they themselves were in the process of losing. At least in part, the fear of Judaization grew out of this cultural crisis. But similar attacks on Jews as despoilers of German values had also been made at the beginning of the century, at the height of German classicism and humanism. The fear of Judaization, which by 1900 had acquired a newly aggressive dynamic, had a long history in Germany.

From certain perspectives, modernism in the arts was little more than symbolic of changes that were occurring in all areas of social and economic life. But it was easier to fight innovations in literature or painting than oppose such forces as urbanization or the internationalization of financial institutions. Not only did modernism in the arts raise anxieties for its own sake, it became the target for frustrations and hatreds with very different roots.

Modernism and Judaization were different phenomena. Modern artists and patrons of modern art could be anti-Semites; Jews could dislike or be indifferent to modern art, and it is one of the ironies of the period that many were inspired by the ideals of the age of Goethe rather than by the values of the industrial nation-state. But individual differences notwithstanding, opposition to modernism and anti-Semitism were natural allies – not least because both were inspired by the myth of a particular and inviolable German purity.

Radicals like Stauff and a surprisingly large number of more moderate sympathizers opposed modernism as an alien force that had infiltrated the work of many German artists. But modernism in Germany in the decades before 1914 was anything but a simple extension or translation of foreign patterns. The various modernist movements derived from German romanticism and realism on the one hand, and on the other responded to foreign influences. These influences ranged from the landscapes of Constable and of the School of Fontainebleau to impressionism, to the symbolism of Böcklin and Moreau, and to the work of such precursors of expressionism as Edvard Munch. An exhibition in 1892 of Munch's paintings was Berlin's first show of the work of a revolutionary modernist, and it caused a sensation. The exhibition's sponsor, the Association of Berlin Artists, was forced by its conservative majority to close the show after three days – an episode that foretold the intense conflicts within the art world that were to come.<sup>2</sup> Some avant-garde groups rejected foreign models altogether, and others borrowed selectively; none of their work could ever be mistaken as other than German. To nativists like Stauff, however, any but the slightest departure from conventional realism seemed un-German, and their criticism added a strikingly violent note to the customary, often unideological resistance to innovation.

## I

The school of Berlin realism, brought to its highest expressive level in the work of Menzel, was also the point of departure of Max Liebermann's art. Liebermann was born in Berlin in 1847, into a prominent Jewish family with connections throughout Central Europe. An uncle was raised to the nobility in Vienna; a second cousin, Walther Rathenau, became foreign minister in the Weimar Republic. The family's great wealth derived from cotton mills; later, factories making machine parts, girders, and railroad tracks were added. Throughout his long life – he died in his eighty-eighth year in 1935 – Liebermann possessed the material freedom of the very rich. One expression of his wealth was his art collection. Apart from works by Rembrandt, Daumier, and such German contemporaries as Menzel, his collection included paintings by Cézanne, Degas, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, and Toulouse-Lautrec, and fifteen paintings, studies in oil, and watercolors by Manet; at the time, it was one of the most important private collections of impressionists in the world. The pictures defined a creative standard that Liebermann – with different gifts and living in a different culture – tried to emulate in his own way.

Liebermann was twenty-five when he painted the first work that set him apart from the mass of young artists – *Women Plucking Geese*. For the next decades a preferred theme remained the world of working people – peasants, shoemakers, knife-grinders, carpenters, harbor pilots, laundrywomen – and the inmates of orphanages and of old-age homes, whom he painted not as colorful outsiders of the bourgeois world, nor as victims of capitalism, but as men and women whose hard work and dignity demanded respect. His energetic brushstrokes and uneven laying-on of paint led early critics to condemn his work as sketchy and unfinished; in his early thirties he began to paint outside the studio and to experiment with a freer use of color. By his fortieth birthday he was gaining a national and, in a small way, even an international reputation. In 1888 the Royal Academy of Arts awarded him its small gold medal; and Wilhelm Bode, the future director-general of the Berlin state museums, declared that Liebermann assured the emergence of a new German art.

Nevertheless, his nonacademic style, the serious sympathy with which he invested his paintings of the poor, and his liberal politics made Liebermann a figure of contention in Berlin at the same time that he was winning major prizes in Paris, Munich, and Vienna. The environment for the fine arts in Berlin was not repressive, but neither did it afford much scope for innovation. Honors, purchases of art by the state, and the major exhibitions – which still dominated the art market – were controlled or strongly influenced by the Royal Academy and by the less elitist but in their leadership equally conventional Verein Berliner Künstler, the Association of Berlin Artists, and the local chapter of the Deutsche Kunstgenossenschaft, the Association of German Artists, whose memberships largely overlapped. The Prussian cultural bureaucracy included liberal as well as conservative officials; but the sympathies of the young emperor William II were with the conservative camp, and as king of Prussia he possessed certain defined powers in matters of cultural policy. Artists who sought important commissions and official honors had to tread cautiously in this environment.

A change became noticeable in the late 1880s. Germany's rapid economic development, a slowly expanding private art market, the emergence of new artists, and foreign influences combined to make the situation of the arts in Berlin more fluid. In February 1892, the young landscape painter Walter Leistikow and eight other members of the Verein Berliner Künstler formed a group to hold separate exhibitions in addition to the annual salon with its many hundreds, even thousands, of entries of indifferent quality. To broaden their appeal, they invited Liebermann and the well-known painter of Berlin life Franz Skarbina to join them. Leistikow, whose close friend Corinth was to write his biography, soon formed an intimate personal and professional alliance with Liebermann. Under the leadership of the two men, the "Eleven" held a series of shows that were favorably reviewed and helped mobilize the supporters of modernism in the city.

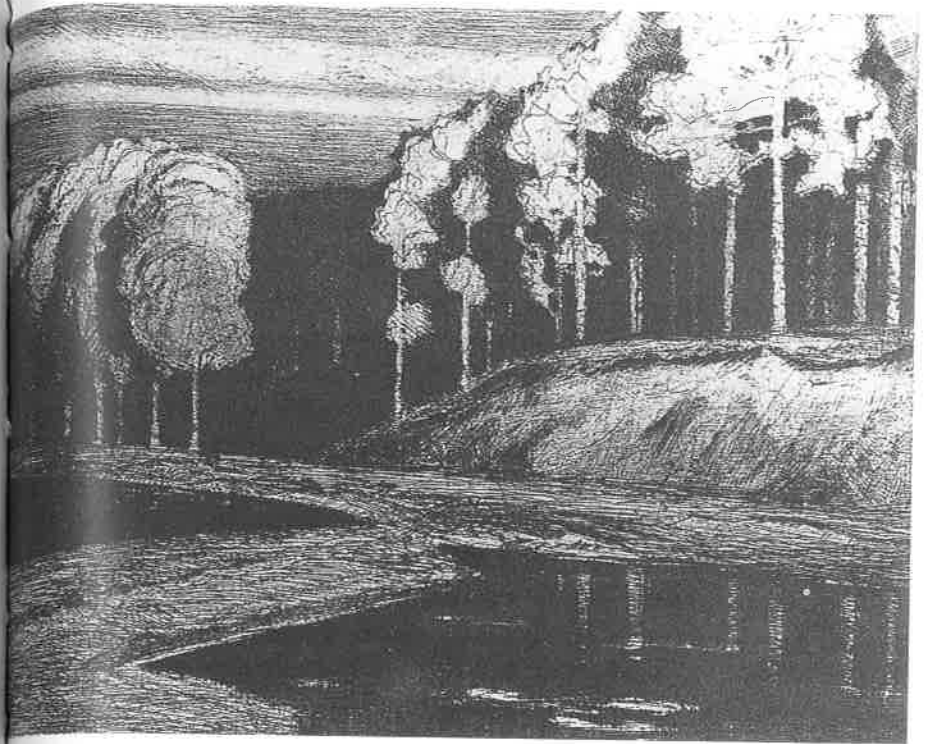
In the gradually changing cultural atmosphere, Liebermann's stature was at last acknowledged. In 1896 the German government allowed him to accept the French Legion of Honor, a decoration he had been offered once before but had been compelled to reject. The following

year, the annual Berlin salon marked his fiftieth birthday with a retrospective; he was awarded the Great Gold Medal and the title of professor. In 1898 he was elected to the Royal Academy.

An event in the same year, however, drove Liebermann openly into opposition to the art establishment, which had just welcomed him as one of its own. The jury of the annual salon rejected one of Leistikow's entries for the 1898 exhibition. The painting – *Grunewald Lake*, today in the Berlin National Gallery – is one of Leistikow's most emotionally charged landscapes, a work reaching out from good regional art to art of universal significance. As the painting was not aggressively revolutionary in either conception or execution, its rejection seems to have been motivated by the wish to embarrass one of the leaders of modernism in Berlin. Leistikow reacted by suggesting that artists who opposed the policies of the Verein resign and organize their own shows, and Liebermann agreed that the jury's decision might be the provocation needed to persuade people to take a step that had long been discussed. A secessionist group formed in May, and after efforts failed to keep it in the Verein as a semiautonomous branch, the group became wholly independent. That Liebermann, one of very few Jews among the sixty-five founding members – perhaps the only one – was elected president of the Berlin Secession indicates the stage that assimilation had reached in Berlin culture by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

## II

In the 1890s, groups of artists broke away from national and local art associations throughout Central Europe. The secessions they formed were institutional responses to two phenomena before which the old art associations seemed helpless: developments in painting and sculpture; and an expanding urban society, whose commercial power potentially changed the market for art. All secessions were driven by similar motives, and, broadly speaking, all passed through similar life cycles. Their founders were not beginners but artists who were established or at least on the way to recognition, whose aesthetic sympathies and professional interests had diverged from those of the conventional majority. The professional standing of these artists is also indicated by their connections and financial resources, which allowed them to build



19. Walter Leistikow, *Evening Landscape*, etching, c. 1900.

their own galleries, as they did, for example, in Vienna and Berlin, and to mount expensive shows that could draw on loans from artists and galleries throughout Europe.

Above all, the secessionists wanted to control the showing of their work and to avoid as far as possible having it submerged in the mass exhibitions that had come to dominate the exhibition scene. The annual art shows in the larger cities and towns, often – as in Berlin – sponsored jointly by the local chapter of the Kunstgenossenschaft, the Academy, and municipal and state authorities, were as inclusive as they could be while still maintaining a reasonable standard of technical competence. In 1912 the Great Berlin Exhibition included 2,467 objects by nearly eleven hundred exhibitors. The show remained open for five months, and the organizers expected half a million visitors, a total they believed that with longer hours and more publicity could easily be doubled.<sup>4</sup> But even elitist exhibitions could be large and were

well attended. In the same year, the International Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne, a milestone in the history of modern art in Germany, showed 634 paintings, graphics, and sculptures, as well as several hundred objects of arts and crafts. During the four months the show was open it was discussed extensively in the press, and it attracted large numbers of visitors.<sup>5</sup> The magnitude and popular appeal of these exhibitions also says something about the impact art now exerted on broad social groups. The conflict over modernism was waged not only among small elites – a fact that further contributed to its politicization.

In the aggregate, the secessions incorporated most of the modernist tendencies of the time. If a specific direction was not represented among members of a particular group it usually appeared in one of its shows, the various secessions tending to support one another and to use their shows to disseminate a broad range of modernist works. Nevertheless, styles often clashed, and the conflicts within modernism could be as intense as the conflicts between avant-garde and establishment. Personal antagonisms and aesthetic differences contributed to the secessions' frequent changes of course and often to their demise. Soon after it was formed in 1892, the Munich Secession divided again. Within eight years of its birth, the Vienna Secession split, partly because many members resented the preferential treatment given to one of the group's leading figures, Gustav Klimt. The Berlin Secession struggled through several crises and, after 1914, lost its innovative edge. But these conflicts and even break-ups should not be seen as failures. They were natural turning points in the rise and development of creative energies, their diffusion and decline, and their replacement by new forces.

Every secession encountered opposition within and outside the art community, but most were quickly accepted by the cultural bureaucracy and – as in Munich, Vienna, and Weimar – soon received financial support from the state. In Berlin the situation was more complex. The Secession had influential friends in government and the cultural bureaucracy, but it also had opponents, of whom the most openly antagonistic was the emperor. He was driven by an honest attachment to styles of idealized or entertaining realism and by the belief that art should celebrate the beauty of life. Art, he thought, became negative if



20. Heinrich Zille, *Mother, I Won't Get Wet*, engraving, n.d. Collection of the author.

it addressed life's unfortunate or seamy side, and could even turn into a politically destructive force.

Some forms of modernism did have political characteristics, and modernism as such had long-range political implications, but the Central European secessions were not centers of political art. Only a few members of the Berlin group expressed even social criticism in their work, most notably, Käthe Kollwitz; the painter Hans Baluschek, who often chose industrial and working-class motifs; and the socialist cartoonist and recorder of Berlin working-class life Heinrich Zille. Zille's drawings, combining humor and social accusation, became fashionable in the 1920s, and today are desirable, expensive items in galleries oriented toward a corporate clientele. His father had been a toolmaker; another prominent member whose father was a skilled worker – a mas-

ter mason – was the sculptor August Gaul. But most early members of the Secession belonged by background and attitude to the moderate, liberal, or conservative middle- and upper-middle classes. Several were members of the nobility, like Konrad von Kardorff, son of a leading conservative politician. Although William II might not have thought so, until the First World War the secessionists' work, with rare exceptions, remained apolitical. But with their more selective exhibitions and their lectures and publications, the secessions nurtured a more knowledgeable art public, fostered private patronage, and reduced the artist's dependence on the state. Economically they were a free-market force, and in this sense they *were* political. That the secessions' interest in aesthetic innovation – limited in Munich, much stronger in Vienna and Berlin – was linked with economic self-interest was criticized at the time and worries some interpreters even today. Yet artistic integrity may coexist with the wish to publicize and sell one's work, and artists – small entrepreneurs in a notoriously treacherous market – had good reason to try to improve their situation by banding together. Nor, although opportunities were increasing, was it without risk to cut loose from the traditional centers of patronage and prestige. More than one member lost an official appointment or a purchase by the state because of his association with the Berlin Secession.

Of the founding members of the Secession, two-thirds are forgotten today. Perhaps twenty still enjoy a regional reputation in Germany, of whom a few stand out: Gaul and his fellow sculptor Fritz Klimsch, the Berlin painters Hans Baluschek, Carl Hagemeister, Franz Skarbina, and especially Walter Leistikow. Only Max Liebermann is still widely known, but even his reputation remains somewhat tenuous beyond the cultural boundaries of Central Europe. With the arrival of other artists, the group gained strength. Some, like Lovis Corinth and Max Slevogt, who came from Munich, were drawn to Berlin in part by the new energy the Secession generated. Käthe Kollwitz became a member in 1901; another primarily graphic artist, Hermann Struck, joined a few years later. Among those who joined subsequently were Lyonel Feininger, Max Beckmann, Ernst Barlach, and Emil Nolde. As early as 1901, corresponding members included Degas, Forain, Hodler, Klingner, Monet, Pissarro, Rodin, Sargent, Steinlen, and Vallotton – names that again indicate the diversity of styles represented in the group. In

his talk at the opening of its first exhibition, Liebermann declared: "In selecting the works [shown] . . . talent alone, whatever its style, was the determinant. . . . We do not believe in a single, sacred direction in art."<sup>6</sup> It remained the Secession's guiding principle – more difficult to follow as time went on – to maintain this diversity.

Gifts and loans enabled the Secession to build a small gallery, and its first exhibition in the spring of 1899 – a survey of contemporary nonacademic German art (including two Swiss painters, Arnold Böcklin and Ferdinand Hodler) – was well received by the critics. Sales of several of the works shown and of the catalogue, which had to be reprinted, also made it modestly profitable. During the next few years the Secession acquired enough capital to build a larger gallery, including a restaurant and a garden, on the Kurfürstendamm. Throughout its existence the Secession enjoyed financial stability, its income derived from membership dues, ticket and catalogue sales, and a commission on works sold. From the beginning the group agreed that administering the affairs of the new organization could not be a part-time effort left to volunteers from among the members, and at an early meeting of the founders Liebermann suggested the appointment as business managers of two cousins, Bruno and Paul Cassirer, who had recently started a gallery and publishing firm in Berlin. The two young men, neither yet thirty, turned down the offer of salaries and proposed instead to handle the Secession's business without pay if they were given seats on the executive committee and the jury. This brought individuals who were not artists to positions of artistic leadership, an unusual arrangement that was to serve the Secession well but also caused it difficulties.

### III

Liebermann's recommendation of the Cassirers would have been taken by Philipp Stauff as further evidence of Jewish conspiracy and infiltration. In the process of assimilation, the Cassirer and Liebermann families followed basically similar patterns, individual differences notwithstanding. At first lumber merchants and estate managers in Silesia, the Cassirers expanded their business activities throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in the factory for high-quality cables that Paul



Cassirer's father founded in Berlin. The family grew very wealthy, although not on the level of the Liebermanns, let alone of such Jewish dynasties as the Mendelssohns and the Friedländer-Fulds.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Cassirers were increasingly entering the professions in the humanities and sciences. Sociologically, the generation that reached maturity in the 1890s was both in advance of and behind its time. The now widely dispersed family tried to maintain cohesion by such means as family foundations and joint projects – a famous progressive boarding school owed its existence to the Cassirers – but most significantly by marrying within the family. Bruno Cassirer and his cousins Ernst, the philosopher, and Richard, one of Germany's foremost neurologists, married cousins, and the parents of Bruno and Ernst had themselves been cousins. Marriages with gentiles also occurred but rarely led to conversions. Liebermann's only child also married a non-Jew, but Liebermann and his wife never completely shed their religious ties. For many of the Cassirers, religion, whether Judaism or Christianity, no longer mattered even in a social sense. Like his father, Paul Cassirer was an atheist.

Before they became partners, Paul Cassirer had published a play and a novel, and worked on the staff of the satirical journal *Simplicissimus*; Bruno Cassirer had studied art history. Both cousins held firm opinions on art and literature, and since neither was good at sharing authority it soon was apparent that the partnership could not last. In 1901, Bruno Cassirer left the Secession and became sole owner of the publishing firm, while his cousin remained manager of the Secession and assumed control of the Cassirer Gallery. Within a few years, Bruno Cassirer built up a small but very strong list in modern literature, art history, and cultural studies. That he also brought out his cousin Ernst's edition of Kant's works in twelve sumptuous volumes scarcely fit into the firm's program, but once again expressed family solidarity. Bruno Cassirer's bibliophile editions illustrated by contemporary artists became famous. Often they were followed by inexpensive reprints, which brought avant-garde images and designs to a wider market. Another force in shaping the taste of the educated public was the firm's periodical *Kunst und Künstler*, which appeared from 1902 to 1933, and under Karl Scheffler became Germany's finest journal of art scholarship and connoisseurship, even if its treatment of the most recent directions after

neo-impressionism was more dutiful than enthusiastic. It was generally considered the unofficial journal of the Berlin Secession.

Bruno Cassirer combined his activities as a publisher with running the estate he had inherited from his father and managing a stud farm and harness-racing stable. His colors won the German national cup eight times. It was said that, like writers, horses stimulated his innovative energies. "He was not a thinker," Scheffler wrote in his memoirs after the Second World War, "but totally a man of instinct. In the end, however, everything turned into action."<sup>8</sup> In his social attitudes he was rather conventional, far more accepting of German upper-class values than his cousin Paul, who early on led an international life and became increasingly critical of the ethos and style of the Wilhelmine empire.

Paul Cassirer is usually regarded as the principal German champion of impressionism and neo-impressionism at the turn of the century. But even more significant than his efforts to gain recognition for these movements, which though new in Germany were rapidly becoming historical, was his backing and advocacy of a number of artists still at the beginning of their careers. This point is sometimes obscured by his differentiated response to the next great wave of German modernism. He admired the work of some expressionists, but disliked or was indifferent to that of others and limited its exposure in his gallery. He valued neither impressionism nor expressionism in their totality, but prized individual artists, which made him suspect to ideologues of all stripes.

The gallery he founded with his cousin in 1898 opened with a show of paintings by Liebermann and Degas and sculptures by Constantin Meunier – a first statement stressing the link between French and German modernism, which became a permanent theme of the gallery and subsequently of the exhibitions of the Secession. Cassirer was the first in Germany to assemble large representative shows of van Gogh and Cézanne. As in France – where Vollard's two van Gogh retrospectives 1896 sold only four paintings – few buyers appeared, or, as in Cassirer's first van Gogh exhibitions in 1901, none at all. But his program of jointly presenting current and recent works with Old Masters, and Germans together with foreigners, had an impact on artists and critics, and gradually on the public.

The gallery filled a cultural vacuum, and within a few years Cassirer had made it the most important venue for nineteenth- and twentieth-century art in Germany. The 1907 fall season illustrates the gallery's scope and depth. It opened in September with a show of 69 Cézanne watercolors, 6 paintings by Matisse, and 34 by Munch. The October show ranged from El Greco, Manet, Monet, and Hodler to Leistikow. January 1908 began with a show of 14 Beckmanns, 17 Corinths, and 10 paintings by Nolde, who was just becoming known. The February show combined paintings by Liebermann and Slevogt with a survey of the work of Alexej von Jawlensky, a strong West European accent being added by paintings of Courbet and Renoir. Each exhibition also introduced the work of two or three Central European newcomers.<sup>9</sup> In later years, Cassirer continued to hold retrospective exhibitions, although increasingly interspersed with these were exhibitions consisting of a few works by many artists. In 1912, in a catalogue marking the opening of the fifteenth year of the gallery, he commented on this change, expressing with great clarity his interest in individual quality rather than in the particular artist, style, or aesthetic doctrine:

The task I faced in 1898 was to introduce a number of great artists, who were unknown in Germany, to give art lovers and critics an opportunity to become acquainted with the personalities of the true leaders of the modern movement.

Today the task seems to me quite different. If in the past it was necessary to show the personalities of particular artists by means of large exhibitions of their work – collective and combative exhibitions – today the[se] personalities . . . are better known in Germany than anywhere else. As long as we had to fight for this art – and we fought hard enough during the past fifteen years – it was necessary to point again and again to the artists' personalities, to their intentions, their theories, and their development – and that could be best achieved in collective exhibitions.

I always knew that this way of showing art had many dangers, especially here in Germany with our pronounced tendency to theorize. Instead of commenting on the finished work, the realization of the artist's intention, the viewer was seduced into occupying himself with the individual behind the work, with the artist's intentions and struggles rather than with the work itself – the only thing that really matters in art. And so it happened that this new art, which among other things fought against the anecdotal . . . , intensely fostered pleasure in the anecdotal. To occupy oneself with

the artist's personality rather than with the work is at bottom the same thing as occupying oneself with the painting's subject matter rather than with the painting.

Friends and enemies claim my gallery is the gallery of impressionism. In 1898 that was a curse word meaning revolution. In 1912 it is again a curse word, now signifying reaction. But just as the single work always gives the lie to broad trends and developments in art, so an exhibition can demonstrate – as I hope this exhibition (of 108 works by 45 artists) does – that the theorists who label my gallery as "impressionist" are mistaken whether they mean one extreme or the other.<sup>10</sup>

An element in the gallery's success was Cassirer's policy of offering a number of artists an annual income in return for the exclusive representation of their work, excepting commissions that came to them directly. Typical were his arrangements with Slevogt and Gaul. Whether or not their works were sold, each was guaranteed a minimum of 4,000 marks a year – about the salary of a Gymnasium teacher or the pay of an army captain. If sales rose above the minimum, the gallery collected a commission and expenses that ranged from 15 to 30 percent. By contrast, the Secession had no funds for the support of needy members – although collections were occasionally taken up for special purposes – and charged only a small commission on works sold through its office. Slevogt, with an established reputation, at once earned considerably more than the minimum. Gaul, although already known in Berlin for his animal sculptures, had not broken into the market and lived in poverty. Cassirer showed his sculptures, found him patrons for special projects, and placed new emphasis on his graphics, which he published and which opened a second market for Gaul's work, leading in a remarkably short time to earnings far beyond the specified minimum. Gaul, who combined high standards, generosity to other artists, and diplomatic talent, became a close friend and advisor to Cassirer and an influential figure in the art community, much honored not only by his colleagues but also by the Prussian state. In later years he was able to use his influence with municipal and state agencies to assist such artists as Kollwitz and Barlach. The documentation is incomplete, but at the time of his death in 1921 he had received some 514,000 marks, perhaps more, in support and sales from the Cassirer



21. August Gaul, *Duck Fountain in Berlin*, bronze, 1911. Photographed by Paul Paret, 1999. The fountain was given to the city by a member of the Cassirer family.

Gallery. The gallery's commissions have been estimated at between 200,000 and 250,000 marks. Economic success came more slowly to other artists, or not at all. Barlach received an income for three years before his first sculpture was sold, and despite repeated showings of their work, Cassirer was unable to interest German buyers in Meunier and Rodin.<sup>11</sup>

A further source of strength was Paul Cassirer's entry into publishing. In 1908 he started a press for bibliophile editions and contemporary graphics, the Pan Presse, which produced several of the outstanding illustrated books of the early twentieth century, among them *The Book of Judith* and *The Song of Songs* in Luther's translation, with colored lithographs by Corinth, and the facsimile score of Mozart's *Magic Flute* with forty-seven etchings by Slevogt, both in a portfolio and in a bound edition. He also launched a small publishing program in art history, writings by artists, and modern literature. Among titles in the next decade and a half were van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo, Marc's wartime sketchbooks and his letters to his wife, fifteen volumes of poetry by Else Lasker-Schüler, novels and plays by Hein-



*Ernst Barlach*

22. Ernst Barlach, *Russian Women*, pencil, 1906. Collection of the author.

rich Mann, and plays by Oskar Kokoschka and Barlach – works of considerable aesthetic variety that went far beyond impressionism in pursuit of new forms of expression. The press's literary bimonthly, *Pan*, started in 1910, was repeatedly confiscated for obscenity by the Berlin police, for among much else printing a travel diary of the young Flaubert.

While Cassirer developed his gallery and expanded his publishing ventures, he continued to manage the business affairs of the Secession, a situation that inevitably led to complaints about conflicts of interest. His most serious conflict, Cassirer once joked, came when he had to divide paintings by van Gogh between simultaneous shows of the Secession and his gallery. The reality was surely more challenging. He strongly influenced the policies of the Secession, and could coordinate them with the policies and schedules of his gallery, but critics tended to overlook the fact that the different structures and conditions of the

two organizations went far toward assuring their mutual independence. The gallery expressed the views of one man. The Secession was an artists' cooperative, which after ten years had more than two hundred members and corresponding members. Its president, Max Liebermann, was famous for his energy and decisiveness, and on the executive committee, Cassirer was merely one in a group of self-assured and often contentious figures; major issues were voted on by the entire membership. The gallery shows were more frequent and much smaller, with far fewer artists, than the exhibitions of the Secession, which, after the first years, might number one hundred fifty participants or more. Above all, Cassirer could not have succeeded in his dual role for nearly fifteen years had the Secession and his gallery been competitors rather than allies in supporting recent and contemporary art, in providing modernists with a strong professional base, and in selling art – the Secession the work of its members, the gallery the work of the artists it represented. Occasionally these were the same individuals; but most members of the Secession were affiliated with other galleries.<sup>12</sup> And in view of the continued opposition to modernism in Berlin, it was invaluable to maintain a united front. Between them, the Secession and the galleries for a time represented the majority of modernist artists working in Berlin.<sup>13</sup> They were twin centers in a spreading network of galleries, critics, publishers, and museum directors, which within a remarkably few years had radically altered the situation of the fine arts in Berlin.

IV

The new institutions, effective though they were, would have had less of an impact had the artists they represented not included several exceptional talents. In the contest for critical attention and financial success, the Secession's artistic leaders – Liebermann, Slevogt, and Corinth – overpowered the conventional realists and history painters, whose continued domination of the Academy and the Kunstgenossenschaft no longer seemed to matter very much. In their paintings they combined a sovereign command of line with floods of color – something new in German art (Plates VI–VIII). They defined and dominated areas of contemporary existence that their rivals seemed to see

SLEVOGT, Max, Berlin  
 218 Dame in Gelb  
 SPIRO, Eugen, Paris  
 219 Weiblicher Akt\*  
 220 Bretonische Landschaft\*  
 STADLER, Toni, München  
 221 Sommertag\*




Max Pechstein

STERL, Robert, Dresden  
 222 E. von Schuch (Generalprobe)\*  
 223 Hoforchester in Peterhof\*  
 STRATHMANN, Carl, München  
 224 Danae\*  
 225 Salambo\*

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STREMEL, Max Arthur, Pasing  
 226 Interieur aus Venedig\*  
 227 Unter den Lauben in Wasserburg  
 am Inn\*  
 228 Der Glasschrank\*



Lovis Corinth

STRUCK, Hermann, Berlin  
 229 Dorfstrasse in Zandvoort\*  
 STUTZ, Ludwig, Berlin  
 230 Stilleben\*

37

23. Two Pages from a Catalogue of the Berlin Secession, 1909. Collection of the author.

only indistinctly, from afar: Liebermann's cool, elegant appraisals of urban society; Slevogt's profusely inventive fantasies; Corinth's fleshly sensuality. And their work, though thoroughly German, was not provincial. Their paintings carried the viewer into a wider world, and – not coincidentally – toward novel concepts of art.

Around them gathered minor masters, the Leistikows and Gauls, whose work was charged with energy and sophistication, and the leaders of the next generation, striking out in new directions. Together they gained a public and won converts in the cultural bureaucracy. But the new had not replaced the old. Art and art institutions in Berlin were now split into hostile camps, and inevitably some on the right defined their conflicts in ideological terms. Liebermann was attacked as though he still painted the poor, and Corinth's celebrations of the flesh were condemned as destructive of public morality and thus of social deference. The politicizing of nonpolitical art made it more

difficult to bridge the gap between the camps. Typical was an episode in 1903. The Prussian Commission for the Fine Arts voted to acquire a Leistikow landscape for the National Gallery. The purchase would have been a conciliatory gesture; but the Prussian Kultusminister rejected the recommendation on the grounds that "Leistikow is active as leader of the 'secession'" – and far from keeping the reason for his rejection to himself, saw to it that it was published in the press.<sup>14</sup>

Efforts at reconciliation and their rejection were repeated on a national scale the following year, in the conflict over the German art exhibition at the St. Louis World Fair. The official of the Reich interior ministry, Theodor Lewald, who coordinated German participation in the fair, saw it as his duty to include the Secession in the art contingent. Disregarding the agreements that Lewald had negotiated with the cultural officials of the various German states, the emperor reversed this policy and excluded the Berlin Secession from the World's Fair. Only August Gaul, it seems, was an exception. He showed the large sculpture of a German eagle, although in the court of honor of the industrial pavilion, not in the art gallery. At the conclusion of the fair, Wanamaker and Company bought the eagle and installed it in its Philadelphia store.<sup>15</sup>

By shutting out the Secession, the emperor boosted the morale of the traditional art groups and made certain that at St. Louis, German art showed the world a national image free of modernist dissonance. In the culture war in which the emperor saw himself the champion of healthy German values, these were desirable achievements, even if his victory over the Berlin Secession was soon compromised by the founding of a national league of progressive art organizations, which further strengthened modernism throughout the country. But the partisanship he had openly shown exposed him to criticism and, somewhat surprisingly, led to a debate in the Reichstag. The left, but also moderates and some conservatives, deplored the mobilization of imperial power against a group of artists, many of whom had a national reputation, and against an official who evenhandedly had done his duty. One speaker on the moderate bourgeois left declared that "the history of art and culture has shown that art will go its own way, despite kings and emperors who want to enchain it."<sup>16</sup> The Reichstag would never

have alluded in such terms to William's father and grandfather, and the debate, which caused monarchists deep embarrassment, is also an interesting indication of the extent to which, by the first years of the new century, the emperor's recklessness and bluster in matters of art as in politics and foreign affairs was diminishing the respect in which he was held.

The emperor, on the other hand, dismissed the debate on German art in St. Louis as one more impertinence from the Reichstag. The experience did nothing to persuade him to show greater discretion. He continued to indulge his tastes in decisions on prizes, commissions, and purchases for the state museums, staying within the bounds of his legal authority, but ignoring possible negative consequences. He felt secure in his convictions; and that many groups throughout German society shared his views and looked to him for confirmation and leadership may also have had an effect. The depth of feeling against the Berlin Secession and what it stood for, on which he could draw for support, is suggested by an incident in the world of art itself.

In 1905 the Heidelberg art historian Henry Thode attempted to mobilize public opinion in defense of an aesthetically and ethnically pure German art. In eight lectures delivered in the university's main auditorium to an audience of nearly one thousand, he defended the paintings of Arnold Böcklin against criticism by Julius Meier-Graefe, but soon he shifted to an attack on French impressionism and its German admirers, who, he declared, were corrupting German culture by their international outlook and economic rapaciousness. As leaders of this movement he pointed to the Berlin Secession, intimately connected with an unnamed art dealer, and to its president, Max Liebermann, whose work he dismissed as dexterous in technique but un-German in spirit. Liebermann responded sharply to Thode's barely masked anti-Semitism, and in three letters to the *Frankfurter Zeitung* ridiculed Thode into silence. But the lectures, which appeared as a pamphlet and were widely discussed, helped structure the radical anti-modernist argument and gave it academic respectability. In cruder language, Thode's accusations reappear in Stauff's openly anti-Semitic tract eight years later.

The emperor never descended to this level, at least in public. Theories of the inviolability of German culture did not much interest him;

he was troubled by what he took to be the aesthetic errors of impressionism and its successors and by the likelihood that the depiction of poverty and human suffering might be exploited for political gain. Within the possibilities open to him, he employed the broad array of state patronage to stem the tide of modern art. Finally he intervened so deeply in the workings of the cultural bureaucracy that he triggered events he could not control.

For years he had had an uneasy relationship with the director of the National Gallery, Hugo von Tschudi, who, influenced by Liebermann and others, was gradually building up the museum's holdings in recent and contemporary foreign as well as German paintings. In 1908, Tschudi, whose acquisition budget was exhausted, acquired four French paintings for the National Gallery in the expectation of a supplemental grant from the government. The emperor exploited this irregularity by secretly moving to replace Tschudi with Anton von Werner, director of the art school linked with the Academy, head of the Verein Berliner Künstler, and an energetic opponent of modernism. The project developed slowly, became public, and was being widely and unfavorably discussed in the press when the London *Daily Telegraph* published an article with comments on foreign and domestic affairs by the emperor. His impulsive statements caused outrage in Germany. A short political crisis followed, and the chancellor, Bernhard von Bülow, exacted a promise from the emperor that he would show greater restraint in the future. His agreement to retain Tschudi as director of the National Gallery was a first step in the new direction.<sup>17</sup>

Politically, the so-called *Daily Telegraph* Affair had no significant lasting consequences, although it further damaged the emperor's reputation. In the cultural sphere, however, the Tschudi Affair, which had become engulfed in the greater scandal, ended in an unintended victory for modernism. Tschudi, although reinstated, soon left Berlin for Munich; but the National Gallery did not fall into conservative hands, and William II and his allies in the ministries now took some care to appear unbiased in guiding the state's support for the fine arts.<sup>18</sup> After his failure to displace Tschudi with Werner, the emperor's activism faded. He might still retard change – in 1912 the National Gallery was able to acquire its first Slevogt only by subterfuge, and when the emperor

visited the museum the staff thought it advisable to hide the painting – but the fight against modernism was now led by the radical right.

As opposition to modernism assumed more extreme forms, the character of modernism was changing. Contemporary debates suggest that the newest stylistic experiments did not, for the time being, further enrage the critics – Thode, in 1905, still aimed his wrath at impressionism, as eight years later did Stauff. This may seem strange. Such early leaders of expressionism as the Brücke artists, certainly, worked in a manner that to the general public might appear more detached from foreign models than did Liebermann and the "German impressionists." With the taint of internationalism gone, one might have thought that the radical right would temper its attacks on modernism. But notwithstanding the efforts of some right-wing intellectuals, this way was not taken. Men like Stauff did not contrast good German modernism with international-Jewish modernism; they largely ignored it, and continued to pour invective on their old enemies. It seems significant that in Stauff's 1913 treatise, expressionism appears only marginally, in the figures of Pechstein, Kandinsky, Beckmann, and Walden, who are dismissively referred to; the author's hatred is reserved for the earlier avant-garde gathered around Liebermann. The radical critique followed its own dynamic, which was less dependent on specifics of style than on such general concepts as the uniqueness of German culture and the threatened subversion of German culture by Jews and other alien forces. By the second half of the decade, nevertheless, the German art public, critics, and artists – whether traditionalist or secessionist – found it difficult to ignore the broadly variegated movement in the fine arts and literature that came to be known as expressionism.

Initially the Secession's response was auspicious. In agreement with Liebermann's statement at the Secession's opening exhibition, "we do not believe in a single, sacred direction in art," the jury for the 1908 graphic exhibition chose entries by members of the Brücke, and by Feininger, Kandinsky, Nolde, and Klee. Paintings by Max Pechstein and Alexej von Jawlensky were accepted for the summer exhibition the following year. The Secession seemed ready to accommodate an infusion of the newest avant-garde.

Some members nevertheless objected to the jury's choices. Their disapproval of the new works combined with dissatisfaction in the

Secession's leadership, which essentially had remained unchanged for twelve years. Consequently Liebermann, Cassirer, and their supporters, resigned from the jury and the executive committee in 1910. They were persuaded to return, except Cassirer, who took a six-months' leave of absence from the Secession's business affairs. In the meantime, a new jury, which included Beckmann, rejected the entries of Nolde and the Brücke painters.

A destructive chain reaction set in. Pechstein organized the "New Secession," which held sensational shows in 1910 and 1911. Nolde, who imagined that a conspiracy by Liebermann and Scheffler, the editor of *Kunst und Künstler*, robbed him of deserved recognition, accused Liebermann of venality and artistic senility.<sup>19</sup> At a special general meeting, the members voted to expel Nolde from the Secession. Liebermann, who advised against this step, tired of the endless quarrels and resigned as president. He was succeeded by Lovis Corinth, whose stature as an artist and dislike of the work of the expressionist newcomers seemed to make him an ideal compromise choice; but he was unable to restore harmony. The results were mediocre exhibitions in 1911 and 1912.

An attack on the Secession by the landscape painter Carl Vinnen, a founding member, who had left the group after a few years, gave the old leadership the opportunity to define its intellectual position once more on the national stage. In a pamphlet published with supporting statements of many artists and critics, Vinnen asserted that instead of buying the works of deserving German artists, museums and collectors squandered money on fashionable but bad modernist paintings from abroad. Even worse, foreign art was seducing young German artists, who for the sake of quick success adopted alien styles and betrayed their native heritage. Responding with *German and French Art*, which soon achieved several editions, Liebermann, Slevogt, Corinth, and Cassirer, together with men who were no longer close to the Secession like Marc, Kandinsky, and Pechstein, not only proved that Vinnen's economic arguments were unfounded but also united in an impressive affirmation of the international character of art, which benefited rather than threatened Germany. Their response was an important declaration in the continuing conflict over the character and future of German art, even if it could not restore the Secession's unity.<sup>20</sup>

In 1912, Pechstein returned to the Secession. His step led to the



24. Max Liebermann, *Horseman on the Beach*, lithograph, 1909. Private collection.

breakup of the "New Secession" and contributed to the breakup of the Brücke, and again demonstrates the fluid relations between the new and the old avant-garde. But the Secession's decline continued. Not surprising in a large and democratic artists' cooperative, dissension among its members, exacerbated by the emergence of expressionism, pushed the Secession from its institutional leadership of modernism in Berlin.

Its place was taken by an array of new groups, galleries, and peri-

odicals, of which historically the most influential was Herwarth Walden's weekly *Der Sturm*. At first a literary journal, *Der Sturm* soon published graphics, beginning with a drawing by Liebermann, but finding its true message in black-and-white works by Kokoschka, the Brücke and Blaue Reiter artists, and later – as Walden tired of them – futurists and cubists. In March 1912, Walden held the first *Sturm* exhibition. Others followed, culminating in the First German Autumn Salon of 1913, a significant survey of contemporary art in Germany and elsewhere in the waning months of peace.

During this time, the Secession experienced a last, brief return to vitality. A stroke forced Corinth to resign as president, and in the obvious crisis in which the Secession found itself, the members elected Cassirer president. The exhibition he organized in the summer of 1913 was a powerful reaffirmation of the breadth and riches of modernism, going back to the 1880s. In contrast to Walden's Autumn Salon, Cassirer stressed the historical continuity from Cézanne and van Gogh to Matisse and such newcomers as Derain, Marquet, and Vlaminck, and from Liebermann and the early Secessionists to Kokoschka, Barlach, and the Brücke. But the Secession's old tolerance had weakened. Thirteen members, whose work the jury had rejected – among them paintings by Corinth's wife, which made Corinth's position difficult – protested the exhibition and forced a split in the Secession. Liebermann, Slevogt, Cassirer, and thirty-nine others resigned and formed the "Free Secession," a gesture of protest that the coming of war soon made meaningless. Except for Corinth, Hermann Struck, and two or three others, the members who remained were among the weakest of the group.<sup>21</sup> Corinth served as president of the rump secession until his death in 1926, but his continued poor health rendered effective leadership out of the question, and the group faded into insignificance. The acceptance of a broad range of styles, which had been the Secession's strength when it was founded, could not survive in a new, more radical, narrowly programmatic time.

## V

For fourteen years after its opening exhibition in 1899, the Berlin Secession was a major institutional force in German modernism. By

creating an alternative to the exhibition and patronage policies of the traditional art associations and of the state, the Secession gave artists a new freedom. That this was achieved only after overcoming intense official opposition was a function of Berlin's special character. The city had developed into a center of great economic power, generated and controlled by the bourgeoisie; at the same time it was the capital of a constitutional yet authoritarian monarchy, whose sovereign claimed broad jurisdiction in matters of art. That the Secession was, nevertheless, victorious in its conflict with William II helped change the culture of Berlin and of Germany.

In this conflict the Secession had allies, ranging from directors of the state museums to journalists and art dealers. Together and often competing, they created the resources and opportunities necessary for a vigorous art community. They strengthened Germany's links to foreign art; broke down the provincial isolation of artists, museums, and art public; and helped German artists translate foreign concepts into a native idiom. As in literature and music, a sophisticated modern art culture developed in Berlin. It survived the First World War and fostered the efflorescence of Weimar, much of which was the work of men and women who were already in the forefront of innovation in 1914.

Although the Secession and its allies were successful at the time, the opposition they faced succeeded in turning art into politics. Before 1914, most modern art in Germany was apolitical – in contrast to the work of officially supported history painters and portrait painters, who celebrated the imperial system – but nowhere in Europe was the issue of modernism politicized to the same extent. The First World War intensified this tendency, until defining certain works of art as degenerate and a threat to the nation's values – usually in anti-Semitic terms – became a political weapon in the war against the Weimar Republic.<sup>22</sup>

## VI

From a different perspective, the brief, creative history of the Secession and its allies may be seen as a high point of Jewish assimilation in Germany, an example of the partnership of Jews and non-Jews in an important area of German life. That anti-Semitic attacks on Jews



prominent in the arts were not the monopoly of Philipp Stauff and other radical populists, but might come from the ranks of modernism itself, does not negate the fact of integration.

How important were Jews in the rise of German modernism? This touches on the issue of Jewish identity, which can hardly be discussed at length here; a few comments related to Berlin at the turn of the century must suffice. For many Jews in the arts or interested in the arts, the issue posed no difficulty. They felt themselves to be Jews, whether in a religious or nonreligious sense, as did the gentile majority among whom they lived. In a society in which assimilation had passed a certain point, this did not necessarily mean that their ideas and feelings about art and its place in German culture and society were uniquely Jewish. Some Jews were influenced by Jewish cultural traditions, others were not. At the time, the concept of race was still widely respected as scientifically sound, but only the more rabid anti-Semites and a few philo-Semitic enthusiasts claimed that genetic inheritance automatically led to a given cultural point of view.

Family background may provide useful evidence for understanding the ideas and behavior of proponents and opponents of modernism in Wilhelmine Berlin. But it is ambiguous evidence, and a complex family background makes it more problematical. It is often misleading to characterize as a Jew someone who had both Jewish and gentile ancestors, whose Jewish ancestors had converted to Christianity, who no longer held Jewish religious beliefs or followed Jewish customs, and who married a gentile. Nor did bloodlines of one sort or another determine a person's sense of self. Some Germans of mixed descent felt themselves to be Jews, others did not.

How difficult it was for members of the latter group to win acceptance for their view of themselves is suggested by a tragicomic incident in the life of Julius Meier-Graefe, who had a Jewish grandfather, but was brought up in a conservative, gentile environment. When Henry Thode attacked Liebermann as innately un-German, Meier-Graefe published a response in which he foolishly asserted that although he himself was not a Jew he fully agreed with Liebermann. The result was all that the Thodes and Stauffs in German society could hope for. At once it was pointed out that Meier-Graefe had a Jewish ancestor, his claim to be gentile was ridiculed, and not only his ideas but also the

language in which he expressed them were branded as typically Yiddish.

The role of Jews differed in the various facets of modernism. For the Secession's first twelve years, its president, who was also one of its leading artists, was a Jew, who was proud of his identity and traditions even as he valued assimilation. But apart from Liebermann, only a few significant artists of Jewish or partly Jewish origin worked in Berlin, among them Hermann Struck, best known for his graphics, the elegant neoclassicist sculptor Louis Tuaillon, Walter Bondy – a cousin of the Cassirers – the young painters Eugen Spiro and Max Oppenheimer, and, above all, Lesser Ury. In the Secession they never formed more than a small minority. Jews were equally rare among the expressionist avant-garde, unless ethnic identity is measured by refinements that go beyond the definitions of the Nuremberg Laws.

Far more dominant was the Jewish presence among the initially small number of gallerists and publishers of modernism. Bruno and Paul Cassirer and later Herwarth Walden exerted a notable influence on the exhibition, dissemination, and sale of modern art. As more publishers and art dealers entered the field, and such long-established galleries owned by gentiles as Gurlitt, Schulte, and Amsler and Rutherford expanded their clientele for modern art, the Cassirers remained first among a growing number of equals. Their work was supported by influential critics, several of whom were Jews. Jewish journalists could also be found in the traditional camp. The critic Hans Rosenhagen, a supporter of the Berlin Secession who had turned against it, and now defended the emperor's art policies, is an example – at least Stauff asserted he was Jewish.

The buyers and collectors of modern art, finally, fell into two main groups. Museum directors and curators were state officials, holding positions to which unconverted Jews were only rarely appointed. The museum directors pivotal in making modern art acceptable in Germany – men such as Hugo von Tschudi in Berlin and later in Munich, Alfred Lichtwark in Hamburg, Gustav Pauli in Bremen and later in Hamburg – were gentiles.

Among private collectors and donors the situation was reversed, especially in Berlin. The major donors of modern and old art to Berlin museums between the accession of William II and the end of the

Weimar Republic have been identified as almost all belonging to the "German-Jewish high bourgeoisie."<sup>23</sup> The reasons for their large gifts of money and works of art varied. Genuine interest and community spirit were motives, as might be social ambition, although several of the most important Jewish donors rejected titles of nobility – for instance, Eduard Arnhold, one of the richest men in Berlin, whom Paul Cassirer advised on his collection and who was one of Tschudi's strong supporters.<sup>24</sup> The claim – advanced not only by racists – that Jews had a special affinity for modernism would, however, be difficult to prove. In other European capitals before 1914, wealthy Jews directed their support elsewhere; presumably each city's particular social and cultural configuration helped determine its preferred forms of patronage. And in Berlin not all wealthy Jews interested in the arts favored modernism. One of Arnhold's peers, the Jewish newspaper magnate Rudolf Mosse, after the emperor the richest man in the capital, was a patron and friend of Anton von Werner, the emperor's ally in fighting the Secession, and a collector of nineteenth-century history and narrative painting. Nor are multimillionaires necessarily representative of larger socioeconomic and ethnic groups. There is no evidence to indicate that in 1900 the tastes in art of the average Jewish and non-Jewish professional or businessman differed greatly. On the other hand, the arts provided unusual scope for the individualism and creativity of members of a group still not fully accepted in German society. Those Jews who resented or were unimpressed by norms that found them inadequate could welcome new forms of art for reasons that would not motivate gentile supporters of modernism.

Not ethnic characteristics, however measured, but historical conditions and individual convictions determined the role Jews played in bringing modernism to Germany. Had there been no Liebermann, Cassirer, or Arnhold, modern art would still have made headway in Central Europe, although the details of the process would have differed. As it was, modernism was fostered jointly by Jews and non-Jews, each depending on the other. Their actions can hardly be identified as representative of this or that ethnic or religious group. Jews took opposing positions in the arts, as did gentiles, and any effort to define assimilated artists, critics, collectors, and dealers on the basis of their Jewish or partly Jewish origins breaks down as soon as the individual

life is studied in detail. The leading figures, especially, with their unique talents, experiences, and goals, rise far above any ethnic typology.

But the part Jews played in the course of modernization, and the reactions it generated, do say a great deal about a community that undoubtedly did exist: German society before the First World War. The shifting balance between acceptance and continued hostility conditioned the role of Jewish, partly Jewish, and formerly Jewish participants, and how this role was perceived. The perception was influenced by attitudes toward Jews that existed throughout western society, but proved particularly damaging in Germany, and to Germany. To identify Jews as enemies of Germanness, helped define and give a spurious reality to the concept they were said to threaten. The negative defined the positive, destroying one preserved the other. Modernism as a Jewish plot became a means for achieving the radical goals of expelling Jews from the nation and of creating a different, purer Germany. These goals were finally achieved between 1939 and 1945, in the years of total war, which in the end turned against Germany, and in the transformation of Jewish assimilation to extermination.