Truth in Soft-Focus:
Photography and Abstraction in Dialogue 1914–1930

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the dialogue between modernist photography and abstraction during the period between 1914 and 1930 primarily in France, Germany and the United States. The duality of photography is emphasised: binaries and antagonistic terms associated with photography are consistently challenged and disentangled to argue against the separation of realism and abstraction.

A formalist-phenomenological methodology associated with art historical traditions is adopted in order to bridge photography and abstraction. Central to this argument is a consideration of atmospheres in photography that contribute to and encourage ties with abstraction. This thesis will attend to atmospheres and their effects, putting formalist-phenomenology into practice by linking realism and abstraction, and will closely read and explore embodied experiences of abstract photographs.

Chapters 1 and 2 theoretically outline key contextual stakes such as the relationship between documentary and aesthetics, photography and painting, as well as perception and photographic optics.

Chapter 3 positions the abstract nature photograph within and against conventions of landscape by excluding the horizon line from compositions. Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents* series and Josef Albers's photographs of sludge are considered alongside Arvid Gutschow's photobook *See Sand Sonne*.

Chapter 4 investigates the still-life photograph as well as formalist concerns relating to light, shadow, glows and blurs as contributors to the atmospheric charge of abstract photographs. Artists given particular attention here include Florence Henri, Lyonel Feininger, Ilse Bing and Paul Strand.

Chapter 5 probes the theme of the machine in photography. Charles Sheeler's River Rouge series and a still-life photograph of jugs and vases are explored in connection with Amédée Ozenfant's theories on the 'spirit' of the modern age. Oblique photographs of the Eiffel Tower by Moholy-Nagy, Ilse Bing and Germaine Krull are also discussed as 'faulty' and disorienting abstract images.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art is a presentation of my own, original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged in footnotes and as referenced in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

In an unpublished lecture delivered in February of 1943 entitled "Photos as Photography and Photos as Art," Josef Albers makes the following assertion:

> There is a saying 'a photo, or a lens, never lies', and a policeman for instance has good reasons to believe it. It is clear that both the lens as well as the silver compound — which are the two most essential devices of photography — have no intention to sin by cheating us. But if that saying means that a photo shows the things as they are, as they look to us, then the saying that 'a photo never lies' is a lie.[1]

Albers, in evoking the image of the policeman, pronounces a key concern regarding the relative capability of photography to deliver evidence, proof or knowledge. Despite the desire for a forensic technology of scientific empiricism and the hope that photography might provide a tool with privileged access to the truth, other things *slip in*.

Albers follows up the question of proof by eliciting photography's material essence: that is, its physics (the lens) and chemistry (the silver compound). He suggests that photography, in material terms, has intent: the agential medium *intends* to be truthful. He questions how things appear, how "they look to us", concluding that photography ultimately cannot deliver truthful renditions. For Albers, the characterization of photography as an honest medium that does not lie is not an acceptable one. Although in many respects, scholarship on photography across

[1] Josef Albers, "Photos as Photography and Photos as Art", Unpublished lecture (24 February, 1943). Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, 84.111. Emailed to me by Michael Beggs, 3.

disciplines has long discredited photography as a technology capable of objective representation of the world, it is a medium that nonetheless maintains ties to reality and to the world that it captures.

For the purpose of this thesis, I am most interested in the tensions in photography or the tug of war between reality and something else, something seemingly less true, less tangible, less identifiable, or in other words, something abstract. I wish to explore not only the ways in which realism and abstraction co-exist in photography, but also how they are in constant dialogue with one another, and how they collaborate and enrich an understanding of the medium. This thesis will demonstrate this relationship through close attention to abstract photographs made between 1914 and 1930. This era marks a pivotal and exemplary moment when photography is being experimented with, and continuously defies convention and expectation. The photographs I will discuss not only balance realism and abstraction, documentary and aesthetics, but also actively participate in both, inspiring the drawing of connections and the troubling of fixed associations of these terms.

Writing many years later, Allan Sekula, like Albers, raises the police in his assessment and questioning of photographic truth, except his aim is to justify documentary, whereas Albers's contextual framework is modernist abstraction. In relatively similar terms though with different stakes, Sekula writes:

> […] any police photography that is publicly displayed is both a specific attempt at identification and a reminder of police power over 'criminal elements.' The only 'objective' truth that photographs offer is the assertion that somebody or something — in this case, an automated camera — was

somewhere and took a picture. Everything else, everything beyond the imprinting of a trace, is up for grabs.[2]

Despite the presumption that photography's power is to be located in its capacity to deliver evidence or objective truth, it is unverifiable. Occupying the space between science and fine art, photography consistently taunts one version or definition of itself.

Steve Edwards has written that it is necessary to attend to photography's participation in both camps of science and of art, and to regard the medium as one in which the two disciplines interact. Arguing that photography inhabits the gap between the two disciplines, Edwards claims that photography's "effects are variform – it focuses power and desire but it also produces knowledge. The effect of anti-realist epistemology is always to negate one wing of this contradiction, elevating some practices over others; it turns knowledge into power, or into desire, and science into art".[3] In this statement, Edwards elicits the binaries at play in Albers's and Sekula's accounts. It is with these opposing terms in mind, terms appear again and again that my study of abstract photography continuously seeks to challenge binaries and draw out the crossovers, conversations and alliances between terms or ideas that initially seem antagonistic.

My thesis examines experiments in photography that, in certain respects, can be viewed as being in excess of documentary or that do not have as their deliberate ambition the representation of the world as fact or data. More particularly, it seeks to

[2] Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary", (Notes on the Politics of Representation). *The Massachusetts Review,* Vol. 19, No. 4 Photography (Winter 1978), 863.
[3] Steve Edwards, "The Machine's Dialogue", *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1990), 63.

trace and provide analyses of the encounters between photography and abstraction within a modernist context, between the years 1914 and 1930 in France, Germany and the United States. My study by no means attempts to overview all geographical or artistic pockets where photography and abstraction came into contact during this period and I have had to make choices to focus my attention in certain ways. As such, my selection of case studies is far from exhaustive of the rich contributions from many countries and movements that may be relevant[4]. I have elected to attend to certain case studies specifically and carefully because of their purchase on the heart of my inquiries and because they are exemplary of exciting interactions between documentary and abstraction from this era. One tactic I have adopted has been to pair the canonical with the unknown, not only to utilize the depth of existing scholarship to pioneer new analyses, but also to propose alternative readings of familiar photographs that emphasize abstraction, placing it at the core of interpretation.

On the surface, the terms *documentary* and *abstraction* may seem to be diametrically opposed. Maria Morris Hambourg has argued that even early explorations of the photographic medium, such as Peter Henry Emerson's book *Naturalistic Photography* from 1889, which "established the criterion of truth to nature as the medium's aesthetic birthright", would continue to have purchase on the understanding of photography's role in the interwar period.[5] My strategy throughout has been to play with and disturb seeming binaries in order to consciously take stock

[4] Other relevant instances of abstract photography can be found in British and Russian modernisms amongst others.

[5] Morris Hambourg, Maria. "From 291 to the Museum of Modern Art: Photography in New York 1910–37", in Maria Morris Hambourg and Christopher Phillips. *The New Vision: Photography between the World Wars. The Ford Motor Company Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 4. Morris Hambourg discusses the influence of Emerson's book on Alfred Stieglitz's photographic approach, which she sees as a "combination of technical brilliance, spiritual yearning, and naturalism", 4.

of each term as informing, challenging and working in tandem with the other. That is, my aim has been to understand better how documentary and abstraction within a photograph work together to produce meaning. My formalist-phenomenological methodology proposes an alternative perspective to examine the dialogue between photography and abstraction by attending to the photograph itself, and the layers of embodied experience that accompany its production and viewing. These experiences and interactions are most prominently exemplified in the abstract photography produced during this experimental historical period.

A particularly noteworthy feature of photography at this moment is the ease with which the camera could be acquired and utilized. With the emergence of snapshot photography, more and more people had access to a camera and could readily learn to make use of photographic technology, a medium that was gathering cultural cachet. [6] Without too much effort or expense, the camera could become walking eyes, eyes that might witness anything and everything, and in turn, document and/or abstract the world. Moreover, in thinking about technology-based modernism, Molly Nesbit has argued that, "The photograph acquired a place in the avant-gardes at precisely the same time that it achieved its greatest degree of popularisation. The avant-garde could not have existed without the mechanically reproduced mass-media photograph".[7] As such, avant-garde and mass uses of photography are intricately linked so that the avant-garde depends on its popular and vernacular use in order to establish and define itself.

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[6] The Kodak was invented in 1888. For a more detailed study, see Gualtieri, Elena. "Photography and the Age of the Snapshot", in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gąsiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker, (December, 2010), 522–540.

[7] Nesbit, "Photography and Modernity (1910–1930)", in eds. Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé, *A History of Photography: social and cultural perspectives*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 104.

There are several other reasons why my case studies fall between 1914 and 1930. While 1914 marks the beginning of the First World War, it also coincides with the inauguration of the wide-scale dissemination of abstract art.[8] At the other end of my date range, while the 1920s was an exceptionally lively period in the history of avant-garde art and particularly with reference to experiments in abstraction, the beginning of the 1930s saw major changes in both the artistic and political spheres that interrupted it: the increasing museumization of modernism, the demise of the Bauhaus and the flight of artists from Germany (1933), the Wall Street Crash followed by the Great Depression, etc. With these events came new priorities for art and photography that included a more deliberate approach to documenting the lives of citizens, so that avant-gardism was demoted in favour of a photojournalist focus.[9]

It is for this reason that the early twentieth century featured so heavily in the 2018 Tate Modern exhibition, *Shape of Light: 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art*. Curated chronologically, the exhibition included works by Marta Hoepffner (set beside Kandinsky's painting, *Swinging*, 1925), German Lorca (hung alongside a Mondrian grid). Also paired together were a painting by Georges Braque and Pierre Dubreil's photograph *Interpretation Picasso: The Railway* (1911), which directly refers, as does Lorca's photograph, not only to a painter, but also to a distinct object. Other artists included: Pierre Dubreil, Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, László Moholy-Nagy (photograms), Man Ray (rayograms), Minor White, Imogen Cunningham, Margaret Bourke-White and Brassaï, to name a few examples of earlier practitioners. It should be noted as well that the exhibition (as does this thesis) adopted a

[8] It is worth mentioning that at this moment, many Paris-based modernist artists began to disperse: Kandinsky returned to Russia, Mondrian to the Netherlands, and Duchamp and Picabia relocated to New York.

[9] This is particularly evident in the photographic projects in America commissioned by the Farm Security Administration along with other notable social documentary or photojournalist pursuits.

transatlantic approach, presenting works principally from both Europe and America, in an effort to explore abstraction in a more international context rather than as a nationally driven movement.

The exhibition proposed to define photography as *rays of light*, intimating an immateriality that corresponded to the emphasis on abstraction. There were, however, many moments of homage or explicit reference to paintings, where the corresponding photograph can be viewed as producing a figurative representation of the work that gets quoted. Although the subject matter and visual realization may be abstract in form, the explicit reference to or quotation of an existing abstract painting effectively undermines the claim that the photograph constitutes an abstraction. While they may successfully communicate the aesthetic of the historical abstract work, the new works are visually likened to the renderings that they refer to and seek to reflect. Abstraction thus cannot be described simply as an instance of aesthetic non-figuration. In photography abstraction is always related to *what* the image represents, as well as to *how* this representation is rendered. It is virtually impossible for photography to exclude subject matter, as the photographic image is necessarily linked to what is represented and captured by the camera.

Elena Gualtieri, who has written on the intersections of modernism and photography, has drawn attention to the fact that the last two issues of *Camera Work*, Alfred Stieglitz's photography journal, were dedicated to Paul Strand in 1917. The issues featured several photographs by Strand such as *Abstraction, Bowls* (Figure 0.1), which demonstrated "a willingness to experiment with abstraction and formalism".[10] Also included in the journal were portraits of urban life taken in New

[10] Elena Gualtieri, "Photography and the Age of the Snapshot", in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, eds. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gąsiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker, (December, 2010), 523.

York City, such as Strand's famous *Blind* (or *Blind Woman*) photograph (Figure 0.2). These inclusions constituted efforts to define 'straight' photography — a term first used in *Camera Work* — as delineating as a working strategy that departs from painterly associations. Instead, straight photography proposed new approaches to vision through the technical and mechanical conditions of unmanipulated photography. It was considered as being in opposition to Stieglitz's earlier promotion of Pictorialism as well as his involvement in founding the Photo-Succession movement and as an explicitly American method.[11] Gualtieri, however, also connects Strand's objective efforts and manifestos to Moholy-Nagy's New Vision, and in doing so, represents one of the few explicit attempts to liken American and European modernist engagement with photographic vision and practices.[12]

In this context, Gualtieri recalls comments made some years ago by Aaron Scharf in his article "Painting, Photography, and the Image of Movement". Here, Scharf demonstrated the ways in which photographic vision challenged associations with naturalistic representation in a manner that reflects some of my arguments concerning abstraction and realism in photography. Scharf concluded that:

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[11] While Stieglitz published on Pictorialist photography at the turn of the century, he later became a strong advocate for 'straight' photography and the turn away from painterly associations. For a detailed discussion of Stieglitz and the Pictorialist tradition, see Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995, 26–28. In opposition to 'straight' photography, and in conjunction with Pictorialism as well as the Photo-Succession movement, Patricia D. Leighten uses the term "overly manipulated" to refer to straight views on Pictorialism, "Critical Attitudes toward Overtly Manipulated Photography in the 20th Century", *Art Journal*, Volume 37, Issue 2 (1977): 133.

[12] The New Vision was coined by Moholy-Nagy in 1928 and will be further explained in the next chapter. Gualtieri, "Photography and the Age of the Snapshot", 525. It should also be noted that in March 2015, Oxford Art Journal published a special issue dedicated to "Modernism after Paul Strand", with important articles by Stephanie Schwartz and Jorge Ribalta among others.

> As long as the photograph represented the 'seeable' world, its images were acceptable within the general framework of naturalism. When, however, as was the case with instantaneous photography, the camera 'saw' more than what was immediately comprehensible to the human vision, its excessive reality was held by some to be a distortion of optical truth and, therefore, pernicious to art. This antagonism may have involved the germs of an art, a fundamentally anti-naturalist art, which could substitute by signs the more vital, direct observation and recording of nature.[13]

By seeing what was in excess of the capacities of the human eye — a point which Moholy-Nagy had often articulated — photography was not representative of a naturalism that was in accordance with or dictated by the human body.[14]

To a certain extent, my argument aligns with those advanced by Scharf and Moholy-Nagy. Yet, I will continue to insist that seeing more is not always tantamount to seeing *more clearly*: images produced by photography cannot participate in naturalism given the ontological confines of the medium, such as, for example, the inevitable framing by the lens. Photography, I argue, by seeing *differently* from the human eye, inaugurated an unexpected marriage between observation and abstraction. It presented a world that *appeared* more real by way of a distortion of and departure from human visual capability in favour of a mechanical one. This apparent proximity to truth, however, should not be confused with truth itself. To understand this point better, it is helpful to consider the analysis of photography made in disciplinary fields beyond art history.

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[13] Aaron Scharf, "Painting, Photography, and the Image of Movement", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 104, No. 710 (May, 1962), 186.
[14] See for example, Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, (London: Lund Humphries, 1925), 28.

i. APPROACHES TO REALISM AND ABSTRACTION IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Scholarship on photography does not neatly fit into one given discipline, but touches enquiries in a variety of fields including Art History, Anthropology, Geography and Colonial Studies, amongst others. As a result, it is impossible to arrive at a single coherent ontological definition or history of photography that would resonate with all scholars. Photography, for each discipline, has its own unique history and functionality, signifying in contemporary disciplinary debates as a result of this history, and specific instrumentality. This is ultimately one of the most interesting aspects of photography: its hesitation relative to neat taxonomy or definition and its refusal to be exclusively one thing but not another.

This thesis does not attempt to cover issues around everyday or real abstraction as developed by Marxist scholars in either a generalised or an applied way.[15] Marxist theories and ideas around realism and abstraction are most appropriately elicited in this project when the photographs themselves speak to relevant issues such as industry in modernism, as is most apparent in the chapter that deals with the machine.[16] It is useful to consider the critique of photography developed in Critical Theory.

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[15] Important texts on real abstraction include: Sven Lütticken, "Living With Abstraction" in *Abstraction* Ed. Maria Lind. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2008), 142–152. Alberto Toscano, "The Open Secret of Real Abstraction", *Rethinking Marxism*, 20:2, 273–287.

[16] Scholarship by Andrew Hemingway has been useful when examining Marxist approaches to industry and art in the Machine Age. See Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America*. (Pittsburgh and New York City: Periscope Publishing Ltd., 2013).

A classic instance of this is the debate on the role and responsibility of photography and its effects on commodity culture as articulated by Walter Benjamin in his critique of Albert Renger-Patzsch's 1928 photobook entitled *Die Welt ist schön*, or *The World is Beautiful* (Figure 0.3). Renger-Patzsch's presentation included many photographs of a variety of subjects, from the natural to the mechanical all shot with attention to form and modernist aesthetics. On this book, Matthew Simms comments that:

> For Renger-Patzsch the subjective impulses associated with fine art, such as private expression and emotional lyricism, were completely out of place in the scientific and objective realm of photographic veracity. An empirical rigour was therefore required as much in the theoretical definition of the specificity of photography *qua* photography as it was in the utilization of the camera to reveal concrete facts about the object world.[17]

There is thus a distinct tension between the expressive potential of photography — belonging in this case to a subjective representation of the world — and the expectation that photography be forensic in its documentarian approach to truth telling. t was as if to have faith in photography, and its fidelity to the world and reality, meant there was no place for inward expression, for it risked muddling too much the desired products of photography. According to Simms, Renger-Patzsch worked to assemble a series of photographs that attended to photography's ostensible capacity to produce objective representation, enabling a dissemination of facts about the material world.

[17] Matthew Simms, "Just photography: Albert Renger-Patzsch's Die Welt ist schön". *History of Photography*, 21:3 (1997), 197.

Critiquing Renger-Patzsch, Benjamin wrote that *The World is Beautiful* acutely explores New Objectivity. He goes on to condemn the project harshly, as follows:

> It has succeeded in turning abject poverty itself, by handling it in a technically perfect way, into an object of enjoyment. For if it is an economic function of photography to supply the masses, by modish processing, with matter which previously eluded mass consumption — Spring, famous people, foreign countries — then one of its political functions is to renovate the world as it is from the inside, i.e. by modish techniques.[18]

For Benjamin, there is no place for pleasure in poverty. The polishing or beautifying of serious scenes or material presences is unquestionably harmful. This "modish processing" contributes to the abstract quality of Renger-Patzsch's photographs and his use of framing and all-over composition and pattern all contribute to their aesthetic appeal. In contrast with Simms's assessment of how Renger-Patzsch wished to view *The World is Beautiful* as employing an "empirical rigor", Benjamin's review maintains that, to a fault, these photographs dangerously aestheticize the world through the application of attractive gloss. Rather than revealing the means of production, according to Benjamin, Renger-Patzsch's book negates political potential in its effort to render the world, and everything in it, as the title suggests, *beautiful*. In this sense, for Benjamin, the book fails the social and political possibilities (and responsibilities) of photography to truly *make visible* ideological and economical concerns in the modern era.

[18] Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" in *Understanding Brecht*, London: Verso, 1998, 95.

Benjamin refines his argument in the following way, stating explicitly his expectation that photography should be put to progressive use: “Here we have an extreme example of what it means to supply a production apparatus without changing it”. He goes on: “changing [photography] would have meant bringing down one of the barriers, surmounting one of the contradictions which inhabit the productive capacity of the intelligentsia”.[19] According to Benjamin, photography is not only a medium that can expose the processes of mass production and consumption, but also one that holds within its command the potential for social reform. To realize such change, a photographer would have to make his/her task the dissolution of harmful ideologies that seek to distance commodities from their modes of production, ultimately causing alienation not only amongst labourers but also among consumers. In this way, Benjamin seeks to illuminate photography as a tool that can be utilized to eliminate adverse economic abstractions that cause consumers to be dissociated from and ignorant of the source of their products.

It becomes evident that photography is always in the process of framing or abstracting its subject matter such that it gets situated either closer to or further from reality in an effort to produce and communicate specific meaning. My interest in this debate is less concerned with the abstractions of the everyday or real world that photography might initiate, and more on the adverse response to the presence of aesthetics in serious and political representation. In this way, I have aimed to reach a conclusion that does not attribute malignant effects to the expressive, aesthetic or abstract.

One “solution” that Benjamin proposes that mitigates the threat of modishness in photography is to place a caption underneath photographs in order to “confer upon

[19] Benjamin, “The Author as Producer”, 95.

it a revolutionary use value".[20] Pairing text with image offers the opportunity for commentary so that the image conquers the risk of signifying as excessively aesthetic to ensure that beauty does not eclipse politics. My task, however, is to insist that to manifest beauty or politics, it was not necessary for one to surpass the other. Yet, despite this inevitable entanglement, there remained a concern that one would ultimately subvert the other and that coexistence was impossible.

Similarly, Siegfried Kracauer expressed his concern with artistic photography in the following way: "[It] does not explore the object assigned to photographic technology but rather wants to hide the technological essence by means of style". His conclusion was that "the artistic photographer is a dilettante artist who apes an artistic manner minus its substance instead of capturing the very lack of substance".[21] Such theories around style are in conjunction with a more general modernist fear and condemnation of ornament and décor in favour of a pared down aesthetic that seeks to focus on essential formal choices over anything stylish that risks going out of fashion[22]. Artistic photography, through its associations with painting, particularly through early tendencies to clumsily mimic the older medium, attempts to suppress the specificities of photography as a *technological* method for representation.

In a similar respect, in 1925, Moholy-Nagy criticized a photograph by Alfred Stieglitz of a street scene in Paris made in the Pictorialist style as being excessively

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[20] Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", 95.
[21] Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography" in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Y Levin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 53.
[22] This effort to dispel with ornament is perhaps most obviously prevalent within the context of modernist architecture and has been explored by architects such as Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier. Nonetheless, it finds its place in painting through the multiple turns toward abstraction in a variety of movements. A discussion of ornament and essential form will follow in my investigation of Amédée Ozenfant's ideas around Purism, working closely as he did with Le Corbusier. For a recent study on Modernism and fashion see Mark Wigley, *White walls, designer dresses*. Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1995).

Impressionist and as having disregarded or overlooked the specificities of photography.[23] For the most part, the photograph is in soft focus, which gives the shapes and subjects a painterly feel, as if applied to a canvas with loose brush strokes. Moreover, the quality of the image is grainy, producing a distinct texture that challenges associations of clarity and focus with photography. The artistic photographer becomes the amateur or dabbler in the medium, and fails to recognize the specificities of photography itself so that style, manifested through the imitation of painting, replaces substantial content.

Explaining that throughout the nineteenth century photography had been taken up by those who previously had been painters, Kracauer recounts that, "with the increasing independence of the technology and the simultaneous evacuation of meaning from the objects, *artistic photography* loses its justification: it grows not into an artwork but into its imitation".[24] Such resistance to imitation is akin to the anxieties that accompanied ornament and style in the modern era. These anxieties were founded on the theory that the use of ornament in modern art or architecture was ultimately a failed attempt to mimic the popular taste of a past bourgeois society. Any effort to maintain styles that belong to a previous era would thus incarnate or constitute a negation of the modern present, wherein form took priority over fashion, and function dictated this form.[25]

Analogous to Benjamin's pronouncement that photography should attempt to recognize, unveil and subvert the alienating intelligentsia, Kracauer too acknowledges

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[23] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 49. The Pictorialist style was a 19th century movement in photography that aimed to produce images that aesthetically resembled painting and the suggestion of brush strokes. As opposed to Straight photography, which rejected manipulating the image, Pictorialist photographs were often in soft-focus and not particularly concerned with depicting reality.
[24] Kracauer, "Photography", 53.
[25] See Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime*, (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1998).

the implicit political use of photography. Yet, instead of a politically invested photography, "the artistic photographers function like those social forces which are interested in the semblance of the spiritual because they fear the real spirit". Kracauer calls for action: "it would be well worth the effort to expose the close ties between the prevailing social order and artistic photography".[26] In asserting that there is something to be uncovered in the kinship between artistic photography and bourgeois ideology, Kracauer, in a manner similar to the argument against style over real content, suggests that artistic photographers, like the elite, prefer the superficial to the real. This attention to style, or to that which merely *resembles* the spirit, is derived from a fear of actuality, namely, those elements, technology included, that contribute to the formation and understanding of what it is to live in and make images during this historical era.

The possible distinction between documentary and abstract photographic practices *could* be established in such a way that the two are deemed counter forces. In opposition to his critique of artistic photography, Kracauer suggests that "current-event photography […] portrays phenomena familiar to *contemporary* consciousness, [and] provides access of a limited sort to the life of the original".[27] Kracauer seeks to separate artistic from photojournalist approaches and does not account for the inevitable osmosis between the two. When he alludes to the "original", Kracauer refers to the original object or subject that is photographed. This is not entirely dissimilar from Benjamin's discussion of the aura of the unique object.[28] Like Benjamin, Kracauer is interested in authentic experience and the role of photography within modernity, especially as it has as a consequence the erosion of authentic

[26] Kracauer, "Photography", 53.
[27] Kracauer, "Photography", 54.
[28] Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations.* (London: Pimlico 1955), 211–244.

experience.[29] It is conceivable that an embrace of the abstract in photography might feel too risky in its aesthetic appeal, for fear that it could cause the viewer, the public or the masses to drift too far from this desired authenticity. My project here, however, is to challenge this fear by proposing that it is the very harmonizing of aesthetics and knowledge/fact that produces the most compelling images. These compelling photographs cannot be neatly separated into neat categories that seek to maintain distinctions between aesthetic and authenticity or other classifications. Rather, the photographs I am interested in are formally abstract and operate within socio-cultural and political spheres as well as artistic ones.

Despite the medium specific endeavour taken up by *The World is Beautiful* to define photography and exhibit its capabilities, Simms engages Benjamin, not only in his critique of Renger-Patzsch's photobook, but also in reference to his assertion regarding the impossibility of an "authentic" print. Simms articulates that:

> What photography overthrows, therefore, is not only the tribunal of art, but also the condition for the possibility of any tribunal whatsoever; namely, the opposition between the proper and the improper with which it makes its categorical distinctions. Thus, the opposition between authentic and inauthentic photography — the ground of the query 'What is photography?'— is undermined by its object, the nullification of this binarism perhaps being photography's sole 'law'.[30]

[29] Kracauer's major concern is centred around memory for fear that photography threatens access to and/or diminishes the power of memory, which ultimately risks the loss of authentic experience as a consequence of the alienating effects of modernity.
[30] Simms, "Just photography", 197–8. This argument by Benjamin can be found in "A Small History of Photography".

Simms proposes that the medium of photography is best defined as one that dissolves binaries. Thus, instead of trying to define photography by asserting or demonstrating what it is not, or through its presumed opposite, photography is best delineated by in-between states of being. In other words, photography is a medium that defies distinction through binaries or polarities, as it often participates in multiple camps that only seem to contradict one another. As such, to define photography through its own means is to refrain from defining it as *not*, or as antithetical to, something else. Not only does photography hover between high and low culture, it also raises questions about the authenticity of images as they operate somewhere between fiction/invention/imagination and truth/data/knowledge.

Thus, a definition of photography ought not be pursued through the attribution of oppositions between photography and other artistic media, or even through qualities such as authentic/inauthentic that coexist within the medium. My effort to understand photography at its most enriching or inclusive is contingent upon the willingness to dissolve limiting binaries that situate it as categorically diametric. It is with this ambition in mind that I seek to unite the terms abstraction and documentary. While it is not my aim here to decisively define photography once and for all or to somehow reach an ontological standpoint on the medium, I wish nevertheless to bring binary terms together in the service of exploring what photography might include and how it might produce meaning or knowledge. As such, I have aimed to unpack multivalent instances of photography that acutely challenge historical efforts to define the medium as one thing but not another.

Benjamin's writings and the subsequent scholarship on his texts have deeply informed my thinking around this historical period and have brought to life the tensions between the real and the abstract as well as between art and everyday life.

Benjamin's seminal Artwork essay is of course a paramount resource in my effort to make sense of the place of photography and the transformations to art and culture that accompanied its inception. Susan Buck-Morss has written extensively on Benjamin, bringing together artistic and Marxist readings of his theories.[31] She has written that what is at the heart of Benjamin's Artwork essay is less mass culture and more dominantly the impact of industrialization on art. She explains that this essay addresses the question of "what happens to the social and cognitive function of art once its authority as an original (the source of its 'aura') has been undermined by mass reproduction and once its efforts at the mimetic replication of reality".[32] The emergence of photography and film as technologies were shocks to the system and to traditional means of representation.

> On this shift toward industry, Buck-Morss writes:
>
> Art's power as illusion moves over into industry (painting into advertising, architecture into technical engineering, handcrafts or sculpture into the industrial arts) creating what we have come to call mass culture, and is taken into the service of capitalist interests for profits[33].

She continues to explain that art's cognitive function is defined by "its ability to speak the truth". This function is redeemable if an artist remains on the margins of society uses photography and film — capitalist materialized technologies — to mimetically

[31] On Benjamin and Marxism, see as well Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*. (London: Pluto Press, 2000).
[32] Susan Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's Passagen-Werk: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution", *New German Critique*, no. 29 (1983): 212.
[33] Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's Passagen-Werk: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution", 213.

express "industrially-transformed sense-perception".[34] This proposes that truth is experienced *through* the mechanisms or mediums that seek to depict it. The associations with technology and modernity that accompany these mediums define how they visually represent the world. Thus, this visualized through industrial means impacts on how representation is transform and defined and comes the ways in which we experience and perceive reality in the world.

Elsewhere, Buck-Morss has explored Benjamin's associations of photography and film with the "magical". She points out that nevertheless there were more complicated effects of the emergence of "a new mimetic science" as a result of industrialisation that challenged perception: the speeding up of time.[35] The technology of photography and the camera as a mechanical device muddled certain aspects of our experience of the real, namely time and space. Buck-Morss argues that this "fragmentation" of images and perception resulted in the experience of shock feeling both in the assembly line as well as the urban crowd.[36] She describes this experience as automated, in which there were no opportunities to absorb one's surroundings or reflect on what one was living through. This notion has been discussed as "distraction", which I will examine at the beginning of Chapter 2 on Perception and Photographic Vision.

Anthropological concerns about the ontology of photography, about what can be expected of photography regarding truth are of interest to me insofar as they

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[34] Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's Passagen-Werk: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution", 213.
[35] Susan Buck-Morss, "Walter Benjamin-Revolutionary Writer (II)." *New Left Review* 129, no. 1 (1981): 90.
[36] Buck-Morss, "Walter Benjamin-Revolutionary Writer (II).", 90. Also on the assembly line, see Terry Smith, "Fordism: Mass Production and Total Control" in *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 15–56 as well as Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*. (Originally published in 1948). (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 115–127.

provide a useful contrast: they have helped me to identify what the stakes are not only for Art History but also for my own study when assessing expectations or problematics of empirical truth derived from photographic practice. Deborah Poole has explored the suspicion of photography in anthropology in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries at the time when the discipline shifted from "the enthusiastic pursuit of racial order to an almost equally fervent rejection of the idea of race". She writes that this suspicion was situated one end of the spectrum of the reception photography in anthropology. On the other side was "an empiricist concern with deception (i.e., a concern for the accuracy with which photographs represented a 'racial fact')".[37] This spoke to a distrust that photography could act as an accurate tool for observation that it ultimately might fail "to capture the intangibles of culture and social organization".[38]

In describing the worry that photography may not be a perfect medium of representation, Poole uses the phrase "accruing meaning" to describe the desired aim of photography as an instrument. I am interested in the notion of obtaining or gathering "meaning" as opposed to "evidence" and the desire to capture something not only visually true, but also palpably descriptive. Similarly, Elizabeth Edwards has aptly asked: "How can the messiness of human experience be translated photographically in ways that might produce anthropological knowledge?"[39] This emphasis on meaning and evidence that is not seen but felt, in other words, meaning as experience, speaks directly to my interest in atmospheres as a bridge between the real and the ethereal, a theme which will become evident throughout the thesis.

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[37] Deborah Poole, "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 161.
[38] Poole, "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies", 161.
[39] Elizabeth Edwards, "Anthropology and photography: A long history of knowledge and affect", *Photographies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 239.

This concern with the deliverance of meaning as distinct from fact is also linked to another argument presented by Poole on anthropological efforts to "eliminate detail or 'noise'" in order to see the human, while also trying to preserve this detail in/as a record of past truths.[40] Poole elucidates that temporality, unique to each photograph, constitutes a "slippage between the classificatory or stabilizing ambitions of photography and its political effects".[41] The indexical quality of photography and its situatedness in a moment in time emphasizes the 'realness' of photography. Yet, it also risks essentializing its content, abstracting the image from the moment the photograph was taken. Using photography as an instrument to immortalize "the last vestiges of evidence available to earlier forms of human life", muddles time in photography altogether. It fails to acknowledge contemporary subjects as part of the same world and instead, posits them as requiring urgent archival action. This results in a significant abstraction of vital temporal details that historicize and politicize images.

Poole argues that even those anthropologists who so fervently wished to use photography as a "guilty pleasure" that they might manipulate images to serve a desired clean narrative or argument had to contend with the tension within the medium. The technical status of photography results in an implicit "unforgiving 'realism'", while the conceptual element whereby subjects of anthropology (first race, then culture and social organization) were themselves statistical or interpretive abstractions".[42] Poole's use of the term abstraction is different from my own. From

[40] Poole, "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies", 164. The urgent call to action to preserve cultures photographically due to a fear that they risk extinction is commonly referred to as the "salvage paradigm".
[41] Poole, "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies", 164.
[42] Poole, "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies", 166.

Poole's anthropological point of view, abstraction resides in the information of images or can be described as an obscuring of necessary details so as to taxonomize information in a desired way.[43] For certain art historical approaches and for myself in this thesis, my use of abstraction pertains to a visual concern: what can be seen or identified in a composition, and in this case, what has intentionally adopted an abstract aesthetic akin to avant-garde and modernist experiments within the discipline.

Anthropologists have also been concerned with the status of photographs as objects rather than as simply remote images discrete from connections to the material world. For example, Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart have written on the materiality of photographs in an effort to draw attention away from the content of a photograph as an image in order to attend more carefully to the ways in which photographs exist in time and space as objects or things.[44] From an art historical perspective, Walead Beshty has also attended to the abstraction of the photograph as a material object in the world in moments where it is reduced to an image only, a two-dimensional "signifying surface". He writes about this abstraction that: "a photograph after all is present in four space-time dimensions of worldly material, and not simply reducible to an immaterial imago/likeness".[45]

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[43] For an in-depth study on the anthropological uses of photography for collecting, ordering, classifying or taxonomizing the world, see Roberts, Russell and Iles, Chrissie. *In visible light: photography and classification in art, science and the everyday*. Museum of Modern Art, 1997.

[44] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Introduction: Photographs as Objects", eds. Edwards, Elizabeth, and Hart, Janice, *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images.* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2. This materiality is described in two main ways: firstly, "the plasticity of the image itself, its chemistry, the paper it is printed on, the toning, the resulting surface variations", and secondly, materiality attends to the use of the photograph or its "presentational form", such as an album or cartes de visite, 3.

[45] Walead Beshty, "Abstracting Photography." *Words Without Pictures*. Ed. Charlotte Cotton and Alex Klein. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009),4.

More relevant to my discussion, however, is Edwards's disavowal of the view that photography is a legitimate source of transparent evidence within the field of Anthropology, which she claimed left practitioners with the question: what counts as data, evidence or information? Edwards explains that:

> If such arguments of photographic irrelevance were premised on a notion of flawed evidence within problematic regimes of truth, importantly they also opened up the possibility of affect and, above all, the recuperation of alternative historical narratives and voices embedded within that abundance.[46]

As much as the suspicion of photography may have limited how evidence was collected and validated, it also expanded opportunities to include new ways or viable methods to obtain knowledge or record experience.

Within my own consideration here, I am interested in how this "affect" is present within certain (abstract) photographs that do not adhere to the *deliberate* mission of rendering scientific evidence. Affect or expression in my own thinking, when examined as residing within photography rather than without, is akin to what I describe at different moments as abstraction, atmosphere, or presence.[47] As such, my investigation seeks to explore how evidence and expression are married within every photograph and to examine these abstract photographs as emblematic of this union. My argument relies on the theory that in photography, realism and abstraction cannot exist without the other. This, to me, is best demonstrated through an examination of

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[46] Edwards, "Anthropology and photography: A long history of knowledge and affect", 240. Reference to abundance is linked to Deborah Poole's ideas around details and excess that photography delivers, which endangers desired narratives of displaying only that which is necessary, without details that may challenge an argument or mode of thinking, "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 159–79.

[47] Edwards discusses affect with regard to presence in "Anthropology and photography", 240.

abstract photographs from this period that make little conscious effort to reflect the world as data, evidence or knowledge.

Writing on the geographical imagination and photography's relationship to place within Geography, James Ryan and Joan Schwartz have formulated the objective/subjective debate on photography as "the relationship between indexicality and instrumentality".[48] From this geographical perspective, these two poles mark the tensions between ties to the world at the moment a photograph is captured and the intent, use or purpose of a photograph that serves a desired impact and message. Moreover, Ryan and Schwartz have argued that the early associations of the real or truth with photography "effectively masked the subjectivity inherent in the decision of what to record, from what angle and when… and likewise veiled the power of photography to mediate the human encounter with people and place".[49] Ryan has further written from a geographical perspective on photography and on "the mediated nature of observation and depiction" .[50] He expresses that historians have explored the various processes and practices of "mapping construct geographical knowledge through different technical conventions and rhetorical strategies, invariably operating within settings of power".[51] To view photography as a driver of scientific empiricism

[48] James R. Ryan and Joan M. Schwartz, "Introduction: Photography and the Geographical Imagination", in James R. Ryan and Joan M. Schwartz (Eds.), *Picturing place: photography and the geographical imagination*. (New York: IB Tauris, 2003), 8. This "instrumentality" is further explained by the following statement: "Made practicable at a time when vision and knowledge came to be extricably linked, the photograph offered a means of observing, describing, studying, ordering, classifying, and thereby, knowing the world", 8.
[49] Ryan and Schwartz, "Introduction: Photography and the Geographical Imagination", 3.
[50] James R. Ryan, "Photography, Visual Revolutions and Victorian Photography", in Livingstone, David N., and Withers, Charles W. J., eds. *Geography and Revolution*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 200.
[51] Ryan, "Photography, Visual Revolutions and Victorian Photography", 200.

in this way could result in legitimizing knowledge or comprehension and thereby "controlling it".[52]

Ryan has also argued that instead of offering a "revolutionary" mode of obtaining knowledge, photography from the outset participated in "long-established research" methods and "inherited aesthetic conventions such as linear perspective". For Ryan, photography as the initiator of a "modern point of view" is not a position divorced from the history of conventions. Instead, it utilized and relied on these traditions for its own establishment: as such, photography "reinforced as much as it revolutionized existing regimes of visual representation and modes of knowledge".[53]

From a Historical Geography perspective, Gillian Rose has written on the importance of practices of "observation, production, reproduction and display" when investigating the derivation of meaning of photography through its uses. She reviews the ways in which historical geography has argued that photographs are useful not only because they are mimetic of their content, but also in "that the production, circulation and consumption of photographs produce and reproduce the imagined geographies of the social group or institution for which they were made", citing the important contribution of Schwartz.[54] For Rose, these processes are twofold and account for a historicity that incorporates use at the time of the making of the photograph as well as contemporary uses and significations, particularly in efforts to

[52] Ryan, "Photography, Visual Revolutions and Victorian Photography", 206.
[53] Ryan, "Photography, Visual Revolutions and Victorian Photography", 202.
[54] Gillian Rose, "Practising photography: an archive, a study, some photographs and a researcher", *Journal of historical geography* 26, no. 4 (2000): 555. Rose cites Joan Schwartz as the leading figure in arguing for the "socio-cultural relationship between photography and geography", Schwartz, Joan M. "The geography lesson: photographs and the construction of imaginative geographies." *Journal of historical geography* 22, no. 1 (1996): 16–45.

reconstruct historical narratives.[55] Rose has also explored the presence of the researcher in a photograph who acts as a referent, serving to document processes of interpretation and the ways in which this leads to inadvertent self-representation.[56]

What all of these diverse disciplinary perspectives share is a concern for how photography does not so much represent as shape knowledge of the world. Similarly, my study explores moments in photography that defy and trouble established forms of seeing and representing. In an art historical context, photography made during the period in question is exceptional because it utilizes formal abstraction to dismantle such conventions, so that photography becomes an instrument for defamiliarizing perception as opposed to sustaining traditional modes of vision and representing the world.

My interest here is not only how photography *mediates* experience but also how it *transforms* it. Moreover, my focus will not be on the mediation *of a place through photography* per se; instead, through attending to aspects of the phenomenology of perception, I seek to explore the experience *of the photograph itself*.

ii. REALISM AND ABSTRACTION IN HISTORY OF ART

[55] Rose, "Practising photography: an archive, a study, some photographs and a researcher", 556.
[56] Rose, "Practising photography: an archive, a study, some photographs and a researcher", 556. It is worth noting that Rose makes use of Sekula's writings on archives and the risk of losing context in photographs, x. As much as distinct disciplines approach photography within their own frameworks: Sekula, Allan. "Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital." in P. Holland, J. Spence and S. Watney (Eds), *The Photography Reader* (2003): 443–52. I am interested in the instances of crossover where scholars make use of alternative disciplinary approaches as akin and helpful to establishing their own. This speaks to the fruitful versatility of photography.

Art Historical approaches to photography and realism differ from the above perspectives primarily as a result of differences in photography's instrumentality or use in an artistic context. In this same vein, differences are determined as well as a function of what art practitioners are asking of photography. The (desired) reliance on photography as a tool to produce and classify knowledge is not necessarily at the heart of how or why photography is used by artists or of how art historians have looked to understand the medium. In this regard, the issue of the index in photography is far less consequential or controversial, as the pressure for photography to have a didactic or scientific mission is less prominent.

From an art historical standpoint, John Beck and David Cunningham discuss images as currency and the ways in which photography abstracts the world, rending it in two dimensions. They argue that to dissociate photography from its indexical quality is to risk depoliticising images by undermining photography's "attachment to the world".[57] While this is certainly pertinent when discussing the validity of photography's indexical relationship to the world, my task is not to question photography's indexical capacity, which I accept unreservedly as a crucial aspect of how photography works. With this acknowledgment, my thesis seeks to investigate how index and photography's connection to the real are troubled by abstraction and in turn trouble abstraction in photography. The risk of depoliticizing photography through deemphasizing the index is also central to my argument on abstract photography. For me, it is the index and photography's strong ties to realism and documentary that ground photographs in the world and cause them to be reflections of or comments on a historical space and time. It is the *conversation* between the index,

[57] John Beck and David Cunningham, "Introduction: Photography and abstraction", *Photographies*, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (2016): 130.

the real and the documentary with the abstract or atmospheric that my argument hinges upon, and that makes this debate and these photographs so compelling.[58]

This less compromised relationship with the index, however, is not entirely distinct from questions around the ethics of representation that seek to examine and interrogate morality or duty when engaging with photography. Poignantly, Ariella Azoulay has introduced the notion of "the civil contract of photography" to address the question of ethics and action in photography. Her concept of the civil contract works to develop and establish a new kind of framework from which to view citizenship "as a status, an institution and a set of practices" through the study of photography.[59] Articulating this theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century when the number of people taking pictures and the amount of images circulated to a mass public has surged, her mandate is about consent, ethics and citizenship: that is, human and civil rights. In order to determine where power lies in the "photographic act", Azoulay formulates a triadic relationship between three parties: "the photographed person, the photographer and the spectator".[60] She argues that operations of these three groups "are not mediated through a sovereign power and are not limited to the bounds of a nation-state or an economic contract". In other words, the photographic act seems to function outside establishments of sovereignty and proposes its own conditions for the adoption and negotiation of power, whereby equality and inequality require new administration within the realm of this contract. Like citizenship, Azoulay argues, plurality is a "prerequisite" to photography:

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[58] For a discussion on Jacques Lacan's position on the real as potentially terrifying when it cannot find its way into representation in an existential way, see Hal Foster, "The Return of the Real" in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 127–170.
[59] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 24.
[60] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 24.

"Photographs bear traces of a plurality of political relations that might be actualized in the act of watching, transforming and disseminating what is seen into claims that demand action".[61]

Azoulay's proposal is useful to me here as it complicates a viewer's *relationship* to photographs and reveals the urgency of addressing the *photographic act* that takes place between three subjects and three subjectivities. I wish to draw from this the choice to view photographs through their relationality and through the *experience* of subjects. While my thesis does not attempt to address citizenship in photography or the photographic act as such, my intention has been to attend to phenomenological experiences of photographs by looking at the position of the photographer and how he or she utilizes the camera, the relational experience of the subjects of the photograph, and lastly, the viewer's embodied experience of looking at and reading the photograph. When Azoulay writes, "Identifying what is seen does not excuse the spectator from 'watching' the photograph, rather than looking at it, and from caring for its sense", I return to my task of how to make sense of and *care* for the photographs. Abstract photography does not allow its viewer to easily or readily identify its content. Rather, it demands the dedication of attention and time to a photograph's content to come to know it in some capacity, even if such capacity might be better described as experiencing an atmosphere than obtaining evidence.

In his discussion of "the nature of photography" and the debate concerning the medium's ambiguity, Richard Shiff has proposed attending to the impact of experience when considering photography as connected to the realistic or the natural. He argues that "to perceive the photograph as a representation of the 'real' depends on an understanding of the camera's mechanism and in most cases on an association

[61] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 25.

of the real with seamless detail".[62] I am particularly intrigued by photographs that literally blur this expectation of detail and fail to provide identifiable figures. It will become clear that my aim is not to look at photographs that exemplify this precision and detail, but to explore the images that refute it. Returning to Shiff:

> The past history of 'realistic' classical painting also comes into play; such painting traditionally offered the viewer all that one expected to see in terms of a proper degree of detail that would define or identify an object. Photography breaks with this past. The viewer of the photograph is shocked by its extension of the standards of proper detail. One faces a representation more real than what the real has been.[63]

According to Shiff, viewers of any kind of representation expect a certain level of detail that refers and ties the to their detailed experience of real life. In photography, the delivery of these is so inflated and so intense that the photographed world appears more real than reality itself as well as what reality has been to date. The photographs in this thesis are rebellious and intentionally defy this offering of extreme detail in their embrace of abstraction and their representation of the world where detail is not a priority. Or, if it is, it is pictured with so much attention that it fails to include a context and is unfaithful to traditional foreground/background compositional distinctions (as in microscopic photographs). I want to explore the connection of

[62] Richard Shiff, "Phototropism (Figuring the Proper), *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989): 175.
[63] Shiff, "Phototropism (Figuring the Proper), 175.

abstraction with the real or the all-too-real as working hand in hand in photographs that are not immediately straightforward.[64]

Also within an art historical framework and consistent with my own thinking, Alex Potts has written topically on modernism and realism: "realism and abstraction in modern art should not be seen as opposing and mutually exclusive".[65] He outlines his task as extracting the "potent and productive" possibility by viewing this dialectical relationship as "conflicted and disruptive". My own position departs slightly in that my wish to view realism and abstraction as not oppositional does not stem from an effort to extract meaning from combat. Rather, my thesis, which adopts a more holistic approach, attempts to regard realism and abstraction as collaborators that challenge one another. I have aimed to clarify and to demonstrate how realism and abstraction are integrated and contribute to more enriching understandings of each other.

Potts also surveys the various uses of the term realism, insisting that "equating it with a spatially unified and naturalistic representation of things" is narrow and naïve.[66] I would certainly agree with this assessment and the other manifestations of realism in modern art that stand apart from mimetic naturalism that Potts delineates:

> The vernacular and the everyday play a central role, as well as a fascination with the material substance of things, both with regard to artistic medium and the broader world being represented. Important too is a commitment to activating interconnections between art and life, such that the art work resists a

[64] Other articles by Richard Shiff are useful when considering connections between life and art. See Richard Shiff, "Art and Life: A Metaphoric Relationship." *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978): 107–22, as well as Richard Shiff, "Representation, Copying, and the Technique of Originality." *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (1984): 333–63.
[65] Alex Potts, *Experiments in modern realism: World making, politics and the everyday in postwar European and American art*, (Yale University Press, 2013), 1.
[66] Potts, *Experiments in modern realism: World making, politics and the everyday in postwar European and American art*, 2, 23.

> tendency to self-referential artistic purism that the institutionalising of modern art has fostered.[67]

My working use of realism expands far beyond a formal naturalism or mimetic likeness to a thing in the world. Moreover, I would like to entertain the possibility that in fact, photography may on same level escape this "institutionalization" in that photographs can never adhere to art for art's sake because of their undeniable and unbreakable link to the real world: their indexicality. Photographs are invariably the result of their very real mark or trace of the world. As Rosalind Krauss says, "it is the order of the natural world that imprints itself on the photographic emulsion and subsequent on the photographic print. This quality or transfer gives to the photograph its documentary status, its undeniable veracity".[68] The index is the direct physical trace of the world on the image, incorporating a presence and absence simultaneously: that thing that caused the trace is no longer there but the effect of that presence (the trace) remains.

For Potts, realism is decidedly broad and multiform, so as to include "the referential, outwardly directed, representational aspects of an art work".[69] He makes the distinction between "anti-formalist" and "anti-formalistic", to argue that the latter "is at odds with a purist understanding of artistic abstraction as systemically evacuating or blocking any concrete reference a work might make to the larger world

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[67] Potts, *Experiments in modern realism: World making, politics and the everyday in postwar European and American art*, 3.
[68] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the index: Seventies art in America. Part 2." *October*, Vol. 4 (Autumn, 1977): 59.
[69] Potts, *Experiments in modern realism: World making, politics and the everyday in postwar European and American art*, 24.

of which it is part".[70] In this version then, a concern for form and abstraction need not necessarily exclude or purge an artwork's referential relationship to the world.

A long-standing debate in art history that focuses on the politically radical art of the twentieth century has developed two oppositional positions. The first mandates that political or radical art needs to adopt the stream of realism associated with figurative or naturalistic representations of the world in order to clearly articulate messages for maximum political effect. The second position is based on the belief that "truly radical politics required experimentation with new artistic languages that subverted conventional representational norms", which lent itself to experimental abstraction.[71] Benjamin Buchloh has also addressed this debate in his influential article "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting", where he traces instances of artists returning to figurative modes of representation after having been previously engaged with abstract aesthetics earlier in their careers.[72] His argument is foregrounded on the conviction that political engagement through art peaked with the avant-garde and abstract practices, so that a shift to return to realism or representation was a cowardly political evasion. He describes this move towards "iconographic references and perceptual conventions" by artists as "calculated" methods to excuse themselves from participating in "aesthetic identification and ideological representation".[73] For

[70] Potts, *Experiments in modern realism: World making, politics and the everyday in postwar European and American art*, 4.
[71] Potts, *Experiments in modern realism: World making, politics and the everyday in postwar European and American art*, 49.
[72] Benjamin Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the return of representation in European painting." *October* 16 (1981): 39–68.
[73] Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression", 40.

Buchloh, the return to representation is a form of repression, and ultimately feeds (intentionally or not) authoritarianism.[74]

At this juncture, I will shift the discussion to attend more closely to what I mean in this thesis when I use the word abstraction. I do not intend to provide a history of all applications of the concept of abstraction or trace its materialisation in artistic production and movements. It is nonetheless worth devoting some time to review some of the major art historical approaches to abstraction and to what an exploration of the concept might constitute.[75] An overview of how the term abstraction has been used will not only be useful in identifying the ways in which photographers have participated in certain traditions, but it will also be valuable in connection with the aim of this thesis to link abstraction with documentary as terms that generatively coexist and conjoin.[76]

Rather than being associated with nature or the material, abstraction has been posited as an evocation of the spiritual or immaterial, belonging to a higher world of ideas. Wassily Kandinsky opens his book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, with the following discussion that underscores his key arguments about abstraction:

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[74] Buchloh has also written on the Russian avant-garde's tension between modernist tendencies towards abstraction with its concern for realism and iconography. See Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography", *October*, Vol. 30 (Autumn, 1984), 82–119.

[75] For an excellent summary of the history and varieties of theories on abstraction see, Charles Harrison, "Abstraction", in eds. Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, Gill Perry. *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 188–264.

[76] One approach to abstraction treats it as a purification or essentializing of aesthetic form so that, freed from representation, a work of art might convey the very core of an idea rather than an ornamented version of a subject in figuration. Formal abstraction from this perspective, then, is seen as an effort not simply to represent the world abstractly, but as an overt rejection of a tradition of representation that sought to mimic nature in art. This is reflected in certain instances in the architectural writings of Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, as well as in Ozenfant's views about the Purist movement and what he designates as constant forms, to be discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.

> Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own which can never be repeated. Efforts to revive the art-principles of the past will at best produce an art that is still-born. It is impossible for us to live and feel, as did the ancient Greeks. In the same way those who strive to follow the Greek methods in sculpture achieve only a similarity of form, the work remaining soulless for all time. Such imitation is mere aping. Externally the monkey completely resembles a human being; he will sit holding a book in front of his nose, and turn over the pages with a thoughtful aspect, but his actions have for him no real meaning.[77]

This opening passage is rich with Kandinsky's dogma on abstraction as spiritual, but also as distinctly modern. He begins by stating that a work of art is the product of its historical period and that it is, as a result, reflective of its qualities and capacities. In the case of abstraction, the period in question is modernity. To copy, in the context of Kandinsky's argument, is not simply to replicate nature, but also to reproduce the past and its dated traditions. In this way, representation and prior art forms are both instances of imitation that render a work of art stale and failing to partake in modernist practices. Art that is in tune with its age — in this case modernity — renounces external form or representation in pursuit of essence and intrinsic qualities.

Such a mode of thinking affirms the binaries that suggest a practice of mind over body and spirit over matter, with the formers esteemed to be more valuable than their corporeal counterparts. Formal abstraction becomes thus a pursuit of higher ideals. Kandinsky goes on to elicit a hierarchy between the monkey and the human

[77] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 1.

being: the monkey apes, and the human must seek the spiritual in order to reach and produce an artwork full of meaning. The argument that separates mind from body, and abstraction from figuration can be disputed with regard to photography, which is engaged with mimesis while also distorting or swerving from the truth.

Returning to Kandinsky's argument that art should reflect the spirit of its historical period, if one acknowledges that the modern era was permeated with economic abstraction, then a 'good' or 'active' artwork would consequently respond to this criterion. In considering abstraction as also including the condition of the alienated labour of modernity, and, consequently, in viewing formally abstract art as emblematic of the modern era, this reflection of the epoch might fall into the trap of being a mimetic reaction to modernity. In other words, if modernity is represented generally by an alienated economic abstraction and if modern art is expressed through formal abstraction, then drawing parallels between the two could result in a logic that suggests a mimetic art form. Conversely, one might question whether abstract art could constitute a response against such problematic abstractions outside art, particularly in the labour force. In his critique of Renger-Patzsch, Benjamin insists that the former's mimetic reflection only perpetuates the alienating effect of modern life, rendering the vernacular dangerously beautiful and aesthetic.

There is yet another troubling paradox with regard to how the interconnections of photography and abstraction relate to the following previously discussed claim explored by many theorists, Moholy-Nagy included: that photography enables an enhanced vision that appears to be more objective and more truthful insofar as it ostensibly brings the beholder closer to reality. The abstract photograph — and any photograph for that matter — as a result of this expanded vision and its invitation to see in a way that is *different* from the human eye, presents an optics that is in fact

further from human perception. Moreover, through what Moholy-Nagy entitles 'faulty photographs' — those that adopt an exaggerated or alternative angle through the lens such as a worm or bird's eye view, in which case the camera produces an image that is further from a direct imitation of human perception — it is nonetheless believed that, despite this distance, we are getting closer to objective reality.[78] In distancing ourselves from an embodied or human optical experience, and adopting, by contrast, a photographic one, there occurs an inescapable abstraction from how we know and have learned to see. According to Moholy-Nagy, this distance is accompanied by an increased proximity to a vision that is more real and more objective, by way of the camera lens. My own argument is situated within the acknowledgment of a *difference* in optics rather than in the championing of one over another.

Finally, considering the question of authenticity, in "A Small History of Photography" Benjamin explains what happens to art with the introduction of photography. As art becomes photographed, it is rendered something of a communal making and the focus is shifted away from individual production. Benjamin articulates the following view:

> But the emphasis changes completely if we turn from photography-as-art to art-as-photography. Everyone will have noticed how much easier it is to get hold of a picture, more particularly a piece of sculpture, not to mention architecture, in a photograph than in reality… But one is brought up short by the way the understanding of great works was transformed at about the same time the techniques were being developed. They can no longer be regarded as the work of individuals; they have become a collective creation, a corpus so

[78] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.

vast it can be assimilated only through miniaturization.[79]

The access to works of art, therefore, is greatly increased through the medium of photography by way of image circulation. As a result, the distance between artworks and any potential beholder dramatically shrinks as visibility through reproduced photographic images increases. Photography, therefore, not only holds the capacity to deliver works of art to the masses, it also renders those works of art in miniature as photography. There is a shift from elite ownership to a public or democratic possession of these images as miniatures through capacity of the dissemination of copies that photography permits.

With this in mind, an argument could be made that the popularization of photography serves the masses and challenges capitalist systems that designate certain works valuable and precious and others without a greater sense of worth. To pursue a discussion on the mechanics of photography as a medium that reproduces works that are then transmitted to citizens, it is necessary at the very least to acknowledge the stream of photography that Benjamin labels "art-as-photography" as opposed to photographic art, or "photography-as-art".

In a similar vein, Hans Belting has written about the ways in which "the what" of images and their method for transmission, "the how", are often muddled and difficult to separate so that they become in some way "shaped" by one another and are often conflated:

Visual media compete, so it seems, with the images they transmit. They tend either to dissimulate themselves or to claim the first voice. The more we pay

[79] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography", in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, 1927–1934.* Translated by Rodney Livingstone and others, Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 520.

> attention to a medium, the less it can hide its strategies… When visual media become self-referential, they turn against their images and steal our attention from them.[80]

It is vital that the medium and the image not be considered distinct and segregated; rather, each ought to be seen as contributing to the interpretation of both, so that a photograph of a machine, or anything else for that matter, is also simultaneously a photograph about photography. In this way, when a photograph declares itself a photograph of something, rather than having a more elusive relationship to it as an *image* of something, by way of drawing attention to itself as such, it detracts attention to whatever it represents and becomes necessarily an image of a subject. Taking Strand's well-known *Blind Woman* photograph of 1916 as an example, there is a difference between the suggestion, "this is an image of a blind woman", and, "this is a blind woman". The emphasis on the photograph being a representation of a subject, or in other words, a photograph of something, initiates a self-referentiality that demands an address to the question: *how* is the blind woman pictured?

"Art-as-photography" is most successful when we forget we are looking at a photograph and transparently see a painting or a sculpture instead of a mediated image of that object. In this case, the *how* is transparent, giving the illusion of true access to these works of art that would otherwise exist at a distance, perhaps more through verbal than visual description.

Benjamin's distinction between "art-as-photography" and "photography-as-art" begs the question as to where to position abstract photography or photographs

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[80] Hans Belting, "Image, Medium, Body", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Winter 2005), 305. This argument is in conjunction with Marshall McLuhan's statement that "the medium is the message", *Understanding Media.* (New York: Routledge, 1964).

that abstract their subject or the effects of photographing objects. To displace or dissolve the aura that Benjamin attributes to original works of art through the photographing and circulating of pictures of artworks, the placelessness and mobility of the subject of a photograph is abstracted from its original context. While time in this sense may be frozen within the image so that it marks the moment wherein the picture was taken, it is also simultaneously confused with the moment that the original pictured work of art was produced.

Moreover, the place of the artwork is often disguised as a non-place: in the case of a painting, its surroundings are often excluded when photographed, cropped around the edges of the frame, and with sculpture, the setting is designed to be invisible so as to not deflect attention away from the sculpture itself, through the use of a curtain or other nondescript backdrop or plinth. Yet, where is the place of these artworks once they are photographed? In the form of a photograph, the works are imbued with a newfound mobility so that, reproduced potentially endlessly, they exist as images in a multitude of locations.

By contrast, "photography-as-art" poses a larger question without a definitive answer for the purpose of this thesis. Nevertheless, I have tried to address the question of the extent to which documentary photography participates in modernist artistic practice and in turn, the ways in which abstract photography links together ideas of truth and expression. This thesis does not directly attend to whether it is ethical to consider documentary an art or whether the conflation of these categories detracts from the potential politics of a documentary pursuit. In other words, I do not spend much time addressing the right that political photography might have to be beautiful or poetic. Rather, I will suggest that photography, being as it is a method for mimesis, is consequently always already art and constitutes an additional medium in the history

of both figurative and abstract reflections on and of the world. Instead of measuring levels of objectivity vs. subjectivity within photographic instances, I have found it more generative to explore *how* these abstractions are manifested in photographs and *how* these examples of abstraction in photography can be viewed as not necessarily antagonistic to realism and photography's indexical nature.[81]

iii. FORMALIST-PHENOMENOLOGY

As previously declared, this thesis is positioned within an art historical framework and specifically in relation to the long history of discussions concerning artistic representation, especially with regard to the medium of painting. It is within this context that I have aimed to illuminate the captivating dialogue between photography and abstraction. In this pairing, the binary of *realism* and *abstraction* emerges as key assumed antagonists. My methodology seeks to disentangle clearly such binaries with the aim of exploring the exchanges between realism/abstraction and documentary/aesthetics in order to argue for cross-interactions and cross-influence so that it becomes evident that abstract photography exemplifies the tensions that are always at play in the medium.

The main methodology that this thesis adopts can be understood as pertaining to formalist-phenomenological approaches to examining and understanding photographs. The arguments presented here have taken the case studies — the photographs themselves — as a starting point from which to observe what happens

[81] By index here, I refer to the technical process of creating a photograph, that is, material trace left by light on the strips of celluloid. For more on the index of photography, see Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America", *October,* Vol. 3 (Spring ,1977), 68–81.

visually in these striking images and to then understand their peculiarities within the context of an unspoken or undocumented historical moment of abstract photography. By this I mean that abstract photography between 1914 and 1930 did not emerge as a designated or comprehensive artistic movement. Instead, these instances of abstract photographs popped up within the context of other artistic groups, threads, narratives or ambitions, such as the Bauhaus, or the New York-centred effort to develop a distinctive American photography.

This methodology draws heavily on analysis of the photographs themselves rather than looking at their circulation or display. By carefully examining the qualities of the photographs and their formally abstract features, I engage in a phenomenologically driven analysis to understand subject positions within photographs: specifically between photographs and viewers, and photographers and their subjects. This approach seeks to unpack the photograph by attending to its relationship to other things (image/viewer/environment).

Hubert Damisch has articulated the complexities inherent in studies in abstraction and the challenges in connecting formal abstraction to political purchase:

> Even from a strictly historical view… we would have to agree that the problematic of abstraction, considered as an operative mode or as a thought-process, totally surpasses the restricted area allowed to abstract art in the program of modernity, to say nothing of the temporal as well as the conceptual limits, thus relegating it to the status of a 'genre'.[82]

This statement represents the challenge implicit in my chosen project, particularly as my methodology moves away from traditions of accounting for artistic movements by

[82] Hubert Damisch, "Remarks on Abstraction", *October*, No. 127, (Winter 2009): 136.

appealing to national considerations. To raise the problem of abstraction's risk of being unable to communicate something political is even more pertinent in a project that does not aim to situate abstract photographs strictly within national paradigms. The application of the concept of *genre* to describe the abstract photography discussed in this thesis is fitting and limits the case studies to those that adhere to a purely plastic motivation devoid of socio-cultural depth. As such, I do not accept associations of nothingness or vacancy with abstraction. Rather, I wish to attend to both tangible and intangible (or not immediately tangible) understandings of how these abstract photographs communicate.

The formalist-phenomenological approach allows for a formal or compositional assessment of photographs without the establishment of an abstract genre. In fact, many of the photographs discussed have little in common with one another and despite working within a formally abstract aesthetic, there is no one originating source for these abstractions, which are always multiple and layered. I have sought a method that links and connects these case studies beyond aesthetic semblance and that contributes to a deeper position from which to think about realism and abstraction in photography.

Damisch has identified another difficulty in considering photography phenomenologically: the question of how to draw a distinction between image and photograph, the former as immaterial, while that the latter constitutes "a *cultural* object" that is "historically constituted".[83] For Damisch, as a photograph is a cultural object derived from human labour, it "cannot be dissociated precisely from its historical meaning and from the necessary datable project in which it originates".[84]

[83] Hubert Damisch, "Five notes for a phenomenology of the photographic image", *October* 5 (1978): 70.
[84] Damisch, "Five notes for a phenomenology of the photographic image", 70.

While my thesis certainly aims to provide a general argument about photography, my study is firmly positioned within the context of modern art practices between 1914 and 1930 for this very reason. Moreover, I wish to emphasize throughout the incontestable bearing of the index on photography's link to reality, and by extension, the link of a very specific moment in time and space.

As such, the consideration of photography exclusively as image is ultimately haunted not only by "its physiochemical make-up", that is, the materiality of how a photograph is made, but also by its historicity: "this ontological deception carries with it a *historical* deceit, far more subtle and insidious. And we return to that object which we got rid of a little too quickly, the black box, the photographic camera".[85] This statement captures a question that has stayed with me throughout the conception of my thesis: What counts as photography? To think about photography in a considered and thorough way, it is necessary to acknowledge that photography is at once the print, the processing chemicals, the camera, celluloid or negative, light as material.

Just as photography can be defined through multiple means, it is also experienced via distinct sensorial vehicles. Shifting to a discussion on human experiences of art through different senses — mostly prominently for this discussion vision and touch — Richard Shiff has eloquently described Clement Greenberg's crucial distinction between "transparency" and "opacity" in painting, linking the former to vision and the latter to touch. Shiff writes: "Vision corresponds to the coordinated view of objects that a transparent painting affords; it is readily (but not exclusively) conceived as a totalizing mode of panoramic survey. Touch corresponds to the unyielding physicality of an opaque surface, one that retains its immediate

[85] Damisch, "Five notes for a phenomenology of the photographic image", 71.

particularity at all points of contact".[86] I am interested in this allocation of vision to the transparent, two-dimensional or ethereal, and opacity to touch. If such a distinction does in fact hold, would a focus on a photographic image belong only to the former and elude opacity? What might "touch" look like with regard to photography where the painter's hand via paintbrush onto the surface of the canvas is not available as a link to the material?

It is my position that "touch" and physical contact is, in photography, inseparably linked to "the other touch" that reflects instead the materiality of the photograph, the index, the touch of light on celluloid, and its situatedness in reality. Attending to this materiality and reality present in the fabrication of the photograph acts as a link to the visual, transparent experience of the image itself. Exploring photography that encompasses both phenomenological forces, that makes room for the interaction between touch and vision, allows for an opening to explore the dialogue between realism and abstraction within the medium.

While this thesis is very much centred on the image status of the photograph and the phenomenological experience that accompanies this kind of looking and touch in a literal sense of holding an object is not at play, I do not wish to suggest that these images are insubstantial or unreal, and will insist on a presence that is not located in objecthood. My interest lies in linking the lack of physicality with the experience of immersion that is possible in a photograph, particularly in abstract photographs that destabilise a viewer's axis of orientation. How does immersion occur in the immaterial (photograph as image) and how can abstract photography or atmosphere in photographs act as extensions of consciousness into the world? How can we view abstract photography as eliciting embodied experiences *through* absence?

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[86] Richard Shiff, "Constructing Physicality", *Art Journal* 50, no. 1 (1991): 42.

In his widely read essay on Cézanne, Maurice Merleau-Ponty has consistently insisted on the importance of nature, life and reality to Cézanne's method of painting as well as his method of perception and the ways in which his vision translated into his art. He articulates the coaction of both forces of reality and the senses:

> His painting would be a paradox: investigate reality without departing from sensations, with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature, without following contours, with no outline to enclose the color, with no perspectival or pictorial composition.[87]

This description suggests a harmonious union between reality and sensorial experience that takes nature as its source and direction but that does not allow for an enclosure within specific confines of reality. Merleau-Ponty continues:

> By departing from the outline, Cézanne would be handing himself over to the chaos of the sensations. Now, the sensations would capsize the objects and constantly suggest illusions — for example, the illusion we have when we move our heads that objects themselves are moving — if our judgment did not constantly set these appearances straight.[88]

I wish to keep this passage at the forefront of my argument on photography and to allow for the intermingling of sensorial chaos and ordered reality or information as working in conjunction. Considering abstract photography from the said period illuminates the possible expansion and collaboration between a phenomenological approach that does not abandon or depart from realism or nature. These visual

[87] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt", in Eds. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor. *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*. (Northwestern University Press, 2007), 72.
[88] Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt", 72.

illusions that occur when attention is paid to sensorial experience are things that I seek to explore and trouble by looking at photography and the new ways of seeing that it insists on. Attention to such illusions and sensorial moments that come, for example, from alterations in typical modes of perception, are inherently linked to the experience of atmospheres that occur both from within and without. They can all be said to partake in that category of experience insofar as they often slip away from clear rhetorical description because they are felt before they are classified and pertain to embodied experiences vaguely described as mood, air, or feeling.

iv. ATMOSPHERES

The concept of "atmospheres" has been critical in the development of my own understanding of how abstraction is expressed in photography. This notion — as well as related ones including mood, aura, feeling, glow, essence, ambiance, environment — is strongly linked both to abstraction as well as phenomenological experience. I am interested in those elements in the world that refute solidity, shape or weight and that are present more as liquids, gases, light and shadow, and the effects of these conditions on the material world.

Atmospheres are difficult to define or confine. It is difficult to determine where they start and stop.[89] They are often felt more than they are seen. As a result, atmospheres are hard to represent or capture intentionally, but also tend to slip in without consent or warning. Atmospheres present, in certain respects, an opposition to associations of documentary and those elements of photography associated with

[89] Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics", *Thesis Eleven* (1993), 113–126.

realism, such as classification or definition. Instead of making things clearer or delivering knowledge, atmospheres in photographs often impede identification and ordering as a result of obscuring or visually compromising the clarity of what one is looking at. In many ways, atmospheres act as an agent of abstraction, complicating that which is otherwise deemed to be on some level obtainable, knowable and possessable.

That being said, I will insist that atmospheres do not necessarily make the viewer see less and are not wholly a hindering or impediment of reality. Rather, atmospheres are able to serve as bridges that assist the conjoining of realism and abstraction in photography. The concept of atmospheres has given me a point of entry allowing for my exploration of this rich collection of photographs that seek an alternative way of reflecting the world, privileging the capturing of mood, a fog or haze, even texture, rather than identifiable objects in situ. Yet, atmospheres are still subject to the technical or indexical processes of photography: a cloud (as will be seen with regard to Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents*) or a glow (as in Lyonel Feininger's photographs of Dessau at night) are nevertheless captured and documented on film. Atmospheres remain markers of a time and a place, and of an environment subject to weather and fluctuations of daylight, present in every photograph produced.

In this thesis, the definition of atmosphere is malleable and polymorphous. It seeks to find a name for many things: the privileging of texture over customary foreground/background compositional relationships, the intangible mood in photographs felt but not seen, the aura or essence of a photograph, the predominance of blur over detail.[90] This thesis does not deal with photographic theory in total but is

[90] The relationship between aura and atmosphere will be discussed with regard to Walter Benjamin's widely read essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations.* (London: Pimlico, 1955), 211–244.

positioned within the historical period from 1914 to 1930 as it is a particularly rich moment to position these discussions being a time of prolific theoretical reflection on the nature of photography to which later theorists have responded.

The aim of the present study is to analyse where photography has *gone abstract* or has been *abstracted* and to situate such unusual moments within both the history of photography and that of abstract art.[91] Throughout the discussion that follows, the terms documentary and abstraction will continue to be positioned as challenging one another, but also as working in tandem.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters are theoretical in focus and seek to present different contexts within which I am positioning my argument. As the scope of my study is wide and deals with major themes and questions such as "photography" and "abstraction", this thesis is by no way an exhaustive account of all the possible approaches to putting these two concepts together and the possibilities of such a study are potentially endless. Thus, it has been important for me to articulate the debates and discursive frameworks that my approach is operating within and responding to. Moreover, to establish a focus, it is necessary to situate my study within the particular historical context and the artistic activities occurring between 1914 and 1930. As such, it is necessary to provide an overview of the impacts and effects of photography on the artistic community during this time. Loosely speaking, the first chapter deals with documentary and realism and the second with abstraction and modernism. This is not to suggest a desire to reinforce

[91] Emmanuelle de L'Ecotais has written a similar sentiment in his essay contribution to the catalogue of Shape of Light: *100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art*. He writes: "the question… is not so much why photography turned towards abstraction — after all, the reasons are the same as they are for other mediums — but rather how and thanks to whom it occurred, bringing not only into the history of photography, but also into the wider history of abstract art", "In Search of a New Reality: 1910–1940", in *Shape of Light: 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2018), 13.

the separation of these concepts. On the contrary, throughout the following discussion it will be evident that the aim will be to track the constant interaction and mutual interplay between these terms and the phenomena to which they refer.

The following three chapters take the form of thematic case studies that I believe best explicate a certain aspect of photography and abstraction from this period. While the possibilities of selecting these themes are numerous and could never all be accounted for, in this instance, I have chosen the themes that contribute to a narrative that explores atmospheres as a key component to my project to examine photography and abstraction. I have found these themes — nature/landscape, still-life/light/shadow and the machine — and the photography from this period that relate to them, to be fascinating and topical considerations from which to examine the dialogue in question.

In Chapter 3 entitled *Landscape and the Abstract Nature Photograph*, I continue to investigate the distinctions that can be made between the landscape and nature photograph through attention to atmosphere and phenomenological experiences of disorientation. With this contrast in mind, I propose that the landscape image is defined by the inclusion of a horizon, whereas the nature photograph suggests an abstraction of the natural environment's typical orientation, visually privileging atmosphere or texture as opposed to a depiction that distinctively divides sky and ground. By contrast to the landscape, the abstract nature photograph may be without a horizon line, and often adopts an oblique or aerial perspective, rendering the representation of land or sky unfamiliar. I take as a point of departure the existing scholarship on Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents* series — photographs of clouds wherein he points his camera directly up to the sky — which often remarks on vertigo, disorientation or discomfort. This basis offers support to my analyses of other works

that, to date, are little known: Josef Albers's *Schlamm* or sludge photographs, German environmentalist Arvid Gutschow's photo-essay book entitled *See Sand Sonne* (*Sea, Sand, Sun*).

The fourth chapter, *Still-Life, Light and Shadow*, considers instances of atmosphere — such as the glow or haze — as assisting in bridging the gap between realism and abstraction in photography. Transitioning from a discussion on nature from the previous chapter, I begin with still-life or *nature-morte* compositions by Florence Henri to investigate her use of mirrors as a tool for disorientation. Then, I move toward closer attention to the glow with reference to photographs by Lyonel Feininger and Ilse Bing. Here I look at photographs taken at night that produce a distinct atmospheric quality whereby emanating light produces a distinct mood or feeling to the abstract renditions. I conclude by returning again to th blur by looking at early and anomalous works by Paul Strand wherein he embraces a soft-focus aesthetic and attends to light and shadow in depictions of everyday objects from his time in Twin Lakes, Connecticut.

The final chapter, *Abstracting The Machine as Modern Spirit*, investigates Amédée Ozenfant's argument that machine, as spirit of modernism, can be embodied in other objects — objects pertaining to his theory of constant forms such as the jug or vase — even in the absence of the machine itself. This is examined in relation to Charles Sheeler's River Rouge series as well as one curious still-life photograph of a congregation of jugs. I go on to explore the tensions between the machine and beauty by looking at aesthetically abstract photographs in Albert Renger-Patzsch's book *Die Welt ist schön* (*The World is Beautiful*) from 1928. Lastly, I look at various oblique photographic representations of the Eiffel Tower by Moholy-Nagy, Ilse Bing and Germaine Krull as examples of Moholy-Nagy's theory of 'faulty photographs'.

Throughout these three sections, I will consider the aura, feeling, environment, disorientation and presence as components of atmosphere that support my arguments around abstraction in the photographs in question.

1 – DOCUMENTARY AND AESTHETICS, PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING

This chapter will address two sets of important issues. On the one hand, I will consider how theorists and practitioners alike have worked to determine the position of photography within the wider context of art history. On the other, I will reflect upon the discourse regarding documentary and realism in photography in order to ground the argument being developed here in the context of existing positions.

i. THE CURIOUS CASE OF A FUZZY CHICKEN

In a 1917 photograph entitled *Side of a White Barn, Pennsylvania* (Figure 1.0), Charles Sheeler produced an *almost* abstract photograph, picturing just what the title suggests. The composition is unique insofar as it bridges the abstract and the represented, without occupying one more than the other. Slightly more than the top half of the photograph is composed of white or light-coloured wood panels — or, at the very least, rendered white by way of the monochrome photograph — vertically positioned one beside the other. Towards the right is an interruption in this otherwise sequential pattern made by a small door constructed of vertical panels of wood. What may have otherwise been a (somewhat) abstract composition is interjected with the figurative and functional: the shadow cast at the top of the panels, the different texture of the wood and the small door making the continuous lines varied. While attention is certainly given to form and pattern, these interruptions made by the door and shadows refuse a flatness that white geometric shapes may have otherwise claimed. But there

is more.

The bottom half of *Side of a White Barn, Pennsylvania* is composed of a roughly textured and run-down white wall with one wooden panel that appears as if it may be covering a hole in the wall, one two-door window with the wooden boards shut, and one horizontal rectangular hole, divided into a six-cell grid. It is striking that this photograph predates Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) (Figure 1.1) by a single year, as it is distinctively composed of white squares on a white wall. What distinguishes the two, however, are the elements of recognizable objects in Sheeler's photograph despite the fact that, at times, the viewer is aware principally of the form of a white square on a white ground. Some examples of these disruptions include: the hinges that would allow entry into an interior space, the small gridded window that presents a darkened three-dimensional hole in the wall (another entry), the cracks in the wall that interrupt its smoothness and that suggest that the barn is dilapidated.

Most interestingly, however, is the chicken in motion that peeks up from the bottom frame of the image, constituting a chicken-shaped blur, an atmospheric form emerging out of focus. Indeed, because of this curious presence of the chicken, Sheeler's photograph distinguishes itself from Malevich's immaculate *White on White*. Whether the blurriness of the chicken as a result of its sudden movement is a demonstration of an abstract intervention in the real, or whether the chicken's presence in the first place is a definitive interjection of the real into the abstract, the point of their coexistence remains the same.

While Sheeler's photographs of the Bucks County Barn have been described as combining European Modernism with American Realism, I am not concerned here

with the issue of style as it relates to national considerations.[92] In the current context, the fuzzy chicken in Sheeler's *Side of a White Barn, Pennsylvania* articulates the nuance that I will continue to try to underscore in my discussion and the case studies presented. That is, one key way in which abstract photography encourages a new thinking about photography more generally, is the impossibility of avoiding or denying the fuzzy chicken in every photograph. Photography, no matter how abstract, can never reject its close tie to reality, the index and documentary.

We can perceive something similar, if less comical in another Sheeler photograph, *Stairwell, Williamsburg* (1935) (Figure 1.2), reminiscent of his earlier stair photographs from Doylestown. This photograph, curiously, barely shows the stairs at all. Instead, the focus is on the space between the walls and ceiling and floor that composes the hall. What is most striking about this image is not simply that the stairs themselves barely make it into the frame, but the positioning of this narrow space so that all walls directly face each other. The viewer is situated at the top of the stairs, which palpably elicit a phenomenological experience of the threat of falling into the expanse of open space, and of ultimately hitting a hard and uneven surface. This sensorial experience is made possible by the unusual cropping or framing of the image.

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[92] In his book on Sheeler, Mark Rawlinson argues that the Bucks County, Pennsylvania series is one that brings out a key tension in Sheeler's practice: "the defining of oneself as a 'modern' artist in America at the beginning of the twentieth century was highly problematic, a problem compounded by the artist's interest in the relatively new field of artistic photography. Moreover, Sheeler's modernism is complicated by his active engagement with decidedly non-modernist interests and practices", *Charles Sheeler: Modernism, Precisionism and the Borders of Abstraction*. (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007, 9. Wanda Corn has insisted on Sheeler's definitive Americanism, "Home Sweet Home", in *The Great American Thing*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 301. See as well: Kristina Wilson, "Ambivalence, Irony, and Americana Charles Sheeler's 'American Interiors'", *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter 2011), 249–276. David Peters Corbett, "The Problematic Past in the Work of Charles Sheeler, 1917–1927", *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (August 2011), 559–580.

Both of these photographs have primarily been discussed in connection to European modernism. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. has referred to *Side of a White Barn, Pennsylvania* "as blank and unforgiving as any Duchamp" and as having "immediately placed (Sheeler) at the forefront of the young field".[93] Meanwhile, in his discussion of *Side of a White Barn*, Mark Rawlinson argues for the coming together of photography and Cubism by way of a shared interest in "surface and texture, revealed through the play of light and form" .[94] He writes that its abstract quality stems from having been deliberately cropped:

> Removing the barn from its context not only enables one to consider the beauty of its form, or the imagination and workmanship of those who constructed it. On the other hand, it also reveals that a barn without a context is not much of a barn after all: its function is negated.[95]

This cropping has also been discussed by Corn in relation to the Doylestown house series: "he cropped the compositions so that the clean bare walls became floating planes, and the structural lines of the building's corners, doorway, hearth, and

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[93] Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., "Sheeler and Photography", in *The Photography of Charles Sheeler*, Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., Gilles Mora, and Karen E. Haas. (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002), 10.
[94] Rawlinson, *Charles Sheeler*, 27. Gilles Mora makes the interesting proposition that Sheeler's engagement with abstraction was more in tandem with the Purism of Ozenfant and Le Corbusier than it was with Cubism, which he concludes was "more difficult to master than the Pictorialist-influenced images Strand produced during the same period", "Charles Sheeler: A Radical Modernism", in *The Photography of Charles Sheeler*, Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., Gilles Mora, and Karen E. Haas. (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002), 83. Stebbins Jr., by contrast shares Rawlinson's associations of Sheeler's work with Cubism and adds the influence of the cinematic so that "each work in the series explores the same subject from a different viewpoint, building a picture of the whole in the sequence of images that could almost be a series of film stills", "Sheeler and Photography", 12.
[95] Rawlinson, *Charles Sheeler*, 27.

windows became as pronounced as a Mondrian grid".[96] While Corn initially wished to situate Sheeler within the context of a distinct Americana, here, she overtly places him in collision with European Modernism. In addition to all the other tensions in Sheeler's work — such as that between painting and photography — one that can be added to this discussion is the opposing yet simultaneous tug towards abstraction and functionalism.

While the barn outside of its context, according to Rawlinson, behaves as an abstract composition, it still is comprised of recognizable materials such as wooden panels and a chicken, albeit blurry. Despite certain connections with Duchamp, as is evident as well in Sheeler's photographs of stairs, which call to mind Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) (Figure 1.3), the "blankness" of *Side of a White Barn, Pennsylvania* must not be overstated for one main reason: the eccentric presence of the blurred chicken.

Frequently examined in conjunction with this photograph is Sheeler's drawing *Barn Abstraction* (Figure 1.4). Once again, this has been discussed again with an attention to nationalism and the American quest to achieve an autonomous and individuated modernism after the First World War.[97] My interest here, however, is Sheeler's oscillation between media, being as he was, at times, a photographer and, at others, a painter. Sheeler has expressed the relationship between painting and photography in his practice in the following passage:

> Since, in making the photographs I have their purpose in mind they usually represent an approximation of the disposition of the elements which comprise the eventual painting. As in making direct references to the nature I seek

[96] Corn, "Home Sweet Home", 302.
[97] Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine*. (London: Reaktion Books, 1991).

> information rather than to reproduce it, so it is in referring to the photograph rather than to transcribe it. Not to produce a replica of nature but to attain an intensified presentation of its essentials, through greater compactness of its formal design by precision of vision and hand, is my objective to achieve in the completed painting.[98]

The word 'precision' here calls forth two important concerns: the Precisionist painting movement, in which Sheeler participated, but also precision as a characteristic of photography[99]. Ben Lifson has stated: "for photography to look like itself, it had to be descriptive, *precise*, transparent".[100] Sheeler describes his process as a liberal translation from one medium to another: his photographs act as a document from which information or data is collected and translated into a painting. This translation need not be exact, however. The key issue is that the photograph enables a kind of vision divorced from the human eye that can be tapped into in order to produce paintings in a new, perhaps more modern manner. While vision may be, on the one hand, mechanical through the camera, on the other hand, transferring it to the hand that paints, it is re-embodied.

It is fruitful with this in mind to elicit Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator". Instead of looking at the translation of a text from one language to

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[98] Charles Sheeler, "Excerpts from Charles Sheeler's 1937 Unpublished 'Autobiography'", from Charles Sheeler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. in *The Photography of Charles Sheeler*, Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., Gilles Mora, and Karen E. Haas. (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002), 191.

[99] Andrew Hemingway has challenged what he describes as naïve characterizations of Precisionism as having an "urban optimism" or "an optimistic view of technology", and proposes an alternative reading of the movement through Marxist theory and ideas, making use of Lukács's critiques of capitalist society. See *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America*, 1–11.

[100] Ben Lifson, *Paul Strand: The Formative Years 1914–1917*, (Millerton: Silver Mountain Foundation, 1983), 2. Italics added by me.

another, I wish to query what happens when a work is translated into an altogether different one. Instead of simply being translated from one medium to another so that the new version remains intimately connected to its referent, a translation of media constitutes such a significant mediation and change that it is not only translated but also transformed.[101]

With this question of translation in mind, Briony Fer has discussed Vija Celmins' artistic process of drawing from photographs, either taken by herself or found in books and magazines as a translation (Figure 1.5):

> Although she may adapt a passage here, or edit out a comet there, *Night Sky #19* is a translation of the photograph into the medium of drawing… whilst I don't think the effect of her work is to make us feel lost in the enormity of a sky we could say that we do get lost in translation between photography and drawing and painting.[102]

This description of getting lost in translation is not to say that elements or details from one medium are lost in the transmission of an image into another; rather what is being conveyed is a mode of getting lost on the part of the viewer such that the translation, in a sense, goes unnoticed or undocumented. In fact, while looking at these works by Celmins, it is not immediately clear that one is examining a drawing rather than a photograph, as they rendered are with hyperrealist sensitivity.

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[101] Rawlinson describes that the subsequent drawing of *Barn Abstraction* results in two considerations: "on one hand it is a mimetic rendering of the functionality of the barns themselves through the eradication of superfluous ornament that served no functional purpose; on the other, it is a continuing formal experimentation through the reinterpretation of the photographic image on paper or canvas", 31.
[102] Briony Fer, "Night Sky #19, 1998", in *Vija Celmins*, ed. Lane Relyea, Robert Gober, and Briony Fer. (London: Phaidon, 2004), 102.

What is most significant in this regard is that, like Celmins, Sheeler begins with photographs and later translates them into sketches, drawings or paintings, with the forms and shadows transcribed from the photograph itself. When considering the discourse of photography, a medium that allows for multiples, it may seem extraordinary or unorthodox to position the photograph as an *original*, which consequently gets translated into other media. Benjamin refers to the "kinship of languages" to express the futility and counter-productivity of trying to purely imitate an original, which for him, does not make for successful translation: the differences in expression within languages must be accounted for.[103] It should not be assumed that a language or a work of art is static. Instead, a work is always in the process of evolution, changing in much the same way as does language; that is to say, a work of art is both historically dependent and subject to this changing history.

If it is useful to read Sheeler's skeletal drawing as a translation of the photograph, then it must be acknowledged that, unlike some of Sheeler's more faithful renditions of photographs into drawings or paintings, *Barn Abstraction* takes liberties that the artist might otherwise have not pursued in his paintings.

Benjamin states that:

> Translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something, from rendering the sense, and in this the original is important to it only insofar as it has already relieved the translator and his translation of the effort of assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed.[104]

[103] See again Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" for a discussion on the distinct reproducible quality of photographic medium and the consequential loss of the aura.
[104] Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913–*

If, then, the translation necessarily depends on the original for the production of meaning, *Barn Abstraction* departs and divorces itself from what is conveyed in the original photograph and concentrates in a saturated manner on the original as a *referent*.

Adding to this line of thought, Benjamin comments on the distinction between the author and the translator as follows:

> Not only does the intention of a translation address or differ from that of a literary work – namely a language as a whole, taking an individual work in an alien language as a point of departure-but it is also qualitatively different altogether. The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, manifest; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational.[105]

Yet, in this case, Sheeler occupies both roles: he betrays his position as translator and opts for a translation that permits significant transformation. These two works alongside one another thus represent Sheeler's process of digesting and examining the

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1926. Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 260. Benjamin also refers to the "translataibility" of an original in that he queries: "the question of whether a work is translatable has a dual meaning. Either: Will an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of its readers? Or, more pertinently: Does its nature lend itself to translation and, therefore, in view of the significance of this form, call for it?", 254.

[105] Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", 259. On his book on Benjamin and photography, Eduardo Cadava writes that for Benjamin, ""the task of translation is not to render a foreign language into one we may call our own, but rather to preserve the foreignness of this language… if languages remain foreign – to other languages and to themselves – it is because, unfolding in time, and according to heterogeneous and discontinuous paths, they change incessantly", *Words of Light*, 17.

ways his work functions within larger histories of abstraction.[106] Moreover, there is a clear exploration of mediums — how they differ and how they can collaborate — and, as a result, a query into how each medium might set out to define itself, in Brock's words "on its own terms".[107]

This case study examining *Barn Abstraction* beside *Side of a White Barn* is useful here for two reasons. The first is to demonstrate the ways in which each participates in abstraction and that the photograph is no less capable of abstract renderings. The fuzzy chicken at once presents an added abstraction in addition to the white monochrome aesthetic, constituting a blur in the foreground, while also routing the photograph in realism through the inadvertent documenting of the chicken in the first place. The second reason is to draw out connections between photography and painting so that they are considered not as oppositional mediums but as collaborating ones: the presence of one medium not threatening but enhancing the exploration and productivity of the other.

> Brock has written on Sheeler's Doylestown photographs that they
>
> […] were championed by Stieglitz as prime examples of the type of 'straight' photography he was promoting by 1917. In contrast to the earlier practice of the pictorialist photographers, who had manipulated their prints and negatives in order to achieve painterly effects, Stieglitz had come to believe that the medium was defined by its unrivalled ability to record the world in sharp focus and that 'the other arts could only prove themselves superior to

[106] Such a history of abstraction would have begun with Malevich and continued through movements such as Constructivism, Dada, De Stijl and the Bauhaus. In America, these forms of abstraction would have begun to have been circulated, most likely through specialty exhibitions and photographs.
[107] Charles Brock, *Charles Sheeler: Across Media*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2006), ix.

photography by making their aim dependent on qualities other than accurate reproduction'.[108]

'Straight' photography thus represented instances whereby the photographer did not alter or intervene in the camera's capturing of a scene and rendering of it as an image. Although Sheeler photographed the underbelly of the stairs in an unusual or vertiginous manner in *Stairs from Below* (1917) (Figure 1.6), he did so in a 'straight' way, privileging directness over manipulation. As such, Sheeler departs from Duchamp in both *Stairs from Below* and *Stairwell, Williamsburg*: while Duchamp can be said to have explored cinema within a painting, Sheeler was interested in producing photographs that communicate as photographs, rather than photographs that partake in the conventions of painting or film.

While the other photographs from the Doylestown series do indeed respond to Stieglitz's 'straight' photography in perhaps a more obvious way, *Stairs from Below* proposes the use of photography for an alternative and unusual mode of seeing that recalls Moholy-Nagy's New Vision and his adoption of oblique or radical camera angles. Sheeler positions himself below the stairs and photographs their underside rather than those surfaces that are stepped on to efficiently travel from one floor to another. As such, there is an attempt in this photograph to notice what is not typically seen and to visually expose these non-visible objects.[109]

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[108] Brock, *Charles Sheeler: Across Media*, 23–25. Quote by Stieglitz, "Photo-Secession Notes," *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910), 54.
[109] Karen Lucic discusses Sheeler's *Stairwell (Bucks County House – Interior Detail)* (1917) as well as *Stairs from Below*, with reference to disorientation in "On The Threshold: Charles Sheeler's Early Photographs", *Prospects*, No. 20 (October 1995), 227–255. She also discusses stairs with regard to Freud as well as Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space,* (Boston: Beacon, 1969).

This unusual access can be expanded twofold: there is firstly, the optical access to space unseen, and secondly, the architectural access to constructed space unused. Both instances of access are related to abstraction, in the production of strange or unfamiliar camera angles and subject matter in such a way that disorients the viewer so that the stairs appear unused or unusable. This photograph must be considered as a direct application of a practice involved in alternative seeing in a way that converses with Duchamp's motion painting, which also proposes an extra-human vision. Despite, or perhaps in spite of, its strict loyalty to photography's medium specificities, *Stairs from Below* constitutes an exploration into photographic seeing, namely the picturing of that which the human eye cannot optically perceive or may not pay visual attention to.

ii. THE *PARAGONE*

I have been interested in tracing how scholars and critics historically attempted to define photography, particularly in relation to painting. These theorizations have taken into consideration photography's participation in both the sciences and fine arts. A few key practitioners who engaged in these theoretical debates include: Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Amédée Ozenfant, and László Moholy-Nagy. I am interested here in the legacy of their positions when reflecting on more recent historiography.

One key term that recurs time and again is 'straight' photography, first appearing in Stieglitz's journal *Camera Work.* It is used to suggest a departure from the previous Pictorial method in order to describe a sharp focused image that has not

undergone any mechanical manipulations. While Pictorialist photographs often tried to evoke painterly associations, 'straight' photography had an opposing ambition: to embrace the mechanical aspects of photography in order to produce photographs that make reference to the medium's own capacities and limitations.

In 1907 photographer Robert Demachy published a text in *Camera Work* entitled "The Straight and the Modified Print", in which he argues that each photographer must choose whether his/her practice is characterized by a 'straight' or a modified/altered method. Demachy suggests that the problem lies in the ambiguity of interventions whereby,

> […] Forbidden by pure photographers when applied to the positive print, is recommended by the same school when applied to the negative, and is then called intensification or reduction, general or local. Its final effect is similar to that of the positive intervention, viz., modification in the general or local thickness of the positive deposit. [110]

He declares the equal "rights" of photographers to engage in such modifications or to choose not to. He proceeds to advance the following statement, which constitutes a very early critique of 'straight' photography as a reliable document or truth source:

> You will say that the practice of intervention is dangerous? Not more so than the use of straight photography for pictorial aims. This may sound paradoxical; but I believe it is just as useless for a man to attempt art through

[110] Robert Demachy, "The Straight and the Modified Print", *Camera Work*. No. 18 (1907-04): 39. At a later date, Beaumont Newhall describes 'straight' photography as: "the esthetic use of the functional properties of the photographic technique, the appreciation of both the camera's potentialities and its limitations, and the divorce of photography from the canons guiding the esthetic principles of other types of graphic art", *The History of Photography*, (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), 144.

> purely mechanical means as it would be foolish for an astronomer to choose gum-bichromate for printing the chart of the Milky Way.[111]

The use of gum-bichromate to generate a picture of the Milky Way would be inappropriate as it would be difficult to see the stars given the graininess of the image. As such, the medium in the service of producing scientific information has to be sufficiently advanced so that the science itself is visible.

For Demachy, artistic expression is necessary for a photograph to be considered art; if it is too 'straight', it risks exclusion from artistic categorization. Representation, in this line of thought, is always in the realm of artistic expression and subjectivity, and cannot entirely bypass these elements in favour of an exclusively mechanical practice: for Demachy, this does not constitute photography. From this perspective, the photographer must find a way in his/her practice to coordinate mechanical and expressive elements, rather than to attend to one and exclude the other. By providing a place for the expressive dimension, a form of artfulness is included in the context of a medium that is ontologically mechanical, and photography's ability and responsibility to transcend its mechanics are affirmed so that it can communicate and represent objects in a manner reflective of artistic activity.

This modernist moment, just a decade into the twentieth century, can be described by a climate of obsessive concern with clarifying and establishing the distinctions between media in general and defining painting and photography as separate practices in particular. My argument proposes that, all the while, these

[111] Demachy, "The Straight and the Modified Print", 40.

boundaries inevitably blend into one another, as abstract photography is emblematic of a practice driven by bending rules once presumed fixed.

In 2013, Arthur C. Danto suggested that, for Leonardo Da Vinci, the role of the *paragone* or contest between media was to promote painting as the superior form of art, above sculpture. Danto went on to apply this notion of historical competition to the relations between painting and photography such that, upon the discovery of the latter medium, "the paragone was instantly conceded when the painter Paul Delaroche, on first learning of Louis Daguerre's invention, supposedly said, 'As of today, painting is dead'".[112] Danto proposed that this statement stemmed from a prevailing belief that it would be "irrational for human beings to have to learn to use instruments like pencils and brushes to create pictures of the world when a portrait or landscape surpassing what most artists could achieve in realistic conviction could be produced by clicking a shutter – requiring no skill at all".[113] While the tenet that photography is a practice that can be engaged in without skill is not accepted today, I will demonstrate below that even during the period to which Danto alludes, such a proposition was contested.

Moreover, this sentiment extends to another debate from this early moment: whether photography could be considered an art at all. This question is even more relevant in the wider argument of my thesis, where abstract photography is explored.

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[112] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of the Contest: the Paragone Between Painting and Photography" in *What Art Is*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 101. On the esteemed impact of painting on other artistic practices, Hubert Damisch has written: "Painting is not only used as a model for the other arts: it guides them, it carries them to their completion, it is — as Alberti says — the *flower of the arts*… so much so that the author of *De Pictura* [Alberti] does not hesitate, at this point, to address his reader directly: 'You will not find any art, unless it is an extremely vile one, that does not consider painting in such a way that, whatever beautiful you see in things, you can be sure it was born from painting'", Damisch, "The inventor of painting", *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 3 (2010): 305–6. Quote from Alberti, *De Pictura*, p. 46.
[113] Danto, "The End of the Contest", 102.

Within an art historical context, the inclusion of an abstract aesthetic in photography troubles certain definitions of the medium insofar as it relies on versions of realism, and is implicated in efforts to define what kinds of photography are included within the discipline.

The perspective to be explored begins with the claim that photography occupies a dual role or pursues a dual function: it is situated between and precisely at the boundary of art and documentary. The photographic medium holds within it the tension between the ornamentation or aestheticization of objects and their use value, and this effectively positions photography as participating in both art and information arenas.[114] Without ornament or décor, photography risks being excluded from artistic consideration. However, embracing ornament would have been considered anti-modern, according to the theories advanced by Amédée Ozenfant and Adolf Loos with reference to painting and architecture, for example.[115] Moreover, to be overly ornamental would also challenge or threaten photography's informative or documentary capacity and would ignore the fact that photography is always linked to the real and is situated in the practice of documenting the world.

Photography, when considered as a medium that delivers reality in image-form, lends or offers itself as an exemplar of the practice of doing away with ornament and excess, of capturing the world while reflecting very little if anything outside what is assumed to be reality. In this way, once photography moved away

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[114] Jorge Ribalta, "The Strand Symptom: A Modernist Disease?", *Oxford Art Journal*, 28.1 (2015), 59. This article is part of a larger issue of Oxford Art Journal dedicated to the topic of "Modernism After Paul Strand", Volume 38, Issue 1, 2015.
[115] Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art.* (New York: Dover Publications, 1928). Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime.* (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1998). Hubert Damisch has written on how there have been theoretical approaches, naming Wilhelm Worringer, that "the 'decorative' or the 'ornamental' is at the heart of the problematic of abstraction on the aesthetic plane, just as it constituted — at the cost of such contradictions! — one of the sources of modernist ideology", "Remarks on Abstraction", 134.

from pictorialism, whereby it effectively abandoned any effort to resemble painting, it could be seen as engaging with data, documentation and information. Without expression conveyed through the likes of a brushstroke, photography as a purveyor of information, in one view, could be regarded as ornament free, and therefore as the most modern medium. Even if photography is taken as unambiguously having the function of documenting and delivering a record of the world, it will always participate in aesthetics. On the flip side, photography that sees itself as only abstract and saturated in aesthetics would be an overt denial of photography's rootedness in the real.

As an example, Danto takes the impact of Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of horses trotting or galloping on painters. He insists that, despite constituting a source of inspiration for painters, Muybridge's images actually fail to depict how accurately the eye sees such movement.[116] Instead, Danto claims, Muybridge's photographs show "phenomena that the human eye could not perceive… or else there would have been no need for the photographs in the first place".[117] Thus, while photography fails to precisely capture motion as seen by the human eye, painters working after the invention of photography nonetheless saw the camera as a vehicle through which painting could be improved. Photography could be esteemed as a new medium that offered painting an alternative and novel vision that served to expand its own capacity to represent the world. In fact, Degas produced numerous charcoal and

[116] See as well Van Deren Coke's chapter on "Stop-Action Photography" in *The Painter and the Photograph.* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964).
[117] Danto, "The End of the Contest", 105.

pastel drawings that took as their figurative source photographs by Muybridge.[118] These instances demonstrate the occurrence of a dynamic exchange between painting and photography, where influence was reciprocal and collaborative. It is worth noting that in fact, blurriness depicts movement *more accurately* as it reflects how humans perceive movement. In this sense, the depiction of movement as blurry is more 'realistic' than the freeze frame of Muybridge's photographs. Not only is the blur as a representative quality of movement situated in realism more firmly, it also takes part in communicating the atmosphere or felt experience of said movement. That is, to experience movement is to expect the moving subject to be blurry, out of focus and undetailed, qualities which act as key descriptors that transmit the message that something is in motion.

Walter Benjamin writes, in a way that foreshadows the concept of punctum introduced by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, that:

> The spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and the now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character in the picture… It is possible, for example, however roughly, to describe the way someone walks, but it is impossible to say anything about that fraction of a second when a person *starts to walk*. Photography with its various aids (lenses, enlargements) can reveal this moment. Photography

[118] Aaron Scharf, "Painting, Photography, and the Image of Movement", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 104, No. 710 (May, 1962), 191. See also Guneratne, "The Birth of a New Realism: Photography, Painting and the Advent of Documentary Cinema", *Film History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Photography and Television (1998), 171. Moholy-Nagy was also aware of these experiments and writes on the camera seeing that which is excess of the human eye: "This principle has already been applied in a few scientific experiments, as in the study of movements (walking, jumping, galloping) and of zoological, botanical and mineral forms (enlargements, microscopic photographs) and other investigations into natural history", *Painting Photography Film*, 28.

> makes us aware for the first time this optical unconscious, just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious.[119]

Benjamin's suggestions here frame what I refer to as photographic vision, a version of optics, or optical experience, that departs from unaided human vision. Photography does not only alter human perception in how it represents the world, it also encourages viewers to look more closely, more attentively. The 'moment' that photography visually enables is one that human beings know exists but have limited access to. With photographic instruments, one could, for example, develop a fuller understanding of what motion looks like, of the lived experience of something in motion. Photography facilitates the visualization of moments in between that are undetected or lost by the human eye; it allows for the registration and perception of the minutest details that constitute these moments. It is important to note here the ways in which abstraction is often a side effect of the aids that Benjamin refers to. This will be demonstrated later in this thesis by assessing either a close-up or framed photograph that dismisses conventional methods of orientating a viewer so that an image is rendered abstractly, for example, in many of Strand's *Twin Lakes* images (Chapter 4).

Reflecting on this earlier moment, Patricia D. Leighten noted that the pictorial approach sought to distance itself from any concern with social documentation. She suggests that, while 'straight' photography aimed to allow a subject to signify in its own way, the pictorial perspective rejected any effort to refer to reality or to direct or

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[119] Walter Benjamin. "A Short History of Photography", *Screen,* vol. 13, issue 1 (1 March 1972), 7. See Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980). This passage by Benjamin is also quoted and discussed in Guneratne, "The Birth of a New Realism: Photography, Painting and the Advent of Documentary Cinema", 168.

'control' viewer experience.[120] According to Leighten, by manipulating the photograph so deliberately, the pictorialists delivered curated messages rather than allowing for an active spectatorship or facilitating the flow of interpretation.[121] This characterization of pictorialists as manipulative and 'straight' photographers as generous in the agency they attributed to their viewers would have appealed to the pictorialists-turned-straight photographers. Although it is evident that the pictorialist approach was concerned with emulating an expressionist style that resembled, and at times even mimicked painting, their primary concern was for photography to be confirmed as a fine art within the academy.[122]

It is critical that the relationship between painting and photography should not be construed as being one-sided or uni-directional so as to suggest that photography either utilised painting to inform its self-definition and practice (and not vice versa) or altogether rejected its relevance. With respect to photography's impact on painting, Aaron Scharf has provided an account that effectively condemns certain responses by painters to the very invention or discovery of photography. Reflecting on the

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[120] Leighten, "Critical Attitudes toward Overtly Manipulated Photography in the 20th Century", 133.

[121] This argument, furthered by myself, can be likened to Jacques Rancière's desire to advocate for the spectator as an active agent. See Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London: Verso, 2008).

[122] Peter C. Bunnell has observed that the pictorial movement was concerned with the "objecthood" of the photograph as a work of art. He explains that despite photography existing as multiples, whereby reproduction is key to the capacities and specificities of the medium, "the artist photographer needed to believe that there was something unique and critically significant about the pictorialist print"[122]. There is a necessary denial of the medium's capabilities and limitations in this approach by early photographers, who aimed to advance their works as products of craft, "underscoring the pliability of the technique, and recognizing that the subtlety of interpretation in a photograph requires knowledge and appreciation of its physical beauty"[122]. This can be understood as a wish to transfer certain elements of the painting tradition onto photography in an effort to elevate it within the hierarchies of fine art histories and to present new and modern artistic contributions. Bunnell, "Pictorial Photography", *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University,* Vol. 51, No. 2 The Art of Pictorial Photography 1890–1925 (1992),12–13.

historical origins of photography more than a hundred years later, Scharf proposes that the interaction between painting and photography constituted a "pictorial osmosis", an approach that challenges earlier conceptions of the tension caused by thinking in reference to a *paragone*. He claims that most artists responded very dramatically to the emergence of photography and that critics and the general public, by "persistently call(ing) for verisimilitude", made painters feel forced to use photography in their effort to render or copy even the minutest details of their subject matter.[123] Yet, while Scharf asserts that "many examples of this kind of picture exist", he does not provide any concrete illustrations to support his argument. Moreover, this description of the impact of photography on painters as one in which they surrendered their concern with innovation, fails entirely to account for more inspired responses to the emergence of photographic technology.

Despite his opening statements, Scharf goes on to admit that some artists "employed photographs, not just to copy from", that is, to paint mimetically. Yet, once again, he provides no examples.[124] More interesting, however, is his conceding that it is difficult to identify similarities or uniformity between photographic images, not only because of the distinct technical apparatuses that differ from one camera to another, but also "[…] because these processes themselves were subject to other than mechanical control." In support of his assertion, Scharf indicates that, "the images of the daguerreotype and the calotype were as dissimilar as the paintings of Meisonnier and Monet".[125] In this way, and through a description of the multiple innovations that materialized the photographic medium (Daguerre, Talbot, Niepce, Hippolyte Bayard), the avenues for expression in photography and the visual outcome of images are vast

[123] Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1968), 12.
[124] Scharf, *Art and Photography*, 12.
[125] Scharf, *Art and Photography*, 14.

and necessarily depend on chance, the technical apparatus or support, and the method of production.

There exists, within these lines of discussion, the long-standing debate around measuring objectivity and subjectivity. While this is not a concern of this thesis, I will briefly consider how this issue has been discussed, particularly when negotiating terms such as straight or pictorial. For example, in the publication entitled *Paul Strand: The Formative Years 1914–1917*, Lifson draws attention to the following problematics faced by Alfred Stieglitz and Strand as they tried to determine the qualitative ways by which photography might participate in both camps of subjective and objective representation:

> Stieglitz had accepted the modernist theory of each art form's uniqueness. Photography, proceeding from the hand, was interpretative, subjective. To be true to itself, Stieglitz held, painting had to be 'anti-photographic,' that is, abstract, non-representational; whereas for photography to look like itself, it had to be descriptive, precise, transparent. Now, suddenly, Pictorialist handwork and misty soft-focus effects, which Strand in 1917 termed 'merely the expression of an impotent desire to paint,' were forbidden.[126]

The way Lifson frames this statement suggests that both mediums were faced with the challenge to adapt in the face of the other. Photography responded to traditions in painting, particularly in the later rejection of Pictorialism. Painting, when faced with the emergence of photography, chose to be "anti-photographic" and, as such, could reject the new medium. This rejection was constituted by an embrace of abstraction, which would define the ownership of a unique painting process. It is curious that

[126] Lifson, *Paul Strand: The Formative Years 1914–1917*, 2.

Lifson relays that photography not painting, for Stieglitz, "proceeded from the hand." This inverse of expectation reveals that despite this search for autonomy, similarities and the ways in which each medium might be described remained. This thesis aims to demonstrate that in fact, painting did not own abstraction. Photography too participated in exploring it aesthetically, even if it came up against moments that sought — by its own practitioners as well as those who viewed photography as a threat — to pigeonhole it.

Stieglitz was not only a photographer, as he also ran a gallery and, in this capacity, was responsible for the repeated exhibition of American photography in the United States in an effort to promote not only a broad American modernism, but also a modernism that prominently featured photography. On 24 February, 1913, one week after the Armory Show's opening in New York, Stieglitz displayed his own photographs, complementing the exhibition of European painting with examples of (his own) American photographic work which, in Charles Brock's terms, served "as a 'diabolical test' of photography's strength".[127]

Brock has stated that, "291 was after all an 'experiment station,' a private, intimate setting where serious artists could view small drawings and works-in-progress".[128] Indeed, agreeing with this statement, Kristina Wilson has argued that Stieglitz's simple design and curatorial choices suggested an experimental "laboratory": "his choice of metaphor, which could have been inspired by his early training as an engineer, was unsurprising in an era when rigorously controlled scientific experiments were seen as able to reveal objective truths about human

[127] Charles Brock, "The Armory Show", 1913: A Diabolical Test", in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries.* Ed. Sarah Greenough. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 132.
[128] Brock, "The Armory Show", 1913: A Diabolical Test", 128.

experience and the natural world.".[129] By carefully monitoring and assembling the works in the gallery, Stieglitz could both experiment with the kinds of artwork that he showed in his space, often pioneering the exhibition of avant-garde artists, as well as observing the social experiments dedicated to visitor response.

Stieglitz's 291, moreover, proposed shows that were often in relation, or complementary, to other events happening in New York City, committed as it was "to fostering a dialogue between photography and the other arts".[130] Brock writes that according to Marius de Zayas and Francis Picabia:

> [Although] Stieglitz was a pioneer in the introduction of modern European art to America, he had failed, in their assessment, 'to discover' American artists who truly understood the deeper significance of this work and used their knowledge to depict contemporary American life: all were, de Zayas' wrote merely 'servile imitators'.[131]

I take this assessment to be an exaggerated and unfair verdict. Furthermore, this was not, of course, Stieglitz's own opinion, as he had supported Strand as his mentee, and had put on an exhibition in 1925 at 291 entitled "Seven Americans", showing the work of Strand, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe (his wife) as well as including his own photographs.

Brock has written that Stieglitz's photograph *The Steerage* (Figure 1.7), "[demonstrates] how the composition of a photograph can be divided, fragmented,

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[129] Kristina Wilson, *The Modern Eye: Stieglitz, MoMA, and the Art of the Exhibition, 1925–1934*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 34.
[130] Sarah Greenough, "Paul Strand, 1916: Applied Intelligence", in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries.* Ed. Sarah Greenough. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 248.
[131] Greenough, "Paul Strand, 1916: Applied Intelligence", 249. Quote from Marius de Zayas, [Untitled], *291* 5–6 (July–August 1915), unpaginated.

and flattened into an abstract, nearly cubist design".[132] This iconic photograph features strong diagonals and sections the composition in a manner reflective of geometrical organization. While these partitions separate elements of the image, they also distinctively flatten the picture. Despite, for example, the plank that protrudes back from the left edge, the image as a whole appears to exist on a single plane with little distinction between a foreground and background, rendering it somewhat abstract.

This assertion calls forth two crucial points: one relating to abstraction and the other to migration, insofar as New York is a port and a point of arrival for immigrants. Brock suggests that in its composition — and I would add also through its use of light — the image is distinctly informed by Cubism. This is accomplished through the framing of subject matter, but, also, according to Brock, through a deliberate flattening of space so that depth of field is reduced and limited, in the suggestion of alternative space. Perspectival space is confused in *The Steerage*, making the plank appear to be floating, an abstract shape in space.[133]

In her book, *Paul Strand Circa 1916*, Morris Hambourg recounts how, subsequent to a trip to Paris with Edward Steichen, Stieglitz, through his gallery, 291, and his photography magazine *Camera Work*, became a pioneer in the display and dissemination of European modern art between 1908 and 1913. In her account, Morris Hambourg refers to "provocative" exhibitions of work by Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso,

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[132] Brock, "The Armory Show", 1913: A Diabolical Test", 135. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Allan Sekula also engages with the abstract potential of Stieglitz's photograph in his efforts to define metonymy and metaphor as distinct qualities in documentary photography.

[133] In her discussion of *The Steerage*, Molly Nesbit proposes a different reading, claiming that the photograph "does not look much like an avant-garde painting". Instead, for Nesbit, this photograph is about "the crowd and the criss-cross of the ship's architecture". She reveals that it was only years later that Stieglitz would consider his photograph to be about "geometry", using Cubist or Futurist "terms", "Photography and Modernity (1910–1930)", 106–107.

and Brancusi.[134] In fact, Edward Steichen produced several photographs of Brancusi's studio in Paris, such as the image entitled *First Cast of Brancusi's 'Bird in Space'* (1925) (Figure 1.8), which features a dramatically lit geometric setting for the sculptor's new abstract work.[135] The photograph itself hints at Cubism and an abstract aesthetic, the light creating the effect of different planes, and positions at its centrepiece Brancusi's abstract sculpture.

Morris Hambourg claims that, "if Strand remembered individual paintings in the Armory Show they would likely have been by Paul Cézanne, the painter most discussed by a series of critics and the one whom Strand would most revere".[136] Morris Hambourg accredits Cézanne as "the first artist of the new era, an empirical researcher who sought to learn how to reproduce nature's solidity and its dynamic interconnections".[137] Rather than offering a narrative of the *paragone* that keeps painting and photography separate, Morris Hambourg proposes a link between the two media. In the case of Strand and Cézanne, this connection provides some sort of guidance or inspiration from painter to photographer. This description of Cézanne as an "empirical researcher" in pursuit of a way to reproduce nature resembles how photography was viewed as a method for generating objective renderings of the world, this constituting the reason for her link between the two artists. In this way, painting can be seen as not only a guide for photography, but as drawing on it for its own development.

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[134] Maria Morris Hambourg, *Paul Strand Circa 1916*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 11.
[135] A photograph like this one was on display at the Tate Modern as part of the Shape of Light exhibition, along with an abstract sculpture of a bird by Brancusi.
[136] Morris Hambourg, *Paul Strand Circa 1916*, 21, 31.
[137] Morris Hambourg, *Paul Strand Circa 1916*, 21, 31.

Sarah Greenough, moreover, has also written that Cézanne, Picasso, and Braque served as Strand's mentors, inspiring him to make use of everyday objects as the subjects of his photographs:

> Like the cubists, he both demonstrated these objects, turning them on their sides and emphasizing their formal structure, and he synthesized new compositions which all elements before the camera, voids and shadows as well as the objects themselves, functioned as energized positive elements within a dynamic composition.[138]

This description of Strand's photography — that it explores and examines Cubist ways of perceiving objects through formal investigations into shapes and angles — suggests that it represents not only an interrogation of abstraction in objects, but also of the ways in which such objects might be visually rendered in an abstract manner. As such, Strand could translate the questions of Cubism into an investigation of how the camera might be used to deliver a Cubist composition in its own right. In this way, European influences on photographers like Strand were not futile in efforts to establish what was, not only an American modernism, but one that had its basis in abstraction or at the very least, that experimented in its possibilities.

Lifson has written about Strand's photograph, *Railroad Sidings* (1914) (Figure 1.9) in a manner reminiscent of the Cubist influence in *The Steerage*, and indeed as a comparison between the two photographers:

> While Stieglitz's pictures of steam locomotives — homages to the machine age — employ a Renaissance perspective and photographic detail, the space of Strand's photograph is disjunctive: flat at the top, tilted, skewed at the bottom;

[138] Greenough, "Paul Strand, 1916: Applied Intelligence", 253–254.

> and as the two rows of boxcar roofs in the lower half of the frame become flat, geometric shapes, precise photographic description begins to give way to an idiom that approaches abstraction.[139]

Reflecting on Cubism as well as Renaissance perspective, such descriptions of photography depend on a language of modernist and historical painting. While Lifson's description of *Railroad Sidings* is apt in his delineation of the photograph as nearly abstract, he does not take into account that the boxcars and railroad are pictured from above at an oblique angle. In certain respects, this perspective adds to the abstraction of the image, picturing its subjects with a distinct photographic vision that implies a distance. Yet, as a result of this photographic perspective, it is more fruitful to use a vocabulary that attends to the specificities of abstraction in photography as opposed to one belonging to a tradition of painting. Lifson wishes to make the case that Strand's approach was ultimately more concerned with abstraction and geometric flatness that intuitively references Cubism than the photographs of Stieglitz, yet his description nonetheless mirrors that of Brock.

I am not interested here in a contest between Stieglitz and Strand in an effort to assert one over the other as the champion of abstraction. Rather, I wish to flag the ways in which scholarship has previously alluded to the connection of these photographers with a visually abstract vocabulary. *Railroad Sidings* and *The Steerage* constitute two examples in which the classification of painting and photography, particularly in their interactions with abstraction, are always muddied and never present clean or satisfying distinctions. Instead, what can be extracted from an examination of these two photographs is how their participation in both abstraction

[139] Lifson, *Paul Strand: The Formative Years 1914–1917*, 2.

and photographic vision come into contact with one another and elucidate the ways in which a sense of place is photographically described by Strand and Stieglitz, at times in a manner that is straightforward and, at others, in a manner that attests, or alludes, to an interest in alternative viewpoints and methods of representation. These alternative approaches may at times borrow a vocabulary of abstraction from painting, which is then appropriated to work in tandem with the specific qualities of photography. Place thus becomes not just a matter of documenting a setting or space at a particular time, it also includes within it properties of *experience*: a blur, an oblique angle, a flattening of foreground and background, a confusing or disorienting composition.

iii. RECENT CRITIQUES OF PHOTOGRAPHY'S TRUTH CLAIMS

Just as the fuzzy chicken evoked questions on the inescapable documentary or realist ties of photography, in this section, I wish to explore how contemporary scholars have theorised photography's truth claims. Rosalind Krauss has written on the index of photography as follows: "It is the order of the natural world that imprints on the photographic emulsion and subsequently on the photographic print. This quality of transfer or trace gives to the photograph its documentary status, its undeniable veracity".[140] She argues that despite this connection to reality, "internal adjustments" are possible within the context of language so that it is the world itself

[140] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2" in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (1986), 211–212. Also quoted in Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, 195.

— and not a cultural system — that secures the objects that inhabit and are reflected in photographs[141].

In 1983, Vilém Flusser wrote about his concern for the "lack of criticism of technical images", claiming that this lack is

> […] dangerous at a time when technical images are in the process of displacing texts — dangerous for the reason that the 'objectivity' of technical images is an illusion. For they are — like all images —–not only symbolic but represent even more abstract complexes of symbols than traditional images.[142]

Addressing this same concern, Abigail Solomon-Godeau has written that Moholy-Nagy's pedagogical program at the Bauhaus was centred on "objective vision and optical truth" as of 1925.[143] She makes a connection between the radical formalism of new Soviet photography and the Anglo-American movement (Stieglitz, Strand, etc.). Her argument is that despite a similar aesthetic stemming from distinct origins, the two groups "shared convictions, for example, that the nature of the medium should properly determine its aesthetic, and that photography must acknowledge its own specific characteristics".[144]

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[141] Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2", 211–212. Geoffrey Batchen has engaged with Krauss and Sekula regarding photography and language in Batchen*Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, 196–97. Here is explores how photography is a form of writing that is both indexical and representational so that the sign of reality is, by virtue of this trace, a representation.

[142] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1983), 15.

[143] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 53. This was also the year that Moholy-Nagy published *Painting Photography Film*, reproducing and critiquing many photographs, and including reproductions of his own photographic work (photoplastics (montages), camera-less photographs, and experiments with mirrors).

[144] Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, 55.

Solomon-Godeau goes on to profess that, while the New York school of photography was comfortable with acknowledging photography's link to subjectivity, as a medium that produces subjective images, simultaneous Soviet and German movements strongly resisted this association. According to Solomon-Godeau, a rejection of "subjectivity, personality, and interiority" had to do with the revolution and with associations of collectivity and utility, and that it also represented a stance in opposition to expression in the fine arts.[145] Thus, to embrace photography as a device for truth-telling necessarily constituted a reaction against simultaneous movements occurring in painting during the years after World War I.

The initial experimentation with the bird's and worm's eye views, as well as with oblique perspectives, had been used as a method of defamiliarization or making strange (*ostranenie*) in order to instantiate a new vision associated with photography.[146] By 1930, these views, alongside the vertiginous view, extreme close-ups and other technical experiments, were familiar aesthetic choices present not only in photobooks and exhibitions produced by the avant-garde, but also in popular media and press communications.[147]

Solomon-Godeau begins her chapter, entitled, "The Armed Vision Disarmed" with a famous quote by George Orwell: "All art is propaganda, but not all propaganda is art".[148] This quote is apt in its description of a once experimental aesthetic that became appropriated by popular uses of photography, particularly ones that either

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[145] Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, 56.
[146] See Simon Watney, "Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror", *Thinking Photography,* ed. Victor Burgin, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1982), 154–176.
[147] See Rosalind Krauss on vertigo in "Stieglitz/ 'Equivalents'", *October*, Vol. 11, Essays in Honor of Jay Leyda (Winter, 1979), 129–140.
[148] Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, 53. Victor Burgen also makes the case for images existing within ideologies: "In the very moment of their being perceived, objects are *placed* within an intelligible system of relationships (no reality can be innocent before the camera)", "Photographic Practice and Art Theory", 45–46. The latter portion of his chapter focuses on signs, semiotics and relational rhetoric.

sought to encourage the consumption of commodities and/or that aimed to put forward or sell a particular way of life. In this way, an art considered to be objective is undeniably placed in the context of propaganda, always subjective in its aim to convince the public of convincing truths and masking its agenda under the veil of a false objectivity. In other words, according to Orwell (and Solomon-Godeau), all art — including photographic images — is packed with politics that send the public messages or instructions regarding how to conduct their lives in the context of an inescapable zeitgeist.

With respect to the act of characterizing certain artists as political and others as not, Solomon-Godeau argues for the "the dense interweave of the social, the political, and the economic with the cultural in the production and reception of aesthetic artifacts".[149] She goes on to argue that any attachment to or wish to preserve the idea of an autonomous aesthetic — an art that operates outside social and political networks — only solidifies a harmful bourgeois ideology. This obsession with autonomy is one that indeed belongs to modernist rhetoric on the work of art. Moreover, the perpetuation of these artistic mythologies, according to Solomon-Godeau, facilitates the invention of hierarchical narratives by cultural judges and institutions that are responsible for the inclusion and exclusion of artworks in their histories, which are then presented as "seamless, disinterested, and authoritative", as well as "universally valid, ecumenical, and effectively consensual".[150]

In one sense, this thesis is guilty of perpetuating mainstream narratives on modernism in its Western focus and in the attention given primarily to white male photographers. I have aimed to respond to under-studied works in order to tell a story about abstraction in photography, a phenomenon that has been insufficiently

[149] Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, xxii.
[150] Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, xxii.

considered, in spite of the fact that it not only challenges veins of modernism, but canonical histories of photography as well.

In Solomon-Godeau's analysis of documentary, which she claims is typically taken "to be animated by some kind of exhortative, ameliorative, or, at the very least, humanistic impulse… it is assigned to the indexical, i.e., objective, end of the spectrum rather than the iconic, expressive end".[151] This humanistic view risks falling into the tempting trap of viewing documentary photography as "real" or as "truthful", as presenting an objective image that has referential attachments by way of an index to that which it depicts. This is highly problematic for Solomon-Godeau, as she insists on a paradigm change and maintains that it is necessary to dismantle the truth-status of all photographs. In this exercise, an institutional critique is also necessary, and pictures should be viewed always within the context of how they are displayed and their historicity, and how they relate to issues of class, gender and race.

In a similar vein, John Tagg has written that:

> […] we have to see that *every* photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place.[152]

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[151] Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, xxvii. Bazin also makes a connection between the object and the represented: "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking, in documentary value the image may be, it shared, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model", "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", 8. He also goes on to compare the photograph to a fingerprint, writing that unlike painting, "photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it", 8.

[152] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, *Essays on Photographies and Histories.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 2.

Tagg explains that there are interventions at every stage of producing and displaying a photograph that depend on a variety of choices and a division of labour, and that these interventions effectively constitute a "new and specific reality" or truth that is grounded in the "real effects" of "transactions".[153] As such, reality is subject to historicities, as well as the social conditions of "the languages, representations, psychological structures and practices in which they are articulated and which they disrupt" and the materiality of the photographic print.[154]

Occupying a different position on the debate around photography and truth is the argument proposed by John Roberts, who describes the ways in which photography's archival capacity has lost, in recent years, archival authority: "its referential function is largely demoted and aestheticized, despite the fact that contemporary art theory has given increasing prominence to the place of photography within the development of the avant-garde".[155] He attributes this "to the increasing theoretical separation between the avant-garde and the philosophical claims of realism".[156]

I propose that Roberts's wish to defend realism is not at all in conflict with aesthetic claims, modernism or abstraction, and that it speaks to my own project to unite these dichotomies. Realism for Roberts is not equated with figuration, but rather with real life or the everyday. His argument functions in the context of debates around subjectivity, the unconscious and expression as being posited against the claims to realism that photography makes. As opposed to a position that privileges subjectivity,

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[153] Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 3.
[154] Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 4.
[155] John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, photography and the everyday.* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), 2–3.
[156] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 3.

such as that adopted by Solomon-Godeau — for whom all photography is subjective and, therefore, cannot be regarded as having any bearing upon truth — Roberts operates within what initially seems to be a theoretical middle ground. According to his perspective, realism is regarded as a core function within the photographic medium and photography is understood as having the capacity to represent the world.

Similarly, Steve Edwards states:

> The predominant forms and uses of photography have little to do with art: everyday photography is valued for its capacity to record events, persons and things. Functional photographs, from photojournalism to police pictures, are concerned with clarity and legibility rather than pictorial complexity. Amateur 'snapshots' constitute a second type of vernacular photography.[157]

From the outset of its conception, certain veins of photography tried to find a respectable place within the fine arts. Edwards proposes, however, that the everyday uses of photography are not concerned with artistic merit. Rather, the focus here is with realism: that is, photography as a tool for documentation, making memories, or delivering evidence, a medium that is necessarily linked with both realism as truth and as the everyday.

In order to critique those who have focused their arguments on aesthetics in too purist a fashion, Roberts takes his position too far in the opposite direction, stating that, "art cannot be directly politicised… because aesthetics is socially impotent" and "art becomes an ethical stand-in for an absent politics".[158] While it is tempting to argue that art that prides itself on autonomy is working within a state of insecurity

[157] Steve Edwards, "Vernacular Modernism", in ed. Paul Wood, *Varieties of Modernism*. (London: Yale University Press and The Open University, 2004), 248.
[158] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 3. Roberts posits his work as a tension within the "philosophical revival of aesthetics" by Adorno.

regarding where it might position itself in terms of function in the world, it cannot be stated that abstract or aesthetic art invariably fails to be political.

What is most worth extracting from Roberts's discussion is his quest to revise the implications of the term realism: "[…] realism's understanding and recovery of the world is based on the socially produced and self-qualifying nature of signification, in which things and their relations and representations are in *dynamic* movement and tension".[159] In this way, realism is not taken to be static but is seen as mutable within the context of social relationality and history. Roberts continues:

> Realism, essentially, is a fallibilistic account of a transitive, stratified and differentiated world; it is not a window on a homogenous and present or phenomenal reality. Consequently, claims to the realist content of representations are not governed by the reflection of their objects, even if such objects play a determinate causal role in these claims.[160]

Realism is not to be defined (exclusively) in terms of the verisimilitude of an image relative to that to which it refers in reality. Rather, realism is a flawed narrative of a world divided by subjectivity and difference; it is always partial to whose reality is being told, and exists as idiomatic chronicle or anecdote.

Roberts offers the following example in support of his argument: "a clear, well-defined photograph of an elm tree has a greater iconic realism than a fuzzy photograph of the same tree. But this does not entail a value judgment. The 'realist-effects' and cognitive and aesthetic merits of such photographs will always be context-determined".[161] As such, realism is less concerned with iconicity as it is with

[159] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption,* 5.
[160] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption,* 5.
[161] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption,* 5–6.

the real impact of an image on its social and political environment. Perhaps it is through these effects that art gains its political charge.

I find Roberts's view about how to approach realism useful in the present context as it allows for the coexistence of an aesthetically abstracted photograph with realism, or with documentary, in a manner specific to photography. Understood in this way, realism is not derived from the clarity of a photograph or the extent to which an object can be identified in detail. The fuzzy chicken that sneaks its way into Sheeler's photograph as a figure in motion that firmly situates the photograph in realism, in the moment of capture, is the perfect example. It is thus implicit within the medium of photography through the acknowledgment that photography always photographs a place or a thing, no matter how abstractly it is rendered. Photography is thus engaged in a continuous process of marrying realism with abstraction, and documentary with aesthetics. It is at once both truth-telling and expressive.

iv. SEKULA ON METAPHOR AND METONYMY

As has been demonstrated, truth claims were crucial both to comparisons between painting and photography, and also to their respective definitions of media. I wish to bring in the theories of Allan Sekula at this juncture in order to situate debates around truth-value and to discuss more recent framings of the stakes of documentary and realism.

In his widely referenced essay, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning", Sekula proposes that photography exists within a particular kind of discourse that is within a network of utterances and meanings, and that photographs themselves

participate in the formation and deliverance of messages. He states, in the following passage, that a photograph does not act alone: "the definition [of discourse] also implies that the photograph is an 'incomplete' utterance, a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability".[162] In this way, each photograph, seen in isolation, is limited in its capacity to deliver messages and necessarily depends on an acute intertextuality, or, in other words, communication among media or other photographs.

Moreover, referencing other theoretical positions on photography, including that of Benjamin, Sekula states that: "photographs achieve semantic status as fetish objects *and* as documents". He goes on: "The photograph is imagined to have, depending on its context, a power that is primarily affective or a power that is primarily informative. Both powers reside in the mythical truth-value of the photograph. But this folklore unknowingly distinguishes two separate truths: the truth of magic and the truth of science".[163]

Such logic posits magic and document in opposition rather than as ripe for collaboration. Nonetheless, both conclusions, according to Sekula, contribute to the view that photography to some extent is a medium for the experience or dissemination of truth, be it emotive or informational. While certain modes of abstraction have been explored by artists as intellectual or cerebral evocations or expressions, other forms have been designed to evoke an emotional encounter with, for example, the expressiveness of line, tone, or colour. This latter instance of abstraction constitutes an effort to affect the viewer by way of composition and formal qualities in the absence of figuration in such a way that might overwhelm the viewer or, at the very

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[162] Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning", Accessed 9 October, 2018. https://zscalarts.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/on-the-invention-of-photographic-meaning-sekula.pdf, 4.
[163] Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning", 10.

least, have significant impact. This affective encounter, therefore, constitutes, despite the lack of documentary information, an alternative way in which truth is exposed and experienced by way of photography's unique and 'magical' potency.

Sekula offers an account of nineteenth century photographs of dead children presented as if asleep, claiming they embody this magical or fetishistic quality:

> The evocation is imagined to occur in an affectively charged arena, an arena of sentiment bounded by nostalgia on one end and hysteria on the other. The image is also invested with a magical power to penetrate appearances and thus to transcend the visible; to reveal, for example, secrets of human character.[164]

According to Sekula, the photograph is not only a sentimental object that acquires value by virtue of its survival despite the perishing of its subjects; it also expresses magical capacities through a specific organization of time and vision that belongs exclusively to the photographic medium.

With respect to claims about the "informative function" of photography, the view that photography provides access to and renders *empirical* truth, Sekula makes use of the distinction between metaphor and metonym as follows:

> From this point of view the photograph represents the real world by a simple metonymy: the photograph stands for the object or event that is curtailed at its spatial or temporal boundaries, or, it stands for a contextually related object or event. An image of a man's face stands for a man, and perhaps, in turn, for a class of men.[165]

[164] Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning", 10.
[165] Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning", 10.

Metonymy in photography allows the photograph to stand in for that which it represents, endowing it with a distinct quality of realness. Not only does the part stand for the whole, that is, the framed image stands in for the totality of a scene, subject or object, but also the metonymic photograph almost becomes that which it depicts or to which it refers.

In contrast to this, Sekula presents his application of the term metaphor to photography, which he condemns. He explores this through a discussion of Stieglitz's autobiographic account of his experience of taking the photograph *The Steerage.* In connection with this photograph, Stieglitz himself has written that:

> A round straw hat, the funnel leaning left, the stairway leaning right, the white drawbridge with its railings made of circular chains, white suspenders crossing on the back of a man in the steerage below, round shapes of iron machinery, a mast cutting into the sky, making a triangular shape… I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life.[166]

In response to this reflective account, Sekula writes the following, quoted here in full:

> The photograph is invested with a complex metonymic power, a power that transcends the perceptual and passes into the realm of affect. The photograph is believed to encode the totality of an experience to stand as a phenomenological equivalent of Stieglitz-being-in-that-place. And yet this metonymy is so attenuated that it passes into metaphor. That is to say, Stieglitz's reductivist compulsion is so extreme, his faith in the power of the image so intense, that he denies the iconic level of the image and makes his claim for meaning at the level of abstraction. Instead of the possible

[166] Quote found in Newhall, *The History of Photography*, 143.

> metonymic equation: common people = my alienation, we have the reduced metaphorical equation: shapes = my alienation. Finally by a process of sematic diffusion we are left with the trivial and absurd assertion: shapes = feelings.[167]

The term 'iconic' here refers to and constitutes the people being represented. Sekula's distinction of metaphor and metonymy situates abstraction as belonging to the former, which, he argues, dissociates itself from what is being represented, in contrast to metonymy, wherein one thing stands in for something else and will always have a connection to that which it represents. Metaphor implies a further distance. In this way, Sekula, who argues for the political potential of metonymy over the abstraction associated with metaphor, is effectively presenting a case for realism in photography and uses Stieglitz's photograph, *The Steerage*, which at first does not appear to partake in abstraction, in support of this argument. Despite its initial realism, the photograph engages a modernist approach to composition by way of its powerful sense of design, illustrated perhaps most obviously through the strong diagonal walkway that runs through the middle of the image. Sekula condemns *The Steerage* for failing to communicate the politics of class, the significance of which is dwarfed by a priority to relay a connection to Cubism and the avant-garde.

My position departs from Sekula's in one crucial way. I want to propose that this connection to the avant-garde and painting movements offers a way of escaping rigid binary thinking. For me, it is the interaction of modernist composition that partakes in painterly (Cubist) abstraction with photography's connection with realism and the depiction of a moment in time that makes *The Steerage* so compelling. It is as such exemplary of the ways in which realism and abstraction unite in photography.

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[167] Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning", 14–15.

Moreover, it is through this dialogue that they play with phenomenology, proposing alternative or new modes of experiencing the world that hinges on a play with the senses and embodied viewing. The dissolution of binaries, as I will reaffirm throughout this thesis, offers time and again a vital method for thinking about what photography could look like and how it might achieve something different.

In summary: in order to bring together the terms documentary and abstraction in order to dissolve unhelpful distinctions that support my methodological aim of demonstrating that they are both always at work in photography, it is important to find a balance whereby each term is deconstructed with the same amount of rigour, and by the same token, each term can still maintain authority in what it represents. As such, to suggest that efforts in documentary are always compromised as a result of a subjectivity that slips in, is to insufficiently acknowledge and accept that photography as a mechanical and chemical process is undeniably tied to that which it represents. Documentary thus need not be compromised to such an extent when the term aesthetic or abstract is introduced so that the reality of this trace no longer holds. Bringing the term abstraction to challenge documentary should not entail a violence that obliterates a defining task to render the world document, but should, rather, focus to expand documentary so that it can participate at the same time in camps of abstraction and aesthetics.

In the other consideration, documentary need not entirely destabilise abstraction so that a photograph that has elements of abstraction may also include within it places or objects in the world. Abstraction in photography can thus coexist with the position that realism includes the acknowledgement of the very real trace left by objects, and need not do away with figuration entirely. For example, Moholy-Nagy's photograms wherein objects are not always identifiable are still a result of

their very presence and physical contact with photosensitive paper. And even when they are identifiable, they remain tied to both realism and abstraction through a variety of factors: presence, (phenomenological) perception, vision, and visual transformations that occur from photographic processes of rendering three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional images.

2 – PERCEPTION AND PHOTOGRAPHIC VISION

Having attended to the theories concerning truth in photography and the ways in which different perspectives have proposed diverse methods to examine tensions around reality and aesthetics, I shift gears at this juncture to a more phenomenological concern. This chapter explores the ways in which the emergence of photographic technology transformed vision and visual perception so that conceptions of experiences could be revised and redefined. In the Introduction, I touched upon Susan Buck-Morss's description of Benjamin's scholarship on societal distraction as a result of industrialization. My aim here is not to return to Benjamin's artwork essay, at the end of which he expressed this sentiment, but to begin by reflecting briefly on how scholars have interpreted his ideas on this element of perception.[168]

Frederic Schwartz has written on Benjamin's writing on distraction as a contrast to traditional modes of aesthetic inquiry: "[…] he sees the latter as passive and the former, in its dispersal of attention, characteristic of the cognitive state of the competent, experienced practitioner of a trade of profession. It is, in its lack of a fixed and fixing focus, 'relaxed'",[169] Schwartz reads Benjamin's sentiment not as a critique of distraction but as an embracing of this "modern state of the urban industrial and commercial assault on the sense"; he does not react against it with traditional praise for concentration. Schwartz's distinction becomes clearer when he explains how passivity and activity are nuanced: "the distracted mass absorbing the work of art as

[168] It is also worth looking at Jonathan Crary's book *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001.
[169] Frederic J. Schwartz, "The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant Garde", *Art History* 24, no. 3 (2001): 420–21. For a more details account, see Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Yale University Press, 2005.

opposed to being absorbed and immobilized by it".[170] Rather than being distracted, Schwartz describes this new perception as "a permanent activation, a total mobilization, a state of emergency of the visual field. It is one that might be part of the phenomenology of revolution".[171] That is, instead of experiencing less, this distraction is better described as a omnipresent and unrelenting hyper-awareness and visual stimulation.

Buck-Morss has explained that at the end of the artwork essay, "Benjamin is saying that sensory alienation lies at the source of the aestheticization of politics, which fascism does not create, but merely 'manages' (*betreibt*)".[172] In her view, Benjamin demands that art has the responsibility "to *undo* the alienation of the corporeal sensorium, to *restore the instinctual power of the human body senses of the sake of humanity's self-preservation*, and to do not this by avoiding the new technologies, but by *passing through* them".[173] I am most interested in the proposed marriage between human sensorial experience and new technologies so that they might work together harmoniously to both artistic and political ends. Buck-Morss poignantly expands on this in the following passage, which I quote in full:

> The nervous system is not contained within the body's limits. The circuit from sense-perception to motor response begins and ends in the world. The brain is thus not an isolable anatomical body, but part of a system that passes through the person and her or his (culturally specific, historically transient) environment. As

[170] Schwartz, "The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant Garde", 420.
[171] Schwartz, "The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant Garde", 424.
[172] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October* 62 (1992): 4.
[173] Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered", 5.

> the source of stimuli and the arena for motor response, the external world must be included to complete the sensory circuit.[174]

Most relevant for me here is the reference to the transient borders between the human body and internal experience, and the external surroundings and the world that touches us. The notion of a "sensory circuit" is one that includes exchange and returns between different bodies or forces and implies constant movement. There are also allusions to atmosphere in this section, connecting to my exploration of the immaterial presences of forces that surround or "pass through" us and that alter how we see the world. It will become evident that there were many investigations and theoretical positions derived from this historic period that sought to comprehend where technology begins and ends when it came to the human body or user, and how such boundaries collided or joined by a kind of extension or osmosis. The questions become: What does it mean to picture the modern world photographically, i.e. through a technological medium? In which ways does the camera insist on new methods or new visualisations of ever-changing surroundings?

Moholy-Nagy explored one approach to how photography might be understood or defined during the modernist era, proposing that the essence of the medium was the manipulation of light through the camera. In this regard, Patrizia C. McBride has argued that it is this very quality of light that "vexed painting in the Western tradition" as it proposed an art form so intrinsically linked with and determined by modernism. It posed the question of what a modern art might look

[174] Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered", 12.

like.[175] McBride's reiteration of Moholy-Nagy's theory that photography could be delineated and circumscribed by light — not only as a material, but also as a method or process — provides one possible sketch of a desire to ontologically segregate painting and photography, valuing the latter as distinctly and dominantly modern. This perspective relies on the interpretation of photography as fundamentally mechanical and as belonging, accordingly, to the modern period. In this way, photography relies less than painting on the human hand — this represents only one opinion, recalling Lifson's description of Stieglitz's view that photography is fundamentally linked to the hand — and is instead characterized by its use of the instrument that permits the making of pictures. In this view, rather than depending on the illusion of a likeness to the world, photography makes use of light to transfer a trace of reality to photosensitive material in a manner not dissimilar to an imprint. It is this notion of the index that fixes photography to the real world so that even in the absence of verisimilitude or the object itself in the image, the process of making that photograph incurs an indisputable presence through the trace that links it to reality.[176]

i. SCIENTIFIC AND ARTISTIC

In the period in question, independent photographic societies and exhibitions began to appear, establishing an artistic network specifically dedicated to the medium.

[175] Patrizia C. McBride, "Narrative Semblance: The Production of Truth in the Modernist Photobook of Weimar Germany", *New German Critique*, No. 115 (Winter 2012), 176. This definition is in conjunction with the 2018 Tate Modern exhibition, *Shape of Light*, which situates photography as first and foremost a medium concerned with and produced by and via light.
[176] Debates around the indexical value of photography explore this trace or imprint in more detail. See Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America".

In 1928, the French journalist, Florent Fels, in reference to the "The First Salon Indépendant de la Photographie", announced the necessary departure of photography from painting:

> Above all we wished to avoid 'artistic' photography, photography inspired by painting, engraving, or drawing… [some photographers] go back to the technique of the Impressionist painters and adopt it for photography, and so we get sunsets on the banks of the Seine, sunlight through the branches of a bosky grove, all aesthetic that finds its proper outlet in painting but has nothing to do with the strict laws of photography dedicated to two tones, white and black.[177]

By deploying the phrase "go back", Fels brings into play a rhetoric centred upon notions of progression and regression, such that photographers who look to painting as their model for the production of photographs undermined the desire to link photography with the advance of knowledge. According to Fels, elements such as atmospheric quality, as expressed in artistically motivated images that captured sunsets and sunlight, were not to be taken as appropriate subjects as they risked recalling the experimentation with colour pursued by the Impressionists.[178]

While certain colour processes existed by this time, the most straightforward and reliable photographic technology was black and white. If photography was, therefore, to be associated with science, knowledge or information, this science was described by a monochrome aesthetic quality. As such, even though humans see in

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[177] Florent Fels, "The First Salon Indépendant de la Photographie", (1928) in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings 1913–1940*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 23–24.
[178] Moholy-Nagy criticized Alfred Stieglitz's photograph of a Parisian Street scene from 1911 for being too Impressionistic. See *Painting, Photography, Film*, 49.

colour, and even though painters had used colour in expressive markings before the emergence of photography, the new medium and thus, information, was communicated in black and white. Thus to perceive scientifically in a manner that foregrounds the assumption of evidence was to experience the truth as monochrome. Yet, what Fels's argument fails to account for is the considerable range of greys that occur between the two extremes, even within a monochromatic palette. Moreover, Fels's rigid opposition to the artistic in his assessment of the ontological capacity of the camera lens fails to include various levels of blur and sharpness in a manner that is altogether distinct from painting and is made possible by the mechanics of the photographic apparatus.[179] Thus, the idea of the camera as a vehicle implicated in the progressive acquisition of knowledge or information was undermined by Fels's own neglect of photography's variable potency. Just as certain paintings adopted an atmospheric perspective to communicate depth or recession by changing colour, tone or focus, the camera can keep certain objects in focus while blurring others. Moreover, the camera can manipulate the textural quality of objects in the foreground or background and thereby suggest or invent variations of distance between or proximity of certain objects or planes.

Florence Henri, who was involved in both the Bauhaus and the Académie Moderne in Paris with Ozenfant and Léger produced many photographs emblematic of this debate. Exemplary in this regard is Henri's *Abstract Composition (Handrail)* (c. 1930) (Figure 2.0), which features the top of a handrail with a spiral detail, presented out of focus, despite being the subject of the image. The companion handrail on the far side of the steps is also out of focus and is depicted as a series of

[179] For a critique of the fuzzy photograph, see Moholy-Nagy and Professor Schaja. "Sharp or Fuzzy?" (1929) in *Moholy-Nagy* ed. Krisztina Passuth. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 306–309.

blurred lines composing a diagonal axis grid with the same spiral décor at the top.[180] On the other hand, the ground close to the lens is sharply focussed, such that each pebble is perceptible in great detail. This does not mean, however, that Henri does not make use of atmospheric perspective. The ground recedes dramatically toward the back of the image and becomes increasingly blurred, while the entire image fades out into nothing in the top left and right corners. While the title suggests that the photograph represents a handrail, it also emphasises that this is definitively an abstract composition, where place is prioritized over object and textures are foregrounded. Confusing the photograph's shift in emphasis from object to setting, whereby the surrounding is privileged by way of its pictorial clarity, Henri challenges conventional pictorial composition by blurring what ought to be most graspable, rendering abstract status to the image.

Abstraction here is the product of photographic techniques, such as cropping, manipulation of depth of field etc. Yet, I do not view this as definitively opposed to Fels's statement that "a good photograph is, above all, a good document.".[181] While Henri's photograph certainly takes liberties when it included an altogether unusual use of sharp focus or blurriness, it is all the same, a *good* document. I do not wish to proceed by attempting to qualify what a *bad* vs. *good* document might entail. I do, however, wish to dispel the association of *good* with conventional sharpness or clarity in photography so as to allow for experiments such as Henri's *Abstract Composition (Handrail)* to enter into the realm of document as well as abstraction.

For his part, Strand, in an effort to describe the specificities of photography, proposed the following in 1917:

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[180] See L. Moholy-Nagy and Professor Schaja. "Sharp or Fuzzy?" (1929) in *Moholy-Nagy* ed. Krisztina Passuth. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 306–309.
[181] Fels, "The First Salon Indépendant de la Photographie", 25.

> The photographer's problem therefore, is to see clearly the limitations and at the same time the potential qualities of his medium, for it is precisely here that honesty, no less than intensity of vision, is the prerequisite of a living expression. This means a real respect for the thing in front of him, expressed in terms of chiaroscuro (color and photography having nothing in common) through a range of almost infinite tonal values which lie beyond the skill of human hand.[182]

Strand articulates that it is equally important to acknowledge photography's limitations as well as its abilities in order to develop a practice grounded in 'honesty'. As such, an 'honest' depiction was necessarily a black and white one in so far as it referred to a photographic document. If photography came to be considered the medium of honesty and, if to begin with and for years after, images were produced in black and white, then truth, and the vision that accompanied it, were subconsciously accepted as monochrome or bichrome. As such, realism in black and white constituted a revision of human coloured vision as close to truth. Abstraction, then, was associated not with seeing less, but with the innovation of a way of seeing that was esteemed to be truer and more real.

It is useful here to return to Danto's description of the aim of the *paragone* is useful to return to here: the contest between mediums that served to promote one over the other, in this case, photography over painting. Unburdening photography of what it could not do by way of affirming its limitations could be consequently advantageous in exploring what it is exactly that photography was *distinctly* good at doing.

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[182] Paul Strand, "Photography" (1917) in *Photographers on Photography*, ed. Nathan Lyons. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 136.

The shift from inferiority to advantage can be seen at the end of the time period I am examining. In 1936, in the context of on-going confrontations of photography by painters, and in an effort to promote the photographic medium, Surrealist poet Louis Aragon condemned painters in the following manner:

> In proportion to their talent, even the greatest of the painters became absolute ignoramuses. They sought to make their paintings represent and signify less and less. They drowned themselves in the delectation of mannerism and material, and lost themselves in abstraction. Nothing human remained on their canvases and they were content to become the demonstrators of the technical problems of painting. They ceased painting for men, and no longer painted for anyone but painters.[183]

In aiming to build a case for realism in photography, arguing that the medium fundamentally concerns itself with the naturalistic depiction of the world, Aragon situated photography not only in opposition to painting, but also, more specifically, against painting's turn towards abstraction. This shift to abstract painting was judged by Aragon to be deplorable insofar as it left painting without content and elitist, inasmuch as it was seen to be reserved for exploration by painters alone. Aragon was disenchanted with experimentation, which constituted for him a veritable mishap in painterly production that required critique and condemnation. It should be noted briefly that Aragon's 1926 novel *Paris Peasant* had a significant impact on Benjamin,

[183] Louis Aragon, "The Quarrel Over Realism", (1936), in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings 1913–1940*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 74. Damisch references a conversation between Matisse and Aragon from 1942 on a drawing of a tree by Matisse, and his effort to make sense of the difference "between abstraction and the art that he refused to characterize as 'abstract', whereby he ultimately concludes that he has created "'the sign of the tree'". He goes on to elucidate a semiological discussion by de Saussure on the tree, "Remarks on Abstraction", 138.

the details of which have been explored in an article by Vaclav Paris who argues that Aragon and Benjamin had a "shared political affect" that was both revolutionary and nostalgic.[184]

Photography was often perceived as providing a new method of vision that represented an alternative to the vision available through the human eye, and even an enhancement of its capabilities. Revisiting Clement Greenberg's strong claim "that the true nature of photography lay in its naturalism", Joel Eisinger has written that: "the critics of photography… wanted to undermine photographic naturalism, but they had tremendous difficulty getting down to the formal criticism that would allow them to do so because the weight of naturalism was so great".[185] As such, there occurred the well documented and much discussed disconnect between the Pictorialist movement and the subsequent 'straight' photography that Stieglitz went on to promote.[186] While there may be instances of 'straight' photography that can be considered photographic abstractions, its position was nevertheless characterized by a commitment to realism. To produce a 'straight' photograph was to reject excess technical manipulations that compromised the integrity of photography's responsibility to convey the real, and not a modified image.

My argument proposes that the abstract 'straight' photograph demonstrates an array of photography's capabilities: to sharpen or blur an image, capture light on celluloid that corresponds to the natural world and what was situated before the camera, while also partaking in artistic choice, intent and expression. My position aims to bridge the gap between realism and abstraction in order to describe how

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[184] Vaclav Paris, "Uncreative Influence: Louis Aragon's Paysan de Paris and Walter Benjamin's Passagen-Werk." *jml: Journal of Modern Literature* 37, no. 1 (2013): 24.
[185] Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995.), 4.
[186] This can be found in Stieglitz's photography journal, *Camera Work*, which was active between 1903 and 1917.

photography is always actively engaged in both. For example, Henri's handrail photograph does not do away with the naturalism or realism that is intrinsic to the photographic process. Yet, without manipulating the photograph to create a fictional image, she produces an image that demonstrates elements of abstraction: namely, the unconventional use of focus and fuzziness that troubles the traditional relationship of foreground with subject and background with setting.

Undeniably, Henri's photograph reveals the tensions between realism and abstraction, but in no way suggests that they are incompatible. Rather, I would argue that through the partnership or collaboration between realism and abstraction, the handrail photograph is emblematic of the duality of photography: it is at once a source of information and also demonstrates artistic and aesthetic practice.

Henri's photograph is very much a product of the debates taking place in the historical context in which she worked. It reflects how the camera radically changed how methods of vision were construed not only with regard to the everyday, but also with particular reflection on how this technology would change older forms of representation and perception, namely painting. In his book, *Painting Photography Film* (1927), Moholy-Nagy includes a photograph by Stieglitz of a Parisian street adding the following caption: "The triumph of Impressionism or photography misunderstood. The photographer has become a painter instead of using his camera **photographically**" (Figure 2.1).[187] The term manipulation is related to the use of the hand so that the manual is posited as opposing the mechanical: the paintbrush in hand

[187] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 49. See Patrizia McBride on Moholy-Nagy's *Painting Photography Film* and his use of illustrations as well as a dynamic design for the layout of certain illustrated pages, "Narrating in Three Dimensions: László Moholy-Nagy's 'Vision in Motion', in *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany"*, (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 83–110. Also discussed in this chapter is Moholy-Nagy's different approach to painting and photography, 87 and his concept of *Gestaltung*.

is in conflict with the camera as machine. Nonetheless, Stieglitz, as the editor of the publication *Camera Work*, explored the question of how photography might be approached as aligned with painting through the writings that he featured, which at times adopted a more forgiving approach to painterly or expressive involvement in photography. This is not to say there was an embrace of painting over photography: quite the opposite.

In the fourteenth edition of *Camera Work* (1906), Stieglitz published an article by George Bernard Shaw that counter-intuitively but presciently argues for the expressiveness of photography as opposed to what he regards as the mechanical qualities of painting. He offers the following two statements:

> If I only knew how stupid a painter can be, I would admit that many painters have no opinions, no mind, nothing but an eye and a hand. Granted; but the camera has an eye without a hand; and that is how it beats even the stupidest painter. The hand of the painter is incurably mechanical: his technique is incurably artificial.[188]

> Now if it could be proved against the camera that its lines were ruled and its curves struck with a compass, there would be some sense in the parrot-cries of mechanicalness. The truth is that it is as much less mechanical than the hand as the hand is less mechanical than the compass. The hand, striking a curve with its fingers from the pivot of the wrist or shoulder, is still a compass, differing from the brass one only in the number of movements of which it is capable.[189]

[188] George Bernard Shaw, "The Unmechanicalness of Photography", *Camera Work*. No. 14 (1906–04),18.
[189] Shaw, "The Unmechanicalness of Photography", 19.

In these passages, Shaw seeks to both condemn painting as a viable artistic practice of modern times, as well as strip it of characteristics that had often been cause for praise and celebration (e.g. as a vehicle for personal, intuitive or expressive representations of the world). Instead of foregrounding the mechanical dimension of photography, which would have acknowledged photography's distinct methods for representation (the way Moholy-Nagy approaches the medium), Shaw insists on grounding or defining photography in relation to what he took to be its fundamentally humanist motivation.

According to Shaw, the human hand or "compass" is closer to the machine than is the camera. Moreover, it is the hand that fails the artist, constrained by a degree of immobility and rigidity from which the disembodied eye of the camera is liberated. It cannot be confirmed whether Stieglitz agreed or disagreed with this premise, but he found it sufficiently striking and compelling to publish it in his magazine at this pivotal moment of trying to define how photography might propose or reveal new ways of seeing and representing the world.

Greenough recounts that Stieglitz's initial conception of photography was associated with science and functional considerations, and that his view may have been the consequence of his having studied mechanical engineering at the Technische Hochschule. There, in Berlin, he also studied photography in the 1880s with Hermann Wilhelm Vogel, who advocated for and used new chemical and mechanical advances in the field.[190] Indeed, it was Stieglitz's view that:

[190] Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and the 'Idea of Photography'", 13. Stieglitz's remark as quoted by Theodore Dreiser, "A Remarkable Art," *The Great Round World* 19 (3 May 1902), 434.

> The photographer was not at the mercy of his machine, but that he could control it, manipulate it, and 'do what [he] wanted it to.' It was this belief in the plastic nature of photography, rooted firmly in his knowledge of its science and technology, that led Stieglitz to champion so ardently the metrics of artistic photography.[191]

In this way, for Stieglitz, scientific and artistic aims were intertwined with one another in photography. The medium would, through its functioning and processes, as well as its execution and delivery, participate in both disciplines. Greenough relays, moreover, how Stieglitz was most interested in Picasso's work, which was shown at his gallery, 291, and he "enthusiastically accepted the idea that art, in order to represent more than material presence, must be abstract" and commended Picasso on "'bringing back art to its true expression'" as well as endorsing what he labelled his "'antiphotographic' vision" as a way to celebrate abstract art.[192]

I want to conclude this section by briefly looking at Benjamin's account of the "optical unconscious", and his allusion to a form of empirical knowledge that photography makes possible. Suggesting that photography has the capacity to assist in scientific research he writes the following: "For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: 'other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious".[193] In this way, and recalling his statement on the moment prior to taking a step, Benjamin describes the ability of photography to see in a manner that is in excess of the human

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[191] Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and the 'Idea of Photography'", 13.
[192] Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and the 'Idea of Photography'", 19. Quotes: "Stieglitz on Photography", 9 and 10, Stieglitz to John Galsworthy, 8 October 1912, YCAL, and "Stieglitz on Photography", 11.
[193] Benjamin, "Little History of Photography", 510.

eye. This allows for deeper inquiry into the nature of worldly phenomena, such as the intricate details of a step. By virtue of the specificities of its mechanics, photography has the capacity to see what goes unseen by the human eye, what transpires unconsciously, and what is understood only after the development of a photograph, rather than consciously perceived at the instant of the photographic capture. As such, the aptitude of photography allows the human eye to see the in-between spaces that the limited natural perceptual experience provided by the eye does not.. The optical unconscious, then, refers to that which the camera sees almost by mistake or in spite of itself, that which *slips into* an image, unseen by the photographer, but registered nonetheless by the camera.

In the following passage, Benjamin describes what the camera can capture: "details of structure, cellular tissue, with which technology and medicine are normally concerned – all this is, in its origins, more native to the camera than the atmospheric landscape of the soulful portrait".[194] Here, a distinction is made between traditions in painting and the new opportunities made possible by the camera, which get associated with empirical research within scientific contexts. Moreover, through these scientific capabilities, there is often the feeling that the viewer gains access to new modes of visual experience and, thereby, sees more. The detail becomes the focal point over the scenic or contextual, whereby the picture as pictorial is no longer in the foreground.

[194] Benjamin, "Little History of Photography", 510. In fact, a key interest for me has been an effort to locate atmosphere in photography, and I am attracted to Benjamin's reference to the atmospheric for this reason. I will probe the question of atmosphere in photographs throughout this thesis as something that is tangible, palpable yet only visible to a certain extent. My questions have included: How are atmospheres, moods, feelings or environments created in photography? How is atmosphere subsequently documented, if at all? My interest lies in the ways in which atmospheres might get communicated using photography, given a wide history of painting weather as well as climatic environments. These artists include, for example, Turner and Constable. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4 with reference to Stieglitz's *Equivalents* series.

Instead, there opens the possibility for alternative or experimental composition, the oblique perspective, the all-over, the zoomed in or enlarged, etc.

Contemplating the optical unconscious, Benjamin theorizes the following on photography:

> […] photography reveals in this material physiognomic aspects, image worlds, which dwell in the smallest things – meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams, but which, enlarged and capable of formulation, make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical variable.[195]

This description of the function of the optical unconscious calls forth anew the dialogue with regard to photography that is concerned with distance and proximity. Photography brings us visually closer to that which the human eye cannot perceive, not only through the technology of lenses and the capacity to capture objects microscopically, but also in the mobility of photographic reproductions, globally transported. In this mode of thinking, photography might be considered as being a scientific tool before an artistic medium and, according to Benjamin, one that lends itself better to exercises in exactitude rather than atmosphere.

And yet, it is through this empirical capacity that magic is activated: the human eye, through photography, is given access to that which it cannot perceive on its own, and this new admission into a forensic vision offers a strange and enchanted dream world. With respect to the example of cells, photography brings the viewer much closer to them and they now become perceptible. They are rendered close up so

[195] Benjamin, "Little History of Photography", 512.

as to make visible microscopic detail. With this nearness, however, come distance, unfamiliarity and abstraction.

ii. SEEING AND PICTURING

Describing her husband, Sybil Moholy-Nagy revealed how "he saw children and cats, old houses and the steel skeletons of mammoth factories, mountain lakes and the pavement patterns of city streets, with a camera eye that tried to be human before being realistic".[196] Sybil's sentiment that distinguishes the human from the realistic, so that one does not equate the other offers another perspective on what is included within the category of the real.

In an effort to locate photography's priority in developing a vision for itself, Peter Galassi proposes a different view:

> The ultimate origins of photography — both technical and aesthetic — lie in the fifteenth-century invention of linear perspective. The technical side of this statement is simple: photography is nothing more than a means for automatically producing pictures in perfect perspective. The aesthetic side is more complex and is meaningful only in broader historical terms.[197]

Galassi goes on to say, however, that practically, photography would not have suited Renaissance composition as, instead of developing a "rational basis of picture-

[196] Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Experiment in Totality*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 28.
[197] Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, 12. See Rosalind Krauss on Galassi in "Photography's Discursive Spaces", *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1986), 134–135.

making," photography serves to produce "a frankly flat picture from a given three-dimensional world".[198] This view of photography assumes that the goal or ambition of the medium is to render the world in two dimensions and leaves little room for different intentions to arise from different users of the camera.

While three-point perspective, used prolifically in the Renaissance and designed to project views from multiple directions, such as from above and below, may seem initially to correspond with Moholy-Nagy's conception of 'faulty photographs', this link does not adhere to the strong Renaissance motivation of achieving coherence. Instead, Moholy-Nagy's photographs that adopt oblique angles are in the service of seeing the world in a new way with little effort to harmonize or refer to human optical experience. While Galassi's suggestion that photography offered the best tool for this method, he does not consider the modernist departure away from coherent perspectives in photography. More specifically, Galassi's argument does not account for those moments when photography goes abstract and intentionally disregards the organization of compositions of congruous elements.

It seems that Galassi's definition was constructed with Renaissance painting in mind, rather than with a consideration of the unique and intrinsic features of the medium itself. Galassi goes on to describe an alternative compositional strategy, arguing that, photography's actual contribution lies in the rendering of three-dimensional objects into a flat field. Here, "the photographer was powerless" despite the fact that the camera was a "tool for perfect perspective".[199]

The problem with Galassi's approach in the present context is that his rhetoric makes use of terms typically associated with painting rather than photography. He therefore misses the opportunity to say something specific about photography itself

[198] Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, 18.
[199] Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, 17.

and does not address where photography departs from established traditions, even within the confines of the medium itself. My focus, by contrast, has been to account for anomalous photographs, to describe them as pertaining acutely to the photographic medium, and finally, to explore how they fit in with the understudied notion of abstract photography.

Returning to the idea of expanded vision, in his text "Photography is Creation with Light", Moholy-Nagy explores the ways in which the camera offers a more developed and sophisticated method for seeing. This method transcends what the human eye can achieve on its own and, by extension, one that also is not possible through drawing and painting. Moholy-Nagy makes the following claim:

> As far as expansion of vision is concerned, even the presently imperfect lens is no longer bound by the narrow limits of our eye. No instrument of manual creation (pencil, paint-brush, etc.) is able to fix comparable details of the world. Equally it is impossible for either manual means or the eye to capture the quintessence of movement. Even the lens's possibilities for distortion — so-called defective photographs (bottom view, top view, transverse view) — must by no means be estimated only in a negative way; they actually provide unbiased visual effects which our eye, being bound by rules of association, is unable to achieve.[200]

In the last portion of his statement, Moholy-Nagy suggests that the human eye is culturally coded and constructed to such an extent that it fails to generate new modes of vision as opposed to the camera, which does so by virtue of its lens as an optical tool. Moreover, Moholy-Nagy makes reference to photographs that adopt a worm's or

[200] Moholy-Nagy, "Photography is Creation with Light", 303.

a bird's eye view, an instance of which is materialized in his *Bauhaus Balconies* (1927) photograph (Figure 2.2).[201] In this photograph, the viewer is afforded the opportunity to see Walter Gropius's building in such a way that it is instinctively linked with mechanical or photographic vision. The human figure in viewed from an atypical manner, i.e. from below, so that he or she reflects on the implication of bodies in this process of new vision.

Moholy-Nagy was intrigued by the potential of "the photographic camera *to make visible* existences which cannot be perceived or taken in by our optical instrument, the eye; *i.e., the photographic camera can either complete or supplement our optical instrument, the eye*".[202] The camera, deemed as capable of seeing that which is in excess of what the human eye can perceive, was regarded as having not only enhanced human perception but also, as Moholy-Nagy states, having "completed" it. This played a role in satisfying the desire to see fully. In a similar vein, in 1964, Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan maintained the position that all media are extensions of the human senses.[203]

Moholy-Nagy goes on to describe "faulty photographs" as: "the view from above, from below, the oblique view, which today often disconcert people who take them to be accidental shots".[204] He continues:

> The secret of their effect is that the photographic camera reproduces the purely optical image and therefore shows the optically true distortions, deformations, foreshortenings, etc., whereas the eye together with our intellectual

[201] Moholy-Nagy published this photograph in *Painting, Photography, Film* with the following caption: "The optical truth of perspectival construction", 60. With the same worm's eye view, the photograph preceding Moholy-Nagy's own is one by Renger-Patzsch, commenting, "Effect as of animal power in a factory chimney", 59.
[202] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.
[203] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.
[204] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.

> experience, supplements perceived optical phenomena by means of association and formally and spatially creates a **conceptual image.** Thus in the photographic camera we have the most reliable aid to a beginning of objective vision.[205]

This new vision is described not only as an extension of what the human eye is capable of capturing, but also as including within it a significant shift in how people would now perceive the world in ways that modified or revised vision conceptually. Moholy-Nagy's phrase "optically true distortions" is striking and helps to illuminate certain ways in which atmospheres function, that is, for example, when distortions are made into something true as opposed to false. To return to the example of the blur in depictions of movement, it is the distortion of the still, detailed and clear image that augments its representational capacity. Now with photography and specifically through the faulty images that propose new angles from which to optically organize visual information, vision itself had to be reconsidered and was, forcibly, through the ubiquity of photographic images, implemented in human sensorial experience.

Moreover, Moholy-Nagy's reference to the beginning of "objective vision" should be read as a trope that accompanies or underpins the expectations of photography. Despite experiments of illusion and trompe l'oeil as well as abstraction or camera-less photography, such as Moholy-Nagy's own photograms, the pursuit of objectivity in vision remained a concern. As photography was progressively associated with objectivity, and thus with the delivery of supportable or hard observation, understanding and embracing abstract photography increasingly became a challenge.

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[205] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.

iii. FLATNESS AND DEPTH

This section further explores efforts to determine the expansive or limited characteristics of photography. These questions appear in writings by Amédée Ozenfant and Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), who critique photography for being too literal and straightforward.[206] They argue that as a medium, photography ultimately fails to summon the essence of objects and results in a sterile or static image. With this in mind, they state in their essay "After Cubism":

> We know how far photography falls short of providing unified images such as we have tried to define; we know this from photographic portraits, for example, which if shot frontally almost never give any hint of the profile. A beautiful painted portrait, by contrast, gives us, through judicious distortion, a sensation of the subject as a whole, study of the most beautiful portraits proves this and shows that they are in no way imitations of the subject, but rather subtle constructions that produce a complete expression.[207]

For Ozenfant and Jeanneret, photography fails to render an image that considers the three-dimensionality of its subject and, therefore, only represents a fraction or fragment of an object and does so in a manner that is altogether flat. They assert that painting, by contrast, can yield a more comprehensive and full depiction of a given object.

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[206] I will continue to look Ozenfant and Jeanneret's text, "After Cubism", in Chapter 5 in the context of their ideas around representing one thing to elicit the aura of another.
[207] Amédée Ozenfant and Jeanneret, "After Cubism", translated by John Golding in *L'esprit nouveau: Purism in Paris, 1918–1925.* Ed. Carol S. Eliel. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2001),163.

It is worth mentioning that in the 'original' *paragone* between painting and sculpture, painting came out on top because of its illusionism and ability to create three dimensions out of two. Interestingly enough, the fragmentation and flattening of an object are both techniques that artists have appropriated in order to yield more abstract images. It would be false to deny the flattening and fragmentary features of Purist compositions, whereby still-life objects are often placed on a single plane yet painted in such a way to as to allude to overlap, whereby one vase or bottle communicates as being in front of or behind another.

This debate on the frontal versus profile portrait brings to mind a set of three photographs taken by Bauhaus master Josef Albers entitled *Amédée Ozenfant, Dessau*, dated 1930-31: in one, Ozenfant's left profile is shown; in another his right profile and, finally, in a third, his face appears in a frontal position (Figure 2.3). This is highly reminiscent of the 'mug shot' police photograph evoked by Albers and Sekula in the introduction. All three images of Ozenfant are close-ups and suggest a shallow space so that depth or flatness is consequently derived from Ozenfant's face rather than from a contextual background or from the space he occupies.

What makes these images so fascinating in this context is that the two profile images render Ozenfant's face flat and it becomes difficult to discern what he might look like from the front or to imagine a depth in his face from that angle. By contrast, in the frontal portrait, his nose protrudes forward toward the camera lens and his ears recede toward the background, not only spatially, but also by being slightly out of focus. This could be due to adjustments in the size of the aperture, so that an increased or decreased amount of light admitted to the camera determines how much the image is in focus. In order to direct attention to certain key features and render certain elements of the image in focus, the photographer could widen the aperture,

even when there is considerable available light. The blur, therefore, asserts itself as the outcome of a photographic method that can be employed to suggest deep or receding space, possible only through its being occupied by an object or subject in three dimensions. In addition, while Ozenfant's face is positioned frontally before the camera, his body appears to be facing toward the right, which implies that Ozenfant would have had to turn his head to face the camera in order to produce a pose wherein his face is frontally fixed.

These photographic portraits of Ozenfant are consistent with Albers's pedagogical exercises in de-familiarization. Eva Díaz describes Albers's exercises as including instructions to students to draw their names backwards and in cursive as if they were reflected in a mirror with their non-writing hand, denying the conscious hand to use a less automatic motor method. This use of a mirror in the context of writing troubled "sterile habits of observation" in order to promote considered line making.[208] She explores Albers's interest in "direct seeing" which surveyed how social constructions fed and fueled the ways in which "perceptual habits" were made manifest and how attention to this could permit such "routine cognitive associations" to be altered.[209] As such, the emphasis is not on an aesthetic practice of looking that is divorced from social connotations or cultural associations. Instead, this kind of influence is acknowledged and attended to in order to provoke potential transformations in familiar habits of looking, with the larger project of proposing and practicing self-conscious looking that could lead to new ways of seeing. Díaz writes:

> Because optical impressions and reactions are highly susceptible to manipulation or error, our understanding of and reflection on visual data —

[208] Eva Díaz, "The Ethics of Perception", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Jun., 2008), 260. Quote from Albers, Search versus Re-Search (Hartford, Conn.: Trinity College Press, 1969), 49.
[209] Díaz, "The Ethics of Perception", 260.

> that is, the way we 'image' or represent the world in the process of perception — must be carefully trained.[210]

Although it is indeed simpler to represent and reflect the world visually in ways that are altered through this mediation, a self-aware and reflexive approach to vision and to methods of looking would inaugurate new patterns or rituals.

Returning to Albers's three photographic portraits of Ozenfant, I wish to bring into play the work of Mary Ann Doane, who has written extensively on the close-up particularly in the context of film. The close-up is the shot "most fully associated with the screen as surface, with the annihilation of a sense of depth and its corresponding rules of perspectival realism. The image becomes, once more, an image rather than a threshold onto a world. Or rather, the world is reduced to this face, this object".[211] There is a clear exploration of depth and surface that elicits the ways in which, through the close-up, the face becomes a surface akin to a landscape, with portions that protrude and others that retreat in its full occupation of the frame's interior space. Ozenfant's face is the screen, occupying the entire frame, its surface described by the deepening of space through facial crevices and protruding features.

Moreover, these three photographs of Ozenfant's face viewed together relate to both Albers's other photography as well as his pedagogical strategies. Achim Borchardt-Hume relates how Albers's focus was often on the spaces in between series of photographs. As a result, the connections one might make between them so as to invite a consideration of what exactly gets communicated between the three portraits of Ozenfant:

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[210] Díaz, "The Ethics of Perception", 264.
[211] Mary Ann Doane, "The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Culture Studies.* 14:5 (2003), 91.

> Subverting the make-believe authority of the photographic image, in Albers's photographs the moment of truth resides not so much in any one shot but in the negative 'unseen' space in between. Demanding active participation of the viewer to fill this space — by, for instance, two dramatic shots of the Eiffel Tower's iron structure into an imaginary ascent — for Albers the human eye always remained the master with the camera its humble servant.[212]

Borchardt-Hume's example is crucially about space. Moreover, for Albers, it is not the camera that does the work the human eye cannot; rather, the human eye, which is the agent in the production of images, makes use of the camera as a mechanic tool. His point is also about association and narrative and the ways in which images are in conversation with one another. A series, for example, proposes a different relational experience from one image to another that includes movement as well as new lines or shapes and negative spaces. The viewing experience of such photographs is located in their relationship with one another and the interaction of the differences, however subtle, between the individual compositions.

In the spirit of learning to see differently and with intent, Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen recounts how Albers would instruct his students to draw a single object from various angles and perspectives, "even to dance around it, celebrating its sensuous three-dimensional quality".[213] She goes on to explain that, for Albers, the importance of such an exercise lay in the process of attending to the "matrix of things and events" in such a way that "tracing this spatio-temporal sequence emphasized that both the

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[212] Achim Borchardt-Hume, "Two Bauhaus Histories", in *Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World*. Ed. Achim Borchardt-Hume. (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 73–4.
[213] Josef Albers and Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, "Interacting with Albers", *AA Files*, No. 67 (2013), 124.

subject and the object existed in space and that everything in space had to do with time, movement and the constantly changing relationships between things".[214]

The triptych of Ozenfant is no exception to this schema: the focus is the relational quality that exists between the images so that, by way of the three viewpoints, Albers offers a spatial or situated presentation of Ozenfant's head, almost as if we might witness his movements turning from one side to the other. These experiments in perspective and angles through photography provided unique points of entry into an alternative vision proposed by photography, one that allowed for a degree of intimacy with or proximity to the subject. The next chapter — which examines the abstract nature photograph in contrast to more conventional landscape depictions — will open with another Albers case study which reveals that attending to the spaces in between images direct and inform the narrative of the images.

[214] Albers and Pelkonen, "Interacting with Albers", 124.

3 – LANDSCAPE AND THE ABSTRACT NATURE PHOTOGRAPH

In 1931, Josef Albers produced two photographic images, labelled in the Guggenheim collection as *Schlamm 1* and *2 (Sludge 1* and *2*) (Figures 3.0 and 3.1). *Schlamm 1* adopts an aerial perspective looking down onto a sludgy substance so that little islands of earth appear and peek above the water's surface, foaming around their edges. *Schlamm 2* also looks down towards the ground and captures supersaturated mud that creates diagonal lines, which move across the image. The sky and a tree are reflected on the surface of the water.

While these two photographs are catalogued as individual works by the Guggenheim online collection, the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation owns a version of the photographs presented as a collage. In this context, *Schlamm 2* is stacked directly above *Schlamm 1* on the same page with a border separating the two images.[215] At the Foundation, there is no reference to the word *schlamm* at all. Instead, this collage bears the title *Dessau, flooded streets during construction, Spring '31* (Figure 3.2). That the two images in the latter instance at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation are presented as a single collage rather than two stand-alone photographs suggests many things. In one respect, the presentation of the images juxtaposed as a single work collates the two photographic instances of muddy substances as a description of a connected larger scene. Moreover, by including within the image the reflection of the sky and a tree at the top of the collage, the joined image suggests a continuous landscape, whereby the gap between the images might function as a surrogate horizon, perhaps even reversing relationships to suggest the earth reflected in the sky.

[215] These are the only two versions in circulation that I have found of these photographs.

The application of different titles by the Guggenheim and the Foundation frames the works in entirely different ways: the use of the word *schlamm* refers to a natural occurrence, while *Dessau, flooded streets during construction, Spring '31* designates not only a place and a time, but also identifies a cause for the land's appearance. The latter does not refer to a purely natural phenomenon; rather the sludge is understood to be the result of rainfall on a construction site, a formation situated in-between the natural and built environment. Moreover, their distinction as separate photographs or as a collage whereby the two images communicate with one other in a manner is not dissimilar to the portraits of Ozenfant's face. In addition to their abstract composition whereby up and down is muddled and sky and puddle unite, their relationship to abstraction is further defined by their presentations. German avant-garde photographer and photojournalist Ilse Bing's photograph *Rue de Valois* (Figure 3.3) from 1932 also comes to mind. Bing's abstract photographs will continue to be evoked throughout the next three chapters as key examples that illuminate and deepen specific arguments on atmospheres or other discussed artists.

This chapter aims to situate landscape and nature photographs both as related to, as well as distinct from, one another, and investigates some of the dilemmas posed by the conflicting accounts of these images by Albers. I ask: how have instances of abstract photography illuminated or revealed how nature can be viewed as implicated in the man-made or the intervened environment? How does abstraction serve as the meeting point of landscape and alternative representations of nature that instantiate defamiliarizing phenomenological experience, such as seeing the sky in the ground?

I will examine a selection of case studies that photographically represent nature and that reside between avant-garde artistic production and scientific observation and documentation. I will argue that these photographs push the

boundaries of historical scholarly framings around the representation of nature. Moreover, I will query what it might mean to attend to photographs of nature that depart from landscape and reflect more abstract compositions or renderings. In this regard, I will propose that it is the presence or absence of a horizon line that distinguishes a landscape photograph from an abstract nature photograph. My argument presents the landscape as always incorporating a horizon and the abstract nature photograph as disorientating the viewer through the lack of an axis of orientation.

This chapter explores the ways in which three modernist photographers — Alfred Stieglitz, Josef Albers, Arvid Gutschow — have engaged in photographing the natural world and have experimented with photography of natural subject matter. I will apply a formalist-phenomenological methodology to engage in a close reading of these photographs and discuss the embodied experience of getting lost in them and trying to find one's bearings in both the familiar and disorienting.

With photography — and with painting in certain respects — a distinction between landscape and the abstract nature photograph must be detailed. Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock have mused on the following questions regarding the notion of landscape, particularly within the context of artistic representations:

> What, exactly, is a landscape? Is it a picture of wildness, or wilderness? Is it an image of a certain dimension or color? Can it contain humans, animals, houses, ships? Must a landscape always speak of beauty? Of solitude? Of

> rapture? Or poetic excess? Of homely everyday things? Can a landscape be symbolic? If so, of what?[216]

The reference to wildness or wilderness participates in a line of thinking that seeks to perceive nature or landscape as something untouched by humans or as something sublime, a concept that has been taken up mainly in aesthetics with competing definitions.[217]

In my own discussion, I make use of the term the sublime in a manner consistent with the definition proposed by Edmund Burke in 1757. For Burke, the sublime constitutes:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[218]

The sublime is the terrifying and appealing, the dangerous, the immense and the vast.[219] Burke links the sublime in nature to the feeling of *astonishment*, "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended",[220] In other respects, in addition to the picturesque, the term landscape is also conventionally used to describe a picture oriented horizontally, establishing a custom for artistic representation of natural

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[216] Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock, *Landscape as Photograph*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 10.
[217] For a good summary on other approaches to the sublime see, *The Sublime*, ed. Simon Morley, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010).
[218] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 34.
[219] Burke writes that a key element of the sublime is "greatness of dimension", 59.
[220] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 47. For more approaches to beauty see, *Beauty*, ed. Dave Beech, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009).

scenes, as opposed to the vertically oriented portrait.[221] The sublime is linked with emotion, experience, and intensity and the act of taking stock of this *astonishment*: bodily and emotional responses are simultaneously activated.

Jussim and Lindquist-Cock also introduce the term 'beauty', which opens up an entirely separate and complicated discourse on the subjectivity of beauty and on the potential pollution of the beautiful in nature through construction or other man-made intervention. Burke defines beauty as "a social quality; for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them (and there are many that do so), they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards these persons".[222] Burke's description extends beyond the human, so that many living things might register and appreciate the object of beauty.

On solitude, hermitage and nature, the following quote by Henry David Thoreau comes to mind: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived".[223] Interestingly enough, the discourse surrounding abstraction and modernism — as will be delineated with

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[221] The argument that landscape is necessarily oriented horizontally is a Eurocentric view that does not account for, for example, Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, which is often vertically oriented. Thus, the Western conventions of portraits as vertical and landscapes as horizontal are not essential or fundamental formats, but are culturally determined.

[222] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 36–37. Burke links beauty to passion, 73. He draws a distinction between the sublime (pain) and beauty (pleasure): "For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive", 101.

[223] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, (New York: Penguin, 2016).

reference to Amédée Ozenfant's conception of constants — concerns itself with the paring down of a life or aesthetics in order to arrive at this very essence.

One important question I want to pose is whether a landscape is effectively a *picture* or an *image* of natural or topographical scenes, rather than a feature of the way in which nature itself is constituted. That is, I want to explore if the term landscape is reserved exclusively for *representations* of nature or a mediation of the natural world that involves the cropping and fracturing of a larger natural setting. If this is the case, then landscape depends on an artistic tool to facilitate this mediation, such as a paintbrush or a camera. Following this logic, geographical terrain on its own does not constitute a landscape: the latter term insists on a visual interpretation and the consequent process of subjects rendered as pictures.

Jussim and Lindquist-Cock go on to claim that: "the landscape photograph, like poetry, seeks to convey not only feeling but an idea; regardless of whether it has as its content things not human, the human interpretation will always govern its meanings".[224] The person who *governs* meaning is not extractable from nature; rather human beings are always faced with the task of finding their place within it. Historically, however, such governing has not primarily been within the realm of either "feelings" or "ideas", but rather, and often violently, is manifested by way of very real and damaging imperium.

When thinking about the nature photograph, I would like to have in mind, particularly given today's climate crisis, the themes of power and control, and the links between the human desire to possess and own both the natural world and the images. The human ambition to own land is far from new and has resulted in countless wars and the colonization of a huge portion of the world. Today, this

[224] Jussim and Lindquist-Cock, *Landscape as Photograph*, 18.

ownership has an anthropocentric focus, causing the destruction of the planet. The desire to own images, however, is one that works hand in hand, and extends to the desire to control meaning and knowledge. For these reasons, I wish for the following statement by Susan Sontag to linger throughout this chapter:

> Images are more real than anyone could have supposed. And just because they are an unlimited resource, one that cannot be exhausted by consumerist waste, there is all the more reason to apply the conservationist remedy. If there can be a better way for the real world to include the one of images, it will require an ecology not only of real things but of images as well.[225]

The term ecology has to do with relationality: that is, it is the biological study of how organisms relate to one another in their environments and physical surroundings. It is with this idea of ecology and relationality that I will present the coming arguments.

i. ATMOSPHERES IN REVIEW

My wish is to move away from the picturesque, which dominated landscape picture making in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century with its particular set of conventions and aesthetic regulations.[226] Rather than seeking to distinguish nature from landscape, Rosalind Krauss has proposed the pairing of the

[225] Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador), 180. Andrew Ross has engaged with Sontag's concept of an "ecology of images" in his discussion of the militarism impact on the environment and the images of ecological devastation that are politically used in moments of extreme international conflict. He plays with assessing the different terms of the "ecology of images" and "images of ecology". See Andrew Ross, "The Ecology of Images" in *The Chicago gangster theory of life: Nature's debt to society*. (New York: Verso, 1995), 159–201.
[226] Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography,* 69.

term *view* with *landscape*. She suggests that photography participates in two discourses, particularly with regard to efforts to capture instances of nature, which she links to the artist's intention, i.e. whether the artist has "constructed" the work for a specific setting: (1) either as geology or (2) as aesthetic, that is, designed for the walls of an art exhibition.[227] Indicating that modernism was indeed always about "this constitution of the work of art as a representation of its own space of exhibition", Krauss proposes that the two discourses, geological and aesthetic, in the absence of clear distinctions, could become muddled or confused.[228]

This slippery territory leads her to further historical discussion on whether photography could be considered Art within the traditions of picture making or if, instead, it was distinctively and exclusively an objective instrument of science. She goes on to propose the distinguishing of 'view' from landscape, although she only clearly defines the first, and states that she hopes her use of the term 'landscape' is apparent. Writing that "*view* speaks to the dramatic insistence of the perspectively organized depth", Krauss claims that it is connected to authorship, often favouring publishers rather than makers or "operators", so that it is often the context of display that communicates most.[229] In this way, 'view' elicits the previously discussed issue with the two framings of Albers's sludge photographs, which demonstrate differences in museological frameworks and raise questions about authorship, asking: who titled what? The two formats presented of the sludge photographs, *Schlamm* and *Dessau, flooded streets during construction, Spring '31*, tell very different stories, determined very strongly by exhibition context and curatorial choices.

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[227] Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View", *Art Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 4, The Crisis in the Discipline (Winter, 1982), 313.
[228] Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View", 313.
[229] Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View", 314.

Krauss argues that landscape, largely accepted as a prolific genre of representation, changed after 1860 so that perspectival recession was replaced by diagonal understandings or "orderings" of the picture plane through the juxtaposition of extreme darks and lights.[230] In the depiction of a receding depth of field, attention to atmospheric sensibilities, such as the blurred effect of receding space, was replaced by objects in focus that were presented in a diagonal line. Such a description, moreover, lends itself to the notion of a landscape as *an aspect* of nature that has been intervened in in some way by humans — most significantly for this discussion, in its picturing — and thus, in the kinds of choices and effects implemented in this process.

Yet, this definition remains unsatisfying. 'View', by contrast, is demonstrated by "its exaggerated depth and focus, [and] opens onto a second feature, which is the isolating of the object of that view. Indeed, it is a 'point of interest,' a natural wonder, a singular phenomenon that comes to occupy this centering of attention".[231] While 'view' suggests a focus on a single element of interest, landscape could come to mean, by contrast, a scene that is vaster, one that suggests depth through diagonals rather than intersecting right angles as in a grid. Moreover, 'view' alludes to a pictorial effect, a focal interest that arises from the photograph, while landscape, also pictorial, is more intently tied to that component that makes it such: the horizon line. While 'view' may propose a different organisation of an image from 'atmospheric perspective', it does not mean that such images are devoid of atmosphere. With this in mind, I will explore the varying ways in which the term atmosphere can be employed in an effort to describe that which may seem or feel intangible in a photograph.

As there has been considerable scholarship on Stieglitz's *Equivalents* series and little to none on the images I will discuss by Albers and Gutschow, I will continue

[230] Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View", 312.
[231] Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View", 314–315.

to make use of these discussions as informing subsequent arguments.[232] I will continue to inquire about how ideas around nature and the natural within the context of photography might be approached, with attention to the environmental and the atmospheric as well as the abstract. In this way, I consider what it might mean to decontextualize nature photographically through the cut, the crop, the close up, and the aerial perspective so that landscape might appear as a study *about* texture, forms or patterns, rather than *of* clouds, water or earth. Viewing these instances in the larger context of modernist abstraction does not necessarily entail a concession to narratives that seek to divorce art from nature: studies about texture are still studies into the reality of such texture and consider the details through which that texture might be experienced. I thus maintain my exploration of abstract photography participating in mutually contributing camps of documentary and aesthetics.

I am interested, furthermore, in the materiality of these photographs and in their consequent immaterial quality — materiality and immateriality both relating differently to abstraction and atmosphere — in both the literal and conceptual meanings of the terms. Linking photography and modernism as both partaking in the problem of fraudulence — whereby it becomes increasingly difficult to visually discern fake from genuine, so that the category of art is called into question, and it is no longer clear what might count as instances of it — Krauss connects the groundlessness of the cloud images with Malevich's *White on White* (Figure 1.1).[233] Later on, she proposes that the cloud constitutes:

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[232] Krauss, Beck and Wilson, as aforementioned. Also see: Annear, Judy. "Clouds to Rain – Stieglitz and the Equivalents", *American Art*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring 2011), 16–19. Szarkowski, John. "The Sky Pictures of Alfred Stieglitz", *MoMA*, No. 20 (Autumn, 1995), 15–17.

[233] Rosalind Krauss, "Stieglitz/ 'Equivalents'", *October*, Vol. 11, Essays in Honor of Jay Leyda (Winter, 1979),130.

> [T]he trace of the atmosphere; conditions of wind and moisture are registered and made visible by configurations of clouds, which are themselves made visible by the refraction of light. In the way that clouds record or trace something that is itself invisible, they are natural signs.[234]

These signs, however, are not left 'natural', for, when they are rendered as photographs, they become mediated in such a way that they become signs of art, science and language by relinquishing any kind of familiar orientation.[235] It is indeed this very *dis*orientation that I wish to further examine and unravel.

Asking the question, "What on Earth?" David Campany has written that, as a photograph cedes the three dimensional in favour of the two, "an unorthodox vantage point may render abstract even the most clear photograph".[236] Discussing the two types of photographs that are at first conceptually far from abstract, the landscape and the forensic photograph, he concludes that they are often the images that signify most abstractly. In other words, 'abstract' does not act as the opposite of a scientific image, but is often a key quality of it, an example being when something is photographed microscopically. Moreover, for Campany the politics of abstraction consist of "strategically estranging" habits of vision so as to become assumed yet always precarious cultural norms.[237]

Krauss's disorientation and Campany's estrangement can be further linked to what Marshall McLuhan has labelled as the counter- or anti-environment which is, for him, created by the artist, who subsequently becomes "an enemy of society": "He

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[234] Krauss, "Stieglitz/ 'Equivalents'", 135.
[235] Krauss, "Stieglitz/ 'Equivalents'", 140.
[236] David Campany, "What's on Earth? Photography's Alien Landscapes", *Aperture*, No. 211, Curiosity (Summer 2013), 47.
[237] Campany, "What's on Earth? Photography's Alien Landscapes", 51.

doesn't seem to be very well adjusted. He does not accept the environment with all its brainwashing functions with any passivity whatever; he just turns upon it and reflects his anti-environmental perceptions upon it".[238] By proposing an anti-environment, McLuhan's artist invites thought and consideration of how existing structures (or environments) might be altered, made different, and, perhaps, even bettered. I suggest that this can even be understood as an abstraction of environment through the imagination of an alternative one, at least in the sense of proposing a challenge to dominating systems or environments.[239]

In her environmental theory, Donna Haraway introduces the term "Chthulucene", which advances the notion of "assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors" so that "maybe, but only maybe, and only with intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people will be possible".[240] She goes on:

> My purpose is to make 'kin' mean something other/more than entities by ancestry or genealogy. The gently defamiliarizing move might seem for a while to be just a mistake, but then with luck appear as correct all along. Kin-making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans.[241]

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[238] Marshal McLuhan, "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion", *Perspecta* n. 11, 1967, 165.
[239] McLuhan also proposes a time factor in the progression or evolution of environments and in the formation of new ones: "every new technology creates a new environment just as a motor car does, as the railway did, or as radio and airplanes do – any new technology changes the whole human environment, and envelops and includes the old environments. It turns these old environments into 'art forms': – old Model T's become precious art objects", "The Invisible Environment", 166. What becomes art or artifact as a result of becoming obsolete is not my concern here, however, it is a compelling argument when paired with the notion of environments as opposed to centered around objects.
[240] Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin", *Environmental Humanities*, Vol. 6, 2015, 160.
[241] Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin", 161.

Haraway's emphasis here on defamiliarization is analogous to the other terms explored: disorientation, estrangement, anti-environment, or vertigo.
In a way that is similar to the view put forward by Jane Bennett in her book *Vibrant Matter*, Haraway calls for the congregations of entities and acts of collaboration that oppose the anthropocene and that decentre the human, levelling it with other ecological agents. To materialize this revision of equality, Haraway instructs her readers to "make kin", to defamiliarize his/herself enough so to become family with the non-human.[242]

Just as sludge is difficult to describe, as each instance of it is composed of different materials of varying quantities and assumes a different form, atmosphere is forever evasive, escaping a comprehensive account or definition. Jean Baudrillard has written: "the systematic alternation between hot and cold is fundamentally a defining trait of the concept of 'atmosphere' itself, for *atmosphere is always both warmth and distance*".[243]

Always in between or, as Mark Dorrian claims, "the thing whose role is always to come between or to surround other things", atmosphere privileges the sensed proximally over the viewed in a way that is akin to feeling temperatures on the surface of one's skin, but also through to one's bones.[244] Dorrian, moreover, claims there is a distance inevitably implicated in atmosphere: "its peculiar attendant anxieties, whether spatial, emotional or epistemological… as haunted air, atmosphere has been the classic site of ontological uncertainty, a shifting space of hallucinatory

[242] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
[243] Jean Baudrillard, "Structures of Atmosphere", in *The System of Objects* (1966) (London: Verso, 2005), 44.
[244] Mark Dorrian, "Atmosphere and Distance", *Journal of Architectural Education*, 67:2 (2013), 283.

appearances, of phantasms, imaginings and dissimulation".[245] As it is ungraspable, tangible only subtly, unwittingly perhaps even unwillingly, atmosphere, though it may be sensed or felt, is always at a distance as a result of its lack of corporeality and its participation in abstraction.

In its state of being situated between things, atmosphere effectively never attains the status of being a thing itself. In this vein, Tonino Griffero argues that atmosphere is *not* an example of "detached, three-dimensional objects that are unusually convex and movable independently from other objects, and that are relatively durable and identical even in motion".[246] Similarly, Tim Ingold has written that:

> […] weather is not really an *object* of perception at all. We might use our eyes to survey the scene and pick out objects as foci of attention… The weather enters into visual awareness not, in the first place, as a thing we see, or even as a panorama, but as *an experience of light itself,*[247]

This reference to the phenomenological experience of light resembles the way in which we might characterize photography as materially made of light left on photosensitive materials. Griffero relates atmosphere to "clouds and shades" and claims that scholars have attended "to the 'veil' or the 'cloud' occulting the 'edge' of the thing itself than to strictly functional parameters, [and] rejoice[d] in the meticulous and occasionally exhausting description of phenomenical *nuances*".[248] This statement is rich for various reasons. Considering Albers's *schlamm*

[245] Dorrian, "Atmosphere and Distance", 283.
[246] Tonino Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, Translated by Sarah De Sanctis. (London: Routledge, 2016), 61.
[247] Tim Ingold, "The eye of the storm: visual perception and the weather", *Visual Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (October 2005), 97.
[248] Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, 4.

photographs, it is undeniable that they are atmospheric not only in their ambience, mood, or aura, but also in their literal depiction of air and water, climatically conjoining to form puddles, reflections and earthy matter. The word 'nuance' utilized by Griffero is important and noteworthy, as it likens atmosphere to a *quality* in a way that is difficult to *quantify*. While some encounters or experiences may be more atmospheric than others, or at the very least occur less subtly than others, atmosphere remains impossible to measure, experienced by way of an embodied inhabiting of an environment with a particular temper and set of vibrations.

Furthermore, Griffero speaks of an edge where atmosphere lies, or, rather, circulates around, in a way that is similar to architect Juhani Pallasmaa's account of atmospheric vision. Pallasmaa writes: "Atmosphere is altogether an unfocused quality. It has to be experienced in an unfocused and partly unconscious manner… so focused vision cannot make us insiders in a space. Only peripheral vision does".[249] This will come to light in the following chapter where I will discuss Paul Strand's Twin Lakes abstractions and their deliberate soft focus and atmosphere and their reliance on a vision that is deliberately imperfect or lacking in precision. While the camera may initially seem to promise and promote an extra human vision, a more perfected vision, the exclusive valorising of this vision fails to consider the variety of ways the camera can be manipulated to invent new visions that are specific to it, but that nonetheless evoke feelings or sensations experienced by human bodies.

The notion of peripheral vision — vision at the edge — refers to the experience of doing a double-take or, in other words, seeing something in the corner of one's eye and, unsure of what was seen, quickly turning one's head back again in

[249] Julian Pallasmaa, "Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience: A Conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa", *Journal for Architecture: Building Atmosphere OASE #91*, (Netherlands: NAI Publishers, 2013), 45.

an effort to capture what was thought to have been conceived, but this time in full vision. I suggest that atmosphere speaks to this experience of the double-take: of thinking one has perceived something, but not having grasped it in its entirety, looking back in an effort to visually encounter it whole, as a totality. However, the success of the double-take is never fulfilled, as with the totalising capture of atmosphere. Distance prevails over the possibility of obtaining a full understanding, information is only acquired tangentially, and a complete image of what is being sensed is never achieved, remaining elusive in its constant escape from possession or unhindered observation.

Acknowledging this distance, Dorrian describes atmosphere as *a medium*, and proposes the possibility of reconciling it "as the medium within which we are immersed as a collectivity and which we internalize through respiration — atmosphere can seem to be an agent of distance's overcoming and hence of connection".[250] This attempt at proximity, closeness and connection can be viewed as facilitated by photography, despite the initial feeling that photography opposes the peripheral, centring on an object of interest and excluding what does not fit into the frame.

While photography is admittedly always partial, abstract photography suggests compositions saturated with atmosphere so that they depict all that resists labelling as an object: the liminal, ephemeral or literally muddy substances. Certain instances of abstract photography picture the peripheral as all-over so that what is imagined existing outside the frame is a continuation of what is already perceived within it. In a landscape photograph, the blur might be employed to designate a background or a deepening of space while objects sit in the foreground. Atmosphere present in such an

[250] Dorrian, "Atmosphere and Distance", 283.

image could constitute an ambient frame as opposed to an expansive periphery without borders.

ii. ALFRED STIEGLITZ'S *EQUIVALENTS*

Between 1922 and 1935, Stieglitz made a series of approximately 350 photographs in which he turned his camera up toward the sky and photographed cloud formations. Within this series are smaller groups of photographs that Stieglitz titled: *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* (1922) (Figure 3.4) and *Songs of the Sky* (beginning in 1923) (Figure 3.5). These photographs exist in several collections including the George Eastman Museum (Rochester, NY), The Art Institute of Chicago, The Phillips Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, amongst others.[251]

Molly Nesbit has argued that in wanting to "transcend the common experience" and the "social roots of the document", Stieglitz had to contend with the tensions he saw in photographs as documents (always straight) and art photographs. Nesbit argues that "Stieglitz had to deprive them of their essential usefulness. Stieglitz could not countenance a hybrid picture that applied art to some useful purpose. In his mind it was all aesthetic or it was nothing".[252] In the argument that follows, I challenge this resolve to have the photographs exclusively belong to one category. The act of carefully observing the skies and taking a series of these cloud photographs is inherently documentary, and their aesthetic appeal stems directly from their

[251] I was able to view many of Stieglitz's cloud photographs at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester during my stay at the University of Rochester funded by the Worldwide Universities Network.
[252] Nesbit, "Photography and Modernity (1910–1930)", 109.

rootedness in capturing these real encounters. The *Equivalents* at once present the viewer with a familiar scene — looking up at the clouds so that they occupy a person's entire frame of vision — but this scene appears in a defamiliarized way, that is, in a photograph where there is no horizon line to ground the viewer.

By 1925, when Stieglitz started calling these photographs of clouds *Equivalents*, he had already established his format: the images were printed the same size as their negative, 4 by 5 inches, and placed behind a white mount with a 3 to 4 inch margin around the sides.[253] At times, Stieglitz would mount his photographs upside down or sideways and they were "printed darkly, accentuating the clouds against a black or nearly black sky.[254] Sarah Greenough claims that this physical turning of the photographs' orientation contributes to their abstract quality: "Our confusion determining a 'top' and a 'bottom' to these photographs, and our inability to locate them in either time or place, forces us to read what we know are photographs of clouds as photographs of abstracted forms".[255] John Beck, moreover, writes: "The objective in these photographs is to get as far away from the pictorial function as possible and to produce images that are closer to music in their lyrical abstraction".[256] This connection to music brings to light the opposing forces associated with both music and abstraction: that is, that they may participate phenomenologically in situated experience while also being associated with the spiritual or universal.[257]

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[253] Kristina Wilson, "The Intimate Gallery and the 'Equivalents': Spirituality in the 1920s Work of Stieglitz", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (Dec. 2003), 746.
[254] John Beck, "Signs of the Sky, Signs of the Times", 126.
[255] Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz and the 'Idea of Photography'", 24.
[256] Beck, "Signs of the Sky, Signs of the Times: Photography as Double Agent", *Theory, Culture & Society,* Vol. 28 (7–8) (2011), 126.
[257] See Ingold, "The eye of the storm", 98, for an expression of the links and asymmetry between sight and sound. Ingold makes reference to James Gibson's writings on *The ecological approach to visual perception*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

Minor White wrote about Stieglitz in relation to his cloud photographs: "To the photographer temperamentally compelled to work inwardly his medium forces him to use the outward landscape to manifest by way of the metaphor of the inner reality".[258] There is an undeniable link that is made time and again with Stieglitz's *Equivalents* to the spiritual as well as to the material, teasing out the tensions between inward and outward, or sky and earth. The title *Equivalents* has also been theorized about. White stated the following about Stieglitz:

> An accurate photographic rendering of a certain cloud, he would say, could be a portrait, an Expressionistic portrait in which the features could not be identified yet which would still be evocative of the person's uniqueness as known by Stieglitz — not precisely because a cloud is not a person — but equivalent.[259]

He professed that: "[…] in practice his cloud pictures transcended the minimum [meaning of the word equivalent], they were usually equivalent to his own experience with unseen and unseeable spirit itself".[260] Maria Morris Hambourg has written that the power of these cloud photographs lie in the "intangible vapors that might more

[258] Minor White, "The Photographer and the American Landscape", *Aperture*, Vol. 11, No. 2 [42] (1964), 54. This text is a review of the exhibition 'The Photographer and the American Landscape' at MoMA, which was Szarkowski's first major show as the director of the Department of Photography. The exhibition included works by Steichen, Stieglitz, Strand, Edward Weston, Harry Callahan and others. See exhibition publication: Szarkowski, *The Photographer and the American Landscape*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1963). Another important exhibition is entitled 'American Landscapes' held at MoMA, organised by Szarkowski in 1981, which displayed photographs from the museum's collection.
[259] Minor White, "THE LIGHT SENSITIVE MIRAGE", *Aperture*, Vol. 6, No. 2 [22] (1958), 77.
[260] White, "THE LIGHT SENSITIVE MIRAGE", 77.

easily be perceived as coextensive with ineffable feelings".[261] I am interested in the capacity of photographic depictions of atmosphere — the outside — as having the potential to parallel and invoke intangible feelings and experiences — the inside.

Similarly, Michael E. Hoffman and Martha Chahroudi quote Stieglitz and place the following passage underneath the illustration of his photograph *Dead Tree* (1927) (Figure 3.6):

> Shapes, as such, mean nothing to me, unless I happen to be feeling something within, of which an equivalent appears, in outer form. With others, shapes often seem to be of interest in themselves. To me, all this has nothing to do with *photography*. It has to do mainly with that which is merely pictorial…[262]

With these concerns in mind, Stieglitz asserted about his own practice: "I am interested in putting down an image only of what I have *seen,* not what it means to me. It is only after I have put down an *equivalent* of what has moved me, that I can begin to think about its meaning".[263] The word 'equivalent' is played with linguistically in these passages to create associations that match with the experience of taking or reflecting on the cloud photographs. As such, Stieglitz describes his

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[261] Maria Morris Hambourg, "From 291 to the Museum of Modern Art: Photography in New York 1910–37", in Maria Morris Hambourg and Christopher Phillips. *The New Vision: Photography between the World Wars. The Ford Motor Company Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 30.

[262] Alfred Stieglitz in Michel E. Hoffman, and Martha Chahroudi, "Spirit of an American Place: An Exhibition of Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz, November 22, 1980 – March 29, 1981", *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 76, No. 331, Spirit of an American Place: An Exhibition of Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz, November 22, 1980 – March 29, 1981 (Winter 1980), 16.

[263] Stieglitz in Hoffman, and Chahroudi, "Spirit of an American Place: An Exhibition of Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz, November 22, 1980 – March 29, 1981", 16. They also write that: "[…] Stieglitz said that all his photographs were 'equivalents,' and that 'all art is but a picture of certain basic relationships, an *equivalent* of the artist's most profound experience of life", 5.

allocation of meaning to the photographs as retroactive. In this way, the meaning or spiritual quality of the photographs are discovered and explored subsequent to their having been captured by the camera. The images are chosen entirely because of the initial appeal of their shape. For Stieglitz, being moved by the *Equivalents* is an act of reflection, a meditation on what has already been made.

While each *Equivalent* is unique, with its own texture and pattern, and variety of lights and darks that interact atmospherically with one another, I wish to draw attention to one example from the series, which is particularly visually disruptive, an *Equivalent* from 1927 in the Phillips Collection (Figure 3.7). This photograph depicts, of course, clouds, yet they only appear as an idiomatic pattern, resembling — but perhaps too textured to be — ripples in a lake caused by a strong wind blowing the water's surface in one direction.[264] Alternatively, the ripples resemble Albers's sludge: part water, part soil, and the lighter repeated lines reflecting the sky on the water's surface. It is unclear if we are looking up or down. The photograph has an all-over aesthetic, more so than other *Equivalents*, whereby there is no distinction between foreground and background in a manner that foreshadows Abstract Expressionism. The entire composition exudes an airy tactility, whereby the interactions between light and dark form what is recognizably a natural phenomenon, an atmospheric reaction, one that is not quite identifiable and leaves the viewer unsure if his/her attention is directed up to sky or downward.

On light and the sublime, Burke had the following to say: "A quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light, has yet a greater effect. But darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light".[265] As darkened images, Stieglitz's

[264] http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/Stieglitz-Equivalent1840+.htm. Accessed 28 September 2018.
[265] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, 65.

Equivalents necessarily function within this description, whereby their chiaroscuro effect brings forward both light and umbra at once.

Krauss has described the *Equivalents* as so disorienting, "almost to the point of vertigo", that it becomes difficult to distinguish up from down, with the consequence that they "lack that most primitive component of our own relationship to it, which is our firm orientation on the ground".[266] I have already addressed this vertiginous sensation as a result of the missing horizon. Moreover, extending this conception of ground from literal to aesthetic or formal, Krauss asserts that even within the sky, clouds are oriented by way of vertical vectors or lines that ultimately declare the cloud to be vertical in and of itself.[267] Similarly, Kristina Wilson has written on *Equivalent 216E* (Figure 3.8), characterized as a "progression of wispy, white forms", that:

> The image gives us no orienting anchor, and as we peer into its uncertain depths, we experience a vertiginous loss of direction; the photograph captures that moment of disconnect between the embodied experience of gravity and the expansive field of the sky, of that 'atmosphere for birds that fly lighter than sparrows'.[268]

Whether the cloud itself is vertical or not, it is clear that the *Equivalents* produce for the viewer such a strongly felt sense of disorientation that one's position with regard to these images is no longer stable. Not being traditional landscapes, the *Equivalents* as well as Albers's sludge photographs promote alternative ways of seeing the earth,

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[266] Krauss, "Stieglitz/ 'Equivalents'", 135.
[267] Krauss, "Stieglitz/ 'Equivalents'", 135.
[268] Wilson, "The Intimate Gallery and the 'Equivalents'", 746. Quote from Stieglitz to Sherwood Anderson, Dec. 9, 1925, ASA/YCAL.

the sky and other natural phenomena. This change in perspective is instantiated by photography, whereby one might look up or down instead of toward the horizon.

In his book *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, Hubert Damisch explores the cloud as a semiotic agent and investigates how the cloud might function as a sign. While his argument is situated within discourses on painting, I wish to evoke one passage where he ruminates on Renaissance painter Correggio's delight in painting clouds. Damisch writes:

> He was bound to be attracted to nebulous structures, both on account of their plasticity and because they provided him with the means to position, split up, and confuse the figures that he set among them just as he pleased. Bodies entwined in clouds defy the laws of gravity and likewise the principles of linear perspective, and they lend themselves to the most arbitrary positions, to foreshortenings, deformations, divisions, magnifications, and fanciful nonsense.[269]

This account of an attraction to painting clouds is saturated with a playfulness that seeks to establish a new order (or disorder) of naturalistic representation. The flexibility or malleability of clouds could insatiate a spatial relationship between objects and their environment that defies the logic of nature and allows for a freedom to explore acts of abstraction. I'm also interested in the all-over depiction of clouds where this play is present, not in any *human or other* figures depicted, but through the clouds as both subject and setting, as object and environment. The cloud — as well as a vaporous and atmospheric surrounding or texture — *is itself* the figure.

The *Equivalent* photographs also participate in another discourse that concerns itself with observation, documentation and control. Even before World War I, when

[269] Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/ Toward a History of Painting*, Trans. J. Lloyd. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 15.

aerial surveillance and bombardment from the air became an important tactic of military action and documentation, Nadar photographed Paris from hot air balloons as early as 1868, in an exploration of what kinds of vision photography could instantiate, and how new visual technology could catalyse new ways of seeing.[270]

Campany, in his book on Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray's photograph, *Dust Breeding* (1920) (Figure 3.9), writes on the perspective of looking down from above, that is, the aerial perspective: "the elevated view is the fragile meeting-point of utility and abstraction, of human and inhuman vision. By 'abstraction' here I mean at the levels of both form and information".[271] This extra-human vision abstracts the earth so that it ceases to resemble a grounded perspective of nature. Photographing the earth by way of looking down onto it is not only an aesthetic abstraction of otherwise familiar territory, but also organises information and collects data in a manner altogether novel: through miniaturization, and perhaps in certain respects, with more literal, symbolic and emotional distance.

Also writing on *Dust Breeding*, David Hopkins remarks that the photograph was initially accompanied by a caption that read, "View taken from an aeroplane", despite the fact that the image was, in truth, an oblique view of Duchamp's *Large Glass* (Figure 3.10) covered in a build-up of dust on its surface, and photographed in Duchamp's studio in New York. Through this association with the aeroplane, a technology of the early twentieth century, Hopkins offers the following interpretation:

> Duchamp and Man Ray assume the personae of boys playing at warfare. It is important here to note that the aerial view (and its implications) was already established as a minor genre within avant-garde production. The marriage of

[270] For more on Nadar and the aerial perspective see Stephen Bann, "Nadar's Aerial View", in *Seeing From Above: The Aerial View in Visual Culture*, ed. Mark Dorrian and Frédéric Pousin. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 83–94.
[271] David Campany, *A Handful of Dust*, (London: Mack, 2015), 10.

> aeroplane and camera implied in the aerial photography — the meeting of two technological modes, which was pioneered by Italian pilots in 1911 — inaugurated a new mechanised mode of visualising warfare, which we find exploited in, for example, Max Ernst's photomontage *Massacre of the Innocents*, which was produced around the same time as *Dust Breeding*.[272]

From this very early moment in modernism, the aerial view was militarized in terms of surveillance and/or attack on an identified enemy. This vision became so prevalent that it was appropriated by avant-garde artists who continued to explore collaborations between photography and aeroplanes. The alliance of the two technologies that resulted in the materialization and dissemination of a new vision gave rise to alternative perspectives made possible through the development of both media and vehicles. Again, McLuhan comes to mind: "the medium is the message".[273]

Although Albers looks down to capture *schlamm*, his perspective admittedly aerial, his position is nevertheless at human height and does not necessarily suggest an extraordinary distance between camera and earth, despite abstracting the land. Even though they are grounded at human height, these images are, nonetheless, aerial in their methods and relate to how Dorrian has depicted the aerial view as

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[272] David Hopkins, " 'The Domain of Rrose Sélavy: Dust Breeding and Aerial Photography", in *Seeing From Above: The Aerial View in Visual Culture*, ed. Mark Dorrian and Frédéric Pousin. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 138–139.

[273] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*. Moreover, in McLuhan's theory of media, he expresses that vehicles for transportation can be considered media. He articulates that the railway "accelerated and enlarged the scale of precious human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure". On the airplane he writes: "by accelerating the rate of transportation, [the airplane] tends to dissolve the railway form of city, politics, and association, quite independently of what the airplane is used for", (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2003), 20. In this way, vehicles as technology assist in the abstraction of messages sent and delivered, shortening the time elapsed in the dissemination of messages or in communicated exchanges.

> […] a serene, transcendent and magisterial subjectivity, one lifted above the immersion in things while still holding them in purview. Indeed the very idea of transcendence is an elevational concept, transcend — which shares its roots with ascent — meaning to climb over, or to go beyond or to surmount.[274]

He goes on to describe how elevating above the Earth represents not only an effort to include more things into view or perspective, but also constitutes a vision altogether new and transformed.[275] He writes that the aerial view "is this interplay of detachment, discernment, immensity and even infinity that is embedded in the idea of the aerial view as 'God's-eye view'".[276] The expansive and the uncontained are power and authority.

Albers's body photographing the sludge is not elevated more than his own height. Yet, with his camera positioned at his eyes as he stands firmly on the ground, he still produces images that participate in an aerial view aesthetic, abstracting the land or earth to such an extent that they nonetheless resemble pictures taken from much higher up. Does he occupy a perspective akin to a God's-eye view, or is his perspective necessarily situated within the human body? The answer, it seems, is somewhere in between. This speaks to the linking of the human photographer with an all-seeing God by way of this aerial capacity and access. Just as the camera more generally proposes a vision that is an alternative, and perhaps even an extension of, the human eye, the aerial perspective likens the photographer with a sky-dwelling God, as he/she possesses a heightened capacity to see and, by extension, occupies a position of sovereignty or control over the pictured subject. Yet, what happens when

[274] Mark Dorrian, "The Aerial Image: Vertigo, Transparency and Miniaturization", *Parallax*, 15:4, 87.
[275] Dorrian, "The Aerial Image", 87.
[276] Dorrian, "The Aerial Image", 87–88.

Stieglitz, unlike Albers, looks up instead of down? What can be surveyed from the ground looking up to the sky?

An exploration of aerial perspective might include the consideration of its counterpart: the worm's eye view. As a result of being familiar with the kinds of abstractions that occur when one looks down from an elevated height to the ground — details are obliterated and buildings and people appear to exist in miniature — looking up at the sky necessarily includes an imagining of what the returning gaze might see. This gaze, embodied, real or imaginary, might look down to see the photographer standing ninety degrees to the earth's surface, grounded by gravity. By this I mean that, looking up at the sky could include or even be intrinsic to the experience of envisaging what one might look like from above.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes about his own body in his flat:

> I can of course take a mental bird's eye view of the flat, visualize it or draw a plan of it on paper, but in that case too I could not grasp the unity of the object without the mediation of bodily experience, for what I call a plan is only a more comprehensive perspective: it is the flat 'seen from above'. And the fact that I am able to draw together in it all habitual perspectives is dependent on my knowing that one and the same embodied subject can view successively *from* various positions.[277]

According to Merleau-Ponty, people can coordinate and integrate different and successive experiences of an object (for example, a flat) because all perspectives are

[277] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 1945), 235.

rooted in and depart from embodied experience. Perceptual experience is always embodied; it inevitably implicates the body and is mediated by bodily experience, even in instances of an imagined bird's eye view.

Such a vision constitutes a picturing of how a God or a pilot might view us from the air. This is not dissimilar to the feeling of vastness elicited when looking up towards the sky. As a result of this tremendous experience, the meaning of *perspective* in this context is twofold: it signifies not only the perceptual perspective of looking up at the sky from the earth's crust, but also the emotional perspective of acknowledging individual minuteness as human beings in an infinite universe. Thus, to look up and to see the sky as a massive expanse that constitutes the atmosphere within which the planet is embedded is to simultaneously confront one's own atomic size, a single speck, almost imperceptible in an immense field.

Looking at Stieglitz's clouds might include a consideration of what the viewer would look like when seen from a returning gaze, situated within the clouds themselves. Thus, to view the *Equivalents* photographs accordingly constitutes an imagined communication or exchange, a glimpsing not only at the sky, but a picturing of the prospect of such a glance, and a responsive return of it. In other words, to look up, particularly as a result of the prolific circulation of aerial perspectives, means to picture looking down at the gazing subject: the two instances of vision go hand in hand.

Also exploring this exchange of glances and, indeed encompassing it within a single image, whereby the ground and the sky encounter one another in a returning gaze or peaceful face-off is Albers's photograph, *Schlamm 2*, which adopts a view looking down at the sludge, but not at a ninety-degree angle up from the ground. Instead, the aerial view is shifted slightly, to communicate Albers's diagonal aim and

perspective: while he points his camera down toward the sludge, he does so tilting it slightly ahead of him. In this way, the sludge does not appear perfectly flat or on a single plane, but is regarded from what seems to be a slight distance, with diagonal lines of sludge hovering over the water, supersaturating the earth. Moreover, this water fails to represent a flat surface for two reasons: firstly, the stream toward the back appears to be in motion, creating a small current conveyed by a series of sequential ripples and, secondly, the water's surface reflects the variable sky above it so that its image is present on it. While distinct clouds are not visible, there is an uneven tone reflected on the water and a leafless tree flipped upside down, its branches reaching toward the bottom frame. As the image is not a picture of sludge on its own, but includes the sky and a tree, its composition results in a texture comprised of part sludge and part reflected sky. This extended vision — that is, access to the sky and the ground — exemplifies the possibilities of the exchange of glances from above to below.

I argue that these photographs draw attention to the world as a planet, as having a topographical terrain and a sky that much of the time appear to be familiar, but that ultimately prove to be uncanny and disorientating. While the aerial view has received attention in the literature, few scholars have addressed what it means to look up at the sky. Is this also about governance and possession, or might it be about something utterly different?

iii. LOOKING UP, LOOKING DOWN

In an essay entitled "The Big Toe", surrealist Georges Bataille proposes that it is the big toe that constitutes the most "*human*" body part, as it firmly situates and stabilizes the body's weight on the ground, facilitating his/her erect stance as opposed to the anthropoid ape on all fours: "This is due to the fact that the ape is tree dwelling, whereas man moves on the earth without clinging to branches, having himself become a tree, in other words raising himself straight up in the air like a tree, and all the more beautiful for the correctness of his erection".[278] Writing that, "human life is erroneously seen as an elevation", Bataille describes the man with his head "raised to the heavens and heavenly things" looking down at his foot in the mud with disgust or contempt.[279] Visually, in the context of the present argument, this statement, bringing into play the heavens as well as the muddy earthly surface, suggests that Stieglitz's *Equivalents* and Albers's images of sludge conflict, with the former reflecting man's or woman's intellect and his/her attention to 'heady' matters and, the latter, constituting, literally and figuratively, the base of his/her body.

Bataille used photography extensively in his Surrealist art magazine, *Documents*, which ran from 1929 to 1930 for 15 issues. In one issue of *Documents,* Bataille presents a photographic illustration of a big toe evoking an abject response, with the following caption: GROS ORTEIL, SUJET MASCULIN, 30 ANS – PHOTO. J-A. BOIFFARD (Figure 3.11).[280] With regard to Bataille's ethnographic surrealism and his notion of "baseness", Niru Ratnam comments that: "*La bassesse*

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[278] Georges Bataille, "The Big Toe", in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 20.
[279] Bataille, "The Big Toe", 20.
[280] Image reproduced in Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006). This image is also an illustration in Ratnam, "Surrealism's other side", 57. This image is also used on the cover of Rosalind Krauss's book, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1986).

oriented human existence towards the mud and the earth, the physical rather than the mental, extolling the virtues of bodily functions, sado-masochism, and ritualistic activities such as sacrifice and cannibalism".[281] Furthermore, Bataille writes:

> The division of the universe into subterranean hell and perfectly pure heaven is an indelible conception, mud and darkness being the *principles* of evil as light and celestial space are the *principles* of good: with their feet in the mud but their heads more or less in light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will permanently elevate them, never to return, into pure space.[282]

While Bataille here is identifying a polarity, in which up is good/positive and down is bad/negative, where the head is heavenly and the feet in the mud signify the grotesque or abject, this is not a polarity, or a binary, that Bataille is comfortable affirming and his discomfort alludes to, even accounts for, the problems associated with assignments of this kind, as I will suggest below.

Albers's *Schlamm 1* depicts wet, supersaturated mud, which has ceased to be soil and has become, as the title suggests, sludge. Water flows through the remaining islands of mud, creating a foamy design on the surface, and collecting particularly around those parts that still manage to rise above the water level. A phenomenological picturing of one's bare feet in this mixture insists on a slight sinking, so that only the tops of the feet remain visible. If the sludge were to present a cool sensation, the instinct would be to remove one's feet, perhaps to hop away. However, if the substance warms the skin, abjection is increased, and the mucky earth mixed with water might feel dirty, as grime sticks to the feet. Switching to look at Stieglitz's

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[281] Niru Ratnam, "Surrealism's other side", in ed. Paul Wood, *Varieties of Modernism*. (London: Yale University Press and The Open University, 2004), 55. He writes that: "The contents of each issue were remarkably heterogeneous, with articles on 'high' art sitting next to descriptions of slaughterhouses", 55.
[282] Bataille, "The Big Toe", 20.

clouds could initially prove to be a diametrically opposed experience, which might privilege certain readings of abstraction as spiritual or immaterial (Kandinsky).

By contrast to the big toe, and the image of the feet in the mud, Bataille proposes an exploration of "the pineal eye":

> The eye, at the summit of the skull, opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the understanding, but is instead an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being, or more exactly, the head.[283]

Bataille writes this passage in a way that viscerally indicates the contempt with which he holds the solipsistic, sinister agent who, immersed entirely in contemplation and looking to the sky for guidance, is utterly blinded by the bright sun. To deny, then, man/woman's inseparability from his/her natural status or, in other words, to view man/woman as all mind and no body is to dangerously neglect the ways in which humans are ineluctably implicated not only with their own bodies, but also with the bodies of others, and with the ecological conditions in which they are always situated.

To qualify Stieglitz's *Equivalents* as cerebral or existential or partaking in the sublime and Albers's sludge as visceral or corporeal is to fail to see the coexistence and inter-implication of head and foot. Moreover, wilful or deliberate attention to nature, that which surrounds humans and of which humans are a part, is a necessary feature in our efforts to see more clearly. Looking up at the clouds in a moment of contemplation or looking at Stieglitz's photographs of clouds do not constitute endeavours more disembodied than to examine the sludge underneath our feet,

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[283] Georges Bataille, "The Pineal Eye" in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 82.

particularly if the vertiginous responses to such works are taken seriously. Thus, the difference between looking up and looking down is not so vast: a common thread is the embodied perspectival abstraction and the perceiving of the world altered.

In his discussion of the detail and the patch, Georges Didi-Huberman distinguishes the two such that "the detail or the part may be subtracted from the whole, whereas in the patch the part devours the whole" .[284] He elucidates this distinction in the following passage:

> The detail is a thread, for example, that is to say a perfectly locatable circumscription of the figurative space; it has *extension*, even if it is minimal – and a well-defined size; it partakes of a measurable space. On the contrary, the patch comes across like a zone of coloured *intensity*; it has, as such, an 'unmeasurable' capacity of *expansion* and not of extension in the picture; it is to say, an event rather than an object.[285]

If the detail delineates the object while the patch describes an event, the detail is, therefore, limited to that object while the patch expands beyond measure and can be more closely associated with the notion of space. Didi-Huberman writes that the detail is akin to an *inclusion*, while the patch, on the other hand, ought to be considered an *intrusion* or *interruption.*[286]

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[284] Georges Didi-Huberman, "The art of not describing: Vermeer – the detail and the patch", *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1989): 164. I first learned about this text in a talk given by Briony Fer at the *Lifework* symposium at held UCL on 10 June 2017 on her analysis of the patch with reference to Latvian-American artist Vija Celmins's photorealistic paintings and drawings.
[285] Didi-Huberman, "The art of not describing: Vermeer – the detail and the patch", 164. Reference to Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).
[286] Didi-Huberman discusses the connection with Roland Barthes's punctum.

These notions about the patch are related to Jean-François Lyotard's linking of the sublime with the features of 'presence' and 'instantaneity' discerned in the work of Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman. Concerning the sublime, Lyotard writes that: "it is feeling of 'there (*Voilà*). There is almost nothing to 'consume', or if there is, I do not know what it is. One cannot consume an occurrence, but merely its meaning. The feeling of the instant is instantaneous".[287] This occurrence is related to Didi-Huberman's description of the patch as an event that presents itself, as it is, all at once. Lyotard relates Newman's painting to the angel who "announces nothing; it is in itself the annunciation"[288]. Moreover, Lyotard insists that "the message is the presentation, but it presents nothing; it is, that is, presence".[289] The patch as intense event is in tandem with Lyotard's notion of presence: it mangles time, insisting on the present, but also reflecting on a future.

Didi-Huberman, declaring the patch violent, relates it to "the way a wound on an area of white skin gives a surge of meaning to the blood that bears beneath it".[290] This violence might be extended to the cut in the work of Stieglitz, as Krauss writes on the *Equivalents*: "these works are most radically and nakedly dependent on cutting,

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[287] Jean-François Lyotard, "Newman: The Instant", in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 80. He goes on to describe the sublime as "the feeling that something will happen, despite everything, within this threatening void, that something will take 'place' and will announce that everything is not over. That place is mere 'here', the most minimal occurrence", 84. There is an acute sense of time in such a depiction whereby the 'here' is the sublime moment, threatening the possibility of something potentially dangerous.

[288] Lyotard, "Newman: The Instant", 79.

[289] Lyotard, "Newman: The Instant", 81. This is akin to McLuhan's argument that "the medium is the message".

[290] Didi-Huberman, "The art of not describing: Vermeer – the detail and the patch", 164.

on the effect of punching the image, we might say, out of the continuous fabric of the sky at large".[291] Moreover, according to Didi-Huberman, it is the detail that implies

> *getting closer*: you 'get into the detail' of a painting the same way you enter into the area of choice offered by an epistemic system you are intimately familiar with. But intimacy does involve a degree of what is undoubtedly a perverse form of violence: you get closer only so as to *cut things up*, divide them into parts and pull them to pieces.[292]

Apart from this violence that is involved in the analysis or dissection resulting from increasing proximity, the patch is the ultimate aggressor because "it is an accident: it surprises us with its essential capacity to intrude".[293] For Didi-Huberman, "the patch is insistent as a result of the repetition of this intrusion or accident so that it ultimately passes from picture to picture, and, as a troubling symptom, creates its own paradigm".[294] In this way, the violence of the patch is repeated again and again, cumulatively leaving the viewer without solid footing, almost as if he or she has lifted so slightly from the ground to be momentarily closer to the sky, yet none the more stable. As Mary Jacobus writes, "clouds draw the eye upward: to movement, distance, and height, to the dynamics of space and the overarching sky. For most of us, they provoke ideas about both transcendence and inwardness. When we look up, we lose ourselves".[295]

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[291] Krauss, "Stieglitz/ 'Equivalents'", 134.
[292] Didi-Huberman, "The art of not describing: Vermeer – the detail and the patch", 135–136.
[293] Didi-Huberman, "The art of not describing: Vermeer – the detail and the patch", 164.
[294] Didi-Huberman, "The art of not describing: Vermeer – the detail and the patch", 164.
[295] Mary Jacobus, "Cloud Studies", *Romantic Things: a Tree, a Rock, a Cloud*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 11–12.

Didi-Huberman's theorizing about the patch has led me to question what happens when a picture is composed entirely of a patch of something assumed to be larger, perhaps a vaster landscape not pictured, or the entirety of an environment or an atmospheric condition that did not make the 'cut' that constituted the camera's severing frame. The configurations of Stieglitz's *Equivalents* are such that they refuse a separation of shallow or deep space. They present only pattern and texture formed by varying effects of light and umbra. Moreover, they at once appear to be extracted from a larger whole while also having a spreading effect. In this regard, we might experience Stieglitz's *Equivalents* or Albers's *Schlamm* works, as well as some photographs by Gutschow, as *all-patch* in their abstract presentation of nature that, denying a pictorial space so that foreground is distinct from background, establishes an all-over composition of shapes and/or texture. By focusing in on a portion of the sky or of a muddy terrain, the camera, through its cuts and framings, forms in the context of these abstract photographs the all-patch. In this way, these photographers leave us with *expansions* of a selected texture, and with, as a result of their all-over composition, the possibility of further expansion. As such, the viewer can imagine the all-over patch as forever expanding. It is for this reason that the all-over patch perpetuates overtly what Didi-Huberman characterizes as a designated "intensity".

The all-patch resonates most with Lyotard's designation of the message as medium, as a result of comprising the picture space in its entirety as well as referring to that which is unseen, unpictured, that which expands beyond the frame: the possibility.[296] In this way, the message is not only what is told, it is also the vehicle through which the message is disseminated. Mixing these relationships so that they become increasingly unclear, Lyotard writes on Newman that his:

[296] Reference to McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

> Space is no longer triadic in the sense of being organized around a sender, a receiver and a referent. The message 'speaks' of nothing' it emanates from no one. It is not Newman who is speaking, or who is using painting to show us something. The message (the painting) is the messenger; it 'says': '*Here I am*', in other words, '*I am yours*' or '*Be mine*'.[297]

The all-patch too resists an author or messenger and speaks for itself, declaring its presence and the violence that might ensue. Lyotard begins with the assertion of presence, '*Here I am*', which he follows with phrases that connote possession, '*I am yours*' and '*Be mine*'. With this desire for ownership or mastery comes the sublime, that event or occurrence of intensity whereby desire comes into contact with danger or potential loss.[298] These sentiments and feelings of intensity are connected to the history of the exploitation of nature by human agents: appreciating nature as perhaps the most beautiful thing imaginable, humans have always also sought to dominate it, and to capitalize on it even at the most extreme expense. The notion of the all-patch of natural phenomena is dangerous at the level of eco-conservation and ecological respect. The all-patch presents nature as an alluring, gorgeous intensity, one that invites the possibility of manipulation and possession: the all-patch of nature suggests an infinite abundance, which it inevitably cannot deliver.

In what further ways, then, is an all-patch image violent, perhaps even traumatic? And, is such violence perpetuated further by way of adopting extreme perspectival angles, looking straight up or down, views that allude to technological advancement and territorial surveillance or domination? Whether there may exist patches within the circumscribed patches of each *Equivalent*, a microcosm of an

[297] Lyotard, "Newman: The Instant", 84.
[298] Burke's account of the sublime is linked to possession.

already established, bordered microcosm, is another question altogether. Nevertheless, the notion of the patch is useful in determining how Stieglitz's cloud photographs, refer not only to the rest of the sky, unpictured, but also to what exists below it, the ground and everything on this ground, even the photographer. The patch is thus implicated in space, as well as existing as an event in time: that is, the encounter of the photographer with his/her environment, and the act of taking pictures.[299]

Stieglitz's all-over patches of the sky and clouds do not refer to a global phenomenon, or even to a planetary one; rather, they become a microcosm of the cosmos, the universe, as an ever-expansive whole, despite, and perhaps because of, the fact that they are photographed as they are. Furthermore, through this universal confrontation, Stieglitz's *Equivalents* force the acknowledgment of clouds as natural phenomena, as having atmospheric or climatic components and causes that are at times forgotten in favour of formal interpretation. Yet, these works are not merely abstract shapes, and Stieglitz does not allow us to be the child who lies in the grass, gazing at the sky and discerning in the cloud's shape an object or animal. Rather, through their darkness as well as through the violence of their all-patch intensity, contained within four borders so that this charge occupies the image in its entirety, the viewer is not engaged in play, but is rather compelled to confront the all-patch.

Beck suggests that the sky as screen associated with reverie is where abstraction, as that which is darkened or obscure, "makes us see".[300] Furthermore, he argues that: "Stieglitz insisted that he wanted the photographs to look like photographs — mechanically produced visual data — but he embraces the symbolist thinking about the relationship between fact and interpretation the necessary and

[299] Didi-Huberman himself discusses the connection with Barthes's punctum.
[300] Beck, "Signs of the Sky, Signs of the Times", 125.

invisible capacity of the latter to outstrip the former".[301] In this way, Stieglitz as technician and as avant-garde artist become bound together by way of these cloud images, which are at once abstract while also signifying as photographs about photography itself.[302] Beck argues that these images are "data disguised as abstraction," making use of camouflage so that one thing appears to signify as something else.

As a series, these patches strike their viewer again and again through their disorientating and vertiginous effect, estranging the viewer from what has already been considered to be known and familiar — the sky — so that it appears altogether alien, novel, and extraordinary. In this regard, the all-patch should be viewed as antagonistic to landscape. While there exist patches within landscape photography, not any image with a horizon constitutes an all-patch. The violence in the all-patch is implicated in feelings of vertigo, discomfort and estrangement and constitutes an *event* or *instance* whereby vision is challenged, as is one's ability to resist an inclination to sway: it becomes necessary to acknowledge these images as necessarily startling in an effort to discover nature anew.

Stieglitz's *Equivalents* series, furthermore, does not exhaust his interest in clouds or atmospheres. He published in *Camera Work*, and more widely, several images of industrial buildings from which smoke and smog enter into the atmosphere, such as in *The Asphalt Paver: New York* (1892) (Figure 3.12), *The Hand of Man* (1902) (Figure 3.13) and most famously, *The City of Ambitions* (1910) (Figure 3.14).

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[301] Beck, "Signs of the Sky, Signs of the Times", 126.

[302] Hagen, Charles, Greenough, Sarah, Gowin, Emmet, Szarkowski, John, Naef, Weston. "Alfred Stieglitz: An Affirmation of Light", in Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1995). Sarah Greenough writes: "Stieglitz started life as a technician. Science, and an understanding of the scientific process really informed his life – the idea that in science you make a set of observations, set up a test to challenge those observations, and then draw your conclusions from them", 103.

These photographs all feature machines or instances of new architecture on an industrial scale that produce substances aesthetically similar to clouds. Yet, with their modern, industrial sources visible in the photographs themselves, they signify in very different ways. These differences, however, are not as distant as they initially seem and do not feed or reinforce binary allocations of what belongs to nature and, conversely, to culture or industry.

On the components that constitute their substance: while clouds are natural formations of interactions between air and water, the fog-like smoke that is expelled from such machines is also the outcome of an organic process, that of burning fossil fuels. The difference is, however, that they are a toxic, gaseous waste product, and the effects of industrial production. More and more this smoke is visually coded as severely detrimental to the earth's atmosphere, constituting an urgent cause for concern about the environmental state of the world. The experience of viewing these moments of machine-made smoke alongside the *Equivalents* may at first suggest that the former constitutes more modern versions of the latter, and are not coded as ecological, transhistorical natural occurrences. However, to view these photographs together entails a confrontation with the extent to which the industrial and its sinister and hazardous expulsions poison the natural world, a confrontation that relies on the irony of formal similarities between toxic waste and cloud formations.

On the impact of certain media on the natural world, Jussim and Lindquist-Cock write that the "pastoral idealist and eulogizer of wilderness" had to give up certain spiritual visions in favour of "the world of fact":

> In that world, unquiet and chaotic, the railroad was destined to transform the wilderness as well as the garden, bringing enterprise and exploitation into both versions of primeval Eden… [Photographers] no longer concerned themselves

> with the purity of untouched Nature of sublimity. They were assumed to be securing documents of utility with strictly material benefits.[303]

While the *Equivalents* may be reminiscent of the nineteenth century romantic, even sublime interest in clouds, as is the case of Constable or Turner, they are no less *modern* than their industrial counterparts and reflect on a modernist ecology and what it might mean to investigate natural phenomena in the twentieth century. The reliance on certain chemical processes in photography should be noted: water is used to produce and develop a photograph, linking photography to ecology, both as a potential subject for an image, but also as a necessary component in the processing of all photographic prints.

The consideration of water as a vital tool in making photographs is just one way to draw attention to the materiality of photography as it links with nature. More specifically in connection with Stieglitz's images of clouds, it is interesting to note that they were developed in a small format, so they could be held in one hand. This material choice is reminiscent of Benjamin's ideas on miniaturisation and photography.[304] Object-like in this manner, the *Equivalents* propel and confirm photography as a material medium, mobile not only through the camera, but also because of the contained size of the prints. Moreover, the *Equivalents* marry art and document almost seamlessly: they are aesthetic and abstract, while also partaking in the forensic. They act as witnesses of instances of water fluctuation, as it intermingles with air in the sky.

Stieglitz's manifestations of modernism and abstraction through the representation of these clouds promote reflection on the notion of technical prowess.

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[303] Jussim and Lindquist-Cock, *Landscape as Photograph*, 40.
[304] Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography".

As John Szarkowski writes, the technical challenge of capturing these clouds with analogue technology was one of Stieglitz's reasons for engaging in this project:

> […] a photographic print… has a very narrow range of reflected brightness; in Stieglitz's sky pictures it is unlikely that the lighter tones are more than twenty times brighter than the darkest tones. Within that narrow range of grays (in a print smaller than a man's hand) the object, one might say, was to make a picture that would suggest the immensities of celestial light and space. Failure was of course the rule.[305]

Looking at the sun for an extended time is bad for one's eyes and taking photographs of the sky or sun is extremely difficult. Interestingly enough, in the book *Before Photography* by Peter Galassi, a photograph of a *Study of the Sky*, dated 1865, by an unknown photographer is featured (Figure 3.15).[306] Moreover, I have found a photograph by Paul Strand titled *Twin Lakes, Connecticut* from 1916, where he points his camera up to the clouds. His much beloved porch is pictured in the top right corner and the roof of this porch comes down from the upper frame of the image to form a dark triangle.

Bing is another photographer who engaged in this practice. In her photograph *Storm Clouds over Jewish Cemetery, Frankfurt* (1932) (Figure 3.16) she has pointed the camera up to the sky, producing a sense of movement between the chiaroscuro interactions between light and umbra. The silhouettes of leaves on a tree are visible to the left side of the frame as well as peeking from the bottom edge. The fact that Bing's title reveals the setting as a Jewish cemetery puts a different spin on the

[305] John Szarkowski, "The Sky Pictures of Alfred Stieglitz", *MoMA*, No. 20 (Autumn, 1995), 17.
[306] Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, 87.

interpretation of this image, evoking associations of heaven and earth, god and mortal, life and death.

Despite the fact that the eye has a much wider range for brightness than a photographic print — hence the frequent disappointment in response to a photograph of a sunset for not fully replicating first-hand experience — Stieglitz made it his mission to capture cloud formations. While in some instances the camera may expand human vision, in this respect it cannot succeed in representing or exceeding the human experience of looking at clouds. Thus, Stieglitz's project was an undeniable challenge. He wrote to David Liebovitz from Lake George on September 18, 1924: "The clouds have taken up much of myself – They have been quite maddening. Whether I have gotten anything down remains to be seen. I am too close to really know".[307]

Moving beyond this pursuit of technical excellence and in an effort to qualify or understand Stieglitz's *Equivalents* within a modernist context, I wish to engage with the scholarship of Mary Jacobus, who proposes more metaphorical readings of clouds. She grounds her argument in the romantic period: "clouds… make us think not only about form and vacancy, mobility and change, but also about the peculiar realm of affectivity that we call 'mood'… Mood is like the weather, changing and unformed, yet always with us".[308] Mood, perhaps a subsection or component of atmosphere, related to affect and environment, becomes symbolized in clouds, perhaps even as a method for describing a scene, or anticipating a future one.

[307] Stieglitz to Liebovitz, published in Stieglitz and Knapp, Bettina L. "Alfred Stieglitz's Letters to David Liebovitz 1923–1930", *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Photography and Literature (Summer, 1985), 19.
[308] Jacobus, "Cloud Studies", 12.

Moreover, Jacobus argues that clouds are reflective of "inner activity" and "evoke fleeting states of mind, feeling, and atmosphere".[309] In line with the changing or mutating states, Jacobus offers the following conclusion on why clouds are so confusing: "they challenge the phenomenology of the visible with what cannot be seen: the luminous opacity associated with the phenomenology of sight".[310] Be that as it may, to view clouds, both formed and amorphous, as varying, dynamic and reflective of one's inner emotional life, though an appealing consideration, is nevertheless an ahistorical and apolitical stance.

Looking at Stieglitz's cloud images, Jacobus's second statement — that clouds problematize vision, making visible and palpable the unseeable in a way that necessarily implicates viewing bodies in this exertion of sight — is particularly arresting. The term exertion, as it is applied to vision, suggests that such an act can be viewed in terms of labour: the labour of seeing. In this regard, it is the emergence of photography, of a new form of vision that implies work for the human eye, in its effort to see in a more acute and advanced way, or simply, to see more. In this way, the human body is as much a medium as photography; viewing becomes an effort and seeing a laborious act that can be learned and practiced, particularly in reference to photographic apparatuses.

Analogous to Jacobus's statement that clouds elicit "inner activity", Albers has written on the ways in which the act of seeing itself is necessarily personalized and individuated:

> Our seeing is also, and to a larger extent, a psychological process, our knowledge and our emotions influence our seeing. Individual interests direct

[309] Jacobus, "Cloud Studies", 14.
[310] Jacobus, "Cloud Studies", 13.

> our attention, focussing differently. A swimmer looks at water in another way than a fisherman or a painter".[311]

In this set of thoughts, Albers suggests that an identity politics is implicit in seeing insofar as the act of viewing something is definitively subjective and contingent on the gazing agent. The process or labour of looking, and by extension looking through a camera lens, is always a mediation that is in excess of the use of a mechanical apparatus. The mediation by the human operator is one that is always already idiomatic.

iv. ARVID GUTSCHOW'S *SEE SAND SONNE*

It is with this in mind that I wish to introduce and consider Arvid Gutschow's *See Sand Sonne*. While there is very little scholarship on Gutschow, particularly in English, Stefanie Odenthal has done important pioneering research into the life and work of this German photographer, connecting his interest in photography with his passion for agriculture.[312] Retiring early in 1947/48 from his work with the state service in Hamburg, during which he often took photographs in the context of urban planning projects, Gutschow went on to study composting and soil enrichment techniques, revisiting interests that related to his initial wish to be a farmer.[313]

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[311] Albers, "Photos as Photography and Photos as Art", 5.
[312] Gutschow's *See Sand Sonne* is mentioned briefly in Van Deren Coke's *Avant-Garde Photography in Germany 1919–1930*, 16.
[313] Stefanie Odenthal, "Arvid Gutschow: A Significant Photographer, Almost Forgotten", in *Arvid Gutschow*. Ed. Erhardt Stif, Alfred. (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 86.

In the context of her study, Odenthal compares, on a variety of occasions, Gutschow with Albert Renger-Patzsch, noting that both photographers had visited the German island of Sylt and had been inspired by the natural setting. Writing that Renger-Patzsch "aimed to represent 'the landscape as a document'", Odenthal reports his return to such subject matter through the 1936 publication of a small pocket-book made of twenty-two images, entitled *Sylt. Bild einer Insel* (Sylt: Image of an Island) (Figure 3.17).[314]

In addition to nature, Gutschow was interested in industry and architecture. Aligning him with Charles Sheeler, Odenthal describes two images of "spectacular views of the bridges over Elbe", which were included in the book *Das Werk. Technische Lichtbildtsudien* (The Factory: Technical Image Studies) from 1931.[315] What I wish to extract here with regard to the larger context of both modernism and media is the decisive connection between nature and industrial photographs and to assert that those who focused certain projects on nature were in no way rejecting urban forms or modern developments that took place away from rural or pastoral sites. In one aspect, as industry expanded and had increasingly negative effects on natural systems of the planet, it became progressively urgent and necessary to attend to nature. To argue that images of nature or landscape belonged to older centuries — tied to ideas around the romantic or sublime — would be to overtly overlook the real effects of industry on the earth and the increasing changes of such impacts.

Along these lines of linking nature with industry, Julian Stallabrass, in a short review of the exhibition 'Photography in the Weimar Republic', held in 1989, mentions Gutschow briefly, writing:

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[314] Odenthal, "Arvid Gutschow: A Significant Photographer, Almost Forgotten", 93. Quote from Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Sylt: Image of an Island*.
[315] Odenthal, "Arvid Gutschow: A Significant Photographer, Almost Forgotten", 97.

> Even nature can be shown to be ordered and repetitive, either directly through agricultural activity, as in Arvid Gutschow's picture of a ploughed field, or by the camera, as in Renger-Patzsch's photograph of the ordered ranks of pine trees. Signification depends on repetition as well as contrast and photography could be seen as an ordering medium that supplied both.[316]

Like the machine or the flow of labour instantiated by industrial architecture — where pattern, order and repetition are at the forefront of design and activity — nature too participates in such modern forms. While Stallabrass's examples entail a *ploughed* field and a landscape arrangement, his analysis expands to include instances of nature where there has been less intervention or disruption by human force or design. These include the ripples in the sand caused by the flow of the tide, or the expanding pattern of glittering reflections of the sun on the surface of the sea. As such, there is order within nature itself, separate from its cultivation by humans, but one that nonetheless recalls and relates to systems of mechanical production. When used to document these instances of modernism, photography — as a medium of modernism — codifies these occurrences as modern, simply by virtue of having been photographed. Moreover, the reproducibility of photographs in sequences or series parallels the repetition of both natural and industrial design.

Gutschow's *See Sand Sonne* is composed of 75 photographs of earth, mud, water and other natural matter that elicit sludge-like textures and consist of mixtures of natural elements that yield a substance both homogenous and heterogeneous. Some images could be considered within the traditional confines of landscape, photographed with a distinct horizon so that the sky is separated from the sea, sand,

[316] Julian Stallabras, "Photography in the Weimar Republic", *Art Monthly*, July 1, Issue 128 (1989): 15–16.

and land. Other images, by contrast, are distinctly more abstract, taking the form of all-over compositions, patterns or textures without a contextualizing scene, disorienting in the same way perhaps as Stieglitz's clouds. A later image by Minor White comes to mind as well, entitled *Sun, Rock, Surf* (1948) (Figure 3.18), whereby the sun is reflected on the wet surface of a large rock, as well as reflecting on the ripples of the incoming breaking tide. Orientation is muddled in this photograph, as it is in Albers's sludge image, in which sun and earth are pictured together by looking down, by way of the reflection of light.[317] I also have in mind Bing's *Sun, Clouds, Reflection on Ocean* (1936) (Figure 3.19), which for me brings together Stieglitz's *Equivalents* and Gutschow's book. Although there is a clear horizon line in this photograph, the sea and the sky are almost reduced to their most basic statuses as climatic occurrences that interact with one another. Both the ocean and the sky are largely dark, but the bright patches of light that escape through the clouds are present in the sea too and confront their reflection. Thus, the light in the sky and its effects below face each other, as well as correspond and change in unison.

Looking at Gutschow's images in the twenty-first century is different from how they may have been perceived when they were initially published in 1930. Decontextualized images of land pictured from above so that the land appears flattened and thus as texture or abstraction is a form of vision increasingly familiar to us today as a result of technologies such as Google Earth. Aerial images, which render the earth in a manner altogether specific to this kind of vision, have been popularized, with an acute understanding of how this form of mapping implies certain modes of control.

[317] This image is published in White, Minor. "THE LIGHT SENSITIVE MIRAGE", *Aperture*, Vol. 6, No. 2 [22] (1958), 75.

Moreover, as Gutschow's photographs are monochrome, it is difficult to tell, for example, sand from snow. The world's topography pictured by Gutschow offers the viewer a heightened sense of awareness that the Earth is indeed a planet with multiple ecosystems, varied instances of soil and rock, elevated heights and valleys, that could, and continuously do, surprise us, appearing at times familiar and quotidian and at others, utterly alien.

The layout in Gutschow's book is curious and deserves special attention: varying from page to page, the photographs have been individually placed on each recto in a unique position. While most images do not occupy the full page, some do, erasing the self-reflexive quality of the white border that reminds the viewer (or reader) that one is looking at a book. Certain images, for example image 10, *Foam of an outgoing wave*, have been photographed horizontally, yet, in order to display them in the book in a larger format, they have been flipped to fit the vertical orientation of the book. *Foam of an outgoing wave* (Figure 3.20) features what its title suggests: a wave at the moment it begins to crash toward the shore. Experienced first-hand as a horizontal occurrence, waves emerge as lines parallel to the water's surface, creating bubbly, elevated foam in its approach to land. The rotated display renders the wave *un*natural, diagonal, yet, more vertical than horizontal. In this way, it becomes evident not only that the image has been tilted 45 degrees, but also that as a result of this orientation, it becomes a composition that exceeds its subject matter: in other words, the photograph is rendered an instance of abstract nature photography. Moreover, the image aesthetically makes evident the movement of the wave, depicting it by way of a blur: the sun reflects on the surface of the water in the form of abstract fuzzy shapes, creating tones of black, white and grey, at times clearly defined and at others composing a gradient, one tone seeping into the next.

Image 66, *Canals in the mud lands with traces of seagulls* (Figure 3.21) is also interesting in this context, as it entails a flirtation between landscape and abstraction. The photograph is placed at the bottom half of the page and depicts ripples in the sand with seagull footprints indented in it. The ripples suggest a deepening into space as they get thinner and smaller, retracting into the depth of the image. There is no horizon line in the picture, only the suggestion of a different piece of land through a small, darkened triangle at the top right corner. Again, these photographs are in black and white. The horizontal line that delineates the photograph from the white blank space on the upper half of the page doubles as a possible horizon.[318] Confusing the identification of the image as abstract rather than as landscape, the blank space in the top half ceases, if only for a moment, to be the book, and instead acts as part of the photograph, signifying as the sky. In this way, the form of the book is muddled with landscape: it becomes difficult to ascertain if the book maintains a self-reflexive capacity or if, instead, this image marks a moment where the medium is disguised as image. There is nonetheless a hint that the book remains self-acknowledged as a book: the photograph is shifted slightly toward the spine of the book and a thin white border comes between the right edge of the photograph and the edge of the page. Still, by placing this particularly cropped photograph at the bottom of the page so that the top, white, blank portion might signify as sky, Gutschow's formatting calls into question the distinctions between the referential and representational, manipulating the composition in such a way that suggests the presence of landscape in this otherwise abstract photograph.

[318] David Hopkins makes a similar observation in the final image of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray's *Dust Breeding* photograph from 1922, whereby, "the white wall beyond the edge of the table is made to function as an implacable sky above a landscape that ends abruptly at an impossibly straight horizon", " 'The Domain of Rrose Sélavy'", 137.

See Sand Sonne includes a brief introduction by German novelist, poet and playwright Hans Leip. It begins with an attempt to draw the reader in, by including him/her under an inclusive and collective subject pronoun:

> Now we are on the edge of the wide world. The sea, the sea darts up the beach towards our feet. We are standing in the sand, we are slowly sinking into the trickling, deep rug, into this in-between area between water and earth, into which the wind furrows waves as into the sea. The sea! The sea! The sand prickles on the skin, makes us one with the landscape, where the landscape builds itself, changes itself, decays and rises up again.[319]

Phenomenological in tone, this passage recollects the experience of imagining one's feet in Albers's sludge. The aim of this rhetoric is to invite the viewer to imagine that he or she might be located at the sea, feet in the sand, sun shining on them. Leip intentionally tries to entice the reader by carefully choosing words that seek to suture him/her into Gutschow's pictured landscape, *to make us feel we are one with it*.

Leip goes on to mention key elements of the book: dunes, mud flats, winds, currents, as well as more atmospheric features such as "vague moods", shadows, haze and fog. Referencing specific places, he writes, "everywhere the same game": "in the dunes behind List on Sylt, in the perpetually swaying sand of the loneliness of Skagen, spring days on Bodden, the desert-like wide-swinging curves of the Curionian Spit, and again the austere charm of the North Sea by Duhnen, Norderney, Scheveningen up to Brittany, where it becomes hard, sandless, surrounded by strong surf".[320] It is interesting to note that the North Sea is a multi-national geographical

[319] Hans Leip in Arvid Gustchow's, *See Sand Sonne* (1930). Translated by Robert Smith.
[320] Leip in Arvid Gustchow's, *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

area with ancient connections that link the north of Germany, the Dutch Coast, and northern France through a shared topography and a shallow ocean.

Another passage brings to light the question of nature as it relates to modernism. Leip writes:

> The cloud roof cover, the compass blow of the horizon, the shading silver colour palette of the sea, the beach, the waves: we supposedly knew about that long ago, we can almost "overlook" it. Yet sensitive people have never stopped sinking themselves into the wonder of nature, although the tendency requires time.[321]

Reading this, I wonder if the silver colour palette is more a reference to the transformations of photography on a landscape and the experience of nature through the photographic print, which in 1930 was necessarily monochrome. Moreover, it could refer to silver bromide, and the careful balance of chemical elements that give the range of greys from sepia (warm) to bluish tints (cool) in ways that affect the interpretation of the photograph dramatically. Leip writes that it is easy to forget about nature and that (perhaps in the face of modernism more so than ever before) attention to it is required in a deliberate manner, with the desire to spend one's time within it. Leip writes that this enjoyment of nature is distinct from that of Rousseau, the Romantics, or the Wandervogel-movement. Instead, it stems from "that particularly unspiritual new-classicism of sport, the body culture, vitamin care and not least out of the technology, which devised the photograph", linking again art with science.[322] He goes on to report how technologies such as publications and films have been aided by photography in efforts to disseminate ideas and images to a mass

[321] Leip in Arvid Gustchow's, *See Sand Sonne* (1930).
[322] Leip in Arvid Gustchow's, *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

audience. With the aim of establishing "unities", designated by "sea, sand, and sun", Leip writes, this book, through photography, situated itself in tandem with a "shared planet" and "universal humanity, reveal[ing] the halo of the commonplace in animals, children, machine parts, flowers and buildings".[323]

Gutschow's photographs show more or less what he proposes in the book's title: more, in that he also photographs snow and plants, and, less, in that he actually does not photograph the sun as subject in and of itself. Unlike Stieglitz, Gutschow does not point his camera up to the sky in an effort to depict it as a primary focal point. Rather, the sun makes appearances in the form of a backdrop or as an effect on other natural phenomena: that is, Gutschow's inclusion of the sun is most evident in examples of gleaming and glittering water surfaces and thus, in the patterns of reflected sunshine. Despite its absence, the sun is nevertheless palpably present and deserving of inclusion in the title as a result of this very quality of its affects.

Considering nature and the machine as functioning in similar ways, whereby each element works in tandem with others to serve a working whole, the fact that Gutschow's images are successional, composed in a book, is not inconsequential. The sequenced images collaborate to form a narrative of sorts. In this vein, Albers has suggested that:

> All paintings, drawings, prints, as projections, are flat, two-dimensional, as all photos are. But most ways of pictorial projection have decides to produce an illusion of three-dimensionality which photography cannot apply or only to a smaller extent. Therefore, photos represent the flattest type of picture.[324]

[323] Leip in Arvid Gustchow's, *See Sand Sonne* (1930).
[324] Albers, "Photos as Photography and Photos as Art", 6.

While it is possible that the blur has come to signify background or spatial elements deeper into the pictorial atmosphere, photography nonetheless consistently produces the flattest instances of any media. If film, for example, can designate a space three-dimensionally through its use of motion — pans, tilts and zooms of the movie camera — then the sequencing of several photographic images of the same subject matter in the format of a book is to propose the rendering of two dimensional images into a view more attuned to an embodied or lived experience of the world, that is, with the capacity for a 360 degree view. The book of photographs, as is the case with *See Sand Sonne*, also demonstrates an instance of photography in three dimensions, the flipping of pages as relating one image to the next, in a manner that shares Krauss's account of the 'view' as engaging with the display and dissemination of images.

In *See Sand Sonne*, images 22, (*Overshadowed stage, the dark damp beach has left the last wave*) (Figure 3.22), 23 (*Water vortex between stones and piles*) (Figure 3.23), 24 (*On a wave streaked stage*) (Figure 3.24), and 25 (*Swirling funnel around stage piles*) (Figure 3.25), all show, from different angles and with different degrees of proximity, wooden groynes (breakwaters designed to protect the beach) in the sea as waves move towards them, foaming and crashing around them or on top of them. Whether or not all four images are of the same pillars or of different ones is inconsequential: their positioning in a sequence as such yields a narrative. This temporal relationship works so that turning each page to see the same subject matter presented newly and at different stages of waves crashing, some more roughly and others more tranquil has the effect of paralleling the movement of the waves. To turn each page is to fill the gaps of the narrative or, in other words, to imply the movement of the waves and the cycle of their approach toward the pillars.

Another instance in which sea, sand, or sun evade primary focus is photograph 72, *Fish traps in mud ditch* (Figure 3.26). This image, through its subject — the fish traps — departs from the others in that it does not get masked as landscape as do the wooden pillars; in addition, it is not a depiction of nature abstracted as all-patch. Instead it is the depiction of human tools and of intervention into the ecosystem in order to make use of its resources, namely fish, for the feeding of its own species. An anomaly in the book, this image evokes Gutschow as an environmentalist, having pursued such work largely apart from his photography.

Does this single image, striking as it is within the context of images of both landscape and abstract of natural occurrences, constitute a critique of exploitation? Or, is its inclusion an effort to acknowledge a harsh Darwinism, nodding to the potentially 'natural' eating of other animals? Either way, *Fish traps in mud ditch* provides the footing for such queries and proposes the impossibility of looking at sea, sand and sun without even the slightest acknowledgment of the existence of something in excess of those three natural elements. This something is that which lurks about, threatening the possibility that such instances should remain considered natural. In certain occurrences, photography may disenchant the world so it becomes ever more exploitable, and in others, it may re-enchant it so as to facilitate a direct engagement.

Atmosphere and phenomenological arguments have served to more deeply reflect on how the introduction of abstraction transforms and expands what is typically considered a nature or landscape photograph. Now, this category beings include, for example, the vertiginous depiction of natural phenomena devoid of a horizon line. The following chapter begins too by questioning categories linked to nature, namely the *nature morte* or still-life photograph. With atmospheric

considerations at the heart of my inquiry — attending to blur, haze, fog, glow, light, shadow, umbra, mood or sense of dis/orientation — I continue to interrogate how formal abstraction informs and challenges phenomenological encounters with unusual photographs from this period.

4 – STILL-LIFE, LIGHT AND SHADOW

Examining the abstract nature photograph, it became clear that the absence or revision of a horizon line could disorient a viewer to such an extent that it causes vertigo. This defamiliarization that reorients the beholder in photography is one method in which photography delivers the real world in a manner less clear, precise or recognizable.

I begin this chapter by considering the blur and its implications in photography, how it obscures a clear access to reality which might otherwise be an expectation of the medium. With this in mind, I wish to evoke a 1929 exchange between Moholy-Nagy and Professor Schaja in which they address the debate on the blur in photography. The latter writes: "if you keep your eyes open you must have noticed that certain photographs in some respects differ from your own photographs — in 'atmosphere', 'contour' and 'presentation'". Responding, Moholy-Nagy states that: "it is fully possible that our eye… does see the world only in a fuzzy, summary way. *But why should the photographic camera conform to the human eye?*".[325] Condemning the fuzzy or blurry aesthetic, Moholy-Nagy declares:

> I prefer a thousand times an exaggeration of objectivity, of sharpness, outlines and details than a mode of presentation that combines, no matter how skilfully, the planes, but omits the details. Objective photography has to teach us to see. We do not want to subordinate the lens to the insufficiencies of our faculty of seeing and perceiving: it must help us to open our eyes.[326]

[325] Professor Schaja, "Sharp or Fuzzy?", (1929) in *Moholy-Nagy* ed. Krisztina Passuth. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 306, 309.
[326] Moholy-Nagy, "Sharp or Fuzzy?", 308.

Yet, despite this rejection, many blurry photographs exist from this modernist period. The notion of the blur is not simply a technological failure whereby a photograph is out of focus by accident. The photographic lens in the process of capturing images is always engaged in negotiating elements that stay in focus and those that appear blurry. A subversion of typical sharp/blurry relationships has been discussed with regard to Florence Henri's *Handrail* photograph (Figure 2.0). Moreover, a blur or soft-focus, I will insist, does not oppose depictions of reality and photography's truth claims, but considers instead alternative methods to draw attention to certain compositional elements, whether that be an object or an atmosphere.

The notion of the blur will be considered in this chapter and looked at in relation to both atmosphere and still-life photography. I am interested in this tension between the blur, which at times conveys movement or the inability of photography to capture movement in sharp focus and the notion of a *still*-life, that is, life rendered motionless. Moreover, the blur, in this chapter, will also include within the category the glow, light and shadow. This will be discussed with regard to both still-life photographs as well as deliberately atmospheric ones in order to bring together motion and stillness, obscurity and life or truth: abstraction and realism. The presented case studies will focus on photographic works by Florence Henri, Paul Strand and Lyonel Feininger. I will also weave in relevant examples by Isle Bing. Although many of Bing's works were produced slightly later than the designated time period of this thesis, her photographs remain useful and pertinent to illuminating the discussion. Moreover, it was after seeing an exhibition of Henri's photographs in 1929 that led Bing chose to leave her doctoral studies in Frankfurt to move to Paris to

become a photographer and, I have discovered, that analysing Bing alongside Henri has enriches my understanding of the works of both artists.[327]

i. FLORENCE HENRI'S *NATURE MORTE* COMPOSITIONS

In the previous chapter, I raised the question of what might count as a landscape or an abstract nature photograph, and queried if there is space within these categories for the inclusion of non-natural phenomena. Returning to this set of issues, I will investigate still-life works as relating to those categories as well as having their own distinct relationship with abstraction. In this vein, the question becomes how to understand photographs that take objects and stillness as their subject matter and propose alternative or unusual perspectives on the everyday.

With this in mind, I wish to discuss a selection of still-life photographs made by Florence Henri that explore visual interactions between objects such as tables, glass vessels (à la Purism), mirrors, and, in one case, the severed head of a classical sculpture. Yet, before I introduce specific still-life photographs, I want to acknowledge Diana C. du Pont's argument about Henri's interest in nature in an effort to bridge certain themes from the previous chapter to this one. It should not be overlooked that the term still-life in French is *nature-morte*. Du Pont writes about two portraits that Henri made in Brittany, one of herself and the other of French poet and novelist Pierre Minet (Figures 4.0 and 4.1), claiming that in these two works Henri

[327] Margarett Loke, "Ilse Bing, 98, 1930's Pioneer Photographer of Avant-Garde Photography", *The New York Times*, March 15, 1998, Section 1, Page 43. Nancy Barrett has recounted that following alignment Bing felt with her work and that of Henri: "Through cropping and dramatic printing, she reduced nature to geometric shapes; 'we both have the sense of abstract composition'", *Ilse Bing: Three Decades of Photography*, (New Orleans Museum of Art, 1985), 15.

sought to "bridge art and the intellect with nature".[328] These photographs picture and frame their respective human subjects in a mirror hung on a wall with a frame featuring carved wooden poles that extend beyond the rectangle of the mirror, evoking a grid. The backdrop of the framed subject is the French countryside, which the viewer comes to understand as situated behind the body of Henri or Minet.

Henri poses in a countrywoman's bandana. Located in front of the mirror the viewer sees a part of a table, on which a glass bowl sits beside a frosted glass vase containing wild flowers. Du Pont writes that, in these works, "Henri confounds the relationship between the interior space of still life and the exterior space of landscape." And she adds: "There is an intent here to identify with nature and, indeed, Henri appears as a woman of the country".[329] In these portraits, as a result of the position of the mirror and where Henri places the viewer of her photograph, what may seem like a photograph framed on a wall becomes instead a vehicle permitting visual access into the natural environment occupied by the artist and/or sitter. The mirror is placed on an exterior wall, but as a result of the domestic props included within the photograph, Henri plays with the boundary between inside and exterior rural space. In this way, these photographs are at once portraits, still-lifes and photographs of nature. They address the question of abstraction and the double instance of flattening a person: first, through the camera lens in a way that all photography is subject to and, secondly, through the subject's representation as a reflection in a mirror, flattening his/her image twofold.

In her discussion of Henri's position relative to nature, du Pont references Amédée Ozenfant, Henri's teacher at the Académie Moderne, and the inclusion of

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[328] Diana C. du Pont, *Florence Henri: Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde*, (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1991), 37.
[329] du Pont, *Florence Henri: Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde*, 37.

photographs of nature in a manner abstracted in his 1928 book, *Foundations of Modern Art*. She includes illustrations from pages of Ozenfant's book which reprint photographs by Karl Blossfeldt of, for example, plants that reflect abstract compositions deriving from their organic form (*Adiantum Pedatum*, 1924-32) (Figure 4.2). In Ozenfant's book, plants are aligned with modernism in order to buttress the author's argument in favour of the existence of constant forms that constitute the source and fuel for modernist making. With regard to these images, there is also an argument advanced for abstraction, not only as the aesthetic way forward, but also as the only way forward in the modern moment, reflecting the spirit of the object-type in the production of new buildings or the creation of new artworks.

Yet, one must not conclude from this that an abstract discourse must be followed in a manner that completely does away with figuration. Rather, it is the interaction between abstraction and realism that I am particularly interested in, given the topic of this thesis and the debates surrounding documentary vs. abstract photography. Du Pont provides an explanation as to why Henri's works should be viewed as simultaneously as both still-lifes and abstractions:

> Although decidedly abstract in intent, Henri's compositions consistently exploit the dialogue between abstraction and reality. They have an insistent connection to the physical world that recalls the visual as well as philosophical approach of Léger, who refused to reject subject matter.[330]

I reiterate in this light my statement that it is not fruitful to attempt to measure the level of abstraction in a photograph, or a painting for that matter; rather it would be productive to focus on the ways in which works experiment with abstraction and the

[330] du Pont, *Florence Henri: Artist-Photographer of the Avant-Garde*, 27.

tensions that arise in this regard. While Henri's photographs do not communicate abstraction through an all-over compositional technique or by attending to texture as opposed to objects in space, her still-life photographs nevertheless function within a history of abstraction, connecting with Purist painting traditions and modernist uses of the camera's functions.

In her photograph, *Still Life Composition (Apple, pear, and grapes, diagonal form in foreground)* (1931) (Figure 4.3), Henri includes, as the title suggests, an unidentifiable diagonal object in the foreground, presented out of focus relative to the sharp rendering of the table on which the fruit sit. The apple, pear and grapes cast shadows on the table that produce abstract forms that originally connect to the forms of their respective fruit. The diagonal form as a blur adds to the abstract nature of the image, severing it into three vertical parts, the first part occupied by the apple and part of the table that recedes by way of a sharp diagonal line in the background, the second part described by the white unidentifiable object that is out of focus, and the last section taken up by the pear and grapes. While there are no mirrors in this composition, as is the case in many of Henri's images, there is still fracturing and fragmentation at work, producing diagonal lines that sever the picture frame and interrupt pictorial coherence.

In the photograph, *Still Life Composition (Landscape and still life of fruit)* (1932) (Figure 4.4), Henri positions a lemon along with other objects, one of which appears to be a plate that stands upright on a reflective table, that effectively doubles the image of the lemon. A portion of a mirror interrupts the frame from the right, forming a triangle with the edge of the photograph and two intruding diagonal lines that cut through the image. Behind this still-life composition is a span of grassy vegetation, followed by a body of water with sailboats, and a lighthouse in the

distance, pictured in the top left corner of the frame. If a typical landscape has one horizon line, a horizontal line that divides land from sky, Henri's photograph seems to present three, separating multiple planes of objects and textures.

Starting from furthest away, there is the point at which the sky is met by a strip on land where the lighthouse sits and at which the ocean seems to end. The next horizontal line separates the ocean from the wide expanse of vibrant vegetation. The last and shortest line distinguishes the still life as foreground from the 'natural' background. The horizontal line is made by the edge of the table on which the objects are housed. This segregation is very short and visually interrupted by the lemon, plate and diagonal mirrors. As a result, the foreground assemblage resembles a collage by way of the dramatic distinction from the plane closest to the viewer, which itself appears flattened and like a backdrop.

This image produces a slight disorientation as a result of the three horizon lines that divide the picture into various planes of depth. Furthermore, this destabilization is further amplified by the disruptive mirror on the right hand edge that severs the image from the top right corner cutting through to one quarter of the bottom frame in from the right. It is worth noting that the mirror functions not only self-referentially, it also serves to allude to photography as intrinsically imitative and reproductive, acting in some respects as a mirror of nature. It may not be surprising then that when William Henry Fox Talbot produced his photographically illustrated book between 1844–1846, in which still life features heavily, he called it *The Pencil of Nature*.[331]

Not quite a horizon line, but echoing its task of division, the edge of the mirror breaks continuity in the image in a manner that, because of its reflective surface and

[331] William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*. (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844–46).

diagonal orientation, confuses its legibility. Like a Cubist collage or painting, lines and axes move in unexpected ways: they cut across the image giving the *impression* or *feeling* of a coherent object through the amalgamation of various angles and perspectives. Henri, as is the case in Cubist traditions, makes no attempts at coherence: like Juan Gris, who incorporated mirrors in his paintings, Henri's photographs intentionally double, disturb and dislocate the viewer from a legible orientation, making no concessions.

Indeed, optical confusion is a key trope in Henri's photography. Examining these works, the viewer must take time with the image in order to discern what exactly is going on, what is reflection, what is picture and what is pictured. In another still-life composition, Henri plays with mirrors, shadows and water (Figure 4.5).[332] A mirror leans on the side of a glass jar filled with water with the stem of a plant placed inside and blurred as a result. This blurring is reminiscent of the blurring functions of a camera and the vision made possible through the lens, although in this image the blur is organically produced by virtue of what happens when an object is submerged in water and the distortions that subsequently ensue. The leafy branch of a plant is positioned to face the mirror, anthropomorphized, as if it is looking at its own reflection. To the viewer, one leaf of this plant can be perceived in the mirror, blurred this time by the camera. The branch, along with another plant situated behind the mirror, cast shadows on the white surface on which they have been placed, while the diagonally deposed mirror cuts through the shadow, blocking it, and in turn producing a sharp diagonal line that distinguishes the gradients in the shadow from the white of the table.

[332] https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/composition-1

One *Untitled* photograph by Henri from 1931 (Figure 4.6) is a still-life of sea shells, a large vase with water and the stems of flowers and a thinner vase with some tall leaves or grass in it. This photograph is taken from an aerial perspective and looks down on the objects. Yet, to say that this is a photograph of these objects is not wholly accurate. The photograph includes the two shells in their entirety in the frame yet the large vase with water is only partially pictured so that the base is visible and the rest of its shape is implied by the strong and translucent shadow cast on the table. In fact, the thinner vase as a physical object is entirely absent from the composition, and only exists within the photograph as a silhouetted shadow. The photograph adopts a strong chiaroscuro effect so that the shadows are dark counterparts to the brightly lit objects, whose shape and ridges cast further shadows on them.

I wish to argue that it is the atmospheric and climatic qualities of this photograph that constitute its focus: that is, the photograph is made more from the effects of light and shadow on matter than from the objects themselves. As such, this photograph consists of more atmospheres than it does of objects and constitutes the result, effect or consequences of three-dimensional sold forms in the world. To view this photograph is to get a sense of what it may have been like to experience the objects and the changing conditions with which new forms and tones are established. I am interested in the immaterial and mutable presence of these effects and consequences in the world and photography's role in capturing fleeting moments that are subject to weather and sunlight. As a result, these new variform presences will always inevitably disappear and reappear in a manner that is altogether new.

Continuing to have phenomenological inquiries at the fore of the discussion, the next section will also look at the atmospheric effects of certain objects and how

their climatic output is for me, the most fascinating part of investigating how these photographs communicate.

ii. THE GLOW IN LYONEL FEININGER AND ILSE BING PHOTOGRAPHS

Returning to the notion of the blur, Josef Albers has written that: "the lens or the combination of lens of a camera objective remains rigid. It behaves as our eye does when we doze".[333] Evoking the blur, Albers goes on to say: "if you want to imitate a photo lens I suggest that you look upward but don't focus at the curtain or the ceiling, just look at nothing, so that the eyes feel relaxed. That is the way a manufactured lens 'looks' and remains always".[334] In an effort to describe what it means for the camera lens to see, Albers encourages looking up and intentionally trying to unfocus the eyes as if dozing. Indeed, while we typically consider the camera as capable of seeing in a manner more exact than the human eye, Albers suggests the opposite and proposes that, if a human were to try to mimic the camera lens to experientially see as it does, he/she would have to laboriously attempt to blur his/her eyes to produce a self-manufactured artificial haze.

Even as late as 1942, in response to an invitation to join the American Abstract Artists group based in New York, Lyonel Feininger, declining the offer, wrote the following reply:

> If I have so long delayed in responding, it is because I have been deeply revolving the question in my mind. And I have reached the conclusion that I

[333] Albers, "Photos as Photography and Photos as Art", 4.
[334] Albers, "Photos as Photography and Photos as Art", 4.

> cannot conscientiously join your faith, for the reason that I would at best be an incomplete co-worker.
>
> My artistic faith is founded on a deep love of nature, and all I represent or have achieved is based on this love. I understand fully that all that I admire in the theory of a non-objective art is outside of my capabilities – and that I should become inarticulate, which would be the worse fate that could befall an artist. We must work out our own salvation in our own way.[335]

In Feininger's refusal to join the American Abstract Artists group, he justifies his decision in reference to his view that nature and abstraction are inherently posited against one another and that to choose one would be to turn his back on the other, nature ultimately prevailing in his own conception of his artistic practice. Feininger is far from the only modern artist to regard nature and abstraction as opposites, a position often associated with Piet Mondrian's Neo-plasticism and his wish to keep art from colliding with, or being contaminated by, nature. Despite Feininger's overt resistances in relation to abstraction, I will nonetheless argue that he was, in fact, directly engaged in abstract pursuits. Specifically, I will claim he did this through an exploration of location and an image's existence in a place (invented or real) and the atmospheric charges of these places that take the form of shadows, hazes and glows.

Born in America in 1881, Feininger moved to Germany at age 16. He commenced his artistic career as a musician, to then become a caricaturist and later a painter, but also, and most importantly in the context of this thesis, a photographer.

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[335] Lyonel Feininger, "Letter to the American Abstract Artists Group" in *Lyonel Feininger*, ed. June L. Ness. (New York: The Marlborough Gallery, 1974), 61. I wish to note here that Feininger is not mentioned in Van Deren Coke's book *Avant-Garde Photography in Germany 1919–1930*, although his sons Andreas and Lux are listed with descriptions on their photographic contributions, 17–18.

While his photographs are not often discussed as central objects of study in the scholarship devoted to Feininger's oeuvre, Laura Muir has written on his photographic practice between 1928 and 1939, tracing his various lens-based projects.[336]

Feininger is quoted by Alfred J. Barr Jr. as expressing his feeling of not quite fitting in either in America or Germany: "'in Germany I was "der Amerikaner"; here in my native land I am sometimes classified and looked upon as a German painter — some have seen relationship to Chinese art in my work — but what is the artist, if not connected with the Universe?'".[337] My aim in this section on Feininger, however, is not to locate the artist as either American or German, but rather to closely examine a curious series of photographs taken between 1929 and 1930, during his time at the Bauhaus, of wooden toys, playfully positioned so as to allude to an imagined or fabricated, perhaps even universal city, or at the very least, an abstracted model for one.

Having carved a model train set in wood for his sons for Christmas in 1913, and later adding to it miniature wooden boats, houses and human figures, Feininger continued to carve these figurines throughout his time at the Bauhaus. His son T. Lux titled them 'City at the Edge of the World', mirroring the title of a 1912 ink and charcoal drawing by Feininger (Figure 4.7). Though these photographs have received little attention, Barbara Haskell has written that the figurines themselves, "situated in a middle ground between sculpture and toys… functioned as actors and props in a constantly changing performance. Their slapstick absurdity and guileless whimsy

[336] Laura Muir, *Lyonel Feininger: Photographs 1928–1939*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011).
[337] Alfred Barr Jr., "Lyonel Feininger – American Artist", in *Feininger-Hartley*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1944),13.

were doors through which Feininger entered 'into Golden childhood again.'".[338] Distinctly connected with child's play, Feininger's subsequent Bauhaus photographs of the carved wooden toys constitute further playful experiments with photography, as well as with locating the semi-abstract figurines as contributions to a make-believe place.

Moreover, rather than Sheeler's engagement in translation — as discussed with regard to *Side of a White Barn, Pennsylvania* and *Barn Abstraction* — Feininger's play with a variety of mediums (i.e. wooden sculpture and photography) is best seen as an experiment in composition and camera angles and an exercise in self-documentation. In this way, Feininger may be viewed as the inventor of place, positioning toys carved by himself in such a way that he becomes the designer of an imagined urban space. Further to this work in set design, Feininger switches his role to photographer, and documents the miniature place while appropriating modernist photographic tools and conventions. These photographs can also be understood as experiments that directly address the interaction between life and art: between toy and sculpture, as well as between high art and popular culture, not to mention formal abstraction and autobiography.

Each *Wooden Toys* photograph comes as a pair: one has been printed positively and the other negatively, reversing the light effects in each, instigating a dialogue or a debate on what counts as photography, the negative on the celluloid strip or the printed positive (Figures 4.8 and 4.9). Feininger has often been discussed as having an acute interest in light and shadow and, by extension, in moments whereby, in Ulrich Luckhardt's terms, "the atmospheric effects become space-

[338] Barbara Haskell, "Redeeming the Scared: The Romantic Modernism of Lyonel Feininger" in *Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World*, ed. Barbara Haskell. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 69.

architecture".[339] While Luckhardt describes Feininger's paintings in Timmendorf as constituting his "transparent phase", Barr, Haskell and Muir have all connected his work to that of Caspar David Friedrich, as both artists were engaged in the production of "light-infused seascapes".[340] Barr and Haskell also allude to the influence of Gothic cathedrals upon Feininger, the former referring to Friedrich, while the latter references Feininger's cover design for *Program of the State Bauhaus in Weimar* from 1919 (Figure 4.10).

Haskell chronicles the beginnings of the Bauhaus and its first manifesto publication, written by Gropius. She notes that Feininger's design for the cover image, which features "three overlapping Gothic spires surrounded by shooting stars and ascending rays of light", sought to parallel "the Bauhaus synthesis of the three disciplines — sculpture, painting, and architecture — under the aegis of a new, spiritual architecture".[341] Yet, despite having been founded on these three forms of artistic practice, and despite the capacity for these media to be represented by three spires of a Gothic cathedral, by 1921, Gropius had already suggested a new curriculum based on abstract teaching over one that tightly linked to nature. This shift alienated Feininger from the school and, in a letter to his wife Julia, he wrote the following on 17 November 1921:

> 'Weimar is fateful — I'll never be myself until I leave… I increasingly realize how the Bauhaus has a crippling effect on me — I have to free myself of it as soon as it is possible and we are financially independent. I'd be happy to

[339] Ulrich Luckhardt, *Lyonel Feininger*, (Munich: Presel-Verlag, 1989), 40.
[340] Haskell, "Redeeming the Sacred", 101.
[341] Haskell, "Redeeming the Sacred", 94.

> remain but without obligation… not feel guilty if I don't teach courses and don't sound into the "promotional horn"'.[342]

As a result of the Bauhaus's turn away from nature in the service of promoting abstraction in a variety of media, Feininger felt he was without a position in the school, as his own practice and teachings were grounded in the representation of natural phenomena as well as built environments. Furthermore, if Feininger, in declining to join the American Abstract Artists Group, viewed abstraction and nature as polarities, it is understandable that he would have experienced this change in the Bauhaus curriculum as harmful to his perspective and approach.

It may seem counterintuitive, then, that with such a response to abstraction, I would still insist that Feininger at this time produced abstract photographic works that participate in a larger discourse around these themes. Despite Feininger's ambivalence, I nonetheless continue to read his words and work against the grain, as it remains a productive method to investigate Feininger's hesitations, ambiguities and irresolution with regard to both abstraction and photography, partaking as he did in both, despite his aversions.

In another letter to Julia, a devastated Feininger responds to the publication of Moholy-Nagy's 1925 *Painting Photography Film*, "which cast static painting as antiquated and lauded technological art as the only legitimate form: " 'this essay weights down on my heart! … My self confidence is turning against being merely "tolerated" at an institute which considers panel painting as over and done with'".[343] Despite this incipient anxiety, Feininger picked up photography around this same

[342] Haskell, "Redeeming the Sacred", 96. Quote: Feininger to Julia, 17 November 1921.
[343] Haskell, "Redeeming the Sacred", 125. Quote: Feininger to Julia, 9 March 1925.

time, largely as a result of his sons' interest and excitement around the medium, with Andreas and T. Lux using old cameras and shooting pictures almost incessantly.[344] Sasha Nicholas writes that by 1929 Feininger was "photographing almost exclusively at night" often taking Gropius's Dessau building as his subject matter: "moisture in the air and street-lamp reflections offered him a range of light effects to explore and manipulate".[345] Feininger writes to Julia on 22 March 1929: "'I intentionally did not focus sharply… the almost full moon was hanging high in the hazy sky and there were many lanterns in the horizon… this looks very strange, long stretched out layers of light and dark stripes illuminated by lights like round accents, all in a foggy haze'".[346] Like Strand, there is intense interest in and concentration on atmosphere, with regard not only to air quality but also to time of day which, for Feininger, becomes important not only in his paintings, as with the Timmendorf works, but also in his photographic images. As characteristics that are used to define the in/tangible quality of a place, this attention to atmosphere extends to his *Wooden Toys* series, in part as a result of the reverse colouration, confusing which might signify as night and which would subsequently constitute day.

Writing that Moholy-Nagy initiated experiments with negative printing at the Bauhaus, Muir has described a negative print from a photograph Feininger took at night entitled *Burgkühnauer Allee 4 around 10 p.m.* (1928) (Figure 4.11):

> Twice removed from the reality of the daytime, his negative image of one of the masters' houses reverses the already distorted tonalities of the original night view. The sky becomes light and the brightly lit studio window becomes

[344] Sasha Nicholas, "The Inveterate Enemy of the Photographic Art: Lyonel Feininger as Photographer" in *Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World*, ed. Barbara Haskell. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 219.
[345] Nicholas, "The Inveterate Enemy of the Photographic Art", 219, 223.
[346] Nicholas, "The Inveterate Enemy of the Photographic Art", 223. Quote: Feininger to Julia, 22 March 1929.

> a nebulous black mass, while the darkened stairwell window is transformed into a ghostly trellis of fine, glowing lines.[347]

As black and white photography is limited in one sense to those tonal polarities and every variation possible in between and, in turn, implies either day or night by way of degrees of darkness or lightness, to reverse a photograph is to strikingly invert the atmospheric quality of an image. It is this very glow or haze described by Muir that I am interested in, that in/tangible element which produces atmosphere in the photograph, perhaps even that translates it from lived experience into an image whose production process itself is implicated in the transfer and sensitivity of light.

Ilse Bing also produced striking photographs that have the emanating glow as their focal point. Her photograph *Bec de Gaz, Paris, 1934* (Figure 4.12) is a solarized negative, so that the lights and darks are reversed in tone. The photograph shows a grainy and almost distorted image whereby certain elements and sources of light are not easily discernible. Taken at night, one exterior light source, which is the brightest point in the image casts a glow across the frame. Yet, equally bright is the spot on the wall just behind the lamp that illuminates it. The photograph is then darkened around this lamp and with a gradient effect becomes lighter again toward the frame, almost as if to suggest a pulsing of light. Another example is Bing's *Rond Point de Champs Elysees, Paris, 1934* (Figure 4.13) (also a solarized negative), which captures the water fountain at the Champs Elysees roundabout. This image is almost entirely made

[347] Muir, *Lyonel Feininger: photographs, 1928–1939*, 23. Sasha Nicholas also address this photograph, describing it the negative and positive pair as "a rhythmic composition of trees illuminated by a radiant window in the damp winter air, Feininger uses the medium as a tool for inventing and sculpting light, and for exploring the possibility of seeing both inner and outer structure", "The Inveterate Enemy of the Photographic Art", 225.

up of light and darkness and the light cast on water that bursts upward in an almost phallic-like gesture.

The photograph, which confuses qualities of a negative and a developed image, is grainy in texture: the photograph is comprised of almost entirely blurry dots of varied tone and bright emanations of light. Nancy Barrett has the following to say about Bing's solarized photographs: "The subject of these photographs, as is much of Bing's photography, is light. 'I photographed into the light which was forbidden,' she explains, 'Light is regarded as the means to photograph. Here it is the main subject'".[348] In this respect, light is not an aspect of atmosphere in the photograph but serves as its principle subject and "protagonist".[349] It is no longer merely surrounding or environment but becomes the focal point of study.

In relation to another solarized photograph, *Loterie Louis Lam*, Dryansky and Houk say the following, which is true of many of Bing's night time solarized images: "The lights of the stand are overexposed, but what might elsewhere be considered a defect here becomes an important element of an enchanting vision. So bring that they seem to be detached from their background and to be floating in the night, these incandescent lights have a hallucinatory presence".[350] This floating quality and the reference to an enchanted night vision, is an aspect of Bing's photographs that are inextricably linked to atmosphere.

Moreover, the "hallucinatory presence" in these photographs relate to the atmospheric quality of these unusual works and stem from their grainy texture and the suspicion that something might be "defective". This possible defect is reminiscent of Moholy-Nagy's labelling of the oblique angles of the New Vision as "faulty

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[348] Barrett, *Ilse Bing: Three Decades of Photography*, 25.
[349] Barrett, *Ilse Bing: Three Decades of Photography*, 25.
[350] Larisa Dryansky and Edwyyn Houk, *Ilse Bing: photography through the looking glass*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006), 49.

photographs".[351] Furthermore, the notion of hallucination is defined by a state of being that occurs as a result of a failure to differentiate the real from the imagined, or, in other times, might be a way to evoke certain crossovers between realism and abstraction.

One last photograph I wish to mention here is Bing's *Orchestra Pit, Theatre des Champs Elysees* (Figure 4.14), which depicts lit up music books in an otherwise entirely blackened space. As there is no definition or figuration in the setting, the lit up books are not only blurry, but they appear to be floating like lanterns in an abyss of pitch black. They no longer are objects confined to the laws of gravity but levitate in a non-space and are visible only as a result of direct light that gives them an airy and weightless presence. This photograph is not only formally and compositionally abstract, it also embodies what might be called photographic synecdoche. The books are so isolated from any kind of context and are lit so dramatically in an otherwise unwavering black space that everything else that was present in reality has been effaced from the image leaving the books alone to represent the entire orchestra and all its elements.

While not a still-life by any traditional means, through its engagement with atmosphere and the glow, this photograph troubles the physics and expectations associated with objects: that is, they adhere to gravity and are not found free floating or levitating mid-air. In this way, *Orchestra Pit* is also about objecthood, though this time breaking rules of matter and gravity and proposing new relationships to them. This question of relationships goes further: as a result of their glow and the darkness that both surrounds and produces them, the illuminated books also attend to the spaces in between and what is not there: the musicians. As such, the synecdoche

[351] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.

whereby the books stand in for the musicians is enriched by the observation that the relational position of each glowing book to one other produces the darkened spaces in between and imply their occupation by the obscured musicians. Like Henri, Bing positions her viewer so that he/she has to *fill in the gaps* and make sense of the unusual and unfamiliar scenes presented.

The glow can be viewed as something distinctly photographic: it is instantiated by the contrast and juxtaposition of light in a dark surrounding, light spreading outward atmospherically into the darkness, hazily, by way of a blur, expanding to fuzzy borders.[352] The glow, however, is almost anachronistic in a modernist context: reminiscent of emanating candlelight, the modern glow, sourced from electricity, distorts the sharp light contained in a bulb, as it radiates liberated extensions from a single source.

The glow is intimately connected to the very atmosphere that it partakes in, contributes to, or perhaps, creates. Gernot Böhme has described atmospheres as

> […] indeterminate above all as regards to their ontological status. We are not sure whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them. We are also unsure where they are. They seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze.[353]

Difficult to locate or identify, perhaps even harder to produce, reproduce or represent, atmospheres are viscerally present in both Feininger's twilight and *Wooden Toys*

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[352] For another image where this night time glow is apparent, see Werner Mantz, *Pressa, Cologne* (1928), reproduced in Coke, *Avant-Garde Photography in Germany 1919–1930*, 48.
[353] Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics", *Thesis Eleven* (1993), 114.

photographs. Moreover, in large portions of his oeuvre, he often seeks effects in transparency or approaches his subject matters at specific times of day, with careful consideration of the way light responds to air.[354] In many of the *Wooden Toys* photographs, Feininger captures them close up, so that the way he has carved each toy geometrically responds to light in a unique way. As such, each cut, layer, or indentation that produces hard edge shapes are either lit emphatically or darkened by cast shadows. That Feininger produces a positive and negative print of each of these photographs responds to the materiality of the figurines themselves as made of wood, which elicits certain relationships to printing such as the woodblock, where negatives and positives are reversed. Furthermore, Feininger has positioned each figurine carefully and with varying depths of field, some closer to the camera and others further back, some in focus and others blurred, producing negative space through their meticulous composition. Where the image has been developed negatively so that the figurines are darker than their surroundings, this negative space is described visually by a glow, emanating from the spaces in between the toys, establishing a blurry atmosphere as if a haze emanates from the gap between the buildings.

Most of these photographs are without a distinct context. Only one photograph positions the toys on a decipherable wooden table, captured from a straight on angle, while the others are often pictured from above or closer up so that they appear to *produce* a place rather than inhabit one. Moreover, in many of the images, Feininger has placed the toys on a shiny surface so that they reflect their forms on the ground on

[354] Haskell also describes Feininger's 1924 focus to Deep, a Baltic fishing village, as an exercise in atmosphere, referencing Luckhardt in the last phrase: "entranced by the village's expansive landscape and the way light reflected on the water, especially at sunset, when 'the glory from above' suspended the separateness of shimmering dots, he would return there every summer through 1936. The combination of Deep's ghostlike, layered clouds and its soft air, colored 'as if one were looking through rose-tinted smoked glass,' presented Feininger with a vision of atmosphere as space-architecture", "Redeeming the Sacred", 124. Quote: Feininger to Julia, 14 May 1932.

which they were positioned, doubling and mirroring the figurines like buildings on a body of water, their individual forms or a skyline reflecting on the water's surface. These reflections necessarily contribute to their atmospheric proclamations, reproducing their shapes only this time reversed, immaterial and blurred.

Treating Feininger's work as effectively experimental, Alois J. Shardt wrote in 1944, "the young student approached his object as closely as possible. By this 'close-up' perspective the parts nearest to his eye became so big, the more remote ones so small, that they no longer seemed to be the parts of the same object".[355] Employing the close up, Feininger's *Wooden Toys* series is at once an experiment in still-life composition, light intensities, architecture and abstract photography. Through the close up, Feininger proposed the palpable built quality of the toys so that they might, despite their abstraction, signify as buildings, and when placed in a cluster, to allude to a village, town or even city. In some images, he adopts a worm's eye view and in others, that of a bird's eye, responding perhaps unknowingly or involuntarily to Moholy-Nagy's "faulty" photographs with oblique camera angles.

Feininger also explored these skewed perspectives in several drawings published in *Le Témoin* in Paris. For example, *The White Man* from 1906 (Figure 4.15) adopts a low position looking up from the ground at a tall, thin man drawn as a white silhouette with a black border as he walks in the city, hands in his pockets,

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[355] Alois J. Schardt, "Lyonel Feininger", (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1944), 14. Schardt also offers the following narrative, describing Feininger's experimentation with light and shadow: "One afternoon in the early fall he saw a group of trees stranding in the full light of sunshine and casting deep, heavy shadows. The shadows were so intense as to seem to disengage themselves from the trees, and the piercing rays of the sun cut away so much of the true shape of the trees themselves that the result was very dissimilar to the conception 'tree' or 'group of trees'. Thus might an object be transformed by the light and shadow into something beyond its individuality. At that time these facts appeared to the observer as strange phenomena, but years later they were to become elements appropriate to an entirely new compositional structure", 14.

smoking a pipe. There is perhaps an aura of alienation as the viewer looks up at the man who appears to be so tall that his hat exceeds the frame like a giant among similarly proportioned new buildings erected in the city. Another drawing from 1907, *Hurrying People* (Figure 4.16), by contrast, employs a bird's eye view, looking down on two men, one in white and one in black: these men also appear to be giants, foreshortened in such a way that, despite the apparent proximity to the cobblestone ground, they appear to stretch upward, to be unnaturally tall.

There is a distinctive distance that Feininger plays with, which Shardt's explains:

> From 1907 to 1912 he concentrated all his efforts on one theme: how the individual responds to forces beyond the individual. He shows how modern man tries to transcend the isolation into which he own overstressed individuality has betrayed him. His men walk in the twilight through small village streets giving themselves up to the enchanting mood of the fading day.[356]

Moreover, writing on his drawing *Moloch in Paris*, published in *Le Témoin* in 1916 (Figure 4.17), Luckhardt exclaims: "[Feininger] was already moving toward the edge of abstraction. The figures barely retain their identity. The two women seem to have become black and white planes, stereotypes against the ground, which with its chalk structuring seems porous".[357] In addition to his experimentation with angles that foreshadows his interest in photography, as demonstrated with the *Wooden Toys* series, Feininger explored themes related not only to formal abstraction but also to the kinds of everyday abstractions or distances that were implicated in modern living. Feininger's ambivalence toward modern life is palpable in his early caricatures of

[356] Schardt, "Lyonel Feininger", 15–16.
[357] Luckhardt, *Lyonel Feininger*, 19.

inhabiting the city in the early twentieth century and is not separate from his initial hesitation toward photography, honouring his attachment to painting and nature throughout his career.

Muir recounts Feininger's disappointment when trying to paint from photographs, particularly with regard to his *Bölbergasse* painting of a cathedral in Deep, in the Baltic region, writing to Julia: " 'I am struggling with the cathedral picture. I simply have not been able to solve the composition… Never again will I work from a photograph; it is dreadful and takes one away from all pictorial effect and from painting altogether'".[358] In fact, Feininger took photographs of the progress of this painting in his studio in Moritzburg, Halle, which exists in two versions, a negative and a positive (Figures 4.18 and 4.19). Such a narrative is distinctly in opposition to Sheeler's engagement with translating his photographs into paintings, which for him offered new perspectives for photographs and constituted a way to employ "new vision" in painting.[359] For Feininger, however, to paint from the photograph squeezed out the painterly element as the pictorial remained a necessary trope of painting. Unlike Sheeler who merged painting and photography through his translations, Feininger is more aligned with Strand, who incorporated an intentionally objective photography with soft-focus atmospherics, which will be explored in the following section. Feininger viewed both media — painting and photography — as separate, their interaction with each other as not necessarily in the service of a productive mutual influence or collaboration.

Muir writes that: "Feininger's photography does not represent a radical departure or rejection of his art up to that point, but a sophisticated reworking and

[358] Muir, *Lyonel Feininger: photographs, 1928–1939*, 28. Quote: Feininger to Julia, 22 January 1931.
[359] The notion of a "new vision" from this time belongs to the writings of Moholy-Nagy.

rediscovery of familiar themes through an unfamiliar language".[360] Like Sheeler and Strand, Feininger's *Wooden Toys* series are fascinating instances of experimentation with earlier moments in the twentieth-century, moments that posed questions about vision and perspective, abstraction, as well as light and atmosphere. Feininger's artistic quest was invested in his environment, whether that term partakes more in nature or in his abstract artistic productions of his surroundings. Feininger's photographs demonstrate a keen capacity for close observation and the ways in which environments change according to specific conditions of light, shadow and time of day and the phenomenological observations that accompany these studies. He encourages us to embody these specific moments and chooses instances where this glow is most dramatic and through his *Wooden Toys* series. By inventing miniature spaces whereby he can manipulate and monitor his experiments in light, shadow and perspective in his very own created world, Feininger invites his viewer to partake in this unique encounter.

iii. PAUL STRAND AND ATMOSPHERIC BLUR

Paul Strand's *Still Life, Pears and Bowls* (1916) (Figure 4.20), taken in Twin Lakes, Connecticut, is composed so that it appears that the fruit and the bowls sit on a single plane, lit by an unclear source, thus casting equally incoherent shadows. Because the crockery is stacked in a messy pile, there is neither a distinct foreground nor background, and the photograph is instantly flattened such that space is reduced to a shallow depth of field, despite a distinct overlap of shapes and shadows. In

[360] Muir, *Lyonel Feininger: photographs, 1928–1939*, 18.

connection with this photograph, Ben Lifson references an "ambiguous receding and projecting space" and describes the shadows and reflections as being "without sources, resembling flat, solid shards in a group of pots that itself looks like one pot seen from many perspectives".[361] While Lifson may be overreaching somewhat in his suggestion that the assemblage of pots suggests one pot perceived from different angles, there is nonetheless movement within the image. At the very least, there is potential for movement as a certain precariousness is conveyed by the dramatic angles of the bowls, suggesting that if one is moved the assembly as a whole would collapse. Moreover, the various angles at which the bowls are placed, despite the flatness of the image, suggest a three dimensionality, an inquiry into the objecthood of the pears and bowls that points to a Cubist influence. Most interesting for me however, is the communication of this movement and Cubist aesthetic: the soft-focus of this image.

Positioning Sheeler and Strand oppositionally, Mora credits the former with having created innovative methods that leap significantly beyond Strand's photographic pursuits. Insisting that Strand continuously falls short, he writes that the photographer "continued to cultivate an atmospheric vagueness, suited to erasing detail and reducing overall sharpness, thus connecting him to another, earlier age.[362] I do not share this view that Strand's "atmospheric vagueness" is detrimental to his work. I wish to propose instead that it is exactly this quality in his pictures that is most compelling and worthy of examination. In what follows, I will explore how atmosphere in these early photographs provokes abstract ruminations on the possibilities of photography when closely attending to air quality, ambience, light, shadow, and environment. I wish to examine how these studies relay a feeling or

[361] Lifson, *Paul Strand: The Formative Years 1914–1917*, 3. See for comparison, Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Enamel Bowls*, c. 1930. See as well, Florence Henri, *L'assiette et le mirroir [Saucer and mirror]* (1931).
[362] Mora, "Charles Sheeler: A Radical Modernism", 83.

mood that details the photographer's setting. As stated above, such a comparison between Sheeler and Strand provides little elucidation of the work of either artist, each of whom approached abstraction in his own manner.

One of the most blurry or fuzzy images produced by Strand is one titled *Ceramic and Fruit* (1916 or 1919) (Figure 4.21). This photograph has been so distorted by a lack of focus by the camera lens that it appears almost to be vibrating or in motion. The image is composed of what appears to be a tea pot, a piece of fruit, maybe an apple, and what looks like a bowl resting upright so that the viewer can see its interior. The photograph is taken from an angle so that the objects are diagonally positioned in the composition, almost as if falling off the table, slipping toward the bottom left corner. This diagonal orientation and the intense vibratory quality of the image deliver a precarious sense to the photograph, as if Strand captured the image right before the chaos of the objects losing balance. As a result, Strand articulates the precariousness of a moment's specific conditions, proposing abstract aesthetic choices: blurriness, the dismissal of clarity and sharp access to the objects in the image. Atmosphere is not only produced by the blur, but also as a "feeling" of the photograph, that the objects are in motion and that their collapse might be imminent.

> Joel Eisinger has written on atmosphere and detail in the following manner: Daguerreotypes are intensely detailed images, but in academic art theory too much detail was considered to be destructive of effect, destructive of a painting's coherence and atmosphere. As photographers began to think more about the artistic potential of their medium, they began to see a conflict between the tremendous capacity for detail in the daguerreotypes and the tonality necessary for effect. In sum, they began to see detail as the mark of

> the scientific and mechanical application of photography and tonality as the mark of artistry.[363]

In this regard, painting has been aligned with atmosphere and the photograph with detail. How, then, does Strand's out-of-focus or "soft-focus quality" not only refuse to provide detail, but also propose abstract qualities in a way that does not posit him as regressive?[364]

Scholarship on Strand has maintained traditional dichotomies and has suggested that the younger photographer departed from his mentor Stieglitz's subjective approach towards a more objective perspective. Fraser Cocks has insisted on the following distinction:

> For Stieglitz, it was enough to achieve an intensification of the world within the boundaries of a particular work. Strand, however, wished to use his art to reform society. The street people anchor the following abstract images to the observed world; the abstract images impart a vitality to the humans.[365]

Moreover, on these differing methods, David Travis states:

> In his photographs of clouds and landscapes, Stieglitz adopted a subjective approach, equating external nature with an inner spiritual condition. Strand's more objective attitude reflected nature in the external aspects of the culture it contained. Strand began to see a wholeness to recover in out-of-the-way places. Increasingly, he sought not just a surface design but large intangibles.

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[363] Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation*, 18.
[364] Mora, "Charles Sheeler: A Radical Modernism", 83.
[365] Fraser Cocks, "Paul Strand", *History of Photography*, 16:1, (1992): 20.

> During his long exposures of his camera, a settled permanence, a residual core of being, became the subject of the photograph.[366]

Travis's description of Stieglitz's subjective method lends itself to imagining the photographer with his feet grounded, intently looking up at the sky to capture one of his *Equivalents*. This fantasy evokes attributing spirituality to his process, a quality that might extend to the photographs as well. According to Travis, Strand's effort to seek the remote or elusive (this is not to suggest that something like a cloud is not both those things), such as the shadows of a porch cast on a table, is an attempt to have an objective approach. With this method, he aimed to capture the stillness of his subjects, but a stillness that is evolving and transforming subject to climate and light.

I maintain that it is not productive to designate or brand photographers as objective or subjective, as this line of questioning or taxonomy ultimately does not allow for in-depth analyses. I propose that instead, it is more useful to acknowledge that, with every practice, irrespective of the presence of a striving for objectivity, elements of subjectivity inevitably slip in. And yet, with photography, while objectivity may be impossible, realism is a constant and undeniable feature. In this regard, this debate between the subjective and objective should repeatedly be set aside when it appears in an effort to find a new vocabulary to describe differing practices.

Cocks has offered the following anecdote on Stieglitz's relationship to abstraction:

> In the years prior to World War I, as he learned more about modernist principles from the French avant-garde painters, Stieglitz associated

[366] David Travis, "Paul Strand's 'Fall in Movement'", *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Notable Acquisitions at The Art Institute of Chicago since 1980 (1993): 188.

> abstraction with his obsession to see in a new, more exact manner. 'Living in the abstract', he lectured Strand, 'makes virtually every reality livable – interesting'. Stieglitz did not mean that objects become alive only as they were rendered as abstract elements; instead, they achieved vitality as their essential characteristics were clarified. The photographer, Stieglitz taught Strand, used the objectivity of the camera to enhance, without altering, the identity of its subjects.[367]

In this way, abstraction was not a method for representation that hindered vision, one that mandated a viewer to see less. Rather, it offered the possibility for an expanded vision and even the opportunity to see in a more refined manner, to reach the crux or locus of an object's characteristics. According to Cocks, this clarity meant a communication of vitality and animism, perhaps even expression. As Strand's mentor, Stieglitz relayed his understandings on abstraction and clarity to his student: he married abstraction and objectivity so that the two might propose a collaborative pursuit.

Strand's title — *Abstraction, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* — situates the photograph in a specific place, despite its being classified as an abstraction. His titles thus behave as elements that break or challenge the assumption that abstraction is

[367] Cocks, "Paul Strand", 19.

devoid of place and is, thus, autonomous.[368] The image *Abstraction, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* is iconographically not strictly abstract: the viewer can identify a table and the shadows of the rods of a porch cast on the table and on the wall behind it. The parallel lines made of shadows project in different diagonal directions, suggesting multiple planes in a manner similar to a cubist treatment of an object or a sitter. The image is made of both objects and atmosphere, effects of objects both included and excluded within the frame. The photograph has been taken in a manner that has fractured the objects before the lens, so that the viewer is offered only a partial context, abstracting a designated place.

However, looking at this image as an abstraction, the beholder also bears witness to a documenting of Twin Lakes, Connecticut. In this regard, I argue that whether a place is included in the title of a photograph or not, to look at a photograph is always invariably to view a place at a given time. In the case of Strand's abstractions, this place is not an artist's studio, but rather out in the world, in Connecticut. In this way, a photograph is automatically located from the outset and indexically refers to the place. Critiques of atmosphere in photographs suggest that they are too Pictorialist through their use of soft focus, rendering an image less sharp, less exact, perhaps even less documentarian. Yet, this atmospheric quality also contributes to the dissemination of information that visually describes or is embedded in a setting, such as the quality of light at a particular time of day.

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[368] This myth of an autonomous abstract art is perhaps most pertinent in a discussion of painting wherein it was often seen as distinct from its environment by contrast to sculpture or architecture, which is distinctly implicated in it. Painting was thus the medium of artistic pursuit that most lent itself to a discourse of artistic autonomy and a self-referential work that need not be considered with regard to its surroundings. This line of thinking is, of course, not without its problematics and should be challenged. Photography, as a two-dimensional art, successfully dispels with such a myth in that not only does it always present an image that has an indexical relationship to its place, but through the circulation of photographs, each object develops its own historicity of transmission and movement.

There exists a similar photograph, most likely taken in the same session as *Abstraction, Twin Lakes* of the same subject matter at a different angle, producing different lines, entitled *Porch Shadows* (Figure 4.22). In fact, Stand experimented with these porch shadows and still-life composition in a few photographs, including *Orange and Jug on Porch* (1916) (Figure 4.23), wherein the geometric shadows cast on the objects on the panelled flooring of the porch produce a deliberate play with objects, light and umbra and resulting in a chiaroscuro effect.

In reference to Strand's still-life compositions of fruit and crockery at the Twin Lakes cottage, Morris Hambourg describes a different encounter with atmosphere and abstraction: "the variations were seemingly infinite, not only because Strand could make and remake the universe of hollows and volumes, but also because the weights and propositions of each composition and its internal movement shifted as the sun moved across the sky".[369] This passage reflects Strand's abstract approach as dealing not with apples or plates, but with "hollows", "volumes" and "weights" as they activate, vitalize and become dynamic in relation to their surrounding environment, the very atmospheric qualities of the given place at a particular time. She goes on to describe how at Twin Lakes, Strand negated the daily uses of his chosen objects and, by appropriating various tilts as methods for framing, he managed to free

> […] the picture space from its normal orientation based on human verticality [which] granted Strand further license to angle his lens in any direction he chose. Step by step, he pulled farther away from the rules and was soon

[369] Morris Hambourg, *Paul Strand Circa 1916*, 33.

swivelling his camera with unprecedented freedom down, on a slant, and even up to the sky.[370]

There is nothing Pictorialist about such an approach, raising the hypothesis of the possibility of a new experimental category predicated on phenomenological inquiry. Strand's "unprecedented freedom" in exploring all the possible angles speaks strongly to his motivation to gain experiences in contrasting perceptions and to document them photographically.

In the spirit of giving advice to students of photography, Strand recommended the following regimen, reminiscent of Cubist practices: "Find out first what this machine and these materials can do without any interference except your own vision. Photograph a tree, a machine, a table, any old thing; do it over and over again under different conditions of light. See what your negative will record".[371] Strand himself adopts this mantra in his own practice, where his efforts at an experimental photography are clearly discernible. Moreover, just as Stieglitz designed and ran 291 gallery under a model of experimentation, Greenough argues that, for Strand, these abstract works represented no more than experiments, and that "once he had extracted their lessons, he abandoned them and began to apply the knowledge he had gained to studies of the world around him".[372] These works mark a very small portion of Strand's oeuvre as a whole, as he did not pursue abstraction during the greater part of his career, shifting to representing often marginalized peoples in New York City in his more explicitly politically driven work. Nonetheless, his abstract photographs provide insight into this experimental period of understanding the conditions of

[370] Morris Hambourg, *Paul Strand Circa 1916*, 33.
[371] Paul Strand, "The Art Motive in Photography" (1923) in *Photographers on Photography*, ed. Nathan Lyons. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 153.
[372] Greenough, "Paul Strand, 1916: Applied Intelligence", 254.

making a photograph that would inform his teaching as well as later photographic work.

In another image bearing the title *Chair Abstraction, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* also from 1916 (Figure 4.24), Strand has captured the image of a Victorian wooden rocking chair.[373] The chair, which has been brought outside, is photographed diagonally, disorienting the perspective of an otherwise upright piece of furniture, designed to support the weight of a human body. Proposed as a series of diagonal lines, the positive space composed of decorative bars of the chair are in contrast to the straight porch shadows in the background. On the seat of the chair are reflections of the lines from its back, producing gestural shadows and contributing to the relationality between atmosphere and object. A photograph by Josef Albers entitled *Garden Chairs III, Early Morning, Kurfürstendam* (1929) (Figure 4.25) proposes an interesting European counterexample of a similar play with chairs, tables and the consequent shadows cast, the sun not only creating new lines by way of shade or umbra, but also by illuminating other parts of the outdoor furniture: line and shape in chiaroscuro. Moreover, in this exploration into light, shadow and tone, Albers calls attention to the garden chairs as not only located in a specific place, Kurfürstendam, but also as captured at a specific time of day with a precise set of atmospheric qualities.

The subject of chairs in modernist photography is a motif that recurs in the work of varied photographers. In 1931, Ilse Bing produced a photograph entitled *Chairs, Paris, Champs Élysées* (Figure 4.26), depicting a series of iron outdoor chairs on a wet and glimmering ground after or during heavy rainfall. The chairs surround the puddle that reflects the sky's brightness. The shape of the chairs with lines of their

[373] The chair is identified as such by Morris Hambourg, *Paul Strand Circa 1916*, 33.

structure that dictate their skeletal shape is repeated, not only establishing a formal pattern of identical repetition, but also inspiring a consideration of how the human body is invoked by the form of the chair despite the absence of people. Yet, all at slightly different angles, this pattern is varied and imperfect and elicits the experiencing of viewing the same object from different angles, reminiscent of pedagogical lessons in perception.

Also in 1931, Florence Henri produced a few chair abstractions, which she titled simply *Composition* (Figure 4.27). In one version, the chair is present almost exclusively as shadow cast on the ground. The seat of the chair is conveyed by silhouetted lines that sprout from a centralised point, so that the abstracted shape looks almost wheel-like. The object in the centre of the image is a potted plant on the ground pictured from above. The plant casts its own shadows onto the pavement which also acting as a surface onto which the chair's shadow is cast. In another photograph (Figure 4.28) from what looks like the same shoot, the plant is pictured from a different angle and the shadow of the chair is positioned at the top left corner. Other objects cast intricate shadows: perhaps another chair produces a criss-cross shadow on the pavement where several diagonal lines cross each other producing a mesh-like projection. This is similar to her *Handrail* photograph, where an out-of-focus pole is closest object to the camera. Henri reverses expectation, so that objects or the climatic outputs of those objects (shadows) appear as further recessed into the frame, despite sharply presented settings.

In a different setting, Lucia Moholy took photographs of chairs at the Bauhaus, where she documented the design work created at the school.[374] Moholy is a fascinating case as her Bauhaus photographs act as aesthetic feats in and of themselves while she is also largely responsible for photographically documenting and recording the activities of her surroundings. In a photograph titled *Folding Chairs in the Antechamber to the Director's Office* (1923) (Figure 4.29), Moholy has photographed five chairs designed by Josef Albers that are placed up against a wall and at a slight distance. Chairs one, three and five are positioned so that their seats are down, while chairs two and four have their seats folded up. This could have served to demonstrate the varied positions of the chairs, but intention aside, the line up repeats a pattern and it is becomes easy to lose oneself in the shapes and forms of the chairs, almost forgetting their objecthood altogether. The room is mostly bare: the floor is a darker tone than the walls, and a white radiator is visible on the right edge of the frame. Interesting for my discussion is the effect of the window on the wall against which the chairs are placed. Taken at daylight, a strong glow of natural light enters the room. It is so bright that it obscures most of the window's definition and radiates as a strong white light hazy glow into the room. The glow, despite hindering visual access to the shape of the window itself, illuminates the room and makes other aspects of the photograph visible. Attention to the atmospheric conditions in this way brings together abstraction and document, illumination and obscurity, as well as the visible and non-visible.

Continuing to explore the relational conversation between absence and presence in abstract photography as they inform connections between realism and

[374] Robin Schuldenfrei has written extensively on Lucia Moholy's little recognized contribution to Bauhaus photography. See Robin Schuldenfrei, "Images in Exile: Lucia Moholy-Nagy's Bauhaus Negatives and the Construction of the Bauhaus Legacy", History of Photography, vol. 37, issue 2, (2013): 182–203.

abstraction, the next chapter, which takes the machine as its thematic focus, begins with a still-life photograph. While the machine is entirely physically absent from the contents of the frame of this peculiar still-life, I argue that it is nonetheless present in spirit through the notion of the constant form. This conversation opens up a further inquiry into atmospheric considerations of presence and absence as they are implicated and useful in digesting complex abstract photographs that resist coherent reading and straightforward interpretation.

5 – ABSTRACTING THE MACHINE AS MODERN SPIRIT

This chapter takes as its theme the machine: photographs of machines made during the modernist period as well as the status of photography as a mechanical medium. I will interrogate how the machine contributed to new ways of seeing in the modernist era by looking at photographic vision as a mechanical vision, and also through a close reading of photographs of machines.

As I will demonstrate, the medium of photography is implicated in the manifestation of new forms of beauty that render the machine the epitome of modernist utilitarian forms which contain — as Amédée Ozenfant (amongst others) articulates time and again — only that which is essential.[375] Consideration of the camera as a machine in itself, allows for a wider perspective on the implications of photography, particularly as it becomes intertwined with the photographing of machines themselves, perhaps most emblematically in Paul Strand's photographs of his Akeley camera (Figure 5.0).[376] These Akeley photographs with the camera as an object as its focus, reflect the still-life custom of depicting useful objects as motionaless and not in use, still. I also have in mind here the self-portraits of Florence Henri (Figure 5.1) and Ilse Bing (Figure 5.2) that include within them the camera as a shared subject. Photographers at the beginning of the twentieth century were keen

[375] Early in *Foundations*, Ozenfant writes on Purism that it deals with "constants" or forms which transcend ephemerality. He describes Purism as an attitude or procedure rather than form, as such, enacting a kind of abstraction from the literal form of a work in favour of a conceptual approach, despite in practice being quite concerned with the visual aesthetics of what such "constants" can and cannot look like. Later, he writes that: "A beautiful Egyptian statue was perfect in its epoch and remains so, since it appeals to all our 'constants'. A work of art that satisfies only a passing need, a changing fashion, wears itself out", 44.

[376] For a detailed discussion on Strand and Stieglitz's relationship to the machine, see Morris Hambourg, "From 291 to the Museum of Modern Art: Photography in New York 1910–37", 24–27.

users of a variety of new technologies, some of which allowed them to document and circulate images of a continuously modernising society. In the replacement of handiwork or crafts by mass industry, machines also became a typical instrument of human labour and were common tools used in everyday life.

With regard to the changes in vision that photography instantiated, implicated as they were in the machine, Rosalind Krauss examines, in the context of the Bauhaus, how the camera offered an alternative method of seeing that was distinctly linked with mechanical vision. She writes: "the instrument — that apparatus for seeing better, faster, more microscopically, further away, and under different conditions than the mere 'unaided eye' — was understood, as we have seen, as a supplement to the human organ, a kind of prosthetic device to extend and amplify a deficient vision".[377] In addition to being an extension of human optics so that new perspectives were suddenly possible, Krauss describes this instrumental vision as an "introjection" that imposes itself "into the very field of the photograph, of the image of that extending, amplifying device for the mastery of reality".[378] To 'master reality' is a sentiment that communicates a demand of documentary and of photography. That is, it refers to a desire or expectation that documentary and photography should deliver truth to the masses by way of the camera's assumed objectivity and superiority of vision associated with the human eye sans apparatus.

This chapter will begin by looking at a still-life photograph by Charles Sheeler to demonstrate its connection not only to his other photographs that take the machine as its explicit subject, but to the machine as the spirit of modernism, as proposed by Ozenfant. While dictionary definitions of the terms *machine* and *apparatus* are virtually the same, there might be associative differences between how the terms are

[377] Rosalind Krauss, "Jump Over the Bauhaus", *October*, vol. 15, (1980): 109.
[378] Krauss, "Jump Over the Bauhaus", 109.

used. While *apparatus* may be associated with physical instruments, the *machine* implies a system and movement, qualities that are often associated with its apparent opposite, nature. Connecting Sheeler's still-life or *nature morte* with the machine according to Ozenfant's theories will lead to my next inquiry having to do with beauty.

Revisiting Albert Renger-Patzsch's *The World is Beautiful* and considering it alongside Jane Heap's *Machine Age Exposition*, I will explore shifts in the attribution of beauty to machines and the problematics associated with this perception. I will look at links between the machine and nature, the latter traditionally and widely affiliated with the beautiful to investigate how photography has located beauty in the modern machine.

I will conclude with a section on photographic depictions of the Eiffel Tower, situating my arguments in formalist-phenomenological readings of modernist viewpoints that elicit Moholy-Nagy's concept of *faulty photographs*. By returning to acts of looking up and looking down, I will attend to the imoprtant differences in the photographs of the Eiffel Tower by Moholy-Nagy, Ilse Bing and Germaine Krull.[379] In particular, I will demonstrate how atmospheres and embodied encounters with these photographs play a vital role in both situating a viewer's experience of the images within abstraction as well as acting as ciphers to reveal the experience of the photographer at the moment he/she captured the tower with his/her camera.

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[379] Christopher Phillips mentions different publications in the 1920s that demonstrated "dizzying views up to skyscraper peaks, close-ups of gleaming machine parts, anonymous split-second dramas glimpsed on city streets, landforms revealed as near-abstractions from far aloft", naming key photographers who were featured in these articles: Berenice Abbott, Moholy-Nagy, Germaine Krull, Maurice Tabard, Herbert Bayer, André Kertész, Florence Henri, Man Ray, and Albert Renger-Patzsch. See Phillips, "Resurrecting Vision: European Photography Between the World Wars", in Maria Morris Hambourg and Christopher Phillips. *The New Vision: Photography between the World Wars. The Ford Motor Company Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 65.

i. THE MACHINES OF CHARLES SHEELER AND AMÉDÉE OZENFANT

I wish to start this chapter that focuses on the machine in modern photography with an already familiar concept: the still-life. In 1922, Charles Sheeler produced a striking untitled photograph of two jugs and a vase on a table lit in such a way that their shadows project and overlap onto the wall behind them (Figure 5.3).[380] What is most peculiar about this still-life composition is its uncanny resemblance to Purist paintings produced by Amédée Ozenfant in France at the very same moment (Figure 5.4). Sheeler's photograph consists of three differently shaped jugs or vessels on a table. The still-life is highly decontextualized so that the table is defined and differentiated from the wall by a diagonal line that spans the width of the image behind the jugs, the table demarcated by a darker shade than the wall. The space of the photograph is shallow; a short round jug with a damaged lip and twisted handle sits at the forefront. Only slightly behind it to the left is a taller, darker jug with a more defined neck curve and to the right is a white carafe with no handle. Cast on the wall behind the jugs are their shadows, overlapping in such a way that creates certain darker shapes and other lighter ones. On the carafe, the first jug's shadow can be seen, as if to establish layers not only of the jugs themselves but also of their shadows. This kind of layering or overlapping of objects and shadows is akin to the aesthetic explored by Ozenfant in his Purist compositions of similar subject matter.

[380] I wish to state early on that Paul Strand also produced curious jug images that play with still life and abstraction through framing techniques in one image (*Jug and Fruit*, 1916), and through cast shadows of a porch in the other (*Orange and Jug on Porch*, 1916).

In their essay, "After Cubism", Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) proposed the following perspective on the machine:

> What is most characteristic of our era… is the industrial, mechanical, scientific spirit. *The solidity of art with this spirit need not lead to a machine made art, nor to depictions of machines.* The deduction is different: the state of mind that results from a knowledge of machines affords profound insights into matter, and consequently into nature.[381]

Concerned with the spirit of an era, that which represents a given moment in history, Ozenfant and Jeanneret turn to the machine to represent their modern era. Yet, for them, this '*machine*' is conceptually abstracted by way of its proposed presence even though it may be absent as maker or as subject of representation. The two authors claim that art made in conjunction with this spirit that attends to the machine need not necessarily be connected to it explicitly, that is, either as a tool in its production or as the subject of representation, the content of the image. Neither Ozenfant's Purist paintings nor Sheeler's jug photograph depict machines outright. According to the conclusions of the Purist duo, however, even though the machine is physically absent, it is still present in "the state of mind that results from a knowledge of machines", which, as a result, extends to a knowledge of "matter" and "nature".

What Ozenfant and Jeanneret mean by "nature" here is not entirely clear. Do they refer to the *natural world* and, in so doing propose a knowledge of that which might constitute the assumed antithesis of the machine? Or, do they mean to suggest nature more conceptually, so as to refer to *the nature of things* in terms of ontology? Either way, their statement remains decisively bold and elicits the notion that an

[381] Ozenfant and Jeanneret, "After Cubism", 147. Italics added by me.

acquired knowledge of machines results in an expanded knowledge of, possibly, at its most extreme, everything else in the modern era.

This absence of any specifically represented machine and its replacement by generalized knowledge of the machine abstracts the viewer from machinery's material presence and productive practice. Yet, for Ozenfant and Jeanneret, the machine is nevertheless contained within something still present. Indeed, they seem to argue that knowledge of one thing transfers onto knowledge of something else entirely as a totality. If one comprehends the spirit of a given time — in this case and according to Ozenfant and Jeanneret embodied in the machine — this comprehension is thus materialized in modern visual arts. If, as Ozenfant and Jeanneret suggest, a machine need not be present as maker or as represented object within a work of art, but could be materialized in a different shape altogether, where does the machine start and where does it end? For them, the machine is abstracted to such an extent that it can itself be visually represented by something altogether other than a machine, and still reflect and stand in for the spirit of an age, in this case, modernism.

In his seminal text, *Foundations of Modern Art,* Ozenfant conceptualized what counts as modern (and what is consequently excluded) through a method that abstracts time and history and effectively muddles notions of modernity since antiquity.[382] Here, he proposed his theory of 'constant forms', which he defines as that which transcends history as a result of essential design. He argues that 'constant form' is embodied in and represented by the jugs, bottles and other vessels that take

[382] Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art,* (New York: Dover Publications, 1928).

precedence as subject matter in Purist compositions and that are rendered in painting by way of abstract techniques.[383]

In her monograph on Ozenfant and Purism, Susan Ball delineates how Ozenfant's notions of constants and the economy of forms made possible through machines extended to his conceptions of the human body. As such:

> The artist himself was interpreted as a type of machine, responding in a mechanical and scientific fashion to sensations of sight, touch, and sound. There is a like response, they claimed, because man and artist are drawn to the underlying order and structure in nature, drawn, that is, to the precision and perfection witnessed in things mechanical. The human eye is the 'resonator,' and 'organe percepteur,' which both seeks out and responds to number and vibrations in objects, determining beauty or ugliness in a mechanical fashion.[384]

Ball's statement about Ozenfant's conception of the artist as a machine is one that

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[383] Similarly to Ozenfant's conception of 'constant form', Damisch has written that in the nineteenth century, Gottfried Semper too "hypothesized an abstract origin for art, which linked it to the production of textiles or to geometric decor derived from techniques of basket-weaving or pottery; so much so that a time would come for some to doubt the very authenticity of Paleolithic wall paintings, whose discovery in the South of France seemed to impose a dogmatic replay, in considering 'geometric' art as having succeeded an initial phase characterized by a 'realism' that had something shocking about it", "Remarks on Abstraction", 135.

[384] Susan Ball, *Ozenfant and Purism: The Evolution of a Style (1915–1930)*. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 120. Quotations from *Après le Cubisme*. Moholy-Nagy makes a parallel statement relaying a description of the human in language inherent to the machine in his essay "Production-Reproduction" whereby he writes "man as construct is the synthesis of all his functional apparatuses, i.e. man will be most perfect in his own time if the functional apparatuses of which he is composed – his cells as well as the most sophisticated organs – are conscious and trained to the limit of their capacity", 289. This method of depicting the human as a apparatus with the capacity for efficiency and function is akin to how one might consider a machine in the modern epoch, hence a likening of man and machine and of human activity with mechanical (re)production.

resonates perhaps most with the photographer and parallels Krauss's notion of the camera as prosthetic. Although it has become evident that Ozenfant would have disagreed with such a link, attached as he was to the union of painting and machines, Ball nonetheless responds to the ways in which vision changed at the moment of Purism's conception. There was thus an effort to view the eye — the part of the body responsible for visual perception — as akin to the machine, as if to evoke the image of a modernist cyborg.[385] In "Purism", Ozenfant and Jeanneret write: "in all ages, man has created objects of transport: boats, cars; objects of defense: arms; objects of pleasure: musical instruments, etc., all of which have always obeyed the law of selection: economy".[386] With regard to these objects, some of which are undoubtedly machines, the authors continue to insist the following: "one discovered that all these objects are true extensions of human limbs and are, for this reason, of human scale, harmonizing both among themselves and with man".[387] In this way, the scale of the human body came to be essential, especially for Le Corbusier in his solo architectural work, and specifically with regard to his Modular theory[388]. Similarly, the camera as a prosthetic that acts as a mechanical eye, has been considered as an instrument that extends and enhances natural or human perception.

In her assessment of Purism, Ball expresses that for Ozenfant, everything came down to the machine so that:

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[385] Although coming from an entirely different perspective, and responding to the horrors of the First World War, it is important to acknowledge the work of Otto Dix in the context of the human-machine hybrid at the beginning of the 1920s in Europe. The image that comes to mind most vividly is his painting, *The Skat Players* (1920).
[386] Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant, "Purism", in *Modern Artists on Art*, ed. Robert L. Herbert. (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964), 56–57.
[387] Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, "Purism", 57.
[388] This publication from 1948 sought to make anthropomorphic claims about the scale of architecture and to propose that architecture ought to be built based on the bodily propositions of a standing man with his arm raised.

> The Purist painting ideally embodied those principles of order and harmony and economy on which Nature, Man, and the Machine were based. Nature herself was a machine, with an underlying order and geometric structure, which was involved in a never-ending process of natural selection[389].

This is similar to Albert Renger-Patzsch's likening of leaf patterns and reptile scales to the formal repetition present in the body/limbs/parts of an industrial machine's tasks, machines also represented in in *Die Welt ist schön* (*The World is Beautiful*) from 1928.[390] In this way, the machine for Ozenfant far exceeded that which could be considered mechanical or defined as industrial tools developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, such that nature itself, perhaps instinctively considered as the machine's direct opposite, should also be included within such a definition.

The category of machines was therefore not limited to the manmade. Instead, it had the capacity to expand and extend to include potentially anything. In actual practice, however, it comprised only that which was carefully selected by modernist theorists like Ozenfant. Thus, conceptualizing the machine in this way entailed the assumption that the theorist had the authority to determine what counts as machine, what counts as modern, and what, consequently was excluded from these categories.

Again, Ball writes the following:

> The Purist interest in economy and efficiency led logically to questions of the mechanical reproduction of painting. The mechanically selected Purist elements depicted to Ozenfant and Jeanneret's paintings formed the standardized, albeit limited, vocabulary of Purism. By extension, the painting

[389] Ball, *Ozenfant and Purism*, 120.
[390] Renger-Patzsch, *The World is Beautiful* (1928).

itself becomes an 'object-type' which also had been perfected and was replicable.[391]

The continuous attempt to reproduce the same object-types through 'constant forms' was an ambition aligned with the modernist (always failed) desire to obtain and reach perfection. Ball's reference to the mechanical reproduction of painting necessarily implicates Benjamin's conceptions of the specificities of photography as a medium and of how photography impacts other forms of art. What is most fascinating about this set of ideas is the association of painting with the machine's capacity for reproduction, which is in a significant way counter-intuitive, especially at the historic moment in which Ozenfant and Jeanneret developed Purism. At that time, figures like Sheeler in America were beginning to explore similar themes with photography. Even more directly, the popularization of photography led to its significant mushrooming: much of the population could now own a camera, and photographs could be disseminated and circulated on a mass scale and with greater ease.

If Benjamin claimed that the mechanical reproduction of art (and of objects) could be made possible through the medium of photography, Ozenfant wished to develop painting in such a way that it worked in tandem with the machine. This new movement of painting, could, according to the Purists, with a success that exceeded that of photography, reproduce and replicate forms that adhered to *his* carefully selected exemplars of prolific 'constants'.[392]

Interestingly, Ozenfant's preoccupation with the machine had implications beyond his concern for Purist painting. In 1910, together with his brother, Ozenfant designed his own automobile, the HISPANO-OZENFANT, which was exhibited in

[391] Ball, *Ozenfant and Purism*, 122.
[392] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

the Salon de l'automobile in 1911. There, it was seen by Alphonse XIII of Spain, who went on to build a replica naming it the Hispano-Alphonse XIII.[393] Moreover, in "After Cubism", Ozenfant and Jeanneret praise Taylorism, which they admit had been met with "pejorative" responses, and propose that, "it is only a matter of the intelligent exploitation of scientific discoveries".[394] They proclaim:

> Already, machines, because of their numerical calibration, have evolved more rapidly, attaining today a remarkable refinement and purity. This purity creates in us a new sensation, a new delectation, whose significance is cause for reflection; it is a new factor in the modern concept of Art.[395]

As Purist painters, Ozenfant and Le Corbusier use the same word to describe their painting movement as they use for the machine: that is, purity. Even more so, this pure machine is sensorial and to be delighted in. For Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, the machine, insofar as it is equated with purity, is the way forward for Art.

Thus, in *Foundations*, Ozenfant compares the wheel of an Egyptian buggy or carriage from 1500 B.C. with the wheel of his Touring Bugatti made in 1928, the same year the book was first published (Figure 5.5).[396] By labelling both images as examples of Bugattis, Ozenfant affiliates the name of the modern car manufacturer with the ancient vehicle-turned-artefact in order to suggest and justify a link between antiquity and modern times as well as a certain transcendentalism of essential tools of mechanical progression. There is a distinct anachronism at work in this likening, but Ozenfant also suggests that pure forms are not only available to modern times. They existed and persisted by way of formal and functional qualities in objects since

[393] Ball, *Ozenfant and Purism*, 9.
[394] Ozenfant and Jeanneret, "After Cubism", 142.
[395] Ozenfant and Jeanneret, "After Cubism", 143.
[396] Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art*, 150.

antiquity. To juxtapose these two "Bugattis" is to reflect similarly on the reproductive quality of forms, which Ozenfant tries to communicate. In the same way that the Bugatti wheel was maintained throughout time so that it serves a modernist purpose, being part of a modernist machine, so too do Ozenfant's jugs function as reproducible forms that in turn stand in for the machine as the source of mechanical reproduction.

Now, with the machine in mind, it might seem more intuitive to discuss Sheeler's River Rouge series as opposed to this curious photograph of jugs on a table. It is worth noting that Terry Smith has discussed Sheeler's River Rouge series with regard to the artist's connections to the New York Dadaists, and having taken inspiration from the Paris avant-garde, mentioning Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, and certain movements, namely Cubism and Fauvism.[397] So, as a means to link the jug photograph with the River Rouge ones, I will bring forth important points regarding this series. In 1927, Sheeler was commissioned to photograph the Ford Company's River Rouge industrial complex in Detroit to promote the Model A car, which was to replace the Model T. Instead of advancing the car into the public eye by way of photographing it either in parts or as a whole, the advertising firm N. W. Ayer & Son developed a marketing strategy whereby photographs of the modern factory would be released, while the car itself would remain hidden, absent, a secret.

The image that has become most iconic of Sheeler's River Rouge series is his *Criss-Crossed Conveyors* (Figure 5.6). This photograph of the exterior of the plant displays the hard edges and straight lines that were at the heart of the industrial architecture of the Ford complex for the mass-production of American cars. One

[397] Terry Smith, "Henry Ford and Charles Sheeler: Monopoly and Modernism", in in *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 109. See as well Hemingway's discussion on Precisionism and the New York Dada with regard to *Broom*, an international magazine connecting modern art movements in Europe and the U.S. in *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America*, 24–29.

distinct X comprised of conveyors composes the foreground of the image, despite being at a distance.[398] The chiaroscuro of this cross renders it the focal point of the image, despite another intersection that forms a second cross with one of the main conveyors in the background. Behind these crosses are eight chimneys with a light smoke filling the air from their openings. Apart from these tubes, the two water towers in the mid-ground and the top halves of a huge number of tires at the bottom of the frame, there are no curved lines in the image. In addition, like many of the photographs from this series, there are no workers visible and the core of the image becomes the massive and overpowering machines that constitute this modernist industrial landscape. The image calls to mind European works by Moholy-Nagy and Alexander Rodchenko that have similar compositions (photographs of architectonic structures with the adoption of intense oblique angles) (Figures 5.7 and 5.8).[399] Another photograph worth mentioning here is *Pont Roulant, Rotterdam (Bridge Crane, Rotterdam)* (1926) by modernist photographer Germaine Krull (Figure 5.9).

In relation to *Criss-Crossed Conveyors*, James H. Maroney Jr. has proposed that the "little puffs of steam are as ubiquitous as the machines from which they emanate. These are to our eyes just the unavoidable and natural by-products of working men and machines",[400] Maroney Jr. also writes that: "Sheeler regarded these puffs of smoke as something more than incidental: they were primary to the subject of

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[398] In his chapter on "Architecture or Revolution" in *Towards a New Architecture*, Le Corbusier discusses the mass-production of building and construction and includes an image of steel beams forming a focal "X" in the center of the photograph, which he labels "Steel Construction. The Steel Corporation", 273. This "X" form can directly be linked to Sheeler's "X" so much so that it may even be possible to establish the form as emblematic of this moment of mass-production not only of products but also of buildings during an uproar of construction.

[399] Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[400] James H. Maroney Jr., "Charles Sheeler Reveals the Machinery of His Soul", *American Art*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), 37.

his Ford photographs".[401] There is an interesting distinction here to be drawn between steam and smoke, and Maroney uses both terms in his visual analysis. While the factory produces both, and although they are visually difficult to distinguish, steam produces power and movement while smoke is waste, pollution and by-product. Not only are their origins different and the ways in which they are produced, but an embodied experience of each of these substances would prove to feel considerably different when taking a breath in their vicinity. Moreover, as the *effects* or *products* of labour that is hidden from the camera, the steam or smoke behaves as a microcosm for the production of the factory as a whole. The suggestion that this substance was indeed the central focus of these images is not far-fetched, being as they were images generated to advertise a car that makes no visual appearance in the series. The steam or smoke thus reflects the industrial climate of the photograph's scenery so that it is representative of the labour that occurs behind the factory walls and behind the modern energy technologies that would have made the machines run.[402] In this way, the opaque air behaves as an abstracted representation of the factory as a machine but also as the car (the final product) as a machine, mechanically produced.

In a similar regard, Karen Lucic has described the focal points of another photograph in the River Rouge series entitled *Stamping Press* (Figure 5.10):

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[401] Maroney Jr., "Charles Sheeler Reveals the Machinery of His Soul", 37.
[402] In his essay, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Steam", T.J. Clark gives a thorough account of the role of steam in paintings by Manet and De Chirico. He argues that "Steam could be harnessed; steam could be compressed. Steam was what initially made the machine world possible. It was the middle term in mankind's great reconstruction of Nature. *Rain, Steam, and Speed*", 157. Moreover, he introduces the term "petrification" in a modernist context as the process by which "image-word seems not to be turning its objects, even its users and viewers, to stone, but rather into water, or vapor, or pure spatiality, pure virtuality" , 162. Clark, unfortunately does not go on to directly further develop this nuanced idea, which would otherwise be worthwhile.

> The interlocking machinery and automatic conveyor belts not only improved productivity, but they also dictated the ways in which labourers would perform their work. The swiftly moving assembly lines severely limited workers' movements and their exercise of individual initiative. Now the factory embodied in its very structure the imperatives of management, whose wishes were conveyed, not merely by foremen, but by the architecture of the workplace.[403]

The main impact of this photograph is the manner in which the machine, monitored and used by the worker, dwarfs him, rendering him minute, anonymous — he faces away from the camera — and ultimately replaceable. Compositionally, abstraction is at the heart of this image: the nearly all-over quality of the gigantic machine, with repeated vertical and horizontal lines intersecting in ways that function to make the machine move in circular motions (again implicating geometry into the aesthetics of the image and into the imagined movements of the machine, comprised of several parts fixed together to complete a single and focused function). The machine comprises the entire picture. The car as a machine itself is absent, yet the mechanics of the manufacturing of the car command the photograph, almost merging with the architecture of the factory, whose beams on the ceiling are machine-like in their supportive function. Today's car advertisements may have similar concepts behind them, showing cars being built by robots. The message is: our products are unsullied

[403] Karen Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1991)92. For a Marxist discussion on risks to the worker's body in automobile factories, see Deborah Leslie and David Butz, "'GM Suicide': Flexibility, Space, and the Injured Body." *Economic Geography* 74, no. 4 (1998): 360–78 as well as David Butz and Deborah Leslie, "Risky Subjects: Changing Geographies of Employment in the Automobile Industry." *Area* 33, no. 2 (2001): 212–19.

by human error and precision made. To remove the trace of human labour is in itself a form of commodification.

While the machine may produce the most significant movements, the worker's motions are managed and limited so that the least amount of human effort is exerted. The worker's manual or artisanal labour is instead replaced by a repetitive task performed and perfected at a rate of increasing speed. Lucic explains this shift away from the human to the machine as follows: "Ford also embraced the emerging mechanistic attitude towards humanity; he even conceived of the body as consisting of interchangeable parts". The human body and its various parts could be assessed and utilised as extensions of machines, as moving parts that facilitate larger motion to serve a function beyond the movement of human limbs. She continues: "[Ford] freely admitted that the principles of mass production limited personal freedom in the labour force and even claimed that most workers welcomed such a situation".[404] In a similar vein, Terry Smith has written on the physical movements of factory workers at the Highland Park Ford Plant: "workers making simple, repetitive gestures of assembly were also performing machinelike functions: analogies to robotic behaviour were quickly drawn. Human space disappeared at Highland Park; machine logic allowed no agency for workers except as operatives".[405] These accounts propose a cyborg-like transformation of humans when they work in the factory so that their movement and place in their surroundings were dictated by the machine's mechanisms. This cyborg, however, is not akin to the enhanced prosthetic of the photographer whereby the camera facilitates agency and expression: here, in the factory, this conjoining is oppressive and stifling.

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[404] Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine*, 89.
[405] Smith, "Fordism: Mass Production and Total Control", 32. For more on the impact and repercussions of the assembly line on the human see Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, 121–127.

Lucic suspects that Sheeler would have been directed by the advertising agency on the whole "to focus on the buildings in isolation, rather than on the hectic activity around the assembly line" in order not to expose the exploitative management that was deemed necessary for this kind of mass-production.[406] The factory worker as machine was not a lustrous selling point for the car as a modern machine itself, made by machines and mechanically reliable. This omission is a prime example of alienation caused by mass industry and the machine and links to strategic capitalist decisions to distance consumers from the production processes of the goods they buy and use.

Looking at Sheeler's River Rouge photographs, the viewer is faced with a series of absences and stand-ins: the workers are absent or dwarfed, steam and smoke behave as icons of industry and machinery, and the machines that produce the car are the mechanical focal point in lieu of the car as the machine, which is entirely excluded and hidden. These choices of exclusions and the absences that become presences are methodical considerations of how atmospheres communicate and how atmospheres can be manipulated to communicate a feeling or even a product even in the absence of the product itself. At times, these deliberate atmospheric interventions are elements of atmosphere itself such as in the case of the steam and smoke. This communication of the absent object or person to communicate a mood or atmosphere is parallel to Ozenfant's proposal that the spirit of the machine is present in 'constant forms', for example, in Sheeler's jug photograph. In this sense spirit acts in a manner akin to atmosphere.

[406] Lucic, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine*, 95.

In an effort to explain the lack of human subjects in Purist compositions, John Golding argues, in a manner reminiscent of the 'missing' people in Sheeler's architectural and domestic scenes, the following:

> The paint is applied evenly and impersonally and the simple subject matter is given a hieratic dignity. But if these paintings are remote there is nothing inhuman about them; they reflect rather man's need to order his surroundings. Their geometry comes across not as an empty theoretical exercise but rather as a *presence*, calm and reassuring.[407]

As such, by facilitating a dialogue between geometry and the machine or the man-made through scientific technology, Purism, according to Ozenfant and Jeanneret constitutes a method by which humans can live harmoniously with the forms around them in the modern era as a mode of re-naturing. This method, however, does not aim only at mere coexistence, but includes within it ordering, organization, and control that seeks to make sense of or manage their surroundings. In other words, artists, and people more generally, arrange the objects of everyday life by seeking to describe, depict and represent them in order to derive greater meaning. Golding's use of the word "presence" in this context to imply a literal human absence can also be reflected upon when considering the lack of human subjects in Sheeler's work. Invisible or unpictured, one might consider the term *presence* alongside related terms, each slightly different and with its own nuance: these might include *feeling*, *essence*, *mood*, or *atmosphere*.

Similar to the considerations of Ozenfant and Jeanneret, Gernot Böhme acknowledges the avant-gardes' aim to organize their surroundings by attending to the

[407] John Golding, *Ozenfant*, (USA: Colorcraft Offset, Inc., 1973), 12.

auras or atmospheres of their environments, not just the objects that inhabit them. He explores the difficulties in describing, determining and defining the notion of atmospheres and indicates that it is difficult to determine "where they are" as they consequently appear "to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze".[408] Using the word "aura" in an attempt to illustrate or qualify atmosphere as the avant-gardes had addressed it, Böhme states that:

> [The avant-gardes] did not succeed in discarding aura like a coat, leaving behind them the sacred halls of art for life. What they did succeed in doing was to thematize the aura of artworks, their halo, their atmosphere, their nimbus. And this made it clear that what makes a work an artwork cannot be grasped solely through its concrete qualities. But what exceeds them, this 'more', the aura, remained completely undetermined. 'Aura' signifies as it were atmosphere as such, the empty characterless envelope of its presence.[409]

Just as art cannot be discarded in exchange of or in the embrace of life, neither could aura be expelled from a consideration of avant-garde art. Aura, as such, exists as atmosphere and describes that which radiates from the art object itself and that cannot be captured by way of attending to its material or easily observable characteristics. Rather, this aura as *excessive* is thus the effect or product of that artwork, its steam or smoke.

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[408] Böhme, "Atmösphere", 114. This discussion of aura is separate from Benjamin's understanding of the concept. Whereas Böhme refers to an ambience or atmosphere that is spatial, Benjamin's approach adopts as well a temporal understanding so that an object's historicity is implicated in its unique quality and what renders that object singular, personal, extraordinary and one of its kind. However, in way not dissimilar to Benjamin's assertion that the aura is displaced and/or dissolved in the face of mechanical reproduction manifested particularly with regard to the medium of photography, Böhme's aura too is custom to the particularity of an object or of a constructed space.

[409] Böhme, "Atmosphere", 116–7.

There is an attempt then to move beyond the literal depiction of the objects conveyed through painting for example, with the final goal of expressing something that transcends the object, namely the aura of that object or of something much larger and expressive of their epoch. In this way, the concept of the aura contains within it more than what Benjamin describes as the uniqueness of a given artwork or object, and instead portrays that which emanates invisibly but palpably from it. Objects and the spaces that exist in between them are reflective not only of their having existed somewhere and having been photographed inhabiting that space, but also can be understood as expanding from them, or as expressed through them, acting, in this case, as a distinctive salute to modernity.

Ozenfant's works present the viewer with the depiction of a variety of containers — "vases, glasses, bottles, plates" — that for him "were built to suit the needs of maximum capacity, maximum strength, maximum economy of materials, maximum economy of effort".[410] As such, Ozenfant's chosen objects are representational themselves and refer to a system that he associates with modern times as well as with older periods. He puts particular emphasis on ancient Greece so that "the true purist work should conquer chance and channel emotion; it should be the rigorous image of a rigorous conception: by means of a clear, purely realized conception, it should offer *facts* to the imagination".[411] Ozenfant and Jeanneret's language here is reflective of the vocabulary associated with factories, mass-production and the economy of both objects and labour. There is a collaborative operation between fact and imagination such that if a Purist painter paints a water jug, it can come to communicate the essence, aura or spirit of a machine (thus representing modernity at large) and need not be literal in its depiction. The vase or glass behaves

[410] Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, "Purism", 56–57.
[411] Ozenfant and Jeanneret, "After Cubism", 163.

as a microcosm of an everyday economy of objects that assists in their organization for humans as well as in the activities of daily human life.

If containing wine, it is possible that the vessels reference — in addition the other subject matter of Ozenfant's paintings — pleasure. Yet, to Ozenfant, the containers reflect platonic forms, constant from the ages of ancient Greece through to the modern era. As such, his inclusion of wine as well as guitars may seem to present a Dionysian opposition, reflected in the hedonistic pursuits of drink and music. However, like "objects of transport" such as boats and cars, Ozenfant and Jeanneret describe these things of pleasure as akin to the Apollonian jugs, "all of which have always obeyed the law of selection: economy".[412] This is consistent with Ozenfant's description of constant forms, which he provides in *Foundations of Modern Art*. For Ozenfant, the constant form is that which transcends epochs by way of its timelessness. It is a form that can be epitomized by objects such as jugs or vessels that, beginning from ancient Greece, embody in and through their shapes a feature or quality deemed essential, or, in other words, objects whose form and beauty are determined by their function. These forms thus defeat ephemerality and come to represent what Ozenfant deems the modern, despite appearing in historical moments that precede the modernist movement by the historic avant-garde.

Moholy-Nagy has also engaged with the economy of form, and called for an embrace of technology:

> **Not against technical progress, but with it.** The solution lies, accordingly, not in working against technical advances, but in exploiting them for the

[412] Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, "Purism", 56–57.

> benefit of all. Man can be freed through techniques, if he finally realizes their function: i.e., a balanced life through full use of our liberated energies.[413]

Continuing his declaration, Moholy-Nagy insists that: "**not a single piece of work, nor the highest individual achievement must be emphasized, but instead the creation of the commonly usable type, development toward 'standards'**".[414] Moholy-Nagy continues to affirm that something cannot come together by way of "scattered individual efforts", which lack "a general concept"; instead the focus was to be "a quest for the essential".[415] Arguably parallel to Ozenfant's idea of the constant form, Moholy-Nagy's type or standard provides a guide on how to approach and ultimately accept and welcome technological advances. In this way, the constant form is privileged over an individual effort at imaginative design. It is through this standardization, therefore, that both Moholy-Nagy and Ozenfant suggest that technology can be naturalized and adored so that a modern life can be pursued. Such efforts at aesthetically paring down forms do not only render the object itself more akin to abstract forms; more than this, the very act of creating a standard or constant form succeeds in brushing over difference in a way that dilutes variability in favor of a transcendent essence.

If anything of this essence is taken to be true, then Sheeler's depictions of vases and vessels on a table are as much machine as his photographs of the Ford industrial complex. While there are certainly problems associated with Ozenfant's notion of constant forms, particularly in what he chooses to exclude from his notion of always having been modern, the proposal of a present machine in its physical

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[413] Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist.* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1928), 16.
[414] Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 20.
[415] Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 20.

absence is compelling in a discussion of abstraction. Both of Sheeler's examples play with notions of presence and absence in ways that evoke mood or atmosphere. The jug photograph still speaks of the machine as spirit even in the absence of a physical machine. In his River Rouge series, the mechanics of the factory and their atmospheric outputs (steam and smoke) reflect what is absent: the car as the product and the workers as the process of labour. These inclusions and exclusions of the machine and their relationships to atmosphere are central to my reading of them as abstract photographs with comments on the real world.

ii. BEAUTY AND THE MACHINE

While I have just discussed the human as absent from representation or present to demonstrate his inferiority to the machine, Jane Heap, the organiser of the 1927 *Machine Age Exposition*, evokes another absence. In the highly illustrated catalogue for the exposition — which included the display of machines, parts, apparatuses as well as photographs and drawings of machines, plants, and instances of architecture, paintings, sculpture, and constructions — Heap wrote: "Utility does not exclude the presence of beauty… on the contrary a machine is not entirely efficient without the element of beauty. Utility and efficacy must take into account the whole man".[416] For Heap, there is an aesthetic change associated with the functional, as both serve to please different parts of "the whole man".[417]

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[416] Jane Heap, "Machine Age Exposition", *Machine Age Exposition Catalogue*, (New York, 1927), 36.

[417] Although this exposition has received little attention, it marks a vital early moment of transatlantic artistic and modernist engagement with the machine and provided a forum for an international congregation of exchange of art and ideas located within

In a similar vein, Ozenfant and Jeanneret expressed the following about machines in "After Cubism":

> We are not unmoved by the intelligence that governs certain machines, by the rigorously calculated proportions of their components, by the precise execution of their parts, by the bracing beauty of their materials, by the consistency of their movement; they almost seem like projections of natural laws.[418]

For the two Purists, emotion enters into the human experience of the machine and its impressive capabilities, in addition to its form and materials, industrially made and for industrial use. Ozenfant and Jeanneret, moreover, link the machine to forms that occur in the natural world, as if it somehow participated in it. In Ozenfant's book *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928), he reproduces photographs by Karl Blossfeldt of

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the purview of modernist production. Perhaps a reason for this relative lack of attention is that the exposition did not fit neatly within discursive models that privilege form, medium or nationalism. Interestingly, Sheeler sat on the artists committee for the exposition with Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Ralph Steiner. Moreover, the texts included in the exhibition catalogue mention many international artists such as Naum Gabo, Theo van Doesburg, Gino Severini, Le Corbusier, Lissitzsky, Léger, and Janco, and also feature photographs of Walter Gropius's Bauhaus building in Dessau. Andrew Hemingway has written Louis Lozowick, who also had a text included in the catalogue, and his Precisionist painting in "Louis Lozowick: Between Modernism and Marxism" in *The Mysticism of Money: Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America*. (Pittsburgh and New York City: Periscope Publishing Ltd., 2013), 107–153.

[418] Ozenfant and Jeanneret, "After Cubism", 143.

natural phenomena such as plants which he paired with machines in such a way as to liken them (Figure 4.2).[419]

Along similar lines, Renger-Patzsch's *The World is Beautiful*, published the same year, presents images of nature and details of organic forms, while also featuring several images of the modern factory and machine. In a few photographs, smokestacks are pictured from an oblique perspective, and cranes and pulleys are attentively photographed. One image, *Schutzgitter und Exhaustoren einer Stahlhobelmaschine* (Protective Grills and Exhaust Pipes of a Steel Planer), offers a close up of a fragmented portion of a large machine so that it is abstracted into repetitive forms retracting into space, its steel matte surface nonetheless reflecting light (Figure 5.11). The grate on the bottom portion of the machine repeats the superficial pattern of small round holes, a portion of which enters the frame from the left edge. Renger-Patzsch's *beautiful world* is not limited to the natural, which he often emphasizes in the same close-up manner, drawing particular attention to, for example, the pattern on a leaf or on the scales of a snake's skin. In these instances of repetitive pattern, links are drawn not only between the factory line of production and the kind of labour that the machine demands of its human operators, but also between the form of the machine and the repetitive motions it dictates. Christopher Phillips has described Renger-Patzsch's project as "hopeful of reconciling nature and technology,

[419] Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern* Art, 271. Ozenfant's *Foundations of Modern Art* includes 226 illustrations. His curation of these images is such that they compose a visual narrative that is often distinct from the text that they flank. I have written about these illustrations in this book in more detail. See Jessica Schouela, "Amédée Ozenfant and the Peripheries of Modernism", *The Centre as Margin: Eccentric Perspectives on Art*, (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2018).

[seeing] an underlying unity of the organic and the mechanical worlds expressed in the photographs' paralleling of forms".[420]

In exploring the two facets of modernist photography, Phillips evokes Moholy-Nagy's term "production-reproduction" so that reproduction describes "precise factual realism" and production refers to "visual experiment".[421] He writes: "Photography came to be more appreciated as a medium responsive to a machine age – a functional medium capable of reproducing the objects before the camera's lens with speed, precision, and scrupulous objectivity. At the same time there was an awareness that photography has untapped expressive potentials",[422] This sentiment is worth considering as not only does it posit the camera as a machine through carefully chosen descriptive terms (speed, precision), but it also outlines the competing priorities of photography to be at once documenter and machine, as well as artist and agent of expression.

I wish to recall at this juncture Walter Benjamin's strong critique of Renger-Patzsch's book for this very insistence on beauty, which Benjamin considered harmful as it fails to address mass production and commodity culture.[423] According to Benjamin, this alignment of beauty and industry does not fulfil the duty of the photographer to reveal the seriousness of the implications of alienation in the modern era. Andreas Huyssen has described this tension between aesthetics and the masses as "the Great Divide", that is "the categorical distinction between high art and mass

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[420] Phillips, "Resurrecting Vision: European Photography Between the World Wars", 93.
[421] Phillips, "Resurrecting Vision: European Photography Between the World Wars", 77. Moholy-Nagy's "Production – Reproduction" essay from 1922 can be found translated in Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy*. (New York: Thames and Hudson), 289–290.
[422] Phillips, "Resurrecting Vision: European Photography Between the World Wars", 77.
[423] Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", 95.

culture".[424] Huyssen writes that: "both modernism and the avantgarde always defined their identity in relation to two cultural phenomena: traditional bourgeois high culture (especially the traditions of romantic idealism and enlightened realism and representation), but also vernacular and popular culture as it was increasingly transformed into modern commercial mass culture".[425] This meeting point of avant-garde aesthetics and commodity culture is interesting with regard to both Renger-Patzsch's book as well as Sheeler's River Rouge series, the purpose of which was, after all, to advertise Ford's newest automobile. The Marxist concern for the place of beauty in such forms of representation has political and social implications beyond the remit of this thesis's formalist-phenomenological focus.

In the *Machine Age Exposition*, Italian painter, sculptor and scenographer Enrico Prampolini traced the origins of artistic interest in the machine to Futurism.[426] Announcing that the machine is "the tutelary symbol of the universal dynamism, potentially embodying in itself the essential elements of human creation", he posed, in a manifesto-like form, the following questions:

> Is not the machine today the most exuberant of the mystery of human creation? Is it not the new mythical deity which weaves the legends and histories of the contemporary human drama? The Machine in its practical and material function comes to have today in human concepts and thoughts the significance of an ideal and spiritual inspiration[427].

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[424] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, viii.
[425] Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, viii–ix.
[426] For a discussion on Futurism, the machine and photography see Phillips, "Resurrecting Vision: European Photography Between the World Wars", 68–70.
[427] Enrico Prampolini, "The Aesthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art", *Machine Age Exposition Catalogue*, (New York, 1927), 10.

For Prampolini, if religion once united distinct peoples of a community, in the early twentieth century the machine could on the same basis be declared the modern messiah and the ultimate celebration of human achievement. If, theologically, it was believed that man was made in God's image, this logic was also implemented with machines, which were often designed with human form and dimensions in mind. With their God-like status, they could be seen as humanist tools in the service of advancing human production with a degree of modern spirituality.[428]

Prampolini, moreover, attributes a spiritual quality to the machine, so that it becomes something to believe in, to adhere to and to follow. Despite Prampolini's argument for universality through use of the term 'human' as an ultimate category, other authors included within the catalogue draw distinctions between cultures and nations, and others still demonstrate a palpable hesitation to whole-heartedly embracing the machine.

Prampolini and Renger-Patzsch shed light on the fact that the modern world has begun to find beauty and spirituality in places that exceed or are beyond nature, and to view nature as necessarily in tandem with the force of dynamic technology. In *Foundations of Modern Art,* Ozenfant has written that: "the necessity for order, the only efficiency, has brought about a beginning of that geometrisation of the spirit which more and more enters into all our activities… Geometry is the sovereign mistress of our industry".[429] For Ozenfant, geometry means power, and power in modern times means industry.

[428] An example of architectural theory with dimensions selected to specifically reflect human scale is Le Corbusier's Modular.
[429] Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art*, 117–120.

To accompany this passage, Ozenfant has included an illustration of a large glass work by Duchamp through which pictures by Léger and Mondrian can be identified, as well as an illustration of drawings by Francis Picabia entitled *Canter*, *Portrait d'une Jeune Fille Américaine dans l'État de Nudité* and *J'ai Vu* (Figure 5.12).[430] Following his statement that geometry represents the pinnacle of the spirit of modern industrial activity, Ozenfant includes the 1919 illustration of a still-life work by himself with bottles and guitar (Figure 5.13), geometric in style, followed by a Purist painting by Le Corbusier on the following page from 1920 and a work by Léger (1926) (Figure 5.14).

It is evident in *The Machine Age Exposition* catalogue that photography was not only used prolifically to document machines, but that these photographs were also subsequently reproduced and included in journals or catalogues as evidence for the very existence of such machines. The display and presentation of photographs in the exposition catalogue, for example, does not overtly inspire questions about why or how these photographs came to be. Curiously, on the page featuring Belgian projects and their makers, the catalogue presents an aerial photograph of New York's Garment Centre produced by F. A. Fairchild's Aerial Service (Figure 5.15). In many ways, this photograph exemplifies the machine: not only does it picture a district in New York named after the production of fashion commodities that occurs within it, but the image is taken from an aerial perspective, one only possible with the camera — as early as 1858 Nadar set off in a hot air balloon to photograph Paris from above — suggesting that the photographer took the picture from an airplane.[431]

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[430] *291 magazine*, Ed. Alfred Stieglitz, No. 5–6 (July–August 2015).
[431] Amongst other artists that adopted an aerial perspective in their photographs is Germaine Krull, whose made images of Marseille in 1930.

The machine is implicated in this photograph beyond acting as the subject of the photograph — the what — as it is implicit in the very production of the image itself — the how. In order to take this photograph, the use of a machine, the airplane (let alone the camera) was necessary to obtain a particular vision and perspective. Furthermore, the aerial point of view is necessarily one that abstracts the subject, deliberately distancing the lens of the camera from what is pictured. Through both the miniaturization and mechanical access to a view from above, the city of New York is further emphasized as a locus for machines and is rendered visually abstracted so that each building is presented as a simplified version of itself, almost akin to a toy. This bird's eye view is thus not just an agent of abstraction, but appears time and again as a symbol of a modern vision.

iii. FAULTY PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

This section continues the theme of looking down from a significant height. I wish to recall Moholy-Nagy's description of certain aspects of the New Vision, namely, the use of oblique angles in photography, which he describes as "faulty". These views include "the view from above, from below, the oblique view, which today often disconcert people who take them to be accidental shots".[432] With these perspectives in minds, Moholy-Nagy argues for the pure opticality of faulty photographs, this purity "show[ing] the optically true distortions, deformations, foreshortenings, etc.".[433] For Moholy-Nagy, this purity through the camera "together with our intellectual experience, supplements perceived optical phenomena by means

[432] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.
[433] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.

of association and formally and spatially creates a **conceptual image.** Thus, in the photographic camera we have the most reliable aid to a beginning of objective vision".[434] While I am not interested here in debating the feasibility of objective vision, I do wish to explore what these faulty photographs help us see, and how they encourage a different kind of seeing. I will do this by attending carefully to a series of photographs from this period of the Eiffel Tower, itself a modernist monument.

On the history of the Eiffel Tower and its design, David Travis has indicated that "Gustave Eiffel and his engineers had designed the tower so that almost everything is askew, providing little that lines up with the rest of Paris".[435] While this may be disorientating in and of itself, Travis goes on to argue that the tower functions neither as a building nor a structure: "It is a machine for viewing Paris".[436] As such, the Eiffel Tower by design is about and aims to facilitate vision and new perceptual experiences. It was made to promote a modern vision that corresponds to Moholy-Nagy's oblique angles in photography: the Eiffel Tower is a monument of modernism in and of itself while also serving as an instrument for a distinctly modern phenomenological experience of Paris. This surveying perspective is very well illustrated by one of Bing's Eiffel Tower photographs (Figure 5.16), whereby the camera is positioned looking down at pedestrians on street level through the gaps of the intersecting iron beams.

It is no surprise then that modernist photographers sought out the tower for its symbolism of the modern era as well as its complex mechanical configuration that invited photographic experimentation. Eleanor Hight has described Moholy-Nagy's photograph, *Paris (Eiffel Tower)* (Figure 5.4) from 1925 in the following way:

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[434] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28.
[435] David Travis, "In and of the Eiffel Tower", *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 13, no. 1 (1987): 5.
[436] Travis, "In and of the Eiffel Tower", 5.

> The angle of vision and the tilting of the camera cut short the view through the tower and thereby suppress any impression of the soaring height of what was then the tallest structure in the world. Instead, Moholy accentuated the crisscrossing linear character of the steel construction. Though the eye tries to move back through the tangled web of steel dominating the foreground, it meets resistance in the forward push of the girders toward and out through the foreground and picture plane.[437]

Moholy-Nagy's photograph adopts an extreme oblique perspective, which not only exhibits an immense height and thus an impressive display of technology, but also produces various layers of depth, so that the intersecting beams reveal the intricacy of its design. His photograph embraces geometric abstraction: lines, angles, and shapes dominate the composition, flattening certain elements, and creating alternative depths of field through camera angles and framing methods. The feeling is one of disorientation. This is not the same kind of disorientation elicited by the nature photographs that lack horizon lines. Rather, the Eiffel Tower pictured in this way produces an excess of intersecting beams and lines so that it is the chaos of abundance that overwhelms and destabilizes.

Curiously, one Ilse Bing photograph of the Eiffel Tower does not look up to the height of the structure, but positions the viewer looking down. Bing's photograph, *It Was So Windy in the Eiffel Tower* from 1931 (Figure 5.17) depicts people in motion on the staircase of the tower so that their figures, although well-defined, are slightly blurred. Contrary to the faint, fuzzy halo around the human figures, the structure of the Eiffel Tower and its iron beams and poles are sharply depicted. While there are

[437] Eleanor M. Hight, *Picturing modernism: Moholy-Nagy and photography in Weimar Germany*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995),110.

sufficient similarities in the *faultiness* of these photographs by Bing and Moholy-Nagy, it is worth noting that Bing was intent on distinguishing herself from certain practices associated with the Bauhaus having to do with medium specificity. Nancy Barrett has argued that "Bing was not associated with Moholy-Nagy or the Bauhaus. 'I was on the edge of the periphery of the Bauhaus,' she says, and she avoided photographic techniques, such as photogram and photomontage, which violate the integrity of camera and lens".[438]

This integrity of the camera and lens, in my view, is closely tied with Bing's effort to have her photographs — in spite of all inclusions of abstraction — to be rooted in reality. Barrett describes the photographer's commitment to reality: "The life and movement of her subjects were never stilled; rather, the strong pictorial composition she imposed on them intensified their life and hinted at the universal laws giving structure to nature".[439] Bing was aware of the contexts of New Photography and New Vision as well as their influence on modern photographic practices. Her own work can be seen as both situated within this moment as well as evidence of a considered departure from certain strict guidelines. While these newer movements were reactionary against Pictorialism and its ties to painting, "there was, it decreed, no need to blur the sharp contours of reality with a soft dreamy focus, or to compensate for the mechanical nature of photography".[440]

The idea that sharpness equals abstraction and blurriness equals reality reverses many other assumptions that have been previously explored in this thesis and it is fascinating for that very reason. Ironically, Bing's loyalty to realism and to nature — the very quality that makes her images and their abstract appeal so intense and so

[438] Barrett, *Ilse Bing: Three Decades of Photography*, (New Orleans Museum of Art, 1985), 15.
[439] Barrett, *Ilse Bing: Three Decades of Photography*, 10.
[440] Dryansky and Houk, *Ilse Bing: photography through the looking glass*, 18.

evocative — might lead some to define her as an abstract photographer. In her case, however, Bing's photography largely embraces this soft, illusionary quality *without* compromising or dispelling photography's ties to its mechanical functions.

Larissa Dryansky and Edwyyn Houk have argued that Bing's *It Was So Windy in the Eiffel Tower* makes use of the New Vision's high angle so "that the portion of the spiral staircase depicted seems abstracted from the rest of the construction and almost suspended in mid-air".[441] Yet, they conclude that "the most remarkable effect […] is an impression of confusion as to the actual direction of the people mounting and descending the stairs".[442] Their description of the disorienting experience of examining this photograph, whereby it is impossible to ascertain if the visitors are ascending or descending the stairs as if they are trapped in continuous merry-go-round is convincing and resonant. They attribute this "circular motion" to the gusts of wind that the title alludes to:

> [T]he detail of the man holding on to his hat clearly alludes. It is as if the scene were caught in a spinning vortex. A feeling of dizziness arises, which is conveyed as well by the dappled light. Up and down, before and after, are fused in the rhythm of perpetual motion, and the ordinary parameters of time and space are swept up in the vertigo of movement.[443]

This vertigo and inability to ground oneself as a result of dizziness and confusion is not only a product of the *faulty* quality of the image, but also of its disorienting atmospheric focus, reminiscent of the earlier discussion of the vertiginous effects of Stieglitz's *Equivalents*. *It Was So Windy in the Eiffel Tower* is rich for interpretation:

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[441] Dryansky and Houk, *Ilse Bing: photography through the looking glass*, 47.
[442] Dryansky and Houk, *Ilse Bing: photography through the looking glass*, 47.
[443] Dryansky and Houk, *Ilse Bing: photography through the looking glass*, 47.

what I would like to extract and underscore is how atmosphere, visually conveyed by the wind and the blurriness of the figures, parallels the disorientation of trying to navigate a complex machine. Moreover, if Sheeler's River Rouge photographs aimed to erase the presence of humans to emphasize the significance of the industrial structure, Bing's photograph *depends on* the presence of people on the Eiffel Tower in the pursuit of the very same purpose.

Bing's photograph, as much as it is about the Eiffel Tower, is about the experience of it and the struggle to understand strategies or concepts used to explain aspects of experience that are often intangible or difficult to grasp: direction or narrative, movement, and atmosphere.

Dryansky and Houk have also recognized this atmospheric quality to Bing's work:

> Even when depicting the most ordinary environment, Bing's photographs have a dreamlike aura. The rendering of air and atmosphere was a key aspect of this style. It is indeed the ability to render the 'air between the things' that in large part justified the young woman's choice of the Leica[444].

I find this passage particularly compelling as it both directly indicates the atmospheric sensitivity in Bing's photographs that is often materialized as a dreamy soft-focus, and grounds her interest in the mechanical and in realism through her choice of a specific camera. While Bing's Leica was chosen for its capacity to enlarge small-format negatives with the deliberate purpose of producing atmospheric photographs,

[444] Dryansky and Houk, *Ilse Bing: photography through the looking glass*, 48. Ilse Bing, quoted in Alan G. Artner, "At 80, Still in Focus: A Long Reign for the 'Queen of the Leica'," *Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 1979, clipping in IBA/EIB. Ilse Bing, quoted in Mildred Stagg, "Ilse Bing 35-mm. Specialist," *U.S. Camera*, August 1949, pp. 51.

her practice is deeply rooted in an exploration of photographic technology, what it could offer, and how it could be instrumentalized to capture ambience, mood, light motion and climate. It is interesting to note that, after its construction, the top of the Eiffel Tower was used for meteorological observations and data collection.

It seems, however, that just as Bing limited her experimentation with photography and did not fully embrace Bauhaus practices such as the photogram for fear of departing too significant from reality, others too drew their own lines. Kim Sichel recalls how in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes grouped Germaine Krull in a list of photographers who experimented with ways that he "detest(ed)".[445] Barthes condemned "contours of technique: superimpressions, anamorphoses, deliberate exploitation of certain defects (blurring, deceptive perspectives, trick framing)".[446] The accusation that these experiments were fundamentally *defective* strongly evokes Moholy-Nagy's labelling them as *faulty* photographs, albeit to a different end. This characterization of these kinds of photographs as dysfunctional, broken or defective is particularly pertinent in the context of examining photographs of machines, which are expected to function, produce, and deliver. When considering the camera as a machine, one that at times is manipulated by the photographer to produce faulty photographs, the camera itself becomes a machine that is fallible and that, on occasion, fails (is it still considered a machine then?). In this line of thinking then, these faulty photographs are impaired documents of machines that work, produced by machines that are damaged.

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[445] Kim Sichel, "Contortions of Technique: Germaine Krull's Experimental Photography", *Abbaspour, Daffner, and Hambourg, Object: Photo.* Available online at: *http://www. moma. org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Sichel. pdf*(2017), 1.
[446] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 33. Quoted in Sichel, "Contortions of Technique: Germaine Krull's Experimental Photography", 1.

Another interpretation could involve the suggestion of playing with the expectation of function and productiveness. In 1928, Krull produced the photobook *Métal* (Figure 5.18), which brought together images of wheels, cogs, bolts, gears, pulleys, cranes, chimneys, tracks and structures, including the Eiffel Tower. In the preface to the new edition of *Métal* in 1976, Krull expressed her wish to depart from traditional uses of photography such as wedding photographs or traditional full-length portraits. She reflects on an earlier moment — between 1922 and 1926 — when she first started to photograph iron:

> Cranes, corn elevators — all these machines had always existed, only nobody had neither the courage nor the taste or fascination to see them, to feel them and to represent them. This, of course, relates only to photography, because there have always been paintings of landscapes, ports or boats[447].

I am intrigued by Krull's sentiment that machines should be *seen, felt* and *represented* and her account of the ways in which this approach contributed to the phenomenological charge of her machine photographs as something to be experienced. This courage and determination to represent machines almost suggests an anthropomorphic call on behalf of machines to be recognized. Perhaps Krull took this to be the task of the avant-garde. It is likely that Florent Fels would have agreed with this sentiment, as he wrote in the initial preface to the first edition of *Métal* on a theme I have just examined: beauty. Fels articulated how:

> Ten years after the war steel will at last serve a noble purpose, it will perhaps be rehabilitated. Steel changes our landscape. Forests of masts replacing trees centuries old. Blast furnaces replacing hills. From this new expression of the

[447] Germaine Krull, "Preface to the new edition of MÉTAL", no page number. *Métal*. Cologne: Neuausgabe Als Mappenwerk Von Ann und Jürgen Wilde, 2003.

> world some aspects have now been captured by beautiful photographs represented of a new romantism.[448]

As such, this moment saw parameters of beauty change and for Fels, the machine was the power source driving this change. While there is much more to be said on the different abstracted photographs of machines represented in *Métal*, for the purpose of this chapter, I will focus exclusively on her photographs of the Eiffel Tower.

In addition to Krull's *Métal* publication, some of her Eiffel Tower photographs appeared in an article titled "Dans toute sa force" (*In Full Force*) in *Vu* in May 1929 (Figure 5.19).[449] Sichel recounts how in her memoirs, Krull recalls an exchange she had with French journalist, Lucien Vogel, who told her "'Go and photograph the Eiffel Tower, Germaine. Photograph it as you really see it, and make sure that you don't bring me a postcard view.' As Krull wrote, she did not see much in the 'dead old form' until she began climbing the staircases and experiencing the tower from various vantage points".[450] In connection with one of Krull's untitled Eiffel Tower photographs (Figure 5.20), Sichel observes that: "The iron beams and patches of light create a dynamic pattern of black and white, producing the effect of an ascending vortex in which the metalwork appears to accelerate skyward".[451] This vortex is viscerally felt as well as the sense that these beams criss-cross and intersect indefinitely with an upward shooting force. It is not the beams alone, however, that

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[448] Florent Fels, "Preface to the first edition of MÉTAL", no page number. *Métal*. Cologne: Neuausgabe Als Mappenwerk Von Ann und Jürgen Wilde, 2003.Translation should be "romanticism".
[449] Sichel, "Contortions of Technique: Germaine Krull's Experimental Photography", 6.
[450] Sichel, "Contortions of Technique: Germaine Krull's Experimental Photography", 6. Quote from Germaine Krull, "Click entre deux guerres" (unpublished manuscript, Germaine Krull Nachlass, Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1976), 12.
[451] Sichel, "Contortions of Technique: Germaine Krull's Experimental Photography", 6.

produce this vortex. The spiral staircase that coils upward almost like a cyclone acutely contributes to this reading — it does not escape me that these associations are weather related. This spiral staircase is recognizable particularly when considered alongside Bing's *It Was So Windy in the Eiffel Tower*, where it can be seen closer up.

The staircase makes a further appearance in another of Krull's Eiffel Tower photographs, *Untitled* or *Eiffel Tower, elevator track and staircase* (1924/27) (Figure 5.21). Switching again to look down, Krull has pointed her camera towards the base of the elevator track, whereby the oblique angle provides a viewpoint that resembles looking down from the height of a rollercoaster at the exact moment before the drop. There is a precariousness in this perceptive, exemplified by the dark bottom that is difficult to grasp visually. Across the way is the spiral staircase, with the direction of assumed movement being downward, as implied by the camera angle. What is particularly arresting is the white steam or smoke that appears to be rising despite the machine components all pointing or gesturing downward. As such, this opaque air obscures visual access to the lower parts of the tower while also subverting the downward orientation, obeying its own laws of physics. It thus becomes an active agent of motion at play in Krull's photograph.

I will conclude with a final Eiffel Tower photograph by Krull: *Paris* or *Champs de Mars* (1925–27) (Figure 5.22). Rather than photographing the steel components of the tower, here Krull has taken a photograph *from* its height. Only the tower's shadow which is cast upon the Champs de Mars reveals the photographer's position. Looking at depictions of the Eiffel Tower, Travis includes an analysis of this peculiar photograph as follows: "The angle of the shadow east of due north would allow one to calculate the time of the afternoon to the hour, as its length would allow

one to determine the season of the year to the month, if it mattered".[452] Travis's argument has more to do with demonstrating that, while one can identify evidence to reconfigure certain variables that reveal details of the moment the photograph was captured, attention to these climatic and atmospheric clues do not shed light on the intentions of the photographer, which remain a mystery.

My focus, however, is keenly situated in the ways in which signs and communications of atmosphere behave as ciphers for gaining access to facts or facets of reality: in this case, season, time of day, weather, etc. It is close attention to these atmospheric ciphers that enable a deeper understanding of that which, while physically absent from the picture, is nonetheless significantly expressed or alluded to, including: a product or object, the labourers that enable production, the spirit of an era or weather patterns at the moment a photograph is taken. Atmospheres, in the perspective detailed in this thesis, thus continue to be at the heart of where abstraction and realism meet, and the ways in which a formalist-phenomenological approach to abstract photographs enable and invite this generative dialogue.

[452] Travis, "In and of the Eiffel Tower", 5.

CONCLUSION

> Strand's pictures often make us believe that they are not just true to life but *truer* than life, more real than factual reality itself. There is a sleight of hand, or of eye, involved in this, a magician's craft of making illusions that disguise themselves as reality. The magic works, to be sure, so far as we believe in it, and Strand's role in fostering conviction in a certain kind of photographic truth has been as monumental as his oeuvre itself.[453]
>
> - Alan Trachtenberg, "Introduction" to *Paul Strand: Essays on his Life and Work*

In this thesis, my purpose has been to evoke and engage with the 'magic' of photography by attending to the dialogue and dual participation of realism and abstraction in the medium. My wish to represent and reaffirm photography's magic has been in the service of arguing for the simultaneous functionality of realism and of abstraction in photography during the key modernist period between 1914 and 1930. I have sought to explore fascinating instances of experimental photography that embrace abstraction and propose alternative capabilities of photography that depart from the traditional conception of the medium's concern with a uni-dimensional orientation toward truth or documentary. By utilising the theme of atmospheres — and related terms such as mood, aura, feeling, environment, climate, air, presence — I have aimed to link abstraction and realism, arguing for a symbiotic relationship between both forces and aims. By attending to abstraction in photography, it has never been my aim to discredit the call or commitment to truth and realism, which I argue can never be completely dispelled in photography. In one respect, this has been confirmed for me through an acknowledgment of indexicality, a concept that I view as closely tied to atmosphere. As such, while the presence of the physical object or

[453] Alan Trachtenberg, "Introduction", in *Paul Strand: Essays on his Life and Work*, ed. Maren Stange, (New York: Aperture, 1991), 2.

subject photographed is absent from the photograph itself, its trace remains through the imprint of light on photosensitive materials. This play between presence and absence is one that parallels what is at stake in atmospheres: that is, that quality of something that is hard to name or define, but that is nevertheless felt or experienced.

It is with these ideas in mind that this thesis has adopted a formalist-phenomenological methodology. While the term abstraction can be understood and applied in a variety of ways — each imply a different relationship to realism — my project typically has used the notion of abstraction in aesthetic terms, that is to say, in reference to non-figurative representation. This formalist approach to abstraction, then, crystalized my method of beginning with the photograph itself and closely attending to what it depicts, and how. Keeping the question of atmospheres in the foreground, I have sought to examine and discuss my chosen themes and photographs through a phenomenological lens that has attended to embodied experience and the kinds of lived disruptions or disorientations that abstraction provokes.

Florence Henri wrote:

> Everything I know and the way in which I know it is primarily made up of abstract elements: spheres, planes, and grids, the parallel lines of which provide me with huge resources, and also mirrors which I use to present the same object from different angles in a single photograph in order to present different visions of a single motif that are complementary and which succeed in explaining it better, interacting with each other.[454]

[454] Florence Henri, quoted by Attilio Colombo in 'Specchio, essenzialità, geometria', *Florence Henri* (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, 1983), 59. Quote found in Zelich, "Florence Henri's Photography Within the Context of the Avant-Gardes", 11.

I am interested in this reflection, not only because of its reference to abstraction as a plastic concern, but also on account of its discussion of vision in terms of perspective and, in Henri's terms, as an *interaction*. This thesis has aimed to identify, articulate and explore a variety of interactions, often presented in the context of an aim to dismantle binary concepts that are often uncritically taken for granted. I have investigated the components of these binaries as being in dialogue with each other and as thereby providing access to a closer examination of abstract photography. Attending to relationships and interactions — between abstraction and realism, but also as embodied encounters with abstract photographs — and understanding photography as a multitude of things has been at the heart of my project.

I will conclude with two photographs by Florence Henri. In 1929, Henri produced the photograph *Fenêtre [Window]* (Figure 6.0), one in a series of other images of windows, a number of them holding the same title.[455] This particular *Fenêtre* has been photographed from within an indoor space. The camera points outside the window at the building across the way, visible through two open panels in a series of what are otherwise vertical panels of frosted and textured glass. There are two ways to gain visual access to outside, one distinctly sharp, the other blurry. There is no artificial lighting: the indoor space, darker, depends on natural light to enter its realm and illuminate it. It is day outside as just as the light enters the indoor space, so does its air, representing an exchange or interaction of climatic environments. The view of the outside is thus presented vertically, defying Western traditions of horizontally oriented landscape. Rather than being a scene of natural vegetation,

[455] This photograph is also illustrated in Sayag, Alain, Lemagny Jean-Claude and de Gouvion Saint-Cyr, Agnès. *Art or Nature: 20th Century French Photography*, (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1988), 151. Here, it is under the title *Les fenêtres* or *Windows* and is dated 1930. Her work is presented in a section on Dada and Surrealism.

however, the vertically framed access to the outdoors pictures a residential building in a city at a moment in history when buildings are soaring upward, the modern metropolis assuming its shape by way of vertical growth. The building's balconies are perceptible only in part and they appear fragmented, interrupted by the frames of the closed glass panes.

Within the indoor space occupied by Henri and her camera is a flat mirror placed on a small stand at a diagonal angle reflecting in part, half of a panel of frosted glass, and a segment of the outdoor exterior architecture of the neighbouring building. The mirror is not in focus, and like Henri's handrail, the object at the fore, potentially the subject of a still-life, is blurred. The modern city is in view but just beyond the point of reach, a permeable wall between the viewer and Parisian street life. The vertical metal rods that exceed the frame give the illusion that the windows might shoot up indefinitely, like the vortex of the metal beams when looking up at the Eiffel Tower.

The two portions of the reflected image in the mirror are separated by a dark diagonal line articulated by the frame of the glass panel that effectively differentiates inside from outside. The reflected image is positioned in the space between interior and exterior and calls forth the in-betweenness, the liminality, of what is visible from what is obscured, what constitutes reflection or rendition and what is seemingly a more direct access to the subject matter. This impression of the image in the mirror as a further layer of removal from the world behaves as a self-reflexive reference to the photographic image in space as a material object, as well as a representation of the world that flattens and abstracts it.

The mirror in Henri's *Fenêtre* troubles the phenomenological task of the viewer to assemble a coherent or legible image and visually conquer or master the

photograph's disorientating riddle. Even so, this image provokes fewer complications with regard to composition than other window photographs created by Henri, in which the mirror is positioned so that it is not a frame within the frame of the photograph. Instead, in these other examples, the mirror extends beyond the boundaries of the image, so as to create different angles without unveiling the tool utilised to instantiate them.

Another Henri photograph from the same year also entitled *Fenêtre* (Figure 6.1) looks almost as if two separate photographs have been juxtaposed into a single image. There appears to be a hard, vertical line separating these portions of the image that give access to two different spaces pictured at different angles. The hard line is actually the edge of Henri's mirror. The effect of the distinct angles offering varying perspectives on the photograph's setting elicits Cubist techniques. Henri breaks with the conventions of photography as relaying space in two-dimensions through a challenge to, and alteration of, perception and accompanying expectations of coherence and orientation. Yet, despite the abstracted and disorientating depiction, Henri's photograph offers increased visibility of her environment, altering and enhancing the capacity for an embodied experience. The two sections of the photograph propose different depths: on the left side, the lines of the balcony tilt slightly downward to the left, while on the right section, the angle is more oblique, causing the more dramatically diagonal shafts of the balcony to appear closer to one another.

The differing angle is not the only disorienting feature of this photograph, which also puts forth a complex atmospheric consideration. Although the two sections of the photograph present different scenes — different buildings at different angles — the perspectival shift instantiated by the mirror reveals distinct climatic situations in

each section. The scene on the left reveals a sunny day, the building illumined by strong rays of light. However, the sky on the right is dark, shadowy and textured, suggests the formation of approaching storm clouds. These kinds of dualities and multiplicities, which are present in reality, are at the heart of how abstract photography encourages new ways of studying photography more generally. It demonstrates that photographs always participate in a multiplicity of truths and abstractions. It is possible to look to the right and see a sunny day and to shift one's gaze to the left and see nearing storm clouds. Both encounters with this varied sky are simultaneously true and divergent.

In both *Fenêtre* photographs, it is clear that Henri leaves little to chance; her compositions are carefully designed and executed so that there is no doubt about the presence of the artist's intervention. These photographs deliberately participate in Moholy-Nagy's conceptions of the New Vision: that is, the use of the camera to see the world in a new way, one that is specifically determined by the mechanics of the photographic apparatus. The framing and the alternative vision dictated and made possible by the camera is definitively abstract and defies conventional spatial arrangement in photographic representations that have as their central purpose the depiction of clearly organized or coherent space. New focuses emerge: the experience of deliberate experiments in perception and dis/orientation, the observation of atmospheric charges, and the materialization of a distinctly modern and photographic vision.

Moholy-Nagy strongly believed that photographic views always *see more*. In the context of abstract photography, images and subject matter are often pictured as distorted or obstructed, blurry or fragmented. On Cubism and abstract art, Alfred Barr Jr. wrote: "The verb *to abstract* means to *draw out of* or *away from*. But the noun

abstraction is something already drawn out of or away from — so much that like a geometrical figure or an amorphous silhouette it may have no apparent relation to concrete reality".[456] This thesis has been committed to challenging the separation between concerns about abstraction and reality, in order to view them as simultaneous and intertwined with each other. It is for this reason that I side with Moholy-Nagy in connection with the emphasis he placed on abstract photography.

Abstract photography may initially appear to hinder seeing *more* or seeing *more clearly* through interventions that seem to decrease access. However, upon closer examination, it is evident that it is these very same interventions that render abstraction a catalyst to deeper encounters with photographic images as well as experiences of perception. The pursuit of abstract photography is thus not to exorcise realism from its aims: rather, it initiates the dialogue between abstraction and realism. It is thus the simultaneously enhanced and alternative seeing that make these photographs so compelling and phenomenologically rich.

[456] Alfred Barr Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 11.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 0.1. Paul Strand. *Abstraction, Bowls, Twin Lakes Connecticut* (1916). Photograph. 33 x 24.8 cm.

Figure 0.2. Paul Strand, *Blind* or *Blind Women, New York* (1916). Platinum print. 34 x 27.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 0.3. Albert Renger-Patzsch *Die Welt ist schön*, *The World is Beautiful* (1928). Book cover.

Figure 1.0. Charles Sheeler, *Side of White Barn, Pennsylvania*. (1917). Gelatin silver print. 19.4 x 24.4 cm. The J. Paul Getty Trust; MoMA; Philadelphia Museum of Art.

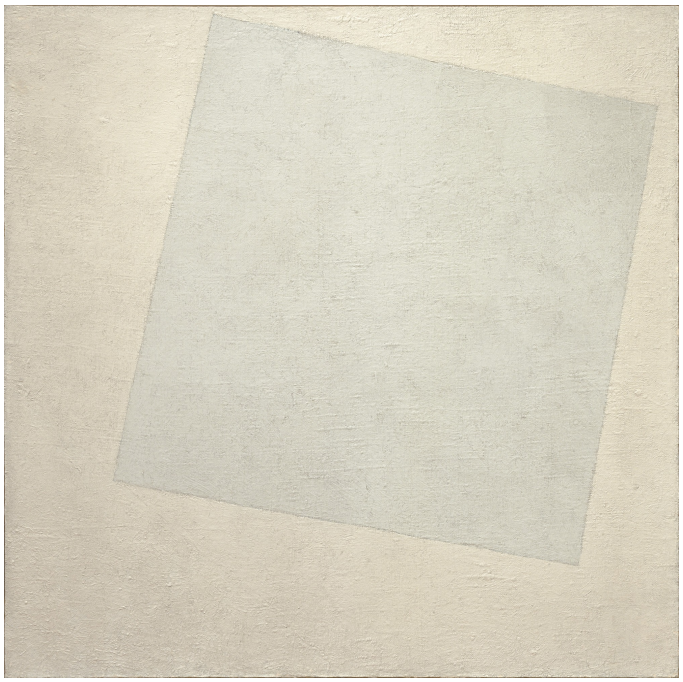

Figure 1.1. Malevich, Kazimir. *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918). Oil on canvas. 79.4 x 79.4 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 1.2. Charles Sheeler. *Stairwell, Williamsburg* (1935). Gelatin silver print. 23.6 x 15.3 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 1.3. Marcel Duchamp. *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912). Oil on canvas. 147 x 89.2 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arsenberg Collection.

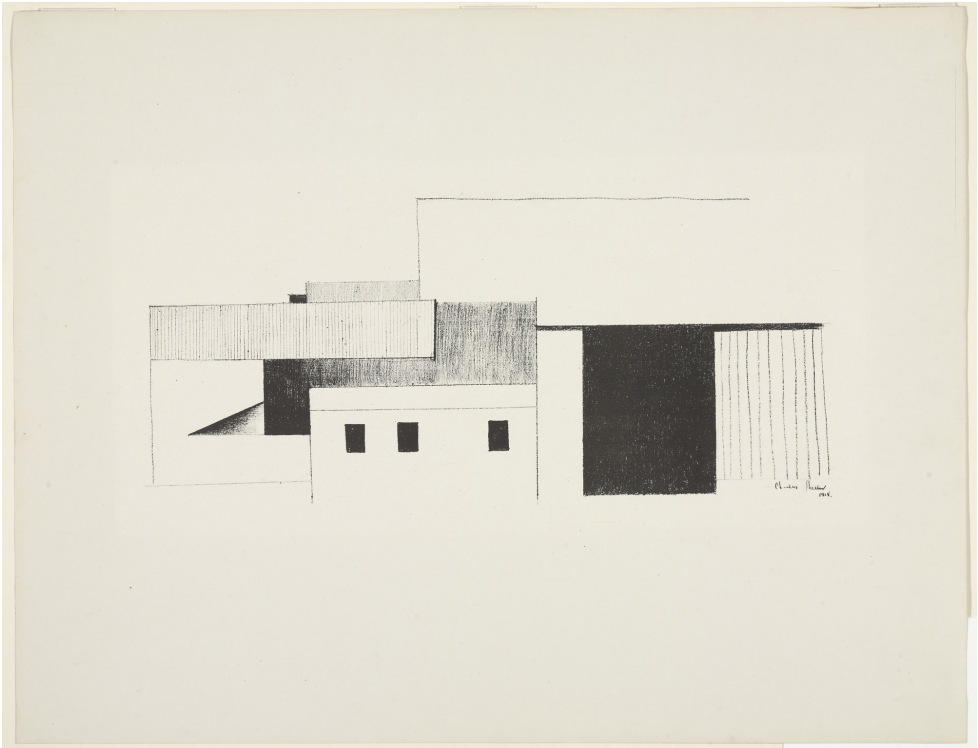

Figure 1.4. Charles Sheeler, *Barn Abstraction*. (1918). Lithograph. 50.2 x 65 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 1.5. Vija Celmins. *Night Sky #19*. (1998). Charcoal on paper. 57 x 67.3 cm. Tate / National Galleries Scotland.

Figure 1.6. Charles Sheeler. *Stairs from Below* (1917). Gelatin silver print. 21 x 15 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 1.7. Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage* (1907). Photogravure. 32.2 x 25.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

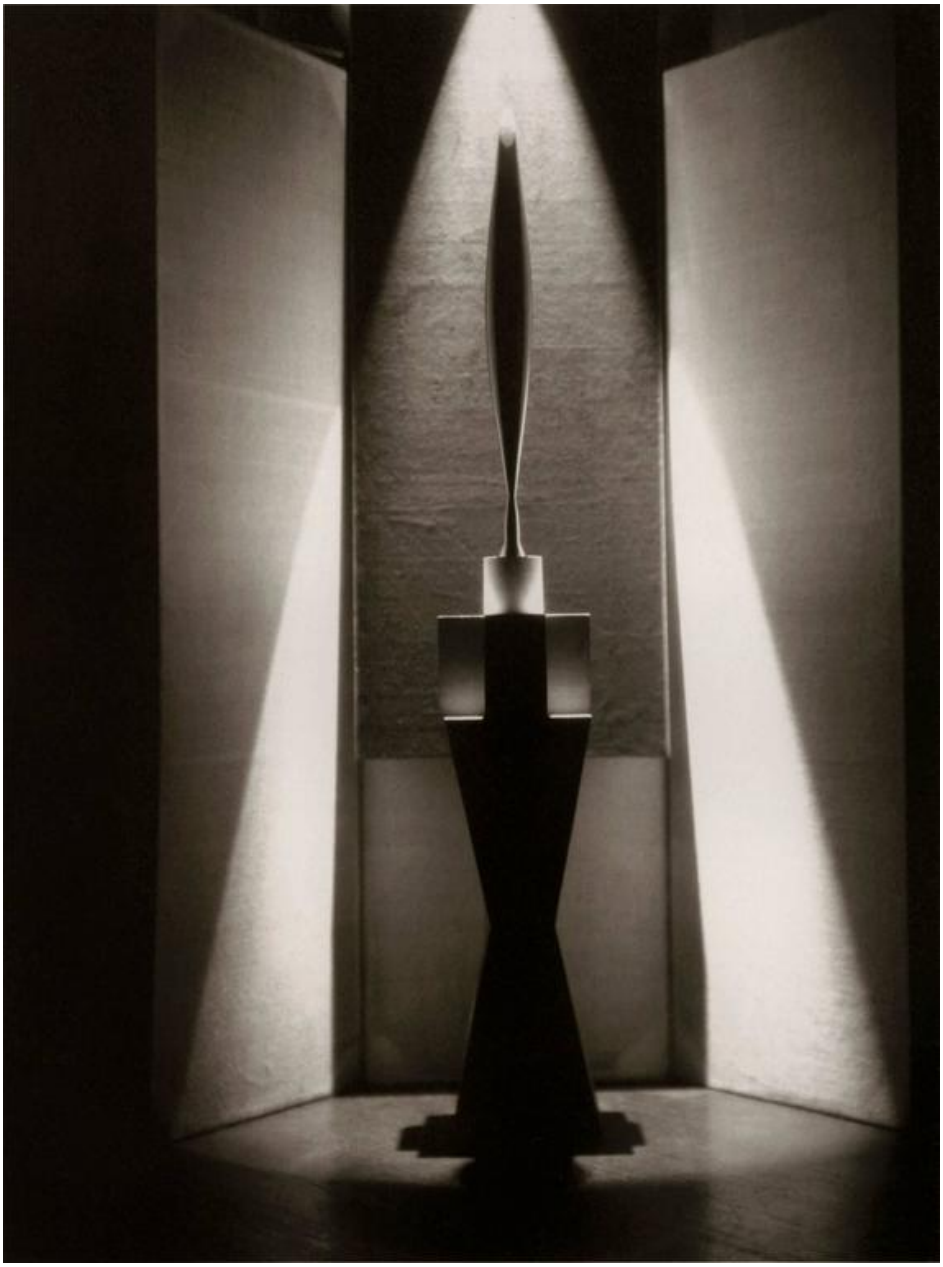

Figure 1.8. Edward Steichen. *First Cast of Brancusi's 'Bird in Space'* (1925). Gelatin silver print. 25.4 x 20.32 cm. Westwood, New Jersey.

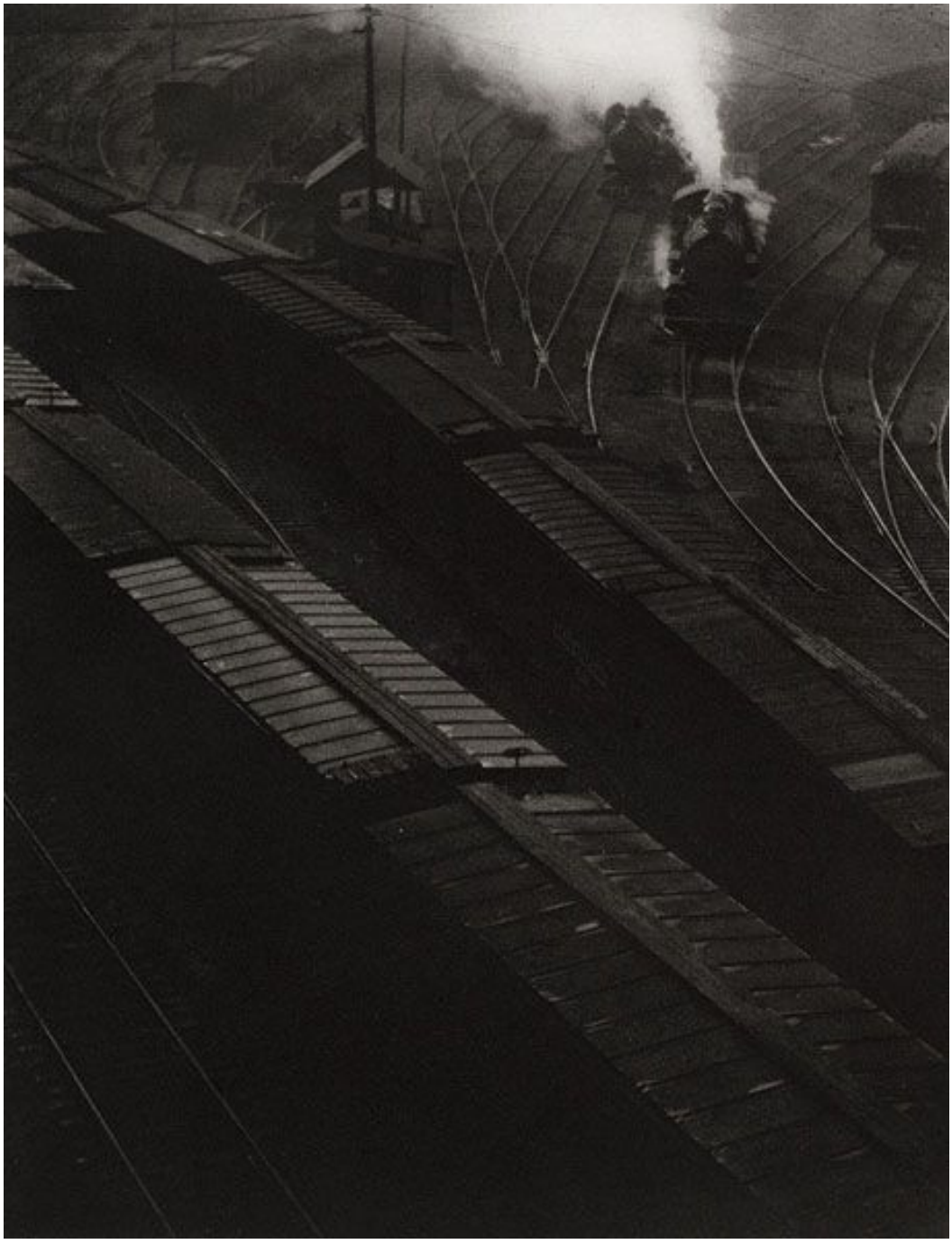

Figure 1.9. Paul Strand. *Railroad Sidings* (1914). Hand-pulled dust grain photogravure made by the Talbot-Klic photogravure process printed onto Lana Gravure paper. 31.7 x 24.1 cm. V&A.

Figure 2.0. Florence Henri, *Abstract Composition (Handrail)* (c. 1930).

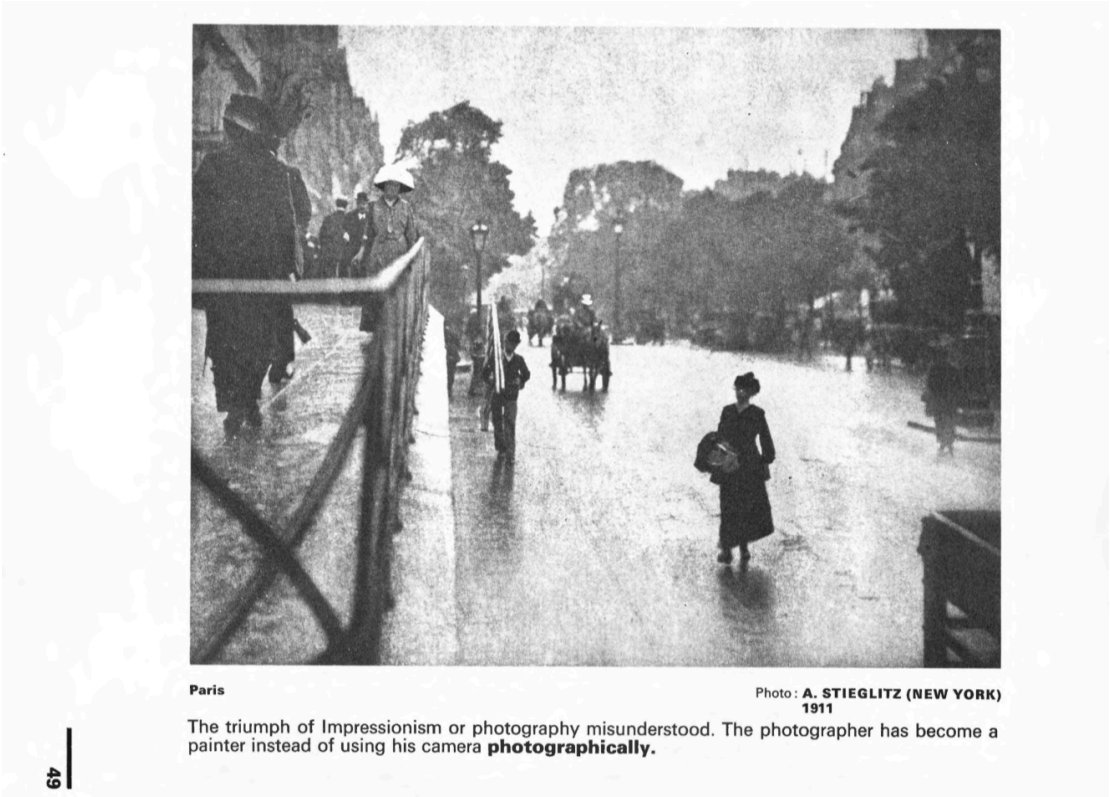

Figure 2.1. Stieglitz's photograph in Moholy-Nagy's *Painting Photography Film* (1927).

Figure 2.2. L. Moholy-Nagy, *Bauhaus Balconies* (1927). Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Figure 2.3. Josef Albers. *Amédée Ozenfant, Dessau* (1930-31). I have placed the three distinct photographs together in this way. Gelatin silver print. Left: 22.5 x 14.3 cm. Middle: 21.8 x 15.4 cm. Right: 22 x 14.4 cm. Harvard Art Museums.

Figure 3.0. Josef Albers. *Schlamm 1* (1931). Gelatin silver print. 15.9 x 23.2 cm. Guggenheim Collection.

Figure 3.1 Josef Albers. *Schlamm 2* (1931). Gelatin silver print. 17.2 x 23.1 cm. Guggenheim Collection.

Figure 3.2. Josef Albers. *Dessau, flooded streets during construction, Spring '31* (1931). Photo collage. 41 x 29.5 cm. Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.

Figure 3.3. Ilse Bing. *Rue de Valois* (1932). Gelatin silver print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Estate of Ilse Bing, courtesy Michael Mattis.

Figure 3.4. Alfred Stieglitz. *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* No. II. (1922). Gelatin silver print. 23.8 x 19.3 cm. Art Institute Chicago.

Figure 3.5. Alfred Stieglitz. *Songs of the Sky* (1924). Gelatin silver print. 9.2 x 11/8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

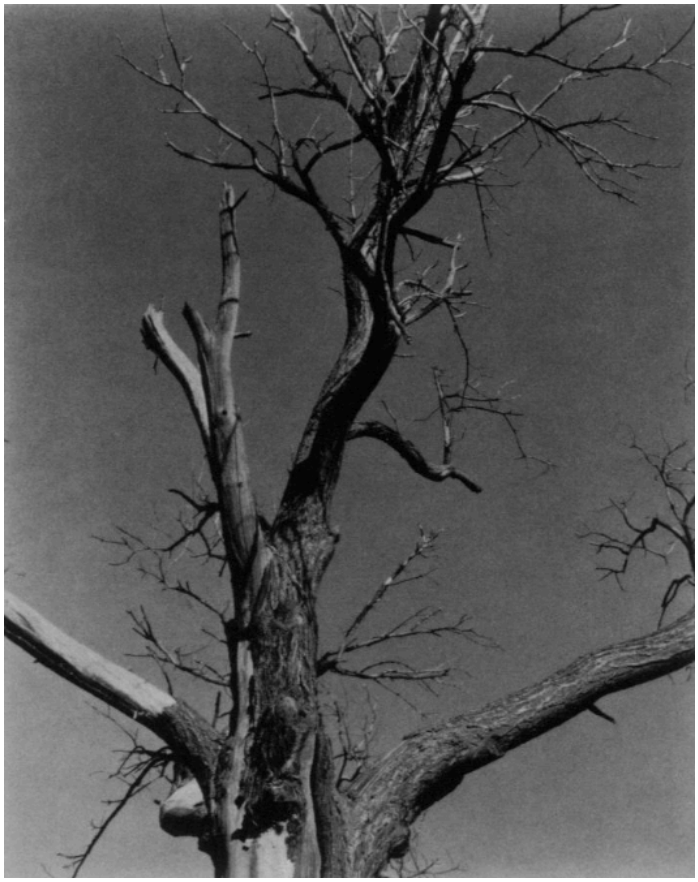

Figure 3.6. Alfred Stieglitz. *Dead Tree* (1927). Gelatin silver print. 23.8 x 15.6 cm.

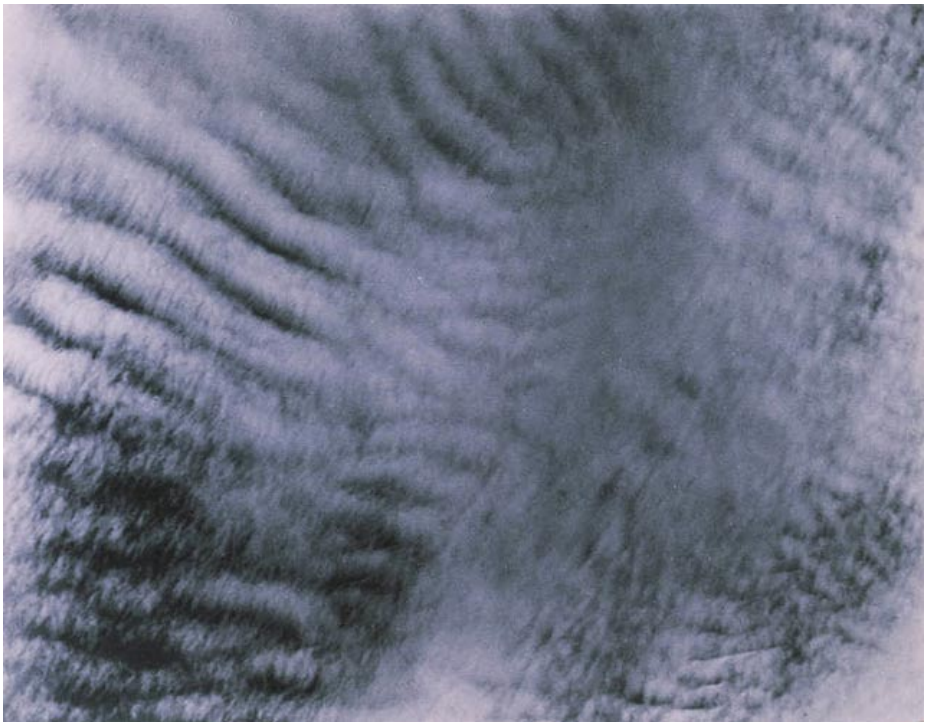

Figure 3.7. Alfred Stieglitz. *Equivalent* (1927) The Phillips Collection. Gelatin silver print. 9.2 x 11.75 cm.

Figure 3.8. Alfred Stieglitz. *Equivalent 216E* (1929). Gelatin silver print. 10.16 x 12.7 cm. New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Yale Collection of American Literature.

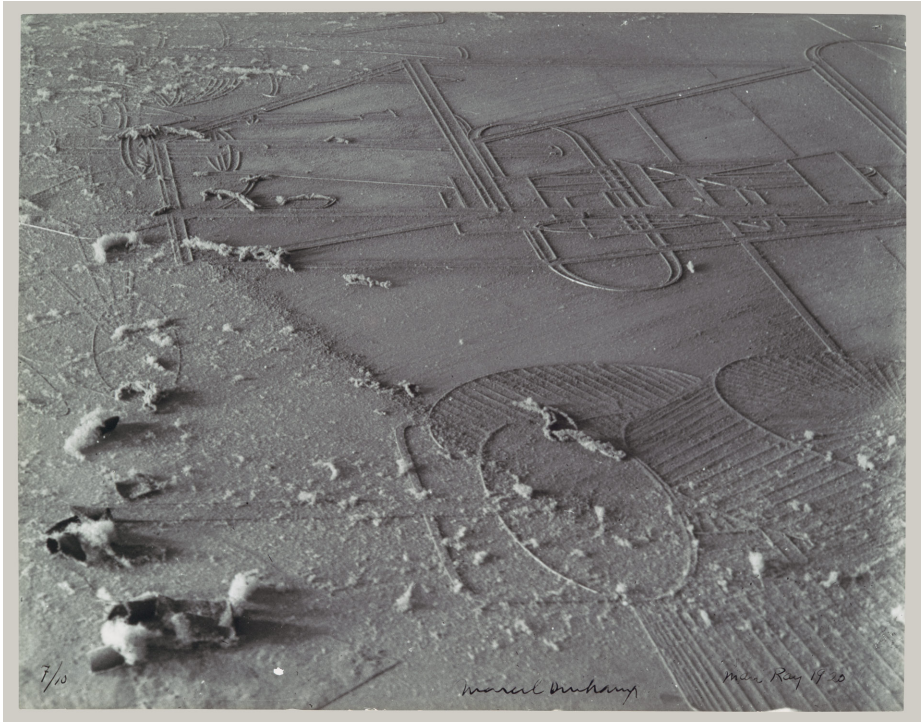

Figure 3.9. Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. *Dust Breeding* (c. 1920). Gelatin Silver Print. 23.9 x 30.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 3.10. Marcel Duchamp. The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass) (1915-23). Oil, lead, dust and varnish on glass. 27.75 x 17.59 cm. Tate.

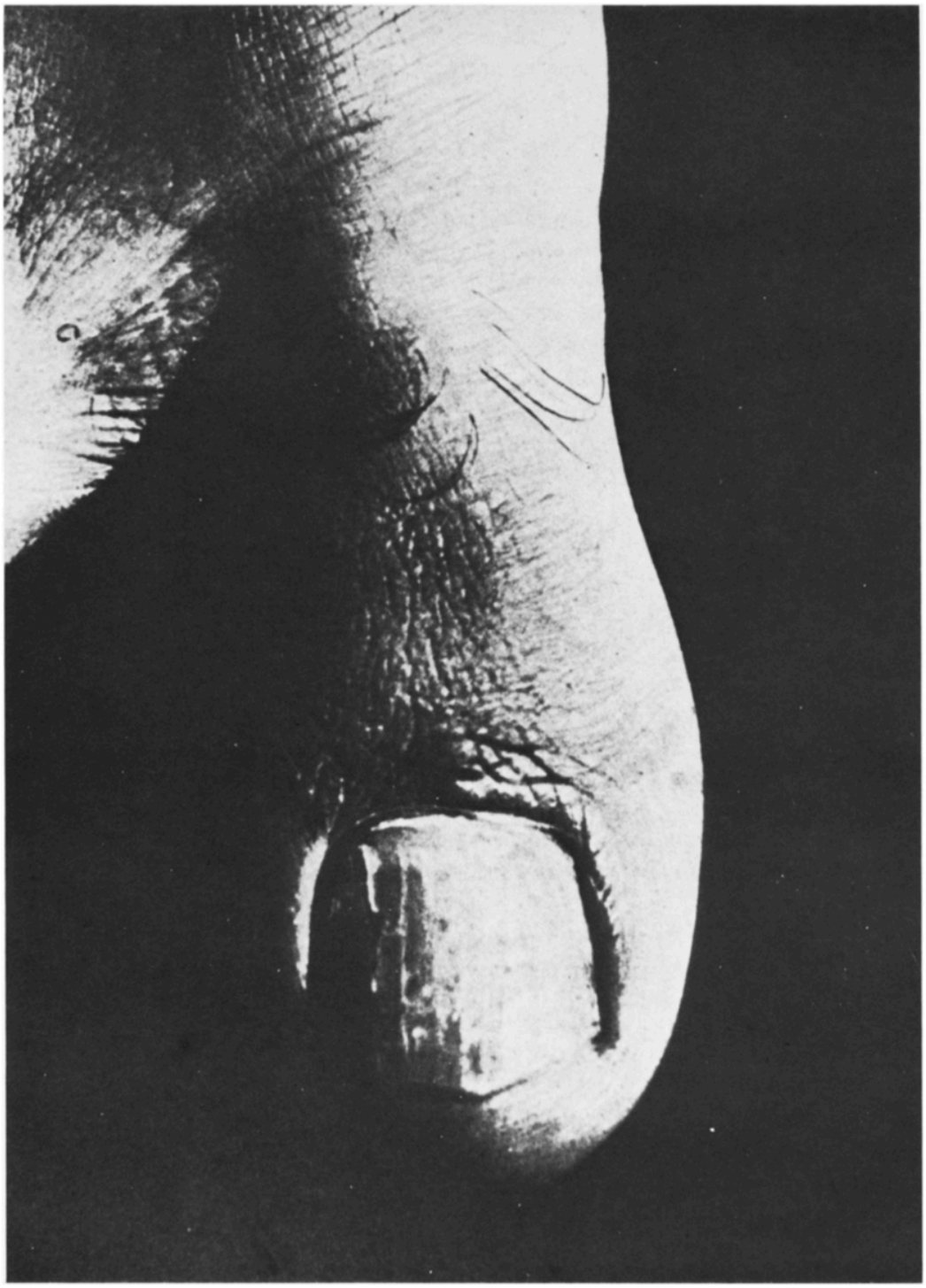

Figure 3.11. J-A. Boiffard. GROS ORTEIL, SUJET MASCULIN, 30 ANS (1929). Published in Georges Batailles's *Documents* no. 6, 1929.

Figure 3.12. Alfred Stieglitz. *The Asphalt Paver: New York* (1892). Photogravure. 14.2 x 17.7 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 3.13. Alfred Stieglitz. *The Hand of Man* (1902). Photogravure. 24.2 x 31.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 3.14. Alfred Stieglitz. *The City of Ambitions* (1910). Photogravure. 33.8 x 26 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; MoMA; The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Figure 3.15. Unknown photographer. *Study of the* Sky (1865). Albumen-silver print from a glass negative. 8 1/8 x 6 3/4 in. Collection André and Marie-Thérèse Jammes, Paris. No. 46.

Figure 3.16. Ilse Bing. *Storm Clouds over Jewish Cemetery, Frankfurt* (1932).

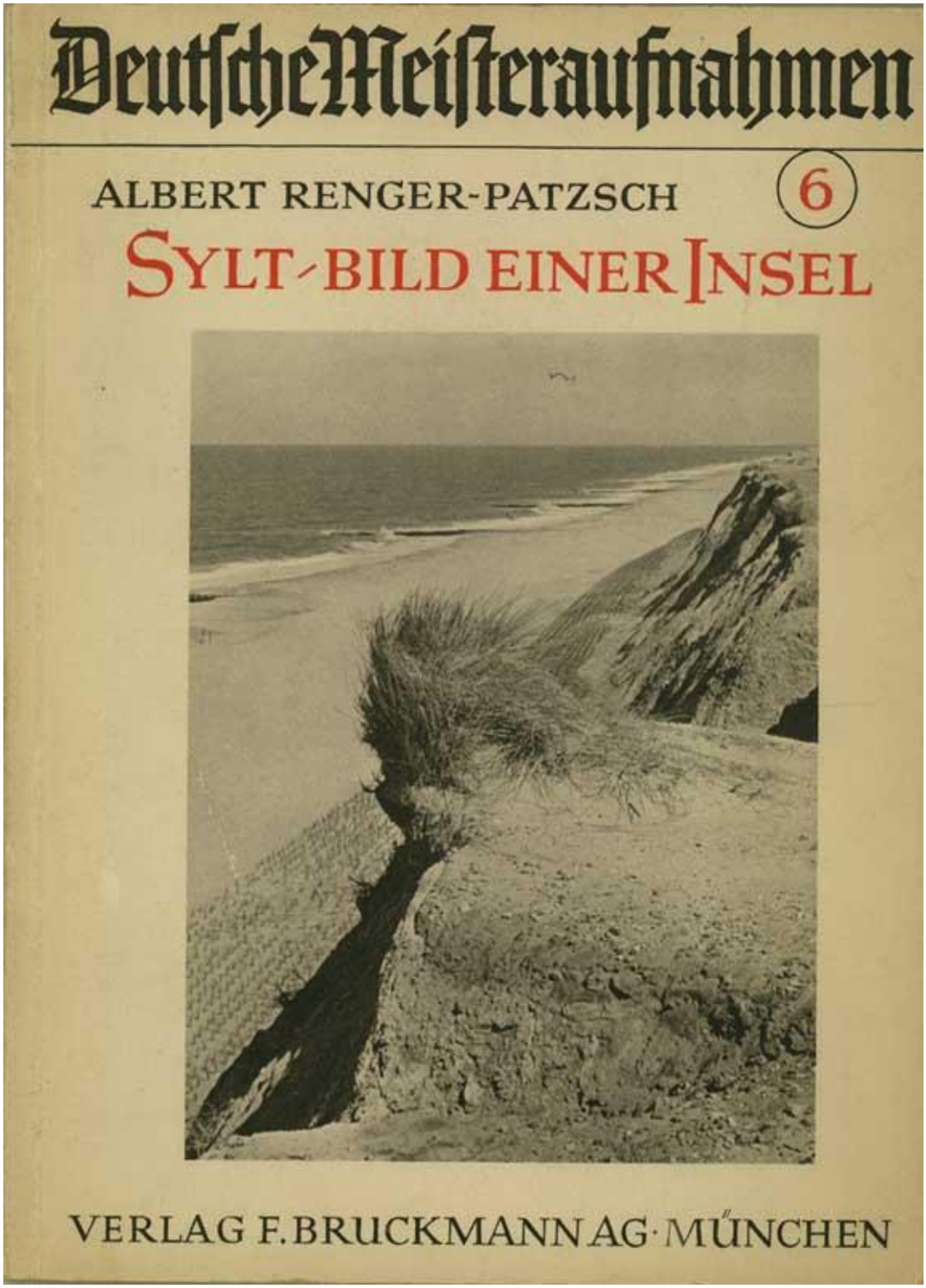

Figure 3.17. Albert Renger-Patzsch. *Sylt. Bild einer Insel* (Sylt: Image of an Island) (1936). Book cover.

Figure 3.18. Minor White. *Sun, Rock, Surf* (1948). Gelatin silver print. 14 x 18.4 cm.

Figure 3.19. Ilse Bing. *Sun, Clouds, Reflection on Ocean* (1936).

Figure 3.20. Arvid Gutschow. *Foam of an outgoing wave* in *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

Figure 3.21. Arvid Gutschow. *Canals in the mud lands with traces of seagulls* in *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

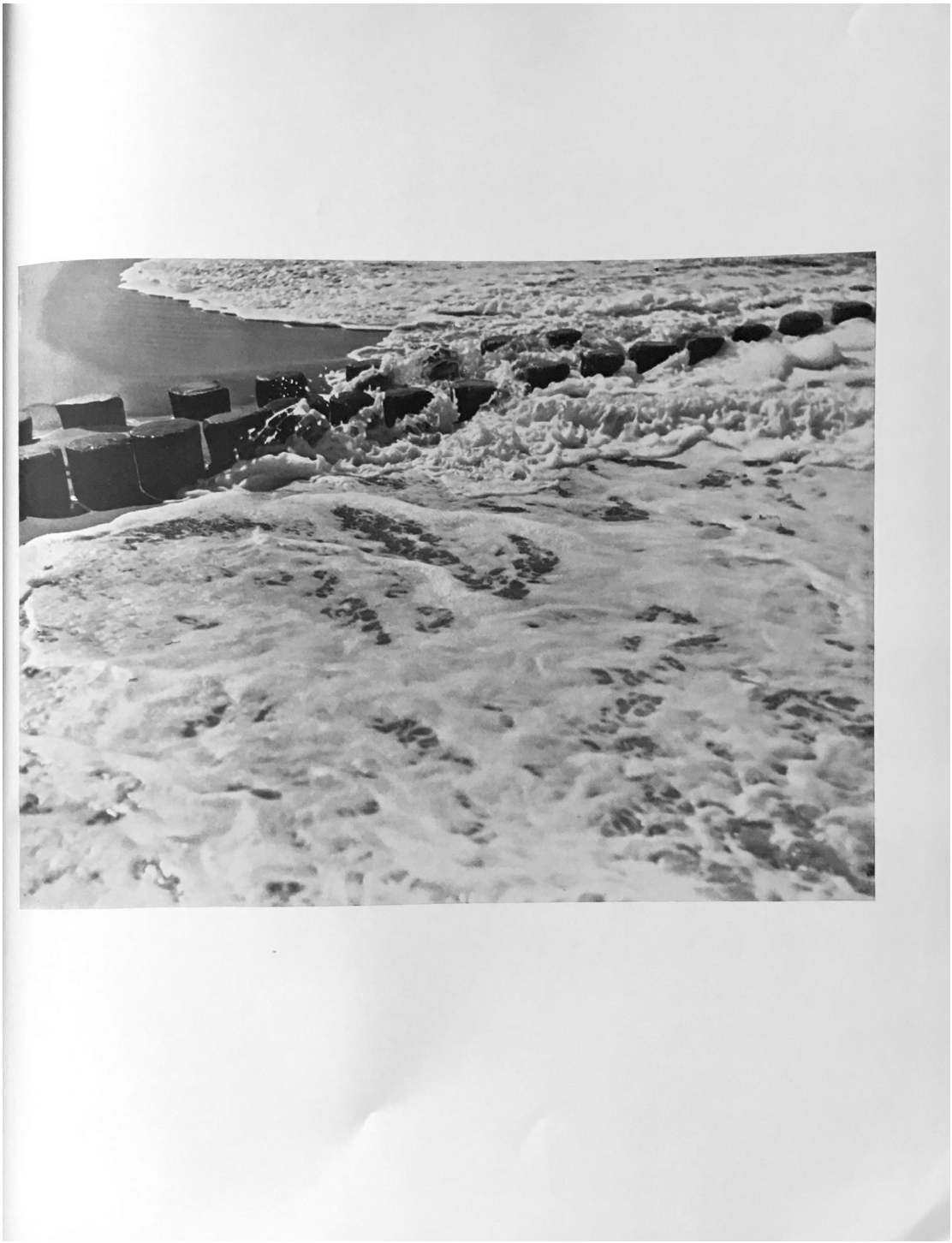

Figure 3.22. Arvid Gutschow. *Overshadowed stage, the dark damp beach has left the last wave* in *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

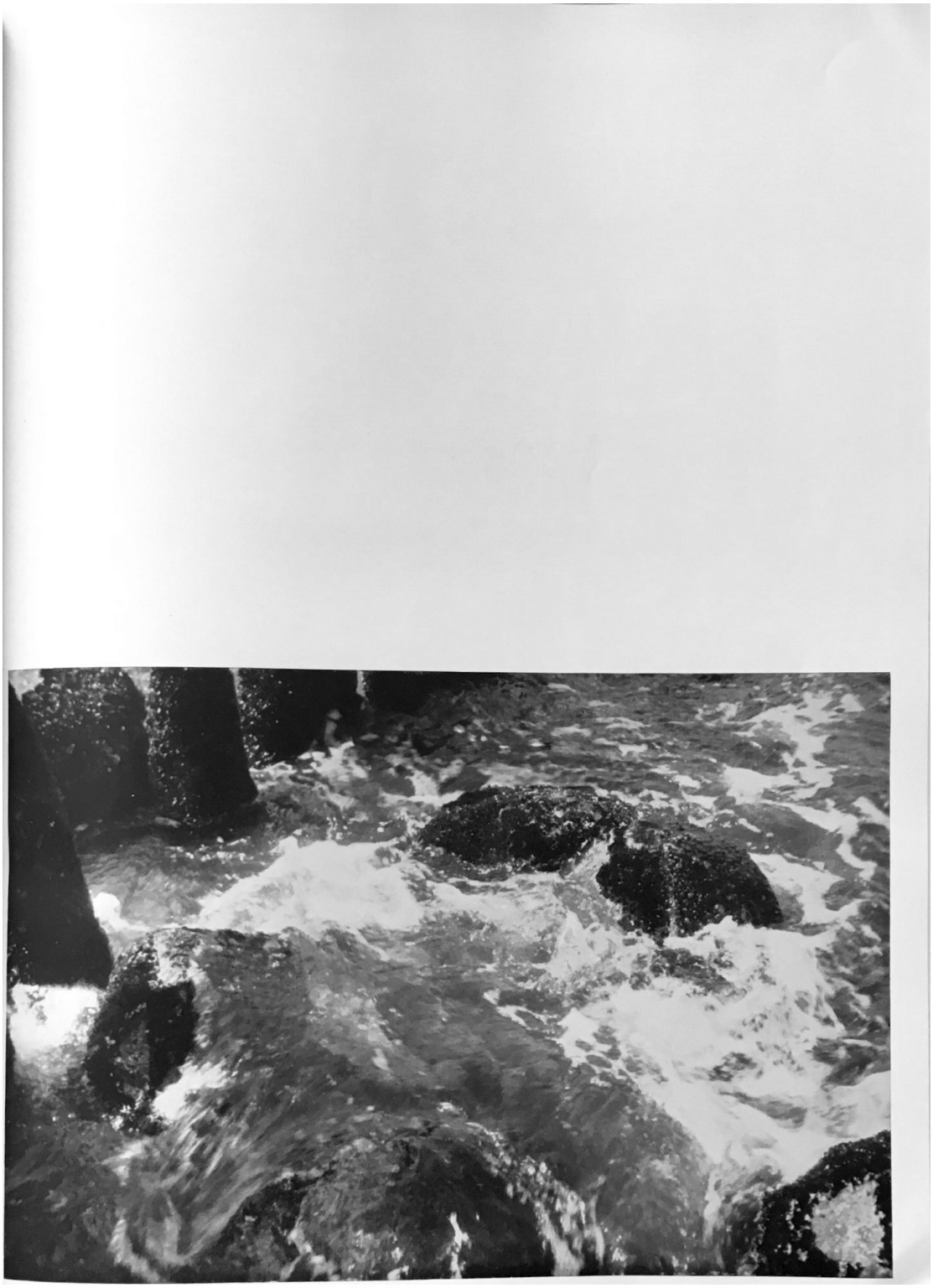

Figure 3.23. Arvid Gutschow. *Water vortex between stones and piles* in *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

Figure 3.24. Arvid Gutschow. *On a wave streaked stage* in *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

Figure 3.25. Arvid Gutschow. *Swirling funnel around stage piles* in *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

Figure 3.26. Arvid Gutschow. *Fish traps in mud ditch* in *See Sand Sonne* (1930).

Figure 4.0. Florence Henri. *Self-Portrait (Artist reflected in mirror mounted on exterior wall)* (1938).

Figure 4.1. Florence Henri. *Portrait of Pierre Minet. (Writer reflected in mirror mounted on exterior wall)* (1938).

Figure 4.2. Karl Blossfeldt. *Adiantum Pedatum* (1924-32) Illustrated in Amédée Ozenfant's *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928). Gelatin silver print. 29.7 x 23.8 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

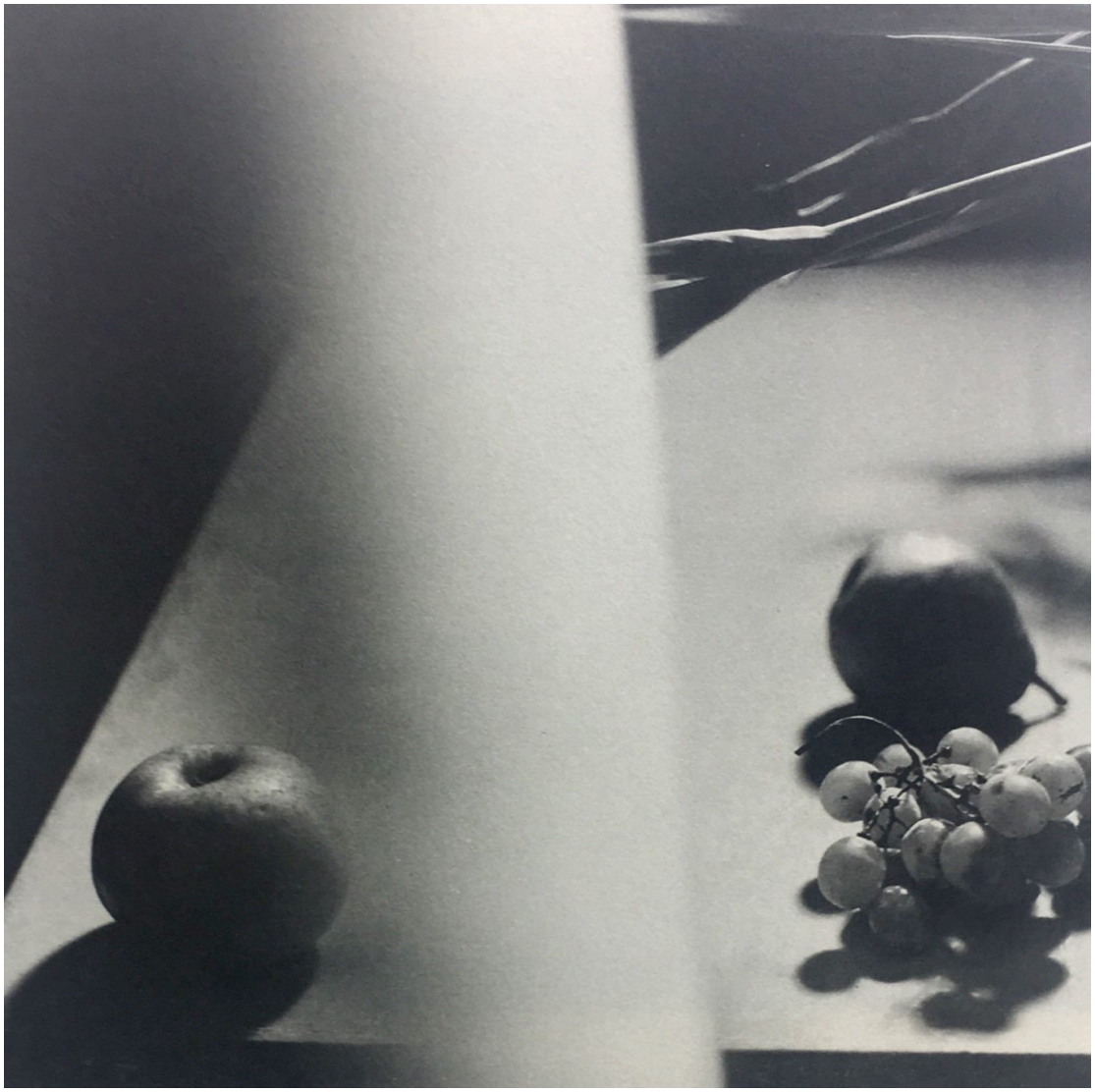

Figure 4.3. Florence Henri. *Still Life Composition (Apple, pear, and grapes, diagonal form in foreground)* (1931).

Figure 4.4. Florence Henri. *Still Life Composition (Landscape and still life of fruit)* (1932).

Figure 4.5. Florence Henri. *Composition.*

Figure 4.6. Florence Henri. *Untitled* (1931). Gelatin silver print. Galleria Martini e Ronchetti, Genova, Italy and The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 4.7. Lyonel Feininger. *The City at the Edge of the World (In der Stadt am Ende der Welt)* (1912). Ink and charcoal on paper. 31.8 x 24.1 cm.

Figure 4.8. Lyonel Feininger. *Wooden Toys*. POSITIVE. (1929-30). Gelatin dry plate (glass), 5.9 x 4.5 cm. Harvard Art Museums.

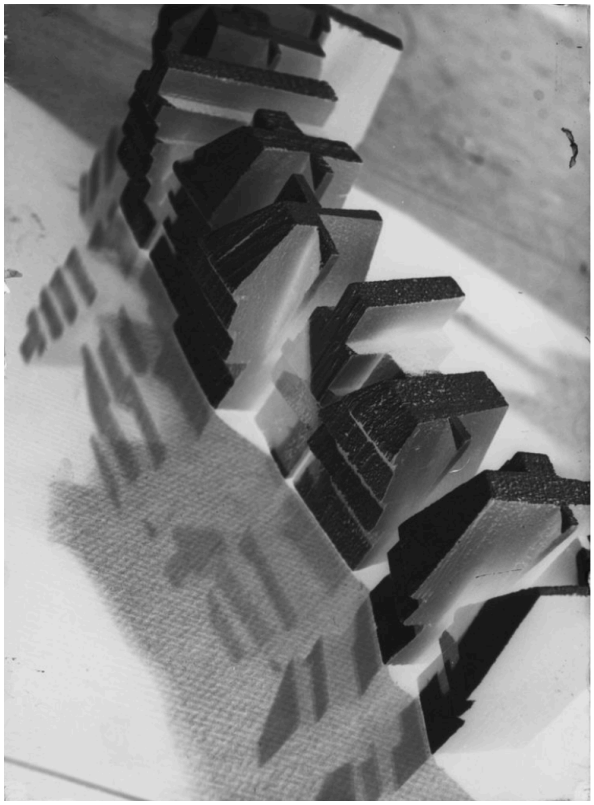

Figure 4.9. Lyonel Feininger. *Wooden Toys*. NEGATIVE. (1929-30). Gelatin dry plate (glass), 5.9 x 4.5 cm. Harvard Art Museums.

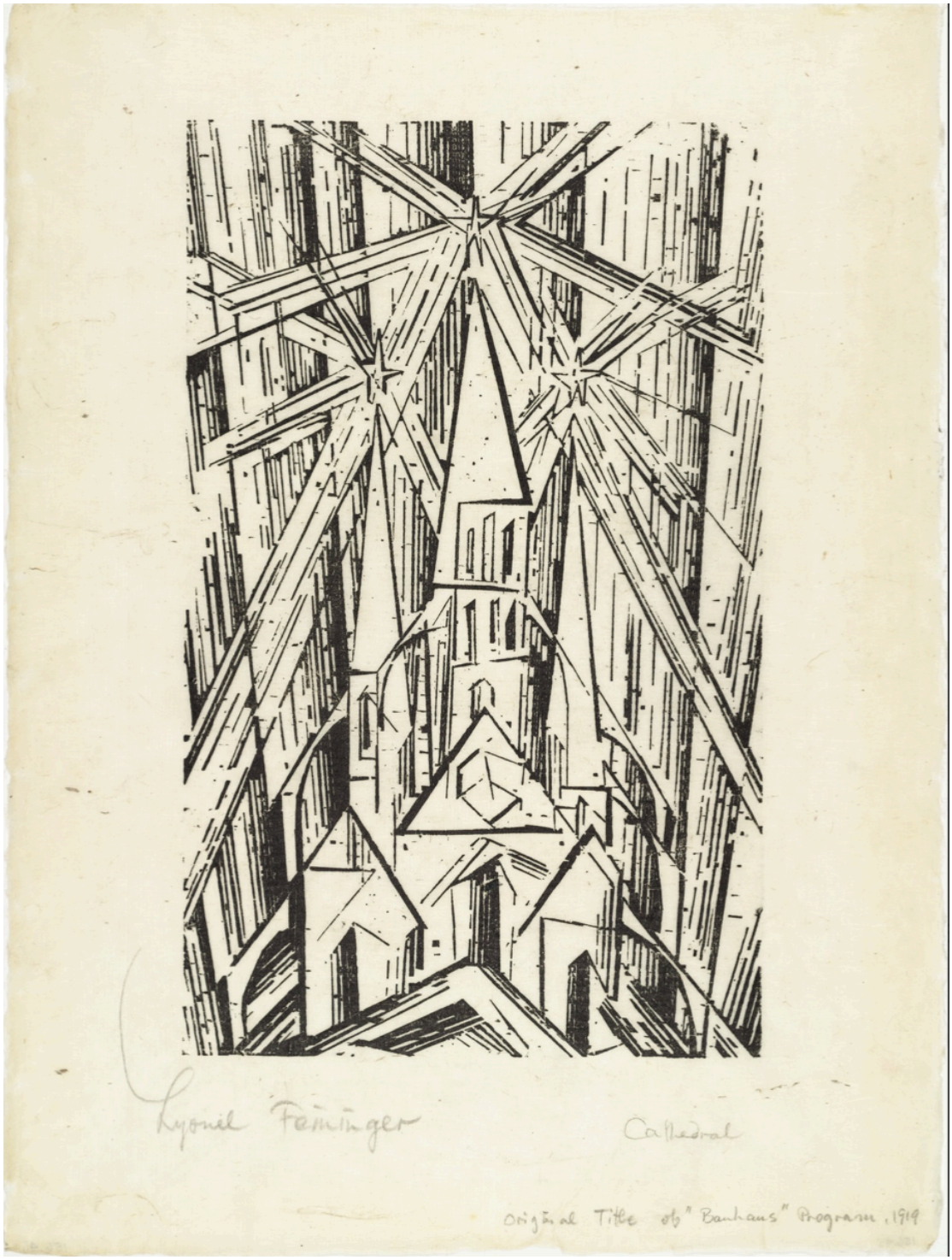

Figure 4.10. Lyonel Feininger. *Cathedral for Program of the State Bauhaus in Weimar* (1919). Woodcut. Composition: 30.5 x 19 cm; sheet (irreg.) 41 x 31 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 4.11. Lyonel Feininger. *Burgkühnauer Allee 4 around 10 p.m.* (1928). Also titled by the Harvard Art Museums as [Negative image of Burgkühnauer Allee No. 4, Dessau] (1928-9). Gelatin dry plate (glass). 4.5 x 5.9 cm. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

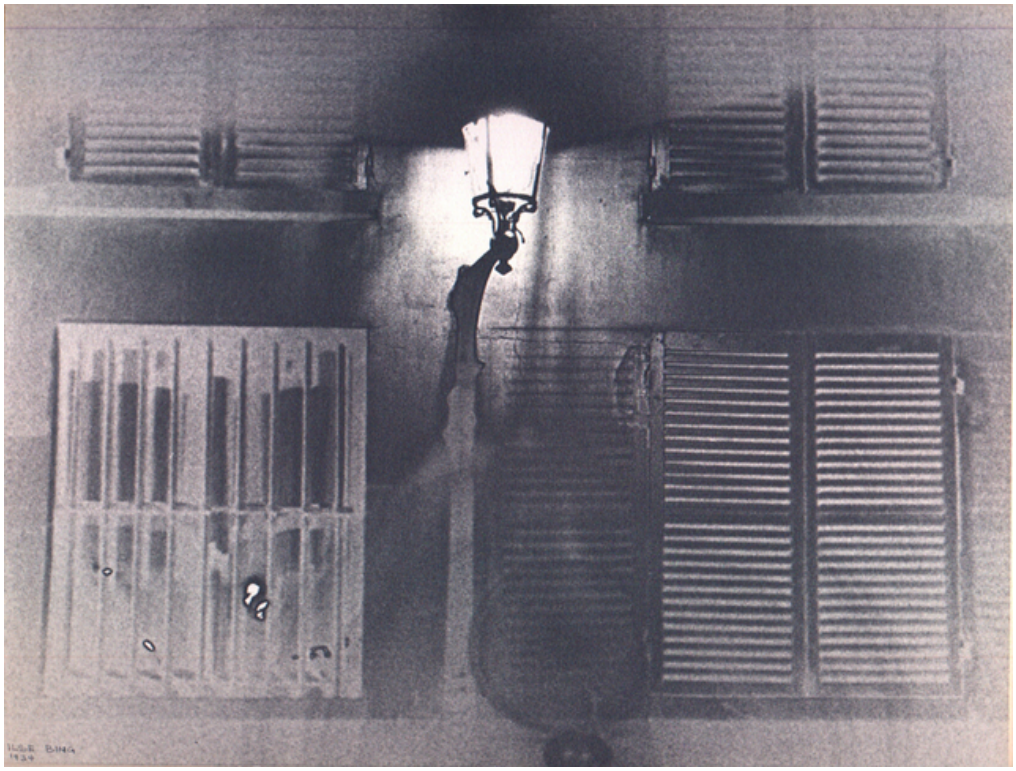

Figure 4.12. Ilse Bing. *Bec de Gaz, Paris, 1934* (1934). Gelatin silver print. 20.3 x 27.9 cm. SAGE Paris, Paris.

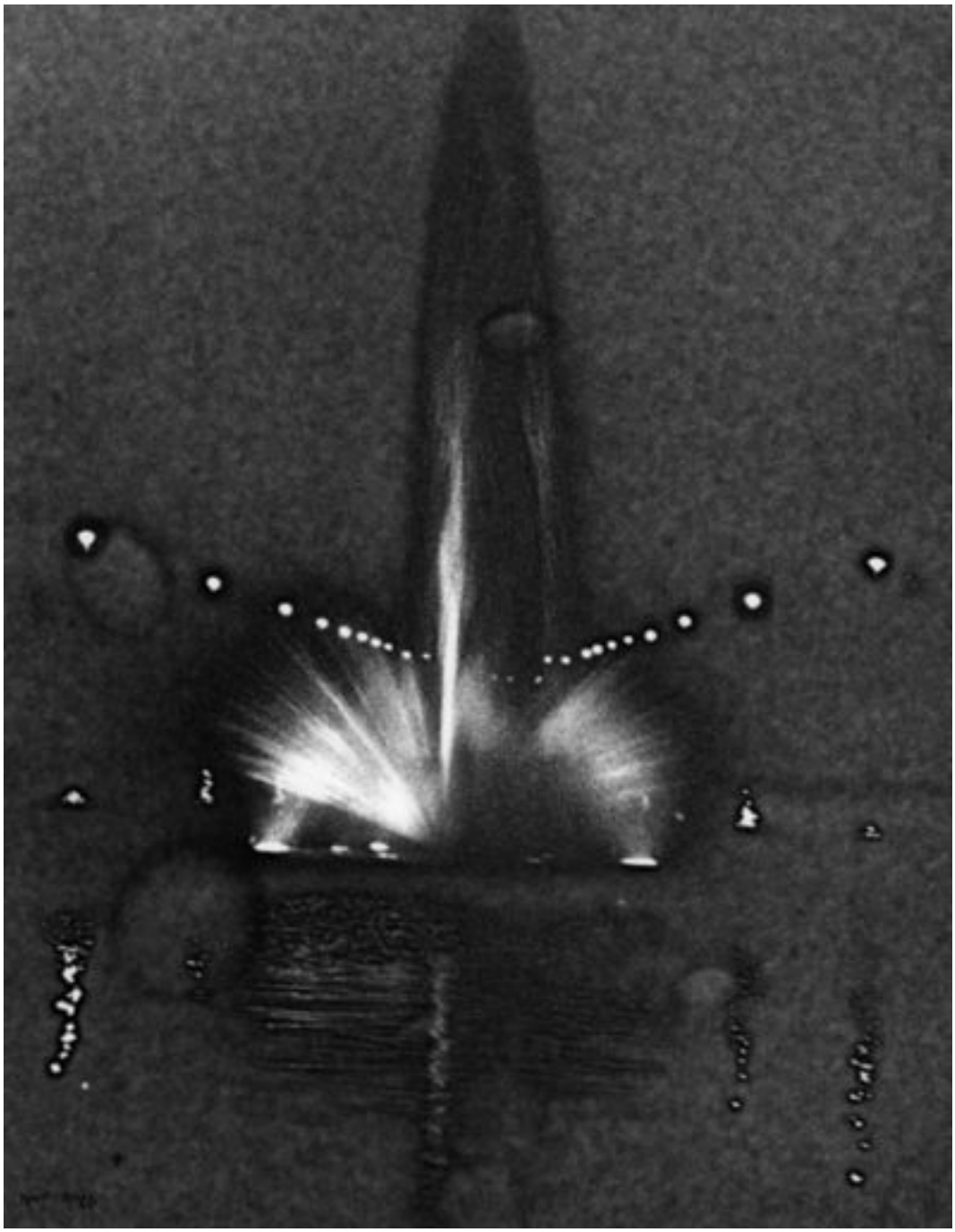

Figure **4**.**13**. Ilse Bing. *Rond Point de Champs Elysees, Paris, 1934* (1934). Gelatin silver print. 33 x 25.7 cm. JL Modern, Florida.

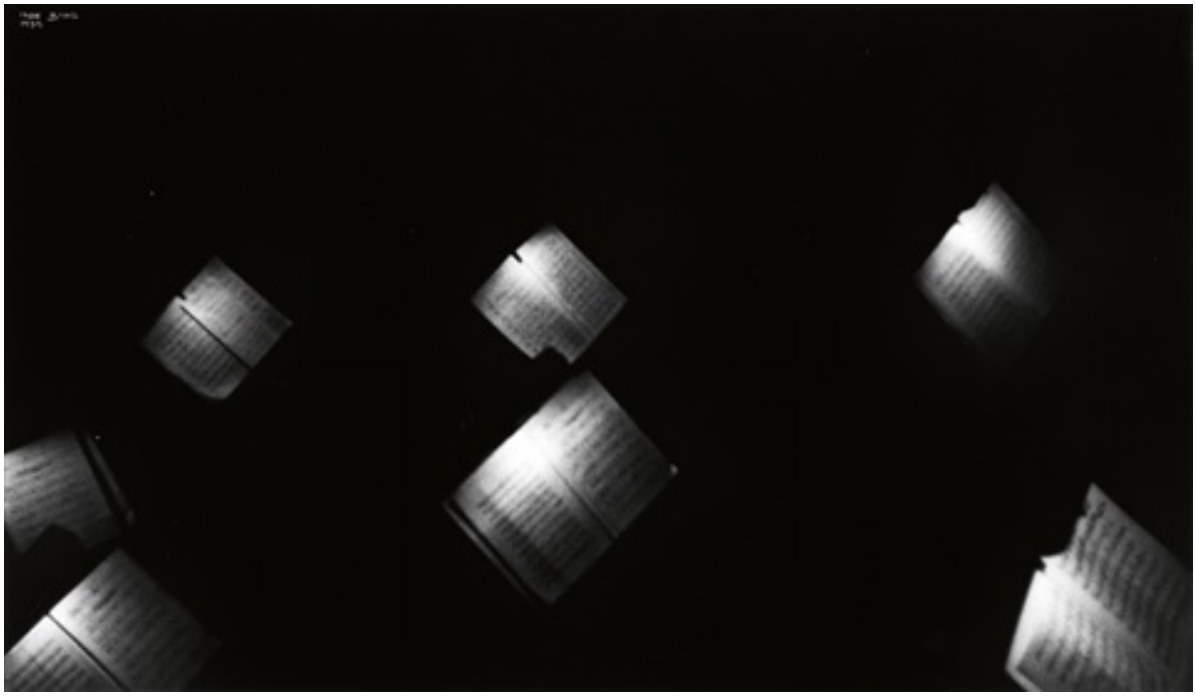

Figure 4.14. Ilse Bing. *Orchestra Pit, Theatre des Champs Elysees* (1933). Silver gelatin print. 19.1 x 32.7 cm. JL Modern, Florida.

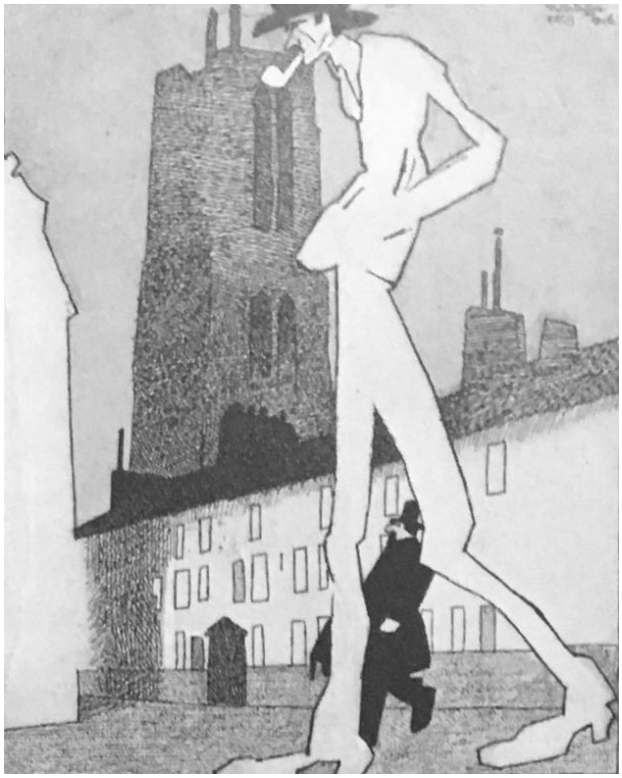

Figure 4.15. Lyonel Feininger. *The White Man*, published in *Le Témoin*, Paris (1906). Watercolour, pen and ink.

Figure 4.16. Lyonel Feininger. *Hurrying People*, published in *Le Témoin*, Paris (1907). Watercolour, pen and ink.

Figure 4.17. Lyonel Feininger. *Moloch à Paris ("Moloch – Can I really leave her alone in this Babylon?"),* published in *Le Témoin*, no. 4, 1907.

Figure 4.18. Lyonel Feininger. Painting "Bölbergasse, Halle" in progress, in Feininger's studio in the Moritzburg, Halle, POSITIVE (c. 1931). Gelatin dry plate (glass), 5.9 x 4.5 cm. Harvard Art Museums.

Figure 4.19. Lyonel Feininger. Painting "Bölbergasse, Halle" in progress, in Feininger's studio in the Moritzburg, Halle, NEGATIVE (c. 1931). Gelatin dry plate (glass), 5.9 x 4.5 cm. Harvard Art Museums.

Figure 4.20. Paul Strand, *Still Life, Pears and Bowls* (1916). Hand-pulled dust grain photogravure made by the Talbot-Klic photogravure process printed onto Lana Gravure paper. 25.4 x 28.6 cm. V&A.

Figure 4.21. Paul Strand. *Ceramic and Fruit* (1916 or 1919). Platinum print. 24.4 x 32.2 cm.

Figure 4.22. Paul Strand. *Abstraction, Porch Shadows, Connecticut* (1916). Gelatin silver print. 33.3 x 23 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

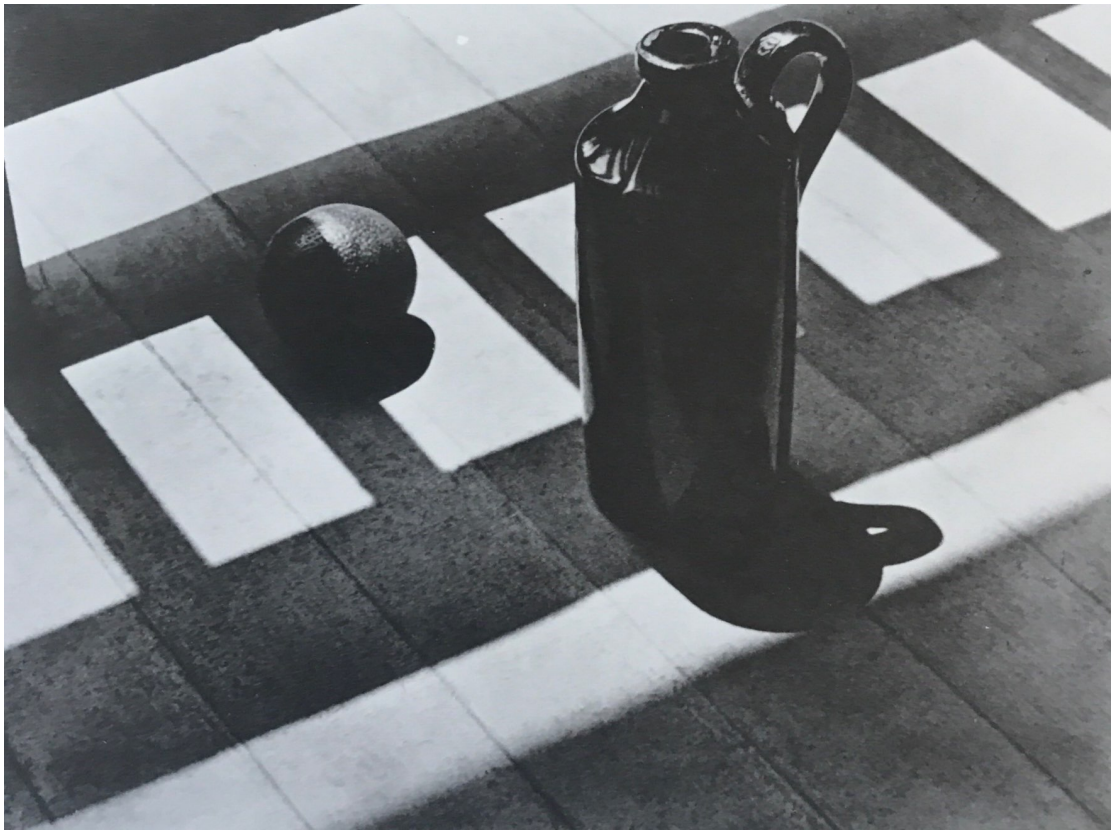

Figure 4.23. Paul Strand. *Orange and Jug on Porch* (1916).

Figure 4.24. Paul Strand. *Chair Abstraction, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* (1916). Palladium print. 33.02 x 24.61 cm. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

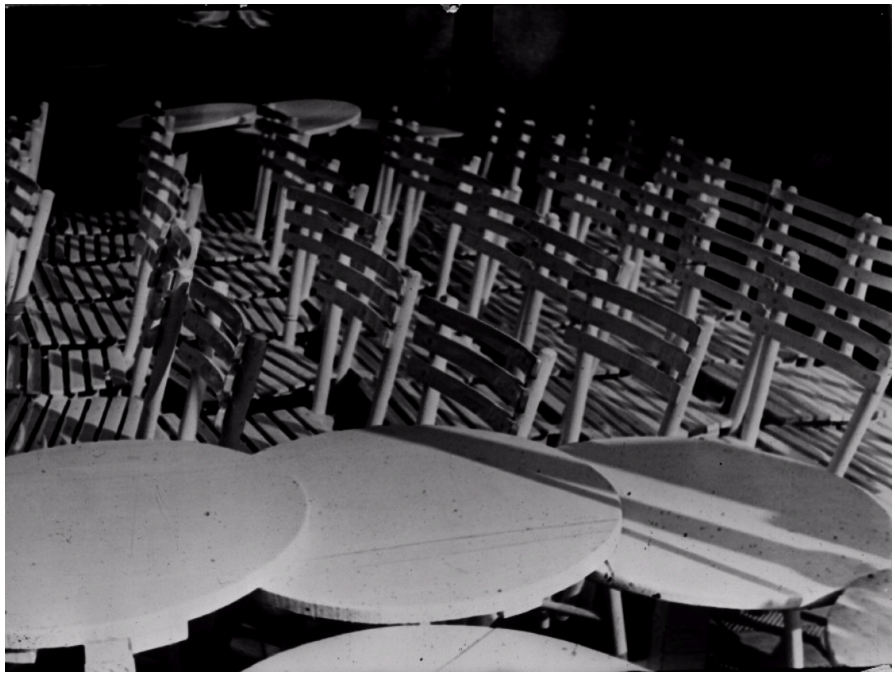

Figure 4.25. Josef Albers. *Garden Chairs III, Early Morning, Kurfürstendam* (1929). Gelatin silver print. 17.2 x 22.8 cm. Harvard Art Museums.

Figure 4.26. Ilse Bing. *Chairs, Paris, Champs Elysses* (1931). Silver gelatin print. 26/4 x 34 cm. JL Modern, Florida.

Figure 4.27. Florence Henri. *Composition* (1931). Gelatin silver print. 39.9 x 30 cm. Atlas Gallery, London.

Figure 4.28. Florence Henri. *Composition* (1931). Gelatin silver print. 30 x 23.6 cm. Atlas Gallery, London.

Figure 4.29. Lucia Moholy. *Folding Chairs in the Antechamber of the Director's Office* (1923). Gelatin silver print. 20.3 x 26.4 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of Walter Gropius.

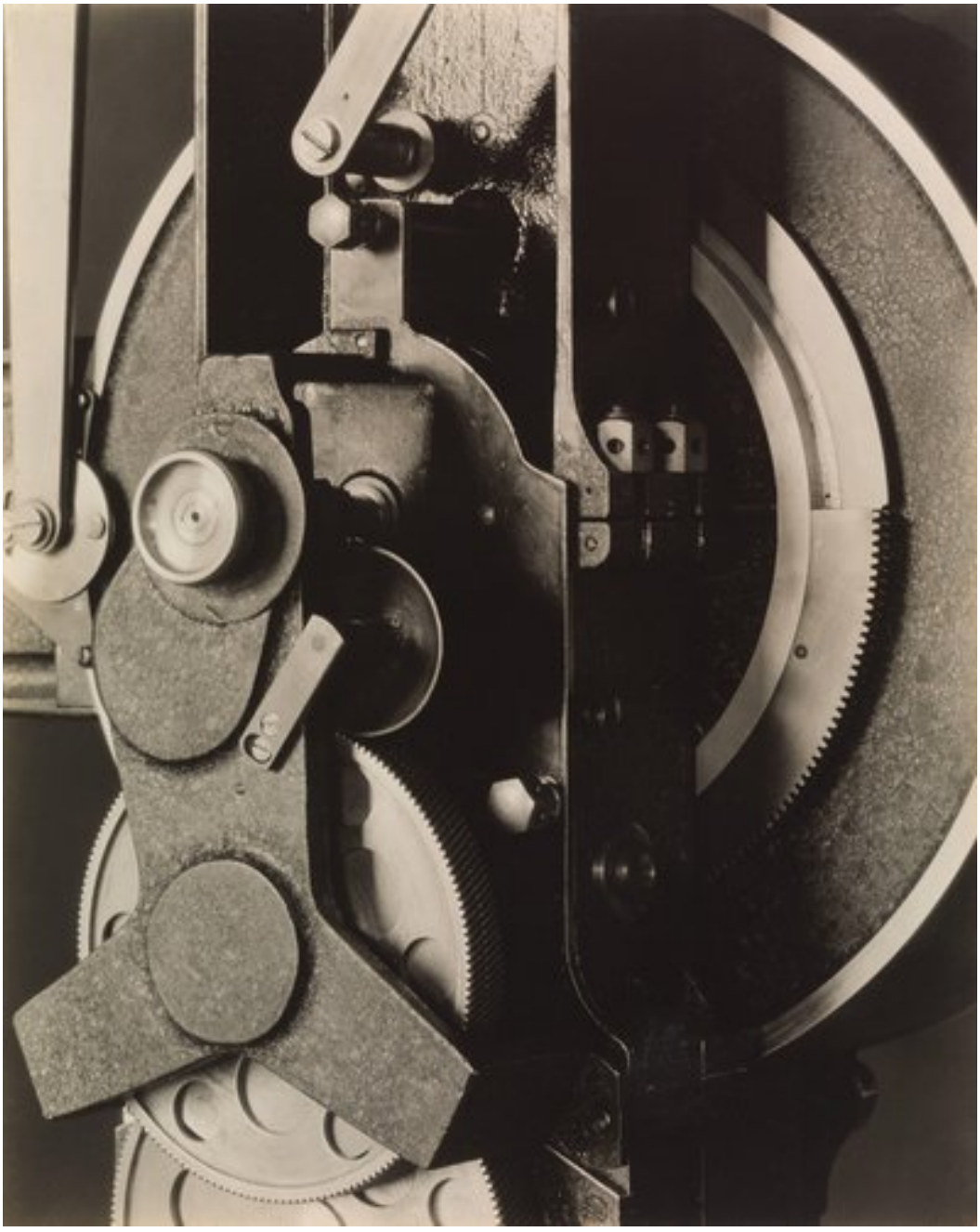

Figure 5.0. Paul Strand, *Double Akeley, New York* (1922). Gelatin silver print. 24.61 x 19.69 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 5.1. Florence Henri. *Self-Portrait* (1928). Gelatin silver print. 39.3 x 25.5 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 5.2. Ilse Bing. *Self-Portrait in Mirrors* (1931). Gelatin silver print. 26.8 x 30.8 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 5.3. Charles Sheeler. Untitled (1922). Whitney Museum of American Art.

Figure 5.4. Amédée Ozenfant, *Nature Morte (Still-life)* (1920-21). Oil on canvas. 80.5 x 100.3 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.

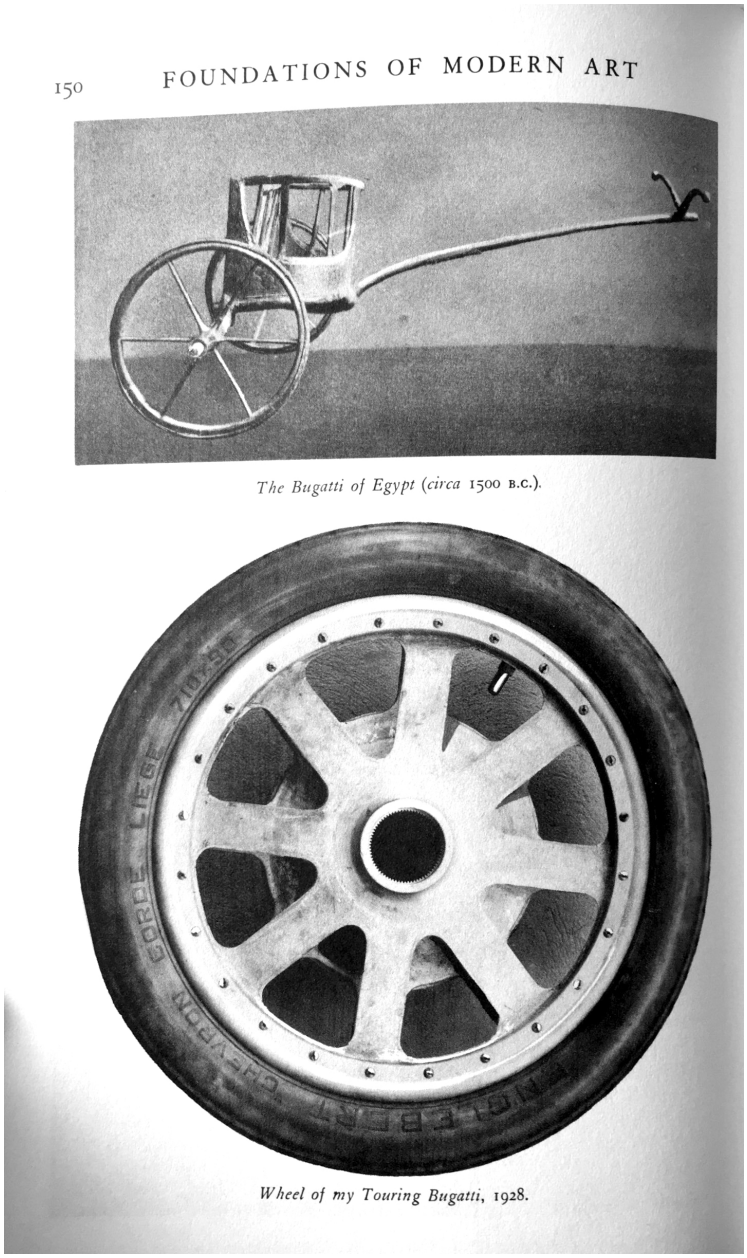

Figure 5.5. Bugatti page from Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928).

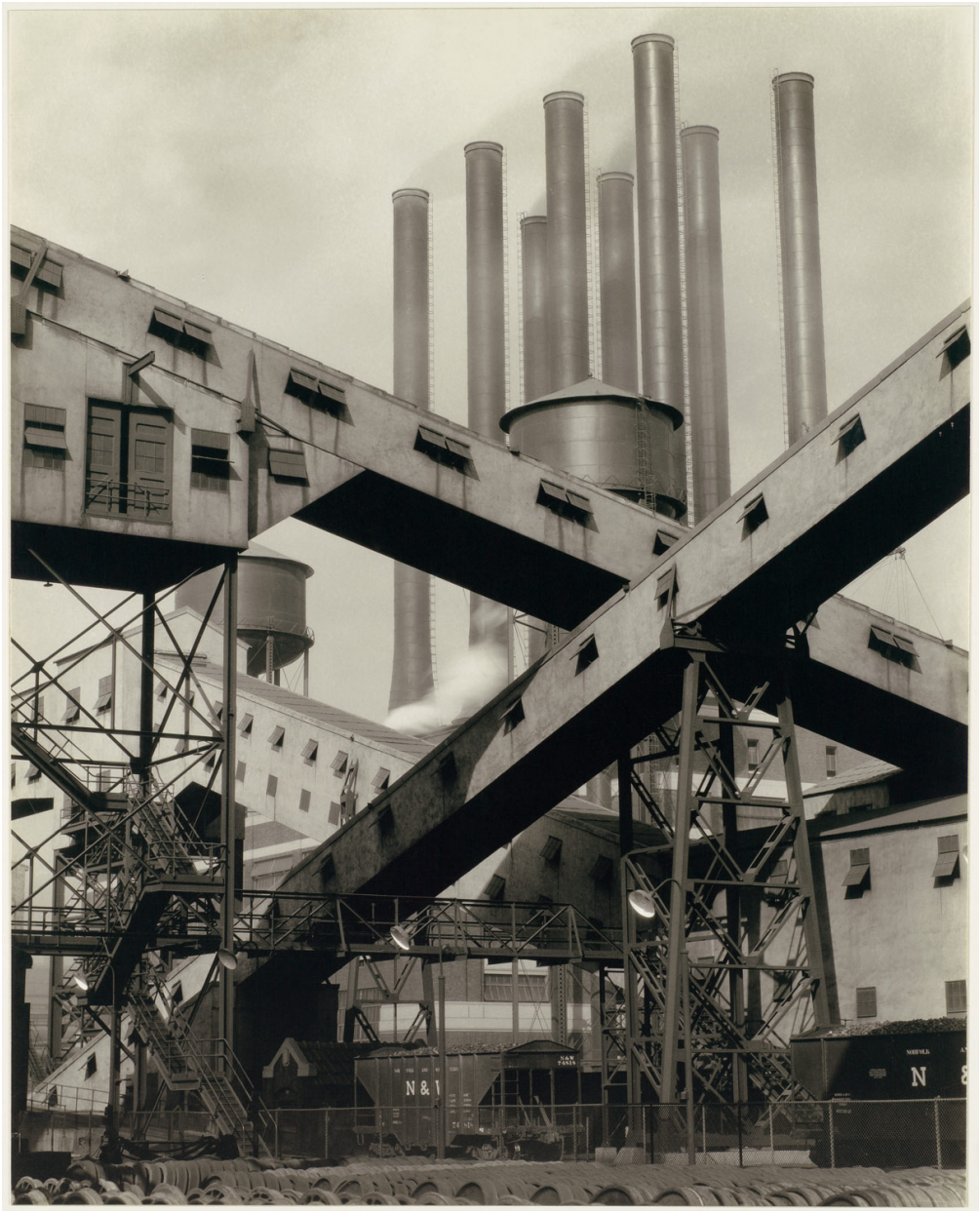

Figure 5.6. Charles Sheeler, *Criss-cross Conveyors, River Rouge Plant, Ford Motor Company*, (1927). Gelatin silver print. 23.5 x 18.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art; MoMA.

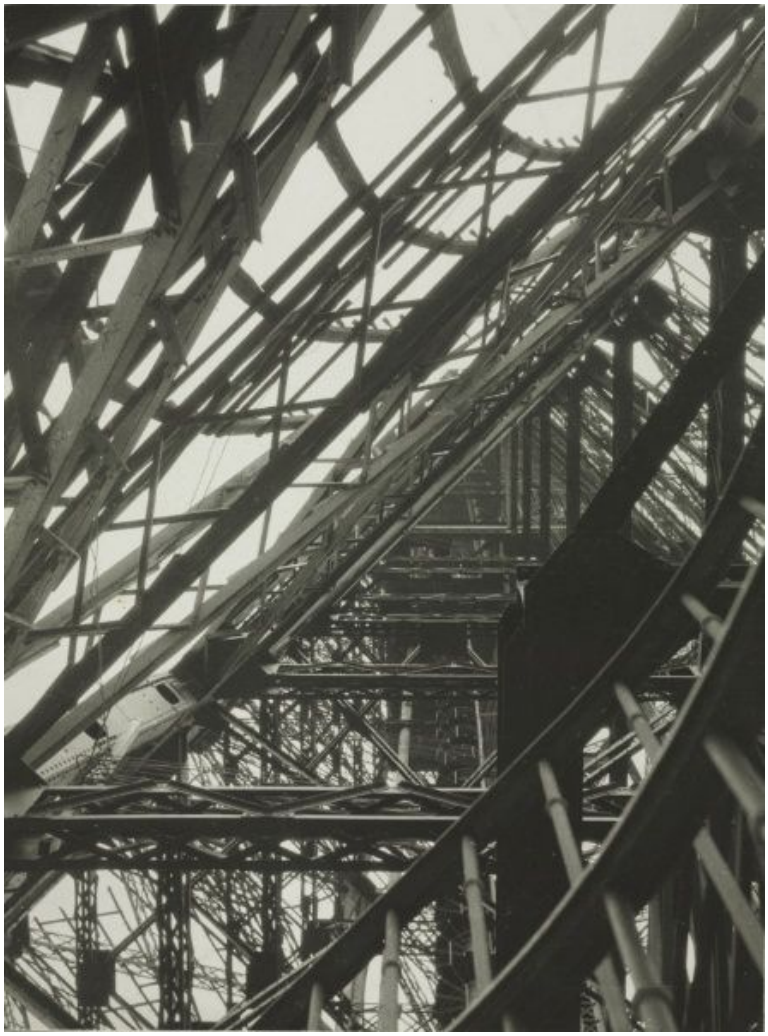

Figure 5.7. L. Moholy-Nagy. *Eiffel Tower* (1925). Gelatin silver print. 29.2 x 21 cm.

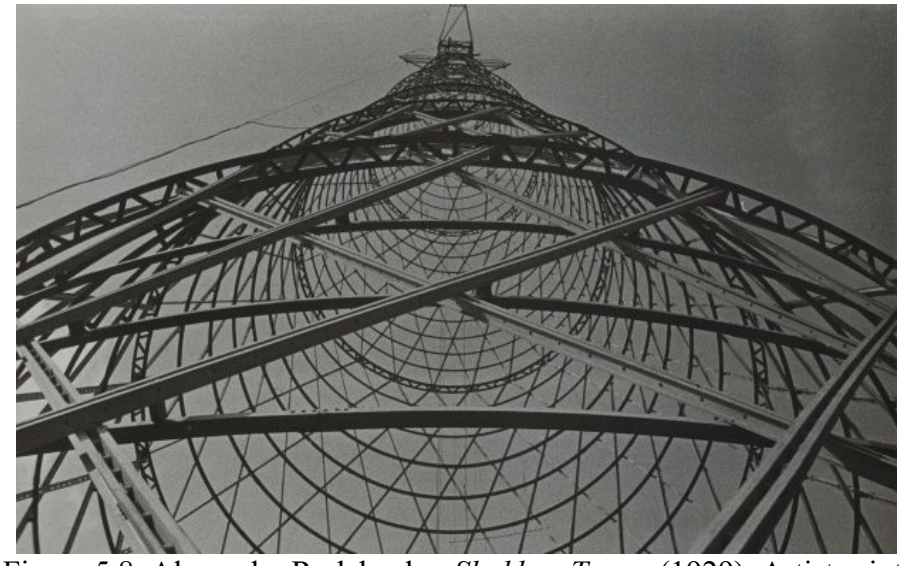

Figure 5.8. Alexander Rodchenko. *Shukhov Tower* (1929). Artist print.

Figure 5.9. Germaine Krull. *Pont Roulant, Rotterdam (Bridge Crane, Rotterdam)* (1926). Gelatin silver print. 21.9 x 15.3 cm. Jeu de Paume, Paris.

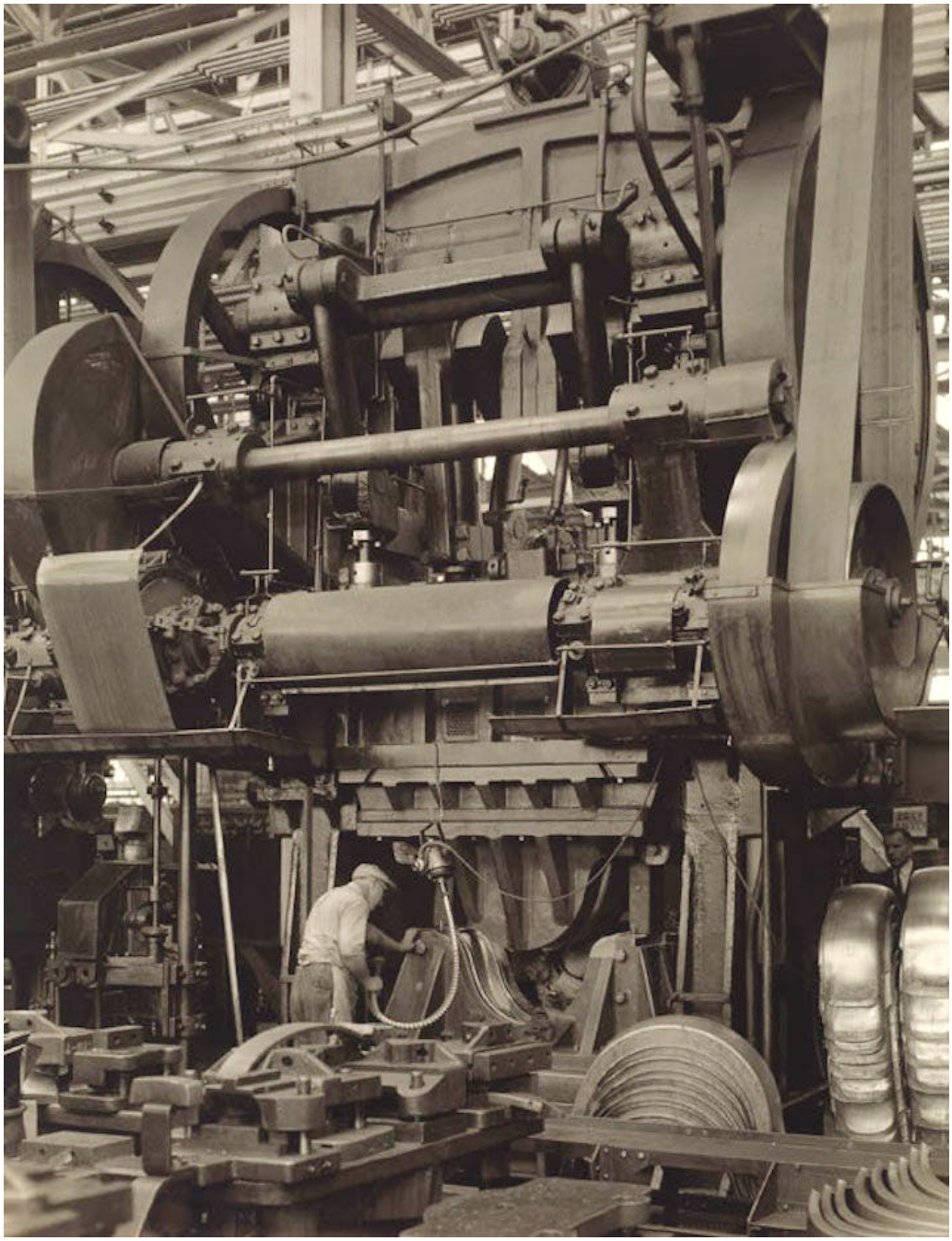

Figure 5.10. Charles Sheeler, *Ford Plant – Stamping Press* (1927). The Lane Collection, Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

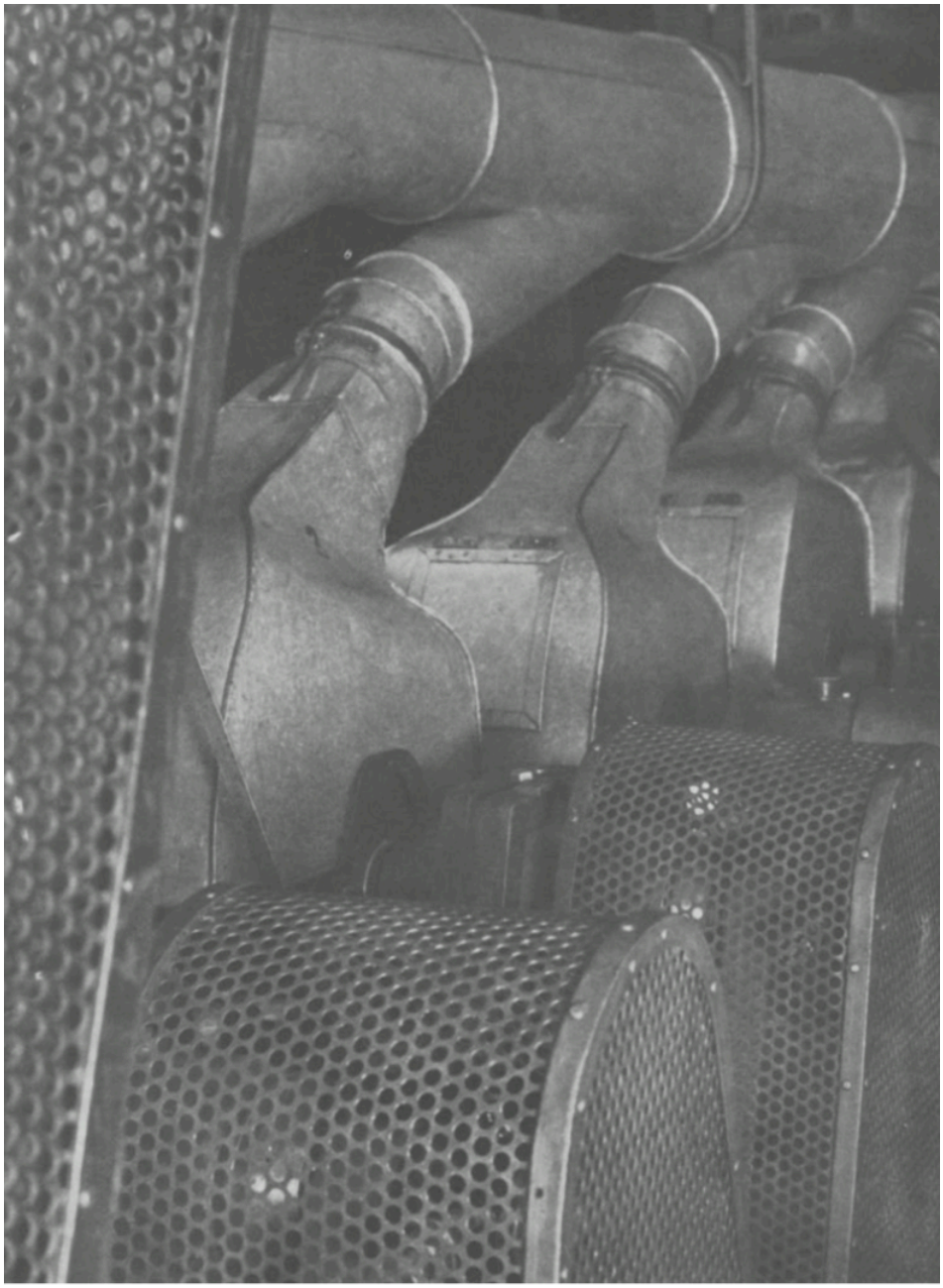

Figure 5.11. Albert Renger-Patzsch. “Schutzgitter und Exhaustoren einer Stahlhobelmaschine,/Protective Grills and Exhaust Pipes of a Steel Planer” in *Die Welt ist schön*, 77 (1928). Albert Renger-Patzsch Archiv/Ann u. Jürgen Wilde, Zülpich/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York.

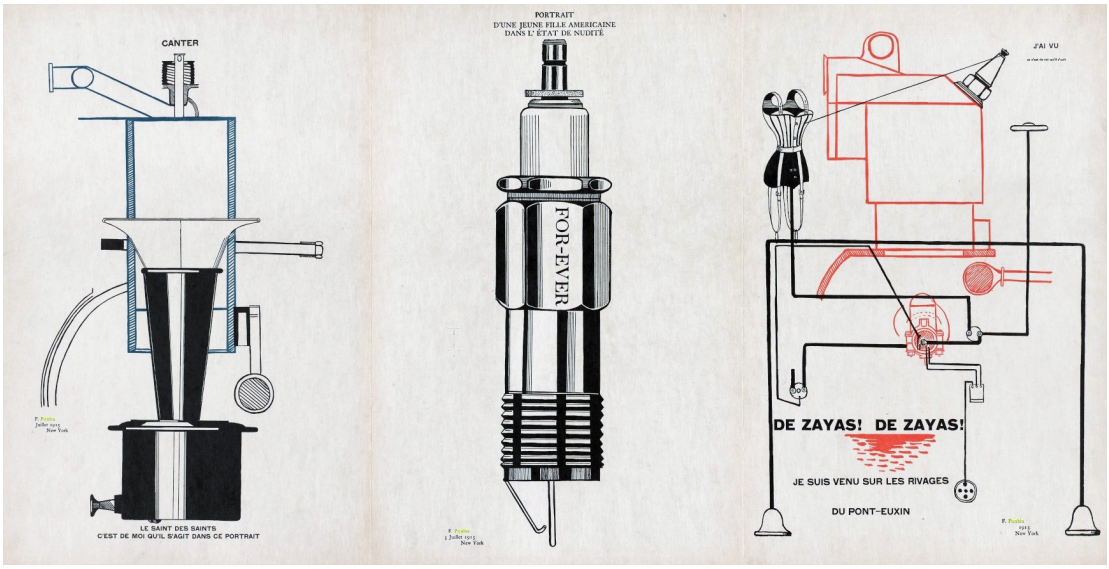

Figure 5.12. Francis Picabia. *Canter*, *Portrait d'une Jeune Fille Américaine dans l'État de Nudité* and *J'ai Vu.* (1915). Blue Mountain Project, Princeton University.

Figure 5.13. Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928).

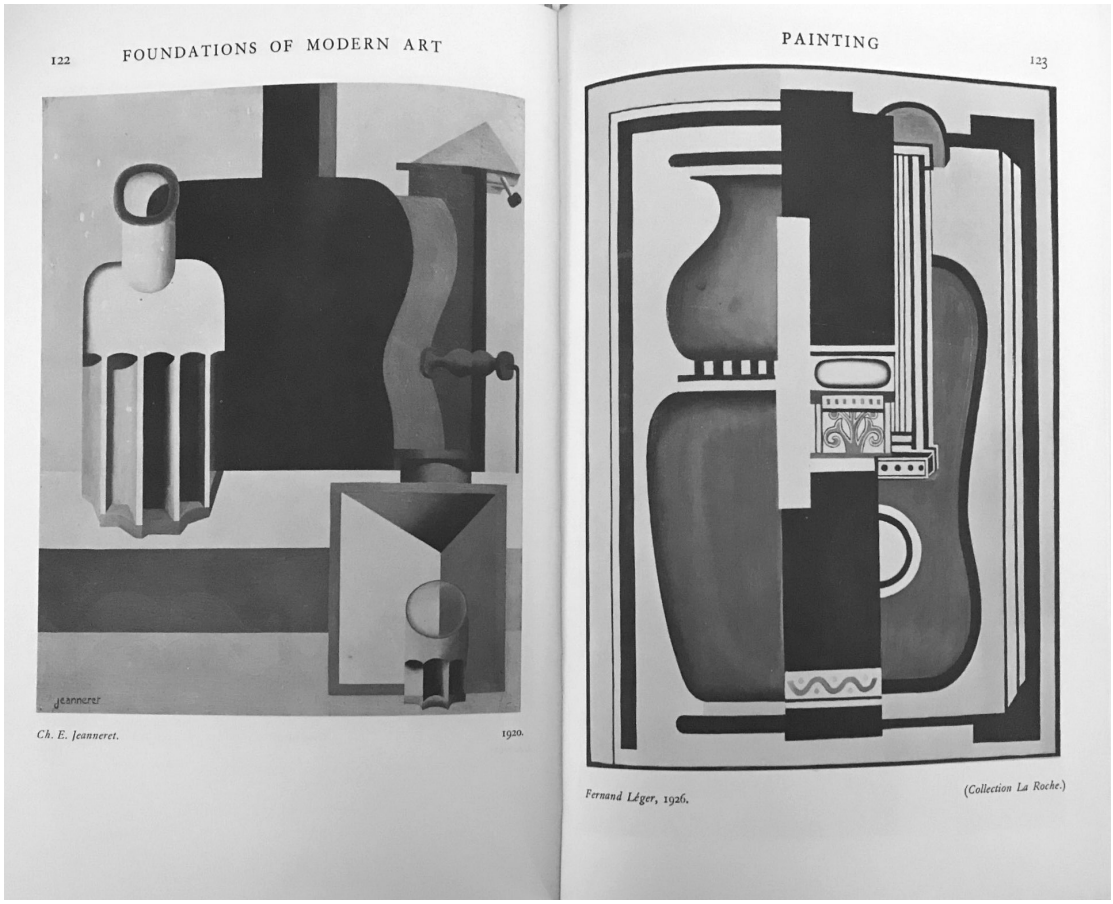

Figure 5.14. Le Corbusier (Jeanneret) and Fernand Léger in Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928).

GARMENT CENTRE. NEW YORK
F. A. Fairchild's Aerial Service

BELGIUM

R. ACKE, COURTRAI

99 Moving Picture Theatre "De Gouden Lanteern" at Courtrai (façade).
100 The Same (Interior).

M. BAUGNIET, BRUSSELS

101 First Sketch for Smoking Room.

V. BOURGEOIS, BRUSSELS

102 The Modern City. Place des Coopérateurs at Brussels.
103 The Modern City. Apartment Building in Brussels.

L. DE KONINCK, BRUSSELS

104 Miscellaneous.

L. DE KONINCK AND L. FRANCOIS

105 Apartment Building in Brussels.

J. DELIGNE, BRUSSELS

106 Hall for Dancing Lessons at Brussels.
107 House at Brussels.

J. EGGERICQX, BRUSSELS

108 Villa "L'Escale" at Le Panne (Belgian coast).

L. FRANCOIS, BRUSSELS

109 Dwellings at Palerme and at Brussels.
110 Interior of Shop at Brussels.

M. GASPARD, BRUSSELS

111 Furniture for photographic accessories and for the display of useful objects.
112 Interior and Furniture.

J. F. HOEBEN, BRUSSELS

113 Villa de Mme. S. at Reeth-Anvers.
114 City Plan for the Suburb of Molenbeek St. Jean at Brussels.

H. HOSTE, BRUGES-LINDENHOF

115 "Noordzee Hotel" at Knocke (Belgian coast).
116 Hotel for Unmarried Workmen (industrial city of Salzaete, Flandre Orientale).
117 Church of Zonnebeke near Ypres.

15

Figure 5.15. F. A. Fairchild's Aerial Service of New York's Garment Centre in *Machine Age Exposition Catalogue* (1927).

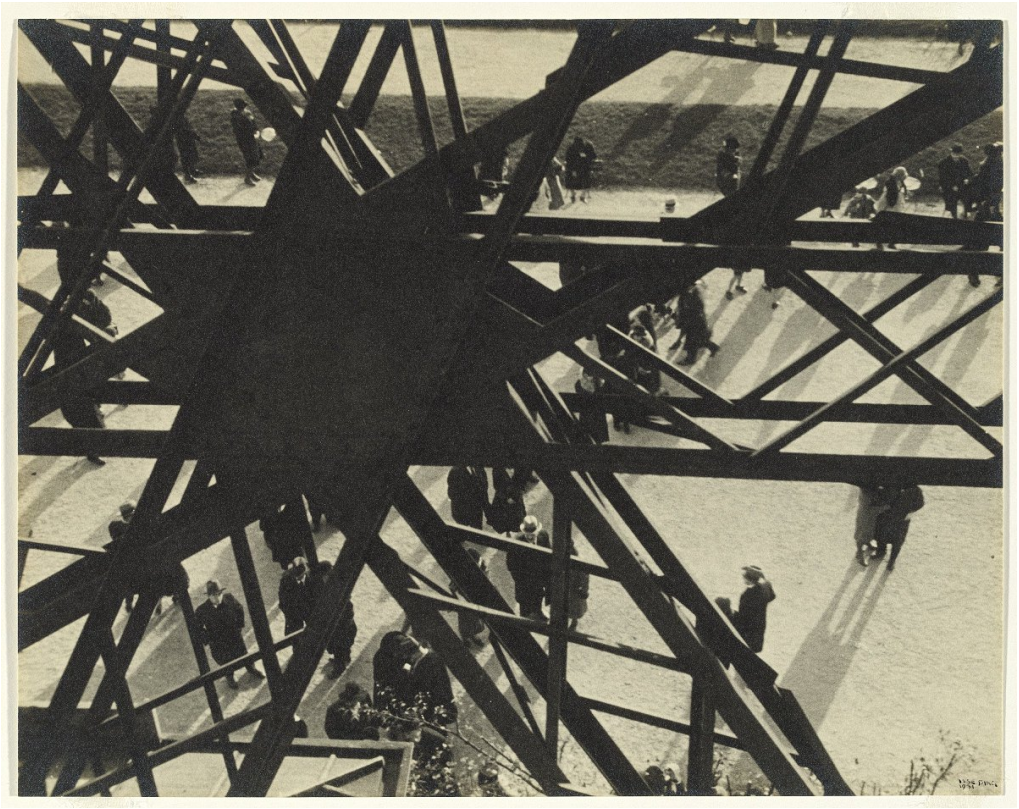

Figure 5.16. Ilse Bing. *Eiffel Tower, Paris* (1931). Gelatin silver photograph. 22.3 x 28.2 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Figure 5.17. Ilse Bing. *"It Was So Windy in the Eiffel Tower"* (1931). Gelatin silver print. 22.1 x 28.1 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 5.18. Germaine Krull. *Cover of Métal*, (1928). Paris: Librairie des Arts Décoratifs. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. Estate of Germaine Krull, Museum Folkwang, Essen.

Figure 5.19. Germaine Krull. “Dans toute sa force” (In Full Force), *Vu*, no. 11 (May 31, 1928): 284. Images by Germaine Krull. Text by Florent Fels.

Figure 5.20. Germaine Krull. Untitled (*Eiffel Tower*). 1927–28. Gelatin silver print. 22.9 × 15.9 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther.

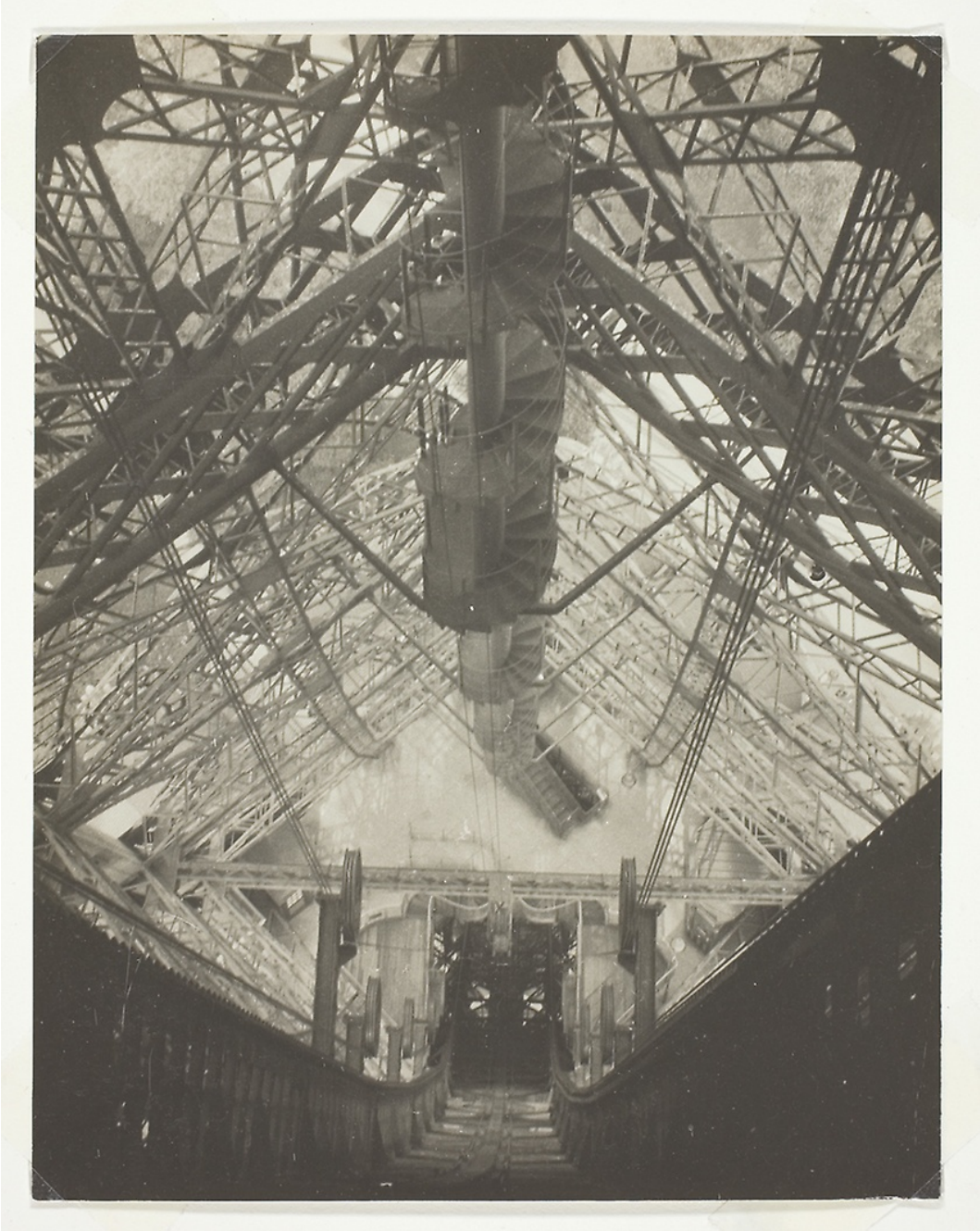

Figure 5.21. Germaine Krull. *Untitled* or *Eiffel Tower, elevator track and staircase,* 1924/27. Gelatin silver print. 20.8 x 16.2 cm. Art Institute of Chicago. The Mary and Leigh Block Endowment Fund.

Figure 5.22. Germaine Krull. *Paris* or *Champs de Mars*, 1925–27. Gelatin silver print. 22.2 x 15.3 cm. Art Institute of Chicago. Photography Collection Purchase Fund.

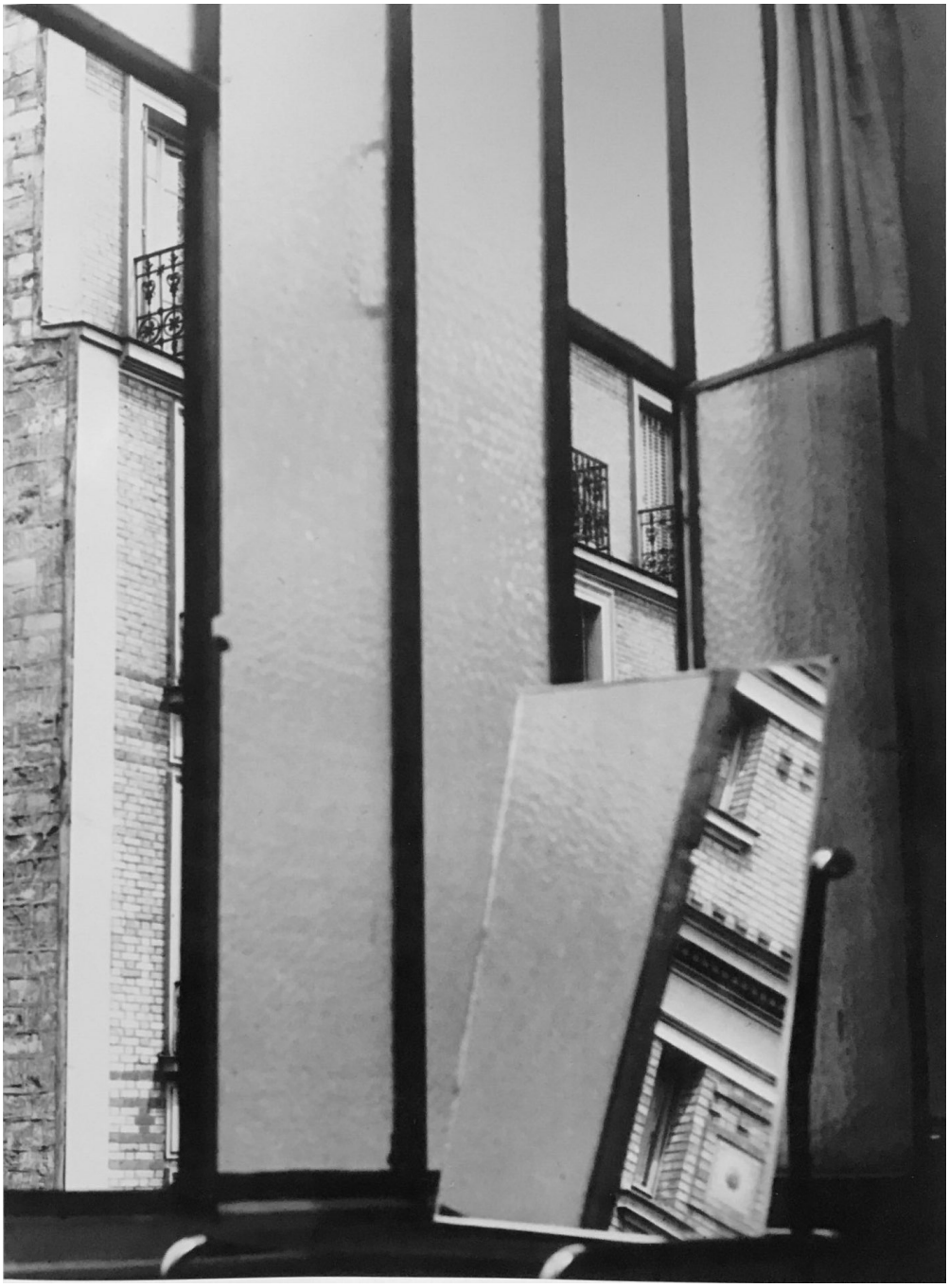

Figure 6.0. Florence Henri. *Fenêtre [Window]* (1929).

Figure 6.1. Florence Henri. *Fenêtre [Window]* (1929).

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