Avant-Garde Photographics: Multidisciplinary Precedents Advancing Transdisciplinary Arts into the New Century

Las fotografías de vanguardia: los precedentes multidisciplinarios avanzan las artes transdisciplinarias hacia el nuevo siglo

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Summary

The multidisciplinary advent of avant-garde photographics in the early 20th century was a search for new directions. Ongoing transformations in innovations established the proto-modern era with European avant-gardes. Advancing new forms of photographic expression with an unprecedented breadth and depth of diversity. Setting precedents for transdisciplinary art practices and strategies, which continue to move past traditions, boundaries, and limitations today.

Individual contributions broadened new forms of proto modern photography -- with and beyond the camera and chemical darkroom. Support of emerging technologies, modern materials and media advanced the formative evolution of modern art across disciplines. Inventions from proto modern photography including modern photomontage, photograms, advances in cinema, exhibtion design, and color, expanded by modern printing methods, explored cross influences between media and materials.

Avant-garde photographics coexisted across classic boundaries that separated traditional art mediums by their limitations. Abandoning conventional art forms for inventive photographic possibilities.

Today transdisciplinary art exists without traditional subjects or genre. Moving the multimedia past into photographic ideas without category, art-historical narratives or divisions. Dichotomies and debates between real and abstraction, subjective and objective, documentary and constructed veracity, the elimination of definitions between original and copy, move avant-garde photographics in the 21st century beyond the modern era.

Resumen

La aparición de la vanguardia fotográfica a comienzos del siglo XX tuvo un carácter multidisciplinar, buscando nuevas direcciones en las que avanzar. Dichas transformaciones supusieron una era proto-moderna estrechamente relacionada con las vanguardias europeas. Nuevas formas de expresión fotográfica con una diversidad sin precedentes, al tiempo que establecía las bases para una práctica y estrategia artísticas transdisciplinares que continúan siendo hoy día un revulsivo para las tradiciones, limitaciones y fronteras del medio.

Las aportaciones de los diferentes artistas contribuyeron a la aparición de nuevas formas de fotografía proto-moderna, tanto en el ámbito de la cámara y el cuarto oscuro como yendo más allá de sus límites. Las tecnologías emergentes en la época, los nuevos materiales y soportes posibilitaron la evolución del arte moderno más allá de las disciplinas tradicionales. Algunas de las aportaciones de la fotografía proto-moderna, como el fotomontaje, los fotogramas, algunos avances en el ámbito del cine, el diseño de las exposiciones y el color, publicitados a través de los medios impresos, permitieron explorar las influencias mutuas entre soportes y medios.

La fotografía de vanguardia coexistió con el sistema de las artes, que separaba las prácticas tradicionales al tiempo que señalaba sus límites. El abandono del arte convencional supuso un impulso para la exploración de las posibilidades de la fotografía.

La transdisciplinariedad del arte contemporáneo ha acabado con las tradicionales diferencias de géneros y temas. El pasado multimedia ha dado paso a ideas fotográficas en las que ya no existen las categorías, los relatos pertenecientes a la tradición de la historia del arte o sus divisiones. La dicotomía entre real y abstracción, subjetivo y objetivo, veracidad construida y documentalismo, la eliminación de la diferencia entre original y copia, nos permiten llevar las ideas de las vanguardias al siglo XXI, más allá de la era moderna.

Palabras clave: Vanguardias fotográficas; fotografía proto-moderna; multidisciplinariedad; transdisciplinariedad; fotomontaje moderno; arte moderno; historia de los comienzos de la fotografía.

Key words: avant-garde photographics, proto modern photography, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, modern photomontage, modern art, early modern history of photography.

1. Introducción

As the dawn of the modern era emerged across Europe, proto modern artists made it their own. The first decades of the twentieth century witnessed new vocabularies and art forms by painters, photographers, printmakers, filmmakers, theatrical directors, sculptors, architects, musicians, and writers that were seeking new directions around the world. Experimental forms of modern photography contributed significantly to the mainstream of the evolution of modern art. From multidisciplinary combinations of materials and media to new applications of color and abstraction that combined realities from the camera to the darkroom and studio along with the modern printing press. Moving beyond traditional art forms and conventional modes of expression.

Photography, its scientific and chemical process, craft and emerging technologies, helped establish modern subjects, approaches, styles, and vision by artists from many disciplines and backgrounds. Major avant-gardists discovered new paths with unprecedented forms of photographic expression that expanded the palette of possibilities.

The diversity found in establishing various forms of proto modern photography shifted from the world of pure literal description and factual rendering made by the camera into other areas. Artistic intention defined modern photographic meaning in many forms and directions. What was selected as subjects with the camera became as important as the ideas created, with what the artist brought to the final form of expression. The shift from conventional practices to expansions and mixtures of genre into modern styles of content was historic. Contributing many innovative practices with real and generated subjects with inventive purpose. The creation of various forms of prints, from the chemical darkroom to ink on paper made from the printing press, also voiced modes of modern times that helped shape change, in art and life.

While the chronicle of early modern history remains to be written, especially with photography and related mediums, a wide range of artists established a

broad variety of approaches[1]. The complexity of innovations in multiple disciplines went far beyond the first black and white prints made only inside the chemical darkroom. Over the lifetimes and oeuvre of artists, modern styles, media, and diverse approaches were reinvented together with independent vision. Photographers worked through a wide variety of materials and means including photomechanical print-media with ink on paper as well as with other emerging technologies. Photographic works were made, remade, and reprinted in various media. Used and reused in a wide array of contexts that engaged the multiplicity found in the inherent nature and latent potentials of many photographic processes.

Proto modern photographers broke away from separating conventional art models or traditional genre to construct their own subjects based on the ocular realities based in the camera. Providing a visual discourse relying beyond the optical rendering of reality, which became a tool for the exploration of new meaning. They conceived a wide array of means with variants such as modern photomontage and other modern art forms. Broadening the use of photography in avant-garde publications, and life-sized photo-lithographic posters, as well as architecturally-scaled installations that expanded customary forms of exhibitions. While fabricating themes to-be-photographed in the studio. At times appropriating borrowed and used photographs made by others with the ink-printed page.

There was no limit to any single style or method. Applications of photographic ideas were broadened and designed to reach the masses. The meaning of the *original* created in artworks was reformed: enlarged to include a wide range of printing methods, even from the same negative with different media, sometimes made throughout years of recreating different variants.

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[1] For introductory research about early modern photography, see *Proto Modern Photography, The Artist and the Critic* from the exhibition *Proto Modern Photography*, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, 1992, created after initial discussions and encouragement by preeminent historian Beaumont Newhall to complete research, writing, and curating for the exhibition to begin to answer the question "from where did modern photography come?".

Avant-garde photographics used the repetitive processes beyond the limitations of the traditional medium of photography for a mixture of purposes. The basis resides more in enduring ideas than original finely-crafted prints from the chemical darkroom, which often became a means to other and further ends visually. Many innovations progressed in the studio and from the printing press as photomechanical prints including color made with ink on paper.

In the final issue of *Camera Work* in 1917, the modern art journal that included fine photogravures made with ink on paper that were hand-tipped into the pages throughout years of publication, photographers Paul Strand and his close friend, editor Alfred Stieglitz, defined their own formal style of modern photography. "Photography," they wrote, "finds its *raison d'être*, like all media, in a complete uniqueness of means…. The full potential power of every medium is dependent upon the purity of its use"[2]. The *purity* and *uniqueness of means* with the medium became key pillars to their aesthetics. In Strand's case with seemingly unaltered, objective photography as the proto modern era unfolded. While pure unadulterated forms of photographs were established and based in fine craftsmanship, printed from the chemical process of photography, they stood alongside innovative alternatives in modern art with other forms of photographic expression, especially in Europe. The wide range of methodologies found throughout proto modern photography are not limited to what Strand and Stieglitz emphasized in their own style of work, in terms of the *purity* and *uniqueness of means* of the medium.

At the same time, a majority of artists began with individual training in European art schools in the provinces. They started to move into larger metropolitan centers that were in historical transition after the First World War. Others worked in photography studios as well as in early developments emerging in modern cinema and theatre. Developing skills with a variety of mediums and disciplines, utilizing emerging technologies and media, materials, and nontraditional resources. To expand proto modern

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[2] "Photography," *Camera Work*, Numbers 49-50, June 1917, 3.

photography collectively beyond conventionally printed forms out of the darkroom and into the masses, including the expansion of expositions.

Key artists and collaborators such as Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova received education with experimental practice in the Art School in Kazan before the end of the First World War and moving independently to Moscow. Teacher and artist Nikolai Fechin encouraged experiment and discovery with a variety of art mediums. Fechin's mastery of human forms and expressive color provided a model of classic discipline with explorations into new paths of modern expression[3]. Rodchenko and Stepanova experimented with the mixture of traditional mediums. In Moscow they began to combine photographs from the printed pages of magazines and postcards in modern photomontage before using the camera or darkroom. At the time working to establish the Constructivist movement that combined abstract with real subjects in style. Related to the fast-changing urban environment, they provided revealing opportunities with countless potentials (F1).

F1. Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova in 1919: Ticket No1 (Knave of Diamonds) with cut postcards and two untitled with chemical darkroom photographs, two for the poem Ghaust Chaba and Construction, and untitled (construction collage), Costakis Collection and Archive, Museum of Modern Art, and the Museum of Byzantine Culture of the Metropolitan Organisation of Museums of Visual Arts of Thessaloniki. First modern photomontages by Gustavs Klucis, *Attack, Latvian Riflemen (Attack. A Strike at the Counter-Revolution), Design for a panel at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in Moscow*, modern photomontage with charcoal, ink and gouache, 1918, Collection of Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga.

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[3] For a comprehensive art history see Galina Tuluzokova, *Nikolai Fechin*, St. Petersburg, 2007 expanded into the English edition. Fechin left for the United States in the 1920s and eventually established his studio in Taos, New Mexico, which remains as a museum today.

Others collaborations and work by artists, first trained in traditional art schools such as Gustavs Klucis and Valentina Kulagina, László Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Nagy, Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz and John Heartfield, began to expand established genre such as portraiture, landscape, and still life with mixed methodologies, media, and combinations of materials. Developing a wide array of unprecedented proto modern content and meaning with media such as modern photomontage, which Klucis started in Moscow in the summer of 1918 by combining painting and drawing with cut and pasted photographs[4]. Based on the reality of the camera often without their own self-made photographs. Proto modern photography also included photograms (camera-less photographs) that evolved with other advances independently in the currents of progressive art movements rooted in Futurism and Cubism, as well as from centuries-old traditions in Greek and Russian iconography[5]. Artists and photographers embraced experimental facets of style and content in form, color, abstraction, and language, which added to the growing complexity of modern art.

Rodchenko combined subjects into broader themes including the human figure with architecture and topography. Inventive viewpoints often aided the increasing mobility of cinematic-based strategies discovered in emerging technologies. In his case with the invention of the smaller, cinematic-based 35mm still-camera that further influenced the etymology of modernism. In Paris during curatorial efforts to assemble avant-garde contributions at the

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[4] Iveta Derkusova*, Gustavs Klucis, Latvijas Nacionālā Mākslas Muzeja Kolekcijas Zinātniskais, Gustavs Klucis, Complete Catalogue of Works in the Latvian National Museum of Art*, Volume II, Riga, 72.

[5] See S. Yates, *Proto Modernios Fotografijos Aspektai: Avangardo Isotija Rusijoje, Europoje ir Centrinėje Azijoje, Facets of Proto Modern Photography: History of Avant-Garde in Russia, Europe and Central Asia* (https://ejournals.vdu.lt/index.php/mik/issue/view/1a45), *Meno istorija ir kritika, Art History & Criticism*, Number 12 (2016), 20-30, Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas,Vytautas Magnus University, Research Council of Lithuania, Kaunas; and *Byzantine Icons to Transdisciplinary Innovations in Modern Photomontage, От византийских икон — к междисциплинарным новациям в фотомонтаже модернизма* for the International scientific conference *The ARCHETYPE and universal in the art of the Christian world from Antiquity to the present: painting and monumental-decorative art, architecture and spatial environment*, Moscow, Collective monograph on the basis of the conference materials, January 25-27, 2018, MGHPA, Moscow State Art and Industry Academy named after S.G. Stroganov, МГХПА им, С.Г.Строганова, ISBN 978-5-87627-141-9, https://cloud.mail.ru/public/FyzM/K5fwvB1nM, 155-166.

Grand Palais in spring 1925, Rodchenko acquired the new Sept hand-held film camera and the Eka, the precursor to the 35mm Leica camera. He began to use the cameras to develop modern photographic style from high and low points of view. Beginning with the Eka camera in Paris then after returning to Moscow during the summer[6]. Bringing the artist's geometric and abstract directions from painting, modern photomontage, and sculpture into avant-garde photographics. To combine everyday reality transcribed with the extra mobile, hand-held camera, and to compose together with nonrepresentational diagonal views and geometric forms. A balance that the artist would establish uniquely in independent style. The majority of photographic works in his oeuvre are made near his family home in Moscow where he taught and worked with artist Varvara Stepanova next to VKhUTEMAS, the modern art school that began within months of the German Bauhaus.

The wide range of avant-garde photographics and practices provides an extensive overview of the intricacy of progressions found throughout early modern art history. Developments multiplied in proto modern photography, from the enhanced mobility with the new hand-held 35mm camera, to fine printing-making methods such as photographic lithography and accompanying printing-press technologies. As artists turned to ink on paper along with mixed media, color, and modern culturally-determined actions. Setting precedents for the digital world that would further unfold later in the twentieth century. Experimenters revealing unconventional ideas to the masses combined with optical, discursive, and discoursive imagery. Liberating a myriad of modern art forms into the mainstream of life with steadfast change. Including added color potentials that greatly enlarged the potentials of avant-garde photographics not yet available from the conventional, black-and-white chemical darkroom.

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[6] See "Rodchenko's Diverse Photographic Modernism: 'Changing the angle of observation from techniques to art', Paris, June 1925" in *Alexander Rodchenko, Abangoardiako argazkigintzea, fotomontaketea eta zinemagintzea (Modern photography, photomontage and film),* Bilbao: Fundación Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa Fundazioa Rodchenko, trilingual publication and exhibition curated and edited with the essay by Steve Yates, assembled by Curatorial Assistance and the Art Museum, University of New Mexico.

Avant-garde photographics falls within many collective areas and multidisciplinary mixtures of artistic practice. Methodologies that often directly combine interrelating ocular with subjective models. Providing a collective view in a widening diversity of modern photographic forms of expression through a wealth of styles and approaches. Extending precedents and contributions not limited to, and including modern photographic exhibitions, installations, theater and cinema, modern printing with color, abstraction, and language, and modern form.

2. Modern Photographic Exhibitions, Installations, Theatre, and Cinema

Architectural-scale installations and the use of large productions of photographs, especially in exhibitions and expositions were staged and applied in a variety of public spaces. By expanding the idea of strategy with new visual forms of exhibits with innovative avenues of expression on a larger than life-scale -- from municipal halls and streets to cinema and theatre. Utilizing photography in three-dimensional architectural spaces for original ways of design and function. The avant-garde expanded photographic forms such as modern photomontage to create architectural-scale works and over life-sized presentations, in two and three-dimensional constructions from the early 1920s to 1930s. Such work was interrelated with sculpture and painting in style and method to advance and combine multidisciplinary forms with a variety of media.

The young generation of proto modernists such as Gustavs Klucis from Latvia along with faculty and students in the state art school in Moscow known as VKhUTEMAS (acronym for Vysshiye Khudozhestvenno-Tekhnicheskiye Masterskiye, Higher Art and Technical Studios) experimented with further photographic forms in various architectural settings, created for open public display while offering multidimensional purposes. Establishing precedents in scale, themes, and subjects based on ocular realities of the camera that went far beyond conventional genre or

conventional darkroom methods. Klucis taught color theory at the school as well as experimented with large-scale modern photomontage and photolithographic processes. Including large format 9x25 meter portraits for projects commissioned by the Moscow City Council that employed over 200 workers (F2)[7].
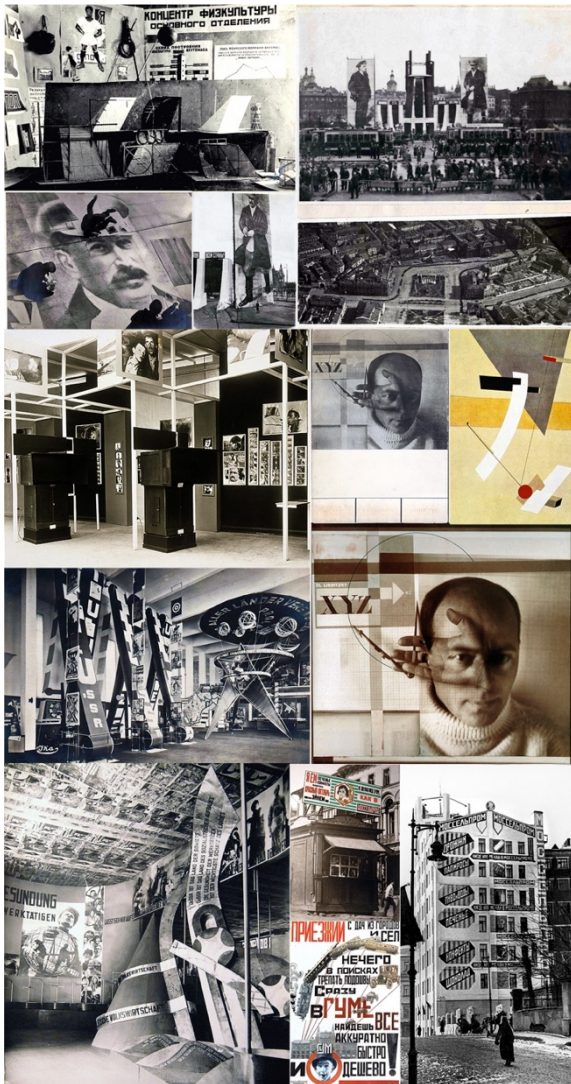
F2. Gustavs Klucis, VKhUTEMAS Architecture Faculty, student work from color, space, and architecture disciplines, 1923-1926, Collection of V.V. Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow; Views of The Dnieper Hydroelectric Power Station – the greatest achievement of socialist industrialization. Decoration of Sverdlov Square [Moscow] for the 1 May celebrations, modern photomontage installation, 1932, from the artist's Red Album, Collection of Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga. El Lissitzky, Russian Film Room with cinema viewers and modern photomontage exhibition installation, Film und Foto Exhibition, Stuttgart, gelatin silver photograph, 1929; Cover Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit (Photo-eye: 76 photos of the time), Stuttgart: F. Wedekind, 1929; Proun 12E, oil painting, 1923, Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum; *The Constructor* (self-portrait), combination print from two negatives, gelatin silver photograph with ink and gouache, Courtesy of the State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, photograph by A. Sergeev. *Entrance to Soviet pavilion at the International Hygiene Exhibition*, Köln, modern photomontage architectural installation, gelatin silver photograph, 1930 and Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova, *Mossleprom photomontage advertisement "Einem biscuits, 1923"* on top of kiosk, Moscow, painted photomontage, 1924, and *Mosselprom Building* with typographical modern photomontage, gelatin silver photograph, 1925; Alexander Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakovsky, *advertisement for GUM*, modern photomontage, 1923, Collection of V.V. Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow.

Modern exhibitions and installations as well as the cinematically-integrated and oversized photographic elements that included modern photomontage originated from the studio to the printing press, produced new experiences in

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[7] Iveta Derkusova, *Gustavs Klucis, Latvijas Nacionālā Mākslas Muzeja Kolekcijas Zinātniskais,* Volume II, Riga, 170-171. For a thorough history with curricula of VKhUTEMAS see S. Khan-Magomedov, *VKUTEMAS*, Paris: Éditions du Regard in two volumes, 1990.

architectural spaces. They consisted of large photographic displays, constructed theatrical sets with two- and three-dimensional designs. Often created and fabricated to be photographed from the studio. Combined with other hand-made and modern materials in multiple scales and dimensions. Exhibitions in large and small rooms, to various architectural sites and outdoor displays, became part of the artist's working methods with optical and discursive vicissitudes. Photography was a common universal language applied with multidisciplinary discoveries from the art of the avant-garde. For the masses, moving beyond conventional exhibition walls, serving artistic, educational, advertising, promotional, and political purposes throughout Europe.

Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova in collaboration with the modern poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, created extensive works with photography and language, from the printed page to large scale applications on buildings in Moscow. Taking their ideas from the studio to the everyday world, they applied proto modern forms of photography and photomontage within various mediums and structures.

El Lissitzky's designs with photography, modern photomontage, and cinema with inventive three-dimensional forms and architectural spaces were especially originated and designed for exhibitions and theatre throughout Europe. From museums to exposition halls, his innovations helped set new standards for photographic productions and staging that included unprecedented functions. Investigating and developing abstract proportions of space with sculptural dimensions. Combining ocular realities based through the camera with his abstract Suprematist Proun paintings in sensibility[8]. To amplify architectonic ideas by merging a variety of media and disciplines with photography to move into three-dimensional installations.

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[8] Проун (Proun, the "Project for affirmation of the new" and as Lissitzky described it, as an 'interchange station between painting and architecture'. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky, Life, Letters, Texts*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1980/1992, 21.

Lucia and László Moholy-Nagy invented their own abstract language with light in cameraless photographs, first noted as shadowgraphs and later known as photograms, experimenting together beginning in 1922. Without the camera, lens, or intermediary film, they placed and moved objects sometimes with multiple exposures of light over light-sensitive photography papers and develop chemically into final prints[9]. Constructing a language of transparency, light, and form that influenced Moholy-Nagy's emerging oeuvre into thirteen mediums, from photograms to painting, drawing, printmaking, theatre, filmmaking, and kinetic sculpture. Merging abstraction into the perception of reality that defines ocular cognizance with images of light and movement. A reduction of photographic terms that broadens experience and understanding through seeing. Moholy-Nagy like Lissitzky displaced written language with new forms of the visible world in modern practice and theory. Eliminating the traditional divisions between art mediums and disciplines while often fusing actuality with abstract veracity (F3).

F3. László Moholy-Nagy, *Light-Space Modulator*, kinetic sculpture and photographs, 1922-1930, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University; untitled photograms 1922 and 1930, Collections of National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; view of modern installation of *Licht-Raum Modulator*, replica 1970, Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven; film stills *from ein lichtspiel: schwarz-weiss-grau, light play: black-white-gray*, 1930. Interrelationships between printed media, modern photomontage, cinematic montage, and modern theatre: Vertov and Kaufman brothers, Eisenstein, Rodchenko, Lucia and László Moholy-Nagy, and Lissitzky.

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[9] Renate Henye and Floris M. Neusüss with Hattula Moholy-Nagy, Editors, *Moholy-Nagy, The Photograms, Catalogue Raisonné*, Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009.

Filmmakers Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein as well as other modern filmmakers devised related cinematic techniques including montage, nonrepresentational editing, and staged filmic sets to reveal further interactions between history and the emerging milieu of modern life. Expanding realism in time and space with abstract structures, movement, and fabricated realities to create truths with the medium of film, moving with and beyond the immediacy of the camera. Using everyday-like events to create further messages animated by editing with additions of filmic montage. Expanded further with staged sets and interacting chronicles with photography to enlarge narrative traditions into modern realities, also onto the printed page of avant-garde journals and photolithographic posters. Collaborations with film crews and experiments combined modern film and photography to create hybrids and interactions throughout and between a variety of related mediums.

Modern cinema and theatre broadened and set precedents for contemporary installation works and setting a platform for video art in the late twentieth century. As well as historic innovations in contemporary photographic installations, which move from the modern era into a wider range of transdisciplinary potentials in the twenty-first century. Continuing to move into new modes of expression with digital technologies that continue to advance exhibition forms, installations, postmodern photographics, theatre, and cinematic practices.

3. Modern Printing and Color

With the advent of modern industrial printing presses, related technologies, color ink processes, and virtually unlimited re-creations of photographic materials on the printed page, came extraordinary artistic possibilities. Photographic multiples created with ink on paper rather than the limited, black and white chemical prints made from the darkroom, became prolific sources in wide-ranging forms of proto modern photography. The intrinsic character of repetition found in the photographic process was multiplied by

various technologies including the printing press. Emerging mass media from innovative journals to lithography, letterpress, and other forms of photomechanical printing with color, provided new avenues of avant-garde photographics.

Alternatives with color expanding the structure of black and white photographs became an expansive model of reality ranging from literal references of the visual world, to moving into the modern world under construction. Color added in the studio with various media from painting and drawing to inks on paper became an art in its own right with limitless possibilities. While some artists received training in painting and related mediums in the arts, others produced new dimensions with color by other means. Through their own individually developed working methods, they created new facets of color before color film and its companion chemical processes existed. While the structure of black and white photographs was a model of reality with literal references to the visual world, color coexisted with various degrees of independence that entered into abstract and nonrepresentational strategies. Artists moved further from simply rendering or vivifying reality with various forms of hand applications of color. From mixtures of oil paint to watercolor and gouache in the studio, to color pigmented inks on the printing press, color became an autonomous component of expression in its own right.

Collaborations between artists, writers and poets added new sensibilities in color with photography. They made use of the added modern element with self-referencing freedoms. The idea that color could exist with various photographic forms in a variety of media was a challenging proposition that was directly associated to modern abstract painting and historical iconography.

Two of the leading collaborative artists in developing modern color were Gustavs Klucis and Valentina Kulagina. Together they created one of the largest bodies of work in color with ink on paper, from large photolithographic prints to other printed forms including modern photomontage. Their methods of applying color inks through various

printing processes in all scales and sizes became a fine art form in its own right. Painterly forms of color sensibility also merged photography with language and design, which also played an increasingly central role, rooted in the Byzantine era[10]. Found photographs were used alongside photographs the artists created in the studio and darkroom, to create themes and subjects with more expressive structures of color and form (F4).

F4. *Icon of St Agios Athanasios* [Pope of Alexandria, third century], 15th century and two icon scenes of the life of *Josef from the Old Testament*, oil on wood panel, 1677-1682, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki; modern photomontages by Klucis, *The Development of Transportation*, 1929, Collection of Russian State Library, St. Petersburg; three photographs of Klucis and Kulagina in studio for photomontages, c 1926-1928; Kulagina, *Day of Women Workers*, 1930, Collection Russian State Library, St. Petersburg; and Klucis, *Cultural Construction*, 1928, and nine color modern photomontages for Moscow Spartakiada, 1928, Collection of Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga.

Primary color, allegorical scenes from life, multiple perspectives, complex two and three-dimensional spaces as windows on the world, the use of geometric pattern and form, figurative elements with architectural form, function with display, and sculptural elements in time and space, expanded their art into new realms of photographic expression. Modernists developed a myriad of ways in how to add color and integrate it successfully as avant-garde photographics laid historical precedents especially with ink on paper outside the darkroom. Establishing unrealized potentials for color with ink on paper that continue to expand with digital technologies progressing into the twenty-first century.

4. Abstraction and Language

From the independent and nonreferential applications of color to the wide variety of modern forms of abstract expression, the avant-garde pursued visual discovery without the boundaries between the photographic medium and other art forms. Pioneers helped introduce elements of abstraction into the realistic lexicon of black and white photography especially with advances in modern painting, printmaking, cinema, architecture, and sculpture. Photography also became an additional means to help transform the emergence of the modern languages into art. Through a mixture of approaches and disciplines, modern language merged with art and design, contributing more than what traditional art mediums alone could offer independently. From the studio and printing press innovative ways of seeing became a critical part of modern prototypes. Abstraction and geometric form made with the camera, photographics originated in the studio and beyond the darkroom, advanced unparalleled new dimensions within the mainstream of modern art.

Innovative ways of seeing became an important part of prototypes in modern photography. Geometric form, line, values, diagonals, curves, and light combined with traditional components from other art forms, helped shape images crafted from the real world with the camera. Various growing

alliances between modern literature, art and photography opened further doors with the modernization of language. The avant-garde merged the morphology and visible patterns of language with visual facets drawn from painting, abstraction, and newfound materials. Language served as visual counterparts with photographic elements ranging from the literal to the abstract. The pictorial and geometric character of printed letters and words were used with nonrepresentational and narrative forms through a variety of media. Elements of language became counterpoints in parity with modern photographs, photomontage, cinema and photomechanical prints with color ink on paper that was originated with the printing press. From advertising to books of poetry, journals, books, and posters to other printed matter, the unique character of Cyrillic and European language lexicons served as independent and fundamental elements in final forms of expression (F5).

F5. László Moholy-Nagy, selected covers of *Bauhaus Bücher*, 1923-8. Aleksandr Rodchenko, cover and page with modern photomontage from *Pro Eto* by Vladimir Mayakovsky, cut photographs with watercolor, gouache and ink, 1923, Collection V.V. Mayakovsky Museum; Elena Semionova, *Aviation Mainstay of Peaceful Labor*, modern photomontage, 1926; El Lissitzky, front page *For the Voice* by Vladimir Mayakovsky, 1923; Rodchenko covers for Mayakovsky's book of poems, *Syphilis*, 1926, Ilya Ehrenburg's *Materialization of Fantasy*, 1926 and cover verso for Mayakovsky's *Conversation with the Finance Inspector About Poetry*, 1926. Raoul Hausmann, *Der Dada*, Number 3 with modern photomontage cover by John Heartfield and page by George Grosz, *Daum marries her pedantic automaton, George May and John Heartfield are very glad of it*, modern photomontage with watercolor, 1920, Collection Institut Valencià d'Art Modern IVAM, Valencia, Spain; Hannah Höch, *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands, Cut with the kitchen knife Dada through the last Weimar beer-belly cultural epoch in Germany*, modern photomontage, 1919-1920, Collection of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Max Ernst, *Song of the Flesh (The Shitting Dog)*, modern photomontage with poetry, 1920, Collection Musée national d'art moderne. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. El Lissitzky, modern photomontage pages from Katalog des Sowjet-Pavillons auf der Internationalen Presse-Austellung, Köln 1928.

The use and mixtures of modern language, such as bringing the linguistic realities drawn directly from realism on the street in the case of poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, complemented modern visual elements created with photography. Bound to the veracity of the camera to help broaden styles and innovative approaches through unmatched trials and experiments.

Narratives became an ever-increasing new genre with staged scenes and theatrical settings for the avant-garde in a widening range of photographic media. In 1923 Vladimir Mayakovsky created one of his major formative contributions in the book of poetry *Pro Eto* (It). His personal poems centered on the daily separation with passages articulated and imagined from everyday experiences with lover Lily Brik. Rodchenko illuminated passages with eight companion modern photomontages from ten original works. Two were not published. The cover photograph of Brik made by Abram Shterenberg was cut, pasted, and combined with black ink and hand-made color. Like others throughout the photomontages inside the book, they exemplify modern photography invented from the studio. The persona of Brik, Mayakovsky, and other individuals in various photographic forms, serve as powerful visual counterparts to the free verse from the street that reveals true passions for everyday life in the 1920s. "I catch my balance…" is a modern spectacle as Mayakovsky stands atop Ivan the Great Bell Tower in St. Basil's Cathedral Square from the heart of the Kremlin, which at the time was the tallest structure in Moscow (81 meters) built in 1508. Lily Brik viewing from below with the masses, in a stance away in front of tall modern building structures and symbols, from the airplane to automobile, tire, and war gun cannon on a railroad car, watches as the modern world moves by in diagonals. Language and modern photomontage animate each other in mutual correspondence:

> *With arms spread crosswise –*
> *Like a cross on the dome –*
> *I catch my balance,*
> *waving crazily.*
> *Night thickens.*

Nothing is seen in the gloom.
There's the moon.
beneath me,
the Mashuk looms hazily.
Struggling for balance
begins to tire me.

Human elements created throughout Rodchenko's wide range of figurative and fragmented images and integral spaces, are a centerpiece offering parallels in visual narratives between everyday language and life. The stark realism and documentary style of the book of poetry, expanded independently by modern photomontage, represent the complexity of change in modern omniscience and existence. Articulated together in meaning from photographic imagery to visually amplify the poet's personal lyric verse[11]. The collaboration exemplifies and underlines the importance concerning human elements and modern sensations in the widening diversity of contributions by the early modernists in all mediums.

The German Dadaists invented their modern photomontage with pasted photographs cut from fragments of magazines and newspapers in various languages to mimic, mock and satirize modern art forms including exhibitions. To criticize German politics, military, and the bourgeoisie of middle-class society, for their failure of complacent values, which supported their culture leading to the First World War. Without predetermined compositions taught in art schools or mindful established forms of design, they added fragments of everyday life cut from photographs in printed magazines and newspapers to express the disarray and chaos of everday post-war culture.

Others would take Dada and abstract sentiments further to combine language with the unconscious and dreams that established early forms of Surrealist discourse and expression with photography. Such as Max Ernst's

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[11] For an insightful history of the poem, modern photomontages, publication, and individuals during the period, including the ten original photomontages now in the collection of the V.V. Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow, see Alexander Lavrentiev, *Vladimir Mayakovsky, Pro Eto*, Berlin: Ars Nicolai, 1994.

exchanges between modern photomontage combined with incongruous juxtapositions in visual content and personal poetry, such as *Song of the Flesh*:

> Le chien qui chie le chien bien coiffé malgré les difficultés du terrain causées par une neige abondante la femme à belle gorge la chanson de la chair

> The dog who shits the well-coiffed dog despite the difficulties of the terrain caused by abundant snow the woman with the beautiful bosom the flesh's song.

5. Modern Form

Manufactured objects from factories and other forms of industrial production taking an ever-increasing role in everyday life became increasingly fresh subjects for the early modern photographer. Engineered materials and structures became a part of content in their own right. Original themes and viewpoints, such as those made by smaller cameras and mass-produced materials, further expanded the industrial character of manufactured objects and architecture found in everyday surroundings.

The early modern photographer concentrated upon the distillation of industrial produced shapes and everyday forms in many ways, from subjects created with the camera and the darkroom, to expanded models created in the studio to the printing press. Common objects, mechanized forms, industry, daily urban scenes and themes, provided an array of new subjects for avant-garde photographics in many mediums. Through the concentration on structures, industrial design, and technology that were combined with abstraction and geometric character originated throughout modern art in all mediums (see F6 for subsequent referenced images).

Rodchenko brought three-dimensional forms from related earlier works in his painting and sculpture into the first year that he began to use the camera. His study of a "three-dimensional photomontage for book cover of Constructivist poets" began as a studio still life. Cut photographs were assembled with small plates of glass, typographical elements, compass,

triangles, ink, pen, and pocketwatch to create the complex multidimensional work. In many ways the sculptural aspects of his staged, modern photomontage construction speak to his own development as an artist in many mediums. The composition indicates references to painting, printmaking, architecture, and sculpture before acquiring his own camera at the end of December 1923. "Three-dimensional photomontage" is as much a self-portrait as a multimedia experiment for the book cover of Constructivist poets that is centered in various proto modern forms of photography.
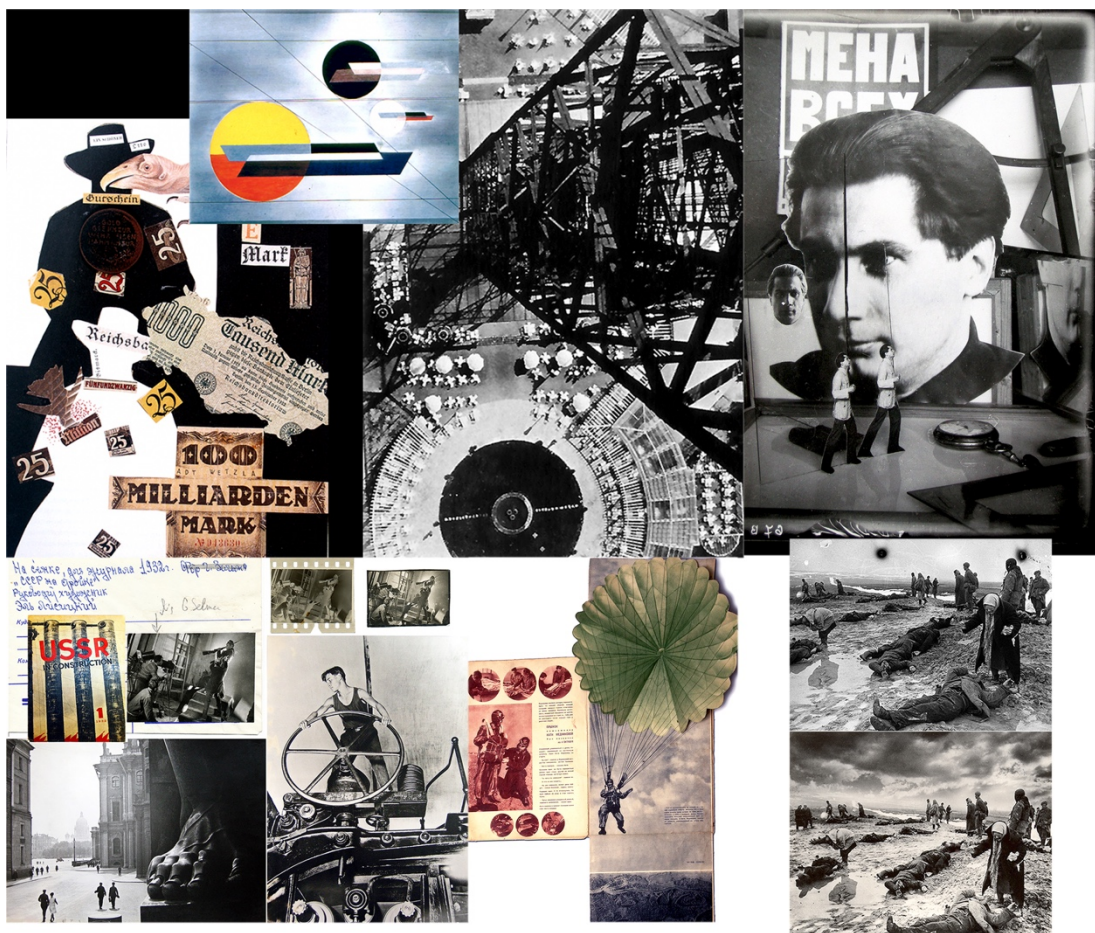
F6. László Moholy-Nagy, *Bankruptcy Vultures*, modern photomontage, 1922-1923, Schwarz Collection, Israel Museum; *The Great Aluminum Painting ALII*, oil on aluminum, 1926; *Radio Tower Berlin*, gelatin silver photograph, 1928. Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Three-dimensional photomontage study for book cover of Constructivist poets, Mena Vsekh (Change of Everybody)*, gelatin silver photograph, 1924, Private Collection. *USSR in Construction No. 1, 1932* including staged photographs by Simon Friedland, Georgi Zelma, and El Lissitzky, negative and envelop with hand writing in ink and pencil, contact print, *On set of USSR In Construction*, gelatin silver photograph, 1932, Collection of Paul Harbaugh; Boris Ignatovich, *The Hermitage*, 1932 and Anatoly Shaikhet, *Komsomol Youth*, 1929, gelatin silver photographs, Collection of Sergei Burasovsky. Varvara Stepanova, *СССР на Стройке, USSR in Construction*, No. 12, December 1935, Parachute Issue and Dmitri Baltermants, *Kerch, Crimea, January 1, 1942*, gelatin silver photograph, and *Grief, Kerch* [with clouds], combination print from two negatives, Collection of Paul Harbaugh.

The photographic process, with its intrinsic reproducibility and countless variations created in many ways inside and outside of the darkroom, offered few limits compared to other traditional art mediums. Artists crafted multiple subjects with the eye through a machine, the camera, rather than creating unique or one-of-a-kind imagery by hand with pencil or paintbrush. The optical realism of photographic images made by the lens could be multiplied, introducing variable aspects of modernity in form, meaning and content. The avant-garde expanded the idea of modern photographics even further.

Photographic themes of repetition, from manufactured commodities and daily products, to the human figure, became common subjects in repetitious variants. Continuous production and the industrial spirit represented transformation in modern life and culture inside the new milieu of possibilities. The early modernists took advantage of the mechanical and optical nature of photography to emphasize the expanding lexicon of modern art moving beyond hand and eye. Proto modern photographers contributed avant-garde photographics in ways that other art forms could not. As an ideal modern medium with unlimited repetition, they expanded the visual lexicon of photography as well, which represented constant change in living day after day.

The avant-garde broadened the use of the human figure as a universal subject and object. The individual physique and visual characteristics of the body played an important role in compositions, themes, and viewpoints beyond personality. As independent visual elements, human forms offered a complexity of new potentials in meaning. From the simplicity and reduction of human shapes made with the camera, to the staged use of individuals in narrative sequences, the modern photographer as auteur directed a wide array of imagery and precedents for new types of genre.

Georgi Zelma, El Lissitzky, and Simon Fridland worked together to photograph and design special issues of the *USSR in Construction* published in Russian, German, Spanish, French and English from 1930-1941 and briefly in 1949, as the journal became a state-sanctioned sanctuary for modern

photomontage and photography. Military characters fashioned and dressed in lighted sets by the three photographers were staged with inventive dedication and imagination. The anonymous figures in military dress with weapons provided role modeling to create a social model for the masses. Theatrical lighting, angled points of view, and chosen gestures with each figure strengthened the fortitude of growing military spirit leading into the Second World War.

Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova made some extraordinary examples created in multiples also with the modern printing press. The issue of *USSR in Construction*, Number 2 in February 1937 was dedicated to military parachutists. The Russian edition included a three-dimensional foldout paper parachute, printed in color and attached to the page. The sculptural form extended from the printed journal page into the reading space of the viewer. Form and function were intermixed with modern photography in ways that redefined the role of the reader expanded with avant-garde photographics. Figurative and abstract foldable elements merged into one. Such narratives became an important part of the avant-garde's treatment and subsequent development of the modern figure. As Soviet purges increased at home in the USSR before the Second World War, the freedom of expression was reduced to propaganda and ideology. By the War the era and initial contributions of proto modern photography and avant-garde photographics ended in Europe.

The early modern photographer moved beyond traditional portraiture and literal descriptions of individuals. Human shapes, forms and structures, from the individual to the masses, played a more active role in their art -- from photographs to photomontage, avant-garde journals, and photolithographic posters, to other photomechanical prints with the expansion of visual elements in color. Modernists added personal approaches in style and vision to each subject with selections and points of view. Even documentary subject matter that depicted everyday scenes was seen and composed in very different modern terms.

The landscape as subject and traditional genre shifted primarily from natural forms and horizons in the nineteenth century, into the industrialized and urbanized topographies constructed in the early twentieth century. The impact and influence of human-made and fabricated elements, from architecture and industry to war, became an inextricable part of the modern landscape in character and essence. Cultural geography increasingly replaced objective exacting descriptions and renditions of nature. How the landscape was seen and constructed with the camera became important in the process and content. The selection of subject matter and points of view helped shape final meaning. Human presence and influence in the modern landscape became paramount.

The turn by the avant-garde towards cultural geography marked a decisive shift from traditional landscapes. Modern photography was not only informed by intention but the human condition. "It is only now that we are acquiring sufficient perspective on the nineteenth century in terms of a metaphor of growth and decay and evolution," writes J.B. Jackson. "We can best rely on the insights of the geographer and the photographer and the philosopher. They are the most trustworthy custodians of the human tradition. For they seek to discover order within randomness, beauty within chaos and the enduring aspirations of mankind behind blunders and failures"[12]. From city-erected scenes of architecture and emerging urbanscapes with daily movements of the masses, to birds-eye views by air, and the ceaseless motion of trams and related industrial modes of transportation, a new immediacy permeates the landscape in avant-garde photographics.

Early modern photographers perceived life no longer as a timeless or eternal setting. Rather, everyday reality became a faster paced phenomenon to be garnered or lost in the shifting transitions of modern machinery, materials, industry, and constant transformations in day-to-day life. The avant-garde adopted modern tendencies to establish their own photographic terms

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[12] S. Yates, *The Essential Landscape with essays by JB Jackson*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 84, see also J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.

through technology and with inevitable advances towards the future. Some of the consequences were not always satisfying artistically. By the advent of World War Two, options were discouraged to continue their innovative advances in the history of modern photography and art. The diversity of precedents that began to multiply throughout the 1920s were redirected if not eliminated. Replaced by other designated purposes by government and state.

Modern photography turned to the military campaign of war. Dmitry Baltermants and others such as Georgi Zelma and war correspondents documented some of the most the painful scenes from Kerch to Stalingrad. At the end of December 1941, the Soviet Army briefly recaptured from the Germans the historic city of Kerch in the Crimea. On January first, Baltermants photographed families in the field searching for their loved ones. He took several images of a woman who found her husband, photographs that were not allowed to be seen by the public for decades. Later he printed photographs of the scene with another image of a tumultuous sky. The powerful modern document, a combination print of two images not unlike a seamless photomontage, created a universal sense of anguish about war. Titled "Grief" it combines some of the earlier advances of modern photography with the subject of human destruction that became a timeless symbol[13].

From the darkroom to the artist's studio, avant-garde photographics established new tenets in a wide array of advances and approaches in the formative stages of proto modern photography, which echoed the diversity of the era with its profound historical change. As the freedom of expression became temporarily diminished, ultimately forced into socially prescribed agendas, world-class innovations of the era slowly disappeared. Replaced, reassigned and redirected exclusively into ideological directives for

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[13] For the most comprehensive account concerning the history of Baltermant's photograph "Grief," its censorship, the various journals where it was published as well as its cultural significance in Jewish history in the USSR, see David Shneer, "Picturing Greif: Soviet Holocaust Photography at the Intersection of History and Memory, *American Historical Review*, February 2010.

photojournalism, propaganda, and officially sanctioned styles such as social realism.

6. Multidisciplinary precedents advancing transdisciplinary arts in the next century

For almost three decades in the early modern era the avant-garde developed new forms of photographic expression with an unprecedented breadth and depth in diversity. Individual contributions expanded new vision with the support of emerging technologies. Inventions from the small, cinema-film based hand-held 35mm camera, to faster papers and darkroom technologies, to modern cinema, large scale media and architecturally-based exhibitions, the emergence of mass-printing processes and photomechanical printing methods made with color, and the combination of mediums and materials outside the darkroom, placed innovations at the forefront and into the mainstream of modern art. Establishing a newfound freedom of expression in modern artistic terms with global significance and lasting influence into the next twenty-first century.

By the late twentieth century photographic artists from all disciplines continued to expand advances from the multidisciplinary methodologies and strategies of avant-garde photographics into newer generations of technologies, materials, and transdisciplinary approaches, while further abandoning modern styles and methods. Based in photographic ideas at the center of visual expression with unconventional materials and never-ending directions. Such as Robert Rauschenberg experimenting with photographics beyond established black and white darkroom practices into more experimental terrain with the first postmodern works historically (F7). A shift in orientation where the "painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of operational processes….in a shift from nature to culture"[14]. His transdisciplinary oeuvre, perhaps even more prolific

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[14] Leo Steinberg's lecture at The Museum of Modern Art about Rauschenberg and first introducing the term "postmodern" was written the following year and published as "The Flatbed Picture Plane", *Other Criteria, Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*,

than Picasso's modern contributions in the first half of the twentieth century, broadened the ground even further for the coming century. With a new generation of artists and photographics outside past definitions, moving with reinventive purpose to establish other forms of visual expression unconditionally unbound by categorical art history. Francisco Infante and Nona Goryunova, Robert Heinecken, Betty Hahn, Thomas Barrow, Susan Rankaitis, Natasha and Valery Cherkashin, Galina Moskaleva, Patrick Nagatani, Barbara Kasten, and Joel-Peter Witkin took the lessons of avant-garde photographics for advancing the re-transformations of ideas into new terrain.

F7. Robert Rauschenberg, *Booster #6* of seven studies, photolithograph; *Solstice*, color photosilkscreen on Plexiglas sliding walls, motorized 10x14x14 feet, 1968; Tracer, color photosilkscreen on canvas, 1963; *Retroactive*, color photosilkscreen on canvas, 1964; Robert Heinecken, *Periodical #6 and #5*, and *Time Magazine* #1, Vietnam War soldier with cut heads, 1969, part of series of American magazines recreated with offset lihtography overprinting, 1971; Francisco Infante and Nona Goryunova, *Suprematistic Games*, color photographs of construction, 1968. From Museum of New Mexico Collection: Betty Hahn, *Starry Night*, cyanotype with watercolor and silver stars applied, 1975; Thomas Barrow, *Discrete Multivariate Analysis*, diptych, two gelatin silver photograms, 1981; Joel-Peter Witkin, *Las Meniñas (Maids of Honor)*, toned gelatin silver photograph, 1987; Natasha and Valery Cherkashin, *1917*, from *Moscow's Red Square in Santa Fe* installation at the Museum of Fine Arts, gelatin silver photograph with drawing, bronze paint on newspaper frame from Pravda and Wall Street Journal, 1994; Susan Rankaitis, *Pale Green and Copper*, multiple toned photogram, 1994; Galina Moskaleva, *Reminiscences of Childhood*, blue and orange toned gelatin silver photograph from negatives by father, 1996; Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracey, *Radio Active Red*, Polacolor II photograph, 1990; Barbara Kasten, *Architectural site 9*, Cibachrome photograph, 1986.

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Avant-garde photographics were initially based in individual modern styles with in-depth skills from conventional disciplines. As artists broke away from traditional schooling and historic training with prescribed art mediums, they began to eliminate art-historical divisions and lines between conventional mediums. Offering no boundaries with new potentials of multidisciplinary forms of art, discovering the diverse potentials in the inherent nature of the photographic process. Often by expanding non-objective subjects, nontraditional media and materials with emerging modern technologies.

F8. Christian Boltanski, *Ombres (Shadows)*, kinetic light sculpture, 1984; Arnulf Rainer, Death Mask, Hugo Wolf, scratched negative, gelatin silver photograph, 1978; R.B. Kitaj, *El Lissitzky* (Photo Eye catalog cover, Stuttgart, 1929) and *Advertisement by Shop Window* from the series *In Our Time*: *Covers for a Small Library After the Life for the Most Part*, photosilkscreen prints in edition of 50, 1969-1970; Floris Neusüss, *vice versa*, *Kassel*, life-sized photogram, 1985; Joseph Beuys, *Vacuum-Mass*, photosensitized canvas, 1970; Sigmar Polka, *Interior*, photograph with painted color, 1984; Anselm Kiefer, Kyffhäuser, book: acrylic, photo emulsion, watercolor and drawing, and *Picture Conflict*, photo emulsion, oil, photo, woodcut, sand, 1980.

Recent decades moving into the new century, artists from all disciplines continue to explore, develop, and mix even further avenues of transdisciplinary arts from many of the precedents of avant-garde photographics without classification (F8). From media-based investigations past and present, into a wide array of media and materials to discover less-

defined subjects without genre in past ocular and discursive forms of expression. Replacing modern and postmodern vocabularies farther into undefined directions. Joseph Beuys, Christian Boltanski, Arnulf Rainer, R.B. Kitaj, Floris Neusüss, Sigmar Polke, and Anselm Kiefer relegate modern and postmodern visual language only as catalysts. As a means to other ends. To serve ahistorical purpose that only remind of the past, for another future. Without principal or singular mediums, fundamental styles, or predominant art definitions. Ongoing contributions with photographic dimensions that expand ideas further in art without category.

The formative, groundbreaking avant-garde years of modern investigation were a search for new direction. Setting the stage for today's transdisciplinary photographics that continue to pass across past definitions, boundaries, and limitations. While continuing to abandon conventional art forms, approaches, and histories. Now advancing with the contemporary emergence of digital forms of electronically-based technologies. That in part, end the black and white chemical darkroom for a return and unlimited expansion of color from various forms of ink on paper to electronic and alternative methods with unlimited ideas that further photographic potentials and definitions.

The true and extraordinary complexity of avant-garde photographics is as embryonic as perpetually unique. In many ways today that continue to engage artists in a process of boundless transdisciplinary directions. That remain enduringly emergent throughout the visual arts globally.

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