SCHOOLS FOR SEEING:
GERMAN PHOTOB KOOKS BETWEEN 1924 AND 1937 AS PERCEPTION PRIMERS
AND SITES OF KNOWLEDGE.

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ABSTRACT.

My dissertation investigates the phenomenon of the photobook in interwar Germany and reconstructs the reasons for its popularity through reference to illustrated newspapers, photomontage, and bookmaking experiments. Examining a series of photobooks and writings on photography from 1924 to 1937, I argue that the photobook appears against a historical horizon where political warnings of the manipulability of photography proliferate. The photobook arises as a training device that slows down perception, imposes a critical distance, and develops new forms of visual engagement.

In the dissertation’s opening chapter, I propose that the photobook in the 1920s contains a theory of photography and a training manual to learn to read photography. The chapter focuses on the elements of the photobook, and on notions of reading it, using Kracauer’s essay “Die Photographie” (1927) as an interpretative horizon. The analysis of Anne Biermann’s *60 Fotos* (1930) allows me to argue for the alphabetization for photography through the photobook. Chapter two contextualizes the concept of alphabetization in children’s books, perception primers, and the form of the atlas. This chapter brings Benjamin’s notion of reading to bear upon interpretations of Blossfeldt’s photobook *Urformen der Kunst* (1928) and a photographically illustrated picture book from around the same time (1930). The space between the images is explored as crucial part also in Warburg’s *Mnemosyne-Atlas* (1924-1929). Closely examining the concept of the atlas in terms of notions of objectivity, knowledge production, and a visual training, this chapter traces the question of standpoint and orientation of the beholder towards photography. Chapter three further explores this question and examines notions of landscape photography in relation to abstraction in a photobook entitled *Das Watt* (German for “mudflats”) from 1937. The photobook in this chapter is viewed in its capacity to disrupt contemporary political, cultural, and aesthetic discourse at the time of publication. *Das Watt* brings together landscape and abstraction, and critically re-examines, re-negotiates and potentially destabilizes key concepts in Nazi propaganda at the time (*Boden, Landschaft and Kunst*).

My project argues that the photobook—with its page layouts, spaces in between the individual photographs, and photographic sequences—demands an active reading process that in turn has an effect on the beholder. Thus a mobilization is achieved in the act of perception.
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INTRODUCTION.

Dein Wald is a small book with text by Paul Eipper and photographs by Hein Gorny that was printed and published in Berlin in 1932. Bound in yellow linen, it encompasses 190 pages of text and 70 photographs. The title already hints at the tone and genre: somewhere between quaint, conservative and whimsical, Dein Wald is a book about nature, a tale of wandering through various (mostly German) forests, inviting the reader to come along and participate in the process of seemingly harmless observations of nature that are nonetheless tied to themes of fraternization and national self-identification already present in the title. This small book stands at the entrance of the dissertation on photobooks, even though it is not a photobook, i.e. a book mostly consisting of photographs with little accompanying text, and more importantly: text that is separate from the image-part of the book. My project is dedicated to the genre of the photobook that was most notably developed to its full capacity in the late 1920s in Germany. And while Dein Wald is not a photobook in this sense, it is a book illustrated with photographs that is reflective of photography as a medium to an unusual degree. This reflexivity is due to the subject of the forest as it is played out in the use of photography.

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1 Private collection, Berlin.
of photography and in the text. *Dein Wald* here stands in for photo-publications around 1932 in Germany, and showcases an exemplary response to the photobook as medium and the question of reading it provokes, having spilled into other genres of photo-publications at this point in time.

My analysis focuses on photobooks from 1924 to 1937 and examines them as perception primers, borrowing a term Walter Benjamin had used in a text from 1931 in order to suggest that photobooks of the 1920’s might serve as a training manual, or Übungsatlas. German photobooks in the 1920s and 1930s are schools for seeing and reading-machines: they make the beholder see and think; they train visual literacy. They are not only shaped by changing political and historical parameters, but in fact offer a commentary to precisely these parameters and give the beholders agency with which to engage actively with their contemporaneous visual culture. My project proposes that the education in photographic literacy is at the core of German photobooks of the 1920s and 1930s, involving a reading and writing of photography, about photography and with photography—and sometimes even: onto the photograph.

*Dein Wald* serves as a starting point because it draws attention to photo-publications concerned with landscape, narrative explorations of nature in their connection to *Stimmung* as transported through photography at the time. Indeed, my project is interested in the writing scene with which *Dein Wald* as a representative of landscape-literature starts. The verbal positioning of the narrator is a typical beginning for this genre; a genre that is mostly narrated in the first person, typically starting with the positioning the narrator. In *Dein Wald*, however, this beginning is bound to the photograph inserted into the narrative, thus beautifully illustrating and simultaneously complicating what precisely is at stake when we encounter such an opening: the stability of the writing scene and the speaker position are at once photographically supported, as much as they are undermined by the photograph. Put differently: the written words are immediately competing with the photograph, as language and photographic image require different intellectual forms of understanding, they are read (or grasped) differently.

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Page 8 and 9 present a desk and a framed view of a forest that opens up before the readers’ eyes.

Fig. 2: Paul Eipper and Hein Gorny, *Dein Wald*, Berlin: Reimer 1932, pp. 8 and 9.

The horizon line in the center of the image provides a symmetry that allows for the foreground—the desk and its objects—to occupy the lower third of the photograph. The image thus prepares the stage for the writing of *Dein Wald*, and for a reading of image and text. There is an open notebook on the desk, there are pens, various other tools for writing (handwritten pages on the right, a smaller note-pad, an inkwell, and a selection of more peculiar objects). There is a small bell, two Buddha statues, and an elephant sculpture. The caption calls attention to a particular silent trias, posited as three forms of companionship to the author: “Die drei stummen Gefährten—Gott, Tier und Wald.” Furthermore, the adjective taciturn, *stumm*, addresses the essential quality of photography: silence. The three realms—or four, if we include the realm of photography—that man can anthropomorphize and equip with language, the spiritual, flora, fauna, and the photographic are all presented here. The photograph is calm in its composition—it is balanced and contemplative. However, it might not be as mute as the author wants us to believe.

Since the source of light is outside the room, the pages on the desk are washed out by the light, and the window almost becomes a screen, while the view of the forest resembles a stage. What is more: the forest looks like a photograph within the photograph. That way, it calls attention to the framing devices the book
offers when showing photographs; it extends, as it were, the frame of visibility to include the mechanisms of construction and narrative. The contrast between photo-page on the left and text on the right creates a suspense that forces the reader to look more closely at both text and photograph. The photographs are printed on different paper than the text. It has a softer and glossier touch (it is coated), while the pages of the text feel solid; they are quite heavy. The difference in paper on the one hand enhances the details in the photographs reproduced, but it also sets apart text pages and images. The beholders move back and forth between reading the words and looking at the photo, alternating between cognitive and sensory processes that correspond to the material support to which they are tied. The beginning of the text, the textual beginning of the book, therefore immediately calls attention to the choreography of the gaze with which the book opens, and to the acts of sensory perception involved in “reading” this book.

Moreover, the very first sentence in this book repeats in a writerly fashion what the photograph provides visually. “So oft mein Blick aufschaut von der Schreibtisch-Ebene, grüßt durchs vorhanglose Fenster greifbar nahe der Wald.” The text is set in a way that the first third of the page is empty, making the photograph the center of attention on this double page, especially with its middle part which is visually dominated by the vertical lines of the trees. The beholders read the first sentence, and look at the photograph, more precisely at the view of the forest that is presented to them “durchs vorhanglose Fenster.” Set in four paragraphs of varying lengths and with its content referring to the photograph, the reader is encouraged, if not forced, to go back and forth between image and text.

The personal pronoun “Dein” of the title is here, at the beginning of the book, replaced by the first person, and complemented by the gaze: “mein Blick.” Because the photograph duplicates this writing scene, however, “mein Blick” is also “Dein Blick”—the gaze of the reader. The forest itself is animated (and anthropomorphized), it “greets” both reader and author through the curtain-less window. The subtitle’s addition “mit siebzig Bildern von Hein Gorny” calls attention to a sequence of images that work analogously to the linearity of language in a book. First of all, this book is an object that not only consists of text but that offers various “paratexts” and images (the frontispiece, the title page with its various fonts, small caps, italics,

5 “Always when (as often as) my gaze looks up from the plane of the desk, the forest greets tangibly through the curtain-less window.” (My translation.) Paul Eipper and Hein Gorny, Dein Wald, p. 9.
various font sizes). These elements and photographs—by way of being printed, framed with captions, and the like—change and engage the text in which they are printed. They enter into a constellation and relationship with the text and the reader.

Trees cast shadows, live on photosynthesis. They provide the source of paper that is needed to print photographs and produce books. Trees thus represent the predominant material basis for writing and photography in the 1930s. And of course, the very material of photography and the book, sunlight and paper, are presented to us on these pages, and they lead us to the actual writing scene, to the wooden desk covered with papers. In depicting trees, the photographs freeze movement in time. Photography is a medium that arrests, brings to a halt. Moreover, fall and winter, the two seasons covered in this book, are times of quiet and stillness. A pause in itself (in photographic form), these seasons are made of light and shadow, the colors of the forest reduced to black, white, grays and browns, and the forest is turned into a screen, where the shadow-play and reflections of light come to the fore. In other words, when it comes to the forest the scene of writing is also photographic, and tangible: not only is the forest “greifbar,” the book is held in the reader’s hands.

Consequently, this book is about writing, and about writing on photography in particular. It emphasizes the writing scene from the very beginning, and it invites the beholder to reflect on the process of writing as an activity akin to walking through a forest. It thus ties into an ancient topos, from Dante’s Divina Comedia to Herder’s Kritische Wälder, to the Brother’s Grimm and the Romantics. Photography can be placed on both sides of this equation of production and reception: photography is a recording device, and thus a tool for writing, but it also produces images that need to be studied and looked at, in short: read, with attention to detail. This small book, at the beginning of the dissertation, introduces photography in the book in relation to reading and writing, as it contemplates the seemingly simple question as to how the book and the photograph relate to one another when brought together. Furthermore, as emphasis is placed on photography as tangible, the book as object comes into view.

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Fig. 3: *Dein Wald*, pp. 102 and 103, photograph captioned “Der Tausend-Säulen-Saal.”

In *Dein Wald*, the particular tone of the book could be considered the most dominant framing device for the photographs presented. The peculiar voice of the text moves between a direct address to the reader in a collegial manner, and poetic prose that sometimes approaches kitsch. Intuitively this book’s tone strikes the reader of today as antiquated, and seductive in its soft and enticing invitation to embark on this journey through a forest. *Dein Wald*, however, is strikingly escapist in its failure to present points of critique or reference to the current political climate in Germany or Europe, at a time when other books are published addressing a pronounced sense of danger tangible at the time. *Dein Wald*, then, is mute in this sense: *stumm* in the sense of looking in a different direction. In this sense, the title is another framing device of the book, one of the paratexts that merits closer inspection. When a book is called *Dein Wald*, your forest, a book that includes photographs and a narration in a personal manner (the first person is a very dominant and very convincing feature of the text) the title might come as a surprise. It does constitute an invitation for the readers to find their forest in those pages and images. It is a landscape that might be particularly German, if we believe the Romantics to be right, but the title nonetheless is striking. It is seductive, meant to lure the reader to pick up the book and look into it, and ideally agree to the implicit thesis the title states: that this is

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8 See for example how prominently the forest is featured in the Grimms’ collection of fairy tales, that in itself was mobilized to form a nation through stories long before the nation state came into being. Cf. the foreword of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in: *Kinder-und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm. Vollständige Ausgabe in der Urfassung.* Edited by Friedrich Panzer, Wiesbaden: Vollmer [1965], pp. 55-62.
indeed the reader’s forest. This in itself is hugely problematic, but exposes the power of photography in the book as a possible undercurrent.

The anthropomorphizing view exposes *ex negativo* the lack of human agents, while it also allows for the interpretation of man’s superiority and dominance. The theme of nature versus culture is implicitly addressed in *Dein Wald*, while never made explicit. The romanticized forest stands in for escapism as found in inner emigration. Here is not the place to pass judgment on that, but rather to examine how photographs and text together surpass the intentions of the book, by creating an awareness of the moment of production that exceeds the formulated aim of the book. Indeed, nature and landscape take on a prominent role in my project. All three chapters offer in-depth readings of books and photographs concerned with representations of both landscape and nature. The book demonstrates to an extraordinary degree one of the central concerns of my dissertation: photography printed in a book complicates readings. There is always a resistance and a wealth of visual and contextual information that cannot be neatly translated into language, there always remains a rest or photographic surplus. My project operates on the assumption that photography is a particular kind of image. While it is true that books had been illustrated before, photobooks work differently because photography as a medium relates differently to the world than other images. More than half a century before the period under discussion in this dissertation, Oliver Wendell Holmes had argued that there is nothing in a man-made image that the artist did not see or put there. In a photograph, however, details can go unnoticed even by the photographer.9 Photography in a book is always already bound to “indexicality,” however complicated this term might be.10 Something in front of the camera or in touch with the photosensitive paper has left a trace and is now part of the image, an image that is again shaped by the mode of presentation and how it relates to it. With regard to *Dein Wald*, it is noteworthy how text and photographs relate to each other, and how they reference one another. While the captions suggest how to see and “read” the photographs, the

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9 Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The stereoscope and the Stereograph”, in: *The Atlantic*, June 1859. “Theoretically, a perfect photograph is absolutely inexhaustible. In a picture you can find nothing which the artist has not seen before you; but in a perfect photograph there will be as many beauties lurking, unobserved, as there are flowers that blush unseen in forests and meadows.” http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/06/the-stereoscope-and-the-stereograph/303361/ (Accessed August 21, 2013.)

images on the other hand enhance the text in a way that by far exceeds the sense of “illustrations.” Dein Wald thus offers a rare example of a text-dominated book incorporating photographic material that pays attention to the specific images, and that—rather than subsuming the photographic reproduction as illustration—uses words to strengthen the argument of the text through the image and simultaneously strengthen the image through the text. Questions of legibility of image and text come to the fore, questions of placing the photograph in a sequence of text and other images. Furthermore, questions of layout and book-design present themselves. These questions will guide me through the analyses in this project.

A sequential medium: Photos in the Photobook.

In a sequence, photographs connect and resonate with one another, especially when assembled in a particular way. This is especially true for the modernist photobooks my project looks at. The complexity of the photobook as an object, the three dimensions—or even four, if we include time—which a photobook has and produces, also means that it produces a surplus when combining the book form with the photograph that is both “flat” and “contains a whole world.” Like texts about photography of the same period, photobooks work to call attention to photographs, on how to look at them and how to read them. Benjamin, Kracauer, and Moholy, as the analyses in chapter one and two show, all provide training manuals on how to read photographs. Photobooks are complex systems of reference, adhering to the creative and associative principles of the essay.

Until now my introduction has only provided an implicit definition of what a photobook is: a book that consist mainly of photographs. As a genre, however, these photographic images are assembled with a particular intention of providing an argument through this image-sequence, not relying on text. In fact, a photobook is a book that may have an introduction, but then offers a photographic sequence that speaks for itself. Often typographers, designers, and the publisher have worked in collaboration with the author of the photographs to produce this book. Not necessarily an artist book, a photobook can however be called an art form in itself, as Ralf Prins underscores: “…comparable with a piece of sculpture, a play or a film. The photographs lose their own photographic character as things ‘in themselves’ and become parts, translated into

11 Illustrations, I am convinced, always have the capacity to exceed the function of illustrating something, they are always more complex than the reduction to one reading wants to assume.
printing ink, of a dramatic event called a book.”

It is more than an archive of an exhibition, it can be a photo-essay, i.e. aiming at an emotional response, often is monographic, but not always. The photobook wants to be read in its entirety, as a book, as a sequence, providing reading instructions. As Jeffrey Ladd explains: “A great book dictates those reading instructions but also works when they are broken.”

What is more, the photobook offers an inter-medial theory of perception. It stimulates thinking and perception, in the particular combination of the medium-specificity of book and the printed photograph on the double-page. My thesis is that photobooks contain and produce a theory of photography. Photography in general is a self-reflexive medium. But in the particular way in which the photobook presents photographs in a sequence, bound together in book-form—which enhances its object-character—the catalyst function of photography becomes even more tangible. When the beholders hold the book in their hands, the acts of holding and looking and reading have an effect on their bodies. The beholders can direct their gaze and rhythm of this act of seeing, always informed and shaped by texture of the page and weight of the book. Touch, as evident in the act of holding the book and leafing-through it, transforms the book from a mere container of images and text into a reading-machine that allows for an expanded perception. Establishing a relationship to the body that connects hand and eye and brain, it actively requires and involves the reader. Every reader is thus an essential part in the actual and manifest “production” of a photobook. The readers are involved because they provide readings and memory images, while actively (and of course reading is always active) looking at, comparing, connecting, relating, and accounting for differences.

My project hopes to help us think about which cognitive processes are actually mobilized when photographs and books are combined. Photobooks enable the beholder to slow down the photographic image flow and to deconstruct and learn to see and read photographs. Photobooks enable this process by sequencing images, a process dependent on the collaboration of the reader. By means of pauses, a visual rhythm is created. Every photograph in a book echoes and references images, and the beholder is part of the

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montage that produces understanding. Photobooks are thus about photography as a thinking device: photobooks quite literally are a technique to see and grasp the world through photography, and they help acquire a competency in reading and writing photography. As Moholy points out, literacy of the future will be measured in proficiency of photography and photography-based images: the one ignorant of or illiterate in photography, “der Photographieunkundige,” is the one unable to read photographs, and unable to write with, onto, or around photography, who will not have access to knowledge (and all those other powerful and complicated concepts tied to literacy, writing and reading). The modernist photobook was meant to prevent this lack of literacy.

Context.

Some of the most iconic German photobooks were published over the course of three years: between 1927 and 1930. August Sander’s Antlitz der Zeit, Karl Blossfeldt’s Urformen der Kunst, Albert Renger-Patzsch’s Die Welt ist schön and Germaine Krull’s Métal were all published in 1928 and 1929; as was the groundbreaking publication accompanying the Film und Foto exhibition in Stuttgart. Moholy’s 60 Fotos and Aenne Biermann’s publication of the same series both appeared in 1930.

In order to better understand the climax of German photobook making at the time, various intellectual, historical and technical frameworks have to be considered. Photobooks at the time were strikingly popular both for photographers and for the audience, presumably because they materialized intellectual modes of exchange practiced by artists at the time and by amateur photographers in other ways: photobooks were a collaborative effort that allowed for multiple modes of reading and enabled productive connections. Providing manifestations of the artistic and intellectual networks that were in place in interwar Germany, photobooks thus worked as catalysts for critics’ and philosophers’ thinking about visual culture, and photography’s potential and task at the time, as evidenced in the work of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Alfred Döblin and Ernst Jünger, to name a few.

Fig. 4: August Sander, *Antlitz der Zeit. Sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen*, Munich: Kurt Wolff / Transmare Verlag 1929, pl. 20: “Proletariermutter”17

Fig. 5: August Sander, *Antlitz der Zeit. Sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen*, Munich: Kurt Wolff / Transmare Verlag 1929, pl. 23: “Handlanger”18

Moreover, these photo-publications were published at a time when photography was widely practiced by amateur photographers, as cameras had become portable and small enough, and film light sensitive enough to allow for snapshots.19 The appeal of a mass-medium, a medium both consumed by the masses and practiced

17 As found on the website http://josefchladek.com/book/august_sander_-_antlitz_der_zeit#image
18 As found on the website http://josefchladek.com/book/august_sander_-_antlitz_der_zeit#image
by the masses, factors into the appeal of photography in print. Photography in the 1920s was not only a mass-medium because photographic images appeared in vast quantities in newspapers, illustrated magazines, and advertising, but also, as Wenzel Jacob among others points out because it is a medium that allows for the recipient to become an author, too.\textsuperscript{20} Thus to take photographs and to look at photographs constitutes the practice of photography at a time that historically resembles our own in this very respect. Photographic literacy, however, still is, as it was then, mostly rudimentary.\textsuperscript{21} This is where the beholder comes in: everything about the photobook provokes learning, suggests reading and interaction between hands and eyes. The photobook of the late 1920s shows that the combination, arrangement and sequence of photographs produces connections that gives agency to the beholder—no matter how they are arranged or read, because the reader can start where they want. In fact, while the photobook is arranged in a sequence of consecutive images, it still works if the sequence is broken, reversed or assembled through jumps back and forth. As Jeffrey Ladd writes: “It is common for example, for people to pick up a [photo-]book and flip from back to front instead of front to back.”\textsuperscript{22} Also in that respect, the beholder becomes involved in the production of the image sequence of the photobook.


With regard to the amateur-notion, see also Carol Armstrong, \textit{Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843-1875.} Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998, where she argues that in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century photographers had to be professionals in so far as they had to be able to develop the plates and print themselves in the darkroom. This changes drastically in the 1880s, when Kodak proposes the era of mass amateur photography.


\textsuperscript{22} Jeffrey Ladd, in \textit{Publish Your Photography Book}, is quite specific: “All books come with their own set of operating instructions. Those are formal elements, either in design or construction that dictate how the book is read. For instance, in Western countries, books are read from left to right and the pictures oriented to the page so that the book is held in a single position from page to page. A great book can have these types of requirements but also work in a variety of ways, knowing that a viewer can approach the book with differing degrees of attention.” (Jeffrey Ladd in: Darius D. Himes & Mary Virginia Swanson, \textit{Publish Your Photography Book}, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011, p. 22.)
State of the Field of Photobook Research.

There is no extensive theory of the modernist photobook yet, and my dissertation attempts to write towards this theory. Furthermore, it is meant as a contribution to German studies, because the 1920s and 1930s in Germany cannot be understood without the role of the photobook interpreted as media practice. A thorough investigation of the political and historical situation will find that photography—and the principle of seriality and sequence it entails—shaped modes of reading and perception embedded in a visual culture that increasingly progressed towards passivity in the beholder. The photobook, this project claims, works against that development because it engages the body of the beholder in the act of visual perception by placing emphasis on the book as an object operating with tactile and temporal elements essential to the medium. Thus mobilizing hands, eyes, and even the full body of the beholder the photobook creates the experience of “book-space” (as El Lissitzky calls it) and “book-cinema” (in the words of Johannes Molzahn) as they come into being when photobook and reader interact. The modernist photobook consciously introduces photography’s self-reflexivity as a historical medium that is always constructed, arranged, and selective. The medium is here understood as creating a space of ambiguity that does not offer simple or easy-to-consume photographs. My project contributes to the fields of German studies and the history of photography with the emphasis put on the alphabetization for photographic literacy that the photobook is equipped with. While there are now many publications that show the photobook, my project analyzes how the photobook works.


Very little of the rapidly increasing literature on the photobook has thus far offered analytical tools, let alone a syntax or vocabulary for grasping the mechanisms and processes that the modernist photobook of the 1920s unleashes.\(^{26}\) My contribution resides in the thorough investigation of these tactile-visual mechanisms in conjunction with close-readings of the photographic content, as based on exemplary photo-publications, such as Aenne Biermann’s *60 Fotos*, Karl Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst*, Alfred Ehrhardt’s *Das Watt*, and others. In the end, a media-theory of the photobook will be empty if it does not acknowledge that every photograph is an image composed of medium-specific characteristics and image-content; one does not exist without the other. The writings of Walter Benjamin are given a prominent place in this project because his texts are heavily influenced by and influential of text-image-relations that are at the heart of the photobook at the time. Not only did Benjamin publish reviews of photobooks between 1928 and 1931, his writings furthermore showcase how images are produced through language, and how images relate to the notion of readability or *Lesbarkeit*.\(^{27}\)

Generally, photo-historians speak of a paradigm shift when it comes to photobooks in 1920s Germany, one that allows us to write a “different history of photography” once we take photobooks into account.\(^{28}\) Only recently, however, have attempts been made to write a history of the photobook.\(^{29}\) A few scholars have prepared the ground: in her essay on the modernist photobook from 1997, photo-historian Hanne Bergius might be the first to pay close attention to the photobook in its montaged form of visual complexity and rhythm, which also bears a relation to the human body in the act of reading and perceiving

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\(^{26}\) Indeed, the relation of language and sequence and grammar and spatial arrangement and how they relate to the modernist photobook will be explored in the following chapters.


the book. Michael Jennings’ 2000 article argues for a complex analysis of the arguments contained and presented in photobooks of Weimar Germany. Almut Klingbeil, on the other hand, in her 2000 dissertation pays particular attention to a change in perception in relation to space, and she convincingly argues how this perceptual change had inscribed itself into the photobooks between 1920 and 1940 she analyzes. More recently, publications by Andrea Nelson and Pepper Stetler, as well as by Daniel Magilow have contributed important aspects to the current debate. Nelson and Stetler have published on the object-character of the photobook, expanding the dimensions of perception beyond the visual, while Magilow has provided context and genesis of the photo-essay. My study analyzes the format of the book as providing a frame that is tied to the act of reading and to self-determined pace of the consumption of content available between the covers, including breaks and pauses. The book creates space to slow down the perception of the photographs it contains and thus allows for a slow-reading and close-reading that newspapers and films usually cannot provide. In many cases, the photographs convey an argument, something that is bound to the form of the book as much as to the content of the photographs shown—leafing through the book is part of the experience and / or argument. Furthermore, hand and eye are tied to the learning and grasping of book and content; photography is construed as a mobilizing medium that encourages strong readings, and creates as space for them by always producing irreducible surplus. This is to say: the learning of photography will never result in proficiency, but it most likely is always in progress as it begins anew with every photograph and photographic constellation.

In the art world of the late 1990s, the focus shifts from photographic vintage or master print to photography in print, putting emphasis on photobooks as visual objects. Simultaneously, the attention shifts from photography in general to the photograph as a printed medium that occurs in more than one context and material form. At this point, around 2000, the photobook is rediscovered as an art form or medium in its own right. One of the consequences is that photography now appears as a medium that is always bound to contexts, and that can only ever be seen through framing devices and as part of a carrier (or in the French word for it: support). Moreover, when the photobook as book-object comes into view, it can be perceived as a serial medium that presents sequences of images. Simultaneously, a new genre of publications has emerged: something one could call “books on photobooks.” These publications in the early 2000’s showcased private collections or personal best-of-lists, something like a shopping list for the most important photobooks of the 20th century. The list of titles includes also exhibition catalogues, which often also featured private collections. These books proceeded more recent research-based publications and are lavishly illustrated, in an exquisite fashion that only collectors and bibliophiles—in the real sense of the word: lovers, that is—can afford to produce. In an effort to make accessible, legible, and visible not only the images contained in a photobook but its more complex material context as a book, these publications show the photobook as a book, with the pages tangible in their materiality, as The Photobook: A History, illustrates:

35 Cf. Thomas Honickel, "Kampf dem Falz. Wie die illustrierten Magazine dem Fotobuch auf die Sprünge halfen." In: Photonews, Zeitung für Fotografie. 05/2008 supplement: PhotonewsThema (2008): pp. 8-10, here 8. The exhibitions were accompanied by a drastic change on the book market: through the world-wide-web, international bookstores dealing with vintage books can compare and quickly adjust prices. Thus the market for dealing with vintage photobooks—not buy coincidence Andrew Roth is a used-book dealer and collector and editor—was expanded and newly defined in the first decade of the new millennium.


37 By private collections of exhibition catalogues, I mean the exhibition on “Paris im Fotobuch” featuring Koetzle’s collection that was presented in the Deichtorhallen museum in Hamburg 2011.

Valerie Sonnenthal, Jeffrey Ladd and Ed Grazda, founders and publishers of a series called “Books on Books,” have taken their investment in photobooks a step further, by presenting photo-publications that are out of print, showing the book in its entirety, with small reproductions of up to six double-spreads or the original per double-page, supplemented with notes on the author and a short interpretative essay. These publications thus make accessible the photobook in its entire sequence. Essential in this approach is the object-character of the book as defined by the entirety of the images it contains, presented in the unique image sequence that the book establishes.

Next to these publications of books on books, the exhibition space has slowly become another site where the photobook is presented in its object-character. In these exhibitions the photobook is no longer illustrative, but it is rather treated as an example of the photographic art form—in the medium of the photobook—in its own right and shown as an object that in itself, as an art form and medium, is worthy of presentation. Furthermore, the photobook today is considered worthy of museum-space: in 2014 a photobook museum was opened in Cologne. In other contexts, the original book is often safely presented in vitrines, showcasing one spread of the photobook. In order to show the photobook in its entirety, some

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40 MoMA 2012 and 2013 exhibitions.
41 Christoph Schaden is the responsible figure here: http://www.thephotobookmuseum.com/de/museum
42 Cf. the annual photobook festivals in Kassel, Germany, and in Vienna, Austria, as well as exhibitions at the Amsterdam Museum of Photography (FOAM).
exhibitions acquire many copies of the same photobook and present the full sequence, one double-page next to the other. While this is a costly way of presenting a sequence, it also underscores the mass-produced elements of photobooks as publications.

Most often, photographic reproductions of a selection of a few individual pages of the book do the trick. These exhibition practices and publications have in common how they present photobooks. The photographic reproduction of the page of the book conveys the topography and materiality of the object. Even if the material quality of the physical object is lacking, the book is photographed in a way that enhances the object-character. The frame of the photograph is chosen in such a way that we can clearly identify the book as a book: the photographic reproduction does not only show the photographic content, but the book-character (as object) is simultaneously conveyed. This means that the page facing the photograph is also included in the reproductive frame, the fold in the middle, page number, caption, etc. This principle of “extended focus” that includes the boundaries of the object implies that to perceive the photobook means to see the spread, and the full page (or more precisely: the mise-en-page). Because the page frames the photograph, it ultimately renders it visible and puts it in concert with the other visual elements on the page and the opposite page. That is to say, that the space surrounding the photograph comes into view as an active, rather than passive, a mobilizing and montaging element in the medium of the photobook. Implied is the handling of the book by the body, bringing in the essential element: the relation between body of the beholder and the book as an object that allows and requires contemplation, reading. It never quite makes immersion possible in a way that film does, because it relies on the action of the spectator’s body.43

With this shift in how photobooks are reproduced, namely as books, the materiality is enhanced paradoxically by means of reproduction. This is, I argue, a direct response to two factors: the loss of material quality in a visual culture dominated by screens, and consequently a yearning for borders, frames, and a more complete picture that allows for the illusion of the object in flat, on-screen reproductions. The second factor is the technical improvement (mostly digital) in book-production, allowing for a more advanced quality

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43 Film might be the best medium to give access to the temporal element that the photobook offers, rather than books illustrating pages of the photobook, it is helpful to turn the photobook into a flip-book or Daumenkins in order to extract the sequence of images, as various videos on youtube, vimeo and other online platforms illustrate. (I will come back to this thought in chapter one and the conclusion.)
approximating the object-character in a photograph, which perfects the process of photographing and printing reproductions.

Fig. 7: Manfred Heiting, Thomas Wiegand (eds.), Deutschland im Fotobuch, Göttingen: Steidl, 2011, pp. 122-23.

In 1997, for example, it was in no way obvious to show the full page-spread of the photobook when analyzing Moholy’s *Malerei Photographie Film* in a scholarly essay. Photo-historian Hanne Bergius and the editors of a catalogue illustrated her important essay on the modernist photobook with reproductions of photographs, only the photographic image which Moholy had chosen for his double-page is shown, not the arrangement on the page with caption, page number, and the placement of the photograph as shown below.44

Fig. 8: László Moholy-Nagy: *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*. Munich: Langen, 1927 (2nd edition), pp. 52-53.

In short: the *mise-en-page* is not depicted nor considered important. This makes obvious how much is gained when the full page comes into view: The photographs in Moholy’s book are placed on the two pages facing one another carefully. They communicate with one another—the photograph of the dancer jumping is elevated ever so slightly as to create a movement for the viewer taking in both pages at once. This specific dynamic, that is crucial to Moholy’s argument in the image sequence, is of course lost in Bergius’—or more likely: the editor’s—choice in reproduction of the images without their frame.

While the images are still the same (and still powerful as a pair), it is the space between them and the particular spatial arrangement that creates a specific meaning that goes beyond the photographic content. This interplay between photographs and the elements framing the photograph in the book marks the importance of the space between the images, caption and other visual elements. My project proposes that the *mise-en-page* is essential to the photobook: the visual rhythm, the breaks and pauses that this spatial arrangement produces hand in hand with the beholder is what the multisensory object of the photobook is made of. It is through the handling of the book that its potential is actualized and set into motion, and it is thus that the beholder is mobilized in an act of expanded perception. With regard to research of photobooks, these publications, technological advantages, and exhibitions are significant steps towards a visibility of the photobook as an object of analysis. The growing interest in the genre generated the question of accessibility and consequently produced the demands for reprints and facsimile editions, such as Germaine Krull’s *Métal*, reprinted in a facsimile edition in 2003. In the 1920s, and again with the scholarly rediscovery of the photobook in the last 20 years, the photobook is embedded in a theory of photography that sees the photobook as always also offering a history and theory of photography: a theory of photography, that is, which regards the photobook as a perception primer or *Übungsatlas* to practice the reading of the sequential, serial and contextual aspects of the photograph, and a literacy of and for photography in its *mise-en-page* in the book.

**Structure: Outline of the Chapters.**

At the heart of this project lies an investigation of a change in perception that comes about when the photobook enters the scene: as a school for seeing, as a catalyst for comparative vision that is brought into
being by constellations of images. In the opening chapter, the photobook is discussed as containing a theory of photography, providing an alternative to other forms of photography in print. Taking Aenne Biermann’s only photobook (her 1930’s 60 Fotos) as the basis for analysis, the chapter focuses on the elements of the photobook and notions of reading, using Siegfried Kracauer’s essay “Photographie” (1927) as an interpretative horizon. The analysis of László Moholy-Nagy’s 1925\textsuperscript{45} Malerei Photographie Film is dedicated to the project of alphabetization for photography through the photobook, referring to notions of mimesis and production (versus reproduction), employed also by Benjamin, to encourage historical and photographic literacy. Mise-en-page and layout of modernist photobooks are analyzed and examined in relation to illustrated magazines, newspapers, and book-design. The space between the images acquires particular significance in a theory of comparative vision as developed in close-readings of photographic sequences, as it functions as a catalyst to produce correspondences.

Chapter two contextualizes the concept of reading in contemporary discourse, namely alphabetization, \textit{Fibel}, and \textit{Atlas}. In this chapter, Walter Benjamin’s notion of reading—in the context of Moholy’s concept of photographic literacy—bears upon interpretations of Blossfeldt’s photobook \textit{Urformen der Kunst} (1928) and a children’s picture book with photographs by Edward Steichen from around the same time (1930). In the second part of this chapter, Karl Blossfeldt’s work is contrasted with Aby Warburg’s \textit{Mnemosyne-Atlas} (1924-1929), closely examining the concept of the atlas in terms of reading directions, orientation and a visual training. Tracing various notions of the atlas in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the form of the atlas as a site of knowledge is of particular interest in this chapter. The photobook is equipped with elements of both the primer and the atlas, relying on the body of the beholder to produce understanding. Blossfeldt’s iconic photobook \textit{Urformen der Kunst} is contrasted with his archive of images as presented in the tableaus of the \textit{Arbeitscollagen} never meant for publication. These forms of visual presentation are related then to Warburg’s idiosyncratic arrangement and re-arrangement of photographic reproductions in the different stages of the \textit{Atlas}, and in the “Bilder-Reihen” and exhibitions in the \textit{Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek}.

\textsuperscript{45} Moholy published the first edition in 1925, the second already in 1927, with a changed title (\textit{Photographie} changed to \textit{Fotografie}) and slight changes in pagination and image-sequence. Henceforth I will mostly be referring to the 1925 edition. The illustration on page 22, for example, in the first edition is found on pp. 46-47, in the second edition on pp. 52-53.
In chapter three, a close-reading of a photobook published in 1937 examines notions of landscape and landscape photography in relation to abstraction at the time. The photobook in this chapter is viewed in its capacity to disrupt contemporary political, cultural, and aesthetic discourse. It investigates the stakes of the book entitled *Das Watt* (German for mudflats) and the mechanics of the disruption proposed by the analysis. *Das Watt* brings together landscape (photographic depictions of German landscape and territory in terms of vacation or heroism) and abstraction (that by 1937 had been termed “degenerate” in painting, but was possible in photography). Thus key concepts in Nazi propaganda at the time (*Boden, Raum, Deutsch, Landschaft* and *Kunst*) are critically re-examined, re-negotiated and potentially destabilized by the book. This is to say, they are handed over to the beholders and activate them as an active part in the process of perception. While this introduction to the project has called attention to the forest in its photographic and potentially “national” character, this chapter ends the dissertation with the mud-lands in North-Western Germany as instable grounds, that might resist a nationalist reading, and instead offers photographicity and a training in photographic literacy in yet another form.

### From *Dein* to *Deutsch*: The concluding paragraph.

I want to return to the analysis of *Dein Wald*. The book ends with the following paragraph:

> Mich, den Menschen, lockt erneut die Wanderseligkeit. Ich will dem Frühling einen Schritt entgegengehen, südwärts durch Deutschland, zum Spessart, wo bald die tausendjährigen Eichen grünen. Von dort aus werde ich immer weiter wandern durch den Wald, über Berg und Tal, will die Buntheit schauen und die Fülle, das Glück der prangenden Sommerszeit.46

Set in the future tense (“ich will … entgegengehen, … werde ich …, will schauen”), this last paragraph literally performs the closing of the book by metaphorically allowing the narrator to walk away from the reader into the woods and continue his travel further south. “Mich, den Menschen,” is at the very end of the book contrasted to the title of the book, *Dein Wald*, and an emphasis is placed on the gaze once again: “to behold the colorfulness and richness, the happiness of the resplendent summertime.” When the readers close the book, there is a page that explains that there will be a second book showcasing “die Buntheit … und die Fülle, das Glück der prangenden Sommerszeit” alluded to in the last sentence. The sequence of *Dein Wald* will

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46 “The blissfulness of hiking now lures me, the human being. I want to go to meet spring, southwards through Germany, to the Spessart, where soon the thousand-year-old oak trees will start to green. From there I want to continue walking through the forest, through mountains and valleys, want to behold the colorfulness and richness, the happiness of the resplendent summertime.” (My translation.) *Dein Wald*, p. 184.
be continued by photos of spring and summer and text that works accordingly: “die Jahresumkreisung ist alsdann geschlossen.”

The sequel to *Dein Wald* is indeed published, as promised at the end of the book, in the winter of 1932/33. It is called “Prangender Sommer im deutschen Wald.” All of a sudden *Dein Wald* has become national territory, is “deutscher Wald” no less. The second book relates the author’s *Walderlebnisse in Mittel- und Süddeutschland und führt zu den Alpen.* This book not only implicitly introduces a series of photobooks that after 1933 increasingly take refuge in the seemingly neutral grounds of nature, but that also serve nationalist propaganda.

The territory of landscape, of the forest in particular, shifts radically when this book is printed and published. There are no neutral “German” grounds at this point in time. This fact, however, also pronouncedly exemplifies that books illustrated with photographs, and photobooks in particular, are never “neutral” because they are always reflexive of their own time. Exactly in the winter of 1932/33, photobooks and photographically illustrated books call for the attentive reader, for a reader, that is, who can read historically and critically.

Revisiting the last paragraph, “tausendjährige Eichen” might already anticipate what is to come: concepts of nationalist and national-socialist agenda using photography and keywords like “tausendjähriges Reich” to legitimate its claim for power. Paul Eipper and Hein Gorny produced and published a great deal of work in the 1930s. In hindsight, their sympathies are not as easily identified as those of other photographers and writers of the time. *Dein Wald* simply makes more explicit what is always at stake: the careful investigation of tone, framing devices, text-image-relation, and contexts the reader is left with. Thus, the photobook hands over to the beholder the necessity and ability to take a stand. The beholder thus mobilized will navigate the territory of photographic images equipped with an expanded notion of photography as embedded in language.

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47 *Dein Wald*, p. 188.
48 “Resplendent Summer in the German Forest” (My translation.) Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Chapter three will look at some examples from the 1930s, photobooks by Erna Lendvai-Direksen, for example. Photographer Hein Gorny is an interesting figure in this. Gorny married a woman that was categorized as “Jewish” by German Nazi bureaucrats in the 1930s. They tried to emigrate to the U.S., but because she did not get the required visa, they returned to Germany. Consequently, in his work as a photographer in the following years he faced difficulties. He mainly focused on animal photography, and collaborated on several projects with Eipper. One of Gorny’s photobooks, *Ein Pferdebuch*, that was published in 1938 and in 1941 was printed in the 5th edition, deals with horses and more than one photo show riders in Nazi uniform. (The double-spread of page 44 and 45 is set beautifully and upon close inspection quite disturbingly exposes a “Reiterzug des Regiments Hermann Göring im Gelände”.)
and a network of image relations, historical and contemporaneous. They will be equipped, that is, with a perception primer to abide photography’s potential surplus and ambiguity, in order to welcome the questions which the modernist photobook places in the beholders’ hands.
Chapter One. Reading the Photobook.

Introduction.

Fig. 9: Aenne Biermann, spread (pp. 47/48) from 60 Fotos, Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann Verlag, 1930.\(^{52}\)

Aenne Biermann (1898-1933) was a self-taught photographer who published only one photobook. Her 60 Fotos was the second (and last) in what was supposed to be a long series of small paperback photobooks, edited by art historian and critic Franz Roh and designed by Jan Tschichold, featuring 60 photographs by one photographer.\(^{53}\) These books were loosely modeled on an iconic publication by August Sander from 1929, called Antlitz der Zeit (or “Face of our Time”) which also contained 60 photographs.

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The double-page spread above from Biermann’s photobook references Sander’s highly successful work, and the photographic investment with physiognomy at the time, but the two photographs chosen make for a poetic and idiosyncratic response. The spread shows two eyes in close-up: one open and one closed. When looking at this double page, the eyes of the beholder move back and forth between the right and left photograph. Examining the open and closed eye, the beholders activate them with their gaze. These two photographs, as part of an image sequence of sixty photographs, similarly activate the viewer’s own eyes by echoing the gesture of seeing, but also by evoking the shutter of the camera which produces the picture that is depicted in the photographs. Open and closed eye mimic human perception, but this page in Biermann’s photobook also separates the act of seeing into two units: it thus photographically introduces a pause. It fixates the otherwise unconscious act of blinking, turning it into a gaze that never tires and a closed eye that will never open again.54 The immobility of the photograph thus produced has a mobilizing effect on the beholder, however, as the beholder’s gaze goes back and forth between the two eyes, opening and closing both photographically fixed, static eyes. The space surrounding the two photos accentuates the horizontal connectedness in their placement on the spread, as they form one image-pair. We see the open left eye on the right, the closed right eye on the left, thus constructing a face in reverse. The eye is here presented as constructed, and projecting and recording, as “looking at” and “being-looked at”; Biermann’s close-up is thus tied to the technique of double-projection in German art history.55 These two photographs of the human eye pull the viewer consciously into the act of perception, construction, perspective, and reproduction.

The modernist photobook—a book made mostly of photographs in the 1920s and 1930s—was a medium that mobilized the beholder in the act of perception.56 This mobilization was produced by the elements that constitute the medium of the photobook, as we have seen in the example of Biermann’s spread: the sequence and spatial arrangement of photographs in the book, the placement and arrangement of the

54 Furthermore, it visualizes the paradox of photography: the moment a photograph is taken, the shutter closes and there is momentary blindness. See the “eye of history” that in Georges Didi-Huberman’s eyes is at the same time blind and capable of seeing everything. Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, Wenn die Bilder Position beziehen. Das Auge der Geschichte I, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2011.
56 Three iconic examples are August Sander’s Antlitz der Zeit. Sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts, Munich: Transmare Verlag / Kurt Wolff Verlag (1929); Karl Blossfeldt’s Urformen der Kunst (1928), Berlin: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, and Albert Renger-Patzsch’s Die Welt ist schön (1928), Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag.
These elements, their analysis and the investigation of how the process of mobilization comes into being, form the basis for this chapter. By mobilization I mean the relationship established between the senso-corporeal activity of the beholder and the photobook by means of the material weight of the object, visual perception and touch (as in the turning of the page). The elements of the photobook produce this mobilization of the beholder through an instant yet complex cognitive process of reading and seeing, and holding the book. In 1920s Germany, the beholder thus acquired photographic literacy. This very concept of photographic literacy was also bound to the activation of the viewer in a political sense, as the dissertation as a whole will put forth, granting the beholder the autonomy of reading the photobook and its visual content according to her own temporal, spatial, physical and intellectual disposition, while simultaneously disrupting the everyday photo consumption at the time. The modernist photobook thus granted the beholder agency and responsibility for the handling, arranging and rearranging of photographs, because the beholder could—and can—adhere to the sequence, or start at the back, jump across pages, or pause at one particular double spread. Moreover, the photobook gave access to the process of construction of photographic meaning and thus eventually to the historical dimension of visual knowledge, and practice in a visual culture that was otherwise built on mostly passive image consumption.

It was Pepper Stetler who in her 2008 article first proposed the term “multi-sensory visual object” for the photobook, borrowing an extended notion of perception from Jonathan Crary. This sense of reading is a perception that not only focuses on the visual information to be processed, but also takes into account the elements of touch, the relation to the body of the beholder, and time. I expand on Stetler’s concept, emphasizing the act of scanning and reading, an act where the body of the observer produces a subjective temporality and point of view. As Jonathan Crary has shown, “perception” is inseparable from touch. Also

expanding on Crary’s notion, I propose that the beholder is mobilized through the movement of the eyes, time, and the complex history of bodily and intellectual memories that complement the reading of the modernist photobook in Germany at this time in particular.

The possibility of expanded or multi-sensory perception activated by the photobook was founded on the essential visual elements of the book as form (type fonts, page numbers, the space between the images). Much of this was made possible by the photographically illustrated newspaper that emerged around the late 1910s in Germany; in contrast to the Illustrierten, however, the photobook complicated the ready assumption of photography and text as a quickly consumable package. Rather, the photobook introduced interruptions to an all too smooth understanding of what it is that photography shows or is. These interruptions are brought about by the very form of the essay that the photobook embodied, as Michael Jennings argued in 2000, and Daniel Magilow in 2012. Jennings introduced the category of the “argumentative structure” of the photo essay, while Magilow placed emphasis on the breaks between the elements as constitutive for the Weimar photo essay. I further develop their readings to an analysis of the German photobook of the 1920s and 1930s, combining the notions of the photobook’s multi-sensory perception, and its argumentative structure with close attention to the space that introduces breaks and interruptions to the viewing process. The photobook is here posited as a medium with the capacity to interrupt and disrupt the very discourse and context in which it is placed. It does so through the juxtapositions and the sequence of photographs. This very constellation does not produce a smooth narrative but instead creates friction and tension. The photobook in my reading interrupts the smooth consumption of photographic images, because it disrupts a passive flow of photographs as experienced in other places (the cinema, or the illustrated press, for example). Instead it creates a space between photographic images, activates this space and calls for the beholder’s active re-assembly of the images by doing so. The space between the photographs is a crucial element in the “mobilization of the beholder,” which in turn constitutes the political dimension of the modernist photobook of the 1920s and 1930s in Germany.

60 In the section on Kracauer, I will elaborate on this thought.
“Political” here is thought in terms of memory, the body, and concepts like *Landschaft* and notions of home, and language at large. While chapter three deals with this more closely, this chapter lays the groundwork for this reading. The handling of the photobook; the engagement of visual capacities, touch, time, and the relation to the body and to the idiosyncratic memory of the beholder, and the photographs’ relation to language and other forms of framing; all these constitute the political dimensions of the modernist German photobook of the 1920s and early 1930s. It is a medium that creates connections, relations, correspondences. How one photograph relates to another, and what happens in the space between two photographs—these things point to the essential openness that the photobook as form produces. The outcome of “reading a photobook” is always different: every time we look at Biermann’s spread of the open and the closed eye we see something slightly different, because it relates to our point of view and this particular moment in time. This very openness makes the modernist photobook so exciting, and its theorization and analysis so challenging.

As Jennings’ and Stetler’s research has shown, the modernist photobook in the 1920s and early 1930s contains a virtual theory of photography, as much as it provides a training manual to learn to read photography. My project argues that it provides an alternative to other forms of photography in print at the time, and that it was conceptualized as such. It is furthermore equipped with the potential to complicate a discourse around photography and its readability, as it might reveal the construction of perception through photography and language and the space in between that the photobook showcases and inhabits. While my dissertation would not be possible without the work of Crary, Jennings, Magilow, and Stetler, I propose that only when the German photobooks from the 1920s and the 1930s are connected can we fully understand what is at stake in terms of the aforementioned political dimension of the photobook of the time. Most scholars have so far focused on the 1920s.

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63 Theoretical input for this project, then, is inspired by thinkers that are interested in constellations that might not be resolved so neatly into black-and-white systems, as it were. Instead, a tolerance, even sensitivity and knack for frictions, fringes, and gray areas seems more appropriate. Spyros Papapetros’ work on animation and Warburg, Georges Didi-Huberman’s work on the Atlas, Carol Armstrong’s readings of early photo-albums, and Samuel Weber’s writings on Benjamin, as much as Walter Benjamin himself, have served as invaluabe inspiration for thinking about photography and what happens in the modernist photobook.
The photobook is precisely situated historically in a place between cinema, newspapers and illustrated magazines, and the photo-essay in exhibitions—and it was conceptualized as something related to these forms while remaining simultaneously distinctly different and with a different purpose—a collector's and bibliophile's item, stored and studied at home. As mentioned above, the photobook assigned agency to the viewer in a way that the other photographic genres could not. As a medium the photobook also allowed the permanent storage of a sequence of photographs, framed photos with text and layout design. Most importantly, it enabled the beholder to activate and pause the viewing process at their will, while simultaneously fixing images in pairs or in a photographic sequence on the printed page. This element of pause and activation, combined with an argumentative constellation of photographs, was crucial for the photobook and its impact.

Biermann's photographic pair is exemplary of German photobooks of the 1920s and early 1930s insofar as it displays the tension that arises when two photographs are placed next to one another. This visual tension ultimately defines photobooks of the period. My project proposes that the German photobook of the 1920s and early 1930s was a medium that was consciously conceived as a school for seeing because it showcased this tension and thus introduced interruptions to an all-too smooth consumption of photography. In the context of contemporaneous debates around learning and knowledge acquisition in relation to photography, the photobook was thus used to acquire photographic literacy. It is not by accident that theorists and critics like Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, László Moholy-Nagy, Franz Roh, and others were particularly interested in the medium of the photobook and its capacity to relate to history and literacy. All of them were—all in their own ways—engaged in the question how photography, and the photobook in particular, could be used to enhance critical, political, and historical thinking. The beholder’s body as a sensory surface tied to tactility, motivity, and memory thus entered the picture, as much as the mind (and body) as storage for memory images. Henri Bergson’s Matter and Memory, read as a theory of photography as much as that of perception and memory, will guide me through questions of seriality, repetition, and

64 Cf. Kracauer’s Photographie from 1927, Benjamin’s texts on photography between 1922 and 1938, and Moholy’s Malerei. Photographie. Film, as first published in 1925.
knowledge production and the acquisition of photographic literacy through the photobook.\(^6\) Bergson’s book precisely argues that perception is tied to knowledge through repetition and memory, but not given as a stable category. For Bergson, perception is always filtered through memory. This very instability of knowledge (as a constructed category) and its ties to repetition and memory are the principles the photobook is based on: the photobook makes use of this instability in the sense of a creative openness, provoking ever-new correspondences and readings. It is this complicated relationship to dynamics of memory evoked by photography, and the photobook’s capacity to introduce pauses and breaks that offers noteworthy reevaluations for the position and significance of the body and subject of the beholder in relation to the modernist German photobook. Every photobook is composed of a particular rhythm created by the photographs. Photohistorian Hanne Bergius has called this particular aspect of the photobook of the 1920s Rhythmus des Sehvorgangs.\(^6\) Repetitions and pauses in the sequence, combined with the turning of the pages induced by the beholder, create the space to experience the photobook as a visual object, defined by this very rhythm. What exactly happens in the beholder when this rhythm is perceived will admittedly be different for every viewer—as it always depends on the idiosyncratic image-education the beholders bring to the book. How the rhythm comes into being, however, can be analyzed, and the elements constituting this rhythm are presented in the following.

\(^6\) According to Eduardo Cadava, the axiom that perception establishes knowledge is what Bergson writes against in his theory of memory in *Matter and Memory*. The relationship between these two categories of knowledge and photography are the red thread running through my dissertation, which tries to trace the different formations this relationship. (Eduardo Cadava, Graduate Seminar, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, Fall 2013.)

Elements of the Photobook.

Fig. 10: Aenne Biermann, double spread (pp. 1/2) from 60 Fotos, Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann Verlag, 1930.67

The first constellation of images in Biermann’s photobook is a self-reflexive gesture.68 With a respectful nod to Karl Blossfeldt’s Urformen der Kunst and similar publications on the photography of plants, the two photographs at the beginning of the sequence set the stage for the act of comparative seeing that the book encourages. Practicing “comparative photography,” as Benjamin would call it a few years later with respect to August Sander’s portraits,69 Biermann invites the viewer to look closely and to also engage with (photo-) memories these images might evoke. A gum tree, or ficus elastica, as the caption says, is portrayed on the left; the right photograph gives us the detail of a conifer branch, set against a black background. The directionality is immediately striking: the long soft leaves of the gum tree lushly bow downwards, and this motion is

68 Biermann’s photographic career was very short. Between 1927 and 1929 she took photographs of plants, commissioned by geologist Rudolf Hundt. While her first photographs date back to 1921, she started to more seriously take photographs only around 1926. She died in 1933 and the political changes in Germany forced this German-Jewish photographer into photo-historical oblivion, until in the 1980s family members and the collection of photography at the Museum Folkwang in Essen started re-inserting her into the writing of history of Weimar photography.
juxtaposed with the small bent forms in the photo on the right, the sharp “pins” of the conifer that point upwards. The black background of the conifer further intensifies the contrast because the frame is completely filled up with the silky texture of the gum tree leaves on the left. The viewer, when examining this photographic pair, goes back and forth between the left and right side, and in a visual osmosis starts filling up the photograph on the right with the planes and surfaces of the photograph on the left. That is to say: the beholder evens out the differences, while they of course never change. The tension of upward and downward movement thus created makes visible how the two photographs interact when placed next to one another. In the act of perception, the page becomes frame and image, and the spread ultimately turns into an image in itself. The image thus produced is visually stabilized by the length of the captions; they balance the emphasis on expansion on the left (here the caption is short) and the lack of surface on the right (here the caption is long, offering the title in German, English, and French). This pair is all about contrasts and tactility, but also about surface and composition: these are photographs that show the space that opens up in a photograph; they make way for the viewer to experience the photo as space, rather than only as surface. This spread posits the book as medium that operates with space and surface, inviting the beholder’s touch to engage with both: the book-space and the surface, both evoked in this pair that begins the sequence. This chapter thus considers the elements of the photobook qua book that shape our reading of the photographs.

The Page as Image: Photobooks and the *Illustrierten*.

The modernist photobook is understood here as producing heightened visibility of not only the photographic image on the page, but also of the page as image. When the page as visual composition comes into view, which is to say: when the page in its capacity exceeding the photographic image comes into view, so do the elements framing the photograph. These elements are the width of the white border, the placement of the photograph on the page, its relationship to the page facing it, and its place within the sequence of photographs. They become distinguishable as elements producing and framing the image, and by extension the photobook.

The German photobook of the 1920s drew on a visual pattern that had been in place for the consumption of the masses for roughly two centuries in Europe, namely the newspaper. In fact, the newspaper page, with its columns and various other visual elements that correspond to the text and guide the
The reader’s eye, is one of the earliest sites that prepare the reader and viewer for the modernist photobook.\(^7^0\) The page of the newspaper holds various elements in place and works as a visual unity, while the reader goes back and forth between various elements on the page. Of course, one hardly looks at the page of the newspaper as an image, but rather immediately “zooms in” to read the text, or engage with an image meant to “illustrate” the news. The space between the elements on a newspaper page, be it different columns of text, different type fonts, or the space between script and image, allow the reader to take in the page as an image, and to see separate unities: words forming one article or text, headlines, captions, and images. Together all these elements on the page form a visual composition that I want to call here “page as image.” The *photographically illustrated* newspapers, in place for roughly 20 years, works with the same principles.

Halftone reproduction around 1880s had brought the breakthrough for both printing photobooks and photography in newspapers, because halftone allowed the photograph to be printed alongside with type, in

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\(^7^0\) Already in 1620 images were a standard part of newspapers and their precursors, see entry on the "Newen Zeitungen" on the following website: http://www.journalistik.uni-mainz.de/819.php. Newspapers as we now know them came into being around 1800.
one go. Since roughly 1895, in Europe and in the US photography appeared regularly alongside text in newspapers, and the same combination in silent cinema (the moving picture and inter-titles) prepared the scene for the modernist photobook. It was not until the first decade of the 1900s, however, that the appearance of newspapers and their photographically illustrated supplements changed internationally, when halftone had been properly implemented and was widely used as a printing procedure. In Germany, however, newspapers were not so frequently illustrated as in France, Britain or the US. Bernd Weise underscores newspapers in Germany using photographs as early as 1902, but he makes clear that these illustrations were used only infrequently. However, in Germany, the situation was peculiar because there were two different systems in place: the daily newspaper (for a long time without photographs) and the weekly illustrated magazines with photographs, or Illustrierte Zeitung which use photographs as early as 1896. Consequently this became paradigmatic for modern visual culture, as in Germany books and particularly illustrated magazines and newspaper supplements, Illustrierte, had worked towards that shift: a concise form of presenting various images in a sequence on one page or several adjunct pages. It was in those weekly

71 Sweetman writes, p. 9: “While the halftone has dominated photomechanical reproduction since then (the mid 1880s, MS), visually it is no better than other inkphoto processes. In fact it is far worse than most of them; it way even be said that while the halftone resembles a photograph, the other inkphoto processes are photographs. Nevertheless, the halftone had one great and finally decisive advantage: it could be printed together with type. Halftone soon became the standard for realistic depiction in the print media.” Cf. Frank Heidtmann, Wie das Photo ins Buch kam. Der Weg zum photographisch illustrierten Buch, Berlin: Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz, 1984.


publications that photographic journalism took place and took shape, in Germany from 1896 onwards, not in the newspapers. These *Illustrierte* were dedicated to illustrating news in a semi-independent format, consisting of montaged photos on a spread of two pages. They thus created a particular genre of photographic image sequence, even if on more disposable paper. As Daniel Magilow has pointed out, the *Illustrierten* in Germany prepared the scene for the photo-publication of the modernist photobook precisely because they were published as a full-fledged form of photographic genre that was separate from newspapers. Here, photographic arrangements played a decisive role. The *Illustrierten* created an audience that grew ever more eager to consume photographic images illustrating events, fulfilling the promise to become eye-witnesses of almost anything that was happening around the world.

As Kracauer writes in 1927: “Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resemble them in a photographic sense.” First published weekly as an illustrated supplement, by the late 1920s they appeared up to three or four times a week, feeding the audience with images.

The technological progress in printing photography next to text was undeniably a huge step forward when it comes to visual culture and the reproduction of photography and its presence in everyday visual consumption. For the photobook as a genre, however, the technological possibility of printing photography was not the crucial factor; there had been books illustrated with photographs from the invention of

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78 Weise, p. 78: “Der entscheidende Unterschied der Entwicklung in Deutschland gegenüber anderen Ländern ist, daß hier die aktuelle fotografische Berichterstattung zunächst in den wöchentlichen Illustrierten stattfand und nicht wie im Ausland in den Tageszeitungen.”


80 Cf. Wenzel Jacob, and also Bernd Weise.


82 The global image agencies were hugely responsible for the success. Moholy frequently uses photographs from various agencies in his 1925 publication *Malerei, Photographie, Film.* (Munich: Langen, 1925).
photography onwards. Instead, there is a significant difference between early illustrated newspapers (around 1630) and early books illustrated with photographs (around 1850) to the photobooks in the 1920s, namely in the way that the photobook as a medium utilizes photography in order to complicate the very process of perception of photography. What changes in the 1920s is the format in which photography is presented in print. This change in the format is influenced by the technological changes, but also, and most importantly, by the context of non-narrative frameworks. That is to say, precisely the assembly of images and the photographic sequence now implies a language of similarities and differences, and it is this comparative approach to photography that changes the game. That means that in the 1920s a shift happens from album to photobook when the structure shifts from loosely connected to essentially and strongly comparative. Michael Jennings calls this the “argumentative structure” of the photobook, he understands the photobook to propose a visual argument of sorts. I want to expand on this by suggesting that this “argumentative structure” had also been shaped by the image-constellations in cinema, exhibitions, and in particular by the *Illustrierten*. It was meant to produce alternative modes of perception of photography, namely through comparative constellations that provoke the comparative engagement of the beholder. As Daniel Magilow argues the *Illustrierten* contain—in their encapsulated form of the magazine—printed on cheaper and short-lived paper, a prototype of the visual arguments that the photobook develops further in its more durable form, often considerably complicating the scope of visual argumentation. The *Illustrierten* became a catalyst in

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85 Here, the Dadaists and various modernist projects come to mind, the writings of James Joyce and other experimental forms of writing.


87 Magilow, pp. 34-62. The *Illustrierte* are a genre of their own, magazines of sorts, and this is unique in Germany. They consist of a few pages that look like and “feel” like a newspaper and bear that name in German, but they work more like a magazine: made of
terms of montage-related perception and thinking. They thus also in this regard prepared the photobook, as Sweetman writes: as “more active groupings and arrangements, more aggressive and intelligent layout and design altered relations between and among pictures, accepted conventions disintegrated.” 88 The emphasis on how the relation “between and among pictures” changed, prepares the ground for a perception of the photobook in its full potential in the 1920s—as a comparative medium. 89 It is indeed by the beginning of the 1920s, that reading had increasingly become a process combining seeing and scanning and reading, as photography was more and more part of the experience of reading in certain contexts, newspapers and illustrated magazines in particular. This meant a montaging (while cross-reading) for the reader, repeating the montage that had gone into the creation of the page on the part of the designers and editors of newspapers and Illustrierte. 90 In Short: more than a usual book would require, reading newspapers and Illustrierte in particular had helped to provide practice for comparative vision and analytical gaze. 91 While newspaper readers had long been used to visual material accompanying the written word, it is with photography that an epistemological shift takes place. Photography introduces a structural gap that is bound to its relation to representation. It produces an openness and friction that calls for an extended reading, because as a


Patrizia McBride emphasizes: “It would be difficult to overstate the impact of technologies of mechanical reproduction on the visual culture of Weimar German, as a flood of images from photography and film upended conventional models of cultural literacy after the media boom of the early 1920s. Within this context, film has attracted far greater attention than photography because of its explosive potential as a mimetic medium that can convey a sense of unfolding time and engender fresh modes of collective reception. Yet the photographic image was an even more ubiquitous and flexible instrument of visual dissemination because of the unprecedented proliferation of newspapers and illustrated magazines.” Patrizia McBride, “Narrative Resemblance: The Production of Truth in the Modernist Photobook of Weimar Germany”, New German Critique 115, Vol. 39, No. 1, Winter 2012, pp. 169-197, 169.


91 Stetler, "Franz Roh and the Art History of Photography."
photographic recording of a moment in time introduces a surplus of detail that goes beyond the focus of any artistic intention, visible or not.92

While texts had been illuminated already in the middle ages, and acts of reading for a long time have meant the reading and seeing of various image-like elements on the page, photography “on the page” in the 1920s suggests a different kind of literacy that is tied to a picture that has been made by a camera, thus promising objectivity and a particular relationship to time (and history) to an extraordinary degree.93

Photographic literacy implies the knowledge of the image in these dimensions (those of time, history, and so-called objectivity), as much as the understanding of the construction of this image, the technique and technology behind it. Illustrierte and the newspapers of the 1920s in Germany were one of the sites where photography was experienced (next to Litfass-Säule, as in the example above, and the moving pictures). That is to say: Illustrierte were a place where one could possibly acquire photographic competency by practicing the combination of reading and seeing while handling the object. While this is theoretically true, in practice the photos in the Illustrierten did not allow for true multi-sensory perception or mobilization, because the reader could not insert breaks into the image sequence, and could not practice comparative vision that would allow the reconstruction of the contextual fabric that could complicate a straightforward reading. The photobook differs from the Illustrierten in some important ways. Most importantly, the photobook operates on a minimum of framing language, and in turn develops the photographic language in its ambiguity to the fullest degree. Thus, the critical dimension, so essential to photographic literacy, was hardly developed in the Illustrierten, but was instead created in the photobook.

In the Illustrierten, there is always a strong narrative frame—spelled out in printed words or not—that defines our reading, in the arrangement of more than two photographs on a page. The particular placement of photographs not only suggests a reading direction and how to assemble the story, it also confines the photographs to confirming an instantaneous message and the unambiguous take-away point. In the example

92 Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The stereoscope and the Stereograph”, in: The Atlantic, June 1859. “Theoretically, a perfect photograph is absolutely inexhaustible. In a picture you can find nothing which the artist has not seen before you; but in a perfect photograph there will be as many beauties lurking, unobserved, as there are flowers that blush unseen in forests and meadows.”

93 “Knowledge” in itself is a complex term, it can (and will in the following) mean learning, understanding, insight, and science. The German terms Wissen and Erkenntnis will help us differentiate those many shades of gray which the term “knowledge” holds when it comes to a theory of the photobook (and, implicitly, of photography).
of Willi Ruge’s photographic parachute-jump from 1931, the arrangement on the double spread makes sure to quickly suggest the succession of events in chronological order from upper left corner to lower right corner: the view of the airplane, two dramatic self-portraits in mid-air, the view down onto the city, anxious spectators on the ground (including the loyal dachshund and fiancé), concluding in the happy arrival on the ground, captured in a romantic kiss, evoking the visual language of the happy ending of a motion picture.

Fig. 13: Willi Ruge, “Ich fotografiere mich beim Absturz mit dem Fallschirm” Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung, no. 21 (May 24, 1931). Ullstein Bild.

In the photobook, with only two photographs next to one another, or only one photograph on each double-page, each photograph is given more space and weight. Because the photographs in a photobook are framed in a linear sequence, they are not framed as tightly by a narrative as the photographs in the example above, rather they are able to create an argument that is not as easily constructed as the framing narrative in the Willi Ruge example. Here, the photographs are used in their illustrative capacity, and in that capacity only. The

95 I will come back to this thought in the section on Vergleichendes Sehen later in this chapter.
photobook however uses photography in a way that precisely opens up the photograph for more ambiguous readings, it is less disposable than the *Illustrierten* also in that regard, and works more slowly, more profoundly. By the 1920s, one can conclude, that

… the context in which the photograph appeared was recognized as crucial to the interpretation, the ‘reading’ of the picture: it was noted that a shift in context or caption altered the meaning of the photograph. And it is precisely this manipulation of meanings that characterize a distinctly modern attitude towards the use of photographs.96

With this quotation, Sweetman implicitly says that the newspaper and magazine layout including photographs accounts for a change in seeing and thinking in general, and more specifically a change in perception of photography. It also created a change in thinking about photography. “When photographs began to appear next to each other on the same page or on adjoining pages, a new benchmark in the history of seeing and thinking had arrived. This, in turn, prepared the ground for new possibilities and conditions for explorations in visual language.”97 The modernist photobook in Germany is based on this new visual language and develops it further, to focus on the photograph’s capacity to construct an argument that cannot be grasped quite so quickly as in the *Illustrierten*. It thus complicates what photographs do when placed next to one another.

In the 1920s, photography meant that one could *picture* what was happening, especially since it was tied to the press and to newspapers, and it meant that one had images, all of a sudden, for the news usually presented in words.98 The image however was not only a necessary and authenticating addendum, it also more and more replaced the text, arguing in a photographic sequence, especially in the *Illustrierten*. This argument was, however, still following a particular narrative frame, arguing more simply, that is to say, and more quickly than text, so it seems. The photographs so successfully made the point, as the Willi Ruge example shows, that the text is almost dispensable altogether. This of course is a problematic conjuncture, which the photobook in

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97 Ibid.
98 Cf. Bernd Weise, and his comments on photojournalisms. Here the illustrative function of the photograph, as much as the original audio-document, however is not to be seen as “merely” illustrative, since both in audio and visual the actual addition is more than one-dimensional and enriched the presented material in more than one way. Cf. Sybille Krämer, “Die Schrift als Hybrid aus Sprache und Bild. Thesen über die Schriftbildlichkeit unter Berücksichtigung von Diagrammatik und Kartographie.” In: *Bilder. Ein (neues) Leitmedium?* Torsten Hoffmann, and Gabriele Rippl (eds.), Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006. pp. 79-92. She points out, among other things, that tables, diagrams, and the like are rich in their visual potential, and that the idea of a “more” illustration says more about the power those images have and the anxieties attached but suppressed by the voice using the word “illustration” for any kind of image.
its aim to school the senses and critical readings of photography works against. The photobook of the 1920s and 1930s instead worked with the principles of the comparative gaze, challenging the beholder by withholding conclusive readings and interpretations.

The photograph printed alongside text in newspapers and illustrated magazines introduced a hitherto unknown sense of truth, direct documentation and proof, a variation of the eyewitness account combined with evidence in the juridical sense. The very moment photography entered the newspaper or *Illustrierte* as evidence or proof, the interpretation and reading of a photograph was required. Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner remind us: “It is not that a photograph has more resemblance than a handmade picture …, but that our belief guarantees its authenticity …. We tend to trust the camera more than our own eyes.” That belief is tied to photography as a mechanical imaging device that we trust more than human perception, which—we know all too well—can be tricked and manipulated. As Carol Armstrong puts it: “The photograph still has the power to convince, no matter the particular claim it appears to substantiate, no matter how improbable the hypothesis it appears to prove, no matter how manipulated it may have been.” We might attribute objectivity or truth to that machine-made image, as if these were stable categories in themselves. As average consumers of photography, we know that an “objective” camera is involved and thus jump to the conclusion that what we see in the photograph is the some kind of “objective truth.” The only thing “true” in a photograph, however, is that it records something that has been there, while it cannot tell us what the exact circumstances were and how we are supposed to read the visual information presented to us. The “photograph’s unique ability to authenticate,” as Armstrong writes, thus presents a conundrum. What is authenticated is only this particular point of view. As a point of view it is tied to the (literal and metaphorical) standpoint of the photographer and the camera, to the selection of the frame, and possible adjustments or alterations of what we see. We cannot verify if what we see is actually “true,” as Roland Barthes points out. Once a thing has been photographed, we are doomed to read the photograph for what it promises us.

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99 Cf. Felix Nadar and Benjamin inspired by Nadar.
101 Armstrong, p. 12.
to depict, unable to differentiate between “truth” and optical trickery.105 Rosen and Zerner write about the photograph as the symbolic carrier for an objectivity that is free of human intervention: “The photograph has acquired a symbolic value, and its fine grain and evenness of detail have come to imply objectivity; photographic vision has become a primary metaphor for objective truth.”106 And Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison remind us: “Not only was the history of late nineteenth-century photography thoroughly bound up with the history of crime control, the … photograph itself was increasingly finding its way into court. As it did, the difficulties surrounding scientific evidence and legal evidence merged.”107 The photograph seems to eliminate human agency, when the contrary is true, because a photograph is always presented and framed, put in context—especially when printed in a newspaper or Illustrierte. It is Walter Benjamin who in late 1931 underscores the importance of inscriptions and captions of the photograph, are we to read and understand it.108 Benjamin also acknowledges, however, that the photograph may not be inscribed unambiguously but rather needs to be deciphered again and again. Of particular importance, then, is the language that frames the photograph. In the case of newspapers and Illustrierte this means mostly: captions and title.109 The caption directs the viewer’s gaze, points out details, directs attention and might even offer an interpretation of the scene or thing photographed.110 (This frame created by language is what limits the photographs’ impact in the...
In the case of Biermann’s photobook, the captions often provide the name of what is shown in a factual manner: the botanical name for a plant, or the genre of the photograph. Sometimes, however, the photographs are not titled at all and then there is only a plate number and the blank space that invites interpretation, turning the words on the page if they do appear, into part of the visual composite on the page.

The title of a photobook, as in the example of Sander’s *Antlitz der Zeit* or “Face or our time,” gives additional room for interpretation of every photograph in the sequence and how it might relate to this title. As in the example of the parachute-photographer, photographs can be framed in a narrative that is not spelled out in so many words. The photobook admittedly is a very different genre, because it usually presents only one or two photographs on one page. This demands a more active composition of the sequence, with built-in room for interpretation. Each double spread is a constellation in itself, together the sequence is composed of various autonomous components then, that make the assembly of a narrative more challenging.

The photobook rather exposes the painstakingly difficult process of combining the photographs in a photobook to arrive at one single interpretation, theme or reading. Instead, the medium seems to celebrate ambiguity and wealth of layers of interpretive elements that are inherent in the medium of photography itself.

With photographs so readily available in vast quantities, the particular mass media-constellation in the 1920s created an appetite for photographic images illustrating the news, readily consumable imagery that rendered the reader of news into an eyewitness, or so it seemed. This particular situation creates the basis for the terms of reading and interpretation of photographic imagery in the 1920s. Kracauer’s 1927 essay—which will be analyzed in the last part of this chapter—exposes photography in this media constellation as more complicated than simple eyewitness testimony. While Sweetman correctly points out that the readers of the photographic illustrated press had been well trained to understand the principles of montage and text-image-relations, photography in print (or at the movies) was still mostly consumed rather passively, without

111 Or how the faces of mother and child in plate 20, as shown in the introduction of this project, might be types, representing both individual and societal traits and fate and standing for a whole stratum of society at the time.

112 Just as it makes the compososition of an argument more challenging, as Jennings shows in his essay—inherit in any reading or argument is the possibility to be contradicted. The same is true for the work the photobook does.

too much of a critical distance. This is where the photobook as medium comes in, and this, in turn, explains why most of the iconic modernist photobooks were published around 1928. The photobook is a response to an image culture, photographically illustrated magazines and the cinema. In both cases photography was presented in a sequence, but could only be consumed as image, and only passively. The photobook, however, gives the viewers the possibility to pause the viewing process, to start at the back or in the middle, thus complicating an image sequence and re-assembling it, while activating and actualizing it whenever it is viewed. This is how the photobook can be said to work to create space to think and reflect. The photobook is addressed at a different kind of reading. It is consumed more slowly, because it resists (already by its sheer weight, size and cost as a book) the all too quick consumption. It is made to last and that in turn influences how it is received and consumed.

While we can conclude from this brief history of the photographically illustrated press in Germany that various techniques for seeing and reading the page as image are in place in newspaper readings of the 1920s already, the photobook creates and enhances a given awareness of the visual elements on the page in relation to text as separate entities as well as as a composite, creating the possibility for a historical reading and critical distance. In a photobook the whole page—or even more correctly: the spread of two pages—creates an image. Here, the space between those elements comes into view, because it is activated by the design and layout of the photobook, and by the viewer. Other visual elements—page number, captions, plate number, the space surrounding the photograph—contribute to this cognitive process. In the photobook the photograph admittedly is the first source of visual information, but through the medium of the book the page now is visible as the element containing the photograph. The material support of the photobook thus causes a shift in attention and focus, in contrast to the illustrated press. Newspaper layout and especially the German illustrated magazines nevertheless helped prepare the photobook’s impact. The page in the photobook extends the visual input from the photograph as sole source of visual information to the photograph contained by the page—form and content thus can be grasped as perhaps inseparable entities. The book makes apparent that the photograph cannot exist without the page as frame, the page in turn helps make visible the photograph as bound to / in a sequence. The linearity with which the photobook presents the
photographs—in pairs or in other constellations on the double-spread—is essential to the photobook as form. In a book these double-page spreads together form the sequence—but the comparative vision activated on spread is the most fundamental element of the photobook. While the photographs can of course be presented in different contexts, the photobook as a medium defines the particular photograph’s visibility in a concrete constellation of images. This grants the beholder space to create connections with other images, while the photographs are always framed in a way that enhances their reflexivity that in turn stimulates reflection in the beholder. The photobook literally creates a space to think and see.\textsuperscript{114}

Part of the urgency of the educational purpose attributed to the photobook at the time stems from the realization that the illustrated press in particular uses photography to train the masses in uncritical thinking and the passive consumption of photography and its messages. Media critics, intellectuals, and engaged photographers had argued that photography could (and decidedly must) also be used and mobilized differently than in the mass-media, and they saw the photobook as one medium to achieve this goal. The photobook, through its combination of bound sequence, title, text included in the arrangement of photographs or the absence thereof, allows for ambiguity and complexity that can create a space of critical investigation. The photobook gives the beholder more freedom than the photo-text-arrangements in the illustrated press; in this openness the photobook prompts idiosyncratic connections that fill the photographic juxtapositions and sequence with meaning that might be different for every reader, and different again every time the photobook is looked at. It is this structural unpredictability that makes the photobook such a radical tool for teaching photographic literacy. Walter Benjamin, and by extension, his friend and colleague Siegfried Kracauer, attribute this positive effect to the photobook, both in their own ways. Benjamin famously called some photobooks “training manuals” or Übungsatlanten,\textsuperscript{115} Kracauer’s emphasis on the form of the essay and the space in between the elements allow for the conclusion that the photobook precisely has the educational


\textsuperscript{115} The English translation falls short of the image of the Atlas, which—the following chapters will show—is such an important precursor to the photobook in its educational dimension.
potential that he claims the illustrated press gambled away. Consequently, the analysis now moves from the page to the book and to the question what the effect the bound form of the book as for the photo-essay.

**The Photobook as Book: Typography and Schriftbild.**

The photobook is primarily a book. This simple statement entails strategies and techniques of reading, seeing and construction of meaning, most often combined. In the photobook, language and script-image become exposed to the act of expanded perception, of reading and seeing and going back and forth between the two in the act of comparative vision. Various paratexts, as Gerard Genette calls them, visually and intellectually structure our approach to a book, what we read and how we read it. Building on Genette’s project, this part of the chapter proposes that the paratextual elements in the photobook constitute the experience and reading, or perception, of the photobook. The beholder takes in not only the “content” or photographs, but importantly also all those other visual elements framing this content. These elements—the space between the images, plate numbers, page numbers and captions—bring a particular dimension of the photographs to the fore in the first place. This dimension makes manifest the openness of the photobook, and a “book-space” that is not so flat as the medium of photography and the book could have us believe.

Some of the elements framing the photographs in a photobook are text and type-fonts in captions and image titles. Because these elements are visual elements, we can speak of text as image in this respect. Type-fonts already implies the particular visual choice for how the words are set. Script, Schrift, is thus not only tied to language, but also to an image, to signs giving form to sound, even if as an image this form is most often simply overlooked. Sybille Krämer draws attention to the dimension of image-characters of the

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117 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation.* Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 1-2: “A literary work consists, entirely or essentially, of a text, defined (very minimally) as a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance. But this text is rarely presented in an undecorated state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. … For us, accordingly, the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or—a word Borges used apropos of a preface—a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back.”

The arrangement of photographs in a book, together with page numbers and other kinds of visual markers and texts, form a specific framework for perception. A photobook fully comes into being only when looked at—only when memory images, and other mental images, or more precisely: a constellation of those other images is added to what is presented on the page. The photobook is thus a collaborative medium. This collaborative aspect also consists in creating the photobook in the first place; photographer, editor, typographer, designer work on this medium together. The form of the photobook is montaged always, the sequence always assembled. In this way, it provokes modes of perception that can be described as “decomposition” and “recomposition.” These acts of taking apart and re-assembly can be likened to learning, memory, and repetition, as Henri Bergson describes them in their analogies to a habit, “demanding first a decomposition and then a recomposition of the whole action.” This aptly construes the effect the


120 Herbert Molderings, “Schattentheater der Technik. Die fotografische Moderne: Germaine Krulls Bildband ‘Métal’.” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2005, section “Neue Sachbücher”: p. 41. “Anders als das Gemälde oder die Zeichnung ist das fotografische Kunstbuch nicht die Leistung eines einzelnen, sondern das Ergebnis einer kollektiven ästhetischen Anstrengung. Trafen sich doch bei der Herstellung eines Bandes ein Fotograf, ein Schriftsteller, ein Typograph, ein Verleger, ein Drucker und ein Buchbinder.” He uses “fotografisches Kunstbuch” rather than Fotobuch. That this is true for any artist book, and that also exhibitions are that kind of communal and collective effort might just strengthen his point to underscore that the terminology of author in relation to the book could be called into question.

121 When Benjamin speaks of literary montage as the main principle of his project, montage then means to show, display and exhibit texts and images (even if images are made of words). For Benjamin, the theory of montage is intimately tied to quoting without quotation marks, which is not say that their products must necessarily be similar. Literary montage is linked to citation. In a written text the montage however is signaled and made possible by blanks and the space in between words. The underlying theoretical principles of montage and quotation (and photography) are indeed strikingly similar: they are all based on “cutting out” from one context and “pasting” into another. The importance of montage for Benjamin’s œuvre lies in the structural dimension of montage. Anke te Hessen offers fruitful insight into this view on montage and contextualizes it historically: “Since the Renaissance, ’cutting and pasting’ has been part and parcel of an active (philological) relation to a textual tradition. From humanistic literary working methods and notebooks to commonplace books and Zettelkästen, and from card-filing systems to digital data banks, traces of a long-standing history of cutting and pasting are in ample evidence.” (Anke te Heesen. “News, Paper, Scissors: Clipping in the Sciences and Arts Around 1920.” Things that Talk, Object Lessons From Art and Science. Ed. Lorraine Daston. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT Press. Zone Books, 2004, pp. 297 – 327, here 298.)

122 Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory. Translated by N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp. 79-80. “The memory of the lesson, which is remembered (80) of learned by heart, has all the marks of a habit. Like a habit, it is acquired by the repetition of the same effort. Like a habit, it demands first a decomposition and then a recomposition of the whole action.”
photobook has on the beholder. It is thus that the form of the essay works with repetitions that create the taking-apart and putting-back together of ideas, themes, and other elements.123

The form of the essay distinguishes the photobook from earlier forms of photo-publications because it introduces montage, pauses and associations. In the 1920s the photobook is oriented towards and inspired by the principle of filmic and photographic montage, that is additionally indebted to the changes in photographic newspapers and illustrated magazines, as we have seen above.124 All this results in a visual shift in the photobook during the 1920s.125 The photobook could only come into being because of various historical premises that form a specific constellation. One of these components of this was the image-theoretical discourse, as expressed and experienced in the newspapers and mass-media at the time. This discourse was mostly taking place in the Feuilleton-section of the newspapers. The philosophical engagement with images in the broader sense by critics like Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and others were often printed in these very Feuilleton sections of the newspapers, as was Benjamin’s essay on photobooks that is now best known as his Kleine Geschichte der Photographie.126 That way the relation between script, image, script-image, and photographic images to each other was very much part of the literal and material context of texts by Kracauer and Benjamin, because the publications in which they published were shaped by the same principles. Benjamin and Kracauer in particular wrote texts analyzing the relationship of photography to language, and contemplating the question if photography could be thought without language, even though it seems to operate detached from language, or even free of it. Both have argued that photography is embedded in a framework of language. My project proposes that the photobook works as a particularly good example to

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125 A filmic montage then enters the scene, trained at constructivist design and layout, and the montages seen in particularly Russian avant-garde films by Eisenstein and others, but also Walter Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling, and Fritz Lang could be named as potential visual influence to the sequencing of photographic images in the newly developed genre of photobooks at the time. (See Sweetman, p. 12)

make a case because it can be regarded a photo-essay, operating with the principles of the essay as form.\textsuperscript{127} If we understand the essay—with Adorno—as experiment or \textit{Versuch}, then the dynamic relationship between content and form is crucial. This relationship is always kept in a complex tension that is possible only in this form of “thinking.”\textsuperscript{128}

Indeed, Adorno’s influential text from 1958 on the essay as form has given us the theoretical vocabulary to develop the argument further of the photobook as essay further. For Adorno, the essay as text (written or spoken) is situated between the hard sciences and art.\textsuperscript{129} The essay as form in Adorno’s eyes reverses the separation of content and form that he laments in the hard sciences. Instead the essay proposes a form that “thinks itself into” questions and problems, and brings them into a constellation or configuration and allows them to be experienced by the reader. Ideally, the essay opens these topics up from the inside.\textsuperscript{130} The concepts (\textit{Begriffe}) in the essay are defined and made more precise by way of context, and only by way of relating to one another.\textsuperscript{131} In a beautiful analogy to language learning, Adorno underscores that ultimately the learner profits from immersion and contextual understanding, rather than systematically knowing the definitions of words “by the book.” While the words might be learned less precisely if the dictionary is not consulted, they are simultaneously grasped with more depth or more dimensions, so it seems:

Wie der Essay die Begriffe sich zueignet, wäre am ehesten vergleichbar dem Verhalten von einem, der in fremdem Land gezwungen ist, dessen Sprache zu sprechen, anstatt schulgerecht aus Elementen zusammenzustümpern. Er wird ohne Diktionär lesen. Hat er das gleiche Wort, in stets wechselndem Zusammenhang, dreißigmal erblickt, so hat er seines Sinnes besser sich versichert, als wenn er die aufgezählten Bedeutungen nachgeschlagen hätte, die meist zu eng sind gegenüber dem Wechsel je nach dem Kontext, und zu vag gegenüber den unverwechselbaren Nuancen, die der Kontext in jedem einzelnen Fall stiftet. Wie freilich solches Lernen dem Irrtum exponiert bleibt, so auch der Essay als Form; für seine Affinität zur offenen geistigen Erfahrung hat er mit dem Mangel an jener Sicherheit zu zahlen, welche die Norm des etablierten Denkens wie den Tod fürchtet.\textsuperscript{132}

It is this passage that allows me to differ from Adorno (and perhaps Jennings and Magilow), when I want to understand the essay as a form that is not necessarily bound to language (and to concepts). Rather, the


\textsuperscript{129} Adorno, “Der Essay als Form,” p. 10.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, p. 16. Of course there are also bad essays, he warns, as there are bad dissertations.


\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, p. 21. This of course corresponds to an uncanny degree with my own philosophy of language learning and teaching.
essential element of the form of the essay can be seen in the act of combining elements in a particular way that is decidedly neither specifically scientific nor purely artistic, but that bears resemblance to the philosophical essay in the sense that it brings together (visual) elements and images in a way that allows them to interact and illuminate each other rather than building on precise definitions. Furthermore, the above quotation refers to the “affinity towards the open experience of the mind.” It is this principle of the essay as a form that encourages associations and that works with gaps and incompleteness.

All this is also part of the photobook of the 1920s. Images here are placed in a constellation and configuration in order to access them from within—and in my understanding the respect towards this visual and creative thinking that the essay as form provokes can be expanded to photography. The photobook proposes a photographic essay—but it is not necessarily tied to language or cannot be reduced to concepts or arguments. Instead, much like the philosophical essay, it offers a productive hybrid of argumentative structures and “contemplative” art. It is only in the form of the essay—only in the bringing together of elements in its specific methodically unmethodical way, as Adorno says—that the complexity of photography as a form of thinking can be grasped, paying tribute to the intricacy that photography in turn makes visible: “nötigt der Essay dazu, eine Sache so vielschichtig zu denken, wie sie ist.” In my reading, Adorno’s word choice “to think a subject“ is very closely tied to images as a form of knowledge, experience and understanding. In a different passage of the same text, he writes: „In Freiheit denkt er zusammen, was sich zusammenfindet in dem frei gewählten Gegenstand.“ This act of “thinking together“ (or: to construct through thinking) is nothing else than putting together, arranging, assembling. This is what the photobook does. It is not for nothing that Adorno calls Benjamin the master of the form of the essay, and in my mind Benjamin’s writing—like that of no other perhaps—is indebted to a scientifically precise, often literal language that more often than not tips over into poetically astounding beauty, providing images to access deeper levels of understanding. It is this importance of images that encourages me to develop a reading of the photobook as essay. The photobook of the 1920s showcases a given subject with the aesthetic of the

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid, p. 23.
fragment, the force of montage, and always operating with breaks and jumps. It is thus ultimately related to child’s play in its energy and imagination.\textsuperscript{137} With the effect that also in the reader a spontaneous act of “subjective imagination“ occurs, in order to respond to the essay’s efforts to convey “die objektive Fülle von Bedeutungen“ as it is presented in the essay.\textsuperscript{138} All this is produced by the bringing together of elements into a configuration where they can interact with one another, the context and the beholder.\textsuperscript{139} And this is, ultimately, what makes this form of presentation so attractive, as it ideally sparks fruitful imagination and thinking by way of its intricacy.\textsuperscript{140}

Benjamin’s \textit{Kleine Geschichte der Photographie} is a review of six photobooks in the form of an essay. As a history of photography, it reproduces the space between the sections which characterizes the form of the essay as collection of breaks or jumps (what Adorno calls \textit{Brüche}), and that also defines the photobook.\textsuperscript{141} Kracauer’s \textit{Photographie}-essay from 1927 does not show a single photograph, but it is similarly indebted to the form of the essay as it adheres to the slow sequences of logical thought that can only be comprehensible in full if read with close attention. This, too, is true for the form of the photobook. And while the sequence might be assembled by the beholder in a different way than the layout of the book suggests, it is still the assemblage of the elements in the mind of the reader and beholder that completes the work of the essay. In 2000, Michael Jennings underscored that the photobook in the 1920s becomes photo-essay, i.e. it is the visual argument that binds the photographs into a language-like structure that one can read.\textsuperscript{142} Building on my analysis of Adorno, I propose that the form of the photobook in the 1920s is also indebted to changes in constructivist bookmaking, especially in layout and design. Changes in the broader book-market and an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{137} Adorno, “Der Essay als Form,” p. 10: „Anstatt wissenschaftlich etwas zu leisten oder künstlerisch etwas zu schaffen, spiegelt noch seine Anstrengung die Mühe des Kindlichen wieder, der ohne Skrupel sich entflammt an dem, was andere schon getan haben.“
\item \textsuperscript{138} Ibid, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{139} In his text, Adorno furthermore places the form of the essay in close proximity of the fragment as it was considered by the Romantics, namely as a construction that is not complete but that approximates completion in a movement of self-reflexivity toward infinity. Ibid, p. 25
\item \textsuperscript{140} Ibid, p. 21: “Essay die Wechselwirkung seiner Begriffe im Prozess geistiger Erfahrung. In ihr bilden jene kein Kontinuum der Operationen, der Gedanke schreitet nicht eigensinnig fort, sondern die Momente verflechten sich teppichhaft. Von der Dichte dieser Verflechtung hängt die Fruchtbarkeit von Gedanken ab. … Der Essay aber wählt sie [die Erinnerung an den Schauplatz geistiger Erfahrung, MS] als Vorbild, ohne sie, die reflektierte Form, einfach nachzuahmen; er vermittelt sie durch seine eigene begriffliche Organisation; er verfährt, wenn man will, methodisch unmethodisch.”
\item \textsuperscript{141} Ibid, p 25. „Er denkt in Brüchen, so wie die Realität brüchig ist, und finde seine Einheit durch die Brüche hindurch, nicht indem er sie glättet. … Diskontinuität ist dem Essay wesentlich, seine Sache stets ein stillgestellter Konflikt.“
\end{itemize}
experimental use of type-fonts opened up a variety in terms of what books looked like and helped fathom the realm of visual argumentation.

Based on El Lissitzky’s writings, Andrea Nelson construes *New Typography* as “New Topography,” and explains that it was “an avant-garde graphic design practise (sic) grounded in the experiments conducted by Futurist, Dada, De Stijl and Russian Constructivist artists. The New Topography … broke with the traditional notions of style and arrangement of type and called for a visible form that developed out of the function of the text.”143 It was Lissitzky who argued for the „book-space“ as made of content as much as form, layout design and script-image, as much as the arguments and ideas. In July 1923, eight theses on *New Typography* (“Topographie der Typographie”) by Lissitzky were published in *Merz* No. 4, marketing a “soon to be published” book.144 One of them reads: “Die Gestaltung des Buchraums durch das Material des Satzes nach den Gesetzen der typographischen Mechanik muss den Zug- und Druckspannungen des Inhalts entsprechen.”145

Established publishers, like Rowohlt Verlag in Berlin, can be consulted for dust-jacket designs. The layout of books corresponds to the “tensions” of the content of these books, and adds possible layers of hermeneutic interpretation for the “book space,” as Lissitzky had demanded in his manifesto.

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144 Ibid, p. 259.
In 1928, two books by Walter Benjamin were published by Rowohlt in Berlin. And while they could not be more different, the layout and design of one references the other, visually conveying the tensions the content evokes intellectually. *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* and *Einbahnstraße* were in fact tied together by a reference on their respective back cover; suggesting that the reader interested in one would be equally interested in the other. The two books, both written in 1924, were conceived as an unlikely pair. Through the design of dust-jackets, cover-pages, and type fonts the content as much as the form were visibly intertwined. The Baroque-book is not only philosophically dense, it is also almost impenetrable when it comes to the layout of the page—long paragraphs are only structured by small chapter titles that are located on the upper left and right hand corners of each page. The book of aphorisms, on the other hand, is structured much like a (Baroque) book of emblems: the focus here lies on visual punctuation of the page, the

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148 The archive of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, where the Benjamin Archive is located, does not allow photography, and the back of the dust-jacket is nowhere to be found but there. Neither the Archive nor the Rowohlt publishing house seem to have any documentation on who designed the two books (see email correspondence with Rohwolt-Verlag summer 2013.) My hunch is that they were cautiously designed as a pair. For reference of the back-cover, see p. 494 in: Walter Benjamin, *Werke und Nachlass. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Edited by Detlev Schöttker in collaboration with Steffen Haug. Volume 8, Frankfurt a-M.: Suhrkamp, 2009. Before, it says: “Zum Erscheinen der *Einbahnstraße* veröffentlichte der Rowohlt Verlag mehrere Buchanzeigen, in denen zum Teil ebenfalls auf Benjamins *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* hingewiesen wird.” Ibid, p. 493.
titles inform the reading, and the small vignettes are full of metaphors and literary images that likens *Einhahnstraße* to photo-essays published in the same year.149

Benjamin’s two books almost form a pair of “positive” and “negative” in the photographic sense: they communicate similar ideas, but in very different form. Thus the following becomes visible: the connectedness of Baroque and Modernity, as philosophically layed out in each book respectively. This connection manifests itself especially in script-image and the understanding that images are framed by language always, and that language is indebted to images, already in the way we perceive language when reading a text. It is not by accident, then, that *Trauerspiel-Buch* and *Einhahnstraße* express this correspondence visually.150 Together they make a case for perception connected to intellectual engagement, emphasizing the layout as one of the contextual and material frames that make “reading” possible. This allows for the conclusion that for Benjamin reading is always connected to images, even more: to a multi-sensory perception that includes the book as visual object, and that within the visual design, a dimension of the content is communicated, shaped, and made accessible. Since Benjamin plays a prominent role in chapter two, here it suffices to say that the book as a visual object not only theoretically appealed to him, but was exercised in the book design of two of his 1928 publications. *Einhahnstraße*, moreover, is linked to photo-publications of the time by its cover design.

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149 See, for example, August Sander’s *Antlitz der Zeit* or Albert Renger-Patzsch’s *Die Welt ist schön.*
Photographer Sasha Stone made the photo-collage for *Einbahnstraße* with which Benjamin was particularly pleased, as it translated the evocative title into a multi-layered photographic space of the metropolis. The designer of the page-layout of Benjamin’s *Einbahnstraße* remains unknown, but was clearly influenced by the *New Typographers*, one of which was Jan Tschichold who designed various photobooks; Biermann’s *60 Fotos* was one of them. Photobooks in particular made use of *New Typography* because here, as we have seen above, image and text are intertwined already. This, in turn, had an effect on other publications. Photobooks were a perfect playground for type-fonts, and the placement of (visual) elements on the page—up to now Biermann’s book has provided some examples as to the enriching effects on the interplay of photography and typography.

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https://www.dhm.de/lemo/Bestand/objekt/r92-5476a
https://www.dhm.de/lemo/Bestand/objekt/r92-5476


other visual elements in the book. Script-image works with blanks, Leerstellen and Zwischenraum, on the visual space of the page. The page works as a plane (as in “image”) but also as a space to be created and occupied by script and / or image. The book-space that Lissitzky wanted to create becomes especially poignant in relation to the photobook.154 But also with regard to Benjamin’s Einbahnstraße, the tensions between content, title of the book and page-layout suggest the creation of a multi-sensory perceptual experience. The Baroque emblem book is referenced, as is the space of the street (evoked in the title), page numbers turn into street numbers, section titles into advertising, or plaques on houses. In the literary complement to the Frankfurter Zeitung, Kracauer writes about both Einbahnstraße and Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels, by addressing the inherent relatedness of the two books.

Ihrer thematischen Verschiedenheit ungeachtet gehören beide Werke als die Äußerungen eines Denkens zusammen, das fremd zu dem der Zeit steht. Stammverwandt sind ihm eher talmudische Schriften und mittelalterliche Traktate. Denn gleich ihnen ist seine Darstellungsform die Interpretation. Seine Absichten sind ideologischer Art. … Es ist die Gegenposition zum philosophischen System, das sich in Allgemeinbegriffen der Welt versichern möchte; die Gegenposition zur abstrakten Verallgemeinerung überhaupt.155

As a counter position to any abstract “Verallgemeinerung,” these two books in their formal presentation manifest an interpretation, Kracauer says. Like religious or mystical texts, he furthermore underscores Benjamin’s books by way of typography and script image appeal not only to an “abstract” intellect but to a more complex (and sensually expanded) reading and perception.


155 My visit to the Benjamin Archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, August 2013, Kracauer’s review can be found in: Literaturblatt der Frankfurter Zeitung, published July 15, 1928.
Coming back to the idea that script-image in the sense of typography is essentially a question of different types and how text is set, we can assert that typography is about making a text legible. Different type-fonts also effect and change the text (and thus the content or message); they render all these concepts visible in different ways. Take Benjamin’s Trauerspiel and Einbahnstraße books, for example: Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels might be one of the examples where density of philosophical inquiry and type layout coincide, visually underscoring the idea that this text might be hard to read. That is to say, typography is always tied to a concept of legibility, to improvement of legibility, most often, even an optimization. It is as if this...

156 Image found in: https://archive.org/stream/Einbahnstrae/BenjaminEinbahnstrae


157 The layout of Einbahnstraße, however, is the perfect counterfeit. Both were published with Rowohlt in 1928, and both were tightly connected in the press as one book in two different forms of presentation. Hence this text might “illustrate” Moholy’s idea of a synthesis of typography and photography. Along with legibility of typography comes the question of orthography, too. In Germany there have been calls to systematize and standardize various spellings, and “photography,” as it happens, is an interesting word in itself in this instance. There is a significant difference between the first and the second edition of Moholy’s Malerei, Fotografie, Film simply because the 1927 edition uses “Fotografie,” the more modern looking version using an “F” instead of the “Ph.” This change in title is a small detail but says quite about about how Moholy definitely wanted to be up to date with the title of his publication. (Siegfried Kracauer uses “Fotografie” for his 1926 essay, Walter Benjamin on the other hand uses “Photographic” in his 1931 “Little History of Photography”.)
understanding would allow us to see a little more of the connective tissue and frame that is part and parcel of the object at hand, like *paratexts* allow us to grasp the connectedness, contextual dimension and contextual attachment of any text.\textsuperscript{159} Usually, script is seen as part of the realm of language, not image.\textsuperscript{160} This distinction, however, is entirely modern, as it fails to acknowledge that script and image had been tied together since the very beginning of language notations. The interdependency has moreover been practiced in the Middle Ages, in illuminated manuscripts, for example.\textsuperscript{161} It does not come as a surprise then, that for others, like Benjamin, Moholy, Tschichold to name a few, in the 1920s script was conceived as image, because the “image” (in an extended sense) was not only ubiquitous, but was a form of thinking that had inscribed itself into various forms of discourse. Benjamin writes about this in some aphorisms in *Einbahnstraße*, in “Chinaware,” for example, when he thinks about various orientations of script and the according mobility of the book. It is here, that he elaborates on the connection between the act of copying a text by hand and the acquisition of knowledge. The friction and bilateral indebtedness between the two symbolic orders of script and photography is at the core of the photobook as developed in the 1920s, and is spelled out in Biermann’s project, as we will see later on.\textsuperscript{162}

In this next section, a publication from 1925 comes into view that is not strictly speaking a photobook. Rather, it is a training manual in perception and thus helps us sketch out the elements of the photobook further that apply to this category. After the page as image and the form layout of the book the analysis now progresses to the sequence of images in a book.

\textsuperscript{159} Cf. Genette, *Paratexts*.

\textsuperscript{160} Krämer writes: „Im Zusammenhang dieser ’mächtigen’ Bifurkation zwischen dem Diskursivem und dem Ikonischen, wird die Schrift – zumal in Gestalt der phonetischen Schrift – umstandslos der Seite des Sprachlichen zugeschlagen. Schrift gilt als Sprache und nicht als Bild.“ Krämer, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{161} Cf. various writings by Walter Benjamin and Michael Camille that are concerned with this question.

\textsuperscript{162} Krämer writes against an old divide and argues for a more complex understanding of both language and image: “Sprache und Bild gelten gewöhnlich als disjunktive symbolische Ordnungen, als zwei nicht aufeinander zurückführbare Vermögen unseres Umgangs mit Zeichen. Der Unterschied von Diskursivem und Ikonischem, Repräsentation und Präsentation, Sagen und Zeigen ist seit Lessings Laokoon (XVI) kanonisch geworden (und zeigt seine Folgewirkungen bis hinein in die Unterscheidung von Digitalem und Analogem).” Krämer, “Die Schrift als Hybrid aus Sprache und Bild.” p. 79.
The Photobook as Multi-Sensory Object (Moholy, *Malerei. Photographie. Film*, 1925)

László Moholy-Nagy is part of and in line with the *New Typography* movement. In his 1925 publication, *Malerei. Photographie. Film*, he hints at the main goal of typography: the written text should be grasped quickly, almost as fast as a photograph or an image could be grasped, or so the common prejudice or understanding goes. His *Malerei. Photographie. Film* was assembled in the summer of 1924, and published in 1925. The book is known “as one of the most important yet perplexing statements on photography’s potential to revolutionize vision and communication,” as Pepper Stetler reminds us. While it is important to note that Moholy’s book is not a photobook, it offers elements of the photo-essay (a sequence of images) and is a training manual in a particular sense: it explicitly claims to provide possible alphabetization for and through photography. In this chapter, it provides the context and connective tissue for the debate around the photobook and its theoretical impact. Moholy’s book is of interest because it is an example of *New Typography* and because it marks a paradigm shift for German photography, as German photo-historian Herbert Molderings underscores: it argues for a media-optimistic use of photography. In line with this educational aspect are 12 short essays on perception, organized around topics of art, architecture, painting, photography, and cinema. The book proposes a theory of artistic progress and offers the theoretical program for a new vision. Moholy not only emphasizes how photography is the basis of perception in 1924, he also explores photography’s potential to “make” images rather than only to reproduce them and consume them passively. Moholy’s book is part of a longer tradition of photographic training manuals and amateur books, as a *Lehrbuch* in that sense it provides practical information on how to take and read photographs. *Lehrbücher* of this kind had been in circulation for

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164 Lázló Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei. Photographie. Film*, Munich: Albert Langen, 1925, p. 4: “This book was assembled in the summer of 1924. Technical difficulties prevented the timely publication.” (My own translation, the original reads “Dieses Buch wurde im Sommer 1924 zusammengestellt. Technische Schwierigkeiten verhinderten das rechtzeitige Erscheinen.”) (Will be referred to in the following as Moholy: *MPF*).


amateur photographers at least since the 1880s. By offering both theoretical arguments in the essays (see “Produktion Reproduktion,” for example) as well as concrete examples of how this new vision could be photographed, he not only teaches the reader to think differently about perception but also teaches her how to see differently.

The roughly forty pages of theoretical text at the beginning of the book are set in a typographic layout that is meant to prepare the reading experience of the photo-sequence that follows, and theoretically frames the viewing experience this sequence offers. Stetler emphasizes that until very recently, Moholy's *Malerei. Photographie. Film* had been regarded mostly as “a textual record” of his groundbreaking ideas of how photography shapes perception. Stetler’s contribution lies in positing Moholy’s book as much more than just 12 essays and illustrations—precisely as “a visual object” that expands a limited notion of only the visual realm, but includes touch and time, and other ways in which this object can relate to the body of the beholder. In the context of this chapter, *Malerei. Photographie. Film* allows us to frame the question of how the German photobook in the 1920s in Germany can be said to actively involve viewer in terms of typography, comparative vision, and touch. This book, however, is a manifestation of his technophile conviction that this shift in perception goes beyond the visual. *Malerei. Photographie. Film* supports an adaptation of the human sensorium to the modern metropolis, its speed and dynamics—and that includes sound—the element of time and an effect of the audio, visual, haptic, and temporal on the perceiving body. The simultaneity of stimuli, be they visual, audio, or other, in a city like Berlin needs getting used to, or training, as Moholy made clear. Most manage this act of acclimatization naturally, while others, in the year of his example, 1924, still need training:

Durch die Riesenentwicklung der Technik und der Großstädte haben unsere Aufnahmeorgane ihre Fähigkeit einer simultanen akustischen und optischen Funktion erweitert. Schon im alltäglichen Leben gibt es Beispiele dafür: Berliner queren den Potsdamer Platz. Sie unterhalten sich, **sie hören gleichzeitig**.

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167 Around 1880, Kodak coined the slogan for photography practiced by the masses: “You push the button, we do the rest.” Moholy’s book also influenced other books of this type (of how to take photographs) would be an interesting subject to analyze more closely, especially with regard to Werner Gräff’s “Es Kommt der neue Fotograf” (1929) and “So sollten Sie fotografieren lernen!” also by Gräff, 1930.

168 Cf. Stetler, p. 89.

169 Stetler, 2008, pp. 89 and 90.
die Hupen der Autos, das Klingeln der Straßenbahn, das Tuten der Omnibusse, das Hallo des Kutschers, das Sausen der Untergrundbahn, das Schreien des Zeitungsverkäufers, die Töne eines Lautsprechers usw.


Ebenso analog, dass moderne Optik und Akustik, als Mittel künstlerischer Gestaltung verwendet, auch nur von einem für die Gegenwart offenen Menschen aufgenommen werden und ihn bereichern können.¹⁷⁰

In that sense, Moholy’s particular design to enhance readability is noteworthy. The visual markers in a book guide our reading and thus influence what we read and how we read it. This impact of type-fonts and book design is at stake in Moholy’s project, as in the Bauhaus-Bücher series at large.

Fig. 18: László Moholy-Nagy: Malerei. Photographie. Film. Munich: Langen 1925. Cover and Title page.

¹⁷⁰ Moholy, MPF, p. 35, “Das simultane oder Polykino” (this section starts on p. 33); I have tried to simulate the visual experience of spacing and typography in the quote.
In this particular book the questions of readability and visual markers are tied to the question of legibility of photography. The book’s title proposes an argument. It suggests that modern art advances from painting to film. Or rather, to make it a little more complex: photography is used in this book to make accessible a shift in perception in Moholy’s time that he embraces enthusiastically. Moholy uses signs, arrows, bars, and points. He uses bold fonts and spacing to structure his text and organize the page and to direct the reader’s attention and focus, so that the most important contents might be grasped and understood more easily.

The second volume of this popular book was published in 1927, changing the orthography from Photographie to a more modern looking Fotografie, giving the book a more contemporary touch, and with the alliteration binding photography closer to film, also visually by way of the more homogenous script image of the title (Fotografie ~ Film). It is unusual in itself to change the title of a publication for its second edition, even if it is only in the way the title is spelled.
What is more, the typographic elements frame the text and contain reading and viewing directions. By the end of the twelve essays, Moholy includes an arrow pointing upwards, signaling that the beholder can and should go back to the beginning. A bold repetition of the word “again,” the German *noch einmal*—in a total of three times—brings the point across: a training in a change of perception can only be achieved by repetition. Every repetition, however, of course is different, adding memories to the actualized act of reading, constantly changing it. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze reminds us of the complicated relationship between difference and repetition, when he writes about the paradox of repetition that is within the beholder, because it is the beholder’s mind that introduces the difference into the perception of repetition. By employing repetition, Moholy thus comments on the interdependency of the book’s visual components and the reader’s mind for actualization or mobilization—by addressing the command for repetition to the reader, he implicitly acknowledges the paradox that Deleuze addresses some 40 years later: every repetition is based on both similarity and difference. This has consequences for the reproductive medium of photography that Moholy wants to establish as *productive*, most of all. Photography is usually thought of as a reproductive medium, a medium that is based on the reproduction and repetition of innumerable “identical” copies printed from one negative. If, however, any repetition, and by extension reproduction, also embodies difference as much as similarity, then context, time, and frameworks come into view as factors altering the same, turning it into the similar. A photographic sequence is productive also in that respect, as it produces similarities and differences between images, but also activates the productive potential of each photographic image. The typographic arrow is of particular interest in this respect. It points upwards—to the paragraph immediately on the page. But it also points to the edges of the book and beyond. The directionality is ambiguous, and that way it expands outwards: the two-dimensional typographic arrow confined to the page can only point in one direction, but it opens up other directions for the hands holding the book. Holding the book horizontally, the arrow points to the horizon, held vertically it points to the ceiling, etc. giving “bookspace” yet another...

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meaning. Everything, that is to say, can be re-examined now, after reading Moholy’s essays on perception. The act of reading the book does not have to follow a linear logic, this arrow also suggests. Moholy’s insistence on the act of repetition or his command of noch einmal, that is also in itself repeated towards the very end of the book, allows us to consider this as a practice, and as training.\textsuperscript{173}.

The book is composed of three sections: essays, a photo sequence that works in pairs, and a film script in complex image constellations. The book’s first section contains theoretical essays revolving around perception, discussing the creative potential to create with photography, among other things, in sections that are mostly three pages long.\textsuperscript{174} The essays are short and concise, the language is thetic and the content almost prophetic (anticipating the internet by many decades, for example).\textsuperscript{175} Main points in the argument are emphasized by tools of graphic and typographic design: bold characters, arrows, bullet points, and the like. Every page in this book is organized also visually, specifically designed to correspond with the content. In the introduction, Moholy points out how “good typography” is important to enhance communication or the delivery of the message (what he calls “Mitteilung”): “Die lineare, gedankenmitteilende Typographie ist nur ein vermittelndes Notglied zwischen dem Inhalt der Mitteilung und dem aufnehmenden Menschen.”\textsuperscript{176} The book’s second section is composed of photographic pairs in a sequence that structurally resembles Biermann’s photobook, but that in contrast consists of images assembled from different sources. The book’s last section presents a “film-script” for a film that was never realized. As a whole, the book visualizes what it wants to teach: a change in perception. Script-image and photography, intertwined for Moholy, are both seen as media and means to shape how we perceive the world: “das Gesehene” (that which is seen) in German stands in close proximity to “das Gelesene” (that which is read), and the connotations emphasize the act of perceiving as active participation, and democratic.\textsuperscript{177} Moholy writes: “Die Eindeutigkeit des Wirklichen, Wahren in der Alltagssituation ist für alle Schichten da. Langsam sickert die Hygiene des Optischen, das

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\textsuperscript{174} In terms of content, the essays range from “Tafelbild, Architektur und Gesamtkunstwerk”, “Haus-Pinakothek”, to essays on photography (“Photographie”, “Reproduktion Produktion”, “Photographie ohne Kamera. Das Photogramm” and “Die Zukunft des photographischen Verfahrens”) and finally film-related issues like “Das simultane oder Polykino” and “Von technischen Möglichkeiten und Forderungen.”
\textsuperscript{176} Moholy, \textit{MPF}, p. 30-31. This, too, is conveyed visually.
\textsuperscript{177} Moholy, \textit{MPF}, p. 30
\end{flushleft}
Gesunde des Gesehenen durch.” Malerei. Photographie. Film was intended as an educational tool, and one that works differently and for a different audience than the preliminary course at the Bauhaus, for example, or other forms of teaching Moholy would have been familiar with. The book provide the ideal form for what Moholy wants to communicate because it allows for multiple repetitions. It is a book of exercises for changing the viewer’s vision, with the very specific means of the book: typography, pages that one has to turn to continue reading or to repeat, the photographs, captions and other constellations of visual elements that can also evoke sound and other sensory experiences. It is not by accident that Moholy speaks of the hygiene of the optical in a text on photography and typography, as other theorists and his contemporaries have pointed out the “healthy” optical and intellectual effects of new type fonts and arrangements of script-image with the effects of educating and purifying what we read and see. Moholy’s book is invested in this hygiene of the seen: “Die Hygiene des Optischen” and “das Gesunde des Gesehenen” are linked to the optical apparatus, but also to the book in the way that Moholy envisions it: approaching film, that is. Moholy’s particular way of writing, or his “voice”, is another device to structure and color this book, one that resembles political rhetorics as much as advertising. The text is journalistic to manifesto-like, soaked with media-optimism and almost utopian convictions of perfecting the human sensorium. The utopian, almost naïve understanding of his ideas is remarkable, the belief in communicability striking. Malerei. Photographie. Film is an experiment in bookmaking as much as it is an experiment in the content it provides. An experiment in bookmaking it is because of the design and layout of the book, an experiment in the content because it is so strongly invested in the positive potential of photography. Moholy’s book is consciously conceptualized as a training manual: one that covers three different purposes. The twelve essays satisfy the theoretical and intellectual appetite, the image sequence of photographic pairs employs the “compare and contrast” of comparative vision, and the dynamic sequence towards the end of the book feeds the more adventurous spectator with a utopia of how

178 Ibid.
The hopes for the hygiene of reading and seeing were high, indeed, but the debate about hygiene in general strikes us now as more than problematic. The language and rhetoric is so close to that of a racial hygiene of fascist and Stalinist regimes.
180 One may wonder in how far Moholy’s multi-lingual everyday is part of that peculiar tone of his writings. Herbert Molderings in 2000 pointed out that Moholy’s German was not good enough, so his wife Lucia must have translated and written most of this book, which might explain the weirdly constructed way of the language used in this book. (Molderings in a seminar at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin in the Spring of 2000.) Cf. Andrea Nelson, “László Moholy-Nagy and Painting Photography Film: A Guide to Narrative Montage.” History of Photography, Volume 30, Number 3, Autumn 2006, pp. 258-269
the future of film could look like. This tripartite structure is repeated in the sources Moholy presents as the pillars of his New Vision: scientific photography in the broader sense (including microscopic and telescopic photography, X-ray photography, chrono-photography, among others), amusement montage (allowing for comic distortions and photographic improbabilities, or more complex visual arguments), and constructivist formal language at large.181 These sources produce images that challenge the human eye, and allow the conclusion that the camera can provide images that the naked human eye could not see. All these sources are part of the “objectivity”-argument that photography had been invested with from the beginning, as I have argued above.182 Moholy further emphasizes that photography (or rather: the camera) is the ideal prosthesis for man, because it can record and fix as an image that the human eye cannot see.183 He enthusiastically embraces this extension into the otherwise invisible, precisely because it allows for a creative working-through. This is the standpoint of the artist. Not so much concerned with the objectivity photography could warrant, but rather with the subjectivity it allows for when it comes to the act of production, Moholy turns photography’s potential for knowledge acquisition upside down. Convinced that the active, multi-sensory participation in a world that is dominated by photographic images provides the best protection against unreflected consumption, Moholy implicitly argues for training and an alphabetization of a different kind. Moholy is invested in a production and creation of photography rather than the “mechanical process of recording” that photography could be.184

The photographic sequence in the second part of the book works in photographic pairs. For this part of the “training”, Moholy made sure to select the image material from a variety of sources, including photographs that the international photo agencies, Bildagenturen, provided and which would have been familiar to the reader of the Illustrierte. These photographs that Moholy had found in and cut out of international newspapers and Illustrierte, or that he had come across in other ways, he assembled in an idiosyncratic way.185

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181 Examples for each of those claims: telescopic views of outer space (pp. 56-57), amusement photography (pp. 92-93), Constructivist (pp. 66-67). Cf. Molderings; and Brigid Doherty in David Wellbery’s A New History of German Literature. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 733-738: “Photography, Typography, and the Modernization of Reading”.
182 The notion of objectivity and its complicated relationship to photography will play an important part in chapter 2.
183 Moholy, MPF, p. 45, enlarged photograph of a headlouse.
185 In my visit to the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin (2012) there were references to a scrapbook that Moholy had assembled which is now lost.
His own photograms appear next to X-Ray photographs, a portrait of dancer Gret Palucca by Charlotte Rudolf is set next to a newspaper image of a motorcyclist in high-speed, racing around a corner, distributed by Atlantic image agency. These pairings are similarly provocative to the pairs Biermann’s photobook uses. Except that for Moholy, the use of various sources brings home his point about the variety of contexts in which photography is experienced: he more strongly posits photography as a mass-medium and even as democratic. Because he includes images that have been circulated widely before, he on the one hand underscores that photography is the most dominant contemporary medium, while simultaneously employing these same mechanisms of publication in a manner that slightly re-arranges the image flow. That way, he juxtaposes photographs that encourage the practice of comparative vision. The combination of photography and the book—Moholy argues with the means of this book—is the perfect medium to adapt to the changing world of modernity, and to the city with its multi-dimensional and multi-sensory challenges in particular. Andrea Nelson underscores: “While this book confirmed the relevance of photographic technology to the pedagogical methods and utilitarian enterprises of the Bauhaus, it also revealed Moholy-Nagy’s aspirations to educate the general public in the skills of visual literacy.”

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187 These means are: the essays, the layout, the photo-sequence and the typophoto.
Gret Palucca’s jump and the motorcyclist are montaged on pages 46 and 47 in a way that allows the photographs to subtly communicate with each other: the image on the left is slightly higher in its placement on the page, literally “lifting up” the jumping dancer that is shown in the image, while gravity pulls the weight of the motorcycle on the right hand-side—as enhanced by the photo’s placement a little lower on the page. Two captions for the “jumping image” are below the image (right and left), the captions for the motorcycle are above the image, the right hand caption higher to accentuate the movement on the page. The captions thus stabilize both images and simultaneously enhance the upward and downward movements. This photographic pair is about conceptual pairs, speed and time, movement and stasis. Both images freeze a moment for us that the human eye could not see without the camera, but the pages of the book render them also dynamic. When portrayed in this way, the dancer and the motorcyclist challenge our perception of the human body as a machine: the shadow of the dancer enhances her in size, while the motorcyclist seems reduced to hands and eyes, his body absorbed by the machine he is operating. Both photographs are linked through a few similarities: a lightly colored background pronounces the horizon line (which in the

189 While I am henceforth using images from the 1927 edition, my references in the text are to the first edition from 1925. (There are some changes from the first to the second edition, mostly these are only small changes, however, but the precise reference will avoid incorrect assumptions.) MPF refers to the first edition, MFF to the second.  
photograph on the left is very low), and which in the case of the cyclist is stabilizing the image, as it marks the middle. Moreover, the motorcycle is diagonally tilted to the right, suggesting a turning of the page to continue the reading of this image sequence, only to find that the next photo on page 48 requires the turning of the book by a 90° angle, continuing the theme of movement and speed, even transportation, because it is a photo of planes in mid-air.


The second image-sequence is embedded in a typographically challenging set of pages, combined to what Moholy calls “typophoto.” It is a film-script or, as Andrea Nelson calls it: “a fourteen page storyboard for a film that was never produced,”<sup>191</sup> entitled: “Dynamik der Großstadt.”<sup>192</sup> It works as a film-substitute, and is a film in book-form: photographs are arranged in a combination of typography and photography assembled on the double-spread of the book, creating a dynamic visual experience that might approximate the experience in a movie theatre (or even go beyond it): the pages are filled with visual elements, text, photos, arrows, and bars, suggesting movement and reading directions for the eyes scanning the page. The enthusiasm with which

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<sup>192</sup> Moholy, *MPF*, p. 114: “Größere Gesellschaften wie UFA wagten damals das Risiko des bizarr Erscheinenden nicht; andere Filmleute haben ‘trotz der guten Idee die Handlung darin nicht gefunden’ und darum die Verfilmung abgelehnt.” (Emphasis in the original.)
Moholy incorporates typographic elements to convey a Constructivist standpoint on what film could be, in his eye, or rather: should be, is easily detectable. Film, for Moholy, *Dynamik der Großstadt* suggests, is a multi-sensory, perhaps even multi-dimensional affair, including sound, space, and of course time. Furthermore, it is a medium that prepares the body of the beholder to not only passively respond to, but more actively engage with the challenges modernity in the metropolis poses. Moreover, his “Dynamik der Großstadt” can be read as a creative response to possible over-stimulation. This response is a counter-attack of multiple-stimuli that is enhanced when the 7-double-page sequence is flipped through quickly, turning this part of the book into a flip-book or *Daumenkino*. In the introduction to the sequence Moholy writes:

> Die Elemente des Visuellen stehen hier nicht unbedingt in logischer Bindung miteinander, trotzdem schließen sie sich durch ihre photographisch-visuelle Relationen zu einem lebendigen Zusammenhang raumzeitlicher Ereignisse zusammen und schalten den Zuschauer aktiv in die Stadtodynamik ein.

This active involvement of the spectator is even more strongly realized in the format that the sequence offers, however, because the beholder can actively choose the speed and direction by turning the pages accordingly.

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193 Moholy, MPF, p. 114: “Der Film ‘Dynamik der Großstadt’ will weder lehren, noch moralisieren, noch erzählen; er möchte visuell, nur visuell wirken. Die Elemente des Visuellen stehen hier nicht unbedingt in logischer Bindung miteinander, trotzdem schließen sie sich durch ihre photographisch-visuelle Relationen zu einem lebendigen Zusammenhang raumzeitlicher Ereignisse zusammen und schalten den Zuschauer aktiv in die Stadtodynamik ein.” (Emphasis in the original.)


195 Moholy, MPF, p. 114.

196 This can be tied to the idea of the Reizschutz as prevention of traumatic experiences. It is Benjamin who speaks of modernity as having a blinding potential, especially when looking at experience in the metropolis. (I am thinking of his thoughts on Bergson here in particular, but also of Erfahrung und Armut (1931), and various other texts that primarily deal with Baudelaire and Paris as the capital oft he 19th century.) Georg Simmel has argued convincingly already in 1903 that life in the metropolis also conditions the human sensorium, and most importantly the ability to process stimuli. (Simmel, 1903, first a lecture and then published as a book.) His “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben” already speaks to the phenomenon of the “cold persona,” that in the 1920s will come to the fore in the context of *New Objectivity*, and will be supported by Ernst Jünger, among others. (See, among others: Helmut Lethen, *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte. Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994. Or the english translation: *Cool Conduct. The culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*, UC California Press, 2002.)

Only a little later Sigmund Freud developed a theory of Reizschutz related to trauma that can be seen as the counter part to Simmel’s theory of reduced, and selective, sensibility. (Sigmund Freud, already in *Traumdeutung* (1900) and early studies on hysteria he prepares this trauma theory, fully formulated however it is for the first time in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 1923.) Freud precisely examines what happens when something that has worked as a protective shield cannot perform this function properly anymore, when the mechanisms of selection and reduction of sensitive input are confused. That the metropolis is the perfect biotopos for a training of the senses in the modern sense seems obvious. Moholy has pointed out that the simultaneity of stimuli, be they visual, audio, or other, in a city like Berlin needs getting used to, training, that is. Most manage this act of acclimatization naturally, but others, in the year of his example, 1924, still need training.
Fig. 23: László Moholy-Nagy: Malerei. Fotografie. Film. (1927) “Dynamik der Großstadt”, pp. 122-123.

Malerei. Photographie. Film aims to produce the person who is alphabetized in photographic literacy in a way that entails the re-assembly of photographs, as his book illustrates. His book is a training manual to take apart and to re-combine under the beholder’s own conditions, while being instructed in the theoretical section, the autonomy that the photographic book as a medium proposes is not quite granted in this hybrid of a book. With an emphasis on the tripartite structure of theoretical input, photographic pairs, and the typophoto, Moholy offers various installments of training towards a literacy of the modern man, tied to repetition: “Das Ganze noch einmal rasch durchlesen” is the repetition of an imperative addressed at the reader already at the end of the theoretical essays. This entails an understanding that as a reproductive medium photography is tied to contexts and language, to prescribed or suggested directions of reading that creatively can be broken in order to engage with the photographic material productively. His book offers a device to look at images differently, because it argues for the human sensorium to be expanded and adjusted to the demands of the life in the modern metropolis, ultimately with a utopian political goal of a better, more peaceful future.

Holding the book, leafing through it, going back and forth, and even turning it to the side or above one’s head, is what Moholy explicitly demands in various directions he addresses directly to the reader.197 Not only

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are some photographs printed so that you have to turn the book in a 90° angle, there are also arrows pointing your attention to the text that then says: “Again, Again, read the whole thing again!” And fittingly, this appears twice. At the end of the theoretical essays, and once more at the end of the *Typophoto* of “Dynamik der Großstadt” where the reader is prompted, once again, to start over and read through it all quickly again: “Das Ganze noch einmal rasch durchlesen.” Emphasis is placed on the rapid repetition, which then slowly approaches film with the means of the book—placing it medially between book-space and book-cinema. In that respect the colon—instead of the expected period—after “Ende” makes sense: this book will never come to an end that is not at the same time a beginning of a repetition, as it is always the beginning of a new reading.

![Image of László Moholy-Nagy's "Malerei. Fotografie. Film." page](image)

**Fig. 26:** László Moholy-Nagy: *Malerei. Fotografie. Film.* (1927), “Dynamik der Großstadt”, pp. 134-135.

*Malerei. Photographie. Film* is a call for a new vision, for an attentive consumption of the images and photographs we are surrounded by (in the *Illustrierte*, for example), but also for a production of images that ultimately enables an acquisition of knowledge about the world and its images, as proposed in the essay “Produktion–Reproduktion.” Moholy claims that art serves the purpose of expanding the human

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198 The proofs as archived in the Bauhaus Archiv indicate that the design for this particular page was changed before going to the printers, inserting the bold arrow that was not part of the page-design before, and continuing the dividing bold lines that visually cut the page in half. (Image 3088, as photographed in the Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, August 22, 2011.)

sensorium (he calls it *Ausbildung der Funktionsapparate*), and that therefore reproductive media have to be employed to expand the insatiable human apparatus.200

Da vor allem die Produktion (produktive Gestaltung) dem menschlichen Aufbau dient, müssen wir versuchen, die bisher nur Reproduktionszwecke angewandten Apparate (Mittel) zu produktiven Zwecken zu erweitern.201

This call for an expanded perception is the call to a more active consumption of photography, and to a “production” of photography, and photography without camera, as the essay exemplifies. To think of photography (and the gramophone, for example) as a medium that can be used to create visual effects, the taking apart and putting back together again of photo-collages (or in the case of the gramophone, a very early form of scratch sounds) immediately come to mind. Not only is the “productive means” that Moholy mentions essential to understanding the principles of photography, using photography productively (in order to produce something new, that is) is a way of learning, if we understand the expansion of the human sensorium to be a school of perception. By “assembling” this book, Moholy uses photographs that have been circulated and published, and consciously feeds them into a system that is productive and creative because it involves the reader in its moment of actualization.202

An alternative to Kracauer’s essay from 1927, Moholy defines “reading” and alphabetization from a creative and productive point of view, aiming to enhance the beholder’s creative response to the challenges of technology. Precisely because to a certain extend we assemble the images in the photobook ourselves, we always contextualize and re-contextualize the photographic images, and we put them next to each other and add other visual markers to make them speak and communicate. That is to say: we ignite cognitive processes (comparative photography) that allow for a more enhanced, multi-dimensional and multi-sensory perception. Moholy’s call for a repeated use of his book and his command to engage with it noch einmal allows for the possibility of alternate reading experiences, which once more underscores that repetition is not only part of the training of the senses, but also part of the construction of a complex perception that allows for multiple interpretations. Moholy’s main claim is that photography is as much a reproductive medium as it is a

200 Ibid, p. 23.
201 Ibid.
202 Moholy, *MPF*. 4: “This book was assembled in the summer of 1924. Technical difficulties prevented the timely publication.” (My own translation, the original reads “Dieses Buch wurde im Sommer 1924 zusammengestellt. Technische Schwierigkeiten verhinderten das rechtzeitige Erscheinen.”)
productive one, involving us as recipients to produce the photograph. In other words: Moholy’s “Production Reproduction” taken seriously highlights the intellectual activity (and creativity) that both the act of seeing and reading involve, not only when it comes to photography.

With this aim for visual alphabetization, reading photographic images is what the photobook of the 1920s proposed as a Kulturtechnik that might also become a cognitive tool. Moholy, the media-optimist, was hopeful: “Die Menschen schlagen einander noch tot, sie habe noch nicht erfasst, wie sie leben, warum sie leben … Langsam sickert die Hygiene des Optischen, das Gesunde des Gesehenen durch.” Moholy’s claim however is of course highly problematic—given the fate of the term hygiene in the 1930s in the language employed by the National Socialist, and other regimes. If we want to follow Moholy in this, photobooks as schools for seeing offer complex visual arguments, framed by typography and paratexts; they execute the—problematic—“hygiene of the optical” by way of montage. Photobooks provoke a comparative analysis and activate the space in between to create connections and correspondences. By taking Benjamin’s word of the “training manual” seriously, photobooks of the 1920s and early 1930s aim at an education of mankind in photographic literacy. And, as we will see later, the political is always part of that literacy.

The Space in between: the Photobook as a site of Vergleichendes Sehen.

The material conditions for the rise of the photobook that I have discussed so far are all evident in Anne Biermann’s 60 Fotos. It is now time to consider the actual reading experience produced by this representative photobook. The arrangement of two photographs per spread in Biermann’s photobook immediately demands that the beholder practice the act of comparative perception, going back and forth between both images, the plate number, the captions, and back to the images. Different than the individual image, the image pair, Peter Geimer and Felix Thürlemann suggest, evokes an intellectual response rather than an emotional one. This is particularly striking in the example that constitutes the beginning of this chapter.

203 This is not so far from Iser’s theory that he writes (50 years later): "The Act of Reading" is similar in that respect as it involves the reader as active participant oft he construction of the book in the act of reading. Wolfgang Iser, Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung, Munich: Fink, 1976.

204 Moholy, MPF, “Typofoto”, p. 36.
The pair, Geimer writes citing Thürlemann, calls for the concept (Begriff) that is born out of the commonalities and the individual characteristics of each image in this particular constellation. In this instance, the beholder cannot perceive the photographs individually, but only as a pair.

Throughout the book, Biermann plays with visual similarities and unlikely pairings, provoking precisely this conceptualizing of the photographic pair. The opening and closing of the eye are one example, lush leaves and pointed forms are another, round shapes as a common motif constitute a third pair. The arrangements pay tribute to the pleasure of creating new connections, and transfer this activity to the viewer. The photographic material becomes the catalyst for a comparative vision and for visual constellations and correspondences. The viewer/reader activates the blanks between the photographic images, and these blanks create a space for the viewers to think and remember, even more: to actually see. Comparatism in art history serves various functions, and can be traced throughout the centuries.

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206 Ibid.
The space between the photographs enables a very particular comparative gaze. It enriches and intensifies the engagement with an arrangement of images (including text) that is presented to us on the page. French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman has recently dedicated a curatorial project to the arrangement of images within the history of the Atlas, and he has coined the question that drives photobook research: “what happens between two images?” It is ultimately a question of the activation of the blank space between the photographs of the sequence and how one might be able to describe the act of comparative perception. At the heart of traditional German art history, the double projection of slides as promoted by Heinrich Wölfflin and Herman von Helmholtz is part and parcel of the act of the comparative gaze. The question of what exactly happens between images when we look at them, especially in a photobook, is a question of comparative seeing (that also involves image memory, memory in general and the question of how knowledge is constructed, at large). Vergleichendes Sehen as a theoretical and practical approach to photography also manifests itself in art historical and media-theoretical discourse at the time.

László Moholy-Nagy, for one, remarks on a multi-perspectival way of reception that ideally involves the viewer “actively,” and Benjamin advocates a “comparative photography” (similar to comparative literature) when it comes to typologies and selections of photographs in photobooks. Once the beholder spends time

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209 Vergleichendes Sehen is a theoretical and practical approach to photography also manifests itself in art historical and media-theoretical discourse at the time. In the following part of this chapter will deal extensively and intensively with Kracauer’s concept of knowledge in the sense of Erkenntnis when it comes to photography. Here it will suffice to mention that he is critical of photography in general, but still seems to formulate the hope that it could be enlisted in the project of an enlightenment of the masses. He points out an important aspect of photography: he claims it produces distance.

210 Here, too, we are reminded of Kracauer, Bergson (and Benjamin reading Bergson). The following part of this chapter will deal extensively and intensively with Kracauer’s concept of knowledge in the sense of Erkenntnis when it comes to photography. Here it will suffice to mention that he is critical of photography in general, but still seems to formulate the hope that it could be enlisted in the project of an enlightenment of the masses. He points out an important aspect of photography: he claims it produces distance.

211 Benjamin, “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie.”
opening-up this particular image-constellation through cognitive questions and investigations, elements from
one image relate to similar elements in the other; the images become visible in a new way, that is, because
they are contrasted and compared to one particular other image that makes visible a particular (unique) set of
image-layers. As developed above, comparative seeing is, moreover, practiced when reading the newspaper,
and illustrated magazines: the eyes move back and forth various columns of text and the layout allows (and
trains) for cross-readings and seeing script-image and the reading of images all at once. However, in the
photobook the photographs are never randomly chosen. Quite the contrary is true: the photographs are
placed with meticulous care on a double page. This very placement and the space between the photographs
and surrounding them define the page that becomes image. Vergleichendes Sehen in the photobook is not simply
comparatism, and not construed here to be reductionist. Instead it serves as a beginning to analyze the
photographic constellations carefully in their choreographed arrangement of all those elements that enter into
this constellation. Implicit in this is an alphabetization for an extended comparative vision and for a
photographic literacy. Therefore, the photobook in the 1920s produced Denkraum, if we borrow a term
from Aby Warburg to describe a space to think or a space that enables thinking, as it mobilizes photography’s
and the book’s potential to be reflexive media. The photobook’s self-reflexivity consists in slowing down
photography and giving it space to “communicate” with other photographs, always in relationship with the
beholder and her memory images. Biermann’s photobook does not only contain 60 photographs, rather it
gives the beholder 30 pairs and presents a sequence of seemingly unrelated images. By way of presenting
them in this sequence, Biermann and Tschichold, who created the layout, create connections and hand over
this very task of engagement to the viewer. The space between the photographs in Biermann’s case first of all
produces question marks.

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Somewhat complicating this art historical approach, the photobook of the 1920s and 1930s uses comparative principles in order to make visible analogies, similarities, and variants (in typologies, for example) as much as it allows for differences, contrasts, and distinctions to come to the fore. By placing image pairs or single images within a sequence, the photobook thus proves to combine two comparative principles—the one creating distinctions based on differences, and one that creates analogies based on similarity. 

Two-thirds into Biermann’s book, we encounter a double page that is framed in a way that gives the photographs more weight on the page: the space above the photographs is wider than the space on the bottom. Moreover, the photographs are both arranged so that they meet at the same level, leaving this upper part of each page blank. The landscape format on the left hand-side presents frozen branches of a tree outside, and the caption indicates the time of day as early morning, and the season as winter: *Kiefer im Raureif* – *Rimy pine tree – Pin sous le givre.*

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Rimy pine tree, the caption reads. The pine needles are covered with an icy surface that resembles photography’s capacity to freeze a moment in time, and visually echoes the silver gelatin surface of the photograph protecting the image once it has been developed. The photograph on the right is placed in portrait orientation, thus framing it with a white border that is different on each of the four sides, while placing it neatly in dialogue with the other photograph. It shows an indoor plant that carefully reverses the amount of white and black its neighbor showcases, as it is set against a dark background. Here, the plant’s light structures inside the leaves echo the branches of the pine tree, but also reminds the beholder of the very first pair in the book with a similar constellation of needles and lush leaves (see page 8 of this chapter). Photographic winter and an internal summer of the indoors are juxtaposed here, while photosynthesis is made apparent in both photographs, connecting the very page these photographs are printed on (presumably printed on paper made from trees) to processes of light and exposure as life-giving forms of reproduction.

Often, as in the next example, the photographic pairs in Biermann’s book are combined due to a visual rhyming of forms, creating correspondences of shapes, photographed in comparable lighting situations, with stark contrasts and deep shadows as a consequence.

Fig. 29: Aenne Biermann, 60 Fotos, pp. 29 and 30, Untitled and Untitled.

The photograph of a magnifying glass on the left and the newspaper create an intriguing image that decreases, rather than increases, the legibility of text. It playfully engages in a depiction of shadows, reflections and distortions that comment on photography’s and the mass-media’s relation to language, photography and the
production of knowledge. The photograph on the right is similarly dominated by a round shape, the vessel holding matches, showcasing their flammable tops (which in themselves repeat the patterns of round forms on a smaller scale). The potential of flames (or is it enlightenment?) is a theme in both photographs, as a magnifying-glass could possibly create flames if held in a specific angle, using sunbeams. This suggested intensification is juxtaposed and mirrored by the two photographs, enhanced by the close-up of two still-lives that imply evening activities. The stark contrast in light and shadow suggests that the photographs were taken with a flash, the artificial, photographic, and rather momentous equivalent to the shocks the modern mind might be exposed to in the metropolis, outside that is, while matches (and the implied cigarettes, or candles) and the magnifying glass evoke a history of seeing and reading across the centuries. The magnifying glass, a prosthesis to better see, which is also a lens, however, blurs the text and distorts it so that the text becomes illegible instead. In rhythmically framing the pair, the plate numbers on the lower left hand side on the left, and the upper left hand side on the right, further suggest a spark perhaps, or the dancing of letters before one’s eyes—if only for the simple reason that there are no captions. While in both photographs the human being and body is implied, in both it has been metonymically replaced. Both together suggest that this is a moment of evening pleasure, a moment of relaxation and inwardness. This is immediately challenged, however, by those looming shadows that call into question the visually uninterrupted space at home, instead shifting the focus to the darkness and distortion created by instruments that should help cast light and improve visibility. This photographic pair is a commentary on the fragile relationship of heightened visibility and distortion, which strongly invites the human hand, however, to make use of the tools presented. Only when the readers take the magnifying glass into their own hands, adjusting it to their own body, the text will become legible, enlarged. This, in turn, is an indicator for the mobilizing effect this particular constellation has on the beholder, handling the photobook at this very instant.

Next to the photographs and the page as image, it is the space between photograph and the rest of the visual elements that frames the image. The empty space between one photograph and the other, or between text and image, and even text and text, constitutes a border and frame. Even if it is invisible at first, it is this space that creates the photographic constellation and makes it legible. From the space between every
word, to the empty pages at the end of a book, it punctuates our reading. If we take our first example from Biermann’s book: the eyes are placed in such a way that they appear literally connected, almost glued together, to form one image. The spread would have an entirely different effect if there were space between the two photos.\(^{216}\) The mise-en-page, the arrangement of the photograph on the page and the space surrounding it are the underlying principles of every photobook of the 1920s.\(^{217}\) They create the rhythm of seeing.

This space in between or Zwischenraum provides the reader and spectator of the photobook with a specific space in which images and text are perceived and read, punctuated by the visual rhythm the sequence provides while the reader holds and handles the book. Wolfgang Iser speaks of Leerstelle to evoke the recipient’s participation.\(^{218}\) I dare suggest, however, that the space does not have to be a blank space or a white page as in all the examples we have seen so far, but rather: the page as such and the turning of the page provide this space that makes the photobook and turns it into a medium that as a whole creates the possibility for slowing down perception.\(^{219}\) In the examples Biermann gives, turning the page often gives access to an unexpected pair and combination. The turning of the page and the space between the images can thus also introduce breaks and interruptions of a smooth image flow.\(^{220}\) It is thus that photobooks contain a theory of

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\(^{216}\) This is a careful expansion of the principles of comparative vision as exemplified above by Geimer and Thürlemann. The more space between the photographs, the more independent they become. While still part of the image constellation of the double spread, the space between and the placement are crucial in creating a particular perceptive experience. If both photographs were presented on the spread alone, the effect would allow a more poetic or emotional reception. The constellation we find, however, is almost brutal in its directness, calling for a conceptual reading rather than an emotional one.

\(^{217}\) There are some similarities between the concepts of “arrangement,” “collage” and “montage,” especially when it comes to artists and art practices in the 1920s. In order to refine the argument, I want to use montage in the way that Benjamin uses it, in a close echoing of the “photomontage” and the German connotations of montage as in “assembling” and “mounting together.” This notion of montage is based on cuts like a film is based on montage, and construction, and means a constellation of images, ultimately, presupposes a seriality, and might come closer to notions of movement while still composed of single images. Collage on the other hand I understand to be based on snippets of paper, most prominently. Te Heesen makes a differentiation between the collages of the Cubists and futurists and the montages of the Dadaists. She points out: “Whereas “collage” means “to glue” and implies handiwork, “montage” has a much more industrial background; since the Encyclopédie, it had been defined as a process by which one assembles the parts of a mechanism. A montage needs a mechanic; it involves fitting together ready-made parts to form a machine or product. It was during the First World War that the term “montage” came to be used in the arts.” (Te Heesen, p. 317) And she goes on to explain that the principle of montage must be understood “against the background” of the conveyor belt “and the division of labor.” (Ibid.) She writes: “The first conveyor belt was installed in 1913 in Henry Ford’s factory, at approximately the same time as film and its cutting techniques were developed.” (Te Heesen, p. 317. She cites Hanno Möbius, Montage und Collage: Literatur, bildende Künste, Film, Fotografie, Musik, Theater bis 1933. Munich (et.al): Fink, 2000.)


\(^{219}\) It is only in the 1950s and 1960s that photobooks are published where there is no border surrounding the photographs, but rather where the photos are printed to cover each page fully. Ed van der Elsken’s “Love on the Leftbank” originally published in 1954 would be one example. Here, the principle of creating space is still intact, as suggested above, through the turning of the page and the sequence of photographs that together create this space.

\(^{220}\) The space between the images is the “cut” of Dadaists and filmmakers, and it is the various frames of the page in the Illustrierte and Zeitenung, and it is the white frame or facing page of the photobook. When it comes to montage, Walter Benjamin’s famous passage on montage comes to mind, as found in convolute N of the The Arcades Project. “Methode dieser Arbeit: literarische Montage. Ich habe
reading images—that they are Übungsatlanten, as Benjamin would have it. The space between the photographs is where this theory comes into existence. The principles of comparative vision turn the photobooks into thinking devices and vehicles for an understanding that is to be located between images and language, in a space that allows for a constellation of the two.  

It is the intricate way of creating connections that makes Biermann’s 60 Fotos so exemplary for the comparative perception which the medium of the photobook warrants. While the choice of photographs is never obvious, the close examination reveals connecting elements that slowly come together as a theme.

Fig. 30: Aenne Biermann, 60 Fotos, p. 9 “Zerbrochenes Ei – Broken Egg – Oeuf brisé” and p. 10 “Kinderhände – A child’s hands – Mains d’enfant.”

Early on in the image sequence Biermann presents a pair of photographs with an opened egg on the left, and the folded hands of a child on the right. These hands rest on a double page of a journal in longhand, Schreibschrift, indicating that these child’s hands are in the process of learning how to write. In the photograph on the left, the perfectly broken white egg contains the yolk, and the empty shell on the right hand-side of the
frame completes this still-life. In both upper and bottom shells light is captured and mirrored, which turns both forms into positive and negative shapes. Moreover, they suggest the hands that broke the egg to create this image, while the photograph on the right shows us hands resting from the act of writing. In this photographic pair, movement has taken place before the photograph was taken, that way the passing of time is captured. Handwriting and the act of reading are implied, as is the idea of reproduction (in the metaphor of the positive and negative forms, container and empty shell, as much as in the hands of a child, and the reproductive techniques of writing and reading as copying and re-producing). The egg furthermore humorously evokes the question of origin, namely implying the proverbial hen (or photographer and mother, Aenne Biermann) and the egg (the daughter photographed). Questions of reproduction and a history of vision are addressed, as tied to techniques of writing, reading, and perception at large. This raises the question of knowledge and knowledge production, and how photography relates to both.

Concerned with how to read images, and implicitly arguing that images hold a form of knowledge that might differ from one represented through language, some of Biermann’s contemporaries have called attention to the necessity, even urgency to think about how knowledge and the production and acquisition thereof might be tied to photography. Moreover, how photography can be mobilized to learn more about the processes of perception that are part of any form of knowledge acquisition. Biermann’s photobook invites the beholder to playfully engage with the question of what happens when photographs are put next to one another, and how photographic literacy might be acquired: how we might learn the “longhand” of photography, that is.


One of Biermann’s contemporaries invested in photography was Siegfried Kracauer. In 1927, his essay on photography—simply entitled Die Photographie—was published in Frankfurter Zeitung where he worked as an editor of the Feuilleton (arts and culture) section.222 In this essay, Kracauer carefully sets up a structure that rhythmically supports the broader argument of his text: by way of repetition he introduces and re-introduces

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themes and motifs that in the end constitute the fabric of Photography. Photography, Kracauer argues explicitly, but also implicitly through the form of his text, needs “the contextual framework” in order to produce understanding, or Erkenntnis, as Kracauer says. By laying out connections of the photograph to questions of memory, identification, original and reproduction, story-telling, death, history and knowledge, Kracauer carefully constructs the argument that photography needs to be activated in order to be understood, in turn it needs to mobilize the viewer to produce understanding. Not one photographic reproduction is used to illustrate his theses, but many photographs are evoked, described, and repeated in descriptions, always slightly altered. Kracauer consciously does not show photography, in order to expose the very structure of photography that to him is most productive when used in the form of the essay. The complicated structure of Kracauer’s text on photography proposes a slowing-down of perception when it comes to looking at photographs. While his ideal form of achieving this slowing-down and the introduction of breaks and interruptions arguably is film, I want to show that with the very architecture of his text he proposes a different, more effective format: the essay. The photobook contemporaneous to his writing of the text, in my mind, fully redeems his call for a medium that creates associations and connections for the viewer. The strike against understanding (Erkenntnis) that Kracauer laments in the Illustrierten, is countered with agency and response that stimulates a re-arrangement in a way that creates material contextual frameworks. These contexts are created, and activated within the beholders, in their bodies and their minds.

The first two pages carefully set up the argument of the essay. We have the title (Die Photographie), a quote from Grimms’ Kinder- und Hausmärchen and the indicator that the text is divided into several sections, separated by numbers 1 through 8. The first paragraph starts with an affirmation: “So sieht die Film-Diva aus.” This sentence, followed by facts, turns out to be the description of a photograph as published in an Illustrierte. The end of the paragraph replaces the “Film-Diva” with a caption that the photograph accompanies: “unsere


224 Precisely because it offers the possibility for associations, connections, in the sense of the dream-fabric that Kracauer speaks of towards the end of his text, I see the photobook as the perfect embodiment of Kracauer’s claims. Kracauer, “Die Photographie”, p. 39.

dämonische Diva,” only to turn the affirmation into a question in the second paragraph: “Sah so die Großmutter aus?” In a shift from the present tense (“so sieht”) to the past tense (“sah so”), the assurance of the sentence has turned into a doubtful question. The second paragraph describes a photograph of the grandmother, but is linked to the film-diva through a careful symmetry of details. The film-diva is only present in photographic form, as is the grandmother, both are photographed when they are 24 years old. They are “similar,” because they are the same age when photographed, and because they exist as photographic reproductions. Kracauer spends time to emphasize that photography is based on mimesis throughout his essay, but he sets up his text so that the reader will have to make an effort to distinguish between grandmother and film-diva. A hasty reading will have us believe that the same photograph is discussed in both paragraphs. However, the image of the public figure and the private relative are used throughout the text to argue that photography is a reproductive medium based on similarity (often impeding memory). A medium, moreover, which is tied to memory and simultaneously to the production of a forgetting in the place of memory: in the example of the film-diva, there is no memory, because no “original” exists: she can only be experienced on the screen, always already reproduced as photographic image that is. This structure of positive and negative (to speak in photographic metaphors) of the possibility to create meaningful context and of the means to work against precisely this capacity lies at the heart of Kracauer’s essay. He evokes images to talk about the power of images, but provocatively positions them in a constellation that leaves the reader in a position where they need to assemble meaning and connections. How, for example, does the epigram relate to the text on photography?

In der Schlauraffenzeit (sic) da ging ich, und sah an einem kleinen Seidenfaden hing Rom und der Lateran, und ein fußloser Mann der überlief ein schnelles Pferd, und ein bitterscharfes Schwert das durchieb eine Brücke.

While language can create the fantastical scenery described, and it is thus certainly “real” in that sense, it might allow the conclusion that a text on photography will also consider the fictitious elements of a so-called

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226 Hannah Feldman writes about photography that enables forgetting, because it produces images for a forgetting, rather than the other way around. It is the replacing of memories with photographic images, erasing counter-narratives and in a complex way illustrating these gaps in memory, nonetheless. (Hannah Feldman, *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.) The oeuvre of W.G. Sebald touch on similar problems, manifested poetically.

objective medium. In my mind the credibility of the eyewitness account in images and text is put into question here, the fragility of “ich sah” is exposed by the very absurdity and sense-less-ness of the images described. By placing photography in the context of German fairy tales and the collection of stories that were often illustrated, Kracauer also creates the contextual framework for a historical reading of photography. Not only is the grandmother the same age as the film-diva when photographed, what is more: the photograph of the grandmother is 60 years old, and it dates back to 1864 (allowing for the conclusion that the text was written, or is at least set in 1924, while it is first published in 1927).\textsuperscript{228} If the grandmother is 24 in 1864, she was born, not quite coincidentally, in 1840—the year some researchers believe to be the year photography was “invented.”\textsuperscript{229}

Keeping this in mind, the epigram then provokes a close-reading and a reading that is conscious of the historical context of what is to come, namely Kracauer’s essay.\textsuperscript{230} Even more is at stake: Kracauer says further into his text that photography, as it is used in the illustrated press, has the potential to numb the senses, the understanding and active engagement with what we see. The insertion of this quotation before the text begins, between the title and the first section, thus also introduces a break, a space to think. This interruption of the continuous flow is what Kracauer’s text is about.\textsuperscript{231} He thus emphasizes pauses, creates them in his text and demands them for a more conscious engagement with photography: “ein bitterscharfes Schwert durchhieb eine Brücke” might refer to exactly that. Furthermore, this quotation introduces the pattern of dream-logics, a thought to which Kracauer comes back towards the end of his essay.

Kracauer writes the following about the illustration of newspapers with photographs and the growing number of illustrated magazines:

\begin{quote}
Die Tageszeitungen bebildern immer mehr ihre Texte, und was wäre ein Magazin ohne Bildmaterial? Der schlagende Beweis für die ausgezeichnete Gültigkeit der Photographie in der Gegenwart wird vor allem durch die Zunahme der illustrierten Zeitungen geliefert. In ihnen versammeln sich … sämtliche Erscheinungen, die der Kamera und dem Publikum erreichbar sind.\textsuperscript{232}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{228} These observations are indebted to Eduardo Cadava and Michael Jennings, and their Graduate Student Seminar in the Fall of 2008, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.
\textsuperscript{229} This, then, might lead to the conclusion that this is not only a photography of the grandmother, but rather that the photograph and the grandmother indeed embody photography. Curiously, she lived in a “narrow room,” which could be read as a camera.
\textsuperscript{230} The Grimms’ fairytales, however, also propose a complex set of imagery and text relations that could be even considered similar in structure to variations of the photo essay.
\textsuperscript{231} Cf. Maglow, \textit{The Photographic Crisis}. 2012.
\textsuperscript{232} Kracauer, “Die Photographie” (1927), p. 33.
In his biting critique, Kracauer points out how the illustration of news with photographs falsely suggests accessibility on two levels. First, everything is integrated into newspapers and magazines that is “accessible” to the camera (and thus the audience, he concludes). Secondly, this suggests that everything that can be photographed might be made accessible for knowledge (in the sense of Erkenntnis). He continues: “Noch niemals hat eine Zeit so gut über sich Bescheid gewusst, wenn Bescheid wissen heißt: ein Bild von den Dingen haben, das ihnen im Sinne der Photographie ähnlich ist.” Being informed, or “Bescheid wissen,” is what photographic illustration of printed news promises, Kracauer notes. He underscores, however, that the effect achieved by the photographs results in something else entirely (i.e.: “ein Bild von den Dingen haben, das ihnen im Sinne der Photographie ähnlich ist.”). Kracauer is sensitive to the distance these photographs create from experience and understanding and thus puts his finger on a sore spot of a society that puts ever more emphasis on photographic images but does not seem to care to acquire the tools necessary to read the information which photography holds and provides. He consequently finishes the thought by concluding: “Noch niemals hat eine Zeit so wenig über sich Bescheid gewusst. Die Einrichtung der Illustrierten ist in der Hand der herrschenden Gesellschaft eines der mächtigsten Streikmittel gegen die Erkenntnis.”233 Not only do we not know anything about our own time, that is. What is more, the illustrated newspapers are indeed “a means of organizing” blindness, so it seems, through the very process of providing too many photographs that do not produce engagement, but rather prevent it.234 Kracauer also says, however, that photography does not necessarily have to create that kind of distance that prevents understanding of its contents or structure. “So müsste es nicht sein”.235 Photographic illustrations do not automatically organize a strike against understanding, but they simultaneously do not automatically allow for understanding or an access to knowledge or even “truth.” The example of Willi Ruge made this clear. The political dimension is to be located in the relationship between photography and memory, and implicitly to the body of the beholder.

In his essay, Kracauer works with repetitions, and establishes a sequence that makes use of the gaps between the elements of the text. The pair of film-diva and grandmother, for example, is discussed in sections

233 Ibid, 34.
235 Kracauer, “Die Photographie” (1927), p. 34.
1, 3, 5, and 8. In the last section, however, the only reference is through acknowledgment of the disappearance, as in the following ellipsis: "Ist die Großmutter verschwunden," thus confirming the reader's futile search for her in the last section where she—according to the logics and rhythm of the text—should have appeared.\textsuperscript{236} This disappearance occurs after section 6 and 7, in which the illustrated press is discussed as producing a "strike against understanding." The grandmother's and film-diva's vanishing can thus be interpreted as a direct consequence of what the \textit{Illustrierten} produce in the reader, a forgetting and even over-writing of \textit{Erkenntnis}. The following section of the essay discusses allegory and symbol; the most abstract and philosophical section in the essay countering the work that the \textit{Illustrierten} do is the section before. The final section of the text (section 8), provides a strong ending with the disappearance of the grandmother, thus coming back to a more public consumption of photography, or rather, the consumption of published photography. Kracauer asserts that film has the capacities to create something that is close to the structure of dreams—because it re-organizes those photographs and puts them together in new ways that can create context. This is "one of film's possibilities," he writes. And continues:

\begin{quote}
[Der Film] verwirklicht sie überall dort, wo er Teile und Ausschnitte zu fremden Gebilden assoziiert. Ist das Durcheinander der Illustrierten Zeitungen Konfusion, so gemahnt dieses Spiel mit der zerstückelten Natur an den \textit{Traum}, in dem die Fragmente des Taglebens sich verwirren.\textsuperscript{237}
\end{quote}

The principles of association and the montage of fragments and parts (\textit{Teile und Ausschnitte}) however are at work in the photobook of the time, and even more powerfully perhaps than in film. The photobook adheres to the structure of the essay, and is readily accessible (like the dream, really), because the beholder does not need any other technology once the constellation of images is produced. This is another medium-specificity that trumps film in this regard, because one needs a projector to show the film. The photobook, on the other hand, once printed, can be viewed without any technological apparatus, deliberately involving the hands of the beholder to actualize its content. And while Kracauer's text is certainly critical of photography, it is not a text against photography. Rather it demonstrates how photography works, or more precisely how it could

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{237} Kracauer, "Die Photographie", p. 39, (emphasis in the original).

The English reads: "The capacity to stir up the elements of nature is one of the possibilities of film. This possibility is realized whenever film combines parts and segments to create strange constructs. If the disarray of the illustrated newspapers is simply confusion, the game that film plays with the pieces of disjointed nature is reminiscent of dreams in which the fragments of daily life become jumbled. This game indicates that the valid organization of things is not known, an organization that would designate how the remains of the grandmother and the diva stored in the general inventory will some day have to appear." (Kracauer, \textit{Photography}, p. 436)
work: photography is sketched in this essay as equipped with the potential of producing gaps and interruptions.\textsuperscript{238} And while there were many *Illustrierte*, that in the words of Kracauer organized “a strike against understanding,” there were also more critical illustrated newspapers in the Weimar Republic, like the AIZ, or *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, founded by Willi Münzenberg in 1921, that served as a possible corrective to points of view voiced in other publication organs.\textsuperscript{239} It was indeed a platform to encourage critical engagement with images, and critique was especially published in the form of photomontages by John Heartfield, and others.\textsuperscript{240} It was the AIZ that advanced to organizing a *strike against* the “strike against understanding” that other magazines were launching, fittingly, in November 1927, picturing workers and addressing issues affecting wide strata of the German population at the time, covering the strike in the coal industry.

![AIZ Strike](image)

Fig. 31: Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung, November 1927.\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{238} Cf. The reading of Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis*, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{240} Web, *deutsche Fotothek*, photograph by Kurt Beck, 1927 (on the website it is listed as 1928). In a more extended version of this chapter, Heartfield’s and Tucholsky’s *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* would be worthy of a close investigation.
Here, *Streik* is not only literally part of the picture. What is more, the writing and reading of the word is introduced as part of the photographic structure. In order to show what this photograph is about we need language, and in order to grasp a pause or interruption in photography we need an image that can translate this very pause into photography. While in the photograph we see foreground and background, separated by part of a gate, a worker is shown in the process of writing *Streik* on the surface of this gate that becomes the surface of the photograph, putting a period, another moment of pause, at the end of the word. Our gaze is arrested, while the word is repeated three times in the cover-design of the magazine: twice as part of the photograph and once in the announcement of its contents. Already in this one photograph on the cover, photographic literacy is practiced with the element of repetition and pause, as Kracauer’s essay puts forth.

Kracauer’s essay is composed of 8 sections, and they are used to create frictions, connections and segues—much like Biermann’s repetition of visual themes, juxtapositions and contrasts create these connections, segues and frictions. Kracauer’s essay allows the conclusion that for the photobook of the 1920s to be political, it heavily depended on the disruptive quality of the space between the photographs or the introduction of juxtapositions, so that a comparative vision was possible, and a re-assembly of the “fragmented” and “dream-like” contextual framework on the part of the beholder and reader. Kracauer in my reading posits those breaks as a place for possible knowledge acquisition, or “Streik gegen die Erkenntnis” in reverse, the gaps, interruptions and pauses produced by the very form of the photobook would precisely allow for and encourage: *Erkenntnis* and *Zusammenhang*. I suggest the reconstruction of a theory of photography that presents itself in the photobook in 1920s Germany that works with these elements precisely. At the time, the photobook as a medium took part in a vivid discourse on the potentials and dangers, possibilities and promises of photography. It worked as a catalyst for a new vision; and it encouraged the practicing of a comparative vision. But even more: it allowed for a slowing down of the consumption of

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242 Kracauer, “Die Photographie”, p. 39
243 Kracauer says that it is the arrangement in the Illustrierten that prevents exactly that, but it does not come as a surprise that I propose the photobook as producing these two things precisely through the sequence and arrangement. Kracauer, “Die Photographie” (1927), p. 34: “... das bunte Arrangement der Bilder. Ihr Nebeneinander schließt systematisch den Zusammenhang aus, der dem Bewusstsein sich eröffnet.” (Kracauer, *Photography*, p. 432: “The contiguity of these images systematically excludes their contextual frameworks available to consciousness.”)
photography, by the very form of the essay: the photobook, like Kracauer’s essay, worked with a sequence composed of pauses—the turning of the page is such a pause, and it is used consciously.

Conclusion.

This chapter has showcased how the elements that constitute the medium—the sequence, the page as image, the space in between—work towards the photographic sequence as one that creates a space to think, as much as the medium and material support of the book creates connections with memory images and other visual elements through the active engagement of the body. The photobook furthermore turned the page of the book into an image. In turn, the photographs enhanced each visual element in the book—script, page numbers, and type-fonts—in its visibility and image-character. The German photobook of the 1920s and 1930s, provoked and produced an act of perception that made visible the material context of visual culture via suggested connections installed in the beholder in the act of repetition. As emphasis is placed on the page as image, the frame of the photograph comes into view and the placement of the photograph in relation to other elements, encouraging the analytical distance to think about the ways in which photography is framed in other contexts. The guiding question in this first part of the chapter was to describe the medium of the photobook and to examine how it works. In the second part of the chapter, the photobook was posited as a medium with the capacity to interrupt and disrupt the very discourse and context it is placed in. Thus, this chapter investigated the theoretical implications and impact of the photobook.

The modernist photobook in the 1920s is equipped with the potential to complicate a discourse around photography and its readability, as it might reveal the construction of perception through photography and language and the space in between that the photobook showcases and inhabits. For photographers of the 20th and 21st centuries, the history of the photobook contains “an alternate history of photography” beyond the iconic master print. By way of presenting photographs in the context of sequence and series, it makes visible the photographic connective tissue for yet another photographic literacy: photographers learn the language of photography through the medium of the photobook, as Peter Pfrunder

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244 Aby Warburg introduces the term *Denkraum*—and while he means something else by that, I want to use it in my dissertation to mean the space for reflection that is created in the photobook, and between photographs.

245 Schweizer Fotobücher, p. 11.
argues in Schweizer Fotobücher. This thought turns the photobook into a primer or spelling book with which to learn the ABC of photography and the photo-essay.

In this respect, Moholy’s technophilia might appear as part of a modern political utopia that actually reduces the human being to a machine that needs optimization in order to work more efficiently. Parts of his text read alarmingly naïve when it comes to the belief in the hygiene and optimization of the human perceptual capacities. The educational tools of photography and film might as well prepare the subject to be integrated smoothly into a high-speed metropolis with its simultaneity of sounds and optical, aural information. As Ernst Jünger emphasizes in his essay “On Pain” in 1931, photography and film might lead to the conforming masses of a highly politicized state, as the 1930s would show across Europe, from Spain to Germany to Italy to Russia. This dimension of propaganda and manipulation of the masses is ever-present in film and photography, as evidenced already in advertising at the time, and Moholy’s optimism reveals blind spots towards the threat of manipulability. However, Moholy’s project as a whole is remarkable when it comes to the theoretical input on the potential of photography and the possibilities of painting, film and photography. Moholy’s call for production (rather than passive reception or reproduction) is not only based in his teaching at the Bauhaus and directed at a few, but it is precisely taking into account the mass-media dimension of photography which is developing rapidly in the 1920s. It is here that the book’s radical pedagogical impetus has to be located. Moholy, not unlike Kracauer perhaps, was convinced that perception is bound to a synthesis and expansion of the senses, rather than to a separation and prioritizing of one sense of perception over the others which enhances the risk of manipulation.

While Moholy’s technophilia and media-optimism in retrospect seem less convincing than Kracauer’s and Benjamin’s critique, they have more in common that one might think on a first glance. When Benjamin

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246 Schweizer Fotobücher, p. 11.
248 Ernst Jünger, Über den Schmerz, 1931, see the ‘event’ section that only a “mediated event” is perceived as an event at all.
249 Stetler, 2008, p. 90: “[Crary] argues that a scholarly approach that separates vision from broader perceptual processes—sound and touch, for example—internalizes modernity’s fragmentation and fracturing of the body into isolated and thus controllable sensory experiences.” As we will see later-on, Kracauer, Moholy (and perhaps even Benjamin) considered film the most complete medium for training puposes of the human sensorium.
wrote his essay on photography in 1931, the times had changed politically from the moment when Moholy was writing in 1924. Nevertheless, part of the optimism of a possible education and alphabetization through photography (in other words: Moholy’s influence) is still tangible in Benjamin’s text. The political dimension in Kracauer’s essay is feasible as a danger of the historical moment, and it is all the more strongly addressed as such in Benjamin's text from 1931. This political reality of the manipulation of photography and the isolation of the senses to a primacy of the visual over the other senses is ever more present in various versions of the art work essay, that could be read as a training manual to a historical reading of photographic images.250 In 1924—and with the second edition in 1927—Moholy provided a creative response, which was based in the idea of a multi-sensory dimension of film, painting and photography as an enhancement of perception and eventually the betterment of man. For Kracauer and Benjamin, this option seemed to have been gambled away.

The shift from a “hygiene of the optical” to the “training for a critical survival” is what marks the importance of an ability to read images between 1925 (the year of Moholy’s manifesto) and 1931, when Benjamin and his contemporaries face political upheavals that will indeed lead to photography’s vital importance for photographers, readers and viewers, belonging to any political field. Benjamin’s call for the use of the typological photobook as a training manual for political reasons reflects exactly that.251 It is between 1924 and 1931 that the German photobook develops a unique and genuinely argumentative structure of visual complexity in training the comparative gaze and photographic literacy. After that, the constructivist principles of arranging images and typography will be employed and exploited for Fascist as much as Stalinist propaganda.252

250 Eduardo Cadava has argued convincingly that this is the case. Eduardo Cadava, “Nadar’s Photographopolis”, Grey Room 48, Summer 2012, pp. 56–77.


252 In terms of New Objectivity Aesthetics and Nazi-ideology, see: Anson Rabinbach, “The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich,” Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: Theories of Fascism, (Oct. 1976), pp. 43-73. His insightful article argues for ambiguities and ambivalences in the use of New Objectivity in the 1930s, and carefully shows continuities of certain aspects of “modernist” tendencies, as well as a change in strategy of Nazi use of aesthetics of production for propaganda purposes in different stages of the Third Reich.
Chapter Two.
Photobooks as Schools for Seeing: Alphabetization and Atlas.

Kinder nämlich … bilden … die Werke der Erwachsenen weniger nach, als dass sie Stoffe sehr verschiedener Art durch das, was sie im Spiel daraus verfertigen, in eine neue, sprunghafte Beziehung zueinander setzen.

Walter Benjamin, *Einzahlstraße*, 1928

Touch has memory.

John Keats, “To – “ (What can I do to Drive away), 1819

Introduction: *Fibel, Atlas, Photobuch.*

In a contemporary review of Erich Mendelsohn’s 1926 architectural photobook *Amerika. Bilderbuch eines Architekten*, El Lissitzky wrote: “Before our eyes unreel utterly uncustumary pictures. To understand some of them, you must hold the book over your head and turn it.”254 Lissitzky’s quotation addresses two essential elements of the photobook: its montage of (unfamiliar) images and its relation to the body of the beholder in the act of perception. In order to produce understanding, the book should be “held over your head” so as to mimic the act of perception in the city as Mendelsohn had photographed it. By looking up into the book,

rather than looking down, the beholder also repeats the act of perception in the metropolis, surrounded by skyscrapers and urban canyons. What is more, by holding the book overhead, the beholder physically repeats the sensation of looking up. The implication is that a more advanced reader will understand the photograph without having to turn the book—and the photobook allows for the adjustments according to photographic reading proficiency, making it both pleasurable for the advanced reader and the ideal training manual for beginners.

Taking Mendelsohn’s coinage Bilderbuch as a starting point, this chapter examines the form of the picture book on the one hand, and the atlas on the other, and how both might relate to photobooks of the 1920s. In the most common understanding, “atlas” means a collection of geographical maps, nowadays mostly used in secondary school education. Perhaps the second most frequently associated genre is the historical atlas, offering geographical cartography of historical scope showcasing comparisons, developments, and the like. A third genre is the atlas for the natural sciences as it was commonly used to study anatomy in medical contexts for example, or geography, or history, between the 16th and 19th century. Most frequently, the term atlas thus refers to the form of images in a book: rather than text only, the atlas presents images of geographical, historical, anatomical “situations,” and it often depicts movement and time projected onto the two-dimensional space of a double-page in the book. Both forms are connected through the reading practices they call for.

The atlas and the picture book as perception primer are here posited as “relatives” to the photobook in two different formats, sharing family resemblances. If the photobook can be situated on a spectrum of assembled media working primarily with photographic images in the 1920s, children’s books and the atlas inhabit the outer fringes of the realm of what Walter Benjamin has called training manual or Übungsatlas.

The primer teaches young children to read and write, while the atlas is usually found in the library of the learned, to be studied with meticulous care for details in the context of knowledge acquisition. Both primer

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and atlas are tied to an alphabetization through seeing, however different they might be in size and weight. The photobook, the atlas and the primer are in fact analogous in the way each of these forms of visual presentation produces knowledge. Alphabetization for photography happens in and through the photobook; alphabetization is achieved by image constellations that are tied to the body, as they set into motion a particular kind of reading and perception. The primer or children’s book is closely connected to the hand of the child holding the book and reading with “finger and eye,” as Benjamin writes.\textsuperscript{258} In the atlas, on the other hand, distance is produced, because taking in the full tableau with all its elements requires the beholder to step back. The atlas marries scientific objectivity with the visual arrangement that works like a “mine,” as Georges Didi-Huberman puts it: for him, the visual presentation of the atlas is “inexhaustibly generous” and yet “dangerous and even explosive.”\textsuperscript{259} The explosive potential lies in the unexpected connections the image constellations produce in the beholder, which simultaneously prove infinitely productive as they ceaselessly create new image relations. Both the illustrated children’s book and the atlas thus produce a kind of knowledge that might be located in the spatial realm between body and book, and perhaps before language. Moreover, this kind of knowledge only comes into being through touch, visual perception, intellect and most importantly: the imagination of the beholder. In what follows, I attempt to fathom how atlas and perception primer constitute the outer edges of what the photobook in the late 1920s and early 1930s might be. Between the atlas (with its elephant size)\textsuperscript{260} and the comparatively smaller children’s book, the photobook reaches various sizes in the late 1920s; also in this regard it fluctuates between hand-held book and object of study. Aenne Biermann’s 60 Fotos is on the smaller side, while Karl Blossfeldt’s Urformen der Kunst can be considered a “coffee-table book”—both contain (and produce) reading and handling directions according to their respective sizes.


\textsuperscript{259} Georges Didi-Huberman, Atlas. How to Carry the World on One’s Back?, Madrid / Karlsruhe / Hamburg, 2010, pp. 14-222. “… the atlas, with its utilitarian and inoffensive appearance, could indeed reveal itself to anyone looking at it as a duplicitous, dangerous and even explosive object, albeit an inexhaustibly generous one. In a word, it is a mine.” Here: p. 14, emphasis in the original.

\textsuperscript{260} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_size
To call the photobook of the 1920s an atlas, however, means to underscore the mechanics of the atlas as a primer for perception or Übngsatlats, as Benjamin wrote with regard to Sander’s Antlitz der Zeit.261 In the context of medical history, for centuries the atlas was meant for the audience “to acquire an ability to distinguish at a glance the normal from the pathological, the typical from the anomalous, the novel from the unknown,” as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison write.262 This effect can only be achieved through a juxtaposition and coexistence of all those elements, by way of (photographic) contiguity, or Nebeneinander.263 To be precise, however, one has to call attention to the different forms and formats in which the atlas occurs.264 It is a medium that is not bound to a specific form of presentation, instead the concept of the atlas moves between book and tableau. The latter can be a plate in a book, the presentation of images upright on the wall, or even an arrangement on a table, as indeed tableau allows for all those readings. Tafel is thus an important concept here. Its connotations ranges from plate as an “illustration” on a page, to the vertical tableau that can reach blackboard size and can thus encompass a complicated constellation of images. The term atlas thus already encompasses a multitude of possible orientations and reading-positions, and this chapter carefully investigates what this analogy entails for the photobook. The atlas is construed as a visual object that appeals to the senses as much as it does to the intellect.265

This nexus makes the photobook particularly appealing in the 1920s and 1930s, a time when there was urgency with regard to the alphabetization for photography—as we have seen in chapter one in the analysis of Kracauer’s essay and Moholy’s book. One can furthermore connect Benjamin’s investment in the atlas with his interest in children’s books. What is more, Benjamin himself implicitly links the photobook of the

263 Siegfried Kracauer, “Die Photographie” (1927). Kracauer, Ornament der Masse. Essays. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1963, pp. 21-39, here 34: “… das bunte Arrangement der Bilder. Ihr Nebeneinander schließt systematisch den Zusammenhang aus, der dem Bewusstsein sich öffnet.” Kracauer, Photography, p. 432: “The contiguity of these images systematically excludes their contextual frameworks available to consciousness.” (Emphasis mine.) Here, Kracauer uses Nebeneinander in a manner that excludes and prevents contextual frameworks and understanding, but I want to show in the following that photographic contiguity can perhaps after all produce context and comprehension, if used in a comparative manner, to work out differences and similarities.
264 Atlas means a number of things, it can be a cartographic atlas (where a three-dimensional space is projected onto the plane), a medical atlas, and what we now associate with Warburg: the upright presentation of images. I will only focus on the book form and the vertical presentation.
265 See also Didi-Huberman, Atlas, p. 15: “Against all epistemic purity, the atlas introduces the sensible dimension into knowledge, and the diverse, and the lacunary character of each image. Against any aesthetic purity it introduces the multiple, the diverse, the hybridity of any montage.”
1920s and early 1930s to both atlas and children’s books in his texts, and my project makes this connection explicit. As Georges Didi-Huberman writes:

We could say, in this perspective, that the atlas of images is a reading machine in the very wide sense that Benjamin wanted to give to the concept of Lesbarkeit. … The atlas would be an apparatus of reading above all; that is, before any ‘serious’ reading, or in the strict sense of the term: an object of knowledge and of contemplation for children, at the same time a childhood of science and a childhood of art.  

This part of the chapter explores this “childhood of science and art” by suggesting a relationship between atlas, perception primer and photobook. In the next section, the genre of the primer will be examined in the form of one particular photographic picture book, published in 1930 and illustrated with modernist photographs by Edward Steichen: The First Picture-Book. Various image constellations by photographer and teacher Karl Blossfeldt, and the Mnemosyne-project by art historian and philosopher of images Aby Warburg will then help us investigate the notion of the atlas in its many appearances. I examine primer and atlas in their relation to photobooks through the interpretative lens of Walter Benjamin’s writings on photography and his concept of Lesbarkeit in particular. In this chapter, Benjamin provides the interpretative horizon concerning the possibility for a literacy of photography. This is a conscious choice—not only was Benjamin writing about photography while many of the books under discussion were published, what is more, his writings were conceived in dialogue with the emerson of the modernist photobook. The texts in question address questions and problems which the photobook of the 1920s showcases in its own medial form. My close-readings of Benjamin’s texts included here hopes to illuminate that his thinking is exemplary and essential to any understanding of the emergence of the photobook in this particular form and materiality.

The photobook shares with the atlas the fact that it trains visual (in the case of the photobook: photographic) literacy through contiguity and the arrangement of images in a sequence. The phobook differs from the atlas, however, in that this very sequence is presented on one page in the atlas, and in consecutive pages in the photobook. Nevertheless, the constellations found in the photobook (the double spread, for

266 Ibid, p. 17.
268 Most of the texts by Benjamin are from the 1920s and early 1930s, the problem of readability is often tied to the image for him, as it is for me throughout this chapter, and indeed, the dissertation.
example) can be compared to one tableau of the atlas because both are activated by the gaze of the beholder in the act of comparative vision. The children’s book introduces the crucial element of the hand in relation to a grasping of images, and the relative proximity to the body while reading the book. Photographic knowledge, this analogy wishes to convey, is produced by way of innervation. The photobook is situated loosely in the middle between atlas and children’s perception primers, borrowing elements from both. The findings in this chapter will lead to an analysis of the photobook where reading, bodily experience through perception, and the acquisition of knowledge come together.

Two main ideas are at the core of this chapter, namely the notion that photographic alphabetization is bound to various different, and explicitly flexible, reading positions where body, hand and eye interact, and secondly an argument as to how the literacy thus achieved might relate to the concept of the atlas as a practice of visual thinking. The heterogeneity of the material presented in this chapter is thus connected through the principles of alphabetization *through* photography and the alphabetization *in* photography. If by alphabetization we understand the process of learning how to read and write, then by “the alphabetization *in* photography” we understand the process of learning how to read photography (and perhaps also how to understand it by way of its language). By “alphabetization *through* photography” we consequently understand how to “write” photography (how to use a camera, and how to write around a photograph, and even onto it, that is).269 This means that photography is the vehicle of alphabetization but it is also the object of literacy. Benjamin makes use of ideas that Moholy had formulated with regard to a literacy of photography: “It is not the person ignorant of writing but the one ignorant of photography who will be the illiterate of the future.”270 Moholy’s quote not only implies that there might be the necessity to learn to read and see photography, but even more that the production and reception of photography might replace the techniques of reading and

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writing with respect to a perhaps “vital necessity”\textsuperscript{271} of recognizing the political and historical dimension in photography, as they are tied to perspective and orientation.

This chapter more pronouncedly explores photography’s relationship to wall and book as it manifests itself in the photobook. Building on the notion of mobility in perception developed in the previous chapter, this chapter now showcases how the photobook invites mobility between the horizontal and vertical, and how the photobook mediates between wall, table, and body, and what the form of presentation entails in terms of reading directions and knowledge transfer. Indebted to a passage in Walter Benjamin’s 1928 \textit{Einhahnstraße}, this mobilization of the book can be traced throughout the history of bookmaking, as connected to copiers, printers, readers and the growing urbanization of script that eventually approaches the “dictatorial perpendicular,” as Benjamin calls it.\textsuperscript{272} Furthermore, this chapter is about reading as much as it is about writing in relation to photography. It deals with the writing about images, the writing onto images, as a child would do, and the writing with images (as in the case of Aby Warburg and Karl Blossfeldt, where photography becomes a form of thinking). Writing, moreover, is connected to learning and memory, and \textit{Tafel} in this context evokes connotations of the educational realm, where the blackboard temporarily holds writing that is then erased again. Here Freud’s \textit{Wunderblock} comes to mind, where a \textit{Waxtafel} is set in analogy to the memory functions that are closely tied to metaphors of photography.\textsuperscript{273} It is no accident that Warburg’s \textit{Bilderatlas Mnemosyne} relies so heavily on photography in order to explore image memory, as the photograph in this context of this chapter is considered a recording device, and a tool for writing that involves the hand and the body, in order to be experienced through touch as much as through visual perception.

Orientation of Image and Script between Production and Reception.

In order to prepare the discussion of the photobook between horizontal and vertical presentation, some of Walter Benjamin’s thoughts on reading and writing will set the stage. Benjamin is concerned with how images and book-space relate to the corporeal and sensual perception of the beholder, and how we can describe the effect on learning. The problem of orientation of the book in regard to the body of the beholder is essential in this section, because it raises the question how body and book influence one another when photography enters the picture. Book, photography and the beholder’s body together create a space for reading, and my project proposes that the photobook acknowledges and inhabits this particular spatial realm.

In a fragment from 1917 (which was not published in his lifetime), Benjamin thinks about the horizontality and verticality that certain images imply for the act of perception.275 He specifically talks about paintings, children’s drawings, and writing, all of which in his interpretation imply the reading direction from the act of production rather than conventions of perception alone. Special emphasis is thus placed on the hand: as producing an image or page, and as holding it in the act of perception.

While this is a long and complex quotation, my focus lies on the aspects that address the act of reading and the orientation of pictures and pages in relation to the beholder’s body in the act of perception. Benjamin here sketches out a concept that he will return to between 1923 and 1926 when writing Einbahnstraße: the notion that script has gone through various phases of orientation, from the verticality of the wall in an ancient version of script to a mid-way position for the scribe in monastic contexts of copying, to lying flat on the

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274 I am greatly indebted to Brigid Doherty for introducing me to crucial texts and for igniting interest in the topic, ultimately for thinking about Benjamin in the context of learning and space in my very first semester at Princeton in the fall of 2008.
In two texts from around the same time as *Einbahnstraße*, “Aussicht ins Kinderbuch” from 1926 and “Neues von Blumen” from 1928, he underscores the above-mentioned aspects of tactility and relationship between the body and the book or page when it comes to reading images. It is in this context that we can understand his remarks in his “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” from 1931, where Benjamin construes reading the photobook as akin to “reading” a picture book, i.e. as the intertwined comprehension of image and text. This allows for the conclusion that the orientation of a page might not only be defined by how it was produced but also by what it shows and how it can be read. “Our reading,” he says, puts the book down horizontally, parallel to the ground and table. With this formulation (*unser Lesen*) he thus creates the possibility for a reading that differs from “ours:” a reading, as I want to suggest here which is closer to the reading and drawing practiced by a child.

As Benjamin had said earlier, a child’s drawing should be “read” according to its principles of production, and its inner orientation or inner sense. Benjamin thus equips a child’s drawing with an inner orientation that is located somewhere between horizontal and vertical, by evoking the body of the child in relation to the drawing. He extends the horizontal plane outward into a more three-dimensional space that includes the young artist’s body, standing or sitting in front of the page and, most importantly, decidedly not fixed but in flux in terms of orientation while drawing. This emphasis on the spatial quality in children’s drawings is unusual. Benjamin only implies this, however, and does not actually make explicit what the “correct” alignment would be. He only defines it ex negativo: “Dagegen betrachte man Kinderzeichnungen. Es wird zumeist gegen deren inneren Sinn verstoßen, sie senkrecht vor sich hinzustellen [...]“ The “inner sense” is an “inner orientation” as much as it is “meaning.” Precisely the sense of space created in children’s (often abstract) drawings adheres neither to the horizontal nor the vertical plane, but occupies a more

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280 This might be closer to a primordial reading – *ursprünglich* is essential and problematic here, but will become relevant again in the discussion of Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst* in part II of this chapter.
complex and mobile place in between that relies on the position of the beholder as flexible, as it relied on the mobile position of the producer before.

The theme of a more complex space is already present in the first sentence of the fragment: “Ein Bild will senkrecht vor den Betrachter gehalten werden.” While it is unusual in the first place to speak from the point of view of the painting (ein Bild will), to assume that the painting will indeed be held is equally surprising. Holding a picture implies a chain of actions: picking up the image, holding it while looking at it, and putting it down again, perhaps even moving the picture between horizontal and vertical while holding it and interacting with it. Benjamin’s formulation thus brings in the hand of the beholder as essential for the act of perception: the grasping and the understanding of the picture here, too, is tied to the body, as the drawing was tied to the child’s body in the act of production. Holding the picture, moreover, determines the maximum distance between body and object: an arm’s length. Kinderzeichnungen then operate at an even closer proximity, defining the appropriate distance for perception and how to receive it. In short: Benjamin suggests a space that is defined by the body relating to the drawing, the painting, or the page. This relation is to be understood as both historical and dynamic.

While the horizontality of reading the page mirrors how we usually (hand-)write in the 20th century, Benjamin suggests that script itself might have belonged to the vertical plane at some point. In Einbahnstraße, he develops these thoughts further, where he contrasts script in the horizontal orientation (as in the book that is likened to a bed) to the more violent use of script in the vertical (his vocabulary suggests circumstances that do the anthropomorphized script harm):

Die Schrift, die im gedruckten Buche ein Asyl gefunden hatte, wo sie ihr autonomes Dasein führte, wird unerbittlich von Reklamen auf die Straße hinausgezerrt und den brutalen Heteronomien des wirtschaftlichen Chaos unterstellt. … Wenn vor Jahrhunderten sie allmählich sich niederzulegen begann, von der aufrechten Inschrift zur schräg auf Pulten ruhenden Handschrift ward, um endlich sich im Buchdruck zu betten, beginnt sie nun ebenso langsam sich wieder vom Boden zu heben.

281 Emphasis mine.
284 Benjamin, “Vereidigter Bücherrevisor”, p. 103.
When Benjamin remarks on the reading habits of his contemporaries in the metropolis, he combines newspaper, film and advertising to point to the new vertical adjustments of script and its consumption. Not only does this quotation suggest that the resurrection of script from the ground might be more cyclical than one could have guessed, it also likens the verticality of script in newspapers, film and advertising to a crucifixion. Script is thus bereft of the notion of refuge the book might offer. The text moves from the political vocabulary of the asylum and the autonomy of the book through the interrogation of the heteronomies of capitalist and violent logics (hinauszerrt, drängen), only to finally, in half a sentence, inject an unexpected optimism: beginnt sie sich nun ebenso langsam wieder vom Boden zu heben. This positive rendering almost speaks of resistance, because the semantic field of the safe and restorative “bed” (sich niederlegen, sich betten) has been subtly replaced by more complicated notions of ground (where it could possibly be suppressed). With this slow resurrection the activity of reading emerges, only to be overtaken by the brutality of the perpendicular, which demands attention in a virtually dictatorial fashion. As is often the case with Benjamin’s writing, he opens up interpretation, allowing for the mobility in time of spatial orientation of script, a mobility that is bound to practices that are always conditioned historically, and which may differ if viewed from the point of view of production or that of reception.

Returning to the 1917 fragment, Benjamin’s text also, however, allows for the conclusion that the page (die Seite) might evoke both representation and semiotics, just as photography could be said to be combining the realms of representation and signs. Benjamin’s fragment neatly divides up those realms for painting and the graphic arts and immediately complicates it again when it comes to text on the page and children’s drawings. Analyzing Benjamin helps us understand the question of orientation and reading direction that is so pertinent for the photobook.

As El Lissitzky’s quotation at the beginning of this chapter had suggested, the photobook as a medium demands various reading positions and it is in itself historical in these vertical and horizontal reading positions. The combination of the pages of the book (and the reading this implies) and the photographs (“in

\[285\]Ibid.
between” horizontal and vertical realms of signification and representation) call for a handling that pays tribute to the flexibility of photography as a medium situated between vertical and horizontal presentation, between reception on the wall or on a table. Most importantly, modifying Benjamin’s quotation in order to accommodate the various reading directions called for by the photographs in a photobook: it needs to be held. Once held in the hand of the beholder, the reading can be adjusted according to the body, and according to the images each double spread presents. The photobook of the 1920s and 1930s, in order to be read, needs handling that allows for a change in position. Verticality and horizontality are suggestions and options, rather than fixed positions. This is particularly true for “uncustomary pictures”, as Lissitzky wrote. Getting accustomed to these photographs and their perspective can best be trained by changes of orientation and reading position. What is indeed surprising, and endlessly generative, in Benjamin’s quotations is that he suggests a more mobile relationship between book and beholder. The beholder of the photobook is thus prompted to engage more critically with horizontality, verticality and the ideological weight these concepts carry in terms of perspective and perception.286

“… im Handumdrehen.” Spatial and Temporal components of the Page.

Fig. 33: Aenne Biermann, cover from 60 Fotos, Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann Verlag, 1930.

286 If we want to understand the vertical as the realm of power, hierarchy, phallus and transcendence, as Bataille suggests, we could complement that with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the horizontal as democratic, heterogeneous, and rhizomatic.
Aenne Biermann’s photobook uses her photograph “Kinderhände” as the cover-illustration. It thus establishes a connection, even analogy between the primer and the photobook. Furthermore, it posits a similarity between the alphabetization of image and language that happens in a children’s book to the acts of learning activated by the photobook of the 1920s. Biermann’s photograph shows longhand, Schreibschrift, a child’s handwriting exercises in a journal, while the child’s folded hands are placed on the empty space of the page yet to be filled with more handwriting. These closed hands are the antipode to the movement of writing and of turning the page, as they come together in the photobook that is activated by the hands depicted. The image on the cover in turn mobilizes the beholder’s hands—so that they might open up the book, guided by curiosity to find out what the book contains.

In “Aussicht ins Kinderbuch,” a small essay on children’s books from 1926, Walter Benjamin places emphasis on the child’s hand in the process of learning, describing how children engage with children’s books and their illustrations in particular.287 He underscores how for children the hand is closely linked to the eye when it comes to perception, and how the learning of reading and writing is stimulated and mediated by the image.288 Brigid Doherty has shown how Anschauung, used by Benjamin in his text, is likely to be borrowed from the pedagogy of Pestallozi who in turn took up this term from Kant’s philosophy, where it relates to both perception and intuition.289 Anschauungsbücher, the term Benjamin uses, Doherty thus translates as “roughly ‘perception primers’,” but she does not neglect to point out that Anschauung of course is very close to Aussicht in Benjamin’s network of connotations, as it includes the gaze (to look and to be looked at).290

In this essay, Benjamin writes that for the child looking at a colored picture book the space of the book comes into being in the act of perception.291 With an unusual gerund—bildernd, parallel to lesen (i.e.

288 Benjamin uses Anschauungsbuch in his text on p. 610.
291 The careful distinction between colored books and black and white illustrations, that Benjamin introduces into his text, seems to suggest that the colorful children’s books evoke the identification and the immersion, rather than expression that the black and white illustrations call forth in the child.
Benjamin calls attention to the child’s image imagination. The neologism of *bildernd* on the one hand depicts the child as actively engaged with an image, on the other hand it also means the active creation of images (in the act of perception or imagination). Benjamin writes:


Benjamin carefully sets up the movement of the child. He uses verbs like “heraustreten,” “eindringen,” and “betreten.” These verbs of transgression and pervasion describe how the imagination of the child evoked by the image transforms the child (it becomes cloud and color), but also changes the book in the process of perception through the child: it is the child who enters the book, the child who acknowledges the book as three-dimensional space and object, rather than simply a plane or two-dimensional page. The child enters the book as a stage and finds “the fairytale alive” there. Because a book is usually regarded as a flat object by the ordinary (adult) reader, a children’s book with its illustrations might seem to be simply extended by two-dimensional drawings. This *Trugwand der Fläche* or “delusive wall of the plane (or surface),” however does not exist for the child. Through their imagination they extend the plane into a more-dimensional space, namely a stage. Benjamin continues:


In his text, Benjamin performs what he describes: the imagination of the child allows for everything to be in flux (“wo bei jedem Schritt sich alles verschiebt”), the child grasps color while reading and receiving everything visually (“mit allen Farben, welche es beim Lesen und Betrachten aufgreift”), and it seems that

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292 The attentive reader will remember that Kracauer had used “bebildern” in his description of the use of photographs in the *Illustrierten*.


295 Ibid (emphasis mine). There is a connection here to the empty stage in the *Trauerspielbuch*. Keeping in mind that Benjamin has read and written extensively at this point already about German Romanticism and the Baroque, this connection is ever more self-evident.
everything is colored and set in motion by this touch of the imagination. Didi-Huberman reminds us that imagination “gives us knowledge that cuts across, through its intrinsic power of montage that consists in discovering.” Benjamin creates this montage precisely in a swift moment and by the turning of the page: “im Handumdrehen.” This notion is both temporal and spatial, as imagination transforms the book as much as it transforms the child. The turning of the page is essential also for the photobook as only in the movement of the turning of the page the sequence of images comes into being.

Looking back at the concept Benjamin had called “inner orientation of children’s drawings,” for Benjamin the act of receiving an image is closely linked to two things: space and animation. The animation, in turn, is intimately tied to the imagining of a story, a story that might find its way to being written down or drawn. In Benjamin’s eyes, the best children’s books pay tribute to this constellation of the senses as intertwined in the process of perception and literacy, because animation, imagination, reading and writing belong together for the child. They are inseparable, precisely because they are all mediated by the body.

So schreiben, so aber lesen auch die Kinder ihre Texte. Und es gibt seltene, passionierende ABC-Bücher, welche in Bildern ein verwandtes Spiel treiben. Da findet man z. B. auf der Tafel A ein Stillleben aufgetürmt, das sehr rätselhaft wirkt, bis man dahinter kommt, daß hier Aal, ABC-Buch, Adler, Apfel, Affe, Amboß, Ampel, Anker, Armbrust, Arnzei, Ast, Aster, Axt sich versammelt haben.

The “stacked-up” elements that Benjamin names here all begin with the letter A. Transitioning the reader from children’s books to the genre of the primer that is meant to teach reading and writing, Benjamin understands the learning of script as strongly connected to images. How this works exactly, Benjamin describes: by evoking the name for the thing that is presented on the page, the child connects image and word, producing the letter in question. In the act of taking the image apart, that is, piece by piece, the child finds the connecting elements and the similarity: in this case the letter that connects all of them. The understanding that for children the process of reading and writing is analogous calls attention to the

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296 Didi-Huberman, *Atlas*, p. 15. (emphasis in the original.)
298 Ibid.
inherently creative process of both reading and writing: it is a decomposition and recomposition in the act of learning.  

Imagination and animation are at the core of Benjamin’s text on the children’s book, as Gabriele Brandstetter underscores. To me, both are tied to the hand of the child. Moreover, the act of imagination and animation—so precisely contained in Benjamin’s verb “bildern”—is at work in the photobook as a primer for photographic literacy. Hand, and by extension the whole body including the eyes are engaged in these photobooks, meant to mobilize the beholder to acquire literacy that allows for the reading of photographic constellations in other contexts. Similar to a child discovering the organizing principles for an image stacked with elements all pertaining to one particular letter, the reader of a photobook looks for connecting elements, similarities and differences. Benjamin argues that the hand of the child is connected closely to the eye in the act of reading: the child’s finger and eye wander through the “image landscape.” It is thus that the meaning of image and word access the child in a way that is not purely cognitive, but that connects body and brain through “finger and eye” by way of innervation and touch. Precisely this relationship of the body of the beholder to the photobook of the 1920s and 1930s is at the heart of my analysis. It is through a combination of touch and eye that photographic literacy will be acquired. The metaphorical language in Benjamin’s essay practices this interrelatedness of image, script, and the act of grasping with hand and mind.

Benjamin emphasizes the familiarity between reading and writing for children when they look at images such as the one he mentioned in the ABC-Buch, and again emphasizes the spatial relationship of images by putting pressure on the realms of inside and outside that the book connects through the hand of the child.

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299 This calls to mind Bergson’s idea of decomposition and recomposition, as discussed in chapter one.


301 Benjamin, “Aussicht ins Kinderbuch”, p. 610, the child which “mit Auge und Finger seine Bilderlandschaft durchquert.”
Solche Bilder kennen Kinder wie ihre Tasche, sie haben sie genauso durchwühlt und das Innerste zu äußerst gekehrt, ohne das kleinste Fetzenchen oder Fädchen vergessen zu haben. Und wenn im kolorierten Kupferstich die Phantasie des Kindes träumerisch in sich selbst versinkt, führt der schwarz-weiße Holzschnitt, die nächtnerne prosaische Abbildung, es aus sich heraus. Mit der zwingenden Aufforderung zur Beschreibung, die in dergleichen Bildern liegt, rufen sie im Kinde das Wort wach.\textsuperscript{302}

Here, too, Benjamin uses verbs of movement to describe the activation through the combination of image and hand achieved in the child: “in sich selbst versinken” and “aus sich herausführen” are used to complement the process of alphabetization that is brought about by the black-and-white illustration. “Aus sich heraus” is related to expression, or \textit{Ausdruck}, and as such it enhances the concept of mobilization the primer has: it “evokes” language and words (and connected to that, image ideas) that lay dormant in the child.

Readers of Benjamin understand the image of \textit{Tasche}, pocket (or indeed bag) as intertextual reference to a childhood-memory as written down in \textit{Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert}. And as in the above quotation, in this memory-episode Benjamin combines theoretical observations about content and form with the grasping of the child’s hand and knowledge produced through the body. Indeed, the grasping of the object—the stocking that is folded into itself to create both container and its contents, and a third that is gained only for the price of the first two being lost—enables the intellectual grasping of the abstract idea that the separation of content and form also loses the magic its conjunction produces. The episode reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

The fascinating account of the small Walter discovering again and again (as expressed in the “Nicht oft genug”) how form and content are indeed one is visualized for the reader with images that allow us to understand both the importance of the hand when it comes to learning, and the element of repetition. By

\textsuperscript{302}Ibid.

taking apart the elements that constitute the fascinating thing that reveals itself to be not only _Tasche_ and “Das Mitgebrachte” but actually a familiar piece of clothing transformed into container and contained, the child repeats the lesson learned through the experiment ("konnte ich so die Probe auf jene rästelhafte Wahrheit machen"), by pulling it into close proximity with his body (“immer näher an mich heran”). In the way the text is constructed, _Tasche_ and “Mitgebrachtes” are not only the starting point of the experiment, the stocking is the outcome of the transformation: “in den sie beide sich verwandelt hatten.” The child in this episode unfolds the _Tasche_, whereas in the earlier quotation from “Aussicht ins Kinderbuch” the _Tasche_ was turned inside out. What both episodes have in common is the connection between inside and outside as realms of knowledge—the child knows the texture and contents because it has felt it repeatedly, and memorized it through touch, not only visually. While the German word is the same, _Tasche_ in the _Berliner Kindheit_ instance is more a separate object, while the “Kinderbuch”-quotation suggests that it is an inside pocket in a jacket or a similar piece of clothing. In both instances Benjamin meticulously sets up how touch is related to the process of learning, and how the hand in collaboration with the eye in relation to the body finds a way to express what it perceives. Moreover, expression is only implied in the verbs chosen to indicate the outward movement that language causes to the body: “aus sich heraus”, and “auswickeln / entwinden”. In the episode from _Berliner Kindheit_ this acquisition of concept and language is developed simultaneously on three levels. The concrete images of woolen stockings, the notion of form and content, and the concepts and words that the child has for them: _Tasche_ and “Das Mitgebrachte”. _Tasche_ is introduced as a visual simile (“das Aussehen einer kleinen _Tasche_”), while “Das Mitgebrachte” is used throughout the episode in quotation marks, indicating that it is the name the child has chosen, and it constitutes something that is “untranslatable”—it cannot be carried over, it can only be a metaphor, can only exist in the constellation of content and form, “Form und Inhalt, Hülle und Verhülltes, ‘Das Mitgebrachte’ und _Tasche_”, only as a quotations, that is. Benjamin conjugates all three levels here, repeats them before he reveals that they are all one—they need the connector “and” in...

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304 It also calls to mind the expression conveying expertise: “Kennt sich darin aus wie in seiner Westentasche.”
order to make sense, in order to create something that is image, concept, and sensually perceptible. The child is the essential agent here, not only because the first person narrator makes visible what otherwise would go unnoticed—the relation between repetition, the act of learning, language and perception—but also because the child allows for the introduction of a simultaneity of concrete objects, images and abstract concepts, as it grasps all three of them in Benjamin’s text here: the intellectual act of Be greifen of this very interconnectedness is visualized. The photobook of the 1920s and 1930s produces a similar process, where the act of repetition creates connections again and again, when the hands open up a world of images that are two-dimensional while simultaneously offering entire image-worlds in themselves. Tasche und “Das Mitgebrachte” can be found in each page of a photobook, and the hand turning the page creates the experiment of learning to see and to name what one sees anew: “Nicht oft genug konnte ich so die Probe auf jene rätselhafte Wahrheit machen...” In his texts, Benjamin fills his words with images, and thus creates a space for the imagination of the readers, connecting their own bodies to the intellectual process.

**Learning to Write Photography: The Photobook as Primer for Photographic Literacy**

Be greifen has two siblings for Benjamin, so it seems: (be)bildern and beschreiben. This trias is essential for the discussion of the photobook, especially as they all relate to processes of reading. For Benjamin, the illustrations in children’s book demand description in the sense of filling in and naming. Beschreiben for Benjamin here means precisely these two things, description in terms of language and a “writing over,” as the more literal be-schreiben as in writing onto a surface. Again, the hand functions as a surface and instrument through which the child absorbs and expresses language. He continues:

Wie es aber diese Bilder mit Worten beschreibt, so “beschreibt” es sie in der Tat. Es bekritzelt sie. … Es lernt an ihnen zugleich die Sprache der Schrift: Hieroglyphik. In deren Zeichen gibt man heute noch den ersten Fibelworten das Linienbild der Dinge, welche sie bedeuten, mit: Ei, Hut.307

The first words used in the primer that Benjamin mentions (Ei, Hut) are echoed in Aenne Biermann’s photographic pair of a broken egg and the hands of a child that we have seen in chapter one.308 After reading Benjamin’s insights on the primer, we can now re-evaluate the photographic pair that Biermann offers. After

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308 The “child” in Biermann’s book is with one exception her daughter, so I believe the female personal pronoun in this instance justified by the photographic context the book provides.
some reflection on the hand as agent, the tactility of the broken egg comes into view. Tactility is here connected to the efforts of reading and writing as a dismantling and assembly, a “taking apart” and a “putting together.” *Ei* and *Hut* might even be found in one and the same image: the neatly opened up egg consists of vessel and a top that in the imagination of a child can easily transform into the egg’s hat.

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 34: Aenne Biermann, *60 Fotos*, p. 9 “Zerbrochenes Ei – Broken Egg – Oeuf brisé” and p. 10 “Kinderhände – A child’s hands – Mains d’enfant.”

The German *Ei* is one of the first words German-speaking children learn to read, because it consists of only two letters and is manageable as such in its brevity while providing a full word. It, too, requires the effort of combining two letters to create a sound that is not simply both letters next to each other, but an altogether different, or third, sound: “e” and “i” only name the object properly when melted together. The word *Ei* then symbolizes the act of reading, while the photograph of the broken egg stands for the letters of the alphabet that have to be assembled to become sound and image, in order to become word. The caption adds tension to this reading, ultimately underscoring the creative potential in the pairing of language and photograph: *zerbrochenes Ei* evokes a slightly different image than the photograph we see. This photograph shows an egg, which has been cracked open carefully to reveal two halves that seem intact, if separate. The tension created by the implication of violence and accident in the “zerbrochen” is further deepened by the calm hands of the child, likely the agent of a broken egg in a number of scenarios, yet there is no connection other than the one created by the placement of the photographs next to one another. Together, the captions—“zerbrochenes
“Ei” and “Kinderhände”—place emphasis on the hand in the process of alphabetization. The hand is the connector between inside and outside, between tactile perception and intellectual comprehension, and even between writing and reading.\(^{309}\)

These captions are a subtle reminder that language and images invite “imaginings,” and they lead me to reconsider the connection of eyes and hands as introduced as a theme for Biermann’s photobook, and for the modernist photobook in the 1920s more broadly. As Franz Roh wrote in his introduction to Aenne Biermann’s photobook, the process of learning how to write is not only tied to reading, in the 1920s it is also tied to the practice of photography.\(^{310}\) In response to the idea that everyone (\(alle\) \(Menschen\)) could now take photos, he writes, beginning with an ellipsis:

Derselbe Schauder, wie ihn Menschen um 1630 hätten haben können bei der Vorstellung, daß alle Menschen \(schreiben\) lernen werden, somit ihre Erlebnisse fixieren können, statt daß dies nur Denjenigen vorbehalten bleibe, die Bedeutendes zu sagen haben. (Mit größter Gelassenheit pflegt die Geschichte über derartige Resentiments hinwegzugehen.)\(^{311}\)

If around 1930, when Roh writes this, photographic literacy is to be acquired by the masses like 300 years earlier writing was acquired, then Biermann’s photographic pair is about the writing of photography, and the practice of photographic vision in the sense of a primer in the photobook. The forms guide us, and they eventually create a whole when both pages come together: the two broken halves are united in the two folded hands of the child. They also come together, however, when the book is closed: echoing the photograph that is displayed on the cover, they also evoke the closing of the book. (For an imaginative child, the hands might reunite the two halves of the broken egg when we close the book.) What is more, the child’s hands could contain something we cannot see, sparking our imagination (“Das Mitgebrachte”?). Moreover, the hands


The egg can further more be seen as an archetypical form that is highly symbolic throughout the history of art. Cf. Anselm Haverkamp, \textit{Die Zweitdeutigkeit der Kunst. Zur historischen Epistemologie der Bilder}, Berlin: August Verlag, 2012.

\(^{310}\) Franz Roh, “Der literarische Foto-Streit,” introduction to: Aenne Biermann. 60 Fotos. Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1930, pp. 3-5, here p. 5. The quotation begins with the following claim that Roh then responds to: “Individualisten von 1930 schaudern bei der Vorstellung, daß nun bald \(alle\) Menschen fotografieren werden.” (Emphasis in the original.)

\(^{311}\) Roh, “Der literarische Foto-Streit”, here p. 5. (Emphasis in the original.)
stand in for the photobook as a whole, because they are essential to activate the image sequence. By the turn of a page, new constellations come into being, “im Handumdrehen” photographic constellations and correspondences change again.312 Biermann’s photobook lingers on the threshold of learning, providing the beholder with the pleasure to remember what it was like to learn to read and write for the first time, by learning to read photographs in a photobook. Benjamin speaks to this memory in a small piece of Berliner Kindheit entitled Lesekasten, describing a toolbox for alphabetization, reading in particular.


The nostalgic acknowledgement that this one phase in one’s life where one inhabits learning, and where the body is filled up with the intense innervation of learning through touch, is forever gone, might be countered by the task of learning to read again in the sense of photographic literacy. In terms of the photobook, acquiring photographic literacy differs from learning to read and write in so far, as the process of learning “photography” indeed never comes to an end. It starts all over again with every new photographic constellation. This leaves us with the paradox of learning that never comes to an end. What is more, there are visual memories, body memories, and a surplus contained in the photograph, also produced in the actualization, all of which come together in slightly different ways every time our hands open up the photobook.


In this next section, a photographic picture book for young children (published 1930) comes into close view, testing the above-made claim in terms of photographic literacy and its connection to the Bilderbuch. The images in question are black and white, according to 1930s standards in photography and the printing of photographs. This constitutes a similarity that allows for a quotation by Benjamin, who writes with regard to black and white woodcut-illustrations in ABC-books that children’s books and primers with simpler

illustrations have a stronger connection to language. Their lack of color seems to stimulate the imagination of the child more. These illustrations, Benjamin asserts, inspire the collaboration of hand and eye to a strong degree, in the act of reading and of writing, describing and appropriating the image.314 “Der echte Wert solch schlichter graphischer Bücher liegt also weit ab von der stumpfen Drastik, um derentwillen die rationalistische Pädagogik sie empfahl.”315 The plain illustrations in this photographically illustrated picture book of the 1930s, an American publication, allow for a similar conclusion: rationalist pedagogy might be behind this sober and objective publication, but, as we will see, its effects are different from the claimed intention of the editor. *The first picture book. Everyday things for Babies* was published in New York in 1930 by Mary Steichen Martin, daughter of photographer Edward Steichen.316 Steichen Martin wrote the introduction, while Edward Steichen provided the photographs. Scholars have pointed out that it is in fact the first picture book illustrated with photographs (in lieu of drawings) at the time.317 As the title already indicates, this book is for very young children, a “baby book” or, as the Danes have it, a *pegebok* or “pointing book.”318 The book was “influential in the development of photographic books for young children. Praised by Barbara Bader as ‘the first of the modern photographic books,’ Steichen pioneered this book type, stimulating similar texts,” Bettina Kummerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer write.319

314 Benjamin combines the process of reading and writing with the observation that for children both is tied very much to the hand and to the eye, in the literal understanding of “begreifen” and “beschreiben” that are both connected to the object of the book that is written on, and handled.


317 And while the cover states Mary Steichen Martin’s name, Bettina Kummerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer speak of “Edward Steichen’s book” in their text. The question of authorship is an interesting one, left undecided by the publication itself. See: “First Pictures, Early Concepts: Early Concept Books,” p. 326-7: “Edward Steichen’s *The First Picture Book*, with a preface by his daughter Mary Steichen Martin, was influential in the development of photographic books for young children.”


319 Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer, “First Pictures, Early Concepts: Early Concept Books,” p. 326-7, when it comes the books inspired by the “First Picture Book”; “These include *First Things. A Picture Book of Objects* (about 1940), Paul Macku’s *Schau mal!* (1949), and Erich Retzlaff’s *Das erste Bilderbuch* (1949). The book’s sensibility reflects a simplicity and purity of style, reminiscent of New
In the introduction, Mary Steichen Martin explains why photography as a method of illustration was chosen. Most importantly (and most revealingly) she states an overall dissatisfaction with most illustrated picture books available because they seem to be too subjective in presentation, i.e. too manipulative in her eyes.

Not only are most pictures inadequate, but also too often they are colored by the artist’s viewpoint and personality, thus presenting a falsified image of the object. Therefore photographs have been used. The photographer, combining understanding of medium and audience, has eliminated as far as possible any misleading play of light and shadow. Each object has been presented as objectively as possible, so that no effects should confuse the child.

The uncompromising belief in photography’s objectivity is not only naïve in the 1930s, it also quite easily exposes Mary Steichen Martin’s true objective to provide a picture book that does not “confuse” the child. Why this confusion has to be avoided, a close-reading of the paragraph makes clear: When we pay attention to word-choice, the negatively tinted group of words like “inadequate,” “artist’s viewpoint and personality”, “falsified”, “misleading” and “effects” are used to create the “confusion”, while they are contrasted with the positive “understanding of medium and audience”, “objective”, and twice the construction of “as (x) as possible” on the side of the photographer working against those ambivalent and “falsifying” emotions that have to be “eliminated” to the best of his abilities. Presentation of the object “as objectively as possible” does not only sound tautological, it also erases the photographer’s signature from the photographs in question, such as to “eliminate” any effects that could cause confusion. Implicitly speaking of hygiene through Realism, which dominated photography at that time.” (Barbara Bader, *American Picturebooks from Noah’s Ark to the Beast Within*. New York: Macmillan, 1976, p. 100)

317 Collection Annette & Rudolf Kicken, Berlin.
321 Ibid, emphasis mine.
322 The proclaimed objective of this book was to produce a picture book that would provide pictures that on the one hand prove “satisfying to children” while this book on the other hand would be “in line with modern educational theory.” *The first picture book. Everyday things for Babies.* n.p.
photography, Mary Steichen Martin reveals her position in favor of a rigid pedagogy that is mostly bereft of the human element.

The “first picture book,” however, cannot fulfill this promise. Instead, as a first photobook it invites the active participation of the child’s hand to reverse the emotionally bare images presented on each page, so that they might become part of a process of pointing and naming in the collaboration of eye and hand. This book with pictures most likely works according to the principles of deictic similarities to the visual world encountered by the baby. Usually a primary caretaker then provides the name for the object pointed at: “ball,” “teddy bear,” “book,” etc. At an age when children actively take in their surroundings by pointing (with their index finger, Zeigefinger), they actively acquire their “mother-tongue” by indexical gestures and innumerable repetitions; words are missing from this “first picture”-photobook, but evoked in every image. This fact affirms photography’s universality in terms of language, a thought that will prove relevant for the discussion of Blossfeldt and Warburg later on. Looking back at Benjamin’s suggestion that black and white illustrations might provoke words more urgently, here the question is raised how language is tied to photography, and how we might read photographs if we do not have language yet. Didi-Huberman’s childhood of art and science comes to mind, and connected to that the question how we can know something through photography. (I will return to that thought.)

In her preface Mary Steichen Martin writes that resemblance to the baby’s surroundings was the most decisive factor for choosing the illustrations. In Steichen’s project the photographs visually echo the child’s domestic surroundings to a degree that provides satisfaction, even “comfort and pleasure”:

I set about providing a book of such pictures, not only for my own but for other children faced with a similar need. … The things chosen for the pictures are those first met by any baby of today as he develops. Herein lies the essence of a baby’s satisfaction in pictures: he likes to recognize what he knows; it is a little triumph for him. It is also a comfort and pleasure, the recognition of old friends.

Recognition, here construed as a form of repetition as well as a form of memory, is tied to the photographic image that simply provides a mirror, as it were. The child recognizes the photographic resemblance of a world that is manufactured to be similar, because it is furnished with the typical elements of every (American)

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323 Photographic resemblance lies at the heart of Kracauer’s critique, as chapter one has explored.
324 *The first Picture Book. Everyday Things for Babies*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930, preface, no pages, (1). (This of course is a highly problematic claim in itself.)
household at the time. As such, the black and white illustrations achieve what Benjamin attributed to the two-dimensional woodcut: children fill in the space of the plane with their imagination. However, this is opposed to what Steichen Martin writes. She understands the process of recognition as satisfactory because it confirms that which is already known, while Bergson reminds us that perception is always already composed of repetition and memory.325 When Steichen Martin writes that her book is supposed to provide photographic images for the first child’s memories, she underestimates that the photographs bound in the book operate with the gap of a temporal delay (as any photograph does), the abstraction through black-and-white, and a spatial more-dimensionality that might be more satisfactory to the child than the images alone could suggest. Here, we find ourselves at the core of an alphabetization through photography: photography as teaching device to learn and understand the objects depicted, in Steichen Martin’s words: “Herein lies the essence of a baby’s satisfaction in pictures: he likes to recognize what he knows; it is a little triumph for him. It is also a comfort and pleasure, the recognition of old friends.”326 Photography is also, however, the material to be learned: and this dimension of the first picture book Steichen Martin fails to see. But it is this aspect that turns the book into a perception primer that also teaches photographic abstraction and its temporal structure. Precisely this allows the conclusion that the educational success does not lie in the sober objectivism that is taken, as we will see, from a point of view that is that of an adult, not a child. In fact, what this book teaches is the awareness for the camera position that creates perspective, boundaries, and a hierarchy. In terms of photographic images, are they always a confirmation of what we know already (as the term recognition that Steichen uses would suggest), or do these early books help shape concepts, as Kümmerling and Meibauer suggest?327 In this picturebook, photography intriguingly complicates what is at stake, and allows for a middle ground between the known and unknown, with the potential for recognition.

When reading Steichen Martin’s introduction through the lens that Siegfried Kracauer provides in his text from 1927, however, we might be tempted to call into question if there ever can be objectivity in photography, or if not “triumph,” “comfort” and “pleasure” speak to a different kind of training that

325 Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory. Translated by N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp. 79-80. “The memory of the lesson, which is remembered (80) or learned by heart, has all the marks of a habit. Like a habit, it is acquired by the repetition of the same effort. Like a habit, it demands first a decomposition and then a recomposition of the whole action.”


327 Cf. Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer.
photography can also provide, namely with regards to advertising and other forms of manipulation, like propaganda. The baby in question certainly is addressed as a small version of the adult that needs to be exposed to a particular picture of the world—that should not “confuse” them, so that they might function most efficiently. This uncritical belief in photography and its hygiene is uncannily analogous to the aesthetics of power that will dominate the experience and employment of photography in the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s. Benjamin’s *Kunstwerk*-essay from 1936 addresses precisely these questions. In his 1976 text “The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich,” Anson Rabinbach argues for ambiguities and ambivalences in the use of New Objectivity after 1933 in Germany, and carefully uncovers continuities of certain aspects of “modernist” tendencies, as well as a change in strategy of Nazi use of aesthetics of production for propaganda purposes in different stages of the Third Reich, that are relevant for Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s critique.328

In the photographic world that Mary and Edward Steichen create with their “first picture book,” there are telephones, books, teddy bears, toothbrushes, and soap. It is the nature of picture books and “pointing books” to offer a typology of similar things (personal hygiene items, household items, clothes, toys), and they are thus intrinsically related to the nature of photography as Kracauer had construed it. However “objectively” presented by Steichen’s photography, it is noteworthy how exactly these elements are portrayed. One of the photographs shows a telephone, standing in for the new technology of communication and the abstracted voice. This instrument, however, is tied to a scene of writing: pen and paper are part of the picture, as is the curtain of a window. All this turns the simple photo of a telephone into a picture of an apparatus offering the very possibility of communication and possible failures in communication: the curtain blocks the view out of the window, and the piece of paper is blank. When tied to the private space of the home, the telephone can then be seen as a device to link various private spaces, but it can be also seen as confirming the guarded space of the private home. This device of telecommunication is staged as something that the child

has only limited access to—it is a device primarily used by the adult members of the household (hence the pen, not a pencil, and the curtain, all signaling boundaries that the child should not trespass).329

The telephone then symbolizes the potential for translation of sound into language into script: assuming that the blank piece of paper is there to record what has been said and heard. The photograph, moreover, translates sound into image. The image is silent—further emphasized by the empty piece of paper. The photograph, however, records the potential of language and translates it for the child: it makes visible and implies sound, as the white page and the pen imply the potential of script. Children thus learn 1) to see, 2) to point and name, 3) to speak (which will later allow them to communicate on the phone), and 4) they finally learn to write, to make use of a white piece of paper. The image performs photographic alphabetization, and even comments on the astounding developments of “talkies” in the movies, the synchronization of photographic image and sound track, another example of language and image intertwined.


330 Collection Annette & Rudolf Kicken, Berlin.
The next photograph moves from the empty page to exercises in notation. Here, the scene of inscription is accessible for the child, and reminds us of Benjamin’s spatial interpretation of *Kinderzeichnungen*, as much as it calls to mind the interrelated appropriation of blank space through inscription and description: these sheets exemplify the verb *bezeichnen* in the way that Benjamin had used them. A pencil and three white sheets of paper with drawings resembling that of a child are arranged on a dark background, which highlights the activity that might just have taken place and could be picked up any moment again. The point of view is noteworthy in this photograph: while the telephone was depicted on eye level (with the telephone at the center of the photographic point of view), the camera looks down onto the sheets of paper, suggesting the point of view of a taller person looking over the shoulder of a child. This in turn allows us to ask what “eye level” means in the telephone photograph. The eye of the camera seems to be located a little higher than the surface of the table, looking straight into the ear-piece of the telephone. This means that the point of view is defined by the telephone, if we take it literally, presenting it as a portrait of this apparatus. It is not, however, the perspective or point of view accessible to a small child. The photographs are altogether taken from an adult point of view, defined by the camera, but implicitly acknowledging that a young child is perhaps most mobile with regard to points of view. Small children perceive their surroundings from sitting on the ground, on a high chair, or being carried around by a primary caretaker. The fluctuating point of view thus corresponds to what I have developed earlier for the children’s drawing, and for the photobook. If we now add the various positions in which the book can be read by the child, flat on the ground or table, or standing in front of them, it is easy to imagine that for a very young child the book will be handled, examined, even torn and colored-in, so that it may grasp and fully appropriate its contents.
Another photograph showcases the example of personal hygiene. It allows for a thought-provoking reading because this still life again is taken from a point of view that might not be accessible for small children intended as the primary readers of this book, unless they stand on a stool or chair (which might very well be what is happening). A toothbrush, a piece of soap and the sink—which upon closer inspection reveals itself as filled with water and bubbles—prepare the scene for the daily rituals of growing up into a modern society.

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331 A few collectors’ books on the internet suggest exactly that: in order to properly work as a perception primer, the book will most likely be almost destroyed. See examples with torn pages here: http://andthings.exblog.jp/iv/detail/index.asp?s=15635951&i=201206%2F26%2F34%2Fa0227034%5F105993%2Ejpg

332 Collection Annette & Rudolf Kicken, Berlin.
This sink filled with water not only symbolizes bodily hygiene, it also serves as a metaphor for the developer bath a photograph needs in order to become visible, and the developer (or education) every child goes through in order to become a full member of society.\textsuperscript{333} The private bathroom is thus tied to the “optical hygiene” of photography that Moholy invoked a few years earlier in his *Malerei. Photographie. Film* from 1925, as much as the photographic metaphor of readability. As a daily routine, this book implicitly suggests, photography mediates everything we see and are surrounded by. Moreover, in the routine of hygiene, outside and inside come together once again, shaping the child internally and externally.

Typology is at the heart of this picture book, and thus at the heart of a training through the book. In this book every page presents elements that are found in almost every household of 1930, literally and figuratively representing nourishment, hygiene, education, communication, and play. The photographic sequence is made of examples; there are newspapers and letters, in another photograph there is a high chair, in another a bowl with fruit, and toys. However, when it comes to everyday things of the baby, there is one page that troubles an all too smooth reading of the photographic picture book. The book we hold in our own hands appears in the book itself. We see “our” book within the book, and find ourselves in a mise-en-abyme of the photobook. The didactic device once again teaches us to see its constructed-ness as a book. Simultaneously, it allows us to recognize photography’s nature of reproduction, and the photobook’s reproducibility. The page showing various typical balls is depicted on top of other picture books, thus “our” book is depicted as one among others; it becomes part of the book itself, and it enters the book while we look at it. Here, then, the book is activated and becomes part of itself, taking the child by the hand, as it were, when entering the “stage of the book” to speak with Benjamin. The open book with the page of various toy balls becomes part of the display of “typical” children’s books—and this is more than just a smart self-assuring gesture from the editor: It is an affirmation of the power of photography and an acknowledgement of the genre of the photobook.

When we look more closely, “our” *First Picture Book* is also an ABC-book, once more enhancing the alphabetization intertwined with photography. Another illustrated children’s book, Beatrix Potter’s “Tale of Peter Rabbit,” known for its beautifully drawn color illustration, supports the connection between the primer and the photobook-picture book. With Potter’s comparatively little book—indeed the difference in size is remarkable—something else enters the scene of the picture book, however: the aspect of relativity. If we take the *First Picture Book* to be a starting point in terms of size, then it relates to other books and to objects photographically depicted inside the book. Hence it creates a sense of scale for the child handling the picture book, and it also teaches photographic reproduction and representation of things. The principle of relativity is enhanced on this page, yet furthered by the composition that shows only closed books, except for our own book, i.e. the book we are reading right now. Because the open page shown in the photograph so directly mirrors the open page that displays the photo, it creates a sense of reflexivity as inherent in the medium of the photobook. Furthermore, the page depicts difference in size, a topic to which children can relate especially well; a fact only enhanced by older or younger siblings. Reconsidering the aspect of inside and outside, which the photobook thematizes when it shows the book being contained in the book itself, one might also read this as a dizzying commentary about containment of feelings for a child, or the failure

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334 Collection Annette & Rudolf Kicken, Berlin.
Most importantly, each of these photographs evokes the question of standpoint and perspective, allowing the child to identify with the point of view or transcending it, igniting the imagination of a different perspective.

The book depicted within the book brings us back to another aspect, that Benjamin’s *Berliner Kindheit*-quotation had mentioned: the pleasure derived from repetition of the chain of recognition and disappearance and retrieval, as Freud describes in the pairing of *fort-da* as coping mechanism for the inexplicable temporary loss of the mother or primary care-taker. This very page in the photobook, the repetition of a page from earlier in the sequence, incorporates this mechanism of *fort-da*, and evokes the turning of the page back to the “original” page, and forth to the reproduction. Endlessly entertaining to the child, the comparison established by going back and forth cannot be simultaneous, but operates with the delay that makes repetition, memory and learning from and with a picture book possible. Rüdiger Campe calls attention to the fact that learning takes place in a space (and time) halfway between the known and the unknown, and he refers to Aristotle’s rhetorics and poetics when he says:

> Weder die einfach verfügbaren noch die ganz unbekannten Worte produzieren Lernen und Lust ... Statt mit der Dialektik von Eigen und Fremd hat man es hier mit der Selektion zwischen Halb-Fremdem-halb-Eigenem zu tun.

In any “concept book” or “pointing book” the sequence of images establishes a typology of objects and object constellations that the baby will recognize as half-familiar and half-unknown. In photographically illustrated books, the contemporaneous typologies as presented in August Sander’s “Antlitz der Zeit” and Blossfeldt’s “Urformen der Kunst” are referenced, even if they are not specifically put in place. And even if they were consciously referenced, as it is likely to assume that Edward Steichen would have been familiar with German photo publications of the time, they forge connections for the attentive reader, teaching photographic literacy through photography.

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336 Feelings are usually experienced intensively by a young child, anger, love, frustration and curiosity are usually tied to processes of learning, uncovering the complex nexus of cause and effect, and discovering patterns that might link one to the other. They are relative also in that sense, and are relative to feelings “seen” in others.


The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the form of the atlas. The atlas is posited here as a constellation of images in books, and images arranged on a table, or on a wall, in a tableau. Furthermore, the atlas is construed as producing a form of knowledge that might precede language or that is known slightly differently than through language. This knowledge is produced through images in a book that opens up possible connections, engaging the beholder through the turning of the page, and the position of holding the book. Building on the first part of the chapter, here, too, the atlas—and with it, the photobook—challenges the “proper” reading position of a book, allowing for a more flexible placement of book in relation to the body (hand and eye, that is) of the beholder. The photobook does not have a correct orientation, but it invites various reading directions, makes possible the placement on the wall, on the table, on the lap, or overhead, depending on how the beholder can best make sense of the images in the process of perception.

First, Karl Blossfeldt’s photographs will be analyzed and in a second step Aby Warburg’s Bilderatlas will be discussed. Karl Blossfeldt’s photos were published in two photobooks during his lifetime, the iconic Urformen der Kunst appeared in 1928, and its successor Wundergarten der Natur in 1932. In both instances, photography was used to create typologies: Blossfeldt took photos of plants which had been manipulated and altered before they were photographed, and they were enlarged afterwards, making forms visible in a way that had not been seen before. Karl Nierendorf wrote the introduction, and the photographs mostly speak for themselves, as there are quite a large number of images (120 Bildtafeln), and the only information we have is the botanical name of the plant depicted and how many times it has been enlarged. The imagery in Urformen der Kunst relies heavily on the traditions of scientific publications. This book thus neatly fits in the tradition of the atlas, as we will see. The rhythm created in this volume will lead us to the tableau of Blossfeldt’s Working Collages which were never meant for publication, but illustrate the selection processes for the photobook, and Blossfeldt’s use of photography as a teaching device, as much as a thinking device. Blossfeldt chose two forms of the atlas, that is to say: the book form presenting tables with photographs, and the form of the tableau or panel, with an arrangement of photographs in a grid-structure. The analysis of Blossfeldt’s
photobook will be complemented in a second step by consideration of the more associative working collages, which in turn will prepare the ground for a brief discussion of Warburg’s work on collective visual memory, photography, and Denkraum as it manifests itself in his Bilderatlas Mnemosyne.

Fig. 42: Karl Blossfeldt, Urformen der Kunst, Berlin: Wasmuth, 1928. Cover.

In a review of Karl Blossfeldt’s Urformen der Kunst, Walter Benjamin formulates a theory of photography that is informed by Blossfeldt’s photobook. Using a pun that refers to the word for plate, or Tafel, as it can mean illustration and tableau, and (dining) table in German, Benjamin draws attention to the intellectual and visual feast and richness the photographs offer. He writes:

... so soll auf den einhundertzwanzig Tafeln dieses Buches für zahllose Betrachtungen und zahllose Betrachtende gedeckt sein. Ja, so viele Freunde wünschen wir diesem reichen und nur an Worten kargen Werke. Man wird aber das Schweigen des Forschers ehren, der diese Bilder hier vorlegt. Vielleicht gehört sein Wissen zu jener Art, die den stumm macht, der es besitzt.

Benjamin’s language oscillates between metaphors of fairytales (“soll auf den Tafeln … gedeckt sein”) and scientific vocabulary (“Schweigen des Forschers…, der … vorlegt”). His text thus finds the most appropriate literary imagery for Blossfeldt’s photobook, because it indeed showcases lay scientific photography (that


340 Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman who has borrowed this idea from Benjamin when he reflects on tableau and Tafel, who both mean table and picture and might be related in ways of arranging images and things we look at, as much as the working table can be an installation in the horizontal, the picture plane in the perpendicular can be a working surface, for example in the case of Aby Warburg’s Bilderatlas. In: Atlas, or: How to carry the world on one’s back. Madrid 2010.

served teaching purposes) presented as art photography or “picture book” which was subsumed by the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement and was heralded as one of the finest examples of objective photography. By drawing on metaphors pertaining to both the sciences and children’s books, Benjamin aptly situates Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst* between picture book and the atlas, as it contains indeed elements of both. In Benjamin’s analysis “Wissen” is tied to “Bild” and “Betrachtung,” and he thus emphasizes that Blossfeldt’s photobook prepares and facilitates an alphabetization through photography, a kind of literacy that differs from learning a language. “[D]iese[s] an Worten karge] Werke”, Benjamin says, offers a kind of knowledge that seems to simply present *photographic* knowledge, perhaps even replacing language. “Vielleicht gehört sein Wissen zu jener Art, die den stumm macht, der es besitzt.” Didi-Huberman calls attention to the implications of *stumm* in relation to the medium of photography: the montage of silent movies (*Stummfilme* in German) come to mind for him, and Warburg’s “silent” *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, based on photographic reproductions. Didi-Huberman thus situates this quotation in the historical context of photography before language, both spatially and temporally.342 For Benjamin, understanding is linked to “Betrachtung.” *Betrachtung* is a slow process, and it is based on repetition, as Benjamin does not fail to mention: “zahllos” should the act of viewing be, innumerable. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm define *betrachten* as closer to thinking, and to work.343 Yet *Betrachtung* also carries the potential for bodily knowledge that might change the beholder: *tragen* is part of this word (*Tracht* is that which is carried).344 This knowledge then can be carried in the beholder’s hands or in their body. And the acquisition of knowledge in this case, the act of carrying it, might indeed change the one who is able to see: “… die den stumm macht, der es besitzt.”


344 Ibid, “Tracht bis Trachtgeld”, Volume 21, column 977-993: “das tragen oder getragen werden”; “das herumtragen”; “das tragen der leibesfrucht, die schwangerschaft (kintracht).”
This differentiates the atlas from the perception primer as developed in the first part of this chapter. Benjamin had construed some picture books as evoking language. Here, on the other hand, the photographer is characterized as taciturn and the beholders become silent once knowledge has passed on to them. This implies that knowledge could pass from the photographer through the medium of the plates to the beholder handling the book. Moreover, Benjamin chooses the verb connected to this deliberately: “besitzen.” Besitz, material and intellectual property, might change hands. However, by way of connotation, Benjamin also evokes a slowing down, a silence and even a sitting down, a being seated in this sentence: possession and sitting are both evoked in the verb besitzen. Furthermore, Tafel evokes both table and blackboard, as do the other images Benjamin uses: “vorlegen” is used in a culinary context, describing the act of serving food. In a scientific context, however, it means to present or even publish: “der diese Bilder hier vorlegt” can be both to serve and to present for publication, implying a reader. The act of seeing, perceiving and reading this photobook for Benjamin is thus automatically tied to the body, as the metaphors of food, most notably, suggest: photographs access the body and pass on photographic knowledge comparable to food that is eaten and digested, passing through the body, nourishing and modifying it.345 The photobook, Benjamin suggests, requires “zahllose Betrachtungen.” It thus requires repetition to induce learning, evoking a bodily response that is mostly mechanical, as Bergson had underscored.346 Moreover, it also offers a mechanism to slow down and be nourished in other ways, if each “plate” is a Tafel where we are invited to sit down.

The metaphor of science Benjamin employs furthermore hints at an essential element in the photographs, precisely because Blossfeldt as a teacher had tried to find a way of conserving the forms found in plants for intensive study. Fresh plants are bound to wilt and wither, and through this process they would change forms. Photography, however, enabled Blossfeldt to conserve the forms in one particular state, and furthermore allowed enlargements to a scientific degree that then and now enables the study of particular details and a repetition of forms within the book. In a letter from 1906, Blossfeldt, the sculptor and teacher

345 Here of course Freud’s text on “Totem and Taboo” comes to mind, where the father-figure is eaten in a cabilistic act, his influence however is all the stronger after the killing and the consumption, perhaps because he is now turned into food that can rule from within the son’s bodies. Sigmund Freud, “Totem und Tabu” (1913), In: Freud, Studienausgabe, Vol. 9, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2000, pp. 287-444.
346 Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory. Translated by N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp. 79-80. “The memory of the lesson, which is remembered (80) or learned by heart, has all the marks of a habit. Like a habit, it is acquired by the repetition of the same effort. Like a habit, it demands first a decomposition and then a recomposition of the whole action.”
for plant modeling, expressed the hope to find a wider audience for his photographs and explained how his photographs came into being: frustrated with the limitations of the specimen available in the form of herbarium presentations or drawings which he deemed too subjective, Blossfeldt had photographed these plants instead, in order to enlarge the forms to make their study in evening light more accessible. Furthermore, they allow for more objective images, as they would make accessible multiple sides of the identical object of study that the herbarium presentation could not.

Blossfeldt here characterizes his photographs as *unverfälscht*, most likely in an effort to argue for the superiority of photography in relation to other media in the study of forms. His photographs were not quite so untouched as he wants to make his reader believe, as the specimen were manipulated, cut, trimmed, etc. to present exactly what Blossfeldt wanted to show. However, the more interesting point in this quotation is to be found in the photographs' unusual degree of enlargement. These enlargements turn these common natural forms into sculptural forms that invite the imagination, and allow his students to better see what would otherwise go unnoticed. The focus for Blossfeldt lies in these forms, while the information provided is limited to minimal, scientific data: the table of contents provides the beholder with the botanical name, and the degree of photographic enlargement. The photographs are supposed to speak for themselves, Blossfeldt wrote in an unpublished manuscript in 1929.

This of course confirms Benjamin’s observation that the photographer and beholder of these images may stay silent, while the images create an alphabet and even language of their own. In a text from 1929, published in *Documents* and illustrated with five of Blossfeldt’s

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photographs, Georges Bataille speaks of a *Langue des Fleurs*, or a language of flowers, in which tactility comes to the fore.350

*Urformen der Kunst* offers a rhythm to the process of seeing the images, which is very decidedly directed by the layout of the book and the sequencing of the images.351 The beholders decide how fast or slowly they want to leaf through the book, they determine the rhythm of looking at those images. And they can also change the direction quite easily, in fact the sequence demands that they do so. One is reminded of Johannes Molzahn’s notion of *Buchkinema*, which has the effect of a flip-book or *Daumenkino*—turning the scientific photographs into a film that can be animated by the hands of the beholder.352 In this animation, the transformation of plants becomes visible as jumping across the sequence, and the direction of most of the photographs immediately comes to the fore in their verticality, producing an almost uncanny warehouse of upright, or simply: phallic forms. Tied to the orientation of verticality and theories of dominance, this form guides us through a close-reading of the book. The analysis provides a critical horizon to the thesis expressed in the title of *Urformen der Kunst* in the first place, and takes a closer look at the temporal and spatial implications this title provides.

Fig. 43: First page of the table of contents *Urformen der Kunst*, “Erläuterungen zu den Bildtafeln”.

Figs. 44–46: plates 1 – 3 of *Urformen der Kunst*.

Figs. 47–49: plates 4 – 6 of *Urformen der Kunst*.

Figs. 50–52: plates 7 – 9 of *Urformen der Kunst*.
The first sequence in *Urformen der Kunst* encompasses 12 plates, ending with a “transitional image” that leads into the next image sequence. From a close-up single portrait of one particular specimen (*Winterschachtelhalm*), we move to three similar, but longer forms, and to a diptych in the third plate. The sequence thus establishes a visual rhythm, that looks almost musical, with a long “note,” three shorter “notes,” followed by two half-“notes.” Introducing the element of time into the viewing process or Betrachtung, each page seems to request the same amount of time for each viewing. The eyes of the beholder in the first plate will look at the single photograph, studying it in detail. They will then compare and contrast the three photographs in the second plate, and will slow down for the diptych in the third plate. Accordingly, the first plate is photographed in a close-up, giving the beholder a form that is recognizable in the following five photographs constituting plates two and three. The camera moves further away in plate two, and then in plate three it is about mid-way between the close-up and the (one is tempted to call them ¾) “portraits” of plate two. Thus, distance is measured by photographic means, and a sense of scale created for the beholder. Usually, in the reproduction, an objective sense of scale is lost, but Blossfelt aims at creating a subjective sense of scale that is contained within the book, creating a universe of forms in this sequence of 120 images. Compared to Aenne Biermann’s relatively small photobook, Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst* is impressive in size, turning the enlargements of plants into astonishing lessons of scale, and confirming, so it seems, the

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suspicion of dominance brought about by the mostly phallic forms. If we look a little more closely, however, the forms in the book oscillate between horizontality and verticality. The images’ content is shaped by the stark verticality of the forms, the books’ pages however are flat and two-dimensional, horizontal in themselves.  

In the sequence, plate four is again a single photograph, that with the change of background from white to dark appears like a counterpoint, and a pause, because it changes the theme of long forms to a round ring-structure, with a focus on the outer cannelure. This structure introduces the new theme, namely a focus on rounder shapes and variations, which is taken up in the following four plates (plates 5-8). This theme is a variation of the first group of photographs, which all showcase surfaces structured with the same cannelure. Moving forward, the book changes the orientation of the photographs, between plate 6 and 7 the beholder has to turn the book in a 90-degree angle, giving the 3 images slightly more space than they would have in the portrait format of the book. This orientation continues until plate 11, where the beholder has to turn the book back again to focus on a single photograph in the portrait orientation. In this sequence, a change of focus is introduced again by a change of background in plate 9, indicating that also a shift in focus has occurred: plate 9 is a transitional image between photographs of cannelure and a softer, hairier or more velvety surface, played out until plate 12. Plate 11 and 12 are single portraits, and seen next to one another they complement, even mirror one another in an upward and downward movement of forms and thus emphasize contrast, leading up to plate 12—where the orientation of photograph and book is back what it was at the beginning of the sequence. In this last image, the velvety surface has moved down to only one part of the plant, laying bare the leaves sheltering the inside of a cup, suggesting a transition for a new theme. In this respect, plates 7-10 are interesting, as they offer the most variation. They operate with a composition of three photographs showcasing elements that are all similar and all slightly different. What is more, in all the attempts of presenting scientific rigor, the plates also expose association, and an underlying ordering principle that is not immediately obvious, moving from one plant family to similar forms that are not necessarily

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354 This, of course, would change when the photographs are displayed on a wall.
related. With regard to Blossfeldt’s first photographic sequence in the photobook, language does not come easily in terms of descriptions or detecting patterns, as they are clearly “montaged” to make visible changes in form and similarities. This book thus illustrates Benjamin’s point about these images: they are somehow connected to comprehension before language; “before” understood both in terms of space and time. In Georges Didi-Huberman’s understanding, the atlas inhabits a place between “canonical forms” of epistemic knowledge and aesthetic form:

The atlas is a visual form of knowledge, a knowledgeable form of seeing. Yes, combining, overlapping or implicating the two paradigms that this last expression assumes – an aesthetic paradigm of the visual form, an epistemic paradigm of knowledge – the atlas in fact subverts the canonical forms in which each of these paradigms tried to find its own excellence and even its fundamental condition of existence. If indeed the atlas subverts both epistemic and aesthetic forms, then something third is created, similar to what Benjamin had called the inseparable unity of content and form. At stake is a form of knowledge that exceeds the purely cognitive, because it relies on the realm that in its very form produces surplus, “combining, overlapping or implicating” two forms of expression and representation otherwise thought of as not so heavily indebted to each other. Atlases from the 17th century onwards have been educational tools, scientific works and primers for analytic perception in one. Most of them transpose or project knowledge onto the two-dimensional plane, as in the case of cartography. Medical atlases presented visual knowledge in the form of contiguity. Blossfeldt’s photography in Benjamin’s eyes uncovers analogies and forms, or, more precisely, variations. These variations allow the viewer to establish connections like medical atlases did for centuries. Blossfeldt’s photobook further enhances that effect by presenting the photographic image in a sequence that is built on repetition and variation, connected by image necessities, as Benjamin calls them:

358 See Sigrid Weigel on Aby Warburg’s atlas: “Instead of projecting geographical knowledge onto a two-dimensional plane as the conventional cartographic map does, his atlas consists of a number of plates each of which a configuration of reproduced images, which are collected under a common heading or leitmotif.” Sigrid Weigel, “Epistemology of Wandering, Tree and Taxonomy.” Images Revues (online), hors-série 4/2013: Survivance d’Aby Warburg, pp. 1-20, p. 1.
Aus jedem Kelche und jedem Blatte springen uns innere Bildnotwendigkeiten entgegen, die in allen Phasen und Stadien des Gezeugten als Metamorphosen das letzte Wort behalten. Das rührt an eine der tiefsten, unergründlichsten Formen des Schöpferischen, an die Variante, die immer vor andern die Form des Genius, der schöpferischen Kollektiva und der Natur war. Sie ist der fruchtbare, dialektische Gegensatz zur Erfindung: Das Natura non facit saltus der Alten.\(^{359}\)

The image necessities are equipped with agency, they have the last word, or more precisely, they keep the last word. *Behalten* then brings us back to the element of touch in relation to Blossfeldt’s photographs, to the holding and handling of images. The photobook as Benjamin understands it consists of variations and of selecting frames. He argues that photography is a process based on reproduction, but also, and this is surprising: on mimesis, because photography does not invent, but instead *finds* images and the similar. Here, the review of the photobook turns into the formulation of theory of photography. And in this respect, *reading* is an essential part of recognizing the similar, Benjamin writes in a small text from 1933, entitled *Lehre vom Ähnlichen*.\(^{360}\) In this text, he links similarities (or variants) produced by nature to the human gaze recognizing similarities. His preferred example is reading stellar constellations, and he underscores that reading indeed has a twofold meaning: there is a profane and a magical reading:

> Da aber diese unsinnliche Ähnlichkeit in alles Lesen hineinwirkt, so eröffnet sich in dieser tiefen Schicht der Zugang zu dem merkwürdigen Doppelsinn des Wortes Lesen als seiner profanen und auch magischen Bedeutung. Der Schüler liest das Abcbuch und der Astrolog die Zukunft in den Sternen. Im ersten Satze tritt das Lesen nicht in seine beiden Komponenten auseinander. Dagegen wohl im zweiten, der den Vorgang nach seinen beiden Schichten deutlich macht: der Astrolog liest den Gestirnstand von den Sternen am Himmel ab; er liest zugleich aus ihm die Zukunft oder das Geschick heraus.\(^{361}\)

There is *Lesen* as in reading a book, and not by accident Benjamin chooses the perception primer as an example here (Abcbuch). The other kind of reading is *Ableisen* and *Herauslesen* as in reading stars, or intestines, and interpreting them as signs to predict fate, where two components of *Lesen* are separated temporally, and enriched by a spatial dimension: *ableisen* implies a flat surface (like a blackboard, or a page), *herauslesen* a more-

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Cf. also Sigrid Weigel, “Epistemology of Wandering, Tree and Taxonomy.” where she writes on p. 6 “This correspondence between a pre-modern material culture of knowledge, the pictorial itinerary of maps, and the post-neurological description of memory in psychoanalysis, which is conceptualized as a scripture of images, provides a wonderful example of Walter Benjamin’s anthropological theory in his *Doctrine of the Similar* (Lehre vom Ähnlichen, 1933). There he argues that certain human capacities – he talks mainly of the mimetic faculty –, which in the phylogenetic and ontogenetic prehistory were directed to the outer world (i.e. mimetic behavior and magic practices of interpreting bowels and astral constellations) have during the course of civilization turned into an intellectual capacity. In the case of the mimetic faculty, the capacity of recognizing the similar has “found its way into language and writing … thus creating in language and writing the most perfect archive of nonsensuous similarity.”

\(^{361}\) Benjamin, “Lehre vom Ähnlichen”, p. 209.
dimensional space and the directionality towards the speaker.\textsuperscript{362} If we take the spatial implications seriously, we arrive at a “reading with the hand” that connects us back to the tactile quality of Blossfeldt’s photographs. The surface structure is paradoxically enhanced, even though the photographic medium is two-dimensional. The plates in the photobook still convey the sculptural quality of the plants photographed because Blossfeldt carefully lit the plants to achieve this effect, the enlargements however also achieve the more tactile quality, adding weight to the observation that touch is relevant for Blossfeldt’s project (slightly undermining the seemingly scientific presentation of the photobook).

In \textit{Über das mimetische Vermögen}, Benjamin refers back to a reading before language and underscores that this act of a spatial reading is most closely related to mimicry:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

“Lesen vor aller Sprache” addresses the couple of time and space, as they have been tied to the hand in the analysis above. In Blossfeldt’s case the photographs chosen all present variations on a theme: on primordial art forms or \textit{Urformen der Kunst}, what Benjamin suggests with his spatial and temporal reference to a \textit{before} language, and what Didi-Huberman had called a “childhood of science and a childhood of art.” Blossfeldt’s photographs are mimetic in that sense: they offer a language of mimicry, an alphabet of forms and images reminiscent of this “reading before language.”

With regard to the element of time, Benjamin underscores that reading and the ability to see similarities are always connected to a decisive moment, a “Zeitmoment.”\textsuperscript{363} What is more, recognizing related instances and images \textit{as similar}, Benjamin asserts, is tied to this particular \textit{Zeitmoment} more than anything else. That way, time is punctually synchronized, as forms are in Blossfeldt’s book. His photobook constructs the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{362} Benjamin, “Über das mimetische Vermögen”, \textit{Gesammelte Schriften}, II.1, pp. 210-213.
\end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{363} Benjamin, “Lehre vom Ähnlichen,” p. 206-207.
\end{flushright}
similar by a particular synchronous sequence (and that always also produces the variant and the different).

Most importantly, Blossfeldt hands all of the photographic moments in time over to the beholder.

So teilt noch das profane Lesen—will es nicht schlechterdings um das Verstehen kommen—mit jedem magischen dies: daß es einem notwendigen Tempo oder vielmehr einem kritischen Augenblicke untersteht, welchen der Lesende um keinen Preis vergessen darf, will er nicht leer ausgehen.  

In this quotation, Benjamin connects Tempo to kritischen Augenblick. But when he writes “oder vielmehr,” he corrects his word choice slightly and thus arrests time for a moment in his text: he moves from “tempo,” from time passing according to a particular speed, to “critical moment”—fixing one moment in time, by changing metaphors. The German Augenblick however also evokes the gaze of the eye, thus making conscious the specific point of view of the beholder. In Blossfeldt’s photobook in particular, tempo and implicitly rhythm are very much part of the reading process. In a photobook both come together indeed: the critical moment and also the tempo that defines the reading, but the speed can be adjusted by the recipient (unlike the sequence of images in cinema). Kritischer Augenblick can mean even more, though. Expanding on what Benjamin had suggested for the spatial orientation for children’s drawings, photography first and foremost offers a temporal orientation that links the photograph to two moments in time: the moment of its formation and the moment of its reception. These two points in time relate to one another, and because the latter moment—the act of perception—constantly moves with the beholder there are constantly new constellations created. This is the critical moment that the reader brings to the scene: “das … Lesen …, das einem kritischen Augenblicke untersteht.” Moreover, there is a critical moment while producing a book. Reading a book composed of photographs, then, might entail not only two, but three Zeitmomente: the photographic moment when the photograph is taken, the moment of producing the book (and selecting the images and creating the sequence), that inevitably leaves traces in the object—as it relates to this specific material context—and the critical moment of each reading.

However, the most essential element in Blossfeldt’s photographs is enlargement. This enlargement however freezes forms in time. Thus, paradoxically, “timelessness” is the most critical part of Blossfeldt’s photographs. The photographs present primordial forms in this respect: they make it simultaneously

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impossible and irrelevant to fix a date to the photograph, and instead link this particular photographic moment in time, the critical moment, to a particular development in the life of this plant, transcending individual moments and binding them to a more cyclical progression. They step out of a particular and linear time, are timeless in that sense, too. And what is more, researchers of Blossfeldt’s estate cannot distinguish if the photographs were taken over the course of 30 years, or perhaps in a small time window between 1896 and 1906, and enlarged one by one until 1926. While Blossfeldt was meticulous about technical and photographic details, assigning dates to the individual prints was indeed irrelevant to him. In fact, it does not change their impact on the beholder, when exactly they were taken, and might increase their “universal” appeal, and their argument as primordial.

The title of Urformen der Kunst suggests that art, those natural forms that were photographed, and reading (and imagination) are linked to two words which also Benjamin had emphasized: Variante and Analogie. Ulrike Meyer Stump underscores that Blossfeldt’s publication in 1928 was all to easily and consciously inserted in a discourse of analogies, which in fact misses Blossfeldt’s essential claim. It was only in the 1920s that the New Objectivity movement subsumed his photographs, and the photobook made this claim of a new “objectivity” particularly compelling. At stake was no less than the situating of photography as an art form, but also fathoming of what photography as a medium is capable of. Karl Nierendorf discovered Blossfeldt’s photographs for the art world, “probably on the occasion of an exhibition in the corridors of the school, showing course work by Blossfeldt and his students,” as Meyer Stump writes.365 “Shortly thereafter, Nierendorf exhibited a selection of plant photographs in his Berlin gallery.”366 And it was Karl Blossfeldt who pursued the idea of the photobook.

While Blossfeldt’s photographs extrapolate a storehouse of visual analogies and corresponding forms, photography can make us see comparatively through the eye of the camera, adding a critical space of reflection. Benjamin calls this the opposite of invention: photography is about finding images, not about

366 Ibid.
“creating” them, necessarily. Referring to Bloßfeldt’s photobook Benjamin writes: “Er hat in jener großen Überprüfung des Wahrnehmungsinventars, die unser Weltbild noch unabsehbar verändern wird, das Seine geleistet.” Blossfeldt, that is to say, has explored the possibilities of photography to provide images that challenge perception, and the “inventory of the senses” or “inventory of perceptions” (Wahrnehmungsinventar is indeed both). These terms evoke experience and perception in the metropolis and thus call attention to the debate around photography: “Jene große Überprüfung des Wahrnehmungsinventars” that Benjamin evokes, is another name for the photobook, especially because this act of examination of the inventory of perceptions changes the beholder’s point of view, and will continue to do so, as every moment of perception brings something new to the table. Benjamin’s claim that photography is an examination of the inventory of the senses is linked to notions of reading as connected to the body. In an effort to explain, Benjamin goes on to quote Moholy and links Blossfeldt’s photographs to the educational function of photography heralded by Moholy that might transform our capacity to read photography:


In this particular historical moment photography is tied as never before to educational purposes, to the acquisition of knowledge and the promise of information, as the analysis in chapter one has shown. Thus Moholy’s call for an alphabetization of photography and through photography must also be seen in relation to how words and text had formerly been invested with knowledge production and information distribution. This, he rightly points out—and Benjamin underscores this claim—is radically challenged by the ways in which photography is widely used in newspapers and advertising and political contexts. Benjamin, and this is important to keep in mind, positions Blossfeldt and his photography against this trend. Rather, he seems to be saying, that Blossfeldt teaches us how to read photography by offering a training manual or atlas of

369 Ibid.
370 We are immediately reminded of what Kracauer wrote about the illustrated newspapers and how their use of photography prevents us from actually seeing the world and ourselves. Cf. Kracauer, Die Photographie (1927), section 6 in his text.
variations, and mimesis, that goes back to a time and space before language. In the book that Blossfeldt offers, a theory of photography is in place that also touches on photographic literacy in the sense of a writing of photography. In the following part of this chapter, Blossfeldt’s photographs will be understood as paying tribute to a change in artistic perception and production, and photographic purposes in teaching and the photographic product. But they also provide a different context for the school of seeing than the Bauhaus (and László Moholy-Nagy, for example). Blossfeldt’s teaching and photography as a part of his teaching is the background to his photobook, and they turn this particular photobook into a teaching device in itself.

_Tafel_, upright: Karl Blossfeldt's so-called “Working Collages” or: The Photographer's Catalogue.

In this next section, Blossfeldt’s photobook will be seen as part of the context of his teaching at the _Kunstgewerbeschule_ in Berlin for over 30 years. During this time, Blossfeldt had amassed a vast number of negatives, more than a thousand. As a way of cataloguing his images he had assembled contact sheets on gray cardboard paper, onto which he glued paper positives of his negatives, sometimes also the cheaper cyanotypes that offer a blue variant.372 These “working collages,” as they have now been problematically termed, had long been forgotten, until they were rediscovered, exhibited and made available in book form between 1997 and 2001. The term collages is fraught with connotations of the avant-gardes and their Klebebilder. Instead, these 61 tables would more correctly be considered photographic contact sheets, fulfilling the purpose of a photographer’s catalogue and archive, simply and economically making available the photographs in their entirety. Blossfeldt had assigned these plates a particular order, which had changed over the course of time, presumably when more photographs were added to the collection.373


373 These numbers can be found in pencil on the front of the sheets, in the lower right-hand corner. Anne Ganteführer-Trier suggests that there had been more plates, as the highest numer is 148. Cf. Anne Ganteführer Trier, “Der Künstler als Archivar,” pp. 13-22.
Fig. 56: Karl Blossfeldt, *Working Collages*, Plate 14, “Ferns I”

Fig. 57: Karl Blossfeldt, *Working Collages*, Plate 15, “Ferns II”

Fig. 58: Karl Blossfeldt, *Working Collages*, Plate 16, “Ferns III”
Plates 14-16 provide a good example of the main purpose these plates fulfilled: the contiguity of forms, the collection and constellation of motifs on one—or in this case: up to three—plate(s), showcasing many variants, similarities, differences. Plate 16 in particular shows that these sequences could have been complemented *ad infinitum*. The repetition of forms with small differences, and the arrangement of similar forms—mostly three or more—on one photographic sheet of paper is immediately striking. Blossfeldt was forced to work economically, because his funds did not allow for photographing each form individually.\(^{374}\) He thus photographed two or three or four specimen on one negative, and only later on selected and isolated the form he found most convincing or most igniting for his teaching purposes.

It is thus that we can determine his working method: only in the second step, once the photographs had been copied onto positive paper, were those elements worthy of enlargement determined by Blossfeldt. On most of the plates of the contact sheets there are markings, red asterisks, or numbers, suggesting a selection for later enlargements and the insertion into a scientific system only immediately apparent to Blossfeldt himself. The small notations on the contact-sheets furthermore create a connection to the notion of the act of writing onto photography in the sense of Benjamin’s *beschreiben*. The way the forms are photographed already also indicates their seriality and indebtedness to sequence and variant, or to a scientific rigor.\(^{375}\) From the vantage point of the 21st century, Blossfeldt’s photographic plates are arranged in one of the most prominent forms of display for art of the 20th century, namely the grid. This, however, is a complicated heritage. Rosalind Krauss has understood the grid as erasing the content of the individual image in favor of the bigger picture of the form. While indeed the form of the grid is powerful, in Blossfeldt’s case of the working collages, this form rather helps hold together the individual images and paradoxically emphasizes each one of them. This might be enhanced by the less than perfect alignment of photographic paper, creating a less rigid grid than Krauss must have had in mind when writing her essay. Ulrike Meyer Stump, on the other hand, advocates for a precise differentiation in the reception of Blossfeldt’s work under

the influence of the grid in exhibition contexts from the 1960s onwards, and argues that it is only with concept art in the 1970s that typologies are presented in the grid. She thus willfully ignores the history of grids contemporaneous to Blossfeldt: on the one hand there are the avant-gardes influenced by constructivist thinking (de Stijl, for example, Piet Mondrian, Kasimir Malevitch, and others), and on the other hand, there are exhibition contexts and the educational tradition that had been drawing on similar forms of presentation for decades by then. While one can argue that the context of teaching is different from the exhibition room, my claim in this chapter is precisely that they borrow from each other. Moreover, Blossfeldt’s way of arranging his photographs on big format sheets of gray cardboard can be seen in the tradition of photographers arranging their images on contact sheets, so as to keep track of their image data-base. (As Eugene Atget had done for practical reasons, too.)

In Blossfeldt’s case, the exhibition and educational context, however, is the most essential. Teaching at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Berlin, he had meant his individually enlarged photographs first and foremost to be didactic materials to ignite creativity and inspire understanding in his students. In a letter from 1906, Blossfeldt expressed the hope to find a wider audience for his photographs, long before his 1928 publication:

Da ich Jahre lang daran gearbeitet habe und nebenbei auch nicht unbedeutende materielle Opfer bringen musste, so würde ich sehr wünschen, wenn nun diese Aufnahmen in irgend einer Weise, sei es als Anregungsmaterial in einzelnen Klassen, Bibliotheken etc. größeren Kreisen und vor allem sämtlichen Schülern nutzbar gemacht werden könnte[n].

Blossfeldt’s aim, to have the photographs made accessible in the Kunstgewerbeschule, culminates in the suggestion to show them in a room, mounted onto its walls. The proposed photographs are enlarged individual photographs, 210 in number.

Für die Besprechung dieser Aufnahmen würde ich es der besseren Übersicht halber für ratsam halten, diese Blätter vorher auf einer Wand zu befestigen, wobei ich gern behülflich sein will. Es sind 210 Blatt 20 x 30 cm und würden rund 12 [Quadrat-]Meter Raum beanspruchen.

377 Ibid, p. 42.
379 This number alone suggests that the photographs have to be individual plates, rather than the working collages, as there are “only” 61 of these working collages, not 210.
380 Ibid.
This presentation most likely was conceptualized in a grid-like presentation that emulates the arrangement on the contact sheets, since a room of 12 square-meters is too small to exhibit 210 photographs that each measure 20x30 cms in any other way than in a grid on each wall. More importantly than this form of presentation, however, so it seems, was Blossfeldt concern to make his photographs accessible for all students of the Kunstgewerbeschule, not least because he believed in the potential of these images. The photographs, mounted on sheets of paper approximating the page of a larger book, predate the plates in the 1928 photo book Urformen der Kunst, roughly doubled in scope, but these plates gives us an idea of what the individual 20x30 cm sheets must have looked like. They encourage students to see, not only because they offer enlargements of forms that would otherwise go unnoticed, but also because this very technique of photographic enlargement and sequential presentation creates a sensitivity for forms in the first place, that is even more effective because color is reduced to shades of gray, black and white. Blossfeldt writes:


Even though Benjamin could not have known this letter, Blossfeldt’s words eerily predate Benjamin’s review of Urformen der Kunst. Blossfeldt calls attention to the treasure trove of forms that his photographs help uncover and enlarge, so that they might not be overlooked anymore; instead, they should jump into the beholder’s eyes (in’s Auge fallen). Now paying attention to something unnoticed before, in’s Auge fallen is an apt description of what happens when one looks at the working sheets. The gaze wanders through these forms and one form will catch our eye, will jump into a relationship with another. This creates a complex constellation of images relating to one another, something one can describe as essential structural element of the atlas: as a motor of imagination.382 This is very closely related to Anregungsmaterial, the term that Blossfeldt uses, which in the context of this chapter evokes the tradition of perception primers and imagination. In fact,

382 See: Didi-Huberman, Atlas, p. 15. “The atlas … deliberately ignores any definitive axioms. For it has to do with a theory of knowledge devoted to the risk of the sensible and of an aesthetic devoted to the risk of disparity. It deconstructs, with its very exuberance, the ideals of uniqueness, of specificity, of purity, of logical exhaustion. It is a tool, not for the logical exhaustion of possibilities given, but for the inexhaustible opening up of possibilities that are not yet given. Its principle, its motor, is none other than the imagination.” (Emphasis in the original.)
Blossfeldt’s lose grid invites the beholder to wander through the image-landscape. What is more, the bolder’s eyes are endlessly engaged, they go back and forth between patterns, individual forms, and small groupings of two, three, four and more elements of similarity. The plates are organized due to an underlying formal necessity, an image-necessity—inexhaustibly generous but difficult to grasp with words. None of these forms can be remembered, unless they are isolated. Language, concepts in particular, can be posited as analogous to photography, as concepts separate, and isolate. While the photographs in isolation where meant to inspire, excite and stimulate visual comprehension and understanding, Blossfeldt’s contact-sheets are the archive, the raw material that uncovers this treasure trove of forms, one by one. Every enlargement presents a selection and isolation from the material connective tissue of the photographically produced encyclopedia of forms. It is thus, that the “working collages” allow us to deduct Blossfeldt’s working method.

Photographing more than one plant on each negative, Blossfeldt can be described as thinking in groups and formations, arranging and rearranging the images according to ever new ordering principles, or contexts. Blossfeldt’s oeuvre, the individual prints, the photobooks and the working collages then form a nexus of photographic appearances, which cannot be thought of as hierarchically structured. Instead, and this too becomes obvious in the contact sheets, Blossfeldt’s thinking is shaped by paratactic arrangements, as much as it is shaped by the processes that photography presupposes: selection of a frame, enlargement, focus, and re-inserting into a context of forms and shapes. These plates, moreover, allow the conclusion that Blossfeldt was an obsessive photographer, repeating the process of selection, enlargement, and contiguity over and over again—working with scientific rigor, he wanted to capture as many forms as possible. What is more, the contact sheets can be considered Anregungsmaterial for himself as a teacher and photographer, slowly selecting and enlarging an ever-growing corpus of photographs, that would have an entirely different effect, once they were singled out and printed on a single sheet of photographic paper. It is this juxtaposition that brings the advantages of both modes of presentation to the fore, and enables the beholder to appreciate both in their own right. While the plates of the Arbeitsbögen allow the intake of a large number of similar forms, the individual plate allows for a more focused study of one form in particular. Blossfeldt’s working collages or
contact sheets appear to be the first manifestation of his photographic oeuvre, presented in a form that favors the totality of images in one group, accessible auf einen Blick.

Compared to these plates, his Urformen der Kunst is a curious thing, then: it sheds light on the atlas of images that is contained in each of Blossfeldt’s photographs. Thus, these plates make visible the forms and variations inherent in the photographs that are shown in the photobook. The contact-sheets, on the other hand, are an atlas by way of presentation, plate by plate, spelling out each group of motif; they are an archive of forms and motifs, a catalogue of all the photographs Blossfeldt had taken.

Fig. 59: Karl Blossfeldt, Working Collages, Plate 27, “Indian balsam and dogwood.”
(The selection for plate 19 in the photobook can be found in the third row, third from left.)

Fig. 60: Karl Blossfeldt, Urformen der Kunst, Plate 19.
Blossfeldt’s working collages open up a dimension in the photobook’s relationship to the atlas, that confirms Didi-Huberman’s thesis of the bringing together of the epistemic and the aesthetic paradigm, and even more, it confirms Benjamin’s hunch that a childhood of collecting meets the scientific eye of the sculptor turned
photographer here. Perhaps most importantly, the contact sheets work against the hierarchy of the vertical as suggested in the individual photographs. The structure of arrangement on the sheets is paratactic, and can be called democratic, close to the structure of the rhizome, which Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduce in their *Mille Plateaux.* What is more, Blossfeldt did not only photograph, but he also assembled herbarium cases, and his photographs only make sense as one of his didactic methods, not the one and only method. A herbarium case with two or three three plants would also be held in hands, in order to be studied closely by the students.

![Fig. 63: Karl Blossfeldt, *Working Collages*, Plate 18, “Tips of Twigs.”](image)

In conclusion, Blossfeldt's corpus of photographs can only be understood considering both ends of the spectrum, the collection of photographic prints on the plate of the *Arbeitsblätter*, and the single photographs. The photobooks from 1928 and 1932, with a combination of individual plates and diptychs and triptychs, are then the middle-ground, directed at a different kind of student than the *Anregungsmaterial* and the working collages. What the photobook and the individual prints have in common, however, is the enlargement and the sculptural quality, conveyed through size and photographic detail. As developed above, the isolated enlarged

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forms first and foremost, and paradoxically, showcase the tactility of photography—binding Blossfeldt's photobooks to the body of the beholder. If it is true that Blossfeldt's photographs evoke forms and images that may lie before language, then this tactility allows for an understanding and a grasping of the form through touch. For a student of sculpture, this is essential.

Several scholars have suggested that Blossfeldt was misunderstood when he was subsumed under the clean and object-oriented *Neue Sachlichkeit,* as Blossfeldt was very much a man of the 19th century, and the subject of his classes was outdated soon after the turn of the century. His belated public recognition speaks to how much his photographs can be used for projection, as much as his career as a professor of design seems to prove how specific his point of view was. His teaching methods were deemed too botanical and scientific. In other words, Blossfeldt's classes did not seem to train the students according to the more lively, free or creative principles “nach der Natur,” as the director of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* had indicated in a letter from 1912 which was meant as a request to release Blossfeldt from his teaching duties; a letter which was, however, neither sent nor delivered. Thus, Blossfeldt stayed on teaching, and made use of the darkroom for his photographic œuvre until he retired in 1930. The particular delay in Blossfeldt’s reception, however, underscores that his photographs contain something like an undercurrent that resists usurpation. For the discourse of *Neue Sachlichkeit,* Blossfeldt’s dimension of tactility subverts the project of the cold persona and distancing hygiene produced by the optical and objective. Blossfeldt’s photographic archive thus unlocks the more complex relationship between isolated photographic print and the eccentric archive of the atlas, and indeed underscores their mutual indebtedness in the effect on the beholder’s sensory perception.

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385 *Konstruktionen von Natur.* pp. 134-135. “Generalverwaltung der Königlichen Museen an den Kultusminister, 26. März 1912 (Briefentwurf durch die Unterrichtsanstalt des Kunstdgewerbemuseums)”. Here, the director, Professor Paul, writes about Blossfeldt’s teaching method: “Diese fast wissenschaftlich zu nennende Methode, … gilt nach unseren heutigen Anschauungen als völlig überwunden. Jedenfalls entspricht sie nicht den freien künstlerisches Schaffen starker betonnden Bedürfnissen … nach einem lebendigen Unterricht im Pflanzenmodellieren nach der Natur.” (This of course also includes a critique of photography, perhaps bound to principles of reduction, abstraction, and comparision as opposed to the study from nature (whatever that may mean).)
Aby Warburg’s *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*.

In this context, a brief discussion of Aby Warburg’s *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* will not be able to do justice to the complexities, and the intricate theory attached to Warburg’s scholarship. However, in this last part of the chapter, similarities and differences can be sketched out to help us better understand the modernist photobook in the context of teaching and learning. In his insightful article on Warburg’s *Bilderatlas* and possible image-pre-figurations in the tradition of atlases, Frank Zöllner calls attention to the fact that the name of the genre as “atlas” most likely comes from the 16th century collections of Mercator maps which depicted the figure of the *Atlas* common in Greek mythology (carrying the globe of the world on his back). The notion of the *atlas* for Benjamin and Warburg, who both used the term in the late 1920s in their writings on images, refers to image-constellations that are presented on one panel or plate, and that display a problem or question, while simultaneously providing a certain number of descriptive elements as much as interpretative ones in this very image as a whole. What is more, the atlas in this understanding works like a mapping device to be read spatially, temporally and based on how the image-elements interact and correspond to each other. And while it presents knowledge at a glance, reading, interpreting and understanding it nonetheless takes time and needs training. Benjamin Buchloh underscores that in the 19th century, “the term was increasingly deployed in German to identify any tabular display of systematized knowledge, so that one could have encountered an atlas in almost all fields of empirical science: an atlas of astronomy, anatomy, geography, or ethnography.” The perception on which the atlas as a form is based is comparative vision—a reading of images in a particular arrangement. The compilers of atlases usually provide some interpretative guidance (in the form of text, captions or titles), while the sources of images is often heterogeneous. This is most essentially true also for Warburg, who—as Horst Bredekamp asserts—“strongly emphasized the value of a picture beyond the limits of the arts” and who was particularly interested

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388 Cf. Black and Zöllner.
in the juxtaposition of images from various sources of high and low culture to include “Bilder … im weitesten Sinne.”

By way of its form, Warburg’s atlas fits squarely into a complex history of visual arrangements, borrowing from many of them: from antique and medieval cartography, to Baroque emblem books, to the Kunstkammer, the grid-structure and montage of the avant-gardes all relate to Warburg’s Bilderatlas, as Sigrid Weigel underscores. She proposes that Warburg’s atlas makes use of a very specific form of the genre and the medium of the atlas. Instead of projecting geographical knowledge onto a two-dimensional plane as the conventional cartographic map does, his atlas consists of a number of plates each of which a configuration of reproduced images, which are collected under a common heading or leitmotif. The contiguity of photographs on one picture plane, sheet or plate is similar to Blossfeldt’s photographic contact sheets, and to contemporary layouts of newspapers and illustrated magazines. The atlas plates were an arrangement of photographic reproductions of art works, arrested by pins holding the images in place. The images were attached to a Tafel that was tall and wide enough to present the pictures on eye-level for a standing spectator, resembling a blackboard, or an educational exhibition wall for visually presenting material. And indeed, the wall was most likely used as both didactic and therapeutic and introduced to Warburg by Fritz Saxl. While the didactic quality is easy to grasp as the Tafeln were meant to educate the beholders, the therapeutic aspect can be illuminated by referring back to Blossfeldt’s Arbeitscollagen. Here, too, the arrangement of images on a plane was meant to create order, a system even, and allowed for visibility in new constellations that would spark connections, but that would also guarantee the storage of images in a way that could contained them, providing an overview of similar images arranged according to a particular theme.

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393 A renaissance of the concept of the atlas today is largely based on a (productive) misunderstanding of Warburg’s atlas-plates, as they seem to ignite imagination and often work as a catalyst, providing visual stimuli and simulateneous incomprehensibility.
395 Most likely Fritz Saxl had brought this form of presenting images from his job in Vienna before joining Warburg, i.e. from the exhibition context. Cf. Zöllner, “Eilig Reisende” im Gebiete der Bildervergleichung”; Aby Warburgs Bilderatlas Mnemosyne und die Tradition der Atlanten.” In: Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft, Vol. 37, 2010, pp. 279-304. Cf. also Martin Treml in conversation with me at the ZfL in the spring of 2012.
The underlying structure of this *Tafel* was a wooden board, which was covered with black linen, onto which the reproductions were then assembled in a certain way, arranged in a grid-like structure, illustrating one or more thematic fields. Visual similarities connected the images thematically, simultaneously, however, connecting diverse, even contradicting emotions that one gesture could encompass: a “similar” gesture, as in the example of the *Menschenopfer*, which could signify as diverse emotions as courage, protection and child-slaughter by the hand of a mother.

Photographs were taken to document the final stage of arrangement, and only as photographs the plates of the *Bilderatlas* have survived. The example above, however, is not part of the *Bilderatlas*, but instead illustrates the principles of arrangement, that also allowed books and other artworks to be incorporated into

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For the importance of black and white for Warburg’s ’neue Methode’ see also Monika Wagner, “Kunstgeschichte in Schwarz-Weiß. Visuelle Argumente bei Panofsky und Warburg”, in: Monika Wagner, Helmut Lethen (eds.), *Schwarz-Weiß als Evidenz: With black and white you can keep more of a distance.* Frankfurt a.M., New York: Campus Verlag, 2015, pp. 126-144.
the display. This example sheds light on the more material fabric of Warburg’s thought process—images in books, books as images, is the red thread of the atlas as it is construed in this chapter. Warburg’s particular investment in photography is illuminated in a diary entry from 1928 for the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek*:

“Ohne den Photographen im Hause würde die Entfaltung der ’neuen Methode’ nicht möglich sein.”

In fact, photography in Warburg’s “neue Methode” was used in more than one way: photographic reproductions were assembled on the tableau, photography as a technique for reproductions was used to enlarge details and to reproduce images that had been depicted in books, and finally, photography was used to document the final stage of what was meant to become a plate in the *Atlas*. Thus, Warburg’s interest in photography as a process to reproduce *and* to produce images and its connection to knowledge-transfer is relevant is essentially tied to the form of presentation on the tableau.

Black-and-white photography offers, first of all, an abstraction from the colorful world it photographs. Therefore, Heinrich Wölfflin had declared photography the midwife to art history as a discipline: photography allows us to see sculpture, architecture or an oil painting abstracted through the black-and-white reduction to a flat image, which one could easily compare, despite the differences in medium and material of each individual object. Similarly, André Malraux (in his 1947/51 text about the imaginary museum) speaks of the leveling effect black and white photography has, when it comes to scale, tonality, and attention to detail. Photography thus essentially is a tool to make visible similarities, when they are photographed: by turning sculpture, architecture, painting and drawings into a photograph, they all are reduced to the flatness of the photographic paper. Because photography always selects, crops, and because photography can enlarge and make smaller, photography essentially can be used to make things look alike that might in reality be very different. Furthermore, Anke te Heesen reminds us, art works that otherwise would be immobile or difficult to access can be brought together and compared through photography: be it architecture, glass windows, or arte-facts from other cultures and regions. It is through photographic

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399 Tagebuch der KWB, S. 186, see Fleckner, 11.
401 Cf. Geimer, pp. 46. Similarly, Horst Bredekamp writes that Heinrich Dilly had argued that “the rise of academic art history at German universities in the nineteenth century would have been impossible without photography.” Bredekamp, “A Neglected Tradition? Art History as Bildwissenschaft.” In: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 29, Spring 2003, p. 419.
reproduction that art history is made possible.\textsuperscript{403} That is even more the case, when photographs are put together and arranged on a table, \textit{Tafel}. Photography for Warburg is a way of making accessible, allowing for various things to be brought together, on the flat surface (doubling the photographic surface) of the plane or \textit{Tafel} of the atlas. Photography cuts away contexts, but it is, on the other hand, always inserted into new contexts and backgrounds. Visual correspondences by way of montage and arrangement are created: this is what the new method Warburg does; it uses photography to offer a school for seeing.

Warburg’s atlas was never finished, and has come down to us only as fragmentary. Had it been completed, it would have consisted of a three-volume edition, one volume only with photographic plates, and the other only with text.\textsuperscript{404} This of course is the conservative way of publishing art-historical theses, and the atlas in its fragment character is much more appealing to the history of art of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Warburg, much like Blossfeldt, was very much a man of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, while his theory of \textit{Pathos-Formel} or pathos-formula, cuts across the centuries and as a mode of thinking is very much revolutionary: rather than at the center, Warburg’s claim was that the affective state of the image would become visible in the seemingly lesser important parts of the image.\textsuperscript{405} Warburg speaks of energy and affective states, \textit{Energie} and \textit{Erregung}, that wander through time and images, and manifest themselves in veils and hair, among other things, something he called \textit{bewegtes Beiwerk}.\textsuperscript{406}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[404] Sigrid Weigel, “Epistemology of Wandering, Tree and Taxonomy.” \textit{Images Revues} (online), hors-série 4/2013: Survivance d’Aby Warburg, p. 3: “But it makes no small difference whether one is talking about an atlas as a printed volume or about the more than 60 image tables that have been handed down to us by means of photography. It is the latter, namely an atlas as a work in progress, that is the form of Warburg’s project named Mnemosyne, and the only one we may refer to when talking about Warburg’s Bilderalias.”
\item[405] Sigrid Weigel writes: “The possibility to assemble and reassemble the boards for any subject or lecture and to arrange and rearrange different pictures on any of the plates is a characteristic that qualifies the atlas – beside his library and his note-boxes, \textit{Zettelkästen} – as the most important medium of what Warburg himself called a laboratory of “kulturwissenschaftliche Bildgeschichte”, a very dense formulation which may be read as history of images and also a history as recognized through images, examined by a cultural scientific approach.” Sigrid Weigel, “Epistemology of Wandering, Tree and Taxonomy.” \textit{Images Revues} (online), hors-série 4/2013: Survivance d’Aby Warburg, pp. 1-20, here p. 4.
\end{itemize}
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The project’s title evokes the humanist tradition in two ways: the Greek word *mneme*, memory, and the *atlas* as a tool to display knowledge, especially as part of any library of the learned. Memory—as both *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*—is crucial to the project. Memory as in *Erinnerung* would be the image-memory of the viewer, *Gedächtnis* would refer to the more abstract container of memory images that the *Atlas* offers in the sense of a *Speicher*. The form of the atlas invites contemplation on memory’s relation to script, and recording. Especially with regard to photography, the image of the blackboard or *Tafel* comes to mind, as Sigmund Freud uses it in his text on memory from 1925, *Notiz über den Wunderblock*, analyzing a plate made of wax (*Waxtafel*) as recording device and productive system that is analogues to memory in both capacities, conserving memory traces and allowing access to them. Mnemosyne, moreover, is the personification of memory in ancient Greek mythology, mother of nine muses, thus inherently related to the idea of reproduction, inspiration, imagination and creativity. Frank Zöllner, however, points out that *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* was only one of several possible constellations of (long) titles and subtitles. This allows the conclusion that for Warburg, *Atlas* was mostly a concept that inspired fluidity in terms of orientation, presentation, and creativity.

Warburg begins his 1929 introduction to the *Bilderatlas* that was published only posthumously in 2000, with the following remarks:

> Bewusstes Distanzschaffen zwischen sich und der Außenwelt darf man wohl als Grundakt menschlicher Zivilisation bezeichnen; wird dieser Zwischenraum das Substrat menschlicher Gestaltung, so sind die Vorbedingungen erfüllt, dass dieses Distanzbewusstsein zu einer sozialen Dauerfunktion werden kann, deren Zugänglichkeit oder Versagen als orientierendes geistiges Instrument eben das Schicksal der menschlichen Kultur bedeutet.

The consciousness of distance, or *Distanzbewusstsein*, and its medium, the space in between, or *Zwischenraum*, gain a vital necessity for the production of art and of cultural production in general, Warburg asserts here. As an instrument for intellectual orientation to read and interpret either one, the concept of *Denkraum* is created.

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410 See Benjamin Buchloh when he writes: “With the confidence in empiricism and the aspiration toward comprehensive completeness of positivist systems of knowledge having withered in the twentieth century, the term atlas seems to have fallen into a more metaphorical usage.” Buchloh, “The Anomic Archive,” p. 122.

as a space that allows for this to happen. As Sigrid Weigel writes: “Both the spacing of the plates as well as the intervals between the images opened up a new space for thinking, reading, interpreting,—and for seeing, discovering and re-reading the history of images, of iconology and of culture.” She underscores that the atlas was the ideal form or presentation for Warburg’s project precisely because it offered this thought-enabling Zwischenraum and Denkraum. Warburg continues:

Dem zwischen religiöser und mathematischer Weltanschauung schwankenden künstlerischen Menschen kommt das Gedächtnis sowohl der Kollektivpersönlichkeit wie des Individuums in einer eigentümlichen Weise zur Hilfe: nicht ohne weiteres Denkraum schaffend, wohl aber an den Grenzpolen des psychischen Verhaltens die Tendenz zur ruhigen Schau oder orgiastischen Hingabe verstärkend.

Denkraum is not created automatically by memory (Gedächtnis), but memory is the precondition for the very possibility of Denkraum. The world of images that Warburg has collected and arranged in the Atlas relies on Zwischenraum and creates Denkraum in the act of perception. The Atlas, in his own words, merely constitutes a beginning, an inventory of image-material (Bildmaterialien) that should be used as a school for seeing, “als orientierendes geistiges Instrument” in its own right, thus creating Denkraum. Warburg’s Atlas is an inventory of images that allows for an alphabetization for a specific kind of knowledge that is contained in and that shows itself in images. Warburg however, had a very particular, and quite conventional understanding of his “school for seeing.” His idea of education relied on himself as the authoritative voice, his atlas relied on his commentary which is now lost, and which was provided in often several-hour long freely delivered lectures. Julia Voss quotes Warburg in a letter to his wife, when she asserts that Warburg’s technique was not always successful:

Und Warburg blieb das nicht verborgen. Als er im Januar 1929 in der renommierten Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rom über die ‘Römische Antike in der Werkstatt des Domenico Ghirlandaio’ sprach,

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413 Warburg, “Einleitung zum Mnemosyne-Atlas” (1929), published 2000, p. 3
fühlte sich selbst das gelehrte Publikum überfordert. An seine Frau schrieb Warburg, er habe ‘das Boot’ seiner Rede ‘in voller Fahrt durch das mare magnum der ca. 250 Bilder 2½ Stunden lang’ gesteuert, wobei einige Passagiere jedoch ‘seekrank’ geworden seien und ‘früher ausgeschifft’ werden mussten.416

Reading the plates of Warburg’s atlas desires a specific kind of knowledge—a knowledge that is indebted in the humanist tradition of the educated few. Also Spyros Papapetros remarks on the usually very dense and challenging contents of Warburg’s oral presentation even for a highly educated audience, and highlights Binswanger’s critique:

After hearing his patient speak in the sanatorium hall, Warburg’s psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger would comment that: ‘the lecture itself… expanded on a large quantity of knowledge, but in a manner that was somewhat disordered: the principle facts [Hauptsachen] are too heavily covered by accessory elements [Beiwerk], and the important viewpoints are indicated only in passing by intimate archaeological allusions that only very few people in the audience can understand.’ However critical (and implicitly envious) Binswanger’s assessment might be, it is perhaps the most accurate diagnosis that the psychiatrist ever made of his patient. Even if Binswanger himself grumbles about details and misses the ‘principle fact’ about the scholar’s thinking process, he implicitly acknowledges that for Warburg the accessory is not simply an object, but a method.417

On the methodological level, the plates present visual material that on a first glance looks disordered, until the beholder is willing to accept that the plates are arranged according to an inherent principle that might be idiosyncratic. The plates present visual material that art historians and scholars educated in a humanist tradition will at least be able to recognize: they present a kind of knowledge that can be accessed if one has a certain kind of image memory to identify every single element in the arrangement presented. The publication of the Atlas in 2000 as part of Warburg’s Gesammelte Schriften has provided us with a key to those images, Martin Warnke and others have suggested a sequence how to read the individual images in connection to the arrangement, and provide the information needed to identify the individual elements on each plate.

The best known and perhaps most analyzed plate of Warburg’s atlas is plate No. 79.418 This plate is the last of the panels, and “compiles scenes of Eucharistic sacraments, sacrifices, and self-sacrifices like the harakiri-sheet.”419
As mentioned above the juxtaposition of images is most striking in the atlas. Photographs portraying representatives of the Catholic Church are combined here with pictures of golfers, race-horses, and a fresco by Raphael depicting the Last Supper. Surprisingly, however, on the right hand side of the panel we also find a full page of an *Illustrierte*, namely the *Hamburger Abendblatt* from July 29, 1929.\textsuperscript{420} Warburg kept the arrangement of images that this page provides. Tellingly, this page however also mirrors the structure of the panel—both convey an associative order that needs assembly in the beholder. As a close-up of this side of the panel shows, the page in itself combines photographs from various different news-stories, presenting a constellation that Warburg had called *Bildersalat*.\textsuperscript{421} Some of the images are now unrecognizable; they have been washed out by the combination of the glossy surface of the reproduction and the light used to take the photograph documenting this state of the plate. (The first row is particularly hard to see because of these photographic effects altering the images.) One last element in this plate calls for our attention, however. While the full page of images of the *Hamburger Abendblatt* is pinned to the panel, another newspaper article has been folded so that only the picture and its caption or the heading of the accompanying article are visible. In

\textsuperscript{420} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{421} Ibid.
this image, we see several men signing a document. Added to the upper right hand corner of the plate, the act of writing in photography enters the picture, and with it, the question of photography as script, and images as quotations. After all, what all these images have in common are the relationship between language and image, and images as gestures connected to a cross-cultural image memory, connecting both the contemporary with the historic, and low culture with high culture.

Fig. 66: Aby Warburg, «Mnemosyne-Atlas», 1924 – 1929; Mnemosyne-Atlas, Plate No. 79, 1929, detail.

The plates of the atlas were photographed in the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek. Often the photos show the spines of the books in the background, as in the example of plate 79 above. What might look like a coincidence or the indexical surplus of the photograph, in my reading constitutes the essential context and connective tissue of Warburg’s thinking. The books of the library are part of his arrangement of photographic reproductions, and they are both visibly and invisibly part of the project of the Atlas. Warburg was not only a scholar of art history, but he also assembled a library by collecting books that were arranged in a particular way, based on the principle of gute Nachbarschaft. The space in between those books allows them to communicate, the books next to one another are thought off as productive and producing connections, if not knowledge. Zwischenraum and Denkraum are both essential parts of the Bibliothek as Warburg conceptualized it. With his Bibliothek, Warburg created a library that, like himself, contains vast quantities of knowledge: the
Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek thus creates a space where one can acquire knowledge, where knowledge and images are stored, where one is prompted to think, learn, and see: it becomes a Denkraum.\footnote{Martin Treml calls the Bibliothek “einen Architektur gewordenen Denkraum.” Martin Treml, “Einleitung: Bemerkungen zu Aby Warburgs Werk und Methode.” In: Warburgs Denkraum. Formen, Motive, Materialien. Matrin Treml, Sabine Flach, Pablo Schneider (eds.), Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2014.} What is more, the books are sometimes tied into, or strapped onto, the exhibition boards for presentation, and are only barely tamed but rather tempting in their presentation as objects that one could handle and leaf through, as in the example below.

![Image of exhibition space with books and images](image)

Fig. 67: Aby Warburg, “Verfolgung” and “Verwandlung”, from Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen, presentation in the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg Hamburg, before 1930.\footnote{Aby Warburg. Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen. Eds. Uwe Fleckner, and Isabella Woldt. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012.}

Books then enter the plate, and almost reverse the idea of the child stepping into the book: in these photographs which are related to the atlas, but are not part of it strictly speaking, books seem to fall out of the two-dimensional space of the photograph, relating the form of the atlas and tableau to space in yet another way. If we take context and background literally, then the library (literally) comes back into the picture that Warburg had produced. Books from the library were tied to the exhibition wall to be photographed. These books visualize the commentary that Warburg provided for the spectators looking at
these plates (and the vast knowledge that he held, which is contained in this library as a project in itself, filled with whispering voices of correspondences).

Even though this photograph (by an anonymous photographer) from February 1927 does not show the atlas, the presentation of the plates of the atlas must have been similar, as plate no. 79 shows. The most important difference perhaps is the upright orientation of the plates in the atlas, rather than the landscape orientation in the exhibition. This photograph, however, most importantly showcases the intimate relationship of showing and reading, of the flatness of the photograph and the materiality of the book. The library functions as a medium or container in itself, enhancing the effect of the book as a medium that contains and produces knowledge, as a site of knowledge. The photographs of the atlas-plates are thus also something like sketches, thinking devices and manifestations of trains of thoughts. Moreover, they point to the commentary provided in form of books as in knowledge about those images and as a form of memory, also, that in the form of the book can be accessed again and again, and will be forgotten again, as Max Weber in his 1919 lecture *Wissenschaft als Beruf* beautifully describes.⁴²⁴ While the discussion of Warburg’s *Atlas* in particular detail has been pushed to the fringes of this project, the borders of the photographs of the plates have come to the fore, and with them the connective tissue of the Bibliothek and the book as part of the image.

Conclusion.

This chapter ends with Warburg because his project brings together aspects of the photobook that have been explored throughout the chapter. Warburg’s *Atlas* is related to the photobook as a medium, as his project brings to visibility the heterogeneity of photography as a medium to produce images and as a medium to reproduce images, to compare and to analyze images. The book as a medium for Warburg is not only part of the library, he also integrates the book into the exhibition wall, treats the book as an image, but simultaneously also acknowledges the object character of the book.

This chapter has traced various treatments of photography in relation to the book. The question of a training in the reading and writing of photography has been at the core—and Warburg, Blossfeldt, and Benjamin all provide different answers. What they have in common, however, is that they attest to the process that might never come to an end, photographic literacy is best achieved when it is practiced. Indeed, one cannot be separated from the other. As Benjamin says in his text on photography from 1931, reading photography and to know what you see when looking at a photograph and to read all the given information “at a glance” requires practice. His argument is that some photobooks of his time provide this visual training, like atlases did for centuries. For Warburg and for Blossfeldt, photography is an instrument to produce visibility that always operates in a constellation of images. The contemporaneous photobook in this project is posited as of one these image constellations, as part of an alphabetization through photography and in photography.

Chapter Three.  
No Neutral Grounds. Landscape-Photobooks of the 1930s and the Landscape of Photography: Das Watt by Alfred Ehrhardt.

“Täusche ich mich nicht, so hat man sich selten klar gemacht, dass Landschaft noch nicht damit gegeben ist, dass allerhand Dinge nebeneinander auf einem Stück Erdboden ausgebreitet sind und unmittelbar angeschaut werden. Den eigentümlichen geistigen Prozess, der aus alldem erst die Landschaft erzeugt, versuche ich von einigen seiner Voraussetzungen und Formen her zu deuten.”

Georg Simmel, Philosophie der Landschaft, 1913

Introduction.

This chapter constitutes the final element in the construction of the thesis in my dissertation. German photobooks in the 1920s and 1930s work with an activated space between the photographs to 1) slow down the perception of photography, 2) consequently rearrange and reassemble certain notions or concepts associated with photography by placing the photographs in a (bound) sequence to create connections, correspondences, sometimes frictions, and 3) thus, in short, interrupt or even disrupt a certain discourse. This chapter focuses on a photobook by photographer Alfred Ehrhardt (1901-1984) that was produced and published in 1937, entitled Das Watt (German for mudflats). It will be viewed in its capacity to disrupt contemporary political, cultural, and aesthetic discourse at the time of publication in Germany. This chapter investigates the stakes of the book and the mechanics of the disruption proposed by the analysis.

Das Watt was published at a time when modern art and abstraction were re-considered (and attacked) by the new political regime that seized power in 1933. Ehrhardt had been teaching mostly abstract painting until then. Forced by the Nazis to give up teaching in 1933, Ehrhardt also completely abandoned painting. He took up the camera instead in order to pursue abstract aesthetics, later also shooting film. While abstract painting was undergoing massive censorship, often resulting in confiscation, Ehrhardt found a way of further working with abstraction. In Das Watt he presented imagery that looks harmless enough because it is representational and “found,” rather than man-made. Yet it was simultaneously abstract. Details of a

landscape captured with the camera fulfilled the criteria for working abstractly, but they did not offend the censors as abstract paintings (or works on paper) would have. In the following, Das Watt will be put forth as a book that consciously engages in the ambiguity (as a Kippfigur) evoked by its subject matter—Ehrhardt’s photography of the mudflats and the mudflats as a landscape.

The book deliberately employs photography in relation to landscape and abstraction to destabilize notions of Boden, Raum, and Landschaft, key concepts of Nazi propaganda at the time. When it comes to photography and the representation of landscape through photography, the stakes are clear. If we believe what Georg Simmel suggests for landscape to be true, namely that it is constructed by us, (Simmel uses “erzeugt”) and if we take it to mean that any national, political, historical landscape is always constructed, how then might the medium of the photobook participate in this construction? And how does photography as a medium relate to the construction of more abstract aspects of this landscape, political, historical, art historical?

This chapter argues that Das Watt negotiates the question of German-ness and “national” landscape with the particular means of the photobook. Due to its form of presentation, by way of pairing two images on a double-page, Das Watt produces comparative views and can thus enhance the ambivalence inherent in each photograph. In each pairing, elements of similarity as well as differences come to the fore, activated by the space between the photographs. Moreover, the beholder is an active part in the viewing process, i.e. the very process of “construction” of the image sequence that the book offers. Building on Pepper Stetler’s argument, the photobook is here posited as a “multi-dimensional visual object”. “Reading” the photobook, in turn, is understood as the act of scanning and reading, an act where the body of the observer (when turning the page, for example) and thus a subjective temporality and point of view come in. This is central to any

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428 Stahl argues that the book bears traces of what she calls “Deutschümelei und kunsthistorisch fragwürdige Interpretation” when it comes to word-choice. Stahl, p. 47.
understanding of why Ehrhardt chose the medium of the photobook for Das Watt in the first place. The act of reading in a multi-dimensional sense involves the beholder to a crucial degree: “perception” is inseparable from touch, the movement of the eyes, and time, as Jonathan Crary has shown. This means that the medium of the photobook can be said to best exploit the thematic, political, and aesthetic ambivalence addressed in the photographs, because it actively engages the beholder. Das Watt, in its ambiguity, hands the act of taking a stand over to the beholder, making her/him an accomplice in ambivalence. Last but not least, the complicated term landscape is used as a means to showcase Ehrhardt’s project in its conscious engagement in a discourse of German landscape and its perception at the time. The term landscape, as I use it in this chapter, focuses on the act of framing, constructing, and perceiving a particular region through a particular lens. For Ehrhardt and for Das Watt, landscape is constructed through the series of photographs and the perspective and space created in every single frame, rather than defined by format or constituting elements (the horizon, foreground, middle-ground, background). Indeed, Ehrhardt mostly presents portrait-formats and close-ups of pieces of land, which are still framed as “landscapes,” as the analysis will show. As in every landscape, the position of the beholder is key also for Ehrhardt and his project.

Already in the 1920s, the medium of the photobook had been tied to contemporary forms of perception and broadly speaking to the discourse of modernity and urbanization in relation to subjectivity and a discussion of “nature” and “culture,” which are also present in Das Watt. German photobooks in 1937 are, however, embedded in a radically different context than Aenne Biermann’s 60 Fotos (1930), Karl Blossfeldt’s Urformen der Kunst (1928), or Germaine Krull’s Métal (1927). Key concepts formulated for the photobook of the 1920s in the earlier chapters will thus be revisited in this chapter and traced in their development and change.

The first part of this chapter thus addresses the making of the book, the context of its publication and its place in German photo-history. The analysis progresses with a discussion of points of comparison in

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the treatment of landscape photography, and of influences in the history of photobooks and visual forms, including the quest for primordial landscapes. The discussion of the concept of “landscape” in relation to photography that this chapter offers will be read against this backdrop.\textsuperscript{436} The analysis of the image sequence of the photobook will culminate in attention to the visual rhythm and structures of the book. The argument is that time and movement in this photobook constitute a dimension of abstraction that almost approaches film while always staying true to the principles of the photobook. The discussion of the term “Buchkinema” as introduced by Johannes Molzahn in 1928 will illuminate this.\textsuperscript{437}

The chapter closes with a focus on the photobook’s potential to resist unambiguous attributions. A reflection on how Das Watt can be said to disrupt a certain discourse of German-ness and Heimat through the use of abstraction concludes the analysis.

\textit{Das Watt.}

The Missing Link. Situating the Photobook.

This chapter establishes Alfred Ehrhardt as one of the missing links in the history of German photography, as he bridges between the 1920s New Objectivity and late 1940s \textit{subjektive Fotografie}. Ehrhardt’s photography of the 1930s connects Bauhaus aesthetics and the \textit{photographie d’auteur} of the post-war period. Precisely because his objectivity is merged with a “subjective” form of close-up and attention to structures, Ehrhardt connects Albert Renger-Patzsch (or Renger, as he is referred to by historians of photography) and his New Objectivity with a more pronounced focus on almost poetic beauty in search of primordial forms and surface structures, approaching abstraction as the essence of a particular form of photography. That is to say, not only is he historically located between the 1920s and late 1940s, he also creates a bridge formally and in terms of content.

Between 1933 and 1937 Ehrhardt developed a photographic tendency that in the 1950s will be titled “subjektive Fotografie” by members of the Fotoform group, like Otto Steinert, and others.\textsuperscript{438} At the same time, in his 1937 photobook \textit{Das Watt}, Ehrhardt practices the photography of New Objectivity and pays

\textsuperscript{436} Magilow uses the more broadly applicable term “nature photobook” for a similar phenomenon in the 1920s that includes the very popular branch of publications on flora in general, see Magilow, p. 65 following.

\textsuperscript{437} Cf. Stetler, p. 99-102.

\textsuperscript{438} Peter Keetman, Toni Schnieders, Siegfried Lauterwasser, Ludwig Windstoßer, Heinz Hajek-Halke, and Swedish photographer Christer Strömbom are other members.
attention to the medium-specificity and artistic potential of photography. Indeed, *Das Watt* is unthinkable without Renger’s book *Die Welt ist schön* from 1928. Ehrhardt did not simply copy Renger, however. Instead, Ehrhardt developed this photographic style further, building on Renger’s photographic vision and coming into his own by expanding it. Fritz Kempe and Christiane Stahl have argued that while Renger’s photobook oeuvre was highly influential to Ehrhardt’s photography, Ehrhardt however was more inclined to also allow poetic qualities in his photographs (through his use of light, e.g.), rather than following Renger fully in the latter’s factual and sober approach.\(^{439}\)

This artistic development was partly due to Ehrhardt’s time at the Bauhaus, where attention to surface, material and form were at the core of the curriculum. In *Das Watt*, however, elements that are idiosyncratic to Ehrhardt’s conception of landscape also come to the fore. Ehrhardt continues principles of the Bauhaus teachings of the New Vision in the particular manner he photographs structures and surface phenomena in the mudflats. Simultaneously, he adds the subjective aspect of a particular sense of authorship in terms of producing the photographs of a landscape that is experienced as constructed. So he combines three things: first, a sense of photographic authorship and recognizable artistic point of view, as it is also emphasized in the photobook (and as taught in the preliminary courses, and material workshops, at the Bauhaus in Dessau); secondly, his abstract interpretation of landscape photography, and thirdly, an analytical photography in the tradition of the New Objectivity movement, indebted to Renger in particular.

Ehrhardt spent a semester at the Bauhaus in Dessau between 1928 and 1929, took part in the obligatory *Vorkurs* and gave lectures.\(^{440}\) Since he was an art educator already, his position was more that of an apprentice (“Hospitant”) to Schlemmer and Klee.\(^{441}\) His paintings prior to 1933 are visibly influenced by Kandinsky, Klee, Lyonel Feininger, and Albers; they are mostly abstracted landscapes.\(^{442}\) His time at the Bauhaus arguably left an impression on his artistic expression and visual thinking. As a result, his


\(^{440}\) Stahl, p. 121-131

\(^{441}\) Ibid, p. 123.

\(^{442}\) Ibid, p. 121-131.
photographs show the attention to detail, form, material, and structures that are part of the *Vorkurs* or preliminary course at the Bauhaus and that he integrated into his own teaching until 1933. More importantly, with the photographic camera, he could experiment with a degree of abstraction that in painting was deemed “degenerate” or *entartet*. In the medium of photography, however, this tendency towards abstraction was “safe”, because in Ehrhardt’s case it was bound to representations of landscape. While he was forced to give up painting, in the medium of photography Ehrhardt was able to find his own visual language to a degree that makes his photography of the 1930s so compelling structurally, and by far surpasses his paintings artistically. Indeed, while his abstract landscape paintings resemble those of his teachers and friends at the Bauhaus, (Klee, Kandinsky and Feininger), in the medium of the photobook he truly comes into his own, as the following pair of images (plate 60 and 61) confirms. This double page is at the heart of the book, and presents a striking verticality. The tactility in both photographs is enhanced by the pairing. Plate 60 on the left is light gray and offers a delicate structure of two forms made of small strings, so it seems. Plate 61 echoes these forms, but in its darker grays and blacks the lighter structures are accentuated, covering most of the image. This double page resembles an exhibition wall, showcasing the tilting of the ground upwards to an absolute verticality. The elements of space are shifted, what was flat on the ground is now flat on the wall. Due to this shift, each of the two photographs presents a study of one particular frame, constructing a new point of view through the means of abstraction.

444 Stahl quotes a former student with the following assessment: “Wenn gemalte (abstrakte!) Bilder nur Ausgeburten und Hirngespinste von Vertretern des Verfalls waren (so etwa lautete ein Zitat aus seiner Hitler-Rede), so konnten die Schnüffelnalzstanz von der Präsentation der Wattbilder Alfred Ehrhardts. Das Gebotene, Dargestellte war seine (abstrakte!) Natur, man musste nur ein Auge dafür haben. Alfred Ehrhardt erwies sich als ein Meister auf diesem Neuland mit dem Medium der Kamera.” Stahl, p. 22
445 Perhaps it is also true that photography, in this abstract form that Ehrhardt in the photobook provides, was a safe place at the time, because it was not considered art by Nazi officials. The role of photography in the discussion around degenerate art is yet to be researched.
446 Stahl, p. 134.
447 One is reminded of the architecture of Mies van der Rohe of the late 1920s here, where exactly those shifting elements (as in the German Pavilion for the world exhibition in 1929 in Barcelona) can be attributed to the influence of the reception of the theories of relativity introduced by Albert Einstein between 1905 (when he published his treaty on “special relativity”) and 1916 (when the “general relativity” was published), which was received by the public by way of educational films, and the like. The forth dimension and the principles of relativity were explained for the ordinary citizen in the early 1920s and presumably found access to art works, architecture, and the like.
The photographs are recognizable as both landscapes and abstractions, a fact that gives them their interpretative (and artistic) richness. By choice of frame, in the close-up studies of surfaces, he practices an experimental form of photography that finds its most productive expression in the photobook. The photographs are arranged in pairs throughout the book. Due to this arrangement, the striking composition of the individual plate is enhanced, as are the choice of frame and angle. The “natural” composition of forms and shapes are immediately comparable through the surfaces photographed. The book offers the tactile quality of theses surfaces, providing a richness in tones of gray, and a surface that quite literally invites the tracing of the hand when turning the page. The hands holding the book can tilt the surface to a 90 degree angle, simulating the wall-like verticality the images suggest, or they can lay the book flat, returning the book to the flatness of the ground depicted. This mobility distinguishes the photobook from prints in an exhibition. Consequently, the book very specifically gives the beholder more freedom to experience the photographs.

What is more, the tendency towards abstraction and the focus on surfaces in these photographs prepares a more subjective interpretation of New Objectivity photography that in the 1950s will be further developed by the German photographie d’auteur. Otto Steinert and the group of “subjective” photographers very consciously placed themselves within a tradition of avant-garde photographers practicing photography in the 1920s in Germany, while not acknowledging that Alfred Ehrhardt’s Das Watt met most of their criteria for a
new photography.\footnote{Stahl, pp. 14-15.} Implied a breach after 1945, and going back to a photographic tradition \textit{before} 1933, these photographers constructed a less complicated history of German photography, operating with binary oppositions not unusual for the time.\footnote{Cf. Wolfgang Bialas and Anson Rabinbach [eds.], \textit{Nazi Germany and the humanities}, Oxford: Oneworld, 2007. (See especially the introduction by Bialas and Rabinbach). Cf. Hartmut Lehmann and James Van Horn Melton, \textit{Paths of continuity: central European historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s}, Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute; Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.} Many histories of “Stunde Null” imply a complete breakdown of German culture in the years of Nazi-government ending with the declaration of capitulation in May 1945. Recently, historiography has stressed continuities over breaks.\footnote{As a researcher one is immediately confronted with questions of conformism, political ignorance (or even thoughtlessness in Arendt's sense? See: Hannah Arendt, \textit{Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil}. New York: Viking Press, 1964.), and how they relate to his photographic career, and above all how they might influence one's own reading and interpretation.} The following proposes the same for the history of photography and posits Ehrhardt’s \textit{Das Watt} as a work of ambiguity consciously constructing a perception of landscape that resists unambiguous attribution of political sympathies.

Unlike most of the artists of the avant-garde, Ehrhardt did not leave but decided to stay in Nazi Germany. Unlike the photographers usually associated with the \textit{New Objectivity} of the 1920s, and indeed unlike most of the photographers discussed in this project, his photographic career only started in 1933.\footnote{Stahl, p. 14 and 134.} All this makes Ehrhardt more complicated in terms of his aesthetic alliance in a time when there were no neutral grounds anymore. Ehrhardt’s photobook however is precisely so intriguing artistically because it prepares abstraction of landscape through photography—something radical indeed.\footnote{After the war, perhaps the most famous abstract landscape painter in the U.S. is Richard Diebenkorn with his Ocean Park series.} Ehrhardt can be said to have accessed unexplored territory in the history of photography. As the history of art knows, this was true for art in general only two decades before Ehrhardt photographed the landscape of the mudflats.\footnote{Städelmuseum Frankfurt a.M. (Germany), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art Humlebaeck (Denmark), ed., \textit{Emil Nolde. Retrospektive}, Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2014. Cf.} The abstract landscapes of expressionism, and especially of Emil Nolde come to mind. Nolde’s biography in particular is similarly complex; his political convictions in the 1930s—he was a member of the Nazi party and an active opponent of “foreign” influences on German art—were, however, much more extreme than Ehrhardt’s.\footnote{Stahl quotes a former student, p. 22: “Alfred Ehrhardt erwies sich als ein Meister auf diesem Neuland mit dem Medium der Kamera.” Stahl, p. 22} Nolde’s abstracted seascapes are contemporary to the \textit{New Objectivity} movement in photography and
Ehrhardt's own paintings, thus all of them constitute the background for Ehrhardt's abstraction in photography as exhibited in *Das Watt*.

It is *Das Watt*'s aesthetic resistance to being categorized, however, that best captures Ehrhardt's stand in a particular political environment. *Das Watt* employs abstraction and creates images that are hard to read, at a time when ambiguity and ambivalence are highly political, but also offer the risk of being misunderstood, misinterpreted, accused of conformity. The entanglement of photography and the political is what a certain strand of the New Objectivity movement in the 1920s had failed to recognize or had willfully ignored, hence Ehrhardt's position as a “more subjective” Objectivity in terms of photography. It is precisely the human and social aspect that surrounds the sober “objectivity” that some photographers wished to repress or failed to acknowledge. In the 1920s perhaps this ignorance was possible, or even seemed desirable. In the 1930s however most of the photographers who had added a more critical approach to New Objectivity had been banned, or seriously disabled from working with photography in Germany. August Sander, whose project for a seven-volume photobook, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* was prohibited by the Nazis, is one example. László Moholy-Nagy, Helmar Lerski and other political or “Jewish” photographers emigrated. Aenne Biermann, also termed “Jewish” by the Nazis, died soon after the seizure of power in 1933, but her photographic legacy was soon repressed and forgotten.455 Photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch stayed in Germany and continued working as a photographer, publishing a few photobooks.456 For this reason, he is perhaps the most complicated figure in this constellation, even though his peak of photobook productivity was between 1927 and 1931.457

With regard to Renger, already in 1931 Walter Benjamin had called the failure to acknowledge “menschliche Zusammenhänge” the very “corruptibility of photography.”458 In this context, my effort is to

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457 Stahl on Renger, p. 133 and pp. 261-64.
expand Benjamin’s claim to the realm of nationalist Blut-und-Boden-photography in the 1930s. Das Watt calls attention to the construction of a point of view and to the construction of a landscape. As a consequence, the corruptibility and ambiguity of photography come to the fore, and quite literally change the grounds our perception is based on. With the means of the photobook horizontality and verticality become mobile, making the beholder of the book an active part in the re-assembly of ground, or “Grund und Boden.”

This is achieved most pronouncedly through the sequence of the photographs that are carefully choreographed in order to destabilize any stable reading; the sequences are founded on images impenetrable in their verticality because they have become wall-like. At a time when any depiction and representation of landscape in Germany is always-already political, this book offers a sequence of images that goes back and forth between images of abstraction (as plates 60 & 61 indicate); images of a horizon line, sky and ground, and perspectival images without a horizon but clear indications of space (e.g., the cover image). The mudflats are a place of ambiguity, half-sea and half-land, constantly in flux. Ehrhardt’s sequence underscores this movement. Towards the end of the book, the sense of danger that the rising tide might evoke is inseparable from a destabilized notion of ground during the course of the sequence. Throughout the choreographed sequence, the direction of a gaze might as convincingly be a “looking away,” as it might be a “focusing on.”

It is both at the same time, yet neither completely. It is also in this sense ambivalent.

A way to illustrate the above is by analyzing the directionality of the water, which is impossible to read in a static photograph. Only the image sequence can indicate this sense of direction, complemented by the captions. In the area of the mudflats, it is crucial to keep in mind what the tide looks like in order to safely reach the mainland. Water that quickly floods the sandy surface of the mudflats complicates the way back on foot, while irregular currents might complicate swimming back. Plates 90 and 91 hint at the importance of orientation in the mudflats, and only plate 91 bears a caption that indicates a sense of danger: “14 kilometers offshore—the tide comes in!”

pp. 343-362.


The distance to the mainland (14 kilometers) is set in stark contrast to the sense of water-movement that will rise faster than a human figure could walk back to the mainland, and, crucially, that will come from more than one direction, making the way back on foot even more difficult. As such, the theme of the destabilization of a sense of orientation is mobilized. The photograph alone cannot give us this clue. We do not see where the mainland is, perhaps the same is true for the photographer. This indication of a limited perspective can be linked to the frames chosen for the photographs presented in the book, offering details of a landscape not the “big picture.” The sequence mobilizes this limited perspective to a construction of a landscape that is never complete. We can also read this in terms of visual interpretation, however. This pair of photographs looks calm and serene, only the caption to the photograph indicates danger, implying that the effort of reading the signs in this landscape are parallel to a close-reading of the caption in order to correctly decipher the photograph as evoking “danger.”

Ehrhardt mostly excludes the depiction of the human figure in Das Watt, and when he does include it, only does so in order to provide orientation and scale, similar to landscape painters of the 18th century who would place small figures in the landscape to indicate perspective. Paradoxically, Ehrhardt carves out a space for the viewer in this mostly abstract landscape by the means of the photobook. As indicated above, the beholder can actively mobilize and change the direction of the images, turn verticality into horizontality,
holding the book or placing it on the table. While any photobook allows this action, *Das Watt* suggests, nay demands it through the subject matter and viewpoint of the camera.

In a time where the resistance to engage with certain types of photographs also created a space for alternative interpretations, Ehrhardt chose to concentrate on photographs of small abstract sections of ground, or *Boden.* He literally abstracted *Boden* by concentration on detail and by pointing his camera in a way that turns the flat surface of the ground into a perspectival space without horizon or wall-like surface, resulting in an abstracted landscape. As the two examples have demonstrated, he showcases the morphology of forms in this presumably stable concept of “ground,” transforming it into details, close-ups and pictures on a wall, radically shifting and destabilizing the grounds certain concepts of landscape are based on, and even more, concerns the very subject position of landscape perception.

**Making the Book.**

Ehrhardt, as one of the few artists of the avant-garde who stayed in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, has mostly been ignored in post-war reception of photography, perhaps because it is difficult to position him politically. It is precisely Ehrhardt’s ambivalence and resistance to unambiguous readings of his photographs that the following puts forth as his strength. The following part of the chapter aims at contextualizing Ehrhardt’s overlooked significance by the close-reading of *Das Watt* in the context of photobook publications of the 1920s and 1930s. *Das Watt* challenges the oversimplifying conjecture that photo-publications between 1933 and 1945 in Germany were either un-political (as in “neutral”) or sui generi

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461 Portraits in particular are a genre that becomes more and more politicized. See mostly: Lendvai-Direksen, Riefenstahl, and Wolff.

462 At a time when the depiction of a coastal landscape usually meant a horizon-line, Ehrhardt has to be compared to those photographers who depicted seascapes like that. See most prominently Paul Wolff’s summer-vacation book that depicts the same landscape in a very different way. Dr. Paul Wolff, *Sonne über See und Strand. Ferienfahrten mit der Leica. Text und 112 Tiefdruckbilder. Mit einem Schlussbeitrag von H. Windisch.* Bechhold Verlagsbuchhandlung: Frankfurt a.M., 1936.

463 Stahl argues convincingly that Ehrhardt focused on his art making, and mostly ignored his surroundings. As he was forced to earn a living as photographer (and later film-maker) after giving up his position as a church musician, he had to make money with his photographs. (Stahl, p. 83.) He did not go into inner emigration, and thus inevitably complied with the regime at least passively. Stahl concludes her book with the following assessment: “Aus heutiger Sicht erscheint Alfred Ehrhardt nicht als Opfer der Kultursäuberung, nicht sein Kampf um die künstlerische Existenz ist relevant, sondern die weitgehend unkritische Fortsetzung seiner Arbeit, mangelnde Zivilcourage und affirmative Einordnung in das totalitär organisierte NS-Kultursystem. Die Entscheidung, sich mit den Machthabern zu arrangieren, statt das Exil zu wählen, mag als künstlerisch fragwürdig, politisch naiv und ethisch unverträchtlich angesehen werden. Menschlich verständlich ist es gleichwohl.” Stahl, p. 275.

Das Watt is a response to a discourse of abstraction in art and depictions of landscape at the time. The suggested destabilization of those key concepts of propaganda in Das Watt is achieved by way of subject matter, photographic point of view, and the texts included in the volume (introduction, photographer’s note and captions to the photographs).

Alfred Ehrhardt was trained as a musician, and he was a self-taught abstract painter. In the 1920s he taught painting at various reform-influenced schools, until in 1933 he had to leave his position at the Landeskunstschule in Hamburg. Nazi laws quite generically accused him of “Kulturbolschewismus” because he had been affiliated with the Bauhaus and other reform-oriented institutions. As a consequence, Ehrhardt briefly went to Denmark to continue teaching, but after a few months returned to Germany to take up a position as choral conductor and organ player in a parish in Cuxhaven.

The position in Cuxhaven enabled him to go on long walks through the Northern German mudflats, a landscape that is shaped by the ebb and flow of water, changing every six hours. It is a place of ambiguity, and a “warehouse of artistic forms” for a visual artist. Ehrhardt writes about this landscape in Das Watt:


The landscape’s ambiguity is addressed by Ehrhardt in the term “Zwischenreich,” the poetical tone corresponds with his photographic language. In this description Ehrhardt’s fascination with a landscape that changes so frequently is conveyed, and his interest in the creation of images and structures in the sand by the constant flux of ebb and flow. The sequence of photographs presented in this book were taken over the course of three years, between 1933 and 1936, in a vast area that the photographer walked and, if necessary, swam across.

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465 Cf. the journal Fotogeschichte, 116, Jg. 30, Summer 2010, “Fotobücher im 20. Jahrhundert.” Of course we know that it is not quite that easy.
467 Stahl, p. 133.
469 Ehrhardt, Das Watt, p. 13.
470 Stahl, p. 66. See also Ehrhardt, Das Watt, p. 13.
Many of these photographs were exhibited in 1936 and 1937 before the book was printed. They were shown first locally in Northern Germany, but after enthusiastic reception traveled across Germany and were even shown internationally.\textsuperscript{471} While this reception clearly encouraged Ehrhardt to proceed with the book, to compile a photobook had been the plan all along, as his correspondence from December 1936 with gallery owner Karl Nierendorf demonstrates.\textsuperscript{472} Nierendorf had played a major role in exhibiting and publishing the photography of Karl Blossfeldt in the late 1920s, and Ehrhardt confessed to him that he had not published any of the photographs in illustrated magazines to date because he hoped that it would be possible to publish them in the form of a photobook (ideally with Nierendorf as a publisher). While Nierendorf could not publish the book, he did exhibit Ehrhardt’s photographs in his Berlin gallery, organized from his exile in Paris.\textsuperscript{473}

Ehrhardt’s explicitly-voiced aim to publish the photographs as a sequence in the form of a photobook implies that the intention to publish the book had already shaped the project conceptually. Indeed, the photobook offers a bound version of a curated sequence that Ehrhardt was in charge of, contrary to exhibition practices at the time and, especially, later on. Moreover, in the photobook the photographs become more permanently stable and situated than they would be for the viewer in an exhibition. Collected in the book, the photographs become portable as a sequence. Thus, this particular sequence of images can be actualized and seen at the will of the beholder, and they are mobilized by the turning of the page. \textit{Mobilized} is to be taken literally here. Johannes Molzahn had in 1928 suggested that the photobook had strong connections to the moving image of film, and he called this phenomenon \textit{Buchkinema}.\textsuperscript{474} When looking at the photobook, we can speed up our leafing through and turn it into a flipbook or \textit{Daumenkino} (“thumb-cinema”) to produce an animated sequence rather than static contemplation. The important distinction from the cinema, however, is that the beholder can decide how fast or how slow to move the images. Therefore, the


\textsuperscript{472} Stahl, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{473} Ibid.

process is more dependent on the viewer as a collaborator. While an exhibition can temporarily reach a wide audience, mass-produced books can be taken home and studied time and again. Additionally, the position of holding the book can be determined by the viewer. This adds yet another layer of mobility and, as outlined above, possibly another tool for the destabilization and activation of ambiguity).

In the case of *Das Watt*, publisher, authors (the photographer and the author of the text contained in the book) and audience form a triangle that is worth looking at more closely. *Das Watt* was eventually published by a young publishing house in Hamburg specializing in books of poetry and, later, landscape photography.\(^{475}\) Publisher Heinrich Ellermann was a philologist and had opened his publishing house in 1934, at a time when most other publishing houses were undergoing “transformations,” to put it mildly, due to Nazi laws after 1933.\(^{476}\) With the help of photographer Alfred Ehrhardt, whose role was instrumental,\(^{477}\) publisher Heinrich Ellermann created a protected place, if only in the form of a few publications, within national-socialist Germany, which offered a decisively different point of view when it came to “landscape photography” that reached a wide audience at the time.\(^{478}\)

The program of publications of the publishing house suggests that *Das Watt* cautiously presents itself as “neutral” within a landscape of pro-fascist photobooks that mobilize nationalist imagery (or rather: *Das Watt* was trying to step outside of it).\(^{479}\) Erna Lendvai-Dircksens would be one example for a photographer who overtly embraced national-socialist imagery and *Gedankengut* in her photography; her photobook *Wanderdünen* will be examined in a later section of this chapter.\(^{480}\) A few of her photobook-publications

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\(^{475}\) In total, 10 photobooks by Alfred Ehrhardt alone were published with Heinrich Ellermann Verlag between 1937 and 1941, culminating in *Schnecken und Muscheln*, portraying natural forms of the spiral in exceptional images.

\(^{476}\) Roland Jaeger makes mention of Gebrüder Enoch Verlag, Kurt Enoch, and his publishing house that he was forced to sell to “Arian” owners. Enoch emigrated from Germany to Paris and in 1940 to the United States. He situates Heinrich Ellermann as positive counterpart to the many pro-Nazi publishers when it comes to photobooks, in continuation in spirit with Enoch.


\(^{479}\) The book was published with a first edition of 8,000. Jaeger, p. 5.

\(^{480}\) Jaeger, pp. 4-5; Almut Klingbeil, *Die Bilder wechseln. Meereslandschaften in deutschen Fotobüchern der 20er bis 40er Jahre*, Hamburg: ConferencePoint Verlag, 2000; Klingbeil in particular offers a list of titles on pp. 30-50.

In the first two years of its existence, until 1936, the young publishing house Ellermann Verlag had mostly published poetry that was not national-socialist.\(^{481}\) Trying their hand at the new medium of the photobook, publisher Heinrich Ellermann and his team printed the project with exceptional attention to the range of gray in the photographic reproductions.\(^{482}\) *Das Watt* was designed with a modernist layout as it had been established in the 1920s, using an uncluttered page-set-up with a focus on the photographic image, and minimal but effective variations on where the photographs were place. The images in turn pay close attention to surface structures in the tradition of New Objectivity. By way of subject matter, however, it was safely couched in the protecting framework of nature and landscape photography that was so popular by pro-regime photographers, reducing the threat of censorship considerably.\(^{483}\)

**The Cover.**

![Fig. 71: Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*. Cover-image & dust jacket. Hamburg 1937.](image)

\(^{481}\) Jaeger, pp. 4-5. He writes about Heinrich Ellerman „Die Publikationen boten damals der nicht nationalsozialistisch infizierten Dichtkunst in Deutschland ein Forum.” And with respect to *Das Watt*: “… die Auflage betrug beachtliche 8,000 Exemplare. Dem Erfolg dieses Titel schloss sich im Verlag Heinrich Ellermann eine Reihe weiterer, vom Format her etwas kleinerer Fotobücher von Alfred Ehrhardt an.”

\(^{482}\) Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*, Hamburg: Heinrich Ellermann Verlag, 1937.

\(^{483}\) Jaeger, 5. “Die Beschränkung der Titel auf landes- und naturkundliche Themen bot den schützenden Rahmen für eine Fotografie, die sich in der Tradition der neuen Sachlichkeit verstand.”
The first photograph the beholder encounters when picking up a copy of Das Watt is the cover. It shows a black-and-white photograph of a sandy surface that is structured visually by a relief pattern of light and shadow. As a medium to depict landscape, photography is instantly problematized by the one photograph chosen for the cover, because it seems to evoke landscape as abstraction. It shows lines in the sand, filling the whole picture. There is no horizon, merely an indication of a point of view and perspective.\textsuperscript{484} The horizon line is outside the frame of the photograph; thus the photo must have been taken precisely without using the horizon as a guideline for orientation, but by lowering the camera onto the sandy surface of the ground instead, tilting the flat surface slightly towards the viewer. This accentuates the perspective. We follow the lines to the end of the space created in this image. The longer we look at the photograph, however, the more we observe small smudges on the ground that disrupt the overall clear lines of the picture. Also the picture’s constituting element, the lines, become disruptive to the viewing process, so much so that the picture starts to flicker. The cover-photograph (which is also the first photo in the book) thus already indicates a degree of destabilization. It does so by proposing the relationship of landscape and abstraction in photography, showcasing possible irritations this combination might evoke. In other words, the cover invites the contemplation of ambiguity.

The name of the photographer rests in the middle of the page. With a significant space below this name, we read in bold white rounded sans-serif letters simply the title: “Das Watt” and below that in a third type font, as sober as the second one but not quite as rounded: “Ein Bildwerk 96 Aufnahmen.” This subtitle, however, deserves closer examination. There is no preposition, “in” or even “von” that appears between these two facts “Bildwerk” (image-work, oeuvre, corpus) and “96 plates,” photos, or more literally: “recordings.” There is no visual marker, no colon, no comma, no dash. There is a lack of any visual connector, or simply: a gap. And this small space in between two words already on the cover conveys something about the book in front of us: this gap, first unnoticed, turns into a powerful vehicle to produce connections and questions. Furthermore, this space between two concepts is an indication of the space between the photographs that makes the photobook. The gap in the subtitle is important precisely because

the two elements thus connected—“Bildwerk” and “Aufnahmen”—do not seamlessly complement each other. If this book is called “Bildwerk,” it is a composite, a creative act or an oeuvre, indicating completeness, while “96 Aufnahmen” on the other hand are a selection and fragmentation. The two terms “Bildwerk” and “96 Aufnahmen” as a conceptual pair participate in the construction of a tension between a “whole” and a “fragment” or detail, just as the photobook as a whole uses this tension to create ambiguity and destabilization.

The cover also makes apparent the tension between the title and the background photograph. It is the same tension addressed in the coupling of “Bildwerk” and “Aufnahmen,” however played out differently: the title Das Watt names a region in Northern Germany that is usually associated with nature, or more conceptually, with a region or landscape. Consequently, the title invokes a mental image of traditional land- or seascapes that provide vastness of space and sky, emptiness, and a clear horizon line. The photograph we see, on the other hand, does not provide this image. In fact, it looks nothing like that: it is a close-up of structured sand formations that are only a fragment of a landscape. This pair (the title and the photograph) then evokes and simultaneously frustrates expectations of this place the title indicates, of the mudflats. The title suggests an emotive, possibly dramatic, even sublime composition of sky, water and beach, but the photograph visually argues against it, and challenges the conception of landscape attached to the name of this region. Photograph and title, as much as genre-definition (“Bildwerk”) and constituting elements (“Aufnahmen”) put into place a complex dynamics of a combined act of reading and seeing, of scanning the mental image evoked by a word (“mudflats”), countered by the photographic image provided. The photograph on the cover, moreover, also illustrates the term mentioned in the subtitle: it is, quite literally, a recording of the sandy grounds. “Aufnahme” in this regard also plays with the visual analogy of the lines for the needle in a phonographic record.

Since the primary purpose of a cover-page is to give information and thus set the stage in terms of expectations of the content, here, too, all the important facts are established. We have the author /

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485 Think Theodor Storm’s Schimmelreiter (1888) or Caspar David Friedrich’s seascapes.
photographer (Alfred Ehrhardt), the title (and implicitly: a regional placing), the sub-title (the number of plates, thus clarifying the question of genre: not prose or text, but photographic images). The photograph, in conjunction with the type font, sets the visual tone; the chosen words and concepts respond to the mental images by adjusting the expectations.

This cover is a first threshold into the photobook at hand, and a threshold not only metaphorically but quite literally: pointing to a place, and the translation thereof into photography. The region addressed in the title is the Northern German mudflats off the coast of Schleswig-Holstein. The title thus takes on not only regional, but also national implications. “Das Watt” is not only a German word, it is a part of Germany. This implicitly raises two questions, connected to each other: the first is the attribution of nationality to a region, and its political and historical dimensions. The second is the representation of these dimensions of the national character of a region, and connected to that, the construction of a landscape in conceptual, representational and political terms. The term landscape is implicitly negotiated in the title, as is the relationship to artistic expression when it comes to landscape through the photograph.

The Opening Sequence.

The fragments of scenery that this book offers can be considered vertical “landscapes” in themselves. A vertical landscape however, a contradistio in adjecto from a certain point of view, calls into question not only the format usually used for the representations of this genre (the horizontal format). It also complicates the idea of what constitutes a landscape. (Can a fragment of it be considered to be landscape or is it a detail of a landscape? What would it be called then?) The opening sequence is remarkable in that respect. The expectation of landscapes with horizon lines is soon to be disappointed. Instead we mostly encounter photographs in the portrait format, offering close-ups, details and indeed “portraits” of formations of sand and water that form abstract patterns.
The first photograph in the sequence is a reproduction of the cover-image. It is the same photograph, yet it sensitizes the viewer to the differences, too: without the title, subtitle and photographer, the photograph is now part of the sequence in the book and allows the beholder to “look again.” This allows for a concentration on the black-and-white tactile structures instead. Destabilization and adjustment of expectations is at stake, this first picture tells us.

Moholy had made use of the repetition (“noch einmal durchlesen”) that is structurally comparable in *Malerei. Photographie. Film* as extensively discussed in Chapter One.

This is an interesting parallel to the aspects of tactility as touched upon in Chapter Two.
Plate 2 and 3, (plate 2, on the left bears the caption “auflaufendes Flutwasser,” plate 3, on the right, “Windbewegungen, den Boden formendes Wasser”) both depict water. They echo each other in their composition, enhancing the tactility and sculptural dimension already at play in plate 1. Plate 2 showcases tidal water; plate 3 is about wet sand, not water primarily. Visually they form a pair, however, because certain forms are repeated in both photographs, especially through the use of light and shadow. Next to water, the elements of light and shadow create the images. Progressing from the first plate to this double page, all elements of this landscape are introduced: light and shadow, water, and sand. Also, in the caption for plate 3, wind and water are posited as shaping the ground, “den Boden formend,” confirming our reading of the construction of concepts in relation to Boden. Ehrhardt thus carefully frames the space he wishes to construct in the sequence of the photobook, using photographs and language. Until now, we have not encountered any horizon line—it is there, but it is just outside the frame of the photographs.

The next plate then offers precisely the horizon-line as a way of orientation, which is immediately relativized by the second photograph in the pair on the double-page.

Fig. 74: Alfred Ehrhardt, Das Watt, pl. 4 (portrait format) and 5 (landscape format), “Wandergruppe dicht vor dem Festland” and “beregnete Sandfläche”

The photograph on the left, plate 4 or “Wandergruppe dicht vor dem Festland” shows a very high horizon line and the sun (mirrored in the pools of water on the lower right hand corner of the image). The human figure, even if very small and removed, is presented as part of the landscape. All of these elements,
horizon, sun, and human figure, offer means of orientation in this ambiguous photographic space. It is a poetic image, where the horizon line has moved up very high in the image, presenting us with a huge part of the picture that almost tips over into abstraction, because it is an ambiguous space of sky and ground. The portrait format turns the landscape upside down: the sun sits in the sky, but is reflected only in the water on the ground; it is thus quite literally mirrored. This creates the effect of clouds merging with the reflections and forms of the ground, creating a striking allegory for the ambiguity and fluidity of visual markers in this strip of land.

The very shape of the sun, distorted but distinct enough, is echoed in the photograph on the right that shows a hole in the ground: water that perhaps has collected in the imprint of a human footstep. This photograph is presented in the “landscape” format, so portrait and landscape are reversed, mirrored; the categories of horizontal and vertical have become fluid, if not destabilized. The two photos provide “the bigger picture” and “the close-up,” (or detail). Plate 4 gives us an idea of where we stand in the bigger picture of this landscape, while plate 5 indicates where we stand quite literally: this is what we might see when we turn down our gaze from the horizon to our feet, and what might happen to the trace of our feet after we continue walking. We are thus introduced to the movement of the camera, as well as to the movement to be expected throughout the book, and to the element of time.

Fig. 75: Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*, pl. 6 - 7 (both in the portrait format), “Mit wilder Wasserkraft in den Boden hineingerissener Wassergraben” and “Sorgsam geformte Strömungsgräben”
When turning the page, plates 6 and 7 complete this introductory sequence, offering us a glimpse of the creation of forms. These are images that are reminiscent of glacial carvings of riverbeds, forms that invite us to cross these landscapes with our eyes and compare them to other shapes, bodily, microscopic or macroscopic. It is what Moholy in his 1925 book had suggested and what Benjamin had slightly altered with regard to Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst*: that photography creates a warehouse of forms that constitute the basis for “comparative photography,” because the camera can go farther than the human eye, and it can bring back images that—assembled in a certain way, as is the case in *Das Watt*—give access to a variety of views, landscapes, and forms.489

![Plate 8 and 9 from *Das Watt*](image)

Fig. 76: Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*, pl. 8 (portrait format) and 9 (landscape format), “Schlick” and “Wellungen”

Borrowing a term from Michael Jennings with regard to the photobook, plate 9, “Wellungen”, can be characterized as a transitional image.490 This image offers a connection to a sequence of “wavings” and according images, detailed studies of the wet sand formations and forms on the ground.

The sequence following this photograph is the most abstract in the book, spanning from pages 9 to 47; it is no accident that the sequence forms the book’s center. This sequence is based mostly on similarities and differences in details, since all the photographs are shot in such a way that there is no horizon line, no clear

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489 See chapters one and two of my project.

position of the sun, nor sea. The entrance to this sequence is provided by Plate 9, “Wellungen,” that is positioned on the page of the book as a horizontal photograph. This print, plate 9, also reminds the viewer of the cover-photograph and the first of the sequence of the photobook, yet it is presented in the landscape format here. Due to the altered format, it establishes photography as one of the motors for memory and the finding of and simultaneous creation of forms, operating with similarities and difference. Reproduction is not only introduced as photographic principle then, rather it is more importantly posited as essential part of Das Watt when it comes to the repetition of forms created over time. The reproduction of photographic images in the book is thus theoretically tied to the repetition of forms as created through wind, water, the sun and the moon, as these images of surfaces are in turn likened back to the ebb and flow of memory when it comes to learning, recognizing and remembering images and structures. It is thus that the first sequence in the book sets the stage for various themes played out in photographic pairings throughout the book. The next section of this chapter consequently investigates various framing devices employed in Das Watt in order to situate this beginning of the book also theoretically.

Frameworks.

Introduction in Das Watt.

The introduction to Das Watt, written by Dr. Karl Dingelstedt, does not focus on the medium-specificity of the book as such, but quite consciously constructs an argument about the medium-specificity of the photograph. Photography as a medium (at this point in time, in the 1930s) is bound, he argues, to technical precision that makes it the ideal instrument for quasi-scientific but also artistic “objectivity” (as opposed to the hand of the painter, which could possibly distort the outcome with emotion and unwanted subjectivity).

This is couched in a contradiction of which the author himself seems to be unaware. In his wish to identify Ehrhardt’s particular artistic achievement, Dingelstadt posits the New Vision—with its turn away from romantic “subjectivity” (for him seen in Impressionism and Kunstphotographie)—as an appropriate framework. While acknowledging that even the amateur photographer will know that there are differences in taking a photograph, depending on “Wahl des Motivs, Stellung des Apparats, … technische Bedingungen,”

491 Oliver Wendell Holmes. “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph.” The Atlantic, 1859, Moholy and Renger use similar ideas in the late 1920s.
Dingelstedt still frames his argument as a history of progress towards of exactness and objectivity. The obvious contradiction is that Ehrhardt’s photography is simultaneously an “instrument,” as the author says, to record in an almost scientific manner, while it is also a form of art that only he as the artist can provide, and thus highly subjective (an artistic point of view which might be as eye-opening in terms of changing our perception as line and brush stroke in a painting by van Gogh, as Dingelstedt implies).  

Und Ehrhardt hat diese Arbeit mit einer Genauigkeit im einzelnen und einer Konsequenz und Systematik durchgeführt, die erstmalig und beispielhaft ist. Ehrhardt hat gesammelt wie ein Wissenschaftler, völlig der Sache hingegeben…

With this quotation, the photobook is posited as the medium that perhaps best fulfills both the objectivity of science (by way of collecting forms in a typology) and of the photography of New Objectivity with the more subjective lens that Ehrhardt brings in. What is more, the attentive reader will remember that Benjamin used a similar language to convey the search for forms as manifest in Blossfeldt’s photobook. Indeed, the word-choice is remarkably similar, suggesting a prevailing longing for photography’s scientific potential in uncovering structural and formal principles that lie beneath the surface of what meets the eye.

Photography, however, offers a dual position, and only one half is attributed to science, the other is assigned to art. The two seem to converge especially fruitfully in the medium of the photobook. The medium of photography in the 1920s in Germany had been confronted with these questions exactly: What is photography and how can the potential of photography as a medium best be used to create photographs that are “photographic” in essence, not imitating other mediums? The question goes even further, however, when the photobook comes in. Here, the implicit assumption is, the photographs turn into art. When photography is used in a scientific and aesthetic (and even didactic) way, as was the case with Blossfeldt, the combination of image and book becomes ever more pregnant with meaning.

In terms of mediums-specificity, only photography is explicitly addressed in *Das Watt*. However, as a photobook, it offers an analysis and a point of view that are constructed, orchestrated and montaged, exemplifying both the scientific and the artistic expectations brought to photography at the time, but also

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493 *Das Watt*, p. 9-10
reflecting on them by means of the bound sequence that the photobook is. Dingelstedt makes reference to the particular expectations photography is equipped with when he speaks of “Mediengerechtigkeit” in his introduction, as does Ehrhardt when he combines technical details of camera and shutter speed with more thorough artistic questions in his introductory remarks.494

Addressing this conundrum, Moholy writes in his text “Die beispiellose Fotografie,” published in *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* in 1927:


Moholy explicitly rejects the imitation of other forms of representation employed by photography to this day. His emphasis on photography’s own exact language, however, is what Ehrhardt took to heart, especially when it comes to the subject matter of landscape photography. The “exact language of photography,” as Moholy says, is not as exact as he would like it to be. Binding this back to the thesis that the photobook might be the ideal medium for photography, the exactness and simultaneous approximation of exactness is what constitutes the ambiguity best conveyed in the photobook. The photobook as a medium needs the viewer who activates and mobilizes the photographs—and in doing so produces their Kippfiguren of photographic ambivalence.

As mentioned above, in his introduction Dingelstedt elegantly encourages the reader to agree that Ehrhardt is indeed an artist who will provide an experience that might change or at least challenge our perception of this particular landscape of the mudflats, and who provides a new “Landschaftsauffassung,” or a different point of view. Expanding this argument, one can claim that photography alters perception through the principle of seriality best achieved in the photobook. There, the sequence offers comparative views, thus enabling comparative perception. The photobook showcases “comparative photography,” as Walter

494 Dingelstedt speaks of “Materialgerechtigkeit” in his introduction, p. 9.
Benjamin had called it (referring to Goethe’s morphology). Dingelstedt puts forth that photography in itself is an inherently sequential medium: already in the first line of his introduction, he makes use of the term “Reihe,” or sequence, series or more literally: row. And throughout his introductory text he uses “Reihung” and “Reihe” several times. After that, Dingelstedt writes:

[Erhardts Photographien] sind als Einzelform oder durch ihre Reihung von geheimnisvoller Schönheit und sprechen zu uns als Zeichen einer großen ewigen Kraft. Es sind Formen einer Landschaft, die wir im Ganzen kennen, deren Struktur, deren aufbauende Teile wir bisher aber nie sahen, weil uns die Augen für sie noch nicht geöffnet waren; Gebilde einer steten Arbeit der Natur, die unbemerkt und im stillen vor sich geht.

If indeed we know this landscape as a whole, but have not been able to see the structural principles before, then Ehrhardt’s photographs offer an analytical perspective, a critical tool to see the tree and the forest, as it were. The repetition through sequence slowly makes visible shapes and forms that resemble similar shapes and forms in other contexts. When the surface structure of the bottom of a tidal inlet (Priel in German) is photographed in a particular way—as on the cover of the book—we are visually reminded of shapes in other dimensions, be they of microscopic or macroscopic nature. (Glacial inlets or the “skeleton” of a leaf might serve as examples for associations on both levels.) If we follow Dingelstedt in this claim, Ehrhardt’s photographs help us shift and picture of a landscape that we think we are familiar with, that we “know,” (“die wir im Ganzen kennen,” Dingelstedt writes) to become more relative concept, or even fluid. Because his photographs single out smaller parts of the whole and create a sequence, they select the structuring and constructive principles or “aufbauende Teile” that constitute a paratactic sequence. This sequence is built on

497 Das Watt, p. 9. “… Bodengebilde, die mehr oder weniger abgewandelt in immer wiederkreierender Reihung die Flächen aufwühlen, durchfurchen oder sie sanft gliedern. Sie sind als Einzelform oder durch ihre Reihung von geheimnisvoller Schönheit und sprechen zu uns als Zeichen einer großen ewigen Kraft.” In these two sentences, the term “Reihung” is used in order to distinguish the individual from the plural, “immer wiederkreierende Reihung” and “Einzelform oder Reihung.” Sequent would perhaps be more expected in this context, Reihe or Bilderreihe however evoke the exhibition context, and as mentioned before the sequence of photographs was indeed first presented in the row on an exhibition wall. (See Uwe Fleckner, “Ohne Worte. Aby Warburgs Bildkomparatistik zwischen Wissenschaftlichem Atlas und kunstpublizistischem Experiment.” In: Uwe Fleckner, und Isabella Woldt (eds.), Aby Warburg. Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012, pp. 1-19. See also the photos that Stahl publishes of the exhibitions in Hamburg.) Reihe however also evokes a series in a publication context, eine Publikations-Reihe. Reihe and Reihung however also have connotations of orderly formations, the ornament of the masses. (Kracauer, Ornament der Masse, 1927.) The photographs in this book are arranged in a sequence, but each photograph goes against the grain of conformist orderliness as well as the ordinary landscape representations, sie tanzen also aus der Reihe. Cf. Klingbeil who distinguishes “Reihe, Narrativ, Sequenz vs. Einzelbild.”
498 See my introduction to this project.
the principle of photography’s seriality and thus offers an alternative view of this landscape, precisely in paratactic and relative terms.

In her 1982 article on landscape, view and photography Rosalind Krauss argues that “aesthetic discourse as it developed in the nineteenth century organized itself around what could be called the space of the exhibition.” She eloquently claims that painting in the second half of the century “internalized” and “represented” the space of the exhibition, or more precisely: the wall. In her eyes the genre of landscape painting came to resemble walls as they flattened. I want to expand her argument by underscoring that the representations grew increasingly more abstract, while painting also explored the relationship of flatness in relationship to the “landscape” (three-dimensionality) of the canvas. With the materiality of paint moving towards relief structures, painting became wall-like in a different sense than Krauss has implied. It is in light of this emancipation of painting and experimentations with the medium-specificities of paint, the canvas and the exhibition wall that I see the photobook in particular as standing in relation to similar questions of “reproduction,” “presentation,” and most importantly in this context: “verticality and the horizon.” An important question to complicate Krauss’ argument for my analysis would be: Has photography as a medium, and more pronouncedly, the photobook, also responded to and internalized the exhibition space or other forms of presentation? Part of the analysis above—and in chapters one and two—has been devoted to crafting this argument, culminating in the mobilization of the photobook as activated by the beholder. Ehrhardt’s abstract photographs can be related to the internalization and representation of the wall in terms of their verticality. As I have argued above, the most abstract double-pages in the book indeed tilt the ground to be represented in such a way that they become wall-like. (Plates 60 and 61 are just one example.) Furthermore, the photographs seriality in the book—the spread as sequence—suggests the horizontal continuation of a horizon-substitute, replaced by the wall-like verticality. The tilting of horizontality towards

504 Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” p. 312.
505 In her essay, Krauss is mostly concerned with the (in her eyes) problematic assessment of “photography as art.” She argues that 19th century photography rather produces “views” than “landscapes,” the latter genre inherently tied to painting.
506 The question of the author that Krauss raises is particularly relevant in my discussion of the photobook and “Autorenbücher” (cf. Klingbeil, and Pfrunder, who posits the photobook as “Autorenbuch” only in a limited sense as the aspect of collaboration shapes the genre more than others, p. 14), because the question of the photographer as author is a fairly new development at the time, and a sign of confidence and changing expectations with respect to the medium of photography and the photobook. Also consider Simmel’s argument that landscape comes into being by a mental process of construction, that could be compared to photographic or artistic selection / creation. (See Simmel, p. 636.)
the verticality of the wall as explored in chapter two comes to mind here, offering a twist and expanded interpretation. The decisive factor here is that the medium of photograph transforms the image, while the book works towards this most radical abstraction by approaching this dimension gradually, only to culminate in an almost brutal horizontality that cannot be softened by holding the book differently. Ehrhardt effectively uses the mobilizing elements of the photobook in order to produce the shock of the impenetrable photographic surface, exhibiting abstraction, no less.

**Seriality and Epigraphs.**

The epigraphs that Ehrhardt placed at the beginning of his photo-sequence convey another framing device, connecting quotations to the principle of seriality. Following the same principle of seriality that photography offers but now employing language, Ehrhardt posits these quotations at the beginning of his photo-sequence to invite reflection on the nature of reproducibility and the repetition of forms and content in art and nature. As the section above about art and science already indicated, Ehrhardt's philosophical tendency toward scientific inquiry combined with artistic eye earned him the nickname of “Naturphilosoph mit der Kamera” around the time he published *Das Watt.* With this understanding of *Naturphilosophie,* Ehrhardt places the three quotations between the two introductory texts and the photographic sequence. These epigraphs, on a page before the photo-sequence begins, are part of the frame of the book, and they constitute a lens for reading what comes afterwards, i.e. the photographs. Analyzing these quotations will thus allow us to fathom the space in which Ehrhardt places his sequence and which he consequently opens up for interpretation.

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The first quote is by Novalis: “Die Natur hat Kunstinstinkt.”\(^{504}\) Taken from a collection of aphorisms, this expression is only the first part of a sentence. The omitted half of the aphorism states that “therefore to differentiate between art and nature is nonsensical.“ By consciously quoting only half of a sentence, Ehrhardt suggests that if nature has a poetic subject, as Novalis implies, then the photographer with his camera simply “records” art forms in nature. In this respect, Karl Blossfeldt’s photobook “Urformen der Kunst“ comes to mind, which in the English and American editions was published as “Art Forms in Nature.“ As Blossfeldt has been mentioned above, this second half of the chapter deals with the implications of the search for archetype forms or *Urformen* more thoroughly.\(^{505}\)

The second epigraph is by Laozi, from *Tao te Ching*, taken from a section called “The Overflowing Life,” which fits Ehrhardt’s formulation of the flowing elementary forces of nature visible in the mudflats. The quote reads: “Große Vollendung muss als unzulänglich erscheinen, und unendlich wird sie in ihrer

\(^{504}\) Novalis, *Aphorismen*, Paderborn: Antigonos Verlag, 2012, p. 69. It is only part of a sentence, only part of an aphorism. The full aphorism reads: “Die Natur hat Kunstinstinkt – daher ist es Geschwätz, wenn man Natur und Kunst unterscheiden will. Beim Dichter sind sie höchstens dadurch verschieden, dass sie durchaus verständig und nicht leidenschaftlich sind, welches sie von denjenigen Menschen unterscheidet – die aus Affekt unwillkürlich musikalische, poetische oder überhaupt interessante Erscheinungen werden.” (59). This omission is of course significant as it eliminates the poet and the other people (Menschen) – and omission that is essential also for Ehrhardt’s photographs.

\(^{505}\) See also: Karl Ameriks (ed.), *Ästhetik und Philosophie der Kunst*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006, (internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus, 4).

\(^{506}\) Karl Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst*, Berlin: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1928. Biology professor Ernst Haeckel’s “Kunstformen der Natur,” published around the turn of the century, is equally relevant in supplying an inventory of forms in art and nature, introducing another title that is close to “art forms in nature.” Ernst Haeckel, *Kunstformen der Natur. Kompletausgabe*, Leipzig & Vienna, Bibliographisches Institut, 1904.
Wirkung. Große Fülle muss als leer erscheinen, und unerschöpflich wird sie in ihrer Wirkung.” The distinctions between appearance (“muss … erscheinen”) and effect or impact (“Wirkung”) addressed in this quotation are not binary oppositions, but instead they are three-steps, offering an appearance that is the opposite of what is stated at the beginning: große Vollendung and große Fülle are thus contrasted to what they seem to be: “unzulänglich” and “leer”, which is then contrasted again to support the axiom that starts the sentence: große Fülle is indeed unerschöpflich, and große Vollendung is confirmed as unendlich. This quotation then proposes the ebb and flow of a changing landscape that the mudflats posit, and by way of language produces the same tide of surplus, to a deficiency, back to a state of fullness. This quotation is framed by two German classics, as the third quotation is taken from Goethe’s text Die Natur; but quoting a canonical Chinese text, framed by two German classics, is a small political gesture in itself. The Goethe-epigraph reads: “Sie schafft ewig neue Gestalten; was ist, war noch nie da, was war, kommt nicht wieder -- alles ist neu, und doch immer das Alte.” This, too, addresses the temporal element of change that the mudflats offer. All three, however, also implicitly refer to the temporal and spatial structure of quotations as repetitions, reproductions, and as difference.

The page with three quotations introduces a lens to reading the photobook: nature is compared to an artist, or even more powerfully: nature is affirmed as an artist. All the forms that Ehrhardt photographs are already artforms because they are the basis of all forms, they are primordial forms or Ur-Formen. In the tradition of photobooks like Karl Blossfeldt’s Urformen der Kunst and Aby Warburgs’ Bilder-Atlas that compile Ur-Formen as well, Ehrhardt quite consciously focuses on the abstract quality presented to him in this landscape that on the micro-level resembles the beginning of all life on this planet, as he had put it in his foreword.506

Goethe as the Original-Genie and Universalforscher, Novalis as the philosopher of romanticism and the fragment, and the classical Chinese text by Laozi, Tao Te Ching bring together Eastern and Western philosophies and invoke a tradition of thinkers that might be more complicated than the belief in a

superiority of the German race and its projected grand history to come. Rather, they suggest the fluidity and change in creativity and creation that are part of the cycle of life. The cyclical dimension above all seems the constant in this picture, but it is employed to suggest respect towards nature as creative force, rather than favoring anthropomorphizing projections. By carefully selecting these three quotes, Ehrhardt creates a frame for the photographs that gives us another set of vocabulary and concepts to keep in mind while reading the sequence of photographs. The fluidity of change in nature is a theme that connects all three of them—the creation of natural forms as compared to art, and possibly beyond, to a realm where aesthetics and politics are merged to a dangerous degree. Especially when considering that Laozi, Goethe and Novalis evoke a humanist tradition, Ehrhardt’s position between the photography of Neue Sachlichkeit and his scientific quest for forms and their repetitions brings us closer to Naturphilosophie. Not for nothing does Stahl situate Ehrhardt in the tradition of Schelling and Heraclitus. In 1937 the choice is more deliberate than it might seem at first glance. Urformen and Urlandschaft at the time are often tied to ideological frameworks that speak to the superiority of race and seek to legitimate this position with a projected past. Ehrhardt on the other hand clearly voices his more humble position and even more clearly shows this in his photographs. In his introductory notes on the Watt-photographs Ehrhardt speaks of a humanist notion of respect, reverence and tact that influences his photography. One can transfer his statement to a call for a more thorough analytical perception when he says:


This is a call for a changed perception through the study of surface structures and constructing principles. Most importantly this perception proposes a strong relation to the “real” (realen Erscheinungen) and to a bigger

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508 Cf. Erna Lendvai-Dircsén’s book that will be discussed later, already in the title there is a difference tangible to Ehrhardt’s use of language: Erna Lendvai-Dircsén, Wanderdünen. Bild einer Urlandschaft. 64 Bildtafeln, Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayreuth, 1941.

509 Alfred Ehrhardt, “Zu den Bildern und Aufnahmen”, in: Das Watt, p. 13 (spacing in the original)
picture of comprehensive entanglement of parts. The landscape of the mudflats repeats the cycle of creation and destruction ad infinitum:

Wasser, Luft und Erde, die „Elemente“, sind die ewigen Kräfte des Watts. Scheinbar zwecklos bauen sie, ebenso zwecklos scheinen sie immer wieder die eben geschaffene Welt der tausendfüßigen Formen und Gestalten zu zerstören, ein hohes, dem menschlichen Sinn kaum begreifliches Spiel, ein ewiger Schöpfungsvorgang, vor Jahrtausenden, als die Erde noch wüst und leer war, ebenso wirklich wie heute und zu späteren Zeiten.

For the act of perception this in turn requires a reading of signs and a deciphering thereof, as he makes clear when he continues:

Dem Menschen aber ist es gegeben, dieser immer lebendigen Schöpfung nahe zu sein, ihre Zeichen und Wunder zu lesen und auf seine Weise zu entziffern, und wenn er sie begreift, wird er spüren, dass die gleiche Gotteskraft, die in diesem „Ödland“ unablässig am Werk ist, auch ihn selbst durchdringt und hält wie alles andere: Land, Baum, Strauch und Getier.510

This complicated entanglement and intertwined existence of a landscape that shapes us, defines us, and is inside us (as inner landscape) consequently marks a shift in acknowledgment of responsibility and dependence. This view of landscape is radical, as it underscores the pervasion or Durchdringung of the beholder by landscape in the act of perception. The photographs of this landscape thus not only resemble other forms in nature (sand formations might look like veins in a leaf, as in plate 18), but also resemble the spectators' inner landscape (think the metaphor of the vein in the sand or leaf in the first place) which brings us back to the idea of the photographically illustrated atlas used in the education of medical doctors as outlined in chapter two. Chapter one had already introduced Moholy-Nagy, who about a decade before Ehrhardt's Das Watt was published had built his theory of a new vision on three pillars: on scientific photography on the macro-level using telescopes, on the micro-level using microscopes and x-ray photography, and visual accidents that allow new perspectives.511 All these elements find resonance in Ehrhardt's implicit theory of photography as manifested in Das Watt.

Moreover, the religious framework and tone („Schöpfungsvorgang“, „Gotteskraft“) further underscore the notion of Naturphilosophie provided in the epigraphs by Novalis and Goethe, („Durchdringung“, „Zeichen und Wunder“) and evoke Goethe's pantheism as formulated in the early letters

511 Moholy, Malerei. Photographie. Film, München, 1925.
in Werther. When focusing on the notion of a reading and deciphering of signs, however, Benjamin’s writings on mimesis and Lesbarkeit come to mind. For him, too, the reading of signs is bound to a capacity to decipher political signs of the present to predict a future by relating them to the past and a historical reading. If indeed Ehrhardt’s photographs and his note on photography are as political as I take them to be, then the deciphering of this landscape can be transferred to the act of deciphering the photographic sequence in Das Watt. Das Ganze, mentioned by Ehrhardt in the above quotation, might indeed then refer to the German situation around 1937.

On the surface however, Ehrhardt presents a photographic morphology of forms and structures of a landscape. Indeed, in a lecture he gave 1937 Ehrhardt references Goethe’s Metamorphose der Pflanzen. Goethe’s spirit of comparative analysis is evoked not only by the quote that Ehrhardt places at the threshold of the photo-sequence as an epigraph. Rather, Goethe’s morphology can be traced throughout the project and even Ehrhardt’s photographic career. Also Benjamin had, a few years earlier, in his 1931 essay Kleine Geschichte der Photographie, referred to Goethe’s morphology in relation to Karl Blossfeldt and had coined the term “vergleichende Photographie” or comparative photography. I see the same principles at work in Ehrhardt’s Das Watt.

Since this section is concerned with the frameworks of Das Watt, we can affirm that especially the morphology of forms as manifest in the search for Urformen frames the whole project. Morphology, in conjunction with seriality and the sequence, introduces an ambiguity in terms of readability and alliance.

One can rather say that the complexity of the issue is born out of the project’s ambiguity.


514 In a first monograph on Alfred Ehrhardt that was published in 2007, Christiane Stahl calls attention to the fact that until fairly recently, while well-known to photo-historians and collectors, Ehrhardt had been mostly ignored in histories of photography. (Stahl, pp. 14-15.) It was only in 2001, that a major retrospective in celebration of Ehrhardt’s 100th birthday rehabilitated his artistic achievements in the field of German photography. (Stahl, p. 15) Stahl makes clear that he had been “forgotten,” because he had been
Some of the plates in the book present an exercise in “compare and contrast,” like plate 16 and plate 17. Our eyes constantly move back and forth, scanning the surface, indulging in their visual tactility. This double-spread presents similarities and differences, and the photographs increasingly resemble relief-patterns of positive and negative, thus proposing a photographic metaphor. What is more, the photographs in their constellation ever so slightly call attention to orientation and point of view. These photographs, that is to say, raise awareness of orientation by offering a fragment of ground—they thus force the beholders to read closely to ultimately determine where they stand in relation to the small fragment and the bigger picture, or das Ganze.

In other words: Das Watt demands comparative perception. It is an analytical project in that regard, because it addresses questions of perception and knowledge, of the relationship between surface phenomena and how we can interpret visual clues, in this case photographic surfaces.515


515 See also Klingbeil, p. 81
Fig. 79: Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*, plate 18 “Ähnlichkeit mit der Aderung eines Pflanzenblattes” and 19, “Grobgeformt”

The photographic pair in plate 18 and 19, following the one just viewed, works with differences more than similarities, already indicated by the difference in format. Plate 18 is presented in the portrait format, while plate 19 is in the vertical format. Plate 18 is more reminiscent of a very flat surface in close-up, while plate 19 offers a stronger relief and three-dimensional quality.

What comes to the fore in this pair is the tactility of photography, a seeming contradiction that is resolved and redeemed in the haptic quality of the prints throughout the book. This then posits the combination of the medium of book and photography as producing a tactile experience, in addition to the visual, and in conjunction with orientation this experience furthermore involves the body of the beholder.

**Rhythm and Sequence.**

Apart from the tactile experience, the carefully choreographed sequence of photographs produces a rhythm of visual forms that plays on the sense of orientation as developed above. This next section looks closely at the implications this rhythm has for the overall argument that Ehrhardt destabilizes the beholder by means of the photographic sequence, and every single pair that together build towards the verticality and most radical degree of abstraction.

As I have mentioned earlier, photo-historian Hanne Bergius evokes a musical simile for reading the sequence of a modernist photobook, when she speaks of the rhythm of the process of seeing or
The musical reference seems more than fitting for Ehrhardt, who held a position as organ player in a parish in Cuxhaven when the photographs were taken. Music was his daily routine, so it seems only natural to assume that a particular musical sense of rhythm would find its way into his photography and the arrangement of photographs in the book. \textsuperscript{517} The simile of musical language speaks to the sense of movement and abstraction, to the changes in themes and repetitions of themes that find correspondence in the photobook.

But it is not only music that found its way into \textit{Das Watt}, also his eye as a painter and art educator, that comes to the fore in the photobook. Furthermore, his engagement with photography’s capacity to capture movement will lead to his film-making. Ehrhardts’s extraordinary interdisciplinary approach to photography manifests itself in \textit{Das Watt}.\textsuperscript{518} Put differently, the medium of the modernist photobook is a form of multisensory thinking that complements Ehrhardt’s artistic aims. And Ehrhardt’s photobook makes use of the medium’s potential to the fullest. His musical thinking, elements of pedagogy and elements of an almost filmic narrative make accessible abstraction, and posit the photobook as a medium of sequence, construction and mobilization through abstraction. Music, photography, visual abstraction as influenced by painting, the movement across time that is almost filmic, the reliance on the recipient turns his book into a multidisciplinary enterprise.

To provide an example for the musicality in \textit{Das Watt}, examining the book’s structure is paramount. After the introductory sequence, the book does not consist of one homogenous group, but rather of smaller sub-sequences, where patterns and points of view are repeated. There is a rather long sequence from plate 9 to plate 47, as already mentioned above, that is about variations of abstraction. Throughout the book, pairs, connections, correspondences, visual echoes and comparisons create a larger whole. Indeed, like reading a


\textsuperscript{517} Stahl, p. 38.

musical score, we encounter images that halt our vision, images that work like transitional images, and images that connect, leading us from one theme to the next.

Fig. 80: Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*, plate 26 “Längs- und Querwellen durch Windwechsel entstanden” and plate 27 “wie Fische mit ihren stromlinineartigen Leibern”

Sometimes the photographs on the double page echo one visual theme, or seem to mirror it with differences, as this double page proposes. Other pairs lead the beholder to a new theme, a new sub-sequence, as he following page makes apparent.

Fig. 81: Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*, pl. 28 and 29.
The next pair continues the theme of relief-like structures in the ground from plate 26 and 27. This double-page however makes visible something else: the pair looks remarkably like a positive and negative, one looks like the imprint of the other. Both forms photographed have been created by the change of wind, the caption clarifies, they are repetitions of the same movement, presumably photographed on different days or in a different area. The photographic metaphor of “positive and negative” invites further thoughts on the nature reproduction as it is tied to tactility and sculpture and time. The forms encountered in these photographs are consciously framed by way of the sequence as ephemeral and changing. The photographs in the book fix something, not only photographically but also in this particular sequence, and they thus repeat the process of negative and positive imprint, indicating that there is no hierarchy but a productive constellation that produces both, implying that perhaps the notion of the original or the author—a theme which the book touches upon several times—is gratifyingly complex. The photobook as a medium only underscores this claim of course, as it heavy relies on the beholder to come into existence when read.

When it comes to comparative perception and a sequence of forms, Karl Blossfeldt’s _Urformen der Kunst_ would have been one of the comparisons available for the photobook-audience at the time. On more than one level, the forms gathered in this sequence bear strong resemblance to details of forms elsewhere, a fact that makes the images so suggestive.

Fig. 82: Karl Blossfeldt, _Urformen der Kunst_, Berlin: Wasmuth, 1928. p. 14.
While Blossfeldt still focuses on the floral shape in their whole form (even if enlarged), presented in front of a plain background, Ehrhardt pushes the abstraction of form further to the detail that fills the whole of the picture frame. Blossfeldt mostly makes use of comparison within one photograph, whereas Ehrhardt gives us strongly enclosed images that rather raise the question of relativism on the macro and micro levels. From the photographs he provides, as in plates 40 and 41, for example, the beholder does not have the means to know how these images relate to each other in terms of scale, or how they relate to the adult human body for reference. That is to say, while Blossfeldt is invested in creating a system of references within the sequence of photographs, Ehrhardt withholds this frame of reference mostly throughout the book, often completely as in the example below.

Fig. 83: Alfred Ehrhardt, *Das Watt*, plate 40 and plate 41.

Indeed, the only references the reader has are the title of the book and the captions accompanying each photograph. That way, the photographs in themselves push towards abstraction, enabled by the lack of references that could indicate a sense of scale. Simultaneously, they open up the forms to more than one field of signification, uncovering the structuring principles of surfaces sculpted by wind, water, and sun, and by the
camera. Moreover, these photographs evoke the history of photography in service of cartography as developed in aerial shots.\textsuperscript{519}

Fig. 84: Alfred Ehrhardt, \textit{Das Watt}, plate 46 and plate 47.

The sequence of surfaces that are half or fully vertical, almost like a wall, reaches plate 47, where we the horizon turns it into a transitional image. The plane literally tilts towards the horizon, giving the image more of an orientation. In this photograph the loss of orientation and the degree of abstraction in the previous photographs becomes all the more apparent, providing a sense of relief for the beholder that now the images are easier to decipher. The sequence provides these images of pause, like a longer note, where the beholder can rest from the analytic work required in the other images.

\textsuperscript{519} French photographer Felix Tournachon (known as Nadar) might be a prominent example, who had photographed from the hot air balloon beginning with Paris in 1858.
The captions for plate 56 and 57 propose two realms of resemblance that differ from those that precede them: the realm of scientific, paleontological classification and that of the engineering. Plate 57 is termed “Fossilschlick,” we get to see sand resembling stone, and plate 56 “Zuleitungskanäle zu einer Schlickfangbank” invites the beholder to find other references and correspondences, in the field of industrial photography. Due to these references, Renger’s photographic legacy of Die Welt ist schön is evoked. The contrast between the two projects however could not be more extreme. While Renger’s intention was to show things in their most objective way possible (which indeed was the intended title for the book: Dinge), Ehrhardt showcases especially in this example forms that invite the comparison to similar forms in a variety of natural states and objects.

The sky and horizon lines do have a place in this sequence, too, however. One of the next double pages (plates 86/87) showcases an empty space of perfect symmetry. The two photographs present serene seascapes, long horizons that flow into each other, enhanced by accentuating the middle of the photograph. Again, the rhythm of the book comes to a slight pause here, as one might pause at the stillness these photographs induce.
This pause does not last long, however, and we are thrown into the forces of the incoming water again when we turn the page, reminded that the change of water and land is everlasting, and can be dangerous if one loses sight of the signs of incoming water. In Plates 88 and 89 the horizon line has moved up dramatically, exposing us to the shimmering beauty of masses of water, slowly flooding into the fields of sand.

The photographs approach absolute abstraction, and thus a degree of absolute verticality. This is remarkable, because photographs usually suggest space—that is indeed their forte, so to say, that they can simulate three dimensions in two. Consequently, when Ehrhardt reduces his photographs to surfaces (and this is also true for those including the horizon line) he formulates something else: he questions depth, and space of landscape, and thus simultaneously redefines photography as a medium that can depict surface structures, tactility and details perhaps especially well. By doing so, he creates a sequence that for the beholder moves back and forth between different scales. The photographs offer no frame, no sense of orientation or direction, no relative scale – they are “too close” to the beholders. This entails that the beholder’s impulse will be to step back and contemplate the image, while at the same time forced to close-read the information at hand.

The rhythm and carefully constructed sequence however provide a manual in orientation, from a long sequence of images with wall-like abstractions, we also encounter horizon lines (as in plates 86 and 87):
the landscape photographs that come as a relief in the calm and contemplative mode. This contrast showcases the sublime of this landscape not in the horizontality and the horizon line, but in the radical close-up and the radical tilt towards the verticality (of the wall)—that’s what abstraction is made of, Ehrhardt asserts. Taking up the idea of the musical rhythm once more, we can conclude that Das Watt is a organized in the form of a sonata on the motif of landscape perhaps, with the themes of A (horizons), and B (abstractions), finally arriving at A, which is radically different from the beginning, as it now offers the incorporation of abstraction and horizons that has changed its structure essentially. For the beholder, the effect is a taking apart of a landscape they might expect to be mostly composed of horizon lines. The images that Das Watt provides can be assembled back to a landscape, but this contains elements of abstraction and stark destabilization, to a dizzying effect that resembles the experience of being 14 km offshore when the tide comes in.

The book ends with a small sequence evoking the beginning of the book. It fades out with three images that resemble the end of a film, the camera moving from the perfectly centered horizon-line slowly upwards to a birds-eye-view in the closing image of the book.

Fig. 87: Alfred Ehrhardt, Das Watt, plates 94-95.
Context for *Das Watt*.  

*Das Watt* appeared in 1937, on the eve of war, after four years of the National Socialist regime of visible and invisible terror towards its citizens marked as *undeutsch*. Seen from this perspective, this book is perhaps most acutely characterized in its absence of the human figure. This fact might invite a reading emphasizing ambiguity and thus resistance; it could equally be a document of a “looking away” from the political change happening all around. Indeed, it is not clear on which side Ehrhardt stands at the time. The radical close-ups of sand- formations are abstractions of *Boden*, but they mostly destabilize by tilting the ground to a wall-like plane and by offering no reference other than what is within the frame.

In order to better assess Ehrhardt’s position as a photographer in Germany around 1937, we need to return to the moment when he was taking up photography, namely to 1933. Ehrhardt did not want to lose his position as an art teacher (he was made to leave by the Nazis with the sweeping accusation of “Kulturbolschewismus”520 and fought hard to be allowed back into teaching, writing a few letters, which read as opportunist or even worse).521 Ehrhardt seems to have had plans to immigrate to Norway, but he decided to pursue a career as a church musician in Northern Germany instead and took up photography and film-

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520 Stahl, p. 133, p. 261-64.
521 Stahl, p. 261-64, also p. 274/75, where she points out that for us today Ehrhardt’s behavior would count as *Abspaltung* or conformism: “Es war kaum möglich, sich als schaffender Künstler der Diktatur zu entziehen. Der Verbleib in Deutschland hatte zwangsläufig Anpassung zur Folge, wenn man weiterhin von seiner Kunst leben wollte. Ausweg boten nur die innere Emigration oder die Flucht ins Exil, die den Verlust der künstlerischen Existenz bedeuten konnten.”
making in his free time.\footnote{Stahl, p. 38.} And up to a certain point, he might have believed in the new vision that this young Germany after 1933 had promised, especially in his quest for primordial forms or \textit{Ur-Formen}. At the time, Ehrhardt was traveling to Eastern Prussia to photograph. The photographs from the trip to this region were collected in his second photobook, \textit{Kurische Nehrung}.\footnote{Alfred Ehrhardt, \textit{Die Kurische Nehrung}. Hamburg: Heinrich Ellermann Verlag, 1938.} There is one photograph in particular that suggests this connection. Taken in 1934, it is entitled “Runenartige Zeichen, entstanden durch die Arbeit des Windes.”\footnote{http://www.deutschefotothek.de/documents/obj/71481365} This one photograph, though, shows the problematic imbrications of aesthetics, the aesthetization of politics, and the use of philosophical trajectory in relation to photography.\footnote{Stahl is careful to introduce voices that called Ehrhardt an opportunist, but she wants to correct scholars who have accused Ehrhardt as a pro-Nazi photographer between 1933 and 1945. “Alfred Ehrhardt’s konservative Zivilisationskritik und seine Suche nach überzeitlichen Werten sind Ausdruck derselben geschichtlichen Krise, die zum Nationalsozialismus führte. Seine nationale und gestalterisch zugleich moderne Einstellung konnte ihn dazu disponieren, in der ästhetischen Moderne und den faktischen wie vermeintlichen Modernisierungsmethoden des Nationalsozialismus konvergenten Elemente zu sehen. Mit der Widersprüchlichkeit zwischen Kontinuität der Moderne und Anpassung steht er in seiner vom totalitären System bedrohten und zerrissenen Künstlergeneration nicht alleine da. Er bemühte sich, Aspekte von Modernekonzepten beizubehalten, mit denen er sich der nationalsozialistischen Kulturbarbarei entgegenzustellen meinte, und versuchte, sich eine von ästhetischer Weltflucht geprägte, weitgehend unpolitische Nische zu schaffen.” Stahl, p. 274/75.} Fig. 89: Alfred Ehrhardt, “Runenartige Zeichen, entstanden durch die Arbeit des Windes”, 1934.

Stahl calls attention to the relationship between natural form and artistic form, and the primordial form that is referred to by the title Ehrhardt chooses: runes.\footnote{Stahl, p. 12: “Unterstützt durch den Bildtitel, werden die Sandwellen zu ‘runenartigen Zeichen’. Damit wird eine Beziehung zwischen Naturform und Kunstform suggeriert. Gleichzeitig verweist der Ausdruck ‘Rune’ auf eine ‘Ur-Form’ der Kunst.”} Runes are indeed primordial art forms, but in 1934 they also evoke the connotations of national-socialist use of the runes, as in the context of the “Schutzstaffel” that
used runes in their emblem as a supposedly legitimizing connection to an archaic tradition. In its composition as a photograph, however, this image is exceptionally powerful. The degree of abstraction complements the almost musical arrangement of forms in the sand that evoke the precision of man-made patterns as much as they recall the precise repetition which Nature herself produces endlessly. The perspective however might be the most interesting aspect of the photograph, as the eyes of the beholder follow the forms in the sand in the same shape that the small shapes on the sand echo: a semi-circle, from the left lower corner to the middle of the upper edge of the image, the zig-zag movement of our gaze is repeated, reproduced in the photograph itself, and enhanced by the perspective of the plane, that, too, is tilted towards the lower right corner, offering the beholder something of a visual ladder to climb up through the photograph. Ehrhardt chose here to focus on his niche, on a point of view that he would explore so successfully in Das Watt: details and Ausschnitte, a protected space of art making that allowed him to explore his search for Ur-Formen and Ur-Landschaften, a landscape without people from a time before civilization. That is to say, Ehrhardt’s focus on the detail is embedded in a discourse of dialectical thinking. It is around the same time that Walter Benjamin formulates his thoughts on the art work in the age of its technological reproducibility, culminating famously in the assessment of the total aestheticization of the political. Photography and film perhaps have the most important role in a re-orientation of the political, as they are so widely employed. According to Eduardo Cadava, Benjamin’s essay proposes a training manual in how to think critically with concepts that have been claimed by Nazi jargon. The implications for the artist working with photography are thus clearly named. Ehrhardt and the team realizing the photobook have used a similarly dialectical technique when it comes to concepts of landscape in relation to photography. Key national-socialist terms, not neutral anymore, like “Boden” and “Raum,” are mentioned and evoked on the very first page of the introduction, but they are systematically re-contextualized and re-activated by the photographs. Even if they were placed in the photobook as concessions to Nazi censors in order not to jeopardize the book-project, the photographs resist an all too smooth integration into that linguistic and ideological system.

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528 “Landgewinnung” and “Raumordnung” are two keywords, that tied to the project of the Autobahn in the 1930s suggest a visual and ideological claim on certain aspects of landscape. Cf. Klingbeil, p. 30.
The photobook formulates an ambiguous position within the impenetrable national discourse of landscape and ground, or “Boden,” and “appropriate” (or “German”) forms of representation.\(^5\) Das Watt presents close-up photographs of forms and formations on the ground, but does so by accentuating their abstraction and verticality, thus turning them into wall-like images. This leads to a destabilization of “stable grounds” by use of abstraction, a visual language that was deemed “degenerate” in other areas of art at the time, but was safe in photography.

The discourse surrounding art at the time is concerned with the question of German-ness. The year of Das Watt’s publication 1937 saw two major propaganda exhibitions in Munich: one on so-called “degenerate” modernist art, and another, Hitler’s personal favorite paintings.\(^5\) While some publications of photobooks such as Sander’s Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts were banned by Nazi laws, photography as reproductive art was perhaps too mobile to be effectively censored.\(^5\) Abstraction in photography, that is to say, as practiced by Ehrhardt still had the protective framework of the representational. His photobook however uses the abstract imagery in a way that questions firm notions of landscape, point of view, and reading directions. Instead, the sequence and the rhythm in the book subject the beholder to a journey directed by tilts and shifts of the image plane, sometimes reaching complete verticality, while always displaying the photographic surface as haptic, thus in conjunction with the holding of the book the photographs relate to a number of senses of the beholder in the act of perception: the sense of time, of touch, and of stability or balance, next to the obvious visual perception. Das Watt calmly forces the beholder to reconsider points of view assumed as stable at the beginning of the book—to offer a view of a landscape that is fragmented into close-ups and abstractions which can be and must be reassembled by the reader in the

\(^5\) The terms “Landgewinnung,” “Osterweiterung,” and most disturbingly “Lebensraum” all belong to this discourse.


\(^5\) Once a photographer publishes her or his work, it becomes part of the landscape of the regime, in what ever supportive or critical role it was conceived or received, and it will most likely be shaped by this landscape, as part of the discourse around “photography,” “landscape,” “culture” and “nature”. Photographers Albert Renger-Patzsch, Alfred Ehrhardt and Hein Gorny are three examples for this. While all three of them cannot be called Nazi-supporters, their continued artistic production nevertheless raises the question if photography can ever be politically neutral, or neutral otherwise. Of course the fate of photographs is a little less predictable, however. Photographs of photographers Ehrhardt, Renger-Patzsch and Gorny appeared in propaganda publications, and the lines are not always clear. The photographs were not always placed there by the photographers, but often they were not withdrawn by their authors either. Klingbeil writes on this on page 38; Stahl mentions that for Renger-Patzsch there is still research necessary to successfully understand his political leanings, see Stahl p. 268. For contexts of landscape photography see Klingbeil, pp. 30-31.
process of leafing through the book. This assembly enables a more analytical, even critical position as it involves the beholder actively in the process of construction of this German landscape characterized mostly by images of the ground. The focus on images of Boden implicitly raises the problem of taking a stand in relation to German politics and aesthetics at the time. And even if the close-ups are an escapist point of view, this, too, is what the photographs contain and thus open this perspective up to the viewers for them to examine closely.

**German-ness in Terms of Landscape.**

One of the key questions has thus far been addressed implicitly all along: how landscape is translated into photography. In Ehrhardt’s case, landscape is translated into photography mostly by omitting the horizon. The horizon usually serves as orientation in terms of direction, but it also reduces the image to one that is easily deciphered. The landscape that the book showcases, the mudflats, is not unique to Germany, but instead reaches from parts of the Dutch coastline in the south to beyond the Danish border in the north. However, this particular landscape on the Northern German coast has been mobilized for an ideology of German-ness. Indeed, Landgewinnung or the permanent struggle for habitable land is what other books illustrated with photographs at the time address specifically. Landgewinnung on the shore is a theme of German speaking literature that Theodor Storm’s Schimmelreiter vividly evokes, and that readers of Goethe’s Faust II are familiar with, as Claudia Brodsky has recently reminded us. For the readers of today, however, this term very closely resembles notions of so-called “Lebens-Raum-Erweiterung” as used by Nazi-Jargon.

Ehrhardt’s image as created in Das Watt is distinctly different from notions of possession. Instead, Ehrhardt focuses on the sand-formations and currents that in fact underscore man’s inferiority to the forces of the tide. The photographic literature at the time did not only look like that, however. There are in fact many seascape photobooks published at the time. The “modernist” layout and subject matter of photobooks had been adopted equally by both left- and right-wing publishers since it had been integral part of advertising.

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532 Die deutsche Nordsee (1937, Atlantis); Rolf Dircksen’s Das Wattenmeer – Landschaft ewigen Wandels; Martin Riegel’s Land und Himmel (1937); Irmgard Heilmann’s Wahlheimat am Meer (1944). Cf. Klingbeil, 30-31.

533 See Stahl, p. 56, 57, where she mentions Landgewinnung und Landerhaltung that are very much topics still today, now however the issue of state controlled nature reserves and world cultural heritage define the terms.

and a “new vision” in the late 1920s. The sea and its beaches are (and were) popular motives for photography in general; many amateur photographers documented tourist destinations, but of course also professional photographers engaged in seascapes again and again. The seaside might in fact be called “one of the most fruitful modernist subjects” because “sand, sea and rocks lent themselves particularly well to abstraction treatment.” Already Moholy’s *Malerei. Photographie. Film* from 1925 called attention to the photographic potential of stark contrasts at the beach that allows for explorations of the medium’s possibilities.

Parr and Badger have called Ehrhardt’s photobook “arguably the best of its genre.” While this assessment is shallow, it still hints at the book’s impact. It is precisely the strong tendency towards abstraction that contributes to the book’s interpretative instability or even interpretative resistance, and simply: its compelling character. There is something else, however, that makes Ehrhardt’s book stand out. As we have seen, his photobook is mostly unpopulated. In total, there are only four of 96 photographs that show the human figure, there are no “portraits” of people. Ehrhardt’s tendency towards abstraction focuses his lens on landscape as a space devoid of humans. To what extent this is a conscious critique of civilization, or born out of the necessity of an abstract artist in search of forms in accordance with *Naturphilosophie*, is a

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534 Parr and Badger, p. 112. Also, in terms of New Objectivity Aesthetics and Nazi-ideology, see: Anson Rabinbach, “The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: Theories of Fascism, (Oct. 1976), pp. 43-73. His insightful article argues for ambiguities and ambivalences in the use of New Objectivity in the 1930s, and carefully shows continuities of certain aspects of “modernist” tendencies, as well as a change in strategy of Nazi use of aesthetics of production for propaganda purposes in different stages of the Third Reich.

535 Parr and Badger, 2004, p. 112. “The best of this genre is arguably Alfred Ehrhardt’s *Das Watt* (Mudflats). … Ehrhardt’s photographs of a commonplace subject – mudflats after the tide has receded – are simple, striking and carefully crafted. Although this kind of thing had often been done before, Ehrhardt does it particularly well. He chooses the low sun of morning and evening, shooting either directly into the light or with strong sidelighting to make the most of the ripple effects left by the departing tide. The sheen produced by the sun raking across the wet mud heightens the modeling effect.”

536 Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei. Photographie. Film*, 1925, p. 59 in the 1927 edition, where Moholy explicitly underscores that this photograph does not have only one right reading direction: “Dieses Bild ist drehbar.”

537 Parr and Badger, 2004.

538 Martin Parr and Garry Badger call the book, with a clumsy metaphor, an “island of tranquil beauty” in the “cultural sea that was becoming increasingly barbaric,” that but they correctly underscore that photography in the avant-garde tradition held a complicated, yet sometimes protected place within cultural life, art-making and censorship in Nazi-Germany. “The date of publication is significant, since it contradicts the widely held belief that New Vision modernism all but disappeared after the Nazis came to power in 1933, subsumed into the propaganda machine in the form of journalistic photography or modernisms in the documentary mode. … the New Vision ethic … was not proscribed by the Nazis like other aspects of modern art. … This is both an attractively designed and finely printed book—an island of tranquil beauty in a cultural sea that was becoming increasingly barbaric. (Parr and Badger, *The Photobook. A History*, Vol. 1, 2004, p. 112.)

question that might be hard to answer. It is a fact, however, that most of the photobooks contemporary to Ehrhardt’s depict seascapes and the landscape of the mudflats populated with people. Since people are citizens of one or another country, we are thus entering the question of “German” landscape photography in the 1930s. Implicitly, the question of neutrality or nationality of photography is thus addressed. Can photography be “German”? Is the photobook under discussion, *Das Watt*, a German photobook and what exactly do we mean by “German” at the time?

There is one publication in particular I would like to use as a comparison to better assess Ehrhardt’s position in this: Dr. Paul Wolff’s *Sonne über See und Strand. Ferienfahrten mit der Leica* from 1936 that presents the beach idyll on one Frisian island off the German coast, Norderney, showcasing young tourists dressed in strikingly white clothes in their summer vacation. The people depicted all look surprisingly happy, and upon closer inspection the whole book reveals itself as an advertising catalogue to promote Norderney as a travel destination and photography with the Leica as a leisure activity, thinly disguised as a photobook. The captions are in German, French, and English. This book is (at least to me: almost embarrassingly) successful in transporting the desired message: to evoke a longing for a summer vacation in the particular region it portrays. The photographs and the text render homage to a tourist destination at the shore, exhibiting the most appealing parts of this German region, mise-en-scène with frequently appearing characters dressed in white linen dresses and trousers.

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540 See publication titles like *Schweizer Fotobücher* and *Autopsie. Deutsche Fotobücher 1918-1945*, which imply that photobooks can indeed have a nationality, vs. the carefully chosen title for “Deutschland im Fotobuch” that focuses on depictions of Germany rather than by German photographers or publications made in Germany.

The emotions evoked by the book and its photographs are happy childhood-memories, the sense of freedom of *Sommerfrische* and vacation that goes hand-in-hand with the repression or simple exclusion of any problem that could question this world that is uncomplicated, beautiful, and light-hearted. The photos have strong suggestive advertising qualities in that they present ideally happy couples, women and children in the sand. Here, the figures in the landscape represent the young and strong German nation that consists of athletic beautiful people, in the spirit of BDM and HJ body cult, on their summer vacation. The horizon line, with equal proportions of sky and space below the horizon, signals harmony, but it also indicates a point of view that is stable. Especially plate 2 and 3 (shown below) show a region that is characterized by vastness and emptiness. An impression that is enhanced by the placement of the photographs that suggest an endless horizon, while it is two different images blended into one to create a panorama of an infinite landscape.
Since Wolff organizes his book around the human body, the perception of the human being (with a camera, keep in mind this is a Leica-book), movement of the body and perception through the camera are the building principles for the image sequence. This difference in composition is immediately apparent when contrasted with Ehrhardt’s *Das Watt*. In Wolff’s *Sonne über See und Strand*, the horizon line, clouds and sky are dominating. One double-page in its proximity to Ehrhardt’s subject matter of tidal inlets and the sand formations found there, just underscores how different the two projects, and thus their different message are. Wolff frames his landscapes visibly with relation to the human body, a child playing in the picture on the right illustrates the degree of abstraction this book can bear: only in the foreground we are reminded of Ehrhardt’s photographic quest for forms, everything else in the picture is about other elements. The two photographs as a pair line up with a very high horizon line, both creating a deep perspective, and the child squatting at the waterline is a key element to Wolff’s book. By contrast, *Das Watt* is fathomable in its radically different point of view. It is the degree in which the camera is tilted further down to take pictures of the ground, the degree in which the carefully selected frames often offer no sense of orientation, but instead create a higher degree of abstraction, and to destabilize the point of view in this space that the photographs in *Das Watt* create.
Wolff’s photobook successfully mobilizes the viewer in a way that is opposed to how *Das Watt* works, and therefore makes us understand how much of an effort Ehrhardt’s destabilization, abstraction and ambiguity is at the time. In Wolff’s pair, the child is crucial because it offers a sense of scale that Ehrhardt’s photographs mostly lack completely. It is thus that we can grasp the radicality of Ehrhardt’s approach: the beholders are thrown into landscape without a sense of scale or orientation (horizon). Instead they are forced to closely read surfaces for details, structure and space.

A few years later, when the summer vacation idyll of 1936 as presented in Wolff’s book gave way to the horrific reality of WWII, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen’s *Wanderdünen. Bild einer Urlandschaft* was published. In 1941 this book uses empty landscape photographs to evoke the battlefield and patriotic notions of home (“Vaterland”) in order to mobilize heroic actions and patriotic death. To a reader of the 21st century the combination of photographs with pathos-saturated foreword, long captions and poems by the author-

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As mentioned above, Ehrhardt himself photographed the former East-Prussian landscape of “Kurische Nehrung,” in his quest for forms of a primordial landscape or “Ur-Landschaft,” a project that is not so easily classified as non-nationalist. Compared to photographers like Erna Lendvai-Dircksen and especially her 1941 photobook “Wanderdünen,” however, it is clear why Ehrhardt today is not considered a fascist photographer unlike Lendvai-Dircksen. Her photobook is full of captions that turn the landscape into a battlefield and trees and sand into enemies. Landscape is anthropomorphized and heroic “deaths” of trees are celebrated in captions that leave no doubt of the political orientation of their author.
photographer Lendvai-Dircksen drastically exposes the dangerous absurdity of Nazi-ideology and war propaganda, when the picture of two fallen-over dead trees receive the caption “im Kampf gefallen.”

In this image pair and the captions Lendvai-Dircksen’s aim shines through: her photographs intent on mobilizing the beholder in terms of support for Germany’s war efforts. The ideological claims in the two sample captions reveal the suggestive power language has in this photographic constellation. Lendvai-Dircksen’s book is centered around two main themes heroism and struggle, both addressed in anthropomorphizing language projected onto the landscape photographed. Another example, the first in the book, helps understand the role of pathos as connected to language framing the book. While the first photograph in the book clearly shows the photographer’s eye and her commitment to composition, her choice of caption, the poetic (or pathetic) “Meereswelle” alone does not give away the objective of the photobook. Only when the double-page of the constellation of photograph and poem is taken into consideration, the implicit ideological undertone becomes visible. The personification of sand, as given in the lyrical I of the poem, describes ebb and flow. The sea speaks to the reader, “ich sinke und ich steige” however


Fig. 93: Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, Wanderdünen, p. 36 “Wurzelfasern bedrohter Bäume suchen nach Nährstoffen”, p. 37 “Im Kampf gefallen.”

Lendvai-Dircksen, Wanderdünen. p. 37. This book could not be farther from modernist photobook-making. The type-fonds chosen are a moderate version of Fraktur-script, the poems, foreword and captions are all more pronounced than the photographs, implying that the photographs are dependent, if not unreadable without the language that frames them. The selection of photographs was in favor of dramatic lighting and perspectives, evoking the sublime and heroic. Three close-up portraits of native inhabitants (all of them are men, another indicator for patriotic duty and heroism?) are interspersed throughout, two of the three are smiling.
immediately become readable as an appeal to endure the fight for superiority as advertised by Nazi propaganda, and not to fear defeat. Lendvai-Dircksen’s book situates itself in support of nationalist propaganda at the time and feeds it with photographs that provide seemingly unambiguous messages of the necessity of the cause.

By now, however, the reader of this project has been sensitized to the undercurrent every photograph also provides. Lendvai-Dircksen as a photographer of course knew this well, and that explains why her reliance on language to provide the unambiguous framework of interpretation. Indeed, the trees in the pair above or the wave in this example cannot on their own put forth the nationalist reading, only the layout of the photobook, the chosen type-font, the captions can do so.

Through these comparisons Ehrhardt’s abstract treatment of this landscape in details and close-ups has become more tangible in their radical distance to Nazi-ideology and aesthetics. The book’s directness against an engagement with the human figure has to be seen in this context of nationalist photobooks. Ehrhardt constructs a landscape through his use of photography, rather than simply depicting it. He creates a space that is, for the most part, devoid of human beings and he thus opens this space up for a more careful investigation of surface structures and forms. Ehrhardt consciously chose the medium of the photobook precisely because it is part of the discourse surrounding the topos of landscape, closely related to Heimat,
among others. As the comparison with Wolff’s and Lendvai-Dircksens’ photobooks has shown, Ehrhardt’s choice to refrain from including the human figure or gestures of the sublime or heroism, mark the photobook’s critical distance from gestures of Heimat. In yet another way the beholder is included in the photobook, since photobooks were popular as presents, especially for Christmas. This use grew increasingly in the years of war. Ehrhardt’s Das Watt does not easily evoke connotations of Heimat, however. Instead, it offers details and fragments of a space that is mostly inhabitable, because it is temporary, and in constant flux.

Ehrhardt’s photographs, however, have also appeared in other, more problematic, contexts. Often, these contexts were created by the captions—a fact that underscores the photographic surplus as ambivalent that especially poignant in Ehrhardt’s case. There is one photograph that had been singled out of Das Watt and was reproduced in an ideological context in the early 1940s. This photograph, the third to last photograph in the book, is simultaneously the one that is least representative in the whole book. It is perfectly centralized, lining up the figures in the middle ground with the horizon. It is a photograph that, especially in conjunction with the title (“homebound wanderers” or “Heimwärts Wandernde”), implies directionality and a sense of home that easily allows for projections of a “national,” even völkisch vocabulary.

As it is set in the book the dialogue with the other photograph at least complicates this attribution. Closer to a “traditional” representation of landscape, this other photograph, plate 95, is primarily about the setting sun indicating the end of a journey, redirecting the spectator’s gaze from the group of people to a space without human beings.

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544 No doubt Ehrhardt was aware of that, in fact the publishing houses often published books already around Christmas, the publication year however was printed as for the calendrical year starting soon after Christmas. A book that was published in 1928, often was made available for Christmas (and the accordingly higher demand for presents) in December 1927.

545 The edition of Wanderdünen (a landscape in former Eastern Prussia) in my library bears a dedication from Christmas of 1946, cautiously stating that this book serves as a memory of the shared home, Heimat, that might be forever lost.

546 Stahl.
As it is part of the sequence of mostly abstract details of this landscape, this penultimate double-page wraps up a destabilization, bringing us home, so to speak. This can indeed be de-contextualized and used for propaganda purposes, but the book ends with an image that is empty, with only the slightest indication of a horizon, truly bringing us back where we started: we have come full circle, looking at a photograph that offers us forms and surface structures. And again any sense of scale is lost. Ehrhardt’s book introduces movement as an essential part of this landscape, and ties it to the body of the beholder. In the medium of the photobook which could be called static, Ehrhardt achieves the complex mobilization of the beholder by providing easy to read photographs only to a limited degree. This results in a sequence that cannot be subsumed easily in terms of standpoint, thus calling attention to the very position of taking a stand, also in terms of moral and political convictions.

Ehrhardt’s focus on close-ups and frames, rather than the “total” landscape dominated by horizon-line and sublime perspective, is what pays tribute to a changed perception at the time.547 His photography is also in this respect practicing a New Vision. The book produces surfaces, and thus again confronts the audience with concepts of depth as inherently “German.” This landscape and the views thereof as provided in Das

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547 Klingbeil argues that a changed perception has inscribed itself into photography: the viewer is more mobile than ever before, and so are her and his cameras. Klingbeil, 2000.
Watt disorient and destabilize, turn images of the ground into wall-like surfaces and question the self-perception of the beholder who might expect landscapes in the Romantic tradition, which invite introspection and contemplations of inner depth. Instead, we are confronted with a series of similarities and differences, recurring forms inducing the awareness that the mudflats are unstable grounds. This lies at the center of this book-project; *Das Watt* is constructed—constructed by a collaborating team of photographer, publisher, layouter, printers, and the audience.

Walter Benjamin reminds us that in its ambivalence, photography is always political. Ehrhardt has produced a photobook that keeps this ambivalence acutely alive. In fact, this ambivalence is at stake in *Das Watt*, because it offers a form of interpretative resistance that is impenetrable. Is it in fact “neutral,” does it “look away” or does it encourage a space for thinking and reading visual signs closely, comparatively, and analytically? The larger argument of my dissertation suggests that the photobook as a medium particularly enhances the space for the beholder as collaborator in this question. Part of the analysis is thus left for the viewer of the photobook: the question how the photographs connect, how they relate to each other and how they relate to the landscape that is evoked by the title, and lastly, how they relate to them as viewers, is the part of the equation that the author hands over to the beholders. Arranged in a way however, that they challenge the edges of the book, horizontal and vertical are coordinates that in this photobook by Ehrhardt are used to explore the medium-specificity of the photobook. When we turn the pages quickly, parts of the sequence turn the morphology into movement, thus integrating time in a way that the single photograph could not, the photobook becomes what Molzahn has called “Buchkinema.”

For Molzahn, a photobook invites visual perception rather than a “reading.” However, Ehrhardt quite consciously complicates this: his photobook reactivates the processes of reading and of deciphering. His surfaces are full of detail that he wanted to have acknowledged and closely studied, as the landscape of the mudflats itself needs to be closely studied. In Benjamin’s words reading the visual cues becomes a “vital necessity,” as the example of the incoming tide showed.

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548 Cf. Stetler, p. 99-102
After Ehrhardt completed *Das Watt* he took up filming, and continued further investigating his sense of movement that is already laid out in the photographs. Time, change, and the fluidity of morphology are at the center of *Das Watt* already. The photobook is a first step towards film, the viewer in the photobook brings in the element of time and movement by turning each page, by actualizing the sequence of photographs. And in a way, Ehrhardt in his artistic biography personifies Moholy’s title, progressing from painting to photography to film, whereas music perhaps is the missing (ephemeral and invisible) link in this development, providing abstraction, tact, seriality and sequence, progression in time and movement. Music is always multidimensional, spatial, and, most and foremost, abstract. In fact, the film that Ehrhardt shot around the same time than the book was published can be seen as a continuation of the same principles, including a musical score. *Das Watt* is *Buchkinema* also in that one sense: the sequence approaches film, but it is more independent as a medium than film. Not one copy of the film from 1938 has survived, but the book gives us an idea of what it could have been like and thus serves as a more stable container of photography that can be set in motion by the viewer.550

Conclusion

*Das Watt* has been presented here as a book shot through with ambivalence, making it an almost ideal surface for projection. The photographs gathered in the book are both abstract and representational; recognizable as details of a landscape, they are nonetheless also abstracted. Ehrhardt’s photography in this book is mostly devoid of human beings and horizon lines. Not quite decidedly *Zivilisationskritik*, this book nevertheless consciously employs various strategies to address certain issues relevant at the time, e.g. the search for primordial forms in nature—only to offer a slightly altered view that cannot be so easily characterized as political, but rather critical in the fullest sense of the word. The verticality produced by way of pointing the camera to the ground could be characterized as an expression of political ignorance, as a refusal to come to terms with the National Socialist party in power and its consequences for everyday life as an artist working with abstraction. In addition to this reading, however, *Das Watt* as a photobook successfully destabilizes key concepts used by National Socialist law making and propaganda by combining both abstraction and representation in one and the same photograph.

How this destabilization works, needs unpacking: Ehrhardt’s photography destabilizes the notion of landscape in its horizontality. He takes photos of the ground, and tilts them upwards, so that they acquire the verticality of a wall—and thus mobilizes a discourse based on questions of representations of landscape, German-ness and abstraction *in and through* photography. Double-pages that are at the core of the photobook, and that are most radical in their verticality (plates 60 to 61, for example), pose the question of verticality in relation to landscape perception and horizontality. The book thus implicitly deconstructs a notion of landscape representations that define its subject matter mostly by format and form, not by content and material. Ehrhardt, I propose, challenges this traditional conception of landscape by presenting strikingly provocative “landscape” photographs that in their verticality consistently approach abstraction. And by doing so he revaluates the coordinates for photography in its relationship to representation and perception. Because the photographs are cut-outs (*Ausschnitte*), framing part of the bigger scene, they simultaneously showcase the photographic principle: photography’s dependence on seriality, reproducibility, and cut-outs of a larger whole.
Das Watt closes the dissertation because it closes the circle of reading landscape photography in the German photobook of the 1930s. While the introduction to my project calls attention to the forest in its photographic and potentially “national” character, this chapter ends the dissertation with the mudflats in North-Western Germany as unstable ground that might resist a nationalist reading, offering abstraction in photography instead. Depicting this landscape in his particular manner, Ehrhardt not only breaks it down into close-up views and surface studies, but also reinserts the subject position in the process of perception and construction of this landscape. It is an analytical sequence of photographs that goes against the more emotive, mythological landscape photography that could be used by propaganda (or advertising), whose awe inducing sublime beauty underscores the allegedly heroic nature of man, and the dreadful phantasm of the “Aryan race.”

While he is still very much indebted to the photography of New Objectivity, Alfred Ehrhardt—contextually and stylistically—thus prepares a more subjective point of view in his photobook. Ehrhardt acquires an artistic position that prepares a form of resistance to appropriation. He does so by stabilizing the more individual and fragmentary subjective point of view (or put differently: by destabilizing the so-called objective, affirmative point of view), and by bringing structures and details and questions of relativity to the fore, techniques that are a continuation of the 1920s debate of a critical reading with regard to photography. In this context this literally means a political act of engaging with photography. Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin have both raised the question of how to read photography critically in times of danger, as I have argued in chapters one and two of this project. As this chapter hopes to show: ambiguity and the lack of a fixed standpoint was highly political at the time.

Das Watt brings together landscape (photographic depictions of German landscape and territory in terms of vacation or heroism) and abstraction (that, at the time, in 1937, had become impossible in painting, but was possible in photography). By doing that, by relating landscape to abstraction through photography,

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551 Dr. Paul Wolff and Erna Lendvai-Dircksen have been introduced as counter-examples, even the more complex Hein Gorny perhaps with his “Pferde”-book where the SS appears in an idyllic setting, should be named here.

552 This book is subly, but consequently working to deconstruct a particular conception of landscape. It aims at showing surface after surface, in order to sensitize perception of photographic images, and in order to prepare the grounds for a subtle shift to an analytical space that encourages thinking. To a citizen of the 21st century, this photobook could not appear more neutral and safe. At a time, however, when nothing was neutral anymore, it could not have been perceived as that.
key concepts in Nazi propaganda at the time (Boden, Raum, Deutsch, Landschaft and Kunst) are critically re-examined, re-negotiated and potentially destabilized. It is thus that Alfred Ehrhardt’s Das Watt can be considered a missing link when it comes to history of the inter-war German photobook, preparing a bridge between principles of New Objectivity photography and concerns of the 1920s, and certain tendencies in post-war West-Germany’s photographie d’auteur. By focusing on the close-up of a piece of landscape, Ehrhardt radically explores photography’s abstract potential, while simultaneously opening up the image to readings, interpretations and projections, thus exposing photography’s potential and dangers. Photography, Ehrhardt shows in Das Watt, is most provocative when it lacks frameworks of reference within the image that could offer a sense of scale or orientation and reading directions. Handing over the work of interpretation to the beholder is what makes Das Watt truly radical for its time.

When pictures of Boden are tilted into verticality, the metaphors connected to ground used so frequently in the nationalist discourse do not hold anymore, and precisely do not provide the desired stability anymore. Lendvai-Dircksen’s book is strongly indebted to this metaphoric network. Her captions equip the images with a search for nourishment in the ground, thus justifying the necessity of war and extermination when tied to the ground as space where roots provide stability, nourishment and growth. When Ehrhardt tilts the ground to the wall and produces abstractions, he exposes his ground as made of surfaces, as photographs that can provide neither depth, nor metaphorical stability.
CONCLUSION. A Photobook to be constructed: Germaine Krull’s Métal.

In this final section of the project, one more photobook from the 1920s will be considered, bringing together several strands of the argument from chapters one, two and three. Germaine Krull’s 1928 Métal is a book that is about the taking apart and the construction of the photobook as a genre. This self-reflexive gesture aims at the heart of what my project is about: memory and agency on the part of the beholder. In my analysis, the overarching question was how the process of perception of and in the photobook is tied to memory and to the body of the beholder. This question allowed me to also consider the viewing traditions that shape the reception of similar objects, namely the newspaper, the essay, the children’s book and the atlas. The first chapter examined contemporaneous reading practices in the context of newspaper and illustrated magazines, and chapter two examined educational contexts like the atlas, the primer or Fibel, and the picture book. The orientation of the book and its handling in the act of perception were essential there. The viewing practices as they developed in the form of the atlas were analyzed in conjunction with the presentation of images on a table or Tafel, presented both horizontally and vertically, depending on the viewing context and mode of display. Examining the concept of the atlas more closely then in turn allowed me to grasp the connections between memory and a surprising tactile dimension in Blossfeldt’s photography. Connected to this aspect of tactility that the photobook enhances, in chapter three Alfred Ehrhardt’s Das Watt has allowed me to more closely examine the aspect of agency that the photobook provokes through this tactile dimension. In conclusion, a brief discussion of Germaine Krull’s Métal will now shed light on the more mobile dimensions of her photobook, and the modernist photobook more generally.

Métal can be called “mobile” because is not bound. Composed of 64 photographic plates, Krull’s photobook is contained in a box and needs arrangement and assembly. It proposes, via the page-numbers, a sequence and the orientation of each plate, but the sequence can be presented in different ways, and it can easily be broken and substituted by a different way of arrangement. The individual plate can be held in the beholders’ hands, over their heads, it can be laid flat on the table, or it can be inserted into a linear presentation on the wall, or in fact into a grid that could be presented in the vertical or the horizontal.
Krull’s *Métal* thus has most of the attributes developed in my analysis: it is a photobook which is closely related to both the atlas as Blossfeldt and Warburg have shaped it (in its freedom of association and arrangement), and to the children’s book as it requires the body of the beholder to interact with each plate. Krull furthermore brings us back to perspectives that invoke a particular perception in the beholder, the body simulating the “decisive moment” when the photograph was taken. Often, the photographs show perspectives that challenge the beholder’s viewpoint: it is not always easy to determine whether the photographs are oriented downwards or upwards. The photographic space is de-familiarized and even destabilized.

Similar to Ehrhardt’s *Das Watt*, Paul Eipper’s *Dein Wald*, Karl Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst* (and Renger’s *Die Welt ist schön*), Krull’s *Métal* does not show any human actors, but showcases and lays bare the construction of a landscape. In Krull’s case this landscape is the industrial area of the European metropolis and its infrastructure. Krull’s *Métal* is self-reflexive, not only in its content but also in its form; it showcases

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One might also be reminded of the dangerous moment in the historical and political sense, or *gefährlicher Augenblick*, as Benjamin has coined it.
the constructive principles of photography, and literally produces this particular photographic understanding for the beholders when they grasp each plate.554

Fig. 98: Germaine Krull, Métal, plate 1 (facsimile, 2003).  Fig. 99: Germaine Krull, Métal, plate 2 (facsimile, 2003).

Of all the works and image-collections analyzed in this project, Krull comes closest to teaching photographic literacy in the sense of producing photographs. Her images offer fragments that can be assembled as almost abstract images of her subject: metal, or Métal, and in doing so, they isolate the beholders’ perceptual process and create awareness of this very process. Taken mostly in various Western-European ports, the photographs help the beholder assemble and—photographically—construct the hopes for a flourishing European continent of the interwar period, heavily reliant on constructive international relations. Krull consequently offers forms, fragments and types that cannot be pinned down nationally. Unbeknownst to photographer and contemporary beholder, however, this network of relations was more fragile than it seemed, resulting in the collapse of the world economy soon after Métal was published. Also the political horizons changed to a much more dangerous combination of colors than the abstracted black and white that Krull’s portfolio provides.

While in chapter one the focus was on the mobilizing effect of perception practiced with regard to the photobook, chapter two has focused on the question of alphabetization by means of the photobook and how the arrangement of photographs is tied to the learning of photography. This understanding of alphabetization for photography then addresses the question of orientation and point of view, and quite literally the standpoint or position of the body in relation to photography as a medium and the photobook as genre. In chapter three this question of standpoint in relation to photographs was explored in relation to the construction of a landscape that might also be political, and Krull’s Métal brings together these different strands. Her photographs do not allow for a specific localization; it is impossible to assign geographical coordinates to what the photographs show. These photographs are abstracted from national entrenchment. Instead they offer those elements that are not particular but typical and abstracted—which photograph was taking where is impossible to say just by looking at it, and indeed the photographer seems to have forgotten where they were taken.555

Are these photographs German because their photographer was trained in Germany? Is this photobook French because it was published in France, or is it European because the photographs were taking all over Europe? Krull’s photos do not provide answers but leave the beholder with these questions. And indeed the problem of nationality of photobooks can be traced through most of the publications on photobooks, suggesting a connection in content and form that could adhere to national borders. There are publications that investigate “Swiss photobooks,” the “German-speaking photobook between 1918 and 1945”, “Japanese photobooks of the 1960s and ‘70s,” the “Latin American photobook,” to name only a few.556 This, of course, is an over-simplification; one that my project in part is also guilty of. In terms of the cultural and material context, however, this national lens perhaps does make sense. It is only intellectually convincing, however, when the absurdity and paradox of trying to fix photography, photographic visual language and thus the photobook to one particular region or language is simultaneously acknowledged as an

analytical crutch. For my project, the particular constellation of factors were examined that lead to a particular form of the photobook, one that is indeed specific for Germany at the time. More broadly, however, photographers at the time and beholders alike were exposed to a more international constellation of photographic images that in turn influenced viewing traditions and the production of images.

Krull’s Métal is a vibrant example of the complications of subsuming a photobook in national drawers, and her project emphasizes the collaborative aspect of the photobook in terms of influence and indeed the photobook’s capacity to surpass linguistic borders. Krull can be said to import the German advances in the field of the photobook to the French publishing scene, as Métal marks the first modernist photobook in France. This, then, is another aspect of the alphabetization through photography that the photobook enables: it creates an alphabet of photographic language that is always tied to—as my project has shown—specific cultural, historical, political and material contexts, but it also always surpasses them and transcends them. Photography and the photobook are tied to language. But as Krull’s portfolio-book clearly exposes, language is in the eye, hand and mind of the beholders.

Krull’s photographs are about orientation within the image, and within the context of the photographs of this mobile book. Krull provides single images—or rather images than can be singled out—that are not fixed in a sequence. She thus interprets the German modernist photobook of her time in a radical way, and more radically also mobilizes the beholder in the process of perception. With her 1928 portfolio, Krull places a box of images into the hands of the beholders, for them to find patterns, similarities, and differences—or perhaps, to learn to read and write photography. Krull’s Métal is part photobook, part atlas, part picture-book, part portfolio that approaches the fluidity of film. Indeed borrowing elements from all of these forms, it creates something new: it is content and form, catalyst for a modern vision. But what is more, Métal relies on the movement of the beholders, on their active participation, and it contains the vocabulary for creating a space to see a little more slowly. Krull’s “book” thus puts into practice what Siegfried Kracauer had called for in his essay on photography one year earlier.

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557 Part of this of course is tied to the layout and design of the book, the visual elements as laid out in my project. The question of the book’s design and layout is one that (for an extended version of this project) would need further research.

Moreover, Krull’s photographs visualize what Benjamin had asserted as characteristic for child’s play in its relation to mimesis: “Kinder nämlich … bilden … die Werke der Erwachsenen weniger nach, als dass sie Stoffe sehr verschiedener Art durch das, was sie im Spiel daraus verfertigen, in eine neue, sprunghafte Beziehung zueinander setzen.”\textsuperscript{559} The relationship of mimesis and learning is one of jumps and falls; it is not smooth but jerky like leafing through Krull’s portfolio is: we encounter jumps and falls in orientation. This analogy for the photobook is thus especially productive, as also the photobook creates space and uses it to put the elements into ever-new constellations.

This is what Benjamin, Blossfeldt, Kracauer, Moholy, Warburg, and the photobooks discussed in this project have in common: they are related to the creative act of perception, as children practice it. This turns the photobook as a medium in the 1920s and 1930s into a catalyst for production instead of passive consumption. Photography in these books—in their heterogeneity—enables the beholders to be active participants in the construction and reassembly of meaning. This is true as an aspiration or potential with which the photobook is equipped. In reality, however, much like the material and political stability in Europe at the time, Krull’s portfolio-book had made concessions to quality, resulting in a rather quick and

unfortunate decay of the book as it was exposed to handling. For a very long time, Krull’s book was not accessible because the quality of the original book was rather poor, so that only few copies survived. In 2003, almost 8 decades after its original date of publication, gallery owners and collectors Ann and Jürgen Wilde published a luxurious facsimile edition of Métal, confirming in the foreword that all the visual details were done with Germaine Krull’s blessing, and to her satisfaction. This facsimile edition exceeds the original by quality, slightly changing the material support to more durable paper that allows the handling in a different way than the 1928 version ever could have achieved. The 1928 photobook thus falls short in a variety of ways, but it productively invites reflections about the potential that each photobook possesses, and the gap between our current moment in time as point of reference for perception and the speculations about the particular material, intellectual, cultural and political context in which it first appeared. Wildes’ 2003 facsimile edition, on the other hand, has restored the photographic image content. By doing so, another layer of material context has been added to Krull’s photobook. And while the handling of the few remaining copies of the original might be precluded, the facsimile edition offers the weight of the careful reconstruction, thus making tangible both memory work and research.

**Memory**

The procedures of memory can be traced through all three chapters, and in a last step I now want to call attention to the aspect of photography that is often thought of as preventing or replacing the mnemonic function in the beholder. Kracauer’s essay in particular pays tribute to the complicated relationship between memory images and photographic images.560 My project however has tried to establish the photobook of the 1920s and 1930s as a medium that is placed in a position in visual culture where the sensory perception of the beholder is stimulated—and with this perception the respective memory visual and corporeal functions. I see the photobook as a medium that consciously trains awareness of the body in relation to photographic images, and thus gives the beholder agency also in the sense of memory activation.561 At a time when the numbing of the senses through photographic images was becoming more and more the norm, the photobook enabled the


561 Warburg’s investment in *Mnemosyne* and memory has to be considered also in this context, adding to the complexity of the issue at stake.
beholder to practice differentiated forms of perception and activated memories inscribed in the body and in the cognitive functions of the beholder. Indeed, this is the utopian reading of what the photobook was able to achieve. The photobook as a medium has been posited in this project as heavily reliant on a collaboration of hand, eye and mind. Ideally, it mobilizes not only the momentary state of perception, but instead brings together memory images and current perception. That is to say: the photobook always works with a temporal and a spatial dimension, and both also essentially rely on a complex (multi-sensory) memory of the beholder.

In reality, however, every photobook of course falls short of those revolutionary expectations. Rather, the photobook, perhaps better than most media, resists an all too smooth integration into becoming a “tool.” In this resistance—that the photobook shares with any photographic image—however, lies its particular and peculiar potential. First and foremost it is a book made of photographs that can only ever be activated and actualized by the gaze of the beholder in the moment of reading. The beholders are invited to go back and forth between the construction of images and interpreting context as much as slow-reading the image content. What is more, the photobook brings together the universal language that photography offers with the individual construction of a sequence and a set of image-context, thus interacting with the readers’ individual memory and linguistic predisposition, transcending national boundaries. As an object, the photobook places the weight (or indeed lightness) of photographic images and alphabetization into the hands of the beholders. And with it, it possesses only the potential for a change in perception, and never its realization. The alphabetization for and through photography is always a process: it starts again with every new reading of any photobook.
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