

# Photography in the Third Reich

Art, Physiognomy and Propaganda

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER WEBSTER

# PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE THIRD REICH





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# Foreword

Eric Kurlander

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Most scholars will recall Walter Benjamin's observation that fascism is defined by the 'aestheticization of politics'. What fewer remember is that Benjamin first floated this argument in a Weimar-era book review. The review dealt with a collection of essays titled *War and Warrior*, which were edited by the well-known nationalist writer, Ernst Jünger. 'The inner connection which lies at the basis of the essays collected in this volume', Jünger explained, 'is that of German nationalism', a nationalism 'that has lost its connection to both the idealism of our grandfathers and the rationalism of our fathers' and sought 'that substance, that layer of an absolute reality of which ideas as well as rational deductions are mere expressions'. 'This stance is thus also a symbolic one', Jünger continued, 'insofar as it comprehends every act, every thought and every feeling as the symbol of a unified and unchangeable being which cannot escape its own inherent laws'. No wonder that Benjamin titled his review of Jünger's collection, 'Theories of German Fascism'.<sup>1</sup> For Jünger had articulated well, already three years before Hitler's rise to power, the relationship between art, myth, and politics in radical nationalist thinking. It was a relationship that sought to escape the realm of empiricism by symbolically uniting the racial and the metaphysical in order to reveal that 'layer of absolute reality' that 'rational deductions' could never suffice to express.

The essays in this volume work to uncover this 'layer of absolute reality' in the realm of National Socialist photography, namely 'the stylised representation of the body as constituent parts of the

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1 See Ansgar Hillach, Jerold Wikoff and Ulf Zimmerman, 'The Aesthetic of Politics: Walter Benjamin's Theories of German Fascism', *New German Critique* 17 (1979), 99–119.



*Volksgemeinschaft*'. More specifically, these essays trace the Third Reich's creation of a 'visual myth of the "master race"' through the use of *physiognomy* — the science of judging character through facial features and other 'racial' characteristics. Although its theoretical premises were not explicitly supernatural, physiognomy belongs epistemologically to other 'border' or 'fringe' sciences (*Grenzwissenschaften*) popular in interwar Germany and Austria. These faith-based, supernaturally-inspired sciences included astrology, radiesthesia ('pendulum dowsing'), characterology, graphology, cosmobiology, and biodynamic agriculture — together constituting an important element of what I call the 'Nazi supernatural imaginary'.<sup>2</sup> Combined with racialist (*völkisch*) esotericism, neo-paganism, and Germanic folklore, the border sciences helped the Third Reich square the circle between claims that National Socialism was a scientifically sound doctrine based on 'applied biology', in the words of Hitler's Deputy Rudolf Hess, and the blood-and-soil mysticism that undergirded National Socialist perceptions of race and space, culture and aesthetics. National Socialist attitudes toward photography, informed as they were by so-called pseudo-scientific doctrines such as physiognomy, might therefore be placed in the context of a broader supernatural imaginary that informed many aspects of German culture in the interwar period.

The authors in this volume recognize that the National Socialist preoccupation with a faith-based, quasi-religious conception of blood and soil was not the only element determining the aesthetic character and cultural trajectory of photography in the Third Reich. As Alan Steinweis, Michael Kater, Pamela Potter, and others have shown in respect to music, theatre, and the visual arts, one cannot ignore the continuities between Weimar and National Socialist-era aesthetic traditions.<sup>3</sup> Most of the contributors to this volume recognize such continuities in the realm of photography as well — between the ostensibly *völkisch*, romantic, racially organicist photography of the Third Reich and the highly modern, experimental culture of the Weimar Republic.

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2 See Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters. A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

3 See Alan Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany. The Reich Chambers of Music, Theatre, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Michael Kater, *Culture in Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Pamela Potter, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

At the same time, one must acknowledge the mystical and irrational trends in Weimar culture itself before 1933. 'Occult beliefs and practices permeated the aesthetic culture of modernism,' writes Corinna Treitel, one of the foremost experts on German esotericism. Numerous Weimar artists and intellectuals, Treitel reminds us, 'drew on occult ideas and experiences to fuel their creative processes.' Among these Weimar-era artists there was a shared expectation that the 'new art speak to the soul' by drawing 'heavily on fin-de-siècle German Theosophy and its deeply psychological understanding of a spiritual reality that lay beyond the reach of the five senses'.<sup>4</sup>

While such aesthetic trends were not inherently fascist, they nonetheless influenced and encouraged modes of artistic experimentation that had little to do with Weimar-era progressivism, what the film historian Lotte Eisner referred to as the 'Mysticism and magic, the dark forces to which Germans have always been more than willing to commit themselves', culminating 'in the apocalyptic doctrine of Expressionism [...] a weird pleasure [...] in evoking horror [...] a predilection for the imagery of darkness'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Weimar social theorist Siegfried Kracauer has cited Fritz Lang's expressionist masterpiece, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, as well as his later films featuring the criminal mastermind Dr Mabuse, as representative of Germany's 'collective soul' wavering between 'tyranny and chaos'.<sup>6</sup> In his *Theses Against Occultism*, Kracauer's Frankfurt School colleague, Theodor Adorno, insisted that the interwar renaissance in occultism — which he dismissively regarded as 'the metaphysics of dunces' — contributed to the rise of National Socialism through its 'irrational rationalization of what advanced industrial society cannot itself rationalize' and 'the ideological mystification of actual social conditions'.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 109–10.

5 Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 8–9, 95–97.

6 Thomas Koebner, 'Murnau — On Film History as Intellectual History,' in Dietrich Scheunemann, ed., *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives* (Rochester: Camden House, 2003), pp. 111–23. There are those who see the *völkisch*, supernatural, and irrational elements intrinsic to Weimar film as less all-encompassing. See, for example, Ofer Ashkenazi, *A Walk into the Night: Reason and Subjectivity in the Films of the Weimar Republic* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2010); Ofer Ashkenazi, *Weimar Film and Modern Jewish Identity* (New York and London: Palgrave, 2012).

7 See Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler a Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Cary J. Nederman and James



If esotericism might have abetted some of the more anti-democratic tendencies within Weimar culture, however, we should be careful about equating fascist aesthetics with traditionalism or anti-modernism. National Socialist ideology and the fascist aesthetic that developed alongside it, was a dynamic and contradictory amalgam of high modernism and neo-classicism, of industrial rationality and agrarian romanticism, biological materialism, and racial mysticism. To be sure, Goebbels and his acolytes were always willing to make concessions to the market and the needs of propaganda. If the reality of National Socialist artistic policy was complex and contentious, the attempt to create a new fascist aesthetic was nonetheless authentic. As Wolfram Pyta argues in a recent book, *Hitler. The Artist as Politician and Military Commander*, the National Socialist Führer viewed himself as an artist staging an elaborate Wagnerian drama in which he and other party leaders were Norse heroes fighting a (meta)physical battle against the Jewish-Bolshevik *Nibelungen*. In this political and cultural struggle, the aesthetics of race and the body, as exemplified by physiognomy, was an essential element.<sup>8</sup>

Such aesthetic norms went well beyond preoccupations with representing socioeconomic reality, as articulated in the Weimar-era photography of Helmar Lerski or August Sander. Already before 1933 *völkisch*-oriented photographers such as Erna Lendvai-Dirksen and Erich Retzlaff favoured a more romantic idealism, anticipating the Third Reich by producing images that reified physiognomic characteristics and highlighted the putative racial superiority of heroic peasants vis-à-vis the subhuman other.<sup>9</sup> Though still reflecting the aesthetic sophistication of Weimar modernity and the pragmatism of the 'New Objectivity' (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), these photographers were, like their colleagues in the

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Wray, 'Popular Occultism and Critical Social Theory: Exploring Some Themes in Adorno's Critique of Astrology and the Occult', *Sociology of Religion* 42:4 (1981), 325–32. Also see, Adorno, *Stars Come Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

8 See Wolfram Pyta, *Hitler. The Artist as Politician and Military Commander* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Frederick Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York: Overlook, 2004).

9 See, for example, Claudia Gabriel Philipp, *Deutsche Volkstrachten, Kunst und Kulturgeschichte: der Fotograf Hans Retzlaff* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1987); Thomas Friedrich and Falk Blask, eds, *Menschenbild und Volksgesicht: Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus* (Münster: LIT, 2006).

fields of characterology or graphology, mimicking and in some respects employing highly modern techniques. Far from rendering the world ‘wie es eigentlich war’ (‘what it was actually like’), they were in fact working to create a new (faith-based) reality through photography, drawing on the supernatural imaginary wherever possible. Thus, while Third-Reich-era photography appropriated elements of high modernism and scientific progress in technical terms, racial physiognomy reinforced a vision of racial utopia, a *völkisch* ideal disconnected from any real-world understanding of science or society.

The perennial debate regarding the visual arts in the Third Reich, after all, is twofold. The first question has to do with the accuracy of Benjamin’s assessment above: were the National Socialists successful in aestheticizing politics in service of their racial and spatial goals; or did they resign themselves to eliminating only the most prominent examples of avant-garde (‘degenerate’) art, allowing, sometimes even exploiting, modern art — not to mention apolitical entertainment — in order to maintain popularity? The second and related question has to do with artistic coercion versus consent. To what degree did the regime manage culture through top-down repression? Or was culture determined by bottom-up efforts of artists and writers to ‘work toward the Führer’, in the words of Ian Kershaw, voluntarily producing art that appeared to satisfy the National Socialist-era market, Hitler, or both?

Early ‘intentionalist’ accounts of National Socialist culture tended to focus on Hitler and Goebbels’ preoccupation with coordinating and politicizing art (aestheticizing politics) from the top down. Many of the same scholars suggested that the National Socialists were cultural philistines, traditionalists who couldn’t recognize quality art or understand modernist aesthetics.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in the 1980s and 90s, more ‘functionalist’ accounts have emphasized the porous nature and artistic eclecticism that defined National Socialist cultural policy, characterized by competing agendas and often producing improvised

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10 See, for example, Paul Ortwin Rave’s *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* (Hamburg: Mann, 1949); Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); Franz Roh, ‘Entartete’ Kunst: Kunstbarbarei im Dritten Reich (Hannover: Fackelträger, 1962); David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Henry Grosshans, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983).

and inconsistent outcomes. Instead of a National Socialist ideological consensus imposed from above, we see a remarkable willingness on the part of leading artists and intellectuals to ‘coordinate’ themselves, whether for economic or ideological reasons, in order to remain viable.<sup>11</sup>

The essays in this volume provide a newer perspective that moves beyond both of these schools.<sup>12</sup> First and foremost, this collection indicates that the National Socialists were anything but cultural hacks. They could appreciate modernist aesthetics, and innovative artists could appreciate National Socialism as well. In this sense, the National Socialists were open to new, even avant-garde ideas — provided they served the purposes of the regime (or pleased its leaders). Indeed, in looking at the role of the state, individual party leaders, and National Socialist propaganda before and after the outbreak of the Second World War; in surveying photographic representations of peasants and workers; and in analyzing aesthetic norms such as *Heimat* and beauty, the essays in this volume uncover a greater ideological coherence and cultural symbiosis between the regime and the arts than one is accustomed to finding in classic functionalist accounts. Yet this ideological consensus is both more voluntarist and diverse than most traditional (‘intentionalist’) interpretations of National Socialist culture would allow. Whether due to market forces or ideology, many photographers were eager to work towards the Führer in order to remain financially and culturally viable in the Third Reich.

The National Socialists, in turn, embraced many photographers’ experiments in modern technology and communication. This modernity in technique appeared, in particular, in the pages of the era’s popular photographic periodicals, such as the *Deutsche Illustrierte* and *Volk und Rasse*, which ranged in content from beautiful ‘Nordic’ women on skis to physiognomic profiles of putatively ‘degenerate’ Dachau inmates.<sup>13</sup> Hitler’s personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, and the above-mentioned Erich Retzlaff produced parallel images of the National

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11 See again Steinweis, *Art* (1996); Kater, *Culture in Nazi Germany* (2019); Potter, *Art of Suppression* (2016); Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (2004). For an earlier example anticipating this argument, see Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1963).

12 For a useful synthesis of this newer approach, see Kater, *Culture in Nazi Germany* (2019).

13 David Crew, ‘Photography and the Cinema,’ in Robert Gellately, ed., *Oxford Illustrated History of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Socialist elite, promoting an ideal of physiognomic ‘nobility’. Similar attempts were made by Retzlaff and others to portray the German peasant as an ideal of Aryan physiognomy, the archetypal representative of blood-and-soil ideology. National-Socialist-era photographers also glorified labour, though in ways that emphasized technology as well as race, creating images not dissimilar from those idealizing industrialization in America or the Soviet Union. Photos of the German *Heimat* were, in contrast, especially romanticized and racialized, drawing on the mythical imagination of Germany’s past and future. Nowhere were the aesthetics of physiognomy more clearly on display — or more explicitly politicized — than in Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia*, which played on racist tropes as consciously and as successfully as any contemporary work of National Socialist propaganda.

What held all this together — the regime’s intentions and the artists’ aspirations — was the ‘Nazi supernatural imaginary’, infused by *völkisch* imagery and the aesthetics of physiognomy. This pseudo-scientific thinking allowed faith-based, blood-and-soil mysticism and ‘applied biology’ to co-exist, bringing the Third Reich’s racial and spatial fantasies into more concrete reality. Though technically sophisticated and modernist in aesthetic sensibility, National-Socialist-era photography consequently drew on the ‘parascience’ of physiognomy to facilitate a project of racial resettlement and even mass murder. At least in the realm of photography, as the essays in this volume suggest, Benjamin’s pronouncement still rings true.





# Introduction

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## Editor's Introduction

*Christopher Webster*

When photography was born from the union of chemistry and optics ('officially' in 1839),<sup>1</sup> it was long anticipated and much desired. From the Renaissance onwards, the urge to provide greater and greater accuracy drove artists to use optical aids when drawing, such as the Camera Obscura. Among the newly wealthy and emergent middle classes of this anthropocentric era, born out of the Enlightenment, there was also a desire for an image-making process that did not rely on the expensive and elitist process of painting. Devices such as the Camera Obscura led to other machines that could provide simple but accurate likenesses. The advent of photography in 1839 presented to the world a device that seemed capable of reproducing reality so exactly as to seem a very piece of that reality itself. Even a scene physically far removed from the intended viewer's gaze could apparently be brought from the realm of the exotic to the innocuous space of the drawing room of any European or American household. Through optics and chemistry, a translocation occurred where it seemed that the receiver of the photograph could hold and read a fragment of another place. Although it did not provide an actual window onto reality (after all, the photograph in its flattened, monotone, shrunken state is a derivation of what the cameraman saw) it was so unique in its time that it appeared to do so.

As the next best thing to the 'real', the photograph quickly assumed a position as arbiter of truth without precedent. This was particularly

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1 Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre's photographic process was disclosed to the French public on 19 August 1839.

relevant in an age when empiricism was the cardinal rule. Photographs appeared as certainties. They seemed *certain* because they were verifiably of *something* — even the photocollage or the carefully assembled photomontage were composed from pieces that had at first been a representation of an object before the lens. Photography lent gravitas to the past and framed collective histories: from the family snapshot to the state occasion; from the dance floor to the battlefield; from birth to death. The photograph was regarded not only as a scientific marvel but also as an objective aid to recording, which would affect a revolution in human perception. The photograph became *evidence* and purported to display things *as they were*. Within months of photography's invention and announcement the new photographers began to travel to every corner of the European-dominated world.

The ability of the camera to take (as opposed to make) a seemingly 'true' portrait likeness, a *vera icon*, ensured its popularity. When portraits were made, physiognomic science was quickly applied to read the shadow on the photographer's plate. Until relatively recently, physiognomy was generally assumed to be able to reveal, by careful study of the features and body of the subject, something about the inner person. The Swiss pastor Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) famously helped to revive physiognomy as a credible study after it had fallen somewhat into disrepute during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, when it became associated with palmistry and other divinatory practices. The Renaissance polymath Giovanni Battista della Porta (1538–1615) for example, had been brought before the Inquisition after over-enthusiastic Neapolitans had hailed him as a 'magus'. Della Porta had, amongst his other publications, also published *De Humana Physiognomonica* in 1586. In *De Humana*, Della Porta's makes a comparative study between the external characteristics of humans and animals. As with many of the nascent scientists of the Renaissance, Della Porta's worldview was intrinsically spiritual and magical, a kind of spiritual metaphysics.

Lavater described how, after careful training, the physiognomist could make a reading of the character in the face; in so doing he was drawing on a broad tradition that included Della Porta. Lavater ensured the continuing popularity of such an understanding through likeness. Nor should the extent of his influence be underestimated. After Lavater's

death in 1801 the *Scots Magazine* remarked that he had been, 'For many years one of the most famous men in Europe'.<sup>2</sup>

For Lavater, the likeness was a derivation of the mark of the creator, a mystical connection to a higher ideal that through moral degradation led to visual 'types.' Lavater posed the rhetorical question:

The human countenance, that mirror of Divinity, that noblest of the works of the Creator — shall not motive and action, shall not the correspondence between the interior and the exterior, the visible and the invisible, the cause and the effect, be there apparent?<sup>3</sup>

The empiricist nineteenth-century sciences, which sought reason over superstition and evidence over faith, nevertheless explored processes of visual examination that were linked to, and born out of an understanding of what was effectively an esoteric physiognomy and widely divergent interpretations of Darwinian evolution. Thus, when photography was invented at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was quickly assimilated as a tool for making physiological assessments, both in the service of science and as a more populist cultural record. Certainly, by the end of the nineteenth century, the camera was being applied prolifically throughout emergent scientific fields of study, such as anthropology, as a measuring and classifying device.

In the late nineteenth century, many in Germany, a country that had only recently been forged into a national state, were keen to demarcate and underline what could specifically be regarded as 'Germanic', both visually and otherwise. One symptom of the cultural anxieties of the era was the emergence of the *völkisch* movement, an eclectic mix of philosophies and trends that involved notions of ethnicity, *Heimat* (or homeland), a return to the land, nature, and romanticism, in particular. Science and photography became inextricably intertwined with these notions especially as several leading scientists, including Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), endorsed a social-Darwinist and ethnically-led hypothesis of German racial science. German science, therefore, laid down the visual formatting for the photographer's approach to the visage of the German *Volk*.

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2 John Graham, 'Lavater's Physiognomy in England', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22:4 (1961), 561.

3 Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy for the Promotion of the Knowledge and Love of Mankind* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1789), p. 24.

By the early twentieth century, ethnographic images were commonly utilised as an increasingly sophisticated tool to validate claims centred on the distinction between one race and another. Scientific texts such as *Deutsche Köpfe nordischer Rasse* (German heads Nordic race, 1927)<sup>4</sup> written by the racial scientists Hans F. K. Günther (1891–1968) and Eugen Fischer (1874–1967) set out to illustrate the Nordic ‘type’ using the clear eye of the photographer’s lens. The use of photography as a comparative means of assessment and identification became increasingly paramount during this period, not only in scientific documents, but also in popular publications that contained photographs of racial types from around the world displayed in photographic charts. What these studies highlighted was not only the geography and range of race, but also what was perceived as the negative admixture and miscegenation that, according to celebrated scientists like Günther), posed a threat to the German race.

In line with the development and use of documentary and creative modernist photography in other parts of the world, Weimar Germany (1919–1933) also quickly established the photographic form as a revelatory medium to document the German people. Moreover, whether the political ideology was of the left or of the right, many photographers were galvanised to impose a typological approach even in their creative practices. Progressive photographic practice in Weimar Germany emerged emphatically and innovatively with its rejection of ‘arty’ Pictorialist practices of manipulation to offer something straight, direct, sometimes brutal — what came to be characterised as the ‘New Vision’. This was when photography, ‘came to occupy a privileged place among the aesthetic activities of the historical moment’.<sup>5</sup>

The photographic focus on physiognomy in Germany that preoccupied so many of the photographers between the two world wars was a focus common to those with conservative or nationalist sympathies, as well as to those who rejected or were unaffiliated with the extremes of the political axis. The celebrated and influential photographer August Sander (1876–1964), for example, employed

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4 Eugen Fischer and Hans F. K. Günther, *Deutsche Köpfe nordischer Rasse: Ergebnisse des Preisausschreibens für den besten nordischen Rassenkopf* (München: J. F. Lehmann Verlag, 1927).

5 George Baker, ‘Photography between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration and the Death of the Portrait’, *October* 76 (Spring 1996), 76.

physiognomy as the central pillar of his portrait catalogue of the German people. According to George Baker, Sander had followed a personal visual interpretation of Hegelian dialectics and sought to demonstrate how degeneracy is co-equal with progress.<sup>6</sup> In 1931 Kenneth Macpherson, writing about Helmar Lerski's (1871–1956) book *Köpfe des Alltags* (Everyday Heads), thought that the photographer had defined a 'clear definition of the physionomical-psychological accord; a blending of visible and 'invisible', so that rather more than character delineation is there [...] Pores of the skin, cracked lips, hairs in the nostrils — these are part of the purpose and reality'.<sup>7</sup> But photographers who would later prosper under National Socialism also adopted these approaches using a 'clear definition of the physionomical-psychological' as defined by those Weimar proponents of the 'New Vision'.

When the National Socialists emerged as the dominant political force in Germany in 1933, many photographers who coordinated themselves according to the new dispensation (the *Selbstgleichschaltung* or self-coordination) were already considered as pioneers in their photographic output with regard to depictions of the racial German proletariat. Indeed, their work seemed an ideal vehicle to broadly disseminate notions centred on the *Volksgemeinschaft* or people's community. The work was invested with a romantic artfulness that made the images visually appealing, as well as carrying the legitimisation of document. This was a time when:

[...] ordinary people increasingly recognised themselves as inhabitants of cultural territories distinguished by language and custom [...] As Germans came to regard each other as contemporaries, they took increasing interest in the tribulations of fellow citizens, tied their own biographies to the national epic, and thereby intertwined personal with national history.<sup>8</sup>

These photographs were born from a then emergent modernist photographic practice, which often possessed the descriptive vigour of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and the directness of an Edward

6 See George Baker, 'Photography between Narrativity and Stasis' (1996).

7 Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is' (1931), in David Mellor, ed., *Germany — the New Photography 1927–1933* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p. 68.

8 Peter Fritzsche, 'The Archive', *History and Memory* 17:1/2 (Spring/Summer 2005), 17.

Weston. These portraits are presented without filters and where there is a hint of a romantic vision it is far removed from the soft vagueness of Pictorialism. They have more in common with Walker Evans' portraits of sharecroppers in Alabama or Dorothea Lange's Depression-era migrant workers. These American counterparts were producing photographic studies as a marker of their time, when their subjects were enduring the trauma of the Depression and its deleterious effect on labour and farming. Supported by government salaries, these photographers sought to 'show and tell', to underscore the primacy of the American relationship to 'honest labour' whilst simultaneously highlighting the plight of these people in turbulent and even disastrous economic times.

Their German contemporaries echo this concerned documentary approach. However, images of plight were not recorded, but rather a celebration of the peasant and proletarian. These photographs are situated as a counterpoint to the perceived dangerous effects of Weimar cosmopolitanism and urban living. They emphasize notions of *Heimat* and *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), concepts that were embedded in National Socialist thinking. They were constructed images of 'Ethnos'.<sup>9</sup>

The subjects recorded in their portfolios are often constructed as striking and unavoidable. Very often, the subjects are encountered face-to-face, almost literally. In the folio publications that included much of this work, many of the portraits are reproduced at near-life-size, creating an unsettling sense of intimacy — sharp eyes, creases of skin, wrinkles, stubble, and roughness. There can be no doubt that this work was often an attempt to ennoble the subjects.<sup>10</sup> Clearly these are not 'neutral' photographs; their use by, for example, the *Rassenpolitische Amt der NSDAP* (the Office of Racial Policy) in various publications and expositions situates them as *political* objects and thus inextricably bound to the fundamental belief system of the National Socialist state.

In the first serious post-war examination in English of the art of National Socialism, Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will's *The*

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9 The editor has used 'Ethnos' as a summary term for this ethnically driven approach to (in particular) the autochthonous peasant and other 'people of the soil'. These were images about the 'tribe', about blood and belonging, framed, as this text explores, through a modern lens of myth, politics, and science.

10 Although this was not exclusively the case — see for example Andrés Zervigón's discussion on Erna Lendvai-Dirksen in this volume.

*Nazification of Art* (1990) suggested that the historical unwillingness to discuss the subject of National Socialist creative making in any critical depth had been the result of an:

[...] understandable reluctance [...] to enter into discussions about National Socialist art for fear of being accused of implying support either for the works under review or for the regime which sponsored them. On the other hand, the tendency to condemn all such works as 'horrific' to an equal degree is a sure sign that the process of historical, social and aesthetic analysis has yet to begin.<sup>11</sup>

Although there has been a plethora of studies on a wide variety of aspects of image-making in the Third Reich, including film, the graphic and fine arts, in the (nearly) thirty years since *The Nazification of Art* appeared, a focussed examination in English of the work of specifically *creative* photographers of Ethnos who flourished under National Socialism is now long overdue, particularly in relation to understanding the lasting historical legacy of their work as 'art' employed as propaganda.<sup>12</sup> Yet, such examinations are still fraught by the potential for negative reactions to the topic, especially in modern-day Germany and Austria. As a result, the photography under scrutiny here has received scant non-judgmental

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- 11 Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich* (Winchester: The Winchester Press, 1990), p. 5. Even this valuable academic text did not explore creative photography in any depth.
  - 12 Exceptions do exist in German. Rolf Sachsse's book *Die Erziehung Zum Wegsehen: Photographie im NS-Staat* (Dresden: Philo and Philo Fine Arts, 2003) is a well-researched, broad, yet detailed study of this period but only available in German; another good example (also only available in German) is the series of essays on the work of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen: Falk Blask and Thomas Friedrich, eds, *Menschenbild und Volksgesicht: Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus* (Münster: Lit, 2005). Paul Garson's *New Images of Nazi Germany* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co. Inc., 2012) is an interesting study but, like his earlier volume *Album of the Damned* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2009), has an emphasis on personal photography and snapshot photography. Other studies are broader in their scope (i.e., their historical focus is broader) such as Klaus Honnef, *German Photography 1870–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) or focus on very specific topics, such as Janina Struk's excellent *Photographing the Holocaust* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), or deal with the periods prior to Hitler (in particular the Weimar period) or post-Hitler. Relevant recent studies of interest in English include Elizabeth Cronin's *Heimat Photography in Austria: A Politicized Vision of Peasants and Skiers* (Salzburg: Fotohof Edition, 2015). However, literature on specifically creative/art photography during the Third Reich, and in particular by those supportive of the regime, remains remarkably scarce.



critical attention in the various histories of photography, largely because of the political affiliation of this work prior to 1945 and the ongoing political bias of some contemporary academics. As the historian Anna Bramwell has suggested, 'Reading history backwards has its problems, especially when it is done from the highly politicised (and nearly always social democratic) viewpoint natural to historians of Nazi Germany'.<sup>13</sup> This volume is intended to be a part of a process of re-evaluation *in context*.

Though it has been well documented how many creative photographers made the decision to leave Germany prior to or soon after the January 1933 electoral success of Adolf Hitler and his *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP),<sup>14</sup> there were some who not only tolerated, but welcomed the political change and, through self-co-ordination with the regime, continued to practice as creative freelance photographers during the twelve years of the Third Reich. This book therefore is a photo-historical survey of the work of some of those select photographers who *embraced* (or at least professionally endured) National Socialism and the formulation of a somatic vision that accorded or aligned itself with a National Socialist worldview.

Involved as it is in the main with creative practice, this text places a deliberate emphasis on those photographers who made an idealised (and aesthetically guided) representation of the overarching notion of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), often through the image of the German peasant (and his landscape) and almost invariably through an interpretation of physiognomy. The idea of 'Blood and Soil' predated National Socialism, however, the idea was adapted and upheld as a core tenet of the movement and has since become synonymous with National Socialism.

Again, according to Anna Bramwell, 'Blood and Soil' as understood by National Socialism,

... was the link between those who held and farmed the land and whose generations of blood, sweat and tears had made the land part of their being, and their being integral to the soil. It meant to them the unwritten

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13 Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'* (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Bucks.: The Kensall Press, 1985), p. 2.

14 Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) won the national elections on 30 January 1933, signalling the beginning of the so-called 'Third Reich'.

history of Europe, a history unconnected with trade, the banditry of the aristocracy, and the infinite duplicity of church and monarchy. It was the antithesis of the mercantile spirit, and still appeals to some basic instinct as a critique of unrootedness.<sup>15</sup>

This book examines the influence of pseudo-scientific notions (such as physiognomy) as well as *völkisch* culture on photography and how this ethnically orientated photography was exploited by the regime (but also enthusiastically produced) after 1933. It analyses the social, political, institutional and cultural processes that affected the photographic practices of select photographers and the proliferation of their influential work during the twelve years of National Socialist rule in Germany. This book sets out to explore how an aestheticized photography was used to create a visual correlation to the 'Master Race' (and its antitheses) and continued to do so under the auspices of the National Socialist state. The contributions to this volume explore the question of whether we can talk of a distinct National Socialist photographic style and posits that if it does exist it might be argued to lie in a stylised representation of the body as constituent parts of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the people's community) by these often passionate photographers, who were concerned with imposing a new National Socialist and *völkisch*-influenced reading of the notion of a 'Blood and Soil' Ethnos.

Where National Socialist ideology itself was conflicted and conflicting (shifting emphasis over its twenty-five-year period from the original twenty-five-point programme of 1920), after 1933 all aspects of culture, including photography and the visual arts, were deeply impacted by the specific demands of the new government. By the mid-1930s, the regime's policy towards the visual arts had effectively become a reflection of Hitler's personal taste for a form of 'Heroic Realism' with 'Blood and Soil' as a core element of these representations.

In the Weimar era, photographers such as Helmar Lerski and August Sander had developed their physiognomic precepts for photography on notions such as class and social position; photographers under National Socialism on the other hand, based their studies on biology, culture, and the homeland or *Heimat* (and to some degree a mythic melange of all of these), the guiding principles of 'Blood and Soil'.

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15 Bramwell, *Blood and Soil* (1985), p. 53.

Many of these photographers, for example, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen (1883–1962) and Erich Retzlaff (1899–1993), had already begun developing a catalogue of racially ‘satisfactory’ and ‘heroic’ peasants during the Weimar period. Whereas their approach became officially sanctioned by the regime after the *Gleichschaltung* (co-ordination) of culture that began in 1933, photographers like Sander were censured. This book includes examinations of how already established, as well as emergent photographers reflected these ‘Blood and Soil’ tendencies in their portfolios and publications, and how personal ideology, social advancement, scientific discourses, and political pressure influenced their practice and output.

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In the first chapter ‘State’, Rolf Sachsse explores the interplay between National Socialist policies towards the arts and photographic aesthetics where ‘media modernity was introduced into a totalitarian government structure’, as well as how this interaction created a lasting legacy in (West) Germany after 1945. Sachsse unravels the seemingly contrary positions of National Socialism’s celebration of the past and its emphasis on a modern industrial vision, weaving a discourse that examines how ‘New Vision’ approaches to media, design, and photography played on paradoxically archaic depictions of Germans themselves, their history, and their landscape. It was, as Sachsse asserts, a process of encouraging a ‘looking away’ that used state-of-the-art approaches.

Chapter two, ‘Leaders’, describes how leadership was framed as an aesthetic manifestation of the *Führerprinzip* (leader principle), the model for leadership in the National Socialist state. The chapter focuses on select publications by one specific photographer, Erich Retzlaff, to explore how this photo-construction extended, like the *Führerprinzip* itself, through the so-called National Socialist ‘elite’, for example, in publications such as *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland* (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany, 1933). It is argued that many of the photographs, such as those reproduced in *Wegbereiter* and other publications like it, go beyond mere record and physiognomically position these men as a new type of man, a political elite. This presentation of an ethno-nationalist elite included sportsmen, artists, and, later, military figures, amongst others. Using these and other

photographic examples, the chapter explores how the physiognomic profile of Hitler can be read in conjunction with an attempt to develop a broader physiognomic portrait of a National Socialist leadership elite.

Following on from the themes developed in the second chapter, in chapter three, 'Workers', Andrés Zervigón examines the framing of the 'Germanic' peasant and worker, and Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's 'psychological' approach in particular. Zervigón explores how these close-up photographs often forced the viewer to look longer at the face of the subject, to engage with it, and thus to read it as framed by a mode that employed both archaism and ultra-modernity. Zervigón argues that the reading of the photograph was thus determined by the context within which the image was framed and the milieu in which it was being presented. From the modernity of the *Reichsautobahn*, to the lone farmer at work with the scythe and the peasant girl in traditional costume, this photography seemed to set out to create an aestheticised and propagandistic record of paradoxical modernisation and entrenched tradition. At the centre of these visual constructions were the workers themselves as time-worn or idealised bodies, racial paragons, and dramatic physiognomic types.

Ulrich Hägele (chapter four) follows the development of the visualisation of the notion of *Heimat* from its Romantic origins in the nineteenth century through to its manifestation as a genre of creative photography during the era of the Third Reich. Hägele surveys the often convoluted and ideologically entangled use of *Heimat* that found its political apotheosis after 1933 with an emphasis on the work of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen and Hans Retzlaff. Using these specific examples, Hägele explores the photographic manifestation of *Heimat* as projected onto the individual situated within the land and as part of the land itself in a 'Blood and Soil' context. The chapter sets out how the relationship of these photographic portfolios to National Socialism was more complex than has formerly been proposed, with an examination of their placement as 'documentary'. The essay appraises these photographer's works as more than merely a blunt affirmation of National Socialist ideology, arguing rather that they were informed by a broader sense of national romanticism.

Chapter five, 'Myth', explores this notion of a 'national romanticism' further by examining the controversial impact of nineteenth-century

*völkisch* and occult currents on National Socialism, and how this supposedly parlous influence leached into image-making and into photography in particular. Using select examples, the chapter explores the photographic framing of the German as 'other'. National Socialist ideologues and propagandists, like their predecessors in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century *völkisch* mise-en-scène, clearly recognised the unifying power of myth and thus promoted (and exploited) it as part of their overarching cultural programme. The work of controversial scholars such as Herman Wirth, and the influence of political institutions such as Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*, played a role in directing this visual manifestation of the (specifically) rural inhabitant so that they were presented as a race apart, having a semi-divine origin in a mythical *Urheimat* in the 'ultimate north'. As images of Ethnos, these photographic portfolios 'revealed' the peasant as an archetypal figure.

In contrast to chapter five, Amos Morris Reich's essay 'Science' (chapter six) enters into the respective scientific logics of a variety of scientific and scholarly fields and reconstructs, from within, the use of photographic techniques with regards to 'race' before and during the National Socialist period. From a methodological perspective, the text surveys Rudolf Martin's standardization of photography as a measuring device in physical anthropology. The second part explores how, during the Third Reich, these techniques were redefined because their scientific, political, and aesthetic contexts had been transformed. Morris Reich argues here that the range of scientific and ideological positions with which photography was aligned became smaller, and rather than being guided by any substantial scientific questions, these positions were used to uphold components of the National Socialist worldview and, sometimes, immediate political concerns. But this process of contraction was not limited to the science-politics nexus, in the strictest sense of the term, as it reflected wider contemporary cultural-political processes. The chapter ends by exploring how, during the Third Reich, the scientific uses of photography increasingly overlapped with National Socialist aesthetic ideologies in general and with certain branches of documentary and art photography in particular.

*Photography in the Third Reich* is an exegesis of the work of select photographers and aesthetic photographic practices during the Third Reich. It is not intended as an overview of photographic practice and application *per se* during the Hitler years, rather, it is specifically focussed on those photographers who engaged with work that emphasised an anti-rational, anti-enlightenment, and romantic model, creating a visual framework upon which ideas relating to the *Volk* could be hung, especially in the image of the autochthonous peasant.

This aesthetic photography presented the subjects as inhabitants of an idealised space and underlined a radical traditionalism relating to Ethnos. The subjects represented a connectivity with the past through customs, dress, and, in particular, the face, as representative of breeding and 'good blood'. The ideal that was visualised looked backwards through a blend of myth, tradition, race science, and occult currents to a divine origin of the 'Aryan' who had, it was suggested, emerged in a distant time from an *Ultima Thule*. And, Janus-like, this work was part of an ideology that also looked forward to a rebirth, an epic palingenesis<sup>16</sup> where, out of the dying decadent world, a new one would be forged in fire and blood.

This book also explores how this interpretation of the autochthonous *Volk* was directed by and co-opted for political propagandistic purposes and where it might be said to fit into an aesthetic and contextual understanding of photography from this period. Although not specifically an eisegeis of the relationship of this photography to ethnic cleansing as a result of racial political policies, it will be argued that the work of these photographers created a mindset of national uniqueness, a visual ethnic identity, and ultimately a reactionary intolerance in the metapolitical crucible of the Third Reich.

Read on a formalist level (a medium-specific approach to interpreting photography using notions such as style, self-expression, aesthetics and photographic tradition) this creative photography of the Third Reich carries all the merits of what is considered 'great' modernist photography from that period. In terms of a purely aesthetic reading (composition, tone, technique, expressiveness, originality, etc.) they are often outstanding and certainly equivalent to the work of their peers

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16 On this notion of a national 'palingenesis' see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (2007).

outside of Germany who are still highly regarded by critics, collectors, museums, and galleries. But such a reading only reveals one facet of their construction. Reading these images from a post-modern and non-aesthetic context (as objects spawned with a particular social function and ideological coding) is also insufficient, however, even when it allows a sharper analytical review of their origination. This book adopts both approaches (formalist aesthetic *and* analytical). This co-dependent reading facilitates an analysis of these images' aesthetic presence as material objects when reproduced in magazines and other media, such as 'coffee-table' picture books, *allied with* the historical, socio-cultural, and political origins that made these photographs so powerful as carriers of meaning, which potently added to the German national myth.



# Photo Lessons: Teaching Physiognomy during the Weimar Republic

Pepper Stetler

Photography flourished during the Weimar Republic as a prolific form of visual communication. Artists were remarkably aware of their era as a moment of transition in which an imagined future of a new photographic language was yet to occur.<sup>17</sup> In a photographically illustrated essay published in 1928, the graphic designer Johannes Molzahn envisioned a future in which reading would be an obsolete skill. “‘Stop reading! Look!’ will be the motto in education,” Molzahn wrote, “‘Stop Reading! Look!’ will be the guiding principle of daily newspapers’.”<sup>18</sup> In an essay published in 1927 on the growing prevalence of photography in advertising, the Hungarian-born Bauhaus professor László Moholy-Nagy predicted, ‘those ignorant of photography, rather than writing, will be the illiterate of the future’.<sup>19</sup> Molzahn, Moholy-Nagy and others anticipated photography’s eventual achievement of a universally accessible and highly efficient form of communication. Germany’s immediate future did not fulfil such emancipatory predictions. By the end of the Weimar Republic, it was clear that one of photography’s most significant achievements was repackaging physiognomy, the ancient practice of identifying and classifying people according to racial and ethnic type, as a modern visual language.<sup>20</sup>

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17 See Pepper Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look!: Modern Vision and the Weimar Photographic Book* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

18 Johannes Molzahn, ‘Nicht mehr lesen! Sehen!’ *Das Kunstblatt* 12:3 (1928), p. 80.

19 László Moholy-Nagy, ‘Die Photographie in der Reklame,’ *Photographische Korrespondenz* 63:9 (1927), 259.

20 The bibliography on physiognomic theories during the Weimar Republic is extensive. In addition to Rittelmann’s work (see for example her essay ‘Facing Off: Photography, Physiognomy, and National Identity in the Modern German Photobook’ *Radical History Review* 106 (December 2010)), studies particularly relevant here are Rüdiger Campe and Manfred Schneider, eds, *Geschichten der Physiognomik: Text, Bild, Wissen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach Verlag, 1996); Sander Gilman and Claudia Schmölders, eds, *Gesichter der Weimarer Republik: eine physiognomische Kulturgeschichte* (Köln: DuMont, 2000); Sabine Hake, ‘Faces of Weimar Germany,’ in Dudley Andrew, ed., *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Reproduction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), pp. 117–47; Claudia Schmölders, *Das Vorurteil im Leibe: eine Einführung in die Physiognomik* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995); Wolfgang Brückle, ‘Politisierung des Angesichts:

Repeated and paraphrased by critics, typographers, art historians, and photographers, Moholy-Nagy's statement became a catchphrase of the era and justified the publication of countless photographic books. Walter Benjamin saw a connection between Moholy-Nagy's prediction and August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time), which he described as a training manual for the increasingly vital skill of reading facial types. *Antlitz der Zeit* featured sixty of Sander's portraits of German citizens taken between 1910 and 1929. The project has come to exemplify the systematic and comparative nature of physiognomic looking that photography facilitates. 'Whether one is of the Left or the Right,' Benjamin writes, 'one will have to get used to being looked at in terms of one's provenance'.<sup>21</sup> The statement is part of an essay on the history of photography. Yet a preoccupation with the future — what the outcome of this culture dominated by photographic media will be — haunts this essay by one of the era's most important critics of photography. The urgency of Benjamin's statement lies in its anticipation of a visual practice that would dominate the Third Reich — recognizing specific racial, ethnic, and political identities through different visual features. But it is also remarkable for its connection between the photographic innovations that Benjamin had watched emerge during the Weimar Republic and this foreboding future. The connection seemed inevitable to him by 1931, so much so that this form of looking was not something to resist, but something to get used to.

Declarations of photography as a new universal language and its revival of physiognomic looking went hand in hand with the racialized and metaphysical pursuits of National Socialist photography. This continuity points to uncomfortable connections between Weimar modernism and the fascist ideology of totalitarian regimes. As Eric Kurlander points out in his forward to this volume, scholars acknowledge

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Zur Semantik des fotografischen Porträts in der Weimarer Republik,' *Fotogeschichte* 17:65 (1997), 3–24; Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004); Helmut Lethen, 'Neusachliche Physiognomik: gegen den Schrecken der ungewissen Zeichen,' *Der Deutschunterricht* 2 (1997), 6–19.

21 Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography,' in Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, eds, *The World of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 287. Originally published in *Die literarische Welt* (September-October 1931).

# Physiognomik

15



Lächelnde, gültige Augen



Hohe Stirn ein Zeichen von Zuverlässigkeit



Gerader, heiterer Blick



Harmonischer Haaransatz

Für die vorbereitete Frau, die in ihrem Beruf als Hausfrau und Mutter aufsteht, ist die Fertigkeit mehr die einzige Gabe, die neue Menschen kennenzulernen. Mit Neugierden wird sie die Dinge empfangen, ihren Gedächtnis zu erweitern, oft werden Fremdbildungen fürs Leben im Dasein gelöst, oft freilich fest auch die Einstellung bald nach, wenn man zu schnell, einem flüchtigen, gefälligen Zeug folgend, seine Sympathie verleiht hat. Ein wenig Menschenkenntnis ist allen Frauen wert.

Gesichtsbewerte hat die Natur den Menschen so geliebt, daß man im ersten Augenblick aus seinen Gesichtszügen auf seinen Charakter schließen kann. Gesicht, Hände, Gang, Haltung, Stoffieren und sonst bilden eine Einheit, die der Menschenerkennung leicht einen Faden klar macht. Der geübte Blick erst aus dem Händeindruck wie aus dem Bild des Auges vieles, das dem Inneren erst langsam durch die Erfahrung klar wird. Niemand aber hat man so wenig Zeit, sich ein Bild von einem neuen Bekannten zu machen, wie eben auf der Reise. Wer sich rechtzeitig daran gewöhnt, die Menschen nach ihren äußeren Kennzeichen zu verstehen, hat sich manche türen Erfahrung aus dem Wege gehen können.

Am wichtigsten sind Ausdruck und Schnitt der Augen ein gerader Blick ist nur dann ein Zeichen von Aufrichtigkeit, wenn er ungenossen, nicht haupthaft wirkt, denn er ist gerade zünger sehr wertig, den Blick nicht niederzuschlagen, wenn man in kurz die Nase feht. Glühende Augen sind fast stets ein Zeichen von Hingeblichkeit und Güte; ruhige Menschen haben, wenn überhaupt, nur mit dem Grunde, durchdringender Blick ist ein Zeichen von hohem Verstand, aber auch von kalter Berechnung; zerkleinerter Blick zeigt von Unüberwindlichkeit, Mangel an Selbstvertrauen und Schwäche.

Sehr wichtig ist auch die Stirn. Eine hohe Stirn bedeutet auf Überlegenheit, Anständigkeit, Zu-

verlässigkeit und in den meisten, aber nicht allen Fällen auf einen hochentwickelten Intellekt; fliehende Stirn ist ein Zeichen von Delirium; eine niedrige Stirn spricht von Bescheidenheit und Bescheidenheit. Auch der Haarschnitt hat dem Runden genug. Harmonische Menschen mit gleich gut entwickelten Gesichtes- und Hingebungen weisen, ob



Weich umrissene, gutmütige Nase



Scharf gezeichnete, egoistische Nase

Mann oder Frau, einen nach der Mitte zu leicht gelehnten Haarschnitt auf; der genau horizontal verlaufende Trennungsfeld von Stirn und Haar ist meist Zeichen eines eigenwilligen und beschränkten Charakters. Jede oder an den Seiten (belebten) deuten gewöhnlich auf eine über das Maß hinaus entwickelte Intelligenz.

Weniger bedeuten, aber auch charakteristisch ist die Form der Nase. Eine große, aber nicht scharf gezeichnete Nase gehört meist einem gutmütigen,

aber schwachen Menschen; die ausgeprägt scharfe, schmalrindige Nase bedeutet einen hohen Verstand, der aber meist mit Hartnäckigkeit verbunden ist. Kurz, vorstehende, mittlere Nase lassen auf große Zuverlässigkeit und Energie, besonders im Organisieren, schließen. Dem Genie eigen ist die feine, längliche, leicht gekrümmte, am Ende nach oben gekrümmte Nase. Sehr feine, lange Nase lassen auf Gemüthsart und Unbeständigkeit von Rücksicht zu.

Rund der Mund, Schmalz, dünne, stets sehr zusammengepresste Lippen sind kein gutes Zeichen. Sie gebären fast stets einem verbittern, rücksichtslos, immer aber einem überaus reflektierten und der Umwelt feinsinnig gegenüberstehenden Menschen. Auch zu volle Lippen mahnen zur Verleumdung, außer bei sehr jungen Menschen. Sie erzählen von harter Sinnlichkeit und unruhiger Betörung des Materieellen. Andererseits sind gerade, schmale Lippen oft sehr gefällig und freundlich und als vergebender Umgang nicht umhin zu meiden. Menschen mit herunterhängender Unterlippe sind geistig meist höchst unbeständig, oft sogar schwachmütig und immer höchst unzuverlässig. Die hart vorgegebene Unterlippe dagegen ist fast stets ein Zeichen von unbegrenzter Entschlossenheit und geradem, aber auch trügigem Charakter.

Ebenso deutet ein hart vorstehendes Kinn auf Egoismus, ja Sturheit. Ein umhüllendes Kinn dagegen läßt auf Gutmütigkeit und Zuverlässigkeit schließen. Ein Kinn mit freigen, scharf gezeichneten Konturen gebt immer einem charaktervollen, selbstbewußten Menschen. Hohlheit der Unterlippe und der Rundung des Kinnes selbst für eine Verleumdung selbst; verleiht das Kinn in einer Linie mit der Unterlippe, so hat man es mit einem sehr egoistischen Menschen zu tun, der unter gar keinen Umständen auf sein eigenes Interesse verzichtet. Ein hohes Kinn bedeutet meist Intelligenz, aber schwachen Charakter.



Volle, sinnliche Lippen



Ausgeprägtes, selbstbewußtes Kinn



Schön gezeichneter, charaktervoller Mund



Kurzes, „intelligente“ Kinn

Fig. 0.1 'Physiognomik,' Praktische Berlinerin 16 (1927), 15. Public domain.

that National-Socialist-era culture developed from — rather than broke with — Weimar aesthetic traditions. The racial strategies of photographers during the Third Reich took advantage of efforts to instill a photographic literacy in a mass public during the Weimar Republic. In the first chapter of this volume, Rolf Sachsse argues for the ‘media modernity’ of the Third Reich — how some of the totalitarian regime’s most celebrated photographers developed from the strategies of ‘New Vision’ photography during the 1920s and early 1930s. This introduction establishes efforts to train modern viewers in photographic literacy during the Weimar Republic as an important parallel trend. The photographers discussed in the chapters that follow build on such skills already put in place by the photo-media culture of the Weimar Republic.

Illustrated magazines and newspaper editors were aware that the growing dominance of the visual required their readers to possess new sets of perceptual skills. An article from 1927, published in the women’s magazine *Praktische Berliner* (see Fig. 0.1), presents physiognomy as a way to enhance the enjoyment of summer vacations:

For the married woman who is wrapped up in her occupation as housewife and mother, vacation is the only opportunity to meet new people... Luckily, the nature of man was created so that his character can for the most part be determined from facial features. Writing, hands, gait, posture, shape of the head, and face create a unity that good judges of character quickly utilize for their purposes.<sup>22</sup>

Although its origins lie in the ancient world, the article describes physiognomy as a modern visual skill that can be developed through experience.

Physiognomic skills also prevent potentially duplicitous social interactions: ‘Lifelong friendships are often started on the beach, and of course disappointment often follows soon after a hasty, pleasant attraction, when one’s affections have been given away too quickly. Knowledge of humankind is necessary for all women’.<sup>23</sup> The photographs accompanying the essay break up the human face into the most concentrated areas of physiognomic meaning: eyes, forehead, lips, chin, and nose. The layout of the article emphasizes the separation of the face into parts, yet it also allows the viewer to imagine their reorganization

<sup>22</sup> ‘Physiognomik,’ *Praktische Berliner* 16 (1927), 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

into a unified whole. Columns of text separate eyes from lips, foreheads from chins, while the photographs of noses appear in the middle of the page. The article's photographs provide views of the face through which the overall character and identity of a person can be deduced. Two photographs of each part of the face appear, allowing us to compare, for example, a 'softly outlined, good-natured nose' to a 'sharply outlined, egotistical nose.' The physiognomic lesson of this essay depends on the cropping, close-ups, and montage-like arrangement of photographic images. Physiognomic reading is considered a skill necessary to interact with strangers in modern life. It requires modern viewers to organize information and establish a coherent worldview from an overwhelming visual field. As presented in this article, physiognomy involved determining the whole from the part, deducing characteristics of a person from a particularly telling detail. The determination of character from facial features cropped and isolated in photographs exemplifies the kind of visual training that Molzahn and Moholy-Nagy promoted.

While illustrated newspapers like *Praktische Berliner* trained a mass audience in physiognomic looking, photographic archives of racial types were emerging as important tools in areas of specialized study. Dr Egon von Eickstadt's *Archiv für Rassenbilder* (Archive of Racial Images) assembled 'scientifically and technically flawless images from life' into an archive of 'all races and racial groups of the Earth'.<sup>24</sup> Offered for sale to the public as a book in 1926, the archive consisted of small cards that could be used 'for instruction and lectures' and fulfilled 'the needs of anthropologists and representatives of neighbouring fields (anatomy, ethnology, geography, and others)'.<sup>25</sup> In order to convey scientific standardization and objectivity, each card showed a profile, frontal, and oblique photography of a member of a particular race. Eickstadt's archive emphasizes the comprehensive nature of the physiognomic project that is so easily facilitated by the reproducibility of the photographic medium. Multiple photographs are compiled into one composite picture of a race or ethnicity.

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24 Egon von Eickstedt, ed., *Archiv für Rassenbilder: Bildaufsätze zur Rassenkunde* (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1926). An advertisement for the archive in the back of Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, *Von Seele und Antlitz der Rassen und Völker: Eine Einführung in die vergleichende Ausdrucksforschung* (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1929) states, 'Das Archiv will in absehbarer Zeit von allen Rassen und Rassengruppen der Erde wissenschaftlich und technisch einwandfreie Bilder vom Lebenden bieten.'

25 From advertisement in the back of Clauss, *Von Seele und Antlitz der Rassen und Völker* (1929).





Fig. 0.2 Bildaufsatz 2, Archivkarte 14 (Image attachment 2, archive card 14) in Egon von Eickstedt, ed., *Archiv für Rassenbilder: Bildaufsätze zur Rassenkunde* (Archive of Pictures of Race: Image Cards for Racial Studies) (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1926). Public domain.

Such an approach anticipates photographic books like Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race), discussed by Andrés Zervigón in the third chapter of this collection. Erich Retzlaff's *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (The Face of the Spirit) compiles photographs of elite German individuals into a comprehensive portrait of German national and cultural achievement, as demonstrated by Christopher Webster in chapter two.

Chiromancy, the physiognomic study of the hands, was an occult yet prevalent part of Weimar culture's obsession with the signifying potential of the body. Photographic books of hands helped to revive this mythical form of knowledge. *Das Buch der hundert Hände* (The Book of a Hundred Hands) is compiled by an enigmatic 'Mme. Sylvia,' who appears in the frontispiece of the book with her face covered by a black mask.<sup>26</sup>

26 Mme. Sylvia, *Das Buch der hundert Hände: mit einer Geschichte der Chirosophie* (Dresden: Verlag von Wolfgang Jess, 1931).



Fig. 0.3 Frontispiece, Mme. Sylvia, *Das Buch der hunderte Hände: mit einer Geschichte der Chirosophie* (The Book of a Hundred Hands) (Dresden: Verlag von Wolfgang Jess, 1931). Public domain.

The photograph sets up a tension between visibility and invisibility and announces the mysterious nature of the knowledge contained on the following pages. Like many physiognomic projects subsequently produced during the Third Reich, *Das Buch der hunderte Hände* and its author, Mme. Sylvia, mixes the rational and the occult. *Das Buch der hunderte Hände* focuses on the hands of identifiable figures such as Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein (see Fig. 0.4).

In addition to photographs of distinguished hands, the book contains several images of handprints, which conflates the photographic index and the direct trace of human hands in ink on paper. While publication does not establish a German national identity, like books of photographic portraits published by National Socialists, it establishes physiognomic looking as a form of mystically defined knowledge, a way of connecting what is seen in a photograph with spiritually sanctioned truth.

*Hände: eine Sammlung von Handabbildungen grosser Toter und Lebender* (Hands: A Collection of Images of Hands of Great Dead and Living People) mixes photographs of the hands of key historical figures

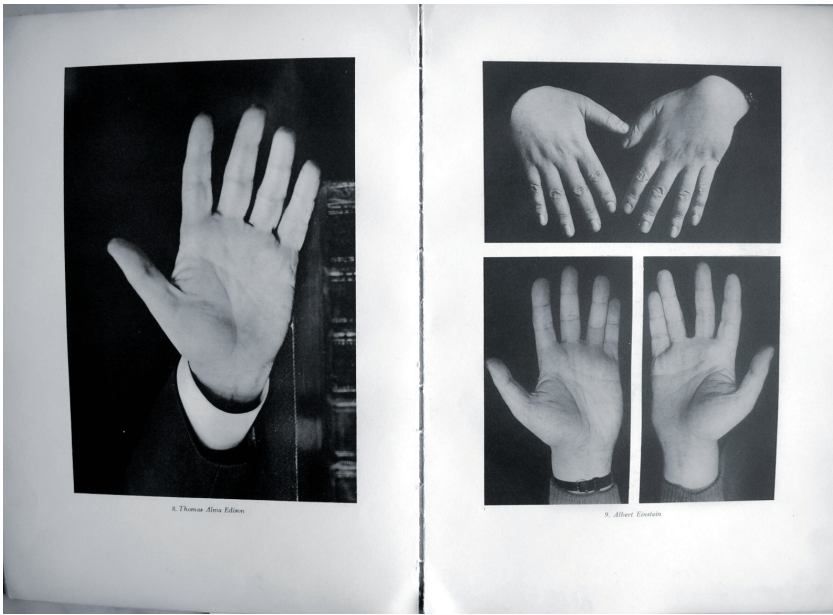


Fig. 0.4 The hands of the inventor Thomas Alva Edison and the theoretical physicist Albert Einstein reproduced in Mme. Sylvia, *Das Buch der hundert Hände: mit einer Geschichte der Chirosophie* (The Book of a Hundred Hands) (Dresden: Verlag von Wolfgang Jess, 1931). Public domain.

with the anonymous hands of professions and ethnicities. The book's preface states that the photographs in the book are meant to connect the appearance of man to an overall 'world view':

Observations and the conclusions drawn from them are based on the general recognition that the form and whole external appearance of man offers a symbolism that concerns itself intensively with the dependence of the worldview on the pure observation of objects. [...] The more the pure function of this perception is intensified, this symbolism is given specific contents and a connection between man and world, between past and future can be created.<sup>27</sup>

Along with the preface, the book includes brief commentaries on the photographs collected. The first thirty-five plates in *Hände* feature the hands of legendary names in European history, including Napoleon,

27 *Hände: Eine Sammlung von Handabbildungen grosser Toter und Lebender* (Hamburg: Gebrüder Enoch Verlag, 1929), p. 5.



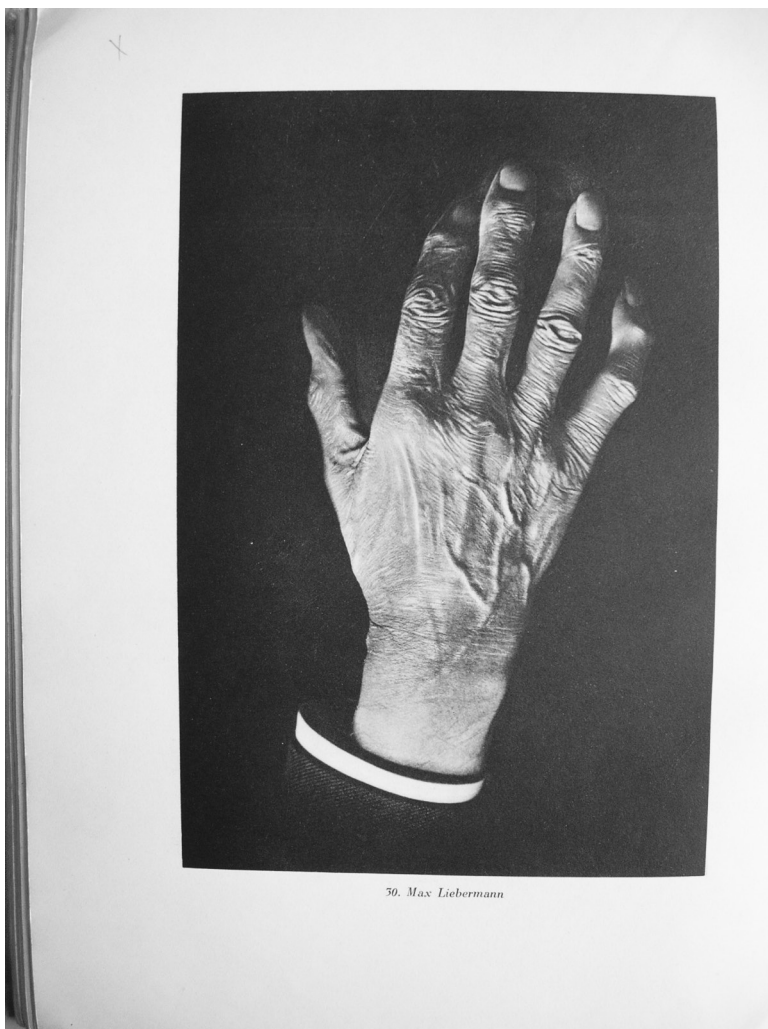


Fig. 0.5 The hand of the artist Max Liebermann reproduced in *Hände: eine Sammlung von Handabbildungen grosser Toter und Lebender* (Hands: A Collection of Images of Hands of Great Dead and Living People) (Hamburg: Gebrüder Enoch Verlag, 1929). Public domain.

Goethe, Victor Hugo, and Gottfried Keller.<sup>28</sup> The book then shows the hands of contemporary notables that exemplify a certain type. The text points to the distinctive features of the hands, the lengths of certain fingers, the width of wrists, the lines on the palm, which indicate certain traits of the individual. For example, the 'slender hand and long, strong, jointed fingers with youthful and long nails' of Max Liebermann in plate 49 is associated with the 'strong, subjective naturalism' of his painting<sup>29</sup> (see Fig. 0.5).

Intermixed with such famous hands are also anonymous examples of the hands of members of a professional occupation. Plate 46, for example, shows the 'short, stable, widely separated fingers with wide ends' of an engineer, whose 'strongly developed lines of the hand are repetitively crossed and sometimes broken'.<sup>30</sup> Plate 48 displays the 'strong and long hand with a regular and oval form' of a photographer.<sup>31</sup> Hands often appear with props appropriate to the profession being represented. The hands of a mountaineer in plate 59 are holding a pick and lantern. The hands of a potter in plate 60 appear in the act of working on a potter's wheel. Other hands represent ethnicities, such as the 'Brazilian' hands in plate 75 and the 'Somali' hands in plate 76. Others are meant to express emotions. The limp hand in plate 82 is labelled as a 'tired hand.' The interlocking hands with bent wrists in plate 85 demonstrate 'tense hands.' Despite these brief commentaries that guide the viewer to notice certain characteristic features in each hand, and to compare the long fingers of the painter to the short, blunt fingers of the engineer, a brief note at the beginning of these introductory commentaries states that these remarks 'in no way attempt to create meaning or an analysis' but instead mean to 'encourage precise observation'.<sup>32</sup> The accompanying text guides the viewer to notice certain aspects of the photographed hands. While physiognomic meaning purports to be purely visual, text is nonetheless required to teach viewers how to look.

28 *Hände* does not explain how photographs of the hands of such historical figures were obtained.

29 *Hände: Eine Sammlung von Handabbildungen grosser Toter und Lebender* (1929), p. 15.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

31 Plates 46, 48, 57 (Office Worker), 60 (Potter), 64 (Worker), and 66 (Draftswoman) are credited to Albert Renger-Patzsch. The hand of the photographer in plate 48, is possibly a self-portrait, although it is not identified as such.

32 *Hände: Eine Sammlung von Handabbildungen grosser Toter und Lebender* (1929), p. 3.

Hands act simultaneously as a bodily fragment and their own autonomous system of expression. Beyond the traits and emotions of an individual, Weimar-era physiognomic studies searched for evidence of unifying connections among social, ethnic, and racial groups. Bodily movements and gestures could potentially express the unifying features of a culture or race. In his book *Das Gesichtsausdruck des Menschen* (The Facial Expression of Man), the physician Hermann Krukenberg wrote that 'above all else it is an issue of whether a legitimate inner connection exists overall or whether facial expression is determined only by habits and upbringing. In the latter case, the entire study of facial expression can demand only a relatively small amount of interest'.<sup>33</sup> Krukenberg indicates a desire to locate a unifying and eternal trait of humankind, something eternally present rather than shaped by circumstantial context. He also attempts to move the study of communication away from linguistic theory and semiotics.<sup>34</sup> Human identity, and the expression of that identity, he argued, was not entirely discursive or arbitrarily motivated. Instead, unifying, eternal features of humanity remain constant, but manifest themselves in various forms. 'The human *Gesichtsausdruck* is a combination of facial expression and enduring features. The latter primarily forms the characteristic traces of humankind and the peculiarities of race specifically.'<sup>35</sup> Because the face displays the 'enduring features,' its expressions make up a universal form of communication that is unspeakable and purely visual: 'One language is still understood by all people but is not taught in any school nor found in any grammar book, is understood by a child as well as by a language teacher: the silent language of the face'.<sup>36</sup> Krukenberg acknowledges the multi-dimensional and transformative nature of the human subject and argues for the importance of his theories to doctors, psychologists, and artists.

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33 Hermann Krukenberg, *Der Gesichtsausdruck des Menschen* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1920), p. 8.

34 Frederic Schwartz discusses the revived interest in physiognomy in the 1920s and 1930s as an effort to move theories of communication beyond the arbitrary motivation of signs. See Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical theory and the history of art in twentieth-century Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 188–89.

35 Krukenberg, *Der Gesichtsausdruck des Menschen* (1920), p. 3.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

Physiognomic theories guided discussions of portrait photography in the Weimar Republic. Manuals for amateur portrait photographers often included chapters that offered introductory lessons in physiognomy.<sup>37</sup> An essay by the psychologist Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss appeared in the 1931 issue of *Das deutsche Lichtbild*, an annual publication devoted to debates and discussions in avant-garde photography.<sup>38</sup> The publication by a psychologist in *Das deutsche Lichtbild* suggests a close connection between physiognomic applications of photography and artistic approaches to the medium. Clauss argues that modern man's distance from nature has made it difficult to capture his 'natural expression' in a photograph. In opposition to 'atelier portraiture,' Clauss calls for a photographic practice that 'wants to capture the human face in the deepest sense of its expression of life'.<sup>39</sup> It is easier, he states, to capture the 'expression' of animals, because they 'know nothing about cameras or photographs'.<sup>40</sup> Clauss goes on to contrast the unposed behaviour of animals with 'the "modern urbanite," who knows too much about the camera' and has a tendency to unnaturally pose and 'play a role' while being photographed. Clauss emphasizes the importance of capturing what the sitter does not control. By virtue of their unconscious nature, certain details can provide access to the interiority of the subject. The less consciously such details are produced, the more purely interiority is being expressed.

Whether he is successful at guiding the play of expression on the face of his subject depends on the strategy of the photographer — his approach to the camera and towards an unconscious expression. There are hardly any general rules. The ways are as varied as the people themselves that we want to capture in photographs. Each person and each type, for example each racial type, demands a different approach.<sup>41</sup>

Clauss argues that it is the responsibility of the photographer, rather than the sitter, to conjure up the interior 'expression of life'. Like

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37 For example, see chapter 15, 'Etwas Physiognomik,' in Franz Fiedler, *Porträt-Photographie* (Berlin: Photokino-Verlag, 1934).

38 Annual issues of *Das deutsche Lichtbild* began in 1927 and were published by Robert and Bruno Schultz.

39 Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, 'Das Menschliche Antlitz,' in *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* (Berlin: Verlag Robert & Bruno Schultz, 1931), unpaginated.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

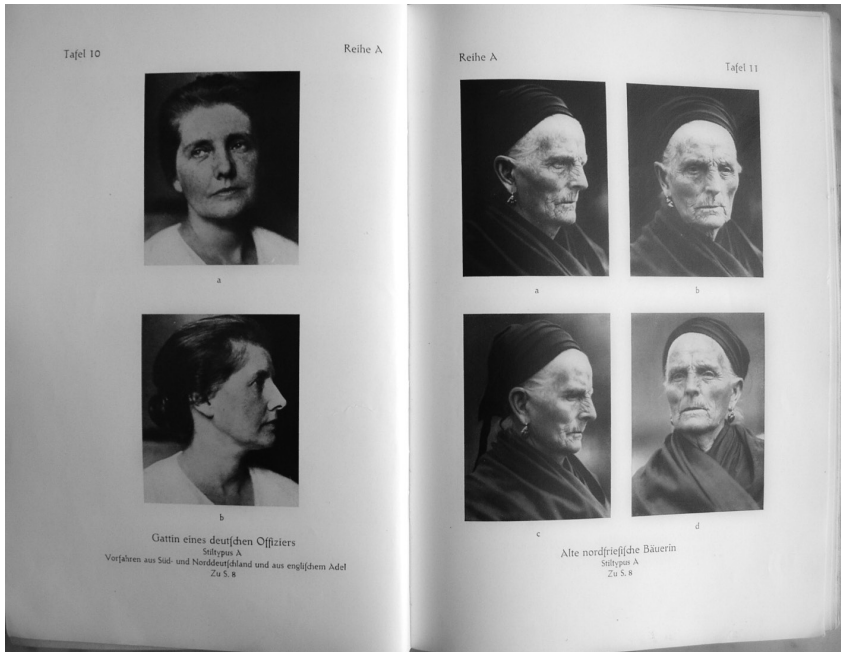


Fig. 0.6 'Gattin eines deutschen Offiziers' (Spouse of a German Officer) and 'Alte nordfriesische Bäuerin' (Elderly North Frisian Farmer's Wife), reproduced in Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, *Von Seele und Antlitz der Rassen und Völker: Eine Einführung in die vergleichende Ausdrucksforschung* (On the Souls and Faces of Races and People) (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1929). Public domain.

Krukenberg, Clauss argues that multiple photographs of a single person, seen from multiple viewpoints and various conditions, can expose previously unseen aspects of a subject's inner being. 'In the most seldom cases — even the most "fruitful" ones — is a single view enough to understand the entire character of a person,' Clauss writes. 'A turn to the side, a change of lighting, a change in expression from something serious to laughing and already the style disappears in which we had understood the face and a new style suddenly breaks through'.<sup>42</sup>

These attempts to articulate the 'true' identity of the human soul are unsettling for their assumptions of fixed meaning and implied hierarchies of authenticity. Not all studies blatantly discuss the racial applications of physiognomy that would inform the ideology of the

42 Ibid.

National Socialist Party. Many did, however, including the work of Clauss. He applied physiognomic theories to the ordering of racial hierarchies, and published *Von der Seele und Antlitz der Rassen und Völker* (On the Souls and Faces of Races and People) in 1929, which used photography to show and compare the physical appearance of members of a variety of cultures.<sup>43</sup> Clauss employs photography to scientifically record, measure, and codify physical traits that are 'typical' of a particular race<sup>44</sup> (see Fig. 0.6).

The strategies of physiognomic reading through photography discussed here were exploited by National Socialist photographers, but do not belong exclusively to this era of history. Cropping, selection, and accumulation were rediscovered in the post-war moment by a new generation of German photographers as forms of visual communication. Moholy-Nagy signals the endurance of this potential in the 1936 essay, 'From Pigment to Light,' where he ends the essay with the prediction he first made nine years before: 'The illiterate of the future will be ignorant of the use of camera and pen alike'.<sup>45</sup> Photography was used effectively by left- and right-wing political parties during the Weimar Republic to explore physiognomy as a new visual language. But according to Moholy-Nagy, all this belongs to a 'confused and groping age'.<sup>46</sup> The realization of a purely visual form of communication remained, perhaps perpetually, in the future.

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43 Clauss, *Von Seele und Antlitz der Rassen und Völker* (1929).

44 On nineteenth-century physiognomic practices, see Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2001).

45 László Moholy-Nagy, 'From Pigment to Light' (1936) in Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), p. 348.

46 Ibid.

STATE





# 1. Dark Sky, White Costumes

## The Janus State of Modern Photography in Germany 1933–1945

Rolf Sachsse

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The sequences are too well known to be displayed here in photographic reproductions: whenever athletes are shown in Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* film from 1938, their bright costumes shine in the sun against a dark sky, adding to the potency of the scene — a potency already reinforced by the low camera angle and the dynamics of their movements. No type of image better illustrates the Janus-like state of modern photography under the National Socialist regime. The form and composition are utterly modern, the technique as advanced as possible, but the message is racial and traditionalist in its ideology. This combination makes these images, indeed the whole film, fascinating: the photographic quality is stunning and absolutely state of the art, yet it delivers a message that also suggests the racial hypothesis of National Socialism — an ideology of ethnic ascendancy, inserted by those making the film and those being shown in it, and a manifest celebration of victory not only for the athletes in the film but for those who commissioned the piece. Nevertheless, this film received a gold medal in 1948 for being the best film ever made of an Olympic Games, and its director received honours of all kinds throughout her century-long life.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter aims to broaden the view of National Socialist photography through an exploration of how media modernity was introduced into a totalitarian government structure; there is surely no bigger contrast than that between the pseudo-medieval milieu of

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1 Markwart Herzog and Mario Leis, eds, *Kunst und Ästhetik im Werk Leni Riefenstahls* (Munich: edition, text + kritik, 2011), pp. 18–21.

National Socialist ideology and its industrial, even post-industrial processes of establishing, across the population, a firm belief in the regime's policies and its direction.<sup>2</sup> The most modern — in some respects even post-modern — aspect of the propaganda politics of the National Socialist regime is its intrinsic insistence on the production of a positive memory: it was desired that everybody should develop a positive memory of life during Hitler's rule, and the biggest problem for post-war students of this history was that this part of National Socialist propaganda had functioned perfectly well.<sup>3</sup> Among historians, there is a common stereotype that the National Socialist regime created a large facade of conservative beauty and administrative perfection that functioned like a 'Potemkin village,' without a proper connection to reality.<sup>4</sup> This puzzle of National Socialism's relationship with modernism and post-modernism persisted even after the war was lost. For example, echoes of National Socialist policies towards the environment endured in the work of Hitler's landscape architect and autobahn designer, Alwin Seifert (see Fig. 1.1).

Seifert would go on to write important books on ecological agriculture during the 1960s, and he was among those who laid the foundations of the Green Party in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> However, this essay is not concerned with the continued effects of National Socialism or the Holocaust and its post-war reception; rather, it explores how aspects of the groundwork for this reception were present in the modernism of media production during the 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter seeks to follow the line of continuity of what was later called the 'New Vision' of the 1920s into the 1930s, and the political

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2 See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

3 Alexander von Plato, 'Geschichte ohne Zeitzeugen? Einige Fragen zur "Erfahrung"' in, *Übergang von Zeitgeschichte zur Geschichte*, from: Fritz Bauer Institut, *Zeugenschaft des Holocaust, Zwischen Trauma, Tradierung und Ermittlung, Jahrbuch 2007 zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag 11, 2007), pp. 141–56.

4 See Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt im deutschen Faschismus* (Munich: Hanser, 1991).

5 See Thomas Zeller, *Driving Germany. The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930–1970* (Berghahn Books: New York, 2007).

6 Aleida Assmann, 'From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with a Traumatic Past,' in, Filomena Viana Guarda, Adriana Martins, Helena Gonçalves da Silva, eds, *Conflict, Memory Transfers and the Reshaping of Europe* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 8–23.

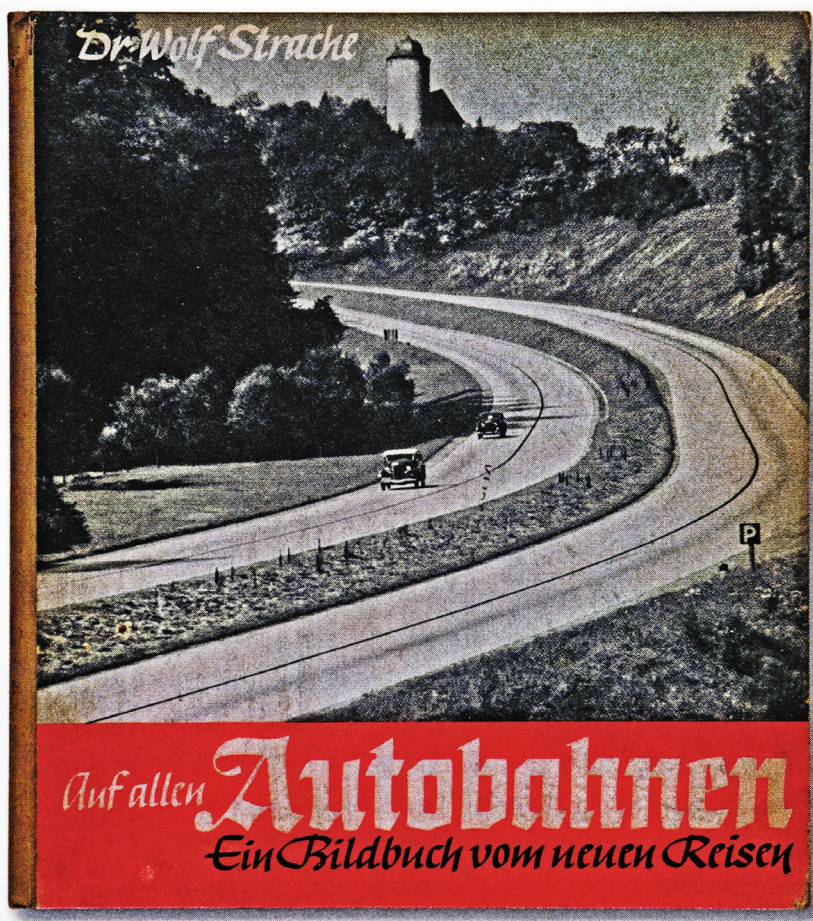


Fig. 1.1 Cover image of Wolf Strache, *Auf allen Autobahnen. Ein Bildbuch vom neuen Reisen* (Along the Autobahns: A Picture Book of Modern Travel) (Darmstadt: L.C. Wittich, 1939). Public domain.

situation therein. This continuity was not only shaped by personal developments and biographical interactions, but also by a general ontogenesis of aesthetic strategies alongside technical inventions, and political actions. The general line of the argument — that 1920s modernism had, in the realm of photography (and film) at least, a continuity after 1933 — is augmented by two technical developments: the establishment of the 35mm camera as the foundation of photographic journalism, and the advent of colour photography, which played an important role not only in propaganda but also with regard to the collective memory of the Second World War. Thus, the last part of this chapter will touch upon the role photography played in modern warfare. However, all of these arguments centred on modernism have to be examined through the lens of the official approach of National Socialism towards a politicised culture, with its strict disregard for modern art in painting and sculpture. That is to say that the modernism of media, as well as building and engineering technologies, was grounded in a clear division from modernism as applied to the traditional genres of art.<sup>7</sup> This division is a subtext to what follows.

## The Continuity of the New Vision in Media, Design, and Photography

Despite the best efforts of historians, a popular myth persists in the history of German design: that after 1933 all modern trends disappeared altogether. It is true that many architects, designers, and artists emigrated from Germany at this time, as some were indeed persecuted and imprisoned in concentration camps. Nevertheless, in principle, modern methods of design were not officially confirmed as excluded, unwanted, or forbidden in the early period of the National Socialist state. At least until 1936, it was still an open question within the regime and its party whether or not a straight, strict, and elegant modern design — after the Italian model — might become the formal style of National Socialism.<sup>8</sup> An examination of the architectural competitions and trade fairs, in particular Germany's participation in international exhibitions, indicates that

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<sup>7</sup> See Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Argon, 1949).

<sup>8</sup> Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus. Zwischen Anbiederung und Verfolgung* (Munich: Prestel, 1993), pp. 9–23.

Germany, until at least the year of the Berlin Olympiad, conformed to the notion of the modern state stylistically. However, the final establishment of the official fine art policy of the NSDAP regime runs directly counter to this observation. The propagation and inclusion of modern forms in the everyday world of National Socialism was thwarted in two ways. On the one hand, a populist and traditionalist aesthetic approach towards fine art and cultural politics became dominant, and on the other hand, the party corralled all creativity within the administrative boundaries of National Socialist cultural organizations. As a result, no stronghold of any modern trend could be established or persist under these conditions. But the propaganda that was created to validate the work and efforts of the National Socialist state had to be absolutely modern, almost avant-garde in its connection to new technical media. The shift between models of a possible future and the present reality framed by picture propaganda in general, was, paradoxically, the result of the most modern media theories of the era — directly imported from American mass communications research.<sup>9</sup>

The acceptance of these continuities of modern trends in photography throughout the National Socialist era resulted in some crucial fundamental outcomes that were important in their direct influence on the perception of ordinary Germans — the so-called post-war collective guilt of the German people with regard to the history of the Holocaust was, it might be argued, shaped by an education in *looking away*.<sup>10</sup> Germans were flooded with modern images of a good, even an idyllic life under National Socialism, effectively encouraging them to ‘look away’ from the daily injuries and crimes committed by party and police, whether visible in everyday life or not. The continuities of the New Vision in German photography of the 1930s have to be understood within four categories, which may form a pattern that enables us to understand both the fascination of these photographs and their effectiveness in terms of propaganda and memory production. Of course, this continuity has to be recognised under the equally important assumption that any continuity had to fit into the state and Party’s own symbolic tropes and adopted meanings — what could be considered as

9 See Jörg Becker, *Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann: Demoskopie zwischen NS-Ideologie und Konservatismus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013).

10 Rolf Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen. Fotografie im NS-Staat* (Dresden: Philo Fine Arts, 2003), pp. 14–18.



modern was a question either for the propaganda ministry or for Joseph Goebbels himself.

The first of these basic patterns is the principle of serialization. According to this principle, the picture consists of the frequent repetition of a small element framed at the margin to evoke infinite repeatability. In the pictorial form of modern advertising, this principle found its ultimate expression in the representation of consumer goods with a positive connotation of industrial production (e.g., cigarettes or screws). In the picture, as in real life, the individual element had no validity, but the repetition of everything — Kracauer's concept of the ornamentation of the mass — became an image of reality.<sup>11</sup> It is obvious that this basic pattern was re-used under National Socialism and visually transposed onto people, not directly, but in the preparation of mass displays of photography and film at Party Congresses or other big events. These were then disseminated by means of cinematic or photographic reproductions and with a mass-media standardization.

The second basic pattern is marked by what Constructivist painting named the counter composition; effectively, the dynamics of modernism are displayed by an inclined compositional cross with equivalent sides, the diagonal vertical guiding the spectator to look up towards new visions. The origin of this compositional form stems from the Soviet avant-garde, to a certain extent from the Dutch group De Stijl and from other Constructivist sources, and points to a close connection between art and technology. This form was replaced in Soviet painting from 1930 by Socialist Realism and propagandistic approaches to image making; a further application of the Constructivist approach was explored in Western fashion photography from 1933 onwards. National Socialist propaganda used this compositional form too, even after 1936, when the officially sanctioned aesthetic became much more reactionary. Although this modern compositional form was very much weakened in angle and dynamics, it continued to be employed in the representation of the most modern technology and particularly for weapons technology; specifically, it was concerned with representing the nation's industrial pre-eminence over potential opponents.

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11 Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, translated, edited, and with a preface by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 291–306.

# Deutsche Meisteraufnahmen

MAX SCHIRNER

1

## UM DEN SPORTREKORD



VERLAG F. BRUCKMANN AG · MÜNCHEN

Fig. 1.2 Cover image of Max Schirner, *Deutsche Meisteraufnahmen: Um den Sportrekord* (German Master Photographers: To The Sports Record) (München: F. Bruckmann, 1936). Public domain.

The third element imported from the 'New Vision' was photomontage, both in the form of collaging already printed pieces of photographs and in the assemblage through exposure of negatives in the darkroom. In addition, various mixtures of intermediate forms and a special form assembled with graphic elements, namely Photoplastics or Typophoto, were also employed.<sup>12</sup> Photomontage was considered an important part of National Socialist propaganda in the years between 1928 to 1932 but this effectively ceased after John Heartfield's (Helmut Herzfeld, 1891–1968) Prague exhibition in 1934 of his Communist and Anti-Fascist photomontages, which ultimately caused a number of diplomatic problems for the German government.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the war, however, photomontage saw a certain renaissance in its exploitation for foreign propaganda posters.

The fourth photographic form of the 'New Vision' was the picture series. Of course, it existed before modernity, and it is inherent to photography in principle. But the picture series correlates to the industrial introduction of roll film, especially the 35mm format, to Germany in around 1925, and the series was in frequent use by the end of the decade. Basically, the picture series was understood in the late 1920s as parallel to a line of film stills that possessed the visual dynamics of synchronous 'seeing', as seen in avant-garde art. It was enthusiastically received as both a key journalistic technology and as a form of comprehensive documentation for complex mediations, and it was used to document a variety of topics by many photographers. Within the National Socialist state, the picture series was flattened and trivialized to represent idyllic and often somewhat kitsch images, but it continued to facilitate, under the right circumstances, the adaptation of the 'New Vision'. For example, Paul Wolff, one of the more ingenious practitioners of the 'New Vision', employed this form extensively for National Socialist propaganda. In addition, the picture series was a common vehicle for the personalization of political content, utilized as a medium of historical authentication, especially when persons of interest, such as state officials, were represented. As demonstrated by the picture series, most of these four elements of the 'New Vision' in

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12 László Moholy-Nagy, 'Typo-Photo,' *Typografische Mitteilungen* 3:10 (1925), 202.

13 See Andrés Zervigón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image. Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-Garde Photomontage* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012).



photography had firm roots in nineteenth-century media practice; the assumption of a genuine 1920s modernism must be viewed as a myth.<sup>14</sup> A similar myth is prevalent when considering the influences of art and design schools of the same period on both modernism and National Socialist propaganda.

The importance of the Bauhaus as a school of fine arts and design should not be overestimated in this history.<sup>15</sup> The notion that one school, the Bauhaus, was the sole originator of an entire approach in style, even to the extent that a whole period of time is associated with that name, is a misrepresentation. The Bauhaus was not at the forefront of photographic developments in the late 1920s. Later historical revisions, such as Walter Gropius' and Herbert Bayer's 1938 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, certainly associated the total conception of design with the name Bauhaus. However, retrospectively examining the history of the Bauhaus, it becomes apparent that the most modern photographs produced were made independently of the institute itself and remained in the private productions of teachers and students.<sup>16</sup> Of course, specific members of the teaching staff of the Bauhaus, such as László Moholy-Nagy or Walter Peterhans, had gained recognition through exhibitions such as the 1929 'Film und Foto' in Stuttgart, amongst others, but their work was — at least contemporaneously — not necessarily connected to the Bauhaus. Although László Moholy-Nagy's writings on photography were published in a series of Bauhaus books, they only gained wider public recognition after 1945. For example, the photomontage, so often associated with the Bauhaus as an exercise or even as a stylistic approach, was only practiced there by Herbert Bayer and in the later class of Joost Schmidt, and then mainly in the form of the so-called Typophoto — the integration of typographic or abstract graphic elements into photographs and paper prints.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, modern press photography was only introduced in this school around 1929, under the guidance of Hannes Meyer and with students such as Irena Blühova or Moshe

14 See Clément Chéroux, *Avant l'avant-garde, du jeu en photographie* (Paris: Textuel, 2015).

15 Rolf Sachsse, 'Éloge de la reproduction. La photographie dans les écoles d'arts appliqués allemandes pendant les années 1920', *Études photographiques* 5:8 (2000), 44–67.

16 See Egidio Marzona, ed., *Bauhaus fotografie* (Dusseldorf: Edition Marzona, 1982).

17 See Gerd Fleischmann, ed., *Bauhaus drucksachen typografie reklame* (Düsseldorf: Edition Marzona, 1984).

Raviv who took part in political movements of their time, mostly on the left wing of the spectrum. And, of course, they were the first to leave Germany when the right-wing parties began to gain the ascendancy.

One of the inventions of the Bauhaus that did make the transition into National Socialist propaganda was Typophoto — used for infographics with a few elements superimposed on a given photograph, or used in a direct way for poster graphics, which were needed for the hundreds of exhibitions planned and pursued as a means of propaganda.<sup>18</sup> This same quality of text-image-line-combinations was applied to book covers, brochures, and booklets of all kinds printed in large quantities in order to be widely disseminated. In addition, Typophoto also made its way into the National Socialist era thanks to people from the Bauhaus, especially Herbert Bayer, Kurt Kranz, and Hein and Hannes Neuner, to name but a few. However, Typophoto was also skilfully executed in other schools as well; for example, under Max Burchartz in Essen with his students Anton Stankowsky and Klaus Wittkugel, or under Georg Trump in Stuttgart with a number of lesser-known students who practised on a mainly local level. Typophoto is specifically connected with printed materials and books were, at the time of the New Vision and the Bauhaus, the most important route to achieving artistic recognition. László Moholy-Nagy's *Malerie Fotografie Film* from 1925 is often cited as the foundation of the Bauhaus' fame; yet far more established at the time were the image collections published around the 1929 'Film und Foto' exhibition such as *Foto-Auge*, edited by the typographer Jan Tschichold, and *Es kommt der neue Fotograf*, edited by Werner Graeff — a former Bauhaus student who had moved onto a successful career as a photographer, teacher, and designer following his role as the press officer of the Stuttgart Weissenhof exhibition of 1928.<sup>19</sup> Even more important for spreading the quality of the New Photography was a small children's book by Graeff, entitled *Ottos Fotos* and launched in 1932.<sup>20</sup> The book was the perfect introduction to producing images in the style of the 'New Vision'.

18 See Michael Tymkiw, *Nazi Exhibition Design and Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

19 See Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, *Foto-Auge. Photo-Eye. 76 Fotos der Zeit* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Wedekind, 1929) and Werner Gräff, *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* (Berlin: Hermann Reckendorf, 1929).

20 See Werner Gräff, *Ottos Fotos* (Stuttgart: Thienemann, 1932).

The first teacher at the Bauhaus to run a photography class, Walter Peterhans, started to write a series of technical advisory books in 1933. Up until 1936, Peterhans produced four different books dealing with topics such as film development and photographic printing. These books were extremely successful and sold more than 50,000 copies in approximately 40 editions. It was only in 1943, five years after Peterhans had left the country, that the publisher considered new editors for this successful production.<sup>21</sup> More complicated is the history of Andreas Feininger, son of the painter Lyonel Feininger, who had never studied at the Bauhaus but, of course, had been living with his parents in Dessau. In the late 1920s, as a trained engineer and an accomplished photo amateur, he started to cooperate with the (at the time) somewhat left-wing author Hans Windisch on producing a handbook of modern photography according to the principles of both the basic Bauhaus training and the 'New Vision' approach. By the time Feininger emigrated to Sweden (and later to the US) Windisch had become a dedicated National Socialist and wrote, with the help of his publisher Walther Heering, his own version of the modern handbook of photography *Die neue Foto-Schule*, which was released in 1937 and became the most successful manual of photography in the German language. Until its final 13<sup>th</sup> edition in the 1970s, Heering's *Die neue Foto-Schule* had sold more than 300,000 copies<sup>22</sup> (see Fig. 1.3).

Another former Bauhaus student, Alfred Ehrhardt, published a number of smaller guides to landscape and water photography, all of them clearly in the style of the 'New Vision' and interpreted in a rather idyllic way of seeing the world that thus fitted the modern view as well as conforming to the ideology of National Socialism.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most significant figures who ensured the continuity of Bauhaus aesthetics into the National Socialist era was Herbert Bayer.<sup>24</sup> During his time at the Bauhaus in both Weimar and Dessau he was regarded as a 'King Midas' to his contemporaries as everything he touched seemed to turn into gold. From 1928 well into the 1930s, he

21 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), p. 272.

22 See Hans Windisch, *Die neue Foto-Schule* (Harzburg: Heering, 1937).

23 See Alfred Ehrhardt and Cyriel Verschaeve, *Ewiges Flandern: ein Bildwerk in 180 Tafeln* (Hamburg: Verlag Broschek & Co, 1943).

24 See Patrik Rössler, *Herbert Bayer: Die Berliner Jahre — Werbegrafik 1928–1938* (Berlin: Vergangenheits-Verlag, 2013).



Fig. 1.3 Cover image of Hans Windisch, *Die neue Fotoschule* (The New Photography School) (Harzburg: Walther Heering Verlag, 1937). Public domain.

served as the art director of the very successful Dorland agency, one of the earliest American-style advertising agencies.<sup>25</sup> He instigated, planned, and executed numerous important exhibitions for the new government, including the official brochure of the 'Deutschland Ausstellung', an exhibition for tourists in Germany that coincided with the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936. This brochure was of a strictly modernist design, containing Typophoto and photomontage effects; over a million copies were produced.<sup>26</sup> Bayer, for whom the photography for his work was often made by his ex-wife Irene Bayer-Hecht,<sup>27</sup> left Germany in early 1938 and, accompanying Walter Gropius, set up the 1938 MOMA exhibition on the Bauhaus and its legacy (Bauhaus: 1919–1928). Nor did Bayer's design credentials remain unnoticed in the US. Following his decision to stay in the country, he was ultimately employed by the US government in designing war propaganda.<sup>28</sup> Other former Bauhaus students and teachers such as Xanti Schawinsky, Hinnerk Scheper, Joost Schmidt, and the Neuner brothers tried to follow in Bayer's footsteps but with far less success. There were numerous other modernists, for example, Fritz Brill or Edmund Kesting, who continued to apply modern ideas to advertising, including photomontage and other elements of the 'New Vision', right up until the end of the Second World War.

In many respects, the 'New Vision' was an educational program in training one's personal imagination, and the 1929 Stuttgart exhibition 'Film und Foto' had large sections aimed at influencing the pedagogy of arts-and-craft schools.<sup>29</sup> The Weimar institution that took over following the closure of the Bauhaus was a model National Socialist school — effectively more focussed on crafts than arts. As early as 1930, with conservative elements and National Socialists on the *Landtag* of Thuringia (the Thuringian State Assembly), the Bauhaus had been reformed by Paul Schultze-Naumburg, a strict anti-modernist in his

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25 Rössler, *Herbert Bayer* (2013).

26 Nerdinger, *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus* (1993), p. 34.

27 Rolf Sachsse, 'Die Frau an seiner Seite, Irene Bayer und Lucia Moholy als Fotografinnen', in Ute Eskildsen, ed., *Fotografieren hieß teilnehmen, Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik* (Dusseldorf: Richter, 1994), pp. 67–75, exhibition catalogue.

28 See Herbert Bayer, *Herbert Bayer: Painter Designer Architect* (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1967).

29 See Gustav Stotz, ed., *Internationale Ausstellung Film und Foto* (Stuttgart: Deutscher Werkbund, 1929).



attitudes towards architecture and design. In the same year, 1930, Walter Hege was installed as professor of photography — he had achieved fame with his dynamic interpretations of antique and medieval sculpture and architecture, and he pursued a mixture of modern technique and monumental vision as the credo of his teaching.<sup>30</sup> An important role in this curriculum was played by Hege's teaching assistant Heinrich Freytag. Freytag published large numbers of technical advice manuals for amateur photographers, thus establishing Hege's post-modern re-coding of modernism and monumentality.

Other influential institutions included the School of Applied Arts Burg Giebichenstein in Halle. This school had established the only modern curriculum in photography to run throughout the 1920s. The course designer, the Swiss national Hans Finsler, left Germany to teach in Zurich in 1932, successfully anticipating the changes that would occur should the National Socialists come to power.<sup>31</sup> His successor Heinrich Koch died too early to make an impact on the school, and the photography class ceased to exist. In addition, there were influential private schools such as the Berlin school of the former Bauhaus teacher Johannes Itten where Lucia Moholy also taught. Itten moved to Krefeld in 1932 as director of the newly established school of textile design, but was then forced to give up his professorship under pressure from colleagues. His Berlin school was also forced to close in 1934 and ultimately Itten, a Swiss national, returned to Switzerland. Itten's successor at the Bauhaus was Georg Muche who had introduced photography to that institution as early as 1921.<sup>32</sup> Private schools in photography and design existed in Berlin as well. The former Bauhaus student Werner Graeff ran his institute for modern photography until early 1934, when he had to emigrate due to his political beliefs. Albert Reimann had founded a large private school for arts and crafts in Berlin in 1902, which had more than 1,000 students by the 1920s and included a film class from 1927. It was sold in 1935 to the modernist architect Hugo Häring, who established a state-controlled institute

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30 See Bodo von Dewitz, ed., *Dom Tempel Skulptur, Architekturphotographien von Walter Hege* (Cologne: Agfa Foto-Historama, 1993), exhibition catalogue.

31 Thilo Koenig and Martin Gasser, eds, *Hans Finsler und die Schweizer Fotokultur, Werk, Fotoklasse, moderne Gestaltung 1932–1960* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2006), pp. 16–41, exhibition catalogue.

32 Georg Muche, letter to Rolf Sachsse, 20 January 1984.

for journalistic photography with the most modern curriculum in war photography at the time; Reimann emigrated to London in 1937 and re-founded his school there.<sup>33</sup>

The most modern aspect of photography as an integral part of National Socialist propaganda was its mediality in establishing positive memories on a collective and individual level. The groundwork had been prepared by theories of propaganda in the 1920s, written by authors such as Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays whose works were translated and put into practice by German theoreticians like Hans Domizlaff.<sup>34</sup> The good life that was to be memorialized had to be as lightweight as all the more accessible aspects of modernity, thus all manuals and magazines for amateur photography were full of examples with dynamic compositions, picture series, and white costumes under a dark sky.<sup>35</sup> Many of these images had to provide the synthesis of the modern and traditional in the subject matter. The *autobahn* was a common motif for the modern, and the landscape as a whole was established as a traditional background for this very modern motif — a comparative visual practice that has been reused by contemporary right-wing and anti-European parties in Germany.<sup>36</sup> And, of course, after the positive international reactions to the ‘very modern’ Olympic Games of 1936, the National Socialists started to prepare for a war footing with the most cutting-edge war technology available, which had to be depicted in the most modern way — photography served as a device for positive martial propaganda from 1937 onwards.<sup>37</sup> The modernity in the representation of German industry, however, was often limited by a need to provide an incongruous reference to old craft traditions. When Albert Renger-Patzsch took photographs of the Schott glass industries,<sup>38</sup> when Paul Wolff and Alfred Tritschler produced annual reports for the Opel motor

33 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), pp. 291–93.

34 Gerhard Voigt, ‘Goebbels als Markentechniker’, in Wolfgang Fritz Haug, ed., *Warenästhetik. Beiträge zur Diskussion, Weiterentwicklung und Vermittlung ihrer Kritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 231–60.

35 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), pp. 117–40.

36 Rolf Sachsse, ‘Entfernung der Landschaft. Heimatfotografie als NS-Bildkonstruktion’, *Fotogeschichte* 31:120 (2011), 69–70.

37 Rolf Sachsse, *Ideologische Inszenierungen. Fotografische Propaganda-Bücher von Staat, Partei und Militär*, in Manfred Heiting and Roland Jaeger, eds, *Autopsie 1. Deutschsprachige Fotobücher 1918 bis 1945 Vol. 1* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012), pp. 476–503.

38 See Angelika Steinmetz-Oppelland, ed., *Albert Renger-Patzsch. Industriefotografien für SCHOTT* (Weimar: VDG Verlag, 2011), exhibition catalogue.



works,<sup>39</sup> when Ruth Hallensleben served as a photographer for the armaments industries between 1938 and 1944,<sup>40</sup> all of them showed the most modern technologies applied to hand-crafted practice, focussing more on workshops than on the modern powerhouse of industrial production lines.<sup>41</sup>

## Propaganda in 35mm

By the beginning of the 1920s, the standard size of press camera negatives was 13 x 18 cm, as glass plates from these cameras could be printed directly onto the standard sizes of the newspaper formats — each rectangular image fitted to three columns, the vertical ones into two.<sup>42</sup> Due to better pre-print technologies from 1925 onwards, and equally due to the interest of photographers and their clients for more surreptitious pictures from restricted places such as law courts, the cameras shrank in size. In 1924, Ernemann Co. in Dresden introduced the Ermanox camera, which used glass plates sized 4.5 x 6 cm, and some of them with plates sized 6 x 9 cm. This camera became the standard camera for photojournalism until 1932 when production ceased due to the financial problems of Zeiss Ikon Co., who had taken over Ernemann in 1926.<sup>43</sup> Even though it was made easier to change the film sheet cassettes by some mechanical tricks, the problems of sheet film remained: the photographer had one chance to take the photograph, and that was it. Thus, roll film cameras seemed a more appropriate alternative with a number of negatives that could be taken within a comparatively short period of time. But the development of the system took some time. Despite inventing it, Eastman Kodak did not develop their system further after 1910. In 1913, Oskar Barnack had

39 See Heinrich Hauser, *Im Kraftfeld von Ruesselsheim, mit 80 Farbphotos von Dr. Paul Wolff* (Munich: Knorr & Hirth, 1942).

40 See Ursula Peters, ed., *Ruth Hallensleben, Frauenarbeit in der Industrie, Fotografien aus den Jahren 1938–1967* (Berlin: D. Nishen, 1985).

41 Rolf Sachsse, 'Mit Bildern zum Image. Fotografisch illustrierte Firmenschriften', in Manfred Heiting and Roland Jaeger, eds, *Autopsie 2. Deutschsprachige Fotobücher 1918 bis 1945 Vol.2* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2014), pp. 476–91.

42 Rolf Sachsse, 'Schlitzverschluss, Stativträger, Sportsucher, Scheinergrade — Zur Technik des Pressefotografen Willy Römer,' in Diethart Kerbs, ed., *Auf den Strassen von Berlin. Der Fotograf Willy Römer 1887–1979* (Boenen: Kettler, 2004), pp. 51–77, exhibition catalogue.

43 See Herbert Blumtritt, *Die Geschichte der Dresdner Fotoindustrie* (Stuttgart: Lindemanns Verlag, 1999).

produced a small 35mm camera for testing film, but it took until 1925 for a fully functioning camera to be presented at the Frankfurt Photo Fair. Even then, it took another five to eight years to actually be able to overcome problems with film and processing. The Leica did not take its place as a professional tool until the early 1930s.

On the other hand, this smaller roll film camera had advantages not foreseen by its inventors. The earliest users were artists who had served during the First World War, and they knew how to handle a rifle — absolutely similar to handling a Leica.<sup>44</sup> Nor were these artists too concerned with perfect prints or in negatives with an excellent gamma. The Leica was ultimately professionalized by two men — with only one taking all of the credit. Emanuel Goldberg had discovered and described the ‘Goldberg Condition’ in 1922, which was the base for developing perfect negatives for photographic journalism; and around 1932 he was the man behind the new Contax camera that served as a replacement to the original Ermanox.<sup>45</sup> But Leica were better at public relations. They urged the photographer Paul Wolff to produce a lengthy manual called ‘My Experiences with the Leica’ (*Meine Erfahrungen mit der Leica*) in 1934 in which *he* claimed to be the inventor of practising the so-called ‘Goldberg Condition’ in the development of 35mm film — and Goldberg remained uncredited and emigrated to Palestine in the same year.<sup>46</sup> Wolff effortlessly cooperated with the Propaganda ministry — whilst personally maintaining an appropriate distance from politics — and managed to introduce the 35mm camera as the main instrument of all photographic journalists.<sup>47</sup> His greatest success came in August 1937, when a decree was issued that all photographic journalists were urged to use 35mm film and when the newly installed ‘Propaganda Companies’ (PK of the Wehrmacht appeared in uniform with a Leica in their hand).<sup>48</sup> Paul Wolff and his companion Alfred Tritschler started to give hundreds of workshops demonstrating how to use the 35mm, using — of course — the Leica. Conversely, Wolff’s

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44 Rolf Sachsse, ‘The Dysfunctional Leica, Instrument of the German Avantgarde’, *History of Photography* 17:3 (1993), 301–04.

45 Michael Buckland, *Emanuel Goldberg and His Knowledge Machine, Information, Invention, and Political Forces* (Westport CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2006), pp. 99–129.

46 See Paul Wolff, *Meine Erfahrungen mit der Leica, Das völlig neue Standardwerk der Kleinbildphotographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Breidenstein, 1934).

47 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), p. 290.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 177–78.

contemporary, the Hungarian photojournalist Robert Capa, preferred to use the Contax, which was technically far more advanced and equipped with better lenses. When Capa received his model, he gave his Leica to Gerda Taro.<sup>49</sup> Despite its important role in photographic propaganda before and during the Second World War, the manufacturers of the Leica, the Leitz Company, maintained a tolerant and respectful attitude to the Jewish population of Wetzlar. The owner, Ludwig Leitz, was credited with saving a considerable number of Jews from persecution.<sup>50</sup>

In comparison to their German competitors, the Leitz company that produced the Leica became the most successful developer and producer of advanced camera technology. There was a large export market for the Leica that generated both income and prestige, and when the Second World War began, the materials for equipping the PK troops was already there — including special cameras with large magazines, long telephoto lenses, etc. Other producers of 35mm cameras for e.g., Zeiss Ikon, were less successful in their efforts. The first 35mm single-lens reflex camera, Exakta by Ihagee, was also produced in Dresden, but ultimately did not have much impact on the market until the beginning of the war.<sup>51</sup> Robot in Dusseldorf produced a 35mm camera, mostly for police use, with a square format and a spring movement for the film allowing 25 images in one row. The 35mm format was not the only roll film format being produced. By 1928, Francke & Heidecke had announced their Rolleiflex, a twin-lens reflex camera for roll film in the square format of 6 x 6cm, which was followed by the Baby Rollei in 1932 with a smaller square format of 4 x 4 cm. And there were smaller cameras, too, ending with the spy formats of Minox by Walter Zepp who had started his business in Riga (to avoid copyright claims by Leitz) but during the war years also moved his manufacturing base to Wetzlar.

The global success of the 35mm film format as a standard of photographic imagery ultimately came after 1945. However, for the German film industry, which was at the time closely associated with the Agfa company as part of IG Farben AG, the 35mm format was another

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49 Irme Schaber, *Gerda Taro Fotoreporterin. Mit Robert Capa im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg. Die Biografie* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2013), pp. 103–20.

50 Rabbi F.D. Smith, 'Ernst Leitz of Wetzlar and the Jews', *Journal of Progressive Judaism* 10:5 (1998), 5–14.

51 See Richard Hummel, *Spiegelreflexkameras aus Dresden. Geschichte Technik Fakten* (Leipzig: Edition Reintzsch, 1994).

important form of modernization. 35mm was the format for film production as well as journalistic photography — both quintessential elements of war propaganda. Technically, the format had the advantage that all production and chemistry had a common base. This included the promotion of colour photography.

## Colour Photography

Colour in photography had its origin long before 1933. James Clerk Maxwell gave a lecture at the Royal Institution in 1861 on three-colour analysis and synthesis to demonstrate the viability of colour photography. By around 1890, a number of systems to integrate three layers of colour into film production came into being.<sup>52</sup> After Adolf Miethe's introduction of the panchromatic emulsion, the brothers Lumière revealed their Autochrome colour slide system to the public and monopolized the colour photographic market for the following three decades, despite the many disadvantages of this additive colour process. A crucial phase of development was reached in the 1930s, when Kodak, having begun extensive research in 1929, announced their Kodachrome film in 1935, a commercially available subtractive colour process.<sup>53</sup>

In Germany, the desire of the National Socialist polity to create an abiding experience of a positive memory of life under National Socialism, coincided with research on mass psychology that demonstrated that colour images were more readily received as being closer to 'reality' than black and white. Colour photography was recognised as a much more effective tool as a means of mass propaganda. Another important factor in the promotion and use of colour technology in Germany was the competition between Kodak and Agfa within the world market of film production. As a result of these combined factors, Agfa began its own research into colour photography.<sup>54</sup> This politicisation of colour in Germany began shortly after 1933 and included the declaration that

52 See Siegfried Gohr, ed., *Farbe im Photo* (Köln: Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle, 1981), exhibition catalogue.

53 Douglas Collins, *The Story of Kodak* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), pp. 205–15.

54 Gert Koshofer, *Farbfotografie* [in 3 Vols] (Munich: Laterna Magica, 1981), Vol. 2, pp. 11–64.

the official film of the Olympic Games was to be produced in colour (although this was never realised). Kodachrome was released to the worldwide market in 1936, with the first Agfacolor Neu films being offered in the spring of 1937.

From the beginning, Agfacolor Neu was a propaganda product. It was sold for roughly half the price of Kodachrome film, and Agfa's profit margin must have been negligible or even negative, although there are no surviving documents of the state having made any compensatory payments. However, the price was one of the smaller initial problems for the medium. The difference between (remembered or actually envisioned) reality and the new colour photographic image was often difficult for viewers and photographers to reconcile, especially as successive and improved versions of the product appeared in the years that followed. As a result, Agfa started to fund workshops in both colour psychology and colour photography, creating a colour photography course at the renowned Hochschule fuer Graphik und Buchkunst (University for Graphics and Book Arts) in Leipzig in 1940.<sup>55</sup> Workshops were carried out by photographers already engaged by the regime for creative and artistic propaganda photography, such as Paul Wolff, Walter Hege, Erich Retzlaff, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, and others. Dozens of manuals on how to achieve good colour photography were written, again with the largest number being produced by prominent practitioners such as Paul Wolff, Hans Windisch, etc. Many competitions were launched for colour photography, mostly to find material for the manuals and for company promotion, although unusually enough, no career photographer emerged out of these competitions. In the main, the task of introducing colour to photographic propaganda was returned to education: Hanns Geissler began his professorship in Leipzig with a small class of students who provided their services to the war effort in Agfa's Wolfen laboratories. However, this work only really bore fruit in the late 1940s when Geissler moved with his class from Leipzig to Cologne to establish a professional school for photographers there. Although the Leipzig institute developed several curricula for schooling professional colour photographers, the training of PK photographers was not linked to it. There were, however, a number of special training sessions, for example, the courses given to those photographers responsible for the

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55 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), p. 329.

documentation of immobile artworks in colour following a special order (*Führerauftrag*) from Adolf Hitler.<sup>56</sup>

As with Kodachrome, Agfacolor Neu was a slide film, preferably produced in 35mm for both the photographic and film industry. It was designed for use in daylight which meant that camera operators and photographers had to use it either in direct sunlight — which created huge problems of contrast — or with very expensive blue bulbs that caused their own problems for the photographers and filmmakers using them. The development of tungsten film,<sup>57</sup> on the other hand, did not produce a positive result before 1942, and even then only a small fraction of the emulsions were reliable and ready for professional usage. Slide films could only be shown by projection, so the photographic industry was interested in developing both negative films and printing papers. However, none of these experiments were produced industrially until after the end of the war. Printing colour photographs was initially only possible in two ways, one being in reproduction in books, magazines, and other types of printed matter, and the other the expensive and hard-to-master process of dye transfer prints. As Kodak's dye transfer materials were not available in Germany until the 1950s, and as other dye transfer processes did not prove to be reliable, propaganda had to continue to use the Herzog brothers' Duxochrome process, which was only available at a dozen laboratories and the price of one print was twice the average monthly income of a German citizen. The resultant image however, was of a unique quality — and remains so even when viewed today. The photographer Walter Frentz used this process to photograph the National Socialist elite, including portraits of Adolf Hitler.<sup>58</sup>

Largely ignorant about the technical aspects of photography, László Moholy-Nagy had argued in 1925 that colour photography should follow the principles of autonomy as applied to abstract painting.<sup>59</sup> He

56 Christian Fuhrmeister, Stephan Klinge, Iris Lauterbach, and Ralf Peters, eds, *'Führerauftrag Monumentalmalerei' Eine Fotokampagne 1943–1945, Veröffentlichungen des Zentralinstituts für Kunstgeschichte, Band XVIII* (Cologne-Weimar-Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2006).

57 Tungsten films were produced to accurately reproduce colour under tungsten light, that is, artificial lighting as in a film studio.

58 See Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen, ed., *Das Auge des Dritten Reiches, Hitlers Kameramann und Fotograf Walter Frentz* (Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2006).

59 László Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei Fotografie Film* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1925), p. 33.

enthusiastically began experiments in this direction after the release of Kodachrome in the US.<sup>60</sup> German colour photography, however, applied some of the modern principles of black-and-white photography to the new medium, whilst trying to solve the many problems in colour control and printing. Even true followers of modernism like Hermann Harz — who ran the most successful laboratory for Duxochrome printing — or Erich Retzlaff, struggled to integrate a truly modern vision into their colour practice.<sup>61</sup> The real achievement of the material came when the modernist approach lost the last scraps of its innocence during the war itself.

## The Worst of Modernism: World War II

In the 1990s, a peculiar phenomenon was identified by those working with photographic materials from the Second World War. In a short space of time, a plethora of colour images and colour films that had not be seen since 1945 appeared on the market. Books on the era were published in full colour, documentaries were shown of destroyed cities and of National Socialist officials posing in glossy costumes and uniforms, all in bright sunlight and, of course, under a deep blue sky. At the same time, war photographs from propaganda sources materialized; magazines like 'Signal', 'Adler', and the Japanese 'Front' were reprinted but unlike the poorly produced right-wing commemorative editions of the 1970s, these were in bright colour on the best paper. There were a number of reasons for this colourization of National Socialist history in film and photography. The fall of the Iron Curtain meant that archives from the former Soviet Bloc countries were more readily available, private TV stations started to launch endless documentaries from uncertain sources, and the death of the last generation of war photographers brought hidden archives to the surface for public consumption.<sup>62</sup> Even as a retrospective, the war became a modern media event.

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60 See Viktor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917–1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

61 Christopher Webster van Tonder, 'Colonising Visions: A Physiognomy of Face and Place in Erich Retzlaff's Book "Länder und Völker an der Donau: Rumänien, Bulgarien, Ungarn, Kroatien,"' *Photoresearcher* 26:23 (2015), 66–77.

62 See Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003).



Compared to the First World War, photography in the Second World War served a totally different purpose. It had been replaced as the main weaponised carrier of information technology by audial media such as FM, stereo transmission and by machine cryptography.<sup>63</sup> Even microfilming for documentary transport, and aerial photography, which had substantiated the first attempts at aerial bombing, had faded. Photography had become only one of the many means of modern propaganda, with all the attendant problems in assessing and recording its effects on the masses. The two genres of modernization described here had now to fulfil their obligations. Amateur photography — which was best viewed in colour — had to memorialize the positive aspects of the war; professionalized photographic journalism was obliged to convey the important images of German victories to the world. War preparations to this end had begun early. In 1936, Goebbels had installed a proto-PK for the fascist view on the Spanish civil war, and it seemed to have worked well; a number of its photographers launched their careers as a result of their involvement, both during the Hitler years and in 1950s West Germany.<sup>64</sup> When the Second World War came, there were roughly 700 PK troops in service, with most of each unit consisting of a film crew (camera, sound, assistants), with two or three photographers, and one or two writers; the larger units also had an artist. All of them had access to technical services for developing black and white 35mm films in either a railroad wagon or in a large truck accompanied by motorcycle couriers for transporting film material from and to Berlin or Wolfen, where colour films had to be developed.<sup>65</sup> During the war, one photographer served for several weeks on the front and had some of his material — black and white negatives, small prints — either processed in the PK cabin or at local photo dealers who had to work under military orders when a town was captured. After several weeks, the photographer had to return to Berlin where the central laboratories

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63 Friedrich Kittler, 'Der Gott der Ohren', in Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, eds, *Das Schwinden der Sinne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 140–58.

64 Diethart Kerbs, 'Deutsche Fotografen im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg', in Jörn Merkert, ed., *Musik, Literatur und Film zur Zeit des Dritten Reichs* (Düsseldorf: Kulturamt, 1987), pp. 107–13, exhibition catalogue.

65 Günther Heysing, 'Propagandatruppen — eine deutsche Erfindung', *Die Wildente* 26 (1963), 36–40 and 152–56.

for the PK, for the SS (with the agency named after their owner, Friedrich Franz Bauer), and for other military services were to be found. The process of censorship followed directly after the material was developed; if the pictures were considered to be good enough, they were delivered to the headquarters of each branch of the armed forces. The best images of the day were collected for Goebbels and Hitler and usually delivered to them by 6 pm. From the headquarters, the photographs were presented to the daily press conference at noon, together with internal remarks on their use and meaning. However, most of the PK material never became public; much of the information available today with regards to National Socialist image production is, at the most, derived from post-war archives.<sup>66</sup>

Amateur photography during the Second World War was shaped and directed by journalistic services in association with the photographic industry.<sup>67</sup> Both still photography and film had their own public relations magazines, printing numerous advertising brochures and filling the weekly papers with articles and images of their production in order to influence the amateur photography of those who went to war. These pictures were accompanied by prose filled with references to comradeship, a wanderlust, and a spirit of adventure when visiting foreign states. This mixture of industrial advertising and state propaganda was typical for most of the war, with a peak in the summer of 1941 — at which point most of the battles had, so far, been won — and with a clear decrease from late 1943 onwards. By the summer of 1944, paper had become so scarce that most of the printed magazines were closed — except for the important propaganda publications such as ‘Signal’. By this time, many of the important PK and war photographers had shifted their modernism on to the next level. They took photographs of what might be termed a form of ‘anti-propaganda’, or they simply worked on their own projects, such as documenting their personal situation. However, in the main, the propaganda produced was extremely successful, as contemporary archives demonstrate. Amateur photography was widespread; there were even photographs of executions and other atrocities perpetrated

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66 Ute Wrocklage, Das Bundesarchiv online. ‘Wissen bereitstellen, Quellen erschließen, Geschichtsverständnis fördern’, in, *Rundbrief Fotografie. Analoge und digitale Bildmedien in Archiven und Sammlungen* 15:3/NF59 (September 2008), pp. 18–23.

67 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), pp. 197–202.

by both the German military, the SS, and other service arms, inside and outside of the concentration camps, the ghettos, and even the city centres where these incidents of violence were committed.<sup>68</sup>

Modern photography carried with it the basic assumption that photographs were of a unique objective documentary value. The foundation of this belief, which stemmed from the 1880s onwards whether the subject was architectural, object, or industrial photography, was that anything depicted with a fine technical quality must be closely linked to the real; that it held its own veracity — and this is exactly what National Socialist ideology wanted from modern photography. Of course, there were fields of artistic expression such as portraiture or sculpture whose ‘value’ as aesthetic objects was predicated on the aesthetic conventions defined by the annual state exhibitions in Munich curated by Hitler’s personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann.<sup>69</sup> But fundamentally, the ideas behind National Socialist propaganda concerned the imagining of a good life and winning the war for a larger (and racially homogeneous) Germany. These works pictured a clear, clean, and modern country and, during the course of the war, a country striving for victory; photography, whether of bunker architecture or airfield buildings, had to show that the war could be won by advanced technology. Reading Paul Virilio three decades later (and looking at the edifices designed by him at the same time), one can reckon how fruitful this propaganda was.<sup>70</sup>

Yet modernism can turn its effectiveness against the state under certain conditions. After the first large bombardments on German cities in 1941, professional and amateur photographers started to document the destruction.<sup>71</sup> Older craft photographers who did not have to serve in the army were commissioned to record the damage, in order to present documentary evidence of the enemy’s actions once the war was won (*Der grosse Endsieg*); younger people began taking photographs after

68 See Jacques Fredj, ed., *Regards sur les ghettos. Scenes from the Ghetto* (Paris: Mémorial de la Shoah, 2013), exhibition catalogue.

69 Christopher Webster van Tonder, *Erich Retzlaff Volksfotograf* (Aberystwyth: School of Art Press, 2013), pp. 38–42. Also, Peter-Klaus Schuster, ed., *Nationalsozialismus und ‘Entartete Kunst’: die ‘Kunststadt’ München* (Munich: Prestel, 1988), exhibition catalogue.

70 See Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archéologie* (Paris: Les Éditions du Demi-Cercle, 1975).

71 Thomas Deres and Martin Rüther, eds, *Fotografieren verboten! Heimliche Aufnahmen von der Zerstörung Kölns* (Cologne: Emons, 1995), exhibition catalogue.

the shock of surviving; and most of all, residents simply recorded the disasters around them in images. In the main, such activities were not seen as anything remotely connected with propaganda. Nor were they censored by the state, which did not regard these images as subversive. Thus, the modern idea of documentation responsible for the most important aspects of war propaganda — ‘We hold up to the enemy [...] our photographic evidence in front of his nose to punch him in the mouth and show the world what reality is like’ (‘Dem Feind aber halten wir [...] unser fotografisches Beweismaterial vor die Nase, um ihm damit aufs Maul zu schlagen und der Welt zu zeigen, wie es mit der Wirklichkeit beschaffen ist’)<sup>72</sup> — rebounded on those who had instigated it: the documentary reality had lost all of its idyllic connotations.

### Modern Propaganda for a Feeble-minded State

‘The challenge of convincing the German people to take part in World War II’, as described by the military historian Wolfram Wette, was the background to all propaganda, including that made using modern photography.<sup>73</sup> As nearly all studies in mass communication research show, propaganda in general can be an arduous task: you cannot change people’s minds through media, only face-to-face and in small groups.<sup>74</sup> This is what Goebbels and his associates knew only too well; it is implied in his diaries as well as in the comments he made at his daily press conference. The Propaganda Ministry attempted to cope with this situation using an extremely modern diversification between photography and film. The still image had to function in memory and as a document, thus the producers had to be craftsmen without too many independent aesthetic attitudes. On the other hand, a film could be regarded as an artwork — not necessarily, but certainly this was an option.<sup>75</sup> In modern terms, photography was regarded as design that had to serve society using aesthetic means. Hence all continuities, from the groundbreaking strategies of the 1920s onwards, were developed as

72 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), p. 354.

73 Wolfram Wette, ‘Die schwierige Überredung zum Krieg: zur psychologischen Mobilmachung der deutschen Bevölkerung 1933–1939’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, *ApuZ* 32–33 (1989), pp. 3–15.

74 Colin Cherry, *On Human Communication* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1957), pp. 21–49.

75 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), p. 238.

an evolving means of creating an impact on the viewer in their encounter with the image.

In his introduction to this book, Christopher Webster has described the Janus-headed character of photography in the National Socialist state, a perfect image for understanding some of the mysteries involved when writing a history of it. Despite the many attempts to regard the history of modern photography from a left-wing perspective, there were equally as many right-wing attitudes in all modern schools and agencies of advertising and design.<sup>76</sup> But most of all, it must be stated that photographers, like nearly all craftsmen, architects, and designers (plus artists, musicians, etc.) in the late Weimar period were not really interested in day-to-day politics — daily life was struggle enough after the 1929 Wall Street Crash.<sup>77</sup> However, reading letters and personal notes from those who had at least some interest in politics, one finds an often guileless misunderstanding of the events unfolding around them. Nearly everybody expected the brawling streetfighters that were the SA Brownshirts (*Sturmabteilung*) to disappear within a couple of years. There was a naïve acceptance of modern strategies in media and propaganda, and above all, of strategies that influenced everyday life with the help of, amongst other things, photography. Looking back on the media history of the National Socialist state, its most important ‘modernism’ can only be regarded as an ‘education in looking away’.<sup>78</sup>

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76 Jorge Ribalta, ed., *The Worker Photography Movement [1929–1939]. Essays and Documents* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2011), pp. 314–45.

77 Werner Möller, ed., *Die Welt spielt Roulette. Zur Kultur der Moderne in der Krise 1927 bis 1932, Edition Bauhaus Vol.9* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002), pp. 9–17.

78 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), pp. 14–18.



# LEADERS





## 2. 'The Deepest Well of German Life'<sup>1</sup>

### Hierarchy, Physiognomy and the Imperative of Leadership in Erich Retzlaff's Portraits of the National Socialist Elite

*Christopher Webster*

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#### The *Führerprinzip* (The Leader Principle)

Since the end of the Second World War, historians have variously characterised the leadership of the National Socialist state as 'a rationally organised and highly perfected system of terrorist rule';<sup>2</sup> or as necessarily chaotic, with Adolf Hitler ultimately holding the key to power as the ultimate arbiter of a polycratic structure of leadership;<sup>3</sup> or even as an 'authoritarian anarchy'.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the historical reality — order or chaos, irrationality or well-oiled bureaucracy — the visual manifestation of the National Socialist leadership at least, was artfully manufactured to present an unambiguous hierarchy of representatives of the *Führerprinzip*). Such a hierarchy and its legitimacy during and following the years of

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1 Jacob Grimm's 'Schiller Memorial address,' 1859. Quoted in Hermann Glaser, *The Cultural Roots of National Socialism* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 60.

2 Hans Mommsen, 'Nationalsozialismus,' in *Sowjetsystem und demokratische Gesellschaft. Eine vergleichende Enzyklopädie*, Vol. 4 (Freiberg: Herder, 1971), p. 702.

3 Klaus Hildebrand, *The Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 137.

4 Ibid.

struggle was, unsurprisingly, reiterated regularly in visual terms by National Socialist publications and, of course, in the writings of the political leaders themselves. The principle permeated the state from Hitler, as *Führer*, down through to the most basic elements such as a *Hitlerjugendführer* of the Hitler Youth.

Although predating National Socialism as an idea, the leadership notion, the *Führerprinzip*, certainly emerged as a core structural element of the National Socialist state in a new form. After Thomas Carlyle and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's notion of the 'Great Man', the desire for a 'ruler-sage' became more pronounced in the milieu of the post-war republic in Germany. However, many conservative thinkers were suspicious of the National Socialists as being too similar to the communists. For example, thinkers such as Count Hermann Keyserling — widely associated with coining the phrase *Führerprinzip*) — believed that the 'ruler-sage' could only emerge when an 'aristocracy of the truly best'<sup>5</sup> had emerged and not through a rule of the masses.

In his 1974 book *Notes on the Third Reich*,<sup>6</sup> that exponent of Integral Traditionalism, the philosopher Julius Evola, argued that the interpretation and application of the *Führerprinzip* by National Socialism had been a new (but flawed) elucidation of an ancient tradition. Evola objected to a biologically reductionist interpretation that regarded race as the foundation of the state; for Evola, such an interpretation missed the 'soul and spirit' of man.<sup>7</sup>

He remarked:

First, at that time this bond [*the Führerprinzip*] was established only in an emergency or in view of definite military ends and, like the dictatorship in the early Roman period, the character of the *Führer* (*dux* or *heretigo*) did not have a permanent character. Second, the 'followers' were the heads of the various tribes, not a mass, the *Volk*. Third, in the ancient German constitution, in addition to the exceptional instances in which, in certain circumstances as we have mentioned, the chief could demand an unconditional obedience — in addition to the *dux* or *heretigo* — there was the *rex*, possessed of a superior dignity based on his origin.<sup>8</sup>

5 Hermann Keyserling, *Politik, Wirtschaft, Weisheit* (Darmstadt: O. Reichl, 1922), pp. 103–04.

6 Originally published as *Il fascismo visto dalla destra; Note sul terzo Reich* (Rome: Gianni Volpe, 1974).

7 Julius Evola, *Notes on the Third Reich*, John Morgan, ed., E. Christian Kopf, translator (London: Arktos, 2013), p. 8.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Evola's summary of Hitler's interpretation of the notion of the *Führerprinzip* is certainly accurate:

For Hitler, the *Volk* alone was the principle of legitimacy. He was established as its direct representative and guide, without intermediaries, and it was to follow him unconditionally. No higher principle existed or was tolerated by him.<sup>9</sup>

For his part, Hitler had stated in *Mein Kampf*:

... the natural development, though after a struggle enduring centuries, finally brought the best man to the place where he belonged. This will always be so and will eternally remain so, as it has always been so. Therefore, it must not be lamented if so many men set out on the road to arrive at the same goal: the most powerful and swiftest will in this way be recognised, and will be the victor.<sup>10</sup>

Influential conservative German cultural figures, who cautiously (or enthusiastically) moved into the orbit of the party after its election victory of 1933, also (often enthusiastically) gave legitimacy to the National Socialist version of the idea. The following three examples are of leading German cultural figures from three different disciplines — jurisprudence, science and the arts — who each lauded the new dispensation and the central role of the *Führerprinzip* to National Socialism.

According to the political scientist and jurist Carl Schmitt:

The strength of the National Socialist state resides in the fact that it is dominated and imbued from top to bottom and in every atom of its being by the idea of leadership. This principle, by means of which the movement has grown great, must be applied both to the state administration and to the various spheres of auto-administration, naturally taking into account the modifications required by the specificity of the matter. It would not be permissible, though, to exclude from the idea of leadership any important sphere of public life.<sup>11</sup>

9 Ibid., p. 35.

10 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. 'Jubiläumsausgabe anlässlich der 50. Lebensjahres des Führers' (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1939), p. 505 (English translation from: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*). Ralph Manheim, translator (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 466.)

11 Carl Schmitt, *State, Movement, People*, Part IV: 'Leadership and Ethnic Identity as Basic Concepts of National Socialist Law,' Simona Draghici, translator. Posted on 24 July 2017 in *North American New Right, philosophy, politics, translations*, <https://www.countercurrents.com>

The poet, writer and dramatist Heinar (Heinrich) Schilling wrote a series of essays for the SS (reproduced in the SS journal *Das Schwarze Korps*) where he outlined certain ideological principles including the *Führerprinzip*. In his 1936 *Weltanschauliche Betrachtungen* (Reflections on a Worldview) he outlined the notion of the *Führerprinzip* as the cornerstone of the new state, with its incorporation into the political and public realm being a significant departure from earlier political and social norms. It was, he declared, a new era, when, 'the nonsense of voting was removed by the introduction of an authoritarian form of government, re-establishing the *Führerprinzip* in a completely new form consistent with current political conditions...'. This, according to Schilling meant the 'restoration of the dominance of an autochthonous blood...' and '... a return to the roots of the historical conditions of our nationhood'.<sup>12</sup> Schilling emphasised, therefore, what he interpreted as National Socialism's unique merger of 'natural law', leadership, and heredity, as each being synchronous and symbiotic elements of this new polity.

Similarly, in his 1938 text *Heredity and Race; An Introduction to Heredity Teaching, Racial Hygiene and Race Studies*, Dr Gustav Franke firmly positioned biological hierarchy in the political realm. Franke asserted a social Darwinist interpretation of biology, in which '... there can hardly be any doubt that man's hereditary endowment, having been examined in diverse areas of human genetic predispositions, has been subject to well-established regulations for the rest of living nature.' As a result, according to Franke, this acceptance of self-evident biological differences ensured that the only conclusion was that some races were 'superior' to others, and such an 'irrefutable' conclusion had resulted in a situation in which '... Marxists of all colours cling to the hopeless equality dogma as their last straw of hope. Certainly, they cannot seriously dismiss the overwhelming abundance of Mendel's previously examined case studies on the effectiveness of the laws of inheritance.'<sup>13</sup>

The three figures discussed above were each asserting their acceptance of the recognition of an 'iron logic of nature', as Hitler had called it in

12 Heinar Schilling, *Weltanschauliche Betrachtungen* (Braunschweig: Vieweg Verlag, 1936), pp. 10–16.

13 Dr Gustav Franke, *Vererbung und Rasse: eine Einführung in Vererbungslehre, Rassenhygiene und Rassenkunde* (München: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1938), p. 97 (translation courtesy of Dr Tomislav Sunić).

*Mein Kampf*. This was a logic that allowed for no other possibility: to attempt to reject such an immutable force, according to Hitler, would only lead man 'to his own doom'.<sup>14</sup>

With the arrival of a National Socialist government in 1933, the 'iron logic of Nature' became a firm part of political, social, and cultural thinking. It was seemingly supported by science (an interpretation of a Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' had already been popularised in Germany by Charles Darwin's friend and disciple, the German scientist Ernst Haeckel) as well as being popularised by a complex mix of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century esoteric and religious interpretations ranging from Theosophy to Ariosophy.<sup>15</sup>

The *Führerprinzip* was based both on a biological imperative of an elite destined for leadership, as well as a parapsychological current that ensured 'natural magicians' (like Hitler) 'also had strong characters and leadership capabilities, which is why 'the Magician is in all earlier times identical with "Ruler"'.<sup>16</sup> These two currents of biological imperative and parapsychological need (Eric Kurlander's 'Supernatural Imaginary'), represent two powerful streams that mingled to form the National Socialist German state. The exoteric current relates to the German state that is familiar in historical narratives about this period. Germany became a militaristic state that looked to remove the shame of the Versailles Treaty and reunify historical and mythic aspects of a greater 'Germania'. National Socialist Germany was a state that aspired to be autarkical, modern, and simultaneously cognisant of blood and tradition.

The second stream was *esoteric*, sometimes tenuous, still partly hidden, often darkly controversial. This influence is less widely known; it also played a significant part in defining what Germany would become under National Socialism. This was a subterranean river, a Germanic *Acheron*, that flowed with ideas of the irrational, the metaphysical, the notions that acted upon 'the Will'. It sprang from a Germany that looked to reject the curse of Nietzsche's 'Last Man' and inculcate the superman or *Übermensch*. The combination of these two currents fed the belief in

14 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1939), p. 287.

15 Ariosophy was, in its various manifestations, a combination of *völkisch* ideology, occultism, and a specifically Germanic interpretation of Theosophical currents.

16 Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 69.

a 'palingenesis' where a new world would rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the old.<sup>17</sup>

As the National Socialists began to embrace the image enthusiastically as part of their efforts to achieve a supremely effective style of visual propaganda, it became the task of the artist and the photographer to frame, in Evola's words, this 'principle of legitimacy' in a visually powerful and enduring manner during the Third Reich itself.

The visual representation of the *Führerprinzip* is examined here through an examination of the creative and aesthetically guided lens of Erich Retzlaff, where, as will be seen, aesthetics and physiognomy (science *and* esoterica) merged in an imaging (and imagining) of power and leadership in the photographic image beyond the image of the *Führer* himself.

## Physiognomy

As both a social and scientific fad, physiognomy had, by the 1920s, achieved enormous cultural popularity. Examinations of people and society were predicated on the belief that the face and body could be read like a book to reveal nature and character. An example of the (often complex) broad engagement with, and interpretation of, physiognomy in the Weimar era is provided by the Jewish writer, critic, and associate of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin. Reflecting on August Sander's physiognomic studies in his essay a 'Little History of Photography' (1931) Benjamin discussed the inevitability of a physiognomic regime of the future: 'Whether one is of the right or the left, one will have to get used to being seen in terms of one's provenance. And in turn, one will see others in this way too. Sander's work is more than a picture-book, it is an atlas of instruction.'<sup>18</sup> In the same essay, Benjamin contextualises Sander's physiognomic achievement in relation to that of avant-garde Soviet filmmakers: 'August Sander put together a series of faces that in no way

17 In his 2007 book *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a New Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), historian and political theorist Roger Griffin posited the idea that 'palingenesis' was a core facet of fascist and ultranationalist political movements.

18 Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 2 Part 2 1931–1934*, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, eds, Rodney Livingstone and others, translators (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 520.



stand beneath the powerful physiognomic galleries that an Eisenstein or a Pudovkin revealed, and he did so from a scientific standpoint'.<sup>19</sup> Not only was this physiognomy paramount, but considerations of nurture and nature were believed to play a part. For example, in his introduction to Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time), the writer Alfred Döblin reflected: '... they were moulded by their race and the development of their personal ability — and through the environment and society which promoted and hindered their development.'<sup>20</sup>

The reading of the face was supposed to rely on the 'indexical and iconic functions' of the photographic form. However, according to Matthias Uecker, such endeavours were ultimately, 'subsumed under a discourse that — despite its declarations to the contrary — valorizes "reading" over "seeing" and ultimately reduces all images to examples or illustrations of a pre-ordained discursive knowledge'.<sup>21</sup>

As explored by Claudia Schmölders in her book *Hitler's Face*, photography and physiognomy played an important role in visually defining the leadership credentials of the *Führer* himself, both prior to and after his accession to power.

No face bears more eloquent witness to the desire for... [a] physiognomic interpretation than this face, in which half a nation between 1919 and 1938 wanted to recognize pure, undiluted futurity, among them the most educated Germans... Since the eighteenth century there prevailed in Germany a tradition of reading physiques, in science and in art, in literature and in politics — a tradition that existed so emphatically only in Germany. Around the same time that Hitler came to Munich, this tradition was modernized for the beginning of the "short century" ... as the physiognomic gaze on the "great man" and the "German Volk" ...<sup>22</sup>

This tradition was especially evident in the photographic depictions of Hitler's face-as-biography through the work of his 'court photographer' Heinrich Hoffmann. Hoffmann first met Hitler in 1919 and he became a

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19 Ibid.

20 August Sander and Alfred Döblin, *Antlitz der Zeit. Sechzig Aufnahmen Deutscher Menschen Des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Transmare Verlag, 1929), quoted in David Mellor, ed., *Germany the New Photography 1927–1933* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p. 56.

21 Matthias Uecker, 'The Face of the Weimar Republic: Photography, Physiognomy and Propaganda in Weimar Germany', *Monatshefte* 99:4 (Winter 2007), 481.

22 Claudia Schmölders, *Hitler's Face: The Biography of an Image* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 3–4.

fixed member of Hitler's inner circle, accompanying him constantly until the end in 1945. Hoffmann's practical monopoly of the image of Hitler made him a wealthy man.<sup>23</sup> In his photographic publications such as *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* (Hitler as No-One Knows Him, 1933) and *Das Antlitz des Führers* (The Face of the Leader, 1939), and even the image of Hitler on postage stamps, it was Hoffmann's work that defined (and helped direct) the formation of Hitler's image from his early days as the messianic figure of the struggle in marches and speeches, to Hitler the 'ordinary' man relaxing in private, through to the statesman on his appointment as Chancellor of the Reich in 1933. For example, in a set of early images from around 1925,



Fig. 2.1 Heinrich Hoffmann, *Adolf Hitler*, 1927, reproduced in Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler Was My Friend* (London: Burke, 1955), pp. 72–73. Fair use.

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23 Christian Zentner and Friedemann Bedürftig, eds, *The Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), p. 437.

Hitler, miming to his own recorded speeches, adopts a series of dramatic poses in front of a mirror with Hoffmann's camera recording the process. These private images were clearly designed to assess the effectiveness of a gesture or a look and, after Hitler looked them over, he instructed Hoffmann to destroy them (Hoffmann, having disobeyed his *Führer's* instructions, later published these images in his 1955 book *Hitler Was My Friend*). What these images reveal is how crafted and rehearsed, almost operatic, Hitler's public performances were and how much Hitler understood that posture, gesture and facial expression could be used as powerful messages in their own right. By 1933, Hoffmann's portrayals of the *Führer* reveal a man seemingly assured and powerful in his role as autocrat of a National Socialist Germany.

Despite this visual domination in terms of the image of the *Führer*,<sup>24</sup> *Reichs-bildberichterslatter* (the *Reich* photojournalist) Hoffmann was not the sole photographic arbiter of the National Socialist physiognomic leadership.

Erich Retzlaff's career commenced during the nadir of the Weimar republic, and he became particularly well known for his photobooks in an era when the picture album was a popular carrier of ideas and influential cultural mores.<sup>25</sup> Retzlaff produced intense, close-up photographs of his subjects, primarily German peasants and workers, influenced by the New Vision style and with an almost visceral visual presence. As will become apparent here, he also played a significant role in the photographic staging of the *Führerprinzip*.

This approach certainly came to employ ideological paradigms that would play a role in defining a specific and important facet of the iconography of National Socialist propaganda. However, the aesthetics employed also place his work firmly in the canon of early twentieth-century modernist photography. As well as being related to the physiognomic practices of his contemporaries, Retzlaff's photographs of rural workers are also reminiscent of the work of American

24 Besides Hoffmann, only a limited number of photographers were allowed access to 'officially' photograph Hitler; these included Hugo Jäger (1900–1970) and Walter Frenz (1907–2004).

25 Wolfgang Brückle, 'Face-Off in Weimar Culture: The Physiognomic Paradigm, Competing Portrait Anthologies, and August Sander's Face of Our Time', *Tate Papers* 19 (Spring 2013), <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/19/face-off-in-weimar-culture-the-physiognomic-paradigm-competing-portrait-anthologies-and-august-sanders-face-of-our-time>



Fig. 2.2 Heinrich Hoffmann, *Adolf Hitler* [no date recorded on caption card], vintage silver gelatin print, retrieved from the Library of Congress. Public domain, [www.loc.gov/item/2004672089/](http://www.loc.gov/item/2004672089/)

Depression-era photographers such as Dorothea Lange or Margaret Bourke-White.

Retzlaff was a technical innovator too. He was significant to the history of photography in relation to his early experimentation with the innovative Agfacolor Neu colour film process in Germany. His contribution to a 1938 book, *Agfacolor, das farbige Lichtbild* (Agfacolor, the Colour Photograph) included an essay entitled *Farbige Bildnisphotographie* (Colour Portrait Photography),<sup>26</sup> centred on how to use the new materials in portraiture, and a series of Retzlaff's own striking colour portraits. Retzlaff remarked:

With colour film we have, for the first time, been given a material that puts us in a position to explore fields that formerly had been outside the capabilities of black and white photography. Everything is still virgin soil, but the possibilities for this medium of colour photography within all areas of life, art and science are evident... Within race-theory and studies of national tradition, there will be entirely new areas to be conquered by aesthetically creative photographers as well as scientists; colour photography will be indispensable to the fields of physiognomy and ethnology. There is no doubt that colour photography will enable us to broaden our knowledge of the world.<sup>27</sup>

As the above quote demonstrates, Retzlaff was thinking in terms of both science and artistic expression, an amalgam of photography, ethnography, and aesthetics.

This complex 'modern' made photographs until 1945 that also conformed very much to a traditionalistic *völkisch* ideology. Retzlaff's photographs present the worker-peasant as part of a racial collective, a German 'type', inextricably bound to the soil of his homeland. This approach employed aesthetics with an ostensibly documentary approach, much as his US contemporaries were doing, albeit towards different political ends.

Retzlaff came to photography as a means to engage with the post-war artistic milieu of Weimar, to express himself artistically and simultaneously make a living. He had worked in a succession of

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<sup>26</sup> Erich Retzlaff, 'Farbige Bildnisphotographie', in Eduard von Pagenhardt, ed., *Agfacolor das farbige Lichtbild. Grundlagen und Aufnahmetechnik für den Liebhaberphotographen* (München: Verlag Knorr und Hirth, 1938), pp. 20–23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 20–21 (author's translation).

commercial jobs after his demobilisation at the end of the First World War, but his interest in, and social contact with, the emergent Weimar art scene convinced him that he too might become an artist. But Retzlaff could not easily paint; he had a badly damaged right hand, a legacy of his time as a soldier on the front during the war.<sup>28</sup> Instead, he set up a small photographic studio on the Königsallee in Düsseldorf. With the enthusiasm of an amateur and no formal training, Retzlaff set out to learn his craft. His early studio portraits were flattering, competent, and conventional. The business thrived and he was soon able to move to larger premises on the Kaiserstrasse. But this commercial work was not enough for the young Retzlaff who, like so many of his generation, was restless and disenchanted by the post-war Versailles settlement and the prospect of being submerged into an 'ordinary' life.<sup>29</sup>

In the late 1920s, Retzlaff became intensely interested in the kind of modern photography he was seeing in exhibitions, journals, and the new picture magazines — portraiture in particular. It is likely that Retzlaff had seen the work of August Sander, whose first exhibition had been reviewed in the *Rheinische Post* in 1928.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, it was during this period that Retzlaff began to explore physiognomy in his portrait practice.

As Retzlaff's studio style changed and aligned itself more and more to an objective and broadly modern approach with a physiognomic premise, the flattering soft-focus work he had employed in his early commissions was replaced by a sharp-focus style, as evident in his portrait of the Düsseldorf gallerist and art dealer Alexander Vömel.<sup>31</sup>

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28 Retzlaff served on the Western Front from 1917–1918 as a machine gunner and was shot through the hand during action. He received the Iron Cross (second class) for bravery under fire.

29 These biographical details are drawn from an interview with Erich Retzlaff. 'Erich Retzlaff to Rolf Sachsse', 8 December 1979, interview, Diessen/Ammersee, Bavaria, Germany (courtesy Rolf Sachsse).

30 Rolf Sachsse, 'Traditional Sculpture in Modern Media', in Christopher Webster van Tonder, *Erich Retzlaff: volksfotograf* (Aberystwyth: Aberystwyth University School of Art Press, 2013), 15–17.

31 Vömel ran Galerie Flechtheim on the Königsallee nearby Retzlaff's first studio. After 1933, Alfred Flechtheim, who was a Jew, left Germany. Vömel took the gallery over and it was re-named Galerie Vömel. After Flechtheim arrived in London, Vömel continued to communicate with him and supply him with art for his new gallery in England.





Fig. 2.3 Erich Retzlaff, *Kunsthändler Alexander Vömel* (Art Dealer Alexander Vömel)  
c.1933, Aberystwyth University, School of Art Museum and Galleries.  
Courtesy of the Estate of Erich Retzlaff.



Retzlaff's new interest in physiognomic photography and in particular working on location was certainly influenced by the photographer Erna Lendvai-Dircksen. Lendvai-Dircksen was, like Retzlaff, herself influenced by the new style of 'straight' photography and photographed in a manner that was direct and dramatically cropped.<sup>32</sup> In particular, Lendvai-Dircksen, a studio photographer of some note, was focussing more and more on the physiognomic portrait of the autochthonous peasant.<sup>33</sup>

Already by the Weimar period, physiognomy had become inextricably bound up with race. This new momentum was epitomised by the books of comparative race and physiognomy produced by populist racial ideologues such as Hans F. K. Günther.<sup>34</sup> For those sympathetically nationalist photographers like Retzlaff<sup>35</sup> and Lendvai-Dircksen, their interpretation of physiognomy was coloured by a *völkisch* interpretation of race, particularly in their photographs of the *Bauer* or peasant. These portrayals attempted to point to something beyond classification, something numinous, whilst employing the supposedly objective eye of the camera to produce the racial-physiognomic photograph.

When Germany became a National Socialist state in 1933, Retzlaff had already published three books of portrait photographs of the

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32 Lendvai-Dircksen was awarded a prize following an exhibition of her photographs of peasants in Frankfurt in 1926. This enthusiasm for her peasant studies stimulated her increasing focus on this aspect of her practice. See Anne Maxwell, *Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics, 1879–1940* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), p. 194.

33 Lendvai-Dircksen's first published images of peasants appeared in an article titled 'Volks-gesicht' in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 39:11 (1930), pp. 467–68. Interestingly, the commercial work of Retzlaff and Lendvai-Dircksen appeared together in an article entitled 'Eine Fundgrube für deutsche Modeschöpfer' — *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* 42:30 (1933), 1084. During the Third Reich, their racial-physiognomic work would be reproduced together many times in a variety of books and magazines. Retzlaff claimed he had once travelled to Lendvai-Dircksen's studio to meet her, but she had been away at the time and the meeting had never taken place (Erich Retzlaff to Rolf Sachsse, interview).

34 Hans Friedrich Karl Günther (1891–1968) was a race scientist whose publications on the racial makeup of the German and European races earned him the nickname *Rassengünther* (race Günther). Adolf Hitler was certainly influenced by his work, owning six of his books in his personal collection. See Timothy Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped His Life* (New York: Knopf, 2008), p. 110.

35 Retzlaff was a pre-1933 member of the NSDAP. His membership card (number 1014457) is dated 1.3.1932 and it is clear from this card that he maintained his membership throughout the war, with the last renewal being on 8 June 1944 (Bundesarchiv, document reference R1–2013/A-3208).

physiognomic German proletariat. His first publication, *Das Antlitz Des Alters* (The Face of Age, 1930), was very well-received and had a number of positive critical reviews. There was even a review in the USA, where the anonymous reviewer for the *Quarterly Review of Biology* found that 'the viewpoint and the purpose of this beautiful volume are literary and artistic rather than scientific...' with its, '... superb portraits of some 35 old men and women...' <sup>36</sup>

The succeeding two volumes echoed the format of the first, with an emphasis on the face, the drama of the closeness to the subject and the large-scale format of their reproduction. As with *Das Antlitz Des Alters*, his dual volume *Deutsche Menschen*<sup>37</sup> (volume one, *Die von der Scholle*, concerned with rural people and volume two, *Menschen am Werk*, concerned with industrial workers) presented anonymous subjects. It is not the individual who is important, but rather their presentation as a type from a collective. The people are described by their occupation, whether it is a farmer or a blast furnace worker or a railwayman (for example, Figure 2.4).

These volumes set the standard that Retzlaff would follow for the next fifteen years, including his forays into colour photography after 1936. Retzlaff had become recognised as an influential creative practitioner in National Socialist Germany. In addition to his work appearing in numerous books,<sup>38</sup> it was also widely reproduced in the press and popular magazines as well as in National Socialist journals such as *Odal*, *Volk und Rasse*, *NS-Frauen-Warte* and, during the war, *Signal*. As in his studio portraits, his work continued to extend beyond the image of the peasant. Covers for *Volk und Rasse* included portraits of the military leader type, the hero, the *Führerprinzip*) as expressed on the battlefield. For example, Retzlaff's portrait of a decorated paratrooper from the cover of a 1941 edition of *Volk und Rasse* is, like his peasant portraits, anonymous and presented as an example of a (victorious) 'Nordic type' (see Fig. 2.5).

36 Anon., *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 6:4 (December 1931), 476.

37 Erich Retzlaff, *Die von der Scholle* and *Menschen am Werk* (Göttingen: Verlag der Deuerlichschen Buchhandlung o.J., 1931).

38 For example, Retzlaff's work was used extensively in the *Blauen Bücher* series by the Karl Langewiesche Verlag. These books were photographically illustrated texts on a variety of German subjects such as traditional costumes, churches, and architecture.

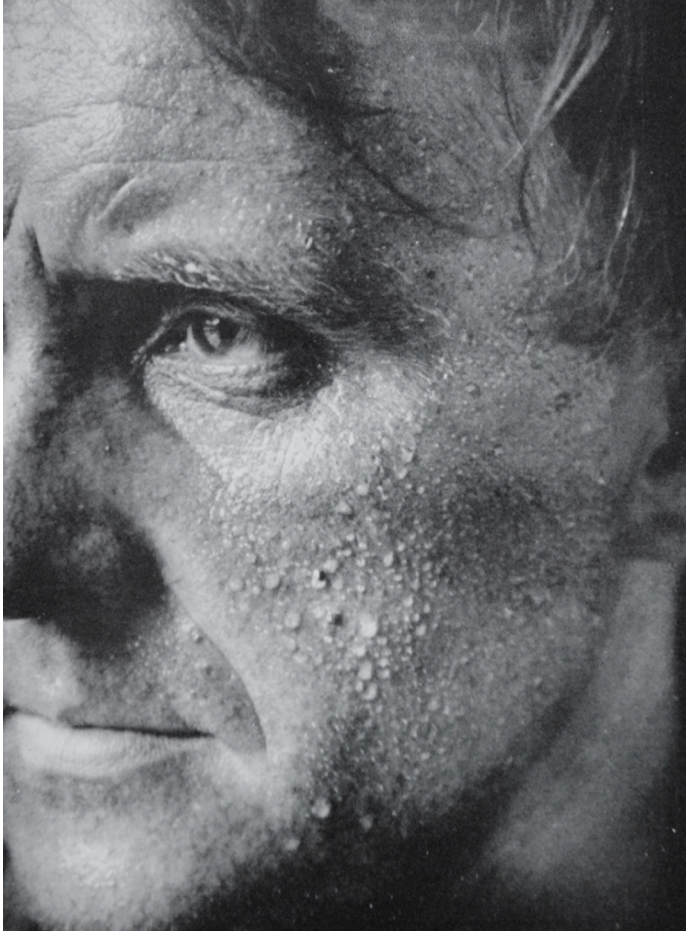


Fig. 2.4 Erich Retzlaff, *Hochofenarbeiter* (Blast Furnace Worker), 1931, reproduced in *Menschen am Werk* (Göttingen: Verlag der Deuerlichschen Buchhandlung o.J., 1931), p. 9. Public domain.



Juli August 1941

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# Volk und Rasse

J. F. Lehmanns Verlag München-Berlin

Fig. 2.5 Erich Retzlaff, *kompanieführer und Anführer der fallschirmjäger bei Dombas in Norwegen*. *Nordische führergestalt* (Company Leader and Leader of the Paratroopers at Dombas in Norway. Nordic Leader) reproduced on the cover of *Volk und Rasse*, 1941. Public domain.

The characteristics of the portrait are typical. As artfully lit as that of a film star, this profile image describes the rugged features in the context of the dashing hero figure, with a powerful focussed gaze and framed tightly, contextualised by the sartorial elegance of the uniform and accompanying military decorations. The unnamed Luftwaffe officer is described in the title as an example of a 'Nordic leader figure'.

### *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland* (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany)

The establishment of Retzlaff's oeuvre in his successful photographic volumes, in addition to his pre-1933 membership of the party, resulted in his commission to photograph a cross-section of the new German political elite. This commission became the text *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland* (1933)<sup>39</sup> that was produced to celebrate the electoral victory of the NSDAP and the establishment of a 'rightist' coalition government.<sup>40</sup> Produced by the Thule Society member and influential nationalist publisher Julius Friedrich Lehmann, this 64-page illustrated paperback opens with a foreword from Wilhelm Freiherr von Müffling:

With this great change in German history, a fountain of new forces has been unleashed. This people's movement, created by the leader Adolf Hitler, has given to the German people men who, with an ardent love of their Fatherland and the highest sense of responsibility, have begun the task of building the nation.<sup>41</sup>

The opening pages present a double page spread with two images, one on each page.

39 Wilhelm Freiherr von Müffling, ed., *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland* (Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1933).

40 This coalition was intended to 'temper' Hitler's power and the NSDAP influence. Appointments to the cabinet included non-NSDAP representatives such as Franz von Papen as Vice-Chancellor and Alfred Hugenberg (DNVP — the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* or German People's Party) as Minister of Economics. In 1933, von Papen allegedly quipped to a political colleague; 'No danger at all. We have hired him for our act. In two months' time we'll have pushed Hitler so far into a corner, he'll be squeaking.'

41 Foreword, *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland* (1933).





Fig. 2.6 Frontispiece from Wilhelm Freiherr von Müffling, ed., *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany)* (Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1933). Public domain.

The first is of Paul von Hindenburg and the second a Hoffmann image of Adolf Hitler. These foundational images use the doubling technique to create a relationship between the pair, to demonstrate their connectedness and thus the premise of the 'revolution'. In the left-hand image, *Reichspräsident* (Reich's president Hindenburg fixes the reader with his gaze. Hindenburg is photographed in three-quarter profile, a grand patriarchal figure poised between what has been and what will come. This elderly but firm figure represents the past, the era before the war, the martial tradition of the war itself and what must be preserved from that historical tradition. On the opposite page, Hitler looks to his right, the viewer's left, symbolically towards Hindenburg. Shown in profile, his physiognomy is presented clearly. Younger and fresher, the new Chancellor is established as someone looking to the past respectfully whilst simultaneously representing the new order, his body positioned as if he is looking backwards whilst moving forwards. As the viewer reads from left to right, Hitler's position on the right-hand side clearly

represents the future. Thus, the volume's theme is established. A new beginning built upon the firm foundations of tradition and custom. The intended message is clear: this revolution is no 'Bolshevik insurgency', rather it is presented as a resuscitation of the old by the new, a rebirth of Germany itself through modern forms.

Retzlaff had been commissioned to provide fifty-five of the one hundred and sixty-eight portraits and is specifically named on the title page as follows: 'Mit 168 Bildnissen von E. Retzlaff (Düsseldorf) und Anderen'. As well as being the single largest provider of photographic portraits for this publication, Retzlaff's contribution also included some of the most important figures in both the broader conservative movement and in particular the NSDAP. His NSDAP portraits included Heinrich Himmler, Ernst Röhm, Gregor Strasser, Wilhelm Frick, Richard Walther Darré, Robert Ley, Rudolf Hess, Julius Streicher, and Joseph Goebbels, to name but a few.<sup>42</sup> Just as in his studies of the peasants of Germany, Retzlaff's studies of the leadership also employed a physiognomic approach. Rather than simply providing a professionally executed studio photograph, it is apparent from their staging that he was concerned with attempting to capture the essence of the sitter, their physiognomic 'signature' and thus the signs of their leadership potential. Retzlaff demonstrated his skills, posing his sitters to best advantage.

Heinrich Himmler's portrait is a three-quarter profile in chiaroscuro with a key light from above (see Fig. 2.7).

This provided a suitably imposing and perhaps sinister presence to the portrait of the *Reichsführer-SS*, accentuating the oval of his face and piercing stare behind his trademark pince-nez. With equally piercing stare, Joseph Goebbels looks back at the camera but in a full-face portrait with a lighter, softer illumination and with Goebbels' large eyes fixed on the viewer (see Fig. 2.8).

The doctor is presented as an intellectual and the inclusion of his left hand, supporting his face, reinforces this notion of the thinker. Of Rudolf Hess on the other hand, Retzlaff, always considering the

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42 Others included (but were not limited to) Philipp Bouhler, Wilhelm Brückner, Otto Dietrich, Hans Frank, Hans Hinkel, Adolf Wagner, and Franz Xaver Schwarz.





Fig. 2.7 Erich Retzlaff, *Heinrich Himmler*, 1933, reproduced in Wilhelm Freiherr von Müffling, ed., *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany)* (Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1933, p. 56. Public domain.



Fig. 2.8 Erich Retzlaff, *Joseph Goebbels*, 1933, reproduced in Wilhelm Freiherr von Müffling, ed., *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany)* (Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1933), p. 11. Public domain.

physiognomic aspect, stated: '... a very nice person. Not good-looking, and not photogenic, but I had taken him from the right angle'.<sup>43</sup>

### *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (The Face of the Spirit)

Despite the deprivations of war and an increasingly desperate social, economic, and military situation, Retzlaff continued to be represented in expensive print editions during the 1940s. In 1943, for example, the Alfred Metzner Verlag (Berlin) published his colour studies of childhood *Komm Spiel mit mir* (Come Play with Me).<sup>44</sup> A year later, when the war situation had become even graver, Retzlaff's work was in print again with both the Metzner Verlag and the Andermann Verlag (Vienna). These publications were respectively, *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (The Face of the Spirit, 1944)<sup>45</sup> and a volume of his photographs of the people and landscapes of the Balkans, *Länder und Völker an der Donau: Rumänien, Bulgarien, Ungarn, Kroatien* (Land and Peoples of the Danube: Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia, 1944).<sup>46</sup> Both editions were lavishly illustrated with full-colour photo-lithographic images, a clear indication that, for the authorities, Retzlaff's work was, despite the advent of 'Total War',<sup>47</sup> considered important enough to have expensive processes and increasingly rare materials and labour made available.<sup>48</sup> These publications, Retzlaff's last made during the National Socialist period, contained Retzlaff's trademark application

43 Erich Retzlaff to Rolf Sachsse, interview.

44 Erich Retzlaff and Barbara Lüders, *Komm spiel mit mir. Ein Bilderbuch nach farb. Aufnahmen* (Berlin: Metzner Verlag, 1943).

45 Erich Retzlaff, *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1944).

46 Erich Retzlaff, *Länder und Völker an der Donau: Rumänien, Bulgarien, Ungarn, Kroatien* (Vienna: Andermann Verlag, 1944).

47 In a speech at the Sportpalast Berlin on the 18 February 1943 and with Germany deeply affected by the catastrophe of Stalingrad, the firebrand propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945) famously called for 'Totalen Krieg', i.e., total war, in which all resources of the state would be committed to the war effort.

48 Retzlaff had been a useful photographer for the regime. As noted here, his work had been reproduced widely in propaganda contexts in political journals and popular magazines throughout the 1930s and 1940s. He had almost certainly received commissions from the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* (Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda). Unfortunately, the Bundesarchiv file (R 56-I/257 — Reichskulturkammer — Zentrale einschließlich Büro Hinkel, Korrespondenz mit Fotograf Erich Retzlaff) is currently misfiled/lost.

of physiognomy — where *Länder und Völker* explored both geographic and human physiognomy.<sup>49</sup> *Das Gesicht des Geistes* was centred on the face of the German intellectual leadership.

*Das Gesicht des Geistes* might be considered to be Retzlaff's physiognomic 'magnum opus', although in its final form it was unfinished. A note inserted in the folio reads:

For war-related reasons, the portfolio 'Das Gesicht des Geistes' will be produced in two parts. The second set of images will follow as quickly as circumstances allow. The portfolio is offered as a whole: by purchasing this portfolio, the buyer agrees to take the second portfolio.<sup>50</sup>

The work was the culmination of over fifteen years of developing a physiognomic approach to his photography since his beginnings with the studio work in Düsseldorf. In this new project, Retzlaff brought together nationally celebrated representatives of intellectual leadership, vibrant colour, and his trademark close-up, large-format reproduction. This monumental though incomplete body of work demonstrates that Susan Sontag's uncompromising assertion that all 'Fascist' art was the 'repudiation of the intellect'<sup>51</sup> was in fact far from the truth. After 1945, Retzlaff would continue this dramatic portrait work with a black-and-white volume *Das Geistige Gesicht Deutschlands* (The Spiritual Face of Germany) published in 1952. But this second volume was a post-war reconceptualization. *Das Geistige Gesichts Deutschlands* was a subtle repositioning of German 'genius' as part of Cold War strategies to demonstrate the creative force of the 'free' west in juxtaposition to the Soviet Bloc. The introduction to *Das Geistige Gesichts Deutschlands* is by Hans-Erich Haack, a former news correspondent, NSDAP apparatchik and West Germany's first post-war director of the Political Archive. Haack tellingly quotes Goethe: "Man muß die Courage haben", sagt Goethe, "das zu sein, wozu die Natur uns gemacht hat." ("One must have the courage," says Goethe,

49 See for example, Christopher Webster van Tonder, 'Colonising Visions: A Physiognomy of Face and Race in Erich Retzlaff's book "Länder und Völker an der Donau: Rumänien, Bulgarien, Ungarn, Kroatien"', *PhotoResearcher* 23 (Spring 2015), 66–77.

50 Slip note inserted into *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (author's translation).

51 Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Straus & Giroux, 1980), p. 96.



"to be as nature has made us.")<sup>52</sup> The emphasis had shifted by the time of this 1952 publication (if not completely) from the political focus of race and nation to one of political stance and national achievement. Certainly, Retzlaff's aim in the 1944 volume, *Das Gesicht des Geistes*, was a representation and recognition of genius and German bearing. The writer Gerhart Hauptmann (himself a subject of the series) introduced the folio in somewhat purple prose, by stating: 'Should we be proud of the German mind? Well, to think of his achievements makes one almost dizzy. Would a non-German person be able to grasp his universal nature?... Everywhere, in all educated nations, they have embraced his genius with passionate love'.<sup>53</sup>

The large colour photolithographs of *Das Gesicht des Geistes* were typical of Retzlaff's style with their almost uncomfortable cinematic proximity, the very kind of closeness that had been both praised and criticised by critics in the past.<sup>54</sup> Their full colour accentuated their presence. The scale at 27 x 37 cm made them life-size or larger. They were unavoidable (see Fig. 2.9).

The significance of the publication *Das Gesicht des Geistes* was intended to be its presentation of elite individuals as the very apogee of (National Socialist) intellectual and cultural achievement. Their presentation was as a readable face designed to demonstrate a physiognomic reading of their greatness.

Inside, the loose prints were enfolded in a paper text that contained the title and the short introduction by Hauptmann. Each sitter is listed and described briefly in terms of their academic and publication achievements. In total, the selection named twenty poets, novelists, musicians, dramatists, visual artists, historians, scientists, and one industrialist. The subjects included or to be included were (those appearing in the extant folio are marked here with an asterisk):

Emil Abderhalden, biochemist and physiologist\*;

Hans Fischer, organic chemist;

52 Erich Retzlaff, *Das Geistige Gesicht Deutschlands* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1952), p. 27 (author's translation).

53 Gerhart Hauptmann, introduction, *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (author's translation).

54 See for example Wolfgang Brückle, 'Erich Retzlaff's Photographic Galleries of Portraits and the Contemporary Response', in Webster van Tonder, *Erich Retzlaff: volksfotograf* (2013), pp. 18–33.

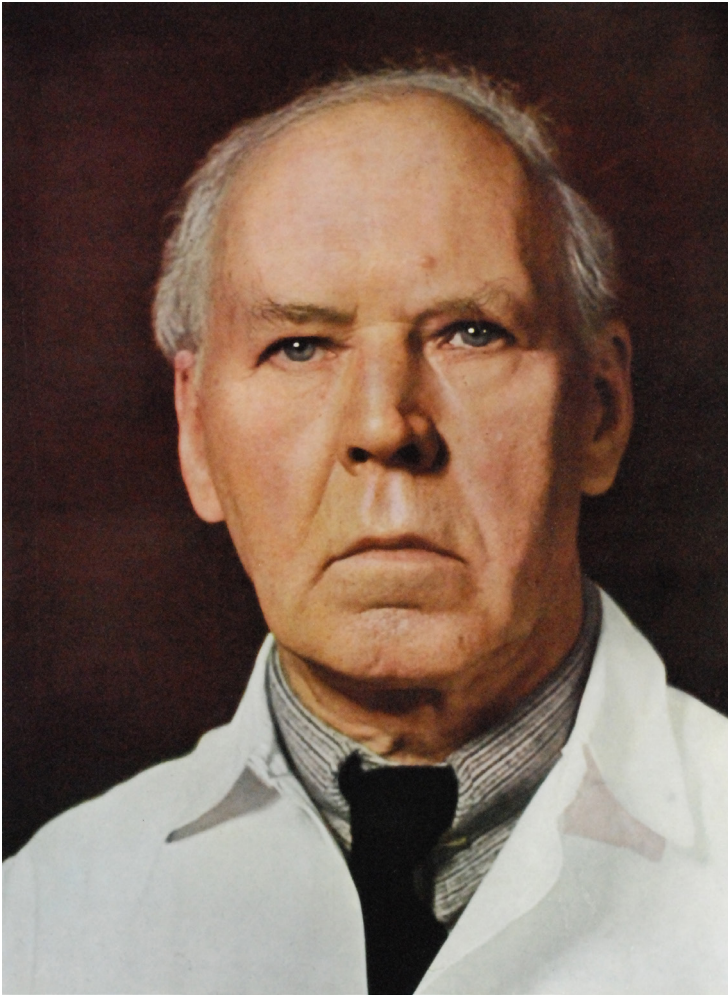


Fig. 2.9 Erich Retzlaff, *Georg Kolbe*, 1944, reproduced in Erich Retzlaff, *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (The Face of the Spirit), (Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1944).  
Public domain.

Otto Hahn, chemist;

Nicolai Hartmann, philosopher\*;

Gerhart Hauptmann, dramatist and novelist\*;

Ricarda Huch, historian, novelist and dramatist;

Ludwig Klages, philosopher, psychologist and handwriting analysis theoretician;

Georg Kolbe, sculptor\*;

Max von Laue, physicist;

Börries von Münchhausen, writer and poet\*;

Hermann Oncken, political writer and historian\*;

Hans Pfitzner, composer\*;

Wilhelm Pinder, art historian\*;

Max Planck, theoretical physicist\*;

Ferdinand Sauerbruch, surgeon;

Wilhelm Schäfer, writer;

Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, historian\*;

Richard Strauss, composer;

Albert Vögler, industrialist;

Heinrich Wieland, chemist.

In this eminent company there was only one woman, Ricarda Huch. Some on the list were certainly sympathetic to the regime,<sup>55</sup> others were decidedly not but were tolerated (and therefore included) because of their standing. Some of the artistic and literary figures were on the *Gottbegnadeten-Liste* (Important Artist Exempt List) or the *Führerliste* (The Leader's list of exempt artists working for the war effort) such as Gerhart Hauptmann, Richard Strauss, and Börries Freiherr von Münchhausen. These reserved-occupation lists of important artists

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55 Of the twenty names listed, three would commit suicide at the end of the war in despair or in order to avoid capture.



had been created by the regime in order to protect and exempt these individuals from military service in any form.<sup>56</sup>

Echoing his work eleven years previously from *Wegbereiter*, the extant portraits are carefully constructed so that the sitters are posed in one of three classic portrait poses: full-face view looking towards the viewer (four of these); three-quarter profiles with eyes either to the viewer or looking beyond the viewer (three of these); and profile (three of these).

For example, the portrait of Emil Abderhalden is presented in three-quarter profile and, like many of the other portraits, he emerges from darkness (see Fig. 2.10).

His head is illuminated by dramatic directional light that picks out his features from above and to the left. Detail and scale are significant. The presence of the sitter is reinforced by its larger-than-life reproduction; the image almost looms from the frame. Abderhalden's features are presented to the viewer for a racial-physiognomic reading. With furrowed brow, iron-grey close-cropped hair, long face and square jaw, his hard, blue-eyed gaze is directed out of the right-hand quarter of the rectangle and thus into the distance. In addition to the physiognomic notion of a projection of inner being or character, in National Socialist terms, race is significant too. Race is readable and considered indicative of character and potential. Abderhalden is an elder statesman of 'Aryan' stock. According to Günther's principles, Abderhalden's racial qualities might be regarded as predominantly Nordic and they are here accentuated alongside the fact of his intellectual significance. Colour photography was able to convey eye colour, hair colour. and skin tone. According to Richard T. Gray, this kind of photography demonstrates,

... just how important the photograph became in Nazi culture as an instrument for training a disciplinary gaze, for developing a form of technologized seeing whose purpose was to strip away the visible veneer of human beings and expose or interpolate an otherwise 'invisible' racial foundation that purportedly undergirded it.<sup>57</sup>

56 For information on the artist lists and so-called 'Führer' lists see for example: Maximilian Haas, 'Die Gottbegnadeten-Liste' in Juri Giannini, Maximilian Haas and Erwin Strouhal, eds, *Eine Institution zwischen Repräsentation und Macht. Die Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien im Kulturleben des Nationalsozialismus* (Vienna: Mille Tre Verlag, 2014).

57 Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. 368.

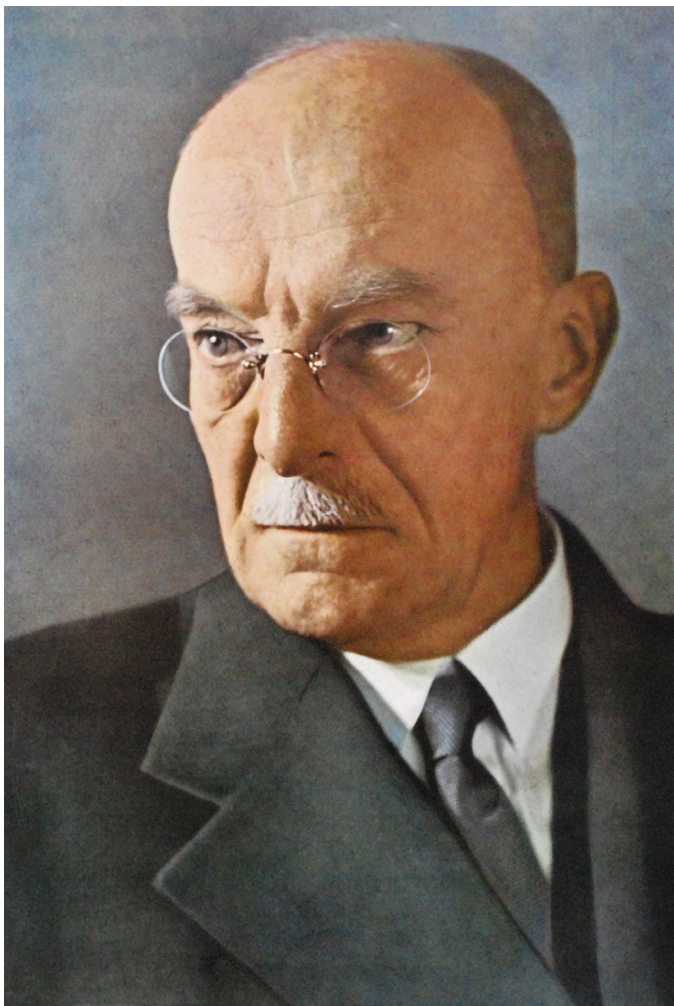


Fig. 2.10 Erich Retzlaff, *Emil Abderhalden*, 1944, reproduced in Erich Retzlaff, *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (The Face of Spirit), (Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1944).  
Public domain.

*Das Gesicht des Geistes*, had it been completed, might have fulfilled Retzlaff's ambition to achieve a full reckoning of the range of 'face' of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community). Retzlaff had photographed the child, the peasant, the worker, the hero, the leadership, and, in this project, the cerebral engine-room at the start of the 'thousand-year Reich'. This final racial-physiognomic folio presented the intellectual legacy of the new (National Socialist) dawn. These great-minds-as-image were evidence of a new epoch. As Hermann Burte — an artist, writer and poet himself — emotionally characterised it: 'A new man has emerged from the depth of the people. He has forged new theses and set forth new Tables and he has created a new people, and raised it up from the same depths out of which the great poems rise — from the mothers, from blood and soil'.<sup>58</sup>

The portfolio presented to its audience an intellectual nobility (whether that nobility agreed with the regime or not). Their race and their character that was so clearly 'demonstrated' physiognomically, photographically, was 'evidence' of the advanced nature and continued potential of the (predominantly) Nordic German in particular. It was, according to the race scientist Hans F. K. Günther (writing in 1927), '... not to be wondered at [...] that it is this Nordic race that has produced so many creative men, that a quite preponderating proportion of the distinguished men [...] show mainly Nordic features...'<sup>59</sup>

The volume *Das Gesicht des Geistes* was prefaced with a note from the editors stating:

The editor and publisher wish, by selecting these portraits of leaders from the older generation of art and science, to offer a valuable inspiration; they retain the right to bring a selection of the younger generation in another series.<sup>60</sup>

If, as the editor's note would suggest, further studies had ever been produced, then the next stage would be a celebration of the new man, the emergent generation of intellectual leaders who had been born during

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58 Hermann Burte, 'Intellectuals Must Belong to the People', a speech delivered in 1940 at the meeting of the poets of the Greater German Reich. Quoted in George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (London: W. H. Allen, 1966), p. 143.

59 Hans F. K. Günther, *The Racial Elements of European History* (London: Methuen, 1927), p. 54.

60 Editor's note from *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (author's translation).

the Third Reich and who would be maturing in the years following the successful conclusion of the war.

## Conclusion

During the 1930s and into the war years, Retzlaff aimed to represent the German as the racial acme, a radical and traditional alternative to what was seen by many conservatives as the post-First-World-War economic, ethnic, and spiritual decline of Germany as epitomised by Spengler's 'Faustian man', or the nihilism of the modern world and the dawn of the era of Nietzsche's 'Last Man'. Over the course of the twelve years of National Socialism, the work of photographers like Retzlaff became the standard image of a National Socialist aesthetic, reproduced widely in populist, political, and art publications. Retzlaff's work never featured the racial other as a counterpoint to his visual acclamation of the 'Aryan' type. Yet, the ubiquitous presence of his work in journals, magazines, and books provided a powerful reinforcement of National Socialist racial policies and ideology by underlining the state's desired visual norms and aspirations. These were images that were made to be consumed, enjoyed, and *identified* with. The fact that they are usually not explicitly ideological (often no banners, flags, insignia, or uniforms) but were implicitly so, is key here. These racial-physiognomic photographs became a form of associative conditioning. The German viewer could examine these 'readable' photographs and identify their place in the National Socialist people's community, the *Volksgemeinschaft*, with its objective of racial homogeneity and a leadership hierarchy of ability, whilst simultaneously learning to identify (through systems such as physiognomy) those racial elements alien to that body.

Race, and the legacy of the Weimar obsession with physiognomy, became a combined motif in National Socialist propaganda and in the work of the photographers contributing to it. The influence of the racial-physiognomic still photography of Retzlaff and others can be strongly detected in various propaganda applications that followed into the 1940s. For example, a physiognomic approach is clearly evident in a *Zeit im Bild* (Image of Our Time) propaganda film made in 1942 of the

German conductor and composer Wilhelm Furtwängler<sup>61</sup> conducting the overture to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*<sup>62</sup> before an audience of workers in a factory in Berlin. The camera pans around the audience during the concert and focusses on their faces, creating dramatic stills that might have come directly from a Retzlaff book. Here are enraptured faces, intent on the cultural event.



Fig 2.11. Still from *Zeit im Bild* (Image of Our Time), 1942, a *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy) production. Courtesy of the Bundesarchiv, Film: B 126144-1.

The film cuts to Furtwängler conducting frenetically, the 'genius' at his station, then back to the *Volk* who watch. The youth, rugged workers, combat soldiers, women, the elderly; are all linked by the intensity of their gaze, their 'Aryan' credentials clear. Here is the racial-physiognomic study as film, moments seen, carefully framed and lit to accentuate the drama of their faces, these anonymous spectators are united across divisions of class, gender, and occupation; they are united by their immersion in a particularly German moment, immersed in the

61 Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886–1954). The film was made at the AEG plant in Berlin on 20 February 1942, and featured Furtwängler conducting the *Reichsorchester* in a *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy) concert for ordinary working-class people. Jonathan Brown, *Great Wagner Conductors: A Listener's Companion* (Oxford: Parrot Press, 2012), p. 664.

62 *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (the Master-Singers of Nuremberg) was the Wagner opera most carefully exploited by the National Socialist state, presented as it was as the symbolic dramatisation of a German renewal.

music of the master, Wagner. The situation is carefully stage-managed, conjoining the lowest proletarian members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* with the intellectual masters of the past (Wagner) and the cultural leaders of the present (Furtwängler). Moreover, it employs a 'still' frame approach that is derived from the legacy and the popularisation of racial-physiognomic photography by photographers like Retzlaff.

If Retzlaff's early studio portraits provided the overture of this *Gesamtkunstwerk*<sup>63</sup> of photograph, race, and physiognomy, the books of peasant portraits developed the leitmotif, *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer* was the chorus of the work, then *Das Gesicht des Geistes* was the incomplete finale and the post-war *Das Geistige Gesicht Deutschlands*, was a drawn-out coda. Like the lavish contemporaneous Ufa colour film epics such as *Kolberg*,<sup>64</sup> *Das Gesicht des Geistes* was most likely intended as an uplifting propaganda fantasy of German resistance and resurgence where the value of the message was considered to outweigh the enormous material cost. Retzlaff's folio was certainly an expensive visual statement, combining colour and scale with an ideological image of the *Führerprinzip* in action. Constructed and presented as it was, the intention would have been to encourage resistance, to demonstrate the achievement of the leadership elite, to show what was at stake should the Reich fall, and what could be resumed, once the war was over and National Socialism had triumphed.

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63 The term *Gesamtkunstwerk* refers to a 'total work of art' and was used by Wagner to signify the aspiration of a theatrical drama that brings together all forms of art.

64 Veit Harlan (director), *Kolberg*, Ufa Filmkunst GmbH, Herstellungsgruppe Veit Harlan, running time 110 minutes, release date 30 January 1945.





# WORKERS



### 3. The Timeless Imprint of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's Face of the German Race

Andrés Mario Zervigón

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In 1932, the small Kulturelle Verlag-Gesellschaft (Culture Press Society) of Berlin published a book that quickly received wide acclaim, as well as notoriety. Leafing through the pages of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race), one might assume that her volume attracted attention due to its copious and luxuriously printed portraits<sup>1</sup> (see Fig. 3.1).

The 140 full-page pictures, produced with the best photogravure reproductive technology available at the time and accompanied by captions, rested next to each other or next to pages partially filled with gothic-style print. The sequencing of these components loosely positioned each portrait as a fleshy stopping point on a rural road trip into the more tradition-bound corners of Germany. Moving from the first image to the last, readers gathered the pictorial and spiritual essence of Teutonic identity as it flashed with little variance across the sitters' faces.

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1 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlag-Gesellschaft, 1932). Here I have followed photo historian Ute Eskildsen in translating the word *Volk* in *Volksgesicht* to 'race.' See Ute Eskildsen, 'Das Prinzip der Portraitdarstellung bei Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, Paul Strand, und Christopher Killip,' *Camera Austria* 4 (1980), 7–16. Lendvai-Dircksen declares this meaning of the word *Volk* forthrightly in the introduction to her 1932 book.

Es war wie ein Wiedersehen nach langer, langer Zeit. Als ob man sich immer gekannt hätte. So sagt die Seele. Der Kopf sagt: Unsinn – Glaube. Was weiß der Kopf schon!

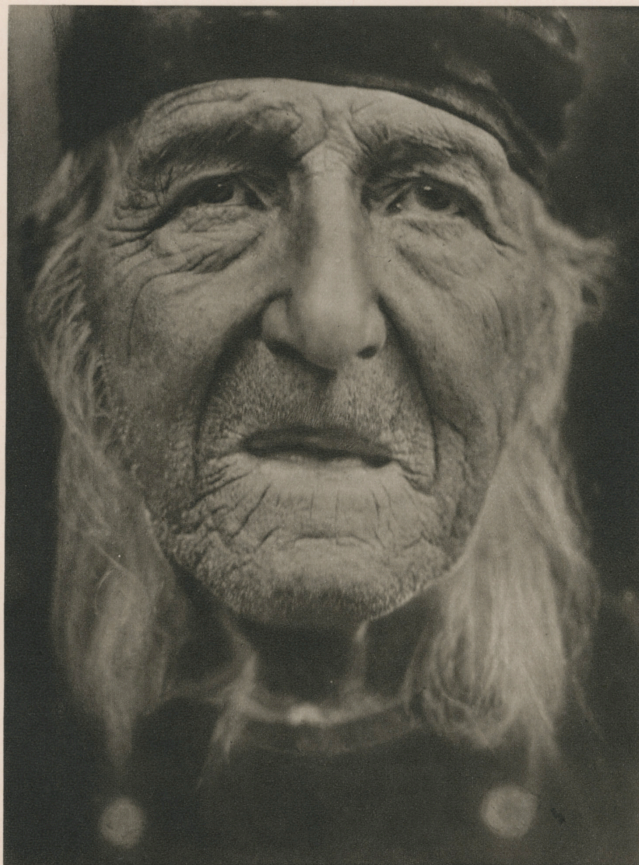
Der Alte fragt nicht: Woher, wohin, fremder Mensch. Er sagt mit dem ganzen Wesen: Es ist herrlich, daß du da bist. Er holt Wein zum Willkomm, lauter und stark; vor dem Haus in der Morgensonne trinken wir reithum, jeder, der g'rad' da ist, trinkt mit: Ein Enkel, zwei Urenkel. Leicht und beglückt, ein Becherlein nach dem andern trinken wir, alle aus demselben Becherlein.

Er erzählt, von Wein und Leben beseligt – er schließt die Augen, wenn ihm Tieferlebtes auf die Lippen kommt: Weisheit des Volkes hier persönliches Gut.

Fromme, edelreife Seele, voll Vertrauen, bereit zur großen Kelter, gehörst zum Besten, was ich auf der Welt sah.

Was ist alles künstliche Wissen in der Welt, was die ganze stolze Mündigkeit der menschlichen Gedanken gegen die ungesuchten Töne dieses Geistes, der nicht wußte, was er wußte, was er war?

Hölderlin.



Alter Bauer von der Mosel  
(Weinbauer)

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Fig. 3.1 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Alter Bauer von der Mosel (Weinbauer)* (Old Farming Peasant from the Mosel Region (Wine Farmer)) with a poem by Friedrich Hölderlin, reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race), (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlagsgesellschaft, 1932), pp. 194–95. Public domain.

Or perhaps it was the popularity of the format itself that attracted so much attention. Sporting such content and narrative, Lendvai-Dircksen's tome profitably hitched itself to the Weimar-era photobook craze, a phenomenon that saw many of Germany's most famous photographers disseminate their work not just through exhibitions and portfolios, but also in publications that stressed image over word. In fact, given the relatively low profile of her text and the utter dominance of the portraits, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* almost qualified as a book-length photo-essay. This new genre, as Michael Jennings observes in his important article on the subject, arose around 1928 and is identified by 'arguments based not on an interplay between text and image, but on photographs alone, arranged in discursive and often polemical order'.<sup>2</sup>

The photobook is of course nearly as old as photography itself, Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* (1844–1846) standing as a prime example. But in these earlier volumes, the photographs largely illustrate the text rather than the other way around, although one could argue that Talbot's volumes offer a few exceptions to this rule. Later in the nineteenth century, new printing technologies such as the halftone enabled photography to cover the pages of mass media formats such as newspapers and magazines and, in the process, reverse the priority of text to image. This advent also made the sequencing of photos possible, allowing magazines in particular to convey themes using pictures and, in the process, leave text a mere afterthought. But it was only in late 1928 that the first book-length photo-essays began to appear. These largely featured a short introduction followed by an uninterrupted sequence of captioned photos.

Though featuring many more pages of text, Lendvai-Dircksen's book closely resembles two of these early and highly popular photo-essays in that, like them, it mapped human typologies. One of these, the left-oriented *Köpfe des Alltags: unbekannte Menschen* (Everyday Heads: Unknown People)<sup>3</sup>, was fashioned in 1931 by the Swiss Berlin-based photographer Helmar Lerski, who praised Lendvai-Dircksen's volume

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2 Michael Jennings, 'Agriculture, Industry, and the Birth of the Photo-Essay in the Late Weimar Republic,' *October* 93 (Summer 2000), 23. See also Daniel Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis: The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2012) and Pepper Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look! Modern Vision and the Weimar Photographic Book* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

3 *Köpfe des Alltags: unbekannte Menschen* (Everyday Heads: Unknown People) (Berlin: Verlag H. Reckendorf g.m.b.h., 1931).





Fig. 3.2 Helmar Lerski, *Putzfrau* (Charwoman) c.1928–1931, silver gelatin print, George Eastman Museum, purchase 1981.1289.0002. Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum.



one year later. In his own book, he similarly used light and exceedingly close framing to monumentalize faces, in this case of Germany's economically battered poor (see Fig. 3.2).

The distinctions visible between these often tragic-looking faces were supposed to align with their professions, which ranged from cleaners to the unemployed. The images in sequence offered both spectacle and pedagogy.

The other of these two landmark photobooks was, of course, August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time, published in 1929. Sander had been producing a large archive of negatives that he intended for an equally massive but ultimately unrealized book project on German society titled *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Citizens of the Twentieth Century). *Antlitz der Zeit* served as an interim report on a multi-volume publication that was to follow.<sup>4</sup> Its sixty sample portraits, each given a full page and a finely printed caption, offered the sitter's profession and, in some cases, region of residence. Here Sander was classifying his subjects by social and professional categories, and then placing them across an arc that rose and fell in stature as one navigated the book from its beginning to end. His intention was to expand photography's perceptual possibilities by placing numerous prints into a series arranged in specific order.<sup>5</sup> Novelist Alfred Döblin explained in the book's introduction, 'Just as there is comparative anatomy, which helps us to understand the nature and history of organs, so this photographer is doing comparative photography, adopting a scientific standpoint superior to that of the photographer of detail'.<sup>6</sup>

Though Sander's portraits were rife with details particular to each picture, his operation of 'scientific' photographic comparison across

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4 Here I use Badger's phraseology, 'an interim report,' to describe *Antlitz der Zeit*. See Gregory Badger, 'Introduction,' in Gregory Badger and Martin Parr, eds, *The Photobook: A History. Volume I* (London: Phaidon, 2004), p. 124.

5 Sander himself explained that 'A successful photo is only a preliminary step toward the intelligent use of photography. [...] Photography is like a mosaic that becomes a synthesis only when it is presented *en masse*.' August Sander, letter to the photographer Abelen, 16 January 1951, cited in Gunther Sander, ed., *August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 36.

6 Alfred Döblin, 'Einleitung,' in *Antlitz der Zeit* (Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1929), cited in Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography,' in Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds, Edmund Jephcott and Kingley Shorter, translators, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 520.

sixty portraits was supposed to aid the reader's broader perception of modern society and acclimatize her or him to its structure and state of radical transition. It would also help the reader find a place in that society. Walter Benjamin famously explained that, '...one will have to get used to being looked at in terms of one's provenance. And one will have to look at others the same way. Sander's work is more than a picture book. It is a training manual [*Übungsatlas*]'.<sup>7</sup>

Each turn of the page becomes a passage along the arc of provenance that trains social perception. Sander's famously static figures come to life as the reader compares one image to the next, a process revealing how identity — even one's own — is distinctly formed by social conditions over time. In both Sander's and Lerski's books, no single photograph appears in isolation but rather as part of a larger whole, which, in turn, engaged with a general social phenomenon. In Sander's case, his book's appeal became one of fetishistic close looking, arranged into a laudable pedagogy much like Lerski's.

The structuring of photos into an argument-driven sequence or a 'mosaic,' as Sander called it, clearly calls to mind the Weimar era's other great popular fascination: montage. As Jennings notes,

like the Dada photomontage, or montage essays by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, or the montage films that followed in the wake of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, meaning arises in the photo-essay as individual images and individual details are absorbed into larger constellations.<sup>8</sup>

This is a key similarity that suggests the importance of the photo assembly over its parts and, in turn, the assembly's relationship to spectacular shifts and problems in the phenomenal world from which it draws.

In this respect, the date of Lendvai-Dircksen's book is significant. Appearing in 1932, it consciously positioned itself at the high-water mark of Weimar-era Germany's photobook boom and of the country's right-wing surge, when a cresting discourse that foregrounded farming peasants as the country's purest representatives of German identity

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography,' in Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, eds, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing. Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 511–12.

<sup>8</sup> Jennings, 'Agriculture, Industry' (2000), p. 29.

took particularly strong hold of the more conservative and reactionary imagination.<sup>9</sup> Lendvai-Dircksen's publication merged both right-wing sentiment and the representation of the peasant by giving the second of these phenomena a compelling visual form over the run of numerous book pages. It was probably her stunning pictorial expression of right-wing ideology through a highly popular format that attracted so much attention.

There was, however, something else that drew so many eyes to her pages. Although the format, sequencing and social embeddedness of her book were standard and popular by 1932, the photos themselves were not. They were, in short, powerfully atypical. Lendvai-Dircksen closely followed August Sander's 1929 book by surveying Germany's population and cataloguing typologies along the way. But her study limited itself strictly to rural farming peasants. Rather than its subjects being defined by permutations of profession, class, and economic status, as was the case with her Cologne-based colleague and Lerski, hers were classified by regional divisions alone. All of Germany, her book proposes, found its representative face in these tightly delimited units of an already small selection of the country's population.

If this were not already focused enough, the individual prints themselves lavish their photographic attention principally on older peasants, particularly those whose wrinkled flesh created a tangled dance of light and shadow before Lendvai-Dircksen's dramatically raking light and sharply focused lens (see Fig. 3.3).

On these aged and creased faces, she deployed a technically sophisticated and seemingly modernist use of photographic formalism. But she did so within a neo-traditional context of gothic typography (*Fraktur*) and nineteenth-century poetry, which she sprinkled through her pages. Lendvai-Dircksen, in other words, was processing techniques and styles associated with modernist photography through an old laboratory of traditional realism, where painters such as Wilhelm Leibl, Hans Thoma, and even the seventeenth-century Rembrandt stood as models.<sup>10</sup>

9 See, for example, Martin Heidigger, 'Schöpferische Landschaft. Warum bleiben wir in der Provinz?' *Der Aleanne*, 1 (March 7, 1934), 1, in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, eds, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 426–28.

10 The association of Rembrandt with right-wing 'Völkisch' German nationalism was best established by Julius Langbehn with his book *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Leipzig: Hirschfeld Verlag, 1890).

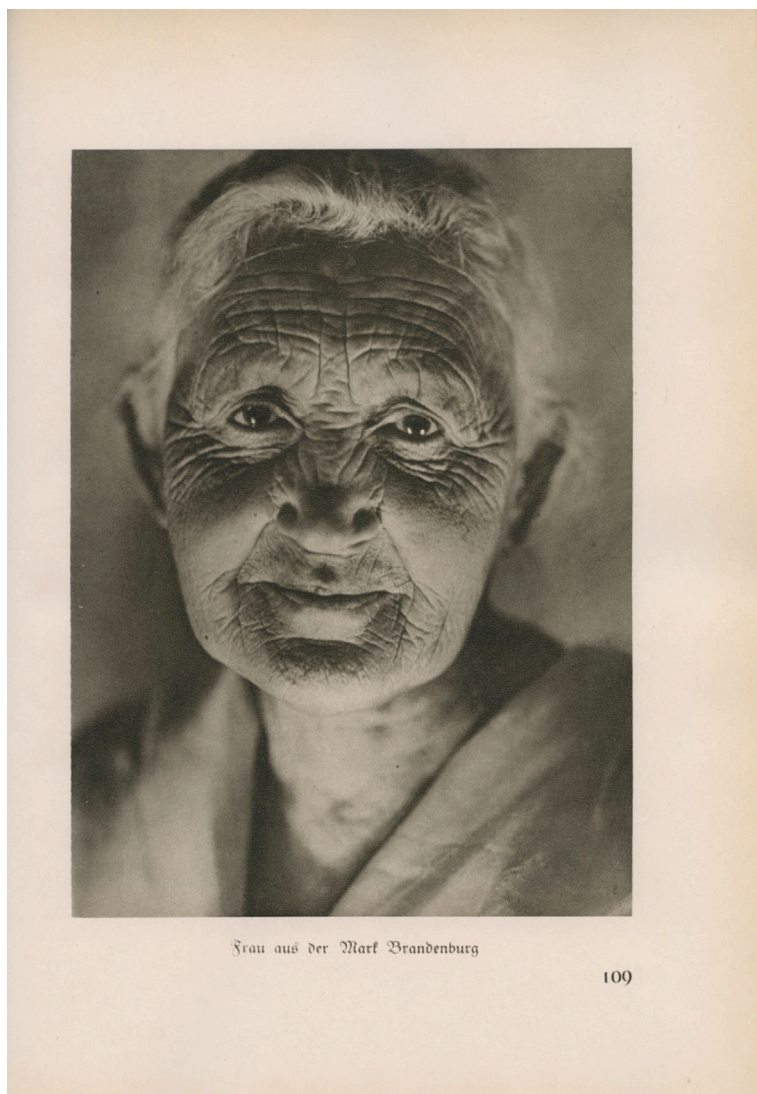


Fig. 3.3 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Frau aus der Mark Brandenburg* (Woman from the Brandenburg Region), reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (Face of the German Race) (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlag-Gesellschaft, 1932), p. 109. Public domain.

The result was a series of aesthetically pioneering images that consciously associated themselves with new trends in the medium, yet simultaneously solicited the most anti-modernist, anachronistic modes of thinking that were closely associated with National-Socialism just prior to its coming into power. Given its right-wing orientation and its inventive pictorial approach, Lendvai-Dircksen's book was trying to intervene spectacularly in at least two seemingly incompatible discursive streams over the pages of her book, doing so in such a way that each aesthetic gesture enhanced the power of the other. This helped assure her book's broadest possible impact and audience. It is here that an implied equation of the face stamped with German identity and the photo imprinted by light became so important.

### Erna Lendvai-Dircksen

The creator of this equation had not always been so strangely caught between thematic reaction and formal innovation. Lendvai-Dircksen began her career in 1916 after graduating from Berlin's *Lette Verein*, a unique institution dedicated to the professional training of women photographers. Like a good number of her fellow *Lette* graduates, she opened a photo studio at the onset of her professional career (her atelier was located in Berlin) and thereafter she quickly rose to fame. By the close of the First World War in late 1918, she was known around the country for her uniquely intense form of portraiture and a more traditional photographic art specialising in the nude female figure.

Her portrait of artist Käthe Kollwitz provides a good example of the first style (see Fig. 3.4).

Here, a raking light from the upper right strikes the artist's bare forehead and right cheek, allowing Kollwitz's dour eyes and sad mien to emerge slowly from an enveloping greyness. The picture's sharp focus plays with the reflection of light on the parts of her face receiving the most illumination, an emphasis which, in turn, allows the eyes and eyebrows to have a greater effect as they interrupt the face's glistening surface. Meanwhile the reddened nose protrudes, cheeks sink, closed muzzle juts forward, and a shallow depth of field allows the artist's compressed torso to sink into softer focus.

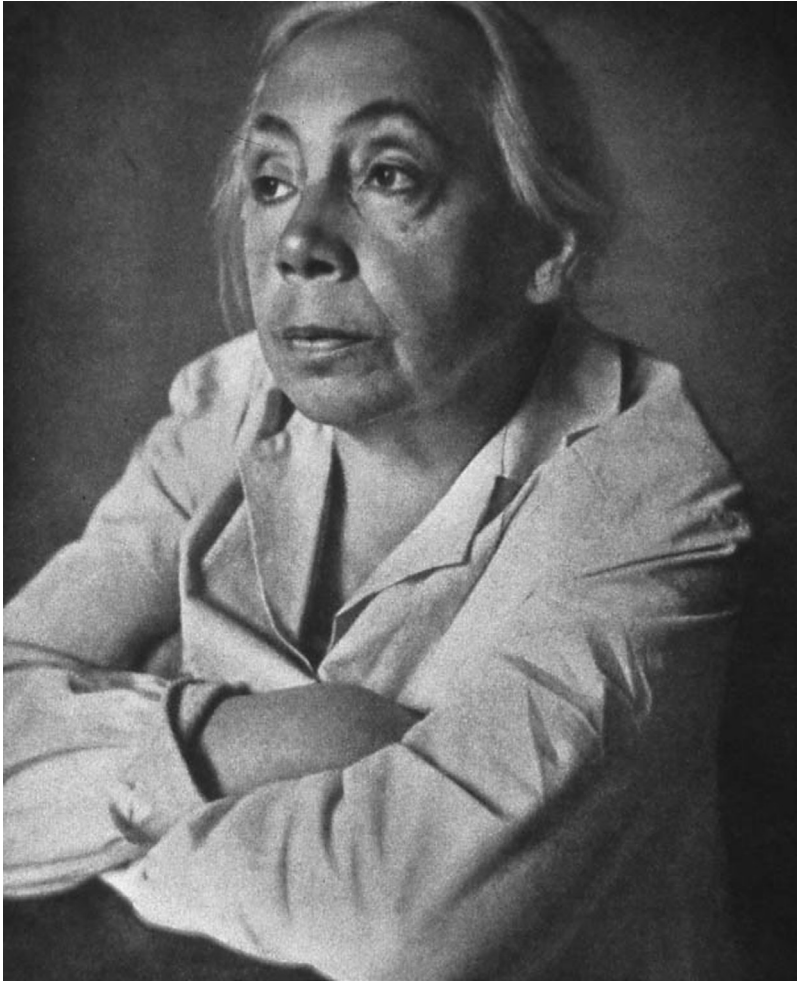


Fig. 3.4 Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Portrait of Käthe Kollwitz*, c.1925, reproduced in *Unsere Zeit in 77 Frauenbildnissen* (Our Era in 77 Portraits of Women) (Leipzig: N. Kampmann, 1930), (no pagination). Public domain.



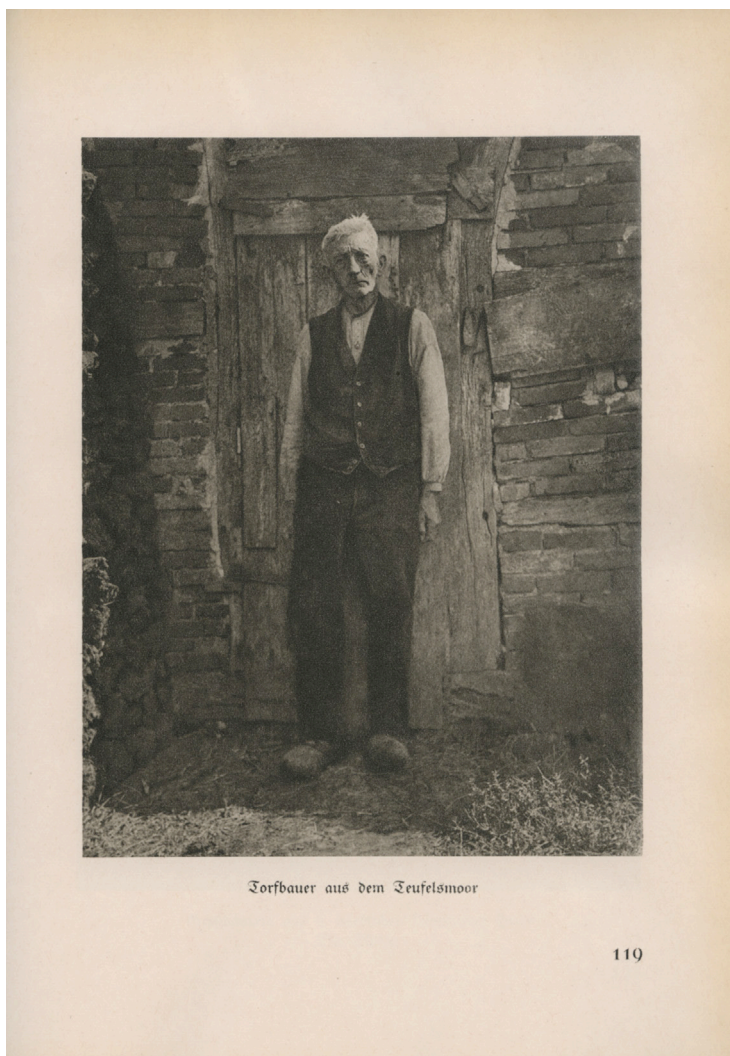


Fig. 3.5 Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Dorfbauer aus dem Teufelsmoor* (Village Peasant from the Devil's Heath),<sup>11</sup> reproduced in her *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race), (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlag-Gesellschaft, 1932), p. 119. Public domain.

11 See Claudia Gabriele Philipp, 'Erna Lendvai-Dirksen (1883–1962). Verschiedene Möglichkeiten, eine Fotografin zu rezipieren,' *Fotogeschichte* 3:7 (1983), 43.



Such visual high fidelity, close framing, and personal investigation were typical of the photo portraiture of the middle years of Weimarer-era Germany. But Lendvai-Dircksen's talent and sensitivity provided an added aesthetic value, enabling her to generate a melancholic picture that coordinated stylistically with Kollwitz's own famously sad images. Lendvai-Dircksen, in other words, was so thoroughly in control of style and photographic technology that she could provide a pictorially tight correspondence to Kollwitz's own approach to image making. The photographer had clearly studied contemporary art forms closely enough to create a precise photographic equivalent in her work.

Concurrent with her celebrity portraits (and a great deal of female nudes) Lendvai-Dircksen also shot innumerable peasant portraits, which she claimed to have begun amassing into a large archive throughout the teens and twenties, although many of these pictures seem to date from the mid-twenties to the early thirties. Nonetheless, she asserted that this initially peripheral interest began in 1911 when, while on vacation, she whimsically photographed a rural blacksmith and a tenant farmer (see Fig. 3.5).

It was then, according to her book, that she perceived how these peasant faces seemingly reflected a bond with, and dependence upon, the *ländliche Heimat*, the rural homeland. As she explained in her book:

The common man who, in his essence and possessions, resides near nature, bears a face that is true and authentic, a face that reveals the basis of his existence. He and his style of living have a physiognomy that speak of existence in a completely and deeply convincing way. Here lies the *impression* of something eternal... [emphasis my own]<sup>12</sup>

According to Lendvai-Dircksen's thinking, after an apparent right-wing or *Völkisch* 'awakening', the sun and soil of rural life marked the peasant face and left an imprint of 'something eternal' on the countenance. The stamp, in turn, expressed an equally eternal but latent character from inside the body outward, allowing the physiognomy to 'speak' a common peasant's 'complete and deeply convincing' identity.<sup>13</sup>

12 Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1932), pp. 5–6.

13 For a similar understanding of physiognomy and language from the fascist period, see Fritz Lange, *Die Sprache des menschlichen Antlitzes. Eine wissenschaftliche Physiognomik und ihre praktische Verwertung im Leben und in der Kunst* (Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1937).

Physiognomy served as a deeply freighted term even before National Socialism's applied use of its tenets. The study of this pseudoscience<sup>14</sup> can be traced to antiquity, but in its modern practice, adherents such as the Briton Sir Thomas Browne and the Swiss pastor Johann Lavater held a consistent belief that human temperament helped shape the face and, therefore, that facial features could 'speak' of a person's interior character or health. As Browne wrote in 1675, 'the Brow speaks often true, [...] Eyes and Noses have Tongues, and the countenance proclaims the heart and inclinations'.<sup>15</sup> These arguments liken facial features to loquacious speech. But Lendvai-Dircksen's understanding of physiognomy equates her peasant faces with the photograph itself, for both 'speak' in complete and convincing detail after having been inscribed from outside by nature, such that they can articulate their interior content more clearly. It is therefore the etching of the face and the photograph in uncanny accord that produces a picture of doubly enhanced clarity.

By 1926, Lendvai-Dircksen had produced enough peasant portraits to open a widely heralded exhibition in Frankfurt that already bore the title *Das deutsche Volksgesicht*. In 1932, she published her first book of this material and sold enough copies to finance a full-time focus on peasant portraiture. Other forms of photography were neglected by Lendvai-Dircksen, as her formula for depicting the Teutonic face ossified in fifteen subsequent books. After her first publication, she turned her attention to younger and middle-aged peasants as well. But with few exceptions, such as her book on the construction of the *autobahn*, scarcely more than the region changed as she moved from province to province, even publishing volumes on the 'Germanic' face in German-occupied Norway, Denmark, and Flanders during the war.<sup>16</sup> By then her books were fully embedded in the nationalist state apparatus. The majority of the volumes produced after the 1933

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14 Editor's note — For more on the current scientific re-evaluation of physiognomy see: Lou Safra, Coralie Chevallier, Julie Grèzes, Nicolas Baumard, 'Tracking historical changes in trustworthiness using machine learning analyses of facial cues in paintings' *Nature Communications* 11, 4728 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-18566-7>

15 Thomas Browne, *Christian Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1716), Part 2, Section 9.

16 This series of books included titles such as *Das Gesicht des deutschen Ostens* (1935), *Das deutsche Volksgesicht: Mecklenburg und Pommern* (1940), *Das germanische Volksgesicht: Norwegen* (1942) and *Reichsautobahn: Mensch und Werk* (1937).

National Socialist electoral victory were released by provincial state-owned publishers, a highly beneficial arrangement that only ended with Germany's defeat in the summer of 1945.

## The Photographs and Their Context

Lendvai-Dircksen's pictorial formula followed her fascination with physiognomy by taking the face as a near singular focus (see Fig. 3.6).

As she explains in her first volume, 'Here it is attempted [...] through a series of pictures to bring the German racial face to view. With few exceptions the illustration of movements and action have been avoided because this would have deflected from the primary topic'.<sup>17</sup>

As a consequence, her images are strikingly static and inexpressive, often even more so than those of August Sander. Her portrait sitters generally gaze stoically outward as their physical features alone perform optical acrobatics. One can see quite clearly that the photographer has removed these subjects from the course of their everyday lives and placed them in a specific photographic setting moulded by the demands of her project. Sometimes her peasants clearly sit in the confines of a photographic studio or a similar space set aside for the purpose. The stasis of identity envisioned by her ideology becomes a static expression on her peasants' faces, made to freeze for the snapping shutter and, in some cases, illuminated by studio light.

Aside from Lendvai-Dircksen's near manic focus on the face, it was her extraordinary emphasis on the aged physiognomy that made her work so unique, particularly in her first peasant book of 1932. Here too she admonished that:

Decisive for selecting from a monstrous amount of material was the fact that the truly essential of any physiognomy only emerges with advancing years. It is for this reason that the young face is seldom enlisted. Only the completed cycle of an entire life is a full sum. And like an old tree that shows the peculiarity of its nature most precisely, so too the old human, who becomes the most pronounced type, who becomes the life history of his line.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1932), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

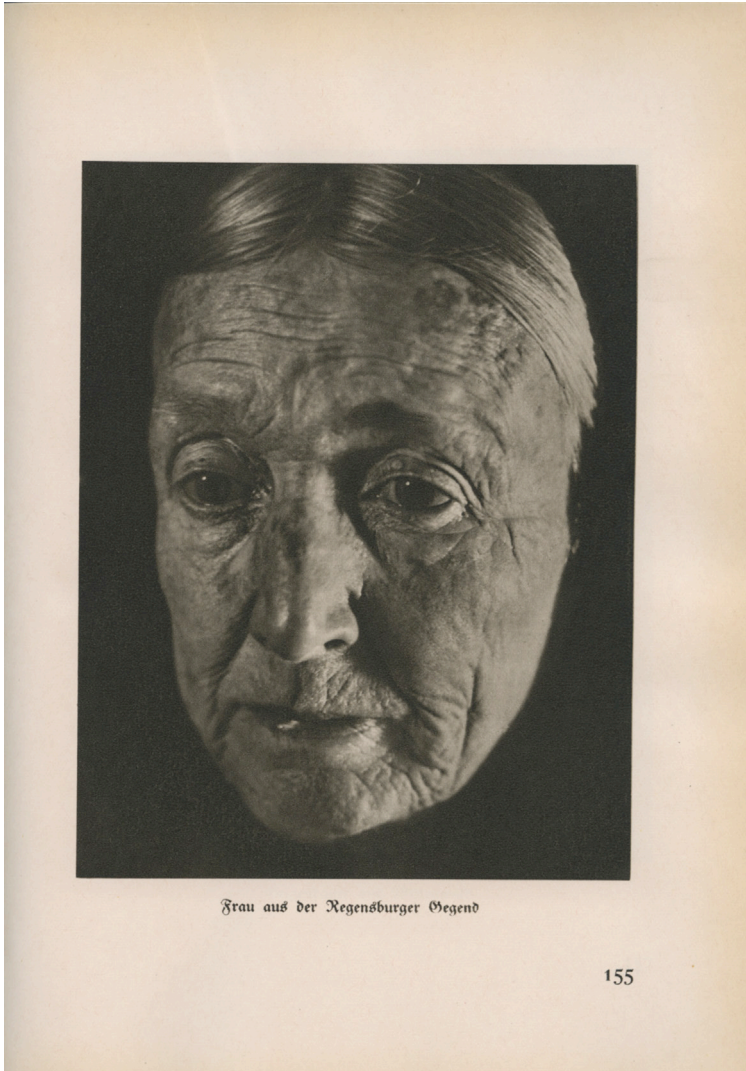


Fig. 3.6 Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Frau aus der Regensburger Gegend* (Woman from Regensburg Region), reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race), (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlag-Gesellschaft, 1932), p. 155. Public domain.

What could be described as her formalist approach to photography encoded this imprinted history in the pictorial rhetoric of the hyper-legible stamped image. Where old trees have rings, her aged faces have wrinkles and her sharp prints have shadow and light.

Correspondingly, of the 140 pictures in this first volume, 110 depict elderly and weathered people. In each, Lendvai-Dirksen deployed with extraordinary agility a sort of technical sophistication closely associated with modernist photography at the time. She could close the face in a tight frame of black and thereby have it float in an inky ether likely cultivated by a studio space and artificial light (see Fig. 3.7).

Or she could reduce other features to the multiple folds and repetitive patterns of traditional dress that, in turn, frame the central face. The uncomfortably tight focus and close proximity of her lens combine with a sharp film stock and high print value conveyed by her book's photogravure printing, to produce a relentless visual assault. In this manner, Lendvai-Dirksen deployed photography's best visual fidelity to confirm how deeply the *Heimat*, the German homeland, actually inscribed itself onto the eloquent physiognomy.

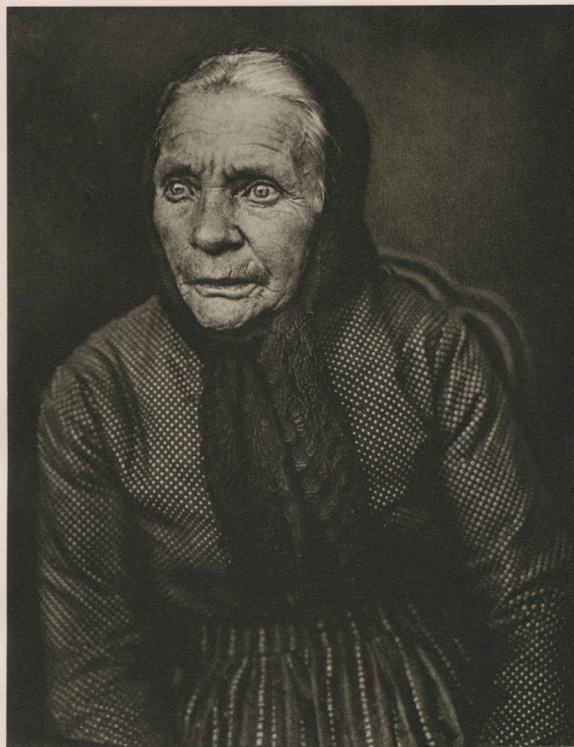
It is important to note that this pictorial discourse about *Heimat* merged with a political and cultural discourse that had been rattling the country since its unification in 1871. The decades that followed saw the much delayed but exceedingly rapid industrialization of Germany's economy. The majority of the population continued to live on the land, even through the Weimar period. But the country's rise to become one of the world's top industrial powers in the late nineteenth century precipitated a national identity crisis. Would Germany foster an urban society complete with social mobility and unceasing cultural innovation? Or would it recover its far less dynamic and more familiar communal virtues as forged on the land through old-fashioned agricultural work?<sup>19</sup>

This crossroads was summed up by sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies as a choice between *Gesellschaft* (society) and *Gemeinschaft* (community).<sup>20</sup> The tension strung by this binary wracked the Weimar era from its beginning. But it climaxed with a number of industrial and agricultural crises in 1928, the sum of which saw deep setbacks for factory and

19 See David Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780–1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003).

20 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Fues Verlag, 1887).





Geestbäuerin

Fig. 3.7 Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Geestbäuerin* (Farming Peasant Woman from the Geest Region), reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race), (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlag-Gesellschaft, 1932), p. 53. Public domain.

agricultural workers before the depression began in late 1929. It was in this broader context that Weimar's photo-essays on human typologies appeared and that Lendvai-Dircksen chose to visualize the eternal human identity of Germany's rural *Gemeinschaft*.<sup>21</sup>

It is also here that her images, so controlled, so removed from the actual life situation of their subjects, emphasise their theme of toiling peasant and embossed character. Many reactionary Germans through the Weimar period and beyond strongly embraced an existing adulation of the country's rural *Heimat*, advocating this location not merely as a site of traditional collectivity but as one of racial health and purity. The pastoral terrain of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) set the alleged contrast between urban and rural into brutally stark clarity. While cities promoted rootlessness, miscegenation, and corporeal degeneration, the countryside offered sun, fresh air, the forest, and regenerative physical exercise. The heavily photographed, nationalist, right-wing nudist Hans Surén, for example, exclaimed in the introduction to his 1925 book *Der Mensch und die Sonne* (Man and Sun):

[a] desire to call attention to the fundamental facts of national existence and development. If physical strength is allowed to decay, even the highest achievements of the spirit and the most profound scientific knowledge will not avert national decline and death.<sup>22</sup>

Without physical strength, the urban achievements of intellect and science will fail to help a German nation in decline. Only in the Teutonic countryside could this strength be recovered. His 'Ode to Light', which also appears in his book's introduction, exclaimed how this 'aspiration of the true German race' could be realized beyond the city:

Hail to all of you who love nature and sunlight! Joyfully you wander through field and meadow, over hill and vale. Barefoot in your linen smocks open at the neck, your knapsack on your back, you wander happily whether the skies be blue or storms rage. The straw in the barn or the noble temple of the forest itself is our resting place at night.<sup>23</sup>

21 I draw this overview of German debates on urban and rural society from Jennings, 'Agriculture, Industry' (2000), and Detlev Peuckert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993).

22 Hans Surén, 'Ode to Light' in *Der Mensch und die Sonne* (Stuttgart: Dieck & Coin Verlag, 1925), translated in Anton Kaes, et al, eds, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 678–79.

23 Surén, 'Ode to Light' (1925), p. 678.





Fig. 3.8 Leni Riefenstahl, *Dancer*, *Olympia*, 1938, courtesy Archives Riefenstahl.

According to this conception, the bucolic wind and sun stimulated happiness while the strain of hiking, of carrying a backpack and sleeping on simple hay conveyed nobility. 'Placed in the bright frame of exalted nature,' Surén intoned, 'the human body finds its most ideal manifestation'.<sup>24</sup>

The most obvious photographic expression of this thinking in the National Socialist era was the *oeuvre* of Leni Riefenstahl around her production of *Olympia*, a two-part film produced during the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin. A series of film frames and separately produced stills, particularly from the opening sequence, flooded the country's ideological space with racial thinking and largely fixed the image of young white strength — with a few important exceptions, such as the African American runner Jesse Owens. One of the more iconic stills from the film's opening featured a dancing nude woman with her back arched and her arms raised against the sky, bright light framing the edges of her taut body (see Fig. 3.8).

Her worship of the cloud-filtered sun followed directly on from the famous motif of Fidus (a pseudonym for the artist Hugo Höppener), which similarly depicted a nude athletic youth, in this case male, exposing his body to the sunny elements (see Fig. 3.9).

Höppener was an adherent of the youth movement after the turn of the last century, and he advocated its ideas of nudism, vegetarianism, and naturalist ways of living that positioned the rural German *Heimat* as the primary source of health.<sup>25</sup> His *Light Prayer*, first produced around 1913 as a postcard, tightly distilled the relationship between the rural sun and corporeal health by having its figure throw his nude body to the sun's regenerative rays and accompanying winds, forging a motif that found repeated expression in the photography of the youth movement published in numerous journals well into the Weimar era.

The similar iconographies maintained a grip on photography during the National Socialist era, as Riefenstahl's still demonstrates. But soon, added to this was the related motif of young corporeal military strength that removed these sun-nourished bodies from the rural *Heimat* and instead placed them in marching grounds and urban festivals, making for

<sup>24</sup> Surén, 'Ode to Light' (1925), p. 679.

<sup>25</sup> See Ulrich Grossmann, Claudia Selheim and Barbara Stambolis, eds, *Abruch der Jugend: deutsche Jugendbewegung zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Verführung* (Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2013), exhibition catalogue.



Fig. 3.9 Fidus (Hugo Höppener), *Lichtgebet* (Light Prayer), 1894. © Deutsches Historisches Museum / A. Psille.

an endless array of bare-chested men undergoing martial training. Both permutations received the full endorsement of Hitler himself when he publicly acclaimed such body types in a speech delivered at the opening of the notorious 1937 *Great German Art Exhibition*, which was set in contrast to the *Degenerate Art Exhibition*. Man has never, he declared:

been more similar in appearance and in sensibilities to the men of antiquity than he is today. Millions of young people are steeling their bodies through participating in competitive sports, contests, and tournaments and, increasingly, are putting these bodies on display in a form and constitution that has not been seen, much less imagined, in perhaps a thousand years... This new type of man who, in all his glistening, glorious human strength, made his spectacular debut at the Olympic Games last year — this, dear sirs of prehistoric artist stammering, is the model of man for the new age...<sup>26</sup>

With these words, Hitler meant to condemn modernist art and Expressionism in particular. But more broadly, he was casting his lot in with the most reactionary of right-wing aesthetic creeds orbiting around an ever-transforming rightist ideology. His equation of modernist figuration with victims of what he called physical degeneration had largely been heralded by architect Paul Schulze-Naumberg in his Weimar-era study entitled *Kunst und Rasse* (Art and Race), the lengthiest and most widely read discourse on nationalist art and its depiction of the human body since Julius Langbehn's 1890 *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as Educator).<sup>27</sup> The scene had been set for a dominant National-Socialist-era photography of a heroic human form shaped by sun and militarism, and redolent of health over 'degeneration.'

### Lendvai-Dircksen and the *Heimat*

Lendvai-Dircksen, however, offered an alternative understanding of the reactionary human form in photography. Her far more lugubrious take on nature and the racial body invoked sickness, debilitating labour, and

26 Adolf Hitler, 'Hitlers Rede zur Eröffnung des Hauses der Deutschen Kunst, München, 18.7. 1937,' in *Mitteilungsblatt der Reichskammer der bildenden Künste* (1 August 1937), 4, translation from, Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, eds, *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 494–500 (quoted from p. 498).

27 Paul Schulze-Naumberg, *Kunst und Rasse* (Munich: Lehmann Verlag, 1928) and Langbehn, *Rembrandt* (1890).

martyr-like sacrifice as its most decisive features. In her unforgiving and carefully posed images, signs of aging and decay inscribed by nature were not just represented but actually heightened with a photographic attentiveness that extended down to the very pores of her subjects' faces. The 'Woman from the Regensburg Region' stares vacantly as her closely framed face appears apparition-like from the blackened background (Fig. 3.6). Static and inexpressive, her countenance speaks through worried wrinkles and almost abject liver spots. The 'Woman from the Tölzer Region' seems to sport an enormous goitre that confirms her status as an authentic peasant but also transforms her into an Amazonian colossus, transgressing traditional gender boundaries while edging toward what the nationalist right often condemned as diseased degeneration (see Fig. 3.10).

An unusually expressive 'Woman from a Small Mecklenburg City' closes her sunken eyes and cracks a smile to reveal dramatic dental decay.

Lendvai-Dirksen's short and unfocused texts accompanying some of these portraits serve to amplify the themes of age and deterioration highlighted in her physiognomic studies. The words accompanying 'Farming Woman of the Geest Region' (Fig. 3.7) reads as if an epitaph:

She lived a life full of work on a meagre strip of land. Belonging to the Niedersachsen racial type, which neighbours the Frisian type, the Geest Volk are dour and hard, slow, withdrawn, hardworking. Their struggle with the meagre land defines their existence. This seventy-year-old is the embodiment of worry, she never thought of herself. Thinking only of others, her nervous eyes stare out toward new duties, new and hard demands.<sup>28</sup>

What the loquacious face does not say by itself, Lendvai-Dirksen is happy to supply in her *Fraktur* gothic-print text, idolizing her subjects through attributes of poverty, deterioration, hardship, and loss. Such attributes stood in stark contrast to the health and physical exaltation associated by the Right with the regenerative German countryside and, as seen in Hitler's *Great German Art Exhibition* opening, increasingly associated with military service and sport.

In the case of men, Lendvai-Dirksen was often more careful. She took pains to emphasize her subject's powerful — if not occasionally portly — masculinity. But her 'Village Peasant from the Devil's Heath'

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28 Lendvai-Dirksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1932), p. 52.





Frau aus der Tölzer Gegend

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Fig. 3.10 Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Frau aus der Tölzer Gegend* (Woman from the Tölzer Region), reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race), (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlag-Gesellschaft, 1932), p. 154. Public domain.



(Fig. 3.5), is a weak-willed poor man who steals the photographer's purse after posing for her, or so her text narrates. He later returns the bag, complaining that he could not resist the evil lure of urban wealth. This blending of the depicted pose with the moments before and after it sees the man perform an act actually authenticating his racial purity.

In her few young faces, Lendvai-Dircksen starkly violates her optical precision by applying a heavy airbrush. In so doing, she seems to emphasize the utterly blank slate of these physiognomies, the freshness of that surface on which a character-building sun and soil will inscribe an interior and latent German authenticity.

## Modernity and Modernism

Complimenting Lendvai-Dircksen's otherwise standard focus on advanced age and toil is an insistent refusal of the modernity that might otherwise aid her suffering peasants. She utterly removes her subjects from the course of history in order to restrict the temporal narrative to its strict task of nationalist identity formation. No tractors, no paved streets, no signs of contemporary medicine, no technology at all ever sully the insistent anachronism of her images. This odd time warp in which only identity takes shape sets her work dramatically apart from other photographs of rural peasants. These alternatives often play with entertaining juxtapositions of old and new, and thus evoke the 'non-synchronicity' or uneven temporal development that thinker Ernst Bloch viewed as a social product of industrial modernization.<sup>29</sup> August Sander, for example, photographed his land-bound farmers with modern agricultural implements or with the contemporary touches of rural poverty in makeshift constructions. In Sander's book, the intrusion of the industrial into the rural defines the social moment that his book navigates and that his assisted perception aimed to provide. By contrast, Lendvai-Dircksen's vision of rural poverty, as in her *Dorfbauer aus dem Teufelsmoor* (Fig. 3.5), favours old bricks and rickety timber over Sander's improvised modern cinderblocks.

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29 Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zürich: Oprecht & Helblin, 1935), republished by Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1985.

In a different venue for National-Socialist-era visual culture, specifically the mystical and rabidly racial anthropological journals from the mid-1930s, one finds many peasant portraits, often with acceptable intrusions of modernity, such as telephone lines. Photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch in the mid-twenties also permitted a temporally contingent countryside, in some cases allowing rural half-timbering to rub against the factory-scapes of industrial modernity in the Ruhr region. Although these photographs did not all appear in photobooks, they were nonetheless set into paginated or portfolio sequences that, from one image to the next, marked the non-synchronicity of the pictorial succession itself and the developing world outside.

In the case of Lendvai-Dirksen, however, the only sign of modernity in her images is the photography itself. And significantly, rather than suppress obvious signs of this technology's presence, she proudly highlights these indications in her work's intricate detail and traces of carefully arranged studio lighting. This, in turn, allows her to transform three-dimensional physical features into a two-dimensional play of form and grey tone, all the while emphasizing the primal and timeless qualities of peasant physiognomy. By contrast, the photographic medium announces its presence demonstratively. It becomes a self-referential exercise in technologized vision, a dramatic disclosure of forms, patterns, and underlying structures that the unaided eye cannot see.

In this respect, her pictures closely followed trends in avant-garde photography generally associated with the Bauhaus instructor László Moholy-Nagy. They thereby intervened in the larger discourse on art photography. For the Hungarian artist, largely working in Berlin by 1926, photography's self-referentiality operated as a critical component of the medium's artistic legitimacy. In a typically modernist gesture, he declared in 1927 that:

[the] first and foremost issue [...] in today's photographic work [...] is to develop an integrally photographic approach that is derived purely from the means of photography itself; only after a more or less exact photographic language has been developed will a truly gifted photographer be able to elevate it to an 'artistic' level.<sup>30</sup>

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30 László Moholy-Nagy, 'Die beispiellos Fotografie,' *Das deutsche Lichtbild* (1927), translated as 'Unprecedented Photography,' in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography*

Moholy-Nagy and his wife Lucia Moholy-Nagy famously began forging this photo-specific language in the early twenties with photograms, direct prints made by placing objects on light-sensitive paper.<sup>31</sup> In these images 'sculpted with light,' as Moholy-Nagy described the procedure, juxtaposed forms tangle against each other and offer optical titillation. Because the photogram process often made it difficult to discern exactly what these objects were, Moholy-Nagy could claim that his and Lucia's pictures produced new relationships of form rather than representing existing relationships already found in the phenomenal world. By his reckoning, such work freed photography from mere reproduction, allowing it instead to become an autonomous tool of art that might train the capacities of human perception to perceive purely formal relationships. Later Moholy-Nagy realized similar strategies with the camera, turning the lens sharply downward or upward in order to defamiliarize the viewer with exactly what it was that she or he saw. These photographs also stressed a play of form over a revelation of content. The pictures, he explained, 'suffice to establish a new kind of seeing, a new kind of visual power'.<sup>32</sup>

Where Moholy-Nagy's 'New Vision' enhanced modern perception through formal pictorial means, the more content-based 'New Objectivity' of other photographers foregrounded overlooked social and natural structures through a use of repetition. Renger-Patzsch's careful 1928 image of shoe lasts seems to unveil hidden forms woven into the world of industry. Karl Blossfeldt's near-microscopic imagery provides much the same unveiling of hidden forms, this time in nature, revealing the aesthetic product of evolution's natural selection. In the world of advertising, such extraordinary play with form and repetition served to cast commodities in a stunningly new and attractive light, charting the course from bag to bean to delicious cup of coffee in one of Renger-Patzsch's most famous commercial photographs.

But for many right-wing Germans, the 'New Vision' of Moholy-Nagy and the seemingly more sober 'New Objectivity' of Renger-Patzsch and Blossfeldt were associated with urban modernity, uncontrolled

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*in the Modern Era. European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), p. 84.

31 See Renate Heyne and Floris M. Neusüss, eds, *László Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms. Catalogue Raisonné* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

32 Moholy-Nagy, 'Unprecedented Photography' (1927), pp. 83–84.

industrialization, and international trends in photography that seemingly erased nation-defined content. Such images appeared to fragment and aestheticize a modern life that many reactionary Germans deemed deeply alienating and foreign. Lendvai-Dircksen herself wrote that, 'although our time bears the distinct stamps of science, technology and commerce, one can scarcely talk of a human unity because the man of today is struck off balance by an imbalanced attention and an overtaking of sensation [...]'.<sup>33</sup> Remarkably, however, her images also use 'New Objectivity' techniques to tease out invisible and overlooked patterns. The result provides the same strain on the viewer's visual faculties.

It is with such thinking in mind that one can return to her equation of photography with the peasant face. She principally employed this operation to shift modernist photography away from its associations with technology, science, and alienation, and instead orient the medium toward mystical and nationalist notions of racial authenticity. Hers was not a newly objective vision of the world, but something she termed a 'psychology of vision', a deeply subjective investigation of the national persona, paradoxically expressed with the cold technical precision of modernist photography.<sup>34</sup> The visual power of her images enhanced this ideological rhetoric, while her principles lent gravity to formal exercises that might otherwise be dismissed by her targeted audience as hollow formalism.

But Lendvai-Dircksen's equation of the authentic German face with the light-imprinted image did something else as well. It displaced the equation made in Sander's book — and others like it — that saw the act of flipping through pages as navigating across an arc of class or professional identity. As noted in Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit*, the perusing reader passes up and down a hierarchy of social difference largely defined by profession. In the process of comparing one photograph to the next, she or he experiences the distinctions of contemporary social formation in the duration of consuming the book itself. But because Lendvai-Dircksen saw identity as fixed and inherent, shy of its slow imprinting by the German sun and soil, reading her photobook cannot

<sup>33</sup> Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1932), p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> See Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, 'Zur Psychologie des Sehens,' in *Das deutsche Lichtbild* (1931), five pages, not paginated.

serve as a time-based equation of identity's social formation. Instead, each page sees the revelation of pre-existing identity in a flash. In a display approaching pyrotechnics, every moment of the shutter's snap, as experienced by the reader from print to print, becomes yet another affirmation of identity's life-long inscription, its natural emergence over de-historicized time. In such a way, the allegory of the photo for the face obscures the disjunction between the temporal development of identity and its frozen stasis in ideology.

Lastly, consider another consequence of this displacement. In taking her photographs on a supposed journey through Germany's countryside, Lendvai-Dircksen removed her subjects from the flow of their everyday lives and placed them in an alien temporal register carefully orchestrated by her photographic peregrination. As the shutter snapped and the flashbulb ignited, she locked her subjects into her tour of the countryside and, correspondingly, into fierce debates about Germany's destiny and identity, disputations which the photographs as a book would contribute to and advance. Her pages in sequence provide a powerful visual form for, and intervention in, racial theories rapidly developing on the eve of Germany's National Socialist takeover. Each new book of hers thereafter, fifteen in total, responded to and extended this discourse, thereby contributing to the larger context from which her project had emerged.

In her first and perhaps most important book, Lendvai-Dircksen uses sequencing and photo technology to perform a number of odd but interrelated manoeuvres, which compensate for the fundamental stasis of identity and society stipulated by her rightist ideology. She intended these operations to provide a right-wing nationalist alternative to modernist photography, creating an emotional, or — as she saw it — psychological impact for her audience, particularly where the cool *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) otherwise provided sober analysis.

But one of her manoeuvres in particular, which likened the tortuous stamping of German identity across the peasant face to the imprinting of the photograph itself, proffered a fundamentally different sort of book-based photographic scenario. It reassigned the temporal experience of the late-Weimar photobook away from the social processes of identity's formation, as charted over pages, to the life-long stamping of physiognomic signs that could supposedly be found in any one of

her many photographs. Though this supposed embossing of identity took time, even an entire lifetime, it ultimately revealed an underlying, essential, and static ethnic character. Her implied allegory of the photo for the face served to obscure the disjunction between temporal development and frozen stasis. It also formed an aspect of her alternative to modernist photography.

As it turned out, however, her contemporaries scarcely took up the formula that she offered once the National Socialists achieved power in early 1933. Thereafter, the continual focus on festivals, rallies and sports quickly generated a large body of photographs that stressed youthful bodies nourished by the rigours of competition and military training. Photographers such as Heinrich Hoffmann, Max Ehlert, Leni Riefenstahl, and many lesser known photojournalists hired to document events for the illustrated press, simply overlooked the rural origins that Lendvai-Dirksen stressed. In other cases, they placed their photographed sports and military figures in the countryside without the extreme signs of wear so important for *Das deutsche Volksgesicht*. The onset of the Second World War accelerated the rising emphasis on the rugged healthy soldier who explored the countryside sometimes for leisure but more often for slaughter. Even Erich Retzlaff, one of the other notable photographers devoted to rural peasants during this era, increasingly avoided the physical marks of advanced age and wear in favour of elaborate regional costumes and youthful figures, albeit with important exceptions.<sup>35</sup> Lendvai-Dirksen herself increasingly gave more space to younger peasants in her subsequent books and, in the case of her book on the *autobahn*, she even offered images of bare-chested men of working age employed on the vast public works project.<sup>36</sup>

Because such visions turned out to be rare in her larger oeuvre, it is intriguing to consider what her career might have become after the turning point of 1933. In the same year that she published *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1932) she also released the book *Unsere deutschen Kinder* (Our German Children), which featured 105 high-quality photographs of peasant children. The subject of this other book is nearly the opposite

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35 See Christopher Webster van Tonder, *Erich Retzlaff: Volksfotograf* (Aberystwyth: Aberystwyth University, School of Art Gallery and Museum, 2013).

36 Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Reichsautobahn. Mensch und Werk* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1937).



of *Das deutsche Volksgesicht*, although the minors who range from infants to toddlers are almost all dusted or even smeared with the soil that would go on to impress their features in older age, at least as far as the other book suggested. Though hedging her bets with these two nearly simultaneously published volumes, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* defines what National-Socialist-era photography could have become, had not sport and militarism come to define the paradoxically reactionary modern conditions of Germany after 1933.

*HEIMAT*



## 4. Photography, *Heimat*, Ideology

Ulrich Hägele

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*Heimat* is an idyll, *Heimat* is the earth, *Heimat* is tradition — and *Heimat* is work. But the term is problematic. *Heimat* is historically a difficult notion to decode as its meaning has shifted significantly over the years. *Heimat* is a ‘chameleon,’ according to Hermann Bausinger: the idea of *Heimat* links to ‘the idea of an emotional relationship that is constant; but this constancy could only ever be a reflection of specific times, because the notion of *Heimat* itself changed its hue, indeed its character and its meaning again and again.’<sup>1</sup> The Grimm dictionary defines *Heimat* as ‘land or just the land in which one is born or has permanent residence.’<sup>2</sup> *Heimat* was thus linked to a geographical area and to the agricultural structure of a rural world characterized by agriculture. *Heimat* also had a traditional social custom in this context. Because the link to the rights of *Heimat* were acquired through birth, marriage, or through an official position for life: if one went into the world and became impoverished, the extended *Heimat* community was notionally obliged to welcome one’s return. *Heimat* became synonymous with rootedness, family, home, and farm. In contrast, the notion of an urban *Heimat* has long remained outside of such imaginings. The cities represented the opposite of *Heimat*: anonymity and mass concentration, mobility and rapid change, poverty and misery — the rootlessness of a life beholden to the capitalist system.

*Heimat* as a term is typically German. In most other languages there is no specific equivalent. Since its origination in the early nineteenth

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1 Hermann Bausinger, ‘Chamäleon Heimat — eine feste Beziehung in Wandel’, *Schwäbische Heimat* 4 (2009), p. 396.

2 Jakob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 10 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1975), pp. 864–66.

century, the understanding of *Heimat* changed, particularly in the period after 1871 when the German Empire prospered politically, economically, socially, and culturally. These changes were self-evident across the new notion of German nationhood. In view of the topographical patchwork on the map, which was now to be woven into a whole, *Heimat* in the national context remained a utopia that one could dream of, which was, however, a long way off. Moreover, *Heimat* was diametrically opposed to modernity. Above all, the bourgeois circles in the metropolitan centres and industrial regions now raised the notion of *Heimat* to an ideal, which was to stand in opposition to the ever-advancing modern age and the associated loss of values from the past.

### *Heimat* and the Foundation of National Meaning

Starting from the traditional concept of *Heimat* based on one's place of birth, *Heimat* was stylized as a contrasting model to modernity, that is, to the industrialized world. Hermann Bausinger characterised this as a 'Kompensationsraum', the notion of *Heimat* for (specifically) the bourgeoisie, as being above all a complex reflex reaction to a nostalgic feeling of loss as well as the foundation of an emergent identity. *Heimat* was linked to a timeless and mostly romantically presented set of ethical and moral standards of value, all forming part of a strategy to seek to neutralise elements of anything considered 'foreign' and 'modern'.<sup>3</sup>

The broader notion of *Heimat* served as part of a bourgeois-intellectual resistance against a general deracination — against the 'specifically metropolitan extravagances of social division, whims, affectations' , as the sociologist Georg Simmel opined in a study on the metropolis of Berlin in 1903.<sup>4</sup> To this end, around the turn of the century, several platforms were formed, such as the *Lebensreformbewegung* (Life Reform Movement) and the *Naturschutzbewegung* (Conservation Movement). And the aim of early *Heimatsfotografie* (Homeland photography) can be explained by these common denominators: the visual preservation

3 Hermann Bausinger and Konrad Köstlin, eds, *Heimat und Identität. Probleme regionaler Kultur. Studien zur Volkskunde und Kulturgeschichte Schleswig-Holsteins* (Neumünster: Waxmann, 1980), p. 25.

4 Georg Simmel, 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben', in Theodor Petermann, ed., *Die Großstadt. Vorträge und Aufsätze zur Städteausstellung. Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung zu Dresden* (Dresden: Gehe Stiftung, 1903), p. 187.

of traditional culture as well as the desire to form an identity for the politically new.

This identification of *Heimat* and rural folk culture also presented an image of national unity to the outside world. A prerequisite to form this overarching conceptual representation of a unified whole was a broad familiarity with the respective costumes, representations, and iconography of the nation. For the dissemination of images, photography was considered the predestined medium. With this tool, a large number of significant and relevant subjects could be documented in a short space of time. Above all, the *Heimatschutzbewegung*<sup>5</sup> (Homeland Protection Movement) enthusiastically adopted the photographic form to spread the notion of *Heimat*.

Oscar Schwindrazheim summarised his thoughts on the potential role of photography in this context in a text written in 1905. In this essay, he criticised the influence of metropolitan culture on art and folk art alike, as a detrimental 'alien influence', and stated that treasures that had survived from 'the central Germanic culture, from ancient times to the present in the farmhouse, smaller town house, peasant art and petty bourgeois art' were now, 'defenceless, abandoned and left to ruin'. This, he continued, was countered by the *Heimatschutzbewegung*, which had used photography as a means of capturing an encounter with the 'ancient variety of folk traditions' in villages and thus reach an ever-growing number of Germans. Photography's role in enthusing these 'supporters of the folk' therefore remedied past shortcomings in representation. Schwindrazheim's vision was conservative. His interest was the representation of a pure, beautiful, and authentic rural world.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst Schwindrazheim's interpretation of the potential of photography was very much one that favoured an aesthetic focussed on ethereal and purely idyllic images of the *Heimat*, Paul Schultze-Naumburg developed a visual process in which 'the poetry of our villages' of the *Heimat* might be identified in relation to progressive

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5 *Heimatschutzbewegung* literally translates as the *Heimat* protection movement. This movement emerged in the late nineteenth century as a reaction to rapid demographic changes and increasing industrialisation. The *Heimatschutzbewegung* or *Heimatbewegung* rejected modernity and extolled instead a return to traditional values, an appreciation of the virtues of agrarian life, the romanticisation of nature, and regional and national Germanic identity, amongst other things.

6 Oscar Schwindrazheim, 'Heimatliche Kunstentdeckungsreisen mit der Camera,' *Deutscher Kamera-Almanach* 1 (1905), 150–51.



urbanization. Chairman of the *Deutschen Bundes Heimatschutz* (German Federation for *Heimat* Protection) and founding member of the *Deutschen Werkbundes* (German Work Federation), he intended to divorce the 'good' from the 'bad', the old from the new, via the path of visual confrontation between example and counterexample, presented under the mantle of quality craftsmanship. With regard to cosmopolitan art and its effect on an indigenous way of life, he spoke of a 'threatening disease' that had seized 'all parts of our culture'. Schultze-Naumburg, in his polarizing view, used a terminology that classified modernism as reprehensible and, accordingly, as something that was in opposition to traditional, ethnic values. He wrote of a 'dreary poverty and desolation', of 'degeneration' and an urban 'avarice, which manifests as a dreadful blind greed'. On the other hand, he set the 'characterful and true beauty' of the rural, which had 'proven itself through the centuries as the standard'.

Figures 4.1a and 4.1b are an example of this comparative process. It is the 'good bench' and the 'ugly bench': on the one hand, a traditional seating arrangement nestles around a gnarled linden tree whilst echoing the undulations of the landscape; it is contrasted with an industrially manufactured piece of furniture, with cast-iron stand and board-like seat.<sup>7</sup> Schultze-Naumburg objected in particular to the choice of building materials: for him, iron and steel were the epitome of industrial mass-production: a mirror image of the growing metropolises and industrial areas in direct opposition to a rural 'naturalness'. Ultimately, the *Heimatschutzbewegung* was very much up to date in terms of the contemporary propaganda that it employed. Two very modern media were used to document, disseminate, and popularize the ideas of the movement: the camera, as a recording device, and the magazine, for reproduction. In this sense, the self-proclaimed guardians of this endangered cultural heritage were trying to motivate broader sections of the population to cooperate in a kind of collective visual rescue operation.

During the 1920s, a discourse emerged that was focussed on the evolution of German society and this gathered momentum, not least because of the lost war. The question of the origins and capacities of the people themselves became a central theme of this inquiry in order to

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7 Paul Schultze-Naumburg, 'Der Garten auf dem Lande', in Heinrich Sohnrey, ed., *Kunst auf dem Lande* (Bielefeld/Leipzig/Berlin: Velhagen & Klasing, 1905), p. 183.

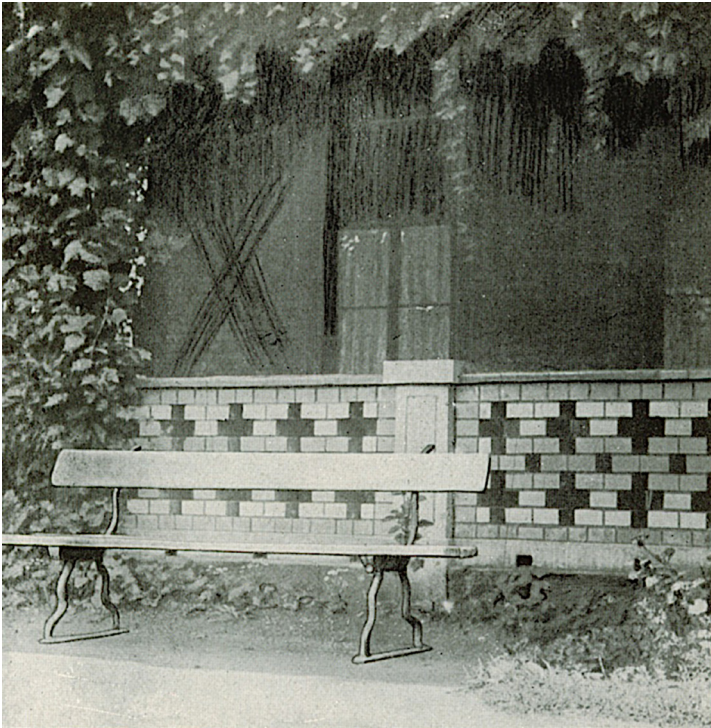


Fig. 4.1a and 4.1b Eine 'gute' und eine 'schlechte' Bank als visuelle Gradmesser (A 'Good' and 'Bad' Bench as Visual Indicators), reproduced in Heinrich Sohnrey, *Kunst auf dem Lande* (Art of the Countryside) (Bielefeld/Leipzig/Berlin: Velhagen & Klasen, 1905), p. 182.  
Public domain.

determine how an individual's provenance affected their contribution to the modern era. August Sander's large-scale photographic project 'People of the 20th Century' was very much a manifestation of this era's search for new interpretations. About forty-five portfolios were planned, each of which was to be accompanied by twelve photographs, beginning with 'the peasant, the earth-bound man [...], all the strata and occupations up to the representatives of the highest civilization and down to the idiot'.<sup>8</sup> Sander, as a creative photographer, carefully directed each image, often setting the protagonists against striking backgrounds or including conspicuous paraphernalia or objects, which often had a function relevant to their occupation. His principle motivation was the observation of milieus.

Sander began his project with the peasant and was thus, as Karl Jaspers observed, working at the height of the anthropologically dominated zeitgeist, which was ideologically overlaid by the notion of a special connectivity to the soil. However, Sander's photographs present the costume as a relic, something that was, in the main, only cherished by old women in the countryside. Above all, his juxtapositions bring to light the stark social differences that were commonplace in rural areas. Sander's work can be interpreted from two points of view. On the one hand, his unmistakably social-documentary portraits convince with their use of a modern and transformative approach to image making, traceable to Dadaist approaches of the early twenties. His pictures are social frescoes,<sup>9</sup> which certainly hint at nineteenth-century genre painting. At the same time, he expanded the range of motifs by including aspects of urban culture. His objective approach to image-making relates Sander's work to the New Vision and New Objectivity. On the other hand, the social-documentary aspect should not be overstated, because Sander proceeded, as did most other artistically ambitious ethnographic photographers, from a peasant archetype by which the interpretation of his sitters was constrained.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, his photographs reflect

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8 August Sander, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* with a text by Ulrich Keller (München: Schirmer & Mosel, 1980), p. 33. Sander's project remained unfinished. The printing plates and the remaining copies of his 1929 book, *Antlitz der Zeit* ('Face of Our Time') were seized and destroyed by the National Socialists in 1936.

9 Sylvain Maresca, *La photographie. Un miroir des sciences sociales* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), p. 19.

10 Martina Mettner, *Die Autonomie der Fotografie. Fotografie als Mittel des Ausdrucks und der Realitätserfassung am Beispiel ausgewählter Fotografenkarrieren* (Marburg: Jonas, 1987), pp. 72–75.

a 'medieval hierarchy of stances',<sup>11</sup> a somewhat cloying conception of society: Sander does not show his workers in the Marxist sense, as proletarians who can be exploited through alienating assembly line work, but as people who accord to a somewhat romanticised ethos of skilled artisans. The photographer's work was produced, as Ulrich Keller noted, 'forcibly, in an ideologically charged field'.<sup>12</sup> August Sander's pictures move in an intermediate domain of traditional and modern *Heimat* photography. Some of them are clearly socially critical — one reason why the National Socialists proscribed Sander from practicing as a photographer.

The National Socialists fully understood the significance of photography and film as carriers of a message to popularise their policies — as early as 1933, Joseph Goebbels had demonstrated his grasp of the power of photography, suggesting that the photograph should be given priority over the word, especially in propaganda.<sup>13</sup> Between 1933 and 1945, images such as Willy Römer's presentation of a precarious *Heimat* before the First World War were considered undesirable. Indeed, most of the practitioners of the New Photography chose, or were forced, to emigrate. The photographers who stayed remained committed to the regime and divided the visual-journalistic 'cake' among themselves: Heinrich Hoffmann was responsible for the *Führerbild* and the visualization of the NSDAP. Erna Lendvai-Dircksen continued to publish illustrated books about the people's *Heimat* across various regions of the German Reich, as well as images of children and the dramatic construction of the *autobahns*. Hans Retzlaff concentrated on depicting traditional rural costumes, which had already disappeared almost completely from everyday life by the 1930s, and published a picture book about the *Arbeitsmädchen am werk* (Labour Service Women at Work). Finally, Paul Wolff and his 'Leica Photography' mimicked the modernist 'fig leaf' of the new colour technology (see Fig. 4.2).

11 Sander, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1980), p. 11.

12 Ibid., p. 21.

13 Joseph Goebbels in his opening speech to the exhibition 'Die Kamera' in Berlin 1933, reproduced in *Druck und Reproduktion, Betriebsausstellung auf der 'Kamera'*, 1 (1933), pp. 3–6.





Fig. 4.2 Cover image from Hans Retzlaff, *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* (Labour Service Women at Work) (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1940). Public domain.

## Völkische Heimat

The main photographic protagonist of the so-called *völkischen Heimat* was Erna Lendvai-Dircksen. Her seminal work was the volume *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race) published in 1932. Besides an introductory text by the author and some descriptions relating to photography, the book contained 140 photographs, beautifully reproduced as copper plate photogravures. Her work focused in particular on the portrait of the individual — group shots, pictures of families, or a mother with her children are not featured in the volume, and there are few people from urban areas: 'The urban man has abandoned the mother soil and a natural life'.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, Lendvai-Dircksen focused on depicting a rural world whose people are the epitome of the *Volkskörper*<sup>15</sup> or body of the nation, and she is one of the few contemporary *Heimat* photographers who tried to substantiate her working method in theoretical terms. The ethnic German *Volk* were positioned as the antithesis of those merely of the state or city dwellers: 'One talks of the "people of the land" in contrast to the "city dweller" and that is to say what is meant. To talk of the *Volk* is to speak of a unified natural community, with its roots anchored in the soil of the landscape. It is a one-of-a-kind entity that, being as simple as it is organic, is not accessible to a quick, superficial understanding.'<sup>16</sup> In a contribution to the 1931 volume *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* (The German Photograph) she struck a blow for the national-conservative *Heimatsfotografie*, which had been popularised at the turn of the century by Paul Schulze-Naumburg and Oscar Schwindrazheim as part of the *Heimatschutzbewegung*. The narrative is concerned with notions of worthiness, harmony, beauty and culture, as elements intrinsically bound to the 'Ur-landscape'.<sup>17</sup> Participating in the 1928 *Pressa* exhibition in Cologne, Lendvai-Dircksen had already outlined these notions in the context of a presentation of her work to her

14 Quoted here from the 1934 edition: Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (Berlin: Drei Masken Verlag, 1934), p. 5.

15 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, 'Zur Psychologie des Sehens' (1931) reproduced in Wolfgang Kemp, ed., *Theorie der Fotografie*, Vol. 2 (München: Schirmer-Mosel, 1979), p. 160.

16 Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1934), p. 6.

17 Lendvai-Dircksen, 'Zur Psychologie des Sehens' (1931), p. 158.



colleagues from the GDL or *Gesellschaft Deutscher Lichtbildner* (Society of German Photographers).<sup>18</sup>

The Stuttgart film and photo exhibition the following year, which acted as a gathering for the entire European photographic elite, was either given the cold shoulder by Lendvai-Dircksen or she was not invited to participate, perhaps because she had defined her photography as outside of a cohesive internationalist vision: 'In exhibitions, the best achievements clearly show what photography has to say for a people; English, German and French photography, as far as they are ethnically based, can be easily distinguished'.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to this approach to an ethnic photography of the *Volk*, Lendvai-Dircksen suggested archly, the photographers of the New Objectivity and advertising were firmly positioned as representatives of the cosmopolitan, urban centres: 'These premature miscarriages of a one-sided intelligence must be confronted by the rooted, vital nature of true originality, which knows how to present a true view of things and is able to counter the creeping pessimism in a detoxifying way'.<sup>20</sup> Two years before Hitler came to power, this derogatory remark was to presage the path that photography would take in the National Socialist state.<sup>21</sup>

Erna Lendvai-Dircksen came from a rural farming background and grew up in Wetterburg, Hessen. Her career as a photographer was typical of the time: first she studied painting (1903–1905 in Kassel), then she pursued an apprenticeship as a photographer in Berlin that she never completed. In 1916, she opened her own portrait studio in Charlottenburg. At first, in terms of geography, the structure of her book *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* seems somewhat strange. Starting with Frisia and the Frisians, Lendvai-Dircksen moves on, seemingly at random, through the book to Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg, Masuria,

18 See for example Willi Warstat, review of the exhibition of the GDL (Gesellschaft Deutscher Lichtbildner) International Press Exhibition (*Pressa*) in Cologne in 1928 in *Das Atelier des Photographen* 35 (1928), 126–28 and also Claudia Gabriele Philipp, 'Erna Lendvai-Dircksen (1883–1962). Verschiedene Möglichkeiten, eine Fotografin zu rezipieren', *Fotogeschichte* 9 (1983), 56.

19 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, 'Ohne Titel', in Wilhelm Schöppe, ed., *Meister der Kamera erzählen. Wie sie wurden und wie sie arbeiten* (Halle an der Saale: Wilhelm Knapp, 1935), p. 35.

20 Lendvai-Dircksen, 'Zur Psychologie des Sehens' (1931), p. 162.

21 For more detail on this subject see, Falk Blask and Thomas Friedrich, eds, *Menschenbild und Volksgesicht. Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005).

Spreewald, Bückeburg, Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden. The sequence of works concludes with Hessen. In this dramaturgy there are aspects that may in fact refer to the biography of the author — one part of her heritage had its origins just where the book begins: 'I did not discover the German farmer when he became the "fashion". The Dircksens are of the oldest Frisian blood, and every hike between the Elbe and the Weser estuary is like a homecoming for me'.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, the photographer seems to claim a connection between this portrayal of human types (for instance, the photograph of a *junge Bäuerin aus dem hessischen Hinterland* (Young Farmer's Wife from the Hessian Hinterland) and the established artistic tradition of Holbein, Cranach, and Dürer, presenting comparisons on a double page (the technique of visual doubling): young and old, daughter and mother, husband and wife. The only objectivation, which Lendvai-Dircksen partially thematises in detail, is the representation of clothing, which in turn brings an ambivalent attitude to light: on the one hand, she presents many portraits that include traditional costumes, the symmetrical composition of which seems to coincide with the criterion of photographic New Objectivity. At the same time, the portrait of the *Jungmädchen aus den Hagendörfern* (Young Girls from the Hagen Villages) conforms to a more stringent compositional expression. The dark hues and blurred, unidentifiable background are two major pictorial features in Lendvai-Dircksen's illustrated books, as well as the juxtaposition of figures over a double page (see Fig. 4.3).

An almost perfect symmetry is also evident in the picture of the *Spreewalderin im Brautputz* (Woman from the Spreewald in Bridal Dress). In this motif, another characteristic of her publication technique is also recognizable: Lendvai-Dircksen often juxtaposed a page of text with a picture, in which she sometimes emotively responded to the picture's theme:

Even if the folk costume traditions do inevitably decline and fade from urban fashion trends, there is still much to be understood about the ceremonial character of this ancient aesthetic. [...] One has to admit it about these daughters of the Spreewald: They know how to move the

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22 Lendvai-Dircksen, 'Ohne Titel' (1935), p. 37.



Fig. 4.3 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Zwei Generationen gegenübergestellt* (Two Generations Compared), 1932, reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (Face of the German Race) (Berlin: Drei Masken Verlag, 1934), pp. 140–41. Public domain.

body beautifully. There is nothing slack or synthetic, only the absolute dependability of the natural.<sup>23</sup>

The description did not attempt to hide the fact that traditional costumes had already largely begun to disappear from the countryside by the 1920s, but it addressed this development openly, albeit with an unmistakable undertone of regret. In contrast, her contemporary, the *Heimat* photographer Hans Retzlaff, tended to carefully eliminate any reference to modern life in his pictures and captions relating to these costumes. He thus focused on a stylized image of the past, which he also sought to suggest was the model approach of modern living: a life lived close to the ancestral soil.

In her accompanying texts, Lendvai-Dircksen sometimes treads a fine line between a commentary and a waspish critique — this is clearly evident in the example she presents of an older farming couple from Hessen.

23 Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1934), p. 106.



Die Frau des Nebensitzenden

Fig. 4.4 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Kranke Frau* (Sick Woman), 1932, reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (Face of the German Race) (Berlin: Drei Masken Verlag, 1934), p. 91. Public domain.

Apparently, the farmer had, in earlier years, demanded too much physical work of his delicate wife. The woman became ill, partially paralysed, and ultimately lived in continuous agony. As the photographer stated about the husband: 'Is he innocent or guilty for his wife's broken life?'<sup>24</sup> When discussing the image of the woman, Lendvai-Dircksen states:

For 30 years she has been sitting on a low stool, growing ever lamer. This terrible wasteland of years has worn down both her mind and her soul. She did not even notice me photographing her. A woman's fate! One of many! She had a robust, almost overpowering man; what did he know about the amount of hard work a young woman's body can withstand when the children come one after the other... The tender woman was broken, [...] an obstacle, waiting for death to deliver her.<sup>25</sup>

The text is highly moralising, sometimes even accusatory. This form of critical presentation thus relates to the approach and published practice of contemporary anthropological-medical racial hygienists. In magazines such as *Volk und Rasse* (People and Race, etc., images of mentally ill people or of Sinti, Roma, and Jews, for example, were visually staged and provided with captions that rejected and often demeaned the subjects. These ignominious commentaries were accompanied by the visual separation of the groups concerned from representations of the bodies of the 'healthy'. Certainly, for Lendvai-Dircksen, the *Volkskörper* consisted of her rural contemporaries: 'Here is the world, here is life and growth. The soil is really Mother Earth'.<sup>26</sup> By accusing the farmer in visual and textual terms of mistreating his wife, a stigmatisation occurs where the man is seen to fall outside of the (moral) 'norm' of the *Volkskörper*.

Lendvai-Dircksen's approach follows a certain pattern. Significantly, the protagonists are represented as inevitable 'victims of fate'<sup>27</sup> and not as autonomous individuals. In most of the pictures, the models don't look into the camera; their gaze is rather out of the frame, as if they have something to hide. The older people, thematically the largest group of her photo portraits, mostly appear to be careworn and marked by their years. With the minor exception of a few images of the elderly, it is the photographs of children who are the only ones arranged to look directly

24 Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1934), p. 224.

25 Ibid., p. 226.

26 Ibid., p. 7.

27 Rolf Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen. Fotografie im NS-Staat* (Berlin: Philo Fine Arts, 2003), p. 156.



into the camera. Lendvai-Dirksen photographed the young females in a manner that was straightforward and slightly from above, this tended to emphasise a passive and expectant role. When photographing the younger males, she set the tripod somewhat below the face, which in turn suggested a self-confidence and mental strength in her subjects. The pictures often show a close-up view of (German) faces furrowed by life, of delicate female youth, and a plethora of traditional costumes (see Fig. 4.5).

The foreign and 'the other' have no place. The photographer thus framed a traditional interpretation of the ethnic *Heimat*, which she herself described as a quest to reconstruct an archetypal image, an *Urbild*,<sup>28</sup> a picture that in turn refers to the Romantic period or to the painterly-figurative peasant painting of artists like Hans Thoma (1839–1924). In this context it is hardly surprising that Lendvai-Dirksen relied on the elderly as the main subject matter for her book. Of the one-hundred-and-forty portraits, fifty-five are older men and women, twenty are young women, and only ten are young men. In the concluding sentence of the book, Erna Lendvai-Dirksen wrote: 'Only in the perfect circle of a whole life do we witness its whole sum; and as an old tree shows most clearly the individual peculiarities of its kind, so does the old man who becomes the most distinctive type, the visual biography of his ethnicity.'<sup>29</sup> In Lendvai-Dirksen's work, as in the work of the other protagonists of this ethno-cultural *Heimatfotografie*, a significant aspect becomes clear in the dramatic construction of these staged photographs: men, women, and children are either shown as individuals of a type or separated according to gender. After the outbreak of war, save for the elderly, there are few men represented in this photographic milieu.

In an excellent essay, Claudia Gabriele Philipp describes Lendvai-Dirksen's photographs as 'Nazi ideology in its purest form'.<sup>30</sup> However, when reflecting on the photographer's early response to her own work, as well as the photographs themselves, one would be doing the photographer an injustice to categorise her entire working portfolio within the category of racial photography. Her way of taking

28 Lendvai-Dirksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1934), p. 138.

29 Ibid., p. 13.

30 Philipp, 'Erna Lendvai-Dirksen (1883–1962). Verschiedene Möglichkeiten, eine Fotografin zu rezipieren' (1983), 48.



Junge Schwäbmer Bäuerin

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Fig. 4.5 Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Junge Schwäbmer Bäuerin* (Young Swabian Peasant Woman), 1932, reproduced in Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (The Face of the German Race) (Berlin: Drei Masken Verlag, 1934), p. 235. Public domain.



photographs was initially multi-layered and was by no means entirely counter-propositional to the 'overarching utilitarian approach' of photographic New Objectivity. Her 'great love for monumentality'<sup>31</sup> does not necessarily contradict this 'modern' photography either.<sup>32</sup> Some of her portraits and images of plants from the 1920s, but also her later landscape and architectural photographs, undoubtedly fulfil the criteria of the New Vision: an extreme close-up approach, full image detail and optical clarity, as well as the use of an axially symmetrical image composition.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Lendvai-Dircksen was an opportunistic photographer who willingly placed her art at the service of the National Socialist regime. As Hannah Marquardt's research revealed, the photographer received financial support for her extensive travels from the *Reichsschrifttumskammer* (Reich Chamber of Literature), a sub-department of Dr Joseph Goebbels' *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture). Lendvai-Dircksen proceeded to develop her work in series and produced a broader overview of her leitmotifs, including corresponding landscape pictures of the region encompassed by each specific publication. Finally, she was able to assemble her own publications from a large pool of visual material and also to contribute to other publications — for example, the article 'Volksgesicht' in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*<sup>34</sup> in 1930 contained variations of those photographic illustrations that were shown in her later monograph *Das deutsche Volksgesicht*. She also worked with well-known figures in the National Socialist establishment, such as Fritz Todt and Franz Riedweg. Riedweg, who was primarily responsible for recruiting volunteers for the pan-European and anti-Bolshevik Germanic SS, wrote an epilogue for her volume of photography entitled *Das deutsche Volksgesicht. Flandern* that was centred on the 'Germanic' look of the Flemish.<sup>35</sup>

31 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Nordsee-Menschen. Deutsche Meisteraufnahmen* (München: F. Bruckmann, 1937).

32 See Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), p. 57. Also, Jeanine Fiedler, ed., *Fotografie am Bauhaus* (Berlin: Dirk Nishen, 1990).

33 See Philipp, 'Erna Lendvai-Dircksen (1883–1962). Verschiedene Möglichkeiten, eine Fotografin zu rezipieren' (1983), 40.

34 *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* 39:11 (1930), 467–68.

35 Erna Lendvai Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht. Flandern* (Bayreuth: Gauverlag, 1942). Riedweg was a highly influential figure in the SS and close associate of *Reichsführer* SS, Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945).

In terms of her own methodology, Lendvai-Dircksen was initially critical of the approaches of photographers and researchers whose work proceeded specifically from the work of the race scientist Hans F. K. Günther, asserting: 'It is not achieved with race-psychological comparisons or with cranial measurements alone; life is something vibrant, and its meaning emerges from this context'.<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, she noted, 'the emergence of national and ethnic folk traditions as part of a living community' had 'nothing to do with the racial form'.<sup>37</sup> By association, Lendvai-Dircksen's studies of the human face with a so-called search for the psychological soul, suggests a certain closeness to the work of Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss. Accordingly, her photographs were regarded as suitable illustrations for magazines relevant to the field of racial studies<sup>38</sup>—Günther also published some of her pictures.<sup>39</sup> In addition, her publications also presented National Socialism with a 'liberal' veneer, and a range of illustrated books were published in the run-up to the 1936 Olympics.<sup>40</sup>

### The *Heimat* Front

After 1933, *völkisch* photography or *Heimat* photography<sup>41</sup> was not intended to be an overt depiction of documentary reality, but rather it represented a construction of reality that accorded to the ideals of National Socialist ideology. Accordingly, when looking through the illustrated books, the impression received is that agricultural and manual labour in the German Reich was carried out exclusively by

36 Lendvai-Dircksen, 'Ohne Titel' (1935), 38.

37 Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (1934), p. 8.

38 See Friedrich Merckenschlager, *Rassenonderung, Rassenmischung, Rassenwandlung* (Berlin: Waldemar Hoffmann, 1933); also, Arthur Gewehr, 'Bildniskunst und Rassenkunde', *Gebrauchs-Photographie und das Atelier des Photographen* 41:12 (1934), 88; also see for example *Volk und Rasse* 4 (April 1942); and *Volk und Rasse* 6 (June 1942).

39 See Hans F. K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes. Mit 29 Karten und 564 Abbildungen* (München: Lehmann, 1930), figure 113, 'Spicka-Neufeld bei Cuxhaven, Friesland, Nordisch.' The photograph also appeared uncropped in *Das deutsche Volksgesicht*, on page 57 as 'Friesischer Fischer aus dem Marschland Wursten'.

40 See *Deutschland. Olympia-Jahr 1936* (Berlin: Volk und Reich, 1936).

41 *Völkisch* or *Heimat* photography as used in the terminology of the National Socialist state, see Paul Lüking, 'Richtlinien des VDAV für fotografische Arbeiten,' *Fotofreund* 13 (1933), 207.

striking-looking peasant types and blonds in traditional costumes in large families with many children — all doing humble work that knew no technical aids. But the reality of life in the countryside was in obvious contradiction to this, for the National Socialist regime intensified the mechanization and motorization of the agricultural economy. The policy of land consolidation was used to increase production so that, in the event of war, food supplies could be secured in an autarkical manner. Where there were once relatively untouched landscapes, four-lane motorways now appeared; initially this did not much benefit the stated aim of increasing the mobility of individual families, but was, it has been argued, linked to aspects of the strategic considerations of the war planners.<sup>42</sup>

Hans Retzlaff made a considerable contribution to this ideologisation of documentary photography with his photographs of traditional costumes.<sup>43</sup> Despite — or precisely because of — the discrepancy between everyday reality and photographically staged reality, his photographs were not only published in large numbers in illustrated books and in magazine articles. They also served — when sold to schools, universities and other educational institutions in the form of slides and paper prints — as teaching objects to illustrate and convey a representation of rural life. The images of ‘folk’ photographers were thus the starting point for more scientific interpretations in the spirit of National Socialist ideology. For example, the headdress of the ‘Spreewaldkindes aus Burg in Sonntagstracht’, taken by Hans Retzlaff in 1934 and acquired by the Tübingen Institute for German Folklore, according to one contemporary, represents the ‘living essence’ through which ‘the rural German, yes, even a sense of Germanic tribal consciousness’ is particularly well expressed.<sup>44</sup>

42 See Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2005), and also J. Adam Tooze, *Ökonomie der Zerstörung. Die Geschichte der Wirtschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (München: Siedler, 2007). [Editor’s note — The notion that the autobahns were designed to facilitate military ends has long been debunked, see for example Thomas Zeller’s *Driving Germany: The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930–1970* (Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2010).]

43 See Gudrun König and Ulrich Hägele, eds, *Völkische Posen, volkscundliche Dokumente. Hans Retzlaffs Fotografien 1930 bis 1945* (Marburg: Jonas, 1999).

44 Ferdinand Herrmann and Wolfgang Treutlein, eds, *Brauch und Sinnbild. Eugen Fehrle zum 60. Geburtstag* (Karlsruhe: Südwestdeutsche Druck und Verlagsgesellschaft, 1940), p. 229.



Fig. 4.6 Hans Retzlaff, *Spreewaldkind aus Burg in Sonntagstracht* (Spreewald Child from Burg in Sunday Costume), vintage silver gelatin print, 1934, courtesy of Archiv Ludwig-Uhland-Institut für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft, Universität Tübingen. Inv.-Nr. 5a383.

By disseminating the photographs in illustrated books in the mass media, they 'served the so-called folk traditions and thus became a political instrument'.<sup>45</sup> *Reichsarbeitsführer* (Reich Labour Leader) Konstantin Hierl apparently appreciated Retzlaff's style of working and commissioned him in 1939 to compile an illustrated book about the *Arbeitsmaiden*.<sup>46</sup> It was to be his last before the end of the war and at the same time the only one without an ethnographic or folkloristic theme.

Hans Retzlaff's illustrated book *Arbeitsmaiden am Werk* (Labour Service Women at Work (see Fig. 4.2) was published in 1940, soon after the outbreak of the Second World War. The ninety-six high-quality intaglio copperplate plates, mostly as full-page images, were intended to provide a more eloquent insight than mere words into 'the first state school of education for female youth as a sign of faith of a new era,' as the book's introduction states.<sup>47</sup> The volume thus assumed a political function within the framework of the war planning of the National Socialist regime and the racial ideology of blood and soil. Despite the visual nature of this book, illustrated as it was with the help of professionally crafted photographs as the central feature, the editors were not, apparently, confident enough to rely fully on the power of the pictures alone. This is evidenced by the fact that the illustrations were preceded by a thirty-page introduction by the RAD's *Generalarbeitsführer* (General Work Leader) Wilhelm 'Will' Decker. Decker's text is divided into several sections, namely: 'the idea', 'the way', 'the form', 'the substance', 'the service', 'the work', 'recreation and leisure time', and 'the flag'. The last section marks a link to the first plate 'Raising the flag before the start of the day's work'. It shows two women in RAD uniform, the so-called 'working maidens'<sup>48</sup> of the book's title, raising a large swastika flag on a wooden flagpole. In the background are other women giving the *Hitlergruß* (the Hitler salute).

Hans Retzlaff's *Arbeitsmaiden am Werk* is divided into five main topics without this being obvious to the reader at first glance, for example,

45 Margit Haatz, Agnes Matthias and Ute Schulz, 'Retzlaff-Portraits im ikonographischen Vergleich,' in *Völkische Posen, volkskundliche Dokumente* (1999), p. 53.

46 A photographic study of women serving in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* or RAD.

47 Will Decker, in the 'Introduction' of Hans Retzlaff, *Arbeitsmaiden am Werk* (Leipzig: E.A. Seemann, 1940), p. 10.

48 'Working maid' or *Arbeitsmaid* was the women's labour service (RADwj) equivalent to the rank of private.

in the form of the subheadings: 'daily routine', 'agricultural work', 'childcare', 'camp activities', and 'leisure activities'. The series of pictures on agricultural work is interrupted twice by pictures on the subject of childcare, resulting in three series on work and two series of children's pictures. With only a few exceptions, these are all outdoor shots. In addition, the illustrated book contains three chronological levels, some of which are intertwined: firstly, the six-month service of the young women in training during their stay in the *Arbeitsdienst* camps,<sup>49</sup> learning domestic activities, political education, and excursions, then the daily routine of the morning flag-raising through to early exercise, rollcall, the journey to work, activities at the workplace, as well as leisure, and the activities in and around the camp. Finally, all the rural and agricultural activities of the women were related to the course of the seasons, starting with planting in spring and continuing through the hay harvest in late summer to giving Advent wreaths to farming families as gifts during the Christmas season. The (mostly) portrait-format illustrations are presented in the style of a photo album, with short captions, provided by Else Stein, *Stabsführerin* (Staff Leader) in the RAD.

The opening sequence already conveys in visualized form the five main characteristics of the Reich Labour Service of the Female Youth (RAD/wJ) within the regime. The images demonstrated that the organization: had a political-propagandistic function (raising the flag); had a strict hierarchy based on the *Führerprinzip* or leader principle (camp leader versus private); was subject to military drill (standing in rank and file); emphasized the disciplinary strengthening of the body; and each individual was mindful of her feminine role, serving as a part of the supposedly racially homogeneous and cohesive *Volksgemeinschaft* or 'the people's community'.<sup>50</sup>

49 The *Arbeitsdienst* camps were part of the Reich Labour Service for young men and women; originally intended as a means of alleviating unemployment, it became in effect a form of national service. See for example Thompson, Paul W. "Reichsarbeitsdienst." *The Military Engineer*, 28.160 (1936) 291–92.

50 See for example, Ulrich Herrmann, 'Formationserziehung — Zur Theorie und Praxis edukativ-formativer Manipulation von jungen Menschen' in Ulrich Hermann and Ulrich Nassen, eds, *Formative Ästhetik im Nationalsozialismus. Intentionen. Medien und Praxisformen totalitärer ästhetischer Herrschaft und Beherrschung* (Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, 1993), pp. 101–12. Also see Jill Stephenson, 'Der Arbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend,' in Dagmar Reese, ed., *Die BDM-Generation. Weibliche Jugendliche in Deutschland und Österreich im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2007), pp. 255–88.





Fig. 4.7 Hans Retzlaff, *Militärischer Drill* (Military Drill), reproduced in Hans Retzlaff, *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* (Labour Service Women at Work) (E. A. Seemann, Leipzig 1940), p. 44. Public domain.

The three pictorial chronological levels are partly interwoven. The first section, which begins with three women engaged with early-morning sports, comprises six shots on three double pages. The pictures show the young women alone or in a group and on their way to work by bicycle. This is followed by a sequence of fourteen photographs depicting individual agricultural activities. The picture of a young woman leading a team of oxen onto the field serves to catch the eye: one of the few examples in the illustrated book in which movement is recorded, as the cheerfully laughing young woman walks between the two oxen towards the camera; a farmhouse can be seen in the background.

'The Image of Baking Bread' leads into the third chapter: the *Arbeitsmaiden* with the farm children. The woman sits at the table at lunch with the children; Retzlaff apparently arranged that the table be taken out of the kitchen into the open air for the photographs. The RAD girl gives the infants, or rather, small children, 'Klaus and Peter', milk from the bottle and helps 'Bärbel' with her schoolwork. The atypical mention of the children by name here contradicts the usual practice of anonymous titles, an approach that is otherwise intended to underline the deindividuation of the individual within the RADwJ.

The following section continues the activities of the *Arbeitsmaiden*, who are now shown out working in the fields (hoeing beets, planting salads, vegetable harvesting, and so on). The visual leitmotif in this series is the three-quarter portrait 'Time of Haymaking' taken from below, on which a young woman carries a load of hay. She smiles and looks out of the picture to the right towards the low sun. Again, light and shadow areas fall on her face and body. A working tool — probably a hay fork — sticks diagonally in the hay, dividing the image field diagonally into a triangle and an irregular square.

Through twenty-eight images on fourteen double pages, the next section visualizes the third and last part of the rural work. An outstanding example with a leitmotif function here is the illustration with the signature 'In the labour service, the working girl gets to know her beautiful German home' (see Fig. 4.8).

A woman stands on a mountain meadow with a young mountain farmer. The terrain drops steeply at their feet. The man in the shirt has shouldered a scythe. With a sweeping gesture he points out of the frame of the picture, the woman in front of him standing slightly outside the frame of the image. The background of the scene is marked by a valley



Fig. 4.8 Hans Retzlaff, *Patriarchale Rollenverteilung: 'Im Arbeitsdienst lernt die Arbeitsmaid ihre schöne deutsche Heimat kennen'* (A Patriarchal Distribution of Roles: 'In the work service, the young working woman gets to know her beautiful German Homeland'), reproduced in Hans Retzlaff, *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* (Labour Service Women at Work) (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1940), p. 87. Public domain.

that extends to the horizon in the low, mountainous, partly wooded landscape.

The illustration is one of only thirteen examples in *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* in which Retzlaff's image features a man. Whereas most of these representations of men are of older farmers who are seen to be giving these women careful instruction in their work, this specific image does not represent the father-daughter configuration, but rather a young, heterosexual couple that reproduces a traditional and timeless structure in its presentation of gender roles. With his outstretched arm pointing the way, the man is assigned an active role, whereas the woman following him attentively is portrayed as reacting.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, photography is used in a symbolically multi-layered manner in its integration in the overall context of the book. The placement of the man and woman, after the series of pictures about childcare, suggests the reproductive function of the young woman, for whom a future as a wife and mother in an agrarian ideal was clearly intimated through the photographic context. In addition, the mountain landscape crossed by a river not only serves as a grandiose backdrop. The water, flowing through the depths of the valley, remains invisible to the observer. As one of the basic elements of nature, it represents the natural world in contrast to the tamed environment shaped by man. Symbolically, water functions as a sign of life, fertility, and sexuality. In this context, images representing water suggest a small and largely hidden metaphorical reference to the idea of the *Volkskörper*. At the same time, the (concealed) visualization of fluid, as Uli Linke explains, results in an equally metaphorical connotation: a collective appropriation of the female body.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, the picture motif could have remained interesting in journalistic terms up until more recent times — the magazine *Heimat* 2010 published the photograph of a young woman from Eltville sitting in a dirndl over the Rhine looking down into the valley.<sup>53</sup>

51 See Marianne Wex, *'Weibliche' und 'männliche' Körpersprache als Folge patriarchalischer Machtverhältnisse* (Frankfurt: Verlag Marianne Wex, 1980). Also, Helmut Maier, 'Der heitere Ernst körperlicher Herrschaftsstrategien. Über "weibliche" und "männliche" Posen auf privaten Urlaubsfotos', *Fotogeschichte* 41 (1991), 47–59.

52 See Uli Linke, *German Bodies. Race and Representation after Hitler* (New York/London: Routledge, 1999).

53 See *Heimat*, 5 (November/December 2010). The headline reads: 'Vertrautheit, Geborgenheit und der Duft von frischem Hefekuchen bei meiner Oma an einem Samstagmorgen,' (Familiarity, security and the smell of fresh yeast cake at my grandma's on a Saturday morning).



Fig. 4.9 Dirndl-Heimat in einer Illustrierten (An Illustration of Traditional *Heimat* Costume), *Heimat*, September 2010, Heft 9, p. 15. Fair use.



Another potential interpretation is suggested by the iconographic tradition of the picture motif itself. In the person of the mountain farmer we have before us none other than the Grim Reaper, who has personified death since the medieval depictions of the Dance of Death — an assumption that gains added plausibility through the title of the picture on the left side as ‘harvest work’ and the intrinsic theme of cutting inherent to this title. However, a more far-reaching interpretation, where there was a concealed, even subversive reference to the everyday casualties of war in 1940, would be in stark contrast to Retzlaff’s usual photographic image practice. More likely, the photographer wanted to imply the death of the enemy in the war. According to the rhetoric of the pictures, the reaper, represented by the German man, mows down the enemy, whilst the German woman gives new life to the land thus conquered.

*Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* ends with two sequences of pictures about domestic work in the camp and leisure activities, the latter presented in the form of song recitals, ball games, and excursions. The seasonal chronology ends with the photograph ‘Christmas in the camp’, in which the women are gathered in front of a Christmas tree by the fireplace. The conclusion of the book — and thus also the end of the chronology of the period of service — is marked by one of the young women saying farewell to a farmer’s wife and the entire village: a polite distance is maintained whilst shaking hands and handing over flowers.

The overall concept of Retzlaff’s *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* is based on Gustav von Estorff’s volume *Daß die Arbeit Freude werde!* (When Work Becomes a Joy) from 1938, which was also a political text and included a preface by *Reichsarbeitsführer* Hierl.<sup>54</sup> With fifty-nine illustrations printed in offset, this publication was considerably narrower, but the originators had already conceived of a chronological division of thirds through the various activities (the six-month period of service, the work during the day, and the overall cycle of the year). Although the volume does not

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54 See Gustav von Estorff, *Daß die Arbeit Freude werde! Ein Bildbericht von den Arbeitsmädchen. Mit einem Geleitwort von Reichsarbeitsführer Konstantin Hierl und einem Vorwort von Generalarbeitsführer Dr. Norbert Schmiedler* (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte-Verlag Wilhelm Andermann, 1938). Another illustrated book on the subject is Hildruth Schmidt-Vanderheyden, ed., *Arbeitsmädchen in Ostpommern. Ein Bildbuch für Führerinnen und Arbeitsmädchen, von der Bezirksleitung XIV, Pommern-Ost* (Berlin: Klinghammer, 1943).



end with Christmas singing, it does conclude with a night-time record of a solstice celebration.

Some of Retzlaff's illustrations correspond to this model down to the last detail. Estorff had already had the RAD women presented standing with their bicycles in an honour-guard formation, with the camp leader sending them off to their working day with a handshake. Estorff's image is a close-up, whilst Retzlaff chose a slightly more distanced camera position. The press photographer Liselotte Purper also represented the young women in a rather lively light in her reports.<sup>55</sup> Her protagonists are shown on a dusty village road.



Fig. 4.10 Liselotte Purper, *Arbeitsmädchen auf dem Weg durchs Dorf* (Labour Service Women on their Way through the Village), vintage silver gelatin print, 1942, courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

<sup>55</sup> Purper worked repeatedly and, apparently with great success, on the theme of these 'Arbeitsmädchen'. A photo book, first published in 1939, had by 1942 reached a circulation of 24,000 copies. See Gertrud Schwerdtfeger-Zypries, *Liselotte Purper: Das ist der weibliche Arbeitsdienst!* (Berlin: Junge Generation, 1940). The photography discussed here is not included in the book.

They laugh, wear their hair open and have fashionably rolled their socks over their ankles. There is a pavement in the foreground and, on the left, two village children are perched on a wall. Purper's picture was created in the tradition of modern photo reportage, which began in the 1920s and aimed to present everyday life as authentically as possible in the media, while at the same time meeting artistic demands — even when working with topics from the rural environment, which otherwise aroused ethnological or folkloristic interest at best.

On the other hand, the photo illustrations in Retzlaff's 'Arbeitsmaiden' appear both thoughtfully constructed and politically compliant, and this is confirmed by the text's two extensive essay contributions. He focuses on the reproductive factors in the lives of these young women as soon-to-be housewives and mothers, whereby domestic tasks, other work, and physical training form the framework of camp life. However, until the final fulfilment of her duty, the woman is presented as largely asexual; someone who, along with all the other likeminded girls, had to stand by her husband and otherwise had no other needs to express — especially not the desire for male closeness.

As can be seen from Retzlaff's, Estorff's, and Purpers' different approaches, National Socialist photography ultimately cannot be assigned clear and homogeneous design features. In National Socialism, photography might most easily be explained by the question of what it does not show: socially critical themes and day-to-day life, industrialization, and armaments production are as absent as intercultural coexistence in the city and in the countryside. Sinti and Roma, Jews, homosexuals, and people with physical and mental disabilities are at best presented in a stigmatizing, racial-ideological context, such as in the SS's openly anti-Semitic work *Der Untermensch*.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, the visual language in the context of industrial photography and advertising is often aesthetically up to date, even when measured against international trends of the time. The illustrated books in particular represented a visual niche within the controlled and censored media and publishing apparatus, which stood out from other printed products of that time not least due to their modern typographic design. In the context of the various manifestations of modernism, the National Socialists used progressive methods in media visualization and also in

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56 Reichsführer SS, SS Hauptamt, *Der Untermensch* (Berlin: Nordland, 1942).

communication, engineering, and armaments, where they were able to present their policies in the right light.

The pictorial tendencies of National Socialist photography can best be characterized under the sign of 'modernity with a view to a closeness with nature'.<sup>57</sup> In concrete terms this resulted in a monumentalization and heroization of people and objects; a typification and idealisation of man and nature; the use of a visual argument through juxtapositions, simplifications, and repetitions. In addition, there were distortions of history in the interplay of image and text.<sup>58</sup> While the aspects of monumentalization and heroization, as well as the juxtaposition of images of man in the sense of racial ideology, were reserved for forthright propagandistic illustrations in specific inflammatory writings and for the National Socialist press, the other characteristics are present in Retzlaff's work *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk*. In a subtle way, however, this volume also deals with the subject of race: the introduction talks about the 'Arbeitsmädchen' embodying 'the blood values of the Nordic race'. Accordingly, some of the images include stereotypical blonde women and children that might allude to the homogeneous 'Aryan folk body' from which everything that was foreign and different had been purged. The women, for their part, according to the text, performed an educational 'honourable service for their people' and in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* 'little talk was needed about National Socialism, because the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* itself was the practical application of National Socialism'.<sup>59</sup>

The political-propagandistic function and the associated ambiguity or concealment of everyday reality is expressed in the photographs — for instance, by idyllising and idealising the service and its protagonists, by situating them in a supposedly untouched world that nourishes an unbroken tradition and thus maintains the illusion of being able to establish 'pre-industrial social relations within an industrial system'.<sup>60</sup> The reality was different. During the course of the war — in the summer of 1941, compulsory military service under the newly created

57 Detlef Hoffmann, "'Auch in der Nazizeit war zwölfmal Spargelzeit". Die Vielfalt der Bilder und der Primat der Rassenpolitik,' *Fotogeschichte* 63 (1997), 61.

58 Rolf Sachsse, 'Probleme der Annäherung. Thesen zu einem diffusen Thema: NS-Fotografie,' *Fotogeschichte* 5 (1982), 59–65 and Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen* (2003), p. 15.

59 Decker, *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* (1940), p. 10.

60 Stefan Bajor, 'Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst im "Dritten Reich". Ein Konflikt zwischen Ideologie und Ökonomie,' *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 28:4 (1980), 341.

*Kriegshilfsdienst* or KHD (War Auxiliary Service) was extended from six to twelve months — the young women were no longer used only in agriculture, but increasingly in administration, in war production, and finally also in the Wehrmacht itself, for example in air defence.<sup>61</sup> The allocation of work within the RADwJ and KHD also did not run as smoothly as the illustrated books portrayed. Due to a high level of labour turnover, there were considerable problems in the recruitment of female management personnel. The women in the camps were also often disturbed by a lack of privacy. More problematically, the farmers found the young helpers' activities to be ineffective and too expensive, as their regular working hours of six hours a day, six days a week, especially during harvest time, did not correspond to the actual need of at least eleven hours a day.<sup>62</sup>

With the *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk* project, Hans Retzlaff had left his traditional 'folkloristic' terrain for the first time in favour of a topical theme grounded in contemporary reality. His pictorial language, however, continued to be oriented towards a backward-looking view of 'folkish' *Heimat* photograph. As a result, the propagandised features, 'led even deeper into timelessness, into the impasse of mythologization', which, in a time of upheaval, helped to assert 'a detached, transcendent being'.<sup>63</sup> The recurring public image for the home front was that of an illusory world with stereotypically recurring, strongly symbolically charged images of the individual female leader and her young workers, who mastered every job with flying colours and who were also the potential bride for the young farmer on the alpine pasture or a caring surrogate mother in the extended family of farmers. Retzlaff's official illustrated book was thus directed against the literary culture of the Weimar Republic by supporting the propaganda strategists' demand for images to take precedence over words. Photography was assigned the function of a supposedly truthful communicator and cultural carrier of ideology, and it was given a firm place in racial-ideological propaganda.

61 Stephenson, 'Der Arbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend' (2007), 265

62 Ibid., 271–76.

63 Gunther Waibl, 'Photographie in Südtirol während des Faschismus,' in Reinhard Johler, Ludwig Paulmichl and Barbara Plankensteiner, eds, *Südtirol. Im Auge der Ethnographen* (Vienna: Edition per procura, 1991), p. 146.

## The *Heimat* in Colour

The fact that the technique of colour photography is largely obscured as part of its propaganda function becomes understandable when the political application of the new medium is taken into account. In 1939, the National Socialists celebrated the centenary of photography. Initially, the new technology was seen as a patriotic way of highlighting the achievements of German industry internationally. 'Agfacolor' was to be marketed as a leading export within the aspirational economic framework of autarky, which focused to a considerable extent on the chemical industry. The propaganda role is, however, equally relevant. Colour photography, for example, was 'involved in fundamental considerations of mass psychological influence, especially with regard to the creation of positive images of memories'.<sup>64</sup> These 'positive memories' could not be created with ordinary photographs of everyday life and work, but rather with 'beautiful photographs'<sup>65</sup> from a propositional notion of a healthy and wholesome homeland. Accordingly, the picture themes were strongly oriented towards a pastoral past. The integration of colour photography into National Socialist propaganda became more and more important during the war. Photographers such as Hans Retzlaff marketed postcard series of rural scenes under the label 'Banater Schwaben' and 'Reichsarbeitsdienst'. These colour pictures were popular with soldiers, and relatives and friends would readily send postcards into the field or to military bases, wherever the soldier was stationed. For example, in August 1941, a group of Hitler Youth girls (*Jungmädels*) sent the postcard 'Bei der Heuernte in Norddeutschland' to their schoolmate Heini Kühl, a lance corporal who was serving in Paris: 'We send our best wishes to you at the muster. In autumn '41 you go. Unfortunately, all too soon'<sup>66</sup> (see Fig. 4.11).

The colour picture shows a blonde young woman raking hay in a meadow. She wears a white apron, a blue blouse, and a red headscarf — the work uniform of the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. However, the role of colour photography as a medium of direct propaganda during

64 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen. Fotografie im NS-Staat* (2003), p. 148.

65 Martin Hürlimann, *Frankreich. Baukunst, Landschaft und Volksleben* (Berlin/Zürich: Atlantis, 1927), XXVIII.

66 Colour photographic postcard by Hans Retzlaff, 'Reichsarbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend. Bei der Heuernte in Norddeutschland,' Series II, No. 2.





Fig. 4.11 Hans Retzlaff, *Bei der Heuernte in Norddeutschland* (Haymaking in Northern Germany), picture postcard, 1941, Archiv Ulrich Hägele).  
Public domain.



the National Socialist era must not be underestimated. With this long-term effect, the all-pervasive propaganda of the National Socialist regime, in the sense of presenting a positive world view and in light of the subsequent horrors of war, appear as a kind of visual virus that can, in retrospect, distort a rational reading of the past even for future generations.

Amateur photographers and photographic literature played a fundamental role in the success of colour photography. From 1938, the *Photoblätter* (Photo News), Agfa's in-house magazine, massively promoted the new films and gave amateurs practical advice on using the materials. Paul Wolff, one of the more prominent of the National Socialist propaganda photographers, played a decisive role in making colour photography popular with amateurs during the war. Even the title of his 1942 illustrated book *Meine Erfahrungen ... farbig* (My Experiences ... in Colour) closely followed a corresponding 1930s publication<sup>67</sup> by the author on 35mm photography with the Leica camera and reads in large part like an advertising brochure for I. G. Farben, under whose supervision the development of the colour-reversal process had been driven forward. Wolff had invited Heiner Kurzbein, head of the picture-press department at the Reich Ministry for Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment to write the forward to the first edition.<sup>68</sup> The fifty-four photographs were made by Paul Wolff, Alfred Tritschler, and Rudolf Hermann, although the photographers are not mentioned in the captions. Instead, Wolff provides detailed explanations of some of the pictures. The emotional *Heimat* paradigm of a Germanic-dominated history, still apparent in the 1939 colour photography book *Die deutsche Donau* (The German Danube),<sup>69</sup> had by this point almost completely disappeared. Image composition and visual staging are here orientated towards a more objective, commercial style of photography. Technical equipment, the workplace (whether it is a hospital ward or in front of a blazing blast furnace) and holidays on the beach have now become the focus. The women photographed radiate the self-confident elegance of well-paid, professional models and the photographs seem more akin to those of a fashion magazine. The National

67 See Paul Wolff, *Meine Erfahrungen mit der Leica* (Frankfurt am Main: H. Bechhold, 1934). The book with 192 gravure illustrations had sold over 50,000 copies by 1939.

68 Paul Wolff, *Meine Erfahrungen ... farbig* (Frankfurt am Main: Breidenstein, 1942).

69 See Kurt Peter Karfeld and Artur Kuhnert, *Die deutsche Donau. Ein Farbbild-Buch* (Leipzig: Paul List, 1939).

Socialist visual stratagem has, it seems, been shaken: a young woman with loose blonde hair lights a cigarette from a candle in a lascivious manner; another, seated behind the steering wheel of her car, flirts through the open sunroof with the filling-station attendant. Atmospheric landscape pictures of the Alps, flower studies, architectural and art photographs are also present. However, this time they do not come from the Reich itself. The architectural images are all exclusively Italian — Assisi, Siena, Perugia, and Florence. In addition, the few remaining representations of traditional costume do not originate from Germany. Wolff presents a 'Little Girl from the Sarentino Valley' (see Fig. 4.12).

The photographic image of the pastoral, which had played a central role in the illustrated books since the 1920s, was visually moving south and eastwards, beyond the cultural sphere of Central Europe. The women portrayed wear headscarves and seem to have gathered in the field to pray. If one reads the possible symbolic components in the publication — the picture is placed on the right side, the contextual information printed on the left — the gaze of the women is to the right, out of the picture frame, a suggestion that, geographically at least, the image might be read as a turning-away from the Reich towards the East. Nevertheless, the question arises why Wolff broke with the usual pictorial conventions of analogous publications. Was this done to visually de-ideologize the publication in anticipation of a possible defeat? Was the author considering future marketing for a new edition of the book after the war, or were there simply no equivalent images from Germany? Why does the staged, ethnically orientated colour *Heimat* photography of the rural milieu suddenly no longer play a role? The second and third editions of this volume *Meine Erfahrungen ... farbig* were published — without the foreword by Kurzbein, but still with the illustrations of the first edition — in 1948 by the Frankfurter Umschau Verlag.<sup>70</sup> In terms of its photographs, at least, the work was able to survive the end of the National Socialist era without major changes. This suggests that Paul Wolff and his co-author Alfred Tritschler had a certain foresight about the sales of the book beyond the end of the war. In this sense, the visual removal of ideology in the publication can be explained. Certainly, it was not due to any lack of corresponding colour photographs from the Reich. For example, Eduard von Pagenhardt's 1938 publication — an anthology of colour illustrations by various

<sup>70</sup> The total circulation was 35,000 copies.



Fig. 4.12 Paul Wolff, *Kleines Mädchen aus dem Sarntal* (A Little Girl from the Sarentino Valley), 1942, reproduced in *Meine Erfahrungen... farbig* (My Experiences... in Colour) (Frankfurt am Main: Breidenstein, 1942), Plate 18. Public domain.

photographers — had already touched on ‘modern life’, idyllic landscapes and the folkloristic genre of *Heimat* photography.<sup>71</sup> Besides night shots of the world exhibition in Paris and atmospheric illuminated swastika flags, naked, ball-playing women were also presented, as well as pictures of the tranquil and technology-free life in the countryside. The latter was represented by the work of Erich Retzlaff with his Agfacolor portraits, but also by photojournalist Emil Grimm — in the image entitled ‘Schwere Arbeit,’ two workers standing in the water on the banks of a river try to move a boulder with the help of a horse and cart. By contrast, *Meine Erfahrungen ... farbig* presents a cross section of innocuous topics; pictures with National Socialist symbols are looked for in vain.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of the 1930s, the notion of *Heimat* was already no longer solely related to the region one came from. As with the first wave of enthusiasm for the notion of *Heimat* at the turn of the century, a photographic visualisation played a decisive role in this transformation. For example, Lendvai-Dircksen had reinterpreted the *Heimat* and the folkloristic component of traditional costume as a specific characteristic of an ethnic-Germanic way of life. Her photographs thus mutated into an instrument to exclude those parts of the German population that fell through the grid of racial ideology: Jews, Sinti, and Roma, the mentally ill, the physically and mentally disabled as well as critics of the regime; all were robbed of their place in the *Heimat*. Persecution, expulsion, emigration, and murder were to follow. What mattered now was no longer so much a demonstration of the achievements of technology, but rather a representation of a pristine rural utopia as evidenced by the eternal splendour of traditional costumes. This media-propagandistic construction of the visual gaze contradicted the reality of a hegemonic National Socialism striving towards a society that embraced state-of-the-art technologies. This technological reality does not appear in these picture series. The other pictorial aspects: gender roles, the visualisation of different generations, or the racial presentation of blonde girls, mostly

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71 Eduard von Pagenhardt, ed., *Agfacolor, das farbige Lichtbild. Grundlagen und Aufnahmetechnik für den Liebhaberfotografen* (München: Knorr & Hirth, 1938).

dressed in traditional costume, is certainly evident. Hans Retzlaff's visual approach — the frontality of the subjects, the concentration on historical vestments, the de-individualization in favour of types — fosters this stylistic reduction in the documentation of traditional costume. His photographs ignore current social and societal circumstances and instead suggest the timelessness of an ancient, homogeneous rural culture. Another decisive factor for the propagandistic potential of this *völkisch* photography is the fact that it was commissioned as part of an educational and didactic tool by scientific disciplines such as Ethnology that employed a scientific method. No objective verification of sources took place. In this respect, Hans Retzlaff's works could also visualise ideology — in the form of a kind of visual rhetorical objectivation, in which a traditional utensil, a custom, or a farmer's cottage could indicate its 'Germanic' roots.

Hans Retzlaff's illustrated books, like the corresponding examples by Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, remained focussed on the idealisation of the rural world during the 1930s. Any reference to the present was, at best, demonstrated by the continuity of tradition through National Socialism. The viewer is spared an encounter with technical achievements as well as armaments, industrialisation, mobility, social problems, and life in the big city. Nor did they address those groups of the population that increasingly suffered from racial ideology. Certainly, the title of Retzlaff's book, *Arbeitsmädchen am Werk*, had explicitly confirmed that the author had primarily directed his camera at young women. However, implicitly this expressed a propagandistic element, *vis-à-vis* the people on the home front who would have to come to terms with the absence of men during the war. By 1940, National Socialist society already largely consisted of women, children, and older men working primarily in agriculture — just as Retzlaff had recorded it. Last but not least, the visual constructions crafted in these illustrated books still defined the collective memory of National Socialism long after 1945. Up until the present day, these euphemistic images served to compensate for an individual's involvement with the regime. Indeed, using these often-innocuous images as evidence, these individual encounters and experiences during the period of National Socialism have been presented in a somewhat different light.

The ideologization of colour photography was somewhat different. Initial responses were determined by the primarily technically motivated tendencies of segmented modernism: as long as it did not disturb the ideology of 'Blood and Soil', then National Socialism recognised the successes of technology as part of an overall Germanic cultural achievement. Agfacolor's colour process was regarded as one of those achievements, not least because it was a reasonable competitor to the American Kodachrome process; the prospect of the economic benefits to the state of bringing in foreign capital cannot be ignored either. In the mid-1930s, however, colour photography with the new 35mm technique was still in an experimental stage. *Heimat* photography was part of it, but not the only element. The focus was also on technology, transport, fashion, and leisure. The fact that Wolff and his partner had recognised the sign of the times at an early stage can be seen from the fact that the illustrated books of colour photography could later be reprinted with almost no major changes. At the end of the war and in the years that followed, the notion of *Heimat*, and indeed *Heimat* photography, continued to play a role as part of a nostalgic and backwards-looking milieu, even if only from the point of view of those who were part of the millions of displaced Germans who had fled or been forcibly expelled from former German territories.



MYTH



# 5. 'Transmissions from an Extrasensory World'<sup>1</sup>

## Ethnos and Mysticism in the Photographic Nexus

*Christopher Webster*

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*How far, since then, the ocean streams  
Have swept us from that land of dreams,  
That land of fiction and of truth,  
The lost Atlantis of our youth!*<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

In contrast to the increasingly lurid scholarly research on the broader subject of the 'Nazi Occult' that has appeared since the end of the Second World War, the relationship to mythic occult currents and esoteric themes in the photography of Ethnos<sup>3</sup> in National Socialist Germany has not been examined in any great depth. However, recent scholarship has confirmed that there were indeed powerful esoteric (as well as exoteric) occult currents that undoubtedly influenced the cultural mythos of National Socialist Germany. This influence

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- 1 *Erste Gesamtausstellung der Werke von Fidus zu seinem 60. Geburtstage* (First complete exhibition of the works of Fidus for his 60th birthday) (Woltersdorf bei Erkner: Fidus-Verlag, 1928), p. 9.
  - 2 From the frontispiece dedication to George Washington Green, in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Ultima Thule* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1880).
  - 3 As noted in the introduction to this volume, I use 'Ethnos' as a summary term for this ethnically driven approach to (in particular) the autochthonous peasant and other 'people of the soil'.

included the photographic portfolios of Ethnos that were developed for propaganda and ideological purposes. Eric Kurlander's definitive work *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (2017) explores this influence in Austria and Germany, arising as it did from a late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century paranormal milieu, as well as how this influence continued to play a part in what Kurlander terms the 'Supernatural Imaginary' throughout the era of the Third Reich itself.

As Kurlander explained:

From cosmopolitan Berlin to Catholic Munich, from Saxony to Schleswig-Holstein thousands of Germans flooded to seances, astrologers, tarot readers, parapsychological experiments, occult bookstores and even esoteric schools and university courses... the sheer size and diversity of the occult marketplace in Germany and Austria suggests that it tapped into a mass consumer culture that was unique in depth and breadth when compared to other countries. Berlin and Munich alone were home to thousands of spiritualists, mediums and astrologers who appealed to tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of consumers.<sup>4</sup>

Kurlander's intelligent work builds upon a slim but significant corpus of scholarly works that have dealt with this topic and its influence (or otherwise) on the origins and direction of National Socialism itself.<sup>5</sup> Kurlander, who has written the preface to this volume, described how this influence in National Socialist Germany, this 'Supernatural Imaginary', was '...a space in which a range of popular esoteric, pseudo-scientific, folklorist, and mythological tropes might be exploited in the

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4 Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters, A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 14.

5 See Joscelyn Godwin's *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), Thomas Hakl's *Unknown Sources: National Socialism and the Occult* (Sequim: Holmes Publishing Group, 2005) and the classic work of Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935* (New York: New York University Press, 1992). In addition, there have been, over the last two decades, a growth of scholarly studies focussed on esoterica *in toto* in academia, as well as academically grounded research societies such as the European Society for Studies in Western Esotericism, the American Association for the Study of Esotericism, and the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Esotericism, amongst others. Added to these are the growing number of postgraduate study courses and academic chairs related to Western and Eastern esotericism (for example at the University of Amsterdam, the École pratique des hautes études, Rice University Houston, the University of Groningen and, until 2014, the Essex Centre for the Study of Western Esotericism, led by the late Goodrick-Clarke).

building of ideological consensus across a diverse Nazi Party and all the more eclectic German population'.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter explores how the influence of nineteenth-century *völkisch* and occult currents on National Socialism percolated the mass-reproduced photographic images of Ethnos, with its framing of the German as 'other', and how the National Socialist syncretisation of myth, the occult, science, and art found a nexus in these photographic images. Additionally, as will be seen, the work of influential (if controversial) scholars such as Herman Wirth, and the powerful influence of political institutions such as Heinrich Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*, also played a direct role in forming this visual manifestation of a race apart, with a divine origin in a mythical *Urheimat* in the 'ultimate north'. The allusion to an occult myth of divine forebears in these photographically staged portrayals of the 'Aryan' added to and extended the celebration of a racial type in line with 'race science'. Photographers of Ethnos, such as Erich Retzlaff or Hans Saebens, often incorporated typological approaches that included a *metaphysical* and *esoteric* basis. They used the machine-generated optical and chemical processes of photography to make work that was breaking the bounds of its empirical realm, in a kind of nationalist 'staged' photography, just as cinema did in the interwar period.

## Occult Currents

In his 1961 essay 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', George L. Mosse explored a 'revolt against positivism' that had formed part of the cultural and semi-religious prelude to the advent of the Third Reich. Part of the powerful attraction of this resistance to aspects of modernity was its setting against the backdrop of a struggle or searching for a national identity in opposition to an emergent globalism. The mysticism evident in the photography of Ethnos was effectively a manifestation in silver of a tradition arising from this 'revolt against positivism', with its emphasis on racial uniqueness. As Mosse further explains:

This German reaction to positivism became intimately bound up with a belief in nature's cosmic life force, a dark force whose mysteries could

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6 Eric Kurlander, 'The orientalist roots of National Socialism?', in Eric Kurlander, Joanne Miyang Cho, Douglas T. McGetchin, eds, *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 164–65.

be understood, not through science, but through the occult. An ideology based on such premises was fused with the glories of an Aryan past, and in turn, that past received a thoroughly romantic and mystical interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

And when ariosophists like Guido von List had adopted this notion, they had further cemented the idea that: 'Nature... the great divine guide and from her flowed the life-force. Whatever was closest to Nature would therefore be closest to the truth... the Aryan past was the most "genuine" manifestation of this inner force.'<sup>8</sup> Not only was the Aryan hypothesised as being racially purer and culturally less 'tainted', it was very often intimated (and sometimes even overtly asserted) that these historically grounded people were even godlike, descendants of a Hyperborean homeland — a case of *Ex Septentrione Lux* — or the light from the North. This idea had been vociferously posited by racialist and *völkisch* thinkers in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in opposition to the Classical idea that all knowledge was *Ex oriente lux* (out of the east, light). Citing a polygenetic origin of humanity, that is, that humankind did not originate from a single common ancestral stock (such as the modern 'Out of Africa' theory),<sup>9</sup> some publications in which this photography of Ethnos appeared insinuated that, in addition to the presentation of these country people as exemplars of their nation with 'superior' qualities, that they were in fact a race apart, having a divine origin in the 'ultimate north,' a celestial *Herrenrasse*, a polar 'Master Race'. For example, in the book *Deutsches Volk — Deutsche Heimat* (German People — German Homeland) (1935), produced by the *NS-Lehrerbundes* (the National Socialist teachers association), the image of a dolmen<sup>10</sup>

7 George L. Mosse, 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22:1 (January-March, 1961), 81.

8 Mosse, 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism' (1961), 84.

9 The theory of a single origin of modern humanity from Africa (a monogenesis) had become the firmly accepted scientific hypothesis by the mid-2000s. It was, however, quite quickly challenged, especially as more and more sophisticated DNA evidence emerged. Some scientists now conclude that humankind's origins are much more complex and, speculatively at least, perhaps do indeed derive from separate emergences in different regions. See for example, Nikhil Swaminathan 'Is the Out of Africa Theory Out?' *Scientific American*, 8 August, 2007, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/is-the-out-of-africa-theory-out/>

10 A dolmen is a single-chamber megalithic tomb.



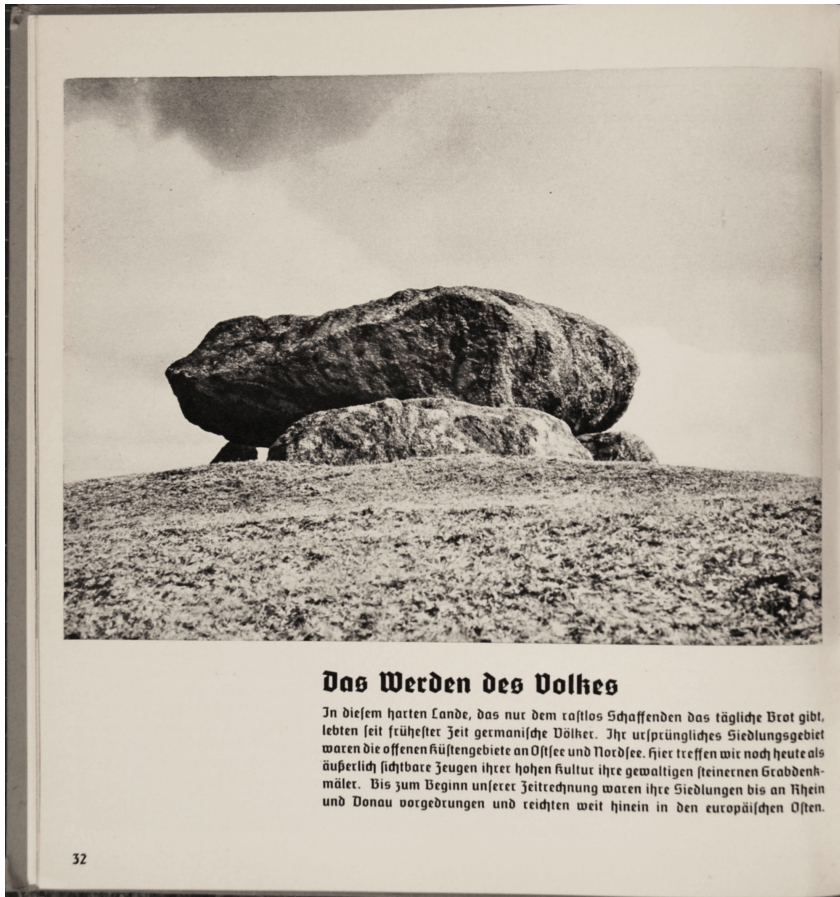


Fig. 5.1 Wilhelm Carl-Mardorf, reproduced in *Deutsches Volk — Deutsche Heimat* (German People — German Homeland) (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark G.m.b.h., 1935), p. 32). Public domain.

is reproduced with a text entitled 'Das Werden des Volkes' (The Becoming of the People/Folk). This use of *Werden* suggests, in the Nietzschean sense, the struggle of 'becoming'. There are no visible links to modernity; rather the timeless presence of the stones, imposed against the sky, are presented to act as reminder of the great age and history of the German people. The burial chamber's imposing presence is reinforced by the photographer's use of a simple implied triangle composition. The accompanying text states: 'Their original settlements were the open coastal areas of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Even

today we encounter visible relics of their huge stone memorials. By the beginning of our own era, their settlements had advanced along the Rhine and Danube and reached far into the east of Europe.<sup>11</sup> Here, it is intimated, lie the first signs, the relics of the *Urvolk* (Germanic Ancestors), following their postdiluvian arrival on the shores of northern Europe at the start of their long journey east and south into their hinterland to 'become' the Germanic *Volk*.

The Atlantean myth<sup>12</sup> had been particularly influential on, and was further popularised by, nineteenth-century occultists such as Helena Blavatsky. Blavatsky was a mystic, writer, and the co-founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875. Her two-volume work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), explored the origins of mankind; it linked to new scientific ideas such as evolution, but melded these ideas with mysticism. In particular, her occult exploration of 'Root races', the development of the Aryan race and the links to an Atlantean homeland are significant. Importantly for this discussion, these ideas filtered through to the *völkisch* pan-German mystics and occultists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who would create their own racial and spiritual philosophy, namely, Ariosophy (the wisdom of the Aryans). Ariosophists such as Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels adapted ideas from a broad range of influences, including Blavatsky's Theosophy, and notions of Aryan racial history as espoused by figures such as Arthur de Gobineau, who had pronounced on the theory of the Aryan master race in his essay *The Inequality of the Human Races* (1855). In the Ariosophic musings of Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, for example, it was postulated that certain 'pure' lines, '...were the closest living descendants of the former god-men'<sup>13</sup> whose earliest recorded ancestors 'were the Atlanteans who had lived on a continent situated in the northern part of the Atlantic Ocean...' and

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11 'Ihr ursprüngliches Siedlungsgebiet waren die offenen küstengebiete an Ostsee und Nordsee. Hier treffen wir noch heute als äusserlich sichtbare Zeugen ihrer gewaltigen steinernen Grabdenkmäler. Bis zum Beginn unserer Zeitrechnung waren ihre Siedlungen bis an Rhein und Donau vorgedrungen und reichten weit hinein in den europäischen Osten.' *Reichsamtseitung des NS-Lehrerbundes, Deutsches Volk — Deutsches Heimat* (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark G.m.b.h., 1935), p. 32.

12 The earliest account of the history of 'Atlantis' is Plato's late dialogue *Critias* (4th century BC) in which the philosopher discusses the location, history, and power of the Atlantean island.

13 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism, Secret Aryan Cults and their influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 97.

that, 'They were [...] descended from the original divine Theozoa with electromagnetic sensory organs and superhuman powers.'<sup>14</sup> Effectively, as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has pointed out, the Social-Darwinian concept of a coming biological struggle for survival of the fittest was accepted and amalgamated with the notion of the inevitable dawn of a mystical and supreme root-race, the Aryan.<sup>15</sup> Such occult, Ariosophist ideas bled into nationalist political thinking and were nurtured by the fratricidal apocalypse of the First World War.

In his book *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time*, Joscelyn Godwin suggested that:

After the First World War Germany was in need of myths that would excuse its defeat and give its people hope for the future. Ariosophy lay readily to hand with its enticing myth of a Nordic-Aryan-Atlantean origin for the German folk... The recent war had proved how the inferior races, with whom the Aryans unwisely interbred, had become their enemies both from within, by polluting their blood, and from without.<sup>16</sup>

As curious as this notion of an alternative and even mystical origin of the 'Aryan' (or, as it came to be alternatively named, the Nordic-Atlantean) may seem, it was variously endorsed by figures at the highest levels of the NSDAP. The *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler had himself stated 'That the Nordic race did not evolve, but came directly down from heaven to settle the Atlantic continent'.<sup>17</sup>

Himmler's interest in a Northern origin had been partly inspired by the research of the pre-historian Herman Wirth. Wirth was an eclectic

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14 Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1992), p. 209. Also, according to Goodrick-Clarke (p. 262), Lanz von Liebenfels' belief in the Atlantean origin had been inspired by the works of two specific post-WW1 books: Karl Georg Zschützsch, *Atlantis, die Urheimat der Arier* (Atlantis the Original Homeland of the Aryans) (Berlin: Arier-Verlag, 1922) and Hermann Wieland, *Atlantis, Edda und Bibel* (Atlantis, Edda and Bible) (Weissenburg: Gross-deutscher Verlag, 1925).

15 Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1992), p. 13.

16 Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time, Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011), p. 124.

17 Himmler's belief in a celestial origin of the Aryan race had been confided to Zoologist and Ahnenerbe expedition leader Dr Ernst Schäfer, who revealed the details of this discussion with Himmler when Schäfer was interrogated after the war. 'The Activities of Dr. Ernst Schäfer, Tibet Explorer and Scientist with SS-sponsored Scientific Institutes', Headquarters United States Forces European Theater, Military Intelligence Service Centre, 12.02.1946, NARA, RG238, M1270/27 (quoted in Heather Pringle, *The Master Plan, Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), p. 150).

and eccentric Dutch scholar whose research had led him to conclude that the Nordic race had originated on a now lost northern Atlantic continent. His 1928 book *Der Aufgang der Menschheit: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der atlantisch-nordischen Rasse*<sup>18</sup> (Ascent of Mankind: Studies on the History of Religion, Symbolism and Texts of the Nordic-Atlantean Race) presented the notion that these so-called Nordic-Atlanteans had been the bearers of language, text, and civilisation to the world after a great cataclysm or climatic change had forced them to leave their northern homeland and migrate across the globe. When Wirth encountered the Oera Linda Book in 1922 he seemed to have discovered a treatise that confirmed his ideas. The Oera Linda Book was a supposedly ancient Frisian text whose assertions linked with Wirth's notion of the Nordic-Atlantean origins of the Germanic peoples. Cornelis Over de Linden had revealed the manuscript in 1867, when he presented it for translation and publication in Dutch. The book chronicled the history of a Nordic-Atlantean people whose nation, Atland or Aldland (read: Atlantis), had been destroyed and who had subsequently settled in Frisia. This Nordic *Urrasse* had comprehensively influenced the historical and cultural development of Europe and had even been the originators of the Phoenician and Greek alphabets.<sup>19</sup>

Wirth's theory of a Nordic-Atlantean race was regarded as controversial even in its day, but his outputs were often very positively received. In a 1929 book review of *Der Aufgang der Menschheit* written for the journal the *American Anthropologist*, John M. Cooper explained:

The writer's general thesis is that pretty nearly everything worth while in the higher spiritual culture of the Occident harks back originally to blond, longheaded Nordics. Our historic Nordic race is the offspring of the *arktisch-nordische* or *vor-nordische Urrasse* that first appeared in the Tertiary on the then vast warm Arctic continent. These Proto-Nordics, with the coming of the glacial epoch, wandered perforce southward, into North America, "Atlantis," and Asia...

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18 Herman Felix Wirth, *Der Aufgang der Menschheit: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der atlantisch-nordischen Rasse* (Ascent of Mankind: Studies on the History of Religion, Symbolism and Texts of the Nordic-Atlantean Race) (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1928).

19 Many scholars rejected the book as a forgery as it challenged historical orthodoxy, but the debate still rages, and the modern proponents of its veracity continue to make the case for a thorough re-examination. For more information about the ongoing translation and research into this document see the blog: Saved From the Flood — Oera Linda Studies, <http://fryskednis.blogspot.com/>

... The whole work is planned to be issued in two parts... They may be cordially recommended to all the faithful who believe with Wirth that the Nordic race is 'die Trägerin der höchsten Geistesveranlagung und die Urheberin der höchsten Geisteskultur.'<sup>20</sup>

A 1933 article in the Dutch newspaper the *Telegraaf* explained Wirth's Nordic-Atlantean hypothesis as an alternative (and potentially engaging) pagan belief system for the modern era. Under the banner 'Actual Primordial Religion of the Aryans', the subtitle dramatically states, 'Polar region regarded the birthplace of the noble Nordic race':

In Germany, a daily increasing movement of people can be observed, that turns away from Christianity and wants to return to the original Germanic and Aryan gods. This movement had been moderate, since many felt uncomfortable worshipping Wodan again. But now, Wirth has come with his "Hailbringer" and it is under this banner, that the anti-Christian Germans can somewhat decently unite if they want...<sup>21</sup>

Although he came to vociferously reject the full conclusions of Wirth's hypotheses—especially in light of Wirth's endorsement of the Oera Linda Book,<sup>22</sup> and Wirth's ongoing patronage by Heinrich Himmler—Alfred Rosenberg, who considered himself to be the chief philosopher of the NSDAP, had also explicitly referred to an alternative origin of the Aryan race as Nordic-Atlanteans.<sup>23</sup>

Rosenberg himself had, like the Ariosophic mystic Lanz von Liebenfels, been inspired by reading Karl Georg Zschützsch's 1922 book *Atlantis, die Urheimat der Arier* (Atlantis, the Original Homeland of the Aryans). Consequently, in his book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*

20 John M. Cooper, *American Anthropologist* 36:4 (October-December 1934), 600–01. 'the bearer of the highest spiritual predisposition and the creator of the highest spiritual culture.'

21 'Prof. Wirth's Heilbrenger,' *Telegraaf* (The Telegraph) 14 May 1933. Translation and source courtesy of Jan Ott, *Saved From the Flood — Oera Linda Studies*, 14 February 2016, <https://fryskednis.blogspot.com/2016/02/>

22 Wirth produced a beautifully bound German translation in 1933: *Die Ura Linda Chronik* (The Oera Linda Chronicle) (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang GMBH, 1933).

23 Despite being largely derided as unreadable, Rosenberg's 1930 book, *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Myth of the Twentieth Century) had a significant reach, with the book selling well over a million copies and consequently having a broad influence: Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (The Myth of the 20th Century. A Maluation of the Mental-Spiritual Struggles of Our Time) München: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1930).

(The Myth of the Twentieth Century) Rosenberg speculated that: ‘... the ancient legend of Atlantis... appear[s] in a new light. It seems not impossible that where the waves of the Atlantic Ocean now crash and erode giant icebergs, once a blossoming continent rose out of the water, on which a creative race raised a mighty, wide-ranging culture, and sent its children out into the world as seafarers and warriors’.<sup>24</sup>

Although the entire Atlantean hypothesis was still largely dismissed within academia, and amongst Nordacists generally (and Rosenberg certainly did not continue to espouse this view publicly, at least), Himmler *did* continue to entertain the idea and to consider the Atlantean hypothesis as a more than plausible one. Indeed, Himmler maintained a correspondence with one of the few academics to defend the thesis, the archaeologist and professor of the University of Berlin, Albert Herrmann.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in a speech made to senior officials and SS officers on the occasion of Reinhard Heydrich’s funeral in 1942, the need for a mystical racial faith to replace Christianity was affirmed once more when Himmler referred directly to the ‘ancient one’ of the Oera Linda Book, Wralda:

Today at Heydrich’s funeral I intentionally expressed in my oration from my deepest conviction a belief in God, a belief in fate, in the ancient one as I called him — that is the old Germanic word: Wralda. We shall once again have to find a new scale of values for our people: the scale of the macrocosm and the microcosm, the starry sky above us and the world in us, the world that we see in the microscope. The essence of these megalomaniacs, these Christians who talk of men ruling this world, must stop and be put back in its proper proportion... By rooting our people in a deep ideological awareness of ancestors and grandchildren we must once more persuade them that they must have sons... That is our mission as a nation on this earth. For thousands of years it has been the mission of

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24 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The Myth of the 20th Century) (1934 edition), p. 24.

25 Herrmann published a book to this effect, titled *Unsere Ahnen und Atlantis: Nordische Seeherrschaft von Skandinavien bis Nordafrika* (Our Ancestors and Atlantis: Nordic Maritime Domination from Scandinavia to North Africa) (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1934). For more on the alternative origins of the Germans and the National Socialist academic position see Johann Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans: How the Nazis Usurped Europe’s Classical Past* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017).



this blond race to rule the earth and again and again to bring it happiness and culture.<sup>26</sup>

In 1934, on Himmler's invitation and in collaboration with *Reichsbauernführer* (Reich Peasant Leader) Richard Walther Darré, Wirth had been instrumental in the founding of the SS research institute known as the *Ahnenerbe*.<sup>27</sup> Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* was initially perceived as a research society of pre-history, and the intent was that it would pursue scholarly research into discovering the history, cultural foundations, and myths of the Germanic peoples. The *Ahnenerbe's* remit expanded rapidly and after 1937 (when Wirth was effectively frozen out)<sup>28</sup> became less of a *völkisch* research group and much more (ostensibly) rigorously academic under the guiding hand of Walther Wüst.<sup>29</sup> However, with Himmler's interests in esoterica and the occult seemingly unquenchable,<sup>30</sup> and as he was an attentive and micromanaging chief, areas most academics considered pseudo-science continued to play a part in the broader programme of Himmler's institute. Some areas that were examined included: 'radiesthesia ('pendulum dowsing'), cosmobiology, and biodynamic

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26 Heinrich Himmler, 'Gedenkrede für Reinhard Heydrich,' English translation in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds, *Nazism, 1919–1945, Vol. 2, State, Economy and Society 1933–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 304. Original German: 'Rede vor den Oberabschnittsführern und Hauptamtschefs im Haus der Flieger in Berlin am 9. 6. 1942 (Gedenkrede für Reinhard Heydrich) (Speech to the upper section leaders and chief officers in the House of Airmen in Berlin on June 9, 1942, memorial speech for Reinhard Heydrich),' U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, T-175, Roll 90, Frames 2664–2685; reproduced in Bradley F. Smith and Agnes F. Peterson, eds, *Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen* (Heinrich Himmler: Secret speeches 1933 to 1945 and other speeches) (Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen, 1974), pp. 159–61.

27 Its full title eventually became the *Forschungs und Lehrgemeinschaft des Ahnenerbe* (the Research and Teaching Community of the Ancestral Heritage).

28 By 1937 the controversial and financially extravagant Wirth had effectively been 'retired' as it was felt that the *Ahnenerbe* needed to become (ostensibly at least) more academically grounded and 'scientific'.

29 As well as exploring pre-history and archaeology, other areas of research included (but were not limited to) anthropology, meteorology, philology, nuclear science, musicology, and folklore.

30 For a scholarly examination of Himmler and his interest in the occult see, Stephen Flowers and Michael Moynihan, *The Secret King: The Myth and Reality of Nazi Occultism* (Los Angeles & Waterbury Center, VT: Feral House & Dominion Press, 2007).

agriculture.<sup>31</sup> These were but a few of the areas of esoteric sciences often keenly endorsed and explored. Such interests extended to photographic propaganda, and fragmentary evidence exists that the *Ahnenerbe* supported (both ideologically and financially) the work of photographers engaged with these studies of a mythic Ethnos. An implicit framing of the 'Germanic' peasant in 'supernatural' terms, and often with links to an occultic Nordic-Atlantean hypothesis, demonstrably continued.

### *Urbild des Gottmenschen* (Archetype of the God-Man)

The portrait of a young farmer by Erich Retzlaff, was reproduced in a 1935 issue of the *NS-Frauen-Warte* to accompany an article entitled 'Der blonde Junge' (The Blond Youth) by Erika Meyer. The closely cropped three-quarter profile of the blond youth accentuates a face that is both solemn and stoically resilient, with its intense out-of-the-frame stare. That intensity is intended to point to a deep passion and strength of belief. And Retzlaff's image of youth accords with Meyer's textual narrative accompanying the image: 'Yes, my *Heimat*, my soil, my work! The blond boy feels it every day, that's why his forehead is so solemnly serious. That's why he speaks so little, that's why his eyes have the brightness of joy and happiness: my *Heimat* — my work.'<sup>32</sup>

As Figure 5.2 suggests, central to the photographic interpretation of a 'mysticism' in the photography of Ethnos was the figure of the farmer, the *Bauer*. In *völkisch* terms, the people of the countryside were regarded as exemplars of the nation as a whole, untainted by that perception of a cosmopolitan degeneracy and alienation postulated as being inherent to life in the city. This notion was central too to National Socialism, reviving as it did an old tradition of representations of the peasant where the peasant motif was presented as an anchor to blood-and-soil conceptions.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to a metropolitan ethnic diversity and

31 For more on the seeming paradox between the National Socialist state's efforts to determine what was (useful) 'scientific occultism' and what was 'occult charlatanry' (and therefore repressed), and the strange mélange explored by Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*, see Eric Kurlander, 'The Nazi Magicians' Controversy: Enlightenment, "Border Science," and Occultism in the Third Reich,' *Central European History* 48:4 (December, 2015).

32 Erika Meyer, 'Der blonde Junge,' (The Blond Youth) *NS-Frauen-Warte* 4 (1935–1936), 106 (author's translation).

33 For more on the peasant motif in German art and photography see Christian Weikop, 'August Sander's *Der Bauer* and the Pervasiveness of the Peasant Tradition',

und Tanz, ernste Arbeit, verantwortungsvolle Pflichterfüllung schmieden sie zusammen. Weltanschauliche politische Schulung rühten sie alle einheitlich aus.

So ist eine ständige Wechselbeziehung da. Bei einer Schulung des Reichsnährstandes sind immer die Führer und Führerinnen von HJ. und BDM-Einheiten anwesend und sprechen dort zu den Mädeln. Umgekehrt sprechen Vertreter des Reichsnährstandes ständig vor HJ. und BDM. Das Leben der Dorfjugend ist schon jetzt wieder von neuem Geist erfüllt. Dorfgemeinschaftsabende führen alle Dorfbewohner aller NS-Formationen zu wirtschaftlicher Dorfgemeinschaft zusammen, ohne Unterschied des Standes. In

ihrer Formation zu nationalsozialistischem Denken und Handeln erzogen, schlingt das Dorf mit seinen Sitten und Bräuten, seinen Festen und Feiern, das letzte Band um sie.

Die Reichsnährstandsausstellung in Hamburg hat in der Abteilung „Jugend am Pflug“ deutlich gezeigt, welche Marsdrigung wir eingeschlagen haben, welches unser Ziel ist und wie weit wir bereits vorgebrungen sind. Zum Landjugend gehört die Uniform, zum Landmadel neben das bäuerliche Kleid die Kluft. Die Spinnstube der Landjugend hat diese Verbindung gezeigt, da die Mädel sich neben ihren anderen Säden auch BDM-Rod und -Bluse weben.

## Der blonde Junge

Von Erika Meyer

Auf einsamer Höhe steht das kleine Haus mit dem tiefen, hängenden Strohdach, den blinden Fensterläden. Eine Pumpe steht alt und verrostet davor. Ein paar hohe Pappeln ragen auf einem Hügel, berücken das Haus beinahe. Wie verschlafen ist es.

Wer aber am Morgen vorbeikommt an dem einsamen Haus, der sieht den blonden Jungen im kleinen Hof. Ein paar Hühner laufen dort umher, und ein Hund bellt. Der blonde Junge streut den Hühnern ihr Korn, er trägt an einem Wallesträger über der Schulter zwei Eimer von der alten Pumpe, er geht in den niedrigen Stall und freisetzt die Pferde.

Der blonde Junge ist schmal und hochgewachsen, er hat harte Knochen und ein braunes Gesicht. Seine Augen haben den Ausdruck des Glüdes, der Freude. Sie schauen in vollem Bewußtsein der Schwere des Lebens und haben doch noch den reinen Glanz eines Kindes. Sein bieder blonder Schopf fällt ihm ein wenig in die Stirn, die so leidend ernst und feierlich ist.

Der blonde Junge spricht wenig. Es sind noch zwei Knechte auf dem Hof, und im Hause ist eine alte Frau, die mit schweren kranken Füßen im Stuhl am Fenster sitzt, am Herd in der niedrigen rauchigen Küche steht ein großes Mädchen und summt.

Die Augen des blonden Jungen schauen überall hin, seine Hände fallen nach allem, sein Schritt hallt durch das Haus, über den Hof, im Garten, sein Weg führt aufs Feld.

Seine Beine, die noch nach Jungensart bloß in Sandalen

heden — er ist ja erst fünfzehn Jahre — haben noch nicht den weltbehobenen Schritt eines Mannes, und seine Schultern sind noch nicht so breit wie die der Bauern unten im Dorf. Sie kennen ihn alle im Dorf, und sie nennen ihn „den blonden Jungen“. Es gibt wohl viele blonde Kinder im Dorf und blonde Männer und Frauen, aber zu keinem scheint das Blond so zugehörig, bei keinem scheint es so eigenes Wesen geworden zu sein wie bei ihm: dem blonden Jungen.

Sie kennen ihn alle, wie er an seinen Selbsten vorbeistreift, sie kennen seinen noch unregelmäßigen, halb jugendhaften, halb männlichen Schritt. Er geht an seinen Ädern entlang, jeden Tag, und schaut mit heiligem Ernst darauf nieder. Jeden Tag läßt er sich ein paar Augenblicke Zeit für seinen Ader, um auf ihn niederzuschauen, um ihm zuzuhören, um ihm zu lauschen. Denn der Boden spricht, spricht etwas, was man in Worte nicht zu fassen vermag, und was der blonde Junge sich jeden Tag von neuem anhört. Den Bauern ist es, als wüsste er den Boden, als seien es seine Augen, die ihm Kraft verliehen. Sie lieben es sonst nicht, wenn Kinder die Arbeit eines Bauern tun, sie wollen die Kinder anweisen, sie lehren. Bei dem blonden Jungen von dem einsamen Haus ist es etwas anderes.

Sie haben viel zu tun, die Bauern, und keiner will dem andern nachsehen in der Bestellung seiner Felder. So kommen sie nicht oft in das kleine Haus oben am Hügel. Aber sie wissen, „oben geht es schon recht“.

Jeden Abend freisetzt die alte frante Frau den Kopf des Jungen: „Du hast dein Tagewerk wieder getan!“ Dann faßt er freudig die harten Hände, die einst zufallen konnten wie die seinen, und sagt: „Mein Tagewerk war wieder schön!“

Sein Tagewerk ist hart, lo hart, daß seine Schultern wohl bald breit sein werden, lo hart, daß seine Schritte bald weit ausfallen müssen, lo hart, daß seine Hände Männerhände werden, rau und voll Schwielen.

Und doch ist sein Tagewerk beinahe immer wie eine Seier. Sein Haus hat zwar nur ein armes Strohdach und kleine Fensterläden, die Küche ist niedrig und rauchig, und das Wasser muß mühsam von der Pumpe geholt werden. Aber hohe Pappeln schützen das Haus, sie feiern mit ihm. Es sind nicht viele Tiere da: zwei Pferde, zwei Kühe, ein paar Hühner, ein paar Schweine. Sie machen viele Arbeit, denn es sind nur wenige Menschen dort oben — aber sie sind wie gute Freunde, die mitwirken, mitfeiern am Tagewerk. Besonders die Pferde. Bis zu den Ädern ist ein weiter Weg, aber er führt durch liebliches Gebüsch, durch Blumenwiesen, auf denen Kühe weiden.

Und aus den Ädern spricht eine heilige Stimme! Eine Stimme, die wohl nicht jeder hören kann, die aber dem blonden Jungen die Seier gibt, die Andacht zu seinem Tagewerk!

Heimat, Boden, Arbeit, spricht die Stimme. Ja, meine Heimat, mein Boden, meine Arbeit! Der blonde Junge fühlt es täglich, darum ist seine Stirn so feierlich und ernst. Darum spricht er so wenig, darum haben seine Augen den Glanz von Freude und Glüd: meine Heimat — meine Arbeit.

Bauer aus der Marsch

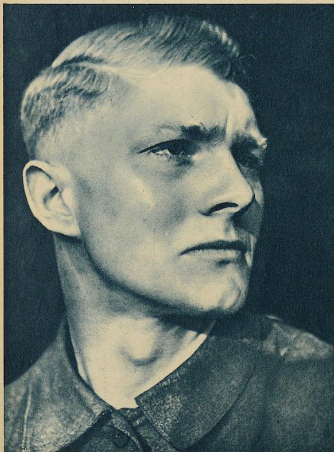


Foto: Retzlaff, Cuxhaven

Fig. 5.2 Erich Retzlaff, *Bauer aus der Marsch* (A Farmer from the Fens) reproduced in NS-Frauen-Warte 4 (1935–1936), 106. Public domain.

the supposed cultural corruption of the cities, the simple country folk, surviving with their traditions into the twentieth century, were presented as important representatives of a long tradition that stretched back into the mists of time and as such were the guardians of the purest spirit and blood of the race, with (notionally at least) a photographically framed aspect of holiness. In this photograph by Hans Saebens, for example, the young North Frisian girls from Föhr are pictured in their traditional communion costumes (see Fig. 5.3).

Saebens has used a soft, flattering filter to create a diffused glow of light around the two subjects. The girls are both in profile with their mouths slightly open as if they have been captured in song or in prayer. The whole is framed like a Wagnerian, operatic motif of a hallowed interaction between ritual, history and tradition. In this framing of a the 'supernatural imaginary,' it is irrelevant that the service is a Christian one; rather, the selection and framing suggests that these girls are seen as emanations of light, representatives of an ancient and mystical bloodline that bears the spark of both the divine and the eternal.

As an example of this characterisation, the National Socialist Indo-Europeanist Walther Wüst elucidated in 1936:

We are, as we can assert with pride based on the most recent, careful, racial research, 'the oldest people on the earth.' Our forefathers were farmers, established farmers in the noblest meaning of the word, who, even four thousand years prior to recorded history, had known how to plow and had managed highly developed animal husbandry and agriculture. Their lives took fullest expression in the cleared arable landscape surrounded by forests. That was their world, not the nerve-splitting, immoral city.<sup>34</sup>

Erich Retzlaff's first series of physiognomic portraits of rural Germans was published in three volumes, beginning in 1930 with his *Das Antlitz des Alters* (The Face of Age), followed by the two-volume *Deutsche*

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*Tate Papers* 19 (Spring 2013), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/19/august-sanders-der-bauer-and-the-pervasiveness-of-the-peasant-tradition>

34 This was a speech Wüst gave to the opening of *Pflegstätte für Germanenkunde* (Promotional Centre for German Studies) in 1936, quoted in Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 191.



Fig. 5.3 Hans Saebens, *Konfirmandinnen aus Föhr* (Confirmants from Föhr), vintage silver gelatin print, c.1936. Courtesy of Aberystwyth University, School of Art Museum and Galleries.



*Menschen* (German People) in 1931.<sup>35</sup> As 'examples' they were widely reproduced — for example, in the August 1932 picture-magazine *Atlantis*, these images were reproduced in full-page format and bore the caption: 'from different regions of Germany, they show the German face still undistorted by urban civilization'.

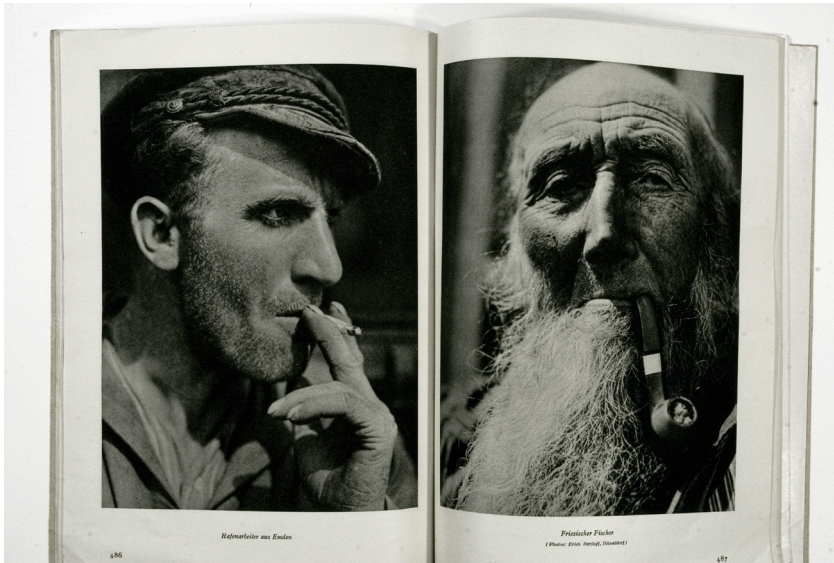


Fig. 5.4 Erich Retzlaff, *Hafenarbeiter aus Emden* & *Friesischer Fischer* (Harbour Worker from Emden & Frisian Fishermen) reproduced in 'Atlantis', Heft 8, August 1932, pp. 486–87. Public domain.

In the post-1933 era, these collections of the physiognomic peasant type proliferated. Retzlaff, Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, and others produced further volumes of racial-physiognomic studies throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Received favourably by the National Socialists, these aestheticised photographic portfolios framed the subjects in these books in a different manner to that of the 'scientific' quantitative route of racial photography so typical of anthropological studies. According to the Dutch scholar Remco Ensels, when discussing correlating Dutch

35 Respectively: Erich Retzlaff and Jakob Kneip, *Das Antlitz des Alters* (The Face of Age) (Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag g.m.b.h., 1930); Erich Retzlaff, *Die von der Scholle* (Those of the Earth) (Göttingen: Verlag der Deuerlich'schen Buchhandlung o.J., 1931), and Erich Retzlaff, *Menschen am Werk* (People and Work) (Göttingen: Verlag der Deuerlich'schen Buchhandlung o.J., 1931).



*Heimat* photographs from the same period, this 'folksy' photography differed from anthropological racial photography in that it 'specialized in a semiotic interpretation of signs. A people's character had to be read, not measured or calculated'.<sup>36</sup> This was a science of looking and evaluating transmuted into art through the photographer's lens, which was ultimately intended to underline a readable racial characteristic that was also representative of the *Volksgeist* or spirit of the nation.

An example of Himmler's ideological and political involvement in the work of these photographers of *Ethnos* is evident from the fact that Erich Retzlaff had been offered support by Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*. The support followed the development of a 1942 collaborative project proposed by Retzlaff and the Dutch photographer Willem F. van Heemskerck Düker<sup>37</sup> with the Metzner Verlag.<sup>38</sup> The proposal outlined a project centred on picturing the inhabitants of the 'Germanic Netherlands'. Not only was strengthening links with other 'Germanic' nations considered important politically, especially if they were now an occupied territory, but there was also a view that, ideologically, the Nordic characteristics of the lower German region, and Scandinavia in particular, were indicative of a purer racial quality that was inherited from that mystical, progenitor race of beings who had, in Himmler's view, come 'down from heaven'.

The 1942 meetings between Retzlaff and van Heemskerck Düker in Berlin were outlined in a report by Machteld Nachenius, van Heemskerck Düker's secretary-assistant.<sup>39</sup> Although the report is brief, it contains

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36 Remco Ensel, 'Photography, Race and Nationalism in the Netherlands', in Paul Puschmann and Tim Riswick, eds, *Building Bridges. Scholars, History and Historical Demography. A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Theo Engelen* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2018), p. 254.

37 Van Heemskerck Düker worked for the Dutch Volksche Werkgemeenschap (People's Working Community), a cultural department of the SS and the Dutch arm of the *Ahnenerbe*.

38 Rolf Sachsse has suggested that it is likely that Retzlaff benefited from his relationship with his lover Regina Dorsch (Verlag Otto Beyer) who made use of her influence in publishing to secure valuable contracts for Retzlaff with the Metzner Verlag. Certainly, Retzlaff was involved with at least three book projects with the Metzner Verlag between 1943 and 1944 (Rolf Sachsse, personal communication, August 2014).

39 Machteld Nachenius was a photographer herself and her work had been included in Hamer publications such as *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) (Willem Frederik van Heemskerck Düker and Sytse Jan van der Molen, *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) (Den Haag: Hamer, 1942)). As Machteld noted, 'The *Ahnenerbe* offers 100 Isopan F, colour film and a Leica model IIIa.' These notes (translated from the Dutch) are from a 1942 report by Machteld Nachenius the secretary of van

clues as to the supposed significance of the inhabitants of the north-western 'Germanic' shoreline, as well as confirming further *Ahnenerbe* involvement with the consultation of the pre-historian, eminent archaeologist and *Ahnenerbe* associate Professor Wilhelm Unverzagt.<sup>40</sup>

The patchy notes further outline the meetings with the publishers and Unverzagt, and the intentions of the project, especially with regards to the regions to be studied and the emphasis to be placed on those photographed:

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> April: We agreed in principle to have VHD write the text and to collaborate on the pictures. R. mentioned several locations in Sl. [Schleswig] Holstein and in Northern Friesland that were worth a visit...

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April: Meeting with Prof. Dr. Unverzagt, on which occasion more locations for Sl Holstein were discussed.

Van Heemskerck Düker was already familiar with Retzlaff's work before being invited to work with Retzlaff on this *Ahnenerbe*-supported project. The two photographers had already both featured in a text written and edited by Van Heemskerck Düker himself. That book was titled *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) and was published in 1942, so their working acquaintance was still fresh when the new project was suggested that same year. As well as the work of Erich Retzlaff, *Friesland-Friezenland* featured the work of the Germans Hans Retzlaff and Hans Saebens, as well as a range of Dutch photographers of Ethnos such as Nico de Haas and van Heemskerck Düker himself.<sup>41</sup> Van Heemskerck Düker was, by

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Heemskerck Düker, they were made on their journey to Berlin (7–12 April 1942) and are provided here courtesy of Dr Remco Ensel (personal communication, 12 August 2013).

40 Dr Wilhelm Unverzagt was a member of the NSDAP and an *Ahnenerbe* researcher. He was responsible for a number of archaeological digs in the Balkans under the supervision of the *Ahnenerbe* managing director Wolfram Sievers and *Ahnenerbe* archaeologist Herbert Jankuhn, in a project Himmler termed *Totalerforschung* (complete research). Retzlaff was demonstrably active in the Balkans at the time Unverzagt and Jankuhn were there, and Retzlaff certainly made physiognomic studies of Caucasus peoples, some of which I have recently viewed and the negatives of which I was able to add to the archive of Aberystwyth University's School of Art Gallery and Museum in 2015. I have yet to establish whether or not Retzlaff was directly involved in the *Ahnenerbe* project in the Caucasus. However, given the difficulty of civilians travelling during the war, and with his confirmed previous *Ahnenerbe* sponsorship, it does seem exceedingly likely.

41 Like van Heemskerck Düker, de Haas was a member of the SS and part of the Dutch *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* (People's Working Community). Notably, de Haas was

1942, also an *SS-Onderstormleider* (SS — Junior Assault Unit Leader) in the Dutch SS and, as part of the 'Feldmeijer group',<sup>42</sup> he was involved in publications and promotional materials designed to reinforce the notion of a Greater Germany and a shared destiny. With its exploration of Dutch and German Friesland, *Friesland-Friezenland* photographically 'demonstrated' the racial, cultural, and chimerical links between the two nations and thus underlined the notion that the 'Germanic' was a concept that superseded modern political boundaries and, moreover, linked the two peoples to a 'superior' historical and mythic past. These earlier publications and projects were *Ahnenerbe*-funded via the Dutch National Socialist publisher the *Hamer Uitgeverij*.<sup>43</sup>



Fig. 5.5 *Van eenen bloede: jongens uit Oost- en Westfriesland* (Of One Blood: Youths from East and West Friesland) double page spread in W. F. van Heemskerck Düker, *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) (Den Haag: Hamer, 1942), pp. 156–57. Public domain.

one of only a very few Dutch nationals who personally received the highly prized SS honour ring from *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler.

42 Henk Feldmeijer was a Dutch National Socialist and leading member of the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* 'People's Working Community'.

43 The *Stichting Uitgeverij Hamer* (Hamer Publishing Foundation) was a proponent of the Greater German Reich and the publishing house was set up with a contributory donation by Himmler himself.

The references to an occulted Nordic-Atlantean origin are even more marked in these Dutch *Hamer* publications with which van Heemskerck Düker was involved, both as an editor and as a photographer. The layout and content of the text further reinforces this concept. For example, despite having lost his position of honorary president in the *Ahnenerbe* by 1939, the Dutch Herman Wirth was still being lauded in these Dutch National Socialist photographic publications and his theories of the origins of the 'Aryan' in a northern Atlantis presented as axiomatic. In one such photographically illustrated text, *Zinnebeelden in Nederland* (Symbols in the Netherlands) (1940), it is stated:

Professor Herman Wirth [...] has emphatically and repeatedly pointed out, that we are wrong to assume that our race, with which the runes are so closely connected, is of Eastern origin. In his opinion, a Northern cultural origin is most probable and this would additionally explain the specific use of the solar cycle in the runes.<sup>44</sup>

These photographs were signs of a racial consubstantiality that could be identified with, to create a national unity where, as Kurlander observed, 'the individual considers himself part of an overreaching, godly essence that is seeking to unfold itself'.<sup>45</sup>

The people whom these photographers selected to be fixed in place in picture-books, exhibitions, and illustrated magazines exemplified the Norwegian author Knut Hamsun's peasant type, that is, someone who was 'A tiller of the ground, body and soul; a worker on the land without respite. A ghost risen out of the past to point to the future, a man from the earliest days of cultivation, a settler in the wilds, nine-hundred years old, and, withal, a man of the day'.<sup>46</sup> The figure of the autochthonous peasant, framed as an archetype, is not presented as an individual but rather as a representation of something primordial from the National Myth. The people are offered to the viewer without being named, rather, as in the physiognomic paradigm of the era, they are titled with their occupation and location. These photo-stories, these series of images collected together in the new medium of the photo-book, were designed

44 W. F. van Heemskerck Düker and H. J. van Houten, *Zinnebeelden in Nederland* (Symbols of the Netherlands) (Den Haag: Hamer, 1940), p. 14.

45 Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters* (2017), p. 172.

46 Knut Hamsun, *Growth of the Soil* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), Book 2, chapter 12, p. 252.

to be encountered, identified with and *read*; presenting an idealised entry point to this National Myth.

For example, *SS-Obersturmbannführer* (SS-Senior Assault Unit Leader) Dr Franz Riedweg wrote in the concluding note to Lendvai-Dircksen's book *Flandern* (1942):

We turn to man, not, as in the past, as a physiological organism, as an intellectual carrier or as a creature burdened with guilt, but to man as a creature related to God and the founder of eternal values. His face is for us the mirror of his being. From the gaze, from the smile, from the play of his movements comes the divinity of thought and the power of mind. From the clarity of the forehead shines the light of reason.

In this series we look at the face of the people, that is, we turn to those people in whom the ancient currents of race, blood and national traditions are unbroken and visibly alive.<sup>47</sup>

These images of Ethnos produced in the National Socialist state were a visual representation of a time when, according to the eminent psychologist Carl Jung, the spirit of Wotan was awakening: 'a god has taken possession of the Germans and their house is filled with a "mighty rushing wind."' <sup>48</sup> When navigating this contentious web of identity, history, and belonging, Jung, a close contemporary of the photographers who made this work, elucidated on the milieu and spirit of Germany in the 1930s that relates to this manifestation of a mythic photography of Ethnos. According to Jung, archetypal images (or primordial images) occur as '...universal patterns or motifs which come from the collective unconscious... the basic content of religions, mythologies, legends and fairy tales.'<sup>49</sup> Jung's exposition on the role of the archetype is relevant to this photography, in which the figures that were photographed as those most 'ordinary folk' are transformed and representative of archetypal imprints, which represented the reawakening of the German to a lineal thread that extended back into the dim past. Although illustrative of a

<sup>47</sup> Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das Germanische Volksgesicht, Flandern* (The German Face, Flanders) (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayreuth, 1942).

<sup>48</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, 'Essay on Wotan' [First published as 'Wotan'], *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* (New Swiss Review), n.s. III (March 1936), 657–69. English translation by Barbara Hannah in *Essays on Contemporary Events* (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), pp. 1–16, <http://www.philosopher.eu/others-writings/essay-on-wotan-w-nietzsche-c-g-jung/>

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in James A. Hall, *Jungian Dream Interpretation: A Handbook of Theory and Practice* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1983), p. 120.



variety of ages, occupations, and regions, these images often depicted a range of what are clearly intended to be representations of archetypal figures. There is the *Volk* mother, the traditional representation of the childbearing, working woman who is perhaps one of the most powerful of these archetypes and which was a representation of the literal future of the nation.



Fig. 5.6 Hans Saebens, *Schaumburg Lippe Bückeburgerinnen* (Bückerburg Woman from Schaumburg Lippe) vintage silver gelatin print, c.1936. Courtesy of Aberystwyth University, School of Art Museum and Galleries.





Fig. 5.7 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Ostpreussische Frauen* (East-Prussian Women) reproduced in 'NS-Frauen-Warte', Heft 1, 1 Juli, 1939, pp. 14–15. Public domain.

Along with this pagan, fertile representation of the Madonna and child, females of different ages are also widely represented. Figure 5.7, for example, is a double page spread from a 1939 edition of the journal *NS-Frauen-Warte* featuring the work of the photographer Erna Lendvai-Dircksen. It contains several images of elderly women (the crone archetype) and a young girl (the maiden) to illustrate the point. As was often the case, significant quotations were placed alongside the images (in this case a traditional lullaby) all in a Fraktur script. Thus, the modernity of this glossy, photographically illustrated magazine is fused with the traditions of the past, just as the 'modern' photographs represent 'traditional' female roles. In the accompanying text, Lendvai-Dircksen suggests that the faces of these women might be read as indicative of humour, struggle, and hardship and that these faces are 'a poem of the nature of the tribe'.<sup>50</sup> So past, present, and future are joined together in a linked chain of a traditional femininity.

50 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Ostpreussische Frauen* (East-Prussian Women), *NS-Frauen-Warte*, 1 (July 1939), 14–15.

Visual representations of the male were treated similarly and included the hero, the youth, and the wise old man. As in the *NS-Frauen-Warte* pages, the images and text in an example from the journal *Volk und Rasse* (see Fig. 5.8) represent the 'warrior', two images of Waffen-SS soldiers 'in the field'.

Like the *NS-Frauen-Warte* examples, the journal *Volk und Rasse* provided archaism — with its *fraktur* text — accentuated alongside the modernity of its photographic reproductions and magazine format. Similarly, these soldiers are presented as archetypal warriors or knights; one holds the harness of a horse and no modern weaponry is evident. The men are reproduced in dramatic profile, their physiognomic traits evident, situated on the page above two happy children who play in glowing sunshine. The legend reads: 'The goal of all struggle is to secure a living space for our children'.<sup>51</sup>

But these journals would go even further in attempting to anchor the sense of a mythic tribal consciousness. In a 1939 *NS-Frauen-Warte* article (see Fig. 5.9), the historical legacy of the Germanic peoples is once more extolled in a modern context. Entitled *Vorgeschichte und Gegenwart* or 'pre-history and the present', the article is filled with quotes from the Edda and illustrated with photographs of modern Germans dressed in the 'attire' of the bronze-age German.

The text describes the historic and ongoing legacy of the Nordic race and how National Socialism had reawakened their power to grasp a future that awaited them, whilst reminding the *Volk* of their ancestral legacy.<sup>52</sup> These modern Germans were posed in historic costumes as having transcended time and as representative of perfect modern replicas of an ancient current — as their racial heritage was 'untainted'. So, modernity and the new political consensus were melded perfectly and linked to an ongoing tradition of community, history, and myth.

These photographic motifs, played out as they were in these popular and easily received formats such as magazines, were intended to elicit a recognition of a flowing collective unconscious that, once realised, would stream through and unite the *Volk* in a primeval joining and

51 Otto Kolar, *Waffen-SS im felde* (Waffen-SS in the Field), *Volk und Rasse*, 2 (February 1942), unpaginated frontispiece.

52 Joachim Benecke, 'Vorgeschichte und Gegenwart' (Pre-history and the Present), *NS-Frauen-Warte* 15 (January 1939), pp. 456–59.



Fig. 5.8 Otto Kolar, *Waffen-SS im felde* (Waffen-SS in the Field) reproduced in *Volk und Rasse*, Heft 2 February 1942, frontispiece. Public domain.

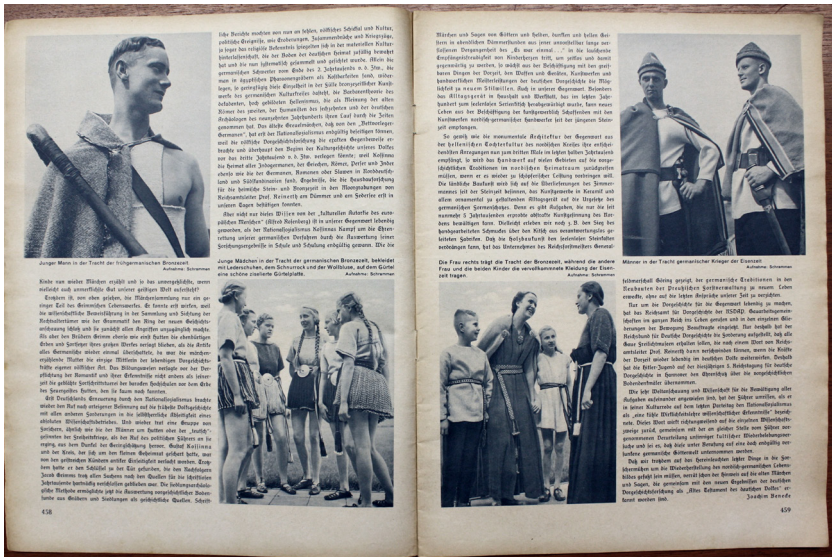


Fig. 5.9 Joachim Benecke, *Vorgeschichte und Gegenwart* (Pre-History and the Present), 'NS-Frauen-Warte', Heft 15 January 1939, pp. 458–59. Public domain.

elicit a powerful national awakening. National Socialist ideologues and propagandists, like their predecessors in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century *völkisch* mise-en-scène, recognised the unifying power of myth as well as the powerful influence of occult thinking on contemporary Germans, and thus promoted (and exploited) it as part of their overarching cultural programme.

The photographic portfolios of the likes of Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, Erich Retzlaff, and others, present motifs infused with a mytho-spiritual edge, an echo of Jung's suggestion of Wotan's awakening.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the 'unfixed physiognomy of the sitters' in Helmar Lerski's Weimar-era *Köpfe des Alltags* (Everyday Heads), these collections provide a mythification that will 'shape the sitters as heroic icons of an imagined German

53 In a later (post-war) correspondence, Jung further commented on the desirability of the racial archetype when discussing the problems facing Western man in the globalist era. Jung wrote, 'He can only discover himself when he is deeply and unconditionally related to some, and generally related to a great many, individuals with whom he has a chance to compare, and from whom he is able to discriminate himself.' C. G. Jung to Miguel Serrano, Zurich, 14 September 1960; in M. Serrano, *Jung & Hesse: A Record of Two Friendships* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 84.



identity.<sup>54</sup> Such photographic constructs, therefore, also provided a marker of exclusion for those who fell outside of this narrative.

## Conclusion

In 1974, Susan Sontag wrote a critique of Leni Riefenstahl's 1973 photographic book *The Last of the Nuba* (German title *Die Nuba*). Sontag's essay 'Fascinating Fascism' posited Riefenstahl's post-war volume as representative of, as she termed it, a 'Fascist aesthetic'. According to Sontag, Riefenstahl 'interprets the Nuba as a mystical people with an extraordinarily developed artistic sense... [overcoming] the challenge and ordeal of the elemental, the primitive... epics of achieved community, in which triumph over everyday reality is achieved by ecstatic self-control and submission.'<sup>55</sup> However, it is certainly this element of the mystical, the notion of the 'uncorrupted' (by modernity), something that links tradition and the present, a striving for perfection and a danger of immersion in a globalizing world that links Riefenstahl's post-war project with her innovative (and now notorious) film work during National Socialism, as well as being characteristic of the work of her pre-1945 German contemporaries who were photographing the autochthonous peasant. Indeed, such notions also continue to be expounded by those considered to be of the European New Right and of the neo-folk and racial pagan scene today. As folklorist Carolyn Emerick recently suggested, 'We can see that mythos and ethnos had always gone hand in hand as part of one holistic *whole* state of being before universalist ideology began working to sever the "ethnikos" from their folk identity.'<sup>56</sup>

Modern forms of communication, such as photography, were masterfully manipulated to promote the image and ideas of National Socialism through visual propaganda, such as the photography under

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54 Pepper Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look! Modern Vision and the Weimar Photographic Book* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p. 165.

55 Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Straus & Giroux, 1980), pp. 86–87. Sontag's essay goes on to 'position' Riefenstahl's work as an extension of the work that Riefenstahl created during the Third Reich. Riefenstahl's post-war re-imagining of her creative career as being that of an artist whose work was 'used' by the state and over which she had no control is critiqued by Sontag.

56 Carolyn Emerick, 'Cultural Mythos & the Return of the Ethnikos,' *Arktos Journal* (posted online 29 October 2018), <https://arktos.com/2018/10/29/cultural>

discussion here. Photography was just one element in that larger picture, but it was a significant one. Many photographers were employed in building up a picture of an energetic and healthy nation steeped in tradition and this mystical Ethnos, which stood outside of 'scientific' typological studies. These photographers set about to manifest visually a spirit of optimism and change running through their country, a visual story of a revolution in living and being, but contextualised in relation to tradition, to a half-glimpsed (but ever present) occultic myth and to the '*Heimat*'. It was in sharp contrast to the representative and utilitarian lot of the 'revealed' individual framed in much of the physiognomic work of the Weimar era. Lerski's *Köpfe des Alltags* had exposed (according to Pepper Stetler),

...the melancholic fate of the individual under this system of modern vision. Ultimately, it articulates the unsettling death of the individual in the face of Weimar's desperate craze for visual legibility and a fixed system of identity. Rather than providing such a system, the ephemeral faces of *Köpfe des Alltags* uncannily remind us of what was lost in the heady alliance of modernity and physiognomy during the Weimar Republic.<sup>57</sup>

The dramatic pictorial constructions of physiognomic Ethnos that were presented in the Third Reich era attempted to showcase this supposed newfound 'health and vitality' and reverse the 'unsettling death' by visually formalising a link between *Volk* and myth, a metaphysical, occultic convergence through photography. The physically strong peasants labouring on the land, the close observation of the face and body, the traditional costume or activity, all staged a picture of a healthy, vibrant culture, of a seemingly unified national body. Photography became a decisive part of this narrative of a nation renewed. The photographers of Ethnos who were making these images (for example, Hans Retzlaff, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, Erich Retzlaff, Otto Kolar, Hemke-Winterer, Friedrich Franz Bauer, etc.) honed their approach to show a people who were healthy and vital. What's more, these images were often imbued with a romantic mysticism, a closeness to the earth, to the soil of the progenitor 'ancestors'. These atavistic pictures are a photographic theatre. Although the people in the photographs are ordinary people,

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57 Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look!* (2015), p. 181.



farmers and people (in the main) of the countryside, they are also actors on the photographer's stage. This was not an uncommon practice in the 1930s as the genre of documentary photography evolved. The 'story' was often told using 'real' actors.

These were spaces where the supernatural might be framed and thus suggested, in a 'real-world' setting, like the metaphorical and staged creative photography associated with modernism. These German photographers, were using their medium as a catalyst, as a visual philosopher's stone, to create an imaginative transmutation in the mind of the viewer and introduce 'a mythicized Germany... sacralised, restored as homeland, re-rooted, founded on a new order, united within a single community, healed of sickness, and purged of pollution.'<sup>58</sup> Whether or not all of these photographers themselves fully believed in the myth that they were framing is unknown.

The notion of a mythic Nordic-Atlantean progenitor race also presented Germany's *Reichsführer-SS* with an opportunity of seizing upon and proclaiming, a radical and a unique racial foundation for the Germanic peoples. This photography formed part of a corpus of visual evidence of a para-historical provenance of those 'purer-blooded' Germanic peoples, coloured as such readings were, with *völkisch*, occult notions of the Aryan as 'god-man'. With the financial and material support from Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*, even 'lowly' photography came to play a part in this process of alluding to a crypto-history of the Germans as descendants of a 'holy' progenitor race from a Nordic Atlantis. As the historian and specialist in Western Esotericism Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has stated, this foundational myth of an Aryan descent from a Nordic Atlantis; '... reflected a utopian imperialism for those who bewailed the impotence and demoralization of the Weimar republic. Pessimists and opponents of the present were drawn to [the] idea that a revival of this Thuata-Atlantean culture would signal the rebirth of the Germanic race'.<sup>59</sup>

To look upon these *völkisch* photographic folios, therefore, is to be presented with a performative, cataphoric mirror of silver, framed

58 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 140.

59 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 130.

within an occult mythos. The intended audience of the illustrated books and magazines was expected to identify with the photographs, to recognise that they were linked: it is an *identitarian* process. The aim was to reinforce a sense of connectedness to an organic society, to recognise a cultural and racial unity against the growing power of the forces of globalism (and the approaching struggle for existence). National Socialist ideologues, like their nationalist predecessors in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century *völkisch* mise-en-scène, exploited the power of an occult myth and thus integrated it into the overarching cultural programme of the regime. The mythlore, the crypto-history, embedded in these photographs, suggested that the origin of those people in the photographs (and by extension the reader or viewer who identified with them) had an alternative, 'holy', and unique origin in a primordial homeland distinct from all the other races of man. For those sympathetically nationalist photographers, their interpretation of these mystical ideas was coloured by such a *völkisch* interpretation, particularly in their photographs of the *Bauer*. Whilst employing the supposedly objective eye of the camera to produce the racial-physiognomic photograph, these portrayals also attempted to point to something beyond classification, and beyond these social and cultural conditions of the time. Their portraits of the peasant were certainly ideological in that they framed their sitters as representatives of an idealised and unsullied Germanic blood stock, but simultaneously they are meant to be suggestive of the spiritual. They attempt to point to the *numinous*. The mythos of these photographs was that this 'singular' race had come from *Ultima Thule*, *Atlantis*, *Hyperborea*... and as such they carried a divine spark unique to their blood. This suggestion was intended to be liberating, so that even the lowliest worker was framed as an aristocrat of humankind, the much vaunted *Übermensch* (Superman) with the earthly world as his deserved prize.

SCIENCE



# 6. Science and Ideology

## Photographic ‘Economies of Demonstration’ in Racial Science

*Amos Morris-Reich*

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The main aim of this chapter is to enter into the respective scientific logics of a variety of scientific and/or scholarly fields and to reconstruct, from within this logic, the use of photographic techniques with regards to ‘race’ before and during the so-called Third Reich. The argument in this chapter is twofold. Firstly, within the various branches of biologically oriented science and scholarship in Germany between 1900 and the 1940s, the scientific uses of photographic practices and techniques varied greatly: both in their epistemological definition, with regard to the scientific-political agenda that they were intended to drive; and in terms of their place in the respective economies of scientific demonstration. And secondly, it is only based on this recognition that the changes in form, scope, purpose, and social effect of the use of photography during the Third Reich can be evaluated.

Consequently, the first part of the chapter will be dedicated to the reconstruction of the main methodological uses of photography for the study of race in the German context from the beginning of the century until the end of the 1920s. This methodological perspective embraces a survey of Rudolf Martin’s standardization of photography as a measuring device in physical anthropology; Eugen Fischer’s use of photography for the observation of patterns of Mendelian hereditary characteristics within families; Felix von Luschan’s use of ‘type’ photographs in ethnology and physical anthropology; Hans F. K. Günther’s massive and complex serialization strategies; and Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss’s

use of photography as a form of self-evidence to bring to the eye a racial essence that was already known *a priori* by the mind.

The second part of the chapter argues that during the era of National Socialism, these techniques were redefined because their scientific, political, and aesthetic contexts had been transformed. Irrespective of the original (scientific and/or ideological) context of their development, or the range of scientific purposes to which they were originally put to use, during the Third Reich their uses narrowed, transforming their contexts and economies of demonstration. The range of scientific and ideological positions with which photography was aligned became smaller, and, rather than being guided by any substantial scientific questions, these positions were used to uphold components of the National Socialist worldview and, sometimes, the immediate political concerns of the regime. But this process of contraction was not limited to the science-politics nexus, in the strictest sense of the term, as it reflected broader contemporary cultural-political processes. The chapter ends by suggesting that, during the period of the Third Reich, the scientific uses of photography increasingly overlapped with the political and aesthetic ideologies of National Socialism in general and with certain branches of documentary and art photography in particular.

However, in order to bring the epistemological diversity to the surface, several interpretive procedures must first be undertaken. To begin with, it is necessary, difficult as this may be, to resist the common tendency to collapse the history of the biological sciences or biologically influenced humanities into the political sphere. In other words, judgment must be suspended on what appear to be objectionable scientific, political, and cultural or social ideas and practices. Secondly, the scientific intentions of those who introduced photography into scientific discourses should be taken (more) seriously, by reconstructing the internal logic of these spheres of knowledge production. Finally, it is also necessary to free an analysis of these photographic practices from the anachronistic imposition of later critical notions of photography, as advanced by Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag. None of these procedures is without problems, but the payoff is that the epistemological and ontological diversity of photographic techniques and practices comes into view.

Several historical and methodological considerations complicate writing about the scientific photography of the Third Reich. These complications all have to do, in one way or another, with the rather



swift turn that history took in 1945 with the collapse of National Socialist Germany, but one of them is connected to dramatic changes in the definition of science, while the others pertain more specifically to photography. Strands of science and ideology that, a short while earlier, were not only legitimate and socially well embedded but in some cases enjoyed hegemonic status could suddenly no longer be publicly upheld. The particularly important consequences of this shift in history, for our purposes, are as follows.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, because scientists wanted to re-establish their scientific reputations, they were compelled to distance themselves from what very quickly came to be understood as National Socialist political ideology, in contrast with science. As a result, a new configuration of differentiations emerged between what qualified as scientific and what was damned as ideological. Importantly, this new configuration was not only different from the one that prevailed until the collapse of National Socialist Germany, but it was also different from the one found among the opponents of the scientific racial paradigm prior to the rise to power of the National Socialists. This was a distinctly West German configuration, and it changed the relationship between branches of science and knowledge in the immediate past, which in turn complicates the account of the history that led to the National Socialist era and the history of the Third Reich itself.

The second complication touches on photography. This chapter reconstructs the uses of photography in science based on the epistemological and conceptual status of photography in respective scientific contexts. But because photography is a visual medium, visual parallels present themselves between photographs generated for different purposes and in different contexts. Science is never completely detached from society and culture, but in the case of scientific photography, comparisons with photography outside of science narrowly understood spring even more strongly and immediately to mind.

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1 For the elaboration on the difficulty of historical contextualization see, Amos Morris-Reich, 'Taboo and Classification: Post-1945 German racial writing on Jews,' in *Leo Baeck Yearbook* 58 (2013), 195–215. For a broader contextualization of photography within twentieth-century German history, and for comprehensive bibliographies on the subject, see Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach, eds, *Photography and Twentieth-Century German History*, a special issue of *Central European History* 48:3 (2015); and Jennifer Evans, Paul Betts, and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, eds, *The Ethics of Seeing: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History* (New York: Berghahn, 2018).

The third complication has to do with the perception of photographs, a question of particular importance. In most cases, we have no documentation of, and therefore cannot judge, the perception of photographs apart from the broader contexts in which they were generated and used. But precisely because that broader context is accessible, the perception of the photographs is in fact accessible as well. The underlying logic of the photographs — the explicit and implicit assumptions and expectations found in their broader context — gives the historian information about how they were perceived. This means, however, that even if there is an insistence on photographic contingency as a feature of the medium, in a highly antisemitic or racist context, there would be no justification for the assumption that the expected audience would have perceived something other than what it was intended to perceive. In other words, in Roland Barthes's terms, the historian's interest is in the *studium* of the photographs, their average effect, rather than in their possible *punctum*.<sup>2</sup> Because the perspective employed here is methodological, focusing on the most important or influential developments in the use of photography for the study of race, single photographs will not be analysed; rather, there is a focus on the relationship of the relative place of photographs within respective economies of demonstration, that is, what photographs were expected to do within their broader context of scientific or scholarly argumentation.

The demystification of the perception of photographs can begin once it is acknowledged that, although it is intuitive to view photographs as if they documented reality or represented a portion of reality from a perch outside that portion, in fact photography is a part of the reality it documents; it partakes and plays a constitutive role in that reality. In this sense, then, the trajectory of scientific photography described in this chapter, rather than running parallel to the social, political, economic, or cultural history leading into the Third Reich, is an active component of those histories. The methodological perspective adopted here, focusing on systematic attempts to use photography for the study of race, leads to the core of the racial sciences. The photographic techniques discussed here were embedded in the work of scientists who were committed to principles of race, and all of the scientists discussed in this chapter who were active in the National Socialist period were committed to racial

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2 See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

determinism. Consequently, looked at very generally, taking a step back from the important differences between them (discussed below), the photographic techniques discussed here have in common that they naturalized a biologically oriented conception of humans, society, culture, and history and deepened the (conscious and unconscious) notion of the foundational place of 'race' in every aspect of the collective and individual life of the nation.

The fourth complication is that all the uses of photography that can be found in the Third Reich were invented prior to the period. Their meaning was transformed during National Socialism because they were now embedded in a transformed political context. Simply from the point of view of quantity, there was an avalanche of publications with photographs, as race was omnipresent in Germany, in both the private and public spheres. This exponential growth found expression in the flourishing of journals and books, in newspapers and newsreels. It is also important to note that while, up until roughly 1927, both the supporters and the opponents of racial determinism employed photographs to underpin their arguments, by the end of the 1920s the opponents of racial determinism had gradually come to realize that photography played into the hands of their opponents, and so photography virtually disappeared from their own scientific publications.<sup>3</sup> These considerations frame the discussion that follows.

The principal argument in this chapter is that it is impossible to understand racial photography as scientific evidence in the National Socialist period without considering its longer historical course before and after the Third Reich. Between 1900 and the 1930s, the scientific uses of photographic practices and techniques varied greatly within branches of biologically oriented German science and scholarship, both in their epistemological definition and in terms of their place in respective economies of scientific demonstration. Uses ranged from the illustration of human diversity by 'type' photographs, through anthropometric photography intended to generate statistical information, to *Gestalt* 'thought experiments'.

Before entering into a detailed discussion of select cases, it is important to state explicitly that not only are the photographic practices

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3 For more on this realisation see: Amos Morris-Reich, 'Photography in Economies of Demonstration: The Idea of the Jews as a Mixed-Race People', *Jewish Social Studies* 20:1 (Fall 2013), 150–83.

different, but so too are the respective concepts of race, the scientific methods for its study, and even the general conceptions of science, and that there are various complex relationships between all of these elements. Concepts of race, for instance, ranged from those of the natural sciences, which were fundamentally descriptive (such as *Anthropologie* or physical anthropology, as part of the biological sciences of the day) and which later relied heavily on statistical methods of measurement, all the way to *Gestalt* psychology or phenomenology, which severely criticized the experimental sciences and their scientific assumptions, statistical methods in particular. With the advent of the Third Reich, in which epistemological diversity was unified by a political framework, the question of the significance of the epistemological diversity *prior* to 1933 necessarily hovers over the discussion.

## Racial Photography: A Methodological Perspective

The most influential development of photography as racial evidence in the German context around 1900 was found in physical anthropology. In the German-language context, the most important tradition here was developed and standardized by the German Swiss anthropologist Rudolf Martin and his many students.<sup>4</sup> Physical anthropology only gradually turned into a respectable academic discipline around 1900. It is important to note that Martin and his students, who standardized anthropometric photography, did not do so out of any inherent interest in photography or even any overt concern with the visual. Most, if not all, physical anthropologists had a medical background, and their introduction to photography formed part of their attempts to introduce and standardize measuring devices. Furthermore, the version of science to which physical anthropologists — most notably Martin himself — adhered was descriptive. Martin, who was politically liberal and whose second wife was Jewish (she was later a survivor of Theresienstadt), viewed race as an inherent part of the study of human variety in its natural scientific context.

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4 See Amos Morris-Reich, 'Anthropology, Standardisation and Measurement: Rudolf Martin and Anthropometric Photography,' *British Journal for the History of Science* 46:3 (2013), 487–516.

Martin's major contribution to the field of physical anthropology was not conceptual, but consisted in his crafting, over a decade, what became the single most important textbook and manual of physical anthropology. In this book he brought to anthropology criminology's use of the camera as a measuring device; that is, he moved it from individual identification to (what he took to be) racial measurement (criminologists also used their measurements to code race as one of the categories of description.) In all four editions, from 1914 to 1966, photography was discussed in the first half of the book, but as a form of material reproduction, not as a form of representation. If the first objective of the anthropologist was to obtain physical anthropological materials, such as skeletons and skulls, in order to measure them, the second objective was to reproduce such materials by way of photographic techniques or geometrical drawing, also in order to measure them. Methodologically, photography was tied quite tightly to statistical methods. The ultimate goal of anthropometric photography, when carried out under sufficient scientific control — a goal Martin believed his method and technique had achieved — was to be transformed into statistical tables (see Fig. 6.1a and 6.1b).

Only statistical tables could represent the respective frequencies of various racial traits. But this was also part of a larger vision of a natural scientific field as, in the end, *describing* the physical variety of mankind. This perspective, of course, does not provide the entire picture. Martin's book also employed other, already existing, uses of type photographs, even if they were not explained or justified as instances of anthropometric photography (see Fig. 6.2).

Furthermore, although Martin repeatedly stated that the study of racial variation was only descriptive, numerous crude forms of racism were incorporated, both textually and photographically, in his work. Politically, too, much of the fine-tuning of anthropometric technique took place during studies of prisoners of war in German and Austrian camps, in ways that could not be separated from politics, not to speak of the use of Martin's methods and technique on Jews in ghettos before they were sent to their deaths during the Third Reich.

Less important at the time than Martin's standardization of technique within anthropology, but more important in terms of the history of medicine to the present day, was the introduction of photography for the

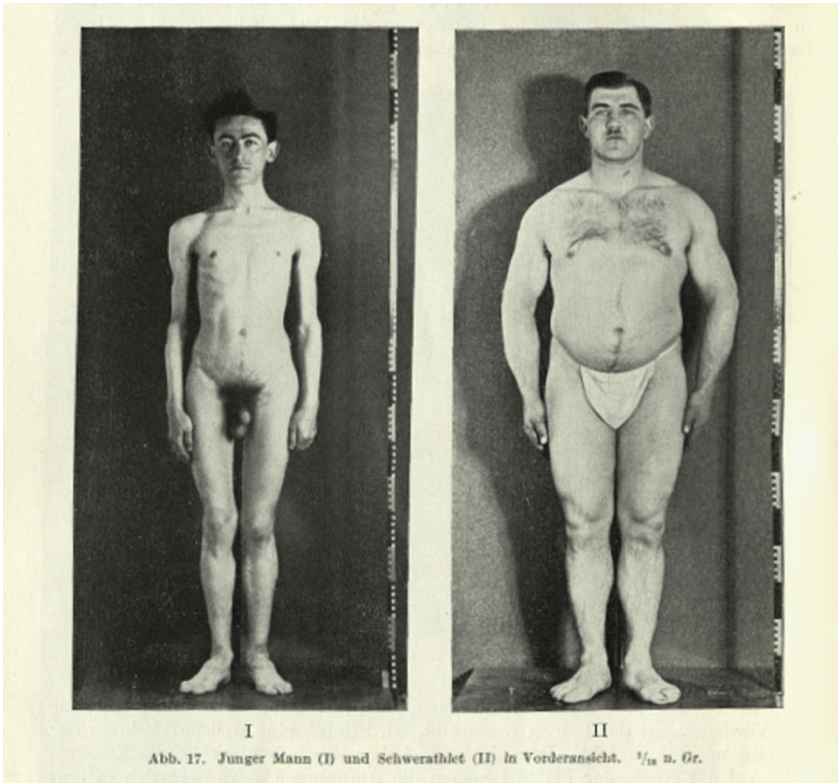


Fig. 6.1a Rudolf Martin, 'Anthropometrie', in A. Gottstein, A. Schlossmann, and A. Teleky, eds, *Handbuch der Sozialen Hygiene und Gesundheitsfürsorge* (Manual of Social Hygiene and Health Care) (Berlin: Lehmann, 1925), p. 298. Public domain.



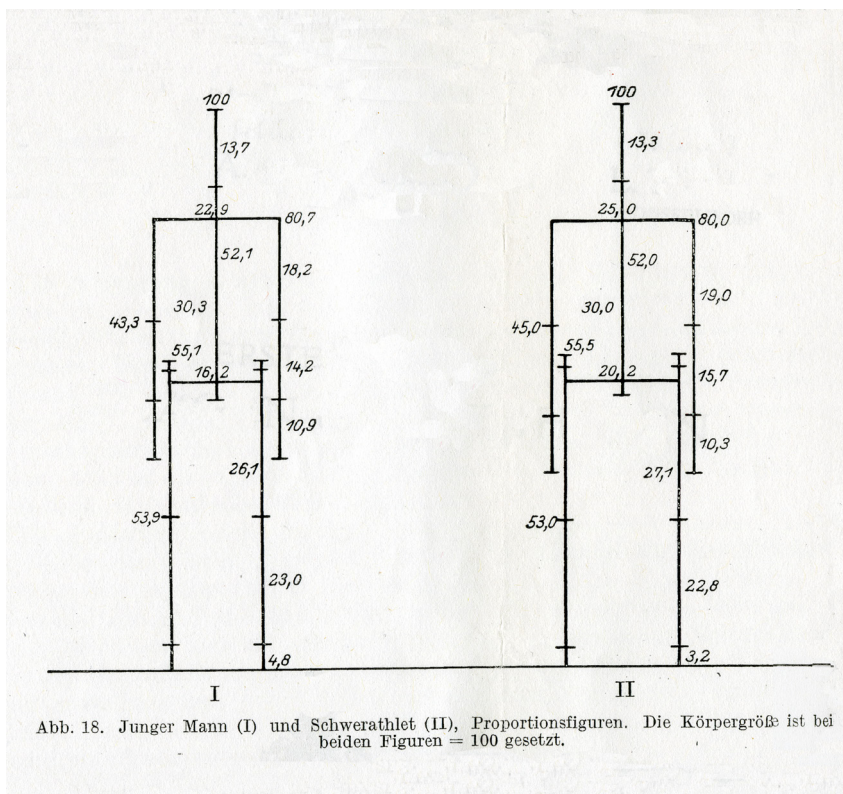


Fig. 6.1b Rudolf Martin, 'Anthropometrie', in A. Gottstein, A. Schlossmann, and A. Teleky, eds, *Handbuch der Sozialen Hygiene und Gesundheitsfürsorge* (Manual of Social Hygiene and Health Care) (Berlin: Lehmann, 1925), p. 300. Public domain.



Fig. 293. Syrer von sogenanntem armenoiden Typus.  
Phot. v. LUSCHAN.

Fig. 6.2 Rudolf Martin, *Lehrbuch der Anthropologie: In systematischer Darstellung* (Textbook of Anthropology: A Systematic Account) (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1914). Public domain.

sake of observation by Eugen Fischer (1874–1967).<sup>5</sup> Fischer introduced his photographic practices at more or less the same time that Martin standardized his, although Fischer belonged to a younger generation of physical anthropologists already on its way towards the study of human heredity. Here, photography was tied not to a descriptive form of *Anthropologie* but to the first attempt to carry the reintroduction of Mendelian genetics into the study of race and, more specifically, into the study of racial mixing — or what Fischer termed ‘racial bastardization’.

Scientific or photographic control played no role in Fischer’s photographic practice; there are also no traces of classical art in the images that he produced, and his photography was not tied to statistics in the same way as Martin’s. His notion of race, too, differed from Martin’s in the sense that, rather than describe statistical frequencies of physical traits, Fischer was committed to a deterministic notion of race and sought to apply Mendel’s notions of genetic inheritance to its study.

Fischer’s famous *Rehobother Bastards* study, focusing on an African population of mixed descent, appeared in 1913 (years before his notorious career under National Socialism, though it was republished numerous times, until 1961). Today, the broader colonial and genocidal context of that study is recognized.<sup>6</sup> At the time, the study was seen as ground-breaking in shifting scientific attention from the study of ‘racial types’ to the study of ‘racial bastards’. In the book itself, Fischer reproduces close to fifty photographs out of the 300 that he had taken.<sup>7</sup> He focused his study on traits that he believed were racial and that he conceived as Mendelian hereditary units.

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5 On Fischer see Bernhard Gessler, *Eugen Fischer (1874–1967): Leben und Werk des Freiburger Anatomen, Anthropologen und Rassenhygienikers bis 1927* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000). The earlier biography by Niels Loesch, titled *Race as Construct*, is even more problematic. The best treatment of the development of Fischer’s ideas on race is Amir Teicher, ‘Eugen Fischer’s Scientific Purview: The Development of a Scientific Concept and the Interrelationship among Science, Society, and Politics in Germany, 1913–1936,’ Master’s thesis, (2008), Tel Aviv University [in Hebrew]. Fischer’s photography has, surprisingly, garnered even less scholarship than have his ideas on race. The only sustained treatment can be found in Kathryn Alice Steinbock, ‘Crisis and Classification: Photographic Portrait Typologies in Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Germany’ PhD thesis, (2011), The University of Michigan.

6 Margit Berner, Annette Hoffmann, Britta Lange (eds), *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot* (Hamburg: Philo, 2011).

7 Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1913).



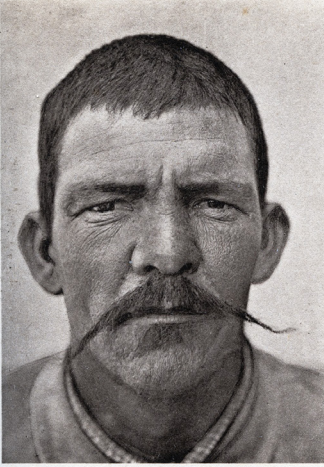


Fig. 1. Charles Mac Nap  
(155 St. 6) Eu.



Fig. 2. Kaspar van Wyk  
(152 St. 11) Eu.

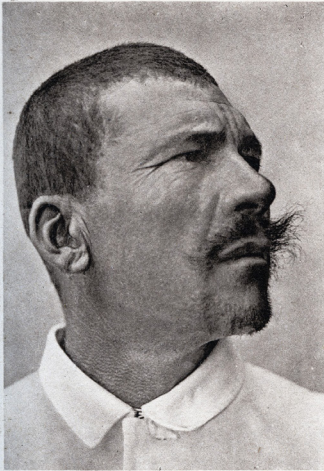


Fig. 3. Malcolm Mac Nap  
(57 St. 6) Eu.

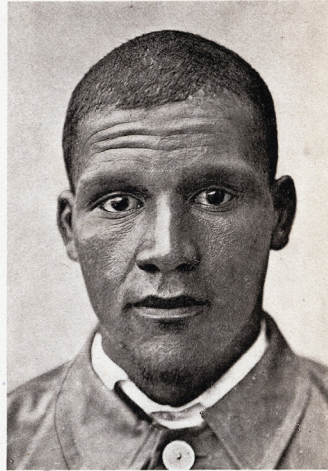


Fig. 4. Jacobus van Wyk  
(292 St. 11) Eu.

Lichtdruck von J. B. Obernetter, München.

Verlag von **Gustav Fischer, Jena.**

Fig. 6.3 Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen: Anthropologische und ethnographische Studien am Rehobother Bastardvolk in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika* (The Rehobother Bastards and the Bastardization Problem in Humans: Anthropological and Ethnographic Studies of the Rehobother Bastard People in German Southwest Africa), (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1961, original 1912), plate 2. Courtesy of ADEVA Akademische Druck.

Fischer's photographs focused on the faces and heads of his subjects. He stated that the undressing of observed objects was neither possible nor advantageous. Photographs, in his view, were not intended to replace nor to extend measurements, which he carried out following Martin's method. His use of photography served rather to provide pictures of patterns of Mendelian hereditary characteristics within families. His photographs, therefore, focus on families: supposedly racially pure parents (termed either Dutch or Hottentot) and their racially mixed children. Significantly, the photographs attempt to demonstrate the alternation of specific traits, rather than whole types. As Fischer was interested in the genealogy of families, each photographed person was named. Fischer attempted to break down types into Mendelian traits, through the portrayal of the mixed offspring next to their 'pure' Khoikhoi or Dutch parents. The reader of the text and observer of the photographs was requested to identify different traits found in the offspring, and to track them to only one of the parents.

This use of photography epitomizes the Mendelian logic of traits that exist irrespective of a whole type, distinct traits that, in persons who are racially mixed, combine as 'whole packages' but do not blend. Photographs were taken from the front, in half or full profile, and yet are independent of measurements and free from strict considerations of control in terms of distance, angle, or lighting. Fischer was not aiming to transform the photographs into statistical tables. In his short explanation of the tables of photographs, Fischer emphasized that the classification of individuals under the photographs introduced as 'Eu', 'Hott.' Or 'Mittl.' — which later became standard practice in Hans F. K. Günther's work — afforded priority to the true (*wirkliche*) bloodlines over appearance (*Aussehen*).

If, in Martin's method, photography was in effect intended as data for the generation of statistics, Fischer employed photographs for the observation of traits. In the archive of his scientific papers in Berlin, one can track some of the uses of photography in Fischer's actual working practices — cards with photographs or photographic clippings glued onto them and Fischer's handwritten working comments. Fischer revisited his famous study in the 1930s, now interested especially in how aging played out in his 'bastard population'.<sup>8</sup> He also published a book in

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8 Eugen Fischer, 'Neue Rehobother Bastardstudien,' *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie* 37:2 (1938), 127–39.

1927, together with Hans F. K. Günther, that culminated with a display of the most beautiful German heads of the Nordic race; in 1943, together with the theologian and student of ancient Judaism Gerhard Kittel, he published a crude antisemitic book with numerous photographs, in which the uses of the photographs intersected in rather complex ways with his more famous racial study and with Martin's method (because the few photographs of Jews included in the album had been taken in Lodz, in early 1940, following Martin's protocol) (see Fig. 6.4).

Fischer's method undermined the veracity of the photograph, but, in contrast the prevailing critical tradition of photography, this did not derive from a reflection on photography but rather from Fischer's belief in a two-layered reality, that is, in the incongruity between the phenotype and the genotype. Photography for Fischer could only express the phenotypical surface; the genotype would remain hidden. This is the source of Fischer's undermining of the 'truth' of photography: photographs do not necessarily tell the truth about reality; they can 'deceive' and cannot be fully trusted.

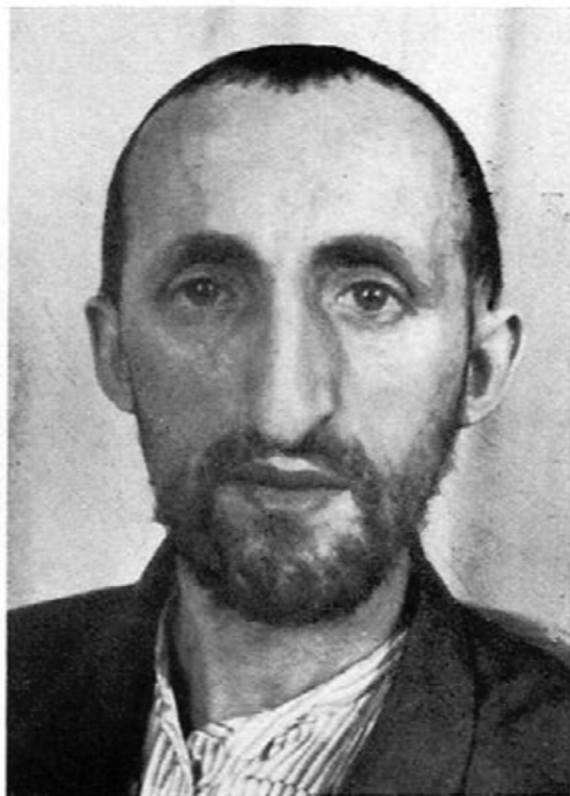
A third mode of using photographs in ethnology and physical anthropology can be illustrated using the work of the politically liberal opponent of antisemitism and Austrian-German polymath Felix von Luschan.<sup>9</sup> Type photographs were, of course, not invented by von Luschan, but in the German-speaking context, von Luschan was central, not only because of his prominence in the field but more specifically because of the way his photographic practice were imbricated with his anthropological sensitivity or prejudices to form racial types.

Von Luschan's photographic practices interacted with a complex and tension-riddled string of interrelated linguistic, archaeological, biological, and cultural-political assumptions or theories. But the effect of his photographs stemmed primarily from their photographic qualities; through his use of serialized photographs, in particular, von Luschan was able to demonstrate that certain features were somehow typical of the group in question. This effect was achieved through careful selection of individuals who tended to cluster around certain shared features

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9 See in particular John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Anja von Laukötter, 'Von der 'Kultur' zur 'Rasse' — vom Objekt zum Körper?', in *Völkerkundemuseen und ihre Wissenschaften zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007), pp. 91–124.





*Abb. 71 a*

Fig. 6.4 Gerhard Kittel and Eugen Fischer, *Das antike Weltjudentum Tatsachen, Texte, Bilder* (Jewry of the Ancient World, Facts, Texts, Images) (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1943), p. 113. Public domain.

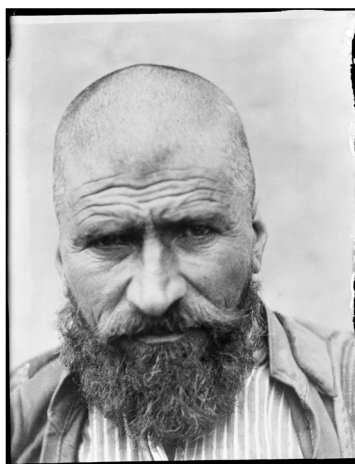
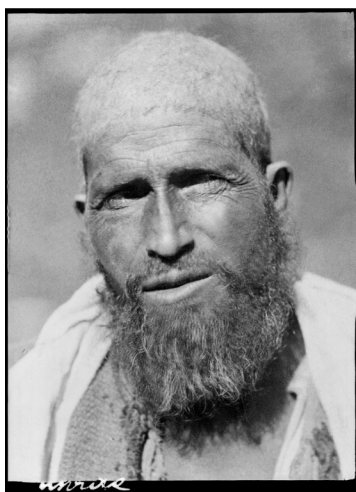
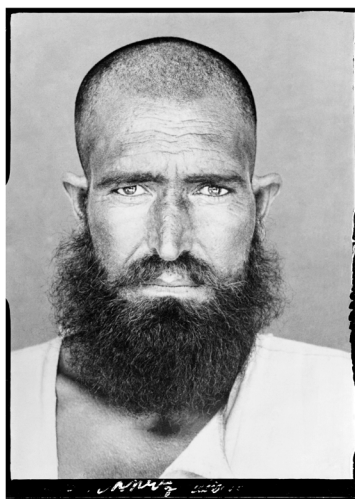
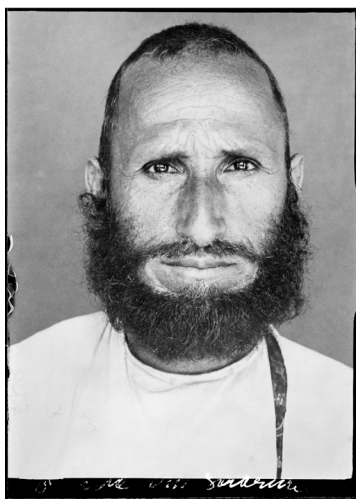


Fig. 6.5 Felix von Luschan, four types of photograph from one collection: 1903 Türke (Turk), 1904 Darde (Kaukasus), 1912 (Kurde), 1914 (Kurde). Courtesy of Felix von Luschan, the collection of the Natural History Museum Vienna, Department of Anthropology. Die Anthropologische Abteilung, Naturhistorisches Museum Wien.

It was magnified by his photographic treatment of his subjects, which was never explicitly elucidated. Unlike anthropometric photography, these photographs were not intended for the purposes of measurement, and von Luschan thus followed no form of control; in practice, however, von Luschan tended to photograph his non-white and non-European subjects (he did not photograph white Europeans) from very close up — thus distorting their faces and, especially, enlarging their noses — and often from an unflattering angle slightly lower than their eyes. Furthermore, he used strong lighting on a neutral background, the effect of which was both the elimination of much facial detail and, within the genre of type photographs, an increased distance between the white, German observers and the non-European, non-white photographed subjects; the effect was to stress discontinuity and difference between the two proposed classes of human.

The justification for discussing Martin and von Luschan in the current context, both of whom died in the Weimar era, is twofold. Firstly, in visual terms, their photographs set the tone for type photographs after their time. And secondly, their techniques were later appropriated wholesale by Fischer, Günther, and others. In fact, much of the discussion of the Third Reich has to contend with scientific and ideological appropriation.

At first sight, the photographic practice of Hans F. K. Günther's *Rassenkunde* (racial lore) seems to derive far more from the kind of photography produced by von Luschan than from that of Martin or Fischer. But this impression conceals the fact that Günther in fact developed a different and effective form of photographic practice. Von Luschan produced his photographs himself, as part of his research and documentation, while Günther relied on numerous sources of existing photographs. Von Luschan, who, like Martin and Fischer, had a medical background, believed he was relying on the hard science of anatomy and skull indices in classifying populations. Photographs, in this respect, were a superficial form of illustration and external to any real scientific demonstration. For instance, von Luschan wrote a two-part article on the Jews in the 1880s, and, on the re-publication of his principal argument in a shortened version in 1905 in Arthur Ruppin's first issue of the first volume of the *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden*, he appended this photograph to the article. He was using a photograph of an Armenian Christian Turk rather than a Jew to *illustrate* a claim

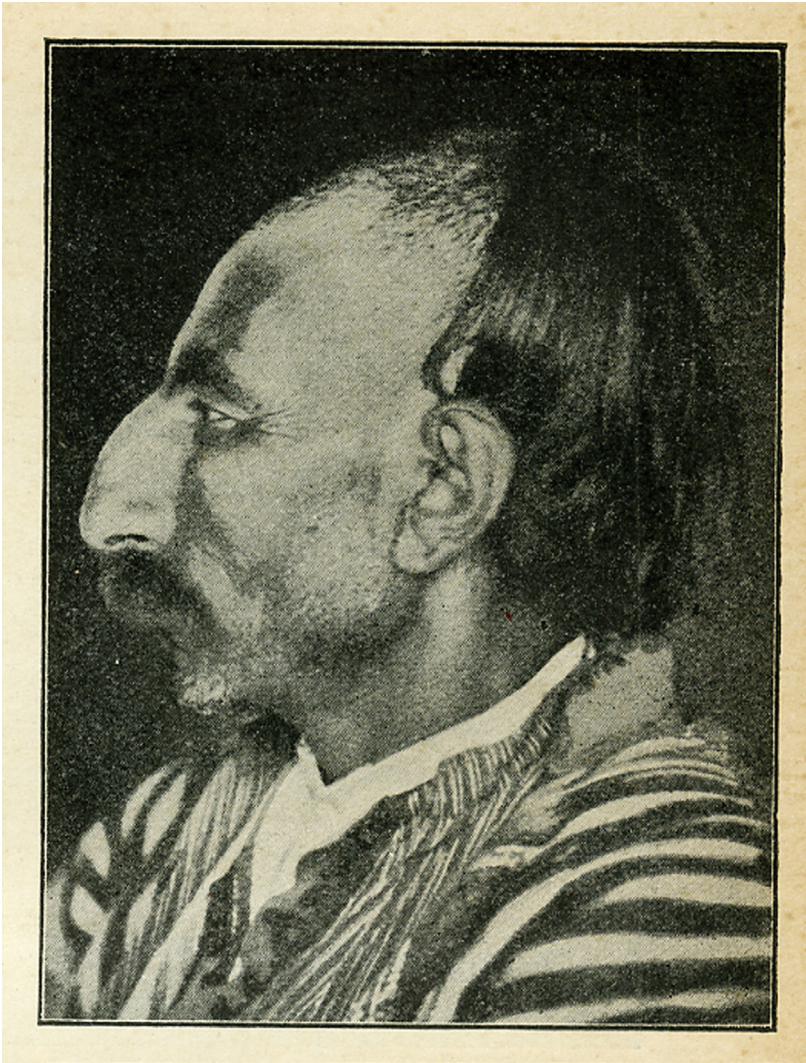


Fig. 6.6 Photograph of a Christian Armenian Turk reproduced in Felix von Luschan, 'Zur physischen Anthropologie der Juden' (The Physical Anthropology of the Jews), *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden* 1:1 (1905), 21. Public domain.

about Jews that he had already formulated and published over a decade earlier, based on what he believed to be essentially objective physical anthropological science (see Fig. 6.6).

In Günther's *Rassenkunde*, photographs were no longer the superficial illustration of an independently reached scientific claim, but rather were thoroughly integrated into the scientific demonstration or the form of argumentation itself.<sup>10</sup> This was the culmination of a process that had been initiated — and not by Günther — in the second decade of the twentieth century.

To speak about Günther in terms of the history of science is to create serious historical and methodological problems. Günther is regarded as the most important authority on race in National Socialist Germany; he was Himmler's mentor and was closely affiliated with the NSDAP and the highest leadership even prior to the National Socialist party's rise to power (note, for instance, that Hitler's only visit to a German university between 1930 and 1945 was for Günther's inauguration speech in Jena in 1930). Günther, who was trained in philology, developed a holistic and deeply deterministic view of race. He was a proponent of the superiority of the Nordic race, which he viewed as the only civilizational agent in world history. He had a less favourable view of what he considered to be the other elements of the German population, and he was ardently antisemitic, conceiving the Jews as a *Gegenrasse* (counter-race) in world history and the product of *Gegenauslese* (adverse selection). After 1945, Günther became the epitome of the 'racial ideologue', first and foremost in the eyes of scientists who now had to distance themselves and their work on race from the immediate past. But even from a perspective outside such an anachronistic West German point of view, Günther had one foot in scholarship and another in ideology, with the two so closely interwoven in this period that it is difficult to separate them, even analytically. Because he lacked any medical or anthropological background, Günther's status within the scientific community was not the same as, for instance, Fischer's. But historiographic traditions after 1945 made the gap between them even larger, removing Günther from the history of science much earlier and much more abruptly than Fischer.

In the current context, Günther is particularly important. As with the other individuals discussed in this chapter, his assumptions about

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10 See chapter three of Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography: Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876–1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).



photography must be deduced from his actual photographic practices. By far the most visually sensitive of any of the people addressed in this chapter, he collected thousands of photographs from a network of archives from all across Europe (like Darwin) — one can only speculate on the number of photographs he had at his disposal and the amount of time and energy he spent in using them, but the fact that he could use more than five hundred photographs in one book is extremely telling; his principal book, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (München: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1922) came out in over twenty editions, and in each edition he played around with the photographs, changing many of them.

Günther's forte was his clear grasp of the power of the serialization of photographs. In a pragmatic sense and a highly politicized form he shared this recognition with contemporaries like Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg. From a practical perspective, then, Günther's was quite close to those early voices in the critical tradition that proclaimed the series as more important than the single image. Most of the effects of Günther's use of photographs derive, not from the single photographs that he used, but from careful strategies of layout.

While there are important differences among the photographs he used in his discussions of various racial groups, his propagandistic effects are achieved far more through serialization and layout than by individual photographs. A scholar of Aby Warburg has noted that Warburg differentiated between serialization as 'arrangement of form' and serialization as 'construction of meaning', which seems to apply to Günther's photographic thinking as well.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of the Nordic type, rather than attempt to reduce complexity to a single racial type or stereotype by use of massive serialization strategies, Günther both destabilized and subtly re-stabilized visual patterns (see Fig. 6.7).

With the Nordic type, however (and only with that type), Günther used serialization to erect and stabilize a prototype. Some of his serialized photographic matrices manifested, in the human sphere, Wittgenstein's idea of 'family resemblance', that is, certain shared features that crisscross a certain population but nonetheless cannot be pinpointed by way of any shared common denominator.

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11 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's 'Atlas': The Anomic Archive,' *October* 88 (Spring 1999), 117–45, quotation from p. 127.





Günther's use of photography was, in a certain sense, more complex — or more difficult to decode — than the written texts in which the photographs were embedded. Günther was not the first to use photographs that were produced for various social purposes — a family photograph of a white German woman with her African German husband and their children, could, in his hands, serve as scientific evidence for the study of race — but in terms of quantity and sophistication he practically created a new genre. His use of photographs also relied on a tacit understanding that far more readers would actually skim through photographic reproductions than read lengthy texts, thus ensuring that his intended effects would be achieved even without the texts that the photographs purportedly only illustrated.

The final innovative use of photographs in the study of race examined here was the form developed by Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss. Here, too, photography is closely tied to serialization, but in a different way than in Günther. And unlike Martin, for whom photographs were data that could be transformed into statistical information, Clauss attempted to transform the racial photograph from evidence (a kind of *Beleg*) into a form of self-evidence (or *Evidenz*), bringing to the eye an essence that was already known *a priori* by the mind.

In contrast to all the cases discussed above, it is not even possible to attempt to imagine Clauss's method without photography; his method, in truth, was an intrinsically photographic one.<sup>12</sup> Clauss, like Günther, had no medical, natural scientific, or physical anthropological background — he was a senior student of the founder of modern phenomenology, the Jewish German Edmund Husserl — and his idiosyncratic use of photography as well as his ideas about race belong far more to the history of the humanities than to the natural sciences.

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12 Clauss's principal book was *Rasse und Seele. Eine Einführung in die Gegenwart* (Munich: J.F. Lehmann Verlag, 1926). In later editions a subtitle was added that indicated its programmatic nature (*Eine Einführung in den Sinn der leiblichen Gestalt*). For a remarkable biography of Clauss, see Peter Weingart, *Doppel-Leben. Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss: Zwischen Rassenforschung und Widerstand* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1995); on his phenomenology, see Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004); on the relationship of his thought to Ludwig Klages's, see Per Leo, *Der Wille zum Wesen: Weltanschauungskultur, charakterologisches Denken und Judenfeindschaft in Deutschland 1890–1940* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, Berlin 2013); on his photographic method, see chapter four of Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography. Racial Evidence as Scientific Evidence, 1876–1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Here photography was not only integral to the scientific demonstration or argumentation process, it was in fact at the heart of the very process of phenomenological observation that comprised Clauss's form of racial phenomenology (see Fig. 6.8).

Clauss's use of serialization was close to that of Étienne-Jules Marey's (1830–1904) or Eadweard Muybridge's (1830–1904) photographic method for the study of movement. The rather idiosyncratic idea was that race expressed itself in terms of style, which was racially determined and could be observed in movement. In terms of style, the Nordic man, defined as *Leistungsmensch* (man of performance), moved in a distinctly Nordic way, the result of the interaction between anatomy and culture, both of which were racially defined. The still camera, according to Clauss, had the advantage over the eye that it could stop, freeze, and represent moments of this movement. Hence, Clauss developed a method of studying that movement by photographing carefully selected individuals in movement, with small intervals between photographs. Of course, by the time Clauss developed his photographic method, technological advances in camera size, shutter speeds, and film sensitivity entailed that his method was not technologically novel. In terms of its visual language it, like all the other instances discussed here, was, instead, conservative or reactionary.

The structure of Clauss's publications, as can be seen from the first lines of every chapter of his most important book, *Rasse und Seele* (Race and Soul), derived from the textual elaboration of photographic series. Rather than specimens of a type in the anthropological or biological sense, the individuals Clauss photographed were closer in their epistemological status to 'examples' in the sense discussed by Kant in his moral philosophy. That is, rather than move from the racial type to the specimen, Clauss believed the single individual he was studying revealed the racial 'rules' of the type as a whole. In this he was following the phenomenological method of gradually removing the accidental from the object under scrutiny until only the core, the essence of the phenomenon, could be grasped and described.

The status of photography in Clauss's study of race was closely tied to *Gestalt* traditions, as was his understanding of race. Following the critique of *Gestalt* psychologists and philosophers in the Neo-Kantian philosophical tradition, and the further critique of the experimental

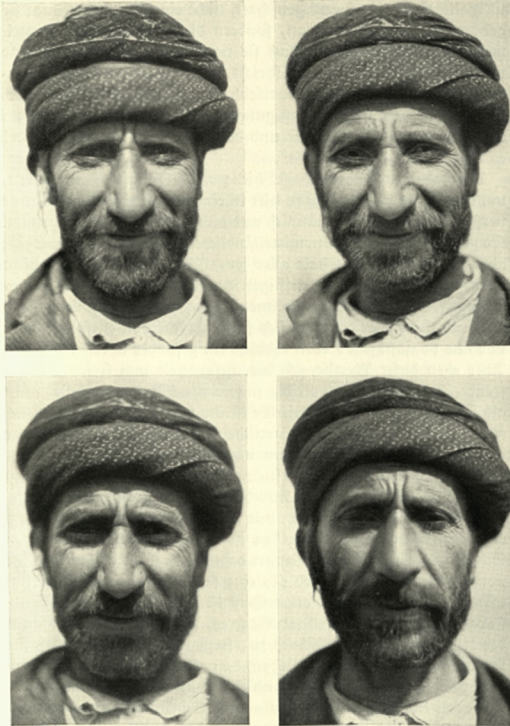


Bild 66—69: Derselbe. Ein Versuch zu schlichter Erweiterung (Bild 66/67) mißlingt; ein immer bereitliegender Mißmut gegenüber dem Einfach-Lebendigen bricht durch (Bild 68/69). Er entspringt aus dem Zwißpalt zwischen „Fleisch“ und „Geist“, der zum Wesen des Erlösungsmenschen gehört.  
 C l a u ß, Rasse und Seele.

Fig. 6.8 Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß, *Rasse und Seele: Eine Einführung in den Sinn der leiblichen Gestalt* (Race and Soul: An Introduction to the Meaning of the Bodily Form) (Munich: Gutenberg, 1937), pp. 78–81, photographs pp. 62–69. Public domain.

sciences, and also in opposition to Martin, who relied heavily on statistical methods in the study of race, Clauss perceived race as an *a priori* structure. Using the analogy of the difference between a stick broken in two and an arrow broken in two, that is, an object that possessed inherent structure transcending its autonomous constitutive 'parts,' Clauss proclaimed that race is *Gestalt* (*Rasse ist Gestalt*). In line with this understanding of race, the status of photographs as scientific evidence in his work approaches, ultimately, that of *Gestalt* thought experiments. In this instance, Clauss took one of the principal photographs from his book *Rasse und Seele* and abstracted from the photograph only the outline. He then gradually modified the outline until the racial *Gestalt* was damaged to such an extent that the racial essence could no longer be observed and grasped (according to what he claimed he had tested on numerous observers) (see Fig. 6.9).

### Expansion and Contraction in the Third Reich

The five ways of using photography in the scientific study of race that I have now documented point to the diverse nature of the racial photograph in terms of its epistemological definition and respective role in scientific demonstration, intertwined with sometimes competing ideas of race, visual language, and photographic technique. The employment of photographs within scientific writing was closely tied to transformations in concepts of objectivity in particular forms of science, such as the gradual transition from 'mechanical objectivity', with its optimistic trust in forms of mechanical reproduction, to 'trained judgment', with the addition of the subjective authority of scientific experts, as described by Daston and Gallison.<sup>13</sup> Some photographic practices were intended for publication, with audiences ranging from the professional to the general public. But photographs were also integrated into the working practices of scientists and scholars. From our later perspective, the differences between them appear negligible. However, it is from a political rather than a scientific perspective that they appear so. It is noteworthy that there were no attempts to develop scientifically novel methods for the employment of photography in the study of race after the 1930s.

In the historical interpretation above, there is a conscious effort to avoid collapsing this chapter on the history of scientific photography

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13 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).



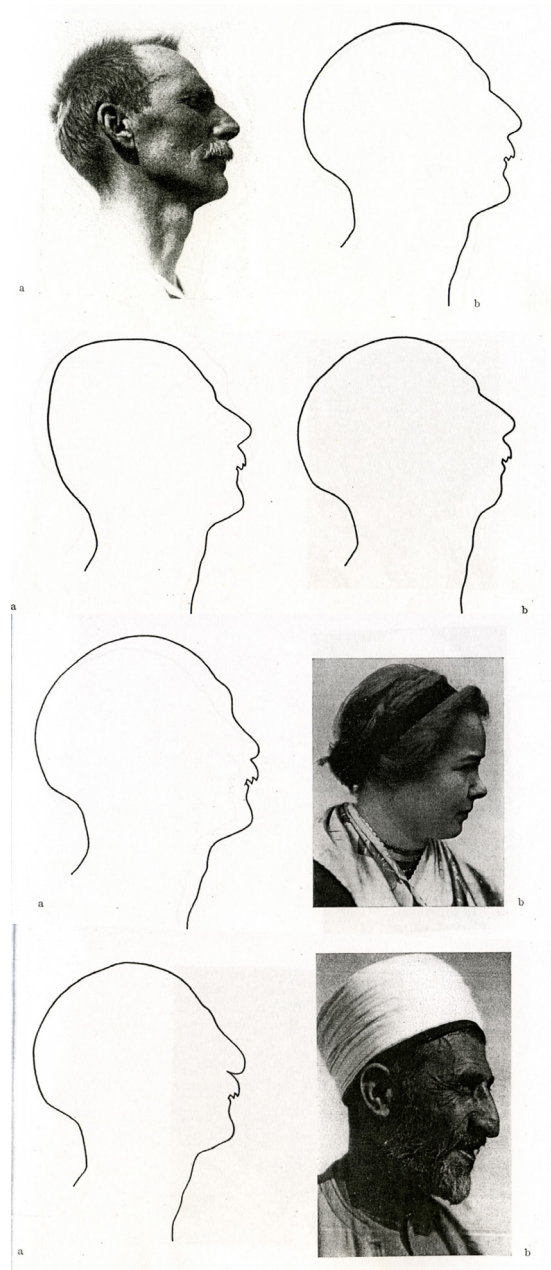


Fig. 6.9 Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß, *Rassenseele und Einzelmesch: Lichtbildervortrag* (The Racial Soul and the Individual: A Slide Presentation) (Munich: Lehmann, 1938), slides 3–5. Public domain.



into the political sphere. This is not motivated by an attempt to defend a purist interpretation of science. Indeed, there can be no question that even the best instances of science are politically 'contaminated', albeit in different ways. Hence, rather than following the post-1945 West German impulse and segregating these instances of racial photography as contaminated, thereby exonerating all of the rest, the same standards, methods of analysis, and modes of interpretation should be applied here as with other facets of the history of science. In the National Socialist era, racial photography flourished, and its meaning was transformed, although its uses were conceptually derivative. The inventory of photographic collections in archaeological institutes or museums in Germany or Austria reveals a shift in the materials generated and archived from non-European, non-white peoples in the imperial period to Jews during the time of the Third Reich. In methodological terms, different practices, underpinned by different conceptions of science or race, were collapsed into explicitly politicized instruments. The photographic repertoire also preceded Hitler's seizure of power, both empirically and in terms of genre and visual language. Quantitatively, racial photography expanded; methodologically, it contracted.

The ways in which science and politics drew on each other, the ways in which they conferred legitimacy on and received legitimacy from each other increased, and their meanings changed.<sup>14</sup> In Germany all of these, irrespective of their methodological differences, remained well within the general outlook of National Socialism. In publications sanctioned by the party and state ideology, where photographs had generally served illustrative purposes, scientists and scholars such as Walter Scheidt, Peter-Heinz Seraphim, and numerous others who made extensive use of photographs now saturated society with images that spoke about race directly or indirectly, and elicited social relations in which race was interwoven: they naturalized, visualized, classified, and instructed viewers about race and racial differences; suggested its presence and importance for virtually every aspect of the life of the individual, the family, the community, and the *Volk*; and sharpened the sensual, intellectual, and

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14 Mitchell G. Ash, *Wissenschaft und Politik als Ressourcen für einander*, in Rüdiger vom Bruch and Brigitte Kaderas (eds), *Wissenschaften und Wissenschaftspolitik. Bestandsaufnahme zu Formationen, Brüchen und Kontinuitäten im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002), pp. 32–51.

political education of citizens. Scientific photographs were interwoven with other photographs within this broader 'visual economy', endowing it with the prestige and authority of science, connecting the scientific discourse with other facets of culture, and providing the public with cues (in the language of art historian Ernst Gombrich) for the decoding and understanding of the photographs, for knowing how to connect the photographs with social reality.<sup>15</sup> The photography that purported only to represent reality in fact took an active part in shaping it.

The previous section attempted to show that the function of racial photographs as scientific evidence was embedded in and relative to various discourses and their respective aims. But photographs generated for one kind of use, based on a certain set of assumptions, could of course also be used in a different context. Scientists and scholars who had laboured to differentiate their practices from those of their peers now often reproduced photographs that were based on one methodology in publications underpinned by another, as political instrumentalization more strongly trumped methodological differences. As a result, the same photograph could be generated in one context, such as these photographs by Martin (Fig. 6.2) and von Luschan (Fig. 6.6) but could, without much effort, be transported and reused in another (see Fig. 6.10).

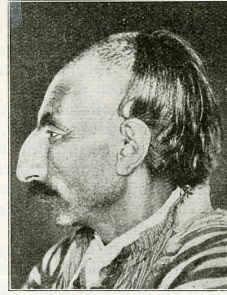
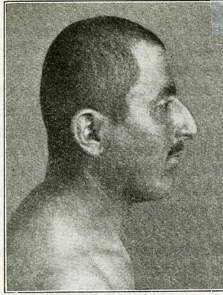
Von Luschan illustrated his argument on Jews with this photograph; Günther not only reproduced it for opposing political ends, but now embedded it in his different economy of demonstration or argumentation. Similarly, Fischer sent a group of assistants and students to measure and photograph Jews in the Lodz ghetto in early 1940 following Martin's method (Fig. 6.4), and, in a 1943 volume, used them for a much more clearly scientific justification for the extermination of the Jews (see Fig. 6.11).

While this phenomenon greatly expanded in the Third Reich, it did not begin or end there. Clauss took this photograph (Fig. 6.8) as part of his phenomenological method, but the physical anthropologist Rainer Knussman reproduced it many years later, in 1986, as a standardized anthropological type photograph. Similarly, physical anthropologist Egon von Eickstedt made no direct mention of Jews in his truly unusual book published in 1963, comprised of over 2,500 pages, but he reproduced two of Clauss's photographs (on page 1657 and page 2256). The latter, which Clauss claimed was an Arab woman, von Eickstedt

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15 See Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

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294 und 295. Armenier (nicht Juden). Vorderasiatische (armenoide) Rasse. (Mätere Angabe f. S. 112.)



296. Syrier (nicht Jude) vorderasiatisch. (Aus Martin, Lehrbuch der Anthropologie.)

Fig. 6.10 Hans F. K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes* (Ethnogeny of the Jewish People) (Munich: Lehmann, 1930), p. 386. Public domain.

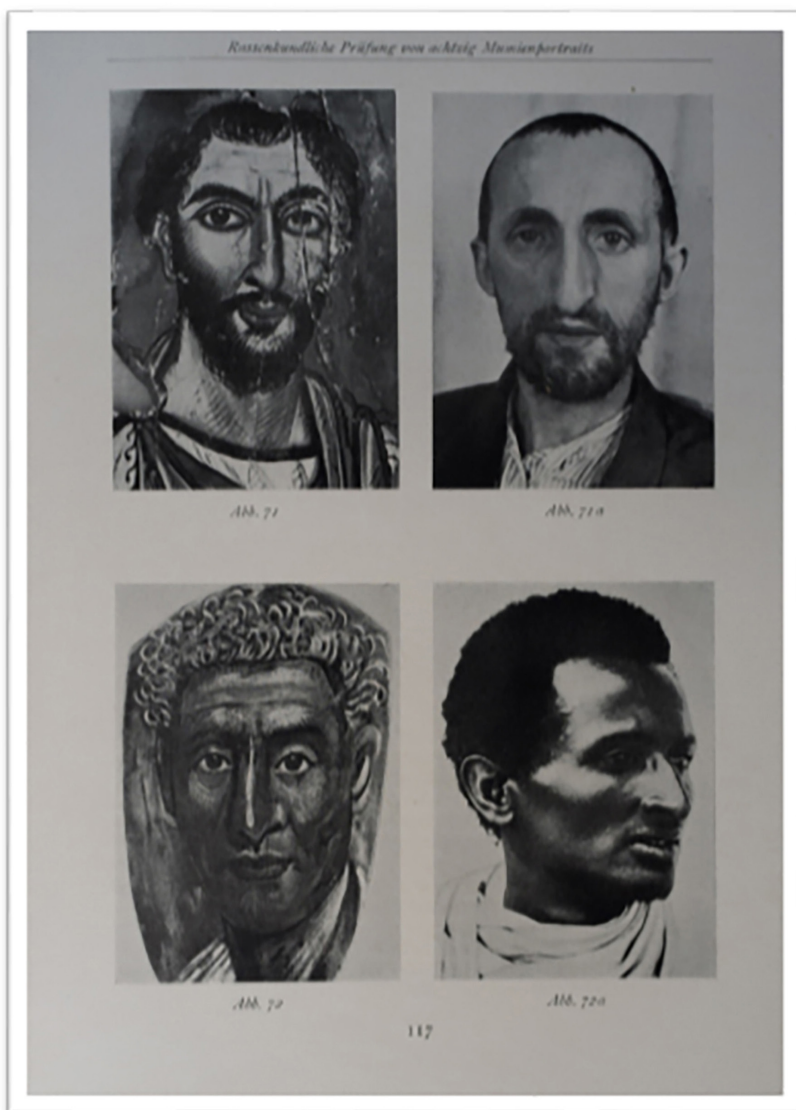


Fig. 6.11 Gerhard Kittel and Eugen Fischer, *Das antike Weltjudentum Tatsachen, Texte, Bilder* (Jewry of the Ancient World; Facts Texts, Pictures) Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1943), p. 116. Public domain.

characterized as 'Armenider Erlösungstypus' (Armenian Redemption Type) which thus integrated Clauss's typology (redemption type) and von Luschan's racial classification (Armenian type).<sup>16</sup>

One way to look at all of this is to say that racial photographs succumbed rather easily to different uses; another, perhaps stronger, approach is to say that the boundaries between racial discourses, which in some respects were fairly clear, in others were quite fluid. This fluidity was closely tied to political instrumentalization, and it all tended in the same general direction, which makes it easier for the later historian to question the significance of the epistemological differences in the first place.

This chapter has addressed photography within science and scholarship. But science and scholarship are never isolated from other facets of society and history. Furthermore, photography, because of its visual legibility, connects spheres of cultural production with each other directly and instantaneously. In terms of their subjects, visual language, and broad political ideology, the kinds of photography elaborated upon here bear considerable similarity to the work of photographers who are discussed at length in other chapters of this volume, such as Erna Lendvai-Dircksen and Erich Retzlaff. Photographs tend to centre on individuals, but the individuals stand for something typical (racial, regional, or ethnic). While focusing on individuals and in fact emphasizing their uniqueness, the photographs discussed here were also speaking about types and, at an even deeper level, and perhaps most crucially, when they focused on members of the German *Volk* they were engaged in establishing a prototype of that *Volk*, arguably one of the few key kernels of the rather fluid National Socialist ideology.

The photographic treatments discussed here speak to viewers in similar terms, suggesting that the photograph offers a direct, immediate depiction of the person, based on and intensifying a naïve conception of the relationship between photography and reality. Both these branches of scientific photography and their respective forms of documentary photography emphasize authenticity more than they do beauty, although they share implicit conservative notions of beauty. And they also share,

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16 Egon Freiherr von Eickstedt, *Ursprung und Entfaltung der Seele: Entwurf und System einer psychologischen Anthropologie* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1963). For Clauss's originals see *Rasse und Seele* (Munich: Lehmann, 1933), pp. 78–81.



in broad terms, the naturalizing *Völkisch* ideology as well as, often, an explicit commitment to National Socialist ideas or motifs. In fact, there is a significant overlap, with regard to the conception of photography's relationship to reality as well as from aesthetic, sociological, cultural, and political perspectives, between *Völkisch* ideology and the ideas of National Socialism. Some of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's photographs could easily replace some of the photographs used in the publications of Clauss or Günther, for instance.

Professional photographers, to a much greater degree than amateur photographers, master the camera and work from within photography's dispositions to create the image they desire. For this reason, the aesthetic and ideological overlap between certain documentary photographers and racial scientists merits special attention. However, for the same reason, it is important to note a caveat; namely, the ability in retrospect to observe visual similarities between photographs made by photographers who were aesthetically and ideologically clearly at odds (such as Helmar Lerski and any of the photographers discussed here). While this raises broader questions with regard to the history of photography, it also means that drawing conclusions based on visual similarities should be approached with caution.

## Conclusion

Methodologically, the use of photographic techniques for the study of race was not developed further after 1945, and quantitatively, it declined quite sharply, although it did not altogether disappear. This stands in contradiction to the relative continuity, otherwise, in the scientific branches in which it had been featured (excluding Günther's *Rassenkunde*, which was debunked as political ideology).<sup>17</sup> The question of why the use of photography lessened is, to some extent, dependent on interpretation. Explanations include internal scientific developments (such as the increasing dominance of concepts based on computing processes within the biological sciences, and the shift to the chromosomal level of analysis in the 1960s) as well as the interface between science and politics and transformations in the public sphere with regard to the legitimacy of these uses of photography. Photography's documentary

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17 See the literature cited in Amos Morris-Reich, 'Taboo and Classification' (2013).



nature also offers itself as an explanation. Indirect evidence for this latter interpretation can be seen in the destruction, by scientists, in the final days of the war, of photographs of Jews taken in Lodz in 1940 (discussed above). They did not destroy other measurements, such as fingerprints, which were taken on the same occasion, based on the same method and for the same purportedly scientific purposes (in fact, some of those scientists were still considering publishing the fingerprints in the late 1940s). The scientists understood the photographs as more incriminating than other media. So, the photographs were destroyed, but everything that had been collected or published was not. What happened to the composite image that this vast repertoire of photographs helped establish in the social imagination? What has this photographic tradition implanted in that social imagination? Did the receding of photography mean the receding of images developed over decades and sitting atop deeper and broader cultural, religious, and social layers?

Attempting to answer this question requires studying photography within a multi-layered, complex history of vision, where vision is understood as a dynamic and sensually, intellectually, and politically shaped process. This work still needs to be carried out. Speaking very generally, the study of photography from the 1980s to today emphasizes photography's contingency, the modes of doubt and ambivalence built into the images that it produces, and the protean nature of vision itself. At least to some extent, these tendencies are corrective with regard to earlier conceptions that implied or assumed photography's direct representation of the real. But in certain respects, they may optimistically exaggerate the roles of photography in historical reality. Perhaps, by building on Aby Warburg's less progressive and possibly more pessimistic view of human vision in history, future work will have to study photography in relation to other forms of image production, to demonstrate how photographs solidified images in the social imagination. Such embedding of photography allows us to locate and stabilize certain points of transition in the relationship between photography and vision, while reminding us that at no point can the history of photography be separated from psychological and social structures, or cultural and political ideologies. The photographic practices studied in this chapter did not create images *ex nihilo*: the images existed prior to them and did not, most probably, entirely disappear with photography's decline



# Conclusion

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In a collapsed and burned-out building, two boys sift through a mountain of rubble, charred beams, and twisted metal; their quest is to find whole bricks.



Fig 7.1 Hans Saebens, 'Untitled', silver gelatin print, 1945. Courtesy of Aberystwyth University's School of Art Museum and Galleries.

The all-pervasive and almost overpowering smell of corruption drifts through the air but the once black skies are now clear of both bombers and smoke. Today, the sun is shining and even here, on the edge of ruin, these children find a purpose; mature beyond their years, they are focused on their task. The *Stunde Null*, the zero hour, has passed, and with the men either dead, far away, or imprisoned, the children too must work alongside the thousands of *Trümmerfrauen*, or rubble women, to clear the way for a future that few foresaw, and none can now predict. This is what remains after nearly six years of war — ashes and ruins, the final symbol of the cataclysm that has been visited on Europe and indeed the world. Somewhere too, amongst the apocalyptic miles of crushed and crumbling wreckage that was once the city of Berlin, lie the ashes of the photographic archives of many of the photographers discussed in this text. Literally and symbolically, the fires of defeat have consumed the ideological work that had become their *métier* for the previous two decades.

But this was not the end of the careers of these photographers who had been 'for the Reich'. Indeed, an examination of many of their post-war activities reveals that, although often not without some personal difficulty, they nevertheless adapted quickly and successfully to the dramatic change in circumstances. In addition to the destruction wrought by allied bombing, many of them embarked on

...selective cleansing actions of private as well as commercial archives, when potentially compromising material was destroyed. As a result of this self-inflicted 'denazification,' the preponderance of photos from this period consists of images that are ideologically 'clean'.<sup>1</sup>

Even those who no longer remained committed to working with 'folksy' images of the German *Heimat* and its people saw their surviving pre-1945 work continue to be used in publications that were now attuned to a tourist market, and one that chimed with earlier, less ideological, conceptions of a *gemütlich* (cosy) and nostalgic image of German life.<sup>2</sup>

1 Ute Tellini, review of, Petra Rösger, ed., *frauenobjektiv: Fotograffinnen 1940 bis 1950*, in *Woman's Art Journal* 23:2 (Autumn 2002–Winter 2003), 40.

2 For more on the peasant motif in German art and photography see Christian Weikop, 'August Sander's *Der Bauer* and the Pervasiveness of the Peasant Tradition', *Tate Papers* 19 (Spring 2013), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/19/august-sanders-der-bauer-and-the-pervasiveness-of-the-peasant-tradition>

Images of women in traditional costume were reconceptualised as 'quaint' and representative of 'warm traditions'. For example, Hans Retzlaff's photograph of the *Bückeberg Bäuerin* is reproduced in the 1961 book *Niedersachsen*<sup>3</sup> and presented for the new tourist market with its title in German, English and French<sup>4</sup> (see Fig. 7.2).

Similarly, Hans Retzlaff's namesake, Erich Retzlaff, resumed his successful photographic career following the war's end and, besides developing a lucrative career as a commercial photographer, continued his photographic portrait project to capture the 'great spirit' of the German mind, which became his book *Das Geistige Gesicht Deutschlands* (The Spiritual Face of Germany) published in 1952. This book was indeed a direct extension of his 1944 colour project *Das Gesicht des Geistes* (The Face of the Spirit). However, as in the recontextualization of Hans Retzlaff's photographs of the *Heimat* and its people, Erich Retzlaff's focus was also now realigned. Instead of an emphasis on a racial-physiognomic elite, the portraits he presented were framed as part of a cold war strategy to present the democratic intellectual cultural force that was the new capitalist West Germany (in ideological opposition to the Marxist totalitarianism of East Germany and the Soviet Bloc).

If any of these former practitioners were still convinced by National Socialism or harboured positive memories of their careers before the end of the war, then they tempered their feelings for the new dispensation, for this was their 'new' *Selbstgleichschaltung* or 'self-co-ordination'. Unsurprisingly though, there is certainly something strikingly different about the photographic output and re-presentation of these photographers works in the post-war period. The downfall of the Third Reich produced, in the main, a palpable difference in the creative output of these prodigious photographers. The visual mutation of their post-war work, and the changes in the biographical narratives that they formed around themselves, are certainly attributable to the general calumny and forced psychological shift that many Germans were experiencing in that most uncertain of periods following the disaster of the war and the collapse of National

3 *Niedersachsen: Bilder eines deutschen Landes*, introduction by Heinrich Mersmann (Frankfurt: Verlag Weidlich, 1961), (unpaginated).

4 With his negatives destroyed, Hans Retzlaff travelled to the Institute of Folklore at Tübingen University after the war in order to make copy negatives of their extensive holdings of his prints.



131 Bückeburg. Bäuerin in festlicher Tracht mit goldbesticktem Kopfputz  
 Peasant woman wearing traditional costume  
 Paysanne de Bückebourg en habit de fête

Fig 7.2 Hans Retzlaff, *Bückeburg. Bäuerin in festlicher Tracht mit goldbesticktem Kopfputz* (Peasant woman wearing traditional costume), c.1935, reproduced in *Niedersachsen: Bilder eines deutschen Landes*, introduction by Heinrich Mersmann (Frankfurt: Verlag Weidlich, 1961), (unpaginated).  
 Public domain.



Socialism. In a general sense, their photography was less dynamic than the work they made in the 1930s and 1940s. The subject matter, without the structure of a National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, now tended to be rather clichéd and rudderless, lacking the punch and bite of its earlier manifestations, or else it was driven by commercial imperatives. This shift tells its own story of trauma and a conscious effort to leave behind the new stigma of the past in the period of *Entnazifizierung* or 'denazification'.

Each of the chapters in this book has explored the relationship between specific trends that were influential in Germany during the period of the Third Reich (such as physiognomy) and the relationship to an aesthetic and Nationalist photography. As Andrés Zervigón pointed out in chapter three, there was a conscious combining of past traditions with modern visions, a neo-traditionalism manifest in the photographic form that was 'aesthetically pioneering'. Each chapter finds that a highly creative and inventive manifestation of modernist photographic practices persisted (through a nationalist lens at least) *after* 1933. Therefore, the notion that an innovative and modernist-influenced photography ceased to exist in Germany after 1933 can thus be readily dismissed. As one American reviewer wrote in 1937, 'German art photography is the last word in both technical expertness and human sympathy'.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the application of these photographic portfolios for political ends is beyond dispute. Sometimes the association was overtly political, as in the use of these photographic works in ideologically radical publications such as the notorious 1942 publication *Der Untermensch*<sup>6</sup> (the subhuman).

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5 R.T.H., 'Menschen am Wasser,' Review of Heinz Kuhbier, ed., *Menschen am Wasser*, in *Books Abroad* 11:1 (1937), 75. Hans Saebens' images of *Niederdeutschland* were represented in this text.

6 Reichsführer SS, SS Hauptamt, *Der Untermensch* (Berlin: Nordland, 1942).

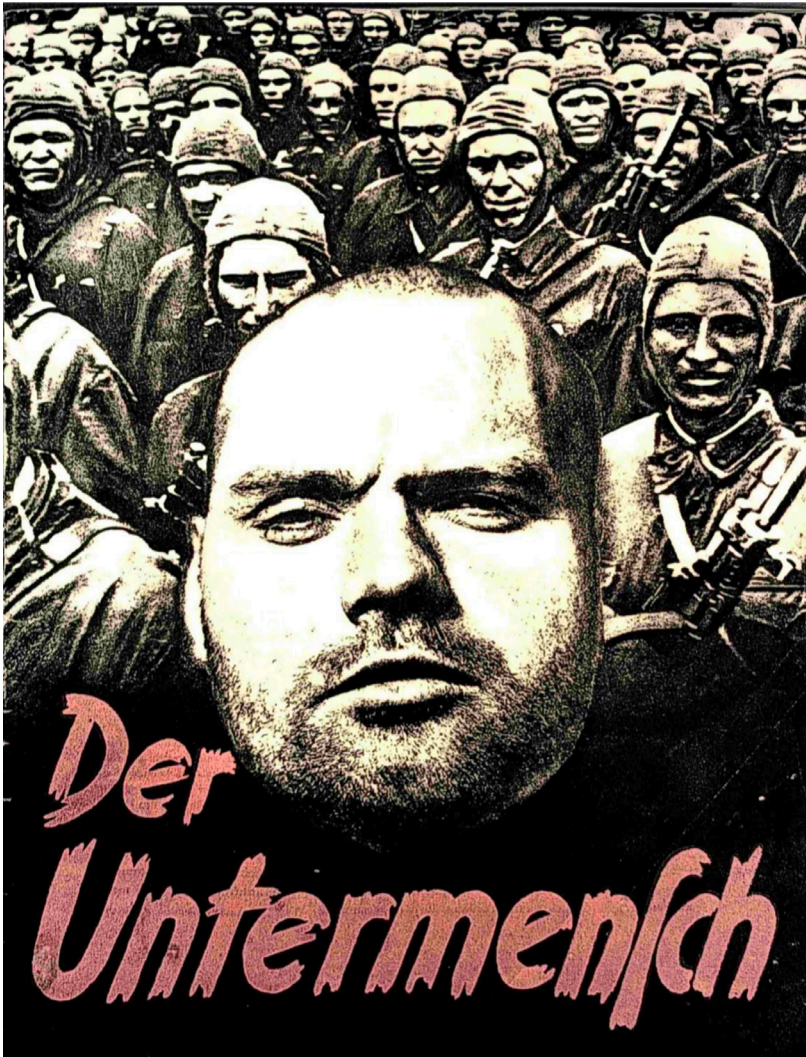


Fig. 7.3 Cover image of the SS pamphlet 'Der Untermensch' (The Subhuman), Reichsführer SS, SS Hauptamt, *Der Untermensch* (Berlin: Nordland, 1942). Public domain.

Produced by the SS as a 'training brochure', it used portrait and landscape images by Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, Hans Retzlaff, F. F. Bauer, and Ilse Steinhoff amongst others. These were all photographers who had engaged with an aesthetic vision of the German *Volk*, all who had artistically explored physiognomy in their working practices. The *Untermensch* document used photo-doubling techniques and polemical language to draw comparisons between 'good' German stock and a parodic and negative representation of (particularly) Slavic and Jewish types.

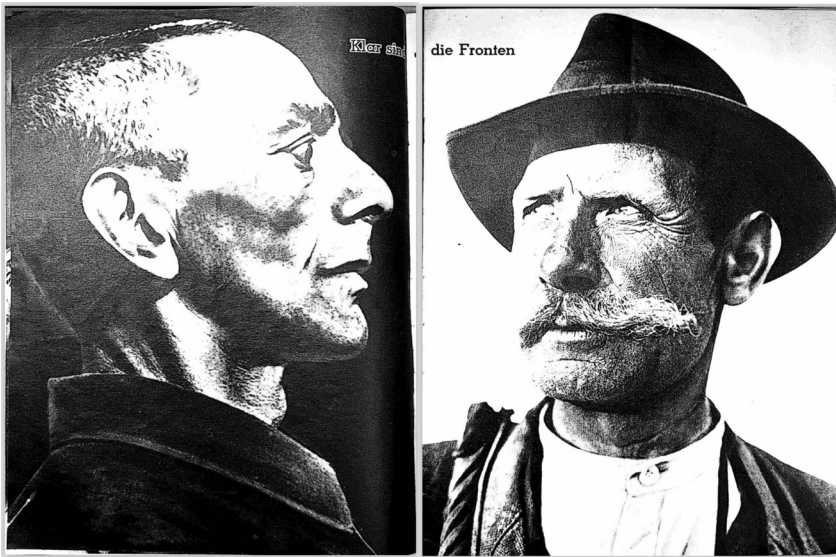


Fig. 7.4 Double-page comparison of two racial types entitled 'Klar sind die Fronten' (the battlelines are clear) from the SS pamphlet 'Der Untermensch' (The Subhuman), Reichsführer SS, SS Hauptamt, *Der Untermensch* (Berlin: Nordland, 1942). Public domain.

The unpaginated illustrated text opens with a statement by *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler from 1935, where he is quoted as saying:

As long as there are people on earth, the battle between humans and subhumans will be the historical rule, this struggle against our folk, led by the Jew, belongs, as far as we can look back into the past, to the natural course of life on our planet. One can calmly come to the conclusion that this struggle to the death is certainly as much a law of nature as the attack of the plague bacillus on a healthy human body.<sup>7</sup>

7 SS Hauptamt, *Der Untermensch* (1942).

As Jennifer Evans has recently pointed out, 'Along its various pathways of production, consumption and display, a photograph trains the eye to identify what it sees while provoking the mind to judge'.<sup>8</sup> The creative and staged photography of Ethnos made and used within the sphere of National Socialism (along with its many other manifestations) was streamlined to intervene between the viewers' encounter with daily life and the larger world surrounding them. It was intended to guide the viewer to assess, to formulate opinions, to identify with, and to educate. It was also intended, as Rolf Sachsse has elucidated in chapter one, to provide a positive feeling and 'warm' memory whilst the viewer is 'looking away' into the constructed space of the photograph.

An example of this type of pedagogical approach for the broader public was the *Volk und Rasse* touring exhibition (1934–1937)<sup>9</sup> organized by the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum and the *Rassenpolitische Amt der NSDAP* (Office of Racial Policy). This exhibition featured a large number of these artistically stylised portraits of the German 'type'<sup>10</sup> (see Fig. 7.5).

The accompanying brochure advised: 'Every German man and every German woman must go into this exhibition and allow this display to have its effect on them. An hour of such an instructional lesson is more effective than the spoken or read word'.

Reinforcing the notion of tradition and modernity, in 1937 the *Reichsgesetzblatt* wrote enthusiastically about the exhibition:

Thus, this exhibition reveals the great inner connections between blood and soil and race and ethnicity. It teaches that every one of us is a member of a great chain of ancestors, and that our fate is defined by those who preceded us just as our people's future will be a reflection of us. There is probably no more vivid a reminder of the great responsibility that

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8 Paul Betts, Jennifer Evans and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, eds, *The Ethics of Seeing: Photography and Twentieth Century German History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), p. 2.

9 The exhibition *Volk und Rasse* (1934–1937) came from the exhibition *Deutsche Arbeit — Deutsches Volk* (Berlin, 1934). In 1936, the exhibition was completely revised and, in 1937, it was integrated into the collection of the Deutsche Hygiene Museum (information courtesy Marion Schneider, DHM, e-mail correspondence 14 August 2017).

10 When I examined press images and related publications from this exhibition, I was able to identify (on behalf of the contemporary Deutsches Hygiene-Museum) some of the works as those by Hans Retzlaff, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen and Erich Retzlaff.



Fig. 7.5 *Volk und Rasse*, a touring exhibition (1934–1937) arranged by the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum and the *Rassenpolitische Amt der NSDAP* (Office of Racial Policy). Image courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsches Hygiene-Museum.

each one of us bears for his people than this exhibition 'People and Race'.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, it might also be argued that the more extreme and politicised applications (and the example of *Der Untermensch* cited above is a crude enough specimen) were a by-product rather than an intended outcome of the genre of work that these photographers had developed. Its political use might have been an obvious outcome and one of which they would or should have been aware. However, the photographers' idealised, romantic-nationalist approach to framing their subjects should, it could be argued, be considered outside of the (often) crude ends to which the political ideologues used their work. Theirs was a kind of 'rightist New Objectivity', or at least one that mirrored the conservative and traditionalist values of the photographers whilst employing modern photographic techniques. Does this exonerate them from any guilt

11 *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 2 (1937), 27.



by association with politics? A Soviet contemporary of these German photographers provides a useful comparison.

Boris Ignatovich enjoyed the patronage of the Soviet state as a photographer whose work was regarded as quintessentially Socialist Realist and was widely used in Soviet propaganda, but he was also regarded as part of that avant-garde in photography that emerged during the interwar years. Ignatovich was selected for that seminal exhibition, *Film und Foto*, which opened in Stuttgart in 1929. So, whilst being regarded as an avant-garde creator, Ignatovich was also used as a 'political' photographer of the Soviet system, a system whose own use of visual media was equal to that of National Socialism in its ruthless ambition to eradicate the state's perceived enemies (amongst other applications). The Soviet propaganda machine utilised the work of artists, writers and photographers (like Ignatovich) in much the same way as National Socialism did in Germany. The ends were often equally destructive, if not, it could legitimately be argued, much more so given the brutal extended legacy of Communism.

As the writer Maksim Gorky opined when discussing the aims of propaganda:

Class hatred should be cultivated by an organic revulsion as far as the enemy is concerned. Enemies must be seen as inferior. I believe quite profoundly that the enemy is our inferior and is a degenerate not only in the physical plane but also in the moral sense.<sup>12</sup>

Gorky's words might have been lifted from *Der Untermensch* itself.

Although some might regard the comparison as problematic,<sup>13</sup> it is relevant when comparing the post-regime treatment of the two groups of practitioners. Photographers of the Soviet Union are now regarded as laudable additions to the canon of the history of photography. They are widely exhibited and discussed positively without the political caveats that inevitably accompany any discussion of their National

12 Quoted in Nicolas Werth, Karel Bartošek, Jean-Louis Panné, Jean-Louis Margolin, Andrzej Paczkowski and Stéphane Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 751.

13 Unlike National Socialism, Communism, its ideological nemesis, is still openly espoused in some quarters as politically viable or simply desirable. Despite the far longer and indisputably bloodier international legacy of applied Marxism, it is not uncommon in western countries to see the hammer and sickle flag waved enthusiastically at protest marches, for example.



Socialist German contemporaries. For example, in 2004 the Nailya Alexander Gallery in New York staged an exhibition entitled *Staging Happiness: The Formation of Socialist Realist Photography*. The gallery wrote:

Photography became the most important artistic tool in shaping the collective consciousness with the purpose to create a New Soviet Man. This resulted in a multitude of commissioned works featuring beautified images of heroic men and women, cheerful pioneers, abundant produce as well as glorified depictions of the Soviet military might and achievements of new economic policies that led to [a] prosperous future under the leadership of the Great Stalin. Photographers became the creators of new icons, and the subjects of their photographs were hailed as the stars of Soviet publications — state-sanctioned role models for the general population.<sup>14</sup>

Photography certainly became an integral tool in delineating the notion of a unified German identity during the National Socialist era. Like their Soviet contemporaries, many of these photographers had no opportunity to leave Germany even if they desired to do so, and of course, many interpreted the new dispensation as a positive transformation, whether in terms of increased patronage (because of their existing reputations) or in terms of new opportunities (as other practitioners fell afoul of National Socialism). What was certain was that, in order to continue practising their craft, photographers needed to be aware of, and in line with, the expectations of the new National Socialist state. This was applicable to cinematographers, sculptors, painters, or indeed anybody working in the arts at the time. Should anyone be in any doubt about these requirements, Joseph Goebbels, the minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, stated in 1938:

Art [...] must feel itself closely connected with the elemental laws of national life. Art and civilisation are implanted in the mother soil of the nation. They are, consequently, forever dependent upon the moral, social, and national principles of the state.<sup>15</sup>

14 See: <http://www.nailyaalexandergallery.com/exhibitions/staging-happiness-the-formation-of-socialist-realist-photography>

15 Joseph Goebbels quoted in Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 56.

The requirement of photography was 'to promote photography in a racial sense'.<sup>16</sup> It was essential that photography must include 'a vital link between the work and national customs and traditions'.<sup>17</sup> Such directions disallowed photographers like August Sander entry, and it certainly excluded others of the wrong political or racial background.

Unlike August Sander's socially structured physiognomic study of Germans, these photographers of a physiognomic Ethnos tended to plough a straight furrow, with the work fixed on those fundamentals that comprised the idealised elements of the National Socialist community and a National Socialist mythos.

As in Socialist Realism, these German counterparts are both *real* and *ideal*. They do indeed extol the virtues of simplicity, unity, identity, and purity that formed part of the propaganda notions of the 'National Community'. There is no doubt that many of these photographers had a pronounced feeling of national sentiment. Theirs was a photography concerned with the 'poetics of nationhood'.<sup>18</sup> These images can be seen to fit into a crafted demonstration of what was posited as 'national culture'.

Was it simply the presence of ideological concerns that might be said to define a National Socialist photographic aesthetic, Sontag's so-called 'Fascist aesthetic'? When examining a documentary photograph, the viewer is confronted with different questions than in an encounter with the art photograph. However, like the photography that was produced for Roosevelt's Farm Security Administration in the United States, these images of Ethnos are cloaked in the language of the document yet resonate with the aesthetic language of the art photograph and, as a result, function as both *fact* and *fiction*; they *point* to a myth through the veil of the photographic 'becoming in time'.<sup>19</sup> Yet the suggestion of this myth is not intended to undermine the plausibility of the image; rather, it reinforces the ideological mythos embedded in the picture and thus, when the viewer engaged with those images, they might confirm the place of the viewer of the time in relation to this national myth. As

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16 Klaus Honnef, Rolf Sachsse and Karin Thomas, eds, *German Photography 1870–1970: Power of a Medium* (Cologne: Dumont Bucherverlag, 1997), p. 8.

17 Honnef, et al, *German Photography 1870–1970* (1997), p. 88.

18 Ian Jeffrey, *German Photography of the 1930s* (London: Royal Festival Hall, 1995), p. 10.

19 Jae Emerling, *Photography History and Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 167.

stories of the 'real', that is, as representations of people encountered in the field, these photographs, to quote the important British documentary filmmaker John Grierson, apply 'a *creative treatment of actuality*' (my italics).<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, as David Bate pointed out in an insightful article:

[...] documentary images are those that create an allegorical sense, a picture with a non-literal significance, a meaning and point beyond literal content [...] All good documentary photographs generate this implicit commentary, where the content and form are combined, harnessed together to make a 'bigger picture' and meaning.<sup>21</sup>

These German photographs are a visual manifestation of a grappling with modernity during a revolutionary and culturally challenging time. Working with this allegorical sense, using Ethnos as the thread that united them, they created an alternative but modern form for a representation of a traditional idea, namely the notion of 'Blood and Soil'. However, as a traditional hypothesis, 'Blood and Soil' became unacceptable after 1945 because of the association of this idea with National Socialism.

In his equally polemical and brilliant 1990 critique of modern intellectual life in Germany, post-war German art, and the deleterious effect of the 'anti-aesthetic' on that art, the innovative German filmmaker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, discussed how the historic notion of 'Blood and Soil' had become tainted, a taboo. As Syberberg explains, 'Blood and Soil',

[...] means the aesthetics grown from an agrarian culture such as had determined European art through aristocratic principles of hierarchies of good and bad until the beginning of Modernism [...] Hitler's attempt to put his ideology into practice appears as a caricature of these traditions and was doomed to failure, as we know today. And yet it is a cultural historical epoch of European art from the *Heimatfilm* to the new classicism of a frightful 'Strength-through-Joy' gesture in sculpture, architecture and painting. It corresponds to a longing, however trivial,

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20 In 1933 Grierson wrote, 'Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art with no such background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses.' John Grierson, 'The Documentary Producer,' *Cinema Quarterly* 2:1 (1933), 8.

21 David Bate, 'The Real Aesthetic: Documentary Noise,' *Portfolio: Contemporary Photography in Britain* 5 (2010), 7.

of men become a mass of people and to the intellectual isolation at the height of the industrial epoch and it is the other side of Modernism.<sup>22</sup>

Effectively, Syberberg argues for the recognition of its place not as a reactionary measure but as an essential, healthy, and necessary facet of modernity.

In the period before 1945, the German photographers whose work focussed on a framing of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), and on the *Heimat*, this photography of Ethnos, were part of a broader conservative milieu that used their photography to assert a counter-propositional position to aspects of modernity, and to reject political liberalism and the shifting social and cultural situation that struggled to emerge in the chaotic atmosphere of post-Versailles Germany. Like their contemporaries Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger, and Oswald Spengler, they were, very often, revolutionary conservatives and formed their photographic aesthetic as a counter-propositional bulwark to a *zeitgeist* that was perceived as alien and destructive to their own concept of German (and European) tradition. It can be no surprise then that the National Socialists seized upon it as a propaganda trope.

These photographs attempt to visually 'cement' the notion of the nation as one that is unified and typified by untainted landscapes, where relations with Nature are harmonious in an ecotopia interspersed with traditional hamlets, villages, and towns, and above all where the apogee of this national community is the representation of the German *Bauer* himself, situated eternally on the earth of his homeland. The individual is framed as an archetype of a rarefied and noble type. Young and old, the people are framed as linked by a common physicality and common activity. Their rootedness to the landscape, their Ethnos, is the substance upon which this 'portrait' is constructed. For even when this photography is not expressly a 'portrait', the works still portray unchanging core values: order, history, ancestral legacies (including race), and unity. These images are presented as the corrective to cosmopolitanism, deracination, and degeneracy — all factors cast as eternal threats to the German 'racial soul'.

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22 Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *On the Fortunes and Misfortunes of Art in Post-War Germany* (translated and annotated by Alexander Jacob), (London: Arktos, 2017), pp. 11–12 (originally *Vom Unglück und Glück der Kunst in Deutschland nach dem letzten Kriege* (München: Matthes und Seitz, 1990)).

It is clear that photography, like other modern inventions and ideas, was readily utilised in the promulgation of National Socialist thinking. Certainly, in terms of the definition of the ideal racial type, it was seen as indispensable. Often these studies would not be produced under the direct auspices of the Reich Ministry for Propaganda, but rather they were made in an ostensibly independent mode and thus appeared to have a greater degree of creative freedom.<sup>23</sup> Images such as those reproduced in journals such as *Volk und Rasse*, in which these photographers were regularly featured, focussed on using the photographic image as a tool to overtly highlight the 'ideal' racial type as part of the corporate national identity.<sup>24</sup> However, unlike the scientific anthropological approach, with its frontal and lateral viewpoints forming an analytical archive, the photographers of the autochthonous *Bauer* presented their subjects in a single summary frame. They had, as Remco Ensels has pointed out, 'emphasized the penetration of a nation's inner life, which was equivalent to a people's character, by means of a two-dimensional photo. Here, the photo acted as the medium that established the connection between body and mind. One photo was enough.'<sup>25</sup>

The photography explored in this book was constructed to render an image of the face, the body, and even geography and the landscape in a context of *Ethnos*, a physical and metaphysical ethno-physiognomy of Germany. In addition, this photography was made by highly skilled practitioners whose approach reflected international trends in avant-garde photography. They often adapted and applied the aesthetics of the 'New Vision' that resulted in a more direct, sharply focused and sometimes documentary approach to the medium. The work of these German photographers echoed the direct straight approach of many of

23 See for example, Matthias Weiss, 'Vermessen — fotografische 'Menscheninventare' vor und aus Zeit des Nationalsozialismus,' in *Maßlose Bilder: Visual Ästhetik der Transgression* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009), p. 359.

24 *Gemeinschaft* (community) as opposed to *Gesellschaft* (society) was an integral paradigm of National Socialist philosophy in the form of *Volksgemeinschaft* (the people's community). The individual was regarded as part of a whole national organism subsumed into a single organic being. Thus, each 'cell' (person) must be of the best quality and, in this ideology, racially echo the whole.

25 Remco Ensels, 'Photography, Race and Nationalism in the Netherlands,' in Paul Puschmann and Tim Riswick, eds, *Building Bridges. Scholars, History and Historical Demography. A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Theo Engelen* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2018), p. 253.

the modernist photographers in America at that time. Indeed, some of the similarities are striking. With straight, sharp, close-cropped images, their German counterparts were also pioneers in using state-of-the-art early-twentieth-century photographic technologies like the 35mm Leica camera, and new film advances such as the Agfacolor Neu film introduced in 1936.

The fact that this photography was also created with, or applied to, an ideological current means that the work *should* be understood. Yet their closeness to National Socialism has ensured that in mainstream histories and museology these photographers have been critically marginalised, pushed into an art-historical closet. It appears that when discussing these works there has been (and often still is) an expectation that one must always proceed pejoratively. It has been, in the main, a continuation of that censorious art historical assumption that:

[...] all art under National Socialism was repellent and barbaric, even to the point of being too repellent and barbaric to analyse; and that aesthetic interest attaches only to that art which National Socialism set out to crush and destroy.<sup>26</sup>

Such subjective 'framing' as originally partially challenged in Taylor and van der Will's *The Nazification of Art* is inevitably counter-productive, and merely reveals the prejudices of the examiner rather than leading to any fresh understanding or positioning of the works in question. Such an attitude, as described in the quote above, is no longer valid nor relevant. Like music, literature, painting, and other artistic forms made in the Third Reich, creative photography that celebrated Ethnos cannot be regarded as an anomaly that is best forgotten, glossed over, or ignored. Nor can we simply regard these photographs as tainted objects to be reviled because of some of the applications during the period of the Third Reich. Beyond this usage, they stand as manifestations of a radical tradition that transcends the era in which they were made. Today, these images have become atavistic memory-shadows still haunting the fringes of our digital information highways (reappearing on the internet through social media and file-sharing sites, for example). This photographic work *remains*, a continuing manifestation of a political,

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26 Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in the Third Reich* (Winchester: The Winchester Press 1990), p. 4.



ideological, esoteric, and Romantic mélange unique to its time. As such, these artefacts require a reading and a positioning in the aesthetic history of the modern era. That is the process that this book has set out to begin.



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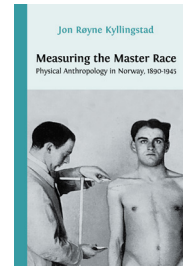
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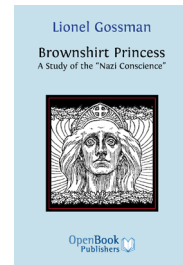
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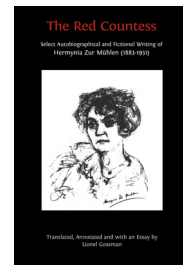
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# Photography in the Third Reich

Art, Physiognomy and Propaganda

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER WEBSTER

This lucid and comprehensive collection of essays by an international group of scholars constitutes a photo-historical survey of select photographers who embraced National Socialism during the Third Reich. These photographers developed and implemented physiognomic and ethnographic photography, and, through a *Selbstgleichschaltung* (a self-co-ordination with the regime), continued to practice as photographers throughout the twelve years of the Third Reich.

The volume explores, through photographic reproductions and accompanying analysis, diverse aspects of photography during the Third Reich, ranging from the influence of Modernism, the qualitative effect of propaganda photography, and the utilisation of technology such as colour film, to the photograph as ideological metaphor. With an emphasis on the idealised representation of the German body and the role of physiognomy within this representation, the book examines how select photographers created and developed a visual myth of the 'master race' and its antitheses under the auspices of the Nationalist Socialist state.

*Photography in the Third Reich* approaches its historical source photographs as material culture, examining their production, construction and proliferation. This detailed and informative text will be a valuable resource not only to historians studying the Third Reich, but to scholars and students of film, history of art, politics, media studies, cultural studies and holocaust studies.

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