

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART'S *WHAT IS MODERN?* SERIES, 1938–1969

BY

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Abstract

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Between 1938 and 1969, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) poses the question of *What Is Modern?* (WIM) in a series of books, traveling exhibitions, and a symposium. This dissertation argues for the WIM project as a sustained if minimally effective effort to influence popular American perceptions of modern art, architecture, and design, at the same time embodying tensions inherent to the museum and its notions of that modernism.

MoMA is an unquestionable influence on modern art history. WIM is a significant component of this influence, yet scholarship on the series is minimal. Hiding in plain sight, the series offers signal insights into the Museum's first century of answers to the question of *What Is Modern?*

Each WIM holds a key to the development and dissemination of MoMA's ideology. Two versions of *What Is Modern Architecture?* (WISMA, 1938, 1962) first advocate for and then wrestle with the legacy of International Style architecture. Next, Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s *What Is Modern Painting?* (WIMP, 1943) and precursors reflect development of the museum's core ideals. At mid-century, Edward Steichen's symposium and unrealized book *What Is Modern Photography?* (WIMPh, 1950, 1951) fail to critically address the medium upon which the series depends to make its case. At the same time, Edgar J. Kaufmann Jr.'s *What Is Modern Design?* (WIMD, 1950) and *What Is Modern Interior Design?* (WISMID, 1953) assert an alternative to the machine

aesthetic and International Style ideology. Finally, two versions of *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (WIMS, 1942, 1969) evince a formalism that, while innovative and provocative in MoMA's early years, read as a conservative statement in the face of late-century art movements and post-colonial attitudes towards "primitivism." The dissertation concludes with a review of media for which the museum chose other (or no) forms of popularization, followed by a review of key themes supporting the central argument.

This investigation draws two interrelated conclusions. First, the WIM series represents a complex and contradictory internal discourse, both within and between departments, over the course of most of the twentieth century, that is subsumed into a confident public education campaign. Second, engagement with modern communications media is integral to the formulation, promulgation—and dissonance—of those notions.

Disclosure Statement

I have been an employee of MoMA since 1998 as a librarian. MoMA subsidized this degree through its tuition benefit.

CONTENTS

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT.....	V
ILLUSTRATIONS	VIII
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Literature Review	5
<i>What Is Modern?</i> Formats	7
Chapter Summaries.....	7
Context.....	9
CHAPTER 1. <i>WHAT IS MODERN ARCHITECTURE?</i> (WISMA) CE AND BOOK, 1938–1962	20
<i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (WISMA1) CE and Book, 1938–1945.....	22
<i>What Is Happening to Modern Architecture?</i> Symposium (1948) and Unpublished WISMA Manuscript (1955).....	48
<i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (WISMA2) CE, 1962–1975.....	57
Conclusion: <i>Transformations in Modern Architecture</i> , 1979.....	81
CHAPTER 2. <i>WHAT IS MODERN PAINTING?</i> (WIMP) BOOK AND CE, 1943–1988 ...	87
Phase 1: Precursors, 1926–1934	88
Phase 2: <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (WIMP) Book and CE Debut, 1943–1944.....	100
Phase 3: War’s End, 1946–1949	132
Phase 4: Consolidation, 1952–1957	135
Phase 5: Decline, 1966–1988.....	141
Conclusion	144
CHAPTER 3. <i>WHAT IS MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY?</i> (WIMPH) SYMPOSIUM AND UNPUBLISHED BOOK, 1950–1951	147
<i>What Is Modern Photography?</i> (WIMPh) Symposium, 1950.....	150
<i>What Is Modern Photography?</i> (WIMPh) Unpublished Book, 1951.....	154
Conclusion	165
CHAPTER 4. <i>WHAT IS MODERN DESIGN?</i> (WIMD) AND <i>WHAT IS MODERN INTERIOR DESIGN?</i> (WISMID) BOOKS, 1950–1953	168
<i>What Is Modern Design?</i> (WIMD) Book, 1950	185
<i>What Is Modern Interior Design?</i> (WISMID) Book, 1953.....	197
Analysis.....	203
Conclusion	221
CHAPTER 5. <i>WHAT IS MODERN SCULPTURE?</i> (WIMS), MULTIPLE FORMATS, 1940–1969	223
<i>What Is Modern Sculpture?</i> (WIMS) Unpublished Book, 1940.....	226
<i>Introduction to Modern Sculpture</i> CE, 1942–1947	227
<i>What Is Modern Sculpture?</i> (WIMS) Slide Talk, 1944–1953	230
<i>What Is Modern Sculpture?</i> (WIMS) Unpublished Book, 1945.....	239

<i>Modern Sculpture</i> Teaching Portfolio, 1951	248
<i>What Is Modern Sculpture?</i> (WIMS) Book, 1969	252
Conclusion	280
CHAPTER 6. WHAT WASN'T MODERN?	283
Film	283
Prints	284
<i>What Is Modern Drawing?</i> (WIMDr) Unpublished Book, 1944	285
CONCLUSION: WHAT WAS <i>WHAT IS MODERN?</i>	290
ILLUSTRATIONS	299
SOURCES CONSULTED	318

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1. <i>What Is Modern?</i> chronology, 1925–1937.	299
2. <i>What Is Modern?</i> chronology, 1938–1942.	300
3. <i>What Is Modern?</i> chronology, 1943–1946.	301
4. <i>What Is Modern?</i> chronology, 1947–1952.	302
5. <i>What Is Modern?</i> chronology, 1953–1968.	303
6. <i>What Is Modern?</i> chronology, 1969–1988.	304
7. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1938). Tugendhat House panel.....	305
8. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1942). Cover.....	305
9. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1942). 4.	305
10. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1938). Penguin Pool inset panel.	305
11. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1938). Fallingwater panel.....	306
12. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1942). Good/bad comparison. 8.....	306
13. Robert Day. <i>New Yorker</i> (May 3, 1952). Untitled cartoon.	306
14. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1962). Title panel.	307
15. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (1962). Lovell/Eames panel.....	307
16. <i>What Is Modern Architecture?</i> (July 24 1962). Blueprint.	308
17. <i>Transformations in Modern Architecture</i> (1979). 124.	308
18. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1943). Cover.....	309
19. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1946). Cover.....	309
20. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1984). Cover.....	309
21. <i>Cubism and Abstract Art</i> (1936). Cover.	310
22. Barr “torpedo” diagrams of ideal permanent collection (1933, 1941).....	310
23. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> Barr layouts for 1952 edition.	310
24. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1943). Stuart Davis reproductions. 5.....	311
25. “Qué Es La Pintura Moderna?” in <i>Saber Ver</i> (1991). Stuart Davis reproductions. 7.....	311
26. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1943). Guernica spread. 36.	311
27. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1946). Guernica spread. n.p. [40–41].....	311
28. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1944). Title panel.	312
29. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1944). Panel 1. Varieties of Expression.	312
30. <i>What Is Modern Painting?</i> (1944). Panel 13. The Artist Fights.....	312

31. <i>What Is Modern Design?</i> (1950). Cover.....	313
32. <i>What Is Modern Interior Design?</i> (1953). Cover.....	313
33. <i>Modern Rooms of the Last 50 Years</i> (1946–1947). Installation photos.....	313
34. <i>What Is Modern Interior Design?</i> (1953). Frontispiece and title page.....	314
35. <i>What Is Modern Interior Design?</i> (1953). Harwell Hamilton Harris. Havens House (Berkeley, 1943). Photo by Man Ray. 27.....	314
36. <i>What Is Modern Design?</i> (1950). 10-11.....	314
37. <i>What Is Modern Design?</i> (1953). Coffee pots 1750 and 1950. 6.....	314
38. <i>Design for Use</i> (1944). Installation photo. Brancusi's <i>Bird in Space</i> (1928) and propellers.	315
39. <i>What Is Modern Design?</i> (1950). Brancusi's <i>Bird in Space</i> (1928), knife, and propeller. 6.....	315
40. <i>What Is Modern Interior Design?</i> (1953). Illustration from Edward Morse, <i>Japanese Homes and their Surroundings</i> (1885). 8.	315
41. <i>What Is Modern Interior Design?</i> (1953). Hans Makart studio (1860s). 30.....	315
42. <i>Introduction to Modern Sculpture</i> circulating exhibition (1942-1947). Panel 3 sketch. <i>Class[ical]</i> . Indicates images of sculpture by Gerhard Marcks, Charles Despiau, Aristide Maillol, and "Greek."	316
43. Jacques Lipchitz. <i>Sailor with Guitar</i> (1914).....	316
44. Walker Evans. <i>African Negro Art: Photographs</i> (1935). Plate 17. "Figure...French Sudan. Wood, 14 3/4 inches high. Collection Mme. Helena Rubinstein, New York." .316	
45. <i>Modern Sculpture</i> teaching portfolio (1951). Introduction, with photographs by Walker Evans, Eliot Elisofon, and Herbert Matter, among others.	316
46. <i>What Is Modern Sculpture?</i> (1969). Cover.....	317
47. <i>What Is Modern Sculpture?</i> (1969). Louise Bourgeois. <i>Quarantania, I</i> (1948-1953, 1981). 96.	317
48. <i>What Is Modern Sculpture?</i> advertisement. <i>Revue des Beaux Arts</i> (1971), 11.....	317
49. Yayoi Kusama. <i>Orgy to Raise the Dead</i> (1969). From <i>New York Daily News</i>	317

INTRODUCTION

What is modern architecture? For that matter, what is modern painting, photography, design, or sculpture? Between 1938 and 1969, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) attempts to address exactly these questions in a series of books, traveling exhibitions, and a symposium on the theme of *What Is Modern?* (WIM).¹ This dissertation argues for the project as a sustained if minimally effective effort to influence popular American perceptions of modernism, at the same time embodying tensions inherent to the museum and its notions of that modernism.

As the museum most strongly associated with institutionalizing modernism, MoMA is an unquestionable influence on the history of the movement. For this reason its catalogs and texts are well examined,² as are its installation design³ and innovative film distribution program.⁴ WIM is a significant component of this influence, yet scholarship on the series is minimal. Hiding in plain sight, the endeavor offers signal insights into the museum's first century of answers to the question of *What Is Modern?*

¹ "WIM" and other acronyms used here are a mix of those used at the time (WISMA, WIMP, and WISMID, for example) and a number invented by me (such as WISMA1, BSMP, WIMDr, WIMPh).

² See John Elderfield, *Modern Painting and Sculpture: 1880 to the Present at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2004); Terence Riley and Stephen Perrella, *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992); Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1995).

³ Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT, 1998).

⁴ Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005).

Each WIM holds a key to the development and dissemination of MoMA's ideology. A version of *What Is Modern Architecture?* (WISMA1, 1938) by John McAndrew and Elizabeth Mock that advocates for International Style architecture is followed decades later by Arthur Drexler's attempt to make sense of its legacy (WISMA2, 1962). Next, founding director Alfred H. Barr's *What Is Modern Painting?* (WIMP, 1943) and precursors reflect the development of the museum's core ideals. At mid-century, Edward Steichen's symposium and unrealized book *What Is Modern Photography?* (WIMPh, 1950, 1951) fail to address critically the medium upon which the series depends to make its case. At the same time, Edgar J. Kaufmann Jr.'s *What Is Modern Design?* (WIMD, 1950) and *What Is Modern Interior Design?* (WISMID, 1953) assert an alternative to the machine aesthetic and International Style ethos championed by colleague Philip Johnson. Finally, two disparate versions of *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (WIMS, 1942, 1969) evince a formalism that, while innovative and provocative in MoMA's early years, read as a conservative statement in the face of late-century art movements and post-colonial attitudes towards "primitivism."

For purposes of this study, how does one characterize modernism but avoid the essentialism that makes WIM series so problematic? In a recent, major exhibition catalog on the subject, Christopher Wilk frames the movement at its broadest:

Like many 'isms,' it seems both to stand for something clearly definable—a major twentieth-century movement in art, architecture, design and literature, even culture—and yet to demand continuous and ever more probing investigation into its history and significance.⁵

In the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Johanna Drucker expands upon this:

⁵ Christopher Wilk, *Modernism: Designing a New World, 1914-1939* (London: V&A, 2006), 12.

Modernism cannot be defined as an aesthetic position but must be understood as an extended historical moment in which various aesthetic issues develop in counterpoint with the emergence of modern culture (characterized by the formation of the nation-state, of the concept of the individual, and of industrial and consumer capitalism). These aesthetic issues are explored by modern visual and literary artists as an ongoing tension between a search for legitimacy according to scientific, universal, ahistorical, or transcendent terms and a self-conscious sense of the historical specificity and cultural effect of artistic forms.⁶

The new standard textbook on modern art *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*,⁷ correctly resists normalizing the term, beginning with the *Anti* and *Post* of the subtitle and first mentioning it deep in the introduction as a “great experiment.” Moreover, by emphasizing four methodologies (psychoanalytic, formalist, social, and post-structural), the authors resist essentialism and argue for discursive strategies that allow for open-ended debate.

Given the post-structuralist orientation of this dissertation, interrogation of the historiography of modernism by Carol Duncan is highly relevant here. She steps back to look critically at the interests of institutions (including academic ones) in debating the notion of modernism:

The ‘history of modern art,’ as it is generally understood in our society...is a cultural construct that is collectively produced and perpetuated by all those professionals who work in art schools, universities, museums, publishing houses, and any other place where modern art is taught, exhibited, or interpreted....this world of art professionals is enormously fragmented and often fails to arrive at any simple or clear consensus about the history of modern art...Not only are there disagreements about where the boundaries of the field lie and what comprises its most important incidents; there are also competing ideas about what its basic

⁶ Johanna Drucker, "Modernism", Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0358 (accessed January 16, 2012).

⁷ Hal Foster and others, *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004). For a compilation of reviews see Geoffrey Batchen Nancy J. Troy, Amelia Jones, Pamela M. Lee, Romy Golan, Robert Storr, Jodi Hauptman, Dario Gamboni, "Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism by Hal Foster; Rosalind Krauss; Yve-Alain Bois; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh [Review]," *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 2 (2006). jstor.org/stable/25067251 (accessed January 14 2012).

intellectual tools should be and what fundamental questions it should be addressing.⁸

To emphasize the ongoing nature of the movement, early on even Barr equivocates when attempting to characterize for general readers. He concludes his 1934 essay “Modern and ‘Modern’” this way:

modern art cannot be defined with any degree of finality either in time or in character and any attempt to do so implies a blind faith, insufficient knowledge, or an academic lack of realism.⁹

To reinforce the constructed nature of modernism and the pitfalls of essentializing it, I make recurring reference to a 1946 statement by Barr about a “pragmatic rhetoric” for popularization of modernism through

research which makes publication *effective* more than that which makes it true, of what might be called the pragmatic rhetoric of education rather than its data.¹⁰

In this study then, modernism is an attempt to come to terms with an ever-changing present, without claims to objectivity, finality, or transcendence.

This investigation draws two interrelated conclusions. First, the WIM series represents a complex and contradictory internal discourse—both within and between departments—subsumed into a confident public education campaign. Second, engagement with modern communications media is integral to the formulation, promulgation—and dissonance—of those notions. More specifically, the series unwittingly evinces fundamental, unresolved issues about *What Is Modern*, including debate about

⁸ Carol Duncan, “The Modern Art Museum: It’s a Man’s World,” in *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 102.

⁹ Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Modern and ‘Modern’,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 1, no. 9 (1934). [jstor.org/stable/4057991](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4057991) (accessed January 20 2012).

¹⁰ Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Research and Publication in Art Museums,” *Museum News* 23, no. January 1 (1946). Reprinted in Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.* (New York: Abrams, 1986), 205–13. Originally a conference paper from 1944, the same year the WIMP CE debuts.

modernism as a limited, historically specific movement or a universal aesthetic; difficulties reconciling notions of “high” and “low” culture; implications of displaying art outside the MoMA galleries; conflicted attitudes towards consumerism; disjunctions between pre- and post-colonial “primitivism;” and contradictory uses of photography.

These tensions are well established by Christopher Phillips, Terence Riley, and Mary Anne Staniszewski among many others but they have not been critically examined in terms of the museum’s commitment to public education,¹¹ adding a new perspective to the substantial literature on MoMA’s role in modernist discourse among academics, curators, critics, and practitioners.

In sum, the WIM series presents an opportunity to examine the process by which the museum adapts a complex “truth” into “effective” narratives of *What Is Modern*, attempting to make a “pragmatic rhetoric” convincing to a general American audience.

Literature Review

The literature on MoMA is substantial. In the 1970s the museum begins to be the subject of so-called institutional critique or New Museology, a socially oriented art history informed by the Frankfurt School and French literary theory.¹² This cross-disciplinary approach, now influential among curators, academics, and artists, studies the socially constructed nature of museums’ authority.

I position the dissertation in this discourse, building upon such MoMA-related works

¹¹ Christopher Phillips, “Judgment Seat of Photography,” *October*, no. 22 (1982). [jstor.org/stable/778362](http://www.jstor.org/stable/778362) (accessed February 1, 2010); Riley and Perrella, 1992; Staniszewski, 1998.

¹² For examples of this approach see Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1991).

as Duncan, Sandeen, and Staniszewski. Duncan's "The Modern Art Museum: It's a Man's World" incisively addresses MoMA's permanent collection installation as a rhetorical space, specifically as a ritual procession.¹³ Another work in this mode is Eric Sandeen's *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America*,¹⁴ a sociopolitical history that situates this popular exhibition in its Cold War context. Additionally, Phillips' *Judgment Seat of Photography* definitively interrogates the curatorial trajectory of the photography collection.¹⁵ The most in-depth, fully integrated work of New Museology concerning MoMA is Staniszewski's *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, which best exemplifies an "approach to art history that acknowledges the vitality, historicity, and the time-and-site-bound character of all aspects of culture."¹⁶ Other relevant works are Terence Riley's *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art* as well as William Kaizen's *The Show To End All Shows: Frank Lloyd Wright and The Museum of Modern Art, 1940*,¹⁷ both valuable for painstaking analysis of primary sources. Together these publications lay the foundation for problematizing the social, formal, and ideological nature of MoMA's modernism.

This dissertation makes several scholarly contributions. First, it demonstrates how institutional paradoxes expressed through popularizations contribute to MoMA's place in the history of modernism. It is also one of the first explorations of MoMA exhibition installations outside of its galleries. In addition, the study fleshes out the record of influential yet under-examined museum figures such as curators Drexler, Robert Goldwater, Kaufmann, and Mock, as well as key administrator Monroe Wheeler and Circulating Exhibitions (CE)

¹³ Duncan.

¹⁴ Sandeen, 1995.

¹⁵ Phillips.

¹⁶ Staniszewski, 1998, xxi.

¹⁷ William Kaizen, *The Show to End All Shows: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Museum of Modern Art, 1940* (New York: MoMA, 2004).

Director Elodie Courter. It also contributes to a nascent sociopolitical analysis of the museum's education programs. Finally, examining the series begins to place MoMA in a meta-history of modern photography by examining its subtle rhetorical uses in WIM.

What Is Modern? Formats

The WIM publication and exhibition history is complex, (Figure 1–6) comprising six books, ten exhibitions (excluding precursors and cancellations), portfolios, slide talks, and a symposium. One is first organized as a circulating exhibition (WISMA), some take the form of portfolios and slide talks (WIMP, WIMS), and others are conceived as books somewhat related to shows (WIMD, WISMID). Most WIM shows are exclusively CEs but at least two (WIMP and WIMD precursors) originate at the museum. At least one CE is planned but abandoned (*What is Good Poster Design?* WIGPD, 1942), as are two books (*What Is Modern Drawing?* or WIMDr, 1944; WIMPh). While most books remain first editions (WISMA, WIMD, WISMID, WIMS), WIMP is revised numerous times and stays in print for decades. Some WIMs have a brief run (WISMID, for example), while others are reinvented decades later (WISMA, WIMS). Still others change subtly over time (especially WIMP). One takes the form of a live event featuring active practitioners (WIMPh). Finally, WIMs are never produced for several MoMA collection areas (film and media, theater arts, prints, drawing).

Chapter Summaries

The first chapter focuses on the book and exhibition *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1938–1945) by McAndrew and Mock, the first in the series and a manifesto of International Style modernism. That effort is contrasted with a 1962 revision by Arthur Drexler that

reaffirms but subtly historicizes its positivism. The approach of McAndrew, first-wave modernist and curator of the poorly received exhibition *Bauhaus: 1919–1928* (1938), is contrasted with that of post-war curator Drexler, who later challenges WISMA premises by introducing a new, questioning approach to MoMA's master narrative through exhibitions such as *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (1979).

The second chapter examines Barr's *What Is Modern Painting?* (1943) as a vehicle for the museum's core ideals and as an indicator of tensions between fixed versus open-ended modernism, and between his scholarly tone and the dogmatism of other WIMs. The book develops from Barr's early teaching portfolios and emerges as a long-lived tool for popularization (the 1988 edition is still found in bookstores). Despite updates on Abstract Expressionism, Pop, and Op Art, WIMP becomes ever more outdated—but compared to subsequent WIMs its inquiring, even-handed tone remains the most open-minded and respectful of the reader's intelligence. The chapter concludes with these issues of fixed versus dynamic modernism and discourse versus dogma, presaging later chapters.

The third chapter interrogates the *What Is Modern Photography?* symposium (1950) and unrealized book (1951), revealing Steichen and colleagues' difficulty reconciling documentary, autonomous, and instrumental aspects of the medium with the WIM visual rhetoric—which depends so heavily on photographs.

The fourth chapter considers Kaufmann's *What Is Modern Design?* (1950) and *What Is Modern Interior Design?* (1953), arguing that they reflect the museum's longstanding embrace of marketing techniques to “sell” modern design, but in this case Kaufmann uses the MoMA platform to explicitly contest the museum's own Machine Art and International Style ideals. Kaufmann's muddled texts are examined for their mix of salesmanship and scholarship, the assertion of an alternative historical trajectory, and for persistent loyalty to

Frank Lloyd Wright (he figures into the longstanding relationship Wright and Kaufmann, Sr., a major patron).¹⁸

The fifth chapter analyzes versions of *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (1940, 1944, 1945, 1969), demonstrating the establishment of a formalist interpretation in the 1940s versions, one that fails to embrace revolutionary art movements of the late 1960s, bringing the WIM series to a disappointing end. The second part of the chapter focuses on a subtext in the 1969 book involving art historical and ethnological methodologies related to WIMS author Robert Goldwater's influential history of Primitivism.¹⁹ By contextualizing the conservatism of the 1969 book, I conclude that it represents the overarching shortcoming of the series: the failure to approach modernism self-critically.

The study ends by briefly addressing absences such as an abandoned *What Is Modern Drawing?* (1944), and then recapitulating the significance of the series as a carefully crafted effort to adapt the complexities and contradictions of modernism into a transparent master narrative intended to be convincing to a general American audience.

Context

Founded in 1929 by Lillie P. Bliss (1864–1931),²⁰ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948),²¹ and Mary Quinn Sullivan (1877–1939),²² MoMA is the first U.S. museum devoted to

¹⁸ Most accounts maintain that Kaufmann *filis* introduces the two, but Toker makes a case that Kaufmann *père* knows, or knows of, Wright first. Franklin Toker, *Fallingwater Rising: Frank Lloyd Wright, E.J. Kaufmann, and America's Most Extraordinary House* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 120.

¹⁹ See Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (New York: New York University, 1937).

²⁰ Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz, eds., *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2010). 514–515

²¹ "Mrs. Rockefeller Dies at Age of 73," *New York Times*, April 6, 1948.

“art in our time.”²³ Formulation and dissemination of MoMA’s core ideals are inextricably intertwined with Barr, who quite simply lives up to the epithet “missionary for the modern.”²⁴ From the outset, Barr and a then-small staff quickly mobilize every communications media available in service of legitimizing the modern movement, from publishing nuanced scholarship to staging overt publicity stunts. In that spirit, the museum rapidly establishes three programs that engender WIM: Circulating Exhibitions, Education, and Publications.

Education Department and Director Victor D’Amico

The WIM series is a direct product of the museum’s educational initiatives.²⁵ Within MoMA’s first year an Education Committee is launched by, among others, founding patron (also artist, educator, and gallerist) Mary Quinn Sullivan.²⁶ Early direction is guided by a formative 1936 assessment known as the “Packard Report.”²⁷

²² “Mrs. C. J. Sullivan; Aided Modern Art,” *New York Times*, no. December 6 (1939).
select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FA0615F63B54107A93C4A91789D95F4D8385F9&scp=55&sq=lillie%20bliss%20museum%20modern%20art&st=cse (accessed January 8, 2012).

²³ The museum’s general history is well documented by sources cited throughout this study.

²⁴ Barr’s legacy cannot be adequately summarized here. Major works include: Barr Jr., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 1986; Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT, 2002); Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* (Chicago: Contemporary, 1989).

²⁵ For a summary history of the department see Barbara Newsom and “F.G.O.,” “Educational Mission of the Museum of Modern Art,” in *Art Museum as Educator: A Collection of Studies as Guides to Practice and Policy*, ed. Council on Museums and Education in the Visual Arts, Barbara Newsom, and Adele Silver (Berkeley: University of California, 1978).

²⁶ Mrs. C. J. Sullivan; Aided Modern Art.

²⁷ Artemas Packard, “Report on the Development of the Museum of Modern Art: Introduction and General Considerations, 1935–36,” (New York: MoMA, [1936]).

Acting upon it, Barr and committee chairman Eliza Parkinson hire art educator Victor D'Amico (1898–1987)²⁸ in 1937.²⁹

D'Amico's background includes heading the fine arts department at a private school³⁰ and conducting art education surveys in the Americas.³¹ His pedagogy is strongly informed by the philosophy known as progressive education, developed by John Dewey.³² Applied to art, the method emphasizes self-directed, hands-on discovery and integration of the arts into an individual's personal development. At base, D'Amico believes that the approach "helps...to keep alive the child's imagination and also the will to express it. Experience, and not the project, is the precious aim of art education."³³ How is this applied in the MoMA context? Several years into Educational Project, as it is first named, he reports that

For the past twenty-five years educators have been evolving a new philosophy and new methods of teaching art. But the schools had neither the materials nor the men [sic] skilled in the art of presenting them dramatically and aesthetically. [MoMA] was among the first to recognize this. It set about to correlate its efforts with those of the educator and in so doing it has exemplified one of the major

²⁸ Douglas McGill, "Victor D'Amico, 82, a Pioneer in Art Education for Children," *New York Times*, no. April 3 (1987). nytimes.com/1987/04/03/obituaries/victor-d-amico-82-a-pioneer-in-art-education-for-children.html (accessed January 16, 2011).

²⁹ For more background on D'Amico see Child Welfare Foundation of Japan, *Victor D'Amico: Art as a Human Necessity*. (Tokyo: Kodomo no Shiro, 1995); Sylvia Corwin, *Exploring the Legends: Guideposts to the Future* (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2000). Scholarship on D'Amico has been hindered by the inaccessibility of his papers at Teachers College, New York. As of May 2011 the unprocessed collection resides at the MoMA Archives.

³⁰ He works from 1926–1948 at the Fieldston School, located in the Bronx.

³¹ See the above sources on D'Amico.

³² For a study of Dewey's thoughts on the museum context see George E. Hein, "John Dewey and Museum Education," *Curator* 47, no. 4 (2004).

³³ Victor D'Amico, *Experiments in Creative Art Teaching. A Progress Report on the Department of Education, 1937-1960* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 3.

objectives of modern education: the coordination of the various departments of education in providing an integrated experience for the child.³⁴

To that end, in over three decades at MoMA D'Amico founds a National Committee on Art Education,³⁵ the innovative People's Art Center, and groundbreaking programs such as the Young People's Gallery, War Veterans' Art Center, Children's Art Carnival, and Children's Art Caravan. From the start, CEs are incorporated into the Project. He notes that

The program as it was developed during the first year included exhibitions sent to [local high] schools, lectures for teachers, gallery tours and discussions of exhibitions in the Young People's Gallery and the Museum.³⁶

According to that same report, by 1941 over ten thousand students are exposed to "rotating exhibitions," as these local shows are called.³⁷ These are soon sent further afield through rental, presumably as part of the by-then official CE program. The year that WIMP is published (1943), the Education Program merges with CE, and in 1948 oversight of both is assigned to Wheeler. By mid-century the Education Department is considered a model program. In 1951, at the height of WIM distribution, D'Amico writes:

Educators and schools all over the United States and from many foreign countries request information ranging from the setting up of an exhibition or planning a single course to the outlining of a curriculum or organizing a new art center...Such requests as these...are typical of hundreds received by the Museum....³⁸

³⁴ "Modern Art for Children: The Educational Project," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 9, no. 1 (1941). [jstor.org/stable/4058017](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4058017) (accessed October 22, 2011).

³⁵ Active from 1942–1963.

³⁶ Modern Art for Children: The Educational Project.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Victor D'Amico, "Creative Art for Children, Young People, Adults, Schools," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 19, no. 1 (1951). [jstor.org/stable/4058253](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4058253) (accessed October 24, 2010).

After thirty-two years at MoMA, D'Amico retires in 1969, whereupon his enterprise is effectively dismantled.³⁹ Subsequent directors reassert departmental identity and each makes their mark,⁴⁰ but all are influenced by D'Amico. This study demonstrates how thoroughly the WIM series is integrated into MoMA's educational philosophy during his tenure, constituting a major component of the museum's larger mission to promulgate modernism.

Department of Circulating Exhibitions and Director Elodie Courter

The Department of Circulating Exhibitions is a vital but virtually unexamined element of the museum's promotional mission.⁴¹ The innovative department is established in 1933 but MoMA's first efforts date to 1932 with a humble portfolio of reproductions, organized by Barr (see Chapter 2), and a traveling version of the International Style show, circulated as *International Exhibition of Modern Architecture* (1932–33, 14 venues) and *Photographic Exhibition of Modern Architecture* (1932–33, approximately 10 venues).⁴²

Between 1931 and the arguable apex of the program in 1954, MoMA circulates 461 exhibitions among 3,700 venues including K-12 schools, technical colleges, clubs,

³⁹ Child Welfare Foundation of Japan, 1995, 18; *ibid.*; Carol Morgan, "From Modernist Utopia to Cold War Reality, a Critical Moment in Museum Education," in *Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, ed. John Elderfield, Studies in Modern Art (New York: MoMA, 1995).

⁴⁰ Philip Yenawine, for example. See his essay in Child Welfare Foundation of Japan, 1995, 30.

⁴¹ For a more detailed history of the program see the Historical Note in the Department of Circulating Exhibitions Records Finding Aid, MoMA Archives, NY. moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/CEf.

⁴² These are thoroughly analyzed in Riley and Perrella, 1992.

military installations, and department stores.⁴³ This study is limited to U.S. shows; those that travel abroad are studies in themselves.⁴⁴ As evidence of the program's early, domestic success, the Packard Report claims that

Apart from the major exhibitions and the series of catalogues which are published in connection with them, the most valuable educational service now being provided by the Museum...is unquestionably the circulating exhibition program...[These] exhibitions are considered in many quarters to represent a standard of excellence for such services.⁴⁵

Citing the success of WIM precursor *A Brief Survey of Modern Painting in Color Reproductions* (Chapter 2), the report urges additional didactic reproduction shows, of which WIM becomes typical:

There is a large and unfulfilled demand for...inexpensive circulating exhibitions which either clearly tell their own story or which can be used to some definite purpose in connection with courses of art study.⁴⁶

To effectively fulfill didactic purpose, the report specifies that such shows should incorporate "carefully prepared suggestions specifying the varieties of interest to be found in the exhibition,"⁴⁷ a proselytizing element that becomes typical of WIM.

⁴³ "Circulating Exhibitions 1931-1954," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 21, no. 3-4 (1954). [jstor.org/stable/4058235](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4058235) (accessed September 19, 2009).

⁴⁴ Helen Franc, "Early Years of the International Program and Council," in *Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, ed. John Elderfield, Studies in Modern Art (New York: MoMA, 1994). For an artist's critical interpretation of one MoMA international traveling exhibition see "Museum of American Art, Berlin", MoAA, museum-of-american-art.org (accessed April 11, 2011). In a similar vein, a MoAA catalog adapts the WIMP book's design for a survey of projects on "authors, exhibitions and institutions central to 20th century art (and its historiography), using copies to de- and reconstruct their specific art historical events and narratives." Künstlerhaus Bethanien and Museum of American Art Berlin, *What is Modern Art?* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2006).

⁴⁵ Packard, 40-1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

In the CE program's early years, simply exposing viewers to modern art is an achievement. For example, Publications staff member Frances Pernas recalls that even at her college,⁴⁸ the scope of art history is limited, but

they had these traveling exhibitions from the Museum, and they were only reproductions, but it was so new to me, the whole thing was so new,...and we would see them, and I decided then and there that I was going to work at The Museum of Modern Art.⁴⁹

In her 12-year tenure at MoMA, founding CE director Elodie Courter (1911–1994) is crucial to establishing and shaping the program.⁵⁰ Immediately after graduating from Wellesley with a degree in art history she seeks work at the museum “in spite of the advice of the Placement Bureau...that there simply were no jobs there. She turned up at the door....”⁵¹ She gets in that door as a volunteer in 1933, becoming the program secretary in 1935 and Director two years later.⁵² She almost single-handedly develops the program's domestic agenda and is involved in all its aspects, from overall direction to budget to curatorial negotiations to copyediting. According to Russell Lynes and Roberta Smith, Courter “became in a few years the museum's most influential instrument of tastemaking”⁵³ by “introducing audiences far from Manhattan to works from the Modern's collection, and to the museum's taste and historical viewpoint.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Wells College in Aurora, New York. Saunders-Dwyer Funeral Home, "Frances Pernas", currentobituary.com/ShowObit.aspx?id=73212&member_id=27 (accessed December 10, 2011).

⁴⁹ Oral History Project; interview with Frances Pernas, 1994, 6. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Hereafter “OH Project.”

⁵⁰ Roberta Smith, "Elodie Osborn, 82, First Director of the Modern's Traveling Shows," *New York Times*, February 4, 1994.

⁵¹ Lynes, 1973, 117. Barr teaches at Wellesley but prior to Courter's arrival.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁴ Smith.

Barr says that “Elodie was the kind who when she left the museum it took four people to replace her.”⁵⁵ That moment comes in 1947 when she departs to start a family (though she works on several teaching portfolios from home). After MoMA she becomes involved with traveling exhibitions at other institutions and in 1953 she literally writes the book on the subject for UNESCO.⁵⁶

By the late 1950s MoMA begins to shift the program’s direction towards international destinations and actual artworks,⁵⁷ leaving domestic reproduction shows behind. Up to that point, however, Courter and the CE program are crucial to MoMA’s U.S. popularization efforts.

In this context, the American reality of racial, ethnic, and economic disparity must be noted. By the 1960s, critics contend that the Education Department largely preaches to a convinced audience of white, middle-class New Yorkers.⁵⁸ Though the department prides itself on economic diversity and racial integration (promotional photographs appear to make a point of featuring persons of color), if the WIM CEs are an accurate indicator, the charge is valid. WIM venues tend to cluster in northern locales, and the ratio of private to public school venues is most likely disproportionate to the national average. Though some WIMs travel to remarkably class-crossing locations such as southern, historically black higher education institutions, for separate and unequal K–12

⁵⁵ Lynes, 1973, 260–1.

⁵⁶ Elodie Courter Osborn, *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions* (Paris: UNESCO, 1953).

⁵⁷ Alfred H. Barr Jr. Papers [AAA: 2178;1295]. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Hereafter “AHB.” Jane Sabersky to Barr and others, January 14, 1954. Sabersky’s detailed memo arguing for reconception of CE anticipates the turning point. For an in-depth study of this initiative see Franc.

⁵⁸ Philip Yenawine, “Approaching Art, Changing Styles: Victor D’Amico and Philip Yenawine at MoMA,” in *Victor D’Amico: Art as a Human Necessity* (Tokyo: Kodomo no Shiro, 1995), 33.

schools of the period, rental of modern art exhibitions or purchase of the ostensibly inexpensive books seems unlikely.

Exhibitions and Publications Director Monroe Wheeler

Over the course of his thirty-two-year tenure as a central MoMA figure, Monroe Wheeler (1899–1988)⁵⁹ is the force behind almost every WIM book.⁶⁰ Characterizing his legacy at the museum, his partner Glenway Wescott describes a “triumvirate” in which “Alfred, of course, was the soul. René [D’Harnoncourt] was the wit, the mind, the spirit,...and Monroe was the technician.”⁶¹

With six years of fine-press publishing experience in Europe,⁶² Wheeler first becomes involved with MoMA’s Library Committee and an exhibit of bookbindings (1935).⁶³ Once on staff, title changes show him becoming ever-more central to the institution: Director of Membership (1938), Director of Publications (1939), Director of Exhibitions (1940), then Director of Publications *and* Exhibitions (1941–1967), which leads to trusteeship and several committees (1944) as well as oversight of CE and Education (1948). Following retirement in 1967, he remains active as an advisor and committee member.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Douglas C. McGill, "Monroe Wheeler, Board Member of Modern Museum, Is Dead at 89," *New York Times*, no. August 16 (1988).
nytimes.com/1988/08/16/obituaries/monroe-wheeler-board-member-of-modern-museum-is-dead-at-89.html (accessed November 22, 2010).

⁶⁰ He arrives after WISMA.

⁶¹ Lynes, 1973, 402.

⁶² McGill.

⁶³ *Ignatz Wiemeler, Modern Bookbinder* (MoMA 42b, 1935).

⁶⁴ Lynes, 1973, 164–5; McGill. See also capsule biography in the Monroe Wheeler Papers Finding Aid, MoMA Archives, NY.
moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/wheelerf.

Wheeler's role in the museum's promulgation efforts is remarkable for leveraging business and editorial acumen in service of profit and popularization. Four specific strategies are relevant here. First, he reinvents MoMA catalogs as appealing commodities. Second, he uses high-volume, low unit cost printing to extend reach and revenue. Third, he subsidizes low-profit publications such as WIM with high-revenue books and reproductions. Finally, he insists upon effective writing. How do efforts such as WIM figure into this business model? Wheeler writes that a

kind of book that is quite useful in art education is the inexpensive paperbound handbook or monograph...selling for a dollar or less. This is the sort of book which can be... an important civilizing agent...⁶⁵

Contrary to what one might expect, these "civilizing agents" are unprofitable. To compensate financially, they are balanced with higher-status, high-profit titles. Wheeler also "sells" WIM as a series, reporting in 1946 that:

The book trade is much more likely to welcome inexpensive books if they are issued in series. For this reason we are developing a new "What Is" group of elementary handbooks—*What Is Modern Painting*, *What Is Modern Sculpture*, *What Is Modern Architecture*, and others—and so far the trade has taken kindly to the ventures.⁶⁶

As part of the education/profit strategy, Wheeler taps into a market for reproductions, a "renumerative" and popular enterprise integral to the WIM endeavor:

[MoMA] has always made a practise [sic] of ordering over-runs of the color plates made for its books. These are then mounted with wide paper margins and sold separately. They are much appreciated by teachers for classroom use, and there is also a large sale for them, glazed with Braquette frames, for use on walls.

⁶⁵ Monroe Wheeler, "The Art Museum and the Art Book Trade," *Museum News* 24, no. 2 (1946): 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Appropriate selections of these mounted reproductions can also be assembled in portfolios.⁶⁷

In addition to a business sense, Wheeler brings editorial expertise to MoMA publications. Of particular relevance to WIM, he recognizes the educational and strategic value of appealing to the broadest possible audience:

No public museum today will concentrate upon historical scholarship to the neglect of the needs of its potential public. There is, in fact, no incompatibility between the highest view of art, with its most scrupulous and scholarly standards, and the educational responsibility.⁶⁸

In this way Barr, Wheeler, and Courter stand at the forefront of a new and confident institution determined to use mass communication methods to disseminate modernist tenets throughout the U.S.

And so the WIM project begins.

⁶⁷ Monroe Wheeler, "The Museum as Publisher," *Art in America* 34, no. 4 (1946): 218.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

CHAPTER 1. *WHAT IS MODERN ARCHITECTURE?* (WISMA) CE AND BOOK,
1938–1962

*[In 1941]...the Museum was... preaching the gospel of modern architecture.
As [MoMA's Philip] Goodwin said, the American public can grasp only one thing
at a time.*

—Bernard Rudofsky⁶⁹

*...modern architecture has been dependent on manifestoes, theoretical projects,
and publicity.*

—Arthur Drexler⁷⁰

What Is Modern Architecture? (WISMA) is the first and one of the last works in the *What Is Modern?* (WIM) series. From its first incarnation in 1938 to revision in 1962, it promotes modernist tenets using multiple persuasive methods to simplify and ostensibly popularize it for a mainstream American audience. The two versions demonstrate how, in the name of promulgation, debate about the nature and viability of modernism is downplayed. These debates include modernism as a limited or ongoing movement, social utility versus aesthetics, and the relevance of modernist ideology across the American class system. This chapter articulates the process by which such discourse is subsumed—but not completely suppressed—into a carefully crafted promotion of International Style modernism. I argue that the first WISMA lays the intellectual, political, and aspirational groundwork for reification of the movement espoused by the second.

⁶⁹ Bernard Rudofsky, *The Human Side of Architecture*, Unpublished Conference Paper, Rudofsky Personal Archives (1966). reprinted in Andrea Bocco Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky: A Humane Designer* (New York: Springer, 2003), 240–1.

⁷⁰ Arthur Drexler, *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (New York: MoMA, 1979), 6.

This is substantiated by tracing the development and execution of the two, situating them within architectural discourse of the time, and analyzing what the process reveals about the museum's attitudes. I present the pre-war version (WISMA1) as one of many dogmatic promotions of modern architecture in the period. Next, I discuss a 1948 symposium and a 1955 manuscript as hesitant and ultimately disregarded reevaluations, concluding with examination of (WISMA2)⁷¹ as the canonization of its predecessor, an argument supported by its recitation of a by-then established master narrative that incorporates an enlarged if unresolved view of modernism's past and future. I argue further that WISMA2 represents a final, overcompensatory gesture at the very moment that modernism's failures are spawning alternative, critical histories. This is supported by comparing persuasive methods used in the two versions and pointing out how photography indicates some of the issues at stake. To reinforce the uncritical nature of the WISMAs, the chapter concludes by discussing how Drexler eventually addresses the museum's positivism in the self-conscious exhibition *Transformations In Modern Architecture* (1979), describing how it refutes the assumptions of its predecessors.

WISMA1 debuts in 1938, organized by Curator of Architecture and Industrial Art John McAndrew (1904–1978)⁷² and his assistant Elizabeth Mock (1904–1998).⁷³ It begins as a CE (1938–1945, over 80 venues) and is subsequently adapted into a book (1942).⁷⁴ Many versions are proposed in between WISMA1 and 2, including a cancelled

⁷¹ Here the 1962 WISMA is indicated as WISMA2, distinguishing it from WISMAII, a 1939 variation of the 1938 show.

⁷² "John M'andrew [sic] Dies, Founded Save Venice," *New York Times*, February 20, 1978.

⁷³ Katrina K. Waters, "Elizabeth Bauer Kassler, 1904-1998," *Journal of the Taliesin Fellows* 23 (1998).

⁷⁴ The first edition is also issued in a staple-bound version with a more illustrative cover. It could have been a small run intended for a particular WISMA iteration.

1940 slide talk,⁷⁵ unfulfilled revision plans in the late 1940s,⁷⁶ and an unpublished 1955 manuscript.⁷⁷ In 1962 Drexler revises the show (1962–1970, 1975, 49 venues). He plans but never completes a book in conjunction with the exhibition. Neither WISMA1 nor 2 is shown at MoMA itself. All iterations are designed specifically for travel to non-museum sites and to appeal to a broad American audience (as opposed to on-site visitors, who tend to be more international and urban).

***What Is Modern Architecture?* (WISMA1) CE and Book, 1938–1945**

Context

Histories of modern architecture exhibitions tend to focus on landmarks such as the Esprit Nouveau pavilion at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs* (1925), the *Weissenhofsiedlung* (1927), and MoMA's International Style show (1932). In retrospect Drexler remarks that

In the 30s [such shows] represented a new architecture that the public could see nowhere else and that architects could not see as much of even in the professional journals. Such exhibitions drew on some 20 years of work, much of it the primary statement of the new architectural aesthetic....⁷⁸

Indeed, one may speculate that in this period average Americans are more likely to experience modern architecture through media, such as exhibitions, than through first-hand experience of buildings. The sheer quantity of shows on modern architecture is

⁷⁵ Department of Circulating Exhibitions Records, II.1.119.3. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Hereafter "CE" or "CE Finding Aid."

⁷⁶ Architecture and Design Department records. Hereafter "A&D Files" or "A&D Photo Files," as appropriate.

⁷⁷ A&D Files.

⁷⁸ Drexler, 1979, 7.

striking and underappreciated. Between 1920 and 1940 alone over five hundred exhibitions are staged worldwide, sited at diverse institutions of great geographic reach, ranging from Malaysia to Sydney to Costa Rica.⁷⁹ In the United States, shows range from department store exhibits to well-studied World's Fairs (such as those of 1939, the year after WISMA1 begins to travel, and 1964, two years after the debut of WISMA2) to under-examined exhibitions by public and private organizations. Most relevant here, and most neglected in scholarship, are the shows' varied attitudes towards modernism. This study focuses on pro-modern shows, but they must be understood in terms of a distinctly mixed American reaction to the trend.

A contemporary (and skeptical) anecdote suggests the WISMA1 target audience. In a 1934 lecture also titled *What Is Modern Architecture?* architect Irving K. Pond characterizes the novelty and spectacle of exhibitions as well as talks on the subject. Describing public reaction to the Keck and Keck's Crystal House and House of Tomorrow at the Century of Progress Exhibition (Chicago, 1933–1934), he reports that “yokels and ‘rubes’ gather...in dense clusters to watch...and think probably that they are beholding art.”⁸⁰ Similarly, Pond describes architects such as Buckminster Fuller “harang[uing] women’s clubs, social service clubs, city clubs, any of the hungry horde who will listen and be impressed.”⁸¹ In this milieu, using similar forms and techniques, WISMA1 tries to feed precisely these “hungry hordes” and penetrate these “cultural circles.”

⁷⁹ Based on exhibition catalogs from this period listed the WorldCat union library catalog.

⁸⁰ Irving Kane. Pond, "*What Is Modern Architecture: A Lecture Given at the College of Architecture at Ann Arbor, U. Of M.,*" (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1934), 20.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

WISMA1 is introduced in 1938 and 1939. The 1939 release coincides with the museum's ten-year anniversary, which draws numerous visitors to three curatorial departments housed in a new, signal building. Six years after its official founding, the CE program is well established: by the end of its first decade MoMA has organized at least twenty architecture exhibitions in the new galleries.⁸² Demand for CEs on architecture is met by eleven, based on "response to these shows and the requests...which come in year after year...."⁸³ WISMA1 builds upon these exhibitions, especially the International Style show. What has not been previously considered is that compared to WISMA1 and other architecture CEs, the International Style show's travel is more limited, and its immediate influence is felt largely among the social and architectural elite. WISMA1, on the other hand, carries a very similar message but strongly orients it to a popular audience in numerous versions, circulating much longer, more frequently, and to more varied locales (more than seventy venues over four years).⁸⁴

A characterization of the presumed CE audience by Courter fully sets the scene. It is drawn from a heated memo to Johnson regarding his plans for traveling shows. She specifically criticizes his inattention to practicalities—including how to communicate with the program's "specific audience." Circulating exhibitions are "needed more seriously in the provinces," according to Courter, and they are directed to a "much less sophisticated public than those prepared for the museum." She concludes, "My own experience has

⁸² MoMA, "Exhibition History List", moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_exhibition_history_list (accessed October 23, 2011).

⁸³ A&D Files. Courter to Johnson, September 6, 1946.

⁸⁴ Sources conflict on circulation of the International Style show. According to CE finding aids, its travel is as described above. Goodyear, however, states that "The exhibition traveled for twenty months and a smaller edition was on tour for five and one-half years." A. Conger Goodyear, *Museum of Modern Art: The First Ten Years* (New York: A. Conger Goodyear, 1943), 92.

taught me that there are considerations affecting the contents, design, and written material for such exhibitions.”⁸⁵ WISMA1 strongly reflects this mindset.

An overview of exhibition and book is followed by background on the two curators and then analysis of the show’s development and final manifestation, focusing on the process through which the curators attempt to make principles of modernist architecture understandable and persuasive to this “much less sophisticated public.”

Overview

The first version of the exhibition is actually two slightly different shows, known as I, II, and possibly a third variant named A (“photographic panels”).⁸⁶ Only versions I (1938–1941, 23 venues) and II (1939–1942, 26 venues) are considered here. Typical of the CE program, WISMA1 is also adapted into several additional versions, in this case a “Young People’s Rotating Exhibition” (1941–1945, 37 venues),⁸⁷ and an unrealized slide talk (1940).⁸⁸

Of the traveling exhibitions, version I comprises thirty-one panels grouped into an introductory set of seven followed by eight sets of three panels each. Photos show sections arranged on large, horizontal, pine boards.⁸⁹ To each board is affixed a square-ish inset flanked by two photographs. (Figure 7) The round-cornered, grained insets incorporate dense arrangements of text, photos, plans, and diagrams, most arranged in two columns. Version II has two more introductory panels, making a total of thirty-three.

⁸⁵ A&D Files. Courter to Johnson, September 6, 1946.

⁸⁶ The finding aid is unclear about the photographic panels.

⁸⁷ CE, 1.1.119.4.

⁸⁸ CE, 2.1.119.5.

⁸⁹ CE, II.1 119.3. Mock to “Mr. Baxter” February 1 and 13, 1940.

The book is published in 1942, during circulation of the versions. A revised edition is published in 1946, but it is identical except for an alternate cover and minor corrections. Departmental reports from 1946–1948 indicate unrealized plans to further revise the publication.⁹⁰ The book establishes the physical format of the series: glue-bound paperback with a trim size of 10 in. x 7 1/2 in. (25 cm x 19 cm) and a length of approximately forty pages. Like most books in the series, the interior is printed in black offset on white stock. The Mondrian-like cover features an additional color highlighting the phrase “is modern.” (Figure 8)

The book begins with a proclamation: “Our buildings are different from those of the past because we live in a different world.” (Figure 9) Asserting that modern times demand modern architecture, a confident, didactic tone is established at the outset. It evokes propaganda shows of the time⁹¹ by encouraging the collective “we” to identify positively with “the stimulating challenge of the present we all live in,” a present in which “thousands of modern buildings show the new, healthy spirit.”⁹² In similar spirit, tenets are presented epigrammatically and illustrated with built examples.

WISMA1 is organized around two bold notions. First, in the book, the modern architect is positioned as a scientist, psychologist, and artist. In both show and book the second and more fully integrated trope concerns a classical reference: “2000 years ago the Roman architect Vitruvius said: architecture should meet three requirements [:]

⁹⁰ A&D Files.

⁹¹ For a survey see Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, ed. *Public Photographic Spaces: Propaganda Exhibitions from Pressa to the Family of Man, 1928-1955* (Barcelona: Actar, 2009). The 1937 Paris World’s Fair is especially relevant for the debut of Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), which soon figures heavily in MoMA’s collection and in WIMP.

⁹² Introductory examples are from the book. I have not located definitive documentation of the introductory panels. John McAndrew and Elizabeth Mock, *What is Modern Architecture?* (New York: MoMA, 1942), 5.

utility, strength, beauty.”⁹³ In the modern era, the organizers argue, *utility* means new building types and the reinvention of traditional types. *Strength* concerns modern construction methods and materials. *Beauty* is the integration of utility and strength into self-evident, transcendent form.

The three requirements loosely conform to the International Style vocabulary of open plan, volume instead of mass, functional asymmetry, ornamental form instead of applied ornament, site planning, and the considered use of natural materials. Each tenet is illustrated with examples, including soon-to-be canonical works such as Mies van der Rohe’s Tugendhat House (1930), the Dessau Bauhaus by Walter Gropius (1925), the PSFS Building by William Lescaze and George Howe (1932), and even MoMA itself (Philip Goodwin and Edward Stone, 1939).

The Tugendhat House panel is typical of methods used to make these signal modern (especially European) works persuasive to the target audience. (Figure 7) As with most of the panels, brief text is illustrated with photos and a plan. In case anyone might miss the point, both capitalization and underlining drive the message home: walls are “independent of the light steel skeleton” and “the whole living space is OPEN” as opposed to “box like rooms.” The house is “without any extraneous ornament” and there is “no trimming,” culminating with: “INDOORS AND OUTDOORS BECOME ONE.” For viewers unfamiliar with the architect’s name or suspicious of its nationality, an asterisk leads to fine print instructing that Mies is “One of the greatest of modern architects” who is “now practicing in America.”

A fitting conclusion to this overview is the final work: the London Zoo’s Penguin Pool (Tecton, 1933). (Figure 10) This North Pole Villa Savoye features ribbon windows,

⁹³ Ibid., 6.

ramps, and a water element, all set in the zoo's white concrete landscape. The curators appear to have been seduced by the birds as much as the structure, indicated by seven separate photos of penguins crowding the panel. All other panel arrangements are more "functional," with only one or two photos and sometimes a plan illustrating spare text. With the Penguin Pool WISMA1 culminates in a tidal wave of appeals, ranging from the rational to emotional, and from ancient to modern:

People love to watch penguins. Walt Disney...spent hours at the pool making sketches of them solemnly walking up and down the curving ramps. The pool was built to display...all the talents of these comic birds. The steps at the top of the ramp are...made the right size for the way they walk.

The ramp leads to the shallow oval pool where, through a glass wall, people can watch....

As in all good modern architecture, everything is carefully designed for its purpose.

- 1) to keep the penguins healthy and happy
- 2) to show them off in the most interesting way....

The penguins read as stand-ins for people—and the modern exhibition—roaming a flat-roofed and glass-walled Esprit Nouveau, marching *en masse* to leap into the bracing pool of modern life.

Before analyzing WISMA1 in detail, this next section introduces the book's authors, demonstrating that their interest in interpreting and promulgating modernism is established early in their careers and continues throughout, yet their attitudes towards the movement is more supple than the stridence of WISMA1 implies.

Curators John McAndrew and Elizabeth Mock

In the late 1920s and early 1930s McAndrew and Mock are at the forefront of a milieu eager to embrace and disseminate then-radical developments in contemporary art, architecture, and design. They form direct and indirect connections to formative

figures in the history of modernism such as Paul Sachs, Catherine Bauer, Johnson, Henry Russell Hitchcock, and Kaufmann. As a fine arts undergraduate at Harvard, McAndrew is classmates with Hitchcock, the pioneering historian of modern architecture and Johnson's cohort. At the Fogg Museum, directed by Barr's mentor Sachs, McAndrew attends a Barr lecture on modern painting. McAndrew meets him at the party following, where he "handed around big color reproductions of radical modern paintings,"⁹⁴ as MoMA soon does with portfolios and then circulating exhibitions (Chapter 2).

Vassar and Wellesley are fertile grounds for establishing modern art as a field of study, with Barr playing a central role. His influence upon McAndrew and Mock begins at Vassar, where he is an associate professor in 1923.⁹⁵ McAndrew starts teaching there in 1931, and Mock enters the picture as McAndrew's student.⁹⁶ Her sister Catherine Bauer also attends Vassar; she becomes involved with significant MoMA exhibitions, including the housing section of the International Style show and a number of under-recognized exhibitions on housing and urban planning. The sisters collaborate closely in the MoMA years, especially on socially oriented projects.⁹⁷

McAndrew becomes acquainted with Barr during European travels in 1927–1928. As documented in Barr's writings,⁹⁸ these historic visits strongly influence MoMA's mission and collection. Anticipating the CE program and teaching portfolios, following his

⁹⁴ Lynes, 1973, 178.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁶ Sally Linden, "Person of the Week: John McAndrew", Wellesley College, wellesley.edu/Anniversary/mcandrew.html (accessed November 22, 2008).

⁹⁷ For an excellent biography of Bauer see H. Peter Oberlander, Eva Newbrun, and Martin Meyerson, *Houser: The Life and Work of Catherine Bauer* (Vancouver: UBC, 1999), 11–4.

⁹⁸ Barr Jr., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 1986.

return from Europe Barr organizes an exhibition of mass-produced posters (installed with thumbtacks) at Wellesley in 1920. Barr and Johnson possibly first meet at the show.⁹⁹

McAndrew becomes involved with other major figures while in Europe. Returning there in 1929, he meets Johnson at a gallery. They travel together during the following year, originally planning to “go all over Germany getting materials for popular articles on architecture.”¹⁰⁰ During this time they encounter the Weissenhofsiedlung and make Johnson’s if not McAndrew’s first visit to the Bauhaus.¹⁰¹ Hired at the museum in 1937, the following year he curates the landmark exhibition *Bauhaus: 1919–1928* (MoMA 82, 1938), the first major introduction of the school’s philosophy to an American audience.

McAndrew’s efforts to disseminate modernism take multiple forms. For example, the year that the WISMA1 book debuts, he poses the question “What Is Functionalism?” in an unrecorded public talk.¹⁰² Towards the end of his MoMA tenure he writes the introduction to *A Design Students’ Guide to the New York World’s Fair*,¹⁰³ which seeks to promote modernism by distinguishing it from the “modernistic” (the “zig-zags” and “rays” of the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* and *Century of Progress*) and “modernoid” (“a newer kind of over-streamlined pseudo-modern” with “soft corners and fungoid bulges”). He negatively compares these to the modern, which should be “shaped by the exigencies of function and materials, and by the formed invention of the designer. It will be free of mannerisms.”

⁹⁹ Lynes, 1973, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Franz Schulze, *Philip Johnson: Life and Work* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1996), 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰² Department of Public Information Records, I [38:303]. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. “Museum of Modern Art Lists Lectures,” *Retailing*, January 23, 1939. Hereafter “PI.”

¹⁰³ Laboratory School of Industrial Design, *Design Students’ Guide to the New York World’s Fair* (New York: PM, 1939).

Anticipating the CE, the *Guide* also shows that the curator understands exhibition design to be an essentially promotional act: “An exposition has its own special qualities...it is not permanent; it must be vivid; a successful exhibit will often be as close to good advertising as it is to architecture or industrial design.” He concludes that “One must look at an exposition as an exposition.” In other words, it must be approached in terms of its main function: to convincingly communicate ideas.

McAndrew leaves MoMA in 1945. Reasons for his departure remain unclear. Franz Schulz states that Johnson begins to dislike him, and that trustees are concerned with the profitability of his shows.¹⁰⁴ Kaizen attributes his departure to the 1941 Frank Lloyd Wright exhibition, specifically cancellation of the catalog based upon conflict with the architect over an essay as well as failure to produce a house in the museum’s garden.¹⁰⁵ McAndrew returns to Wellesley, first to teach and then to direct the college’s art museum from 1947–1957, a successful integration of his curatorial and pedagogical skills.¹⁰⁶ There he is most likely aware of Barr’s legacy, in particular the 1927 course on modern art (believed to be the first in the U.S.) that lays the foundation for MoMA and its populist efforts.¹⁰⁷ As seen in Chapter 2, the influence of Barr’s course is far-reaching and a definite precursor to the WIM series.

McAndrew’s pedagogical skills arguably influence the forceful didacticism of WISMA1. One Wellesley colleague describes him as the “department’s most brilliant and influential teacher.”¹⁰⁸ In 1946 Johnson writes that

¹⁰⁴ Schulze, 1996, 172–3.

¹⁰⁵ Kaizen, 2004; *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Lynes, 1973, 178.

¹⁰⁷ Kantor, 2002, 91–2; Lynes, 1973, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Linden,

I have talked with so many girls who have been exposed to you and they all speak with the greatest enthusiasm. I don't know what you did for them but whatever it was, it was good."¹⁰⁹

Lynes states that McAndrew has a reputation as “a lively lecturer” who is “able to write simply, clearly, and without jargon...”¹¹⁰ He is also known as a man of strong aesthetic opinions, with difficulty accepting the opinions of others.¹¹¹ This rigidity may account in part for the orthodoxy of the WISMA1 message.

Elizabeth Mock assists McAndrew on WISMA1. The project exemplifies her commitment to popularizing modern architecture. Following 1932 graduation from Vassar,¹¹² she is inspired by the International Style show to become an architect. Financially unable to attend the Bauhaus,¹¹³ she studies at Taliesin in 1932–1933, where she meets her first husband and collaborator, Swiss architect Rudolph Mock.¹¹⁴ In the mid-1930s she studies at the Basel Gewerbeschule.¹¹⁵

In 1937 she writes to Barr seeking a curatorial position at the museum.¹¹⁶ The letter establishes her career-long interest in popularization, specifically “to work in an interpretive position between designer and public.” She emphasizes how her exposure to international architecture enhances her ability to communicate with a domestic audience: “[it] enables me to look at the United States more objectively and has made me more sensitive to the peculiarly national aspects of our problems.” Showing a

¹⁰⁹ A&D Files. Johnson to McAndrew, September 25, 1946.

¹¹⁰ Lynes, 1973, 179.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Waters: 27.

¹¹³ A&D Files. Mock to Barr, July 30, 1937.

¹¹⁴ Matthew Postal, “‘Toward a Democratic Esthetic?:’ The Modern House in America, 1932-1955” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1998), 158.

¹¹⁵ A&D Files. Mock to Barr, July 30, 1937.

¹¹⁶ A&D Files. Mock to Barr, July 30, 1937.

prescient understanding of exhibitions as interpretive tools, she discusses shows by her Basel teacher Georg Schmidt, writing that

the interest with which the public attended these exhibitions convinced me that the exhibition can be one of the most efficient way to put across ideas and information[,] leading to a more intelligent appreciation of modern design.

Hired by McAndrew in 1938, she works at the museum until 1946, serving in several positions in the Architecture Department, including that of Acting Director.¹¹⁷ With WISMA1 she fulfills the intentions of her query letter, serving as a key mediator between the high-level curatorial concerns of the department and the populist mission of the CE and the Education Departments. To this end she forms a solid working relationship with Courter and D'Amico, and as we will see “her gift for the ‘turned phrase’”¹¹⁸ helps to make projects such as WISMA1 appealing. Her efforts at MoMA are wide-ranging, with a common thread of promulgating a socially oriented modernism. For example, she produces shows about school design and family-friendly planning, as well as the 1946 show and well-selling book *If You Want To Build a House*.¹¹⁹

Mock's career is characterized by a modulated attitude towards modernism that informs the didactic subtleties of WISMA1. While dogmatic, even in this early effort she emphasizes quality of life. As Matthew Postal states, she “viewed architecture as primarily a social act.”¹²⁰ Beneath the imperative headlines lies Mock's more flexible

¹¹⁷ For a fuller account see Jennifer Tobias, *Elizabeth Mock at the Museum of Modern Art, 1938-1946* (Unpublished: 2002). Archives Pamphlet File: Kassler, Elizabeth B. MoMA Archives, NY.

¹¹⁸ A&D Files. Courter to Johnson, draft of September 6, 1946 memo.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Kassler [Mock], *If You Want to Build a House* (New York: MoMA, 1946). Courter's spouse, cartoonist Robert Osborn, illustrates the book.

¹²⁰ Postal, 162.

approach. She says of her career in retrospect, “I was trying to promote modern architecture, but open it up.”¹²¹

Mock continues at the museum until 1946. Schulze claims that she is “gentled into the departmental shade” by Johnson,¹²² though evidence shows that she doesn’t go gently. Around this time, she prepares a yearly report thick with accomplishments. It emphasizes her public relations role, in which “talking to people” and promoting modern architecture are central. Ironically, following her departure even Johnson acknowledges that he is “wearing out” and urgently seeks “Someone who can (1) write, and (2) be presentable to the public.”¹²³

Development and Analysis

This section examines the process through which exhibition and book develop, analyzing how they are made persuasive. The two fully engage modern design and communication methods, ranging from classical rhetoric to cutting-edge advertising techniques. Text and image are integrated into forms derived as much from American commercialism as Bauhaus principles. To this end Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater (1937) is examined as an instance of instrumental photography. Its role in the WISMAs is also shown to anticipate its use in another Drexler exhibition decades later.

Evidence of the curators’ thought process is found first in handwritten drafts (many undated and unsigned) such as a presumably preliminary, haphazard list organized tentatively into Vitruvian categories. Elements are listed in no particular order,

¹²¹ Gutman interview, quoted in *ibid*.

¹²² Schulze, 1996, 174.

¹²³ A&D Files. “MoMA and Dept Personnel.” Johnson to McAndrew, September 25, 1946. The same day, Johnson sends a very similar letter to Agnes Rindge, a figure in Chapter 5.

as they might be in a brainstorming session. They can be grouped, roughly as they appear in sequence, into building types (apartment house, department store, industrial), infrastructure (transportation, planning, parks), more building types (private houses, schools, and [illegible—nursing?] community centers, shops), materials (stone and brick, wood, glass), and ending with construction methods and materials (steel skeleton, reinforced concrete, cantilever, plywood, glass blocks, [illegible—possibly “equipment”]).¹²⁴ Each category lists a number of built examples. Together they imply that modernism is suitable for virtually all-building types.

Because only a few copies of the show had to be produced, each inset panel appears to be handcrafted. Text is typed in an outsized sans serif and then, along with images, most likely cut and glued to unpainted plywood. Evidence that text and image develop together is found in early drafts, where thumbnail layouts are sketched alongside the text. This is also evinced by the final panels, in which type has been set to coordinate with image placement.¹²⁵ Still, the finished panels convey a provisional, amateur feel appropriate for a mobile, Depression-era exhibition staged by a confident young institution. The impression is of a work—and a movement—in progress.

The book is more polished, conveying authority through self-assured text and refined Bauhaus-influenced graphic design. It is a two-dimensional manifestation of three-dimensional tenets it espouses: asymmetry, open (layout) plan, and the absence of (typographic) mass or ornament. Photographs are elegantly arranged and positioned to correspond to the relevant text. The text is set in Futura, a thoroughly modern

¹²⁴ CE, II.1.119.3.

¹²⁵ CE, II.1.119.3.

typeface designed in 1928 by Deutsche Werkbund member Paul Renner.¹²⁶ This approach to graphic design becomes typical of MoMA publications, including several WIMs.¹²⁷

Other examples of design development show how panels are formulated to appeal to a popular audience. The clearest is a panel on Frank Lloyd Wright featuring the Jacobs House (1937) and “House at Bear Run” (Fallingwater). (Figure 11). The Jacobs House, the first built Usonian structure,¹²⁸ is clearly chosen to appeal to a Depression-era viewers. The text emphasizes that the “small house” “cost only \$5,500 including architect’s fee.” It also celebrates privacy and greenery: “it shuts off the street and guarantees privacy for the small garden it cloisters.” The practicality of the garden is literally foregrounded in a photo, featuring what appears to be a freshly planted vegetable garden. The text highlights innovative sandwich-wall construction and stresses simple use of low-end materials such as plywood, complementing a prefabricated dwelling described in the book introduction (a government-sponsored Experimental Plywood House, also in Madison, Wisconsin).¹²⁹

Fallingwater’s grandeur is a distinct contrast, made compatible with the modesty of the other house by selective editing. For example, the house’s substantial construction costs are omitted, as is a floor plan, which would have rendered the Usonian house tiny in comparison. Moreover the Usonian house text stresses its utility,

¹²⁶ Christopher Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

¹²⁷ Architecture historian and curator Barry Bergdoll speculates that in the early years MoMA consciously emulated Bauhaus publications such as the *Bauhausbucher* series. Personal communication, 2008.

¹²⁸ William Allin Storrer, *Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: A Complete Catalog*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT, 1978), 234.

¹²⁹ McAndrew and Mock, 1942, 35.

while description of Fallingwater emphasizes the beauty of the waterfall and the drama of the cantilever. The message: the elite get landscape and the masses get arable land.

The Fallingwater panel exemplifies how photographs are sought, commissioned, and edited to amplify the editorial message. For practical and budgetary reasons many images are solicited from the architects themselves (implications of this are explored further in the section on WISMA2). The persuasive element is found, for example, in photo queries regarding Oscar Stonorov's Charlestown Playhouse (Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, 1939). In correspondence with the architect, Mock specifies "the view from the playcourt and the interior view of the large play-room"¹³⁰ and the two discuss "getting kids in the picture."¹³¹ To do so she even advises that he "wait until September first for a photograph good enough to enlarge,"¹³² presumably because school is back in session then. Demonstrating the degree to which Mock understands the power of images, she continues that if a photograph of the Playhouse can't be included, the work will be dropped from the show. Her request is fulfilled, for the show features large images from precisely these viewpoints (credited only to "Wallace"). In the book however, only a small and childless exterior image is used,¹³³ while a sunny and child-filled photo of Richard Neutra's Bell Experimental School (Los Angeles, 1935) is more prominent (the image is by Luckhaus Studio in Los Angeles).¹³⁴ That Neutra can supply numerous appealing photos (most by Julius Shulman)¹³⁵ says much about how the

¹³⁰ CE, II.1.119.3, Mock to Stonorov, August 3, 1939.

¹³¹ CE, II.1.119.3, Stonorov to Mock, August 14, 1939.

¹³² CE, II.1.119.3, Mock to Stonorov, August 3, 1939.

¹³³ McAndrew and Mock, 1942, 14.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹³⁵ A&D Files. Notes on the file photos specify that Shulman photos are to be credited to Neutra and not the photographer. This effectively foregrounds the architect's name and amplifies his reputation.

architect's work is disseminated, a topic Drexler addresses directly almost half a century later.

In one photo-hunting instance, art direction comes from the source, specifically Roy Stryker, then at the Farm Security Administration (he is referred by Bauer, who is herself involved with a federal agency). When staff member Mary Cooke requests photos of Greenbelt, Maryland,¹³⁶ Stryker's reply reflects his legacy as an expert in propaganda photography. Showing particular concern for print quality, he advises "a few carefully done enlargements. I would suggest that these be about 11 x 14 in size. We would prefer to have a few good prints in the exhibit than many hurriedly done enlargements."¹³⁷

The results of this process show how dissonances within the modernist ethos are smoothed into a viable master narrative through a variety of persuasive methods. A major example is panels on dwellings, which evince class tensions between high (houses) and low (housing) that typify MoMA's attitude for decades to come—all the way to WISMA2. Houses are grouped separately from housing, which includes apartment blocks as well as dormitories for college students and farm workers. While clearly zoned off from high-end, freestanding houses, the class boundary is less pronounced than in the notorious split of the International Style show, in which public housing is delegated to Bauer and Lewis Mumford. In this way one detects the influence of Mock and Bauer, who consistently demonstrate more interest in socioeconomic diversity than do Johnson or Hitchcock.

¹³⁶ The first of three New Deal-era communities planned on the garden city model. See Cathy D. Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2001).

¹³⁷ CE, II.1.119.3. Roy Stryker to Mary Cooke, May 31, 1938.

Analyzing other rhetorical methods reveals similar smoothing of discursive dissonances. This includes more invocations of science, the classical, children and nature, as well as techniques such as good/bad comparisons, anticipation of public wariness, and, in a final example, persuasive photography. These anticipate the much different tone of WISMA2.

Besides the Vitruvian dictum, “Science” is the other major rhetorical trope of WISMA1, despite Mock and McAndrew’s critique of its worship in other contexts. In the book, science is invoked in the very first sentence: “During the last hundred years our environment has been dramatically transformed, largely by Science.”¹³⁸ In this construct science is at the pinnacle of a holy trinity: “The modern architect is a scientist...and a psychologist...and an artist....”¹³⁹ Layering this upon the Vitruvian triad, these professions are reassuringly married into scientist/utility, psychologist/strength, and artist/beauty. For any audience wary of the rigorous rationality of science, the inclusion of psychologist and artist may be intended as a comforting balance, appealing to a society newly assimilating psychoanalysis, industrial psychology, and progressive education.

In other contexts, however, invoking the scientific enables Mock if not McAndrew to subtly subvert this rhetoric. Mock’s critical attitude is expressed most directly in a 1947 *Interiors* article about fashion. In it she parries a series of leading questions posed by critic, designer, and dress reformer Bernard Rudofsky (1905–1988),¹⁴⁰ then at *Interiors* and also a MoMA curatorial consultant. Countering his quasi-rational and strongly held opinions, Mock asserts that

¹³⁸ McAndrew and Mock, 1942, 5.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Architekturzentrum Wien, *Lessons from Bernard Rudofsky: Life as a Voyage* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2007).

Clothing is so free and intimate that it is a proper vehicle for the irrational, and isn't it really rather nice to have a mad and lusty thing like fashion flourishing in this age of pseudo-rational, pseudo-scientific regimentation?...Let us not confuse modern architecture with a health movement; surely it can cope with the irrational as well as any self-respecting architecture of the past.¹⁴¹

That the exchange is with Rudofsky is significant, for his provocative show *Are Clothes Modern?* (1944–1945) remains the only MoMA show devoted to garment design, and its rational approach most likely makes it an acceptable topic. Considered mere “fashion,” clothing remains largely excluded from the modernist canon, in part because it is still considered “irrational.”¹⁴²

Classical rhetoric recurs throughout the text. By situating modernism in this venerable framework, the curators appeal to the loftiest of audience aspirations, making the new and unfamiliar more palatable by linking it to a respected tradition. This becomes clear by examining the Vitruvian triad in more detail, specifically the way that semantic changes yield a gentle spin. The triad surfaces in WISMA2 as well, but as a foil to canonical modernism. Later, Kaufmann make a similar gesture when he invokes Thomas Aquinas in WISMID (Chapter 4).

Thanks to Vitruvius's *De Architectura* (Ten Books on Architecture)¹⁴³ the dictum *commodus, utilitas, venusitas* is a well-established pedagogic trope, rediscovered in the Renaissance and continuing in architectural education to this day.¹⁴⁴ In early WISMA1 manuscripts most likely handwritten by Mock, a sixteenth-century translation is used: *commodity, firmness, and delight*. This terminology is believed to be appropriate to its

¹⁴¹ Bernard Rudofsky, "Problems of Design: 1. The Unfashionable Human Body," *Interiors & Industrial Design* 57, no. 4 (1947): 87.

¹⁴² This theme is thoroughly explored in Mary McLeod, "Undressing Architecture: Fashion and Modernity," in *Architecture: In Fashion*, ed. Deborah Fausch (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994).

¹⁴³ Vitruvius, Ingrid Rowland, and Thomas Howe, *Ten Books on Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002).

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Gordon Smith, *Vitruvius on Architecture* (New York: Monacelli, 2003).

time, but subsequent translations use terms more familiar to the twentieth-century reader, hence the substitution of *stability* for *firmness* in a draft, then the final *utility, strength, and beauty*. Oddly, WISMA1's last words return to the stiffer *fitness* and *firmness*. Referring to the penguin pool, the text concludes:

Guided by the 2000 year old standards of Vitruvius, today we find in this modern structure

FITNESS for its purpose
FIRMNESS of construction
DELIGHT in the lyric sweep and interplay of curves.

The triad has a MoMA pre-history, beginning with the opening salvo of Barr's 1928 essay on American industrial architecture, referring to a Necco factory in Cambridge.¹⁴⁵ The dictum is also mentioned in his foreword to the International Style catalog.¹⁴⁶

Scholars tend to agree that *De Architectura* is motivated by a desire to bring the vocation of building to the realm of civic discourse, a goal achieved by endowing it with a rhetorical vocabulary. This is confirmed by Stephen Frith, who argues that "in the *Ten Books*, the way we are encouraged to judge architecture is the same mode of reasoning that oratory is to be judged by."¹⁴⁷ In other words, rhetoric—like architecture—requires elegant construction, a kind of *venustas* [beauty]. In terms of modernist rhetoric, this means that invoking a classical orator in WISMA1 is unintentionally ironic, for by claiming architecture for discourse Vitruvius negates the fundamental modernist value of self-evident, "honest" materiality. Richard Patterson agrees that this notion of uninflected

¹⁴⁵ Alfred H. Barr Jr., "Necco Factory," *Arts* 13, no. 5 (1928).

¹⁴⁶ Alfred H. Barr Jr. and others, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (New York: MoMA, 1932), 77–81.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Frith, "Primitive Exchange: On Rhetoric and Architectural Symbol," *Arq* 8, no. 1 (2004).
journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=289351&jid=&volumeId=&issueId=&aid=289350 (accessed October 22, 2011).

construction is subverted by Vitruvius himself through “submission of technical activities to the discipline of speech, style, criteria of judgment, ethics, and politics.”¹⁴⁸

Vitruvius might have approved of the rhetorical technique of visual comparisons. It pervades the series and its implications are considered throughout this dissertation. Considering two images side-by-side is a common and effective discursive method, as art historians well know.¹⁴⁹ Modernist rhetoric lends itself particularly well to this through juxtaposition of “good” (modern) with “bad” (not modern). In the WISMA1 book a “bad” neoclassical high school and neo-colonial bedroom (the latter style experiences a revival at the time) are compared to their “good” modernist counterparts. (Figure 12) Then as now, such comparisons are familiar to American consumers as an ad-industry staple. The mix of advertising technique and aesthetics makes for a heady didactic blend.

As described earlier, WISMA1 is relentlessly upbeat, even in anticipation of audience distaste. Another technique found twice in the show can be called the “need not” trope. For example: “modern buildings, though unornamented, need not seem bare nor harsh!” and “the skyscraper need not be an evil.” It recurs in WISMA2 as well (“efficiency is not always grim”). In late WISMA1 manuscripts, editing of “bare nor harsh” reveals debate about the issue: the sentence is vigorously crossed out and margin notes ask “leave out?” and “why?” with “ADD” in capital letters. Ultimately omitted from both show and book, the exchange indicates a suppressed dissonance.

¹⁴⁸ Richard Patterson, “What Vitruvius Said,” in *Narrating Architecture: A Retrospective Anthology*, ed. James Madge and Andrew Peckham (London: Routledge, 2006), 345.

¹⁴⁹ Visual comparison is integral to art historical discourse yet it appears to have been little studied in itself, especially in terms of projected images. Further investigation would begin with Riegl, Panofsky, and Warburg and incorporate current thinking from the cognitive sciences. For a brief historical account of projected visual comparisons see Darsie Alexander, *Slide Show: Projected Images in Contemporary Art* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2005).

At this same time, public dissonance is surfacing among figures such as pedagogue Joseph Hudnut,¹⁵⁰ critic Louis Mumford, and architectural historian Vincent Scully. As discussed below, the latter two soon figure directly in the WISMA story.

A subtle form of persuasion in WISMA1 involves children. As seen previously in the search for school photos, Mock appears to know that “getting kids in the picture” is a way to appeal to parents and also teachers—adults who can influence actual building. The question of sensitivity to children runs deeper than this, however. An unexplored aspect of the Architecture and Design Department’s seventy-year history is that curators (especially chief curators) tend to be childless. This is significant because their works tend to overlook the role of families and children in modern architecture, while parent-curators tend to consider it. In the WIM period, those without children include Johnson, McAndrew, Kaufmann, and Drexler (exceptions are Eliot Noyes and Peter Blake). Curators with children include Mock, Bauer, and Ernestine Fantl. A related, also unexplored issue is the role of motherhood in the slowing or ending of curators’ careers, exemplified by Courter.

References to the natural world and Ruskinian “truth to materials” are common to justifications of industrial-age architecture, and WISMA1 is no exception. In the book subsection on *Absence of Ornament*, part of the *Beauty* section, the authors begin by invoking the pre-industrial age, in which “Traditional architectural ornament was made by master stonecutters.” After an extended push for the machine aesthetic, however, the

¹⁵⁰ The year that the WISMA1 CE ends, Hudnut publishes his prescient essay questioning doctrinaire modernism: Joseph Hudnut, “The Post-Modern House,” *Architectural Record* 97, no. 5 (1945). His career as a humanist-modernist is well-covered by Jill Pearlman, “Joseph Hudnut’s Other Modernism at the ‘Harvard Bauhaus,’” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56, no. 4 (1997). [jstor.org/stable/991314](https://www.jstor.org/stable/991314) (accessed September 4, 2011). In another connection to WIM, she mentions that Hudnut was familiar with and influenced by Dewey’s theory of progressive education.

section concludes by claiming this earthy past for the present, where modern architects “have come...to delight in...wood, brick, and stone, materials as old as architecture itself.”¹⁵¹ This rhetoric can be attributed in part to Mock, based on a curatorial legacy that emphasizes nature and natural materials. In fact her career is bookended by this interest. Her 1937 job query letter mentions her experience at Taliesin, where she “acquired some feeling for the properties of wood and stone.”¹⁵² Then in 1964, after officially leaving the museum, she writes the first and almost only MoMA book on modern gardens.¹⁵³ The role of nature in WISMA1 resonates today in urgent debate about its place in the modernist world. Suffice it to say that environmental effects of twentieth-century modernism are only now beginning to be assessed by MoMA in light of climate change and the ethic of sustainability.¹⁵⁴

At the time of WISMA1, however, the apotheosis of modern Nature—and the show—splashes in the penguin pool. This panel has the most photos, almost all of penguins themselves. This suggests that McAndrew and Mock have some awareness that the entertaining animals make the stark structure more appealing to the public gaze. The images are repurposed from the film *New Architecture for the London Zoo* (1936), commissioned by the MoMA from László Moholy-Nagy for the exhibition *Modern Architecture in England* (1937) by Hitchcock and Bauer. The 15-minute silent film is shown during that exhibition and distributed through the Film Library. While watching

¹⁵¹ McAndrew and Mock, 1942, 16–7.

¹⁵² A&D Files. Mock to Barr, July 30, 1937.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Kassler [Mock], *Modern Gardens and the Landscape* (New York: MoMA, 1964). This is followed decades later by the 2005 exhibition and book *Groundswell* (MoMA 1936).

¹⁵⁴ MoMA begins to address climate change in the exhibition *Rising Currents* (MoMA 2112, 2010).

penguins romp in the film, viewers learn from intertitles that even modern birds require modern architecture:

The animals for the first time are no longer housed in artificial reproductions of their natural surroundings. The new buildings provide a hygienic organic setting, the simplicity of which best displays the natural characteristics of the animals.¹⁵⁵

In this construct, reproducing a habitat is “artificial” while a “hygienic organic” and “simple” setting is more “real.” This artificial/real strategy (and by implication bad/good) is also found in the book, where the Georgian high school is considered to be an artificial environment while the modernist high school should be the “natural” habitat of the modern student. Ironically, the Zoo completely reverses itself by designing a new, naturalistic habitat intended to “best meet the environmental needs of the species rather than simply serve the viewing requirements of the public.” Tecton’s “art deco” structure (as the Zoo terms it) remains as a preserved relic, symbolizing modernism’s demise.¹⁵⁶

This account of WISMA1 concludes with the rhetorical use of Fallingwater, underscoring the role of photography in the promulgation of modern architecture. Besides its appearance in the Wright panel (Figure 11), in version II of the show, a now-iconic photo is featured in an introductory panel, perhaps to appeal to a non-urban populace. In comparison, a dramatic nighttime cityscape of Rockefeller Center opens the book (the Rockefeller family is of course the museum’s longstanding patron). The Fallingwater image is part of a series on Wright buildings commissioned by *Architectural*

¹⁵⁵ László Moholy-Nagy, "New Architecture and the London Zoo", MoMA, [youtube.com/watch?v=5hex_o9OVt0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hex_o9OVt0) (accessed August 30, 2011).

¹⁵⁶ London Zoo, "ZSL London Zoo's Penguins", zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/exhibits/penguins/zsl-london-zoos-penguins,1039,AR.html (accessed May 2, 2009).

Forum in 1937.¹⁵⁷ The image is by Bill Hedrich of Hedrich Blessing, one of the first U.S. architectural photography firms.

The case of Fallingwater underscores MoMA's role in establishing it as a canonical work. Shortly after its completion McAndrew brings the residence to public light in a modest show titled *A New House by Frank Lloyd Wright on Bear Run, Pennsylvania* (MoMA 70, 1938; CE with abbreviated title 1938–1940, 18 venues). McAndrew thinks he might even be the first person besides the Kaufmanns to visit.¹⁵⁸ He may be the first to photograph it: a series of undated snapshots in the department's photo files show the just-completed building with a workman on site and construction debris still visible. Notably, two of the three photographs in the book and one in the show are his snapshots, with one taken from an angle very similar to the professional photograph. The snapshots and Hedrich image are subsequently distributed through the Architecture Department's Photo Files, a collection built specifically to document and disseminate modern architecture. As an indicator of the program's reach, the backs of these file images are cluttered with sizing and cropping notations, constituting a virtual timeline of their iconization. A *New Yorker* cartoon deposited in the file evinces a departmental understanding of relationships between photography and dissemination.¹⁵⁹ (Figure 13) Showing a street of Fallingwater clones, it satirizes the machine production of both images and houses.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Tony Hiss, *Building Images: Seventy Years of Photography at Hedrich Blessing* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2000), 36.

¹⁵⁸ Lynes, 1973, 180.

¹⁵⁹ The file also contains a snapshot of the site prior to construction. The caption claims that it is unique.

¹⁶⁰ Robert Day, "Untitled," *New Yorker*, May 3, 1952.

Fallingwater is also relevant as an example of architectural glamour photography, characterized by dramatic spatiality and lighting achieved through points of view often never experienced in everyday life. In this case, as Hedrich states:

The shoot was difficult because of the nature of the structure, which rises from a waterfall.... The building is about three stories high, and the best place to take the photograph was from the middle of the very cold stream. So we went into town and bought some waders."¹⁶¹

Wright is at first unimpressed by the dramatic perspective:

he initially critiqued it as rather 'acrobatic.' But it was later to become his favorite perspective.... Indeed, this picture is reputed to have given the residence the name 'Fallingwater.'¹⁶²

Finally, it should be noted that through Fallingwater McAndrew and Kaufmann *films* become friends. Anticipating his involvement with the museum, Kaufmann personally signs the contract to show WISMA1 at the family's Pittsburgh department store.¹⁶³ Much later McAndrew serves as a Fallingwater trustee,¹⁶⁴ confirming the work as a durable palimpsest in the legacy of modernism.

Interrogating WISMA1's premises and methods demonstrates that the show and book represent an idealistic first-generation attempt to spread the word of International Style modernism, one that involves glossing over paradoxes inherent to the movement such as its perceived finality, a problematic concern with aesthetics in relation to social utility, and relevance across the American class system. As such it lays the groundwork for reflection upon the International Style legacy in subsequent efforts, culminating in WISMA2.

¹⁶¹ Hiss, 2000, 36.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ CE, II.1.119.3.

¹⁶⁴ Linden,

What Is Happening to Modern Architecture? Symposium (1948) and Unpublished WISMA Manuscript (1955)

Between the two WISMAs, MoMA reluctantly starts to reflect upon the legacy of the International Style show in light of two decades of critical reception. This takes the form of a 1948 symposium titled *What Is Happening to Modern Architecture?* and a previously unexamined 1955 manuscript for a revised WISMA. Together they show the museum reconsidering but ultimately committed to canonical modern principles.

What is Happening to Modern Architecture? (1948)

The 1948 symposium is a direct reaction to the IS show and, indirectly, to WISMA, essentially asking *what is happening to MoMA's version of modern architecture?* The precipitating event is a critique by Lewis Mumford, whose 1947 *New Yorker* essay posits the vernacular, specifically a "New Empiricism" or "Bay Region Style" as a truly international style.¹⁶⁵

As a debate among critics, academics, curators, and elite architects, the event is public but not populist. Speakers Barr and Hitchcock represent curatorial forces driving the 1932 show. Johnson and Kaufmann apparently make "statements"¹⁶⁶ but Johnson's appears to be undocumented. Architect speakers represent a spectrum of positions on the question; these include Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, Eero Saarinen, and William

¹⁶⁵ Lewis Mumford, "Sky Line: Status Quo," *New Yorker*, no. October 11 (1947). [archives.newyorker.com/?i=1947-10-11#folio=104](https://www.newyorker.com/?i=1947-10-11#folio=104) (accessed October 23, 2011).

¹⁶⁶ PI, 136, [mf 37;115]. The finding aid lists Johnson but it is unclear if he is a speaker or audience commentator. His absence from the *Bulletin* article suggests the latter. Kaufmann publishes an article under the symposium title shortly after the event; one can safely assume that this is similar to his actual statement. Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?," *Arts and Architecture* 66, no. 9 (1949).

Wurster, among others. Future MoMA curator and, much later, disillusioned modernist Peter Blake also makes an appearance. Scully, strongly sympathetic to Mumford's point of view, adds apparently unrecorded commentary.

A common thread runs through the partial transcript published in the museum's *Bulletin*.¹⁶⁷ all speakers complicate the notion of an International Style and disavow formal dictates and claiming their view of modern architecture for humanist principles.

Mumford (and presumably Scully) argues for a traditional vernacular termed the Bay Region Style, or its British variant New Empiricism, as a true universal. Naming Bernard Maybeck (1862–1957), William Wurster (1895–1973), John Galen Howard (1864–1931), and Gardner Dailey (1895–1967) as examples,¹⁶⁸ he posits

a form of modern architecture...which is so native that people, when they ask for a building, do not ask for it in any style...To me, that is a sample of internationalism, not a sample of localism and limited effort. Any local effort, if worth anything, is worth reproducing elsewhere; and any universal formula that is worth anything must always be susceptible of being brought home-otherwise it lacks true universality.

Barr and Hitchcock defend the International Style by complicating it. Hitchcock submits that the scholarly depth of his book 1929 *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration*, upon which the show is based, is sacrificed in the drive to dissemination.¹⁶⁹ He upholds the thesis of the book: a continuum between nineteenth-century revivalism, defined as “eclecticism of taste” and a turn-of-the-century emergence of a New Tradition, or “eclecticism of style,” complicated by an indeterminate

¹⁶⁷ Alfred H. Barr Jr. and others, "What Is Happening to Modern Architecture? A Symposium at the Museum of Modern Art," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 15, no. 3 (1948). jstor.org/stable/4058109 (accessed April 8, 2011).

¹⁶⁸ Mumford; Lewis Mumford and Alfred H. Barr Jr., "[Correspondence]," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 15, no. 3 (1948). jstor.org/stable/4058110 (accessed January 22, 2012).

¹⁶⁹ Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* (London: Payson & Clarke, 1929).

contemporary practice by those he calls the New Pioneers.¹⁷⁰ In the American context, he names Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–1886) as the New Tradition exemplar, whose potential was limited only by his early death. (Note the importance of public acceptance here; even the academic Hitchcock recognizes the importance of promulgation.):

Richardson was cut off at a time when he might have gone on with the development of his own style and have eventually made it really intelligible to the country at large, so that its acceptance would have been the acceptance of the New Tradition and not merely of another revival.¹⁷¹

His example of a New Pioneer in America is Neutra (1892–1970), featured in both WISMA1 and 2. Hitchcock argues that his drawing for an unbuilt Project for a Skyscraper (1927, used as the book’s cover and concluding image)¹⁷² “came nearer to accomplishing the feat of making its engineering a new way of architecture than any other.” The emphasis on “engineering” does not denote strict functionalism, however. Rather, he stresses that Neutra’s work “illustrates that the new manner can cope individually and effectively with American conditions.” He also praises the architect as an “urbanist”, technician, and architect with “an integrity of aesthetic expression only found in the best work of Wright within the New Tradition.” (He contradicts himself, however by judging that his paper architecture is superior to his built works.)¹⁷³

Also relevant to the WISMA story is his 1929 opinion of Wright: “It is particularly in the work of Wright that the history of the New Tradition in the twentieth century is summed up in America.”¹⁷⁴ In the 1948 symposium, however, the architect is claimed by

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁷² Ibid., Figure 58, n.p.

¹⁷³ Ibid., all quotes from 204.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 104.

both Barr and Hitchcock for the International Style. Hitchcock does so by way of Wright's expressive range, concluding that

he is less of an enemy of the International Style than he claims to be, and that there are many possibilities of expression within the frame of reference of modern architecture.¹⁷⁵

All this said, in both the 1929 book and 1948 symposium Hitchcock carefully qualifies every assertion, maintaining an historian's distrust of conclusions. But even twenty years on, his insistence upon an open-ended interrelationship between New Tradition and New Pioneers indicates how his complex thesis was essentialized by Barr and Johnson, for purposes of promulgation, into the 1932 International Style show. In this way *What Is Happening to Modern Architecture?* adds to the story of WISMA a small step towards self-criticality by the museum, spurred by the consequences of oversimplifying a complex movement for the sake of promoting it—crucially misbalancing “effective” and “true” in the making of a “pragmatic rhetoric” of the IS show.

Unpublished WISMA Manuscript (1955)

This institutional reflectiveness is taken another step when, in the mid-fifties, the museum considers—and ultimately rejects—integrating the critique into a new WISMA. This takes the form of a manuscript penned by Scully.¹⁷⁶ It is submitted through Johnson to Drexler in 1955, a year before Drexler's appointment as chief curator and during a period in which Johnson remains influential in the department. Meanwhile Scully is becoming established at Yale, where he has been teaching for eight years and

¹⁷⁵ Barr Jr. and others.

¹⁷⁶ A&D Files.

developing an alternative approach to modernism.¹⁷⁷ The typescript can be characterized broadly as an expansive, liberal humanist history that both confirms and challenges MoMA's positivism. Why is Scully's manuscript rejected, especially given the absence of an alternative? The most likely reason is that like Mumford before him, Scully's unreconstructed humanism and nascent ambivalence about modernism contradict the MoMA ethos. His vision, while generally affirming modernism as a heroic enterprise, is simply too historical, lyrical, and socially conscious for the museum's taste.

Tracing the Scully manuscript begins with a 2003 essay collection, in which editor Neil Levine states that

Scully had become quite close to Henry Russell Hitchcock by the late 1940s and through him met Philip Johnson. Sometime between 1950 and 1952 they apparently convinced Alfred Barr...that their young protégé should be commissioned to write a history of modern architecture for [MoMA] as a sequel to *The International Style* [catalog]....Barr scotched the idea when he found the draft...not to his liking.¹⁷⁸

It is unclear when or why the manuscript is "scotched." In department files, correspondence dates back to at least March 1955, when Johnson has a copy of "*What is a Modern Painting*" [sic] sent to Scully.¹⁷⁹ Over the next several months the prospective author sends many photo requests to architects. The number and tone of the requests ("The Museum has asked me to write a short book called '*What Is Modern Architecture.*'")¹⁸⁰ indicates that it is a viable project long in the making. Besides that, however, a thorough but not exhaustive search yields no other documentation in the

¹⁷⁷ For a biographical sketch see James Stevenson, "Profiles: What Seas What Shores," *New Yorker*, no. February 18 (1980). archives.newyorker.com/?i=1980-02-18#folio=043 (accessed November 28, 2011).

¹⁷⁸ Vincent Scully and Neil Levine, *Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (Princeton: Princeton, 2003), 74–5.

¹⁷⁹ A&D Files.

¹⁸⁰ A&D Files.

departmental files or MoMA Archives. Queries to Scully in late 2008 and early 2009 yield no response. Nor does a query to Levine in mid-2009.

Rejected by the museum, the manuscript becomes a historiographic palimpsest. Scully adapts it into several other forms, in particular the book *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy*, published in 1961 and significantly revised in 1974.¹⁸¹ Both editions state that it is drawn from a 1957 lecture—with no mention of the MoMA background.¹⁸²

That the manuscript undermines the museum's master narrative is evinced by two particular challenges: Scully's critique of the dehumanizing aspects of industrialized architecture and the placement of modernism's origins in the Baroque period. Comment here is limited to manuscript markup: pencil tics (indicated here as [*tic*]) and question marks (indicated as [?]) are noted alongside several passages on one of three file copies. To aid interpretation of the marks, line breaks are retained here. The sixty-four-page typescript is organized as follows:

- I. Architecture and Modern Engineering
- II. Freedom and Order
- III. The Challenge of Urban Life
- IV. The Ultimate Continuities
- V. Style and Meaning
- VI. The Monument and the Self

Section I immediately marks a departure from the simplistic, now-oriented WISMA1 approach. In the excerpt below, for example, the social role of architecture is emphasized ("human" and its variants seem to appear in every sentence) and Classicism is invoked as readily as in its predecessor, however Scully's approach is

¹⁸¹ Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy* (New York: Braziller, 1961); Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy*, Rev. ed. (New York: Braziller, 1974).

¹⁸² Scully and Levine, *Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, 2003, 74–5.

abstract, replete with epic metaphors, and requires knowledge of specialized architectural terms.

The Greek temple was the house of a humanly conceived god, whose presence freed humanity from the terrors of fate and the [tic] monstrous. Thus the peripteral colonnade dignifies the old [tic] megaron house and asserts, in the space of nature, the stereometric abstraction of an order humanly conceived.¹⁸³

As in WISMA1, Classicism figures into the reification of modernism, but in sharp contrast to the functionalist cooptation of Vitruvius, here modernism is a new chapter in the heroic saga of Western man. The journeys of Odysseus and Agamemnon become metaphors for the modern commute, in which the urban populace “submit[s] twice each day, like epic heroes, to the fantastic odysseys of parkway and suburban railway line.”¹⁸⁴ To today’s reader, this “invention of tradition”¹⁸⁵ is as questionable as in WISMA1.

Next the text addresses industrialization and urbanization, appearing at first to maintain the positivist materialism promulgated by Pevsner, Gideon, and the WISMAs. It turns quickly, however, to its dehumanizing effects, in which the modern era

has been both complicated and assisted by modern engineering technology. Such technology has been the most characteristic offspring of industrialism, democracy, and building programs for mass populations. Vast, undifferentiated spaces [?] have in a way [tic] been easier to imagine and to resolve in form than have the more complex programs [?] which involve human individuality or city order. In the new spaces the group begins to become undifferentiated; the problem resolves itself into one of engineering calculation. Such programs...partially absolved [modern man] from responsibility to wrestle with [tic] the world on any terms but those of his technical specialty. He is thus in some measure released from the crushing load of humanism....¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Vincent Scully, *What is Modern Architecture?*, Unpublished manuscript, A&D Files (June 1955), 1.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983).

¹⁸⁶ Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy*, 1961, 6.

In Section II Scully establishes his career-long position linking modernism to the Baroque, a sophisticated argument that further complicates the positivist lineage. Someone's disapproval of this approach is suggested by pencil marks in two sections. The first invokes Piranesi as the origin of modern architecture's struggle between "freedom and order." Scully writes cryptically:

[?] The orbits are in collision; the objectives for movement are unknown, and movement itself takes on a kind of threat.¹⁸⁷

The anonymous editor's difficulty with Scully's complication of materialism is further indicated in this passage on the Gothic pavilion at Stowe:

[a] blow against the ancient European concept of urban order as the bearer [*tic*] of civilization. It produces [*tic*] Rousseau and the noble savage and, to [*tic*] some extent, the romanticism of the frontier. it migles [*sic*] with [*tic*] nineteenth-century materialism and scientism to produce the concept of the organic. It reacts against both the ideal order of Romantic-Classicism and the real chaos of the new industrial cities. Thus it produces the suburb, designed on picturesque principles of asymmetry and variety.¹⁸⁸

One can see why Scully's point of view would be problematic for an institution promulgating functionalism, large-scale urbanism, and the embrace of industrialized life, while maintaining persistent ambivalence about the organicism of Frank Lloyd Wright (who was just as ambivalent about the museum).¹⁸⁹ Scully instead sings a ballad of the "primitive," the picturesque, romantic Classicism, tempered industrialization, and Wright's Usonian fantasies.

Based upon this indirect evidence, one can speculate that the manuscript is "scotched" for de-emphasis on formal qualities and disregard for International Style

¹⁸⁷ Scully, *What is Modern Architecture?*, June 1955, 4.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸⁹ See for example Kaizen, 2004.

tenets. Or perhaps Barr feels that the passionate tone is too far removed from the museum's by-then tempered institutional voice, especially that of Drexler.

In his 1974 book revision Scully goes further, largely rejecting a positivist history. Long free of MoMA baggage, he adds an additional section reassessing the movement. Introducing "Twelve Years After: The Age of Irony," he contrasts the "Americanized version of existential idealism" of the first edition with the "rather sardonic empiricism not untouched by disillusionment and anger"¹⁹⁰ of the second. This disillusionment concerns a turn from monumentality to brutalism, failed urban redevelopment projects, and "puristic solutions to anything."¹⁹¹ Instead, "With the passing of the heroes" such as Corbusier and Kahn, Scully looks to Robert Venturi (and presumably the unacknowledged Denise Scott Brown) who "disavowed idealism and architectural heroics alike in favor of a renewed, if ironic, acceptance of reality...."¹⁹²

Thus both Scully and Drexler first deny, then eventually address ambivalence about the movement roughly in parallel. Scully's first edition and WISMA2 are issued within a year of each other (1961 and 1962) and the second edition is published within several years of the equally reflective *Transformations* (1974 and 1979). But at the time of WISMA2 Scully offers a soft modernism that the museum still can't soft sell. Ironically, this paean to democracy and individual freedom resonates strongly with Barr's *What Is Modern Painting?* (Chapter 2). By rejecting the manuscript the museum also rejects an approach that is in many ways true to Barr's humanistic modernism.

¹⁹⁰ Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy*, 1974, ix.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 52.

What Is Modern Architecture? (WISMA2) CE, 1962–1975

By the early 1960s MoMA has thoroughly institutionalized modern architecture and Drexler's WISMA2 confirms it. The show just as readily promulgates—but also subtly undermines—by-then canonical modernism amidst increasingly prevalent debate about the movement. Twenty years after WISMA1, these same debates persist regarding timeless or historically situated modernism, the relative value of utility and aesthetics, and social relevance across the American class spectrum. Development documents show Drexler striving to harmonize major directions of the maturing movement—and the debates they represent—into a viable master narrative. Evidence for this is found in development documents, specifically a series of changes to grouping, sequence, images, and text. The process resonates with WISMA1 and corresponds to Drexler's particular difficulty with three areas in the sequence, which I call pivot points. These pivots reveal the curator trying to make sense of the present and to theorize a possible future for modernism by leveraging the movement's past.

Analysis of these tensions is supplemented with references to several of Drexler's other shows, in particular *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (1979). The chapter concludes by positioning it as a philosophical next step and key component in Drexler's—and MoMA's—legacy, in particular the way it marks a turning point in the museum's attitude to the architectural history it helps to create. I conclude that WISMA2 represents a final attempt by MoMA to downplay modernism's contradictions, an overcompensatory effort disseminated at the very moment that the movement's failures are spawning alternative, critical histories.

Drexler does this primarily through images. Through this fundamentally visual way of thinking, in concert with his publishing and curatorial background, Drexler intimately (if at first unselfconsciously) demonstrates understanding of media's powerful

role in contemporary American life and in the dissemination of architectural ideas. I posit that it is no accident that he is being drawn intellectually to the role of images in key postmodern notions of mediation, spectacle, and institutional power. Building on Felicity Scott's account of Drexler's "postmodern turn,"¹⁹³ I argue that the curator's tendency to think about architecture through images is integral to the turning point itself. I demonstrate this through evidence of his nascent consciousness of photography's "truth effect" and the way that this critical awareness calls into question the ostensibly self-evident truths of modern architecture. I conclude that Drexler becomes postmodern *through* images, and that WISMA2 presages the turn.

The next sections put the exhibition in context with post-war American architecture and sketch a biography of Drexler, emphasizing how his background influences WISMA2. Next, a description of the exhibition content is followed by close analysis of the development progress, supporting the argument for WISMA2 as an attempt to reconcile paradoxical ideas about the movement. The chapter ends with a discussion of photography as a key element in Drexler's shift towards a postmodern point of view.

Context

By 1962 the average American has experienced both successes and failures of modern architecture. He is likely to encounter an effective post-war school, hospital, or government building, but is just as likely to witness heavy-handed slum clearance, Corbusiesque vertical ghettos, and white-flight suburban sprawl. Meanwhile, Cold War

¹⁹³ Felicity Scott, "When Systems Fail: Arthur Drexler and the Postmodern Turn," *Perspecta* 35 (2004).

baby boomers are growing up immersed in space-race media and technology, yet once of age, some react to it by reinventing the Arts and Crafts Movement, Art Nouveau, and vernacular architecture.

This reaction extends to the critical community as well, building upon earlier commentary of Mumford and Hudnut. For example, a year before WISMA2 Nikolaus Pevsner's student Reyner Banham publishes the revisionist *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*,¹⁹⁴ followed a year later by Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of American Cities*.¹⁹⁵ This period also witnesses the birth of Team 10 and the death of CIAM.¹⁹⁶ Less well known but characteristic of this climate is a recently-published 1966 radio talk by Pevsner outlining a hypothetical revision of his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, one that accounts for the Expressionism he purposely omitted in the first edition.¹⁹⁷ The timing is crucial, for this moment marks the beginning of the end of the very history reified by MoMA and promulgated by WISMA2.

By the time of WISMA2 the CE program has been subsumed by the Cold War-era International Program (IP). Courter has been gone for over a decade¹⁹⁸ and D'Amico's influence is fading. While education and popularization remain a museum priority, CE and IP are increasingly oriented to a more adult and global audience. The

¹⁹⁴ Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York: Praeger, 1960). For an in-depth analysis of their respective attitudes see Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism* (Cambridge: MIT, 2008).

¹⁹⁵ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, 1961).

¹⁹⁶ Max Risselada and Dirk Heuvel, eds., *Team 10 1953-1981: In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: NAI, 2005).

¹⁹⁷ Nikolaus Pevsner, "Anti-Pioneers," in *Pevsner on Art and Architecture: The Radio Talks* (London: Methuen, 2002).

¹⁹⁸ Smith.

WISMA2 message is more sophisticated, but it still strives to draw in viewers through accessible text and dramatic imagery.

Curator Arthur Drexler

Prior to analysis of the show, this brief biography of Drexler provides background on his career as an educator, promoter, and latent questioner of the modern canon. Drexler is an enduring figure in the Architecture and Design department. From his debut as a curator in 1951, promotion to Director in 1956, and retirement in 1985, his MoMA career spans three decades, witnessing the maturation and decline of International Style modernism. His curatorial legacy reflects this trajectory, from canonical exhibitions of the 1950s, the beginnings of a more expansive view in the 1960s with *Visionary Architecture* (1962) and publication of Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Modern Architecture* (1966), and finally to overt questioning of the canon in the 1970s and 1980s with the daring *École des Beaux-Arts* exhibition (1975) and *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (1979), concluding with shows such as *Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier* (1985).

Drexler attends New York City's High School of Music and Art and completes a year at Cooper Union, where he learns rendering, before entering the Army Corps of Engineers in 1942.¹⁹⁹ The influence of his engineering experience may be detected in the prevalence of structurally daring works in WISMA2 and other exhibitions. In another subtle connection to the show, one obituary suggests that Drexler's enthusiasm for informal teaching and exhibitions such as *Beaux-Arts* and *Transformations* are efforts to

¹⁹⁹ Lynes, 1973, 321–2.

inspire young architects and as such may reflect regrets about his own truncated education.²⁰⁰

After the war Drexler works as an architectural draftsman in New York and in 1947 joins the office of architect, designer, and critic George Nelson, where he designs furniture, including possibly the Herman Miller 4774 chair.²⁰¹ Through Nelson's influence Drexler is hired as a writer at *Interiors*: "noticing that Drexler had remarkable abilities, not necessarily including design, he [Nelson] suggested in 1950 that his colleagues at *Interiors* hire Drexler as architecture editor."²⁰² His tenure at the magazine may overlap with that of the iconoclastic Bernard Rudofsky, with whom he collaborates (and conflicts) at MoMA.²⁰³

His *Interiors* experience leads to MoMA via Johnson and then-curator Blake. Drexler meets Johnson when writing a (formalist) article on the Glass House.²⁰⁴ While writing another article²⁰⁵ Drexler meets Blake, who recalls:

Philip asked me if I could think of someone to take my place, and I told him of a young writer for *Interiors* magazine, Arthur Drexler, who had done an interesting piece about my museum project for Jackson Pollock. Philip hadn't heard of Drexler, but they met and liked each other, and Arthur replaced me at MoMA.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁰ Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, "Arthur Drexler Remembered by Colleagues and Architects," *Architecture* 76, no. 3 (1987): 36.

²⁰¹ Stanley Abercrombie, *George Nelson: The Design of Modern Design* (Cambridge: MIT, 1995), 311, note 22.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 56. Another source dates his hire to 1948. Articles with his byline date back to at least 1949. This catalog places Rudofsky at *Interiors* from 1946–1949: Architekturzentrum Wien, 2007, 287.

²⁰³ Architekturzentrum Wien, 2007. See above regarding conflicting sources.

²⁰⁴ Arthur Drexler, "Architecture Opaque and Transparent: Philip Johnson's Glass and Brick Houses in Connecticut," *Interiors & Industrial Design* 59, no. 3 (1949).

²⁰⁵ Arthur Drexler, "Unframed Space; a Museum for Jackson Pollack's [sic] Paintings," *Interiors* (1950).

²⁰⁶ Peter Blake, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

That these two articles lead to his MoMA career is arguably overdetermined, for both works are canonical modern showplaces and Drexler's choice to write about them demonstrates a nascent self-consciousness about exhibition and display. Moreover the theme of reflecting glass, a major element in the Pollock project and of course the Glass House, presages the theme of the reflective glass skin and its role in the simulacral experience of architecture featured decades later in *Transformations*.

Rudofsky is mentioned here as a possible influence upon Drexler's eventual ambivalence about canonical modernism. Rudofsky's career-long critique of modernist failings are a feature of his work at MoMA, as seen in the WIM inversion *Are Clothes Modern?* (1944–1945) and the quasi-anthropological *Architecture Without Architects* (1964–1965).²⁰⁷ At MoMA, Rudofsky and Drexler overlap for several years. Drexler inherits the strong-minded and flamboyant iconoclast, who has been peripherally involved with the museum since placing in the *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* competition of 1940–1941.²⁰⁸ Then, later in 1941 architecture committee member Philip Goodwin asks Rudofsky to “suggest some unhackneyed subjects for exhibitions,”²⁰⁹ and in 1960–1961 he is also contracted for a series of “didactic” circulating exhibitions,²¹⁰ for which he can control the “original concept, iconographic research and...everything needed to produce a given number of panels to be rented out....”²¹¹

The professional relationship between Drexler and Rudofsky is difficult to characterize. Andrea Guarneri asserts that in 1967 their relationship deteriorates over

²⁰⁷ Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: MoMA, 1964).

²⁰⁸ Eliot Noyes, *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* (New York: MoMA, 1941).

²⁰⁹ Bernard Rudofsky, *Prodigious Builders: Notes Toward a Natural History of Architecture with Special Regard to Those Species That Are Traditionally Neglected or Downright Ignored* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 366.

²¹⁰ Guarneri, 2003, 24.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

editorial and budgetary issues, exacerbated by the death of the diplomatic d'Harnoncourt who, she speculates, protects Rudofsky's independence.²¹² Such tensions are understandable given Rudofsky's interest in autonomy and Drexler's position as department head. Their differing styles could also be a cause of conflict, given Rudofsky's passionate approach and Drexler's remote manner. On another level, however, Drexler may conceivably be influenced by Rudofsky's linking of transhistorical and "timeless" building with the eternal present promised by the modern movement. He could also be influenced by Rudofsky's sophisticated use of imagery, especially photographs, to make compelling visual arguments.

Overview

The sixty-nine-panel exhibition travels from 1962 to 1970 and once more in 1975. It goes to forty-nine venues, ranging from the Boise Art Association in Idaho to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. It never shows at MoMA and no book is published. WISMA2 panels are more professionally fabricated than the glue-pot collage of its predecessor, reflecting consolidation of both modernist history and MoMA as an institution. Photos document a set of large panels (48 in. x 36 in., 122 cm x 91 cm) composed of photographs, plans, and text) and small panels (12 in. x 36 in., 30 cm x 91 cm) for titles, small illustrations, and text. The panels appear to be black-and-white, printed photographically on one continuous surface and mounted on a rigid support. They are essentially large-format photographs, reflecting one of several production methods made ubiquitous through commercial photography and then incorporated into museum display. Indeed, Drexler makes frequent use of such techniques. Like the

²¹² Ibid., 26.

WISMA1 book, the panel layout is “open plan,” with large and compelling photographs arranged in generous space. Despite this, the type is small, justified, and tightly leaded—the typography of magazines such as *Interiors* and not that of exhibition text panels.

According to a press release, the show is

designed to give students and interested laymen a background in those ideas which have played a major role in the development of modern architecture.... [It] shows the practical and theoretic sources of modern architectural style, and examines its basic characteristics through examples outstanding for their esthetic solution to problems of structure and function.²¹³

It is immediately evident that *structure*, *function*, and *esthetics* echo the *strength*, *utility*, and *beauty* of WISMA1. While this seems as straightforward as its predecessor, the show itself is more difficult to parse. It has no consistent organizing scheme, flirting with but never committing to conventions of chronology, movement, architect, country, or construction technique. In contrast to the simplistic Vitruvian triad, WISMA2 has over 25 headings including *Ritual Architecture* and *Practical Splendor*. In brief, the narrative is as follows:

The title panel greets viewers with a vertiginous aerial photograph of skyscrapers. (Figure 14) Compared to the can-do tone of WISMA1, the introductory text is remote but the message is similar:

Modern architecture...achieves the status of art when it organizes mass, space, light, and structure into an intelligible whole—an intellectually ordered environment which affects our emotions. But modern architecture differs from past work in its notion of what constitutes order; its use of materials; and the variety of its problems.

The starting point for this difference from the past is marked at nineteenth-century industrialization, exemplified by a materialist interpretation of the Crystal Palace

²¹³ CE 2.2.131.1.

(1851) and then by Art Nouveau and Secessionism (“the first break with historic styles”). The following panel concerns structural consequences of iron and steel (Chicago skyscrapers), then the narrative moves quickly to avant-garde reactions to the modern condition (Cubism, De Stijl, Futurism, and the Bauhaus). This is followed by a sequence of works by pre-war giants (Le Corbusier, Mies, Wright, and Alvar Aalto).

Next is a section on post-war skyscrapers (curtain-wall icons such as Mies’ Seagram Building, 1958). The narrative then scales up to city planning, beginning with the monumental Chandigarh (1956) and Brasília (1960) and followed by the merely large (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill’s Air Force Academy, 1959, and corporate office parks such as Eero Saarinen’s GM Technical Center, 1956).

The following section scales back down to panels on apartments (all European), a village hall by Aalto, (Säynätsalo, Finland, 1951), and a dormitory by Paul Rudolph (New Haven, 1961). This then shifts from quasi-public to private in *The American House*, which features the most examples of any category. In this section Richard Neutra’s Lovell House (1929) is followed by a panel of four strongly modern houses, including John Yeon and Albert Doyle’s Watzek House (1938, also featured in WISMA1). Crucially, the following panel breaks subtly with orthodoxy by juxtaposing Johnson’s rectilinear, volumetric Glass House (1949) with the curvy massing of Oscar Niemeyer’s house (Canoas, Brazil, 1953).

Following this is a sudden shift to *Organic Form*, in which the work of Antoni Gaudi and Erich Mendelsohn are compressed into one small panel, effectively minimizing pre-war Expressionism. The narrative then jumps immediately to post-war Expressionism, exemplified by Corbusier’s Ronchamp (1955) and the Guggenheim (1959, a placement that would have irked Wright). These lead in turn to three panels of *Ritual Architecture* (mostly churches) and then back to the rational with Louis Kahn’s Richards Medical Research Building (1961).

Once back in functionalist territory, there follows two panels on reinforced concrete shells (*Engineering*), two architect-engineers (Pier Luigi Nervi and Buckminster Fuller), and then a scaling up again to monumental engineering (highways and dams). The exhibition concludes by literally bringing the show back down to earth. Under the heading *Earth Into Architecture*, the final panel featured a dramatic work little known today: the Helicoide [Spiral] de la Roca Tarpeya, by Jorge Romero Gutierrez (Caracas, 1960).²¹⁴ Notable for taking advantage of a site between two mountains, the self-contained complex is a massive, tiered spiral built to incorporate housing, shopping, conference and exhibition space.²¹⁵

Development

The process of formulating the WISMA2 message is traced here through preparatory lists, layouts, images of the final panels, and the final checklist. No text drafts have surfaced. Changes within and between these sources reveal how ambivalence about the state of modernism is subsumed but not completely suppressed by Drexler himself.

Overarching WIM themes and their particular expression are the focus here. The question of closed versus open-ended modernism is evinced by a more historicist view (inclusion of Art Nouveau, Futurism, and Expressionism) and with it the suggestion that a more historically informed modernism can reinvigorate the movement. The theme of

²¹⁴ "Helicoide De La Roca Tarpeya, Caracas," *Baumeister* 58, no. 3 (1961); Jose Rosas, "Helicoide De Caracas," *Arq*, December, 2002; "Spiral City," *Time* (1960). time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,939671,00.html (accessed May 30, 2011).

²¹⁵ Despite press enthusiasm at the time, the complex not only fails, it becomes the headquarters and prison of the Venezuelan secret police (la Dirección General Sectorial de Inteligencia y Prevención or DISIP).

social utility in relation to aesthetics is found in several areas. As discussed below, the first concerns Drexler's difficulty arranging sequences about housing and houses. The most pointed is a small panel on pre-war Expressionism and the way that Drexler tries it in several different positions, attempting literally to find its place in the master narrative. The final instance is a concluding section that both lauds and critiques the role of engineering in contemporary practice.

Drexler develops the content and designs the panels. Department staff member Ellen Marsh, whose contribution appears to be more administrative than editorial, assists him. It is unusual for a curator, especially a chief, to orchestrate a CE, and there is some question about the wisdom of it. This is seen in a January 1961 memo from Marsh to soon-to-be CE Executive Director Waldo Rasmussen stating that "The latest word from Arthur...is that he will design the show. I trust this is final."²¹⁶ The concern may be based upon Drexler's difficulty with deadlines, and he lives up to his reputation: memos show a production schedule revised at least once, with increasingly alarmed urgings to meet it. The development process is also notable for the apparent lack of input from the Exhibitions Program or D'Amico, who is still in place if less influential than in the WISMA1 era.

The most revealing aspects of the editorial process²¹⁷ concern panel deletions and additions as well as panel resequencing. These demonstrate that the challenge is

²¹⁶ CE, II.2.131.1. Marsh to Rasmussen, January 3, 1961.

²¹⁷ Because some documentation is undated, the developmental chronology can't be traced precisely. This assesment assumes the most plausible chronological sequence of the following sources:
 January 3, 1962. Photo search list
 June 1. Typeface memo
 No date. Installation/production list 1
 July 20. Pre-typesetting checklist/
 No date. Installation/production list 2

not only the WIM question but also how to answer it in a clear and persuasive way. The narrative develops through a number of experiments with sequencing. These form the basis for analysis of the three larger debates (past/future, utility/aesthetics, high/low). To help explicate the resequencings, they are numbered and listed here schematically, with “->“ indicating movement from one panel or set of panels to the next.

Two sequences are explored in installation/production list 1 and the July 20 pretypesetting checklist. In both cases the first scenario is marked up to become the second. Prior to the markup the sequence is:

(1) apartments -> Lovell -> houses -> Johnson/Niemeyer -> village hall/dorm -> Gaudi/Mendelsohn -> “engineering shells” -> Ronchamp/Guggenheim -> TWA/garage -> churches -> Richards -> Nervi

After markup the sequence becomes:

(2) apartments -> village hall/dorm -> Lovell -> houses -> Johnson/Niemeyer -> Gaudi/Mendelsohn -> Ronchamp/Guggenheim -> TWA/garage -> churches -> Richards -> shells -> Nervi

Parsing this out, the village hall/dorm panel moves earlier in the sequence (between apartments and Lovell) and shells move towards the end (between Richards and Nervi). The first scenario uses the village hall/dorm to conclude the dwelling section, a clean break to prewar Expressionism, but then with the awkward segue into shells before reaching postwar Expressionism. The second scenario is smoother, with the quasi-public village hall/dorm as transition between public and private dwellings, then the

July 24. Blueprint layouts

No date. Panel photographs with verso resequencing

No date (between July 24 blueprints and September 12 opening). Final checklist

“Installation/production” refers to lists that cross-reference “installation” (viewing sequence) and “production” (assumed to mean fabrication sequence). “Blueprint layouts” refer to precise panel drawings indicating panel sizes, composition, and installation/production numbering. (Figure 16) “Panel photographs” denote actual and most likely final panels, though renumberings on the back of several photographs indicate some last-minute alterations.

switch to pre- and postwar Expressionism, with engineering shells as part of the shift back to rationalism.

To this point then, the sequencing appears to vary between two scenarios. The July 24 blueprints reveal additional complexities. An initial sequence is legible but subsequently overdrawn with numerous renumberings. (Figure 16). Except for an overall sense of agitation it is virtually impossible to follow the thought process. As initially drawn, the sequence is:

(3) apartments -> houses -> Johnson/Niemeyer -> village hall/dorm -> Ronchamp/Guggenheim -> shells -> churches -> Richards -> Gaudi/Mendelsohn -> Nervi

In this scenario the Lovell panel is absent. In its place, apartments and houses each have a panel. One of the many renumberings is:

(4) apartments -> houses -> Lovell -> Johnson/Niemeyer -> village hall/dorm -> Gaudi/Mendelsohn -> shells -> Ronchamp/Guggenheim -> TWA/garage -> churches -> Richards -> Nervi

This renumbering shows the Lovell panel drawn late in the process, even though it is play in all other scenarios. This suggests that it is deleted at one point and then restored to ease the transition from housing to houses, or to originate contemporary houses in early modernism. The village hall/dorm again reverts to the sequencing of scenario 1, returning to the position between Johnson/Niemeyer and Gaudi/Mendelsohn. It is difficult to understand the thinking behind this particular sequence because there is little to link the hall or dorm to either of the pendant panels.

The final checklist ultimately reverts back to scenario 2:

(5) apartments -> village hall/dorm -> Lovell -> houses -> Johnson/Niemeyer -> Gaudi/Mendelsohn -> Ronchamp/Guggenheim -> TWA/garage -> churches -> Richards -> shells -> Nervi

The village hall/dorm has now come to rest before the Lovell House as the transition between mass and single-family dwelling. Johnson/Niemeyer now conclude the house section, making a sharp break to prewar Expressionism. TWA/garage now serves as part of the postwar Expressionist continuum, between Ronchamp/Guggenheim and churches. The shell game ends by returning TWA/garage to the functionalist/engineering finale between Richards Medical and Nervi. All these scenarios end with an abrupt shift back to functionalism and rationalism, signaled by the Richards Building and continuing as a more or less materialist sequence of engineer-architect collaboration and engineered structures, concluding with the Helicoide.

These struggles can be seen as a microcosm of issues facing Drexler, MoMA, and a larger critical community all trying come to terms with the second half of the modernist century. If Drexler is seeking a grand unification of *utility*, *strength*, and *beauty*, the process shows that he never quite ties together the social, material, and expressive directions of the movement. That he tries to do so all at once speaks to the ambitions of modernism and the difficulty of maintaining its ideology in the postwar period, even by those heavily invested in its perpetuation.

The visual nature of this process is also significant, found in even the earliest development documents. Based on available evidence, it is clear that in comparison to the heavy textual development of WISMA1, its successor is thoroughly visual. This is evinced by the search for and use of photography. The influence of published photographs in particular is indicated by a search list and numerous queries indicating pointed editorial directives for subjects, compositional elements, cropping, and drama. The taste for compelling images is found in one list, which specifies a “cold, hard, zippy” Roman bath, a “vast, simple” dam, a corn refining plant (“the busier and more dramatic the better”), Nervi’s “most dramatic ceilings,” and “recent, dramatic pictures” of

Chandigarh.²¹⁸ The results, as seen in the final panels, constitute virtual billboards for modernism.

Images are drawn from wide-ranging sources, first in 1961 for the planned book, then again in 1962 for the show. At least three photos are lifted directly from G. E. Kidder Smith's newly published *New Architecture of Europe*.²¹⁹ Staffs also pursue an image from Siegfried Giedion's *Space, Time, and Architecture*.²²⁰ A book by Frederick Gutheim is sought for an Aalto image, a colleague offers to provide a book with a Ronchamp image, the *New Yorker* is mentioned regarding a dam, and the image of a corn refining plant is referenced from the MoMA catalog *Built in USA (1952)*.²²¹ Even two of Drexler's own photos illustrate the Chandigarh section.

Some searches yield the desired results. Regarding the skyscraper photo ultimately used as the title image, Marsh writes that "The photograph is remarkable. We are very pleased to have it. Mr. Drexler has every intention of using it..."²²² In another case, public relations staff at the Illinois Institute of Technology go so far as to stage an unobstructed photograph of Mies' Crown Hall (1956).²²³ A very specific search concerns early Chicago steel frame construction from the era of the 1893 World's Columbian exhibition:

we would like...a skyscraper under construction, with several floors completed and workers lifting the steel to higher levels...we want to show structure and construction in any steel or iron and steel building..."²²⁴

²¹⁸ CE, II.2.131.1.

²¹⁹ G. E. Kidder Smith, *New Architecture of Europe: An Illustrated Guidebook and Appraisal* (Cleveland: World, 1961).

²²⁰ CE, II.2.131.1. Marsh to Asko Salokorpi, May 2, 1962.

²²¹ CE, II.2.131.1.

²²² CE, II.2.131.1. Marsh to Albert A. [Stanly], November 27, 1961.

²²³ CE, II.1.131.1. Marsh to IIT, May-June 1962.

²²⁴ CE, II.2.131.1.

Similarly, the journal *Werk* is queried regarding “living quarters for Arabs” by Jean Hentsch-D’Espine (Casablanca, 1958). The curators look for an in-process image and a photo of the completed project (the latter is used).²²⁵ Even commercial images are sought, including “a very handsome advertisement with a photograph of the water tower for Lahti,²²⁶ designed by the firm of Reino Kioivula & Company.”²²⁷

The search leads to exchanges with influential figures. For example, Gideon links the availability of images to scholarly interest. In response to a request for an image of Henri Labrouste’s *Bibliothèque Nationale* (1868), Gideon writes, “Of course you don’t find copies of [illegible]. Nobody was before, nor afterwards interested in the object.”²²⁸ In another example, the Magnum agency makes use of an Elliott Erwitt photograph of Niemeyer’s Brasília (master plan 1957) contingent upon the photographer’s approval. Marsh suggests to Drexler:

if Erwitt balked or had any questions about releasing the photo...[Magnum] should tell Erwitt to phone you directly. If he calls, tell him you hate the place; I think it will help.²²⁹

They are apparently successful, for one of his photographs is featured in the Brasília section.

The image of Mies’ Farnsworth House (1951) used in the show is one of several used by the museum over the years. Comparing them reveals subtle editorial inflection, in particular an increasing emphasis on transparency, culminating in a 1980s staging by

²²⁵ CE, II.2.131.1. Ellen Marsh to Hentsch-D’Espine, January 10, 1962, referencing *Werk*, May 1957.

²²⁶ In Finland.

²²⁷ CE, II.2.131.1. Marsh to Pargas Kalkbergs Aktiebolag (a company related to Finska Mineral), September 25, 1963. A Scandinavian water tower is included in the show, but it is from Sweden, cribbed from Kidder-Smith’s survey.

²²⁸ CE, II.2.131.1. Gideon to Marsh, February 4, 1962.

²²⁹ CE, II.2.131.1. Marsh to Drexler, January 24, 1962.

Drexler. The sequence begins with the catalog for Johnson's *Mies van der Rohe* (MoMA 356, 1947), which shows an uncredited model photograph of the as-yet unbuilt work.²³⁰ The materials and lighting create the impression of a translucent—not transparent—floating box.

The undated WISMA2 image is by George H. Steuer. The elevation view emphasizes the linearity of the steel frame and the entry's dramatic cantilever. But the drapes are all closed, rendering the curtain wall as a virtual solid.

For the second edition of the Mies catalog (1953), the completed house is captured in an elegant Hedrich Blessing photograph.²³¹ The unnamed photographer celebrates the building's revolutionary transparency, but by choosing to also elucidate the building core and to leave one corner curtained, the effect is dampened. Jack Hedrich claims that Mies is at the shoot,²³² suggesting that the architect has an editorial role.

Drexler, however, has the last word, commissioning new photography from Hedrich Blessing for the *Mies van der Rohe Centennial Exhibition* (MoMA 1415, 1986).²³³ According to the photographer, Jon Miller,

The...reason they wanted the house rephotographed had to do with the way the curtains were arranged in the original photographs. In some views, the curtains masked the view through the corners of the house.²³⁴

Despite the earlier presence of Mies, Miller maintains that "Drexler was not as concerned with the history of the matter as he was with capturing on film that transparent

²³⁰ Philip Johnson, *Mies Van der Rohe* (New York: MoMA, 1947), 167.

²³¹ Philip Johnson, *Mies Van der Rohe*, 2nd ed. (New York: MoMA, 1953), 171.

²³² Hiss, 2000, 39.

²³³ The exhibition has no catalog.

²³⁴ Hiss, 2000, 39. Visual drama is most likely the primary motivation. The color images, complete with Fall foliage, are installed at large scale on a dark background, along with a model.

effect that is so much about Modernist architecture."²³⁵ In this way he pursues Barr's "practical rhetoric," privileging the "effective" (communicating the idea of transparent volume) over the "true" (communicating the architect's presumably literal point of view).

Much of the WISMA2 image search concerns the unrealized book. Clearly a publication is part of Drexler's initial plan, for early memos indicate that he plans the show as an "adaptation of book material,"²³⁶ which he considers a "new edition"²³⁷ of the WISMA1 publication. Mere months before the show opens, the blueprints indicate that a book is still considered viable. But no manuscript from this period has surfaced, nor have reasons for the absence of a publication. This is significant on two counts. First, catalogs published late, typical of Drexler, make curatorial intentions harder to grasp. This can negatively affect initial reception, as with the provocative *Beaux-Arts* and *Transformations* exhibitions. Second, the absence of a book clearly undermines the WIM goal of popularization.

Analysis

Returning to the exhibition, three points in the sequence demonstrate how Drexler tries to reconcile questions of social relevance, the historicity of modernism, and utility versus aesthetics. In the first pivot point, as I term it, organization of material on housing and houses echoes the class issues found in WISMA1, with persistent disparities of economics, power, and taste still requiring subtle treatment in an ostensibly populist exhibition. This is found in a sequence of two panels about mass housing, one on quasi-public structures, and four on single-family houses. A panel on semi-private

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ CE, II.2.131.1. October 27, 1961, November 7, 1961.

²³⁷ CE, II.2.131.1. Marsh to Tech Built, October 2, 1962.

spaces (referred to here as village hall/dorm) and the late insertion of the Lovell House panel (Figure 15) are especially telling. The vigorous resequencing of this segment demonstrates how Drexler struggles to assert that modernism remains an appropriate mode for both elite and mass dwellings.

Recognizing that this may be a tough sell, he anticipates disbelief with the “need not” apologia—just as in WISMA1. One reads that “it often comes as a surprise to American citizens that apartment houses need not be...dreary warrens....” and the “individual apartment need not be a mere cell cut off from the world.”

In contrast to WISMA1 there is no Usonian house—but no Levittown house either, demonstrating lack of a sanctioned alternative to pervasive suburban housing developments. Instead, choices are limited to bold European apartment complexes or individually designed houses (Eames, Lovell). Just as in WISMA1, Fallingwater is further distanced from everyday reality. Relegated to a historical section rather than the section on homes, as with WISMA1 the text stresses abstractions such as composition, structural daring, and aesthetic engagement of the landscape. Illustrated with the same Hedrich photograph, the text intones:

Abstract in its geometry and intellectual in its concept, Fallingwater seems a natural extension of its site. The building produces that sense of repose and simplicity characteristic of Wright’s architecture at its greatest.

Returning to the section on freestanding, commissioned houses, the Lovell House carries the most ideological baggage. Even without a gable or white picket fence, Neutra’s modernism appeals to viewers enchanted by California and the American Dream. The image itself suggests the aspirational: lower-class viewers might be drawn to the sheer size of the house and surrounding land, while some upper-class viewers might be attracted to the glamorous aesthetic.

But on a historiographic level, one finds that even decades after WISMA2 Drexler has difficulty placing Neutra in the canon. This multi-layered ambivalence is worth examining in both WISMA2 and in the context of the architect's 1982 MoMA retrospective.²³⁸ In WISMA2 Drexler acknowledges Neutra's role in disseminating the International Style, noting how he "contributed most to a way of designing houses that...spread around the world..." In the retrospective Drexler reinforces this, stating that the Lovell House

became for a while indispensable to the iconology of modern architecture.... In Europe by 1929 neither Gropius nor Breuer nor Mendelsohn had built houses of comparable sophistication. Mies had not yet built the Tugendhat or Berlin or Exposition houses; Le Corbusier had completed...only one [Villa Stein]...that offered an architectural image of equal conviction and...sophistication.²³⁹

The curator makes an explicit connection between image dissemination and canonization, remarking with some irritation (perhaps from his magazine stint) that "Since news of his work could be had only from professional journals, Neutra became perhaps too energetic in pressing photographs of each new house on editors everywhere."²⁴⁰ Lovell's postwar counterpart, the Eames House (1950), is represented by a small photo on the same panel; it too gained fame through publication, this time as an *Arts & Architecture* Case Study House.²⁴¹

Drexler's difficulties with Neutra run deeper still, extending to other curatorial decisions about his work. In the 1982 catalog, regarding the choice of Marcel Breuer

²³⁸ Arthur Drexler and Thomas S. Hines, *Architecture of Richard Neutra: From International Style to California Modern* (New York: MoMA, 1982).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁴¹ Esther McCoy and Museum of Contemporary Art, *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses* (Cambridge: MIT, 1998).

over Neutra for the 1949 exhibition house in the museum's garden, the curator writes that one reason for the choice is the desire to

suggest some continuity between the ideas of the 20s and the beginning of the 50s, rather than suggest that for houses the International Style no longer seemed quite adequate even to those architects most closely associated with it. Neutra, in becoming more regional than international, had at the same time become almost as idiosyncratic as Wright.²⁴²

Recognizing, then, that even by 1949 International Style modernism is threatened, Drexler establishes a defensive position. In response, he tries to cover all bases by choosing Breuer. Thus Neutra signifies "old" and Breuer signifies "young," a questionable construct. Next he reminisces that Breuer's butterfly roof is supposed to read as an inverted gable and is therefore a "friendly acknowledgment of tradition-bound neighbors." In fact the project is an unfriendly response to a Lustron aluminum house erected just a block south during the previous summer.²⁴³

Justifying the rejection of Neutra for the next garden house yields still more contradictions. According to Drexler the 1950 Ain House is an explicit attempt to compensate for negative public reception of its predecessor and to serve as "an alternative to the Levittown house." Drexler recounts that here, too, "Neutra was not considered suitable," presumably because his homes are private and pricey commissions.

Ironically, his difficulties with Neutra ultimately come full circle: in the retrospective, Drexler positions Scully's treatments of the architect as an index of

²⁴² Drexler and Hines, *Architecture of Richard Neutra: From International Style to California Modern*, 1982, 22. Recent scholarship explores the truly idiosyncratic effects of Reichian psychoanalysis upon iconic Neutra works. See Sylvia Lavin, *Form Follows Libido: Architecture and Richard Neutra in a Psychoanalytic Culture* (Cambridge: MIT, 2007).

²⁴³ Barry Bergdoll and Peter Christensen, *Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling* (New York: MoMA, 2008), 9–10.

negative critical opinion. He argues first that Scully's book on Wright²⁴⁴ downplays evidence of Neutra's influence upon his teacher by ignoring connections between the Lovell House and Fallingwater. Completing the historiographic cycle, Drexler then points out the omission of Neutra in the author's *Modern Architecture*—the very text rejected by the museum.²⁴⁵

The exhibition's second pivot point reflects the attempt to make sense of Expressionism in historiographic terms and in view of contemporary practice. This plays out in fraught attempts to place two panels, one the single small panel on Gaudi's Santa Coloma (1898–1914) and Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower (1924) and the second the large panel on Saarinen's TWA Terminal (1962).²⁴⁶

On a historiographic level, the final placement of Gaudi/Mendelsohn and TWA/garage admits Expressionism to the canon as a rationalization of postwar shifts away from the functionalist ethos. Specifically, Gaudi/Mendelsohn becomes the origin point for Ronchamp and the Guggenheim. Thus positioned, TWA/garage helps to legitimize other evocative postwar works. One sees this anticipated, but still unresolved, in Drexler's earlier appraisal of the terminal, found in the 1959 exhibition *Architecture and Imagery: Four New Buildings*:

Some architects believe that...uniformity truthfully reflects the decisive characteristics of technology in our time. Others, however, believe that just because technology...has imposed such overriding uniformity, it is increasingly desirable that a building's shape express some particular aspect of its purpose. An apartment house, they believe, should not look like an office building and a church should not look like a gymnasium.

²⁴⁴ Vincent Scully, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Brazillier, 1960).

²⁴⁵ Drexler and Hines, *Architecture of Richard Neutra: From International Style to California Modern*, 1982, 19.

²⁴⁶ Because this panel features a small inset on a New Haven parking structure by Paul Rudolph (1963), it is denoted here as TWA/garage.

Architects convinced that such distinctions are meaningful have...attempted to give their buildings a more individual character by choosing sculptural shapes such as domes, vaults, and massive columns or piers.²⁴⁷

Returning to WISMA2, the placement of TWA/garage admits but also effectively curtails this expressive trajectory by being relegated to the category of “Ritual Architecture.” In this construct

Most of the problems with which architects are confronted seem to require the use of rectilinear structures and spaces. But certain kinds of buildings lend themselves—indeed seem to require—a greater variety of emotional overtones than rational rectangularity affords.

By this way of thinking, emotionally evocative buildings such as churches may be sculptural. This is contradicted by a later panel, however, which features a variety of mostly utilitarian buildings evincing the same reinforced concrete shell structure. To this point one is led to think that “rational rectangularity” remains the only appropriate form for utilitarian buildings, but in the panel, clearly demarcated with the title *Engineering*, one finds a factory, a stadium, and an airplane hangar, but also a chapel, confusing the rational/irrational dichotomy.

The dichotomy is reinforced by the third pivot point, a panel on the then-new Richards Medical Research Laboratory. By placing it right after the church sequence it serves as the gateway to the final third of the show, in which the balance of utility and aesthetics is tipped firmly back towards the rational. The text lauds Kahn’s “refusal to abandon the functionalist ethics of modern architecture” by seeking to “to expand both functionalism and aesthetics by developing the service elements of his buildings so that they provide a visible record not only of how the building was made but of how it is

²⁴⁷ Arthur Drexler and Wilder Green, "Four New Buildings: Architecture and Imagery," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 26, no. 2 (1959). [jstor.org/stable/4058264](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4058264) (accessed March 1, 2009).

used.” Drexler could not have known then that time proves the building thoroughly dysfunctional.

Despite this return to the functionalist ethos, in the last third of the show the curator subtly questions the respective roles of engineers and architects in determining form. On the one hand, three panels celebrate the structural virtuosity of Nervi and Fuller, while another endorses works that “however determined by technological considerations, can be given a beauty of form attributable only to an engineer’s aesthetic intuition.” Drexler is less sanguine about highways, however, worrying about “the effects such constructions will have on the total environment, let alone on the art of architecture.” Taking a swipe at sprawl, he continues,

With its monumental piers trampling over two-story frame houses, the highway seems to deny the landscape around it, and yet it may perhaps be admitted that in this case the road is more beautiful than the houses it dwarfs.

For all this ambivalence about architect-engineer collaboration the show concludes, as did WISMA1, with a spiraling, self-contained environment—the Helicoide. Drexler crucially situates it between the past and several possible futures of modernism:

The future of architecture has been held to lie in closer attention to the lessons of history; or in exploitation of industrial technology and science; or in the development of forms more highly expressive of particular kinds of use.

This can be parsed into the three divergent paths: postmodernism (“lessons of history”), functionalism (“industrial technology and science”), and Expressionism (“expressive of particular kinds of use”). But rather than attempt to unify them, Drexler proposes a different direction, one that has no corollary in his other works or, for that matter, the WISMA1 ethos: he suggests the possibilities of “architecture as an extension of the earth itself...an improvement for human purposes of an existing landscape.” With a groundswell of revisionist critique then unsettling the establishment landscape, a spiral between two mountains is an apt metaphor for the fissures and switchbacks of WISMA2,

for answering the question of *What Is Modern Architecture?* places Drexler and MoMA between two formidable mountains: the rock of canonical modernism and the hard place ahead, the uncharted territory of its future.

Conclusion: *Transformations in Modern Architecture, 1979*

By the end of his MoMA career Drexler returns to history, specifically a postmodern approach to it. This chapter ends with a final argument: that developing a self-consciousness about photography is key to the curator's gradual shift to a postmodern point of view. I support this by examining his 1979 exhibition *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, positioning the show as a major component in Drexler's—and MoMA's—legacy, in particular the way that it marks a turning point in the museum's attitude to the architectural history it helped to create. As Felicity Scott puts it, by the 1970s Drexler is addressing

replacement of a supposedly coherent set of modernist codes and their determinate references by a set of knowingly ambiguous, allusive (and elusive) and decidedly unstable or multivalent ones.

This approach crucially “traced the impact on the discipline of historical forces” including the force of MoMA itself.²⁴⁸ I agree, concluding that *Transformations* in particular evinces a major conceptual shift from unreflective image use in the WISMA to overt recognition that photographic mediation is integral to any “view” of twentieth-century architecture. In a response to *Transformations* Drexler asserts that he doesn't believe “the half-truth that the medium is the message, but everyone must have seen that the medium influences the form that message can take,” and furthermore, being

²⁴⁸ Scott: 135.

surrounded by images “put[s] you in a different relation to them.”²⁴⁹ This gets to the core of his “postmodern turn,” as Scott terms it, bringing with it a new critical consciousness about the rhetorical power of mediation.

Drexler’s exhibitions consistently emphasize visual drama, from the use of spotlighting, projection, and light boxes to wall-sized photographs. With equal consistency, text is secondary. Emilio Ambasz observes that the curator “saw architecture as high art....and he therefore had a lingering distrust of ideology. For him the supreme misfortune occurred when the idea arrived before the image.”²⁵⁰ There are two ways to interpret Ambasz’s statement. On the one hand it confirms Drexler’s legacy as a formalist (he famously describes the automobile as “hollow, rolling sculpture”).²⁵¹ In this view, Drexler uses forms to illustrate history, not the other way around. But a more subtle interpretation is that through *Transformations* he comes to critical awareness that imagery carries ideology. Though his 1976 exhibition *Architecture of the École des Beaux Arts* is better known, I submit that *Transformations* is the more direct reckoning with canonical modernism, for only in this show does Drexler frankly address the role of institutionalization in modernist discourse and the role of photography in institutionalization.

The show is organized around eclectic themes of *Sculptural Form*, *Sculptural Tradition*, and *Regional Vernacular*, with a jumble of adjacent sections on architectural elements such as pyramids, bunkers, baroque features (a nod to Scully), neoclassical affinities, Islamic historicism, and geometrical openings. Installation shots show an explosion of black-and-white photographs on angled panels (recalling Herbert Bayer’s

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 140.

²⁵⁰ Dean: 36.

²⁵¹ Arthur Drexler, *8 Automobiles: An Exhibition Concerned with the Esthetics of Motorcar Design* (New York: MoMA, 1951).

Field of Vision technique).²⁵² It literalizes Drexler's observation that being surrounded by images puts one in a different relation to them: Scott describes being "encircled by a dizzying proliferation of curtain walls and Expressionistic structural forms organized as multiple small bits of information."²⁵³ Within this is a darkened gallery featuring backlit color images of glass-sheathed office buildings.²⁵⁴ Textual elements offer little orientation, with minimal labeling (the catalog, of course, is late). One could interpret these disorienting effects as failings on Drexler's part, but another interpretation is that of he is trying to convey the chaotic state of modernism in the 1970s.

In WISMA2 photography is intended to be transparent, but only with *Transformations* does Drexler recognize the need for *critical* transparency, making explicit that

Information about buildings depends upon surrogate materials—photographs, models, drawings—and the manner in which images are selected and organized is central to the selection of buildings for this book, as it was for the exhibition that preceded it.²⁵⁵

On the one hand he appears to reject a strict Benjaminian/McLuhanist/ Venturian belief that images become signifiers independent of their referent. On the other hand, his belief that media influence "the form [a] message can take" can be interpreted as a new awareness that media—and the curator who uses them—*mediate*. They speak a truth but not *the* truth to which canonical modernism aspires.

This new self-awareness is confirmed in the indirect overturning of the Vitruvian rhetoric, for in *Transformations* the triad is refuted word-for-word. Here *utility*, *strength*,

²⁵² For background on this technique see Staniszewski, 1998.

²⁵³ Scott: 139–40.

²⁵⁴ An additional installation commissioned from Gaetano Pesce is canceled two days before the opening.

²⁵⁵ Drexler, *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, 1979, 7.

and *beauty* become *logical*, *technical*, and *emotional*—then replaced by a new trinity of *crazy*, *wild*, and *camp*:

an architecture based on objective analysis alone is impossible—emotionally, logically, and even technically. Modern architecture has thus had a history of trying to escape from the internal contradictions of its own philosophy... Today 'functional' has no place in serious discourse about... architecture.... 'Strong' [and] 'tough'... describe qualities presently less gratifying than those now designated by 'crazy,' 'wild,' and 'camp.'²⁵⁶

At the time, Kenneth Frampton correctly identifies the rhetorical implications of the photography but interprets it negatively, arguing for the value of direct experience and lamenting the reduction of built form “first by the processes of modern building production and then by the techniques of photographic reproduction.” He concludes that this “admass” experience is merely a “redeeming mask” over the decline of high modernism.²⁵⁷ Drexler clearly agrees about the decline but identifies the trend as an important new perspective: “the modern movement in architecture as understood by its pioneers is now over,” but in its place he sees an opportunity to “[focus] attention on the nature of modernism” by interrogating “the way we see buildings and talk about them.”²⁵⁸ Thus in *Transformations* he is more willing to embrace post-pioneer architecture, considering it in historiographic terms and exploring its effects upon built form.

Frampton's reference to advertising, however, returns to a key issue of architectural photography. As in the WISMAs, the mass of photographs in *Transformations* is overwhelmingly promotional, made on behalf of architects, often in conjunction with advertisers or architecture magazines. The catalog uncritically acknowledges that “Photographs... were, in most cases, provided by the architect or

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 3, 5.

²⁵⁷ Kenneth Frampton, “Blow Up,” *Skyline* 2, no. 1 (1979): 6.

²⁵⁸ Drexler, *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, 1979, 3.

owner, to whom we are most grateful."²⁵⁹ However necessary, such images are staged to show a work at its best. They also overwhelmingly emphasize spatial drama, a power Drexler clearly incorporates into display. But as Frampton points out, this comes at the expense of observing actual human experience. Then as now, architectural images are constructed to eliminate people, unpleasant site conditions, or evidence of failure. Because most photos are made at the moment a work is completed, the effects of time upon structure and site are also absent.²⁶⁰

While conscious of these issues Drexler is too much part of the system to refuse promotional images. This is unfortunate, for viewers often fail to recognize the bias.²⁶¹ The catalog is more reflective, dwelling at length upon the role of publication in the promulgation and reception of architecture:

Professional journals whose primary purpose is to document what seems to be the best work must make their selections within the limits imposed by a fixed number of pages. Extensive presentation of one building necessarily crowds out many others; the equal documentation of many buildings tends to subordinate them as members of a class.²⁶²

Thus Frampton is factually and philosophically correct that Drexler

barricade[s] himself within a palisade of architecture magazines from the past twenty years, each one provisionally ticketed at the appropriate page for the final dispensation of the all-seeing eye.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 167.

²⁶⁰ For the opposite approach see Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built* (New York: Viking, 1994).

²⁶¹ Commissioning independent photographs is a recent trend. One MoMA example is a series by Richard Pare, found in Richard Pare and Jean-Louis Cohen, *Lost Vanguard: Russian Modernist Architecture, 1922-1932* (New York: Monacelli, 2007). Another is the explicitly manipulated images of Thomas Ruff, discussed in Thomas Ruff and Ronald Jones, "A Thousand Words: Thomas Ruff Talks About 'L.M.V.D.R.,' Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe," *Artforum* 39, no. 10 (2001).

²⁶² Drexler, *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, 1979, 7.

²⁶³ Frampton: 16.

Blake also observes the link, declaring the catalog to be “little more than one of those year-end, single-subject issues that *Life Magazine* used to assemble....”²⁶⁴

Frampton goes so far as to say of the catalog that the “coffee-table book format has been blown up to the scale of an exhibition.”²⁶⁵

The catalog reveals a surprise, however, adding a final layer to the WISMA palimpsest. In the section *Elements: Parapets*, one finds the familiar Hedrich image of Fallingwater—one of only two pre-war works in the entire catalog.²⁶⁶ (Figure 17) This one resonant photograph marks how a means of promoting modernism becomes a means for questioning it. It demonstrates how, in the WISMAs and *Transformations*, architecture, the museum, and communications media in combination do more than simply “influence the form the message can take.” Rather, both the medium and mediators influence the message itself.

A decade after WISMA2, Drexler resolves the overarching question of modernism as a fixed or ongoing movement by returning it to history. He commits to the idea that modernism can continue to be a viable movement through, in part, insightful use of the past, and by giving modernism a past, Drexler believes that it can have a future. Therefore, as Vidler puts it, “historians of the modern movement” (including this writer) “might then be seen not only as contributing to our historical knowledge of earlier phases of the modern [but also] as instances of the processes of modernity’s self-reflection....”²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Peter Blake, “Review,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 41, no. 1 (1982). jstor.org/stable/989791 (accessed November 23, 2008).

²⁶⁵ Frampton: 6.

²⁶⁶ Drexler, *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, 1979, 124. The other is Mies’ Glass Skyscraper model (1922).

²⁶⁷ Vidler, 2008, 200.

CHAPTER 2. *WHAT IS MODERN PAINTING?* (WIMP) BOOK AND CE, 1943–1988

The amount of time you are able to devote to unimportant matters and to philosophical discussion...has been a constant source of wonder to me.... Your only original literary contribution has been What Is Modern Painting—a work of 38 pages, which engaged your attention for nearly five months.

—Stephen C. Clark, Board Chairman, to Alfred Barr²⁶⁸

[P]ressure is brought to bear on museums to earn their way by making themselves into popular community centers [but also] to raise their standards of research and publication. Both can be done...providing we have enough faith to believe in the value of both and enough skill to persuade others to agree with us.

—Alfred Barr²⁶⁹

The debut of Alfred Barr's booklet *What Is Modern Painting?* (WIMP) in 1943 marks the arrival of the longest lived, most widely disseminated, and most variably packaged WIM, encompassing a book (10 editions, 1943–1988), circulating exhibition (1944–1956, 422 venues), MoMA show (MoMA 280, 1945), and a slide talk (1944–1945, 235 venues). If *What Is Modern Architecture?* (Chapter 1) represents two curators' single pronouncements on pre-and postwar modern architecture, WIMP is Barr's iterative process of institutionalizing a core ideology of modern art. This chapter examines the process, arguing that WIMP evinces a fundamental tension of the WIM series: between dogma and discourse, "effective" and "true."

WIMP is analyzed here in terms of this key tension, focusing on the wide variety of textual, visual, and material strategies used by the museum to "persuade others to agree" with the modernist message. In the process, related themes characteristic of the WIM series as a whole emerge. These include the question of fixed versus ongoing

²⁶⁸ Harriet Bee and Michelle Elligott, *Art in Our Time: A Chronicle of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2004), 181.

²⁶⁹ Alfred H. Barr Jr., "Research and Publication in Art Museums," in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.* (New York: Abrams, 1986), 206.

modernism, tensions between elite curatorial and popular educational discourse, the notion of universal visual language, elisions of art and commerce, and especially the uncritical use of proxy media for rhetorical purposes.

Reflecting WIMP's long gestation and reach, this chapter is organized into five chronological sections. The first accounts for precursors by Barr, tracing the accretion of ideas, formats, and persuasive methods that coalesce into WIMP. The second, war-era phase marks the culmination of these efforts into the WIMP book, exhibition, and other manifestations. The third phase is notable for wider distribution and several design changes in the immediate postwar period. The fourth phase reflects consolidation of the WIMP message and the museum's identity in the 1950s. The fifth and final phase evinces the decline of the series beginning in the 1960s, showing how the message becomes fixed in time as new art movements develop—including movements directly critical of WIMP's premises. I conclude that over its long life, and of all the WIMs, WIMP best exemplifies the museum's fraught attempt to balance old guard and avant-garde, dogma and discourse, "effective" and "true."

Phase 1: Precursors, 1926–1934

The evolution of WIMP in the early 1940s must be understood through precursors of the 1920s and 1930s. Promoting modern art originates in Barr's pre-MoMA period at Harvard and Wellesley in the late 1920s, involving lectures, the first American university course on modern art, teaching portfolios, and several exhibitions.²⁷⁰ Barr begins thinking about the relationship between lecture and display as early as a 1925

²⁷⁰ The most comprehensive account of Barr's pre-MoMA period is Kantor, 2002.

talk at Harvard, regarding himself “as a showman carefully arranging an exhibition.”²⁷¹ In terms of technique, at the time conventional lantern slides are limited to black and white,²⁷² but “since modern art cannot be fully understood without color,”²⁷³ he seeks out print reproductions. Looking back in 1947 he recalls:

I used large color reproductions for teaching purposes. Artists were better reproduced on the whole at that time than they are now for there were very good reproductions available of Bonnard, Feininger, Leger, De Chirico, Kandinsky and Chagall. These were mostly through German publishers though our own *Dial* portfolio was a great help too.²⁷⁴

A relatively new mass-market product type in the U.S. in the late 1920s,²⁷⁵ as a dissemination device the portfolio format meets several practical needs: plates can be addressed serially (as in a book), as individual works propped up or hand-held for close examination, as framed prints, or as proxies in an exhibition. All of these techniques are incorporated into WIMP manifestations.

Wellesley and Harvard Shows, 1926–1927

²⁷¹ Ibid., 97.

²⁷² Kodachrome slides date from the 1930s. See Richard Benson, *The Printed Picture* (New York: MoMA, 2008), 196.

²⁷³ Kantor, 2002, 101.

²⁷⁴ AHB [AAA: 2172:366]. Barr to Jane Sabersky, February 3, 1947. The portfolio, titled *Living Art*, is discussed further below.

²⁷⁵ The centrality of reproductions to CE is clear from its archival presence, which includes an entire card file devoted to individual works. As a promotional tool this is the CE equivalent of the A&D Photo Files (Chapter 1). See CE, I.5, “Color Reproductions [of Works of Art].” Also, the MoMA Library holds a file on the U.S. reproductions market, including catalogs and articles published from 1909 to the late 1940s. Most likely these are consulted by Wheeler and others regarding purchase and production. See “[Color Reproduction of Works of Art: Catalogs, Checklists, and Listings of Reproductions for Sale]”, MoMA Library, arcade.nyarc.org:80/record=b738785~S8 (accessed December 12, 2009).

1926 and 1927 are pivotal years for Barr and the future museum. As is well documented, Barr teaches his first U.S. modern art course and corresponds about exhibiting modern art with Catherine Dreier of the Société Anonyme. At Harvard and Wellesley he organizes two formative shows. The first, at Wellesley, is *Exhibition of Progressive Modern Painting from Daumier and Corot to Post-Cubism* (EPMP, April 1927)²⁷⁶ discussed below as the first major WIMP precursor. The second is a little-noted show of *Dial* portfolio plates he organizes a few months before EPMP. Kantor places the show, titled *Living Art*, at the Fogg in 1926 and then Wellesley in January 1927.²⁷⁷ As precursors to WIMP, together EPMP and *Living Art* introduce key WIM issues concerning original and reproduction, fixed and ongoing, effective and true.

For background on the shows' approach, Barr's early lectures are organized around manifest subject matter and formal strategies. Sybil Kantor identifies this tendency in one of Barr's earliest lectures:

Barr arranged the slides...in categories of subject matter—animal pictures, portraits, landscapes... instead of presenting them chronologically.²⁷⁸

According to Kantor, within subject matter Barr focuses on formal elements: light, atmosphere, composition, decorative line, and simplification. She notes that he then traces the formal considerations in terms of chronological influences, a verbal precursor to his 1933 and 1941 “torpedo” diagrams, in which nineteenth century modernism propels twentieth century developments. (Figure 22) Subject organization, as we will see, also lends itself especially well to visual comparisons.

²⁷⁶ Art Museum of Wellesley College, *Exhibition of Progressive Modern Painting from Daumier and Corot to Post-Cubism* (Wellesley: Art Museum of Wellesley College, 1927).

²⁷⁷ Kantor, 2002, 113.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 77–8.

Kantor also notes that in his very earliest lectures Barr *eschews* interpretation when introducing artworks, remaining silent and leaving students to draw their own conclusions. To emphasize the importance of active looking in relation to passive listening, Barr even discourages note taking.²⁷⁹ Apparently this silent treatment mystifies the audience, which according to the same author is also typical of his lectures. In WIMP and other efforts, we see that outside of the lecture hall, Barr's career is devoted to the opposite approach.

The organization of these lectures carries over to EPMP and anticipates WIMP in its issues, methods, and choice of artists. Like WIMP, the organization is thematic, discursive, and comparative. The opening text explains that EPMP is "intended to illustrate twentieth century painting of a modern spirit with certain of its nineteenth century ancestors," organized not by "nationality, chronology, or the exigencies of interior decoration but according to subject-matter. Such a division permits the visitor to compare various pictorial treatments of a similar natural problem."²⁸⁰

The introduction sets these out as "Fundamental Principles," each organized into, crucially, a series of visual comparisons.²⁸¹ The two main oppositions are nineteenth-century naturalism in relation to twentieth-century abstraction and the division of art into expressions of inner or outer reality. Also like WIMP the explicit subject matter is grouped into still life, landscape, and figuration. These become a "naturalistic...point of departure" for Expressionist, Precisionist, and Cubist still lifes.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 77, 96.

²⁸⁰ CE, II.1.42.2. "Exhibition of Progressive Modern Painting," typescript, n.d.

²⁸¹ Its use by Barr is closely observed by James Leggio, who frames it as a "drama of opposing forces." James Leggio, "Alfred H. Barr, Jr., as a Writer of Allegory: Art Criticism in a Literary Context," in *Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, ed. John Elderfield, Studies in Modern Art (New York: MoMA, 1995), 109.

EPMP also crucially introduces the theme of historically situated versus timeless modernism, asserting that: “Time alone will simplify our complex impression of the painting of the first quarter of our century, and we would probably not agree with this simplification.” To this end Barr lists “apparently important” post-war movements familiar as the canonical “isms” of today. In this way the show embodies the fundamental paradox of MoMA, modernism, and even WIMP itself: what is it to historicize the present?

Formally titled *Living Art: Twenty Facsimile Reproductions after Paintings, Drawings and Engravings and Ten Photographs After Sculpture by Contemporary Artists*, the 1923 collotype²⁸² set is a labor of love organized by *Dial* editor Scofield Thayer and published under the auspices of that “little magazine.” Printed in Berlin, the reproductions sample European and American modern painting, drawing, and sculpture (ten of each). The more daring artists include Picasso, Edvard Munch, Alexander Archipenko, and André Derain.²⁸³ In terms of reception, Barr remarks only that it “stirred up much wrath.”²⁸⁴ This wrath most likely concerns the works of art and not their mechanical reproduction, yet that is precisely the show’s significance. For it marks a moment when, for the purposes of promoting modern art, reproductions take on a kind of equivalence to originals. The line between publication and exhibition is also further blurred, especially when considering that after exhibition the portfolio is given to the Fogg, legitimizing it as both art object and teaching tool.

²⁸² A continuous tone process similar in principle to silver-gelatin photography. Benson, 2008, 246–7.

²⁸³ Nicholas Joost, *Scofield Thayer and the Dial, an Illustrated History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1964), 228–9.

²⁸⁴ Kantor, 2002, 113.

Returning to EPMP, it may be the earliest example of the explanatory labels espoused by Barr, a practice derived by Sachs from natural history museums²⁸⁵ and continued at MoMA to this day. In EPMP labels, a few sentences for each work present a specific “natural problem,” presumably a formal one, by pairing it with a nineteenth century precedent. Oddly, neither labels nor published checklist indicate dates. This is most likely an oversight, but if not, could the absence represent a further de-emphasis on chronology?

Using reproductions and labels brings up a tension in the series between encouraging direct observation of original artwork, in order to focus on formal qualities, and broader intellectualization spurred by interpretive material. Which is more effective, which more true: the silence of Barr’s early lectures or the abstraction of label text? Are “sensibilities” enough to understand the work in any depth? This ambivalence is found in an extensive analysis of a Gris still life, with Barr’s commentary concluding by asking the viewer to put reason “to sleep:”

Such an analysis...is intended to satisfy the curiosity, the intellect, and by doing so put it to sleep so that the observer may enjoy the picture with her sensibilities. Otherwise analysis is pernicious, except as a game or discipline.²⁸⁶

Finally, EPMP is an early indicator of Barr’s uncritical invocation of photography for didactic purposes. For example, he mentions photography as a way to explain a precisionist painting by Sheeler. Listed as *Stairway*, the work is most likely *Staircases, Doylestown* (1925), later borrowed for MoMA’s 1939 retrospective.²⁸⁷ Barr introduces Sheeler as “one of the finest American photographers,” but omits that the work in

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 73.

²⁸⁶ CE, II.1.42.1. Packing list, revised September 20, 1936.

²⁸⁷ Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Charles Sheeler: Paintings, Drawings, Photographs* (New York: MoMA, 1939). Catalog number 15.

question is derived from photographs such as *Doylestown House, Stairway, Open Door* (1914–1917), later given to the museum by the artist himself.²⁸⁸ Rather, he argues that Sheeler’s “paintings are photographic in the best sense....They go beyond the photograph” through “purposeful simplification,” “clean and flat” color, and “the mechanically-perfect edges of the sharp-focus lens.” The curator struggles, however, to follow the show’s thesis and connect Sheeler to a nineteenth-century precedent. Rather than relate these aspects of the work to the truly modern nineteenth century medium of photography, he opts for a strictly painterly interpretation, comparing quieted brushwork to unidentified “Italian or Flemish ‘Primitives.’”²⁸⁹

The shows also read as a trade-off of two types of “quality,” for comparing the EPMP and *Living Art* checklists is to compare originals of the lesser works available to Barr at the time with reproductions of masterworks. One can conjecture that the potential “effectiveness” of canonical reproductions is judged by Barr to be a reasonable trade-off for the “truth” of second-tier originals. By the time of WIMP twenty years later, MoMA is sufficiently established to do both: exhibit canonical originals *and* distribute them in reproduction.

A Brief Survey of Modern Painting in Color Reproductions (BSMP) CE and Book, 1931–1939

Within two years of opening in 1929, MoMA organizes its first traveling show of reproductions, the first such exhibit at the museum itself and the third major WIMP precursor, titled *A Brief Survey of Modern Painting in Color Reproductions* (BSMP;

²⁸⁸ MoMA, "Charles Sheeler. Doylestown House, Stairway, Open Door (1914–1917)", moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=46257 (accessed October 23, 2011).

²⁸⁹ CE, II.1.42.2.

MoMA 18, 1932; CE 1931–39, 86 venues). The widely distributed, long-lived show indicates public interest and, at the same time, ratchets up effective/true tension through elisions of reproduction and original, publication and exhibition, art and commerce. A 1930s report to trustees points to BSMP as evidence of demand for inexpensive CEs:

This has been very clearly revealed by the striking success of two types of circulating exhibitions which have been offered...; namely the “Survey of Modern Painting” in color reproductions (which has been in constant demand over a period of almost five years and is still going strong)...²⁹⁰

Its extensive tour includes department stores (Wanamaker’s, May’s, Kreske’s), public galleries (Vancouver Art Gallery, Louisiana Museum of Art) commercial galleries (Addison Gallery, Sarachek Fine Arts in Kansas City), a library, women’s clubs, Howard University, and many colleges. In 1936, three years after closure of the Bauhaus, it travels to Yale and Black Mountain College, where several former faculty members now teach.

The circulating version of approximately sixty images is organized into two sections: nineteenth and twentieth-century painting. These in turn are subdivided into four individually rentable parts, a model common to WIMP CEs.²⁹¹ In drafts we see that while Barr thinks in a scholarly, continuous narrative, an editor (most likely Courter) thinks about packaging the subdivisions, noting at one point: “Revise arrangement so that sections do not depend on each other.”²⁹² This enables sections to be marketed to different audiences, so that, for example, a venue might self-select Post-Impressionism but not twentieth-century painting—in effect, choosing which segments of modernism to accept or ignore. The most significant aspect of this packaging is that unlike fully curated

²⁹⁰ Packard, 43.

²⁹¹ These are omitted from this study.

²⁹² CE, II.1.42.1. n.d.

exhibitions, venues now have a kit of parts with which to make independent statements, choosing which segments to rent as well as the installation setting and sequencing. There appears to be little record of exactly how the shows are installed, but numerous local adaptations, discussed below, demonstrate active reinvention of the material.

The rhetorical methods of the *Brief Survey of Modern Painting* (BSMP) are consistent with other precursors, but with a more populist orientation. This includes anticipation of audience disbelief, a tonal mix of low-key discursion and blatant appeals for open-mindedness, and again, comparisons. All are found in the conclusion to the 1932 on-site version catalog:

Modern painting may seem confusing....[The artist] picks and chooses whatever he wishes in the attempt to work out a synthesis of expression. Side by side to-day are artists who paint exactly what they see in nature and artists who paint story pictures of romantic...landscapes, sociological and political problem pictures, sentimental portraits, dreams....To enjoy the work of these artists it is well to forget prejudice, both modern and old-fashioned, to give the picture itself a chance to live!²⁹³

Accompanied by “wall labels and placards,” BSMP further conflates exhibition and teaching material, art and documentation. Photographs of the works depict less of a sequence and more of a random line-up of images in slim frames, with and without mats, suggesting how they might appear in a commercial display or user-driven, non-gallery installation. This presentation effectively secularizes the work, removing it from the “ritual space” of the modern art museum posited by Duncan.²⁹⁴

The photographs reveal another effect of exhibiting reproductions: scale change. While scholars are accustomed to this in books and classroom projections, the effect in

²⁹³ Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Brief Survey of Modern Painting: Notes on the Museum's Circulating Exhibition of Color Reproductions of Modern Paintings* (New York: MoMA, 1932), n.p.

²⁹⁴ Duncan.

a gallery setting is jarring. One reason is that a major expressive choice by the artist is removed. A related reason is what can be called a “domestication effect:” works are tamed by sizing them for personal consumption. To the organizers’ credit, several versions of the BSMP texts caution about the limits of reproductions, focusing not on philosophical implications but simple availability. In a draft of one of the circulating versions, for example:

The visitor may feel after studying these four exhibitions that the twentieth century comes off badly by comparison with the nineteenth. This is partially the result of a dearth of good color reproductions of recent paintings.²⁹⁵

In terms of didactic labels, Kantor introduces the intriguing possibility that BSMP may have included a chart similar to the notorious diagram featured on the cover of the *Cubism and Abstract Art* catalog (MoMA 46, 1936, Figure 21).²⁹⁶ Unfortunately I am unable to confirm Kantor’s find in the specified MoMA Archives material. Confirmation would originate Barr’s MoMA charts four years prior to its best-known manifestation and in the more didactic context of a CE, not the presumably more sophisticated realm of an on-site exhibition. The possibility also invites analysis of their relation to Barr’s “torpedo” diagrams, dated one to two years after the launch of BSMP. (Figure 22) Kantor characterizes the CE chart as “a less complex initial approach” that

begins with Courbet and the generation of 1850 and ends in 1925 with the superrealists. After the impressionists, Barr inserted Expressionism, dividing the artists into *die Brücke* under “psychological” and *les Fauves* under “decorative”....²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ CE, II.1.42.2. *Modern Painting: Four Exhibitions of Color Reproductions*. Undated typescript.

²⁹⁶ Kantor, 2002, 325-8. “The Chart: Modernism in Time and Space.”

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 325.

If there is a chart it is most likely incorporated into the show's other didactic labels.²⁹⁸ As one indicator of reception, staff member Ernestine Fantl²⁹⁹ is critical:

I think they are very good but...too long....I think that the wall labels should have sufficient information about the artist and the painting and the placard thing should [have a] juicy tidbit about the various movements and the painters' positions toward or against them???³⁰⁰

She continues,

With a one-man show, I should think that the wall gadget would contain some historical aesthetic dope, some biography, some general critical analysis and the individual labels would underline the points of the paintings.

And concludes with the conciliatory, "it may be the fault of the little print....They do look a bit forbidding...." Fantl's emphasis on integrating the "juicy" and controversial (along with brevity and large type) into the "placard thing" suggests a popularization strategy of sensationalism. Had the idea been developed, in terms of the "practical rhetoric" sought by Barr, would it have been more or less "effective?"

Reproduction sales in conjunction with BSMP introduce the conflation of education and commodification, popularism and profitability, made explicit in the companion brochure *For Your Own Collection of Modern Paintings*.³⁰¹ The unattributed text, most likely *not* by Barr or Wheeler, is an odd combination of ad-industry aggressiveness and the remote authority more typical of today's museums. The frank commodification goes so far as to promote reproductions as tangible simulations of auratic originals. The brochure begins with this explicit pitch:

²⁹⁸ For more on the use of diagrams in the MoMA gallery setting see Staniszewski, 1998.

²⁹⁹ Fantl is responsible for the Publications Department from 1933–1935, becoming Architecture and Industrial Design Department curator in 1935. Lynes, 1973, 116–7.

³⁰⁰ CE, II.1.42.2. Ernestine Fantl to Barr, n.d.

³⁰¹ CE, II.1.42.2. MoMA, "For Your Own Collection of Modern Paintings," ([1932]).

Have you not left with reluctance the halls of a museum or...gallery...wishing you could gather together the pictures you most enjoyed and live with them daily? It is not impossible....You can build a collection at a modest cost which will reflect your taste and bring continuous pleasure.

According to the brochure this “continuous pleasure” can be fulfilled by the museum:

So many requests have been received by the Museum inquiring where these particular facsimiles may be purchased and asking for copies of the wall placards of the Exhibition, that the Museum has placed the prints on sale and published the explanatory material in catalogue form.

Unselfconsciousness about these works of art in mechanical reproduction is indicated by the promotion of one medium (print) as an uncomplicated simulation of a completely different one (painting):

Color facsimiles which reproduce the every brush stroke of the master with amazing faithfulness are within the reach of all lovers of art...It is necessary to run your fingers over the surface of the print to believe it is not the original oil painting.

The modest brochure is also an early indicator of the museum’s skill in packaging material, for it advertises not only the prints but also labels, the catalog, other MoMA books, and the CE itself. It even promotes a related program: “The Museum offers its services in selecting and procuring prints; advising concerning their use, and supplying information about artists and art movements.” The then-informal program is officialized in 1951 as the Art Lending Service, which continues until 1982.³⁰² More a shopping than lending operation, the program’s key function is to serve as middleman between dealers and buyers. The little-studied program correlates with WIM in its conflation of curating, education, and mass marketing.

³⁰² See History Note in MoMA Archives, NY., "Art Lending Service and Art Advisory Service Records 1948-1996", moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/ArtLendingf (accessed October 23, 2011).

Phase 2: *What Is Modern Painting?* (WIMP) Book and CE Debut, 1943–1944

The experiments at Harvard, Wellesley, and now at MoMA itself lead to the second stage of this narrative—the debut of WIMP as a book and then a CE. The book in particular culminates Barr's previous efforts, yielding a gentle manifesto of modernist ideals. Here, in-depth discussion of the book is followed by an account of its adaptation into a CE and other media, demonstrating how the material is integrated into a comprehensive campaign.

The WIMP book—or booklet as it is called at the time—is first published in 1943 and revised ten times, remaining in print almost continuously. The last (tenth) edition is published in 1983, forty years after the first and two years after Barr's death. The last reprint (1988) is stocked in the MoMA bookstore as recently as May 2007, and the museum's distributor sells its last copy in July 2008.³⁰³ Though one would expect the work to be continually updated, in fact there are only two major revisions (1952 and 1966). In effect, for anyone who purchases the book in the following four decades, modern painting stops with Pop and Op Art.

When Barr begins drafting the book in early 1943, two events dominate the museum and in turn influence WIMP: his firing and the war. Despite the war, museum attendance is growing, with over 415,000 on-site visitors and an estimated 622,000 visitors to touring exhibitions that year.³⁰⁴ In terms of the series as a whole, the WISMA book has been out for a year and the show is in the middle of its run. A slide show version of *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (1944–1953) goes on the road the following year.

³⁰³ Personal communication. Bryan Stauss, September 8–9, 2009.

³⁰⁴ Annual Report, 1943–1944.

The next book in the series, *What Is Modern Design?* (1950), is still several years in the post-war future.

As is well documented elsewhere, MoMA makes support for the war an unquestioned priority.³⁰⁵ Initiatives range from poster contests to government contracts to a CE on camouflage. Curatorially, constraints on European contact severely limit new loans and acquisitions and leave many existing loans stranded at the museum, such as two works prominently featured in WIMP: Rousseau's *Sleeping Gypsy* (1897) and Picasso's *Guernica* (1937).

In 1943 alone, almost a third of MoMA's thirty-two exhibitions are war-related,³⁰⁶ evinced by the propagandistic Steichen show *Airways to Peace* (MoMA 236, 1943; CE 1943–1944, 5 venues)³⁰⁷ and also many unexamined exhibitions such as *Art from Fighting China* (MoMA 205, 1942; CE 1942–1944, 13 venues), *New Acquisitions: Free German Art* (MoMA 186, 1942), a number of contest shows exemplified by *Magazine Cover Competition: Women in Necessary Civilian Employment* (MoMA 241, 1943), and curious efforts such as a tableau of *Norman Bel Geddes War Maneuver Models* (MoMA 250, 1944). Self-reflexive (and self-justifying) shows include *The Museum and the War* (MoMA 202, 1942–1943) and *Art Education in Wartime* (MoMA 214, 1943; CE 1943–1945, 9 venues). The war atmosphere pervades WIMP during and long after the end of the conflict.

The major museum event of 1943, however, is Barr's dismissal. In fact, Board Chairman Stephen Clark, the main force behind the firing, specifically cites WIMP in his

³⁰⁵ See in particular "The Museum and the War," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 10, no. 1 (1942). jstor.org/stable/i385728 (accessed February 1, 2010).

³⁰⁶ MoMA, "Exhibition History List".

³⁰⁷ Kantor, 2002; Phillips.

official letter (see chapter epigraph). Within the larger politics of the event,³⁰⁸ accounts confirm Barr's difficulty balancing the dual roles of curator and administrator. Rather, his strengths are identical to those that make WIMP successful: curatorial acumen, scholarship, and adventurous communication techniques. The poignancy of WIMP is that the very tool for disseminating the museum's core values is used against its most successful proponent.

It is also poignant that Barr takes on the exercise in first principles at this particular moment, when the museum confronts its contradictory mission of both historicizing and advancing "art in our time." This specifically concerns exploration of an idea to transfer older modern works between MoMA, the Metropolitan, and Whitney Museums.³⁰⁹ At that moment, asking *What Is Modern Painting?* also questions *What is a museum of modern art? What is the role of its director?* Thus WIMP can be read as a subtle institutional and personal interrogation. Barr returns to the museum as director of collections in 1946,³¹⁰ as talks are resuming between the three museums,³¹¹ This position reaffirms his strengths and enables him to remain a vital force at the museum for decades to come—even as WIMP becomes ever-more outdated.

Two accounts from the time further contextualize WIMP's development. The first is an extensive article in the MoMA *Bulletin* on *The Questioning Public*,³¹² an upbeat account of visitor perceptions. The second concerns a forum on didactic, non-gallery

³⁰⁸ See Lynes and Marquis.

³⁰⁹ For a detailed account see Kirk Varnedoe, "The Evolving Torpedo: Changing Ideas of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture of the Museum of Modern Art," in *Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, ed. John Elderfield, Studies in Modern Art (New York: MoMA, 1995).

³¹⁰ This is another chapter of MoMA history well covered by Lynes and Kantor.

³¹¹ Varnedoe, 27-8.

³¹² Ruth Olson, Dorothy E. G. Seckler, and Abraham L. Chanin, "The Questioning Public," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 15, no. 1 (1947). [jstor.org/stable/4058105](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4058105) (accessed June 19, 2009).

display methods staged at a nearby museum.³¹³ In the 1947 article, staff educators write of a public which “at the same time eager and puzzled, approaches the Museum’s Collection with mixed emotions.”³¹⁴ The article focuses on the gallery talk, the most direct means to make a curatorial case. In this “lively means of uniting the artist, the Museum and the public in a common understanding,”³¹⁵

the docent acts as catalyst. His³¹⁶ job is to convert casual interest into knowledge and, by enabling the visitor to discover and enrich his own feelings, to promote a sympathetic response to the efforts of both the artist and the Museum.³¹⁷

The article characterizes major types of visitors (U.S., international, families, students, and professionals), then quotes common difficulties understanding modern art. These read as the other side of the WIMP dialog, with its consistent anticipation of disbelief. The writers appear certain that these “Cries of approval and disapproval are primarily a reflection of the stimulating breadth of...activities” at the museum and are convinced that through efforts such as gallery talks,

[t]he number of adamant objectors has grown smaller and the quality of acceptance more perceptive....a whole new order of perception has developed during the 1940s.³¹⁸

As “promot[ing] a sympathetic response” implies, the docents are determined to communicate “an institution from which good, exciting and important things are expected,” to which “the entire audience grants the Museum a unique responsibility for artistic leadership.” The writers are confident that this wins over visitors:

³¹³ Secondary sources list no title for the event.

³¹⁴ Olson, Seckler, and Chanin.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ In fact, docents tend to be women.

³¹⁷ Olson, Seckler, and Chanin.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

The Museum has stimulated many contributing elements in this growing awareness of art and through its activities has brought the entire audience into warmer, more active touch with contemporary culture.³¹⁹

True or not, with the CE program thriving, education programs within the galleries are more than matched by those extending beyond the museum's walls.

To further contextualize WIMP, a 1944 event gives an idea of didactic visual communication techniques available at the time. Staged in an exhibit hall at the American Museum of Natural History uptown, the gathering literally displays remarkable fluidity among communications media developed and uncritically adopted by government, military, and corporate entities as well as cultural institutions. The event is documented in a clipping as a joint effort of educators and museums, "designed to give teachers an opportunity to examine available materials in visual education for present and post-war needs."³²⁰ The showcase is described as "fifty exhibitions from museums and industrial sources," complemented by "visual aid materials...as well as elementary classes in the arts, sciences and social studies," with "demonstrations...given in the use of motion pictures and slide projectors."

The museum's offering, recorded only as "Modern Painting," could well have been WIMP, taking its place among other museum contributions. Several exhibits mentioned blend art history and ethnography, such as *The Congo and Its People* (Brooklyn Museum of Art), *Peoples of the Pacific Islands* (Newark Museum), *Greek Athletics* (Metropolitan Museum), and the unfortunately titled *Art in Countries South of Us* (U.S. Department of Education).

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ CE, Album III.49. "Museum to Show Use of Visual Aids," *New York Sun*, December 30, 1944. Short of checking AMNH archives, this is the only account I have located.

When thinking of military technologies adapted for civilian use, Jeeps and aluminum chairs come to mind,³²¹ but at this event, the military-industrial complex offers new communications technologies poised for peacetime application. Sessions introduce “leaders in the development of new visual technics” such as “Army Training Technics” of the U.S. Signal Corps and “Photographing Heat and Air” by Norman F. Barnes of GE Engineering Laboratories. As seen throughout this study, WIM readily implements these media and methods. The embrace of ethnographic, scientific, and military photography is examined further in Chapters 3 and 5 as evidence of difficulty reconciling instrumental and aesthetic aspects of the medium.

WIMP on the Page

Discussion of the WIMP exhibition depends upon its origin as a book. At forty-four pages the first edition has the same trim size, Futura type, and monotone printing of its predecessor WISMA. Among the WIMs, visual and rhetorical comparisons are used to strongest effect here. The opening section sets out a series of three comparisons. Echoing the organization of EPMP, each illustrates a distinct category, usually amplified by layout on a two-page spread. The first concerns the nature of representation, addressed in progressively more depth in subsequent sections (*Selected Facts, Portraits of Buildings and People, Critics of Society, and Of the “Common Man”*). This is followed by now-standard treatments of Impressionism, Expressionism (*The World Transformed, The Religious Spirit, Painting is Like Music*), Cubism (*The Constructors*) and Surrealism (*Mystery and Magic*), culminating in a forceful final spread on Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937)

³²¹ See, for example, Donald Albrecht, *World War II and the American Dream* (Cambridge: MIT, 1995).

titled *The Artist and the Crisis: Allegory and Prophecy*). The book ends with the author's passionate afterword *Truth, Freedom, Perfection*. The opening comparisons and the last two categories best illustrate WIM themes of mediation versus direct encounter, situated versus transcendent modernism, and effective versus true.

Barr's opening statements set an amiable tone and establish the essential message, which persists through all editions:

This booklet is written for people who have had little experience in looking at paintings, particularly those modern paintings which are sometimes considered puzzling, difficult, incompetent or crazy. It is intended to undermine prejudice, disturb indifference and awaken interest so that some greater understanding and love of the more adventurous paintings of our day may follow.³²²

He then puts the question in semiotic terms, evoking his early, silent lectures and setting up a key paradox of the book: the notion that art is self-evident and best encountered directly—yet WIM depends upon text and reproductions. In this construct, painting is its own language and interpretive text can only “give...information” and “point out a few things:”

What is modern painting? It is not easy to answer this question in words, for writing is done with words while paintings are made out of shapes and colors. The best words can do is give you some information, point out a few things you might overlook, and if...you feel that you don't like modern painting anyway, words may possibly help you to change your mind.³²³

Moreover, the “shapes and colors” of painting constitute a universal visual language—an assumption that becomes increasingly hard to sustain in later editions:

[A]lthough we may have seen a million pictures in our lives we may never have learned to look at a painting as an art. For [painting]...is like a language you have to learn to read...Some pictures...are prose, others are poetry, and still others are like algebra or geometry. But...there are no foreign languages in painting....there

³²² Alfred H. Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?* (New York: MoMA, 1943), 2.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

are only local dialects which can be understood internationally, for painting is a kind of visual Esperanto.³²⁴

The opening trio of comparisons concerns landscape, “war pictures,” and portraits. Each of these familiar genres is arranged in a spread, within which a conservative representation is complemented by a more daring work. The powerful opening volley contrasts Dean Fausett’s *Derby View* (1939) with Stuart Davis’ *Summer Landscape* (1930). The author begins by comparing the artists’ backgrounds and approaches:

Fausett, though he is a young American, paints his summer scene in a manner handed down from English artists of over a hundred years ago...Stuart Davis is older than Fausett but he works in a more “modern” style. [The Davis] does not depend for its chief interest upon what the artist saw in nature but upon how he has changed what he saw.³²⁵

In the most unselfconscious use of photography in the entire series, the Davis is compared to a photograph of presumably the same scene. (Figure 24) This comparison within a comparison occupies the full right-hand page:

The photograph...although it was taken in winter with no leaves on the trees, shows the scene on which Davis based his picture. Comparing it with the painting we can see how the artist has transformed a prosaic, commonplace view into a lively, decorative composition.³²⁶

Barr then describes the abstraction process, concluding that “with all these omissions and simplifications and rearrangements Davis has given a clearer and more complete idea of the village than does the snapshot.”³²⁷ Remarkably, then, the photo is assumed to be a transparent approximation of reality with none of the volition granted to the painting.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid., 4.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

The comparison raises additional issues. By eliminating the complex effects of color, one of two fundamental visual elements identified by Barr (“shapes and colors”), monotone reproduction changes the terms of debate. This becomes clear by comparing the black and white book with a color version of the text printed much later in *Saber Ver*, a promotional magazine published by the Mexican broadcaster Fundación Cultural Televisa. (The journal title resonates with the didactic possibilities of WIMP and television, translating roughly as “Knowing How to See.”)³²⁸ (Figure 25) In gray scale the spatial effects of color are effectively flattened, amplifying other similarities between the two images, such as two-dimensional composition. The color reproduction more vividly supports the argument that the Davis is “a crisp, vivacious, gaily colored design [that] has caught the lighthearted spirit of a summer day.”³²⁹ In the end, the message is clear:

Perhaps...you will find it hard to choose between them, but it is not hard to decide which shows the more imagination, the greater will to select, control, arrange and organize.”³³⁰

Though referring to the two paintings, we see how Barr, too, is selecting, controlling, and arranging. Moreover, today we would say that Barr could be speaking of the snapshot as well. Ironically then, he misses an opportunity to show how photography, too, is an authored process.

War is the most powerful weapon in Barr’s rhetorical arsenal, used to the fullest in the section *The Artist and the Crisis*. It focuses solely on Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), introduced succinctly as a “dramatic statement about one of the world’s most urgent

³²⁸ Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Qué Es La Pintura Moderna? Primera Parte,” *Saber Ver: lo Contemporáneo del Arte* 1, no. 1 (1991).

³²⁹ Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?*, 1943, 4.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

problems: war and its effect on humanity.”³³¹ Next, he elaborates with a simile for abstraction and autonomy, a “true” but also “effective” narrative element in which individual genius heroically rejects pre-modern conventions. Again using juxtaposition, he positions nineteenth century modern painting as move towards

what we can see before us, and what we see is above all a beauty of form and color with very little interest in human emotion of character and none at all in religion, politics, economics, psychology or the historical and mythological past of the human race... These older paintings are victories in a long war of independence during which artists fought to deliver art first from the complex world of human affairs and then from visual reality itself....³³²

By invoking *Guernica* in the wartime context, in contrast to the nineteenth century moment of which he speaks, he foregrounds the effects of modern war on “the complex world of human affairs” as a way to ask viewers to “see above all a beauty of form and color.”

Another, subtle and perhaps unintentional reference to war concerns representation of German artists solely by Beckmann and (Swiss-born) Klee. In contrast, thirteen artists from France (including Picasso and Gris). Most striking, however, is the inclusion of sixteen American artists.³³³ While this headcount could simply reflect Barr’s preferred point of modernism’s origin in France, the low German representation is remarkable. Moreover, Barr stresses how Beckmann was persecuted by the Nazis. Considering that and the general second-rate status of American modernists among critics at the time, Barr’s neglect of German modernists can be attributed to wartime boosterism as well as the general goal of reaching a U.S. audience.

³³¹ Ibid., 37.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ The count varies depending on how one defines the nationality of Ruiz, Matta, and Whistler.

Barr's anti-fascist attitudes are well documented.³³⁴ Advocacy for artistic freedom is central to his career and WIMP is just one way that he mobilizes popular media for this purpose. This is evinced by his frequent essays and letters to editors in mainstream publications ranging from the *New York Times Magazine* to *Life*. Barr's insistence on retaining specific political references throughout WIMP editions is emblematic of the series tension between transcendent and historically situated modernism. Both a universal and situated paean to individual freedom, Barr again relates the loftiest of formal concerns to immediate circumstances. The focus here is the iconic *Guernica*, but relationships between formal and topical concerns are found throughout the book. Examples include works on sleepy legislators (Groper's *The Senate*, 1935), class (Antonio Ruiz's *The New Rich*, 1941), and provincialism (Edward Hopper's *Daughters of Revolution*, 1932). I conclude that Barr's WIMP writing is both true to his convictions and effective in its appeal to a public experiencing both wartime privations and national pride in free expression.

The theme of individual freedom in the face of oppression is made abundantly clear as discussion of *Guernica* proceeds, culminating in the book's concluding section, titled with the triad *Truth, Freedom, Perfection*. In both a blunt link to fascism and an indirect jab at reactionary readers, Barr observes:

Sometimes in art galleries one hears a man who has just glanced at a cubist or expressionist picture turn away with the angry words, 'it ought to be burned,' or 'There ought to be a law against it.' That was just the way Hitler felt.³³⁵

The essay is packed with similar links between historical and contemporary rejection of modern art. To this end Barr invokes everything from the Wright brothers to

³³⁴ See "The Statesman" chapter in Barr Jr., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 1986.

³³⁵ Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?*, 1943, 38.

Van Gogh's suicide to Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. Here the author implicates American readers specifically:

[T]here are other less direct ways of crushing freedom in the arts. In a democracy the original, progressive artist often faces the indifference or intolerance of the public, the ignorance of officials, the malice of conservative artists, the laziness of the critics, the blindness or timidity of picture buyers and museums.³³⁶

None too subtle, the section further reinforces the themes of effective and true, topical versus transcendent modernism, and direct encounter in relation to didactic commentary. Barr establishes, then complicates the triad:

Truth, which in art we often arrive at through a 'lie,' *freedom*, which in art is a delusion unless controlled by self-discipline, and *perfection*, which if it were ever absolute would be the death of art...³³⁷

Most relevant here, his reference to "lie" plays on the idea of self-evident truth in painting by revisiting a previous reference to Picasso: "Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth."³³⁸

Returning to the theme of direct versus indirect understanding, Barr again qualifies the whole premise of the primer, still privileging direct encounter on the questionable assumption that it is equally or more purely communicative:

[P]erhaps through pondering such ideas as these we can deepen our understanding of...modern painting; but for most people the direct experience of art will always be more pleasurable and more important than trying to puzzle out its ultimate meaning.³³⁹

Bringing the text to a close, he reinforces the point with the last of many Picasso quotes, further questioning the very didacticism of the book:

³³⁶ Ibid., 38–9.

³³⁷ Ibid., 39.

³³⁸ Ibid., 38.

³³⁹ Ibid., 39.

Why does one love...everything around one...without trying to understand it? But in the case of a painting people have to *understand*.³⁴⁰

In this way Barr carries comparison through to the end, pairing the question of *What Is Modern Painting?* with the implied question, per his previously mentioned statement on museum publishing,³⁴¹ *What is the pragmatic rhetoric of painting?*

WIMP's design development indicates a search for pragmatic *design* rhetoric, demonstrating integrated thinking about text, image, sequencing, and layout. Drafts show Barr conceiving these elements together, mainly in two-page spreads with numerous cross-references. He remarks later that the book is "put together like a mosaic of words and pictures."³⁴² One can see the layout as a two-dimensional version of a gallery sequence, evoking 1925 Barr's notion of the lecturer as a "showman carefully arranging an exhibition."³⁴³ The sequencing can also be seen as a narrative version of the 1936 chart. (Figure 21) While such integrated design is common today, at the time many art publications segregated text and images for technological reasons, as when color images are involved.

Featuring two symmetrical columns and justified type, the WIMP layout is most likely by Frances Pernas, Assistant Manager of Publications. Despite the proximity of images to text and the conceptual sensitivity of the "mosaic" model, Pernas is correct in her retrospective assessment of Barr's design sense as "[v]ery much out of style, in a way" and that "[h]is layouts were always pretty awful"³⁴⁴ because the art "came first, and if the book looked like the devil, he didn't care."³⁴⁵

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Barr Jr.

³⁴² Wheeler II.108. Barr to Wheeler, September 21, 1948.

³⁴³ Barr to Paul Sachs, February 14, 1927. Quoted in Kantor, 2002, 97.

³⁴⁴ OH Project; Frances Pernas, 1994. 39.

³⁴⁵ OH Project; Frances Pernas, 1994. 39.

Because the art comes first, Barr objects to “bleeding” images off of the edge of a page. According to Marquis, Barr’s idea is that space around the image creates a well-defined rectangle similar to viewing an actual, three-dimensional canvas. Without it, “One loses the sense of definition which the rectangular format of the canvas creates.”³⁴⁶ Even by 1959, he maintains that “bleeding pictures is a barbarous mayhem, comparable to cutting off the first and last lines of a sonnet.”³⁴⁷

Barr’s conservatism about layout and cropping is surprising, given his familiarity with Bauhaus-influenced graphic design. Moreover, even after MoMA publications begin to be commended for progressive design, Barr’s taste remains conservative. Regarding another book,³⁴⁸ Pernas recalls:

we did have an awful set-to....He wanted that double-column, and I had a fight with him about it.... But I just couldn’t see that book in double-column...to have that in two little strips, nobody going to read it, [sic] and a big book—you can’t read that that way.³⁴⁹

Pernas argues instead for a three-quarter column, which means adding pages, but Barr insists upon maximizing word count within the existing pagination. In the end, however, she prevails.³⁵⁰

This helps to explain some of the inelegant layouts but doesn’t entirely account for reproduction sizing. Pernas explains Barr’s approach to the question:

³⁴⁶ AHB, 1.297 [mf 2183:844]. Barr to Milton Fox, April 4 and December 9, 1957. Quoted in Marquis, 1989, 283 and note, 402.

³⁴⁷ AHB, 1.433 [mf 2193:150]. Barr to Douglas Cooper, May 29, 1959. Quoted in *ibid.*

³⁴⁸ She describes it as the “fiftieth-anniversary book” but this is unlikely for several reasons. A stronger possibility is the substantial 25th-anniversary publication, laid out in a single, three-quarter-page column. Alfred H. Barr Jr., ed. *Masters of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, [1954]).

³⁴⁹ OH Project; Frances Pernas, 1994. 39–40.

³⁵⁰ OH Project; Frances Pernas, 1994. 40–41.

A big painting should have as large a cut as possible, a little painting should have a small cut... That was sort of an uphill fight with Alfred—I mean, just to get it so the plates weren't overlapping. He really didn't care about that.³⁵¹

While the *Guernica* layouts follow this logic (Figures 26, 27), other reproductions such as a large Matisse and a small Kandinsky do not. As readers, publishers, and appropriation artists³⁵² well know, scale change is an inherent issue with text-based art reproductions. This is of special relevance to WIMP, given the intention to disseminate modern painting to audiences lacking direct experience with it.

In a review, historian, pedagogue, and textbook author H. W. Janson observes WIMP's considered text-image interrelationship as innovative art historiography. He argues that WIMP and the few comparable texts of the time represent

a comparatively new and still largely unexplored variety of art publication. Adapted in both price and content to...readers whose acquaintance with art of any kind is either non-existent or...severely limited, they are not intended to convey information...nor to teach 'appreciation,' in terms of aesthetic principles, but simply to establish some sort of contact between the reader and the work of art in its contemporary setting.³⁵³

The uncredited³⁵⁴ cover design is curious. (Figure 18) Printed in one color (turquoise)³⁵⁵ it features a round-edged trapezoid framing the title, with four thin ruled lines crossing at a diagonal. The typography appears unconsidered, with the anonymous sans-serif font poorly letter-spaced. Overall the cover has the undesigned feeling of a product catalog or shop sign, a contrast with other MoMA exhibition catalogs of the time.

³⁵¹ OH Project; Frances Pernas, 1994. 38–39.

³⁵² Artist Sherrie Levine addresses the issue most directly in her re-photography of art book reproductions. See Douglas Eklund, *Pictures Generation, 1974–1984* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 2009).

³⁵³ H. W. Janson, "What is Modern Painting? [Review]," *College Art Journal* 5, no. 3 (1946). jstor.org/stable/772881 (accessed November 28, 2011).

³⁵⁴ No evidence of authorship has surfaced. Pernas would have had a production role.

³⁵⁵ But not process cyan, an unmixed turquoise color that could possibly have produced a similar effect at even less expense.

The cover can be interpreted in several ways. The one-color design is consistent with wartime shortages and Barr's strong interest in a low sale price. It can also be interpreted as a visual signal for a "low" educational booklet, purposely distinguished from high-status exhibition catalogs. One can also read the sharp lines and rounded shape as an analogy to Barr's conception of modern art as dual trajectories of geometric (line) and non-geometric (shape) abstraction. (Figure 21) Ironically, the narrow lines can also be interpreted as the "speed lines" disdained as "modernoid" or "moderne" by MoMA's design curators (see Chapter 1).

The WIMP editorial process is well documented, from early drafts to near-final copy. Strong interest in reader feedback puts into action Barr's later statement that "museums...will continue to waste much time on research and publication until more research is done on *the public itself*."³⁵⁶ This echoes Wheeler's strategy as well (see Introduction). Manuscript comments are solicited from a wide range of sources, from educators to author Clarence Day,³⁵⁷ and from school children to future MoMA curators. The material provides insight into Barr's thought process, the diversity of readers, and the nature of their reactions. The process has an opinion-poll quality—in fact, in just this period sociologist Robert Merton and colleagues are developing a form of inquiry that comes to be known as the "focus group."³⁵⁸ Numerous opinions are culled from informal questionnaires. These show direct concern with what kind of truth is effective, given questions such as:

³⁵⁶ Barr Jr.

³⁵⁷ AHB, 6.B.2.d. For a summary of Day's career see "Clarence Day", Encyclopædia Britannica Online, search.eb.com/article-9029553 (accessed December 8, 2009).

³⁵⁸ See the introduction to Robert Merton, Marjorie Fiske, and Patricia Kendall, *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990).

Are there any sections that are specially interesting or dull?

What do you think of the choice of pictures?

What do you think of the style of writing?

Would you like to see any of the following added to the book...?

A list of other color reproductions by the same artists...which might be used as school decorations or purchased by students or by teachers

A brief history [of] the period, in about one page of type

A diagram or tree on the development of modern art³⁵⁹

Responses vary. Teacher reviews are generally positive and include very specific

comments. Some reactions are strongly negative, such as one reader's opinion that the text is

an extremely poor one...If an attempt is being made to unprejudice the prejudiced, it should be taken into consideration that the readers have some degree of intelligence and need sound explanation and theories rather than soothing words.³⁶⁰

D'Amico's comments are concrete, consistent with his hands-on philosophy. At one point he enthuses that "The words built up as if the paintings were being made before the reader's eyes." Barr considers some of his edits, such as the suggestion to amplify how James McNeill Whistler's *Arrangement in Gray and Black (Portrait of the Artist's Mother, 1871)* is poorly received in its day, and rejects others such as using a work "more liked than [Winslow] Homer's *Croquet Match*" (1872).³⁶¹

The manuscript is reviewed by another signal figure: writer, critic, collector, and future MoMA curator James Thrall Soby.³⁶² In fact, Soby soon becomes Director of the Painting and Sculpture Department following Barr's ouster. His margin notes tend to the intellectual and scholarly but always circle back to effectiveness with "students" and "kids." In the manuscript, someone—conceivably Barr—indicates responses to Soby's

³⁵⁹ AHB, 6.B.2.d, n.d.

³⁶⁰ AHB, 6.B.2.d.

³⁶¹ AHB, 6.B.2.d. D'Amico to Barr. n.d.

³⁶² For more on Soby's MoMA legacy see "Special Section, James Thrall Soby," in *Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, ed. John Elderfield, Studies in Modern Art (New York: MoMA, 1995).

points with “x” or check marks. For example, Soby judges the conclusion to be “rather lofty,” “hightoned,” and “abstract.” Along with the teachers and many other reviewers, Soby also advocates removing topical references in favor of transcendent ideals: “the analogies to Hitler, etc. still seem to me too contemporary in the fleeting sense of the word.” In short, the reviewers want a narrative of “art in our time” that avoids specifics. Barr consistently ignores this advice.

An x-mark implies rejection of a Soby comment contradicting Barr’s assertion that “Mondrian...is not a cold intellectual;...he loves swing music; his latest abstract picture is called *Broadway Boogie Woogie* and lives up to its title!” Soby counters that “Mondrian admired Boogie Woogie in a coldly intellectual way,” but lets the point go for the sake of effectiveness: “the kids don’t [so] perhaps the point will go over with them.” Similarly, Soby looks for reassurance that “students [are] getting some personal pleasure” from art. His sensitivity to “kids” and their “personal pleasure” is unusual in a Painting and Sculpture curator.

Most relevant here, one finds a check next to the comment on *Two Landscapes*, questioning the assertion that the Davis painting is “clearer and more complete” than a photograph. His reasoning is difficult to follow, however. One might think he would challenge the idea of photographic transparency, but instead he argues that the point is “applicable only to pros looking at abstract pictures.”³⁶³ Is he asserting that high-level evaluation of photography should be evaluated in the same way as abstraction, independent of medium or manifest subject matter? Text and image remained unchanged.

³⁶³ AHB, 6.b.2.d. Soby to Barr, August 24, 1943.

Another reader soon has a strong link to Barr and MoMA: future curator William Lieberman. In the summer of 1943 Lieberman volunteers at the museum prior to his entry into Harvard.³⁶⁴ Most likely he reads WIMP during his assignment to the Publications Department. After graduation and upon Barr's rehiring Lieberman becomes his assistant. At MoMA he eventually founds the Department of Drawings and Prints (1960). This becomes Lieberman's Department of Drawings (1971), and the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books (1969), led by Riva Castleman. In 1979, Lieberman leaves MoMA to head the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Twentieth Century Art.³⁶⁵ Once WIMP is published, Barr sends a copy to Lieberman. Most likely eager to impress Barr, he responds on Harvard stationery, effusing that

The book is so clearly written, the points so simply made....The audience sincerely seeking information about modern art is easily confused by the manifestoes, the lavish and sometimes ridiculous verbiage of 'enthusiasts,' and the frequent lack of sympathy and understanding.³⁶⁶

Emphasizing professional ambitions, he continues, "I am enjoying Harvard. While I have always made the modern my field for specialization, I know I am profiting by the firm foundations offered here."

One reader who has particular cause to notice and critique the use of photography as a rhetorical device is populist author, influential critic, activist, and dedicated pedagogue Elizabeth McCausland.³⁶⁷ Then teaching art history at Sarah

³⁶⁴ There is some indication that he was on salary during part of the time.

³⁶⁵ For more on Lieberman's career see Sam Hunter, *Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York: Abrams, 1984). Kay Larson, "Met Goes Modern: Bill Lieberman's Brave New Wing," *New York* 19, no. 49 (1986).

³⁶⁶ AHB, 6.B.2.c. William Lieberman to Barr, December 19, 1943.

³⁶⁷ The only substantial biography of this underappreciated figure is "Elizabeth McCausland, Critic and Idealist," *Archives of American Art Journal* 6, no. 2 (1966). For a capsule biography see this finding aid: Smithsonian Archives of American Art, "Finding Aid to the Elizabeth McCausland Papers, 1838-1965, Bulk 1920-1960, in the Archives of

Lawrence College, her authority on the subject derives from her career-long writing on photography—one of the few women to do so at the time. Of all respondents besides Soby (who misses the point), McCausland is the only one to question Barr's assumptions about photography, asking why the medium is considered a lesser art:

After twenty years of writing about art, I still get a little cross when I find the adjective 'Photographic' used as a term of derogation. Isn't there another word?

She then reports responses from her students at Sarah Lawrence. Unfortunately one of them also appears to miss the point, stating that:

At first we may have been hostile to such works of art as the abstract picture of the backyard; but if we go further we may see that...the whole composition really is of more value than the conservative "photographic" backyard on the opposite page.³⁶⁸

Once published, the book is reviewed by several professional journals but garners many more letters from general readers, indicative of its popular impact. Writers range from everyday skeptics to high-level art world figures. If one were to compare these letters to any received for one of Barr's scholarly catalogs, it is safe to conjecture that the response to WIMP is greater in quantity, diversity, and strength of feeling. It is possible, of course, that negative letters are discarded, and it is impossible to account for indifferent or unconvinced readers who fail to write. Other Barr files, however, also document a long and steady stream of letters from a general American public mystified by modernism. Barr answers many of these, often with a copy of or reference to WIMP.³⁶⁹

American Art", aaa.si.edu/collections/findingaids/mccaeliz.pdf (accessed October 23, 2011). In another link to MoMA, the year after WIMP is published she serves on the Photography Department Advisory Committee.

³⁶⁸ AHB, 6.B.2.d. Elizabeth McCausland to Barr, March 7, 1944.

³⁶⁹ See AHB, Series 7. Political Controversy.

In his review, Janson declares that WIMP “stands out as a small miracle of balanced judgment and clarity of expression,”³⁷⁰ a work with “lucidity and fairness...avoidance of violent partisanship, and...implicit respect for...individual opinion...”³⁷¹ He recognizes the effective/true tension as well, dryly noting “the difficulty of finding a method of approach that will fulfill its purpose without sacrificing the author’s intellectual self-respect...”³⁷² In addition, he notes how the book deals well with “the problem of how to provide good and plentiful illustrations while keeping the price sufficiently low for mass distribution.”³⁷³ He then puts WIMP to the test, seeking “the verdict of several hundred freshmen and sophomores” in his introductory course:

They were asked to write a critique....About one-quarter of the class openly declared that...the booklet had not budged them from their predominantly negative attitude...but there was virtually unanimous agreement concerning the author’s ability to argue his case...even the most conservative in the group admitted that [it] induced them to take seriously what they had...regarded only as a bad joke.³⁷⁴

Letters from the general public record similar attitude changes, often to the writers’ own surprise. This one is typical:

What Is Modern Painting...has certainly stimulated interest in a subject which I have always considered difficult, crazy and esoteric. The lucid writing appealed immediately to me and, I believe, has put me on the road to loving and understanding modern art.³⁷⁵

Finally, many respondents comment on the evenhanded tone:

I want to tell you how much I enjoyed your unimpatient reasonableness in suggesting that there may be more in Modern Art than meets the layman’s hasty

³⁷⁰ Janson.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 256.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

³⁷⁵ CE, II.1.120.1. Lucille Gyr to MoMA, February 18, 1946.

and unlooking eye....It's done in such a way that he may become suspicious that perhaps it is he who is missing the point...through appealing to his reason.³⁷⁶

WIMP receives relatively few reviews, suggesting that it lacks the prestige of a traditional museum publication. It does spur several responses from individual journalists, however. In an ongoing debate with a skeptical *New York News* editorial writer, Barr reminds him of their agreement that "if I were to send you this booklet, you were to send a letter telling me whether the booklet answers any of [your] questions."³⁷⁷

He receives an apologetic response:

Difficult as it is, after forty-three years, to change one's mind, the logic of your reasoning on modern art, has opened new vistas to me if it hasn't just yet altered my opinions....Your explanations and pictured examples make me feel a bit ashamed. I liked to believe I had an open mind...frankly, I am not entirely converted...The important thing is you have made me curious.³⁷⁸

Journalist, designer, and polemicist George Nelson pens a letter as well. (Per Chapter 1, as managing editor of *Architectural Forum* he later recommends Drexler to the museum). Nelson's response is especially relevant for identifying the shared challenge of being effective and true:

It is not my custom to indulge in writing fan letters, but on this occasion I find it impossible to resist...I may know nothing about art—to coin a phrase—but I happen to know a great deal about the terrific difficulties involved in presenting complicated ideas in simple form. What impressed me so much in your booklet was that this was achieved without writing down in any sense and without any sacrifice of essential accuracy.³⁷⁹

Another telling note is received from a staff member at the *Magazine of Art*, which becomes an unintentional meeting ground between "high" and "low" readers. The writer states that while he hasn't read the book,

³⁷⁶ AHB, B.2.c. Priscilla Moore Houston to Barr, January 8, 1945.

³⁷⁷ AHB, B.2.c. Julius Mahler to Barr, April 11, 1944.

³⁷⁸ AHB, B.2.c. Barr to Mahler, April 20, 1944.

³⁷⁹ AHB, B.2.d. George Nelson to Barr, February 15, 1944.

my new secretary has....She has read it twice...and it's such a revelation to her that she now gives her room-mates no peace. They are all embroiled in a great argument about it. Wonderful!...She says it is so plain and clear, and that it doesn't make her feel ignorant.³⁸⁰

He concludes with a quip about Barr's recent "exile," referring to the firing: "Now I can't make up my mind whether it is better for you to stay home and write some more books or to return to the Museum and say it with exhibitions."

Responses from museum administrators move further into the "high" end of art discourse. Fiske Kimball, director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, seizes upon WIMP's potential for persuasive use among his own associates: "marvelous!...I am giving it to trustees, secretaries, doubters, evangelists."³⁸¹ To another art museum administrator, the book is a refresher, reminding her of the hazards of historicizing modernism: "...I realize more and more as I sink into a museum atmosphere, the tending to lapse into paths of convention and good taste."³⁸² In a final example, WIMP becomes a sales tool. Here a Paris gallerist recounts using WIMP to sell a painting:

I have recommended it to several people who hesitated to buy paintings by Milton Avery.... Without exception after reading the book, the painting sold. One buyer remarked, 'Now I can defend my purchase against the criticism of my friends who know as little about modern painting as I did before I read Mr. Barr's book.'³⁸³

The breadth of these responses corresponds to the book's market success, which increases at war's end when the mainstream publisher Simon and Schuster begins distributing MoMA books. This marks the next phase of the book's development, discussed in Phase 3 below.

³⁸⁰ AHB, B.2.c. "John" to Barr, November 23, 1943.

³⁸¹ AHB, B.2.d. Fiske Kimball to Barr, March 29, 1944.

³⁸² AHB, B.2.d. Marion R. Becker to Barr, December 6, 1943.

³⁸³ AHB, B.2.d. Herbert H. Elfers to Barr, November 13, 1944.

WIMP On the Road

In 1944, the year following publication, the book begins to be adapted into an exhibition and other media, significantly expanding its reach. Twenty rental copies of *What Is Modern Painting?* travel the U.S. for over a decade to over four hundred venues, making it one of the longest-running and most widely disseminated CEs. Renting is now only one option in this full-on multimedia effort. Along with the show one can purchase the book (“also available in punched notebook form, in lots of 10”), rent a color slide talk (1944–55, 235 venues), and buy individual reproductions. Promotion of the show is directed to “schools, colleges, libraries, hospitals, clubs, and small galleries. Teachers especially will find it valuable in classroom discussions.” The show is further advertised this way to potential venues:

13 colored panels and a title panel, all 29” x 40” in size, containing reproductions in full color of 31 well [sic] known modern paintings, photographs of 9 others. Explanatory text on each panel gives information about the artists represented, their points of view, and their outstanding contributions to the development of modern painting.³⁸⁴

The color reproductions are pasted on to the panels, with others printed directly on the white panels in black collotype. Photos of the panels (Figures 28–30) show a spacious layout comprised of relatively small images and text blocks. The color image dimensions are most likely limited by standard print sizes, which may be oriented to a small-format market and may explain the use of background colors to fill out the panels. At least one viewer finds the images too small: “I was disappointed in the size of reproductions. Not large enough for a class of 55 students.”³⁸⁵

The opening panel establishes the thesis and feel of the show: (Figure 28)

³⁸⁴ CE, II.1 120.1. “*What Is Modern Painting?*,” unpublished exhibition description, n.d. (possibly June 1944).

³⁸⁵ CE, II.2.120.1. Marian Modena to MoMA, September 30, 1946.

The pictures in this exhibition show some of the most important approaches to painting in our time. They do not represent a history or survey of modern art, but are grouped according to the different ideas they represent...the text on each panel [points] out certain aspects of the pictures that might be overlooked and information about the artists that sheds some light on their work.

Compared to the book, the show is condensed, oversimplified, and despite the evenhanded introduction, more doctrinaire than discursive. Most of the “unimpatient reasonableness,” along with much of the humor and turn of phrase, takes on a fully didactic tone, beginning with the stark opening section *Variety of Expression* (Panel 1, Figure 29). Firmly establishing abstraction as an expressive response to the modern world, the panel collapses several subtler book sections into short statements on three works. George Braque’s *Still Life* (1928) introduces the idea of non-representational imagery under the heading *Shapes And Colors for Their Own Sake*. It is supplemented with two smaller reproductions: Edward Hopper’s *House by the Railroad* (1925) exemplifies *A Mood Evoked by the Outside World* while Yves Tanguy’s surrealist *Witness* (1940) is intended to place Surrealism in the *Dream World*. With similar brevity Panel 9 simplifies expressive abstraction:

The paintings on this panel are of trees, skies, mountains, and oceans, but they are not realistic descriptions. They express the artists’ feelings about nature, about night, wind, and starlight.

The panels’ image-text relationship is artless, most likely due to the small reproductions. A diagram attempting to show Braque’s abstraction process in three easy steps is an unselfconscious addition. (Panel 1, Figure 29) These unattributed line drawings are, like the Davis-related photo, assumed to be uninflected.

Unlike the book there are no direct references to photography, but one panel suggests a degree of understanding that photography isn’t transparent: Panel 9 asks “What makes a picture realistic?” and answers simply that “It is never quite like the image in a mirror. The artist is not a recording machine....”

A final alteration is a sequence change that returns to the WIMP theme of topicality in relation to transcendence. A section early on in the book (*Moral Criticism, Social Criticism*) is moved in the show to the panel just prior to the climactic *Guernica* panel, with the title changing from the passive *Artist and the Crisis* to the active *The Artist Fights*. (Panel 13, Figure 30). *Guernica* again culminates the argument but it now shares the frame with Orozco's *Zapatistas* (1931). The Orozco in fact dominates *Guernica*, positioned at top left at a much larger scale—again, most likely a product of limited reproduction sizes. The effect is to amplify the war theme, a move that would most likely resonate at the show's many military venues. On the other hand, the powerful opening comparison of "war pictures" in the book is replaced with the more cerebral sections *Varieties of Expression* and *Selecting and Arranging Facts*, discussed above. It is tempting to attribute these choices to Barr, but minimal evidence of his involvement suggests that it is more likely the work of Courter and CE staff member Alice Otis. His distance from the project may also account for the excision of topical references.

At this point WIMP moves to the forefront of a CE initiative to further disseminate MoMA's message, a new distribution method termed "multiple exhibitions." A history of CE, published in the museum's *Bulletin* a decade later, explains that:

In an effort to continue supplying schools and other organizations with needed visual aids, three types of educational material were developed: multiple exhibitions, teaching portfolios and slide talks. The series of multiple exhibitions consists of light-weight panels on which are mounted color reproductions, photographs, drawings or diagrams reproduced in quantity for rental or sale, accompanied by a running commentary.³⁸⁶

Rather than move one show from venue to venue, now many copies of a show can circulate simultaneously—significantly increasing reach. Organizations can also now

³⁸⁶ Circulating Exhibitions 1931-1954.

purchase WIMP for \$60 (\$737 today) or rent it for three weeks for \$18 (\$221),³⁸⁷ commodifying CEs into mail-order art.

To further promote the show and further complicate the original/reproduction relationship, the CE launches at the museum itself as an exhibition (MoMA 280, 1945)—there is even a press preview.³⁸⁸ The panels are installed in the “auditorium galleries,” a below-ground space leading to the museum’s theater, a popular venue for film screenings.³⁸⁹ Presumably this literally “low” placement is purposeful, intending to appeal to the target audience but also to separate it from the “high” gallery spaces above. At the same time, positioning the reproductions as an encounter comparable to a gallery experience of originals creates a dissonance. The assignment of this kind of equivalence recalls Barr’s dual original and reproduction shows of the late 1920s (Chapter 1). It suggests either (or both) unselfconsciousness regarding the implications of doing so or a conscious decision that the dissonance is worthwhile in the name of this notion of effectiveness.

The installation is also an overt advertisement for CEs and reproductions, one intended to promote the program beyond the general public to mass media outlets and potential lenders. In 1954, in a memo to high-level museum staff about revising the entire program, CE Associate Curator Jane Sabersky argues for

³⁸⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Inflation Calculator", data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl (accessed November 21, 2009).

³⁸⁸ MoMA, "...Press Preview of Two Small Circulating Exhibitions...", February [26], 1945, moma.org/docs/press_archives/977/releases/MOMA_1945_0011.pdf?2010 (accessed August 30, 2011).

³⁸⁹ MoMA, "New Technique of Multiple Circulating Exhibitions on Display at Museum of Modern Art", March 6, 1945, moma.org/docs/press_archives/978/releases/MOMA_1945_0012_1945-03-06_45306-10.pdf?2010 (accessed August 30, 2011).

the importance of suitable space...in the Museum's galleries. Such exhibition space is only too rarely assigned to this Department...We cannot hope to advertise our programs adequately, and particularly the programme designed for the domestic market, unless our exhibitions can be shown in the Museum's galleries with regularity. Only then can we gain the attention of the pertinent newspapers and magazines.... And...at the same time satisfy the interest and curiosity of our lenders in our work, while stimulating others into greater willingness to support our programme.³⁹⁰

Further evidence of commodification concerns a promulgation/profit strategy initiated by Wheeler. According to a press release, "Hung on the extreme west wall of the second floor gallery was a display of the Museum's larger color reproductions, each of them framed."³⁹¹ Of the 13 reproductions for sale, viewers can choose from at least five seen in WIMP. Wheeler appears to have no concerns about print as a simulacrum of paint, for in the same press release he states:

[MoMA] prides itself upon obtaining in its color reproductions the greatest fidelity to the original possible...Our reproductions...reproduce not only the colors but also the surface texture of the original works of art.³⁹²

He goes on to describe how some reproductions, including a Rouault in WIMP, are crafted by an artist couple (Albert Urban and his spouse). This adds additional prestige value by suggesting that an artist-made print reproduction somehow contributes to "the greatest fidelity" to an actual painting. T

he conflation of didacticism and salesmanship is unabashed:

Color reproductions, like phonograph records, are a means of familiarizing a large public with the aesthetic pleasures of art; their purpose is that of initiation and education.³⁹³

³⁹⁰ AHB [AAA: 2178;1298]. Jane Sabersky to Barr and others, January 14, 1954.

³⁹¹ MoMA, "New Technique of Multiple Circulating Exhibitions on Display at Museum of Modern Art".

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

As with Barr's various caveats about reproductions, this is carefully qualified to emphasize direct experience:

perhaps one of their greatest merits is that, in the end, they teach one not to be satisfied with them or any substitute for an original work of art.³⁹⁴

In terms of development, Otis reshapes WIMP into a CE by adapting the text, helping to select images, and working with fabricators.³⁹⁵ Despite intimate involvement with the book, Barr appears to be minimally involved with the show. This is seen in one of few exchanges between Barr and CE staff. In January 1944, mere months before production, Courter writes:

I am...attaching Alice Otis' labels for the exhibition... which I thought you might like to read. I am not sure about some of the titles of the panels and I want to go over the text carefully another time along with the publication....³⁹⁶

This makes sense, as he is officially "in exile" until 1947, though during this period he installs himself at the museum's library, where staff seeks him out. In the CE as at the museum, his voice is quieted. The result is a stark version of his gently reasoned text.

Different artworks are featured in the CE for pragmatic as much as didactic reasons. Long lists of possibilities are considered, influenced by legibility, subject, and cost. The art has to read at a reduced scale and, in some instances, in black and white. In terms of subject matter, works presumed to be appealing or "accessible," as one would say today, are favored. Finally, print cost is a major element, motivated by the desire to keep the rent/sale prices low. Some of the two-hundred copies of each color

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ CE, II.1.120.1.

³⁹⁶ CE, II.1.120.1. Courter to Barr, January 7, 1944.

reproduction are purchased and others printed in conjunction with copies for sale.

Courter memos confirm that

The choice of pictures was governed almost entirely by what was available in quantity here at the Museum, because it was too expensive to buy them from other places.³⁹⁷

At the time she even plans to “point out on the title panel that the exhibition has been limited to existing color reproductions.”³⁹⁸ A memo from Courter to Wheeler touches on these issues:

I have just learned that you have decided not to publish the Van Gogh “Starry Night” as a large color reproduction....I should like to put in a strong request for it. As you may know, we are trying to assemble an introductory exhibition on modern painting which will amplify the WIMP booklet. We need seriously a number of good color reproductions and we need them in quantities of several hundred copies so that the exhibition can be sold inexpensively.³⁹⁹

In several instances shortfalls preclude use (Picasso’s *Girl Before A Mirror*, 1932)⁴⁰⁰ and a work by John Kane, featured in the book, is omitted for reasons of print quality and timing.⁴⁰¹ In another case, a work is used in a panel for its legibility compared to others, as seen in this query to Barr regarding Peter Blume’s *The Eternal City* (1934–1937):

If you can suggest any other picture to use on Panel 4, I should appreciate it. We had used the Blume here but thought that perhaps it did not fit in well with the Gropper and Wood reproductions. Still, I think the panel is weak as it is and perhaps needs a strong note, and the Blume can be read from a photograph.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ CE, II.1.120.1. Courter to Rindge, n.d. Rindge makes a further appearance in Chapter 4.

³⁹⁸ CE, II.1.120.1. Courter to Barr. January 7, 1944.

³⁹⁹ CE, II.1.120.1. Courter to Wheeler, September 16, 1943.

⁴⁰⁰ CE, II.1.120.1. Alice Otis to Iona Ulrich, November 3, 1943.

⁴⁰¹ CE, II.1.120.1. Otis to Marie McSwigan, University of Pittsburgh, May 3, 1944.

⁴⁰² CE, II.1.120.1. Courter to Barr. January 7, 1944.

Regarding market appeal, Courter recognizes that Loren MacIver's graphic *Hopscotch* (1940) "would reproduce beautifully in the silk screen process; I suppose, however, it would not be as salable a picture as the other you have mentioned." Similarly, she writes of Paul Klee's *Around The Fish* (1926) that it is "a fairly popular picture and I should think it would be an easy matter to sell copies...."⁴⁰³ Another memo takes the opposite approach, proposing that inclusion in a panel will spur sales of less popular prints.

After extensive deliberations, Otis arrives at the final checklist. Note the deletion of *Retreat from Dunkirk*, half of the book's strong opening comparison of "war pictures:"

Of the reproductions which I asked to have 200 copies reserved for the WIMP exhibition, I would like to withdraw Eurlich *Retreat from Dunkirk*, Prendergast *East River* and add to the list: Arp: *Anchor, Table, Mountain, Navel*. This will then be the final list....⁴⁰⁴

The finished panels begin touring the country that year. As with other CEs, the venues are geographically and institutionally diverse, ranging from the Walker Art Center to the American Red Cross. The show even makes a rare international appearance in Australia. Department store installations blur art and commerce: one store promotes WIMP in a remarkable advertorial for living room suites.⁴⁰⁵ The itinerary is also notable for a preponderance of military and government installations, including several Army commands, the Office of War Information, the U.S.O., and the Haitian State Department.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Both CE, II.1.120.1.

⁴⁰⁴ CE, II.1.120.1. Otis to Ulrich and others, February 10, 1944.

⁴⁰⁵ Victor Furniture Center, "What is Modern Furniture?" And "What is Modern Painting?," *Your Home Magazine*, March-April, 1953.

⁴⁰⁶ CE, Album III.49.

Exit surveys conducted by the museum are generally positive. In regional newspapers, however, reception varies. One Tennessee reviewer is unimpressed, describing a “motley demonstration of cubism, abstraction, realism and runaway expression.” She does find Cezanne, “Orozio,” and Matisse to be acceptable, however.⁴⁰⁷ Another reviewer pans the show but praises the labels, stating that the exhibit

has at least the redeeming feature of printed placards strategically placed to buoy up the visitor with some sort of explanation as to why it should be circulated and hung. Whether it makes for clearer understanding remains vague.⁴⁰⁸

One might think that traveling shows would be received passively, as one-way communication from institutional authority. But several accounts describe adaptation on site, most often by incorporation into local events. This ability to act upon a museum art exhibition is rare and reveals more about reception than conventional reviews. In Great Falls, Montana, WIMP is installed in conjunction with an annual exhibition and “an illustrated explanation of modern painting by...local artists.”⁴⁰⁹ The women’s club of Dixon, Illinois, accompanies the slide show with piano selections “to show that painting, like the art of music, need not contain recognizable imitations of nature.”⁴¹⁰ And the Junior League of Saginaw, Michigan, presents the panel show and slide talk as “an added attraction” to its annual art exhibition (held at a Buick showroom). There the “children’s interest committee of the Saginaw Radio ouncil [sic]” even get involved,

⁴⁰⁷ CE, II.2.120.1. Ruth Campbell, “Westfield Paintings Offset Motley Modern Art Exhibit,” *Morning Tennessean*, September 7, 1953.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ CE, Album III.49.

⁴¹⁰ CE, Album III.49. Mrs. William W. Roat to Virginia Pearson, November 26, 1946.

creating a “dramatization on the lives and works of several artists whose works will be shown” to be broadcast over the local radio station.⁴¹¹

This pattern continues throughout the show’s 13-year duration. But as with late editions of the book, if one encounters the show towards the end of its run, modern painting ends with *Guernica*. A 1956 viewer misses over a decade of major developments, with Abstract Expressionism the most conspicuous absence. The show freezes in time even as it moves through it.

Phase 3: War’s End, 1946–1949

The immediate postwar period brings a return to peacetime attendance and programming. Demand for the WIMP book remains strong and is significantly enhanced by mainstream distribution. Design changes and minor but telling text edits evince this transformation from a modest educational “booklet” to a splashier trade publication. Meanwhile, the show continues touring the country unchanged.

1943 edition is successful enough to warrant a reprint, even with continuing paper shortages. Wheeler notes:

Our stock...is getting low, and inasmuch as it is a small book using comparatively little paper I think we can arrange to do a new edition of it and not let it go out of print. It has been an extremely successful publication.⁴¹²

Edits to this edition are minimal, mainly putting war references in the past tense. The real significance of the edition is as part of the first wave of MoMA books to be

⁴¹¹ CE, Album III.49. “Colored Slides at Art Exhibit.” *Saginaw Michigan News*, October 1, 1944.

⁴¹² AHB, B.2.c. Wheeler to Barr, March 14, 1945. This “new edition” most likely refers to a reprint, which may have been called the second edition.

distributed by the mainstream publisher Simon and Schuster, beginning in January, 1946. According to a representative, the relationship is a quick success:

All sixteen of our salesmen turned in glowing reports on the first four months of our joint venture. Book stores throughout the country seem without exception to be delighted with the new arrangement.⁴¹³

While it is difficult to quantify the degree to which mainstream distribution increases WIMP sales, it appears to be positive. Continued demand brings the prospect of a revised edition. The next day Wheeler reports that “Simon & Schuster has just ordered 5,000 copies....To prevent this book from going out of print we are ordering a new edition at once.”⁴¹⁴

This 1946 edition (called the third) introduces a more spacious layout and distinctive cover. Regarding layout, Barr notes to Wheeler, “Thanks in large part to Frances’ ingenuity the changes will make it considerably better balanced and less cramped.”⁴¹⁵ This is clearest in the placement of *Guernica*, with a scaled-up image now positioned horizontally across the spread. (Figure 27) Now the largest reproduction in the book by far, it makes an even stronger final impression and further amplifies Barr’s passion for humanism and political freedom.

A bold, elegant new cover (Figure 19) by influential designer, educator, and theoretician Geörgy Kepes takes full advantage of his practical and philosophical skills, communicating the book’s juxtapositions of representation and abstraction through line and shape, motion and stillness, black and white. It remains in place for decades.

⁴¹³ MW, II.108. Albert Rice Leventhal to Wheeler, June 12, 1946.

⁴¹⁴ MW, II.108. Wheeler to Barr, June 13, 1946.

⁴¹⁵ MW, II.108. Barr to Wheeler, August 31, 1946.

The cover design is consistent with Kepes' seminal primer *Language of Vision*.⁴¹⁶ Published only a year after WIMP, the two can be seen as analogs, as both argue for universal visual language—Barr's "Esperanto." Where WIMP makes its point with paintings, *Language of Vision* uses posters and advertising. The books share a "practical rhetoric" echoed in a Kepes quip: design has two interrelated goals, he writes, "[o]ne is to advertise the product, the other to train the eye."⁴¹⁷ This in turn resonates with Barr's trope of effective (advertising) and true (vision).

By 1949, sales remain strong enough to warrant still another reprint, bringing with it an opportunity for more revisions—and royalties. Barr agrees that updates are in order, writing to Wheeler, "there are a number of changes I'd like to make—corrections and additions caused by the passage of time and new problems." With inventory low, however, the publisher advocates for a straight reprint, with six months after that to prepare a revised edition.⁴¹⁸ Given the immediate demand, Barr agrees to postpone substantial revision.⁴¹⁹ He is less willing to postpone income, however. "I had also expected royalties on future editions of WIMP—indeed had been assured of them. What can we do about this? I'm deep in debt." Considering that he has long received only a symbolic salary and loses even that when fired, his anxious tone is understandable. The new edition comes to fruition only in 1952 as the first of only two substantial revisions.

⁴¹⁶ György Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Chicago: Theobald, 1944).

⁴¹⁷ "1981 Hall of Fame: Geörgy Kepes", Art Directors Club, adcglobel.org/archive/hof/1981/?id=258 (accessed May 31, 2011).

⁴¹⁸ MW, II.108. Wheeler to Barr, January 28, 1949.

⁴¹⁹ MW, II.108. Barr to Wheeler, February 2, 1949.

Phase 4: Consolidation, 1952–1957

After almost a decade in print WIMP is finally revised in 1952 (the show ends its run five years later). The revision reflects a conservative mid-century turn at MoMA and in American society at large. It also unwittingly undermines the notion of universal visual language.

In 1952 MoMA also reassesses its once-radical approach to “art in our time” by dissolving the 1947 “three-museum” agreement to transfer older works.⁴²⁰ Meanwhile, McCarthyism and a general conservative shift in middle-class American taste engender a defensive reaction by Barr. His correspondence at the time shows intense activity in support of artistic freedom, especially in light of Red Scare effects upon left-leaning artists. In this context the question shifts from *What Is Modern Painting?* to *Is Modern Art Communistic?* the provocative title of his 1952 *New York Times Magazine* essay.⁴²¹

In fact, that very article may be on Barr’s mind several weeks later when he sends an ardent memo to Wheeler regarding WIMP’s retail price. When Wheeler proposes raising the price to \$1.25 from \$1, Barr argues that the lower price will “increase and hasten the distribution of the book” without seriously undercutting revenue. WIMP is “not just another publication venture but an instrument of propaganda in the original and best sense of the word,” an effort that “should be considered as publicity in a very vital sense, having to do with the essential freedom of art and the Museum.” He continues,

WIMP deals not only with the principal medium with which the Museum is concerned; it is also the medium subject to the most serious misunderstanding on

⁴²⁰ Varnedoe, 41.

⁴²¹ Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Is Modern Art Communistic?,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 14, 1952. Reprinted in Barr Jr., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 1986. *Defining Modern Art*.

the part of the public and this misunderstanding involves the most sinister implications. On the other hand WIMP is a political tract as well as an exposition of an art.

By keeping the price low, he reiterates, “we will fulfill our original purpose in publishing the series, a purpose which is now far more urgent than it was.”⁴²² For comparison, in 1943, when WIMP is published, \$1 is also the price of a sixty-four-page paperback Calder catalog (cloth bound, \$2).⁴²³ Wheeler replies with a fiscal counter-argument based on unit costs, with no mention of political considerations.⁴²⁴ Eventually the price goes up.

The revision is also motivated by the opportunity to translate WIMP into Portuguese. To be co-published with the modern art museums of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Barr is firm that the prospective book

must not be reprinted without considerable revisions...I have adjusted a good many passages to the post-war climate (the WIMP text had not been revised since it was first written in mid-war 1943!)....⁴²⁵

He also uncritically resolves to adapt the text to local culture, complicating the notion of “visual Esperanto,” in which there “there are no foreign languages in painting... only local dialects which can be understood internationally.....”⁴²⁶

I have tried to revise the book both in time—the text is nine years old—and for Brazilian readers. This meant taking out all purely topical or locally American references, as well as more general revisions in the light of history and changes in taste over the past decade.⁴²⁷

⁴²² MW, II.108. Barr to Wheeler, January 8, 1953.

⁴²³ "Museum Notes," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 11, no. 2 (1943). [jstor.org/stable/4058183](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4058183) (accessed February 1, 2010). At \$5.50, a color reproduction is significantly more expensive than most exhibition catalogs, perhaps due to high-end printing methods.

⁴²⁴ MW, II.108. Wheeler to Barr, January 9, 1953.

⁴²⁵ AHB, 6.B.2.b. Barr to Wheeler, April 11, 1952.

⁴²⁶ Alfred H. Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?* (New York,: MoMA, 1952), 5.

⁴²⁷ AHB, 6.B.2.b. Barr to Wheeler, February 27, 1952.

He proposes substitutions presumably more relevant to this “local dialect” such as replacing the topical Ruiz with a work by Brazilian Candido Portinari, subject of a 1940 MoMA exhibition.⁴²⁸ He also selects works in the co-publishers’ collections, a way of promoting them:

Have incorporated three Brazilian paintings owned by MOMA and two European works—Tanguy in Rio museum, Chagall in Sao Paulo...(Omitting Ruiz, Bombois, Ryder, Dali and Miro.)⁴²⁹

In the translation, then, Barr chooses the presumed effectiveness of “dialect” and topicality over the ostensible truth of cultural transcendence. Other translations, omitted from this analysis, reveal this paradox as well.⁴³⁰

Despite dissolution of the three-museum agreement that same year,⁴³¹ in the revisions Barr resists premature canonization, cautioning about post-war developments:

There may be other recent paintings which twenty years from now will seem obviously greater. We cannot tell for sure. Nor can we say that these paintings for all their power and richness of interest are better than the paintings of several decades ago....it may be that the times are ripe for one kind of painting and not for another.⁴³²

The revised edition maintains the antifascist theme. Rather than soften it in the post-war context, Barr directs it at a new threat—Communism:

I have...put in a long paragraph on Soviet art policies...(when this text was first written we were enthusiastic allies of the Russians so I did not balance certain

⁴²⁸ AHB, 6.B.2.b Barr to Wheeler, February 27, 1952. *Portinari of Brazil*, (New York: MoMA, 1940).

⁴²⁹ AHB, 6.B.2.b. Barr to Wheeler, February 11, 1952.

⁴³⁰ WIMP is by far the most translated WIM book, including editions in Japanese (1953), Portuguese (1953), Spanish (1953 and in a 1991 magazine), and French (1988). Dutch and German translations are also considered in 1948 and one reader proposes a Hebrew translation in 1950. See Barr 6.B.2.b.i.

⁴³¹ The last ties are cut in 1952. Varnedoe, 41.

⁴³² Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?*, 1952, 44.

observations about Hitler with others about Stalin as I had done in 1936 in *Cubism and Abstract Art*).⁴³³

Following directly upon existing passages on Nazism, the new paragraphs are equally passionate, discussing suppressed Soviet artists, shuttered museums, and propaganda.⁴³⁴ Though he mentions Picasso's Party membership, Barr distances modern art from Communism. As in the *Times Magazine* article, he is careful to shift the question away from suspicion of the unfamiliar and towards the all-American idea of individual expression. To drive the point home, he answers the question "Why do totalitarian dictators hate modern art?" with "Because the artist...stands for individual freedom...to tell the truth as he feels from inner necessity...." The subsequent 1956 edition adds an additional gesture: President Eisenhower is quoted speaking at MoMA itself, proclaiming, "as long as our artists are free to create...there will be healthy controversy and progress in art."⁴³⁵ In another publication Barr takes pains to point out how the conservative landscape that opens the book (*Derby View*, discussed earlier) is chosen by Eisenhower for loan to the White House.⁴³⁶

Besides invoking anti-Communism, Barr also chooses works provocative to the general public, a strategy with the potential to take advantage of mass media sensationalism. He focuses on "the three most talked-about pictures in the current [show] at the Tate...."⁴³⁷ Kazimir Malevich's ever-provocative *Suprematist Composition:*

⁴³³ AHB, 6.B.2.b. Barr to Wheeler, April 11, 1952.

⁴³⁴ Barr and the MoMA Library maintained files on reactionary criticism. See AHB, Series 7, Political Controversy and MoMA Library Archives Pamphlet File Art--Twentieth Century--Reactionary Criticism. For examples see Jennifer Tobias, *Modern Art and Reactionary Criticism* (New York: MoMA Library, 2000).

⁴³⁵ Alfred H. Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?* (New York: MoMA, 1956), 46.

⁴³⁶ Alfred H. Barr Jr., "[Painting and Sculpture Acquisitions June 1, 1953 through June 30, 1955]," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 23, no. 3 (1956). [jstor.org/stable/4058296](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4058296) (accessed November 21, 2011).

⁴³⁷ AHB, 6.B.2.b. Barr to Wheeler, August 15, 1952.

White on White (1918), Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), and Giacomo Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912). The Duchamp and Balla are duly added to the new WIMP section *Motion and Commotion*, with Futurism further illustrated by Boccioni's trio *States of Mind* (1911). The exhibition, *XXth Century Masterpieces: an Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture at the Tate Gallery*⁴³⁸ is part of an expansive Festival of the Twentieth Century organized by the Congress for Cultural Freedom—an anti-Communist organization with links to the CIA.⁴³⁹ It is in fact curated by James Johnson Sweeney (1900–1986).⁴⁴⁰ Sweeney, a long-time MoMA figure who briefly replaces Barr following his ouster, is at this point a member of the affiliated American Committee for Cultural Freedom.⁴⁴¹ It is ironic, then, that Barr's advocacy for individual freedom, including radical movements such as Futurism and (Russian) Suprematism, is in this instance inspired by the efforts of a group devoted to “cultural freedom.”

Regarding contemporary developments, Barr adds a spread on Abstract Expressionism, again featuring juxtapositions, with one page on *Pleasure and Pain* and the other titled *Activity and Serenity*. The former features Pierre Matisse's *1001 Nights* (1950) and Maxim Gorky's *Agony* (1947). The latter shows Mark Rothko's *Number 10* (1950) dwarfing Jackson Pollock's *Number 7* (also 1950). All suffer from black and white reproduction. The texts themselves are unremarkable, with the exception of a nervous reference to Communism:

⁴³⁸ James Johnson Sweeney, *XXth Century Masterpieces: An Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture at the Tate Gallery* (London: Arts Council, 1952).

⁴³⁹ Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA and Post-War American Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁴⁰ Grace Glueck, "James Johnson Sweeney Dies, Art Critic and Museum Head," *New York Times*, no. April 15 (1986). nytimes.com/1986/04/15/obituaries/james-johnson-sweeney-dies-art-critic-and-museum-head.html (accessed October 22, 2011).

⁴⁴¹ Scott-Smith, 2002, 132–3.

abstract painting is the dominant, characteristic art of the mid-century. (That is, in the free world. Painters controlled by the Communists, however, are required to use a realistic style though, of course, this does not mean that ‘realistic’ painters, in America, for instance, are ordinarily Communist in sympathy!)⁴⁴²

For the 1952 edition Barr continues to write in coordination with page sequencing, sketching layout diagrams for new sections (Figure 23)⁴⁴³ and inserting page mockups into a copy of the book.⁴⁴⁴ To emphasize revision, Barr goes so far as to suggest “a color change on the cover, or a new cover...let’s change cover to a bright light green or orange (couldn’t we use one of those new ‘dazzle’ poster paints?)”⁴⁴⁵ The cover remains the same, however, until the 1980s. (Figure 20)

Barr also considers a completely new type of edition, one that would take advantage of the robust post-war paperback market. While discussing another book with a publisher, he writes,

It occurred to me on a hunch to ask whether Pocket Books might be interested in considering WIMP. He seemed really interested and said that they had in fact been scheduling some such book in the near future...It does seem to me that WIMP with adequate revisions might really be something they could use.⁴⁴⁶

Collaboration with Pocket Books, the paperback imprint of MoMA’s distributor Simon & Schuster, would potentially extend WIMP’s reach. Though never produced, a mockup shows that the idea is thoroughly explored. Had the book come to fruition, it would have predated the 1958 launch of Thames & Hudson’s comparable and still successful *World of Art* series.

⁴⁴² Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?*, 1952, 42.

⁴⁴³ AHB, 6.B.2.b. Image at right is a detail from a letter-sized sheet.

⁴⁴⁴ AHB, 6.B.2.b. Barr to Wheeler, February 27, 1952.

⁴⁴⁵ AHB, 6.B.2.b.

⁴⁴⁶ MW, II.108. Barr to Wheeler, February 25, 1952.

Phase 5: Decline, 1966–1988

After a second major revision in 1966, WIMP remains essentially unchanged for the next twenty years. This account concludes by assessing this last significant attempt to keep the book timely and then questioning its subsequent neglect. I argue that the WIM ethos simply can't accommodate developments such as New Photography, Installation, Conceptualism, or politically-oriented art beyond *Guernica*.

The 1966 additions to WIMP constitute a third page on Abstract Expressionism (*Mid-Century Abstraction: Violence and Anxiety*) and a facing page on *The 1960s: "Pop" and "Op."* The AbEx section asserts a softening of the geometric/non-geometric resolution of Barr's 1936 chart (Figure 21), describing works that incorporate both. The section also harmonizes the dream world/outer world schema of the CE, in which the artist "turns his back on neither humanity nor nature."⁴⁴⁷ In a twist to the Cold War theme, Barr refers indirectly to nuclear energy regarding Adolph Gottlieb's *Blast, I* (1957) by asking "Is this a succinct 1958 version of *Guernica*? Don't jump to conclusions—the disc may be the rising sun."⁴⁴⁸

The addition of Pop Art is situated firmly in the world of geometric abstraction and outer reality. This is exemplified by Roy Lichtenstein's *Flatten—Sand Fleas!* (1962), another reference to war underscored by pointing out the image's origin in a comic about a Marine landing. The author then broadens the theme by encouraging the reader to compare it "[i]n character and quality of violence...with de Kooning's *Woman, I* and Picasso's *Guernica*...."⁴⁴⁹ The Lichtenstein is juxtaposed awkwardly in both layout and concept with a tiny reproduction of a huge Op Art canvas, *Untitled* (1965) by Arnold

⁴⁴⁷ Alfred H. Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?* (New York,; MoMA, 1966), 44.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Schmidt. As a hard-edge, black and white work, the painting lends itself well to monotone printing but the drastic scale change (from eight feet to three inches wide) fails to account for the phenomenological nature of Op Art. Recalling his early caveat that “writing is done with words while paintings are made of shapes and colors,”⁴⁵⁰ here Barr has only words to convey how the “eight-foot wide painting” produces “an almost architectural effect of perspective and dazzling light.”⁴⁵¹ If reproductions should be proportional to their actual size, as Pernas mentions earlier, he would likely have been displeased by this layout (Pernas has left MoMA by this point).

With the 1966 edition time quite simply stops for WIMP. Evidence suggests that this is only occasionally questioned, as in this memo concerning caption updates to (most likely) the 1975 reprint. Associate Editor Jane Fluegel notes:

I am somewhat dismayed about stopping at Op and Pop—I wish we could add a paragraph by Rubin on later tendencies (Alfred updated every edition, as nearly as I can tell). If the paragraph were added, some of the Cold War rhetoric at the end could be dropped.⁴⁵²

There is even a practical reason to update the content of that edition: to obtain an ISBN (International Standard Book Number) number. The humble ISBN aids marketing and library cataloging, but according to a memo, at the time books have to be fifty pages or more to get one. To that end a staff member asks, “Can we add two [pages]?”⁴⁵³ Apparently not, for the count remains at forty-eight.

Though the 1966 edition stops moving with time, an era is passing at the museum itself. Barr retires the next year and by the end of the decade, vital first-

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁵² Jane Fluegel Papers, 1.17. Fluegel to Francis Kloeppel, April 23, 1975. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Hereafter “JF.”

⁴⁵³ JF, 1.17. Frances Keech to Francis Kloeppel. May 1, 1975.

generation staff follows. Crucially, at the same time a revived avant-garde begins to question assumptions such as those espoused by WIMP. Given the momentum of the project and based on sales, some demand, why does the content stagnate?

In institutional terms, one factor may be power realignment between the education and curatorial departments: when D'Amico retires in 1969, the education program is reconceived and the blatant populism of WIMP is inconsistent with a new, curatorially-driven emphasis on passive appreciation, as opposed to D'Amico's hands-on populism.⁴⁵⁴

Another factor concerns MoMA's rapid post-war growth. Pernas recalls:

The cohesiveness of the Museum sort of gave way about that time...the staff was larger, and it just wasn't as focused, it seems to me, as it had been before. [And] I was probably doing many, many more books. I was spread much thinner—much thinner—because we ended up having a huge budget for the books, and it just meant more work.⁴⁵⁵

A third explanation is that by this point Barr is such a revered figure at MoMA that the book is preserved as an ideological shrine. Within the by-then established institution it could have been considered a form of heresy to reconceive it, even though doing so presents an opportunity to pass authority to Barr's successors, such as Lieberman, who reviews the WIMP manuscript as an ambitious student.

A fourth and sadder possibility concerns Barr's slow decline around this time. His papers show, and Lynes confirms, that Barr gradually withdraws from the art world due to persistent frail health and the gradual onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Finally, Barr could have simply lost touch with vanguard movements after the early 1960s. This is borne out in his later bibliography: his exhibition catalogs of the

⁴⁵⁴ For more on this transition see Morgan.

⁴⁵⁵ OH Project, Frances Pernas, 1994. 38.

1960s mostly concern acquisition of individual works and relatively conservative collections, and his publications trickle off by 1970.⁴⁵⁶ But he must have been at least aware of developments in Conceptualism, Installation, Happenings, and photography—or at least MoMA’s attempts to make sense of them. The museum’s more progressive gestures in this period include the self-destructing Jean Tinguely installation *Homage to New York* (MoMA 661, 1960), the photographic *New Documents* (MoMA 821, 1967), and museum’s first venture into conceptual art, Kynaston McShine’s *Information* (1970). Barr’s sense of these new developments hasn’t been examined in depth.

Conclusion

These new directions are simply incompatible with the fundamental premises of WIMP and the museum’s by-then established master narrative. This is even clearer when considering the climate of activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when questioning modernism also means interrogating the idea of a modernist museum. As is well known, this interrogation involves direct action—much of it directed at MoMA.⁴⁵⁷ Groups such as the Art Workers Coalition, New York Art Strike, and Artists Meeting for Cultural Change organize numerous actions at the museum, while several individuals intervene with artworks themselves. In terms of WIMP, the most symbolic gesture is Art Workers Coalition member and future gallerist Tony Shafrazi’s 1974 action upon

⁴⁵⁶ See Barr bibliography in Barr Jr., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 1986, 274–92.

⁴⁵⁷ For much more on the Art Workers Coalition and related activism see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California, 2009); Beth Handler, “Art of Activism: Artists and Writers Protest, the Art Workers’ Coalition, and the New York Art Strike Protest the Vietnam War” (Ph. D. diss., Yale, 2001). For actions related to the museum’s attitudes towards women artists, see Jennifer Tobias, “Documenting a Feminist Past: Art World Critique”, moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/37 (accessed April 16, 2011).

Guernica, in which he enters the gallery and spray-paints “kill lies all” on the canvas. Clearly intended to link massacre in *Guernica* to U.S. atrocities in Vietnam, the act must also be read as an interrogation of painting—both in and outside the frame. Put simply, at this particular juncture, modern art can concern itself with abstract form, furthering, for example, the trajectory of minimalism and hard-edge painting, or it can—and perhaps should—move further into the sociopolitical realm. If so, many politically oriented artists reason at the time, this means recognizing that the art world itself exists in the sociopolitical realm and must be addressed accordingly.

In other words, at this second level Shafrazi’s gesture asks the larger question *What Is modern painting in the context of institutional power?* The answer “kill lies all” has particular resonance for WIMP, for “lies” may conceivably be a reference to the well-known Picasso aphorism quoted in the book: “Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.”⁴⁵⁸ If so, this constitutes a fundamental critique of modernist painting and its institutionalization in the ostensibly neutral MoMA galleries—and in texts such as WIMP. In this line of thinking the “lie” of painting is no longer effective as “truth.” By the 1970s, could one even ask *What Is Modern Painting?*

Though only recently retired, Barr appears to have been uninvolved in these developments. Instead, this is left to short-lived directors Bates Lowry and John Hightower, as well as their successor Richard Oldenburg (a distant relation of Claes). Their spectrum of responses, though too complex to address here, testify to the depth of the crisis.⁴⁵⁹

In short, reconsidering WIMP means reconsidering the very idea of modernism in light of these developments. Can there be a “pragmatic rhetoric of education” in this new

⁴⁵⁸ Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?*, 1943, 38.

⁴⁵⁹ See Lynes and Handler.

climate, or has the discourse of painting become dogma? Is MoMA's modernism truly open ended or has the torpedo lost momentum? I conclude that the decline of WIMP is directly related to these larger issues. Barr is correct that modernism is a moving target, but he fails to anticipate that its trajectory doesn't follow a straight line. Rather, at that moment the torpedo explodes, propelling art—and art historiography—in all directions.

CHAPTER 3. *WHAT IS MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY?* (WIMPH) SYMPOSIUM AND UNPUBLISHED BOOK, 1950–1951

[Edward Steichen] demonstrated that all photography, if properly packaged, could be efficiently channeled into the currents of the mass media.

—Christopher Phillips⁴⁶⁰

No doubt Mr. Steichen has a general idea of what he wants. But in view of his inability at this point to explain it more precisely...[w]e could not decide from what standpoint to take it; what to include; what exclude; how to give it form; and so on.

—Andreas Feininger⁴⁶¹

For a series so dependent upon reproductions to convey the modernist message, how is photography itself addressed? The WIM effort that comes closest to self-consciousness regarding the persuasive use of the medium is Edward Steichen's 1950 symposium *What Is Modern Photography?* (WIMPh) and unrealized book proposal the following year. At the same time, photography is the most elusive of subjects, revealing a long-term discourse across museum departments about the appropriate rhetoric for a rhetorical medium. I argue that by organizing a pluralistic symposium without including historians or critics, and through difficulties producing a didactic show or book, Steichen and his colleagues are unable to reconcile fundamental, paradoxical aspects of photography, both of which are espoused by MoMA. These concern tensions between notions of the autonomous, original creative artist finding truth through the medium's ostensible transparency, and photography's equally powerful capacity to be mobilized for persuasive purposes by larger entities—including MoMA itself.

⁴⁶⁰ Phillips.

⁴⁶¹ MW, II.54. Joseph D. Isaacson to Wheeler, March 20, 1947.

Steichen's curatorial legacy is renowned for this embrace of instrumental, mass-media photography, part of a relentless drive for rhetorical effectiveness (in the Barr sense) at the expense of more subtle truths. But even given the opportunity to reconcile these practices in WIM form, Steichen is unable to formulate a rigorous argument. I speculate that a key reason is that doing so has the potential to expose how the museum's use of photography in the series contradicts modernist ideals of transparency, timelessness, and originality.

I conclude with a final paradox, arguing that Steichen's resistance demonstrates a certain degree of integrity: by failing to theorize modern photography in didactic, institutionalized form, his non-answer to the WIM question is the series' most sophisticated if suppressed example of the medium's persuasive capacity. It is also true to his career as a practitioner: WIMPh is the only action-oriented component of the series.

MoMA's role in the historiography of photography is well documented.⁴⁶² Integral to Barr's vision, the department (established in 1940) is the first of its kind in an art museum. Its founding curator Beaumont Newhall organizes one of the earliest museum survey exhibitions on the subject: *Photography, 1839–1937* (MoMA 60, 1937; CE *Photography 1839–1937 I*, 1937–1938, 10 venues and *Brief Survey of Photography from 1839–1937*, 1937–38, 12 venues).⁴⁶³ From that show emerges the first aesthetically

⁴⁶² Olivier Lugon, "Edward Steichen as Exhibition Designer," in *Steichen: Lives in Photography*, ed. Todd Brandow and William A. Ewing (New York: Norton, 2007); Lynes, 1973; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, ed; Beaumont Newhall, *Focus: Memoirs of a Life in Photography* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993); Phillips; Sandeen, 1995; Staniszewski, 1998.

⁴⁶³ CE, II.1.32.5.

oriented history of the medium, mapping out Newhall's approach to the new discipline.⁴⁶⁴

The sharp curatorial contrasts between Newhall and his successor Steichen are thoroughly addressed elsewhere.⁴⁶⁵ Most relevant here is that Newhall tends to look to photography's first century of material and aesthetic development while Steichen mainly focuses on its contemporary role as a mass communications medium.

At the time of the symposium Steichen has been in place as chief curator for the first three of an eventual fifteen years, having controversially succeeded Newhall in 1947.⁴⁶⁶ The symposium is explicitly "carrying on [the] same idea"⁴⁶⁷ of his first major exhibition after joining the staff: *In and Out of Focus: A Survey of Today's Photography* (MoMA 373, 1948; CE 1949–1950). Both serve to stake out his curatorial position and distance him from Newhall.

To put the symposium in context with MoMA exhibitions at the time, in 1950 five of twenty-seven exhibitions concern photography. Of these, three typify Steichen's penchant for group, thematic, and/or contemporary shows (*Photographs of Picasso by Gjon Mili and by Robert Capa, Color Photography, Photographs by 51 Photographers*) and two are historical and/or monographic (Alfred Stieglitz and Eugène Atget recent acquisitions, *Photographs by Lewis Carroll*). CEs on photography in play that year show

⁴⁶⁴ The exhibition catalog is revised into a small-run publication and then a larger edition, itself subsequently revised several times. The sequence: Beaumont Newhall, *Photography 1839–1937* (New York: MoMA, 1937); Beaumont Newhall, *Photography, a Short Critical History*, 2nd ed. (New York: MoMA, [1938]); Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* 4th ed. (New York: MoMA, [1964]). The MoMA Archives holds a copy of the 1937 catalog annotated by Newhall in anticipation of the subsequent *Short History*.

⁴⁶⁵ See Newhall, *Focus: Memoirs of a Life in Photography*, 1993; Phillips.

⁴⁶⁶ Newhall, *Focus: Memoirs of a Life in Photography*, 1993; Phillips.

⁴⁶⁷ Edward Steichen and Walter Rosenblum, "What is Modern Photography?," *American Photography* 45, no. 3 (1951): 146. In this published transcript, Rosenblum comments on the event, characterized below. He is not a symposium speaker or organizer.

a similar tendency (*In and Out of Focus; The Exact Instant: Events and Faces in 100 Years of News Photography; Fifty Great Photographs; and a series on Leading Photographers*).⁴⁶⁸

What Is Modern Photography? (WIMPh) Symposium, 1950

On November 20, 1950 the MoMA auditorium is ready for a live audience of five hundred as well as for broadcast over Voice of America and local radio station WNYC.⁴⁶⁹ Designed to appeal to the millions of photographers in America to whom Steichen often refers,⁴⁷⁰ the museum's aggressive publicity team promotes the symposium as an event "of vital interest to editors and art directors as well as all creative photographers." On the agenda:

Ten of the top ranking American photographers will present their points of view on the meaning and philosophy of modern photography...Going beyond processes or techniques, these photographers in discussing "*What Is Modern Photography?*" will analyze and appraise modern photography in the various fields referred to as reportage, "f-64," documentary, illustration, abstraction and experimental.⁴⁷¹

These fields are represented by Margaret Bourke-White, Walker Evans, Gjon Mili, Lisette Model, Wright Morris, Homer Page, Irving Penn, Ben Shahn, Charles

⁴⁶⁸ MoMA, "Exhibition History List".

⁴⁶⁹ MoMA, "Symposium on 'What is Modern Photography?' To Be Held at Museum", October 11, 1950, moma.org/docs/press_archives/1462/releases/MOMA_1950_0071_1950-10-11_501011-62.pdf?2010 (accessed 2011, August 30); Steichen and Rosenblum: 147.

⁴⁷⁰ The number varies from twenty to thirty million, depending more on Steichen's whim than any specific evidence. In his manuscript for the symposium introduction, "twenty million" is crossed out and upped to a vigorously handwritten "30 million." Box 9, Folder 4, Edward Steichen Manuscript Collection. George Eastman House Library.

⁴⁷¹ MoMA, "Symposium on 'What is Modern Photography?' To Be Held at Museum".

Sheeler, and Aaron Siskind. (Edward Weston and Weegee are also considered at one point.)⁴⁷²

Examination of the symposium form and content shows a reframing of the larger WIM question. How? First, by being a live public event featuring multiple speakers rather than a closely edited institutional statement fixed on paper or panels. Also in that spirit, no historians, critics, or other curators are invited to speak. On the one hand, the symposium is commendable as a diverse, artist-driven forum on contemporary practice. On the other hand, in a transcript one finds that speakers tend to focus on their work exclusively, so the question is effectively narrowed to *what is your modern photography now?*

A few speakers acknowledge but quickly dispose of the theoretical question in temporal or material terms. Mili, for example, quips that “There is no such thing as modern photography. There is photography and there is the lack of it.”⁴⁷³ Evans is one of the few to consider to the question, musing that “In photography I do feel that a good picture usually shows a relation to its period,”⁴⁷⁴ giving Matthew Brady and Atget as examples. But after situating photography in context of the twentieth-century avant garde, he then downplays “relation to...period” in favor of transcendent originality:

I don't see how anyone can be interested in a photograph that isn't either original or daring or beautiful or somehow of unalloyed coinage...I choke on the word “modern” used in connection with these qualities.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Box 9, Folder 4, Steichen Manuscript Collection. George Eastman House Library.

⁴⁷³ Steichen and Rosenblum: 153.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

In other words, despite his accomplishments in instrumental photography (for government and commerce), he maintains that modern photography must be daring, beautiful—and pure. Shahn says the same thing, but with irony:

Modern photography...is photography taken now, as photography in 1935 was modern photography then and became old hat...only if it was bad. If it is good it is timeless.⁴⁷⁶

Beyond the temporal question, tension between autonomy and instrumentalization is the dominant issue. One of the few reviewers observes that:

The question which was avoided...is how the photographer can assert his own individuality when facing the demands of his “modern” employer...How can he fight back when his pictures are misused and distorted to fit in with some previously conceived editorial layout?⁴⁷⁷

Most speakers put the two in opposition. But echoing Steichen’s own career, Irving Penn embraces mass media as a platform for a full spectrum of practice:

The modern photographer stands in awe of the fact that an issue of LIFE magazine will be seen by 24 [million] people...Never before in the history of mankind has anyone working in a visual medium been able to communicate so widely...The modern photographer...is inevitably drawn to the medium which offers him the fullest opportunity for this communication.⁴⁷⁸

In this way a given photographer

communicates the look of a war battlefield, or the look of a movie actress, he informs his readers of the new twist of a hipline in a dress collection. He studies tribal rites of African natives and then publishes his documents in a small edition book. Or he makes a photograph that sells soap.⁴⁷⁹

In this spirit, with WIMPh Steichen makes a symposium to sell the instrumentality of photography. As such, it is a rare moment of WIM transparency regarding this

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 147.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

thoroughly modern component of the medium. But as examples below demonstrate, in other instances Steichen and his colleagues have difficulty reconciling this aspect of photography with the modernist ideology of transparency, temporal transcendence, materialism, and originality.

To what degree is Steichen aware of this tension? How does he address it within the strictures of a WIM publication or show, where the means to a convincing message is the very medium under discussion? Unlike virtually all the other WIM players, Steichen is keenly aware of the medium's rhetorical capacity—but lacks the critical consciousness necessary to expose it. Posing the WIM question brings the paradox to the surface, but Steichen suppresses the cognitive dissonance it provokes.

Given his post-Secessionist career in mass-media photography, it almost goes without saying that Steichen embraces the medium's persuasive power. A year after departing from MoMA in 1962, for example, he continues to celebrate how:

Photography, including the cinema and television as well as the printed page, is a great and forceful medium of mass communication. To this medium the exhibition gallery adds still another dimension...technical and practical aspects of photography make it eminently suitable. The ease with which any given image can be made small or large, the flexibility of placement and juxtaposition, the great range of material available in photographs—all these factors make photography the obvious medium for such projects.⁴⁸⁰

Several historians and critics agree that for all his sophistication Steichen is insufficiently critical regarding this “obvious medium.” For example, in his assessment of Steichen's exhibition design Olivier Lugon believes him to be self-aware, observing:

His use of applied arts...added up to a theory of photography as authentic as any based on doctrinal texts and manifestos. Indeed, Steichen was perfectly aware that, given a medium as physically and semantically malleable as photography,

⁴⁸⁰ Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), n.p. [14-5].

fashioning the framework and context for pictures already meant altering their impact and shaping their meaning.⁴⁸¹

Lugon and others extensively document Steichen's tendency to manipulate the medium for the sake of a given message. Phillips, for example, rightly concludes that Steichen "demonstrated that all photography, if properly packaged, could be efficiently channeled into the currents of the mass media."⁴⁸² In other words, on the Barr scale of effective and true, Steichen's legacy consistently aligns with the effective.

To support this argument for cognitive dissonance and suppression in the WIM context, I conclude with three examples of Steichen's difficulty integrating instrumentality into the museum's populist rhetoric.

What Is Modern Photography? (WIMPh) Unpublished Book, 1951

Following the symposium, Wheeler recognizes yet another opportunity for a WIM and swiftly propagates the idea, as in this memo to d'Harnoncourt:

In talking to Captain Steichen the other day he said that he thought that the pamphlet entitled "*What Is Modern Photography?*" might be based on the transcription of our Photography Symposium. I know this would be very popular and I would greatly appreciate your encouraging him in it. As he has no major show in hand, he might find time to edit it now and thus make an important and remunerative contribution to our publication program.⁴⁸³

Two days after this, photographer (and later trustee) Shirley C. Burden⁴⁸⁴ adds his support and brings up the idea with the curator:

⁴⁸¹ Lugon, 267.

⁴⁸² Phillips.

⁴⁸³ MW, II.109. Wheeler to d'Harnoncourt, August 20, 1951.

⁴⁸⁴ Photographer, filmmaker, gallerist, and teacher Shirley Burden (1909–1989). One biographical sketch describes a "mentor" relationship with Steichen. Burden's work is included in *Diogenes With a Camera IV* (MoMA 599, 1956) and another MoMA show in 1958. He is recruited by the curator to seek out Los Angeles area works for *Family of*

At the suggestion of Nelson Rockefeller and my brother, Bill Burden,⁴⁸⁵ I had a talk the other day with Mr. Steichen. During the course of our conversation, the subject of printing pamphlets similar to "*What Is Modern Art*", [sic] on photographic subjects was discussed...I feel certain there are many people throughout the United States who would be intensely interested in the work of Mr. Steichen's department if they were aware of its existence.⁴⁸⁶

Burden is more enthusiastic about this form of outreach than Steichen himself:

Mr. Steichen, I don't think agrees with me about this. He feels the right people will find the Museum if they are interested enough. Regardless whose opinion is correct, we both agreed more pamphlets on photographic subjects, widely circulated, would be a worth while venture.⁴⁸⁷

Wheeler replies:

This is a matter which has preoccupied us for a long time. We feel that a companion volume to our publications *What Is Modern Painting?* and *What Is Modern Architecture?* with the title *What Is Modern Photography?* would be the most useful and influential publication we could do.⁴⁸⁸

He outlines what is involved:

the problem is not to get such a book printed, it is to get such a book written in the first place. It is an extremely difficult task to present the aesthetic theories of an art in a language intelligible to the layman, and the two books I have mentioned above represent an immense amount of research and rewriting.⁴⁸⁹

Wheeler then asks Burden to fund it:

Captain Steichen feels that if he could have an experienced research assistant for a period of from four to six months he could produce the text for this volume...I wonder if you might undertake to raise this amount of money.⁴⁹⁰

Man. Later in his career he is a trustee at Aperture and MoMA. See Shirley C. Burden Papers, 1947-1989 Finding Aid, New York Public Library, nypl.org/archives/2082, and "Shirley Burden, 80, a Writer-Photographer," *New York Times*, June 5, 1989.

⁴⁸⁵ For a brief biography of Burden (1906–1984) see "William Burden, Ex-Museum President, Dies," *New York Times*, October 11, 1984.. For a darker view of the family see Wendy Burden, *Dead End Gene Pool: A Memoir* (New York: Gotham, 2010).

⁴⁸⁶ MW, II.109. Burden to Wheeler, August 22, 1951.

⁴⁸⁷ MW, II.109. Burden to Wheeler, August 22, 1951.

⁴⁸⁸ MW, II.109. Wheeler to Burden, August 27, 1951.

⁴⁸⁹ MW, II.109. Wheeler to Burden, August 27, 1951.

⁴⁹⁰ MW, II.109. Wheeler to Burden, August 27, 1951.

He does. A note in Steichen's distinctive handwriting reports that "Burden will give \$1000.00 conditional upon another gift of same amount for '*What Is Modern Photography?*'"⁴⁹¹ Wheeler promptly secures this from department trustee and collector David H. McAlpin.⁴⁹² Burden's response is matter-of-fact: "It is nice to know that there is somebody else in the world interested enough in photography to put down cold hard cash."⁴⁹³ In his acknowledgment, Wheeler reiterates the didactic potential of the effort:

These little books have proved to be the museum's most effective medium of elementary instruction about the modern arts, and the lack of a book on photography has been deplored by many educators.⁴⁹⁴

The "little book" of "elementary instruction" is never completed, however, and the dearth of further documentation suggests that it is never started.⁴⁹⁵ Why? As with John Rewald's unfinished WIMDr (Chapter 6), the curator may have assigned educational material to a low priority. For example, Steichen relishes military action and that year he is recruited by a friend to serve as an "official advisor on Navy photography,"⁴⁹⁶ an

⁴⁹¹ MW, II.109. Confirmed in Wheeler to David H. McAlpin, October 2, 1951.

⁴⁹² Notable as an innovative founder of photography institutions, McAlpin (1897–1989) helps to establish the MoMA Photography Department and he also funds the first chair of photography and a photography center at Princeton. Susan Heller Anderson, "David McAlpin 3d, a Longtime Patron of Photography, 92," *New York Times*, June 3, 1989. According to Steichen, McAlpin suggests the *Road to Victory* show. Edward Steichen, "My Life in Photography," *Saturday Review*, March 28, 1959. 17. His collection is shown at MoMA in *From the McAlpin Collection* (MoMA 814, 1966-1967). See also Philips regarding his role at MoMA.

⁴⁹³ MW, II.109. Burden to Wheeler, November 14, 1951.

⁴⁹⁴ MW, II.109. Wheeler to McAlpin, October 18, 1951.

⁴⁹⁵ To date I have located only one later reference describing a prospective thirty-two-page book. MW, II.108. Wheeler to Barr, January 9, 1953. I have found no further evidence in CE, d'Harnoncourt, or Barr Papers at MoMA, or in Eastman House files on the symposium. Photography Department Committee minutes (closed to researchers) and the Burden Papers at the New York Public Library are worth further exploration, though the latter finding aid offers no direct references.

⁴⁹⁶ Penelope Niven, *Steichen: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1997), 633.

endeavor eventually packaged into *Korea—The Impact of War in Photographs* (MoMA 470, 1951; CE *The Faces of Korea*, 1951, 5 venues).

Another factor concerns personal style. Steichen is quite simply a talker and not a writer, a commander and not a collaborator, a picture editor and not a curator. In terms of the WIM symposium, he is chief editor of the story while others report from the field. A public event is also more consistent with his populist ethos.

Several years earlier, Steichen and MoMA staff also struggle to find rhetorical form for a popular discussion of modern photography. As discussed below, they ask: should it be a show, CE, or book? A publication modeled on a how-to series by D'Amico, a technical manual, the “army method of instruction,” a “dissertation,” or should it take on a new form? Development documents for the WIMPh book and precursors reveal vigorous and often unresolved internal debate, much of it instigated by Steichen.

Know Your Camera, Unrealized CE, 1944⁴⁹⁷

Between Steichen's two guest-curated propagandistic exhibitions *Road to Victory* (MoMA 182, 1942) and *Power in the Pacific* (MoMA 275, 1945), he is involved in the fraught, unrealized, and previously unexamined CE panel show *Know Your Camera* (1944). Involving a spectrum of editorial, educational, and curatorial agendas, the project grows to include Courter, D'Amico, then-Photography Department Trustee James Thrall Soby, and photographer/pedagogue Andreas Feininger. *Know Your Camera* is one of several popularization efforts that are eventually realized as the 1944–1945 panel show *Creative Photography*, discussed below.

⁴⁹⁷ Most documents mentioned here lack dates. Based upon other evidence, the project is most likely in play between April 3 and September 1, 1944.

The story begins with an undated manuscript most likely by “Otis + Feininger.”⁴⁹⁸ By this point the manuscript is very developed, with designated panels and photographs (most by Feininger), as well as specifications for graphics and printing. It is modeled on Feininger’s own manuals⁴⁹⁹ and strongly anticipates *Creative Photography*.⁵⁰⁰ The twelve-panel sequence begins with *The Instantaneous Image*, followed by panels on formal elements (viewpoint, angle of vision, “concentration,” space, perspective, sharpness or diffusion, motion, contrast, and color). The concluding panel, titled *The Photographer’s Choice*, attempts to integrate technique with expressive intent.⁵⁰¹

The manuscript bears many comments, reflecting debate about how to formulate a message about the medium. In brief, D’Amico rejects much of the technical detail, characteristically pressing instead for focus on the individual (pitching “YOUR CAMERA AND YOU” instead of *Know Your Camera* as the exhibition title) and on visual argument (“use big photo & little writing”). Soby’s notes echo his comments on the WIMP manuscript a year prior for emphasis on communicating to “kids” (“too philosophical for kids—will they understand ‘opposite psychological effects.’”).⁵⁰² He, too, urges less attention to technical considerations (“I’m still opposed to the gadgetry of this.”)

In the WIM context the most telling note concerns the final panel, which provides the first evidence of Steichen’s difficulties and presages the abandoned WIMPh book. The panel addresses three photographs (one each by Adams, “Harriet” Model, and

⁴⁹⁸ CE, II.1.49.1.1.

⁴⁹⁹ Courter mentions Andreas Feininger, *Fotographische Gestaltung* (Harzburg: Heering, 1937).

⁵⁰⁰ CE, II.1.49.1. In fact, this material is located in the CE files on that show.

⁵⁰¹ CE, II.1.49.1.1.

⁵⁰² The commentator is indicated only as “J.S.” and “he.” The context strongly suggests Soby.

Ralph Steiner), asserting that good photography harmonizes personal expression with technical facility:

Such brilliant expression does not depend on technical skill so much as on the special vision of the man [sic] who saw the picture and then made the translation into two dimensions and black-and-white. But this vision must be backed up by skill and knowledge in order that it may appear in the way the photographer conceived it.⁵⁰³

Someone notes the curator's opinion: "Last panel should be real inspiration see Steichen idea."

As a result, Otis indicates that "our plans for this exhibition have been somewhat changed due to certain suggestions of Commander Steichen," which involves "planning it and laying it out in its new state. I believe it has been much improved."⁵⁰⁴ In a memo to Feininger, a staff member (possibly Otis) elaborates:

The text of the photography exhibition has come back from Steichen with many suggestions for revision, particularly emphasis on the idea of 'inspiring the public' rather than giving technical information that can be found in Eastman handbooks. This sounds like making a rather different show, but I think sounds like more revision than it would actually turn out to be. It would mean adding some panels, but keeping quite intact what we have. Miss Courter has done some work on it and has given it back to me.⁵⁰⁵

Otherwise, documentation of the specific "Steichen idea" is elusive, but one may speculate that at this point he is trying to "inspire the public" by associating photography with the modernist ideal of personal vision.

Understanding Photography Manuscript n.d. (probably 1940s)

⁵⁰³ CE, II.1.49.1.1.

⁵⁰⁴ CE, II.1.49.1. Otis to Winthrop Davenport, August 15, 1944.

⁵⁰⁵ CE, II.1.49.1. n.a. to Feininger, September 1, 1944.

A second instance of Steichen's irresolution concerns another precursor to the *Creative Photography CE*: a brief, undated outline by D'Amico titled *Understanding Photography* (undated; most likely 1940s).⁵⁰⁶ Possibly a riposte to an earlier manuscript, the text evinces both "little writing" and "inspiring the public." But again Steichen summarily rejects the ending, presumably including the final section, which is indicated at that point by only the cryptic title *Photographs Which Achieve a Purpose (or, different means to different ends)*. The comment "Steichen. Rev conclusion" gives no indication of how to do so, however. Another unanswered question is what *purpose* means to D'Amico and the group. Self-expression or practical application? What about rhetorical purpose?

Creative Photography CE, 1944–1945

The contested *Understanding Photography* and *Know Your Camera* develop indirectly into the panel show *Creative Photography* (MoMA 280a; CE 1944–1945, indeterminate venues). Ready for distribution in 1944, it is one of the first two CEs available for sale as well as rental.⁵⁰⁷ The final text manifests a forceful prose evocative of Mock's WISMA (Chapter 1). It blends enthusiasm, repetition, and an active voice with considerable technical information and the unequivocal directive that photography is

A MEANS OF EXPRESSION. The camera is a versatile tool, but the photographer, like other artists, is more important than his tools.

⁵⁰⁶ CE, II.1.49.1. "VDA Outline," *Understanding Photography*. n.d.

⁵⁰⁷ The other is WIMP (see Chapter 2). *Creative Photography* is one of few extant panel shows. Viewing the actual panels gives a feel for scale and hanging possibilities of such exhibits. See CE, Bundle 124. The show is also adapted for publication in an Australian journal, demonstrating a CE repackaged for further dissemination. Andreas Feininger, "Creative Photography," *Australasian Photo-Review* 57, no. 2 (1950).

The result remains weighted towards technical concerns but this version packages it in the rhetoric of individual creativity. One can only speculate if this is Steichen's "rev."

Photography Pamphlet, How to Take a Photograph, or Photography How To Do It Series (various titles, unpublished, 1946–1947)

The most dramatic example of MoMA's difficulty finding a didactic form for photography flares up in a contentious three-month project instigated three years before the 1950 WIMPh symposium.⁵⁰⁸ Another cross-departmental effort, it involves Steichen and D'Amico as well as Art Education Committee member Joseph D. Isaacson and his co-author, mentioned only as "Stamm."⁵⁰⁹ It is intended to be part of D'Amico's *Art for Beginners* series,⁵¹⁰ how-to books used at his War Veterans Art Center.⁵¹¹ Here, too, manuscripts show the editorial group seeking rhetorical ways to integrate technical and expressive elements of the medium.

At the outset a staff member makes a point of mentioning that "Mr. Isaacson has not published anything on photography (Mr. Wheeler may want to tell Mr. Steichen this.)"⁵¹² But if the staff has doubts, to contemporary eyes the authors largely achieve the progressive-education-style pragmatism of other books in the series. As stated in the introduction, the text is straightforward about the intention "to help you understand

⁵⁰⁸ Correspondence dates from late December 1946 to March 1947.

⁵⁰⁹ Possibly caterer and photographer Eugene B. Stamm. Roberta Hershenson, "Shots in the Dark: Tunnel Photography," *New York Times*, no. February 25 (2001). nytimes.com/2001/02/25/nyregion/shots-in-the-dark-tunnel-photography.html (accessed November 22, 2011); "Paid Notice: Deaths. Stamm, Eugene B.," *New York Times*, January 24, 2006.

⁵¹⁰ Published 1947–1952. *How to Make Pottery and Ceramic Sculpture, How to Make Modern Jewelry, and How to Make Objects of Wood.*

⁵¹¹ MW, II.54. Helen Ward to Wheeler. January 17, 1947.

⁵¹² MW, II.54. Frances Keech to "Miss Ritter." August 9, 1946.

something about fine photographs, and to encourage you to make them.”⁵¹³

In this framework the authors encourage use of simple equipment (a box camera) as a means to learn how to “see photographically, to be able to see with your eyes how and what you want to take.... “ before an image is “conceived entire” at the decisive moment of exposure. This perceptive capacity, the authors conclude,

determines whether you will be a mechanical adjunct of your camera, or whether your camera is a tool, executing your intent in making photographs expressive of your thoughts and feelings.

The extensive, at times poetic essay uses direct address and, like WIMP, it “speaks” to reader intelligence. It formally analyzes many examples from the collection in detail, and invokes numerous quotes by photographers. Crucially, it shifts from the WIM convention of passive appreciation to active participation. But this shift originates Steichen’s resistance to formal pedagogy in his self-perception as a noble practitioner operating outside of convention. Can such originality be taught in WIM form?

Thus, reviewing the manuscript, Steichen again objects but still can’t articulate how to frame the message. This time he wrestles with the action-orientation of an “instruction book” versus a discursive “dissertation.” Should the reader learn technique, which may limit as well as encourage creativity, or general principles, which may discourage practical application? A secretary conveys his opinion to Wheeler:

Mr. Steichen called this afternoon to discuss the text of the How to Take a Photograph publication....He said that he was ‘very much disappointed’ in the text, that either he did not understand the purpose of the series or the author did not. He felt that the text had turned out to be a dissertation on photography rather than an instruction book, which last he thought to have been the original intention...He

⁵¹³ MW, II.54. Joseph Issacson, *Tentative Partial Draft.*, Unpublished manuscript (December 28, 1946), 3.

thought these errors could be corrected but that the general flavor of the text was a more serious matter.⁵¹⁴

Apparently he gives the matter no more serious thought because two months after submitting the manuscript the authors query D'Amico regarding

the pamphlet we are doing for the Museum. Frankly I'm getting impatient with the manner in which our efforts have been so beautifully ignored...Stamm and I are anxious to continue and a conference with Steichen would decide whether we can expect to finish under Museum auspices or with another publisher.⁵¹⁵ What can be done about it?⁵¹⁶

What is done about it leads to the project breaking down. Within the week Isaacson and presumably Stamm meet with Wheeler, Steichen, and D'Amico. After the "discussion," Isaacson writes, "Stamm and I have come to the conclusion that it would be fruitless for us to prepare another draft or outline of a book on photography for publication by the Museum."⁵¹⁷ He continues,

we feel that we cannot undertake a revision to conform to a standpoint and to meet a treatment of the subject which those who decide these questions for the Museum declare themselves unable to define even approximately.

He describes Steichen's passive-aggressive response:

You will recall that when we insistently asked what kind of treatment was desired we were told by Mr. Steichen that he did not know [sic] exactly. All he had to say on this subject consisted of an emphatic and sweeping rejection of our effort, and the statement that when he saw what he wanted he would recognize it. The effort to induce him to formulate a more precise explanation elicited a series of what to us were contradictory statements.

⁵¹⁴ MW, II.54. Ward to Wheeler. January 17, 1947.

⁵¹⁵ There is no indication of a publication in the union library catalog worldcat.org.

⁵¹⁶ MW, II.54. Isaacson to D'Amico. March 5, 1947.

⁵¹⁷ MW, II.54. Isaacson to Wheeler. March 20, 1947. The memo dates the meeting to March 11.

Here the key paradox threatens to surface. Echoing Evans in the symposium, Steichen seems to be insisting that somehow “originality” is possible independent of historic and didactic context:

He objected to fine photographs as illustrations because, he said, the beginner would try to copy them instead of doing original work. Yet he recommended including amateur efforts together with Sheeler’s “Side of a Barn”—which the beginner will then surely attempt to copy.

Isaacson then recounts their suggestions for alternatives, along with Steichen’s rejection of each:

He admired the army method of instruction. Yet he recommended (in vague terms) discussing the psychological processes in the mind of the beginner. He offered as an example of desirable treatment an oversimplified discussion in a manual which makes the point that developing is as easy as baking a cake. Yet he knows that the problem cannot be pinned down in mechanical terms, that developing is a part of the whole process of photography; that it should be related to exposure and printing; and that even for the beginner it should not be divorced from the intent and purpose of the photographer. He disclaimed an intention to turn out a manual but insisted that the work to be published must be an elementary instructional text.

Clearly frustrated, the authors reinforce their point with a photographic metaphor:

No doubt Mr. Steichen has a general idea of what he wants. But in view of his inability at this point to explain it more precisely, Stamm and I feel that it would not be worth our while to shoot at a moving target of which we do not have the range. In a way it would be like trying to make a photograph of something we cannot see. We could not decide from what standpoint to take it; what to include; what exclude; how to give it form; and so on.

They conclude by withdrawing from the project:

We are sure you will appreciate our difficulty and agree with us that under the circumstances it would be better if you were to ask someone else to make the attempt to meet Mr. Steichen’s vague and evanescent criteria.

This is acknowledged by Wheeler’s assistant (characteristically, Steichen penned no direct comment): “I am sure that he will understand your viewpoint,” she writes

diplomatically. “We all appreciate the time and effort you and Mr. Stamm have given this project.”⁵¹⁸

Conclusion

In describing the impasse Isaacson gets to the heart of the various constituencies’ difficulty making photography “intelligible to the layman.” These case studies reveal the group’s particular difficulty with the “practical rhetoric” (as Barr termed it) of teaching originality, and most crucially their problems reconciling instrumental (“illustrations”) with autonomous (“fine”) photography—exactly the paradox of image use in WIM. Steichen’s awareness of the persuasive power of photography is at the center of this difficulty. He knows that photography isn’t transparent but can’t bring the issue to the surface in the WIM context. Persistently deprecating institutionalization in any form, he writes that:

Habits in thinking or technique are always stultifying in the long run...and when a certain set of habits becomes general, a whole art period can condemn itself to the loss of freedom. It is probably this stultifying process, more than anything else, that transforms the avant-garde of one generation into academicians in the eyes of the next.⁵¹⁹

To his credit, he is confident that modern photography will remain an open-ended prospect, presumably one that embraces a full range of practice, from instrumental and illustrative to autonomous and creative:

⁵¹⁸ MW, II.54. Ward to Isaacson. March 24, 1947.

⁵¹⁹ Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, 1963, 15.

In the vigorous state of present-day photography, we have such a multitude of varying concepts that there is little danger of any of them taking over the banner of righteousness and imposing its aesthetic upon others.⁵²⁰

Regarding this attitude, Lugon astutely observes that it amounts to a de facto ethos, with Steichen as

someone who constantly worked on the fringes of the medium, locating photography's impact outside itself—which ultimately, if paradoxically, may well be the best way to circumscribe its 'essence.'⁵²¹

In the WIM context, however, by failing to address photography's social "impact outside itself" Steichen circumscribes a crucial aspect of the medium, one upon which the series depended for its impact. In this way the *What Is Modern Photography?* efforts confirm a central paradox of the series: the uncritical use of photography in the drive to promulgate modernism.

Does the museum ever find a didactic form that integrates autonomous and instrumental aspects of photographic practice, or the question of teaching creativity through passive appreciation (per Newman and the other WIMs) or through practical instruction (per Feininger and Steichen).

In terms of the Education Department, photography is never the subject of a *How to Do It Series* book, and through the D'Amico period, traditional tactile media such as sculpture, drawing, and painting remain the emphasis. Only with the new ubiquity of digital imaging is photography integrated into the department's hands-on programming.

Nor does the Photography Department return to a maker-based approach. The closest thing to a didactic work is the 1973 book *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures*

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Lugon, 273.

*from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*⁵²² by Steichen's successor John Szarkowski, who, like Steichen, was a practicing photographer. The concise, informal commentary on each image is populist in tone and is forthcoming about the applied nature of many images, from daguerreotype studio portraits to Irving Penn's fashion photography. The book is successful enough to be reprinted eight times by 2009.⁵²³ That said, no curator returns to the idea of a practice-based didactic publication or exhibition.

⁵²² John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs; 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 1973).

⁵²³ John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs; 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2009).

CHAPTER 4. *WHAT IS MODERN DESIGN? (WIMD) AND WHAT IS MODERN INTERIOR DESIGN? (WISMID) BOOKS, 1950–1953*

Alfred [Barr] was just as convinced as I was that Machine Art was the only possible ending.

—Philip Johnson⁵²⁴

There are those today who delight in denouncing the Machine Style (it seems a little late)....

—Edgar Kaufmann Jr.⁵²⁵

This chapter addresses the third and fourth books in the *What Is Modern?* series: *What Is Modern Design?* (WIMD, 1950) and *What Is Modern Interior Design?* (WISMID, 1953). (Figure 31, 32) Both are authored by Edgar Kaufmann Jr. (1910–1989),⁵²⁶ MoMA curator and consultant on industrial design. The two works are considered together here based on their shared authorship, discourse, and mid-century publication. They are also primarily texts and not exhibitions. I argue that they represent a bold challenge to the dominant master narrative of modern design promulgated by key figures at the mid-century museum, in particular Philip Johnson. I position their divergent approaches along two general trajectories: Johnson's Machine Art model and Kaufmann's attitudes, informed by Wright, Scandinavian modernism, and especially a subtle sensibility termed *Wiener Wohnkultur* by Long.⁵²⁷ The books also evince themes characteristic of the WIM series as a whole, including conflation of didacticism and salesmanship, awkward attempts to

⁵²⁴ Oral History Project; interview with Philip Johnson, 1991, 99. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

⁵²⁵ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?* (New York: MoMA, 1953), 15.

⁵²⁶ Paul Goldberger, "Edgar Kaufmann Jr., 79, Architecture Historian," *New York Times*, no. August 1 (1989). nytimes.com/1989/08/01/obituaries/edgar-kaufmann-jr-79-architecture-historian.html (accessed April 27, 2010).

⁵²⁷ Christopher Long, "Wiener Wohnkultur: Interior Design in Vienna, 1910-1938," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 5, no. 1 (1997-1998).

make modern design understandable across the American class spectrum, contradictory attitudes regarding universal modernism, and problematic uses of photography.

Analysis also brings to light three under-recognized aspects of Kaufmann's MoMA career. The first is his concern with design history, often overshadowed by scholarly attention to the market-oriented immediacy of his well-known *Good Design* program (1950–1955).⁵²⁸ Second, these studies tend to focus on promotion of the museum's agenda to upper- and middle-class women, but the books reveal an attempt to appeal to a broader age and gender range. Finally, Kaufmann's distaste for the International Style is well known, but only in these two books does he articulate his point of view in depth.

These arguments are substantiated in three sections. First, an overview briefly characterizes the terms Machine Art/Machine Style and *Wohnkultur*, and then situates the books in the immediate post-war period in the U.S. and at MoMA. The second section traces the development, production, and reception of the works. The third section analyzes Kaufmann's alternative narrative and rhetorical methods. The chapter concludes that despite their packaging as "simple" primers, WIMD and WISMID are high-level challenges to the idea that MoMA could have only one answer to the question of *What Is Modern Design?*

Overview

To put the books in context with the WIM series as a whole, the two are published

⁵²⁸ For the most complete history of the program see Terence Riley and Edward Eigen, "Between the Museum and the Marketplace: Selling Good Design," in *Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, ed. John Elderfield, Studies in Modern Art (New York: MoMA, 1994).

between the pre- and post-war versions of *What Is Modern Architecture?* (WISMA, 1938–1962, Chapter 1) and contemporary with the only major rewrite of *What Is Modern Painting?* (WIMP, 1952, Chapter 2). WIMD is published in 1950, the first year of *Good Design*. WISMID is published three years later, at the midpoint of the *Good Design* program and two years before Kaufmann quits the museum. It is over a decade until publication of the next and last book in the series, *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (WIMS, 1969, Chapter 5).

WIMD has no equivalent exhibition, though in the books Kaufmann liberally repurposes material from MoMA shows and publications. WISMID is based on the CE panel show *Modern Rooms of the Last 50 Years* (MR50. MoMA 337, 1946–1947; circulated 1947–1949). (Figure 33) A CE is proposed in 1951 but there is virtually no record of it.⁵²⁹

The books match the format of earlier WIM volumes: 10 in. x 7.5 in. (25 cm x 19 cm) paperbacks. Both are thirty-two pages and generously illustrated in black and white, with one notable exception. Their layouts are generally unremarkable; in fact they maintain the “out of style”⁵³⁰ two-column layout of WIMP. Closer examination of the design shows how the publications conflate textbook, art book, and sales catalog.

Context

This chapter is grounded in notions of Machine Art (or Machine Style, as Kaufmann terms it) and *Wiener Wohnkultur*. Machine Art refers to Johnson’s well-known exhibition (MoMA 34, 1934; CE 1934-44, 25 venues)⁵³¹ in which manufactured products are installed in a gallery setting with the “point of view that though usefulness is an essential

⁵²⁹ CE, II.2.131.4.

⁵³⁰ OH Project; Frances Pernas, 1994. 39.

⁵³¹ CE, II.1.72.3.1. The CE version, which travels for a decade in two versions, would benefit from further exploration.

[for machine-made objects], appearance has at least as great a value."⁵³² The catalog text historically situates the objects, but is critical of the movements Kaufmann values most. Johnson states that in the U.S. at least,

For the most part we have inherited the worst of the English Arts and Crafts Movement and the worst of the Art Nouveau style, the worst of the Viennese Kunstgewerbe....

But this dark period is anomalous, according to Johnson:

the twentieth century restores the art of making machines and useful objects to its place, as a technic of making rapidly, simply, and well the useful objects of current life.⁵³³

In contrast, the idea of a *Wiener Wohnkultur* is a comparatively new and subtle area of inquiry, identified by Christopher Long.⁵³⁴ He describes this interwar sensibility as “neither a movement or a coherent ideology” but a “sort of ‘mitigated’ modernism.”⁵³⁵ Through it “The Viennese...offered a middle path, an alternative to mere revivalism on the one extreme and a wholesale ‘purification’ and ‘invention’ on the other.”

Long situates the movement as a post-1910 reaction to Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956) and the Wiener Werkstätte, but also as part of a “commitment of the Viennese to preserving the nineteenth-century bourgeois ideal of the home as a sight of refinement and refuge.”⁵³⁶

Maria Welzig agrees, discussing how the sensibility translates in Pittsburgh, where several émigrés resettle, partly through relationships with the Kaufmanns:⁵³⁷

⁵³² Philip Johnson and Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Machine Art* (New York: MoMA, 1934). n.p.

⁵³³ *Ibid.* n.p

⁵³⁴ Long.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

⁵³⁷ For more on Gábor, Frank, and Sobotka in Pittsburgh, see Maria Welzig, "Entwurzelt: Sobotka, Wlach und Frank in Pittsburgh und New York," in *Visionäre &*

László Gábor (1895–1944) becomes the store’s art director, Walter Sobotka (1888–1972) teaches under the auspices of a trade group headed by Kaufmann, Sr., and a show of work by Josef Frank (1885–1967) is exhibited in the store.⁵³⁸ Welzig quotes Sobotka and Frank opposing “Bauhaus ideology” and “soldier-education,” preferring instead what they called “the more rationalistic Viennese school of design.”⁵³⁹

As if describing Kaufmann’s WIM ethos, Long argues that this “mitigated modernism” offers no rigid rules and is instead

the vision of a “way of life,” a set of general principles of how to dwell in the modern age without having to sacrifice comfort, convenience, pleasure, or a connection with the past.⁵⁴⁰

In historiographic terms he rightly concludes that

Though...largely ignored by historians of modern design [it] represents one of the most ambitious and thoroughgoing attempts of those years to reconcile a modern form language with such everyday needs as physical and psychological comfort—precisely those aspects that many at the time found conspicuously lacking in the work of the avant-garde.⁵⁴¹

The subtlety and scholarly neglect of *Wiener Wohnkultur* can be seen to parallel Kaufmann’s challenge in the WIM books: how to communicate—and historicize—an approach to modernity more complex and therefore harder to package than the “single body of discipline”⁵⁴² posited by Johnson. Indeed, only in recent decades have the ideas of “mitigated” modernists started to be examined in this light. For example, the role of Hitchcock in formulating and then reflecting upon the International Style ethos, as in the

Vertriebene: Österreichische Spuren in der Modernen Amerikanischen Architektur, ed. Matthias Boeckl (Berlin: Ernst and Sohn, 1995).

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 207, 11, 22.

⁵⁴⁰ Long: 29.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Henry Russell Hitchcock, *International Style: Architecture since 1922* (New York: Norton, 1932), 36.

What is Happening to Modern Architecture? symposium and Scully manuscript (Chapter 1). Kaufmann would likely have been more receptive to their arguments for mitigated modern architecture.

WIMD and WISMID must also be understood in the context of the postwar United States, a period of conversion to a peacetime economy, increased home ownership, a baby boom, and mobility enabled by affordable cars and a massive new highway system. In material terms, Lynn Spigel pinpoints this moment as the beginning of (or, one could argue, a return to) “everyday modernism,” defined as:

a broad postwar era lifestyle phenomenon experienced through midcentury forms of quotidian modern cultural experiences and artifacts....from television viewing...to the proliferation of suburban shopping malls...to the increased popular interest in museum excursions [and] general enthusiasm...for designs that signified progress, science, and forward-looking lifestyles.⁵⁴³

Regarding increased interest in museums, even before the war’s end MoMA attempts to channel it towards design exhibitions. As Kaufmann himself recounts in an internal 1942 report,⁵⁴⁴ by founding the Industrial Design department in 1940 MoMA builds upon initiatives at the Newark Museum, Metropolitan Museum, Walker Art Center, and at world’s fairs and department stores.⁵⁴⁵ In imagining a future for design exhibitions,

⁵⁴³ Lynn Spigel, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago: Chicago University, 2008), 299–300.

⁵⁴⁴ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *Industrial Design and Museums in the United States of America.*, Unpublished manuscript, A&D Files (February 1942).

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6. One would think that he would invoke the Victoria and Albert Museum or the Museum für Angewandte Kunst but he generally sticks to the American focus of the report. For an account of early commercial-museum collaborations see William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1993). For illustrated accounts of several U.S. department store exhibitions of the 1920s and 1930s see Marilyn Friedman, *Selling Good Design: Promoting the Early Modern Interior* (New York: Rizzoli, 2003). For more on world’s fairs see Tony Bennett, *Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

Kaufmann makes several observations that presage WIMD and WISMID. First, he recognizes a tendency to split design between museums of technology and fine arts:

Industrial design as practiced does not fit into either of the two kinds of museums we possess. It is very likely that a new kind of museum needs to be created in which contemporary facts are less fitted into conventional molds....⁵⁴⁶

He envisions an alternative that integrates design education. Between the wars, he asserts,

design education was considered (It is still without a single dissenting museum) in terms of craft work....Design for industry, which forms so large a part of the surroundings of every young museum-goer and which is absorbingly interesting to him, is largely ignored and rarely discussed...because it is thorny and problematic for the average instructor.⁵⁴⁷

By proposing a more integrated approach, Kaufmann also identifies potential promotional benefits for supposedly “disinterested” museums:

museum[s] may well look on industrial design as an obvious link to more direct community service, to increased attendance, to increased monetary support. [in pencil:] In turn, industry may look to the museum for [illegible—constructive?] public relations and disinterested evaluation of design.⁵⁴⁸

By the time WIMD and WISMID are published approximately a decade later, Kaufmann successfully breaks the conventional mold.

When the books are published at mid-century MoMA is entering a period of consolidation, reaffirming its curatorial structure and identity (see Chapter 2). Throughout this period the museum continues to actively promote modernism to the American middle class—a demographic with new time and interest to visit museums but also one in tune with a Cold War turn towards conservative tastes. Meanwhile, following World

⁵⁴⁶ Kaufmann Jr., *Industrial Design and Museums in the United States of America.*, February 1942, 10.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

War II several curators return from military service (displacing acting curators, many of them women). D'Amico remains in place throughout this period, as does his populist programming, though Courter is gone at this point.

In this period, the Architecture and Industrial Design departments (founded 1932 and 1940 respectively) constitute a modest but consistent part of the museum's programming. Of 339 exhibitions between 1945 and 1955, thirty-seven concern architecture and forty-eight design.⁵⁴⁹ Of approximately one hundred to two hundred CEs in this period, seventeen focus on architecture and twenty-six on design.⁵⁵⁰

An aspect of the curatorial mix of particular relevance here concerns exhibitions on Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe. The two architects are strongly associated with Kaufmann and Johnson, respectively, to the degree that the curators' divergent master narratives are built around them. Given the dominance of Mies and the International Style in MoMA histories, it's surprising to learn that in this period there are in fact more monographic shows on Wright (five) than Mies (two). The most closely studied are John McAndrew's *Frank Lloyd Wright: American Architect* (MoMA 114, 1940–1941)⁵⁵¹ and Johnson's *Architecture of Mies van der Rohe* (MoMA 356, 1947—the same year as the first WIMD draft). Ironically, then, the person who Johnson names “the greatest architect of the nineteenth century,” lives on at MoMA well into the twentieth.

⁵⁴⁹ MoMA, "Exhibition History List". Exclusive of graphic design, film, general acquisitions shows, theater arts, and (problematically) indigenous material culture of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Several shows are counted as both architecture and design. Theater arts deserve reintegration into studies of MoMA's philosophy of modernism.

⁵⁵⁰ CE Program Finding Aid. It is difficult to quantify total CEs in this period. Based upon statistics for 1931–1954 one can safely estimate one hundred to two hundred shows, most circulating to multiple venues. This selection excludes graphic design, film, and theater arts. Some shows are counted as both architecture and design.

⁵⁵¹ For a thorough account of the 1940-1941 retrospective see Kaizen, 2004. For more on McAndrew see Chapter 1.

Another underappreciated aspect of on-site exhibitions in this period is the emphasis on didacticism and popularization. Such shows include *Orientation in the Arts for Adults* (MoMA 461, 1950) and the awkwardly titled *Developing Creativeness In Children* (MoMA 575, 1955). These complement D'Amico's innovative People's Art Center and baby-boom friendly Children's Art Carnival.⁵⁵² Edward Steichen's exhaustively studied *Family of Man* (MoMA 569, 1955) is most indicative of the museum's aggressive mid-century attempts to universalize modernism.⁵⁵³ In a similar vein and very much in the WIM spirit is *Modern Art in Your Life* (MoMA 423, 1949) by d'Harnoncourt and Robert Goldwater (discussed in Chapter 4).⁵⁵⁴ Exhibitions about mass-produced goods set an early precedent. In 1940–1941, soon after the establishment of the Industrial Design department, Noyes initiates

an elementary show which attempted to make clear the meaning and correct use of form in Industrial Design. Since it was to be seen by secondary school children, it was extremely simple and used photographs of familiar objects to make its points.⁵⁵⁵

Noyes and Kaufmann also initiate the successful *Useful Objects* series (1939–1947).⁵⁵⁶ Showing the influence of his Vienna years (discussed below), Kaufmann's 1942 report states that the series is directly “modeled after Central European exhibitions of

⁵⁵² Child Welfare Foundation of Japan, 1995; D'Amico, *Experiments in Creative Art Teaching. A Progress Report on the Department of Education, 1937-1960*, 1960.

⁵⁵³ Sandeen, 1995.

⁵⁵⁴ Robert Goldwater and René d'Harnoncourt, *Modern Art in Your Life* (New York: MoMA, 1949). This show and book take the promotion of modernism to an extreme, asserting that *Modern Art Will Be In Your Life*.

⁵⁵⁵ Noyes report to John Hay Whitney, April 7, 1941. Cited in Bruce Gordon, *Eliot Noyes* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 59. The citation may refer to *Furniture Design Today* (1941–1945, 25 venues), a version of *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* documented in CE, II.1.62.3.

⁵⁵⁶ A CE version of *Useful Objects* titled *What is Good Design?* (1942-1945, 17 venues) is composed of actual objects. With reproduction shows the norm, I hope to examine this rarity further, especially in terms of didactic relationships between objects and photographs. CE, II.1.119.1.1.

inexpensive standard design for every day use that were a vital part of Werkbund activities in various countries."⁵⁵⁷ In the report, he takes pride in efforts such as *Useful Objects*, especially as a bridge between art and industry:

other institutions all over the country have started to do similar shows; no less than twelve were seen by the public in the last winter season, and...the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, has outstripped [MoMA] by having a year-round activityThis wave of effective popular education in the simplest terms has proven the most useful link so far between American museums and the buying public.⁵⁵⁸

Curators Edgar Kaufmann Jr., and Philip Johnson

To further contextualize WIMD and WISMID in this “wave...of popular education,” and to better understand how Kaufmann and Johnson arrive at such different curatorial approaches, biographical background on the two is offered here.

Unlike Johnson, Kaufmann leaves few personal records and to date there is no book-length biography.⁵⁵⁹ He descends from four merchant Jewish brothers who establish the eponymous department store in Pittsburgh⁵⁶⁰ after emigrating from Viernheim (Hessen) in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁶¹ Kaufmann grows up in the considerable shadow of his father (1885–1955), who makes the store both competitive and stylish, and whose commercial, architectural, and civic accomplishments are rivaled

⁵⁵⁷ Kaufmann Jr., *Industrial Design and Museums in the United States of America.*, February 1942, 5.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵⁹ The most detailed are Richard Louis Cleary, *Merchant Prince and Master Builder: Edgar J. Kaufmann and Frank Lloyd Wright* (Pittsburgh: Heinz Architectural Center, 1999); Toker, 2005.

⁵⁶⁰ For more on Kaufmann père and a history of the family business see Cleary, 1999; Leon Harris, *Merchant Princes: An Intimate History of Jewish Families Who Built Great Department Stores* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Toker, 2005. See also this obituary: "\$1,000,000 Gift to City," *New York Times*, April 16, 1955.

⁵⁶¹ Harris, 1979, 92.

only by his taste for scandal.⁵⁶² Evidence suggests that Kaufmann's mother Lilliane 1889–1952 is the stronger personal influence. She also figures strongly in the store's operations, including profitable dissemination of "mitigated modern" taste—a legacy that deserves to be fully explored.⁵⁶³

After attending private school in Pittsburgh, in 1927–1928 Kaufmann Jr. briefly studies painting in New York. Then, encouraged by Lilliane's friend ceramicist Valerie Wiesel, he enrolls at the Kunstgewerbeschule Vienna, where he studies for a year.⁵⁶⁴ At the school and the affiliated Museum für Angewandte Kunst (itself modeled on the Victoria and Albert Museum), Kaufmann is exposed to an institution dedicated to the integration of arts and industry, a model he brings to MoMA. For example, the Kunstgewerbeschule sells products through the Wiener Werkstätte—in which Kaufmann, Sr., is an investor.⁵⁶⁵ The family also has a buying office in Vienna,⁵⁶⁶ and Toker speculates that these commercial connections may partially motivate the enrollment.⁵⁶⁷ After leaving the school, Kaufmann continues his education along a similar trajectory, especially in terms of art and design integration. From 1930–1933 he studies typography, printing, and painting in Florence under Austrian-born artist, typographer, and William Morris devotee Victor Hammer, also a friend of Lilliane's. The Kaufmanns have a buying office in Florence as well.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ For a brief biography see Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, "Lilliane S. Kaufmann 1889-1952", paconserv.org/fallingwater/family/liliane.htm (accessed May 1, 2011). See also Cleary, 1999; Toker, 2005.

⁵⁶⁴ Cleary, 1999, 28–30.

⁵⁶⁵ Toker, 2005, 360.

⁵⁶⁶ Cleary, 1999, 26.

⁵⁶⁷ Toker, 2005, 360.

⁵⁶⁸ Cleary, 1999, 27; Toker, 2005, 360.

Kaufmann's belief in a modernism consistent with Arts and Crafts principles is clearly influenced by Hammer; unfortunately their relationship is virtually unexplored. Hammer is best known for traditionalized representational painting and especially for developing an uncial typeface, a type of letterform derived from medieval scripts. In Arts and Crafts terms, his commitment to letterpress is also very much in the tradition of Morris and the Kelmscott Press. Hammer emigrates in 1939 after the German invasion of Austria, eventually founding a press in Kentucky.⁵⁶⁹

Kaufmann returns to the States in 1934 and the following year enrolls briefly at Taliesin, where he works primarily on a large-scale Broadacre City model funded by his father.⁵⁷⁰ The model is later shown at Rockefeller Center, a commercial counterpoint to MoMA nearby.⁵⁷¹

From 1935 through the late 1930s, Kaufmann works in the home furnishings department of the family business.⁵⁷² In his relatively brief involvement with the store Kaufmann gains practical experience in industrial design, manufacturing, and marketing. To that end he presumably observes his parents' efforts to use high culture as a form of advertising, as with store installation of exhibitions—including MoMA CEs such as *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* (MoMA 148; CE 1941–1942, with additional variants). No doubt he is also exposed to Lilliane's successful marketing of stylistically

⁵⁶⁹ For more on Hammer see Eleanor Irwin, *Victor Hammer* (Buffalo: Hillside, 1982).

⁵⁷⁰ Toker, 2005, 125.

⁵⁷¹ Frank Lloyd Wright, "Genius and the Mobocracy," in *Frank Lloyd Wright Collected Writings*, ed. Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Studies in Modern Art (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 378. Except for discussion of MoMA and Fallingwater in Chapter 1, the well-studied relationship between the Kaufmanns and Wright is omitted here. See Harris, Cleary, Toker.

⁵⁷² Cleary, 1999, 27.

eclectic goods to women.⁵⁷³ In particular she establishes a successful boutique on the store's previously slow-moving eleventh floor, which she names the Vendôme Shops. Cleary characterizes Liliane's "aesthetic sensibility" as one that stresses "quality over style homogeneity" and harmonizes antiques, handcraft, and "high style" design.⁵⁷⁴ This eclecticism resonates with the *Wohnkultur* ethos and presages her son's taste—a sensibility that permeates WIMD and WISMID.

In this period Kaufmann is aware of the spread of European fascism at both a general and personal level: the family helps several Austrian artists and designers emigrate and hires the Hungarian-born László Gabor to design for the store.⁵⁷⁵ As part of MoMA's *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* competition (1941), Kaufmann also helps Austrian-born Bernard Rudofsky gain entry to the U.S.⁵⁷⁶

Despite the years at the store, Kaufmann declines to continue in the business. It is sold to a conglomerate in 1946. Leon Harris attributes this in part to his disinterest,⁵⁷⁷ and his father's strong personality no doubt plays a role as well. Kaufmann is clearly interested in pursuing art-industry integration, and through John McAndrew (see Chapter 1) he becomes involved with MoMA. His opening volley is to propose a museum-industry collaboration to Barr in 1940,⁵⁷⁸ which essentially leads to tutoring Noyes on how to market the fledgling ID department.⁵⁷⁹ To this end Kaufmann becomes an official (if unpaid) curator under Noyes that year.

⁵⁷³ Western Pennsylvania Conservancy,

⁵⁷⁴ Cleary, 1999, 26–7; Toker, 2005, 456.

⁵⁷⁵ Cleary, 1999, 27; Toker, 2005, 71-2.

⁵⁷⁶ Architekturzentrum Wien, 2007, 76.

⁵⁷⁷ Harris, 1979, 109.

⁵⁷⁸ Eigen and Riley.

⁵⁷⁹ Gordon, 2006, 58-9.

In 1949, not long after Kaufmann and Johnson's return to the museum following wartime service,⁵⁸⁰ the departments are strategically separated into Architecture (headed by Johnson) and Industrial Design (headed by Peter Blake). One account asserts that Kaufmann is conveniently travelling at the time.⁵⁸¹ In a series of interviews Johnson later recounts the split (note the passive voice—other accounts put him in a much more active role):⁵⁸² "Alfred and René must have asked me if that was all right, and I said, 'Oh, heavens yes. Anything to be in a separate world.'"⁵⁸³ Effectively demoted and distanced from most curatorial activities, Kaufmann retains independent programs such as the low-cost furniture competition and *Good Design*.

At the point of developing WIMD in the late 1940s Kaufmann has little long-form publishing experience. Prior to joining MoMA he is a design writer for yearly anthologies published by the progressive New Directions Press.⁵⁸⁴ While associated with the *Organic Design* project, he doesn't write for the catalog, and the *Good Design* catalogs have no interpretive text. His main MoMA publications to date are both published in 1946: *Modern Rooms of the Last Fifty Years* (discussed below) and an issue of the museum's *Bulletin* promoting the department. Titled "What Is Modern Industrial Design?" it shares the title but not the interrogative nature of the WIM series.⁵⁸⁵ In the mid-century period he also publishes magazine and newspaper articles, several quite pithy.

⁵⁸⁰ Lynes, 1973.

⁵⁸¹ Blake, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept*, 1993. 130

⁵⁸² For example, Schulze, 1996.

⁵⁸³ Oral History Project; interview with Philip Johnson, 1991, 127. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

⁵⁸⁴ MoMA Publicity Department biography. Artist File, Museum of Modern Art Library.

⁵⁸⁵ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., "What is Modern Industrial Design?," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 14, no. 1 (1946). jstor.org/stable/4058147 (accessed November 23, 2011).

Kaufmann quits the museum in 1955, after numerous threats to resign.⁵⁸⁶ To the end he resists a rigid machine aesthetic and International Style tenets, as evinced by his exuberant parting shot, the under-examined *Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India* (MoMA 576, 1955).⁵⁸⁷ That year he also inherits Fallingwater following his father's death, a year after his mother Liliane's fatal overdose at the house.⁵⁸⁸ After Kaufmann Jr.'s death in 1989, Fallingwater becomes a public trust.⁵⁸⁹

Johnson's legacy (1906–2005)⁵⁹⁰ is well documented.⁵⁹¹ His Ohio upbringing is both comfortable and cultured. Johnson's father graduates from Harvard and founds a prominent Cleveland law firm. Johnson's college-educated mother Louise is from a wealthy establishment family.⁵⁹² He attends Harvard as an undergraduate, pursuing a humanities-oriented curriculum. At around this time he achieves financial independence through a gift from his father: stock in Alcoa (Aluminum Corporation of America). To everyone's surprise, its value soars.

This independence enables Johnson to pursue diverse interests, from the fledgling culture of modernism to radical right-wing politics. After meeting Barr during travels in Europe, Johnson becomes involved with MoMA. He becomes the founding

⁵⁸⁶ Lynes, 1973, 320.

⁵⁸⁷ MoMA curator Juliet Kinchin calls it his "coming out." Personal communication, May 7, 2010. See also Juliet Kinchin, "Women, MoMA, and Midcentury Design," in *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York: MoMA, 2010).

⁵⁸⁸ Toker, 2005, 349.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 395; Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, "Mission", fallingwater.org/64/mission (accessed September 4, 2011).

⁵⁹⁰ Paul Goldberger, "Philip Johnson, Architecture's Restless Intellect, Dies at 98," *New York Times*, no. January 27 (2005). nytimes.com/2005/01/27/arts/design/27johnson.html (accessed October 22, 2011).

⁵⁹¹ The standard biography of Johnson is Schulze, 1996. This summary is drawn primarily from its early chapters. A biography by Mark Lamster, to be published by Little, Brown, will further inform the discussion.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 1–12.

director of the Architecture Department as a result of the 1932 International Style show. He then leaves the museum between 1935 and 1940 to participate in right-wing political activities in the U.S. and Europe. Upon return he studies architecture at Harvard, graduating in 1943. In 1945, following wartime service, Johnson returns to the museum, in part because of few opportunities to build. He recalls: “[I]t seemed like a logical way to pick up life again, after the war. So, it was really the personal influence of Alfred Barr...He said, ‘Well, why don’t you come back?’”⁵⁹³ He reenters in the background, admitting to a colleague that his political activities make him too controversial to return as the official department head.⁵⁹⁴ Noyes remains in place as director until resigning in 1946 to practice design. Incongruously, Noyes’ next position is with Norman Bel Geddes, advocate of the streamline aesthetic detested by Kaufmann, Johnson, and other MoMA curators.⁵⁹⁵

In 1954, the year before Kaufmann resigns, Johnson departs to practice architecture, leaving the department to his handpicked successor Arthur Drexler (see Chapter 1).⁵⁹⁶ Ironically, Johnson attributes the decision to Wright, who tells him that “you can’t be on both sides. You can’t criticize and judge and still be a creative artist.”⁵⁹⁷ For the rest of his life Johnson remains an active force at the museum as a trustee and major contributor to the collections.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹³ Philip Johnson and Sharon Zane, *Oral History, 1990-1991*, Transcript (1990-1991), 90–1.

⁵⁹⁴ Blake, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept*, 1993, 108.

⁵⁹⁵ Gordon, 2006, 85–7.

⁵⁹⁶ Johnson and Zane, *Oral History, 1990-1991*, 1990-1991, 154.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ John Elderfield, ed. *Philip Johnson and the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 1998).

All sources remark on the animosity between Kaufmann and Johnson during their MoMA tenure.⁵⁹⁹ Accounts also tend to elide their personal and philosophical differences. While this study focuses on the latter, personality and background arguably influence their approach to advancing the museum's mission. Johnson himself recalls:

Edgar and I didn't get along very well. He had a different set of tastes from mine...My background was Bauhaus and Mondrian, his was Vienna and Hoffmann and that was an entirely other direction from the strict functionalist International Style. So he felt a stranger from Alfred and my direction.⁶⁰⁰

These tastes resonate with nuances of class and cultural milieu. While both are financially independent, Johnson's wealth by investment trumps Kaufmann's mercantile background. Also Johnson never has to work, while Kaufmann has at least symbolic obligation to the family business. Though both are well travelled in Europe and Kaufmann is fluent in several languages, Johnson has the prestigious formal education Kaufmann lacks. That the Kaufmanns are Jewish and the Johnsons WASPs is also a consideration. For Kaufmann *père*, this comes with a degree of exclusion from the Pittsburgh establishment, and this may reverberate with his son. Johnson's right-wing political activities definitely resonate, to the extent that Kaufmann Jr., investigates them, either personally or on behalf of MoMA.⁶⁰¹

Moreover, the subtleties of their personas arguably influence their effectiveness as proselytizers. Johnson is handsome and charming with a sly humor and gift for aphorism. He moves comfortably in elite circles and has a talent for attracting high-level donors. Kaufmann is less attractive (small, with glasses and facial scars), difficult to work

⁵⁹⁹ Blake, Schulze, Toker. Some little-known evidence to the contrary is worth exploring. This includes an occasional memo, passages in Kaufmann's 1942 report, and a co-authored article.

⁶⁰⁰ Johnson and Zane, *Oral History, 1990-1991*, 1990-1991, 87. Note how Johnson claims Barr for the IS—Barr might well have considered himself more fluid.

⁶⁰¹ Schulze, 1996, 181, 238-9; Toker, 2005, 362, 456.

with, and seems to be most comfortable among designers and manufacturers. The two share sexual orientation but even that may be divisive: colleague Blake asserts that the two compete for Barr's approval.⁶⁰²

The persistence of this dynamic in accounts of the curators' intellectual legacy is a reminder of the degree to which personality can influence the formulation and perpetuation of ostensibly "disinterested" histories. Johnson, however, remarks that there is in fact no disinterested scholarship: "it always ends up with the people, and then history takes over."⁶⁰³

What Is Modern Design? (WIMD) Book, 1950

This section traces the development and reception of WIMD, a process that spans three years and five very different drafts. The book is organized into two sections: an introductory text and examples of domestic objects. These are grouped into furniture, textiles, pottery, glass, lamps, and metal, an odd categorical mixture of functions (furniture, lamps) and materials (pottery, glass, metal).

The typographic cover and title pages are the work of designer Jack Dunbar.⁶⁰⁴ The most daring gesture is the use of the serif typeface Bodoni for the cover and text, a striking choice relative to other MoMA publications of the time and to other WIMs. (Figure 31) It represents a subtle departure from WISMA and WIMP, which use the thoroughly modern sans serif Futura, and towards Bodoni's then-fashionable commercial use, as in

⁶⁰² Blake, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept*, 1993, 133.

⁶⁰³ OH Project; Philip Johnson, 1991, 213. Johnson and Zane, *Oral History, 1990-1991*, 1990-1991, 213.

⁶⁰⁴ Dunbar is best known for interior design. See Interior Design, "Jack Dunbar", interiordesign.net/hof/11150-Jack_Dunbar.php (accessed September 4, 2011).

Alexey Brodovitch's *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*.⁶⁰⁵ As an art director for *Bazaar*, Dunbar would be especially familiar with the font. Such typographic subtleties are monitored by Wheeler, who later suggests sans serif for the reprint: "I feel that the appearance...will be improved by using small sans serif cap for headings instead of Bodoni – what do you think about this?"⁶⁰⁶ Apparently Kaufmann thinks not very much—the type remains unchanged.

Didactic text precedes the examples section. The text begins, sensibly enough, with questions: "What is design? What is modern design?" and "What is good design?" Other books in the WIM series frame the answers in terms of a radical break from the past, focusing on the now and future. In "radical" contrast, Kaufmann consistently discusses the modern movement in an historicist framework. In this construct, the past is always already embedded in the modern—an approach he develops even further in WISMID. To this end the WIMD introduction defines "modern" in a relatively long time span, reaching back a century through "three pioneering generations of modern designers and teachers."⁶⁰⁷

Development

The book's three-year development, a "relatively long time span" in itself, involves eight iterations of the text located to date, including the final publication, constituting five complete rewrites between 1947 and 1950. All are conceived as an extended preface to a series of examples and all wrestle with the role of historicity and lineage, the blending of scholarship and salesmanship, and the attempt to appeal to both adult consumers and the

⁶⁰⁵ See Josephine Bacon and Gabriel Bauret, *Alexey Brodovitch* (New York: Assouline, 2005).

⁶⁰⁶ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, January 25, 1952.

⁶⁰⁷ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?* (New York: MoMA, 1950), 5.

primary-school education market. The versions are numbered here as follows, in chronological order:

- 1a. February 3 1947. First draft with Wheeler comments.⁶⁰⁸
- 1b. February 3 1947. First draft with Barr comments.⁶⁰⁹
2. April 6 1948. Second draft.⁶¹⁰
3. Mid-1948. Third draft (Second draft with minor changes).⁶¹¹
- 3a. November 30 1948. Third draft with D'Amico comments.⁶¹²
4. 1948–1949. Fourth draft with long history section.⁶¹³
5. August 10 1949. Fifth draft. Condensed, especially history section.⁶¹⁴
6. 1950 publication.⁶¹⁵

In sum, the initial draft (here Version 1a and 1b, February 1947) is an ambitious effort, envisaged as the “first of 3 parts.” Version 2 (April 1948) introduces the section “What About Ornament?” which includes a diatribe against streamlining.⁶¹⁶ Version 3 (mid-1948) involves minor changes. Version 3a (November 1948) is a copy of Version 3 with comments by D'Amico. Version 4 (1948–1949) significantly expands and foregrounds design history. Version 5 (August 1949) is much condensed, especially the history section. Version 6 (1950) is the published book. In the absence of any interim manuscripts, most of the texts read as complete rewrites. Versions 4 and 5 represent the largest editorial leaps, especially regarding the expansion and then sharp contraction of historical material.

It is not clear who initiates the publication, but one can speculate about Kaufmann and Wheeler's motivations. For Kaufmann the book is an opportunity to legitimize the newly defined ID department and distinguish it from the Architecture Department. It could also

⁶⁰⁸ MW, II.106.

⁶⁰⁹ AHB, 1.165.

⁶¹⁰ A&D Files.

⁶¹¹ MW, II.106.

⁶¹² MW, II.106.

⁶¹³ MW, II.106.

⁶¹⁴ A&D Files.

⁶¹⁵ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950.

⁶¹⁶ For a survey of streamlining see Claude Lichtenstein and Franz Engler, *Streamlined: A Metaphor for Progress* (Baden: Lars Muller, 199[4]).

serve as a didactic guide to the first year of *Good Design* exhibitions, which have only product listings as a catalog. While there is no direct evidence that the books are produced in conjunction with *Good Design*, they clearly complement the program. For his part, Wheeler most likely sees yet another opportunity to add to the marketable series.

Aside from brief comments on the first draft, Barr is uninvolved, but continuation of the series is consistent with his populist stance. There is no evidence of CE involvement. The other major voices in the editorial process are readers from the New York City Board of Education. Johnson is virtually uninvolved.

In February 1947 Kaufmann sends the first “rough draft” (Version 1) to Barr, d’Harnoncourt, Wheeler, D’Amico—and Johnson.⁶¹⁷ Kaufmann proposes a book of “general premises, analyzed examples and cultural correlations:”

The text should be visualized as the first of three parts into which the booklet would be divided. It would be followed by large illustrations of good modern design, analyzed in the light of principles described in the first section. The final section would be a comparative, historic chart running through the last one hundred years...I believe that these three divisions, namely: general premises, analyzed examples and cultural correlations will be a simple form for people to follow.

The emphasis on history stands out immediately, to the extent of devoting a separate section to it: “The historical comparisons are really helpful, yet fitting them into the general text would make it too cumbersome.”⁶¹⁸ He concludes by asking for comments and to “bother you with a more complete draft of the actual book with examples for the central section, of course the most important part of the book.”⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ MW, II.106. Kaufmann to Barr, D’Harnoncourt, Wheeler, D’Amico, and Johnson, February 3, 1947.

⁶¹⁸ MW, II.106. Kaufmann to Barr, D’Harnoncourt, Wheeler, D’Amico, and Johnson, February 3, 1947.

⁶¹⁹ MW, II.106. Kaufmann to Barr, D’Harnoncourt, Wheeler, D’Amico, and Johnson, February 3, 1947.

After a month and two plaintive memos requesting feedback,⁶²⁰ Barr and Wheeler (but evidently not Johnson, d'Harnoncourt, or D'Amico) reply. Barr's response (Version 1a) amounts to a few underlines and question marks. Wheeler's markup (Version 1b) is prefaced diplomatically:

As to your "*What Is Modern Design*" text, I think this makes an excellent beginning, but I wish you would ask Victor D'Amico about the approach he has found most desirable in making these matters clear to beginners.⁶²¹

The most telling specific comment is by Wheeler, rightly questioning Kaufmann's assertion that "Book learning means mind-training; only recently people discovered that to think well requires as much physical and emotional development as mental."⁶²² Such writing is consistent through the project and indicative of Kaufmann's "mind-training." Indeed, it may reflect insecurity about his lack of a college degree.

The editorial trail picks up a year later, with a now-enthusiastic Wheeler setting a production schedule. This is determined by member obligations (they receive MoMA publications, an innovative and cost-effective promotion method); anticipated sales based on the success of WISMA and WIMP; and, unusually for a MoMA publication, an explicit appeal to the primary education market. Regarding members, Wheeler writes:

When we made the publications schedule for the current fiscal year we included as one of the four books to be sent to members the booklet you are preparing on Industrial Design for the 'Introductory Series to the Modern Arts.' This must, therefore, go out to members before July first.⁶²³

As for sales appeal, he is explicit:

⁶²⁰ MW, II.106. Kaufmann to Wheeler et al, February 18, 1947. Kaufmann to Wheeler, March 3, 1947.

⁶²¹ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, March 14, 1947.

⁶²² MW, II.106. Kaufmann to Barr, Wheeler, et al. February 3, 1947.

⁶²³ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, March 12, 1948.

I hate to rush you with this book but we are desperately anxious to augment this series for which there is a lively demand and your title is the only one in view at present.⁶²⁴

In targeting a textbook market, Wheeler is clearly attempting to build on the success of WIMP, which is based in part upon sales to educational institutions (see Chapter 2). For WIMD, Wheeler directly appeals to the New York City Board of Education:

Simon and Schuster has just succeeded in getting *What Is Modern Painting?* widely accepted for school use and if [WIMD] is to be listed during the next school year your book will have to be out by July first... This will enable us to get it out in this fiscal year for our members and meet the school demand in the autumn... Otherwise, because of various school board regulations, which I don't understand, it could not be used until the following year.⁶²⁵

These factors determine the deadline for text and illustrations—only a month away: “As it will take two and a half months to produce the booklet, we must have the final copy by April fifteenth.”⁶²⁶ The goal of a “finished book” is pushed back to later in the year, however, due to bad reviews from manuscript readers. Wheeler breaks the news:⁶²⁷

we submitted the manuscript of your book to a number of different people in order to test its effectiveness and I am sorry to say that your concept and mine did not find approbation. I am afraid that we will have to take these criticisms into consideration because it is important to have the support of the more progressive people in the educational field for a publication as far reaching as this will be. I am sure we can work out a way of meeting their objections....⁶²⁸

Unfortunately the record lacks evidence of this “number of different people,” but by curious coincidence, Wheeler sends the manuscript to an educator for (paid) review on that same day. He seeks out a Miss Virginia Murphy, Director of Art for the New York City Board of Education, who likely influences book purchases:

⁶²⁴ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, March 12, 1948.

⁶²⁵ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, March 12, 1948.

⁶²⁶ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, March 12, 1948.

⁶²⁷ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, June 21, 1948.

⁶²⁸ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, June 21, 1948.

We have been planning for some time to publish a companion book to *What Is Modern Painting?* and *What Is Modern Architecture?* to be entitled *What Is Modern Design?* Our Industrial Design Department has made an attempt at compiling such a book and we very much need your advice and criticism before going any further with it. What we would like to have is your frank criticism of its effectiveness so far as students or laymen are concerned and any suggestions that you might make will be most carefully considered.⁶²⁹

I have not been able to locate Murphy's comments, but in October Wheeler responds that, "We are now having the book re-written with a view to correcting the various shortcomings which you observed and I think you will be satisfied with the new version."⁶³⁰

Meanwhile, D'Amico reviews the manuscript (Version 3a)⁶³¹ as Wheeler advises at the outset. His assessment is frank, stressing that such a text must be made understandable to a general audience:

Too general...should [illegible] these 3 [illegible—groups?]: teachers, students, consumers... Requires too much background from the reader to be useful to [illegible] public we should have in mind.

For example, he questions the tone in which Kaufmann condemns streamlining of everyday objects as "hopelessly vulgarized by parallel ridges and 'brightwork,'" characterizing it as the "tricky and vulgar" ornament of the modern age. D'Amico asserts that this "offends reader[.] Doesn't explain why vulgar." This is especially relevant for an American audience, among whom streamlining is popular or at least unquestioned.

Between November 1948 and August 1949 Kaufmann pens Version 4,⁶³² adding the background D'Amico urges. *Lots* of background. This, too, goes to a reader for

⁶²⁹ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Miss Virginia Murphy, June 21, 1948.

⁶³⁰ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Murphy, October 19, 1948.

⁶³¹ MW, II.106. Untitled manuscript (Version 3) with cover note "Comments to Mr. Wheeler 11/30/48."

⁶³² MW, II.106. "Development of Modern Design" (Version 4). n.d.

comment. The unidentified reviewer gets to core of Kaufmann's style ("is this talking down too much?") regarding passages such as this one:

Our eyes, like our other senses, are little trained as a rule: most of us look at design all around us with no more comprehension than most men in Gutenberg's day had for printed words. To see design, to read its meaning, is a capacity latent in every person but rarely developed.⁶³³

The reviewer also astutely observes that the text "lacks continuity" as well as specificity:

This chapter is better I think, but I still miss any sense of a connected story, perhaps because no period mentioned ever seems quite defined in terms of the concrete objects which I, as uninitiate know[:] houses, furniture, styles etc.⁶³⁴

He or she is especially perceptive in arguing for clarity but not simplification (effective and true) and concrete examples to support abstract ideas, noting that:

I don't mean that it ought to be written more simply—but there is a lack of the [illegible—sureness?] of concrete illustrations and ideas here which makes it difficult for me to get it pinned down.⁶³⁵

The next draft (Version 5, August 1949), marked "revised," appears to be another fresh start and the last of the manuscripts.⁶³⁶ Compared to earlier drafts, especially Version 4, this one is much shorter, with fewer sections and the history section relegated to a secondary position. No further development documents between this version and the published book (Version 6, 1950) have surfaced. Structurally, the only major change is that a section on ornament (along with the anti-streamlining screed) is restored from a previous version.

⁶³³ MW, II.106. Version 4. n.p.

⁶³⁴ MW, II.106. Version 4, cover note.

⁶³⁵ MW, II.106. Version 4, cover note.

⁶³⁶ A&D Files. Cover memo and "revised" manuscript. Kaufmann to d'Harnoncourt, August 10, 1949.

In rhetorical terms, the final brevity of the historical element is striking, condensed into the single paragraph *How Modern Design Developed*:

It began a century ago when creative and perceptive people reacted to the vast problems posed by technological change and mass production. Modern design, in a steady development since then, has taken on a number of outward forms. Along with examples of current products some of the less familiar forms are pictured here, whenever these older works have present-day significance.⁶³⁷

In just this brief passage Kaufmann encapsulates the key elements of his philosophy: industrialization brings “vast problems” (confirming the Gothic Revival), design may have more than one formal criteria (International Style jab), and “older works” should be retained as viable modern design (historical eclecticism à la *Wohnkultur*).

Kaufmann then posits twelve muddled “precepts.” Even these practical-sounding guidelines are introduced as a product of history: “Out of a hundred years of development certain precepts have emerged and endured.”⁶³⁸ The author then undermines his own commandments with the qualification that “like all rules [they] should be taken with a grain of salt.”⁶³⁹ All begin (repetitively) with “Modern design should:”

1. fulfill the practical needs of modern life.
2. express the spirit of our times.
3. benefit by...advances in the fine arts and pure sciences.
4. take advantage of new materials and techniques and develop familiar ones.
5. develop the forms, textures, and colors that spring from the direct fulfillment of requirements in appropriate materials and techniques.
6. express the purpose of an object, never making it seem to be what it is not.
7. express the qualities and beauties of the materials used, never making the materials seem to be what they are not.

⁶³⁷ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950, 7.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

8. express the methods used to make an object, not disguising mass production as handcraft or simulating a technique not used.
9. blend the expression of utility, materials, and process into a visually satisfactory whole.
10. be simple, its structure, evident in its appearance, avoiding extraneous enrichment.
11. master the machine for the service of man.
12. serve as wide a public as possible, considering modest needs and limited costs no less.⁶⁴⁰

At the book's conclusion, in an apparent attempt to consolidate the unwieldy precepts, he invokes a triad of qualities derived from the medieval aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁴¹ Similar to the way WISMA1 aphorizes the Vitruvian *utility, strength, and beauty* (see Chapter 1), Kaufmann's attempt is more muddled:

Integrity is most surely expressed in the oneness of form and function already mentioned.

Clarity is forwarded by a maxim of modern design: let all functional parts be visible and all visible parts, functional (another way of stating the unity of form and function)

Harmony may well be thought of as inward and outward. Inward harmony will be found where there is an agreeable relationship between the components of an object. Outward harmony will be found where the object is able to take its place graciously in a larger ensemble.⁶⁴²

At first these postulations appear authoritative and fully in line with MoMA ideals. Indeed, Aquinas' triad is quoted in a *Machine Art* epigraph.⁶⁴³ But in this context, the principles they represent reveal unintentional complexities and contradictions, especially

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁴¹ Aquinas' influence upon historiography is an interesting question beyond the scope of this study. At what point are his sparse, elliptical references to truth and beauty claimed as a coherent theory by art historians, and to what rhetorical purposes are they put in art historical discourse? For background see Umberto Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1988); John Hood, *Essential Aquinas: Writings on Philosophy, Religion, and Society* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).

⁶⁴² Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950, 9.

⁶⁴³ Johnson and Barr Jr., *Machine Art*, 1934, n.p.

regarding the rhetorical use of history. To complicate things further, in WISMID the author introduces yet another set of precepts: *comfort*, *quality*, *lightness*, and (again) *harmony*. These tropes and the larger WIMD argument are discussed further in the analysis section below.

Reception

How is WIMD received? With little interest, apparently. Of the few reviews located to date, including those clipped by the publicity department, many are from journals that bypass general readership, addressing readers knowledgeable about and often convinced by modernist principles. A review in the *New Republic* approves of Kaufmann's history but criticizes the eternal newness it engenders:

A brief, sensible, clearly written preface to an extreme purist taste in contemporary furniture...with a good historical background. The choice of objects is as antiseptic as the annual Museum of Modern Art Christmas Gift shows. No utensils here could acquire a patina or a trace of homey shabbiness; they clean with a dust-defying sadness. For stainless steel there is no past or future, and the hospital shall be our home.⁶⁴⁴

The *RIBA Journal* exemplifies a professionally oriented review. These, too, tend to focus on questions of taste. In this case a patronizing reviewer finds the book "happily free from patronizing tones:"

By the title of this elegant little book you will know exactly what to expect. First comes a brief sermon on the essentials of good design, very simply written and happily free from the patronizing tones rather too common in works of this sort.

⁶⁴⁴ PI, I [25:643]. n.a., "Untitled Review," *New Republic* December 11 (1950). MoMA Archives, NY.

The layman, one hopes, will profit by reading it. Architects, of course, do not need to be reminded about such things—or so I assume.⁶⁴⁵

Another professional review, from the German journal *Werk*, astutely identifies the book's strategic role in the museum's mission:

Through a multiplicity of activities, [MoMA] managed, in less than a decade, to awaken the interest of the American public for the importance of good design in modern home equipment... This publication with its simple but well put together issues serves as an introduction to the design problems of the present time... [including] lapidary formulations [and] succinct comments on illustrated examples... The text addresses the average consumer and wants to advise him on what the market has to offer.⁶⁴⁶

Sales indicate the degree to which the book manages to “awaken the interest of the American public.” Within its first year of publication Wheeler reports that “*What Is Modern Design?*” is selling at the desk at the rate of 250 copies a month. This is extremely good.”⁶⁴⁷ Sales are strong enough to print additional copies within two years of publication: “Dear Edgar, It looks as though we will very soon have to reprint *What Is Modern Design?*”⁶⁴⁸ But there appears to be little interest in revisions, for in the same memo he asks, “have you any changes to make which would not increase the size of the book[?]” With no indication of a response from Kaufmann, nor any changes to the second printing, one can conclude that no further editions are planned.⁶⁴⁹

In this way the long inquiry into *What Is Modern Design?* ultimately leads to a short-lived answer. But Kaufmann re-asks the question several years later with his most

⁶⁴⁵ PI, I [25:643]. "J. C. P.", "Untitled Review," *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal* 58, no. 9 (1951).

⁶⁴⁶ W. R., "Edgar Kaufmann Jr.: What is Modern Design?," *Werk* 40, no. 9 (1953). Thanks to Beatrice Gross for translation.

⁶⁴⁷ MW, II.106 Wheeler to Kaufmann, December 13, 1950.

⁶⁴⁸ MW, II.106. Wheeler to Kaufmann, January 25, 1952.

⁶⁴⁹ WIMD and WISMID are reprinted together in 1969 by Arno Press as one in a series of MoMA book re-issues.

fully articulated refutation of the museum's dominant design narrative, *What Is Modern Interior Design?*

***What Is Modern Interior Design?* (WISMID) Book, 1953**

What Is Modern Interior Design? (1953) follows three years after the WIMD book, in the midst of *Good Design*'s five-year run and two years before Kaufmann leaves the museum. In his last year at MoMA WISMID is translated into Japanese⁶⁵⁰ and a CE is proposed but cancelled six years after that.⁶⁵¹

WISMID restores and expands the history excised from WIMD, a narrative very different from the by-then canonical lineage formulated by Johnson and reaffirmed by Gideon and Pevsner (for more on these two see Chapter 1). These differences are consistent in several ways with WIMD and echo the larger tensions of the series as a whole. Broadly, this concerns the insertion of a subtle, high level debate into an ostensibly simple primer—in this case a debate about the history and future of the International Style. We find this expressed through drastic realignments of historical causality, questionable assertions of universal modernism, unabashed advocacy for Wright as the apotheosis of modernist ideals, and the use of multiple persuasive means—especially photography—to reinforce the idea of a “mitigated modernism.”

The stated intention of WISMID is to

⁶⁵⁰ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?* (Tokyo: Shokoku-Sha, [1955]).

⁶⁵¹ CE, II.2.131.4.

show the art of arranging objects for agreeable living as art developed in the first century of modern design, 1850–1950; to observe in this history a few dominant traits; and to show that these traits are evident in good interiors today.⁶⁵²

Just as in WIMD, the argument is set in an historicizing framework. The first section frames Kaufmann’s argument around four “traits of modern rooms:” *comfort*, *quality*, *lightness*, and *harmony*. Each quality is developed as a brief historical account, beginning with eighteenth-century French notions of *comfort* and ending in mid-century America with Wright as the champion of *harmony*. Are the traits related to Aquinas, *integrity*, *clarity*, *harmony*, invoked in WIMD? Is the author aware of the Vitruvian *utility*, *strength*, and *beauty* of WISMA1, discussed in Chapter 1? The four qualities appear to have no specific origin, but they serve as a memorable epigram.

The book’s second section concerns “certain important points of view that have affected the development of modern design.”⁶⁵³ These number exactly two: *The Machine* and *Nature*, which correspond directly to those of Kaufmann and Johnson.

The third section struggles for reconciliation of these oppositions, postulated as “the merging of these viewpoints in our own time.”⁶⁵⁴ According to Kaufmann, they merge into Wright. The final section illustrates recent built works meant to represent the successful integration of nature, technology, and the four traits. In a move likely to appeal to the target audience and echoing Mumford’s regionalism,⁶⁵⁵ the works represent broad U.S. areas: New York, New England, California and the west coast, and the middle west.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵² Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 3.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ See above regarding the *New Yorker* article and resulting MoMA symposium.

⁶⁵⁶ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950, 23–9.

In contrast to Mumford's garden city ideal,⁶⁵⁷ however, is the emphasis on freestanding homes. Throughout the section, and the book for that matter, single-family houses dominate—urban interiors are the exception and mass housing is entirely absent. The book ends with a brief summary, selectively rejecting a very particular nineteenth century aesthetic and underscoring Wright's role as the apotheosis of modern design.

Designed (like WIMD) by Jack Dunbar, the book's cover features a vibrant pink and red checkerboard pattern, (Figure 32) a bold departure from the austerity of other WIM covers. Moreover, it decorates the diagram, suggesting a "feminine" tablecloth or tile floor more than an abstract, "masculine" grid.

Aside from the occasional memo and some photo queries there appears to be little additional documentation of the book's development. In the absence of such material I look for insights to similarly sparse records of WISMID's precursor, the CE and article *Modern Rooms of the Last Fifty Years* (MR50).

Development

As early as his 1942 report, Kaufmann states that MoMA "has had great demand for a show about the development of interior room arrangement from William Morris till the present."⁶⁵⁸ (One can speculate that a major source of this "demand" is the curator himself.) Photo queries imply that the show is organized under his auspices, as in a memo by ID Clerk Mary McCampbell reporting that "This department is preparing a circulating

⁶⁵⁷ Found throughout Mumford's writings and touched upon in Chapter 1, this biography traces his involvement with regionalism: Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (New York: Grove, 1989).

⁶⁵⁸ Kaufmann Jr., *Industrial Design and Museums in the United States of America.*, February 1942, 8.

exhibition....⁶⁵⁹ Kaufmann's precise role is unclear. He receives no title credit and has no presence in the exhibition files, but it is standard policy for CE to at least nominally consult with the relevant curatorial department. The best clue to authorship is the sensibility of the text itself, which suggests collaboration between CE and ID. This can be inferred from the adroit organization of the material characteristic of CE and the awkward, often condescending prose typical of Kaufmann.

Production techniques are similar to WISMA1 (see Chapter 1), but the explicit content—narrative, writing style, and images—lays the foundation for WISMID. The show is composed of twenty-four panels of 30 in. x 24 in. (76 cm x 61 cm) “hardboard,” each with rounded edges and grommets for hanging. The material is divided into three sections: *The Revival of Crafts*, *The Influence of the Machine*, and *The Present Synthesis*. In this schema the thesis of Arts and Crafts humanism meets its antithesis in Machine Art functionalism, resulting in synthesis into, essentially, the “mitigated modernism” of *Wiener Wohnkultur* and its American (Wright) and Scandinavian manifestations (Aalto).

Only late-stage galleys document MR50's development. Among this camera-ready material is a tiny, telling bit of evidence: a series of small, sharp check marks call out sentences that are sympathetic to the machine aesthetic. This example is from, appropriately enough, Panel 13 of *The Influence of the Machine*:

it became a matter of pride for people to live comfortably and graciously in the [*check*] least space, with the least equipment. The words efficient and minimal became synonymous.⁶⁶⁰

Such marks are also found in Scully's manuscript for WISMA (see Chapter 1), where they, too, applaud functionalist principles. One can only speculate who checks over these

⁶⁵⁹ Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. #337. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Mary McCampbell to William D. Geer. November 11, 1946. Hereafter “REG.”

⁶⁶⁰ CE, II.1.82.7.1.

texts.

By the exhibition's close in early 1947, the content is adapted into an *Interiors* magazine feature in collaboration with Bernard Rudofsky (for more on his role at *Interiors* and relationship to MoMA, see Chapter 1).⁶⁶¹ With text and illustrations supplied by the museum, exhibition panels and article vary only in their layout. The collaboration further evinces the WIM series' skillful elision of education and salesmanship, for the article serves both museum and magazine well: *Interiors* acquires a low-cost, highbrow feature attractive to advertisers and readers. For MoMA, the article further spreads the museum's message, potentially reaching an even larger if more specialized audience than the CE itself. Presumably the museum also makes good promotional use of the "5,000 staple-bound offprints" it receives in exchange.⁶⁶² Indeed, Barr complements Kaufmann on its promotional value: "Thanks for the reprint of Modern Rooms. I wish we could have it on sale at the desk. It is such a good job and does you and the Museum such credit."⁶⁶³ This positive outcome may help to spark WISMID six years later.

The publication receives few press notices, so here, too, the show stands in as an indicator. It travels to twenty venues, mostly colleges and universities. Among these are a teachers' college, a fine arts society, and a military academy. At Penn State, an estimated five hundred people view the show. Of approximately a thousand visitors to the installation at the Speed Memorial Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, diverse groups include the Women's Auxiliary of the Southeastern Section of the American Society for Engineering Education, a Girl Scout troop, and even a nursery school class.⁶⁶⁴ A specific indicator of reception is a

⁶⁶¹ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., "Modern Rooms of the Last Fifty Years," *Interiors* 106, no. (1946).

⁶⁶² REG, Exh. #337. Wheeler to Ulrich, December 11, 1946.

⁶⁶³ REG, Exh. #337. Barr to Kaufmann, April 24, 1947.

⁶⁶⁴ CE, II.1.82.7.1.

comment by Philips Exeter Academy art director Glen Krause, who states that “Our student body is pretty conservative - particularly so regarding architecture and interiors. So - comments varied considerably.” But the conservatism is “the main reason I wanted this exhibition. Personally I thought it excellent.”⁶⁶⁵

Of the eight clippings documented in a CE album, Dorothy Welty Thomas, writing in the *Ithaca Journal*,⁶⁶⁶ is one of few reviewers to evaluate a WIM in socioeconomic terms. For example, she perceptively questions the chain of causality presented in the show, challenging the alignment of Morris, Wright, Japonisme, and the 1939 Swedish World’s Fair as progenitors:

According to the [MoMA] these trends in simplicity are the parents of modernism as seen today...Art trends go hand in hand with political, economic, and religious developments. Sometimes it is hard to say which is the parent and which is the child.

She astutely concludes that “cross-currents of ideas are too numerous to trace. Art is as international as commerce.” Thomas also correctly identifies the show as a strategic communication:

It should be remembered here that the term ‘modern’ used here refers to an art cult, not to a chronological period The [MoMA] is set up to further this movement in art and as such may be expected to propagandize for it, as well as to instruct in the facts. Whatever the motive, they are thorough.

Indeed. The next section analyzes in greater depth how thoroughly WIMD and WISMID propagandize for the movement.

⁶⁶⁵ CE, II.1.82.7.1.

⁶⁶⁶ CE, III.20.5. Dorothy Welty Thomas, "Modern Rooms of the Last 50 Years," *Ithaca Journal*, July 15, 1948.

Analysis

This section fleshes out Kaufmann's genealogy of design history according to WIMD and WISMID, analyzing it as a counterpoint to the Machine Art/International Style trajectory and in relation to the notion of *Wiener Wohnkultur* and Wright's organicism. The chapter concludes with a section on persuasive methods used—with greater and lesser effectiveness—to make this point of view plausible to a mainstream American audience.

Teasing out Kaufmann's often tangled narrative, one can surmise that the history of design follows two paths. One pessimistic trajectory concerns “the machine” and the other optimistically reconciles the machine and “nature.” In essence, Kaufmann's overall argument is that history propels a modernism that engenders not efficiency and functionalism but humanistic values such as comfort, vague notions of “quality,” and harmony with the natural world. With slight oversimplification the two paths can be diagrammed as:

Good: Middle Ages -> Louis XVI -> (Arts and Crafts + Japonisme) -> (Art Nouveau + Wiener Werkstätte) -> (“nature” + Scandinavia) -> Frank Lloyd Wright

Bad: (Industrial Revolution + Behrens) -> Machine Style -> streamlining -> nuclear energy

For a rough visual comparison with the International Style trajectory, if one was to make a diagram from the three-page Historical Note in the *Modern Architecture* catalog,⁶⁶⁷ the result would be strikingly similar to Barr's well-known 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art* catalog diagram (Figure 21), which also follows two paths: one leads to “geometrical abstraction” (including the machine aesthetic) and the other to “non-geometrical abstraction” (such as Biomorphism and Surrealism).

⁶⁶⁷ Barr Jr. and others, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, 1932*, 18–20.

In brief, the Kaufmann narrative goes like this: The “prevailing idea of comfort in the Western world today...had its beginnings in France two hundred years ago” in reaction to the formality of the Louis XIV court. From there, historical forces move swiftly to the Industrial Revolution and Morris’ reaction to it. A section of WISMID begins expansively with:

Modern design was born of the turmoil called the Industrial Revolution...So relentlessly far-reaching...that all human society was revised, populations swelled; new empires arose; the values men lived by, their dreams, their understanding of the natural world around them, all changed. A new cosmos was outlined by Isaac Newton...[Man] came to have faith in the power of the machine....⁶⁶⁸

The narrative turns immediately to the Arts and Crafts movement as a positive reaction to industrialization. This is the first of many such references, for Kaufmann consistently originates contemporary modernism in mid-nineteenth century England with Morris, “one of the first great modern designers...whose philosophy is fundamental in the practice of design today.”⁶⁶⁹ Thus,

the works of the Middle Ages, once thought grotesque, were admired as reservoirs of profound truth, records of a sincere and noble way of life; a view constant with the high romantic ideals and religious aspirations of the early nineteenth-century. This solemn medievalism emphasized a sense of quality that modern interior design inherited. The Gothic Revival at its height preached craftsmanship and the craftsman’s joy in his material for its own sake.⁶⁷⁰

The Kelmscott Manor drawing room illustrated (1872) “speaks to the eye of relaxation, of pampering the individual, and of friendly association between individuals who share its atmosphere.” Consistent with a *Wohnkultur* sensibility and characteristic of Kaufmann’s descriptions, the author makes sure to point out how eclectic, often craft-oriented details contribute to this humane atmosphere, as in the mix of eighteenth-century

⁶⁶⁸ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 14.

⁶⁶⁹ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950, n.p. [4].

⁶⁷⁰ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 6–7.

antiques, “private enthusiasms” and “many Eastern curios.”⁶⁷¹

In the realm of “Eastern curios,” the narrative then takes a brief detour to Japan along with a hazy notion of its traditional architecture, a view likely influenced by the Aesthetic Movement and of course Wright.⁶⁷² In this schema, the opening of Japan to the West is also claimed for the Arts and Crafts: “The Japanese way of expressing structure and materials frankly was with in perfect accord with the principles of the [then-]contemporary Gothic Revival.”⁶⁷³ According to the author, in the form of Japonisme this leads to Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who is then succeeded by Breuer, positioned “midway between Mackintosh and the present.”⁶⁷⁴

Meanwhile, back west, “[b]y the dawn of the twentieth century the first results were beginning to show, hints of new design suited to a power plant world.”⁶⁷⁵ But rather than follow the Pevsner-Gideon trajectory to the Chicago School, Auguste Perret, or Corbusier, in Kaufmann’s narrative the power plant generates a reaction in the form of Art Nouveau, specifically Victor Horta, Richard Riemerschmid, Otto Wagner, Mackintosh—and eventually, Wright.⁶⁷⁶ In this way the Crystal Palace (1851), icon of Pevsnerian rationalism (see Chapter 1) leads directly to Horta’s Nouveau Tassel House (1893). In this way “half a century of ingenious greenhouse engineering,” propagates not skyscrapers or curtain walls but an exotic “glass and iron magic cave.”⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁷² Kevin Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁶⁷³ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 4.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 12.

Then, jumping into the early twentieth century, “the 1920s and ‘30s saw a burst of vigorous design which may well be called the Machine Style”⁶⁷⁸ which “culminated in the first victorious campaign to give modern man a background eloquent of his skills and aims, suited to his needs.” Here, too, Kaufmann emphasizes Arts and Crafts predecessors, in which the Machine Style “translated the ideals of the Gothic Revival and its heirs into technologically up-to-date materials and processes.”⁶⁷⁹

In WISMID and quite possibly all of his writing, the four-page section titled *The Machine* is Kaufmann’s most direct refutation of Machine Art/International Style. Wedged in the middle of the book, it is positioned as an ideological and chronological dead end. Beginning with the “Great Machine” of the Newtonian universe, the section is framed as a fascination but ultimate disillusionment with the machine aesthetic.

Johnson and Kaufmann appear to concur on the opening premise that “three groups evolved the Machine Style[:.]”⁶⁸⁰ the Bauhaus, De Stijl, and L’Esprit Nouveau of “Charles le Corbusier.”⁶⁸¹ But Kaufmann then consistently contradicts this by linking the evolution back to his preferred sites of origin (Arts and Crafts, Vienna) and disparaging the machine aesthetic. If compared to Johnson’s *Machine Art*, each believes the other’s presumed norm to be “temporary” or an “anomaly.” Thus Johnson declares that “the twentieth century is gradually rectifying” the “anomaly” of much industrial design of the previous century, in which a craft orientation meant that “technics and design were divorced.”⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 14–5.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Johnson and Barr Jr., *Machine Art*, 1934, n.p.

People of sensibility in the nineteenth century...failed to see the possibilities inherent in the new technics. Instead, they misused or rejected the new technics and developed their...useful arts on a handicraft basis.

Kaufmann in turn judges the “new technics” to be the anomaly, asserting that 1930 Werkbund exhibition in Paris “assured the Machine Style of international (though, as it proved, temporary) validity.”⁶⁸³

In another example, Kaufmann writes that Mart Stam’s Weissenhof house (1927) is “the most stimulating, convincing demonstration of modern design for daily life” produced in the interwar period—but because of the “softer” aspects of the austere interior. Choosing to ignore a metal desk and table, he instead emphasizes two Thonet chairs and their nineteenth century origins, then sniffs at “how many of the effects gained in metal could be achieved in wood too, a less expensive, less clamorous material.”⁶⁸⁴

Kaufmann wavers on the role of the Bauhaus. First associating it with perceived failures of the Machine Style, he then decides that its social goals are worthy of Gothic Revival ideals as “a training center for all of the arts...to explore and develop man’s technological resources expressively and functionally, to suit both bodily and spiritual needs.”⁶⁸⁵

Mies is represented only in *The Machine* section and only by early works such as the Weissenhofsiedlung (1927), Tugendhat House (1930, “now a ruin”), and the Berlin exhibition house (1931).⁶⁸⁶ In Kaufmann’s chronology the “lyric constructor and exacting technician of the Machine Style” never even makes it to the 1940s, much less to the States.

⁶⁸³ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 17.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15–6.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 16–8.

The section as a whole is bounded in this way, with the latest works dating to 1937. Reinforcing the perceived dead end, it concludes at the beginning with Wagner's reception room for *Die Zeit* (1902).⁶⁸⁷ Effectively reoriginating Machine Style principles in turn-of-the-century Vienna, Kaufmann ultimately credits Wagner with the whole movement:

It is only just to remember that a vision of the new style had been embodied a whole generation earlier (unaccountably without emulation or much applause) in some works of Vienna's leading architect, Otto Wagner.⁶⁸⁸

In a final flourish, he notes that "Wagner and Wright admired each other's work."⁶⁸⁹

WIMD follows a similar line of thought regarding the machine aesthetic. Kaufmann is unsparing in his distaste, as in a draft remarking upon its "extreme of chilly paucity" and "canvas-strapped chromium cages."⁶⁹⁰ In his history the Machine Style not only ends, it degenerates into moderne, art deco, and—even worse—streamlining.

According to WIMD this is all Peter Behrens' fault. Kaufmann is unequivocally critical of his legacy and is most strident in another context, a then-well-known 1948 essay titled "Borax, or the Chromium-Plated Calf." Taking pains to identify the designer's nationality, Kaufmann writes:

Behrens was the chief style arbiter of the giant trusts of the German Empire....The pomposity and monotony of his style have left their blight on those who follow in the practice of design for great industrial concerns....In today's streamlining, smooth surfaces, brightwork trim, oversized curves of transition, sullen, solid

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁹⁰ WIMD Version 3, 8.

colours, manicured engineering details, are all taken over from Behrens's work and that of his disciples.⁶⁹¹

In this construct Behrens receives no credit for design suitable to a "power plant world" and, unfairly, all the blame for the "vulgar" aestheticization of streamlining, in which the "directness" of engineering "was taken over for less stringently practical objects."⁶⁹²

Looking to the future of the past, Kaufmann asserts that the Machine Style is predestined for the advent of nuclear energy and the soon-to-be space race:

In the very decades of the Machine Style the end of the machine was ensured by the beginning of man's control over radiant energy, a power vastly more gripping and effective. If the music of the spheres once turned into a whirl of gears, now space surges with supersonic forces which we cannot sense, but which we plan to use.⁶⁹³

Doomed by its excesses, in one of the drafts the author concludes that

Through the early 1930s the machine style grew in quality and influence, but this success did not go unchallenged; ultimately it was checked. Today, looking back, we may hazard a guess that this style was overly synthetic and forced into a changing world too soon, perhaps, to last.⁶⁹⁴

Once "checked," to what does the "changing world" turn? According to Kaufmann,

The designers of the later 1930s and '40s who felt limited by the Machine Style were not eager to abandon the advances [of] expressive clarity, technical mastery and critical acclaim. Hence, they did not seek to replace it with a naturalistic counterstyle....Rather they began to enrich and enlarge the language of the Machine Style, blending elements into it until a new amalgam appeared, not only different but more adaptable than any earlier form of modern design.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹¹ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., "Borax, or the Chromium-Plated Calf," *Architectural Review* 104, no. 620 (1948): 89.

⁶⁹² WIMD Version 4, 8.

⁶⁹³ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 15.

⁶⁹⁴ WIMD Version 5, 8.

⁶⁹⁵ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 20.

In WISMID *The Machine* concludes with one hope of a future for the Machine Style: “One spirit prevails in the work of the right angle designers of 1900 [and] after 1920...” In an indirect reference to Hitchcock’s 1942 monograph on Wright, this spirit concerns “The nature of materials.”⁶⁹⁶

Key designers who follow this path, according to Kaufmann, are Breuer and Corbusier, who “were among the first to go further, dramatizing the integration of nature and science as the milieu of modern man.”⁶⁹⁷ As examples he chooses a kinder, gentler house by Breuer (1936) featuring stone walls and blond wood, as well as Corbusier’s rural, vaulted *Maison de Week-end* (1935), characterized as a “pleasure pavilion.”⁶⁹⁸ In the former, plywood is considered “an old craft material reappearing in unusual form,” in comparison to its *New Materials* designation in WISMA1. In the latter he jabs at an unloved International Style idiom, pointing out how concrete vaults “replace conventional modern flat roofs,” He then extends their trajectory not to Mies, as Johnson might have done, but to Aino and Alvar Aalto furniture for, conveniently enough, a Wright house (Oboler House, Malibu, 1940–1946).⁶⁹⁹

WISMID concludes with a paean to Wright, showing two living rooms as examples: the Usonian Goetsch-Winckler house (Michigan, 1939) and Pauson house (Phoenix, 1940).⁷⁰⁰ Here Wright culminates a century of modern design, achieved by harmonizing the International Style machine with the domesticated “nature” of *Wohnkultur*.

⁶⁹⁶ Henry Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials, 1887-1941: The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942).

⁶⁹⁷ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 21.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19–20.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20–1; Storrer, 1978, 275–6.

⁷⁰⁰ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 29; Storrer, 1978, 250, 69. In the *Interiors* article Pauson House is replaced by Taliesin West (1939).

What do these two rooms in particular reveal about the traits and attitudes which...underlie the hundred-year-old tradition of modern interior design? Neither one is excessive in its emphasis on modern technology, nor on nature, for that matter. A close relationship between man and the natural world around him is assumed but not stressed. We see no fur throws, no 'free-form' coffee tables, no tropical plants, no growing trees embodied in the rooms. Nor can we find, on the other hand, shiny metal trim, great walls of glass, intricate structure exposed.⁷⁰¹

In his conclusion, Kaufmann reiterates his claims that mid-century modernism is a positive evolution from eighteenth-century humanism, the Gothic Revival, the natural sciences, Japonisme, nineteenth-century Romanticism, and a rehabilitated love affair with the machine aesthetic. Unlike the International Style catalog assertion that "the confusion of the past forty years, or rather of the past century, may shortly come to an end,"⁷⁰² in the Kaufmann trajectory as in the *Wohnkultur* ethos, modernism resolves "confusion" by assimilating and not rejecting the past.

Persuasive Techniques

After a general look at Kaufmann's often-perverse writing style, this section examines his specific efforts to be convincing, including the rhetorical use of triads, authority figures, gender references, and the relative appeal of the primer form to the then-burgeoning do-it-yourself genre. As in other chapters, the analysis concludes by examining persuasive uses of photography.

Editorial Style and Rhetorical Devices

For a series devoted to "pragmatic rhetoric," as Barr puts it (see Chapter 2),

⁷⁰¹ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 29.

⁷⁰² Barr Jr. and others, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, 1932, 13.

Kaufmann's writing style consistently undermines his case; it is discontinuous, lugubrious, and often condescending (Lawrence calls his prose "long-winded").⁷⁰³ His strident attempts to be convincing persistently backfire despite his success in other pop culture contexts such as magazine articles and television appearances.⁷⁰⁴ Reading the text today, it seems likely that at least a segment of the target audience would find it off-putting.

The texts leave one wondering how a multilingual curator writing an ostensibly populist book can be so condescending.⁷⁰⁵ Are readers really so "illiterate" that they would miss the tone, not to mention the questionable grammar, of statements such as this: "In our day most people are illiterate about the language [of design] as most people five hundred years ago were about the language of books."⁷⁰⁶ In another instance, Kaufmann asserts that the general marketplace "take[s] advantage of a public whose response is instinctive, undeveloped."⁷⁰⁷

Even noun use is relevant, with number, person, and gender all adding unintentionally alienating inflection. For example, Kaufmann invariably refers to "men" or "man." While editorially conventional, as part of a culture industry well aware of women's role in the production and consumption of design, by speaking of "Bauhaus men" and similar misnomers Kaufmann misses a chance to use gender sensitivity to his advantage. WISMA and WIMP, in comparison, are simply more appealing for a book of this type: they directly engage a collective, gender-neutral readership in the act of modernity. In WISMA, "we" are the subject, as in "Our buildings are different from those

⁷⁰³ Sidney Lawrence, "Declaration of Function: Documents from the Museum of Modern Art's Design Crusade, 1933-1950," *Design Issues* 2, no. 1 (1985).

⁷⁰⁴ See for example Kaufmann Jr.

⁷⁰⁵ Toker, 2005.

⁷⁰⁶ WIMD Version 1, 5.

⁷⁰⁷ WIMD Version 1, 5.

of the past because we live in a different world.”⁷⁰⁸ In WIMP, Barr’s use of “you” has the effect of conversing with a genial author, as in “If...you feel that you don’t like modern painting anyway, words may possibly help you to change your mind.”⁷⁰⁹

Kaufmann also has a taste for strange analogies. For example, he chooses to critique planned obsolescence by comparing it to farmers exploiting land: “The mass-buying public...is generally exploited by sensational designers today, much as yesterday stupid men ravaged the topsoil by deforestation and bad ploughing.”⁷¹⁰ In this way he also potentially alienates his “public” by implying that they, too, are “stupid men.” In other instances the author manages to combine a condescending tone and strange analogy in one sentence: “[an] important idea is that people in the mass can be...investigated and this knowledge used to the advantage of the individual (old age benefits for example).”⁷¹¹ For all their awkwardness, however, these societal referents (farming, social security, and, in another instance, class mobility) emphasize humanist principles consistent with Gothic Revival and *Wohnkultur* principles.

As with WISMA1, in the two books Kaufmann uses the classic rhetorical techniques of *tricolon* (the use of three elements to make an elegant, memorable maxim) and *sententia* (the invocation of respected authority): both books invoke sage wisdom from the distant past as well as “science,” the former in groups of three (and four) elements. Thus in WIMD Kaufmann looks to the *integrity, clarity, and harmony* of Aquinas for the same reasons that WISMA1 invokes the *utility, strength, and beauty* of Vitruvius. Kaufmann’s use of Aquinas is confusing, however, because WISMID also invokes similar but not identical principles of *comfort, quality, lightness* and *harmony* in addition

⁷⁰⁸ McAndrew and Mock, 1942, 4.

⁷⁰⁹ Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?*, 1943, 3.

⁷¹⁰ WIMD Version 1b, 5.

⁷¹¹ WIMD Version 2, 3.

to the twelve unwieldy precepts at the book's outset. Why Kaufmann feels no need to reconcile these dictates is curious. The end result muddles WIMD and WISMID's *clarity* and *harmony*, and therefore their *integrity*.

As for science, in the Kaufmann schema truth springs from the *natural* sciences and not the engineering celebrated in WISMA1, *Machine Art*, or the International Style show. According to the author, the "asymmetric flowing curves" of Art Nouveau and its progeny are based upon close observation of the organic world, including the world of the subconscious. Such curves are discovered "in nature through the lenses of microscopes" where they "suggested impulsive subhuman vitality." In the same milieu, presumably that of Freud's Vienna, "importance [was] reattributed to spontaneous imagination by psychologists exploring the substructure of human responses." As if vindicated at last, Kaufmann concludes that looking back, "All of a sudden, the life-loving, vibrant designs of Art Nouveau seemed a lot less absurd."⁷¹²

Genre Strategy

In the two books Kaufmann and Wheeler miss another strategic opportunity: to join the then-booming genre of design and decorating manuals.⁷¹³ Despite the editorial resemblance to a decorating book, complete with examples and guidelines, the Kaufmann WIMs are remote and didactic: the WISMID introduction is clear that "The aim of this study is to deepen the appreciation of modern industrial design; it cannot begin to teach the practice of it."⁷¹⁴ In WIMD, practicality is contracted out to another source:

⁷¹² All quotes in this paragraph from Version 4, 10.

⁷¹³ Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Do It Yourself: Home Improvement in 20th-Century America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 39–41.

⁷¹⁴ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 3.

“Home furnishings are designed one by one, but are used together...How to assemble such articles is a separate topic, not to be discussed here....” Readers are referred to the even more remote “brief survey” MR50, which as a magazine article is ephemeral and therefore difficult for general readers to obtain as time passes.

As a modern design promoter Kaufmann is much more successful in the concrete than the abstract, and in short quips rather than extended discursion. In WIMD, for example, he is at his most effective discussing how to evaluate a table:

Try looking at a wooden dining table—how is the edge of the top treated?...How are the legs joined to the top?...How are the legs spaced? How do [leg braces] contribute to the whole design?⁷¹⁵

His pitch blends gallery talk and sales floor demo, curator and salesman. This brings to mind his television and newsreel appearances in this period, where Kaufmann actively engages consumers in demonstrations.⁷¹⁶

In comparison, the books’ remoteness effectively mystifies the subject and renders the reader passive. To sense the difference, compare Kaufmann’s approach to more user-friendly MoMA books such as Mock’s *If You Want to Build a House* (1946) and D’Amico’s *How To Make Objects of Wood* (1952).⁷¹⁷ In short, by overshooting the WIM ideal, Kaufmann’s books most likely lose readers to the truly popular DIY genre.

Role of Reproductions

⁷¹⁵ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950, 9.

⁷¹⁶ For an account of television appearances see Spigel, 2008, 163–4. Film clips of Kaufmann at *Good Design* 1950 and 1952 are held by the museum’s Film Department and Architecture and Design Study Center. The clips are shown in this exhibition: MoMA, “What Was Good Design? Moma’s Message, 1944-1956”, moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/958 (accessed January 25, 2012).

⁷¹⁷ Kendall Bassett and Victor D’Amico, *How to Make Objects of Wood* (New York: MoMA, 1952).

As with all WIMs, photography constitutes the most subtle rhetorical tool in the Kaufmann books, showing how the two incorporate mass media techniques in order to challenge the museum's dominant design narrative, a challenge in which even subtle visual choices play an important role.

Consistent with the other WIMs, photographic availability and legibility influence editorial choices, but despite an explicit rationale (below), the effects of other choices are far more striking. The most dissonance results from decontextualization, specifically the prevalence of unpopulated interiors and exhibition installations, silhouetted objects, close cropping, and drastic scale changes. Other choices include typological layouts that create a sales catalog effect, good/bad comparisons, use of captions to compensate for softening details absent from medium-range views, strategic use of a color image, image repurposing, and in one case, an unusual instance of cross-cultural documentation.

These choices should be understood in the context of mid-century American visual media culture, which encompasses a mature picture press, the rise of shelter magazines and DIY manuals, a confident advertising industry, and the rapid acceptance of television. The books' production values are modest compared to other publications aimed at a similar audience, consistent with Barr's low price directive. At the same time, the books' design manifest exactly the art/industry/education fusion Kaufmann seeks in his MoMA work as a whole, successfully conflating textbook, art book, and sales catalog.

In WISMID Kaufmann provides a straightforward rationale for photo choices:

Each illustration was chosen first for its informative quality and only then for the importance of the work represented. Some excellent and well-known modern interiors were omitted because too many photographs were required to explain their worth, others because no satisfactory photos were available.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁸ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950, 3.

With little record of the editorial process, this claim is difficult to substantiate. The record does show that availability is in fact not much of a consideration, however. Contemporary examples appear to be obtained with little trouble from the architects and/or their photographers, and Kaufmann personally secures reproduction permissions from Wright.⁷¹⁹ This ready availability of images, in comparison to the laborious sourcing for WISMA1, is an indicator of the maturation of architectural photography as a specialized profession, by then serving robust postwar building and publishing industries. In WISMID, images are secured from several well-known architectural photographers, including Hedrich Blessing (see also Chapter 1) and Julius Shulman. Their colleague Ezra Stoller supplies the WISMID frontispiece, a view of the living room of Wright's Mossberg House (1952).⁷²⁰ (Figure 34) As the only color photograph in the WIM books, the large image places Wright in the literal forefront of Kaufmann's argument. An image by Man Ray, a commercial as well as fine art photographer, is also included.⁷²¹ (Figure 35) Kaufmann purports to have chosen photographs in which "emphasis is placed on rooms in use," yet Man Ray's is the only populated photograph, in which a man in suit and tie sits stiffly at one end of a sleek sofa. Thus the impeccably arranged spaces, most depicting luxurious freestanding houses, are "in use" for primarily rhetorical purposes.

In the WIMD examples section, decontextualization contributes strongly to the dual impression of sales catalog and art catalog. This is most striking in the first spread

⁷¹⁹ As in MR50, from which many WISMID images are drawn. See for example REG 337. McCampbell to William D. Geer. November 11, 1946.

⁷²⁰ Storrer, 1978, 302. This source dates the house to 1948.

⁷²¹ Harwell Hamilton Harris. Havens House (Berkeley, 1943). 27. For cursory information on Ray's commercial work in California where the house is located, see Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray, American Artist* (New York: Crown, 1988). For an account of his fashion photography see John Esten, *Man Ray: Bazaar Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988). This theme of art/commercial photographers is developed further in my unpublished talk *Don't Quit Your Day Job: The Little-Known Commercial Work of Canonical Twentieth-Century Artists*. CUNY, 2009.

of examples. (Figure 36) On the left is *Chairs for Conversing and Relaxing: Metal Frames* and on the right, *Side Chairs and Occasional Chairs in Metal*. The images are all silhouetted, sized to roughly the same height, and arranged on a grid in expansive white space. On one level they read as an inventory, evoking product catalogs designed by Ladislav Sutnar⁷²² or an archaeological typology. At the same time, the chairs read as art objects. Similarly, textiles are shown as sharply cropped photographic details, rendering them as flat, painterly “canvases.”⁷²³

Decontextualization also figures into the reprise of good/bad, modern/non-modern comparisons seen throughout the series. In this case, WIMD compares coffee pots from 1750 and 1950 (an elegant alliteration of dates), with photos silhouetted and positioned side by side. (Figure 37) Kaufmann follows the party line on the practical superiority of the modern steel pot but the caption hints at admiration for the silver pot as a “symbol of aristocratic dignity,” with details serving as “reminders of classical influence.” His conclusion about the 1950 pot is equally ambivalent: “Convenience and efficiency are expressed rather than dignity.”⁷²⁴

Decontextualization is especially apparent in the prevalence of illustrative exhibition photographs. Of the forty-two twentieth-century interiors shown in WISMID, eleven are from exhibitions. These include a Finn Juhl room (1952) installed at the Museum of Industrial Arts in Norway and a living room (1949) by Florence Knoll (the only interior by a woman) shown at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Similarly, WIMD features a group of Eames cabinets that

⁷²² Suttner's second treatise on catalog design is published the same year as WIMD. See Knud Lönberg-Holm and Ladislav Sutnar, *Catalog Design* (New York: Sweet's, 1944); Knud Lönberg-Holm and Ladislav Sutnar, *Catalog Design Progress* (New York: Sweet's, 1950).

⁷²³ For more on textiles and Abstract Expressionism see Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1995).

⁷²⁴ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950, 6.

appear to be photographed in a showroom.

The most remarkable decontextualization is found in WIMD, where the author photographically adapts a rhetorical installation from the show *Design for Use* (MoMA 258b, 1944). In the exhibition, two propellers flank Brancusi's *Bird in Space* (1928),⁷²⁵ attempting to link art and engineering through formal resemblance. (Figure 38) In WIMD, a propeller and the Brancusi flank a much-enlarged carving knife of recent vintage, literally positioning design front and center between art and engineering. (Figure 39) To achieve this, each work is silhouetted and scaled to the same height, removing them from any context and reducing them to a formal, truly "streamlined" comparison.

Finally, an instance of larger cultural decontextualization concerns a WISMID illustration depicting traditional Japanese architecture. The drawing, by nineteenth-century observer Edwin Morse, is reproduced from his treatise *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings*.⁷²⁶ (Figure 40) On the one hand, the one-point perspective drawing is more "legible" in western terms, and this type of image is likely to have been seen at the turn of the century by designers influenced by Japanese aesthetics—Wright in particular was familiar with the book.⁷²⁷ On the other hand, the author misses an opportunity to convey the radical spatiality of Japanese prints, a major source of inspiration to those same designers. Moreover, the 1955 Japanese translation of WISMID uses the same image and most likely the same vague commentary about "tradition."⁷²⁸ As with the

⁷²⁵ MoMA, "Constantin Brancusi. Bird in Space (1928)", moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=81033 (accessed October 23, 2011).

⁷²⁶ Edwin Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (London: Tröbner, 1885). U.S. edition online at archive.org/details/japanesehomes00mors.

⁷²⁷ Nute, 2000.

⁷²⁸ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, [1955].

translation of WIMP into Japanese in 1952 (see Chapter 1), the reference could be received as underinformed by Japanese readers.

Still another nuance of photography involves the use of descriptive text to amplify visual details that support the curator's thesis. In particular Kaufmann makes a point of noting colors, textures, and nonindustrial materials. This is found mostly in WISMID, where the dominant distance shots obscure small-scale, often subtly-formed elements such as carpets, finishes, and craft objects. Captions emphasizing these softer components counter the austerity of some interiors, an approach consistent with the *Wohnkultur* sensibility and his mother's choices for the Vendôme Shops.

Furthermore, the standard black and white images remove color as a design element. In this way even icons of functionalism read quite differently, as in a description of a Tugendhat House interior emphasizing how "Oriental rugs, patterned and plain, are placed under furniture groupings" and "[s]hantung silk curtains hang at the glass...."⁷²⁹ Similarly, the caption for a stark black-and-white photo of Mies' 1931 Berlin Exhibition house notes a Kandinsky painting in the background. In comparison, the same house and view is included in WISMA1 but with no emphasis on tangibles. Rather, it celebrates their absence in the open plan, where "one enjoys a pleasant feeling of expansive openness" that is "[s]carcely interrupted by the great areas of glass...."⁷³⁰ In a third example, describing a Gropius and Breuer furniture installation at a 1930 Paris exhibition, Kaufmann acknowledges the historical importance of the furniture but sniffs that "today a wider range of materials, colors, and shapes would be natural and desirable."⁷³¹ In still other instances, designers are applauded for using "non-mechanistic

⁷²⁹ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 16.

⁷³⁰ McAndrew and Mock, 1942, 12–3.

⁷³¹ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 15.

elements for warmth: Breuer, oriental rugs and ceramics; le Corbusier, wood, leather and tile in large areas.”⁷³² Notably, many of the images include plants and flowers, a strategy consistent with photography of modernist interiors found in shelter magazines and MoMA publications.⁷³³ Though Kaufmann has no role in staging any of the photos, the foliage reinforces his point about “non-mechanistic elements.”

Together the editorial remoteness and use of depopulated, decontextualized images leave an alienating impression, as if viewing a theater set or display window. Passing references in the texts echo this, as in *WIMD*, where the author asks, “who can resist looking into a lighted window at night?—a glimpse of a strange room, someone’s home, a way of life grasped in a flash.”⁷³⁴ or in *WISMID*, where interiors are characterized “as effective backgrounds for people.” Despite the rhetoric of humanist design, the two books leave one in uncomfortable comfort, the feeling of never being truly “at home.”

Conclusion

In terms of Barr’s search for a “pragmatic rhetoric” in museum publishing that balances “effective” and “true,” how successful are the Kaufmann books, especially in relation to the Machine Art/International Style legacy? In broad terms, by midcentury canonical modernism has the attention if not the love of an American audience. In comparison Kaufmann’s “mitigated modernism” is more complex and despite potentially greater appeal to the U.S. mainstream, he can’t “sell” it in *WIM* form. This is exemplified by the final *WISMID* image, a striking good/bad comparison. After numerous pages of

⁷³² Ibid., 18.

⁷³³ Juliet Kinchin has observed the use of plants in depictions of modern interiors, including a small example in *What Was Modern?* See note above.

⁷³⁴ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, 1950. 5

elegant modern interiors culminating in the two Wright houses, turning to the last page reveals a large image of the florid Vienna studio of nineteenth-century painter Hans Makart.⁷³⁵ (Figure 41) While the studio is clearly not “modern” in the same way as, say, Wright’s interior for Waller house (1899),⁷³⁶ few American readers (then or now) would be able to distinguish subtle material and ideological differences between a pre- and post-WWI Viennese aesthetic. For example, Makart’s “[u]nprincipled pilfering of the past” and “antiquarian props” may have been indistinguishable from the “eighteenth century antiques” of the Morris drawing room or the Windsor chair pictured in Stone’s Goodyear House (1939).⁷³⁷ In the same way, “private enthusiasms” and “Eastern curios” are as integral to Alexander Girard’s living room⁷³⁸ as to Morris or Makart’s spaces. And are the plants and flowers of the modernist rooms so different from the “bunches of dried grasses...made fashionable by Makart” and condemned by Kaufmann?

He ends the book by declaring that the Makart studio is “what modern interior design had to fight,” a battle for modernism that Johnson says (the same year) has “long been won.”⁷³⁹ Won by whom? With the two books Kaufmann fights not just for popularization of modern design but for its history and future, for another way to answer the question of *What Is Modern Design?* The final sentence of WISMID refers to the modern movement as a whole but it could just as well indicate the two curators’ discursive struggle: “In human terms the fight has been a good one.”⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁵ Gerbert Frodl, “Hans Makart”, Grove Art Online, groveart.com (accessed May 27, 2010).

⁷³⁶ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 12; Storrer, 1978, 47.

⁷³⁷ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 7.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁷³⁹ Henry Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler, *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture* (New York: MoMA, 1952), 8.

⁷⁴⁰ Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Interior Design?*, 1953, 30.

CHAPTER 5. *WHAT IS MODERN SCULPTURE?* (WIMS), MULTIPLE FORMATS,
1940–1969

Non-historical study implies a denial of richness of content in works of art...For the observer then sees only what he is looking for...and his insights are shaped chiefly by contemporary taste.... Since the past is made to seem very similar to the present, it cannot be said to illuminate it.

—Alfred Barr, Agnes Rindge, and others⁷⁴¹

[S]ince cultural attitudes change rapidly, even the recent past can be foreign to [one's] natural modes of understanding [one's] own present, especially in the interpretation of visual material.

—Robert Goldwater⁷⁴²

The 1969 book *What Is Modern Sculpture?* constitutes the de facto conclusion of the *What Is Modern?* series. It also culminates several precursors: two unrealized publications (1940, 1945),⁷⁴³ a CE titled *An Introduction to Modern Sculpture* (1942–1947, 35 venues),⁷⁴⁴ a slide talk (1944–1953, 62 venues),⁷⁴⁵ and a teaching portfolio titled *Modern Sculpture* (1951).⁷⁴⁶ As literally the final chapter in this account of the WIM series, I argue that it is no accident that the WIM series ends in the late 1960s, a major cultural turning point in the United States and worldwide, for that turn includes questioning even the question of *What Is Modern?*

⁷⁴¹ Committee of the College Art Association, "Statement on the Place of the History of Art in the Liberal Arts Curriculum," *College Art Journal* 3, no. 3 (1944). [jstor.org/stable/773440](http://www.jstor.org/stable/773440) (accessed December 8, 2010).

⁷⁴² Robert Goldwater, "Art History and Anthropology: Some Comparisons of Methodology," in *Primitive Art and Society*, ed. Anthony Forge (New York: Oxford University, 1973). Reprinted in Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Belknap, 1986), 304.

⁷⁴³ MW, II.110.

⁷⁴⁴ CE, II.1.67.4.

⁷⁴⁵ CE, II.1.121.2.

⁷⁴⁶ Elodie Courter, *Modern Sculpture*, Teaching Portfolio 1 (New York: MoMA, [1951]).

When the early versions of WIMS are being developed in the 1940s, average Americans have little direct access to modern sculpture. WIMS is intended to expose audiences to recent work and disseminate concepts such as abstraction and related ideas about three-dimensional art forms. But by the time WIMS is published in 1969, modern art is better known and to some degree more accepted by a U.S. audience. The book reflects this through an authoritative and informative—but uncritical—narrative.

Asking the question *What Is Modern?* at this point represents a failure to account for profound social changes of the late 1960s, changes engendering radical interrogation of the assumptions upon which MoMA and other institutions are based. In this way WIM comes full circle, as if grade-schoolers who encounter the series in the 1940s and 1950s grow up to be not only conversant in modernist ideology but ready to evaluate it critically. As in previous chapters, the themes examined here concern the problematic notion of a universal modernism, tension between connoisseurial and educational approaches to curating, and persistent problems reconciling formal and contextual interpretation of objects and their images.

The theme of universal modernism is of particular relevance to the treatment of sculpture. All sculpture WIMs consistently invoke pre-modern⁷⁴⁷ European art and, unique to the series, non-European indigenous material culture (then often termed “primitive art”).⁷⁴⁸ In fact, several WIMS writers engage with this aspect of sculpture in

⁷⁴⁷ For purposes of discussion “pre-modern” is defined here as material culture prior to the late 1900s, referring to broadly historical periods such as the Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance eras.

⁷⁴⁸ There is simply no satisfactory term for indigenous material culture of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Rather than claim material for either art (“art”) or anthropology (“artifact”) I use the more neutral terms “material culture” and “arts.” Where known, self-identified group name, time, and place are specified (“Bamana, nineteenth century Sudan” and not “non-Western” or “African.”) Collective intellectual and formal investigation of this material by early twentieth-century modern artists is indicated as the

some larger way. To better understand the role of this secondary discourse in the WIMs, three participants' work is explored: historian Robert Goldwater, author of the 1969 book and spouse of major twentieth century artist Louise Bourgeois; Agnes Rindge, prospective author of an unrealized 1945 WIM; and her colleague, curator James Johnson Sweeney. Though creators of the 1942 CE and 1951 teaching portfolio are less invested in the subject, they also refer to pre-twentieth century objects in the attempt to make modern sculpture plausible to a general American audience.

Here a chronological account of WIM versions is followed by an examination of persuasive techniques used in them. These include content organization and narrative sequencing, graphic design, and again, photography. Throughout, the "primitive" theme is stressed, especially as manifested in two analytical methods common to art history and to the disciplinary trio of archaeology, anthropology, and ethnography.⁷⁴⁹ These concern the art historical idea of "affinities" and the corresponding ethnographic theory of "style areas." Both maintain the significance of formal similarities independent of sociocultural context and both make troubling use of visual comparisons to argue the point.

Probing these aspects of WIM reveals a view of modern sculpture that is new to American audiences in the 1940s but has, by the late 1960s, failed to embrace new interpretive approaches, bringing the WIM series to a disappointing end. Moreover, this failure evinces how MoMA is insufficiently aware of critical new attitudes towards

movement Primitivism. When contextualizing historiographic material, the highly problematic term "primitive" is indicated in quotations. For a spectrum of attitudes towards the term "primitive" see James Clifford, *Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1988); Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, Rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1967); Susan Vogel, *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, 2nd ed. (New York: Prestel, 1989).

⁷⁴⁹ For concision, hereafter I use the term "ethnography."

museums—both art and ethnological—as institutions. The chapter ends with the conclusion that forty years after MoMA’s founding, with this last WIM manifestation in 1969 the museum only begins to come to terms with this new, truly interrogative way of asking *What Is Modern?*

What Is Modern Sculpture? (WIMS) Unpublished Book, 1940

The idea of adding *What Is Modern Sculpture?* to the WIM series begins in 1940 with Wheeler. At this point he has been at the museum for five years and officially becomes director of the publications department the following year. The unrealized book would have been the second WIM production after the 1938 *What Is Modern Architecture?* (WISMA1) CE and before the 1943 debut of *What Is Modern Painting?* (WIMP) as a book, slide talk, and CE. WIMS is Wheeler’s first association with the series, though he is already heavily involved with MoMA’s dissemination of modern art through print media. As described in Chapter 2, he actively acquires and distributes reproductions of paintings for the museum.

The 1940 initiative exists only as a brief exchange between Wheeler and a printer. In it, Wheeler posits only “a book of reproductions of modern sculpture in the Museum’s collection.”⁷⁵⁰ In response the printer supplies quotes for a thirty-two and sixty-four-page collotype book with a trim size of 7 ½ in. x 10 in. (19 cm x 25 cm), with options for a small (2,500) and large (10,000) run.⁷⁵¹ It is unclear if the publication is intended to be an educational booklet, handbook, teaching portfolio, or something else entirely. The trim size is consistent with the series but there is no evidence of

⁷⁵⁰ MW, II.110. Wheeler to Walter Fredrick, September 9, 1940.

⁷⁵¹ MW, II.110. Walter Frederick to Wheeler, September 7, 1940.

collaboration with CE, Education, or curatorial staff. Compared to its modestly printed predecessor WISMA, the interest in colotype indicates more attention to reproduction quality, suggesting more of a collection handbook.⁷⁵² Unfortunately there appears to be no further evidence of the initiative or why it is abandoned.⁷⁵³ A WIMS book is only realized just after Wheeler's retirement almost thirty years later.

Introduction to Modern Sculpture CE, 1942–1947

Two years after the 1940 exchange, a key WIMS precursor takes the form of a CE titled *An Introduction to Modern Sculpture* (1942–1947, 35 venues).⁷⁵⁴ The twelve-panel show establishes the trope of invoking global, pre-modern material culture as well as the persuasive use of visual comparisons between them.

To date I have located no images of the final panels but sketches and texts remain. Following a title panel, the sequence begins with the question *What Is Modern Sculpture?* and begins the answer with images of “two heads that show you what a variety of things it may be.”⁷⁵⁵ The first panel visually compares a plaster portrait of artist George “Pop” Hart (1932) by Reuben Nakian with Rudolf Belling's *Bust* (1923),⁷⁵⁶ described as a “robot who might be a man from Mars or a Frankenstein monster.” The

⁷⁵² MoMA, "Plates from Three Teaching Portfolios to Be Exhibited", August 17, 1951, moma.org/docs/press_archives/1536/releases/MOMA_1951_0054_1951-08-17_510817-46.pdf (accessed October 31, 2011).

⁷⁵³ Exploration of MoMA committee minutes and Publications Department budgets could shed more light on the subject. Committee minutes are restricted from public use.

⁷⁵⁴ CE, II.1.67.4 and CE, III.13.1. The record is unclear regarding versions. There are two versions but the only difference between them may be the addition of “An” to the beginning of the title. There are 35 venues listed for first version but the finding aid is unclear if this includes the second version as well.

⁷⁵⁵ All quotes from CE, II.1.67.4.

⁷⁵⁶ Quite likely MoMA, "Rudolph Belling. Sculpture 23 (1923)", moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81202 (accessed January 25, 2012).

viewer is then asked, “Which do you like better?” followed by a gentle, Barr-style suggestion: “Before making up your mind too firmly, look at them both carefully and notice these differences between them.” These differences are categorized graphically into four categories: *Material*, *Technique*, *Form*, and *Expression*, again using comparison to encourage close observation.

The following two-panel section on *Classical Beauty* (Panel 3, Figure 42)⁷⁵⁷ continues the comparative approach, juxtaposing an image of an unidentified ancient Greek statue from the Metropolitan Museum with twentieth-century figures by (according to the sketch) Gerhard Marcks, Georges Despiau, and Aristide Maillol. This returns to and inverts the WIM trope of good/bad, modern/not modern. Other instances *negatively* compare representational or traditional forms with abstract, twentieth-century works. This panel establishes instead a *positive* emphasis on traditional Western representational forms and their perceived similarity to modern art. Thus:

The figure on the right was done in Greece about 2400 years ago. The figures below were done in Europe with the past 35 years. Do they seem alike to you?

In this context “classical” is defined loftily as “an expression of the dignity of man as seen through the natural grace of the human body.” This is further defined by qualities assumed to be common to both ancient and modern forms: “simple” poses and “natural” shapes. The next panel (Panel 4) makes a similar assertion: that revivalism is also modern. Comparing a portrait bust by Donatello with two more works by Maillol and Despiau, the curators argue (incorrectly) that reinventing art of the past is a practice dating to the Renaissance. Therefore, idealized naturalism is legitimate in modern sculpture because it is part of a venerable tradition. Besides reversing the usual WIM

⁷⁵⁷ CE, II.1.67.4. Detail from larger sheet.

trope of non-modern (bad) and modern (good), this introduces a key means by which the museum argues for timeless modernism: by selectively claiming the past for the movement. Several MoMA figures mobilize this idea, especially d'Harnoncourt, as in his show *Timeless Aspects of Modern Art* (MoMA 393, 1948–1949).

The narrative proceeds to Expressionism in the section *Feeling and Expression* (Panels 5, 6) in which non-mimetic figuration is further legitimized by linking it to humanist ideals and established European historical periods. Thus figures by Ernst Barlach “are human, humorous and earthy; their faces and gestures remind one of Gothic and Medieval figures.”

Anticipating viewer unfamiliarity with or estrangement from abstraction, Expressionism serves as a transition to *New Forms* (Panels 7, 8). Here the curators are direct: “Some sculptors have made a radical break with tradition,” in which Raymond Duchamp-Villon’s Cubist *Horse* (1915)⁷⁵⁸ is characterized as “a dynamic fusion of machine and animal” and Brancusi’s *Bird in Space* (1928),⁷⁵⁹ is a “form created for its own sake rather than to represent something else.” Ironically *Bird in Space* is shown to much different effect in the 1950 *What Is Modern Design?* (Chapter 3), where it is used to represent functionalism.

The show makes no direct reference to Africa, Oceania, or the Americas. It does, however, refer to primordial forms in commentary regarding Jacques Lipchitz’s *Figure* (1929, Panel 8),⁷⁶⁰ considered to be

⁷⁵⁸ MoMA, “Raymond Duchamp-Villon. The Horse (1914)”, moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81482 (accessed January 25, 2012).

⁷⁵⁹ MoMA, “Constantin Brancusi. Bird in Space (1928)”, moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81033 (accessed January 25, 2012).

⁷⁶⁰ MoMA, “Jacques Lipchitz. Figure (1926–1930, 1937)”, moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81158 (accessed January 25, 2012).

as monumental as a prehistoric monolith. It is the most abstract version of the human figure in this exhibition....But it still seems to stand defiantly staring you down with its two piercing eyes.

Figure recurs in several WIMS variants. Invariably the work is interpreted with reference to the primeval. At least one viewer disagrees, sending a poem in 1946 on “My Friend the Atomic Man.”⁷⁶¹

The bulk of the show rests upon *Materials and Techniques* (Panels 9–12), with a panel each on *Bronze, Terracotta, Stone, and Wood* and ending with one on *Plastics, Glass, Metal*. Emphasis on medium is literalized by display of a material sample along with photos of sculpture in that medium. The show appears to end abruptly with the *Plastics, Glass, Metal* panel. The only explicit summation is the last sentence of the text, which reinforces the emphasis on materials and techniques as ends in themselves. In this way Antoine Pevsner is “experimenting with forms and materials and is not interested with associations, either real or imaginary.” In short, for this version of WIMS the medium is the only message.

The only explicit message, perhaps. The persistent linking of modernism with the archaic, primordial, and “primitive” establishes a subtext of timeless modernism particular to WIM treatment of sculpture. In the attempt to popularize “art in our time,” with sculpture the curators consistently look to art in *all* time.

What Is Modern Sculpture? (WIMS) Slide Talk, 1944–1953

The strategic use of the ancient and “primitive” to position modernism as part of an ageless cultural heritage becomes more explicit in the next WIMS manifestation, a pre-

⁷⁶¹ P&S Object File 214.1937. Guido Ansbacher to MoMA Trustees, August 9, 1946.

scripted, mail-order slide talk (1944–1953, 62 venues).⁷⁶² Like its predecessor, with one exception the talk references the deep past as a means to situate modern sculpture on a broad cultural continuum. In this case, references to the “primitive” predominate.

Slides add another medium through which the museum promotes modernism.

The 1944–1945 catalog announces:

As a new service to teachers and speakers, a number of slide talks have been prepared or are in preparation for use in classrooms, assembly programs, and meetings. Each set of...slides is accompanied by text which may be read...as a running commentary...or used as background material for subsequent talks...Many sets will be found valuable for use in conjunction with exhibitions on the same subject.”⁷⁶³

Available in either black and white or Kodachrome, the sets can be rented or purchased. Whether used in predetermined sequence or recombined into alternative statements, by introducing slides to the CE repertoire each user becomes, at some level, a mouthpiece for modernism. To this end, the organizers take full advantage of the format. Users are provided with careful instructions for the forty-five-slide set, including a choice of delivery styles ranging from active (“for those who...wish to make special points of their own”) to passive (“it can be read in full just as it stands” although “headings and slide numbers...should not be read aloud.”)⁷⁶⁴ Because the format is technically fallible (as any slide presenter will attest) a later catalog specifies projection techniques, cautioning that “Teachers should experiment with the slides before classroom use.”⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶² CE, II.1.121.2.

⁷⁶³ *Circulating Exhibitions 1944-1945*, (New York: MoMA, 1944); *Circulating Exhibitions 1945-1946*, (New York: MoMA, 1945), 41.

⁷⁶⁴ CE, II.1.121.2. *What is Modern Sculpture?*, Typescript (March 10, 1946), n.p.

⁷⁶⁵ *Circulating Exhibitions 1945-1946*, 1945, 46.

The talk is apparently a collective effort with no named author. The amicable but authoritative tone suggests the indirect influence of Barr, but there is no evidence of his involvement—in fact the show is developed during his three-year absence. The argument is unambiguous, with an emphasis on materials that aligns art historical formalism with the empiricism of the progressive education movement. Otherwise the talk incorporates persuasive techniques found throughout the WIM series, including direct address, conversational language, and visual comparisons.

The talk is essentially an adaptation of the 1942–1947 precursor CE *Introduction to Modern Sculpture* (above), constituting a similar and sometimes identical narrative, with the exception that the materials section precedes the stylistic sequence. Following the interrogative pattern of the series, the slide commentary begins with questions, immediately setting up the theme of continuity with the deep past:

What are the ideas that sculptors are expressing in our time? What place does their work have in our world? Is it different from sculpture of the past, or does it take its place in a continuous tradition?⁷⁶⁶

The text then offers an

attempt to answer such difficult questions rather indirectly by showing you contemporary... sculpture, discussing their special characteristics in terms of the tools and materials by which they were made.⁷⁶⁷

This begins with formal characteristics (three-dimensionality, texture, color), leading to a section on materials, largely repeating the *Introduction to Modern Sculpture* parade of works in stone, wood, clay, and bronze, and culminating with a reprise of Belling's *Bust*. The *Forms and Materials* section ends the first third of the talk with the curiously passive assertion that “We have been discussing sculpture from the point of

⁷⁶⁶ CE, II.1.121.2. n.p.

⁷⁶⁷ CE, II.1.121.2. n.p.

view of materials and methods...because modern sculptors have themselves laid special emphasis on this subject.” This backgrounds the interpreter’s role, projecting the “special emphasis” of the institution upon modern sculptors.

With that, the interpreters shift to “other approaches...that are equally revealing and help to answer our original question.” The formal diversity of these “other approaches” is presented as an indicator of free expression, considered “one of the main characteristics of our age,” and one especially relevant for the wartime context. It implies that tolerance of sculptural variety is in fact a moral imperative: “We live in a complex world where many points of view and beliefs are allowed to exist side by side....”⁷⁶⁸ But as if anticipating limits to viewer open-mindedness, the authors make certain to point out that reassuring order is maintained through consensus: “do not assume that sculpture today is a mass of individual opinions. There are certain beliefs that are shared among living artists....”⁷⁶⁹

This brings the narrative back to the theme of historical continuity, with shared beliefs as “schools of thought which derive from the past, although they are given new forms and new interpretations.”⁷⁷⁰ It sets the scene for a sequence on Classicism and Expressionism very similar to *Introduction to Modern Sculpture* but with even more ancient and archaic works, including a fifth-century Greek figure, an Aztec stone carving, a Romanesque cathedral carving, and a Bernini. Here, too, modernism is situated—in positive terms—as a continuity with the deep past and not a revolutionary break from it. In this it is similar to WISMID and WIMD, but on a vast scale.

⁷⁶⁸ CE, II.1.121.2. 7.

⁷⁶⁹ CE, II.1.121.2. 7.

⁷⁷⁰ CE, II.1.121.2. 7.

Slide 29, approximately halfway through the talk, introduces abstraction, positioning it as both a synthesis of forms (considered continuous with tradition) and expression (representing a break from it):

Although we have been making such a clear-cut distinction between... Classicism...and...expressionism...actually most sculpture done today is neither purely formal nor purely expressive.⁷⁷¹

The key example is a split-image slide comparing another Lipchitz with a traditional figure from the Sudan—discussed further below. The final few slides reinforce the theme of synthesis through a carefully paced reprise of three works:

In closing let us look at three images of the human figure...as representing three totally opposite concepts, each an important part of our own civilization....”

Complete with “(Pause)” inserted between each slide, the sequence reinforces a three-stage narrative of modern sculpture: classicizing naturalism (Maillol), Expressionism (Lehmbruck), and abstraction—culminating in the Lipchitz *Figure*. But here, too, modernity is linked back to the primordial, with a touch of exoticism added. Thus the *Figure* is

a giant of metal, with the boldness of modern man, who has harnessed the air, even in sculpture.... This has the monumental dignity of Egypt and Mesopotamia, yet its form belongs only to the twentieth century...This piece suggests a person however in much the same mysterious way that an Indian totempole has symbolic meaning. The rings can be seen as arms and legs, the eyes stare out at you hypnotically. There is almost frightening dignity in this piece.”⁷⁷²

This assessment ends with a closer look at the talk’s most overt conflation of modern and primordial: the pairing of a Lipchitz with a Sudanese figure (Slide 32). The

⁷⁷¹ CE, II.1.121.2. 11.

⁷⁷² CE, II.1.121.2. 11, 16-17.

former is most likely *Sailor With Guitar*, 1914, Figure 43).⁷⁷³ Its counterpart is identified only as “Sudan Africa: *Ceremonial Figure*, wood,” dating to the nineteenth century. To analyze the pair, the first challenge is to identify the *Ceremonial Figure*. The minimal description is significant in itself, a reflection of Western attitudes towards the works at the time of collection. The material culture produced within the boundaries of present-day Sudan is diverse, making precise identification virtually impossible. This makes the choice of a proxy fraught, for as seen in other examples, mass decontextualization of indigenous material can lead historians (and dissertation writers) to create dubious affinities between essentially unrelated works. For purposes of discussion I present here a work documented by Walker Evans in conjunction with Sweeney’s landmark *African Negro Art* show (MoMA 39, 1935).⁷⁷⁴ (Figure 44) This caption, which in fact a young Robert Goldwater helps to formulate, is also minimal:

Figure (catalog no. 14). French Sudan Wood, 14 ¾ inches high. Collection Mme. Helena Rubinstein.⁷⁷⁵

In terms of Primitivist historiography and advancement of the talk’s rhetorical goals, the narrative begins by anticipating disbelief, asking, “Is the sculptor overstepping his powers as an artist in abstracting natural forms to this extent?” and answering definitively, “Why should he not exercise his powers of changing, building, inventing?” But within limits—African material culture is then segregated from Western tradition:

⁷⁷³ Philadelphia Museum of Art, “Jacques Lipchitz. *Sailor with Guitar* (1914)”, philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/50805.html (accessed January 21, 2012).

⁷⁷⁴ For an in-depth account of the portfolio see Virginia-Lee Webb, *Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 2000).

⁷⁷⁵ The actual image used in the talk could conceivably have been reproduced from the portfolio, but there is no evidence of this and since the images are monotone, it is unlikely that it would have been used for a color slide set.

On the left you see a ceremonial figure carved in wood by an African Negro of the last century. The long torso and stylized body had a special magical meaning to the people for whom it was originally made, and we who cannot share this meaning can still admire the power and beauty of the piece.⁷⁷⁶

As Sweeney does in the 1935 show, this description mystifies the work by asserting that the abstraction is “magical” and incomprehensible to contemporary Western viewers—conveniently leaving formal criteria as the only valid basis for evaluation. The Lipchitz, in contrast, is assumed to be readily intelligible:

The jaunty sailor on the right...belongs specifically to the 20th century, for the changes that Lipchitz has wrought express the character of the sailor and emphasize his gaiety.⁷⁷⁷

In this way the curators view the sailor’s equally “stylized body” as self-evident expression of “character” and “gaiety” and not “magical meaning.”

To contemporary eyes, this interpretation has another problematic resonance: colonialism and the aggressive export of objects like the *Ceremonial Figure*. This is intensified when considering that the Lipchitz is motivated by a port scene in which smugglers distract a sailor. According to one source the inspiration is:

a young sailor called Llampa whom the artist had observed during a stay in a fishing village on the island of Majorca with a number of fellow artists...in 1914. Llampa was in fact working for the Spanish government as a customs agent and had been sent to Majorca to observe the local fisherman, who were smuggling tobacco, cigars, and other goods.⁷⁷⁸

Though exporting works such as the Sudanese figure is most likely legal at the time, today’s cultural patrimony laws consider these objects in an entirely different framework. In the earlier context, the objects fuel a market for such works among early twentieth-century Western artists—such as Lipchitz. The slide talk authors most likely

⁷⁷⁶ CE, II.1.121.2. 12.

⁷⁷⁷ CE, II.1.121.2. 12.

⁷⁷⁸ Michael Taylor, "Jacques Lipchitz and Philadelphia," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 92, no. 391/392 (2004). jstor.org/stable/3795509 (accessed July 26, 2010).

know that the artist collected such work.⁷⁷⁹ They could not know that many years later his collection is exhibited at the Museum of Primitive Art in a show by none other than Goldwater⁷⁸⁰ and later sold at auction, beginning a new commercial cycle.

In summary, the ostensibly introductory slide talk makes sophisticated rhetorical use of pre-twentieth century three-dimensional forms, at once placing modern sculpture on a long cultural continuum and yet also exoticizing selected points on that continuum.

Reception

How do viewers receive the message? As with most CEs, follow-up questionnaires provide some evidence.⁷⁸¹ In this case comments are virtually all positive, characteristic of WIM show feedback but also possibly indicative of self-selection. The most effusive reaction comes from the head of the Choate School Art Department, who perhaps wishfully notes that the talk is

Received by boys with enthusiasm especially toward their newly found sense that the more abstract form modes embodied the warm human values even as does the idealism and realism of Renaissance work.

An organizer at Franklin Junior High School in Green Bay, Wisconsin, estimates that 450 students view the show, for which he: “read the lecture on a tape recorder and played it back to every class.” The writer also mentions the value of simple exposure to recent sculpture: “Most of [the students] have never seen a mobile so I think these slides helped.” A respondent from Georgia State Women’s College adds one of the few

⁷⁷⁹ Courter notes it in her *Modern Sculpture* portfolio, published two years after the CE.

⁷⁸⁰ Lee Boltin and Robert Goldwater, *Lipchitz (Jacques, Yulla & Lolya) Collection* (New York: Museum of Primitive Art, 1960).

⁷⁸¹ All quotes in this section are from questionnaires in CE, II.I.121.2.

qualified comments: “more explanations than I expected; but glad to have them.”

The Pittsburgh Water Color Society stages the show as a “performance” at the area Arts and Crafts Center, enticing groups such as the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh, the Society of Sculptors, and a School of Display Arts. As with several installations of WIMP, local organizers integrate the show into another event, in this case an exhibition. The respondent notes that the event “correlated perfectly with the slide talk – It was thoroughly enjoyed, and animated discussion followed the performance.”

Three teachers’ colleges rent the show. In fact the State Teachers College in Patterson, New Jersey, does so six times over five years, suggesting that it is used as a pedagogical model. If true, it would mean that the CE promulgates not just a set of ideas but also a set of persuasive methods. Finally, one comment that may be heartening to CE staff comes from a venue with four-hundred viewers: “Can we get something else like it for the other arts?”

The talk circulates mostly in the northern and western U.S. but also in racially segregated southern states. Given the inclusion of the Sudanese figure, it is interesting to speculate upon how this small element is received by the Mississippi, Georgia, Texas, and Alabama venues. For example, in 1950 WIMS is shown in Montgomery, Alabama, at historically white Huntingdon College.⁷⁸² As is well known, Montgomery is the site of the 1955 bus boycott, 1960 lunch counter sit-in, and 1965 voting rights march led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.⁷⁸³ Unfortunately there is no ready evidence of response to the showing. Ironically, distribution of the CE *Photographs of African Negro Art by Walker*

⁷⁸² Listed as “Huntington” in the itinerary.

⁷⁸³ For background on the civil rights movement in Montgomery see Robert Heinrich, “Montgomery: The Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacies” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis, 2008).

Evans (1935-37, 16 venues) is limited to historically black colleges.⁷⁸⁴

What Is Modern Sculpture? (WIMS) Unpublished Book, 1945

Five years after the failed 1940 initiative Wheeler revives the idea of a WIMS book. He taps friend and Vassar professor Agnes Rindge (1900–1977)⁷⁸⁵ but she withdraws, apparently before writing, due to unspecified tensions with Barr and Sweeney. In the absence of much direct evidence, analysis of secondary sources suggests that the conflict involves three strong personalities engaged in larger debates about sculpture at MoMA. These debates concern educational versus connoisseurial goals; general aesthetic adventurousness, especially regarding the relative importance of figuration and abstraction; and difficulty reconciling strictly formal interests with a somewhat more contextual perspective. To further develop the theme of “primitivism” as an index of these tensions, the group’s views regarding indigenous African material culture is emphasized here.

Rindge became involved with MoMA in early 1938, giving introductory lectures on modern art (including sculpture) to members.⁷⁸⁶ In the 1940s she joins museum committees.⁷⁸⁷ In 1943–1944, for undetermined reasons she divides her time between Vassar and MoMA⁷⁸⁸ as “Assistant Executive Vice-President on the Museum staff as

⁷⁸⁴ CE, II.1.91.7. For a detailed look at dissemination of the Evans photographs see Webb, 2000.

⁷⁸⁵ Vassar College Art Gallery, *Exhibition in Memory of Agnes Rindge Claflin, 1900-1977* (Poughkeepsie: Vassar, 1978).

⁷⁸⁶ "Program for 1938," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 5, no. 1 (1938). [jstor.org/stable/4057931](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4057931) (accessed August 31, 2010).

⁷⁸⁷ "Agnes [Millicent] Rindge Claflin", Duke University, dictionaryofarthistorians.org/claflina.htm (accessed January 21, 2012).

⁷⁸⁸ MW, II.110. Rindge to Stephen Clark and Jere Abbott, June 13, 1945.

advisor for the various educational programs.”⁷⁸⁹

Rindge is a career educator, influencing several generations of students.⁷⁹⁰ She is described as “a mover and shaker in the art world”⁷⁹¹ but while she is “absorbed by the perfection of scholarship...she never aimed at being herself a scholar.”⁷⁹² She does, however, organize the Vassar art gallery as a teaching collection and help several émigré German art historians gain positions in the art history department.

According to one colleague, being her student is “at once a bracing and inspiring and a sobering experience. It was also...terrifying.”⁷⁹³ Another former student describes her as “the ultimate non-authoritarian. She never imposed her tastes on anybody, even though the passionate commitment to them was perfectly evident.”⁷⁹⁴ Rather, “her teaching style was based on ellipsis, on indirection, on innuendo, on precision, and on wit, and on a remarkably penetrating sensibility....”⁷⁹⁵ Still another remembers differently:

She was straightforward and didn’t mince any words. Her criticism of a book, of a lecture, of a student, of a member of the faculty, or of a decision by a committee went right to the point....⁷⁹⁶

According to one more colleague and former student “she was constantly encouraging people to try and do things that she must have considered eccentric at

⁷⁸⁹ Biographical Note. Agnes Claflin Rindge Papers, Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries. specialcollections.vassar.edu/findingaids/claflin_agnes.html#d0e53. She reports on her year of MoMA activities in Program for 1938.

⁷⁹⁰ These include A. Everett Austen, Aline Saarinen, and Russell Lynes. The latter authors *Good Old Modern* (1973), a major secondary source for this dissertation.

⁷⁹¹ Vassar College Art Gallery, 1978, 3.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 8–9.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

best....”⁷⁹⁷ Yet in the MoMA context, something goes awry despite the presumably shared belief in robust debate.

Sweeney becomes involved with the museum in the 1930s as a “friend of MoMA.”⁷⁹⁸ The *African Negro Art* exhibition marks his curatorial debut.⁷⁹⁹ He serves briefly as Director of Painting and Sculpture (1945–1946)⁸⁰⁰ after Barr is fired (see Chapter 2). Following Barr’s return he continues at the museum, “concluding in the 1950s and 1960s in various capacities.”⁸⁰¹ After MoMA Sweeney directs the Guggenheim Museum and then the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. In his later years he advises the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.⁸⁰²

Described as a “forceful spokesman for the new and the experimental,”⁸⁰³ Sweeney is evidently strong-willed, to the degree that he apparently resigns each of his professional posts over questions of autonomy. Thus, according to an obituary he leaves MoMA “when a change in administrative structure abridged his authority,” quits the Guggenheim in 1959 over disagreements with trustees regarding “the use of the museum and my ideals,” and resigns from the MFA in 1968 “in conflict over what he felt was trustee interference with his running of the museum.”⁸⁰⁴

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁹⁸ Sweeney Papers Finding Aid. MoMA Archives, NY. moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/JJSweeneyf,

⁷⁹⁹ James Johnson Sweeney, *African Negro Art* (New York: MoMA, 1935).

⁸⁰⁰ MoMA, “James J. Sweeney Appointed Head of Painting and Sculpture at Museum of Modern Art”, January 26, 1945, moma.org/docs/press_archives/971/releases/MOMA_1945_0005_1945-01-26_45126-4.pdf?2010 (accessed January 21, 2012).

⁸⁰¹ Sweeney Papers Finding Aid.

⁸⁰² Glueck.

⁸⁰³ For an in-depth analysis of Sweeney’s style see Marcia Brennan, *Curating Consciousness: Mysticism and the Modern Museum* (Cambridge: MIT, 2010).

⁸⁰⁴ Glueck.

Beyond personality differences, what is the substance of the conflict and how does it play out in the WIMS context? Tracing the project begins with a memo from Rindge to top MoMA administrators, reviewing her activities for 1944–1945:

The particular task requested of me...has not been completed. This was the brochure on Modern Sculpture. Now that the sculpture collection is fully installed and available for study, I feel that progress can be made....⁸⁰⁵

But, she says,

I must admit, frankly, that I have been inhibited by my association with Mr. Barr and Mr. Sweeney on the Committee on Museum Collections. Not that I do not honour their views and their distinguished knowledge, but I have felt my own ideas and tastes to be sufficiently divergent to make it impossible to satisfy them.

She then proposes to withdraw from the project:

It is ...the privilege of the Museum to discard the finished work prior to publication. However, if there should be a strong preference in this matter, I should prefer not to embark upon it.

And defers to her colleague, newly assigned the formidable task of replacing

Barr:

Since the proposal was made Mr. Sweeney has joined the staff and he is not only an able writer, but is quite identified with the field of modern sculpture. I am much impressed with his work..., both the coherent direction and the thorough review he is bringing to his department. I should, therefore, be loath to embarrass him by this prior commitment.

She concludes: "Perhaps an informal review of the matter by Mr. Wheeler would be appropriate." He encourages the project anyway: "we greatly need such a book for introductory series to the modern arts and I hope you will be able to complete it very soon."⁸⁰⁶ As mediator he

⁸⁰⁵ MW, II.110. Rindge to Clark and Abbott, June 13, 1945.

⁸⁰⁶ MW, II.110. Wheeler to Mrs. Philip Claflin [Agnes Rindge], June 27, 1945.

[d]iscussed with Jim Sweeney your anxiety regarding his attitude toward the introduction to modern sculpture which you are writing for us. He assures me that he is most eager to see it and that he would certainly not expect your taste and judgment always to conform with his own. He will be glad to read the text and make whatever comments occur to him, as will also Alfred Barr – and indeed if there are any others whose comments or criticism might be helpful, we shall be glad to help you obtain it.⁸⁰⁷

Despite this diplomatic effort, the project appears to be abandoned at that point.

Regrettably the WIMS correspondence only hints at their differences of “ideas and tastes.” The general content of the original memo suggests that Rindge simply overcommits herself and runs out of time. It also shows deference to a new chief curator. But on another level the “divergent” attitudes most likely involve fundamental conflicts regarding the nature of modern sculpture. This is supported by their writings on sculptural abstraction, especially regarding non-European material culture.

Rindge’s authority on sculpture is based upon the 1929 publication of her Radcliffe dissertation: *The Art of Sculpture: an Analysis of the Aesthetics of Sculpture*. The text, one of very few she publishes, is an ambitious attempt to identify universal aesthetic ideals across centuries and world cultures. It is also a prolix elaboration of taste in the guise of scholarship. Her early views on abstraction and Primitivism in particular prove to be shortsighted, particularly compared to those of Sweeney and Barr. Regarding the first wave of abstraction earlier in the new century she declares that:

Having weathered this violent catharsis we have no need to dwell upon it...A great deal of it was silly. Some of it was healthful.⁸⁰⁸

Considering Alexander Archipenko (“None of his work ever looks quite stupid”), once he “abandoned his most exaggerated experiments” and returned to more conventional figuration “he developed a mode of distortion that is both personal and

⁸⁰⁷ MW, II.110. Wheeler to Mrs. Philip Claflin [Agnes Rindge], June 27, 1945.

⁸⁰⁸ Agnes Rindge, *Sculpture* (New York: Payson and Clarke, 1929), 169–70.

expressive.” In like manner she considers Brancusi’s *Bird in Space* (1928, see also Chapter 3)⁸⁰⁹ and *Mademoiselle Pogany [I]* (1912),⁸¹⁰ to be decorative objects, characterizing them as “the perfect contemporary bibelots.”⁸¹¹

On Primitivism she writes, “Panegyrics on Negro sculpture have too lately filled the press to require comment.”⁸¹² She also feels no requirement to comment on precisely how “The poverty of any sophisticated imitation of primitive art appears from a comparison of the Maya head in the Fogg with a Gauguin, a Brancusi, or an Epstein.”⁸¹³ She does set up an implied visual comparison in a Warburg-like grouping⁸¹⁴ of eclectic illustrations, in this case on a page that also includes a Benin portrait⁸¹⁵ and Brancusi’s *Blond Negress* (1926).⁸¹⁶ But failure to articulate the presumed “poverty” undermines her case.

Given the book’s long-term perspective, from her point of view at the time, early twentieth-century artists’ interest in “savage art” merely follows a long tradition of “exhausting every previously known mannerism” from the classical to “oriental conventionalism.” To her it “all amounted to just another imitation.”⁸¹⁷ Regarding

⁸⁰⁹ MoMA, “Constantin Brancusi. *Bird in Space* (1928)”.

⁸¹⁰ Philadelphia Museum of Art, “Constantin Brancusi. *Mademoiselle Pogany [I]* (1912)”, philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/44648.html (accessed January 21, 2012).

⁸¹¹ Rindge, 1929, 170.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, 148.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 148–9.

⁸¹⁴ For background on Warburg’s image groupings see Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone, 2004).

⁸¹⁵ *Idia Queen Mother, Kingdom of Benin, 16th-17th centuries*. University of Pennsylvania Museum.

⁸¹⁶ San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, “Constantin Brancusi. *La Nègresse Blonde* (the *Blond Negress*, 1926)”, sfmoma.org/artwork/88 (accessed January 21, 2012).

⁸¹⁷ Rindge, 1929, 147–8.

twentieth century art as a whole, she damns it with faint praise: "Modern art may not be the greatest the world has ever known, but it merits our sincere appreciation."⁸¹⁸

These early views appear to change by the time she is established as a faculty member, however. Barr's spouse Margaret recalls that her modern sculpture class with Rindge "was the first course that opened my eyes to the advantages of modern art of any kind."⁸¹⁹ But evidence also suggests that Rindge's tastes remain conservative. At the time she sets out to write *WIMS*, for example, she also publishes an article on Charles Despiau in the Museum's *Bulletin*, positing the modernity of his sculpture. She praises the works for being somehow universal *and* historically situated:

No lingering trait of Greek emulation marks his nudes whose postures are in casual repose and whose bodily forms closely mirror our taste, differentiating us from other times...⁸²⁰

She seems to advocate for a kind of "objectivity" that signifies a break from the past but at a remove from the present. The passage continues:

The simple quiet perfection of a wholly objective but sympathetic art could hardly cite remark in the midst of the stylistic battles and manifestoes of the first quarter of the century...There is no subject interest, no idealism, and no mannerism of composition or surface...They are not the result of a close examination of external shapes nor are they intellectual analyses of forms or characters. They are not psychological musings....⁸²¹

By mid-century Rindge appears to take modernism more seriously as an area of study and revisits ideas about historical continuity. By the time she reviews a survey of modern sculpture in 1950, she has integrated the movement into her broad historical perspective:

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 184.

⁸¹⁹ Margaret Scolari Barr Oral History, aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/barr74.htm.

⁸²⁰ Agnes Rindge, "Charles Despiau," *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 11, no. 4 (1944). jstor.org/stable/4058140 (accessed August 15, 2010).

⁸²¹ Ibid.

Sculpture is a legitimate expression of artistic creation, and it has an ancient and honorable tradition in man's history. [The author] takes pains to indicate that many of the aspects of contemporary art that seem strange and disturbing to the spectator—abstraction, symbolism, distortion—are among the oldest expressive devices of the artist.⁸²²

In contrast, Sweeney appears to have a more expansive view of what modern sculpture can be, one that holds up better over time. But as Marcia Brennan analyzes in depth, in retrospect his approach to modern art—and the “primitive”—also depends upon ellipses and mystifications amidst an ostensibly scholarly apparatus:

Sweeney was able to promote a powerfully ambivalent discourse that seamlessly conjoined the dignified professionalism and erudition of his interpretive approach...with the liberating promise of intuitive, archaic impulses....⁸²³

As an example, she notes how, in a 1934 book on contemporary art,⁸²⁴ Sweeney explicitly links modern Western painting with African material in terms of “intuition,” craftsmanship, composition, and abstraction.⁸²⁵

While Rindge appears to keep the broad cultural history of three-dimensional form in mind, Sweeney is consistently interested strictly in “plastic qualities,” especially regarding African works. This is clear in his *African Negro Art* catalog introduction, in which social context is excluded as too mysterious and alien to consider. Echoing the slide talk, he writes:

We recognize in it the mature plastic idiom of a people whose social, psychological and religious outlook, as well as history and environment, differ widely from ours. We can never hope to plumb its expression fully.⁸²⁶

⁸²² Agnes Rindge, "[Review of Jacques Schnier, *Sculpture in Modern America*, 1948]," *College Art Journal* 9, no. 3 (1950). [jstor.org/stable/773759](http://www.jstor.org/stable/773759) Accessed: 12/08/2010 (accessed December 8, 2010).

⁸²³ Brennan, 2010, 53.

⁸²⁴ James Johnson Sweeney, *Plastic Redirections in 20th Century Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934).

⁸²⁵ Brennan, 2010, 45.

⁸²⁶ Sweeney, *African Negro Art*, 1935, 11.

Rather, its “merits...are purely its own.” But whose own? Sweeney merits the works for formal characteristics only:

essential plastic seriousness, moving dramatic qualities, eminent craftsmanship and sensibility to material, as well as the relationship of material with form and expression.

On the one hand, Sweeney is correct that cross-cultural subjectivity is fraught. but here he uses Otherness to justify considering only form.

The *African Negro Art* exhibition is clearly intended to link traditional African material culture to Western modernism, but at the time of the show, Sweeney is reluctant to draw conclusions about influence:

Whether or not African Negro art has made any fundamental contribution to the general European tradition through the interest shown in it by artists...is a broadly debatable point.”⁸²⁷

But he maintains that “In the end...it is not the tribal characteristics of Negro art nor its strangeness that are interesting. It is its plastic qualities.”⁸²⁸

The conflict between Rindge and Barr is difficult to parse and can only be suggested here. At the time, he and Rindge were strong advocates for art history in higher education, based on a College Art Association position paper signed by the two and many others.⁸²⁹ A few letters from 1930 suggest an amicable relationship: in one Barr credits her as an “authority on sculpture”⁸³⁰ and in another proposes that she write an article about “various directions in which American sculpture is moving (or not moving).”⁸³¹

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁸²⁹ Committee of the College Art Association.

⁸³⁰ Claflin Papers, Vassar. Barr to Rindge, December 9, 1930.

⁸³¹ Claflin Papers, Vassar. Barr to Rindge, December 4, 1930.

Brennan offers an astute observation regarding the dynamic between Barr and Sweeney, one that Rindge may encounter and one that engages Barr's effective/true rhetorical strategy (see Chapter 2). Sweeney and Barr, she observes,

provided a contemporary audience with structurally reassuring guides for the intellectual comprehension of challenging modernist artworks.... Moreover, as prominent cultural mediators and active creators of the modernist canon, Sweeney and Barr moved fluidly between the domains of avant-garde modernism and archetypal primitivism, between the specialized, esoteric world of scholarly discourse and a broader, exoteric engagement with the educated general public.⁸³²

While the goal of “structurally reassuring guides” is no doubt of interest to Rindge as an educator, in the final analysis Barr and Sweeney are quite simply the more expansive thinkers and more astute “cultural mediators.” In sum, the 1945 WIMS appears to falter due to a subtle combination of personalities and unresolved conflicts regarding the nature of modern sculpture. Further investigation could help to illuminate the internal politics of these “ideas and tastes.”⁸³³

Modern Sculpture Teaching Portfolio, 1951⁸³⁴

More evidence informs the museum's next move in the effort to popularize three-dimensional art: *Modern Sculpture*, the first in a series of teaching portfolios published in the early 1950s. Very similar to the slide talk and consistent with the series in its dissemination role, the portfolio is discussed here as a visual approximation of the slide talk, as a show of

⁸³² Brennan, 2010, 55–6.

⁸³³ Further study of museum committee notes (closed to researchers) and the Rindge papers in particular would help to complete the picture.

⁸³⁴ The *Modern Sculpture* portfolio itself bears no date. The CE Finding Aid dates the portfolio series to “ca. 1950.” (CE, II.1.108.1). Per press releases it is “available for sale” for the 1951–1952 catalog (MOMA_1951_0034_1951-05-16_510516-27.pdf) but another release dates it to 1947 (MOMA_1954_0106_99.pdf). A third documents its exhibition in the Auditorium Gallery in 1951 (MOMA_1951_0054_1951-08-17_510817-46). Based on these sources, 1951 is used here.

reproductions, and as an escalation of references to the “primitive.”

Modern Sculpture revives the portfolio form instigated by Barr in the 1920s (see Chapter 2), but now it is an editorially mature product of modern graphic design. As with all WIMS the portfolio is intended to “illustrate...many divergent points of view as well as the great variety of materials and techniques in use today.”⁸³⁵ Written by Courter with elegant design by Herbert Matter (1907–1985),⁸³⁶ the 14 in. x 11 in. (36 cm x 28 cm) portfolio is a slipcased set of forty monotone plates accompanied by an illustrated introduction. (Figure 45) The high production values reflect the museum’s postwar confidence that there is an audience for the book. A press release promotes the plates’ educational flexibility and, at the same time, their value as art-like status objects:

They are especially designed for use in classrooms: the collotype plates are printed on heavy paper and are loose leaf so they can be grouped in various ways to illustrate a lecture or to form a small exhibition. The plates, which are reproduced from the work of outstanding photographers, can also be used as wall decorations in the home, or, as they are in a handsome slipcase, can serve as an addition to any library.⁸³⁷

The introduction follows the by-then well-established WIMS script, especially regarding ancient and “primitive” material culture. For example, the section *Influences from the Past* links the distant past to contemporary sculptors who “revitalized” traditions.⁸³⁸ Trying to make the connection convincing, the author anticipates disbelief and tries to counter it by conflating the primal and primordial. In the section on *Qualities of the Sculptor’s Art* she asserts that while “sculpture is thought ‘difficult’ to understand,”

⁸³⁵ Courter, [1951]. All quotes are from the unpaginated “introductory brochure.”

⁸³⁶ Regrettably there is no substantive biography or recent retrospective of Matter. The most in-depth source to date is Cato Reduff, “Visual Language of Herbert Matter,” (Zürich: PiXiU, 2010). For a biography with timeline see herbertmatter.net.

⁸³⁷ MoMA, “Press Release”, August 17, 1951, moma.org/docs/press_archives/1536/releases/MOMA_1951_0054_1951-08-17_510817-46.pdf?2010 (accessed January 21, 2012).

⁸³⁸ Courter, [1951], n.p. The text is unpaginated.

“it was primitive man’s first form of artistic expression and it remains the first to which the child turns naturally.”⁸³⁹ In another section this is expanded and exoticized by referencing animism:

primitive man was prompted to endow the carved or modeled image with real existence. He thought of his sculpture as a living thing, possessing a “mysterious” power.⁸⁴⁰

Continuing the trope, in the section *Influences from the Past*, the “violence” of Boccioni and the “exuberance” of Lipchitz are positioned to correspond to Baroque art while the elongation and subjectivity of Lehmbruck’s figuration emphasizes affinity to medieval sculpture.

The *New Concepts* section makes the leap to the twentieth century. Evoking the sheer enthusiasm (and the second-person “we”) of WISMA1, readers learn that

We are conscious today of our existence in a constantly changing, shifting universe, of the inter-relation of time and space, to build into the air, to travel through it at speeds greater than that of sound...During the past forty years we have seen the definition of sculpture altered in many ways. At times it approaches architecture...and again it seems closer to painting.... It ranges from mass to volume in composition from static treatment to movement. In less than half a century, a tremendous revolution in sculptural form has taken place.⁸⁴¹

But in comparison to the other WIMs, here, too the past is also very much present. In this way the exuberance of *New Concepts* returns to history in the following section, *Influences from the Past*:

In contrast to the forms which reflect our preoccupation with space and time elements in contemporary thought there are intuitive plastic statements which demonstrate our creative affinity to sculptors of primitive and archaic cultures. Furthermore, contemporary sculpture exhibits many strong ties to the principal

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid.

traditions which have been established in Western civilization since the times of Egypt and Greece.⁸⁴²

From these traditions, Courter argues, sculptors may “draw upon any source, ancient or modern, which enriches their own expression.” Though Goldwater is uninvolved in the portfolio, this line of thinking follows the thesis of his landmark *Primitivism and Modern Painting*.⁸⁴³ As in all the WIMS versions, these traditions are linked to Brancusi, Moore, and Picasso. The portfolio’s gloss on Picasso’s Cubism is characteristic:

many of the most radical developments in the sculpture of our time stem as much from the intuitive tribal expression of African Negro, Oceanic and Pre-Columbian sculptors as from the intellectual attempts of the Cubists....⁸⁴⁴

Lipchitz’s *Figure* makes an appearance in the portfolio as well, this time referencing influence. The awkward caption describes the work as “awe-inspiring in its strong hypnotic quality which may derive from African Negro Ceremonial masks which Lipchitz admires.”⁸⁴⁵

Characteristic of WIMS in its tendency to invoke the deep past and frame modern sculpture as part of a universal, timeless phenomenon, in sum the portfolio is a skillfully packaged dissemination tool, fully engaging modern printing and distribution in the attempt to engage a post-war audience.

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (New York: Harper, 1938).

⁸⁴⁴ Courter, [1951], n.p.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

What Is Modern Sculpture? (WIMS) Book, 1969

The slide talk travels through the late 1940s and the panel show circulates into the early 1950s. Otherwise the question of *What Is Modern Sculpture?* is asked again only in the late 1960s, when Wheeler commissions a text from Goldwater. As an evenhanded but staid account of twentieth century sculpture, copious evidence shows a museum that has fully institutionalized modernism and is at this point looking more to the past than future of sculpture. The book culminates the WIM series effort to create an accessible master narrative for modernism, but in retrospect its unadventurousness renders it a comforting coffee table book⁸⁴⁶ published at the moment when tables are turning on the modern century.

Support for this argument is found, again, in the book's treatment of Primitivism and the indigenous arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Though the text makes few explicit references to "primitive" art, I argue that the author's approach reflects an art history influenced by ethnography, and this in turn dovetails with fundamental principles of MoMA's ideology at the time. Specifically, this involves a confluence between art historical formalism, expressed through Goldwater's notion of "affinities," and the ethnological epistemology of "style areas."

Following an account of the book's design and development, as well as background on Goldwater, Bourgeois, and affinity/style area theory, these themes are discussed in terms of the book's general organization and the inclusion of Bourgeois'

⁸⁴⁶ For an account of one of the first "coffee table" books, with emphasis on the role of photography curator, writer, and critic Nancy Newhall, see Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005); David Featherstone, "This is the American Earth: A Collaboration by Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall," in *Ansel Adams, New Light: Essays on His Legacy and Legend*, ed. Michael Read and Michael Dawson (San Francisco: Friends of Photography, 1993).

sculpture *Quarantania, I* (1947–1953, 1981) in the section on Assemblage.⁸⁴⁷ (Figure 47) I conclude that by adhering to MoMA's by-then conventional notions of modernism, Goldwater's approach is indicative of why the series concludes at that particular moment: by 1969 *What Is Modern?* has become a critical, not pedagogical question.

Design

The book's format changes from previous WIM publications, expanding from a floppy booklet to a handsome hardcover book, a concrete manifestation of MoMA's now-firm foundation. Joseph Del Valle designs the 146-page text, bound in gray cloth.⁸⁴⁸ It features a full-color photographic dust jacket around its pleasant heft and roughly square trim size of 9 1/4 in. x 9 1/2 in. (23 cm x 24 cm).

In the punning dust jacket (Figure 46), all or part of the title is spelled out in three-dimensional, slab-serif Clarendon letters arranged on a marble bridge in the museum's garden—another symbol of the museum as a settled platform for modern sculpture.

Editor Harriet Bee (née Schoenholz) recalls Del Valle staging the shot:

He had the letters for the cover fabricated to stand as sculptures, placed them in the sculpture garden, and had them photographed there under his direction. It was a big production for a cover but all were pleased with the result.⁸⁴⁹

For all that effort, however, only the word "sculpture" reads as three-dimensional. The rest of the title appears to be a photographic imposition, creating an interesting frisson between two and three dimensions. If intentional, it suggests a degree of self-

⁸⁴⁷ MoMA, "Louise Bourgeois. *Quarantania, I* (1947–1953, 1981)", [moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=81955](https://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=81955) (accessed October 23, 2011). The museum acquires it the same year that WIMS is published.

⁸⁴⁸ In the 1960s Del Valle designs numerous art books, including several for MoMA.

⁸⁴⁹ Bee to author. July 20, 2010.

consciousness about the implications of representing three dimensions in two-dimensional reproduction.

This attention to form carries through to the book's generous pagination and spacious layout. As with Barr's Harvard talk over forty years prior (see Chapter 2), Goldwater thinks of the book as series of galleries, similarly representing three dimensions in two: "As far as possible within the format of a book, the works included here have been arranged as though in an exhibition."⁸⁵⁰ With text and image laid out in two asymmetrical columns with generous margins, content is situated comfortably in white space, and also like an installation, "related works can be seen together, and the texts are always close to the illustrations."⁸⁵¹

These high production values are a distinct shift from the utilitarian design of the other WIM books. With WIMS, upmarket production implies a readership sufficiently convinced by modern art to purchase a reassuring picture book about it, signifying an institution that by this point has the luxury of preaching to the convinced.⁸⁵²

Context

The 1969 book is published at key moment of transition for the MoMA administration. Virtually all first-generation staff is retiring. Barr formally retires in 1967 (and appears to have no role in WIMS). Wheeler does so that year as well, though he remains involved as a trustee advisor. D'Harnoncourt retires in 1968 and dies the following year in a car accident. D'Amico also departs in 1968, his educational empire

⁸⁵⁰ Robert Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?* (New York: MoMA, 1969), 7.

⁸⁵¹ Barr Jr., *What is Modern Painting?*, 1943, 7.

⁸⁵² For more on modernism as an indicator of American taste, see Russell Lynes, *Tastemakers* (New York: Harper, 1954).

dismantled and placed under curatorial control. CE is by this point focusing on international exhibitions.⁸⁵³

Curatorially, in 1969 William Rubin and William Lieberman are appointed to share directorship of Painting and Sculpture. Edward Steichen leaves the Photography Department in 1962, succeeded by handpicked and less politically oriented John Szarkowski in 1966. The most forward-thinking development is the appointment of Kynaston McShine as Painting and Sculpture Associate Curator in 1968.⁸⁵⁴ McShine's eye for contemporary trends is established *Primary Structures* (1966), his proto-minimalist exhibition staged two years earlier at the New York City Jewish Museum.⁸⁵⁵ He is also the first curator of color at the museum.

In terms of sculpture, MoMA exhibitions at the time vary from conventional to adventurous. After four decades of establishing its collection and identity, the museum can now stage exhibitions of both "historical" and contemporary modernism, as in a show of Giacomo Manzù (MoMA 886, 1969) and a *Salute to Alexander Calder* (MoMA 916, 1969; includes a short film by Rindge). Shows oriented to contemporary trends—some suggesting nascent institutional self-consciousness—include *Christo Wraps the Museum* (MoMA 857, 1968), *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* (MoMA 877, 1968–1969), and the under-examined *Spaces* (MoMA 917b, 1969–1970, "A new experience of space in art.")⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵³ For more on staff transitions during this period see Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art*, 1973.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.* For a brief biographical summary see the section of that title in Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research Finding Aid, MoMA Archives, NY. moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/InfoExhibitionRecordsf.

⁸⁵⁵ Kynaston McShine, *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1966).

⁸⁵⁶ Jennifer Licht, *Spaces* (New York: MoMA, 1969); MoMA, "Spaces Exhibition Opens at Museum of Modern Art", December 30, 1969,

The WIMS book gives little indication of the late 1960s sociopolitical climate in the U.S. or abroad. Relevant to the “primitivism” theme, colonial independence movements, especially in Africa, mark this period. Within a decade, scholars such as Edward Said, Clifford Geertz, and James Clifford aggressively reevaluate longstanding assumptions about the “primitive,” the colonial, and the Other.⁸⁵⁷ Within this dynamic, a 1969 intervention at MoMA by Yaoyi Kusama demonstrates that the most progressive endeavor at the museum is conceived outside the gallery walls.

Author Robert Goldwater

More background on Goldwater and Bourgeois informs this argument for institutional consolidation and art historical/ethnographic confluence. Goldwater’s legacy is much in need of in-depth assessment; there is no biography or book-length study of his scholarship. Like Barr, he is one of the first U.S. graduate students of modern art, studying at Harvard several years after Barr’s tenure there. He is affiliated with MoMA while still enrolled, “for editing the catalog of the objects and adding to the data on the collection” for *African Negro Art* (1935).⁸⁵⁸ In the 1940s he collaborates with d’Harnoncourt, who has longstanding interest in indigenous material culture.

Goldwater’s next MoMA affiliation is indirect: he is the first and only director of the Museum of Primitive Art (founded 1957), located across the street from MoMA and like it backed by Nelson Rockefeller. The year that WIMS is published, Rockefeller offers

moma.org/docs/press_archives/4395/releases/MOMA_1969_July-December_0088_162.pdf?2010 (accessed January 21, 2012).

⁸⁵⁷ Clifford, 1988; Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

⁸⁵⁸ Walker Evans, *African Negro Art: Photographs* (New York: MoMA, [1935]); Sweeney, *African Negro Art*, 1935.

the collection to the Metropolitan Museum; it reopens there in 1984 as the Michael Rockefeller Wing. The related library is named for Goldwater.

Goldwater is strongly associated with the notion of “affinities,” an approach he shares with d’Harnoncourt. At its simplest, “affinity” and “style area” theory share the idea that formal resemblances are evidence of cultural influence across time and space. Both theories acknowledge the complexities of historical specificity but choose to focus on “objective” formal criteria shared by diverse cultures, namely the quasi-scientific collection, description, and categorization of material “evidence.”⁸⁵⁹ In both schemas, cultural decontextualization dovetails with visual decontextualization, in which the related technique of formal, one-to-one comparisons has a tendency to suggest universal, timeless relationships between objects.

A crucial link between “affinity” and “style area” theory concerns the professionalization of art history and ethnography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his critique of MoMA’s notorious 1984 exhibition “*Primitivism*” in *20th Century Art*,⁸⁶⁰ James Clifford points out that:

The institutionalized distinction between aesthetic and anthropological discourses took form during the years documented at MoMA [in the show], years that saw the complementary discovery of primitive ‘art’ and of an anthropological concept of ‘culture.’⁸⁶¹

In other words, at the turn of the century, professionalization is in progress, but by the mid-twentieth century, when Goldwater is writing, most practitioners position themselves in one of two distinct disciplines. Anthropologist, teacher, and curator Monni

⁸⁵⁹ See for example Paul Wingert, *Primitive Art: Its Traditions and Styles* (New York: Oxford, 1962).

⁸⁶⁰ William Rubin, “*Primitivism*” in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: MoMA, 1984).

⁸⁶¹ Clifford, 1988, 199–200.

Adams⁸⁶² astutely characterizes this art historical/ethnological dynamic as a “double heritage.”⁸⁶³ One can schematize this as a spectrum of practices that become bounded during the first half of the twentieth century. Exemplified by art historical approaches on one end of the spectrum and ethnographic approaches on the other. Once boundaries are established, they reintegrate into more cross-disciplinary practice by late in the century, exemplified by Clifford. Historiographically, scholars are only recently re-discovering middle-ground figures such as William Fagg, Hans Himmelhaber, and Paul Wingert.⁸⁶⁴

As with any fledgling discipline, achieving legitimacy is crucial, and in the arts and humanities, establishing quasi-scientific methods is one way to do this. For his part Goldwater argues that “description and limitation of local styles” is a reasonable first encounter with any new body of material, making these the “earliest concerns...in both disciplines.”⁸⁶⁵

A bewildering mass of undifferentiated material had to be set in some graspable order, and this was achieved by the establishment of static focal points...descriptions and the consequent allocations at first tend to be made almost entirely on the basis of what can be described as external

⁸⁶² Alvin Powell, "A Lifelong Love of African Art," *Harvard Gazette*, no. March 3 (2011). news.harvard.edu/gazette/tag/monni-adams (accessed December 18, 2011).

⁸⁶³ Monni Adams, "African Visual Arts from an Art Historical Perspective," *African Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (1989). jstor.org/stable/523970 (accessed November 11, 2010).

⁸⁶⁴ Another dimension concerns later twentieth century artist-ethnographer confluence. See for example the collaboration of Eliot Elisofon with ethnographers William Fagg and Roy Sieber, both of whom supported formalism and style area theory. Eliot Elisofon and William Butler Fagg, *Sculpture of Africa* (New York: Hacker, 1978). For a biography of Elisofon with emphasis on his African work see Robert Nooter and Nancy Nooter, "Eliot Elisofon: Photographer of Africa," *African Arts* 8, no. 1 (1974). jstor.org/stable/3334914 (accessed November 21, 2010). For more on Sieber and photography see Christraud M. Geary, "Incidental Photographer: Roy Sieber and His African Images," *African Arts* 36, no. 2 (2003). jstor.org/stable/3337931 (accessed November 20, 2010).

⁸⁶⁵ Goldwater, 306, 10–11. Originally presented at a 1967 conference.

characteristics...generally elements of a certain minimal stylization about which objective agreement among outside observers seem most easily reached.⁸⁶⁶

He maintains that this is universal, as true for Western as non-Western arts:

[It was as] necessary to localize and describe individual schools of early medieval manuscript illumination [as it was] first of all to distinguish Bakuba from Baluba and Bena Lulua...and it is presently important to distinguish the various local tribal and village styles in the Cameroons or along the Sepik.⁸⁶⁷

As the figure most associated with the notion of "style areas," Paul Wingert (1900–1974)⁸⁶⁸ would have agreed. While there are few direct connections between Wingert and Goldwater, both teach at New York universities (NYU, Columbia), where they innovate art historical courses on African material culture.⁸⁶⁹ Moreover, Wingert collaborates with d'Harnoncourt in *Arts of the South Seas* (1946),⁸⁷⁰ MoMA's most substantial exhibition of indigenous arts. Wingert's approach is remarkably consistent with both the affinity theory and the museum's mantra of form and function. He writes:

Every art object has two aspects: 1) the objective or morphological, consisting of shapes, lines, surfaces, and colors in their particular relationships; and 2) the subjective or cultural, containing the answers to such questions as why it was made...and how it was used...(i.e., the function).⁸⁷¹

The intent [of morphological analysis] is to make clear why the style features of a figure from...New Guinea make it possible to recognize it as such, and not to confuse it with a figure from the Eastern Congo...it is not the attainment...of the universal artistic properties that matters, but the unique ways in which they are handled....⁸⁷²

To be considered a style, he believes that

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., 306.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ "Paul S. Wingert, Art Historian, 74; Columbia Professor Merged Work with Anthropology," *New York Times*, December 24, 1974.

⁸⁶⁹ Adams.

⁸⁷⁰ Ralph Linton, Paul S. Wingert, and René d'Harnoncourt, *Arts of the South Seas* (New York: MoMA, 1946).

⁸⁷¹ Wingert, 1962, 75.

⁸⁷² Ibid., 76–7.

The final product must consequently be a unique creation, a personalized expression of content captured in the rendering of forms and the interrelationships of all the component parts united in one object. These are the broad essentials of style, regardless of time and place.⁸⁷³

Esther Pasztory points out that while this is a “handy” way to integrate new kinds of material into the art historical canon, it tends to be self-justifying:

The practice and theory of style...exist together and reinforce one another. When Paul Wingert taught African art from the perspective of style area that was so handy for students, that concept was not intrinsic to the material, but was an artifact of European thought derived from the notion of folk and national styles characteristic of European culture.⁸⁷⁴

Furthermore, she supports the idea of a mutually beneficial professional confluence between anthropologists (style areas) and art historians (affinities). Discussing the crossover in her analysis of Sub-Saharan works (such as the Sudanese example in *Introduction to Modern Sculpture*), she asserts that:

In the US, emphasis on stylistic analysis...was encouraged by the popularity of formalism in studies of modern art, the field most sympathetic to African art. We can understand how scholars of a marginal subject such as sub-Saharan sculpture might choose to work within the dominant intellectual paradigm of style as a strategy to bring their subject into respected status in art history. Style also afforded a unified approach to the diverse sculptural forms confronting them.⁸⁷⁵

In a speech two years before publication of *WIMS*, Goldwater reflects upon the affinity/style area strategy, acknowledging its shortcomings but ultimately defending it. While style areas “do exist and have some sort of paradigmatic influence,” he agrees that the approach risks teleology in which “Material, social, and religious contexts...are found to explain why such a style must belong to such a place.”⁸⁷⁶ But focus on social function alone also falls short, he asserts, because it tends to imply that exchange and

⁸⁷³ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁷⁴ Esther Pasztory, *Thinking with Things: Toward a New Definition of Art* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005), 175.

⁸⁷⁵ Adams.

⁸⁷⁶ The speech was published in 1973. See Goldwater, 307–8.

use value operate independently of formal considerations. He argues instead that form and social function are integral and must be considered together.⁸⁷⁷ To make his point he uses another art historical analogy, challenging scholars to address how a cathedral influences society and not the other way around.

Detailed analysis of the WIMS book, below, reveals Goldwater's style area/affinity approach as a key subtext. Introducing Louise Bourgeois at this point fully sets the scene.

Louise Bourgeois

Scholars have only touched upon the relationship of Goldwater and Bourgeois, especially regarding the "primitive." In interviews the artist emphasizes Goldwater's intellectuality, rationality, and emotional reserve. She describes her early impression of him as a "puritan" compared to her sexually charged early life. She says, "I thought it was wonderful. And I married that guy."⁸⁷⁸ In a late interview she describes him as "a completely rational person....I never saw him angry in my life. Ever." Yet she is ever-mystified by this cerebrality: "I married a guy that I absolutely could not understand—he was so intellectual, and so predictable...And I could never make him out."⁸⁷⁹ Within this dynamic she takes pains to distance his art history from her art making. While clearly an informed, intellectual artist, she claims:

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., 307, 13.

⁸⁷⁸ Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, eds., *Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews, 1923-1997* (Cambridge: MIT, 1998), 179.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 170.

I am not interested in art history. My husband taught it, so I had my fill at home! I do believe in it as an activity, as a form of intellectual pursuit, but it did nothing for me—except that it kept me at a certain bracing level of intellectuality.⁸⁸⁰

In another statement she privileges “real” art: “I lived in a bath of history. We talked of nothing but history. I had nothing against it, but it is not real stuff. It is not what art is made of.”⁸⁸¹

What is Goldwater’s point of view on the relationship? Unfortunately I have found no indication. Their career pursuits are more substantially documented. The record reveals particular connections to MoMA, and indirectly to the inclusion of *Quarantania, I* in WIMS. In the 1940s, when the slide talk is in circulation, and several years after Rindge and Sweeney debate figuration and abstraction, Bourgeois begins to explore sculpture.⁸⁸² In 1949, the same year that Goldwater and d’Harnoncourt are putting the affinities-heavy, ostensibly populist *Modern Art in Your Life* in the MoMA galleries (MoMA 423, 1949),⁸⁸³ Bourgeois is reinventing sculpture installation with the debut of her *personages* at the Peridot Gallery. In another MoMA connection, future curator Drexler is the catalyst for the landmark show. According to the artist, “The 1949 exhibition was brought about by...Drexler.... He came to my house, viewed all of the works, and as Peridot’s advisor, said, ‘We’re going to show all of this.’”⁸⁸⁴ Bourgeois also asserts that Barr purchases *Sleeping Figure*, one of the *personages* in that show.⁸⁸⁵ In one last

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 216.

⁸⁸² Robert Storr, Paulo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Phaidon, 2003).

⁸⁸³ Goldwater and d’Harnoncourt, *Modern Art in Your Life*, 1949.

⁸⁸⁴ Bernadac and Obrist, eds., 176.

⁸⁸⁵ In the interview Bourgeois dates *Sleeping Figure* to 1947 and its acquisition to 1949. MoMA dates the work to 1950 and accession to 1951. MoMA, “Louise Bourgeois. *Sleeping Figure* (1950)”, moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80752 (accessed January 21, 2012).

connection, Drexler gives a Bourgeois sculpture to the museum in 1986, a year before his death.⁸⁸⁶

Development

Returning to WIMS, the book's introduction confirms that "The first suggestion of my writing this book came from Monroe Wheeler, and I wish to thank him for our initial discussions and his subsequent interest."⁸⁸⁷ Otherwise no development documents have surfaced.⁸⁸⁸ The book is dedicated to d'Harnoncourt, and in the front matter Goldwater acknowledges "the indirect contribution of Alfred H. Barr Jr. whose *What Is Modern Painting?*, the first [sic] of this series, is a model of clarity and conciseness."⁸⁸⁹

One factor that may influence the choice of Goldwater as author is his 1965 publication of an expanded *Primitivism in Modern Art*,⁸⁹⁰ which includes an added chapter on "Primitivism in Modern Sculpture." The chapter is organized differently than the WIMS book but the approach is the same and some examples echo it.

According to the WIMS introduction, curator William Rubin, among others, reviews the regrettably absent draft.⁸⁹¹ Coincidentally, the year of the book's publication he interviews Bourgeois for an article,⁸⁹² and ironically, in 1984 he curates the *Primitivism* show so widely criticized for taking the notion of affinities to an extreme. Another notable

⁸⁸⁶ *Portrait* (1963). 385.1986.

⁸⁸⁷ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, n.p.

⁸⁸⁸ Exploration of Goldwater's papers at the Archives of American Art could prove fruitful. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/collection/goldrobe.htm

⁸⁸⁹ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, n.p.

⁸⁹⁰ Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 1967.

⁸⁹¹ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, n.p.

⁸⁹² See Bernadac and Obrist, eds.

manuscript reviewer is Goldwater and Bourgeois' son Jean-Louis, who "contributed a very useful critical reading of the text and helped in its editing."⁸⁹³

The younger Bourgeois' career resonates with his parents' interest in indigenous material culture. He is inspired in part by a MoMA project: Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects* (MoMA 752, 1964–1965; CE 1965–1973, 41 venues; see Chapter 1).⁸⁹⁴ According to one source, after reading the Rudofsky book Jean-Louis, who studies architecture in college and works at one point for *Artforum*, becomes interested in adobe structures.⁸⁹⁵ Beginning in 1980 the self-described "activist, relaxivist, and Groucho Marxist"⁸⁹⁶ immerses himself in the Djenné community of Mali and co-authors a book on its indigenous architecture with his wife Carollee Pelos. He has since become politically active there.⁸⁹⁷ By making this leap his career represents the next step from the indirect work of his parents to a hands-on "affinity between the tribal and the modern."

The WIMS book has no equivalent exhibition. It has only one edition and lackluster reviews, suggesting unremarkable sales and minimal impact. The most astute review observes that while "very agreeably produced...most of what the author has to say is to

⁸⁹³ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, n.p.

⁸⁹⁴ Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture*, 1964.

⁸⁹⁵ Alex Ulam, "Clown: How to Tell Jokes That Win Friends and Influence People in an Ancient City in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Walrus*, no. July/August (2004). walrusmagazine.com/articles/2004.07-method-child-entertainment-africa/ (accessed October 22, 2011).

⁸⁹⁶ enoughism.org. Last updated 2004. High school reunion statement, 2008. goodwork7.com/j-lbour_short_autobio.pdf.

⁸⁹⁷ Jean-Louis Bourgeois, Carollee Pelos, and Basil Davidson, *Spectacular Vernacular: The Adobe Tradition* (New York: Aperture, 1989).

the point but unexceptional."⁸⁹⁸ The following sections here examine why and how this is true.

Organization

The book's organization demonstrates intersection between "affinity" and "style area" methodologies. It is divided into three sections. The first and last are genres, beginning with *The Human Figure* and ending with the built environment (*Relief, Monuments, and Architecture as Sculpture*). The middle division mixes artist-driven movements (such as *Impressionism, Futurism*) and formal categories (*Expressionist Constructivism, Biomorphism*) arranged in roughly chronological order. The last two sections of this middle division concern emerging categories such as *Assemblage* and *Tendencies of the Sixties*. Goldwater's précis confirms that

The book's general structure is more symmetrical than sequential. The opening and closing sections...are nonhistorical and illustrate contrasting interpretations of similar themes or problems. In the central section, the tendencies of modern sculpture have been grouped by style, an arrangement necessarily entailing considerations of period; even here, however, affinities of form and intention have been given precedence of the details of historical development.⁸⁹⁹

The author emphasizes that the book is

not a history, with all that this would imply of sources, influences, development, and biographical detail. The emphasis has rather been upon a more direct apprehension and appreciation of a representative selection of individual works of art, and on their understanding and enjoyment when they are encountered as they were conceived—for themselves.⁹⁰⁰

⁸⁹⁸ Nigel Koastam, "What is Modern Sculpture? By Robert Goldwater," *Leonardo* 6, no. 1 (1973): 73.

⁸⁹⁹ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, 7.

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

By focusing on “affinities of form,” and deciding that the works are created only “for themselves,” irrelevant of context, Goldwater’s approach is removed from “details of historical development”—much like style area methodology. To what selves does he refer, for example? The transcendent Kantian “thing in itself,”⁹⁰¹ the perceiving viewer, or artists’ expressive selves? Crucially, “themselves” fails to account for the authorial self, the socially situated art historian/ethnographer—and the institution—framing the works in these terms.

This notion carries through in the mix of historiographically established movements (such as *Impressionism*) and categories with names that sound like them but are actually formal groupings (such as *Biomorphism*). These are in fact “affinities,” “coined by critics” such as Goldwater himself. They are indeed “more artificial,” representing unattributed “perceived similarities” across time and space—and even subconscious influences among artists:

the terms Biomorphism, space drawing, expressionist constructivism, and assemblage are of a different, and more artificial, sort. They have been coined by critics to express relationships of a much more generalized and widespread kind, often among artists of different generations and countries who have had no direct contact with one another. They are meant to suggest perceived similarities among works by artists who, being heirs to the whole heritage of modern art, may or may not be conscious of their sources and affinities. They indicate the existence of the contemporaneous international tendencies that have characterized the growth and diffusion of modern art during the last three decades.⁹⁰²

The *Biomorphism* section, for example, groups works of diverse decades and intentions (Brancusi, Lipchitz, and Calder) by their shared use of curves.⁹⁰³

⁹⁰¹ See Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, trans., James Meredith Creed (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911).

⁹⁰² Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, 8.

⁹⁰³ The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s earliest usage example for biomorphism dates to 1935 (in a formal characterization of Miro), the year prior to Barr’s *Cubism and Abstract Art*, with its division of abstract art into “geometric” and “non-geometric.”

The curve...constitutes the sole, or the dominant, formal language employed... whether they define more or less stylized representations, or altogether nonrepresentational, are seemingly more organic than geometric.⁹⁰⁴

Based on these assumptions about the “whole heritage” of modern sculpture, we now examine how Goldwater addressed assemblage through the example of *Quarantania, I*.

Quarantania, I as Assemblage

Assemblage is one of the chronological segments in the book’s middle section, positioned between the genre bookends. It is anchored by Picasso’s fringed *Still Life* (1914) and concludes with post-war works by Louise Nevelson, Mark di Suvero, John Chamberlain—and Bourgeois.

The section roughly follows the influential schema introduced by William Seitz and Peter Selz in the MoMA exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* (MoMA 695, 1961) earlier in the decade.⁹⁰⁵ Following that schema, Goldwater introduces assemblage as a departure from material and craft considerations stressed with such consistency in the WIMS predecessors. “Sculpture’s traditional materials,” he writes, “have been stone, wood, clay, and bronze; its techniques have been carving and modeling.” Assemblage, in contrast, enables “varying results” through “one essential method: the bringing together (assembling) rather than the making (creating) of the work’s constituent parts.” Moreover, “In its ideal definition, assemblage uses as its elements only pre-existent

"Assemblage", Oxford English Dictionary, oed.com/view/Entry/11781 (accessed September 4, 2011).

⁹⁰⁴ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, 56.

⁹⁰⁵ William Seitz, *Art of Assemblage* (New York: MoMA, 1961). The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates its first art-related example to the time of the show. "Assemblage". "Assemblage".

objects (natural or fabricated—but not by the artist), which it combines into a new whole.” The salvage nature of materials is also a factor, he writes, because “assemblage has tended to employ used objects rather than new ones.”⁹⁰⁶

To the author’s credit, this definition goes beyond simple formal criteria to embrace intellectual processes. As with the *Dada*, *Surrealism*, and (nominally) *Constructivism* sections he asserts that assemblage should be appreciated for its latent rather than manifest content: “It is its attitudes, not its skills, that make it contemporary.” This involves the investment of objects with “imagination,” objects “whose personal history has furnished them with an identity.” Along with mixed materials themselves, their interrelationship ideally coalesces into “juxtapositions which both prompt and manifest that imagination.”⁹⁰⁷ In this way

the play of the mind is paramount...[The artist] is freed from copying nature, and he is also freed from the limitations of traditional technique: his skill as a craftsman is measured entirely by the imaginative results he achieves.⁹⁰⁸

Here the author demonstrates an understanding that content can be intellectual as well as formal. At this point Goldwater also first shows consciousness of mutability and transience as considerations:

Any assemblage of worn, discarded objects protests against accepted definitions of art. But...their original purpose is lost in a new aesthetic, with its own conventions. But the ‘anti-art’ impulse can find more radical ways to startle the observer into new realizations; it can attack the desire for permanence basic to the creation of most painting and sculpture.”

Within this definition of assemblage, inclusion of *Quarantania*, *I* as an assemblage is curious. Goldwater rationalizes it this way:

⁹⁰⁶ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, 92.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

Bourgeois' *Quarantania, I* takes the method of assemblage at its most literal. Each of its wooden elements...is a separate unit anchored in a base that serves as common ground for a concentrated gathering of carved abstract shapes. Similar but not identical, their rhythms and relations give the work its formal interest. At the same time, as the attenuated, organic curves suggest, there is a symbolic reference. Here is a human group, its members alike but various, leaning toward one another in an intensity of feeling that unites them even as it leaves each one silent and alone.⁹⁰⁹

While Goldwater correctly identifies the psychological and emotional character of the work, he contradicts his own criteria in several ways. First, the materials are not truly salvaged: according to Bourgeois, the raw lumber "came from the makers of water towers for buildings in New York."⁹¹⁰ Furthermore, the wood is carved and painted by the artist, contradicting the "ideal definition" of "bringing together (assembling) rather than the making (creating) of...constituent parts."⁹¹¹ Third and most important, while Goldwater recognizes the transient sensibility of salvaged and recombined materials, he fails to fully account for the way *Quarantania, I* "attack[s] the desire for permanence" embodied by conventional modern sculpture and re-radicalized by mutable installation.⁹¹² Presentation of the work took many forms over the years: first shown in 1949 as separate *personages* attached directly to the floor of the Peridot Gallery, then clustering into a group, then "cannibalized" into at least one other version.⁹¹³ By focusing on the "assemblage at its most literal," the author misses a major opportunity to situate Bourgeois in the new modernity of Minimalism and Installation, categories only partially recognized in the *Tendencies of the Sixties* section.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁹¹⁰ Bernadac and Obrist, eds. 181. For a detailed account of the *personages* see Saint Louis Art Museum, *Louise Bourgeois: The Personages* (New York: Saint Louis Art Museum, 1994).

⁹¹¹ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, 92.

⁹¹² Ibid., 101.

⁹¹³ "Cannibalized" is quoted from an internal document. MoMA Painting and Sculpture Department Object File.

To his credit, Goldwater resists setting up an explicit “affinity” between *Quarantania, I* and indigenous material culture. Others do, but the assertions are dubious. In a 1997 article, Barbara Catoir makes direct formal comparisons between “totemic” Bourgeois sculptures and indigenous works in much the same way as the 1984 *Primitivism* show, also mentioning Goldwater’s interest in the subject.⁹¹⁴ Unfortunately her argument falls victim to misleading “affinities” identified by Clifford and Arthur Danto regarding the *Primitivism* show.

More relevant is Anne Wagner’s 1999 essay on Bourgeois and “regression.” She directly challenges Goldwater’s categorization of *Quarantania, I* as assemblage:

We might be tempted to bow to his apparently broad-based authority if the term assemblage did not tend to elide the calculated stages of manufacture—the rough joinery and contingent shaping, the beat-up surface and distinctly architectural painting, flat white and blue—that lead to Bourgeois’ assembled whole.⁹¹⁵

She goes further:

It leaves aside...the way her work—not least in the MoMA example—grasps, fuses and defuses a whole handful of live wires within twentieth-century sculptural practice. Brancusi meets Giacometti meets Arp meets a ghostly family in a Dogon village somewhere between the sky and a mouthful of teeth. Or something, with the space within ‘something’ the key.⁹¹⁶

Based on that considerable leap, Wagner then (over)interprets the work as a commentary on the history of figure sculpture in general and “primitivism” in particular:

My own emphasis falls much more on these objects as engaged in a reflection on processes and objects of sculpture, as substitute or anti-bodies;...in other words,

⁹¹⁴ Barbara Catoir, “Louise Bourgeois und Robert Goldwater: Das Frühwerk der Künstlerin und die Afrikanische Plastik,” in *Sie und Er: Frauenmacht und Männerherrschaft Im Kulturvergleich*, ed. Gisela Voßlger, Ethnologica (Köln: Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum für Völkerkunde, 1997).

⁹¹⁵ Anne Wagner, “Bourgeois Prehistory, or the Ransom of Fantasies,” *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no. 2 (1999). jstor.org/stable/1360632 (accessed June 24, 2010).

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to the meta-discursive aspect of these works, which is (paradoxically) aggressively literal yet (simultaneously) historical....⁹¹⁷

Wagner, like Goldwater, invokes African material culture, but to different ends. Her argument is more sophisticated for discrediting the work as assemblage and, more importantly, positioning the work as a self-conscious reference to Primitivism. Neither writer takes the artist's view into account, however, a shortcoming in ethnographic and, according to some methodologies, art historical terms.

How did the artist perceive the work in relation to assemblage? As an autobiographical narrative and in formal terms. Her statements make no mention of Primitivism, and in one interview she denies interest in African sculpture altogether.⁹¹⁸ Instead, her interpretation of the *personages* focuses on personal transitions, specifically from interior to exterior space, domestic instability to stability, and mental interiority to social engagement:

I had three children, and I didn't have a place, physically, to do the sculpture...In '41 we moved to...18th Street. It had an immense mansard roof...I went up to the roof and did the sculpture because I had the space.⁹¹⁹

She also discusses the work in terms of her early, surrealist *femmes maisons*,⁹²⁰ describing "a very significant evolution there where the retirement, the withdrawal, in the *maison* evolves...Then the presences appear."⁹²¹ In this way she "moved from the *maison* to the occupants of the *maison*..." Indeed, one of the *personages* is titled *Portrait of Jean-Louis* (1947–1949), her son and future reviewer of the WIMS

⁹¹⁷ Ibid., 8 and note 74.

⁹¹⁸ Bernadac and Obrist, eds., 355. Many modern artists deny influence by material culture of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, even when they have been clearly engaged by the subject. This perceived autonomy is worthy of further study.

⁹¹⁹ Barbara Flug Colin, "Conversation with Louise Bourgeois," *Frigate*, no. 2 (2000-2001). frigatezine.com/essay/lives/eli02bou.html (accessed October 23, 2011).

⁹²⁰ See Storr, Herkenhoff, and Schwartzman, 2003.

⁹²¹ Colin.

manuscript. In another source she even links her choice of materials to Goldwater and their domestic economy: “I felt I had to save my husband’s money rather than do sculpture that cost money.”⁹²²

In another statement, however, we find that the artist may well have considered *Quarantania, I* to be an assemblage. The year of the book’s publication, Rubin asks Bourgeois to characterize her “wood sculptures of the forties.”⁹²³ Bourgeois’ answer concerns speed and form. She describes one type of work as “spontaneous” or “immediate”⁹²⁴ and other a more methodically constructed type she considers to be “assemblage:”

Now both in the past and today I have also made a very different kind of sculpture...a work of assemblage; a synthesis, a putting together of elements, which is peaceful as opposed to the outburst of the previous type of work. The second kind of work makes use of many, originally separate, pieces gathered together to bring out their similarities and their differences, and also to make them into a whole which is more than [sic] the sum of its separate parts. There is nothing impetuous.... There is on the contrary a great restraint, care, reflection, and time involved, and the possibility of endless minor changes and adjustments.⁹²⁵

Thus between Goldwater, Catoir, Wagner, and Bourgeois herself we have a number of perspectives (from the time and today) upon the work as assemblage and in relation to the “primitive,” each with some validity. My conclusion is that Goldwater’s organization of the narrative, his understanding of Bourgeois’ work, and his framing of contemporary tendencies make the most sense retrospectively in terms of the dubious notion of “affinities.” Even twenty years after the *personages* and at the cusp of truly *New Tendencies of the Sixties*, Goldwater can’t see the art beyond its formal aspects, even regarding his wife’s work.

⁹²² Bernadac and Obrist, eds., 161.

⁹²³ Ibid., 84.

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ Ibid., 81–6.

Analysis

Persuasive Techniques

Stepping back from the work itself, let us look at persuasive techniques used in the WIMS versions and how these figure into key WIM themes: the notion of timeless, universal modernism; the attempt to balance connoisseurial and educational approaches to it; and tensions between formal and contextual interpretation. As with the examination of other WIM efforts, here, too, photographs make WIMS more convincing—and unintentionally more complex. This complexity is engendered by technology (black and white versus color; slides) as well as cognition (visual comparisons), and epistemology (how staff make sense of documentary illustration by “art” photographers) All of these in turn are related to the issue of “affinities” and “style areas,” for photographic visual comparison is one of the most powerful ways to argue for relationships between disparate objects.

Simple exposure to modern sculpture is a major goal of the early WIMS efforts, anticipating André Malraux’s idea of a “museum without walls” enabled by photography of sculpture.⁹²⁶ Rindge notes this in a 1944 review of the year’s educational activities at MoMA, emphasizing the value of CEs as an alternative to

the general reluctance of most schools and colleges to include contemporary art in their studies. And for many museums, the field of contemporary art, outside of their own local artists, has been relatively inaccessible.⁹²⁷

As a University of Georgia respondent wrote of the slide talk in particular:

⁹²⁶ André Malraux, *Musee Imaginaire: Psychologie De L'art* (Geneva: Skira, 1947). For a survey of the subject see Roxana Marcoci, *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today* (New York: MoMA, 2010).

⁹²⁷ Agnes Rindge, "Educational Activities of the Museum of Modern Art," *College Art Journal* 3, no. 4 (1944). jstor.org/stable/773200 (accessed November 23, 2008).

this means of presenting sculpture to scattered localities is a most worthwhile [illegible—undertaking?] The lack of sculpture in many small museums and the difficulties which transportation of sculpture would present make this item a very valuable service....⁹²⁸

In fact, during the war a CE moratorium on transporting actual sculpture makes proxies the sole means of dissemination.⁹²⁹

As with the series as a whole, the use of photographic proxies in WIMS comes with cognitive and persuasive implications. “A photograph unfortunately can only tell part of the story,” reads one of the 1944 slide talk captions. Indeed, the manifest content of WIMS photographs is only one part of their story as rhetorical elements of the museum’s dissemination strategy.

Black and White and Slides All Over

As mentioned previously, organizers of the 1940s WIMS identify sculpture as a subject appropriate for color slides. In most if not all other WIMS versions, black and white reproductions are used. How does this choice influence the effectiveness of the WIMS message? For comparison, even in an upmarket 1952 edition of *Museum Without Walls*,⁹³⁰ a compendium of hundreds of images, all but a few are black and white. But by the time of the 1969 WIMS, full-color art books are more common in the American marketplace. WIMS has the highest production values of any WIM publication, but except for the dust jacket, black and white halftones are used throughout. Comparing WIMS to other MoMA publications of the time shows that this is typical, especially for

⁹²⁸ CE, II.1.121.2. Questionnaire response from University of Georgia, Savannah. January 17, 1948.

⁹²⁹ *Circulating Exhibitions 1944-1945*, 1944, n.p.

⁹³⁰ André Malraux, *Le Musée Imaginaire De La Sculpture Mondiale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952).

non-painting exhibitions. From this one can assume that monotone is a conventional (and no doubt economical) choice, but closer analysis reveals persuasive effects as well.

WIMS exemplifies how even in the color era black and white is often favored for photography of sculpture, and this carries subtle but significant rhetorical effects. First, monotone photography emphasizes texture, making it particularly sensitive to “pure” materials (such as bronze, clay, and wood). Monotone photography also downplays “distractions” of object color in favor of mass and shape (for implications of this in WIMP see Chapter 2). Moreover, removing color tends to distance the work from its physical context: a field of fresh green grass rendered in shades of grey fundamentally alters one’s perception of sculpture in its midst. Another effect is to harmonize diverse works, subtly but often misleadingly causing them to read as a cohesive group. In this, black and white also has what can be called a “classicizing” effect, creating a subtle positive association between contemporary art and unpainted classical sculpture. Perhaps for these reasons the CE organizers appear not to have taken advantage of Kodachrome, for the slide talks generally follow the same rhetorical strategy as black and white versions.

Visual Comparisons

As we have seen, rhetorical visual comparisons pervade WIM, from good/bad setups in the 1939 WISMA to the “affinities” of the 1969 WIMS. It resonates with the earlier WIMS as well: the year after WIMP’s publication, the College Art Association addresses visual comparison in a “Statement on the Place of the History of Art in the Liberal Arts Curriculum”—a committee of which Barr and Agnes Rindge are part. For introductory teaching purposes, they argue,

comparison is the fundamental method for the discovery and demonstration of the unique qualities of works of art in any medium, instruction in the spatial arts has this peculiar advantage: two or even more works can be seen together. It is thus easier to exhibit similarities and differences between the early and late paintings of Renoir than between early and late novels of Balzac.⁹³¹

In this highly questionable line of thinking, images can be understood simultaneously but literature is most easily compared sequentially. The committee also (wrongly) asserts that unlike literature, art is a universal language because art doesn't require fluency in the original language of a given text. Thus, the authors reason, the need to understand a "foreign language," demonstrating no cognizance that images, too, are translations:

does not arise in the study of the visual arts, where linguistic barriers do not exist, and where it may be necessary to deal with a reproduction (often nowadays in full color), but never a 'translation.'⁹³²

The effectiveness of pictorial comparisons depends upon two fundamental elements of visual cognition known as "parallelism" and the "Kuleshov effect."

Information design critic Edward Tufte defines the first this way:

Parallelism connects visual elements. Connections are built among images by position, orientation, overlap, synchronization, and similarities in content. Parallelism grows from a common viewpoint that relates like to like. Congruity of structures across multiple images gives the eye a context for assessing data variation. Parallelism is not simply a matter of design arrangements, for the perceiving mind itself actively works to detect and indeed to generate lines, clusters, and matches among assorted visual elements.⁹³³

The second cognitive phenomenon is known in film studies as the "Kuleshov effect."⁹³⁴ The term describes how, by juxtaposing two unrelated images, the viewer tends to "create" relationships between them, often causing confusion of coincidence

⁹³¹ Committee of the College Art Association.

⁹³² Ibid., 85.

⁹³³ Edward Tufte, *Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative* (Cheshire: Graphics, 1997).

⁹³⁴ See David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998).

with causality. In both cases the rhetorical effectiveness of visual comparisons depends upon “the perceiving mind” that “actively works” to make sense of the information presented (and omitted).

The slide version of WIMS explicitly demonstrates these effects. Almost every point is made using pairings even though the show is made for a single projector. In some cases serial projection appears to have been circumvented by combining two images into one slide, with *Sailor/Sudan* the key pairing. The persistence of this rhetorical strategy in the face of technical obstacles speaks to the import of paired images in making the WIMS case.

Photography of *Quarantania*, I returns to the issue of mutability. Most sculptures in the book are immobile and attached to traditional bases, and by the time of the book’s publication the Bourgeois has become a fixed composition as well. Unselfconsciousness about the significance of such change is seen in an advertisement for the book, which features a different version of the sculpture.⁹³⁵ (Figure 48) Soon the work transforms again by being cast in bronze from the museum’s original. On its sleek cubic base, the bronze serves as an apt metaphor for Bourgeois’ canonization and solidification of the museum’s authority.

Art/Documentation Paradox

As argued throughout this study (especially regarding *What Is Modern Photography?*, Chapter 3), the WIM series demonstrates a paradoxical attitude towards

⁹³⁵ "What is Modern Sculpture? [Advertisement]," *Revue des Beaux Arts* (1971): 11.

art and documentary⁹³⁶ photography in light of the museum's ideology: at the same time that MoMA is attempting to elevate photography to an art form it is also fully mobilizing its power as a mass communications media. Sculpture is especially indicative because it exists in three-dimensional space and is almost always photographed in a physical and therefore social context.⁹³⁷

This is even more poignant when considering the WIMS prevalence of documentary images credited to MoMA-supported photographers, especially for images of indigenous material culture. They literally show a modernist point of view, complicating any aspiration to uninflected documentation. The 1951 *Modern Sculpture* teaching portfolio is a particularly strong example: it incorporates photographs of African artifacts by Walker Evans; a photo of a monumental Mayan figure is supplied by Eliot Elisofon (1911–1973), whose photographs of African art are published as a book and distributed as a didactic MoMA CE,⁹³⁸ and Brassai (1899–1984) is represented by a photo of Picasso's *Death's Head* (1944). The majority of images are by portfolio designer Herbert Matter himself, the most striking of which is a time-motion series tracing the movement of a Calder mobile. Matter also contributes an unremarkable outdoor photograph of the Lipchitz *Figure*. In one case the designer/photographer even silhouettes an Evans image of a "Gabun" (Gabon) figure, transforming it into a modernist graphic element anchoring a dynamic, asymmetrical page of illustrations. (Figure 45)

This tension between art and documentation is further complicated by display of *Modern Sculpture* plates in the museum's Auditorium Gallery. As with several other

⁹³⁶ Here "documentary" and "documentation" refer to photography of objects for illustrative, recording, or pedagogical purposes. It should not be considered synonymous with the movements known as Documentary or Straight Photography.

⁹³⁷ Silhouetting—the literal cutting-out of surrounding material—is also crucial to art historical discourse. This study only touches upon the issue.

⁹³⁸ Elisofon and Fagg, 1978. See below regarding the CE version.

WIMs (discussed in previous chapters), this literally positions reproductions in an ambiguous relationship to the main galleries. The sculptural subject heightens this ambiguity, for the images are functioning as both art proxies and art photographs.

To what degree are WIMS creators conscious of this art/documentation paradox? In the case of *Introduction to Modern Sculpture* one can infer from contact with Adams, who is solicited for negatives of the Lipchitz *Figure*, as well as a Brancusi and a Maillol. He also supplies a photo of William Zorach's *Child with Cat* (1926) for the portfolio. In preparation of *Introduction to Modern Sculpture*, an unidentified staff member treats Adams' photos as more than just illustrations: "I couldn't bear the idea of using other photographs, and was going to hold the show over until I received yours...."⁹³⁹ What makes them special? The photos are serviceable but undistinguished. One is hard-pressed to differentiate them from others used in the project, many by "named" photographers who may well also have pursued art photography. The "real" difference is that unremarkable illustration by a canonical artist is perceived to be more valuable than an adept illustration by an unrecognized photographer.

One might think that by 1969 WIM contributors would be aware that photographic representation of sculpture involves historiographic complexities, but in general this is not true of the WIMS book. Two examples of self-consciousness do stand out, however. The first is the photo used to illustrate Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914).⁹⁴⁰ The photo, by Man Ray, documents the "original" readymade, now lost. According to Caroline Cross the photo is made for use in an edition of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935–1941), the artist's sculptural comment on reproduction and museums.⁹⁴¹ While Goldwater could

⁹³⁹ CE, II.1 67.4. n.a. (possibly Alice Otis) to Adams, October 27, 1942.

⁹⁴⁰ Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, 52.

⁹⁴¹ Caroline Cros, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 67.

have chosen a more legible image of a replica, to his credit he uses this more resonant one. The second example is Moholy-Nagy's photo of his *Space Modulator* (1940), found in the *Constructivism* section.⁹⁴² First, the image is a rare example of a sculptor's literal point of view on their work. Also, like several other of his *Modulator* images, this one consciously engages optics, with the photo staged to downplay the object itself and to emphasize instead the light effects it produces. In this way it is arguably intentional that his images of the *Space Modulators* tend to resemble his photograms, complete with spatially ambiguous, high contrast rendering of darkness and light. With the Duchamp and *Space Modulator*, then, Goldwater makes some artful choices, privileging art-historical resonance over documentary legibility.

Thus to the very end of the WIM series photography remains integral to communicating the museum's message, but the producers rarely achieve self-consciousness about the implications of doing so.

Conclusion

Exactly thirty years after first asking the question of *What Is Modern?*, as the final installment in the series WIMS finds the museum promoting a comfortable master narrative at a moment of historiographic transition to a sociopolitically situated, critical modernity.

⁹⁴² Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?*, 1969, 68. The image is credited to Sibyl Moholy-Nagy but this probably refers to her husband's estate. The photo is most likely by the sculptor himself. A similar spatial ambiguity is found in the image of Richard Lippold's tensile sculpture *Variation Number 7: Full Moon* (1949-1950), 78. The image is by Soichi Sunami, Chief Fine Arts Photographer at the museum for three decades, beginning in 1930. See John Sunami, *Biographical Note and Personal Memoir on Soichi Sunami.*, Unpublished manuscript, MoMA Library (1975). His role at MoMA deserves further exploration.

In a final and telling example of an art/documentation paradox we return to the museum's garden, site of Despiau and Maillol figures beloved by Rindge, setting of the Adams photographs for the 1942 panel show,⁹⁴³ and the staging of the 1969 book cover. That August, artist Yayoi Kusama holds a *Grand [O]rgy to Awaken the Dead at MoMA*, (Figure 49) an unsanctioned action in which "[s]ix young women and two men stripped off their clothes and cavorted for 20 minutes among the bronze and stone nudes in the garden" and "struck poses parodying the statues."⁹⁴⁴ In a printed statement the artist states that "At the museum you can take off your clothes in good company," specifically the company of "Renoir, Maillol, Giacometti, and Picasso." The group gets as far as Maillol's bronze nude *The River* (1938-39, 1943, 1948)⁹⁴⁵ before agreeing to leave. The statement further elaborates Kusama's "Thoughts on the Mausoleum of Modern Art," which begin by posing the WIM series' question: "What's modern here?" Her answer is radically different from the museum's, however. Exiting the fountain that summer day, Kusama identifies a fundamental paradox of the series and MoMA as a whole: institutionalization of a dynamic movement:

What's modern here? I don't see it.
 Van Gogh, Cezanne, these other ghosts, all are dead or dying.
 While the dead show dead art, living artists die.
 Fame and reputations are sold across the counter...
 Diamonds for grand dames attending their funeral.
 MOMA is political, a show place for vanity...
 No life stirs in empty rooms where DON'T TOUCH is the rule...

⁹⁴³ For a photograph of Lipchitz's *Figure* supplied by Adams see the Painting and Sculpture Department Object File.

⁹⁴⁴ "Naked Performers Burlesque Bronze Nudes at Museum," *New York Times*, August 25, 1969.

⁹⁴⁵ MoMA, "Aristide Maillol. *The River* (1938–1948)", moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81798 (accessed January 21, 2012).

But the following year MoMA has the last word, beginning a new cycle of canonizing the avant-garde. This is found in the 1970 *Information* exhibition curated by McShine, a landmark survey of conceptualism that signals the museum's first glimmer of institutional self-consciousness.⁹⁴⁶ In that spirit the catalog subverts assumptions about what an art museum publication should be, a genre that MoMA has helped to establish over the course of forty years. In a distinct departure from Wheeler's legacy, the heart of the catalog is composed of a page by each artist in the show, limited to black ink on white stock of uniform size. Even more telling, however, is the multi-page photomontage at the book's conclusion, presumably assembled by museum staff: one full page reprints a newspaper account of Kusama's event, appropriating it into institutional history. As such it demonstrates the fundamental contradiction of institutionalizing the radical.

In their survey history *Art Since 1900*, mentioned in this study's introduction as an exemplar of self-aware historiography, Foster et al confirm that Americans tend to learn about provocative art the ultimately conservative museum context:

A persistent paradox of advanced art in the United States is located [in institutions such as MoMA]; its very reception often occurred within museum settings, and in this sense it was often already institutional.⁹⁴⁷

By bringing Kusama's intervention out of the garden and into a sanctioned MoMA publication, the museum begins a new cycle of institutionalizing "art in our time."

⁹⁴⁶ Critical reception, especially regarding institutional reflexivity, is mixed. For a compilation of reviews see PI, II.A.441-442.

⁹⁴⁷ Foster and others, 2004, 221.

CHAPTER 6. WHAT WASN'T MODERN?

In some collection areas the *What Is Modern?* question is never posed. A simple reason is that most of these curatorial departments are founded after CE's mid-century heyday: Prints (formal collecting begins in the 1940s, with the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books named in 1969),⁹⁴⁸ Drawings (1971), and Media (video collecting begins in the 1970s, the Department of Film and Media is formally established in 1994, and the Department of Media is founded in 2006).⁹⁴⁹ An exception concerns theater arts. A department on the subject bearing various names is in place from 1944 to 1948,⁹⁵⁰ and it is an active CE topic, but there is no evidence that a WIM is considered. Film, prints, and drawings are briefly considered here. These absences put the manifest WIMs in perspective and further support the argument that books and circulating exhibitions are just one component of MoMA's wide-ranging promulgation strategy.

Film

In the realm of film, to this day screenings are quite simply the museum's most effective means for promoting motion pictures as an art form. Indeed, the department is founded in 1935 as the Film *Library*,⁹⁵¹ reflecting its emphasis on dissemination, and

⁹⁴⁸ Deborah Wye, *Artists & Prints: Masterworks from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MoMA, 2004), 8–9.

⁹⁴⁹ MoMA, "Museum of Modern Art Creates New Curatorial Department", October 2, 2006, press.moma.org/images/press/press_release_archive/Media.pdf (accessed September 4, 2011).

⁹⁵⁰ Dance Archives Finding Aid. MoMA Archives, NY. moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/DanceArchivesf.

⁹⁵¹ Wasson, 2005, 107.

anecdotally, even now many memberships are purchased for free admission to all films. As Haidee Wasson attests in her thorough history of the department, the innovative and far-reaching program aggressively screens and distributes landmark works of the already popular modern medium.⁹⁵² In the program's early days, however, if the appeal of film is self-evident to the general American public, that public is only gradually convinced of film as art. To that end, the Film Library's first curator Iris Barry supplements screenings with printed commentary.⁹⁵³ This is actually the reverse of the general WIM strategy, in which interpretive material is used to encourage direct encounter with art. Instead, direct encounter with film is infused with art-oriented interpretive material. That the local and circulating programs remain popular even into the broadband era attests to the program's success.

Prints

Today's Prints and Illustrated Books Department emerges gradually, from some of MoMA's earliest acquisitions to a distinct department in 1969.⁹⁵⁴ Looking at its outreach methods, it is clear that by practice if not plan, direct encounter remains the preferred promotional strategy. Hands-on access, for example, is built into the idea of the Print Room organized by MoMA founder Abby Aldrich Rockefeller in 1949.⁹⁵⁵ According to Barr, Rockefeller believed that because prints are

⁹⁵² Ibid.

⁹⁵³ Iris Barry and Jay Leyda, *Film Notes: Being the Program Notes for the Film Library's Circulating Programs* (New York: MoMA, 1940).

⁹⁵⁴ Wye, 2004, 8–9.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 8.

available on a democratic scale, [they] should hold a place of special importance in a museum concerned with encouraging the widespread collecting of original works of art.⁹⁵⁶

This “democratic” idea carries through to the present in the form of a Print Study Center,⁹⁵⁷ which organizes viewings for individuals and groups.

The closest thing to a print WIM is a 1997 brochure, web site,⁹⁵⁸ and small collection show titled *What is a Print?* (MoMA 1885, 2001). The color brochure, still available in the galleries, is devoted to technical explanations of woodcut, etching, lithography, and screen printing, each illustrated with an example. In terms of ideology, however, the brochure makes no attempt to ask *what is a modern print?*

What Is Modern Drawing? (WIMDr) Unpublished Book, 1944

For drawings, a WIM is attempted but never realized. Its development and decline touches on series themes of “high” curatorial ambitions in relation to “low” educational priorities as well as debate about the relative social utility of the endeavor.

In 1944 historian and critic John Rewald guest-curates a survey exhibition at MoMA titled *Modern Drawings* (MoMA 252, 1944; CE 1944–1945, 8 venues; CE with alternate title 1944–1946, 15 venues). Wheeler, who writes a number of MoMA books, serves as the catalog’s lead author. Two days after the opening, he reminds Rewald of a prior agreement:

Inasmuch as you were obligated to do so much research on the Drawings exhibition and unable to complete the writing for the *What Is Modern Drawing* booklet, I have arranged for you to continue in our employ...until April 1. This I am

⁹⁵⁶ Quoted in *What is a Print?*, (New York: MoMA, 1997).

⁹⁵⁷ moma.org/learn/resources/study_centers

⁹⁵⁸ Starr Figura, "What is a Print?", MoMA, moma.org/interactives/projects/2001/whatisaprint (accessed March 1, 2011).

sure will give you plenty of time to write the text which will accompany the photographs in this publication. I hope you will be able to develop an outline of both photographs and text... so that we can proceed on a definitive version.⁹⁵⁹

Apparently Rewald misses the deadline and receives a definitive two-week extension to

complete your work on "*What Is Modern Drawing?*" I am sorry that our budget for this small book will not permit any further salary outlay. At the conclusion of this period, therefore, I shall try to find time to complete the integration and editing of the book as a whole, and I hope to have the benefit of your further counsel and assistance in so doing.⁹⁶⁰

A manuscript is produced, but its whereabouts are unknown. An undated note in Wheeler's files places it in an elusive "dark red folder between file & wall of office."⁹⁶¹

To infer the content, evidence is limited to the exhibition catalog and several administrative documents. The catalog evokes WIM in the use of easily grasped categories and generalist prose. Had other WIM books served as a model, the WIMDr manuscript might have also echoed its organization of modernity into a by then well-established narrative of nineteenth and early-twentieth century movements that have in common the rejection of representational conventions. In this construct, modern drawing

embraces several distinct movements, standpoints in opposition and rival predilections of thought and emotion and technique: expressionism, abstraction, surrealism...to name the more obvious...[The artists] all refused to submit to the traditions of the academies in which they had their esthetic education....⁹⁶²

In the absence of the manuscript or other correspondence, several humble photo requisition forms also suggest the content. These reference images for the prospective

⁹⁵⁹ MW, II.107. Wheeler to Rewald, February 18, 1944.

⁹⁶⁰ MW, II.107. Wheeler to Rewald, April 7, 1944.

⁹⁶¹ REG 252 includes a longhand manuscript in a dark red notebook, but it is for the exhibition catalog and is most likely by Wheeler. Rewald's papers at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. are sealed until 2044.

⁹⁶² Monroe Wheeler and John Rewald, *Modern Drawings* (New York: MoMA, 1944), 10–1.

booklet are ordered under Wheeler's auspices before and just after Rewald's final deadline. Among the otherwise conservative works one finds a curious listing for "Disney."⁹⁶³ The order specifies a "print," which means a copy print from a file negative. Are the authors considering an animation drawing for WIMDr? The name may refer to Disney as a collector (he becomes a MoMA trustee that year) but this is doubtful because all the other photo requisitions are indicated by artist name, with only a few mentioning the owner at all. Ron Magliozzi of the Film Department's Special Collections reports that there could be animation art in the museum by that point, but the absence of documentation precludes confirmation. He also notes that a Disney film program screens at MoMA that April,⁹⁶⁴ a series that could conceivably influence the authors. These scenarios are plausible but unlikely when compared to the *Modern Drawing* checklists, however.⁹⁶⁵ Had a Disney drawing actually been considered and had the book come to fruition, it would be the WIM series' only visual example of popular media imagery—and a rhetorically skillful one at that.

Why is the project abandoned? One possibility is that he isn't interested in popularization relative to high-prestige projects. For comparison, at the time of *Modern Drawings* he is involved in at least three other high-level publications, including catalogues raisonnés and compilations of artists' letters.⁹⁶⁶ Moreover, his major work *The History of Impressionism* (1946),⁹⁶⁷ is most likely in process then. One may also

⁹⁶³ MW, II.107. Requisitions dated March 31, April 5, 25, and 26, 1944.

⁹⁶⁴ Personal communication. Ron Magliozzi to author. January 31, 2011.

⁹⁶⁵ Numerous lists indicate the selection process. On the other hand, inclusion of a Dali's *Harpo Marx* (1937) in the exhibition can also be considered a nod to popularism.

⁹⁶⁶ See the union library catalog Worldcat.org.

⁹⁶⁷ John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism* (New York: MoMA, 1946).

speculate that as a MoMA publication, Wheeler anticipates the Impressionism book's greater prestige and marketing value, and as a result, prioritizes it.⁹⁶⁸

A subtlety of Rewald's hire is noted briefly here, for it touches on a WIM tension between social utility and aesthetics (seen previously in the WISMAs): how does the museum define popularization in the midst of world war?

Rewald is clearly a figure conscious of fascism's effects. Berlin born, his (Jewish) family leaves Germany in 1933. Rewald studies in Germany and then completes a dissertation at the Sorbonne in 1936. In 1939 he is interned, in France, as an enemy alien and in 1941 he emigrates to the U.S.⁹⁶⁹

This it is ironic that to secure Rewald's services, Wheeler must convince the U.S. Army to relieve him of translation duties. To this end the publisher queries Colonel L. E. Norris of the War Department Translation Section regarding "a very important educational project."⁹⁷⁰ To which Norris replies:

Consider the fact that the work Mr. Rewald is now doing is of direct assistance in the prosecution of the War...Can you say that...a book on twentieth-century drawings has any...bearing on the War one way or another. And do you not believe that every effort of every one of us should be directed towards [the war], even though it may mean the complete abandonment of other activities which help not at all.⁹⁷¹

Instead Wheeler directs every effort towards justifying the drawing project. His response to Norris invokes everything from President Roosevelt's blessing of the museum as a "citadel of civilization" to morale building:

⁹⁶⁸ MoMA publishes four editions and the book is translated into several languages.

⁹⁶⁹ Michael Kimmelman, "John Rewald, 81, Expert on Art of Post-Impressionist Period, Dies," *New York Times*, no. February 3 (1994).
nytimes.com/1994/02/03/obituaries/john-rewald-81-expert-on-art-of-post-imp-ressionist-period-dies.html?scp=1&sq=john rewald&st=cse (accessed January 8, 2012).

⁹⁷⁰ REG 252. Wheeler to Colonel L. E. Norris, October 21, 1943.

⁹⁷¹ REG 252. Norris to Wheeler, October 22, 1943.

the few exhibitions...which are not upon war subjects are designed to provide mental refreshment and relaxation which are so essential to both the armed forces and the civilian population in these times.⁹⁷²

Touting educational value, he continues, “The book which Mr. Rewald will prepare will be used as a text book in at least 2000 schools which regularly acquire our publications.”⁹⁷³ Though the “text book” Wheeler invokes is most likely the exhibition catalog, it is possible that he may also have WIMDr in mind.

Norris remains unimpressed—but relents:

As a military man, I must naturally consider military things or activities directly connected with training or fighting of more importance than the auxiliary services of morale building or recreation...I cannot say that I have changed my opinions. However, Mr. Rewald is doing his best to find a replacement for himself....[so] I will be able to release him....⁹⁷⁴

As discussed previously, MoMA emphatically supports the war.⁹⁷⁵ But in this instance, Wheeler prioritizes an art book over army books. While it is true that more people can translate French than write an exhibition catalog, the degree to which Wheeler uses popular art education to justify the project is striking. Ironically, Norris represents the very population that WIM seeks to win over. While MoMA wins the battle for Rewald, it loses at least one heart and mind in the process.

⁹⁷² REG 252. Wheeler to Norris, October 25, 1943.

⁹⁷³ REG 252. Wheeler to Norris, October 25, 1943.

⁹⁷⁴ REG 252. Norris to Wheeler. October 27, 1943.

⁹⁷⁵ See in particular *The Museum and the War*.

CONCLUSION: WHAT WAS *WHAT IS MODERN?*

As described in Chapter 2, in 1944 MoMA founding director Alfred Barr posits a “pragmatic rhetoric” for popularizing modern art, one that balances the “effective” and the “true.”⁹⁷⁶ In that spirit, this dissertation seeks to be an effective argument for complex truths about MoMA’s popularization attempts. This conclusion summarizes the arguments by chapter and then by key theme, ending with areas for further inquiry into the ongoing question of *What Is Modern?*

Each chapter establishes how, over the course of three decades, participants in the series develop numerous, media-savvy forms for popularizing modern art, architecture, and design to a persistently skeptical American public, at the same time wrestling internally with exactly the questions of modernity answered with such apparent confidence in the WIM manifestations. For this reason, the story of WIM is deeply interrelated with MoMA’s institutional trajectory in this same period (1938–1969), an arc of legitimization, consolidation, and almost—but not quite—self-reflection. Each chapter’s investigation of a WIM subject supports this argument and leads to the conclusion that in spreading the word of modernism, the overarching shortcoming of the series is MoMA’s crucial failure to critically examine the very idea of asking *What Is Modern?* within and between departments.

A review of the series’ chronological development shows how each subject corresponds to a core issue confronting the museum as a whole. Chapter 1 investigates a panel show (1938) and book (1942) on the subject of *What Is Modern Architecture?* In them, curators John McAndrew and Elizabeth Mock’s confident assertions regarding

⁹⁷⁶ Barr Jr., 207.

International Style principles overlay more nuanced, socially-oriented views about the future of U. S. modern architecture. The issue is taken a step further in a proposed 1955 book revision, in which a manuscript by historian and critic Vincent Scully is “scotched,” most likely for complicating the International Style ethos. These questions are addressed again in Arthur Drexler’s 1962 revision of the show, which evinces a curator trying to reconcile International Style ideals with two decades of modern architecture’s successes and failures. Analysis of Drexler’s later exhibition *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (1979), makes a case for how these subtexts eventually surface in that show, leading to his “postmodern turn.”

Next, the gestation, reception, and revision of Alfred Barr’s long-lived *What Is Modern Painting?* (1943–1988) and precursors (1927–1934) are shown to track closely with the establishment of the museum’s modernist master narrative. The process reveals complexities and contradictions inherent to theorizing modernism, in particular the attempt to reconcile reproduction and original, publication and exhibition, interpretation and direct encounter, as well as subjectivity and sociopolitical concerns in relation to the notion of universal visual language and timeless truths. These complex intersections recur throughout WIMP and are most evident in their absence, specifically the lack of significant updates to the book after 1966. In this way, Barr fails to re-evaluate his own master narrative in light of emerging critical attitudes.

In the immediate postwar period, curator and photographer Edward Steichen attempts to address *What Is Modern Photography* in a symposium (1950) and unrealized book (1951). Examining the process in Chapter 3 reveals a struggle to find an integrated curatorial approach to the medium, one that makes sense for a spectrum of practice ranging from technical virtuosity to self-expression for its own sake, and especially from autonomous artwork to instrumental, mass media product. Dissection of several manuscripts shows how Steichen and colleagues confront but can’t resolve

these paradoxical aspects of photographic practice within the WIM framework. Drafts show how the participants seek to position photography as an art form capable of expressing transcendent truth, yet they have difficulty reconciling this with its instrumental role in WIM. The endeavor brings the issue close to the surface, but the dissonance it provokes contributes to breakdown of the project. This further supports the argument that in WIMPh as in the series as a whole, those involved never achieve full critical awareness of these key issues.

At the same mid-century moment, in the books *What Is Modern Design?* (1950) and *What Is Interior Design?* (1953), author and curator Edgar Kaufmann leverages the ostensibly user-friendly WIM form into a polemical rejection of MoMA's own Machine Art and International Style dogma, arguing instead for a "mitigated" modernism that integrates eclecticism into the pursuit of human comfort. Chapter 4 discusses these as contrasts to the approach of colleague Philip Johnson, which emphasizes German rationalism and the primacy of Mies van der Rohe, while Kaufmann originates modern design in the British Arts and Crafts movement and Viennese decorative arts, culminating in Scandinavian modernism and the oeuvre of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Finally, as one of the earliest and the last of the WIM manifestations, a *What Is Modern Sculpture?* slide talk (1944) and book (1969) reveal a consistently problematic approach to an origin story for modern sculpture. Confirming the uncritical nature of the series, the two versions make curious use of the long history of three-dimensional form, often contradicting the museum's own rhetoric about modern art as a break from the deep past. This is made clear by examining the shortcomings of both versions' strictly formal interpretations, in particular the perpetuation of questionable assumptions regarding classical sculpture and indigenous material culture of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. The 1969 book in particular represents a disappointing end to the series, for at the very moment of publishing the most self-satisfied WIM, an emerging critical

consensus forces the museum to realize that asking *What Is Modern?* is not a neutral question.

The final chapter of this study puts the manifest WIMs in context with curatorial areas in which the question is never posed, never realized, or where popularization efforts take other form. The unrealized *What Is Modern Drawing?* book (1944) shows MoMA's publisher Monroe Wheeler making choices about the appropriate wartime role for the museum and curatorial staff. With film and prints, the departments develop popularization strategies based upon direct encounter, supporting the argument that during this period the WIM series is only one of several means by which MoMA seeks to make modernism plausible to a general audience.

Several key themes recur throughout the thirty-year project, further supporting the argument that the series is integral to fundamental institutional debate about the nature of modernism. These are summarized here, with an example how each surfaces in the series.

One theme concerns interdepartmental dynamics. This study shows how education and publication programs constitute vital but largely unexamined parts of the museum's development, especially in the form of the trailblazing Circulating Exhibitions program. Moreover, scholarship on MoMA exhibitions tends to be auteurist, positioning curators as autonomous actors, but WIM demonstrates that in fact most efforts are strongly collaborative. This account consistently foregrounds the influence of underexamined museum figures such as publisher and exhibitions director Monroe Wheeler and Circulating Exhibitions director Elodie Courter.

One finds a related dynamic between departments regarding curatorial balance between high-level discourse and popular appeal in the drive to legitimize modernism. An instance of this is revealed in the WIMPh book attempt, with multiple actors striving to integrate multiple pedagogical positions, seeking common ground between notions of

photography as mass media, as a means of self-expression, and as a technological phenomenon claimed for modernism. Finally, the evidence of collaboration brings to light the role of external influences upon project development, especially the role of feedback from viewers, readers, and reviewers.

Yet the institutional culture is equally remarkable for the absence of attempts to reconcile interdepartmental ideas about *What Is Modern*. Despite Barr's vision of a multidisciplinary museum, over the thirty-year duration of the WIM project, departmental perspectives become in fact less unified. It's significant that a rare example of integration is also a didactic one. Mentioned here only in passing, Goldwater and d'Harnoncourt's totalizing book and exhibition *Modern Art in Your Life*⁹⁷⁷ (1949) is one of the museum's few attempts to find synchronic consensus across departments, even as it reveals disjunctions within sub-disciplines and embodies all the contradictions of the WIM series.

The series is also remarkable for mobilizing mass media communications techniques, to the point of eliding marketing and focus-group techniques with scholarship. These methods include conventional book and magazine production techniques but also strategic use of nationwide print distribution, press publicity, color slides, multimedia advertising, installation design, audience surveys, and even radio broadcasts. To this end I examine the use of photography throughout the series as an index of this vital and contradictory component of the museum's communication strategies.

This is seen especially in the use of photographic reproductions as proxies for auratic original artworks. Does art have to be encountered directly in order to be understood? What are the parameters of "understanding?" Reproductions enable

⁹⁷⁷ Goldwater and d'Harnoncourt, *Modern Art in Your Life*, 1949.

distribution of the modernist message far beyond the museum's walls, but examination of their use in the series reveals problematic implications of doing so. This surfaces in virtually every WIM context, from early distribution and sale of reproductions to circulation of entire installations based upon them. One especially strong example is *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (1944, 1969), in which ostensibly neutral documentation of three-dimensional forms, as with black and white photography, produces subtle rhetorical effects. Another is the commodification of reproductions related to the exhibitions, a skillful means to disseminate modern art *and* generate revenue.

A related issue brought to light by this study is the function of reproductions outside the gallery context, a major and previously unexamined aspect of MoMA exhibitions. Just one effect is that these carefully organized panels, portfolios, and slides enable local participants to be active agents in the interpretation and dissemination of modernism. This is demonstrated by the integration of shows such as WIMP into local events and unusual venues.

The study also closely examines rhetorical strategies permeating the series, revealing subtleties of the balance between Barr's notions of "effective" and "true." The most frequent (and problematic) is the use of visual comparisons. WIMS reveals this with dubious comparisons between pre-modern and modern sculpture. In contradiction to the idea of modern art as a break from the deep past, the WIMS invoke classical and primordial forms as a means to legitimize modern sculpture. In the process, both the early and late WIMS perpetuate dubious assumptions about both western classical forms and indigenous material culture of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas.

In conclusion, this dissertation lays the groundwork for several areas of further inquiry. First, what is the relevance of WIM to the larger discourse of institutional critique? For example, how might one assess MoMA's curatorial and educational self-awareness after 1969? As described in Chapter 6 regarding curator Kynaston McShine's

1970 *Information* show, MoMA's first attempt to make sense of conceptual art and institutional critique is, problematically, sanctioned by the institution being critiqued. This is reinforced when McShine returns to the topic thirty years later in the largely historical 1999 exhibition *The Museum as Muse*.⁹⁷⁸ Taking this a step further, the museum commissions works by artists known for interrogating art institutions, including Michael Asher, Janet Cardiff, and Fred Wilson.⁹⁷⁹ Since then, MoMA is among many other museums (including ethnographic ones) to demonstrate mainstreaming of institutional critique. Given these works' sanctioned status, how should they be evaluated?

Another area of interest concerns the pervasiveness of rhetorical visual comparisons in WIM as an index of their longstanding role in art historiography. Further study would be informed by contemporary developments in a number of disciplines, from semiotics to the cognitive sciences. Just one aspect of the topic concerns the perennial art historical question of universal visual language versus culture-bound subjectivity—how does contemporary scientific thinking inform this issue?

Related to this, to what degree is the series influenced by persuasive techniques developed outside of the art museum context? As discussed in Chapter 4 regarding a 1940s forum on exhibition strategies, MoMA and other cultural institutions incorporated persuasive communication techniques drawn from commercial, military, and government realms. Further investigation of these interrelationships would most likely reveal more connections than commonly assumed.

⁹⁷⁸ Kynaston McShine, *Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: MoMA, 1999).

⁹⁷⁹ Michael Asher, *Painting and Sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art: Catalog of Deaccessions, 1929 through 1998* (New York: MoMA, 1999); Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, "MoMA Walk, 1999", cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/moma.html (accessed September 4, 2011); Fred Wilson, "Road to Victory, 1999", moma.org/interactives/projects/1999/wilson/ (accessed September 4, 2011).

Finally, much can be learned from further study of offsite MoMA installations. For example, how do non-auratic exhibition materials read in local, informal installations? How does incorporation of the shows into local events and unconventional spaces inflect their reception? These questions would be further informed by examining CEs that incorporate sample materials and objects. For example, the 1944 CE *Introduction to Modern Sculpture* is the only show considered here (Chapter 5) to use such materials. A similar, more fully documented show is *What is Good Design?* (MoMA 160; CE 1942-1945, 17 venues), which engenders participation to the degree that several objects are “acquired” (stolen) by viewers—a consumer model of participation.

The persistence of these themes across the WIM spectrum demonstrates that even “simple” popularization efforts are enmeshed with larger issues regarding modernism and art institutions as a whole. At the same time, evidence shows a consistent lack of institutional awareness of contradictions inherent in the endeavor.

In sum, this study demonstrates that like no other MoMA program, the *What Is Modern?* series constitutes a thirty-year endeavor to popularize a particular view of modernism even as that view changed over time. This suggests one last question: is there a way to assess influence of the series upon general American perceptions of modernism? In 1926, preparing to teach his first course on modern art at Wellesley, Barr faces a similar question: how do students understand the modern movement? To find out, he creates a questionnaire, reprinted in *Vanity Fair* the following year.⁹⁸⁰ If it was republished today in a popular media outlet, what could be learned about how modernism is generally understood in our time?

⁹⁸⁰ Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Modern Art Questionnaire,” *Vanity Fair* 28, no. August (1927): 85, 96, 8. Reprinted in Barr Jr., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, 1986. 56–61. Only one student passes: future Architecture and Design Curator Elizabeth Fantl.

Evidence of reception discussed throughout this study indicates a consistently “Questioning Public,”⁹⁸¹ one that to this day embraces debate and resists dogmatic modernism. For this reason the last word in this study goes to the understated force behind the series, Monroe Wheeler. Looking back in 1979, his reflection upon the museum’s promulgation efforts resonates with the WIM project:

To this day, despite 50 years of Alfred’s instruction, visitors to the museum prefer one another’s opinion even to his.⁹⁸²

⁹⁸¹ Olson, Seckler, and Chanin.

⁹⁸² Monroe Wheeler, “I Remember MoMA,” *Artnews* 78, no. October (1979): 127.

ILLUSTRATIONS

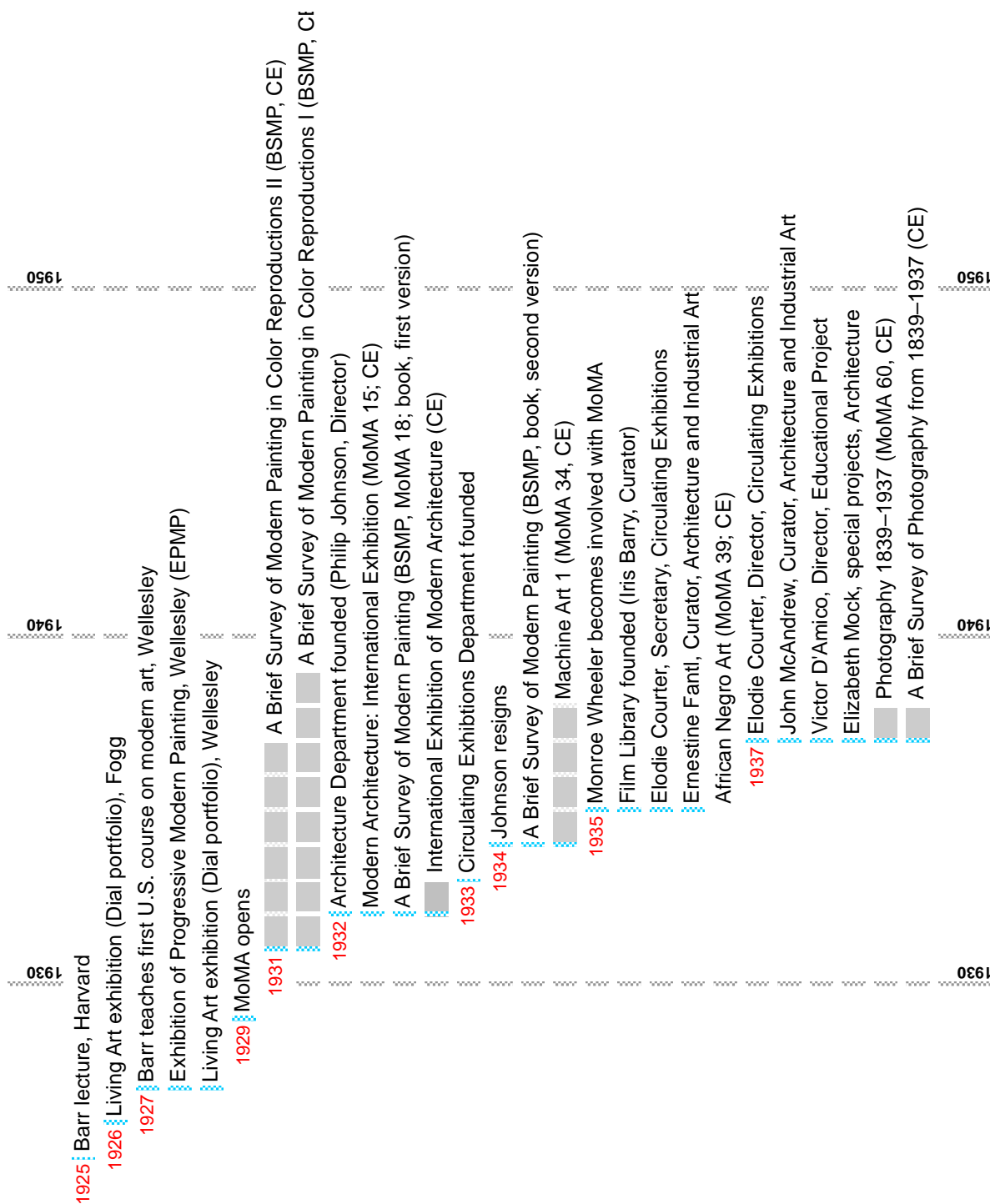


Figure 1. *What Is Modern?* chronology, 1925–1937.

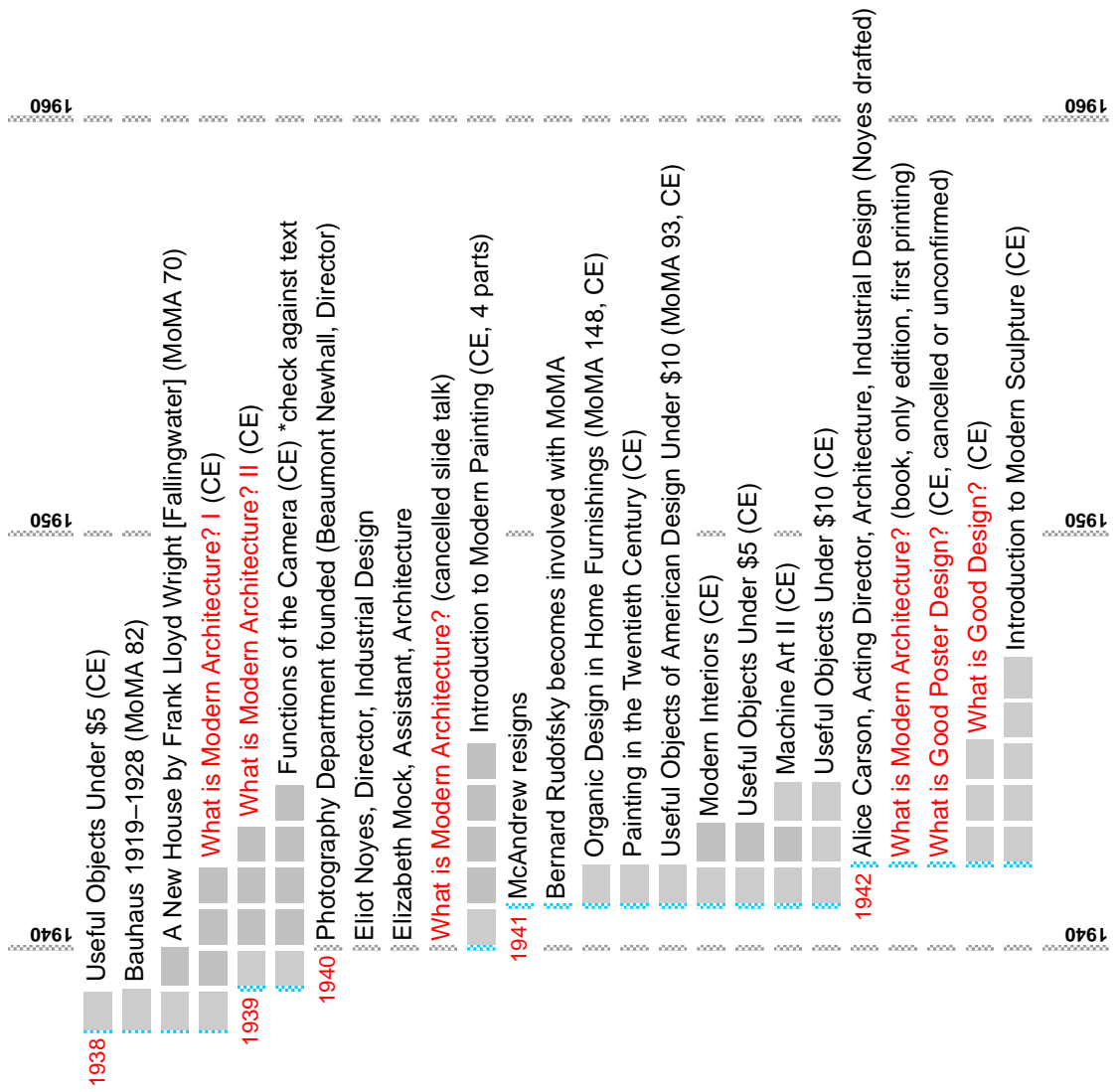


Figure 2. *What Is Modern?* chronology, 1938–1942.

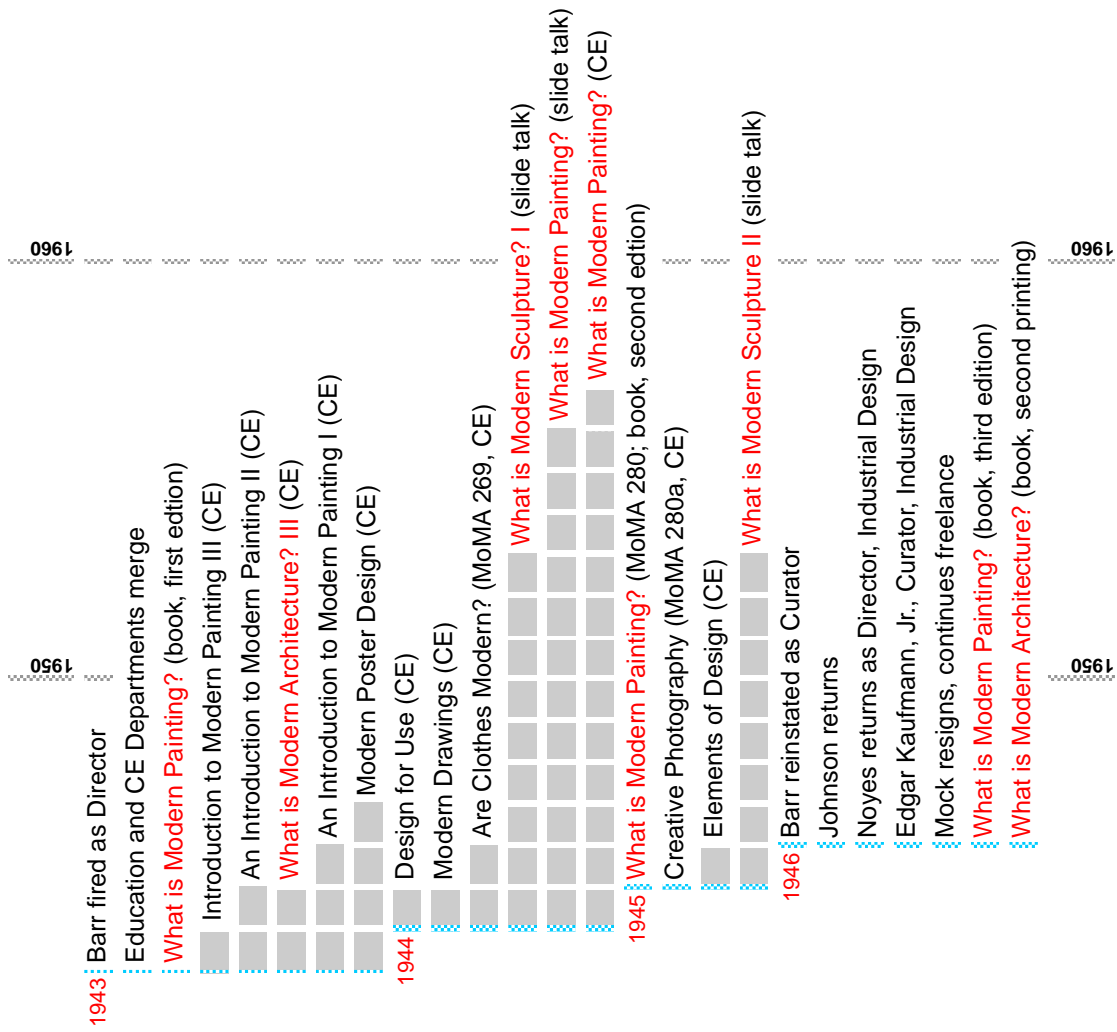


Figure 3. *What Is Modern?* chronology, 1943–1946.

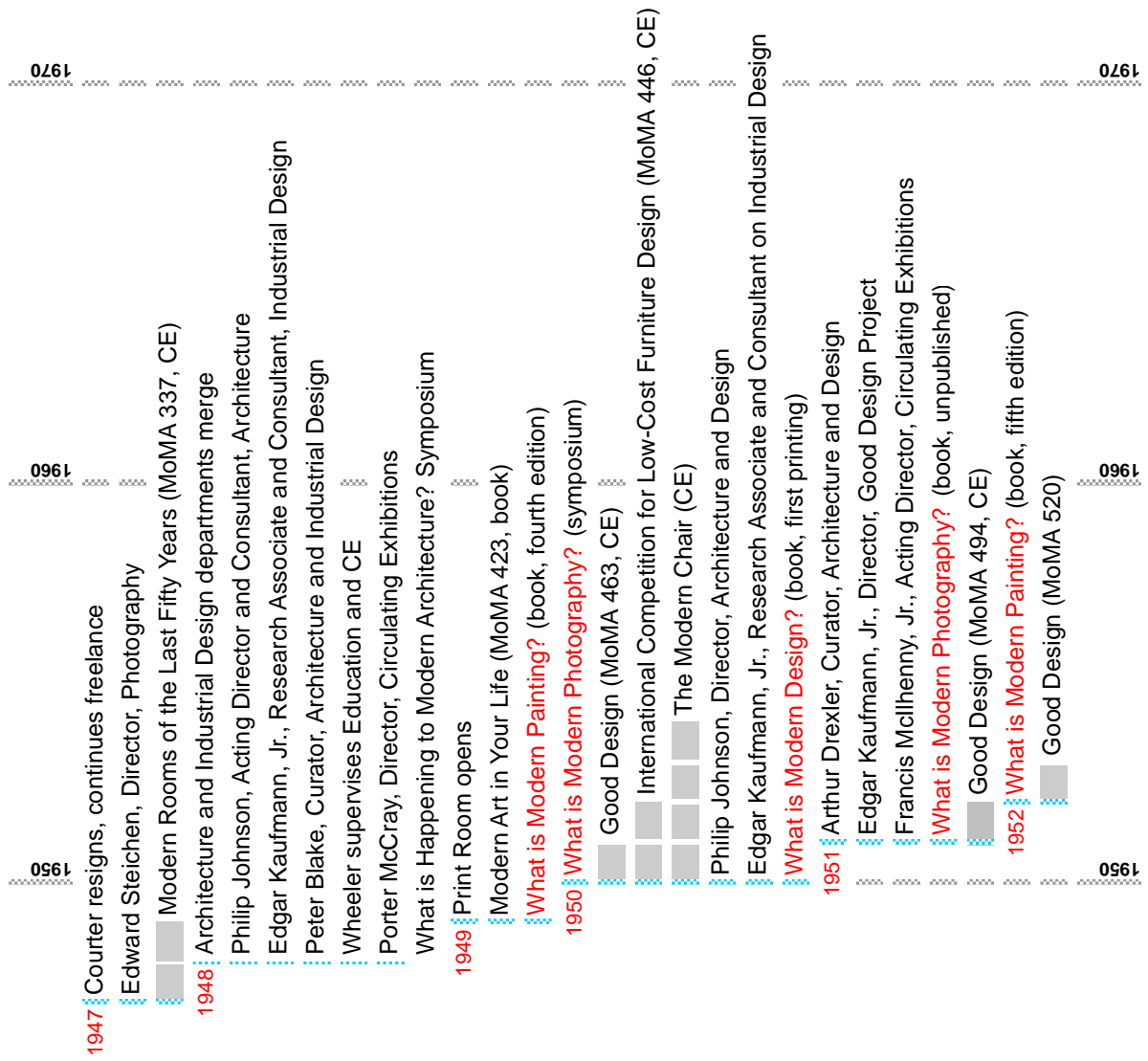


Figure 4. *What Is Modern?* chronology, 1947–1952.

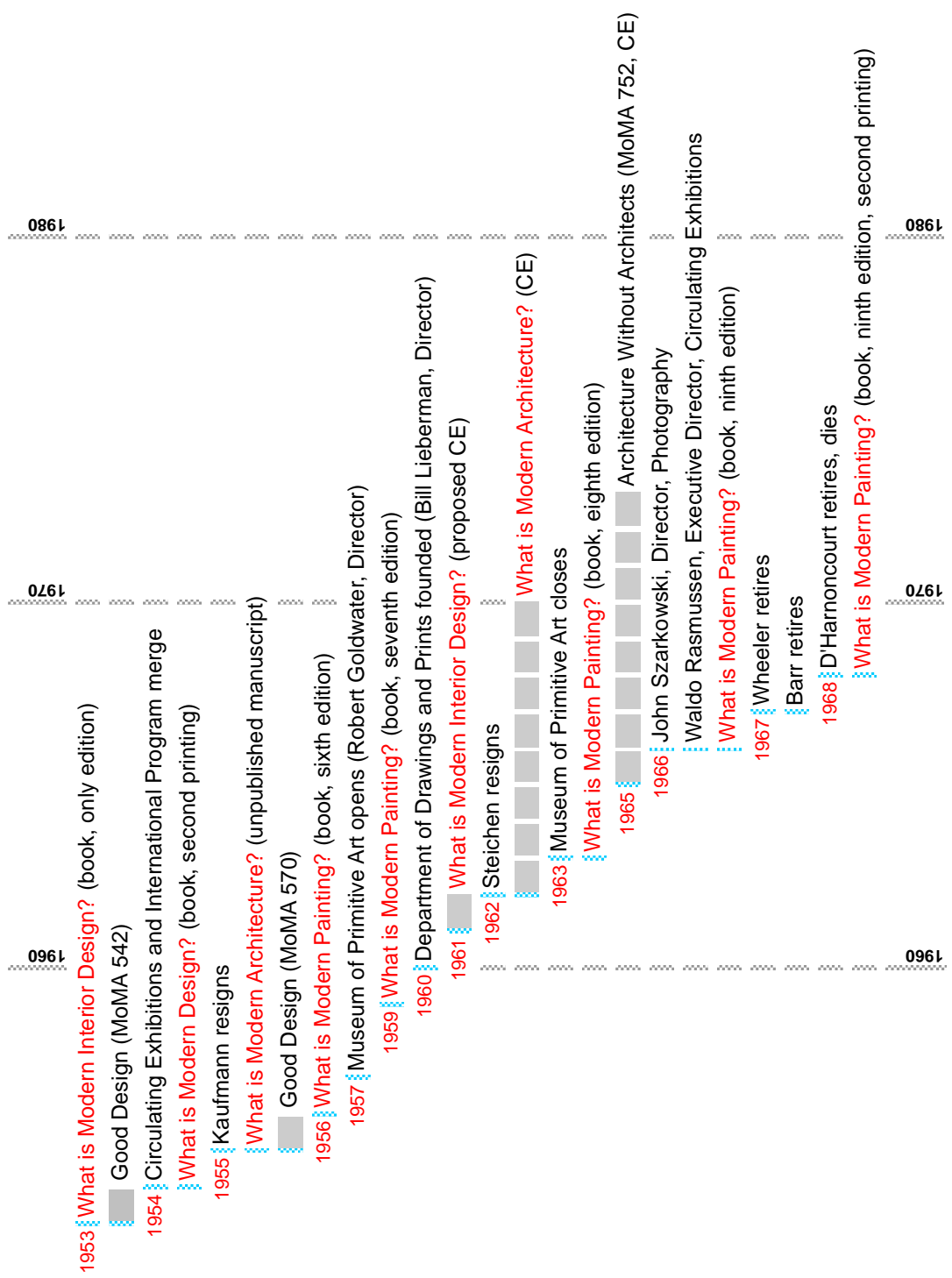


Figure 5. *What Is Modern?* chronology, 1953–1968.

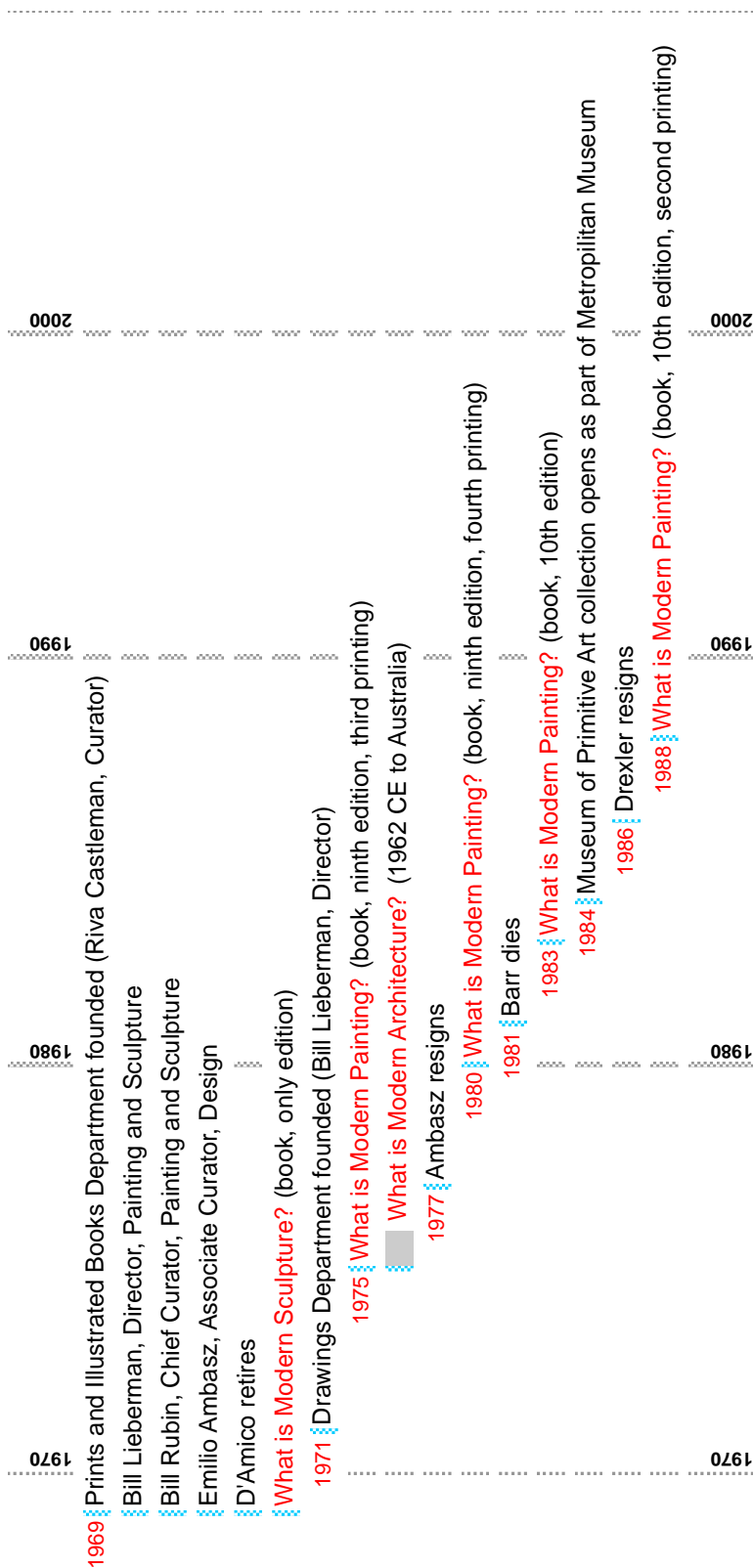


Figure 6. *What Is Modern?* chronology, 1969–1988.

Figure 7. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1938). Tugendhat House panel.

Figure 8. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1942). Cover.

Figure 9. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1942). 4.

Figure 10. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1938). Penguin Pool inset panel.

Figure 11. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1938). Fallingwater panel.

Figure 12. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1942). Good/bad comparison. 8.

Figure 13. Robert Day. *New Yorker* (May 3, 1952). Untitled cartoon.

Figure 14. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1962). Title panel.

Figure 15. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (1962). Lovell/Eames panel.

Figure 16. *What Is Modern Architecture?* (July 24, 1962). Blueprint.

Figure 17. *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (1979). 124.

Figure 18. *What Is Modern Painting?*
(1943). Cover.

Figure 19. *What Is Modern Painting?*
(1946). Cover.

Figure 20. *What Is Modern Painting?*
(1984). Cover.

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Figure 21. *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936). Cover.

Figure 22. Barr “torpedo” diagrams of ideal permanent collection (1933, 1941).

Figure 23. *What Is Modern Painting?* Barr layouts for 1952 edition.

Figure 24. *What Is Modern Painting?* (1943). Stuart Davis reproductions. 5.

Figure 25. "Qué Es La Pintura Moderna?" in *Saber Ver* (1991). Stuart Davis reproductions. 7.

Figure 26. *What Is Modern Painting?* (1943). *Guernica* spread. 36.

Figure 27. *What Is Modern Painting?* (1946). *Guernica* spread. n.p. [40–41].

Figure 28. *What Is Modern Painting?* (1944).
Title panel.

Figure 29. *What Is Modern Painting?* (1944).
Panel 1. *Varieties of Expression*.

Figure 30. *What Is Modern Painting?* (1944).
Panel 13. *The Artist Fights*.

Figure 31. *What Is Modern Design?* (1950). Cover.

Figure 32. *What Is Modern Interior Design?* (1953). Cover.

Figure 33. *Modern Rooms of the Last 50 Years* (1946–1947). Installation photos.

Figure 34. *What Is Modern Interior Design?* (1953). Frontispiece and title page.

Figure 32. *What Is Modern Interior Design?* (1953). Harwell Hamilton Harris. Havens House (Berkeley, 1943). Photo by Man Ray. 27.

Figure 36. *What Is Modern Design?* (1950). 10-11.

Figure 37. *What Is Modern Design?* (1953). Coffee pots 1750 and 1950. 6.

Figure 38. *Design for Use* (1944).
Installation photo. Brancusi's *Bird in
Space* (1928) and propellers.

Figure 39. *What Is Modern Design?*
(1950). Brancusi's *Bird in Space* (1928),
knife, and propeller. 6.

Figure 40. *What Is Modern Interior Design?*
(1953). 8. Illustration from Edward Morse,
Japanese Homes and their Surroundings
(1885).

Figure 41. *What Is Modern Interior Design?*
(1953). Hans Makart studio (1860s). 30.

Figure 42. *Introduction to Modern Sculpture* circulating exhibition (1942-1947). Panel 3 sketch. *Class[ical]*. Indicates images of sculpture by Gerhard Marcks, Charles Despiau, Aristide Maillol, and "Greek."

Figure 43. Jacques Lipchitz. *Sailor with Guitar* (1914).

Figure 44. Walker Evans. *African Negro Art: Photographs* (1935). Plate 17. "Figure...French Sudan. Wood, 14 3/4 inches high. Collection Mme. Helena Rubinstein, New York."

Figure 45. *Modern Sculpture* teaching portfolio (1951). Introduction, with photographs by Walker Evans, Eliot Elisofon, and Herbert Matter, among others.

Figure 46. *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (1969).
Cover.

Figure 47. *What Is Modern Sculpture?* (1969).
Louise Bourgeois. *Quarantania, I* (1948-1953,
1981). 96.

Figure 48. *What Is Modern Sculpture?*
advertisement. *Revue des Beaux Arts* (1971),

Figure 49. Yayoi Kusama. *Orgy to Raise the
Dead* (1969). From *New York Daily News*.

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