

ment of formal elements absorbs nearly all the impetus of motion. The way forward from here is to create movement in space without recourse to the development of formal elements in their own right.

Translated by Caroline Fawkes

1. The term "new vision" does not refer to any organized photographic movement. *The New Vision* was the title of the 1930 American translation of Moholy-Nagy's book, *Von Material zu Architektur* (1929), which summarized Moholy's famous Bauhaus preliminary course. In the United States, "new vision" has generally come to designate the kind of experimental photography that Moholy and other avant-garde photographers advocated.
2. The Bauhaus, established in Weimar in 1919 by Walter Gropius, encouraged its students to seek a new union of art, design, and technology. Moholy-Nagy, who taught the year long preliminary course and directed the metal workshop in the years 1923–28, was by far the most outspoken advocate of photography and film among the Bauhaus faculty. It was thanks to his example that a number of Bauhaus students took up photography in the mid-1920s. In 1926 the Bauhaus was moved to Dessau, and in 1932 to Berlin.
3. Walter Ruttmann (1887–1941) was a German filmmaker known in the early 1920s for his abstract films. He received wide acclaim for his experimental urban documentary, *Berlin, Symphony of a City* (1927).
4. Viking Eggeling (1880–1925), a Swedish-born experimental filmmaker active in Germany in the early 1920s, was best known for his *Diagonal Symphony* (1924). Hans Richter (1888–1976) was a German filmmaker whose experimental *Rhythmus 21* (1921) attracted considerable attention. Richter was one of the editors of the avant-garde Berlin review *G*, and in 1929 organized the film section of the Stuttgart *Film und Foto* exhibition.

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY

UNPRECEDENTED PHOTOGRAPHY

In 1927 the first volume of the photographic annual *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* featured two short statements by László Moholy-Nagy and Albert Renger-Patzsch on the nature of photography and the paths it might take. Their opinions, which may be read here and in a later selection (see p. 104), contrasted sharply. The unmistakable division between Moholy's experimental attitude and Renger-Patzsch's commitment to photographic realism prepared the ground for the ensuing debates in Germany about avant-garde photography.

In "Unprecedented Photography" Moholy-Nagy presents photography as a modernist visual medium. He argues that it represents a historic mutation in the visual arts, reflecting the fact that "this century belongs to light." The immediate task of the photographer consists in developing a true "language of photography" entirely from within its own range of optical and chemical possibilities. Emphasizing the need to move beyond traditional forms of representation, Moholy points out some of the new experimental techniques which photographers might begin to explore.

Original publication: László Moholy-Nagy, "Die beispiellos Fotografie," in *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* (Berlin, 1927), pp. x–xi; also published in *i10* (Amsterdam) 1, no. 1 (1927), pp. 114–17.

Until now, all the essays and commentaries about the paths and aims of photography have been following a false trail. Again and again, the question singled out from all the various possible approaches as the most essential has been that of the relationship between art and photography.

But the *fact* of photography does not grow or diminish in value according to whether it is classified as a method of recording reality or as a medium of scientific investigation or as a way of preserving vanished events, or as a basis for the process of reproduction, or as "art."

The photographic process has no precedent among the previously known visual media. And when photography relies on its own possibilities, its results, too, are without precedent. Just one of its features—the range of infinitely subtle gradations of light and dark that capture the phenomenon of light in what seems to be an almost immaterial

radiance—would suffice to establish a new kind of seeing, a new kind of visual power.

But the subject of photography involves infinitely more. In today's photographic work, the first and foremost issue is to develop an integrally photographic approach that is derived purely from the means of photography itself; only after a more or less exact photographic language has been developed will a truly gifted photographer be able to elevate it to an "artistic" level. The prerequisite for this is: no dependence on traditional forms of representation! Photography has no need for that. No ancient or contemporary painting can match the singular effectiveness available to photography. Why the "painterly" comparisons? Why Rembrandt—or Picasso—imitations?

One can say without utopian extravagance that the near future will bring a great transvaluation in the goals photography sets itself. The investigation is already under way, although frequently along separate paths:

Conscious use of light-dark relationships. Activity of brightness, passivity of darkness. Inversions of the relationships between positive and negative values.

Introduction of greater contrasts.

Use of the texture and structure (facture)¹ of various materials.

Unknown forms of representation.

The areas that have yet to be examined can be established in line with the new elements of photographic practice, as follows:

1. Unfamiliar views made by positioning the camera obliquely, or pointing it up or down.

2. Experiments with various lens systems, changing the relationships familiar to normal vision, occasionally distorting them to the point of unrecognizability. (Concave and convex mirrors, funhouse mirror shots, etc., were the first steps.) This gives rise to a paradox: the mechanical imagination.

3. Encircling the object (a further development of stereo photography on *one* plate).

4. New kinds of camera construction. Avoidance of the foreshortening effect of perspective.

5. Adapting experiences with X-ray—aperspectivity and penetration—to the uses of photography.

6. Cameraless photographs, made by casting light on the sensitive surface.

7. True color sensitivity.

Only a work that combines all possible interrelationships, the synthesis of these elements, will be recognized as true photography.

The development of photography is receiving a powerful impetus from the new culture of light, which is already highly cultivated in many places.

This century belongs to light. Photography is the first means of giving tangible shape to light, though in a transposed and—perhaps just for that reason—almost abstract form.

Film goes even further—generally one might say that photography culminates in film. The development of a new dimension in optical experience is achieved to a still greater degree by film.

But the spadework accomplished by still photography is indispensable for a developed cinema. A peculiar interrelationship: the master taking instruction from the apprentice. A reciprocal laboratory: photography as an investigatory field for film, and film as a stimulus for photography.

The issues raised by cinema provide lessons that serve as guiding principles for the practice of photography and can enrich the photographic results themselves: changing light intensities and light tempos, variations in spatial motion engendered by light, the extinguishing and flashing forth of the whole organism of motion, the triggering of latent functional charges in us, in our brain. Chiaroscuro. Light-palpability, light-movement. Light-distance and light-proximity. Penetrating and cumulative light rays.—The strongest visual experiences that can be granted to man.

Translated by Joel Agee

1. "Facture" was the term used by many constructivist artists and critics to refer to the specific visual characteristics of a material's surface texture.

ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH

AIMS

After serving in the German army during the First World War, Albert Renger-Patzsch (1897–1966) studied chemistry at the Dresden Technische Hochschule, and in 1920 opened his own photography studio in Bad Harzburg. His meticulous photographs emphasizing the formal aspects of plants, architecture, and machines quickly attracted attention. Thanks to the success of his 1928 picture book *The World Is Beautiful*, Renger-Patzsch was by the end of the decade one of the most influential and widely exhibited photographers in Germany.

Renger-Patzsch championed a style of precise, ultra-objective photography that in some ways ran parallel to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement in German painting of the twenties. Although he believed, like Moholy-Nagy, that photography must develop its own, specific means of expression, Renger-Patzsch was convinced that “the secret of a good photograph resides in its realism.” Thus he found little value in the work of either old-style pictorial photographers or contemporary experimentalists like Moholy-Nagy. When in 1927 *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* published short statements by Renger-Patzsch (reproduced below) and Moholy-Nagy (see p. 83), the stage was set for a much wider discussion of modern photography which other voices were quick to join.

Original publication: Albert Renger-Patzsch, “Ziele,” *Das Deutsche Lichtbild*, 1927, p. xviii.

Photography has only recently come of age. Emulating the visual arts through the medium of photography is still the endeavor of many gifted photographers, and, today no less than in the years of photography’s infancy, success in this vein is still the criterion of artistic style in photography.

Art is at a turning point. Since the turn of the century, there has been a prevailing effort to avoid worn paths in order to discover *new laws*.

Artistic expression played a significant role, though not the most important one, in the art of earlier epochs. Historical, religious, literary impulses predominated, although the emphasis shifted at various

times. Always lagging behind these trends was: photography. Photography has its *own* technique and its *own* means. Trying to use these means to achieve painterly effects brings the photographer into conflict with the truthfulness and unequivocalness of his medium, his material, his technique. And whatever similarity to works of pictorial art can be attained is, at best, purely superficial.

The secret of a good photograph, which can possess artistic qualities just as a work of visual art can, resides in its realism. For rendering our impressions of nature, of plants, animals, the works of architects and sculptors, and the creations of engineers, photography offers us a most reliable tool. We still don’t sufficiently appreciate the opportunity to capture the magic of material things. The structure of wood, stone, and metal can be shown with a perfection beyond the means of painting. As photographers, we can express the concepts of height and depth with wonderful precision, and in the analysis and rendering of the fastest motion, photography is the undisputed master.

To do justice to modern technology’s rigid linear structure, to the lofty gridwork of cranes and bridges, to the dynamism of machines operating at one thousand horsepower—only photography is capable of that. What those who are attached to the “painterly” style regard as photography’s defect—the *mechanical* reproduction of form—is just what makes it superior to all other means of expression. The absolutely correct rendering of form, the subtlety of tonal gradation from the brightest highlight to the darkest shadow, impart to a technically expert photograph the magic of experience.

Let us therefore leave art to the artists, and let us try to use the medium of photography to create photographs that can endure because of their *photographic* qualities—without borrowing from art.

Translated by Joel Agee

ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH

JOY BEFORE THE OBJECT

In the following essay, which appeared in the Berlin art journal *Das Kunstblatt*, Albert Renger-Patzsch (see p. 104) develops his idea of photographic realism as the only legitimate path for serious photographers. At this time his sharpest criticism was still directed at the pictorial photographers, who remained quite active in Germany. Renger-Patzsch's call for photographers to "look at things anew" did not, however, signal an approval of experimental photographic techniques. Before long his main attack would shift its target to avant-gardists like Moholy-Nagy, who in his opinion relied too heavily on visual devices developed by abstract painting.

Original publication: Albert Renger-Patzsch, "Die Freude am Gegenstand," *Das Kunstblatt* (Berlin), no. 1 (1928), p. 19.

Photography has been in existence for nearly a hundred years. The country-fair magicians have become a group of serious professionals.

Through films and illustrated magazines, photography exerts a tremendous influence on the masses. The photographic industry is developing at an American tempo and we are in possession of a splendid tool.

It strikes us as all the more peculiar, then, that so-called "artistic photography" still lies aslumber like Sleeping Beauty, and that pictures in the style of an 1890 *Gartenlaube*¹ are still accorded the highest recognition at the great international exhibitions.

Due to its mechanical processes, photography is without doubt the most refractory artistic medium; and at a time when photography was technically still very unfinished, the most obvious course of action was to engage in a race with painting and to produce photos in which one tried to feign "art," ruining one's own technique with an alien method.

To a photographer who remains within the limits prescribed for photographic technique, the mechanical procedure of his medium, the swiftness of its execution, the objectivity of its representations, and the possibility of arresting static moments of fast and even the

fastest movements—these represent the greatest and most obvious advantages over every other medium of expression.

The rigid adherence of "artist-photographers" to the model provided by painting has always been damaging to photographic achievement. There is an urgent need to examine old opinions and look at things from a new viewpoint. There must be an increase in the joy one takes in an object, and the photographer should become fully conscious of the splendid fidelity of reproduction made possible by his technique.

Nature, after all, is not so poor that she requires constant improvement. There is still room within that rectangle of shining bromide paper for new spatial and planar effects; many things still await the one who will recognize their beauty. The unretouched photos reproduced here are efforts in this direction.

Translated by Joel Agee

1. *Die Gartenlaube* was a popular magazine aimed at a middle-class audience, and known for its sentimental illustrations.

ERNÖ KALLAI
and ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH

POSTSCRIPT TO PHOTO-INFLATION/
BOOM TIMES

A wave of German exhibitions and publications devoted to photography reached its crest in 1929 with the international *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart. Organized by the German Werkbund, an influential association of architects and designers, it presented about one thousand works vividly demonstrating the "new vision" in photography and graphic design. The exhibition coincided with the publication of two important books, *Foto-Auge* (Photo-eye) by Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, and *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* (Here comes the new photographer!) by Werner Gräff.

At just this moment opposition to the experimental wing of "new vision" photography was consolidating, however, as can clearly be seen from the following statements which appeared in *bauhaus* magazine in late 1929. Although unsigned, the opening remarks regarding "photo-inflation" are almost certainly the work of Ernő Kallai (see p. 94), who during 1928–29 was the editor of *bauhaus*. It was no doubt at Kallai's invitation that the photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch (see p. 104) contributed his acerbic commentary on the Stuttgart exhibition.

Original publication: *bauhaus* (Dessau) 3, no. 4 (October–December 1929), p. 20.

Postscript to Photo-inflation

That endless series of exhibitions and publications has moved abroad for a while. Let us quickly take advantage of the reprieve and come to our senses before it's too late.* It's time to say some things which no one wanted to hear at the peak of the commotion. You will perhaps argue that *bauhaus* too has brought out a photo issue. Correct. To be

* We have just received the terrifying news that the Werkbund's photo exhibition has suddenly reappeared, this time in Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum. Run! Flee while you can!

honest, by now we're almost regretting it. Although our publication did not amount to a jubilant transfiguration of photography as the only visual experience conducive to human happiness, as was claimed in other places—from highly serious design publications to gaily colored magazines. We tried to be judicious and critical. A resolve that, in view of the photo-inflation, cannot be carried out emphatically enough. Hence the following addenda.

Boom Times

still prevail in the world of photography, and everyone's in a hurry to bring in the harvest, even though the yield is scarce and of meager quality. These people display a remarkable haste and industry, and the only thing "modern" about this business is the method by which it is transacted.

For photography is already one hundred years old, and there is no need for haste. But the way exhibitions are managed today, with everyone worried that he'll miss the right moment and fail to profit from the boom before it's over—all this has an incomparably comical effect. But the general rush and haste has been accompanied by a confusion of ideas that gives one pause.

In the fashionable photograph—with a few exceptions—affection and craving for originality are coupled with a lack of aesthetic standards and of craft. A blatant example: the Stuttgart exhibition, a selection of photographic ephemera in pretentious get-up. Not the kind of thing that should be shown in such an exhibition, namely, a cross section of international photography, measured by the best that can be found between the poles. Instead, it was a random heap of photos with only one common denominator: their mediocrity. In place of quality, quantity. Proof: the almost unanimous enthusiasm of the press. The recipe for success: shoot from above or below. Enormous enlargements or reductions, the trash can as the most satisfying motif. Send negative prints to the press, the monster eats everything. (Motive: new, interesting visual effects.) Take pictures at night, underexposure has the most interesting effects. And then: let chance work for you, it'll do the job. That's how modern photos are made, health food for magazines and conversational fodder for the culture-mongers, to the joy of their creators.

Translated by Joel Agee