MODERNIST MAGAZINES AND THE SOCIAL IDEAL

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Tim Satterthwaite

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To my father,
Jerome Satterthwaite

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Acknowledgements

The journey of this book began in 2009, when my MA tutor at Sussex University, David Mellor, suggested I take a look at the bound copies of *VU* magazine in Brighton's St Peter's House Library. This became my MA thesis, which became the kernel of my doctoral thesis at The Courtauld Institute of Art, supervised by Gavin Parkinson. My thanks to these two eminent scholars, and to the many other people, who have helped me on the long and winding road to the completion of the book manuscript. Particular thanks to Émilie Bernard and the staff of the Musée Nicéphore Niépce; to Patrick Rössler for his invaluable endorsement of the book project; and to the late Robert Lebeck (1929–2014), who – quite literally – threw me the keys to his extraordinary archive. And thanks, most of all, to my wife, Lucy Bryson, who supported and encouraged me throughout, and brought me late-night cups of peppermint tea.

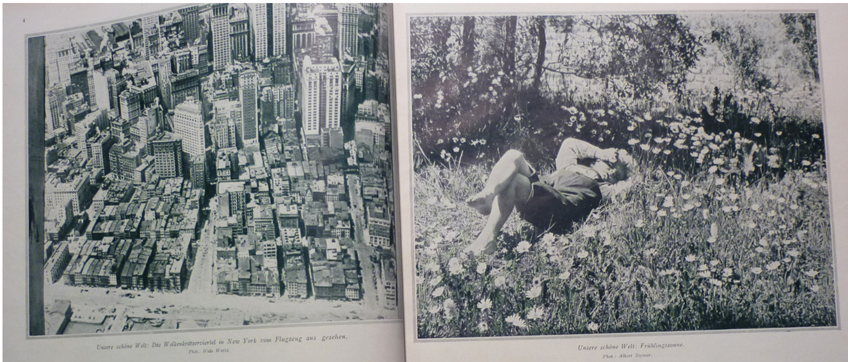

Figure 1 Page spread, *Die Dame*, end May 1924, pp. 4–5.

Introduction

A page spread from the women's magazine *Die Dame* (The Lady), of May 1924, presents the reader with two half-page photographs, celebrating 'Unsere schöne Welt' (Our beautiful world) (Figure 1). The images are strikingly dissimilar: the left-hand (verso) page presents an aerial view of New York, with squat nineteenth-century tenement blocks giving way, in the middle distance, to the crystalline forms of skyscrapers; the recto image is of a little boy lazing in a garden full of oxeye daisies, his bent arm shielding his eyes from the brilliant sunlight. The paired photographs, symmetrically aligned, seem designed to tease the reader: *what do these pictures have in common? What do we, the modern magazine of 1924, find beautiful?*

The new photo-illustrated magazines that began appearing on European newsstands in late 1924, and the years that followed, took this idea of a unified aesthetic modernity as their point of departure. Launched in the shadow of the First World War and its traumatic aftermath, the popular magazines of the 1920s traded in idealist images of leisure, communality, and consumer plenty, conveying the optimistic promise of a new, machine-age society. The 'beautiful world' of *Die Dame*'s aerial view describes the repetitious forms of Manhattan, but also the technological world beyond the image frame. The paired photographs invoke a modernist synthesis: rationalised modernity, symbolised by the geometric order of the modern city, is reconciled with the paradisiac ideal of the child in the garden.

The diverse and evolving projections of this modernist utopia, in the pioneering German and French popular magazines of the interwar decades, form the subject of this book. Mapping the period from the stabilisation of the Weimar economy in 1924 to the Nazi dictatorship of 1933, the book explores the rival visions of the new society in popular modernism, and the evolution of these ideals from the 1920s into the Depression era. The new magazines were defined by the profusion and continuous variety of their photography, with pictures of exotic locations, beach resorts, and the gilded lives of film stars, sharing space with images of modern technology, engineering and architecture, and picturesque views of the historical and natural world. The physical unity

of the magazine, and the panoptic gaze of the camera, invoked the idea of an inclusive global modernity, built on universal values of tolerance and sociability, and the material prosperity of the machine-age future.

The elements and structural mechanisms of this modernist ideal were, however, intrinsically problematic. For the traumatised postwar generation, technological modernity promised material goods and a leisured society, but had delivered industrialised slaughter; America represented the consumer ideal, but also the 'monotonisation of the world' and the loss of local cultures; for many critics, the price of modernity was exile from tradition and from nature itself.[1] In such a context, the utopian projections of modernist magazines could be only provisional and dialectical: whilst the idealised worlds conjured in photographs and feature articles spoke to the subjective aspirations of modern readers, the magazines also captured the inherent tensions in these ideals, and their contested status. Crucially, the new periodicals responded *critically* to developments in contemporary culture, engaging proactively and in real time with modernism's evolving ideas and visual forms. As this book will argue, the assimilation of the machine aesthetic into the cultural mainstream, as the naturalised visual language of modernity, was not – in Germany of 1924, at least – a foregone conclusion: the values of an alternative, *organic* modernism continued to assert their claim throughout the 1920s. As recorders and critical observers of the contemporary scene, popular magazines both reflected and shaped the process by which the values and aesthetics of the technological era achieved cultural ascendancy at the turn of the new decade.

The historian of magazines encounters the immediate problem of abundance. For each popular title there are multiple issues over multiple years, each issue rich in visual and textual materials: the Weimar monthlies, explored in Part II, had up to 200 pages per issue, with photographs or other graphics on around three quarters of these pages. For a broad-based critical history, such as this book, the volume of source material increases exponentially with each additional title. Material on this scale is impossible to assimilate, and there is the risk of undue subjectivity on the historian's part: it is all too easy, by selecting out particular materials, to create contingent narratives and hierarchies that support preconceived ideas, or to transform the magazines, by default, into undifferentiated source material for studies within the broader cultural history of the period. To study magazines' *internal* culture – their specific ideological formations, aesthetics, and thematic hierarchies – requires robust, generalising criteria, that apply across a range of principal themes and reveal underlying commonalities over time, and between diverse materials.

A defining aspect of the photography of interwar magazines was its preoccupation with repetition and regularity. In the Weimar monthlies, alongside the spectacular geometries of kick-line dancers and the mathematical forms of civil engineering and architecture, photo-pages featured aerial views of modular urban landscapes and photomicrographs of self-replicating natural forms; art photographs thematised the organic and geometric visual order of the material world. The use of repetitious form was equally marked in French magazines, in which a geometric aesthetic appeared both in individual photographs and as an organising principle in page layouts; human patterns, such as the configurations of urban crowds in *VU* magazine (Chapter 11), served as a kind of visual shorthand in Depression-era narratives of social order and disorder.

The axiomatic foundation of this book, laid out in Part I, is that the *patterning aesthetic* of popular magazines embodied the communitarian and collectivist ideals of the reconstruction era. Drawing on the visual culture of early twentieth-century modernism (Chapter 3), photographers and magazine editors traced the symbolic forms of a new society in the groupings and regularities of the visual world: in the broadest terms, geometric pattern forms invoked the image of a rationalised machine-age society, and of progress *towards* this modernist utopia; informal and organic groupings spoke to a dream of sociability and a return to nature. The book's intention, here, is not to impose a crude, reductive interpretation on complex images, but to describe the underlying cultural *resonances* of their compositional patterning, for a notional magazine reader of the interwar period.[2] As the book's figures illustrate, the pattern forms in figurative images ranged in visual intensity, and in symbolic intent, from the emphatic to the infinitely subtle and ambiguous. In the expansive terms proposed in Chapter 2, the symbolic patterning culture of modernism was universalist – embracing both skyscrapers and oxeye daisies.

Alongside its thematic emphasis on visual groupings, the detailed focus of *Modernist Magazines* is limited to two magazines, which form the spine of the longitudinal case studies in Parts II and III. This book makes no attempt to compete, in scope, with standard works such as *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* (a three-volume study of avant-garde periodicals),[3] though it does have one crucial advantage. Unlike the Oxford *History*, and the excellent *Deutsche illustrierte Presse* (2016),[4] which present topical chapters on individual titles, the present book is able to track the *evolution* of its selected magazines – occurring in dialectical relation to the crisis conditions of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Like the magazine reader who

becomes familiar with a favourite title over months and years, understanding a magazine's culture requires *time*, and the space to explore its developing themes, ideals, and preoccupations; the extended case studies seek to capture at least some of the complexity of these collective enterprises. The focus of *Modernist Magazines and the Social Ideal* is not, however, limited to two periodicals, as its title makes clear: thematic discussions, throughout the book, place *UHU* and *VU* within their respective magazine contexts, and introduce key antecedents and contemporaneous rivals. These are the neighbouring titles on the magazine racks, when our notional German reader picks out the new issue of *UHU*, or, in Paris, catches up on the weekly news in *VU* magazine.

The two titles at the heart of this book were exceptional, both in their own right, and as representative of a wider class of photo-illustrated magazines of the period. *UHU*, explored in Part II, was an imaginative and beautifully made monthly 'revue', launched by the leading German publishing house Ullstein Verlag in October 1924. The magazine was typical of a new style of progressive popular monthly of the Weimar era, presenting a mix of topical features, light fiction, and lavish photogravure illustrations, aimed at a middle-class readership: it was 'readable in a train journey from Berlin to Hamburg'.[5] *UHU*'s contributors, over its nine-year run, included many of Germany's leading writers, photographers, artists and designers – Kurt Tucholsky, Kurt Szafranski, Walter Gropius, Vicki Baum, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Sasha Stone, Walter Benjamin … – a roll call which points to the intimate dialogue between avant-garde and mainstream culture at this period.

The French weekly news magazine *VU*, launched in March 1928, was the product of an equally rich visual and journalistic culture. As Part III describes, *VU* was a pioneering title, without immediate competitors in its early years: Chapter 1 provides a provisional outline of the magazine's lineage – notably, the sporting magazines *La Vie au grand air* and *Match l'Intran*. *VU*'s achievement lay in marrying the reportage style of German news supplements such as *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* with the optimistic ideals of technological modernism. Like *UHU*'s communitarian visions – though without the German magazine's cult of nature – *VU*'s modernist utopia was invoked in images of rationalised collectivity and social order, and in the patterned configurations of page layouts. The magazine's progressive idealism shaped, in turn, its agonised, searching response to the Depression crisis and the rise of Hitler. As Chapter 11 describes, the collapse of the liberal modernist ideal in the turmoil of the early 1930s was inflected in the destabilised, oppositional structures of *VU*'s photographs and graphic designs.

The language of patterning

A key assumption underlying the visual readings in this book is that regular (geometric) patterns and irregular (non-geometric, informal) patterns share a basic property: the elements in the pattern seem to *belong together*. This 'togetherness' is forcefully expressed in many of the contrasting pattern forms in this book: see, for example, the flock of cranes and the aeroplane formation in Figure 6, or the irregular and linear groupings in Hannah Höch's scrapbook (Figure 21). The premise of *Modernist Magazines* is that *visual unities* such as these had a particular cultural resonance in the interwar period, as symbolic figures of community and social order; and that the 'strength' (coherence and stability) and regularity/informality of these patterns informed this symbolisation.

To develop this thesis demands a theory of *pattern* that embraces irregular and regular groupings, and accounts for their dynamic properties. In the absence of current critical theory in this area, *Modernist Magazines* outlines a provisional approach (Chapter 2), introduced here as *pattern theory*. The methodology, based in the Gestalt tradition and the present-day science of perceptual organisation, falls outside of critical orthodoxy, and will require, for its full defence, a book of its own. As presented here, pattern theory appears as a bespoke toolkit: a small set of critical terms, and a body of theoretical assumptions, on which some – not all – of the book's visual readings are built. The burden of this book is that critical and scientific theories of visual experience need not be incompatible: that an account of the visual system's *constructive* role in cognition does not negate a historicist approach to visual culture. If the reader experiences no such incompatibility over the course of this book, then the approach may perhaps have taken its first forward step.

Absent from Chapter 2, and from the book as a whole, is any account of the philosophical traditions on which pattern theory builds. The defence of the theory demands a historicist treatment, relating the proposed methodology to key antecedents: Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* (1856); the formalist theories of the Vienna School – Wölfflin, Riegl, Panofsky, Sedlmayr;[6] Siegfried Kracauer's critical studies of Weimar mass culture; postwar engagements with Gestalt theory in the work of Ernst Gombrich, Rudolf Arnheim, Susanne K Langer, Gyorgy Kepes, Kevin Lynch. The complex task of situating pattern theory within these fragmentary, conflicting theoretical traditions lies, clearly, beyond the scope of the present book. For better or worse, pattern theory is introduced

here on its own merits, in the hope that the dedicated chapter provides at least adequate temporary foundations.

Magazine histories

Modernist Magazines and the Social Ideal is a child of the digital era: the book's primary source materials are my own digital facsimiles of magazine pages photographed, by kind permission, at the National Art Library, London, the Kunstbibliothek Berlin, and the Robert Lebeck archive. This collection was supplemented by materials in online archives: principally, the outstanding *Illustrierte Presse* archive containing searchable runs of the leading Weimar monthlies; the *Gallica* archive of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris; digitised runs of *VU* and *Voilà* on the website of the Musée Nicéphore Niépce (MNN), Chalon-sur-Saône.[7]

The supple advantages of digital technology, allowing the researcher to summon magazine pages at the click of a mouse, extend beyond simple convenience and economy. In the case of the present book at least, without this capacity to range freely over time and across different publications the thematic chapters could not have been written – or would have been very different. There is reason to hope, therefore, that the important books published this century in the field of magazine studies mark the dawning of spring in the digital humanities, and that many further critical texts will follow: recent titles on the modernist period include the Oxford *History of Modernist Magazines* and *Deutsche illustrierte Presse* mentioned previously; Thierry Gervais and Gaëlle Morel's *The Making of Visual News* (2017); Danielle Leenaerts's *Petite histoire du magazine Vu* (2010); and Michel Hockx et al., *A Space of their Own* (2017), on women's periodicals in twentieth-century China (not cited in the present book) – a collection which suggests the possibilities, in the digital era, of a new globalised, post-colonial agenda in magazine studies.[8]

The foundations of *Modernist Magazines* lie in the new accounts of modernism that emerged in the final decades of the last century, challenging both the conventional hierarchies and conceptual paradigms of art history. Jeffrey Herf's *Reactionary Modernism* (1984), and the revisionist histories that built on this (Chapter 1), provide the essential framework for my reading of Weimar magazines in Part II.[9] An equal debt, perhaps less acknowledged in the

chapters that follow, is due to the pioneering work of historians such as Hanno Hardt and Bernd Weise, whose detailed scholarly accounts of the German photo-illustrated press began appearing in the late 1980s.[10] The axiomatic basis of these histories, as of the present book, is that the magazines and illustrated supplements of the early twentieth century were more than mere ephemera, blithely recording the fashions and innovations of modern life. They were cultural actors in themselves, celebrating but also critiquing the forms and practices of the emerging technological society. This book seeks to capture something of this dialogue between magazines and their milieux, in the era of utopian modernism and of the catastrophic collapse of these progressive ideals.

Notes

1 Stefan Zweig, "Die Monotonisierung der Welt" (The monotonisation of the world) *Berlin Börsen-Courier*, February 1, 1925. See below, p. 129.
2 The metaphor of submerged "resonances" in the photographic image is insightfully developed in Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).
3 The final volume in this series explores avant-garde European magazines of the modernist era: Peter Brooker et al., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume III: Europe 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
4 Katja Leiskau, Patrick Rössler, and Susann Trabert, eds., *Deutsche illustrierte Presse: Journalismus und visuelle Kultur in der Weimarer Republik* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016).
5 Frederick Ullstein, quoted in Sophie v. Stackelberg, "Illustrierte Magazine als Zeitschriftentyp und Historische Quelle. Der 'Uhu' als Beispiel," in *Fotografie und Bildpublizistik in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Diethart Kerbs and Walter Uka (Bönen: Kettler, 2004), 133.
6 For an introduction to the theories of the Vienna School in the nineteenth and twentieth century, see Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 1–36, 137–242; Christopher S. Wood, *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 9–46.
7 *Illustrierte Presse*: www.illustrierte-presse.de (now hosted on arhistoricum.net); *Gallica*: gallica.bnf.fr; Musée Nicéphore Niépce archive: www.museeniepce.com/index.php?/collections. Images described but not reproduced in this book are, in most cases, freely available on these websites.

8 Thierry Gervais and Gaëlle Morel, *The Making of Visual News: A History of Photography in the Press*, trans. John Tittenson (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017); Danielle Leenaerts, *Petite histoire du magazine Vu (1928-1940): Entre Photographie d'information Et Photographie d'Art* (Bruxelles and New York: PIE: Peter Lang, 2010); Michel Hockx, Joan Judge, and Barbara Mittler, eds., *A Space of Their Own: Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

9 Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

10 Hanno Hardt, "Pictures for the Masses: Photography and the Rise of Popular Magazines in Weimar Germany," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 13, no. 1 (1989); Bernd Weise, "Pressefotografie I. Die Anfänge in Deutschland, Ausgehend von einer Kritik bisheriger Forschungansätze," *Fotogeschichte* 9, no. 31 (1989); Bernd Weise, "Pressefotografie II. Fortschritt der Fotografie- und Drucktechnik und Veränderungen des Pressmarktes im deutschen Kaiserreich," *Fotogeschichte* 9, no. 33 (1989); Bernd Weise, "Pressefotografie III. Das Geschäft mit dem aktuellen Foto: Fotografen, Bildagenturen, Interessenverbände, Arbeitstechnik, die Entwicklung in Deutschland bis zum ersten Weltkrieg," *Fotogeschichte* 10, no. 37 (1990); Bernd Weise, "Pressefotografie IV. Die Entwicklung des Fotorechts und der Handel mit der Bildnachricht," *Fotogeschichte* 14, no. 52 (1994).

Part I

Social Modernism

1

The Idea of the Whole

> *We are convinced that this flood will never disperse. … We live in it – not like fish in water, but like the seafarer on the ocean who knows the treachery of the sea.*
>
> Paul Renner, 'Das Lichtbild' (The Photograph), 1930

The European popular magazines of the 1920s and early 1930s built their appeal on visions of a youthful, harmonious modernity, characterised by outdoor leisure, communality, and the peaceful application of modern technology. Whilst the components of this ideal varied from title to title, and evolved over time within individual magazines, its common principle was one of tolerance: the reconciliation, or mutual coexistence, of opposing forces, ideologies, and traditions. The defining question, inflected in the utopian imagery of German popular monthlies, and addressed with explicit urgency in the 1930s editorials of *VU* magazine, concerned the nature of modern society: how could individuals, and nations, learn to live together, and avoid a return to civil unrest and the catastrophe of war.

From this general perspective, the idealist visual culture of interwar magazines relates to broader societal hopes and fears, regarding the nature of technological modernity. Images of the natural world and traditional life published in Weimar monthlies, alongside photos of film stars and modern interiors, added picturesque variety to the magazines' photo-pages. Such juxtapositions also, however, speak to the profound historical dilemmas in German society and cultural life in the era of mass industrialisation: the dichotomy between traditional and modern ideals, the values of an urbanised, technological present and a rural, agrarian past. Progressive French magazines, in their turn, refracted the acute societal tensions of interwar France, concerning economic modernisation, the role of women, Americanisation, the future of the built environment.

In their different ways, the magazines explored in this book resolved these tensions in favour of *modernism*, embracing the new cultural forms and modes of being that emerged from the experience of modernity. As the evolving content of these magazines reveals, however, the nature and degree of this engagement was not predetermined: in the early postwar years, in particular, the mythic ideals and visual language of popular modernism appear fluid and contingent, reflecting the play of dialectical forces that shaped its evolution. In the broadest terms, the popular magazines present a dialogue between alternative modernisms: a modernism of the machine, embracing technological and technocratic systems, and visually embodied in the geometric aesthetic; a modernism of the body, favouring the free expression of subjectivity and a renewed, spiritual connection with the natural world.

The resolution of this dichotomy, in favour of the technological ideal and machine modernism, played out in the pages of Weimar magazines in the years before the Great Depression. The values of an alternative, *organic* modernism, and the cultural impulse to reconcile this ideal with the prerogatives of the machine age, were symbolised in photographs of natural forms and the unclothed human body, and inflected in the wider imagery of social groupings and regularities in the manmade and organic world.

Yearning for unity

The force and currency of Weimar's modernist dialectic can be glimpsed in the editorials of two magazines from the mid-1920s. For the popular science and technology monthly *Die Koralle* (Coral) the dilemma has an existential primacy, laid out in the editorial of the opening issue, of April 1925:

> Through our age runs a deep yearning to escape from the monotony and haste of our daily lives into the limitless space and freedom of mother nature. *Die Koralle* will lead the way. It will show how to discern the thousand forms in which the mysterious creativity of nature is expressed, and provide information in words and pictures on all the great and small, wonderful and unknown [creations] that surround us. … But *Die Koralle* also wants to make nature harnessed by the human spirit, the wonders of technology, accessible to the reader's understanding.[1]

The striking ambivalence towards technological modernity, in a magazine aimed explicitly at a 'cultivated, critical readership, interested in technology',

is expressed through a mythic trope, in which nature serves as compensatory palliative to the dehumanising effects of modern life.[2]

Modernity and the natural world are paired, more ambiguously, in the general-interest magazine *Revue des Monats* (Revue of the Month), in a pithy satirical poem from the September 1928 issue. 'Wer liest was?' (Who reads what?), by Max Kolpe and Billie Wilder, describes the bewildering array of reading matter offered by a Berlin newsagent, including a stereotypical revue magazine,[3] defined in terms of its topical interests: modern art and metropolitan glamour, the sexual revolution – 'Man is Woman! Woman is Man! Love complexes: the erotic becomes a pastime!' – equated, in the following line, with a modish embrace of the natural: 'Zurück zur Natur!' (Return to nature!).[4] The connection is not self-evident: whilst erotic emancipation was, indeed, one idealist element of Weimar *Freikörperkultur* (nudism), this was highly contested even within the movement itself;[5] in the context of 'Wer liest was?', the appeal to nature is simple shorthand, evoking the heterodoxy and fluidity of modern life. As the exclamation marks peppering the rhyme seem to suggest, the magazines that played out and sought to reconcile these contrasting ideals expressed the paradoxes at the heart of 1920s modernism.

The historiography of the Weimar era has, traditionally, equated the progressive movement in German art and visual culture with the machine aesthetic. In part, this reflects the historical importance of the Bauhaus, and the fact that, as Walter Laqueur notes, Weimar modernism's impact on international culture was felt most strongly in the fields of architecture and design.[6] It speaks also to a tendency, handed down from the first generation of historians after the Second World War, to construct a binary opposition between *modernism* (rationalist, technophiliac, progressive) and *Nazism* (irrationalist, atavistic, reactionary).[7] In this construct, the Weimar period becomes a Manichean struggle between dark and light, past and future, dictatorship and democracy. John Willett, for example, talks of a 'contest between the modern movement in the arts and the primitive-conservative resentments with which it has long had to contend' – a battle which the forces of progress were destined to lose. As recent historiography has underlined, this binary elides the tensions on both sides of the equation: the ambivalence of many liberal modernists towards technological modernity; the embrace of technology by some on the German right. What Willett terms 'one of the world's decisive battles' was a more complex and contradictory engagement than this metaphor allows.[8] Only in the crisis of the early 1930s, as the Weimar Republic neared its final collapse, did such ideological and aesthetic alignments

begin to emerge. In the relatively stable years before the Great Depression, the new visual culture was shaped by the subtler potentialities and conflicts playing out within modernism itself.

The present book connects to a more recent, revisionist strand in Weimar historiography. Building on pivotal studies such as Jeffrey Herf's *Reactionary Modernism* (1984), critical histories have explored the ambivalence of Weimar progressives, and their opponents, on the central question of technological modernity. In its classical formulation, this is the debate over *Kultur* and *Technik*, the values of Germanic culture versus technology/rationalisation, defined as historical and philosophical antitheses. For Modris Eksteins, the terms encapsulate the fundamental dichotomy in German responses to industrial modernity after 1871: remorseless industrial expansion and rationalisation, on the one hand; the cultural reaction to this, decrying the destruction of traditional life and the urbanisation of German society, on the other. In Eksteins's synoptic account, the euphoric response to the outbreak of war in 1914 represents the cathartic endpoint of this *Drang nach vorne* (push forward), a momentary reconciliation of societal tensions: 'Technological innovation and industrial progress would, in a grand synthesis, combine with a spirit of pastoral simplicity. Society and culture would no longer be conflicting realms but an indissoluble whole.'[9] The legacy of the war, from this perspective, was a profound disenchantment, with the social-cultural divide now experienced as traumatic loss. As Friedrich Meinecke wrote, in the early 1920s, of his contemporaries: 'The deep yearning for the inner unity and harmony of all laws of life and events in life remains a powerful force in the German spirit.'[10] More than a simple clash of progressives and traditionalists, Weimar's 'spiritual yearning' describes a crisis *within* these movements, reflecting the disjunction of postwar ideals and the fragmentation of subjectivity.

The paradoxical reconciliations of *Kultur* and *Technik*, on the part of Weimar's right-wing ideologues, are described in Herf's *Reactionary Modernism*. In this account, an important strand within conservative and subsequent Nazi ideology sought to combine a *völkisch* romanticism, invoking a myth of return to an idealised rural past, with an embrace of the material aspects of technological modernity. The 'reactionary modernists' wanted Germany 'to be more rather than less industrialized, to have more rather than fewer radios, trains, highways, cars, and planes'; their complaint was with bourgeois capitalism, and parliamentary democracy, which prevented the proper application of this technology to the task of German military and nationalistic revival.[11] As Herf

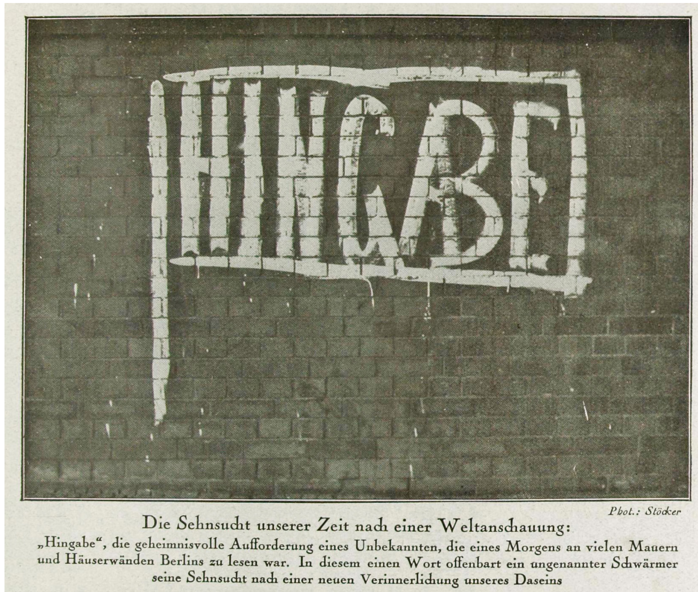

Figure 2 'Die Sehnsucht unserer Zeit nach einer Weltanschauung' (The longing of our time for a world view) *UHU,* November 1926, p. 3. The extended caption reads: '"Devotion", an anonymous, mysterious demand which could be read one morning on many Berlin walls and house ends. In this single word an unnamed visionary reveals his yearning for a new spiritualisation of our being.'

notes, the synthesis proposed by Ernst Jünger, and by Joseph Goebbels, drew on a potent irrationalist tradition in modernism inspired by Nietzschean ideas of the will and the triumph of the spirit over reason.[12] The fusion of futuristic modernity with the cult of heroic tradition – the equation of fascism – was an expression of the modernist spirit.[13]

The monthly revue magazine, *UHU*, a mass-market title with bourgeois liberal sympathies, projected an idealism far removed from the strident irrationalism of the Weimar right.[14] In abstract terms, however, the same 'yearning for … inner unity' emerges in its editorial themes and visual imagery. The disjunction of cultural traditions and social realities, and the effects of this on modern society and individual subjectivity, are the explicit subject of an *UHU* article by Herman Hesse (Figure 2), 'Die Sehnsucht unser Zeit nach einer Weltanschauung' (The longing of our time for a world view), published in November 1926. The article is remarkable both for its prominence – twelve photo-illustrated pages at the front of the magazine – and its humane seriousness. Hesse writes:

> The new image of the earth's surface, completely transformed and recast in just a few decades, and the enormous changes manifest in every city and every landscape of the world since industrialization, correspond to an upheaval in the human mind and soul. … Destroyed and lost for the greater part of the civilized world are, beyond all else, the two universal foundations of life, culture and morality: religion and customary morals. Our life is lacking in morals, in a traditional, sacred, unwritten understanding about what is proper and becoming between people.[15]

Though the war has completed the 'death and dismantling' of traditional culture and morality, it has also, Hesse argues, created the conditions for a spiritual rebirth. Echoing the apocalyptic teleology of the Berlin Expressionists in the prewar decade,[16] Germany's trauma becomes the catalyst for an 'awakening of the soul, this burning resurgence of longings for the divine'; ultimately, to a utopian synthesis of modernity and the 'longed-for occult doctrine of the new humanity'. Whilst Hesse resorts to mystical abstractions – *Kultur* and *Technik* are here reconciled through a return to a Faustian 'underworld' – crucially, the article locates this synthesis within a tolerant, humanistic modern age.[17] Hesse's article, in this general sense, describes the modernist philosophy common to the magazines that form the subject of this book: a progressive, socially liberal attitude to modern life, tempered by the need to find a secure, lasting ground for modern morality and subjectivity. The common driver of this project was a kind of rational optimism, an implicit assertion that Europe's traumatic modernity did not preclude the establishment, or rediscovery, of communal values.

In Hesse's article, the reconciliation of society and culture depends on the religious impulse, as a resurgent force promoting unified morals. In the more characteristic secular mode of the revue magazines, the primary resolution was aesthetic, encapsulated in the ideal of *Schönheit* (beauty): the expression of health, wholeness, harmonious order, in both the natural and manmade world. In the pages of *UHU*, *Scherl's Magazin*, or *Revue des Monats*, the dream of synthesis was realised, photographically, in proliferating images of an idealised actuality.

The Goethean gestalt

The synthetic ideal invoked by the revue magazines, and the fragility of this synthesis, are nicely captured in a photographic spread from *UHU*, April

1930 (Figure 3), showing a close-up study of a magnolia flower, by Imogen Cunningham, set against the portrait of an elderly ‘Blumenfrau’ (woman in bloom). The playful pairing of the flower form and the woman’s head, and the repetitious textures of the stamens and her wrinkled skin, invokes an ideal organic unity, mediated via the benevolent technology of the camera and printed page: nature and the machine age are reconciled within an all-embracing modernity. Given the traumatic economic and political situation in Germany of 1930, this utopian moment has a particular poignancy; but the photographs also embody subtler tensions and possibilities, worked out in the pages of *UHU* and its rivals over the course of the preceding decade.

A central paradox of Weimar-era modernism is the scepticism, on the part of many of its associated figures, about the direction and pace of technological and social change. Max Weber’s gloomy prediction of a bureaucratic future inhabited by ‘specialists without spirit, hedonists without heart’ finds a powerful echo in the Expressionist fantasies of Franz Kafka, in Freud’s theory of ‘neurotic’ cultures, and in the social and cultural critiques of the Frankfurt School.[18] In Detlev Peukert’s view, similarities between the rhetoric of progressive critics (Peukert labels them ‘post-modernist’) and their conservative opponents led

Figure 3 ‘Blume und Blumenfrau’ (Flower and woman in bloom), *UHU*, April 1930, pp. 10–11.

contemporaries, and some later historians, to lump them together as part of a reactionary, anti-modernising tradition descending from Nietzsche to Hitler.[19] More particularly, for our current purposes, the historical stress on the negativity of *Kulturkritik* has tended to obscure the constructive alternatives that critics of rationalisation proposed in this period. 'Machine modernism' describes the dominant cultural turn of the interwar decades, but not the *only* progressive response to technological modernity. As Peukert puts it, the 'feverish intellectual climate' of 1920s Germany 'created almost laboratory-like conditions in which every conceivable solution to the problems of modernity could be put to the test'.[20] Alongside the Weimar era's irrationalist, anti-modern, and racialist utopias were more humane idealisms, which sought to challenge the mechanistic logic of machine-age society without destroying its productive and emancipatory potential.

The historiography of this technological critique has focused, not on visual culture, but on holistic approaches in the German natural sciences, and on the 'life reform movement' (*Lebensreformbewegung*), the complex of social and cultural formations aiming to reconstruct modern society around the body and its relations to the natural world. These traditions are summarised in two landmark histories: Michael Hau's *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany* (2003) and Anne Harrington's *Reenchanted Science* (1996), on the reform movement in the natural sciences.[21] In Harrington's account, holism, as epistemology, was particular to the German-speaking countries, with philosophical roots in the Kantian idea of *Naturzwecke* (natural purpose) and in Goethe's development, after Kant, of a theory of *Gestalt*, or primal organic form.[22] Goethe's ontological division, separating organic from inert form, re-emerges in the critical oppositions of the industrial era – *Kultur* versus *Technik*, or (German) *Kultur* versus (French) *Civilization* – binaries that privileged the organic, rural character of traditional society over the soulless, mechanistic logic of industrialisation. In Ferdinand Tönnies's highly influential *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society) of 1887, the living body/lifeless machine metaphors become reified, composing a rhetoric of existential crisis: '*Gemeinschaft* should be understood as a living organism, *Gesellschaft* as a mechanical aggregate and artefact.'[23] This reification marks a pivotal moment in modernist culture, mapping Goethe's symbolic opposition – living/non-living – onto the social and cultural crises of industrialisation. As Chapter 3 describes, the visual expressions of this duality – the sign of the body and of the machine – appear in the symbolic forms and motifs of avant-garde art in the early twentieth century.

According to Goethe's holistic science, which enjoyed a significant renaissance from the end of the nineteenth century, all organic life expressed a common formative principle.[24] In Goethe's theory, the diversity of the natural world could be traced back to a small number of fundamental forms, or *Gestalten*; growth was the metamorphosis of these *Gestalten* into ever more complex organic structures – a leaf becoming a flower petal, for example. Since humans were part of this cosmic chain of being, they embodied these same *Gestalten*: each 'circumscribed living being takes part in the Infinite; it has something of infinity within itself'.[25] Aesthetic sensibility was man's intuitive response to this sublime unity, the expression of humanity's place within a timeless natural order.

For both progressive and traditionalist critics of modernity in the interwar period, the Goethean *Gestalt*, describing the cosmic wholeness of living things, offered a philosophical framework within which the cultural decline of industrial society could be articulated: modernity was *meaningless* because it lacked *Gestalt*, the self-creating unity of an organic tradition. The term has a notable currency in the *Kulturpessimismus* of conservative critics such as Oswald Spengler, whose *Decline of the West* contrasts the 'exact, deadening procedure of modern physics' with the 'formative forces' (*Gestaltungskräfte*) of cultural renewal.[26] For the novelist Hans Reiser, the emptiness of technological *Form* is so complete, that it loses coherence; 'form', absent of culture, becomes 'formlessness' (*Formlosigkeit*):[27]

> But what if form – that is, all known and familiar forms – is now a lie, because the present age, as a cultural epoch, has no form – creates no forms other than steel structures, machines and other technical achievements? What if the present age, both in its material manifestations and in spiritual, cultural and artistic terms, is only formlessness, disintegration, mishmash, as God-forsaken and futile as any age has ever been? … [The] casualty of this age … will have to pretend that the express-train tempo of modern life is a post-chaise canter, that the stink of petrol is like rose petals, and that a stock-exchange wizard has a fairy-tale heart of gold.[28]

In Reiser's argument, the soullessness of modernity is expressed at the level of visual form, but only for the attentive, sceptical viewer who can distinguish the 'lie' and 'pretence' of 'technical achievements' (*technische Errungenschaften*) from the true *Gestalt* of organic and hand-crafted entities such as rose petals, horses, and carriages. What visual characteristics these items share is hard to define – *Gestalt* appears to be intuitive rather than quantifiable – but the belief in

its presence has significant resonance at this period. At its limit, it underlies the irrationalist essentialism of *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life), exemplified in the pseudo-scientific, and reactionary, doctrines of Ludwig Klages. Using handwriting analysis (graphology) to probe beneath the 'masks of courtesy' of modern civilisation, Klages and his followers would reveal nothing less than the *Gestaltungskraft der Seele* (the soul's formative power), the submerged trace of an authentic, organic culture in the body's repetitious pattern forms.[29]

For Klages, as for Reiser, cultural renewal depends on the critical gaze, able to distinguish the true (organic) form from the false (machine) form that seeks, insidiously, to displace it. The two critics represent an oppositional, quasi-mystical strand in German cultural theory, to which both progressives and conservatives contributed: a belief in the essential, spiritual properties of organic and traditional objects and materials. In this context, the blithe visual pairing of an old woman and a magnolia in *UHU* magazine, based on their organic similarities, connects to the 'yearning' for a humanised and spiritualised modernity – a loss that the idealist photography of Weimar magazines sought to remedy.

Spiritualised form

The designer Paul Renner's speech at the opening of the Munich exhibition *Das Lichtbild* (The photograph), published in the magazine *Die Form* in July 1930, reflects a dominant theme in German writing on photography at this period. Renner acknowledges, as his point of departure, a profound societal anxiety about the impacts of technological modernity:

> We of the Werkbund know what humanity has lost as a result of this mechanization. We know that an unbroken human being in the fullness of his life can only be found in a village that has hardly been touched by modern technology; that only there do people know what spring, summer, fall, and winter are.[30]

The modern city dweller, in Renner's hyperbolic vision, is a fragmented, rootless individual, exiled from community and tradition, and with no living connection to the natural world. This dislocation is permanent – there can be no return to the values of a pre-industrial past – but not irredeemable. For Renner, as for other Weimar modernists, the challenge lay in creating a new synthesis,

between rationalisation and tradition, technology and nature, social order and subjectivity.

As the success of exhibitions such as *Das Lichtbild* affirmed, Renner's dream of a reconciled modernity would find its means of expression, and its resonant symbols, in photography. For the art historian Wolfgang Born, the technological eye of the camera, subject to the photographer's aesthetic sense, offered a means of resisting the 'rigid dictatorship of the machine'. Photography was both the essential medium of the 'generation of engineers' and the means by which the superficial objectivity of modernity could be penetrated: the camera lens offered a 'spiritual way of seeing that intuits a hidden meaning behind the appearance of things'.[31] Born's rhetoric, echoed in other progressive writing of this period, inverts the utopian ideal of machine modernism.[32] Van Doesburg's image of an evolving, vitalised technology – 'Every machine is the spiritualisation of an organism'[33] – was recast, in Weimar photographic theory, as a figure of cultural resistance, an expression of a 'new humanism' defying the tyranny of scientific rationalism.[34] Even among fervent advocates of mechanisation, such as Johannes Molzahn, the ideal was of a supple and *subservient* technology, not of a new age of rational systems: 'The image will become one of the most effective weapons against intellectualism, against the mechanization of the spirit.'[35] Photography, the product of the machine age, becomes a means of capturing its symbols, and hence mastering them.

The mythic promise of Weimar-era photography achieved its fullest expression in the images and editorials of the new popular magazines. At the simplest level, the diversity and global reach of the magazines' photography projected visions of a reconciled modernity encompassing all corners of the natural and manmade, historical and modern world. The proliferation of these images – in monthly issues running, typically, to more than 100 pages – contained the promise of an unfolding aesthetic and consumerist utopia, responsive to the needs and desires of magazine purchasers.[36]

As Molzahn and Born suggest, however, the idea of utopian synthesis was also expressed at the level of individual photographs, both in their content and compositional form. In the configurations of repetitious elements, in the emphasis on the regularities and symmetries of the machine age, the natural geometry of organic forms, or the informal configurations of animal and human groupings, Weimar magazines offered competing, symbolic visions of social order and communality. Photographs of wildlife, for example, typically present the collective groupings of particular species – flocks of birds, herds of antelopes