

# FROM BAUHAUS TO BUENOS AIRES



# GRETE STERN AND HORACIO COPPOLA

**FROM BAUHAUS TO BUENOS AIRES**



Plate 1



Plate 2

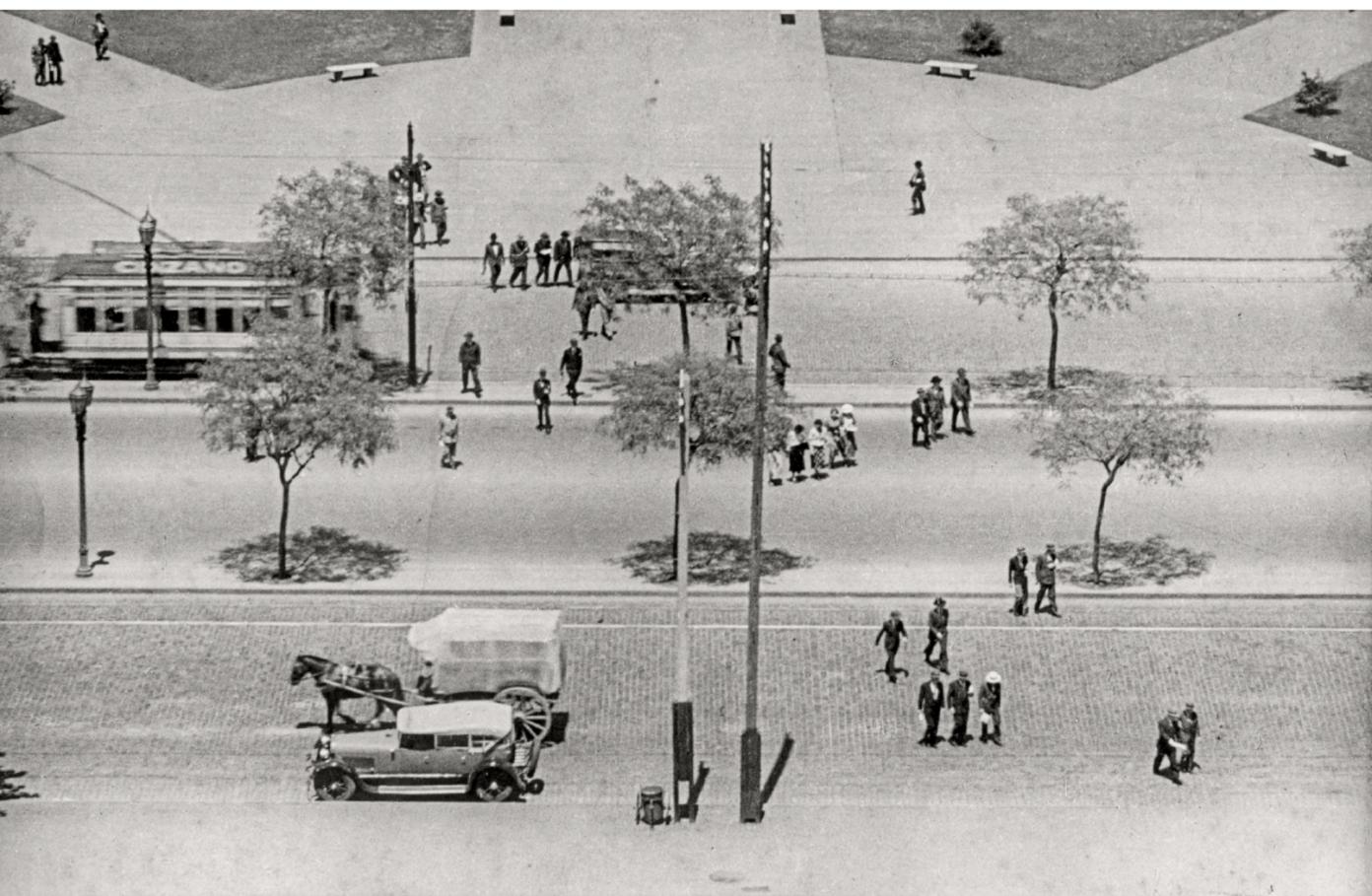


Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5

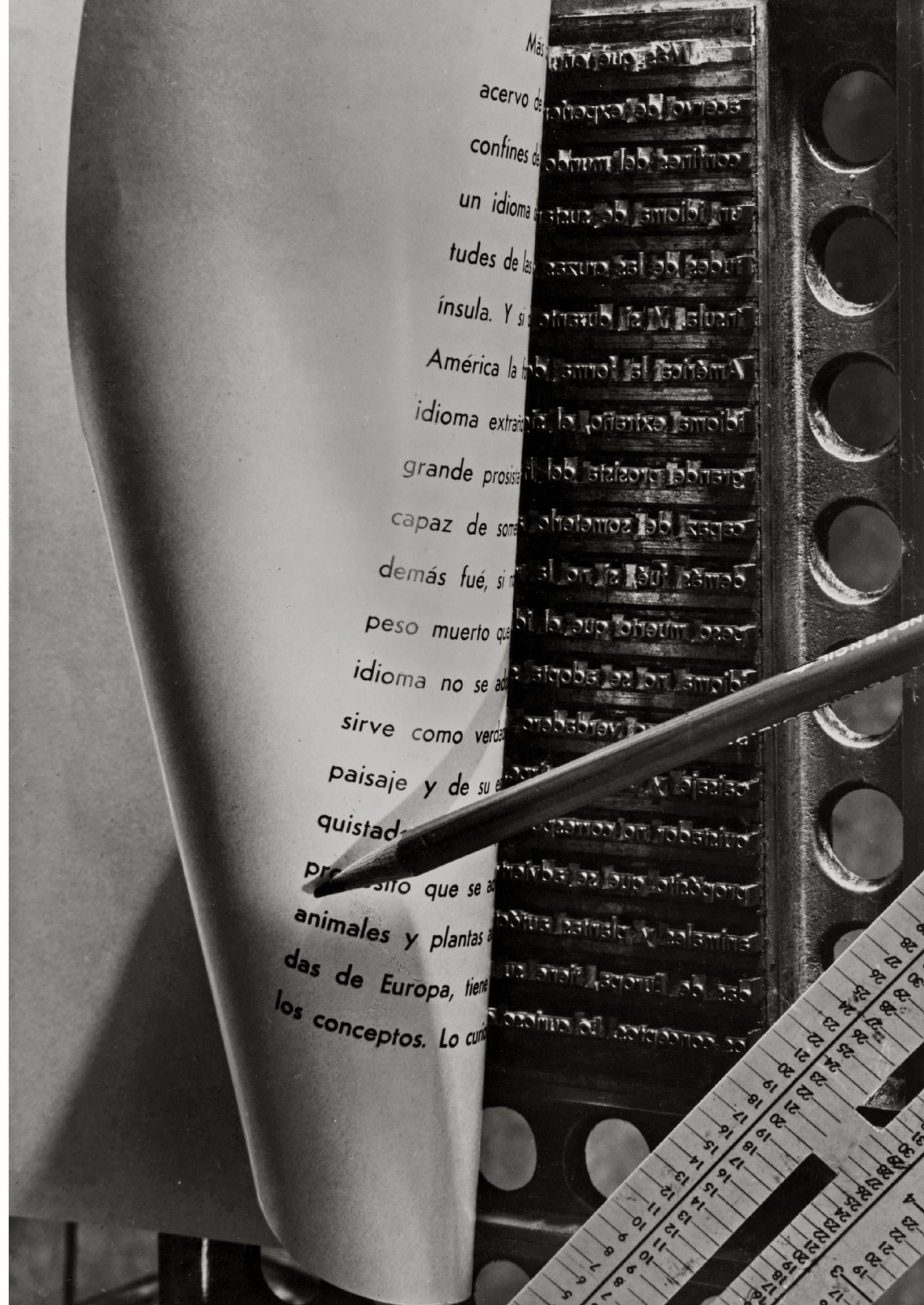


Plate 6

Plate 7



Plate 8





Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12

ROXANA MARCOCI and SARAH HERMANSON MEISTER  
with an essay by Jodi Roberts

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

**FROM BAUHAUS TO BUENOS AIRES  
GRETE STERN AND HORACIO COPPOLA**

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## Lenders to the Exhibition

Estate of Horacio Coppola, Buenos Aires  
The Art Institute of Chicago  
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern  
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid  
Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
The New York Public Library  
Tate, London

Collection Anna Gamazo de Abelló, Madrid  
Collection Sergio Alberto Baur, Buenos Aires  
Collection Eduardo F. Costantini, Buenos Aires  
Collection Alexis Fabry, Paris  
Collection Jorge Helft and Marion Eppinger, Buenos Aires  
Collection Helen Kornblum  
Collection Raul Naon, Buenos Aires  
Collection Leticia and Stanislas Poniatowski  
Collection Diran Sirinian, Buenos Aires  
Private collection, Boston  
Private collection, Buenos Aires  
Private collection, London  
Private collection, Paris  
Private collection

Eric Franck Fine Art, London  
Galería Jorge Mara-La Ruche, Buenos Aires  
Galerie Berinson, Berlin  
Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York  
Michael Hoppen Gallery, London

## Foreword

Glenn D. Lowry

The Museum of Modern Art is proud to present *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola*, the first major exhibition of two influential figures of avant-garde photography, film, and graphic design who established themselves as visionary modernists on both sides of the Atlantic. As a survey of the individual accomplishments and parallel developments from the late 1920s through the early 1950s of the careers of the German-born Grete Stern (1904–1999) and the Argentine Horacio Coppola (1906–2012), the exhibition presents many works that have never been shown before in the United States or elsewhere, while the accompanying catalogue offers an exploration of the trajectories of each artist as well as an in-depth study of their collaborations.

Stern's and Coppola's paths first crossed in 1932 at the Bauhaus in Berlin, where they were students of the acclaimed teacher and photographer Walter Peterhans. Stern had already established a pioneering commercial studio, ringl + pit, with her friend Ellen (Rosenberg) Auerbach, and Coppola had begun groundbreaking experimentations with photography in his native Argentina. With the rise of the Third Reich, Stern and Coppola fled Germany, first for London and then Buenos Aires, where amid a vibrant milieu of both Argentine and émigré artists and intellectuals they revolutionized graphic design, photography, and film-based practices. Advancing the ideas of the New Vision in which they had immersed themselves in Europe, they achieved stunning results. Coppola captured the unique character of Buenos Aires from the city's center to its outskirts in his 1936 *Buenos Aires*, now recognized as a landmark photo-book, and in his contemporary experimental film, *Así Nació el Obelisco (The Birth of the Obelisk)*. Stern's forward-thinking *Sueños (Dreams)*, a series of photomontages she contributed to a popular women's magazine, incisively comment on women's relationship to a patriarchal social order with an urgency and surreal wit that still resonates today.

Considering the interdisciplinary works and cosmopolitan contexts of these two significant artists, *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires* makes a major contribution to the histories of interwar modernism and the international avant-garde.

After its presentation in New York, the exhibition will be shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. This is possible only because the exhibition's lenders (listed opposite) have been willing to part with important works for a substantial period of time, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

The Museum would like to thank Roxana Marcoci, Senior Curator, and Sarah Meister, Curator, Research and Collections, Department of Photography, for skillfully and thoughtfully organizing this important exhibition and catalogue, assisted by the fine staff throughout the Museum. Deserving particular mention is Jodi Roberts, who came to MoMA to work on other projects but whose expertise in regards to the careers of both Stern and Coppola, as is evidenced by her essay here, was invaluable. We are deeply grateful to the estate of Horacio Coppola for its kind cooperation. For their most generous support of the exhibition, we extend our warmest appreciation to our funders: The Modern Women's Fund, The David Berg Foundation, the Consulate General of the Argentine Republic in New York, MoMA's Annual Exhibition Fund, and The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, as well as to the John Szarkowski Publications Fund, which made this publication possible. Finally, I would like to thank the munificent Committee on Photography, who, often in partnership with the Latin American and Caribbean Fund, has facilitated numerous important acquisitions of work by Stern and Coppola during the past decade, helping to make possible this thrilling journey from the Bauhaus to Buenos Aires in the company of two extraordinary artists.

**Grete Stern Plates**

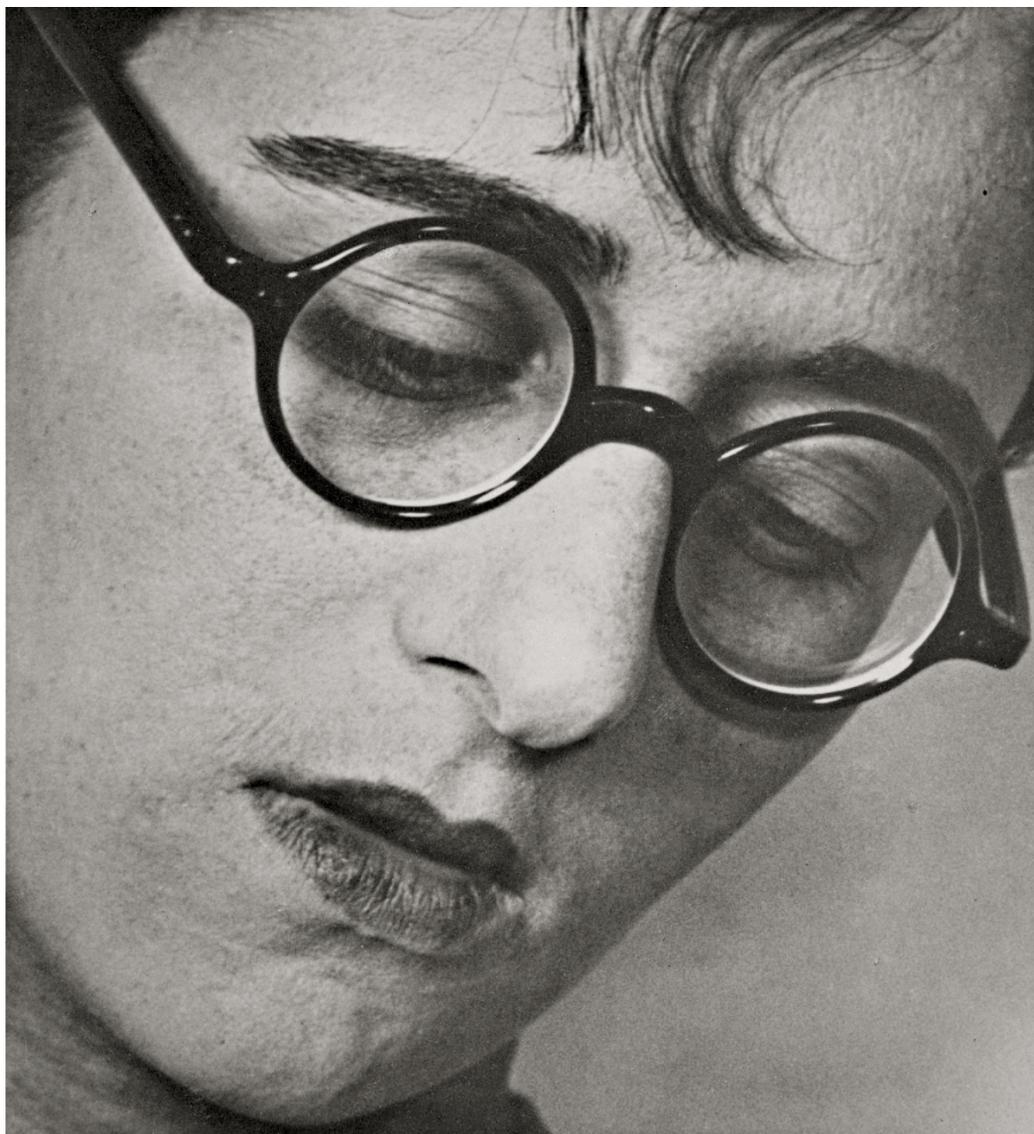


Plate 13  
ringl + pit  
*ringl mit Brille (ringl with Glasses)*. 1929  
Gelatin silver print, 6 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (17.4 x 15.5 cm)  
Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany



Plate 14  
ringl + pit  
*Ellen Auerbach*. c. 1928  
Gelatin silver print, 8 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 6" (21.2 x 15.3 cm)  
Galerie Berinson, Berlin



Plate 28  
 ringl + pit  
*Dents*. c. 1934  
 Gelatin silver print, 13 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (35.2 x 22.7 cm)  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ford Motor Company Collection,  
 Gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell



Plate 29  
 ringl + pit  
*Komol*. 1931  
 Gelatin silver print, 14 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (35.9 x 24.4 cm)  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ford Motor Company Collection,  
 Gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell



Plate 36  
 ringl + pit  
*Rotbart (Red Beard)*. 1931  
 Gelatin silver print, 5 3/4 x 8 13/16" (13.7 x 22.7 cm)  
 The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Plate 37  
 ringl + pit  
*Seifenlauge (Soapsuds)*. 1930  
 Gelatin silver print, 7 x 6 1/4"  
 (17.8 x 15.9 cm)  
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
 Acquired through the generosity of Roxann Taylor



Plate 38  
 ringl + pit  
*ringl in Tub*. 1931  
 Gelatin silver print, 8 7/8 x 6 1/4" (22.6 x 15.5 cm)  
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Latin American and Caribbean Fund

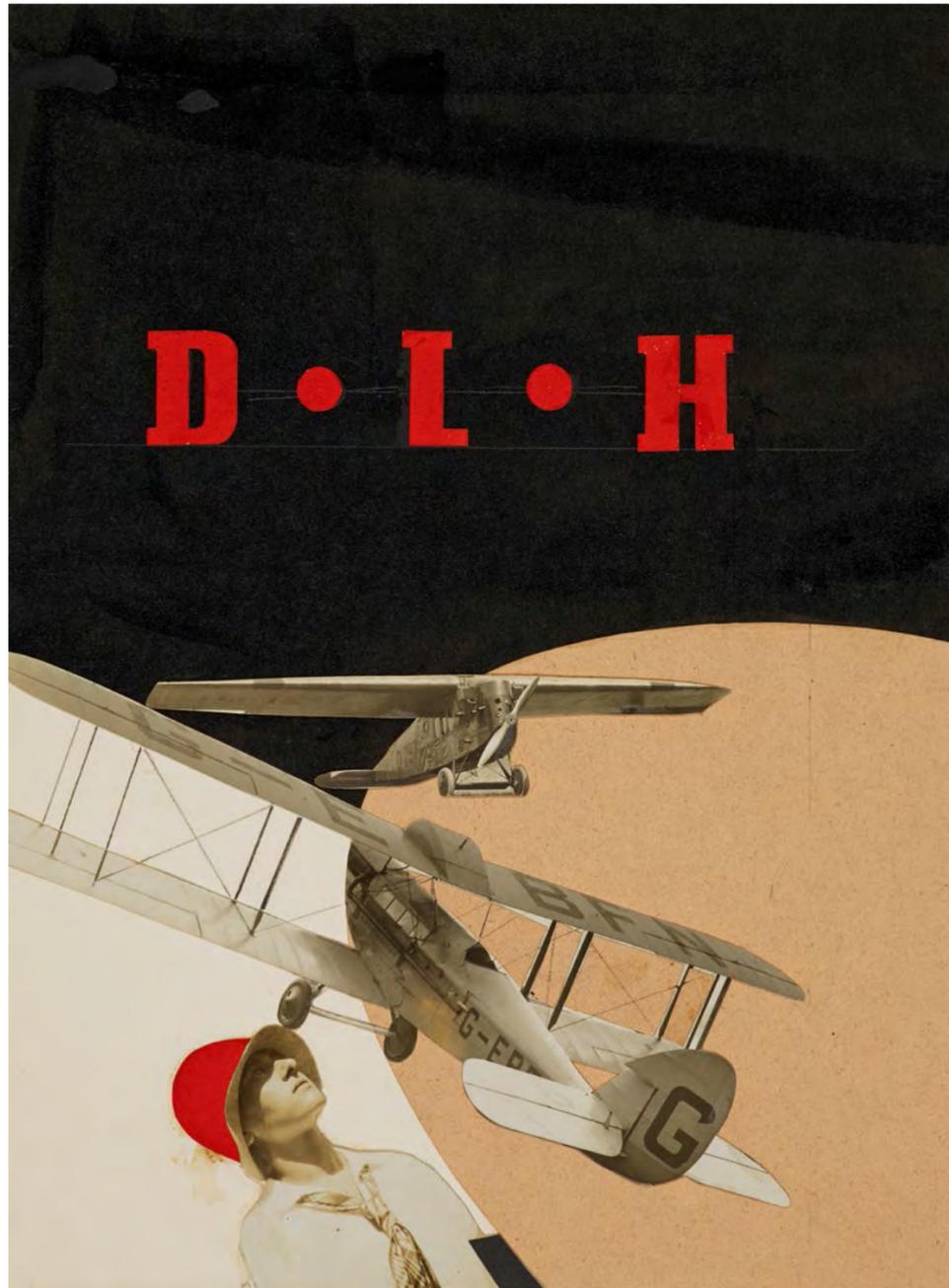


Plate 50  
*D.L.H.* 1925  
 Photocollage, 8<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 6<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (21.5 × 16 cm)  
 Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany

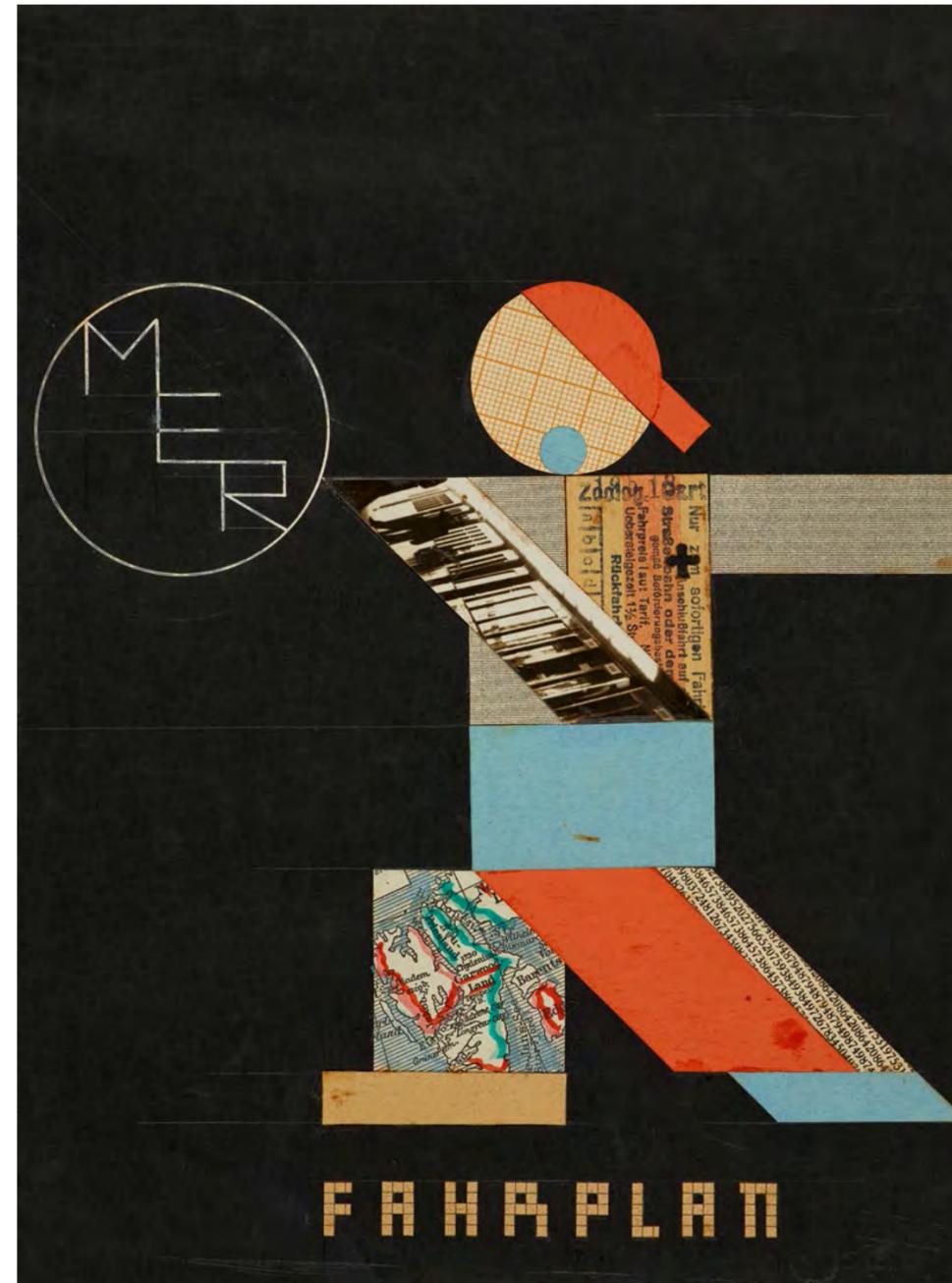


Plate 51  
*MER Fahrplan (MER Schedule)*. 1926  
 Photocollage, 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (23.5 × 17 cm)  
 Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany



Plate 98  
*Sueño No. 27: No destiñe con el agua* (Dream No. 27: Does Not Fade with Water). 1951  
Gelatin silver print, printed 1990s, 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (29 × 23 cm)  
Collection Eduardo F. Costantini, Buenos Aires



Plate 99  
*Sueño No. 28: Amor sin ilusión* (Dream No. 28: Love Without Illusion). 1951  
Gelatin silver print, 19<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (50 × 40 cm)  
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

**Horacio Coppola Plates**



Plate 123  
*Estudio (Bauhaus Study)*. October 1932  
 Gelatin silver print, 3 3/8 x 4 1/2" (8.5 x 11.4 cm)  
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
 Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther

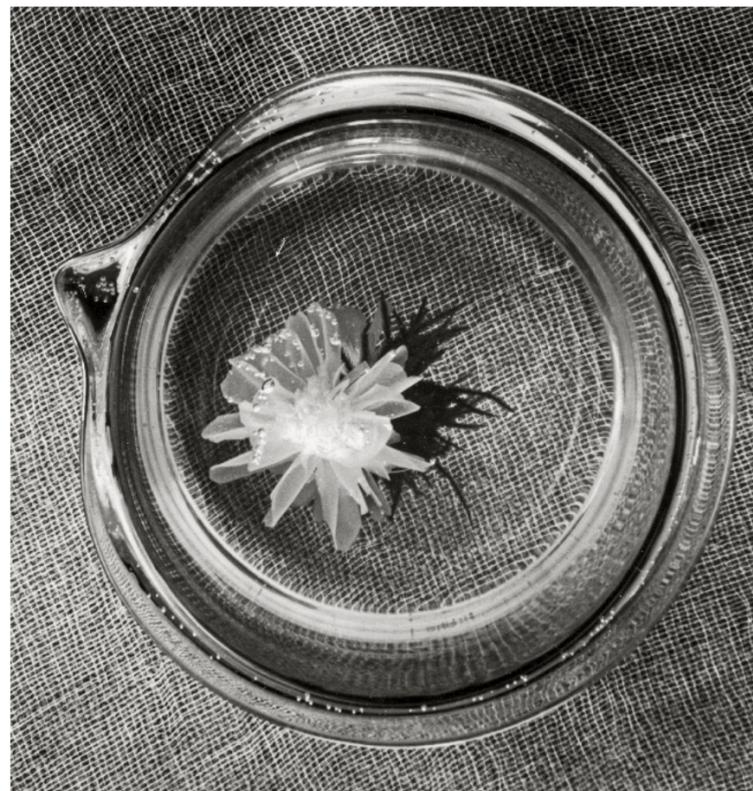


Plate 124  
*Japanische Blume, Bauhaus, Berlin*  
*(Japanese Flower, Bauhaus, Berlin)*.  
 November 1932  
 Gelatin silver print,  
 6 1/16 x 6 1/16" (17 x 17.7 cm)  
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
 Geraldine J. Murphy Fund

Plate 125  
*Estudio (Bauhaus Study)*. October 1932  
 Gelatin silver print,  
 6 1/2 x 7 7/8" (16.5 x 20 cm)  
 Estate of Horacio Coppola, Buenos Aires





Plate 131  
*London*. 1934  
Gelatin silver print, 6 $\frac{1}{16}$  x 7 $\frac{13}{16}$ " (15.7 x 19.8 cm)  
Estate of Horacio Coppola, courtesy Galería Jorge Mara-La Ruche, Buenos Aires

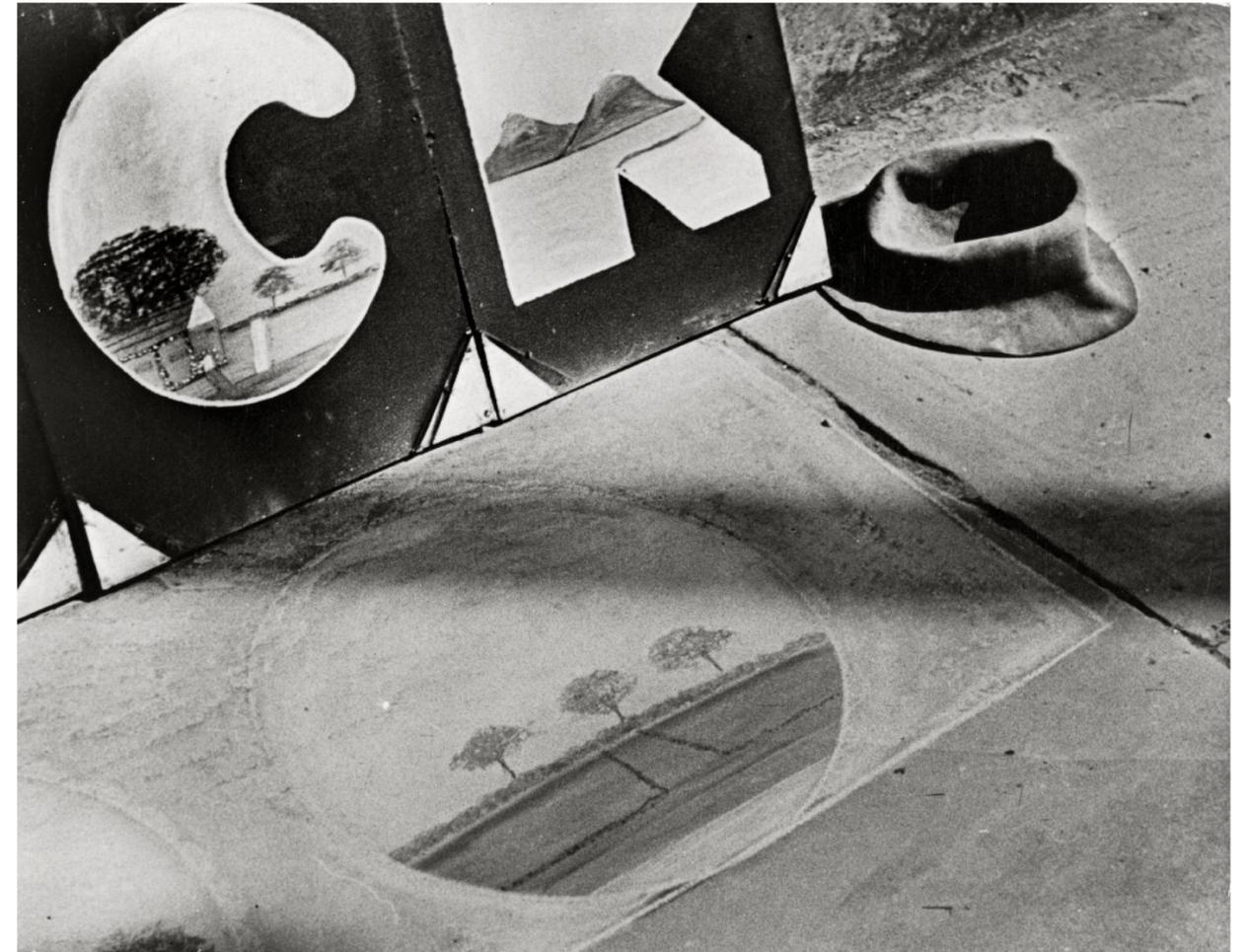


Plate 132  
*London*. 1934  
Gelatin silver print, 6 x 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (15.2 x 19.3 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Latin American and Caribbean Fund

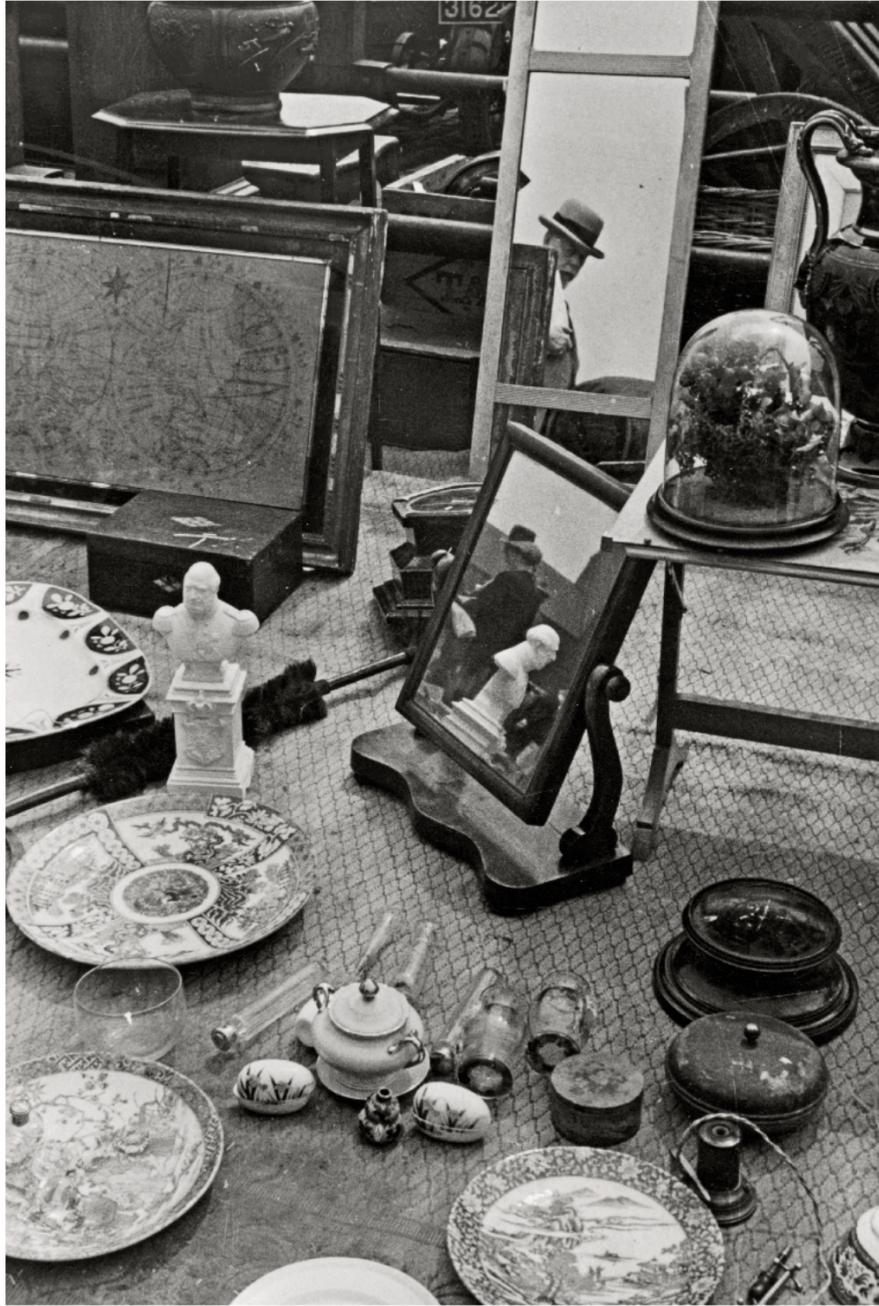


Plate 133  
*London*, 1934  
Gelatin silver print, 8 1/8 x 5 1/2" (20.5 x 13.9 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Richard O. Rieger



Plate 134  
*Hyde Park, London*, 1934  
Gelatin silver print, 7 3/8 x 4 1/2" (19.4 x 12.6 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. John Szarkowski Fund



Plate 137  
London, 1934  
Gelatin silver print, 6¼ × 7¾" (15.8 × 20 cm)  
Estate of Horacio Coppola, courtesy Galería Jorge Mara-La Ruche, Buenos Aires



Plate 138  
Mataderos, Londres (Slaughterhouses, London), 1934  
Gelatin silver print, 8¾ × 10¾" (22.3 × 27.3 cm)  
Estate of Horacio Coppola, courtesy Galería Jorge Mara-La Ruche, Buenos Aires

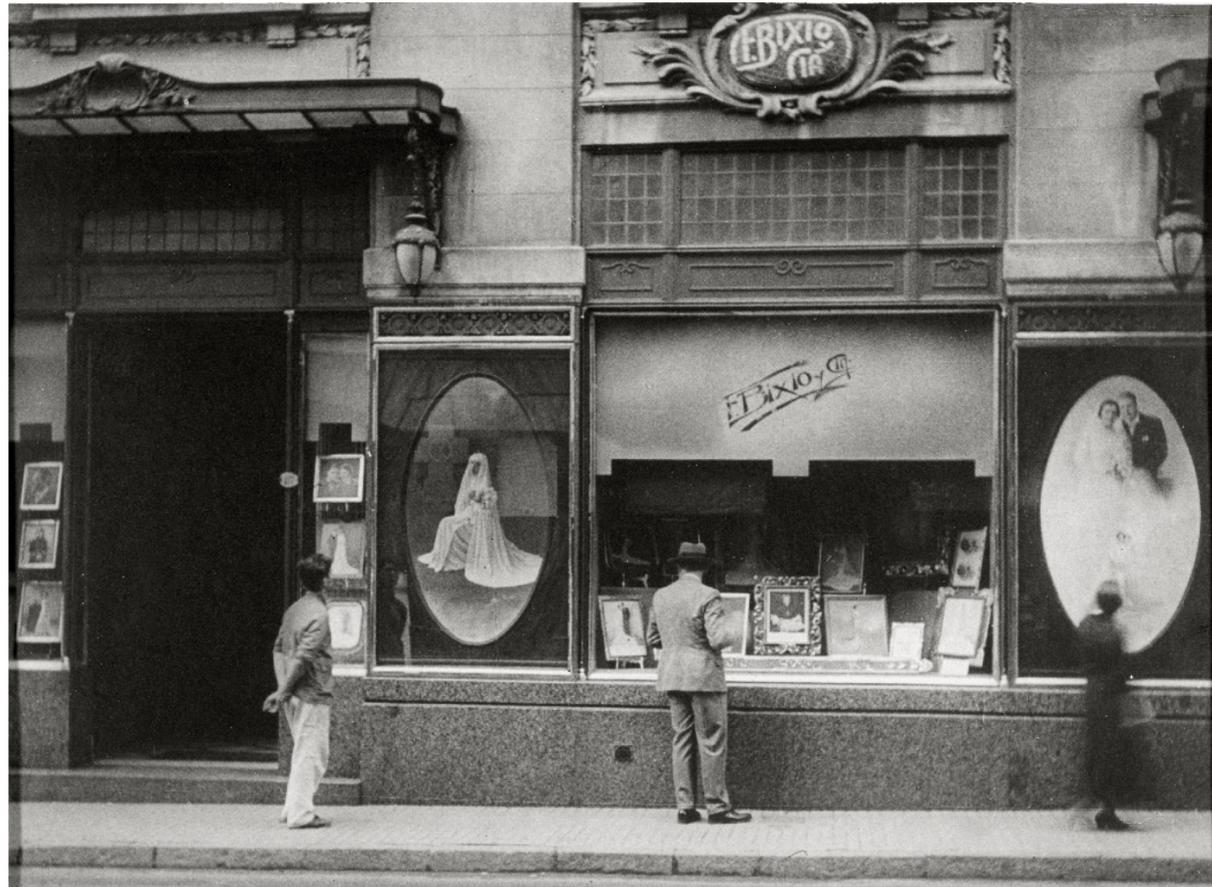


Plate 179  
*Calle Bernardo de Irigoyen al 300 (300 Calle Bernardo de Irigoyen). 1936*  
 Gelatin silver print, 6 $\frac{5}{16}$  x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (16.1 x 21 cm)  
 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

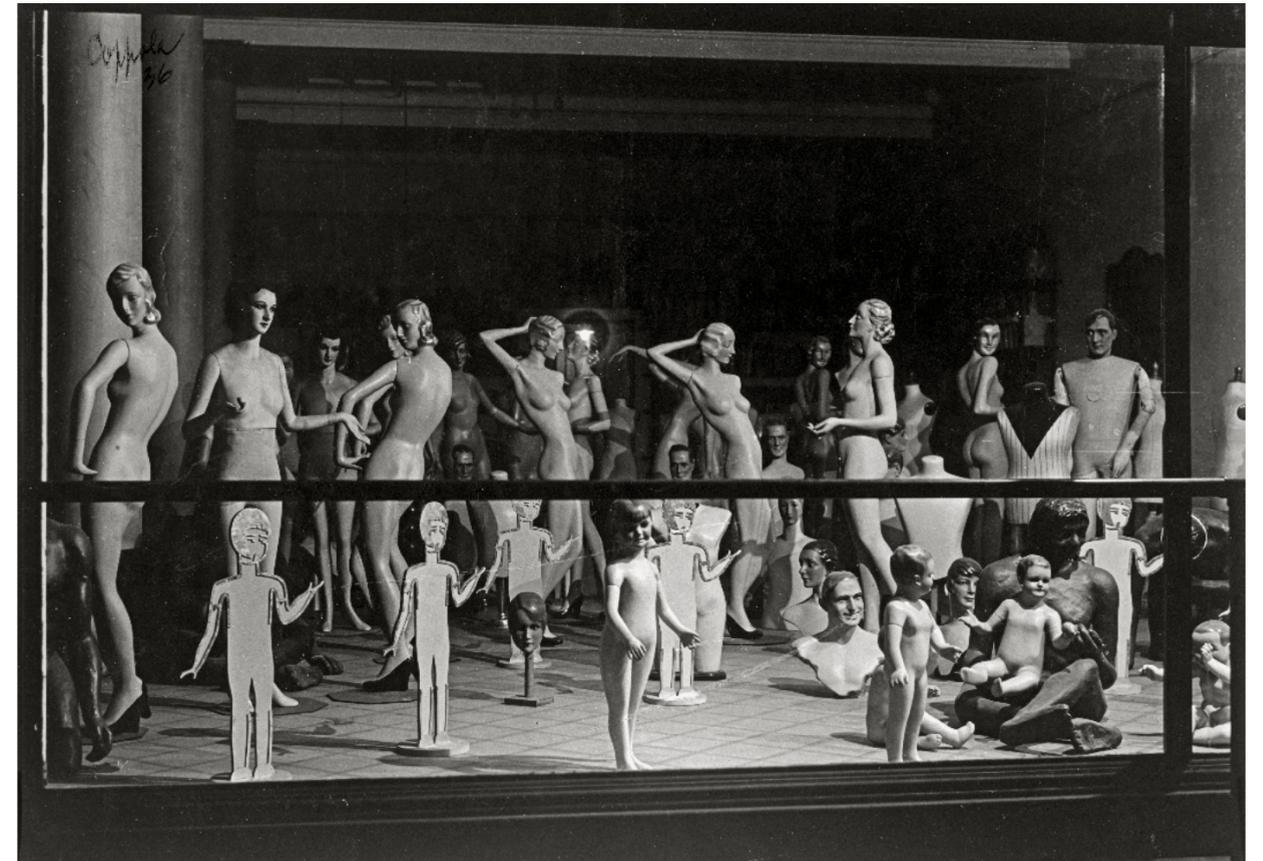


Plate 180  
*Avenida Díaz Vélez al 4800 (4800 Avenida Díaz Vélez). 1936*  
 Gelatin silver print, printed c. 1952, 23 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (59.7 x 42.5 cm)  
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Agnes Rindge Clafin Fund

**Selected Artists' Texts and  
Writings about the Artists**

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## Selected Artists' Texts and Writings about the Artists

Compiled and translated by Rachel Kaplan

OVERCOMING THE POLEMIC (1930)  
Horacio Coppola

*Avant-Garde and Modern Art.*

The birth of modern art—the art of today—has existed amid an exasperating fight against the hostility of the inert non-modern vision; there has been a way of speaking about modern art as the avant-garde of modern art, or, as avant-garde art. It is necessary to state—to denounce—this error that makes two distinct expressions synonymous, expressions that are not only used to refer to the same object but that are employed indiscriminately in order to refer to two distinct objects: I.) the controversial movement supporting the art of today, and II.) the art of today, modern art.

*Avant-Gardism or Polemics.*

Faced with a novel, a painting, a poem of today, the instinctive spectator capable of discovering and of faithfully experiencing the presence of modern art perceives adjacent movements of polemical excitement as an integral part, in a way, of the work itself: metaphors, deformations, constructions, *parts* that only achieve a mechanical value as things present in the work and that don't have their own redeeming values.

Such a mistake, evident today, began as just a confused truth: the arbitrary and violent affirmation of the modern way of living, of today, concealed the dual reality: the polemical and the authentic. Perhaps because the *evaluative position of the modern artist*, as creator or spectator, implied a point of view—*This IS mine, new*—as the product of a negation: *It IS NOT the other, old*. The new work physiologically demanded the total affirmation of itself—of the bad and the good of itself—and also the total negation of the alternative. This description of two periods as opposites can be expressed simply: *new, avant-garde* and *old, retardataire*, a description that is purely polemical and outside of any cultural category. The cultural category arises by designating these periods, without evaluating them individually, with the terms *modern* and *old-fashioned*, terms whose meanings note deeper content and together distort the interpretation of the final judgment: *new-good* and *old-bad* of the polemist account.

A fair reading, though perhaps too naïve and descriptive, could be: *modern-ours* and *old-fashioned—before*.

*Polemics, a Historical Phenomenon.*

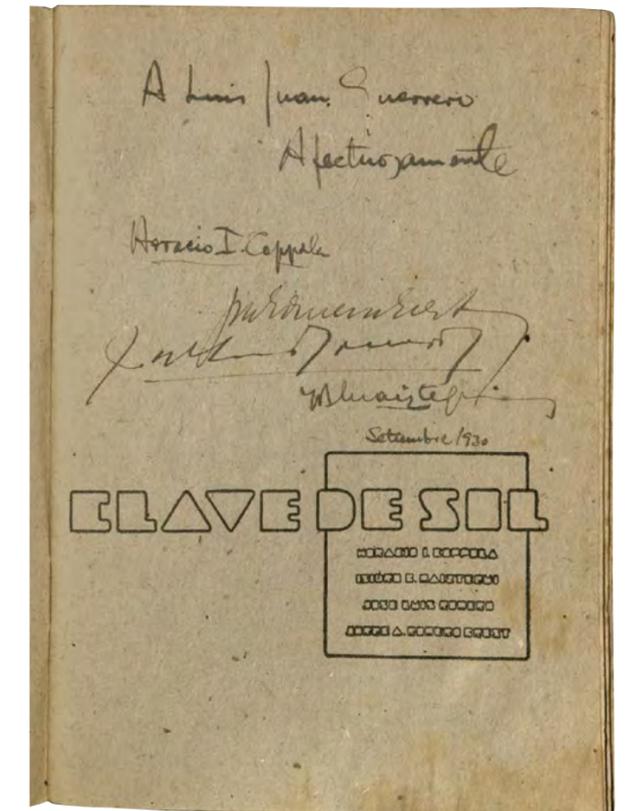
Historically, it is necessary for the polemical assessment [of the new] to prevail over others for a period of time. This prevalence is explained as a vital necessity of creating self-awareness by excluding—externally—the presence of what has occurred previously—negating its worth—while [the new] undergoes its own process of formation: achieving the clear conviction of a patrimony that becomes our own as distinct and necessary, it is then accepted, supporting its own legitimacy, a legitimacy distinct from precedents. Thus, moments of acute controversy occur—in which artists create with simultaneous desires for art and for the avant-garde—moments that each time are closer to a full cultural life, from established spontaneity, from incorporation of the modern will as a pure contemporaneous expression with natural tradition. Each new movement has its avant-garde and its contrasting affirmation and negation of whole entities: Positivism and Not-Positivism, Romanticism and Not-Romanticism, Realism and Not-Realism. The immediate pattern of the spectator faced with each new movement has been to affirm and defend one and to deny and attack the other, according to an external assessment employing polemical criteria based on false conclusions derived from his understanding of evolution, or if not false, they are imprecise or inappropriate to justify the assessment. But this immediate pattern can go on changing, reaching a satisfactory contemporary measurement, when the polemical position of the spectator ceases to be insurmountable, and in moments of innocent and propitious abandon, his sensibility, guided by intuitions favorable to the “contrary” reasons, he notices the internal disequilibrium of all that he had affirmed as true and unique until this moment. Attaining in this way a criteria freed from prejudices unrelated to the thing being judged, the modern spirit of today heeds the old-fashioned—no longer old—submitting itself to the charm of its entire human sense and, vice versa, perhaps the outdated spirit reaches a similar understanding of the modern. From this moment, the modern spirit notices what is *new* in the controversial style with intellectual and almost erudite pleasure. (But even in

these final moments, many continue affirming and negating: the professional polemicists, avant-garde or retardataire, continue experiencing—whether they are deceived or insincere—the long-standing human delight of negating in order to affirm, attacking the defeated and defending the victor. It is this delight that until a short time ago the authentic artist of today could have experienced in the avant-garde camp when making or understanding a novel, a painting, a theory for initiates of the avant-garde, all full of possibilities, the fervor of camaraderie, and a mouth-watering “hostility” towards a cornered enemy.)

To overcome something is more than the negative task of removing the empty gestures from things. It is starting another positive task and, faced with modern art, attempting an assessment of the implication of things beyond the mistaken avant-garde affirmation of our contemporary conscience; it is affirming the contemporaneity and the consequence of modern art, being especially concerned with it, experiencing it reflexively.

Horacio Coppola, “Superación de la polémica,”  
Clave de Sol 1 (1930): pp. 5–8.

Clave de Sol 1 (1930): p. 3, inscribed by Horacio Coppola and the journal's three other editors. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles



CAMERA STUDIES: RINGL + PIT (1931)

Traugott Schalcher

ringl + pit are among the very few photographers who study not only the tone effects, not only the play of light and shade which builds up the outward forms, but also the line itself. This care for line is especially apparent in the vegetable still-life with its especially finely felt lines. This feeling for line is bound up with freshness of conception, artistic curiosity, and courage to carry out bold original ideas. Is it not daring to photograph a well-known society lady (by no means a mannequin) in full evening dress as a pure back view, or a pure back view,

Gebrauchsgraphik. International Advertising Art 8, no. 2 [1931]: p. 33. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Museum of Modern Art Library

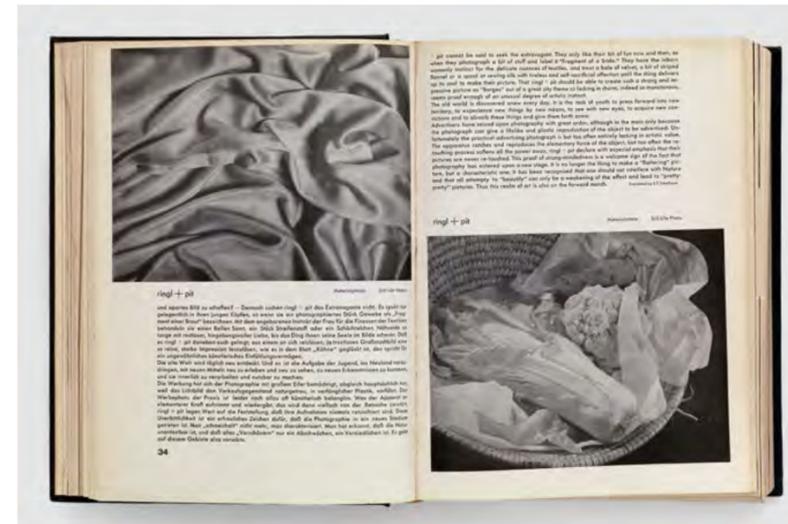


without the least turn of the head, and thereby to achieve a good likeness and a refined and original picture? Yet ringl + pit cannot be said to seek the extravagant. They only like their bit of fun now and then, as when they photograph a bit of stuff and label it "Fragment of a Bride." They have the inborn womanly instinct for the delicate nuances of textiles, and treat a bale of velvet, a bit of striped flannel, or a spool of sewing silk with tireless and self-sacrificial affection until the thing delivers up its soul to make their picture. That ringl + pit should be able to create such a strong and impressive picture as "Barges" out of a great city theme so lacking in charm, indeed so monotonous, seems proof enough of an unusual degree of artistic instinct.

The old world is discovered anew every day. It is the task of youth to press forward into new territory, to experience new things by new means, to see with new eyes, to acquire new convictions, and to absorb these things and give them forth anew.

Advertisers have seized upon photography with great ardor, although in the main only because the photograph can give a lifelike and plastic reproduction of the object to be advertised. Unfortunately the practical advertising photograph is but too often entirely lacking in artistic value. The apparatus catches and reproduces the elementary force of the object, but too often the retouching process softens all the power away. ringl + pit declare with especial emphasis that their pictures are never re-touched. This proof of strong-mindedness is a welcome sign of the fact that photography has entered upon a new stage. It is no longer the thing to make a "flattering" picture, but a characteristic one. It has been recognized that one should not interfere with Nature and that all [attempts] to "beautify" can [only] be a weakening of the effect and lead to "pretty-pretty" pictures. Thus this realm of art is also on the forward march.

Traugott Schalcher, "Fotostudien/camera studies: ringl + pit," E. T. Scheffauer, trans., Gebrauchsgraphik. International Advertising Art 8, no. 2 (Berlin: Druck und Verlag, 1931): pp. 33-39.



Gebrauchsgraphik. International Advertising Art 8, no. 2 [1931]: pp. 34-39. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Museum of Modern Art Library



Excerpts from  
ON FILM AND ITS EXPRESSION: AMERICAN FILM (1931)  
Horacio Coppola

It is impossible for us to say anything about film that isn't already conditioned by the circumstances of our life that lead us to routinely watch it, a life that we fervently declare when feeling, when thinking, when wanting that which we feel, which we think, which we want, coming from an element of concern—our greatest delight—facing this newest source of creation whose authentic existence we sense in the theater.

Every film that we have seen has influenced our perspective; the experience of our feeling has increased, has directed our fervor; our intimate knowledge of the past years has made us malleable and emotional inquisitors. We have come to know a dimension of American film, short and intense, from which all of its history ideally can be abstracted to assert its truth: an evident reality, hidden in its constant presence in front of our most perfect sense. Watching film, this sense seems to demonstrate itself as the least suitable to make us see.

In this way, considering American cinema, we understand true impressions only as something that film contains, something that could well be film itself.

#### *The valuable aspect of American film: presence of life*

[. . .] We pursue an understanding of American film, we search for a valuable meaning in its natural, intimate expression that is directed intrinsically toward the exteriorization of the historical American being. It is a rich exteriorization of American life, of the historical experience of man in America, in the United States. In the films that demand designation as authentic moments of American life (e.g., films created by Griffith or Vidor), there is a revealing exteriorization of a specific life that the filmmaker gathers from the world according to an internal instinct (*instinctive and interesting*, because film is experienced with the resolve that its creation holds the future *attention* of the American man, the future interest of the film's spectator). The filmmaker himself, who when creating the film is the original spectator of American life, has a profound internal determination. A spectator, after being a man historically part of the American experience,

the filmmaker experiences, endures like an American man, the expressive impulse of that life. Life, that is the authentic and natural object of the will of film's creation.

In this sense we remember, in regards to American film, the words with which Waldo Frank defines the essential position of the American artist today (a group of current artists): ". . . our artists . . . are literally obligated to take the plastic form of their vision, from the plasma of their experience—without obeying conceptual legacy or aesthetic tradition. This new creation, direct from a formal world with materials existing inside of us, is what I call apocalyptic method, and its elements are found in our arts. . . . Alfred Stieglitz's [sic] photographic studies belong to this class. Maybe these latest (of the current arts) are *the most American manifestation, since the substance of (the American) man's apocalyptic vision is a document of nature and his tool is a machine.*"<sup>1</sup>

Considering the validity of the filmmaker's obligation to reveal American life in his films, and recognizing this obligation as an instinctive imposition that informs his will of expression, we seek to understand American film as a product of the desire for an epic expression of American life [. . .]

#### *Moments of film considered as processes*

Considering a film produced in a cinematographic studio, we find elements that reveal the quality of the process characteristic of the moment prior to the transposition. In order to use this analysis, we need to differentiate (not contrast) photography and film. A film is a collection of elements or images of states that occur before the camera, normally one every  $\frac{1}{16}$  second. Each element is a photograph in the movie and a state in its duration [. . .] Photography, independent from film, possesses the essential value of being a plastic image. And its plastic expression is determined by the existing relation between the photographed object and the segmentation as an image that the camera makes of it. Photography is an image of an object that is strengthened by its quality of being a segment, by the necessity to keep in mind the (static) segmentation as an organic and intrinsic value of its expression: photography is conditioned by the exclusion of the (spatial and temporal) *other* from the object in a way that the excluded parts either matter or don't in order to express the object, in order to organize it as an expressive image. (Aesthetically *the value*

*of photography has at its base the aesthetic value of nature itself.* Franz Roh.) The plastic quality of the photographic element of film ( $\frac{1}{16}$  second) is not necessary for film's expression, since it is independent from the static element, which by intervening in the film becomes *luxurious*. Film's plastic element is beyond the photographic element; it lies in the shot, as film's character is essentially dynamic: a shot is the combination (series) of images in the same visual angle [. . .]

Faced with American film, we see that its will of expression coincides inversely, so to speak, with the qualities of film: the quality of evident process (the virtual moment when it is voided as being virtual) *is essential* to the expression of American film, but the plastic qualities *are not important*. A perfect example is the American shot. The American shot is when the visual angle spans the image, e.g., of a person, from a varying height between the knees and the waist up to the head. If we accept the constructed image as plastic, a harmonious whole, with a *static* value in relation to the process, viewing an American shot as evidence, we conclude that it is the least plastic example possible; we explain this while recognizing its characteristic virtual quality in a transcendental extreme, due to the predominance of *what occurs* (expressed values) in the film's process over *the things that occur* (expressive values) [. . .] The films of Chaplin, Sternberg, Greta Garbo, Al Jolson, and, especially, *The Circus*, *The Docks of New York*, *Anna Christie*, and *The Jazz Singer* are examples of continuous American shots.

#### *Film moments as processes organized by the filmmaker*

[. . .] Whether in the studio or not, when something is *organized* in front of the camera by the express will of the filmmaker, the resulting film is, essentially, a creation. The minimal act of creation on the part of man is to intervene in the conception of the process as such: as an example, it is sufficient to mention *White Shadows in the South Seas* as opposed to a documentary in the strict sense, *With Byrd at the South Pole*.

#### *Presence of life*

That is to say, the possibility to create an organized film exists according to a process imposed on spontaneous reality

by collecting filmed fragments of nature, fragments that compose a new synthesis, which is human insofar as it responds to the clear and unique conception of the filmmaker.

But—always with American film—this process interests us more as it possesses a rigorously human content than as a work by man. In American film the filmmaker directly gathers the expressive states of a reality that he presents before the camera. His intervention when *creating* the film *is* presenting before the camera, and *with* the camera, a living reality: a process of human feeling [. . .]

#### *The specific American value*

[. . .] We have analyzed the manner in which film is used as an instrument of the American filmmaker's will: as such it is not the image that is of interest in a film's vision but rather reality—the American submerges us in the reality that *is seen*. What matters before the camera—what will matter after the image—is this process imbued with human meaning. This specific act of forgetting the image in American film is not an oversight by the filmmaker: he arranges images that are voided and that disappear as they do in the American life that contains them.

#### *Overcoming time*

Creation responds to a historical determination, to an American experience. A film is composed of images of something that existed and occurred in concrete time and space. The filmmaker's creation responds voluntarily to an intention that seeks to historically present something that is reproduced before the camera, something that is from American experience and that is opportune to being revived by the American. It is revived as a historically concrete life, not as the past, not as the future, but as *occurring in a historic present for the film's spectator*. It is in this sense that American film can be considered an epic expression of American life [. . .]

*From Horacio Coppola, "Sobre Cine. De la expresión. El cine Americano," Clave de Sol 2 (1931): pp. 7–23.*

<sup>1</sup> Here Coppola cites Waldo Frank's *The Rediscovery of America* (1929). Italics and parenthetical notations are Coppola's.

ARTISTS' STATEMENT (1935)  
Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern

The photographic image is the result of two acts: the preparation of the shot and, second, the photographic process. The first part is conditioned and directed by the free and subjective activity of the photographer based on his precise knowledge of the photographic process. In that first part, the photographer makes a selection of the photogenic values of the object. This selection is not mechanical. Through it, the photographer expresses his intuition of the object and his understanding, his knowledge of the object. He chooses the fullest perspective of the object, its spatial arrangement; he determines the proportion of light and dark, the areas that are in sharp focus and those that are not, the plastic and morphological values that define the object and its materials. This act of free and subjective preparation ends the moment exposure occurs. The photographic technique is an optical-chemical process that obtains from an object a detailed image with a range of shades that includes intermediary tones (halftones). To void this process, or to modify it with subsequent manual treatment, is to deprive the photographic technique of its specific properties. That this optical-chemical process as such is independent from the free and subjective activity of the photographer does not mean that photography is a less appropriate means of human expression than other techniques that use manual processes. In a strict sense, the technical photographic process only "verifies" the photographer's subjective representation in front of the object: his understanding of the object. Is photography an art? In fact, photography has refrained from addressing this issue: it has created its own place in today's life; it has a social function. The images of things and beings that photography allows to be produced indicate a fundamentally new possibility of knowledge and expression given photography's specific ability to detail and "insist" upon the reality of those beings and things.

Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern, artists' statement from the flyer for their joint exhibition at the headquarters of Sur, Buenos Aires, October 1935.

ON PHOTOGRAPHY (1937)  
Horacio Coppola

[Editor's note to the original text]: This article, written for CAMPO GRAFICO, is one of the rare writings in which an absolute interest in clarity overcomes the polemic temptation. Readers will find in incisive form an "exact" definition of photography as an optical-chemical phenomenon, at the service of the intelligent and sensible faculties of man. The controversial windbagery about whether photography is an art or not is greatly lessened when confronted with a modern desire that is so inquisitive and disciplined.

In the statement that we publish on a separate page, Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola tell us: "Is photography an art? In fact, photography has refrained from addressing this issue: it has created its own place in today's life; it has a social function."

"Campo Grafico" in its fourth year of life, with its functionalist polemic, has always favored the real and very important function of typography in modern life at the



expense of obsolete and short-sighted aspirations of situating typography in the realm of art, poetry, etc.

In the following statement, I bring together ideas, opinions, and analyses that have been the subject of my reflections for some time. I have read them in books, in magazines; I have learned and discussed them with my teachers and classmates, with photographers and friends; I have sensed them and I have tried to implement them; and above all, I have shared them with my partner.

The reality of things, of the object

We look with our eyes and we see things, objects. Only rarely do we look at objects to see them for themselves. We look at a book to read it, a closet to open it, a mirror to see the reflected image. These objects are made from a given material, with a given surface, form, color, and volume. The

book is smooth or rough paper, ink, a bunch of pages, a prism. This material, this surface, form, and volume, reflects material, reflects part of the light that illuminates it: they are visible objects; they are objects that exist for the photographic camera. They can be defined as such: bodies of all types in rest and in motion, as well as the phenomena between bodies; not only bodies in a solid state but also those like water and air have the property of reflecting light. In certain cases these bodies can only reflect part of light, as infrared rays are not visible to the human eye but are visible with the photographic camera.

So the photographic camera is a visual machine, that is, a human eye mechanically enhanced by the vision that is obtained from what it sees, an image preserved on glass, celluloid, paper, etc. It is an optical-chemical phenomenon. The optical part is the camera obscura. Ramón y Cajal (the Spanish scientist) recalls that when he was a child, he was often shut in a dark room at school, a practice that existed then as a means of punishment. He couldn't resign himself to remain alone and without light, and one day he made a hole in the wall that



Campo Grafico 5, no. 3 (March 1937): pp. 5-7. Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany.



natural colors. Therefore, the blue color and the red color of an object are transcribed in gray tones equivalent to the blue tone and the red tone.

And as we have already discussed in depth, the black-and-white scale also contains intermediate tones and half-tones.

The last factor: the photographic image is the image of a fragment of reality; it is that rectangle that precisely individualizes the fragment, limiting it, isolating it, defining it, almost as a new autonomous reality. As such, this rectangle is an integral part in the construction of the image, and it signifies an equilibrant relationship of the image's organization with a new autonomous reality. The image's equilibrium is determined by its content and by the degree to which, in taking the photograph, it excludes the reality of which this object formed a part.

#### *The photographer's will and human expression*

Photography is an instrument through which man can produce an image of an object with the degree of faithfulness that I have discussed. This possibility of photography's realism is its essence, its specific quality. Photographic faithfulness is the same element from which arises the photographer's will to permanently fix on paper his vision of the visible object, of the thing. The photographer uses and is served by this faithfulness: he adjusts it, limits it, emphasizes it. The photographer sees, analyzes, knows the visible reality of objects, of things, to later capture and fix a photographic image of an object of his choosing, materializing the visible values that interest his feelings and his will and his fantasies. The photographer makes a selection of values on the basis of his precise knowledge of the mechanism and of the photographic process. This selection signifies that the photographer has completed a decisive intellectual task; based on his intuition of the object, on his comprehension and knowledge, he selects the most complete view of the object, of its spatial order; he determines the proportions of chiaroscuro; he puts in sharp focus the details or parts of the object that he wants to fix with precision and faithfulness, he gradates the values of the less-sharp parts that remain of the object; he accentuates in this way the plastic and morphological values that define the object and its material. This selection of values,

this determination of the extent to which these processes are used in the realization of the photographic image, constitute photography's elements of expression, or rather are the expression of the photographer himself. Photography, an optical-chemical mechanism, is therefore an instrument of the will of the photographer, of his intuition and understanding, of his human consciousness. It is the expression of a human that is interested in the visible reality of beings and of things and that has created the instrument capable of detailing and "insisting" on the visible reality of these beings and things. The visible aspect is one of the vehicles through which man can communicate with the intimate reality of beings and things, whose visible aspect is—to an extent—one possibility of expression of intimate reality.

It is important to add: the photographic camera possesses the capacity to detail and "insist" upon the visible reality of beings and things, but this doesn't mean that it can always capture this reality. Photography is an instrument at the service of the human consciousness of reality. The human eye is also able to see the visible reality of an object, but this visible reality exists to the degree in which the human knows it as such and to the degree in which he considers this reality.

By this I mean to say that visible reality will be captured by the photographic machine provided that the photographer already knows this reality, and the photographic image will not only be the expression of the photographer to the degree in which he knows visible reality but also to the degree in which the photographer consciously or unconsciously knows the intimate reality of the object that emerges from a shared visible reality. Through the work of chance and given the mechanical perfection of the photographic camera, a photographic image full of meaning might result as a product of the mechanical use that one person can make of this camera. But the isolated and random fact may be of interest to the extent that it reveals the possibility of this medium, which the conscious man puts at the service of his will.

*Horacio Coppola, "Della Fotografia," Campo Grafico 5, no. 3 (March 1937): pp. 8–11.*

#### NOTES ON PHOTOMONTAGE (1967)

*Grete Stern*

Some years ago the magazine *Idilio*, from Editorial Abril, dedicated one of its pages to the interpretation of dreams. It was titled: "Psychoanalysis Will Help You." It was a moment in which the concepts of psychoanalytic ideas penetrated every level of society, and these pages were warmly received by the primarily female reading public.

I remember that the literary-interpretative part of the new section was under the direction of Professor Gino Germani, well known in academic circles, who signed the notes with the pseudonym Richard Rest. For the photographic illustration of the interpreted dreams, Editorial Abril sought my collaboration. I proposed using photomontages.

The work was carried out more or less like this: Germani gave me the text of the dream, a faithful copy in the majority of cases of one of the many letters that had been sent to Editorial Abril requesting an interpretation. Sometimes, before beginning my task, I spoke with Germani about the interpretation. In general, it happened that Germani made requests about the layout: that it should be horizontal or vertical, or that the foreground be darker than the background, or to represent restless forms. On other occasions, he told me that a figure should appear doing this or that, or he insisted that I use animals or floral elements.

Now then, what is a photomontage? An approximate definition: the joining of different photographs, preexisting or taken for this purpose, in order to create a new photographic composition. In this way numerous possibilities for the composition arise, among them the juxtaposition of implausible elements. For example: a woman in a bathing suit, in a ballroom, leading an elephant. In addition, the proportions of the elements used in the montage can be distorted. In this way, it is not difficult at all for a child to appear to be seated on a fly that represents an airplane, flying over a forest of cabbage. Also, perspective can be distorted: a man photographed from above observes some towers or trees photographed from below. The distorted perspective will always give the effect of the unstable, of the implausible. It should be added that, in contrast, correct perspective is essential for other cases, such as the child seated on the fly, because here exact perspective graphically increases the veracity.

There are various techniques for the production of a photomontage. For example, the elements that comprise it can be projected directly onto photographic paper with an enlarger: the enlarger is moved according to the desired size; the paper that receives the projection is moved according to the place that the image should occupy; parts of the negative or of the paper can be covered so that the entire negative is not projected, or to leave white areas on the paper to receive other projections and to avoid one photograph covering another, though this may often be the sought-after effect.

The montages that I am exhibiting are made in another way. First I prepare a sketch, a pencil drawing that indicates the layout and the photographic elements that will compose the montage. We see: a background of clouds, a sandy beach in the foreground, on which we see a glass bottle with a girl enclosed inside. I enlarge the negatives according to this sketch. I get the clouds and the beach from negatives in my archive. I take a photograph of a girl seated in the position indicated by the sketch. I enlarge it to a size that allows it to be placed behind a real bottle, in a way that produces the impression that the girl is enclosed in the bottle. I photograph the arrangement and cut it out. Then I experiment with the tone of the backgrounds—the sky with clouds and the sandy beach—so that they emphasize the bottle. I also play with the size of the bottle in respect to the background, seeing which tonalities and relative size I prefer. I am inclined to this system, which allows me to make choices visually, not intellectually, moving and changing the photographic elements until I reach the composition that satisfies me. Next I put the photographs in the chosen order. If I think it is necessary, I add graphic elements, such as shadows, emphasized edges, etc. Retouching is also useful in montage, adding or erasing what one desires. In this case, we find ourselves before a combination of graphic and photographic elements.

Another way of working, which is more complicated than the one I just described, but that produces good effects of space, light, shadow, and verisimilitude, is the following: the different photographs that form the montage are placed—either loose, between pieces of glass, or supported on sticks or boxes—in their corresponding order as if they were a stage set. If it seems necessary, I can leave some elements out of focus. In the background, the clouds; the sandy beach closer to the camera; and, at the edge of the beach, or between

the beach and clouds, the little bottle with the girl. No photograph touches another. This gives the possibility to produce new effects by way of the lighting. Finally, I photograph the entire scene.

Photomontage is also used for other purposes. Architects, sculptors, and decorators—especially those in the theater—use it often. Its application demands a great control of perspective and proportion. Concerning what I have said, I am going to discuss a case I think is interesting. A sculptor designed a monument to be erected in a certain place in the city. He submitted a reduced-size figure to the corresponding competition and added a photomontage where the sculpture could be seen installed in its intended destination. In order to create the photomontage, it was necessary to first photograph the specified place. The sculptor chose the point of view, and the photographer had to decide: 1) at what height he should place the camera; 2) what should be the position of the sun in the moment of the shot. The photographer took two shots: one where the background or the distant areas were as sharp as the close areas, and the second leaving the distant areas out of focus.

The next photograph was of the small monument. Here, also, the sculptor selected the angle of observation. The photographer had to calculate at what height from the small monument to place the camera lens and, additionally, he had to select the position of the lights so that the effect produced would correspond to the effect of the sun in the previous photographic scene. Again he made two photographs: one with the background in focus, the other with the background out of focus. For the final shot he didn't paste the photograph of the monument over the photo of the city, but he placed it in front of it, obtaining in this way a great effect of volume.

Photomontage is also used for advertising purposes, now with less intensity than ten or fifteen years ago. But it is always interesting for producing book covers, advertisements, and posters. Outside of the catalogue, I present here some of my works created for advertising.

A few days ago I saw in a bookstore a book that recommends and explains the use of photomontage. I observed some rare montages: the combination of different parts from various faces, achieving unusual expressions. For montage work it is extremely useful to have a large collection of magazines. Seeing many photographs opens the field to suggestions and stimulates ideas.

When a photomontage is destined for a publication, we must take the precaution to not use faces or figures of people without their authorization. Once, in a montage for Editorial Abril, I showed the face of a girl looking at her hand. Each one of her fingers was replaced by the figure of a different man. For this work I used figures of models from my archive, whose approval was assured. But I was missing the figure of a man for the thumb: he had to be short, fat, and without a hat. I recalled a photograph of a group of workers that I had taken years before. There was a man with the characteristics I sought. I pasted his photograph over the thumb and handed in the work. Days after the magazine appeared, the editorial offices informed me that a widow, very offended, had appeared asking where they got the photograph of her deceased husband—the man on the thumb—and who had authorized its reproduction. I explained the details of the case to the authorities of Abril, and they gave my name and telephone number to the woman. I was prepared to assume responsibility for this rather unforeseen situation, but the woman never contacted me.

Photographers were not the first ones to make a globally recognized graphic medium from this play with photographs, but rather the visual artists who comprised the Dada and Surrealist movements. They discovered in the photograph a new and distinct element for the production of their compositions, in combination with drawing and painting.

Dada was an artistic movement that was created in Zurich, Switzerland, in early 1919, meaning World War I had barely ended. Young visual artists and writers from various European countries met daily in a cabaret named Voltaire. They all opposed war and nationalism, and invited artists of all types and the public to participate by offering suggestions and formulating proposals. Picasso and Marinetti were among the first. In truth, Dada presented itself against all of the existing -isms: Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, etc. It had the intention of upsetting the public. And this purpose was largely achieved. The presentations made in the cabaret were so strange, so eccentric, that they produced very violent reactions from the public.<sup>1</sup>

In Berlin, Dada had a more political tone. Huelsenbeck, the known leader of Dada, was Commissar of Fine Arts of the German Revolution. Other collaborators of international renown were George Grosz, the extraordinary draftsman, and

John Heartfield, who utilized photomontage for book covers for his Malik publishing house and applied an arbitrary typography to posters that contained political statements. Another was Kurt Schwitters, painter, draftsman, and poet, who was not politically engaged. He wrote long poems composed only of sounds, which he himself recited singing, screaming, whistling, and dancing around a statue in an art gallery in Hannover where he lived. All of this was similar to the presentations that occurred in Zurich, and it is, fifty years later, the direct precursor to what today we call "Happenings." Schwitters made montages utilizing photographs, scraps of paper, buttons, or any other object he found on his walks.

The photographer Man Ray belonged to Dada. He was North American, but he took up residency in Paris. He presented Rayograms, which were cameraless photographs, or plays with light and shadow cast by objects on positive and negative material.

In 1924, poets and artists—young people, all of them, among them some adolescents—founded the Surrealist movement, which can be understood as a continuation of Dada, with greater importance and emphasis in regards to its influence, its demands, and consequently, what it produced. I will name some of the best-known visual artists of Surrealism: Dalí, Tanguy, Magritte. And again, the photographer Man Ray. One of his most widely disseminated montages is the one representing the beautiful lips of a woman in a sky covered by little clouds, over a dark, neutral landscape. He called it *À l'heure de l'observatoire—les Amoureux* (*Observatory Time—The Lovers*). A detail to emphasize: the title of a photomontage always performs a very important role.

André Breton, the leader of Surrealism, said in a declaration of the movement: "To me, the strongest image is that which presents the greatest degree of arbitrariness." An interpretation of these words could be the following: in Dada and Surrealism, remnants from the romanticism of the last century are presented, together with the rejection of everything that is known and an enormous value of invention. Today we are living in the age of inventions: flying saucers, machines that replace man in his daily chores, and other things that no one thought possible in 1930.

One year before the birth of Surrealism, another movement arose in Germany that was called *Die neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), which sought to present the

objective image, opposed to all sentimentalism. In effect, photography can offer the objective representation of a thing, especially if showing it without its context. Many Dada artists made self-portraits combining the objectivity of a cropped photograph with the romantic-inventive personal gesture. In a work titled *Mask to Insult the Aesthetes*, we see half of a woman's body, her low-cut dress adorned with a rose, the oval of her face covered with a montage of photographs and newspaper clippings.

To finish, I will describe advertisements—photomontages—reproduced in a book dedicated to Dada and Surrealism. The first ad is from 1906 from an English magazine, created with clear naiveté. We see a group of well-dressed men and women, and in the background, a factory with its chimneys. In the gray sky, hanging over the whole scene, a corset with garters, like those used by women of the time. At the bottom we read: *Party in the Garden of the Royal Corset Company*. The other ad is from 1936, from a magazine for women's clothing. It is presented with advertising skill. We see the oval of a face, cut from smooth fabric; threads of knitting wool form the hair; two buttons in place of eyes; another thread suggests the nose; and a small semi-open zipper is the mouth. The caption says: "Most slide fasteners suffer from exposure." The translation isn't easy, as it gives way to a double interpretation. It can mean that the majority of zippers remain open or that very "active" zippers suffer precisely for being too "active."

To debate whether or not photography is an art seems to me a waste of time, because the field of definitions is infinite, well worn, and controversial, and no definition can deny the importance that photography has in the social, political, and expressive life of people today.

For me, in any case, photography is a means with which I express myself and that requires, as Julio Cortázar states in his story *Las babas del diablo* (*The Devil's Drool*), that one possess "discipline, aesthetic education, and steady hands."

Grete Stern, "Apuntes sobre fotomontaje," text read at the Foto Club Argentino, Buenos Aires, September 1967. Published in Luis Priamo, Hugo Vezzetti, and Grete Stern, Sueños. Fotomontajes de Grete Stern. Serie completa. Edición de la obra impresa en la revista *Idilio* (1948–1951) (Buenos Aires: Fundación CEPPA, 2004), pp. 29–33.

<sup>1</sup> Stern's chronology here is inaccurate, as Dada emerged in Zurich during the midst of World War I. Cabaret Voltaire both opened and closed in 1916, though the Dada movement continued and expanded. The cabaret hosted exhibitions and published one issue of an eponymous magazine, which included works by Picasso and Marinetti. Richard Huelsenbeck's "title," which Stern

subsequently references, was self-proclaimed and never official, a typical Dada joke.

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