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**Weimar Photography: Bauhaus,
Cultural Difference, Exile: Part 1**

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A (Still) Marginal Modernity, or The Artist as Stenographer

JORDAN TROELLER

It is one of the more easily ignored facts of history that photography at the Bauhaus began not with the arrival of László Moholy-Nagy, nor with the appointment of Walter Peterhans to establish the school's first photography workshop, but with one of the school's office secretaries, Paula Stockmar. Three years into the school's existence, Walter Gropius, increasingly aware of photography's political expediency, announced that he had asked Stockmar "to photograph all eligible works coming out of the workshops, in part for the archive that we are assembling in the secretary's office, which will provide an overview of everything that has been achieved thus far, and in part for future publications."¹ The photographs that she took, along with those by staffed photo agencies, the studios of Hermann Eckner and Helene Hüttich and Susanne Oemler, and later by Lucia Moholy, filled several albums from which Gropius drew, both to advertise the school's products as well as to defend its legitimacy to an increasingly hostile public.² While much has been written on the New Vision photography of Moholy-Nagy, Erich Consemüller, and others at the Bauhaus, photographic practices like these, which seem to fall outside the parameters of formalist experimentation, were dismissed as replications, lacking in authorial originality and akin to the labor of a typist or stenographer.³ As a testament to the endurance of that view, Stockmar continues to be an obscure figure. We know of her only through the album photographs and a few stamped prints housed at the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin, a corpus that attended her shift in profession from "secretary" in 1921 to "photographer" in 1924, as recorded in the Weimar address registry. Seemingly benign, that shift points to a profound gendering of avant-garde photography, one that feminized the medium's transcriptive attributes and generated discursive contradictions that have yet to be fully recognized.

It was in the pages of *October* forty years ago that this comparison between photography and writing—"a comparison that largely denigrates the latter," as

1. Walter Gropius, memo to the workshops, April 25, 1922, folder 14, Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, Landesarchiv Thüringen–Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar.

2. The albums are housed in the Archiv der Moderne in Weimar and have been reproduced in the four-volume facsimile *Bauhaus-Alben* (Weimar: Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, 2006–2009).

3. I wish to thank Maria Gough for suggesting this term (and its implications) at just the right moment.

Rosalind Krauss pointed out—was first brought to the fore.⁴ In response to the centennial anniversary of the founding of the school last year, in which many of the familiar clichés of Bauhaus photography were cheerfully trotted out (yet again), *October* has gathered a selection of contributions that trouble this masculinist discourse of experimentation by drawing attention to the contributions of women photographers. Following a path well trodden by our feminist forebears, ours is not a biographical project of admitting marginalized figures into the canon but a theoretical one, in which we argue that these contributions challenge the criteria by which that canon was made (and remade), from the 1920s to the present. The essays we offer here point to the relevance and necessity of that still unfinished project of questioning disciplinary assumptions, a project that, it should be noted, takes on a new urgency when that same canon is ravenously incorporating geographies of art-making once regarded as insignificant. It is *especially* at a moment like this that the categories of difference, reproduction, artistic labor, and the like need to be interrogated, not because these qualities were the exclusive prerogative of women artists (or artists of color, for that matter) but because they found a precise articulation in their hands, enabling a reflection on those issues in ways that proffer new perspectives onto familiar territory.

In the first part of this special issue on Weimar-era photography, three authors focus on a central figure working in or around the Bauhaus to explore the precarious status of her reception in relation to a masculinized discourse of quality from which she was largely excluded—or, in the case of Florence Henri, to which she was made to conform. These three women—Henri, Lucia Moholy, and Grete Stern—are part of a broader spectrum of marginalized, often feminized, photographic production within interwar German photography and its diaspora, as these women pursued their careers abroad for obvious (and sometimes not so obvious) reasons. Arguments from two of these essays were presented at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in June 2019 at a workshop that I co-organized with Linn Burchert and Johanna Függer-Vagts (“Engendering Bauhaus Histories”). I thank them, the audience members, and, above all, Professor Eva Ehninger for their support.

The second part of this issue, which will be published in volume 173, more closely attends to this diasporic dimension and its conditions of exile and emigration. Whether Bauhausers or not, all of these women shared an access to the medium, which differentiated them from their counterparts elsewhere: In the Weimar German context, photography had developed a gendered institutional status whereby it was long viewed as a technical craft, as opposed to a fine art—a distinction that materialized in the form of admitting women decades before the German art academies did (in 1918). These “technical schools,” such as the Lette-Verein in Berlin, where Marianne Breslauer studied, trained women in careers not unlike those of a stenographer—to become technicians in a range of scientific

4. Rosalind Krauss, “Jump Over the Bauhaus,” *October* 15 (Winter 1980), p. 104.

fields mobilizing the medium, from microphotography to X-ray technology.⁵ The great irony of this is that as the male-dominated avant-garde colonized such techniques, incorporating them into New Vision photography, the same fields that enabled women to gain access to the medium also laid the groundwork for a powerful, if implicit, critique of that masculinized discourse.

Women taking photographs at the Bauhaus or learning the medium there—Gertrud Arndt, Ellen Auerbach, Irena Blühová, Marianne Brandt, Ise Gropius, Florence Henri, Judit Kárász, Lucia Moholy, and Grete Stern, to name just a small selection—did so with these historical conditions either directly or indirectly shaping their understanding of the medium. This is one reason (though by no means the only one) by which we can begin to account for why so many women in Weimar Germany took up photography, and did so on their own time, as well as on their own initiative. These conditions collided with the progressive character of the school, which may have empowered women to engage with questions of representation and self-representation on their own terms, in work undertaken in their studios as well as on the street, far from the classroom. Much of that work critically reinvented the genres of portraiture and self-portraiture. Questions of subjectivity and the relationship between the object and its object-world were indivisible from the medium's marginalized status vis-à-vis the fine arts.

In addition to the three critical essays, we have included original translations of texts written by Lucia Moholy, arguably the school's first photography instructor in all but name. Although she herself would have resisted such a title, many who took up photography in Dessau around 1925 did so in dialogue with her; it was she who had the most knowledge and experience with the medium, and it was in her basement of the Gropius-designed Masters' House that many Bauhausers first experimented with processing prints. A prolific writer during her long career, Moholy left behind a substantial corpus of published and unpublished texts, including dozens of book and exhibition reviews.⁶ She had a habit of sketching out book manuscripts, including one on the Bauhaus. Photography for her seemed to serve as an aid to writing, and the five-hundred-plus photographs that she took after her time at the Bauhaus—the vast majority of which have yet to be catalogued, including many taken on trips to the Middle East in the 1950s—were likely meant to support her unfinished book projects.

What is especially interesting in these texts is Moholy's tone, and it is one that I have tried to preserve in the translations: Keeping alive a certain kind of German *Sachlichkeit*, she rarely uses the first-person voice, even when describing

5. See Susanne Baumann, "Der Weg über die Schulen," in *Fotografieren hieß teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Ute Eskildsen (Düsseldorf: Richter, 1994).

6. In addition to reviews, reports, and articles, Moholy published two books during her lifetime, both of which she wrote in English: *A Hundred Years of Photography, 1839–1939* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939) and *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy: Dokumentarische Ungereimtheiten/Moholy-Nagy, Marginal Notes: Documentary Absurdities* (Krefeld: Scherpe, 1972).

events in which she was directly involved. Historical objectivity was for her a necessary fiction. And while many of her texts reflect on how and for whom history is written, they do so only indirectly and in quite subtle ways. Significantly, she was one of the first—if not *the* first—to draw attention to how the Bauhaus began to be historicized. Her writings on the school's postwar reception in exhibition and print form are concerned less with offering a counter-narrative than with identifying the mechanisms of heroization, myth-building, and generalizations then being generated around its prominent figures, even as such prognoses were still being formed. She had the foresight to look at artists—El Lissitzky among them—who were then little known in Anglo-American art history (and even in Germany, where he spent a significant period of time in the 1920s) and to argue against a monolithic concept of the school; she often made the point that there were as many Bauhauses as there were members. Arguing against the monolingualism of the term “Bauhaus” as referring to a single style or school (a position she saw as particularly egregious with respect to painting), her position anticipates—by some fifty years—the more nuanced and insightful reflections that have appeared in recent decades, contributions that underscore the school's methodological diversity, unearth its exceedingly complex reception history (in which photography played a central role), and challenge the all-too-seductive equation of “the Bauhaus” with “Western democracy.” Hegemonic fictions, as Moholy was one of the first to point out, those terms are now increasingly difficult to sustain as anything other than that which must be deconstructed, demythologized, expanded, complicated, and rearticulated.

It is to that end that we offer these contributions, both Moholy's voice, as a witness to that period, and our own, as we look anew at her photographs and those of her colleagues Florence Henri and Grete Stern. At a moment in which one is less inclined to revisit the histories of Western Europe, when visions of “the global” expose the necessary decolonization of the canon as much as they do our own desires for an art history of social justice, we make the somewhat unpopular move of insisting on Weimar Germany and its legacies abroad. That is because Weimar Germany is a story first and foremost about late-capitalist fascism—about where it comes from, how it breeds surreptitiously under the sign of electoral politics (and emergency measures carried out for our own good, we are told), why one becomes vulnerable to its ideology of cyclical crises and returns to order, and what the demands are that it places on cultural producers—demands that were as often answered with ambivalence, reticence, introspection, and even at times paralysis as they were with valiant resistance and protest. Just what was the self, subjectivity, and agency under such conditions is a theme that structures many of the photographs that you will see in these pages.

That we can even point to such questions is due to emergent methodological models that question foundational assumptions around photography as a history of image-making and knowledge production based on the work of European and

North American practitioners.⁷ Taking our cue from such authors, we suggest that any answers worth exploring will have to do away with heroes and villains, with avant-garde and rear-guard binaries, and attend to the integrity of the image and its conditions of production, which often means contending with a visual object in tension with what advanced photography is supposed to look like. One of the first to inhabit that position was Moholy, and her subsequent writings, read alongside the critical essays we offer here, gesture to how we might begin to look again at a period we thought we knew. Hardly giving Moholy her due, this small selection of texts, which the Bauhaus-Archiv has kindly allowed us to translate and publish, expands the little that is available in English of her writings. The hope is that such a gesture will invite further research and reflection on the remarkable women photographers of Weimar Germany.

7. Jennifer Bajorek, *Unfixed: Photography and Decolonial Imagination in West Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 19.



Florence Henri. Self-Portrait. 1928.

Florence Henri's Oblique*

SABINE KRIEBEL

One day in Paris in 1928, Florence Henri arranged herself among things—a mirror, two reflective balls, a wooden table. She let her body settle, allowing gravity to take hold of her shoulders while she crossed her arms on the table and slackened her facial muscles into an impassive mien. Only then did she bid the camera's shutter to open its eye onto her arrangement, arresting an instant of elemental stillness. In its habitus of dispassion, the photograph reads as an iteration of the detached, rational, and objective aesthetic that characterized the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) of the 1920s or as an exemplar of the formalist experiments of the Bauhaus's *Neues Sehen* (New Vision), both of which were postwar aesthetic modes that combined de-cathexis with a pragmatic mastery of the empirical world. An assemblage of deliberation composed with a geometric vocabulary, the photograph documents phenomenological consciousness in the austere language of mathematical physics, rooted in logic and the empirical world: "I am, because this is." And though Henri's intentionality toward objects is exacting, it is also purposefully off-kilter. She has deliberately placed the two balls just right of the mirror's center, such that the linear fissure created by the table planks bisects only one ball while leaving the other compositionally unmoored, staging an inaccuracy that underlines the accuracy of the rest of the picture. The mirror that duplicates the balls equally eschews alignment, its edges slightly outside the diagonals that could, but do not, contain the mirror within them. This is an eccentric—literally, out of center—picture (*ekkentros*, from *ek*, "out of," and *kentron*, "center"); it is willfully out of line.

Placed at an oblique angle in order to facilitate a pictorial illusion, the camera stands behind and to the left of Henri, capturing her mirrored likeness but not the camera's reflection. Orthogonal lines that project into an illusionistic mirror-space appoint the individual as vanishing point, a nod to Renaissance perspective that nominates the modern subject at its center—unique, self-sufficient, and autonomous. Yet here, that autonomous subject is a phantasm. Rather than lay bare its technological apparatus, this modernist photograph is spectral and specu-

* I owe thanks to perceptive audiences at Concordia University, Canada, and the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, for feedback that grounded and rerouted this essay in important ways, and to Martha Langford and Natalie Adamson for extending invitations to speak and offering criticism.

lar, functioning as a self-conscious subversion of photographic transparency. Henri's hands are demonstratively not at work, not taking the picture. Instead, the photograph asserts that the specter in the mirror is not made by human hands; it is an *acheiropoieton*, an icon conjured miraculously.

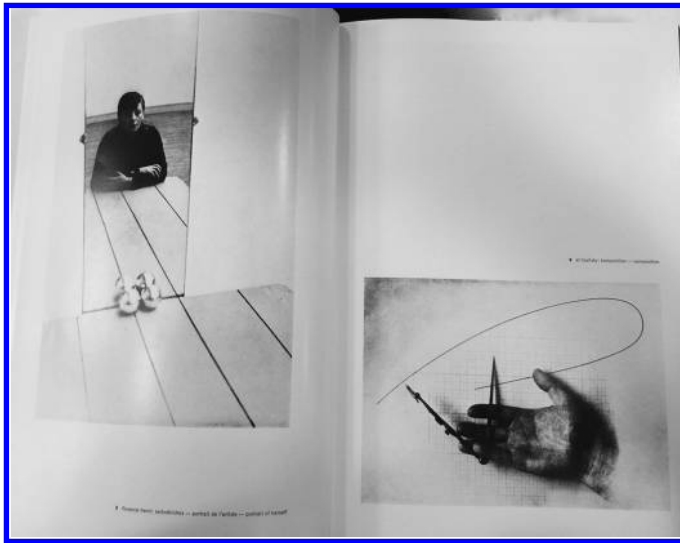
Henri's 1928 self-portrait circulated widely as an icon of New Vision photography. Bound into a formalist discourse that corrals its reception and diminishes its peculiarity, the photograph functions as an emblem for a certain set of historical concerns tied to affective detachment, technological acuity, and specular play. The first to tether her work to a mechanical formalism was her friend László Moholy-Nagy, a key collaborator on the 1929 *Film und Foto* (FIFO) exhibition, which showcased the multifarious potential of modern photography. Organized by the German Werkbund (an association of artists, designers, architects, and industrialists), the Stuttgart exhibition was the first systematic overview of international developments in film and photography of the interwar years in which visual-technological experiment flourished. Moholy-Nagy included Henri's self-portrait along with another twenty of her still lifes—mostly objects with mirrors—as exemplars of a self-referential photographic practice that investigates the possibilities of abstract, optical composition with light.¹ They represent a *deliberate* process that eschews photography's mimetic, reproductive capacities for a productive, generative artwork that instantiates new relationships in the world. The stakes of those relationships, according to Moholy-Nagy's 1925 Bauhaus book *Painting, Photography, Film*, which became the conceptual template for the FIFO exhibition, is a broadly conceived "service to human development" anchored in a primordial "craving" for the new.² Far from the transformative cognition conceived by the Soviet avant-gardes, the fresh correlations imagined here serve a vague humanist agenda virtually destined for a capitalist advertising apparatus that feeds on that very cycle of yearning and novelty.³ Henri's self-portrait was subsequently reproduced in Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold's *Foto Auge*, published to accompany

1. A total of twenty-one Henri photographs were exhibited, an amount on a par with that of established avant-garde practitioners Man Ray and Germaine Krull and far exceeding that of most others represented. Christina Zelich, "Florence Henri's Photography within the Avant-Gardes," in *Florence Henri* (New York: Aperture, 2015), p. 13.

2. László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film* (London: Lund Humphries, 1969), p. 31. "It is a basic fact of the human condition that the functional apparatus craves for further new impressions every time a new exposure has taken place. This is one of the reasons why new creative experiments are an enduring necessity. *From this point of view the creations are valuable only when they produce new, previously unknown relationships.* This is another way of saying that reproduction (repetition of existing relationships) *without* enriching points of view . . . be considered at best only a matter of virtuosity. Since production (productive creativity) is primarily of service to human development, we must endeavor to expand the apparatus (means) which has so far been used solely for purposes of reproduction for productive purposes." I cite Moholy-Nagy as the sole author of the book for purposes of bibliographic convention, but recent research has highlighted the evidence that Lucia Moholy in all likelihood played a significant role in this project. See Robin Schuldenfrei, "Images in Exile: Lucia Moholy's Bauhaus Negatives and the Construction of the Bauhaus Legacy," *History of Photography*, 37, no. 2 (May 2013), pp. 182–203, and Lucia Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy: dokumentarische Ungereimtheiten* (Krefeld: Scherpe Verlag, 1972).

3. See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Armed Vision Disarmed: Radical Formalism from Weapon to Style," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 82–107; and Rosalind Krauss, "Jump Over the Bauhaus," *October* 15 (Winter 1980), pp. 103–10.

the FIFO exhibit and foreground avant-garde practices. The portrait and its reception launched her international career as a photographer, a path upon which she had embarked only the previous year. As the comparison with El Lissitzky's *Composition* on the facing page of *Foto-Eye* makes clear, Henri's oblique self-portrait proclaims the human body a thing among things. Emblematic of the detachment that gave rise to the designation "new objectivity," neither of these bodies is engaged in labor; instead, they are elements within a rationalized composition, flesh abstracted.



Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold. Foto-Eye.
(Stuttgart: F. Wedekind, 1929).

If, as phenomenology asserts, intentionality represents a quality of consciousness towards the world, then which states of mind does this picture's obliquity materialize? Though arguably rooted in Henri's specific geographical dislocations and psychic displacements, the answer to the question, which I will map out below, unearths a fundamental loss of ground coupled with tenacious efforts to reclaim it. It also reveals the unconscious operations that underpin the self-portrait's resonance in a pictorial culture rife with affective repression. Reading Henri's photographic work obliquely, this essay sidelines the modernist aesthetic frame that contains readings of this work to look askance at the terrain of subject-object relations being rethought urgently by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, among others, at this historical juncture. Though its parameters were bitterly contested, phenomenology sought to redefine the conception of human relationality with the world, focusing on the qualities of individual human consciousness vis-à-vis phe-

nomena. At issue is not the *what* of the world (things) but the *how* of relating (what Husserl called *noesis*), rooted in “intentionality,” the term Husserl invoked to indicate that consciousness is directed toward things in the world.

Consciousness always has an object. The New Objectivity, after all, names a “new” sober or detached orientation to the world, shattered after war, with a *noesis* of dispassion, an internal quality that can range from nonchalance to repression. “New Vision,” coined in the same historical matrix by Moholy-Nagy, likewise signals a reformation of perception. Both terms name an ambition to establish a new ground of consciousness after World War I rooted in the altered apprehension of the phenomenal world.

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“If we desire a reevaluation in the field of photography so that it can be used productively,” asserts Moholy-Nagy in *Painting, Photography, Film*, “we must exploit the light sensitivity of the photographic (silver bromide) plate: fixing upon it light phenomena (moments from light displays) *which we have ourselves composed* (with contrivances of mirrors or lenses, transparent crystals, liquids, etc.).”⁴ Exploit, fixing, *we ourselves composed*—agency takes on an urgency in this passage that foregrounds direct artistic mastery over natural phenomena. As Michael Jennings has noted, Moholy-Nagy was interested in the interpenetrations of the human subject and the camera.⁵ At the same time, the synthetic technology described in this passage is meant to bring human capacity to its limits.

Henri’s self-possessed, abstracted presence within a composition of mirrored surfaces that extend vision derives from photographic experiments she would have witnessed the previous year, during a four-month sojourn at the Dessau Bauhaus in 1927. Passing through to visit her friends Margarete Schall and Grete Willers, who were students there, Henri decided to enroll as an unmatriculated student for the summer semester from April to July 1927 and participate in the preliminary course taught by Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers.⁶ This was not the first time that she had enrolled as a Bauhaus student—in 1923–24 in Weimar she took classes in Henry van de Velde’s art nouveau structure—but it was her first experience on the new modernist campus designed by Walter Gropius that was intended to embody the institution’s industrial-technological ambitions. In Dessau, Henri moved into the Moholys’ Bauhaus Master house, having met László on a previous visit. She became close friends with Lucia and served as model for her close-up, abstracting

4. Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, p. 31. Emphasis in original.

5. Michael Jennings, “Agriculture, Industry, and the Birth of the Photo-Essay in the Late Weimar Republic,” *October* 93 (Summer 2000), p. 38.

6. Giovanni Battista Martini and Alberto Ronchetti, “Biography,” in *Florence Henri*, p. 194.

portraits, which in turn found an analogue in Henri's 1928 self-portrait.⁷ Though Henri produced primarily abstract Cubist paintings and collages at the time, she also experimented with photography and witnessed how Bauhaus teachers and students alike explored the formal possibilities of light-reflecting surfaces—mirrored, refracted, illuminated, shadowed, static, and fleeting.⁸ She participated in those experiments, a subject among objects.

Bauhaus explorations with light and contrivances, though often ludic, magnified the disclosive potential of reflection and reveled in uncanny effects that subordinate human agency. Prized for their panoptic view, mirrored balls in Bauhaus photographs reflected the surrounding room space in distorted, haptic detail, extending the beholder's vision and connecting our consciousness with the object world behind us. As such, mirrored balls represented the prosthetic supplements to human vision that Moholy-Nagy celebrated. The example of convex perspective reproduced in *Painting, Photography, Film* operates simultaneously as a fun-house self-portrait, a tactile amplification of Bauhaus weaving work, and an architectural room study.⁹ In contrast to the selectivity of human sight, such photographic-specular vision renders each element in synchronous focus, issuing a seamless spatial-tactile montage of interior space in which the particularity of floor patterning before us cohabits with the distant ceiling and windows behind us in a single, grounded, pictorial field impossible to conjure with the ordinary camera. Joost Schmidt's 1931 ads for Bauhaus wallpaper use convex mirrors to conflate space and time,

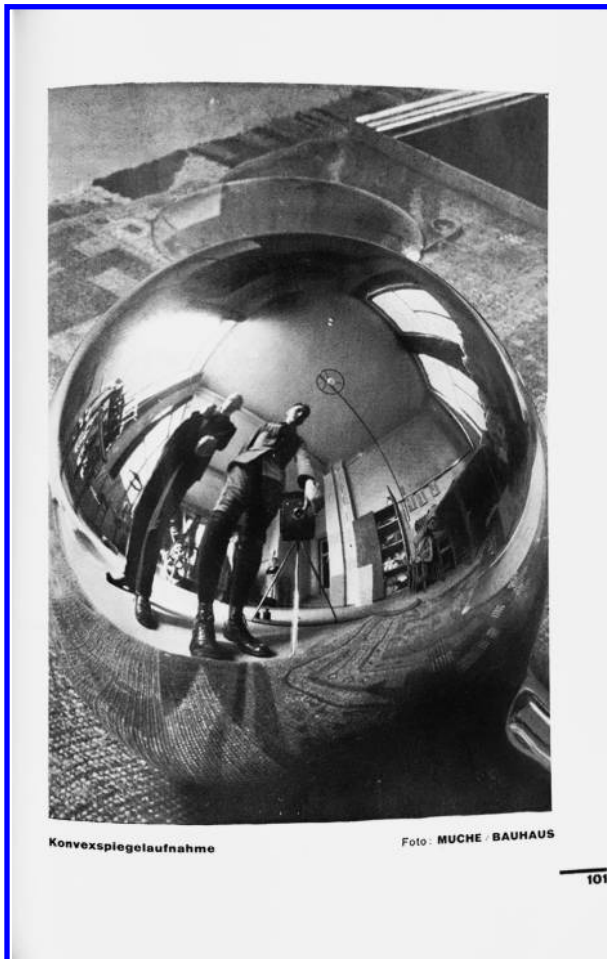


*Florence Henri with Georg Muche
at the Dessau Bauhaus, 1927.*

7. Zelich, "Florence Henri's Photography," pp. 8–9.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

9. This image was also replicated fourfold for the FIFO brochure designed by Moholy-Nagy.



Georg Muche, "Photographed Reflections in a Convex Mirror," from László Moholy-Nagy, Painting, Photography, Film, 1925.

conjuring both a distorted interior and a vision of the future in a glass ball. Henri may also have witnessed how Lucia Moholy sought to *avoid* any inadvertent reflections of the photo apparatus and room in her documentary photographs of metal workshop products, whose surfaces gleam with a modernist machine aesthetic.

After her stimulating summer in Dessau, one that would ultimately reorient her life's course, Henri returned to Paris in August 1927 with new artistic ideas and a shipment of Bauhaus furniture that would subsequently make repeated appearances in her photographs, co-conspirators in her compositions of flesh and metal. Her purchases included Wilhelm Wagenfeld's glass lamp and teapot



Joost Schmidt. Advertising brochure for Bauhaus wallpaper. 1931.

as well as Marcel Breuer's chromium-plated steel armchairs and tables.¹⁰ Henri's Parisian private sphere was thus attuned to the new Bauhaus aesthetics of technological modernity.¹¹ The Bauhaus and its modern conveniences, she wrote to Schall, had spoiled Paris for her.¹²

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The studied displacements in Henri's self-portrait—the balls off-center, the mirror off-kilter—can be read as deliberately formalist, an echo or repetition of the displacement enacted by the oblique picture itself. Frame and subject matter reinforce one another, as the whole picture, from content to construction, is just slightly off to one side in a display of pictorial artifice and artistic volition. Neither perpendicular nor parallel to a given surface, "oblique" refers to a slanting angle. Formally, the oblique angle enables the pictorial illusions of dynamism and recession, of movement and depth of field. Rhetorically, the term suggests something askance, covert, or furtive. As a position or embodied location, an oblique angle signals the subjective and the partial, undoing the illusion of the autonomous, rational vision of the camera. The oblique thus signified vitality, irrationality, and instability rather than detached, staid objectivity, and was a favorite of Expressionist film and Surrealist photography for this reason. Rather than being direct, analogous, or cognate, the oblique suggests circuitous, decentered, and

10. Martini and Ronchetti, "Biography," p. 196.

11. On the cultural reception of tubular steel furniture, see Rudolf Fischer and Wolf Tegethof, eds., *Modern Wohnen: Möbeldesign und Wohnkultur der Moderne* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2016).

12. Diana C. DuPont, *Florence Henri: Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990), p. 132.

alternative pathways of knowing. In the 1920s, oblique angles were used widely by avant-garde photographers to transform our habits of perception and change our ways of understanding the world. More recently, the oblique view has been allied with queerness, in a political phenomenology that has mobilized positions of misalignment, marginality, and deviation to think through embodied positions of productive disruption in a world that is organized around heteronormative and phallogocentric modes. “To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things,” writes Sarah Ahmed, who notes the potential of reworking habitual cultural patterns to inscribe new paths and orientations.¹³ Thus, obliquity represents a position and a direction, a spatial location and a strategy for disruption and reconfiguration, an emplacement and a frame of mind.

We are positioned to behold Henri’s frontal portrait obliquely by virtue of the camera’s position to the left, and thus subtly interpellated as voyeurs viewing from the margins. Initially, the picture conjures the illusion that we view the picture authoritatively, with all objects arrayed before us; the flat mirror is the “optical device,” as Moholy-Nagy would call it, that extends our perceptual apparatus and generates an impression of mastery. Though optically collocated in the picture plane, subject and object positions diverge, psychoanalytically speaking, for the sitter in the mirror—that Lacanian “matrix of the symbolic” that divides the unified subject between self and object, between recognition and misrecognition, securing identity for the beholder while disavowing experiential interiority.¹⁴ The self is exteriorized at the expense of being. Through her reflection in the hanging mirror, Henri becomes part of a discursive structure that precedes her, and in this case, one looped into discourses of detachment, dehumanization, and formal rigor, or of ironic-resistant feminist subjectivity.¹⁵

Deliberately excluded from view by virtue of the camera’s oblique, the material body of the sitter is delivered as immaterial, separating reality from reflection

13. Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), p. 161.

14. Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 4.

15. The mirrored balls, and in particular their placement near a projecting orthogonal, are the crux for a set of poststructuralist readings that steer away from formalist intentionality into the realm of psychosocial fortuity. In Rosalind Krauss’s brief but formative analysis of 1981, Henri’s work is inscribed within the phallogocentric order via the two balls and bisecting line that suggest a phallus at the picture’s center. Arguing for a structural reciprocity between frame and image, container and contained, Krauss asserts that the phallic signifier is an internalized representation of the camera and its optical potency, the framing device an image of mastery and control within the “inchoate sprawl of the real.” Rosalind Krauss, “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism,” *October* 19 (Winter 1981), p. 34. For Carol Armstrong, the mirrored surfaces are structures internal to the picture that mimic the operations of the camera apparatus, in its capture, freezing, and replication of the body. As the mirror traps body, the camera traps mirror, in a system of gendered substitutions that inscribes the camera’s power and names its reflexive internality. The photographic apparatus thus emerges not as phallus but as speculum, a catoptric system of invisible interiority in which the body is caught. Carol Armstrong, “Florence Henri: A Photographic Series of 1928: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall,” *History of Photography* (Spring 1994), pp. 223–29.

and mimicking the operations of photography itself. But this mirror and this photograph obscure as much as they reveal: The work is imbued with deception while it parades the rationalist values of its moment. Contrast the substantive weight and psychological presence conveyed by two other self-portraits produced around the same time—same mirror, same space, same sitter—which take as their subject the artist's physical operation of the camera. These images instate reciprocity between the fleshy actuality of the subject and the objects of her attention, as do the series



Henri. Self-Portrait. 1927–28.



Henri.
Self-Portrait.
1927–28.

of double portraits of Schall and “Charly,” whose reflections and their source are captured by the camera below, providing legible narrative spaces, the satisfaction of conceptual totality, and transparency. Henri’s inexorable returns to such scenarios illuminate her investments in the exchange between referent and representation. Instead of conversational reciprocity, the asymmetry of the 1928 self-portrait proposes a power relationship in which the artist has the upper hand. In the absence of its embodied source, we are left with an apparition, unburdened by weight, something that edges the image into the magical and the uncanny, setting its rationalist project on edge. She is an illusory mirror reflection, a specular ghost that haunts as physiognomic surface data.

The solid metal balls do the work that the fleshy body does not, keeping the image from detaching into sheer pictorial hallucination. The spheres anchor the picture with their actual thingness and their weight, more so than the planes of the mirror and wooden table. The embodied, reproductive aspects of the human are displaced onto these mirrored spheres, for not only do they seem to touch, kiss, replicate, commune, and even mimic the phallus, their convex surfaces see what we cannot, lending them an agency denied us. Registered in miniature, almost illegible form on their perceptual skin is an abstraction that reveals the photographer, four-fold. This shadow has often been read as Henri herself—logically speaking, she must appear as a reflection in the mirrored balls before her—underpinning the frequent assumption that Henri used an automatic shutter release.

But look again, following the trajectory of the orthogonal line that touches her left elbow. Henri’s facing image should appear on the *right* side of the convex ball, elongated rightward by the distortions of the spherical surface. Instead, the shadow inclines in the opposite direction, leftward in the convexity and decidedly to the left of the orthogonal where the camera would be. Note the rigid linearity

of the reflections atop the left-hand ball—those wedges that register the room's window to the right—and the way they hover stiffly over the surface rather than conform organically to the sphere's curvature. They intimate the awkward artifice of a retoucher's hand and may explain how Henri's body disappeared. Henri was not averse to retouching her photographs.¹⁶ Another humanoid blur is partially visible on the right-hand edge of both right spheres, more emphatically so in the back reflection, perhaps another witness standing by the window. Judging from her other self-portraits before the mirror, Henri looks to be using a No. 2 Brownie

16. Martini and Ronchetti, "Biography," p. 198.



Henri. Double Portrait. 1927-28.

Model E, a very simple camera manufactured between 1917 and 1924 that was neither fitted with a self-timer nor compatible with a cable release.¹⁷ Someone else released the shutter with a lever on the box's side.

Though Henri's picture might appear to be solipsistic, enclosed in a detached, self-referential system, the specular relay between mirrored surfaces and camera operates within a representational circuitry that presupposes human relationality, not isolation. A mirror is a device premised on exchange. Rather than the product of a singular vision, this bifurcated self is a collaboration between the sitter Henri and the anamorphic, fourfold co-conspirator operating the camera behind her. The omniscient spheres lay bare the device of illusionism for those who are observant or patient enough to see it, but only as a distorted smudge. As disclosive surfaces often installed for decorative purposes in windows and gardens, mirrored balls would also reveal intruders to the house's inhabitants, serving as panoptica. They were variously called watch balls or witches' balls in English and *boules de sorcière* in French, and their reflective surfaces were believed to catch the evil Other and trap it in its catoptric prison.¹⁸ Folkloric uses aside, the balls, like the mirror, like photography, see what we do not. The optical unconscious is laid bare.

Revealing a complex intersubjective network that also enfolds the beholder in its discomfiting matrix, this work is neither unequivocal nor monadic. As viewers, we are sutured into the image at the level of its artifice, caught between the specular apparition before us and the omniscient gaze we intuit behind us. Made to hover mid-table, we assume a conflicted position conferred with gentle material intimacy and enclosure while being estranged from its distant human subject. We are projected within the construction, while she is outside. In a form of shot/reverse-shot staging, we are momentarily bound into a comforting experience of cognitive unity, aware of the fiction and its construction. But that satisfaction of totality yields to the unease of dispossession with the dawning realization that knowledge is controlled by the omnipotent figure behind the camera, who sees the enfleshed referent and not just the sign. Though we are woven into position with the all-knowing view, it turns out that we are only authorized to see what the murky apparition in a ball permits us to see. In a picture ripe with phallic potency, we are rendered impotent. Like the oblique structure of the fetish, also premised on a sidelong look, the photograph points to the absence of flesh, offering us a petrified reflection instead.

One might read the work as an inscription of Henri's own gendered objectification in culture, a body trapped and contained in the mirror, perpetually

17. Confirmed in an email exchange with curator Todd Gustavson, Technology Collection, George Eastman House, June 27, 2019.

18. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, pp. 187–89; Margaret J. M. Ezell, "Looking Glass Histories," *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 3 (July 2004), pp. 317–38; Richard Gregory, *Mirrors in Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 62–64.

the object of the external gaze, within the context of a psychoanalytic visual analysis replayed above. But it is also possible to imagine that power lies in its very deception, refusing the beholder mastery and leaving the subject to escape view and double objectification by the camera while protecting her selfhood. The beholder cannot empathically recuperate any trace of the subject's inner life. Psychological communion between viewer and viewed is repelled and displaced onto the intimacies suggested by the illusion of four touching metal balls. In the context of interwar thought, that rift between subjective integrity and outward being, between self and self-projection, exemplifies what philosophical anthropologist Hellmuth Plessner deemed the "ex-centric" human positionality in 1928, in a book coincident with Henri's self-portrait and rooted in Husserlian phenomenology.¹⁹ As opposed to plants or animals, Plessner's humans simultaneously dwell within the bodily and project themselves out into the world; they are centric and ex-centric, "naturally artificial" beings in the world.²⁰

Importantly for my argument, ex-centricity is not sheer projective externality; it is reflexive and protective, allowing the subject to experience the self from without, to generate masks and personae, and to shield a vulnerable inner core. "Plessner's humans needed a world where they could both reveal and hide themselves," as Michael Gubser observes.²¹ Thus Henri's photograph is not only eccentric but ex-centric, staging exteriority reflexively, performatively, and defensively. The photograph reverberated in a fraught postwar cultural context in which the boundaries between self and other, between individuality and collectivity, were actively being renegotiated along personal and political lines. Though Plessner's conclusions about collectivity were ultimately pessimistic and anti-liberal, Henri's photographic vision was predicated, as I will argue, on hopeful correspondences.²² And while Plessner's alliances concerned organic structures, Henri's boundaries extended to incorporate the inorganic, the technical, and the machinic. When conceived obliquely as episodic rather than artifactual, Henri's photograph can be seen to instantiate rather than cede power in ways that are, perhaps, queer.²³

19. Hellmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie, 1928*; translated by Millay Hyatt as *Levels of Organic Life and the Human* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

20. Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, pp. 287–300.

21. Michael Gubser, *The Far Reaches: Phenomenology, Ethics, and Social Renewal in Central Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 123.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

23. I use this term in Ahmed's rich phenomenological sense, as an off-center consciousness that disturbs order and inscribes new paths from nonnormative orientations. For a reading of Henri's photographs as haunted by queer desire and queer networks, see Elizabeth Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), pp. 148–54. Tirza True Latimer's tightly argued *Eccentric Modernisms: Making Differences in the History of American Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017) uses the terms *eccentric* and *queer* interchangeably to signify departures from social norms and illuminate marginalized modernisms; see p. 4.

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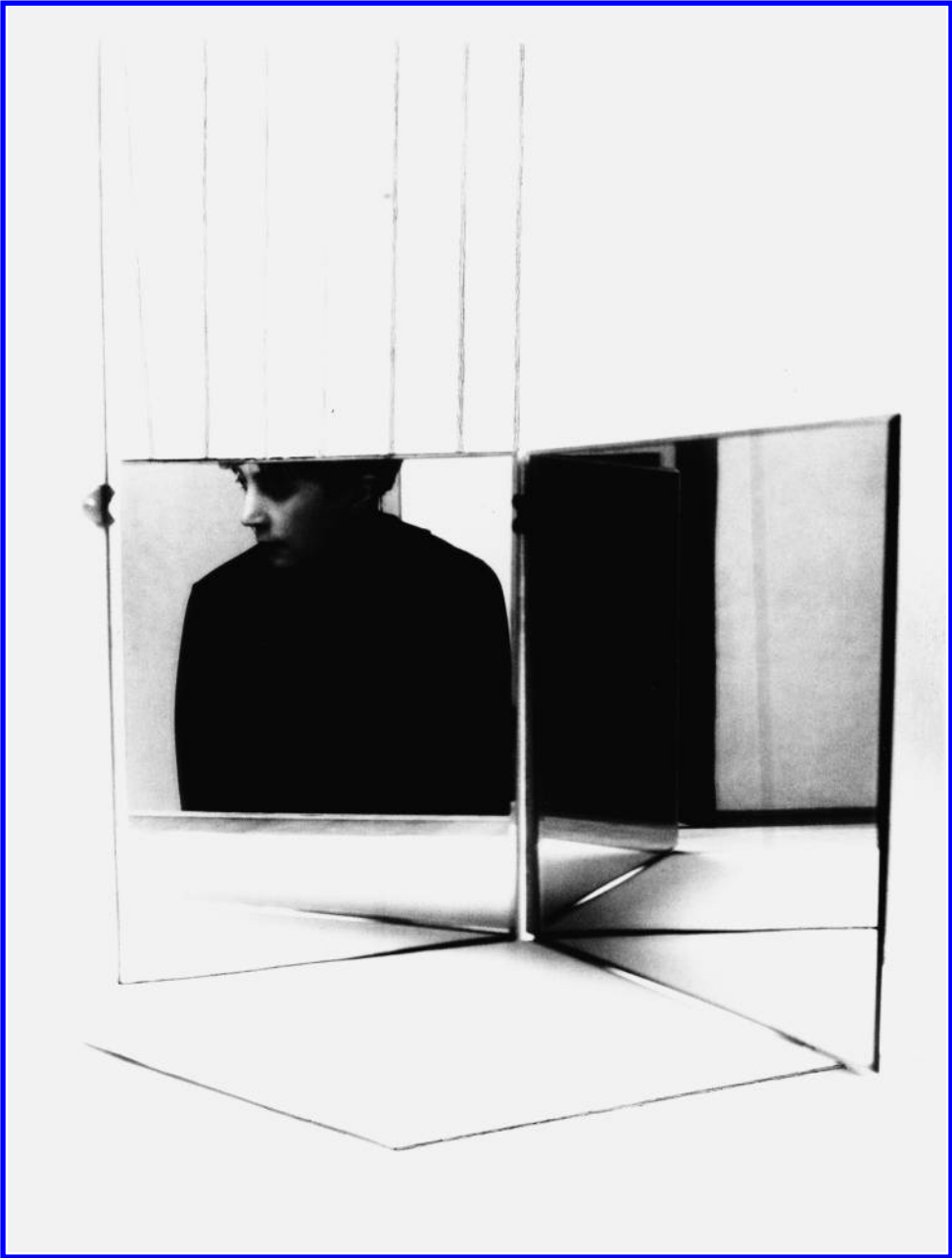
“Now for some news,” wrote Henri from Paris in 1928 to her friend Lou Scheper in Germany: “I’m taking photographs. If I enjoy it, I’ll give up painting (provisionally). . . . I’m so tired of all this painting that doesn’t go anywhere [*Ich habe dieses vage in Nichts Malen so satt*], and I’ve got so many ideas for photographs. . . . I’d like to have a profession which produces results but also interests other people [*das Interesse auch anderer erregen*].”²⁴ In a formulation that pits psychosomatic surfeit (*so satt*) against a gestural void (*dieses vage Nichts*), photography here is imagined as a social conduit that *arouses* spectatorial investment. Painting remains a nebulous, solitary pursuit. The passage reveals her desire to move from formalist isolation to intersubjectivity. Henri’s works, I argue, confront the limitations of a static, homologic view of the world and embrace embodied perception as dynamic, unfolding, and idiosyncratic processes, in which the boundaries between subject and object, viewer and viewed, dissolve and reconfigure inconclusively. At a moment where technology was rapidly changing perception, supplementing human vision with precision, focus, and unprecedented control, Henri’s work courts perceptual instability, pulling the proverbial ground from underneath our feet. Groundlessness was equally central to the work of her close friend Carl Einstein, with whom she had an “intense relationship” beginning sometime between 1919 and 1923.²⁵ The content of their conversations can only be speculative, but Henri’s painting interrogated Cubism’s destabilizations while Einstein developed his critical ideas on Braque and Picasso. By then he had already published the pioneering *Negro Sculpture* of 1915, which Sebastian Zeidler has characterized as “a lost wanderer’s phenomenology of space,” a dialectical formalism of uprooted objects grounded in groundlessness.²⁶

Another portrait composition of 1927–28, which is a montage of photograph and drawing, is similarly designed to destabilize and frustrate. Though we find our footing in a recognizable portrait—Margarete Schall in three-quarters profile gazing introspectively to the left—the pendant mirror on the right transports us into a cubic aperture that confuses us with its various thresholds of space. Again, the mirror sees things that we do not—a third cantilevered mirror, for example, or the stable “room space” of floor and wall in the back that, if we were to use Schall’s body as reference point, would be at table height. Using Henri’s self-portrait as source, we can name the long vertical plane on the left as “mirror,” anchoring ourselves, like with the self-portrait, in the stable and recognizable: We visually grasp the two brackets, right and left, that affix the mirror to the wall. However, that solid mirror-object disappears as soon

24. Zelich, p. 8. The German original is cited in Herbert Molderings, *Die Moderne der Fotografie*, (Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2008), p. 256.

25. Giovanni Battista Martini, “Encounters with Florence Henri,” in *Florence Henri*, p. 188, Giovanni Battista Martini and Alberto Ronchetti, “Biography,” *ibid.*, p. 89.

26. Sebastian Zeidler, *Form as Revolt: Carl Einstein and the Ground of Modern Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. 89. The rich and productive interconnections of Einstein’s thought and Henri’s aesthetic commitments are outside the scope of this essay but will be treated extensively in my forthcoming book project.



Henri. Portrait Composition. 1927–28.

as we try to track it upwards. It simultaneously metamorphoses into a hand-drawn line on the right while Schall's formerly stable mirror image retreats from the left-hand edge into deep space at an obtuse angle. She becomes a human reflection in an ever-shifting set of planes, a fun-house image teasing us with illusions of stability, but in fact as ambiguous as the rest of the picture. Identity is grounded in a void. What initially appear to be locatable, perpendicular room spaces shift into eccentric geometries that destroy orientation. The reproduction confuses the hand-drawn line with edge and shadow; human traces fuse with material limits and natural phenomena. We do not know where we stand. The work displaces.

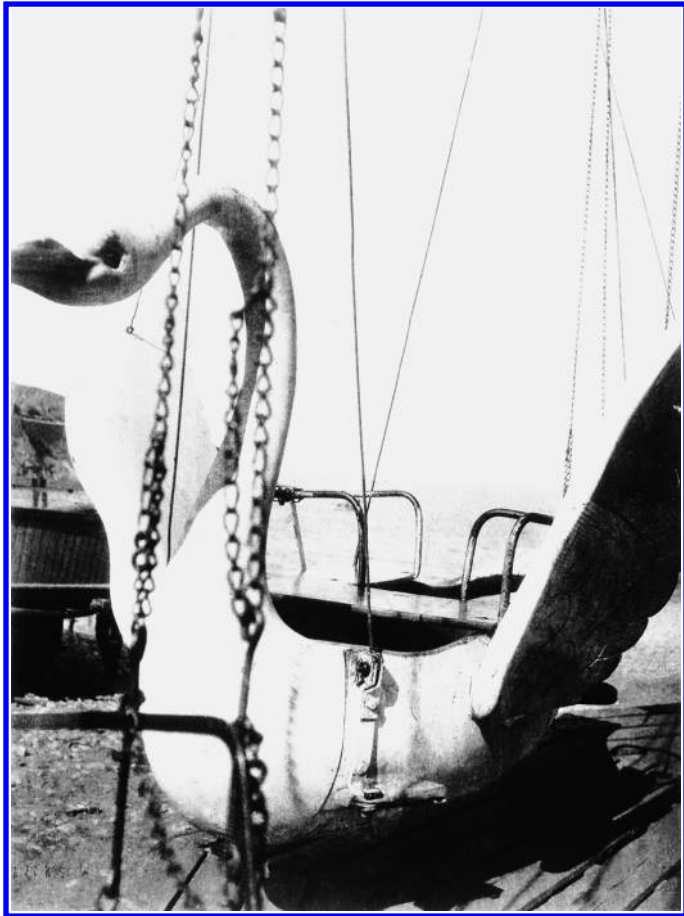
This image similarly denies reciprocity or closure, offering instead fragments that lead nowhere, punctuated by the deliberately incomplete rectangle drawn at the picture's base. The line meanders off, refusing to neatly close the square, deviating in the same direction as the sitter's gaze. This perverse linear dissent finds its counterpart in the single leftward slanting line above the mirror that refuses to echo the family of parallel lines to its right. With the clarity of writing or diagramming, these marks establish intent, whereas the gentle confusions of plane, reflection, and space might leave us baffled, as in a dream with its hidden and fragmented structure.

Not unlike the gothic horror theater of nineteenth-century phantasmagoria, this destabilizing play of mirrors, lines, and photographic fragments projects an array of illusions, from introspective apparitions to disintegrating spaces, rendering the corporeal incorporeal and our emplacement dissolute. Phantasmagoria also constantly changed shape and hid its origins, emblemizing, for Walter Benjamin at least, the misrepresentation that stands for the reality of life under capitalism.²⁷ Image, illusion, and exchange determine social relations; value becomes a product of transaction and desire, not substance. Henri's dialectical fiction and Benjamin's meditations on the Parisian arcades lie in the same experiential matrix, in which humans and objects increasingly exchange places.

27. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).



Henri.
Carousel Horses.
1928.



Henri.
Carousel Swan.
1928.

An abiding interest in the thingness of humans and the humanity of things courses through Henri's work, seeking kinships and tinged with longing. Her 1928 portraits of carousel animals probe the empathic ambitions of the commodity, since these artificial beasts are engineered to seek connection with their potential riders. The shadows that fall on the horses' faces lend the picture a melancholic aspect, suggesting a frame of mind that conjures pensive yearning, while the swan's imploring look and subordinate carriage beckon the beholder to fill the gaping hole in its torso that is the rider's seat. Their *noeisis* is predicated on longing and lack, pointing to absence of connection while promising to fill it—the exact inverse enacted by the two portraits above. Contrast the petrified arrest of the *Tailor's Mannequin* of 1930–31, whose strained congeniality is rendered all the more alienating through the oblique perspective. It not only fails to connect humanly but materializes that



Henri. Tailor's Mannequin. 1930–31.

false attempt. In the balance of human/nonhuman that Henri persistently pursues, the human dummy exemplifies detachment enveloped in inauthenticity while the animal forms assume a congenial, even hopeful, co-presence. Though these works can be assimilated into the category of the Surrealist uncanny and thus represent what has been called Henri's Surrealist modernism, they accumulate alternative and perhaps more indicative meanings when recontextualized by other photographs composed in the same year.²⁸ Ineluctably drawn to the dynamics of isolation and empathy, these works play out self-encounters as other-encounters that query the operations of subjecthood in the world.

A series of compositions involving lone reflective balls in the company of mirrors seem to identify with or disavow their reflection, thus directing their "attention" to self or the imagined beholder. It is as if their surfaces, a fusion of eyes and skin, perceive. Bound in by the oblique angle of viewing, we happen upon their self-reflection accidentally, voyeuristically, witness to a scenario that for Carol Armstrong is uncanny, spectral, and nihilistic.

28. Hal Foster's *Compulsive Beauty* (MIT Press, 1993) remains the definitive work on the subject.

[I]t looks like nothing more than a thing without eyes, without a gaze, gazing at itself, like “someone” without features or psyche, without interiority or exteriority, without individuality, blindly looking at its likeness, a likeness that has no meaning, because the thing in itself, its “front” the same as its “back” and the same as its “profile” view as well . . . everywhere alike and identical to every other member of its object species.²⁹

And yet, without undoing the preternatural charge of Armstrong’s description, I argue that these balls also “dwell” insistently before us, manifesting a within-ness, a primal element of being that is solidly located on a horizontal plane, while their surfaces bear traces of the relational networks that define them in the here and now. In my reading, they are less spectral and more ontological, studies of being and being-with that place their interrogations in alignment with Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, published the previous year.³⁰ These balls “mean” because they are. Their location in front of a mirror, that symbol of *vanitas*, situates them in the matrix of temporality, death, and limitation that Heidegger attributes to the human quality of *Dasein*, and not just the *Sein* of things. They teeter on the tightrope of subjectivity and thinghood, at once inert and yet suffused with an uncanny psychology. In at least two of these compositions, an accident “befalls” the entity, victim of a toppled metallic rack (or two) whose now-oblique disposition instantiates contingency, fallenness, while trapping the sphere beneath the prison of geometric regularity that extends and multiplies through specular space.

What I am suggesting is that Henri’s series of photographic experiments in formal composition, which continually orbit issues of equivocal presence, thing-



Top and bottom:
Henri. Composition. 1928.

29. Armstrong, “Florence Henri: A Photographic Series of 1928,” p. 223.

30. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 1996).

ness, empathy, and alienation, amount to a set of investigations about subjecthood in a material world whose apparent technological-industrial rationality is subtended by volatility, vulnerability, madness. While they outwardly insist on the “objective vision” that photography and other optical devices claim to make possible, seeming to instantiate the world, often from multiple vantage points, as something to be “known,” ordered, and controlled, their oblique perspectives remind us that this “new vision” stems from a first-person standpoint, a contingent “I” that apprehends the world mediated by desire, longing, lack, power, perversion—what Heidegger would call *Befindlichkeit*, or perceptual affect or mood. Their repetition and their urgency—which lent Henri the psychic impetus to assemble subjects/objects in space for several years and then photograph them—have less to do with a dogged devotion to the aesthetic task of composition than to holding fast a set of relationships between and among things for interrogation. Part of that formula includes a commitment in the camera’s access to “the real” in ways that her abstract compositions in paint failed to sustain. The photographic stakes involve suspending perception in a mediated, machinic age that objectifies and externalizes, holds at a distance and makes concrete that which is ephemeral, abstract, and invisible, at the same time that the medium summons proximity and analogy like no other.³¹

Henri’s investigations, which found broad public resonance in the late 1920s and ’30s as insistently “modern,” speak to a set of subtending concerns about Being in an increasingly technologically determined world whose terms simultaneously empower and subordinate the human subject.³² The impelling force, of course, was the technological warfare that decimated the European landscape and psyche, the reverberations of which were still palpitating beneath a mantle of repression. Though scientific and philosophical investigations into mind and matter preceded the war—I think here of Husserl and Freud, but also of Franz Brentano (from whom Husserl took the term “intention”) and Wilhelm Wundt (against whose empiricism phenomenology was directed)—they adopted a momentum and urgency in the postwar moment that amounted to a small revolution on the border between France and Germany in the university town of

31. On analogy and photography, see Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy or, The History of Photography, Part I* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

32. In addition to the 1929 FIFO show and accompanying catalogue, Henri’s photographs were included in major international photography exhibitions, including the 1929 *Fotografie der Gegenwart* at the Museum Folkwang in Essen, which traveled to Hanover, Berlin, Dresden, and Magdeburg; *Das Lichtbild* in Munich in 1930, which traveled to Essen, Düsseldorf, Dessau, and Breslau; *Die neue Fotografie*, in Basel in 1931; *Foreign Advertising Photography*, in New York, 1931; three exhibitions of modern photography in London’s Royal Photography Society in 1932, 1933, and 1934; and *International Photographers*, in the Brooklyn Museum in 1932, to cite a few salient examples. Her work was repeatedly singled out in reviews, and the journal of the German Werkbund, *Die Form*, published three Henri photographs to illustrate an article by photographer Sasha Stone. In addition, Beaumont Newhall included her work in a New York MoMA brochure in 1937, and the photographer Ilse Bing moved to Paris in 1929 to work near Henri. Zelich, “Florence Henri’s Photography,” pp. 197–201, DuPont, *Florence Henri*, p. 145.

Freiburg. Here founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl attracted a coterie of thinkers embarking on the contentious study of embodied consciousness in the material world, including Edith Stein, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Emmanuel Levinas. In 1929, Maurice Merleau-Ponty attended Husserl's lectures in Paris; in 1933, Jean-Paul Sartre went to Berlin to read Husserl, which became the basis of his existentialist philosophy. These are names that represent some of the most innovative, far-reaching thinking in response to the shocks of the twentieth century.³³ As multifarious and complicated as phenomenology was to become, at its core is the understanding that consciousness is corporeal and intentional, directed toward things in the world; it is also explicitly subjective and implicitly intersubjective. Its method: Describe phenomena, returning to things themselves and to the *qualities* of experience before things. Phenomenology offered its practitioners both orientation and liberation in moments of profound social and cultural dislocation, an extreme manifestation of that state of human being that Heidegger called "thrown-ness" (*Geworfenheit*), the arbitrary, groundless temporality of human existence, of "not being in control of one's basis or foundation," as Kaja Silverman formulates it.³⁴ That groundlessness, though destabilizing, also revealed the potential of a new beginning intentionally anchored in the material world.

*

I am. We are.

That is enough. Now we have to begin. Life has been put in our hands. For itself it became empty long ago. It pitches senselessly back and forth, but we stand firm, and so we want to be its initiative and we want to be its ends.

Thus begins the secular genesis staged in Ernst Bloch's preface, or *Absicht* (intention), to his messianic Marxist treatise *The Spirit of Utopia*, which was written during World War I, published in 1918, and reworked in 1923 to incorporate his new political inclinations.³⁵ The second version, from which the above quote is drawn, differs from the first slightly but significantly by opening with instantia-

33. There are few historical overviews of phenomenology that reflect on the sociohistorical context of its flourishing. The most expansive scholarly account of phenomenology's sociopolitical scope is Michael Gubser, *The Far Reaches: Phenomenology, Ethics, and Social Renewal in Central Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). Sarah Bakewell has distilled the socially radical implications of phenomenology in the popular account *At the Existentialist Café* (London: Vintage Books, 2016).

34. Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 34.

35. Ernst Bloch, *Spirit of Utopia*, translation Anthony A. Nasser, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

tions of consciousness—I am. We are.—followed by a pregnant silent space that offers the simple assertion of ego consciousness as ground zero for reinventing life after catastrophe. The book proceeds with a self-encounter rooted in phenomenology, a perceptual experience with a series of objects—an old pitcher, a glass. Its ambition is to break through the falseness of the world to some form of authenticity, leading from the self, via ornament and the history of music, to what he calls the “we problem,” the problem of community. The point of origin, an encounter with things, offers a fundamental basis for forging a new path in an uncertain world. “[T]hat is why we go, why we cut new, metaphysically constitutive paths, summon what is not, build into the blue, and build ourselves into the blue, and there seek the true, the real, where the merely factual disappears—*incipit vita nova*.”³⁶

Building new constitutive paths out of matter: This would aptly describe the radical utopian project of the Bauhaus of the 1920s, one equally committed to the role of experience—tactile, visual, corporeal—in the construction of a new object environment in which the modern human being would reorient him- or herself.³⁷ And it was in this very environment that Henri briefly encountered phenomenal explorations of materials and media that were provocative enough for her to relinquish painting for photography. Inverting the coordinates of Bloch’s path, Henri moved from music to painterly abstraction to the (photographic) apprehension of things in order to address the issue of relationships in the world. Trained as a pianist, she abandoned her musical education in Berlin during the war to study painting, albeit with Johannes Walter-Kurau, whose method drew inspiration from musical harmonies.³⁸ In 1925, she moved to Paris and enrolled at the Académie Moderne to study with Fernand Léger, Amédée Ozenfant, and André Lhote. Her abstract paintings and collages were regularly exhibited, including at the Salon d’Automne, and published in the prestigious *Cahiers d’Art*. Writing to a friend in 1926 that she was just as fascinated by Bauhaus master Georg Muche “as by Moholy-Nagy and the furniture,” Henri took a subsequent detour to Dessau that reconstituted her own creative path.³⁹

“Above all, what I want with photography is to compose the image as I do with painting,” Henri asserted retrospectively, in a statement that illustrates a remarkable confidence in intentionality.⁴⁰ “The volumes, lines, shadows, and light must respond to my intention,” she continued, “and say what I want them to say.”

36. Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, p. 11.

37. See Leah Dickerman, “Bauhaus Fundamentals,” in *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity*, ed. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), pp. 15–39, for a lucid discussion of the role of experience in Bauhaus teaching and thinking.

38. DuPont, *Florence Henri*, p. 130.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

40. Zelich, “Florence Henri’s Photography,” p. 11.

And all this under the strict control of the composition, as I'm not aiming to explain the world or explain my thoughts. Everything I know and the way in which I know it is primarily made up of abstract elements: spheres, planes and grids, the parallel lines of which provide me with huge resources, and also mirrors which I use to present the same object from different angles in a single photograph in order to present different visions of a single motif that are complementary and which succeed in explaining it better, interacting with each other. In the end this is much harder to explain than to do. . . . You will undoubtedly perceive that I often talk about composition. That is because this idea is everything to me.⁴¹

Privileging conscious control over unconscious articulation, Henri's retroactive assessment of her photographic work (she returned to painting after 1945) certainly manifests her commitment to the "abstracting mechanically formalist discourse" that Rosalind Krauss rightly noted "straightjackets" her reception, but also latently reveals what one might call a phenomenological sensibility vis-à-vis knowledge, objects, and intentionality.⁴² One might say that with sleight of hand and mirrors, Henri escapes the restraints that bind her. Composition is the key word here, a term that describes not the assemblage but *how* the assemblage has been arranged, while knowledge is bound up with forms "interacting with each other" to explain a concept better than language can. "*Everything I know and the way in which I know it is primarily made up of abstract elements.*" Displacements, as Silverman notes, are at the heart of psychic life.⁴³

Window of 1935 locates us in an interior space, looking through the aperture and through the window to an adjacent building. Though our eyes are asked to traverse the boundary between inside and outside, the space of embodied location and the space beyond, the picture is really about the peripheral, or about that which we see from the margins of our perception. We witness an encounter between two shadows that resemble heads, looking, facing, considering each other in a mutual regard, though they are just things—the shutter's handles blurred. Perception or orientation from the margins, from an oblique view, is a decentered view, as Ahmed notes, one that orients the embodied subject queerly such that we lose ground or lose hold of the familiar.⁴⁴ The result is a perceptual experience that warrants a double take, that second look to make sure we are in our right mind. This uncanny apprehension also confuses the site of origin—does the misperception happen from within or is it provoked from without? It is a vital strangeness that resides somewhere between the body and its objects, perpetually destabilizing us. Henri, who moved fluidly between hetero-

41. Ibid.

42. Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," p. 4.

43. Silverman, *World Spectators*, p. 42.

44. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, pp. 161–64.

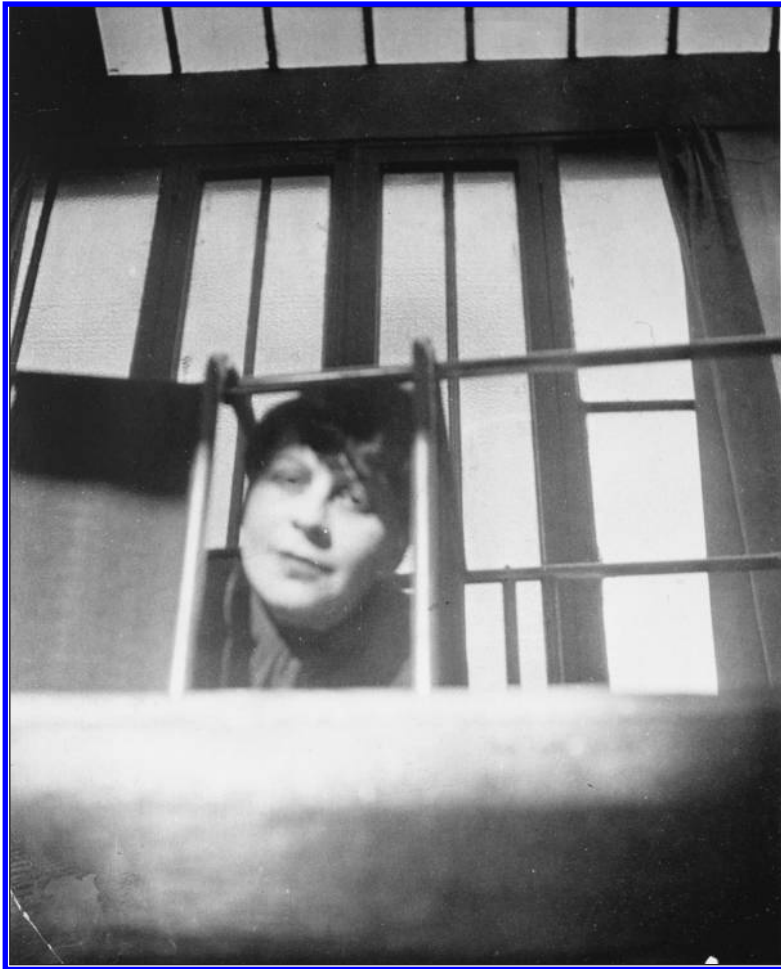


Henri. Window. 1935.

sexual and homosexual relationships, having long-term attachments with both men and women, and who also moved fluidly among national identities, variously identified as Swiss, Italian, German, Polish, American, and French during a period where nationalisms signified strongly, lived and oriented herself pluralistically in the international avant-garde, though by virtue of her gender and sexuality, she operated from a margin. For Merleau-Ponty, the oblique view or things perceived from an angle signify distance, a retreating object that “begins to slip away from the hold of our gaze and . . . joins with it less strictly”; things viewed from a straight, direct, head-on perspective signify proximity.⁴⁵ In a work such as *Window*, we perceive both intimately and at a distance, we possess proximate knowledge while registering that certainty slips from our grasp.

I conclude my ruminations about Henri’s oblique kinship with things more directly with a peculiar and rather uncharacteristic portrait of 1928. It is easily interpreted as yet another example of the artist being interested in frames—the framing of the photograph, the framing of the self—and another formal exercise in horizontal and vertical structures in which the artist seems to

45. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 273.



Henri. Self-Portrait. 1928.

compress and subsume her body into the hard metal quadrilateral of tubular steel. The composition is all lines and structure with a wistful, tilted face enclosed in its center, bearing a downward gaze directed at both beholder and camera resignedly but affectionately. In this self-portrait, the embrace of the human by technological form is quite literal, enclosed as she is within its cold metal appendages. Had she offered the camera a blank face as in the self-portrait with balls, this configuration would read effortlessly as a dystopian commentary on the mechanization of the human in the modern age, a thing among things, the anomie and alienation under capitalism. Nor is she a *Prospektfigur*, a

media typos of detached aloofness intended to illustrate the commodity's functionality for the consumer.⁴⁶ Her direct address and relaxed corporeality suggest an amenable intertwining of subject and object; in Plessner's terms, her fleshy boundary is not an indifferent barrier but actively takes a position with respect to its surroundings, staking an existential claim.⁴⁷ We might even interpret this configuration as a set of companionable correspondences between the human and the industrial nonhuman, the *ich-du*/I-Thou (rather than I-It) relationship that Martin Buber imagined between the human and its object environment in 1923.⁴⁸ It is a strange, even reluctant, kinship because it calls human autonomy and primacy into question.⁴⁹ *Incipit vita nova*.

46. Magdalena Droste, "Stahlrohrstühle als Objekte medialer Bildstrategien und ihr doppeltes Leben," in Fischer and Tegethoff, *Modern Wohnen*, p. 191.

47. Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, pp. 94–99.

48. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923), trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

49. Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy: The History of Photography, Part I*, p. 11.

Psicofotografía:
Grete Stern and the
Administration of
the Unconscious

SUSAN LAXTON

Between 1948 and 1951, Grete Stern, a German photographer best known during her lifetime for her geometrically ordered, realist approach to photography, worked intensively on a heavily manipulated typology of dreams, creating more than 140 photomontages constructed in a style that can only be characterized as Surrealist: figurative, illusionistic, narrative, and irrational. Stern was living in Buenos Aires by then, so the images have been exhibited repeatedly under the name “*Sueños*” (dreams)—and in spite of their anomalous appearance in her overall range of production, they have become the most frequently examined examples of her work.¹ Visually, they are nothing if not arresting—not least because they seem to indicate a pivot away from both schools of photography to which Stern has been linked: the “New Vision” model associated with Moholy-Nagy’s Bauhaus experiments and, more dramatically, the sober *Neue Sachlichkeit*, a photographic direction supported in the late Bauhaus by Walter Peterhans, Stern’s teacher, who came on at the school as master of photography in 1929.²

The *Sueños* images first appeared as a commission for the *fotonovela* magazine *Idilio*, where they illustrated “Psychoanalysis Can Help You,” a weekly advice column written by sociologist Gino Germani and psychoanalyst Enrique Butelman under the

1. Awareness of Stern’s *Sueños* series came late, when in 1967 the artist reprinted and retitled certain of the photomontages from negatives in her archive, reclaiming them as art. The original prints, considered of little value at the time, had been destroyed by the publisher of *Idilio*, Editorial Abril. See Luis Priamo, *Sueños: Fotomontajes de Grete Stern: Serie completa* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Fundación CEPPA, 2003), p. 103. For the fullest review of the literature on the images since the 1980s, including those authors who have characterized the images as “surreal,” see Paula Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible: Grete Stern y la revista Idilio, 1948–1951* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2012), pp. 77–80.

2. For a characterization of *Sachlichkeit* as a general term summarizing the cultural sensibility under which the Bauhaus developed, see Herbert Molderings, “Urbanism and Technological Utopianism,” in *Germany: The New Photography, 1927–33*, ed. David Mellor (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), pp. 87–94; and Rosalind Krauss, “Jump Over the Bauhaus,” *October* 15 (Winter 1980), pp. 102–10. For a periodization of the Bauhaus that links masters and directors to shifts in the administrative goals and realized sensibilities of the school, see Leah Dickerman, “Bauhaus Fundamentals,” and Adrian Sudhalter, “14 Years Bauhaus: A Chronicle,” in *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity*, ed. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), pp. 15–39; 323–37.

pseudonym Richard Rest.³ The feature offered individual interpretations of dream narratives sent in by the overwhelmingly female readership, and ran from *Idilio's* first issue, published on October 26, 1948, through issue 140 in July 1951. Each installment was illustrated prominently with a photomontage by Stern, most depicting young women beset by preposterous circumstances ranging from the mildly hallucinogenic (a face multiplied in a mirror, "Mirror Dreams") to the peculiar (picking

3. Priamo, *Sueños*, p. 17. Butelman, a Jungian psychoanalyst, made the dream interpretations and developed advice for the readers, which he then communicated to Germani, who worked directly with Stern on the corresponding illustrations. See Hugo Vezzetti, "El psicoanálisis y los sueños en *Idilio*," in Priamo, *Sueños*, p. 153. Prominent in their respective fields, both men had been forced out of academia by the Peronist regime. For the roles of these two displaced figures in the development of psychoanalysis in Argentina, see Mariano Ben Plotkin, "Tell Me Your Dreams: Psychoanalysis and Popular Culture in Buenos Aires, 1930–1950," *The Americas* 55, no. 4 (April 1999), pp. 620–21.

QUIEREMOS AYUDABLE A CONOCERSE A SI MISMA, A FORTALECER SU ALMA, A RESOLVER SUS PROBLEMAS, A RESPONDER A SUS DUDAS, A VENECR SUS COMPLEJOS Y A SUPERARSE

PSICOANALISIS LE AYUDARA

MIS PROBLEMAS. — Resalmente no los tiene. En cuanto a que no "habe despertar amor", puede estar tranquila de que se equivoca muy mucho.

CIRINA S. C. (Buenos Aires). — Vuelva a pensar en su edad, le falla exactamente vivir toda su vida. ¿No cree que quiere apenarse demasiado? Todó lo que ahora le parece que le falta ya lo tendrá. Le aconsejamos que no se afite, que lance la controla de las chicas de su edad. En cuanto a su silueta, también esto tiene resuelto: gústele por el consejo de alicia médico. Si bien creemos que lo único que le dñe es dejar pasar algunos años y esperar.

MÓNICA (San Juan). — Usted no tiene problema. Es simplemente una chicaafortunada, aunque quizá no se dá cuenta.

POBRE FLOE (Quilmes). — Usted también es muy joven. Recuerde siempre que la belleza no lo es todo: la felicidad y el amor no dependen de ella. Noto se lo dije antes: usted sea muy linda... y está equivalentemente convertida de la entera (lo que ocurre a menudo).

LAMP-LOPE (Concepción del Uruguay). — Tiene una personalidad realmente bien equilibrada. Acerca de sus ideas acerca del amor "único" recurra: cuanto hemos venido diciendo a menudo en estas columnas.

LINDA DE OJOS GRANDES Y NEGROS (B. Aires). — Normal. Para su problema sentimental le aconsejamos se dirija a Silvia Watteau, en esta misma revista. ("Confidencias").

GALLEGUITA (Ginebra, Suiza). — Perfectamente normal. Su problema no es de orden psicológico.

ROBERTA R. (Salta). — Nuestro consejo para su felicidad futura, es que no se case con su hijo.

ACTEON (Cahulul). — No hallamos su carta entre la correspondencia, que no ha llegado.

ATORRENTADA (Córdoba). — Usted es normal desde el punto de vista psíquico. Su único problema es la enfermedad, es la que confiamos pueda curarse pronto. Los desajustes amorosos son muy comunes, y a su joven edad no debe preocuparse por ellos.

D. O. C. T. O. R. A. MORENA (Chascomús). — Perfectamente normal.

LINDITA E. V. — El problema que menciona no tiene resuelto psicológico. Por lo demás, es usted

perfectamente normal. E. R. A. DE MAPIIS: Muchas veces hemos hablado en estas columnas acerca del mito del "amor". A usted también le decimos, no se deje vencer de ningún modo por ese desengañado o por la verdad de que "ya no puede volver a amar"; no piense en el pasado, apunte hacia el futuro. En su vida actual debe alegrarse de haber podido superar tan brillantemente las otras pruebas a que la sometió la vida. En general, en casos como el suyo, quedan restos profundos y verdaderos deformaciones de la personalidad. Ello no ha ocurrido en usted, lo cual representa una garantía de que está bien dotada para enfrentar a la vida.

PETTY A. R. L. (Buenos Aires): Como a usted es muy joven y ha de hallar seguramente su camino. Los sueños no tienen significado especial.

ALMA DESTROZADA (Buenos Aires). — Es muy probable que sus inhibiciones actuales se relacionen con el episodio que le ocurrió a los trece años. Ese hecho, y las ideas un tanto equivocadas sobre el amor, le han causado un malestar que es responsable de su problema actual. Le hallamos de sus ideas porque su cuando de actual resaca que su conducta con su novio es "anormal" en otra parte de su carta, parece manifestar un verdadero horror hacia determinados aspectos del amor. En primer lugar debe convencerse de que, tal como lo afirman la moral y la religión, el matrimonio se funda sobre una unión indisoluble de alma y cuerpo, y que toda separación de estos dos términos significa una anomalía contraria a la naturaleza de las cosas. Por supuesto, las relaciones amorosas, tanto antes como después del matrimonio, deben desarrollarse dentro de lo que fijas la moral y las buenas costumbres, y, por consiguiente, obrar muy limo en sus oportunidades. Para ahora no debe dejar que el miedo por el peligro pasado paralice en usted lo que representa el optimismo — y lo subconscientemente admitido. — Sabemos que está luchando con lo que se llama una "fear" a superar, pero, como del contenido de su carta no se desprende la existencia de alguna grave deformación del carácter, creemos que una actitud de actitud consciente de superar cuanto le de Dios puede ayudarla. Si, en efecto, su problema actual dependiera de causas más profundas, ya cierto podría resolverse, pero ya no sería posible hacerlo por simples consejos. Debería acudir personalmente a algún médico psicólogo o psomaniático. Pero es muy probable que pueda superar el problema por sus propios medios. Corras tratando de analizar sus creencias y los sentimientos que le ha dejado su primer episodio, para llegar a convencerse de que tan sólo teme, inconscientemente, que se repita lo ocurrido. Por supuesto, puede volver a escribirnos si quiere.

MARIANELA (Capital). — Egoístamente por sentimiento de personalidad resuelta.

En el habla corriente, muchas veces se utiliza el término egoísmo como sinónimo de egoísmo. En realidad, egoístamente significa egoísmo llevado al máximo, o sea, una conducta que gira por completo, en todas sus manifestaciones, alrededor del propio yo. En el sentido muy pequeño, egoístamente significa egoísmo en su sentido normal. Es evidente que una criatura no se preocupa ni del prójimo, porque por cosas que no sean sus propias necesidades y deseos, y que su padre está allí para satisfacer sus exigencias, necesidades y deseos. En el sentido normal, egoístamente significa egoísmo en su sentido normal. Es evidente que una criatura no se preocupa ni del prójimo, porque por cosas que no sean sus propias necesidades y deseos, y que su padre está allí para satisfacer sus exigencias, necesidades y deseos. En el sentido normal, egoístamente significa egoísmo en su sentido normal. Es evidente que una criatura no se preocupa ni del prójimo, porque por cosas que no sean sus propias necesidades y deseos, y que su padre está allí para satisfacer sus exigencias, necesidades y deseos.

(Sigue en pág. 41)

Grete Stern. "Dreams about Trains." *Idilio* 8. August 23, 1949.

strawberries in a bookcase, “A Dream about Fruit”) to the traumatic (a reptile-headed train bearing down at top speed, “Dreams about Trains”).⁴ As almost all critics of the work have pointed out, the photomontages are inventive, often humorous (in spite of the disturbing scenes they depict), and exaggerated enough to read as satire, particularly as they were published in proximity to the pictorial melodramas typical of the *fotonovela* genre. These are all characteristics consistent with Stern’s previous work, yet their appearance in this context has been treated as, on the one hand, a critical response to the repressive ideology of the Perón dictatorship, particularly with regard to the regime’s subordination of women; and, on the other, as symptomatic of the general rise of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires, a movement that would utterly saturate Argentina over the next decade.⁵ Still, Stern’s radical shift in style and facture is the most striking aspect of the images; oddly, this change has gone unremarked.

Given the circumstances, it would seem that Stern, galvanized by her political situation and pledged to a new alliance with psychoanalysis, was finally able to break with past allegiances to achieve an unprecedented level of creative freedom—precisely the kind of imaginative liberation advocated by the Surrealist movement. But if we look beyond the surface of these images to recover the structures that both inform their content and direct their effects, it is clear that Stern’s commercial background, rather than her new psychoanalytic connections, was operating in telling ways. The consistent organizational label “*Sueños*,” which was applied to each image as it appeared—“Dreams about Animals,” “Dreams about Reminiscence,” etc.—speaks to the generic, archival structure the series evokes when taken as a whole. It is this quality, which looks back to the great photographic typologies of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* period, that provides historical grounding for the *Sueños* images and indicates their importance as a turning point for avant-garde production in the face of the postwar shift in representational power from the material to the symbolic in the early days of the information age.⁶ The very appearance of Stern’s *Sueños* in the mass-media apparatus of

4. “Mirror Dreams” appeared in *Idilio* 2, no. 17, March 15, 1949, p. 2; “A Dream about Fruit,” in *Idilio* 1, no. 8, December 14, 1948, p. 2; and “Dreams about Trains,” in *Idilio* 2, no. 8, August 23, 1949, p. 2.

5. The anti-Peronist attribution, widely accepted in the literature on the *Sueños*, flows from Stern’s personal politics and those of the figures around her (including Arte Madí, the psychoanalytic community, and the editorship of *Idilio* and its parent company Editorial Abril), as opposed to any overtly propagandist iconography in the photomontages. See especially Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*, pp. 27–29 and 135–43; and Jodi Roberts, *Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern: Defining the Modern in Argentine Photography, 1930–1956* (PhD diss., New York University, 2015), p. 261. Complicating this characterization of the *Sueños* as a “counter-public” is the fact that while fulfilling the *Idilio* commission, Stern also worked as the official photographer for Estudio del Plan de Buenos Aires, a government-supported housing initiative. Roberts, *Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern*, pp. 267–71.

6. “The principle of accumulation in the form of sequence is one of the standard procedures of the photography of New Objectivity . . . [an] aesthetic preparation of objects for advertising purposes.” Udo Hartmann, “The Eye of Herbert Bayer,” in *Photography at the Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 65. The only exceptions to this labeling system are the first two installments in the series, which were both entitled “The Mysterious World of Dreams.” See *Idilio* 1, no. 1 (October 26, 1948) and 1, no. 2 (November 2, 1948). For an account that places the *Sueños* photomontages in the context of “sexology” and a rising technical imagination promulgated by mass media, see Plotkin, “Tell Me Your Dreams,” pp. 608–11.

the late 1940s demonstrates how classifying systems—which for photographers of the 1920s and '30s had been legitimate forms of response to the chaos of modern urban life and the sudden loss of long-standing traditions embedded in the very material of everyday life (records of actual people and things)—became in the postwar context a means of generic classification and authoritative didactic imagery (information posing as facts) that collapsed formerly distinct economies of desire. The shift both affirms and exceeds the historically specific boundaries of Peronist nation-building to portend the sub rosa forms of surveillance and self-administration that now pervade contemporary culture.

Tabular Training

Stern's colleague at *Idilio* Gino Germani confirmed Stern's full participation in the construction of this new bureaucracy when he dubbed her work "*psicofotografía*," or "psychophotography," a technique located, as he put it, at the intersection of science and art.⁷ Yet there is little in Stern's background to indicate that she would have been interested in photomontage as a technique for the illustration of dreams, however "scientific" its basis. Stern had enrolled at the Bauhaus, a locus of radical photomontage interpretation and dissemination, but late, in its final Berlin months. This was long after Moholy-Nagy had left, a figure who, in mandating that art must be experimental, acknowledged Surrealist-style darkroom manipulations—albeit somewhat disparagingly—characterizing them as "optical jokes," possibly with Herbert Bayer's contemporary photomontages in mind.⁸

Stern's training had been with Walter Peterhans, with whom she had worked as a private student before he left Berlin for the Dessau Bauhaus in 1929.⁹ By then, Bayer, like Moholy-Nagy, had left the school to pursue a career in advertising, and the Bauhaus, now under the direction of Hannes Meyer, had stepped up its emphasis on pragmatic utilitarian design, emphasizing the social function of objects and actions over their aesthetic qualities in an effort to ease the school's ongoing financial difficulties. Under Meyer's program of "radical scientific functionalism," teaching was inseparable from production, and as part of the advertising and marketing workshop, the new photography course focused mainly on product photography.¹⁰ In comparison to Bayer and Moholy-Nagy, Peterhans was far less open to experiment, eschewing solarization, double exposure, photogrammatic abstraction, and the like. Instead, his priorities tended toward sharp detail

7. Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*, p. 57.

8. László Moholy-Nagy, "A New Instrument of Vision" (1932); reprinted in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 52.

9. Roxana Marcoci, "Photographer Against the Grain: Through the Lens of Grete Stern," in *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015), p. 21.

10. Michael Siebenbrodt and Lutz Schöbe, *Bauhaus, 1911–1933: Weimar—Dessau—Berlin* (London: Parkstone International, 2009), pp. 30; 54.

and evenness, with objects organized systematically in a strong all-over composition. Even when Peterhans was producing collage-like textural studies or working with unusual shadow effects, his means were exclusively photographic and never entailed darkroom or print manipulation. Rather, his method was driven by a technique of pre-visualization that he called “seeing like a camera,” which sought to mechanize not only the visual field but vision itself, rendering the image as objectively as possible.¹¹

Peterhans’s most characteristic work—that is to say, the model that would have been presented to Stern—entailed shooting down onto a still-life arrangement of objects of various forms and textures, most often presented on a board or table whose edges conformed with the immanent constraints of the camera viewfinder. This approach resulted in oddly stilted compositions in which photography’s usual distortion of scale was suppressed as much as possible and dimensional space was sacrificed to structure. The moody gray scale Peterhans cultivated, an outgrowth of his disdain for artificial light, further flattened the field. Peterhans’s standardized, dispassionate approach has led art historian Jeannine Fiedler to identify his work as “tabular,” not merely because these images render the pictorial in congruence with a flat surface but because of the analytical ethos motivating his photographic project—the sense that each image provides us with an index or inventory of form and texture, rendered in the spirit of the ledger rather than the window. As Fiedler points out, Peterhans’s systematic rendering of the visual field was driven by his philosophy of “axiomatic aesthetics,” which he defined as a “logico-critical” approach that sought to deduce, through photography, universal principles of form residing in the unconscious.¹² Effectively, the process he describes seeks to use photographic means to subject the chaos and clutter of the Freudian unconscious to mathematical principles, making it available to regulation and a form of management that, in its concern with detail and comprehensiveness, conforms with bureaucratic ideals. Every Peterhans still life is informed by this codification of affective memory, a wholesale conversion of the corporeal (that is to say, the material) to the quantifiably symbolic, delivered to vision as a detailed array of facts.

Peterhans’s administration of aesthetics is consistent with the spirit of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and it underscores the movement’s archival concerns in the priority given to the organization and rationalization of the cultural field.¹³ Peterhans

11. Jeannine Fiedler, “Walter Peterhans: A Tabularian Approach,” in *Photography at the Bauhaus* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 84–90.

12. Walter Peterhans, “Fragment on Aesthetics,” in *Ratio* 3, no. 2 (1961), p. 119.

13. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Warburg’s Paragon? The End of Collage and Photomontage in Postwar Europe,” in *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art*, ed. Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (Munich: Prestel, 1998), p. 54. For an account that describes in detail the historical terms by which *Neue Sachlichkeit* photography emerged from the *sachlich*, or documentary, photography of objects, see Megan Luke, “Still Lives and Commodities,” in *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic, 1919–1933*, ed. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015), pp. 228–41.

drew directly on this philosophy for his teaching, and Stern's photographic formation, accordingly, was refined in this crucible of programmatic organization.¹⁴ It was here she learned how to stage and develop pictures with priority given not to spatial illusion but to orderly and legible composition. She must have been an excellent pupil: When Peterhans left Berlin to direct the advertising and photography workshop at the Dessau Bauhaus, she purchased his equipment and took over his private classes.¹⁵

The photographic precision and organizational principles that Stern learned under Peterhans continued to inform the *sachlich* quality of her early photographic work in Buenos Aires. Even when Stern chose to communicate a "juxtaposition effect," as in, for example, her self-portrait of 1943, she generated the composite through an arrangement of disparate objects in front of the camera in the manner of a still life, as opposed to cutting, pasting, and rephotographing images from various sources.¹⁶ Consistent with Peterhans's mathematical approach, Stern rendered the psychological depth traditionally sought through self-portraiture not so much as an extended meditation on the nature of subjectivity but as an array of mobile, abstracted units (among them Stern's own mirrored face), each rendered as a careful study of form and substance. Motivated by the logic of visual seduction, the resulting image affords each object its greatest potential as a commodity fetish. Here, the materiality of desire—its condition as a corporeally driven, unwilling impulse—is sought through a controlled archive of symbolic units available to recombine for any number of future commissions.

In fact, Stern learned her photographic craft at a historical moment characterized by an increasingly sophisticated advertising industry. Without question, Germany was the European leader in modern visual persuasion, a field that deployed marketing strategies heavily dependent on the "scientizing" of advertising through statistics and psychology. The ranks of publicity companies were filled with "psychotechnicians" whose sole aim was to reach the consumer by subliminal means.¹⁷ By the 1920s, over 170 German firms were using "psychotechnical reasoning" to increase demand for their products, and by 1932 the subject was being taught at thirty-two German universities and institutions.¹⁸ The goal, as psychotechnician Mia Klein explained in 1929, was to produce a "readiness of will" in

14. Fiedler, "Walter Peterhans," p. 87, and p. 90n13.

15. Marcoci, "Photographer Against the Grain," p. 23.

16. This had been Stern's method for years, dating back to the advertising strategies she had developed in Berlin, where she and Auerbach (who had also been a Peterhans student) adapted the tabular approach for use in their commercial commissions, fully realizing the predisposition to the regularity and predictability of industrial systems that had always been latent in Peterhans's algorithmic philosophy.

17. Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 96.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 97.



Grete Stern. Self Portrait. 1943.

the potential consumer through psychological means.¹⁹ Photography and graphic design played an important role in this new approach to publicity: Because the consumer was meant to make irrational decisions, persuasion was pursued through affective rather than conceptual means, that is to say, through subjective identification with imagery rather than through informative text. If by 1929 the four “watchwords” in the psychology of advertising were “attraction, interest, attention, and association,” those rubrics (particularly the last) were to meant to reach the consumer via subliminally directed means instead of blatant statements of fact.²⁰ Witty juxtaposition, calibrated not to alienate but to beguile, became a prized technique of visual persuasion.

19. Ibid., p. 100.

20. Ibid. Freud’s own nephew, Edward Bernays, a Viennese immigrant to the United States, initiated this co-optation of the psyche when he applied fundamental Freudian ideas (notably, the assertion that irrational drives determine human behavior) to advertising as a strategy to “engineer consent.” For a pragmatic guide, see See Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Liveright, 1928).

The kind of means-ends thinking that drives advertising imagery, authorizing it to absorb any technique or discipline (including psychoanalysis) that might serve its purposes, permeated the institutional apparatus that had supported firms like the one Stern herself had founded in Berlin with Ellen Auerbach, Foto ringl + pit. As such, the power hierarchy that advertising articulates through its attempts at consumer manipulation would have been difficult for Stern and Auerbach to perceive, let alone overcome, even if they had not been immersed in the Bauhaus's pro-publicity program. Their advertising compositions were designed to cultivate a sensibility open to consumption and were a far cry from the early avant-garde forms of photomontage that Stern would have witnessed in Berlin, which emphasized shock and estrangement rather than mythmaking. By the 1930s, even John Heartfield had shifted from a heterogeneous, alienating style of photomontage to an illusionistic mode that facilitated the virtual "suturing" of the viewer into the scene. That Heartfield, a committed communist, would adapt publicity techniques for radical political ends is one indication that advertising, with its shift from selling products to selling desire, was increasingly understood as the most effective communication structure of the time.²¹

Perhaps more directly than Heartfield's example, Herbert Bayer's work would have provided an effective model for Stern's shift to darkroom-altered photomontage, and it would have been more likely to have activated a mnemonic link for her between Surrealism and advertising. Bayer, who headed the Bauhaus workshop for printing and advertising in Dessau from 1926 to 1928, explicitly linked photomontage with unconscious manipulation, deeming it "particularly compatible with advertising psychology and the imagery of ideas."²² Like Stern, Bayer was heavily invested in design for mass media and advertising: Over the short span of his tenure as a Bauhaus master, he reorganized the workshop and updated it to become the more businesslike advertising department, and on leaving the Bauhaus in 1928 he worked for the advertising firm Dorland Studio (where he would have competed with ringl + pit for commissions). In 1931, Bayer materialized the full collapse of psychic exploration and marketing technique with a series of eleven photomontage illustrations of his own dreams, among them his *Self Portrait* (1932) and the now-famous *Lonely Metropolitan* (1932). His process, which involved cutting, pasting, and rephotographing to form an incongruous or irrational scenario within a perspectively correct spatial field, was identical to the method Stern would adopt years later to make her own dream images: the creation through photomontage of a "plausible impossible" that would ultimately class Bayer's efforts with Surrealist photomontage and painting.²³

21. For the specific ways that suture operates in Heartfield's work, see Sabine Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). For Heartfield's early engagement with advertising, see Andrés Zervigón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-Garde Photomontage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

22. Herbert Bayer, *Herbert Bayer: Painter, Designer, Architect* (New York: Reinhold, 1967), p. 40.

23. Arthur A. Cogen, *Herbert Bayer: The Complete Work* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), pp. 264–66.

Psicofotografía *at Work*

The fusion of advertising and applied psychology that formed the context for Stern's commercial work casts Germani's characterization of the *Sueños* images as *psicofotografía* in something of a new light, clarifying why Stern was chosen for the *Idilio* commission in spite of her reputation for photographic "objectivity." Thinking for the masses instead of an artistic elite had been part of her formation as a commercial photographer. And importantly, Stern was well trained in reaching out to women: Like *Idilio*, ringl + pit's "target" consumer had been the same "young and feminine" woman that was called out on *Idilio*'s cover.²⁴

When in 1935 she had arrived in Buenos Aires with her then husband, Horacio Coppola, she had been welcomed into the intellectual community around Victoria Ocampo's *Sur*, the reigning avant-garde publishing house, not on the basis of her advertising work but because of her "natural" portraits and her avoidance of the darkroom techniques typical of Surrealism.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, in the thirteen years that followed, Stern continued to make photographs reflecting her *Neue Sachlichkeit* formation: orderly compositions that prioritized clarity of visual communication, crisp detail, and straightforward means of photographic production.²⁶ By the mid-1940s she had aligned herself with Asociación Arte Concreto and then Movimiento de Arte Madí, two groups that, in their championing of pure geometric abstraction, had not engaged with photography at all. Yet their emphasis on materiality in the visual arts would have had a strong attraction for Stern, recalling her years in the late Bauhaus circle, and her shift to darkroom-assisted photomontage, however brief considering the span of her long career, seems to have emerged out of her cultural confrontation with unconscious processes under the aegis of these two avant-garde groups. Two separately commissioned works from 1943 and 1947 (the year just before the *Idilio* commission) articulate the shift. The first, a clever cover design for the magazine *Ver* (See), returns to a familiar Bauhaus trope—the mirror as a mediation and expansion of portraiture—but unlike the graphically stark presentations of the 1920s, this image uses photomontage to pack the pictorial space with information, moving attention away from the specificity of the portrait and toward the more abstract concept of "seeing" as an indiscriminate gathering in of visual material. Like the *Sueños* montages, the *Ver* cover naturalizes space even as it uses the photomontage technique to produce irrational effects: a disembodied human hand, positioned as if it has

24. Maud Lavin, *Clean New World: Culture, Politics, and Graphic Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 50.

25. Jorge Romero Brest, "Fotografías de Horacio Coppola y Grete Stern," *Sur* 5, no. 13 (October 1935), pp. 91–102; p. 92. The resistance to photograms and photomontage techniques may have been due to the influence of Roger Caillois, who served on the editorial board of *Sur* at the time and who was by then adamantly anti-Surrealist.

26. From time to time Stern would create complex collagelike photographic tableaux recalling her early advertising work in Berlin. But for the most part, Stern's commercial montage work failed to gain a foothold in conservative Buenos Aires. Priamo, *Sueños*, p. 12.

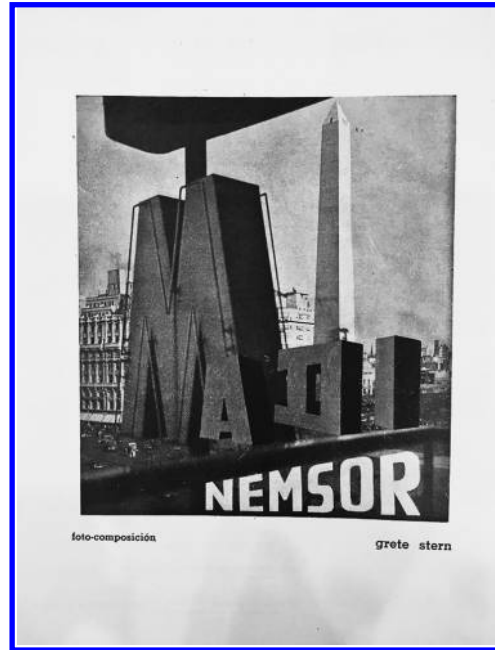


Stern. Ver. 1943.

been placed upright on a table; a mirror placed on the same table that appears to reflect not merely the mirrored face above but part of the word *Ver*; a logo that isn't otherwise integrated into the naturalized space at all, but which floats on the surface of the image. By contrast with Stern's self-portrait of the same date, which has a distinctly flattened, tabular look, the *Ver* image builds a vertical space congruent with natural vision and then undermines that convention of apprehension by juxtaposing unrelated objects. The composition draws on the structure of dreams: Objects are grouped according to the syntax of the material world but are so irrational in combination that they gain meaning only through interpretive association. Effectively, the *Ver* montage emblemizes the structural incongruities on which both dream and advertising imagery depend, and it links the two succinctly within Stern's overall practice.

The spatial organization of the second photomontage Stern made during her avant-garde association in Buenos Aires is more directly related—at least in terms of its articulation of deep perspectival space—to the *Sueños* images she would begin the following year. Stern made this “*Foto-composición*” to commemorate the formation of Arte Madí, a movement comprising artists who had broken away from Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención in 1946. Here she developed the illusion of language made concrete in natural space simply by inserting the letters A, D, and I into a photograph of a large neon M (advertising Movado watches) looming over the Plaza de la República.²⁷ The blocky, sculptural style of the lettering so successfully matches the monumentality of the found, commercial M pictured in the photograph that the illusion of a synthetic whole is complete, and only a close inspection of the image reveals that the word MADI does not actually float spectacularly over Buenos Aires. By comparison with the *Sueños* group, the poster entailed only a minimal intervention into the existing pictorial space, but it is the first instance in which Stern abandoned Peterhans’s shallow collage-like space and refined her illusionistic efforts in the darkroom.

While Stern never exhibited with the *Madistas*, she opened her home and her library to them, photographed their work, and contributed to their eponymous journal.²⁸ Her alliance with the group made sense in terms of prior aesthetic allegiances: Like Peterhans, Madí was sworn to an art conceived entirely by the conscious mind before its execution (an idea the group had borrowed from Theo Van Doesburg; they sought objectivity in their approach to facture, and their interest in sheer materiality as a source of artistic merit would have resonated with Stern’s formational *Neue*



Stern. “Photo Composition.” *Arte Madí Universal*, October 2, 1948.

27. Gyula Kosice, “Madí and Concrete-Invention,” *Manifestoes and Polemics in Latin American Modern Art*, ed. Patrick Frank (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), p. 105.

28. Ana Jorgelina Pozzi-Harris, *Marginal Disruptions: Concrete and Madí Art in Argentina, 1940–55* (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007), p. 65. On Stern as photographer of Madí sculptures, see Gabriel Perez-Barreiro, *The Argentine Avant-Garde 1944–1950* (PhD diss., University of Essex, 1996), p. 183.

Sachlichkeit and Bauhaus values.²⁹ Madí's emphasis on invention and dynamism may have posed problems for Stern, who continued making straight portraits rather than experimenting with abstraction. But inventing constructions to be photographed was precisely what Stern had been doing all along in her advertising work, and the association with Madí may have provided the impetus for her to move away from the static compositions typical of her commissioned work and toward intervening in the illusionistic space of the photograph itself.

Still, Madí railed against figuration, Romantic naturalism, and representations of the unconscious. Like *Arte Concreto*, which had expressed public antipathy to the Surrealist movement in an illustrated statement distributed at an exhibition in Stern's home, Madí took direct aim at the Surrealists in their manifesto by characterizing their own priorities in opposition to "instinctive impulses . . . intuition . . . the revelation of the unconscious . . . the magical . . . metaphysics."³⁰ These are prominent features of the *Sueños* series; if Stern really wanted to make concrete photography, a turn to photograms (which would have been familiar to her from her Berlin years) or a return to tabular studies of comparative materials would have made more sense than the extremes of illusionistic photomontage she adopted for the Madí poster.³¹ Judging from Stern's allegiances, it would seem that *psicofotografía* had developed out of its emphatic *exclusion* from art practice; for Stern, visualizations of the psyche, in their revelation of unconscious desire, belonged in the advertising realm rather than in an art practice grounded in material fact. Indeed, Stern had not left behind her training in publicity. Even the Madí commission recalls an important historical example of advertising montage that would have been familiar to Stern from the Bauhaus archives: the extraordinary Odol advertisement series, which placed monumental representations of the company's logo into naturalistic landscapes as a way to sell mouthwash. The series, which spanned the first few years of the twentieth century, embodies Stern's strategies of seriality and juxtaposition as well as her use of humor and drama as a ploy to generate anticipation of the next installment.³²

29. True to her roots in Peterhans's studio, Stern began each *Sueños* photomontage by pre-visualizing the composition. See Grete Stern, "Notes on Photomontage" (1967), in *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires*, p. 241. For Madí's interest in Van Doesburg, see Dawn Ades, "Arte Madí/Arte Concreto-Inención," in *Writings on Art and Anti-Art* (London: Ridinghouse, 2015), p. 165. For a concise characterization of Madí principles, see Alexander Alberro, *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 40.

30. The illustrated flier distributed at the *Arte Concreto* exhibition hosted in Stern's home reads: "Invention appears to unify concrete art and against the metaphysical speculation of surrealism" (Archive of the Getty Research Institute, *Inención—arte concreto—invención*, no. 2017.M.2). For the Madí assertions against Surrealist precepts, see Gyula Kosice, "Madí Manifesto," in *Manifestoes and Polemics in Latin American Modern Art*, p. 102. Notably, a number of the members of *Arte Concreto* had begun their artistic careers working in a Surrealist style. See Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*, p. 79n8.

31. Kosice, "Madí Manifesto," p. 102.

32. Henrietta Váth-Hinz, *ODOL: Reklame-Kunst um 1900, Werkbund-Archiv 14* (Berlin: Anabas-Verlag, 1985).

to recreate the story line of a movie.³³ But unlike the *cine-romanzo*, the *fotonovela* generated its own, independent “story of the heart,” exploiting at once the popularity of cinema and the rapid turnaround of the serially produced magazine, shaking off its origins in publicity to produce a simulacrum of cinematic effects.³⁴ *Idilio*’s target audience was young working-class and middle-class women, and its presentation was designed, like popular cinema, to be transparent to the narrative depicted, a narrative that was always consistent with what was perceived to be the strongest desire of young women: to find “true love.”³⁵ The tales were melodramatic and sequential, with elliptical final frames designed to bring the reader back to purchase the next issue. They were, that is, utterly commercial enterprises, and conceived so conventionally as to have shaped subjectivity not merely according to an affirmative model of femininity but of feminine consumerism cast as patriotic activity to align with Peronist modernization.³⁶

Stern’s photomontages have been assessed as critical interventions into this monolithic popularization of Peronism, specifically with regard to the feminist sensibility they communicate, which would have been anathema to the administration.³⁷ In these accounts, Stern herself is fashioned as an outsider, a Weimar New Woman dropped into a socially conservative backwater and supplied with an agency and insight foreclosed to her Latin American counterparts. The characterization betrays a disturbing Eurocentrism, but given the authoritarian nature of the Perón dictatorship and the fascist government from which Stern had fled, ascribing this attitude to her is not entirely without foundation. The iconography of the photomontages bears out this reading in the most literal way: The majority of the *Sueños* images, as almost every critic has pointed out, construct a subject constrained (by confined spaces, locked doors, or inadequate tools) or threatened (by monstrous animals, babies, men, technology, fire, water, the cosmos, a camera, or her own unrecognizable body). At times, the depictions are complicated by a marked complacency in the smiling and tolerant attitudes of the women in question, indicating Stern’s purported distance from the subject she constructs, as if she stands above and outside these women’s situations, passing skeptical judgment on their placid acceptance of subjugation. It is perhaps because of the complexity of Stern’s political position that the most nuanced feminist account of Stern’s series, Paula Bertúa’s *The Camera on the Threshold of the Sensible* (*La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*), ultimately draws back from individual readings of the images to assess the series as a whole, claiming that Stern, by materializing women’s

33. Jan Baetens, *Pour Le Roman-Photo* (Brussels: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2010), p. 9.

34. Jan Baetens, *Du Roman-Photo* (Paris: Médusa-médias, 1994), p. 14.

35. Plotkin, “Tell Me Your Dreams,” pp. 618–19; Vezzetti, “El psicoanálisis y los sueños en *Idilio*,” p. 156.

36. Rachel Greenspan, “Dreaming Woman: Image, Place, and the Aesthetics of Exile,” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 98, no. 4 (2017), p. 98.

37. Priamo, *Sueños*, p. 45; Vezzetti, “El psicoanálisis y los sueños en *Idilio*,” p. 158; Marcoci, “Photographer Against the Grain,” p. 37.

dreams in photomontage form (regardless of their iconography of subjugation), provided agency to women simply by formulating an expanded language for female subjectivity.³⁸ Just as the *Idilio* story lines, constructed at least in part by the magazine's readers, might have supplied a reliable sociological barometer of prevailing norms in a particular class of women, the dreams the readers communicated to Richard Rest might well have inadvertently revealed politically important collective anxieties and repressions. This interpretation positions Stern, and by extension the *Idilio* editors, as figures operating a site of resistance to conservative Peronist values—a counter-public positioned to simultaneously expose the anti-feminist biases of Freudian psychoanalysis as well. But this approach ascribes a self-reflexivity regarding the destructive power of publicity that isn't necessarily supported by what we know of Stern herself, who, consistent with Bauhaus values, continued to pursue advertising commissions without acknowledging any conflict of interest with her avant-garde commitments in Argentina, and who later expressed puzzlement over feminist interpretations of her work.³⁹ In fact, marketing strategies pervaded *fotonovela* form; the *Idilio* editors constantly tracked reader preferences with surveys and questionnaires, adjusting story lines not to give voice to consumers but to attract the greatest number of readers possible.⁴⁰ While Editorial Abril, the publishing house that produced *Idilio*, was committed to an anti-Peronist position, it appears that the magazine itself was produced as a means of generating revenue in support of the publishing house's more serious projects—and was thus allocated to popular appeal alone. As Ana Germani reported years later regarding her father's stint as a "psychological counselor" for *Idilio*, the figures involved were "well acquainted with the enormous market potential that women's magazines, in particular a psychological guidance section, could attract," and the responses Butelman wrote as Richard Rest for the column encouraged women in their aspirations to social improvement, a key feature of Perón's program for modernization.⁴¹ Reader participation, through questionnaires and dream narratives, may have undercut the authority of the script writers and editors at *Idilio*, giving voice to women who might not otherwise have been heard, but it would have done so only to the extent that the effort increased readership, for it was the use of dream analysis as a marketing ploy that had introduced "Psychoanalysis Can Help You" into the pages of *Idilio*.

Characterizing the *Sueños* montages as a form of feminist resistance is also stymied by the temper of Richard Rest's advice itself, which was overwhelmingly

38. Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*, p. 178.

39. Grete Stern and Ellen Auerbach, as interviewed in the documentary film *Ringl + Pit*, New Day films, dir. Juan Mandelbaum, 1995. See also Stern, "Notes on Photomontage, 1967," in *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires*, pp. 241–43.

40. Like many *fotonovela* weeklies, *Idilio* used a number of strategies for soliciting reader response in order to assure the popularity of the stories that would follow, including multiple choice on the motivations of the characters or the directions the story might take in the next issue. See Baetens, *Pour le Roman-Foto*, p. 30; Plotkin, "Tell Me Your Dreams," p. 618.

41. Ana Germani, *Antifascism and Sociology* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2008), p. 77.

ster.” Brief analysis and advice follow: “With this, the unconscious seeks to point out the uselessness of her life. . . . It was necessary, then, to break the bars of the prison of false prejudices.” “You must go back to your youth, and you can achieve this only through your friend, whom you love.” “The dream actually contains a clear warning, because it indicates the need for the protagonist to assume, in spite of her impulses, the adult attitude that corresponds to her psychic state and location in real life.”⁴⁴ Richard Rest’s attitude throughout is paternalistic and authoritarian (in some cases, dreamers were curtly dismissed with no analysis: “Your worries have no basis”; “Normal. Your problems are not psychic in nature”), tempered only by Stern’s artistic discretion—her choice, for example, of a flimsy birdcage as a prison, or a floating net to represent the dreamer’s “false

44. Richard Rest, “El psicoanálisis le ayudará,” *Idilio* 2, no. 47 (October 11, 1949), p. 2; no. 22 (April 19, 1949), p. 2; and 2, no. 40 (August 23, 1949), p. 2.

EL

QUEEREN AFIDABLE A CONOCERSE A SI MISMA, A FORTALECER SU ALMA, A RESOLVER SUS PROBLEMAS, A RESISTIR A SUS ENEMIGOS, A VENCER SUS COMPLEJOS Y A SUPERARSE

PSICOANALISIS LE AYUDARA

RECUERDA APLICADA (CARRER). —
Ejemplo de identificación.

Cuando usted sea una mujer hermosa en la siguiente época, "tan pronto como un hombre pueda, le enseñaré cómo vencer a su enemigo".


En la vida real, el hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión. El hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión. El hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión.

B. J. (Montevideo). — Le enseñaré la vida de un prisionero condenado a muerte. En la vida real, el hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión. El hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión.

ROSA E. (Paraná). — Desde un punto de vista psicológico, su sueño es un ejemplo de identificación. El hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión. El hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión.

LOS SUEÑOS DE REMINISCENCIAS

En este sueño, el sujeto se ve a sí mismo en un momento de su vida pasada. El hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión. El hombre que ha caído en la tentación de la mujer hermosa, se encuentra en una situación de confusión.



Stern. “Dreams about Reminiscence.” *Idilio* 22, April 19, 1949.

prejudices.”⁴⁵ In every instance Stern’s elaborations on the analysis transform the potentially threatening dream imagery into a humorous and engaging scenario, mitigating the rigid judgment offered in the text itself. Stern’s license in this respect imposes a marked distance between text and image, suggesting that the photomontages might operate separately from the overwhelmingly negative and admonitory dream analyses themselves, an idea that is supported somewhat by the *Sueños’ fotonovela* context, a format driven by photographic images rather than text.⁴⁶

But this disposition to visual autonomy, which might have indicated a desire to open a critical space within a hermetic commercial enterprise, is undercut by the fact that magazine readers never had access to the original dream narratives analyzed in “Psychoanalysis Can Help You”—*Idilio* published only Rest’s and Stern’s interpretations of them.⁴⁷ The effect is to have controlled and limited the possible interpretations of the original dreams, channeling their meaning into, on the one hand, a generic prescription and, on the other, a humorous, nearly parodic grasp of what were almost certainly a set of valid anxieties expressed by the women who wrote in. Any possibility that Stern’s photomontages might have performed as an interruptive force within the magazine was already foreclosed by the time the readers’ dream narratives made their way to her, for they had already been worked over by Germani and Butelman, the two men who controlled the interpretation and advice and who suggested to Stern the sort of image she should construct for that week’s installment.⁴⁸ This rigid, top-down flow of directives was, then as now, consistent with commercial practice in general and the *fotonovela* process in particular: Photographer-illustrators took direction from writers (who in turn worked within parameters set by editors and art directors), constructing theatrical “tableaux” that depicted the actions indicated by the master narrative. The *Sueños* photomontages, deracinated from *Idilio*, renamed and framed on the wall of a gallery, may today read as defiant avant-garde gestures, but the illustrations for “Psychoanalysis Can Help You,” grasped in their original conservative context, convey a message structurally consistent with the magazine’s own. As images generated by the *Idilio* system, they were subject to the same creative constraints as the rest of the magazine’s content.

If any radical break can be discerned here, it is with the body of Stern’s previous work. As a graphic designer, Stern had tempered her commissions with market requirements, but she had always managed to maintain the signature style necessary to brand her graphic work as “thoroughly modern.” The *Sueños* images, though, represent a departure so drastic as to have effaced all recognizable signs

45. Rest, “El psicoanálisis le ayudará,” *Idilio* 2, no. 47 (October 11, 1949), p. 43; and 3, no. 64 (February 7, 1950), p. 30. Some dreamers were referred to answers Rest had already given to other women in the same issue, another sign of the interchangeability of response in the column.

46. For an interpretation that finds this separation essential to the meaning of the photomontages, see Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*, pp. 24–26.

47. The original letters are now lost. See Vezzetti, “El psicoanálisis y los sueños en *Idilio*,” p. 154.

48. Mario Ben Plotkin, “Tell Me Your Dreams,” p. 623.

of Stern's intervention as designer from the images. The figurative photomontage process was, by mid-century, retrograde, and the resulting images melodramatic rather than crisp and "objective." It is as if Stern sought to mask her association with the commission by drawing on Surrealism, a movement disdained by her avant-garde circle. Like her colleagues at *Idilio*, who distanced themselves from their remunerative, anti-intellectual role by hiding under a pseudonym, Stern disavowed *psicofotografía* even as she developed it.⁴⁹ Preserving her anonymity, she turned from materiality and collage-as-model to fictive *fotonovela*-as-model and constructed her productive persona accordingly—a move that, in its disappearance of the self into a figure of statistically determined mass appeal, anticipates the postindustrial turn in photography, particularly those practices carried forward on a wave of commercially determined, technologically enabled structures and processes. All of the possibility of critical address expressed in Stern's early, tabular advertisement collages dissolves here as the *Sueños* images take on the aspect of what Walter Benjamin called the "dictatorial perpendicular" typical of newspapers and mass media: an alignment with natural vision that serves to advance information with the authority of truth rather than rhetoric.⁵⁰

No One Dreams That Way

One exception to Benjamin's circumspection around mass-media authority was his attitude toward cinema, the medium that, in its diachrony and montage-driven openness to interpretation, formed the basis of his techno-optimism. Benjamin's likening of cinema to the dream state joins the *fotonovela*'s historical genesis to form yet another suggestive constellation around the *Sueños* images. For the *fotonovela* is a narrative configuration imbricated with film form: It had its origins in cinema publicity; developed its story lines to align with popular cinematic plots; and, as Jan Baetens has argued, even offered a set of fresh narrative possibilities drawn from film to the medium of still photography itself.⁵¹ To be clear, the cinematic conventions evoked in the *fotonovela* had little to do with early and experimental film (Benjamin's main interest), notably cinematic montage, and much more to do with the ways that narrative film had developed in the commercial sphere—not least in the marketing strategies from which the *fotonovela* itself

49. The rupture the *Sueños* commission represented in Stern's work was brief. After the *Idilio* commission, Stern returned to straight photography for her commission for the city of Buenos Aires and her ethnographic portraits of the indigenous Gran Chaco people. See Roberts, *Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern*, pp. 267–71; and Grete Stern, *Aborígenes del Gran Chaco: Fotografías de Grete Stern, 1958–1964* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Antorchas/Fundación CEPPA, 2005).

50. Walter Benjamin, "One Way Street," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 456. Hal Foster has written persuasively on the critical potential of the tabular image at mid-century in *The First Pop Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 17–61.

51. Jan Baetens, "Reworking or Making Up? A Note on Photonovels in Diarmuid Costello's Approach to Medium Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 1 (Autumn 2014), p. 166.

emerged. Yet the *Sueños*' accessible, slapstick humor sets them apart somewhat from standard *fotonovela* drama, aligning them with the exaggerated expressions and absurd situations of silent films. It is here, I would argue, that the *Sueños* approach an avant-garde sensibility, specifically the Surrealists' taste for kitsch, a devotion to obsolescence and past history in the form of dreams and their technologically produced counterparts, photography and film, that Benjamin recognized as key to the movement's radical potential.⁵²

For twenty-first-century scholars, rehearsed as we are in the movement's commitment to psychoanalysis, Surrealism's illusionistic style of photomontage would be the obvious choice for representations of the unconscious, because of the ease with which the medium communicates the signal dream paradox, that is, the tension between naturalized syntax and its irrational content. But a turn to Surrealist "psychophotographic" methods wouldn't have been nearly as obvious from Stern's vantage point in 1948 Buenos Aires—or at least it would have been obvious for different reasons, those drawn directly from a popular culture of psychoanalysis forming itself through commercial rather than avant-garde strategies.

To begin with, there are surprisingly few examples of spatially illusionistic Surrealist photomontage from the interwar period, and even fewer that would have been available to Stern in her Berlin years. *Film und Foto*, the extraordinary Werkbund exhibition of 1929, featured E. L. T. Mesens's *The Disconcerting Light* (1926), which disrupts a perspectively sound cityscape with an eye and a stylized flash of light, but the image shows its seams boldly, without the synthetic plausibility Stern achieved in the *Sueños* images. Man Ray's work was represented in the exhibition as well, but in the form of photograms, images that Stern acknowledged in her 1967 "Notes on Photomontage" but that bear no resemblance to her own work.⁵³

A second important exhibition, *Fotomontage*, mounted at the Kunstgewerbemuseums, Berlin, in the spring of 1931, would have certainly attracted Stern's attention, in part because of its scope—the photomontage techniques on display used cleverly in modern advertising and propaganda as well as in avant-garde art. But the exhibition was dominated by German and Russian examples; indeed, in his foreword to the catalogue, Curt Glaser observed that in France, "the concept is virtually unknown, and photomontage is also only very rarely used in commercial advertising."⁵⁴

52. Walter Benjamin, "Dream Kitsch," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 236–39.

53. Stern, "Notes on Photomontage," p. 243. In the same essay, Stern also misremembered Man Ray's *À l'heure de l'observatoire—Les Amoureux* as a photomontage and erroneously attributes Mesen's *Masque servant à injurier les esthètes* (1929) to Dada.

54. Adrian Sudhalter, *Photomontage Between the Wars, 1918–1939* (Ottawa, Ont.; Carleton University Art Gallery, 2012), p. 16.

Suggestively, it was only after this 1931 exhibition that highly illusionistic photomontages began to appear at the hands of the French Surrealists. Dora Maar's remarkable images from 1933–36 come close to the style Stern adopted, but there is no evidence that they had made their way to Argentina by the late 1940s. Paul Éluard, Suzanne Muzard, and André Breton produced a number of photomontages in the early 1930s that exploited photography's reality effect in the same way that Stern's *Sueños* would, and two of them, Éluard's *The Women from Martinique* and Breton's *The Enchanted Well* (both 1931–32), appeared in *The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*, the catalogue for the 1938 *International Exhibition of Surrealism*. Psychoanalyst Enrique Pichon-Rivière, a friend of Stern's, had long admired Surrealism, and she may well have accessed a copy through him, given the exhibition's international theme.⁵⁵ The dictionary, with its promise of methodical distillation, would have proved an excellent reference for a resourceful graphic designer seeking not only a quick overview of Surrealist style but a survey of the movement's newly expanded presence (the very ubiquity that had exposed Surrealism to direct criticism from Arte Concreto and Madí).⁵⁶ The Éluard and Breton photomontages were joined on the same page with illustrations from Georges Hugnet's *The Seventh Face of the Dice* (1936), Shigeru Imai's *On the Fly* (1935), and Jindrich Styrsky's *Self Love* (1933)—all photomontages, all featuring figures of women, and all bearing a striking resemblance to the structure and iconography of Stern's *Sueños*.



Dora Maar. *Forbidden Games*. 1935.
© Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York/ADAGP, Paris.

55. The psychoanalytic community in Buenos Aires was fully engaged with the artistic, political, and cultural intelligentsia. Pichon-Rivière, president of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Society, had, in 1943, hosted an exhibition of emerging Arte Concreto-Invencción artists in his home (as Stern herself would in 1945). For Pichon-Rivière's engagement with the arts (including Surrealism), see Hugo Vezzetti, *Aventuras de Freud en el país de los Argentinos: De José Ingenieros a Enrique Pichon-Rivière* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1996), pp. 245–89.

56. André Breton and Paul Éluard, eds., *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: Galerie des Beaux Arts, 1938), p. 37.



Page from *The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*.
© ARS, New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Éluard's *The Women from Martinique*, in which a gowned female figure drifts, supine, across an impossibly starry and daylight sky, has the most immediate iconographic resonance with dreamscape imagery as Stern repeatedly imagined it; over the three years that she illustrated "Psychoanalysis Can Help You," the column featured five photomontages that set their protagonists floating through space, indi-

cating that for Stern, the open sky performed as a general sign for the material detachment of the dream state. Hugnet’s image is dominated by a kneeling woman bound in chains; it evinces a sensibility of subjection that runs through nearly all of the *Idilio* images, effectively thematizing lack of agency as a foremost preoccupation of young women at this time. Breton’s image, like Stern’s, communicates the precarity of female experience: In it, a young woman’s torso emerges from a window in an attitude of ecstatic abandon, back arched, hair flying, and face raised, as if flinging herself from the building. But among these Surrealist photomontages (which we can take as representative of the group’s best efforts in the ’30s, given their presence in the exhibition and catalogue), only Breton’s image, with its fully clothed figure poised at the edge of plausibility, appears as though it could slip directly into the pages of *Idilio*. Close examination of this group of photomontages ultimately articulates not merely the difference between Surrealist practice and Stern’s rational approach but also the differences between photomontage conceived by men rather than women; between images advanced as art rather than mass communication; and between photography that draws on Freudian structures rather than constructs sensational images of popular complaints. Nudity, for example, is abundantly present in the Surrealists’ images of subjugation, something impermissible within *Idilio*’s sublimated sexual code. Distortions of the female body in the form of fragmentation, which we see in the Surrealist images of detached or multiplied legs and breasts, confine themselves to amusing condensations in Stern’s work, as when, for example, a head with flowing hair is mounted on a paintbrush handle, or when a distraught woman appears with elephant’s legs (“Dreams about Contrasts”).⁵⁷ Overwhelmingly, Stern’s dreamers are depicted whole, and their dreams are correspondingly polite. The relative absence of bodily fragmentation is joined by a strikingly



Stern. “Dreams about Contrasts.” *Idilio* 85, July 4, 1950.

57. There is only one exception to this rule: In Stern’s “Dreams about the Body,” *Idilio* 1, no. 5 (November 23, 1948), the lower half of a woman’s modestly skirted body walks down a long road. The image occurs early in the series and the disturbing scene of amputation is never repeated.

unified *mise-en-scène*. Stern has correctly identified a perspectively accurate setting as essential to recreating the hallucinatory visual effects of dreams, in imitation of the spatial negotiation of internal and external realities that Surrealism so hotly pursued.

The best of Surrealist imagery attempts to pry open a gap in our quotidian and rupture the seamless experience of functional life with the shock of events beyond our control. Indeed, evoking the everyday was always the necessary foil to articulating the violence of unconscious processes. But the Surrealist everyday was never depicted as quite so ordinary as yours or mine or that of the Argentinian bourgeoisie at mid-century. Surrealist sites, regardless of the realism with which they are depicted, are most often as extraordinary as the figures that populate them: obsolescent (as in Breton's ancient wall) and incongruous (Shigeru Imai's sea washing the cobblestones; Éluard's dark daylight sky). Even Hugnet's scene of imprisonment, framed by the relative calm of a misty grove, insists on whatever mystery a foggy shroud can still muster.⁵⁸

Hugnet's image is instructive here, for it articulates the difference between French Surrealism's priorities in the 1930s, particularly with regard to mass media, and the displacement of those priorities as the movement spread across other cultures in the postwar period. His photomontage from *The Seventh Face of the Dice* is distinguished by two collage elements apparently clipped from a set of engravings of sea life.⁵⁹ One of these strangely formless figures (they are both identifiable as corals in their original context), appears as a trunk-like vertical *repoussoir*, another as the torso of a composite figure to the right of the nude, opening holes in the seamless illusion constructed within the photographic space, where they stubbornly resist synthesis into the dreamscape, effectively pointing, through sheer inscrutability, to the ultimate unknowability of the unconscious as formulated in Freudian theory. This affirmation of endless interpretation is strengthened by the poetic text that accompanied the Surrealist image in its original published form, a disjointed juxtaposition of short passages lifted directly from mass-media publications. By cutting and pasting separate phrases, Hugnet preserved the original typefaces in all their variety, twisting poesis from the functional language of publicity. Slicing directly into the discursive field, Hugnet emphasizes the materiality of Surrealist visual language even as he does violence to the apparently seamless wash of information in the public press, generating a poem that, in expressing latent meaning, effects a critical analysis of mass media's hidden strategies of persuasion. The formal relation of text to image strengthens the critique of advertising as it mimics the typical relation of sparse, cleverly disposed text to a dominant, striking image, even to the extent that the last word of the poem takes the scale and feminine typeface of a brand name. Yet contra advertisement, the Surrealist work foregrounds gaps in rational discourse that force the viewer to interpret—absences

58. On this page of the *The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*, the Styrsky is the only exception. But possibly blankness is the most frightening backdrop of all, abandoning the figure to a contextual void.

59. Georges Hugnet, *La septième face du dé* (Paris: Éditions Jean Bucher, 1936), n.p.



Georges Hugnet. The Seventh Face of the Dice, no. 7, 1936.

© ARS, New York/ADAGP, Paris.

that signaled irruptions of unconscious desire.⁶⁰ Poem and image present these gaps in turn, each opening the other to multiple interpretations.

By contrast, the relation of text to photomontage in “Psychoanalysis Can Help You” is synthetic and affirmative of mass media’s reductive, consumption-forward structures. Each image supports and illustrates the accompanying text in the advice column to the extent that Richard Rest’s analysis appears to be directed toward the image itself, rather than the image generated from the analysis, as was the case. Indeed, the *Sueños* photomontages can be identified as such at two levels: internally, in reference to the combination-printed images themselves, painstaking-

60. The goal of a *poesis* imposed against the functionalist language of mass media had been in place in avant-garde circles since Shklovskii theorized *ostrananie*, or “making strange.” See Yve-Alain Bois, “Thermometers Should Last Forever,” *October* 111 (Winter 2005), p. 66.

ingly composed to preserve illusionistic space; and in these images' reciprocity with the text that accompanied them, itself a collaboration between two writers. In all cases, the marks of difference have been effaced. Just as Stern's photomontage style enervates the anti-aesthetic shock of avant-garde production, Richard Rest, the phantom patriarch, stabilizes and demystifies the absurd juxtapositions of the dream image, offering a pseudo-prescription that promises not only to banish such imagery from the sleep of the dreamer but to ultimately restore the dreamer herself to a fully functional place in society. Likewise, Stern's benign photomontages, in their tidy, entertaining illusionism, communicate an even-tempered calm in spite of the disturbing scenarios they describe, echoing Rest's reassuring analytic tone. Her figures' moderately exaggerated gestures encourage readers to laugh away their anxious dreams once they have been recast as useful information. The text/image dyad posits the unconscious as knowable (by the male analyst) and communicable (to the hapless women), stripping away the inscrutability that was psychoanalysis's greatest argument against unified humanist subjectivity and disabling any possibility of a critical praxis that might rise from the revolutionary effects of desire. What the *Sueños* photomontages evoke is the dream with its teeth removed—the unconscious disciplined and administered. Adorno may have said of Surrealist imagery “no one dreams that way,” but he also said, in the same breath: “Reducing surrealism to psychological dream theory subjects it to the ignominy of something official.”⁶¹

The *Sueños* present the nadir of this dubious achievement, for they are neither the pictorial analogy of the author's dreams nor a fantasy of imagined desire, but the dreams of real women, solicited, sorted, tabulated, and even imaged forth for their subjects, with all of the authoritative condescension of the bureaucratic archive. And after all, the fragments synthesized in Stern's psychophotographs are stock images of a sort as well: Stern harvested them from the women, objects, and photographs that surrounded her (her daughter, housekeeper, friends, home, and even her ex-husband's photographic archive), as opposed to the personal objects, spaces, and acquaintances of the dreamer's own realm of experience.⁶² Because the reader is never privy to the dream narrative submitted by the analyst, the *Sueños* repeat Richard Rest's authoritative gesture, displacing the original dream narrative and instead establishing Stern's imagery as a memory substitute. In the case of psychophotography, the effect has dire implications for self-knowledge, for the project taps photographic verism (as a signifier of “the real”) in order to persuade the reader of the nature and meaning of her dream. What will be recalled is not the dream itself but this replacement image, tidied into legibility, labeled, disseminated, and ready to be stored away as useful infor-

61. Theodor Adorno, “Looking Back on Surrealism,” in *Notes to Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 87, 86.

62. Paula Bertúa has tracked Stern's constructions and appropriations in *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*, pp. 108–19.

mation. Chaos and doubt are expunged, and, along with them, the promise of heteroglossia held out by avant-garde photomontage.

Stern's photomontages offer, then, a literalization of Surrealism's own aims, but with results radically different from those of Surrealist montage and collage: not a composite of multiple and conflicting points of view but a collaborative synthesis without conflict, standardized for general consumption—indeed, a version of the unconscious so mediated that it withdraws the primary material (unpresentable in its irrationality) from public consideration. The falsely unifying tone that results, delivered as a mere token of self-knowledge, is both symptom and affirmation of a form of general address necessary to advertising's desire to reach the widest possible audience. Here, in this new arm of the emerging service society, a standardized, pop psychoanalysis began to crystallize, calculated to survey female anxiety as effectively as the nineteenth-century invention of hysteria. Its refinement in mid-twentieth-century discourse was that it was no longer confined to the institutionalized elite, but widely disseminated in the public sphere as “self-help.”

If this kind of expansion was the natural extension of capitalist marketing into the sciences, then the *Sueños* at the very least illustrate the radical difference between the Surrealist and Bauhaus relations to mass media and advertisement in the interwar period. If by 1948 applied psychoanalysis could join Surrealist style in the *Sueños* to form a marketable version of the avant-garde imaginary, it must be said that the Bauhaus absorption of avant-garde forms into the applied arts had laid the ground for this operation. And while the Bauhaus embrace of design for advertising was years behind her, Stern's dismissive attitude toward Surrealism's achievements—pronounced enough that the *Sueños* can be understood as a mockery of the movement—would have been affirmed by a number of events converging in the late '40s; circumstances that simultaneously reintroduced Surrealism to the intellectual and popular imagination and consigned its best efforts to oblivion, rendering the movement's strategies available to be mined for sensational effect.

Two of these events date to the exact year of the first *Idilio* commission, 1948. First, Maurice Nadeau's *History of Surrealism* appeared, published by the Buenos Aires press Santiago Rueda in its first Spanish translation.⁶³ The volume contained only three illustrations: two anonymous line drawings and a reproduction of the cover of *Littérature 7 (nouvelle série)* (1922), and gave scant attention to the interpretation of dreams, but, coming on the heels of Surrealism's denouncement by Madí, it would have brought the movement to Stern's attention, even as it symbolically relegated Surrealism to the past. Within a year, Julio Cortázar, a supporter, would review the book and declare the Surrealist movement a “living corpse.”⁶⁴ The second telling event of 1948 would have hit closer to home for Stern, coming as it did from her own intellectual circle. Enrique

63. Maurice Nadeau, *Historia del Surrealismo* (Buenos Aires: Santiago Rueda, 1948).

64. Julio Cortázar, “Un cadáver viviente” (1949), in *Obra crítica 2* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1994), pp. 178–80.

Pichon-Rivière, in collaboration with Elías Piterbarg and Aldo Pellegrini (whose journal *Que* had supported Surrealism in the 1920s), launched the journal *Ciclo*, whose first volume was dedicated to open disavowal of the Surrealist movement in favor of geometric abstraction. The central essay, by Piterbarg, chronicles an interview with Breton in which he finds the Surrealist unable to accept responsibility for his now-“mythic” status and casts Surrealism itself as “painfully impotent” in comparison to socialism and existentialism.⁶⁵

But disempowering Surrealism, while necessary for Stern’s appropriation of the movement as a bankrupt style, was not sufficient to guarantee popular appeal—looking to literary precedents would not have helped Stern locate photomontage as the ideal vehicle for a popular reception of dream imagery. For this task, she would be seeking not a poetic, elitist source but one with proven wide appeal. Given the roots of the *fotonovela* and its sustained attention to movie gossip and publicity, cinema would suggest itself, and Stern did not have to look far for a source: Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Spellbound*, for which Salvador Dalí had designed a much-publicized dream sequence and which had been distributed in Buenos Aires in 1945.⁶⁶ Here, in Hollywood cinema, Stern would have (consciously or unconsciously) found ample photographic precedent for disturbing dreamscapes made appealing through romantic connotations.

Spellbound’s love story places psychoanalysis at its center, as a beautiful analyst struggles to “unlock her client/lover’s traumatically repressed memory of murder through a number of techniques, among them dream analysis.” Poster advertisements for the film, which emphasized the drama of the love affair (“Will he kiss me or kill me?”), hint at the proximity of cinema and *fotonovela* form, and they testify to the extent to which montage juxtaposition was already a well-rehearsed strategy for popular communication and a signifier of the commercial performative: Do something. Buy something. Say something. *Spellbound*’s Argentine title, *Cuéntame tu vida* (Tell me about yourself), plays nicely on the intimacy of the analyst/analysand relationship and that relationship’s proximity to desire—the doubled roles of the couple in the film—and would have helped to naturalize the appearance of the feature “Psychoanalysis Can Help You” in the *fotonovela* program. Likewise, given audience familiarity with cinematic montage (a phenomenon recognized and exploited by the narrative photographic form of the *fotonovela*), it is easy to see how Dalí’s dreamscape, easily the most notorious aspect of the film, could have provided a springboard for Stern’s decision to draw on Surrealist illusionism for *Idilio*’s own dream imagery.

In fact, a number of Stern’s *Sueños* seem to pay direct homage to the unusual dream motifs in *Spellbound*: the playing card in “Dreams about Ambition”; the cur-

65. Elías Piterbarg, “Surrealismo y surrealistas en 1948,” *Ciclo: Arte, literatura, pensamiento* 1, no. 1 (November–December 1948), pp. 65–73.

66. Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible*, pp. 17–18. The producer of *Spellbound*, David O. Selznick, had contracted with Dalí for his “publicity value” alone; the flamboyant artist had appeared in *Life* magazine six times in 1943. See Sara Cochran, “*Spellbound*, 1944,” in *Dalí and Film*, ed. Matthew Gale (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), pp. 174–75.

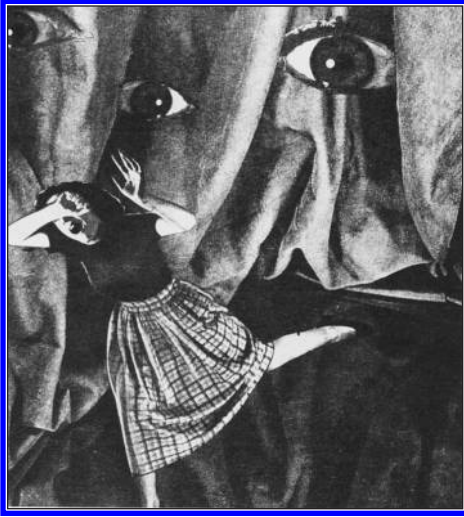
tain of eyes in “Dreams about Persecution”; and the terrifying blank-faced man in “Dreams about Transpositions.” By including them, Stern’s *psicofotografía* images subtly referenced motifs familiar to her readers, opening a conduit for acknowledging the centrality of an inner, unknown “other” through psychoanalysis. But just as *Spellbound*’s story line sacrificed accuracy (of psychoanalytic method, its subjects, objects, and ethics) to the love story at its center, the *Sueños* effectively subordinated strategies of disruption by transforming them into empty forms of entertainment, accelerating the rise of pop psychology as a debased form of Freudian psychoanalysis.⁶⁷ Witty and light, the *Sueños* reduce their dreamers to a single generic subject: the subject of advertising and consumption.

Stern’s two fellow expats Germani and Butelman helped along this scenario of degradation. Any independent feminist gestures Stern might have gen-

67. Nancy Berthier, “Quand Hitchcock rencontre Dalí: *Spellbound* (La maison du docteur Edwardes, 1945),” *Savoirs et clinique* 12, no. 1 (2010), pp. 115–24.



Left: Stern.
“Dreams about Ambition.”
Idilio 85, July 4, 1950.
Right: Alfred Hitchcock.
Spellbound. 1945.



Left: Stern.
 "Dreams about Persecution."
 Idilio 46, October 4, 1949.
 Right: Alfred Hitchcock.
 Spellbound. 1945.



PSICOANALISIS LE AYUDARA

¿Quieres saber, pronto y con exactitud, de qué manera se proyecta tu vida futura? ¿Quieres saber, pronto y con exactitud, de qué manera se proyecta tu vida futura? ¿Quieres saber, pronto y con exactitud, de qué manera se proyecta tu vida futura?

EN LA PAGINA DE LE CONTESTAMOS, LECTORA AMIGA

LOS SUEÑOS DE TRASPOSICIONES de diez características, que el alma, si se analiza en su propia esencia, no puede ser analizada ni entendida a través de la ciencia. Los sueños de trasposiciones son aquellos que se proyectan en el mundo de los sueños, pero que en la vida real no tienen lugar. Los sueños de trasposiciones son aquellos que se proyectan en el mundo de los sueños, pero que en la vida real no tienen lugar.

Fantasmas

En la página de los contestamos, lectora amiga, se habla de un ser que vive en el mundo de los sueños, pero que en la vida real no tiene lugar. Este ser es el fantasma, que vive en el mundo de los sueños, pero que en la vida real no tiene lugar.



Left: Stern.
 "Dreams about Transpositions."
 Idilio 64, February 7, 1950.
 Right: Alfred Hitchcock.
 Spellbound. 1945.

erated in the photomontages are ultimately undercut by Richard Rest's control of the dream's analysis and depiction: the decision not to publish the letters themselves, but rather to allow the pseudo-analyst to speak for the female dreamers who had written for help, combined with the analyses themselves, which were necessarily literal and reductive and produced a one-size-fits-all response closer to fortune-telling than revelation. Every wedding dress signifies optimism; every door, opportunity. Mirrors always speak to self-regard, while blank faces reveal a loss of personality.⁶⁸ The schemata are especially striking when the series is considered as a whole, and its formulaic repetitions take on a didactic quality: the reductive drone of mansplaining. The possibility of constructing a progressive, critical subject lies not in the iconography of the images but in the archive itself as a collation of the various perspectives of women at the time, made public and widely disseminated here. By treating their work for *Idilio* as a somewhat embarrassing commercial scheme, Butelman and Germani wasted an extraordinary opportunity to intervene in the writing of women's history by moving it away from patriarchal priorities and toward a complex set of unconscious affects.

Stern's photomontages, in their placid rendering of absurd and even frightening narrative scenes, affirm this patriarchal authority, presenting spaces pleasantly familiar in their congruence with the visible world and oddly reassuring in their taming of the chaotic dreamscape. Themes and iconography of the various dreams are rendered repetitive, each featuring a stock Everywoman dropped into a threatening scenario. All of the components of "Psychoanalysis Can Help You" synthesize in the name of sobriety, as against avant-garde spontaneity, intoxication, and fragmentation. Peterhans's tabular structure, so dependent on the rationalization of the visual field, emerges here to support administrative priorities, as Surrealism's much-sought-after breakdown between public and private is presented as the normalization of surveillance: public fictions displacing private revelations.

*From the Bauhaus to the Counting House,
or Monetizing the Unthought*

It should come as no surprise to today's reader that in the late 1940s the logic of mnemonic classification, that is, the logic of the archive, would insinuate itself into the organization of the unconscious as a mechanism for the mastery of information and the capitalization of memory.⁶⁹ What emerges as new in Stern's case are the very public terms by which certain avant-garde practices were dragged

68. The Richard Rest interpretations have been published as *Los Sueños: Gino Germani en la revista Idilio con fotomontajes de Grete Stern*, ed. Syd Krochmalny and Marina Miariasch (Buenos Aires: Caja Negra, 2017).

69. Given Freud's model of the mind, the archive, as a form of "artificial memory," can be understood as itself based on the atomized structures of the unconscious. The difference is that the Freudian psyche was theorized as essentially gnomic in the plethora of interpretations it offered, whereas the models rising at mid-century were able to offer mechanisms for mastery of information. See Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 30 and 137.

along with it. I have in mind those movements and means that, historically, sought to revolutionize the very concept of reality—Surrealism’s propulsion of unconscious effects into everyday experience, of course, but also the Bauhaus ideals of democratic access to modern principles of design.⁷⁰ Analysis of the *Sueños* images in the context of their original reception reveals a product fetishism reaching well beyond the Bauhaus’s consumer modernity to monetize the psyche itself. Similarly, in spite of their pictorial irrationality, the *Sueños* images were an integral part of a program that strayed far from Surrealism’s commitment to the ludic, poetic, and traumatic implications of Freudian tenets. Rather, the *Sueños* series offered, in direct contrast to Surrealism’s highly individualized artistic productions, schematic and rationalized explanations for unconscious phenomena, and in doing so effectively instrumentalized dreams as a form of pseudo-self-knowledge. While the very existence of the commission attests to the rising presence of psychoanalysis in postwar Buenos Aires culture, it offers simultaneous evidence of how much the support for that rise depended on mass-media conduits into the popular imagination—a shift away from the Bauhaus emphasis on material industrialization toward a form of consumer domination effected by a newly expanded discursive public sphere.⁷¹ Stern’s background in advertising, supported by her association with Bauhaus principles that affirmed a fluidity between art and commerce uncomplicated by concerns about reification, constituted signal components of this new, postindustrial ethos and would contribute to the rapidity with which the psychoanalytic method—formerly a site of critical engagement for the avant-garde—was assimilated and disabled by the culture industry in Buenos Aires. Ultimately, Stern’s commitment to the combination of legibility and visual sensationalism central to advertising would undercut the multiple and conflicting points of view associated with avant-garde photomontage form, delivering it instead as technical shorthand for the administration of the unconscious.⁷²

The wave of pop psychoanalysis that would shortly wash over Argentina could only have been possible with the aid of advanced structures of bureaucratic efficiency—the archive and the database—that facilitated standardization and interchangeability, consigning subjectivity to quantifiable units in service of the rising, if spurious, cult of the self. Archive form, then, joins pictorial and textual composites as a third, overarching category of montage determining Stern’s work for

70. Stern herself characterized photomontage as “play with photographs” and linked the technique to Dada, Surrealism, and advertising in her “Notes on Photomontage” (1967), p. 242.

71. Buenos Aires saw a boom in psychoanalysis in the 1960s, but there is ample evidence that it was established in the popular imagination before it was embraced by the literary elite. See Plotkin, “Tell Me Your Dreams,” p. 603. By this account, Stern was not so much raising consciousness with the *Sueños* photomontages as responding to an already primed public.

72. Freud’s project itself could be characterized as such an archive, but crucially, one that is seeded with the kernel of its own destruction. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Idillio, and given that standardization is its central strategy for administration, it can be considered the model for the text-image relation as well as the internal structure of the photomontages themselves. Photomontage form, which in the interwar years followed the dynamic principles of visual estrangement in order to bring out the greatest heterogeneity, here resurfaces as the very language of administration. In this quantitative arrangement, production is rendered obscure in order to ease consumption: Data transmission takes priority over dynamic interpretation, subordinating the dream image to a bureaucratically structured classification system that affirms the very power structures the interwar avant-garde railed against. Delivered with sensational wit, Stern's pictorial administration of the unconscious anticipates the bureaucratization of everyday life characteristic of postindustrial culture, marking out the terrain with which photomontage strategies would have to grapple in the immediate postwar period and beyond.



Lucia Moholy. Hands Peeling Potatoes. C. 1930.

Lucia Moholy's
Idle Hands*

JORDAN TROELLER

*I want to let you in on something:
I am actually not a photographer.*

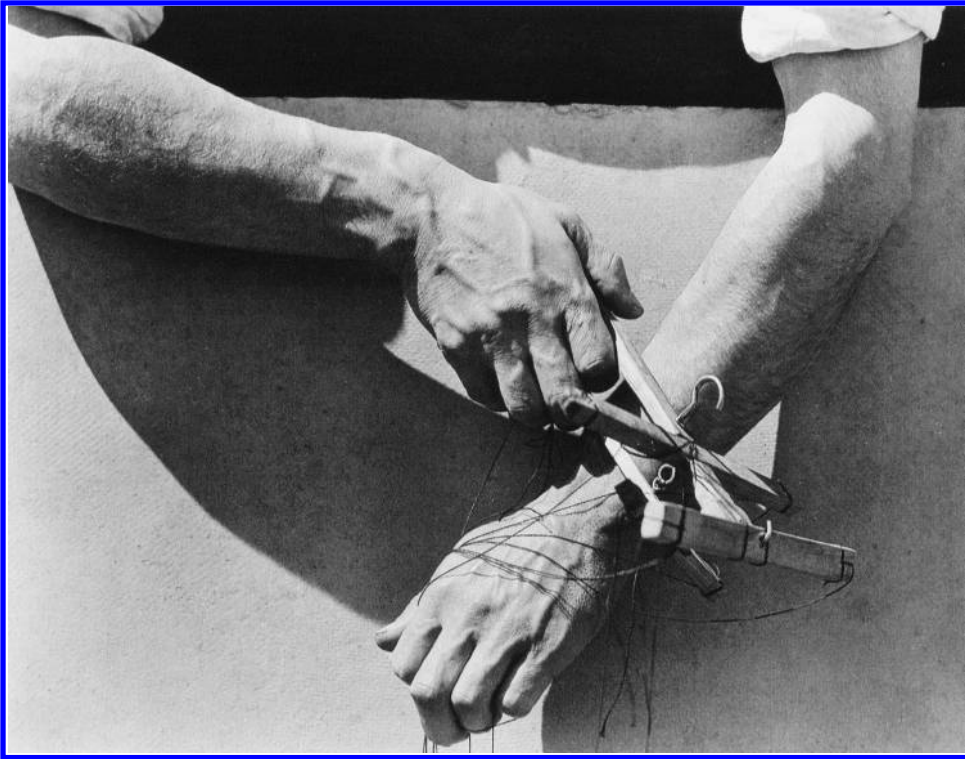
—Lucia Moholy¹

A photograph taken by Lucia Moholy, sometime around 1930, depicts two hands poised over a wooden bowl. One holds a potato, while the other wields a small knife from which a ribbon of peel unfurls into the sitter's lap. The peel bends toward us, its surface dissolving into a gray haze as it passes through the shallow plane of focus. That arc gestures to Moholy's single-minded gaze, her foregrounding of certain, seemingly unimportant details, while allowing others to fade into a blur or be cut off entirely, with the camera's aperture opened up to its full diameter. Minuscule furrows in the skin become monumental, like cracks in a desert floor. We can even make out the ridges of the thumb pad pressing against the knife, ridges that would index the sitter's identity if we knew who this was—which we do not, Moholy having cropped off the body at the neck and knees and left much of what remains in harsh shadows. Even the edge of the bowl curves in and out of clarity. As if a purposefully careless image, fixed by what would seem to be an untrained hand, the photograph purports to offer us an “artless” scene, a visual counterpart to Moholy's own curious disavowal of the medium cited above.

One question that this essay poses is whether the photograph—and others like it, in which Moholy portrays hands stilled in acts of domesticity—is an image of labor. And by that I do not mean whether the potato-peeling counts as labor

* This essay benefited from Maria Gough's encouraging comments, as well as the assistance of Barbara Günther and Silke Mehrwald at the Archiv der deutschen Frauenbewegung in Kassel, Germany, who facilitated the discovery of previously unknown photographs by Lucia Moholy. I am also grateful to Laura Frahm, Rolf Sachsse, Robin Schuldenfrei, Trevor Stark, and, above all, Susan Laxton for feedback on various drafts. An earlier version was presented at the Whitney Independent Study Program in March 2019, and I thank the participants, as well as Ron Clark, for the opportunity to discuss these ideas with them.

1. Lucia Moholy, unpublished interview with Rolf Sachsse, June 18, 1982 (all translations are mine unless otherwise noted). My thanks to Rolf Sachsse for kindly making available material from his personal archive.



Tina Modotti. Hands of the Puppeteer. 1929.

(we all know it does), but rather whether Lucia Moholy's own labor, as the author of this image, does. For despite taking on an *image* of labor, the photograph's formal properties mark it as structurally different from those photographs of the industrializing 1920s that we immediately recognize as depicting work, images that isolate and augment the laboring body as productive: August Sander's bricklayer confronting the camera comes to mind, whose hand authoritatively stabilizes the weight on his shoulders, but so does Tina Modotti's *Hands of the Puppeteer*, in which the tools of the artist, rather than wooden bowl and paring knife, signify a heroic (and masculinized) street performer in contrast to Moholy's apron-clad homemaker. Modotti took this photograph in 1929, while still in Mexico and active in the country's radical agrarian movement, a year prior to her arrival in Berlin. Moholy, who was also living in Berlin, may have learned of it in a small exhibition that was organized by fellow photographer Lotte Jacobi.² In an era of the worker-photographer, who analogized photographic labor to wage labor and declared the camera

2. On the exhibition, see Margaret Hooks, *Tina Modotti: Photographer and Revolutionary* (London: Pandora, 1993), p. 214. Modotti resided in Berlin between April and October 1930. A client of Lucia Moholy's colleague Umbo (Otto Umbehr) at Johannes Itten's school in Berlin was Egon Erwin Kisch, who had seen the show organized by Jacobi and written positively about it.

a “tool,” Moholy’s anonymous subject, sitting and preparing food, appears domesticated in comparison, the feminized Other to Modotti’s working artist.³

If *Hands Peeling Potatoes* departs from more familiar representations of labor in the interwar period, it also stands out within Moholy’s own oeuvre. Comprising a vast body of work, her career as a photographer is all too often reduced to those iconic views of Bauhaus architecture and its design objects, which she took as the school’s official photographer in all but name. This was a role that Moholy voluntarily stepped into between April 1923, when she arrived at the school in Weimar as the wife of László Moholy-Nagy, and April 1928, when the couple left and moved back to Berlin. During these five years, which were primarily spent in Dessau, Moholy produced the corpus of photographs that now overwhelmingly defines her seven-decade-long career, a career that spanned journalism, architectural photography, portraiture, art history, print-based reproductive technology, and library science. The some 560 negatives taken at the Bauhaus transformed the school and its accomplishments into a media phenomenon during its existence but also afterward, as they circulated in journals and newspapers, as well as the books authored by Bauhaus faculty members—publications that also established these authors’ individual reputations.⁴ Moholy was not paid for this labor nor given a title; in fact, many of these images, when attributed at all, were subsequently *mis*attributed to her husband.⁵ Hers was a kind of labor, not unlike that of housework, that was real but negated in its recognition—rendered as idle, in the sense of nonproductive, and thus unremunerated.⁶ This was the case because such labor was expected of her as one of the *Meisterfrauen*, to use her term, “those wives

3. Tina Modotti, “On Photography” (1929), cited in Hooks, *Tina Modotti*, p. 193. Compare Modotti’s text with Moholy’s exposé for a manuscript, “Der Amateur bei sich zuhause,” in which she implores readers of all social classes, whether they live in “bourgeois” or “proletarian” homes (but especially “housewives”), to take up a photography of everyday life—a claim, *avant la lettre*, for the personal as political: see Sachsse’s short introduction to the text and the facsimile in *Manifeste! Eine andere Geschichte der Fotografie*, ed. Franziska Maria Scheuer (Göttingen: Steidl, 2014), p. 391; pp. 208–09. (Thanks to Steffen Siegel for locating this for me.)

4. Robin Schuldenfrei, “Images in Exile,” *History of Photography* 37, no. 2 (May 2013), p. 186. My argument builds on Schuldenfrei’s insight into (mis)perceptions of Moholy’s authorship by Walter Gropius and others who later used her Bauhaus negatives without her permission, even withholding the negatives for decades, despite repeated requests on her part that they be returned.

5. This is compounded by the fact that Moholy-Nagy’s name is often abbreviated to “Moholy” in the literature, thus making it challenging even linguistically to reassert his wife’s presence. In what follows, I use their full last names to refer to each respectively (i.e., “Moholy” for her and “Moholy-Nagy” for him). On how Moholy was cast as the passive, supportive wife in contrast to her active, productive husband, see Anja Baumhoff, “Zwischen Kunst und Technik: Lucia Moholy und die Entwicklung der modernen Produktfotografie,” in *Klassik und Avantgarde: Das Bauhaus in Weimar, 1919–1925*, ed. Hellmut Th. Seemann and Thorsten Valk (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), p. 170. See also Mercedes Valdivieso, “Eine ‘symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft’: Lucia and László Moholy-Nagy,” in *Liebe Macht Kunst: Künstlerpaare im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Renate Berger (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 65–85.

6. I use the term “housework” as theorized by Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Selma James, in the 1970s, as a qualitatively different kind of labor under capitalism than wage labor, one that is to be continually “transformed into a natural attribute rather than to be recognized as a social contract,” thus “reinforcing the common assumption that *housework is not work*.” Silvia Federici, “Wages Against Housework” (1975), in *Wages for Housework: The New York Committee 1972–1977, History, Theory, Documents*, ed. Silvia Federici and Arlen Austen (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2018), p. 203 (emphasis in original).

of the Bauhaus masters, who had no official status and yet crucially participated in the history and reception of the Bauhaus” through “critique, engagement, ambition, and independent work.”⁷

Attesting to that “independent work,” *Hands Peeling Potatoes* was taken not at the Bauhaus but 220 kilometers south of Dessau, as part of a very different kind of pedagogical experiment. Named after the abandoned farm that it acquired in 1923, Schwarze Erde (“black earth”), or Schwarzerden, as it is better known, was a school by and for women as well as a self-sustaining agricultural commune whose members daily practiced what sociability might look like outside of both patriarchy and industrial capitalism. A remarkable, though little-known, episode in the German women’s movement, the commune was established by the poet Marie Buchhold and the pedagogue Elisabeth Vogler. Both were highly critical of the capitalist economy as leading to “a one-dimensional, unequal division of production” whose consequences were “in favor of accumulation at the exhaustion of the worker . . . the disempowerment of millions for the benefit of a few.”⁸ As if this were not enough to raise eyebrows, coming as it did from a rural corner of the Rhön Mountains populated mostly by Catholic farming families, Schwarzerden extended its critique beyond one of class to one of gender, arguing that capitalism wrought particular damage on women. Not only did the bourgeois institution of marriage limit opportunities for women in the workplace and exploit the unpaid domestic labor that they performed in the home, the founders argued, it also led “only too easily” to the exclusion of women from their larger community and from these essential social bonds as “the fertile wellspring of resistance.”⁹

Moholy visited Schwarzerden on several occasions between 1922 and 1930, a period that coincided with her Bauhaus affiliation. She took dozens of photographs on her visits, often with the large-format wooden camera that she used in Weimar and Dessau, which she valued for its capacity to render detail.¹⁰ And like her activity at the Bauhaus, this engagement blurred the line between work and leisure; she had made friends with Buchhold, Vogler, and Tilla Winz, another leading member, long before she arrived in Dessau and seemed to have donated her skills as a photographer to the commune. Many of her photographs appeared in its publicity materials, devising—as at the Bauhaus—a visual language for a pedagogically motivated social movement that, in this case, rejected marriage, motherhood, and traditional forms of female wage labor. Other photographs taken at Schwarzerden, though, are clearly personal documents, intimate portraits of a

7. Lucia Moholy, “Zur Zeit als ich mein Elternhaus verließ . . .” (Zurich, after 1974), pp. 16–17, Lucia Moholy Papers, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

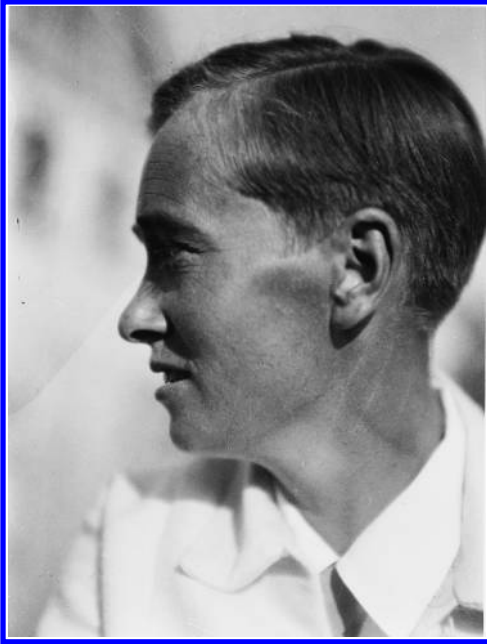
8. Marie Buchhold, “Sommerkurs I, July 1925,” cited in Ortrud Wörner-Heil, *Vor der Utopie zur Sozialreform: Jugendsiedlung Frankenfeld im Hessischen Ried und Frauensiedlung Schwarze Erde in der Rhön 1915 bis 1933* (Darmstadt: Hessische Historische Kommission Darmstadt, 1996), p. 458. Marta Neumayer is sometimes referred to as a third founding member, although Wörner-Heil argues that the roles played by Buchhold and Vogler, given their close relationship, were more substantial.

9. Marie Buchhold, “Die ländliche Wirtschaftsgemeinde” (1925), cited in Wörner-Heil, *Vor der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 461.

10. Lucia Moholy, “The Missing Negatives,” *British Journal of Photography* (January 7, 1983), p. 6.



*Page from an album in the Schwarzerden Papers,
Archiv der deutschen Frauenbewegung, Kassel,
with photographs by Lucia Moholy.*



Top: Moholy.
Portrait of Tilla Winz. 1927.

Bottom: Moholy.
Portrait of Florence Henri (in Profile). 1927.

tightly knit community of women that bear striking similarities to her portraits at the Bauhaus. Later circulating as gifts among the women and filling the pages of personal photo albums, these photographs not only attest to a neglected chapter in the history of German feminism, they gesture to a form of radical politics held together by intimacy between women and non-normative forms of family, one that posed a powerful alternative to the sociability on offer in Dessau.¹¹

What follows focuses on the photographs that Moholy took at Schwarzerden, considering what the commune was and what it became through her lens. I propose that her capacity to lend Schwarzerden a viable representational idiom derived from her experience of marginalization at the Bauhaus, and that we should see these photographs as the revalorization of a kind of feminized photographic labor that was systematically negated at the Bauhaus, and, as such, as an oblique commentary on the gendered nature of avant-garde discourse in the 1920s. Many, including Moholy herself, undervalued her work, dismissing it in rela-

11. These albums are located in the papers of Schule Schwarzerden at the Archiv der deutschen Frauenbewegung in Kassel, Germany (hereafter “AddF, Kassel”). As Susan Laxton pointed out to me, it may be that this alternative sociability was closer to that of the early Bauhaus under Johannes Itten; see Elizabeth Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), pp. 26–32.

tion to the supposedly more “artistic” output of her male colleagues. This happened first in relation to her husband’s photograms—which originated on one of their early trips to the Rhön Mountains—and then later in relation to the cult of authorship more broadly at Gropius’s Bauhaus. Coded as “reproductive,” in distinction to the “productive” work of her male colleagues, Moholy’s photography was not maliciously ignored so much as it was naturalized as a labor of love on the part of a devoted wife, whose status as an artist was never seriously considered.

Where I depart from previous feminist readings of Moholy’s work at the Bauhaus is to argue that this naturalization only partly had to do with gender; a more encompassing explanation requires looking at the terms of production/reproduction in which it unfolded—terms articulated by Moholy-Nagy, above all, but also, perversely, by Moholy herself, as it was she who composed the Hungarian artist’s texts during this period (having a better grasp of the German language than he did and having trained professionally as an editor and translator). Understanding the language in which that rejection was articulated illuminates how recalcitrant notions of photographic transparency persisted, paradoxically, within the rhetoric of radicalized vision. Contending with the character of labor on both sides of Moholy’s camera, in other words, requires grappling with the contradictions of originality at the heart of New Vision photography.¹²

“Vogler, Biology, Loheland”

On August 10, 1922, László Moholy-Nagy wrote to Theo van Doesburg from the small village of Weyhers in the Rhön Mountains, where he and Lucia Moholy were spending the summer. Trying to lure the Dutch artist, then living in Weimar, to come out for a visit, he describes their humble accommodations:

I’ve asked around what it would cost if you wanted to come here for a while. In the village guesthouses board and lodging for one person costs 150 marks per day. We live with farmers, but they haven’t yet told us what we’re to pay. We hope, of course, that it will be much cheaper. Otherwise a catastrophic bankruptcy awaits us. Of course—if you have serious intentions to come here (the scenery is beautiful) and are satisfied with very simple food (soured milk, salad, cured meats, vegetables,

12. My formulation of these issues owes a debt to Anne Wagner’s exemplary study *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), and particularly her challenge to a one-dimensional biographical recovery of women artists: “I have returned to the familiar ratio, female to male, to make visible its inherent complexity and incompleteness—and above all to show that those qualities are importantly a matter of visual form. When transposed to visual representation, the relationship need not always—did not always—involve subordination and dependency. I think it is high time we learned to think more deeply about the representational purposes and ambitions of work by women, and to assess their place in a cultural dialogue. Only if we do so will we begin to give them their due” (p. 285).

potatoes—though not all at once!)—then maybe we could ask local farmers whether or not you could be housed? The cost would then be half (or a little cheaper).¹³

The letter reminds us of how crucial friendships were to the early-twentieth-century avant-garde: that work got done around the dinner table; that money was a constant worry; that intellectual labor was never far from the necessity to put food on the table and pay the rent. But the statement also testifies to Moholy-Nagy's ambivalence toward a place where he seemed to feel out of his element and clung to his male colleagues: "The farmers, though," he wrote smugly, "are real sticks-in-the-mud. So please write to me in this respect. I'm curious whether Lissitzky is already in Weimar? A trip with him and Röhl and Graeff—even in the case of only a short stay—would be very nice. Please think about it."¹⁴

At the time of this letter, the couple had been married for a year and a half. They had met in Berlin in April or May 1920 and shortly thereafter began sharing an apartment before marrying on her twenty-seventh birthday on January 18, 1921. She then took on his last name and he acquired her Czech citizenship, which he needed to remain in Germany. While the Prague-born Lucia Schulz had been in Germany since 1914, working as an editor and journalist, Moholy-Nagy was a new arrival from Hungary, where he had participated in the short-lived Soviet Republic. His situation, unlike hers, was precarious. Trying to make his way as a painter and doing side work as the Berlin correspondent for the avant-garde Hungarian journal *MA*, Moholy-Nagy brought in little money; his first show at Herwarth Walden's gallery in Berlin sold few works. It was her salary that sustained the couple in these early years.¹⁵ Eager to escape "all the business" of Berlin, as Moholy-Nagy described his artistic engagements, but needing to find an alternative to the pricey seaside, the couple found respite in Weyhers in the Rhön because it was affordable—even if, in Moholy-Nagy's mind, terribly provincial.¹⁶

Whereas he complained of intellectual boredom, she saw things differently. The visits to the Rhön, which the couple took regularly throughout the 1920s, were in her mind "self-evident," the consequence of shared intellectual interests

13. László Moholy-Nagy to Theo van Doesburg, August 10, 1922; reprinted in Theo van Doesburg, *Grondbegrippen der nieuwe beeldende kunst*, ed. Umberto Barbieri et al. (Nijmegen: Socialist Uitgeverij, 1983), p. 102.

14. *Ibid.*

15. In June 1920, she was hired by the publishing house Rowohlt, where she performed editorial duties as well as oversaw the company's press and public relations; see Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy* (Düsseldorf: Marzona, 1985), p. 9. It is unclear when Moholy stopped working for Rowohlt; Sachsse states here that her duties ended on July 31, 1921. Elsewhere, he reports that she continued working there until 1923, when the couple moved to Weimar; see Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus-Fotografin* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 1995), p. 12.

16. László Moholy-Nagy to Doesburg, July 26, 1924; reprinted in Doesburg, *Grondbegrippen*, p. 107.

and the “fruitful mental labor” that she and he were able to pursue in the “invigorating” climate of the Rhön:

Staying in one of the many little senior cottages with a view of meadows and mountains, where we were allowed to lead a modest summertime existence according to our own wishes, we soon came to know many other people who, in this harsh—at the time, still unfrequented—region had found, or had hoped to find, the rhythm of their lives. Among them was Elisabeth Vogler, already then filled by an enthusiastic will towards new life, which was to be realized a few years later in the founding of the Schule Schwarzerden.¹⁷

Her tone, unlike that of her husband, embraces the community of the rural area, and the women of nearby Schwarzerden above all. That community had been long in the making; it can be traced to friendships that Moholy had cultivated in the German youth movement, in which she was an active participant.¹⁸ In 1918, while working at the Leipzig publisher B. G. Teubner, Moholy met several fellow members with whom she would become lifelong friends, including the activists Friedrich Vorwerk and Paul Vogler, who was Elisabeth Vogler's brother. These contacts brought her to Hamburg in December 1919, where she began working for one of the movement's publishers, Adolf Saal, whose bookstore Moholy later described as “a meeting place” of socially engaged intellectuals.¹⁹ Saal was a central figure within the youth movement, publishing its main journal, the *Freideutsche Jugend*, and directing the eponymous publishing house. It was while working for Saal that Moholy, likely through Paul Vogler, first met Marie Buchhold and Elisabeth Vogler, the two founders of Schwarzerden.²⁰

A pressing concern for all three women at this moment was what Elisabeth Vogler described as the “body-soul problem.”²¹ In an article for *Freideutsche Jugend*, Moholy elaborated the stakes of this “problem” in the terms of the symbolic.²² Defining her use of “symbol” in terms of speech (*Sprache*), visual representation

17. Lucia Moholy's contribution to Karin Oeking, *Elisabeth Vogler* (Gersfeld-Bodenhof: Gymnastikschule Schwarzerden, Rhön, 1977), p. 33.

18. When and how Moholy became involved in the *Jugendbewegung* is not known; for an account of her relationship to the movement and its impact on her intellectual formation, see Oliver Botar, “The Origins of László Moholy-Nagy's Biocentric Constructivism,” in *Signs of Life: Bio Art and Beyond*, ed. Eduardo Kac (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 320–30.

19. Moholy, “Autobiographical Notes”; cited in Botar, “The Origins of László Moholy-Nagy's Biocentric Constructivism,” p. 321. Paul Vogler, then studying economics in Hamburg, turned to medicine out of a desire, Botar writes, to reform what he saw as the capitalist/corporate nature of the medical system. See p. 329 for Moholy's description of Adolf Saal's bookstore.

20. Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 188. Marie Buchhold was then an editor at the *Freideutsche Jugend*.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Lucia Schulz, “Symbol,” *Freideutsche Jugend* 5, no. 10 (October 1919), pp. 406–08.

(*Bilder einer ewigen Welt*), and religious signification (*Wege von Mensch zu Gott*), Moholy describes a new set of conditions for her generation, in which such symbolic relations no longer tie the subject to the external world; the self is inextricably bound to that reality in ways that exceed representation. In Nietzschean language, Moholy describes this encounter with the world as a “sublimation” of “language as symbol. No symbol can any longer bind me with the world that I [now] am. Two become one, and language dies.” Evoking Vogler’s terminology, Moholy explains how this insight reengineers the relation between body and subjectivity: “Body [*Leib*] und soul [*Seele*] arise out of the same foundation [*Wurzel*, literally ‘roots’]; they are one. We no longer know the spiritual content of a corporeal world . . . we are God.”

With its references to an embodied nature, Moholy’s text anticipates the agrarian imagination of what would become Schwarzerden’s feminist politics, a politics rooted in the German youth movement. While Oliver Botar has uncovered the extent of Moholy’s engagement with the *Freideutsche Jugend*, and especially its influence on her husband’s “biocentric pedagogy,” I invoke it here to point to its consequences for an environmentally conscious female communalism in interwar Germany, one that Botar himself suggests in describing Buchhold as “an unrecognized pioneer of eco-feminism.”²³ The movement’s rejection of anthropocentrism and its embrace of a neo-vitalist, ecological view of the world, although varied across practitioners, took a particular form in Buchhold’s writings and in Vogler’s pedagogy, as both occupied themselves with the question of gender equality, particularly within “co-education.”²⁴ For Buchhold, this was an engagement with the role of Eros in the relationship between student and teacher; for Vogler, with new forms of “bodily training [*Körperlehre*]” that departed from both contemporary forms of Expressionist dance, on the one hand, and structured gymnastics, on the other.²⁵ For Moholy, it meant revising categories of signification in terms of the symbolic. For all three, though, how to live communally as women in an economically dire postwar Germany was central and took concrete form in their participation in several experimental communities, including the Marxist colony Barkenhoff near the Bremen Soviet Republic, in which Moholy participated as an undercover informant.²⁶

23. Botar, “The Origins of László Moholy-Nagy’s Biocentric Constructivism,” p. 333.

24. See Buchhold’s article in *Freideutsche Jugend* 5, no. 11 (November 1919), pp. 475–78.

25. Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 349.

26. Heinrich Vogeler, a leading member of Barkenhoff, recalled, “The now wife (and very good photographer) of the abstract painter Moholy-Nagy” and Klara Möller “committed themselves—under the cloak of medical aid—to providing news and information to those workers who had fought in the battles.” Heinrich Vogeler, *Werden: Erinnerungen mit Lebenszeugnissen aus den Jahren 1923–1942*, ed. Joachim Prieue and Paul-Gerhard Wenzloff (Berlin: Rütten and Loening, 1989), p. 277; cited and trans. in Sandra Neugärtner, “Utopias of a New Society: Lucia Moholy, László Moholy-Nagy, and the Loheland and Schwarzerden Women’s Communes,” in *Bauhaus Bodies: Gender, Sexuality, and Body Culture in Modernism’s Legendary Art School*, ed. Elizabeth Otto and Patrick Rössler (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 77 (trans. modified).



Moholy. Portrait of
Elisabeth Vogler,
From Above. 1927.

An autobiographical note in Moholy's papers alludes elliptically to her activities in the Rhön during the summer of 1922: "Vogler, biology, Loheland."²⁷ The three terms abbreviate Moholy's intellectual interests at this moment: Elisabeth Vogler's nascent commune that she was then planning with Buchhold (both of whom were living that summer in the village of Rabensnest near to where László and Lucia were staying); a continued conversation around the social ramifications of a biological worldview, which she was having with Moholy-Nagy; and, lastly, an encounter with Loheland, another intentional community centered on questions of the body, land, and craft, but one, as I argue, of a very different kind than Schwarzerden (although they have often been compared). Moholy's visits to nearby Loheland would have been mediated through Elisabeth Vogler, who had spent six months at the school, studying and teaching theories of the body, in early 1920—just months after she and Moholy had met in Hamburg. Vogler left the school early, however, disagreeing with the founders' anthroposophical approach and later arguing against the exclusive character of such Rudolf Steiner-inflected

27. Lucia Moholy, "Autobiographical Notes," p. 14, Lucia Moholy Papers, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

methods, as she set out a conception of the body that put communalism at the center of a feminist pedagogy.²⁸ Moholy's developing conception of the body and its representation in the terms of symbolism, as the radical lamination of sign with referent, prefigured the photogram experiments that she would "implement" with Moholy-Nagy—an "invention," as her husband would later describe it, that took place in the very same context in which Moholy would later dramatically reject those masculinist terms of production.

The Artist as (Re)producer

If the Rhön was in many ways *her* territory, as the site of proto-feminist elaborations of the German *Jugendbewegung*, it was also where she and Moholy-Nagy began to experiment with the photogram. "I clearly remember how it came about," she recalled, matter-of-factly:

During a stroll in the Rhön Mountains in the summer of 1922, we discussed the problems arising from the antithesis Production versus Reproduction. This gradually led us to implement our conclusions by making photograms, having had no previous knowledge of any such steps taken by Schad, May Ray, and Lissitzky (or others for that matter). . . . The deliberations which formed the basis of our activities were published in *De Stijl* 7/1922 and reprinted in other magazines.²⁹

The publication to which Moholy refers is the essay "Production-Reproduction," a short statement that sets out two opposing terms that would become crucial for the reception of not only his but also her photographs.³⁰ Drawing biological comparisons, the essay proposes a definition of subjectivity as physiological: "Man is most realized when his constituent faculties—the cells as well as the most complicated organs—are developed to their full potential." As a privileged means of shaping those faculties, art constitutes "creative activity [*gestaltende Tätigkeit*]" and, as such, is to be distinguished from "reproductive" activity as the "reiteration of already existing relations." If iteration entrenches old habits, creativity "produces new, so far unknown relations," for it is "above all Production (productive creativity) that serves human development." This definition of "creative activity" is then elaborated with the example of technological means of

28. Neugärtner, "Utopias of a New Society," p. 83; Wörner-Heil, *Vor der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, pp. 191–92.

29. Moholy's own translation of a statement that she originally made in her essay "Das Bauhaus-Bild" (1968), in Lucia Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy: Dokumentarische Ungereimtheiten/Moholy-Nagy, Marginal Notes: Documentary Absurdities* (Krefeld: Scherpe, 1972), p. 59. See the translation of "Das Bauhaus-Bild" in this issue.

30. László Moholy-Nagy, "Production-Reproduction," *De Stijl* 5, no. 7 (July 1922), pp. 97–100. The authorship of this essay is contested, as I discuss. Historically, it has been published as the sole work of Moholy-Nagy, but it is increasingly believed to have been significantly developed, if not co-written, by Lucia Moholy.

reproduction, including photography, which, up until that point, has only been “used for reproductive purposes” but could be “revaluated”—a key term in the argument—“to use the light sensitivity of the silver-bromide plate to capture and fix light-effects (movements in the play of light) produced by our manipulation of mirrors or lenses, etc.”³¹

The photograms that the couple began producing upon their return to Berlin that fall were unique objects; there is no evidence that Moholy-Nagy ever made photograms directly on the silver-bromide plates of which he writes (and which would have allowed him to replicate such images).³² This was certainly the case with the earliest photograms, made on daylight paper, which required only water (rather than an outfitted darkroom) to develop the image, but it also holds true for those photograms that the couple made in the basement darkroom of their Master's House in Dessau, which they moved into in 1926.³³ Moholy-Nagy subjected the unique prints to a series of photographic operations, a process that he termed “revaluation [*Umwertung*]” and that included tonal reversal and mirror-imaged compositions. He also had his photograms enlarged to resemble a common format for paintings at that time (60 x 90 cm), as well as cut up and reassembled, sometimes as collages but also as the juxtaposition of two photograms, as in the case



László Moholy-Nagy. *Untitled*. 1925–26.
© 2020 Estate of László Moholy-Nagy/Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York.

31. László Moholy-Nagy, “Production-Reproduction,” in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 79–80 (trans. modified).

32. Renate Heyne and Floris M. Neusüss, eds., *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms: Catalogue Raisonné* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), p. 41. Moholy attributes part of this to “trying to keep expenses down”: “Neither at Dessau, nor later in Berlin, where a well-appointed laboratory had been installed, did we dare to use highly sensitive emulsions as a primary base for producing photograms. If reference was made in *Painting, Photography, Film* to ‘silver bromide plates,’ this was perfectly true in theory, but did not apply to everyday practice.” Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, pp. 61–62.

33. On the darkroom in that house and its impact on several photographers at the Bauhaus, see Wolfgang Thoener, “Das Fotografenhaus/The Photographers’ House,” in *Die Zeitschrift der Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau* 4 (November 2012), pp. 42–53.

of a hand juxtaposed with the profile of a face.³⁴ Because of the unique character of the photogram, the expenses involved in making the photograms resistant to further exposure from light, and the fact that contact printing was unreliable, these operations often necessitated taking a photograph of the original in order to replicate it.

Significantly, it was Lucia Moholy who carried out these reproductions. Moholy-Nagy neither had nor was interested in acquiring the extensive technical knowledge of photographic reversal required to create these “revaluations.” As Beaumont Newhall put it, “Moholy[-Nagy] did very little darkroom work. Certainly, so far as his camera pictures were concerned, he had no interest whatsoever in what we call the ‘fine print.’ To him the image which the camera or the photogram could capture was the exciting thing.”³⁵ Moholy, by contrast, had almost a decade of professional experience in print technology by the time the couple arrived at the Bauhaus. She expanded this knowledge by apprenticing with the studio photographer Hermann Eckner in Weimar and studying briefly at the Akademie für Graphische Künste und Buchgewerbe in Leipzig, where she acquired “the fundamentals of reproduction techniques.”³⁶ It was here, too, that Moholy began studying the history of photography, with which she was already familiar, having studied art history (as well as philosophy) at the university in Prague; Moholy-Nagy, by contrast, began studying law in Budapest, under pressure from his parents, but never completed his degree. It was not simply that her husband had no interest in the technical knowledge around photographic reproduction, as Moholy herself was quick to point out. It was rather that he, like his male colleagues, viewed such knowledge as derivative, the work of “technicians,” in comparison to the more consequential work of the painter and architect.³⁷ Or, as Moholy-Nagy put it succinctly in explaining why he would not be the one to set up the darkrooms at the New Bauhaus in Chicago: “I am not a photographer, but a painter.”³⁸

34. Heyne and Neusüss, *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms*, p. 40. The small formats (13 x 18 and 18 x 24 cm) were best for the arrangement of objects onto the photosensitive surface but meant that for any larger sizes, one would have to rephotograph the image in order to print it at an enlarged size.

35. Beaumont Newhall, taped remarks transcribed by Alice Swan in November 1973, cited in Leland D. Rice and David W. Steadman, eds., *Photographs of Moholy-Nagy from the Collection of William Larson* (Claremont, CA: Pomona College, 1975), p. 7.

36. Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 85. On the photography class there, see Rolf Sachsse, “Beginnen wir! Die photographischen Abteilungen der Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst in Leipzig zwischen 1890 und 1950,” in *Fotografie: Leipziger Schule, Arbeiten von Absolventen und Studenten 1980–93, 100 Jahre Fotografie an der Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig*, ed. Joachim Jansong (Leipzig: Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst, 1993), pp. 7–15.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 77. See also Sachsse’s remarks in an interview with Moholy (June 17, 1983), in which he proposes that one reason there was no photography workshop at the Bauhaus under Gropius’s leadership may have been because Gropius regarded photography as a “vehicle for delivering images of his built objects” and photographers as “technicians [*Handwerker*].”

38. László Moholy-Nagy, cited in Henry Holmes Smith, “Across the Atlantic,” in Rice and Steadman, *Photographs of Moholy-Nagy*, p. 18. On the exchange between these two media in his work, see Joyce Tsai, *Moholy-Nagy: Painting after Photography* (Berkeley: University of California, 2018).

As their Bauhaus colleague Max Gebhard recalled, “In my opinion, Lucia’s labor was decisive for the photographic work of Moholy-Nagy, for the photograms as well as the photographs that were produced over the course of several years. I often experienced her coming out of the darkroom with a still wet photograph and into [Moholy-Nagy’s] studio, and the two would talk about it.”³⁹ Because Moholy-Nagy often required images for specific purposes, this work of enlargement and replication could be quite complex. One could not simply replicate the original photogram, “for in photogram-making,” as Moholy explained, “every phase is subject to varying influences, and the ultimate effects are not to be foreseen or calculated with any amount of certainty. The grading of tone values, moreover, is largely a matter for ad hoc decisions during the process of chemical treatment in the laboratory.”⁴⁰ In lieu of being able to simulate the same results, Moholy had to make reproductions of existing works, which she did either through contact printing or, as was more often the case, through photographing the photogram. This process was made more complex by Moholy-Nagy’s desire to illustrate both the positive photogram as well as its negative inversion, which meant that suitable negatives for publishing had to be produced of both the original photograph and its mirrored, tonal-inverted opposite.⁴¹ These processes often required devising inventive methods in lieu of proper equipment—pinning the photogram to a board, for instance, when mounting it under glass was not possible—and detailed postproduction in order to crop out the thumbtacks. It sometimes resulted in substantial errors, like the loss of tonal values and blurred edges if the camera was not perfectly parallel to the original.⁴² Sometimes entire photograms would go missing or were never returned from the publisher, and Moholy-Nagy, believing he had already made the “work,” would ask Moholy to refabricate it in the darkroom—even though, as she explains, this was never simply *refabrication*, but rather the creation of a new work. Her skill became indispensable for realizing his ambitious vision—a vision that was all the more challenging to implement given that the artist had little understanding of the steps involved in bringing it to fruition.

Statements like Gebhard’s observation of Moholy’s labor appear all too frequently in testimony from former Bauhaus members. Often, these comments

39. Max Gebhard, cited in Irene-Charlotte Lusk, *Montagen ins Blaue: László Moholy-Nagy, Fotomontagen und -collagen 1922–1943* (Berlin: Anabas, 1980), p. 181.

40. Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 63.

41. See explanations of this terminology in Heyne and Neusüss, *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms*, p. 41. Lucia Moholy distinguishes between these reproductive methods in *Marginal Notes*, p. 64, and evokes a comparison with the contemporary practice of the multiple in the 1970s.

42. Heyne and Neusüss, *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms*, pp. 52–53. Many photograms bear added graphite and ink, techniques then typical for improving the registration of photos in print and in which Moholy had been trained; see Julie Barten, Sylvie Pénichon, and Carol Stringari, “The Materialization of Light,” in *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present*, ed. Matthew Witkovsky et al. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2016), pp. 188–202.

reverse gender stereotypes, such that Moholy's pragmatism is figured as the rational counterpart to the "feverish sensory perception of his new vision."⁴³ Consider Xanti Schawinsky in a letter to Moholy-Nagy's second wife, Sibyl:

Lucia often sat in the atelier in Weimar and Dessau and it was said that she kept an eye on him, making sure that he painted. She was a serious person, who seldom laughed. Moholy-Nagy's photography was, without a doubt, supported by her technical contribution. She took on his darkroom work, and, I believe, deserves a certain amount of Moholy[-Nagy]'s reputation as a photographer; most of the photographs that are of any importance were made during that time.⁴⁴

This "contribution" was at times figured as an "unusually close working arrangement" (Moholy's own words) and at other times as a collaboration.⁴⁵ That is even more apparent in her husband's texts, beginning with the 1922 essay "Production-Reproduction," at which point the Hungarian artist could hardly write a postcard to friends in German, much less craft a theoretical argument.⁴⁶ "What he needed was not only the translation of his stilted verbal attempts into fluent, written German, and adequate expressions for thoughts that were often still in a very nascent state, but also someone with whom he could think out loud in the creative process and see it to the end—the last of which was very often left to me. The initial idea came from him, the argumentation was done together, and the formulation was mine."⁴⁷ The formulation, but also, it would appear, the content of those texts, given that a "methodical reading of scholarly, especially scientific, texts did not appeal to him," according to Moholy; it was she, in combination with him, who generated what Otto Stelzer described as "the wealth of technological Utopias buried in the footnotes of his book *Painting, Photography, Film*."⁴⁸ This was labor

43. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, cited in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft,'" p. 69. Valdivieso describes this as a "reversal of gender binaries" in which the rational is aligned with the female integer (pp. 78–81).

44. Xanti Schawinsky to Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, August 25, 1948; reprinted in Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1986), p. 425.

45. Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 55. The German phrase she uses is "*symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*"; Moholy, *Marginalien*, p. 11.

46. Rolf Sachsse, "Moholy, oder: Vom Wert der Reproduktion," in *Das neue Sehen: von der Fotografie am Bauhaus zur subjektiven Fotografie*, ed. Rainer Wick (Munich: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1991), p. 94. Before Moholy, it was Alfred Kemény who had helped to write her husband's essays in German.

47. Moholy, cited in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft,'" pp. 68–69.

48. Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 54 (Moholy cites Stelzer's postscript to the 1967 edition of *Painting, Photography, Film*). Her role appears to have been extensive: "There was not a single text that he sent out that I had not read, and there were moments, or opportunities, where I had to say, hey, listen, that's just not true. Then he would say, well, then just say it the other way around. So his logic was unreliable [*unverlässlich*]." Moholy, interview with Sachsse, June 17, 1983.

that, as Lothar Schreyer recalled, far exceeded that of simply correcting diction and style and took on the character of co-authorship.⁴⁹

Moholy's decisive role in the photograms as well as the theoretical texts is perhaps how we can begin to explain why Moholy-Nagy so vehemently cultivated a mythology of originality. Artistic agency lay in verbal instruction. This is made explicit in one of Moholy-Nagy's most iconic works, his so-called telephone paintings of 1922, which he claimed to have had made in conversation with a fabricator over the phone; paintings that became emblematic of Moholy-Nagy's devaluation of physical labor as artistic meaning.⁵⁰ But it is highly ambiguous as to whether those gestures actually accomplish what Moholy-Nagy claimed for them, for invocations of the artist's "touch" persisted, even if they were purportedly emptied of significance in being assigned to an iconographic register. A paintbrush, the preoccupation with hands, even the smuggling in of a signature, retooled in stenciled script—and ironically no different from Lucia's name at this time—effectively reinstate an authorial conception of the work of art, even if the mechanical is the vehicle by which it does so.⁵¹ This mythology distracted attention away from his wife's actual role in the realization of his artworks and focused it instead on the question of who (of his male colleagues) had first "discovered" the photogram (a debate in which Lissitzky had accused Moholy-Nagy of plagiarizing Man Ray).⁵² Moholy-Nagy responded that he had come to the photogram "through theoretical work," referring to the 1922 essay. He further distinguishes his approach from that of "a woman at Loheland," whose use of transparent organic materials placed onto photographic paper was, unlike his use of the technique, he contended, "*nothing more* than the fixing of an accidentally charming effect, *nothing more* than a naturalistic photograph that had come about without an actual mastery of the photographic process."⁵³

49. See Lothar Schreyer, *Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus* (Munich: Langer-Müller, 1956), p. 238; cited in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft,'" p. 68.

50. This was a mythology that Moholy deconstructs, tracing Moholy-Nagy's declaration of the paintings in 1946 "as having been ordered over the telephone" (in his *Abstract of an Artist*) back to the actual circumstances in 1922, when he exclaimed, extremely satisfied with the fabricator's work, that he "might even have done it over the telephone!" See Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, pp. 75–76.

51. On the issue of names, see Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 52. "Nagy" was his proper last name and he had added "Moholy" (adapting the name of his family's estate), "a name which lacked any reality of its own for the simple reason that it was the bearer's own invention."

52. El Lissitzky to Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, September 15, 1925, reprinted in *El Lissitzky: Maler, Architekt Typograf Fotograf*, ed. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers (Dresden 1967, new ed. 1992), pp. 63–64.

53. Moholy-Nagy, "Fotoplastische Reklame," *Offset-, Buch- und Werbekunst* 7 (1927), p. 388 (emphasis added). It is now well established that Moholy-Nagy refers here to photograms produced by Bertha Günther, a teacher at Loheland from 1916 to 1926, who made small-format photograms on daylight paper using plant material. See Herbert Molderings, "László Moholy-Nagy und die Neuerfindung der Fotograms," in *Die Moderne der Fotografie* (Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2008), p. 51; see also Molderings's essay in Heyne and Neusüss, *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms*, p. 18. In contrast to her husband, Moholy argued that the making of these photograms was not a hobby of Günther's but rather "formed, in one way or another, part of the artistic training of the students at Loheland," just as it would Moholy-Nagy's own pedagogy at the Bauhaus and New Bauhaus in Chicago (Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 61).

Mastery indeed. Under these circumstances, the photograms of the 1920s reveal the stakes of picturing hands in these years and the labor that they elided. Given that this is Moholy's own profile pictured here, in *Untitled*, whose "idle hand" is it, exactly, that rested upon the photosensitive emulsion?⁵⁴ And does it coincide with the hand that chose the paper, prepared the chemicals, operated the enlarger, adjusted the exposure, and carried the print from bath to bath? If so, what is left of Moholy-Nagy here? Can we—*should* we—continue to describe the celebrated double-portrait photogram of the couple as evidence of their "symbiotic working arrangement"? Does this not incriminate exactly the opposite, the unequal division of labor upon which the (masculinist) avant-garde relied, in both rhetoric and practice—Moholy-Nagy, of course, being in good company here?⁵⁵ In many photograms, the presence of a female hand is unmistakable, just as we also encounter her stamp on the backs of several prints, in and among his. As was to be expected, whatever shared authorship Moholy-Nagy may have acknowledged in the 1920s was, in later years, thoroughly erased, even during her and her husband's own lifetime, as when the initial caption to the now-iconic "double portrait" later read "self-portrait," and then "double self-portrait," referring to the male artist alone.⁵⁶ "Labor" was a highly contradictory term for someone who repeatedly stressed "production" and yet seemed to have been incapable of realizing such work without the direct help of others, a kind of "*Raphael without hands*," as Rolf Sachsse has pointed out, "an avant-gardist without any foundation in artistic technologies."⁵⁷

What we begin to see in the distinction between "production" and "reproduction" is that it describes a formal operation as much as it does a gendered division of labor. She, skilled in replicative technologies and thus perceived as a kind of stenographer, did "nothing more" than carry out the artist's dictation, while he claimed singular authorship through a jargon of authenticity that she, perversely, helped to craft. We should recognize in such images not only the reassertion of artistic genius in the very medium whose technology posed the greatest threat to those conventions but, more significantly, the labor that made that reassertion possible, the invisible hand of the artist-as-reproducer, who brought it into being.

54. The phrase comes from Renate Heyne and Floris Michael Neusüss, who write of one photogram of hands juxtaposed with paintbrushes as "the artist's hand at rest, idle, in a certain sense, while his picture is painted by the light." See Heyne and Neusüss, *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms*, p. 155. The claim that "this may be a portrait of Lucia Moholy" is made on p. 153.

55. To cite just one example, Herbert Bayer wrote to the historian Andreas Haus: "We let our wives, who were photographers, work for us"; cited in Andreas Haus to Lucia Moholy, November 4, 1977, Lucia Moholy Papers, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

56. *Popular Photography* 5, no. 6 (December 1939), pp. 30–31; reprinted in Heyne and Neusüss, *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms*, p. 253. The caption to the image reads: "Moholy-Nagy laid his head down on the projection paper to make the photogram shown above. He then turned his head on the paper and made a second exposure."

57. Sachsse, "Telephone, Reproduktion, und Erzeugerabfüllung: Der Begriff des Originals bei László Moholy-Nagy," in *Über Moholy-Nagy*, ed. Gottfried Jäger and Gudrun Wessing (Bielefeld: Kerber, 1997), p. 74 (emphasis in original).

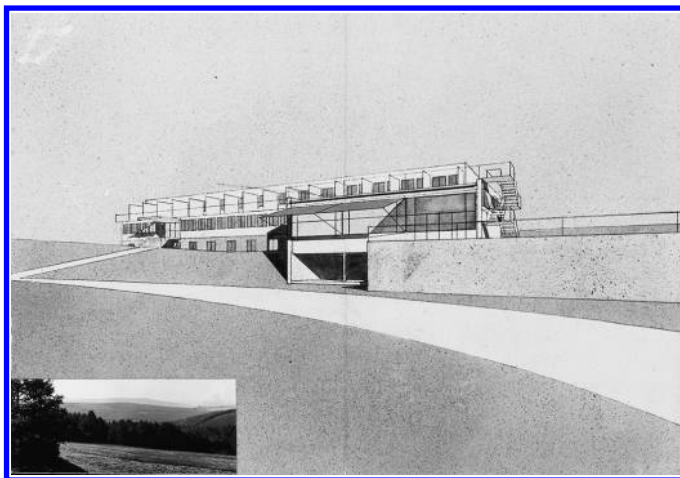
A Collective Corpus

This redefinition of the production/reproduction dyad has profound consequences for the role gender played in the construction of avant-garde photographic discourses. To grasp those consequences, though, we need to look more closely at the photographs Lucia Moholy took during the years in which she was visiting Schwarzerden while simultaneously living in Dessau as the wife of a Bauhaus master. As others have pointed out, these two worlds had much in common: Both were indebted to the German youth movement and its toppling of the hierarchy between student and teacher, body and mind, older and younger generations. Both embraced holistic conceptions of pedagogy in which physical movement, dance, and gymnastics played central roles. And both were deeply invested in establishing collectivity as the basis for a new social fabric in contemporary Germany.⁵⁸ This shared ground led to collaborations that exceed Moholy's photographs: In 1930, Walter Gropius drew up plans for a new building for Schwarzerden, whose design took advantage of the hilly nature of the school's property to create a two-level complex.⁵⁹ Like the Bauhaus building in Dessau, living quarters for students were housed in the same structure as the school's library, seminar rooms, a large gymnastics hall, and faculty offices, facilitating an educational experience that permeated everyday life. Although the building was never realized, Moholy-Nagy's wall-painting scheme for the commune's existing gymnastics hall was, thus implementing ideas he had devel-

58. Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, pp. 507–08. See also Neugärtner's comparison of the Bauhaus and Schwarzerden in "Utopias of a New Society," p. 87–91, and her assertion that although Lucia Moholy's "theoretical affiliations rested with Buchhold and Vogler," the Bauhaus (e.g., Moholy-Nagy) was much closer to Loheland than to Schwarzerden (p. 91).

59. Reginald R. Isaacs, *Walter Gropius: Der Mensch und sein Werk* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1984), p. 550.

*Walter Gropius
(design) and
Stefan Sebök (drawing).
Perspectival
plan for Schule
Schwarzerden, 1930.
Gropius © 2020
Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York/VG
Bild-Kunst, Bonn.*





Moholy. Double Portrait of Elisabeth Vogler and Tilla Winz. 1927.

oped on the dynamic construction of light and space.⁶⁰ Moholy-Nagy, furthermore, furnished Paul Vogler's medical offices in Berlin with Bauhaus-designed tables, chairs, cabinets, lighting fixtures, and textiles (an interior that Moholy also photographed). We can safely assume that these commissions were only possible because of the relationships that she had cultivated through her personal and professional connections with the women of Schwarzerden.⁶¹

Many of the photographs that Moholy took at the commune have the intimate character of snapshots taken by close friends. One depicts Elisabeth Vogler and fellow member Tilla Winz in a grassy meadow, sitting close enough to one another that their bodies touch; both smile, while Winz looks down at her own hands playing with a blade of grass. Moholy must have had the camera on a tripod, because in another photograph—this time with Moholy pictured—the same roof

60. Viet Loers, "Moholy-Nagy's 'Raum der Gegenwart' und die Utopie vom dynamisch-konstruktiven Lichtraum," in *László Moholy-Nagy* (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1991), pp. 37–53. Schwarzerden's newsletter describes "gay pastel colors, gray and yellow, with a light-colored burlap wall covering"; see *Mitteilung des Bundes für sozialangewandte Gymnastik und Körperpflege* 1 (July 1930), p. 5.

61. For more on Lucia and László's friendship with Paul Vogler and his wife Paula Vogler (née Doodt), who had also studied medicine in Jena, see Botar, "The Origins of László Moholy-Nagy's Biocentric Constructivism," p. 324, where he also illustrates a portrait that Moholy took of Paula Vogler at Schwarzerden. See also Moholy's contribution in *Elisabeth Vogler*, p. 33.



Portrait of Lucia Moholy, possibly taken by the artist. 1927.

(of the commune's original building) and two trees appear in the background.⁶² All three women wear white, button-down shirts and dark ties, as if Moholy did not simply visit when she came to the commune but conformed to the life of its members. Moholy had much in common with the founding women of Schwarzerden: All were around the same age (Vogler is thirty-five years old here, Winz thirty-one, and Moholy thirty-three), all had participated in the German youth movement, all came from bourgeois homes, with fathers who owned companies, worked as lawyers, and were members of the clergy. Some of these women took great personal risks staying at the commune against the wishes of families who wanted them to follow a "normal" path.⁶³ It was likely that Moholy had much more in common with these women than with the other so-called *Meisterfrauen* at the Bauhaus, many of whom seemed less interested in their female peers than they were in supporting their husbands. Ise Gropius, for one, seemed to embrace her expected duties, whereas Moholy, although clearly a willing participant, later in life expressed reservations about how "women's work" was treated at the Bauhaus.⁶⁴

62. The identification of this photograph as having been taken at Schwarzerden (and likely not by Moholy-Nagy, as indicated in Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus-Fotografin*) benefited from conversations with Meghan Forbes.

63. Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, pp. 465–66.

64. Lucia Moholy later reflected: "When it came to editorial work, I, of course, had to contribute, and when one looks back, one can only say that that was the tendency then, that women

Both photographs were taken on the grounds of Schwarzerden, which included a forty-acre farm that sustained the commune's members and functioned as a working model of an alternative to what Ilse Hoeborn, another leading member (and frequent subject of Moholy's photographs), described as the often "one-dimensional diet of potatoes and bread typical of proletarian children."⁶⁵ The commune also consciously rejected the monetization of the land, criticizing the use of chemicals, fertilizers, and agricultural technologies by the "capitalist farmer and large landowner," which pushed the earth to the point of "exhaustion [*Ausnutzung*]."⁶⁶ Although rejecting industrial food, the commune significantly did not idealize pre-capitalist primitivism. Buchhold warned against the romanticizing of commune life and the "danger that one becomes self-satisfied," a danger because "the *political* gets forgotten."⁶⁷ The rejection of the city was not a rejection of urban life per se but of urban life in the form that it had become under capitalism, wherein, as Buchhold saw it, men devised jobs for women that excluded them from creative work and stifled their potential for self-realization. To counter this, the commune saw as its task the necessity of "contending with the current capitalist economy," by generating a "collectively oriented living body."⁶⁸ The idea was to model "life in a new sociological form," as Buchhold put it, "a visible work, or better a thing [*Sache*] through which and out of which we will realize something. It is the Schwarze Erde, an attempt [*Versuch*] to build for ourselves an economy that corresponds to our own logic, one which will allow us to create in it and out of it a living organism."⁶⁹

The year of these two portraits was a decisive one for Schwarzerden; in 1927, the commune realized its goal of becoming a state-recognized school. From the start, Buchhold and Vogler had devised a pedagogical component as a way to introduce the larger community to their more radical ideas, which they did through summer programs for children during their school holidays (in which city kids would

were'n't allowed to participate, even though they were very strong. Today, of course, it is different. Why I played along, though, is another question" (Sachsse interview with Lucia Moholy, June 18, 1982).

In contrast, Ise Gropius wrote in her Bauhaus diary, which she later revised in the 1970s: "I did not enter any of the workshops, since my particular talents lay in the literary field, which made me a natural collaborator for the endless output of statements, articles, and reports that were required of my husband." Ise Gropius, cited in Valdivieso, "Ise Gropius: 'Everybody Here Calls Me Frau Bauhaus,'" in *Bauhaus Bodies*, p. 173. She also rationalized the unpaid labor of women at the Bauhaus by pointing to its "meager budget," such that there was never enough "secretarial help," and so, "under great pressure, the wives of the young masters would help out." Ise Gropius, cited in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft,'" p. 71 n. 29.

65. Ilse Hoeborn, "Notwendigkeit der sozial-gymnastischen und körperpflegerischen Tätigkeit an Kinderheimen," *Gymnastik* 3, no. 1/2 (January 1928), p. 9.

66. Buchhold, "Bildungselemente," p. 21, cited in Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, pp. 447–48.

67. Marie Buchhold, "Herbststred auf der Schwarzen Erde," November 4, 1923, box 41, AddF, Kassel (emphasis in original).

68. "Ländliche Wirtschaftsgemeinde," in Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 467.

69. Marie Buchhold, "Herbststred auf der Schwarzen Erde," November 4, 1923, box 41, AddF, Kassel.

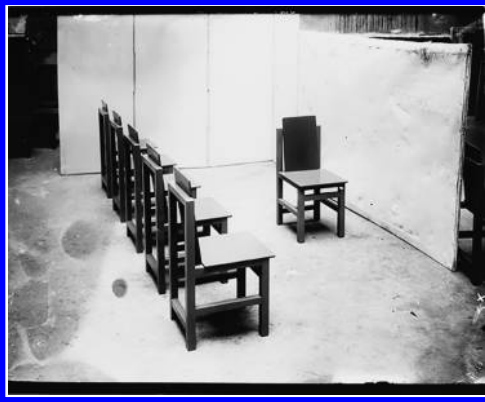
spend weeks at a time in the countryside) and “vacation courses” for working women based on gymnastics, breathing work, and massage, as well as lectures and cultural activities. Such courses augmented programs that they implemented in orphanages, women’s prisons, and psychiatric wards. The agricultural commune both modeled the utopian dimension of this “social work” and supported it financially, providing “an economic basis for the future of our pedagogical work.”⁷⁰ Finding a visual analogue for this pedagogical project, Moholy took photographs that appeared in the school’s inaugural publicity materials. A substantial but unknown commission in Moholy’s body of work, the series recalls similar such uses of her photographs in Bauhaus publicity materials, but in this case, the message delivered was not that of functional design but rather a conception of the body called for by Schwarzerden’s feminist materialism. That materialism took concrete form in offering women an eighteen-month-long course of training in a new professional field that the founders of Schwarzerden had devised: “socially applied gymnastics.”⁷¹ At the end of the training period, women were qualified to work in early-childhood and youth education, as nurses and health-care workers, in prisons and mental institutions, and as caretakers, with the objective of achieving a more equitable society through physical and mental self-care. As the brochure read, this “new social career,” intended “for the modern woman,” offered a form of “creativity” and thus an alternative to alienated work: “As a creative woman [*schaffende Frau*], you will find satisfaction in a career that makes a difference, that is never repetitive, but always vital.”



Cover and interior page from the publicity brochure “Schule Schwarzerden,” 1927, with photographs by Lucia Moholy.

70. “Ländliche Wirtschaftsgemeinde,” in Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 454.

71. The curriculum was extensive and covered anatomy, nutrition, hygiene, air and sunbathing, massage practices, sociology, history, the women’s movement, geography, and social welfare, as well as music, singing, and drawing. All women eighteen years of age and older, who had some kind of secondary-school education, were invited to attend; see a copy of the brochure (box 41), whose cover bears a landscape photograph by Moholy, and the course plans (box 15), AddF, Kassel.



Moholy.
Children's Chairs (1923).
1924–25.

employed standard studio techniques, such as neutral backgrounds, giving these images the appearance of having been unauthored—again, attesting to Moholy's self-effacing approach to photography. Paradoxically, however, this calculated arrangement produces a visual rhetoric of *Sachlichkeit*, or matter-of-factness, one which served the ideology of functionalism (as opposed to Expressionism) at the Dessau Bauhaus. It is particularly striking here, in the treatment of juvenile bodies, because it injects a logic of seriality into a pedagogical project of holism, and then further renders those two attributes—repetition and wholeness—compatible.

One reason for that compatibility was a shared materialist commitment. For the women of Schwarzerden, that took the form of a repeated insistence on maintaining an “objective” understanding of their present, its challenges, and the “tasks at hand.”⁷³ Buchhold and Vogler were explicit in their approach to the body as not therapeutic but social; they were not interested in gymnastics as a form of treatment or restoration, mental or physical, but rather as a structural means by which everyday life—in the home, workplace, and school—could be reconfigured.⁷⁴ For Moholy, it meant going one step further: desexualizing the

Moholy's photographs do not simply illustrate the school's activities, they find a visual analogue for its pedagogical logic. In one instance, she arranged three children at a diagonal, with each demonstrating one position of a sequence known as the “crawling exercise.”⁷² Moholy's decision to treat the individual body as a serial unit recalls techniques she had developed in her Bauhaus product photography, whereby multiple exemplars of identical objects, positioned in different ways, visualize a spectrum of attributes within a single image. This serial approach

72. The crawling exercise fell into the category of “functional” gymnastics, which, alongside “static” and “rhythmic” gymnastics, was a central component of a curriculum devised by Vogler. Functional gymnastics aimed to stimulate “the regeneration of the entire organism through the activation of vital functions of individual bodily components.” See “Lehrstoffpläne,” box 15, AddF, Kassel.

73. Marie Buchhold, “Herbstrede auf der Schwarzen Erde,” November 4, 1923, box 41, AddF, Kassel.

74. Buchhold and Vogler, “Sozial angewandte Gymnastik und Körperpflege,” *Gymnastik* 3, no. 1/2 (January 1928), p. 6.

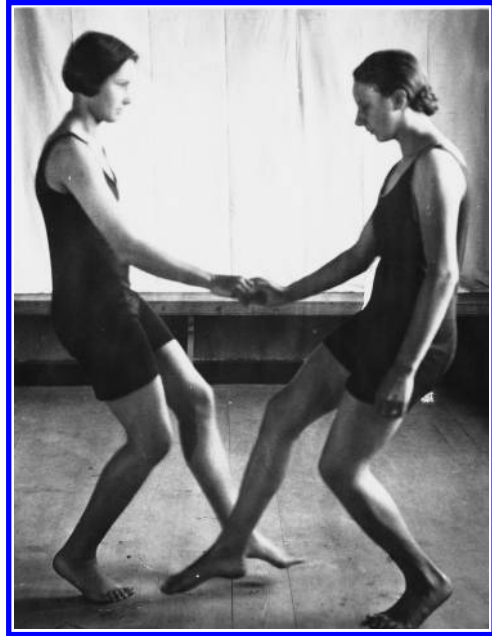
body in order to heighten its generalizability. Faces are turned away from us and genitals obscured. The pose, embodying a pedagogical principle, takes precedence over the individual characteristics of the sitter—here is the body not as a site of subjectivity but as an organism training to live within a collectivity. This is why the unclothed, prepubescent body of the child becomes pervasive in these photographs. Just as she has assumed the position of a passive observer, “merely” reproducing someone else’s program, decisions of framing, focus, and arrangement produce a photograph that asks us to assume the position of a disinterested viewer, to suspend the gendered conditions of representation. We are asked to consider their position spatially, to see the body as a demonstration piece rather than as an object of desire.⁷⁵ At times, that materialist approach to the body is so extreme that some photographs seem to go too far, to de-humanize their subjects through sameness and seriality.

Moholy’s erasure of her own libidinal investment in the photographic image, under the sign of *Sachlichkeit*, analogized Schwarzerden’s philosophy of collectivity. Many of the exercises that Moholy depicts happen in small groups, as if micro-experiments in the “dismantling of the self [*Ich-Abbau*]” that

75. That captions frequently accompany these photographs further disciplines their meaning. A special issue on Schwarzerden in the journal *Gymnastik* (ibid.) includes several photographs that she very likely took in summer and fall 1927, one of which portrays a group of women outside with captions underneath each pair or trio: “breathing in,” “breathing out,” “drumming” on the back, and so forth.



Moholy. Children Demonstrating Stretching Exercise. C. 1927.



Moholy. Blanche Moll and
Luise Möhl. 1927.

Buchhold called for as a challenge to the ego-driven patterns of bourgeois identity and private property.⁷⁶ Although members of *Schwarzerden* were allowed to have a minimum of personal effects, everything else was held as common property. Individualism was a remnant of the nineteenth century to be dispensed with, not unlike architectural ornament at the Bauhaus. In its place would be a new emphasis on communication: Courses were built around “listening,” “listening to,” “understanding,” “accepting,” and “articulating.” Buchhold even used the term *Erosgemeinschaft* (collectivity of Eros), founded on a principle of communism with a small *c*, of living in common, not only materially but as a means to reshape patterns of sociability, of subjective self-regard, and of one’s own relationship to one’s body.⁷⁷ Although mobilizing repetition and seriality, Moholy’s photographs also feature the body in dialogue with other bodies. This must have struck a chord with the leading women of *Schwarzerden*, given that Ruth Hallensleben—a former preschool teacher and trained social pedagogue

76. Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 462.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 462 n. 98 and p. 463. Elisabeth Vogler had studied with the controversial early-twentieth-century pedagogue Gustav Wyneken, who advanced the notion of an erotic relationship between student and teacher, usually of the same sex. This raises the question of *Schwarzerden*’s lesbianism, of which I found no hard evidence (Sachsse, though, recalls learning of an affair between Tilla Winz and Florence Henri; in conversation with the author, June 6, 2019). Any expression of nonnormative sexuality was no doubt complicated by living in a conservative part of rural Germany, of which the women were keenly aware.



*Ruth Hallensleben. Exercise at
Schule Schwarzerden. 1938.
© Ruth Hallensleben /
Fotoarchiv Ruhr Museum.*

(later known for her industrial photography)—mimicked her aesthetic to a remarkable degree.⁷⁸

Borrowing from the contemporary German educational reformer Fritz Klatt, who also held courses at the school, Schwarzerden theorized a counter-version of labor, one that was oddly in accordance with Moholy's anti-individualist approach to photography. Broadly defined in the terms of "creative rest [*schöpferische Pause*]," as opposed to capitalist productivity, recovery and rejuvenation protested capitalist efficiency as the primary means in which the body itself, under such conditions, was exhausted.⁷⁹ Such critiques not only build upon socialist and communist strategies of combating exploitation, they also anticipate the New Left-era protests that embraced nonwork, idleness, and even sleep as a means of pointing

78. Hallensleben was employed as a preschool teacher in Kassel until 1930 and had to leave this profession after a court case was brought against her (likely on the grounds of homosexuality, which Paragraph 175, in effect since 1871, had made illegal). She then undertook studies in photography in Cologne and was allowed to practice from 1934 onward. Correspondence with Rolf Sachsse, March 8, 2020. Hallensleben did not have relationships with men, but she also—for obvious reasons—did not embrace a lesbian identity; see Rolf Sachsse, "Eine deutsche Fotografin," in *Ruth Hallensleben: Frauenarbeit in der Industrie*, ed. Ursula Peters (Berlin: Dirk Nishen, 1985), pp. 74–79. On the use of Paragraph 175 against female teachers during the Weimar Republic, see Marti M. Lybeck, *Desiring Emancipation: New Women and Homosexuality in Germany, 1890–1930* (Albany: State University of New York, 2014), pp. 117–21.

79. Marie Buchhold, "Schöpferische Pause," a review of Klatt's eponymous book, cited in Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 457.

to the foundational antinomy between capitalism and sustainability.⁸⁰ Labor, redefined as unalienated—as “idle” in the eyes of capital—became directed toward meeting the needs of the body, intellect, and emotional life, with the work of the hands playing a prominent role in exercises like massage, partner movement-work, and various forms of hand-based training like drawing with both the right and left hands as well as modeling in clay. Whereas the most immediate purpose of such “leisure” activities was to strengthen the hands, “to refine their sense of feeling and to teach a sense of proportion,” a further goal was to introduce students to an “expanded definition of gymnastic pedagogy,” which included an introduction to the history of art, which “awakens the feeling for aesthetic values and deepens the understanding of other times and other peoples,” so that students come out of their program “neither one-dimensional nor unworldly.”⁸¹ The hand took on significance not only as a healing entity, in massage and other forms of restorative touch, but also as a source of self-care in the face of exploitation and as the “foundation of artistic creation.”⁸²

Hand/Head

This conception of idle creativity, as a kind of queering of conventional models of creation, for which Moholy found a unique visual language, stood in stark contrast to Moholy-Nagy’s revalorization of the hand as the font of artistic value. His integration of so-called hand sculptures as part of his courses at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, where he arrived in 1937, guided students in exploring tactile materials, like clay and wood, that they would shape into objects “modeled to fit the sensibilities of the hand that grasps it.”⁸³ Described as honing “the function of the hands to catch, to press, to twist, to feel thickness, to weigh, to go through holes, to use his joints, etc.,” these exercises served the liberation of sensory perception only to the extent that the body could be retooled to better conform to industrial capitalism. As Emma Stein has argued, in examining how World War II shaped Moholy-Nagy’s curriculum in Chicago, such exercises were forms of “wartime pedagogy,” whereby “creative programs” for veterans addressed “break-downs, . . . psychopathic cases, . . . [and] injured industrial workers”—even implicating wartime trauma in the capitalist workplace.⁸⁴ In language that superficially recalls that of Schwarzerden, Moholy-Nagy termed this “rehabilitation,” whereby “buried energies” were to be “released for contemporary orientation” and thus

80. See Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014).

81. “Lehrstoffpläne,” box 15, AddF, Kassel.

82. Buchhold, cited in Wörner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform*, p. 468.

83. See Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision* (New York: Norton, 1938).

84. Moholy-Nagy, “Better Than Before,” *The Technology Review*, 46, no. 1 (November 1943), cited in Emma Stein, “László Moholy-Nagy and Chicago’s War Industry: Photographic Pedagogy at the New Bauhaus,” *History of Photography* 38, no. 4 (2014), p. 401.



Moholy. Lessons with Modeling Clay at Schwarzerden. 1927.

“can be applied to all types of work in the artistic, scientific, and technical sphere.”⁸⁵ But the difference is crucial: If Moholy-Nagy sought out exercises that would respond to the destructive tendencies of industrial capitalism, in order to better prepare the body to withstand that destruction, Schwarzerden’s restorative practices sought to circumvent it altogether by proposing counter-models within the context of a feminist and anti-capitalist critique.

The status of the hand figured prominently in such debates, because it emblemized the vexed nature of authorship under such conditions of alienation. Photography, for Moholy-Nagy, had the most to offer this “rehabilitation” of the senses because, as he saw it, its mechanical basis undermined the role of human agency and instead stressed the agency of materials and technologies. Moholy-Nagy repeatedly espoused defamiliarization as the means by which one develops “an integrally photographic approach that is derived purely from the means of photography itself,” including extreme contrast of tonal values, oblique-angle views, distortion using concave and convex mirrors, avoidance of perspective, X-ray technology, cam-

85. Ibid.

erless photographs, and “unknown forms of representation.”⁸⁶ Such arguments were mounted in the context of a debate on the respective advantages (and disadvantages) of photography and painting as media.⁸⁷ Unfolding in the pages of the avant-garde journal *i 10* during the very months that Moholy likely took many of her photographs at Schwarzerden, this was a debate from which she was excluded, even though she had drafted a contribution and even helped to found the journal.⁸⁸ (She was, however, allowed to submit book reviews, presumably because the work in question was not properly “hers” but a gloss on someone else’s.) Those debates centered on the “objectivity” of photography in comparison to painting, wherein the trace of the artist’s hand (often coded as “facture” in these debates) continued to guarantee some degree of authorial intention.⁸⁹ Although Moholy-Nagy took the position that photography should be embraced as a medium for artists, arguing for a modernist approach in which “photography relies on its own possibilities” and as a consequence profoundly destabilizes authorial intentionality as a site of meaning production, he—and every other participant in the debate—left the foundational definition of “production” intact: artistic originality, guaranteed by the criterium of formal novelty. The most consequential implications of mechanical reproduction, however, remained untouched.⁹⁰

These debates were part of a broader cultural understanding of the hand in Weimar Germany to which the masculinist avant-garde fully subscribed: “In its perceived immutability, [the hand] was seen as a true sign of character,” a belief evidenced by a contemporary fascination with palm reading and handwriting analysis.⁹¹ One thinks not only of its repeated use as an emblem for new visions of the artist as

86. All of which are cited in Moholy-Nagy, “Unprecedented Photography,” trans. and reprinted in Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era*, pp. 83–85. On his rejection of photography as a form of knowledge, see Susan Laxton, “Moholy’s Doubt,” in *Photography and Doubt*, ed. Sabine T. Kriebel and Andrés Mario Zervigón (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 141–60.

87. The debates were spurred by Ernst Kállai’s contribution “Malerei und Photographie” (which illustrates a photograph by Moholy of a magnolia flower) in *i 10* 1, no. 4 (1927), pp. 148–57. When Moholy-Nagy, as co-editor of the journal, included Kállai’s article, he invited several others to submit responses; these were published as “Diskussion über Ernst Kállai’s Artikel ‘Malerei und Fotografie [sic],” *i 10* 1, no. 6 (1927), pp. 227–40, and ends with a response by Kállai.

88. See Moholy, “International Avant-Garde, 1927–1929,” in this issue. An undated typescript in Moholy’s papers at the Bauhaus-Archiv, with the title “malerei und fotografie,” suggests that she drafted a contribution to the debate; whether she was invited and then rejected, or not invited in the first place, is not known.

89. On the various meanings of facture in the Russian context (of which Moholy-Nagy was aware) and how these meanings mapped onto shifting conceptions of the artist, see Maria Gough, “Faktura: The Making of the Russian Avant-Garde,” *RES: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 36 (1999), pp. 32–59.

90. This would be theoretically challenged by Walter Benjamin a decade later. On a discussion of reproducibility in relation to Benjamin and Moholy-Nagy, see Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin, “Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work of Art,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproduction, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 11–12.

91. Stephanie D’Alessandro, “Through the Eye and the Hand,” in *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present*, p. 66.

engineer, as in El Lissitzky's self-portrait *The Constructor*, and as central motifs in John Heartfield's agitprop photomontage, but also marshaled for consumption, as in a photomontage of Marcel Breuer's hands that Moholy-Nagy adapted to advertise the Schocken department store in Nuremberg. The hand as metonym for the autonomous subject was even extended to the collective subject in Walter Gropius's vision of *Handwerk*, or craft-based production, as the basis for shifting artistic production away from "meaningless salon painting" and toward the generation of work in direct dialogue with social needs, above all housing.⁹² But even as Gropius resuscitated references to medieval guild labor as a counter-model to the panel painter, neither he nor the coterie of painters that he hired could actually disavow the nineteenth-century conception of the artist as genius—even at times parodying their own veiled traditionalism, as in a series of handprints made by Bauhaus members of their own hands (signed and dated), one of which by Moholy-Nagy reads, inscribed to Gropius, "my right hand at your service."⁹³ While everywhere claims were being made

92. This was a common refrain in Gropius's founding texts of the Bauhaus, and the figure of the hand as a metonym for artistic labor also concludes his 1919 manifesto: "Together let us desire, conceive, and create the new structure of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting as one unity and, one day, rise, like the crystal symbol of a new faith, toward heaven from the hands of a million workers."

93. On these works, see Jan Tichy and Robin Schuldenfrei, eds., *Ascendants: Bauhaus Handprints* (Chicago: Institute of Design, 2019). Stein corroborates this position when she points to how "the hand acts as a symbolic trace of authorship in the form of the artist's imprint as indicative of his or her presence" (Stein, "László Moholy-Nagy and Chicago's War Industry," p. 403).



László Moholy-Nagy.
Handprint. 1926.
 © 2020 Estate of László
 Moholy-Nagy/Artists
 Rights Society (ARS),
 New York.

to move away from “traditional forms of representation,” assumptions underlying those representational forms, regarding aesthetic labor as fundamentally different from manual labor, proved as stable as ever.⁹⁴ Moholy-Nagy may have quibbled with the “fetishization of *Handwerk*,” but he himself resuscitated the legitimacy of the artist’s touch as a guarantee of the value of that (intellectual) labor, perversely reinscribing the very authenticity that he claimed to contest.

Lucia Moholy, by contrast, was able to mount a more powerful critique of traditional forms of artistic authorship, precisely because she was working from a position of marginality. As a female practitioner excluded from those photographers generating what Moholy-Nagy would identify, in his championing of Florence Henri and others as generating “productive,” New Vision images, Moholy made seemingly “artless” photographs, refusing those photographic attributes that would be read as “innovative”—oblique angles, abstract composition, X-ray technologies, and the like. In fact, it was only because these photographs erased her agency as author that she was given space and resources at the Bauhaus at all: Her approach complemented Gropius’s understanding of photography as handmaiden to the architect, as “entirely subordinated to the object” depicted.⁹⁵ This aspect

94. Moholy-Nagy, “Unprecedented Photography,” in *Photography in the Modern Era*, p. 84.

95. Jeannine Fiedler, cited in Olivar Botar, “Lucia Moholy’s Fotografische Arbeit der 20er Jahre: Eine Nicht-Künstlerin Erschafft Kunst,” in *Lucia Moholy: Material und Architektur: Fotos der Bauhauszeit* (Berlin: Derda Galerie, 2016), p. 8.



Albert Renger-Patzsch. Hands. 1926.
© 2020 Albert Renger-Patzsch Archiv/
Ann u. Jürgen Wilde, Zülpich/Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York.

also rendered her illegible as a *Neue Sachlichkeit* photographer, whereby New Vision tactics of disorientation were also avoided. But even here the resulting images remained recognizable within the category of artistic production, as in the example of Albert Renger-Patzsch, who figured hands as expressive entities that had the capacity to “speak” and thereby deposit authorial intention as the horizon of the work’s meaning.⁹⁶ Moholy’s “objectivity,” by contrast, was dismissed as the uninspired realism of a bygone era, and, moreover, collapsed with her personhood, the unfortunate consequence of her “all-too-large *Sachlichkeit*,” under which Gropius “suffers,” as she “never allows for a warm, heartfelt note.”⁹⁷

Reflecting on the pervasive use of the hand as a physiognomic feature in portraiture in the work of Juliet Margaret Cameron and David Octavius Hill, Moholy introduced her own conception of portraiture as a de-psychologized study of detail. Speaking in the third person, though with reference to one of her own images, she writes: “For the first time in the history of photography it was not only the shape, delineation and expression of the human face, but the sculptural details of the head and the texture of skin, hair, nails and dress, which became attractive subjects to the photographer.”⁹⁸ Tracing its emergence to “object photography” as well as Soviet film, Moholy admits that “to the general public in Western Europe, this style appears strange and exotic. They find it interesting and worth discussing, but few of them wish to have their portraits taken in the same way.” This was a fact that Moholy knew well, having run a struggling portrait studio in London, where she photographed English artists, writers, and pacifists in ways that amplified the close-cropped, shallow focus that she frequently employed in the 1920s. This emphasis on disciplining the body to the point of mimicking means of social control was the aspect that most distinguished Moholy’s photography from that of her husband, who fetishized non-perspectival representation. Moholy-Nagy hardly veiled his contempt for an approach that he dismissed as a kind of reconstructed realism, and Moholy recalls on at least one occasion how he publicly embarrassed her for espousing legibility as a photographic value.⁹⁹

96. See, for example, Adolf Koelsch, *Hände und was sie sagen: 64 Bilder* (Zurich: Füssli, 1929), which includes photographs by Renger-Patzsch, who also wrote that “the hands, in addition to the head, belong to any good portrait.” Renger-Patzsch, “Einiges über Hände und Händeaufnahmen,” in *Photographie für alle* (Berlin, 1927); reprinted in Renger-Patzsch, *Die Freude am Gegenstand: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Photographie*, ed. Bernd Stiegler and Ann and Jürgen Wilde (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2010), p. 95.

97. Ise Gropius, diary, July 2, 1925, cited in Valdivieso, “Eine ‘symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft,’” p. 78.

98. Lucia Moholy, *A Hundred Years of Photography 1839–1939* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), p. 165.

99. In 1927, she noted in her diary a conversation with Moholy-Nagy and a printer in his studio. He “asked (whistled) for me, to weigh in on a design. when I expressed that one can’t recognize what the title picture represents, he laughed at me, ‘one doesn’t need to recognize it, it should just look good.’ he could have said the same thing seriously, especially since we were with someone we didn’t even know.” Moholy, “notiz über ein gespräch December 16, 1927,” diary, Lucia Moholy Papers, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

The series of hand portraits that Moholy took at Schwarzerden forwarded this radical de-subjectivization of the individual and in doing so challenged avant-garde discourses of “production” that left in place—despite rhetoric to the contrary—the autonomy of the author-artist. Moholy fragmented the body, identifying it with its parts and then again with its various forms of domestic (i.e., reproductive) labor—labor that was, like her own act of taking the image, maligned as artistically unmeaningful, “merely” reproductive. These are rightly *her* images—taken neither for publicity (at either school) nor as “documentation” nor on the instruction of others, like her husband, who, in one “self-portrait,” with his right arm outstretched toward the camera, claimed that the photograph was his “idea” and Moholy simply carried it out.¹⁰⁰ This subordination of *techne* to concept, embodied in Moholy and her husband, respectively, is not an isolated case, but, as I have argued, characterized the discourse of the German avant-garde. It is against that ideology of authorial autonomy that we should see the radically de-subjectivized hand portraits of Moholy—radical not only in their embrace of photography as first and foremost a reproductive medium but radical, too, in her willingness to put her own authorship on the line in making self-consciously “nonproductive” imagery.

“Hausfotografin”

Although Moholy was extremely busy at the Bauhaus, responding to the high demand for her photographs, she complained of a depression that impacted her well-being.¹⁰¹ A draft of a letter to her husband expresses a strong desire to leave Dessau:

I reluctantly came along to Weimar at that point, and then reluctantly to Dessau—after these four years I simply can’t stand it anymore. . . . I need something that I’m not finding here . . . other people, as well, and another kind of energy around me, and it doesn’t help that each week twenty friends come to visit. They are our captives and bring nothing more than organs that must be filled. I have to go where others exhibit strength and where I, too, now and again, can unwind.¹⁰²

100. László Moholy-Nagy, “Scharf oder unscharf?,” *i 10* 2, no. 20 (April 1929), pp. 163–67. See the caption to the photo in Oliver Botar, *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, die Medien und die Künste* (Zurich: Lars Müller, 2014), p. 17. Moholy-Nagy’s statement has since led to a confusion over the authorship of this image, whether it should be attributed to her alone, to both parties, or to him alone (as evidenced by the photograph’s varying attribution across the collections of the Met Museum, the MoMA, and the Bauhaus-Archiv). This confusion—stemming from his claim versus the fact of who was actually behind the camera—points to how resilient this notion of “production” continues to be and how its legitimacy relies on invalidating “reproduction.”

101. Moholy, diary entry, April 13, 1927, Lucia Moholy Papers, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

102. Moholy, diary entry that begins “an laci,” May 27, 1927, Lucia Moholy Papers, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin (emphasis in original).



Moholy. Hands Pinning Cloth. C. 1930.

Whether she found that respite at Schwarzerden is not known. Certainly, the circumstances of her marriage were on her mind, as suggested by a book review published in *i 10* entitled “the perfect marriage.”¹⁰³ Shortly thereafter, in April 1928, she and Moholy-Nagy moved to Berlin; they separated a year later. Moholy founded her own photography class at Johannes Itten’s school. She kept doing dark-room work and taking photographs for Moholy-Nagy, particularly his stage sets at the Kroll Opera. Hands continued to feature prominently in her work, including in a series of Clara Zetkin in conversation with the German Communist representative Theodor Neubauer, as well as a portrait of Yella Curjel, wife of the Kroll director Hans Curjel, with her hands obscuring her face.

In an autobiographical text entitled “Woman of the Twentieth Century,” Moholy described her role in the 1920s with the term “*Hausfotografin* [house photographer].”¹⁰⁴ I do not believe that she meant this contemptuously, but as an objective description of her labor, in the sense of “in house,” for hire, and thus work that she did not see as “creative.”¹⁰⁵ But the term, for our purposes, means much more; it encapsulates the ambiguous reception of both her labor and her photographs in relation to her avant-garde peers, but also her interest in marginal practices of photography engendering new ways of seeing, as when she appeals to an amateur photography “of the house and kitchen”: “Think for instance of the housewife, who daily interacts with her kitchen appliances. Among those thousands of housewives hardly one has probably thought to pay attention to the *play of form, light, and shadow*, which emerges from her work with sieves, plates, eggs, meals, leftovers, liquids, and other minor things [*Kleinigkeiten*] of all kinds.”¹⁰⁶ While other scholars have traced her work’s marginalization to biography—to her gender and, in one case, to her assimilated Jewish background as playing a role in that “negation of self”—I have argued here for the significance of her images and their reception.¹⁰⁷ *Hands Peeling Potatoes*, for one, was the initial spark for this planned book on domestic photography.¹⁰⁸ Those images lay bare photography as a replicative medium with profound consequences for conventional conceptions of creation and, in doing so,

103. Lucia Moholy, “die vollkommene ehe, boekbespreking,” *i 10* 1, no. 12 (December 1927), pp. 459–60.

104. Moholy, “Frau des 20. Jahrhunderts,” p. 35; cited in Valdivieso, “Eine ‘symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft,’” p. 78 n. 45.

105. Moholy would often deny her identity as an artist, construing her and Moholy-Nagy’s collaboration as “the symbiotic alliance of two diverging temperaments. Innate boldness and passionate fervor on the one hand, restraint of approach on the other, had each, it appears, a part to play in the outcome, initiative and implementation remaining the artist’s [i.e., Moholy-Nagy’s] birthright”; see Moholy, *Marginal Notes*, p. 55.

106. Lucia Moholy, “Der Amateur bei sich zuhause,” reprinted in *Manifeste! Eine andere Geschichte der Fotografie*, p. 209 (emphasis in original).

107. Rose-Carol Washton Long, “Lucia Moholy’s Bauhaus Photography and the Issue of the Hidden Jew,” *Women’s Art Journal* 35, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014), p. 45.

108. Conversation with Rolf Sachsse, March 8, 2020.



Moholy. Yella Curjel, Hands. 1927.

fundamentally challenge a discourse of New Vision photography that had sublimated replication under the sign of authorial intention. As such, they “question the transcendence of the New Vision’s ‘one of form,’” as Carol Armstrong has argued in relation to Tina Modotti’s photographs, drawing on Luce Irigaray’s critique of essentialism.¹⁰⁹ While those (primarily male) practitioners—Moholy-Nagy above all—essentially repressed the full threat of photography to those

109. Carol Armstrong, “This Photography Which Is Not One: In the Gray Zone with Tina Modotti,” *October* 101 (Summer 2002), p. 52 (emphasis in original). This needs to be done not only within this field but even within Moholy’s oeuvre, part of which has been recruited for what Armstrong calls “modernism’s monotheistic monopoly of the self-definition of photography as an avant-garde optics.”

models of mastery, Moholy embraced this aspect of the medium, with all the consequences that it entailed for her own self-effacement.¹¹⁰

And those consequences were extreme. In August 1933, Neubauer, with whom Moholy was having a relationship, was arrested by the Gestapo in her Berlin apartment, prompting Moholy to emigrate quickly. In the haste of this departure, she was compelled to leave her glass negatives behind, with the intention, as she later wrote, of retrieving them at some point in the future.¹¹¹ That recovery was delayed by the outbreak of World War II, and Moholy believed that the negatives had been destroyed, until she began to see them reproduced in publications. With the help of a lawyer, she gradually pieced together that they were in Walter Gropius's possession: When Moholy-Nagy left for England, he had moved them into Gropius's basement, and Gropius had them shipped, along with all of his other possessions, upon his emigration in 1937. As Robin Schuldenfrei has argued, in recovering this remarkable episode, Gropius retained the images because he believed that, given that the photographs were of his school and his buildings, he had a right to their usage; that his authorship (of the referent) therefore outweighed hers (of the image).¹¹²

Many of the photographs in the Schwarzerden archive bear the numbering system that Moholy devised in the 1950s in her effort to regain possession of her negatives and thus her authorship.¹¹³ This numbering system is written in pencil and in Moholy's handwriting from that period (as opposed to the 1920s). Some prints also bear her Berlin-era stamp (1929–1933), gesturing to the complex temporality of this body of work, which indexes two very different periods in the self-consciousness of a female artist, one producing and one reassembling her oeuvre (and, moreover, one that she never would have described with that lofty term). The inscriptions further attest to Moholy's renewed contact with Vogler and Buchhold after World War II: Judging from correspondence and statements, she very likely sent them additional prints that they then pasted into albums. On the occasion of Vogler's death in 1975, Buchhold solicited recollections from close friends, to which Moholy enthusiastically responded. The end of Moholy's contribution suggests the high regard in which she held the women of Schwarzerden and particularly Vogler: "It was only after many years of painful separation that the

110. Anja Guttenberger explores this aspect of Moholy's "serial self-portraits," which she, furthermore, excluded from her own photographic oeuvre; see Guttenberger, "Mit eigenen Augen: Serielle Autoporträts von Lucia Moholy und Florence Henri," in *Gespiegeltes Ich: Fotografisches Selbstbildnisse von Frauen in den 1920er Jahren*, ed. Gerda Breuer and Elina Knorpp (Berlin: Nicolai, 2014), p. 101.

111. Moholy, "The Missing Negatives," p. 7.

112. Schuldenfrei, "Images in Exile," p. 201.

113. This system consists of her initials in lowercase, a roman numeral I or II, a slash, and a number. It corresponds to a card catalogue that Moholy created for her photos, which is now in the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin. It is only because of this inscription on the verso of several prints in the AddF that I was able to identify these photographs as Moholy's at all, given that many are not among her papers at the Bauhaus-Archiv.

symbol of awakening life, sent by me from London via personal messengers (Moholy-Nagy had died in Chicago in 1946), secured the continued existence of the old friendship. This symbol was followed by a reunion, which confirmed our loyalty and sparked a deep admiration for her successful work.”¹¹⁴

Abigail Solomon-Godeau wrote not long ago that photography is “a medium which by virtue of its supposed transparency, truth, and naturalism has been an especially potent purveyor of cultural ideology—particularly the ideology of gender.”¹¹⁵ What the Schwarzerden photos show us is how that ideology unfolded on multiple registers: It was not simply that Moholy’s photographic labor was feminized because she was a woman (although that certainly played a role). It was feminized because it did not conform to the hegemonic terms of originality then underpinning the distinction between artistic and nonartistic labor. At the very moment in which Moholy’s hands were busy laboring for her husband’s career, her own were dismissed in the highly gendered language of “reproduction,” as the “reiteration of already existing relations,” to borrow from the 1922 essay. What is so extraordinary is to see just how resilient those terms were: Moholy herself played a large part in securing them, not only by participating in that system as the Other against which her male colleagues defined their own “productive” work, but by crafting its very discourse. To read the gendered dimension of her Schwarzerden photographs is to read them against the intentions of their maker, for although Moholy later asserted authorship of her images, she never pointed to gender as playing a role in their devaluation. Nor was she involved in the German feminist movement beyond her tenuous connection to Schwarzerden. This is one of the conundrums of women photographers of the interwar period: While they led independent lives, pursuing their careers in the face of rampant sexism, none of them seemed to have embraced the feminist movements in their respective countries.¹¹⁶

As the exception that proves the rule, Moholy’s photographs at Schwarzerden reflect on that conundrum in ways that go beyond biography and begin to dismantle the avant-garde’s own mythologies about visual reproduction. Gropius—or Herbert Bayer or Sigfried Giedion or Moholy-Nagy, for that matter, men who all protested Moholy’s requests in the 1950s to have her name credited—never actually contested her authorship; they knew perfectly well that she had taken the photographs. The ground on which they protested was that her author-

114. Moholy, in *Elisabeth Vogler*, p. 34.

115. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 257.

116. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “New Women and New Vision Photography in the Crucible of Modernity,” *Jeu de Paume: Le magazine* (October 21, 2015), <http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org/2015/10/abigail-solomon-godeau-new-women-and-new-vision-photography-in-the-crucible-of-modernity-en/>.

ship was qualitatively different from theirs.¹¹⁷ That difference was predicated on the false premise that there exist certain forms of visual representation that merely transcribe the world as it already is. We now recognize that that is rarely, if ever, the case; that every act of reproduction implicates decisions, interests, and priorities, whether intended or not. But to have admitted this would have been to admit that her authorship—her embrace of the medium’s realism, its replicative nature, and its mechanical limitations—was on an equal footing with theirs and thus would have profoundly destabilized the myth of nonmimetic representation as an inherently progressive mode of artistic production, a myth on which they had built entire careers and one that continues to underpin histories of the avant-garde and its “originality.” It is a lesson we have heard before and one that is worth hearing again.¹¹⁸ This time, though, with more attention paid to how discourses of originality unfold as much on the surface of the image as they do through the material lives, economic conditions, and gendered bodies of their makers.

117. This is an attempt to explain why, as Schuldenfrei points out, “the object photographed took precedence over the authored photograph as object,” an aspect that Moholy also observed when she described how isolating the object through the photograph effectively lent it greater significance than it previously possessed (Moholy, *A Hundred Years of Photography*, p. 164, cited in Schuldenfrei, “Images in Exile,” p. 202).

118. The reference is to Rosalind Krauss’s *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). I hope my own argument will not be read as a “return” to the historicist model of art history that Krauss critiques, one in which the meaning of the work is grounded in “the biographical matrix of its author” without ever questioning “the categories of such a discussion—work of art, medium, author, oeuvre” (p. 4).

International Avant-Garde, 1927–1929*

LUCIA MOHOLY

They had agreed on the program of the newly founded magazine; now it was just a matter of finding a name that would be able to convey the diversity and breadth of its contents. “If only there were not already so many Internationals,” thought one. “Why don’t we try to guarantee our own longevity through the title?” asked another. And the third: “The ‘tenth international’ would probably be thinking far enough ahead—‘International Ten’ . . . ?” From there, it was only a small step to the coining of the abbreviated title “*i 10*.”¹

The plan for a multilingual publication on art, literature, and politics came into being in 1922 in Berlin and then was further developed in 1925 in Paris, once the initiator and later editor-in-chief Arthur Lehning (at that time Müller Lehning), a sociologist from Amsterdam, won over his compatriot Piet Mondrian as collaborator. Gradually other artists and writers joined, and soon musicians, architects, philosophers, and pedagogues, such that, with the first issue’s appearance in January 1927, the circle of those interested had been expanded as well as consolidated.

Appearing through July 1929, the publication had a minuscule print run—the number of subscribers oscillated between one and three hundred; however, it now occupies a place alongside the other historical documents of the 1920s. Its primary task was to be the voice of a generation that believed in finding a common denominator across the most diverse fields of knowledge. One was as opposed to narrow concepts of specialization as to vague generalizations, and had set out the goal of creating a framework in which the exponents of the various disciplines could each be heard—whether speaking in Dutch, German, French, or English. Among those, there were some who were just emerging, and others who were able to lend the magazine a form and a face. The result was complementary; the effect, multifaceted.

* Originally published in *Du: Kulturelle Monatsschrift* 24, no. 3 (1964), pp. 76–78. All German texts by Lucia Moholy © Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

1. The journal’s founder, Arthur Lehning, later wrote of its title: “The first number was already being prepared and no name had been found for the journal. In keeping with its international character, we were looking for a title which did not need to be translated. It became clear during one of our talks that even those who had agreed to collaborate would not necessarily agree with one another about everything else. With such a situation ahead of us, we would, someone said, be approaching the Tenth International: hence *i 10*. If my memory is correct, it was Lucia Moholy who suggested it.” Lehning, “Introduction,” in *Internationale Revue i 10: 1927–1929* (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1979).—*Trans.*

Back then it was unusual to see Kurt Schwitters's *Sonate in Urlauten* in print; and the poetry of Hans Arp was by no means common knowledge.² Mondrian's contributions on the topic of Neoplasticism, including his article "Jazz and Neoplasticism," were still little-known formulations of his thought processes. Kandinsky's essay on "Synthetic Art" had grown out of his earlier writings. Ernst Bloch's "Notes on the Stravinsky Problem" and "Metaphysical Ideas on *Fidelio*" ["Metaphysisches zu *Fidelio*"] were as thrilling as Krenek's "Mechanization of Art" and "'New Objectivity' in Music" or Willem Pijper's commentary on this complex of questions. Willi Baumeister, Adolf Behne, Max Burchartz, Will Grohmann, Georg Muche, Moholy-Nagy, among others, participated in the discussion on "painting and photography," initiated by Ernst Kallai. The problem of "advertising as visual art" was also already current at that time. J. J. P. Oud and C. van Eesteren wrote on architecture and city planning; Walter Benjamin, on Karl Kraus, Philippe Soupault, and "New Russian Literature"; E. H. Posse, on Georges Sorel; Karl Wilken, on the "Victory of Freedom in Education"; Müller Lehning, E. J. Gumbel, Ilya Ehrenburg, and others, on political, cultural, and social-scientific questions of the day. Discussions of contemporary books and relevant congresses likewise stood on the docket.³ In brief: The magazine was one of astounding elasticity and receptivity. Like many other periodicals from the 1920s, *i 10* has been out of print for years.

During the war and since then, libraries have made increasing use of modern reproduction methods, primarily to remedy the scarcity of study material and to promote the exchange of scientific information. Now, in an effort to produce facsimile editions of out-of-print publications, various publishers have begun to put those methods to use, in conjunction with the appropriate printing techniques. In the fall of 1963, prompted by Arthur Lehning, the publisher van Daamen, at The Hague, released a photo-offset edition, overseen by Bert Bakker, of the magazine *i 10*, which consisted of a selection of articles chosen by Lehning and Jurriaan Schrofer. The edition bears the subtitle "de internationale avant-garde tussen de twee wereldoorlogen" (The international avant-garde between the two world wars). Reducing the original format by half, the volume brings together, in easily legible text, around a third of the original magazine, with its 660 pages and numerous illustrations from the fields of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, typography, etc. The full spectrum of the material and its themes can be found in toto in the accompanying index of the volumes published in 1927 and 1928–1929. Coinciding with the release of the volume, an exhibition of documents from the circle around *i 10* can be seen at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

—Translated by Jordan Troeller

2. Kurt Schwitters, "Meine Sonate in Urlauten," *i 10* 1, no. 11 (November 1927), pp. 392–401. Moholy refers to several articles published in *i 10*, of which we have only provided a reference to the first; for the others, see the reprint edition cited above.—*Trans.*

3. Moholy herself published three such contributions: a review of the book *Die vollkommene Ehe* in *i 10* 1, no. 12 (December 1927), pp. 459–60; "VI Internationaler Kongress für Zeichen, Kunstunterricht und angewandte Kunst in Prag, 29. Juli–5. August 1928," *i 10* 2, no. 17–18 (December 1928), pp. 96–97; and a review of Knud Rasmussen's book *Rasmussens Thulefahrt: Zwei Jahre im Schlitten durch unerforschtes Eskimoland* in *i 10* 2, no. 20 (April 1929), p. 168.—*Trans.*

LUCIA MOHOLY

The oft-invoked and much-vaunted—perhaps also at times overestimated—decade between 1920 to 1930 possessed, at least in artistic circles, a few essential features: an openness to the new, a readiness to collaborate, a recognition of others, the reciprocity of critique, an exchange of thought, a notion of goals held in common. One lived, if geographically dispersed, in a community whose problems were also one's own, a community that one felt supported by and for whose destiny one felt responsible, and one worked in an atmosphere thick with ideas struggling to be realized. Incitement came from all sides, spontaneously and unconditionally and not predominantly from one or another direction, as one might like to see it in retrospect. Often, opinion stood in opposition to opinion, judgment to judgment, and agreement was confronted by dissension. One discussed, fought, attacked, lost one's temper—there were also angry young men (and women) back then—and as these exchanges went back and forth, the crux of the matter slowly and gradually emerged.

The struggle of words and ideas, which was carried out in this way during the first half of the decade in Berlin, Weimar, Düsseldorf, Hanover, etc., had a resounding echo internationally because, for one, artists from all over the world participated and, furthermore, similar questions with the same intensity and thoroughness were being discussed around the same time in many countries in Europe, especially Holland, France, and Switzerland. Such was it that El Lissitzky, bound to the same set of conditions, joined the circle that met together at relatively short intervals, here and there—permanently, one could almost say. To this group belonged: Hans Arp, Theo van Doesburg, Cornelis van Eesteren, Werner Graeff, László Moholy-Nagy, J. J. P. Oud, Hans Richter, Mies van der Rohe, Kurt Schwitters, Mart Stam, as well as the art theorist Adolf Behne, Ernst Kállai, and Alfred Kemény, who was also known under the name “Durus.” One spoke about Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Dada, Esprit Nouveau, De Stijl, Proun. One discussed painting and sculpture, housing-estate architecture and urban planning, the past and the present, and one planned for the future.

* Originally published in *Das Werk: Architektur und Kunst* 53, no. 6 (1966), pp. 229–36. My thanks to Samuel Johnson for consulting on the notes.—*Trans.*

In 1921, at the Institute for Artistic Culture (INKhUK) in Moscow, Alfred Kemény gave a lecture on “New Tendencies in Contemporary Art in Russia and Germany” and on this occasion met Lissitzky.¹ In the same year in Russia, particularly with reference to the work of Vladimir Tatlin, the term “Constructivism” began to be used. In Moscow in 1920, the forward-looking “Realistic Manifesto” by the brothers [Antoine] Pevsner and [Naum] Gabo appeared, and soon after, in 1922, followed “Dynamic-Constructive System of Forces,” by Kemény and Moholy-Nagy in the publication *Der Sturm*. In the Galerie van Diemen in Berlin in 1922, the large exhibition of Russian art from the 1890s to the present, which Lissitzky helped to design, took place—it was also shown in Amsterdam.² He had come to Berlin under the auspices of VOKS [the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations Abroad]—the (as one would say today) public-relations office of the USSR—to publish the trilingual journal *Veshch’–Object–Gegenstand* with Ilya Ehrenburg, of which three issues appeared. The journal represented ideas that were not dissimilar to those found in the Dutch publication *De Stijl*.

Born in 1890 in the Smolensk Governorate [of Imperial Russia], El (Eleazar Markovich) Lissitzky studied architecture and engineering in Darmstadt between 1909 and 1914. He earned his diploma in 1915 in Moscow and was then active in various architecture offices. In 1917, he became a designer of flags and posters in the service of the revolution. At the same time, he dedicated himself to the illustration of Hasidic books, influenced in part by Chagall, whom he admired, and in part by his gravitation towards Jewish folklore.³ In 1919 he received a professorship in the architecture department at the academy in Vitebsk, which presented him with new tasks. The illustrated Hasidic books receded into the background. Although there is no evidence of a shift in his thinking, some critics believe that the change should be interpreted as a departure from the Jewish cause, a claim at times based only on the fact that Lissitzky, like other artists, had signed various groups of works in different ways. It was an artistic decision, not one based on a worldview.

The teaching position in Vitebsk led to close contact with Kasimir Malevich, a painter following in the footsteps of Cézanne, Derain, Léger, and Picasso, who played a meaningful role in his artistic conception by painting the *Black Square on White Ground* in 1913, which was followed by *White Square on Black Ground* in 1918. Malevich attempted to win over his younger colleague to Suprematism, which he had publicly announced in 1915; this he succeeded in

1. Moholy could be referring to the text by Kemény later published as “Vorträge und Diskussionen am ‘Institut für Künstlerische Kultur’ (INChUK), Moscow 1921,” in *Wechselwirkungen: Ungarische Avantgarde in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Hubertus Gassner (Marburg: Jonas, 1986), pp. 226–30.—*Trans.*

2. Contrary to rumor, Lissitzky was not involved in the design of this exhibition, although he did give his lecture “New Russian Art” at the exhibition’s Amsterdam venue in 1923.—*Trans.*

3. Moholy’s use of “Hasidic” here and in the following mention is inaccurate, given that Hasidism had little to do with the revival of folk culture and its secular elements in which Lissitzky was involved.—*Trans.*

doing to a large extent. Lissitzky never quite shed his initial enthusiasm; something of it remains in his graphic art.

However, it was not the “objectless world” that fundamentally attracted Lissitzky but rather a world of new, self-generated “objects,” which he called “PROUN.”⁴ The word itself betrays little of its meaning; it is an abbreviated reference to Unovis (the earlier Academy), which comprises the letters U(tverditeli) NOV(ogo) IS(kusstva) = Founding of New Forms in Art—all reduced to “un”; thus: PRO-UN.⁵

“Cubism,” said Lissitzky, “moves along tracks laid on the ground; the construction of Suprematism follows the straight lines and curves of the aeroplane . . . PROUN leads us to construct a new body . . . A PROUN begins as a level surface, turns into a model of three-dimensional space [*räumlichen Modellbau*], and goes on to construct all the objects of everyday life.”⁶ It is “a stopping point on the path of constructing a new form,” or, as Lissitzky says in the book *Die Kunstismen* (which he and Hans Arp published in Erlenbach, near Zurich), “a transfer station between painting and architecture.”

Searching for the middle ground between the opposing figures of Malevich and Tatlin, Lissitzky found a synthesis between abstraction and concreteness, one that unified visionary artistry and objective correspondence. The PROUN was the new, that which he sought out, that which had hovered before him; *hovered* in almost a literal sense, inasmuch as for him it actually seemed to float, that “structure round which we must circle, looking at it from all sides, peering down from above, investigating from below,” in which “the one axis of the picture that stood perpendicular to the horizontal was destroyed,” as he wrote during his recovery in the Ticino in 1924. The demand expressed around the same time by Herwarth Walden that abstract painting should have no top or bottom, no left or right side, but rather must be correct in every orientation—a new, weightless reality for Lissitzky—is here elevated to a new stage through the inclusion of the spatial dimension granted to PROUN in that “circling round it, we screw ourselves [*wir schrauben uns*] into space.” As such it is hardly surprising that even art experts sometimes have various opinions about the correct orientation of a PROUN.

In his own way, Lissitzky was an iconoclast. And yet he painted canvases and wooden panels that we would describe with the old, familiar word “image” had he not given us the name PROUN. In his use of color he painted with the utmost

4. The allusion is to Malevich’s book *Die gegenstandslose Welt* (published in 1927 as part of the Bauhaus book series) and Lissitzky’s journal, *Veshch Objet Gegenstand*.—*Trans.*

5. Unovis was a “Party in Art” that was based in the Vitebsk People’s Art School; it did not replace the name of the school itself. Note that Moholy gives the correct Russian phrase but mistranslates it (“champions of the new art” would be more accurate).—*Trans.*

6. Moholy very likely quotes from El Lissitzky, “Proun,” *De Stijl* 5, no. 6 (June 1922), pp. 82–85. In this passage and others also likely from the *De Stijl* piece, I have used the English version of his text, found in *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, ed. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers and trans. Helene Aldwinckle (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), pp. 343–44; departing only when Aldwinckle’s translation was inaccurate.—*Trans.*

economy: a rich spectrum of white, gray, and brown tones with accents of brick red, slate blue, even yellow or green—and black is almost always present. It was not painting in itself but its content that led Lissitzky to write in *Kunstblatt* in 1925: “Painting pictures is over!” His revolutionary view refers to that kind of painting done in the service of the church, the monarchy, and the philistine, and for him, such art had ceded its right to exist. He understood Expressionism, the “distortion of the clear world of things,” as a decadent phenomenon comparable to caricature. Only “pure painting” could still be tolerated, because “here the artist begins to reorient [*Umstellung*] himself.” Does that perhaps answer the questions that arise when one thinks of the *Room for Constructivist Art* (*Raum der gegenstandslosen Kunst*), designed by Lissitzky for the International Exhibition in Dresden in 1926, or the *Abstract Cabinet* (*Kabinett der Abstrakten*) that he created in 1926–27 in the Landesmuseum Hannover? Is that the “reorientation [*Umstellung*]” that is documented here? Or a gesture of friendly goodwill towards the host country? Barring Dresden and Hanover, the numerous exhibition spaces that Lissitzky designed in Berlin, Amsterdam, Cologne, Stuttgart, Leipzig, Paris, and New York were, almost without exception, intended for the “world of objects,” such as press, film, theater, aviation, health care, agriculture, and trade, rendering them through a means of meaningful, effective, and emphatic representation. Were it not for Lissitzky’s efforts in this arena, contemporary exhibition design would be unthinkable.

Each of the exhibition rooms designed by Lissitzky sought to develop his notion of PROUN, which had been realized in the purest form in the *Prouns Space* [*PROUNENRAUM*] of the Great Berlin Art Exhibition in 1923. It is certainly no coincidence that this exemplary integration of space, sculpture, and painting, which at that time generated so much enthusiasm among the De Stijl group of architects, is now being reconstructed in Holland, twenty-five years after Lissitzky’s death, and was shown initially as part of his large retrospective in Eindhoven. For Switzerland, the encounter with the reconstruction was even more meaningful, as the example of the Hochschule St. Gallen embodies current efforts to integrate the arts. And for Hanover, where the *Abstract Cabinet* was destroyed in 1936 by the National Socialists, the exhibition was a demonstration of the utmost importance.

As De Stijl looked to architecture as its ultimate goal, Lissitzky also continued to advance beyond the *Prouns Space* to what might be called a PROUN-architecture. In a letter written to J. J. P. Oud in May 1925, shortly before his return to Russia, which included photos of his *Wolkenbügel*, a high-rise building planned for Moscow, one reads (in Lissitzky’s own peculiar style of writing): “. . . I endeavor to consider and evaluate all the aspects of function, the necessities, and the possible materials, etc., but I find satisfaction when, as a result, I create a work that confronts me in a surprising way. I believe that all my organs, together in their totality, have a truer course than just the brain alone . . .”

The intuitive way of working that is expressed in this letter is supplemented by the critical perspective of the formally trained architect. In 1930, a book enti-

tled *Russia: The Reconstruction of Architecture in the Soviet Union* appeared as part of the series “New Architecture in the World,” edited by Joseph Gantner for the Schroll publishing company. Annotated by Lissitzky, it featured works by architects active there in the 1920s. The new edition, published in 1965 as volume 14 of Ullstein’s “Bauweltfundamente” (fundamentals of architecture) under the revised title *Architecture for World Revolution*, collects some additional texts and commentaries by Lissitzky on the subject of artistic design, as well as, in a special supplement, reports by various authors on architecture and urban planning in the USSR in the years from 1928 to 1933.⁷

Although Lissitzky often traveled, he always found time to turn to contemplative work alongside and in between the larger commissions that exhausted him because of his not entirely strong constitution. The Kestner Society enabled him, among other things, to draw multiple series of lithographs, including *Kestner’s Portfolio PROUN 1919–1923*—a previous PROUN portfolio had been published in Moscow in 1921—and the portfolio of figures *Victory over the Sun*, ten sheets of an electro-mechanical sketch of ideas for the eponymous opera by Kruchenykh and Matiushin, which was performed for the first time in 1913 at the Luna Park Theater in St. Petersburg (with stage design and costumes by Malevich). To be sure, the mechanization of the theater was “in the air”; there were many ideas, and each was new and different. By transforming *his* into graphic form, Lissitzky made convincing works of art.

As important as Lissitzky-the-graphic-artist is Lissitzky-the-typographer. This is already evident in the picture book *About Two Squares*, which dates to 1920 in Vitebsk and which was printed in Berlin and Holland in 1922. Also published in Berlin and designed by Lissitzky was the volume of poetry *For the Voice* by Mayakovsky, which appeared in 1923, and the designs *Four Arithmetic Operations*, from 1928, which owe less to Suprematism and more, perhaps, to his contact with Schwitters. Additionally, there were numerous envelopes, catalogues, posters, and other printed matter, some of which employed photographic means, such as the unforgettable poster of the Russian exhibition at the Kunstgewerbemuseum Zurich in 1929.

In his essay “Our Book,” published in the *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* (1926–27), Lissitzky cites the Futurist Manifesto of 1909, in which Marinetti opposed the harmony of sentence structure [*Satzbild*] and instead championed a “new painterly pictographic” of the printed page, which the Dadaists had already tried to realize. The Russians, above all Alexander Rodchenko and Nathan Altman, entirely reconceptualized layout and typography according to Constructivist tenets, a long line of development that can then be followed in the West from [O.H.W.] Hadank to the Bauhaus. What is particular about Lissitzky, though, is that each of his typographical works has its own PROUN character and at the same time remains an excellent example of typography.

7. See El Lissitzky, *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, trans. Erich Dluhosch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970).—*Trans.*

In the same essay, Lissitzky, aware of the limitations of available material, points to the growing need to find new methods for book production. He envisioned replacing traditional typesetting and printing techniques with the use of light-sensitive materials. These rather unorthodox possibilities for 1926, along with other photographic, photomechanical, and typographic problems, were repeatedly discussed between him and Moholy-Nagy. Of course, Lissitzky also visited the Bauhaus; but the newly emerging view that he exercised a decisive influence on the direction of its development lacks any foundation. It is probably based on a confusion with Theo van Doesburg, who was often in Weimar for longer periods and who had formed a De Stijl group there before the arrival of Lissitzky. The fact that Lissitzky, as well as works of his that were exhibited in Dessau in 1927, were particularly well understood by Bauhaus painters and typographers is due to the nature of the situation [*die Natur der Sache*]. And yet the PROUN remained a world of its own that could not go on indefinitely, but could only be transformed, and whose luminosity shines today with undiminished brightness.

Until 1938 and then again after 1949, works by Lissitzky could be seen at various group exhibitions in Switzerland, England, Italy, Holland, Germany, and the USA. An overall view of his work has been overdue for some time. Mart Stam recalls Lissitzky's statement that he did not paint his pictures for them "to become an object for the art historian in a museum." Might this be perhaps a valid reason for why it is that he is virtually unknown to today's art historians? This is contradicted by the fact that the "pictures" are only a part of Lissitzky's life, and the insights to be gained from a comprehensive view of his work are of the utmost importance, especially now. The retrospective of the past months, collected with much effort and expertise from museums, libraries, and private collections in many countries, including Switzerland, was an overdue debt of gratitude to a great and idiosyncratic artist. At the same time, for the generation that was allowed to be "present," it was a reminder of an extraordinary human being, one who was supported by a community of friends who knew how to interpret the signs of the time in an uncommon way.

—Translated by Jordan Troeller

The Image of the Bauhaus*

LUCIA MOHOLY

On May 4, the exhibition Fifty Years Bauhaus opened in the Kunstgebäude am Schloßplatz in Stuttgart with around 1,500 objects (paintings, sculptures, watercolors, drawings, architectural models, objects from the workshops, and photographs). It will run until July 28, before traveling to London and then to four American cities.

What follows here does not contend with the Bauhaus nor with its members—how could it be otherwise?—but rather with a few examples of interpretation, none of which can be entirely reconciled with the original Bauhaus image.

A young artist with Constructivist leanings recently said that he owed much to the Bauhaus. After having been asked what that meant, since he, born in 1928, could not have experienced it himself, he spoke of its work ethic [*Arbeitsethos*], which still emboldens one today to make uncompromising artworks. It could have been left at that, were it not for the fact that much has been said and even more written in the last few years that requires correction. This is all the more necessary given that it is often only those who have witnessed a considerable part of the Bauhaus who are able to provide historically reliable corrections—and already the number of these people has diminished considerably.

Those who are somewhat familiar with journalism in this field may have noticed, among other things, that recently the Bauhaus has often been portrayed as having been, above all, a gathering place for painters, who, as at artists' colonies such as Worpswede, retreated into an environment of their own in order to work undisturbed. That was not the case in Weimar and even less so in Dessau. The artists at the Bauhaus had to expect to devote a large part of their time to collective, mainly pedagogical tasks that lay outside their own work. Despite this affiliation, they were cosmopolitan [*weltoffen*] in the true sense of the word and have remained loyal to this artistic character. On the occasion of the opening exhibition in 1962, the Museum of the Twentieth Century in Vienna [today the MUMOK] exemplified the position of the painters at the Bauhaus in the catalogue with the following words: “expressionist incitement coincided with the cool logic of the

* Originally published as “Das Bauhaus-Bild,” *Das Werk: Architektur und Kunst* 55, no. 6 (1968), pp. 397–402.

Constructivists. The engineer had to sit down at the table with the artist; the designer with the architect. . . . With their work, the Bauhaus masters demonstrated that no damage can be done to the ‘pure and eternally artistic’ [*Rein- und Ewig-Künstlerischen*] when it renounces its isolated genius . . . and admits objective laws.”¹ That was certainly clear.

Still, another kind of isolationist strategy seems to be making the rounds. It has become customary to exhibit and publish works by artists who taught at the Bauhaus alongside one another. In this way, we can see, among other things, how different these individual artistic credos were, even as they held in common an objective goal. Titles such as *The Painters of the Bauhaus* (*Die Maler am Bauhaus*, Munich 1950), *Painters of the Bauhaus* [in English—*trans.*] (London 1962), *Painters of the Bauhaus* (*Maler am Bauhaus*, Berlin 1965) were clear and accurate. The abbreviated phrase “Bauhaus painter” came into use, and gradually the name “Bauhaus” in its entirety referred to a direction in painting. In this way, the dates of the Bauhaus—its foundation, relocation, closure—came to be grouped under Marcel Brion’s rubric of “the development of modern abstract art up to 1933.”²

In 1956, Klipstein and Co. in Bern (as they were then known) held an exhibition entitled *From die Brücke to the Bauhaus*, in which the Bauhaus was only represented by Feininger, Kandinsky, Klee, and Schlemmer. On the occasion of the London exhibition in 1962, Basel’s *National-Zeitung* spoke of the “Romantic strain of Bauhaus art,” and the *Frankfurter Rundschau* wrote that the London art public stands “in awe of the Periclean potency of this modern Weimar classic.” In an exchange of views with Fritz Billeter, Paul Nizon suggested that one should “turn to the so-called concrete art of those succeeding Mondrian and Bauhaus” (*Kunstnachrichten*, 1966).

In 1967, an exhibition of masterpieces from German private collections was displayed in Hamburg and Frankfurt as *From the Bauhaus to the Present*. In a consideration of magical realism in Wuppertal, *Die Zeit* wrote that it was “the third force between the old Expressionism and the Bauhaus pioneers.” A New York journal reported from Geneva on “the tendencies of the Blaue Reiter and the Bauhaus pioneers as comparable to Expressionism and Abstract Constructivism,” and, on another occasion, addressing an art exhibition in Düsseldorf, the publication described it as “German art of die Brücke and Blaue Reiter up to the group Zero, from the Bauhaus and the Surrealists to [Norbert] Kricke and [Konrad] Klapheck”—always using the term “Bauhaus” in the sense of a homogeneous group of artists. Likewise, the Bauhaus also comes up in discussions of Roy Lichtenstein.

Even Hans M. Wingler, director of the Bauhaus-Archiv in Darmstadt, spoke in 1967 in Chicago of the “official Bauhaus painting” of Kandinsky, Klee, Moholy-

1. The speaker refers to Kandinsky’s oft-cited phrase in his 1911 treatise *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (*On the Spiritual in Art*).—*Trans.*

2. Moholy refers to Marcel Brion’s *Modern Painting: From Impressionism to Abstract Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961).—*Trans.*

Nagy, Schlemmer, and Feininger—others were not mentioned in this respect—from which Action Painting and the psychogram as well as all other art movements, with the exception of Pop art, emerged. An “official Bauhaus painting” never existed and could never exist.

When Werner Haftmann refers to the “genuine contribution . . . of Bauhaus painting, which engraved the name Bauhaus firmly in the annals of history and of fine art,” he in turn refers to Kandinsky, Klee, Schlemmer, and Feininger, whose work and teaching he contrasts with the “international conformism of De Stijl.” In the catalogue of a London private gallery (a publication from late 1965), the advocates of Constructivist painting then found themselves forced to misplace the “aesthetic theories underlying Suprematism” in the Bauhaus years!

Needless to say, many students also worked as painters or sculptors, mostly outside of class, and in particular outside of the preliminary course [*Vorkurs*], which was compulsory for all students and whose content was not invested in artistic ambition. Here it was about loosening up, becoming conscious; learning balance, tension, and release; dealing with oneself, with tradition, with material, with the corporeal and the visible, with textiles, form, color, texture, tactile peculiarities, and so on—in short, the ways to and stages of one’s own work, which was not to be art work.

It is well known that the preliminary course, which was initiated by Johannes Itten at the Bauhaus and then continued in a modified form by Josef Albers and Moholy-Nagy, has established itself in the world. Less well known and, above all, less recognized are the effects on the development of today’s artistic thinking, which also manifests itself in Central Europe, having been mediated through the Anglo-Saxon countries. What was started there—folded and bent, stretched and shrunk, cut and punched, transparent or opaque, full of color or having very little color, layered and built, placed, hung, or suspended, resting or moving to address the spectator—takes up again many of the attempts that were made nearly forty years ago. Of course, some new aspects have come along, above all, the tendency to submit the “seriousness” of life, paraphrasing Schiller, to the “serenity” of art.³

Initially serving pedagogical aims, the task of becoming familiar with the possibilities of relating, forming, and working with various materials continued at the Bauhaus in a pragmatic way. It helped young people find their way to becoming designers and also opened up new directions for design itself—a branch of the Bauhaus’s work of which surprisingly little is said today. (Writing from a personal perspective in *Form* 37, 1967, Wilhelm Wagenfeld revived this workshop atmosphere.)

Over the years, experiments were made in order to reconfigure principles of relationships into a new system. This was hardly the original intention, although

3. Moholy invokes the aphorism by Friedrich Schiller “Ernst ist das Leben, heiter ist die Kunst.”—*Trans.*

the fact that the events did have a certain consistency cannot be denied. In a film that deals with Oskar Holweck's foundations course at the Staatliche Werkkunstschule Saarbrücken, someone poses the question, "What has that got to do with art?" The answer given: "Everything; out of it comes art." And Walter Kuhn closes the preface to his exhibition catalogue *Plastic and Spatial Symmetries* with the words "Objective values are orientations for subjective feelings" (not to be confused with "Subjective Experience and Objective Recognition," with which Itten opens his book *The Art of Color*). Kuhn's train of thought is continued, in the same catalogue, by Peter Iden, who, referring to the Bauhaus and De Stijl, invokes "the happiness, the imagination, and the subject's capacity for perceptive capacities, which engender the plumb line of rational, mathematical experience."

In this way, many of today's comparisons are inadequate or even misleading because "the Bauhaus" as a whole was neither as exclusively rational nor as predominantly irrational as it is believed here or there. The mention of De Stijl in the same breadth here indicates this tendency. Even today, architectural construction is, once again, often awarded primacy.

The complexity of the Bauhaus constellation also raises other problems that present certain difficulties to the pertinent literature. Authors who tend to crowd too much into the short span of the Bauhaus years have coined the collective term "Bauhaus experiments," which worsens rather than relieves one's ability to convey information. Two related examples: while widely regarded today as the prototype of the artist's signature work, Moholy-Nagy's enamel paintings were, in fact, created in the pre-Bauhaus period and so have nothing to do with his role as head of the metal workshop. They were commissioned in 1922 at a Berlin factory in various sizes according to scale. In recent years, there have been many oft-published and analyzed accounts, albeit compressed, of the negotiations back then.

The photogram idea also dates from the pre-Bauhaus period. I remember clearly—here I allow for a personal perspective—the context in which they were created. On a walk in the Rhön in the summer of 1922, we discussed the problem of "production/reproduction," which became the starting point of our photogram activity, independently from the ideas of Schad, Man Ray, and Lissitzky. The first photograms were created on old-fashioned daylight or printing-out paper in the studio on Lützowstrasse [in Berlin], which we occupied until the spring of 1923; others were made in Weimar; then, under better technical conditions, in the private darkroom on Burgkühnauer Allee in Dessau. The profiles, which have become known as the self- or double-portraits, also date to this time. The original thought process [*Gedankengänge*] behind the works was published as an article in *De Stijl* 7 (1922) and reprinted in several other magazines. The juxtaposition of terms finally reappeared as a chapter heading in the book *Painting, Photography, Film*, which was completed in the summer of 1924 in Weimar. In addition, numerous other such summarized insights can be traced back to the pre-Bauhaus era.

Moholy-Nagy was not appointed to the Bauhaus because of his photographic work, as some say, nor did he found or direct the photo department. Even the

assumption that he had given up painting in favor of light art around 1925 does not correspond to the facts. His enthusiasm for photography, which was almost limitless but not exclusive, had, of course, an effect in Bauhaus circles; indeed, it was almost contagious. But the photo department of the Bauhaus was founded in 1929, one year after his departure, in the era of Hannes Meyer, and was built up and directed by Walter Peterhans. Nevertheless, in 1967, in relation to the Bauhaus, a leading photo magazine failed to mention the merits of Peterhans as leader of the official photo department from 1929 to 1933.

Despite the facts, it seems to be difficult to correct established ideas. It is widely held, even today, that the Bauhaus was an architectural school, which created the Bauhaus style and exercised its influence in the field of architecture. It was probably in part the name that generated this suggestive effect, and in part, the program, which discussed an overall concept of construction that was to be undertaken collectively. The ways in which this was done can be read from history; opinions, from the commentary. For G. C. Argan, the Haus Sommerfeld was already “a document of the Bauhaus doctrine” and of the overall conception realized in it, whereby the wallpaper is the “bearer of the new conception of space [*Raumidee*]”; the new lamp, “an absolute identification of light and space”; and the new furniture, a “designed construction . . . to complement the architecture.”

In contrast, the students felt that the project of construction, which was to be created collectively, necessitated an architectural department, but in point of fact, there was no such thing as an architectural department in the first eight years of the Bauhaus. Lectures were held on statics and architectural history, and Gropius’s architectural office offered opportunities for obtaining information and sometimes also for working on private commissions. The first regular department of architecture and planning was founded in 1927. Hannes Meyer had been appointed to lead it, along with other teachers, including Hans Wittwer and Ludwig Hilberseimer, and Mart Stam among the guest lecturers. Meyer continued to lead the department as director of the Bauhaus from 1928 to 1930. Mies van der Rohe, the third and final director, 1930–1933, also essentially retained the direction of the architectural department, which was meanwhile renamed “Bau und Ausbau” (Architecture and interior furnishing). Despite H. M. Wingler’s documentary presentation of the sequence Gropius, Meyer, and van der Rohe, one still comes across information gaps, even in such prominent places as the Information Center at Harvard University or the *Encyclopedia of the Arts*, published in London.⁴

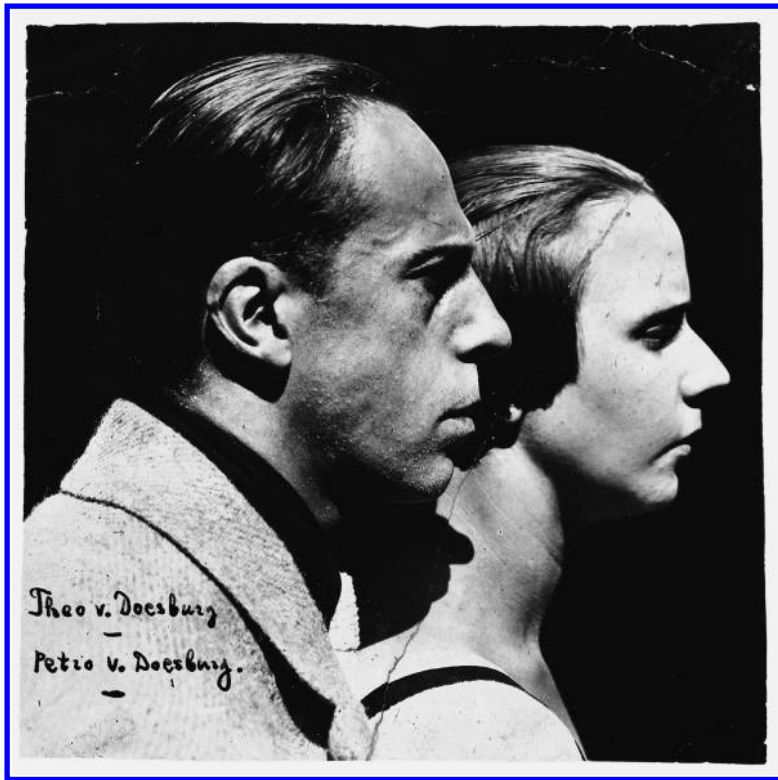
On the occasion of the first major Bauhaus exhibition, planned for the summer of 1923, the twenty-eight-year-old Georg Muche, then leading the weaving workshop, designed the so-called experimental house [*Versuchshaus*], which was constructed under the supervision of Adolf Meyer and Walter March in Weimar and furnished by the Bauhaus workshops. The following year, Muche designed a

4. Given Moholy’s work in the field of library science, her use of the phrase “Information Center” (in English in the original) likely refers to a specific department or institute within Harvard’s library system.—*Trans.*

skyscraper, which was not executed, and in 1926, with Richard Paulick, he built a steel house in the housing settlement Törten in Dessau. Among the students were Alfred Arndt, Marcel Breuer, Farkas Molnar, Franz Singer, and Andor Weininger, who grappled intensively with architectural problems.

The facts: three directors who were practicing architects; members of various workshops who, individually or collectively, aspired to architecture but at first could achieve little; an architectural department that had a relatively short life under changing management and difficult external circumstances; and finally, a number of well-known architects who have emerged from one or another phase of the Bauhaus. Should one ask on which of these conditions the Bauhaus style was based, the answer would be difficult. And how is it to be explained if a man like Karl Pawek, in a discussion dedicated to the Bauhaus during a whole evening on the occasion of the Third Humanities Congress in Munich in 1960, speaks of the “geometrization of style” that “after 1945 has become decisive for (German) architecture”? He thinks, he said, of a “world of boxes,” as he imagines it, and that “these boxes should continuously multiply,” and he asks why, in the age of pluralism, we are “stylistically under a very definite stylistic dictatorship.” What, exactly, did Pawek have in mind? And how could one come to an understanding about a “style” if, in the sphere of action of the Bauhaus, the term alone was rejected as inadmissible? Was it about real differences of opinion or about misunderstandings and mistakes? Probably one as well as the other.

In *Bauhaus: Idea—Form—Purpose—Time* (Frankfurt, 1964), Walter Dexel wrote from another point of view: “One cannot simply label a wide-ranging event that has grown out of many roots with the slogan ‘Bauhaus style.’ The word ‘Bauhaus style’ is a myth, an unauthorized simplification, and an unjustified concealment of the many important forces that collaborated on the style of that time.” A style of the time that the Bauhaus had helped shape? One of the forces involved was the De Stijl movement. In 1929 in the *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, the movement’s theorist Theo van Doesburg reported on his first meeting with Gropius, Adolf Meyer, Fred Forbat, and others in the winter of 1921 in Berlin. Van Doesburg also spent a lot of time in Weimar at the beginning of the ’20s, where he founded a De Stijl group. In 1922 a congress of Constructivists and Dadaists took place there, which included, among others, C. van Eesteren, El Lissitzky, Tristan Tzara, and Moholy-Nagy. The initiative of van Doesburg and the influence of the De Stijl movement on the development of the Bauhaus as well as the contact with Russian Constructivism are still today treated as *quantités négligeables*; but so much has been written about these relationships that any further trivialization would hardly be permissible or even possible. And the volumes by Mondrian, Doesburg (recently reprinted), Oud, and Malevich, published in the series of Bauhaus books during the 1920s—which, along with the book on Cubism, were not written by masters of the Bauhaus—were also not merely accidental. Whether and to what extent the relatively modest De Stijl exhibition which recently took place in London has helped clarify matters is difficult to decide from the catalogue.



Lucia Moholy. Double Portrait of Theo and Nelly van Doesburg. 1921.

Whereas the Bauhaus objected to a “Bauhaus style” as a “return to academic stagnation,” there are apparently no objections to the term “Bauhaus architecture.” *Work and Time* recently drew on the phrase “clear Bauhaus architecture” in a comparison with the new Rosenthal factory in Selb.

But even the expression “Bauhaus architecture” is open to interpretation, if only because the word “Bauhaus” itself allows for interpretations that have gradually hardened. For the initiated, it can mean: idea, program, education, institute, or construction. But how can, or should, outsiders demarcate the different connotations of the single word? Even then, it may have been tempting to set up the visible building, the Bauhaus, instead of an idea, a program, a pedagogy whose meaning was not easy to understand; or even to believe that the “new construction of the future” had already been realized.

It is difficult to judge whether the completion of the building was for Gropius a decisive step in the realization of the Bauhaus image. His opening

speech of December 4, 1926, does not suggest it. Only the confident tenor of his resignation request of February 4, 1928, could raise the question.⁵

More than four decades later, *Der Monat* (March 1967) published a report by James Marston Fitch, a professor at Columbia University, on his visit to Dessau in the summer of 1966. He largely identified with the goals of the Bauhaus but never saw it at work. For him, it was the buildings, above all, that attracted his interest, not least because, as he says, “our intellectual conception of Gropius’s architecture has been shaped by a specific selection of original photos.” In Dessau, he learned that a magistrate had “designated the Bauhaus a landmarked building and allotted funds for its restoration.”

Here, too, the question of interpretation plays a role. What is handed down to posterity in Dessau is not the Bauhaus as a place of teaching and experimentation—even a museum does not seem to be intended; approaches to this are already available elsewhere—but the work of an architect who, analogous to the private studios of his fellow painters, maintained a private studio for the execution of architectural tasks. Admittedly, the workshops were involved in the furnishing of the—as one used to say back then—“Bauhaus buildings,” but, as Gropius himself says in the foreword to volume 12 of the Bauhaus books, all the designs and blueprints were created in his private office, and he himself, as the architect and construction manager, was responsible for the overall direction—planning, awarding, and site management. Or, as Fitch puts it: “Gropius architecture.”

The former description “Bauhaus buildings” had a utilitarian and descriptive character; the expression “Bauhaus architecture” is used today mostly in the sense of a rating, which has the building complex as a starting point and the Bauhaus as its sponsor. As a generic term, it is ambiguous and, like the term “Bauhaus painting,” historically not to be subsumed into the image of the Bauhaus.

—Translated by Jordan Troeller

5. Although Gropius had been under fire in the press for expenses related to building projects, he framed his reasons for leaving in positive terms, as wanting “to be able to work and develop free from the restrictions of official duties and responsibilities.” See Walter Gropius, “Submission of Resignation to the Magistracy of the City of Dessau,” in *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), p. 136.—*Trans.*

LUCIA MOHOLY

Some colleagues are of the opinion that the history of the Bauhaus can only begin to be written once the last of its members has passed away. I, however, hold the opposing position; that we who are still here are obligated to share as much as possible of our knowledge, our experiences, our memories, and our own questions and provisional answers, in an effort to spare those who follow from groping in the dark. What follows, then, are a few key terms that by no means lay claim to completeness.

We are still far from a single clear, encompassing picture of the situation; as one former Bauhaus member said in Berlin in 1967, “There are so many versions of the Bauhaus circulating that one is tempted to believe that there was not one but seven or eight Bauhauses.”

In an effort to compare these various versions by placing them in relation to one another, I have taken several examples from the press which address the subject of the Bauhaus. In doing so, I came across widely different meanings. One finds—among headlines like “The Fanfare of the Bauhaus Has Faded Away” (*Schweizer Werkbund Kommentare*), on the one hand, and “The Bauhaus Idea Is as Timely as Ever” (*Stuttgarter Zeitung*), on the other hand—the sober assertion that “the Bauhaus has shifted from being viewed in a vaguely romanticist light to an historically factual [*sachlich*] one” (*Schwäbische Donauzeitung*).

In many circles, the notion that the Bauhaus was a school of architecture still persists. The name itself may have in part projected (or even still projects) this power of suggestion; another reason for it may lie in the school’s founding manifesto, which implored a “new guild of craftsmen [*Handwerker*]” to erect “the building of the future.” The collection of documents published in 1962 by Hans M. Wingler and titled *The Bauhaus* has revived the memory of that manifesto.

* Originally published as “Fragen der Interpretation” in *Bauhaus und Bauhäusler: Bekenntnisse und Erinnerungen*, ed. Eckhard Neumann (Stuttgart: Hallwag, 1971), pp. 169–78. Trans. by Eva Richter and Alba Lorman in *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People: Personal Opinions and Recollections of Former Bauhaus Members and Their Contemporaries*, ed. Eckhard Neumann, rev. ed. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1993), pp. 237–46. (Note that an earlier version of Neumann’s anthology, published in English in spring 1970, does not include Moholy’s text.) The 1993 translation is based on the 1985 German reedition of Neumann’s book, in which two paragraphs are curiously reordered. Not knowing who was responsible for this change, I have used the original 1971 text.—*Trans.*

“Gropius builds his last cathedral,” read accounts of the opening of the Thomas Glassworks in Amberg, Oberplatz, in summer 1970.¹

That the initial concept found a strong resonance, albeit one that could not be quickly realized, was due to the nature of the situation at the time. But who (except perhaps those immediately concerned) was (or even could have been) in a position to grasp the manifold forces of the post–World War I period, which would come together to shape the school’s everyday existence? Quite a few may have been astonished to read Otto Stelzer writing in 1968: “At that time, Gropius had acted tactfully, and he was the man for it. The whole world spoke of *Handwerk* and of the spirit of the architectural collectives [*Bauhütte*]; that was the fashion of the day, and such language especially found favor among the conservatives within the finance ministries. It was actually the conservatives who applauded the founding manifesto’s sentence: ‘Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all return to the crafts [*Handwerk*]!’”² Such a reading must have been authorized, for soon thereafter one could hear Gropius saying similar things on television. A tragic legacy in the last year of his life? To this, Stelzer offers the answer: “It is easy to establish that a man like Gropius never had such a ‘return’ in mind, for in 1916 there already existed a draft of the manifesto and it by no means concerns a revival of *Handwerk*.”³

Faith in the manifesto was so firm and sure that soon thereafter the Sommerfeld House in Berlin-Dahlem, built in 1921 by Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer in a prairie style with abundant ornamental wood carvings, was praised as a “document of the Bauhaus doctrine” (G. C. Argan). The same author, in advancing the opinion that industrial design confers “mythical significance” upon an object, wrote in 1951 that Bauhaus wallpaper was to be understood as the “bearer of the new conception of space [*Raumidee*]” and Bauhaus lamps as “an absolute

1. The Glassworks in Amberg was Walter Gropius’s last built work, designed with his Boston architectural firm The Architects Collaborative (TAC) and completed in 1970, one year after his death.—*Trans.*

2. I have left “*Handwerk*” in the original, because “craft” does not connote the range of activity signified by the term, which includes the industrial trades. Bakers and bricklayers, for instance, were also considered *Handwerker*, along with artisans, painters, and architects. For an expanded discussion, see Stefan Muthesius, “*Handwerk/Kunsth Handwerk*,” *Journal of Design History* 11, no. 1 (1998), pp. 85–95.—*Trans.*

3. One could have added here: “as the conservatives understood it,” which is the subtext of Stelzer’s quote (and what Moholy means by “tragic” in the preceding sentence). To understand this better, one would need to go back to Gropius’s drafts for the founding manifesto, which can be found in Volker Wahl, ed., *Das Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar: Dokumente zur Geschichte des Instituts 1919–1926* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009). To read these texts, it is crucial to grasp that although the far left and the conservative right in Germany at this time both invoked the term “*Handwerk*,” each side had a very different conception of what this meant—whether it would be used to stoke the resentment of small tradesmen who had been left behind in an industrializing Germany, or whether it would be used in a revolutionary sense, as it was in the case of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst (in whose journal Gropius’s draft appeared), as the basis for a whole-scale transformation of labor (from alienated to unalienated) as part of a Communist reorganization of everyday life.—*Trans.*

identification of light and space.” Much clearer was Walter Gropius’s own formulation, as reported from Argentina in 1960: “Architecture should be in everything, from a teacup to a city plan.”⁴ Myth and reality [*Sachlichkeit*] often compensated for one another’s shortfalls.

In circles further afield, the Bauhaus embodies today, as it did then, “the advent of modern architecture” (*Nationalzeitung Basel*), even though it is well known that during its first eight years it had no architecture program. All that it had were lectures on statics and the history of architecture, and Gropius’s architectural firm offered students bits of information and, now and again, the possibility of collaboration on his private architectural projects. The designation “Architectural Department of the State Bauhaus in Weimar,” in volumes 1 and 3 of the Bauhaus books, which were assembled in 1924 and published in 1925, is to be attributed to the anticipatory character [*Ungereiftheit*] of the terminology back then.

The first regular department of architecture and planning was established in 1927. To lead it, the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer was appointed. Meyer continued to direct the workshop when he led the school from 1928 to 1930, just as Mies van der Rohe did in his role as the Bauhaus’s third director. As such, the assertions often made about the Bauhaus with respect to housing construction and urban planning, as well as architectural efficiency and industrialization, are at best descriptions of the later Bauhaus—if one can ascribe them at all to a single site. A more accurate picture, though, is that they were part of an incredible movement, propelled on many sides and coming into being in numerous places almost simultaneously.

What also remains little known today is that the photography course at the Bauhaus was first established only in 1929. And yet one often hears it mentioned with reference to Moholy-Nagy. That does not correspond to the facts. What is correct is that, as Müller-Brockmann put it, at the Bauhaus Moholy-Nagy “promoted an engagement with typography and photography as a medium for both artistic and commercial statements,” and also that, as Wingler writes, “Moholy-Nagy’s photographic experiments characteristic of the Dessau period precipitated similar endeavors.” But Moholy-Nagy neither established nor headed the photography course. Indeed, at the time of its founding, he, along with Gropius and others, had already left the Bauhaus. It was Walter Peterhans who oversaw the photography course from 1929 until 1933. And those are not the only inaccuracies and contradictions that ought to be set straight.

In early 1928, Gropius resigned his position as director. It is erroneous to speak of a resignation in 1925 (*Stuttgarter Zeitung*) or a “dismissal” in 1933 (*Zeitgemäße Form*). Before he came to Harvard in 1937, he was in England from 1934 to 1937—not from “1937 to 1940,” as the *Sunday Times* quoted him as claiming. But even at Harvard, in his immediate proximity, the publication *Building Harvard* appeared in 1964, which described him as the director of the Bauhaus in

4. Gropius’s quote is in English in the original.—*Trans.*

the 1920s and early '30s (“... the famous Bauhaus in Germany which Gropius led in the 1920s and early 1930s”). It is quite likely that a measure of uncertainty here played a role, one that concerned the dates of the Bauhaus’s duration, and was triggered through the title of the book that was published in the US in 1938: *Bauhaus 1919–1928*.

Apart from that, unconfirmed interpretations circulate as to who among those involved “belong to some extent to the group of founders” (Grohmann); who occupied the position of assistant director at any given point; which teachers were “discovered” by whom; and who was “accepted” or “rejected” by whom (Schreyer). There are voices that count El Lissitzky and Theo van Doesburg among the Bauhaus Masters (Farner); and others that as well regard Malevich and Mondrian as affiliated members, “combatants that stood in close relation to the Bauhaus” (Stelzer). In contrast, there is a tendency among former members of the Bauhaus to underestimate the influence of the Russians and the Dutch. Also underestimated is (and has been) the role of Hannes Meyer, even though his name has resurfaced through the books by Wingler and Schnaidt.⁵ In the entry on the Bauhaus in the *Encyclopedia of the Arts* of 1966, the second director goes unnamed—an omission that is, of course, mimicked by the press.

Even though systematic instruction in the field of architecture was not practiced until the late Bauhaus period, it has become routine to use the phrase “Bauhaus architecture” with reference to the Bauhaus before and during 1928. The tendency that appeared on the part of the public to group together all products developed at the Bauhaus—including dishware, lamps, fabric, wallpaper, furniture, printed matter, etc.—as “Bauhaus style” met the subsequent retort that there was not and could not be a single Bauhaus style; such a style, it was believed, would have meant a “return to academic stagnation, into the very state of inertia that is inimical to life and against which the Bauhaus was called into being” (volume 12 of the Bauhaus book series).⁶

The use of the expression “Bauhaus architecture,” however, has remained unchallenged, even though—or perhaps because—it lends itself to various meanings. From the start, the very concept “Bauhaus” has been open to interpretation. Even to the initiated, it could be an idea, a program, a method, an institute, and/or a building. How, then, should the outsider be expected to differentiate the various meanings? Even back then it seems to have been tempting to replace an idea or program, whose meaning was not clear, with the realized building, the B a u h a u s—as it read in large letters, visible from a distance—and to allow oneself to be lulled by the belief that the “building of the future” had already been erected. It may also

5. Claude Schnaidt, ed., *Hannes Meyer: Bauten, Projekte, und Schriften/Buildings, Projects, and Writings* (Teufen: Arthur Niggli, 1965). Hans M. Wingler’s *Das Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* (1969), published in an English edition by the MIT Press that same year, includes a section of documents relating to Meyer’s tenure.—*Trans.*

6. Walter Gropius, *Bauhausbauten Dessau* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1930). Fifty-four of Moholy’s photographs appear in this book.—*Trans.*

be that the confident tone of Walter Gropius's resignation letter to the magistrate of the city of Dessau was meant to portray the matter in a positive light. Gropius went; the building remained.

The press later granted a substitutive role to the Gropius-designed buildings in Dessau, which were carried out as private commissions by his firm (the workshops were involved only in the interior furnishings), a role that lives on in the description "Bauhaus architecture" and one that "lends its name to an entire direction in architecture" (*Tagesanzeiger*). In his account "The Dessau Bauhaus Today" (*Der Monat*), James Marston Fitch wrote that his "perception of the Gropius architecture" (note that he did not say Bauhaus architecture) "was formed through a specific selection of original photographs"—he called them "classical views"; one with which the "Bauhaus of today" was no longer identical.

The misguided notion of the primacy of architecture—"architecture was the dominant motive" (*Paris This Week*)—was somewhat reined in by the traveling exhibition of 1968, *Fifty Years of Bauhaus*. This resulted from the fact that many of the architectural photographs on display represented works from the post-Bauhaus period and often had little to do with the years between 1919 and 1933. With this section, as well as several others, an effort had to be made to justify the exhibition's title. This in turn led some journalists to give more weight to the exhibition that represented "the work and accomplishments of the Bauhaus in the period from 1919 to 1969" (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*), or the "fifty-year existence of the Bauhaus" (*Die Zeit*). The exhibition's title was neither correct nor even felicitously chosen; it suggested a continuity that did not correspond to the actual given facts. In Germany, there were years included, which had prompted Bauhaus members—and for some even forced them—to abandon what had once been "Bauhaus" and, sooner or later, to search for a new homeland. Whether one can claim, as happened at the opening in Stuttgart, that under these circumstances the Bauhaus represents "the German contribution to the culture and civilization of the world in this century" (*Staatsanzeiger für Baden-Württemberg*) is questionable.

The recent press on the Bauhaus has also overemphasized the fine arts. At times the Bauhaus has been portrayed in such a way that one might think it was first and foremost a meeting place for painters, who had retreated to an environment in which they were able to live their art undisturbed, not unlike artist colonies such as Worpswede. At its inaugural exhibition in 1962, the Museum of the Twentieth Century in Vienna [today the MUMOK] described the position of artists at the Bauhaus as follows: "With their work, the Bauhaus masters demonstrated that no damage can be done to the 'pure and eternally artistic' [*Rein- und Ewig-Künstlerischen*] when it renounces its isolated genius. . . . and admits objective laws."⁷ Within the sphere of these objective laws, artists found themselves together "in the camaraderie of the Bauhaus" (Haftmann); in their studios they remained,

7. The speaker refers to Kandinsky's phrase in his 1911 treatise *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (*On the Spiritual in Art*).—*Trans.*

each to his own, a solitary actor [*Einzelgänger*]. They had brought with them that which made them artists; they did not develop it at the Bauhaus, even if the relative security of existence and, above all, the shared pedagogical ideas within the group proved to be of great significance for their personal development.

Among the champions of the “isolated genius,” there was, however, no shortage of bemoaning that the artists had shifted from their own (fine art) work to collaboration in the Bauhaus experiment. The opposite has also been insinuated; that the Bauhaus’s pedagogical success is due to the fact “that artists with great teaching abilities were at the same time able to render their own art teachable” (*Werk*). Here lies a fundamental misunderstanding.

The oft-encountered description “Bauhaus painters” is also misleading, for it attempts to place a number of disparate artistic personalities under a single integer and thus define the Bauhaus in terms of painting. At times, Bauhaus masters are mentioned in the same breath as the “Blue Rider” (*Pictures on Exhibit*); and on occasion one also comes across the set phrase “Mondrian and the Bauhaus” (*Kunstnachrichten*).

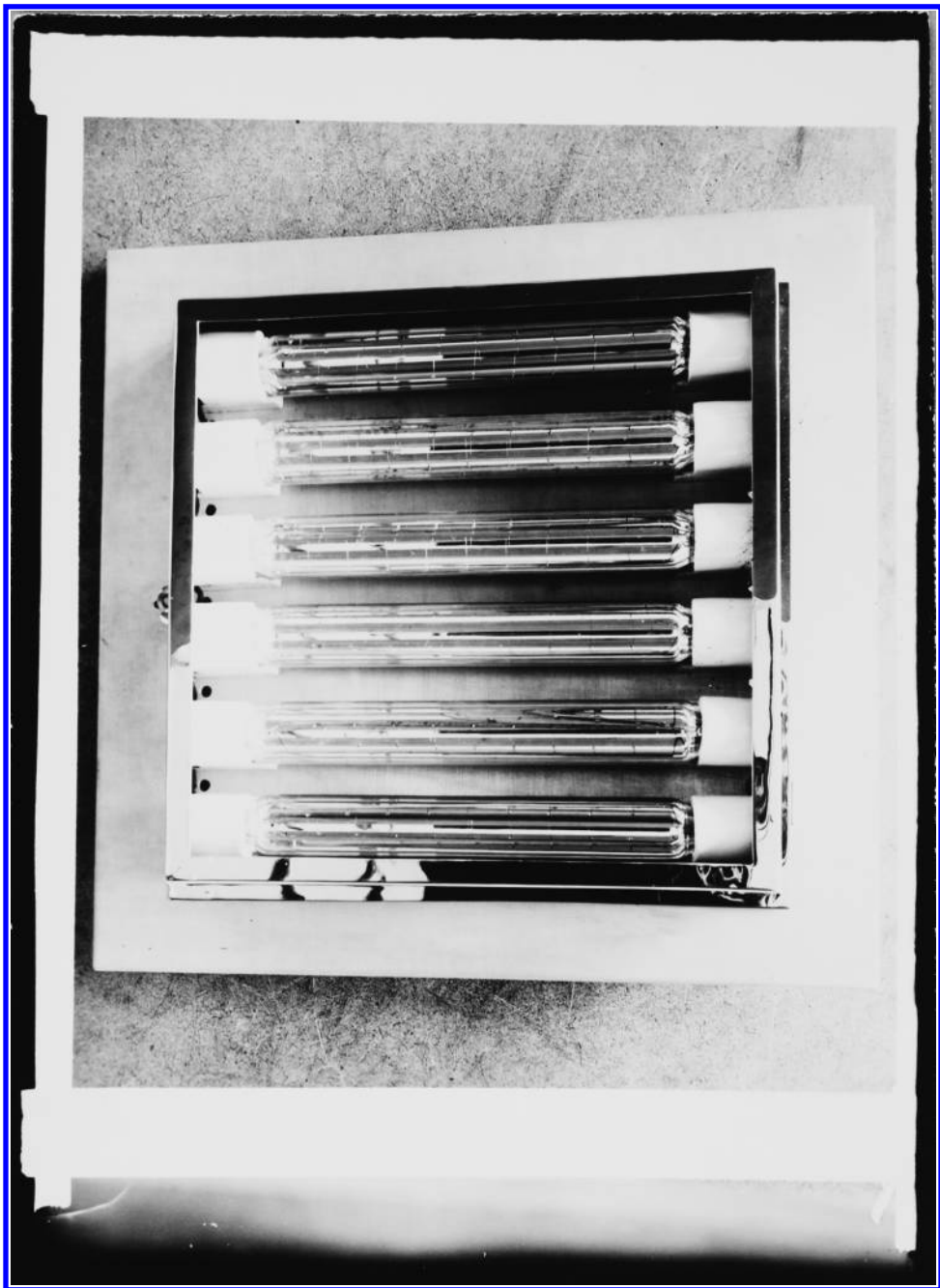
In connection with an exhibition in London, the press reported on the “romantic trait in Bauhaus art” (*National Zeitung Basel*) and saw the “Periclean power of this modern Weimar classicism” (*Frankfurter Rundschau*), while *The New Statesman* wrote, in a cool, considered voice: “What have such things to do with the Bauhaus . . . whose main achievement *qua* school was not in the field of painting at all.”⁸

Instead of mitigating this tendency to emphasize the fine arts at the Bauhaus, the traveling exhibition effectively intensified it. A comparison of works by the relevant masters makes sense, of course, and it was understandable that one also wished to exhibit works of their students there. Important here was the relationship between the fine arts, on the one hand, and instruction plus workshop training, on the other hand. The relatively large number of fine-art works on display (in Stuttgart) could have led to a shift in emphasis regarding this relationship. But because a portion of the critique was a priori inclined to focus on the painting, it led—as it had already on earlier occasions—to debates on whether the pedagogical methods at the Bauhaus had been devised to train a new generation of painters. “Of course not,” declared Reyner Banham, already in 1962, “that was not the intention.”⁹ But in 1968, the question was again of interest for many, for it allowed one to make conclusions about why the traveling exhibition was presented the way it was.

Yet, in a completely different sense, one can credit the exhibition for having made clear the difference between art and work done as part of the workshop training [*Werklehre*]. Proponents of the Primary Structures, Minimal Art, Art of the Real, Land Art, and the like have repeatedly positioned these experi-

8. Statement left in English in the original.—*Trans.*

9. Statement left in English in the original.—*Trans.*



*Lucia Moholy. Square Ceiling Fixture for
Six Tubes (1925). 1925.*

ments as derived from the Bauhaus or “those affiliated with the Bauhaus”—a misconception that has been partly corrected through the thorough study of the preliminary course at the Bauhaus. Characterized by Gropius as the “artery of the Bauhaus’s collective work” and demonstrated by the exhibition (in reference somewhat to contemporary pedagogy), the preliminary course undertook experimentations, studies, exercises, “études,” all aimed at an engagement with form and color, structure and texture, surfaces and materials, fabric and interior space, balance and tension, without by any means claiming to produce art. “Investigation and not creation,” as a lecture on the BBC put it, and “a shaking sifter [*Schüttelsieb*] of talent, a trial that determined the right choice of workshop,” read the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*.¹⁰

Whether folded or bent, stretched or crumpled, cut up or perforated, transparent or opaque, colored or pale, layered or in rows, floating, static, or in motion, that which yesterday and today seeks to address the viewer as art is often guided by the achievements of the 1920s, which, for completely different ends, grew out of the preliminary studies from both the early and late Bauhaus. “It is most interesting,” read an opinion in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*,

that this part of the Bauhaus, the preliminary course, notably took on a life of its own in Paris. Op art, Schöffer, Vasarély, Agam, Takis (one should also add here Bridget Riley)—they all have elevated that transitional point as the end goal. They have made an Absolute of what in Weimar and Dessau was mere pedagogy.

An English cynic said: “That Op is op no one can doubt; but is Op art?”¹¹

According to the Stuttgart catalogue, the exhibition planners allowed for nearly 300 works of fine art by Bauhaus members; that number was later reduced. Works listed as “Bauhaus graphics” were grouped together in a separate catalogue. “But why?” asked a London critic. The answer can be deduced from H. M. Wingler’s introduction to the newly published portfolio of works. Although an exhibition prospectus from 1963 spoke of “works from the graphic workshop of the Staatliche Bauhaus,” clarifying who belonged in which group, two years later, one read that “technical realization in the printing workshop is regarded . . . as a criterion of membership in Bauhaus graphics . . . To include ‘foreign’ works as Bauhaus graphics is legitimate, because by accepting any artistic sketch for printing, one is always making an ideological decision.” Thus, on the walls of the Stuttgart exhibition, among the familiar Bauhaus names, one could find prints by Archipenko, Baumeister, Beckmann, Boccioni, Carrà, Chagall, Chirico, Goncharova, Grosz, Heckel, Jawlensky, Kirchner, Kokoschka, Léger, Larionov,

10. The BBC lecture topic and the list of art movements in the 1960s earlier in the paragraph are all in English in the original.—*Trans.*

11. Again, quote in English in the original. It is worth underscoring that the interjection on Riley—the only woman named in the list—is from Moholy (and not the cited author).—*Trans.*

Marcoussis, Mondrian, Pechstein, Pampolini, Rohlfis, Schmidt-Rottluff, Severini—all of whom never belonged to the Bauhaus community. It then becomes clear why these names necessitated their own catalogue.

It would seem that, apart from all else, the magic of major names had proved irresistible. On the occasion of a 1964 show in Frankfurt, one spoke of Dixel, Michel, and Molzahn as “devotees [*Zugewandten*],” and on one page of the previously mentioned publication of the Harvard University Information Center, under the section “From the Bauhaus,” artistic contributions by Arp and Mirò were named along with those by Albers and Bayer.

Notwithstanding the fact that the press has done everything conceivable to render accessible the “legendary idea that goes by the name Bauhaus” (*FAZ*), it has remained, to this day, essentially impossible to grasp. The role of design, too, which had a clearly practical function as craft [*Handwerk*] and as industrial design, has suffered a loss in conceptual clarity over the years. What has endured is the summary formula: “The cradle of all that today purports to be super-modernist lies with the Bauhaus.”

A consciousness of the meaning and significance of this prehistory has hardly surfaced. Those who might have shed light on the matter or themselves espoused similar ideas are sometimes named but often overlooked. Julius Posner, professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Berlin [today the Berlin University of the Arts—*trans.*], has expressed himself on various occasions with respect to the subject of historical relationships, especially on the Werkbund and the Bauhaus, and has incited controversy with such remarks. Significant for these connections were the exhibitions of the Neue Sammlung in Munich in 1969 and 1971, where one could see impressive examples of functional design from the nineteenth century. In a 1966 lecture on “Education through Manual Making [*Erziehung durch manuelles Tun*],” sponsored by the Bauhaus-Archiv, Otto Stelzer said that the Bauhaus was “not so much the birthplace of entirely new, revolutionary ideas as it was a kind of gathering receptacle for concepts that were already long in existence.” “In fact,” he added, “Bauhaus ideas have a long prehistory.” Already at the inauguration of the Bauhaus-Archiv in 1960, H. M. Wingler spoke of the “manifestation of a historical development that spans more than a century”; and in his foreword to a 1966 publication of Gottfried Semper’s collected writings, he asserted that the journal *Science, Industry, and Art* of 1852 has recently often been viewed “as the incunabulum of pursuits that then peaked in the Bauhaus.”

Accompanying these historical events has been the effort to evoke a future. “The Bauhaus lives on, radiantly ascending to the heavens, even at the most magnificent gate that ever admitted entry into a continent, even in New York,” wrote Benno Reifenberg in 1965. “One would have to go back to Cluny and the determination of highly educated monks in the tenth century, in order to find parallels to a similar occurrence. They held that next to the salvation of the soul was a secular

order, and accordingly they set their aims high, almost as far as the regime of the Church. . . . The fascination of the name Bauhaus stems from faith in a reforming power, one that architecture does not intend to relinquish.”

Less “heavens-ascendent” but also professing a vision of an architectural future was the socially critical thesis advanced by Roland Günter that “the single true revolution in architecture, that of the Bauhaus, sought effectively to emancipate man in a world without emblems and not simply to raise him in the social hierarchy, but this revolution in essence has not yet been carried out, because the structure of our society has only become mobile, not anti-hierarchical.” Here, too, we see an attempt at equating Bauhaus architecture and architecture in general with one another.

When one speaks of the historical Bauhaus, H. M. Wingler said in Chicago in 1967, one must realize that it can be divided into four stages, each of which came to an end, respectively, in 1923, 1928, 1930, and 1933. The position of anyone conversant on the subject of the Bauhaus, he went on, will be determined by the particular stage on which the person chooses to focus. As a provisional basis for discussion, such a division may be useful. As a point of departure, however, for a more comprehensive evaluation, it is inappropriate; it reinforces the tendency to pit individual phases against one another and to lump the majority of successes that have been attributed to the Bauhaus into one or another of these stages. In this way, one does not even get close to the heart of the Bauhaus phenomenon, which all in all had a total of only fourteen years at its disposal; there can be no question of “twenty-four active years” (*New York Times*).

Debates on the historical Bauhaus, “laboratory and mission in one,” are not without tension, pathos, and emotion; traces of esoterica are also to be found. One would have to shake loose from such restrictions if one wants to be in the position to convey objective criteria [*Wertmaßstäbe*].

With this ad hoc selection of quotes from the press, I have tried to demonstrate that there is still considerable work to be done: comparative studies of extant literature; a critical assessment of individual works; a close reading of the manifestos; analyses of environmental conditions, including the personal and interpersonal dynamics—all this and much more, in addition to an estimate of achievements and results, constitute some of the basic prerequisites for a legitimately valid interpretation of the Bauhaus.

The subject of a Bauhaus “succession [*Nachfolge*]” here has remained unconsidered.

—Translated by Jordan Troeller

Shape: A Conversation

David Joselit: Amy, in the introductory panel for your Artist's Choice exhibition at MoMA, *The Shape of Shape*, you write, "I wonder if, in fact, shape got left behind when modern art turned to systems, series, grids, and all things calculable in the 20th century."¹ This is a provocative proposal about modern historiography. Could you elaborate on what *shape* means to you as a framework for looking at painting?

Amy Sillman: It fundamentally started with wanting to investigate the mechanisms by which some art or topics are just left out. For a long time now, I've wondered why shape is so little talked or written about. This shape idea crystallized last year when I did some research into postwar English abstraction, a real zone of outliers, and arrived at the painter Prunella Clough, who was pretty well established in her lifetime but posthumously drifted out of sight. Clough was a very interesting, quietly experimental painter (and, by the way, the niece of architect and designer Eileen Gray. Her early paintings were classic leftist-approved images of factories and workers, but later she moved to more abstract fields with references to electronics, lighting, plastics, found objects, and all kinds of synthetic modern surfaces. Her work also had a kind of non sequitur language about it and surfaces that were both flat and deep. In other words, a really cool artist, but one who worked totally outside of any particular claim to radicality. Far from challenging easel painting, she just carried on with it, but doing eccentric work. And it was shape-based. So I ended up thinking, *Wow, there isn't much language around her, nor around shapes*. And I started wondering if people who work with shape are in some ways always doing the wrong thing, in avant-garde terms—for whatever those terms are worth, which I'm not sure about.

Joselit: Right.

Michelle Kuo: And then you and I were in London at the same time last year and saw some of Clough's work there.

Sillman: Yes, and I wondered aloud in a conversation last year with some of the MoMA curators why don't *they* show more eccentric stuff like Prunella's. I asked why they don't routinely drag more people like her out of their store-

1. *Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of Shape*, which opened on October 21, 2019, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was organized by Amy Sillman with Michelle Kuo and Jenny Harris.

house; why there is such a gulf between stuff that painters love and what you see and read about all the time in art history? And why do we lump all outliers into something noble but forgettable called “artists’ artists”? When we were talking, I didn’t realize that MoMA was undertaking this huge rehang of the whole museum in this vein of openness and reinvestigation. But it turned out that my questions fit with the curators’ mission, and I guess they had already been wanting to ask me to do an Artist’s Choice show, where an artist gets to pick works from the collection. So we decided to do this as part of the reopening of the new MoMA.

My first criterion was shape alone, just looking through the catalogue at all things that were made of shapes alone: no images, no bodies, no systems, nothing nameable. I ended up with a list of eight hundred works with shape, but then it lacked much in the way of point of view. No tension, no skin in the game, literally. I wanted the room to feel anxious and alive . . . and I had to cut it down to under a hundred somehow. That’s when I hit on the idea of shadow as the criterion instead of shape.

Joselit: How did the idea come to you?

Sillman: I thought of it from walking the dog, noticing his shadow and how you can’t get rid of your shadow, how it’s always pinned to your body. And I thought, *Hah, it’s like subjectivity*. I wanted the room to feel uncomfortable, full of “wrong” things. That meant composition, and subjectivity, and feelings. The whole show was in a sense purposefully meant to be pro-subjectivity. Shape and subjectivity align in a funny way. As do affect and subject position.

Kuo: The key thing is that the shadow is never stable: It doesn’t conjure a static, coherent subject but instead points to how the subject is always dissolving and morphing and exists *in time*.

Sillman: Right, and once I moved the criterion from shape to shadow, I could include time, position, specific people, flesh, skin tones, and desire, night, anxiety, etc. Therefore, a kind of emotional political awareness. But it was still about flatness, as in modern art.

Joselit: So is shadow “the shape of shape”?

Sillman: Well, I had already intuitively chosen the Kirchner woodblock *Schlemihl Meets His Shadow* (1915–16), which was amazing because, I mean—“schlemiel”?? (He’s Jewish?)—and read *A Short History of the Shadow* by Viktor Stoichita, which got me thinking about it. But realizing that shadow could be *the* criterion for making cuts to the list was a kind of eureka moment in doing this room.

Kuo: And Amy, you yourself made a shape for the show—an enormous red shape on the tablet wall that introduces the entire gallery—and then we painted the shadow of that shape on the opposite side of the wall.

The shadow is not a mirror, not a doubling of *you*, but a strange index or extension that is always changing. In that sense, the shadow is the oppo-



Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—
The Shape of Shape. 2019.
Installation view.

site of system. Shadow is literally subjective—and so it goes against the grain of what we consider high modernism and how, throughout the twentieth century, in very different moments and places and for very different reasons, artists rejected subjective choice or gesture. They thought it was either too romantic or whimsical, or too heroic and too mythic. They cut subjective choice out of the picture and instead used overarching systems—rules, grids, series. They mounted a critique of the individual (white, male) subject exercising his choice.

But *The Shape of Shape* identifies an interesting strain of artists who chose to stay with whimsical gestures, with subjective choice. These artists, in very different times and places, *reclaimed* composition—or shape—for other subjects and other bodies. Some of these bodies had been marginalized, or overlooked, or repressed. It's a critique of the critique—a double turn of the screw, as you've said. But it's not a simple return. What I find so moving about the show is that it doesn't try to recuperate some kind of transcendental, whole subject. You confront the critique of subjectivity, the death of the author, but you don't just return to some older notion of an ideal, whole, heroic and typically male

subject. You open onto a fantastically kaleidoscopic, splitting, shifting subjectivity, one that's riven with doubt and fear, but also joy.

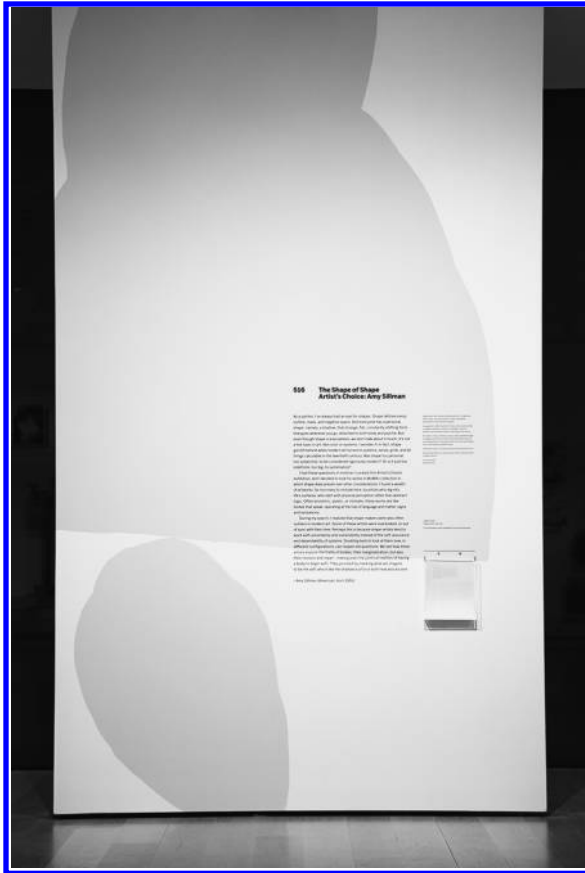
Joselit: I think this is also relevant to how various practices of figuration that are at the forefront of debates in contemporary painting right now seem not to have an art-historical genealogy that recognizes them as part of modernism. One of the reasons why I think our conversation makes sense in *October* is because the journal has traditionally theorized painting in the ways that you are describing as avant-garde. I feel that your exhibition persuasively demonstrates that there are other traditions and practices that are left out of canonical accounts, and that attending to them might allow us to expand our definition of modern painting. From this perspective, I want to hear from Michelle with regard to how *The Shape of Shape* figures in the new expanded MoMA's efforts to rethink the modern canon.

Kuo: I think one reason that people have responded so enthusiastically to the show is that it takes the spirit of the new rehang to the limit. It's a wild, exuberant, highly personal manifestation of how we might examine a museum collection—one that is often seen as defining, embodying, the modern canon itself—and find new genealogies both within and beyond it. By diversifying the collection, giving it more space, and digging deep into this vast, constantly changing archive of objects, maybe we can construct different modernisms.

Amy's take is both deeply thought and deeply felt, and visitors feel her joy looking at these works. It's a kind of hidden visual history of the twentieth century, and I admit that I have struggled with how and whether to theorize it as such. Part of what I realized is that if there's not an explicit theoretical framework, there is a historical one, which resonates with Aby Warburg's notion of the *Pathosformel*. It traces a history of gesture, or of affective form. And so you're going to feel all of these very strange resonances across very different places and times. Ultimately you feel that there's some kind of deep structure to these works that's not just about a history of physical bodies but also of affect, emotions, or psychological intensities. And that affective charge comes through when you see how Vincent Fecteau renders a lavender swoop in America in 2007, and then suddenly you see a similar form in the Thomas Mukarobgwa painting from Zimbabwe in 1962. You see artists confronted with a blank field and having to decide, "What will I do? What kind of mark will I make, and how?" There is a latent history of these decisions. And maybe that doesn't really accord with other kinds of theoretical formulations or chronological histories.

Joselit: Could you describe the installation?

Sillman: I wanted to cram as much art in the room as possible, and not just on the wall as in a salon hanging. I wanted viewers to enter, not just pass by. I thought of putting the art on bleachers that went around the room as a way



Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—
The Shape of Shape. 2019.
Installation view.

to flip the position of the viewers: They would be in a kind of arena with anthropomorphized artworks surrounding them, “looking back” at them. But also, the viewers have to look from the ground up, there’s a link from their feet up the wall, instead of from the authoritative neutrality of the wall. This feet-first view causes ungainliness. You have to bend over, crouch down, start from the floor. My show is physical and confusing—there are no labels, but rather a separate map for each wall. All of that was purposeful.

Kuo: The Artist’s Choice is a long-running series at MoMA, and it felt very important to include one in the reopening in order to represent a perspective like Amy’s. Amy is showing how artists are always looking at other artists, and so it’s a reception history—and a different history from the kinds that curators or art historians might tell. You’ve even referred to the show as a kind of vintage store.

Sillman: Yeah, the only strong criticism I've been given directly from anyone was on a group tour I did there the other day with some patrons. One woman came up and said, "Some of my friends don't like this room because they think it looks like a thrift store." (Haha, yes, MoMA as the best vintage store in the world.) But I thought, now that all the stores are closing, maybe people get excited by looking at things the same way they did when they used to go to shoe stores or yard sales.

Kuo: But I think it's important, too, to bring up this question of "outsiders" or "outliers" and how those categories get defined nowadays. Many of the artists in the show are not well known, and their work is on view for the first time at the museum. We were looking for artworks that defied overarching systems, unlike many of the echt-modernist works in the collection.

Sillman: But I do want to point out that most artists my age, who know the 1970s, know a lot of these artists very well.

Kuo: Absolutely—and they had already been recognized by MoMA, after all, by virtue of being in the collection. So in some way they've been there all along, in the same way that there are so many more artworks—and so much more data—available to us now in the overwhelming saturation of image culture.

Joselit: We're focusing on what's left out, but I also feel that there are all kinds of painting practices that aren't being left out at all but rather are becoming very prominent, without much critical acknowledgment. A lot of figurative painting, some by African-American artists, some by women, some by straight white guys, too, doesn't seem to have any critical foundation in how we understand modernism. Such work is prevalent in the art world but hasn't been addressed in critical genealogies of modern painting.

Sillman: But my show really is rooted in abstraction, and my love of it.

Joselit: True, but I think there's a parallel here with regard to blind spots in the canon.

Sillman: It is about something that's supposed to be modernism but it's . . . sort of the back side. I love this phrase that Clement Greenberg once used about color-field paintings: that they are "open from the back." I think what he meant by this was that those stained, poured, open fields make you think about the painting differently from Ab Ex paintings, which are always addressed to the front of the canvas, even with someone like Pollock working with gravity. In color-field paintings you optically fall into these big gaps between the forms, which sort of pulls you toward the idea that there's a back of the canvas, which you can't see but you sense. So, in that vein, *The Shape of Shape* is "open from the back." The whole show tries to make unseen things in that flat modern art history visible. I think my aim is also not unlike Katy Siegel's *Hard Times*, *High Times* show, which demonstrated that artists of all colors and genders were actively *doing* things during a time (the 1970s) when critical art histories declared that they were finished and weren't being done anymore. Precisely the opposite: All these great people like Jack Whitten and Ed Clark and Nancy Spero and Ida Applebroog and Mary

Heilmann (etc., etc.) were making paintings anyway, many of them polychromatic, tactile, narrative-based, action-driven, crafty, personal, drawing-based, or whatever else goes against the grain of what you're supposed to do. They were all *aware* of painting's problems but were doing it anyway—not that “doing it anyway” is *always* political, but I think all these artists were conscious of connecting to different histories than the one being taught as “critical.” What was taught as critical was simply too narrow.

Kuo: You've also described the show as a diagram.

Sillman: Yeah. I think that my insistence on not putting individual labels next to the works makes you look without precise identification in a kind of hyperlink, or diagram of visual associations, going sideways from one thing to the next, as in a train of thought that is visually coherent but without a grand narrative of history.

Kuo: It also allows you to connect a work from 1895 to one from 1975, or an iconic picture to a totally unknown relic.

Sillman: Well, I guess flatness is still the principle, the vector. It is an abstraction show and personally I love flatness. Everything in the show is so flat that I realized later it all looks like deli meat, like every shape was made by a deli slicer.

Kuo: But you've converted the two-dimensional paintings into objects because they're tilted, they're leaning on a shelf, you can see over them, you can see around them. They are turned into things. (Sandwiches?!) And conversely, strangely, some of the sculptures in the round become more frontal. The show upends dimensionality altogether.

Joselit: The resistance to instant identification that you've built into the show underlines the fact that the art history of modern and contemporary art has become more deductive than inductive, if I'm using those terms correctly. In fields such as ancient art where there are many fewer named artists and primary sources, traditionally interpretations have been induced from an archive of artifacts rather than a plethora of supporting documents. Now, obviously, that's difficult to do with contemporary art because there's too much information, but also because contemporary art history depends upon well-documented individuals. From this perspective, I see this project, in part, as an invitation to broaden our archives and be bolder about moving beyond what is already well known, and also to revisit how formal analysis is not just an arbitrary projection but a means of gathering visual evidence.

Sillman: I was recently thinking about Achim Hochdörfer's 2009 article in *Artforum*, “A Hidden Reserve: Painting from 1958 to 1965,” where he argued too that a whole strain of activity in painting was suppressed during a certain period. I understood Achim's article as a structural argument in support of the gestural, but a kind of gesture that turns inside out the way it is usually slotted into art history. I think he saw gesture as a kind of dropped thread and tried to recuperate it in a way that is similar to my attitude toward shape.



Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—*The Shape of Shape*.
2019. Installation view. Photograph by Heidi Bohnenkamp.

Kuo: Achim identified this strange historical moment when gestural abstraction was being discredited, but when some artists still believed in certain of its devices and effects. I actually had the pleasure of editing the piece, and I remember being struck by all the images we used to illustrate the text—they formed their own litany of shapes, from Joan Mitchell's little quasi-script-like marks to Simon Hantaï's folds to Joan Snyder's welts of pigment. These artists save gesture, but they no longer treat it as an expressionist trace—they weren't aiming for some naive, immediate transmission of emotion. Their works defied binaries of literalism and illusion, materiality and transcendence. Many of the works in *The Shape of Shape* do, too.

Sometimes artists' curation is seen as simply instinctive and therefore ahistorical. But it strikes me that there's often a false opposition between something that's intuitive and something that's rigorous. Your thinking about these artworks and these (hidden) histories is in fact a very intellectual engagement with a very specific archive.

Sillman: Well, this is what I teach. I keep on teaching sincere and intelligent painting and lots of drawing, even when it is a no-go.

Kuo: Yeah. [*Laughter.*]

Sillman: I feel like I found a way to frame this as critical activity, but not in the terms of critical theory. O maybe just in a more Brechtian way: partial failure or defeat as a part of the struggle.

Kuo: In fact, in making the checklist we worked both inductively and deductively. We would see things in storage, and it might catch our eye—and that’s how, for instance, the work by the Peruvian artist Jorge Eielson, *White Quipus* (1964), made its way into the show. The work just happened to be on the rack as we were walking through, en route to looking at something else.

Sillman: That was one of the few things I’d never heard of.

Kuo: The work is Eielson’s riff on quipus, or “talking knots,” the Incan system for recording information. So it represents a practice, whether figurative or abstract or in-between, that has a very strong set of genealogies but may not have been exhibited as widely as it is now.

Sillman: And isn’t there a system besides inductive and deductive? Devin Fore was telling me the other day about Charles Peirce’s term “abductive,” in which the logic moves from the particular to the particular rather than up or down to the general. I think my methodology, if there is one, is in the particulars, and in looking for what animates work that I feel was not accounted for properly before.

Kuo: Returning.

Sillman: Looking back to find out what was wrong with the first interpretation.

Joselit: When I was visiting the show again the other day, I was wondering how you might define a *shape* versus, for instance, a *form*. And what I concluded is that a shape is a kind of intermediate thing somewhere between a body and a geometric figure. It’s something in-between that can’t be called a circle, for



Artist’s Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of Shape. 2019.
Installation view. Photograph by Heidi Bohnenkamp.



Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of Shape. 2019.
Installation view. Photograph by Heidi Bohnenkamp.

instance, but nor could it be securely labeled a head. I wonder if you have a working definition of shape. I feel like there is something specific here that is significant—for instance, Pollock didn't really make shapes; Barnett Newman didn't make shapes either.

Sillman: Agnes Martin didn't after her early biomorphic paintings.

Joselit: No.

Kuo: Well, it goes back to the issue of composition. Shape seems to be somewhere between composition and anti-composition, form and formlessness, between good gestalt and raw matter.

Sillman: Yeah, the show was supposed to be about people who persist with composition. Shape is the fruit of a certain kind of compositional labor and attention. There were definitely taste and sensibility guidelines, but I tried to choose artworks with shapes that seemed to lie productively and compellingly and absolutely *between*—you said between body and figure, but I thought of something between linguistic structures and random outlines.

Joselit: That's a great definition.

Sillman: And to paraphrase what we said earlier: Shadow is a shape that lies between body and figure. I think you could actually substitute the idea of

“drawing” for “shape” and get a similar show. People involved in a certain kind of drawing are always doing something essentially compositional: It’s kind of fussy, you have to keep making adjustments, moving things around, erasing, rebuilding, keep making decisions. It happens in the moment. It’s a weird activity that literally changes your consciousness, it’s so tender and it lies between the body and the mind. Very personal. I feel like that’s not what people are trained to do anymore, but it accounts for a lot of the weeds of artmaking, actually.

Kuo: Funnily enough, even though all of the works are ardently compositional, the exhibition’s display establishes a kind of allover effect. In this sense the exhibition as a whole is non-compositional, because it’s about destabilizing hierarchies.

Sillman: My interest has always been partly about where worlds collide: where linguistic and visual structures meet. I feel like that’s where composition is interesting to me, where it’s the most difficult kind of balance. I think that’s what improv is.

Kuo: And shape is, after all, about boundaries: drawing them and dissolving them, mediating between a thing and its environment, or between a frame and what lies within. One thing that jumps out in the show is the porous boundary



Artist’s Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of Shape. 2019.
Installation view. Photograph by Heidi Bohnenkamp.

between humans and machines. There are lots of body parts that seem more like prosthetics. Or entities that seem both organic and inorganic.

David, I am curious how you think the issues raised in Amy's show fit in with your recent work.

Joselit: I'm very interested in thinking of shape as an intermediate zone between form and body, between subject and object. I recently finished a long project on globalization where in order to adequately address art from other places, I had to rethink my own judgments of taste, based on my training in European modernism. There are modernisms that aren't Western modernisms that are just as modern but look different. So I feel it's very important and exciting to revise the archives we work from and our means of evaluating their importance or their status as knowledge, both beyond the Western canon and within it.

Sillman: I don't know how knowledge is made, but I feel like I've learned as a painter that what are to me better paintings get into places of trouble during their making and then work their way out of that trouble, and back around again to a kind of ending without a foregone conclusion. Surprise is different from "new." I think that's a principle of improvisation, a form that asks something unforeseen to be built into the very moment of its composition. I see that as how drawing works. Every drawer I know does that in some way. I think art is kind of boring when it doesn't do that.

Joselit: Your account makes me think of Donna Haraway's recent book, *Staying with the Trouble*, as a different model of political or critical praxis. I think that we do need to redefine how we understand politics and art. So I like your definition of "staying with the trouble." Interesting art can do that well.

Kuo: A lot of the work in the show is about commitment, which is a form of politics.

Sillman: I got wonderful responses from very political artists and writers who loved the show. And I felt like, *Oh wow, those are the exact people I want to feel love there.* I was happy that artists and nonartists reported that same feeling of pleasurable surprise from the show. I think there are many different ways to register protest.

Translations in Time*

SUSAN BUCK-MORSS

YEAR 1 is a project in the reconfiguration of knowledge. The focus is on the first century that starts the numerical countdown to the present. All of the schemata of modernity—time, space, concepts and categories (as in Kant's First Critique)—are put to the test of comprehending this alleged beginning, and none survives unscathed. The epistemological apparatus that modernity calls history was supposed to hold the past in place, in an order that leads to the present in coherent narrative form. But history writing itself provides knowledge that overturns this presumption, freeing the past to speak otherwise. The first century as the arbitrary starting point of linear time is examined in philological detail, and the presumed concepts and categories (binaries of difference) applied to it are exposed as deceptive. Walter Benjamin's understanding of the task of the translator, when applied to historical rather than linguistic translation, provides the methodological armature for the analysis. What follows is an excerpt from the methodological introduction to Chapter 2, "Translations in Time."—S. B-M.

We are in need of a method. How might the relationship between history and philosophy work against the conventions of ownership of time? Philosophy tends toward universality. History is wedded to particularity. How can their collaboration inform an idea of universal history that does not sacrifice differences of historical experience but honors them?

Combining the Incommensurable

Let us begin with a definition of the philosophy of history by the nineteenth-century historian Jacob Burckhardt: "The philosophy of history is a centaur." This description appears dismissive, perhaps a warning, not a formula for success. The centaur, animal in lower body, human in the head and heart, is an impossible beast, a liminal fusion of spirit and matter, not only mythical but monstrous. Here is the full quotation: "Above all, we have nothing to do with the philosophy of history. The philosophy of history is a centaur, a contradiction in terms, for history coordinates, and hence is unphilosophical, while philosophy subordinates, and

* The following is an adapted excerpt from *Year 1* by Susan Buck-Morss (forthcoming in Spring 2021), reprinted courtesy of MIT Press.

hence is unhistorical.”¹ How, then, are these two forms of knowledge, history and philosophy, to be connected without subordinating one to the other? Can coordination itself produce philosophy? Two traditions will need to be avoided because they have not served us well. One is the Hegelian hierarchy that subsumes history within a concept of philosophy as Spirit or Reason (*Geist*) and views this concept as actualized in the course of historical events. The other is modern phenomenology that considers historical conjunctures as contingent and reduces the status of history to mere historicity, a lived experience of temporality making no more than existential claims. In both cases, the critical power of the encounter between present philosophizing and the historical past is blunted. If instead the tension between history and philosophy keeps both in play, if these knowledge procedures are horizontally rather than hierarchically arranged, can the difference between them be made fruitful? The philosophical significance of linguistic practice suggests a comparison: Can history writing be a way of doing philosophy if philosophy is understood as a task of translation?

Walter Benjamin’s description of the “task” (*Aufgabe*) of the translator suggests a possibility. He uses as metaphor an image that anticipates his later description of the “task” of the historical materialist: “For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, wordliness [*Wörtlichkeit*] is the arcade.”² The century-old urban arcade is a passageway that pierces through the street facade of the present, providing an entry point into the past. The translator, similarly, treats words as entryways. Words, rather than sentences, are the “primary element.”³ Benjamin creates a noun (*Wörtlichkeit*) from an adjective (*wörtlich*). It is translated officially as “literalness,” but I prefer a calque, “wordliness,” to mark a procedure that relies on the word’s illuminative power. The juxtaposition of original and translation does not eliminate the distance between them. “A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light.”⁴ There is no attempt to smooth over the difficulties in finding equivalences. Rather than focusing on the semantic meaning of the text, the translator treats each word as a “fragment” of language as a whole.

1. From Burckhardt’s 1868–72 manuscript (never intended for publication) in Jacob Burckhardt, *Über das Studium der Geschichte*, translated in Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 161. Howard describes Burckhardt’s “youthful contempt for Hegelian historical optimism”; it was in the context of Hegel’s “conflation of historical and philosophical ways of knowing” that Burckhardt, a historian of Italian Renaissance art, made the centaur analogy (pp. 160–61).

2. Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 260. In the original German: “Denn der Satz ist die Mauer vor der Sprache des Originals, Wörtlichkeit die Arkade” (translation modified, as explained above); Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 4:1, ed. Tillman Rexroth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 18.

3. Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” p. 260.

4. *Ibid.*

For the translator of fragments of *history*, the “wordliness” of the temporally distant original is the specific detail, while the wall might be understood as the established narrative that the present tells about itself. The detail that counts is the one that arrests the reader because it does not fit that narrative. It will be evident that recognizing the marginal, the overlooked, the inappropriate demands expertise. The specialist is indispensable. One has need of a certain antiquarian instinct to trace such details down. The scholarly rigor of disciplinary adherence thus demarcates the ground of knowledge—but not the gaze. The latter, as Benjamin showed us, is a philosophical procedure.

There is the word, but there is also the historical object, the Paris arcade itself. If the sentence remains caught in the text, the arcade provides an escape. It is not text but image, indexing a historical object named by the word and experienced by particular human beings at a historically transient moment in time. At issue is not historical contextualization as a relativizing epistemological move that is said by philosophers to rob the experience of truth, as if transience and truth were philosophically incompatible. Rather, the object is indispensable for establishing the *Wörtlichkeit*, the wordliness, of historical translation, and hence its truth.

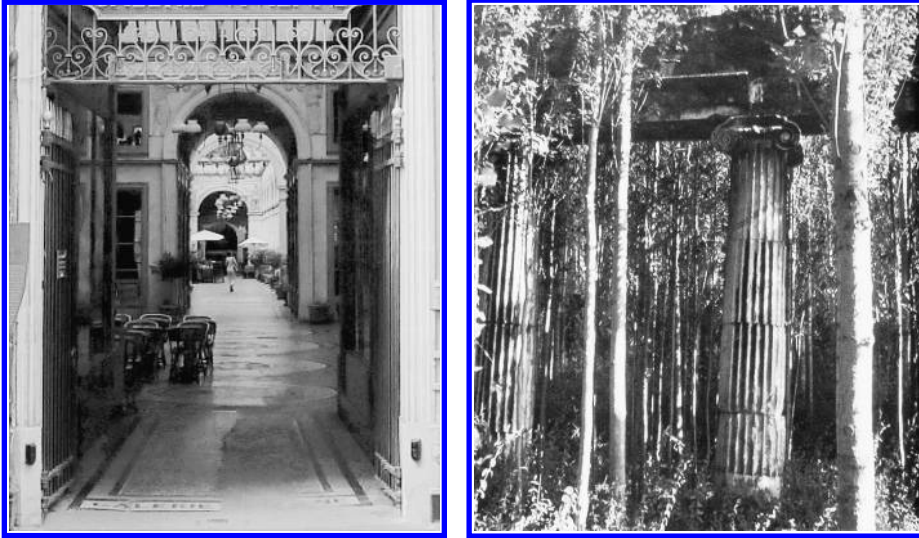
Philologically, we can push this idea further. Benjamin’s neologism *Wörtlichkeit* can be compared with his repeated attempt to utilize the suffix *-barkeit* (-ability) for philosophical gain. Samuel Weber has written a book, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, on his uses of this suffix on multiple occasions, famously in the essay “The Artwork in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [*Reproduzierbarkeit*].”⁵ Not quite the same is happening here. The suffix “-ability” forms nouns from verbs, whereas “-liness” denotes an adjectival quality. But if we consider word (*Wort*) as expression, then this early formulation by Benjamin, *Wörtlichkeit*, might be thought of (although he did not) as a pair with *Wört-barkeit*, the express-ibility of the material world, its capacity, in human language, to be named.⁶ The aim here is not an exegesis of Walter Benjamin’s texts. Rather, it is to recognize a philosophical understanding of translation that allows us to bring philosophy and history into a different relation than those that have dominated in (and over) the past.

The word, as the expression of objects, pulls away from subjective intent. Whereas speakers of English tend to define a “literal” reading as reductive, perhaps equivalent to a fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture, as if its truth were fully accessible within the text (the correlate in German is *buchstäblich*), Benjamin’s idea of “wordliness” moves interpretation in the other direction. When he describes in his philosophical text “On the Concept of History” the “task” [*Aufgabe*] of the historical materialist, he has a materialist metaphysics in mind:

5. Samuel Weber, *Benjamin’s -Abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

6. This capacity of the object, its impart-ability (*Mittel-barkeit*) in language, is an idea in Benjamin’s writing, language’s capacity to carry the name across the barriers of linguistic separation, pointing to a divine Word inaccessible to humans, yet demonstrated by the translatability (*Übersetzbarkeit*) of one language into another. It determines the “innermost kinship of languages,” a “special kinship [that] holds because languages are not strangers to one another but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express” (Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” p. 255).

Words draw us away from the present toward the transitory objects, the historical particulars, they have named.⁷



*Left: Interior of Passage Vivienne, nineteenth century, Paris.
Right: Ruins of the agora, first century CE, Aphrodisias (Geyre), Turkey.
Photograph by Jonathan S. Blair.*

But this also means that to speak of historical objects, and more, to speak afterwards about what is written of them, is to deal with ghosts, icons, avatars, monuments, fetishes, afterimages, ruins, and not the historical object itself. If the word, or the image, is the ghostly residue, the dead metaphor, of a sensory, transitory nature, the experience of which truly disappears, how is philosophy to acknowledge this severe limitation to its capacity to tell the truth? Philosophy as historical translation would then strive to bring to life the residues of a still-distant past, to resurrect them or, if theological language is to be avoided, to bring their *wordliness* back into

7. In the Paraliopomena to “On the Concept of History,” Benjamin criticizes historians who “project the past into the present”: “The false aliveness of the past-made-present, the elimination of every echo of a ‘lament’ from history, marks history’s final subjection to the modern concept of science. . . . In other words, the project of discovering ‘laws’ for the course of historical events is not the only means—and hardly the most subtle—of assimilating historiography to natural science. The notion that the historian’s task (*Aufgabe*) is to make the past ‘present’ . . . is guilty of the same fraudulence, and is far less transparent” (Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 401). In German: “Die Vorstellung, es sei die Aufgabe des Historikers das Vergangne zu ‘vergegenwärtigen’ macht sich der gleichen Erschleichung schuldig und ist doch viel weniger leicht durchschaubar” (Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1:3, p. 1231).

circulation, transforming knowledge of both past and present in the process.⁸ It follows that subsuming the past under contemporary logics and categories—even those of radical contemporaries like Foucault, or Agamben—is insufficient. For them, history is the starting point for the development of concepts, but history as temporal distance is superseded. The historical object is a means to an end, not itself the philosophical goal. The concept, as method, then takes on imperial airs, subsuming potentially every concrete case. (Governmentality or bare life, genealogies or states of exception are discovered in every corner of the globe.⁹)

How to move forward, then, in moving backward to the first century? Consider the confession of that excellent historian Fergus Millar: “Those who study and teach the history of the ancient world suffer from a great disadvantage, which we find difficult to admit even to ourselves: in a perfectly literal sense we do not know what we are talking about.”¹⁰ A seemingly insurmountable constraint! But now consider Souleymane Bachir Diagne’s formulation when speaking of his participation in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*:¹¹ “Translation is the impossible task that in the end always succeeds.”¹² Translation is impossible. And we do it anyway.¹³ Moreover, the translation process is intrinsi-

8. Let me clarify that I am proposing here a very different Copernican Revolution in the philosophy of history than he himself intended. My reception of Benjamin has been marked by working through the historical details of the Arcades Project that, as famously “failed,” does not seem to be of present academic interest, at least not for philosophers. My goal, then as now, is not to be faithful to what Benjamin did, or would have done, had he been writing instead of me. Rather, Benjamin’s work is good to think with.

9. For Michel Foucault on governmentality, see “Governmentality,” and on genealogy, see “Theatrum Politicum: The Genealogy of Capital—Police and the State of Prosperity,” both in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For Giorgio Agamben on bare life, see *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), and on states of exception, see Giorgio Agamben, *States of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

10. Fergus Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East*, vol. 2: *Government, Society, and Culture in the Roman Empire*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton and Guy M. Rogers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. xi; again in “The World of the Golden Ass,” p. 313.

11. First published in France as *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Paris: de Seuil, 2003); English translation, *The Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, edited by Emily Apter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

12. While the idea of philosophy as itself translation as articulated by Souleymane Bachir Diagne is significantly different from the task considered here, I am indebted in what follows to his lecture and seminar on this topic at the School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell University, summer 2015.

13. Already in 1998, Cassin described the “untranslatable” as not an end to the task of the translator but “the interminability of translating: the idea that one can never have done with translation” (Apter, Preface to *Untranslatables*, p. vii). In contrast, Benjamin sees the “translatability” (*Übersetzbarkeit*) of languages as the condition of possibility of a universal language. We will have to consider: How might moving laterally across distances in time rescue a historical idea of universality from Cassin’s conclusion that rigorous attention to “untranslatables” requires a philosophical positioning of “consistent relativism,” when relativism is precisely the obstacle to a *rapprochement* between philosophy and history?

cally philosophical, defined by what Diagne refers to as lateral universality: “Philosophy can *only* be universal if it moves across differences.”¹⁴ And: “It is distance that constitutes philosophy.”¹⁵ Diagne is speaking of linguistic distance, but the claim might apply to temporal distance as well.

Words do not hang on the facade of the present, advertising their availability. They are embedded in history, which forms no continuous tradition. Modern German philosophy has thought otherwise. What has been called, rightly, Heidegger’s “ontological nationalism” congeals in his declaration that philosophy has only one language, Greek yesterday and German today.¹⁶ But what if the Greek of yesterday has been *mistranslated* by the Germans of today, precisely because the task of *historical* translation was ignored?

The Mimetic Capacity

The only way to reach universality is horizontal, never pretending to abandon the realm of particularity; the way leading through [translation] . . . making various languages clash, marry, meet, befriend, mingle with, and confront one another.

—Agata Bielik-Robson¹⁷

We are inquiring as to what happens when the task of the historian is understood as itself philosophy, a task of translation that crosses the chasm between a distant past and our time without exclusionary appropriation by the present, without present categories of knowledge reigning supreme but, rather, in a way that transforms knowledge on both sides of the temporal divide.

Consider Marx on the ancients, the comments with which he concludes the introduction to the *Grundrisse* (1857). In asking why differences in modes of production and, correspondingly, in forms of consciousness do not lead to historical solipsism, but rather allow for our appreciation of another era, Marx turns to the ancient Greeks. He asks why it is that Greek art and epic poetry, grounded in myth and “bound up with certain forms of social development,” still afford us aesthetic

14. Diagne, seminar at the School of Criticism and Theory, summer 2015.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre’s description, cited in Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa* (Dakar: Codesria, 2016), p. 25.

17. Agata Bielik-Robson, “Marrano Universalism: Benjamin, Derrida, and Buck-Morss on the Condition of Universal Exile,” *Telos* 186 (Spring 2019), pp. 25-44; here p. 25. Bielik-Robson clarifies: “A ‘Marrano philosopher’ struggles to convince his readers that the Jewish mode of thinking is *not* alien to the spirit of universalism, just negotiates it differently: not as a ready-made declaration of a universal essence, but as an ongoing practice, something Walter Benjamin called ‘the task of the translation’; and on Benjamin: “for him the true universality emerges only through the clashes—or marriages—of two or more separate idioms” (*ibid.*, p. 27).

pleasure and indeed, “in a certain respect, count as a norm and as an unattainable model”? He answers:

A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child’s naiveté, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm? There are unruly children and precocious children. Many of the old peoples belong in this category. The Greeks were normal children. The charm of their art for us is not in contradiction to the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. . . . [It] is inextricably bound up, rather, with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could alone arise, can never return.¹⁸

Contrast Marx’s approach with Walter Benjamin’s very different orientation with regard to the same issue, the connection between phylogeny and ontogeny, in the 1933 text “The Mimetic Faculty.”¹⁹ Children’s play, Benjamin observes, preserves a mimetic capacity to perceive the world analogically that extends to non-sensuous similarities. He writes: “The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher but also a windmill and a train.” He continues:

It must be borne in mind that neither mimetic powers nor mimetic objects remain the same in the course of thousands of years. Rather, we must suppose that the gift of producing similarities (for example, in dancing, whose oldest function this is), and therefore also the gift of recognizing them, have changed with historical development. The direction of this change seems determined by the increasing decay of

18. Karl Marx, Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/>.

19. NB: The translators into English of this essay—both Rodney Livingstone (in *Reflections*) and Edmund Jephcott (in *Selected Works*)—have chosen “faculty” rather than “capacity” for the German word *Vermögen*, a move that provides in English an unwarranted connection to Kant, whose text “The Contest of the Faculties” (famous for its reference to the French Revolution) bears the title “Der Streit der Fakultäten.” This accords with the contemporary wisdom, which puts great stock in the testimony of Gershom Scholem that Benjamin in his early years concerned himself deeply with Kant. True enough, but Benjamin’s reception was deeply revisionist of the Kantian tradition. This emphasis is symptomatic of the remarkable assimilation of Benjamin’s work into the academy that rejected him—appropriating his work within the European philosophical tradition of not only Kant but also the German Romantics, as well as Nietzsche, even Heidegger. See as exemplary the entry by Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles, “Walter Benjamin,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall 2015 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/benjamin/>.

This entry, which expertly describes excellent academic work, documents the absorption of Benjamin into the history of ideas, drawing his work into present intellectual discussions very far from the historical emergencies of Benjamin’s time. The latter, in my opinion, is the angle of vision from which a historical-materialist interpretation ought not to stray.

the mimetic faculty. For clearly the perceptual world [*Merkwelt*] of modern man contains only minimal residues of the magical correspondences and analogies that were familiar to ancient peoples.²⁰

The implication in Benjamin's text is this: What the nineteenth-century European Karl Marx can only see as "childish" about ancient mimetic arts (despite their incomparably skillful, mimetic productions of human forms) is due to the undeveloped, hence still-childhood stage of Marx's own mimetic faculty.²¹ Their difference lies in Benjamin's concept of history. Marx's conflation of ancient Greece with humanity's childhood was in full accord with the attitude of Hegel.²² In contrast, Benjamin's rejection of history as progress was logically consequent, leading him to challenge the entire schema of history within which this metaphor of humanity's "childhood" was inscribed.²³

Benjamin believed that the training of children's innate mimetic capacity had been stunted by bourgeois education. Imagistic cognition had been sacrificed to the pedagogy of written texts. Repetition, learning by rote, diminished human mimetic skill, reducing it to mere mimicking, eternal repetition rather than inventive play. (The rhythmic improvisations of dancing retain this playfulness of bodily translation.) In the Paralipomena to the text "On the Concept of History," he

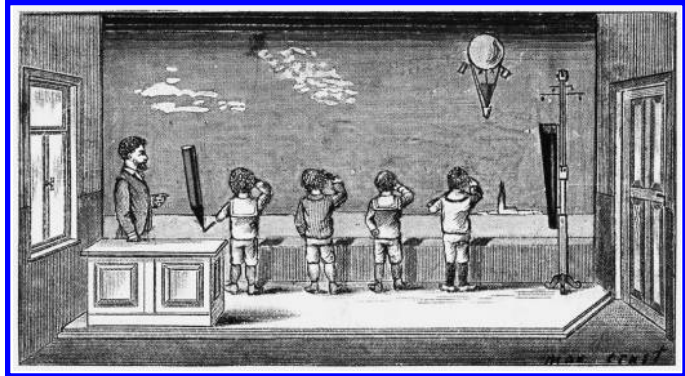
20. Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927–1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al., trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 720–21. I have altered the translation of *Tanzen* from "dances" (a word that suggests an art form) to "dancing," because I believe Benjamin was connecting his discussion to the revolution in dancing as a form of popular culture that marks the 1920s and '30s, and that can be seen as a rebirth of the mimetic capacity Benjamin has in mind.

21. Despite his continued enjoyment of Greek and Roman classical texts, in keeping with nineteenth-century European understandings, Marx saw as "childlike" the mythic elements of ancient cultures that were preserved in classical forms of epic and drama, and were found in his own time in societies that he considered less historically developed than those of the modern West. The critique of the West's celebration of scientific reason as itself a form of myth would come later (see, e.g., Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1947).

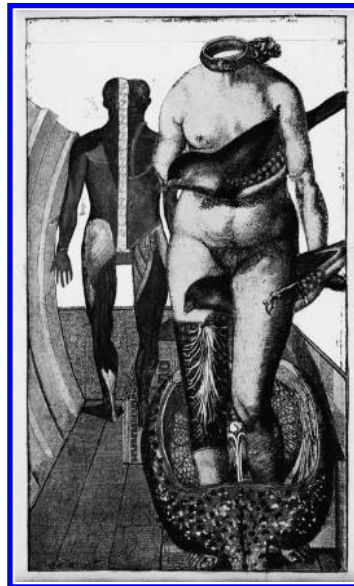
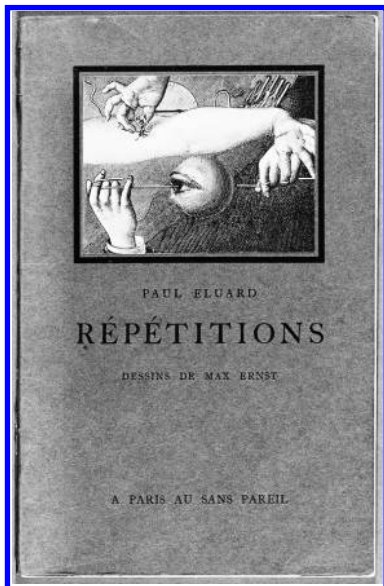
22. This approach to aesthetic forms as preconceptual and therefore primitive manifests Marx's debt to Hegel. In exposing Europe's "Hellenomania," Martin Bernal provides the relevant passage from Hegel that describes this appropriation of earlier periods by those that come later, which Hegel saw as totally unproblematic: "The name of Greece strikes home to the hearts of men of education in Europe, and more particularly is this so with us Germans. . . . [The Greeks] certainly received the substantial beginnings of their religion, culture . . . from Asia, Syria and Egypt; but they have so greatly obliterated the foreign nature of this origin, and it is so much changed, worked on, turned round and altogether made so different, that what they—as we—prize, know and love in it is essentially their own" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, cited in Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 295).

23. Benjamin's critique of history as progress was not simply a reaction to the political events of the 1930s; it was deeply embedded in his materialist approach to history, one that did not exclude serious consideration of theology. Benjamin's rejection of the childhood metaphor saves his thinking from the then-dominant view that non-Western peoples, as historically undeveloped, were childlike, hence behind the West.

Max Ernst, frontispiece to
Paul Éluard's *Répétitions*
(Paris, 1922). © 2020
Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York /
ADAGP, Paris.



writes: “The basic conception in myth is the world as punishment—punishment which actually engenders those to whom punishment is due. Eternal recurrence is the punishment of being held back in school, projected onto the cosmic sphere: humanity has to copy out its text in endless repetitions,” and he refers in parentheses to Paul Éluard’s book of Surrealist poems *Répétitions*. The frontispiece of Éluard’s book, an image by Max Ernst, provides the historical object of his words. This image is in striking contrast to all of the other illustrations by Ernst both on the cover of *Répétitions* and throughout the small book, printed by the avant-garde publisher Sans Pareil (literally “without equal”), that pointed to the newness of the poetry and images it contained. Its position as frontispiece, an image to which



Ernst. Cover of and illustration from *Répétitions*. 1922.
© 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

Benjamin referred on several occasions, suggests that Benjamin experienced Surrealism as a critique of, and escape from, the cognitive stunting that the bourgeois upbringing of his generation had entailed.

In the 1933 text on the mimetic capacity, Benjamin considered “whether we are concerned with the decay of this faculty or with its transformation,” and surely he hoped for the latter. Not only the work of the Surrealists but silent cinema and specifically the gestural figure of Charlie Chaplin might provide a new kind of schooling in the mimetic faculty.

If our understanding of a distant past demands a mimetic capacity to recognize similarities across temporal expanse, the method is uniquely relevant to the first century. For if we are searching for a way to tie together the most diverse forms of the surviving sources, then the fact that their creators were extremely sophisticated in the development and deployment of their mimetic faculty means that studying them can provide a schooling for us and potentially a transformation in this capacity itself. The problem of historical translation then becomes how to expand our understanding of the past to embrace the then-existing capacities for recognizing similarities for which we have lost the ability, rather than wipe out their traces in our presentation of history, as if they were not a necessary attribute of history’s truth.

When applied to writers in the first century considered in YEAR 1, the capacity to present thought analogically unites figures as seemingly diverse as Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, and John of Patmos. Each forms one—the more marginalized one—of a pair of thinkers, the other of which is more accessible to present discourse. So: Flavius Josephus, historian of the Judaeen War, not Tacitus, the more acceptable first-century historian; Philo of Alexandria, neo-Platonic interpreter of the book of Genesis, not Seneca, favored by secular philosophers today; John of Patmos, writer of the Bible’s final book of Revelation, not Saint Paul, the darling of Marxist post-secularists Badiou, Žižek, and others. Now, if we apply to them our privileged category of Identity, it will be said that they were all Jews. But Philo and John were appropriated by Christians, and no group has been eager to claim Josephus as its own. The ways they make advocates of identity categories uncomfortable, their diverse ways of being Jewish, blur the boundaries of these categorical distinctions. Metaphor, mimesis, the pairing of nonidenticals: Such analogical constructs abound in ancient texts, providing keys to a method of juxtaposing philosophy and history across fields now segmented by vertical divisions into separate histories organized by categories of difference: Christian, Jewish, Hellenic, Roman.

Concluding Fragments: Why the First Century?

Readers may not be aware of any of the first-century authors scrutinized in YEAR 1, and those who know one may be ignorant of the others. Yet taken seriously on their own terms, they lead in surprising directions that contradict profoundly

what we think we know, providing keys to a radical overturning of the epistemological preconceptions of our time. When this occurs, an abundance of interconnections becomes possible as minor characters are drawn into the vortex of historical rearrangement. Antigone and John Coltrane, Plato and Bulwer-Lytton, Nicholas of Cusa and Zora Neal Hurston, al-Farabi and Jean Anouilh all make an appearance, not to mention Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Kristeva, and Derrida.

*

It is possible to colonize time as well as territory. It happens when particular collectives claim a specific, vertical slice of history, set upon it a flag of national or religious belonging, and control the production and distribution of the meanings that are mined within it. This clearly has been the fate of the first century. Contemporary anthropology has led the way in exposing the violent distortions in knowledge that colonization of space entails. This critique applies as well to colonized time. In exploring the distant past, we are foreigners entering alien territory. The natives share understandings not accessible to us without translation. Even if we know their words, we cannot assume proprietary rights over the meanings they convey. Even if we can trace the erratic path by which they have been rescued throughout time and come down to us, the privatizing laws of inheritance do not apply.

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Global humanity deserves a common history, but of what kind? There is general awareness that a different pedagogy is called for. YEAR 1 is written as a contribution to its development. Here is the wager: If the first century can be reclaimed as common ground rather than the origin of deeply entrenched differences, then its very remoteness in time has the potential to lift modernity's self-understanding off existing foundational constraints, allowing a repositioning and reorientation of intellectual labor. And such a reorientation is necessary. Modernity does not have the power to transcend entrenched differences on the basis of its own resources, as the ways it describes differences are modernity's own inventions. The names of recent theoretical initiatives—postmodern, postcolonial, post-secular—are indicative of the inadequacy of this attempt to leave the recent past behind.

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By refusing to remain within any pre-given conceptual context, YEAR 1 proposes a transformed idea of just how the terms philosophy and history are linked together. History writing, more than an immanent critique, becomes an approach to truth that can properly be called philosophy. It will be clear that my lifelong relationship to the thinking of Benjamin is behind this endeavor, specifically, his

insistence that historical objects have a metaphysical import that can be brought to legibility in the present. His friend Adorno wrote to him that such a project was situated “at the crossroads between magic and positivism,” and warned, “this place is bewitched.” I make no claim of succeeding where Benjamin failed, or even trying to accomplish what he intended. I am a very different sort of thinker. My research is in and about a very different historical moment than those that concerned him. But I have long considered as objectively compelling the precarious positioning that he took, and that Adorno shunned, of reading the fragments and details of history as vital to the philosophical endeavor. I make no apologies for opening up this project to its dangers. The question is: Can the discovery of historical facts transform philosophical presuppositions, and can it do so in such a way that rescuing the past, by overcoming the narcissism of the present, provides an experience of epistemological liberation?

DAVID JOSELIT

The word is now a virus. The flu virus may once have been a healthy lung cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the lungs. The word may once have been a healthy neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk.¹

William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded*

It is now simply a fact—we have learned it all too well—that “viral” memes and biological viruses are coagents. The progress of the novel coronavirus in the United States, and elsewhere, has been enabled by misinformation gone viral. This is the deadly consequence of what is called “fake news.” It is not entirely Donald Trump’s doing that information *infects* rather than *informs* us, but he has achieved something remarkable in *legitimizing* a relation to knowledge that is viral rather than evidence-based. He has done so by using his power as president of the United States to thoroughly assault the institutional actors who authorize information as knowledge, including journalists, climate scientists, judges, and epidemiologists, as well as denigrating the testimony of anyone whose speech he regards as illegitimate, including people of color, asylum seekers, and refugees of all kinds. Fake news, in other words, introduces a crisis of authorization. But is the “cure” worse than the disease, as some politicians (including Trump himself) have suggested with regard to the economic devastation caused by social distancing? If the cure for information gone viral is to authorize some forms of knowledge as legitimate and others as illegitimate, doesn’t this contravene the long-held convictions among critics and historians

1. William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962; reprint, New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 49.

of modern and contemporary art that progressive cultural expression should *question* authority rather than establish it?

To *authorize* is distinct from authoring. The *New York Times*, for instance, authorizes the writing of all who contribute to its pages. But while authorization can occur through elite institutions like the *Times*, it also has great democratic potential—in fact, as a form of power it is necessarily communal. Black Lives Matter, for instance, has reauthorized video recordings of police brutality, previously suppressed, or dismissed as isolated cases, as evidence of *systemic* white supremacy. Nonetheless, such communal forms of authorization are by no means limited to progressive political positions. Stephen Moore, an adviser to Trump’s Covid-19 economic task force, who assisted a group organizing protests against stay-at-home orders in Wisconsin, was reported as declaring, “We need to be the Rosa Parks here . . . and protest these government injustices.”² In doing so, he attempted to reauthorize the activism of an African-American civil-rights hero for his own libertarian cause. If biological viruses hijack the cells of human organisms, human agencies (whether governmental, community-based, or individual) seek to control viral forms of information. This is possible because, like an organic virus that moves freely from host to host, the informational kind is no longer impeded by any stable discursive authority. To be sure, it seems that social distancing may be easier to accomplish than informational distancing.

In some ways, of course, the loosening of powers of authorization sounds like a very good thing. After all, the avant-garde has been devoted to de-authorizing aesthetic form and content throughout its history: The readymade is only the most obvious example. It might even be possible to define modernism as an agonism of de-authorization whose agonizing endgame is unfolding before us in our world of fake news. Whether or not this is the case, I believe the struggle over the authorization of images is the most significant aesthetic challenge of this moment—one that is often incorrectly understood as identity politics. Consider, on the one hand, a contested discursive field that includes both the theorization among many African-American thinkers, including Fred Moten, Saidiya Hartman, and Tina Campt, of strategies of fugitivity, whose aim is to escape balkanized stereotypes (or infection by toxic information viruses), and, on the other hand, the seemingly contradictory claims to the rights to represent the heritage one identifies with (or perhaps, more expansively, that one *cares for*) that erupted in controversy over the inclusion of Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmett Till, the black boy brutally murdered in 1955 for allegedly flirting with a white woman, in the 2017 Whitney Biennial. This juxtaposition indicates a profound double bind—the impulse to evade oppressive identity projections coexists with claims over the rights to represent a deeply painful

2. Michael D. Shear and Sarah Mervosh, “Trump Encourages Protest Against Governors Who Have Imposed Virus Restrictions,” *New York Times*, April 17, 2020; updated April 20, 2020; accessed online, April 24, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-governors.html?searchResultPosition=2>. I am grateful To Keisha Knight for initially pointing out this analogy to me.

historical legacy that still remains unknown or misunderstood by many white Americans. The complexity of this double bind calls for strategies that are very different from a straightforward or affirmative identity politics. This is where seizing upon authorization as a practice—an agonistic democratic struggle over the meaning of any particular image or quantum of information—becomes urgent. Artists as different as Kara Walker and Cameron Rowland, for instance, powerfully explore how images and objects move in and out of different proprietary regimes. The former, through heightening affective encounters with debased stereotypes that contemporary African-Americans “should” deplore, and the latter by exploring how persons can be moved into the category of property when they are no longer considered human. Each artist re-authorizes a discourse that neither one invented. In this sense, their work may be associated with practices dedicated to the appropriation and recalibration of existing images that were introduced in Pop art and greatly expanded after the Pictures generation. All of these practices are premised on strategies of re-authorization that engage with the viral images of a particular time and place.

My point is this: We are faced with a critical and ethical challenge right now as well as a health and economic crisis of existential proportions. If we want to believe in the de-authorizing effects of contemporary art as a romantic and revolutionary capacity, must we not recognize that the regime of fake news has taken such strategies to their most terrifying extreme? I propose that it is the citizen’s responsibility not only to *de-authorize* but to *reauthorize* information (including images) in the face of our world gone viral. What does this mean for the history and criticism of modern and contemporary art (and, more broadly, visual culture), which is the project of this journal and its readers? In response to these conditions, I will offer two reflections, or recommendations, on method.

1. The social history of art should not consist exclusively of encircling artworks within an account of contemporaneous historical events like a gilded frame, or performing a literary analysis of the criticism that was coeval with a work of art. These approaches are illuminating, but in themselves they articulate only a single moment in the artwork’s life, which is no more significant than any other. Fastening an artwork to a context suggests that that work has an essential, transhistorical meaning, which no work of art possesses or can possess (a basic historiographical study of any “masterpiece” will prove that, or just the fact that your last visit to the *Demoiselles d’Avignon* wasn’t quite like the previous one). The work of art hosts an endless chain of events of apperception, and as art historians or critics we enact a certain violence when we assign it a single meaning in the way that the art market assigns a price (though even prices fluctuate). The event of an artwork’s making really has very little to do with the event of its appearance fifty years later (or five minutes later, for that matter). What if, instead of attaching works of art to a privileged time or place, we

choose to focus on one or more historically specific moments of the work's "life" that attest to its engagement in struggles of the authorization and de-authorization of images? A controversial recent example of this would be the Museum of Modern Art's juxtaposition of Picasso's *Demoiselles* with Faith Ringgold's *American People Series #20: Die* (1967). The choice to hang these two paintings together was certainly anachronistic, and perhaps it was condescending, but it led to a lot of salutary debate because it straightforwardly and explicitly sought to authorize Faith Ringgold's work, as that of an African-American woman, as an icon equal to Picasso's.

2. In the wake of postmodernism's and post-structuralism's interventions in the 1980s, the reality and concept of a canon became radioactive. This was an important moment of de-authorization, but after nearly forty years, it has led to a condition where the *history* in modern and contemporary art history has been in decline. The prevalence of the case study as a preferred scholarly approach is an index of this. Case studies suggest an atmosphere of history while simultaneously occluding it—the gaps between the cases evacuate whatever historical events may have linked them (or demonstrated their arbitrariness). The case study is the strategy of the historian who has abdicated their responsibility to history. These remarks may seem to contradict what I said above, but not at all. What I am arguing is that, first, artworks are reiterable events that may continually reenter history, and, second, the work of an historian should be to *authorize* an historical account of these events. It is highly significant that the postmodern intervention demonstrated that no one historical narrative can ever again be taken as *the* canon. But that doesn't mean that crafting historical narratives and evaluating their relative power and utility should be abandoned. Moreover, it is my belief that artworks themselves tell history, that through their form they give the story of how a particular configuration of images has been authorized by the artist through a distinctive grammar of combination and execution. Some people might dismiss this as formalism, but I call it history.

In the face of the thoroughgoing de-authorization of information we are experiencing, I believe we should embrace the capacity of the intellectual to authorize knowledge in a manner that is open, ethical, and desirous of provoking vigorous debate. As a discipline, we need to authorize politically engaged historical narratives and work with activist allies to de-authorize toxic institutional structures and re-authorize or authorize those we admire. We are not outside the virus as metaphor; it is up to each of us to decide how to fight it.