
Symposium Question Period and Discussion

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[Introduction by Stephen Mansbach missing from tape]

*[Question from an unidentified speaker, addressed to Eleanor Hight]:
In your presentation of the various media and materials, as well as
the metaphors [Moholy-Nagy] used for motion, one of the things that
seemed to register most effectively is the metaphoric use of transparency,
that somehow motion through things tends to reinforce the sense of
visual transparency. Can you say something about the relationship
between transparency, both literal and metaphoric, and how it might
work with your notion of vision, as well as motion?*

Eleanor Hight: That's a very interesting [question] and a very important concept here. Transparency is something that he probably got from Lissitzky, Lissitzky's use of transparency around 1920, 1921, and 1922. He knew Lissitzky quite well. The writer Ilya Ehrenburg talked about how he would see Lissitzky and Moholy arguing about art in the Romanisches Café in Berlin. And he corresponded with Malevich; he [edited] one of Malevich's books [for publication as one of the Bauhausbücher]. He corresponded with Rodchenko, and there were other Russian artists going

back and forth through Berlin. Lissitzky used transparent planes in his paintings, the *Prouns*. There were two things: I think it became a way to show passing through one plane to something beyond, which moves you back in space, and also in his photograms, they tended to be beams of light. He used transparency to create rays of light or to create his light forms moving through space. So it is an important element of these compositions, both in Moholy's paintings using transparency and in his photograms, too.

[Same Questioner]: Might there be a metaphoric dimension to that as well? You mentioned quite effectively the role of X-rays as new modes through which you penetrate the surface into, let's say, the heart of the matter. Can the metaphor be sustained in the work we saw today?

Eleanor Hight: That's an interesting subject, and actually the spiritual world will be handled by the next talk, when Oliver Botar gets up to speak, but it is an interesting idea that while Moholy is so fascinated with technology and machinery, he uses it to take us into some higher place, which is actually separated from the material world.

[Same Questioner]: In the films we saw this morning, one of them, obviously, the one related to the light machine [Ein Lichtspiel schwarz weiss grau], is almost completely abstract, and the other two have abstract elements because he is emphasizing things like the falling of shadows across streets and things like that. But in the first film [Berliner Stilleben, 1932], there's a sort of anthropological social consciousness as well, which I don't see as being congruous with a Bauhaus background. But in the third film [Gross-Stadt Zigeuner, 1932], it's not anthropological, but it has a sort of romantic, picturesque quality. I see that film as almost exploiting the sort of exoticism of these Gypsy bands, and I find that very incongruous with the Bauhaus philosophy. Am I just reading something into this film?

Eleanor Hight: Let me talk about two things here, and even though [the program] says I am talking about films, I am not an expert on his films at all, except for the abstract film [Ein Lichtspiel schwarz weiss grau]. The [Berlin] film, and I'm not positive on this, but I believe it's thought by some people such as Jan-Christopher Horak that it couldn't have been made in 1926 and it was actually made later, possibly 1930

[probably 1931]. It is essentially a series of still photographs. He directs the camera in one direction, stays there, then cuts to another one, and in those kinds of still photographs he creates with the [movie] camera, you see stylistic characteristics that are found in his camera photographs, which I didn't talk about today, that is, the odd angles of view—the bird's-eye view looking from above to below where the horizon is cut out—a way of turning the environment into a series of abstract, and in this case moving, patterns.

Now for the last movie, the *Gypsies*, I don't know too much about that either, except that I think there must have been a kind of personal identification with the subject. He came from [what was then] Hungary, and some Gypsies [Roma or Sinti] also came [from] Hungary ... so it was part of his culture that he was familiar with, and then I also wonder if maybe he identified [with them]. So, on the one hand he would see the Gypsies and [they] would remind him of his old culture, and on the other hand, maybe he identified at least a little bit with their homelessness. When we think of Moholy moving from Szeged to Budapest to Vienna to Berlin to Weimar to Dessau, Amsterdam, London, finally to Chicago, he was essentially a man without a country, and you could really understand why he wanted to create a kind of international language of art and vision. I thought of that, too, when I saw the film, all these scenes with fighting. You know it doesn't really say good things about the Gypsies, but I think it's probably a kind of affinity with them [that] I never really noticed before. Ellen Frank, who was his companion in the late twenties, and he took a number of photographs of her, was the [woman] who held out her [hand] to have her [palm] read. That's something I had never [noticed]. I don't know if that answers your question, I'm not a specialist on the films, really.

[Question from an unidentified member of the audience]: Just as an [aside] about the last [film]: in the late twenties there was a series of [German] laws to limit the influx of Gypsies for the winter. These same discussions are taking place today, and only this week was it resolved by the Berlin city council to allow Hungarian Gypsies to settle in Berlin for the winter months. And again, this is a kind of reprise of what took place earlier, and it [may] very well be as Eleanor [Hight] says, that [it] is a kind of personal identification [when] émigrés, particularly those from already dissolved empires to the east, were coming into Berlin in such huge numbers. More than 385,000 Russians had come within three

years, 260,000 from Hungary and Romania. So this was a problem in the late twenties and early thirties and remains a problem today.

Eleanor Hight: And how did Gypsies make money? Often through entertainment, through kinds of circus acts, and through music. I grew up in Toledo, Ohio, which has a large Hungarian population, the Midwest does, and Gypsy violinists and musicians could be seen in various places. There was a long period when he focused on that aspect of Gypsies in the film, too.

[Question from an unidentified speaker addressed to Eleanor Hight]: Could you develop further the connection between Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy? There seem to be a lot of sympathies and common interests in their work, but how much actual contact was there, and what are some of the important differences?

Eleanor Hight: As far as I know there was no contact. There might have been, Moholy did go to Paris, I mean it is possible, but as far as I know there was no contact. [They certainly met in the United States, as they were photographed together at an exhibition in Chicago in April, 1945.] There is a kind of competition, and you could see this in the literature of the sixties and seventies, for instance, about who invented the photogram.

Eleanor Hight [in response to a missing question concerning Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Rodchenko and photography]: [... Moholy] really had completely developed his theory before Rodchenko started writing and publishing his photographs and articles in the late twenties. I maintain that while, in terms of photography, they developed somewhat separate although parallel paths, and their careers are also parallel in many ways, I think Moholy's own developments were more original, and not tied to his in photography.

[Question from an identified speaker addressed to Oliver Botar]: You didn't mention the Bauhaus connection and, as I guess everybody knows, Moholy came to the Bauhaus as a place to [missing words]. How does Itten fit in with all this pedagogical philosophy that influenced Moholy? It seems to me that he was like-minded, yet Moholy came and brought with him a complete shift. So did Moholy have to give up his

beliefs in order to be accepted as a proponent of the new direction at the Bauhaus?

Oliver Botar: There is a lot that I wasn't able to get into in this brief time. This is a very good question, because, in fact, Itten and Moholy shared many views. I think the chief difference between them was that Itten was more spiritually minded, if I can use that term. He was an adherent of the Mazdaznan sect, some people would call it a "cult," which was related to the *Lebensreform* movement and it had Youth Movement adherents, yet was more oriented towards the transcendental. Moholy, on the other hand, was not. What appealed to him in Monism, and especially in Haeckelian Monism, I would assume, is its materialism and its idea that matter and spirit are, so to speak, one and are manifest in matter, so that when you look at matter, then you find manifestations of basic structures throughout nature. Just to speak very briefly to the *Gypsy* film, I see that film not so much as purely anecdotal and anthropological, but rather as a film that gives evidence of Moholy's fascination with life and the patterns of life. If you look at the film you see that he collects actual snippets of similar types of activities, be it fighting or be it dancing, which of course was another interest of the *Lebensreform* movement: rhythms of life expressed in dance, and I see him looking for patterns, actually visual patterns, within these patterns of behaviour within communities. So, just to finish my answer: their ideas were related, but their approach was very different, and I think it was that difference in approach that was key to Gropius in his decision to hire Moholy. The biocentric Constructivist discourse emerged in 1923, coincident with the point at which Moholy was hired to the Bauhaus. The appearance of the "Schelpennummer" [Shell Issue] of the Dutch journal *Wendingen*, the one that appeared with X-ray images of triton shells, was one of the impetuses to the development of this discourse as was the appearance in 1923 of [Raoul] Francé's chapter in [the Berlin art journal] *Das Kunstblatt*, which everyone read. So these views were developing within Moholy as they were within Lissitzky at that time. Let me just emphasize that Francé was very popular with members of this circle. Mies van der Rohe owned almost every one of Francé's books, and they are in his library at the University of Illinois, in Chicago. Hausmann was reading and rejecting him. Francé was quite popular.

[Question from an unidentified speaker]: You talk about the movements

of Bioromanticism and Biocentrism in art. What are some other artists who might be associated with them?

Oliver Botar: First, I would hesitate to use the term “movement” with respect to either because they are historical or critical constructs. I am now reclaiming the German term *Biozentrik* from its early 20th century usage. *Bioromantik* was a critical construct proposed by Kállai in 1932, so it is not a “movement” in terms of a self-conscious group of people who shared ideas and put out a manifesto. Kállai, in defining *Bioromantik*, talks about the biocentric point of view combined with biomorphic abstract style. Everyone from Franz Marc to Brancuși would be very typical; Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, the list could go on and on. Basically, classic Modernist artists who engaged in a stylistic discourse of biomorphic abstraction, and concomitantly shared one or another of the biocentric philosophical views, were part of it. It is this pairing of style and world view that Kállai would refer to as *Bioromantik* or “Bioromanticism.”

[Same questioner]: And it had to be abstract?

Oliver Botar: Actually, no. That is a very good question, because Kállai never insisted that it be abstract, and he included the work of Surrealists as well, but it had to be Modernist. “Biomorphic Modernism” may be a better term than “biomorphic abstraction.”

[Same questioner]: Does Karl Blossfeldt, the photographer, fit in?

Oliver Botar: Karl Blossfeldt and photography would have been a whole other chapter that I would have liked to include in my talk. I will discuss it in my [Ph.D.] dissertation. Where I disagree with Kállai in some aspects of his view toward photography [which in general he felt was less expressive than painting as a medium]. Actually, Kállai really appreciated Blossfeldt’s photographs, as did Moholy-Nagy. I mean [Moholy] included Blossfeldt’s work—that Kállai, as far as I can tell, brought to the Bauhaus in 1929—in the Film und Foto [FiFo] exhibition held in Stuttgart that year, in the room Moholy curated for that exhibition [Raum 1]. However Kállai appreciated Blossfeldt precisely because he wasn’t an art photographer, per se. He was a metal smith, and he took these photographs, close-ups of plants for those of you who don’t know Blossfeldt’s work, he took them mostly around the turn of the [19th–20th]

century as models for his students to imitate in producing their metalwork. They were “aestheticized” [and commercialized] by Karl Nierendorf, a Berlin dealer and publisher, in the mid 20s and [that’s how] they became well-known. Blossfeldt then influenced photographers to work in a similar style. This whole aesthetic of close-up nature photography was practiced not only in Germany by Blossfeldt and later by Albert Renger-Patzsch (who, by the way, was discovered by Ernst Fuhrmann and first published by Moholy-Nagy within the discourse of the avant-garde), but also in North America. I’m thinking of Imogen Cunningham, Edward Weston [and others in the F-64 Group]. These American photographers were then exhibited at the Film und Foto exhibition. And because some of these American photographers were also, in effect, “biocentric” in their world-views, I would actually describe their work as “Bioromantic Photography.” This is again, and I must emphasize this, a *historical* construct.

[Question from an unidentified speaker]: How can geometric abstractions be “bioromantic?”

Oliver Botar: I hesitate to use the term “bioromantic” for geometric abstraction, just because that would cast the net too widely. However, for example Lissitzky was biocentric in 1924; I mean ... his manifesto *Nasci* or “Nature” in Latin is a rejection of the machine analogy, a call for the adoption of the nature analogy, and clearly biocentric. Lissitzky was so enamoured of Francé that he sent this special issue of [Kurt Schwitters’ journal] *Merz* entitled *Nasci* to Francé [for his opinion]. We don’t know whether Francé got it or not, but Lissitzky was totally into Francé at that time. And yet his art continued to be geometric. If you think about [Francé’s seven] *Grundformen* that I showed, that Moholy drew very nicely—and you can see what pure geometric forms they are—you can understand that for artists who were really wanting to link themselves with a natural philosophy, with nature, to “re-link” themselves with nature, would have been ecstatic to discover this popular scientific writer who was saying that basic geometric forms are the building blocks of all nature. So that, then, would make their geometric paintings reflective of this idea.

[Same questioner?]: I think the purest form of your argument would be [Vladimir] Tatlin himself.

Oliver Botar: In Tatlin's case, I would argue that, intuitively or otherwise, already his *Monument to the Third International* itself, as a spiral, reflects this interest at that time. This doesn't seem so far-fetched because one of the most important circles of organicist avant-garde artists was that around Mikhail Matyiushin and Pavel Filonov in what was then Petersburg, members of which were creating art parallel with this, in an even more biomorphic, abstract [manner]. Later on, Tatlin's *Letatlin* which was ergonomic [would have demonstrated his interest in organicism].

Stephen Mansbach: If I were a bioromantic or biocentric artist, it wouldn't just be forms that appealed to me, as you have beautifully demonstrated; it would be particular media that would have resonance. One would think of woodcuts, here as a medium that has a long history, but is by nature "natural." Why was, for example, in Moholy's vast experimentation, such a little role devoted to something which, on the surface, particularly from Worpsswede onwards, played such an instrumental role in, let's say, Expressionism, that is, the woodcut?

Oliver Botar: I would disagree with your premise [that the woodcut is by nature more "natural" than other media]. From the point of view of biocentrism, every material is natural. There is no privileged material, such as wood, apart from the fact that even if you use wood in the production of a woodcut, you are still actually applying pigment to paper, normally.

[Question from an unidentified speaker]: Is there any relationship between Buckminster Fuller and this group, because he eventually came to teach [garbled recording] [at Moholy-Nagy's Chicago schools?]

Oliver Botar: I actually haven't had the chance to research the relationship between Fuller and Moholy-Nagy yet, but maybe Alain or someone else might know about that. I am sure that Moholy-Nagy was interested in Fuller's work. Fuller was definitely what I would term a "biocentric," although let's not forget that this is a German term, employed by Ludwig Klages, by Hans Prinzhorn, by Raoul Francé, and I am kind of reviving it and expanding it, I'm distorting it to some extent, but I would definitely describe Fuller as a "biocentric." In fact, I would love to find out what the relationship between Fuller and Francé was, because Francé

was not only promoting his idea of *Biotechnik*, that is learning from technology that was already being employed in nature, such as the turbine—Francé made money by patenting various inventions, which he copied directly from nature. So the relationship between biotechnology [i.e. what is now termed “bionics”] and Francé is not just coincidental with his term *Biotechnik*.

[Comment addressed to Stephen Mansbach from an unidentified speaker]: Just a comment regarding your question. I think that these abstract prints from the twenties are sometimes woodcuts, sometimes linocuts. Linoleum is much easier to work with, the woodcut is very time-consuming, so that someone who was always in a hurry and doing a million things would not want to rework woodcuts when linoleum is much easier to rework. He [Moholy-Nagy] used a lot of man-made materials, plastic and linoleum, and [Indiscernible].

Oliver Botar: Let's not forget that, from the biocentric point of view, anything made by people was itself organic, because we are part of that whole natural system. Is there time for one more question?

[Question from an unidentified speaker]: That was quite an impressive list of “isms” with most of which Moholy was connected. You mentioned that in one of his summer vacations he spent time with a group associated with anthroposophy. I was wondering if you could say a little more about what connections or affinities Moholy-Nagy had with them.

Oliver Botar: [The German women's commune] ... Loheland was inspired by Rudolph Steiner, that esoteric philosopher who was situated somewhere between the really “out-to-lunch” esoterics in theosophy (“out-to-lunch” from the point of view of a person who doesn't appreciate this kind of stuff), and let's say a more scientifically based view of the world. Steiner was in between. Steiner wrote a dissertation on Goethe's colour theory, he was a respected scientist, and he was, in fact, the inventor of organic farming. (The term “organic farming”—*organische Landwirtschaft*—was an adaptation by the Nazis of Steiner's *biodynamisches Landwirtschaft*, or “biodynamic farming”). I don't think that Moholy was really interested in anthroposophy, at least I have not found any evidence of this. On the other hand, one could describe Steiner as being biocentric ... so that would be the connection.

[Question from an unidentified speaker or audience member]: Dr. Forgács, I wondered what role, if any, the KURI movement or Hungarian students at the Bauhaus might have had in Moholy's appointment.

Éva Forgács.: I don't know of any evidence that the KURI group played a part in his appointment. Adolf Behne called Gropius's attention to Moholy, and Gropius chose him over van Doesburg and El Lissitzky. Moholy's exhibition at Der Sturm impressed Gropius. Nobody else could have really played a part in that; it was quite a special constellation. I think the KURI group could not possibly have had much contact with Moholy-Nagy prior to his appointment.

[same questioner]: So when they were pushing for Constructivism ... [Indiscernible]

Éva Forgács: [Indiscernible] ... wanting to keep a balance between various Constructivist tendencies ... [Indiscernible] Gropius seemed really anxious and wanted to secure that. Obviously, International Constructivism seemed to be so strong and significant in Germany that he certainly wanted someone in the Bauhaus who was an important representative. The problem, as I said, was that he wanted an important representative of this important tendency, but not an all-too-powerful personality, and Moholy-Nagy was very young at that time. I'm not saying he was not a powerful personality; I am saying that in terms of prestige and a leading position in the international avant-garde, at the time he was hired for the Bauhaus faculty, he was not a leading personality. I think that was one of the very important reasons why he was selected.

Oliver Botar: I have a comment for Éva Forgács. I was interested that you mentioned Kállai's use of the word "objectivist." It occurred to me that Francé's philosophy was referred to as "objektive Philosophie" and this is, in fact, the exact term (Éva Forgács: Which year are you talking about? 1921-22. Good.), and he was trying to decide between [the terms] "objective philosophy" and "biocentric philosophy." He actually decided on "objective." I think it is a coincidence; I don't think Kállai was reading Francé that early, if ever, so I just wanted to comment on that coincidence.

I also wanted to comment on Alain's talk. You mention the

aesthetics leading to the ethics. Again, an interesting parallel; this is exactly the idea of Ernst Haeckel, which is why he published the album, *Kunstformen der Natur*. He wanted to present to artists models from nature that were aesthetic, but would lead to an ethical sense of art. I thought it was an interesting parallel.

Alain Findeli: If you look at natural forms as the result of a process, it is easy to make the connection between aesthetics and ethics. If you look at the shape and the form you are in aesthetics, but if you look at the object as the result of a process, if you look at the process, you are in ethics. A process is active. This is how we can make the connection. (Oliver Botar: Right.) Absolutely, but on the problem of objectivity, this is why I used quotation marks when I was talking about objectivity. It is very dangerous to use this word because it can have opposite meanings depending on the context in which you use it. If you look at objectivity in the way the rationalists and positivists look at it, it has precisely the opposite meaning that Francé was talking about or Moholy when he was talking about *exakt* and *objektiv*. *Objektiv*, in this context, has more to do with phenomenology, that is, a way of looking at an object without prejudices, patterns, inherited methodology, and so on, so we have to be very careful about that.

Éva Forgács: I should like to clarify that, because I don't think it is confusing. We just need to know which year we are talking about. Because there were so many tendencies at the time and so many different currents of ideas, certain words seem to have different meanings every year. This is precisely the case in the 1920s. When Kállai used the term "objectivity" in 1920-1921 in a series of articles titled "New Art", he gave an account of what he knew of the latest contemporary tendencies to an émigré journal, *MA*, edited by Kassák and published in Vienna. He was the first to give a reasonable, comprehensible account of Cubism so late in 1920-1921. He called it "objectivism," obviously not yet being familiar with the term "Constructivism." But what he wanted to express, and did express, was that he was tired of Expressionism; he was tired of all kinds of emotionalism and subjectivism in art, because he thought that all of that belonged to a past era that was passé. He welcomed Moholy-Nagy as someone who was a representative of the new, fresh tendency that he identified with at that time. If we frame his usage this way, I think we avoid confusion.

[Question from an unidentified speaker addressed to Alain Findeli]: A point of disagreement: you talked about Raoul Francé's Plants as Inventors. Moholy did not necessarily ascribe to the idea that "form follows function," but if he taught Francé's biotechnics and agreed with it, then he would have followed that idea, since Francé's idea was that nature was a process within which form always directly followed function. I was wondering if you could clarify or discuss that.

Alain Findeli: I should have my text, because I have a quotation by Moholy from *Vision in Motion* on this question. Moholy said that nature should be regarded as the ideal, and we as designers try to imitate nature. But we are not capable of doing so because nature is much more intelligent. (It doesn't say "intelligent," but that is what it means.) Nature is much more intelligent than we are, number one, and number two, nature has much more time to develop these ideal forms in a trial and error process than we do. So we, as designers, can imitate nature in this way, but it is not possible to attain the ideal.

On the question of "form follows function," he does say, more or less, that form follows function, but function has to be taken not only on the material plane, but also on the psychological, the sociological, and another one I don't remember here. So, what the Postmodern designers say—one of the critiques the Postmodernists have made of the functionalists—is that the concept of function is taken too strictly by the Modernists. They propose to extend the concept of function to the symbolic aspects, as well. But Moholy already said this in 1940-1945. He didn't use the word "symbolic." He couldn't use "symbolic" for the reasons that you mentioned; the term was too loaded. He said that function had to be considered not only as material, but also as psychological, social, and so on. Is that clear enough?

[Unidentified speaker or audience member]: I'd like to address my question to Prof. Meikle. My question is that you talked about the theory of the Bauhaus in Chicago as being an influence on industrial design in the United States. I wondered if you could address the Bauhaus formulation of ideas and Moholy-Nagy's theories before this period, whether designers such as Teague and Bel Geddes had all interacted with Bauhaus ...

Jeffrey Meikle: That's a good question. I think that in the last thirty or

forty years, probably thirty years, we've schematized different styles, different approaches, made things far more categorized, far more than people did at the time they lived through it. When I think of the 1920s and 30s and the designers who were making a profession, like the people you referred to (Teague, Dreyfuss, Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes were the major ones, Van Doren was another one), none of these people were trained as designers, they were advertising illustrators or stage designers, or whatever. Van Doren worked in an art museum doing design and came into it accidentally. The interesting thing is that these people were aware of what was happening in Europe, and they all had copies of Le Corbusier's book *Towards a New Architecture*. They got it as soon as it came out in English in 1927. Some of them had been in Paris in 1925 for the Art Deco exposition. When Teague came back from Paris in 1925 a very successful ad illustrator, and his New York office already had French period furniture. He decided to become a designer and he refurnished his office with Bauhaus steel-tube chairs and French Art Deco cabinetry. This was a very eclectic approach, bringing in everything that was happening in Europe, using it in whatever way he saw fit. So I think they were aware of the Bauhaus. They were certainly aware of Corbusier, but they weren't in any way aligning themselves with one intellectual school or another. It was very fluid, just taking things out of the air and using them. I guess it is a cliché, but in a very pragmatic, American way.

[Same questioner]: Do you think ... [Indiscernible] ... were published in the 1930s, do you think that their writings and the style of their writings were very utopian, were they in any way influenced by the Bauhaus manifesto?

Jeffrey Meikle: The only way I can answer that is that I don't recall any real mentions or references. Norman Bel Geddes, for example, was very much influenced by Erich Mendelsohn. The connection is there. He met Mendelsohn in 1924 when the architect came to the States. I think it was Mendelsohn's streamlined Expressionist style that led Bel Geddes to pick up on streamlining. In fact there is evidence that Mendelsohn gave Bel Geddes a sketch of his Einstein tower. For many years Teague corresponded sporadically with Corbusier. I don't recall specific references to people at the Bauhaus, and I don't know the degree to which they were familiar with what was happening there.

Lloyd Engelbrecht: Joseph Sinel, who was more or less part of the group Jeffrey was speaking about, had some contact with Moholy while Moholy was still living in Europe. On March 3, 1931, it was announced that Moholy had received honourable mention for his work shown at the Exhibition of Foreign Advertising Photography held at the Art Centre in New York. Among the judges were Joseph Sinel and famed motion-picture director, D. W. Griffith.

Jeffrey Meikle: That would be interesting. I hadn't heard that.

Oliver Botar: I think it was more people like Alfred Barr and Philip Johnson who were the first to really make the connection. During the twenties, Bauhaus knowledge filtered back in various ways, in a sort of random sense, but Johnson and Alfred Barr actually visited Dessau and kind of processed what was going on, and I think what they saw there was a big influence on what they conceived in the design department of MOMA when they opened it in 1929.

[Unidentified speaker or audience member]: I'm interested in the fact that one misconception about the Bauhaus has to do with the perceived style that results from the activities. What's interesting to me in the success or failure of the philosophy is that in Germany and Chicago, many of these ideas as taught in the foundation courses manifested themselves in very similar forms in the product. A hand sculpture was a hand sculpture in 1923 to, well, I don't know the time line in Germany exactly, but say 1928, to the New Bauhaus in 1938. We tend to associate this particular outcome with this particular idea, and the Bauhaus philosophy was meant to encompass many more things. It was about discovery. But for two generations you had students "discovering" the same thing. I'm wondering, by the time it was in Chicago, if they were really inclined to increase the range of solutions developed during the Bauhaus years in Germany.

Alain Findeli: I think Moholy is also partly responsible for these interpretations, because there are many aspects of what he writes about that I can't agree with, and that we shouldn't agree with today. One, specifically, is illustrated in a series of film strips mounted to illustrate the design process, the progression of the students from basic design to fourth-year workshop, from abstract forms to concrete recognizable

products (pp. 410–411 of my book; see also *Vision in Motion*, p. 73). And then he adds in substance: “Well, first-year students play around with materials in abstract form.” He pictures two or three examples of basic design assignments and production. Then from these exercises they go to useful products, and that’s the error I’d like to point out. This is a very rationalistic, positivistic, and modernistic way of looking at things, theoretically speaking. This is wrong today. Well, it is not wrong, because you can’t reproach him for having looked at things in this way, because in the contemporary *Zeitgeist* there are things you can’t think about because it is too early to think about more sophisticated or more complex things. So there are many misinterpreted aspects of the teachings for which he is also responsible. Now, about formalism: If you think materialistically, you will end up with products, with material objects, that will describe the philosophy you are relying on. You will end up with a style. And Gropius said, I don’t know how many times, “the Bauhaus is not a school for style,” but finally they ended up with a style. Of course! You can’t avoid it. Postmodernism means the same thing. You can take it seriously or you can take it superficially. If superficially, you get the Postmodern style. But if you look at Postmodern philosophy, you will find things that are more universal than the cycle of styles. We must avoid remaining on the superficial level of style. We have to go deeper in order to find what is more universal.

Lloyd Engelbrecht: I think one of the things that is interesting in Chicago, when I talk to people, is that the New Bauhaus students also participated in the WPA, and the artist’s union of the time, and many, outside of school, produced what would be considered realist or Regionalist works, American scene works, and what I kind of find interesting is that Moholy didn’t seem to mind that as long as it went on outside of the school. He was supportive of it, and the artists could resolve for themselves working with this sort of Constructivist language, on one hand, and this very realist language on the other. Part of the connection there, I think, has to do with what someone talked about: social responsibility. They were, as American regionalists, responsible for speaking to their time and place, and in that case the environment of that time affected that form. I see them as connected, although art history is trying to compartmentalize all this and not let us see Bauhaus-influenced objects outside the Constructivist types of very functional, very minimal expressions.

[Unidentified speaker]: I have a question. I don't know if Dr. Meikle or Dr. Findeli could answer this. Both of you talked a lot about Vision in Motion, and the way I understand it, the book that had greater impact on art education in the United States from maybe the 40s on was The New Vision. Over the years, when I've worked with Moholy's The New Vision, people in their late 50s and in their 60s say, "Oh, I remember, I used his book as my textbook." Wasn't it one of the only textbooks for art education, I don't know when that would have been, in the 50s maybe? And, for instance, my copy was my brother-in-law's, who is now sixty years old. There are places where he underlined it for study, and I just wonder if you could say what impact that English edition of From Material to Architecture had on design education here in the United States, rather than Vision in Motion, which is a hardback and more expensive?

Jeffrey Meikle: I'm sorry I can't address your actual question as to how much impact one or the other of the works had. I chose *Vision in Motion* because it was published in 1947, it's a postwar book and, in fact, my original comparison was going to be Harold Van Doren, and then I went back and looked at Lippincott just to get that one juicy quotation that everyone uses, and read the whole book, and realized, "Oh no, this says Paul Theobald, 1947. I've got to use this book." There are more interesting ideas in it. I took *Vision in Motion* abstractly as being a summing up of everything that Moholy stood for at the end of his life, and that's why I used it. It may be an ahistorical choice on my part.

[Same questioner]: I agree with that. I don't know anything about the history of the time, but people have come up to me over the years and said they had this book in school.

Jeffrey Meikle: That may be a result of the paperback price, as you suggest. I don't know.

Lloyd Engelbrecht: May I speak to that? There were three principal instructors, as we heard today, of the Foundation Course at the Bauhaus: Josef Albers, Itten, and Moholy. Unlike Moholy, the other two wrote only briefly about the foundation course prior to 1929; they wrote [about it] in some depth only after World War II, but even then, they wrote only about part of what their foundation course consisted of. Moholy

brought out the last of the Bauhaus books in 1929, his *From Material to Architecture*, known in the United States as *The New Vision*, with illustrations, many of them of student work. And the first American edition came out in 1932, the second in 1938, with a lot of work of New Bauhaus students, and this is the book that had so much influence in the United States. Also, particularly art and architectural education was still tied to Beaux-Arts models and Moholy's book provided both teachers and students with an actual pedagogy that they could use, and they did. I hear the same thing, by the way, from people. Moholy-Nagy, and right away they talk. Allen Porter, you had a comment?

Allen Porter: I wanted to say that before I knew about Moholy's book, it was *Language of Vision* that got me there. I discovered Kepes' book while I was in the army, but when I was in school, all the way through high school, I wasn't aware of even the earlier book. It was *Language of Vision* that started the spark of familiarity with what was going on, and no one even mentioned it.

Alain Findeli: I'm glad you brought up *Language of Vision*, because there you find the theory of the impact of visual arrangement of material in a picture or in a poster or in a photograph. In the last chapter, Kepes explains how visual material can have psychological and political effects; it is very clearly and unambiguously explained. This is what completes Moholy-Nagy's theory of phenomenology of vision very well. They go together. It is very important to read the last chapter, absolutely. I'm glad you mentioned it. Now, *The New Vision*: Moholy's key concepts are already in *The New Vision*, especially in the second American edition of 1938 that Lloyd mentioned. It is only expanded in *Vision in Motion*. I didn't mean to say that the two books were different, only that it was more convenient to use the more comprehensive *Vision in Motion* because everything is there.

[Unidentified speaker or audience member]: Maybe Dr. Margolin can answer. What is going on in ... [Indiscernible: the Institute of Design?] ... the last repository [indiscernible: of the ideas?] of Moholy-Nagy? Had it all evaporated, or was there anything explicit there?

Victor Margolin: I think the break came in the early 1950s when Jay Doblin came in. There was a real bloodletting and many of the people

who had studied under Moholy and were then teaching at the Institute of Design left. A number of them went down to Southern Illinois University, where Harold Cohen brought in Buckminster Fuller. That was all a direct outgrowth of Moholy's teaching. At the Institute of Design Jay Doblin, who had come from Raymond Loewy's office in New York, began to move in a very different direction, though not explicitly toward a model of commercial design. He became very interested in computers, for example, and ID became one of the first schools to really start doing software design. Then they got involved in training a lot of people from Japan and so forth, and so from the time Doblin came in, there wasn't a connection anymore to the old ID. Of course now, for public relations purposes, the Institute of Design has reclaimed Moholy and it serves them well to have him as a predecessor, but after Doblin arrived they never took his ideas very seriously. Now they emphasize the computer kind of high-tech CAD, corporate orientation, design management, things of that sort.

[Same questioner]: So Southern Illinois, Carbondale, is a place to go.

Victor Margolin: It was, but is no longer. Many places have their moment and then people disperse. But Carbondale was really kind of exciting at one time. I don't remember what year it was, around 1955, when Davis Pratt and his wife, a graphic designer named Elsa Kula, went down there, and Harold Cohen persuaded the president of SIU to bring Bucky Fuller in as a distinguished university professor, which he did, and Fuller built a geodesic house there and used it to hang his hat while he was traveling all over the world. They did a lot of things down at Southern Illinois University that really grew out of the Moholy spirit. I heard a very good talk on that topic by Al Gowan, who teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art and who had studied at SIU. There was also a group in Chicago that coalesced around Jay Doblin. Larry Keeley was one. He didn't go to the ID, but he learned a lot from Doblin about strategic planning. There is a whole line of thinking that came from Doblin, but that led into corporate planning, and it had no reference to the earlier Moholy period.

[Same questioner]: So there is no place now, is what I'm trying to say.

Victor Margolin: Not that I know of. Alain Findeli may know better than I do.

Lloyd Engelbrecht: A lot of people did go to the University of Illinois.

Victor Margolin: Forgive me. This is a classic case of suppressing your identity, I guess! [Laughter] In fact, yes, well, we were, my school continued a Moholy legacy. Anyway, maybe I didn't think of it as such, because the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC) is a big university and, yes, a number of people came from the Institute of Design to the art department there. When Hans Wingler wrote his book about the Bauhaus, he missed Southern Illinois but put UIC in the lineage. He said that it went from Weimar to Dessau to Berlin to Chicago and UIC came after the New Bauhaus, School of Design, and Institute of Design. Wingler also left out the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Ulm. UIC had a number of people, not many who had studied under Moholy, but some who had come just after that, who did, for a number of years after that, try to keep the ID spirit going.

Lloyd Engelbrecht: John Walley was one.

Victor Margolin: Yes. Lloyd Engelbrecht is, of course, the one who really studied all of this some years ago. I don't have any evidence that there was a cadre of students who came out representing a UIC approach. The School of Art and Design became part of the big university program, and until very recently, there have been, and still are, people on the UIC faculty who reference back to that earlier period, but the School of Art and Design doesn't represent that Moholy influence today.

[Unidentified speaker or member of the audience]: There was an article in the paper recently that said in Southern Illinois apparently there is some kind of dispute going on about whether to tear down the Porter House or not. The odd thing is, there are people who would just as soon see it torn down and not to be left to disintegrate. The other comment was that nobody in Carbondale even knows who Porter is anymore.

Steven Mansbach: Allow me, then, to pose a question to the panel. The nature of the symposium we've celebrated today, and indeed the commemorative exhibition that we'll see at the reception in a few minutes, focuses on Moholy the individual. As a result, we have a natural tendency to celebrate his signal accomplishments and influence. I wonder whether his greatness may lie not so much in originality,

but in his unique ability to synthesize. To what extent might we recognize that one of his greatest accomplishments is his singular ability, or certainly distinctive ability, to bring together opposing ideologies, conflicting thought patterns, and resolve these in a way that has served as a foundation, as opposed to creating a series of original events, or perhaps original thoughts, or original works of art. So much perhaps may stem ultimately from his ability to synthesize the work of many others, and through that synthesis to establish something that might be, as pointed out this morning, the very foundation for modern creativity.

Éva Forgács: You have halfway answered your own question. (Stephen Mansbach: That's why I asked it! [Laughter]) Of course it is a very complex question and not easy to answer, but I will give two answers to it. One is that I think that Moholy-Nagy was, in a way, a very original and very innovative artist, because he seemed to be so receptive to everything technical and new. He also had a feeling for exactly what technical novelty stands for. I think we can see evidence in his work that he found that everything technical and new was a metaphor for previously unexpressed states of mind. That was something that he was very strongly aware of and did convey. On the other hand, as far as his painting is concerned, and in a way his achievement as an artist, I would say, if you'll excuse the simile, that if he were a musician, I'd rather compare him to a soloist than to a composer. I think that in this sense I would rather say he was a synthesizer. He was very sensitive to playing tunes that other people composed. But I would partly attribute this to his sense for innovative thinking, his technical ingenuity.

Victor Margolin: In fact, I would respond to that by looking at particular media, and I'd like to bring up a body of Moholy's work that mostly falls between the cracks, because it never really fits the grid of how we define him, and that's the photoplastics, which I think are extraordinary, brilliant works. They are full of narrative that also gets suppressed in most readings, because there is no good way of reading Moholy-Nagy in terms of narrative. Everyone tries to relate things to the abstract and the universal. I rather enjoyed seeing that photomontage image where a man is looking at a woman in the photoplastic entitled *Jealousy*. I think there are all kinds of narrative elements that are yet to be extracted from those works, which I feel would bring Moholy to the fore of narrative modern art. I find the photoplastics really quite extraordinary. Some of

his photographs also come to that level. As far as the painting, I would agree with Éva Forgács. None of his paintings really get me going in the sense of being works that are uniquely expressive or defining a direction in a way that will make them stand out. In response to your question, I would say that in some areas Moholy is a synthesizer, and yet I would like us not to forget the particular bodies of work that may well be rediscovered with some new reading that would reposition him.

Éva Forgács: May I just add something? I think it is important at this point. One of his key abilities was that he was able to have certain visions that nobody else apparently had, like when he made his telephone pictures. I don't think the great achievement was that he created geometric compositions that other artists also created, but the fact that he got the idea of translating the visual signs into sound signs, so to speak, coding them, having the image created in another system of codes, and retranslating those codes into images. If you want to push it a little bit far—but it is not really too far—we can say he anticipated computer thinking. That is exactly what it was about. As far as I know, this was a vision that no other artist had at that time.

Jeffrey Meikle: I'd like to add something to what has been said so far. I don't know if I see him as effecting a synthesis so much as himself serving as a kind of example of what can be done in an era in which people tend to be overspecialized, and I think we are becoming more [words missing] you don't have to be narrow; you can be a broad individual. In that regard I think he escapes synthesis, because he was involved in so many areas.

Lloyd Engelbrecht: Let me just make one point, since Victor raised the point about innovative artwork. I think it should be obvious for a special reason that he did something else. Alain, you brought that little mock-up of the Chicago-era bent Plexiglas sculpture. I think that was innovative. For one thing, there were very few artworks in which a plate is bent into complex curves, and that is the case here, and also that was intellectually, I think, part of some of the design of those post-world war chairs, such as those by Charles and Ray Eames, where the plywood was bent into complex curves. Also, some of those Plexiglas sculptures were combined with metal, and of course metal and fibreglass furniture evolved in the few years after Moholy's death. So I would place the Chicago-era Plexiglas sculptures as innovative artworks.

Victor Margolin: Maybe we could heat this up a little; it's been a very even day. Now it might be fun to raise some issue where we disagree. In a way, Moholy has benefited justifiably from the kinds of readings of his career that we've been giving in the sense that he represents, as Jeff Meikle says, a kind of comprehensive artist and obviously does stand as an example to anyone today, as an inspiration for what can be done, and against much specialization. On the other hand, I think by awarding that kind of identity, we perhaps don't look closely enough at particular works. I mean, for example, he wasn't a very good typographer in my estimation; there were a few pieces out of many that he did that I would really put with what I consider the best. If I compare his work to Lissitzky's, for example, I feel Lissitzky was much more inventive and contributed more to the field of typography. On the other hand, there are other fields where he did make really good contributions, and maybe the next step in all of this is, as Eleanor Hight has done with photography, to look more closely at works in relation to other works of their type, acknowledging, of course, this broader sense, but then trying to understand particular aspects of Moholy's career.

Stephen Mansbach: One of the reasons why I think it is a worthy topic to pursue, as you are doing, is that during his mature phase, as all of us have discussed in one way or another, that is, primarily in the 1920s although it continued to the end of his life, the era was characterized by an intolerance, an aesthetic absolutism, where so many theoreticians, so many innovators, took a very hard line on everything, were extraordinarily intolerant, unsympathetic, indeed fundamentally antipathetic towards embracing larger visions. As we've dissected Moholy and presented him today in various talks, we tended to focus on his breadth of vision, as well as his depth, and I wonder whether that is in some way the result of his ability to synthesize so many things, as opposed to identifying himself with, or limiting himself to, one or two rather restrictive stances as one might say, for example, van Doesburg, with whom he was in interaction for a great deal of time. He'd celebrate and cite many figures who contributed in manifold ways to the evolution of what we understand as Modernism and modern art. And yet, many of these individuals were extraordinarily narrow-minded and restrictive in their views, and yet this is a man who, I think, we all recognize as perhaps best characterized by the breadth of his vision. And I wonder whether that, indeed, is a partial result of his ability to embrace so many different sources and reconcile them.

[Unidentified speaker]: I was going to ask, before you mentioned this issue of complexity: I wasn't even thinking about other debates of Modernism, for example, the debate over Moholy's work and Lissitzky's. I remember the same question was asked about Lissitzky in another symposium. Are we to understand him as a great synthesizer in terms of what you mentioned about Moholy?

Alain Findeli: I can try to answer the question. The way I look at it is the following. We cannot use traditional concepts and categories to try to circumscribe what can be called the complexity of an artist like Moholy or Lissitzky. I used the term "complexity" because it is a contemporary concept we can use to understand artists who are difficult to understand. The term "synthesis" is not good enough because we have read many times that Moholy was an eclectic, a jack-of-all-trades, and so on. His activity was spread out on a horizontal plane, so this reading of the horizontal plane—breadth, as you say—results in complexity. But we have to look at complexity on a vertical plane, too, which makes Moholy's complexity more complex. This is why I used the metaphor of the alchemist, why I present Moholy as an alchemist. He was not only working on the horizontal plane, he was also working on the vertical plane. The horizontal plane, from a logical standpoint—I borrow the term from rhetoric—is the topical plane. The vertical plane is the hermeneutical plane.

Let's take a concept like transparency. You can read transparency in the material world in Moholy's work, but then you can climb the ladder and go higher and higher (i.e., deeper and deeper) into the concept. You can track the concept of transparency in the activity of the artist. Then you look for the concept of transparency in his teaching, for instance, on the psychological level, like transparency as an ideal to obtain in each student. Then you can use the concept of transparency on the social and collective level, where it can be looked at as an ideal that has to be achieved in political, social, and collective action. This is the vertical, hermeneutical dimension that makes complexity even more complex.

Stephen Mansbach: As you can see, we need another symposium to follow up on this, but may I ask you to join me in thanking all the speakers for their contribution to today's gathering, and our thanks to the organizers for making it possible.