TERENCE SENTER

Moholy-Nagy's English photography*

'Thanks to the photographer humanity has acquired the power of perceiving its surroundings, and its very existence, with new eyes.' L. Moholy-Nagy in *The Listener*, London, 1933.[1]

MOHOLY-NAGY had made three short, exploratory visits to London before settling there on 19th or 20th May 1935, as a refugee from Nazism. The changed German atmosphere, that, in the nineteen twenties, had nurtured his ideas and made him the most influential stimulant at Walter Gropius's Bauhaus school of design, paralysed his development[2] in 1933. He felt the effects even in Holland where he worked as art director for the new *International Textiles*, launched by a former patron, Ludwig Katz, who had fled from Berlin at Hitler's election.

By 1933, a handful of English activists had awoken to the continental modern movement in art and design, leading that year, for example, to a London branch of C.I.A.M.,[3] called Mars (Modern Architectural Research Group). The group's international liaison secretary, P. Morton Shand, approached Moholy at their Athens Congress of summer 1933 about possible emigration, but found that he had already planned to investigate London in November. Shand was a knowledgeable, travelled architecture reporter whose linguistic skill was to prove immediately useful to Moholy in providing translations of his articles for English publication. In 1935 the emigration to London of his closest friend, Gropius, effected the previous October by Shand, Jack Pritchard and E. Maxwell Fry, was good reason for Moholy to follow.[4] However, the generally parochial, unaccommodating and stringent conditions presented an impossible challenge to Gropius. His profound, missionary vision of architecture, which galvanised even Mars members at a talk in 1934, stood little chance in the face of too few actual commissions to guarantee an independent living in his partnership with Fry.[5] Finally, lacking any initiative from the appropriate English universities, Gropius accepted the chair in architecture offered by a more appreciative Harvard (Fig.21). While Moholy was to stay in London for only two years before again following Gropius on 1st July 1937, his security had been quickly assured by a lucrative design consultancy, won for him by Ashley Havinden,[6] with Simpson's new menswear store in Piccadilly.

When Moholy left Germany, his reputation as a photographer, rather than painter, went before him. At his Utrecht exhibition of 1934, for instance, this reputation and his central campaign against fragmented thought and vision were highlighted when a specialist reporter was assigned who could cope only with photography.[7] Furthermore, Moholy implied in a reminiscence of his first London visit, that, for those he met, photography was generally his only known medium.[8]

His second short London visit, in August 1934, was to study and practise with Lucia Moholy the experimental Kodak imbibation process for colour reproduction. The red, yellow, and blue components of the transparency were separated by filters to form monochrome reversal prints on matrices of special paper, which, brushed with warm water, could be made to reconstitute the original image by registered superimposition of their three colours on the page. Moholy had undertaken this rigorous and expensive procedure, which he regarded as 'highly interesting' and a 'noble craft', to justify his increasingly uneasy dealings with *International Textiles*, but rejected the results as being too complex, unpredictable and fugitive for publishing purposes.[9]

Sensitive, reliable colour photography was one of the many targets that he set for his proposed light studios, subsidised research academies that he advocated from 1929 until 1937 as timely replacements for irrelevant art schools centred on painting.[10] Without such a studio, he

In the footnotes the following abbreviations are used:
LMN=Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. B=Bauhaus Archive, Berlin. S=Smithsonian Institution: Archives of American Art, Laszlo and Sibyl Moholy-Nagy papers. C=correspondence.

The following items are referred to by the bracketed letter only:
(a) LMN: *Malerei, Photographie, Film,* Munich, Albert Langen Verlag [1925 and 1927], Bauhaus book 8.
(b) LMN: *Von Material zu Architektur,* Munich, Albert Langen Verlag [1929], Bauhaus book 14. (Florian Kupferberg reprint, Berlin [1968]).
(c) LMN: 'Probleme des neuen Films', *Die Form,* Berlin, 7/5 [15th May 1932] (English version in *Telehor,* 1-2, pp.37-40, as 'Problems of the modern film').
(d) LMN: 'Wohin geht die photographische Entwicklung?' *Agfa Photoblätter,* Berlin, vol.8, pt.9 [1932].
(e) LMN: 'How photography revolutionises vision'. *The Listener,* London [8th November 1933].
(f) LMN: 'Photography in a flash', *Industrial Arts,* London, vol.1, no.4 [Winter 1936].
(g) LMN: *Vision in motion,* Chicago, Paul Theobald [1947].

*I am indebted to all my sources mentioned in the notes, but would like to extend special thanks to Sir Leslie Martin, Sir John Betjeman and Harry Blacker for permitting the publication of their works by L. Moholy-Nagy.

[1] (e), p.690.
[2] Cf. C: LMN to Herbert Read, 24th January 1934 (University of Victoria Library, Canada), and LMN to Gropius, 13th May 1935 (B. 7/108); also SYBIL MOHOLY-NAGY: *My life in Germany – two years before and two years after the start of the Hitler régime.* Unpublished manuscript, spring 1940. p.131. (S. 946:0763).
[3] Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne.
[4] Information from Ise Gropius, 8th April 1971; and Jack Pritchard, in discussion, 11th February 1971. C: between LMN and Gropius: 31st March 1935; 6th April 1935; and 10th April 1935; also, Frau Schiefer to Gropius, 17th April 1935 (B. 7/115; 7/112-113; 7/110; and 7/353).
[5] E. Maxwell Fry, in discussion, 15th April 1971. Also, E. M. FRY: 'Walter Gropius', *The Architectural Review,* London [March 1955], p.155.
[6] The late Ashley Havinden: graphic designer and head of the art department at the advertising agents W. S. Crawford, Ltd. He had been a devotee of the Bauhaus, and of LMN and Herbert Bayer in particular, since his visit to Germany in 1926. Information from Ashley Havinden, 6th January 1972.
[7] C: LMN to Sibylle Pietzsch, 9th October 1934 (S. 951:0148).
[8] C: LMN to Gropius, 16th December 1935 (B. 9/73-74).
[9] C: LMN to Sibylle Pietzsch, 16th August 1934; undated; and 9th October 1934 (S. 951:0130, 0046, 0149-0150). LMN and his wife, Lucia Moholy had separated in 1929; Sybille Pietzsch had become his second wife. Technical aspects: Paul Hartland, in discussion, 20th September 1973. Hartland worked under LMN at *International Textiles* in Holland.
[10] Cf. LMN: 'Fotogramm und Grenzgebiete', *Die Form,* Berlin, yr.4, pt.10 [15th May 1929], p.256; (c), p.157; LMN: 'An open letter', *Sight and Sound,* London [summer 1932], p.57; LMN: 'Light painting', in J. L. MARTIN, BEN NICHOLSON and N. GABO (eds.): *Circle,* London [1937], pp.245-47.
Elsewhere, LMN noted Prof. F. Weidert's industrially supported foundation of an optical institute at Berlin School of Technology (d), p.272.

found his free experimental progress towards the creation of objective 'light-frescoes' blocked for want of fundamental optical research equipment. Patrons, too, were unforthcoming. He had written of this frustrated ambition in 1934, and reiterated it in England in spring 1936, when he described more precisely his envisaged, fluctuating, multicoloured symphonies of brilliant light projected from reflective or transparent synthetic walls, straight or arched, which would change slowly and dissolve into an infinite number of controlled details. A switch would trigger its strictly composed score. He had also considered manual or automatic apparatus, creating light visions on vaporous screens, and had yearned for the opportunity of activating the confines of a white room with the multicoloured, interpenetrating beams of twelve projectors.[11] His closest practical approaches had been his *Light prop* (built 1930), backed by A.E.G. for inclusion in the Werkbund exhibition in Paris in 1930, and his related film, *Lightplay: black, white, and grey*,[12] backed by A.E.G. and Agfa the same year.

He regarded painting, photography, and film as parts of one problem, building with light, which had its roots as a thematic obsession even in his adolescent poetry. In 1922, his creed came into focus with his productive proposition, based on concerted plumbing of objective, natural laws.[13] Here, the artist would justify himself in a collective society and assist in the fulfilment of human life at the profoundest level by satisfying the biological need for new experience with a stream of fresh relationships established between known and unrevealed phenomena. He expected all disciplines to cooperate impersonally on research and reappraisal, unhindered by constraints of thought imposed by old technologies. For his own part, he assessed modern art movements, especially cubism, as intuitive bearers of the distinctive new human consciousness. With light as the central force of his modern movement crusade, he looked directly to photography for productive ways of yielding new, fundamental experiences and consequently discovered the cameraless photogram. Soon he regarded photography as 'one of the most important factors in the dawn of a new life', because it obliged the eye to see objectively, unchannelled by painters of the past.[14] Its detached records of startling and unfamiliar phenomena in time and space, frequently inaccessible to the unaided eye, made the photographic camera a worthy tool for the quest towards 'mathematical certainty' in a period of 'elucidation and purification'.[15] With photography outpacing painting in representational precision and, incidentally, being boosted further by recent painterly indications of its spheres of superior capacity, Moholy speculated about the continued rôle of painting. First, he saw manual painting relegated to the production of absolute, universally valid colour compositions,[16] then, in 1928, as mechanical techniques intruded, the risk of its lingering as an educational medium and deferring the new culture of colour by light construction.[17] In 1927, he announced that the illiterates of the future would be those ignorant of photography, rather than writing.[18]

Herbert Read's attempt to persuade the Mayor Gallery to stage an exhibition of Moholy's work in January 1934 based on his reputation in photography is hardly surprising.[19] The Deutsche Werkbund had given him particular prominence, and asked him to arrange a special introductory survey of modern photographic developments at their great international exhibition, *Film und Foto* (1929-30). His photography was the medium most mentioned by the handful of English press notices from 1927.[20]

In his English publications and practice, Moholy reached an ambivalent position on the nature and merits of camera photography. Although brief, this period represented the peak of his photographic activity, yielding the majority of his documentary subjects, half his colour experiments, and his only two ventures into commercial film. The photogram, as his 'most valid' form of photography,[21] remained his theoretical research tool. Significantly, in view of his analysis that painting, sculpture and architecture were tending towards 'space creation' and motion relationships, he regarded the photogram in 1933 as 'the most completely dematerialised medium which the New Vision commands'.[22] Applied camera photography depended on its revelations. However, the camera's impartial record of interrelated distortions arising from viewpoint, becoming especially emphasised from unusual angles, was a photographic fundamental that he had valued in amateur, accidental snapshots and recommended as exercises to Bauhaus adherents in 'the practice of seeing'[23] the modern world. Representation could be turned by the original artist from mere reportage to creativity, and productive results had already emerged from the still fresh exploration in 1928. He continued to favour bird's-eye and worm's-eye views in 1932.[24] In 1933 he spoke of the radical advances of camera work as comparable to those of the photogram.[25] In England, however, he regarded the oblique

[11] Cf. C: LMN to Fr. Kalivoda, June 1934, in FR. KALIVODA (ed.): *Telehor*, 1-2, Brno [1936], p.30; and LMN: 'Light-architecture', *Industrial Arts*, London [spring 1936], p.15.

[12] Hereafter, referred to as *Lightplay*.
LMN's published coloured-light-programme, fundamental to his *Light prop*, and last seen in 1931, was reconstructed for the exhibition on him at the I.C.A., London, which I selected and catalogued for the Arts Council of Great Britain, 12th January to 10th February 1980, cat. pp.38-39, item 11a.

[13] Cf. particularly, LMN: 'Produktion-Reproduktion', *De Stijl*, Leiden, Vol V, no.7 [July 1922], pp.98-100; and LMN: 'Richtlinien für eine synthetische Zeitschrift', *Pásmo*, pt.7-8, [1924], p.5 (the major part of this article is dated 1922).

[14] Cf. (a) [1925], p.37, and [1927], pp.26-27; (b), pp.68, 88-91.

[15] LMN: *Pasmo*, p.5.

[16] (a) [1925], pp.9-11, 20.

[17] (c), p.156. Although LMN explained (p.155) that this article was written in 1928 and delivered as a lecture at the Zehnte Deutsche Bilderwoche, Dresden (September 1929), his usual evolving procedures might mean that he was referring to the gist.

[18] LMN: Discussion on Kallai's article, *Malerei und Fotografie*, i 10, Amsterdam, vol.1, no.6 [1927], p.233.

[19] C: LMN to Herbert Read, 24th January 1934, as cited. Also, the late Fred Mayor, in discussion, 5th April 1972. No exhibition resulted. Mayor thought that Read had considered his gallery as most suitable for LMN because of an earlier exhibition there of Paul Leni's film drawings (1926).

[20] E.g.: 'O.B.': 'Two titles to remember', *Close Up*, London [July 1929], pp.69-70; J. DUDLEY JOHNSTON: 'The new photography', *The Photographic Journal*, London [April 1932], pp.155-56; and P. MORTON SHAND: 'New eyes for old', *The Architectural Review*, London, vol.75 [January 1934], pp.11-12.

[21] LMN: *Fotografie ist Lichtgestaltung*, Bauhaus, Dessau, vol.2, pt.1 [1928], p.5.

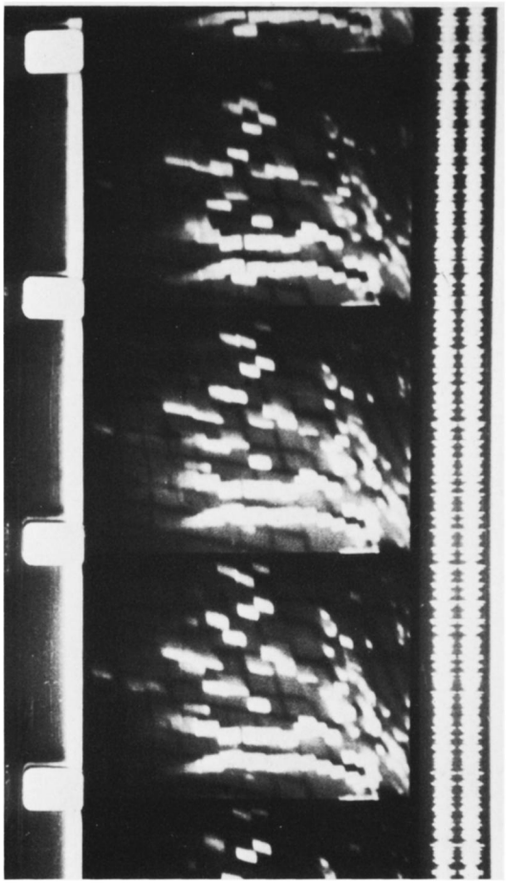
[22] (e), p.688. Cf. his general analysis in (b).

[23] LMN: 'Geradlinigkeit des Geistes – Umwege der Technik', *Bauhaus*, Dessau, vol.1 [1926], unpaginated.

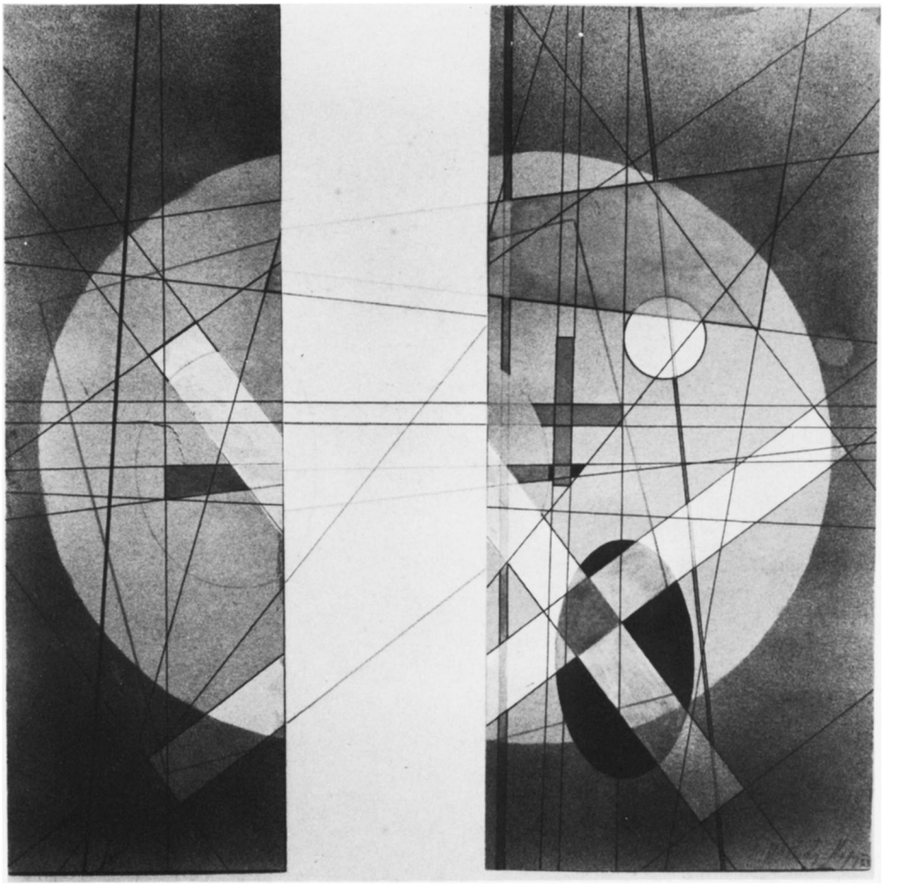
[24] (d), p.269.

[25] (e), p.688.

21. L. Moholy-Nagy (right) at Walter Gropius's departure for America, 12th March, 1937. (Gropius, left and Jack Pritchard, background).



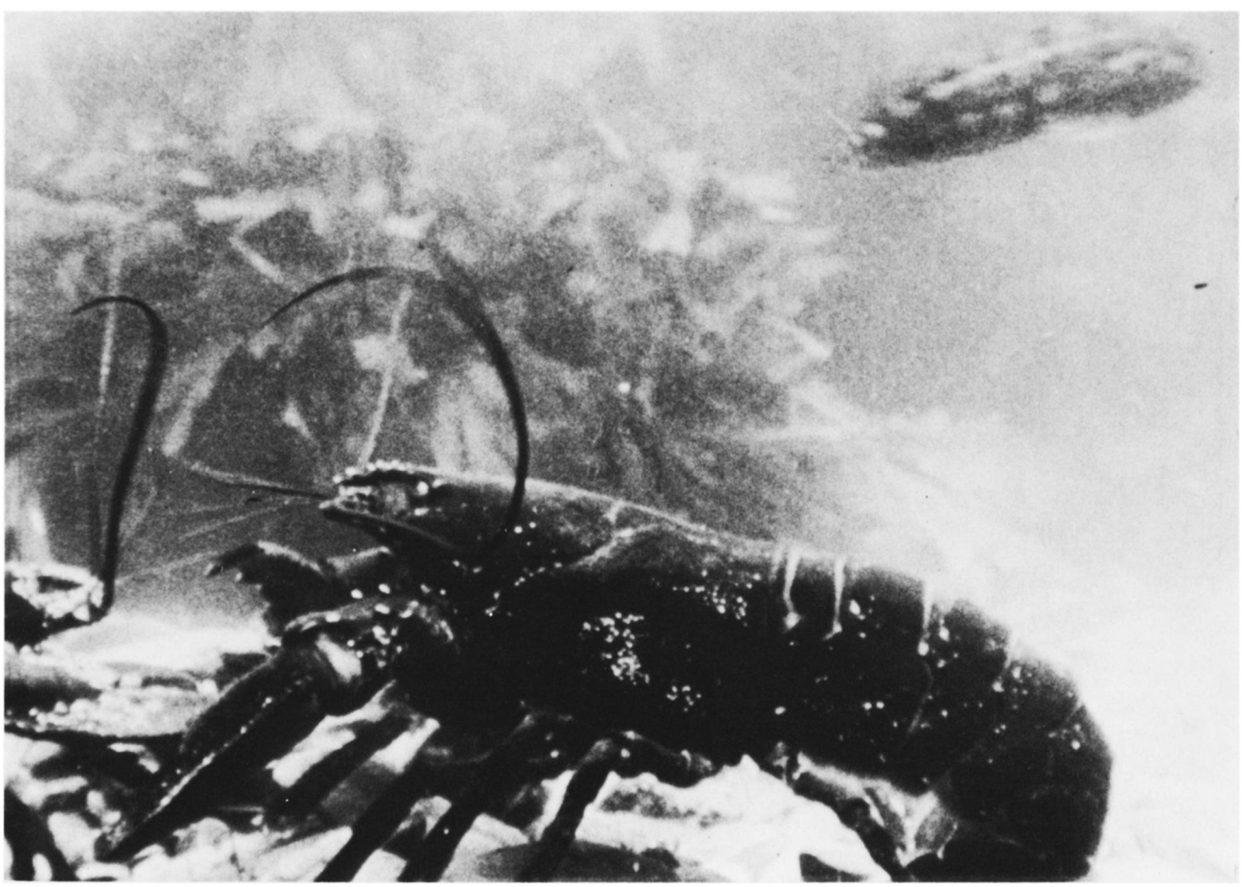
22. Special effect from the film *Things to Come*, by L. Moholy-Nagy. 1936.



23. *Untitled*, by L. Moholy-Nagy. 1923. Collage, pencil, ink and water-colour. (Annely Juda Fine Art, London).

24. *Portrait of The Hon. Penelope Chetwode (Lady Betjeman)*, by L. Moholy-Nagy. Winter, 1933. (Sir John Betjeman collection).

25. *Portrait of Harry Blacker*, by L. Moholy-Nagy. 1935-36. From a Dufaycolor transparency, 6.1 by 9.4 cm. (Harry Blacker collection).



26. Scene from film *Lobsters*. 1936.

angle as no longer sufficient, by this time fearing the risk that photographers might aim to create beautiful pictures 'by following a given list of directions'.[26] Nevertheless, unusual viewpoints had been, and remained, major devices in his photography. In 1936 he explained his experimental photograms as means to return to the origins, to discover 'new methods, new applications and new theories of photography' as 'an artistic force' in opportunities neglected by the dominant, representational line of development. He stated that once a certain stage of technical and artistic competence had been reached, camera photography offered 'nothing more to the man anxious for new achievement'.[27] Moholy's position had been anticipated in articles between 1928 and 1932, when he noted the danger of photographic demonstrations becoming regarded as accepted formulae for the easy production of beautiful camera pictures, and warned against misuse of the medium for individual artistic expression. By contrast, he reaffirmed the importance of the universal, educational function of modern photography, and, in England, stressed the consequent need to profit by this 'means of building up a new vision'.[28]

The main possibilities left to conventional photography lay for him in a more logical application of its narrative expression of scenes, persons and incidents in thematic series, forming an organic unit dissociated from aesthetics inherited from painting. He denoted the series as 'plainly the culmination of photography', an 'effective technique approximating to that of the film', and the film represented the climax of the photographic processes.[29] The precedent, from 1925, was his category of 'photo-text', in which photographs might replace text as a totally objective sequence of communication arising from inherent, visual, associative, conceptual and synthetic interrelationships.[30] It shared the range of expressive possibilities and concentrated, simultaneous experience that he had expected of the photoplastic. The photographic series would present economically the substance of a whole novel, poem or pamphlet, rather than imitate film structure with instants from a limited action. Consequently, committed social comment could oust his familiar, self-styled 'purely aesthetic principle of pictorial composition', as he declared in the book, *The streetmarkets of London* [1936].[31] The photographer's social responsibility was to reproduce a fragment of everyday life through sharp, accurate images, and prompt the viewer to socialist action by reaching him at his most effective, sublimi-

[26] Cf. LMN: contribution to *Modern Photography, 1935-1936,* London, The Studio Ltd [September 1935], p.18, and, on the threatened emergence of aesthetic formulae, LMN: *Wohin geht die photographische Entwicklung?* Agfa Photoblätter, Berlin, vol.8, pt.9, p.269, and LMN: 'Photography in a flash', *Industrial Arts,* London, vol.1, no.4 [winter 1936], p.302.

[27] LMN: 'We must turn back before photography can progress. Possibilities of series pictures', *Photography,* London [February 1936], vol.4, no.42 p.2.

[28] Cf. (c), p.158; (d), p.272; and LMN: *Modern Photography, 1935-1936,* p.18.

[29] Cf. LMN: *Modern Photography, 1935-1936,* p.18; and LMN's foreword to MARY BENEDETTA: *The streetmarkets of London,* London, John Miles Ltd. [1936], p.vii.

Film was accorded this status because, unlike the photogram, it could cope with constructed, raw light effects, which were usually in movement, (see: LMN: 'Light: a medium of plastic expression', *Broom,* vol.4, no.4 [March 1923], pp.283-284).

[30] (a) [1925], p.32.

[31] LMN: *The streetmarkets of London* [1936], p.vii.

nal level.[32] Enigmatically, however, in winter 1936 he could still measure photographic value 'not merely by photographic aesthetics, but by the human-social intensity of the optical representation',[33] and continue his 'purely aesthetic' compositions.

To represent his English production, the following will be considered: (a) experimental film work for *Things to come*; (b) the documentary, *Lobsters*; and (c) previously unpublished examples of still photography, with special reference to his Hull series.

Moholy's contribution to *Things to come* (1936), included in the five and a half minute sequence of the reconstruction of Everytown between 1970 and 2054, appears to have been made between early November and mid-December, 1935.[34] He had introduced himself to Alexander Korda's mammoth London Films, as well as to John Grierson's modest government documentary film unit, through his short, abstract film, *Lightplay*. Moholy had known Alexander Korda's brother, Vincent, a painter turned art director, since 1930.[35] The showing of *Lightplay* impressed not only the Kordas but their special effects director, Ned Mann, whose contribution to *Things to come*, was to reflect its influence. Originally, Vincent Korda's old friend Léger had been requested by the author, H. G. Wells, to supply the effects and modern settings. However, Wells was dismayed by Léger's drawings which recalled his film *Ballet mécanique* (1924). Next, Le Corbusier was asked, but declined, finding, like Léger, Wells's notion of a new, underground city-setting for old-fashioned pastimes incomprehensible. Finally, Vincent Korda designed the architectural settings, using Le Corbusier's *Towards a new architecture* [1927] as a guide. For his futuristic furniture designs, based on items at Heal's store, Vincent Korda acquired supplies of a new, but scarce, display plastic called Rhodoid, made, according to its manufacturers, in rigid, polished, matt or embossed sheets, rods or tubes, and available in a thousand colours.[36] Enthused by this material, Moholy asked studio craftsmen to construct many special effects models from it, and started a productive new phase of uncompromising experiment close to the light-fresco with implications for the colour film.[37]

Moholy found that Arthur Bliss's already recorded music determined the length and pace of the reconstruction sequence. Bliss had followed Wells's desire for the sound to become a generating, constructive partner of imagery, as conceived by Grierson.[38] Furthermore,

[32] Cf. (f), p.302: and LMN: 'Subject without art', *The Studio,* London, vol.112 [November 1936], p.259.

[33] (f), p.302.

[34] Judging by press reports on progress at the studio, and the activities of central protagonists.

[35] Much information in this section from the late Vincent Korda, in discussion, 2nd July 1971.

[36] Rhodoid advertisement and note in *Display,* London [December 1936], pp.533-34.

[37] Cf. SIBYL MOHOLY-NAGY: 'Constructivism from Kasimir Malevitch to Laszlo Moholy-Nagy', *Arts and Architecture,* Los Angeles, vol.83 [June 1966], p.28; RICHARD KOPPE: 'The New Bauhaus, Chicago', in ECKHARD NEUMANN, (ed.): *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People,* New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. [1970], p.237; and C: LMN to Paul Citroen, 16th June 1936 (B), reprinted in HANNAH WEITEMEIER, *et al.: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,* Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje [1974], p.96.

[38] Information from the late Sir Arthur Bliss, 3rd October 1974. Cf. also, SIR ARTHUR BLISS: *As I remember,* London [1970], p.105; and PETER GRIFFITHS, and DAVID J. BADDER and SIR ARTHUR BLISS: interview of March 1974 in *Film Dope,* Potters Bar, no.5 [July 1974], p.2.

themes and dominant movements were stipulated by Wells. He envisaged 'an age of enormous mechanical and industrial energy' with 'shots suggesting experiment, design and the making of new materials', rapidly dissolving in succession, and 'bridged with enigmatic and eccentric mechanical movements', ending in a 'fantasia of powerful rotating and swinging forms' which gradually smoothed in rhythm as efficiency overcame stress.[39]

Moholy worked with a trainee special effects camera assistant, Wally Veevers, in a small stage at Worton Hall Studios, Isleworth. Veevers recalls that Moholy 'was then creating and shooting a montage sequence of futuristic effects, using various coiled glass tubing, bottles, bubbling liquids, back light effects and smoke, etc. to achieve his aim'.[40]

When Moholy found eventually that, with dramatic episodes, much of his work was discarded, he was bitterly disappointed.[41] However, Vincent Korda has explained that the desired, total length was the sole cause. Vincent Korda's enterprising, initial conception, of colour and gradually expanding screen-image to commend Wells's planned future, also had to be rejected because technical processes proved inadequate.

Only some ninety seconds of Moholy's work, mainly light effects, remained, interspersed between Mann's machines. However, four discarded snippets were discovered in 1975, still in 35 mm negative form, amongst material inherited from London Films.[42] Included was the shot of revolving, transparent cones, multiplied by a prismatic lens, that Moholy singled out subsequently to allege editorial timidity.[43] Vincent Korda identified later the following as Moholy's shots in the film:

(a) a whirling grid of bent glass tubing, filled with mercury, which subsequently formed his *Kinetic sculpture* (1930-36);
(b) a recurring, oblique, latticed plane that becomes irregular, and transforms into a shooting spray of interpenetrating light particles (Fig.22), then a circular motif of light spots;
(c) a sparkling, wavering retort, viewed through louvred strips of Rhodoid, with background reflector;
(d) revolving, oil-covered rollers;
(e) illuminated, 'T'-shaped tubing in boiling liquid;
(f) a latticed, numerical meter in oblique shafts of light and shadow.

The gesturing, helmeted diver behind corrugated glass was also Moholy's creation.[44] Additionally, Vincent Korda indicated Moholy's involvement in, for example, the disturbing, contrasted motions of a diminutive technician travelling before giant, advancing generator components.

The recovered shots comprise:

(1) further footage of interpenetrating, rectangular light particles;
(2) a close-up, transparent sphere, filled with flaws which appear to interact confusingly as it revolves; alongside, a grid with streaming oil;
(3) superimposed rows of upright, opaque, perforated strips, with overhead vertical wires, moving diagonally in opposite directions;
(4) turning cones, string spiral and skeletal structures, multiplied and revolving clockwise *via* a prismatic lens.

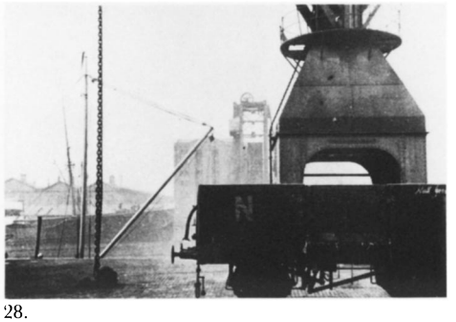
Aspects of all but e, f, and 1 appear in twenty-one of his twenty-five available set-stills. Vincent Korda, who did not know of the skeletal structures recalling Mies van der Rohe's model glass skyscraper (1921-22) until 1971, believed that here Moholy had simply created an opportunity to resolve his ideas about architecture. 'Ultra skyscrapers' were, in any case, expressly forbidden by Wells.[45]

Moholy's abstract sequences relied on his long established neutral, geometric strip, circle and grid forms, and non-illusionistic means of creating spatial tension between them by transparency, reflection, superimposition, repetition, reversal, dislocation, distortion, coincidence or varied direction (compare Fig.23).[46] Even his diver depended on mechanical distortion. The curriculum of his light studio, discussed in print three years earlier, anticipated these special effects. Here, his view of the far-reaching, educational duty of film to explore the new consciousness of space-time by light, motion and sound was central. His suggested trellis and skeleton mechanisms to produce background light and shade, and walls of variously absorbing and reflecting light had already appeared in his Berlin stage designs,[47] *Light prop* and *Lightplay,* from 1929 to 1931. The challenge of film, 'construction with movement itself', through changing, spatial relationships between stable forms, stemmed from his earliest 'productive' speculations,[48] and, in *Things to come,* clearly underlay his movements across or between rigid shapes and his gyroscopic, virtual volumes. A lost English film extended his exploration of motion in space-time by showing the opposed action of two adjacent white outlined circles, alternately expanding and contracting for about a minute against a black background before replacement by the caption, *'etc'.*[49] Furthermore, Moholy later identified spirals, transparency and distortion, present in several of his set-stills, as concentrated space-time symbols.[50]

He included telepathic possibilities of spatial experience in his vision of the intimate union between humanity and space,[51] and in England restricted his meditation to the working day when the minds of others would be too preoccupied to appropriate his ideas. He also

[39] H. G. WELLS: *Things to come,* London [1935], pp.91-93.
[40] Information from Wally Veevers, 13th February 1973.
[41] The late Dr Hans Juda, in discussion, 11th May 1972. Dr Juda accompanied LMN to the showing.
[42] Discovered by Lisa Pontecorvo, with the help of John Kelly, while researching The Open University television programme on LMN in autumn 1975, at Movietone News Library, Denham. (Information from Lisa Pontecorvo, 22nd November 1976.)
[43] (g), p.267 See also his reference to the use of oil drops, p.188, f.n.
[44] LMN published it as his own in (f), p.299; and, in reverse, in 'Why Bauhaus education', *Shelter,* Philadelphia [March 1938], p.9.
[45] H. G. WELLS: *Things to come* [1935], p.13.
[46] For a fuller account of LMN's development, see my two-part essay *Moholy-Nagy's vision of unity,* in the Arts Council catalogue [1980], pp.11-22 and 30-35.
[47] (c), p.157. Cf., for instance, his settings for *Tales of Hoffmann* (1929).
[48] LMN: *De Stijl* [1922], p.100.
[49] Harry Blacker in discussion, 12th May 1971 and 23rd November 1979.
[50] Cf. (g), p.256; and LMN: 'Space-time problems in art', *The world of abstract art,* New York [1946], p.9.
[51] (b), p.196.

27.

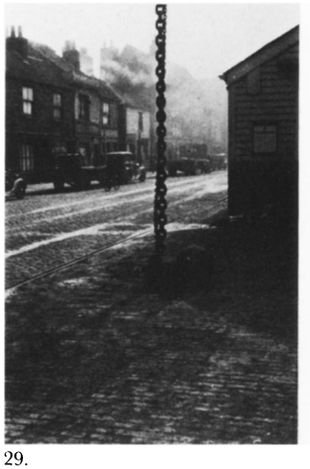


28.

27, 28. *Humber Dock Street: crane* (westward). This photograph has stains in sky area.

29, 30. *Humber Dock Street: crane* (southward)

31. *Humber Dock Street: crane* (north-westward).



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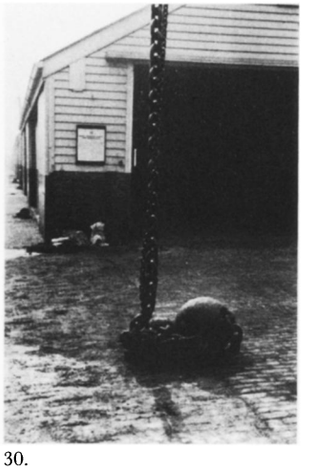
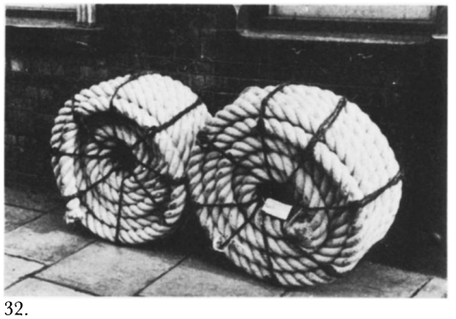


30.

31.



32.

32. *Humber Dock Street* (eastward).

33-35. *Humber Dock Street* (southward).

36. *Humber Dock Street* (north-westward).

33

34

35

36

37.

38.

39.

37-38. *Humber Dock Street* (westward).

39. *Minerva Terrace.*

Photographic series of Hull, by L. Moholy-Nagy. Early 1937. (Sir Leslie Martin collection).

40.

41.

42.

43.

44.

40, 41. *Nelson Street* (southward).

42. *Unidentified.* 43. *Nelson Street* (westward).

44. *Nelson Street: Corporation (Victoria) Pier* (north-eastward).

45.

46.

45. *Nelson Street: Corporation (Victoria) Pier* (northward).

46. *Unidentified.*

47*-49. *Nelson Street: from horsewash-ramp and moored keel boat* (westward). (*this photograph has stains in the sky area).

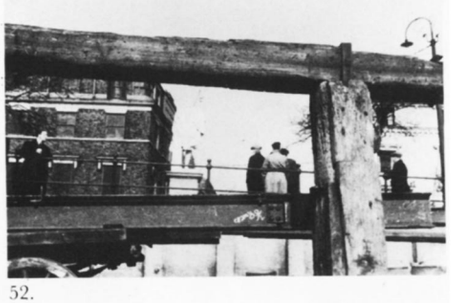
47.

48.

49.

50.

51.



52.

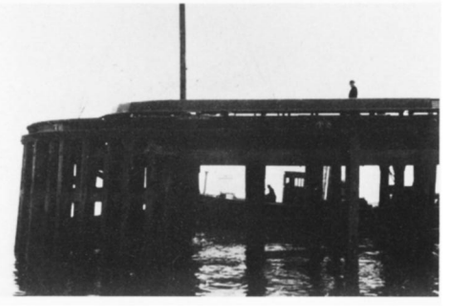
50. *Nelson Street: from horsewash-ramp and moored keel boat* (north-westward); 51, 52 (northward).

Photographic series of Hull, by L. Moholy-Nagy. Early 1937. (Sir Leslie Martin collection).

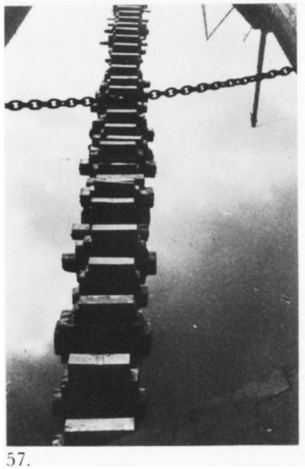
53.

54.

53, 54. *Nelson Street: from horsewash-ramp and moored keel boat* (north-westward).



55. *Nelson Street: from horsewash-ramp and moored keel boat* (southward); 56 (eastward).



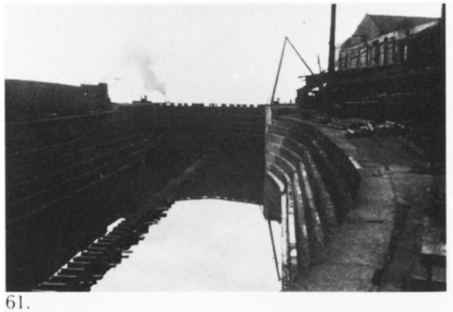
57.

58.

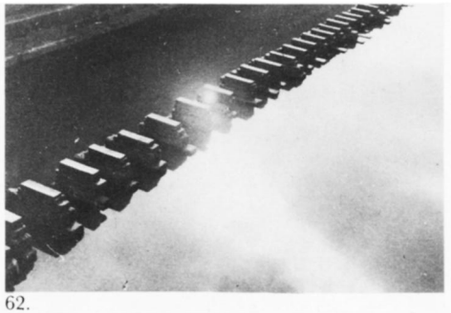
59.

60.

57-60. *Humber Street: Hull Central Dry Dock* (southward).



61.



62.

63.

61. *Humber Street: Hull Central Dry Dock* (southward); 62, 63. (south-eastward).

Photographic series of Hull, by L. Moholy-Nagy. Early 1937. (Sir Leslie Martin collection).

64.

65.

64, 65. *Unidentified.*

66, 67. *Queen's Gardens: Guildhall* (law courts; southward). Both photographs have staining in the sky area.

66.

67.

68. *Humber Dock Street* (southward).

69. *Nelson Street: from horsewash-ramp and moored keel boat* (westward).

70. *Humber Street: Hull Central Dry Dock* (southward).

Photographic series of Hull, by L. Moholy-Nagy. Early 1937. (Sir Leslie Martin collection).

believed in a type of biological clock, and at Simpson's had a chart of favourable periods for thought.[52] The light studio, he believed, should aim, through the 'abstract sound film', to determine subconscious, biological responses in order to control the film in its appropriate preparation for future social awareness. He considered that montage- and documentary-sound films would inevitably benefit.[53] In London he continued to construct sound by drawing profiles onto the sound-track as an experiment towards the optical and acoustic fusion of the 'montage-sound film'.[54] In the sound documentary he saw an obligation to 'extend our hearing towards hitherto unknown aural efficiency', comparable with what the silent film had done for sight.[55]

He had begun his documentary *Lobsters* by 20th July 1935,[56] and, on 6th June 1936, Beachcomber of *the Daily Express* reported its completion, much to Moholy's delight.[57] His producer and co-director was the head of Bury Productions, John Mathias, a wealthy amateur from the fringes of John Grierson's pioneering movement. Mathias had promises of backing from London Films, with the result that Vincent Korda saw the unedited 'rushes'. Dr R. J. Daniel, director of Liverpool University Marine Biological Station at Port Erin, Isle of Man, became the scientific adviser through Julian Huxley, a friend of Mathias, Secretary of London Zoological Society, director of a small documentary company, and connected with Grierson and London Films. Huxley's keen support for Moholy in America stemmed from this period.[58]

Moholy was very interested in the work of Grierson's G.P.O. propaganda film unit, and frequently visited to watch and discuss work in progress. Coincidentally, Stuart Legg recalls showing him sequences of lobsters manœuvring and fighting underwater (see Fig.26). The fascinated Moholy requested a repeat, occasionally muttering as he watched, 'Machines of war'.[59] The successful commercial and ideological example of Grierson's *Drifters* (1929) seems to have influenced Moholy's *Lobsters*. Both Moholy and Grierson believed in art as a by-product of the honest, lucid deed.[60] Grierson's potent social demand for film to educate the people to democratic citizenship in the modern working world by expressing appropriate dramatic patterns of significance, approached Moholy's view. However, Moholy's later *New architecture at the London Zoo* (1937) demonstrated that the domination of literary message over visual properties was only temporary. After all, Grierson had found the continental notion of motion-centred film, epitomised by Ruttmann's 'symphonist' *Berlin* (1927), not creative enough because there were no issues,[61] and, consistently, had bought a copy of Moholy's *Lightplay* for use only as eye-catching snippets in, for example, Legg's *The coming of the dial* (1935). Nevertheless, Grierson could amicably remember Moholy, of 'that German lot', as 'the one that let most light into the swamp'.[62]

With picture and spoken commentary, Moholy echoed *Drifters* by presenting a journey to the fishing grounds, the catch and natural hazards as ingredients of a dramatised patriotic 'ocean tale'.[63] The lobster fleet was filmed during its twelve mile, daily outings from Littlehampton and Brighton,[64] but the lobsters' habits were recorded in a set built in a photographing tank at Port Erin, where the creature was being bred. Daniel found that Moholy's ebullient, overriding concern for a well balanced story led him to dismiss certain scientific possibilities. Neither did Moholy show passing interest in their successful oyster breeding experiments. His approach was typified by an instance when 'he was as much excited with the appearance of beautiful air bubbles trapped in the shell as in the actual casting'. This episode in the allegedly murky, but actually shimmering, depths belongs to a striking range of illumination. Generally, standard English documentary camera techniques and positions appear, but a few familiar hallmarks occur in oblique viewpoints, geometric form, regimentation of objects, close-up heads and shifting the focus to the background, giving, for example, the looming lobster an unexpected immediacy. The commentary facilitated an economic eighteen minute experience, compared with Grierson's sprawling, silent hour. Even so, both commentary and nautical chorus, which a contemporary critic found 'strained and pseudo-lyrical',[65] suggest the commercial restrictions on Moholy's ideas about optophonetic synthesis and extending aural efficiency.

Although hampered by the lack of large scale facilities for objective colour exploration through, for instance, polarisation and the colour photogram, Moholy was experimenting with colour photography and colour application for films in May 1936.[66] Dufaycolor film manufacturers among others approached him to try their product. He regarded Seurat as the inspiration behind Dufaycolor's blue, green and red sprinkled receptors for transparencies and drew lessons from Cézanne's conscious, controlled use of receding and advancing colours for constructive, photographic interpretation of nature. He found his own Rhodoid paintings similarly indicative. His most familiar colour photograph, made at Simpson's studio, shows transparent Rhodoid samples intercrossed, so that their complex colour superimpositions, along with his long time exposure of 100 seconds at f.50 under a 1500 watt lamp, would strenuously test the

[52] Harry Blacker in discussion, 8th February 1980.
[53] (c), p.158.
[54] Harry Blacker in discussion, 12th May 1971 and 10th April 1980.
[55] LMN: 'Die Optik im Tonfilm', *Film und Volk*, vol.3, pt.6 [July 1929], p.9.
[56] Internal evidence of Gropius's undated draft greeting to LMN on his fortieth birthday. (B. 7/128a).
[57] Page 10. Also, Harry Blacker in discussion, 12th May 1971.
[58] Information from Dr R. J. Daniel, 23rd February 1974, and the late Sir Julian Huxley, 10th December 1970. LMN was also in charge of photography and editing of the film.
[59] Information from Stuart Legg, 3rd May 1974; and Basil Wright, 31st January 1974.
[60] Cf., especially, (b), p.8; and JOHN GRIERSON: 'First principles of documentary' [1932], reprinted in FORSYTH HARDY (ed.): *Grierson on documentary*, London [1966], p.151.
[61] JOHN GRIERSON: *Grierson on documentary* [1966], p.150.
[62] Information from the late John Grierson, 23rd December 1971. Cf. RAYMOND SPOTTISWOODE: *The grammar of the film*, London [1935], pp.86-87.
[63] The provisional title for *Lobsters* was *An ocean tale*.
[64] Harry Blacker, in discussion, 12th May 1971. Cf. ANON.: 'L. Moholy-Nagy', *Shelf Appeal*, London [November 1935], pp.38-39.
[65] A. VESSELO: 'Documentary films: Lobsters', *Sight and Sound*, London, vol.5, no.20 [winter 1936-1937], p.144.
[66] ANON.: 'Famous artist as display adviser', *Display*, London [May 1936], p.92.

film sensitivity for colour, sharpness and staying power. Here his ideas on colour key and pictorial transitions in films were clearly related.[67]

Moholy's portrait of his close friend and colleague, Harry Blacker (1935-36; Fig.25) is an exceptional addition to his minute, known colour *œuvre*. Also photographed at Simpson's, but in simple daylight conditions, this is possibly his only surviving original transparency. Blacker recalls his choice of suit and tie to present Moholy with a worthy test in broken colour and texture. Moholy commented little on specific items but he would often point out notable additive or subtractive effects. This subtle portrait demonstrates the significance of his preference for the concentrated, unenlarged image. In black and white reproduction, it evokes his frequent observation to Blacker that mastery of the greys brings mastery of colour.[68]

All of Moholy's English photographic series emerged from his contacts with fellow Mars members, John Betjeman, J. M. Richards and Leslie Martin. He had already met and photographed Betjeman's future wife, Penelope Chetwode, in Berlin[69] in 1933 (Fig.24). Within a month of arrival in London he had met Betjeman, former assistant editor of *The Architectural Review*, who recommended him to Harry F. Paroissien, a prime mover of John Miles publishers, an offshoot of Simpkin Marshall. The enthusiastic Paroissien commissioned him to illustrate Mary Benedetta's *The streetmarkets of London*, Bernard Fergusson's *Eton portrait*, and Betjeman's *An Oxford University chest*, for publication over the following three years.[70] Richards, then assistant editor of *The Architectural Review*, commissioned him to design and illustrate an article on seaside architecture for publication in July 1936, but by summer 1935 had begun photographic excursions with Moholy to resorts mainly in south-east England, concentrating on the new Bexhill Pavilion by Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff.[71]

Moholy's friendship with Martin led to a lecture invitation early in 1937 at Hull School of Architecture. This small school, formed by Martin in 1934 for the Royal Institute of British Architects to serve a large adjoining area of Yorkshire, had soon gained in reputation as an enthusiastic, stimulating centre. Another Mars guest, Bobby Carter, recalls the particularly decisive meetings there.[72] Moholy stayed with the Martins before 26th March, and his uncommissioned photographs arose from a morning stroll with them to the docks (Figs.27-65) and back to the centre (Figs.66, 67). Sir Leslie recalls Moholy's spontaneous choice of subjects, and his darting and diving for unusual viewpoints[73] with his manœuvrable, unobtrusive 35 mm Leica camera that had proved so convenient for candid work on his books.

Uniquely, his contact prints of Hull bear the frame numbers,[74] betraying the exact order of his complete creative procedure, and showing his vast selective enterprise in rapidly squeezing richly varied simultaneous, pictorial possibilities from even confined settings (7-11; 20-21; 23; 27-36; 37-43). With a concentration unknown to most contemporary English photographers, who consciously emulated classical painters or produced lax, spatial layouts of theatrical picturesqueness,[75] Moholy manœuvred the pictorial elements in his view-finder for a tautness intuitively determined by his painterly discoveries,[76] especially coincidences of line (e.g. Fig.28). Spatial devices appear in the frequent cellular divisions and 'simultaneous interceptions'[77] (e.g. Figs.45 and 51), as well as features discussed in 1929: wide perspectives; meeting and cutting surfaces; corners; intervals between moving objects; interpenetrating objects; and relationships of mass and light.[78] Kinetic effects by repetition occur, and surface treatment by massing discrete objects.

Moholy's formalism, which was temporarily reduced for the streetmarkets by his socialist 'impressionistic photo-reportage'[79] but accompanied by disenchantment with professional photography,[80] was quickly restored in the Oxford and Paris (June 1937) sequences,[81] and the Zoo film. However, in the Eton and Hull series, a midway point emerged. The two aspects are recalled by Blacker. During their walks, Moholy would stop suddenly to frame some object and its surround with his fingers as he discussed its abstract implications, or he would call at streetmarket stalls to browse through and purchase Victorian photograph albums which he regarded as highly valuable social records.[82] Fittingly, his Hull photographs have become a social document. Many subjects along his half-mile right angle of busy streets formed by Humber Dock Street (Figs.27-38), Minerva Terrace (Fig.39), and Nelson Street waterfront (Figs.40-56), are now derelict, altered, or demolished.

From establishment Eton and Oxford to popular streetmarket spectacle, and the forlorn unemployed of

[67] Harry Blacker in discussion, 11th February 1981. Cf. LMN: 'Paths to the unleashed colour camera', *Penrose Annual*, London [1937], pp.26-27; LMN: 'Supplementary remarks on the sound and colour film', London [1935], in *Telehor* [1936], p.42; and (g), p.154.
This Rhodoid subject, frame-size 13 by 18cm, was reproduced by LMN in *Penrose Annual* [1937], opp.p.28, with technical data, and in (g), p.171.

[68] Harry Blacker in discussion, 12th May 1971; 21st March 1981; and 11th February 1981. The suit is in rich, mottled fawn, flecked with vermilion.

[69] Information from Lady Betjeman, 20th February 1974.

[70] Information from Sir John Betjeman, 20th April 1971; and Harry F. Paroissien, 27th April 1971.
Cf. C: Sibyl Moholy-Nagy to LMN, 18th June 1935, for annotation in LMN's hand (S. 951:0170); and LMN's unpublished English notebook, p.12.

[71] Sir James Richards in discussion, 16th December 1971.

[72] Bobby Carter, in his vote of thanks for E. Maxwell Fry's talk, *The Bauhaus and the Modern Movement*, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, 22nd October 1968, unpublished transcript, pp.28-29. Carter was R.I.B.A. librarian in 1937.

[73] Sir Leslie Martin in discussion, 7th June 1971 and 11th October 1980.

[74] This series has survived only in the form of a single set of contact prints, individually gauged for picture density during processing, as indicated by the cutting and overlapping. Possibly, as Bernard Fergusson found regarding the Eton set, LMN destroyed the negatives (see B. FERGUSSON: *Portrait of Eton*, London [1949], p.10). John Morgan has meticulously reproduced the Hull series for this article.

[75] Cf. Madame Yevonde's talk of imitating Rembrandt, and her choice of classical 'Goddesses and others' as her exhibition theme for her photographic colour portraits in 1935 (YEVONDE: *In camera*, London [1940], pp.201 and 232). Elsewhere, a brand of insipid surrealism is evident. However, John Havinden and Edwin Smith are among notable exceptions.

[76] Hattula Moholy-Nagy remembers having watched her father follow such a procedure so that his composition would be completed in the view-finder, without subsequent cropping. (Hattula Moholy-Nagy in discussion, 8th September 1977.)

[77] A phrase from (e), p.688.

[78] (b), p.196.

[79] LMN: *The streetmarkets of London* [1936], p.vii.

[80] Sir James Richards in discussion, 16th December 1971.

[81] Published in ANON: 'Moholy-Nagy, picture hunter, looks at the Paris Exposition', *Architectural Record*, New York, vol.82 [October 1937], pp.92-93. (Exposition officially opened 24th May 1937).

[82] Harry Blacker in discussion, 8th February 1980 and 10th April 1980.

Hull (Fig.48), Moholy's camera arrested English life viewed through the eyes of the mainstream modern movement. In Moholy-Nagy, Read recognised 'one of the most creative intelligences of our time'.[83] In the average Englishman, Moholy perceived a 'lost optical and life quality'. He felt that the English had forfeited the experiences of colour and form, and, although well disposed to modern art, could confuse real achievement with the worst kitsch. He concluded that their business-like, numerical reduction of reality and lack of imagination required that 'everything, including design, must be conclusively presented to them'.[84]

[83] HERBERT READ: 'A new humanism', *The Architectural Review*, London [October 1935], p.151.
[84] LMN: English notebook, pp.17,40,42 and 43.

Shorter Notices

*Duncan Grant on a Sickert Lecture**

BY RICHARD SHONE

THE following description of Sickert and of a lecture he gave to the School of Painting and Drawing, Euston Road, was written by Duncan Grant on 6th and 7th July 1938. William Coldstream and Victor Pasmore, prominent figures in the running of the School, shared an admiration for Sickert and asked him to address the School (at 317 Euston Road, WC1) on the afternoon of 6th July. Sickert and his wife, the painter Thérèse Lessore (Figs.71 and 72), came up from London from their house at St Peter's-in-Thanet, and lunched at 8 Fitzroy Street in Vanessa Bell's studio. The adjoining studio (at the back of the house) had been Sickert's own during the First War and was taken over by Grant in 1920 (both were destroyed by enemy action in September 1940). Grant, Vanessa Bell and her son Quentin Bell were present.[1] The first part of Grant's account concerns the luncheon, giving a vivid impression of Sickert in old age (he was then seventy-eight). The second part, written the following day, is concerned with the lecture itself.[2] The event had obviously aroused interest, for the teachers and pupils of the School were joined by sympathetic friends and visitors. Among them were the French painter Simon Bussy, Clive Bell, Helen Anrep (who had helped finance the School) and the painter Keith Baynes.[3] thus several generations were brought together in their admiration for the doyen of English painting. It was, perhaps, admiration for Sickert's earlier work that drew many of them (as well, of course, as personal affection). His later work, frequently based on nineteenth-century prints and on photographs, was still controversial. The young painter William Townsend, for example, records Augustus John's denunciation of Sickert 'as nowadays a sham'.[4] Clive Bell voiced similar opinions at the time and again in his chapter on Sickert in *Old Friends* [1956]. And it seems that, from his detectable influence on some of the Euston Road painters, it was the earlier Sickert of Camden Town, Venice and France who was more revered and mined. In recent years the later work has gained in interest and popularity, particularly through the few included in the Arts Council exhibition *Sickert*, 1977-78. And this month an exhibition totally devoted to the late work (the first of its kind) opens at the Hayward Gallery, London.

The text which follows was written in ink on writing-paper headed '8 Fitzroy Street, W.1.'

'Wednesday, July 6, '38.

Sickert to lunch before lecture. Talk of the lady opposite who charged 10d and was very quick. Poking his head out of the curtains to amuse the children. Bessie Belmont[5] – like a butcher's daughter *en rut*. What was she like? Could she sing? could she dance? Not very well; she was a diseuse. Her friend the Duke – "the only Duke she ever loved and who loved her" – gave Sickert a lift in his barouche in Bedford Square – a newspaper boy with placard "Duke embezzles island". Sickert wished to stop and buy the paper. "No, no," says the duke, "a matter of no importance."

"I've known a great many actresses," he said, "but I suppose the greatest of all was Monteya[6]. I remember I had to play the *père digne* in 'La Dame aux Camélias' in Cornwall with her once at a great house for charity and they said I must have an imperial. So I went for a walk and saw the finest white tail I've ever seen on any donkey and with a pair of scissors cut some off and made myself a perfect imperial. I remember Monteya laughed in the final scene when I kissed her and said 'This is the first time I've ever been kissed by a donkey's tail.' "

Sickert

Old, very old in brown tweed tails, a blue linen shirt without a tie, a white beard, wonderful eyes ie. sympathetic and remarkably quick to take in any sort of impression, primarily of human character. No memory for names and very little for people whom he has met within the last twenty years but a very quick and vivid memory of names and people before that. A complete egoist with still extraordinary charm. At moments irritable and so completely dependent on his wife for most things; a great sympathy for youth and *au fond* very serious, not at all cynical. A very great dear but tremendously exhausting. Pathetic. Full of fun.

[7th July, 1938]

There was an awkward moment at Sickert's lecture yesterday when he turned to Clive [Bell] who was the chairman and said "Do I see Roger Fry there?" pointing to a grey haired gentleman in the audience and later when Clive asked Claude Rogers to say something Sickert again said "Roger? Roger? Is he here?" Complete forgetfulness I think for at lunch he had talked of Roger knowing him dead [Fry had died in 1934].

I sat next to Simon Bussy who was rather upset and astonished I think that Sickert had not recognized him.

*I should like to thank Mrs John Couper for allowing the text of Duncan Grant's MS to be printed here. The photographs of Sickert, taken in the late 1930s and here reproduced for the first time, were given to me by the late Keith Baynes.

[1] For Sickert's relations with the Bloomsbury painters and writers see W. BARON in the catalogue *Duncan Grant and Bloomsbury*, Fine Art Society, Edinburgh, [1975]m.
[2] The lecture is referred to in D. SUTTON: *Walter Sickert*, London [1976], p.242.
[3] The painter Rodrigo Moynihan, who was also present, remembers Sickert's initial reluctance to come to the point of his talk. He discussed the merits of the studio stove and began in a rambling fashion, mixing reminiscence with practical advice. Conversation with the author, June 1981.
[4] A. FORGE, ed.: *The Townsend Journals*, Tate Gallery, London [1976], p.35.
[5] A mistake for the music hall performer Bessie Bellwood.
[6] A mistake for the Polish actress Helena Modjeska (1844-1909). For another account of this story, set in Devon rather than Cornwall, see D. SUTTON, *op.cit.*, p.27.