

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: NEW WOMANHOOD AND THE BAUHAUS: THE AVANT-GARDE PHOTOGRAPHY OF LUCIA MOHOLY

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During the years 1922–1928, Lucia Moholy operated as an independent photographer at the Bauhaus School in Germany, capturing images of students’ and masters’ art objects, inventively recording the defining architectural elements of the school, and pursuing her own experiments in portraits and photograms. Immersed in the dynamic, radical environment of the Bauhaus, Moholy explored the potential for modernist representative photography. From images capturing the avant-garde building designs of the Bauhaus to portraits sensitively exploring the phenomenon of the New Woman, Moholy’s oeuvre demonstrates her innovative engagement with contemporary artistic and cultural concerns. This dissertation seeks to reclaim Moholy’s place as the foundational figure for photography at the Bauhaus and argues for the radicality and unrestrained modernity of her artistic output.

Given the continued effacement of Lucia Moholy's significant contribution to German modernism, this dissertation serves as a historiographical correction. Asserting Moholy's central importance to the development of a photographic discipline at the Bauhaus, I demonstrate her impact as a pioneering female professional photographer in a field dominated by men. Moholy's portraits and architectural photographs serve as testament to her unique experience of the Bauhaus and celebrate both the institution's and her own modernity, and the free lifestyle each advanced. For younger female photographers who would matriculate at the Bauhaus, Moholy served as a powerful exemplar for considering the world through a multivalent female perspective, unrestricted by the domineering masculinity of the Bauhaus. In reconsidering Moholy's oeuvre, I also situate her contextually within the German avant-garde and consider the individual interpretations of New Womanhood by Moholy and her contemporaries.

Moholy's photographs possess a rich multiplicity of meaning, revealing layers upon layers. They are simultaneously experimental portraits of people and buildings, grounded in Weimar avant-garde expression, and memorializations that build a concrete history and contribute to the Weimar cultural archive. Arguing for Moholy's innovation, her engagement with avant-garde trends in 1920s Europe, and her creation of a representational modernism, this dissertation interrupts the canon of Modernist scholarship and prompts a rethinking of Lucia Moholy's contribution to photographic experimentation at the Bauhaus.

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PHOTOGRAPHY OF LUCIA MOHOLY

by

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For my parents.

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Introduction

In a small photograph titled *Bauhaus Dessau, Werkstattgebäude von Südwesten* (*Workshop Building, from the Southwest*), 1925–26 (Figure 1), an imposing edifice dominates the composition. The structure is composed of a series of interconnected built spaces of varying heights and materials; walls shaded white, grey, and black connect to corridors and whole facades constructed from panels of transparent glass. Straight walls lead vertically to flat roofs, producing an angularity and clean sharpness to the overall construction. Against a dark wall in the foreground, distinctive lettering proclaims the function and meaning of these buildings: Bauhaus. The scene is emptied of all traces of human presence; here stands the Bauhaus as the great monument to modernity.

One of the defining images of the Bauhaus, *Bauhaus Dessau, Werkstattgebäude von Südwesten* was disseminated through contemporary postcards as advertising material and has been reproduced since then in numerous scholarly texts. It stands as emblem and icon of the Bauhaus, a photograph that contains the essence of the Bauhaus within it, acts as a locus, and embodies the very definition of Bauhaus modernity and ideology (social, pedagogical, and aesthetic). The photograph is part of a broader project undertaken by Lucia Moholy over the course of 1925 and 1926, during which time she captured the Bauhaus Dessau under construction and in its newly completed state. The resulting body of images captured the vast edifices of the Bauhaus and its adjacent living spaces from a multitude of different angles, preserving permanently on film the entire exterior aspect of the modernist school.

While these photographs became the foundation for memorializing the Bauhaus, shaping the way we understand German modernism today, the artist behind the lens has not been similarly remembered. Lucia Moholy played a central role in the early development of photographic practice at the Bauhaus, however in the following decades she rapidly disappeared from the scholarship surrounding the Bauhaus. The reasons for this are multiple and complex, largely stemming from the appropriation of Moholy's photographs by Walter Gropius and the adulation of her husband, László Moholy-Nagy, as the singular and preeminent figure of photographic importance at the Bauhaus, both at the time and in subsequent years. Moholy's effacement speaks to a wider issue in Bauhaus scholarship, one only recently being addressed by scholars, of a blanket avoidance of serious critical thinking regarding female artists at the Bauhaus. This dissertation proposes to rethink the canon, to critically reconsider the contributions of Lucia Moholy both to the avant-garde experimentation of the Bauhaus community and more broadly to the radical innovations of 1920s German photography, and to situate her in relation to Weimar New Womanhood. It further reconsiders Moholy's contribution to twentieth-century photography and art historiography by critically assessing the artist's post-Bauhaus photography and writing as an outgrowth of her Bauhaus period achievements.

Lucia Moholy and László Moholy-Nagy¹ moved to the Weimar Bauhaus in 1923, at the invitation of Walter Gropius. Moholy-Nagy was to replace Johannes Itten [1888–1967] on the Bauhaus faculty and assume responsibility for teaching the preliminary

¹ To avoid confusion, I will refer throughout my dissertation to Lucia Moholy [1894–1989] as “Moholy” and her husband László Moholy-Nagy [1895–1946] as “Moholy-Nagy.” Many studies use “Moholy” and “Moholy-Nagy” interchangeably to discuss László, but I consciously avoid this so as to maintain clarity.

course and overseeing the metal workshop. Moholy-Nagy, a Hungarian artist invested in International Constructivism, was deeply committed to a rational aesthetic, believing strongly in the potential of mechanical production and the need for a new visual language appropriate to the vastly altered post-World War One cultural landscape.² His appointment to this teaching position signaled the greater shift Gropius was attempting to undertake at the Bauhaus; moving away from the perceived negative influence of Mazdaznan principles (expounded by Itten) and the focus on individual craftsmanship, Gropius declared a new approach: “Art and Technology: A New Unity.”³ Gropius sought, through advocating a universal formal and stylistic language, to create a new order, one that was international in spirit and scope. Founded on utopian principles, the Bauhaus operated under the concept that art could radically alter everyday experience and that artists could thus shape their environment and lived experience, and thereby change lives. The Bauhaus that Lucia Moholy and László Moholy-Nagy experienced was an international avant-garde collective, an institution that celebrated innovation, radical design concepts, and the challenging of perceived assumptions and realities. It was within this “crucible of modernism”⁴ that Lucia Moholy became a pioneering avant-garde photographer and, I will argue, the major foundational figure for photographic experimentation at the Bauhaus.

² During this period, Moholy-Nagy’s work turned towards International Constructivism, following his emigration from Hungary and his newly-forged relationships with El Lissitzky and Theo van Doesburg. The impact of International Constructivism is felt in his emphatic belief in an art expressed through mechanical reproduction. See, for instance, Steven A. Mansbach, *Visions of Totality: László Moholy-Nagy, Theo van Doesburg, and El Lissitzky* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980) and Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

³ Walter Gropius, “Kunst und Technik: eine neue Einheit,” lecture given at the opening of the Bauhaus exhibition, 1923, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

⁴ Kate Bush, “Foreword,” in *Bauhaus: Art as Life*, ed. Catherine Ince, Lydia Yee, and Juliette Desorgues (London: Koenig Books, 2012), 6.

During her years of residence at the Bauhaus (1923–28), while Moholy-Nagy was engaged as a teaching Master, Moholy operated as an independent photographer, capturing images of students’ and masters’ art objects, architectural elements of the school, and also pursuing her own experiments in portraits and photograms. During these years she solidified her training in photography by becoming an apprentice at Otto Eckner’s studio and studying at the Leipzig Academy for Graphic and Book Arts in 1924–25. Following her period of study there, she was hired by Walter Gropius to capture the new Bauhaus complex in Dessau, both in its semi-constructed form and following its completion. She supplemented her professional activities in Dessau with trips to Paris and summer vacations at Paul and Paula Vogler’s home at Schwarzerden, where she and Moholy-Nagy engaged in *Ferienkurse* (holiday courses) heavily informed by *Lebensreform* practices.⁵ Moholy’s artistic output during this period was prolific, her preoccupation with photographic experimentation framed within the context of an explosion of radical photographic theory within the German artistic community.

I. The Weimar Context

The “Golden Twenties” (1923–28) in Germany was a period of perceived endless possibilities. Photography became a central focus of interest, resulting in the emergence of a *Foto-Kultur* that produced innovative and radical images. Multiple divergent strands of photographic practice emerged; *Neue Sachlichkeit* (“New Objectivity”) propounded

⁵ Oliver A. Botar, *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (Zürich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014), 18. *Lebensreform* (“Life Reform”) was a popular movement in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in Germany and Switzerland that emphasized healthy living, nudism, and one’s physical connection to the environment.

“photographic photography,”⁶ with close attention to sharp, precise details and so-called “straight images,” while *Neues Sehen* (“New Vision”) advocated the total transformation and rethinking of reality. Inherent to this avid, growing interest in photography, and particularly to *Neues Sehen*, was the belief that the camera could capture elements of reality that the human eye could not. Thus *Neues Sehen* photographers strove to liberate perspective and focus through the use of cropping, close-ups, worm’s eye, bird’s eye, inversion, the manipulation of light and dark, photomontage, photograms, and multiple exposure. The objective was to use new techniques to bring about an entirely new perspective on the world; in envisioning a new society, Germans demonstrated a utopian hope for new possibilities in the aftermath of World War One. These pioneering images were broadly accessible, as Berlin had become the center of German publishing following the war and large numbers of New Vision images were published in magazines, newspapers, and journals. The experimental energy of *Neues Sehen* photography saturated the cultural sphere, embodying a collective desire to see the world anew. Furthermore, the accessibility of photography as a discipline dramatically increased with the introduction of the handheld Leica camera in 1925. With far shorter exposure times than previous cameras and a relative ease of operation, the Leica opened up photography to a broader spectrum of people and encouraged amateur experimentation.⁷ It was within this spirited, experimental milieu that Moholy functioned as a professional photographer.

⁶ Roxana Marcoci et al., eds., *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015), 21.

⁷ Katherine C. Ware, “Photography at the Bauhaus,” in *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend (Cologne: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999), 506.

The photo boom in the 1920s involved newly emerging female photographers who participated in the artistic dialogue to a degree not possible before the war. Artists such as Moholy, Marianne Brandt, Ellen Auerbach, Grete Stern, Ilse Bing, and Florence Henri experimented with photography within the newly expanded bounds of their cultural freedom. The impact of World War One was registered in terms of the number of women in professional careers; hired to fill the absent positions left by men serving in the military, these women's voices grew stronger in the fight for suffrage. In November of 1918, as the war was ending, women above the age of twenty-one achieved the right to vote. The establishment of the Weimar Republic quickly brought with it increasing freedoms for women. The Weimar Constitution of 1919 expanded female liberties, including for the first time equal opportunity for education, civil service appointments, and equal pay. In the arts, women were increasingly being trained at craft schools⁸ and professional female-run photography studios emerged. Towards the end of the decade, for example, Grete Stern and Ellen Auerbach established their own professional studio in Berlin; their work, as Roxana Marcoci observes, "played a critical role in redefining women's cultural agency."⁹

During this period, the stability of traditional gender roles was undermined. While many critics argued passionately for the continued role of the woman as housewife and mother as a stabilizing force in society, the strength of the New Woman movement had

⁸ Ulrike Müller offers an analysis of the rise of female education in the arts in her book *Bauhaus Women: Art, Handicraft, Design* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009). Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, women were increasingly trained in arts and crafts (an impact of industrialization). They were permitted to participate in short courses that dealt with such skills as weaving, decoration, bookbinding, photography, and drawing (see page 14). Many women began attending craft schools because they were forbidden from attending the art academies. Müller estimates that the number of craft schools in 1910 was around sixty. Among these, twelve were committed exclusively to the training of women, ten separated women into their own "Ladies Departments," and four allowed women limited access to classes (see page 8).

⁹ Marcoci et al., *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola*, 24.

an enormous impact on contemporary conceptions of a woman's role and the fluidity of female identity. New Womanhood was complex and oftentimes ambiguous, encapsulating a broad spectrum of identities and female experiences across Germany. The New Woman could be "flapper or vamp, political revolutionary or suffragette,"¹⁰ seductive, professional, "masculine," adventurous, or independent. As clear boundaries of the "female" and of "womanliness" began to dissolve, women in the 1920s experienced an opportunity for self-liberation that was entirely novel. The New Woman, with her short hair – the "*bubikopf*" in Germany – and her license to smoke cigarettes, wear trousers, and engage in sexual relations outside of marriage, was a figure of female agency and emancipation that proved a powerful force in a rapidly changing German society. Moholy's portraits from the mid-1920s capture this dynamic, shifting gender terrain, exploring the "masculinized," liberated, transgressive identity of the New Woman through portraits of Lily Hildebrandt, Florence Henri, Otti Berger, and Nelly van Doesburg, among others. Emancipated from the ideal of womanhood – woman as nurturer, caregiver, mother, self-sacrificing wife – the women in Moholy's portraits catalogue the individual and widely varying interpretations and experiences of womanhood in 1920s Weimar Germany. Moholy, furthermore, both visualized the New Woman and herself embodied the concept, as professional photographer and the most active female photographer at the Bauhaus.

Simultaneous to the jubilant force of female liberation came, however, the fear of such liberation from more conservative factions, leading to their characterization of New

¹⁰ Linda Nochlin, "Foreword: Representing the New Woman – Complexity and Contradiction," in *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s*, ed. Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2011), vii.

Women as whores, as femme fatales, and as negligent mothers. Juxtaposed alongside the ecstatic view of liberated womanhood was a more disturbing and grotesque vision of the female sex, one visualized by such artists as George Grosz, Rudolf Schlichter, and Otto Dix. Their images of grotesque, debased prostitutes and *lustmord* scenes which render the violence felt towards women in graphic detail (Figures 2-5) serve as a counterpoint to the victorious depiction of modern womanhood, casting women as the source of Weimar degeneration and dissolution. Dix's and Grosz's dark fantasies of the female sex are echoed in Hans Bellmer's savaged and distorted dolls (Figure 6), which speak further to the misogynistic reaction towards the New Woman – what Nochlin calls the “dark underbelly of the New Woman theme: that savage imagery of domination and sexual excess empowered by violent male fantasies.”¹¹

Despite shifting gender relations in Weimar society, an entrenched masculinist culture prevailed at the Bauhaus. The newfound liberties and independence of German women, expressed in popular culture by the phenomenon of the *Neue Frau*, were not reflected in the administrative hierarchy of the school or in the treatment of its students. As Anja Baumhoff has shown in her compelling study *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus*, what began as a progressive school advocating equality quickly became a far more resistant and traditional environment.¹² When the Bauhaus opened its application process for the Weimar school in 1919, more women sought admission than did men,¹³ in the summer semester of that year, eighty-four women and seventy-nine men registered as

¹¹ Ibid., x.

¹² See Anja Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic's Premier Art Institute, 1919-1932* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001).

¹³ Ulrike Müller, *Bauhaus Women. Art, Handicraft, Design* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 7.

students.¹⁴ Walter Gropius, in his welcoming address to the incoming students, proclaimed: “No distinction between the beautiful and the strong sex. Absolutely equal rights, but also absolutely equal duties. No consideration for ladies; at work all craftsmen. I shall strongly oppose the limited occupation with pretty little salon pictures to pass the time.”¹⁵ Putting aside the sexism in correlating the artistic output of women with “pretty little salon pictures,” it is clear that, at least publicly, Gropius initially advocated an educational environment built on equality of the sexes. Documents from Gropius’s archives reveal, however, that despite his rhetoric regarding equal opportunities for students of both genders and gender-blindness in admissions, Gropius actually sought to limit the role and participation of women at the Bauhaus relatively soon after he made this pronouncement.¹⁶

The restriction of female artists at the Bauhaus was enacted not only through decreasing admissions, but also through a conscious channeling of women into specific workshops. Following the required preliminary course, aspiring artists chose which department to study in under the advisement of the preliminary course instructor. The instructors of this course, particularly in the earlier years of the Bauhaus, consistently directed women into the weaving workshop, so that it was almost entirely made up of female students. The pottery and decorative arts workshops were similarly promoted as suitable workspaces for women. Following the artist Annie Weil’s application to the

¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵ Walter Gropius, notes from Gropius’ address to the Bauhaus students in 1919. Quoted in Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic’s Premier Art Institute, 1919-1932*, 53.

¹⁶ Again, Baumhoff’s book is elucidatory on this topic. In February 1920, Gropius demanded a secret reduction of the “female element” at the school, insisting that women should constitute no more than one-third of Bauhaus students. In September 1920, he demanded “a sharp reduction of the over-represented female sex.” Walter Gropius, both quotes taken from Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus*, 58.

Bauhaus in 1921 (in which she demonstrated an interest in a workshop other than weaving), Gropius wrote to her to explain that

It is not advisable, in our experience, that women work in the heavy craft areas such as carpentry and so forth. For this reason a women's section has been formed at the Bauhaus which works particularly with textiles; bookbinding and pottery also accept women. We are fundamentally opposed to the education of women as architects.¹⁷

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the view of the school's director, few women were promoted to teaching positions. Ulrike Müller notes that among about forty-five teachers in Weimar and thirty-five in Dessau, there were only six women at each.¹⁸ The lack of female role models in positions of authority at the school must have had a detrimental impact on the female students fighting to achieve recognition for their work. Baumhoff describes an educational environment in which women were consistently subordinated to supporting roles, secondary figures to the more important work of the male Bauhäuslers.¹⁹ Given the masculine community spirit of the Bauhaus – a school with the expressed aim to educate the new *man* – those women who wished to forge a successful career were forced to move outside of prescribed social norms and adopt a more independent, ambitious, and career-driven stance.

For Lucia Moholy to operate as an independent and professionally contracted female artist within this milieu is both notable and significant. Baumhoff argues that there was no solidarity in terms of women forging alliances to demand more opportunities at

¹⁷ Letter from Walter Gropius to Annie Weil in Vienna, February 23, 1921. Quoted in Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic's Premier Art Institute, 1919-1932*, 59.

¹⁸ Müller, *Bauhaus Women. Art, Handicraft, Design*, 14.

¹⁹ Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic's Premier Art Institute, 1919-1932*, 149.

the school; for the most part, it seems that women artists fought on an individual basis for the acknowledgement of their own work.²⁰ Moholy worked as a female photographer at the Bauhaus years before the discipline was acknowledged as a field worthy of study; once established in 1929, however, it became the second-largest department at the school with female students.²¹ As one of the earliest photographers at the Bauhaus (and one of only a few active professionally), Moholy occupied a crucial role as a pioneering female role model in a world of men for young incoming students. Furthermore, her position at the school allowed her the liberty to work in a manner not accessible to others. As the wife of a Bauhaus master (indeed, one of the most lauded and influential Bauhaus masters), Moholy was permitted greater freedoms. She was also, crucially, not a student. She was not required to take the preliminary course and she was not typecast as a weaver because of her sex. Moholy thus exercised freedoms that most other women at the Bauhaus did not receive. Her portraits, architectural photographs, and documentation of Bauhaus art objects serve as testament to her own unique experience of the Bauhaus and celebrate the modernity and liberty of her lifestyle. For the younger female photographers who would follow at the Bauhaus, including Grit Kallin-Fischer, Elsa Thiemann, Gertrud Arndt, and Korona Krause, Moholy served as a model for considering the world through a multivalent female perspective, unrestricted by the domineering masculinity of the Bauhaus.

II. Reflections on the Field and Revisiting Lucia Moholy

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

²¹ Müller, *Bauhaus Women. Art, Handicraft, Design*, 11.

Given the vast and diverse creative output of female Bauhäuslers and their active participation in Bauhaus coursework and culture, the state of scholarship in this field is surprisingly deficient. Critical studies have largely focused on the weaving workshop,²² a perhaps inevitable result of the concentration of women in that department and the measurable success the workshop achieved in marketing and selling Bauhaus products. The few publications that attempt to take a broader perspective on female artistic contributions are of key importance in laying a foundation for future scholarship, but are hindered by their attempt to tackle the broad range of mediums, artistic approaches, and individual ideologies under a unifying banner of gender within a single publication. Studies such as Ulrike Müller's *Bauhaus Women. Art, Handicraft, Design* are therefore of great historiographical significance in their attempt to highlight the achievements of women at the Bauhaus and in their success in emphasizing the challenges female students faced at the school. However, their introductory study of individual artists should be viewed as a launching point for more penetrative, individualized scholarship. In addition, the field of Bauhaus scholarship seems preoccupied with studying the achievements of a few select female artists, namely those women (such as Marianne Brandt and Gunta Stölzl) who managed to achieve career success while at the Bauhaus despite their gender. While the artistic contributions of these women are unarguably tremendous, the narrow concentration on a few female artists who "overcame" the hierarchical masculinity of the Bauhaus serves to diminish the great achievements of their lesser-known female

²² See, for example, T'ai Lin Smith, *Bauhaus Weaving Theory: From Feminine Craft to Mode of Design* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); *Das Bauhaus webt: die Textilwerkstatt am Bauhaus: ein Projekt der Bauhaus-Sammlungen in Weimar, Dessau, Berlin* (Berlin: G+H, 1998); Sigrid Weltge-Wortmann, *Women's Work: Textile Art from the Bauhaus* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993); Magdalena Droste et. al., *Gunta Stölzl, Weberei am Bauhaus und aus eigener Werkstatt* (Berlin: Kupfergraben, 1987).

colleagues and furthers an inaccurate portrayal of the culture of artistic innovation and collaboration at the Bauhaus.

Thus, while progress has been made in academic publications on the Bauhaus to highlight the accomplishments of the female artists in the weaving workshop, scholarship addressing both amateur and professional female photographers at the Bauhaus remains undeveloped (to say nothing of the artists working in the pottery and wood-working studios). Eugene Prakapas's 1985 survey *Bauhaus Photography*, the first to address the creative output of Bauhäuslers in this medium, set the tone for the treatment of female photographers, subordinating their contributions below those of the male "masters."²³ This assumption has unfortunately be reiterated in numerous scholarly texts until recent years, with focus remaining steadfastly assigned to such pioneers as László Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, and T. Lux Feininger. Some female photographers have received critical attention, in particular Grete Stern, Grit Kallin-Fischer, and Lotte Stam Beese (one of the first women to join the Bauhaus Department of Architecture, in 1927), however scholarship surrounding these women tends to focus on their careers outside of the Bauhaus, rather than their artistic exploration while at the school. The innovations of female photographers, beginning with the early pioneering experimentations of Lucia Moholy, is thus a rich field of untapped potential.

Given what I will argue is Moholy's central importance to the development of a photographic discipline at the Bauhaus, the effacement of her contribution in Bauhaus scholarship is troubling. There is no full-length penetrative study of Lucia Moholy's photographs that considers her position at the Bauhaus or the influence both her presence

²³ Eugene Prakapas, *Bauhaus Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985).

and photographic output had on future Bauhäuslers. I am further concerned by the assumption of female apprenticeship that is embedded in many existing Bauhaus texts. In addressing this issue in my dissertation, I take as inspiration Moholy's own words concerning the achievements of women at the Bauhaus. In a biographical statement, "Twentieth-Century Woman," Moholy explained:

It would not be absurd, if someone were resolved to do so, to write about the role of the masters' wives, those who had no official status and yet played a decisive role in the aftermath of the Bauhaus...too much has been written about the masters themselves to have to discuss them here.²⁴

Repeatedly, across numerous texts, Moholy's images of Bauhaus architecture, students' classroom creations, and portraits are used as illustrations to discuss the subject captured on camera, rather than as focal points for a discussion of her work. In the earliest publications these images were used without crediting the artist at all, effectively stripping them of any artistic content in their own right and reducing them to a documentary function.²⁵ While progress has been made in reinstating Moholy's authorship of these works, far greater critical analysis of her photographs must be undertaken. As recently as 2009, Moholy's work has been utilized solely for its documentary function. In *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, a persuasive compendium that offers a renewed critical approach to questions of androgyny, masculinity, and authorship at the Bauhaus, Jeffrey Saletnik and

²⁴ Lucia Moholy, quoted in Müller, *Bauhaus Women. Art, Handicraft, Design*, 11.

²⁵ See, for example, Ise Gropius, Walter Gropius, and Herbert Bayer, [eds.], *Bauhaus 1919-1928* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938). For analyses of the means by which Moholy's authorship was effaced from these photos (thus impacting her lack of accreditation in the MoMA Bauhaus exhibition), 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): 182-203; and Lucia Moholy, "The Case of the Missing Negatives," *British Journal of Photography*, 130, no. 6388 (7 January, 1983): 6-8, 18.

Robin Schuldenfrei open their study of the Bauhaus with a discussion of Lucia Moholy's *Typewriter on Desk in Walter Gropius's House at the Bauhaus, Dessau, 1926*. Deeming it to be the most "thought-provoking and evocative"²⁶ of the photographs Moholy took at the Bauhaus, Saletnik and Schuldenfrei utilize it as an entry point into discussing the historical construction of the Bauhaus, conceptualizing the school as "a palimpsest, having been repeatedly and at times strategically erased and rewritten."²⁷ While Saletnik and Schuldenfrei's analysis of the manner in which the Bauhaus has been established in historical memory is cogent and effective, the authors neglect to apply their own consideration to the object with which they commence their argument. They neither critically evaluate Moholy's intentions nor the image itself as a work of art.

The eradication of Moholy's artistic intention is evident even when her works are considered in their own right. Saletnik and Schuldenfrei designate Moholy's photographs as "straightforward documentary images,"²⁸ a description repeated across numerous Bauhaus texts, where studies of other artists refer briefly, and dismissively, to Moholy's work.²⁹ The narrow lens through which Moholy is consistently viewed, and the assumption that her photographs are "straightforward" and "documentary" are superficial readings of an artist whose career was long, varied, and experimental. In mis-categorizing Moholy's photographs as belonging to the field of documentary photography and, moreover, frequently dismissing her work as without nuanced artistic intention, scholars

²⁶ Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei, eds., "Introduction," in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See, for example, Jeannine Fiedler, ed., *Photography at the Bauhaus* (Germany: Dirk Nishen, 1990); Ulrike Müller, *Bauhaus Women. Art, Handicraft, Design* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009); and Angela Madesani and Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini, *Lucia Moholy: between Photography and Life* (Milan, Italy: Cinisello Balsamo, 2012).

ignore the reality of early photographic discourse at the Bauhaus, a discourse that allowed female participation to a greater degree than in the official workshops.

The three existing monographic studies of Lucia Moholy's oeuvre engage with the meaning of Moholy's work and her significance as a Bauhaus photographer in somewhat contradictory ways. Rolf Sachsse's book *Lucia Moholy* (1985)³⁰ represents a significant first step in rescuing the artist's career from irrelevancy. Sachsse attempts to correct an understanding of Moholy as occupying a "woman's role" at the Bauhaus; yet his analysis does not extensively explore the full nuance of her work. Sachsse repeatedly emphasizes Moholy as a systematic, pragmatic artist and argues that her portraits are objective, scientific, and largely empirical. His assumption is that Moholy's planned, deliberate, unspontaneous style (his interpretation) leads to wholly objective photos. While Sachsse's book is an important early contribution to the scholarship on Moholy, laying the foundation for further possible research, the brevity of the text does not provide for a substantive examination. A second book by Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, published in 1995, is hindered by an even shorter investigative essay, although again Sachsse's contribution in attempting to recover Moholy as an artist of worth and interest cannot be understated. Further, his investigation into Moholy's biographical details has reconstructed an outline of her life that is invaluable to any study of the artist. Finally, a Swiss exhibition on Moholy in 2012, and its corresponding catalogue, *Lucia Moholy: between Photography and Life*, brought together works from across Moholy's life to provide the most recent attention to the artist's photographs. However, I fundamentally disagree with the argument made by the two curators, Angela Madesani and Nicoletta

³⁰ Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy* (Düsseldorf: Edition Marzona, 1985).

Ossanna Cavadini, who assert that Moholy's photographs are purely reproductive. Madesani contends that "Lucia Moholy's research in the field of photography was not artistic in nature, but rather aimed at recording, documenting and relating, in different ways in different periods, what was happening around her."³¹ To disallow any interpretive reading of Moholy's photographs, to claim their purely reproductive nature and to deny the subjective, is to misunderstand an artist who was at the forefront of her field at the Bauhaus.³² This dissertation, therefore, corrects a misreading of a pioneering female photographer in the 1920s German avant-garde and provides an alternative perspective on her Bauhaus portraits and architecture photographs.

III. Methodology

This project is at heart an effort to reevaluate Lucia Moholy's photographic oeuvre and to assert her whole-hearted participation in the Weimar photographic avant-garde. In so doing, it aims also to question the assumed tenets of "modernism," particularly those that determine abstraction and universality to be assumed preconditions of the modernist project. Despite the recent work of some scholars (particularly in the

³¹ Angela Madesani, "Life as Witness: Notes on the Photographic Works of Lucia Moholy between Still Life and Portraiture," in *Lucia Moholy: Between Photography and Life*, ed. Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini and Angela Madesani (Milan, Italy: Cinisello Balsamo, 2012), 17.

³² The repeated hierarchizing of documentary photography below that of "artistic" photography is, furthermore, a mode with which I am not interested in engaging. The frequent discussion of reproductive photography in a pejorative tone (clear even in the few examples given here) puzzles and concerns me. I wish to make it clear, therefore, that I am arguing that Moholy was not operating solely within the field of documentary photography. My belief that she has been miscategorized, and thus minimized in terms of her significance, is not intended to cast a negative judgment on the documentary mode in photographic practice but rather hopes to emphasize and enrich the discussion of photographic categories in general.

fields of American and Eastern European Modernisms)³³ to complicate our understanding of modernism, much scholarship continues to operate within a relatively narrow framework regarding this subject. The approach to major figures of the European avant-garde, including László Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, and Aleksandr Rodchenko, still relies on relatively inflexible definitions of modernism as codified by scholars and museums in the early- and mid-twentieth century. This traditional framework for modernism, constructed through a Western European lens, prioritizes geometric stylistic language, universality, a tendency towards non-representation, or abstraction, and utopianism. While these remain fundamental tenets of some branches of modernism, they do not adequately encompass the expansive body of modernisms emergent across Europe during the early twentieth century. The insistent use of the language of ‘Western European Modernism’ to evaluate the work of artists who operated outside of known movements is unproductive, and the assumption of a monolithic Western canon from which all modernism derives is a problematic premise.

This dissertation therefore seeks to interrupt the modernist canon in two senses: first, in arguing for the viable positioning of a representational photography within the modernist project; and second, in disassembling the masculinist focus of the canon and reconstructing it based on female artistic participation. I argue that Lucia Moholy was engaged in an approach to modernist photography that did not require the whole-hearted

³³ See, for example, Sanja Bahun-Radunović and Marinos Pourgouris, *The Avant-Garde and the Margin: New Territories of Modernism* (Newark, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006); Jacqueline Francis, *Making Race: Modernism and Racial Art in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012); and Lauren Kroiz, *Creative Composites: Modernism, Race, and the Stieglitz Circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

embrace of abstraction. The existing scholarship on Lucia Moholy considers her work as largely “straight” photography and documentary in nature, due entirely to the premise that modernist works must embody a radical, abstract, universalizing approach to the world. Throughout her career, Moholy never abandoned representational subject matter, yet her photographs express the radically new environment of the modern world. Moholy’s photographs powerfully demonstrate the need for a variant and capacious understanding of modernism as a whole. Alongside the tenets of abstraction, revolution, subversion, and disintegration of tradition must be included expressions of continued representation, gender identity, race, and regional identity. I return to the contemporary usage of the term, a more inclusive and broad label that was not married to a particular aesthetic ideology but instead adopted into its ranks any idea or person that celebrated the injunction to “make it new.”³⁴ For some artists this involved a determined striving for radically novel, altered perspectives; for others it meant reevaluating the world from existing viewpoints. In a period of rapid industrial innovation, population displacement, violence, and cultural transformation, artists universally experienced the delight, uncertainty, and terror of the new social order. The ways in which they expressed their existential struggle, however, was entirely varied and individual. “Today’s artist lives in an era of dissolution without guidance,” proclaimed Walter Gropius. “He stands alone. The old forms are in ruins, the benumbed world is shaken up, the old human spirit is invalidated and in flux towards a new form. We float in space and cannot perceive the

³⁴ See Christopher Wilk’s introduction in Christopher Wilk, *Modernism: Designing a New World* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2008) for a thorough consideration of modernism. While I distance myself from Wilk’s assumption of certain universalizing tenets in the modernist project – particularly those mentioned above – I value his considered evaluation of the changing conceptions of modernism over the twentieth century.

new order.”³⁵ Gropius’s description of a world exploded, of (male) artists searching for a foothold aptly underscores the simultaneous universality of this destabilized existence and the wholly individual way in which it was experienced – “He stands alone.” The lived experiences of modernist artists were multiple; their attempts to visualize these experiences were necessarily so as well. My approach in this dissertation therefore embraces a more inclusive understanding of the modernist project and explores the potential for modernist representational photography. Such an approach seems particularly critical to a study of the Bauhaus, which was a center for modernist thought that attracted artists from across Europe. The collaboration and collegiate attitudes of artists from vastly different cultures produced a confluence of ideas that were dynamic, innovative, and inflected by individual cultural experiences.

My expanded conception of modernism, and the Bauhaus project in particular, extends to recognizing female artists as co-constructors of a modernist aesthetic alongside their male colleagues. Engaging in oppositional dialogue with the idea of modernism as the celebration of male genius, I wish to continue recent scholarly endeavors to demonstrate the diversity and multiplicity of modernism by considering how Lucia Moholy operated as a female artist within this cultural space. Despite the work of numerous feminist scholars in dismantling the masculinized perspective of modernism as a series of male innovators creatively working within the same dynamic atmosphere, there is still much work to be done to fundamentally shift the approach of scholarship and teaching in the field of modernism. In Bauhaus scholarship, in particular, female artists’ involvement in the school’s project is yet to be fully explored. The focus of scholarship

³⁵ Walter Gropius, *Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrates für Kunst in Berlin (Yes! Voices for the World Council for Art in Berlin)* (Berlin, 1919).

on the successes of the weaving department, while an important addition to Bauhaus historiography, to some degree continues the contemporary categorization of women as weavers by not exploring the creative output of women in other Bauhaus workshops. Women enrolled at the Bauhaus in great numbers and contributed significantly to its artistic output. The dearth of scholarship addressing these contributions reflects the continued scholarly rhetoric of the Bauhaus as a space for male creativity and genius.

In challenging the established masculine tenets of Bauhaus modernism, I am conscious to avoid approaching Moholy through a Western male hegemonic art historical lens. I am not interested in absorbing Moholy (or other female Bauhaus artists) into the mainstream canon, as though they simply fit into an ossified narrative of male artists. In this study, therefore, I approach Moholy on her own artistic terms to consider how her work alters the current narrative of Bauhaus modernism. The typical precepts of modernism (as discussed above) were codified based on the artworks and theories of male artists. The experience of modernity, and the resultant exploration of modernism, however, was entirely different for women, who had a distinctive and dissimilar experience of public and private spaces during the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. In turn, female experiences of modernity and modernism were inflected by class, racial, and economic boundaries; Moholy's experience of the Golden Twenties and the rise of the New Woman was necessarily inflected by her status as a Czech middle-class, Jewish woman.

In nuancing and disassembling the standardized tenets of modernism, I am indebted to the many feminist scholars who fought to challenge the status quo in this regard, arguing for a radical dismantling of masculinity hegemony in modernist

scholarship. From early feminist publications by Griselda Pollock, Norma Broude, and Rozsika Parker to more recent inquiries by Marsha Meskimmon, Anja Baumhoff, and Anne Wagner, these scholarly works and their authors have pioneered an alternate mode of art historical inquiry without which this dissertation would not be possible. I am particularly indebted to Meskimmon and Baumhoff for their challenges to the status quo in the field of German modernism. Meskimmon's study *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* strongly informed my approach in its emphasis of women's cultural agency in modernist enquiry and its argument for the polyvocality of modernist experimentation, which included a rich and diverse female art practice. Meskimmon's focus on the manner in which "women artists negotiated their subject positions (as 'women' and 'artists') in and through the visual culture of the Weimar Republic, so saturated with typologies of 'woman'"³⁶ was of fundamental importance in framing my consideration of Moholy. I am similarly indebted to Baumhoff's pioneering book *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic's Premier Art Institute, 1919-1932* for its nuanced consideration of gender relations at the Bauhaus. Baumhoff's focus on the history of women at the school and her attempt to construct an understanding of gender ideology at the Bauhaus provides a much-needed alternate view of daily life at the school. Her study seeks to answer the question of how women functioned in a heavily masculine educational space and draws on a vast reservoir of primary documents to demonstrate the institutional bigotry that frequently stymied female creativity. These critical attempts to dismantle the cult of Gropius's Bauhaus and to recover effaced female artists' careers serve as

³⁶ Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 16.

important foundations for my own scholarship, in which I strive to shift away from a male-centered understanding of Bauhaus modernism and towards a more balanced consideration of the central role female artists played in the school and in its artistic output.

My enquiry into Lucia Moholy's engagement with female creativity at the Bauhaus requires a deep engagement with the social and historical forces that impacted female participation in public life during the Weimar Republic. The 1920s in Germany were years of great gains in women's liberation but also continued societal and legal constraint and subordination. By the 1925 census, 35.8 percent of the entire German labor force was female (about 11.5 million women), following the opening of thousands of positions during the Great War and the gains made under the Weimar Constitution of 1918.³⁷ Young educated women across social strata entered the labor market, spurred by aspirations fomented by the new socialist state. The rise of the New Woman, both a fictive film and advertising type and the embodiment of feminist principles for real women, introduced the concept of an economically and socially independent, fashionable, daring, and courageous woman to German society. Increasing attention to the issues of healthy sexuality and access to birth control and abortions led to the emergence of the Sex Reform movement. A broadly popular movement built upon the working-class and informed by supporters in the medical profession, the Sex Reform movement produced sex manuals, oversaw women's health clinics, advocated for family planning, organized seminars and journals educating the public on progressive

³⁷ Helen Boak, "Women in Weimar Germany: The 'Frauenfrage and the Female Vote,'" in *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, ed. Richard J. Bessel and Edgar J. Feuchtwanger (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1981), 161–62.

approaches to sexual relations, and championed the New Woman. However, despite the increased accessibility of public space (and its attendant benefits) for women, Weimar society remained fundamentally patriarchal. Despite the rise in female laborers, women rarely replaced men in skilled-labor positions (one of the great fears of the period), and indeed remained in more traditional roles, either within the household or in secretarial and menial labor positions. Conservative factions argued ferociously for women's place in the home as caregiving mothers, undermining their credibility as contributors to the economic health of the country. The increased sexual freedom of young women during a period of restricted abortions and slowly-increasing access to contraception had unplanned negative consequences, the burden of which was inevitably borne entirely by women.³⁸ The heterogeneity of female experience and the manner in which women themselves defined their own womanhood during this period is thus fundamental to my investigation into Moholy's experience as a professional artist.

With issues of gender discourse during the Weimar years in mind, I seek to critically investigate the manner in which Moholy was undervalued in relation to her husband because of her gender. This issue is multivalent. To some degree, it is the result of masculinist scholarship posthumously writing Moholy's agency and artistic independence out of the literature and propagating the requirement of a male relation (husband, father, mentor) to legitimize a female artist. However, what interests me more is how Moholy and Moholy-Nagy interacted as colleagues and partners during the 1920s, and the manner in which Moholy both pushed against and conformed to heteronormative

³⁸ It is estimated that during the Weimar period, on average, every German woman underwent an abortion at least twice in her life, a statistic that is so large it beggars belief. For further information see Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 70.

gender roles over the course of their relationship.³⁹ Although Moholy-Nagy rapidly rose to international renown over the course of the 1920s, when he and Moholy first met and married, he was not yet an icon of international avant-gardism. Indeed, Moholy-Nagy relied upon Moholy's intellect and creative ideas in his own work. As he later described to his second wife, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, "Her intellect was like a beacon which lit up my emotional chaos. She taught me to think."⁴⁰ Moholy thus faced the particular double-bind of being a female artist who is also wife to an artist. She was expected to fulfill the social role of wife, domestic support, and muse while attempting to break into the male-dominated field of avant-garde photography. As is clear from Moholy-Nagy's quote, Moholy functioned as a support system in multiple ways: not simply as wife and caregiver, but as intellectual inspiration. Moholy's position was thus a complicated one. Fighting against cultural expectation as a woman in the field of professional photography, she also played the role of wife, and more specifically a Bauhaus Master's wife, enjoying the benefits and professional opportunities that this position entailed.

In reconsidering Moholy's position as a professional female artist married to a famous Bauhaus Master, I am acutely aware of the prevalent mode of an assumed patrilineage in scholarship, and the dangers of engaging with this line of thinking. In a marriage between two heterosexual artists, there is frequently a presumption of male influence rather than a concerted effort to investigate the channels of interchange and inspiration between the two artists on an equal footing. Furthermore, despite repeated challenges to this methodology, many studies of female artists continue to reference male

³⁹ Due to the long-term closure of the Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin, for renovations, my investigation will be necessarily bounded by the availability of particular archival materials and publications. Following the re-opening of the archive, this topic will demand renewed attention.

⁴⁰ Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 74.

forebears rather than female sources (an example pertinent to this study is Marianne Brandt, whose work is repeatedly tied to the father-figure of Moholy-Nagy). In arguing for Moholy's significance as an artist, I neither want to position her within a masculinist modernist canon nor demonstrate how she lives up to the standards of male forebears. My interest lies in situating Moholy within the female avant-garde of the Bauhaus and within the broader context of 1920s German photography as produced by both genders. Despite the assumptions of existing Bauhaus scholarship, I argue that there *was* matrilineage at the Bauhaus and that it existed not only in the weaving department (where it was created inorganically, one might argue) but also in the field of photography, where Moholy stood as one of the pioneering experimental artists at the school.

I thus approach the study of Moholy's photographs with an awareness of the two sparring and interconnected elements underlining this topic. I wish, in this dissertation, to acknowledge the difficult circumstances of Moholy's work – her struggle against male hegemony and the interference of Walter Gropius in female creativity at the Bauhaus, the adulation and prioritizing of Moholy-Nagy at her professional expense – while not falling back on the repetitive mantra of an extraordinary woman who struggled and achieved in a system designed for and by men. I do not wish to argue that Moholy was “exceptional” in the sense of being a female exception in a world of men, thus continuing the masculinist perspective of male superiority and artistic genius. I also have no interest in tokenizing Moholy as *the* singular female Bauhaus innovator in photography. Rather, Moholy was exceptional as an artist in her own right, a successful woman working amidst other women in a collegiate atmosphere that was male-dominated, but in a political and cultural environment that provided opportunities for female creativity and freedom to an

unprecedented degree. It would, however, be a historical error to ignore the very real differences of accessibility and opportunity for women at the Bauhaus in comparison to men. My consideration of Moholy's success as an artist during the Weimar years therefore attempts to situate her work within the broader contributions of the 1920s German photographic avant-garde, while acknowledging and exploring the reality of female artistic experience operational within patriarchal parameters during those years.

IV. Chapters

In reevaluating Moholy's oeuvre during the period 1922–1933, with an expanded postscript that addresses her post-Bauhaus years, I have chosen to attend to her (co-produced) photograms, portraits, and architecture photographs as rich gateways to a renewed understanding of her work. In Chapter One, I lay the contextual foundation for an understanding of Weimar architectural modernism, in order to foreground my study of Moholy's Dessau Bauhaus photographs. Arguing for the experimental modernism of Moholy's artistic approach, I demonstrate the means by which Moholy's architecture photographs embodied Bauhaus ideals, before considering how these photographs later memorialized the Bauhaus spirit. Chapter Two addresses the complex phenomenon of the New Woman in Weimar Germany and considers how female photographers, newly emergent as a professional group, interrupted the masculine space of photography to engender their own visualizations of female experience in the Weimar Republic. Building on this historical framework, Chapter Three takes Moholy's portraits from the period 1924–1933 as its subject, demonstrating the multivalent approach Moholy took in

capturing the human form. Drawing on fruitful juxtapositions with other female photographers with whom Moholy had contact, I argue for Moholy's significant impact as the earliest experimental female photographer at the Bauhaus and for her engagement with contemporary cultural issues. Chapter Four addresses the relationship between Moholy and her husband, Moholy-Nagy, to illuminate the means by which Moholy both asserted herself as an equal partner in their artistic ambitions and was limited by her role as artist's wife, playing a supporting role to her husband's ambitions. The relationship between these two artists was a complicated one, sometimes pushing the boundaries of traditional heterosexual relationships and at other times requiring Moholy to subordinate her own interests and agency beneath those of her husband. Finally, in Chapter Five I address Moholy's career as an independent artist, separated from her husband, following her emigration from Germany in 1933 and her resettlement first in London and later Switzerland. By providing an extended post-script of this nature, I hope to frame Moholy's Bauhaus years and provide comparative material that illuminates both the distinctions and connections between her Bauhaus and post-Bauhaus photography. In the productive decades following her emigration from Germany, Moholy both explored multiple new avenues of photographic experimentation and asserted her voice as a highly-regarded critic and primary source regarding the Bauhaus. By the end of her career, Moholy had established herself as one of the key witnesses to the radical avant-garde of the early twentieth century, embracing her role in establishing a historical record of Bauhaus life.

Chapter One:

Architectural Modernism and the Dessau Bauhaus Photographs

“Then think of us, now, think of what surrounds you:

Bare knees and a sporty ‘do

Radio and film

Automobile and aeroplane

Specialty shops and department stores.

Don’t think they’re superficialities –

The deeper meaning is in them...

...And you ask, what is this architecture for?

So, no wonder, but a product of life itself, our life, our times.”

- Erich Mendelsohn¹

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I approach Lucia Moholy’s photographs of Dessau Bauhaus architecture in multiple varying and intersecting ways. Through close looking, I refute the claim that these images serve solely a documentary purpose and demonstrate instead the experimental modernism of Moholy’s artistic approach. To do so requires a contextualization of modernist architecture and its photographers during the years Moholy was operating; thus I devote space early in this chapter for that important foundation. Having placed Moholy definitively within the modernist practice of her contemporaries, I consider the manner in which her architectural body of work both reflected and defined Bauhaus ideals for a wider public. The translation of her work into postcards and the repeated reproduction of her Dessau Bauhaus photographs in publications in the decades following the dissolution of the school provide fruitful

¹ Erich Mendelsohn, “Why This Architecture?”, first published as “Warum diese Architektur?” *Die literarische Welt* 4, no. 10 (March 9, 1928), 1. Reprinted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 451.

material for considering how her works memorialized the Bauhaus and disseminated its artistic mission.

A reconsideration of Moholy's architecture images is long overdue, as scholarship to date has treated the works solely for their documentary function. Bauhaus literature on topics other than photography tends to advance this argument also by utilizing Moholy's images purely to depict the school, without critically considering the material displayed. This approach to Moholy's work is exemplified by Rolf Sachsse, Moholy's primary biographer and scholar, who has claimed that "all Lucia Moholy's architectural photographs are objective to the point of being inartistic, and make no formal claims for themselves, being subordinated to their subject as far as is possible."² Certainly to some extent, Moholy's photographs do serve a documentary function (a topic to which I will return in considering their advertising impact and legacy) but they should not be interpreted solely in this manner. In fact, at the time of their production Walter Gropius found some of Moholy's photographs of the Bauhaus to be *too* subjective, his desire for rationalist images finding issue with the framing of some of her works. Nicoletta Cavadini discusses an episode when Gropius swapped out an image of the Bauhaus workshops (Figure 7) for a more "straight" depiction of the school for an upcoming Bauhaus publication, feeling that the "intentional distortion" of the camera's perspective did not provide a complete representation of the functionality of the Bauhaus structure and the materials used therein.³

² Rolf Sachsse, "Architectural and Product Photography," in *Photography at the Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler (Germany: Dirk Nishen, 1990), 186.

³ Angela Madessani and Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini, *Lucia Moholy: Between Photography and Life* (Milan, Italy: Cinisello Balsamo, 2012), 37.

When one begins to study the corpus of Moholy's Dessau photographs, it quickly becomes clear that there is something *more* to these images. Moholy's energetic, dramatic, and unusual views of the Bauhaus reveal an artist engaged at a conceptual level with the modernist principles the built spaces themselves espouse. Moholy's photographs operate on multiple levels, they have multiple biographies and functions, and they can be approached in a single study in multiple ways. This chapter is therefore divided into several distinct sub-parts, to allow for an exploration that truly does these images justice.⁴ I wish, in this chapter, to address Moholy's architectural photographs from varying angles, to delve deeper into their individual aspects, and thereby to demonstrate the richness and multiplicity of meanings that can be taken from a close reading of Moholy's work. Mining beneath the familiar surface of these photographs as simple illustrations of the Bauhaus site, I consider the multiple accruals and layers of history with which Moholy's photographs have become imbued. Borrowing Paul Paret's scholarly approach to a photograph from the Bauhaus sculpture workshop, I consider how a Moholy architectural photograph, "a piece of Bauhaus ephemera, may be both marginalia and an autonomous object, a modernist machine with its own immanent potential to generate histories and meanings."⁵

II. Modernist Architecture in the Weimar Period

⁴ I should further note that the approach taken across each chapter in this dissertation will be different. I do not feel bounded by a need for continuity and symmetry across chapters. In breaking from that mold, I wish to demonstrate the varied ways in which one can approach a reading of Moholy's oeuvre; this stems from a desire to free myself from the constraints of needing to approach scholarship in a particular way. The different areas of Moholy's oeuvre necessarily require different scholarly approaches, and thus I structure each chapter as the subject matter requires.

⁵ Paul Paret, "Picturing Sculpture," in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, ed. Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 177.

The early years of the Weimar Republic were ones of deep turmoil and crisis. The communist uprising that occurred almost immediately after the signing of peace with the Allied forces plunged the fledgling government into crisis, as different political factions vied for control over the new state. The assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in January 1919 by violent paramilitary units caused uproar and further instability, all set against the background of a volatile economy and the pressures of the Versailles Treaty terms. The transition from a monarchical, hierarchical society under the Hohenzollern Empire to a democratic state under the Weimar Republic was not a smooth one, and the grievances caused by the surrender in November 1918 and the devastation of a long and unsuccessful war contributed to a deeply troubled social climate. The soaring inflation which reached its peak in 1923 further led to a lack of faith in the government and the impossibility of reconstruction of the German landscape.

In these years immediately following World War One, the economic realities of the defeated German society made large-scale rejuvenative building projects unfeasible. There simply was neither the money nor the infrastructure to support expansive building projects. Many architects during these early years were confined to two-dimensional and model-scale planning, and a great number turned to writing treatises on the future of German architecture. At the same time that architects faced a lack of funding and building materials, a massive housing crisis arose in Germany, especially Berlin. This huge housing shortage, caused by the flood of people shifting to the urban environment, caused terrible squalor and living conditions. Conditions only improved partway into the 1920s, when the introduction of a currency reform in October 1923 by the Weimar government helped to stabilize the economy. In 1924, an infusion of money from the

Dawes Plan created a huge upswing in the economy and finally the possibility for building projects to begin anew.

This period of difficulty and restraint in the construction sphere saw the founding of various architectural movements interested in a new spiritual beginning for art and architecture and a complete break from the past. The *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (Work Council of Art), founded in 1918 after the war, believed strongly in “a newly politicized concept of architecture as a vehicle for revolutionary social transformation”⁶ and a democratization of the arts. Bruno Taut, one of its members, spoke strongly of architecture functioning as a unifying thread across the arts, producing a *Gesamtkunstwerk* “under the wing of a great architecture.”⁷ Its members included Walter Gropius, Cesar Klein, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Hans Scharoun, and Adolf Behne. Its desire was to “reunite art and the people,” as “art must no longer be the privilege of the few, but the pleasure and life of the masses. The joining of the arts under the wings of a great architecture is the goal.”⁸ The *Arbeitsrat* declared a commitment to housing developments constructed by architects, artists, and sculptors, the demolishing of the old bastions of traditional art education, and a new approach to art training, particularly in the crafts. Other radical arts organizations also flourished during this period. Founded around the same time as the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, the *Novembergruppe* was committed to utopian principles of socialism and egalitarianism, and consisted of Expressionist artists, including Erich Mendelsohn, who felt deeply allied with revolutionary workers and believed strongly in the political purpose of art. *Der*

⁶ Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 429.

⁷ Arbeitsrat für Kunst, “Architektur Program,” in *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945*, by Barbara Miller-Lane (Cambridge, MA: Harvard College, 1968), 52.

⁸ Ibid.

Ring, founded by Hugo Häring and Mies van der Rohe in 1925, further promoted modernist forms of architecture, arguing for an aesthetic of organic functionalism.

In these early years of the Weimar Republic, architects such as Taut, Mies van der Rohe, Gropius, and Mendelsohn explored expressionist forms of architecture that might signify the spiritual forms for the new post-war world. Although their expressionist impulses soon receded, the interest in colored forms, glass, and reinforced concrete spawned by expressionist architecture would prove significant for their future work in *Neues Bauen* (*New Building*). At stake was the issue of how to separate the architecture of the new age from the decorativeness of the Wilhelmine era. A desire for greater clarity, purity, and simplicity of vision, of lines, and of space drove architects towards philosophies that melded technological innovation and progress with a sometimes utopian drive for a renewed and better society. They strove for a radical break from the past that signified furthermore a break from recent historical events, from defeat, and a brand-new start. Although the specificities of their aesthetic vocabulary differed, the leaders of the modern architecture movement, including Gropius, Taut, Mies van der Rohe, Mendelsohn, Hilberseimer, Ernst May, and Hannes Meyer, were fundamentally concerned with organizing public collective space and addressing issues of social housing.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a vast diversity of architectural expression. Alongside the radical architectural designs of Gropius, seen in the Dessau Bauhaus building and the Törten Estate, for example, and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* expressions of Mies van der Rohe, could be seen the expressionist forms of Mendelsohn, whose interest in concrete produced great solid curvilinear structures, the spiritual investment in glass

and color by Taut, and Fritz Schumacher's experimentation with vast brick and glass forms as part of Brick Expressionism. Indeed, as John Zukowsky's study *The Many Faces of Architecture* elucidates, architectural design in the 1920s was multifaceted and diverse. The impression of a uniformly radical building style that swept across Germany is indeed misleading; the extreme modernism of such buildings as the Dessau Bauhaus was in fact in the minority in comparison to the overall diversity and hybridity of architectural approaches during the Weimar years.⁹

While many major building projects were based in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main also saw a major rejuvenation during the 1920s, labeled "Das Neue Frankfurt," stemming largely from the vast planning projects for residential housing initiated and carried out by Ernst May. May's scheme to build new housing units across Frankfurt resulted in more than 12,000 homes being built between 1925 and 1930,¹⁰ funded through a joint venture between the local city government and private companies and building societies. Grete Schütte-Lihotsky's Frankfurt Kitchen was the central design element in many of these constructions (some 10,000).¹¹ The vast enterprise to revolutionize housing in Frankfurt was publicized both locally and further afield through the publication *Das Neue Frankfurt*, which ran monthly from 1926 to 1931 and promoted the innovative designs of architects and artists involved in the project.

Encouraged by the Weimar Government, which considered the crisis of postwar housing as a significant problem to solve, such projects as that of May in Frankfurt were remarkably successful. Frankfurt was not the only city to benefit from new housing

⁹ John Zukowsky, ed., *The Many Faces of Modern Architecture: Building in Germany between the World Wars* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 1994), 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

developments. Across Germany new *siedlungen* (housing estates for workers) appeared, designed by well-known architects including Gropius. Funded by building societies, Social Democrats, and unions, they demonstrated the atmosphere of social idealism and commitment to democratic principles. To widely publicize the architectural potential of these housing projects, in 1927 the German Werkbund sponsored the *Weissenhof Siedlung* exhibition in Stuttgart. Organized by Mies van der Rohe and Häring, and including contributions from Le Corbusier and J.J.P. Oud, the exhibition hosted up to 20,000 visitors a day during its tenure.¹² Numerous architects displayed housing designs intended simultaneously to economize and improve people's living conditions; the most advanced of these demonstrated the future of building through prefabricated parts. Offering low rents to workers who could not afford more expensive housing options elsewhere, the *siedlungen* promoted clean, simple living spaces with plenty of access to natural light and the outdoors.¹³ The *siedlungen* were designed utilizing the principles of *Neue Sachlichkeit*; built in parallel blocks on the north-south axis (to maximize sunlight distribution across apartments), they were entirely stripped of ornamentation, painted with diverse colors, and covered with flat roofs. These mass housing complexes demonstrated the commitment of avant-garde architects to the common social good during the Weimar years; they were, as Colquhoun notes, "an extraordinary act of collective architectural will."¹⁴

The built environment of Weimar Germany was transformed via other means as well and was not confined solely to living spaces. The innovations brought by electrical

¹² Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 455.

¹³ Zukowsky, *The Many Faces of Modern Architecture: Building in Germany between the World Wars*, 101.

¹⁴ Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168.

advertising radically reconfigured public space, restructuring store fronts and streets to support enormous signage lit day and night in brilliant light. The turn to glass as a fundamental material in modern architecture similarly transformed people's interactions with public space, as department stores and smaller shop fronts displayed their goods through floor-to-ceiling windows of glass. At night, these shimmering facades of glass would reflect and refract the luminous electric lighting and advertisements of the street, creating a dazzling display unlike anything seen before.

The key tenets of the new architecture relied upon a radical break from building designs of previous generations. In his book *The New Architecture*, Gropius described the problems of the past architecture and the ambitions of the *Neues Bauen*:

During the course of the last two or three generations architecture degenerated into a florid aestheticism, as weak as it was sentimental, in which the art of building became synonymous with meticulous concealment of the verities of structure under a welter of heterogeneous ornament...A modern building should derive its architectural significance solely from the vigour and consequence of its own organic proportions. It must be true to itself, logically transparent and virginal of lies or trivialities, as befits a direct affirmation of our contemporary world of mechanization and rapid transit. The increasingly daring lightness of modern constructional methods has banished the crushing sense of ponderosity inseparable from the solid walls and massive foundations of masonry. And with its disappearance the old obsession for the hollow sham of axial symmetry is giving place to the vital rhythmic equilibrium of free asymmetrical grouping.¹⁵

The modern building should display simplicity and rationality, and be formed of cubic spaces, white walls, flat roofs, and geometric forms. "The New Architecture throws open its walls like curtains to admit a plenitude of fresh air, daylight and sunshine," Gropius declared. "Instead of anchoring buildings ponderously into the ground with massive

¹⁵ Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. P. Morton Shand (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1930), 81.

foundations, it poises them lightly, yet firmly, upon the face of the earth; and bodies itself forth, not in stylistic imitation or ornamental frippery, but in those simple and sharply modelled designs in which every part merges naturally into the comprehensive volume of the whole. Thus its aesthetic meets our material and psychological requirements alike.”¹⁶ Throwing open its enclosures to the world, *Neues Bauen* sought the dissolution of the boundary between interior and exterior, private and public, which was executed most dramatically through the radical use of glass as a sheer façade. Proponents of *Neues Bauen* focused on materials such as glass, iron, steel, and reinforced concrete to radically reconsidered the accessibility and visibility of interior built spaces, and to promote openness, simplicity, rationality, and functionalism in architecture. While architects like Mendelsohn focused on reinforced concrete as a potential means for reshaping built space in innovative ways, Gropius and Taut saw in glass the opportunity to completely transform architectural design. Its transparency, facilitation of sunlit spaces, and dazzling displays of light and reflectivity opened up new visions for the future of architecture. Glass, “a completely new and pure material,”¹⁷ according to Adolf Behne, furthermore symbolized the transparency deemed necessary for the new republic, in its attempt to move on from the trauma of the war years.

The debates surrounding the new architecture and the form it should take were not limited solely to that field. Given modernist architects’ interest in creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and involving the masses, they engaged deeply with experts and intellectuals across various fields, including critics, photographers, city planners, and

¹⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹⁷ Adolf Behne, “Review of Scheerbart’s Glass Architecture,” ed. Charlotte Benton and Tim Benton (London: Lockwood, 1975), 77.

writers. A large number of publications concerning architectural theory and design emerged in the latter half of the 1920s, many of which were accessible and widely distributed amongst non-experts and those with amateur interest. The thrust was towards an entirely new concept of healthy living, one that involved revolutionizing household items, interior design, and buildings themselves. By revolutionizing the home, the argument held, one could revolutionize the citizen, creating a New Man or New Woman born from the new Weimar society. *Neues Bauen* paid particular attention to the concept of the New Woman and what that might mean for the domestic space, a critical juncture of architectural discussion to which I will return. This culture of interdisciplinary discussion and theoretical debate became, as Sabine Hake observes, “a laboratory for artistic innovation and social change.”¹⁸ Through radical artistic and architectural designs, and constant challenging of presumed positions, these intellectuals intended to propose a fundamentally new vision of modern society, one more egalitarian, less class-based and more visionary than seen before.

III. Photographing Modernist Architecture

This avant-garde push towards a radical new built environment for the democratic age aligned with a dramatic rise in photographic experimentation across Europe. In avant-garde circles across the continent, artists experimented with the seeming truthfulness of the camera lens, distorting perspectives, manipulating light and dark, and presenting novel subject matter for consideration. In Germany, both *Neues Sehen* and *Neue Sachlichkeit* inaugurated new approaches to photography, presenting entirely new

¹⁸ Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 20.

vistas and ways of understanding the world, and novel perspectives on familiar scenes. The “potent photo-consciousness” of the Weimar era, as Andres Zervigón observes, produced both a questioning of the authenticity and honesty of the medium, and a modernist vocabulary suitable for the technologically advanced, democratic new state.¹⁹ Artists increasingly turned to technological means to produce radical new perspectives on modern life, attempting to both stimulate and address “the shock of the new.” Avant-garde architectural projects were a major recipient of this photographic focus. The angular geometry, smooth white surfaces, dramatic concrete forms, and shimmering glass facades were particularly amenable to experimental photography, and photographers dedicated a great deal of attention to capturing these iconic Weimar buildings in their many facets and aspects.

Photographic renderings of modernist architecture were also highly valuable as means of promoting the new architecture and disseminating ideas internationally. No longer were buildings received and known only by locals and those who journeyed to see them. With the proliferation of publications focused on architecture, art, and photography during this period, photographs of modernist buildings were widely published and distributed across the globe. The rise of photo essays and photojournalism further fueled both the desire for novel photographic expressions of ideas and experiences, and the proliferation and impact of photography on everyday experience.²⁰ Modernist architects

¹⁹ Andrés Mario Zervigón, *Photography and Germany* (London: Reaktion, 2017), 84, 99.

²⁰ Germany during the Weimar years was positively inundated with a series of periodicals, journals, tabloids, newspapers, and magazines. More than four thousand titles were published regularly during the mid-1920s. Popular publications included *Uhu* and *Die Dame*, published by Ullstein and catered to the New Woman, *Der Querschnitt*, which addressed a broad spectrum of cultural interests, and the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung (BIZ)*, which had more than one million subscribers (for more information, see Kaes et al., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 641). These magazines drew heavily on contemporary photography, both journalistic and artistic, to satisfy their readership. Slowly but surely, photographs became the central focus of articles and think-pieces, marginalizing text and relying on the image to communicate the central

took advantage of the saturation of Weimar culture with photography to advance their artistic visions, particularly the photo-essay form, which melded image and text to impart a deeper and fuller understanding of the topic in question.

Weimar Germany was not the origin of architectural photography, of course. Buildings had been some of the earliest subjects of photographic experimentation during the mid-nineteenth century. What was a marked change, however, was the intent on the part of both architects and photographers to envision social change and novel perspectives. Modernist architecture and its photography became inextricably intertwined. They were defined by each other – photographers sought out architectural subjects for their plethora of abstract, unusual perspectives and the potential to radicalize views, and modernist architecture became known primarily through these photographs that so dramatically and distinctly froze their structures in unusual images. These photographic representations reveal the manner in which new modernist constructions were received and interpreted by Weimar artists. Indeed, the dialogue between architecture and photography became such that the conception of new ideas and exploration of radical uses of light, transparency, structure, and so forth, was not simply produced by architects and recorded by photographers. Instead, a productive and symbiotic relationship emerged in which these two mediums together created a new vision for modernity. These photographs furthermore served as a means of promotion and advertisement for *Neues Bauen* architects such as Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Mendelsohn, who understood the potential of photography to spread their utopian aesthetic visions.

message. *BIZ* in particular was an early adopter and strong proponent of the photo essay, printing multi-page spreads of photographs that sought to tell a story or communicate an idea.

Thus through extensive photographing of modern urban sites, new building constructions, city planning, streets, and housing, both at ground level and from aerial views, photographers captured the entirety of the modern German city, making visible for its citizens the juxtaposition of old and new, the rapid areas of growth, the advancements made by technology, and the dramatic, continual changes to their city's façade. Importantly, as Sabine Hake observes, these images also produced an idealized conception of the modern urban environment that did not necessarily equate with the realities of lived experience on the ground.²¹ Carefully curating a particular view of the city's built space, contemporary photographs promoted a particular message about the vibrant, dynamic modernity of the Weimar city and the potential advancements provided by technological innovation. This message was spread rapidly and with ease throughout the general public, made effortless through the plethora of publications that emerged during the Weimar years and contributed to the "progressive medialization of metropolitan culture" and the saturation of society with the photographic image.²² Modernist architectural sites such as Mendelsohn's *Mossehaus* and *Einstein Tower*, Gropius and Adolf Meyer's *Fagus Factory*, and Gropius's *Dessau Bauhaus* were the repeated recipients of the photographic gaze, captured time and again, from numerous angles, and reproduced widely in publications as examples of the radical future of architectural design. It was within this fertile culture of photographic experimentation that Moholy operated as the primary photographer of the Dessau Bauhaus.

²¹ Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin*, 172.

²² See Hake, *Topographies of Class*, 174. Hake quotes contemporary sources who complained of the "Ullsteinization of the visual imagination" and further draws attention to the ubiquity of the visual image in Weimar society, displayed in magazines sold at kiosks, bars, and cafes everywhere.

The Dessau Bauhaus

Amidst the vast abundance of architectural modernism during the Weimar years, perhaps the most defining symbol of German modernist design was the Dessau Bauhaus (1925–26). Designed by Gropius following the expulsion of the Bauhaus from Weimar and commissioned by the town of Dessau, the Bauhaus buildings were designed to reflect Bauhaus principles and provide an ideal space for the workshops, living quarters, and administrative offices of the school. The Dessau Bauhaus design epitomized Gropius's design principles, namely "simplicity in multiplicity; the efficient exploitation of space, material, time, and money. The affirmation of the living environment of machines and vehicles, of their tempo and rhythm. The mastery of increasingly daring formal devices to overcome the earth-bound inertia of buildings with the effect and appearance of suspension."²³

The Bauhaus embodied this new architecture, revealing simple geometric forms, rational lines, contained blocks of modulated color, and a functionalist approach to each element. The building site consisted of three main interlocking sections which connected to each other through a bridge and single-storey building. These three sections held different important focal points for the school: the workshops, the vocational school, and the studios. The most visually stunning (and most important from the Bauhaus perspective) of these wings, the workshop area, was celebrated with a shimmering façade of glass that rendered the entire wall of the building both transparent and reflective. The studio building, meanwhile, consisted of a multi-storey block with white walls and

²³ Walter Gropius, "Who is Right? Traditional Architecture or Building in New Forms," first published as "Wer hat Recht? Traditionelle Baukunst oder Bauen in neuen Formen," *Uhu*, no. 7 (April 1926), 30-40. Reprinted in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 441.

regular symmetrical balconies projecting from the wall. Seen from above, the buildings seemed to radiate outwards, abstract shapes that produced constant motion. The purposeful asymmetricality of the Bauhaus served not only to demonstrate the dynamism of interlocking geometric planes, but also to break up the solidity and monolithic nature of earlier building designs, which seemed stolid and weighted down by comparison. The interacting, interlocking elements of the building created constant points of interest and interruption for the viewer; this impact was further supported by the materials used – glass, reinforced concrete, and iron – all of which inspired a sensation of unexpected, novel material interactions. The use of color was carefully planned and controlled in the design of the school: the outside projected a unified, monochrome palette of white and grey, while the inside color scheme, designed by Hinnerk Scheper, utilized a broad range of carefully selected colors. Detailing the concept behind the interior color scheme, Scheper explained:

In the design, a distinction is made between load-bearing and infill areas; their architectonic tension is thereby given full expression. The spatial impact of the color is emphasized by the use of different materials: smooth, polished, grainy and rough plaster surfaces, matt and glossy coats of paint, glass, metal, etc.²⁴

The Dessau Bauhaus stunned contemporary viewers, manifesting for the first time, in many people's opinion, something truly, radically new in architectural design.

Ilya Ehrenburg, upon visiting the school for the first time, proclaimed:

when i finally caught sight of the 'bauhaus', which seems to be all of a piece, like a persistent thought, and its glass walls, forming a transparent angle, flowing into the air and yet separated from it by a precise will – i stood still involuntarily, and this was not amazement at

²⁴ Hinnerk Scheper, "Farbiger Orientierungsplan des Dessauer Bauhauses, 1926," in *The Bauhaus Building in Dessau*, by Christin Irrgang (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2014), 86.

the sight of a sensual invention, no, it was simple admiration. there is a legitimate continuity in architecture, and i imagine that it will not be difficult for an expert to establish the pedigree of these forms. i should just like to say something about the triumph of clarity. this building is to a certain extent in a state of hostile contrast to its neighbors and to the ground itself, for the first time the earth sees a cult of naked reason here...every angle, every line, right down to the last detail, repeats the conclusion of theorems forgotten since schooldays: 'qed...' ²⁵

Karel Teige, meanwhile, declared the Dessau Bauhaus a “headquarters of modern design,”²⁶ and Tadeusz Peiper, theoretician of the Polish avant-garde, underlined the complex’s incredible modernity: “If we need one more proof of the epoch-making value of the achievements of the new art, here it is. Iron, reinforced concrete and glass.”²⁷ Here, announced Peiper, “I saw the new architecture for the first time, not as an illustration, but in its entire inspiring existence.”²⁸ This emphasis on the new pinnacle achieved in modern architecture by Gropius at the Bauhaus was repeated by other major cultural figures. Art historian Wilhelm van Kempen’s description of the building when standing before it perfectly captures the dramatic impact of this radical building on the contemporary observer:

There it stands before us, a mighty, powerful complex, a massive cube: large areas of wall, completely glazed on one side, large wall areas broken down into windows on the other side, and between them the bridge, and behind that a towering building, looking out calmly on its surroundings through broad windows...The magnificent glass wall of the workshop wing of the Bauhaus, in all its monumentally legitimate

²⁵ Ilya Ehrenburg, *Visum der Zeit*, 1929. Reprinted in Margaret Kentgens-Craig, ed., *The Dessau Bauhaus Building 1926-1999* (Basel; Berlin; Boston: Birkhäuser, 1998), 17.

²⁶ Karel Teige, “10 Jahre Bauhaus,” *Volksblatt für Anhalt* (1930). Reprinted in *ibid.*, 117.

²⁷ Tadeusz Peiper, “Im Bauhaus.” Reprinted in *ibid.*

²⁸ Tadeusz Peiper, after his visit to Dessau in 1927. Reprinted in Wolfgang Thöner, *The Bauhaus Life: Life and Work in the Masters’ Houses Estate in Dessau* (Leipzig: Seemann, 2006), 4.

technology, in contrast with the lightness of the bridge – this is something that has to be felt, rather than just seen.²⁹

Photographing the Bauhaus: Lucia Moholy's Avant-Garde Approach

As discussed above, such radical architectural expressions of *Neues Bauen* as the Dessau Bauhaus relied heavily on photography to capture its dramatic modernist forms in a manner that would impart their true meaning and impact. For Gropius, Lucia Moholy and the photographs she produced of the Bauhaus during the period 1925–26 were fundamentally important to disseminating his theoretical message and to capturing the Bauhaus vision. Up to this point, sparse attention has been paid to the dynamic experimentation of these images and the manner in which Moholy successfully encapsulated the spirit of the Bauhaus in her photographs. In this section, I provide a counter-argument to the existing critical reception these images have received: that, in fact, Moholy's photographs are not “straightforward documentary images,”³⁰ but instead that they approach their radical subject matter with their own experimental strategy. Moholy's photographs both capture the innovative modernist principles of the Bauhaus and themselves explore the pioneering tactics of *Neues Sehen* photographers across Europe during the 1920s.

Bauhausgebäude Dessau: Werkstattfassade (Bauhaus Building Dessau: Workshop Façade), 1925–26 (Figure 7), provides an ideal entry point into a renewed consideration of Moholy's artistic intentions. In this image, the sheer glass façade of the workshop wing is captured from an unexpected, unusual angle; the Bauhaus is presented

²⁹ Wilhelm van Kampen, “Die Einweihung des Bauhauses Dessau,” *Dessauer Zeitung*, (December 4, 1926). Reprinted in Kentgens-Craig, *The Dessau Bauhaus Building 1926-1999*, 120.

³⁰ Jeffrey Sautnik and Robin Schuldenfrei, eds., *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.

as a looming, overwhelming presence that encompasses one's entire viewpoint. The façade cuts a sheer angle across the sky, the perspective emphasizing its dynamism. The photograph seems to herald something entirely new, a progressive thrust forward embodied here by the towering glass design of the workshop wing. The viewer's entire vision is taken over by the new way of seeing and the new mode of design. Utmost in Moholy's mind seems to be the desire to monumentalize and frame the dynamic modernism of the Bauhaus space, and to emphasize the clean angularity and planes of its construction. *Werkstattfassade* is a towering presentation of Bauhaus principles, an image crafted to fill the entire frame with the new architectural standard. On display here, and an aesthetic element consisting revealed across Moholy's Dessau photographs, is how different materials and forms act in dialogue with one another. In this image, one observes a pure glass façade, segmented by dark window jambs, abutting a plain, uniform, grey concrete wall with no windows at all. Beneath, a pure, long white strip grounds the windowed space. Along the left half of the painted white concrete shadows of the trees dance and project patterns onto the plain background. The entire construction is set against the empty grey-white expanse of the sky. Throughout, stark contrasts of light and dark dominate, the juxtaposition between the two only serving to highlight the patterns of shadows which discolor and alter the clean, segmented lines.

Framing, of course, is fundamental to the photographic action, and Moholy's choice of perspective and subject, her choice of framing, was always conscious and purposeful. Across most of her Dessau photographs (barring a few in which she sought new perspectives from the Bauhaus roofs), the viewer is on the ground, part of the new built environment and participating in this modernist experimental space. What becomes

progressively clear as one walks through the spaces of the Bauhaus captured by Moholy, looking up at the workshop façade or down the bridge corridor past Gropius's office, is a real sense of the modernist ambition of the Bauhaus, as stated through the built spaces themselves. Highlighted in all these images is the stark, bold modernity of the buildings: full glass panel walls, clean, simple lines, no ornamentation, staircases rendered in a functionalist, geometric design. Through these architectural photographs, Moholy strives to capture the meaning of the new construction, to effect through her photographic perspective a sense of this visionary new world built in real space, this site of modernist promise.

Across multiple of her photographs, Moholy explored the numerous possibilities presented by glass for experimental photography. In *Werkstattflügel von Nordwesten* (*Workshop Wing from the Northwest*), 1926 (Figure 8), Moholy captures the workshop façade as a pure, reflective panel of glass, interrupted only by the vertical lines of reinforced steel in its frame. Reflected in both sides of the wing can be seen the line of trees facing the façade and the connecting bridge, which seems almost to continue into the building as its reflection multiplies its length. Here the glass seems opaque, solid, and impenetrable, a smooth wall casting back any image projected upon it. In a completely different perspective, *Eingangshof von Südwesten* (*Entrance Courtyard from the Southwest*), 1925–26 (Figure 9), Moholy captures a radical change in the same façade. Here the glass seems to dissolve completely, becoming dematerialized and transparent. Suddenly the entirety of the interior space becomes visible to the viewer, and light penetrates through to the other side of the glass wall, rendering both previously solid, immutable walls immaterial. The façade takes on entirely new qualities in this image,

appearing incredibly light and delicate. Moholy reveals Bauhaus architecture as innovative and adaptive, opening up new vistas to the viewer and demonstrating how glass can be manipulated for its sheerness and mutability. *Eingangshof von Südwesten* encapsulates Gropius's ambition for the workshop façade and demonstrates the possibilities for experimental artistic interaction that the architect so wished for. In the caption to this image in his book *Bauhausbauten*, Gropius declared: "For the first time, the problem of dissolving the wall by stretching out a continuous glass skin before the load-bearing skeleton was carried through to the final conclusion."³¹ In this photograph, Moholy effectively demonstrated the potential for glass in the new architecture: its ability to reveal simultaneously the interior and exterior of the building, its stripping away of privacy and opening up internal spaces so that nothing is hidden from sight or unlit. In *Eingangshof von Südwesten* interior becomes exterior and the barriers between public and private melt away. The Bauhaus stands open for all to witness its progressive thrust into the future. The desire embodied by glass architecture for openness and a reordering of public and private space reflected broader impulses in Weimar modernity, as increasingly the barrier between private and public space became tenuous with the advancements in electricity, advertisements, photography, telephones, film, and radio. These various elements of the modern experience, as Beatriz Colomina observes, worked to radically alter everyday experience, and each "can be understood as a mechanism that disrupts the older boundaries between inside and outside, public and private, night and day, depth and surface, here and there, street and interior, and so on."³²

³¹ Walter Gropius, *Bauhausbauten Dessau* (Mainz und Berlin, 1930), 47.

³² Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 12.

Glass was the dominant building material at the Bauhaus, reflecting the modern glass culture of the Weimar period as a whole. Gropius wrote in 1926 that “glass is the purest building material consisting of earthly matter, closing off space and keeping out weather, but also having the effect of opening up space, without being and light...glass architecture, a poetic utopia until recently, is becoming an uninhibited reality.”³³ In the introduction to his book *Glas im Bau und als Gebrauchsgegenstand (Glass in Modern Architecture)*, 1929, Arthur Korn declared that “A new glass age has begun, which is equal in beauty to the old one of Gothic windows.”³⁴ There was a sense that glass could free buildings (and man) from the earth, that it signified weightlessness and spatial opportunities for architecture, including light, hygiene, openness, and transparency. “Its sparkling insubstantiality, and the way it seems to float between wall and wall imponderably as the air,” as Gropius wrote, made it an essential and promising material for new modernist construction. The sparkling insubstantiality of glass and its ability to open up space is revealed through Moholy’s photograph of her and Moholy-Nagy’s dining space in their Bauhaus home, *Bauhaus Meisterhaus, Dessau (Bauhaus Masters’ Housing, Dessau)*, 1926 (Figure 10). Here one is witness to an incredible drama of light. The glass windows glow, becoming almost permeable and porous through the strength of the light shining through. Positioned centrally in the frame, the floor-to-ceiling window exudes an almost heavenly glow, radiating light into the room and becoming an iconic center of attention. The sheerness and thinness of the window material are brought to the fore, as one clearly observes the outline of trees through the windows, which seem almost

³³ Walter Gropius, “Glasbau,” 1926. Reprinted in Kentgens-Craig, *The Dessau Bauhaus Building 1926-1999*, 21.

³⁴ Arthur Korn, *Glass in Modern Architecture of the Bauhaus Period* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 6.

flat and imprinted onto the window panes themselves. These slim, bare trees exactly echo the verticality of the window panes; the boundary between the two becomes blurred, they become interspersed with one another and become a series of vertical lines emphasizing the overall linearity of the window setting. The sparkling insubstantiality of glass has opened this room up to glorious, brilliant light, energizing the space and making it glow.

Moholy's use of dramatic angles and unusual spatial perspectives is further indicative of her commitment to modernist principles of composition, as both were core elements of the dramatic new way of viewing the world, and her utilization of such principles was particularly innovative and daring when compared to other photographs of architectural sites during the period. Moholy understood deeply the dynamism and modernity of the Bauhaus and sought to produce this sensation to the highest degree possible in her photographs. Her Dessau photographs are not solely documents of Bauhaus buildings; rather, they embody Bauhaus principles of construction, light, and materiality through a radical and modern approach to photography. Moholy's subjectivity emerges in her purposeful framing, her choice of angles, the abstracting of a building's geometry, and the reflection of organic forms in geometric planes. Frequently Moholy distorts perspective so as to envision the world from new angles and thus open up new vistas and understandings of modern life.

The unusual, sharp angles seen in such works as *Werkstattfassade* give the impression that the Bauhaus buildings are in a state of dynamic movement. This sense of energy and motion is further emphasized in both *Werkstattflügel von Nordosten* (*Workshop Wing from the Northeast*), 1925–26 (Figure 11), and *Bauhausgebäude Dessau: Fachschulecke* (*Bauhaus Building, Dessau: Corner of the Technical School*),

1925–26 (Figure 12). In the former, the workshop façade emerges from behind a sharp, triangular shadowed area at upper left, thrusting perpendicularly across the horizontal space of the image. The juxtaposition of these two geometric angles, one rendered entirely in darkness and the other in patterned light, imparts a clear sense of dynamism and drama. The monumentality and dynamic energy of the Bauhaus are further reflected in the latter image, *Fachschulecke*, where Moholy presents the Technical School from the unusual angle of the building's corner edge. This angle serves to warp the viewer's sense of the built space, forcing the eyes to rise up to the tip of the corner, where the two walls meet, and consider the building almost as a flattened, abstracted shape. The wall dominating the left half of the composition seems to soar away from the viewer's position, the even, symmetrical windows and the tracks in the mud below exacerbating this sense of movement. By placing the viewer in this exact position, Moholy emphasizes the monumentality of the Bauhaus space and its imposing, dramatic, dynamic imprint on the landscape.

In abstracting and isolating small segments of the buildings for her Bauhaus photographs, Moholy demonstrated her knowledge and fluency in *Neues Bauen* principles. In *Bauhausgebäude Dessau: Balkon am Atelierhaus (Bauhaus Building Dessau: Studio Balcony)*, 1926 (Figure 13), we observe one of Moholy's most abstract renderings of the Bauhaus. Here the artist concentrates on a single balcony of the studio wing, set against the hazy background of distant suburban buildings and the grey sky. The image is dramatic: the dark railings are starkly contrasted against the grey-white sky, and they cast a long shadow across the white wall of the building. The windows are entirely dark; one can only just make out curtains pulled to one side in the upper-storey

room, but the ground-floor room is completely ensconced in darkness. At the top of the photograph in the center of the composition an abstracted triangular shard cuts across the sky. So abstracted and flattened is this shape that it takes a moment to realize that this is the upper balcony for the second storey. The abstracted shadows of the railings and roof stand in stark contrast to the saturated darkness of the ground and windows. Here Moholy utilizes a contemporary avant-garde technique to force a new perspective on assumed known quantities and prompt an envisioning of a completely new perspective on life. Abstracting the studio out of its built landscape, Moholy emphasizes the core principles of the construction: clarity, sparseness, simplicity, and functionality. The studio balcony becomes a series of geometric elements interacting with verticality, light, and dark, drawing attention to the sparse, coherent, rational aesthetic of the Bauhaus.

Across the body of her architecture photographs, Moholy tackled a fundamental question at the Bauhaus: how does one interpret and experience light? Throughout these images one observes the expressive values of light and dark emphasized above all; they serve as the foundation of each image. Moholy-Nagy, in his *Vorkurs* at the Bauhaus, emphasized the importance of glass and reflective materials such as mirrors not only as materials that were emphatically modern and industrial-made, but also as entry points into profound new approaches to form, space, and light.³⁵ Moholy-Nagy called photography “Lichtgestaltung” (light-play), making central to the medium the fundamental issues he had stressed in other artistic arenas. Concerns with light, space, and reflectivity were thus discussed in depth at the Bauhaus during this period, in classes, publications, and discussions amongst the Masters. Moholy’s production of photograms

³⁵ Diana C. Du Pont, *Florence Henri: Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 20.

with her husband likely made her particularly sensitive to the opportunities and issues presented by light when photographing, and must have impacted her investigation into saturation, transparency, and contrasts of dark and light in interior and exterior spaces. Given she used no brightening screens or added light when photographing from inside buildings, Moholy often spent considerable time waiting for the right light for a shot.³⁶ She frequently photographed early in the morning or late in the evening to try and combat the issues inherent in photographing from a dark space looking out of a window. The resulting images are often dramatic productions of light and dark. In *Flur mit Durchblick auf Werkstattflügel (Hallway with View to the Workshop Wing)*, 1926 (Figure 14), for example, the sharp angularity of the interlocking Bauhaus buildings is amplified by the contrast of the darkened space in which the photographer stands to the vast glass façade of the workshop lit by bright light. From absolute darkness emerges the crystalline glass façade of the modernist structure. The image is glorifying in its modernity, both in terms of the building's and the photograph's own presentation. The transparency of the glass allows one to begin to foray into the interior of the lower space of the building, but not enough to fully elucidate what lies behind the window panes.

Similarly, in *Brücke Flür (Bridge Hallway)*, 1925–26 (Figure 15), Moholy manipulates light to an extreme degree. Here the immense darkness of the foreground contrasts dramatically with the horizontal band of light emanating from the window that cuts across the image. The glow of the connected white building seen through the window panes takes on an almost other-worldly quality. Moholy demonstrates her expertise in utilizing natural light, here waiting for the right moment to capture the

³⁶ Sachsse, "Architectural and Product Photography," 186.

corridor to create an incredible sense of drama. In the foreground, the windows are clearly outlined by the exterior light, but as one's eyes travel down the length of the corridor, one observes the light penetrating the glass window and making almost invisible the window panes. It is only upon closer examination that one notices a secondary play of light occurring in the space; on the floor, the shadows from the windows take on a prismatic, geometric quality and pattern the floor in natural light. The Bauhaus Dessau was a building constructed from light; its spaces were determined by light, reflectivity and transparency were core concerns, and the vast glass windows and facades served to create a sense of light-filled, open spaces conducive to an entirely novel way of envisioning and designing the world. Moholy's photographs capture the transparency and lightness of the Bauhaus buildings, making central the phenomenon of reflection and clarity.

In surveying Moholy's photographs of the Dessau Bauhaus, one observes the purposeful way the buildings are shown in complete isolation from their surroundings. Moholy seems to remove all context from her photographs of the Bauhaus, focusing on the formal qualities of modernist design and turning the building into an emblem of modernist architecture. The building becomes, to quote Colomina, "an object relatively independent of place,"³⁷ one that develops its meaning and impact separate from the landscape it inhabits. The isolation of the buildings from their surroundings in Moholy's photographs reflects the broader desire of the school itself to stand entirely separate from the geographic context of Dessau, to forge something completely distinct and new, not tainted by the existing landscape. Moholy's photographs are, furthermore, renderings of

³⁷ Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, 111.

an untouched Bauhaus, not yet inhabited or affected by the life and liveliness of students and teachers. In these images, many of which were taken before construction was even complete, one observes the Bauhaus completely new, not yet performing its intended function as a school. These images are emphatically unlike those taken by other contemporary photographs that depict students and teachers interacting with the built environment. These are pristine spaces, not filled with the spirit of the Bauhaus as seen in such photographs as those by Irene Bayer and T. Lux Feininger. The impact of this emptiness is that one can imagine oneself in the scene without having that fantasy jarred or disrupted by the presence of a living person, by the trace of the real individual upon the scene. Furthermore, the removal of the human figure from the landscape gave these images a timelessness and iconic status, as there was no human presence to disrupt the sense that one could stand in the same scene decades later, or to hinder the elevation of the image to an icon of modernity.

Contextualizing Moholy's Dessau Photographs

Moholy's position within the avant-garde German photography scene is clarified through comparisons with other photographs produced during the same period. The subjectivity and artistic license taken with her photographs is revealed through the contrast between two views of the connecting bridge hallway at the Dessau Bauhaus; one, Moholy's *Brücke Flür*, with which we are already familiar, and the other from the Photothek archive, labeled *Studio Flügel und Brücke (Studio Hallway and Bridge)*, 1925–26 (Figure 16). In this second image, the bridge hallway is rendered in an entirely documentary fashion. Light is evenly applied across the entire space, illuminating the length of the hallway and creating no dramatic plays of shadow on the walls or floor.

Here one can clearly assess this section of the Bauhaus building and note its various constructive elements – the installation of the radiator at floor level, the windowpane fittings, the doorways to offices on the right. The image is taken from slightly further back than Moholy's photograph, revealing more of the space and the length of the corridor. The intention here is to render objectively the Bauhaus space, detailing it for posterity and removing the photographer's hand from the composition. The image provides a stark contrast when juxtaposed with Moholy's *Brücke Flür*, saturated in dramatic areas of light and dark and glowing with an other-worldly light. These images, taken the same year and addressing the same subject matter, demonstrate the widely different approach of the two photographers, and Moholy's clear investment in a subjective, individual exploration of perspective and content.

This difference between the straight documentary photographs produced during the mid-1920s of the Bauhaus and Moholy's oeuvre is made clear through multiple other juxtapositions. In another image from the Photothek archive, we see the Bauhaus building rendered during construction (*Bauhausgebäude Dessau von Nordosten während des Baus*, 1926 [*Bauhaus Building Dessau from the Northeast during Construction*, Figure 17]). Here the impact of the Bauhaus space is altered. Again light is evenly distributed across the frame, creating a sense of uniformity and evenness between the built space and the ground upon which it sits. The building is clearly situated within the landscape, with one-third of the composition given over to the grass and earth in the foreground. Carefully lit, this foreground element is clearly delineated so that individual blades of grass are visible, deflecting the viewer's full attention away from the buildings in the middle ground. The presence of figures (a larger issue to which I will return

momentarily) interrupts the isolation of the scene, injecting human life into this modernist space. In an image taken around the same time, *Bauhausgebäude Dessau von Nordosten* (*Bauhaus Building Dessau from the Northeast*), 1926 (Figure 18), Moholy makes subtle changes that completely alter the effect of the photograph. Here light has been manipulated to impact the space in an entirely different manner. The earth foreground creates a dark swathe horizontally across the space; so rich and obscure is it that one must look closely to make out paths and grass, and the construction elements so clearly visible in the former image. The sky is completely bare and uniform in shade, no hint of clouds to disrupt the empty backdrop to the central focus of the scene: the Bauhaus buildings themselves. Here, set between two swathes of opposite colors, the Bauhaus stands out as a striking monument to the new building, bereft of figures and isolated in the landscape, baring a few stark trees behind and to the right. The subjectivity and subtle artistry that Moholy brings to her images are further reflected in comparisons with Erich Consemüller's interior photographs. In such images as *Vorraum mit Türen zum Auditorium* (*Vestibule with Doors to the Auditorium*), 1926–30 (Figure 19), and *Fachschule Klassenzimmer mit Lehrer-Schränken und flachen Dateien für Zeichnungen* (*Technical School Classroom with Teachers' Closets and Flat Files for Drawings*), 1925–26 (Figure 20), Consemüller renders the newly-constructed Bauhaus in straightforward documentary photographs that capture the detailing and design of each room. These spaces are, like Moholy's, empty of people, captured before the school was opened and animated by student life, but they are presented with a uniformity and objectivity that distinguishes them from Moholy's work. In these images one does not find the drama of light as seen in *Bauhaus Meisterhaus, Dessau*, or the conscious

patterning of shadows highlighted in *Salon von Lucia und László Moholy-Nagys Haus* (*Drawing Room of Lucia and László Moholy-Nagy's House*), 1925–26 (Figure 21). It is through these juxtapositions that one comprehends the individual, artistic perspective that Moholy brought to her craft, and understands how Moholy was not engaged solely in the documentary photography tradition.

There was one artist operating as an amateur photographer at the Bauhaus with whom Moholy shared an aesthetic vocabulary. Lyonel Feininger, while working as a Bauhaus Master in the printing workshop, produced numerous photographs of the Bauhaus over the course of his tenure there. Interested particularly in exploring elements of light and dark, Feininger often photographed at night, walking around the Bauhaus grounds late into the evening to capture the school from unusual perspectives. His images reveal a preoccupation with abstracting architectural elements and presenting unique perspectives on the school to reveal some previously undiscovered perception. In *Untitled (Bauhaus, Dessau)*, 1929 (Figure 22), the image has been highly exposed to create stark contrasts between the dark foreground, rendered almost as purely black, and the white and grey lines of the Bauhaus buildings. The image is so exposed that the white wall of the building becomes almost a flattened geometric object, an interlocking form in space with the horizontal bar of the glass corridor. In *Bauhaus (Dessau)*, 1929 (Figure 23), Feininger captures the balconies of the studio building from an oblique angle at night. The roof of the building cuts a sheer angle diagonally down the composition, cutting the space between the building and the open night sky. By photographing the studio building at night, Feininger captures the light effects of the interior as they cast bright squares upwards onto the bottoms of the upper-storey balconies. The effect is striking, as each

square balcony, dark or light, becomes an abstract plane projecting from the vertical wall. Finally, *Untitled (Bauhaus, Dessau, 1929)*, 1929 (Figure 24), reveals Feininger's involvement in the same artistic dialogue Moholy had initiated some three years earlier. Here one observes Feininger playing with the same marvelous reflectivity of the workshop façade and capturing only a small segment of the Bauhaus complex to explore the interaction of architectural elements. Feininger, as Laura Muir reveals in an interview with his son, T. Lux Feininger, greatly admired Moholy and was well-versed in her work.³⁸ While Feininger diverged from Moholy in his overarching photographic ambition, as he was preoccupied with expressive emotion and creating a meditative mood,³⁹ the two artists drew on the same visual vocabulary to reconsider the Bauhaus from novel perspectives.

The Bauhaus was not the only modernist building to be routinely photographed, both from a documentary and avant-garde perspective, and Moholy certainly would have been engaged with the plethora of architectural photographs produced and published during the mid-1920s. In September 1921, an image of Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower was published on the cover of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (Figure 25), broadcasting this monumental building, symbolic of a new age of design, to the general public. Mendelsohn's redesign of the Mossehaus façade, 1921–23, was also the subject of photographic attention, with images published in daily magazines, journals, and photobooks. Indeed, so ubiquitous was the image of Mossehaus that it became one of the most widely-known symbols of *Neues Bauen*. It would have been impossible for Moholy

³⁸ Laura Muir, "Lyonel Feininger," in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, by Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 134.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

to be unfamiliar with this striking new façade and the varying photographic approaches taken to capturing it. In his own publication, *Das Gesamtschaffen des Architekten (The Overall Work of the Architect)*, 1930, Mendelsohn included images of Mossehaus that emphasized its dynamism and functionalism and, importantly, cropped the building so that its new façade was seen in dramatic profile, overwhelming the entire composition. In one image of Mossehaus's looming vertical façade (Figure 26), people are still visible standing on the street in front of the building, however they are dwarfed by the vast expanse of the building above them. Here the verticality and experimental curvilinear forms of Mendelsohn's design are emphasized. In a second image (Figure 27), the entrance of the building is captured from ground level, the cropped angle of the photograph highlighting the sweeping dynamism of the curved façade forms.

Decontextualized views of architecture in the urban environment were extremely popular, and were achieved through close cropping and unusual angles, but also through the removal of pedestrians or cars, to give the sense that these buildings operated entirely outside of everyday existence. This approach was reiterated by Laszlo Willinger who, in his photobook *100 x Berlin*, 1929, presented Mossehaus from a ground-level angle, looking up at the profile of the building, which dominates almost the entirety of the composition (Figure 28).⁴⁰ Here we observe Willinger engaging in the same sort of approach as Moholy; purposely isolating the rational, geometric elements of the new building style, Willinger highlights the incredible modernity of the space and asserts the impact of its presence on the viewer. Other photographers, however, approached the site

⁴⁰ For a complete analysis of Willinger's, Stone's, and Bucovich's photobooks with regards to Mossehaus, see Hake, *Topographies of Class*, 188-195. Hake contextualizes these images to situate them within the urban reality of Berlin during the 1920s and demonstrates how the books functioned to promote New Building as socially and politically significant.

from an entirely different perspective, emphatically situating it within its urban context. In Sasha Stone's photobook *Berlin in Bildern (Berlin in Pictures)*, 1929 (Figure 29), Mossehaus is captured from the street level and from a slight distance, revealing in the foreground walking pedestrians and automobiles. This image clearly sites Mossehaus within the real space of Weimar Berlin, demonstrating how it interacted with the streets and buildings around it, and how Berlin citizens utilized it in their urban topography. Mario von Bucovich, in *Berlin*, 1928 (Figure 30), minimizes the modernist impact of Mossehaus to an even greater degree, reducing the reflectivity of its banded windows and casting heavy shadows to make the architectural details of the space difficult to delineate. Here Mossehaus does not function as a modernist icon, standing alone in its environment, but is revealed, rather, in its banal everyday context, situated packed within the urban world and utilized functionally as a work space. Such images as those by von Bucovich and Stone stand in stark contrast to Moholy's Dessau Bauhaus photographs, where Moholy completely eradicates the human form. The Bauhaus, of course, was set apart from the bustling metropolis, situated on the fringes of the smaller town of Dessau. Moholy's images thus figure the Bauhaus as a radical, dynamic bastion of modernism set apart (physically and conceptually) from the hectic nature of the city. Here one can truly experience pure modernism in isolation, away from the distracting and detracting realities of the city.

Approaching architecture from an entirely *sachlich* perspective, Albert Renger-Patzsch provides an example of an alternative attitude to architectural photography during these years. Commissioned to photograph the Fagus Factory, designed by Gropius and Adolf Meyer in 1911, by the company's management in April 1928, Renger-Patzsch

produced roughly sixty images that captured the exterior, interior, and production of the factory. In the series of exterior images, Renger-Patzsch presents carefully composed images that capture Gropius and Meyer's vision for the new factory setting. Renger-Patzsch fills the picture frame with the construction, focusing the viewer's entire attention on the clean, sharp lines and angles of the Fagus Factory. In *Hauptgebäude: Eingang und stützenlose Ecke, Ansicht von Südwesten* (*Main Building: Entrance and Supporting Corner, View from the South-west*) (Figure 31), Renger-Patzsch aligns the linearity of the building, with its columns of glass panels and intersecting horizontal bands of brick and steel, with the vertical frame of the photograph itself, creating a sense of rational structure and linear movement. Further images such as *Blick nach Norden entlang der Südwest-Front des Werks* (*Looking North along the South-west Front of the Plant*) (Figure 32) and *Pförtnerhaus, Werkstor und Hauptgebäude* (*Gatehouse, Factory Gate, and Main Building*) (Figure 33) underline Renger-Patzsch's objective, rational approach to seeing, and his focus on the details of the subject to reveal the intangible, the previously unseen. Renger-Patzsch's belief in the ability of the camera to intensify our consciousness of things and to open up our vision to what can be revealed through incredible details produced images that heighten our awareness of the interacting elements of the Fagus Factory. There are aspects of his approach that overlap with Moholy's, particularly in his keen awareness of the potential inherent in light and dark and his appreciation of the angular geometry of the Fagus Factory, however Renger-Patzsch's objectivity and focus on "a pure aesthetic of seeing"⁴¹ fundamentally distances him from Moholy's project.

⁴¹ Michael E. Hoffman, "Preface," in *Albert Renger-Patzsch: Joy Before the Object*, by Donald B. Kuspit (New York: Aperture, 1993), 3.

IV. Masculine Architecture and the Female Photographer

In considering Moholy's photographs alongside other images of the Bauhaus and major architectural works of the period, it is impossible to avoid the fact that all of these buildings were designed and constructed by men. I would like, therefore, to spend some time briefly considering Moholy's place within the gendered world of architects and photographers during this period, and address Moholy's position as a female photographer photographing an inherently masculine space. Given the relatively recent emancipation of women and the slow encouragement of female higher education, the domination of the architectural field by men during the Weimar period is not surprising. Women had only been given access to (some) university education in 1900, but the acceptance of women into professional fields of study such as architecture was slow. It was extremely difficult for female architects to establish themselves professionally, in part because of immense resistance by established male architects and in part because the field required connections and a network of relationships that female architects, as a result of their recent entry into the field, necessarily did not have.⁴² The attitude towards women's involvement in the field (emanating from both men and women) can be summed up in Helene Nonné-Schmidt's article "Woman's Place at the Bauhaus," published in 1926:

...The artistically active woman applies herself most often and most successfully to work in a two-dimensional plane. This observation can be explained by her lack of the spatial imagination characteristic of men...In addition, the way the woman sees is, so to speak, childlike, because like a child she sees the details instead of the overall picture...But let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that this aspect

⁴² Mark Peach, "'Der Architekt Denkt, Die Hausfrau Lenkt': German Modern Architecture and the Modern Woman," *German Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (1995): 443.

of her nature will change, despite all the accomplishments of the Women's Movement and despite all the investigations and experiments. There are even indications that woman is counting on her limitations, considering them a great advantage.⁴³

Neues Bauen was a movement inspired and driven by male intellectuals and leading male architects, and thus the major tenets of the new design were shaped solely from a (1920s) male perspective. As Michael Lee observes, "Architectural modernism has almost universally been construed as a masculine project...Moreover, the classic narratives recite a similar formula: modernism enunciates its discourse through the heroic figure of the genius (male) architect, disseminates its ideal form via the icon of the (phallic) skyscraper, and carries out its rational (male) operations within the denatured (defeminized) space of the metropolis."⁴⁴

It is worth grounding this discussion in terms of the inherent masculinity of Weimar modernism as espoused by its male adherents. Whether this be in terms of violent misogynistic fantasies against the female figure (discussed in Chapter Two), utopian visions of the ideal New Man, or repeated emphasis on the sleek, technological (masculine) machine forms of the new visual vocabulary, modernist expression was formulated almost entirely from the male perspective. Women that broke from this mold were (and still are) considered brave (or dangerous), independent outliers that proved the exception to the modernist idiom. This emphasis on "masculine" forms and rational, "male" thinking was articulated just as strongly in the field of architecture. Weimar

⁴³ Helene Nonné-Schmidt, "Woman's Place at the Bauhaus," *Vivos voco*, V, no. 8/9 (August-September, 1926). Reprinted in Hans Maria Wingler and Joseph Stein, *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), 116.

⁴⁴ Michael Lee, "Landscape and Gender," in *Modernism and Landscape Architecture, 1890-1940*, by Therese O'Malley and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (New Haven and London: National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2015), 29.

debates surrounding the new architecture often couched descriptions in terms of a “hard” masculine style versus a “soft” feminine one. The new architecture was rational, simple, dismissive of the decorative, and clean. This debate carried over into the structured landscape discourse of the period, which divided design types into the *Architekturgarten* (architectural garden) and *Naturgarten* (nature garden). From the first decade of the twentieth century, flower gardens were increasingly associated with decoration and, thus, women. The connection was forged between floral ornamentation and the woman as flower, as ornament herself, as Lee elucidates in his essay “Landscape and Gender.”⁴⁵ The move towards “masculine” tenets of sobriety and rationality in architecture was reflected in landscaping, where garden designs were reduced to functionalist, minimalist settings and stripped of too much floral ornamentation.

Women were frequently used in advertising in relation to the new architecture, but in specific ways that were appropriate for the type of building being advertised. Lee speaks to the correlation drawn in advertisements between modern domestic spaces such as the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart and the modern woman.⁴⁶ Janet Ward similarly highlights the manner in which “the ‘spirit of the new fashion’ for women went hand in hand with the ‘spirit of the new architecture.’”⁴⁷ The figure of the New Woman, slim, “masculinized” in body type and dress, was repeatedly used to advertise the new architecture, as seen in the architectural proposal by the Luckhardt Brothers and Alfons Anker for the Alexanderplatz competition.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁷ Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 82.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The longstanding gendering of public space as male and the private sphere as female posed a problem for contemporary male modernist architects, who sought to revolutionize domestic space. To break away from the concept of the home as female, and as a primarily female-inhabited space, architects had to radically re-envision residential spaces, stripping them of ornament, decoration, and anything suggesting hominess and sentimentality (the feminine). Machine living suggested the masculine instead of the feminine. Weimar architects sought to transform the environment of the modern man, including the home, and new architectural designs were conceived with him in mind.

Household efficiency became a major focus for male architects during these years. As part of the push towards clean, spacious, and airy housing, architects sought to rationalize the domestic spaces occupied by the housewife, framing it as making her workspace in the home more efficient. It was advertised as pragmatic to be organized, efficient, neat, and clean. Walter Gropius, in his book *Bauhausbauten*, outlined this drive towards efficiency:

The housewife, of whom so many more demands are made today than before, in the exhausting hustle and bustle of life, and who in the rarest cases can procure enough household aid, will appreciate it gratefully when she is no longer looking at an overwhelming wealth of useless objects and cluttered monuments, whose care steals her time and which only give an old-fashioned, overworked touch of “comfort.” The advantages of the new dwellings will be seen most quickly. Just as we do not think of walking along the street in a rococo costume instead of our modern clothes, so we also want our extended dress, the apartment, freed from senseless, space-constraining junk and superfluous ornaments. We have become tired of the arbitrariness of these lifestyles and now, in clear, concise and simple forms which correspond to the

nature of our present life, we seek the essential and sensible expression of our surroundings.⁴⁹

These calls to efficiency were popularized through multiple successful publications during the period. Bruno Taut's *Die neue Wohnung – Die Frau als Schöpferin (The New Apartment – Woman as Creator)*, published in 1924 (and quickly selling 26,000 copies by 1928),⁵⁰ argued for a total transformation of the household space that would thereby revolutionize female household labor. Treating the domestic space as the female workplace, Taut envisioned a productive housewife who rationalized and clarified the new German household to increase efficiency and an ideal domestic setting. Through the use of new architectural principles, specifically light, color, and cubic space, women would be freed to be more creative in the domestic realm and experience a spiritual awakening. Taut's publication was followed by Erna Meyer's wildly successful *Der neue Haushalt (The New Household)*, 1926, a book catered to housewives that promised techniques to achieve a fully rationalized home, including budgets, cleaning and furnishing tips, and child-rearing methods. Meyer described enthusiastically new innovations in electric household items, such as washing machines and refrigerators, despite the fact that most households could not afford such luxuries. Meyer thus presented in *Der neue Haushalt* a vision of the new household in its ideal form, not one that was necessarily available to the author's readership. It was the woman that was key to securing the ideal living space of the New Man.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Gropius, *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, 144.

⁵⁰ Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, 76.

⁵¹ Other notable publications regarding the new housing include Grete and Walter Dixel, *Das Wohnhaus von Heute* (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker Verlag, 1928) and Ludwig Neundörfer, *So wollen wir wohnen* (Stuttgart: Franckhische Verlagshandlung, 1931)

The rationalization of the household seemed one of the few places where women were able to flourish professionally and make broad suggestions for reform. As Ward notes, Lilly Reich organized the domestic appliances exhibition at the Stuttgart Weissenhof exhibition in 1927, and Elisabeth Lueders performed the same role for the German Building Exhibition in 1931, where Lillian Gilberth installed the American kitchen exhibition.⁵² The most famous example of a woman in a leading design role is Grete Schütte-Lihotsky, who pioneered the “Frankfurt Kitchen” in 1925 as part of Frankfurt am Main’s new housing developments. The Frankfurt Kitchen, six square meters in size, condensed into a small, rational space all the cooking appliances and utensils needed in a family home. As Schütte-Lihotsky explained in her essay “Rationalization in the Household”:

Today’s hectic urban life-style imposes demands on women far exceeding those of the calmer conditions of eighty years ago, yet today’s woman is nevertheless condemned to manage her household (aside from the relief offered by a few exceptions) just like her grandmother did... We recognize from past experience that the single-family dwelling is here to stay, but that it must also be organized as rationally as possible. The question is how to improve the traditional methods of household management, which waste both energy and time. What we can do is transfer the principles of labor-saving management developed in factories and offices, which have led to unsuspected increases in productivity, to the household.⁵³

Underlying these encouraged architectural and interior transformations was the argument that an essentializing and paring-down of one’s household would free the housewife to engage in other activities and spend less time cooking and cleaning.

⁵² Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, 78.

⁵³ Grete Schütte-Lihotsky, “Rationalization in the Household,” first published as “Rationalisierung im Haushalt,” *Das neue Frankfurt*, no. 5 (1926-1927), 120-123. Reprinted in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 462.

Efficiency was touted as equaling freedom, although of course the entire concept was based on the premise of a woman staying at home and not being in the professional sphere. Ultimately, the call by (primarily) male architects to rationalize the domestic space and unburden women from their chores was still strongly based in a desire to keep women contented within the domestic sphere and not encouraged to break from their prescribed and traditional social roles (after all, these publications were directed at women, the assumed domestic laborers).⁵⁴

As a professional female photographer working within this social context, Moholy was operating, therefore, in an entirely male space. She was a female photographer capturing on camera the modernist, masculinized space of the Bauhaus. She was, moreover, hired by a man who held traditional views on women and their capacity for art, and was interested in architectural photography for its documentary function. In capturing the Dessau Bauhaus from her own distinct perspective, carving out a space for an experimental, figural modernist approach to photography, Moholy asserted her voice as a female photographer in a world of men and gained the respect and admiration of older, more established artists in the field. She also demonstrated the viability of photography as a professional career for other women interested in the field; her widely visible and promoted work served as a signal to independent, driven women that a female artist could intrude upon the masculinist space of architectural modernism. Moholy's interruption of the masculine Bauhaus canon came at exactly the moment when professional women were seeking to carve out an independent space in German urban culture, particularly in the field of architecture. As Despina Stratigakos details in her

⁵⁴ Peach, "“Der Architekt Denkt, Die Hausfrau Lenkt”: German Modern Architecture and the Modern Woman," 449.

study *A Women's Berlin: Building the Modern City*, just as the New Woman was emerging as a symbol of female liberty and emancipation during the later stages of the Wilhelmine period, female architects sought to transform the built environment into a space suited to this newly envisioned womanhood. Laying the groundwork for professional female artists and architects during the 1920s, female architects of the late Wilhelmine period, such as Emilie Winkelmann, rejected the narrow, homogeneous vocabulary of the modernist movement as espoused by famous male architects and instead sought to define their own modernist experience through the built landscape, demonstrating the necessary nuance of modernity through a gendered lens.⁵⁵ Moholy's series of Bauhaus Dessau photographs entered into dialogue, therefore, with this push towards professional female visibility in traditionally male spheres, and contributed to the rattling of Weimar's patriarchal structure. The visibility of Moholy's images and the symbolic significance they held as female-produced works cannot be overstated. Given the overwhelming visible presence of male-built constructions and sleek new "masculine" modernist designs all over Berlin and across Germany, the engagement of a successful female photographer with such material was emblematic for women.

V. The Intrusion of the Natural World

As I have detailed above, Moholy's photographs glorify the modernist principles of the Bauhaus Dessau, using dramatic angles and unusual perspectives to highlight the radical use of glass, asymmetry, and new design principles. Moholy's photographs further expound the unique modernism of the Bauhaus by capturing the buildings in

⁵⁵ Despina Stratigakos, *A Women's Berlin: Building the Modern City* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

complete isolation from their surroundings. This approach propagated the message Gropius was trying to send when he built the school in isolation from the town of Dessau: here was a utopian, radical approach to art education standing alone, separated from tradition, a bastion of the new principles. Moholy's photographs, carefully cropped so as to focus the entire frame solely on the buildings in question, demonstrated this principle of independent leadership towards the future. The stand-alone quality of Moholy's photographs also promoted a desirable interpretation of modernist buildings: that they are presented with no trace of human presence, stripped bare and completely pure, and untouched by the environment surrounding them. Here was the modernist message unadulterated, unfiltered, and complete; the viewer has the opportunity to see the Bauhaus Dessau in a manner later impossible, stripped of the people, objects, cars, and bicycles that would inhabit it.

Having said this, there are photographs within Moholy's oeuvre that undermine the perfect purity of the Bauhaus and introduce a complicating element to the image. In many of her Bauhaus Dessau photographs, nature seems to impinge on the buildings, giving the impression that it is impossible to divorce the modernist building from its environs. In these images, we see the great divide between the natural world and the clean, machinist planes of modernist architecture crumble. The photographs in which the dialogue between the natural and the man-made world is most apparent are those of the Masters' Houses, the residences built for the Dessau Masters Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, László Moholy-Nagy, Georg Muche, Oskar Schlemmer, and Walter Gropius. In these images, Moholy purposely sites the buildings within their natural environment, carefully composing her frames so as to enhance the impact the

foliage has upon the image. In *Meisterhäuser von Nordwesten* (*Masters' Houses from the Northwest*), 1926 (Figure 34), multiple trees construct the verticality of the image and segment one's view of the houses into multiple columned lines. The density of these trees increases towards the left background of the image, where they are seen compacted densely around another Master's house. Unlike in many of the main Dessau photographs discussed earlier, here Moholy calls attention to the grass in the foreground, and to the siting of these buildings in their earthly context. The trees are solidly grounded in the grassed earth, their natural placement serving as a compositional device to heighten the verticality of the buildings behind. Moholy uses these slim, tall trees as a repeated compositional element across many of her Masters' Houses images. Whether seen from a slight bird's eye perspective as in *Meisterhaus von Südosten* (*Master's House from the Southwest*), 1926 (Figure 35), or at the ground level as in *Haus des Direktors, Garteneingang* (*Director's House, Garden Entrance*), 1926 (Figure 36), the trees become a dividing line, a measure of verticality, and a means of highlight the geometry and clarity of the built spaces. Here nature plays a role in constructing the Bauhaus; Moholy both manipulates and abstracts nature into geometric forms, and softens the constructed aspect of the Master houses by emphasizing their place within a natural setting.

Moholy further draws on the opportunities for dialogue with the natural world in other photographs of the Masters' Houses. In *Meisterhaus von Osten* (*Master's House from the East*), 1926 (Figure 37), Moholy captures her home positioned within the forested space and slightly obscured by some trees. Here the viewer stands in the grass to contemplate the building; he or she occupies the same natural landscape and can be placed within the scene. Moholy returns to her fascination with the role of light in this

photograph, revealing the patches of sunlight in the grass and freezing the shadowing of trees on the walls, which create asymmetrical, organic patterns across the building. The dappled light on the leaves creates a striking effect, in some places softly revealing details of the leaf structure and in other blanching the entire crown of the trees, impressing the powerful strength of the sun. The white walls of the Masters' Houses set themselves up well as blank canvases for shadow play. In *Gropiusbau von Westen* (*Gropius's House from the West*), 1926 (Figure 38), the light casts an even stronger imprint upon the exterior walls of the building, impressing whole sections of trees onto the white surface. Peering out at the house from behind the large cluster of trees in the left foreground, the viewer is left with the clear impression that the natural landscape holds dominion over this space. The dramatic interplay of light and dark upon Bauhaus space becomes more intense in *Doppelhaushälfte, Blick vom Garten* (*Semi-detached House, View from Garden*), 1926 (Figure 39), where shadowed areas amongst the trees and in the entryway of the house juxtapose with brilliant pockets of light illuminated through the trees. Dense, lush foliage takes up the entire skyline and one has a sense of total immersion in the natural landscape. Moholy relies on the natural play of light to create this atmospheric effect, but reveals her deft ability to utilize these natural effects to the greatest impact.

Gropius himself understood the important relationship of the built environment with nature, detailing his approach in *Bauhausbauten*. Beneath Moholy's image *Meisterhäuser von Nordwesten*, Gropius explained: "The interweaving of tree and plant growth between the building body, which opens and closes the view, ensures a pleasant contrast, loosens and animates the schema, mediates between the building and the human

being and creates tension and scale...For architecture does not exacerbate itself, unless we consider our psychological needs for harmonious space, for the harmony and mass of the members, which make the space only vividly perceptive as a higher order.”⁵⁶ Gropius was concerned not only with utility but with the integration of architecture and nature, where architecture might serve as a vehicle for vast natural landscapes. Explaining the benefits of the flat roof in *The New Architecture*, Gropius connected this design element with the benefits for environmental immersion:

With the development of air transport the architect will have to pay as much attention to the bird’s-eye perspective of his houses as to their elevations. The utilization of flat roofs as ‘grounds’ offers us a means of re-acclimatizing nature amidst the stony deserts of our great towns; for the plots from which she has been evicted to make room for buildings can be given back to her up aloft. Seen from the skies, the leafy house-tops of the cities of the future will look like endless chains of hanging gardens.⁵⁷

Ise Gropius’s photograph of a Master’s House from before 1929, published in *Bauhausbauten*, provides an interesting point of comparison to those photographs captured by Moholy of the same subject matter. In *Westansicht des Einzelhauses Gropius mit Nebeneingang (Western View of Gropius’s Detached House with Low-level Entrance* [Figure 40]), Ise Gropius photographs her home from the ground level, through the now-familiar narrow trees. Strafing light casts small hints of shadow onto the wall, although the effect is much diminished by comparison to Moholy’s works. In Gropius’s photograph, the space seems much more settled into nature and the photograph itself seems more natural, casually capturing the building in its environs. The key difference that effects this sensation, however, is the presence of the people at lower left, holding

⁵⁶ Gropius, *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, 88.

⁵⁷ Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, 30.

their bicycles while talking in the sunshine. Their presence gives the impression that this is a relaxed photograph of the day-to-day functioning of the space and the people that used it. Moholy's photographs are emphatically bereft of this human trace and she uses nature as an artistic tool, as an aesthetic element. Her works emphasize the geometry and linearity of the spaces they capture, their abstract and totemic quality. Her use of light and dark is artful and carefully considered, and the overall impression of her Masters' Houses photographs is one of careful contemplation and meticulous study.

The impact of nature is felt to a lesser, though still present, degree in some of Moholy's photographs of the main Bauhaus buildings. In *Bauhausgebäude Dessau, Fachschule (Bauhaus Building Dessau, Technical School)*, 1926 (Figure 41) the same view seen earlier in a slightly different rendering is here presented through the literal framing of the composition by trees. Here Moholy assumes a position amidst the trees, purposely highlighting their presence by framing the shot so that the branches form a canopy at the top of the picture frame. It is impossible to focus on built space here except through a natural lens. Nature becomes a ghostly imprint on the building's walls, a particularly striking detail as the shadows become almost mimicry of the design features of the Bauhaus itself, with the trees projected as evenly repeating patterns on the school's wall. Nature thus becomes somehow synthesized into the Bauhaus ideal. The shadows of the trees also serve to impact the reflectivity of the glass window bands; while the upper two tiers remain relatively untouched by the intrusion of nature, providing a shiny mirror-like quality, the lower section of glass is etched with an organic pattern and darkened, reducing its dramatic reflective quality. The traces of leaves on the branches, rendered as small black dots in this image, provide a fleeting, subtle trace of circularity in a picture

constructed on angular intersecting planes. In other images, such as *Bauhausgebäude Dessau, Werkstattflügel von Nordwesten* (*Bauhaus Building Dessau, Workshop Wing from the Northwest*), 1925–26 (Figure 8), the trees themselves are barely visible; the evidence of the natural world exists largely in shadows cast upon the glass façade. Here the industrial, constructed edifice begins to succumb to nature, as organic forms creep back into the image through the play of dark shadows on reflective window panes.

Biocentrism and the Moholy-Nagys

In reflecting on Moholy's impulse to explore the Bauhaus in its natural environs, it is worth addressing her, and her husband's, interest in a biocentric world view and a perspective shaped by a consciousness of the importance of the natural world, and how this might have inflected her artistic approach. In the early 1920s, Moholy was involved with the *Freideutsche Jugend* (*Free German Youth*), who espoused a utopian approach to living and suggested a transformation of life – or “life reform.” The movement was strongly influenced by a deep commitment to environmental issues and drew heavily on biocentrism, a worldview that had emerged in recent decades and espoused a perspective altogether separate from machine adulation, emphasizing instead the natural world as core. This movement evinced an early environmental consciousness that many major artists of the period were interested in, including Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Hans Arp, and Vladimir Tatlin. It was Moholy that introduced Moholy-Nagy to biocentrism and the *Lebensreformbewegung* (*Life Reform Movement*) and opened his world view to new aesthetic pathways and possibilities.⁵⁸ Moholy-Nagy later spoke of the impact of this

⁵⁸ Oliver A. Botar, *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (Zürich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014), 11.

biocentric view on his artistic approach, explaining: “One suddenly becomes aware [of]...the incoherent use of our rich resources. Technological ingenuity provides us with gigantic structures, factories, and skyscrapers, but how we use them is shockingly anti-biological – resulting in wild city growth, elimination of vegetation, fresh air, and sunlight.” Moholy-Nagy argued that the goal should be “a biologically right living most probably through a right regional planning; toward a city-land unity.”⁵⁹

Oliver Botar, in his book *Sensing the Future*, details at length the relationship of the Moholy-Nagys to the *Lebensreformbewegung* and the biocentric artist colonies that flourished during the early twentieth century. Lucia Moholy (then Schulz) was deeply involved in the Communist commune Barkenhoff, founded by the artist Heinrich Vogeler in 1918, which espoused a nature-focused approach to life. Moholy was introduced to the commune in 1919 by her close friends Paul and Paula Vogler, a couple who focused on natural therapeutic remedies for ailments. As Botar notes, Moholy’s connections across this movement were strong; she was friends with Paul Vogler’s sister, Elisabeth Vogler, who founded a women’s commune at Schwarzerden in 1923. Schwarzerden was only 10.5 kilometers from Loheland, another women’s commune frequented by many in the *Freideutsche Jugend*.⁶⁰ Moholy and Moholy-Nagy, who had summered near Loheland in 1922, stayed at Schwarzerden during their summer vacations from the Bauhaus in 1924 and 1926, participating in the Ferienkurse (holiday courses), which provided lectures, classes, and demonstrations on a holistic and healthy approach to living.⁶¹ In fact, Paul

⁵⁹ László Moholy-Nagy, “Space-Time and the Photographer,” *The American Annual of Photography* (1943). Quoted in *ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Vogler became Moholy-Nagy's physician, and the artist later designed his office.⁶² The two couples became intimate friends; Moholy wrote to Elisabeth Vogler of their deep and abiding friendship, saying "the agreement of our respective ways of thinking became clearer, the tone of our conversations more intense, the exchange of ideas more fruitful, our friendship became stronger, indeed more intimate."⁶³ Botar further observes that the Moholy-Nagys' connection to Schwarzerden was artistic as well as personal, as Moholy photographed the commune and its Ferienkurze (the whereabouts of only a few of these photographs is known) and Moholy-Nagy designed the color scheme for the commune's gymnastics hall in 1930.⁶⁴

Moholy and Moholy-Nagy were thus deeply involved in the *Lebensreformbewegung* community in the Rhön Mountains. Perhaps most importantly, it was during their first summer stay at Loheland that they discovered the practice of photograms together. Moholy later remembered that "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 steps taken by Schad, Man Ray and Lissitzky."⁶⁵ Botar emphasizes the intellectual underpinnings of the couple's essay "Production-Reproduction" as lying in their connections to the *Freideutsche Jugend* and the *Lebensreformbewegung*. This connection did not diminish as the length of their tenure at the Bauhaus increased. In 1924, Moholy-Nagy invited

⁶² Ibid., 19.

⁶³ Lucia Moholy, printed in Ortrud Worner-Heil, *Von der Utopie zur Sozialreform: Jugendsiedlung Frankenfeld im hessischen Ried und Frauensiedlung Schwarze Erde in der Rhoen 1915 bis 1933* (Darmstadt: Hessische Historische Kommission; Marburg: Historische Kommission für Hessen, 1996), 50. Quoted in *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Lucia Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy* (Krefeld: Scherpe Verlag, 1972), 59.

Heinrich Jacoby, an educator associated with the Bund Entschiedener Schulreformer (Association of Determined School Reformers),⁶⁶ to give a lecture at the school. During Jacoby's stay there, Moholy made a series of photographic portraits of the educator. Moholy and Moholy-Nagy's ongoing commitment to the principles of biocentrism and *lebensreform* during the course of the 1920s seems of some significance to Moholy's artistic production during this period, and perhaps impacted her approach to the natural landscape in her Dessau photographs.

The Figure Reenters the Scene

For the most part, Moholy's Dessau photographs capture the Bauhaus as a series of large, empty edifices bereft of human forms. This approach, as previously discussed, is purposeful, and serves to isolate and make timeless the iconic modernist building. Across her photographs of the Bauhaus buildings and the Masters' Houses, no figures are seen; this is a world uninhabited by the everyday or the human trace. This known quality in Moholy's architecture photographs makes the existence of two images in which Moholy herself seems to intrude into the frame particularly fascinating. In both *Dach des Atelierhauses* (*Roof of the Studio Building*), 1926 (Figure 42), and *Bauhausgebäude Dessau*, 1926 (Figure 43), the clear shadow of Moholy and her standing camera is projected into the foreground space. In *Dach des Atelierhauses*, the photographer's shadow appears at bottom right, occupying a relatively substantial portion of the photograph. The diagonal length of her shadow cast upon the ground mirrors the strong diagonal of the building ledge to the left, suggesting that the insertion of her presence into

⁶⁶ The group was an outgrowth of the pedagogical reform movement within the Freideutsche Jugend.

the image cannot be accidental. Indeed, Moholy's shadow in this image becomes a third strong line of force moving into the distance alongside the roof of the parallel connecting bridge and the edge of the studio building. In *Bauhausgebäude Dessau*, only Moholy's head and the top of the camera are cast in shadow onto the landscape, allowing the viewer to physically enter the scene and become the photographer himself or herself. In these images, albeit in an oblique way, the human element is revealed.

One might dismiss Moholy's intrusion into her architecture photographs as accidental, as a technical mistake on the part of the photographer, and yet the continued existence of these images suggests that the interaction of the human with the natural and architectural worlds is worthy of consideration. Moholy clearly felt these images were artistically credible as she submitted them to Gropius as part of her collection of Bauhaus photographs. Furthermore, Gropius himself thought them interesting enough to publish in his book *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, where one observes *Dach des Atelierhauses* printed as an illustration of the studio roof and its materials.⁶⁷ Gropius makes no mention of the shadow in his caption, continuing the trend in the book of delivering straightforward, brief descriptions of his various architectural designs. It is difficult to ignore this clear intrusion of the human, the animate, into the scene however. The impact of Moholy's presence is that the pure inaccessibility and timelessness of the Bauhaus are momentarily disrupted; the veil between icon and real space falls away, and the human may enter the modernist construction. Across a large body of images that solidify the iconic status of the Bauhaus, these two images shatter this carefully constructed illusion and remind the viewer that the Bauhaus existed in real space and was crafted for practical, everyday

⁶⁷ See Gropius, *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, 54, for this image.

functions. Given Moholy's careful construction of each photograph and her distinct approach to capturing the Bauhaus, so dissimilar from such photographers as T. Lux Feininger, these instances in which the human figure does intrude into the space become somehow more significant, more momentous. The photographs suggest Moholy subtly asserting her presence as Bauhaus photographer, signing herself into the image with the literal trace of her body.

VI. The Photograph as Object in the Weimar Environment

In Moholy's architecture photographs, one observes the Bauhaus monumentalized, both literally and conceptually. Through these images, Moholy not only explored modernist innovations in photography but also articulated Gropius's architectural ambitions and Bauhaus design principles. Many of her photographs were used by Gropius for reproductive advertising functions. Moholy's architecture images were published in Bauhaus materials, newspapers, and illustrated magazines, as well as in the *bauhaus* magazine and avant-garde journals. Because of their efficacy in capturing Bauhaus design ideals, Moholy's photographs became compelling propaganda for the school. Her first series of Bauhaus Dessau photographs were exhibited at the official opening of the school in December 1926.⁶⁸ For the invitation cards sent out for the opening ceremony, Herbert Bayer used *Bauhausgebäude Dessau von Nordosten* (*Bauhaus Building Dessau from the Northeast*), 1926 (Figure 18), as the illustrating image.⁶⁹ During her time at the Bauhaus, Moholy was at the center of media imagery for the school, her images proving significant to the representation of the Bauhaus and the

⁶⁸ Madesani and Cavadini, *Lucia Moholy: Between Photography and Life*, 35.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

dissemination of its core principles. Over the course of this section, I wish to explore the role Moholy's photographs played as physical objects in the German cultural environment and their means of dissemination, paying particular attention to the postcard as a case study.

The distribution of Moholy's architecture photographs engaged in a long history of distribution and advertisement of architectural forms through photography. For many architects, artists, and members of the general public, architectural works were only known to them through publications and distributed images. If one could not travel to the physical site of the construction, one had to rely on secondary reproductions to learn about the building. Architectural photographs such as Moholy's thus served a crucial function in educating people about Bauhaus principles of architecture and Gropius's innovative designs. Photographs – “real” renderings of the built space – were the primary means by which people experienced modernist architecture, rather than through drawings, letters from those that visited, or personal trips. As Colomina observes in her seminal book *Privacy and Publicity*, the key point is not simply that these buildings were publicized largely through photographs, allowing those from afar to learn of them, but indeed that many architects were known *solely* through these photographic renderings of their constructions. As Colomina explains, “this presupposes a transformation of the site of architectural production – no longer exclusively located on the construction site, but more and more displaced into the rather immaterial sites of architectural publications, exhibitions, journals.”⁷⁰ These modernist spaces existed almost immediately in two-dimensional form and lived a full secondary life through published media. Furthermore,

⁷⁰ Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, 14.

Colomina argues, it was only through the media and the dissemination of imagery and information that modern architecture actually *became* modern.⁷¹ Following Colomina's argument, that architecture became modern by engaging with mechanical equipment for media needs (for example, photography), one could argue that a crucial factor in the Bauhaus being so decidedly modern is its representation through Moholy's photographs. For many, the Bauhaus would only have been experienced and known of through Moholy's photographs, particularly those distributed widely through small postcards.

The existence of numerous publications from the 1920s, including those by renowned architects such as Taut and Gropius, speaks to the crucial role architectural photography played in the dissemination of new ideologies and design principles. Examples include Arthur Korn's *Glas im Bau und als Gebrauchsgegenstand*, 1929, Gustav Adolf Platz's, *Die Baukunst der neuesten Zeit*, 1927, Taut's *Die neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, 1929, and Gropius's *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, 1930. The intimate involvement of architects in publicizing their own works through photography (most pertinent to this study Gropius's *Bauhausbauten Dessau*) underlines the central role assigned to the medium during this period. Such photographs were not always purely documentary in their rendering, as I have already argued on Moholy's behalf. In some of Moholy's images the functionality of the Bauhaus buildings entirely fades away. Not solely intended to detail the various rooms, facades, and buildings of the Bauhaus, these photographs are subjective, carefully framed to convey a specific meaning. Thus the photography of architecture took on a subjective slant in the disseminating of the architect's or building's message – these images not only recorded the building for

⁷¹ Ibid.

posterity but interpreted it as well, creating layers of meaning before the images reached a wider viewership.

Gropius's publication, *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, produced in 1930 as part of the Bauhaus Book series (number 12) and co-edited by László Moholy-Nagy and Moholy, draws heavily on Moholy's architecture photographs as a means of advertisement and dissemination of ideas. The publication is interesting, for Gropius prints Moholy's photographs (with a credit line) for their documentary function, sometimes pairing them with explanatory text detailing his architectural requirements and theoretical beliefs and at other times allowing them to stand alone as exemplars of his work. His use of the photographs, however, betrays his reliance on the dynamic and modernist approach taken by Moholy, as he utilizes her diverse range of photographs, taken from dramatically different perspectives, to illustrate how innovative and distinctive the Bauhaus construction was. It is only through pages of juxtaposed images by Moholy, depicting the soaring transparency and shimmering glass of the workshop façade, or the sharp, angular geometry of the studio wing, that Gropius can effectively impart his ideas to the reader.

This reliance on Moholy's distinctive perspective had already been demonstrated the year before, when Arthur Korn published his book *Glas im Bau und als Gebrauchsgegenstand* and printed multiple of Moholy's photographs, which he felt perfectly captured the power and benefits of glass in architecture. Those published included *Bauhausgebäude Dessau, Fachschule, Flur mit Durchblick auf Werkstattflügel, Brücke Flür* and *Bauhaus Werkstatt (Bauhaus Workshop)*, 1925–26 (Figure 44). Moholy's photographs were thus widely used at the time both as a means of educating people about the Bauhaus and, importantly, as definitive examples of the new modern

building materials. Korn considered Moholy's photographs to be the best illustrations of glass modernism in architecture for the Bauhaus; works that managed to capture through film the same spirit as that intended by the architect. Moholy's work was also used in the first publication of the Bauhaus to embody the school's message and impart it to visitors and readers. The first issue of the *bauhaus* magazine, edited by Gropius and Moholy-Nagy, was prepared as part of the opening celebrations of the Dessau Bauhaus, as a brief magazine that would be distributed to the many visitors who came for the grand opening. The title page of *bauhaus 1* displayed four photographs: the aerial Junkers photograph (Figure 45), a photograph by Moholy of the Bauhaus, and two ground plans demonstrating the siting of the school and the organization of the interior. Gropius's accompanying text was brief and to the point, addressing the technical elements of the school, but largely allowing the photographs to speak for themselves. It was not through long essays that the Bauhaus message would be interpreted, but rather through exemplary, definitive images of the school such as those by Moholy. The lack of text accompanying Moholy's photographs in *bauhaus 1* and *Bauhausbauten Dessau* speaks to the power of her images to convey the Bauhaus message without written support. It also reflects the contemporary trend towards promoting architectural sites through photobooks, an increasingly popular form of publication during the Weimar years. These books, inexpensive and easily accessible, as they relied on images rather than texts, were enormously popular across the social spectrum and served as a successful means of widely distributing the new architectural vision. Such books as those already discussed, including *Berlin* by von Bucovich, *100 x Berlin* by Willinger, and *Berlin in Pictures*, by Stone, visualized the new urban space, including images of new constructions like

Mossehaus, redesigned department stores, railways, and entertainment spaces alongside familiar sites such as the Brandenburg Gate, Berliner Dom, Opera House, and Unter den Linden. The heightened visibility of modern urban space and radical new structures fostered a culture sensitive to its own dynamic modernity and saturated with visual aids.

Of course, Moholy's photographs of the Bauhaus are necessarily *not* an experience of the Bauhaus architecture itself. The photographs, although attempting to impart a sense of Bauhaus modernist architecture cannot provide the actual three-dimensional, sculptural experience of these buildings as they were intended. Gropius understood the limitations of photography in capturing the essence of architecture, and explained in *Bauhausbauten Dessau* how he attempted to circumvent this problem in the book:

The medium of presenting architecture in a book is very limited. Photography is not able to reproduce the experience of space. The true mass ratios of a room or a building in relation to our established, absolute body size produce in front of the building itself exciting energies, which the minimized surface area of the picture is not able to reproduce at all. After all, mass and space are also the housing and background for the life which they serve – the movements which occur in them can only be represented in a figurative sense. I thought I could reproduce the essentials of these buildings, the order of their vital functions, and the spatial expression resulting from them, from all these foundations, only by passing the reader successively through numerous excerpts of the pictures, in order to enable him to see through this change of vision the illusion of the imaginary spatial sequence.⁷²

Moholy's photographs, combined serially, thus provide the essential sense of the Bauhaus. Depicting pristine, untouched spaces, and a wealth of both rational and unexpected views, the photographs would, Gropius hoped, piece together a sense of the

⁷² Gropius, *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, 11.

spatiality of the Bauhaus and project some three-dimensionality into the flat pages of the book.

In considering the role Moholy's images played in disseminating the ideology of the Bauhaus, it is worth addressing the series of printed postcards produced by the Bauhaus during the 1920s and the manner in which Moholy's postcards participated in the construction of canonic views of the school. From the time of their invention, postcards proved to be a highly effective means of rapid communication and dissemination of ideas. In fact, the first medium to mass-distribute photography was the postcard. Invented in 1869 in Austria-Hungary as a means of short-form written communication, the postcard was almost immediately embraced by countries throughout the world; Germany, Great Britain, and Switzerland adopted the form in 1870, followed by Norway, Belgium, Russia, the United States, Japan, and France in the subsequent three years.⁷³ Initially, postcards largely consisted of text, but soon drawings and images were added to the card. By the end of the nineteenth century, the entire front side of the postcard was image and the text became secondary, placed on the back of the card in a small area next to the address, in the same format we are familiar with today. Although postcards had started much earlier as drawn cards, by 1900 ninety percent of those produced were photographic.⁷⁴ The introduction of the Brownie line of cameras by Kodak in 1900 greatly advanced the popularity of photographic postcards, as these easy-to-operate cameras made accessible the printing of photographic postcards by relative amateurs. The 3A Folding Pocket Kodak, introduced in 1903, actually produced

⁷³ Clément Chérouz and Ute Eskildsen, eds., *The Stamp of Fantasy: The Visual Inventiveness of Photographic Postcards* (Winterthur: Fotomuseum Winterthur and Gottingen Steidl, 2007), 195.

⁷⁴ Zervigón, *Photography and Germany*, 65.

postcard-sized negatives, meaning that users could immediately print their images onto a postcard.⁷⁵ By the turn of the century, images of famous cities were printed on postcards and distributed globally. The postcard became a way of sharing famous architectural sites and monuments, a means of capturing a destination's most quintessential elements.

The popularity of the postcard was unprecedented, particularly in Germany, which led the world in number of postcards bought and mailed. In 1890, 314,296,000 postcards were sent through the mail; by 1913 this number was 1,792,824,900.⁷⁶

Analyzing this incredible phenomenon, the German Imperial Post Office observed that on average about 1.5 million postcards were sold every single day in 1902.⁷⁷ The vast scale of the postcard's adoption is crucial to keep in mind when thinking about the potential reach and audience for Bauhaus postcards. The postcard was a universal social and cultural phenomenon, wildly popular and highly effective in its alteration of the means of communication between people. As Richard Carline observes, the broad popularity of the postcard arose during a period of social and political unrest, as socio-economic boundaries became less rigid, women's suffrage came to the forefront, and socialist groups gained strength across Europe.⁷⁸ The postcard was a part of this cultural dialogue,

⁷⁵ Rachel Snow, "Correspondence Here: Real Photo Postcards and the Snapshot Aesthetic," in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, by David Prochaska and Jordana Mendelson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 42.

⁷⁶ See John Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (October 1980): 39 for future statistics.

⁷⁷ Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard." This phenomenon was not confined to Germany. The United States Post Office estimated that almost one billion postcards were sent in 1913 (See Robert Bodgan and Todd Weseloh, *Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People's Photography* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 2). That same year 1,504,860,312 postcards were sent in Japan and 903,180,000 in Great Britain (Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard," 39).

⁷⁸ Richard Carline, *Pictures in the Post: The Story of the Picture Postcard and Its Place in the History of Popular Art* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1959), 32.

serving as an easy form of propaganda and communication during a heady, uncertain time.

From the opening of the Dessau buildings, the Bauhaus seemed tapped into the wide popularity of the postcard and clearly saw its potential utility as a means of advertising and disseminating information about the school. As mentioned briefly above, for the invitation cards sent out in December 1926 promoting the opening of the Dessau school and inviting people to its celebrations, Herbert Bayer used Moholy's photograph *Bauhausgebäude Dessau von Nordosten*, 1926, as the illustrating image.⁷⁹ This was likely one of the first times Moholy's photographs were rendered in small, portable form and distributed widely as a means of advertisement. Over the next few years, the Bauhaus produced numerous small black and white postcards of art objects produced at the school, including Paul Klee's *bauhaus: feuerwind*, 1923, Gunta Stölzl's *wandbehang*, 1924, Josef Albers's *bauhaus: einscheiben-glasbild*, 1926, Lyonel Feininger's *stille tag am mere*, 1926, and Marianne Brandt's *bauhaus: beleuchtungskörper*, 1926. The overwhelming majority of the postcards printed, however, were the photographs of the Bauhaus taken by Moholy.

The production and distribution of these postcards by the Bauhaus, as the school purposely tapped into the broad popularity of the medium, demonstrates the active effort undertaken by Bauhaus staff to disseminate the new modernist principles. Moholy's photographs, and some by Erich Consemüller, were published in newspapers and magazines during the early years of the Dessau Bauhaus, in order to advertise the new school and spread its design principles widely. The adoption of the postcard was a further

⁷⁹ Madesani and Cavadini, *Lucia Moholy: Between Photography and Life*, 35.

step in this vein to encourage people to come visit the new site or, if that proved impossible, to engage with Bauhaus modernism remotely. Some years earlier Ise Gropius, in her diary, had revealed her concern about the isolation of the Fagus Factory and thus the relative difficulty of circulating Walter Gropius's ideas to a broader audience.⁸⁰ The question of how to reach a broad audience and spread the message of *Neues Bauen* was thus a central concern from the early days of Gropius's independent career. For modernist architecture to effect the change upon the environment that it so desired, it needed to be widely known and adopted. This was only possible through adamant advertisement and education. Ise and Walter Gropius thus launched a public advertising campaign to promote the new Dessau Bauhaus, relying heavily on Moholy and her photographs to do so. Ise Gropius's diary reveals the extent of this campaign. On November 26, 1926, before the official opening of the school, Gropius wrote: "we are getting more and more enquiries from the papers, we can't print enough photographs. frau moholy has far too much to do and is working night and day to produce all the photographs ordered from her."⁸¹ A month later, she noted: "23.12.1926: there seems to be no end to publications about the bauhaus..."⁸² By the new year, the unrelenting promotion of the school seemed to be paying off. On January 21st, 1927, Gropius wrote: "21.1.1927: there are so many publications about the Bauhaus that I'm sure we must make good money out of it."⁸³ Certainly, in terms of attracting visitors to the site, the promotion campaign had been wildly successful. Fritz Hesse, the mayor of Dessau during

⁸⁰ Walter Scheiffele, "'You Must Go There' – Contemporary Reactions," in *The Dessau Bauhaus Building 1926-1999*, by Margaret Kentgens-Craig (Basel; Berlin; Boston: Birkhäuser, 1998), 113.

⁸¹ Ise Gropius, *Tagebuch 1924 bis 1928*, typescript, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Quoted in *ibid.*, 115.

⁸² Ise Gropius, *Tagebuch 1924 bis 1928*. Quoted in *ibid.*

⁸³ Ise Gropius, *Tagebuch 1924 bis 1928*. Quoted in *ibid.*

the period and a great supporter of the Bauhaus, estimated that more than 20,000 people journeyed to the Dessau Bauhaus during the years 1927–30 to see the school for themselves.⁸⁴ The school worked hard to gain recognition globally and relied on visitor’s statements and newspaper articles to spread its message. Karel Teige declared the Bauhaus to be “a headquarters of modern design,” in the *Volksblatt für Anhalt* in 1930.⁸⁵ Moholy’s photographs were published in a special print edition of *Welt Spiegel* in 1926 (in which, it should be noted, the magazine gave her credit for the photographs), one of her images was published on the title page of the magazine *Blätter für Alle* in 1927, and her architecture photographs were further distributed in an article on the Dessau Bauhaus for a Japanese publication.⁸⁶

In being translated into the postcard format, Lucia Moholy’s photographs became altered, taking on both new aesthetic qualities and a new role. To some degree, as laid out above, this role was educational, a means of teaching the recipient (or purchaser) of the postcard about contemporary art and architecture. Moholy’s “postcard photos” became a means of promoting the Bauhaus message through quick, rapidly translatable postcard images. They also became the means by which people who would never see the Bauhaus in person could learn of it and see at least one perspective of it. Moholy’s photographs therefore played a significant role in opening up the world of the Bauhaus to a wider public and spawning enthusiasm for this radical example of *Neues Bauen*. Moholy’s photographs became the gatekeepers to a wider recognition of Gropius’s work.

⁸⁴ Fritz Hesse. Quoted in *ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁵ Karel Teige, 10 Jahre Bauhaus, in: *Volksblatt für Anhalt* (1930), Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, press cuttings from Dessau newspapers. Quoted in *ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

Moholy's postcard photographs were also social equalizers to a certain extent. Soon after its invention, the postcard had rapidly become an important leveler between classes because of its affordability and accessibility. The photo postcard was a popular form of communication amongst the working-classes and amongst illiterate segments of the population, in part because of its affordability and informality, but also because a photograph did not require literacy. Social groups that previously might not have found architectural and artistic innovations accessible could now purchase or receive an individual, personal photograph of the artwork. The postcard was a medium of popular art, intended for the mass consumer. It was cheap to purchase and acceptable to write an informal, less grammatically-structured note on the back. It was also delivered quickly, allowing one to write a brief, rapidly-crafted note to a friend or family member and drop it in the mail. The postcard was thus most popular with the lower middle- and working-classes and was, according to Fraser, "possibly the great vehicle for messages of the new urban proletariat."⁸⁷ The visual attraction of the postcard, one side of which was entirely taken up by an image, made it a popular form of communication. The Bauhaus postcards tapped into this emerging consumer culture of mass-produced, affordable goods to great effect. People across the social spectrum would learn of the Bauhaus through Moholy's postcard-sized photographs – the intended audience was not limited to artists and intellectuals, but tourists, locals, and people of all classes.

The Bauhaus was not the only artistic group to consider the postcard an ideal medium; in fact, it operated within a wider tendency of avant-garde artists to both collect and produce postcards. This area of interest had a relatively long history, with such artists

⁸⁷ Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard," 39.

as Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, and Hannah Höch amassing large postcard collections throughout their lives and travels. The Wiener Werkstätte produced artistic postcards, printing and painting directly onto postcards as miniature art objects in their own right. For many avant-garde artists, their postcard collections were a mode of personal curation, with notes, drawings, and observations written on the back of images collected. Dadaist artists such as Raoul Hausmann and Sophie Täuber-Arp produced collaged postcards that they sent to friends with personal messages. Moholy herself made constant use of the medium; surviving postcards sent by the artist to Hannah Höch – whom she tenderly nicknamed “Hö Hö” – demonstrate Moholy’s use of postcards both as communication and as a means of sharing ideas and images.⁸⁸ What began as personal communication between friends and family soon developed into a larger, more commercial enterprise, with such artists as the Bragaglia brothers producing postcards of their *Fotodinamica Futurista* series, their futurist “photodynamic” photographs, reproduced in postcard form. As Chérouz notes, Kurt Schwitters similarly rendered his Merz paintings and collages in postcard form, sending them to friends as collector’s items.⁸⁹ Chérouz also observes that Bauhaus students frequently sent personalized collage postcards to faculty members during the 1920s,⁹⁰ demonstrating the popularity of the medium at the school and its active presence in the mindset of both students and faculty members there.

In considering the impact of Moholy’s photographs in their postcard form, it is critically important to remember that Moholy did not capture her images with the intention of them being rendered in postcard form. These photographs were artworks first

⁸⁸ Postkarte von Lucia Moholy an Hannah Höch, October 5, 1923, Berlinische Galerie I.N. BG-HHC K 391/79.

⁸⁹ Chérouz and Eskildsen, *The Stamp of Fantasy: The Visual Inventiveness of Photographic Postcards*, 200.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

and foremost, and were later translated into the popular form of communication. This situation is entirely different from the numerous postcard photographers who worked in that specific market to produce real photo postcards. The secondary life taken on by the postcards made from her photographs was not a part of Moholy's original intention. One must attend, therefore, to the unavoidable changes rendered to the photograph when it is reduced to such a compact size. What is the impact of constricting Moholy's images thus? In *Bauhausneubau Dessau* (photograph 1925–26, postcard printing unknown date), one observes the iconic forms of the studio building, bridge corridor, and workshop rendered in 3 ½ x 5 ½ in. format. Naturally, the same dilemmas faced by the photographer when capturing architectural forms in a larger format arise here, namely the flattening out of the building's three-dimensional weight and the erasure of its physicality in built space. However, Moholy approached these issues when photographing with specific intentions for the sizing and format of her works. The scaling of her images, the perspectives chosen, and her careful consideration of light, were all done with the intention of conveying the monumentality and stunning impact of the Bauhaus in a particular format. In the (secondary) shrinking of the Bauhaus to the size of one's hand, inevitably the awe-inspiring scale of the space is lost to some degree. In these postcards, the same viewpoint seen in its original format now becomes an intimate view of Bauhaus space, as, for example, in *Bauhausneubau Dessau, Werkstättenbau* (photo 1925–26, postcard printed unknown date, Figure 46). Postcards are inherently private and personal in their format; capable of being held in one hand, they are intended for individual, close-hand viewing. Thus in *Werkstättenbau*, the viewer feels as though he or she is privy to a private glimpse of the Bauhaus, seen through the trees, empty of any other human trace,

and captured in that moment for the viewer to enjoy. The postcards continue to transmit the overarching modernist message of the Bauhaus, rendering the same geometric lines and rational spaces, and yet in this secondary life as postcards, Moholy's photographs undergo a subtle, but significant, change.

Returning to the physicality of the postcard and its life as an object in its own right, one must consider the manner in which it served as a means of collecting and of curating a personal collection, and the implication this has for Moholy's work. Postcards during the early twentieth century were purchased not simply for correspondence but also for personal collection, to draw into one's own possession a collection of one's favorite sites, artworks, and images of cities for personal reflection and consideration. There is a very real probability that Moholy's photographic postcards were also collected as signifiers of the Bauhaus. Through this action, they became collector's items and took on a secondary life not just as art object and as disseminator of Bauhaus meaning, but as archive and icon for personal study and reflection. To collect postcards of artworks (as many still do today), was an opportunity to take a miniature replica of the original artwork home, a means of experiencing some fraction of the original as often as one would like. It was a way, also, for an individual to amass a personalized art collection consisting of their interests. This reflects back on Moholy's images which, although used by Gropius as documentary examples of the new Bauhaus buildings, were collected as art objects through the reproductive postcard. Once collected, they entered the same personal museum collection as other art objects reproduced in two dimensions, underscoring their status as art.

In addressing this secondary postcard life of Moholy's photographs, it is also worth considering the relationship that developed between her images and the written text inscribed by the purchaser of the card. Initially conceived as an autonomous object, the postcard moves the photograph into a different realm of communication and meaning with the addition of text on its reverse side. The personal messages inscribed on the back of Moholy's images define the photographs within a specific setting and layer upon them a secondary narrative context. The postcard becomes, in Naomi Schor's words, "the perfectly reversible semiotic object, a virtual analogon of the sign."⁹¹ One side of the card imprints the pictorial moment, the other the textual. As Rachel Snow describes, the knowledge of the postcard as object, as conveyor of language and text, prompts the viewer/reader to turn over the image and look at its back. In so doing, "this act transforms our awareness of the photograph as an image into an awareness of the photograph as an image-object."⁹² Moholy's photographs become three dimensional through the postcard, as the viewer/reader turns the image over to read the text on the other side. The addition of personalized text, handwritten in ink, on the reverse of these images asserts the materiality of these objects as three dimensional, and further alters their function, siting them as recipients of inscribed meaning entirely separate to that of the image displayed.

Memorializing the Bauhaus

Postcards serve as aids to memory and as simulacrums, and Moholy's photographs printed on postcards entered into the important role of memorializing the

⁹¹ Naomi Schor, "Cartes Postales: Representing Paris 1900," in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, by David Prochaska and Jordana Mendelson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 21.

⁹² Snow, "Correspondence Here: Real Photo Postcards and the Snapshot Aesthetic," 51.

Bauhaus and permanently imprinting its spaces as seen in 1926 and 1927. Erich Lissner, who collected Bauhaus postcards during the Weimar period, called the objects “souvenirs of bygone times;”⁹³ the objects become rare glimpses into a world that no longer exists and that has been layered over by history in the intervening decades. These postcards stand as a connecting thread between “our experiences *in situ* and elsewhere, between a moment and its memory,” as Ellen Handy describes.⁹⁴ In considering this element of Moholy’s photographs, I wish to address their role in memorializing the Bauhaus and creating the school’s legacy. Robin Schuldenfrei has addressed at length the manner in which Moholy’s reputation and contribution was effaced by Walter Gropius in her essay “Images in Exile: Lucia Moholy’s Bauhaus Negatives and the Construction of the Bauhaus Legacy,” which argues that the significance of Moholy’s photographs was heightened in exile once Bauhaus artists were forced abroad by the rise of the Nazis.⁹⁵ Schuldenfrei asserts that “processes of meaning-formation for exiled artists of the Bauhaus were closely tied to the power involved in the ability to reproduce photographs, specifically Lucia Moholy’s photographs, and for the importance of the photograph as a stand-in for that which was no longer accessible or extant.”⁹⁶ With Schuldenfrei’s excellent foundation in place, I wish to address the manner in which Moholy’s images, published in Bauhaus scholarship since their creation through to the present day, have played a significant role in visualizing and defining Bauhaus architecture principles.

⁹³ Erich Lissner, “Around the Bauhaus in 1923,” in *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People*, by Eckhardt Neumann (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1993), 102.

⁹⁴ Ellen Handy, “Outward and Visible Signs: Postcards and the Art-Historical Canon,” in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, by David Prochaska and Jordana Mendelson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 126.

⁹⁵ 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): 182–203.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

Although Moholy's images are now credited, and have been for the past several decades, in the immediate post-World War Two period they were frequently published without her name or any acknowledgment of her artistry. The Bauhaus buildings were constructed to serve as ideals of modernist design, examples of a transformed environment to impact and shape modern society, and Moholy's images, in their innovative approach to architectural forms, perfectly captured and enhanced these Bauhaus principles.

Over the decades following the closing of the Bauhaus in Germany, the school has taken on a symbolic aura and has become a legendary part of the Modernist canon. The realities of the school have receded somewhat as the concept of a utopian, idealistic school striving to radically change art education in 1920s Weimar Germany has taken center stage in many historical readings. The Dessau Bauhaus building itself played an important part in this, as it stood (and still stands) as the totemic image of the school, the symbol of what it achieved and strove to do. It is without a doubt one of the icons of Modern architecture, a required reproduction in every survey text. It is exactly these reproductions that interest me, in considering how these definitive shots of the Bauhaus have become the canonical ones, returned to time and time again. The original canonical viewpoints of the Bauhaus are those taken by Lucia Moholy, those we have been studying in this chapter. Particularly in the years immediately following the dissolution of the Bauhaus, when the school was used as a local Nazi headquarters, Moholy's photographs served as the only means of return to the idealistic principles propounded by Bauhaus adherents. The buildings themselves were altered – the famous bauhaus logo removed and replaced by a swastika – and thus to see the school in its complete, original context required viewing Moholy's photographs. This continued to be the case for many

decades following the end of the war, when the buildings were used as barracks, meeting rooms, and clubs until finally the school was recognized as an important national landmark and returned to its historic shape in 1976 by the GDR government.

The weight of memory laden within Moholy's images therefore cannot be overstated. Frozen in time, her architecture photographs captured the perfect, utopian years in Dessau, effectively erasing the hard realities of the school's struggles throughout its tenure there. The images discussed throughout this chapter construct an idealized vision of Bauhaus practices and symbolize the pinnacle of Modernist teaching and thinking; they do not capture the lived experience of those who worked and studied there, the trials and tribulations of running the school, or indeed local grievances and hostility towards the Bauhaus program. The photographs are fundamentally idealistic rather than realistic. Themselves the embodiments of experimental modern architecture, Moholy's photographs become talismanic, to borrow Zervigón's wording;⁹⁷ they functioned both at the time and in contemporary space as emotive memorializations of an idealistic concept no longer in existence. These are images that stand for another age, a time when Germany was in the full throes of a hopeful reconstruction period – the “Golden Twenties,” an age of utopian possibilities. They embody ideals forged before the economic crash and the dark years of Nazi rule and the Second World War.

For those who participated in the Bauhaus experiment, either as a faculty member or student, the images also serve as a means of collective identity, a way back into the spirit of the school for those who lived through it and wished to recapture those memories. Moholy's photographs thus provide the means for an emotional connection

⁹⁷ Zervigón, *Photography and Germany*, 83.

with a lost space. Despite the closing of the Bauhaus, the photographs live on as permanent, perfect memories of the school for its former inhabitants to remember it by. The images are frozen in time, untouched by the realities and social and historical conditions, and thus provide an endlessly perfect memory for former Bauhäuslers. The space represented within Moholy's photographs becomes potent with meaning, and the affective impact of these images is formed by their history and what they signified to contemporary viewers.

Moholy's photographs were also used by the leaders of the Bauhaus to cement and memorialize the institution at the time of their creation. Her architecture images were initially commissioned both for educational purposes and to make permanent the achievements of the school in photographic space. Moholy herself was deeply involved in the act of memory preservation over the course of her career and understood its importance and the deep significance photographs could take on. As part of her later photography work in Yugoslavia and her role in the microfilm *Aslib* project, Moholy undertook projects of preserving and memorializing sites for collective memory. Her work across her career signaled a deep understanding of, and commitment to, recording and conserving memory. Moholy understood the powerful status buildings hold, as remnants of the past, as something eternal and assumed to outlive its builders, and appreciated the means by which memory becomes inscribed into buildings.

The role Moholy's images played in institutionalizing a symbolic Bauhaus image was advanced by the numerous publications which reprinted her photographs over the years. Gropius's *Bauhausbauten Dessau* was not only a form of education and advertisement at the time, but over the decades came to memorialize the Bauhaus

buildings through Moholy's photographs. Moholy herself spoke of the "great number of books, magazines, catalogues and other publications where photographs of mine have been reproduced,"⁹⁸ among them Korn's *Glas im Bau*, which served to christen Moholy's photographs as the defining exemplars of glass photographer, and Sigfried Giedion's book *Walter Gropius, Work and Teamwork*, published 1954, which displayed a Moholy photograph on its front cover. This memorialization through publications proved to be crucial for architectural historians following World War Two, as access to the Bauhaus was cut off and the buildings were badly damaged and then fell into disrepair. The only means by which to study the school was through Moholy's photographs that were reproduced in publications, rather than through firsthand experience. The effect of these publications and the prolific reproduction of Moholy's photographs across countless books is that her images have become coopted as background illustrations for Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus, and architectural history, no longer considered as artworks in their own right. Moholy's photographs have become the standard type used to represent the Bauhaus and have become commonplace images, even serving as the template for newer photographs which seek to capture the same perspectives as the originals. Across different texts, Moholy's photographs become synonymous with Bauhaus modernity, deeply resonant in this regard, and yet their individual status as art objects is largely ignored. So familiar as representations of the Bauhaus, the photographs are taken at face value and not considered for the complex way in which they interacted with contemporary cultural trends or entered into the artistic canon. My intention in this chapter has been to reintroduce Moholy's voice, her artistic intent, and photographic

⁹⁸ Lucia Moholy, "The Case of the Missing Negatives," *British Journal of Photography* 130, no. 6388 (January 7, 1983): 6.

direction into these images, and return them to their status as art objects, rather than documents. Moholy's architecture photographs signify multiple ideas and principles, and can be unpacked from widely varying angles, as I have attempted to demonstrate here. Dynamic modernist perspectives, contemporary advertisements, and symbolic encapsulations of the Bauhaus spirit, Moholy's architecture photographs are multifaceted entities that disclose layers of meaning within their printed space.

Chapter Two: New Womanhood in Weimar Germany

“What is the modern woman?
A charming *Bubikopf* – says the hairdressers
A model of depravity – says Aunt Klotilde
A complex of sexual problems – says the psychoanalyst
Comrade and soul friend – says the youth
Miserable housewife – says the reactionary
Expensive – says the bachelor
The best customer – says the stocking dealer
An unhappiness for my son – says the mother-in-law
The center of the sanitorium – says the doctor
The same, since the dawn of history – says the wise man”

- *Die Dame*¹

I. Introduction

In a photograph taken by Umbo in 1928–29 (Figure 47), unidentified Bauhaus students discuss work produced during the preliminary course taught by Josef Albers. Albers leans over to touch one of the sculpted forms on the ground, as seated and standing students watch his actions or study the other geometric forms scattered across the space of the classroom. While the photograph offers a view into pedagogical methods at the Bauhaus, it is also interesting for capturing offhandedly the modernity of the women in the class. Almost every woman in the photograph seems to be sporting the short, fashionable *bubikopf* haircut, and their attire reveals the significant changes to women’s fashion during this period, with all of them baring their lower legs in shortened skirts and dresses. The women in Umbo’s photograph bear the signifiers of the New Woman, a phenomenon that swept Germany during the Weimar era, rapidly changing the

¹ *Die Dame*, Heft 4 (erstes Novemberheft, 1925): 3.

aesthetic environment of 1920s German culture. The Bauhaus, as a bastion of modernist, liberal thinking, became an environment where women freely embraced varying aspects of New Womanhood. Lucia Moholy, positioned within this cultural space, was ideally located to reflect upon the personal responses to women's rapidly changing position within society through her artistic practice.

To comprehend fully Moholy's position as a successful female photographer and the significance of her portraits of women requires a consideration of female agency and the position of the New Woman during the Weimar years. In this chapter, therefore, I will spend considerable time addressing the complex phenomenon of the New Woman and the political, hypothetical, and realized freedoms women were promised with the advent of the Weimar Republic. I contextualize the rise of female photographers and the manner in which they interrupted the masculine space of photography to frame my discussion of Moholy's portraiture in Chapter Three. During a period in which women navigated a complex landscape of increasing freedoms and continued patriarchal resistance, I wish to consider the cultural agency of female artists and the manner in which they disrupted or participated in the dialogue surrounding women's rights and purpose. Drawing inspiration from Rita Felski's directive in her study *The Gender of Modernity* to give primacy to artistic works produced by women, instead of defining modernism through male experience, I choose in this and the following chapter to make central female photographic creativity during the Weimar period.² In doing so, one might assert female participation in the construction of the modernist aesthetic. Such an approach thus shifts our consideration of Weimar portraiture away from a privileging of such figures as

² Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10.

August Sander and Hugo Erfurth towards a more expansive acknowledgment of the diversity of female participation in the field of photography during these years.

II. New Womanhood and the Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic was defined by tumult, uncertainty, whirlwind dynamism, and “vertigo,”³ as it teetered between economic crisis and recovery, political revolution and repression, liberalism and traditionalism. Avant-garde artistic movements challenged aesthetic principles and social ideologies; political factions such as the Communists and proto-Fascists waged war, both in social debates and actual violent acts; and social reformers sought to decriminalize elements of the penal code that undermined minorities in society. The result, as Anton Kaes so aptly describes, was “a frantic kaleidoscopic shuffling of the fragments of a nascent modernity and the remnants of a persistent past.”⁴ “Equal parts utopian dream and civic nightmare,”⁵ the Weimar Republic became the stage for an explosion of experimentation and radical expression.

Perhaps the most visible, changeable, and conflicted point of focus during the Weimar Republic was the woman and her role in modern society. Furious debates ranged across many issues centralized around womanhood, including birth control, the woman’s role as mother, the *Neue Frau*, prostitution, and employment. The increasingly vocal advocacy for women’s rights from such groups as the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*

³ See Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe 1900-1914* (New York: Basic Books, 2008). Blom discusses at length how the years 1900-1914 were characterized by feelings of vertigo, anxiety, and exhilaration for those living in Europe.

⁴ Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p.xviii.

⁵ Claudia Bohn-Spector, “Introduction,” in *August Sander: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 5.

(*BDF, Association of German Women*) and *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (*SPD, German Social-Democratic Party*) amounted to a visible and concerted challenge to male authority, a challenge which had ramifications at both the state and private domestic levels. Women participated enthusiastically in the early Weimar years and took advantage of their newfound constitutional rights. Approximately eighty percent of eligible women voted in 1919, resulting in an incredible ten percent (forty-nine women) of the National Assembly constituting female delegates.⁶ Although this enthusiasm waned with the lack of progress made on behalf of women in the following years, in the nascent months of the Weimar Republic women participated in public and civic life to an unprecedented degree.

Women became increasingly visible in the workforce during these years as well. The First World War had brought numerous professional opportunities for women as more and more men were called to serve in the military. The war brought women into the public sphere as never before, not only through industrial labor but also in their roles in volunteer services and as nurses both at the front and in hospitals further removed from the conflict. As the new Weimar republic became established, and populations continued the trend of shifting towards major metropolitan areas, increasingly women took on roles deemed acceptable for their intellectual capabilities, particularly as secretaries and sales girls. The statistics demonstrate, however, that the percentage increase of women in the working population before and after the war was minimal – thirty-six percent compared to thirty-four percent before.⁷ In actuality, then, women were not flooding the workplace

⁶ Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women in Politics and Work," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*

and displacing men from their positions; their public presence was merely sensed more acutely, Bridenthal argues, because they were not welcomed by men and because the alarming rise in inflation and the Depression made the scant available jobs more competitive.⁸ Rather than women replacing men across work sectors, they simply appeared in more visible public roles, such as railway guards, mail women, and factory workers. Their greater appearance in public spaces “led to an increase in anxiety that women were presenting a direct challenge to already unstable hierarchies of male cultural authority.”⁹

In the cultural arena, previously censored ideas and lifestyles flourished during the Weimar years, despite areas of strong social resistance. Homosexuals, at least in Berlin, found greater acceptance and tolerance, and were able to socialize, publish literature, and advocate for their rights openly. A broad range of sexual interests and desires became increasingly accepted, and sexually explicit films, cabarets, literature, and songs became widely circulated and discussed. Magnus Hirschfeld, the sexologist and founder of the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee (WhK, Scientific-Humanitarian Committee)*, the first homosexual rights organization in the world, opened his *Institute for Sexual Science* in 1918 and dedicated its work to educating people about sexuality and providing medical assistance. The female experience, and the concept of “femininity,”

⁸ Ibid., 45. These authors elaborate on this point, explaining that in fact half of the working women in the Weimar Republic were employed in agriculture, and many of those women were peasant wives. The absence of men during World War One left many women to shoulder the burden of agricultural work alone. Thus factories in industrialized cities were not overrun by women; in reality only one-third of the factory workforce was female and many working women were to be found in the countryside. See pages 46-47 for more.

⁹ Dorothy Rowe, *Representing Berlin. Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 130.

became increasingly heterogeneous as discussions turned to gender and sexual identity in Weimar culture.

In this cultural space of heightened attunement to sexuality and female liberation, the female body became increasingly politicized, with concern about the increasing use of contraception and a declining birth rate leading to governmental intervention in intimate matters of family planning and sexual activity. Two prominent groups arose within the German Women's Movement: the BDF, which focused primarily on improving working conditions and educational opportunities for women, women's rights in marriage and divorce, and sexual hygiene, and the SPD, led by Clara Zetkin and emphatically committed to the proletarian, socialist advancement of women. While the BDF was less radical politically than the SPD, focusing on the heterosexual family unit, both organizations garnered widespread support as they vocally challenged the status quo for German women. While the Weimar Constitution had introduced new fundamental rights to women, including the right to education and female suffrage, it specifically regulated control over women's bodies, declaring abortion to be illegal (the contentious Paragraph 218) and restricting women's rights in marriage and divorce.¹⁰ Abortion became a central, and extremely controversial, issue of debate through the 1920s. For some women, childbearing represented a significant impediment to their career goals; for others, particularly working-class women with multiple children already, future births signified extreme economic hardship and unsustainable burdens. Despite its illegality, abortion became a prevalent, and often dangerous, action; Atina Grossmann attests that, on average, every German woman had at least two abortions during her lifetime, with

¹⁰ Ibid., 132.

projections for working-class women even higher.¹¹ German sex reformers and the SPD focused throughout the Weimar period, therefore, on enacting social legislation that reduced regulation of the female body.¹²

Within this roiling cauldron of political unrest, sex reform, and social advocacy, the New Woman emerged as a cultural phenomenon. Immediately detectable by her signature look – the bubikopf haircut, cigarettes, loose, sometimes androgynous clothing, athletic body type – the New Woman worked, smoked cigarettes, voted, practiced sex outside of marriage, took birth control, and drank. New Women were office girls, sales women, prostitutes, flappers, cabaret dancers, domestic workers, and mothers. Many participated in athletics, promoting a lean, sporty, healthy body. The economic possibilities in large cities were significant lures for young women, and their increased income and financial independence allowed them to participate in mass culture and entertainment, particularly locations like the cinema and dance halls. Irreverent and emancipated, the New Woman defied convention across different arenas: fashion,

¹¹ Atina Grossman, “The New Woman and the Rationalization of Sexuality in Weimar Germany,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 157. Grossman quotes the statistic of one million abortions annually by 1931, producing this average.

¹² The Sex Reform movement was a grassroots movement that gained momentum during the 1920s and focused on accessing birth control and providing medical information and assistance to working-class women. It championed sex education and outspokenly discussed a woman’s right to sexual satisfaction. It was not, however, an entirely liberal organization; despite championing aspects of New Womanhood, the movement also strongly adhered to the belief in marriage and motherhood, and advocated for women to be both professional successful and committed to the longevity of the institution of marriage. The hope was that in providing access to birth control and successful methods of reducing unwanted children, the sex reformers could preserve the sanctity of marriage and ensure the stability of the German family. The sex reform movement was also, it should be noted, committed to promoting heterosexual relationships and did not extend its sex education and medical services to the homosexual community. Atina Grossman observes that “the Weimar Sex Reform movement thus presents to us a “sexual revolution” in all its complexity and ambiguity: sexual satisfaction for women, but satisfaction proclaimed and defined mainly by men; the right to contraception and abortion, but only when “necessary”; active sexuality justified because it was healthy and potentially procreative; orgasm as a eugenic measure. The Sex Reform leagues recognized and encouraged female sexuality, but on male heterosexual terms – in defense of the family... women were never given the chance to define, envision, and experience their own sexuality – this, despite the fact that the movement prided itself on its humanity and progressivism.” (See Atina Grossmann, “The New Woman and the Rationalization of Sexuality in Weimar Germany,” 155).

athletics, social reform, sexuality, the workplace, and the media. She became both a beacon of liberalism and female independence, and a warning sign of the degeneration of modern society. Elsa Herrmann, in her essay “This is the New Woman,” published in 1929, declared:

The new woman has set herself the goal of proving in her work and deeds that the representatives of the female sex are not second-class persons existing only in dependence and obedience but are fully capable of satisfying the demands of their positions in life. The proof of her personal value and the proof of the value of her sex are therefore the maxims ruling the life of every single woman of our times, for the sake of herself and the sake of the whole...¹³

The glamorous lifestyle of the advertised New Woman, complete with new fashions, sleek, modern cars, and weekends by the seaside, was in reality only accessible to a small, wealthy elite; for the majority of working women, particularly those in the capital who aspired to this new ideal, the New Woman image was a fantasy that could only be mimicked through cheaper imitations, rather than realized. In a manner not unlike today’s glamour magazines, the New Woman image as espoused in magazines, journals, newspaper supplements, and advertisements was a compelling means of encouraging consumption amongst young, fashionable women. Women rapidly became representative of the new consumerist culture, mostly because a large proportion of them made household decisions regarding home goods, clothing, and food on behalf of themselves and the entire family. The image of the New Woman was both lauded and distorted – while women were depicted in new professional positions, working in office jobs or in factories, driving cars and flying airplanes, they were also objectified and beautified for

¹³ Elsa Herrmann, “This is the New Woman,” first published as *So ist die neue Frau* (Hellerau: Avalon Verlag, 1929), 32-43. Reprinted in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 207.

the sole purpose of selling glamour, makeup, and ideal beauty. As Maud Lavin observes, the messages sent about the New Woman were frequently contradictory, and “the new consumer culture positioned women as both commodities and customers.”¹⁴ Lavin declares the New Woman to be “a cumulative perception of female stereotypes,”¹⁵ and while I disagree that the New Woman existed only in this sense, the proliferation of female “types” that abounded during the 1920s is important to acknowledge as an aspect of Weimar female experience. In reality, there was no single “type” of Weimar New Woman, and those that self-identified with this new form of female expression and liberation did not necessarily adhere to the stylistic tropes defined above. Despite vast differences in the lived experiences of New Women, they were united in one sense: that of discarding traditional Wilhelmine values of womanhood and rejecting any standardized notion of women’s obligations in society. Being a woman no longer necessarily required running a domestic household and raising children.

The rise of the New Woman, in combination with increasing dispensable income for women, led to rapid change and diversity in the fashions and self-styling of women in the Weimar period. Androgyny in particular became popular and widely adopted, not only within the lesbian community, where it signaled a certain lifestyle and sexual identity, but also amongst young women and artists, who embraced the literal freedom the clothes provided their bodies and the metaphorical significance of adopting more “masculine” attire. Modern women’s fashions embraced more adaptable, comfortable clothing that could be worn on public transport and in office jobs. Corsets were

¹⁴ Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

abandoned and waistlines of dresses dropped to the hips, and some women began wearing trousers instead. Most dramatically (and controversially), hemlines on skirts and dresses rose, so that women bared their legs in public. Daring new fashions provided an opportunity for self-expression and a declaration of independence and individuality for women, who embraced the opportunity to wear a wide range of clothing styles not previously available.¹⁶

In the wake of World War One, there was a broader drive in the German population, among both men and women, to attain a new, healthy, strong body. This desire for a new physical type, as Erik Jensen outlines in *Body by Weimar*, encompassed a range of movements and interests, including vegetarianism, nudism, temperance, hiking, and athleticism.¹⁷ The desire to achieve the ideal healthy body led to a rising interest in professional athletes and in personal fitness regimes that allowed people to emulate their athletic heroes. Female tennis players in particular became a focal point for the athletic extreme of the New Woman, with their toned and muscular bodies, their professional drive, and their adoption of loose, revealing athletic clothes. Indeed, Jensen notes that female tennis players occupied a powerful position in the movement towards female liberation because they were both subversive in their dress and ambition but more feminine and genteel than, say, those women who participated in track and field.¹⁸ Tennis had long been a sport accepted and promoted by the upper and upper-middle classes, and

¹⁶ It is worth noting that although these new fashionable styles required the financial support of male-run businesses for success, many of the designers involved in the fashioning of the New Woman were in fact female; thus women were directly involved in their own self-fashioning, producing styles created for and by their own gender. Similarly, many of the fashion journalists and illustrators that triumphed these new styles in women's magazines were women. Women's fashion in Weimar Germany thus became a space in which women could actively participate in their own image and identity creation.

¹⁷ Erik N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

so professional female tennis players occupied a space both traditional and radically new. The popularity of female athletes led to a desire for a thin, muscular physique that reduced the more curved traits of the female body. The widespread interest in female tennis players is evidenced by Lotte Laserstein's painting *Tennis Player*, 1929 (Figure 48), which depicts a female tennis player resting and observing a match in which another woman participates. While the painting does not depict the athletic female in action, it does highlight the aesthetic of this type of New Woman, with her short, "mannish" haircut and loose, fashionable clothing that reveals her legs. Drawing on numerous contemporary advertisements and posters for female athletes, here Laserstein depicts New Womanhood from her own perspective, presenting an image of a tanned, fashionable *garçonne* participating in an immensely popular sport.

The popularity of the bubikopf hairstyle, short, daring fashions, and loose, unstructured clothing prompted, unsurprisingly, a strongly negative reaction from some contemporary observers. In an article titled "Enough is Enough! Against the Masculinization of Women," published in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* in March 1925, the (male) author rails against the current fashions and the negative impact on male sensibilities:

What started as a playful game in women's fashion is gradually becoming a distressing aberration. At first it was like a charming novelty: that gentle, delicate women cut their long tresses and bobbed their hair; that the dresses they wore hung down in an almost perfectly straight line, denying the contours of the female body, the curve of the hips; that they shortened their skirts, exposing their slender legs up to calf level...But the male sensibility began to take offense at this as the fashion that was so becoming to young girls and their delicate figures was adopted by all women. It did an aesthetic disservice to stately and full-figured women. But the trend went even further; women no longer

wanted to appear asexual; rather fashion was increasingly calculated to make women's outward appearance more masculine.¹⁹

The author continues:

And we observe more often now that the bobbed haircut with its curls is disappearing, to be replaced by the modern, masculine hairstyle: sleek and brushed straight back. The new fashion in women's coats is also decidedly masculine: it would scarcely be noticed this spring if a woman absentmindedly put on her husband's coat...It is high time that sound male judgment take a stand against these odious fashions, the excesses of which have been transplanted here from America. In the theater we might enjoy, one time, seeing an actress playing a man's part if she is suitable for the role; but not every woman should venture to display herself in pants and shorts, be it on stage or at sporting events. And the masculinization of the female face replaces its natural allure with, at best, an unnatural one: the look of a sickeningly sweet boy is detested by every real boy or man.²⁰

Women's fashions became the central advertising focus of department stores, with their brilliantly lit window displays promoting the latest styles and consumer goods for women.²¹ But, as Mila Ganeva notes, fashion was not simply a manipulative device to promote sales; "it also emerged as a powerful medium for the autonomous self-expression of women."²² Fashion was a powerful mode of self-expression and self-identity, helping to "shape a public sphere within which the female practitioners were transformed from objects of male voyeurism into active subjects of the complex, ambivalent, and constantly shifting experience of metropolitan modernity."²³

¹⁹ "Enough is Enough! Against the Masculinization of Women," first published as "Nun aber genug! Gegen die Vermännlichung der Frau," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (March 29, 1925), 389. Reprinted in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 659.

²⁰ "Enough is Enough!" in *ibid.*

²¹ Mila Ganeva observes that 25% of the average income in Weimar Germany was spent on clothing. See Mila Ganeva, *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918-1933* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

²³ *Ibid.*

The highly visible New Woman figure, combined with a perceived increase in women in the workplace, female emancipation, the call for abortion rights, and sexuality outside the constraints of marriage, resulted in a crisis of masculinity and threatened male authority during the Weimar years. Male anxieties proliferated regarding the upsetting of the traditional balance between men and women, with women being perceived to be carving out too much independence and pursuing opportunities outside of the family home. This anxiety was triggered furthermore by the complete destabilization of the German social, economic, and governmental system following the collapse of the Wilhelmine Empire and the dire consequences stemming from the loss of the First World War. Conservative factions of men were fearful of the new, of this uncertain modern world in which mechanization was changing the role of workers and women were gaining increasing prominence and power in society. The New Woman, the ultimate symbol of the threat to the German social order, was seen as a peril to the stability of the traditional family, and thus to German society as a whole. The decline in the birthrate and the increasing occurrence of illegal abortions fostered grave concern amongst conservative forces in society, who blamed the young generation of “new women,” with their working lifestyles, disinclination to marry young, and desire to achieve success professionally, for this social crisis. Women’s desires to experience independence before settling into marriage and to earn their own income was particularly concerning in the wake of World War One, when a traumatized and depleted male citizenry demanded the stability and comfort of the traditional family home to repopulate and restore order to the country.

The crisis felt by men was further exacerbated by the very public documentation of the “third sex” – homosexuals – by Magnus Hirschfeld.²⁴ Hirschfeld’s work to integrate the gay community into the norms of Weimar culture partially dismantled the strict gender binaries and social divisions that had existed in German society for decades. Alongside the increasing popularity of androgyny amongst New Women, and the use of androgyny by the lesbian community as a signifier of their sexual identity, came a blurring of masculine and feminine, undermining the stability of gender norms and creating a perceived threat to those members of the community staunchly traditionalist in their gender perception.²⁵

The heated debate surrounding Weimar womanhood found expression in visual and textual manifestations, from artists depicting the *neue Frau*, *Lustmord*, and prostitution, to the capital city itself being evocatively described as the “Whore of Babylon.” Berlin, the center of Weimar modernity, decadence, dissolution, and radicalness, became “conflated with an image of a sexually voracious devouring female who comes to symbolize the city’s modernity.”²⁶ Berlin became the simultaneous symbol of degeneration and sexual fascination, a city that offered everything and that everyone should experience once – *jemand einmal in Berlin*, as the contemporary slogan declared. For young, independent, professional women, large, increasingly liberal cities such as Berlin offered opportunities for professional and personal growth unlike anything they had previously experienced. For staunch traditionalists, such as the readers of the extreme

²⁴ Richard W McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity”* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 5.

²⁵ Richard McCormick calls this threat and rising male anxiety “a discourse of castration,” as men grappled with the loss of control over women in a social and sexual sense, and blamed women for the perceived crisis of masculinity following the war and the end of the Wilhelmine monarchy. See McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality*, 21.

²⁶ Rowe, *Representing Berlin. Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany*, 1.

right-wing newspaper, *Der Völkischer Beobachter* (*The People's Observer*), Berlin was instead “a melting pot of everything that is evil – prostitution, drinking houses, cinemas, Marxism, Jews, strippers, Negroes, dancing and all the vile off-shoots of modern art.”²⁷

The identification of Berlin as Whore was reflected in the conflation of the New Woman with the prostitute by contemporary men anxious about the increasing presence of women in the public sphere. The proliferation and visibility of prostitutes on the streets of Berlin, already depicted by artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner before the war, added to the concern regarding the morality of womanhood in Weimar Germany. This fascination with, and fear of, the prostitute and the sexualized young woman found visual outlet in countless artistic renderings of prostitutes and “loose” women during these years.

III. Fighting Against the Grain: Dueling Depictions of Women in Weimar Germany

In considering Lucia Moholy's depiction of women in the Weimar Republic, it is critical to address the broader artistic rendering of womanhood by her contemporaries that constructed a public narrative around the New Woman. “Femininity,” so much debated and changing in its conception during these years, was placed visually under the microscope as well, with many male artists in particular revealing their anxieties about the current state of womanhood in Weimar society. The varied renderings of the female form by such artists as Otto Dix, George Grosz, Christian Schad, and Hans Bellmer reveal, to use Patrice Petro's words, “a male desire that simultaneously elevates and

²⁷ *Der Völkischer Beobachter*, 1928, quoted in *ibid.*, 138.

represses woman as object of allure and as harbinger of danger.”²⁸ This simultaneous allure and revulsion of modern womanhood was seen, as previously mentioned, in the routine description of Berlin as “Whore of Babylon,” but also in a plethora of paintings, drawings, and photographs of prostitutes, lustmord (sex murder) scenes, and mutilated female bodies. The visual assault on the female form undertaken by some male artists, the violence and debasement of these paintings, drawings, and photographs, need to be addressed for the manner in which they fomented a language of danger and violation for women. In many of these works, women are reduced to their (perceived) essential function as vessels for sexual pleasure and reproduction.²⁹ Eroticized, sexualized, or debased in lustmord and prostitution scenes, the woman becomes stripped of her individual character, her value as a fellow human being, and becomes generalized as an object of male desire or repulsion. In comparing these images with those to be discussed later by Moholy, Irene Bayer, Marianne Brandt, and others, one gains a better understanding of the visual landscape into which these women interjected their own understandings of the New Woman.

One of the most prolific personas rendered artistically in these years was that of the femme fatale, “a psychic projection of male subjectivity in crisis,” as Barbara Hales describes her.³⁰ A sexualized figure, the femme fatale as a type bore traces of the trauma and fear of World War One, embodying unseen dangers and the dissolution of a beaten country. As Hales explains, the psychological trauma of the war rooted in the male mind,

²⁸ Patrice Petro, “Perceptions of Difference: Woman as Spectator and Spectacle,” in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 42.

²⁹ Carmen Finnan, “Between Challenge and Conformity – Yva’s Photographic Career and Oeuvre,” in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic* (Würzburg: Könishausen & Neumann, 2006), 130.

³⁰ Barbara Hales, “Projecting Trauma: The Femme Fatale in Weimar and Hollywood Film Noir,” *Women in German Yearbook* 23 (2007): 225.

in those that had served and witnessed unspeakable horrors, emerged as a crisis of masculinity in the early Weimar years.³¹ Women, who had gained increased public visibility, won emancipation, and seemed increasingly independent and individually minded, were easy targets for male anxieties in this postwar period. The femme fatale was one manifestation of these anxieties, a woman both alluring and extremely dangerous who preyed on men, overpowering and emasculating them. The popular press was filled with weekly stories about female criminals and libidinous praying mantises, fomenting further anxieties about the uncontrollable danger of the independent woman. The destructive power of female sexuality was rendered in the cinema as well, perhaps most famously embodied in Maria's character in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, 1927. The real Maria, a caring, motherly figure who attracts the admiration of the young Freder, is doubled and replaced by a robot version of herself, who flaunts her sexuality and uses it, ultimately, to bring about the ruin of the workers' underground city beneath Metropolis. The city is only saved by repressing this sexual female, who is destroyed and replaced once more by the maternal Maria. The subtext of the story is obvious, and the controlling of female sexual desire and power is clearly fundamental to the success of the protagonists.

The fear of the sexualized woman spilled over into other contemporary female types. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the masculinization of the New Woman, her adoption of androgynous dress and "male" modes of behavior, promoted anxiety on the part of both conservative men and women, who felt that this masculinization eroded the true femininity of womanhood. "Woman wants social equality with man, she wants his

³¹ Ibid., 226.

abilities and powers, wants to dictate like he does, and possibly replace him,” the painter and writer Georg von der Vring warned.³² Apart from the final element of von der Vring’s panicked warning, this was of course true, but while it was seen as a positive goal for female liberation and advancement by the more liberal elements of society, for many, particularly more conservative men, it was seen as a disturbing threat to patriarchal society and the entire structural system of Weimar culture. The threat of masculinization, of the “Mannsweib” (“mannish woman”), was directly linked to women’s sexuality in a different way than the *femme fatale*. In this new manifestation of womanhood, women seemed less concerned with appearing feminine and attractive to prospective male partners in a traditional sense; their reconfiguration of what sexuality meant for them individually seemed (worryingly) to ignore what men desired. Paul Poiret, writing for *Der Querschnitt (The Cross Section)* in 1927, declared, “Enough with women made of cardboard, the emaciated forms, the pointed shoulders, bosoms without breasts. [...] I see women who are ‘women,’ [...] happy and proud mothers, cheerful wives.”³³ The “Mannsweib” not only envisioned her sexuality based on her own desires and interests; she also promoted (threatened) an independent lifestyle not necessarily based on the bearing of children and supporting of the domestic space.

Contemporary debates and anxieties about the New Woman were addressed at length by many artists loosely grouped under the umbrella term of *Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity)*. *Neue Sachlichkeit* itself was, as Richard McCormick observes, “explicitly, indeed defensively *masculine*,”³⁴ its cool, rational aesthetic dedicated to

³² George von der Brung, “Offensive der Frau,” quoted in *ibid.*, 234.

³³ Paul Poiret, quoted in *ibid.*

³⁴ McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity,”* 47 (emphasis in original).

visualizing the modern experiences through the perspective of the man. Many of the paintings and drawings by such artists as Christian Schad and Otto Dix de-eroticized the female body, purposefully rendering the female form, even in traditionally sexual situations, as somehow disturbing, contaminated, or unusual. Dix frequently depicted the popular and controversial nightclub scene in Berlin, spaces that were denigrated for their sexual licentiousness and dissoluteness but simultaneously enormously popular for their spreading of American culture (through jazz and dance groups like the Tiller Girls) and the freedom they allowed people to release their inhibitions. In *Metropolis (Großstadt)*, 1927–28 (Figure 49), for example, Dix presents a triptych encapsulating aspects of modern city life. In the center panel, a fashionably-dressed young couple dance to the lively jazz band depicted on the left-hand side. Spectators, rendered in varying brilliant and garish hues, look on and complete this scene of an energetic Weimar dance hall. Susan Funkenstein argues that the central panel of *Metropolis* highlights the centrality of the New Woman in Weimar culture, as Dix depicts fashionable, liberated women participating in an aspect of public life not previously available to them.³⁵ These lavishly dressed women, some apparently unescorted, some smoking, their short bobbed haircuts visible, embody the ideal lifestyle of the New Woman. Funkenstein reads these women, however, as exaggerated caricatures of the New Woman type, articulated by Dix as a means of critiquing and considering her meaning and function in society.³⁶ Funkenstein points to the relative corpulence of the woman dancing and the fact that she does not quite embody the ideal type of the New Woman, despite her fashionable

³⁵ Susan Laikin Funkenstein, “Fashionable Dancing: Gender, The Charleston, and German Identity in Otto Dix’s *Metropolis*,” *German Studies Review* 28, no. 1 (February 2005): 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

clothing. She is heavy-set, her bright orange hair short but not in the bubikopf style, her dancing slightly awkward. The woman watching her dance, directly to her right, is the right build and look for the New Woman but is garishly dressed, not quite able to achieve the fantasy promoted in the mass media.³⁷ Meanwhile, the two panels framing the central scene tell a markedly different story. Here, the accepted garish dress in the central panel becomes lewd and repulsive, with heavily made-up prostitutes flaunting their bodies at a crippled war veteran. The juxtaposition of these scenes asserts the uncertain position of women in Weimar society; on the one hand, one views women desperately attempting to live the new ideal lifestyle, and on the other Dix bares the underbelly of Weimar society.

These artists captured an environment that was both compelling and repellent. As Hans Sahl, a Weimar journalist, explained in his memoirs:

Many people now think that living in Berlin in the 1920s must have been an enviable slice of luck. But we must not forget that in Weimar Germany, with Berlin as its artistic capital, it was not just the spirit of the century that took shape, but also its downfall...I experienced that time as provisional, as something unreal. Germany had lost a war and almost sleepwalked into a republic for which it wasn't prepared...It was a time of great misery, with legless war veterans riding the sidewalks on rolling planks, in a nation that seemed to consist of nothing but beggars, whores, invalids, and fat-necked speculators.³⁸

Dix, who frequently produced portraits of well-known cultural and political figures as part of his critical gaze upon the repellent/compelling Weimar world, turned his gaze to women for many of his paintings. In his portrait of Sylvia von Harden from 1926 (Figure 50), Dix captures the journalist in her self-fashioning as a New Woman: here is the familiar bubikopf haircut, the makeup, short dress, cigarette, and placement within a

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hans Sahl, quoted in Ian Buruma, "Weimar Faces," *New York Review of Books* 53, no. 17 (November 2, 2006): 14.

public space, unchaperoned and drinking. Yet as he was often wont to do, Dix turns his cynical gaze upon this figure, caricaturing von Harden's androgynous new womanhood. Her makeup is garish, too white and death-like, her stockings slip embarrassingly down her leg, her hands splayed across her thigh and resting uncomfortably against the chair back somehow awkward and ungainly. Von Harden's expression is unreadable, she is lost in her thoughts, but Dix's rendering of her facial features is unflattering and somewhat distorted. There is something unnatural about von Harden in this scene; Dix suggests that her adoption of modern, androgynous fashions might be a charade rather than a natural impulse. Meanwhile, Dix takes an entirely different approach in his portrait of the infamous dancer Anita Berber, 1925 (Figure 51). In this painting, Dix renders Berber in a striking, powerful red dress set against a dark red background, the curve-hugging liquidity of her dress a nod to her profession as a dancer. Berber is poised and in control, hand self-assuredly posed upon her hip, mouth pursed as she gazes to the left of the canvas frame. Berber was a figure of popular infamy, living her life decadently, with copious drug use and lovers, and a wild, enthusiastic embrace of the seedy nightlife of Weimar decadence. Here Dix captures her iconic status and her power as a notorious woman in the public eye, providing even greater visibility to a woman who enthusiastically lived outside the mainstream of conservative values.

Prostitutes and *Lustmord*

Prostitutes were a continued source of artistic material for artists like Dix, Grosz, Max Beckmann, and Schad during the 1920s. Their ubiquity on the streets of major cities following the First World War, a ubiquity equaled only by unemployed, wounded war veterans, made them an unwitting symbol of the debasement of German society

following its defeat at the hands of the Allies. The prostitute, “the living symbol of desire and corruption, of a world where feelings are faked for the right price,” became a source of disgusted fascination for these artists. For Ian Buruma, rendering these disturbing sexual figures visually served as a means for these artists of “coming back from the dead,” of coming to terms with the horrors of the war and fixating this horror into the figure of the prostitute.³⁹ The prostitute “signified the fears and desires of the male subject faced with the commodification, urbanization and alienation of modernity.”⁴⁰ She could be read as a misogynist reaction to female sexual liberation, but also as a critical commentary on the miseries and opportunities (or lack thereof) for poor, struggling Weimar citizens in the immediate post-war period. While one should avoid categorizing all of Dix’s, Grosz’s, and Schad’s depictions of prostitutes as signs of their own masculinist crisis, given their commitment to nuanced critiques of Weimar society, it is worth noting that the prostitutes in their works are types, are always the “Other,” figures that do not tell their own story or perspective.

Few female artists represented prostitutes, in large part because of a lack of exposure to that world and the social constraints of what was appropriate. Those who did, however, rendered the prostitute in a completely different manner, perhaps partly because the sexual transaction inherent in the relationship between male customer and female prostitute did not exist. Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler and Jeanne Mammen are two artists whose interventions into the depiction of prostitutes offer an alternative view from a female perspective. In her watercolor, *Lissy*, 1931 (Figure 52), for example, Lohse-

³⁹ Both quotes *ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰ Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren’t Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 27.

Wächtler presents a far more sympathetic and human rendering of a Weimar prostitute than any painted by the male artists mentioned previously. Unlike in so many of Dix's and Grosz's paintings, in which the prostitute's gaze is directed towards potential customers or away from the viewer's stare, Lissy confronts the viewer's gaze straight on, with an expression that exudes both confidence and wary self-containment. Lissy appropriates the male gaze, challenging the viewer to acknowledge her as an actual human being, rather than a sexual commodity. Her clothing, too, differs greatly from the women rendered garishly or in dishabille in such works as *Prostitute*, 1923, *Three Prostitutes on the Street*, 1925, and *Dedicated to Sadists*, 1922, all by Dix. Wearing a simple, form-fitting, vibrant red dress, Lissy announces her profession but bares only her left arm for our visual consumption. She shows no interest in the men behind her, who are rendered in fleeting brushstrokes and dark blues to contrast her form; they, too, appear deep in conversation and do not participate in the usual male sexualization of the female form. Britany Salsbury argues that Lohse-Wächtler's watercolor reveals the artist's consideration for, and understanding of, disenfranchised women, and reflects her own experience working within a sometimes misogynistic male environment.⁴¹ Lohse-Wächtler herself embraced elements of New Womanhood, adopting the bubikopf haircut, smoking a pipe, dressing in loose, corsetless clothing, adopting the moniker "Nikolaus," and engaging socially with radical groups (she was a member of the *Spartakusbund* [*Spartacus Group*] in Dresden, of which Otto Dix was also a member).⁴² Lohse-Wächtler's artistic circle was one known for its macho, sometimes misogynist attitude to

⁴¹ Britany L. Salsbury, "Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler: A Feminist View of Weimar Culture," *Woman's Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2008): 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 25.

women; thus a painting like *Lissy* can be read, Salsbury argues, as an empowering feminist stance against the more common objectification of female sex workers.⁴³

Jeanne Mammen, a successful illustrator and painter whose works were published in such magazines as *Die Dame*, *Uhu*, and *Simplicissimus*, similarly engaged with strong female figures and the prostitute in a manner outside of the mainstream. She focused on the female figure as a source of sexual power, rebelliousness, and independence, and highlighted not only the Berlin subculture of prostitution and nightlife, but also the lesbian scene. In her watercolor, *Berlin Street Scene* (Figure 53), published in October 1929 in the magazine *Ulk*, Mammen renders Berlin at night, crowded, lively, and filled with women of different social backgrounds. Mammen purposely renders the scene ambiguous, presenting self-assured, confident women who occupy an unknown social position: is the woman at the far right, for example, a prostitute? Jill Suzanne Smith labels this woman a “Berlin coquette,” a woman “irreverent, urbane” and playful.⁴⁴ Her sexual availability is ambivalent, and this is intentional on Mammen’s part; the artist demonstrates the fluidity of sexuality, desire, and accessibility in the heady Weimar years in Berlin. Further back in the scene, in the center middle-ground, two women appear to be in dialogue with two men. As Smith observes, this interaction is also left ambiguous. Is this a negotiation between prostitutes and potential customers, or something less illicit – a chance meeting and flirtation on the street, for example?⁴⁵ While one of the women’s body language suggests resignation or submission, the woman directly behind her tilts her chin up at the men with whom she converses, exuding power and control over the

⁴³ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁴ Jill Suzanne Smith, *Berlin Coquette: Prostitution and the New German Woman, 1890-1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

situation. If these women are prostitutes, Smith observes, then this woman “is certainly a self-conscious commodity.”⁴⁶ Mammen presents this busy Berlin scene nonjudgmentally, providing a more positive view of female sexuality in the Weimar years.

While Dix, Schad, Grosz, and others depicted the prostitute in numerous paintings and drawings that utilized the sex worker as a means to critique German society and complicate female advancement, it is in the plethora of *lustmord* (sex murder) paintings, drawings, and watercolors that one witnesses a truly disturbing vision of the female body during these years. The sheer number of these works produced, in which a mutilated, murdered female body lies bared for the viewer’s consumption, the victim of a man’s murderous sexual violence, reveals a disturbing undercurrent to contemporary discussions around women’s rights and the role of women in Weimar society. Multiple works by Otto Dix, including *Lustmord (Sex Murder)*, 1922 (painting), *Scene II (Murder)*, 1922 (Figure 2), and *Lustmord*, 1922 (etching) (Figure 3), illustrate Dix’s visions of extreme violence against women. In these images, the viewer is presented with shocking, graphic depictions of slaughtered women rendered unrecognizable through the violence enacted upon their bodies. The gruesome details of these sexual horrors, exacerbated through pools of blood and disfigured genitals, produce deeply disturbing images that concentrate all attention on brutality against the female form. The extreme violence of these scenes is hard to take in, and one cannot help but analyze the artistic vision that produced such fantasies. This point becomes particularly relevant when one notes that Dix self-identified as a sex murderer in his life-size painting *Der Lustmörder (Selbstporträt) (The Sex Murderer, Self Portrait)*, 1920 (Figure 4), a work in which Dix

⁴⁶ Ibid.

depicts himself in the act of dismembering a woman in a graphic and extremely violent manner. Dressed in a fashionable suit, with a menacing, leering grin upon his face, Dix clutches a bloody knife in one hand and the dismembered leg of a woman in his other, as around him body parts seem to fly through the air, spurting blood across the scene. Dix doubly emphasized his signature as sex murderer in this painting not only by giving the murderer his face, but also by printing his hands in red paint (blood) across the canvas, literally imprinting his handiwork onto the mutilated woman. When explaining his vision to a horrified friend, Dix declared, “I had to get it out of me – that was all!”⁴⁷ describing this vision of violent sexual destruction against the female body as an impulse that existed within him.

George Grosz, who, like Dix, placed himself into the mind of the sex murderer, once posing as Jack the Ripper for a photograph,⁴⁸ took a repeatedly misogynist position towards women. He was unsupportive of the women’s movement and focused on the female sex as degenerate, sexually available and repulsive, and the receiver of repeated male brutality.⁴⁹ His painting, *John der Frauenmörder (John the Murderer of Women)*, 1918 (Figure 5), encapsulates the menace to women posed by violent men. Here a young woman lying on a bed is almost decapitated, her eye a dark bruise and her right arm completely dismembered. She seems to be suspended in mid-air on the bed, the spatial organization of the scene illogical and warped, so that she hovers above the murderer slouching from the room. The scene is one of revulsion, the woman’s corpse, although

⁴⁷ Otto Dix, quoted in Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ Grosz, in a letter to his brother-in-law Otto Schmalhausen in 1918, wrote: “Between the two of us: I could give a shit about depth in women. Usually that means that they suffer from a repulsive excess of male characteristics – angularity and thighlessness; in this matter I am in agreement with Kerr (the critic): “I’m the only one with a mind.” Quoted in *ibid.*, 103.

relatively intact compared to Dix's paintings on the same theme, is blocky, disjointed, and unsexual. Here woman has been repressed, silenced by man, her identity reduced to a disturbing, fragmented corpse. Such distressing scenes of sexual violence against women were relatively common amongst male artists in this circle; other examples include Rudolf Schlichter's *Lustmord*, 1924, Heinrich Maria Davringhausen's *The Sex Murderer*, 1917, and Max Beckmann's *Martyrdom*, 1919, which, although depicting the (non-sexual) death of the esteemed political activist Rosa Luxemburg, renders the scene with overtly brutal sexual tones.

These lustmord scenes, as Maria Tatar observes in her penetrative study *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, were part of a "modernist project that aestheticizes violence and turns the mutilated female body into an object of fascination and dread, riveting in its display of disfiguring violence yet also repugnant in the detail of its morbid carnality."⁵⁰ Representing lustmord provided a means of controlling male sexual and social anxieties by rendering physical violence upon the female body. The specific violence enacted upon the female body in these scenes, usually focused upon the mutilation or obliteration of the female sex organs, symbolically strips the woman of her biological power, her ability to create life. The mutilation of the female body also speaks to a punishment of bodies that remained unmarred by the war, and a desire to wreak havoc and dismemberment upon the female population in a manner akin to that experienced by the male body. These images by Dix, Grosz, and others are fantasies of sexual assault, reducing women to vulnerable targets upon which male cruelties and sexual fantasies can be enacted. "Cut, mutilated, fragmented, dismembered, and maimed,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

the female body is put on display as an icon of cultural crisis and as the site of transcendent artistic experience.”⁵¹ Ultimately, as in rape fantasies, these lustmord visions represented male desire for power and domination over the female body, rather than necessarily the sexual act itself. This masculine domination over the female body was, as Tatar observes, a crucial element of Weimar aesthetic modernism in general.⁵² Sexual murder became the punishment for women attempting to break free of the traditional hierarchy of Wilhelmine society and embrace the changes promised by the new Weimar order. Such violent visions had artistic outlets in other mediums as well; McCormick references, for example, Alfred Döblin’s novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 1929, in which the protagonist, Franz Biberkopf, finds rejuvenation following a period in jail for murdering a woman by raping the sister of his victim.⁵³ All of these violent scenarios were also tinged with a sense, somehow, of women’s complicity in their own murders; that these women were somehow deserving of their violent ends, because of their profession as prostitutes or because of their desire for independence, is an underlying element to these works.⁵⁴ Furthermore, these images always place the man in a position of violent power. They are never depicted pre-murder, from the scared perspective of the woman. These images are emphatically not objective considerations of a contemporary cultural phenomenon; they are the positioning and emphasis of masculine physical power against the defenseless female sex.

The distortion and fragmentation of the female body seen across these images manifested towards the end of the Weimar period in Hans Bellmer’s female doll project.

⁵¹ Ibid., 173.

⁵² Ibid., 178.

⁵³ McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity,”* 23.

⁵⁴ Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, 183.

Bellmer's first doll, created in 1933 right as the Nazis rose to power, was a life-size figure encased in plaster and made to resemble a prepubescent girl. The second doll, a more sophisticated and cleverly engineered object, was constructed from a series of limbs attached to swiveling ball joints, allowing Bellmer to attach, detach, and twist limbs into different configurations of his choice. These dolls then took on different positions and personas as Bellmer photographed them in changing environments (see Figure 6).

Usually presented naked in these images, the doll becomes a series of disarticulated limbs merged together in disturbing and impossible distortions of the female body. There is something deeply disconcerting about the disfigured, amputated, and irregularly reconstructed forms of the dolls. Bellmer needed, in his own words, "to construct an artificial girl with anatomical possibilities...capable of re-creating the heights of passion even to inventing new desires."⁵⁵ The doll represented, for Bellmer, childish enjoyment, sexual pleasure and perversion, and his (unfulfilled) desire for a child. Another overwhelming influence, however, was the phenomenon of the New Woman and the endless cultural debate regarding sexuality, gender, and female liberation that Bellmer, as a man living in Berlin in his twenties, could not have avoided. Overwhelmingly, these photographs of the doll impart Bellmer's fetishistic desire for control over the female form. Bellmer exerts total control over the doll, able to remove and reattach her limbs at will, creating impossible, fantastical scenarios of headless girls with two sets of hips and genitalia, limbless torsos, and decapitated bodies which seem available for only one (sexual) function.

⁵⁵ Hans Bellmer, quoted in Sue Taylor, "Hans Bellmer in The Art Institute of Chicago: The Wandering Libido and the Hysterical Body," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 22, no. 2, Mary Reynolds and the Spirit of Surrealism (1996): 151.

This thread of male domination and subjugation of the female body seen across the works of Dix, Grosz, Bellmer, Beckmann, and others, diverge dramatically from the worldview of Moholy and other female photographers like Hannah Höch, Brandt, Gertrud Arndt, and Lotte Jacobi (who I will consider in greater detail in the following chapter). While Dix and others celebrated the excesses of the Weimar era, critiquing broad social circumstances and rendering the majority of their female subjects as types or symbols, Moholy and other female photographers at the Bauhaus (and beyond), focused rather on the self-contained and self-fashioned individual, even if sometimes recognizing eccentricities. While taken as a whole Moholy's photographs may present a view of Weimar New Womanhood, the significant point is that it is the individual, composite parts of each personality rendered that contributes to an overarching developed understanding of these women's experiences. Such a position is fundamentally different to that taken by Dix, Grosz, and Bellmer, whose renderings of Weimar womanhood did not focus primarily on the individual, lived experiences of women they knew.

IV. Photography and New Womanhood

Photography played a vital role in the proliferation of New Woman images, countless numbers of which were published in subscription magazines during the Weimar years. Magazines embraced the newest medium for capturing everyday life, high fashion, and celebrities, and photography became a fundamental aspect of disseminating the New Woman lifestyle. High fashion portrait photographs, such as those taken by Madame d'Ora (Dora Kallmus) in Vienna, were widely published in such magazines as *Die Dame*, *Uhu*, and *Elegante Welt*. Madame d'Ora's sitters ranged from the elite of Viennese

society to internationally famous characters such as Josephine Baker and Anita Berber. Through these images, printed across hundreds of pages and consumed by thousands of readers, women could vicariously experience the lives of celebrity figures and emulate their style and character. Fashion photography also became a significant means through which to visualize the newly independent and individually-expressive young woman. By linking fashion, previously illustrated in magazines through drawings, with the modern, mechanical technology of photography, publishing houses such as Ullstein consolidated their position as modern, forward-looking, and dynamic institutions that were the harbingers of cultural change. Fashion photographs declared a spirit of cosmopolitanism, elegance, and worldliness, highly appealing to women seeking to refashion themselves in the new Weimar landscape. The magazines that depicted, and presented, this confident New Woman were available everywhere; as a photograph from 1932 of a newsstand in Berlin demonstrates (Figure 54),⁵⁶ fashion magazines could be purchased on street corners, from kiosks brimming over with the latest news and images from all over the world. The ubiquity of these magazines in the public realm, with their covers depicting glamorous models and ideals of New Womanhood, meant that women's everyday lives were saturated with models and suggestions for how to be ideally a New Woman.

In publications such as *Die Dame* and *Uhu*, the New Woman was presented uncritically as an ideal type attainable if one simply purchased the right clothing, makeup, and home goods. The rather cold, sleek lines of New Woman advertising seen, for example, in car advertisements (Figure 55) and for beauty creams (Figure 56), and the photographs of famous or wealthy women dressed in modern fashions and presented

⁵⁶ Image taken from Daniel H. Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis: The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 3.

superficially without commentary, did not in any way acknowledge the individual experiences of women during the Weimar period. One garners little sense from this imaging that women were sentient beings with characters, aspirations, and interests beyond the clothing they wore. Despite this, *Die Dame* should be acknowledged for its promotion of women's sexuality and its foray into the complicated world of defining New Womanhood. Given the ubiquity of magazines and advertisements dedicated to the New Woman, it would have been impossible for a female artist not to have been engaged with the clichés of the *neue Frau*.

Magazines and journals also utilized photographs to create an entirely new approach to journalism and critical thinking: narrative photography and photobooks. The *illustrierten* magazines, affordable weekly periodicals, became increasingly popular for their photo stories, in which they organized images in a narrative series to tell a story or develop a theme or argument. The traditional hierarchy of text assuming precedence over image altered dramatically, as photos supplanted text and became the primary means through which to communicate an idea. The *illustrierten* taught viewers to read meaning and narrative from a series of juxtaposed images, essentially coaching viewers “to see the world *photographically*,” as Daniel Magilow observes.⁵⁷ The scope and outreach of these popular *illustrierten* was vast; Magilow notes that in 1929, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (*BIZ*, *Berlin Illustrated Magazine*) had a print run of 1,844,130 copies, while in the following two years the *Münchner Illustrierte Zeitung* (*MIP*, *Munich Illustrated Magazine*) had a circulation of 700,000 copies.⁵⁸ More than 4,000 newspapers, journals, magazines, and tabloids were published in Germany in the 1920s, with forty-five

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

morning papers, two midday papers, and fourteen evening papers available daily in Berlin.⁵⁹ These magazines, which circulated amongst millions of readers, accustomed the mass audience to photographic modes of seeing. Their new interest in photo stories also led to a rise in demand for photo reportage, a demand that positively affected both male and female photographers. Lotte Jacobi, a professional female photographer studied in the following chapter, produced a series of photographic stories from her travels in central Asia during the 1930s which were published in magazines. The high demand for photographs provided opportunities for women to gain greater visibility in the field of professional photography.

Professional training for female photographers had gained institutional recognition as early as 1866, when the Photographische Lehranstalt des Lette-Vereins (Photography Academy of the Lette Association), committed solely to the education of women, was founded in Berlin. Its first photography course was taught in 1867 and regular courses training women in the use of modern photographic instruments commenced in 1890. This was followed one year later in Breslau with the opening of the Photographische Lehranstalt für Damen des Breslauer Frauenbildungs-Vereins (Photographic School for Ladies of the Breslau Women's Education Association), and in 1900 in Munich, with the founding of the Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt für Photographie, Lichtdruck und Gravur (Educational and Experimental Establishment for Photography).⁶⁰ The opening of these institutions provided women with structured, professional training

⁵⁹ For more statistics on publications during the Weimar Republic, see Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 641.

⁶⁰ Ute Eskildsen, "A Chance to Participate: A Transitional Time for Women Photographers," in *Visions of the "Neue Frau": Women and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1995), 63.

in photography for the first time. By the 1920s, many more professional studios and independent teachers offered women opportunities to train in photography, with schools and studios run in Weimar, Berlin (the Itten Schule and Reimann Schule, for instance), Halle (the Burg Giebichenstein crafts school), Essen (the Folkswangschule), Munich (the Bayerische Staatslehranstalt für Lichtbildwesen), and Stuttgart. The Bauhaus was relatively late in institutionalizing the study of photography for both men and women, founding its photography department only in 1929.⁶¹

Despite the increasing number of studios where women could learn photographic techniques, the barriers to entry into the field were still high for female photographers. Many of the women considered in the next chapter were from relatively well-off families, usually at least middle-class, and had been educated from a young age. The majority of them had the time and money to dedicate themselves to their pursuit, and the family support to study away from home or abroad at one of these photography institutions. For these women, professional photography was not their primary means of financial security, which thus allowed them the freedom to explore their creative interests without concern for personal security or financial stability. It also meant that the difficulty in founding a professional photography studio as a woman was no barrier to the continuation of their artistic production, as most of these women had the ability to continue to photograph regardless of whether they made money professionally by their trade. For some women, however, training at a professional institution was not possible, whether for financial or family reasons. Ute Eskildsen observes that a number of well-

⁶¹ See below, pages 42-45.

known female photographers during the Weimar period were autodidacts, including Germaine Krull, Ilse Bing, Gisele Freund, and Aenne Biermann.⁶²

In the altered climate of 1920s Weimar Germany, in which women achieved increasing professional acceptance and visibility, a number of female photographers did find significant professional success and ran their own studios. Grete Stern and Ellen Auerbach, known professionally as ringl + pit (their childhood nicknames), were amongst the most successful, emerging towards the end of the 1920s with their own photography studio in Berlin. Both women studied privately with Walter Peterhans before founding their ringl + pit studio in 1930.⁶³ Ringl + pit produced a large body of composite and photomontage advertisements, utilizing avant-garde techniques to enter into the consumer market. These two women, living independently in Berlin and earning their own livelihoods, embodied one element of the New Woman persona. They frequently photographed each other and friends in various states of masquerade and androgyny, performing different personas for the camera, taking on ever-changing identities, and challenging set notions of femininity. Their artistic and personal freedom in Berlin made them inspiring role models for the possibilities available to women in the new Weimar landscape.

Other female artists also gained significant professional success with their own studios. Yva (Else Neuländer) opened her studio in Berlin in 1925 and soon became one of the most successful female professional photographers in Weimar Germany. Yva produced portraits, nudes, and advertising photographs of women, and gained increasing

⁶² Ute Eskildsen, quoted in Lena Johannesson and Gunilla Knape, eds., *Women Photographers – European Experience* (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2004), 44.

⁶³ Stern continued her studies with Peterhans once he moved to the Bauhaus and directed the newly-founded photography department.

success with the frequent publication of her photographs in *Die Dame* magazine. Her portraits of women provided an alternative to the sexualization of the female form seen repeatedly in print media, and she sought to capture the nuance of her subjects without reducing them to an object for male consumption. Kim Sichel outlines just a few amongst the numerous female photographers working professionally in Berlin alone during this time (to say nothing of artists such as Madame d’Ora and Trude Fleischmann in Vienna). Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, later to become famous for her physiognomic portraits of the Germanic *volk*, ran a portrait studio in Berlin from 1916 to 1943; Stephanie Brandl opened her own portrait studio in 1926. Suse Byk and Hanna Riess operated studios near Germaine Krull’s on the Kurfürstendamm throughout the 1920s, Florence Henri worked briefly at a studio in Berlin in 1922 and 1923 alongside Johannes Walter-Kurau, and Elli Marcus opened a photography studio in 1918 and achieved success there throughout the 1920s.⁶⁴

V. New Women Envisioning the Modern World

Unsurprisingly, women were enthusiastic to engage with all areas and modes of photography during these years, despite any cultural or institutional pressures to avoid “masculine” fields and concentrate on “feminine” output. Numerous women entered the field of photo reportage including, as mentioned previously, Lotte Jacobi, while others gained commercial success in advertising and representational portraiture. Many were involved in the expected “traditional” female genres of fashion and theater (such as Elli Marcus and Yva), publishing photographs in popular women’s magazines such as *Die*

⁶⁴ See Kim Sichel, *Germaine Krull: Photographer of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 36, for a more expansive list of female photographers operating in Berlin.

Dame, Elegante Welt, and Uhu. Others, meanwhile, explored the possibilities of *neue Sachlichkeit* and *neues Sehen*, entering into dialogue with contemporary conversations surrounding modernist photographic practice. Such artists as Germaine Krull, Marianne Breslauer, Lucia Moholy, Lotte Jacobi, Hannah Höch, and Marianne Brandt produced works that exemplify the radical push towards re-envisioning the modern world. Although the working realities these women faced often placed limitations on them due to their gender, in theory the modernist aesthetic, with its ideological push towards experimentation, radicalism, and alternative interpretation, offered an unprecedented opportunity for female photographers to explore their artistic interests.⁶⁵

The interventions that female photographers made into the field of experimental photography during the Weimar years contributed significantly to the development and shaping of the artistic landscape. Prominent artists such as ringl + pit, Yva, Henri, Krull, Jacobi, Moholy, and others, interjected their own perspectives into a field previously dominated by male photographers, and their alternate approaches to portraiture, and particularly the depiction and envisioning of women, provided a counterpoint to the existing monologue surrounding photography. These women visualized experiences of womanhood and modernity that they themselves were experiencing as professionals in a rapidly changing cultural environment. As Carmen Finnan emphasizes, “the career of a professional, female photographer promised a life that could bridge the gap somewhat between projected notions of the New Woman in the mass media and the lived experience of women in the growing and changing workplace.”⁶⁶ Moholy, Krull, Stern,

⁶⁵ Naomi Rosenblum argues this point as well in her study on female photographers. See Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 127.

⁶⁶ Finnan, “Between Challenge and Conformity – Yva’s Photographic Career and Oeuvre,” 125.

Auerbach, and numerous other working female photographers intervened in the proliferation of images of New Womanhood and explored their own nuanced approaches to what womanhood and femininity meant during this tumultuous time. “Far from demonstrating a single, unified aesthetic in relation to ‘woman,’” Marsha Meskimmon argues, “women artists were able to appropriate, manipulate and challenge monolithic stereotypes of woman as other, definable only in relation to a masculine subject. In so doing, they questioned the centrality of the masculine subject and the canonical constructions of art and history premised upon the marginalization of woman/women.”⁶⁷ Female photographers thus operated in a dual space, both subjected to patriarchal objectification and reduction, and constructing their own narrative surrounding their individual identities.

One of the most visible female artists contemporary with Moholy who investigated the concept of the New Woman was Hannah Höch, with whom Moholy became acquainted in the early 1920s as Höch had a personal and professional relationship with Moholy-Nagy. Höch, only five years older than Moholy, first made her name as the sole female member of the Dada movement. In a volatile relationship with Raoul Hausmann, Höch faced a particularly challenging route to artistic success, constantly belittled as less talented within the hyper-masculine Dada scene and facing opposition from George Grosz and John Heartfield for her inclusion in the Dada-Messe.⁶⁸ Höch was distinguished within this macho group by her interest in critically considering the phenomenon of the New Woman, and in rendering her in her myriad forms through modernist applications of cut montage. As Matthew Biro observes, Höch’s essential

⁶⁷ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism*, 233.

⁶⁸ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, 17.

artistic goal was “an interrogation of modern identity”;⁶⁹ thus she focused on the complex meaning of modern identity for women like herself: emancipated, professional, and living in a non-traditional partnership outside the bounds of marriage.

Höch’s photomontages, spliced, accumulated, and juxtaposed images producing an array of comparisons and meanings, were ideal for analyzing the diffusive world of the New Woman. Höch did not embrace the New Woman wholeheartedly; neither, however, did she reject her critically. Instead her photomontages present multiple interpretations of the New Woman and what her role in Weimar society could be. In some images, the New Woman became “cyborgian,”⁷⁰ “both a consumer and a producer of representations in the mass media,”⁷¹ a womanly ideal who spawned literally thousands of images for mass dissemination and assumed a mythic character. Höch harnessed the myth of the New Woman, a figure that both inspired female independence and desire and existed beyond the achievable bounds of lived reality, that both attracted and repulsed the male gaze, to comment on the commoditization of Weimar culture and the simultaneous pleasure and anxiety this female symbol evoked. In *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (*Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*), 1919–20 (Figure 57), for example, Höch combines images of numerous recognizable Weimar figures from the period, including artists, famous athletes, and politicians. Women, as Maud Lavin notes in her analysis of this image, maintain “a

⁶⁹ Matthew Biro, “Hannah Höch’s New Woman: Photomontage, Distraction, and Visual Literacy in the Weimar Republic,” in *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 115.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

catalytic role in the opposition between a revolutionary Dada world associated with Karl Marx and the anti-Dada world of the politically compromised President Friedrich Ebert.”⁷² Women inserted into the image include Elsa Lasker-Schüle, Käthe Kollwitz, and Asta Nielsen. The female figures represent, in contrast to the anti-Dada world symbolized in President Ebert and government officials, liberation, modernity, and technology.

Höch was fascinated by, and preoccupied with, the presentation of women through advertisements and fashion magazines, forms of mass media with which she was intimately familiar through her role working for the Ullstein Verlag. Höch appropriated these images again and again to reconsider and re-form conceptualizations of femininity and womanhood in modern Germany. In a series entitled *Porträts*, Höch spliced together composite images to comment on the different “types” of women, casting a critical eye on classifications of femininity and embracing the contradictions of womanhood. In so doing, Höch “managed to turn the masculine, authoritative view of women in the mass media into works which emphasized the fluidity of gender,”⁷³ thus emphatically reclaiming the projection of womanhood as one belonging to women, and not men. Höch’s project was a powerful claim to female representation in a masculine space, and one which had an enormous impact for other female artists working in the Weimar artistic sphere.

Within the Bauhaus, a number of female artists adopted the principles of Höch’s composite style to similarly investigate New Womanhood. Marianne Brandt, closely

⁷² Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, 19.

⁷³ Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists’ Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996), 41.

mentored by Moholy-Nagy and friendly with Moholy, became one of the most prominent and successful female artists at the Bauhaus. One of the few women able to break away from placement into the weaving department, partially through the assistance of Moholy-Nagy, Brandt became highly successful in the metal workshop, producing numerous Bauhaus designs and furnishings, some of which formed a fundamental design feature of the Dessau Bauhaus, including her light fixtures.⁷⁴ It is in her photomontages, however, that we witness a nuanced and critical consideration of the position of the New Woman in Weimar society. Through her photomontages, Brandt explored the nature of gender identity and used these works to confront her position as a woman in a world dominated by men. She drew on the source material of countless Weimar magazines and newspapers to construct her photomontages. Her focus was the New Woman, but also the female constructor, a woman of technical ability and professional power who had the means to design and refashion the world. Brandt shared Moholy's desire to visualize New Womanhood in its multiple varying meanings; it is in her technical approach that her vision differs.

In *Helfen Sie mit! (Die Frauenbewegte) (Help Out! (The Liberated Woman))*, 1926 (Figure 58), Brandt montages a series of disparate images, with a female head dominating the scene. This woman is undoubtedly a New Woman: she has short hair, large, fashionable glasses, and she smokes a pipe, a clear contemporary indicator of radical femininity. She stares directly at the viewer with an unbroken gaze. Around her, Brandt places disparate images of landscapes; the rows of crosses across which are written the words *Helfen Sie mit!* and the dust plume rising from an explosion suggest the

⁷⁴ In fact, Brandt was the only woman to graduate from the metal workshop.

devastation caused by the First World War. These are contrasted with images on the opposite side of rowers on a river, a boat in open water, and a landscape seen from above. Here is the unstable Weimar democracy rendered in photographic form, the devastation from which it emerged not yet fully reconciled with contemporary life, the New Woman a figure of contention looming over the cultural landscape. Elizabeth Otto reads this photomontage as representing “tensions between the possibility to enact political change on the one hand, and the potential for melancholic, contemplative inaction on the other.”⁷⁵

Brandt took the modern medium of photography a step further in visualizing New Womanhood, using the avant-garde techniques of photomontage to present a figure entirely new to Weimar life. Many of her montages address the speed, dynamism, and heady change of the Weimar period, and women’s roles within this changing culture. Repeatedly, Brandt drew on the imagery of war and violence and interposes women’s bodies onto these scenes, in order to critically consider women’s positions within a culture of violent destruction and masculine force (see, for example, *Es wird marschiert* (*On the March*), 1928). Technology was both a lure and a danger for Brandt, an opportunity to render an entirely novel perspective on women’s position in society and simultaneously a facilitator of uncontrollable, unpredictable change. Brandt’s photomontages encouraged women “to see themselves not merely as symbols of change or as consumers of interwar visual cultures, but also as agents of change who were culturally critical and politically savvy.”⁷⁶ They reasserted women’s power to participate

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!: Bauhaus-Photomontagen von Marianne Brandt* (Berlin: Jovis, 2005), 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

critically in the construction of Weimar society and staked a claim for women's centrality to the development of this new culture.

VI. Lucia Moholy and Photography at the Bauhaus

Lucia Moholy was an early adopter of photographic experimentation, and this would exert a profound influence on the role, meanings, and pedagogy of photography at the Bauhaus. During the period when Moholy and Moholy-Nagy were in residence at the Bauhaus, 1923 to 1928, the number of female photographers, both those with an amateur and a professional interest, rose measurably, an increase that should partially be credited to Moholy's visible position as a successful professional female photographer in her own right. Given that photography was not an official department at the Bauhaus until after the Moholy-Nagys' departure, there was greater opportunity for female participation, as women could experiment with photography outside of the bounds of the accepted "women's" departments, principally the weaving and bookbinding workshops.

Photography also held career potential, and young female students matriculating at the school looked to the commercial successes of pioneering female professionals in cities like Berlin as their inspiration. Photography soon became, as Ulrike Müller observes, the second-largest artistic field with female participation at the school after the weaving department.⁷⁷ Indeed, the popularity of photography, especially among women, did not await the formation of a formal workshop; rather, from the arrival of Moholy, photography garnered the passionate interest of the student body, especially those that were female. Just some of the many students who experimented with the medium and

⁷⁷ Ulrike Müller, *Bauhaus Women. Art, Handicraft, Design* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 11.

contributed to the wealth of avant-garde photography during the period include Lotte Beese, Katt Bott, Marianne Brandt, Lotte Gerson, Florence Henri, Edith Suschitzky, and Irene Bluhova. The adoption of photography as a means of experimentation was, furthermore, not limited to the students; Irene Bayer, Ise Gropius, and Gertrud Arndt (following her return to the Bauhaus after graduating), all spouses of Bauhaus masters, each independently produced photographs that engaged to differing degrees with modernist themes, styles, and perspectives while living at the school as masters' wives.

In the early stages of their time at the Bauhaus, it was Moholy more than her husband who was deeply engaged with the medium of photography. László Moholy-Nagy encouraged the use of photography amongst his students and engaged with the medium theoretically through his photograms, but it was not until 1925 that he focused more specifically on photography for its full potential. In these early years at the Weimar Bauhaus, 1923–25, he was not technically adept with a camera and relied heavily on Moholy for her skills both with a camera and in the darkroom. Moholy, meanwhile, attended quickly to the practical applications of photography and the real possibilities of its techniques. She studied with Otto Eckner at his studio in Weimar during the summer holidays of 1923 and later compounded her training with further study at the Akademie für Graphische Künste und Buchgewerbe (Academy of Graphic Arts and Book Trade) in Leipzig. Having already begun to photograph before meeting her future husband in 1920, Moholy dedicated much of her time at the Bauhaus to exploring the multiple artistic avenues opened up by the medium. This would include in time the later famous architecture photographs of the Dessau Bauhaus buildings, but prior to this she also explored portrait and object photography. Despite her early contribution to the field, and

her position as perhaps the earliest female photographer at the Bauhaus, the significance of her role has still not been fully acknowledged in the scholarship.⁷⁸

The root causes of this historiographical omission can be traced to the contemporary climate of the Bauhaus itself. Moholy was, first and foremost, recognized by the administration as well as the masters and the students as a Bauhaus master's wife rather than an artist in her own right. She was also disadvantaged to some extent by the significance and brilliance of her husband, who became the theoretical magnet around which the Bauhaus operated during the mid-1920s. Thus she operated in her husband's shadow and bore his presumed influence or authorship on shared projects, an issue to which I will return in Chapter Four. Her position at the Bauhaus, and the manner in which she was considered by Gropius and the other Bauhaus masters, is reflected in the fact that she was not considered for the position of head of the new photography department in 1929, despite having operated as the most prominent photographer at the school for many years and despite her university education in art history and philosophy. As Baumhoff points out, to shift her status from wife to master was "unthinkable" for the masculinist leadership of the school, and thus the role was outsourced to Walter Peterhans.⁷⁹ Baumhoff references the Bauhäusler Werner Feist to underline this point; Feist later reflected that photography had become "legitimate" under the direction of Peterhans. As Baumhoff notes, "A woman was hardly expected to be able to produce this

⁷⁸ Anja Baumhoff discusses this disparity at some length in Anja Baumhoff, "Frauen und Foto am Bauhaus: ein modernes Medium im Spannungsfeld von Geschlecht, Kunst und Technik," *Frauen, Kunst, Wissenschaft* 14 (March 1991): 37.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

legitimacy, since she could transfer little of her own status to the new medium.”⁸⁰

Peterhans, a successful male artist, meanwhile, conferred this legitimacy without issue.

The issue of women’s status at the Bauhaus, as I discussed in my introduction, was a complex one; women were both offered the opportunity to receive a degree from a valued art institution and participate in a modernist way of life, while simultaneously typecast into traditionally “feminine” crafts such as weaving and pottery. They were still called upon to adhere to traditional gender norms, such as serving tea and meals, decorating the Bauhaus with “crafts,” and, ultimately, preparing for motherhood at some point in the future. Otto Dorfner, a master craftsman in bookbinding, perfectly summarized the perspective women faced in 1922, when he suggested areas for expansion of the Weimar Bauhaus:

The issue of women at the Staatliches Bauhaus remains as yet unsolved. The textile department and the women’s section must be expanded to give women a chance to participate effectively at the Bauhaus, in an environment that is suited to their physique. Women are out of place in the construction workshops; let the women make carpets, let them weave fabrics, let them dye, print and paint; let them do embroidery; let them make clothes. Thus they will become a productive and useful element within the Bauhaus, whose handiwork may be employed to create a cosy atmosphere throughout the school building.⁸¹

Despite this, female students maintained a positive attitude regarding their opportunities at the school: “The very right to participate fills me with sweet music; it is a great privilege, especially for woman,” Käthe Brachmann declared. “After all, what is the status of woman here? – Like all working women, we are an object of pity to the men.

⁸⁰ Ibid. All translations from this text are my own.

⁸¹ Anja Baumhoff, “What’s in the Shadow of a Bauhaus Block? Gender Issues in Classical Modernity,” in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic* (Würzburg: Könighausen & Neumann, 2006), 53.

“Why do you not honor your natural vocation?” – that is the most profound question I ever get to hear from them. It is often preceded by comments on superficial matters.”⁸²

The Bauhaus offered an opportunity for photographic exploration for both sexes, but in reality the opportunities and recognition available to women were fewer than for men, as in other realms of artistic expression at the school. Lucia Moholy was not the only Bauhaus master’s wife to photograph on a regular basis (although she was by far the most successful and career-driven partner); Ise Gropius, Gertrud Arndt, Irene Bayer, Lou Scheper, and Helene Schmidt-Nun all adopted the medium during their time at the Bauhaus. However for many of these women, whose own artistic drive and intellect was little acknowledged by the male masters at the school, photography had to remain a personal enjoyment and hobby. Their experimentations were not necessarily taken seriously as forays into the art world. It seems that those female artists who were most successful at the Bauhaus were students who manipulated the system by achieving specialized male patronage from specific Bauhaus masters, for example Marianne Brandt from Moholy-Nagy, and Katt Bott from Marcel Breuer.⁸³ Regardless of male patronage or not, the female photographers who engaged in the new photographic techniques utilized the medium to assert their position in the avant-garde, to define their independent artistic identities, and to capture the energy and dynamism of the rapidly changing world in which they lived. Moving outside of prescribed social norms, many of these women carved out space for themselves as ambitious, career-driven, independent artists.

Moholy’s place within this dynamic Bauhaus environment was perhaps less liberated than some of the younger female photographers whom she inspired. Moholy

⁸² Käthe Brachmann, “Echo auf Gropius. Antrittsrede und Programm,” quoted in *ibid.*, 52.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 61.

was in some sense an outlier in normal middle-class society in that she was an artist and operated independently, receiving higher technical training and working for an income (in fact, working as the breadwinner in her marriage until Moholy-Nagy was hired by the Bauhaus). However, she also married in 1921, on her twenty-fifth birthday, and therefore did not herself exemplify the stereotypical young New Woman, the single, working woman who explored her sexual freedom. She entered into the traditional social structure of marriage and supported her husband in his career, even if their lifestyle was not typically middle-class. For all the radicality and experimentation of the Bauhaus, the wives of the masters played a relatively traditional role at the school, organizing their husbands' correspondence, keeping house, and assisting their husbands in their projects. It was the younger, single women at the school who more fully tasted the freedoms and new experiences of the Golden Twenties. For these single, independent female students who embraced photography in the wake of Moholy's own experimentations, Moholy served as an entry point into a liberating exploration of female artistic expression, unrestrained by the masculine structure of the school at which they matriculated.

Chapter Three: The Weimar Portraits

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I address the body of portraits produced by Moholy beginning in the mid-1920s and continuing until her emigration to London. Considered as a whole, these portraits reflect the multiple and divergent ways in which Moholy approached the human form and her experimental approach to portrait photography. Across this oeuvre, Moholy explored deep psychological intimacy, abstraction, seriality, texture, and the effects of light and dark to produce a collection of portraits that capture the dynamic spirit of Weimar portraiture. The power of these works speaks to the potential for representational photography to express the radically new environment of the transformed modernist world.¹

Drawing on the contextual foundation laid in the previous chapter, I analyze closely Moholy's photographic output and the manner in which her portraits engage with contemporary cultural phenomena of significance and debate. My study of Moholy's portraits will therefore extend to a comparative consideration of other female photographers working in the artistic space during these years, both those with whom Moholy had personal contact and those further afield who forged successful careers despite facing entrenched masculinist systems, much as Moholy did. In the case of female Bauhaus photographers operating during, or soon after, Moholy's time at the

¹ I use the term "representational photography" here to describe a mode of photography in which a clear human subject is still discernable. I view artistic experimentation with "abstraction" as a sliding scale; a work need not be either "abstract" or "representational," but may rather exhibit tendencies in both directions. Thus Moholy utilized techniques of photographic abstraction to enhance her portraits and produce a distinctive photographic eye.

school (1923–1928), I will argue the case for photographic matrilineage at the Bauhaus and will address Moholy’s enormous impact as the earliest experimental female photographer at the school. Moholy’s influence on younger female Bauhäusler demonstrates the fallacy of an assumed male canon and forces us to step away from a methodology that relies on juxtaposition with a valued male artist to validate a woman’s work. In doing this, I want to emphasize that I am not studying the photography of female Bauhaus artists as a thematically homogenous “style” but rather closely looking at the individual outputs of the few women who started the exploration of photography at the Bauhaus. I also have no interest in tokenizing Moholy as the singular female Bauhaus innovator in photography. Instead, I seek to situate Moholy within the broader culture of female experimental photography, both at the Bauhaus and beyond, and to demonstrate through comparative study the wealth and diversity of female artistic photographic production during the Weimar years.

II. Portraiture and New Womanhood

In the years following the First World War, as Germany recovered from the trauma and devastation of that four-year conflict, artists produced a plethora of portraits, attempting to capture newly fashioned self-images in the young republic. The Weimar period saw what Claudia Schmölders and Sander Gilman call the “Weimar obsession with the meaning of the face,”² with numerous exhibitions dedicated to portraiture and the close-up becoming a popular mode of intimate character study in photography and film. Anna-Carola Krause observes that “this fascination for human representation,” this

² Claudia Schmölders and Sander Gilman, quoted in Anna-Carola Krause, *Lotte Laserstein: meine einzige Wirklichkeit/My Only Reality* (Berlin: Das Verborgene Museum, 2003), 120.

striving to capture the face in its most revealing aspects, can be understood as “a response to alienation in anonymous mass society, a form of self-discovery, a heightened quest for self-perception and the preservation of individual identity.”³ While some artists rejected the traditional mode of portraiture as a window into the subject’s personality, status, or significance, instead rendering the human figure as object or typology, others aspired to achieve psychological intimacy through unusual renderings of the sitter’s face or body.

For female photographers, recently enfranchised and increasingly exposed to artistic and professional opportunities in the public realm, portraiture held the potential to reframe the female experience and the female body from their own perspectives, rather than from that of male artists. Lucia Moholy, operating within this context, took hundreds of portrait photographs during the 1920s, producing a varied and experimental oeuvre that exemplifies her desire to grasp the human figure in all of its aspects. Although Moholy took many photographs of men across her career, for the most part I focus in this chapter on her portraits of women, and the manner in which these works enter into the contemporary dialogue regarding the New Woman. Moholy’s portraits are especially important to study for they were her largest body of work produced outside of a commission or request from the Bauhaus. Thus they offer the opportunity to critically analyze Moholy’s artistic intentions and interests outside of the bounds of professional requirements, in moments both casual and carefully composed, when she turned her lens to the modern female subject. Moholy approached portraiture in a manner quintessentially of the new era and the renewed interest in the new Weimar citizen, the reinvention of self, and the exploration of the modern psyche. Photography became, for

³ Ibid.

Moholy, a way into penetrating the human condition, a way of framing human subjects and opening up new avenues for contemplating individual character. She understood that through close observation, clarity and intimacy regarding the subject could be obtained.

Lucia Moholy's Representations of New Womanhood

What becomes clear in studying the range of portraits Moholy took of women with whom she was friends or acquaintances is the nuanced, individual expression of contemporary womanhood that each portrait projects. Moholy's portraits under consideration in this chapter, those from the 1920s, capture the dynamic, shifting gender terrain of Weimar Germany and, through their commitment to the individuality of each sitter, explore the human condition as experienced by women during this time. Many reflect the "masculinized," liberated, transgressive identity of the New Woman, while others reflect the continued embrace of a more traditional concept of womanhood. Unlike some of her contemporary male artists, Moholy did not generalize or stereotype her female sitters as flappers, mothers, or prostitutes, but contemplated them as individuals to produce a series of works that treat the New Woman subject with depth and variation. Her portraits are visualizations of identity in a rapidly changing and fractured world, and they emit a vitality and exuberance regarding life. Over the course of her career, Moholy photographed a far greater number of women than men, dedicating much of her corpus to considering the female condition in its myriad forms. In giving visual expression to these individuals, Moholy wrested power from the predominantly male gaze of the photographer and the viewer and provided the means for her female subjects to define their own subjecthood, rather than being the objects of male imagination and desire.

Moholy's portraits catalogue the widely varying interpretations of womanhood in 1920s Weimar Germany. In *Nelly van Doesburg*, 1924 (Figure 59) and *Florence Henri*, 1927 (Figure 60), for example, we observe two women who have adopted significant markers of the New Woman in their self-fashioning. Van Doesburg sports a dramatic, short haircut and no adornment in the form of jewelry, makeup, or embellished clothing. Henri, while sporting a similar short bubikopf, does embrace forms of adornment, utilizing makeup and fashionable earrings to assert her modern femininity. *Portrait of Anni Albers*, 1927 (Figure 61), meanwhile, presents a more extreme androgynization of the New Woman. In this portrait, Albers, a textile artist in the weaving department, is presented from the side, her mannish haircut and simple, loose-fitting clothing declaring her adoption of a radical new mode of female styling. *Eva Fernbach*, 1927 (Figure 62), similarly presents a more extreme example of the "masculinization" trend sweeping Weimar Germany. Fernbach, a student in the woodworking workshop who is here depicted seated outdoors, also sports the bubikopf (as so many Bauhaus women did) and adopts the traditionally male attire of the tie and shirt. Fernbach appears relaxed and confident, a woman presenting her embrace of a liberated experience of self-fashioning. In portraits of *Julia Feininger*, 1926, *Nina Kandinsky*, 1927, and *Otti Berger*, 1927–28 (Figures 63, 64, and 65, respectively), meanwhile, Moholy captures women who embraced more traditionally "feminine" modes of dress and self-styling. Feininger and Kandinsky, while sporting short, fashionable haircuts, both wear floral elements in their attire – Feininger pins a bouquet to her shirt and Kandinsky wears a flowered, patterned sweater – and Feininger further makes visible the ring on her finger. Otti Berger, meanwhile, retains a longer haircut than most of the women depicted by Moholy and

accessorizes her outfit with a chunky necklace. Her smiling visage suggests a woman comfortable and confident in her skin.

What is particularly interesting in Moholy's portraits is the manner in which the photographs construct identity. Given that, the relationship between the sitter's autonomy and the photographer's intent seems particularly relevant in these works. The agency of Moholy's sitters is crucial to consider, particularly given many were themselves artists or writers fundamentally concerned with identity and self-construction. Surveying the body of Moholy's portraits, it is clear that her subjects were comfortable with her, allowing Moholy to come extremely close and capture them in moments of vulnerability, proximity, and intimacy. Secondary images taken as part of Moholy's process to capture the exact, correct photograph, reveal subjects smiling and relaxed, comfortable in the photographer's presence. Moholy's desire to reveal the characters and emotions of her sitters, rather than rendering them solely as objects or documentary subjects, likely encouraged a good relationship between photographer and sitter, and the desire on the part of the subject to engage actively in the experience of being photographed. Scholars who address Moholy's portraits of her husband frequently consider these images as entirely constructed and authored by Moholy-Nagy, stripping Moholy of agency over her own artistic production (see, for example, Gerda Breuer's description of *Portrait of László Moholy-Nagy*, 1926 (Figure 66), as a work in which Moholy-Nagy "staged himself as a self-concoction of the New Man"⁴). In much scholarship, it thus seems that authorship and intention are changed as a matter of convenience when considering Moholy's photographs. Such an approach ignores the more difficult issue of addressing

⁴ Gerda Breuer, "Introduction," in *Gespiegeltes Ich: Fotografische Selbstbildnisse von Frauen in Den 1920er Jahren* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2014), 8.

Moholy's role in the construction of her portraits. Given the careful, planned style Moholy brought to her photographic practice, it is hard to understand how her agency would be so stripped from her photographs.

Moholy's relationship with her sitters and her active participation in the construction of their photographic identity raises a further significant point worth emphasizing. Many of Moholy's subjects were the wives of Bauhaus Masters, some artists and intellectuals in their own right whose career pursuits were demoted beneath those of their husbands. Thus, one might understand Moholy's photographs of women like Nina Kandinsky, Julia Feininger, and Anni Albers as indirect self-portraits of the artist herself, as the subjects occupied a similar position to Moholy's own: spouses of Masters not fully recognized in their own rights as creators. If one views these portraits in this light, Moholy's position regarding female creativity and self-identity becomes further clarified, and our understanding of the artist enriched. Through her (self-) portraits of Bauhaus Masters' wives, Moholy explores the myriad possibilities for female self-representation from a position of perceived lower significance. The artist gave equal, if not more, photographic space to the female halves of the many Bauhaus artistic couples in her acquaintance, suggesting her own purposeful acknowledgment of the significance of these women's professional pursuits and personal interests. Viewed as partial self-portraits, these photographs take on new meaning as declarations of Moholy's own artistic and intellectual worth.

Moholy's consideration of New Womanhood enters into dialogue with other female photographers exploring the same subjects during this period. Lotte Jacobi, for example, produced a powerful portrait of Weimar androgyny in her photograph *Klaus*

and *Erika Mann*, 1928 (Figure 67), an image that captures two siblings that appear identical in dress and look, both smoking cigarettes and wearing shirt and tie, interchangeable despite their differing genders. Erika Mann represents the extreme of androgynous identity in the Weimar age, adopting the entire look of her brother so that it is impossible to tell, viewing her in profile, whether she is a man or a woman. Erika Mann here encapsulates the freedom of women's self-fashioning during these years, as well as exemplifying the source of male anxiety surrounding the masculinization of women. In her portrait *Lotte Lenya*, 1928 (Figure 68), Jacobi explores another liberated female identity, rendering the actress as the quintessential New Woman, hair cropped short, makeup applied, cigarette held visibly across her face. Unlike in some of Jacobi's photographs, which are concerned more with the theatricality of the image and less with the revealing of inner character, here Lenya is presented in close relation to the viewer and stares directly at the camera. Jacobi, whose portraits show great range and depth, adapted her approach to be tailored to each subject, once saying "my style is the style of the people whose photographs I take."⁵ This will to render New Womanhood in its myriad forms is seen in the photographs of numerous other female photographers, including Aenne Biermann's *Untitled (Anneliese Schiesser)*, c.1931, Traute Rose, *Lotte Laserstein*, c.1928, and Trude Fleischmann, *Elisabeth Bergner as "Fräulein Else,"* 1929.

As is the case with artists like Hannah Höch and Marianne Brandt,⁶ Moholy's investigation of womanhood and her position as a woman photographing other women was significant. Moholy captured women not through the male gaze, as typical objects of

⁵ Boris Friedewald, *Women Photographers: From Julia Margaret Cameron to Cindy Sherman* (London; New York: Prestel, 2014), 98.

⁶ See Chapter Two for discussions of Höch's and Brandt's work.

the male lens and male control, but rather through a female perspective, bringing a more closely-shared understanding and common experience to her practice. The significance of her alternate approach to female portraiture, particularly during such a fraught cultural and social moment, cannot be overstated. As a professional female photographer at the Bauhaus, Moholy both visualized the New Woman in her photographs and herself embodied the concept, reclaiming some of the ground traditionally held and dominated by men. Moholy's images function powerfully on multiple layers, first in that they are produced by a female photographer reclaiming the male gaze, and second as images of women that look out, that capture your gaze, that demand a different evaluation of their self-fashioning and their characters. Butler asserts that "for a woman to use a camera is a kind of theft of this [patriarchal] power, an assertion of the right to value her own capacities of observation and judgment."⁷ Moholy reframes her female subjects as women who have the freedom to stage themselves as thinking, intelligent individuals, rather than as women defined by their appearance. While she may not have inserted clear political references into her work, as did Höch and Brandt, Moholy's career-driven focus and consideration of the disparate threads of New Womanhood manifest as a clear cultural and political stance during a tumultuous period in which women's social position was recalibrated. Moholy's claiming of male space and her visible presence as a professional female photographer cannot but have an enormous impact on younger female students at the Bauhaus.

In considering Moholy's navigation of the difficult world of professional photography as a woman, one wonders if her embrace of 'objectivity' allowed her to

⁷ Susan Butler, "So How Do I Look? Women Before and Behind the Camera," in *Staging the Self: Self-Portrait Photography 1840s-1980s* (Plymouth: Plymouth Arts Centre, 1986), 51.

escape her gender, as it were, and not have her work be considered “feminine” in the masculine sphere of 1920s photography. Moholy’s purposeful claim that she “photographed people like a house”⁸ allowed her to objectivize her subjects and create a parallel between her successful architecture photographs and her forays into portraits. Her rational, considered approach to her subjects was in dialogue with many of the successful male photographers of the period, including August Sander and Hugo Erfurth, even though the outcome of her approach was entirely different from theirs. These qualities – rationality, objectivity, clarity – were considered at the time to be natural masculine qualities, not feminine ones. Moholy may well have been distancing herself from being pigeonholed into being described as having a “feminine aesthetic” or “womanly approach.” Whether intentionally or not, Moholy’s technical approach, utilizing the same rational methods as many of her revered and respected male colleagues, legitimized her work in the contemporary sphere. Moholy avoided producing fashion or nude photographs for women’s magazines (considered lesser artistic modes at the time, although certainly not legitimately so); instead, she applied her profound artistic insight into complex portraits of New Womanhood. Through this approach, as Anja Baumhoff observes, Moholy could carve out freedom for herself as a photographer, freedom from her gender and the generalizations or assumptions that came with the label “female photographer.”⁹ As a female photographer, Moholy had to battle a constant assumption by men in the public sphere that women somehow could not attain the same excellence in

⁸ Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy* (Düsseldorf: Edition Marzona, 1985), 36. See my discussion of Moholy’s experimentation with photographic objectivity later in this chapter.

⁹ Anja Baumhoff, “Frauen und Foto am Bauhaus: ein modernes Medium im Spannungsfeld von Geschlecht, Kunst und Technik,” *Frauen, Kunst, Wissenschaft* 14 (March 1991): 41. Although this freedom only went so far, as she never sought to hide her gender and was known by her circle of artistic colleagues.

portraiture as men. Alfred Kuhn, for example, wrote in 1927 that “woman lacks the ability to extract the ‘characteristic,’ and thus to become a portraitist of great magnitude. To do so would require that sharp-eyed lack of charity which simply cannot lie within the nature of the creative woman, insofar as her creativity resides in heightened humanity.”¹⁰ Moholy emphatically did not ascribe to this idea of a feminine touch to women’s portraiture, instead depicting herself and others without guile, “softness,” or in a sexualized or flirtatious context. Her self-professed interest in “radical objectivity” could in part have been a self-conscious alignment with an idea both scientific and gender-neutral, as Baumhoff argues;¹¹ her adoption of a “masculine” approach suggests a desire to avoid being gender-stereotyped based simply on the style of one’s artistic work.¹²

III. Lucia Moholy’s Experimental Photographic Vision

Considering the body of Moholy’s portraits of women as a whole, one is struck by the breadth and diversity of her approach. Moholy thought deeply about the individual characters of her sitters, producing portraits that drew out specific elements of the subject and personalized each photograph. What is uniform across these works is Moholy’s celebration of her subject’s modernity and of their collective position within the Weimar cultural environment. Her photographs are carefully crafted, considered, and planned in their execution; they do not embrace the spontaneous, snapshot playfulness of many other photographers at the Bauhaus, such as T. Lux Feininger. In many of Feininger’s works,

¹⁰ Alfred Kuhn, quoted in Krausse, *Lotte Laserstein: meine einzige Wirklichkeit/My Only Reality*, 178.

¹¹ Baumhoff, “Frauen und Foto am Bauhaus: ein modernes Medium im Spannungsfeld von Geschlecht, Kunst und Technik,” 39.

¹² Although it is outside the scope of this study, it is worth bearing in mind that Moholy was also involved in the significant process of depicting men through women’s eyes, rather than through the assumed male perspective. In so doing, Moholy contributed to a view of male sitters not inherently masculine, a view open to minority perspectives.

for example *Untitled (Georg Hartmann and Miriam Manuckiam)*, c.1928, and *Group of Bauhaus Students*, 1929, Bauhäuslers are depicted relaxing or exercising; the photographs exude a lightness of spirit not emphasized by Moholy. Her photographs, by contrast, are not meant to appear as informal or relaxed, captured on the fly. Rather, they are carefully crafted and studiously produced portraits. This approach does not engender, however, a stiff or formal impression; indeed, there is a clear motility to her photographs that undermine nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century protocols of portraiture. Moholy pondered carefully and creatively the exterior nature and interior character of each of her subjects before taking the photograph, reflecting her deep interest in the subject itself, in the people she was photographing. Even when exploring abstracted viewpoints of her sitters, she never lost interest in the human subject and in the potential of its character to reveal or conceal. Moholy applied no single methodology to her portraits, nor did she limit herself to a consistent point of view, adapting her approach as she felt necessary. Her portraits reveal her interest in the merging of art and science, her rational, calculating approach producing revelatory images of the human character.

Moholy understood the potential for intimacy in portraiture and employed a range of technical methods to prompt this connection with the viewer. In her portraits, Moholy utilizes the camera from varying angular perspectives and physical proximity to the sitter to produce penetrating psychological studies, complex in their meaning and intent. Her works shift away from traditional portraiture, in that they do not depict the trappings of wealth, rank, occupation, or interests. They are human studies, imbued only with the added elements of clothing and what these items might reflect about the sitter. Her portrait of *Florence Henri* (Figure 60), reveals the striking directness and intimacy of

many of Moholy's works. In this image, Henri is framed extremely closely, her head slightly cropped on two sides so that we do not see her entire face. Her neck and a small portion of her shirt are visible, however the environment she occupies is completely eradicated. Henri stares directly at the camera, acknowledging the photographer's (and subsequent viewer's) gaze yet revealing very little through her elusive, penetrating expression. Henri's stare is impossible to escape, in part because of the close cropping of the image, and Moholy renders her as a physical and psychological force to be reckoned with. Moholy presents the viewer with a strikingly dramatic, intensely psychological portrait of Henri, one that both suggests intimacy through the physical nearness of the sitter and yet denies our interpretation of her character because of her elusive expression. As in many of her portraits, Moholy presents the ambiguity of her sitter: Henri's gaze is cryptic and her personality visually indecipherable. Moholy plays with the intimate frankness of the camera to demonstrate how portraiture can conceal as much as it reveals.

The contemplative, penetrating nature of Moholy's portraits is made eminently apparent through a comparison of her photograph of *Walter Gropius*, 1926 (Figure 69), and one by Hugo Erfurth two years later (*Walter Gropius*, 1928, [Figure 70]). In Erfurth's portrait, Gropius stands leaning against his desk, pictured in his professional space, the master of his working environment. All but his lower legs are visible to the viewer as he grips the desk behind him and gazes forthrightly at the camera. Erfurth presents Gropius as architect and director, a man comfortable in his station, poised and professional. In Moholy's portrait, Gropius is depicted leaning over, head propped in his hands, as he gazes directly at the camera. Despite being able to see his chest and arms, the viewer is drawn to his gaze, which assertively addresses the camera. In this

photograph, one has a much stronger sense of Gropius as a person, his visage inviting us to consider him at length. His position squashes the skin on his face and highlights the wrinkles in his forehead; this is not Bauhaus Director Gropius in his official capacity, but Walter Gropius the man and artist offering himself for our consideration. His pose is not vulnerable – indeed, he considers us just as we consider him – yet it is frank and inviting, not as closed off as in his portrait by Erfurth.

In other images, Moholy reveals her subject from unusual perspectives, approaching them obliquely to give the impression of a woman caught off-guard, or an expression captured unbeknownst to the sitter. In *Low angle portrait of Lily Hildebrandt*, 1926 (Figure 71), for example, Moholy renders Hildebrandt from a low perspective, looking up at the artist as she looks into the distance contemplatively.¹³ The blurring of the photograph, with only Hildebrandt's face emerging with clarity, suggests a figure caught in action, rapidly and unawares, and yet we know that Moholy carefully staged her portraits (especially of other women artists) and rejected the snapshot technique. The lack of evidence regarding Hildebrandt's physical positioning in the environment, and the effect of her head emerging from a blurred, darkened space, lends an abstract quality to the photograph, as well as an air of mystery. Hildebrandt looks towards something off-camera, her expression knowing; she is protected from the viewer's full examination and we cannot penetrate her psyche. Who is Hildebrandt? Moholy reveals so little, even as she moves close to her subject, that we are left without understanding Hildebrandt's sense of self and identity. The oblique denial of the gaze is also seen in *Portrait of Anni Albers* (Figure 61), in which Moholy draws on traditional portraiture conventions by providing a

¹³ Lily Hildebrandt was a painter, graphic artist, and master glassmaker.

profile view of the master weaver sitter against a plain white background, a maneuver also designed to reduce our concentration to Albers alone. Yet simultaneously, Albers's portrayal undermines portraiture expectations; her pose both reveals and conceals her personality, providing an uninterrupted view of one side of her face and the clothes she chose to reflect her character while denying a close reading of her expression made possible in the portrait of Henri.

In addressing the perspectival approach Moholy took to her subjects, one must consider the seriality of her portraits. For many of her subjects, Moholy produced sets of three or more photographs from different angles: frontally, in profile, and obliquely. Moholy follows a structured system in photographing her sitters, perhaps believing that more is revealed through the repetition of seriality. Rolf Sachsse sees Moholy's methodology in this sense as fitting into a nineteenth-century documentary tradition, one utilized in such fields as psychiatry, psychology, and criminal studies. He points to the structured progression of each view of the sitter, moving from the frontal perspective, three-quarter view, profile, oblique forehead and hairline shot, and the neutrality of the background against which the sitter was captured.¹⁴ Certainly to some degree the technique unavoidably evokes early police photographs of criminals, in taking photographs straight on and from each side. It also echoes August Sander's serial treatment of the German race, or serial photographs attempting to record and document all facets of a person or people through a taxonomic approach.¹⁵

¹⁴ Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin* (Berlin: Museumspädagogischer Dienst Berlin, 1995), 18.

¹⁵ It furthermore conforms to the conventions painters provided to sculptors in previous centuries, as seen in the triple portrait *Charles I*, 1635-1636, painted by Anthony van Dyke for Lorenzo Bernini's bust commission executed in the summer of 1636.

To some extent, then, perhaps Moholy was referencing this photographic tradition. Given her art history training and her deep interest in the technical elements of photography from its invention, this reference could well have been intentional. I think this explanation is not, however, the sole rationale for Moholy's approach. Considering her fascination with the human character, as well as her interest in abstracting the figure to grasp previously unknown elements of the subject at hand, this seriality seems more persuasively to be an attempt on Moholy's part to capture every possible aspect of her subject so as to consider and reveal him or her from all angles. Her interest in seriality also speaks to the influence of New Vision theories upon her work. Aleksandr Rodchenko, writing for *Novyj LEF* in 1928, declared: "You have to make several different photos and objects, from different points of view and under different conditions, as if you were to investigate and not always look through the one key hole."¹⁶ Moholy's serial photographs, both of herself and of others, suggest a dynamic, cinematic sequence of revealing the human face. The barrage of these images when viewed sequentially, each photograph revealing a different gesture, a different perspective, reflects the dynamism and rapidity of the age in which Moholy was working. They participated in the contemporary bombardment, both by artists and the mass media, of photographs that depicted the world through new perspectives.

Moholy was one amongst many women who adopted the close-up portrait to attain some sort of veristic intimacy or study of the face. Lotte Beese, who matriculated at the Bauhaus in 1926, studying weaving and later architecture and photography,

¹⁶ Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Puti sovremennoj fotografii*, in: *Novyj LEF*, Moskva 1928, p.31-39, quoted in Anja Guttenberger, "Mit eigenen Augen. Serielle Autoporträts von Lucia Moholy und Florence Henri," in *Gespiegeltes Ich: fotografische Selbstbildnisse von Frauen in den 1920er Jahren*, ed. Gerda Breuer and Elina Knorpp (Berlin: Nicolai, 2014), 102.

produced a series of portrait photographs while at the school. In *Portrait of Hannes Meyer*, c.1928 (Figure 72), Beese adopts a similar approach to Moholy, presenting a closely cropped view of Meyer's face. Meyer, the Swiss architect and second director of the Bauhaus, stares directly at the camera, his face occupying almost the entire picture plane, with his hand a large vertical counterpoint on the left-hand side cutting across the horizontality of the composition. Here the focus is on Meyer and nothing else; his gaze arrests ours as it dissolves into the shadows at the bottom of the photograph. Florence Henri, too, experimented with this approach. In her portrait of *Woti Werner*, c.1929 (Figure 73), Henri crops Werner at an unusual angle, revealing most of her head and part of her shoulders. Werner casts her gaze to the side, avoiding acknowledging the viewer's appraisal, while Henri draws the camera lens close to study Werner's face. Just as in many of Moholy's portraits, Henri investigates the tension between revelation and concealment in portraiture, what we can ascertain from studying the face without having access to the subject's eyes. Aenne Biermann, an artist relatively separated from the avant-garde artistic scene, also produced a series of closely-cropped, psychologically intimate portraits.¹⁷ In works such as *Woman with Monocle*, 1928, and *Through the Glasses*, 1929, Biermann uses extremely close studies of the face as a means of better understanding the human subject. Her sitters stare at the camera with direct, frank,

¹⁷ Biermann married her husband at the age of 22 in 1920 and moved to Gera, where they lived a wealthy and comfortable life. Biermann turned to taking photographs soon after her children were born, and many of her early works are portraits of them. In 1926, Biermann became more intensely preoccupied with artistic experimentation. It is likely that she was aware of the avant-garde work of the Bauhaus, as she had friends who were connected to Gropius, and she would have been exposed to the latest radical innovations in the field – the *Neue Wege der Fotografie* (New Ways of Photography) exhibition, held in Jena in 1928, was close to where she lived. The main body of her work was produced between 1929 and 1932, and her photographs were included in exhibitions such as *Fotografie der Gegenwart* (January-February 1929, Essen), *Film und Foto* (May-July 1929, Stuttgart), *Das Lichtbild* (June-Sept 1930, Munich), *Die neue Fotografie* (1931, Basel), and *Internationale de la Photographie* (1932, Brussels).

unswerving gazes; the entirety of their faces not necessary to forge a connection with the viewer. This cropping technique, adopted by Moholy, Biermann, Henri, Beese, and many others, was utilized as a means of strategically reevaluating assumed known entities, revealing the human face as never previously depicted.

As I discussed in my introductory chapter, multiple scholars have argued that Moholy's photography was entirely documentary; Angela Madesani claims that Lucia Moholy's images are "not artistic in nature, but rather aimed at recording, documenting and relating, in different ways in different periods, what was happening around her."¹⁸ The mistake here, I believe, is in construing Moholy's approach as being a mere recording of the physical exteriorities, rather than as her own nuanced interpretation of contemporary photographic objectivity. In addition to her abiding interest in human psychology, Moholy was drawn to "radical objectivity," as Baumhoff calls it, to some degree.¹⁹ As part of her diverse approaches to the human form, she was interested in abstracting the figure into a formal composition, utilizing light and dark to construct a human subject as object. Perhaps the best examples of Moholy's work in this arena are her portraits of Nelly and Theo van Doesburg from 1924 (Images 1 and 15). In both portraits, Moholy sets her subjects against monochromatic dark and light backgrounds in profile form. There are no shadows present; each is photographed, as Sachsse notes, in the same manner as the metalwork Bauhaus objects Moholy was commissioned to photograph.²⁰ In *Nelly van Doesburg*, Moholy renders her subject in stark contrasts of

¹⁸ Angela Madesani and Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini, *Lucia Moholy: Between Photography and Life* (Milan, Italy: Cinisello Balsamo, 2012), 17.

¹⁹ Baumhoff, "Frauen und Foto am Bauhaus: ein modernes Medium im Spannungsfeld von Geschlecht, Kunst und Technik," 39.

²⁰ Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, 18.

light and dark, with her fashionable, cropped hair in a dramatic, angular contrast to the blanched whiteness of her skin. The darkness of her hair is mirrored below in the plain back shirt van Doesburg wears; the segmenting of dark-light-dark creates an interplay of geometric forms that abstracts the sitter into blocks of contrasting color rather than as a human figure. Moholy takes the same approach, although slightly less markedly, in her portrait of *Theo van Doesburg*, rendering the artist identically in profile against a plain background, all context removed so that the focus remains entirely on the sitter. It is in Nelly van Doesburg's portrait, however, that one truly gets a sense of the subject rendered as an object. Van Doesburg's resting, inexpressive gaze strips her of any emotive, psychological power, presenting her as a neutral figure made object by Moholy's exposure and manipulation of light and dark. Here one sees in action Moholy-Nagy's call, in *Malerei Photographie Film*, for "an experiment in objective portraiture: to photograph the person as an object, not to burden the photographic results with a subjective intention."²¹

One also observes Moholy's interest in contrasting lights and darks to create geometric interacting forms in her portrait of Moholy-Nagy from 1926 (Figure 66). In this image, Moholy places her husband against a vertical panel of white, which is hinged and connected to a contrasting dark panel that forms a color dialogue with the dark outfit Moholy-Nagy wears. This suit, a crimson fisherman's suit that he used as his workshop clothes while at the Bauhaus in Dessau, underpins Moholy-Nagy's status as a modernist artist in pared-down, simply designed clothes. Moholy-Nagy is lit uniformly, his entire

²¹ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei Photographie Film* (Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1925), 22. Given that Moholy was significantly involved in editing the first edition of *Malerei Photographie Film*, one could interpret such language as reflecting Moholy's own experimental pursuits.

figure clearly rendered against the bright white background, against which one sees a shadow cast by a branch behind the photographer. Through her image of contrasting tonal shades and forms, Moholy explores spatial relationships between forms, utilizing Moholy-Nagy's body as another object in space to illustrate this interaction.

Moholy extended this interest in spatial relationships more emphatically in other portraits, where she presented the figure's head completely isolated, seemingly disconnected from its environment, and cropped so as to be disembodied. Closely cropped perspectives on figures became immensely popular at the Bauhaus and beyond during the late 1920s, impacted in part by the Soviet avant-garde. Moholy-Nagy explored such unusual perspectives at length in his portraiture, for example in *Ellen Frank*, 1929 (Figure 74), where Moholy-Nagy presents Frank in extremely close quarters, cropping her face so that only her nose, lips, and left eye are visible to the camera lens. Some of Moholy's portraits, such as those of *Georg Muche*, 1926 (Figure 75), and *Ingeborg Lebert*, 1927 (Figure 76), reveal her similar involvement with this avant-garde line of artistic questioning. Moholy can certainly be situated within the radical New Vision wave of photography in the sense that her photographs show an unconventional approach to the depiction of the human body. In many photographs, individual elements of the face are zeroed-in on; the camera angle fragments perspective and makes abstract elements of the sitter's body at the same time as creating a distinct impression of mood and character. On one level, these photographs are formal explorations that reveal the milieu in which Moholy was working. She addresses how the play of light and dark and unusual camera angles work to abstract, to create texture, and to make ambiguous the human figure and character. In her portrait *Frau Binder*, 1925 (Figure 77), one observes the most abstracted

embodiment of Moholy's interests in this vein. Here, the photographer makes foreign the view of the body, approaching Binder from an oblique overhead position, and gazing down at the top of her face. Binder's face is set against a completely abstracted dark background below, which takes up fully one half of the composition and provides a striking dark contrast to the lighter elements of her face. The disembodiment of Binder's head, of which only half is visible to us, serves to abstract this element and transform the portrait into an object study of differing planes and shapes. The outline of Binder's forehead and nose are heightened in effect, drawing the viewer's attention to the sharp contrast between light and dark played out along this ridge. The surface of the body becomes object here, facial elements reduced to geometric angles and shapes. Moholy zeroes in so close to her subject, in such detail, that we can no longer recognize the human subject as it is traditionally captured in portraiture.

Drawing on the ability of the camera to approach the subject from new perspectives, Moholy deftly manipulates natural light to call attention to the surface of the body, the result of which is often a sculptural quality or a nuanced sense of texture. Texture becomes a central element to these images through Moholy's careful consideration of light and shadow. The fleshy frown lines on Walter Gropius's face call attention to the consistency and substance of his skin in *Portrait of Walter Gropius*, while the soft contrast between white strands of hair and deeply wrinkled skin in *Portrait of Clara Zetkin*, 1929-30 (Figure 78), enhance the textural quality of Zetkin's visage.²² In

²² Clara Zetkin was a representative of the Communist Party of Germany in the Reichstag during the Weimar years. A strong advocate on behalf of women's rights, Zetkin had helped organize the first International Women's Day. Moholy met Zetkin through her partner Theodor Neubauer, with whom Moholy became involved following her separation from Moholy-Nagy. Neubauer was also a member of the Communist Party in the Reichstag, and an outspoken socialist critic. Moholy portrayed Zetkin in a series of photographs, some with Neubauer included in the scene. Her decision to portray a radical and public figure

Ingeborg Lebert, Moholy's manipulation of light and the angle at which she approaches Lebert makes the body almost sculptural, material-like, and porous. Lebert's skin becomes almost ossified, a carved surface of light and shadow, a plastic object. These are images formed and impacted by light and dark, intended to isolate and make principal the figure. Moholy once commented that "I have photographed people just like a house,"²³ an approach clearly seen through her deft manipulation of light and dark to shape and frame her subjects and her interest in approaching her object of study from unusual, revelatory perspectives.

IV. Photographic Experimentation by Other Female Bauhaus Photographers

Moholy's interests in extreme contrasts of light and dark and abstracting the face from the body were shared by other female Bauhaus photographers working around the same time, or a little after her departure from the school in 1928. In Beese's *Hannes Meyer*, 1928–29 (Figure 79), one observes the same preoccupation with juxtapositions of contrasting light. Meyer's head emerges disembodied from the darkness, a disjointed, floating object brilliantly lit from below. There is no sense that his head is connected to a body and his face seems entirely formed by the light source beneath him. Here is a study in the extreme contrasts of light and dark and the manner in which these elements can form the human face. This portrait of Meyer presents an entirely different view of the architect to that taken by Beese in the same year and discussed earlier in this chapter

in the German Socialist movement was a radical act in its own right, indicating Moholy's openness to the Socialist agenda and her embrace of a new political and social circle following her move from the Bauhaus.
²³ Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, 36.

(Figure 72). While Beese similarly focuses closely on the face as the focal point of the composition, in this second image she abstracts the head so that it appears entirely isolated in space, the framing (and contextualizing) hands and chest seen in Figure 72 removed from the frame. Beese increases the sharp contrasts of light and dark to produce an image more stark, striking, and avant-garde than her other portrait of Meyer.

Etel Mittag-Fodor's *Mädchenporträt (Portrait of a Girl)*, 1928 (Figure 80), also draws on a dramatic contrast of light and dark from an extremely close, oblique perspective, to present an unusual perspective on the human form. In Irene Bayer's portrait of *Grit Kallin-Fischer*, another Bauhaus student, from 1928 (Figure 81), Bayer captures her subject from an oblique angle.²⁴ Kallin-Fischer's face is visible but relatively inaccessible to the viewer, as we are positioned overhead and upside-down, distorting our usual recognition of the human face. Kallin-Fischer's eyes are shut, perhaps she is even unaware of our presence; there is thus no sense of what she is thinking and no intimate connection to her character. Bayer approaches her subject almost as an object study rather than a portrait, as she considers the lines and shapes of Kallin-Fischer's face and purposely renders her from an unusual perspective, the better from which to abstract and reconsider her form. Grit Kallin-Fischer, photographing Irene Bayer in turn, further demonstrates the impact of Moholy's experimental exploration of light and dark while at the Bauhaus. In *Portrait of Irene Bayer*, 1927–28 (Figure 82), Kallin-Fischer presents

²⁴ Bayer was married to Herbert Bayer, a graphic designer who, following his training at the Bauhaus, was appointed the Master of Printing and Advertising at the school by Gropius. Irene Bayer (née Hecht) was born in Chicago and moved to Berlin at the age of twenty-two to study at the Academy of Fine Arts. Having taken the preliminary course at the Weimar Bauhaus (unofficially – she never enrolled), Bayer trained in photography at the Academy of Graphic Arts and Book Publishing in Leipzig, just as Moholy had done, and moved to the Bauhaus Dessau in 1926 following her marriage to Herbert Bayer. There she was largely relegated to an assistant position, helping Bayer with his own photography; despite this, she explored her own interests in experimental photography, producing a large number of images capturing everyday life at the Bauhaus, and the people who lived and worked there.

Bayer set against a background divided into light and dark vertical blocks. Bayer is lit from the left-hand side and seems to emerge from the pure darkness on the right of the composition. Kallin-Fischer produces a dramatic interplay of light and shadow to frame and sculpt Bayer's face in a style that maintains a dialogue with Moholy's earlier explorations in the same vein.²⁵ Further examples of Bauhaus photographers exploring texture and effects of light to produce either sculptural or flat effects include Elsa Thiemann's *Portrait of Hans Thiemann*, c.1929–30, Charlotte Grunert's *Portrait of Katja Rose*, c.1932, and Beese's *Portrait of Mart Stam*, 1929–30.

Moholy's impact on other female Bauhäusler is seen perhaps most directly in her relationship with Florence Henri. Henri matriculated at the Bauhaus for a semester in 1927, during which time she forged a strong relationship with Moholy-Nagy and Moholy. She lived in a room in their master house and spent large quantities of time with them. The impact her relationship with Moholy would have upon her artistic direction cannot be understated. It was Moholy who suggested to Henri that she begin photographing,²⁶ and Henri was exposed to Moholy's own artistic production on a routine basis while living with her and her husband. These months spent together, working and living closely with one another, would leave, as Guttenberger observes, "a lasting impression on both women."²⁷ Henri's first photograph was an architectural view of the workshop building's

²⁵ Kallin-Fischer entered the Bauhaus in 1926 and became one of the few women besides Marianne Brandt who worked in the metal workshop, under the pedagogical guidance of Moholy-Nagy. During these years, she began experimenting with photography, producing a range of penetrating and experimental portraits. One observes, in these portraits, an interest in many of the same compositional devices that Moholy so frequently used. In such works as *Portrait of Alfredo Bortoluzzi*, 1927-28, *Portrait of Edward Fischer*, 1925, and *Untitled (Portrait of Edward Fischer)*, 1927, one sees Kallin-Fischer exploring the interplay of darkness and light, unusual perspectives, close-cropping of the figure, and direct, intimate connections with the subject that seek to reveal or conceal the sitter's countenance. Kallin-Fischer utilized many of the same photographic principles as Moholy to produce an oeuvre of portraits distinctly modern and individual.

²⁶ Guttenberger, "Mit eigenen Augen. Serielle Autoporträts von Lucia Moholy und Florence Henri," 96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

glass façade, taken from inside the Bauhaus studio space, a perspective that, as Diana Du Pont notes, reflects Moholy's earlier Dessau Bauhaus photographs and her interest in architecture photography.²⁸

Moholy and Henri's close relationship was captured in the former's depictions of the latter. Although one of these images has already been discussed, it is important to state here that Moholy's tightly cropped photographs serially plumb the depths of her subject's visage, presenting Henri in intimate renderings that suggest the closeness of their relationship. Du Pont calls Moholy's impact on Henri's artistic development "extremely significant,"²⁹ their relationship influencing Henri's shift to photography as her professional endeavor. It was in 1928, immediately following her period of stay at the Bauhaus, that Henri began experimenting with self-portraits. Indeed, her portraits were likely to some degree inspired by those she witnessed (and sat for) by Moholy, given that she similarly experimented with approaching her subject frontally and obliquely, seeking to access different approaches to the sitter. Her portraits frequently depicted women; and her style, presenting these figures in close proximity to the picture frame, filling the entire space of the composition, hearkens back to Moholy's own portraits of women. Similarly also to Moholy, Henri focused on representing the modern woman in her myriad guises; presented alone, without the signifiers of family or profession, these women stood for themselves as independent individuals living in the modern world. In such images as *Lore Krüger*, *Woti Werner*, 1929, and *Portrait*, 1930, Henri rendered the New Woman in her own style, making central the physical and intellectual presence of her subjects and

²⁸ Diana C. Du Pont, *Florence Henri: Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 19. For an in-depth consideration of Moholy's architectural photographs of, and for, the Bauhaus, please see Chapter One of this dissertation.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

asserting their worth as subjects of photography. Henri's self-portraits display the influence of her relationship with both Moholy and her husband; they combine Henri's contemplative, studied gaze and self-recognition in the mirror with a constructivist interest in interlocking planes and surfaces. Henri used mirrors to fragment and deconstruct the space her self-portrait occupied, providing multiple and alternate perspectives on herself within a geometric, rectilinear environment.

Lucia Moholy and August Sander

Despite numerous women producing portrait photographs during the same period Moholy operated, the field was dominated by men, perhaps the most renowned today being August Sander. Given the insistent labeling of Moholy's photographs as "documentary" by numerous art historians, and Sachsse's argument that her portraits follow some of the same documentary traditions that Sander utilized, it seems worthwhile to spend some time considering Sander's approach to portraiture and the manner in which Moholy's works enter into a dialogue with his corpus of works.

Working in Cologne and a generation older than most of the photographers already discussed, Sander was somewhat separated from the avant-garde milieu of eastern Germany, and particularly Berlin and Dessau. His major life's work, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts (People of the Twentieth Century)*, 1911–1964, was an ongoing project seeking to document the full strata of the German people alive during his era. In photographing each German "type," Sander hoped to create a collective portrait of Germany, a compendium that distilled into typological photographs the entirety of the German race. Given the ongoing, incomplete nature of Sander's project, in 1929 he published a preview to his work titled *Antlitz der Zeit (Face of the Time)*, which

presented sixty portraits from his larger body of work. Proceeding chronologically, and following a strict methodology, Sander chronicled peasants, politicians, the unemployed, the mentally ill, scholars, artists, and mothers, attempting to unlock the reality of Germany's social fabric. Sander adapted the environment in which his subjects were portrayed based on their social or professional role; thus, tradesmen and peasants are situated in areas that reflect their work, while middle- and upper-class subjects are portrayed more classically in neutral interiors.

Sander was interested in capturing an encyclopedic registering of Germans in the early twentieth century. His was an almost scientific approach and task, focused on observation, detailed recording of facts, and a comprehensive registering of types. In such images as *Peasant Woman of the Westerwald*, 1912, *Social Democratic parliamentarian, Cologne*, 1927, and *Pastry cook, Cologne*, 1928 (Figure 83), the subjects are classified according to type, the titles given their photographs demonstrating their function as representatives of a social group, rather than as individuals. Sander was emphatically not interested in the personalities and characteristics of each person photographed; he did not attempt to connect the viewer intimately with his subject to reveal some greater depth to their individual person. Instead, they are symbolic of a broader conception of the German "race." Sander's photographic study provoked contemplation regarding the meaning of "Germanness" in a period of extreme flux and volatility. Could depicting physiognomic types reveal the inner character of the German people, their spirit? Could the German people be so neatly delineated into groups? This approach was entirely different to Moholy, who was committed to the individuality of each of her sitters, regardless of whether she was exploring psychological depth or an objective approach. Sander

maintained a careful, critical distance from his subjects, allowing them to assume the pose they felt projected themselves and their position best. He considered himself a documentarian, utilizing the camera to render a “physiognomic momentary portrait”³⁰ of German society as a whole. As Sander wrote in his essay “Remarks on My Exhibition at the Cologne Art Union” in November 1927: “Nothing seems better suited than photography to give an absolutely faithful historical picture of our time.”³¹ Sander’s portraits are observational, reserved and distant; the artist did not forge an emotional connection with the sitter and the portraits were not intended to elicit such a connection between viewer and subject. Moholy, on the other hand, was friends with most of her portrait subjects, and captured them in ways that either reveal that intimacy or acknowledge the individuality of each portrait.

Significantly, Sander and Moholy also differed greatly in their approach to German women. Sander’s approach to the female subject was couched in traditionalism, in dramatic comparison to the diverse spectrum of womanhood that Moholy captured through her portraits. Sander dedicated only a small section of his study to women, and even then focused largely on middle- and upper-class women in domestic roles. In surveying his photographs of German women, such as *Young Bourgeois Mother*, 1926, *Young Bourgeois Woman*, 1930, *Untitled (Woman)*, 1930, and *Dr. Lu Strauss-Ernst and Son Jimmy, Cologne*, 1928, one has an overwhelming sense of the traditional roles assigned to women and their responsibilities as mothers and wives. Few of the woman

³⁰ August Sander, “Photography as a Universal Language,” quoted in Gabriele Conrath-Scholl, *August Sander: Seeing, Observing, and Thinking: Photographs* (Munich; Cologne: Schirmer/Mosel; Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, 2009), 28.

³¹ August Sander, “Remarks on My Exhibition at the Cologne Art Union (‘Erläuterung zu meiner Ausstellung im Kölnischen Kunstverein’),” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 645.

portrayed by Sander display the typical tropes associated with New Womanhood, such as a bobbed haircut, fashionable, loose clothing or androgynous dress, or cigarettes; instead, the overarching view Sander presented suggests a society still firmly entrenched in traditional social values. There is little indication amidst these images of the radical, sweeping change confronting Weimar society during this period; few women are depicted in working roles, despite the millions of professional women at work during these years, and fewer still embody any element of the more liberal lifestyle available to those young women that lived in metropolitan areas. Thus Sander, a prestigious, successful male photographer enjoying public acclaim during this period, established himself as a bastion of male traditionalism in the face of women's increasing public presence and power. The one photograph in this corpus frequently lauded as a definitive symbol of New Womanhood, *Wife of Painter Peter Abelen, Cologne, 1926* (Figure 84), which supposedly "challenges our expectations of gender identity,"³² loses some of its strength when one learns that Peter Abelen entirely staged the photograph of his wife, Helene, to his liking, presenting her as the perfect New Woman when in fact such a mode was not her own style. Here Helene Abelen is observed in a defiant and ferocious pose, cigarette clenched between her teeth, hair slicked back, wearing a white shirt and trousers with accompanying androgynous tie. She seems to perfectly encapsulate the "glittering media image of the emancipated female,"³³ the perfect New Woman in every aspect of her dress. However, as previously noted, this conception of Helene Abelen was not of her own making. Her daughter revealed some years after the portrait was taken that her father

³² Olivia Lahs-Gonzales and Lucy Lippard, *Defining Eye: Women Photographers of the 20th Century: Selections from the Helen Kornblum Collection* (St. Louis, MO: Saint Louis Art Museum, 1997), 43.

³³ *August Sander: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 48.

constructed Helene's appearance to reflect the new woman he wished his wife to emulate. Thus her clothes, her cut hair, even her confident, aggressive pose, were all carefully chosen and fashioned by Peter, producing an image that is "a carefully orchestrated performance, a theatrical ploy"³⁴ that presents the image of female liberation but actually entirely undercuts it in reality. The title of the photograph – *Wife of Painter Peter Abelen* – further underscores this point; here Helene's name is not recorded, as though she is defined only through her husband and not through her own character. Helene is seen in another photograph taken by Sander in an entirely different state. In *Mother and Daughter, Cologne, 1926*, one observes Helene Abelen sitting on the floor with her child, staring at the camera as she is depicted in her usual role of mother and caregiver. Here, one senses, the mask falls away and Helene Abelen appears closer to who she really is. Sander's approach to his female subjects thus betrays a great deal about his consideration of women with the German social fabric, a perspective altogether alien to photographers like Moholy who sought to capture the vibrant diversity of female experience during the Weimar years.

Finally, Sander differed strongly to Moholy in his approach to lighting and composition. Sander was adamantly opposed to stark juxtapositions of light and dark, frequently asserting that "there must be no unrelieved shadows in a picture."³⁵ He abhorred artificial light and relied solely upon natural light, regardless of the extra work or effort required as a result. He also, as is clear from his corpus of works, rejected modernist principles of unusual perspectives and extreme close-ups, believing strongly in

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gunther Sander, ed., *August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century. Portrait Photographs, 1892-1952* (Cambridge, MA; London, England: The MIT Press, 1986), 28.

traditional compositional modes of portraiture. “When a person is shown seated in the photo,” Sander declared, “the viewer must have the feeling that he will not bump the ceiling if he stands up.”³⁶ Adhering to his position as a documentary, observational photographer, Sander refused to inject his own viewpoints into his images, producing works radically unlike those by Moholy, who approached her subjects from unusual perspectives to capture them anew. The tendency to group Moholy into Sander’s mode of portraiture is, therefore, one that does not consider closely enough the intention and effect of Moholy’s own oeuvre.

V. Self-Fashioning New Womanhood: Self-Portraiture in the 1920s

The 1920s saw a turn towards photographic self-portraits, as the new small, easily handled cameras provided increasingly diverse opportunities for self-representation. Many female photographers turned to self-portraiture as a means of entering into dialogue with a mode often used by their male colleagues. Self-portraiture during the modernist period became an opportunity for trying on different personas, for experimenting with masquerade, deception, and obfuscation. It was a liberating avenue to explore, allowing artists the freedom to imagine themselves at will, with the use of technological advancements to aid in their visions. Some female photographers utilized modern techniques of montage and double-exposure to experiment with self-representation, including artists such as Gertrud Arndt, Hannah Höch, Claude Cahun, and Wanda Wulz. The contested status of photography within the hierarchy of fine arts, whether it could in fact be considered art or not, provided a greater degree of freedom for

³⁶ Ibid.

artists experimenting in the medium, and it also signaled a radical, cutting-edge approach to exploring identity. To self-fashion as a female artist during this period was particularly significant, given the constant defining of femininity and womanhood occurring from outside pressures in the mass media. In the body of self-portraits by female photographers considered in this section, one observes varied techniques for investigating gender identity, asserting artistic professionalism, challenging gender stereotypes, and voicing new conceptions of self through the use of the camera.

Across time, self-portraiture has offered the unique opportunity for the artist to represent him or herself solely as they wish to be seen, removing other cognizant agents from the production of their image or likeness. Even more significantly, as Susan Butler explains, this power has allowed the female photographer, so frequently the subject of the male gaze, to represent herself as she wishes; the woman takes control of her own image production.³⁷ In the self-portrait, it is not only the artist's likeness that is depicted. The image speaks volumes about the artist's character, direction, and purpose. As Erika Billeter observes, "almost every self-portrait points beyond itself."³⁸ Self-portraits can be the documenting of significant moments in the artist's life, an exploration of sexual identity, an invitation into emotional intimacy with the artist, and an uncovering of the self. For female artists during the Weimar period, the self-portrait offered all these things, as well as the opportunity to challenge traditional notions of gender and the role of women in society. To photograph oneself was an act both of power and vulnerability, laying oneself open for others to analyze. It was often an intimate act, signaling a desire

³⁷ Butler, "So How Do I Look? Women Before and Behind the Camera," 51.

³⁸ Erika Billeter, ed., *Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography: Photographers Reflecting Their Own Image* (Bern: Benteli Verlag, 1985), 7.

on the artist's part to plumb the depths of their own character, and to allow others to do the same. In the case of an artist such as Lucia Moholy, who photographed herself so infrequently and left us with few self-portraits to consider, each existing photograph becomes a potent entry point into the artist's intentions.

For female photographers during this period, the self-portrait functioned not only as a means of self-discovery and reinvention of identity, but also as an assertion of independence and professional capability in a period of social upheaval. Female artists carved out space in traditionally male artistic circles for female self-portraiture, an act of self-confidence and a declaration of worth as well. The sheer number of female photographic self-portraits during the Weimar years attests to the perceived significance of the medium for these artists. Unlike in so many images of women across centuries of artistic production, in these photographic self-portraits under consideration the woman envisioned herself, engendered her own image production, and asserted her standing as an artist. The female artist "presents an embodied subject,"³⁹ a depiction framed through the artist's vision of herself, rather than through her physical appearance as understood and qualified by others. Self-portraiture is a masculine tradition, so for women to engage in it is significant, an undercutting of the defined, standard mode of doing things. These artists interjected female voices into a traditionally male space, "insert[ing] themselves as practitioners within the masculinist myth of the artist as hero/genius"⁴⁰ to the end of appropriating and upending conventions and asserting their own legitimacy.⁴¹

³⁹ Rosy Martin, "Foreword: How Do I Look?," in *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996), xv.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁴¹ As photography became increasingly institutionalized at the school as a serious field of study, it also became masculinized, with a male Bauhaus master leading the newly established Photography Department and teaching a methodology of rational, cold, detailed vision. Thus the turn to self-portraiture takes on

The manner in which female photographers entered into this realm of legitimation through self-portraiture varied widely. Some took on the endeavor earnestly, presenting themselves as serious artists in their craft, self-fashioning as legitimate and worthy entrants to the field. Others played with the potential of the mode, offering self-portraits that obscured their features or turned their personas into masquerade, subverting any ability to forge a direct connection to the artist.⁴² Across these varying modes, Marsha Meskimmon argues, women were forced to confront what it meant to be both ‘woman’ and ‘artist’ in a culture that defined artistry by specifically masculine codes of being, for example genius, flaneur, outsider, and bohemian.⁴³ In addressing a small range of the female photographic self-portraits produced during the Weimar era, I hope to situate Moholy’s own self-fashioning within this milieu in order to better understand the artist and her position within Weimar womanhood.

Lucia Moholy and Self-Portraiture

There are few self-portraits by Moholy remaining from her Weimar period (and few from her entire career). Moholy seems to have portrayed herself relatively infrequently, offering us, the contemporary viewers, limited opportunities to assess her artistic construction of herself. The most famous of these self-portraits is one taken by Moholy in 1930, following her move from the Bauhaus and her separation from Moholy-Nagy. In this *Selbstporträt* (Figure 85), Moholy leans forward, head propped in her

more potent meaning as a way of asserting their value as contributors to the field, as artists in their own right.

⁴² Gertrud Arndt, under consideration later in this section, was perhaps the most ardent adaptor of this mode, producing a series of masked self-portraits.

⁴³ Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists’ Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996), 27.

hands, as she gazes solemnly and directly at the camera. Her hair is pulled back in a simple style, she wears no makeup, and her clothing registers as an insignificant element in the portrait. The entire focus is on Moholy's face and the intensity with which she connects with the viewer. The photograph was taken just a year after Moholy and her husband separated, at the beginning of Moholy's decades-long career as an independent artist outside of the artistic sphere and influence of her husband. The portrait declares Moholy's seriousness and her desire to be accepted for her own artistic legitimacy. As so many of her female compatriots did, Moholy utilizes the photographic self-portrait to state her independence and capability as an artist; it functions as a declaration of artistic worth and intent.

There is, furthermore, nothing displayed to detract from her character study. Moholy does not embrace the common fashionable trappings of New Womanhood in rendering her likeness for the world; she purposely presents herself as a study in character. The viewer is unable to read into her personality via her clothes, makeup, or jewelry; instead, one must glean what one can simply from her face. The portrait, in this sense, is consistent with many of Moholy's portraits of her friends, those that zero in on the face or profile as the sole communicator of inner character and psychological depth. In this image, Moholy presents herself as unreadable; her direct, concentrated, unflinching gaze reveals no clear emotional state being communicated. Moholy simultaneously opens herself up for consideration by the viewer, by presenting herself in close proximity and connecting with the viewer's gaze, and makes difficult any superficial interpretation of her character.

In portraying herself in this mode, Moholy embraces one of the fundamental functions of self-portraiture: the introspective attempt to self-examine, to unmask, and to plumb the depths of one's own character. Moholy embraces the self-portrait as a means of deeper self-understanding, establishing her own rules for self-representation and self-perception. In her contemplative expression one observes Moholy staging her own presentation to the world; this is a self-analysis controlled by the artist. Self-portraits, of course, never fully reveal the authentic self as they are constructed by the artist; they have a specific intention and meaning that the artist wishes the viewer to derive from the image. The author is unreliable, managing her public persona to a certain extent through a mode that Amelia Jones describes as a "photographic self performance."⁴⁴ Despite this, the photographer cannot control all aspects of the camera; the lens reveals unsuspected or unplanned elements to the viewer. Thus as one makes eye contact with Moholy there is a sense of being invited into her introspection, to consider her personal declaration of self and evaluate her character based on this representation.

A second image in the series captures Moholy in profile form, as she adopts the same method of serial photography seen in her portraits of others (Figure 86). Here, again, one is struck by the simplicity of Moholy's self-representation. We see her face in profile, smooth, clear skin, and short hair controlled but not fashionably coiffed. The intensity of Moholy's direct stare is gone; here the artist adopts a more relaxed, contemplative expression. Moholy allows us the opportunity here to consider her without interruption; in not acknowledging the camera, it is almost as though Moholy distances herself from the creation of the image, attempting to render herself captured objectively

⁴⁴ Amelia Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 40.

in a moment unawares. Moholy's pose echoes that of Marianne Breslauer and Germaine Krull in two self-portraits from 1929 and 1927 (Figures 87 and 88), in which the artists avoided acknowledging the camera, both refusing the viewer access to an intimate connection with their gazes and allowing for a distancing of the self from the image taken.

Self-Representation, Subjecthood, and Female Empowerment

One crucial element of the female self-portrait was that these artists asserted themselves as subjects rather than objects in the picture frame. Meskimmon explains that across western art, “‘woman’ was consistently evoked, while ‘women’ were subjects who escaped representation. Stereotypical uses of women’s bodies as subject-matter occluded the representation in art of women’s multifaceted experiences”⁴⁵ By controlling the use and depiction of their own faces and bodies, female photographers turned away from a male objectification of their selves and instead asserted their existence as subjects. Many, including Moholy, addressed this issue by self-consciously avoiding rendering their likeness in a manner that focused on beauty or superficial details. Femininity no longer needed to be the core of the female self, though of course it could be if the artist so chose. The point was that the woman maintained control of her likeness, projecting what she wished to convey about herself. “Voyeuristic access to a woman’s body as an object of delectation” is denied;⁴⁶ in many of these photographs women present themselves as sober, serious characters to disallow overt sexualization by the viewer.

⁴⁵ Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists’ Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

The representation of “woman” across western art is complex and laden with meaning. For many of these female artists, then, self-representation was a means of coming to terms with what visualizations of womanhood meant in art. Their self-portraits explore the myriad ways in which woman can be realized and depicted when explored from a female perspective, rather than the male “norm.” Meskimmon elaborates on this point, observing that “The binarism of male/female, in which the latter term has meaning only in opposition to the former, creates a structure in which masculinity is stable and in control of representation while femininity is defined as difference (even deviance) from this norm.”⁴⁷ Thus female artists had to work to undermine these inherent power structures in order to envision womanhood in an alternate manner, to move away from stereotypes, and into a position of subjecthood rather than objecthood. Of particular interest in this regard are Marta Astfalck-Vietz’s self-portraits in which she displays herself naked, varyingly concealing and revealing her body using lace and other materials. In these images Astfalck-Vietz purposefully alters our perception of female sexuality, reclaiming the female body from its traditional position as a prop for male sexual fantasies and revealing it in a different, empowered light. There is nothing overtly erotic or pornographic about Astfalck-Vietz’s photographs; instead, she uses the female nude to explore a different consideration of the female body, one that registers her interest in experimental dance, bodily movement, and female ownership of nakedness. Marianne Breslauer’s semi-naked self-portrait from 1933 (Figure 89) is also worth considering in this light, as one of the few self-portraits by a professional female photographer in that period that reveals the woman’s own partially nude body. In this

⁴⁷ Ibid., 102.

photograph, Breslauer hides her face through the cover of her hair, concealing her expression, but reveals to the viewer intimate sexual elements of her body. Breslauer strips herself almost bare as she performs her art, producing a partially nude self-portrait that might be understood as a declaration of liberation, an act of sexual and personal freedom. Breslauer renders herself bare for the consideration of the viewer, yet her nudity is not the sole focus of the image. The camera, almost as tall as her, acts as a second figure she is in dialogue with, taking up a large vertical section of the composition and drawing the eye, as Breslauer leans over to look into the viewfinder as she takes the photograph. While one might project a phallic interpretation upon this image in the positioning of the camera and tripod, such a reading is undercut, I feel, by Breslauer's confident embrace of her own body and her active role as professional photographer. Breslauer does not display her nudity for our erotic enjoyment; rather, she turns it into a casual, modern mode of being that she expects to be accepted by the viewer.

In asserting themselves as subjects of the image, rather than as objects, many female artists embraced androgyny as a means of appropriating power from traditionally male identifiers. Diminishing or concealing markers of one's femininity allowed female artists to break away from stereotypes connected with their gender.⁴⁸ Androgyny was a powerful means by which women could adopt a professional air and insert themselves into the masculine public space, drawing on the sobriety, seriousness of purpose, and lack of ostentation associated with simple men's clothing. Women thus used more gender-neutral garb as a means of both signifying their new womanhood and appropriating the

⁴⁸ This does not mean, of course, that those who explored androgyny did not consider themselves feminine or womanly; rather, in breaking from the prescribed mold of traditional "feminine" norms, these women had the opportunity to define their femininity on an individual basis, as they understood it.

power and privilege inherent in masculine dress and behavior. Their adoption of masculine garb and posturing also asserted the instability of gender norms and the possibility for fluidity in social gender construction.

This interest in self-fashioning as androgynous, masculine, and outside of the mainstream was notably popular amongst women at the Bauhaus, where a culture of liberal views and artistic experimentation fostered greater acceptance of radical forms of expression outside of the norm. Numerous surviving photographs from the period reveal the widespread adoption of androgyny at the school. Ise Gropius, the wife of the director, depicted herself with a fashionable bob haircut and simple shirt, her androgynous image repeated again and again through the reflectivity of the mirror (*Self-Portrait*, 1927 [Figure 90]). In other images, such as *Photograph of Gerhard Kadow and Else Franke*, 1929, women and men sport the same haircuts and casual style of dress, a purposeful blurring of gender lines creating an environment where women could express themselves more freely and with greater acceptance than ever previously. Tut Schlemmer speaks to this rejecting of conventional dress codes, explaining: “At first people let themselves go. Boys had long hair, girls short skirts. No collars or stockings were worn, which was shocking and extravagant then.”⁴⁹ This stance was adopted by female painters too, as seen, for example, in Eva Schulze-Knabe’s *Self-Portrait* of 1929 and Lotte Laserstein’s *Self-Portrait with Cat* of 1925. As an artist who asserted her New Woman androgyny and frequently explored themes traditionally adopted by male painters, for example, artist and muse (e.g. Laserstein, *Artist and Model in the Studio, Berlin Wilmersdorf*, 1929, and

⁴⁹ Tut Schlemmer, quoted in Eckhardt Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People: Personal Opinions and Recollections of Former Bauhaus Members and Their Contemporaries* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), 164.

Traute in the Mirror, 1930), Laserstein utilized this masculine appropriation as a means of asserting her own power and validity as an artist.

Many female artists also centralized signifiers of female independence into their self-portraits, for example cigarettes, which were a marker of masculine behavior and a sign of radical modernity in a woman. Germaine Krull, for example, repeatedly drew on this indicator in her self-portraits, depicting herself as relaxed, casually smoking, the epitome of the New Woman.⁵⁰ Lotte Jacobi similarly utilized the cigarette in a later self-portrait from 1937 (Figure 91), in which she adopts a confident pose, dressed in a black coat and shirt with large buttons, and holds her camera up at shoulder height to capture the image in the mirror. In her right hand, she prominently displays a cigarette, clearly posed as a fundamental element of the scene. These specific signifiers of female independence – the cigarette, the bubikopf, the short skirt – declared the empowerment of the artist. They also purposely referenced male subjects of portraits depicted with cigarettes, for example *André Malraux*, 1930 (Figure 92), and *Walter Benjamin*, 1926, both by Germaine Krull.

The adoption of “masculine” modes of dress and behavior to assert one’s worth as a female artist was not without its complexity. Meskimmon discusses the difficult

⁵⁰ Krull both depicted and herself embodied aspects of New Womanhood, operating a successful business venture, often wearing men’s clothes and enjoying sexual relationships with men and women, resulting in more than one abortion. Established as a photographer in Berlin in 1918, by 1926 Krull moved to Paris and worked professionally there. Krull was an “inclusionary modernist,” [Sichel, *Germaine Krull*, xviii] an artist who embraced high and low forms of art and public consumption, investigated commercial work, and saw the field of photography as open to numerous modes of experimentation. Unlike many of the female photographers of the period, Kim Sichel notes, Krull transgressed the boundaries of male/female and operated outside of accepted modes of female photography, including those of photojournalism, war photography, and industry. She turned her lens to female nudes, photographing lesbian scenes in an empowering manner, one that stripped the voyeuristic gaze from the man and returned agency to the female subjects, subverting the norms of female sexual representation. See Sichel, *Germaine Krull*, for further analysis.

relationship female artists must have had with the assumption of masculine traits and garb. As she observes, the avant-garde groups in the early decades of the twentieth century were comprised almost entirely of men and held fairly sexist views about women. It was extremely difficult for female artists to break into these groups; many were ostracized or relegated to the margins as lovers, students, and models; others simply could not achieve professional success with institutional support. Simultaneously, however, as Meskimmon argues, these avant-garde spaces did offer some respite from the crippling traditional expectations placed upon women; Moholy, for example, although hindered throughout her career by the egos of the male artists around her, achieved some professional success at the Bauhaus and gained exposure to modernist intellectual thought and artistic ideas. Thus, Meskimmon argues, despite the entrenched masculinism of the avant-garde and the underlying significance of adopting masculine conventions, many female artists felt it was worth taking on these modes as their own.⁵¹

For other artists, androgyny was not the only means of subverting masculine conventions and reclaiming female agency in depicting the body. The advent of the New Woman encouraged role play and experimentation with different personas, fashions, and guises on the part of women. Here was the opportunity to reinvent, to play, to discover through masquerade and drag what best expressed one's own personality. Through costuming (of which androgyny was a part), one could explore previously untapped elements of one's personality, coming to terms with one's identity and inventing new modes of being. Gertrud Arndt is a prime example of such experimentation. Having acquired a camera in 1926 while a student at the Bauhaus, Arndt produced numerous

⁵¹ Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, 40.

photographs of friends, her husband, the Bauhaus-affiliated architect Alfred Arndt, and herself during the late 1920s. When the couple returned to the Bauhaus after Alfred Arndt took up a teaching position there, Gertrud Arndt found herself, like Moholy, occupying the role of Bauhaus master's wife. Similarly to Moholy, Arndt was no longer truly a member of the Bauhaus scene, as she had completed her studies some years before and was not teaching. This was perhaps a difficult space to occupy for a professional artist who had successfully graduated from the school herself, and Arndt embraced photography as a means of artistic outlet. In 1930, over the course of a few days, she produced forty-three self-portraits in which she utilized a series of costumes to adopt different personas before the camera. As Arndt later explained, "So I was home, as a loafer so to speak, and out of boredom, I started to take these pictures...It was just my only pleasure. I just had time."⁵²

Across the forty-three images, Arndt presents a series of personas, utilizing different fabrics, such as tulle, lace, feathers, flowers, and fur, to explore, critique, and deconstruct modes of fashion and femininity (see Figures 93 and 94). The photographs are always framed around her face and upper chest; no other part of her body is revealed. Thus the viewer is encouraged to look closely at the subject's facial expressions, which change from the sultry, to the mysterious, to the playful and absurd across the range of photographs. "I've always had an interest in the face," Arndt later explained. "What you can do with a face is interesting."⁵³ In these photographs, Arndt took on different

⁵² Interview with Gertrud Arndt, May 1993, quoted in Sabina Leßmann, "Die Maske der Weiblichkeit nimmt kuriose Formen an...: Rollenspiele und Verkleidungen in den Fotografien Gertrud Arndts und Marta Astfalck-Vietz," in *Fotografieren hieß teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1994), 275.

⁵³ Interview with Gertrud Arndt, May 1993, quoted in *ibid.*, 274.

personas for her own exploration, including the femme fatale, the world traveler, an Asian woman, a child, and a widow, using different costumes and guises as a mode of personal transformation. Her expressions ranged from demur, to silly, to alluring, and sometimes satirical and tongue-in-cheek. Arndt used these personas to explore the idea that identity can be constantly in flux, repeatedly deconstructed and rebuilt as something else. These photographs, never intended for exhibition or sale, were Arndt's personal means of adopting different "selves" to try on. We are left, as Sabina Leßmann observes, wondering which of these women is actually Arndt, if any of them (or perhaps all of them). Arndt herself hinted at this mystery of self-expression/evasiveness: "You want to know: what can you do with yourself? It's the same thing, but you're surprised when you open your eyes like that or open your mouth and see your teeth and the tongue - there you look quite different - I mean, you do not show that to anyone ... You see yourself then differently ... Maybe you always have a mask ... Natural expression is also a mask, or you are always different. Yes, you are multiple."⁵⁴

For the most part in these photographs, Arndt stares directly at the camera, acknowledging the gaze of the viewer with different reactions: self-assuredness, coquetry, or coyness, for example. In adopting so many roles, Arndt seems to distance herself from these preselected versions of femininity, discarding one for another as easily as changing clothes. The possibilities inherent in such discarding and distancing were multiple; Arndt could pick and choose her self-representation as woman. Thinking back on her friend Schmidt's comments about the images – "The one with the flower in your mouth – you look like a whore. Say, what kind of photos are you making there?" – Arndt

⁵⁴ Interview with Gertrud Arndt, May 1993, quoted in *ibid.*, 275.

later explained, “I wasn’t thinking of such things of course. I have no idea what a whore looks like. *But I mean: you can be anything.*”⁵⁵

Astfalck-Vietz was also in the business of disguising and masquerading to question the various personas women present to the world. Trained at the School of Applied Arts and deeply interested in textiles, Astfalck-Vietz used materials she collected over time, including lace and other fabrics, as props in her photographs. Like Arndt, Astfalck-Vietz used photography as an opportunity to exploring self-disguise and revelation, adopting different personas and roles for different photographs. The freedom these women displayed in adopting different selves and playing with their own identities are testimony to the liberation offered by new womanhood and the increasing opportunities in the medium of photography.

In two further self-portraits taken by Moholy in either 1930 or 1931 (Figures 95 and 96), the artist frames herself in an entirely different mode to that of Arndt. The images seem more relaxed and casual in nature than her “official” self-portrait discussed previously. Here one observes the lighter side of Moholy, revealing her from the perspective of an intimate friend. In one, we see Moholy from a slightly upward angle; Moholy gazes at something above our head and smiles, the skin around her eyes creasing with enjoyment, as we seem to catch the artist in a moment of casual intimacy. Although the background is blurred, we ascertain that Moholy is somewhere outside and the staging of the photograph, at an odd angle, seemingly catching Moholy unaware, gives an impression of spontaneity and informality. This is an image that is not as carefully composed, and thus offers an entirely different rendering of the artist. In the other self-

⁵⁵ Interview with Gertrud Arndt, May 1993, quoted in *ibid.*, emphasis mine.

portrait, taken during the same sitting, Moholy looks directly at the camera with a pensive, elusive gaze, her lips tightened and slightly pursed, her eyes masking her inner thoughts. Set more clearly in the outdoors, Moholy turns to the camera and acknowledges its view, but prevents the establishment of an intimate connection by her closed-off gaze. These two self-portraits speak to the breadth of Moholy's photographic experimentation and her willingness, at times, to turn the camera on herself and reveal different aspects of her personality. Moholy's changing facial expressions suggest her interest in exploring what different aspects of one's personality can be revealed through different expressive gestures. Taken together, viewed serially, one gains a sense of Moholy as a whole, as though somehow these images collectively present a rounded view of the artist. These images are not intended to be "professional" headshots, communications of her artistic drive or professional status (a likelihood compounded by the fact that Moholy did not caption these images in her workbook⁵⁶). Here, instead, we glimpse Moholy "off-duty" as it were, smiling at something unseen off-camera or playfully confounding the viewer's interpretation with a mysterious look. They are personal photographs for private use, and thus reveal a great deal about Moholy in moments of informality. Moholy herself spoke to this desire to reveal one's true self through the use of the camera and avoid subjectivity on the part of the artist. In her notes for *malerei und fotografie (painting and photography)*, Moholy critiques the loaded subjectivity that a painter can bring to his own likeness, and the fact that artists frequently represent themselves as they wish, injecting their own observations into the image: "the photographer, however, can - when he wants to produce an original self-portrait - just choose this expression, the expression that he

⁵⁶ Guttenberger, "Mit eigenen Augen. Serielle Autoporträts von Lucia Moholy und Florence Henri," 101.

has while at work. [...] in this case, it is a work that is mixed with self-observation. And it is very doubtful whether this is the appropriate expression for a self-portrait.”⁵⁷

Unlike many of her contemporary female photographers, Moholy approaches self-portraiture with a pared-down aesthetic. She utilizes no props or devices to signal her craft, as one sees in the self-portraits by Germaine Krull, Marianne Breslauer, and Lotte Jacobi, and others that forefront the camera itself in the image. Moreover she does not use reflecting devices such as mirrors to add a layer of complexity to the photograph, as do Florence Henri, Ilse Bing, and Ise Gropius. In Moholy’s self-portraits, there is nothing except the artist herself, and even here we are offered only a glimpse, as the photographs all reveal only her head and upper torso. By removing reflecting devices, such as the mirror, Moholy circumvents this self-observation that so concerns her, producing direct images that only reveal themselves when the photograph is developed. It is only once the image is completed and takes permanent form that the artist can begin the task of self-observation; thus Moholy’s photographs are not influenced by self-conscious posing and adjustments that might have taken place had she been aware of her visage.

VI. Other Self-Representations of Women at the Bauhaus

Moholy was not the only female Bauhäusler to serially self-represent. Marianne Brandt, who had been photographing consistently since 1917, produced a series of self-portraits while studying at the Bauhaus, establishing herself in different settings, sometimes in her own room reclining, sometimes utilizing popular Bauhaus products to diffract her images, sometimes displaying the camera as a key element. Her photographs

⁵⁷ Lucia Moholy, “malerei und fotografie,” Typoskript, Inv.-Nr. 12.433/47, Nachlass Lucia Moholy, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin, quoted in *ibid.*

are more experimental, technically, than Moholy's, frequently displaying distortion, montage, and doubling, yet fundamentally they speak to the same desire to construct or evaluate a persona through serial representation. In such images as three titled *Selbstporträt im Atelier, Bauhaus Dessau (Self-Portrait in the Studio, Bauhaus Dessau)*, 1928/29, and *Selbstporträt mit Bauhausstoff und Wellpappe in der Kugel gespiegelt, Atelier im Bauhaus Dessau (Self-Portrait with Bauhaus Fabric and Cardboard Mirrored in the Ball, Studio in the Bauhaus Dessau)*, 1928, one observes Brandt capturing herself from different angles, none of which involve the photographer facing the camera directly. Brandt's expression is always serious, studied, and never hints at a relaxed or casual representation of self. One gets the impression in these photographs of Brandt playing with her identity, revealing herself through carefully constructed photographs in different Bauhaus locations. In *Selbstporträt im Atelier, Bauhaus Dessau* (Figure 97), Brandt is clearly situated in her atelier in the Bauhaus wing that housed students, the recognizable balcony seen out of the window. Brandt uses a rounded mirror placed above her head to cast the angle of the photograph down towards her body, where we see her grasping her camera, the instrument of her artistry. Brandt constructs herself as a New Woman in this photograph – she wears simple, loose-fitting clothing, her hair is cropped short, and she identifies herself as a photographer working in the modernist school. Another self-portrait titled *Selbstporträt im Atelier, Bauhaus Dessau* (Figure 98), captures the artist from a vastly different perspective: she has placed metallic orbs (a source of much photographic experimentation and fascination amongst Bauhaus students) on the ground and stands above them, replicating her image clearly in triplicate, and twice more indiscernibly in the two tiniest spheres. Here Brandt's self-portrait almost entirely effaces the possibility

of a character reading through the subject's visage. The only information we can glean from Brandt is mostly from the construction of the photograph in general and her stance within it, rather than from studying her particularly. Brandt highlights here her interest in modernist experimentation, presenting herself from a highly unusual angle and drawing on the popularity of doubling (or in this case quintupling) the image. The use of these metal objects in her self-portrait (seen also in *Selbstporträt mit Bauhausstoff und Wellpappe in der Kugel gespiegelt* and a third *Selbstporträt im Atelier, Bauhaus Dessau*) is of critical importance; Brandt, a central figure in the Bauhaus metal workshop, identifies herself with the material that defines her artistry.

Numerous female artists drew on the mirror as a means of complicating self-representation during these years. One could be doubled or tripled through the mirror, reflected back on oneself for consideration. One of the few extant photographs by Ise Gropius, a self-portrait from 1926–27, reveals the artist using the device of the mirror to reflect herself many times over, producing a serial self-portrait in a single image. Florence Henri's mirror portraits, meanwhile, depict a psychological dialogue between the subject and her mirror image – the viewer is not part of the conversation, but observes from the outside. In her work *Self-Portrait in the Mirror with Two Balls*, 1928 (Figure 99), Henri utilizes the mirror simultaneously as a frame and a reflecting device through which to consider herself. Entirely unlike Moholy's insistent "direct image" approach, Henri photographs herself in a lengthy self-contemplation. In clearly visualizing the mirror, and turning it into a literal frame for her countenance, Henri draws attention to the constructed, artificial nature of the photograph; she is aware she is being observed, both by herself and the viewer, and she turns this observation into a framed work of art.

Meskimmon draws attention to the history of women gazing in mirrors in artworks, observing that traditionally such observation was closely linked with vanity, and frequently involved nude women contemplating themselves in mirrors, thus allowing us to voyeuristically contemplate and objectify them.⁵⁸ An artist like Henri would have been well aware of the art-historical significance of looking at oneself in the mirror, and she manipulates this trope to suggest a self-conscious alternate, modern approach. Henri replaces the male gaze with her own, allowing herself as woman the opportunity to present her own identity.

In her photograph *Self-Portrait with Mirrors*, 1931 (Figure 100), Ilse Bing also drew on the mirror as an effective reflecting device for self-portraiture. Bing's double self-portrait both allows the artist to confront the viewer head-on through the camera lens and gives her the opportunity to depict herself in the act of her profession – we see her as professional photographer from the side. Here, Bing uses not one, but two mirrors, producing a double self-portrait both straight on and from the side, she is both subject and agent of the work. In *Self-Portrait with Mirrors*, the viewer actually receives two self-portraits, one in which we connect directly with Bing as she looks us in the eyes, her face partly obscured behind her camera, and another in which we can observe Bing unhindered as she executes her craft. The image embodies the simultaneous, multiple ways of seeing inherent to the modern world, and the vast potential for multiplied self-representation through the camera.

Most of Moholy's portraits, both of others and herself, take a relatively direct approach to the figure, in the sense that she did not utilize strategies like double-exposure

⁵⁸ Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, 3.

or mirroring in the majority of her photographs. The existence of a few images in her oeuvre that suggest her own interest in doubling, or shadowing, the human figure, are therefore of particular interest for their divergence from her other work. Of particular note in this regard is a photograph by Moholy from 1930 titled *Selbstporträt allein* (*Self-Portrait Alone*) (Figure 101). In this image, Moholy presents herself in the most radical and experimental of her self-portrait forms: as a shadow cast against rocks below. Unlike in her other self-portraits, where Moholy reveals a close focus on her face from multiple perspectives, as a means of revealing her character through different angles, here Moholy's face and expression are completely hidden; all that we see is a distorted shadow outline of her body, her legs looming large in comparison to her small upper body through the shadow cast by the sun. The photograph points back obliquely to Moholy and Moholy-Nagy's photograms produced in the early 1920s, (see, for example, Figure 105),⁵⁹ and the idea of using light and shadows to draw out objects cast against a plain background. This photograph, considered in parallel with Moholy's other self-portraits previously discussed, demonstrates the range of Moholy's artistic experimentation, and her interest in abstract avenues of photographic inquiry. It also suggests that we may consider two images discussed in Chapter One, *Bauhausgebäude Dessau* (*Bauhaus Building Dessau*), 1925–26, and *Bauhausgebäude Dessau, Dachgarten* (*Bauhaus Building Dessau, Roof Garden*), 1925–26, as self-portraits of a kind as well, given that Moholy purposely allows her figure to intrude into the picture frame.

⁵⁹ For further photograms by Moholy and Moholy-Nagy from the early 1920s, see Andreas Haus, *Moholy-Nagy: Photographs and Photograms* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980) and Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

Moholy's self-portraits in this vein share an affinity with Ilse Bing's portrait, *Mein Schatten und der Schatten von Architekten Mart Stam auf dem Dach* (*My Shadow and the Shadow of Architect Mart Stam on the Roof*), from 1930 (Figure 102). Here, Bing presents a double-portrait of herself and the architect Mart Stam by casting their shadows against an abutting wall. As with Moholy's images, Bing and Stam are situated on the roof of their building, and Bing uses the long shadow cast by the sun to formulate a portrait of the two artists. Just as in Moholy's photographs, here we have no sense of the specific features of the artists; they could, in fact, be anyone, and are only identified through Bing's naming of the image. Casting one's own portrait solely through shadows, as do Moholy and Bing, entirely erases the traditional ambition of portraiture to display something revelatory about the specific person represented. What do these images present of the artist? We are unable to identify facial features or emotions. What we can glean from the image is based entirely on the outline of the figure, one blurred and distorted slightly by the sunlight, an element of the photograph that the photographer cannot control.

What is (obliquely) present in both Bing's image and Moholy's two photographs at the Dessau Bauhaus, however, is one traditional element of portraiture: the signifier of the sitter's profession. In all three images the camera itself is situated in the composition, an actor in its own right being rendered through portraiture. One could interpret the two photographs of Moholy's shadow alongside the boxy outline of her camera, and that of Bing holding up her camera in the light, as self-portraits of the artist at work in a professional setting. Photographing themselves with the tool of their artistic success, Moholy and Bing make a statement regarding their stature as professional artists and the

legitimacy of their work. Entering into dialogue with the numerous portraits by male artists with their cameras present, Moholy asserts her place within this canon, staging herself specifically as a female artist in the act of artistic creation.

To photograph oneself with one's camera was a powerful statement by a female artist during this period, when women were consciously asserting their status as artists worthy of equal consideration to men. Meskimmon observes that part of the power of such images lies in "their assertion of women as active makers of culture, which is unexpected in terms of masculine norms in art history."⁶⁰ These women were contributing to the developing field of experimental photography, and their self-representations in this role disrupted the assumption of male authorship in art. Many female artists, including Moholy, were not fully emancipated and had domestic duties to fulfill as wives, mothers, or daughters. Thus to purposefully situate themselves as professional artists working in the field, in compositions traditionally occupied by men, was an empowering declaration of artistic independence.

Numerous female photographers took to portraying themselves with their cameras visible during this period, with most of them addressing the subject in a more direct fashion than Moholy. In such images as Trude Fleischmann, *Trude Fleischmann mit ihrer Kamera im Atelier (Trude Fleischmann in the Studio with her Camera)*, 1929, Lotte Jacobi, *Self-Portrait*, 1930 (Figure 103), the previously-discussed Ilse Bing, *Selbstporträt mit Kamera*, 1931, Éva Besnyö, *Self-Portrait, Berlin*, 1931, and Germaine Krull, *Selbstporträt mit Ikarette (Self-Portrait with Ikarette)*, 1925 (Figure 104), we see female photographers making central the method of their artistic practice. Juxtaposed with, for

⁶⁰ Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, 28.

example, August Sander's *Self-Portrait in His Darkroom, Cologne, 1940*, one understands these self-portraits as purposefully posing the female artist at work in her professional space, validating her independent artistic career. Jacobi, in *Self-Portrait*, shows herself in the act of photographing. Her facial expression is one of slightly skeptical, serious concentration as she considers herself in the mirror at the moment of pressing the shutter. The large 18 x 24cm plate camera, emerging from darkness, takes up half of the compositional space; the image reads almost as a double-portrait of Jacobi and her camera. In Krull's self-portrait, the camera actually replaces the photographer's eyes and most of her face, suggesting her identity is deeply intertwined with that object. In Krull's left hand burns a cigarette, the typical indicator of the New Woman. The camera confronts the viewer head-on, taking prime position as the central compositional element and defining the message of the photograph. It is the action of photographing that is the self-portrait in this image; Krull's role as photographer taking precedence over any other reading of the artist/woman one might discern. The merging of the camera with Krull's face suggests a morphing of the woman into machine, and speaks directly to the contemporary avant-garde discussions surrounding the technological lens replacing the natural eye. What remains in such an image is an overwhelming sense of the photographer as confident professional, an artist who circumvents being defined solely by her sex by centralizing the methods of her artistic production.

Reflecting on the content of this and the previous chapter, one gains a sense of the tumultuous artistic landscape within which Lucia Moholy produced her portraits of female friends and acquaintances, a landscape defined both by courageous, pioneering female artists and disturbed masculinist renderings of female victimhood. "On the dark

side of the triumphant representation of the New Woman,” as Linda Nochlin observes, “lie the misogynistic representations of outraged male fantasy.”⁶¹ Moholy’s images of confident, independent, strong women living in the Weimar Republic counteracted such debased, repressed male desires, and provide a positive interpretation of women’s experiences from the perspective of someone with a firsthand perspective. Her self-portraits, emphatic claims to her own validity as an artist, represent the professional woman as capable, confident, and self-reliant, powerful contradictions to the anxiety-ridden productions of artists like Dix and Grosz, or the purposeful disregard of Sander. Embracing the modernity of Weimar womanhood, Moholy joined numerous other female artists in their effort to disrupt conservative thinking about femininity and re-envision womanhood from a position of empowerment.

⁶¹ Linda Nochlin, “Foreword: Representing the New Woman – Complexity and Contradiction,” in *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s*, ed. Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2011), x.

Chapter Four: A Partnership between Equals: Lucia Moholy and László Moholy- Nagy

I begin to feel how difficult it is for a girl to stand totally alone! – Lucia Moholy¹

I go to the Great Men to get at the wives and mistresses. They are the ghosts in the corner of these memorials, dismissed in a knowing parenthetical. – Kate Zambreno²

In a 1926 photogram by Lucia Moholy and László Moholy-Nagy, the silhouetted profiles of two figures are visible, seeming to merge together to produce a double-faced, Janus-like head. *Fotogramm, László und Lucia* (Figure 105), produced while the artists were living at the Dessau Bauhaus, presents self-portraits of the two artists unified as an indistinguishable single unit. The photogram is appropriately symbolic of their relationship and the manner in which it has been interpreted in art historiography: the artists worked in symbiosis together for much of the 1920s, collaborating on photograms and artistic treatises, and yet Moholy's co-authorship is written out of the image, sole credit being given to Moholy-Nagy.³ Moholy's relationship with her husband was a complicated one, both radical and traditional, allowing her some recourse to freedom and experimentation while denying her artistic voice and authorship in other ways. Anja

¹ "Ich beginne zu fühlen, wie schwer es für ein Mädchen ist, ganz allein zu stehen!" Lucia Moholy, summarizing her diary entry "ersten Flug in die Welt." Quoted in Mercedes Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft': Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," in *LIEBE MACHT KUNST. Künstlerpaare im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Renate Berger (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 68.

² Kate Zambreno, *Heroines* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012), 238.

³ Magdalena Droste describes the co-authorship of this photogram in her book *The Bauhaus 1919-1933: Reform and Avant-Garde* (Germany: Benedikt Taschen, 1993), 29. The Victoria and Albert Museum, which holds this artwork in its collection, lists the artist only as Moholy-Nagy.

Baumhoff's observation that Moholy "was his mouthpiece, his lecturer, his technical assistant, inspirer and his wife"⁴ both underscores the role Moholy played in their relationship and betrays the inherent inequity of scholarship addressing Moholy: everything is framed around Moholy-Nagy. In this chapter, I address Moholy's position as artist and wife, and investigate the collaborative work produced by the couple in the 1920s so as to define more clearly Moholy's intellectual stance as an artist during her years of marriage with Moholy-Nagy. Examining Moholy's dual position as artist and wife during these years will provide the framework for understanding her independent career following their separation, the subject of my final chapter.

The significance of Moholy's relationship with Moholy-Nagy for her development as an artist cannot be overstated. Spanning the entire "golden" 1920s, their relationship bore witness to the birth of Moholy's career as a professional photographer, her experimentation with avant-garde photographic techniques, her continued work as an editor, and her exposure to many of the foremost avant-garde artists in Germany. Moholy's intimate connection with Moholy-Nagy proved double-edged, both opening doors to artistic development and hindering her individual success, restricting her to normative female roles. As Norma Broude observes,

Many women artists in the twentieth century have experienced similar tensions between their gender identity and their artistic subjectivity, in the face of the historical conflict between these two terms. The problem of constructing the self against the grain of cultural expectation is a particularly difficult one for the artist who is also a wife, with a

⁴ Anja Baumhoff, "Frauen und Foto am Bauhaus: ein modernes Medium im Spannungsfeld von Geschlecht, Kunst und Technik," *Frauen, Kunst, Wissenschaft* 14 (March 1991): 37.

designated social role, and it is inflected differently still for the artist who is the wife of another, more celebrated artist.⁵

I wish to consider how Moholy defined her own artistry within this context and how she managed her role as wife to a highly-valued (albeit still quite young) male artist, one who was a significant contributor to the Bauhaus. The impact of Moholy-Nagy's artistic ascent during the 1920s upon Moholy is particularly significant, given that at the start of their relationship it was Moholy who was already proficient in photography and guided her husband through its technical aspects.⁶

Moholy's life and art are often considered inseparable from Moholy-Nagy's; her photographs are rarely discussed without mentioning him. Too often, she is relegated to brief observations or footnotes in publications about Moholy-Nagy (even those that address their shared work), and she is presented in exhibitions to this date as "Moholy-Nagy's wife, also an artist."⁷ Moholy lives on in Moholy-Nagy's shadow, primarily existing as his wife and only secondarily as an artist. Anne Wagner observes that to be a female artist married to a successful male artist, particularly in the twentieth century, required "both public and private negotiation of the roles of woman and wife, as well as that of artist; they shape the various means used to claim authorship or voice or identity

⁵ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: IconEditions, 1992), 16.

⁶ Werner David Feist, a student at the Bauhaus, recalls of their photographic experimentation: "In short, we were all amateurs unfettered by dos and don'ts. That included the great recorder of Bauhaus life, Lux Feininger, the chronicler of much Bauhaus work, Erich Consemüller. It included Albers and Bayer and Kurt Kranz. It even applied to Moholy-Nagy. The sole exception in the late twenties was Lucia Moholy who had actually been through photography training and specialized in micro-photography." See Werner David Feist, *My Years at the Bauhaus* (Berlin: Bauhaus Archiv, 2012), 98.

⁷ The recent traveling exhibition *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present* (2016–2017) mentions Moholy in this manner in a single object label. The sole exhibition to treat both artists with equal attention, treating Moholy as an independent, successful artist, is the recent Barbican exhibition *Modern Couples: Art, Intimacy and the Avant-Garde* (2018), an exhibit with the specific purpose of reframing masculinist interpretations of modernism.

in a work of art, as well as the value placed on that art in the public realm.”⁸ Moholy’s marriage to one of the most celebrated artists of the twentieth century irrevocably altered the course of her artistic development and the reception of her work in art historical scholarship for decades. Yet, as both artists repeatedly emphasized, their relationship was relatively short for the course of their lives (indeed, Moholy-Nagy remarried and his second wife, Sibyl, played a significant role in memorializing his life and art) and Moholy was a well-educated, intelligent, creative artist who contributed a great deal to the visual, and written, arts over the course of her lifetime. How, then, do we deal with the multiple identities of Moholy, first as artist and Moholy-Nagy’s wife in the 1920s, and then as independent artist beginning in the 1930s and continuing until her death in 1989? This chapter addresses the first half of that question in order to elucidate the conditions that foregrounded Moholy’s later years.

As previously detailed in Chapters Two and Three, the position of the female artist in Weimar Germany was a complex one, burdened with contradictions and expectations. For those artists who were also wives, the complexity was twofold, their independence and success further curtailed by their matrimonial obligations. Married female artists faced enormous challenges in attempting to break into the professional (male) artworld while navigating the 1920s conception of womanliness and the wife, embodied by the restrictive *Hausfrau* ideal. The contemporary author Alice Rühle-Gerstel described this challenge succinctly in her book *Das Frauenproblem der Gegenwart. Eine psychologische Bilanz (The Women’s Problem of the Present. A Psychological Record)*, published in 1932:

⁸ Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1.

The whole world, as it is today, is a world of men. The space in which the life-style and the goals of women take place is borrowed space; the space of values and reality belongs to men.⁹

Marriage was frequently a burden to women who wanted to achieve independent career success, and even more difficult when one's husband was also an artist. Many of the Bauhaus wives, including Ise Gropius, Irene Bayer, Gertrud Arndt, and, to some extent, Moholy, were either encouraged or expected to prioritize their husband's work over their own, following a tradition of wives and muses being subordinated to promoting a man's art. Hannah Höch, for many years in a relationship with Raoul Hausmann, was consistently treated as inferior by many of their male Dada compatriots, frequently tasked with fetching tea and doing administrative tasks, despite her being one of the most innovative artists of the group. For female artists married to, or partnered with, male artists, gender stereotypes played a strong role in defining emotional, social, and physical burdens; thus it was especially important for these women to carve out equal space for their own creativity.

In the early years of their relationship, Moholy and Moholy-Nagy subverted the stereotypical tropes of marriage to some extent, treating each other as intellectual equals. As the sole breadwinner in the first years of their marriage, Moholy disrupted gender norms that dictated women remain in the domestic sphere; without her professional positions, Moholy-Nagy would have struggled to realize his artistic ambitions full time. Theirs was a partnership between equals in the early years, one that embodied the

⁹ Translation mine. Alice Rühle-Gerstel: "Die ganze Welt, wie sie heute ist, ist Männerwelt. Der Raum, in dem sich die Lebensgestaltung und die Zielsetzungen der Frauen vollziehen, ist entliehener Raum; der Raum der Werte und Wirklichkeit gehört den Männern." [Alice Rühle-Gerstel, *Das Frauenproblem der Gegenwart. Eine psychologische Bilanz*, Leipzig, Hirzel, 1932]. Quoted in Christiane Schönfeld and Carmen Finnan, eds., *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), xvii.

contemporary concept of the *Liebespaar*, in which the woman and man were each valued equally for their contribution.¹⁰ Undermining conventional norms whereby the woman is deemed emotional and subjective, and the man balanced and objective, Moholy was considered the more rational, and intellectual of the pair, while Moholy-Nagy was celebrated as intuitive and emotional.¹¹ Moholy herself referred to her relationship with Moholy-Nagy as “symbiotic”¹² on numerous occasions; their partnership was defined by shared intellectual and artistic experimentation in the years before their move to the Dessau Bauhaus. Indeed their unusually balanced relationship, as Mercedes Valdivieso notes, was likely one of the triggers for the breakdown of their marriage; ultimately Moholy-Nagy seemed unable to cope equitably with Moholy’s independence and intellectual parity.¹³ Reflecting some forty years later, Moholy wrote:

While we had been intoxicated with big ideas at the time, the years at the Bauhaus offered the opportunity to examine what has been said and what happened in reality. As long as we lived within the B.H. community and general criticism was heard to some extent in a good tone, my sometimes-skeptical comments were not only tolerated but regarded as cooperation. In private, this soon looked a little different. What was accepted and better absorbed by the former "notes" of rational thinking in a foreign language seemed to him, after he had assimilated it, to have to be rejected as the paternal tutelage which he believed to do justice to his self-confidence.¹⁴

Moholy-Nagy’s ultimately traditional opinion of the woman’s role and of Moholy’s (significant) contribution to his artistic development is detailed in Sibyl Moholy-Nagy’s

¹⁰ Translated literally as “love pair” or “loving couple,” the *Liebespaar* concept was a forward-thinking approach to heterosexual relationships, one in which the man and woman had parity in their work and personal lives.

¹¹ See Valdivieso, “Eine ‘symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft’: Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,” 78–81 for an in-depth discussion of the partnership between Moholy and Moholy-Nagy in this respect.

¹² Lucia Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy* (Krefeld: Scherpe Verlag, 1972).

¹³ Valdivieso, “Eine ‘symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft’: Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,” 81.

¹⁴ Lucia Moholy, Bauhaus Archive, Nachlass Lucia Moholy, Mappe 4, 33-34. Quoted in *ibid.*

study of her husband's work, *Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality*, in which she remembers Moholy-Nagy opining on the subject:

“Women!” He flipped his left hand contemptuously through the air. “They’re only part – they are never all. A good teacher – that was my wife. Her mind was like a beacon, lighting up my own emotional chaos. She taught me to think. All the discipline I have today I owe her. But it wasn’t enough. I learned to remain alone with my emotions. And there’s the good mistress – beautiful, relaxing to the point of stupor. But it’s like drinking. It only lasts through the intoxication. Afterward the isolation is only more bitter. No woman understands totality in a man. It’s eternal self-reference: their ego, their looks, their careers –”

He stopped for a moment.

“There’s no patience in women. They can’t let a man grow.”¹⁵

Moholy-Nagy's attitude towards women, revealed in this paragraph, must have impacted Moholy's individual artistic development and her perspective on New Womanhood. Moholy-Nagy's views on the position of women in society were complex, and his treatment of women in his art reveals a great deal about his personal biases. Eleanor Hight has addressed this subject at length in her study *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany*. Addressing the breadth of Moholy-Nagy's photographs and photomontages of women,¹⁶ Hight explicates the conflicted nature of these images, which both explore the phenomenon of the sexually liberated, independent woman and signify her as aggressive or threatening. Moholy-Nagy's framing of the New Woman, Hight argues, reflects his “struggle to understand the crisis of modernity, in which women's liberation could simultaneously be seen as a sign of

¹⁵ Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 74.

¹⁶ Hight notes that the vast majority of Moholy-Nagy's photographs of people during the 1920s were of women. See Eleanor M. Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 131.

progress and a constant threat to society.”¹⁷ In Moholy-Nagy’s portrait of Moholy from 1926 (Figure 106), rendered both in positive and negative, Hight reads a deeper significance reflective of the couple’s relationship. The closely-cropped image, eliminating part of Moholy’s face, and the sharp contrasts of light and dark, amplified by the streaks of light in the background, “imply a kind of oppressive manipulation and control enacted by the photographer.”¹⁸ The image’s negative counterpart provides an even more muted impression, rendering Moholy “statuelike, cold and immovable,” her face “disfigured” by Moholy-Nagy’s manipulation of shadowing.¹⁹ Moholy-Nagy’s conflicted opinion of women, as framed by Hight and his own language, unavoidably had ramifications for his wife, a driven, intellectual woman attempting to achieve career success in the same field as her husband.²⁰ To be considered “only part...never all” by her own husband, intoxicating but unable to understand him in totality, must have signaled to Moholy her position in their marriage, and her husband’s standpoint on women’s intellectual capacities. Positioned within this context, Moholy’s own portraits of New Womanhood and her self-portraits, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, gain further significance. Her embrace of this subject, celebrating the diversity of female experience in Weimar Germany, serves as a counterbalance to Moholy-Nagy and is perhaps revealing of the dynamics of their relationship.

Moholy-Nagy’s reflections on his relationship with Moholy disclose her significant role in another manner: as support system, inspiration, and motivator for her

¹⁷ Ibid., 165.

¹⁸ Ibid., 138.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ It should be noted, however, that Moholy-Nagy did not limit himself solely to the field of photography during these years. Indeed, painting arguably constituted his primary area of artistic engagement during the 1920s.

husband's creativity. "Her mind was like a beacon, lighting up my own emotional chaos," Moholy-Nagy said. "She taught me to think. All the discipline I have today I owe her." Sibyl Moholy-Nagy describes Moholy's impact as being significant; Moholy clarified and honed her husband's ideas, contributing her own intellect and experience to the refinement of his vision: "To the delirious sense-perception of his new vision she added her superior intelligence and the sober working discipline of a scholar. In collaboration with her, Moholy[-Nagy] acquired the ability to think and express himself logically and intelligibly."²¹ Xanti Schawinsky, the Bauhaus painter and photographer, remembered Moholy's direct involvement in ensuring Moholy-Nagy's focus in the studio, explaining: "In spite of his [Moholy-Nagy's] many-sided educational activities, his publicizing work and his general activities, he painted almost every day. In Weimar and Dessau Lucia often sat during this time in the studio. It was said that she made sure that he would paint diligently."²² Indeed Lloyd Engelbrecht suggests that Moholy's role in this regard may have informed Moholy-Nagy's attempt to situate painting as a relevant element of his oeuvre.²³ Dedicating time each day to her husband's creativity, ensuring he had the time he needed to work, would have left less time for Moholy to focus on her own artistic endeavors and reveals the prioritization of Moholy-Nagy's work over her own. Moholy herself hierarchized her obligations while at the Bauhaus, listing them in prioritized order as: "a) Aspirations and goals of the artist M.-N., b) Aspirations and aims of the Bauhaus, c) my own work in the service of a) and b)."²⁴ Moholy's position was to some degree

²¹ Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality*, 21.

²² Xanti Schawinsky, Letter, August 25, 1948. Quoted in Lloyd C. Engelbrecht, *Moholy-Nagy: Mentor to Modernism* (Cincinnati: Flying Trapeze Press, 2009), 326.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Lucia Moholy, unpublished note, Bauhaus Archive, Nachlass Lucia Moholy, Mappe 4, 17-18. Quoted in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft': Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," 76.

reflective of the Bauhaus spirit – she states in the same note that “ I should say with a good conscience that usually ambition did not play a role at all for me, or only a negligible one”²⁵ – but it also signifies the assumed gender role she was expected to play. As Valdivieso observes, Moholy’s declared lack of ambition reflects the “female-specific inclination to sacrifice one’s own workload to the “common task,” which is usually that of the partner.”²⁶

Perhaps one of the most significant impacts Moholy had upon Moholy-Nagy in the first years of their relationship was introducing him to the *Freideutsche Jugend* (the *Free German Youth*, part of the wider *Jugendbewegung* [*Youth Movement*]) and to a *Biozentrik* world view that emphasized an ecological consciousness and biological determinism, as Oliver Botar describes it.²⁷ The movement emphasized a holistic approach to nature, celebrating the unity of life and utopian, sometimes Romantic, principles. Moholy forged close connections to Heinrich Vogeler’s Barkenhoff in Worpswede, an artists’ colony in Northern Germany that emphasized an alternate lifestyle based on a respect for nature and communist principles, and stayed there for long periods in 1918 and 1919. By 1918, Moholy had developed close friendships with Paul and Paula Vogler, and Elisabeth Vogler (Paul’s sister), all disciples of the Lebensreform lifestyle and firm believers in the use of natural remedies for healthy living.²⁸ In 1919, Moholy published the article “Symbole” in the *Freideutsche Jugend* magazine, articulating her own intellectual ideas surrounding Lebensreform, the Jugendbewegung,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Valdivieso, “Eine ‘symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft’: Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,” 76.

²⁷ Oliver A. Botar, *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (Zürich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014), 17.

²⁸ Ibid., 18.

and literary Expressionism. In the article, she outlined “the cosmos of unity,” in which “body and soul are the same root, are one.” According to this principle, responsible man “lives his unity with the cosmos,” overcoming the need for language as a mode of communication because of the resultant singularity of man and world.²⁹

Moholy introduced Moholy-Nagy to the intellectual ideas surrounding the *Freideutsche Jugend* and expanded his social circle to include leading proponents of the movement. Her adherence to *Lebensreform* principles and her friendships with its followers greatly impacted the couple’s lifestyle. In the summer of 1922, the couple spent their holiday near *Loheland, Schule für Körperbildung, Landbau und Handwerk* (Loheland, School for Bodily Culture, Farming and Handicrafts), a women’s commune in the Rhön mountains. The following year, Elisabeth Vogler, Moholy’s close friend, founded another women’s commune at Schwarzerden, near Loheland, and offered a program of *Lebensreform* activities, including classes and lecture series, and physical health exercises such as massage, gymnastics, and breathing instruction.³⁰ Moholy and Moholy-Nagy spent both the summers of 1924 and 1926 with Paul and Paula Vogler at Schwarzerden and, as Botar notes, Elisabeth Vogler remembers Moholy participating in the courses offered there.³¹ As mentioned in Chapter One, Moholy photographed the many activities of the school in 1927 and again in 1930, and Moholy-Nagy later designed Paul Vogler’s physician’s office in Berlin, as well as the color scheme for Schwarzerden’s Gymnastics Hall in 1930.³² Moholy felt deeply connected to the

²⁹ Lucia Schulz, “Symbole,” *Freideutsche Jugend*, Coburg 5. (1919). Reprinted in Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin* (Berlin: Museumspädagogischer Dienst Berlin, 1995), 71.

³⁰ See Botar, *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts*, 18 for a detailed discussion of Schwarzerden.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 19.

Lebensreform way of life and to some of its strongest adherents, in particular Elisabeth Vogler, with whom Moholy shared ideological beliefs and a deep, abiding friendship.³³ Introducing Moholy-Nagy to the *Freideutsche Jugend* at a time when the artist was confronting a new artistic chapter,³⁴ Moholy expanded her husband's intellectual and social sphere, instilling an enduring commitment to an organic, nature-focused way of life. The couple's lifestyle in these early years was difficult, their income restricted solely to Moholy's earnings, and yet their embrace of the *Lebensreform* lifestyle invigorated and propelled them. "'Laci" and Lucia were poor, and the extreme frugality of their life emphasized the spiritual basis of their relationship," Sibyl Moholy-Nagy explains. "Their bond was a shared vision of the totality of revolutionary design, and an unlimited willingness to work and to sacrifice for it."³⁵

The influence of Moholy's engagement with the *Freideutsche Jugend* finds concrete, published form in "Produktion-Reproduktion," the essay co-authored by Moholy and Moholy-Nagy and published in *De Stijl* in July 1922.³⁶ Usually credited only to Moholy-Nagy, the essay was in actuality the collaborative product of both artists' ideas; Moholy's erasure in this regard is, as Valdivieso observes, "symptomatic for the reception of the cooperative working relationship between Laszlo and Lucia Moholy-Nagy."³⁷ Given the agreement in recent scholarship of Moholy's co-authorship, I wish to

³³ Moholy summarized their relationship in a letter to Vogler thusly: "the agreement of our respective ways of thinking became clearer, the tone of our conversations more intense, the exchange of ideas more fruitful, our friendship became stronger, indeed more intimate." Lucia Moholy, letter, quoted in Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin*, 108.

³⁴ Botar observes that 1920 and 1921 were years of flux for Moholy-Nagy, as he attempted to forge an entirely new pictorial language and experiment with new materials. See Botar, 11.

³⁵ Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality*, 21.

³⁶ László Moholy-Nagy, "Produktion-Reproduktion," *De Stijl* 5, no. 7 (July 1922).

³⁷ Valdivieso, 65. Kate Zambreno, in her book *Heroines*, writes that "So much of modernism is myth-making – who gets to be remembered? Whose writing is preserved and whose is not?" (Zambreno, 109). Her thesis that the wives of modernism are written out of history, erased and (sometimes violently) subdued

treat “Produktion-Reproduktion” equally as a declaration of the artist’s intellectual theories as much as her husband’s, and trace Moholy’s voice within the document. “Produktion-Reproduktion” argues that the production of new forms and new ideas is necessary to spark new understandings and stimulate the senses anew. Focusing on the sensory capacity of the human being, one could turn reproductive technologies into productive ones, thereby transforming the familiar into the unfamiliar. The fundamental concern is to engender an entirely new way of seeing the world – a new vision – by utilizing known technologies, such as the gramophone, photography, the individual (static) image, and film, in novel ways. “It is in the nature of human existence that the senses are insatiable, that they reach out for more new experience every time they take something in,” Moholy and Moholy-Nagy write. “From this point of view creative endeavors are only valid if they produce new, as yet unfamiliar relationships.”³⁸ Challenging the reader to rethink the capacities of current technologies, for example incising into the wax plate of the gramophone directly, the two artists hoped to revolutionize artistic mediums and thereby transform human perception.

Traces of Moholy’s intellectual interests are observable in other aspects of “Produktion-Reproduktion.” Both Sachsse and Botar observe the influence of Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius’s empirio-criticism upon the article’s thesis,³⁹ a philosophical standpoint introduced by Moholy, the former student of philosophy and art history.

Having studied Mach and Avenarius while at Prague University, Moholy was drawn to

by male genius, finds written form in a powerful and poignant essay, in which she attempts to reclaim those lost voices. Her overarching point applies directly to Moholy, whose voice was erased both by her husband and later by art historians over many decades.

³⁸ Moholy-Nagy, “Produktion-Reproduktion.”

³⁹ See Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin*, 9, and Botar, *Sensing the Future*, 20.

their theories regarding subjective sensory experience, particularly in relation to artistic production. The empirio-critical philosophers argued that objective substance does not exist; rather, worldly material is constructed upon sensory experience, for example tactility, color, and density. Mach and Avenarius's thesis that sensory qualities build our perceived reality finds direct affiliation with Moholy and Moholy-Nagy's argument that "functioning as a human totality depends on developing the senses to their fullest extent – for art attempts to create new relationships between familiar and as yet unfamiliar data, optical, acoustic or whatever, and forces us to take it all in through our sensory equipment."⁴⁰ The article's emphasis on the fundamental significance of sensory perception reveals Moholy's equal role in shaping the "Produktion-Reproduktion" thesis. Moholy, reflecting years later upon their collaborative process, remembered that "What he [Moholy-Nagy] needed was not only the translation of his faltering language attempts into a fluent written language, or the finding of the adequate expression for a thought, which was often still in the making, *but also the experience of the imaginative process, which he often left to me. The initial idea came from him, the argument was common to both of us, the wording was mine.*"⁴¹ Contemporaries of the couple also spoke of Moholy's intellectual involvement in Moholy-Nagy's theoretical work. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, an art historian and patron of the arts, wrote that Moholy-Nagy's "clever wife Lucia played a large part in the writing and theoretical work of her husband and helped him a lot."⁴² Moholy's role in producing "Produktion-Reproduktion" was not simply

⁴⁰ Moholy-Nagy, "Produktion-Reproduktion."

⁴¹ Lucia Moholy, unpublished note, Bauhaus Archive, Nachlass Lucia Moholy, Mappe 4, 30-31. Quoted in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft': Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," 69. Emphasis mine.

⁴² Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky. Maler, Architekt, Typograf, Fotograf. Erinnerungen, Briefe, Schriften* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1967), 22.

editorial; rather her intellectual interests in empirio-criticism and biologism contributed significantly to the article's formation and impacted her husband's artistic philosophy.

In addition to her co-authorship of "Produktion-Reproduktion," Moholy played a significant supporting role in her husband's written work throughout the 1920s.

Remembering her role in *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy* (*Marginal Notes on Moholy-Nagy*), the text she published in 1972, Moholy described Moholy-Nagy's "inadequate command of the German language which prevented him from following theoretical arguments" and explained that, as a result, she was "over a number of years, responsible for the wording and editing of the texts that appeared in books, essays, articles, reviews and manifestos."⁴³ Moholy's role as editor of the numerous written works Moholy-Nagy published during the course of their relationship was substantial and time-consuming, requiring the prioritization of her husband's work over her own. In 1922, she revised the text for "Dynamic-Constructive Energy-System of Forces,"⁴⁴ a statement co-written by Alfréd Kemény and Moholy-Nagy in response to Naum Gabo's earlier "Realistic Manifesto," (1920). Moholy edited Moholy-Nagy's book *Malerei Photographie Film*, a compendium of existing articles and new essays published in 1925, and likely provided a substantial degree of technical guidance, as her expertise in photography eclipsed her husband's at this stage.⁴⁵ Moholy-Nagy's archival papers from 1929, including

⁴³ Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy*, 11.

⁴⁴ First published as "Dynamisch-konstruktives Kraftsystem," *Der Sturm*, Berlin, no.12 (1922). A note in Moholy's archive describes the text as being "worded by Lucia Moholy." See Engelbrecht, 178, Inv.-Nr. 6240, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

⁴⁵ Pepper Stetler observes that in *Malerei Photographie Film*, Moholy-Nagy was not yet fully committed to working in the medium of photography, noting that "far from an expert photographer, he interacts with the medium at this time as a collector, typographer, and theorist." Pepper Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look! Modern Vision and the Weimar Photographic Book* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 24. Given the degree of Moholy-Nagy's skill with photography at this time, it is likely that he relied heavily on Moholy's knowledge of the medium.

preliminary ideas and plans for Room 1 in the *Film und Foto* exhibition, which Moholy-Nagy designed, are almost entirely written by Moholy, revealing her husband's continued reliance on her superior command of German and his demand for her design acumen and support as a secretary and assistant.

Perhaps Moholy's most significant editorial role during the 1920s came through her involvement in the Bauhaus Books series. Having previously worked as an editor and publicist at both Ernst Rowohlt and Kurf Wolff, the Berlin and Munich publishers, respectively, and having studied at the *Staatliche Akademie für graphische Kunst und Buchgewerbe zu Leipzig* in 1924 and 1925, where she learned "the fundamentals of reproduction technique and book-binding,"⁴⁶ Moholy was highly educated in book publication. Her skills in this regard were invaluable to Gropius and Moholy-Nagy, neither of whom had expertise in book publishing but were eager to produce a series of books on the Bauhaus. As Moholy herself describes, she was knowledgeable about all facets of the printing process: "I had acquired some working knowledge of the various printing processes, typographical rules, choice of paper and other basic requirements. I had learned to prepare a manuscript for the printer, was a reliable proof-reader and familiar with matters of make-up and layout."⁴⁷ Preoccupied with the conceptual facets of the book series, Gropius and Moholy-Nagy were entirely unprepared to focus on the practical, technical aspects of producing a publication; "Gropius and Moholy-Nagy, responsible as editors for the selection of subject matter, the choice of authors and, of course, the overall planning of the series, were neither free nor willing to give time to the

⁴⁶ Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy*, 44.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

details of book production,” Moholy remembered.⁴⁸ As a result, both men relied heavily on Moholy to impart her knowledge and guide the practical aspects of the project. For the publication written by Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zu Architektur*, book fourteen in the series, Moholy not only edited the manuscript, as was standard, but also helped design the dust jacket with Max Gebhard, a freelance graphic artist who worked with Moholy-Nagy on stage designs for the Kroll Opera. Gebhard later detailed Moholy’s involvement in the design, explaining “I transferred the lines of the title to a glass plate. Moholy[-Nagy] built with it a sculptural “composition” in front of a red plane. Through transparency and the play of shadows an astounding spatial effect emerged; the typography no longer stood apart but entered into a union with space. His wife Lucia made the color photograph.”⁴⁹

Despite Moholy’s invaluable contribution to the publication of the fourteen Bauhaus books, she was not listed as an editor, designer, or contributor in any of the publications, and neither Gropius nor Moholy-Nagy acknowledged her work in their own writings. Moholy deeply regretted that she had not demanded being credited, later writing:

It is right when I said that everything I learned in my publishing work also benefited the work at the Bauhaus, because neither Gropius nor Moholy-Nagy, who was a publisher, had the necessary knowledge in this field. The fact that I did not insist that my name was mentioned as an editor was a naive omission, which was to take its toll later. When, after Moholy-Nagy's death (in 1946), the Bauhaus books were reissued, it was not my consent that was obtained, but that of his second wife, who had nothing to do with the original Bauhaus books. However, I

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Ich habe die Titelzeilen auf eine Glasplatte übertragen. Moholy-Nagy baute damit eine plastische “Komposition” vor eine rote Fläche. Durch Schattenwirkung und Transparenz entstand eine erstaunliche räumliche Wirkung: die Typografie stand nicht mehr für sich, sondern ging mit dem Raum eine Verbindung ein. Seine Frau Lucia machte davon die Farbaufnahme.” Quoted in Engelbrecht, 387.

was largely responsible not only for the editing and production of the Bauhaus books, but also the authorship of the texts done by Moholy-Nagy – both articles and books would not have been conceivable without intensive cooperation on my part, since Moholy-Nagy only spoke German with insufficient power at that time.⁵⁰

Given the gender imparity cultivated by Gropius at the Bauhaus, as detailed in earlier chapters, and the dynamic of Moholy's relationship with her husband, one can understand the means by which Moholy's contribution was written out of history by her male collaborators. Moholy-Nagy's erasure of Moholy's significant contribution to his intellectual and artistic production in the 1920s is most clearly documented in the Bauhaus books. In the first edition of *Von Material zu Architektur*, Moholy-Nagy curtly credited his wife in the preface to the text, acknowledging in just a few lines the enormous contribution she had made in helping him conceptualize, write, and edit his tract: "In her preparation and correction of the manuscript of this book my wife, Lucia Moholy, contributed appreciable improvement and elucidation in thought and wording."⁵¹ By the next printing of the text, this acknowledgment had been erased, effectively writing out of history Moholy's contribution and their partnership. Simultaneous to the intentional omission of Moholy's name from publications including her images (most egregiously in Gropius's *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, Bauhaus Book 12), Moholy-Nagy and Gropius belittled her worth as an artist and editor by expunging her input in their joint projects. To some degree, Moholy's viewpoint at the time was framed by her utopian, communal, *Lebensreform* perspective; thus, as revealed in previous

⁵⁰ Lucia Moholy, unpublished note, Bauhaus Archive, Nachlass Lucia Moholy, Mappe 3. Quoted in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft': Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," 75.

⁵¹ "manuscript und korrektoren des buches wurden von meiner frau, lucia Moholy, durchgearbeitet, in gedanken und formulierung vielfach geklärt und bereichert." In László Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zu Architektur*, Bauhausbücher 14 (Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1929), 5.

quotations, by supporting and contributing to her husband's work, engaging in their "symbiotic relationship," she was promoting their shared vision. However, later in life her feelings shifted, altered perhaps by decades of reflection. Sachsse, who collaborated with Moholy in the years before she died to produce the first monograph on the artist, emphasized Moholy's awareness of the patriarchal construct of the modernist avant-garde and her position within it. According to Sachsse, Moholy had repeatedly attempted in her final years to write an autobiography, a "painful process" that she never completed as she "felt too strongly the presence of those who impaired the self-determination of her life" within a mostly male-constituted avant-garde that made success as a female artist difficult to achieve.⁵²

The largest collaborative project upon which Moholy and Moholy-Nagy embarked was that of the photogram, an experimental approach to photography they invented in July 1922 while on holiday near the Loheland women's commune. These photograms, created by arranging objects on light-sensitive photographic paper and exposing the tableau to light, thus eliminating the camera as a photographic tool entirely, proposed an alternate approach to photographic technology.⁵³ Through the photogram, one could turn the process of photographing into the subject of the photo itself. Moholy recalled the origin of their idea in *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy*, explaining: "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

⁵² Rolf Sachsse, "Die Frau an seiner Seite: Irene Bayer und Lucia Moholy als Fotografinnen," in *Fotografieren hieß teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1994), 74.

⁵³ This method was being explored concurrently by Christian Schad and Man Ray. All four artists insisted they were not aware of each other's experiments before beginning their own.

our conclusions by making photograms, having had no previous knowledge of any steps taken by Schad, Man Ray and Lissitzky.”⁵⁴ Their creation of photograms was a collaborative inventive process, the two artists working together symbiotically to produce a new mode of photography. The earliest photograms display abstracted shapes (rendered as planes and geometric angles) intersecting with one another against a sharply contrasted background. In these early images, one observes Moholy and Moholy-Nagy rendering dematerialized objects in two dimensions on paper, turning amorphous light into a physical trace. The impetus for working with light as the medium likely came from Moholy-Nagy, given his similar explorations in painting. “The photographer is a creator with light; photography is the organization of light.”⁵⁵ Moholy-Nagy explained in 1928. “The light-sensitive layer – plate or paper – is a *tabula rasa*, a blank page on which one may make notes with light.”⁵⁶

While Moholy-Nagy brought his interest in Constructivist theory to bear on the project, Moholy provided the technical expertise for executing the works.⁵⁷ Eleanor Hight

⁵⁴ “The photogram idea also dates from the pre-Bauhaus period. I remember - here a personal formulation is permitted - clearly the situation of its emergence. On a walk in the Rhön in the summer of 1922, we discussed the problem of ‘Production / Reproduction,’ which, independent of the ideas of Schad, Man Ray and Lissitzky, became the starting point of our photogram activity. The first photograms, on old-fashioned daylight or copy paper, were made in the studio on Lützowstrasse, which we lived in until the spring of 1923, the following in Weimar, then under better technical conditions in the private laboratory on the Burgkühnauer Allee in Dessau. The profiles known as self or double portraits also date from this period. The original thoughts were published as articles in ‘De Stijl’ 7, 1922, and reprinted in various other magazines. Finally, the comparison returned as a chapter heading in the book ‘painting, photography, film,’ which was completed in the summer of 1924 in Weimar. Numerous other insights summarized here go back to the pre-Bauhaus period.” See Lucia Moholy, “Das Bauhaus-Bild,” *Werk* 55 (June 1968): 399.

⁵⁵ László Moholy-Nagy, “Fotografie ist Lichtgestaltung,” *Bauhaus* 2 (1928). Quoted in Hight, 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ In her essay “Eine ‘symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft’: Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,” Valdivieso makes the compelling point that a photogram, unlike a photograph, is not produced in the darkroom and comes about only through the physical arrangements of objects on a surface, which are then exposed by light. Those scholars that emphasize Moholy’s technical expertise as being the sole contribution to the photograms overlook this fact; for Moholy to have produced photograms alongside Moholy-Nagy, she must have given her artistic input in the arranging and conception of these works. Often scholars write of Moholy’s contribution to Moholy-Nagy’s work solely in terms of her processing his prints in the darkroom for him. Such an argument falls short when considering the photogram, a method that requires no

observes that “it is doubtful that Moholy[-Nagy] would have made photograms at all if her expertise had not been at hand.”⁵⁸ In preparation for an exhibition of her photographs at Pomona College in 1975, Moholy clarified for the curator the dynamic of the couple in creating the photograms, writing (in the third person): “...practically all photograms prior to 1928 were done by collaboration between Laszlo and Lucia Moholy-Nagy, his being the pictorial ideas and elements, hers the control of the optical and chemical processes, *the contribution of both equally indispensable to the results*, and...an appreciable number of those negatives were subsequently photographed by her...”⁵⁹ Following the creation of the photogram, as Moholy notes above, she would frequently make glass negatives of the image, so that it could be replicated and manipulated in multiple future combinations. Moholy, as a trained technician long interested in the scientific aspect of photography, was fascinated by the process of producing the photogram, later describing in *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy* how the couple had selected daylight paper as their material, as it “allowed us to watch every phase of the design during the entire process.”⁶⁰

The photograms made by Moholy and Moholy-Nagy are pure experimentation with the potential and effects of light, nonrepresentational images that reveal Moholy’s engagement with total abstraction, unlike any other photographs she produced in her career. They are also among the earliest known surviving photographic works by Moholy, thus offering a valuable illustration of Moholy’s contribution to modernist abstraction. Moholy never returned to producing such abstracted works following her

darkroom. While the contribution of ideas may not have been exactly equal, the photograms were the intellectual product of both minds. See Valdivieso, 70.

⁵⁸ Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany*, 60.

⁵⁹ Lucia Moholy to Leland Rice, “cc [i.e., carbon copy to] Mr. Engelbrecht.” December 28, 1974. Quoted in Engelbrecht, *Moholy-Nagy: Mentor to Modernism*, 170. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ Moholy, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy*, 17.

separation from Moholy-Nagy; whether this was because he was the primary motivating force for such experimentation or because she desired a clean break from a visual language associated with her husband, is not clear. Moholy-Nagy, treating her contribution in much the same manner as he had her written work, erased Moholy's co-authorship of these early photograms, later describing his sole production of the works and signing only his name to them.⁶¹ His ability to do so reflects the contemporary patriarchal structures of marriage and society, and the assumption of male artistic genius that presumed the supporting role of the female artist.

The repeated depreciating of Moholy's work underscores the challenging environment within which she worked and the barriers that constrained her artistic ambitions. During Moholy's years at the Bauhaus, and in later reflections, the artist was self-effacing about her own photography, signaling the avant-garde nature of Moholy-Nagy's work in comparison to her own. She called her work "reproductive," despite the clearly experimental quality of many of her photographs, qualities which led Moholy-Nagy to include Moholy's photographs in his publications as examples of the new direction in the medium.⁶² Moholy's modesty in this regard indicates her devaluing of her own artistic career for the sake of her husband's. Such modesty also belies the reality of their working relationship and the enormous contribution Moholy made to the production of their photograms and Moholy-Nagy's photographs.⁶³ There is, as Baumhoff observes,

⁶¹ Valdivieso observes that as early as 1935, Moholy-Nagy only referred to himself when discussing the origin of the photogram in a letter to Walter Gropius, and that his text "Abstract of an Artist" similarly makes no mention of Moholy's contribution. See Valdivieso, 70.

⁶² One is reminded, again, of Walter Gropius's rejection of some of Moholy's Bauhaus Dessau photographs as being too experimental for publication materials.

⁶³ Moholy developed every photograph the couple made, both independently and together, until they separated, an enormous task that reflects her technical expertise as a photographer and her physical involvement in the creation of each artwork.

a presumption of femininity encoded within the concept of “reproductive” work; the idea of Moholy, as wife and woman, creating “reproductive” work in support of her husband’s “productive” ambitions is laden with gendered connotations.⁶⁴ The photographs the two artists took of each other during the Bauhaus Dessau years deepen this gender dichotomy of passive, reproductive female versus active, productive male, as Rose Carol Washton-Long demonstrates. While Moholy depicts her husband standing strong and engaged, dressed in a workman’s suit and assuming a thoughtful pose (Figure 66), Moholy-Nagy renders his wife in soft, passive poses, sometimes with bared shoulders, but never in a stance that reflects action or emphasizes her intellectual engagement.⁶⁵

Prioritizing her husband’s career over her own, Moholy made enormous sacrifices in other, less easily quantified, ways. She was deeply unhappy in Dessau, thinking the town a nowhere-stop on the road to somewhere more interesting, and missed Berlin, a city in which she had flourished both as a single, working woman and in the early years of their marriage. “Dessau is the kind of place, in which one – on a journey – has missed a connection and must wait for the next train,” Moholy wrote in her diary. “Nothing more than a wait for the next train. Otherwise one would never get off at this city.”⁶⁶ One can only wonder to what extent being forced to live there for many years impacted her artistic work and her spirit. The mental toll of balancing her desire to be with her husband and

⁶⁴ Baumhoff, “Frauen und Foto am Bauhaus: ein modernes Medium im Spannungsfeld von Geschlecht, Kunst und Technik,” 38.

⁶⁵ Rose-Carol Washton Long, “Lucia Moholy’s Bauhaus Photography and the Issue of the Hidden Jew,” *Woman’s Art Journal*, Fall/Winter 2014, 38.

⁶⁶ “Dessau is wie ein ort, in dem man – auf der reise – den Anschluss versäumt hat und auf den nächsten zug warten muss.

Nichts weiter al sein warten auf den nächsten zug.

Man wäre in dieser stadt sonst nie ausgestiegen.”

From a page in Lucia Moholy’s diary, dated May 5, 1927. Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin, Inv. Nr. 11782/5.

Quoted in Engelbrecht, 206.

her desire to pursue her career in the city she loved becomes apparent in her diary entries over time; unhappiness and a lack of interest in life, as well as suicidal thoughts, fill the pages.⁶⁷ The sacrifice Moholy made by moving to Dessau is apparent in a letter she wrote to Moholy-Nagy in May 1927, in which she says:

dear laci - why can't you decide to believe me that it is the big city that attracts me? I was reluctant to go to Weimar at the time, and then resisted Dessau. I cannot take it anymore after 4 years, even though I was away in between – it all adds up, and it's different, as if from time to time one needs meat, because one does not like to eat spinach every day.

believe me - I need the swirl of the environment - and since I cannot afford to travel often just to be in the city, I have to combine it with a job. The goal is not for me to leave you - but to rediscover you.⁶⁸

Moholy and Moholy-Nagy's relationship became increasingly complicated towards the end of the 1920s. Moholy-Nagy began an affair with Gropius's sister-in-law, Ellen Frank, in early May 1928, a presumably affecting event which Moholy noted in her diary with only the words "anfang mai – berlin moholy – ellen frank" ("beginning of may – moholy berlin – ellen frank").⁶⁹ Following their separation the next year, the two remained artistic collaborators, with Moholy continuing to edit her former husband's work and photographing his sets for the Kroll Opera. Later, Moholy briefly lived with Moholy-Nagy's second wife, Sibyl, and their child in England while Moholy-Nagy was based in Switzerland, moving out in September 1935, once she had secured housing for

⁶⁷ Lucia Moholy, journal entry, April 13, 1927, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. See Washton Long, "Lucia Moholy's Bauhaus Photography and the Issue of the Hidden Jew," 42, for more details from Moholy's diary.

⁶⁸ Lucia Moholy, Note to Laci, May 24, 1927, Bauhaus Archive, Nachlass Lucia Moholy, Mappe 136. Quoted in Valdivieso, "Eine 'symbiotische Arbeitsgemeinschaft': Lucia und Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," 77.

⁶⁹ Lucia Moholy, diary page, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin, Inv. Nr. 11782/18. Quoted in Engelbrecht, *Moholy-Nagy: Mentor to Modernism*, 239.

herself in London.⁷⁰ The two remained in touch for the rest of Moholy-Nagy's life and continued to support each other's professional efforts from afar. It was only with the passing of her former husband, and some years of reflection, that Moholy began to write of their time at the Bauhaus and her own position within their partnership. Her written memories elucidate the imbalance of their working relationship, and the many sacrifices she made for her husband; but they also underscore the opportunities presented to Moholy through her connection with Moholy-Nagy and the incredible circle of artists and intellectuals with whom she became acquainted.⁷¹ The inherent challenge of Moholy's dual position as artist and wife, and the challenging working conditions she was forced to navigate as a female professional photographer in Weimar Germany, inform our interpretation of the artist and underscore her achievements over a long and varied career.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 426.

⁷¹ Moholy and Moholy-Nagy occupied a central position within the avant-garde world. They participated in the International Dada/Constructivist Congress held in Weimar and Jena in September, 1922. Paul Citröen was one of Moholy-Nagy's closest friends at the Bauhaus, and within the couple's intimate circle were Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann, both of whom were interested in Mazdaznan principles. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers remembers the Moholys hosting her and El Lissitzky, as well as Hausmann, Höch, Hans Richter, and Werner Gräff. She also recalled that "Lucia was very wise and took an interest in her husband's theoretical work and was of great help to him." Moholy invited Höch to visit her and Moholy-Nagy at the Weimar Bauhaus in May, 1923, and corresponded with her often. On a trip to Paris in July, 1925, the couple visited the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modern* with their friends Franciska Claussen and Piet Mondrian, and also saw on that trip Theo and Nelly van Doesburg. See Engelbrecht, 138 and 268 for more details.

Chapter Five: Life after the Bauhaus

I. Introduction

In the years following Lucia Moholy's departure from the Bauhaus and her separation from László Moholy-Nagy,¹ her career developed along multiple concurrent tracks, revealing the diversity of her intellectual interest and her ambitions as an independent artist. Having moved to Berlin from Dessau with Moholy-Nagy in 1928, Moholy remained in the city for five years, continuing to produce portrait photographs of friends while simultaneously working as an editor, in particular for Walter Gropius's *Bauhausbauten Dessau*, discussed in Chapter One. Her photographs were exhibited in many of the major exhibitions of the late 1920s, including *100 Jahre Lichtbild* (Basel, 1927), *Neue Wege der Photographie* (Kunstverein Jena, March to May 1928),² *Fotografie der Gegenwart* (Essen, 1929), and *Das Lichtbild* (Munich, 1930). Three of Moholy's photographs were displayed at *Film und Foto*, 1929, the vast traveling photography exhibition that presented works across documentary, scientific, experimental, and avant-garde fields and highlighted contemporary innovations by prominent artists of the day.³ Moholy and Moholy-Nagy's separation did not signal the end of their artistic collaboration; the two artists continued to work together for a couple

¹ The couple separated in early 1929, but their divorce was not finalized until March 1934.

² Moholy exhibited alongside Moholy-Nagy, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Umbo, and Walter Peterhans at this exhibition.

³ That Moholy's photographs were included in *Film und Foto* demonstrates her significance in the field of photography. It is not clear which of her photographs were exhibited – the catalogue does not list them individually – however in later years she recalled that they were portraits taken during her Bauhaus period, perhaps the same ones exhibited in the *Fotografie der Gegenwart* show. See Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy* (Düsseldorf: Edition Marzona, 1985), 48, for more information.

of years following the end of their marital relationship and stayed in touch until Moholy-Nagy's death in 1946. In particular, Moholy photographed Moholy-Nagy's stage sets for the Kroll Opera on Potsdamer Platz, rendering the sets with dramatic, abstracted lighting and utilizing the same approach she took with the Bauhaus Dessau: using innovative photography techniques to highlight experimentation in theater. Moholy also photographed some of Moholy-Nagy's exhibition spaces for documentary purposes, contributed to his poster designs and book covers, and continued to assist in editing his writing, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In August 1933, following the arrest of her partner Theodor Neubauer by the Gestapo in her apartment, Moholy emigrated from Germany, traveling home to Prague before stopping in Paris and finally ending her journey in London, where she resided until 1956. Quickly establishing herself as an esteemed portrait photographer, Moholy operated a private studio out of her home in Bloomsbury, catering to the desires of her clients while continuing to photograph friends in her social circle. The result is a body of work broad in artistic styles, exemplifying Moholy's adaptability and her deep knowledge of photographic techniques. Alongside her photography work, Moholy wrote and published a book on the history of photography in 1939, titled *A Hundred Years of Photography*, which sold over 40,000 copies. During these same years, Moholy worked at the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux (Aslib), undertaking a large-scale microfilming project. Once the Blitz began, Moholy attempted to leave London, turning to Gropius and Moholy-Nagy for assistance. Moholy-Nagy offered her a position teaching at the New Bauhaus in Chicago,⁴ but her visa application was denied

⁴ Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy's second wife, wrote to Moholy assuring her that "we will do everything we can to help you [...] we will send you a contract with the School of Design as a photography

and she was forced to stay in London for the remainder of the war. Residing in Turkey for many years while working for UNESCO, establishing a microfilm archive of cultural monuments in the Middle and Near East, Moholy finally moved to Zürich in 1958, where she spent the remainder of her life as an art critic, contributing to numerous journals and newspapers over the following decades.

In this final chapter, I consider the two major components of Moholy's artistic practice in the post-Bauhaus years, photography and art journalism, as a means of establishing to what degree, and in what manner, Moholy's artistic practice shifted in the years following her departure from the Bauhaus. In so doing, I hope to frame Moholy's Bauhaus years by considering how they were distinct, and how they marked the foundation for her later artistic development. Having addressed her working and personal relationship with Moholy-Nagy in the previous chapter, I intend also to demonstrate Moholy's path as an independent artist following her divorce, and the significant successes she achieved as a single career woman, successes that were not commensurate with the expected roles often assigned to women (by men) during that time. Utilizing close analyses of Moholy's photographic images and written work, I juxtapose these analyses with those photographs executed when at the Bauhaus to reveal the manner in which Moholy employed lessons learned at the Bauhaus to develop her artistic practice in multiple new directions.

teacher [...] Here there is always a sofa on which you can stay until you have enough resources to live alone. [...] we will gladly help you with the crossing as long as necessary." Sibyl Moholy-Nagy to Moholy, 7 July, 1940. See Robin Schuldenfrei, "Bilder im Exil: Lucia Moholys Bauhaus-Negative und die Konstruktion des Bauhaus-Erbes," in *Entfernt: Frauen des Bauhauses während der NS-Zeit: Verfolgung und Exil*, ed. Inge Hansen-Schaberg (München: Edition text + Kritik, 2012), 260.

II. Portraits in the Post-Bauhaus Period

Following her departure from the Bauhaus, Moholy continued to produce numerous portraits of friends and acquaintances within her social circle. Indeed, portraits comprised the overwhelming majority of Moholy's oeuvre for the rest of her career, her interest in the human figure a continuing thread across the course of her life. The portraits created in the years subsequent to her Bauhaus period demonstrate a broader stylistic range, as Moholy both continued her exploration of modernist visual expression and borrowed from turn-of-the-century photographic conventions. Often Moholy would work with multiple visual modes simultaneously, demonstrating her breadth and versatility as a photographer.

Berlin and Yugoslavia

Two photographs from her Berlin period (1928-33) exemplify Moholy's continued engagement with the artistic idioms of her Bauhaus years and her concurrent introduction of new pictorial methods. *Fanny Mayer, Feldberg*, 1928 (Figure 107), captures the sitter at close range, in the familiar oblique, serial portrait style Moholy used throughout the 1920s. The image is far more naturalistic than, for example, that of *Ingeborg Lebert* (Figure 76), taken only one year before; Mayer is clearly situated within a real environment, not placed against a blank background. Moholy utilizes natural light in her Mayer series; the woman is evenly lit by the sun, the entirety of her features visible to the viewer. Rather than manipulating light to cast dramatic contrasts of light and dark, Moholy allows Mayer's clothing to create the same effect. In the profile view (Figure 108), one can just distinguish the blurred face of another woman captured behind Mayer,

her face indiscriminately cropped from the frame. The accidental inclusion of this woman suggests the relaxed, informal nature of the photo session – Moholy has not removed the woman from the shot or worried about her presence while photographing. The intimacy of the portrait, Moholy capturing Mayer’s calm, pensive expression from close range, suggests equally Moholy’s intimacy with the sitter herself. Mayer was a senior citizen at the Hotel Feldbergerhof in Feldberg, in the Black Forest, and had become acquainted with Moholy through the *Freideutsche Jugend*, of which they were both adherents. In opening herself up to such frank scrutiny by the photographer, Mayer suggests her familiarity with, and trust in, Moholy. In its relaxed naturalism, *Fanny Meyer* is quite a different photograph from her more experimental Bauhaus works, and yet still traces of those photographs remain in the closely-framed shot, the oblique angle from below, and the cropping of the image so that the figure is not captured entirely within it.

In *Johannes Itten*, taken two years later in 1930 (Figure 109), Moholy presents a more affected, studied portrait of the former Bauhaus artist, casting Itten in dramatic light and observing him from an oblique angle. Itten levels an intense stare upon the viewer, looking slightly up towards our vantage point. Just as in early portraits of Frau Binder and Ingeborg Lebert, Moholy plays with the textural quality of the photograph; the play of light and dark upon Itten’s face gives a sculpted, stone quality to his skin. The viewer’s eyes are drawn to the thin line of shadow cast by the temple of Itten’s glasses, a sharp diagonal that seems to cut across his face and interrupts the smoothness of his skin. Moholy’s exposure of the photograph turns the pattern of Itten’s suit into texture, exposing the weave of the suit and evoking a tactility to the flat surface of the

photograph. Drawing on pictorial conventions practiced while at the Bauhaus, Moholy presents Itten as a serious character, intense and unflinching in purpose.

Moholy had become acquainted with Johannes Itten when she moved to the Weimar Bauhaus, where they briefly overlapped before Itten left the school and was replaced as head of the preliminary course by Moholy-Nagy. The Moholy-Nagys and Itten were not close at the Bauhaus; according to Rolf Sachsse, not only the temperaments but also the pedagogies and intellectual beliefs of the two male artists were too divergent to allow for friendship.⁵ However, following Moholy's move back to Berlin, Itten invited her to lead the photography department at the private art school he had founded in 1926. Moholy took over the position as Head of Photography at the Itten School from Umbo (Otto Umbehr), the avant-garde photographer and former Bauhaus student. Moholy's recruitment for this prestigious role, following in the footsteps of a radical modernist photography, clearly demonstrates that she was valued and respected as a photographer in her own right by Itten. Moholy was given free rein over the structure of her course; Itten never interfered with her classes or audited her teaching.⁶ The syllabus for the photography course listed a broad range of technical aspects to be taught, including some of the most avant-garde approaches of the day. To be covered in the course were more standard concepts such as portrait and landscape photography, but also "journalistic photography" and "experimental photography" (with photograms, photomontage, and simultaneous photography specifically listed), and an "introduction to film technology," in which montage would be covered.⁷ Considering Moholy's position

⁵ Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, 49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷ See Sachsse, 49, for further details.

at the forefront of avant-garde photography, her partnership with Moholy-Nagy having offered numerous opportunities for experimentation in the field, she was an ideal candidate for the position.

Teaching at the Itten School and working on numerous side projects, including photographing Moholy-Nagy's stage sets for the Kroll Opera and assisting in the publication of Gropius's *Bauhausbauten Dessau* book, left Moholy less time for her own photography. What photographs do exist from this period are almost entirely portrait series, including numerous portraits of children, as well as (mostly female) friends from different areas of Moholy's life. Continuing her use of the serialized photograph to present her subjects from three different angles, Moholy explored the ability of perspective to inspire novel modes of interpretation. In a series of photographs of a child, titled *Kinderportrait*, *Kinderportrait mit Hand*, and *Haarschopf*, all from 1930 (*Portrait of a Child*, *Portrait of a Child with Hand*, *Mop of Hair*, Figures 110 and 111), Moholy presents studies in expression, light and dark, and patterning, respectively. These are images which engage with the New Vision style, utilizing unusual viewpoints, cropping, and extreme lighting to present the child from three entirely distinct perspectives. In *Haarschopf*, Moholy captures the child from behind, looking down on his hair and jacket. The stripes on the boy's jacket produce an upward diagonal thrust to the image, a sense of movement intensified by the angle of the photograph, through which the body appears to emerge from the lower right corner of the frame. A shimmer of light on the boy's hair produces a radiating ring of light that effects movement in a circular, countering direction. Moholy's interest in the potential of light, texture, framing, and patterning to produce unusual perspectives clearly references the avant-garde milieu with which she

was engaged throughout the 1920s. The image, as Rolf Sachsse observes, seems a reference to Man Ray's photograph of Marcel Duchamp, *Tonsure*, from 1921 (Figure 112).⁸ *Haarschopf* mirrors *Tonsure* in its positioning of the body facing away from the camera and the patterning of the chair which dominates the lower half of the camera. In both images, the denial of the sitter's gaze (Duchamp's identity only revealed in *Tonsure* through his unique hairstyle) creates a sense of mystery and intrigue, but also deflects attention away from character as the focal point. In these images, patterning and the textural quality of the hair become the principal areas of focus, requiring viewers to recalibrate their concept of a portrait.

In *Friseur* (Figure 113), 1930, Moholy again deflects attention from the sitter's face, presenting a portrait of light, shadow, and geometric shapes. The chair becomes an almost abstracted, constructivist element at the right-hand side of the composition through its extreme exposure against the white background. It is a photograph composed of angles and geometric shapes, sharpened and demarcated by contrasts of light and dark. The girl's hair being pulled away from her head forms a sharp angle and lends movement to the image: the image is clearly captured at the moment of the hair being combed. The gesture, as Sachsse notes, gives a sense of spontaneity despite the image being carefully composed.⁹ The spontaneity of this moment, the figure caught mid-action, is a shift away from the still, posed portraits of Moholy's Bauhaus years and indicates the introduction of a new dynamic into her oeuvre. Sachsse argues that such an approach was the norm for Moholy-Nagy, but not Moholy, indicating perhaps the influence of her husband's

⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁹ Ibid.

perspective on her photographic style and an “emancipatory step” beyond her portraiture in earlier years.¹⁰

In 1930, Moholy traveled to Yugoslavia, capturing the landscapes and local people she encountered during her visit. The photographs she produced during this trip mark a new direction in her photography, one informed by a social consciousness that was to shape her later work with UNESCO. By 1930, Moholy had become interested in travel photography and in the prospect of revitalizing interest in countries little known to Western Europeans. Producing a mixture of landscape and portrait photographs while in Yugoslavia, Moholy attempted to cast a positive light on the country, capturing the beauty of the landscape and portraying a broad spectrum of Yugoslav society in multiple pictorial modes. Although these images have been characterized as straight documentary photographs by some scholars,¹¹ I believe Moholy’s engagement with experimental photographic techniques form a constant, underlying foundation for her compositions. Many of the landscape and townscape photographs are taken from slightly unusual angles, or crop and frame the subject matter in a way that intentionally distorts or abstracts the contents of the composition (see, for example, *Jugoslawien, Frauenbad*, 1930 [*Yugoslavia, Women’s Bath*, Figure 114]). The same interest in directionality observed in Moholy’s portraits of children (discussed above) and in many of her Dessau Bauhaus photographs is seen in *Jugoslawien, Bäume am Wasser*, 1930 (Figure 115), in which Moholy exploits the natural lean of the trees and frames the composition to produce a strong diagonal thrust to the photograph. Similarly, she applies the same

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See, for example, Angela Madesani and Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini, *Lucia Moholy: Between Photography and Life* (Milan, Italy: Cinisello Balsammo, 2012), 25.

interest in dramatic lighting rendered in her photographs of the Masters' houses in Dessau to her nature pictures; thus *Jugoslawien, Baum*, 1930 (*Yugoslavia, Tree*, Figure 116), becomes a study of highly contrasted light and shadowed forms, dramatically evident in the fissures in the ground and in the deep creases of the tree trunk.

Moholy's portraits taken on her Yugoslavia trip reflect the increasing diversity of her photographic aesthetic, ranging from seemingly casual, spontaneous photographs to carefully composed works. Two photographs in particular encapsulate this spectrum: *Jugoslawien, Priester*, 1930 (*Yugoslavia, Priest*, Figure 117), and *Jugoslawien, Zigeunerfrau* (*Yugoslavia, Gypsy Woman*, 1930, Figure 118). In the former image, Moholy captures a young priest, dressed in local religious robes, as he looks away from the camera, his face captured almost in profile. Set against a blurred landscape, the image seems spontaneously taken; the priest is cropped so that only his upper torso and head are visible and his features are not closely defined. The informal appearance of the photograph suggests a serendipitous meeting of photographer and sitter, prompting the impulsive creation of the image. In *Zigeunerfrau*, on the other hand, Moholy presents a carefully composed portrait at close range. The gypsy woman captures our attention in a direct stare, her expression calm and mild. Across her forehead is an intricate pattern of beading that, in addition to the fragments of jewelry and clothing visible, is a marker of her community which she bears proudly. Moholy effects dramatic interplays of light and dark across the woman's face and head, such that hair, headdress, makeup, and shadow merge into indistinguishable forms. The facial maquillage, strikingly contrasted in brilliant white against her shadowed forehead, dominates the composition and compels the viewer to study the makeup more closely. Where does beading end and light cast

through her headscarf begin? Moholy's interest in texture takes physical, concrete form in this image, as the overlay of beading, patterned cloth, and applique produce a richly textured, layered depth to the composition. The background, a real space hinted at above the woman's right shoulder, is blanched to the point of almost pure whiteness, providing a dramatic contrast to the shades of black and grey in the woman's figure. In this photograph, Moholy utilizes the formal techniques learned during the 1920s, drawing on her earlier portrait work, but the intended meaning is different. *Zigeunerfrau* encapsulates Moholy's desire to capture the culture and traditional characters of Yugoslavia, in order to normalize the culture for foreign audiences and highlight the humanity of these people.

Moholy's socially-minded approach in this regard is exemplified in another image, *Jugoslawien*, 1930 (*Yugoslavia*, Figure 119). *Jugoslawien* is laden with social significance; a woman sits holding her head in her hands, her clothes frayed and her feet bare. What we can see of her face, her skin slightly wrinkled, suggests an older woman, and her expression betrays hopelessness and weariness, the markers of a difficult life. Two children linger in the background, one standing perfectly in line with the sitting woman to produce the slightly strange impression that he is the long shadow cast by her body. Moholy's adept manipulation of natural light is on display in this photograph, as she uses the shadow cast by the building's overhang (not visible in the image) to divide the scene and create a clear demarcation of foreground and background, casting the children as dark, semi-visible shadows. Moholy's choice of subject and framing of the composition demonstrates her interest in the woman's life and her desire to elicit some sort of response by publicizing her impoverishment. Moholy's photographs during her trip to Yugoslavia signal a development in her photographic interests and her desire to

preserve and document a foreign culture. This interest was to take a more directed form later in her career, when she was appointed head of UNESCO's cultural heritage microfilm archive in the Middle East in 1946.¹²

London

In 1933, Moholy left Germany permanently, fearing for her safety under the new Nazi regime. Her cause for worry was well-founded: her partner, Theodor Neubauer, with whom she had been in a relationship since 1930, was arrested by the Nazis in August 1933.¹³ Neubauer, the parliamentary leader of the German Communist Party, had taken on a false name and gone into hiding following the Reichstag fire of February 27, 1933; his arrest was ostensibly for his apparent role in the fire (although there is no evidence that he took part) and he was eventually charged for using a false identity and sentenced to prison.¹⁴ Moholy, present at the time of his arrest in her apartment, left Germany soon after, traveling first to Prague, then Paris, and then finally settling in London in 1934. This was a difficult period in Moholy's life, and her resettlement in London came at great personal cost. Forced to flee Germany and worried for the fate of her partner, Moholy left behind not only her circle of friends but also her entire life's work: 500-600 glass negatives. These negatives she left in the care of Walter Gropius, a

¹² While in this role, Moholy lived in Turkey and travelled to Cyprus, Jordan, Israel, Greece, Syria, and Lebanon, taking personal photographs during her work travels.

¹³ Neubauer had formerly been a member of the Thuringian legislature and had a doctorate from the University of Jena. He was, by all accounts, a highly educated, charismatic, and well-spoken man, and Moholy's relationship with him was serious enough that she began signing her prints "Lucia Moholy-Neubauer." By chance, Neubauer had lived in Weimar at the same time as Moholy and Moholy-Nagy (when they lived at the Weimar Bauhaus), although it does not appear that he and Moholy became close at that time.

¹⁴ See Lucia Moholy to Heinrich Jacoby, January 10, 1947, 82, in Lloyd C. Engelbrecht, *Moholy-Nagy: Mentor to Modernism* (Cincinnati: Flying Trapeze Press, 2009), 216. Moholy expended an enormous effort trying to secure Neubauer's release, to no avail. Neubauer was freed in 1939 but later arrested again and murdered by the Nazis in February of 1945.

decision that proved disastrous as she was only able to recoup a small percentage of the negatives much later in life, and with great difficulty.¹⁵ Newly settled in London, Moholy essentially had to begin her artistic and social life from scratch, without the corpus of her works as support for her establishment as an artist. Despite these hardships, which Moholy described as “a wound in the heart,”¹⁶ Moholy felt welcomed in Britain and soon established herself within a new artistic circle. “Here, for one reason or another, I immediately felt at home,” Moholy later wrote. “Generous welcome from many quarters included invitations to the great homes of England, where, in spite of my extreme poverty – with no financial support from any quarter – I was fortunate enough to meet some of the leading personalities in art, literature, music, theater and politics.”¹⁷

The circumstances surrounding Moholy’s establishment in London necessarily changed her artistic focus to some degree. She remained absorbed primarily with portraiture (although she did produce landscape and architectural photographs in London, Cambridge, and Surrey) but shifted from largely photographing friends to working for professional hire as a portraitist. This change was born of financial necessity; her “extreme poverty” and lack of support from a partner or family obligated her to seek commissions for portraits of men and women in high society. Having secured a Home Office permit to work as a private photographer in a residential area,¹⁸ in 1935 Moholy

¹⁵ For many years, Walter Gropius denied that he had Moholy’s negatives, claiming them lost in the chaos of the war and his move to the United States. It was only after many years of persistence (years in which Gropius used Moholy’s photographs without permission in exhibitions [such as the 1938 MoMA Bauhaus exhibition] and publications) that Gropius finally admitted he had kept her negatives for his own use. Moholy called Gropius’s actions to deceive her a “fully-fledged conspiracy.” See Lucia Moholy, “The Case of the Missing Negatives,” *British Journal of Photography* 130, no. 6388 (January 7, 1983) for the full story.

¹⁶ Lucia Moholy to Bentinck, 23 February 1937, in Schuldenfrei, “Bilder im Exil: Lucia Moholys Bauhaus-Negative und die Konstruktion des Bauhaus-Erbes,” 259.

¹⁷ Moholy, “The Case of the Missing Negatives,” 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

established a studio on Mecklenburg Square in Bloomsbury, where she forged close friendships with her neighbors in the Bloomsbury Group, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, John Lehman, G. Harrison-Brown, R. H. Tawney, and others. Many of her portraits captured the intellectuals, scholars, and writers in whose circles she now socialized, as well as lords and ladies of the English upper class who requested private commissions.

For the most part, Moholy's London photographs adopt a more traditional style of portrait photography, moving away from the experimental portraits created while she was at the Bauhaus. In the majority of the London works, the lighting is less dramatic, the composition standardly framed and less closely cropped. The more conservative portraits in her oeuvre clearly catered to the desires of her clients and were an economic means to an end. Moholy reveals her professional flexibility in this regard: her clients commissioned portraits in a particular style, and she obliged them. *Portrait of Hilda Schuster* (Figure 120), created soon after Moholy established her studio in 1935, exemplifies the diversity of her photographic approach during these years. In this portrait Schuster, a Quaker who had facilitated Moholy's move to London and sponsored her application for a British passport, adopts a pensive pose, her hand supporting her chin as she gazes into the distance. Moholy draws on turn-of-the-century photographic portraiture conventions, blurring Schuster's outline and borrowing from Pictorialism's soft tonality and dramatic, expressive lighting to frame Schuster against a dark background. In a photograph of Schuster's brother, *Dr. Frederick Parkes Weber*, taken in 1936 (Figure 121), Moholy again blurs the outline of Weber's body to draw attention to his face. Weber stares at us with a direct, unabashed gaze, inviting our consideration as he peers into the camera over his wired glasses. Set against a plain background, Weber is

presented at close range and fairly uniform lighting, no dramatic angles or shadows used to manipulate the impact of his portrait. In a second image from this series, also titled simply *Dr. Frederick Parkes Weber* (Figure 122), Moholy presents Weber in profile view, maintaining a serious expression as he gazes at some unknown point. Here Moholy takes advantage of the natural contrast between his herring-boned suit and the whiteness of his hair to produce a portrait built upon subtle gradations of light and dark.

Two other portraits created in the early years of Moholy's London period reveal Moholy's use of studio portrait conventions for specific commissions. Both *Portrait of Edward Garnett*, 1936 (Figure 123), and *Portrait of Ernest Rhys*, 1938 (Figure 124), are carefully staged images intended to reflect the seriousness and intellect of the sitter. Garnett, a writer and literary critic, adopts the pose of a deep-thinking intellectual, resting his cheek against his fingertips as he gazes beyond the camera, apparently deep in thought. Rhys similarly turns slightly away from the camera, staring intensely out of the frame, a preoccupied expression on his face. Moholy utilizes artificial studio lighting to cast an even light across her subject's faces, ensuring their expressions and features are readable. In neither image does one feel the same sense of personal connection between photographer and sitter that so many of the portraits from the 1920s impart. Instead, one understands that these portraits are intended to function as professional headshots for the two writers, "little more than press material for their publishers," as Sachsse describes them.¹⁹ Other portraits taken during the same years, including *Portrait of F.A. Voigt*, 1935 (Figure 125), *Portrait of Professor Polany (Michael Polany)*, 1936 (Figure 126), and *Portrait of Sir Alfred Hopkinson*, 1937 (Figure 127), adhere to a similar, if less-

¹⁹ Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, 57.

artificial, construct, presenting three-quarter or straight-on portrait studies at close range with the intention of reflecting the serious professional character of the sitter.

In other photographs produced concurrently to those discussed above, Moholy demonstrates the diversity of her artistic approach during her London years, as she simultaneously continued to explore qualities of New Vision ideology in some of her works. In *Margaret Goldsmith*, 1935 (Figure 128), one observes clear parallels with Moholy's Bauhaus photographs. Goldsmith is framed by sharply contrasting light (on the left) and darkness (on the right), confusing any understanding of the background against which she stands. Goldsmith's face is half subsumed by the dark, her three-quarter profile made angular and dramatically defined as a result. She looks towards an unknown point, her serious gaze deflected from the camera, and any interpretation of her expression obviated by the encroachment of the shadows. The image is almost tenebristic, Goldsmith's figure both brilliantly lit by light and completely obscured by darkness. In another image from the same series, *Margaret Goldsmith* (Figure 129), Moholy adopts a more casual approach, capturing Goldsmith straight on, a broad smile transforming her features from the serious expression seen in the previous image. Here, Moholy uses contrasts of light and dark once more, but the effect is less stark; one can construe that the darkness framing Goldsmith's left side is the shadow cast by her face and mass of hair. In *Ernest Barker*, 1936 (Figure 130), Moholy develops the physical weight of the shadow, setting Barker against a white background and casting light so that his shadow expands and encompasses the entire composition space. Barker, presented in profile, is partially cropped and offset in the lower left quarter of the composition, his body made a device for multiplying the figure. Moholy's doubling of Barker through shadows is a clear

reference to earlier avant-garde experiments in the multiplying of forms, but it also suggests a duality of form and spirit, both Barker's body and intellect, or perhaps soul, portraited.

Moholy's most dramatic study in shadows from these years is *Emma, Countess of Oxford and Asquith*, 1935 (Figure 131), a portrait which brought the artist a great deal of public recognition in London and established her as a renowned portraitist. The photograph presents Lady Asquith in profile view; the outline of her facial features becomes a silhouette, defined entirely by the shadow which subsumes her features. In contrast to the portrait of Margaret Goldsmith, *Emma, Countess of Oxford and Asquith* is a study in gradations of grey and black, less striking in its contrast but effecting greater elusiveness of character in the sitter. Moholy's manipulation of shadowing gives a strong textural quality to the photograph, reminiscent of her approach to her earlier portraits of Walter Gropius (Figure 69), Johannes Itten (Figure 109), and Ingeborg Lebert (Figure 76). The play of light and dark across the sitter's thick, wavy hair outlines individual strands and creates depth, drawing the viewer's attention fully to the Countess's hair, which occupies a significant portion of the composition. The structure of the composition refers back to Moholy's earlier portraits of Nelly van Doesburg (Figure 59) and Frau Binder (Figure 77); all three images abstract the human profile, turning the focus to the quality of lines, light, and patterns to present a modernist approach to the profile portrait. In *Emma, Countess of Oxford and Asquith*, the focus is entirely on Lady Asquith and yet the application of light obscures the means by which to understand her character. It is an elusive portrait, conveying the dignity of the sitter but little else.

The corpus of Moholy's works from her years in England reveal, collectively, the broad socio-economic range of people that Moholy photographed. The Countess of Oxford and Asquith wrote of her admiration in a letter to Moholy in March 1936, saying: "I think your photographs quite wonderful, so do all my friends. They are different from the modern photography which goes in for what might be called "beauty parlors." Your photographs create real men and women, and contribute to the biographies of great and famous people."²⁰ Moholy did, indeed, play a role in visually recording and defining the famous people she photographed. Among her sitters were professors, authors, critics, scientists, and peace activists. Many of her photographs capture the aristocracy of England, including barons, lords, and countesses; these were a different class of people from those she knew at the Bauhaus, with entirely dissimilar lifestyles and world outlooks. The English society that Moholy became exposed to through these connections was diametrically opposed to the one in which she had been immersed while living in Dessau. Concurrent to her commissions of esteemed figures, however, she also photographed Quakers (people who had helped her immigrate to England), friends, and her own cleaning lady. *Mrs. Palmer*, taken a year after the photograph of the Countess of Oxford and Asquith in 1936 (Figure 132), captures the housekeeper with her head tilted slightly upward, her gaze turned beyond the viewer's shoulder as she smiles broadly. Presented in the more traditional style of photography Moholy now frequently embraced, *Mrs. Palmers* is evenly lit, her entire face open and visible. Giving an unmodulated, genuine smile, *Mrs. Palmers* fills the composition with her personality; she seems to be

²⁰ Margot Oxford and Asquith to Moholy, 6 March 1936. Quoted in 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): 190.

caught unawares as she thinks of something joyful. In contrast to her carefully posed portraits of Edward Garnett and Ernest Rhys, here Moholy captures human emotion and expression, demonstrating her continued interest in the psychology and character of her sitters. There is a palpable warmth to this photograph, an unbridled happiness that suggests intimacy and rapport between subject and photographer. Moholy's portrait of Mrs. Palmers draws direct association with the photographer's earlier photographs of close friends, such as those of Otta Berger, and yet the relaxed directness of the portrait, giving an impression of spontaneity and unrestrained joy, signals the development of Moholy's approach in this regard.

III. The Hands as Subject

Across the many decades of her artistic career, there was one subject to which Moholy returned time and again: hands. The artist's interest in hands and their expressive potential formed a continuing thread connecting her Bauhaus period to the years spent in Berlin and London. While Moholy produced only a small number of hand portraits while at the Bauhaus, following her move back to Berlin these images multiplied in number, with Moholy utilizing the subject to explore the symbolic significance of the hands in a multitude of styles, opening up new avenues of meaning through the isolation of her subject. The hands, for Moholy, signified another opportunity to grasp at the psychological depth of the portrayed, and proved a fruitful new mode of continuing her early work exploring the complexity of her sitters.²¹

²¹ Moholy's fascination with the gestural potential of the hands in their many forms engages with a long artistic tradition of signifying through hands, and recalls Rodin's comprehensive investigation into the

As with her portraits in the post-Bauhaus period, Moholy's photographs of hands display a diversity of artistic techniques, ranging from experimental New Vision studies to representational photographs celebrating the politics or personality of the sitter. Perhaps the most avant-garde of these images is one she produced while still in residence at the Bauhaus, *Georg Muches Hände*, from 1927 (Figure 133). In this portrait, Muche's hands appear almost completely abstracted from his body in dark space, only a hint of his suit visible in the sleeves and trousers to suggest a bodily connection. His hands seem to emerge from the darkness as two disconnected, floating objects, the stark cut of light from dark created by the hem of the suit jacket producing a fragmentary and almost surreal effect. Muche's hands are held in a frozen moment, his fingers pulled together in a pinching gesture, the thumb and index finger of his right hand not quite touching. The effect is a sense of movement and tension; Muche's hands are not relaxed, resting upon his legs, but rather animate objects, caught in a stiffly held gesture. There is little revealed of the owner of these hands, no obvious personality characteristics revealed through the pose. The hands are presented almost as two sculpted objects, and the entire composition exemplifies Moholy's engagement with New Vision photographic principles during her Bauhaus years. The gender of the sitter is ambiguous; the delicacy and pure whiteness of the fingers, blached to the point that blemishes are invisible, suggest a femininity to the hands. Portraits of men's hands had already been represented throughout Western European art history as a standard motif, a signifier of male artistic genius, of strength, hard work, and the power contained within the hands. Women's hands, when depicted, more typically signified the opposite: delicacy, softness, and submission. Moholy, in

expressive potential of the hands. Through producing hundreds of plaster casts, Rodin attempted to reproduce every gesture of the hand in order to capture the entire spectrum of spontaneous human gestures.

portraying Muche's hands as soft, delicate, and beautiful, undoes this gender binary, confusing the viewer's easy reading of the subject matter.

A photograph produced two years later, *Gret Paluccas Hände*, 1929 (Figure 134), displays Moholy's continued engagement with avant-garde photography in the first year of her total independence as an artist. Utilizing a similar approach to that taken in *Georg Muches Hände*, Moholy crops the composition tightly, Palucca's hands filling the photographic space. Strong vertical and horizontal lines divide the composition, with Palucca's right hand dominating the foreground space, a brilliantly lit object sharply contrasted to the shadows surrounding it. The vertical lines of Palucca's right hand find visual complement in the metallic striations of her bracelet; both forms are clearly articulated against the vaguely-focused background. The image is almost a portrait of jewelry, the hands becoming mannequin-like vehicles for the ornaments worn upon them. Moholy's manipulation of light and dark makes the hands appear smooth, pure, and object-like; there is little sense of their functionality or the effects of everyday life upon them. It is only through knowing to whom these hands belong that a secondary layer of meaning becomes apparent. Gret Palucca, one of the foremost modernist dancers in Germany in the 1920s, championed an energetic, expressive style of dance that demanded the engagement of the entire body. Her choreography prioritized improvisation and movements that were precise and almost architectural, inspiring the admiration of numerous Weimar artists, including Moholy-Nagy, Wassily Kandinsky, Gropius, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Her hands, presented by Moholy as monumental objects demanding the attention of the viewer, held the power of Palucca's expressive style. The

energy and vigor of Palucca's hands are made latent in Moholy's portrait, a tension hidden within the layers of the photograph.

These two experimental photographs by Moholy reveal her deep engagement with contemporary interest in the hands as conveyances of meaning, beyond merely the presumed influence of her husband. *Georg Muches Hände* in particular calls to mind Stella Simon's film, *Hände: Das Leben und die Liebe eines Zärtlichen Geschlechts* (*Hands: The Life and Loves of the Gentler Sex*), produced in 1928 at Berlin's Technische Hochschule in collaboration with Miklos Bandy. In this proto-feminist, expressionist short film, hands act as the protagonists in the story – there is no other human trace present. The narrative is enacted by interacting hands that describe a love story, complete with betrayal, between two main characters. The early scenes of the film show a multitude of hands moving in various directions, barely touching and making fleeting physical connections with one another. Dramatic contrasts of light and dark heighten the impact of the white hands producing fluid, abstract shapes and movements against a dark background. Periodically, the narrative is interrupted by text explaining the scene (“er kommt,” “die kokette spielt,” “alles geht zum Fest” [“he comes,” “the coquette plays,” “everyone goes to the festival”]) but the majority of the story is communicated clearly through the interaction of hands, appendages which are intended to embody and signify the female experience. The avant-garde set, built upon abstract shapes and constructivist angles, participates in the same experimental dialogue that Moholy was exploring through her hand portraits of the same years. Simon, an American photographer and filmographer who worked in Germany and the United States, utilized hands both as signifiers of female subjectivity and as “components of kaleidoscopic abstraction and

plasticity.”²² Fundamental to both *Hände* and Moholy’s two photographs is an understanding of the way in which abstraction can obscure identity and thereby signify alternative meanings.

Moholy’s exploration of abstraction in this regard also brings to mind Man Ray’s countless experimental images of hands throughout his career, photographs in which hands appear as both disembodied and as the primary focus in portraits of people (see, for example, *Portrait of a Half-Hidden Man with Expressive Hands* (Russell H. Greeley), c.1930, *Study of Hands, Negative Solarization print*, 1930, and *Hands of Juliet*, 1951). Man Ray’s preoccupation with hands extended from his rayographs, in which he captured hands in a similar manner to Moholy and Moholy-Nagy in their photograms, to his solarization technique, which imbued his hand portraits with a surreal, otherworldly quality and, as Man Ray later explained to an interviewer, allowed him to “get away from banality...to produce a photograph that would not look like a photograph.”²³ While Man Ray focused more on capturing the uncanny and the surreal, his work enters into dialogue with Moholy’s early abstract photographs through their shared interest in liberating the hands from a strict connection to representation and embodiment. By decontextualizing the hands, both artists could emphasize their expressive potential and power.

Moholy’s interest in hands reflects a broader contemporary artistic milieu that frequently focused on these features as a means of signifying the power entailed therein.²⁴

As Stephanie D’Alessandro observes, during the Weimar years the hand “assumed an

²² Jennifer Wild, “An Artist’s Hands: Stella Simon, Modernist Synthesis, and Narrative Resistance,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 97.

²³ Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray. The Rigour of Imagination* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), 282.

²⁴ This preoccupation was not limited to European modernism – one need only think of Alfred Stieglitz’s enormous corpus of photographs of Georgia O’Keeffe’s hands, in which these elements of her body became signifiers of her femininity, her artistry, and her female subjecthood.

elevated status as a kind of activated visual call,” its representation being utilized in posters and advertisements, including those designed by such artists as John Heartfield and Moholy-Nagy.²⁵ In contrast to the perceived changeability of much of the body, from androgynous dressing and bubikopf hairstyles to the advent of plastic surgery, the hand was seen as invariable, an indicator of individual character that could not be altered and “a kind of agent, beacon, or truth index.”²⁶ Artists across the spectrum of Weimar modernist photography, including Albert Renger-Patzsch, Umbo, and Moholy-Nagy, produced countless photographs of hands. Renger-Patzsch concluded his groundbreaking book *Die Welt ist Schön* with an image titled *Hände (Hands)* (Figure 135), in which the two forms come together in apparent prayer, tightly framed against a dark, empty background. Writing in the magazine *Photographie für Alle (Photography for Everyone)* in 1928, Renger-Patzsch explained the significance of hands for the photographer:

The hands play a special role among artists and craftsmen. Here, in a certain sense, the hands lead their own existence. The pronounced individuality of such hands gave me the idea many years ago to isolate hands from the body as though for an image and to let them represent themselves in the photograph. Without doubt, such shots are a little alienating when we first see them, as is everything that is somewhat different from the norm.²⁷

Although Renger-Patzsch approached photography from a distinct vantage point to Moholy, his observations reflect an underlying commonality of interest: that hands “lead

²⁵ Stephanie D’Alessandro, “Through the Eye and the Hand: Constructing Space, Constructing Vision in the Work of Moholy-Nagy,” in *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present*, ed. Matthew S. Witkovsky, Carol S. Eliel, and Karole P.B. Vail (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 66. D’Alessandro notes in particular Heartfield’s 1928 election poster and Moholy-Nagy’s advertisement for the Schocken department store.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁷ Albert Renger-Patzsch, “Einiges über Hände und Händeaufnahmen,” quoted in Daniel H. Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis: The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 90.

their own existence” and have the power to represent themselves in a portrait. Moholy’s husband was similarly preoccupied with hands, keeping in his artist files a set of handprints from many of his Bauhaus colleagues and, as D’Alessandro notes, at one point gifting his own handprint to Walter Gropius as a birthday present.²⁸

During her years in Germany, Moholy also rendered the hand as a signifier of artistic genius. In *László Moholy-Nagy mit Hand*, 1926 (Figure 136), Moholy-Nagy holds his hand up to the camera, partly obscuring his face. The gesture is both a playful, familiar one – *don’t photograph me!* – and a signal that foregrounds the hand as the key element in the portrait. The hand here is paramount; it acts as the stamp of the artist, the mark of his skill. Moholy-Nagy’s power as an artist lies in his hands; they are the means by which he expresses himself, the gateway to his work. In this photograph, Moholy-Nagy presents his hand as his signature and foregrounds it as protagonist of his portrait. Moholy strengthens this connection between artist and hand through her manipulation of the focal point. Blurring the hand in the foreground, Moholy brings her husband into focus in the background; the effect is that one’s attention is drawn first to the hand but then led deeper into the photograph, to the person in focus in the background. The complete darkness of the background exaggerates the effect of this unusual composition, outlining Moholy-Nagy and amplifying the selective lighting illuminating his face and hand. Cutting off the side of his face, Moholy-Nagy’s hand perfectly frames his right eye, acting almost as a viewfinder for both artist and viewer, and creating a clear focal point. Moholy thereby connects the hand to its owner, both symbolically and physically.

²⁸ D’Alessandro, “Through the Eye and the Hand: Constructing Space, Constructing Vision in the Work of Moholy-Nagy,” 66.

The use of the hand in self-portraiture as an expression of the artist and of her or his trade is, of course, a trope that has existed for centuries, and modernist artists continued the tradition, albeit through the use of new materials and technology. Moholy's portrait of Moholy-Nagy fits into a broader pattern of contemporary artists signifying their artistry through their hands. The Russian artist El Lissitzky, for example, superimposed his hand holding a protractor across a photograph of his face in *The Constructor (Self-Portrait)*, 1924. Moholy-Nagy, in his design for the cover of the journal *Foto-Qualität* in 1931, layered a photograph of a camera over an early photogram of his hand, suggesting the deep connection between the artist and this new technology. While El Lissitzky's and Moholy-Nagy's images promote complementary messages, the former advocating the continued importance of the artist's mind and personal engagement in the creative process, the latter championing the replacement of the artist's eye with the machine,²⁹ both images imprint the hand as the signifier of artistic expression upon the page. This concept of the hand as signifying of artistry is further reflected in Umbo's photograph of Bauhaus women (Alexa von Porewski, Lena Amsel, Rut Landshoff, and one unknown woman), taken before 1929 (Figure 137). Here, these four women sit in a row, none acknowledging the camera but all presenting their hands in similar gestures across their bodies. The symmetry and diagonal thrust of the composition focuses one's attention on the displayed hands, presented by these women as a means of signifying their roles as artists in the tradition of countless male artists.

The significance of the hand as the locus of artistic expression was of paramount importance from the earliest years of Moholy and Moholy-Nagy's collaboration. As

²⁹ See Eleanor M. Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 83 for an in-depth comparison of these images. .

D'Alessandro observes, their 1922 article "Produktion-Reproduktion" centralizes the hand as the key element in producing entirely new modes of art,³⁰ for example incising the gramophone wax plate oneself with a needle and "manipulating mirrors or lenses" to capture light effects on a silver-bromide plate.³¹ The dialogue and tension between the artist's hand (or trace thereof) and its removal and replacement by the (photographic) machine found visual form in the two artists' early photograms, some of which expose the outline of one of the artist's hands. In these photograms, Moholy and Moholy-Nagy directly placed their hands into the artwork, producing an experimental portrait of the hand. By inserting the artist's hand back into the mechanical process, complicating the contemporary debate surrounding technology and art, Moholy and Moholy-Nagy imbued these early photograms with a tangible sense of the artistic process and of the artist's physical touch upon the light-sensitive paper. Moholy-Nagy continued this work with his later independently-produced photograms, as seen in two photograms from 1926 (Figures 138 and 139). In both, Moholy-Nagy imprints his hand upon the paper, encompassing the entire composition and, in the first work, multiplying the effect by doubling the hand. The effect is a powerful statement of artistic primacy, a dramatic physical trace of the artist starkly declared in black and white.

In the years immediately following her separation from Moholy-Nagy, while she remained in Germany, Moholy moved away from the stark, abstract objectification of the hands in her photography, producing instead numerous studies which retained some signifier of human presence or the environment. This approach was to remain a constant

³⁰ D'Alessandro, "Through the Eye and the Hand: Constructing Space, Constructing Vision in the Work of Moholy-Nagy," 65.

³¹ László Moholy-Nagy, "Produktion-Reproduktion," *De Stijl* 5, no. 7 (July 1922).

for the rest of Moholy's career; although Moholy produced experimental hand studies throughout her life, none were as abstract as those produced during her Bauhaus period. Many of the photographs from the years 1929–1931 prioritize a haptic experience. In *Hände von Gisa Schulz*, c.1929 (Figure 140), Moholy frames her sister off-center and from above. The observer looks down at Gisa Schulz's head from close range, her pale fingers supporting her head. Blurring the background, Moholy directs the viewer's gaze towards the hands which, enmeshed in Schulz's hair, evoke a sense of touch. The textural quality of the hair and the familiarity of the gesture heightens the haptic sensation; purposely concealing the sitter's face, Moholy elevates the hands and their function to the level of portraiture here. In *Yella Curjel*, c.1929 (Figure 141), the artist takes a similar approach. Curjel covers her face with her hands, her fingertips resting lightly upon her eyebrows and eyelids. Here, the hands replace the facial features as the focus of the portrait, the slight diagonal thrust of the composition leading one's eyes along the hands as the central element to the photograph. The clear delineation of each finger, outlined in dark lines of shadow (particularly on the left-hand side), and the detail rendered in the photograph, even the leukonychia visible on Curjel's fingernails, makes paramount the tactility of the captured pose. Covering her eyes to remove her sense of sight, a play on vision and its limitations, Curjel encourages the viewer to prioritize their own haptic experience.

Moholy's preoccupation with haptism was likely informed, at least in part, by the teaching principles espoused first by Johannes Itten, and later by her own husband, at the Bauhaus. Itten, the first instructor of the preliminary course at the Bauhaus, was a proponent of teaching through sensory experience; thus he directed students to close their

eyes and explore textures solely through the sense of touch. Itten's elevation of haptism as a significant element of artistic training drew, in turn, on the influence of Raoul Hausmann, whose 1921 manifesto "Presentismus gegen den Puffkeismus der deutschen Seele" ("Presentism against the puffkeism of the German soul") called for

the extension and overcoming of all our senses. We want to explode all boundaries that have existed until now!!! ... We call for haptism, just as we call for odorism!! Let us expand the haptic and give it a scientific basis beyond all the arbitrariness that has existed thus far!! Haptic art will expand the human being! ... We want to set about refining our most important sense; long live the haptic emanation!!³²

When Moholy-Nagy took over the teaching of the preliminary course in 1923, he adopted Itten's approach, assigning students the task of organizing materials by their tactility and producing artworks that evoked specific textures.³³ Both Itten and Moholy-Nagy emphasized tactile exercises to train the senses; the hand was of paramount importance in this regard. Later, in his book *Von Material zu Architektur* of 1929,³⁴ Moholy-Nagy emphasized "experience with the material" through "primitive tactile exercises"³⁵ (*Tastübungen*) and argued that haptism was "the basic sensory experience, which, nevertheless, has been least developed within a discourse of art."³⁶ Moholy, as Master's wife and editor of Moholy-Nagy's writings, and later as Head of Photography at Itten's school, would have been directly exposed to these intellectual and artistic concepts

³² Raoul Hausmann, "PRÉsentismus," *De Stijl* 4, no. 9 (1921): cols. 140 ff. Quoted in Rainier K. Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 149.

³³ Examples of such exercises include producing scales of textures upon which different materials were fixed, to produce gradations of smoothness to roughness. See Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, 150, for a more detailed discussion on sensory training in the preliminary course at the Bauhaus.

³⁴ Published in English as *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture*.

³⁵ László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture*, trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947), 18–19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

surrounding the hand and its haptic potential; her exploration of these principles in her own photography comes, therefore, as no surprise.

Many of Moholy's post-Bauhaus hand photographs drew on the nineteenth-century conception of the hands as revelatory of personality. Through closely framed portraits of a sitter's hands, their expressive gestures enlarged to form the entire focus of the image, Moholy provided the means by which to read the (hidden) sitter's character. In *Clara Zetkins Hände*, 1929 (Figure 142), Moholy presents the activist's wrinkled, roughened hands clasped in rest upon the sitter's knee. These hands, with their bare, unmanicured fingers, signal someone who has toiled and whose enduring strength bears traces upon her body. In contrast with the portrait of Gret Palucca's hands discussed earlier, which conveys a sense of leisure, wealth, and delicacy, the photograph of Zetkin's hands imparts the wisdom, hard work, and struggle of a woman who fought for women's rights and socialism throughout her life. Given Zetkin's position as a leading Communist party orator, this image seems almost an ode to the Communist worker, elevating and iconizing Zetkin's hands as symbols of her long-time struggle for justice. Moholy's increasing engagement with the Communist party during the end of the 1920s and her relationship with Neubauer, through whom she met Zetkin, suggest a favorable reading of her subject in this regard. Produced within a larger series of portraits of Zetkin, *Clara Zetkins Hände* is clearly intended to function as a character portrait in its own right, signifying Zetkin's passions and work through close study of her hands.

A striking juxtaposition with *Clara Zetkins Hände* is the photograph *Hände eines Zeitarbeiters (Hands of a temporary worker)*, around 1930 (Figure 143), by August Sander. Sander's photograph, created a year after Moholy's, presents the hands of a

worker posed in an almost identical manner to Zetkin's. The two photographs are almost uncanny in their similarity, from the thumb pointing towards the foreground and the hands resting upon the legs of the sitter, to the roughness and dirtiness of the nails, and even the patterning of the two figures' sleeves. Sander's rendering of physiognomic character through detailed photographs here converges with Moholy's desire to reveal the character through unusual approaches to the body and through unexpected angles. Both photographs are intended as portraits of the worker (whether intellectual, in Zetkin's case, or manual); the hands are emblematic in this regard as the defining symbols of the physical toil of a hardworking life. Where the images differ is in the intention of the artist. While Sander, as discussed in Chapter Three, photographed hands so as to reveal the trade or background of the sitter, producing portraits that functioned as representative of an entire class or trade,³⁷ Moholy intends Zetkin's hands to reveal additional information about the individual, to function as another portrait in her serial study of the Communist orator.

Through Moholy's portrait studies of hands, she distilled the essence of her subjects into a concentrated form, utilizing the hands to signify meaning and communicate a message or symbolize some element of the human subject. Moholy expanded her portrait studies of the 1920s to include this new genre, experimenting with the multiplicity of meanings conceivable through physical gestures and the capability of the hands to signify character autonomously. In *Frederick Parkes Webers Hände*, 1936 (Figure 144), for example, Weber's hands suggest a man at rest and contemplative. His

³⁷ Sander produced numerous photographs of hands for this purpose over the course of his career. See, for example, *Studien – Der Mensch [Hands of a Tenor]*, about 1928, *Studien – Der Mensch [Hands of a touring Actor]*, c.1929, *Untitled*, 1938 (MoMA), and *Studien – Der Mensch [Hands of a Photographer (Gunther Sander)]*, 1944.

fingers are intertwined, thumbs pressing lightly against one another, in a familiar gesture that evokes an image of a person thinking deeply, in a restful state, all energies absorbed in reflection. Weber, a dermatologist in London, was a highly educated man who published thousands of articles and tens of books during his career; the pose he adopts thus further signifies the nature of his work as a scholar and doctor. In *Fanny Mayers Hände*, 1928 (Figure 145), Moholy presents a seemingly less constructed portrait, capturing Mayer's hands mid-action and outdoors. The natural light of the environment bleaches the background of the image, obscuring secondary details on the right side of the composition, and focusing the viewer's attention on Mayer's aged and veined right hand, caught mid-gesture. The simplicity and normality of the scene are striking in comparison to more highly composed hand portraits such as those of Muche and Palucca. Captured as part of a series of portraits of Mayer, similarly to the Zetkin series, this study of Mayer's hands contributes to Mayer's overall character study, presenting a casual moment of hands at work.

A final grouping of Moholy's portraits from both her Berlin and London years address the hands in moments of action, undertaking various activities. A series of four photographs, *Hände, kartoffelschälend* (*Hands, Peeling Potatoes*, Figure 146), *Hände, Strümpfe stopfend* (*Hands, Stuffing Stockings*, Figure 147), *Hände, Strümpfe stopfend (mit Schere)* (*Hands, Stuffing Stockings (with Scissors)*, Figure 148), and *Hände beim Abstecken* (*Hands when Pinning*, Figure 149), all taken around 1929–1930, present as frozen object studies, gestural actions that are carefully constructed and posed to be photographed. All four images are dramatic compositions of light and dark; Moholy utilizes both the effects of natural lighting and the sharp contrasts in color of the sitters'

clothing to produce portraits built upon juxtaposed complementary elements. None of the photographs reveal the face of the sitter; each is singularly focused on the hands as the protagonist of the composition. In *Hände, kartoffelschälend*, Moholy captures a gesture whose smooth, unbroken action (the long potato peel curling into the pan) instills a sense of calmness and reflection. Composed outdoors, the unknown woman set against a background of highly contrasted grey and black, the portrait is a study of simultaneous action and stillness. Purposely cropping the frame to remove the face as a focal point, Moholy explores contrasting elements of light and dark – the white blouse, the dark smock, the grey of the potato skin, its textural quality still tangible – to produce a luminous object study. In *Hände, Strümpfe stopfend* and *Hände, Strümpfe stopfend (mit Schere)*, Moholy introduces constructivist elements into the composition through her careful framing of the image. Taking advantage of the natural patterning effect of the wicker chair upon which her subject sits, Moholy emphasizes the vertical and diamond-shaped slats in *Hände, Strümpfe stopfend*, framing the composition so that the geometric patterning dominates the lower half of the image. The geometricity of the lower picture plane is echoed and mirrored in the striped patterning of the sitter's tie, which contrasts sharply against a plain white blouse. The disjointedness of the photograph's parts – a hand that emerges from the darkness at the edge of the frame to grasp the stocking, the stockinged hand, the slats of the wicker chair, and the torso of the sitter that cuts a white vertical line down the center of the composition – produce a complex abstracted composition that must be studied carefully to parse its components. The abstract patterning of *Hände, Strümpfe stopfend* is repeated in *Hände, Strümpfe stopfend (mit Schere)*, though to lesser effect. Here, Moholy captures the same elements in another

gesture, as the hand cuts the tip of the stocking which is blanched almost to the point of two-dimensionality in this image. The geometric patterning of the chair is present here also, although slightly blurred, thus diminishing its effect. In both images, the black and white stripes emerge from the lower-left corner of the composition, seeming to diagonally travel up the frame, imparting a sense of movement into an otherwise static moment.

Moholy's exploration of New Vision principles and her interest in the effects of light and shadow are further seen in *Hände beim Abstecken*, a dramatic portrait of hands pinning a dress. In this photograph, Moholy orchestrates juxtapositions of light and dark elements to produce an image that is more a portrait of light effects and shapes rather than of the ostensible subject (hands pinning a dress). Here, again, it is the hands that are the protagonists of the photograph, their gestures made central to the composition and their forms objectified. Moholy abstracts the hands a step further in this image, beyond the others produced during this same period, removing any environmental context and utilizing lighting aids rather than natural sunlight. The stark juxtaposition of dark, shadowed hands against white dress, the subtle patterning of which mirrors the horizontality of the hands, and the framing of the composition, those hands bisecting the composition, produces a striking visual study. Moholy takes the visual language of *Fanny Mayers Hände* and abstracts the image a stage further, removing identifying human traces (the veins of Mayer's hand) to produce a smooth, streamlined effect.

Moholy's interest in the hands and their gestural potential may have stemmed in part from her early devotion to the *Freideutsche Jugend* and the *Lebensreformbewegung*, with its emphasis on the body in its natural form and one's physical connection to the

environment. Photographing herself nude on multiple occasions, Moholy celebrated the body and the freedom of its natural form, embracing tenets of *freie Körperkultur* (FKK, Free Body Culture) and prioritizing a respect for nature. Moholy's celebration of the bare human figure in this regard formed a foundation for her focus on the hands as a fundamentally expressive element of the human form. Many of her photographs of hands capture these forms in momentary, slightly blurred gestures, framing the hands to emphasize their expressivity and dynamism. In her portraits of Theodor Neubauer's hands from 1929, for example, Moholy plays with the focal points of the images, alternately blurring and sharpening elements to call attention to Neubauer's movements. These closely cropped, enlarged portraits, studying the angles, movement, and linearity of the hands, operate within the New Vision language that Moholy had immersed herself in during her Bauhaus years. In two images taken some years later, once Moholy had moved to England, the artist developed this visual concept further. In both *Baron Blacketts Hände*, 1936 (Figure 150), and *Jimmy James Hände*, 1937 (Figure 151), Moholy enlarges the hands to encompass the entire picture plane, both acting as strong vertical elements centralized in the composition. The photographs are almost action portraits of cigarette smoking, reminiscent of Moholy's earlier portraits of women smoking, and yet with an entirely different focus. Neither portrait reveals the identity of the sitter; only the titles of the works disclose this information. Much softer than the carefully composed gestural studies from 1929 and 1930 discussed in previous pages, *Baron Blacketts Hände* and *Jimmy James Hände* monumentalize the hand as the sole significant element in the composition. Moholy's adept manipulation of light and dark is still present in these images, but she employs these elements in a less dramatic manner. In *Jimmy James Hände*

in particular there is a slight blurring to the outlines of each form; in some areas, for instance along the knuckles, index finger, and James's upper arm, this effect is so strong as to give the impression of elements dissolving into the background. Centralizing the hands in each of these compositions, Moholy suggests that their purposeful gestures form the portrait itself, that the sitters' characters are represented by the revelatory actions the hands take. Here the (traditionally) masculine gesture of smoking a cigarette suggests the seriousness and activeness of the sitters, recalling the numerous portraits of such figures as André Malraux and Max Beckmann smoking to suggest their intellectualness and worth.

IV. Moholy as Writer and Art Critic

In the years following her departure from the Bauhaus, during which she resided in Berlin, London, Istanbul, Ankara, Berlin once more, and finally Zürich, Moholy produced a wealth of written work, including hundreds of articles and exhibition reviews, and an enormously successful book. In her occupation as a writer and art critic, Moholy produced the largest body of her work, and yet this area of her creative and critical output has been largely overlooked in scholarship. Over the decades following the closure of the Bauhaus and the diasporization of its adherents across the globe, Moholy emerged as a critical voice in art journalism, contributing to numerous journals, including the *Burlington Magazine*, and publishing articles that shaped new interpretations of the Bauhaus and its followers. "In hindsight," as Rolf Sachsse observes, "it is difficult to say

what Lucia Moholy's medium really was: language or photography."³⁸ In this section, I consider Moholy's writing as another mode of entry into the artist's world, as a means of understanding her critical thinking and her own approach to art. Such an approach reveals a great deal about Moholy's own critical analysis and her intellectual position regarding the Bauhaus and later artistic developments.

A Hundred Years of Photography

In January 1939, Moholy published the book *A Hundred Years of Photography* as a Pelican Short to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the invention of photography. The book was intended as an accessible entry into the history of photography for the general public, rather than as a contribution to the existing field of technical photography scholarship. Moholy attempted, within a short text, to give a broad understanding of the historical roots of the medium, as well as its technical innovations and procedures, social uses, and the cultural impact of its invention. Reflecting on the role and impact of photography on culture in the one hundred years since 1839, Moholy traces the fundamental underpinnings of the medium back to ancient China, Assyria, Egypt, and Pompeian culture. The book is written in narrative form, as a story of photography's impact in society through time, the intent of which was to inspire reflection on the interaction between man and technology across history. As Moholy explains in the preface:

This little book, therefore, does not claim, by any means, to be a complete history of photography. It has been written, not to replace any of those previously published, but because it was felt that at the age of a hundred, which, by now, photography has reached, it may be worth

³⁸ Rolf Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografien* (Berlin: Museumspädagogischer Dienst Berlin, 1995), 13. Sachsse also observes that Moholy's writing is untouched as a focus for scholarship.

while to give a thought not only to the achievements of photography as such, but to the part it has played by mutual give and take throughout these hundred years in the life of man and society.³⁹

The book quickly sold 40,000 copies, becoming popular as a gateway into the history and social impact of photography from the earliest experiments to contemporary avant-garde innovation. By 1939, photographs were ubiquitous across developed societies, saturating newspapers, magazines, and billboards, and produced by amateurs and professionals alike with the help of cheap, easily-operated cameras. Moholy understood the revolutionizing phenomenon of the medium, writing that “life without photographs is no longer imaginable. They pass before our eyes and awaken our interest; they pass through the atmosphere, unseen and unheard, over distances of thousands of miles. They are in our lives, as our lives are in them.”⁴⁰ *A Hundred Years of Photography* was thus intended, as Moholy explains, to trace the early underpinnings of the groundbreaking medium, from its early position “as a kind of magic art” to “the status of a world power” that it held by 1939.⁴¹

Close study of *A Hundred Years of Photography* reveals the methodological underpinnings of Moholy’s scholarship and her perception of photography. From the first pages, Moholy emphasizes a scientific and rational approach over religious or mystical thinking, positioning technology as fundamental to human innovation and development. It is through rational thinking and an embrace of technique, Moholy argues, that creativity emerges: “Periods with religious or mystical feelings will breed less inventive

³⁹ Lucia Moholy, *A Hundred Years of Photography: 1839-1939* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1939), 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

power than periods with rational and scientific thinking.”⁴² Photography, a modern technology built upon “collective efforts spread over thousands of years,” was the result of a convergence, in the nineteenth century, of all the necessary factors to produce innovation: experience, knowledge, and engineering capacity.⁴³ It was through this favoring of technological development that momentum could build for a revolutionary tool like the camera. Moholy’s emphasis on a rational, scientific approach echoes, as Rolf Sachsse points out, her earlier commitment to biologism during the 1920s and her own rational interpretation of that movement.⁴⁴

In the early pages of the book, Moholy turns her measured approach to photography’s relationship with technique, critically assessing the balance between the two elements in relation to other art forms. Tackling the question of whether photography is an art, Moholy describes the relationship between photography and technique as being “peculiar,” with “more equality of rights between the two than there is between the other arts and their techniques.”⁴⁵ While in other centuries-old art mediums the hand (and thus the mind) dictates the actions of the tool (be that pencil, paintbrush, or chisel), in photography the camera removes some of the will from the human hand and cedes power to the machine, altering the balance between the hand’s intention and the tool’s control. Thus while in painting, drawing, sculpture, and printing the designation of whether a work is “art” or not “depends mainly on the mind, partly on the hand, and to a negligible degree only on the tool,” in photography “the tool’s share grows more important, while the hand’s share is reduced to a minimum. The mind’s share, on which the result mainly

⁴² Ibid., 9.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, 60.

⁴⁵ Moholy, *A Hundred Years of Photography: 1839-1939*, 15.

depends, upholds its position as the *primus mobile*. The result may be a work of art – or may not.”⁴⁶ Moholy thus argues that while the mind maintains its position as the primary driver in the production of a photograph, the camera strips agency from the artist’s hand in the actual development of the artwork. Moholy’s position is balanced; she intends no provocation to contemporary debates and maintains that “photography is an art *and* a technique. Whether the one name is used for it or the other, neither is meant to be a challenge to those who advocate the one *or* the other.”⁴⁷ Moholy’s approach to the subject reveals her reflective, nuanced scholarly practice; she argues that one must study the historical background of photography and its relation to its environment in order to fully understand it as a practice and concept. For Moholy, it is not possible to fully understand photography through technique alone; a holistic consideration is required.

In reading *A Hundred Years of Photography*, the breadth and depth of Moholy’s knowledge on the subjects of photography, philosophy, and art history become clear. Weaving the social and historical context of photography into each chapter, Moholy traces the underpinnings of photography back to China 2,000 years ago before moving through history to the present day. She references “lens-shaped pieces of glass” in Nineveh, Assyria, Egypt, and in Pompeian houses, which she sees as the earliest foundational materials for a modern photographic practice. She draws a connection between Aristophanes in the 5th century BCE and Euclid in 300 BCE, both of whom studied the potential of lens glass and the refraction of light. Aristotle, Pliny, Ptolemy, and Seneca are cited as ancient scientists and philosophers who were “greatly interested

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

in optics in the first three centuries A.D.”⁴⁸ Tracing the roots of photography back centuries in human history, Moholy grounds the modern technological medium in its cultural and social context, seamlessly bringing it to life and emphasizing its significance as part of the narrative of human existence. Moholy’s decision to write a narrative history of photography was founded in her own longstanding intellectual engagement with the subject. Having studied art history at university, Moholy later undertook a research project on Erich Stenger’s photography collection while working at the Itten School.⁴⁹ She initiated this project, approaching Stenger for permission to access his collection, and undertook a book project based on her research, which was never published. The focus of her project was the “nature of photography” and its relationship with history and “the eternal problems of humanity.”⁵⁰ Preoccupied with artistic process (as evidenced in “Produktion-Reproduktion” in 1922), Moholy used the *A Hundred Years of Photography* project as an opportunity to critically study the underpinnings and impact of photography across human history. According to Sachsse, who knew the artist personally and professionally in the final years of her life, Moholy’s interest in history pervaded her life and shaped her intellectual direction: “The radical and life-long unbroken modernity of her thinking was historically founded,”⁵¹ based on an application of historical lessons to elucidate the present world.

Moholy’s voice emerges across the pages of *A Hundred Years of Photography*, allowing the reader indirect access to a photographer who was relatively silent about her

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁹ Erich Stenger was a photochemist, historian and theorist of photography, as well as an avid art collector. He invented multiple photochemical tools, including a darkroom lamp with liquid filters and a chemical photographic copying method. During his lifetime, Stenger’s photography collection was considered to be the largest in the world.

⁵⁰ Lucia Moholy, quoted in Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, 53.

⁵¹ Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin*, 25.

own practice throughout her career. Through Moholy's consideration of other photographers, we are able to draw conclusions about, and make connections with, her own work. Her reflections on portraiture photography across different time periods are revealing; considering the early daguerreotype portraits, Moholy describes the "feeling of warmth and contact" which "seems to tell a story of the interest which was taken in the person by the photographer."⁵² These are personal portraits, Moholy argues, fostering a special dialogue between sitter and artist: "The truth which they reveal is one which has found its counterpart in the other person while the process was taking place. It is not pure realism, not classic purification, but the kind of give and take between subject and object which has been indispensable in all periods for the creation of good portraiture, in painting as well as in photography."⁵³ This connection between subject and artist was of personal significance to Moholy who, as discussed in Chapter Three, captured her subjects in poses that suggested an intimacy between the two participants. Her later evaluation of Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits, in which "the head, and the head alone, has become the perfect incarnation of mental and intellectual capabilities, almost too powerful to stay within the bounds of the picture,"⁵⁴ further signals Moholy's own investment in closely-framed portraits that isolated the head or the hands as the sole signifier of a person's character.

Moholy invites further inferences about her intentions in her own photographic practice elsewhere in the book, when she addresses the relationship of the photograph to

⁵² Moholy, *A Hundred Years of Photography: 1839-1939*, 41.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

history. In a chapter addressing David Octavius Hill and the practice of setting portraits within natural landscapes, Moholy writes:

It is one thing to put down an everyday scene because it awakens picturesque imaginings, and another to do so for reasons of historic truth and interests.

Every photograph taken of a famous building (as most of them were in the first year) or of a well-known person has – in addition to its picturesque or private meaning – its historical value. This value increases when the object taken ceases to exist, or – still more so when events of historical or sociological interest have been taken.⁵⁵

Moholy's argument for the significance of photographs that capture erased spaces, especially following episodes of historical importance, is doubly noteworthy given the value of her own photographs as windows into the vibrant world of the Bauhaus. As discussed at length in Chapter One, Moholy's photographs of the Dessau Bauhaus act as memorializations of a school and spirit that no longer exists, cut off abruptly by forced emigration and National Socialist destruction. Moholy's self-awareness, presented in *A Hundred Years of Photography* obliquely and objectively, indicates her consciousness of the secondary role her photographs took on in the decades following her move from Dessau.

Commissioned as a publication to celebrate the centenary of the invention of photography, *A Hundred Years of Photography* offered Moholy the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between photography, her chosen artistic medium, and societies over time. Covering a period of almost four thousand years, Moholy adopted a dual narrative tone in her approach, writing both as the academic art historian and as the opinionated

⁵⁵ Ibid., 62.

artist. Her modesty regarding her participation in the modernist avant-garde is evident in this text as in her earlier writing and diary entries; addressing the avant-garde experimentation of her husband and his contemporaries, Moholy removes herself entirely from the frame, describing photography as “a new medium by means of which they [“abstract painters”] tried to give shape to their feelings of balance.”⁵⁶ Photograms are given as an example of “abstract expression,”⁵⁷ but Moholy makes no mention of her role in discovering this method (an omission she regretted, and attempted to rectify, many decades later). Interestingly, despite discussing the radical innovations of the avant-garde, Moholy does not include any of those artists’ photographs in the book; instead one of the few examples from the 1920s and 1930s is her own portrait *Emma, Countess of Oxford and Asquith* (Figure 131). *A Hundred Years of Photography* achieved enormous popular success, bringing Moholy further attention as a scholar and photographer in Britain, and establishing her as one of the few female contributors to the art historical record.⁵⁸

Following the publication of *A Hundred Years of Photography*, Moholy became increasingly engaged professionally with the preservation of historical records and publications. In 1942, during the Second World War, Moholy operated a microfilm service called Aslib (Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux). Over the course of the war, Aslib microfilmed hundreds of scientific magazines and journals, including more than 300 published in Germany, 40 in France, 30 in Italy, and many from

⁵⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ When Moholy published *A Hundred Years of Photography* in 1939, she was one of the first women to write a history of photography. Gisèle Freund, the German-born French photographer, had published *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle* (“Photography in Nineteenth-Century France”) only three years before, in 1936.

other regions, including Scandinavia and Czechoslovakia.⁵⁹ During the two-year period 1943–45, Aslib microfilmed roughly 12.5 million pages of records, according to Moholy.⁶⁰ Moholy became head of Aslib in 1945 and produced a number of articles on microfilming during this period that reveal her interest in the protection of (national) heritage and the significance of historical preservation.⁶¹ Moholy wrote extensively on the importance of establishing microfilm archives for the preservation of information, historical records, and books inaccessible or no longer in existence, due to destruction or loss.⁶² Given the widespread destruction caused by the war, Moholy stressed the important role archives could play in preserving national and cultural identity.⁶³ After the war, and during the 1950s, Moholy built on the work she did at Aslib, working as a UNESCO commissioner and undertaking microfilming projects in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and her home of Czechoslovakia. Living first in Istanbul in 1952–53 and then Ankara in 1955–56, Moholy became the head of UNESCO’s cultural heritage filming project in the Middle East, focusing her efforts on building cultural-historical archives through

⁵⁹ Following the war, it was revealed that the service had been used to aid Bletchley Park in their covert operations. See Lucia Moholy, “The Aslib Microfilm Service: The Story of its Wartime Activities,” in *the Journal of Documentation*, 11, no. 3 (12) (1946).

⁶⁰ Lucia Moholy, Private report: The Aslib Microfilm Services, with 10 Enclosures, manuscript, London, c. 1947. Discussed in Rolf Sachsse, “Microfilm Services and Their Application to Scholarly Study, Scientific Research, Education and Re-Education in the Post-War Period: A Draft Proposal by Lucia Moholy to the UNESCO Preparatory Commission 1945, and Its Prehistory in Modern Art,” in *Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation*, ed. Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena (Berlin; Munich; Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 173.

⁶¹ See, for example, Lucia Moholy, *Microfilm Services and Their Application to Scholarly Study, Scientific Research, Education and Re-Education in the Post-War Period, A Suggestion With 5 Appendixes*, August 1945.

⁶² Sachsse, “Microfilm Services and Their Application to Scholarly Study, Scientific Research, Education and Re-Education in the Post-War Period: A Draft Proposal by Lucia Moholy to the UNESCO Preparatory Commission 1945, and Its Prehistory in Modern Art,” 169.

⁶³ Moholy’s efforts in microfilming and her success as a photographer and writer in London earned her membership in the Royal Photographic Society in 1948. She also held a teaching position at the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts and the Central School of Arts and Crafts. See Madesani and Cavadini, *Lucia Moholy: Between Photography and Life*, 27 for more information.

microfilming. In an article published for the International Congress for Reprography in 1963, Moholy elucidated her hopes for the future of microfilming and photographic archiving, explaining:

Furthermore, reprographics, as an exponent of an expanded conception, has participated in a task that has so far been little talked about: to contribute to a better understanding of various cultural and social structures. Whether or not such a result comes about with or without intent is not essential at first...If my thesis is correct and reprographics as a factor in social formation plays not only a retrospective, but also a forward-looking, role, then we would be taking a small step closer to a cultural community that may be the germ of a new humanism.⁶⁴

Moholy's ambition towards a humanistic community reflects her longstanding adherence to rationalism and her preoccupation with the human relationship to the world, tenets which she had espoused since the late 1910s.

Moholy as Art Critic: The Later Years

Following her time in Turkey working as Commissioner for UNESCO's Middle and Near East cultural heritage project, Moholy lived in Berlin for two years in 1957–58, writing a company history of Eternit, the building workshop supplier. Having completed that project, she moved permanently to Zürich at the request of Johannes Itten, whose publications she assisted on. She edited *Kunst der Farbe (The Art of Color)* and *Mein Vorkurs am Bauhaus: Gestaltungs- und Formenlehre (Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus)* for publication in 1961 and 1963, respectively, and began writing for the *Burlington Magazine*, as well as numerous other publications, contributing essays and reviews. Moholy's focus was not limited to modernism in these published works; she

⁶⁴ Lucia Moholy, "Die Reprographie als Faktor in der Gesellschaftsbildung," in Othmar Helwich (ed.), *Bericht über den 1. Internationalen Kongress für Reprographie*, Köln 14. -19.10.1963, Darmstadt 1964, 324-325, Quoted in Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy*, 63.

wrote on a wide range of artistic movements and exhibition topics, including Hellenistic Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopian art, as well as modernists such as Kurt Schwitters, Käthe Kollwitz, and Paul Klee. Sometimes she reported in a journalistic fashion on news in the art world, covering new administrations and directions taken by art institutions, while in other articles she reflected critically on artists in her Bauhaus circle or recent exhibitions. Moholy's written output during the final four decades of her life was substantial, establishing the artist as a serious critic in the art world and a valued contributor to contemporary debates. Having written her early Expressionist publications under the pseudonym Ulrich Steffen, during a period in which women were not taken seriously as intellectuals or writers, Moholy asserted the validity of her ideas as a woman and critic in the post-war world, achieving recognition in her own name across multiple publications.

In framing herself as an art critic and historian in her post-Bauhaus years, Moholy assumed the role as gatekeeper to information about Moholy-Nagy, as she became the means by which to access her more famous husband, particularly following his death. Her years in Switzerland saw a constant negotiating of her position as biographer, secretary, and memorializer of Moholy-Nagy, as she was a valuable source of knowledge about their shared life during the heady Weimar years. This role took multiple forms; she reviewed numerous books and articles written about Moholy-Nagy, providing corrections and rebuttals when necessary, and also published her own articles about her husband's work and his ambitions.⁶⁵ Her contribution to the historiography of Moholy-Nagy was invaluable in this regard, as she shed light on her husband's working style, his relationships with other artists, and his personal opinions on methodology and

⁶⁵ She also edited Krisztina Passuth's monograph on Moholy-Nagy, first published in 1982.

production. In “L. Moholy-Nagy und die Anhänge der kinetischen Plastik” (“L. Moholy-Nagy and the Kinetic Plastic Attachments”),⁶⁶ for example, Moholy elucidated the working collaboration between Alfréd Kemény and Moholy-Nagy, and the conditions that brought forth their article “Kinetic-Constructive Force System,” published in *Der Sturm* in 1922. She also rectified misinterpretations regarding the genesis of Moholy-Nagy’s *Lichtrequisit einer elektrischen Bühne (Light Prop for an Electric Stage [Light-Stage Modulator])*, describing the combined inspiration from the Bauhaus metal workshop and the Kroll State Opera in Berlin that made the realization of Moholy-Nagy’s ambitious project possible.⁶⁷ Despite having separated from her husband decades earlier, Moholy was called upon for the rest of her life to verify information regarding Moholy-Nagy’s artistic output, requests she obliged without fail. Thus, despite her success as an independent writer and photographer over many years, Moholy returned repeatedly to reflecting upon her former husband’s impact, her significance as a storyteller and memorializer contingent on Moholy-Nagy’s fame.

As well as serving as a significant font of knowledge relating to her husband, Moholy became an important primary source regarding the avant-garde world in the 1920s more generally. As more of the trailblazing modernists died over the years, Moholy, now established as a regular contributor to art journals, and friends with such artists as Itten, Klee, Schwitters, and El Lissitzky, provided accounts of their years together at the Bauhaus and in Berlin. Moholy became an educator and leading authority on the lived experience at the Bauhaus, assuming the role of “contemporary witness,” as

⁶⁶ Lucia Moholy, “L. Moholy-Nagy und die Anhänge der kinetischen Plastik,” *Werk – Archithese: Zeitschrift und Schriftenreihe für Architektur und Kunst = revue et collection d’architecture et d’art* 66, no. 35-36: Iberia (1979): 85, 88.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

Sachsse describes her.⁶⁸ Her passionate commitment to historical preservation, borne out in her work over many decades, assumed a new aspect in this regard; Moholy became the living archive of the Bauhaus, building through each published article, interview, and personal reminiscence a preserved, lucid memory of the Bauhaus for public and scholarly consumption. For those seeking to understand the pioneering modernist school, Moholy functioned as the means to recapture an atmosphere and educational environment no longer in existence. Betraying no hint of the personal grievances between individual Masters at the school, especially those who clashed with her husband, Moholy wrote on the Bauhaus in her typically rational, objective, and reflective manner. Her essays and reviews are filled with small, delightful reminiscences that offer a glimpse of a past world: Kandinsky was thought of as “a magician, master of a thousand mysteries,”⁶⁹ “endowed with great wisdom and supreme powers of being.”⁷⁰ Itten was both “a hard taskmaster” and “the most generous of friends,” characterized by “a profound sense of responsibility pervaded by human sympathy and understanding, if often hidden under a rough surface.”⁷¹ Through her reviews and reminiscences, Moholy’s voice as a contemporary participant and observer resonates strongly. She was, as Sachsse recalls, “an incorruptible, and often even inconvenient, witness to the times,”⁷² and her written output over the decades spent in Switzerland coalesce into an invaluable archive of Bauhaus history.

⁶⁸ Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin*, 26.

⁶⁹ Lucia Moholy, “Switzerland,” *The Burlington Magazine* 105, no. 728, Victorian Art. Painting, Furniture, Sculpture (November 1963): 525.

⁷⁰ “His were the brain and the hand that put non-objective art on its feet, his the courage and the initiative to inaugurate a movement that was to mould the art of many countries,” Moholy continues. See Moholy, “Switzerland,” 525.

⁷¹ Lucia Moholy, “Reviewed Work: Johannes Itten: Werke und Schriften by Willy Rotzler and Anneliese Itten,” *The Burlington Magazine* 116, no. 852, Modern Art (1908-25) (March 1974): 166.

⁷² Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin*, 6.

In two major articles, “Das Bauhaus-Bild” (“The Bauhaus-Image”) and “Bauhaus im Rückblick” (The Bauhaus in Retrospect”), published in 1968 and 1977, respectively, Moholy elucidated her own artistic and intellectual position regarding the Bauhaus, seeking to correct scholarly misinterpretations about the school and clarify the working environment the Bauhäuslers experienced. Describing a community in which, no matter which workshop you studied in, “you felt in any case at home,” Moholy underscores the supportive atmosphere of the school, a place in which “one had the opportunity to ask, to be instructed, to compare, to find confirmation, to encounter resistance, to assert oneself or to adapt, at least to develop oneself.”⁷³ The “basic attitude of the Bauhaus” was one of liberation: freedom to express oneself artistically and personally in whatever manner one wished.⁷⁴ The multiplicity of artistic experimentation engendered by such an approach defined the Bauhaus as a special, distinctive place, imprecisely defined by any one label.

In both articles, Moholy addresses the concept of the Bauhaus and its uniqueness as “an idea, a program, a pedagogy, whose meaning was not easy to understand,” a school devoted to the “new construction of the future.”⁷⁵ Moholy is adamant on this point: the concept of the Bauhaus allowed for no single designation, and contemporary attempts to assign set labels to the school fundamentally misunderstand its mission. Academics who write of a “Bauhaus style” commit “a fatal error; because a Bauhaus style has never existed and could never exist.”⁷⁶ Quoting Gropius, who declared “the goal of the Bauhaus is no style, no system, no dogma or canon, no recipe and no fashion,”⁷⁷

⁷³ Lucia Moholy, “Bauhaus im Rückblick,” *Du: kulturelle Monatsschrift* 37, no. 433 (March 1977): 50.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁵ Lucia Moholy, “Das Bauhaus-Bild,” *Werk* 55 (June 1968): 402.

⁷⁶ Moholy, “Bauhaus im Rückblick,” 50.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

Moholy critiques the numerous interpretations of the school since its closure that warp the original mission of the school. Moholy designates herself as a member of a small group who “watch over the purity of the Bauhaus idea,” witnesses to the collective experimentation and liberation of the Bauhaus in the 1920s.⁷⁸ Moholy took her role as eyewitness seriously, diligently responding to the numerous articles and books published on the Bauhaus in the decades following the Second World War. Adamant to make “historically reliable corrections,”⁷⁹ Moholy dispelled myths surrounding the Bauhaus, including the notion that the school functioned similarly to the Worpswede artist colony and that there existed an “official Bauhaus painting” (in the work of Feininger, Kandinsky, Klee, Moholy-Nagy, and Schlemmer), as posited by Hans Wingler.⁸⁰ Moholy’s criticism was always delivered frankly and her judgments could be censorious – her review of Wingler’s famous tome on the Bauhaus found significant faults⁸¹ – and yet she treated her subjects fairly, seeking only to maintain the purity of the Bauhaus concept and ensure historical veracity. Moholy achieved “sovereignty”⁸² as the key

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Moholy, “Das Bauhaus-Bild,” 397.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 398. Moholy emphasized that “an ‘official Bauhaus painting’ never existed and could never exist.” Later in the same article, Moholy reiterates her point, writing that “the Bauhaus image cannot be classified historically,” with any attempts to designate artworks or styles as “Bauhaus” rendered “ambiguous.” [Ibid., 402].

⁸¹ In her review of Wingler’s *Das Bauhaus*, Moholy finds fault with Wingler’s structural approach to the book, pointing to oddly divided artistic treatises and workshops which create an unsuccessful flow to the book. Wingler’s attempt to simultaneously print numerous Bauhaus documents and provide a history of the school in a single publication is, according to Moholy, “problematic,” as the two methodologies do not meld seamlessly and discrepancies inevitably arise. See Lucia Moholy, “Hans Maria Wingler: das Bauhaus” *Du: kulturelle Monatsschrift*, 23, no. 8 (1963): 72. Moholy furthermore argues that the book is accessible only to those within the Bauhaus circle and scholars in the field, and details small errors in texts, picture titles, and specific dates throughout the book, as well as extreme retouching of images that fundamentally alter the original photographs and make details impossible to make out (ceilings blanching into non-existence, shadows removed, “furniture that used to stand on the floor, pots that used to stand on tables now float in the air.” [Ibid., 74] Despite these criticisms, however, Moholy acknowledges Wingler’s publication as important for laying out a broad wealth of information regarding the Bauhaus, allowing future scholars to penetrate deeper into the subject.

⁸² Sachsse, *Lucia Moholy: Bauhaus Fotografin*, 26.

eyewitness to the Bauhaus, and she drew on a vast reserve of memories and experiences to support contemporary scholarship in the field.

In addition to elucidating her experience of the Bauhaus, the numerous articles Moholy published in the final decades of her career, in combination with *A Hundred Years of Photography*, provide a window onto Moholy's perspective on photography. Given her lasting silence on the impetus behind her portraits and architecture photographs of the 1920s, the small tidbits of information gleaned and compiled from her later writings are invaluable, providing an oblique means by which to unpack Moholy's artistic intentions. Following her residence in London and her work at Aslib, Moholy became adamant about the broadscale applications photography might have as a medium, and wrote frequently on its position as both art form and scientific technology. In a letter to the editor of *The Times* newspaper, written with Tom Hopkinson and Nikolaus Pevsner in 1952, Moholy argued that photography must be acknowledged as "a visual medium in its own right" and promoted as a technology with "formative influence" and "considerable scope."⁸³ Too much emphasis had been placed to date on the science of the medium, on its technology and processes; Moholy argued that in approaching photography in such a manner, one prevents photographs from speaking for themselves, for elucidating new ideas and new modes of vision.⁸⁴ In a radio broadcast for

⁸³ Lucia Moholy, Tom Hopkinson, and Nikolaus Pevsner, "National Collection of Photography," *The Times*, June 28, 1952, 52350 edition.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* In an article written many years later, in 1975, Moholy expanded on the question of whether or not photography is art, arguing that it is not the technical aspect of the medium that is art by default, but rather the user's hands that produce art through the technology. Photography requires active creation to produce art, in the same manner that a paintbrush or pastel is not art alone. "Photography may be one thing if affiliated to a teaching institution; another if installed in a museum of science and technology; different again if sponsored by a society with mainly historical interests; and an entirely novel affair within range and reference of the fine arts." She continues: "For photography, like other techniques is not and cannot be art *per se* by the same tenet that brush and paint, pen and ink, spray gun or silk-screen etc. cannot claim to be art *per se*. If, therefore, painting, drawing, screen-printing and multiple-techniques may lend themselves

Südrundfunk Stuttgart in December 1957, Moholy discussed the topic of “The Roll of Photography in Society,” beginning by declaring that “photography has become indispensable in the context of contemporary and social history.”⁸⁵ Recounting the history of photography during the 1920s, which saw the innovations of worm’s- and bird’s-eye views, Moholy speaks of the radical transformation brought about by photography, whereby the world is experienced through images and “photographic vision.”⁸⁶ Moholy’s interest in the everyday impact of photographs, their reception in society and their ability to reframe the known world, is revealed towards the end of the broadcast, as she discusses the photograph’s universality as a mode of communication, and its ability to bridge language differences and engage with human vision.⁸⁷ For Moholy, “truly fulfilled images” with the power to move are those that capture human experiences, allowing the viewer to experience the world through technological vision.

Through her regular contributions to art journals and newspapers, Moholy solidified her intellectual voice as a critic. Hers was a fair, candid approach, informed by personal reflections and memories of her subjects that bring their characters and art to life. Written during her middle and late career, the articles reflect Moholy’s contemplative, insightful approach, the artist bringing her years of experience and professional knowledge to bear upon her writing. Often written in descriptive, beautiful prose,⁸⁸ Moholy’s written work stands out as a significant aspect of her oeuvre, offering

to producing art, why not photography?” See Lucia Moholy, “Photography in Switzerland,” *The Burlington Magazine*, 117, no. 862 (Jan., 1975): 70.

⁸⁵ Lucia Moholy, “Die Rolle der Photographie in der Gesellschaft, Radio-vortrag Südrundfunk Stuttgart, 10.12.1957” (Stuttgart, December 10, 1957).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Of Giacometti’s sculptures, she wrote: “The slim bodies we love so well surge up like stalagmites, firmly rooted on feet which are earth-bound, keeping them to the ground we tread ourselves. Bodies they are, but not bodies suggesting flesh or bone. Nerve-centers rather, vibrating with movement instilled into them by

the reader another perspective on this multifaceted artist. When considered in conjunction with her photographs from the post-Bauhaus years, a picture emerges of Moholy as an experimental artist of great breadth, who adapted to difficult and unexpected circumstances and established her legacy as a key participant of, and witness to, the twentieth century.

the artist's touch. Movement upwards mainly, and forward. The swing of the torso, the screwing up of shoulders, the lifting of arms, the striding walk – they are not movement temporarily held, but the essence of movement, movement per se, expressed in figurative terms." Lucia Moholy, "Switzerland," *The Burlington Magazine* 105, no. 718 (January 1963): 38.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this dissertation, I argued for a reconsideration of Lucia Moholy as a pioneering artist engaged with the issues of Bauhaus experimentation and the complexities of Weimar New Womanhood. I hope, in the five preceding chapters, that I have successfully initiated this reconsideration by demonstrating Moholy's innovation, her engagement with avant-garde trends in 1920s Europe, and her creation of a representational modernism that explored psychological intimacy, objectivity, and architectural modernism using a polyvocal stylistic approach. Considered as an independent individual, distinct from her husband, Moholy emerges as an experimental artist who captured the spirit of the Bauhaus and of Weimar modernity through her photographs, setting the standard for photographic experimentation at the Bauhaus for its masters and students.

There is necessarily a great deal more work to be done in excavating Moholy's career and critically reexamining her photographic oeuvre, but herein lies the opportunity for manifold constructive contributions to the field. This study was bounded in certain areas by limited access to archives; upon their reopening, a closer examination of Moholy's relationship with her husband will be possible, as well as a more detailed reading of Moholy's diaries and unpublished writings. Furthermore, much of Moholy's post-Bauhaus life has not yet been traced in depth, to say nothing of her earliest work in photography before her Bauhaus years, which has been entirely neglected. More broadly, there are rich depths to be plumbed in the subject(s) of female photographers at the Bauhaus, many of whom have not yet been acknowledged in scholarship. Much of the

work produced by students at the Bauhaus, whether as part of their studies or as independent expression, has not been treated with serious consideration. Thus, a closer examination of the output of the numerous female students who experimented with photography, both before and after the photography department was established in 1929, could yield fruitful conclusions that illuminate and expand our understanding of Bauhaus photography. Such students as Corona Krause, Irena Blühová, Grit Kallin-Fischer, Charlotte Grunert, and Lotte Burckhardt, are just a few amongst the many female artists whose stories are yet to be comprehensively examined.

Moholy's photographs possess a rich multiplicity of meaning, revealing layers upon layers. They are simultaneously experimental portraits of people and buildings, grounded in Weimar avant-garde expression, and memorializations that build a concrete history and contribute to the Weimar cultural archive. Committed to modernist principles of architecture, Moholy produced bold and daring photographs that defined a standard for architectural photography during the Weimar years. By critically considering the content and meaning of the Bauhaus Dessau photographs rather than treating them for their documentary function, one realigns one's focus on Moholy, thereby revealing the manner in which her architecture photographs engaged with, and themselves espoused contemporary modernist principles. Moholy's embrace of avant-garde photographic techniques extended to other aspects of her oeuvre. Her dynamic portraits capturing Weimar society provide a nuanced consideration of contemporary womanhood and the unstable gender dynamic in German society during the interwar years. Through a wealth of portrait photographs produced across many years, from those highlighting the avant-gardism and androgyny of sitters like Anni Albers and Eva Fernbach to others that

framed the relaxed naturalism of Nina Kandinsky and Julia Feininger, Moholy expanded the visual language surrounding womanhood in Weimar Germany, her portraits complicating the dialogue established by her male counterparts.

Asserting her voice as a female photographer in a largely-male professional sphere, Moholy carved out her own independent space as an intellectual and professional, gaining recognition and success in her own right while concurrently contributing over many years to the work of her husband. The significance of Moholy's achievement in this regard, given the dominant patriarchal system in place and the difficulty women faced in achieving career success across the decades during which Moholy worked, cannot be overstated. Establishing herself as a professional photographer and editor while living at the Bauhaus, Moholy exemplified the ambitious, career-driven New Woman, seeking to achieve her own professional goals within the parameters of her marriage. For younger female students at the Bauhaus, simultaneously embracing newly-discovered freedoms and experiencing the gender-restrictive boundaries placed on their creativity, the symbolic significance of Moholy's professional success must have been substantial. By framing Moholy's explorations of New Womanhood through her portraiture in relation to other professional female photographers, and addressing the realities of her working conditions, bounded by her matrimonial obligations, I hope I have illuminated Moholy's achievements as an artist and situated her within a modernist practice co-constructed by female participation. Furthermore, in reevaluating Moholy and Moholy-Nagy's relationship, revealing the extent to which Moholy supported Moholy-Nagy intellectually and co-produced the early photograms, I have demonstrated the equal give-and-take between the two artists, their mutual reliance on one another's intellect and artistic

curiosity, and the myriad ways in which Moholy contributed to Moholy-Nagy's work. My intention, in so doing, was to undermine the presumption of male influence still applied to Moholy's oeuvre, demonstrating instead the productive channels of interchange that engendered pioneering artistic treatises, photograms, and photographs.

To date, Moholy's impact is felt most greatly in the scholarship through her role as memorializer of the Bauhaus. Certainly, we are indebted to her for canonizing the school through distinctive, experimental photographs that perfectly captured Gropius's intentions and the spirit of the school. Moholy's images are the means by which we understand the Bauhaus building; they preserve an idealistic space no longer extant. Moholy's commitment to conserving history and her deep understanding of the methods by which memory is inscribed into cultural consciousness are reflected throughout her career, in her work for Aslib and her travels in Eastern Europe, preserving sites and cultures for our collective memory. And yet, as I have argued over the course of this dissertation, her photographs are so much more than memorializing documents of a time and place. They are multifaceted in nature: dynamic, sometimes experimental, psychologically intimate, weighted with the burden of history, and exemplary of representational modernism. Moholy remained committed to figurative subject matter, never fully embracing abstraction but working in a visual language that utilized avant-garde techniques to express the heady, radical environment of the post-war world. In this sense, Moholy's photographs expose the flaws in our current concept of the modernist canon, demonstrating the multiplicity of modernist expression in the interwar years. Moholy believed in photography's authenticity, in its ability to open up new avenues of understanding, once describing how through this medium one could discover "the not yet

seen, the not yet recognized, the as yet unknown. Discovery, uncovering, clarification, elimination, decipherment, entrapment – new beauty, new reality, new truth.”¹ Across Moholy’s oeuvre, we observe the artist in this process of discovery, revealing not-yet-seen aspects of the human figure or startling perspectives of architectural sites to expand our understanding of reality and underline the rich nuance of modern life.

¹ Lucia Moholy, Vierseitiges Schreibmaschinentypskript, Nachlass Lucia Moholy, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin, quoted in Anja Guttenberger, “Mit eigenen Augen. Serielle Autoporträts von Lucia Moholy und Florence Henri,” in *Gespiegeltes Ich: fotografische Selbstbildnisse von Frauen in den 1920er Jahren*, ed. Gerda Breuer and Elina Knorpp (Berlin: Nicolai, 2014), 100.

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