All Consuming:
The Tiller-Effect and the Aesthetics of Americanization in Weimar Photography 1923-1933

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation will examine the social and political consequences of the intersection of Neue Sachlichkeit photography and *Amerikanismus* in late Weimar era Germany. The German term *Amerikanismus* refers to the lifestyle, ideals, and ideology associated with the so-called Americanization of the German economy. In 1923, in response to widespread hyperinflation in Germany, an Allied commission, initiated by Charles G. Dawes and a group of American bankers, was formed which would result in the August 1924 enactment of The Dawes Plan. This plan brought temporary stability to the post-WWI German economy by providing cash, loans, and new industrial techniques to stimulate efficiency and production. The frenzied growth of capitalism stimulated by this new American-German business alliance is responsible for a culture-wide association of capitalist efficiency (and all that it entails) with what was perceived as an American process, or the process of Americanization. This "importation" of Americanization coincided with an unprecedented proliferation of photography in the German illustrated press. Simultaneously, a "machine aesthetic," emphasizing industrialization and its products, referred to as Neue Sachlichkeit photography, was becoming ubiquitous. *Amerikanismus* is inseparable from this growing photographic, image-based culture of the commodity and is therefore more significant for an understanding of Neue

Sachlichkeit than has been previously understood. The reigning notion of this era as one of "machine age romanticism" will be contested and put into the context of advertising and the aesthetics of consumption. This dissertation seeks 1) to define the impact of Americanization upon Weimar photography; 2) to consider Siegfried Kracauer's writings about the "mass ornament" and how Taylorization manifested itself visually in the ubiquity of serialization as a photographic compositional device (referred to here as the Tiller-Effect due to the broad influence of the "American" precision dance format born of The Tiller Girls); 3) to contextualize Neue Sachlichkeit photographic projects as seen in the Werkbund's industrial design journal, *Die Form*, concentrating on the serial composition and its political implications; and finally 4) to consider the work of Bauhaus photography student, Elsa Thiemann, whose repetition of objects suggests the popularization of industrial serialization and the aesthetics of Americanization.

Acknowledgements

The word “engineer” was the artist’s mantra in Germany by the mid-1920s. It served to legitimate the artist as a modern hybrid who could avail himself of the new, industrial primacy. In my own family, the word “engineer” signaled all forms of legitimacy. To become an engineer was not necessarily a choice, but rather an assumption, even a Lutheran obligation. This “calling” makes sense to me today in a new way. From the vantage point of history and of visual culture the familial importance placed upon engineering becomes, in part, a reflection of the American and international emphasis placed upon industrial manufacturing during the early and mid-twentieth century.

As the only daughter in my immediate family and with three younger brothers, I experienced this calling as a gender-specific mantle, one that I *could choose*, but one that was not necessarily assumed for me. And yet, the *images* of engineering and industrial culture, and their *effects*, still had great impact. Family images circulated in the form of photographs, mechanical inventions, drawings and plans, child-rendered smokestacks, and visually charged oral histories of grandfathers in the factories of Pittsburgh’s industrial North Side and in the booming mills of Butler, Pennsylvania. Familial lore was usually attached to company names like H.J. Heinz, Westinghouse, Pullman Standard, Armco, and Spang & Company. These images, whether inherited as memories or experienced first-hand, included youthful inventions, heaps of slag, foundry picnics, discourse around mysterious objects such as ball bearings, and endless pot roasts served to fellow-engineers on white linen-covered card tables dutifully assembled by

engineering wives. Many a drive through the industrial landscape of Akron, Youngstown, and Pittsburgh was enlivened by optimistic manufacturing-sales-slogans playfully (while seriously) practiced upon wriggling, back-seat child-prospects. As a result, my interest in industrial imagery is a blend of my parents' own complicated inheritance, my grandfathers' loving, if remote, and powerful presences, and my grandmother's kitchen-table-refrigerator-art-making afternoons. Writing both respectfully and critically, it is to this history that I attribute my own interest in the subject at hand.

A substantial list of individuals to whom I owe great thanks has exponentially increased in size over the past two years as I have moved from New York to Savannah and toward the finish line. My dissertation advisor Geoffrey Batchen has been supportive and insightful from day one. His incisive photographic eye, focus on the big picture, and ever-inspiring feedback kept my writing on track. His breadth of knowledge, witty encouragement, and belief in my project has been absolutely crucial. I am also very grateful to Rose-Carol Washton Long who has been my most enduring connection to the Graduate Center since I worked for her as an office assistant in 1996. As my first E.O., my professor on multiple occasions, and my second dissertation advisor, her guidance and her facility with Weimar history have been invaluable. Joyce Rheuban's Cinema Studies seminars inspired the topic that lead to this dissertation. Her dedication to the primary research of Weimar issues, the pedagogical atmosphere of inquiry and discussion established in her seminars, and her course's emphasis upon feminist theory and primary research planted the seeds, especially for Chapter Three. Elspeth H. Brown's 2005 publication on the relationship between photography and industrial rationalization

refreshed my research and writing at a critical juncture. I am very thankful to her for the invaluable insights and suggestions for publication that she has provided for my work. Her feedback reflects the breadth of a highly dedicated scholar and I feel privileged to have worked with her on this project. I would also like to express thanks to Kevin Murphy, as Executive Officer, for his patience and encouragement with my progress.

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Patience and endurance with this dissertation has been sustained mightily by the support of my peers at the Graduate Center, just a few of whom include: Marianne Eggler, Todd Magreta, Rachel Snow, Greg Williams, and Vanessa Rocco. I especially thank Cary Levine and Philip Glahn for reading and editing parts of my work and for their friendship, intellectual banter, and co-experiencing (of seminars, exams, dissertations *and* parenting) throughout this process that can only be called irreplaceable. I also owe great thanks to Lauren Frederick-Bowen and Sandylene Wakefield in the Art History Department of The Graduate Center, who have been GC friends since 1996, enduring my torturing them with repeated procedural questions, usually embedded in well-meaning humor intended to make the everyday administration a little more playful.

A number of dedicated librarians and archivists have been immensely generous. I wish to thank the following individuals and their institutions for support: Sabine Hartmann, Photo-Archivist of The Bauhaus Archive in Berlin introduced me to the work of Elsa Thiemann; Dr. Gabriele Toepser-Ziegert, Director, Institute for Newspaper Research (Institüt für Zeitungsforschung) in Dortmund and her assistant, Mr. Dieter Wenzel; Dr. Tanja Löhr-Michels and Susanne Braun of the Die Photographische Sammlung - SK Stiftung Kultur (The Photographic Collection, Foundation for Culture) in Cologne; Inka Schube, Curator at the Sprengel Museum in Hannover; Joseph Kurr at the Staatsbibliothek (State Library) of Berlin; Ute Eskildsen and Christina Buschmann at the Folkwang Museum in Essen; Christiane Staehl at the Alfred Ehrhardt-Stiftung; Frank Boscoe in Albany, New York; Kevin Madill, Assistant Librarian at The Museum of Modern Art; Special Collections Librarian Wayne Furman and Vincenzo Rutigliano in Art & Architecture at The New York Public Library; and Robin Miller and Elvira Sanchez in the Visual Resources Collection at The Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD).

I wish to express thanks to many of my former colleagues at Nassau Community College in Garden City, New York for their enduring support, especially Susan Kravitz, Marina Delaney, and Susan Dooley. I am also grateful for my current colleagues in The Art History Department at The Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) and for all of my energetic and engaging students, former, current, and future. It is my students that have made writing a dissertation while teaching full time since 2000 worth every effort!

Many friends have been supportive along the way, pushing me to finish at moments of lost interest and frustration. And for this I thank especially Micaela Dingle

Boscoe (for babysitting during conferences and dropping everything to join me on my research trip to Berlin), Jutta Müller for all of her helpful arrangements in Germany and for seventeen years of friendship and mutual love of art and its history, and Gregg Orifici for a passionate friendship and for prodding me toward the finish line by constantly asking if I was done yet, for years. My conversations with Monica Grandy over the years have inspired and sustained my work and provide a continuous source of hidden strength. I am also thankful to the following individuals for their varied generosities, new and enduring friendships, and selfless support during this dissertation process: Liz Sargent, Mary Nichols, Kristin Harward-Grant, Danielle Hughes Rose, Susan Falls, Pilar Guzmán, Sarah Gavlak, Susan Fuller, Simone Manwarring, Kelly Casey Dreher, and so many encouraging friends and neighbors in New York City and in the Baldwin Park neighborhood of Savannah, Georgia. Also, Ashley Cole, Elizabeth de Zepeda, and the teachers of Christchurch Children's School have given me the peace of mind to focus and for that I am extremely grateful.

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*** All Elsa Thiemann images in this chapter are Courtesy of The Bauhaus Archive-Museum of Design, Berlin**

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Chapter I

Introduction

This dissertation will examine the social and political consequences of the intersection of Neue Sachlichkeit photography and *Amerikanismus* in late Weimar era Germany.[1] In 1923, in the midst of widespread hyperinflation in Germany, an Allied commission, initiated by Charles G. Dawes and a group of American bankers, was formed which would result in the August 1924 enactment of The Dawes Plan. The Dawes Plan brought temporary stability to the post-WWI German economy by providing cash, loans, and new industrial techniques to stimulate efficiency and production. The frenzied growth of capitalism stimulated by this new American-German business alliance is responsible for a culture-wide association of capitalist efficiency (and all that it entails) with what was perceived as an American process, or the process of Americanization.[2] This period in Germany, 1923-1933, has often been referred to as the years of stabilization. Yet these years, while they may have seen some stabilization of the German currency, remain haunted by a spirit of crisis, a crisis that is economic, spiritual,

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[1] As will be discussed in this dissertation, a number of authors suggest the connection between Neue Sachlichkeit imagery and Americanization. For instance, Roland März writes that Neue Sachlichkeit was for the bourgeoisie and had capitalist and Americanist tendencies. See Roland März, ed., *Realismus und Sachlichkeit. Aspekte deutscher Kunst 1919-1933*, exhibition catalogue (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1974). The contribution of Dennis Crockett in *German Post-Expressionism: The Art of the Great Disorder, 1918-1924* (Univ. Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1999) will be discussed at length below.

[2] For further discussion of the association of capitalism and commercialization with America, see Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). The Dawes Plan and its stimulation of new American-German business alliances was partially responsible for the strong association in Germany of all things commercial with the United States, but also the fact that America offered an alternative to Russian Communism and was also free of inter-cultural predjudices that English or French capitalism models represented for Germans. As a result, hundreds of German engineers, industrialists, students, managers, and union leaders visited the United States in the mid to late 1920s. See Nolan, pp. 17-29.

and national in scope. The United States, perceived by Weimar Germans as both predator and protector, is the subtext of this crisis. The German term *Amerikanismus* refers to the lifestyle, ideals, and ideology associated with the so-called Americanization of the German economy. *Metalarbeiter-Zeitung* reported in its March 19, 1927 issue that Calvin Coolidge called Germany "the most Americanized land in the world."[3] This "importation" of Americanization coincided with an unprecedented proliferation of photography in the German illustrated press. By the mid-twenties a "machine aesthetic," emphasizing industrialization and its products, which was referred to as Neue Sachlichkeit photography, had become ubiquitous.[4] My thesis is that *Amerikanismus* is inseparable from this growing photographic, image-based culture of the commodity. I plan to point out that photography became one of the principal vehicles by which American values were transmitted and popularized abroad. Examining the impact of Americanization in Germany, along with the cross-pollination and popularization of the Neue Sachlichkeit photographic style, may prompt a re-view of the standard myth that America became the "capital" of the art world only after World War II. American capitalism was influencing European image production all along as Americanization took hold, perhaps with greatest force, in Germany. Yet just as this dissertation employs the

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[3] Nolan, pp. 146.

[4] The debate around Americanization is, of course, a European-wide phenomenon in the 1920s. It was generally referred to as *Amerikanismus* in the context of Germany and was debated more widely in Germany than in any other country at the time due to its close economic ties with the United States after WWI. Ford's autobiography, *My Life and Work*, sold over 200,000 copies in Germany alone after it was published in late 1923. See Mary Nolan's chapter "The Infatuation with Fordism" in *Vision of Modernity* for a full discussion of Ford's reception in Germany. Although ambivalently received, it was extremely popular, and "essential reading if one wanted to participate at any level in the debate about economic rationalization and Americanism." p. 35. Nolan notes that "over fifty books on American technology, economic prosperity, and mass consumption were published in the 1920s...[and] every serious business and engineering publication ran regular articles on American technology, labor policy and marketing" (Nolan, p. 4). The relationship of Americanization to Russia and to The Netherlands, as both countries were also grappling with the *America effect*, will be briefly addressed in Chapter Two of this dissertation as a factor at play during this period.

terms Americanization and Neue Sachlichkeit, it seeks to problematize such terminological assumptions. Taking a cue from Frederic J. Schwartz who writes: "[t]he history of art is no longer the history of styles," this dissertation seeks to disrupt the study of photography as a study of styles and broad assumptions.[5] Americanization and Neue Sachlichkeit will be viewed here as a construction, a German perception, which blankets a great deal of subtleties. The reigning notion of this era as one of "machine age romanticism" will be contested and put into the context of advertising and the aesthetics of consumption.

Embraced and opposed by both the political left and right, *Amerikanismus* was hotly debated by successive Weimar governments and in the German newspapers, popular magazines, art circles, and industrial and commercial trade journals during the 1920s and 1930s. Central to this dissertation is Siegfried Kracauer's theorization of the "mass ornament," as it was reflected in popular culture, and which he defined as an aesthetic, a "look," or a "process that began with the Tiller Girls" as so-called "products of American distraction factories," even though the Tiller Girls were not actually American in origin.[6] This process, or as he calls it, a "change in tastes," is predicated upon seriality, precision, organization, and rationalization, all qualities which were valued by a growing capitalist economy based upon Frederick Taylor's and Henry Ford's

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[5] Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and The History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 1.

[6] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (*Die Frankfurter Zeitung*, June 9-10, 1927), reprinted in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 75. The process of rationalization, in its rapid trickling down from the industrial sector into the domain of everyday life, resulted in an aesthetic preoccupation with serial repetition and was regularly associated with America. Kracauer does not directly address the term *Amerikanismus* but offers America as a point of origin, a country guilty of profit for its own sake resulting in an emptying out of meaning.

principles of efficiency in manufacturing.[7] This Americanized aesthetic, which I refer to as the Tiller-Effect, promulgated by the photographic image, was so ubiquitous beginning in 1923 that a closer examination of it and the cross-cultural factors contributing to its presence in art, commercial, and vernacular photography is therefore overdue.[8]

This introductory chapter will outline some of the questions and concerns elided by most discussions of Weimar era photography. I will address the question of why a study of the impact of Americanization on Weimar photography is warranted, a link that is mentioned as important in many texts of the era but never entirely defined.[9] I will provide a brief, revised historiography for the term Neue Sachlichkeit as it relates to photography and suggest that its link to the Americanization debates needs a more complex, contextualized, interdisciplinary reading. I plan to discuss many of the

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[7] Frederick Winslow Taylor, as the "father" of efficiency through rationalization in industry and business, has been written about extensively. His most influential book, *The Principles of Scientific Management,* was published first in 1911 and profoundly revolutionized labor practice internationally. A few key sources for further reading on Taylor and the impact of his ideas both on business and culture, see Martha Banta, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); and Elspeth Brown, *The Corporate Eye; Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Robert Kanigel, *The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency* (New York: Viking, 1997).

[8] I have chosen the year 1923 as a starting point, rather than 1918 or 1919, dates that represent the beginning of the Weimar Republic, as the year 1923 represents the height of German "hyperinflation" and the very beginning of the formulation of the 1924 Dawes Plan. It is also the same year that Felix Weil founded The Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in association with Frankfurt University. This same time period, roughly, also saw the initiation of the Deutscher Werkbund's trade journal *Die Form*, which I will discuss as important to the understanding of Neue Sachlichkeit photography and its promotion of the industrial sector. Thus, it is in the early to mid 1920s that I have chosen to begin this particular study of the impact of *Amerikanismus* upon photographic practice.

[9] The year 2005 saw a resurgence of interest in the topic of Americanization, including Victoria de Grazia's *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2005). One recent text, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* by Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005) briefly mentions the role of photography (pp. 117-119) and mentions that the topic is "drawing increased scholarly attention." (p. 182). The authors cite only three texts which address photography in relation to Americanization: Alan Trachtenberg's *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang,1989); see also Miles Orvell's T*he Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press,1989), and David E. Nye and Mick Gidley's *American Photographs in Europe* (Amsterdam: V.U. Univ. Press, 1994).

photographic projects that originated as a result of corporate patronage. I am interested in the contradictions that arise once individual projects are re-contextualized and will advocate a holistic approach, one in which the worlds of art and business, citizen and consumer, photographer and patron, amateur and professional, fine art and advertising, are entangled, respond to one another, borrow from one another, overlap, and finally congeal to form a more complex reading of both image and text.

Advertising and industrial photography will be central to my argument as it examines the influence of Americanization resulting in a preoccupation with serialization, a visual mimicry of the industrial processes of manufacture. Photography of the serialized object, an aesthetic of plenty, flourished during this period between the wars reflecting the fluctuations of both economics and politics.[10] Accordingly, much of Neue Sachlichkeit photography proves to be a short but critical chapter in the history of commodity culture. This dissertation thus focuses on the commercial and popular aspects of this aesthetic. It examines anonymous photographs, advertisements, journalistic photographs for human-interest articles such as those by Sasha Stone, industrial photographs for promotion by Renger-Patzsch, Hein Gorny, and Hans Finsler, as well as those influenced by a "Renger-Patzsch aesthetic." This study constitutes a historical cross-section, a mere ten years, characterized by a wave of *Amerikanismus* and a cultural preoccupation with the logic of production and consumption.

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[10] Eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994) employ the term "Visions of Plenty" as a title for their Chapter 27, "Visions of Plenty: Mass Consumption, Fashion, and Advertising," pp. 655 - 672. One of the best citations reproduced in this chapter is found in an article written by Ernst Lorsy entitled "The Hour of Chewing Gum" in which Lorsy claims (tongue - and gum - in cheek) that "[c]hewing gum is the cheapest way to Americanize oneself, and that is why the Germans of today, who harbor an intense yearning for America, have chosen it...Due to the continual movement of the jaw, they never got to thinking, to contemplating their class position, the regulation of work, or the goal of life...", p. 662. Originally published as "Die Stunde des Kaugummis," *Das Tagebuch*, no. 26 (June 26, 1926), pp. 913-915.

The logic of mass-production and consumption constituted as an "aesthetic" can be seen on many levels, but was perhaps most apparent to those writers associated with The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, which was also founded in 1923. As the country looked more to the United States, young German intellectuals such as Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Siegfried Kracauer, and others began to perceive a moment of crisis. They precipitously saw the growing menace of fascism, the waning of socialist and communist allegiance, and the emergent power of organized industrial capitalism. Douglas Kellner, in his introduction to *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, does not mention the United States directly, but reminds that 1923 was "the year marking the end of the period of revolutionary upheaval that began with the Russian revolution and the end of World War I, while also marking the beginning of the stabilization of capitalism and bourgeois rule."[11] This is why Benjamin criticized Neue Sachlichkeit photography for its links to "chicness," fashion, and "modish commerce" a point which will arise in Chapter Four in relation to the journal *Die Form* and its celebration of modish commerce.[12]

Questions and Contingencies

It is my intention therefore to attend to these aspects of photographic production, to ask the contextual questions that, once revealed, highlight the relationship between photography and capital, questions that are more often than not related as "Marxist

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[11] Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 12.

[12] Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (address given at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, 1934) in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, 1927-1934*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 775.

critique" or marginalized as external to the image. Some questions I hope to interlace throughout the discussion are as follows: To what extent can photography be overtly linked to an industrial paradigm or what we might call an industrial aesthetic? How does the *desire* for commodities play itself out in the imagery of a particular culture? To what extent is photography capable of social critique? Or was the dominant aspect of Weimar photography so intertwined with commercial culture, commerce, and advertising that it was incapable of a critique of capitalism? Or, on the other hand, because of its very cozy relationship with the industrial revolution, is photography perhaps uniquely capable of social and systematic critique and question-raising in ways that have not yet been formulated? What was the artist's relation to the commodity image in the twenties? How does photography collaborate or participate in the mystification of commodity and class relations by encoding, aestheticizing, masking, and depoliticizing its subject matter or underlying content? In other words, how does a long-standing "machine romanticism," often evidenced as a preoccupation with the serialized object and a so-called aesthetic of the ordinary, one supposedly revealing "the objective truth" by way of the camera, actually conceal the material and real relations at play in and around the imagery?

Neo, Neue, New - Vision, Sachlichkeit, Objectivity: The Literature

The general, textbook state of photography in Weimar Germany most often refers to the stylistic term New Vision as an umbrella term, an art historical short-cut for understanding a vast array of experimental practices. The New Vision "style" generally includes: photomontage, Bauhaus practice and cameraless or photogram imagery, product photography or *sachfotografie* by Walter Peterhans and his students, architectural

bird's-eye and worm's-eye views in the manner of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Moholy, industrial design and advertising photography by Albert Renger-Patzsch and others, X-Ray imaging, and all manner of photographic innovations as presented in the major exhibitions of the 1920s, such as *Film und Foto*.[13] *The New Vision: Photography Between the World Wars, The Ford Motor Company Collection* remains one of the most significant catalogues on the subject. It typifies the literature in response to Neue Sachlichkeit photographs, mentioning the obvious connections to an industrial client but highlighting the images (removed from their original contexts) for glossy clarity, elegance, and functionality; in other words, for the ultra-modern vision that they represent.[14] Christopher Phillips sees the Neue Sachlichkeit approach as a search for "objective truth and documentary clarity…[that] was not long confined to the elegantly functional images of anonymous architectural and industrial photographers," and so takes an interest in how artists such as August Sander, Lucia Moholy and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy borrow from this look. Where Phillips summarizes that "the glistening machine look...signified a willing embrace of the new technological civilization," I will pursue the question further and ask: but what did this willing embrace itself signify? Must the artist sell in order to survive?

The lumping of so many types of photographs under the broad labels of New Vision or even the only-slightly-tighter term Neue Sachlichkeit is also problematic as it refers to a very diverse, and not very related, grouping of both paintings and photographs.

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[13] See for instance, Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography, from 1839 to the Present* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1982); Michel Frizot, ed., *A New History of Photography* (Köln: Könemann, 1998).

[14] Maria Morris Hambourg and Christopher Phillips, *The New Vision: Photography Between the World Wars, Ford Motor Company Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989). This concept of the "willing embrace" of technology and industrial imagery will be addressed again in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Details of production are swept under the rug for historical (and pedagogical) convenience and categorization. New Vision and Neue Sachlichkeit are often used interchangeably but frequently New Vision is used as the overarching stylistic term that houses Neue Sachlichkeit among these other forms. As will be discussed, these designations remain too broad, homogenizing the various practices, intentions, politics, and attitudes that constitute late Weimar photographic production and its popularization.

Many scholars have taken an interest in the Weimar Republic, yet there are relatively few scholarly publications on the complex relationships that sprung to life in the twenties and thirties between the photographer and industry and between the visual cultures of Germany and the United States. The primary sources relating to Americanization in both English and German are extensive, ranging from articles in popular magazines and trade journals, to government leaflets and literature. Invaluable for my research are the contemporaneous critical essays and articles that touch upon themes related to Americanization, commercialization, and the politics of Neue Sachlichkeit photography by theoreticians such as Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukács, Oswald Spengler, and Antonio Gramsci.[15] Minor authors such as Wilhelm Lotz, Willi Warstadt, and Adolf Halfeld also debated Americanization in the popular press.

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[15] See Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, 1927-1934*, p. 768-782**,** in which Benjamin establishes a political basis for a critique of Renger-Patzsch. His *Das Passagen-Werk (*Frankfurt-am-Main, Surhkamp, 1983), in addition to his other writings, set a critical tone in relation to the political economy of the commodity. For more on the Lukács-Bloch debate over Expressionism and its decline in the 1930s, see Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971). See also Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (1935), trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1991). Oswald Spengler's various writings, including chs. 7, 8, and 9 in his 1918 *The Decline of the West*, vol. II, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1960), and Antonio Gramsci's "Americanism and Fordism" in *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed and trans.by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971, 1997) shed light on the debates.

More recently, Jean-Louis Cohen's and Hubert Damisch's *Americanisme et Modernité* (1993) deals with Americanization in relation to architectural and other forms of modernity, but is not concerned specifically with photography. Victoria de Grazia's *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (2005) provides a vast array of research on American business influence Europe-wide in the form of cinema, advertising, growth of the supermarket and even the influence of rotary clubs. Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes's 2005 book *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* offers an excellent history of Americanization as it was played out in the years prior to my topic. With a focus on Americanization as mass culture in the form of world's fairs and entertainment, their chapters outlining the debates in Europe, and their bibliographic essay have been immensely useful. Melissa Rangona's dissertation "A Genealogy of Spectacle: Fascism, Consumerism, and the Mimetic Body" explores Americanization and visual culture in relation to fascism.[16]

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[16] Melissa Rangona, "A Genealogy of Spectacle: Fascism, Consumerism, and the Mimetic Body" (Ph.D. Diss., State Univ. of New York, Buffalo, 1997); other key sources that do not cover my topic in depth but will be useful and will be discussed briefly here in the introduction include: Ute Eskildsen and Wieland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1978); Ute Eskildsen and Jan-Christopher Horak, *Film und Foto, der zwanziger Jahre: Eine Betrachtung der Internationalen Werkbundausstellung Film und Foto 1929* (Würtembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, May 17 - July 8, 1979); Ute Eskildsen, et al, ed., *Fotografieren hiess Teilnehmen: Fotografinnen desWeimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Richter, 1994); (David Mellor, ed., *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-1933, Documents and Essays* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978); Van Deren Coke, *Avant-Garde Photography in Germany, 1919-1939* (New York: Pantheon Books,1982); Rainer Wick, ed., *Das Neue Sehen: von der Fotografie am Bauhaus zur Subjectiven Fotografie* (Munich: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1991); Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republik Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Sigfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* Thomas Y. Levin, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of Calif. Press, 1993); *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, edited and with an introduction by Christopher Phillips (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Aperture, 1989); Maria Morris Hambourg and Christopher Phillips, eds., *The New Vision: Photography Between the World Wars: Ford Motor Company Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and The Third Reich* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Frederic J. Schwartz, *Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World Wa*r (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Klaus Honnef, Rolf

One important exhibition catalogue, *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and His Contemporaries, 1915-1933* explores graphic publications and suggests how much more study of Weimar cultre is needed.[17]

Although Kracauer was one of the most important cultural critics of the Weimar era, the scholarship to date about his early writings is not extensive.[18] Other writers are even more neglected. Fritz Giese, Joseph Roth, Paul Landau, and other Weimar critics contributed essays and short articles in the daily press about the Tiller Girls as machinations of *Amerikanismus*.[19] More recently, Peter Jelavich, Sabine Hake, Gunter Berghaus, and Janet Ward have touched upon the Tiller Girls phenomenon and visual culture in the 1920s, but have not treated their symbolic relation to a broader Neue Sachlichkeit or serial aesthetic.[20] Ward's *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in*

Sachsse, Karin Thomas, eds., *German Photography 1870-1970: Power of a Medium* (Cologne: DuMont, 1997).

[17] Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by Georg Grosz and His Contemporaries, 1915-1933*, published to accompany exhibition for the Busch-Reisinger Museum in conjunction with America/Weimar: Americanism in the Germany of the twenties organized by the Goethe-Institut Boston (Cambridge, Mass.: The Museum, 1990). This catalogue focuses mainly on graphics and drawings rather than photography. The essay by John Czaplicka is, however, an especially useful initial investigation. The catalogue focuses on the responses to America of the German avant-garde such as Grosz, the DaDa work of John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, El Lissitzky, and others. It does not take Neue Sachlichkeit photography or commercial and vernacular imagery into consideration.

[18] Kracauer scholarship focuses mainly upon his three English language publications on film theory: *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947); *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press,1960); and *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press,1969). See also Thomas Y. Levin, "The English-Language Reception of Kracuer's Work: A Bibliography" *New German Critique*, no. 54 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 183-189.

[19] See Fritz Giese, *Girlkultur: Vergleiche zwischen amerikanischem und europäischem Rythmus und Lebensgefühl* (Munich, publisher unknown, 1925); Joseph Roth, "Die Girls," *Das Tagebbuch*, vol. 11, no. 14, April 5, 1930, pp. 348-349; Paul Landau, "Girlkultur: von der Amerikanisierung Europas," *Westermanns Monatshefte*, vol. 71, no. 845 (January 1927).

[20] Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Sabine Hake, "Girls and Crisis: The Other Side of Diversion," *New German Critique* 40 (Winter, 1987); Gunter Berghaus, "Girlkultur: Feminism, Americanism, and Popular Entertainment in Weimar Germany," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 1, no. 3/4 (1988), 193-219; see also Manuela Thurner, "Girlkultur and Kulturfeminismus: Gender and Americanism in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933" (Ph.D. Diss., American Studies, Yale University, 1999).

1920s Germany provides much useful insight into the broader social scene.[21] However, her focus is not on photography, but rather on architecture, advertising and window design, and the visual dynamics of the city as a play of surfaces. Her important contribution will be discussed at greater length below.

Maud Lavin's chapter "The New Circle of Advertising Designers" in *Clean New World: Culture, Politics, and Graphic Design* serves as a springboard for some of the larger questions posed by this dissertation and especially for the issues explored in Chapters Four and Five.[22] Among other things, she suggests further scholarship is needed on the political, economic, and aesthetic relations between artists and corporate culture in the 1920s. Ute Eskildsen's work on Neue Sachlichkeit photography is indispensable and perhaps the most extensive body of work on the subject. Her contributions will be discussed at more length below. Her *Werbfotografie* (1989), an exhibition catalogue, and her *Fotografieren hiess teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik*, which highlights the contributions of women photographers, provide indispensible discussions of Neue Sachlichkeit, advertising, and concurrent styles.[23] Covering the 1920s through the 1980s, *Werbfotografie* allows for a cursory overview of each period. A number of sources, such as Jost Hermand's essay "Unity Within Diversity? The History of the Conception of Neue Sachlichkeit" (1977) and his "Neue Sachlichkeit: Ideology, Lifestyle, or Artistic Movement?" (1993), Jill Lloyd and Michael Peppiatt's *Christian Schad and the Neue Sachlichkeit* (2003), and Dennis Crockett's

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[21] Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[22] Maud Lavin, *Clean New World: Culture, Politics, and Graphic Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).
[23] See Ute Eskildsen, *Werbfotografie in Deutschland zeit den zwanziger Jahren* (Essen: Fotografische Sammlung im Museum Folkwang, 1989); and Ute Eskildsen, *Fotografieren hiess teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Richter, 1994).

German Post-Expressionism: The Art of the Great Disorder, 1918-1924 (1999) address the problem of defining Neue Sachlichkeit.[24]

Matthew Witkovsky's exhibition and catalog essays for *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945* (2007) provide an important new layer to an understanding of modern photographic practice as complex and internationally fluid. The exhibition defines avant-garde practice in general, noting Neue Sachlichkeit photography specifically, as less bound by nationalism than has been previously presumed, a point that this dissertation also suggests throughout. This exhibition introduced the work of key modern photographers operating in Central Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, extending the dialogue to include the "widespread engagement with modernist ideas" that reach beyond the traditional histories, which have focused mostly on the United States, Western Europe, and the Soviet Union.

Regarding Neue Sachlichkeit photography, Witkovsky introduces important Czech and Hungarian examples such as those by Franisek Cermak and Francis Haar. Yet he maintains that the style was "German" in nature, promulgated by Albert Renger-Patzsch, and that it, like New Vision, was "spread through institutional measures in [Germany], which transformed individual efforts into a truly popular phenomenon."[25] This is true, if partial, as the notion of Renger-Patzsch's impact and the style's popularization will be expanded in Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation. Yet, it

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[24] Jost Hermand, "Unity Within Diversity? The History of the Conception of Neue Sachlichkeit" in Keith Bullivant, ed., *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1977; Jost Hermand, "Neue Sachlichkeit: Ideology, Lifestyle, or Artistic Movement?" in Thomas W. Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann, eds., *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1994); Jill Lloyd and Michael Peppiatt eds., *Christian Schad and the Neue Sachlichkeit* (exh. cat. New York: Neue Galerie New York, 2003); Dennis Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism: The Art of the Great Disorder, 1918-1924* (Univ. Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1999).

[25] Matthew S. Witkovsky, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945*, with an introduction by Peter Demetz (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2007), p. 15.

does not acknowledge the great *degree* to which the Neue Sachlichkeit interest was provoked by American influence and commodity capitalism, and popularized less by avant-garde practice and more by advertising and vernacular practice. His chapter entitled "Modern Living" recognizes that the Neue Sachlichkeit (and New Vision) styles "are created for and within the marketplace," a key acknowledgment.[26]

Most importantly, Witkovsky points out instances of Americanization outside of Western Europe, such as in the work of Polish artist, Mieczyslaw Choynowski. His 1932 photomontage entitled "Ameryka," was published in a Polish weekly in January 1932. A dizzying merry-go-round of skyscrapers crushes an unseen body of a black man, hands chained, reaching toward Lady Liberty in the upper right corner. This provides further evidence that there is work to be done in order to understand the full visual, rhetorical, and international implications of the early, modern, photo-based, march of Americanization. The discussion at hand seeks to further understand the *in depth* links of Weimar photography to rising commercialism, to the related concept of the mass ornament, and to the moment of Americanization that helps to define it. In the following section, I will continue to outline the arguments and issues posed by some of the above authors and others who have provided the foundation upon which my dissertation builds.

The label "Neue Sachlichkeit" was first applied to painting and then later appropriated for photography. As a result, many discussions of Neue Sachlichkeit photography are still placed within the context of painted imagery. However, since this dissertation, in part, will be problematizing the term Neue Sachlichkeit itself, let us begin with Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub (1884-1963), then the Director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle, who, it is generally accepted, first used the term in 1923 in an open call for

[26] Ibid., p. 91.

works in the journal *Das Kunstblat*t announcing an exhibition of paintings.[27] However, Wieland Schmied, writing in 1978, notes that as early as 1920 in a *Frankfurter Zeitung* article entitled "Back to the Object," Hartlaub had introduced the new tendency, which he then referred to as "neo-naturalism."[28] Hartlaub defined Neue Sachlichkeit as having two opposed tendencies. These paintings, as he saw them, were no longer Expressionistic in style and content but signaled a shift toward recognizable, non-abstract, figurative subject matter, a tendency which he believed would benefit the cause of the left as it was capable of more direct social critique. The Hartlaub exhibition, "Neue Sachlichkeit, Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus," finally took place between June 14 and September 13, 1925.[29] In 1925 Franz Roh also published his book *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus, Probleme der neuesten europaischen Malerei*.[30] So this new tendency, as a tendency in painting, was largely underway and recognized in the mainstream by 1925 at the latest.

Starting in the 1970s, a few authors, including Jost Hermand, Helmut Lethem, Wieland Schmied, Ute Eskildsen, Dennis Crockett, and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, and Rose-Carol Washton Long revive this discussion. They provide plentiful discussions

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[27] Fritz Schmalenbach, in "The Term *Neue-Sachlichkeit*" in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. XXII, no. 3 (September 1940) claims that he first used the term mainly as an expression for architecture in 1924, one year before the mounting of the Hartlaub exhibition. Schmalenbach wrote that "it was related to the general contemporary feeling in Germany of resignation and cynicism after a period of exuberant hopes…". This, he said was "the negative side of the Neue Sachlichkeit; the positive side expresses itself in the enthusiasm for the immediate reality as a result of the desire to take things on a material basis without immediately investing them with ideal implications" (p. 164).

[28] Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, "Zurück zu den Objekt" (*Frankfurter Zeitung*, Summer, 1920), as quoted in Wieland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties* (London: Hayward Art Gallery, 1978), p. 8.

[29] Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, "*Neue Sachlichkeit: Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus"* (Mannheim: Städtische Kunsthalle, 1925); see English translation in Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), p. 290.

[30] Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der nuesten europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1925).

and useful historiographies for this often misunderstood and constantly shifting term. It must be kept in mind that only Eskildsen is interested in photography, although each author points to Neue Sachlichkeit as signaling widely-radiating tendencies in the twenties. Helmut Lethen, in 1970, revived the association of the style with Americanism and Fordism, focusing on the idea of cultural resignation as seen in Weimar literature rather than visual culture.[31] Jost Hermand, writing in 1977, provides an article-length historiography and conceptualization of Neue Sachlichkeit. Hermand restates Franz Roh's 1925 description by stating that the new style was sober, quiet, cool, static, smooth, and objective.[32] Hermand does begin to identify Neue Sachlichkeit as something larger than a tendency in painting by noting that it was more of a spirit of the times, "understood everywhere as a deliverance from Expressionist revolutionism, whose world-transforming élan was suddenly considered sentimental and even embarrassing."[33]

Hermand argued that Neue Sachlichkeit "is merely the ideological and aesthetic means of expression of a relatively small group from the bourgeois liberal or middling bourgeois sectors between 1923 and 1929 who, partly consciously and partly unconsciously, let themselves be captivated by the deceptive illusion of a new stabilization of social conditions, basing itself on technology and a higher standard of living."[34] The idea of a deceptive illusion casts the imagery into dark shadow, allowing some scholars to link Neue Sachlichkeit to National Socialism.[35] But it also signals one

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[31] See Helmut Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit, 1924-1932: Studien zur Literatur des 'Weissen Sozialismus'* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970).
[32] See Jost Hermand, "Unity within Diversity? The History of the concept of 'Neue Sachlichkeit'" in Keith Bullivant, ed., *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).
[33] Ibid., p. 168.
[34] Ibid., p. 178.
[35] The idea that impulses behind Neue Sachlichkeit were to be understood ambivalently was present, it seems, from the very beginning. Schmalenbach himself, as footnoted above, proclaimed in 1924 that there

of the central tropes that arise in both the primary and secondary literature: the notion of deception, illusion; a mis-recognition or misperception, a blind spot. Some, like Siegfried Kracauer, who is discussed below and in Chapter Three, refer to Neue Sachlichkeit as a phenomenon of paralysis; others refer to an elision or even a disavowal when it comes to the imagery of Neue Sachlichkeit. For a stylistic term that is generally translated as New Objectivity and characterized as "matter-of-fact," sober and clear, this variously described missing link becomes particularly glaring. Plainly stated, how can a style, a look, be both matter-of-fact and illusory at the same time? How can it be both objective and deceptive in its view of reality?

For Hermand, and for others such as Lethen, Neue Sachlichkeit signified resignation and stability, "the consolidation of the basic capitalist order."[36] As Hermand only begins to indicate here, it was not only an art movement or style but a collective mindset rejecting utopianism and embracing, to the point of irrationality, the orders, forms, and structures of a newly and quickly ushered in (and perceived to be American) capitalism. Its irrationality was partially due to the ecstatic pace of the rationalization of production in various industries and forms of business in Germany, and the sense of desperation, both psychological and real, to regain some semblance of normalcy and order, to overcome the embarrassment of defeat and the depression of economic crisis. As has been well documented, the process of industrialization in Germany, as opposed to its European neighbors, happened so late, so quickly, and so furiously that it was perhaps experienced collectively as a crisis, a jolt of fast-paced commercial development

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was a positive and a negative side to this new tendency toward materialism. A relatively recent account linking Neue Sachlichkeit to National Socialism is Olaf Peters, *Neue Sachlichkeit und Nazionalsozialismus: Affirmation und Kritik, 1931-1947* (Reimer, 1998).

[36] Ibid., p. 167.

shocking a country already traumatized by war and defeat. Thus it comes as no surprise that much so-called Neue Sachlichkeit imagery is, in the early 1930s, held up by the National Socialists as acceptable because it is ordered, rationalized, and perceived as anti-revolutionary.

Neue Sachlichkeit, then, as a visual result of this moment of "irrational rationalization," has been read as paving the road for fascism or the "deutscher Sonderweg."[37] This may be so; a road once paved, put into "order," widely popularized, as this dissertation will suggest, is far more accessible to all who would travel it. And indeed, the fascist ringleaders of spectacle borrowed from the established interest in and acceptance of mass forms of entertainment and visual display. However, I would argue that it is far more productive to see Neue Sachlichkeit, and its twin moment of frenzied capitalist growth in Germany, through a much wider lens, one which looks into the future to consider this moment as a chapter in the history of capitalism. The question will persist then: to what extent were photographers who participated in commercial projects, especially those considered today "members" of the usually leftist and experimental avant-garde, complicit in paving the path, whether that path "leads" to fascism or, as I would argue persists, through fascism, and beyond into our own era of corporate capitalism?

In keeping with Hartlaub, Hermand and other scholars have also identified a left-wing Neue Sachlichkeit, i.e. Grosz and Dix, and a right-wing form exemplified by the painters Werner Peiner and Bernhard Dörries. He pointed out that the tendency of

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[37] On irrational rationalization and on the notion of 'deutscher Sonderweg" (German's particular/irregular path), see Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989) and H. Grebing, *Der 'deutsche Sonderweg' in Europa 1806-1945. Einei Kritik* (Stuttgart: 1986).

writers who approach the subject of Neue Sachlichkeit since the beginning has been to list qualities that maintained the grouping as either left-wing or right-wing. Hermand concluded: "everything problematical or contradictory is avoided."[38] The Left wing or "Veristic" mode of Neue Sachlichkeit is still the side that is more typically highlighted for exhibition as it continues to offer the more appealing notion that the role of the artist was mainly that of social critic, using imagery to critique war, institutional oppression, greed, and sexual mores. The 2006 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 192*0s[39] focused on painting and maintained this division between left and right. It pushed aside many of the contradictions presented by Neue Sachlichkeit and the imagery of the mid-twenties and early thirties, in favor of focusing on the "Veristic" or Left wing branch and "the artist as social critic."[40]

In fact, the persistence of the left and right winged notions of the term, point to this late Weimar production as containing more nuance, even paradoxical undertones, especially in relation to its photographic application. What is written about this term, as we will see, also changes depending upon when it is written. While this dissertation frames the "look" as a response to Americanization, it is a term that has been variously understood and at times, and according to Hartlaub himself, "widely misappropriated."[41] It signals a machine-aesthetic and machine-rhetoric that has been borrowed by socialists,

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[38] Hermand in Bullivant, *Culture and Society*, p. 173.

[39] *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, ed., Sabine Rewald, with essays by Ian Buruma and Matthias Eberle (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale Univ. Press, Nov. 14, 2006-Feb. 19, 2007).

[40] This phrase, which I will bring into question again in Chapter Four as part of a discussion of the artist's relation to the new industrial patron, is borrowed from Peter Selz , "The Artist as Social Critic" in *German Realism of the Twenties: The Artist as Social Critic* (Minneapolis: The Minnesota Institute of the Arts, 1980).

[41] Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993) p. 290. In this passage, Long mentions a letter that Hartlaub wrote indicating that he understood, already by 1923, that the term was being interpreted with great fluctuation.

communists, and capitalists; and though, their applications may at times look alike, their intentions vary greatly. Though George Grosz did not employ the term in 1921, he called for the "clarity of an engineer's drawing" as a communistic mode for the representation of content that could be easily legible to the working class masses.[42] By roughly 1927 the term had become mainstream and was more generally applied as a popular strategy used for commercial purposes, recognizing the everyday world, its patterns, and more importantly, its products.

Thus the so-called demand for clarity itself is not as clear as it appears. In 1923, when Gustav Hartlaub, mentioned above, began to organize his (painting) exhibition he advocated that the term had *both* a left and a right wing. The left was interested in "the world of real events, evoking experience in its actual tempo" and the right was interested in "the timelessly valid object" and the "eternally valid laws of existence."[43] Though Hartlaub's own politics were left-leaning and derived from his socialist ideas, a point which has been made by Crockett, Bletter, and Long, it is perhaps because of his attempt to reconcile these two sides for the sake of his exhibition and for the sake of allowing art to "live – in spite of a cultural situation apparently as hostile to art's very existence" that the confusion of Neue Sachlichkeit persists.[44] Part of the problem also lies in the unquestioning appropriation of Neue Sachlichkeit as a painting term applied to photographic practice. George Grosz, for example, while his work focused on painting, at

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[42] For more detailed history of George Grosz's political evolution, and the Weimar relationship between art and the Communist Party in Germany, see Long, *German Expressionism*, pp. 274-277; see also Barbara McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party, Art and Radicalism in Crisis, 1918-1936* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997).

[43] Ibid., p. 291.

[44] See, for instance, Long, *German Expressionism*, in which it is pointed ou that Hartlaub felt that his original designation of the term had been greatly altered by 1929 and that Neue Sachlichkeit "could refer to artists who applied 'a socialist flavor' to the new realism that had emerged…", p. 290.

the same time recognized the importance of photography's role in representing and communicating the new clarity. Photography, as it was being recognized, had a unique capacity to connect with the working class in order to ignite changes in social structure. Yet this same concreteness and clarity, attention to the real, the everyday, and the object itself, was simultaneously beginning to foster the proliferation of American-style seductive capitalism through its reinforcement of the same strategies: fragmentation, the close-up, serialization, focus on the machine, its product, and its process, and the un-peopled object as product; same subject matter, same strategy, different goals. This popular, photographic dissemination of Neue Sachlichkeit, by the latter 1920s, had become central to the concerns of capitalism.

A brief account of the complexities of Neue Sachlichkeit as a term and its implications is useful. Since Dennis Crockett and a few key authors have addressed this issue in more length, I will only summarize it in part here in order to point out how this terminological slippage is both relevant for and complicated by the addition of photography. Rosemarie Haag Bletter offers an excellent definition of Neue Sachlichkeit and provides an important history of this term (although in relation to architecture). Her essay offers a concise discussion of the evolution of sachlichkeit and a definition: "Sachlichkeit, although sometimes translated as function, literally means 'thingness.' Sachlichkeit is more properly translated as 'the simple, practical, straightforward solution to a problem,' as 'matter-of-factness' and occasionally as 'objectivity.' Sachlichkeit simultaneously suggests the world of real objects and that of a conceptual rationalism."[45]

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[45] See Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Introduction" to *Adolf Behne, The Modern Functional Building*, trans. Michael Robinson (Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996), pp. 47-48. See also above reference to Peter Selz, "The Artist as Social Critic" in

Like Peter Selz before her in his 1980 "The Artist as Social Critic," Bletter mentions the relationship to a "victory of capitalism, Amerikanismus, and Fordism" but she curtails an investigation into the depth of this association, calling it the realm of "Marxist historians." Thus the formalist reading of images can be maintained while the associations raised in this dissertation, especially in Chapter Four, can be contained in a paragraph or two.

As Bletter's definition suggests, the names themselves, Neue Sachlichkeit and New Objectivity, hint at the very root of the misunderstanding. Objectivity assumes the condition of being "given," unquestioned, scientific, in need of no further discussion or disclosure of facts. It is as if to say, what you see is what you see; it's all there right before your eyes: nature, man, machine. This assumption, an appealing simplicity, misleads the viewer into believing that all of the conditions and intentions of the image (often in close-up format) are laid out before him or her; it is matter-of-fact, as simple as that. Yet so many of the texts converge in that they insist upon objectivity while acknowledging that Neue Sachlichkeit represents a time of disavowal, illusion, and deception. They profess clarity while concealing the contextual. They celebrate the close-up form while distancing themselves from what the forms signify as objects. There is apparently much that is hidden by a close-up.

In 1999 Dennis Crockett provided perhaps the most useful account of the problem of translating Neue Sachlichkeit. He writes: "The first historical study of Die neue Sachlichkeit was carried out by Fritz Schmalenbach in the mid-1930s (at which time all the major representatives of the movement were designated 'degenerate' by the Nazi

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German Realism of the Twenties: The Artist as Social Critic (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1980).

authorities). At that time he was one of the few to understand – or care about – the general misconceptions regarding the term Neue Sachlichkeit. He emphasized that Hartlaub's original understanding of the term was lost when it became a popular slogan."[46] In fact, Schmalenbach and Hartlaub both emphasized that this popular "slogan" was more of a "new mental attitude."[47] Although the idea of a popular slogan would indicate a far-reaching appeal, indicating that it touched a nerve far deeper than Hermand's "relatively small group from the bourgeois liberal or middling bourgeois sectors" would indicate.

He does emphasize that the first and most obvious problem with Neue Sachlichkeit is one of translation. Just as Rose-Carol Washton Long has corrected the historical misunderstanding of the term "gegenstandlos," so that it is translated as "objectless" or "abstraction" rather than "non-objective," the German "sachlichkeit" seems to be a similar translator's pitfall.[48] *Sache* and *Gegenstand* are often confused, as if they have the same meaning: that is, thing, article, or object. There is a constant confusion throughout the literature between images employing so-called objectivity and images depicting recognizable, non-abstract objects. The two words, object and objectivity, each with an entirely unique meaning, are linked in English translations. This is part of the problem with any discussion of Neue Sachlichkeit in either painting or photography.

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[46] Dennis Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism: The Art of the Great Disorder, 1918-1924* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1999), p. 2.
[47] Fritz Schmalenbach, "The Term Neue-Sachlichkeit," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. XXII, no. 3 (September 1940), pp. 161-165.
[48] See Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Non-objective," *Guggenheim Museum A-Z*, ed. Nancy Spector (New York, NY: The Museum, 1992), p. 200.

Crockett outlines for us some of the translational options: "*Sachlichkeit*, which lacks a single acceptable English equivalent, should be understood by its root, *Sache*, meaning 'thing,' 'fact,' 'subject,' or 'object.' *Sachlich* could best be understood as 'factual,' 'matter-of-fact,' 'impartial,' 'practical,' or 'precise;' *Sachlichkeit* is the noun form of the adjective and usually implies 'matter-of-factness.' *Ein Gegenstand* is to be understood as a more tangible or concrete object or thing than *eine Sache*. The adjective *gegenständlich* could be understood as 'concrete,' 'object-like,' and sometimes 'graphic'."[49] We begin to see where the problems arise, even though much of the above is the typical challenge of the translator of German to English texts. But where does this leave us? He focuses on the imagery, not as a larger, cultural phenomenon, but as a stylistic foil for the much-more widely examined and celebrated Expressionist style. He does note however, and this becomes the most important factor here, that "the terms Sachlichkeit and Neue Sachlichkeit came to designate life in Weimar Germany – a new public attitude – during the period of relative economic and political stabilization (1924-29). The slogan stood for an all-business attitude, an attitude Germans perceived as intrinsically American: 'The Neue Sachlichkeit is Americanism, the cult of the objective, the hard fact, the predilection for functional work, professional conscientiousness, and usefulness'."[50]

I further Crockett's examination in that I examine the photography of the period in relation to usage in advertising, industry, and business. But I also consider Neue Sachlichkeit to be a product of neither instability nor stability but rather of the collective uncertainties that are a result of the feverish fluctuation between the two, a kind of love-

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[49] Crockett, p. 1.
[50] George Waldemar, "Frankreich und die 'Neue Sachlichkeit,' *Das Kunstblatt* 11 (November 1927); see also Crockett, p. 395.

hate, plenty-paucity, inflation-depression mentality that holds the Weimar years in ambivalent suspension. This mentality is characterized by and reflected in the public debate surrounding Germany's embrace and rejection of America. Crockett's own documentation backs up this idea. He notes that a 1922 *Frankfurter Zeitung* article argues that: "Germany is craving, hungering for goods and he who possesses goods is master of the situation."[51] In addition, he notes that in March 1922 *Berliner Tageblatt* reports: "It's no longer simply a zeal for acquiring, or even a rage: it is a madness," and "[b]usiness has reached a maximum of intensity. Buyers care nothing about prices. There is a general rush for goods."[52] Backing up these observations, are those of the author and one time partner of Dadaist Hannah Höch, Til Brugmann, who referred to the Weimar era as one of "commodity sickness," confirming a kind of hysterical reaction to the situation.[53] In his epilogue, Crockett makes the point that a more popular version of Neue Sachlichkeit, one that had become associated with *Amerikanismus*, and served therefore as a point of criticism against the bourgeoisie by authors such as Adolf Halfeld and Alfred Durus, had proliferated by the late 1920s.[54] Like Expressionism, Crockett writes, Neue Sachlichkeit had become "a fashion that could be reduced to a recipe and easily reproduced."[55] This is a point that comes to life in Chapter Three of this dissertation as examples of this association with American culture are brought to light, while at the same time it will be argued that this popular association of a *sachlichkeit* aesthetic with American values was apparent at an earlier stage, closer to 1923. My

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[51] Crockett, p. 28.
[52] Ibid.
[53] See Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 140; Brugman's short stories were published in a book which she compiled together with her partner at the time, Hannah Höch, entitled *Scheingehacktes*: *Die neue Reihe* (Berlin: unknown publisher, 1935).
[54] Crockett, p. 157.
[55] Ibid.

study, building upon Crockett's, considers Neue Sachlichkeit not as art but as imagery, neither antithetical nor similar to Expressionism, but as produced by different circumstances, a by-product of Americanization and the fast-paced commercial growth of the late Weimar period.

Finally, it must be noted that painting and photography operated in very separate spheres of practice and exhibition. Whereas today an artist may be both photographer and painter, this was not as frequently the case in the 1920s when the field of photography was just emerging and proving itself an art form. The two can, then, be considered separately with common aspects found in the depiction of recognizable objects versus a heavy reliance upon abstraction. For example, the paintings of Georg Grosz and Otto Dix, as the two foremost painters in the style, have quite a different subject matter, mood, intention, and reception than the photographs of Albert Renger-Patzsch or Hans Finsler, to name only two photographers that are generally also categorized with the painters under the term Neue Sachlichkeit.

Wieland Schmied, in his 1978 exhibition catalogue for the Hayward Gallery, *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties*, also focuses mostly on painting, even though he includes an essay and selection of photographs by Ute Eskildsen.[56] Schmied uses the term Neue Sachlichkeit interchangeably with "new naturalism," "new objectivity" and "new realism." He does not provoke discussion around the term but rather maintains Hartlaub's formulation of "a collective designation for the realistic tendencies apparent in the painting of the 1920s."[57] Schmied's definition offers that:

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[56] Wieland Schmied, with photograph selection and essay by Ute Eskildsen, *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties* (London: Hayward Gallery, 11 November 1978 - 14 January 1979).
[57] Ibid., p. 9.

> …[a]fter the ecstasies of Expressionism artists now sought the sobriety of the eye; cosmic dreams gave way to banal events, emotional excess to total unsentimentality… The important thing was to look at what was there outside the window, on the asphalt, along the street (and down the drain), on the factory floor and in the shipyard, in operating-theatres and brothels, in allotments, in a railway-crossing cottage or a contented hovel, along the washing-line perspectives of a tenement courtyard.[58]

Neue Sachlichkeit photography, rather than representing a society coming under control and "get[ting] a grip" is actually quite the opposite. Any sense of control is false or deceptive, a desire at that moment unrealizable. Schmied's definitions, while speaking of the desire to "penetrate things conceptually through unselfseeking observation," actually reinforce the imagery as de-contextualized and mysterious. The Hayward catalogue, as can be typical of the treatment of Neue Sachlichkeit photography, reproduces photographic images with little contextualization. Ute Eskildsen's essay initiates an effort to reproduce photographs in their magazine form, although the images are just as often framed as aesthetic products of machinic celebration.

Her essay, as one of the first to attend to Neue Sachlichkeit photography, remains one of the most critical starting points for any study of the era. However, the fact remains that many of the photographs the Hayward catalogue reproduces were originally produced for the purpose of commercial interest and advertising. Depicted, for instance, is Max Burchartz's commercial brochure for the Bochumer Verein, 1931, which is a promotion of wheelbases for streetcars and trains. Also reproduced is another Burchartz image of an industrial facility looming powerfully over the viewer, taken from a dizzying worm's eye point of view**. [Figures 1.1 and 1.2]** Each lacks any explicatory text or acknowledgment of the conditions of the images' production or function. The

[58] Ibid., p. 8.

photographs are merely titled "Commercial brochure" and "Coking plant."[59] Also reproduced is an example of Walter Peterhans's "Industrial manufactured dishes," 1929 and Albert Renger-Patzsch's "Tanks," c. 1926, depicting not actually tanks but bathtubs (from a series he was commissioned to photograph for the bathtub manufacturer and retailer, Krauss Works of Schwarzenberg).[60] **[Figures 1.3 and 1.4]** Eskildsen pairs "tanks" (bathtubs) with Renger-Patzsh's famous "Viper's Head" of 1925, whose metallic chain-like skin wends around, link after link, with natural-mechanical precision. The "tanks" are thus reconfirmed by this juxtaposition as industrial creatures as natural as the snake. Their metallic bodies standing on end are fitted perfectly one within the next, their top ends curved and linked to form overlapping scales. The circumstances of production or commission have been edited out in favor of depicting objects whose process is as natural as its photographic form. The visual satisfaction of the abstract patterning and sheer numbers of the stacked "tanks," along with the orderliness of their self-presentation, are seen here, true to Renger-Patzsh's own mode of representation, as if each tank had been spontaneously generated and then lined up one alongside the next into the thousands without the touch of a human hand.

The turn toward the subject matter of machines and objects, an outward mode of depiction, is not simply a matter-of-fact celebration of modern, mechanical beauty, nor is it without specific industrial and commercial context. Instead it reveals the desperation of a society seeking to compensate its losses, and to order its chaos, both financial and

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[59] These two images are noted as being in the collections of Lotte Burchartz and The Folkwang Museum in Essen respectively. They are reproduced in Eskildsen, p. 106. In this particular case, I am interested in pointing out this missing information as an example. My research does not delve into Burchartz's work, but encourages this as a possible point of departure for further investigation.

[60] An undated letter between Renger-Patzsch and the Krauss-Werke along with other letters between the photographer and industrial clients may be worth investigating in the Inventory of the Albert Renger-Patzsch Papers, 1924-1966 at The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California.

psychological, through an intense preoccupation with material goods to be possessed, objects of infinite plenitude, and a comforting, rational, repetition.

Siegfried Kracauer takes these cultural preoccupations as his own subject matter. He does not reflect directly upon the term Neue Sachlichkeit in his essay "The Mass Ornament." However, he does theorize the growing ubiquity of the serial aesthetic of sports, dance, and popular photographic imagery as "mass ornament," infused with American cultural values and based on the structure and ideology of capitalism. He sees the desire for the mass ornament as not at all limited to some form of artistic production but rather, as he writes in June 1927 for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*:

> [T]he structure of the mass ornament reflects that of the entire contemporary situation...Like the mass ornament, the capitalist production process is an end in itself. The commodities that it spews forth are not actually produced to be possessed; rather, they are made for the sake of a profit that knows no limit. Its growth is tied to that of business....[t]he mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires.[61]

Kracauer, much later in his 1947 book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, returns to this idea of an "aesthetic reflex" as the result of a collective psychological state. His aim here is to explore Neue Sachlichkeit as manifested in the medium of film. Like most authors, he does not in this text depart from Hartlaub's original formulation of the term as related to resignation, but expands upon it and concentrates on its collective psychological impact. He quotes Hartlaub in saying that "'It was related…to the general contemporary feeling in Germany of resignation and cynicism after a period of exuberant hopes…Cynicism and resignation are the negative side of the Neue Sachlichkeit; the positive side expresses itself in the enthusiasm for the immediate reality as a result of the desire to take things entirely objectively on a material

[61] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," (June 1927), in *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 78-79.

basis without immediately investing them with ideal implications'".[62] Kracauer writes: "In other words, New Objectivity marks a state of paralysis… a mentality disinclined to commit itself in any direction...The main feature of the new realism is its reluctance to ask questions, to take sides. Reality is portrayed not so as to make facts yield their implications, but to drown all implications in an ocean of facts...".[63] This state of paralysis, during the period of stabilization, for Kracauer became part of "the inner workings of the paralyzed collective soul."

Although it is to the medium of film that Kracauer turns in this book, it is interesting to note that he delineates the chief characteristics of the films of this period, which represent this collective German soul, as enveloped in indifference, avoidance, lack of any idealism, and escapism; he writes "They seem cut off from all inner roots. The emotional grounds are frozen."[64] In Kracauer's sense, then, we might see the term objectivity as a term that actually uses an interest in the given facts, the surface of things, to mask denial, to mask subjective content. The desire to take objects, reality, the everyday, on a material basis or at face value then becomes not a desire for this so-called matter-of-fact objectivity, but rather a matter of obfuscation and denial of the actual circumstances, a denial of the subjectivity of context. Rather than attempting to understand the desire or the need to grasp, to see, to depict the object up close or ad infinitum, the so-called objectivity becomes the desire to see only the object, to not look beneath the surface, a trope that will be returned to at various points within this text.

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[62] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), p. 165.
[63] Ibid., p. 165.
[64] Ibid., p. 138.

Janet Ward, in *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (2001), finds a theoretical dwelling space in this trope of the surface.[65] However she highlights the Weimar years as a celebration of surface culture rather than a calling for its penetration. Ward limits Neue Sachlichkeit to the years 1924-1929, the so-called years of stabilization when the *Rentenmark* was initiated as a way to stabilize the inflation of the *Deutschemark* currency. She widens its scope, however, stating that it began "as an earnest term for faith in progress and Fordism."[66] For Ward, Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity or New Sobriety as she interchangeably refers to it) is equated with functionalism and a visual culture of surfaces reflected mainly in the new architecture, fashion, film, and new outdoor, electric advertisements in and around the city of Berlin. Her detailed study provides excellent insights for my own. However, her research does not encompass photography in any depth but instead concentrates on the urban landscape.

As can be seen from the above entries, in the attempt to define aspects of New Vision/ Neue Sachlichkeit photography, many different scholars have influenced this dissertation. However, a few key authors who deal specifically with Weimar era photography will be referenced throughout, as it is to these that I perhaps owe a greatest debt: Ute Eskildsen, Van Deren Coke, Herbert Molderings, and Maud Lavin. The sheer dedication of Ute Eskildsen's work on Weimar photography remains unprecedented. She has offered and continues to offer through her research, writing, and exhibitions at the Museum Folkwang in Essen, a comprehensive overview of the various practitioners in the twenties and thirties (and beyond). In her article "Photography and the Neue Sachlichkeit Movement," which was mentioned above, she discusses two main

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[65] Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001).
[66] Ibid., p. 4.

photographic directions: the camera used in a 'realistic' manner and the camera as a source of new perspectives.[67] She states that the former direction is inspired by Renger-Patzsch and the latter by Moholy-Nagy. This division or rift within the so-called New Vision continues to be followed throughout the literature and remains particularly intact in the current introductory textbooks on the history of photography. Eskildsen's writings on New Vision, however indispensable they remain, tend to aggregate these strains of photographic practice, desiring comprehensive accounts and modernist definitions, and gathering all of them under the ideology of objectivity in that they are "…based on a principle of truth to the medium."[68] This statement, however, leads to questions rather than neat, summarizing answers. The validity of objectivity, the definition of truth, and the medium of photography itself have all been completely thrown open to question and interrogation in the intervening years. Chasing after objectivity in order to position the photography into convenient, orderly packages under the existing terminology of New Vision or Neue Sachlichkeit may be today a problematic logic. It does not actually investigate the various projects, contexts, and *raison d'etre* of the images and instead obscures some of the more ideological questions about the relationships between artists and the industry they often served.

In fact, many who write on Neue Sachlichkeit photography reference only in passing the influence of economics and industrialization. The Dawes Plan, for instance, is usually evoked as a parallel entity to the development of Weimar photographic practice, without tracing the interrelationships that may have been at play. Most scholarship about this contentious period maintains a primary focus on the photograph as

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[67] Ute Eskildsen, "Photography and the Neue Sachlichkeit Movement," *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1979), pp. 85-97.
[68] Eskildsen, p. 85.

an aesthetic object. The authors do not contextualize or politicize such imagery but rather are concerned with the then much-needed task of establishing these photographers within the barely emergent canon of the history of photography. At the least, through introducing Weimar photographic practice to the scholarly realm and to the museum-going public, these historians offered up the imagery for further investigation.

Herbert Molderings, in 1978, contributed one of only in-depth analyses touching upon economic influence in his essay entitled "Urbanism and Technological Utopianism: Thoughts on the photography of Neue Sachlichkeit and the Bauhaus."[69] Since then he has remained one of the historians most sensitive to the politics of 1920s photography. He comes the closest of the four authors to elucidating some of the contradictions that arise within the left-leaning artistic avant-garde in the service of industrial capitalism. His essay touches on the key issue of the commodity fetishism that helps to create and sustain the Neue Sachlichkeit photographic imagery. He begins by discussing the fact that "[t]he invention of photography had coincided with a period of fully developed commodity production, and all successive developments of the photographic image took place as functions of its commodity character."[70] He continues: "…Photography, itself a commodity, steadily increased the range of commercial economy by bringing into circulation reproductions of objects that were not otherwise available." Molderings writes that as the medium enters the twenties a new realism or Neue Sachlichkeit comes into being which is for him not only a style or a new school (and this is where my dissertation will be in agreement with him) but a new method of seeing, "an innovation in the method of reproduction." However, he sees Renger-Patzsch as a benign "chief

[69] Herbert Molderings in David Mellor, ed., *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-1933, Documents and Essays* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), pp. 87-94.
[70] Ibid. p. 87.

representative of the new school" (with which I would disagree) and goes on to say that "...the new technique was naturally not an isolated autonomous development but was part of a complex of postwar social and aesthetic tendencies, which I would designate by the title of urbanism and technological utopianism."[71] Here, we see that Molderings too struggles with how to designate the imagery, using Neue Sachlichkeit, neo-realism, new vision, urbanism, and technological utopianism interchangeably. However he is one of the few to hint at the direct links between the establishment of Neue Sachlichkeit as a style and the commercial interests of its patrons:

> Within a few years the pictorial structure of the 'new vision' was fully developed: clear, sharp and precise reproduction, shots from unusual angles, close-up or from a great distance, narrowly limited detail instead of an ensemble, isolation of particular features, emphasis on material surface and abstract structure. All this contributed to an aesthetically fragmented perception, less human than technical and mechanical in its effect. It is a question whether this so-called 'photographic sight' has really developed and extended our natural powers of vision and perception, as is repeatedly claimed, or whether it has not blunted them…Man and things are both under a spell which inhibits understanding: the effect is one of reified sight, the content of which is no longer the real world so much as the camera's artistic technique. In this confrontation, things and men are alike speechless.[72]

Here we see the roots of Molderings' Marxist critique, taking notice of this trope of the blind spot or speechlessness, called by him a spell cast on the relationship between things and men, inhibiting understanding by way of reification. His observations run against the grain, raising questions as to the legitimacy of reading photographs as exercises in formalism.

All along what has been praised is the way the objects in the Neue Sachlichkeit style are photographed; what is so modern is the spirit of vision, the boldness of

[71] Ibid., p. 89.
[72] Ibid., p. 94.

perception made possible by the camera. Yet Molderings is one of the few to question this blanket celebration of vision. Rather than an opening up of perception, such imagery, being celebrated for its technique, is almost entirely overlooked in terms of its content and its contextual circumstances of production.

Van Deren Coke's 1980 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art exhibition, which was accompanied by a small but seminal book entitled Avant-*Garde Photography in Germany, 1919-1939*, is a significant document. Yet it too perpetuates this idea. It provides short discussions of individual photographers who, up until this point, had been largely obscured (and actually many of them remain obscure today), the inter-war period having been a confused territory of amnesia between two open wounds. Much German imagery, especially as it related to mass ornamentation and industrialism, went un-discussed during the 1940s through the mid-1970s, as the majority of historians who celebrated Germany turned to Expressionism. The interest in Expressionism was due in part to Expressionism's public denigration by Hitler and the National Socialists at the 1937 *Entartete Kunst* exhibition. This allowed Expressionism, whether in painting, film, or photography, a particular legitimacy as *pre- and anti*-Nazi imagery.

Van Deren Coke reinserts photographers such as Albert Renger-Patzsch (annointed the "father of New Objectivity" and the "Heldenvater der Fotografie"[73]), Sasha Stone, Hein Gorny, Hans Finsler, Lucia Moholy-Nagy, Christian Schad, Gyorgy Kepes, Hans Richter, Walter Peterhans, Andreas Feininger, and others more or less

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[73] Virginia Heckert in "Albert Renger-Patzsch as Educator, 'Learn to See the World'" *History of Photography*, vol. 21, n. 3 (Autumn 1997), p. 214, footnotes that Renger-Patzsch apparently gave himself this knickname "beginning in the 1950s, as indicated in correspondence in GRIHAH, for example in a letter to Dr. Hans Flemming in Frankfurt am Main dated 28 February, 1959." Heckert writes: "He used this description – undoubtedly tongue-in-cheek – as he grew older and received more numerous requests for information about his work." Nonetheless, I would suggest that the notion of a "hero-father" of photography is an interesting choice of words.

unknown, into the western canon of modernist practice. This is very useful as a catalogue, yet it relegates their individual and collective projects into narrow aesthetic terms. He provides short, biographical paragraphs on each photographer, separating their images from any original commercial context, and re-presenting them as individual images teaming with modern enthusiasm for technology. Coke's very first sentence reads as follows: "Avant-garde photographers in such major centers as Berlin, Munich, and Cologne explored the use of daring new ways to register on film the great changes taking place in the world. New uses were found for the camera's ability to record with exactitude the products of industry that were in need of introduction to the public."[74] In this sense, the idea of avant-garde photographers engaging in commerce is not at all questioned by Coke. It is an assumption, an aspect of experimentation and of record keeping with exactitude. They filled a need, almost as if to serve industry and commerce was to perform a public service. Coke continues in a celebratory mode:

> Out of the first 'machine' war came the realization in Germany that the technology that produced bombers and tanks could be used to manufacture goods for a new society. Machines were redesigned to create simple but elegant kitchenware, light fixtures, and means of transportation. The emphasis placed on industrial architecture was clearly revealed in the nature of structural engineering, and there grew an interest on the part of artists and designers in the precision of cogs, pipes, the planes of ribbed aluminum, and the textures of other industrial materials.[75]

As I will later argue in more detail, this enthusiasm might be more productively and completely viewed as bridled by contradiction, surrounded by conflict (of a psychological, economical, and political nature) and blanketed by debates and misunderstandings (or mythologizations) of rationalization, Americanization,

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[74] Van Deren Coke, *Avant Garde Photography in Germany, 1919-1939* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 7.
[75] Ibid, p. 8.

industrialism, and an irrational delight in consumerism. Coke, however, does not question any of the forces behind such enthusiasms, preferring instead to maintain the museological position of celebration.

Such a statement presents materials solely in terms of aesthetic value, in terms of precision, forms, planes, and textures, and positions the artist as a kind of naïve appreciator of forms on behalf of an industrial client. This will become one of the larger questions underlying this dissertation, especially for Chapter Four: to what extent were the photographers politically and socially engaged? To whom were their allegiances made? Was the utopian belief in renewal and the powers of industrial development really the unquestioned force for artists on both the left and the right and the driving force for their engagement with and support of firms such as AEG, Bochum, Siemens, and Krupp? It may be worthwhile to quote Coke's essay at some greater length as it usefully points out the important relationship emerging between photography and industry. It allows us to see how this first wave of photo-historians of the New Vision, writing in the late seventies and early eighties, often talk of Weimar as a culture of surfaces and mention the idea of delving below surfaces in search of meaning, but actually end up skimming over those surfaces in order to admire them and celebrate their formal beauty. To this end, Coke writes:

> Germany's modernist movement in photography, or 'new vision' as it was often called, grew out of a heightened awareness of the aesthetic possibilities of geometric forms –either those related to the machine or to architecture… The photojournalist competed for space in popular periodicals with their interpretations of the complex and contradictory forces at work. They evoked both the dynamism of machines and people's faith in them and the fruitful future they seemed to symbolize. The new vision that was born in photography was successfully applied to portraiture as well as advertising and journalism. The

> hypnotic forces at work in this exciting period become apparent when one takes time to delve beneath the surface of these deft and precise pictures.[76]

In keeping with my critique then, Coke talks of delving beneath the surface, but maintains that the images symbolize dynamism and faith in progress, that the photographers were "free-spirited" rather than in any way hired, and that the forces at work were "hypnotic" (yet another form of mystery, paralysis and elision).

Rosalind Krauss, in her 1980 article "Jump Over the Bauhaus," reviews Van Deren Coke's *Avant-Garde Photography in Germany, 1919-1939*.[77] She points out "the partnership between a newly wrought camera culture and a newly aestheticized industrialism."[78] Krauss, however, continues to collapse a variety of practices under the term New Vision. New Vision is identified with the 1920s fascination with the close-up, with product fetishism, the new interest in photography for the purposes of advertising in general, "the liberation of eyesight from the horizon-line" i.e. the bird's eye view and worm's eye view imagery popularized by Moholy-Nagy, the composite print of photo-montage, the multiple exposure; in other words, "the necessary visual transformation of reality itself."[79] This basic list has formed our understanding of the term New Vision as interchangeably used with Neue Sachlichkeit, and is still used as the basis for most textbooks on the history of the medium. It is a convenient catchall, a generalized "ism." Krauss, after listing such a variety of practices to designate one single "style," has to ask: "Is there, finally, any one coherent vision in The New Vision?" And I would add this to her questioning: what is being overlooked when history collapses so much into

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[76] Coke, p. 8.
[77] Rosalind Krauss, "Jump Over the Bauhaus" *October* (Winter 1980), pp. 103-110.
[78] Ibid., p. 103.
[79] Ibid., p. 104.

generalities? Krauss answers her own question with: "what unites the various techniques and formal tropes of The New Vision's camera-seeing is the constant experience of the camera-seen." What she says unites these forms is either the camera itself or the self-reflexivity of the technological apparatus. Yet she maintains her discussion on the level of the formal, aesthetic tropes of the individual images. In the end, Krauss concludes, "The New Vision is utterly fascinating and perfectly ambiguous."[80] Thus the mystification of the image is perpetuated and reigns supreme.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues against this supremacy of formalism in photographic history. She writes: "…[C]ultural fields – especially those pertaining to the visual arts – are institutionally and conceptually organized around the conviction that there is a discrete entity called the aesthetic and a discrete entity called the political, and that they occupy categorically distinct, and indeed antithetical realms."[81] She continues:

> The institutional formation of a photographic aesthetic (and the histories it engenders) masks a politics no less active and instrumental for being entirely disavowed. In one sense, the politics of photographic aestheticism is manifest in the activity of selection: what practices and practitioners are made visible, which ones are banished or ignored. In another, more profound sense, the politics of aestheticism is the expression of an ideology of cultural production which is premised on an idealism that is at best naïve and at worst mendacious. This is an ideology that proclaims the autonomy of the aesthetic, the primacy of the individual artist, and the noncontingency of cultural production.[82]

Solomon-Godeau points out the need to look at the nature of such banishments and disavowals, and, as I have noted above, Neue Sachlichkeit photography built an aesthetic on just such an unnoticed content of contingency. Of course, Solomon-Godeau is also writing in response to the boom of the photographic fine art market in the late

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[80] Ibid., p. 110.
[81] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. xxi.
[82] Ibid., p. xxiv.

seventies and early eighties, just coincidentally at the same time that historians began to reflect back upon New Vision photography as an art form. This then allows us to consider the aestheticization of New Vision and Neue Sachlichkeit projects as not only a denial of context, but also as a response to the burgeoning art economy of the eighties.

As Liz Wells, Maud Lavin, and Sally Stein have also indicated, one area largely overlooked in all of this has been the advertising photography of the 1920s. Only a small handful of scholars of art history and visual culture have begun to consider such images as a separate but related (to the more aestheticized and personalized imagery of photomontage for example) practice. Liz Wells points out that "…from the very beginning, photographs were employed to induce desire and promote commodity culture."[83] She continues:

> Within the traditional histories of photography, commercial photography has largely been ignored, despite the fact that photography produced for advertising and marketing constitutes the largest quantity of photographic production. While there are a number of critiques on advertising imagery, these tend not to be concerned with the photograph in particular. Other areas of commercial photographic production have received relatively no critical attention from scholars. Much of the history or literature that has been written has tended to be commissioned by the companies themselves or their associates, such as Thirsty Work: Ten Years of Heineken Advertising and Some Examples of Benson Advertising. These publications have also been unconcerned with the photographic aspect…It was during the inter-war years that photographs began to be generally employed within the advertising industry.[84]

Sally Stein has similarly called for more scholarly analysis of the magazine, and within it the advertisement, as vehicles for "the visible materiality of consumer culture," saying that "[w]e need to comprehend better the ways these institutional forms structure meaning...how they are integrated into a larger complex pattern of experiences and also

[83] Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 169.
[84] Ibid., p. 169.

how they are resisted (at least partially) because of their inconsistency with the logic of our experiences."[85] Her careful attention to the magazine layout as a way of providing insight into the construction and psychology of consumerism has helped to light the way for my own work. In addition, Patricia Johnston's careful attention to the original contextual usage of the advertising work of Edward Steichen has informed my dissertation greatly as she considers his imagery in light of the history of consumption.[86]

Maud Lavin's writing on Weimar art and design has proven to be especially instructive for my dissertation as she has pointed out some of the areas still in need of investigation and she has done so with an eye toward positioning Weimar image culture in relation to design and commodity culture in the United States. Additionally inspirational is her ability to situate the fast-paced development of mass culture imagery in the twenties as part of a historical trajectory related to design, advertising, photography, and internet dissemination today. The third chapter of her 2000 book, *Clean New World*, will serve as a springboard for Chapter Four of this dissertation. She highlights the Ring Neue Werbegestalter (Circle of New Advertising Designers) founded in 1928 by Kurt Schwitters, raising questions about the politics and utopian aspirations of a group of visual artists being employed by industrial clients and German city governments to advertise products and promote technological rationalization. Lavin argues that the artists were utopian about the possibilities for technology and that this was the general climate in Germany. It therefore did not matter what one's politics amounted

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[85] Sally Stein, "The Graphic Ordering of Desire: Modernization of a Middle-Class Women's Magazine, 1919-1939" in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1989), 160. See also "The Composite Photographic Image and the Composition of Consumer Ideology," *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1981), pp. 39-45.

[86] Patricia Johnston, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

to or with which party one was allied, since the belief in the system of rationalization was embraced by both the United States and the Soviet Union. She writes:

> At this point one might ask cynically if all the exhibiting, promoting, and fervent talk about the blessings of advertising on the part of the Ring artists was not simply a desperate attempt to earn a living at commercial graphics during the worldwide depression. This, after all, is how traditional art histories have described the involvement of a fine artist like Schwitters in commercial advertising. However, one has only to read the Ring members' published statements and their letters to one another to realize how much more than money was at stake: these documents are evidence of a serious desire to contribute to mass culture, to sway it toward functionalism, rationality, and a glorifying of production.[87]

Chapter Four of this dissertation will be expanding Lavin's discussion to include the photographic commissions of Albert Renger-Patzsch, Hein Gorny, Hans Finsler, discussing the issues at stake in the photographers' engagement with industrial imagery and forms. I will discuss their work as part of the photography of sales, promotion, display, and a fetishistic response to rationalization. It is also a style of imagery that stretched beyond its functionality as advertising and into the cultural imagination at large, serving to naturalize the image of industry and contributing to the construction of an "imagery of consensus."[88] Lavin's account does not take into consideration just how contentious the monologue of rationalization was. This monologue was tempered by a heated *dialogue* concerning the German understanding of Americanization and rationalization.

Advertising was perceived to be one among many "American" imports at a time when German industry became occupied with reorganizing the productive process through installing assembly lines and using advertising to aim at a mass consumer

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[87] Lavin, pp. 39-40.
[88] See Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

market. Lavin writes that "[w]ith rationalization of production bearing the stamp of both U.S. and Soviet practice, the representation of rationalized technology in German culture often avoided any explicit political identification and, instead, focused on technical apparatus. In addition, divisions between workers and management were elided by the mythic creation of the celebrated engineer, an amalgam of labor and management: creator, producer, thinker, doer – above all, efficient man."[89]

Lavin's observation that rationalization was largely characterized without political identification does not take into account the significant and extensive debate around Americanization which had become roundly associated, almost inseparable, from the term rationalization. She continues: "Thus geometric form and grid composition in 1920s German graphics connoted such admiration of rationalization and technology, and a belief in the supreme importance of industry to society (a belief held by supporters of quite different governmental forms). The focus on form paralleled the fascination with means of production and both, it seems, worked together to block discussion among cultural modernists about industrial ownership, labor practices, and profits. This elision is particularly striking – and with hindsight, curious – among those who were actually producing advertisements for industry."[90]

Lavin, like some of the authors mentioned above, notices an elision, something unsaid and blocked from discussion and she explains it as a blinding by enthusiasm for the technology. I am suggesting that this blind spot runs deeper and coincides with an inability to see the forest (of capitalism) through the trees. It also involves a lack of

[89] Lavin, pp. 31-32.
[90] Ibid., p. 33.

attention to the actual conditions of production, a perpetuation of the apolitical formalism of the imagery.

This study will extend Lavin's observations and examine them, not only in relation to advertising during this period but in relation to a collective visual interest in the serialized object in photography. It was an interest that appears to be a frenzied, almost delirious desire for representations of excess, for material goods, in response to the hyperbole of Weimar inflation and depression. Thus where Lavin focuses on photomontage and typographical design ads produced by artists like Jan Tschichold and Kurt Schwitters, I am more interested in the photographic, serial aesthetic of products and consumer goods in advertising, photojournalism, and art photography. I will look at not only the specific photographers involved in commercial work for industry, but also at the strong, silent forces underlying the photographic imagery most often corralled under the term Neue Sachlichkeit, de-captioned, de-contextualized, and thus made more palatable for history and exhibition. In addition, Maud Lavin asserts an important methodological point:

> To exclude [the] involvement with mass communications from art history, as has been common practice, is to create a history in which artists and intellectuals are sequestered from the majority of society – from societal evolution, discourse, and change... Such isolation was not the condition of a 1920s avant-garde deeply occupied with mass-cultural production. Nor need isolation from mass culture and its societal issues be a scholarly or artistic condition today…Instead, a more nuanced cultural history is called for, one that recognizes that these and other 1920s artists endeavored for ideological and financial reasons to reach a mass audience and to participate fully in modern means of communication."[91]

Thus most importantly, Lavin calls for "a more nuanced cultural history," pointing out that the history of art until just recently has passed over the complications of

[91] Ibid., p. 46.

commercially-tainted image production in order to uphold the myth of the artist as individual genius. Her above passage, then, might be read as a kind of historian's call to arms to examine artistic and commercial production, and the hidden relationships between the two, from a more interdisciplinary perspective. This view, often marginalized as Marxist, represents a re-framing of both photographic imagery and the history of capitalism as intertwined, as based in material economic and political structures rather than formal dynamics.

In fact, while the camera has been written about from various points of view, beginning in the 1920s as a machine first and foremost, and the history of photography has remained largely a history of changing technologies, it has rarely been pointedly regarded as a direct, hand-in-hand partner in the history and development of industrial capital. A few writers, such as Christopher Phillips, Elizabeth Anne McCauley, and Allan Sekula have referred to the fact of photography's infancy alongside that of the industrial revolution.[92] However photography has not yet in a more comprehensive way been dissected in its advertising role, as visual support and facilitator of the now unquestioned, pervasiveness of the image as commodity and the commodity as image. Commodity and image have become interchangeable, almost one and the same; the principles of photography and of industry interlocked from the beginning (reproducibility, seriality, sales, attachment to the object or the referent, entrepreneurial spirit, mechanics of means, inventorying capacity, profitability in all of its forms). In

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[92] See Christopher Phillips, ed. and intro., *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Aperture, 1989); Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994);
Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (Halifax, N.S., Canada: Press of the Novia Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984).

these and so many ways, the camera's structural, discursive, and paradigmatic existence has been bound to that of the commodity.

Neat Packages and Messy Oversights: The Methodology

The medium of photography itself acts here as a methodological guide. The photograph as an always incomplete image, a fragment or a still cut out of the larger and ever-moving reality, can guide the historian to insist on finding meaning in the fragmentary, the detail, and the contingency of the collection. Photography's mutability of meaning and mobility of context suggests that any text written about it must also be partial and contingent rather than an encompassing, comprehensive account. Photography, as a medium also attached to psychological, even emotional readings, will act here, I hope, as a guide to the writing of a history equally informed by psychological ruptures and passionate responses to imagery. As has been discussed by Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, and more recently by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Carol Armstrong and others, photography enjoys special status as something denotative, attached to the real, and indexical.[93] It is imbued with the inflection of objectivity and has remained, even to this day, a medium associated with transparency, a medium itself largely unseen. We stubbornly see what is in the photograph before we understand the materiality and

[93] Carol Armstrong's approach has influenced my interest in the contextual circumstances of photography. She writes: "Museums that show photographs display modernist, ambiguity-celebrating ones elegantly matted and framed on the wall like paintings, perfectly printed and adhering to archival (or better, museal) standards of permanence, with the most minimal titles and verbal information clearly separated from the images clearly occupying a different domain from that of the photographic object. They also show historic photographs of all kinds that way. The history of photograph collecting and of the art museum's colonization of the historic photograph is rife with removals from the photograph's printed context, be it cut from the album series or from the pages of a book." Carol Armstrong, *Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843-1875* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), p. 2. My coursework with her taught me to find meaning in the excesses and details, to look *around* the image as well as at it, and to pay attention to the ruptures, contradictions, and inconsistencies of both image and text.

presentation of the photograph, the conditions under which it was produced, the intentionality behind it, and the multi-layered *meaning* of the subject matter and the compositional format that is at stake.

The methodological intention is to employ a wide-angle lens by including in my study a broad array of photographic practices and discursive spaces. By examining four thematic case studies in which the commodity, the consumer object, emerges as both imaged and imagined, I hope to peel away some of the generalized discussions of Neue Sachlichkeit photography in order to reveal a more nuanced understanding of Weimar photography and its commercial associations. As I have been insinuating, the primary and secondary literature pertaining to the Weimar era, and to Neue Sachlichkeit imagery in particular, is riddled with related terms such as repression, deception, blind spots, and states of paralysis. There seems to be room, then, for a text that would try to look more directly at the blind spots of Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetics and engage them in a dialogue with the economic conditions, international debates, and photographic discursive arenas that produced them. Each chapter of this dissertation may be considered an attempt to gaze more directly at, and to speak more frankly about, the complexity of photography in the service of commerce. This includes the understanding of how consumerism, industry, and commodity production visually shape our culture both then and now. Each of these four chapters is also linked by an interest in reassessing the terminology encircling much of the literature about the inter-war years and photography.

Allan Sekula's model of photographic investigation will come to mind for the reader. His essay "Photography Between Labor and Capital", published in 1983, serves as one of a small handful of methodological models I look to in my own interrogative

formulations. In this study he takes as his subject matter photographs of the miners and mining industry in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia by local photographer, Leslie Shedden. A series of questions he posits at the outset is worth quoting as my approach will at times echo his own:

> How does photography serve to legitimate and normalize existing power relationships? How does it serve as the voice of authority, while simultaneously claiming to constitute a token of exchange between equal partners? What havens and temporary escapes from the realm of necessity are provided by photographic means? What resistances are encouraged and strengthened? How is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted and obliterated by photographs? What futures are promised; what futures are forgotten? In the broadest sense, these questions concern the ways in which photography constructs an imaginary economy…Nonetheless, such questions are easily eclipsed, or simply left unasked. To understand this denial of politics, this depoliticization of photographic meaning, we need to examine some of the underlying problems of photographic culture.[94]

Sekula is concerned with a typical eclipsing of the content of politics and economics. Photography within this context is able to constitute an "imaginary economy," an economy of images only revealed if the context, commission, and original intention is made available. He writes that "[d]espite the powerful impression of reality…photographs, in themselves, are fragmentary and incomplete utterances. Meaning is always directed by layout, captions, text, and site and mode of presentation."[95] My dissertation will be seeking to restore more of that meaning for a broad selection of photographs produced during the late Weimar Republic.

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[94] Allan Sekula, "Photography Between Labour and Capital" in Benjamin Buchloh and Robert Wilkie, eds., *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures, 1948-1968*, with photographs by Leslie Shedden (Novia Scotia: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Press, 1983), pp. 193-194.
[95] Ibid., p. 196.

American Values: Girls and Goods, White Collars and Photography: The Chapter Breakdown

Each of the chapters in this dissertation seeks to place Neue Sachlichkeit and the popular look of product photography and the serialized image within more wide-reaching contexts: the larger contexts of cross-cultural and international debate about Americanization, the commercial and political relations between photographer (artist) and industrial client, and the cross-pollinating context of art and vernacular photographies which permeated avant-garde and popular culture during the inter-war years. Chapter Two and Chapter Three consider the ambivalence of the term Americanization and how this concept was made manifest through photographic imagery. Specifically, Chapter Two will focus on the origins of the term Americanization, its text- and image-based dissemination and its ambivalent reception in Germany. Chapter Three will look at Siegfried Kracauer's early writings on photography, the "mass ornament," and his under-examined sociological text, *Die Angestellten* (*The Salaried Masses*) as they relate to the debates concerning Americanization and the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic.[96] I will consider particular visual tropes explored by Kracauer as examples of the fantasies of Americanism and consumerism abounding in the twenties and thirties. Of particular significance will be Kracauer's discussion of the Tiller Girls, a popular form of entertainment during the Weimar era. Resembling the more vaudevillian can-can or the marginalized Rockette dancers of today, the Tiller Girls phenomenon reflected, according to Kracauer, the mass production and mass consumption orgy that was the late 1920s.

[96] Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten: Aus dem nuesten Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), originally printed in installments in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 1929. For translation see *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans., Quintin Hoare, intoduction by Inka Mülder-Bach (London and New York: Verso, 1998). Of particular interest will be Kracauer's "The Mass Ornament" (1927), but also his "Photography, (1927), "Revolt of the Middle Classes" (1931), "The Little Shop Girls Go to the Movies" (1927), and "Boredom" (1924), among others; all reprinted in Levin, ed., *The Mass Ornament*.

This "process", he writes, in fact "began with the Tiller Girls". Assumed to be "American," the popular form of precision-line dance, the lining up of one body after the next in extreme rhythm, actually originated in Manchester, England but sparked a new interest in serialization. This new interest was exploited by advertising, but it also became a popular "aesthetic" in its own right. I will explore this long-standing misattribution and its indication that Americanization was a perception first and foremost, a convenient label or ideological football.

I will consider those visual tropes central to Kracauer's texts which signal the mass ornament: the "girl", the goods or consumer plenty, the white collar, and the proliferation of photography itself, examining how each relates to the inventorial mindset of American capitalism.[97] The second half of this dissertation will include two case studies of the Neue Sachlichkeit serial aesthetic or Tiller-Effect in context. Chapter Four first looks at the figure of Albert Renger-Patzsch and his relation to German industry. It then examines the journal (published from October 1925-January 1935 by the Deutsche Werkbund) *Die Form* and its contentious engagement with the industrial sector, focusing on articles and photographs within it by Renger-Patzsch, Hein Gorny, and Hans Finsler in particular. These three have been chosen because they are the most-represented photographers in *Die Form*, and are perhaps the three most well-known photographers labeled alternately as Neue Sachlichkeit, industrial photographers, or "Sachfotografen" by historians such as Eskildsen and Van Deren Coke discussed above. I will focus upon their use of the serial format and their promotion of industry as a practice with political implications. Neue Sachlichkeit photographers oscillated between aesthetic and

commercial worlds and the journal *Die Form* attempted to straddle this divide. The political implications of this oscillation will be considered here with the hope of raising questions regarding the relations between photographers and the growing corporate culture of the commodity of the 1920s and 1930s.

Chapter Five will continue a discussion of the imagery of mass ornamentation, honing in on the work of "bauhäuslerin" Elsa Thiemann, whose preoccupation with the serialized object points to the popularization of the Tiller-Effect as an aesthetic. As a student of Walter Peterhans and clearly influenced by the popularity that Renger-Patzsch's images had acquired, she, unlike many of her teachers and fellow-students, has not garnered much attention because her work was just recently, circa 2004, donated to The Bauhaus Archive. Yet her many images of objects of the everyday, organized according to a serial principle, shed light on Neue Sachlichkeit as a highly shifting practice, influenced by internalized "American" *values*. Her series of "Rätselbilder," puzzle or enigma photographs, offers an occasion to come to terms with German culture's preoccupation with the everyday object and the psychological complexities of standardization. The focus upon commodity culture in Weimar Germany allows us to examine the formative years of photographic production, the Weimar obsession with commodities inherited from the U.S., and the collective desire for plenitude and excess (and images of plenitude and excess) born of the postwar actuality of paucity and deprivation. This time and place, both economically and visually, allows for an examination of how photography shaped a collective perception around images of Americanization.

Chapter II

Defining Americanization, Visualizing *Amerikanismus*

The term Americanization is a visual one. It is a term whose changing meaning is largely disseminated through photographic images. A widely debated concept, it is envisioned with great variety depending upon the time and place of its usage. In recent years it summons, for example, images of protests and debates surrounding U.S. immigration and of Wal-Mart-variety sprawl washing up on the coast of Southeast Asia. Americanization connotes, for better or worse, images of the golden arches as well as the stars and the stripes. It summons Lewis Hine's 1904 photographs of Ellis Island immigrants, as hundreds of thousands embarked upon the process of Americanization, but also vivid images of anti-American flag-burning in Iraq and other hotly contested countries around the globe. Eighty years ago, in 1926, an Americanization campaign was the solution to the American government's fear of mass immigration. This resulted in U.S. policies of homogenization and assimilation that had begun earlier in the 1880s with the so-called "Americanization" of the native population, an effort that expanded after World War I.

In Europe, the term engendered great debates, involving both disdain and embrace, regarding American cultural infiltration. In a German article entitled "Amerikanismus" for the *Vossische Zeitung* in September 1925, Rudolf Kayser called it "the newest European trendy word. It works like most trendy words do: the more one uses it, the less one knows what it means."[98] But the definition of Americanization, as it

[98] Rudolf Kayser, "Amerikanismus", *Vossiche Zeitung*, Sunday, September 27, 1925 as translated and reprinted in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, p. 395.

is conveyed by images, changes with each passing decade. However it is becoming more and more clear that Americanization has all along meant the process of internalizing and internationalizing capitalism. Critics writing on the subject of Americanization today still maintain the task of defining, or re-defining, the term without acknowledging that it always was, and certainly is today, a synonym for global capitalism. This is a pill much larger and more difficult to swallow than the cultural, entertainment-based and commercial manifestations conjured by the word itself.

Americanization is a convenient catchall term that has throughout the twentieth century laid blame at the feet of the Americans. It gives capitalism and all that it is responsible for, a fresher face (or at least a semi-fresh face), thereby deflecting engagement with the actual conditions, side effects, and marginalized results of a corporate profit-driven social, economic, and political system. Americanization, indirectly through visual forms such as news reportage, government "spin," and especially through advertising, lays claim to an image that is youthful and fun, buoyant, sexy, pioneering and exciting. It is a visual term that elicits desires. Yet throughout the twentieth century, among citizen-consumers in both The United States and abroad, the term is shorthand for "evil" at one dinner table and "heroics" at another. It is a word that implies a process, at once sociological, psychological, economic, and certainly political. One recent author, Peter C. Whybrow, even writes of Americanization as a *biological* process by which immigrants coming to the United States genetically produce over time a nation of risk-takers, a gene pool of the curious and the quick.[99] Many refer to Americanization as shorthand for the internationalization of fast food, the globalization of

[99] Peter C. Whybrow, *American Mania: When More is Not Enough* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005).

consumerism, the outsourcing of jobs by Western companies for cheaper labor, or the pop-cultural spread of so-called American values via Hollywood, an accusation leveled since the invention of cinema and an idea especially active during the Weimar era.

A small, yet growing, body of literature is emerging over the past few years which re-kindles the subject of Americanization, including Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes' *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (2005) and Victoria de Grazia's *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (2005).[100] Each deals with the larger European picture in relation to mass culture and consumerism, including cinema and other forms of entertainment. But as I have found across the board in the literature on Americanization issues, none deal with the importance of the medium of photography as the visual vehicle for disseminating "principles" or "values" of Americanization, both in the United States to its own citizens and abroad. Photography is only mentioned tangentially and the focus is more often than not on Hollywood cinema.

Most of the literature, while citing Germany as ground zero for the Americanization of Europe, does not center on Germany alone but takes a more global view. Yet the term Americanization found its most vociferous and visual battleground in

[100] Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen The Mall: Europeans and Mass Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. And London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996); Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America vs. Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Harm G. Schröter, *Americanization of the European Economy: A Compact Survey of American Economic Influence in Europe since the 1880s* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Norwell, Mass.: Springer, 2005); Adelheid von Saldern, *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum in Deutschland des 20 Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1996).

Germany during the period between the wars.[101] Due to its dependence upon the United States economy after World War I, Germany became a laboratory for working out the fears and fanaticisms, the rejection and the embrace, inherent in not what America *meant* as much as how America was produced as an image, how it was *imagined* and thus translated into *Amerikanismus***.** In this chapter, I will begin with a brief history of the Weimar Republic. This will contextualize my dissertation, providing an historical basis for understanding The Dawes Plan and the process of stabilization (1923-24) as a point of origin for a more concerted infiltration of *Amerikanismus* into Germany. I will outline some of the most significant early twentieth-century definitions of Americanization, the issues at stake within the *Amerikanismus* debates in Germany, and the ways in which photography was used to frame both Americanization as a process in the United States and *Amerikanismus* as a spirit of the times in Germany.

A Brief Weimar History

The short, vibrant, unstable history of the Weimar Republic is one that has been detailed by others. I will therefore provide here a curtailed history of the key economic and political developments as a background for the developing definitions and debates surrounding Americanization and *Amerikanismus* in Germany**.**[102] This history has been

[101] For the perception of Americanization in the wider international debates in The Netherlands and Russia, see Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Stewart Wentworth, *The Making of a Nation: A Discussion of Americanism and Americanization* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1920).
[102] For general Weimar Republic history and culture see: Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (London: The Penguin Press, 1987); Ruth Henig, *The Weimar Republic, 1919-1933* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); John Willet, *Art and Politics of the Weimar Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Anton Kaes, *Weimarer Republik: Manifeste und*

documented in a variety of forms, mostly by German and American authors, since the fledgling birth of the Weimar Republic in November of 1918. Some historians mark the beginning as November 9, just two days before the signing of the November 11 armistice. Others mark the Republic's birth by way of the Spartacist uprising and the tragic deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht of January 15, 1919 and still others mark it by the establishment of the Weimar constitution of August 11, 1919. A brief outline, with a focus upon the political and economic conditions that took shape between 1918 and the demise of the republic at the hands of the National Socialists in 1933, is necessary here as an integral part of the imagery to be discussed.[103] An underlying premise of this dissertation is that a majority of the photographic imagery produced during the Weimar years was inspired by and even underwritten by the economic and political conditions at the time and the debates surrounding Americanization that accompanied them. The focus here is upon the dates 1923 to 1933, indicating that it is not a history of the Weimar Republic *per se* but a concentration on the photographic imagery produced during the so-called "period of stabilization" and American intervention of 1924-1929, followed by the rapid decline of 1929-1933. This ten-year span was a short, concentrated period of time dominated by the influx of American capital and by the political muscle and jostle of large industry.

As World War I came to a close, Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated the throne, taking exile in The Netherlands on November 28, 1918 and leaving the German government up

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Dokumente zur Deutschen Literatur, 1918-1933 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1983); Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Keith Bullivant, ed., *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978); Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Eberhard Kolb*, The Weimar Republic* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[103] I rely primarily on the outstanding and comprehensive histories by authors such as Detlev Peukert, Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, Mary Nolan, Klaus Schwabe, William C. McNeil, John Willett, and Peter Gay, among others.

for grabs. In order to pre-empt this, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Philipp Scheidemann, proclaimed a new republic on November 9, hoping to negate any claim upon the government that would be imminently announced by the Spartacist Party, dedicated to bringing Soviet-style communism to Germany. But on January 1, 1919, the Spartacists took to the streets of Berlin. As has been well documented, this short-lived revolution was met by the mercenary and revenge-thirsty Freikorps, a private military body made up of professional, volunteer soldiers displaced by the end of the war. The bloody clash ended with the violent public assassinations of the leaders of this popular left wing movement, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. By February of 1919, Friedrich Ebert, the Chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was elected to be the first president of a newly proclaimed republic.

By June 28, 1919 the Treaty of Versailles was signed under protest by the Germans. The treaty became a collective sore spot that was unable to heal for the German people during the existence of the new republic. The reparations payments required of Germany, for example, were insurmountable and perceived almost unanimously as such. The much debated, so-called "guilt clause" of the Versaille Treaty claimed that one hundred percent of the blame for the war lay with the Germans. Germany was required to demilitarize and release all of the territories annexed during the war. Despite protests, a Weimar constitution was nonetheless forged and adopted on August 11, 1919, creating an ever-tenuous multi-party government of proportional representation by region, a key element of which was that women were given the right to vote for the first time. But even as the new government initiated operations, it was already under attack from all directions. In 1920 there was an attempted overthrow of the government by a right-wing faction initiated by Wolfgang Kapp, in protest at President

Ebert's acceptance of the terms of the Versailles Treaty. Without enough support, the putsch failed and Kapp was jailed for treason by 1922. The year 1922 also saw the murder of the Jewish foreign minister and chairman of the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft (AEG), Walter Rathenau, sending the government further off balance.[104]

By 1923, the German government was still struggling with paying even small, regular amounts of the immense reparations to the Allies. The Versailles Treaty therefore had not been honored, bringing France and Germany again to the point of stand off. In response, France and Belgium sent troops into Germany's most concentrated industrial region. They brought in their own workers and began arresting German resisters. The German Mark during this time, which was already extremely inflated at approximately 10,000 Marks to the U.S. dollar, slid rapidly to 25,000 Marks per dollar by April of 1923. It hit an all-time low, an unimaginable point of 4.6 million Marks per dollar by August, completely bottoming out the German currency. This time of crisis and hyper-inflation in the Spring of 1923 (Peter Selz has said that by "November 1923 one U.S. dollar was worth 42 trillion marks") was aided by the printing of new money to pay still-employed German workers.[105] This allowed conservative factions to gain stronger popular hold under the coalition government's chancellor, Gustav Stresemann. With the Russians apparently watching every move and considering a revolutionary take-over of German provinces, Adolf Hitler staged an unsuccessful putsch, the Munich Putsch, in November of 1923. But Stresemann was able to successfully stave off such insurrections and also able to end the passive resistance in the Ruhr region, bringing the currency under some control. Given the constant unrest of the early Republic and the ever-present threat of

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[104] Again, see above footnotes for the historical resource materials consulted for this summation of the history.

[105] Peter Selz, "The Artist as Social Critic" in *German Realism of the Twenties: The Artist as Social Critic (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts*, 1980), p. 31.

military action, Detlev Peukert writes: "in a sense the world war of 1914-1918 did not end until 1923."[106] Stresemann was by 1924 named foreign minister by his successor. He brokered the stabilization of German currency by American bankers under a now-famous plan called The Dawes Plan. This plan restructured a reparations plan that was, at least as it was perceived at first, more feasible than the terms of the Versailles Treaty. This began the process of putting Germany on the track of economic recovery. However, as is well-documented, the Dawes Plan also enabled American funds and influence to infiltrate the German economy and culture, provoking many observers from within to proclaim a new type of destabilization, that of the German culture in the grips of American cultural and economic influence.

The Dawes Plan

The Dawes Plan serves as an historical springboard for this dissertation because it is a moment during which Americans step in to take a much more visible role in the German economy and in the minds of the German people, effecting cultural output and initiating the *Amerikanismus* debates. The name Dawes, again, refers to General Charles G. Dawes, an American banker from Chicago who was asked to serve as chairman of an international committee of experts including Owen D. Young, then Chairman of General Electric (and also a director for both AEG or German General Electric and OSRAM). This committee was established in 1923 by the Reparations Commission, and not surprisingly, was comprised of bankers and industry executives. It also consisted of representatives from France, Great Britain, Belgium, and Italy, and it met from January to April of 1924. Dawes's plan, which was made public in April of 1924 and accepted by

[106] Peukert, p. 63.

the Germans in August, established reform of the currency (a new note, the Reichsmark was initiated and tied to the gold standard), which essentially brought about the evacuation of the Ruhr (which did not actually begin until August of 1925). At the heart of The Dawes Plan was the availability of American money for German large-scale industries. American dollars, with the German railways and other properties serving as security, were sent to help with repayment, setting new terms for the more realistic fulfillment of Versaille payments.

The Dawes Plan also stipulated that the German Reichsbank would be placed under the supervision of the Allies, seeing to it that Germany repay approximately one billion marks per year for the unforeseeable future, an amount that as we will see with the implementation of the later Young Plan, was still an insurmountable goal. According to historian William C. McNeil, "under the Dawes Plan, German reparations payments would begin at a very low level and Germany would be given a large international loan to stabilize its currency and pay for some of the initial reparations. Over the four-year period, the reparations payments would rise to an annual sum of 2.5 billion RM by 1928, and be maintained at that level for an undetermined time into the future."[107] It is widely accepted today that no one actually believed in Germany's ability to pay such large sums, a point that becomes significant for the larger picture of both the country's collective high on the borrowing of American money and its rapid and ultimately tragic decline and vulnerability to the Nazi agenda.[108]

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[107] McNeil, p. 27.

[108] I do not want to imply, however, that the National Socialist takeover of industry in the early 1930s represented a totally separate or unrelated entity from this earlier moment of American influence. In fact, it is only somewhat understood today that American shareholders, including banks like J..P. Morgan, American companies such as General Electric, and independent American investors assisted in the funding of the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany through contributions to its Nationale Treuhand, a fund maintained for Hitler's operation and through the production of wartime materials in factories such as AEG, I. G.

In 1924, the Dawes committee installed a young man named Seymour Parker Gilbert, then only 32 years old, as an Allied Agent for Reparations Payments in Berlin. He was an underling in the firm of J.P. Morgan and was put in place in Berlin for five years in order to insure that the Dawes reparations were being paid. With the Dawes Plan in place a new era for industrial production began, one that was tethered to American interests. Mobilization of industry became the order of the day and political empowerment of the industrial sector was re-established. As McNeil asserts "important social reforms which had been antithetic to industry, especially the government guaranteed eight-hour day, were suspended and owners were given greater discretion over factory operations. The industrialist could once again begin to feel master of his own house."[109] Klaus Schwabe's account further argues that with the mobilization of German industry American companies invested so deeply in the struggling German economy that their boards of directors were often enmeshed. As a consequence, many German corporations were being lead for all intents and purposes by American executives. "Once the stumbling block of the reparation question had been removed, American businessmen systematically invested in the German economy. American credits poured into Germany; American companies were fused with their German counterparts."[110] Germany became the largest recipient of American money outside of Canada at the time, entangling the

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Farben, Osram, and Krupp still under American financial influence. Although my dissertation does not encompass this period of history, post-1933, the politics of these companies leading up to that point will remain of interest as they contradict our assumptions about the politics of the avant-garde who participated in them by way of advertising and design. Chapter Four of this dissertation addresses these issues and cites sources for further reading on the relationship between U.S. industry, German industry, and the rise of fascism.

[109] McNeil, p. 5.

[110] Klaus Schwabe in Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History, Vol. II The Relationship in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 21

United States also in German foreign policymaking. [111] Calvin Coolidge rewarded Charles Dawes for his incisive American business acumen *cum* statesmanship by appointing him to the Vice Presidency of the United States in 1925.

Many problems with The Dawes Plan, however, have since come to light. The most obvious was that the entire German, and for the most part, French and British, economies became too tightly connected to the successes and failures of American banks and American large-scale industries. "With the German currency stabilized and reparations payments brought under control, American capital, as predicted, poured into the country….But in the medium term a vicious cycle developed, as American credits were followed by German reparations payments, which led to French credit repayments, primarily to the Americans, which in turn were followed by new American credits. In late 1929 this whole overblown system collapsed, and the countries involved were sucked into the world-wide recession."[112]

The stabilization of currency and new sense of productivity in Germany after 1924 created a buzz of consumer confidence and an almost frenzied country-wide interest in studying American business and rationalization models. The dependence upon the United States also created widespread anxiety, because despite the new money and so-called "stabilization," or because of it, the only consistency in the republic was its inconsistency, given the frequent changing of political leaders and the constant rise and fall of the market and the rate of employment. Historical events during the Weimar Republic seem to have developed more rapidly than usual as the economy hit extreme

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[111] William C. McNeil, *American Money and the Weimar Republic: Economics and Politics on the Eve of the Great Depression* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986), p. 1.
[112] Peukert, pp. 195-196.

highs and lows between 1924 and 1933.[113] In 1926 Germany was allowed to rejoin the League of Nations but economic crisis struck again. The following year, 1927, saw an economic upward swing with unemployment down briefly between 1927 and 1929. From ten percent in 1926, it was reduced and then shot up to almost 30 percent by 1932.

In 1929 Gustav Stresemann died and his policy of rapprochement ended, even though his Great Coalition was able to maintain office until 1930. The year 1929, of course, saw the Great Depression beginning with the Wall Street crash of October. This event initiated economic reverberations all over the western world, and these were especially intense in Germany with its economy bound together so tightly with that of the United States. The situation only grew more and more grave from 1929 onward. In December 1929, Reich Finance Minister Rudolf Hilferding resigned with unemployment in the industrial sector at a high, and industrial leaders took advantage of this further destabilization by making demands upon the government on their own behalf. By 1930, many German industrialists called for retrenchment of welfare benefits, wage cuts, and the dismantling of the system of collective bargaining.[114]

Peukert writes that it is "no surprise that, despite differences of emphasis, the authoritarian line pursued by the presidential cabinets after 1930 coincided closely with the industrialists' strategy…And heavy industry, which had been particularly badly hit by the economic crisis, was anxious to recover by winning armaments orders, and therefore

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[113] The Great Coalition, beginning in August of 1923 is led by Gustav Stresemann which consisted of SPD or Social Democratic Party, the Catholic Centre Party, the DDP or Deutsche Demokratische Partei, and the DVP or Deutsche Volkspartei. A second "Great Coalition" was formed in June of 1928 which lasted until September 1930. For one of the most accepted historical accounts of the political shifts during the Weimar Republic, and one upon which this dissertation relies for much of its basic history, see Peter Gay, "A Short Political History of the Weimar Republic" in Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968 and 2001), pp. 147 – 164.

[114] Peukert, p. 230.

had a vested interest in a new rearmament drive… The aims of the industrialists were thus virtually sufficient in themselves to render the policies of a republican coalition unworkable and to make some form of authoritarian, anti-parliamentary regime more likely."[115] We begin to see a spike in the interest in the imagery of industrial machines, materials, goods, and processes after 1930 as newspapers, weekly magazines, and trade journals look toward the industrial disputes and the country takes an active interest in rearmament. On September 14, 1930 the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) gained Parliamentary seats, and received over eighteen percent of votes, shifting the balance greatly to the right. Then on January 30, 1933 President Paul von Hindenburg named Adolf Hitler chancellor. Less than one month later, on February 27, 1933, the Reichstag building was set ablaze, allowing Hitler to seize control. With the 1934 death of President von Hindenburg, Hitler was able to establish absolute power.

All of the anxiety of the mid-twenties through the rise of Hitler manifested itself in a variety of ways in the German culture. As a result of the tethered yet voluminous American dollars that flowed into the German economy, we might say that an obsession with material quantity developed, a preoccupation with consumer goods, with concrete possessions. This is reflected in the debates and intense ambivalence encircling a growing interest in the term *Amerikanismus,* which came to be understood as both an illness of sorts and a salve. Another cultural manifestation of crisis and American economic intervention can be seen in the body of Neue Sachlich style imagery in advertising and art photography that emerges during the 1920s and early 1930s, largely preoccupied as it is with the subject matter of industry and the products of rationalization. Rather than maintaining objectivity and representing "things as they are," Neue

[115] Ibid.

Sachlichkeit, it may be argued, accomplished the opposite - masking truths, mystifying ideology, and modeling fantasies. It is no coincidence, and I believe it has been overlooked, that the Neue Sachlichkeit style comes into being simultaneously with American economic intervention and the introduction of photography into the area of advertising. Instead of maintaining Neue Sachlichkeit photographic imagery as just one stylistic phase of avant-garde experimentation, an aspect of New Vision photography in Europe, I suggest that it is more productive to examine it as a visual product of Americanization linked to the growth of advertising in Germany and with close ties to American corporate values.

The Dawes Plan is mentioned in brief throughout the art historical literature on the Weimar period in lieu of a discussion of the role that American corporate interest played in German culture. It is rarely tied, for example, to the fact that American companies became intertwined in German policymaking, while extracting profits and contributing toward eventual re-armament.[116] A second American plan called The Young Plan was adopted in January 1930 and was led by Owen D. Young. Young was the chairman of General Electric between 1922 and 1939 (and again 1942-1945). The Young Plan also called for the withdrawal of the last French troops from the Ruhr region. With this banker's increased visibility in Germany, Owen D. Young became a director of Germany's General Electric (or AEG, Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft) and also OSRAM in Germany, which was the major manufacturer of light bulbs and lighting equipment. The Young Plan, which further intertwined American and German industries, was short-lived however. By 1931, because of the depth and debilitation of the world

[116] Chapter Four of this dissertation discusses some of the more specific connections between German and U.S. industry.

economic crisis, a moratorium proclaimed by President Hoover suspended reparations payments and international debt for one year and was the first step toward a final waiver of claims.

Both The Dawes Plan and The Young Plan must be seen not only in light of their contributions toward American-German relations and their positive efforts to assist with reparations, but also as motivated by profit. They were led, not by politicians, but by bankers and industrialists, whose presence in the German economy greatly impacted German culture. This framework reinforces the degree to which corporate interest fueled the process of Americanization in both the United States and in Germany. We will return to how the anxiety about *Amerikanismus* influenced cultural production in Germany. But I will first outline Americanization as a rhetorical and a visual process, a successful campaign within the United States that was then effectively exported to Germany by way of economic and cultural influence.

Defining Americanization in America

Americanization is a topic that has been extensively documented in relation to the United States and its policies to foster nationalism, assimilation, and the promotion of allegiance. Just as the idea of America has been part real and part imagination, Americanization has been similarly invented and reinvented. Its meaning changes depending upon which country is employing it. In the United States the term was already in place as early as the 1850s. However, interestingly enough, the first references to Americanization seem to appear in relation to Germany. James W. Ceaser writes that the first references to Americanization "…appear among German immigrants in America in

the 1850s who lamented the 'Americanization' of the German community, meaning its loss of identification with the homeland and its full-scale adoption of the ways of the new country".[117] Ceaser argues that the Germans in particular developed the earliest and most sustained symbolic preoccupation with America as a concept. It was a Romantic notion entwined with a desire for newness, the expanses of nature, and "a release from the burdens of history."[118] The conservative Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876-1925), in his 1906 book *Contemporary Times,* "was perhaps the first writer to explicitly draw the distinction between the actual or geographic America and Americanism understood as an abstract principle."[119]

Americanism was given an ambivalent reception among the immigrant population in the United States just as *Amerikanismus* was received in Germany. It was viewed by some communities within the United States fearfully as a process to lament, a loss of identity, and on the other, a means of satisfying collective desires for change, for the new, for material satisfaction. Usage of the term was quickly adopted by both local and federal organizations as an all-encompassing catchphrase for assimilation, to fight the dissolving of the nation into too many small communities of immigrants, and to promote identity as American and American only.[120] For those on the enforcing end,

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[117] James W. Ceaser, *Reconstructing America: The Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 163.
[118] Ibid., p. 176.
[119] Ibid., p. 174.
[120] Stewart Wentworth, a frequent contributor to the debates circulating around the idea of Americanizing the immigrant population, in *The Making of a Nation: A Discussion of Americanism and Americanizaiton* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1920), calls for a more orderly and comprehensive conception of Americanism because of a growing and rapid influx of "alien" immigrants, suggesting that it is dangerous to not control the situation because of the "mad pace" of business and industry. He writes that "fundamentally the process of Americanization consists of three parts – education, assimilation, and naturalization" and he calls for conformity to an "American spirit, language, identity, way of life". He calls this "Americanism" and discusses his participation in various "Americanization Conferences" around the country. He attests that "Americanism is not a form, it is a spirit" or a movement. Wentworth suggested discouragement and restraint of use of any foreign language and that we temporarily close our doors to new

Americanization in the United States became a tool to fight the fear of splintering into perceived foreign factions and to shore up America's identity as a nation. It was also employed in the late nineteenth century in relation, ironically, to the *native* American population. The history of the term Americanization in the U.S. is in a sense the history of immigration: the anglicizing of names, the promotion of U.S. history, the encouragement of reading and writing of English only, the intermittent banning of foreign languages in schools, churches, and civic organizations, and the implementation of entire classes in local libraries nationwide to learn about Americanization. In a similar fashion, practices and customs that crossed the Atlantic, such as arranged marriages, were looked upon with disdain and actively resisted.[121]

After the United States entered World War I in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson felt it necessary to put into action a grand scale Americanization machine in the form of an agency of speechmakers and volunteers called the Committee on Public Information (CPI). This was used to promote the United States' entry into the war and to sell patriotism. Wilson's propagandists disseminated in grass roots fashion, delivering speeches in every type of public space across the U.S., including schools, churches, civic organizations, and movie houses. This committee was abolished by 1919 after the signing of the armistice. However, it left a blueprint for governmental public relations

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immigrants in order to take hold of this problem. He discusses labor-capital relations, public schools, farms, neighborhoods, and slums, and that all need to be reformed to work together in a spirit of Americanism, pp. 6-12.

[121] Many of these practices however were part of much-needed reforms for immigrant workers. For instance Lillian Wald, founder of The Henry Street Settlement in New York City in 1893 and Jane Adams, founder of Hull House in Chicago in 1889, both fought against the practice of arranged marriages.

efforts and established a successful precedent for the *process* of Americanization as a way to influence public opinion on a mass scale.[122]

With Wilson's CPI in place, Americanization quickly began to receive widespread recognition as a profit-encouraging process within the industrial sector. Through the 1910s and 1920s entire conferences, underwritten by local industrial management, were being organized with local and federal government officials to promote Americanization in schools, families, neighborhoods, and especially the workplace. This effort, which ultimately groomed an entire immigrant workforce to become more driven, more efficient, cleaner, safer (and thus less expensive) employees, was evaluated on the local level by a number of organizations. Photographs were recognized immediately as the best way to convey Americanization information to a largely non-English-speaking population. Thus photographic images proliferated in brochures, on factory-floor bulletin boards, in local libraries and in community centers, showing disheveled immigrants cleaned up for the camera and often dressed in costume to represent American history (Pilgrims, Betsy Ross) or American ideals (Liberty, Freedom).

One excellent example of how important the role of photographic imagery (and the role of the industrial benefactor) had become in this effort can be found in a report produced by the Board of Education of the City of Chicago in cooperation with The Chicago Association of Commerce.[123] With this one, locally significant but widely imitated report, a number of issues are brought to light for the purposes of this

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[122] In 1924 the National Origins Act was passed in order to place limitations on the number of immigrants entering the U.S., a law that not only favored immigration from western Europe, but also banned outright immigration of Asians until the law was repealed in the 1960s.

[123] "A Year of Americanization Work, July 1918 – July 1919: Has it Paid? Read the Answer!" (Chicago: Board of Education for the City of Chicago in cooperation with the Chicago Association of Commerce, 1919), n.p..

dissertation. It highlights the role of photography in the development of a visual canon of Americanization, and it signals the underlying support and early association of industry in the development and proliferation of such imagery. The report was titled "A Year of Americanization Work, July 1918-July 1919: Has it Paid? Read the Answer!" This report takes great pride in its goal of assimilating differences among immigrants. One might argue that its central, unstated goal was to create a more efficient workforce for local industry, merging the notion of Americanization and industry or Americanization and business interest from the outset. The title's question, "Has it Paid?" insinuates the idea that the hard work of Americanizing immigrants benefits the country, serving a public good and therefore being worth the year's work. It also has the effect of evaluating a social activity in terms of profit and loss margins. However, the report more indirectly answers that Americanization literally *pays*, raising profit dollars for private industry.

A typical Americanization photograph depicts a classroom full of workers studying American poetry, customs, the English language, or short lessons dictating acceptable modes of behavior and dress. [**Figure 2.1**] The subjects are engrossed and usually dressed in their finest. These classes would often take place in a factory or adjacent room where the students could address the camera as a group, with one or two overseers, teachers, or managers in the background, and a display of the ever-present American flag. A primer by teachers and educational leaders in the Chicago community was written for such classroom lessons. The report includes a photograph of male workers from The McCormick Reaper Works that is captioned "How Foreign Workers Are Made Happy Americans." [**Figure 2.2**] A group of thirty men is studying the primer intently as if directed to look at the primer by the photographer. Opposite this

photograph of Americanization in progress is the example of "Lesson 1" in the primer. [**Figure 2.3**] It depicts, in a simplistic "Dick and Jane" style, "A Coat," diagrammatically pointing to a Collar, Sleeve, Pocket, and Button. It then depicts in both type and script (in what today might playfully be compared to Magritte's ironic, surrealist mockery of the diagrammatic mode of representation, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe"), the English sentences: "This is a coat. This is a button. This is a pocket. This is a collar. This is a sleeve." That these features of the proper worker's attire are visually presented as "Lesson 1" in a primer on the Americanization of the worker is significant. It attests to the fundamental importance and symbolic expression of the outward attire, the basic commodities necessary to become an American worker. The white shirt collar and jacket are associated directly with the process of Americanization, the respectability of work, and the training of the worker as first and foremost an American. It bespeaks the obvious adage that it is the dress that makes the man (American).

But it also establishes what I will examine further in Chapter Three; that the white shirt collar is one of the basic visual tropes of Americanization. It is an object that in turn assumed prominence in Germany as a signifier of American values. In the accompanying photographs in the report, the shirt collar is then "demonstrated" on the factory workers. It is reinforced in a more elevated version, always with neat tie, jacket, and pocket watch, on the managers and owners often present in the photograph, overseeing the workers and vouching for their education. [**Figures 2.4 and 2.5**] The collar, as something able to convey information about social class, takes on iconic status by the 1920s and is a designation that remains relevant today. The white collar, as it was photographed for advertising, with its primary associative power and recognition factor is quickly elevated through the use of advertising into a powerful icon of social mobility and eventually a

symbol of American modernism in design. We need only consider the number of commercial photographers such as Paul Outerbridge, Jr., Paul Wolff, Hein Gorny, and Umbo, to name only a few, who embraced this subject matter for the purposes of advertising in order to see that it is then transformed into a fine art symbol of all that is modern. Its contextual presence as part of the ABC's of becoming an American initiates the notion of the collar as part of the visual lexicon of Americanization, clothing the immigrant in what it means to possess American attributes or at least to wear Americanism on one's sleeve.

Attesting to the national scope and inter-disciplinary outreach of the Americanization effort, another photograph in this report is of a classroom and visiting committee at the Barrett Company's plant. [*Figure 2.6*] It is captioned by naming all of the visitors in attendance: representatives (both men and women) from Illinois and Kentucky councils on national defense, one from the Americanization Bureau of New York City, a safety engineer from Oliver Iron Mining Co., a superintendent of schools from Boston and from Pittsburgh, and a member of the board of education from Buffalo, among others. One observer, an employment manager from the company Rosenwald and Weil, notices that he has found "a much greater interest and cooperation among these employees in their daily work" as a result of their attendance in Americanization classes.[124] One teacher, a Miss Mary E. Harris, boasts: "Nothing but English is now spoken in the U.S. Ball-Bearing Co."

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[124] David E. Nye, *Henry Ford: "Ignorant Idealist"* (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1979) writes that Henry Ford's own policy demanded his workers Americanize thoroughly, at work and at home: "Over the years Ford had repeatedly tried to homogenize his work force, to make his employees identical in language, custom, and self-reliance. His village industries were to be run by natural, whole men who had shaken off all vestiges of foreign custom, reborn in the melting pot of his factory," p. 129.

But Americanization clearly does not simply mean that one can speak English. In fact, in searching for a definition of the term as it is applied in America in the early twentieth century, one finds that authors of this same report (The Committee on Americanization in cooperation with members of the Foreign Language Newspaper Press of Chicago) conveniently established their own definition:

> Americanization applies equally to the native born and the foreign born. It means the development, and possession by the individual, of intelligent pride, loyalty, love, and devotion to the government, institutions, and ideals of the United States, and the practical identification of his interests with those of the nation and its people. It involves the practical realization of the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. It may take place in the native born by the regular and usual influences of home, society, and the school. In the case of the foreign born, Americanization is mainly dependent, on the one hand, upon the expression of cordial welcome and sincere friendliness toward him, and, on the other hand, upon his own initiative and interest, and is promoted by such social, linguistic and civil intercourse and education, as he may be able to find, and of which he may of his own accord avail himself.[125]

Perhaps noteworthy is the fact that the institution of work is not incorporated into the defining statement above. Work is never mentioned in the definition and yet every image in the report is of a man or woman represented first and foremost as a member of the workforce of a particular corporation for mining, electricity, or the castings and machine manufacturing industry. The photographs tell us that Americanization classes organize and order the worker, transform them into docile students under the tutelage of their managers and plant owners, promote active attention to command, and unify the labor force. These classes supposedly change them from a dangerously eclectic foreign mass into a similarly dressed, eager, and grateful workforce, yet the text eliminates these references. The photograph reproduced directly underneath the above definition of

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[125] "A Year of Americanization Work, July 1918 – July 1919: Has it Paid? Read the Answer!" (Chicago: Board of Education for the City of Chicago in cooperation with the Chicago Association of Commerce, 1919), n.p..

Americanization is captioned “One of the English Classes at the Deering Works, International Harvester Co.”. [**Figure 2.7**]

The use of a dress code to differentiate factory floor worker from manager-owner is striking. The workers, in this case all men, are seated and wearing white shirts with dark jackets and the manager-owners stand watchfully at the back of the room, wearing dark suits and ties. It is clear through the photographs that Americanization is a formula produced by and for the benefit of American private industry. It has as much or more to do with the enhancement of profit and the establishment of a force of workers and consumers as it does with pilgrim’s pride and abstract notions of national indivisibility. On the next page, a “NOTICE” poster is reproduced which was displayed in Chicago industries warning that *only* workers who have become naturalized Americans will be promoted. [**Figure 2.8**] Americanization is not only a perk of employment but is actually a threatening command. The notice urges loyalty to government and to employer, and “encourages” the learning of English through plant assistance and in neighborhood Community Centers and Public Evening Schools. The report finishes with statistical charts and warnings that the failure to understand English results in higher frequency, severity, and time loss due to on-site accidents. It is followed by four portrait pages of the men and women participating as teachers, members of the Committee on Americanization, members of the Chicago Association of Commerce, and the employers and managing officials who were in direct contact with the industrial classes.

One employment manager, a Fred H. Smith, summarized that “the most important benefit derived by this firm from Americanization work in my opinion is that with Americanization, which is a permanent cure for Bolshevism, comes a higher standard of

morale, which is the basis of better quality and bigger quantity production," confirming all of the visual information conveyed by the photographs in this report. The very last page of the report is a letter from (and photograph of) Secretary Lane, The Secretary of the Interior in Washington, D.C., in which he is apparently writing "I thank you for sending me the copy of 'Chicago Commerce'. You have shown without doubt that 'Americanization' does pay." This once again underlines the association of Americanization with the industrial bottom line and reinforces it as a visual process ordained by the American government in collaboration with large industry.

There was, however, a conflicting definition of Americanization and what it meant to be American that was established by the various local labor unions. Chicago, since it pushed hard in the teens and twenties for one hundred percent Americanization of its immigrant population, serves as an example city. The Chicago Federation of Labor, The Women's Trade Union League and various other local pro-worker civic organizations also preached Americanization to the immigrant laborer.[126] However, their message, in words and images, reflects a different concept of Americanness.

One photograph reproduced by the Chicago Historical Society depicts an "Americanization pageant" held in 1924 by the Chicago Commons Settlement House and taken by an unknown photographer. [127] [**Figure 2.9]** A group of children are costumed for the camera and stand on a set of bleachers loosely positioned to face the camera. Their costumes reflect the traditions of other countries rather than promoting pure homogeneity; they are Slavic, Dutch, Germanic, and Spanish, but also depicted is a Betsy

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[126] For further discussion of Americanization efforts in relation to the working class, see James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the American Working Class, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992), pp. 996-1020.

[127] Photographer unknown, "Pageant at The Chicago Commons Settlement House," 1924, provided by The Chicago History Museum.

Ross figure and a Pilgrim. What joins all of these miniaturized citizens of the world is the American flag draping around them and the hand-drawn cartoon of a ship on the backdrop. The photograph confirms a definition of Americanization competing with the one enforced by the representatives of local commerce and industry: that individual national identity is acceptable *simultaneous with* American identity, a more tolerant and eclectic conception. To photograph this scene and disseminate it as an example of the process of Americanization efforts seems to be the main purpose of this costumed gathering, arranged for the very didactic purpose of the photograph, a photo-op for the showcasing of Americanization as a process.

Defining *Amerikanismus* in Germany

Just as Americanization became one of the most present catchphrases in the United States, it became one of the most overused and abused terms in the twenties in Europe, signaling a more consciously ideological debate. Widespread mythologizations of America as both nemesis and savior developed and were openly discussed in newspaper articles, magazines, trade journals, and entire books. A perception of America emerged as all-business, free of weighted concerns, the capitol of capitalism, for both those who had never visited the United States and for those who had. This was merged with an un-self-conscious desire for material wealth born of the deprivation, loss and economic devastation created by the war. *Amerikanismus*, as understood by both

conservatives and liberals, was a kind of addictive spirit (of consumption) to which Germans found themselves susceptible.[128]

It did not manifest itself in such blatant didacticism as we saw promoted by the Americanization effort in the United States. Instead it operated more insidiously, implying American values through the youthful field of advertising photography, a field that saw its biggest boom years between the mid-twenties and mid-thirties, just at the height of American economic influence in Germany. Although *Neue Sachlichkei*t photography throughout the art historical literature has been discussed in the framework of fine art, many of the projects that today are treated as singularly modern images, were originally conceived as direct and indirect forms of advertising. They were produced as part of a campaign to promote a product or, more often, to promote an entire industry or range of industries such as the standard goods (*Typenwaren*) production of porcelain, household utensils, machine tools, cars, shoes, electricity, or furniture, to name just a few examples.

Amerikanismus seemed to translate very well into easily digested, easily disseminated snippets of visual information rather than long treatises or philosophical texts. It therefore dovetailed perfectly with the growth of the illustrated press, advertising, and also the popular new style of magazine and *feuilleton reportage* which conveyed meaning at a glance to a young, busy, urban readership.[129] The following

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[128] It is informative to note the number of magazine articles and novels appearing in the Weimar period addressing the relationship of a protagonist to consumption and protagonist to window display and urban advertising which was often perceived as a dizzying activity, one which had the potential to overwhelm. See Janet Ward, "The Display Window: Designs and Desires of Weimar Consumerism" in *Weimar Surfaces*, pp. 191-240. Examples can be seen also in Chapter Three and in the prevalence of the "shopgirl" as a type in Kracauer's writings.

[129] Siegfried Kracauer, writing for *Die Frankfurter Zeitung*, remains, of course, one of the most important of the early twentieth century critics to develop *reportage* as a way of writing about the quotidian or what

section of this chapter will outline the basic ideas in circulation about *Amerikanismus*, the key critics and the ideas at stake. It will then examine examples of the iconography of *Amerikanismus* as it took hold in the German imagination as an equation of quantity and boundless materialism, paying particular attention to moments of intercultural American-German photographic exchange.

The United States had been perceived by Germans, since roughly the 1870s, as a vast expanse of boundless landscape. With the Dawes Plan and the expansion of American business interest in Germany, the perception that the boundless landscape equals America is exchanged for the photo-based image of boundless materialism. Just as land may be viewed as potential raw materials under the influence of industrial capitalism, the image of the land as quantitative is exchanged for the image of commodity materials, wealth, and sheer, even infinite, plenitude. Threatening to swamp other nations in its wake, America as a symbol was blamed for the destruction of German society and cultural values and also celebrated as a model for a new, fast-paced world of high finance where women worked, fashion ruled, and business and entertainment were the order of the day. It would replace the old regimes, the old social structures, and the old economic order. America in Germany, for better or for worse, was received as an image first and foremost, an image of sheer quantity.[130] As the literature on the Americanization of Europe, and of Germany in particular, has grown substantially in the past years, I will merely summarize the debates here. My aim is to consider what role

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he called the "unscheinbare Oberflächenäusserungen" or surface-level expressions, as keys to unlocking collective secrets about behavior, desire, and socio-political meaning.

[130] Perhaps the best resource for a discussion of the role of America as an image in Germany is Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning Amerika: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and his Contemporaries, 1915 – 1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Museum, 1990) which is mentioned at greater length in Chapter One.

photographic imagery played in the dissemination of and understanding of *Amerikanismus*.[131]

Rob Kroes and Robert W. Rydell write about the Americanization debate in Europe as having its origins in the 1880s, just as America was becoming an economic presence abroad and beginning to develop forms of mass culture that were being exported to Europe by way of international world fairs.[132] In fact, in the literature of the past two decades, Americanization has become synonymous with mass culture.[133] It is a pairing that has served to highlight the forms of entertainment (American films and their European "invasion" were the most visible and most criticized American export) while unintentionally obscuring the more ambivalent (and much less fun) aims and effects of corporate capitalism. Kroes and Rydell, in a sub-section entitled "European Responses," discuss briefly the writings of conservative European critics such as Johan Huizanga, Max Weber, and Matthew Arnold. They write: "[b]y 1901, when W. T. Stead wrote his

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[131] For a thorough discussion of the positions taken by the various critics writing in the 1920s, see Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Nolan's bibliographic essay entitled "Economic Americanism," pages 308-309, includes the reception of Henry Ford in Germany, travel essays by economists and engineers, and responses to Americanism from both the left and the right including authors such as Julius Hirsch, *Das Amerikanische Wirtschaftwunder* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1926); Charlotte Lütkens, *Staat und Gesellschaft in Amerika. Zur Soziologie des amerikanischen Kapitalismus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1929); Theodore Lüddecke, *Das Amerikanische Wirtschaftstempo als Bedrohung Europas* (Leipzig: Paul List, 1925); Arthur Feiler, *Amerika-Europa* (Frankfurt: Societäts Druckerei, 1926); and Alice Solomon, *Kultur im Werden: Amerikanische Reise-eindrücke* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1924); Paul Rohrbach, *Amerika und Wir. Reisebetrachtunge*n (Berlin, 1926); Alfred Rühl, Vom Wirtschaftsgeist in Amerika (Leipzig, 1927). For discussions of the perception of Americanization abroad by recent authors, see also Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., *"Here, There and Everywhere": The Foreign Policy of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000); Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1961); Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History, Vol. II The Relationship in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Dan Diner, *America in the Eyes of the Germans*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Weiner, 1996).

[132] Rob Kroes and Robert W. Rydell, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*, pp. 47-72.

[133] Andreas Huyssen's important contribution to the relation between Americanismus and mass culture will be discussed below as I come to its definitions within Germany specifically in the 1920s. See *After the Great Divide, Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986).

largely anecdotal book, a general concern about 'Americanization' had been in the air for at least a generation."[134] A British critic, William Thomas Stead, viewed Americanization as an inevitable trend and proclaimed and outlined its political, cultural, and economic impact upon every continent. Kroes and Rydell stress "the possible range of meanings for the word Americanization" and credit the term as coming from French writers such as Baudelaire and the Goncourts who used the word to mean all forms of materialistic degradation of culture.[135]

James Ceaser argues that the nineteenth-century brand of Americanism as it was perceived abroad was one based on race and the fear of degeneracy. Just at the moment the United States was beginning to establish itself as a young nation, it had to establish policies of Americanization in order to stave off its own dissolution into the melting pot. He writes:

> The America of the turn of the century was different. It was seen as a powerful, almost irresistible force, degenerate, if you will, in the sense of being grotesque and often blindly destructive. The earlier thinkers had attributed degeneration to the physical causes of the environment or the mixing of the races. At the turn of the twentieth century the cause of deformation was intellectual or spiritual. America represented the political idea of a constructed political order based on individual freedom and democracy…America became the emblem for the technological and scientific project of modernity…. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, America had been discussed as a place or country – although it was clear that its qualities were often serving political and philosophical purposes. By the second half of the nineteenth century, it was also being seen as a process or a worldview capable of being separated from its physical home and transferred elsewhere. America was entering the realm of the spirit.[136]

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[134]Kroes and Rydell, p. 149; W.T. Stead, *The Americanization of the World or the Trend of the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Horace Markley, 1901).
[135] Kroes and Rydell, p. 166. Kroes notes that Baudelaire was the first to "coin" the term"américanisé" in relation to the 1855 Exposition Universelle de Paris, using it as a denigration of the impact of American industrialization upon French values.
[136] Ceaser, p. 163.

Amerikanismus could thus stand ambivalently for the promise of economic prosperity, the prognosis of cultural depravity, and everything in between. It was a popular topic of discussion (both light-hearted and heated) in the press. Depending upon the venue, the concept swung between politics and culture and was often couched in negative terms positing long-standing German high *Kultur* against recent American mass cultural forms such as jazz, precision-dance, movies, boxing, advertising, and various forms of spectacle. According to Mary Nolan, the debate was epitomized by the statement: "Germany had spirit or intellect (*Geist*); America had materialism. Germany had *Kultur*; America had consumption."[137]

Yet Nolan's book rightfully argues throughout for the complexity of the German reception of the American model. She argues that America figures so prominently in the German mindset during the Weimar period that the German conceptualization of America and its own mobilization as an industrial power are two sides of the same coin. As "one of only two available models for economic and social modernity – the Soviet Union representing the other," the American economic success story was everywhere in evidence in Germany. Nevertheless, most German observers remained fearful of any full-scale embrace of the American system and its cultural byproducts. Nolan details the positions of the various critics. For example "Charlotte Lütkens and Adolf Halfeld were interested in the links between rationalized American capitalism and those phenomena invariably described as characteristic of American society in the 1920s: movies, sports, jazz, the emancipation of youth, the displacement of traditional cultural leaders, the democratization of consumption, the rise in divorce, and the altered position of

[137] Nolan, p. 113.

women."[138] The estimation of another critic, Moritz J. Bonn, might be summarized as "The almighty dollar and its use are the meaning and goal of American life."[139]

But according to Detlev Peukert the debates cannot be so easily polarized. He writes, in a chapter entitled "'Americanism' versus *Kulturkritik*", that:

> [t]he dispute between the advocates and opponents of 'Americanism' in the twenties, in other words, was by no means simply a confrontation between progress and reaction, between liberating modernity and the stultifying tradition. This confrontation was certainly real enough, and the international economic crisis made it all the more sharp. But the debate about 'Americanism' was also a focus for the concerns of those who feared for the future of humane values within an unregulated industrial society yet did not want to urge a retreat into a pre-industrial golden age. For such people, freedom and human dignity would certainly not be served by exchanging the old chains of European traditionalism for the new conformity of a rationalized, modular-built American future."[140]

Peukert's analysis not only points to the unproductiveness of understanding *Amerikanismus* as a coin with only two sides, the liberal and the conservative positions as taken within Germany, but also points to the association of *Amerikanismus* with a rhetoric of imagination, a word that conjured up fears and futures of a very general nature.

Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Andreas Huyssen are key figures in the twentieth century's critical literature concerning the fears and futures of American influence in the world, and upon German art and culture in particular. Adorno and Horkheimer's 1944 essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," written while both were in New York, does not speak of an "Americanism" per se, yet the entire critique is bound together with American systems of consumption and

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[138] Ibid., p. 108.
[139] Ibid., p. 109; Moritz J. Bonn, whom Nolan describes as representing "the classical free-market liberal assessment of America and Germany" (Nolan, p. 309) in his book *Amerika und sein Problem* (Munich: Meyer and Jessen, 1925).
[140] Peukert, Detlev J. K., *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (London: The Penguin Press, 1987), pp. 180-181.

entertainment. Speaking of "the totality of the culture industry," Adorno and Horkheimer equate the culture of the West i.e. the U.S. with repetition.[141] The repetition of cinematic plots, musical patterns, popular novels, and even human personalities is an inseparable product of American efficiency and rationalization, a fate that they link to German fascism and its shared fascination with control by way of replication and repetition, the weeding out of all difference.

Like Adorno's and Horkheimer's text, Andreas Huyssen's much later discussion often assumes the American qualities of mass culture while not always stating this outright. While most of his work centers on its relation to Pop Art and issues facing the 1960s in Germany and the U.S., he views this Americanized "cult of technology" as a notion that was filled with contradictions, especially as it was embraced by the European left in the 1920s. His interpretation of Americanism was "associated with jazz, sports cars, technology, movies, and photography" – a shorthand that may have at this point become a limitation for what could become a more broad understanding of the term and its European reception.[142]

Although the focus here is upon Germany, this reception cannot be understood without the writings of Italian theoretician, Antonio Gramsci, a one-time member of the Italian Parliament in the early 1920s and the secret general secretary of the Italian Communist Party at a time when fascism in Italy was becoming the ruling order of the day. His essay, "Americanism and Fordism," and other related articles were just one section of his *Prison Notebooks*, handwritten while Gramsci was imprisoned for his politics and smuggled out just before his death in the prison's clinic. Gramsci is one of

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[141] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Englightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972, pp. 120-167.
[142] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indiannapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 60.

the first to attempt a systematic definition of Americanism, which he, as most writers after him would do, equates with the principles of capitalism enacted by Henry Ford and what became known as Fordism. Gramsci points out that Americanism in the U.S. was a very different thing than it was in Europe. He writes that in America, Americanism "exists quite naturally" but that in Europe, since the upper classes and the historic aristocracy have no real relation to production, this offers a demographic problem.[143]

The notion of Americanism is therefore bound together with industrial production. He points out that Americanism's reception in Europe was encountering great resistance and was not simple but fraught with ambivalence and that it therefore merited closer examination. He notes that it is particularly fraught with ambivalence in Berlin, even more than in Paris or in Moscow, where it had also become a topic of great interest. In Germany, writes Gramsci, Americanism was born of crisis. It was intermittently rejected and embraced due to the extreme crisis of inflation, crisis of war, and crisis of speeded-up industrialization, all of which existed simultaneously in Germany.[144]

Oswald Spengler was perhaps America's and Americanization's most influential and most conservative German critic. He prophesized about what an America grafted onto Germany would look like. Borrowing from Nietzsche, Spengler's ideas on America infected those of Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger, Adolf Halfeld. Spengler's main (and catastrophic, because for him Americanization equaled the end of a cycle of decline) idea was that *Technik* (understood less as technology *per se* and more as a philosophical

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[143] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 281.
[144] Rob Kroes*, If You've Seen One, You've Seen the* Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 18.

position toward technology and science) and American-style mechanization were taking over the world and would lead ultimately toward soulless decline because it was founded on egalitarian ideals.[145] A simplification of Spenglerian thought might read that egalitarianism is a pipe dream as man's nature is contrary to it. There were those who were born to lead and those who were not.

We know, of course, what the kernels of Spengler's anti-rational, anti-Enlightenment extremism sprouted, but his notion of how American values would lead toward a different form of decline adds a level of complexity to the idea that rationalization, in its many forms, went hand in hand with Nazification.[146] Only from a position of some distance today can we ask: did Americanization and American investors' influence upon Germany's industrial and political practices and policies lead toward 1933 or away from it? Where does the debate over pro versus anti-America fit into this history? And how does the infusion of American money and industrial technology after the enactment of the Dawes Plan implicate the American government and particular American industrialists in the handing over of power to the Nazi regime in the early 1930s? I will not pretend to have answers to these questions, which reach outside the scope of visual culture, but cannot resist poking a finger into this wound.

Adolf Halfeld, mentioned above, was a German newspaper correspondent who traveled when in the U.S. to study the country's habits and then also lived in the U.S. for many years. He was, however, one of the most influential conservative critics of

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[145] See James Ceasar for a complete discussion of the positions of both Spengler and Heidegger on America, pp. 175-186.

[146] Spengler wrote that "Equal rights are contrary to nature [and] are the beginning of the irrevocable decline of societies…Society rests upon the inequality of men. That is a natural fact. There are strong and weak natures, natures born to lead or not to lead", as quoted in Ceaser, p. 179 and cited from Spengler, *Year of Decision*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1934), p. 92**.**

America, writing a two hundred and thirty page book entirely dedicated to *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*.[147] Halfeld's position captured the German imagination because of its fulfillment of existing stereotypes of the American landscape, practices, and people. His "study" was repeated by like-minded critics and is still cited when *Amerikanismus* is mentioned.[148] With chapter titles like "The Americanization of Europe", "The Business State", "The Dying Landscape", "The Omnipotence of Positive Thinking", this still-un-translated book summarized and perpetuated the stereotypical thinking about the United States that was prevalent among Germans at the time. His terminology, such as "Masseninvasion" and "Girlisierung unseres Geschmacks", reflects the kind of chatter about America that was the word on the street and in the popular press. This book was written after Halfeld spent just over a year in the United States and he offers the disclaimer that it is indeed a subjective account. Yet, he claims, it is not without sight of objectivity, written from the perspective of a German and a European. He makes many claims about America, most based on stereotypes, and insists that the more Germany and Europe in general embrace American values through its films, advertisements, business practices, feminism, and spirit, the more they will surrender their free will.

Ernst Bloch is another key figure in the Amerikanismus debates. In *Heritage of Our Times*, Bloch writes about *Neue Sachlichkeit* as an American phenomenon, emerging from the problematic process of capitalization that he calls "the despiritualization of life, the process of human beings and things becoming commodities, [which] is polished up as

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[147] Adolf Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus: kritische Betrachtungen eines Deutschen und Europäers* (Jena: E. Diedrichs, 1927).
[148] See, for instance, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* for a translation of Halfeld's "America and the New Objectivity" (1928), p. 407.

if it was in order, indeed order itself."[149] Bloch, who continued to defend Expressionism as progressive, characterized *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its American tendencies as blazing the trail leading toward Nazi fascism. He criticized this sensibility or trend as deceptive, writing that it expresses:

> …only the honesty of the foreground, and it provides no holds, not the slightest flourish for further examination; a smooth face guards crooked paths. Just like the peasant who, on receiving a sum of money which he was supposed to check, counted only to sixty then stopped, because the sum had been correct up to then and would certainly go on being correct, so too should the proletarian and employee deal with Objectivity; which is correct at the front as long as one does not continue counting into the background. Its light, its cheerfulness, its clarity mark the part as the whole, the shop-window as the shop.[150]

Bloch's description lends itself quite handily, indeed almost seems to describe, photographs such as Hein Gorny's usually "Untitled" advertisement for DKW automobiles, depicting an endless display of shiny new vehicles hot off the conveyer belt.[151] [**Figure 2.10**] DKW was the acronym for one of the major automobile manufacturers, Dampf Kraft Wagen or steam-driven wagon. It merged with three other companies: Audi, Horch, and Wanderer in 1932 to form the AU or Auto Union. The photograph is usually given the date of 1930 yet the shape of the logo on the front car suggest that it was taken instead in 1932 or after, some time after the merger of these companies. Most of the logos after this merger looked like the four linked rings of the current Audi logo but with the addition of the words "Auto Union" in the center of the

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[149] Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Stephen and Neville Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); first published in Zurich in 1935.
[150] Ibid., pp. 198-199.
[151] This image is listed as "Untitled" in Van Deren Coke, *Avant Garde Photography in Germany 1919-1939*, and is credited to Joachim Giesel, Galerie Spectrum, Hannover**.** It is published as *Auftrag DKW, um 1930* (Commission DKW, circa 1930) in Ute Eslkildsen *Werbfotografie***,** p. 37.

rings enclosed within a long rectangular shape. This shape is slightly in evidence in the picture.[152]

Providing a model for the formal structure envisioned by the *Amerikanismus* debates, the Gorny image also leads us directly to the source: the modern assembly line and its mantra of efficient mass production. Not only is a new consumer product being conveyed but also an idea, a mythological yet appealing concept: surplus production will eliminate depression and war, a kind of capitalist fairy tale of infinite provision and democracy via mass consumerism. As the automobiles extend into the distance as far as the eye can see (or at least as far as the photo-frame can hold), we read into the image the possibility of a happy satisfaction of desire. Whether we can afford to buy one or not, the possibilities are perceived as new, limitless, boundless, and as American as the recent invention of the automobile. The cars are beaming with shiny light-heartedness and cheery availability. As if to insinuate Bloch's vision, these thirteen windshields and hoods and twenty-six headlights and gleaming fenders stand in for a perceived endless army of sameness, a prospect both comforting and threatening for the German viewer.

Given the apparent, if temporary, "bounce-back" of the German economy and currency after 1924, one might expect to see this growing interest in the imaging of quantity and the preoccupation with abundance and plenitude, even with the hyperbole effect peculiar to the Weimar Republic. However, after the Wall Street crash and the beginning of the worldwide Depression in the early 1930s, one might also intuitively expect to see this trend subside. And yet it remains and becomes an even stronger impulse after 1929. This might be explained by the fact that, as the Weimar government swings toward the right after 1930, it aligns itself more and more with the needs and

[152] For more on the automotive industry, see pp. 37 and 150 in Nolan.

demands of industrial capital. The blossoming of such imagery is apparently in marked contrast to the fact that the world economic crisis had just begun. It can, however, be read as an image of collective fantasy and as a capitulation to the industrial sector. This, while magazine editors, managers, publishers, writers, and even artists incline themselves away from protest against American-style capitalism and toward accepting it as inevitable. Patricia Johnston notes: "In the depths of the depression, moreover, new industrial design reflected a hope that technological progress would solve economic problems and reinforced a sense of optimism."[153] In other words, an optimistic image projecting productivity was not a contradiction in the 1930s but rather held hopes that "consumer demand for new design would keep the factories busy…[and in this sense] buying things was itself a patriotic act."[154]

The Gorny image may therefore suggest that American-style rationalization was characterized by boundlessness and quantity. Similarly, the provocative image of unchecked production and unlimited consumption underlines most of the texts and images participating in the *Amerikanismus* banter of the day. Fantasy or reality, this image of material consumption on a grand, unbounded scale is insinuated throughout the literature, riddled with references to the issue of quantity. Quantity is seen as taking preference over quality in the American way of thinking. Most Europeans already thought of America as a place of boundlessness in relation to expansive spaces, and infinite possibilities, but by the 1920s, as industrial production replaced agricultural production, that symbolic image had been submerged and replaced by boundless quantity of objects, of material goods.

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[153] Patricia Johnston, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). p. 124.
[154] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

Greatly influenced by Oswald Spengler, Martin Heidegger, perhaps "the preeminent philosopher of technology and the originator of the postmodern symbol of America…" defined Americanism in terms of boundlessness and quantity.[155] He wrote: "[t]he way of life most characteristic of the age of technology is captured by the symbol of America (or Americanization). America embodies all the effects of the rule of technology over production, culture, and politics. The material things themselves are less important than a way of "calculative thinking" that reckons everything in quantitative terms and that represents the culmination of metaphysical thought." Heidegger offers the closest thing to a definition of Americanism in his statement that "[t]he primacy of sheer quantity is itself a quality i.e. an essential characteristic, which is that of boundlessness. This is the principle we call Americanism."[156]

Quantity as a prerequisite for the mass ornament perceived to originate on American soil is also at the heart of Siegfried Kracauer's critique of culture in the 1920s, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. Whether his immediate subject is the cinematic or stadium audience as undifferentiated mass, the entertainment form mirroring the audience as mass "demonstrations of mathematics", or the new masses of ungrounded salaried employees, Kracauer's observations point to *quantity*, not as a noun representing monetary or material value but as a new socio-cultural value in and of itself. He is haunted by the Heideggerian observation that "quality has been transformed into quantity" and fears that the capitalist epoch and its preoccupation with mass markets,

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[155] Heidegger "draws the bleakest picture of America" says Ceaser, p. 180. "Americanism is not something born on the rocky shores of Massachusetts and nurtured on the broad plains of Kansas. It represents a working out of modern European thought…", p. 196.

[156] Cited in Ceaser, p. 192; from Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlins Hymne," (1942) in *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 53:86 (of 79 volumes), (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975).

surplus profits, and endless products has infiltrated not only cultural products but also the mechanisms of the everyday.[157]

In the Spirit of Inclusion: European-wide *Amerikanismus*

In the spirit of inclusion, it is only fair to note that the Germans were not the only ones who perceived America as having an unseemly preoccupation with profit and numbers. So too did many critics from The Netherlands, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, and even the United States in the 1920s. In fact, as noted above, Charles Baudelaire began to make this connection and to criticize it as early as the 1850s, at the advent of industrialization. Most writers and critics on the subject expressed to one degree or another ambivalence about America and what it meant. Edgar A. Mowrer, an American journalist who later won the Pulitzer Prize in 1933 for his insights on the rise of National Socialism in Germany, expressed his ambivalence about American influence abroad through his book, *This American World* (1928)**.** [158] In it he tackles the relationship between the United States and Europe. He writes: "To a seasoned viewpoint, one great man, one great book, one great idea, is superior to any number of mediocrities. Not so to the great American people. For them, numbers have a fascination. More of this, more of that, bigger than, richer than – such expressions mean something tangible and soothing. What satisfaction we draw from consideration of the number and size… What we are out for is 'progress.' And the progress, we understand, is measured in numbers."[159]

Mowrer suggests that the ambivalence surrounding America and Americanization in Europe is generated by human desire, the desire for consumer goods, a desire that is

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[157] Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*, p. 30.
[158] Edgar A. Mowrer, *This American World* (New York: J.H. Sears & Company, Inc., 1928).
[159] Ibid., p. 10.

born of deprivation. He continues: "Whereas the old aristocratic and cultural *élite* and some of the social radicals bitterly resent American plutocratic ideals and standardized mediocracy, the masses in Europe fall ready victims to the lures of American life. This life, lifted from its social setting in the United States, is often grotesque. But its material benefits loom so luscious that it would take more abnegation than impoverished Europe possesses to refuse them."[160] According to Mowrer, then, the embrace of Americanism is not only class-based but also is born of the seduction and perceived plenitude of material goods by an impoverished people, the desire for plentitude born of paucity.[161]

An anecdote about Henry Ford reported by Mowrer, whether truth or heresay, succinctly states the great divide between European thought and American thought as a divide understood as quality versus quantity: "Henry Ford looked at a Rembrandt. 'What's the good of it; there ain't but one of it,' he said. 'Multiply it by a million and I'll help you circulate it'."[162] This statement attests to the perceived crudeness and shrewdness of Ford's vision at its most basic but also puts into practice the Benjaminian observation regarding the emerging primacy of the copy, the multiple, and the cultural embrace of mass production (he writes: "Quantity has been transformed into quality").[163] Somewhere in between Ford's capitalist mantra to circulate the copy for sales and Benjamin's revolutionary optimism regarding the copy's potential to shatter tradition is a discussion of Neue Sachlichkeit photography. Its imagery celebrates the object and its

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[160] Ibid., pp. 29-30.
[161] Mowrer goes on to connect Americanism to the field of advertising through the idea that only "native" (and by native he seems to mean non-recent-immigrants) Americans understand sales and advertising as a *service* to the people because of its relationship to prosperity, a link that will be explored further below.
[162] Mowrer, p. 156.
[163] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), as reprinted in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4, 1935-1937*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 267.

copy and professes boundlessness. It touches upon both art and commercial advertising; it is both European in preoccupation with form and experimentation and American in preoccupation with the commercial product - - the car, the collar, the cigarette, the shoe. Just at the moment when the *Neue Sachlich* photograph of the object enters the scene, photographers are claiming artistic status, and iconic, even auratic status for the photograph. And yet the medium of photography and the object photographed giddily proclaim aura's destruction, offering one for everyone, enough for everybody, an embarrassment of riches. Whether it is Spengler, Halfeld, Heidegger, Bloch, or one of the tens of others writing on America in the 1920s, each theorizes extensively about America's penchant for quantity; a yearning for the copy is considered the country's most outstanding and defining feature.

Selling Americanization/ Buying *Amerikanismus*

If America is equated with quantity and material boundlessness in much of the literature, this equation is consistent with the photographic images we find adorning advertisements in the illustrated press. The following section will discuss how Americanization was established as an image. It was perceived in the twenties through the growing field of commercial advertising photography, infused with American values and packaged as the style we now consider *Neue Sachlichkeit* photography. Many of the photographs today understood by art historians stylistically as *Neue Sachlichkeit* might be more productively considered cultural manifestations of Americanization and the *Amerikanismus* debate. As such, they are visual examples of the preoccupation with "the

thing itself" and with capitalist surplus and quantity. The concept of Americanization in the United States was indeed promoted through the imagery of classrooms, parades, and pageants, as discussed above, but, by the mid-twenties, it began to be indirectly promoted by way of the fresh new field of photographic advertising.[164]

Robert A. Sobieszek, in his 1988 book *The Art of Persuasion*, calls the 1920s and the 1930s "the first golden age of advertising photography." Even though photography was brought into existence through the 1830s, it only "played a minor role in advertising for nearly a century after its invention."[165] As is well documented in most textbooks on the history of photography, by the 1920s, with the vast improvements in reproduction offered by the halftone process, it quickly became the norm to include photographs printed easily alongside text.[166] The "first golden age of advertising photography" comes about simultaneously with the perfection of this process, and also with the recognition and dissemination of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a "style" or cult or sensibility commensurate with modernism. Both celebrated the object, the commodity, and the material production of machine-made goods. The preferred look or treatment of an

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[164] See Elspeth Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Corporate Culture, 1884-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). For another recent discussion of the role of photography in the field of early advertising, see Patricia Johnston, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[165] Robert A. Sobieszek, *The Art of Persuasion: A History of Advertising Photography* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1988), pp. 14-16.

[166] Patricia Johnston provides a succinct history of the halftone process: "The technology for halftone reproduction had been patented in 1852 by William Henry Fox Talbot, who had invented a gravure process in which a photograph was printed separately on coated paper and then tipped into the text. Other inventors soon refined his concept and by the 1880s had developed type-compatible relief halftone processes. The technology was continually improved until 1890, when Louis and Max Levy of Philadelphia developed an excellent quality type-compatible relief halftone process. In the 1920s the process became more economical and further technical refinements were made in ink, paper, plates, photographic emulsions, and press technology, but there was no major technological change," p. 31.

image in advertising during this first golden age is one that Sobieszek terms "the modernist treatment."[167]

Characterized by isolation of the product as a single object or by making it appear to be one of thousands, the product/subject is arranged in a studio setting and is presented as an entity in and of itself, detached from human actions and interactions. Elspeth Brown argues that the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century approach to the object in an advertisement stressed the narrative interaction of person and thing within a place, a setting, seeking to re-create the familiar - - the kitchen or bathroom, the road, the store. But, she adds, the beginning of international modernism in terms of advertising relied upon the object itself to emanate associations and social meaning, activating unconscious desire on the part of the consumer. In other words, the "modernist treatment" relied upon the power of commodity fetishism and preyed upon the fears and frenzies that mark the boom and bust years between the wars. The object gained a new power, a sociologically significant and enticing aura. The commodity could incite desire without scenario. It became charged with symbolism through the power of repetition in illustrated magazines. Ad men and their clients began to realize that designs, which not only depicted the product to be sold but also projected desirable qualities to be associated with that product, were the most successful.[168] Cleanliness and friendliness, precision, success, speed and efficiency, if projected through the elements of design, could sell products. American business was booming and therefore images associated with America sold more products.

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[167] For the discussion of the relationship between photography, advertising, and modernism which took place in some of the prominent trade journals in the 1920s, see Robert Sobieszek's footnotes on page 36, especially Sidney F. Wicks, "Photography in Modern Advertising and Commerce," *The British Journal of Photography* 81, no. 3862 (11 May 1934); Brian Rowe, "There Is No Modern Art in American Advertising," *Printer's Ink Monthly* 18 (February 1929); J.R. McKinney, "What Has Happened to Modern Art in Advertising," *Printer's Ink Monthly* 19 (November 1929).

[168] For a good discussion of advertising psychology and the understanding of image symbolism and subliminal impact, see Patricia Johnston's sub-chapter "The Psychology of Persuasion," pp. 93-104.

Photography, because of its own associations with precision, speed, modernity and machine efficiency, was soon recognized to be especially suitable for the projection of such ideals. "When corporations turned to photography…they turned quickly because they saw photography as the best visual expression of the new American age. Though invented by Daguerre and Talbot – one French, the other British – photography, as the newest artistic medium, was considered naturally American."[169] Elspeth Brown adds: "[p]hotographs denoted the superior product through the image's immediate quality, while photography as a medium implicitly connoted the efficiency of American business culture. Photography was the preferred medium in advertising copy directed to an implied rational consumer".[170]

The qualities of being American were conveyed through advertisements, as we will see in Chapters Three and Four. There was a high degree of international exchange in the area of advertising during the Weimar years, as the field was suddenly being viewed as the key to profitability. Advertising trade journals such as the popular *Gebrauchsgraphik* or the sleek *Die Reklame* with both German and English articles began to appear and to herald the international, and largely American-influenced advances in the field. Just as we see engineers and would-be industrialists, politicians and businessmen traveling to the U.S. in great frequency during the Weimar period, we also see ads encouraging advertising executives to travel to the U.S. in order to study the field. One typical ad from 1928 offers an "Amerikafahrt for Deutscher

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[169] Johnston, p. 31.
[170] Brown, p. 164; see Elspeth Brown's chapter entitled "Rationalizing Consumption: Photography and Commercial Illustration" for a history of the photograph in advertising, pp. 159-216.

Reklamefachleute" stating that it is the wish of every German ad-man to learn about and observe the American advertising business in person.[171] [**Figure 2.11**]

As long as *Neue Sachlichkeit* photography is understood as a specifically *German* phenomenon rather than as a reflection of its historical and economic circumstances and its definite relations to American capitalistic rationalization, its larger cultural meaning will be misunderstood. Rather than reflecting an interest in experimentalism, this new look is more productively viewed as part of a growing awareness and influence of American corporate values. Rather than staking a claim for the national origin of a particular style, perhaps it is more productive to ask less colonialist (claim-staking) questions about origin in favor of looking at *how* images signify so-called "American" values and perpetuate a spirit and a *perception* of *Amerikanismus*. That will be the aim of my next chapter.

[171] "Amerikafahrt. Deutscher Reklamefachleute", offered by M. Riesebrodt, *Gebrauchsgraphik*, October 1929; the editor of this journal was H.K.Frenzel.

Chapter III

Girls and Goods, White Collars and Photographs: *Amerikanismus* and the Tiller-Effect

"The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires."[172]

"Nur von ihren Extremen her kann die Wirklichkeit erschlossen werden"[173]

In 1923 the Hungarian artist and Bauhaus teacher László Moholy-Nagy introduced the subject of the Tiller Girls into one of his many socially charged and sexually loaded collages.[174] The Tiller Girls were the name for the much-emulated precision dance troupe perceived to be from America. *Chute*, one of Moholy-Nagy's more striking compositions, combines pen and ink with airbrushed elements, and collaged half-tone and photo-gravure reproductions. [**Figure 3.1**] A repeated photographic image of the dancers is situated upon a curved chute, a tall structure much like a toboggan-run or an industrial conveyor belt. Each dancer's legs are spread-eagle as each dancer's head rests back upon the lower torso of the next, creating a chain-link of connected bodies moving along an assembly line. The legs and shoes form the most

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[172] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (June 1927) in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, edited and translated and with an introduction by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 79.

[173] Siegfried Kracauer, "Preface" to *Die Angestellten, Aus dem nuesten Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), p. 7.

[174] See Eleanor Hight, in her book on *Moholy-Nagy, Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995). Hight points out that Moholy-Nagy began making his photomontages in 1923 (p. 147), which suggests that Chute is one of his earliest examples. Hight mentions Germany's "deep involvement with mass culture" at this time, but does not link Chute specifically with perceptions of the United States, p. 146. Some more work on this connection in Moholy-Nagy's images and also on the dating of his photomontages may be warranted, as others have noted that he only began working with photomontage after 1924, pointing to a possible discrepancy of dating. As far as this argument is concerned, it makes perfect sense that *Chute*, with its Tiller reference, would be a product of the burgeoning *Amerikanismus* of 1923.

ornamental pattern of this image. Leg after leg, and mary-jane after mary-jane, is lined up in rhythmic formation as far into the distance and up the conveyor belt as the eye can see. The dancers, more than can be counted, appear to recede beyond the upper left corner of the composition's frame.

Moholy's inclusion of photographs together with photogravure and hand-drawn figures of the dancers in the distance renders this as an even more abstract composition than the serialized formation already creates. The heads and bodies start as photographic in the front of the line-up and devolve toward the upper left into tiny circles, lines, and black dots for shoes. With the exception of the first figure closest to the picture plane, each dancer's head appears to sit right in the center of a pair of legs, rendering the image sexually suggestive as well as ornamental. The chute itself is suspended upon a pen and ink structure of criss-crossed pylons, representing iron pier supports similar to those of an electrical power plant. Becoming taller instead of smaller as it recedes upward into the left distance, the chute delivers for Moholy-Nagy a fantastical supply of playful, abstract, and obedient female automatons. This relatively simple composition of linked bodies and lined-up piers points to the complexity and ubiquity of the Tiller Girls as a cultural symbol. Created, significantly, in the year 1923, *Chute* suggests a chain link of connections merging Tiller-style dancers with American-style industrial rationalization, desire with conformity and consumption, and the spirit of *Amerikanismus* with the mechanism of *Kapitalismus*. Spirit and mechanism were merging into a sufficiently abstracted concept with the force of overwhelming distraction.

Tiller troupes had been around since 1890, but as Moholy-Nagy's collage hints, their presence in the public imagination gained momentum by 1923, as did an interest in

all things American. Actually English in origin, the Tiller Girls were widely perceived to be American. Their *Americanness* grew to be something of a myth. This mythological "American" status propelled them further into the Weimar spotlight. On this wave of popularity, the dancers (and their hundreds of look-alikes) traveled the country (and the world) as unwitting, indirect ambassadors for American-style rationalization. Their serial format perpetuated a kind of *Tiller-Effect*, a pervasive interest in the visual logic of rhythmic repetition as a compositional device. In this sense the Tillers embodied the assembly line, celebrating uniformity and reinforcing audience desire as intertwined with American principles of efficiency and the mechanistic rhythms of capitalist order. The idea of a Tiller-Effect and this format's American mythology prompt the following questions: In what ways did the Tiller Girls and their perceived American qualities influence Weimar visual culture? Can the Tiller-Effect, as part of the "spirit" of *Amerikanismus*, actually be seen as a metaphor for capitalism in general? Can it inform us about how capitalism has been disseminated through photographic images? And to what extent was the Tiller-Effect a mechanism of distraction capable of at least temporarily deflecting the experience of capitalism as a crisis?

The Tillers were so present in entertainment and magazine culture by the mid-twenties that they became the subject of numerous cartoons. In a March 1925 issue of *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the cartoonist Paul Zimmel depicted a drunken man seeing not "double" but "multiple." [**Figure 3.2**] While watching a single female dancer perform, the drunk thinks he is seeing instead a Tiller-style troupe of tens of girls. The caption reads: "Betrunkener. (Beim Auftreten einer Tänzerin): 'Aha, die berühmte Tanzmädchentruppe!'" ("A drunk - at the stepping of a single dancer): Aha, the famous

Tiller Girls troupe!"). The Tiller name, which became shorthand for all different troupes with a variety of titles and shows, was a household name and was often represented as directly linked to the American, Fordist model. [175] A second cartoon by the same illustrator in 1926 depicted the dancers rolling off an assembly line to be packed into a wagon that will circulate them like goods to destinations around the world. [**Figure 3.3**] It reads: "Ford übernimmt die Herstellung von Tillergirls. Tagesproduktion: 15,000" ("Ford takes over the production of Tiller Girls, Daily Production: 15,000"). The association between the Tiller-style performances as a Fordist-Taylorist principle of serialization had become a fairly commonplace assumption, one understood by even the most average reader. Their form demonstrated everything that America stood for at that moment in the eyes of the world. Their playful movements, impeccably synchronized, were so ubiquitous that Renate Berger referred to the Tiller-style dance display as "the hallmark of the 1920s."[176] For many critics The Tiller Girls and their knock-offs became "signposts" for detrimental cultural change in Germany, a movement toward a less spiritual and a more matter-of-fact civilization. Yet for the average viewer/reader they were wonderfully distracting, endlessly fascinating, American in nature, and therefore progressive. They signaled great abundance through organized and ordered rationalization, and even the possibility of glamour and class elevation for the average Gertrude.

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[175] This cartoon is found in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (*BIZ*), 28 March 1926, vol. 13, n. 35; Peter Jelavich mentions this delightful cartoon briefly and reproduces it in his book *Berlin Cabaret: Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 182.

[176] Renate Berger, "Moments Can Change Your Life: Creative Crises in the Lives of Dancers in the 1920s," as quoted in Marsha Meskimmon and Shearer West, eds., *Visions of the Neue Frau and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany* (Aldershot England and Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 77.

As was outlined in the previous chapter, with the onset of extreme inflation in Germany directly after World War I, consumption was severely limited and goods became scarce, thus the collective desire for plenitude and connectedness to the American model was made more visible. By September 1923 passive resistance in the industrial Ruhr region had finally ceased. By August 1924 the economy witnessed the implementation of the *Rentenmar*k and a great influx of American loans with the acceptance of the Dawes Plan. Relative stabilization began to take shape in Germany, although an oscillation between inflation and stabilization remained throughout the decade. As paper currency became unreliable, there was an increase in the valuation of durable goods or consumer products – a valuing literally and visually of "the thing itself" and a disproportionate desire for its copious supply. "The thing itself" became the mantra of Neue Sachlichkeit. In part, this dissertation argues that the desire for "the thing itself" whether in close-up, repeated *ad infinitum*, abstracted, magnified, or fragmented from its social context, was an indirect reaction to the fluctuations of the economy and to the ambivalent reception of the American economic model. This was the era of the product, the new American-style primacy of consumer goods in German daily life, politics, and theory. The reverberations of economic oscillation, coupled with the desire for "the thing itself" and its sense of American amelioration, can be seen in the photographic output of this period and its preoccupation with the *Tiller-Effect*. This chapter will examine the impact of the Tiller-Girls imagery as an *effect* or a visual trope of *Amerikanismus*, captivating Weimar culture and playfully masking its response to the crisis of capitalist modernity.

The Elephant in the Room

"The Occident remains omnipresent, whether one acknowledges it or not."[177]

America the big, America the bountiful, America the boundless; these rank among the positive perceptions of the United States. America the soulless, America the culture-less, America as producer of the mass ornament; these rank among the negative perceptions. This darker side is inseparable from any understanding of the Weimar concept of the United States that was so much a part of Germany's self-perception as a struggling democracy in the 1920s. The writings of Siegfried Kracauer, perhaps more than any other Weimar critic, ably illuminate both sides. His writings are also a good place to start in order to grasp the various significances the Tiller Girls held as not only a "hallmark" of the times but as an *effect*, snowballing an aesthetic preference for rhythmic organization.

Kracauer's "Ornament der Masse" and his various ruminations written between 1921 and 1933 will be discussed in this chapter as they illuminate his *visual tropes of Amerikanismus.* I have identified these visual tropes or touchstones permeating Kracauer's writings in this era as follows: girls and goods, white collars (and white-collar masses) and photography itself, as a medium (and an object) without which the mass ornament and therefore the Tiller-Effect would be impossible. These tropes here identified should help us to understand better the significance of the Tiller-Effect.

Girls, in the form of *Neue Frauen* or New Women, are the first and perhaps the most obvious visual trope in Kracauer's writing, viewed by him as infinitely replicable products of Hollywood. The second trope is that of consumer goods or objects i.e. the

[177] Kracauer, "Boredom" (November 1924), *The Mass Ornament*, p. 333.

"the thing" or *Sache* of Neue Sachlichkeit. Inseparable from advertising, a new, image-based understanding of the many-sided value of goods (as opposed to cash) had proliferated into a mass ornamental reflection of capitalism. Thirdly, Kracauer returns over and again to the image of the white collar - as in the newly established white-collar masses and their uniform, consumerist desires. As a Weimar visual trope, I will expand my discussion to include not only the white collar, but its accessories, the burgeoning corporate environment of the new worker. And finally, for Kracauer the medium of photography may be seen as a fourth visual trope of the Tiller-Effect and its *Amerikanismus*. Photography is discussed in the inventorial sense of the young medium as a collection or "piling up" of images signaling modernity and the speeded up pace of consumption. Photography facilitated the Tiller-Effect by its very ontology as a medium for reproduction and as the leading disseminator of *Amerikanismus*. As "visual hieroglyphs" or "material expressions of a particular historical condition," these tropes in Kracauer's work reflect the newly cemented mass-market economy and the spirit of *Amerikanismus* that accompanied it.[178]

Along with his *Mass Ornament* essays, Kracauer's 1929 book *Die Angestellten* will be considered. It is a text that has received much less attention to date than any of his other writings.[179] *Die Angestellten* is important in this context as a sociological study of the white-collar masses whose uniformity, rationalization, and sheer numbers helped to produce the Tiller-Effect while they simultaneously mimic it. And yet it should be noted that Kracauer, in his writings, is not always *explicitly* pointing a finger of blame at

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[178] See Thomas Y. Levin, "Introduction," *The Mass Ornament*, p. 20.

[179] Kracauer, *Die Angestellten: Aus dem nuesten Deutschland* (Suhrkamp, 1971); In this chapter I refer at times to this German version, but for the most part my citations come from the English translation of it, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, introd. Inka Mulder-Bach, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Verso, 1998).

America. He references the United States by name fifteen or so times throughout. However, America and German perceptions and misperceptions of that country are no doubt Kracauer's indexical touchstone. In his writings, America is often the elephant in the room. The United States supplies the girls and the goods (and the technology to produce them), the white collars, and even the most imitated photographic "types" in the form of magazine icons and moving picture beauties for emulation. For better or for worse, and Kracauer is himself, at times, an ambivalent filter, America provides the fuel for his critique.

On June 9th and June 10th of 1927 *Die Frankfurter Zeitung* ran two installments of an article by Siegfried Kracauer entitled "Das Ornament der Masse" in which the author pinpointed the Tiller Girls as being at the heart of a cultural change in tastes. He argued that this change in tastes represented much more than just that. It was a proclivity for organized, emptied-of-meaning, distraction through sheer numbers, a grand display of accumulation and excess produced by American culture and its factories of distraction. More than a simple "change in tastes," the Tillers represented for Kracauer a necessary stage in the evolution of capitalism, through which, he believed, we must pass in order to move beyond to a more enlightened stage. Although highly critical, and indeed suspicious, of the popular taste for distraction through excess, both associating it with and differentiating it from the grand military displays of power through sheer organization, Kracauer teased his audience. He patronized them while also implicating them as a group; their desire for a reflection of themselves and a visual reinforcement of their own sheer numbers and mechanical work and lifestyle.

A second article on the subject of the Tiller Girls and their significance was published just eight months after Kracauer's and was written by photographer Erich Salomon. His article has gone unnoticed by most scholars and is decidedly un-theoretical in nature. Salomon identified what he called the "Tiller-Prinzip," stating that it had been wholeheartedly transposed into a visual application in the illustrated press. He calls attention to the newly recognized field of advertising. In fact, he published his article in one of the many new magazines dedicated to advertising along the American model, *Die Reklame*.[180] [**Figures 3.4 and 3.5**] Thus in many ways, this chapter piggybacks upon Salomon's brief observation as much as it looks to Kracauer's. Salomon observed the ubiquity of "Das Tiller-Girl-Prinzip" as a style or a new format for success in advertising. Both authors (mis)understood and thus perpetuated the Tiller phenomenon as American. Salomon, for example, wrote that the "Tiller-Prinzip" and its "spatial rhythm" came to Germany from America: "Die Amerikaner haben wohl zuerst diese Wirkung des räumlichen Rhythmus erkannt, indem sie den Typus der Tiller-girl-Tanzvorführungen schufen, die bald über die ganze Welt verbreitet wurden" ("The Americans first recognized this effect of spatial rhythm in the Tiller-Girl dance presentation Type that they created, which would soon spread over the whole world").[181]

The first image in Salomon's article depicts the Tillers themselves, each in a bathing suit and wearing the New Woman's "bubikopf" or bobbed hairstyle. [**Figure 3.4**] Their zigzagged bodies are linked in simultaneous movement like the rods and pistons of

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[180] *Die Reklame* is just one of many new magazines that sprung to life in the 1920s (*Die Reklame* was published in Berlin beginning in 1919) dedicated solely to advertising design issues. *Gebrauchs-Graphik* was another journal dedicated to advertising and graphic design, publishing from 1924-1944 and then again starting in 1950.

[181] Dr. Erich Salomon, "Das Tiller-Girl-Prinzip in der Reklame", *Die Reklame*, vol. 3, February 1928, p. 112.

a locomotive. Its caption reads: “Tillergirls wie sie aus Amerika zu uns gekommen sind” (“Tiller Girls as they came to us from America”). The next image places this one onto an advertisement for the girls’ performances (“Heute neue!” or “Today New!). [**Figure 3.5**] It builds up to the idea that their formation was not only employed for their own ads but to advertise products of all sort: cigarettes and soap, white collars and coffee, “famous American toothbrushes” and women’s bathing suits designed for the champion swimmer in “you.” The caption reads: “Gleichmässige Wiederholungen eines Bildes als praktisches Anwendungen des Tiller-girl-Prinzips in der Reklame” (Regular or simultaneous repetition of an image as practical application of the Tiller Girl-Principle in advertising”). Thus the Tiller-Effect as an advertising application was able to stimulate sales through association with a spirit of Americanness. It emanated associations with the New Woman, with cleanliness, professionalism, athleticism, good taste, and happiness (the collar ad for Dornbusch reads: “Es ist ein Dornbusch Kragen der Ihnen Freude macht” or “It is a Dornbusch Collar that Makes You Happy”). The repetitious formation itself seemed to be able to generate these “American” qualities for the consumer. Before returning to Kracauer’s visual tropes of *Amerikanismus*, a brief diversion helps us to understand the origins of the Tiller Girls as an American myth and *Amerikanismus* in this sense as itself a kind of mythological spirit.

An Abridged Tiller Story

The Tiller Girls were an original troupe that was created by John Tiller of Manchester, England as early as 1890.[182] [**Figure 3.6**] The troupe was then copied by various theatres and choreographers, resulting in the popular proliferation (some by Tillers's own relatives) of the Lawrence Tiller Girls, The Jackson Girls, The Carlton Girls, The Plaza Girls, and later the Gertrude Hoffman Girls, The Chester Hale Girls, and of course, the ever-kicking Rockettes of Radio City Music Hall. Each troupe consisted of many young female bodies lined-up in a single hyper-organized "body" of rhythm and motion understood at the time under the terms "military precision dancing" or Revue dance. John Tiller's obituary designated him the originator of military precision dancing. Born in Manchester, England, he was the nephew of a cotton manufacturer and so began by working in the cotton mill in a management position, in spite of his having always dreamt of a life in the theatre. In 1890 he began to train local girls between the ages of eight and ten, most of whom were working in the factories of Manchester's industrial neighborhoods, to perform dance routines on Sundays in the company warehouse. His

[182] See Peter Jelavich, "'Girls and Crisis': The Political Aesthetics of the Kickline in Weimar Berlin" in Michael S. Roth, *Rediscovering History*: *Culture, Politics, and the Psyche* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994). In this essay the "crisis" or *Krise* refers to the Great Depression. On page 226, Jelavich notes that the Tiller Girls – the most famous troupe – "was actually English. John Tiller had been a manufacturer in Manchester until the 1880s, when his business failed. Seeking a new vocation, he began to drill young women in perfectly synchronized movements. This act soon drew international attention, and by the 1920s there were Tiller troupes performing in major cities of Europe and America". He continues: "Eric Haller hired one of them – the so-called Empire Girls – away from New York's Ziegfield Follies. This created some confusion about their nationality, and throughout the twenties many observers believed that they were an American troupe."

first troupe, called "Four Little Sunbeams," performed at the Saint James Theatre in London, receiving rave reviews and prompting him to rent a space for rehearsal in the theatre. He trained various acts of girls including "The Forget-Me-Nots," the "Troubadours," and "Rustic Revelry," until by the late 1890s they assumed the name "Tiller Girls" and had gained popularity in London, Paris, Germany, America, and Australia. He began to hire "girls" under the ripe old age of thirty, which became his cut-off year. Tiller designated his dancers with different terms according to their age and size, as if they were horses for training and showing. In a 1912 newspaper interview, he explained that a "'pony' is a small dancer who may be of any age" and a "'flapper' is a girl who has just 'come out.' She is at an awkward age, neither a child nor a woman, and she is just as likely to develop into a showgirl as a pony."[183]

In addition, Tiller emphasized the celibacy of his performers. Doremy Vernon, a granddaughter of one of the dancers and the only author of a book dedicated to the Tiller Girls, writes: "The girls were so attractive that his [Tiller's] relations were courting them and marrying the most beautiful ones behind his back...Tiller was possessive and seemed to expect them to remain single until they were about thirty years of age, then quietly fade away. When one of them married he gave the impression of feeling betrayed."[184] Morality became one of the strongest demands John Tiller placed on his performers. He continually stressed that his girls lead "a clean life." "The word 'ladies' often figured in John's description of his dancers," continues Vernon, and "he was at great pains to ensure that the public did not associate his performers with the bad name that dancers usually

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[183] "Tiller und Tillergirls," *Wintergarten Magazine*, January 1930, pp. 10-14; reprinted in Bodo Niemann, *Von Mund zu Mund* (Berlin: Galerie Bodo-Niemann, 1995), pp. 33-39.
[184] Doremy Vernon, *Tiller's Girls* (England: Robson Books Ltd., 1988), p. 27.

had."[185] He would brag that "the girl who has entered the theatrical profession as a child is...far, far safer than the girl who enters the profession after childhood, and far safer than the girl in other professions open to women."[186] He continued that the young dancers are "impressed with the importance of personal cleanliness, of regular hours, and of good morals." In this way rhythmic work and disciplined morality were inseparable in the Tiller philosophy.

Emphasis was placed on the Tiller Girls as workers and in fact most of the original girls had been chosen directly out of the factories in which they worked as children or teenagers. John Tiller was quoted as saying that "the stage has no glamour for them. It is their workshop, and they have been brought up to know that they have to work."[188] The Tillers performed as "The Pony Ballet" in New York for the first time in 1899, where they appeared in George Lederer's production of "Man on the Moon." This was only the first of many performances in the U.S., as it is recorded that they appeared some thirty years later in Chicago, where their upstanding morality continued to be hailed. One woman, a critic writing for the *Chicago Daily News*, claimed: "[Their performance] is welcome because the girls are all clothed in their right minds."[189]

Most profit was made after the advent of the ciné-varieté shows in 1923, performances that would combine slapstick theatre with one-act plays, dance routines,

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[185] Ibid., p. 16.
[186] Anonymous, "Some Facts About the Ballet," *The New York Times*, 31 March 1912.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Amy Leslie, *Chicago Daily News*, 23 August 1927.
[190] The ciné-varieté ---- The Tiller-style troupes were integrated into narrative cinema after the advent of sound when the combination of singing and dancing on film became technically more productive. The 1929 film *The Broadway Melody* is generally considered the first full sound film to incorporate the dancers, building its entire narrative around their on and off-stage follies. Their easy transition into Hollywood cinematic productions at this time may also offer some explanation for why the precision dance style has been perpetuated as an American creation.

and silent films. As a result of the Dawes Plan, American companies began to heavily invest in the German economy, building cinemas in Germany, most of them in Berlin. Each cinema would book its own Tiller-style troupe to accompany as entertainment before and between silent films. Between 1923 and the early 1930s especially, during the period generally discussed as one of stabilization, the Tiller troupes were constantly in the Berlin newspapers and magazines, performing in Berlin at the Wintergarten and at the Grosses Schauspielhaus among other venues. [**Figure 3.7**] Circa 1930, *The Wintergarten Magazine* confers their popularity, proclaiming:

> Selten waren die Presse und das Publikum in ihrer Meinung so einstimmig wie bei diesen Original Lawrence Tiller Girls, selten ist über eine Truppe so viel in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften geschrieben, in zahlösen Bildern über sie berichtet worden, wie über diese Girls, die es an Popularität mit jedem grossen Sänger oder Boxerchampion aufnehmen konnten.[191]

Performances by such girl troupes were so popular and photographs of them so prevalent that Kracauer credited "these products of American distraction factories" for the public-wide preference for quantity, for the mass ornamental display of sheer numbers. The fact that Kracauer, and most viewers and historians since, perceived this form to be American, attests to the powerful economic impact that the United States had upon Germany, the intensified dissemination of Taylorist theories of efficiency in production, and the hundreds of articles and books relaying Ford's business and financial success with assembly-line production.

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[191] The Lawrence Tiller Girls were a troupe formed by John's son, Lawrence, against his father's will, and which eventually became a competitor of the original Tiller Girls act; see *Wintergarten Magazine* (January 1930), pp. 10-14. Translation: "Seldom are the press and the public in their opinions so much in agreement as they are over these original Lawrence Tiller Girls. Seldom is so much written over a troupe in the newspapers and magazines (they are reported on in innumerable pictures) as it is over these girls whose popularity could compare with each great singer or boxing champion."

A handful of examples help to illustrate the popularity of the Tiller troupes in the media. The Jackson Girls were a group that performed at the Scala Theater in Berlin and were widely photographed for the magazines. One under-acknowledged photographer, Sasha Stone whose work bridged Neue Sachlichkeit and photo-journalistic subject matter depicted the dancers with particular effectiveness, as if aware of Kracauer's arguments.[193] Photographing for *Uhu* magazine in 1929, Stone documented the girls on vacation, precisely dining, relaxing, stretching, and playfully dangling only their legs from the tour bus window. [**Figures 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10**] In Stone's photograph, legs, separated from bodies, and decorated with matching mary-janes, are extended by their long, late afternoon shadows striping the side of the bus. Reflecting precision, except when imprecise, Stone's girls cement their on-and-off stage popularity and point to "the girl" as an undifferentiated part, a twenty-four-seven, living-breathing consumable.[194]

Single photographs as personal interest images, promotional shots, and entire articles about the girl-troupes and their on and off-stage lifestyles can be found in almost every issue. Just a few examples include: "Wie Eine Revue Entsteht," "40 Girls Gesücht," "Girlwanderung" (written by James E. Abbe – about the movement toward Hollywood for the purpose of the new sound films), "Die Hoffmann-Mädchen," and the Lawrence Tiller Girls hanging out at the pool.[195] [**Figures 3.11, 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14**]

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[193] A recent exhibition, and one of the few ever, of Sasha Stone's photographs, depicted his street scenes of Berlin, *Sasha Stone: Berlin in Pictures*, The Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, October 28, 2006 – March 11, 2007. No catalogue (only a calendar) was produced. More work remains to be done on this photographer.

[194] Photographs of the dancers off stage, while they attempt to insist upon their subjects' conformity – the girls all wear the same outfits, eat the same food at the same time, and relax in the same way – they nonetheless seem to betray various imprecisions. One girl looks away from the camera, anther scrunches her nose in reaction to the bright sunlight, the next has a haircut that doesn't quite seem to fit. These are the photographs that reveal the impossibilities of exact human precision and order.

[195] See respectively: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, August 1929, no. 34, pp. 1603-4; Erik Charell, in *Uhu*, vol. 3, no. 2 December, 1925, p. 8; *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 20 September, 1930, n.p.; *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, August, 1929, no. 34, pp. 1603-4; *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 8 March 1925, no. 10;

Each article reinforces the popularity of this form of entertainment, giving a sense of the extent to which the original Tillers were only the first of hundreds of copy-cat troupes drilling around the world. Articles in 1926 and 1930 depicted Japanese "Tillers" and the world-wide popularity of these look-alikes, one caption reading: "Kein Land Ohne Tiller Girls." ("No Country Without Tiller Girls"). [**Figures 3.15 and 3.16**] A single, large scale photograph in *Die Wochenschau* (1928) depicts a Tiller troupe being choreographed on a beach; its caption emphasizes their obedience and their Americanness: "Alles hört auf sein Kommando! Ein Unterrichtsstünde junger Amerikanischer Schwimmerinnen am Badestrand" ("Everyone listens to his command! A practice hour for young American bathers on the beach.")[196] [**Figure 3.17**] A thoroughly playful piece in *Uhu* contains a poem by "My" next to a Sasha Stone photograph of the Jackson Girls. [**Figure 3.18**] The poem "Die Girls marschieren" ("The Girls March") revels in the rhythm and identicalness of the dancers and yet marvels at the fact that the girls retain some (if mock) individuality:

> Jedes Bein
> Will Einzelbein noch sein –
> Und nicht nur Truppe,
> Und nicht nur Puppe,
> Davon is keine Rede,
> Denn jede –
> Wer es auch sei
> Lissi wie Hede –
> Quinnie? – Winnie – Jessi – Bessy,
> Hilde I und Hilde II.
> Blond? Brünett? Verstandig? Dumm?
> Ist ein Individuum….
>
> Wir lassen uns von Fesseln fesseln.
> Wir hören Horn und Saxaphon

Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, 1 April 1925, no. 14, p. 421. Respective translations: "How a Revue is Built," "40 Girls Sought," "Girl Migration."

[196] *Die Wochenschau*, n. 16, April 15, 1928.

Und Schlagzeug. Sordinerte Geigen.
Wir lassen uns ein Beinpaar zeigen.
Man sieht es schwingen, schnellen, steigen –
Verstärkt durch Multiplikation.
Schlank und blank, mit durchtrainierten Gang.
Aus. Applaus. Jung tanzen sie hinaus[197]

The huge popularity of this subject was such that Kracauer and Salomon were not the only writers to observe that this entertainment style was reaching beyond the theatres. They were joined at the time by the comments of Paul Landau, Friedrich Heller, Richard Huelsenbeck, Joseph Roth, and Fritz Giese.[198] Kracauer's work on The Tiller Girls has itself been discussed by a number of scholars in the past twenty years, such as Thomas Y. Levin, Gunter Berghaus, Peter Jelavich, Gertrud Koch, Andreas Huyssen, and Karsten Witte, among others. To most authors they remain an entertainment force reflecting the gender politics of the new woman, but in the terms of Kracauer's original intention, they are a visual instigator of the politics and effects of Americanization as both perception and reality. In contrast, the goal of the present discussion is to understand the Tiller Girls as part of a larger continuum of the *Amerkanismus* aesthetic; an *effect* of *Amerikanismus* with wide-reaching influence upon photographic production than previously understood.

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[197] "Ein Step von My: Die Girls marschieren," *Uhu*, vol. 4, no. 5, January 1929, n.p. Translation: "Every Leg, wants to remain an individual leg – and not only troupes, and not only dolls, that is no way to talk, because each – whether it be Lissi or Hede – Quinnie? Winnie – Jessi – Bessy, Hilde I or Hilde II – Blond? Brunette? Intelligent? Dumb? Each is an individual…We let ourselves to be chained (captivated) by chains, we hear horn and saxaphone, and drums, violin, We let ourselves watch a pair of legs, One sees it swing, move quickly, step – Empowered through multiplication, slender and shiny, with thoroughly trained pace, Over, applause. Youth dance yourself out."

[198] Melissa Ragona, "A Geneology of Spectacle: Fascism, Consumerism and the Mimetic Body," (Ph.D. Diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1997). Ragona deals with the arguments of the above writers briefly, with emphasis upon the theories of Fritz Giese. Her work discusses the Tiller Girls in relation to "Girlkultur" as a mythology of spectacle and an example of a larger project of modernist specular theory at an intersection between fascism and consumerism, including also Leni Riefenstahl and Andy Warhol.

The Contagious Image: Girls, Girls, Girls

As the Tiller-Girls themselves are naturally composed of, well, "girls," similarly in Kracauer's writings we find the so-called "girl" to be his most apparent and frequently employed trope. She is not a woman (to follow his observations) but a girl; youngish, *modisch*, a flapper or *Neue Frau* who is an infinitely reproducable "product" of filmic and photographic culture. She is the "pink-collar worker," the female counterpart to the white-collar male salaried employee. The "girl" as a type populates a number of Kracauer's essays and books, just as she can be found in *Uhu*, *Die Dame*, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, *Die Wochenschau*, and *Der Querschnitt,* to name a few. She is extremely significant as both a product of the "American distraction factories" and also as a consumer, the target audience for most advertisements and articles in the press. In Kracauer's writings, and in the minds of most (male) critics of Americanization, she is an atomaton-like, American creation. She attends the movies, stars in the movies, performs on stage, devours the illustrated magazines, consumes *en masse*, and has come from America, sparking the transformation of German culture.

Amerikanismus was embodied in "the girl." At least this is what Kracauer mused. Or rather, to be more precise, it was a *photograph* of a girl "even if she is perhaps only one-twelfth of a dozen Tiller girls."[199] She was the timeless diva of the movies and illustrated presses. She was undifferentiated from thousands of others and in this sense inseparable from the photographic medium. She was a creation of photography in that her image was contagious and reproducible. One might say that Kracauer's imagination of "the girl," as a type, is perhaps his muse throughout most of his writings. She surfaces

[199] Kracauer in *The Mass Ornament*, p. 33.

in his essays “Photography,” “Travel and Dance,” “The Mass Ornament,” and “The Revolt of the Middle Classes” (the essay which would provide the basis for his later book *Die Angestellten*). She even voices her grievances and professes her innermost secrets to Kracauer directly (or so he imagines) in almost every chapter of *Die Angestellten*. She is the implied type most susceptible to the whims and fancies of fashion in his essay on the work of “Georg Simmel” (“The fact that women yield to fashion more than men can be explained by the innate lack of objectivity of the female sex and by its dependence on the social environment”).[200] She is the main subject of “The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies” in which Kracauer patronizes female spectators as a social group, portraying them through a fictionalized (and therefore a playfully misleading) device, as the dupes of society. The little shopgirl spectators will "fall for" or believe in every film as it is presented to them, according to Kracauer. They have no sovereign stance from which to view the world, let alone the world of moving images.

With “The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies,” Kracauer establishes “the girl” as subject and audience, the predominant spectatorial contingent of American cinema. She is the "Little Miss Typist" of Berlin society, modeling herself after the screen scenarios. His girls "gain unexpected insights into the misery of mankind and the goodness from above." They "grope for their date's hand and think of the coming Sunday." They can't "resist the appeal of the marches and the uniforms" depicted in a war film. They have "silly hearts," they dream up millionaires based on their girlish magazines, and they

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[200] Kracauer in *The Mass Ornament*, p. 248. Kracauer’s relationship to Simmel was informally one of student and teacher respectively. Simmel’s writings such as “The Metropolis and Mental Life” and his *The Philosophy of Money* greatly influenced Kracauer’s subject matter and approach. See “The Metropolis and Mental Life” in Donald Levine, ed., *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) and Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and Kaethe Mengelberg (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

[201] See Kracauer, "Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" (March 1927), in *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 292-303.

"wipe their eyes and quickly powder their noses before the lights go up."[202] In short, Kracauer's "girl" is to be understood as a multiple and a type - unaware, lovestruck, gullable, concerned with her appearance, highly emotional, and impressionable.

Examples of the "girl" as either a twin or a multiple are pervasive in the magazines. She is at times a reflection or even a faceless composite, a type, rather than an individual. Another poem-photograph vignette in a 1926 issue of *Uhu* points to the idea of the "Sister" as a fashion. [**Figure 3.19**] The sister, indicates again the author "My," is not to be confused with the German "Schwester." That is, she is one part of two or more "girls" who are not blood relatives but rather "Mode Sisters" or fashion sisters. Another example is a juxtaposition of two photographs in *Uhu* depicting "Die Zwillinge" ("Twins"). In the first photograph, two disembodied heads are doubled into four using a kaleidoscopic mirror. In the second, the caption emphasizes the lack of differentiation between "Brüderchen und Schwesterchen" ("Little Brothers and Little Sisters"), depicting two "girls" (as the diminutive "chen" indicates) in the popular, masculine hair and dress styles of the day.[203] [**Figure 3.20**] Kracauer's own emphasis, above all, implies that the invention of the girl is part of a larger process that began in the United States and spread to Germany like a contagious virus. His essays, taken in conjunction, reveal Kracauer's tendency to see Weimar woman almost as a carrier of *Amerikansmus*, a creature most susceptible to the delights and detriments of American-style capitalistic

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[202] As an aside, and as the work of photographer August Sander has elucidated, there is an intriguing preoccupation with twins during the Weimar period. A number of single photographs in the magazines feature twins, often without an attached article or explication as the one mentioned above. A subject for further research would be to question this interest, positing it as a fascination with similarity and difference, conformity and difference, concepts at the heart of any popular or scientific understanding of physiognomy and eugenics. One such article posits a "Ein Dorf der Zwillinge" ("A Village of Twins") [Figure 3.21] See *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, n. 41, 6 October 1929.

seduction.

The Tiller Girls, as the main subjects of "The Mass Ornament," are situated at the causal moment of a cultural and social chain reaction**.** [**Figures 3.21**] The result of this process or change in "tastes," as Kracauer sees it, is a capitalistic emptying out of meaning, a cultural ambivalence driven by pure profit. It is necessary to quote Kracauer at some length in order to establish not only his definition of the mass ornament but also its basis in the American economic model, forged together with the female body and proliferated through photography. He begins "The Mass Ornament" with the following:

> In the domain of body culture, which also covers the illustrated newspapers, tastes have been quietly changing. *The process began with the Tiller Girls. These products of American distraction factories are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics*. As they condense into figures in the revues, performances of the same geometric precision are taking place in what is always the same packed stadium, be it Australia or India, not to mention America. The tiniest village, which they have not yet reached, learns about them through the weekly newsreels. One need only glance at the screen to learn that the ornaments are composed of thousands of bodies, sexless bodies in bathing suits. The regularity of their patterns is cheered by the masses, themselves arranged by the stands in tier upon ordered tier.[7] (my italics)

In defining the mass ornament, Kracauer differentiates it from the mass military demonstrations. He writes:

> The mass movements of the girls, by contrast, take place in a vacuum; they are a linear system that no longer has any erotic meaning but at best points to the locus of the erotic. Moreover, the meaning of the living star formations in the stadiums is not that of military exercises. No matter how regular the latter may turn out to be, that regularity was considered a means to an end; the parade march arose out of patriotic feelings and in turn aroused them in soldiers and subjects. The star formations, however, have no meaning beyond themselves, and the masses above whom they rise are not a moral unit like a company of soldiers…rather the girl-units drill in order to produce an immense number of parallel lines, the goal being to train the broadest mass of people in order to create a pattern of undreamed-of dimensions. The end result is the ornament, whose closure is brought about by

emptying all the substantial constructs of their contents.[204]

For Kracauer, the Tiller Girls represented a living, breathing, entertaining embodiment of Americanization, the collective desire for consumer plenty fused with the erotic desire for the female body in perpetuity. Three years later, in his "Girls und Krise" of 1931, Kracauer would hone his idea of the Tillers in relation to the economics of inflation and to the American system:

> In that postwar era, in which prosperity appeared limitless and which could scarcely conceive of unemployment, the Girls were artificially manufactured in the USA and exported to Europe by the dozens. Not only were they American products; at the same time they demonstrated the greatness of American production…When they formed an undulating snake, they radiantly illustrated the virtues of the conveyor belt; when they tapped their feet in fast tempo, it sounded like business, business; when they kicked their legs with mathematic precision, they joyously affirmed the progress of rationalization; and when they kept repeating the same movements without ever interrupting their routine, one envisioned an uninterrupted chain of autos gliding from the factories into the world, and believed that the blessings of prosperity had no end.[205]

The precision-line dance phenomenon was an aesthetic manifestation of the *so-called* "American" principles of manufacture. It was not itself an American phenomenon but rather an example of the way in which the concept of *Amerikanismus* manifested itself visually. And although Gunter Berghaus in 1988 and Peter Jelavich in 1993 respectively, in their analyses of the "girl-*kultur*" of the twenties, both mentioned that the Tiller Girls were not actually American, still most writers who have referred to the Tiller phenomenon in passing have mischaracterized them (and continue to do so) as not only

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[204] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (1927), *The Mass Ornament*, p. 77.
[205] Siegfried Kracauer, "Girls und Krise" (*Frankfurter Zeitung* 27, May 1931), Karsten Witte, "Introduction to Siegfried Kracauer's 'The Mass Ornament,'" *New German Critique*, no. 5 (Spring 1975), pp. 63-64; this passage is also discussed by Patrice Petro in *Joyless Street: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

American dancers, but as an American "invention."[206] Jelavich suggested that they were thought to be American because of one dancer who was hired from America. This seems highly unlikely however, and I would argue that the confusion is instead one of perception. It stems from the systematic structure and repetitious movements of this dance as a *serial form* and its *perceived* association with American efficiency in engineering, organization, and industrial production.[207]

Therefore Kracauer's Americanized "girl" type is not a woman, not exactly the socially and politically "empowered" Neue Frau envisioned by so many historians of Weimar culture, and she is not even a real American. In fact, the media's reveling in the "girl" as diminutive, doubled, multiplied, de-individualized, even replaceable, may provide some contradictions to the notion of the more powerful, emboldened, liberated New Woman. The "girl" as a type is instead a persistent *perception*, a mythical product of capitalism and of what Kracauer, and many since, have considered American principles and values. She is a product of the economic conditions of capitalism. This mischaracterization is more interesting than a simple mistake would warrant, suggesting that America and the idea of Americanization were (and are) more powerful as perceptual and photographic *constructs* than as actual entities.

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[206] Gunter Berghaus, "Girlkultur: Feminism, Americanism, and Popular Entertainment in Weimar Germany," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 1, no. 3/4 (1988), pp. 193-219; see also Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret,* p. 175.

[207] For Kracauer, the Tiller Girl is fully integrated into the mass, no longer able to be an individual and, in fact, never was one. She is a link in the chain, composed of parts (legs, arms, heads, torsos), interchangeable and anonymous. Kracauer writes: "The ornament, detached from its bearers, must be understood *rationally*. It consists of lines and circles like those found in textbooks on Euclidean geometry, and also incorporates the elementary components of physics, such as waves and spirals. Both the proliferations of organic forms and the emanations of spiritual life remain excluded. The Tiller Girls can no longer be reassembled into human beings after the fact...Arms, thighs, and other segments are the smallest component parts of the composition." See Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *The Mass Ornament*, p. 77.

Goods, Goods, Goods

Nothing constructs national identity (whether mythological or real) as aggressively as photographic advertising. As Salomon noted in his observation, advertisements played perhaps the most significant role in popularizing the Tiller-Effect (while simultaneously selling goods themselves and propagating the capitalist system). Generally bundled within an understanding of *Neue Sachlichkeit* photography or sometimes labeled as part of "product photography" or *sachfotografie*, the advertising-oriented photography of products lined up in serial formation temporarily populated the Weimar visual field. In his earlier essay "Travel and Dance" (1925), as opposed to "The Mass Ornament," Kracauer differently identified this modern sensibility. In this article, instead of the term "mass-ornament," he described a structural way of interacting in the world, a way of thinking about life. This structure comprises pattern, rhythm, and sequence. It is what he calls an "after-each-other or *nacheinander* structure."[208] This *Nacheinander* is essentially the Tiller-Effect, the serial logic that is pervasive throughout Neue Sachlichkeit-era photography. Rather than being limited to avant-garde photographic experimentation, this logic was much more pervasive. It could be found in the way people travel and the way they dance, the way they work and live out their everyday lives. As Kracauer writes: "For them, the distorted image of eternity emerges only out of the sequentiality of trustee board meetings and displays of dancing."[209] It is their new relation to industrial capitalism with its desire for rhythm and pattern, endless repetition, and the illusion of infinity. This desire however was most manifest for the masses in material forms and images.

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[208] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (June 1927), *The Mass Ornament*, p. 71. The idea of the "nacheinander" will be discussed again in Chapter Five.
[209] Ibid., p. 72.

The "American" Tiller-Effect includes the use of rhythm and repetition in the composition, the fetishization of the quantity and infinity of the objects depicted, a de-emphasis of the human, the beautification and the abstraction of industrial production, the use of the diagonal in order to imply the availability of infinite goods, an emphasis on the power and mesmerizing effect of the new consumer object, and a celebration of commodity culture and consumer desire, pattern, and surface. We see the Tiller-Effect applied to sell almost everything, including the list supplied by Salomon and in addition magazines, facial cream, make-up compacts, shaving cream and razors, shoes and chocolates, and even an egg-preservation fluid called Garantol. [**Figure 3.22**]

One particularly effective example is an ad for "Creme Mouson," a moisturizer. [**Figure 3.23**] It depicts potentially hundreds of young women, all holding pens and writing; presumably each is busy at her office job. The ad is directed at "Berufstätige Frauen!" ("Working Women!"), and warns them not to neglect their appearance on the job.[210] The sheer numbers of similar women represented implies that every young woman is using this product and that therefore every one should use it. It suggests a visually satisfying and, to some, a comforting image, allowing that if one only applies this cream, one will be "in step" with the rest of the highly organized female workforce.

A second example combines graphic and photographic illustration to advertise "Mystikum Compact der Festpuder für die Handtasche" (Mystical Compacts, the powder foundation for the handbag). [**Figure 3.24**] The ad asks: "Sehen wir nicht blendend aus?" ("Don't we look blended together?"), as it depicts six young, doll-like female faces floating in the darkness. Each one touches the next, blending cheek into cheek as if to

[210] *BIZ*, March 1929, n. 10, vol. 38, n.p.

present a singular six-headed body along with the idea that to be a type, a face in the crowd, is desirable all over the world "Berlin, New York, Paris."[211]

The Tiller-Effect images may be chilling to the modern viewer in that they insinuate a cultural desire for a conformity that seems to know no limits. Regardless of whether girls or goods are for sale, the Tiller-Effect promotes consumer and cultural conformity. Whether used toward the goal of mobilizing a new consumer-base or mobilizing voters or military troops, observing the Tiller-Effect in its many applications allows a look beyond formalism in order to consider this phenomenon as more than a mere affectation. As for Kracauer, the girls and the goods were ultimately one and the same. Their formation and organization, their serial logic, formed the basis of the new aesthetics of an Americanized German consumer culture which desperately sought order and abundance in a culture of disorder and desire. However, "[l]ike the mass ornament, the capitalist production process is an end in itself. The commodities that it spews forth are not actually produced to be possessed; rather, they are made for the sake of profit that knows no limit."[212]

Kracauer's Collars: Salaried Employees and Consumer Desires

The third visual trope of *Amerikanismus* able to epitomize the Tiller-Effect that I have identified in Kracauer's work is the white collar, a device invented and popularized in the United States. As an image that emerges frequently in Kracauer's writings, it may be understood as referring to both the white-collar worker, or salaried employee, and the

[211] *BIZ*, March 1929, n. 10, vol. 38, p. 335.
[212] Ibid., p. 78.

men's white collar as symbolic consumer object itself. The white collar in advertisements, in shop window displays, on the streets, as a character type in novels, serials, and magazine illustrations was everywhere in evidence in the mid-twenties and early thirties. As middle-management workers, office employees, and salespeople at all levels began to dissociate themselves from factory work and its politically entangled, socially "unclean" associations, the white collar worker and his or her lifestyle choices, pastimes, and habits burst onto the visual field. The white collar is, of course, not simply a class of workers or a singular object, or an aspect of fashion, but is symbolic of demographic and cultural change on a mass, and international, level. It represents an entire workforce's attitude toward self, society, and nation. As a starched visual convention it suggests the widespread emulation and adoption of American-style business culture. The white collar, for Kracauer, acts as the bogeyman of the capitalist system. It represented the worker's embrace, without critique, of the profit-driven philosophical and ethical trappings of American-style business practice and the culture of capitalism that accompanied it.

The eruption of this social group was most famously dissected and popularized by C. Wright Mills in 1951, and is usually considered a phenomenon of the 1950s and the rise of suburbia. However, this demographic swelled most drastically after the Civil War in the United States and again after World War I internationally, as consumer capitalism and the mass-market economy gained momentum.[213] In Germany, the white-collar worker or *Angestellter*, as a political and social category, was *legally* created as a

[213] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951). For further reading on the subject of the working class or "Angestellten" as it related to the rise of fascism in Germany, see Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). This study was one of the first projects called for by Max Horkheimer in the early 1930s as he assumed the position as the director of The Frankfurt School for Social Research.

delineated category of citizen-worker in 1911. However, this new office worker or sales-worker didn't burst onto the scene in great numbers until after the interruption of World War I, in the mid-twenties, just as American bankers and politicians (often one and the same), loaded with war profits, stepped in to jumpstart the German post-war economy. This new population was typically uninterested in politics or unwilling to associate with a worker-struggle, although he was, ironically, himself a political creation. Inka Mülder-Bach, who writes the Introduction to the English translation of Kracauer's 1930 book *Die Angestellten, Aus dem nuesten Deutschland*, explains:

> Indeed, there was no other Western country in which employees, both in their own consciousness and in that of the public, so early played such a central role as in Germany. In no other were they so intensively courted by politics; in no other was the distinction between workers and salaried employees marked so sharply and with such far-reaching consequences. The concept of the 'new middle class' had been coined at the end of the nineteenth century. It defined the employees as the new centre of society and assigned them the function of a buffer against socialist endeavors. The Angestelltenversicherungsgesetz of 1911 - which had no equivalent in any other Western country – confirmed this concept by granting them legal privileges in terms of insurance and labour rights and defining them as a higher stratum in relation to the working class.[214]

Kracauer was one of the first writers to more critically and theoretically parse the psychological and sociological tendencies of this new class of people. His reportorial, *Die Angestellten* (translated as 'the salaried masses'), was, like "Ornament der Masse," published in installments in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1929. [**Figure 3.25**] It was then published as a small book in 1930. It was, however, not translated into English until the version, edited by Inka Mulder-Bach and published in 1998. For *Die Angestellten*

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[214] Kracauer, *Die Angestellten: Aus dem nuesten Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Societäts Verlag, 1930); For the English translation, see *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, ed. Inka Mülder-Bach, trans. Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1998). p. 6. For the later, paperback edition in German, see *Die Angestellten*: Aus dem nuesten Deutschland (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971).

Kracauer interviewed countless clerks, salespeople, office managers and office workers, both men and women. He conveyed a "picture" of this social group, its desires and its delusions, its political beliefs and its consumer habits. This book, hidden underneath the radar of visual culture because of its sociological subject matter, might be read as a *photographic portrait* of the white-collar worker in Germany. It is not photographic because it contains actual photographs; in fact, it contains none at all. Rather, it is *photographic* because Kracauer's writing style favors snippets of dialogue and descriptive "snapshots" of an array of employees, from the lowest in the pecking order to the managerial level.[215] He seems to write images of each person. We receive a snapshot version of each employee as an individual even as Kracauer proceeds to draw him or her as a caricature to suit his thesis.

His dialogue is candid, always implicating himself as interviewer. Conversations are between Kracauer and a shifting array of white-collar employees at work or at leisure. They respond about their working life and their on-the-job relations with frankness, and sometimes anonymously, for fear of reprisal from a colleague or an employer. We visualize the jealous salesgirl who rats out her co-worker, the switchboard operator or the "graphologist" who "penetrates the employees' souls like a government spy in hostile territory," and the "official in a Berlin job centre" who claims that what is necessary these days is "a morally pink complexion" which he models after the Americans and their friendly faces in business.[216] Kracauer frames his observations as snapshots, quick mini-

[215] Gertrud Koch refers briefly to the way in which Kracauer's style of reportage, in its mosaic-like prose, might be seen as photographic in nature. She notes: "his reportage corresponds to photography." See Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[216] Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p. 37–38.

dialogues that have the capacity to radiate more information than their subjects realize or intend.

The new white-collar worker in Germany saw him and her self as partaking in the new, successful American-style business economy, assuming "a morally pink complexion," in order to achieve success in climbing the company ladder. This "morally pink complexion" contained more than a hint of *Amerikanismus,* suggesting the way in which that "morally pink complexion" had infiltrated both body and mind.[217] In fact, one sees numerous references in the daily magazines highlighting, and mostly praising, this moral pinkness, light-hearted spirit, and sense of humor that was perceived to be American. One article in *Uhu* entitled "Uns fehlt Lebensheiterkeit!" ("We Are Missing Life's Amusement!"), chastises Germans for not having a jovial and humor-filled, positive outlook on life like the Americans, so-called qualities that promote success in business and in life.[218] [**Figure 3.26**] Underneath the photograph of a young woman and juxtaposed with one of three happy American babies, a caption reads: "Uns fehlt Lebensheiterkeit: Lächeln sollst du – immer lächeln – ein ungeschriebenes Gesetz der amerikanischen Offentlichkeit" (We are missing life's amusement: You should laugh – always laugh – an unwritten rule of the American public").

Other cultural critics responded to this new populace and the cultural changes reverberating in its wake, although Kracauer's account is the most visual in nature. His is the most colorful and succinct rather than statistical. He acknowledges that Emil Lederer and Jakob Marschak, in the 1926 book *The New Middle Class* (*Grundriss der Sozialökonomik*), "directed attention for the first time to the altered condition of salaried

[217] Ibid.
[218] *Uhu*, vol. 11, August 1925.

employees."[219] In addition to these more light-hearted observations in *Die Angestellten,* however, Kracauer and others positioned the new demographic as largely responsible for the eventual acceptance of Nazi policy and ideology.[220] Ernst Bloch addressed the same subject in his essay "Artificial Centre" of 1929 which was published in *Heritage of Our Times*.[221] Bloch's main idea was to map out the rise of Nazism and the Third Reich and to criticize all of its tendencies. He also criticized the white-collar worker, the non-proletariat employee class for being oblivious to their own position in relation to capital. He calls them a distracted, manipulated, deceived group without organization. He links the "new objective façade of nickel and glass," as part of the aesthetic tendencies of Neue Sachlichkeit and its preoccupation with surface, to this condition of distraction. Three years after the publication of *Die Angestellten*, and with a bit more hindsight, Hans Speier, a German economist, would also write about the white-collar masses in Germany and their direct responsibility for the rise of fascism.[222] Kracauer makes some of these same inferences, but in keeping with his "Frankfurt School" associates, implicates the economic systems at play and seems to caricature the workers as oblivious pawns of a larger game already in play and beyond their control.

The term "white collar," and its cousin "blue collar" are sociological nicknames, especially as they have been bandied about in the United States and in Europe. Their usefulness is quickly eroding in the off-shoring and out-sourcing economy of the present.

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[219] Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p. 81.
[220] For more about the relationship between the middle class white-collar worker and fascism, see Jürgen Kocka, *Die Angestellten in der deutsche Geschichte, 1850-1980* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) and also his *Zur politischen Sozialgeschichte der Angestellten: USA 1890-1940 im Internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1977). This issue will come into play again, however, in the following chapter.
[221] Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Stephen and Neville Plaice; first published, Zurich 1935 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
[222] Hans Speier, *Die Angestellten vor dem Nationalsozialismus, Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der deutschen Sozialstruktur 1918-1933* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977). This book was originally published in 1933 and then translated into English in 1939.

The white-collar worker and all that he or she represents have been examined from the standpoint of sociology, but not extensively from the starting point of the image, as visual responses to and reflections of "corporate culture." Thus, a consideration of the white collar as an international symbol of Americanization and a visual metaphor at the intersection of mass-market consumption and photographic modernism takes on new meaning, especially as its reality erodes.

Was Tragen? Kass Kragen (What are you wearing? Kass collars)

A western businessman would not have been considered worth his salt if he had not worn a detachable, white collar on a daily basis. Because it had to be worn, it had first to be sold. Common ads such as those for the German companies Kass, Eterna, Mey & Edlich, or Dornbusch insinuate the collar as a purveyor of homogeneity and consistency through both spatial and temporal suggestions of continuity [**See Figures 3.27 and 3.28**]. In accordance with the Tiller-Effect, Dornbusch for example, often represented rows of look-alike heads, whether as drawings, photographs, or filmic advertisements.[223] One such advertisement is juxtaposed with another Tiller-Effect ad of doll-like sailors for *Regatta Zigaretten*. [**Figure 3.29**] A Mey & Edlich ad implied instead temporal, that is historical, continuity by insinuating the consistency of the white collar from seventeenth century Holland to twentieth century man. As in the Dornbusch composition, each insinuates an endless march of consumers, embracing the Tiller-Effect as an expression of continuity and contiguity.[224]

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[223] Janet Ward makes the interesting point that not only static ads, but also filmic ones were being presented in the department store windows, blurring the division between advertising and entertainment. For example, Tietz department store in Berlin "in 1927 showed a humorous advertising film for Dornbusch shirt collars"; see *Schaufenster-Kunst und-Technik* (April 1927), p. 25.
[224] *BIZ*, vol. 50, n. 39, 15 December 1929.

The display window, as a space in which the Tiller-Effect had become a popular sales technique, increasingly captivated its growing consumer base. It irrevocably altered the way human beings interact with objects. The detachable white collars provide a perfect example of this, often stacked in the windows like delicate treats. In magazine examples demonstrating the ideal display design, white collars are piled high like fetishistic totems.[225] They are stacked like canned goods or ordered in endless rows, mirroring the new workers in numbers and triggering their desires to look the part and become players in the American-style big business boom of the golden age [**Figures 3.30 and 3.31**].

One display window for Kass Kragen (or Kass Collars) asks "Was Tragen?" ("What are you wearing?"). [**Figure 3.32**] It implies the dynamism of the employee by featuring a diagonal tower of Kass collars leading up to an over-sized, full-color drawing of a male head wearing a collar. The figure is clean and orderly in his appearance. His hair is parted with mechanical precision. His squared jaw and exceedingly symmetrical face lend him the determined look of a leader. This window display is typical of those for white collars in that, in addition to projecting the American qualities of its product, it also employed the popular technique of stacking, seeking to sell products through visual inundation. Referred to as the "Stapelfenster" technique, the object of attention is repeated over and over again as if to suggest its abundance and a "get it while it lasts" sense of consumer panic. To emphasize the sense of "the New" that this technique

[225] The following examples in Figures 3.30 and 3.31 are from *Schaufenster-Kunst und Technik* (March 1930), p. 21 and *Schaufenster-Kunst und Technik* (May 1930), p. 24.

offered, one journal called the stacking of wares "the new building material" and "a new language of architecture."[226]

Advertising trade journals such as *Die Reklame* and *Schaufenster-Kunst und Technik* focused solely on how to achieve the greatest visual interest and therefore sales through the art of display. These journals, like *Gebrauchsgraphik*, consciously catered to both German and American retailers and window designers by publishing in English and German. They included articles on American techniques and innovations in design in almost every issue. The white collar turns up in countless articles within these journals as one of the most frequently purchased and visibly advertised goods on the market. *Schaufenster-Kunst und Technik* often featured it as a ware susceptible to the most modern of display systems. It was a stackable item and therefore able to be endlessly lined up in dizzying displays, enticing the consumer by dazzling him (or her, as women made up almost eighty percent of the consumer base by the mid twenties) with the promise of ever more.[227] Thus not only the white collar as a subject, but its advertising and display formats were intertwined with the American model.

Iconic Collars

It is in this way, through advertising, that the white collar became the "matter-of-fact," Neue Sachlichkeit subject *par excellence*. It has been considered as such for its purity of form (a construction of white shapes and lines) and therefore streamlined representation, rather than as a more complex subject matter operating on multiple levels

[226] See Von G. E. Thiele, "Das Stapelfenster," *Die Reklame*, vol. 3 (February 1932), p. 68.
[227] See the aforementioned book, Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), as one discussion concerning the role of gender in consumer culture.

within visual culture. The first photograph of a white collar to be propelled to international fame through advertising was by the American Paul Outerbridge. It was published in the internationally recognized magazine, *Vanity Fair*, in November 1922, having been produced while Outerbridge was still a student at the Clarence White School of Photography. [**Figure 3.33**] But, as Robert Sobieszek argued, it became one of the key images to effectively usher modernism into photographic advertising. It was an advertisement for George P. Ide & Co., a factory based in Troy, New York. Troy was better known throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century as "collar city" because of its role in the invention, production, and international dissemination of men's detachable white shirt collars (an alternative to the daily washing of the entire shirt).

As "Untitled," the Outerbridge collar has been reproduced numerous times, a beacon of international modernist design and New Objectivity.[228] [**Figure 3.34**] As an *American* example, and an *early* example at that, of what has come to be known as New Objectivity in photography, the Outerbridge collar's matter-of-fact interest in "the thing itself" propelled this image (and Outerbridge himself) into the spotlight. Inspiring a range of similar imagery in Germany, the Outerbridge collar suggests American foundations for German *Sachlichkeit*. In this sense, the Outerbridge collar advertisement is less "straight" forward than most views would suggest. It announces a transitional moment in commercial visual culture even as it hints at an American foundation for German *Sachlichkeit*.

In the original advertisement, the Outerbridge collar photograph is surrounded by an ornate, almost theatrical framework composed of vegetation. The frame of time

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[228] See Maria Morris-Hambourg and Christopher Phillips, *The New Vision*, p. 112; and Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Culural History* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2001), p. 266.

suggested by this border is Victorian, its frame of reference that of the masterpiece painting. Whereas what it contains contradicts these suggestions. Its contents, a crisp, white collar, is highly modern, the attire for the re-configured businessman of the twentieth century and its frame of reference that of the new masses rather than the old masterpiece. The original advertisement thus points to cultural and temporal clashes.[229] First of all, most advertising in 1922 was still illustrated rather than photographed, and this is so in both countries.[230] Even as late as 1930 in the most popular illustrated periodical in Germany, the *BIZ*, *Uhu*, or *Die Dame*, the advertisements were still only about one-half illustrated and one-half photographed. Any glance through a cross-section of American and German publications shows this time to be one of transition as the photographic image is just beginning to dominate illustration and step up consumer desire.

In this sense, Outerbridge's *Vanity Fair* image represents the meeting of old and new. It points to the contradictions at that moment between old form/ old man and new form/ new man and how photography played a significant role in that re-identification process. The frame surrounding the Outerbridge collar is delicate, ornate, formal, and balanced by sconce-like spirals and leafy tendrils. This enclosure announces the proprieties and elegance of the Victorian businessman. The photographic portion of the

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[229] As a minor point, I am currently researching this border itself in order to understand further the collaborative aspects of the image within the advertising process; the border work was possibly by Walter Dorwin Teague.

[230] "Prior to the early 1920s, photographers were not a major presence in the organizational framework of advertising," writes Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), p. 177. "The J. Walter Thompson agency was one of the leaders in advertising photography in the 1920s," p. 186. Steichen worked for Conde Nast and J. Walter Thompson; Bogart outlines how the Photographer's Association of America and The Art Center, along with the Clarence White School on East 11th Street in Manhattan, began to heavily promote the application of photography for commercial ends, to be used for advertising. "Articles in amateur journals like *American Photographer* also pushed the possibilities, telling readers that the advertising pages offered a highly specialized field that 'demanded original and telling ideas' and paid well - $25 - $1,000 per picture," Bogart, p. 196.

advertisement, the collar itself, on the other hand, contradicts its old-fashioned container. It announces not only the new man, but also a new form and the new medium for producing and conveying commercial literacy, photography. Even more it announces that a *product* can represent all of this. In effect, the clothes make the man, but only by passing through the socio-psychological filter of photography.

The contrast between the frame of this advertisement and the image could not be any greater. It is no wonder that historians and curators, collectors and dealers, have chosen to view this image separately from its original context. The context (the frame and ad as a whole) speaks of a confused moment, not the straight-forward, pure, dynamic trajectory of modernism as progressive. It suggests instead that any given moment in time is laced with contradictions and laden with messier circumstances than most historians would wish to see. The text of the ad supports this observation in that the stamped label on the collar itself employs a boxy, bold, typographic font using all capitals: "I D E S T Y L E". And yet the framed text announces "Ide" COLLARS in a traditional script, itself framed again in the most ornate encasing.[231] The streamlined collar signifies American principles in business, while it also announces the advent of *international sachlichkeit* or the prominence of the ordinary *object* capturing the public imagination as a *product* newly complicated with fetishistic identifications.

As products, objects in the 1920s were declared significant enough to stand alone, outside of the confines of too much text or distracting narrative. The consumer must

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[231] This collar signals another point of contestation at the intersection of photographic history and consumerism: the position of the photographer *vis a vis* his or her client. Under the photograph, and in very small, but visible text, it is written: "Photograph by Paul Outerbridge, Jr. for Geo. P. Ide & Co., Troy, N.Y.," a detail pointing to an awareness of the photographer as an artist. This idea will become relevant again in the next chapter. It was a practice that was not yet an assumption in the industry and was being contested in trade journal discussions and editorials by art directors, photographers, and commercial clients.

have hoped to absorb (or hoped that her husband would absorb) the product's (in this case, the collar's) impressive cleanliness, precision, and dynamism, all qualities upheld by the growing corporate culture of the twenties. Outerbridge's starched white collar obliquely posed on top of the sharp, repetitive, dynamic (but also intellectual) surface of the chessboard, projected to the new worker an imagined version of himself as precise, and organized, totally Americanized, an efficient player in the newly rationalized international economy.

In Germany, the white collar, as not only an object of advertisements and consumer display, but also as a subject of modern and photographic consciousness, entered the field later than in the United States. The Outerbridge collar was given international reception, being exhibited in the New York International Salon, coincidentally in the year 1923, as American business began to flex its muscles in Germany. By 1926 the collar was reproduced in an issue of *Das Kunstblatt*.[232] Neue Sachlichkeit photographers such as Hein Gorny, Paul Wolff and Umbo (Otto Umbehr), all photographed the white collar, often employing the Tiller-Effect to reinforce the impact of this product and its associative properties. Each depicted the collar, like Outerbridge did, as an object in its own right, detached from the man and detached from any narrative. As such the collar assumed a position as part of the Neue Sachlichkeit photographic aesthetic.

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[232] This is according to Beaumont Newhall, who reproduced one of the captions in this article which celebrated the work of Americans Paul Outerbridge, Jr. and Ralph Steiner: "Photography in America: Precision work. Exact representation of form. No pictorial romanticism. Unconditional involvement with technique. Pushing technical possibilities to the utmost. Clear picture architecture. Emphasis on plastic values. Concerned interest in the form world of every day surroundings. Through close-ups things take on a new aspect." Newhall, "Photo-Eye of the 1920s, The Deutsche Werkbund Exhibition of 1929" in David Mellor, *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-1933*; citation originally from 'Photographie in Amerika,' *Das Kunstblatt*, X, 1926, p. 447. The image from *Das Kunstblatt* could not be located in various libraries at this time including The New York Public Library and The Museum of Modern Art Library. It seems to be a particular issue that has gone missing and so is not currently accessible for this chapter.

Hein Gorny's 1928 photograph of white collars, for instance, has been reproduced in key texts and essays discussing the import of Neue Sachlichkeit as a way to illustrate the modernism of the medium of photography. [**Figure 3.35**] Gorny was a commercial and fine art photographer whose projects for the journal *Die Form* will be discussed in the following chapter.[233] Like Outerbridge's collar, Gorny's image of multiple collars is usually reproduced as "Untitled," reinforcing its modern status as a work of art rather than as an advertisement. But Gorny takes Outerbridge's singular collar and multiplies it, almost nightmarishly, to reveal an army of collars. With a sinister Golem-like edge, his photograph suggests the takeover of the world by the white-collar masses. His bright white yokes face forward in confrontation with the consumer demanding that he join the ranks of the recently anointed middle class. Partially in shadow, and extending in neat rows beyond all four corners of the photograph's frame, the collars express their sheer numbers more than they advertise their brand, which can barely be deciphered from an interior stamp upon each collar (it seems to read: "Feinste Bielefelder," a description also used in some of the Dornbusch advertisements to describe its fabrication. The Tiller-Effect was employed to the fullest extent by Gorny, heightening awareness and the associative qualities of the collar through repetition of it as a product.

Another Neue Sachlich photographer, Paul Wolff, who frequently employed the Tiller-Effect in his compositions, photographed white collars for Dornbusch in 1930. [**Figure 3.36**] This company, one of the largest manufacturers of the white collar in

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[233] One example reproduction can bee found in Abigail Solomon-Godeau *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 66. Here it is reproduced as "Untitled," 1928. Solomon-Godeau does not discuss the image itself but uses it to illustrate Herbert Molderings' citations regarding the use of photography in the fetishizing of commodities. Much more research could be done on the photographs and contextual circumstances of Hein Gorny. His 1936 photograph of a series of gas masks, for instance, provides an intriguing counterpart to his white collars. I hope to conduct further research on Gorny for an essay subsequent to this dissertation. This will require a trip to Halle in order to explore his archives.

Germany, seems to have been experiencing a transition from using advertising with illustrations to advertising with photographs. During the same years one can find graphic illustrations for Dornbusch (as was seen in the Salomon article above) alongside photographic ones. The Wolff photograph may be influenced by Outerbridge's, in that its focus is on a close-up view of detached collars, expressing the modernism of the product's design as an independent object. Yet the Wolff image differs from the Gorny one in that it appears to be more self-conscious as an advertisement, rather than as a photograph first and an advertisement second. Wolff represented just seven collars piled carefully and precariously atop their boxed packaging. The Dornbusch name is half visible on the package front in the lower register of the image and on the stamped-in shirt labels. The collar itself exhibits a stamp of three male heads, repeating the company's many-headed, Tiller-esque logo. The repetition within the logo reinforces the mantra of conformity that the multiplied collars as products proclaim.

A third German example taken in 1928 is by the photographer Umbo. [**Figures 3.37a and 3.37b**] Reproduced in a 1928 issue of *BIZ*, again the following year in *Der Querschnitt*, and then in a July 1930 issue of *Gebrauchsgraphik*, Umbo's photograph for Estee collars is a prime example of the Tiller-Effect. The *Gebrauchsgraphik* reproduction is part of an article featuring Umbo and other photographers such as Herbert Bayer, emphasizing each photographer's ability to depict objects effectively. Of Umbo's image, the author illuminates: "the optical charm of the series has been utilized."[234] Umbo's innumerable collars reach back in diagonal perspective. They emerge as if floating in a blackened ethereal space, establishing a phalanx of ghostly, empty forms. By 1930, after the Wall Street debacle and the onset of international Depression, this

[234] *Gebrauchsgraphik* (July 1930), pp. 47-48. See also this image as reproduced in Herbert Molderings, *Otto Umbehr: Umbo 1902-1980* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), n.p.

image must have become more complicated, suggesting the *unemployment* of the white-collar masses (even their potential *deployment* as troops) rather than their optimistic *employment*.

Herbert Molderings mentioned this image in his 1995 monograph, suggesting that Umbo was using parody to present the collars like a revue dance troupe. Where this may be true, and Umbo's work eagerly embraced parody and humor, the Tiller-Effect still remained a highly visible formula for the effective advertising and display of goods, especially those goods entangled with American associations such as the white collar. Hein Gorny's army, Paul Wolff's shadowy stack, and Umbo's receding phalanx of disembodied collars linger as visual reminders. They remind of the rich discourse surrounding the white collar worker during the Weimar era, the frequency of the Tiller-Effect as an application suggestive of the American assembly-line technique, and the complexities hidden behind a Neue Sachlichkeit photographic subject matter heralded as primarily visual experimentation.

The Corporate Image Expanded

The male white-collar employee and the female *Angestelltin* or "pink-collar" employee and his or her accessories are, like the Tiller Girls, to be found in proliferation in the illustrated press. The magazines are full of, not only collars, but office "girls" and suited men, typewriters and American qualities. One particularly apt poem in *Uhu* depicts a drawing of the unsung office heroine as the girl of the times. She diligently sits upright at her typewriter. [**Figure 3.38**] The title reads: "Ich bin das junge Mädchen

deiner Zeit" ("I am the young girl of your time"). In the poem, the Mädchen claims that people don't really know her, that they confuse her with Jazz music. "I am the young girl, the girl of your time…I am the young girl in the office, who sits at the typewriter and writes for you…I am one of a thousand and always the same…I am sick and pale under my makeup and my red lipstick but my smile still balances fragile and gentle around my mouth…I am the small girlfriend of your happiness, I am the young girl of your time."[235] In a second example, one of many, a fictional, documentary-style photo-essay with photographs by one Karl Schenker, uses the actress Ursula Grabley to depict the daily life of a young, stylish typist, emphasizing the pace of the office environment and its proximity to private life. [**Figures 3.39 and 3.40**] "Leben mit der Schreibmaschine" ("Life with the Typewriter") uses Hollywood-esque, staged photographs (as if stills from a film) to depict a typical office-worker's day during which her public and private lives have become inseparable. This pretty Amerikanisch bobbed-haired New Woman is a slave to her typewriter while happily managing to remain fashionable and pursue her love interests from her desk: she is the new ideal.

As a relatively new category of worker, the *Angestelltin* or *Angestellter* was quickly absorbed into the popular imagination, both reflecting and inspiring the typical reader. In Kracauer's writing the swelling white-collar masses assume the positions of not only workers, but also consumers of magazines, goods, films, and all forms of mass-entertainment. Thomas Y. Levin writes that it is in *Die Angestellten* "that Kracauer established the important correlation between the psychosocial conditions peculiar to that class (lack of roots, isolation, emotional vulnerability, a general feeling of insecurity) and

[235] Joe Lederer, "Ich bin das junge Mädchen deiner Zeit," *Uhu*, vol. 2, n. 3 (November 1926), pp. 54-55.

the new social obsession with consumption and conspicuous, compensatory leisure (cafés, dance halls, illustrated magazines, cabarets)."[236]

In this way, both male and female officer workers and salespersons were touted as the new "common man," his or her dreams and desires revealed, documented, and lampooned on the magazine page. Like the one mentioned above, most articles appeared in the form of journalistic fiction. They depicted character types and focused on qualities that were seen as indistinguishable from American employees. One such article employed photomontage (a tool of the avant-garde generally used toward a critical end) to both sympathize with and mock the young salesgirl as a type.[237] [**Figures 3.41**] The montage scenes by "Hoinkis" refer to the fashion photographer Ewald Hoinkis. Billing itself as a "Fotofantasie," this article, "Ein Mädchen Träumt" ("A Girl Dreams"), uses short poetic verse by the novelist Erich Kästner. A stockings salesclerk whiles away the hours bored at her day-job. In another photograph she dreams of being swept off her feet by a Hollywood-style kiss. In a third, a photomontage, she imagines her own fairy-tale American-style wedding complete with white dress and tuxedo-wearing, handsome prince. Kästner writes that "her Garden of Eden lies in the magazines," suggesting the powerful hold photo-illustrated magazines had over the lives of *Angestelltin*, not only reflecting and reporting on their lives but also to some extent *creating* them.

Sasha Stone, like many "Neue Sachlichkeit" photographers, balanced a career that defied photo-historical classifications. His imagery is at in part journalistic, as we saw in his piece covering revue dancers on vacation. It is at turns avant-garde, even surrealistic (he trained with Man Ray), and then *sachlich* with a penchant for advertising and presenting industry in a positive light. He created a series of photo-collages depicting the

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[236] Levin, "Introduction," *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 25-26.
[237] Kästner and Hoinkis, "Ein Mädchen Träumt," Uhu, vol. 1, n. 9 (October 1932), pp. 14-19.

scenario of the office worker specifically for an article in *Uhu* magazine. His photographs expand the array of consumer articles now needed to maintain a suitable, efficient office environment. Entitled "Das 100Pferdige Büro – Keine Utopie" (The Hundred-horse-power Office – No Utopia")[238] [**Figure 3.42, 3.43, and 3.44**], this 1926 article sets the stage with a cartoon of the big boss of a firm. He is teleconferencing futuristically with his five managers all over the world. The drawing seems, at first glance, to poke fun at the new mindset of efficient order, punctuality, and extremes of rationalization in the office environment. But the rest of the article heralds the onset of office rationalization as a necessary evil, referencing throughout the various "amerikanisch" systems that have propelled the giant firms to their heights of success: "Time is money – das hundertpferdige Büro kommt!" ("Time is money – the hundred-horse-powered office is on the way!"). Stone photographed office worksites as places purged of chance, structured in all aspects with rows of homogenous typists, perfected cataloguing systems, and alarmed reminders to keep the worker in step with all of his appointments.

One of Stone's photographs is partially a photo-collage, with the firm's name "HINZ" spelled out in arrows pointing to the corresponding letters on the phonetically, rather than alphabetically, arranged card catalog. Hinz was a firm that mass-produced the equipment needed to keep just such an office running at maximum efficiency. This Stone close-up of a card catalogue filing system was later reproduced as "kartei – cartothéque - files" in Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold's *Foto-Auge, 76 Fotos der Zeit*, (1929).[239] Stone's "Files" is juxtaposed in *Foto-Auge* next to an anonymous photograph provided by the

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[238] *Uhu*, vol. 7, n. 2 (April 1926), pp. 51-57.
[239] See reprinted version: Peter C. Bunnell and Robert A. Sobieszek, eds., *Photo-Eye, 76 Photos of the Times* (New York: Arno Press, 1973).

company I.G. Farben depicting people on a beach and boardwalk. [**Figure 3.45**] The chaotic randomness of the human condition seems to be emphasized in this image given its placement next to the orderliness of a card catalog file. One announces disorder and the other answers with order. Stone's image "indexed" the idea that ordering systems such as the card catalogue file, with its neatly arranged tabs and columns of letters with numbers, signaled the presence of modernity. Indeed the objects of communication and organization within the white-collar office space represented the state of the art and the modernism of systematicity itself.

Like the white collar, the typewriter was metonymic for the new masses. Both were invented in the United States and rose to photographic iconicity there before assuming a similar position within German Neue Sachlichkeit imagery.[240] The modern typewriter, with its fifty odd, identical keys ordered in a stadium-like formation of neat rows, and its production of a tap-tap-tap rhythm, reflected the assumption and consumption of the white-collar realm. On both sides of the Atlantic, the typewriter became a symbol of office efficiency and fast-paced corporate communication. The American photographer Ralph Steiner's *Typewriter Keys* of 1921 is one of the earliest examples of the stark close-up view of the machine soon to become one hallmark of Neue Sachlichkeit photography.[241] [**Figure 3.46**] This image, which would eventually

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[240] Similar to the invention of photography, it seems a number of individuals (all of them Americans) had some hand in the invention of the typewriter. It was patented in 1868 by Christopher Latham Sholes of Wisconsin.

[241] The typewriter became the subject for a number of other photographers in the 1920s and 1930s, including Tina Modotti and Margaret Bourke-White. However it did not consistently index the white-collar worker and the pursuit of modern systems of organization. Modotti's *Mella's Typewriter* of 1928, for example, adopts a similarly radical viewpoint of this ordinary machine, but she includes a snippet of text from the writings of Leon Trotsky. Her photograph, thus so similar at first glance to the ones mentioned above, is radically different in its meaning. In her work, the typewriter represents one of the most crucial weapons of revolution. Her image is considered a "psychological portrait" of Julio Antonio Mella, Cuban revolutionary and Modotti's lover. Bourke-White's detail of a "Royal Typewriter" from 1934 holds perhaps less emblematic power at this point, existing as a corporate advertisement first and foremost, while still signaling the modernity of this machine.

come into the Ford Motor Company Collection, isolated the keys from the machine, focusing on the repeated forms of eight keys: circles and curves, letters, numbers, and grammatical symbols stand in for not only the whole machine, but also the entire mechanism of white-collar communication.

In Germany the typewriter as a subject matter came of age a few years later. It was photographed by Erich Comeriner (*The Keys of My Typewriter*, 1929; Georg Trump (*Feldmühle*, circa 1929; and Walter Funkat, *Hinz advertisement*, 1931), just to name a few.[242] [**Figures 3.47, 3.48, 3.49**] Comeriner's image, not an advertisement, is very similar to Steiner's although his keys are seen from an above angle emphasizing the angularity of the vision over the abstraction of the object. Trump's photograph portrays a Remington Portable almost directly from above, an advertisement for Feldmühle Paper Company in Stetten, Germany.[243] Umbo more playfully depicted the typewriter as the mechanical upper torso of the racing photographer or the multi-tasking reporter on his cover for Werner Graeff's 1929 *Hier Kommt der neue Fotograf*. [**Figure 3.50**] His typewriter is at the heart of the photographer as the "new man," a bionic configuration of machines in motion. Part camera, phonograph, fountain pen, alarm clock, engine, automobile and airplane, the new man types away upon the keys of his machine even as this modern flaneur roams over and around the modern metropolis in search of action. A little-known Bauhaus student of Walter Peterhans, Elsa Thiemann, whose work will be introduced in Chapter Five, also paid homage to the typewriter as subject in her *Schreibmaschinentasten* (*Typewriter Keys*) of circa 1930. Like Steiner she focuses on the

[242] Erich Comeriner's photograph can be found in the Collection of Manfred Heiting.
[243] Both the Comeriner and the Trump photographs of typewriters are reproduced in Honnef, Sachsse, Karin, ed., *German Photography: Power of a Medium,* p. 171.

serial repetition of the keys as abstracted objects rather than on the machine as a product. [**Figure 3.51**]

Photography: An Optical Inventory

Forging ahead to consider a fourth and final visual trope in Kracauer's texts, on a more ontological level, the medium of photography itself – rather than just what it is able to depict - emerges as inseparable from a Weimar construction of *Amerikanismus*. This connection between photography, and not only Americanization in general, but the birth of industrialization, was mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. It is a connection that is made explicit in even the most cursory reading of Kracauer. For him, the camera makes the mass possible. It facilitates replication, repetition, and emulation on many different levels.

Born of the industrial revolution, photography, for Kracauer, especially the photography of American-style illustrated magazines, is a medium that warehouses, takes inventory, and delights in sheer accumulation. It piles up and endlessly reproduces, making ownership (of not only objects but also qualities) seem possible for all. It is the perfect vehicle for the projection of excess and the fetishization of objects of the quotidian present. Each of the tropes of *Amerikanismus* discussed above is impossible without photography. Photography disseminates the serialized girls, the mass-produced goods, and the desires of the white-collar masses in the illustrated press. It makes possible the reflection of their habits and encourages their conformities, reinforcing desires, fantasies, and economic and cultural structures.

But photography is itself the product of the same system. Its ontological status is explored by Kracauer as a visual presence that not only conveys meaning, but produces it. According to Kracauer, just as the mass ornament is a reflection of the capitalist production process, so too is photography. He writes more precisely: "No different from earlier modes of representation, photography, too, is assigned to a particular developmental stage of practical and material life. *It is a secretion of the capitalist mode of production*. The same mere nature which appears in photography flourishes in the reality of the society produced by this capitalist mode of production."[244] (my italics) Kracauer does not treat photography as a passive conveyor of goods and values, but rather credits it as an active perpetrator, its serial nature responsible for a culture of excesses just as it also records it. For Kracauer, photography is not merely a record-keeper, which may usefully keep track of images and events as it has often been called upon to do throughout its history. Rather, it is more of a generator, reproducing *ad infinitum* what we already have, see, want, and know. By its very nature it inventories, recording, yes, but as a kind of stacking up of details, images, objects, people, and fragments: "…photography merely stockpiles the elements."[245] Although Kracauer brings the photographic medium into almost all of his discussions, a few of his essays highlight photography's role as a signifier of *Amerikanismus* and as a tool used to disseminate the powerful construct of *Amerika*.

In his 1927 essay "Photography," Kracauer discussed the medium as an optical inventory, increasing in this role due to the proliferation of images and diminished

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[244] Kracauer, "Photography" (*Die Frankfurter Zeitung*, 28 October, 1927), *The Mass Ornament*, p. 61.
[245] Ibid., p. 52.

volume of texts in the popular illustrated magazines.[246] Photography as an optical inventory assembled meaning through a "list" of images strung together like words.[247] Yet the images and their volume are credited with the destruction of memory, both personal and collective. Kracauer's observations closely resemble what Walter Benjamin would later, but more famously, observe in his "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936). Benjamin suggests photography's responsibility for destroying the aura of originality and tradition that encircle and enchant an object or work of art. He notes that photography's ability to bring all things into close range through reproduction has also created a new perception or what he calls a "sense of the universal equality of things." Emphasizing that this is not only a change in the outward appearance of things, Benjamin sees it as having far-reaching effects: "The alignment of reality with the masses and of the masses with reality is a process of immeasurable importance for both thinking and perception."[248]

Kracauer's focus is on the photography that is specifically of the illustrated newspapers and its sheer proliferation:

> The flood of photographs sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits. Artworks suffer this fate through their reproductions. The phrase 'lie together, die together' applies to the multiply reproduced original; rather than coming into view through the reproductions, it tends to disappear in its multiplicity and to live on as art photography. In the illustrated magazines, people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving. The spatial continuum from the camera's perspective dominates the

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[246] See Hans Siemsen, in "The Literature of Nonreaders" pp. 663-664 in *WRS* and first published as "Die Literatur der Nichtleser," *Die literarische Welt* 2, no. 37 (September 10, 1926), p. 4. Siemsen addresses the sheer ubiquity of the illustrated publications and advertisements as the new forms of literature of the day: "But those who read no books also have their literature. They read the newspaper, especially the columns. They go to the cinema…[a]nd they read the ad pillars and the billboards on buildings, roofs, and streetcars. Who knows Pascal? Everyone knows Odol."

[247] Kracauer, "Photography" (1927), *The Mass Ornament*, p. 57.

[248] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4, 1935-1937*, p. 105.

> spatial appearance of the perceived object; the resemblance between the image and the object effaces the contours of the object's 'history.'[249]

He holds this flood of photography in the magazines responsible for not only the destruction of memory, but also the destruction of *meaning*. This is a significant allegation. It connects us back to Chapter One's observations regarding the power of visual distraction to erase meaning, or at least to elide it. It is visual distraction, within a culture based upon capitalist accumulation, to which even artists and photographers, the producers of visual culture, fall prey. It renders suspect all of the great claims of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its delight in the real, the objective, the discovery of meaning in the everyday. Kracauer's understanding of this new photography as a barrage of images creating a new kind of meaning through the erasure of meaning and clouding perception through distraction links to the *Neue Sachlich* tendency to erase contextual circumstances and celebrate surface and shape, singularity and seriality, while clouding political and economic meaning and material relations.

And again, he does not directly point a finger at the United States as the monstrous creator of such a system, but he always comes back to America as more simply a site of origin, a system emulated, or an instigator of forms. Kracauer suggests:

> [n]ever before has a period known so little about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding…The contiguity of these images systematically excludes their contextual framework available to consciousness. The 'image-idea' drives away the idea. The blizzard of photographs betrays an indifference toward what the things mean. It does not have to be this way; but in any case the American illustrated magazines – which the publications of other countries emulate to a large degree – equate the world with the quintessence of the photographs...That the world devours them is a sign of the fear of death. What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory image. In the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present, and the

[249] Kracauer, "Photography" (1927), *The Mass Ornament*, p. 58.

> photographed present has been entirely eternalized. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it." [250]

Thus the perceived *Amerikanisch* blizzard of photographs, the contiguity of images, the sense of sheer accumulation, for Kracuaer, staves off understanding and keeps at bay any deeper awareness of the crisis-like conditions at play.

Amerika as a Construct

The Tiller myth and the ubiquity of the Till-Effect attest to the power of America as an imagined and a photographic construct, an "ismus." And yet the question remains: what exactly was behind the power of this pervasive myth and the Weimar fascination with America as a construct? As scholars in recent years have begun to question the fast-paced, commercially-instigated, often haphazard re-development of the city of Berlin, the power of America as a construct persists.[251] And yet America has historically (in the wider sense of a public understanding) been experienced as much through novels, short essays in the illustrated press and trade journals, and through travel articles written by all sorts as by way of actual experience. Franz Kafka, in his unfinished book *Amerika* (published posthumously in 1927), is just one of the most prominent among a number of authors in the twenties to imagine America without ever having been there. A long list of examples emerges which treat the subject of America as an image; a symbol of wealth, greed, rationalized production, irrational consumption, valuelessness, and boundlessness.

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[250] Kracauer, "Photography" (1927), *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 58-59.
[251] See *Visual Culture in Twentieth Century Germany: Text as Spectacle*, ed. Gail Finney (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006). Janet Ward's essay in this anthology discusses the architectural development of the city of Berlin and its various critical points since Germany's movement of the capital from Bonn to Berlin.

James W. Ceaser explores the various manifestations of America as a symbolic concept: "[w]riters on America do not simply speak of the United States; they have also constructed the concept of "Americanism" or "Americanization," which refers to such fundamental developments of modernity as cultural homogenization, democratization, and degeneration. America so conceived may exist outside of the United States and involve no actual Americans. Once this point is reached, it becomes clear that the real America is no longer at issue: an idea or symbol called "America" has taken over. No other nation [has attained this] status of a pure abstraction."[252]

Many German novels, journalistic articles, paintings, cartoons, and photo-montages depicted America not as reality but as imaginary. Nevertheless "Envisioning America," a conference and an exhibition organized by Beeke Sell Tower with Peter Nisbet in 1990, is one of the first and only important efforts in recent scholarship to address the *imagery* of Americanism as a subject in its own right.[253] This important contribution, however, admits to not covering in much depth photographic output as an aspect of *Amerikanismus*. One key essay in this catalog is John Czaplicka's "*Amerikabilder* and the German Discourse on Modern Civilization, 1890-1925." He identified three phases in the relationship of Germany to the United States, especially as they pertain to the development of image production by the Germans of America and the Americans: "The full recognition of America as a global power and competitor by the 1890s, the intervention of the United States in World War I, and the massive investment

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[252] James Ceaser, *Reconstructing America: The Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 161. Visser Hooft, a Dutch historian of *Amerikanismus* writing in 1931, added: "Europe 'will be more influenced by its own picture of America than by America itself"; see Trommler, p. 333. For a recent publication dealing with the issues of Americanism in Paris between the wars, see Sophie Lévy, ed., *A Transatlantic Avant-Garde: American Artists in Paris, 1918-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

[253] Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and his Contemporaries, 1915-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Busch-Reisinger Museum and Harvard University, 1990).

of American business and industry in Europe after that war."[254] Czaplicka cites images which surface throughout the early twentieth century by artists such as Lyonel Feininger, Karl Hubbuch, Hannah Höch, Marianne Brandt, John Heartfield, Gerd Arntz and, of course, George Grosz, to name just a few.

Grosz constructed images of America as conceptual "portraits," although he had not yet ever visited the United States at this point. His *Memory of New York, 1915-1916* is a caricatured palimpsest of text, architecture, technology, and figurative types. [**Figure 3.52**] Heartfield's *Amerikabilder*, photo-collages entitled *Endpapers for J. Dorfmann 'Im Lande der Rekordzahlen* (In the Country of Record Numbers) from 1927, included images lifted from the daily newspapers. [**Figure 3.53**] He reinforced the association of America with the placing of quantity over quality by including various images of serialization, such as motorcycle policemen at the ready, revue dancers, factory workers, KKK members in formation, skyscrapers with their endless levels and windows, and a beauty pageant line-up. Gerd Arntz, in his 1924 image, *Things American*, not so dissimilar from the Paul Zimmel cartoons of the following years, used "easily read types and pictorial symbols" to represent America as a land of mass-produced Tiller Girls and automobiles.[255] [**Figure 3.54**] The recent *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s* exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art included one painting in particular

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[254] John Czaplicka, "Amerikabilder and the German Discourse on Modern Civilization, 1890-1925" in Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America*, pp. 39-40. Czaplicka quotes the art critic Karl Scheffler who "attacked Berlin as a parvenu, and materialist city in restless haste laying blame on a middle class who advocated capitalism and prayed in the faith of *Amerikanismus* 'giving themselves up to the God of quantity'," p. 43. Czaplicka also notes: "When, in 1924, American financial intervention in the form of the Dawes Plan provided for economic stabilization through a reduction in reparation payments and by granting long-term credits, that model seemed all the more worthy of emulation. During this period of 'stabilization' from 1924 until 1929 the German *Amerikabild* was augmented by new human and economic models, even while the cultural critique of America continued." Further research and interpretation could be done to discuss John Heartfield's series as endpapers for J. Dorfmann's 'Im Lande der Rekordzahlen,' (Vienna/Berlin, 1927).

[255] Czaplicka in *Envisioning America*, pp. 54-55.

by Otto Dix entitled *To Beauty*, 1922, which Beeke Sell Tower in an earlier essay referred to as "a veritable encyclopedia of *Amerikanismus*: the Indian head on the drum as reminder of the Wild West; jazz, represented by the black drummer, as harbinger of American popular culture; the telephone [standing in] for technology and commerce."[256] [**Figure 3.55**] As a construct of types, its production of myth is much more important than its basis in reality.

The Tiller-Effect is ultimately such a construct. Stimulating the public imagination, it presented "American" order (if excessive) and abundance (if unattainable) in place of German disorder and desire. It depicted control where lack of control was the order of the day. But the effect was not only perceived as a harmless, if ambivalent form. Peter Jelavich, in his writing about the precision dance troupes, subtly implicated the Tiller-Effect as a predilection toward fascist regimes of order. He pointed to the endpoint of this ultra-organized form, stating that the troupes were "signposts along the way" toward the camps, the worst of the worst of modernity – they were "products of human de-structuring and dehumanized restructuring."[257] Kracauer also insinuated the culpability of the white-collar masses in relation to the rise of fascism, yet he stopped just short of making an outright connection. He certainly tries to come to terms with the larger cultural preference for excess, serialized and ordered spectacle, and organized consumption over more traditional cultural forms. However in June of 1927, he could not have connected these dots directly to Nazi policy. He linked them instead to the

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[256] See *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s* (New York, New Haven and London: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2006), p. 48. This quotation is from Beeke Sell Tower, "Jungle Music and Song of Machines: Jazz and American Dance in Weimar Culture," in *Envisioning Amerika*, p. 4.

[257] Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret: Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 239.

American model. He sensed a chill in the air, as his country simultaneously looked toward America as a model *and* over the next six short years would move toward the most extreme political right.

The Tiller-Effect, however, may more productively – and more broadly – be understood as a metaphor for capitalism in general and a masking over of the cultural shocks in its wake. At once a harmless distraction *and* a distracting harbinger, the Tiller-Effect reveals the contagious power of images and their role in the generation of perceptions. An understanding of it serves as a visual foundation to the twentieth century's love affair with repetition and the visual logic of seriality. It is at the heart of *Amerikanismus*, helping to shed light on this "cult" of popular phenomena as instead a metaphor for capitalism as well as a mechanism for deflecting it.

Chapter IV

'For the Improvement of the Products of Manufacture': *Die Form* Photography and the Spiritualized Economy of the *Typenwaren*

"Just as art works become commodities and are enjoyed as such, the commodity itself in consumer society has become image, representation, spectacle. The commodification of art ends up in the aestheticization of the commodity."[258]

The Deutscher Werkbund's motto was "For the improvement of the products of manufacture."[259] The motto tells all. It succinctly reveals that the bottom line concerns of the Deutscher Werkbund dovetailed with the bottom line concerns of industry. The Werkbund, an association of architects, industrialists, and designers, was founded in 1907. It promoted German industrial production and design as comparable and competitive with American and English manufacturing while seeking the advancement of particularly "German" product "types." In the mid-1920s the Werkbund began to publish its popular trade journal, *Die Form*, *Zeitschrift für Gestaltende Arbeit* (*Form: Journal for Structured Work*),[260] a bi-monthly journal that went to twenty-four issues per month by 1930.[261] It was published between 1925 and 1934, and became an essential national and international public forum for the Werkbund, publishing many of its articles and captions (inconsistently) in both German and English. This chapter, in part, discusses the fact that although the association's clearly stated aim was to improve the products of manufacture, it spilled gallons of ink and reproduced endless photographs in *Die Form* in order to dress

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[258] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 21.
[259] See Ute Eskildsen, "Photography and the Neue Sachlichkeit Movement", *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties*, with text also by Wieland Schmied (London: Hayward Gallery and Arts Council of Great Britain, November 11, 1978 – January 14, 1979) p. 88.
[260] *Gestaltende* has amorphous translations: shaped, formed, arranged, structured, creative. I have translated it as structured because the journal emphasized designs for organized, industrial production. See *German College Dictionary* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998, 2nd edition), p. 215.
[261] *Die Form* was published in Berlin by Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, GmBH.

up this aim and transform it into a more spiritual, more cultural pursuit. It sought to establish what Frederic J. Schwartz called a "spiritualized economy."[262] The notion of the "type," or the standardized product of the assembly line, was the foundation of this spiritualized economy. In the hands of the *Die Form* editors, writers, and photographers, the mass-produced "type" was elevated. It was raised to the status of cultural object and infused with philosophical, nationalistic, and aesthetic meaning which posited its so-called German "quality" over an American emphasis on "quantity. This chapter will argue that the need to justify, aestheticize, and claim standardized production as "natural" and *geistig*, spiritual and therefore qualitative, reflects the degree to which industrialization in Germany in the mid-twenties was experienced as a national crisis of identity related to American intervention. *Die Form* used the medium of photography to focus on object design and design in general, including furniture, architecture, appliances, textiles, ceramics, garden design, and all of the products of industry within these categories referred to as "Typenwaren." The journal adopted a Neue Sachlichkeit approach to the photography of *Typenwaren* as its most essential form of "matter-of-fact" illustration, seeking the most "objective" mode for indirect product promotion.

This chapter will examine select photographic commissions within *Die Form* as representative of its attempt to transform the industrial production sector into a "natural," non-threatening aesthetic enterprise, one which held the promise of order and

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[262] Frederick J. Schwartz, "The Spiritualized Economy and the Development of 'Types'" in *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 79. In a later chapter, Schwartz discusses the spiritual inflection behind the mass production of "types" by drawing on the wisdom of Georg Simmel. Schwartz summarizes: "…by the purchase and display of identical forms, subjects in a society could be united by sharing references to the same model, and thus (here is the weak link) signs of the same spirit. This is the utopian flip side of industry's ability to reproduce any form and the business need to appeal to as large a market as possible. Style as Simmel describes it is the industrial generation of the 'with-many-shared,' of forms suited to distribution; it is a sort of collective ownership of symbols," p 99.

rationalization for Germany's future. Photography, and the photographer's "willing embrace" of the industrial patron, played a most significant role in *Die Form* as the vehicle for disseminating the formal beauty of industry, illustrating and making visual the Werkbund's motto. I will look at how the photographs (and therefore also the photographers) assisted in a glorified reception of industry, ironically during a time of widespread and rapidly increasing unemployment, worker unrest, and the onset of international economic crisis.[263] I will suggest the behind-the-scenes role played by American banking and industry as a crucial component for an understanding of *Die Form* as a political tool, a publication that was, because of its developed sense of "spiritualized" nationalism and industrialism, able to smoothly transition into supporting the early agenda of National Socialism in the early 1930s. No direct link between *Die Form* and the rise of National Socialism will be made, but rather the photographs and texts examined will point toward coincidences and suggest a political understanding for the images and projects at stake.

Of significance for this chapter is the question, raised originally in Chapter One, regarding the "willing embrace" of industrial and technological imagery by the artist-photographer. Where Christopher Phillips asserted that "the glistening machine look...signified a willing embrace of the new technological civilization," this chapter

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[263] For discussions of German economics in the 1920s in light of inflation, hyper-inflation, and stabilization, see Gerald Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Steven B. Webb, *Hyperinflation and Stabilization in Weimar Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Bernard Widdig, *Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001); Harold James, *The German Slump: Politics and Economics, 1924-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Chapter Two of this dissertation summarizes an historical account of the Weimar years. Feldman offers what has been considered the definitive account of the inflationary crisis years as inflation was caused in part by the Reichsbank increase in the volume of paper money in circulation as early as 1914. The fact that the government tried to stave off currency anxiety shortly thereafter, compounded by massive war debt after Versailles by 1919, Feldman says that "hyper-inflation" ensued by 1922 as social and political instability increased and the industrial region of the Ruhr valley saw an escalation of unrest.

considers what that willing embrace itself may have signified? In other words, what was the artist-photographer's position in regard to the industrial client and how might the photographs (and to some extent the life choices of the photographers) provide some answers? What kinds of meaning were the photographs conveying about the benevolent or malevolent role of industrialization, cartelization, and rationalization in Germany? In a similar mode of questioning, Terry Smith, writing of *American* photographers who focused their energies on the subject matter of the industrial giants, asks:

> How consequential was Sheeler at the Rouge [Ford River Rouge factory], Margaret Bourke-White at Otis Steel? If their kinds of representation did come to define the subject during this period, how did this occur, what were the structures of its dissemination, how stable were the meanings being established in this spreading?[264]

It is these types of questions, among others, that are being considered in this chapter in relation to the work of German photographers working in the Neue Sachlichkeit mode and employed by the Deutscher Werkbund's *Die Form*.

The first sections will consider the role of the artist-photographer in the mid-twenties and his position toward industry and commercial photography. The next sections will explore the Werkbund's relationship to the industrial sector and its ties to American cartels. I will then look briefly at the influence of the key Werkbund-organized photography exhibitions in establishing a visually appealing reception for industry. I will then outline specific *Die Form* photographic projects as examples, focusing on three of the journal's main photographers, all of whom are considered today proponents of the Neue Sachlichkeit style: Albert Renger-Patzsch, Hein Gorny, and Hans Finsler. Their work for this publication has not been examined and provides some

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[264] Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 128.

insights into the commercial and political context of photographic Neue Sachlichkeit, its roots in and relationship to the American assembly-line.

The methodological approach used here is not unlike the underlying mode of questioning found throughout this dissertation, borrowing loosely from the perspective of "Critical Theory," a line of questioning promoted by the so-called "Frankfurt School." Rolf Wiggerhaus summarized this approach as "a form of thought that is committed to the abolition of domination and that stands in a Marxist tradition open to a wide variety of associations."[265] As such, the photographs discussed may be understood as partaking in the power relations of the so-called "new world" of industrial commodity culture with its rapid transformation of German economy and society.[266] And yet, it must be noted that raising questions like those raised in this chapter about the intentions of Neue Sachlichkeit photography and its participants has more often than not been dismissed by much of the literature as "Marxist."[267] As a result it has often been deemed a minor

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[265] Rolf Wiggerhaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance,* trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 658.

[266] It is almost impossible in this context to overlook the work of Guy Debord, although to look to a French theorist of the nineteen sixties in order to write about Germany between the world wars may seem a stretch. However, Guy Debord's forty-first thesis in *The Society of the Spectacle* provides a useful window onto the role of the commodity and its banal familiarity in the form of everyday "objects" in Neue Sachlichkeit photography. Debord touches on the unseen or the covert aspect of an economy colonizing on the basis of familiarity. The thesis reads: "The commodity's dominion over the economy was at first exercised in a covert manner. The economy itself, the material basis of social life, was neither perceived nor understood - not properly known precisely because of its 'familiarity.' In a society where concrete commodities were few and far between, it was the dominance of money that seemed to play the role of emissary, invested with full authority by an unknown power. With the coming of the industrial revolution, the division of labor specific to that revolution's manufacturing system, and mass production for a world market, the commodity emerged in its full-fledged form as a force aspiring to the complete colonization of social life. It was at this moment too that political economy established itself as at once the dominant science and the science of domination." In this thesis, it is almost as if Debord is describing the Weimar economy, the industrial cartels that were formed between the United States and Germany controlling not only economic production but also foreign policy, and the imagery of reification which surfaced in the popular form of an interest in the objects and goods of the "everyday." See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), pp. 28-29.

[267] Here the reference is to Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Introduction," *The Modern Functional Building: Adolf Behne*, pp. 50-51, who writes: "Marxist historians in particular saw [Neue Sachlichkeit] as the victory of capitalism, *Amerikanismus*, and Fordism," listing the examples of Helmut Lethen and Jost Hermand.

"theory" amongst a range of possible interpretations. This discussion will suggest that such a line of questioning should become a more mainstream, less marginalized, mode of thinking about image production and intention.

Romancing the Machine

Neue Sachlichkeit photography has been described as a "style" that "sought to both express and transform the modern world." It is celebrated for its matter-of-fact "integrity of the object before the lens."[268] Neue Sachlichkeit photographers have been praised for their attention to the object, to the thing itself, to the "new" world around them. They have been traditionally credited for their enthusiasm for technology and optimism that the machine age had arrived and would alleviate strained social and economic conditions. And yet, many of the photographers' own statements, life choices, and photographic compositions indicate less a utopianism and more a desire to take part in the new economy and to promote the powerful industrial forces that were driving it. Maud Lavin suggested that the photographer's role represented "a serious and prolonged engagement in mass culture" and I hope to build upon this assessment, moving yet further away from its links with machine romanticism.[269] Ute Eskildsen saw the participation of the photographers as a coping mechanism, a way "to cope with a changing material world." In one of the earliest articles to examine Neue Sachlichkeit photography in depth, Eskildsen wrote:

> The emphasis on the appropriation of elements of external reality in Neue Sachlichkeit photography amounted to an ideal of objectivity; and yet the

[268] Christopher Phillips, "Resurrecting Vision: The New Photography in Europe Between the Wars," *The New Vision: Photography Between the World Wars* (New York: Ford Motor Company Collection and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), p. 68.
[269] Maud Lavin, *Clean New World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 58.

> concentration on nature and on manufactured commodities indicates more an expansion of the traditional position *to cope with a changing material world.* Industry increased the number of new artifacts for the photographer to consider, but since these products were discussed in terms of 'the beauty of technology' and 'the engineer as the creator of the new forms' the way in which they were seen was conditioned by the same attitudes."[270] (my italics)

Eskildsen's many essays on Neue Sachlichkeit still today are the foundation of any understanding of this moment in photography's history. However, they often maintain a formal reception. Although she points out that the photographs have been received over time as objects of beauty and new form, her texts do not completely *challenge* this formal reception and belief in the photographers' utopian foundations. Her readings of imagery often assisted in its confirmation, nonetheless providing the most crucial introductory information about this subject matter, calling it to attention for the first time since the Weimar period.

Eskildsen, in this first and perhaps most important article, concluded that the effects of "scientific and technical discoveries" in the form of industrialization were finally having their greatest impact around the year "1924, a time of rapid industrial growth and economic consolidation (when the Dawes plan became operative). After the previous fashion for idealization, with its concealment of technique, the photography in the 1920s celebrated the pervasive influence of technology through a new objective style. The altered relation to 'reality' of that time expressed itself as an optimistic belief in the technical possibilities of the medium".[271] She argues that, by the 1930s, with the firm entrenchment of the photographer "in the two specialized fields of advertising and photographic journalism…when the Nazis began to insinuate new and perverted

[270] Ute Eskildsen, "Photography and the Neue Sachlichkeit Movement", *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties*, p. 88.
[271] Ibid., p. 95.

meanings into established forms, they found in photography a tool admirably suited to their purposes."[272] I view her conclusion as a highly provocative introductory statement. Her suggestion regarding the impact of American industry upon Neue Sachlichkeit photography and its residue of a fertile ground for fascism seems to warrant more than a passing comment.

The work of both Maud Lavin and Ute Eskildsen raises a number of additional questions: To what extent were the Neue Sachlichkeit photographers utopian in their aims? What was the ideological effect of the abstraction and naturalization of industry through photographic imagery? To what extent was the serial format used by these photographers, which blossomed after 1924, influenced by the increased American role in industry and the popular aesthetics of Americanization discussed in the previous chapter? (How) did the photographers' embrace of industrial and commercial subject matter constitute a coping mechanism for the "changing material world"? If so, (how) did it assist in the normalization of the industrial strength that would eventually confirm the Nazi agenda?

The Artist as Social Critic?

From the perspective of art history, a perception of the Weimar era artist as formal experimentalist has been wedded to the perception that he was simultaneously a social critic and political agitator. While this was certainly true in many cases (George Grosz and John Heartfield being two of the most prominent and politically-engaged artists), it was not always, or consistently, the case. Peter Selz is one of the most well-known historians of Weimar culture. In his 1980 essay "The Artist as Social Critic" he

[272] Ibid., p. 96.

focused on the "Verist" artists "who expressed their disgust with or protest against a system."[273] His work cemented the tendency of historians and museums to focus on this more socially-critical conception of the Neue Sachlichkeit artist, a position that was in part perpetuated in the 2006 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition, *Glitter and Doom*, which was mentioned in Chapter One. While the reality of the Weimar artist as social critic absolutely existed and was a crucial part of the Weimar experience, its emphasis overshadows the less appealing reality that many artists participated in society not with an eye toward criticism, but with a hand in confirmation. Many artists and photographers recognized the opportunity for steady employment and willingly abandoned an older definition of the artist's role within society. Selz dismissed the "'rational,' industrialized, and dehumanized art of the middle class during the stabilization period" as the territory of "Marxist scholars,"[274] in essence choosing to ignore this aspect of the imagery.[275] Yet, as may be suggested by *Die For*m photography and other magazine articles addressing the expanded role of the artist-photographer into the commercial realm, artists and photographers could not have been entirely unconscious of the politics of their employers and their willing embrace of industrial commissions requires that we question this awareness.

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[273] Selz, p. 32.
[274] Ibid.
[275] In Selz's defense, he is dealing with mostly painted imagery. However this article represents precisely the types of confusion about Neue Sachlichkeit that has arisen over the years, as the focus has stayed largely in the realm of formalism.

Industrial Healing

A 1925 cover for another Weimar trade journal, the graphic design journal *Gebrauchs-Graphik* (published in Berlin between 1924 and 1944), illustrates the complex relationship that had come about in the mid-twenties between the artist and his industrial client. **[Figure 4.1]** *Gebrauchs-Graphik* (note that some issues used the hyphen between the two words and some issues read as one word, *Gebrauchsgraphik*) makes the willing alliance between the visual artist and the industrial patron clear.[276] The fact that *Gebrauchs-Graphik*, like *Die Form*, began publication, with a focus on advertising, just after the inception of a more widespread American intervention in the German economy may also be considered significant. This particular cover design depicts a smart-suited industrialist with a smirk-like smile on his face handing coins to a pipe-smoking artist suited in a white laboratory coat or a white engineer's coat. The industrialist, with his short hair and bow tie, holds a cadeusius in his left side pocket, the ancient Roman symbol for peace and healing. In the upper pocket of the long-haired artist are his tools: pencils, pens, paintbrush. In the background, behind the two figures, loom two smokestacks and the factory from which they rise with another smokestack and the plant's operations in the distant background. The presence of the cadeusius in the industrialist's pocket indicates the position of the industrialist as a healer and a peacemaker, roles that we see confirmed in the 1920s as the large-scale industrial

[276] For more on *Gebrauchs-Graphik* see Jeremy Aynsley, "*Gebrauchs-Graphik* as an Early Graphic Design Journal, 1924-38" *Journal of Design History*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1992).

manufacturers became fiercely involved in the foreign policy-making of the Weimar government and were looked to as the entities capable of and responsible for national economic recovery. In this image the artist carries the banner for graphic design and advertising for the industrialist. The banner itself is magically transformed into a precipitation of coins, flowing directly into the right-hand pocket of the industrialist. The two "types" are interdependent; the artist/engineer is dependent upon the industrialist for his living and the industrialist realizes that he needs the artist/engineer for his profit margin. But of the two, the industrialist is the only one with the grin on his face. This image also suggests that by 1925 this relationship was being cemented and yet it remained an obvious site of ambivalence in which visual art was recognized as having the power to make money for industry. The role of artist was transforming from that of an independent entity, producing work with critical power, to that of "gefesselte" or obliged entity, producing work that would visually *empower* the already powerful.

Frederic J. Schwartz, in an essay that focuses on the centrality of the corporate trademark as aesthetic icon and the graphic artist's connection to industry during the Weimar years, writes that many artists "were less interested in cultural theory than in practical work that paid".[277] He argues that the burgeoning industrial, mass-market commodity culture was a boon for artists at a moment when their position was one of uncertainty and that the increased sense of commodity fetishism was seen as an economic opportunity: "from their vantage point fetishism opened up some interesting possibilities and served their purposes well. The appearance of the commodity on the market

[277] Frederic J. Schwartz, "Commodity Signs: Peter Behrens, the AEG, and the Trademark" in *Journal of Design History*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1996), pp. 153-184; p. 178.

provided a last refuge for the artist's traditional magic at a time when it seemed to be threatened."[278]

Detlev Peukert wrote in this same vein, considering the constitutive social changes that were taking place in the artistic community as a result of drastically changed economic conditions:

> Indeed, it was precisely through the confusion experienced by individuals and their fears for their social status that the real psychological impact of the inflation made itself felt. A profiteering ethic became common among people who had previously prided themselves on their rectitude. Others turned to crime out of sheer hardship, justifying their action on the grounds that it was the only way they could survive. Both phenomena, profiteering and poverty-induced crime, showed that the rather rigid social and moral code of the age of the monarchy had at last begun to work loose….In a sense, there had been an inversion of values. Money and success were now seen as goals that justified breaking the law, while honesty was stigmatized because it flew in the face of the rules of a dog-eat-dog inflationary society**.** The shifts in the relative standing of the different social groups that we have described not only made individuals uncertain about their social status but also helped foster a widespread new relativism in social morality.[279]

As has been mentioned, Maud Lavin's contribution regarding the position of the artist to the industrial and commercial realm is significant. She proposed that the German avant-garde was over by roughly 1922 and that from 1922 until 1933 what was at stake "was not at all a rebellion against art institutions, but rather a serious and prolonged engagement with mass culture."[280] She maintains that artists experienced this engagement mostly in terms of a utopian belief in the power of industry and commerce to

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[278] Ibid.

[279] Peukert, p. 66. Elizabeth and Stuart Ewen have also contributed some of the most important writing about changing social relationships as a result of the growth of consumer culture and especially the impact of all forms of advertising in the 1920s and beyond. "The Ewans argue, advertising, the culture industries and marketing were producing 'a new capitalist cosmos. It was here that industrial-bureaucratic rationality was fused with the aesthetic sphere.' The fusion of advertising and aesthetics became 'the aphrodisiac by which a submission to corporate advances could be achieved.'" See Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 157-158. Kellner quotes Ewen and Ewen, 'Americanization and Consumption,' *Telos*, 37 (Fall 1978), p. 49.

[280] Lavin, p. 58.

improve the human condition rather than in terms of individual economic opportunity and personal gain. Lavin points out that even during the years of the Great Depression, rather than criticize rationalization and large industry, artists showed interest in a machine aesthetic and in images that reflected the rationalization process, celebrated as grandiose and even utopian. The artists, she wrote, "shared a utopian belief in a rationalized society."[281] As much as my own position agrees with Maud Lavin's in many ways, in that I see the photographers as engaging in the industrial realm of mass production seriously and in a prolonged fashion, I would counter that this engagement is not as grandiose and utopian as one might like to believe, but rather that it offered a more practical path for photographers to achieve an advanced social status and remuneration.

By 1929, and after numerous photography exhibitions sought to align photographers and industrial subject matter, the position of the photographer, and how he (or she) was considered by society, started to become clearer. The photographer's position became somewhat elevated. Photographs in the illustrated magazines, whether for the purpose of advertising or reportage, were beginning to list the name of the photographer. He or she began to assume the position of a "star" in his (or her) own right, a recognizable name, a brand of imagery. Most photographers by the mid-twenties had begun to move fluidly between genres, working as comfortably in a journalistic mode as in more avant-garde circles or in the commercial arena.

An October 1929 article in *Uhu* is revealing about the photographer's newly found status.[282] **[Figure 4.2]** It also sheds some light upon the question of *how* photographers considered themselves, their own class positions, and their relationship to

[281] Ibid., p. 37.
[282] *Uhu*, October 1929, vol. 6, n. 1, pp. 34-39.

established social and economic order. An unidentified writer in "Eine neue Künstler-Gilde: Der Fotograf erobert Neulan" ("A New Artists Guild: The Photographer Conquers New Land") contends that "the question today of whether or not photographs are artworks has been decided…This can be seen through the temperament of the artists…and whoever knows something about photography will recognize upon first glance whether a work is a Hoppé or a Renger-Patzsch, a Munkascy or a Stone" (my translation). More importantly, the article reproduces portraits of a number of photographers which project self-satisfaction, and a certain level of middle-class or even upper class confidence. Each wears a suit and a white collar, even Moholy-Nagy, who is included within this selection. [**Figure 4.3**] Renger-Patzsch is the only one in this article who is not presented in a standard, formulaic, full or three-quarter face format. [**Figure 4.4**] His is a self-portrait taken using a tripod, photographing his reflection in the side-view mirror of a shiny new automobile. His composition is similar to Rodchenko's partial self-portrait, "The Chauffeur," also dated 1929, except Renger-Patzsch's composition is without the chauffeur and the modern housing project in the background.[283] Thus Renger-Patzsch's image does not include the reference to social relations, outside the automobile as status symbol. The photographer places himself instead in between a tree (abstracted here and standing in for Nature), and a new car (also abstracted and possibly standing in for industrial production): the photographer as the superstar interloper, uniting nature and industry, the organic and the mechanical.

The *Uhu* article, in its depiction of photographers as "stars," suggests that the class position of photographers was contested and in the process of elevation. There was

[283] Rodchenko's self-portrait to which I am referring has been famously disseminated on the cover of Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present* (New York: Bulfinch, 1982).

clearly a desire among photographers to associate themselves upward as part of a wealthier class rather than as part of a bohemian circle; most of these photographers had become household names by 1929 through their advertising work, Albert Renger-Patzsch perhaps first among them. We might ask then: does the coldly calculated imagery of the *Gebrauchs-Graphik* cover along with the un-conflicted participation of artist-photographers in the commercial and industrial enterprises, at least to some extent, undermine this more desirable reading of their impulse as utopian? Does the desire for financial gain and social status contradict the interpretation that the photography of this period and its photographers were consumed by technological romance? And to what extent can the Deutscher Werkbund's *Die Form* and its desire to reflect the concerns of the reigning industrial powers serve as an example of this willing embrace and unconflicted participation? Does the Werkbund's glorification of industry through photography and text ultimately undermine its utopian claims for aesthetic and spiritual design?

Power Relations and Werkbund Desires

In "The Mass Ornament" (1927) Kracauer pointed out that the ornament is a diversion, a mythological creation, that is not only a reflection of the reigning capitalist order but is literally "sponsored by those in power."[284] "The production and mindless consumption of the ornamental patterns divert them [the masses themselves] from the imperative to change the reigning order."[285] Just as the Tiller Girls phenomenon was conceived of and sponsored by the leaders of large industry, so too were most of the photographic images which we today refer to as *Neue Sachlichkeit*. This was a look

[284] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (1927), *The Mass Ornament*, p. 85.
[285] Ibid.

promoted by the Deutscher Werkbund. Frederic J. Schwartz discusses the Werkbund's desire to associate itself with those in power, Germany's major industrial enterprises that had been growing since before World War I and had been joining forces with industrial concerns in the United States since the turn of the century. Commercial diplomacy had been a part of the relations between the two countries for decades. However they had been strained until 1923 when the Dawes Plan process was initiated and the mutual status of "most favored nation" was achieved in negotiations, allowing for more fluidity in trade.[286]

> For the large-scale industrial enterprises with which the Werkbund sought to ally itself did not represent a stable economic form: contemporaries noted that the move to this organizational form, seen as an inevitability of capitalism, had gathered its own momentum. Firms were getting bigger, swallowing smaller firms, merging with other concerns, or dividing up markets by forming cartels, syndicates, fusions, and trusts. An even smaller number of companies were controlling increasingly larger markets, sometimes establishing monopolies. In Germany and elsewhere, the AEG, for example, was recognized as the most prominent example of this trend towards the concentration of capital.[287]

The Germans had also been working with the Russians in terms of sharing technology and selling materials.[288] But Schwartz notes that Lenin suspected a German-U.S. desire for greater takeover of world markets. He provides a citation from "Lenin's 1916 study of organized capitalism and imperialism" which he quotes at some length:

> The famous A.E.G…controls 175 to 200 companies (through shareholdings), and a total capital of approximately 1,500,000,000 marks…Needless to say, the AEG is a huge combine…In 1907, the German and American trusts concluded an

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[286] For detailed primary discussion of the history of commercial relations between the two countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Wallace McClure, "German-American Commercial Relations," *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 19, no. 4 (October 1925), pp. 689-701.

[287] See Schwartz in "Commodity Signs…," where he is dealing with this phenomenon in the 1910s and 1920s, p. 157.

[288] For more regarding the relations between Russia and Germany during the Weimar years, see the following sources: Lionel Kochan, *Russia and the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, Eng.: Bowes and Bowes; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1954); Harvey Leonard Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia 1926-1933: A Study in Diplomatic Instability* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966); Haigh, R.H. et al, *German-Soviet relations in the Weimar Era: Friendship from Necessity* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1985).

> agreement by which they divided the world between themselves. Competition between them ceased. The American General Electric Company 'got' the United States and Canada. The AEG 'got' Germany, Austria, Russia, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, Turkey and the Balkans.[289]

Lenin's statements suggest the degree to which awareness of the various industrial concerns and their motives and intentions had to have been public and international knowledge for quite some time. The United States and Germany had established cultural ties that had begun strengthening during the early part of the twentieth century as regulations upon industrial cartelization began to decrease. But as power was amassed, those who benefited from that power, directly or indirectly, such as the Werkbund and its affiliates, seemed to look the other way.

Schwartz writes that, for example, the Werkbund "bracketed out" the full force of the "relations of power" represented by the conglomerations, noting that the Werkbund's philosophy supported a notion that "the very real crisis of industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization could be interpreted as a loss of spirit; relations of power could be bracketed out. And it allowed the problems of modernity to be analyzed while positing the presence of an alleviating, ameliorative force within modern capitalism itself. That force was the production sector."[290] As was seen in the *Gebrauchs-Graphik* cover, the industrialist was often perceived as figure of healing power, a powerful perception with the ability to mask over real conditions. In fact, the Werkbund itself had been torn from within by the question of whether to view industry and the standardization of production as a positive force for change or a threat to the artist's existence, attempting to unite the

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[289] See Schwartz, "Commodity Signs…", p. 180. In this footnote n. 24, Schwartz cites V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), pp. 68-70.
[290] Frederic J. Schwarz, "Commodity Signs…," p. 157.

two as bedfellows in the pages of *Die Form*, while, as Schwartz suggests, bracketing out the actual relations of power.

Exhibiting Art and Industry

Many voices throughout the past century have contributed to the history and criticism of the Deutscher Werkbund. But its history has largely been written from the perspective of design and architecture rather than from the point of view of photography. What is referred to in the literature as "The Werkbund Debate" is of concern to its journal *Die Form*, even if the debates began some twenty years before the journal started its publication run. These rifts, which haunted the Werkbund for years, were represented on the one hand by Henry van de Velde and his support for the individual artist and on the other hand by Hermann Muthesius ("a bureaucrat of the Prussian Ministry of Trade in Berlin") and his support for increased standardization within design.[291] These two camps were essentially formed at the group's very inception in 1907 and then were more publicly played out at the Werkbund Ausstellung in Cologne in 1914. The debate was centered upon architecture and essentially pitted the impulse toward creative individuality in form against industrial standardization and "hinged in part on a misunderstanding of the word *Typisierung* (standardization)."[292] Schwartz points out that the term *Typisierung* was a word that was basically invented by Muthesius in 1911. It was too ambiguous for many Werkbund members and "seems to have been chosen [by Muthesius] for its very discursive indeterminacy or, better, mobility: it could resonate back and forth between the realms of economics and culture."[293] Definitions abound in the discussions at this earlier

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[291] Bletter, Introduction" to *Adolf Behne, The Modern Functional Building*, p. 26.
[292] Ibid., p. 26.
[293] Schwartz, *Der Werkbund*, p. 122; for entire article see pp. 121-146.

juncture as *types* are interchangeably referred to as simply objects with style, uniform units, standardized forms, articles, and modules. However Schwartz, in parsing out Muthesius's definition, notes that the term signaled an alliance with the newly forming German cartels: "The type and the syndicate are explicitly equated as forces of order over a state of chaos defined as cultural laissez-faire."[294] This alliance grew stronger after the war and became more public by way of Werkbund-sponsored exhibitions.

The Werkbund had great organizational influence over two of the most important photography exhibitions before the rise of National Socialism: *Pressa* in Cologne, 1928, and *Film und Foto*, held originally in Stuttgart, 1929. These exhibitions worked toward confirming the importance of industrial subject matter for the photographer and presented a visually appealing image of industry to a wider public.[295] A legacy of supporting the marriage of industry to aesthetic form was begun with the international expos in Paris, London, and the United States. It was reinforced with new energy in the first years of the twentieth century in Germany by Hermann Muthesius, and others. *Pressa* was the largest exhibition to be held in Germany to that point. It introduced to a lay audience the idea that the industrial sector was a necessary, natural, essential, and economic, even a governing force. Newly minted, and largely American-backed industrial conglomerates such as AEG and Siemens exhibited at Pressa. Jeremy Aynsley writes: "the Dawes Plan had stabilized the economy, and Germany had made several moves to re-enter world trade. As if to testify to this, the newly established cartels and conglomerates such as IG

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[294] Schwartz, p. 126.

[295] "The watershed Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds: *Film und Foto*…opened in Stuttgart at the Neue Städtische Ausstellungshallen and traveled in varying forms to venues in Zurich, Berlin, Danzig, Vienna, Agram, Munich, Tokyo and Osaka"; for more about the specifics of Film und Foto in relation to German photographic exhibition history, see Vanessa Rocco 2004, *Before Film und Foto: Pictorialism to The New Vision in German Photography Exhibitions from 1909-1929,* Ph.D. diss. The Graduate Center, CUNY, p. 8.

Farbenindustrie, Siemens, AEG, and MAN industrial machinery were all exhibitors or advertisers at Cologne."[296] He continues: "By the time of *Pressa* in 1928, the Werkbund Debate which had focused on Henry Van de Velde's advocacy of artistic individuality versus Hermann Muthesius's support of standardization and rationalization in design for industries, might appear to have been resolved on the side of Muthesius in the sphere of design for publication. The acceptance of mechanization; the proliferation of information on systems of production; the use of statistical evidence in charts, diagrams, and graphs with circulations and editions quoted; the use of photography as the major illustrative source in new photo-mechanical processes all manifested this."[297] *Film und Foto* the following year took this idea and proclaimed photography the most capable generator of simultaneously industrial subject and artistic spirit.

Film und Foto, organized ostensibly by Werkbund member Gustav Stotz, set the tone for industrial, advertising, and documentary photographs to be received as worthy images with powerful formal compositions.[298] Moholy-Nagy, as the stronger voice behind the exhibition, was perhaps its most well-known, internationally energizing force. His approach advocated a formal reception for the imagery but configured it as a positive move toward the "deteriorization of systems of hierarchies in displaying photography."[299] One key text that supported this reception was published in lieu of a full exhibition catalogue for *Film und Foto*. Edited by Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, *Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* (*Foto Eye: 76 Fotos of the Times*) participated in the popular reception of

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[296] Jeremy Aynsley, "Pressa, Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," *Design Issues*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1994), p. 55.
[297] Aynsley, p. 58.
[298] Vanessa Rocco notes that Moholy-Nagy, rather than the organizer, Gustav Stotz, was the most influential voice of *Film und Foto*. "[T]here is no question that Moholy-Nagy wielded enormous influence over the exhibition's message to the public and critics, given his role on the selection committee, and as organizer of both the historical section and his own large mid-career retrospective." p. 11.
[299] Ibid., p. 9.

industry and its imagery as artistic, satisfying the motto set up by the Werkbund.[300] Gustav Stotz, in a 1929 *Das Kunstblatt* article, wrote: "An optical epoch has developed. We see the things around us differently from before, without pictorial aims in the Impressionist sense. Some things have become important for us, when formerly they were scarcely noticed: clogs, a gutter, cotton reels, cloth, machines, etc. They interest us in their material existence, in their simple essence; they interest us as means of structuring space on a flat surface, as supports for light and shade**."**[301] *Film und Foto* elevated industrial and commercial subjects and their photographers to loftier positions as new-visionary images of and image-makers for the industrialists.[302]

The exhibition emphasized thematic categories as the Roh and Tschichold text illustrated. The text, as did the exhibition, collapsed the contextual differences between images and their productive intentions. This resulted in clever, even at times humorous, formal comparisons that downplayed, even negated photographic context. Broad themes of the exhibition are not necessarily verbalized by the text, but are established by the juxtaposition and choice of photographic inclusion. For instance, the commodity as newly acceptable and visually stimulating subject matter for fine art is represented by Eugene Atget's"Corsets, Paris, 1927" and George Grosz and John Heartfield's "Dada-merika." **[Figures 4.5, 4.6]** The mass ornament as rationalization and organizational effort is a thematic thread that is represented by Sasha Stone, "Files," an anonymous

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[300] Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, eds. *Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, Dr. Fritz Wedekind, 1929); reprinted Paris: Éditions du Chene, 1973). Werner Graeff, *Es Kommt der Neue Fotograf* (Here Comes the New Photographer) (Berlin: H. Reckendorf, GmbH, 1929).
[301] Gustav Stotz, Werkbund-Ausstellung 'Film und Foto' Stuttgart 1929," *Das Kunstblatt* (January 1929).
[302] For a summarized lineage of the reception of industrial and commercial photographs as fine art in terms of formalism and the influence of Moholy-Nagy in this realm, see Vanessa Rocco pp. 11-13.; see also Allison Bertrand "Beaumont Newhall's Photography 1838 – 1937: Making History" in *History of Photography* (Summer 1997); see also Beaumont Newhall, "Photo-Eye of the 1920s: The Deutsche Werkbund Exhibition of 1929" (1977).

photograph of a Russian crowd, and another anonymous, not to mention disturbing, photograph of naked "Sick Children" encircled inside a sand pit on a beach, each one stretching his/her arms overhead. **[Figures 4.7, 4.8, 4.9]** The related theme of the aestheticization of industry can be seen in *Foto-Auge* in the examples of Hans Finsler's "Incandescent Lamp" for the OSRAM electric company and one of Max Burchartz's 1925 photomontages for Bochumer Verein, a manufacturer of steel products. **[Figures 4.10 and 4.11]** One depicts a light bulb and its shadow along with its accessories (cord, sockets) and the other, as many wheel axels as the eye can see. Each image elevates the industrial product to the status of sculptural object, equating art and commercial advertising. In this sense the association of the photographer with the profession of the engineer was an underlying assumption for the exhibition and its accompanying books, the subject matter of all things mechanical and technical, industrial and scientific having become not only fashionable but essentially modern.

Film und Foto, *Pressa*, and a handful of the smaller photography exhibitions in the 1920s in Germany might be considered display counterparts to the Werkbund's journal *Die Form.* Each venue raised the industrial to the level of aesthetics, promoting the aestheticism of the key constituents of industry, but without advertising *per se*. With its celebration of the role of photography in relation to non-art, industrial and commercial applications, *Film und Foto* helped to establish the naturalization and beautification of industry as fashionable and modern, but also as nationalistic.

Die Form **Projects**

Each of *Die Form*'s issues dealt with an overarching theme such as advertising, home furnishings, ceramics, fashion, or window display. In relation to these stated themes, however, certain concepts are repeatedly in play throughout the entire twelve years of the journal's publication. Some of the key concepts include: the standardization of goods (*Typenwaren, Serienarbeiten, Serienfabrikationen*) as part of what was referred to in semi-spiritual terms as "good form"; the relation between "Nature and Machine" (for an example, see Walter Riezler, 1922); the correspondence between "Qualität und Form" (see Riezler, 1922) and between "Industrie und Ornament" (see Georg Mendelssohn, 1925); the "Germanness "of *Qualität*; the unifying possibilities provided by mass-production (see "Einheit der Welt," Riezler, 1927); the beauty of machine-made forms; the influence of the United States; the "Einfluss der Grossindustrie…" or the influence of large industry (see Riemerschmid, 1926); and the importance of the visual artist in the process of mass-production.

The Deutscher Werkbund and its spokesmen, as represented by the writers and editors of *Die Form,* maintained a balancing act, balancing the aims and goals of industrial profit and the cartels that supported that effort against the desire to discuss aesthetics and to promote a "künstlerisch" approach to assembly-line production. How did the photographers, who were beginning to receive more recognition through a publication like *Die Form* that valued their input and often (but not always) captioned their names, fit into this precarious balancing act? Were photographers, because of their special relation to a more technological apparatus, less susceptible to view conflicts between the goals of an autonomous art production and the goals of industry and commerce?

A counterpart to *Die Form* in the United States did not necessarily exist with similar goals of softening and beautifying industrial products. A more popular "magazine" might be *Fortune* magazine, founded in 1930 by the politically ambitious, publishing industry giant, Henry Luce. However *Fortune* focused on human activity and human accomplishment in the realm of accumulated wealth and less on the commodities themselves and their formal structures. *Die Form*'s format and interests are decidedly cooler and its overall appeal less popular. Both magazines however promoted the growth of large industry and embraced photography wholeheartedly in order to present mass production as a spiritually uplifting, natural and beneficial process. *Fortune*, like *Die Form*, employed photographic strategies that reflected the fascination with the assembly line's sequential perfection.

Terry Smith writes about the corporatist influence behind American magazines in the 1930s such as *Fortune*, speaking of their "complicity in the construction of the corporate state."[303] He notes how important the use of photographic imagery had become for magazines such as *Fortune* and that photographers saw the writing on the wall. They either had to participate or they would become irrelevant. Smith writes: "with exceptions, the modernist artists who joined/ were drafted into the advertising boom of the 1920s found it necessary to adapt/ subsume their work or be displaced." In the case of *Fortune*, Smith saw the use of photography to convey "the gaze of management at leisure." He refers to American photographer Margaret Bourke-White's serial composition entitled "Plow Blades, Oliver Chilled Plow Co., Indiana" **[Figure 4.12]** which appeared in *Fortune*, March 1930. The sharp blades in "Plow Blades" (an image also similar to Renger-Patzsch's "Flatirons" of 1928 [**Figure 4.13**]) glow with the natural

[303] Terry Smith, *Making the Modern*, pp. 188-189.

light of a nearby window, highlighting their curvaceous, almost sensuous shapes. The viewer loses any sense of the forms' functional purpose as the camera's lens attends to the seduction of rhythmic repetition. Bourke-White's image for *Fortune* is comparable to the anonymous, also 1930, photographs for *Die Form* taken of showerheads and gas ovens (these images will be discussed again later in this chapter) [**Figure 4.14**].

Smith's analysis is a perfect fit for these images, as it is for many, if not most, of the German Neue Sachlichkeit photographs in *Die Form*: "[m]odernism aestheticizes by stilling motion, banishing productive labor, excluding the human, implying an autonomy to the mechanical, then seeking a beauty of representation, simplicity, regularity of rhythm, clarity of surface. This is the gaze of management at leisure, marveling at the new beauties which its organizational inventiveness can create."[304] Like Smith's assessment of Bourke-White's repetitious man-made forms, promotional photographs in *Die Form* of standardized goods by Neue Sachlichkeit photographers such as Albert Renger-Patzsch, Hans Finsler and Hein Gorny do not necessarily indicate the excited optimism of artists whose work is done out of a sense of technological utopianism. Instead, they mirror Smith's "gaze of management," eschewing a socially utopian stance and confirming the beauty of industrial order and power.

Siegfried Kracauer hinted at the late Republic's reception of, and position regarding, technological utopianism when he questioned, in 1930, the possibility for anyone to remain still completely optimistic about the machine as "an instrument of

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[304] Ibid., p. 194. "Plow Blades" is just one of tens of Margaret Bourke-White's images throughout out the 1920s and 1930s that highlighted the formal beauty of American (and German and Russian) assembly-line production. A recent, however uncritical, account of her work can be found in Stephen Bennett Phillips, *Margaret Bourke-White: The Photography of Design, 1927-1936* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2003).

liberation'." This sentiment he called trite at best.[305] One has to wonder, especially after the October 1929 Wall Street crash and quickly ensuing world-wide economic Depression, how a magazine thriving upon, supporting, and publicizing the benefits of an aesthetic approach to rationalization, such as *Fortune* or *Die Form* could still be seen as progressive? If, as Kracauer suggests, the mantra of technological utopianism had become a trite position, a bankrupt or at least suspicious belief system by 1929, then why did the preoccupation with the visual form of the conveyor belt or the Tiller-Effect in Germany not subside after 1929? Instead it maintained its position as one of the most common formats for the representation of objects.

Whether as a belief in technology as a liberating force, or as outright promotion of industry, the subject matter of industry not only remains in play after the Wall Street crash, it seems increasingly to become a norm, the standard for photography during the early 1930s. Maud Lavin also noted that with the onslaught of the Depression there was not the disillusionment with rationalization that one might assume but rather "the promotion of rationalization [became] more strenuous".[306] Lavin does not explain this seeming contradiction however. I would suggest that it is an irrational socio-cultural response, a crisis-mode response represented by the act of fetishization and the collective desire for escapism and personal betterment through consumerist models of abundance. If so many photographers who participated in industrial promotion through the mid-twenties and into the early thirties did not do so out of a utopian belief in technology, what other reason would explain such a warm welcome to the products, systems, goals, and uniformities of their industrial clients? As will be pursued in the next section,

[305]Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p. 46.
[306] Lavin, p. 46.

perhaps it is more instructive to look to the photographs themselves for an answer, as letters between photographers and clients regarding their commissions or how they *felt* about them, remain less available and, in many cases are non-existent.[307]

Few scholars have dealt with industrial photography, especially as it was published in *Die Form*, and for perhaps obvious reasons; it is not the most riveting imagery. Gerda Breuer offers a very brief commentary about the role of photography in *Die Form*:

> The photography…was 'realistic' – soberly objective in documenting the quality, material properties and form of the object, without the subjective style of the photographer. The image was a document of the object. It was meant to inform the consumer, convincing rather than persuading. At first, and even as late as the 1920s, the photographs did not yet possess the brilliance of Neue Sachlichkeit photography, though these increasingly found their way into the Werkbund publications. As often as not, the photographer would not even be credited by name – a remarkable contradiction, given that it was the Werkbund which mounted one of the most famous photographic exhibitions in the 1920s: the 1929 "Film und Foto-Ausstellung" in Stuttgart, featuring the cream of the international avant-garde.[308]

Breuer then notes that "this objectively functional photography related to industrial form maintained an astonishing and hitherto rarely noted continuity in the Third Reich, allowing some adherents of modernism to go on working, whether to a limited degree, completely unaffected or even quite successfully".[309] Breuer's text is quite brief and she does not mention the influence of American industry in this realm of photography. But her observation of the continuities between Weimar and Third Reich photographic

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[307] It may prove fruitful for a later essay to investigate the Renger-Patzsch papers on hand at The Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Some of his letters there may indicate further his personal position in relation to the economic and political climate and may be revealing about specific commissions.
[308] Breuer, p. 92 in *The Ecstasy of Things: From the Functional Object to the Fetish in 20th Century Photographs*, eds., Thomas Seelig and Urs Stahel, (Fotomuseum Winterthur Fotostiftung Schweiz, and Steidl, 2004).
[309] Ibid.

practice is provocative and may be a partial explanation for why much Neue Sachlichkeit photography was kept out of the literature until attention to it was revived in the 1970s.

Historians have often focused on the more dynamic issues and imagery involved in Expressionism, as it was "untainted" and in most ways totally at odds with the goals of fascism. And yet, when attention to the Neue Sachlichkeit and its so-called matter-of-fact return to realism was revived in the late 1970s, it was recovered largely for its formal properties as avant-garde production, just as it had been in the process of being established *before* 1933. Content was played down and form was celebrated as part of the modern spirit or *geist*. Economic and political issues, any relation to a celebration of industrial-military power, were minimized in favor of attending to the power of the modern eye and the special viewing capacities of the "camera as machine." The images in *Die Form* can be viewed in this light as part of the primary effort to naturalize and formalize industrial intentions and products. In an effort to emphasize form and abstract spirit over direct advertisement, it published numerous photographs of the industrial structures and products of companies which received extensive financial support and internal guidance from U.S.-based banks, individual, and corporations, and whose role in re-armament and the establishment of Nazi power was not insignificant.

Die Form regularly published contributions by the American Lewis Mumford, one of the most famous writers on the subject of the liberating power of the machine. In his 1930 *Die Form* article, "Bourgeois Culture and Machine Art," for example, Mumford is not disheartened, and in fact continued to celebrate machine-made products such as "china and glassware and rugs and chairs" for their ability to show a "common spirit."[310] This spirit celebrated "clean lines," "fitness," and "exquisite proportions," characteristics

[310]Lewis Mumford, "Bourgeois Culture and Machine Art" *Die Form*, vol. 11/12 (1930), p. 322.

that today, from our historical vantage point, sound like a suspicious blend of the goals of industry and the "aesthetic" goals of fascism. Lewis Mumford, of course, advocated a benign socialism in which the machine promoted individual freedom of choice (that is, within a reasonable and limited set of standardized patterns). Mumford's voice added legitimacy and weight to the promotion and naturalization of industry as his comments were often couched in a dialectics of international politics and ideology. Contrary to Kracauer's comment regarding the triteness of technological utopianism by 1930, Mumford wrote that with the help of the machine "we now have at our command a store of power which, if properly used, will do away with industrial slavery and create, for every member of the community, an equal share in the essentials of life…In this new economy, there is still a place for individuality."[311] Considering Mumford's words in the context of the Weimar economy in 1930, the reality of "equal share in the essentials of life" as a creation of industry must have had a hollow ring at best, as more than three million workers were already unemployed and Hitler's Nazi party was in the process of gaining one hundred forty-three seats in parliament.

Quality or Quantity?

In addition to a recurrent call for a spiritual approach to the products of industry, another idea recurs throughout the pages of *Die Form***,** one which was long-associated with the Werkbund, and that is the word *Qualität* or quality. *Qualität* was infused with both a spiritual and a nationalistic character. Artistic quality of form was called upon in the production of *Typenwaren*, and was couched as a particularly German characteristic. It was both a direct and an implied contrast to the German perception of The United

[311] Mumford, p. 324.

States as a country preoccupied with quantity or *Quantität* as was discussed in Chapter Two. An example of the discursive centrality of *Qualität* and its particularly German relationship to the standardized type can be found in a *Die Form* article entitled "Qualität oder Quantität? Eine Kultur—und Wirtschaftspolitische Betrachtung."[312] The type is discussed as a natural result of the existence of man as a typological being. Thus the type is understood as not only natural but rooted in the very fabric of man: his body parts, his needs, and his desires. The article asserts that man is part of an army of types and that, based upon the needs and desires of these types, is born the standardized goods or the *Typenwaren*: "Die Menschen sind im hohen Masse typische Wesen mit uniformen Trieben und Bedürfnissen. Die gleiche Grundlage der körperlichen Gestalt, Empfindungen und Strebungen geben der wirtschaftlichen Produktion…in weitem Ausmasse ein typisches Gepräge."[313] Thus the notion of the standardized commodity is again naturalized as a reflection of the human body, part of the community of human "types." This is then infused with the very spirit of *Germanness* as the quality of the standardized type is established in *Die Form* as the German goal, one which is often placed in contrast to the perceived American goal of quantity and sheer accumulation: "Hier und hier allein, so glauben wir, liegt die wirtschafliche Weltaufgabe von Deutschlands Zukunft. Deutschland hat in Friedenszeiten und auch noch heute wie kein

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[312] Translated as: "Quality or Quantity: A Cultural and Economic-Political Observation," *Die Form*, vol. 8, n. 2, 1927. This article was reproduced in *Die Form*: *Stimme des Deutschen Werkbundes, 1925-1934*, ed. Felix Schwarz and Frank Gloor (Gütersohn: Bertelsmann Fachverlag, 1969), pp. 78-80. See two below translations in footnotes for quotations here.

[313] Translation: "Men are largely typical beings with uniform operations and needs. The same foundation of the bodily whole, senses and desires, are in economic production…to a great extent a typical shape is taken," p. 79.

anderes Land der Welt Köpfe und Hände, die Qualitätsware zu erdenken und herzustellen vermögen."[314]

The notion of the "type" is, as has been discussed at some length throughout the art historical literature of the 1920s, very much part of the visual logic of this period. We see its presence, with varying intentions, in both painting and photography in the work of two of the most prominent figures in German art history of this time: George Grosz and August Sander.[315] The notion of a type is also highly visible in advertising as the seller seeks to foster the consumer's self-association with the typological characteristics of a person who would consume a particular product.[316] Seeking to define German industry's special role as a producer of good form or quality, the author above prescribes that Germany should think more about applying quality as a way of conquering quantity. This article proffers a notion of a particularly "German" preoccupation with neat typologies and a proclivity toward orderliness by way of a grand schematic typology. This notion is merged, however unconsciously, with the large-scale industrial desire to achieve standardization of production and products. Yes, the article proposes attention to quality but as an application that would foster the still-desired goal of achieving quantitative and profitable production.

Typenwaren Photography

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[314] Translation: "Here and here alone, so we believe, lies the economic task of Germany's future. Germany has in times of peace and also still today like no other country in the world, the heads and hands to conceive of quality wares and to make possible their presentation," p. 80.

[315] For more on the development of typology in photography, see George Baker, "Photography Between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration, and the Decay of the Portrait," *October*, vol. 76 (Spring 1996), pp. 72-13; see also Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive" in Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 343-388.

[316] Further investigation into the various applications of the "type" as a socio-cultural and economically motivated device could be done in this area.

Typenwaren, sometimes referred to as *Serienarbeit*, was translated by *Die Form* as "goods to type" or "standard goods." Its examples in the pages of *Die Form* are banal and commercial in nature. The editors are also careful not to *overtly* promote any one company in order to maintain their said interest in form for form's sake. *Die Form* thus takes as its subject matter the not-so-provocative objects of the everyday: lamps and light bulbs, crank shafts and tires, shoe lasts and kitchen sinks, household furnishings and window display designs. Perhaps this is one reason that this photographic context has been overlooked in favor of the iconic, singular object, the de-contextualized individual image as work of art. The pages of *Die Form* reveal a ten-year-long preoccupation with *Typenwaren* through photographic representation that the Werkbund adopted as raw material and transformed into a national philosophy.

If we consider Germany's ongoing industrial unrest throughout the years in question and what has been often referred to as its fast, furious, and late path toward industrialization, *Die Form* might be viewed as a confused response to these conditions. Frederic J. Schwartz saw the Werkbund's interest in the commodity in this light: "Members of the Werkbund repeatedly and mysteriously invoked the brand-name commodity and its logo as some sort of answer to the problem of the relation of culture and economy in modernity."[317] Industry was seen alternately as an ameliorative, healing force, a necessary evil, and a utopian possibility. The standardized goods, produced under the "guidance " of a designer or an artist, and displayed and advertised with the help of a team of artists, seemed somehow to offer a way out of this conundrum and a way in for artists, allowing them to take part in the biggest changes facing the nation.

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[317] Schwartz, "Peter Behrens, the AEG, and the Trademark" *Journal of Design History,* vol. 9, no. 3 (1996), p. 154.

This desire to take part was recognized by the Werkbund from day one and harnessed in their justifications for the association as they standardized type was presented as the solution. The notion of the product as an ordered "type" was discussed by Hermann Muthesius in 1911 as part of his keynote address at the Werkbund's annual meeting. Schwartz quotes Muthesius: "A severe trend is present in modern social and economic organization, a trend towards the subordination under leading principles, the strict ordering of every individual element, the suppression of the inessential in favor of the essential. This social and economic tendency towards organization has a spiritual affinity with the formal tendency towards organization in our artistic movement."[318] Here, we can see that the unique blend of economy, spirit, art, industry, and standardized goods is not invented in the twenties as much as it was *cemented* at this time. Its urgency, "severity," and widespread popularity manifested itself from the mid-twenties on as a crisis response to economic uncertainty. Muthesius's choice of language seems important. It is worth noting that Muthesius envisioned the "severe trend" of organization according to type as one that was not only economic but also social and artistic, an affinity for "subordination" through "strict ordering," "suppression," and essentialism. He not only recognized this tendency, but also supported it as it played itself out upon the pages of *Die Form* and in many aspects of German culture.

Albert Renger-Patzsch's Serialized Goods: The *Typenwaren* Naturalized

Given Albert Renger-Patzsch's stylistic proclivity toward the serialized ordering of objects according to type in his compositions, it comes as no surprise that he was

[318] Schwartz, p. 167; original speech by Hermann Muthesius, 'Wo stehen wir?' *JDW*, vol. 1 (1912,), p. 25.

embraced as the unofficial official photographer for *Die Form*. His participation spans most of this journal's years of publication. Even though the notion of the *Typenwaren*, as has been discussed above, was a consistent concern of the journal, one particular June 1930 issue of *Die Form* was dedicated to a full discussion of *Typenwaren*, using the photographs of Renger-Patzsch to illustrate its main points. The article focused on German standard wares but also the international markets for its production and design. This particular issue frequently referred to a "New Era" in which industry reigns and the standardized good is its foot soldier and Renger-Patzsch's images supported this militaristic approach to the *Typenwaren*. The new era was seen "as a result of the technical and economic unification, prepared by the science of the new vision of the world."[319] Writers waxed wistfully and abstractly of a New Era in economics and a collective will toward industrial standardization. They envisioned a new, totalizing world ruled by this German economic order.

One multi-part article of this issue is entitled simply "Typenwaren." It had segments in German, English, and French, as was typical of *Die Form* in its desire to reach German, but also French, American, and other English-speaking communities. Serialized goods or *Typenwaren* were discussed here as objects of "value and importance." The Renger-Patzsch photographs reproduced for this article were from his then-forthcoming book *Eisen und Stahl*. **[Figure 4.15]** The first photograph at the top of the article presents a caravan made up of camels, each one marching obediently along from the composition's upper left to the lower right. Renger-Patzsch photographs one camel proceeding slowly after the next, a chain of natural beasts of burden, an essential and universal form. It associates standardized goods and the mass-production of

[319] "Typenwaren," *Die Form*, vol. 11/12, n. 5 (1930), p. 304.

serialized forms with timelessness and an ur-cultural origin, Middle Eastern origin, if not an implied Biblical one. The first general caption proclaims that these images confirm the serial order of things, the order of sameness: "Die Reihung Gleicher Elemente." The caption reads in part: "Man forces the powers of nature to do him service, in that he selects the functions he needs and puts them to use, while endeavoring to obliterate all other functions, accidental contingencies and individual peculiarities."

The second photograph, like the camels mimicking the Tiller-Effect, depicts a phalanx of trucks each motoring forward along a dirt road next to a similar line-up of trees. The truck models, NAG-Lastwagen, are vehicles belonging to the German Post Office, their square design like a military truck. The caption reads: "A modern caravan: Man makes his own beasts of burden. The motors are more similar to one another than the animals and less personal, and are built only to fulfill the functions desired of them." The third photograph, reproduced directly below the other two, depicts electric irons, used to iron clothing. They are situated on a rudimentary conveyor belt in a cluttered corner of what appears to be the cellar of an old building. The belt carries along the irons, which are paired up, two by two, and seen from below. They are conveyed toward a small square opening in a roughly plastered wall, giving the appearance that this production takes place in a quaint, cottage industry rather than the large company that it is actually housed in, that of Siemens Elektro-Wärme, G.m.b.H. which was based in Dresden and existed between 1920 and 1945, a large subsidiary of the Siemens parent company.[320] The caption praises the ability of industrial mass-manufacture to produce

[320] Most of the histories of Siemens are written by either a Siemens family member or affiliated author and thus a critical reading of the company in the historical perspective of the Weimar era has not been located. Jürgen Kocka produced an essay that perhaps comes closest to this idea, but his study is focused on the company's history before WWI. See Jürgen Kocka, "Family and Bureaucracy in German Industrial

exceedingly large quantities of the same article. Thus standardized goods are given a timeless and natural provenance by photography's innate ability to distill comparisons. This article continues by depicting, on the next page, a smaller kind of human-scaled, industrial "work station" in a Zündapp, G.m.b.H factory, a site for the production of motorcycles. **[Figure 4.16]** The singular workstation (minus the worker) is photographed as if to say that the industrial process of *Typiesierung* or standardization does not *entirely* abandon the idea of human intervention. In keeping with the Werkbund spirit, the caption assures the reader that a "creative touch is possible" at the stage of the formation of the model, inserting the "spirit" of the worker without actually requiring his presence for the image.

In this sense, and consistently, *Die Form* advocated the notion of a "*natural* process of manufacture."[321] (my italics) Using images such as Renger-Patzsch's and the continuous format of the serialized object, the journal strove to transform the public and the German and international design community's perception of the industrial process. The so-called "matter-of-fact" quality of the images employed in the magazine presents a conflict-free, "objective," manufacturing world, one almost totally exempt from human interference. Its objects are presented as deadpan, documentary images, in close-up format or in keeping with the success of the Tiller-Effect, allowing the viewer to focus on the form of the object as a natural consequence of the "nature-based," standardized process that produced it.

A 1930 article entitled "Die Mitarbeit des Künstlers am Industriellen Erzeugnis" employed photographs to argue for a secure future for artists as participants in

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Management, 1850-1914: Siemens in Comparative Perspective," *Business History Review*, vol. XLV, no. 2 (Summer 1971), pp. 133-156.

[321] Ibid., p. 309.

industry.[322] [**Figure 4.17**] The author-editor, Wilhelm Lotz, introduced a new term, the "Künstlerprolitariat" or artist-proletariat, and the "Kunnstgewerblerproletariat" or advertising proletariat, asking the readers to consider the artist as a laborer. Lotz surveyed various industries about their relationship to design and art, asking: "Does industry understand the positive value of the new forms? Does it observe them as a concern of advertising, as a precaution, or as a cultural obligation…?"[323] It seems as though Lotz intended to assert that the artist be able to retain a degree of freedom in relation to industry and that he not become totally co-opted by compromises. Yet the responses from industry representatives that he received did not necessarily reflect this assertion.

One response was from the firm Junkers & Co. of Dessau, a company that is today merged with Bosch, and was mostly known for its wartime production of fighter planes during both World War I and World War II. In this article, however, its more innocuous products for the home are anonymously photographed in rows to achieve the desired Tiller-Effect**.** The photographs depict gas-fueled heating ovens for bathrooms (*Gasbadeöfen*) and showerheads. [**Figure 4.18**] These utilitarian appliances are lined up one after the next and photographed at close-range, totally separated from their factory environment. Each composition clearly mimics the sleek, repeated abstractions of Kracauer's mass ornament that had by 1930 become the Renger-Patzsch trademark. However, the showerhead forms, ovens, and coils float against blackened backgrounds, a device not seen in Renger-Patzsch's work, indicating that they may not be taken by Renger-Patzsch (each photograph is not captioned with a photographer's name in this

[322] Wilhelm Lotz, "Die Mitarbeit des Künstlers am Industriellen Erzeugnis," *Die Form*, vol. 8, n. 5 (April, 1930), pp. 197-216.
[323] Ibid., p. 200.

example, thus also pointing to the fact that the role of the industrial or commercial photographer was still being somewhat contested). Nonetheless their compositional format suggests the pervasive copying of Renger-Patzsch's style, which as will be discussed in Chapter Five, had become widespread by 1930. The company's representative who contributed a response to Lotz's questionnaire, in a sense contradicted what the photographs depict. He writes: "Nichts an unseren Apparaten ist Ornament" (nothing about our apparatus is ornamental). Instead he suggests that the company's products are purely functional rather than products with artistic design input. The anonymous photographer, in keeping with the spirit of his times, seems to see otherwise, using the camera to lend ornamentation where there was none. He takes the most banal of functional, everyday products and transforms them into abstract, elegant objects of visually curious form. The camera provides the artistic value for the products. It assuages and softens, rendering visually appealing that which is mass-produced, lending intrigue to the most common product. The writer states that the role of the artist is not important in this company's design but that the artist "comes in handy" for their product's *propaganda*: "…dass in einigen Details ein Künstler, der für die Propaganda unseres Werks tätig ist" ("in the uniting of details an artist plays an active role in the propaganda of our works").[324]

At the time that this article was written promoting Junkers & Co., of Dessau, the company had already begun Nazi cooperation, although it seems by way of force. Junkers & Co. was founded in 1895 by Hugo Junkers, an esteemed engineer and designer of airplane engines and other products. He was a self-proclaimed socialist and a pacifist who worked under threat of takeover by the Nazis during the first few years of their rule.

[324] Ibid., p. 214.

However, his entire factory and its contents were seized in 1933 when the National Socialists took complete control of all of its production and its patents and Junkers was placed under house arrest where he died in 1935. *Die Form*'s editors, and indeed its photographers, did not seem to pay any attention to the political or historical circumstances surrounding the companies promoted. Renger-Patzsch, as our key example, between 1925 and the year of his death in 1966, had photographed for most of the major industrial concerns existing in Germany, regardless of each one's particular politico-historical circumstances.

A January 1931 article in *Die Form* turns the discussion back to the actual works of Renger-Patzsch, rather than those showing his influence. This time Renger-Patzsch's photographs for *Eisen und Stahl* were reproduced in this issue as a celebration of Vereinigte Stahlwerke. The images were highlighted in *Die Form* as part of an article celebrating recent and forthcoming books on photography and the use of photography in the realm of "des neuen Sehens" or The New Vision. **[Figures 4.19 – 4.22]** The company Vereinigte Stahlwerke was by 1926 one of the largest industrial concentrations in the world, combining a network of seven different industrial entities. This company, like many other German corporations, was on the receiving end of U.S. loans after the implementation of the Dawes Plan. It has also been established in German economic and political history that Vereinigte Stahlwerke had been a contributor of funds to the NSDAP years before Hitler's actual assumption of power. This is, of course, not unlike most of the large industrial concerns that played a role in the political developments of the early 1930s. And yet Renger-Patzsch's *Eisen und Stahl* presented industrial structures as graceful, all-powerful forms. A small, introductory text was written at the

beginning of *Eisen und Stahl* which supported the reception of Renger-Patzsch's images as "beauty of form." However, it should not go unnoticed that this text for the book was written by the Generaldirektor of Vereinigten Stahlwerke AG, one Albert Vögler, himself.[325] To add to this curious juxtaposition of beauty and power or beauty masking power, is the *Die Form* article itself, which was published just before *Eisen und Stahl*'s publication.[326] The book was published, perhaps not surprisingly, by *Die Form*'s own Werkbund publisher Hermann Reckendorf. And both publications were completed in 1931, the same year that Walter Benjamin pinpointed Renger-Patzsch himself and criticized the photographer's uncritical involvement with and celebration of industry.

This *Die Form* article celebrating the book was entitled "Fotobücher" and was written, again, by Wilhelm Lotz. Lotz, of course, fails to mention that the attractive book was co-authored by Vereinigte Stahlwerke's Generaldirector. As might be predicted, the subsequent pages in the *Die Form* article focused on the formal power and beauty of industrial structures using examples from *Eisen und Stahl*. Clean, orderly, attractive transformers of an "open-air electric power exchange station" which "raise and lower the electric voltage pressure" are represented, together with a closer view of a "milling piston" taken for Zündapp Works in Nuremberg in 1930. [**Figures 4.19 and 4.20]** An arched bridge seen from below is photographed as if to mimic the flying buttresses of a Gothic cathedral. [**Figure 4.21**] Cropping out all reference to function or physical

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[325] This was noted by Claus Pfingsten in *Aspekte zum fotografischen Werk Albert Renger-Patzschs, Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte* (Germany: publisher unknown, 1992), Band 9, p. 71. Albert Vögler was one of the earliest and strongest supporters of Hitler and was the representative for Germany on the Dawes Plan Committee. One of the most prominent German industrialists, he also acted as one of the key German delegates to the 1928 Young Plan which was discussed in Chapter Two. Antony C. Sutton notes that "the difference between The Dawes Plan and The Young Plan" was that, while the Dawes Plan required payment in goods produced in Germany financed by foreign loans, the Young Plan required monetary payments" thus placing Germany in a deeper situation of real and publicly-perceived economic crisis; see *Wall Street and The Rise of Hitler* (Seal Beach, CA: '76 Press, 1976), p. 25.

[326] Wilhelm Lotz, "Fotobücher," *Die Form*, vol. 1, n. 6 (1931), pp. 28-37.

context and attending to the abstract joints and riveted patterns of arched bridge, the photograph singles out organic and geometric forms, allowing the viewer to appreciate the bridge for its abstractions alone. A fourth Renger-Patzsch photograph depicts a suspension railway, a "transport line for ore and coal." [**Figure 4.22**] The caption notes the function of this structure while the composition with its rhythmic repetition of steel beams and right-angle joints emphasizes the railway's sculptural qualities.

Each, in typical Renger-Patzsch style, is presented autonomously and excludes even the slightest reference to any human intervention. The article's text, however, does include a human presence. A few pages later, Lotz includes an extreme close-up of an unknown man by photographer Helmar Lerski. [**Figure 4.23**] The image is taken from from Lerski's book *Köpfe des Alltags* (keeping in mind that the stated goal of Lotz's article was to promote forthcoming books on photography, Renger-Patzsch's and Lerski's among them). In the Lerski image, juxtaposed next to the Renger-Patzsch images, a young man wears an expression of the most piercing intensity.[327] His thin, straight lips are pursed, his jaw and cheekbones chiseled. He is clearly being placed near the industrial Renger-Patzsch images as the human element in industry, depicted as Germanic strength and determination embodied. Lerski shows us the mythical, heroic German worker whose characteristically Aryan features and unwavering gaze into the far distance present the antidote to August Sander's lexicon of everyday Germans. The Lerski photograph near the Renger-Patzsch photographs places a stamp of heroicism upon the industrial agenda, regardless of the nature of the industry: electricity, mining, ship-building, milling; each becomes part of a new vision of industrial mythology through abstraction and omission.

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[327] Helmar Lerski, *Köpfe des Alltags* (Berlin: Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1931).

Instead of pointing out that *Eisen und Stahl* was a promotional product for Vereinigte Stahlwerke, Lotz concentrated on this book as a "photography book" and focused on the idea of a "new vision," shifting the terms to those of aesthetics. He asked whether the function of modern photography is a symptom of new vision or a co-creator of it? In other words, he asks, is the change in vision, represented by Renger-Patzsch's imagery, a cause or an effect? Given his inquiry and the circumstances of production and support for Renger-Patzsch's imagery in question, it seems a major oversight by the author to not ask if then the "new vision" is cause or effect of Vereinigte Stahlwerke (for instance)? This is a question that we might, in an altered form, apply to the photographic imagery being examined in this chapter and as an overview of the imagery represented by *Die Form*. To what extent does the uncritical support of industry, resulting in photographic worship of technology and its position of power create a new vision? And, in turn, how does a "new vision," whether phrased as a new way of perceiving, or as an attention to the beauty of industry and its products, perpetuate the economic power structures supported by industry? Is the so-called new vision of photography an effect, a symptom, or a co-producer of the new economy? Put this way, the photographer and not only his imagery, is moved into a more critical spotlight.

Renger-Patzsch's Industry in Critical Context

Renger-Patzsch's contribution to *Die Form* here has also been highlighted because his work has perhaps received more critical attention than any other Weimar era photographer. His work has been celebrated and criticized with vehemence, accounts that have been documented through a significant body of existing literature, yet as the

above discussion points toward, questions regarding the political implications of his work and his own politics remain unresolved. Walter Benjamin's voice propelled Renger-Patzsch to public and historical recognition. He was a critic of not only the photographer's participation in industry but also his celebratory and beautifying approach to the condition of the world. His very terse, yet very effective, critique of Renger-Patzsch's 1928 book *Die Welt ist schön* is one of the sparks which ignited this dissertation and its interest in the murky relationship between photographers and their industrial subject matter. Benjamin mentions Albert Renger-Patzsch by name at least twice: once in his "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie" and again as part of a lecture given in April of 1934 at the Institute for Studies of Fascism in Paris which became his famous essay "The Author as Producer."[328]

Beautiful, fashionable, chic, and modish, these are the words Benjamin used to denigrate the new "mater-of-factness" of Neue Sachlichkeit photography. They are not words one would traditionally associate with harsh criticism. And yet the terms chic and modish, for Benjamin, signaled danger and the artist's capitulation to the most powerful forces in society. In "A Little History of Photography" Benjamin mounts what it seems would have been received as an entirely unpopular accusation of current trends in photography. In a period in which almost every photographer, whether considering him or herself "avant-garde" or not, produced at least some work for commercial concerns, Benjamin wrote that there was nothing more dangerous for photography than the taint of commercialism. In two passages Benjamin points his finger directly at Renger-Patzsch

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[328] "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie" ("Little History of Photography") was first published in *Die Literarische Welt,* September 25 and October 20, 1931; see *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2*, pp. 507-530. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (1934), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2,* pp. 768-782.

as being responsible for the trendiness of a photography that serves commerce as its master and in so doing turns away from the task of critique and instead chooses to beautify the conditions and structures in power. He praises figures such as August Sander and posits him against Renger-Patzsch. He also strangely enough supports a quotation by the photographer Sasha Stone whose own work participates in the sort of "arty journalism" and fashionable celebration of industry that Benjamin here denigrates:

> The photographers who went over from figurative art to photography not on opportunistic grounds, not by chance, not out of sheer laziness, today constitute the avant-garde among their colleagues, because they are to some extent protected by their background against the greatest danger facing photography today, the touch of the commercial artist. 'Photography as art,' says Sasha Stone, 'is a very dangerous field.' When photography takes itself out of context, severing the connections illustrated by Sander, Blossfeldt or Germaine Krull, when it frees itself from physiognomic, political and scientific interest, it becomes *creative*. The lens now looks for interesting juxtapositions; photography turns into a sort of arty journalism… The creative in photography is its capitulation to fashion. *The world is beautiful* - that is its watchword. In it is unmasked the posture of a photography that can endow any soup can with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists, *even when this photography's most dream-laden subjects are a forerunner more of its saleability* than any knowledge it might procure. [my italics] But because the true face of this kind of photographic creativity is the advertisement or association, its logical counterpart is the act of unmasking or construction. As Brecht says: 'The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the A.E.G. tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations – the factory, say – means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed.'[329]

Benjamin's critique, referring specifically to Renger-Patzsch, takes on even more specificity when considered in relation to the spiritually-inflected journalism of

[329] Walter Benjamin, "A Little History of Photography" (1931), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2,* pp. 525-526.

manufacturing that we see in *Die Form*.[330] More recent historians have, at times, concluded otherwise. Donald Kuspit's *Joy Before the Object*, as an example, perpetuated the reception of Albert Renger-Patzsch as machine-romantic. Indeed, Renger-Patzsch was *perhaps* this also, but Kuspit's analysis capitalizes on a notion of industrial "joy." Renger-Patzsch, as Kuspit celebrates through short quotations next to photographs that lend to the reader's reception of the images as de-contextualized formal entities, employed romantic language when discussing his own images of the Ruhr. He used phrases like "the magic of material things" and "the dynamism of machines."[331] Kuspit's analysis is most problematic though when he asserts that "Renger-Patzsch repeatedly *contrasts* the natural and the industrial landscapes of the Ruhr" (my italics), stating that he "surely wants to show that the Ruhr is not all industrial wasteland" and that he "implicitly uses nature to criticize society."[332] This statement should be read with great suspicion since almost every Renger-Patzsch photograph of industry presents industry, at times *in relation* to nature, but always as softly comfortable within nature, and as natural *as* nature. Industry is the gentle giant on the horizon, or a "misty" backdrop to a landscape. More often than not, as his *Die Form* projects show, he positively *compares* nature and industry, rather than offering a critical contrast between the two**.**

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[330] In "The Author as Producer" (1934), Benjamin again summoned the work of Renger-Patzsch as an example of what *no*t to do: "Rather than asking, 'What is the attitude of a work *to* the relations of production of its time?' I would like to ask, 'What is its position *in* them?'" He argued that it is not the artist's or the author's mission "to report but to struggle; not to play the spectator but to intervene actively." He considered how this mandate did *not* find application unfortunately in the majority of illustrated publications of the day. He suggested that publications, in the mode of Neue Sachlichkeit instead adapted and assimilated potentially revolutionary imagery, confirming existing power relations rather than questioning them. See *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, 1927-1934*, p. 770.

[331] Donald Kuspit, *Albert Renger-Patzsch: Joy Before the Object* (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1993), p. 48.

[332] Ibid., p. 70.

Michael Jennings offers yet another version. He sees Renger-Patzsch's work as more loaded with contradictions, representing the "entanglement and entrapment" of modern vision. He sees Renger-Patsch's preoccupation with serial repetition as a claustrophobic response to a modernizing society. Where most historians or critics of Renger-Patzsch have either celebrated his desire to reconcile nature and technology and his ability "to see things as they are" or on the other hand, rebuked his disinterest in the human figure, the worker, and the political aspects of his industrial imagery, Jennings, not unlike Donald Kuspit, takes the position that Renger-Patzsch was actually a moderate. He reads the photographer's industrial and natural imagery as ambivalent, thematizing visual entrapment, and suggesting that Renger-Patzsch's is a "psychologically fraught field of vision."[333] He claims that Renger-Patzsch is "a moderate whose ambivalent gaze across a vast Weimar landscape all but devoid of humans offers a sobering counterpoint to the technological optimism of so much of the New Photography."[334] I would argue that there is very little, if anything, in the imagery of Renger-Patzsch's work that would suggest his position as critical of his industrial (or, for that matter, Werkbund) employers. While an interesting third position to adopt, I believe, it does not consider the extent to which the photographer took part in the industrial enterprise. Thus where Brecht is quoted as saying that "[a] photograph of the Krupp works or the A.E.G. tells us next to nothing about these institutions," this study instead suggests that such photographs do indeed reveal quite a bit about the intentions of the photographers, the intentions of those who commission their work, and the role such images may have played in the important and decisive years leading up to 1933.

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[333] Michael Jennings, "Agriculture, Industry, and the Birth of the Photo-Essay in the Late Weimar Republic," *October*, vol. 93 (Summer 2000), p. 54.
[334] Ibid., p. 55.

It is interesting to note that Renger-Patzsch continued to participate in the field of industrial photography straight through the years of the Third Reich, remaining a productive German industrial photographer into the 1960s. His work and life, in some ways, were not disrupted by the assumption to power of the Nazi regime. Virginia Heckert, in her highly informative although hagiographic account of Renger-Patzsch and his work, noticed that after 1933, Renger-Patzsch grew dissatisfied with teaching (he was teaching at the Folkwang School in Essen). He abandoned it and as a result his commissions for industry and private companies increased throughout the 1930s. Heckert listed a number of the companies for whom he photographed, but strangely enough, she did not suggest the problematic nature of a photographer whose work supports (i.e. visually confirms and does not question) the beginnings of a fascist regime and its military-industrial preparations. This was of course not Heckert's goal with an article focused on the role of Renger-Patzsch as an educator, but at the same time, in her account, a piece of the puzzle seems to be missing. She noted that he worked in the early and mid-thirties for "Schott & Genossen, Thyssen, Krupp, Colsmann, Gutehöffnungshütte and Krausswerke" and she mentioned that Renger-Patzsch's son, Ernst, recalled "that German industry arranged for his father's exemption from military service in 1939-40" and that "in 1943-44 he was drafted by the Organisation Todt to deliver top-secret documentation of the Atlantic wall."[335] She does not mention that Krupp, Thyssen, Schott & Genossen, along with most major German industries at the time, directly supported Hitler and, through patent connections, the sharing of directors on boards, and the forming and upholding of U.S-German cartels, were intimately connected to a number of other companies including Osram, AEG, I. G. Farben, and both

[335] Heckert, p. 209.

German and U.S. General Electric. These companies all funneled support to the National Socialists and were involved in the early thirties with the production of war-time materials.[336] Heckert did acknowledge (in a footnote) that: "the question still remains unanswered as to whether Renger-Patzsch identified with National Socialist politics or whether his collaboration was a matter of surviving the times."[337]

Hein Gorny: Electric Gardens and Endless Forms

Hein Gorny (1904-1967) is another of the photographers most frequently included in the pages of *Die Form* and, like Renger-Patzsch, he was celebrated as a key figure of the Neue Sachlichkeit.[338] An article entitled "Ewig" – "Zeitlos" or "Infinite" – "Timeless" by W. Riezler employs the photographs of Hein Gorny to illustrate the timelessness of good industrial form, good design.[339] This review of an exhibition called "Ewige Formen" in Munich compares forms, mostly ceramic, from China, Peru, ancient Rome and other cultures, forms of the "natural" world, to forms "born of the spirit of the modern machine." In two Hein Gorny photographs, "Tendrils of Virginia Creeper" and "Kraftwerk Brauweiler" ("Power Works, Brauweiler"), the sinewy appendages of a Virginia Creeper vine are directly compared to the abstract, intricate lines and wires used to carry electrical voltage. [**Figure 4.24**] The delicate but deceptively strong vines of a "creeper" are depicted at close range, clinging for dear life to a branch, its arms looping

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[336] See Claus Pfingston, "Albert Renger-Patzsch: Early Industrial Photography," *History of Photography*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1997), p. 189. For more on the history of, specifically, Krupp and its role in the Third Reich, see *The Arms of Krupp: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Dynasty that Armed Germany at War* by William Manchester (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1964).
[337] Heckert, p. 214.
[338] The two photographers were aware of one another's work and had some light correspondence that is known (a letter dated 1930 to Renger-Patzsch from Hein Gorny). This could be explored further with access to the Renger-Patzsch Papers at The Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, Box 1A, Folder 2.
[339] W. Riezler, "Ewig" – "Zeitlos," *Die Form*, vol. 5, n. 6 (1931), pp. 167-176.

and interlocking, fastening themselves to another stem to form an abstracted system of mutual, structural interdependence. Both images are fragmented from their larger system, sparking curiosity rather than offering explanations. What this juxtaposition of Gorny's photographs offers is not comparative clarity nor documentary explication about natural and technological systems, even if depicted in a kind of scientific close-up format. Rather each image delivers obfuscation by way of aestheticization, softening the image of a vast electric power plant and insinuating that its system governs with the same timeless, natural, formal beauty as the *North American* Virginia creeper. The implication of infinity through a comparison to nature (American nature, at that) comes as no surprise as it is an implication that has also been made familiar throughout this dissertation in the compositional device of the Tiller dynamic.

The "Kraftwerk Brauweiler" photograph takes a low vantage point, as do all of the images in this series. From below we look upward in awe of the "drop-shaped condensers" carrying 220,000 volts and the web of power lines with their dark linear abstraction against the white sky. **[Figure 4.24a]** Here, Gorny employs the worm's eye viewpoint, so vehemently advocated by Moholy-Nagy as one of the modes of "neue Sicht" or New Vision. A new perception of an industrial structure is emphasized which sets dark against light, figure against ground, and nature wedded to industry. The fact that this abstracted, endless system of linear interconnections is man-made seems almost impossible from this view. Its form is presented as inseparable from its function just as any given system found in the natural world of plants and animals.

Without missing a comparative beat, the next article in this same issue "advertises" Kraftwerk Brauweiler further, while maintaining the journal's reportorial,

indirectly promotional stance. The article is titled "Brauweiler, der Elektrische Garten" ("Brauweiler, the Electric Garden").[340] **[Figure 4.25]** This juxtaposition of articles about the same company suggests how *Die Form* was able to delicately interweave aesthetic concerns with subtle, documentary-like, advertising promotions.[341] The author is not identified, although it is likely W. Riezler again. Instead, directly under the title we read: "Mit Aufnahmen von Hein Gorny" ("With photographs by Hein Gorny"). It should be noted that this was not the typical format for crediting the work of a photographer, giving the photographer author-like status (in fact inserting his name *instead of the author's*). Thus the photographer is given more credit as an "author" of the article than the writer. The photographer and his images then become the conceptual force behind the article.

This article reproduces ten more photographs by Hein Gorny, all of them depicting the Brauweiler electrical plant. The first two images each depict a single man. In the first image a works engineer wearing a dark suit and white-collared shirt is seated in front of an abstracted map of the facility, making a telephone call in the chief control office. And in the second photograph a suited male switchboard attendant (possibly the same man) in the control room "carries out the switching orders of the works engineer." The Gorny images reinforce the Brauweiler power facility as a powerful entity easily brought under control and maintained by only one man: the captions mention respectively that "one man is here sufficient" and "the switchboard attendant carries out the switching orders of the works engineer: these again are carried out by one man." Gorny chooses a

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[340] "Brauweiler, Der Elektrische Garten," *Die Form*, vol. 5, n. 6 (1931), pp. 177–181.

[341] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" similarly noted: "In the most influential American magazines, *Life* and *Fortune*, a quick glance can now scarcely distinguish advertising from editorial picture and text. The latter features an enthusiastic and gratuitous account of the great man (with illustrations of his life and grooming habits) which will bring him new fans, while the advertisement pages use so many factual photographs and details that they represent the ideal of information which the editorial part as only begun to try to achieve"; see *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 163.

worm's eye vantage point placing the viewer in a position of awe as the photographs and their captions consciously emphasize the power plant as a massive, modern cathedral, a structure of endlessly repetitive forms. Comparing this power facility to a well-tended and organized garden, with emphasis upon the caretaker's (engineer/gardener's) control and the abstract structure's infinite naturalism, it is as if the Brauweiler plant had risen from the earth itself, flowery knobs, switches, and transformers neatly growing in ornamental rows.

Hein Gorny's images are inseparable from the conceptual aspects of the article's message. So supportive of the formal beauty and strength of this "plant," his photographs seem to be directed by the owners or the shareholders themselves. The images completely complement and reflect a singularly positive aesthetic light onto the Brauweiler plant near Cologne, which was part of the larger Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerk (RWE). Gorny depicts the plant as a sprawling, self-sufficient healthy force, clean and new, eternal and all encompassing. Brauweiler, at the time this article was written in order to feature it, was "das grösste Umspannwerk der Welt" ("the largest electrical transformer station in the world"), perhaps not the universal, picture-perfect conception of a garden.[342] That this facility was the largest station in the world was also the first statement that the article made. Thus all of the photographs which follow can be read as parts of an endless and endlessly impressive "power structure" that is maintained by only one or two men. [**Figures 4.26, 4.27, and 4.28**]

Just less than two short years later, the town of Brauweiler, in which this plant was situated, near Cologne, became the notorious home of one of the largest work camps, i.e. concentration camps, in Germany. The town of Brauweiler, receiving rounds of

[342] Ibid., p. 177.

"workers" already at the very onset of the Third Reich, continued to prosper as the Brauweiler plant continued its productivity uninterrupted only to join the conglomerate, Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG, shortly before World War II. Historian Antony C. Sutton indicates that American banks, as investors in Vereinigte Stahlwerke, for example, during the mid-twenties and into the early thirties, made as much as close to three million dollars on these German loans.[343] This is not to say that the path between photographers as image-makers for specific industrial interests leads directly down the German "Sonderweg".[344] In other words, it is not to say that there is a *direct link* between *Die Form* as a Werkbund venue and the rise of NSDAP fascism. Rather, it is to suggest that an attentiveness to a circuitous path of connections, pointing to coincidences, and considering the politico-economic picture and its implications for Neue Sachlichkeit is a more fruitful way to point to gaps in the history and to raise questions in need of further investigation. In the past, such images of industry and nature have been generally extolled as bold, virtuous, modern compositions and this is no less the case. Yet the function of such compositions may be more productively viewed as part of the propaganda of industry being visually billed as an affair of the eye rather than an affair of the wallet, one with human consequences and inseparable from material, national and international relations.

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[343] Antony C. Sutton, *Wall Street and the Rise of Hitler* (Seal Beach, Calif.: '76 Press, 1976), pp. 24-26.
[344] See Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity,* translated by Richard Deveson (London: Allen Lane, 1991). And for more on the historiography of the "Deutsscher Sonderweg" as a theory, see Thomas Childers, "The Social Language of Politics in Germany: The Sociology of Political Discourse in the Weimar Republic" in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 95, no. 2 (April 1990). Childers studies the sociology of language, particularly "coporatist terminology" (p.337), as it was used for political propaganda leading up to the NSDAP takeover. His method of "reading" terminology is suggestive for a "reading" of imagery as indirect propaganda, although in the case of this chapter, not as party propaganda but as promotional imagery for a status quo of power relations. See also Jürgen Kocka, "German History Before Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988), pp. 3-16.

Hans Finsler: Struggling Light Bulbs and Uniform Chocolates

Hans Finsler (1891 – 1972) was perhaps the third most prominent photographer for *Die Form*. This becomes apparent as one examines all of *Die Form*'s issues and begins to see how frequently certain photographers, such as Renger-Patzsch, Gorny and Finsler, are represented in and employed by the journal. Having studied art history under Heinrich Wölfflin, Hans Finsler has been called the "educator of Neue Sachlichkeit photography."[345] He was employed beginning in 1926 in Halle at the Kunstgewerbeschule (applied arts school) Burg Giebichenstein, although, as Bruno Thüring notes, for years Finsler and his family struggled financially. Thüring, in an essay for the *Neue Wege* catalogue, noted that Finsler and his wife, Lita, lived under thoroughly modest conditions and were forced to keep their daughter with Lita's grandparents until 1928.[346] Thüring notes that beginning in 1926 Finsler focused on "sachphotographie," which for Finsler meant a kind of "visual grammar" of objects based upon a Wölfflinian foundation of formalism in perception.[347] Thilo Koenig, who is also one of the few to write about Finsler, differentiates him from Renger-Patzsch and from Hein Gorny, saying that he "was more interested in an ethic of photographic communication than in the kind of glorification of industrial mass production, or the meaningless worship of surface appeal, seen in contemporaries like Hein Gorny, with his collections of numerous

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[345] Heckert, p. 205.
[346] See Bruno Thüring, "Der Blick auf die Dinge, Hans Finsler, Photographien 1926-1932," *Neue Wege der Photographie* (Halle, Zürich, Berlin: Verlag Peter Lang, 1991).
[347] See "Sprache des Bildes," 1929 as reprinted in *Finsler, Neue Wege der Photographie*, p. 266; See also Thilo Koenig, "Objective Photography in Switzerland 1930-1950" in *The Ecstasy of Things;* Koenig offers a summary of Finsler's work and a biography.

identical objects completely filling the picture plane."[348] Of the photographers discussed in this chapter, Finsler may have sought to maintain the most "objective" stance in relation to his corporate clientele. And yet, as Koenig neglects to consider, it is the very definition of and possibility for "objectivity" under the historical circumstances of commercial and industrial representation in this period that may be brought into question.

In the fall of 1927, Finsler began to accept contracts from various firms to photograph their products. One of his first contracts was with the local chocolate-maker "MOST." As uniformity was at its peak of being hailed one of the most modern methods for efficiency in all realms of commerce (window display, graphic design and packaging, magazine advertisements), MOST was a company that was celebrated as highly modern in its approach. It was called progressive in its ability to apply strict standardization to not only its production process but also to its individual franchise stores. A 1931 article in *Die Form* praises this company's uniformity of furnishings, shelving, display, exterior design, and product handling.[349] [**Figure 4.29**] In terms of Finsler's role with MOST, his photographs had been commissioned mainly for a company brochure. [**Figure 4.30**] Thüring notes that Finsler photographed the spaces of the factory, the production process, and the finished products. His photographs of the chocolate-mixing machines themselves are abstracted close-ups. A selection of these photographs was published in *Die Form* and is characteristic of the machine-images at the time in that the focus is upon the form of the machine, its beauty, and its curves.

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[348] Koenig, p. 121.
[349] "Schaufenster und Geschäftshäuser," *Die Form*, vol. 10, n. 6, (1931), pp. 371–378.

The MOST images were included as part of a feature article by the typographer and theorist Jan Tschchold entitled "Fotografie und Typografie."[350] Finsler's images engage in the spaces and processes of industry as a naturalistic enterprise, paternalistic and even magical, a Willy Wonka-like series of chutes and slides, smiling female workers, and infinitesimal treats. Tschichold, and also Moholy-Nagy, among others, celebrated a new role for photography called the "typophoto" which combined photography with typography as a new approach for advertising. The aim of his article was to convince both artists and industrialists of the need for artists to be involved in image-production for industry. No conflict regarding independence or allegiance for artists is mentioned. He discusses how the new "typofoto" compares to and *is* art – artful – a new art form – calling it a modern and new form of the times: "An der Grenze zur Kunst befindet sich die gestellte fotografie" ("Posed photography finds itself on the border of art")." Tschichold's goal was to recognize not only the new combination of typography and photography for the purpose of successful advertising but also to acknowledge product photography as a highly artistic endeavor.[351] Toward this end he compared Finsler's "Schokolademaschine" for MOST to a painting or drawing in its diversity of tones, its contrast, and its sheer abstraction. Finsler's images in this context are re-purposed by *Die Form* as examples of artistic photography, a subtle sleight of hand performed by the editors, transforming the commercial project into an aesthetic endeavor after the fact.

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[350] Jan Tschichold, "Fotografie und Typografie" *Die Form*, vol. 5, n. 3 (1928), pp. 221–227.
[351] See also Jan Tschichold, "Photography and Typography" as re-printed in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era,* pp. 121–127. Moholy-Nagy separately defined "typophoto" in his 1927 edition of *Painting, Photography, Film*; he defined his use of the term to mean the creation of "a 'phototext' in place of words, as a precise form of representation." See Long in James-Chakraborty, ed., *Bauhaus Culture*, p. 58.

Hans Finsler photographed porcelain dish sets and porcelain vessels perhaps more than any other object. A number of his commissions were for the Staatliche Porzellan-Manufaktur of Berlin, founded as the Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur in the eighteenth century. White porcelain vessels may not be the most visually stimulating material to view in that his compositions generally consist of precisely ordered white rows of vases, cups, teapots, or stacks of dishes. [**Figure 4.31**] His 1930 images of porcelain are indeed a didactic photographic exercise in uniformity, as if every composition is produced in order to teach his students "here, this is how one photographs an object best, emphasizing clarity, precision, repetition, uniformity and order." His compositions, with their emphasis upon repetition and uniformity, help to reinforce the values of homogeneity facilitated by methodical assembly-line production and consumption. In an article for *Die Form* by Victor Bourgeois entitled "Le Werkbund Et La Production Moderne," the caption for the Finsler photograph [**Figure 4.32**] of flower vases celebrates the consumer's potential achievement of individuality through the purchase of an object of uniformity: "The end in view is absolute similarity (*Gleichheit*). Only when the individual object is put to its intended purpose does it come into relation to its surroundings and to man. It is given a function and thereby acquires an individual existence."[352] This, in a nutshell, is one of the great, persistent myths of consumer culture; that it does not matter that millions of other consumers own the exact same object because once it belongs to *your* home and *your* surroundings, it will reflect *your* individuality and unique style. In this article's style of writing, too, we see the persistent spiritualization of consumerism and mass-production, and its translation into mythical

[352] Victor Bourgeois, "Le Werkbund et la Production moderne," *Die Form*, vol. 11/12, n. 5 (1930), pp. 309-312.

terminology. Hans Finsler, as the pedagogic leader of Neue Sachlichkeit photography, used photography in its commercial capacity to support himself and his family, while also helping to sell capitalism as form and products as detached, existential, abstract objects. His photographs, while compositionally "objective" and emptied of everything "good form," are simultaneously loaded with cultural values.

One of the most frequently reproduced images by Hans Finsler that stands out as exemplary of Neue Sachlichkeit photography is his photograph of a light bulb and its shadow. [**Figure 4.33**] This image, photographed for the electricity giant OSRAM (which was founded as a brand name in 1906 and merged as a subsidiary of Siemens in 1919), stands out in the literature on Neue Sachlichkeit photography in the same way that the Paul Outerbridge white collar does. [**Figure 4.34**] Like the photograph of the white collar, the light bulb photograph's compositional form has been hailed as iconic of the machine age and the interest in "the thing itself." Similarly too, the photograph is usually called "Untitled" or given the simply descriptive title "Elektrische Birne" (electric light bulb) and is dated 1928.[353] It was first published in 1928 in a book entitled "Licht und Beleuchtung" by Wilhelm Lotz for Verlag Hermann Reckendorf. This was the sixth book in a series called "Bücher der Form," (Books of Form). The goal of this series of books, much like Renger-Patzsch's *Eisen und Stahl*, was to promote the products of industry as good design and aesthetic form, as objects rather than as products, and therefore based less upon economics or use value and more upon the beauty of technology. Finsler's OSRAM photograph was also shown in an exhibition of his own

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[353] For example, Finsler's photograph was most recently reproduced in Sergiusz Michalski ed., *New Objectivity – Neue Sachlichkeit Painting in Germany in the 1920s* (Köln and Los Angeles: Taschen Verlag, 2003), p. 188. In the section entitled "Neue Sachlichkeit Iconography: An Isolating View of Things," Michalski treats the light bulb image in terms of its formal, "isolated" qualities, as a still life image comparable to the painted Neue Sachlichkeit still life.

work entitled "Neue Wege der Photographie" which was held in Halle in 1928. A slightly altered version of the OSRAM bulb was then selected for the exhibition *Film und Foto*, and was reproduced by Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold in *Foto-Auge*, cementing this photograph as one of the hallmarks of modern photography.[354] [**Figures 4.35a and 4.35b]** In this version the image is titled "Glühbirne – lampe á incandescence – incandescent lamp." Its juxtaposition with another Finsler photograph of "woven material," places emphasis on the images as formal studies in product design, thus giving examples of how the camera can be a tool of modern advertising. The two in combination emphasize the photographic capacity for reproducing the details of threading, both material and electrical, thrown into relief by Finsler's chiaroscuro. Here, instead of a single bulb with its shadow, the editors have chosen a view that includes three socket parts and a dark frayed cord, its feathery wires exposed and doubled by shadow. The formalism of the images as existing outside the parameters of industrial commission has been maintained.

In most reproductions, the Finsler bulb photograph is indeed strategically attractive and artful in that it does not overtly advertise itself as a product. Rather the OSRAM logo is presented in softened letters on the rounded glass of the bulb. The logo is cleverly doubled in shadow upon a white surface. Much like Outerbridge's collar, Finsler's light bulb expresses iconic power as a visual zeitgeist, suggesting through its singularity as an object that it, much like objects in a time capsule, represents more than its function. As a singular object it becomes a proxy for the very modernity of the German electrical power industry encapsulated by "good form" and the principles of

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[354] For the English version of *Foto-Auge*, see *Photo-Eye, 76 Photos of the Period*, ed. Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold (New York: Arno Press, 1973), plate 14.

product and logo design. The subject matter it conveys, light and shadow, also serves the self-reflexive purpose of referencing photography itself, suggesting perhaps a second reason why this particular image has remained relevant.

Finsler's light bulb was published in a *Die Form* article of 1933. [**Figure 4.36**] The article calls for the recognition of the light bulb as an object with formal independence. The otherwise completely un-amusing article by author, a Richard L. F. Schulz of Berlin, is titled (amusingly) "Der Kampf der elektrischen Glühlampe um ihre formale Selbständigkeit" ("The Struggle of the Electric Lamp"). It is as if to suggest that the electrical light bulb itself experienced a struggle for its independence. This odd title remains however consistent with the Neue Sachlichkeit impulse to anthropomorphize inanimate objects, lending them powerful attributes and even the kind of spirituality one could only gain through existential struggle. Yet what remains obscured still today in publications of this light bulb by the focus on the image as being artful and experimental in nature, a bold composition, is the fact that OSRAM was a company deeply entangled in American and German politics, a company that by the late twenties, when Finsler took this commission, had become extremely visible, a household word.[355]

Sutton, mentioned above, published extensively on the subject matter of American business and governmental involvement in German industry before World War II. He was one of few writers to make explicit connections between American big business and the rise of Nazi fascism.[356] Sutton notes that a number of the companies, especially the German electrical companies associated with (i.e. stock in them was owned

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[355] August Sander's son Gunther Sander also photographed for OSRAM in 1930 as a representative of Atelier August Sander. His image is reproduced in *The Ecstasy of Things*, p. 182.

[356] For an example of a primary source regarding American investments in the German industrial sector, see "Europe Paying War Debt by Selling Control of Industries to Americans" in *Analist*, no. 34 (September 20, 1929), pp. 541-542.

by) American counterparts, were left untouched by the Allied bombings during World War II. OSRAM was one of the largest manufacturers of electrical equipment in the world, with American board members including Owen D. Young of the 1929 Young Plan. This company would also, only a few short years after Finsler's photographic campaign, assist in the funding of Adolf Hitler's ascendancy by writing checks directly to Hitler's private campaign fund, Die Nationale Treuhand.[357] Like a number of other large industries, including I.G. Farben, German General Electric, and Krupp, all of which hired the most distinguished Neue Sachlichkeit photographers to portray their products, OSRAM not only contributed directly to Hitler's election, but also made massive profits The company delicately balanced a softened dialogue of rationalization and a quieted involvement at the highest level with American bankers acting as statesmen to determine foreign policy that would most benefit their interests. It is companies like OSRAM that provided a space for the confluence of Americanization efforts and American profit interests with German industrial and military aims. The history of these relations, however, has been eclipsed not only by the mantra of aesthetic concern in relation to imagery, but by the decades-long separation of the disciplines; the history of images has largely been understood in isolation from the histories of business, economics, or politics. The OSRAM light bulb photograph's participation in the discursive arena of aesthetics and form naturally helped to soften its edges and present the corporation as an industry integral to life. If these companies could so successfully hide, or at least not proclaim, their support for whichever regime would most benefit their profit margins, it is one goal of this dissertation to suggest that perhaps it is through the corporate imagery and its

[357] See Sutton, pp. 52-66.

promotion by *Die Form* that we may come to understand the values these companies practiced in relation to the values their photographs projected.

The Primacy of Economics

The extent to which German industrialists were involved in political decisions of state and foreign policy has been a point of debate for decades, although most historians agree that the leaders of heavy industry played a decisive and on-going political role throughout the Republic. Historian Gerald D. Feldman dealt with the "primacy of economics over politics": "Where the bureaucrats had sought to reduce politics to matters of administration, the Weimar businessmen sought to reduce politics to matters of economic management in the interests of *die Wirtschaft*, the collective world of industry and finance."[358] Feldman names most of the men involved in this struggle for political power which would benefit their individual enterprises: Felix Deutsch, Arnold and Wilhelm Siemens, and Walter Rathenau all were in the electrical production industry; Hugo Stinnes, Alfred Hugenburg, and Albert Vögler were in heavy industry mining and processing of coal and iron, producing steel, and also shipping; Carl Duisberg was the founder and reigning ruler of the chemical industry through the giant I. G. Farbenindustrie; and Paul Reusch was the director of GütteHoffnungshütte, just to name most of the prominent figures. Feldman argues that a 1923 law that had been passed against cartelization was "pitifully weak" and lent to a general atmosphere in which the leading directors of industry were calling the shots: "The Social Democrats…were

[358] Gerald D. Feldman, "The Social and Economic Policies of German Big Business, 1918 – 1929" in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 75, n. 1 (October 1969), p. 49; see also Henry Ashby Turner, *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism and Big Business, 1914-1945* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1994).

lacking in economic ideas of their own and actually accepted many of the ideas and practices of big business."

By 1926 many industrial leaders even attempted to reform the constitution single-handedly through the formation of The League for the Renewal of the Reich.[359] Thus, for instance, in 1923 the German General Electric Company, AEG, formed an alliance with American General Electric and the following year Siemens allied itself with the American industrial power, Westinghouse. In 1927 AEG joined together with a number of smaller firms in order to establish Vereinigte Eisenbahn-Signal Werke. In 1929 American General Electric (the President of which at the time was Owen D. Young who, again, was an American delegate for The Dawes Plan and the Chairman of The Young Plan and who in 1930 became one of the company directors for both AEG and OSRAM) purchased just over sixteen percent of OSRAM, giving the Americans a great deal of control over the German electrical industry.[360] Historian Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann adds to the idea that Weimar political history has largely obscured this degree of industrial and *American* involvement, suggesting that past histories have focused on the Weimar Repbublic as a history of political successes and political failures, a history of decision-making based upon the roles played by those holding political office. He instead asserts that the heads of German industry (and whom we may note were not always Germans), steel, electrical power, mining, railroads, were the ones who ultimately held the political power and exerted the most influence upon national and foreign policy.[361]

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[359] Feldman, pp. 53–55.
[360] Sutton, pp. 52-53.
[361] Although his focus is upon German-Russian relations, see Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann in "Industrial Primacy in German Foreign Policy? Myths and Realities in German-Russian Relations at the End of the

With such powerful forces in play, it only makes sense that the Werkbund would seek to align itself with those leaders in an attempt to find a way for its artisans, artists, and photographers to integrate smoothly and efficiently into the abstract and actual world of "die Wirtschaft" (or the "spiritualized economy"). Indeed the notion that artists, such as Moholy-Nagy and others at the Bauhaus, were seeking to collapse the idea of the artist with the profession of the engineer, when viewed in light of this primacy of the industrial realm, appears to be less and less a romantic desire to participate in social change, and more an opportunity-based desire to participate in the mechanisms and financial successes of American-influenced industrial capitalism. The artist's desire to associate himself with the profession of the engineer will be raised again in the following chapter.

No Crisis Here

What seems a curious omission from *Die Form* is any acknowledgement of the problems that the industrial sector was experiencing during the years of its publication. It is true that the economy was on the upswing after the initial stabilization efforts just before *Die Form* was initiated, but still inconsistency in the German economy remained the only consistent formula throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. In the midst of conglomeration and rationalized expansion, there were major labor conflicts and rising unemployment into the early thirties. Peter Selz summarizes: "The prosperity was real enough; German industry was modernizing its plant, business was stable, wages were relatively high, unemployment was low – it fell below three-quarters of a million in 1928. But there were hidden ominous developments: industries and businesses were merging on

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Weimar Republc," Richard Bessel and E. J. Feuchtwanger, eds, *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 241-267. He provides an interesting discussion of the dynamics between industry and foreign policy.

an unprecedented scale; governments, both federal and state, were wasting funds; the powerful industrial magnate Alfred Hugenberg, who had grown rich in the inflation, was gaining control of the opinion industries; and much of the basis of prosperity was, after all, foreign money pumped into Germany – a source that might dry up."[362]

But "reparations remained an issue" and the Owen D. Young Plan was adopted in March 1929, orchestrated by Hjalmar Schacht, President of the Reichsbank, working again closely with J.P. Morgan bankers and American industrial leadership. The Young Plan stated that "Germany was to be complete master over its affairs, but would continue to pay reparations on a graduated scale, ranging from 1.7 billion marks the first year to about 2.5 billion in 1966 and around 1.5 billion annually thereafter until 1988."[363] But October 1929, of course, brought the stock market crash in New York, one of the "most disastrous for the least stable regime, that is, for Germany, which had lived off foreign aid far more than many Germans knew or were willing to admit."[364] The rest of Germany's downward spiral is well-developed history, but the idea that American bankers and industrialists played such an active role in German policy through funding and corporate leadership seems today still to be an under-recognized aspect of Weimar history.

Reading through *Die Form* and examining the photographs that illustrate its articles, one cannot help but notice that any sense of industrial crisis seems to be eliminated or deliberately kept at bay. Even in the last months of 1929 and beginning of 1930, when the crisis was beginning to be felt on all levels, one continues to see articles published in *Die Form* which praise the industrial process, totally uncritical, as if

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[362] Peter Selz, p. 156.
[363] Ibid., p. 158.
[364] Ibid., p. 159.

unaware, of developments. In 1929 and 1930 Wilhelm Lotz, for instance, continued to write enthusiastic articles entitled "Das Massenerzeugnis" (The Product of Mass-manufacture), "Die Mitarbeit des Künstlers am industriellen Erzeugnis" (The Collaboration of Artists in Industrial Manufacturing), and "Das ist Modern!" In addition, the writer Otto Neurath, in 1930 continued to extol the benefits of "Das Sachbild" (The Object or Product Photograph).

The uncritical engagement that so many of the photographers of the inter-war years had with industry allowed them to find the much-needed financial support to help make their interest in photography possible, especially during such economically uncertain years. But their support of the aims and interests of unbridled industrial entities also no doubt lent an air of playful naturalism to companies wishing to put forth a friendly, unproblematic face at a time when their entangled, international politics and military activities would have been seen as less than friendly if their full magnitude could have been embraced**.** Sutton argued that the German industrial cartels were "major supporters of Hitler and Naziism and were directly responsible for bringing the Nazis to power in 1933" and that "[t]he roles of American I. G. Farben, General Electric, Standard Oil of New Jersey, Ford, and other U.S. firms" were significant in this history. He provided "known documentary evidence on the financing of Hitler, complete with photographic reproduction of the bank transfer slips used to transfer funds from Farben, General Electric, and other firms to Hitler, through Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht."[365] He spelled out connections between American banking interests, especially those of J. P. Morgan and his associates, and German companies making profits to re-pay the Allied

[365] Sutton, p. 18.

reparations. Thus one of his central accusations is that certain "statesmen" in the U.S. made profits hand over fist on both ends, as interest on loans and as direct profits from German companies upon whose boards they sat and in whom they held stock.

Interestingly, Finsler's light bulb photograph for OSRAM appeared in *Die Form* once again in January of 1933, the same month that Hitler was appointed to the position of chancellor of Germany. His appointment had the strong backing of industrialists and politicians who believed that he could be kept under control while supporting their causes. And yet, the dialogue surrounding most of these "objects" photographed not as products but as objective "objects" concerns their beauty and optical interest as photographic subjects, deleting any discussion of the companies commissioning them. Hans Finsler, however, unlike Renger-Patzsch, had already left Germany in March 1932 for Zürich where he remained. Arguably *Die Form* itself, and the Neue Sachlichkeit style of functional photography that it propagated, may be viewed as a decade-long textual and visual response to the "crisis" of German industrialization. Using the term "qualität" as its mantra, *Die Form* and its editors established a moral position for design, using arguments of a philosophical, art historical, ethical, and spiritual nature to promote a positive reception of industry and its rationalization of production.

Die Form Approaching 1933

By the years 1931 through 1933, it was becoming clear that not only *Die Form* and its writers, but also Renger-Patzsch as a photographer, were being influenced by the newly- empowered Nazi government. Renger-Patzch's photographs, among others' were reproduced for a *Die Form* review by W. Lotz of the 1933 Berlin exhibition "Die Kamera" and for a neighboring article on "Berufsfotografie" (Professional Photography)

by W. Niemann. The images shown take this earlier effort to naturalize industry and now bring it, not surprisingly, under the official umbrella of fascism. The first photograph in the article "Zur Ausstellung 'Die Kamera'" depicts the entrance hall to the exhibition, which itself featured five photo-murals of Nazi parades. [**Figure 4.37**] The swastika can be seen at least five times in the different murals hanging above the doors to the exhibition. But what is perhaps most striking about *Die Form*'s embrace of Nazi content is that this shift to reflect the Nazi agenda did not seem to require any radical re-formatting, personnel, or editorial changes for the journal. Renger-Patzsch, for instance, did not leave the journal. In fact, we see his photographs perhaps even more frequently during the years 1933 and 1934. The effort to naturalize industry is now simply conflated with the goals of the Nazi regime and its Beauty of Labor bureau, founded in 1933.[366] Anson Rabinbach, for instance, pointed out that Wilhelm Lotz, the *Die Form* editor and regular contributor, became the editor of the Nazi journal *Schönheit der Arbeit*" (The Beauty of Labor).[367] In this sense the continuity is not only to be found in the images and articles but in the actual staffing consistency between *Die Form* and *Schönheit der Artbeit*.

To return to the above-mentioned 1933 Lotz article, Renger-Patzsch's photographs appear in support of, and in the context of, an essay that recognizes the exhibition "Die Kamera" as one of the first exhibitions of photography mounted in support of National Socialism. His natural and industrial landscapes around the city of

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[366] Regarding the Nazi's "Schönheit der Arbeit" program, see Anson G. Rabinbach, "The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich," Journal of Contemporary History, 11 (1976), pp. 43-74. This article was also mentioned in chapter one. Rabinbach writes: "Under the slogan – 'the German everyday shall be beautiful,' – the Bureau of Beauty of Labour (Amt Schönheit der Arbeit) attempted to radically transform both the interior and exterior landscape of the German industrial plant…Aesthetic illusion was integrated into concrete social forms, motivated by political goals," p. 43.

[367] Ibid., p. 57.

Essen, which follow directly after the photograph of the Nazi parade murals, appear in proximity to one another in the article as almost mirror images: the natural and the industrial as counterparts. **[Figures 4.38 and 4.39]** His photograph of a set of railroad tracks seen from slightly above converging into the deepest distance, with smokestacks looming large in the far background is placed two pages later and is juxtaposed with a non-industrialized winding roadway, its white posts lined up like dominoes. **[Figures 4.40 and 4.41]** Following the four Renger-Patzsch landscapes are three more romanticized Germanic landscapes: one of birch trees by a photographer called "Schreiner of Munich" and two extremely nostalgic views by Hildegard Heise of an "Ostseelandschaft" (East Sea Landscape) and a mountain view entitled "Tessiner Landschaft" (Tessin Landscape). **[Figures 4.42, 4.43, and 4.44]** The first image, not unlike Renger-Patzsch's works shown, emphasizes the straight pathway to the distance as a one-way, uncomplicated direction, a simplified view onto an idealized past, the German agricultural landscape; the mythical path of the peasant. Following these landscapes are two portraits by Hugo Erfurth: one of the animal painter Feldbauer and one of a *Stahlhelm* soldier. **[Figures 4.45, 4.46]** The two figures, mirroring one another in the journal, each challenge the viewer to a staring contest, artist and soldier alike acknowledging his role in the new regime. In the context of the *Die Form* article as a whole, one cannot help but view these photographs as having had a hand in naturalizing and softening the goals of a totalizing military-industrial complex, one whose spiritualistic and naturalistic aims have quickly and easily been absorbed by the Nazi regime.

The content of *Die Form* in 1933 and 1934 did not have to be drastically altered to express support for the goals of fascism, one of which dovetailed with the Werkbund's motto mentioned in the very beginning of this chapter: "For the Improvement of the Products of Manufacture." The products and processes of manufacture were still insured as important to the German economy and the Nazi spirit. We do begin to see titles that emphasize even more overtly the *Germanic* quality of production. Also of note is an attempt to re-define the Werkbund's role in articles such as the 1933 "Der Deutsche Werkbund im neuen Reich" by Winfried Wendland. However, most of the same writers and photographers continued their work for this journal uninterrupted after 1933.

In fact, in examining a number of illustrated trade journals such as the aforementioned *Gebrauchsgraphik*, *Die Reklame*, *Schaufenster-Kunst und Technik*, and more popular magazines such as *Die Dame*, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, and *Uhu*, just on the edge of 1932 and the Nazi takeover of power in 1933, we see that most of these other publications experienced a much more dramatic editorial and pictorial rupture than did *Die Form*. Until 1932, one saw international ideas and progressive content put forth by a variety of authors and with a vast array of viewpoints and opinions in these publications. Immediately, in 1933 however, all of these publications began, almost overnight, to reflect a singularly fascist point of view. In the case of *Die Reklame*, for example, it is an almost shocking, abrupt change in imagery, content, and tone. The disembodied head of Hitler drawn in pencil now floats on its front cover. **[Figure 4.47]** The script has changed from a modern one to the medieval German *Fraktur* script preferred by Hitler. The first article in the magazine is entitled "Adolf Hitler über Werbung" (Adolf Hitler on Advertising), announcing that his terms will provide the new

definition for the field. **[Figure 4.48]** In the case of *Die Form*, on the other hand, a journal already steeped in a rhetorical mode of German industrial myth-making and support of the abstraction of material conditions, the National Socialist siege represented much less of a disruption. This is not to say that many of the writers of *Die Form* did not change nor that the content did not adjust itself to reflect Nazi social policy, but rather it is to suggest that *Die Form*'s support for a mystified, abstracted and a-critical, de-politicized view of German industry was in many ways aligned with the aims of the National Socialists all along.

Die Form lent cultural and moral legitimacy to the conveyor belt, using the seduction and appeal of aesthetic rationalization in photography as a consort. The final chapter of this dissertation will discuss how the approach established by Renger-Patzsch, Gorny, Finsler and the so-called "objective" impulse of *Die Form* with its emphasis on the "type," the close-up, and the serial format did not wane into the thirties, but was absorbed by young photographers. I will consider how the invented term "to renger" (meaning to photograph like Renger-Patzsch) had become a popular pursuit in photography, one that internalized the logic of the assembly line, continuing to work through the German cultural "crisis" of standardization.

Chapter V

Nacheinander: Elsa Thiemann and the "Rätselfoto"

The "German" Neue Sachlichkeit emphasis on the industrial apparatus and the consumer product as an object in isolation or repetition was discussed in Chapter One in relation to the existing literature. In Chapter Two, it was inferred as an inheritance of Americanization, an institutionalizing process, which was "exported" to Germany and received with ambivalent arms in the form of *Amerikanismus*. Chapter Three then examined this inheritance as photographic, first and foremost, a metaphoric effect with implications for advertising, journalism, art, and industrial photography. Chapter Four singled out Neue Sachlichkeit photography in its industrial context by focusing on the journal *Die Form* as one under-examined by the history of photography (since its purview has been understood to be more that of design history). It considered one journal's (and its three key photographers') stake in the legitimization of German (or what was often American-German) industrialization and the homogenizing, naturalizing values therein inherent during the twenties and thirties. This fifth chapter zooms in closer to examine the work of a single photographer.

While there are a number of Neue Sachlichkeit photographers whose work has yet to be studied in much depth, such as, for instance, the work of Sasha Stone, or Gorny and Finsler, both mentioned only briefly in the previous chapter, the work of Bauhaus-trained Elsa Thiemann points to a particularly curious obsession with the serialized, Tiller-effect*ed* object. Thiemann, a student of Walter Peterhans, was for a short time in the early 1930s preoccupied with the inoculated, serialized object. She photographed objects

removed from context in order to emphasize the formal qualities of pattern. As such her work may be seen as an example of the popularization of the Neue Sachlichkeit subject as fetishistic object. Thiemann's photographs transformed Renger-Patzsch's project into playful visual puzzles, combining banality with fantasy. Her work has not yet been written about in the English language and has to date only received a single exhibition catalogue, which was published in 2004 in Germany by the Bauhaus Archive. A number of her photographs are reproduced in this chapter for the first time. Her relative obscurity speaks to the banality of her subject: nails, spoons, forks, girders and graters. It also suggests the degree to which the visual logic of the Tiller-effect had infiltrated all levels of German image production. Thiemann's relative obsession with (and her culture's desire to focus upon) repeated, ordered, and organized objects, speaks to this more permeating Weimar fascination with the mass ornament, industrial serialization, and even Americanization by association.

One After Another After Another

Siegfried Kracauer, in his *Frankfurter Zeitung* essay "Travel and Dance" (1925), introduced the Weimar cultural desire for all things *nacheinander*. By this term, which in English is translated as "one-after-another," Kracauer identified a culture-wide appreciation for regular patterning and sequential rhythms. He recognized this desire in the structured patterns of serialization and repetition in work life, entertainment forms, advertising, and even in modes of travel and dance. His 1925 notion of the *nacheinander* is arguably the basis for his 1927 observation of "the mass ornament." This was expanded upon in Chapter Three of this dissertation in order to consider it as an effect of

Amerikanismus and that perception's visual dissemination as a metaphor for capitalism. It is useful, however, to return to this perhaps more fundamental description of the "one-after-another" impulse especially as we begin to understand Thiemann's work, this "genre" of photographic imagery, and its popularity.

Walter Benjamin similarly observed this impulse as an organizational mode used by the Parisian arcades, "the forerunners of department stores."[368] Benjamin, in recognizing the one-after-another organization of the commercial arcades, compared them to the utopian socialist Charles Fourier's *phalanstére* communities. He discussed this communal plan's indebtedness to mechanized industry and to the military formation of the phalanx defined as "a body of troops in close array" or "any closely linked crowd of people."[369] Significantly, Benjamin made his observations in 1935, *not only* as an historian of the nineteenth century, but also as a citizen of the Weimar Republic. Kracauer's and Benjamin's observations about the changed urban environment and new consumerist desires during the Weimar years were made partially in response to the heightened awareness of American-style capitalism in the 1920s, the peak years of the *Amerikanismus* debate. The "Nacheinander" is related to German *perceptions* of American industrial patterns and its urban rhythms. It is the tap-tap rhythm of jazz music and the pace of business in America as others have observed. It describes the German perception of what it meant to physically and psychically absorb an American pace; to live, eat, sleep, and play within the parameters of organized industrial efficiency.

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[368] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 3.

[369] For his definition I refer to *WordWebOnline* [database on-line], http://www.wordwebonline.com, accessed July 17, 2007.

As was discussed at length in Chapter Three, *Amerikanismus* operated through perceptions rather than facts, through images and imaginings rather than as a body of established knowledge. It was comprised of ideals and ideologies couched in the form of photographic images. W. J. T. Mitchell has argued that the terms idea, ideal, and ideology are all bound together; each contains and is conveyed through images. "'Idea' comes from the Greek verb 'to see,' and is frequently linked with the notion of the 'eidolon,' the 'visible image' that is fundamental to ancient optics and theories of perception."[370] Mitchell's summary of "Ideology" (which is a fairly standard phrasing of the "Marxist" definition) may also prove useful here. He writes: "Ideology is false consciousness, a system of symbolic representations that reflects on the historical situation of domination by a particular class, and which serves to conceal the historical character and class bias of that system under guises of naturalness and universality."[371] This definition, together with an image-based conception of *Amerikanismus*, may remind the reader of the issues that have been circulating throughout this dissertation: the power of photographs as icons, the employment of photographs in the service of domination, the concealment of meaning under form and compositional value, the role of class in the creation and dissemination of photography, and the guise of "naturalness and universality" that was achieved in so many of the photographs labeled as part of the "style" of Neue Sachlichkeit. Kracauer, Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno, among others writing at this time, began to consciously "read" their faster-paced, more regulated, Americanized culture through photographic images rather than through traditional text.

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[370] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 5.
[371] Ibid., p. 4.

Miriam Hansen has pointed out that all three --Kracauer, Benjamin, and Adorno-- shared the idea that the "reading" of images was an exercise in hieroglyphics.[372] Photographic images on billboards in the streets, in the newspapers and magazines, seemed to march along, keeping pace with a new sense of time and reducing text to the succinct form of the caption. Each recognized that all of the most important meanings for the culture at large were being conveyed through images. The "nacheinander" or one-after-another structure, a device typical of photography in the twenties and early thirties, can be seen both in the dissemination of photographic images in the form of magazines and journals, that is *outside* the composition, and in the composition of images themselves, that is, *inside* the four corners of the photographic frame. The central questions then that this final chapter seeks to answer are: If this structural preoccupation with the *nacheinander* may be read as a kind of hieroglyphic language, what is it able to say about the culture which perpetuated it? And if it manifested in the photographic repetition of everyday mass-produced objects, and was perceived as having an American foundation, how can it inform our understanding of the Americanized Weimar era as a central part of the history of commodity culture?

As introduced above, this chapter brings to the surface the work of Bauhaus photographer, Elsa Thiemann, as an example of the popularization of the "nacheinander," Tiller-Effect logic in Weimar photography. **[Figure 5.1]** The chapter concentrates on an early 1930s series that she produced, which she called interchangeably "Rätselbilder" or "Rätselfotos" (puzzle/ enigma pictures or puzzle/enigma photos). **[Figure 5.2]** This series was composed of approximately one hundred photographs of

[372] See Miriam Hansen "Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer," *New German Critique*, no.56, "Special Issue on Theordor W. Adorno" (Spring-Summer 1992), pp. 43-73.

inanimate objects, often seen from a close-up view and organized in *nacheinander* sequences. Thiemann's photographs, many of them still unpublished, were only exhibited once, in 2004, almost all of them reproduced for the first time in a single, mini-monographic exhibition catalogue organized by the Bauhaus-Archiv, Museum für Gestaltung together with the Berlinische Galerie.[373] [**Figure 5.3**] The Bauhaus-Archiv catalogue contains a forward by Annemarie Jaeggi and texts by Margot Schmidt. In fact, Thiemann's negatives were only then, in 2004, donated to the Bauhaus-Archiv-Museum.

After an introduction of Thiemann and her series, the next section will discuss the widespread influence of Albert Renger-Patzsch, which by the early 1930s was significant, and the role that Walter Peterhans (Thiemann's photography teacher at the Bauhaus) played in her work. The third section will discuss the *Rätselfoto* as a popular "genre," pointing toward the estrangement and aestheticization of objects. Finally, I will return to an analysis of how Thiemann's photographs may be placed in the context of Weimar hieroglyphics and the Neue Sachlichkeit photographic language of objects, things, and goods. The object, in close-up and in serial format, I will argue, can be seen to represent a cultural escapism. Rather than a "return to realism," as it is thought to be, Neue Sachlichkeit's attention toward "things" offered a diversionary framing-out of everything extraneous to the object and its particular brand of rhythmic abstraction. Thiemann's work has also been chosen here for its affinity to the work of Albert Renger-Patzsch, Hein Gorny, and Hans Finsler, and as an example of the next generation's response to the crisis of capitalism.

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[373] Thiemann's photographs have also been reproduced, with only one or two examples, in Jeannine Fiedler, ed., *Fotografie am Bauhaus*; Thiemann is only mentioned in a handful of other German publications including Eskildsen, ed., *Fotografieren hiess teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik* (Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1994); see also the "Bibliografie" in Schmidt and Jaeggi, *Elsa Thiemann, Fotografin: Bauhaus und Berlin* (Berlin: Kupfergraben-Verlag, 2004), p. 68.

Elsa Thiemann

Thiemann, born Elsa Franke (1910-1981), studied at the Bauhaus in Dessau from 1929 to 1931. Her name may easily be confused with another photographer of her generation, Else Thalemann (1901-1985), provoking some misunderstanding about the nature of her imagery. Elsa Franke met her future husband, painter Hans Thiemann, in 1930 while they were both students at the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus Archive catalogue referred to above begins with an analysis of a series of four photographic pairs that Thiemann took of Hans and herself in the early 1930s and then again circa 1950. [**Figures 5.4 and 5.5**]

Although the catalogue text does not mention it, Thiemann's gravitation toward pattern and repetition already asserts itself, whether consciously or not, in this project of pairing husband and self at different stages in their lives. Each pair contains various gestures of doubling. In pair one, for instance, the same sash-like shadow drapes across each figure, his and her comportment looking left of the frame, while hands rest on thighs and a curvilinear drawing stencil hangs on each wall. In the following pairs furniture, radiators, shadows, profile and hand gestures strive toward likeness. During Thiemann's second semester she studied printmaking and advertising with Joost Schmidt and then began to study with Walter Peterhans. Margot Schmidt, in her brief catalogue essay, writes: "Peterhans vermittelte den Schülern die Bildauffassung der 'Neuen Sachlichkeit", die sich auserhalb des Bauhauses entwickelt hatte und von vielen berühmten Fotografen

erfolgreich praktiziert wurde."[374] Thus the focus in Peterhans's course was on photographing inanimate objects and on still lifes, popular as part of the Neue Sachlichkeit style, and Thiemann seems to have embraced this subject matter. She also applied this to her design work. Thiemann used photography, especially cameraless imagery or photograms, as a method to produce stark, organic repetitive designs for tapestries at the Bauhaus. [**Figures 5.6 and 5.7**] Her designs, which resemble black and white versions of Anna Atkins' British algae cyanotypes from the 1850s, use camera-less photography to emphasize the rhythm and pattern of a botanical form or a feather's repeated shape. Her photographic tapestry designs arguably inform her *Rätselbilder*, and may have in part inspired them, in that they use the photographic surface as a site of assembly, the act of establishing patterns using found objects, organic and synthetic.

Logically, as a Bauhaus student of Walter Peterhans, and as a young artist making photographs directly in the wake of the 1929 exhibition *Film und Foto*, Thiemann experimented with various approaches to the medium. Her oeuvre spans from approximately 1929 until 1960, when her husband (they were a pair at the Bauhaus but did not marry until 1947) took a teaching position at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Hamburg.[375] Elsa Thiemann also took a number of the more intriguing portraits at the Bauhaus.[376] Many of them are angular views of her would-be husband who would later, during the 1950s, exhibit with a minor artists' group called the "Fantasten" or the "Fantastics" in Berlin. Looking over Thiemann's entire oeuvre, her photographs span an

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[374] Schmidt and Jaeggi, p. 16. Translation: "Peterhans mediated to the students the view of Neue Sachlichkeit, which had developed outside of the Bauhaus and was practiced by many famous and successful photographers."
[375] See Jaeggi and Schmidt, pp. 4-12 for additional Elsa Thiemann biographical information.
[376] Two of her portraits of Hans Thiemann are reproduced in *Fotografie am Bauhaus*, catalogue no. 169 and 170.

interest in Surrealism, an Atget-esque impulse toward urban documentation, the practice of popular journalism including images of Berlin in ruins after World War II, and eclectic occupation with street scenes of the 1950s, much like those of Americans Helen Levitt or Arthur Leipzig. In addition, she produced a series of portraits of artists in their studios (a popular genre explored by many photographers, including Edward Steichen). So, in addition to her *Rätselfotos*, Thiemann's oeuvre covers diverse territory while directly reflecting a life lived during, through, and after two world wars.

Fetish Fotos

Elsa Thiemann's series of *Rätselfotos* were taken in the early thirties; some possibly while still at the Bauhaus, but most of them were likely produced just as she emerged and began to establish her name in the field. The bulk of photographs from this series are not stamped with exact dates, but many were marked with her rubber stamp indicating their production in the "early 1930s." She stamped most of her photographs: "Honorar und Belege an Elsa Thiemann Bildreporterin, Bin.-Neukölln, Hertzbergstr. 7/8." Thus her stamp indicated her authorship and address, and presented the photographer as a "Bildreporterin" or "picture-reporter." Her very limited archive contains letters indicating that she had intended and had attempted to sell her *Rätselfotos* to magazines. However, no record has been located which would indicate that she had actually *published* them. Her struggle may perhaps reflect that of a still burgeoning identity during the mid to late 1930s and the trouble photographers had at the time to situate their roles as somewhere between artist, reporter or journalist, engineer or advertiser.

In one example from this series, Thiemann photographed an array of pyramidical cones nestled into a molded form. [**Figure 5.8]** Lined with surface ridges and almost architectural in structure, each pyramid shape is attached to the next, their numbers reaching outside all edges of the frame. This particular *nacheinander* abstraction or photographic "puzzle" was, in its original life, a standard cardboard egg carton. Under Thiemann's lens the empty cardboard shell is transformed into a pattern of repeated, (almost) identical shapes that indirectly point to the new efficiencies in production and distribution, which even eggs could not escape.[377]

A second example, a close-up of a field of metal tacks, is easily confused with a Renger-Paztsch composition [**Figure 5.9**]. A grouping of some fifty or so tacks is seen at an angle from above, their pointed stems darting upward. Arranged in semi-regular rows (or columns, depending on how the photograph is held), each tack is the same as the next. However the natural lighting gleams off the surface of each inexactly, forming patterns of stem shadows and semi-circular lights. In this image, the least significant of items is bathed in attention emanating a preciosity reserved for a collection of jewels or coins. Though Thiemann was likely not aware of her work's affinities with the definition that Karl Marx provided for commodity fetishism, her *Rätsel* photographs may be "read" as an act of rendering (or "Rengering," as the case may be) mass-produced objects more mysterious to the viewer; obscuring their use value and masking out all extraneous relationships in order to abstract and beautify the inanimate object's repeated and focused form. In the case of Thiemann, the viewer was invited to participate; to try to recognize

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[377] The factory production of eggs was only just beginning to gain momentum in the early 1930s. Germany, still today one of the largest importers of eggs, was initiating an interest in eggs produced in greater bulk. For a primary source bulletin on international egg production, however biased, see Howard C. Pierce, "The Poultry and Egg Industry in Europe" (Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1926).

what each form actually was. This exchange, in the context of the commodity as fetishistic, plays out almost like a mockery: asking the viewer to recognize the object itself, to solve the mystery, while also maintaining the "aura" and fantastical or mysterious quality of its social value.

Adorno, Kracauer, and Benjamin of course did not only pull the notion of the social hieroglyphic out of the zeitgeist, but each was using the term in relation to Marx, who in "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," compared the fetishistic experience with commodities to social hieroglyphs, images loaded with value or meaning beyond their practical function.[378] Janet Ward provided a useful summary of Marx's "fetishism of commodities" as she related it to Weimar consumer display:

> Under capitalism, commodities are made mysterious and their use value, or origins of production, are obscured by their exchange value. This act of phantasmagorical veiling-over constitutes for Marx an act of fraud: the surface cult of commodities thus distorts the way people understand social relations and working conditions behind the production of objects."[379]

In the *Rätselfotos*, such as in the examples "Rolltreppe" (escalator stairs) or "Zentralheizung" (central heating radiator), Thiemann focuses on the serial properties of each form: the radiator with its "shoulders" and knobs, notches and "ribs" is transformed into an endless field of repeated shapes. [**Figures 5.10 and 5.11**] The stairs of a wooden department store escalator, by way of the camera's foreshortening and adjustment of angle, is reduced to its prior-to-assembly existence as rows of aligned, finger-shaped

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[378]Marx discussed "the enigmatical character of the product of labour" and wrote: [B]y an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it. Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products; for to stamp an object of utility as value, is just as much a social product as language." See Karl Marx, *Capital*: *A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, vol. 1, part 1, ch. 1, p. 74.

[379] Ward, pp. 191-192.

slats. Their use value obscured, the repeated wooden slats become a phalanx of small, uncanny fetish objects, familiar and yet unfamiliar, a standard, if modern, architectural element of commodity exchange and use value rendered mysterious by the camera. Thiemann's act of using photography to transform an object from something whose properties and function are recognizable to one that is abstract, obscured, and beautified is metonymic of photography's role in the process of fetishizing commodities.

The photograph (the camera having been made manifest and public during the blossoming years of the Second Industrial Revolution in the 1840s and 1850s) was (and remains) integral to the process of commodity exchange. It was and is *the* accepted medium for visual communication, not only about the actual properties and qualities of an object, but more importantly, about the social values, properties, and anxieties that an object also projects.

Herbert Molderings discussed the way that this act of transformation was used in Neue Sachlichkeit photography as a sales technique:

> Objects hitherto regarded as without significance are made 'interesting' and surprising by multiple exploitation of the camera's technical possibilities, unusual perspectives, close-ups and deceptive partial views…The advertising value of such photographs consists precisely in the fact that the objects are not presented functionally and contain a promise of mysterious meaning over and beyond their use-value; they take on a bizarre unexpected appearance suggesting that they live lives of their own, independent of human beings. More than all the fauvist, cubist, and expressionist paintings, it was applied photography which modified and renewed the centuries-old genre of the still life of the twentieth century: pictorial expression of 'commodity fetishism.'[380]

Molderings' essay is one of the few written in the 1970s which identified a specific subset of New Vision photographers actively creating an "aesthetic of commodities," as

[380] Herbert Molderings, "Urbanism and Technological Utopianism: Thoughts on the photography of Neue Sachlichkeit and the Bauhaus," in David Mellor, ed., *Germany, The New Photography, 1927-1933* (London, 1978), p. 93; Abigail Solomon-Godeau also cites Moldernings; see *Photography at the Dock…*p. 64.

he said "affecting both production and distribution" (and, I would add, consumption). He established the link, toward which other writers have only hinted, between this new subject matter of industrial photography and the serial principle of manufacture.

While it may be true that Thiemann's work does not directly convey "Americanness" or profess a direct relationship to the United States, this Bauhaus photographer recognized a cultural captivation with mass-produced forms combined with a desire for regularity, pattern, ornament, and order. She capitalized on the cultural anxiety surrounding and fascination with everyday, functional objects. In the mode of game-like escapism, her series presented her audience with visual "puzzles," offered by individual photographs. Each photograph was a puzzle, a mystery, or an enigma. Forks, spoons, nails, rakes, keys, all of the most common of objects were presented as abstract. They were distanced and *estranged* from the viewer, ironically, through the extreme *proximity* of the camera's lens and the composition's repetition. **[Figures 5.12 – 5.16]**

'Rengering': The Renger-Patzsch Brand

Renger-Patzsch's particular "brand" of photography, his signature extreme close-up and focus upon singular and serialized objects, propelled his name to fame not only in photographic circles but also in the mainstream media. A 1929 article in *Uhu* entitled "Halt mal still! Martin Munkacsy und Renger-Patzsch über Amateur-Photographie," ("Hold Still a Minute! Martin Munkascy and Renger-Patzsch on Amateur Photography") points to Renger-Patzsch's popular visibility and provided a series of useful lessons for what constituted a successful amateur photograph [**Figure 5.17**]. It gave advice for close-ups, travel photographs, action shots, and lighting preferences. At the end of the

article, Renger-Patzsch provided a list of fourteen tips for photographers.[381] [**Figure 5.18]** In fact, the work of Albert Renger-Patzsch had reached such a point of public awareness in Germany by the early 1930s that his name was being used (slightly tongue-in-cheek) as a verb. "To renger" meant to photograph like Renger-Patzsch or to depict the serialized object and to employ an extreme close-up view. In this sense "rengering" became a kind of *mannerism*, carrying the connotations of stylization, amusement, and amateur, copy-cat mimicry. Virginia Heckert writes:

> Clearly Renger-Patzsch had influenced many to follow his example, both in his brief capacity as a teacher, but also in his unwavering conviction with regard to the essential nature of the photographic medium…In the early years, there was a term applied to this influence: One 'rengered', as Fritz Kempe wrote in 1966: 'One finds photographs which are almost identical to those of Renger in the ensuing years. They bear the names of photographers, amateurs and professionals who have long been forgotten. Particularly in close-ups of plants and structures, which are prevalent in photography journals and picture books, a tremendous amount of rengering occurs.'[382]

Thus it seems that Renger-Patzsch's devotion to the photographing of objects became so widespread that his name became a verb in certain circles, "to renger."

Although Elsa Thiemann concentrated on the *Rätselfoto*, this popular "genre" was not her own invention. It was in fact a form of "rengering" that could be seen in the popular illustrated magazines such as *BIZ* or *UHU*, and *Die Dame*. Like Thiemann's series title, these visual crossword puzzles were usually referred to as *Rätselbilder*.[383] It was a popular exercise that combined Renger-Patzsch's use of the serial object and the close-up and transformed his style of composition into a "picture-puzzle." It would often

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[381] "Halt mal still!: Martin Munkacsy und Renger-Patzsch über Amateur-Photographie," *Uhu*, h. 5, j. 5 (July 1929), pp. 18-28.

[382] Virginia Heckert, "Albert Renger-Patzsch as Educator, 'Learn to See the World,'" *History of Photography*, vol. 21, n. 3, (Autumn 1997), p. 210.

[383] For examples of publications employing the terms *Rätselbilder* or *Rätselfotografen*, see the below paragraphs. One example, by Anne Biermann, for instance, can be found in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung,* no. 29 (July 1929); the Hein Gorny photographs for "Was ist das?" can be found in *Die Wochenschau*, n. 15, p. 8, 1929.

be placed at the back of the publication, like today's placement of a crossword puzzle. The term is still used today in Germany, mostly among amateurs and on personal "Foto-Blogs," to suggest the construction of an image as an intentional "puzzle," asking the viewer to make sense of the subject matter obscured by camera optics and to guess what it represents.[384]

"Was ist Das?": The Rätselfoto

We find some examples of the *Rätselfoto* parlour game in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung (BIZ), Die Dame*, and in *Die Wochenschau*. One such example was titled appropriately "Was ist das?: Dinge, die man nicht wiederkennt" ("What is that? Things that one does not recognize again"). [**Figure 5.19**] This *Die Wochenschau* article featured four photographs, not surprisingly, by Hein Gorny.[385] The four photographs depict respectively (clockwise from top left) the end of a ballpoint-type pen, macaroni noodles, soap foam, and liverwurst seen under a microscope. Each caption, in this case, reveals what is depicted since each image alone would not. Hein Gorny's participation in this venue also suggests his fluidity as a photographer and the fascination with the camera's ability to estrange the object from its function.

A second example can be found in the July 1929 issue of *BIZ*.[386] This issue features a tiny "article" with three photographs by ¨Anne Biermann Gera." [**Figure 5.20**] The first depicts a close-up of a dinner plate containing small fruits or nuts. The next

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[384] For some examples of the *Rätselfoto* as a still popular genre in German amateur photography, see the following community-based and blog-based websites: http://textundblog.de/?p=579, http://www.nikon-fotografie.de/vbulletin/showthread.php?t=2488, http://www.fotocommunity.fr/pc/pc/display/9234670, http://eye.de/foren_nfac/viewtopic.php?topic=2152&forum=36&2, accessed November 7, 2007.

[385] This image was reproduced by Ute Eskildsen in her essay to which I have now referred to numerous times, "Photography and the Neue Sachlichkeit Movement," p. 101. However Eskildsen does not address these images directly or say anything about their placement in this article.

[386] *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung,* July 1929, n. 29.

image is a cross-sectional close-up of the core of a cabbage (not entirely unlike Edward Weston's 1931 cabbage). The third photograph shows a series of circular disks whose identity is indecipherable. The title of the tiny article is again: "Was ist das?" Explaining the goal of the "Rätselphotograph," the article reads:

> The camera has here its objective provided by organized things which are well-known; but at once it has gone too near the objects, and another time the camera is at a distance of more than one hundred meters above; or from a standpoint from which we are not used to seeing the things. So based upon good familiarity comes unfamiliarity. Perhaps you may guess correctly when you view correctly.[387]

The caption adds that these Biermann photographs were also published in another Ullstein Verlag publication called "Der Zeitvertreiber" ("The Time Traveller") in which "is contained more than thirty original word and picture-puzzles." This suggests only that there was a market for such photographs outside the venue of the magazine and that this market was what Thiemann was perhaps trying to reach.[388]

A third example in *Die Dame* (1931) is entitled "Das sind keine modernen Stoffe, sondern…" ("That is not modern material, but rather…")[389] [**Figures 5.21 and 5.22**] The four photographs presented are by lesser-known photographers: Dr. J. von Heimburg and Kleinschmidt of Magdeburg. One depicts at least ten orderly rows of wooden chairs set up out of doors on a tiled surface. It ominously prefigures Leni Riefenstahl's "Calisthenics, Olympic Games, Berlin" (1936) in its attention to spatial precision and a

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[387] Translation: "Die Kamera hat hier ihr Objectiv auf lauter Dinge gerichtet, die wohlbekannt sind: aber einmal ist sie zu nah an die Gegenstände herangegangen, ein andermal nahm sie sie aus mehreren hundert Mieter Entfernung auf, oder von einem Standpunkt, von dem wir die Dinge zu sehen nicht gewohnt sind. So sind aus lauter guten Bekannten Unbekannte geworden. Uber vielleicht raten Sie doch richtig, wenn Sie recht genau hinschauen."

[388] I have not been able to find this particular publication as of yet. However, it sets a pop-cultural (establishes a market) precedent for Thiemann's genre in the year directly before she enrolled at the Bauhaus.

[389] *Die Dame*, 1 April 1931, vol. 14, n. 58.

perfected, almost dogmatic, aesthetic repetition [**Figure 5.23**]. The others depict a tree-like growth of sea coral branches, a mass of objects from a "Lost and Found" office, and a castle wall decorated with rows of matching trophies from a wild boar hunt. The photographs shown here transform the objects depicted into things excessively decorative. Rather than address the camera's clever capacity, the compositions suggest a wallpaper-like symmetry with a hinted implication of nationalism in the subject matter of the castle's boar hunt and the dogmatism of the arrangements. One is left to wonder if a series such as this, with its seemingly innocuous, playful images, could be considered a transitional image between Weimar applications of the mass ornament and Nazi applications of the same structures. The difference is no doubt a fine line.

Thiemann's *Rätselfotos* followed quickly in the footsteps of Renger-Patzsch. They are manneristic in the sense that the intention of her photographs appears to be less about the object represented and more about its mimesis, an act of obfuscating reality rather than revealing it. [**Figures 5.24 and 5.25**] This impulse may be seen in the comparison of a Renger-Patzsch tree, "Blutbuchenstamm" (1925) and Thiemann, *Trees* (c. 1930) in which Renger-Patzsch abstracts the majestic tree and Thiemann obfuscates a grouping of trees into a series of veins and arteries.[390] Where Renger-Patzsch's "stated aim" was to reveal reality (although we have in the previous chapter noted that this was not *exactly* the case) and his work was labeled as "realism," Thiemann's un-stated aim is an intentional obfuscation of the object, taking each object to the edge of what is recognizable. But in addition to her Renger-Patzsch influence, Thiemann's *Rätselfoto* series also reflects her training in Walter Peterhans's *Sachphotographie* courses. And so,

[390] Renger-Patzsch's "Blutbuchenstamm," 1925 is reproduced in Otto Steinert and Fritz Kempe, *Albert Renger-Patzsch, Der Fotograf der Dinge* (Essen: Ruhrland und Heimat Museum, 1966), cat. no. 10, p. 6.

rather than dismiss the imagery as mere gaming, or as mimicry and mannerism, it may prove more useful for the history of photography and a history of consumer-culture to try to understand the intention and popularity of the serialized and abstracted object. If we were to stop with the interpretation of Thiemann's images as mannerism alone, we might also miss the opportunity to further understand aspects of the late Bauhaus phase and one young photographer's sensitive response to the Weimar preoccupation with inanimate objects and serial structures, everyday objects and their mass-production.

The Influence of Walter Peterhans and Sachphotographie at the Bauhaus

Photography was, of course, a key aspect of commercial production, documentation, and "play" for the students of the Bauhaus. Although Lazslo Moholy-Nagy is the first name usually associated with photography at the Bauhaus, Walter Peterhans's aesthetic, itself influenced by Renger-Patzsch, was just as influential, if not more so.[391] [**Figure 5.26**] Photography had indeed become an integral part of the everyday at the Bauhaus by roughly 1927. As is well known, photography was not part of the official curriculum until 1929 with the implementation of Peterhans's course. Just as photography was beginning to be taken more seriously by the late twenties, the Bauhaus further sanctioned the medium by finally recognizing it and adopting it as curriculum. Peterhans's approach to photography was very different from that of

[391] For examples by Walter Peterhans see Roswitha Fricke, *Bauhaus Photography* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), cat. no. 32. Also, Gerhard Glüher discusses the reception of Renger-Patzsch's style of Neue Sachlichkeit photography at the Bauhaus. He summarizes the Bauhaus situated debate lead by Ernst Kallai concerning the diverging attitudes about photography as expressed by Lazslo Moholy-Nagy and Albert Renger-Patzsch in which Kallai sides with Renger-Patzsch's aesthetic. He discusses how this aesthetic, in which the object is fore-grounded, can be found in the theories and teachings of Walter Peterhans. See Gerhard Glüher, *Licht-Bild-Medium: Untersuchungen zur Fotografie am Bauhaus* (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1994), pp. 87-91.

Moholy-Nagy, who had championed the medium through his photographs, his photomontages, photograms, essays and books, produced while he was a member of the Bauhaus faculty. Walter Peterhans's philosophy was much closer to Renger-Patzsch's than to Moholy's, as Christopher Phillips suggested, noting that attitudes toward the medium had greatly changed from "radical experimentation" to an interest in the so-called "integrity of the object" by the time that Hannes Meyer had become the new director of the school.[392]

Peterhans, as Jeannine Fiedler relates, was a methodologist and a philosophical pedagogue of aesthetics who concentrated on teaching the basic foundations of formalism.[393] Fiedler indeed noted that Peterhans's work and teaching methods shared an affinity with the work of Renger-Patzsch: "In der Reihe neusachlicher Fotografen im Deutschland der zwanziger Jahre ragt Peterhans als der technisch brillanteste neben Perfektionisten wie Albert Renger-Patzsch und Hans Finsler aus."[394] She summarized Peterhans's vision as that of an analytically thinking and seeing "Techniker" whose work also incorporated elements of Surrealism as he combined different textures, surfaces, shapes, and tones into still-life arrangements of inanimate objects.[395]

But Peterhans's photographic pedagogy was not only based upon a formal impulse. It matched the school's desire to play a role in commercial culture. It is not mentioned in the literature that this desire, which became a more concrete aspect of

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[392] Phillips, *The New Vision*, p. 94.
[393] Jeannine Fiedler, "Walter Peterhans: Eine 'tabula-rische' Annäherung" in *Fotografie am Bauhaus*, pp. 85-90. Complicating this discussion is the fact that Hannes Meyer and many of the students at the Bauhaus were communist, an issue that will need further clarification at a later date. For more on this, see also Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919-1933* (Berlin: Bauhaus Archiv, Museum für Gestaltung, 2002).
[394] Ibid., p. 89. Translation: "In the line-up of Neue Sachlich photographers in Germany of the 1920s Peterhans stands out as one of the most brilliant "technicians" next to perfectionists like Albert Renger-Patzsch and Hans Finsler."
[395] Ibid., p. 89.

Bauhaus philosophy by 1923, coincided historically with the increased presence of American banks and businesses in Germany. With this increased cash influx, the industrial sector was viewed ever more intensively by Walter Gropius, Moholy-Nagy, and other guiding forces at the Dessau Bauhaus as the only chance for the school's economic survival. Anna Rowland wrote: "By the time of the 'Bauhaus Exhibition,' which ran from 15 August to 30 September 1923, Walter Gropius realized that the very survival of the school depended on making contact with the external world (das Werkleben), and in particular, finding industrial manufacturers for the models developed in the workshops."[396] Rowland notes that even though Gropius's stated aims were to begin to design for the everyday man and everyday consumption, their actual commissions were more specialized and in the service of specialty clientele. To begin to combat this and in attempt to insure the survival of the Bauhaus, Moholy-Nagy and Gropius re-conceived of the Bauhaus workshops as "Produktiv-Apparat," lending the atmosphere of the school an enhanced vision of itself as a place of conception for industry, the workshop of the artist as engineer.

In 1923, it was determined "…that Preliminary Course students should earn money by serial production of workshop products."[397] An interest in serial production at the Bauhaus was not unrelated to the Werkbund debate around *Typisierung* and in 1924, the Bauhaus participated in a Werkbund exhibition entitled "*Die Form*," a display counterpart to the journal organized near the time of the journal's inception. This took place at the height of Gropius's desire to try to come up with a successful formula for Bauhaus integration into industry. It is in this context too that we see the use of the serial

[396] Anna Rowland, "Business Management at the (Weimar Bauhaus," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 1, no. 3-4 (1988), p. 153.
[397] Ibid., p. 156.

format emerge with greater frequency as an expression of the desire to *appear* industrialized, to give the appearance of being able to satisfy clients on an industrial scale, even if this was generally not possible. "Here we see Gropius making a direct link between creating models for serial production and displaying them in rows, almost as if he believed in sympathetic magic: if hand-made craft products were displayed serially, then a manufacturer would be persuaded to produce them serially"[398]

The Bauhaus thus sought to merge traditionally opposed entities such as artist/engineer, art/commerce, and craft/industry on all levels including that of personal identity, workshop identity, display design, and in organizational and institutional philosophy. In this sense too, the school, and its series of minor successes and numerous failures in its attempts to achieve closer ties to industry through serial production and a serial aesthetic, may be seen as embodying the surrounding debates discussed in the last chapter concerning the place of the artist and the photographer in relation to industry. Frederic J. Schwartz points out the complex and often contradictory relationship that the Bauhaus had to consumer capitalism and the politics of the prevailing economic system. On the one hand he writes:

> Certainly the school started in a mood and mode that would have to be termed expressionist anticapitalism. Its second director Hannes Meyer was a committed socialist, one more interested in providing good products to those with little disposable income than in producing luxury items with a high profit margin. And many of the projects associated with the school and its avant-garde circuit were placed in the service of local Social Democratic authorities in order to provide public housing that would circumvent capitalist real estate speculation. But regardless of this radical or left-wing cachet, it is abundantly clear that in the years following the turn to 'art and technics,' the Bauhaus was as much implicated in consumer capitalism as it was its victim. It sought an alliance with industry; it was willing to work within the system, not outside or against it; it sought to use the everyday object and the market through which it moved as a site of cultural intervention, the consumer commodity as a vehicle for a utopia that

[398] Ibid., p. 165.

> was usually aesthetically and not politically or economically defined. However high flown the rhetoric or uncompromising the pose, the Bauhaus was in no way an ivory tower.[399]

And on the other hand, Schwartz is critical of the Bauhaus's position, stating in an earlier essay that: "If Bauhaus theory concentrated on the production of commodities, it did so with a willful blindness to the rest of the object's life: its distribution, exchange and consumption."[400]

But by 1928 Walter Gropius had left the Bauhaus and handed over the reigns to Hannes Meyer, who supported all efforts in design for industry and supported photography enthusiastically, adding it to the core curriculum by the following year. By 1929, any conflicted feelings about the photographer's participation in industry and commerce had greatly subsided. The large-scale exhibitions such as the *Deutsche Photographische Ausstellung* (1926), *Pressa* (1928), *Neue Wege der Photographie* (1928), *Film und Foto* (1929), and the Bauhaus emphasis upon industrial collaborations had all confirmed that. A (temporarily) stabilized economy based on industrialization must have reinforced this participation. Thus, as Peterhans assumed the first teaching post for photography at the Bauhaus, no longer only the object as photographic subject, but the *product* as photographic subject, whether for advertising, display, or documentation of design, was ready to assume a central place in practice. The field of *Sachfotografie*, with its emphasis upon a display syntax mimicking the industrial process, began to draw more attention.

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[399] Schwartz, "Utopia for Sale: The Bauhaus and Weimar Germany's Consumer Culture," Kathleen James-Chakraborty, ed., *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 120.

[400] Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 2.

Peterhans's students, interestingly many of them women, embraced his vision of the object as both formal and commercial subject matter. A number of his students, such as Grit Kallin, Ellen Auerbach, and Grete Stern, after their Bauhaus years, opened their own advertising studios. Rose-Carol Washton Long has added that "[b]ecause of its reputation for experimentation and enthusiastic embrace of 'modernity,' women continued to apply to the Bauhaus in great numbers. Many gravitated to photography not only because of its creative potential but also because commercial portraiture and advertising provided a way to make a living."[401] To this Schwartz added, in speaking of the Bauhaus students' involvement in the commercial arena: "They knew that everyday objects in an industrial economy were not only produced and consumed but also had to move through a system of distribution and exchange – the unruly realm of commerce. The history of the Bauhaus shows not only an awareness of this fact but often excitement about it, and occasionally even sophistication in dealing with it."[402]

One could argue that the students of Peterhans such as those mentioned above, along with Elsa Thiemann, Irene Bulhova, Irene Hoffmann, Gertrud Arndt, Naftali Rubinstein, Hinnerk Scheper, Walter Funkat, and others too numerous to list, produced more vibrant photographs than Peterhans himself. Still lifes of everyday objects abound in his students' work, often with an emphasis on repetition as a compositional device.[403] [**Figures 5.27 and 5.28**] Andreas Haus summarized Peterhans's influence as one that included an emphasis on not only formal composition and photographic chemistry, but

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[401] Rose-Carol Washton Long, "From Metaphysics to Material Culture: Painting and Photography at the Bauhaus," in Kathleen James-Chakraborty, ed., *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 60-61.
[402] Schwartz, "Utopia for Sale: The Bauhaus and Weimar Germany's Consumer Culture" in *Bauhaus Culture*, p. 120.
[403] See collected portfolio 1929 in 21 parts with 41 photographs by Gertrud Arndt, Irene Hoffmann, Fritz Kuhr, Hannes Schmidt**,** *Fotografie am Bauhaus*, pp. 98-99.

also an awareness of a certain preciousness and precision of materials.[404] Peterhans's precision and preciousness in handling and representing materials has been interpreted mostly as his specific brand of pedagogy, an almost scientific formalism. Fiedler, for instance, noted: "This look at 'structure, texture, facture and piled up objects,' as Moholy put it, would have had no abstract intrinsic value but was intended as a technical exercise."[405] But what Moholy-Nagy derogatorily referred to as "piled up objects" or the emphasis upon still life that Peterhans placed, Haus echoes was intended as "a technical exercise."

While this may be true, and Peterhans himself boasted that he was concerned with "concrete problems of photographic technique, not Moholyian false problems of photography with distorting lenses or without perspective," the sheer prevalence of the "piled up objects" as subject matter at the Bauhaus, in magazine and journal advertising, and in the vernacular imagery of "play" such as may be represented by Thiemann's images, asks that we consider its socio-cultural significance, not just its technical utility.[406] Maud Lavin, in her aforementioned essays on Weimar photography and design, pointed out that the Peterhans group (that is, Walter Peterhans and his students) is still today treated only formally in terms of "texture, form, and technical proficiency."[407]

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[404] Andreas Haus, "Fotografie am Bauhaus: Die Entwicklung eines Mediums," *Fotografie am Bauhaus: Die Entwicklung eines Mediums* (Berlin: Dirk Nishen and Bauhaus-Archiv, 1990), p. 151.
[405] Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend, eds., *Bauhaus* (Cologne: Könemann Verlag, 2000), p. 522.
[406] Peterhans, "The Present State of Photography," in Morris-Hambourg and Phillips, *The New Vision*, p. 173.
[407] Lavin, *Clean New World*, p. 64. In addition, Martin Jaeggi discusses this same material. Jaeggi, in a short essay for a 2004 coffee-table-style book on the photography of objects, re-confirmed the treatment of this subject matter and functional aesthetic as first and foremost a formal one concerned with beauty and "calculated perfection." He wrote: "Photographs reveal the charms of uniformity, the beauty of form produced a millionfold; they stage monotony as ornament and the rational world as a triumph of geometry, free of illusion. In the spirit of the formally beautiful functionality that he seeks to portray, the photographer becomes a visual engineer who strives to achieve coolly calculated perfection rather than expression. He lends an appearance of reality to the utopia of the perfect industrial material and the beautiful mass-manufactured form; the opposite of mind and matter seems sublated in the consumer

An expanded reading of Elsa Thiemann's work may be viewed also as a response to Lavin's point and as a way to understand its social implications.

On the level of social implications then, Thiemann's photographs unconsciously engage in a dialogue concerning the hidden, mysterious, and enigmatic relationship that constitutes Marxist commodity fetishism; a concept that was defined some fifty years prior to her work. Although by the early 1930s the concept of the commodity as fetish was still largely unrecognized by the public, it was a new awareness which was being discussed amongst German intellectuals especially after the 1923 founding of The Institute for Social Research. This awareness may assist here by provoking a deeper understanding of the social implications for these piled up, *nacheinander*, Tiller-Effect images.

Hieroglyphic Stuttering

Miriam Hansen's 1992 essay provided a provocative framework for a discussion of Thiemann's *Rätselfotos*. As hinted above, Hansen discussed the differing ways in which Kracauer, Benjamin, and Adorno understood Weimar images as forms of writing. Each began to understand images, filmic or photographic, social and cultural, as syntactical presentations strung together and in need of critical interpretation. This image-writing "refers to a form of inscription that is fixed and motivated in its discrete signs, yet is not immediately accessible and requires deciphering."[408] Hansen explains: "In his 1953 essay "Prolog zum Fernsehen" (Prologue to Television), Adorno speaks of

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commodity created by industry and commerce." See Martin Jaeggi, "Form and Material", *The Ecstasy of Things: From the Functional Object to the Fetish in 20th Century Photographs*, eds., Thomas Seelig and Urs Stahel, (Fotomuseum Winterthur Fotostiftung Schweiz, and Steidl, 2004), p. 16.

[408] Miriam Hansen, "Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer," *New German Critque* (Spring-Summer 1992), n. 56, p. 46.

mass culture as a 'language of imaging' (Bildersprache), 'pictographic writing' (Bilderschrift) or 'hieroglyphic writing' (Hieroglyphenschrift).'"[409] In terms of Kracauer, Hansen explains that he "reads the ephemeral, unnoticed and culturally marginalized phenomena of everyday life as configurations of writing, resorting to scriptural figures such as 'hieroglyph,' 'ornament,' 'rebus,' or 'arabesque.'"[410] Much has been said about the transposition of images into text and the idea of a photo-based literacy in the 1920s. This was echoed by Moholy-Nagy's now famous pronouncement that the illiterate person of the future would not be the one ignorant of the pen "but the one ignorant of photography."[411] Photo-based images, it was perceived, were becoming *the* language of the twentieth century. But what is perhaps the most interesting idea brought up by Hansen's article, is that it is not just the writing of images, but a writing that is hidden, enigmatic, ornamental, and in need of de-coding. Hansen points out that Adorno most explicitly picks up on the idea of images being encoded as *Rätseln* or enigmas: "Adorno joins writing and tropes of graphicity such as 'cipher' and 'hieroglyph' with the character of art as enigma (Rätsel). 'All works of art are scripts [*Schriften*]…that is, hieroglyphic ones whose code has been lost and whose gravity [*Gehalt*] not least depends on the fact that their code is missing.'"[412]

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[409] Ibid., p. 47. Hansen cites that Adorno's words here were originally published in "Prolog zum Fernsehen," *GS* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1977) 10.2, pp. 513-514.
[410] Ibid., p. 63.
[411] This Moholy-Nagy phrase is famously over and mis-quoted. It was written in 1932 and published in "A New Instrument of Vision," (Brno: Telehor, 1936); reprinted Kostelanetz, ed., *Moholy-Nagy* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1970), p. 54.
[412] Hansen, p. 57. See also Adorno *GS* 3, p. 189. It is worth noting that Hansen also deals with Derrida in her essay and points out that Derrida, in tracing "the history of the hieroglyph exemplifies the indissociable relationship between writing and power." He "traces the net that binds writing to the production, circulation and contestation of meaning and knowledge, and both to a 'caste' of intellectuals and institutions that ensure 'hegemony, whether [their] own or that of special interests.'" See Derrida, "Scribble (Writing-Power)," trans. Cary Plotkin, *Yale French Studies* 58 (1979), 117-47; 124; in Hansen, see pp. 43-73.

Thiemann's *Rätselfotos*, like hieroglyphs, operate on two levels: as simple visual puzzles and as unconscious attempts to work through the cultural anxieties surrounding rationalization and the fetishized human response to commodities. The subject matter of her "Schreibmaschinentasten," or "Typewriter Keys" returns us to the discussion of the iconography of the salaried masses in Chapter Three.[413] [**Figures 5.29 and 5.30**] The first figure, a close-up, presents, on one level, five rounded abstract forms seen from just below. The metallic forms decrease in focus as they recede from the lower foreground to the upper background of the print. Like the furniture in *Alice in Wonderland*, this typewriter's size has grown gigantic through the camera's lens in relation to the viewer's perspective. So, on one level Thiemann presents a playful image; the identity of a newly ubiquitous modern product rendered obscure while larger than life. On a second, hieroglyphic level, the exceedingly close attention to the keys of a typewriter asks not only to be deciphered in terms of what the image represents in "real life," but also in terms of what it may mean on a socio-cultural level as a near tidal wave of fast-paced rationalization of production and consumption washed over the nation. Minor objects have become major subjects as attention to consumption masked over more pressing national concerns. The repetition of the same objects in Thiemann's work allowed the viewer to become lost in a game by which the mind could be temporarily engaged in a kind of visual stuttering and seductive patterning.

In a related mode of thinking about the repeated or stuttered image as conveying encoded meaning, Rosalind Krauss famously wrote of photographic Surrealism as

[413] It is unclear whether or not Thiemann's typewriter image or typewriter keys image were intended for advertising, although the fact that figure 5.30 includes a legible label "Wanderer-Werke A.G. Chemnitz" makes it more likely as having advertising intentions. The image is labeled simply "1930s".

"nature convulsed into a kind of writing."[414] In "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" Krauss drew upon a discussion of syntax and "spacing." She focused on spacing in the linguistic sense and thus set up a distinction between Surrealist and Dadaist photographic practices. Seeing doubling and repetition as a trope in Surrealist photographic projects, Krauss provided the linguistic example of the baby's utterance of "pa" as having no real meaning in contrast to its doubling or its repetition as "papa," which acquires meaning and signals intention. Krauss argued that Dada photomontage, in contrast to Surrealist photography, incorporated spacing between montaged images, announcing its existence as an "interpretation or signification." Surrealism, on the other hand, sought seamlessness, employing spacing and doubling *within* the print itself.[415]

While Elsa Thiemann's photographs are *not* Dada and also *not* Surrealism (although they do employ Surrealist tendencies of estrangement and defamiliarization), they do depict the repeated object, lined up often in row after row, a syntactical exercise in repetition.[416] That Thiemann's photographs indicate the presence of a syntax is perhaps more obvious when they are considered as a series rather than taken photograph by photograph. What we see then is not only one or two serial compositions intended to be deciphered and "named" by the viewer, but *over one hundred* photographic compositions of repeated and/or rhythmically organized objects. If Thiemann's *Rätselbilder* were to "convulse" "into a kind of writing," they would probably produce a string of stutters rather than a coherent sentence. Like Krauss's example of the child's word acquisition in the utterance "pa" *versus* "pa-pa," Thiemann's images signal

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[414] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 107.
[415] Krauss, p. 107.
[416] Jeannine Fiedler, in *Fotografie am Bauhaus* noted that Walter Peterhans also had a strong affinity for Surrealism.

intention yet are frustrated in their production of *conscious* meaning. Language, in the form of the repetition of a syllable, the repetition of a word, or in this case, the repetition of an image, is not the same thing as a full sentence, an articulated idea. And thus Thiemann's photographs constitute a visual stutter, an arrested syntactical response to the crisis of rationalization.

This idea returns us to one of the key observations in this dissertation's introduction: the fact that Neue Sachlichkeit offered *not more* clarity and realism, as it is often proclaimed, but *less* clarity and realism. Its so-called "matter-of-factness" frequently resulted in distortion - framing out material relations, consumer-producer relations, and power-relations, while framing in the aestheticization and mystification of "the thing itself." As if she were consciously summarizing this last point, Krauss added: "At the very boundary of the image the camera frame which crops or cuts the represented element out of reality-at-large can be seen as another example of spacing. Spacing is the indication of a break in the simultaneous experience of the real, a rupture that issues into sequence. Photographic cropping is *always* experienced as a rupture in the continuous fabric of reality."[417]

If, as Krauss relayed, we should share Bertolt Brecht's "insistence on signification as a political act," a notion which was ultimately at stake in the previous chapter, then how can Thiemann's visual stuttering articulate meaning?[418] Her photographs of everyday objects are not advertising a particular product brand or corporation. As far as we know from the scant documents she left behind her *Rätselfotos* were not commissioned by a client. They do not necessarily intimate power structures or soften a

[417] Krauss, p. 115.
[418] Ibid., p. 104.

corporate image as we saw in Chapter Four. However they do internalize the heightened socio-cultural consciousness surrounding object-relations. Using photography's unique capacity for fragmentation and focus, Thiemann responds to her Bauhaus and cultural milieu with its institutionalized, popularized, Americanized, exhibited, and commercialized preoccupation with mass-produced goods and forms. Her series is arguably an internalization of this fetishistic relationship between consumer and commodity, between viewer and object. *Internalized* because Thiemann's work does not itself provoke a critique of capitalist rationalization, in the way that, say, some of the more overtly promotional examples in the previous chapter did. Instead, as a student of the Bauhaus and of her particular moment in photographic history, she represented the structures of commodity fetishism, transforming it into a language, a text of endlessly repeated, and sometimes interwoven, images. Her work points to Germany's desire to look away from external and social circumstances and to look inward instead with a myopic eye and an abstracted view of "reality." But this is what makes her photographs interesting. If we take Thiemann's work at face value, as she proposed it, as mere "gaming," her photographs lose their charge and become, at best, simple, playful exercises in optics, and at worst, mannerism and "Rengering."

The Object: Estrangement, Satire, or Salvation

The Surrealist photographer's relation to the everyday object was one of estrangement, revealing the uncanny in the most familiar of things. The Dada photomontagist's relation to the everyday object was one of satire, employing magazine representations of the newest commodities on the market as a tool of social criticism and

a means to jar viewers into producing new meaning. The Neue Sachlichkeit photographer's relation to the everyday object was perhaps even more complex. The object offered salvation. After war and financial and political instability, everyday objects provided a foundation in concrete things and consumer goods; things that one could put faith in as opposed to lofty notions and revolutionary visual slogans. Forks and cars, collars and cigarettes, dancing legs and typewriters were suddenly interesting for their form, their newness, their commodity character, their sobriety and clarity. As graspable, everyday forms they could *sich verstecken* or hide all of the instabilities, offering escapism into the so-called "real."

Just as industry and its promise of bountiful products was being viewed by many as having healing properties, the notion of a "return" to the "object" in visual art was couched similarly in terms of cultural healing and salvation. As early as 1921, Wilhelm Hausenstein, an art critic and cultural historian, wrote of the "salvation of the individual in the object."[419] Neue Sachlichkeit, with its move away from the abstract emotionalism of Expressionism and toward a grasping of the object, was infused with a similar healing power, as if to insinuate that art itself had been "sick" and could now be healed by attending to the real, the everyday, the thing itself, the commodity.

As the Frankfurt School writers would explain, salvation and clarity through objects provided a visual system of false consciousness, claiming detail and pattern, close-up and photographic tangibility as realism, while masking out the complexities of difference, the reality of heterogeneity, corporate responsibility, and aspects of social and economic uncertainty. In a pedagogic, social, and cultural atmosphere in which the "object" or the "thing," the *Sache* or the *Typenform*, is so highly regarded, attended to,

[419] Hausenstein is quoted in Peter Selz, *German Realism of the Twenties: The Artist as Social Critic*, p. 29.

and infused with spiritual, philosophical, and even nationalistic meaning (as in the case of Renger-Patzsch and the *Werkbund* in its journal *Die Form*), it can be no surprise that young photographers like Elsa Thiemann, aware of her surroundings, invested significant amounts of time, energy, and feeling into the photographing of objects.

Thiemann's work is a curious blend of Surrealism's estrangement from the world and Realism's close-up engagement with its details. Forks and spoons, typewriters and escalator stairs, egg cartons and cheese graters, the needles of a gramophone, the steel girders of a railway underpass, and the holes of a kitchen strainer are all transformed by their proximity to the lens and by virtue of their ordered organization and state of being, cut off from a larger picture, literally and figuratively. [**Figures 5.31 and 5.32]** Common objects are estranged from us by the camera's propensity for pattern. Her *Rätselfotos* offer an example of this next generation's very tenuous response to *sachlichkeit* and, as such, act as a *temporary* conclusion to an interest in repetition, systems of organization and pattern, the subject matter of industrial products of the everyday and industrial structures and processes; a penchant that would be not only co-opted by the National Socialists, but then would be rescued and revived by a generation of photographers starting out in the 1950s such as Bernd und Hilla Becher. We see in the work of Thiemann (and some of her fellow-students) the "piling up" and ordering of keys and bananas, glassware and newspapers, shoes and pipes. The camera pays attention to them as if they had something important to reveal, some secret to be disclosed through their act of congregation on the page. Yes, a photographic experimentalism and interest in materials is central, but it is as if the photographer has turned away from the human

subject and toward the wisdom of the inanimate in order to a) escape from the human condition or b) to help grasp more physically the human condition.

Chapter VI

Concluding Remarks

An insignificant advertisement toward the back of *Die Reklame* (April 1928) provides unlikely punctuation for a dissertation. The photograph presents a bald-headed, round-spectacled man holding a camera chest-high while floating toward the viewer above the mechanical entanglements of a factory floor. [**Figure 6.1**] This image of a crisply dressed, white-collared photographer, one Herr Carl Brunotte of Düsseldorf, however, does not act as an exclamation point here, but instead as a postscript. He offers: "I make industry photographs, re-touches, stereotypes – [for] advertising and newspapers." The complexity of the factory floor lies behind Carl (interestingly his name spelled with an Americanized "C" rather than a more Germanic "K"), its gears spinning, spindles whirling and protruding, and parts spontaneously proliferating. The image is an art-conscious composition of circular forms. It layers photographer as interpreter and interloper between industry and camera, and camera between photographer and viewer. This friendly-enough human face, together with his mechanical partner in business, offer to organize, present, interpret, and sell industry itself. The image puts forth the camera as commercial tool for the re-presentation of industry, and the photographer as "Ich" or Self, salesman, artist, engineer, and advertiser all rolled into one. As a postscript, it also summarizes some of the spaces and questions that have been opened up by these chapters, including questions of transnational photographic exchange, the commercial role of the photographer, the political subtext of Neue Sachlichkeit and industrial photography, and the spaces for further investigation of lesser-known or unknown

photographers once the field of questioning has been opened to consider more breakdown between art and commerce.

This dissertation began with the suggestion that Neue Sachlichkeit photography was significantly more international, commercial, and political in scope than has been previously understood. As a stylistic category the term has delimited specifically German paintings and photographs, depicting objects and people, machines and nature with the "objectivity," "new realism," "sobriety," and "clarity" of the 1920s and 1930s. Its language-based and conceptual connection to "objectivity" was questioned even as its historical coincidence with American economic involvement in German industry was brought to light. This dissertation concludes with what is hopefully a more nuanced understanding of this period; one that is complicated by the idea of culture as an export and the impact of trans-national exchange, corporate ideology, and consumer desire. It points out the central role of photography and of American-German relations in the history of twentieth century capitalism. It looks toward a new history of images that breaks down distinctions between art and commerce in order to see how images are used. It essentially asks us to re-think what we *think* we already know about photography (and photographers, known figures such as Renger-Patzsch and unknown ones such as Elsa Thiemann).

Old, New, Next: Photographic Resistance and Persistence

In the late 1980s (when I was deciding to pursue art history), a "New Art History" was emergent, pointing its finger at the "Old Art History" with its connoisseurship and confidence, its expertise and stylistic proclamations. The New seemed to offer a

broadened array of questions inspired by philosophy, theory, psychoanalysis, feminism, and all of the methodological "categories" that may now be found in any art history survey textbook. Now, more than twenty years later, are we still in the "New Art History" phase? If not, then what is the new, new art history? Where do we go (or are we already going) after "new"? The magnetic pull I felt toward the history of art was absolutely rooted in this burgeoning New Art History, rendering the field both daunting in its vastness of new possibilities and exciting for the same reason. And yet, as much as I value my every art experience and remain invested in "art" as a category, an object, a thing, a process, a way of life, I find that it remains bound to a lingering emphasis upon stylistic boundaries, hierarchies, nationalisms, privileging of the visual over the many other factors at play in a composition, assumptions regarding capitalism as a structural given, and the perpetuation of various forms of elitism.

The History of Photography is both separate and inseparable from old and new Art History. Hence many of the questions asked in this dissertation stem from the categories and approaches both established by a more traditional art history and challenged by the new. And yet photography offers a special opportunity for the art historian due to its resistance to all of the lingering emphases and categorizations mentioned above. It is this resistance, or what we might call the antagonistic nature of photography, that may lead to a new level of interdisciplinary inquiry. Photography partakes in stylistic endeavors while infrequently adhering to them. It privileges the visual – the eye – and its desire for aesthetic pleasure, while betraying "the real" and therefore pointing toward the flaw in the system and toward the unseen factors at play in the production of an image. Photography has battled for hierarchical status and yet its

umbilical tie to industrialization and mass (re) production renders it vulnerable (and accessible) to open-season investigation and interrogation from all fields: economics, politics, the history of science and of advertising, sociology, just to name a few.

Photography, its conception riddled with nationalistic competition and international exchange, is also well situated to provide a platform for questioning nation-based histories of practice and meaning-production. Its hybrid status (chemical and natural, mechanical and human, artistic and industrial) places it potentially at the center of a new dialog concerning the assumptions posited by the history of capitalism and the ideological demands and social implications of that paradigm. Photography and the writing of its history offers itself as a template, situating alternative questions regarding power-relations, economic impact upon image-production and social impact in turn enacted by images, international exchanges and foreign relations as visual manifestations, and the importance of re-reading histories and existing reception. This is just to offer a few ideas to be pursued in a "new, new art history" inspired by photographic resistance and multi-disciplinary persistence. Questions such as *how* photography is used, by *whom* and for *what* systems, rather than how photography is or is not art, may become more central to this dialogue, one which could rattle positivistic assumptions regarding nationalism, stylistic exchange, and medium or genre-specificity.

The visual history of photographic production and reception is indeed all consuming. As a field of study it will become even more interdisciplinary and transnational in its scope and boundless in its effect upon the histories of art, commerce, and industry. It is my hope that these histories will collide with more frequency. This dissertation therefore represents a single cog in the machine of a history yet to be written.

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