Garden Cities: The Corn Belt Academy in the Machine Age.

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Reacting against modernism, the regionalists Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry and Thomas Hart Benton came to advocate a form of art which they considered genuinely American and realist. Nevertheless, many of the landscape paintings of the regionalist artists, and those of Grant Wood in particular, reveal an influence from the "cubist" industrial landscapes of the 1920s and in many ways form parallels to the industrial landscapes of the precisionist painters of the 1930s. Grant Wood's art after 1930 can be interpreted as an attempt to combine the pastoral regionalist vision with the modernist vision of the cubists and the precisionists.

Generally, the work in painting (murals) and photography by many of the American Scene artists reflects aspects of the New Deal as expressed in projects like the TVA, rural electrification, the garden cities movement, architecture and industrial design. Also in industrial enterprise and technology there were attempts to pastoralize the machine. The best example is Henry Ford who in the 1920s and the 1930s actually tried to decentralize parts of his big industrial complexes by encouraging small production units in rural factories and communities to counteract the results of applied Fordism and Taylorism.

In a review of a retrospective exhibition of the American Scene painter Thomas Hart Benton in 1989, *Time Magazine* claimed credit for having launched the American Scene movement in its Christmas issue in 1934. In that issue *Time* announced that modern incomprehensible artistic "isms" like cubism, dadaism, futurism, *etc.* had now been replaced by a

sturdy American movement that had its roots in the Midwest.[1] It was mainly three artists that made up this movement. They were Thomas Hart Benton from Missouri, born in 1889; Grant Wood from Anamosa, Iowa, born in 1891; and John Steuart Curry from Kansas, born in 1897. The promoter of Regionalism was a Kansas-born art dealer named Maynard Walker who sensed that the resentments of the Depression could be harnessed in the field of art. Cultural populism welling up from the undefiled American heartland was a commodity with a potential for profit. The reviewer also suggests that the editor of Time in 1934, Henry Luce, was actually looking for a patriotic cover story and found it in American regionalism. Therefore Walker was interviewed for the story and Thomas Hart Benton's self-portrait went on the cover. Benton was much later quoted as having said that in this way a play had been written and a stage set up for the American Scene artists: "Grant Wood became the typical Iowa small towner, John Curry the typical Kansas farmer and I just an Ozark hillbilly. We accepted our roles."[2]

Whatever Time did to launch these artists into fame in 1934, it would debunk fifty years later, in the 1980s. Time Magazine's reviewer of the Benton retrospective points out in 1989 that with our hindsight of later developments in art and according to current tastes and views Benton's art now seems vulgar and intolerably "tarted up." Another Time review of a retrospective of Grant Wood in 1983 characterizes Wood as less than a footnote in the history of modern art, a provincial cornball.[3] The magazine suggests that the revival of Grant Wood can be effectively seen as a cultural index of Reagan's America with a taste for the nostalgia that the Moral Majority might entertain for Wood's "American Gothic." The same hindsight now also enables us to see the obvious parallels between American democratic regionalism and, ironically, official Soviet art or Nazi art propaganda in the 1930s. The author of the above review, Robert Hughes, characterizes the similarities as follows:

> If social realism meant sanitized images of collective rural production, new tractors, bonny children and muscular workers, so did capitalist realism proposed by Benton and Wood.

1 In his article "Versions of Public Art: National Self-Representation in the Iconography of Nazi Germany and the New Deal" (American *Studies* in *Scandinavia*, Vol 24, No. 1, 1992), Heinz Ickstadt points out the interesting, but also disturbing, parallels between these attitudes and the official denunciation of the same art forms in Hitler's Germany.

2 Time, May 1, 1989, p. 51.

3 Time, June 27, 1983, p. 50.

> Both were arts of idealization and propaganda. In aesthetic terms, little that Benton painted for the next 40 years would have seemed altogether out of place on the ceilings of the Moscow subway.

In spite of an an apparent disregard for the so-called Corn Belt Academy by contemporary popular art criticism, the artists catapulted into popular attention by the article in 1934, still seem remarkably alive and able to rouse considerable interest, not least in their ability to have created enduring American icons like Wood's "American Gothic," Curry's "Baptism in Kansas," or Benton's "Huck Finn." Moreover, a closer scrutiny of their achievement may actually reveal considerable affinities between the American Scene artists and the alien "isms" that *Time* was so quick to dismiss in 1934.

The Armory Show which opened in New York in 1913 was the event that brought the "isms" from Europe to the attention of a larger American audience. At this exhibition Americans could see the cubist pictures for the first time, and among them Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" which aroused particular debate and ridicule. The Armory Show pushed the Modernist movement in the arts in the United States forward, and accelerated the transformations in taste and attitudes that Robert Hughes have called the "Shock of the New."[4]

Art historian Barbara Novak seems to dismiss the idea that cubism brought an entirely new way of perceiving reality to American art. So-called analytical cubism, for example Picasso's attempts to break down an object into its geometric constituents, or to paint the far side of objects which the eye could not see, but which experience would tell us existed all the same, never gained much ground in American painting.[5] Synthetic cubism, on the other hand, which emphasized the object in its uniqueness or in isolation or amplified it in a context of other objects, became the mode in which the man made new things from machine parts to skyscrapers could be celebrated. Novak suggests that in early 20th century American art there was a merging of the transcendentalist reverence for the beauty of the objective world and the mysterious power that Henry Adams felt from the dynamo.

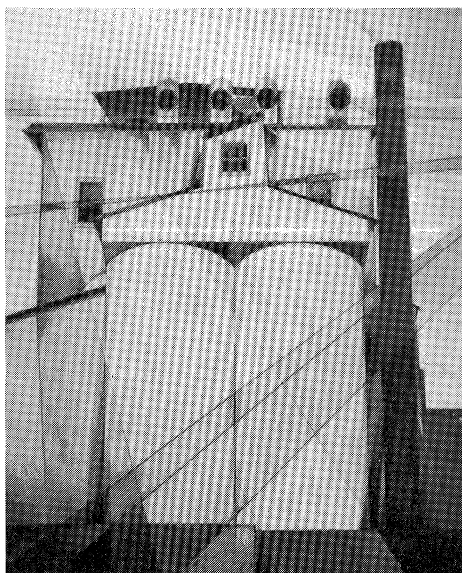
4 Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New. Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).

5 Barbara Novak, *American Pointing of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Praeger Publ., 1969), p. 265.

Alongside the new isms, the schools of realist and naturalist painting in America persisted and inevitably the two strains would cross and merge and in turn reflect the social and cultural preoccupations of America at a time of dramatic material transformation of society. The muckraking and social commitment of the Ash Can School continued into the optimism of the 1920s and the Machine Age.

The style of painting that has been loosely referred to as precisionist, cubist realism or Machine Art developed in the 1920s and 30s around the photographer Alfred Stieglitz and his gallery in New York called "291," Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler and Joseph Stella to mention some of the more prominent names.

In order to examine some of the formal elements used by the precisionists and to study a particular treatment of the relationship between the machine and the garden in the United States during and after World War I, let us take a closer look at Charles Demuth's painting "My Egypt" from 1927. The cosmopolitan artist Charles Demuth had his roots in Lancaster, Penn., and in many of his works he uses the landscape and the activities of people in a rural environment. In "My Egypt" he takes up a motive that had already caught the imagination of European artists like the architect and director of the Bauhaus school of



Charles Demuth, "My Egypt," 1929. New York, Whitney Museum of American Art.

architecture in Germany, Walter Gropius. In a lecture on "Monumental Art and Industrial Building" in 1911 Gropius showed a series of pictures of American grain silos. Like that of Egyptian pyramids and classical temples, the form of the silos expressed for Gropius monumentality and power and in this case the monumentality and power of American technology and civilization.6

"My Egypt" is a frontal view of a grain elevator in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Since the structure fills up most of the picture, the spectator gets a strong impression of weight and monumentality. The clear geometry of the cylindrical and rectangular parts of the silo is complemented by the triangular shafts of light which cross in front of the building and which seem to come from sources outside the picture. The meaning of the object portrayed in the picture goes far beyond the purely painterly aspects like the use of planes, lines, light, mass and balance. The title may reflect the mania for Egyptology in American popular culture in 1922 when Howard Carter discovered "King Tut's" tomb. The solidity of the cylinders and the pedimental cap suggests the ancient temple of Karnak, and since we know that the silos are meant to be filled with golden grain or seed which again suggests the fertility of the earth, we may perceive the connection between ancient religion and fertility in the picture. These two ideas may also connect with the story of the sojourn of the Jews in the Land of Goshen and their exodus from Egypt to the "Promised Land."

"My Egypt" represents an interesting example of cubist abstraction and simplicity in the way the artist has handled symmetry, mass and color. But even more importantly it combines the admiration for industrial architecture, the machine age technology and the future on the one hand with farming, grain, seed and mythical fertility religion on the other. In other words a painting that seems to depict a Machine Age structure combines it with a pastoral and agrarian world.

Though Benton, Wood and Curry are commonly characterized as regionalists, "American Scene" and Midwesterners, they are in many ways also very different. Depending on how one defines the Midwest geographically and the term "midwestern" socially and historically, one may relate the three artists to different parts of the Midwest. Grant Wood as an Iowan may then qualify as a "full" Midwesterner, with John

6 Tomas P. Hughes, American Genesis (New York, Penguin Books, 1990), p. 314.

Steuart Curry of Kansas somewhat on the sideline. The art of Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, in my opinion, shows more affinities with the rural, poor, romantic and decadent South as depicted in *e.g.* Faulkner's or Tennessee Williams's works.

Wood, Curry and Benton were deeply steeped in a Midwestern culture which already had a long history of Jeffersonianism behind it in its tradition of populism and social progressivism. By 1900, the Midwest had gone through a tremendous technological and commercial revolution with agressive development and urbanization in Chicago and Detroit. The farmers very often found themselves pawns in the hands of mighty economic forces like distant banks and ruthless railroads. The contradictions between the pioneer and rural Midwest and the growth of an urban industrial economy constitute the themes and subject matter of a good deal of Carl Sandburg's poetry.

Defense of agrarian, populist and small town values against the forces of technology, the latter represented in painting by precisionism, was part of the energy that the Depression and the New Deal unleashed the 1930s. Therefore regionalism in art is a reaction against modernism, the cult of technology and the power of the capitals of finance. Regionalism could also take the form of rather conservative and even reactionary attitudes like the Southernism of the 1930 manifesto of Southern intellectuals, I'll Take My Stand.

Grant Wood also wrote a regionalist manifesto called "Revolt Against the City," published in Iowa City in 1935. In that article he begins by proclaiming his defiance of the tyranny of artistic taste by the eastern cities, New York in particular, and, in a very traditional American manner, claiming independence from European models. Further he says that American art has come of age and the regionalists need not be beholden to anyone. New York has now come to represent a repressive European influence. "Our Middle West ... has long had much the same attitude toward the the East that the coastal cities had toward Europe," Wood writes.[7] His painting "Daughters of Revolution" from 1932 is most often seen as a satire of the old East. However, the painting of the good ladies, who all seem like spitting images of George Washington himself, may also reflect sincere American patriotism and midwestern isolationism.

7 Grant Wood, "Revolt Against the City," printed in Joseph Czestochowski, *John Steuart Curry and Grant **Wood.** A Portrait of Rural America* (Columbia & London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1981), p. 130.

It was not only the East that was perceived as having had a stultifying influence on true American art, but even more so the pernicious European fashions in art that invaded America. As late as in 1951, Thomas Hart Benton underlines the same attitude: "we were all in revolt against the unhappy effects which the Armory Show of 1913 had had on American painting. We objected to the new Parisian aesthetics which was more and more turning away from the living world of active men and women into an academic world of empty pattern."[8]

In his essay Grant Wood reviews the present state of American drama, music and painting. The latter had now declared its independence from Europe and was "retreating from the cities to the more American village and country life."[9] There the artist could use the native materials for his art. According to an article by John Steuart Curry in 1935,

> The artist must paint the thing that is most alive to him. To do this in a distinguished manner takes thought and a realization of what is to be accomplished. Thousands of us are now painting what is called "the American Scene." We are glorifying landscapes, elevated stations, subways, butcher shops, 14th Street, Mid-Westem farmers, and we are one and all painting out of the fulness of our lives and experiences. ...
>
> Grant Wood is producing an art that is real, indigenous to the life of his people. He has brought the town of Cedar Rapids and the state of Iowa renown and is, in my mind, the perfect example of that situation talked about now—'the artist as a part of his civilization.'[10]

This insistence on using material taken from genuine American life was not primarily based on aesthetics or any philosophy of art. It springs partly from the traditional inferiority complex that so many American artists felt toward Europe. But more importantly the issue was a moral one, and regionalism in the arts is rooted in the same cultural and psychological soil as political isolationism, prohibition and old time religion which dominated the midwestern Bible Belt.

In 1935 Grant Wood saw that great changes had taken place. "The Great Depression has taught us many things, and not the least of them is self-reliance. It has thrown down the Tower of Babel erected in the years of false prosperity; it has sent men and women back to the land; it has

8 Thomas Hart Benton, "Afterword: On Regionalism, 1951," printed in Joseph Czestochowski, *John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood.,* p. 213.

9 *Ibid.,* p. 131.

10 John Steuart Curry, "What Should the American Artist Paint?" printed in Joseph Czestochowski, *John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood,* p. *40.*

caused us to rediscover some of the old frontier virtues."[11] Thomas Hart Benton also provides a clear statement of the corrupting power of the city in his 1930 painting "City Activities" where we can see city sex and licentiousness in the burlesque shows, violence in the prize fights counterbalanced by the religious piety of an Elmer Gantry and Salvation Army do-gooders. It is probably in this context that one may understand Wood's famous "American Gothic" from 1930. Because of the age difference between the two figures in the picture the man is not supposed to be the woman's husband, but probably her father who protects her and their life style with his hayfork, like an Amish patriarch, against alien invaders.

Grant Wood also celebrates the Wordsworthian notion of the farmer as particularly worthy of the artist's attention and interpretation. He describes him as "a less socialized being than the average American," something Grant Wood considers a complement:

> the Iowa farmer as I know him is fully as American as Boston, and has the great advantage of being father away from European influence. He knows little of life in crowded cities, and would find such intimacies uncomfortable; it is with difficulty that he reconciles himself even to village life.[12]

This is reflected in a picture like "Spring Turning" (1936) where we see the farmer doing the spring plowing in a landscape that suggests the outlines of human buttocks. He is a servant of the forces of fertility, of spring and seeding, which explains why he is completely dominated by the landscape.

A work that embodies a number of midwestern attitudes is "Arbor Day." The painting shows a little school house on the prairie which also seems to function as a church. The school mistress is directing her students in their work of the ritual planting of a tree on an elevated site in front of the school on Arbor Day. The picture celebrates the importance of education, planting the tree of knowledge, the dignity of work, the formation of young minds, the transformation of the environment into a garden, etc.

Even though the regionalists articulated important sentiments and issues in the late 1920s and in the 30s, they were merely voices crying

11 Ibid., p. 130.
12 Ibid., p. 133.

in the wilderness. The forces that shaped America in these two decades were technlogical, industrial and financial. The American natural landscapes were increasingly turned into industrial landscapes dominated by industrial architecture, smoke stacks and industrial waste, as noted by for example Scott Fitzgerald in his description of the Valley of Ashes in *The Great Gatsby.* In the Midwest the urban development of the Chicago skyscrapers caught the imagination of Sandburg in "Prayers of Steel." Henry Ford's huge production plants for the T-model at Midland Park, designed by Albert Kahn, and later at River Rouge, Detroit, represented whole new and revolutionary concepts of industrial and managerial organization. The logic of mass production was formulated into theory as "Fordism" and "Taylorism" from Frederick W. Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911. This admiration for the wonderful future of technology was further promoted in The World's Fair in Chicago, "The Century of Progress" in 1932.

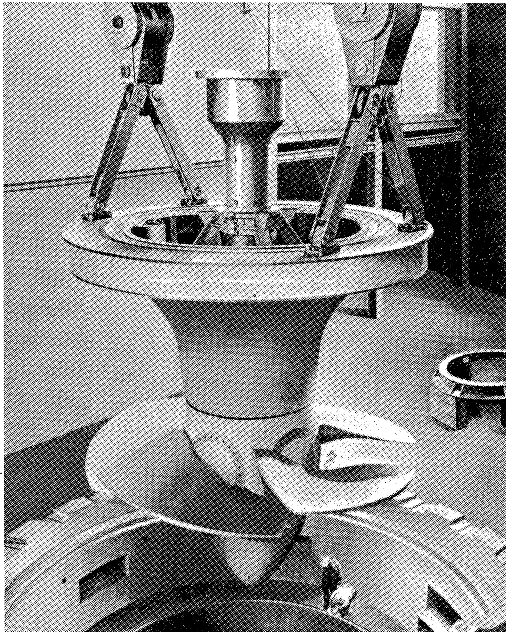
The new industrial and urban landscapes were not entirely new. They had existed for many decades in the great Eastern cities or in the Pensylvania steel mills. But in the Midwest the enormous contrasts between the Chicago skyline and Detroit's automobile factories on the one hand and the rolling open prairie farm land and wooded land of lakes on the other were relatively recent developments. This new industrial and and social environment was celebrated by many artists, particularly in photography (by Alfred Stieglitz, Louis Hine, Walker Evans and Margaret Bourke-White) and in painting by the precisionists, e.g. Demuth, Sheeler and Georgia O'Keeffee. These artists were influenced by the new art which the Armory Show introduced to America, by Italian futurism and contemporary architecture and machinery.

The New Deal philosophy and programs in the 1930s were based on the conviction that technology could be used to overcome the economic and social problems created by the Depression. Arthur Morgan, the director of the Tennessee Valley Authority maintained that the goal of the TVA was to create an integrated social and economic order.[13] Particularly the use of clean electric power generated by water power trapped by huge dams (e. g. Hoover Dam) could transform society and revive the poverty stricken regions by making electricity available to farmers and village workshops. The TVA programs in particular caught

13 Tomas P. Hughes, *American* Genesis (New York, Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 367-368.

the imagination of artists as well as the general public. Margaret Bourke-White's photograph of Fort Peak Dam in Montana, which went on the first cover of *Life* magazine Nov. 23, 1936 captures the same monumentality as Demuth's painting of the grain elevator made nine years earlier. Only here it is not grain which is behind the concrete walls, but water. TVA also produced a lot of promotion and propaganda material in the form of photographs and films which gave the impression of a clean world of monumental and precise machinery made even more desirable by contrasting shots of hillbilly poverty in the Tennessee Valley. Charles Sheeler's painting titled "Suspended Power" from 1939 captures the enormous size and power of water turbines that are being installed in a hydroelectric plant. Likewise the artist's interest in the intricacies and precision of machinery is expressed in "Rolling Power" also from 1939.

The pictures by Charles Sheeler that are particularly relevant in order to put Grant Wood's landscapes into the context of regionalism, precisionism and New Deal thinking are the ones that he painted of the River Rouge Plant for Ford Motor Co.: "American Landscape" (1930), "River Rouge Plant" (1932) and "City Interior" (1936).



Charles Scheeler, "Suspended Power," 1939. Dallas Museum of Art.

The title "American Landscape" suggests that the motive is typically and generally American. Another corresponding picture by Sheeler is titled "Classic Landscape" which suggests that the industrial buildings have replaced the classical ruins with temple columns standing like smokestacks in the paintings of say Poussin or Claude Lorraine. Leo Marx in his discussion of "American Landscape" in his Machine in the Garden, characterizes the picture as an industrial landscape pastoralized. Like Henry Adams before him, Sheeler saw the similarities between factories and Gothic cathedrals.[14] The industrial landscape in precisionist painting reflected a planned and ordered world, an expression of man's rationality, in which the presence of the human form became insignificant or superfluous. In William Carlos Williams's poem "Classic Scene" (1938) we find that the same clean, but inhuman environment has been evoked:

A power-house
in the shape of
a red brick chair
90 feet high

on the seat of which
sit the figures
of two metal
stacks - aluminum -

commanding an area
of squalid shacks
side by side -
from one of which

buff smoke
streams while under
a grey sky
the other remains

passive today -

Apparently Grant Wood's rural Iowan landscapes seem to have little in common with Sheeler's industrial landscapes. There are no factories in

14 "In a period such as ours, when only a few isolated individuals give evidence of a religious content, some form other than that of the Gothic Cathedral must be found for our authentic expression. Since industry predominantly concerns the greatest numbers, finding an expression for it concerns the artist." Quoted in Tomas P. Hughes, American Genesis, p. 339.

Wood's pictures. Landscapes consist of the rounded and stylized anthropomorphic contours of hills and corn fields, punctuated by farm buildings or the lines drawn by farmers plowing the fields ("Spring Turning"). But in paintings like "Stone City" the spectator may perceive an interesting combination of farming landscape and industrial activity which Wood tries to keep in balance.

Grant Wood, "Stone City," 1930. Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska.

"Stone City" shows a harmonious Jeffersonian landscape of fields and farms and farmhouses. From the way the shadows fall in the picture, we may assume that it is early morning or late afternoon. A short stretch of river spanned by a simple iron suspension bridge is centrally placed in the picture. To the right there is a structure which could either be a storage building or a small mill. The house to the left is counterbalanced by a church which just enters the field of vision. In the middle background there is a stone quarry that has been cut into the hillside, and which blends in with the rest of the landscape so that it is neither ugly nor out of place. The site looks quite deserted and like Sheeler's "American landscape" shows no activity at all. The surface of the painting reveals no trace of brushstrokes and appears glassy, translucent and luminist.

The clear outlines of the landscape and the absence of human forms give an impression of a scene at rest and in balance. The artist has adopted a "Breughelian" God's-eye-view of the landscape which corresponds to Sheeler's point of view in "American landscape."

Art historian Wanda Corn has observed the strong and important influence from American traditional folk art in Wood's pictures. Wood, however, was also keenly aware of the contemporary art scene in America, and Wanda Corn notices his concern about not being taken seriously by the art community if he came to be perceived as a homespun farmer artist. Wanda Corn states Wood's position as follows: "Aware that the return to narration and subject matter was suspect in avant-garde circles as simply a new form of illustration, Wood believed regionalist painters could escape that derogatory judgment if they imposed modern decorative qualities and abstract designs upon their subjects."[15] In "Stone City" Corn finds a curious combination of the traditional and the modern. "Stone City reminds us of Art Deco decorations and American folk art—Folk Art Deco, we might call it, applied to the rural landscape."[16]

Therefore Wood's "Stone City" may firstly be said to reflect some of the artistic ideas and preoccupations of the precisionists. Secondly it reflects the pastoral, patriotic, and regionalist ideas of midwesterners and thirdly the dream and aspirations of many industrialists and New Deal planners of garden cities. The Garden City movement was part of the New Deal ideology for redesigning rural America.[17] The idea of a garden city was a planned, simple, Jeffersonian, rural but electrified community of about 30.000 people. People from older decaying industrial cities would be encouraged to move to such places. The factories would be surounded by pastoral greenbelts, and electricity and automobiles would help eliminate overcrowding and poverty.

Although some model garden cities were set up, they soon either languished or followed the way of general urban development in America. Experiments that proved more viable—at least for some time—were Henry Ford's village industries. Henry Ford, himself a midwesterner, believed hydroelectric power to be a way of decentralizing industry,

15 Wanda M. Corn, *Grant Wood. The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), p. 42.

16 *Ibid.,* p. 74.

17 See Daniel Schaffer, *Garden Cities for America: The Radburn Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1982).

deurbanizing the city and revitalizing the countryside. From about 1920 Henry Ford began a program of decentralizing automobile production. During the next twenty years he opened small local factories, about 19 in all, within sixty miles of Dearborn, Michigan, in order to produce components for Ford products.[18] Ford looked for existing buildings like gristmills or other structures, stocked them with the appropriate tools and had them connected to the power grid in the area. He also made a point of hiring local workers and encouraged them to grow crops on local small farms during their spare time.

Another attempt to combine industry and agriculture was launched around 1930. It was called the chemurgy movement, and Orland R. Sweeney, head of Iowa State College's chemistry department in Ames, was among its first instigators. The idea was to make chemicals from agricultural products. Henry A. Wallace, later Roosevelt's secretary of agriculture and vice-president during Roosevelt's third term, supported the project. As technology historians Marcus and Segal point out, Sweeney maintained that

> Massive but voluntary relocation of urban people to new rural communities was America's only chance for salvation. There the new rural inhabitants could erect small hydro-electric-powered plants to convert agricultural commodities into chemicals, and to produce industrial goods. America would become a continuum of family farms and small rural industrial communities.[19]

Grant Wood also happend to have an historic example of a local agricultural and manufacturing community almost in his neighborhood, namely the old Amana Colonies in south-eastern Iowa, founded by a German religious sect in 1855. It used to be run along religious-communist principles by the church elders. In 1932 its secular affairs were organized under the new Amana Society. Many communistic practices were then dropped and members were issued stock in the profit-sharing society.

The artistic technique and qualities that Wood and Sheeler seem to share are revealed in their use of space, planes, lines, light and the erasure of brush strokes. Considered in the the broader context of history of art in America, their works of art are strongly reminiscent of the works of

18 See Alan I Marcus and Howard P. Segal, *Technology in America. A Brief History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p. 270.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 273.

the romantic 19th century school of luminist painters of whom the most prominent were Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-65) and Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904) who employed much the same techniques. Art historian Barbara Novak defines luminism as "a form of ideal realism" and distinguishes luminism from the more generally romantic Hudson River School by describing luminism as a style of painting which is related to the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau. Lane's art, according to Novak, "is perhaps the closest parallel to Emerson's Transcendentalism that America produced: of all the painters of the mid-century, he was the most 'transparent eyeball.'"[20] Lane's intense realism makes the landscapes and the objets in them appear as being charged with a strong inner light or force or meaning.

Obviously the transcendentalist or spiritual ideas would be less important for the precisionists and for Wood's regionalism in the 1920s and the 1930s than for American painters around 1850. These modern artists would reflect and interpret a far more complex and chaotic world in which the number of modern, massproduced objects made by efficient machinery was increasing every day. However, it may be possible to perceive a relationship in technique and subject matter between the luminists and modern painters like Wood and Sheeler. Barbara Novak sums up the parallels and the transitions between the luminist and the modernist visions in this vay:

> The cult of nature had given way to the cult of the machine, grain elevators and factories had replaced the deserted beach. But an art that had always tended toward the measured and planar, toward the smooth-surfaced and anonymous, toward the timeless and the contained, tempered in its character by a technological society with a longstanding admiration for the Platonic simplicity of machine forms, could easily accommodate itself to this new landscape.

Though the cosmopolitan Henry Adams had been deeply disturbed by the conflict between the Virgin and the Dynamo, America was, from the beginning, the natural land of the machine."[21]

In this modern world of immense agricultural and industrial-urban landscapes and at a time when capitalist, materialist society was in deep crisis, artists turned their attention to the meaning of these very landscapes,

20 Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Praeger Publ., 1969), p.110.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

and to the balancing of the two opposites in the Jeffersonian idea of garden cities. There were to be no satanic mills in America, and like Emerson, many of the New Dealers and even industrialists in the "Machine Age" wanted to, in Emerson's words, "disgust men with cities and infuse into them the passion for country life." In this process machine power did not represent a threat, but an ally. Leo Marx says about Emerson that he was "confident that under native conditions science and technology can be made to serve a rural ideal,"[22] In the same way the New Dealers, the garden citiy planners and the chemurgists were confident that planning and electrification would go a long way towards creating ideal garden city communities.

22 Leo Man;, *The Machine in the* Garden (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 236.