

# From Empire to Marketplace. Agfa and the Rebuilding of the German Photography Industry after 1945.

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[N° 24 novembre 2009 : Elites économiques et création photographique](#)

## From Empire to Marketplace

Agfa and the Rebuilding of the German Photography Industry after 1945

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### Résumé

The rapid growth of the Federal Republic of Germany has often been attributed

exclusively to the revival of its economy. The result has been to project the image of a country that, until the early 1960s, was overly prosaic and where art, predominantly abstract, was detached from the new state's political and structural concerns. Yet in the area of photography, the birth of Photokina in Cologne in 1950 attests to the emergence of a close link between industry and photographic practice during the period of reconstruction. After 1945, a unified photography sector emerged in West Germany as a result of the concerted efforts of domestic firms and professional as well as amateur photographers.

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- 1 Bodo von DEWITZ, 'Hugo Erfurth. Ein Photograph und die vielen "Köpfe seiner Zeit,"' in *Hugo Erfurth* ([...](#))

The relationship between the photography industry and photographers is one that is rarely described. From the product of the lab to the professional photographer, from the mass-produced camera to the amateur, and from the paper factory to the artist, the economic chain traces relationships of interdependence. Certain historical upheavals permit us to observe the alliances that constitute a photographic sphere. This is the case with the rebirth of post-totalitarian Germany; the photography industry was directly involved in the 'economic miracle' that enabled the reconfigured Germany to join the group of the world's richest countries. Initially, however, there was nothing to suggest that photography stood poised to regain its former status as one of the leading sectors of the German economy. Factories had been bombed, and production sites were often separated between East and West. Germans themselves were no longer in a position to take photographs, their cameras having been either destroyed or requisitioned, and professional photographers were limited to taking 'passport photographs.'<sup>1</sup> But despite the stranglehold on the domestic economy at the hands of the occupying forces, German firms put new business strategies in place.

- 2 Born in 1895, Bruno UHL went to work for Bayer and Agfa, in their sales divisions, in 1921. He beca ([...](#))

<sup>2</sup>Located at the intersection of high-tech industry and an emerging leisured

society, the photography sector was emblematic of German reconstruction. It bore witness to the end of the alliance between politics and industry under National Socialism and exemplified the birth of a new alliance between industry and culture. How was this new model established? This far-reaching transformation was brought about by the unification of the hitherto scattered branches of the photography industry and involved an investment on the part of this economic sector in establishing a framework for promoting the medium. The inception of the trade fair Photokina in Cologne in 1950, which brought together industrial products and photography exhibitions, attests to this close link between the photography industry and photographic practice. But this phenomenon was by no means the consequence of any sort of determinism; rather, it was the result of the energetic efforts of individuals, among them Bruno Uhl, who was, at the time, the marketing director of Agfa.<sup>2</sup> Through his involvement in various initiatives in the early 1950s, Uhl became one of the pillars of the photography sector.

## An Industry in Ruins and under External Control

- 3 It was an IG Farben company that had manufactured the gas Zyklon B, which was used in the death cam (...)

3 Before the war, Agfa, like Zeiss Ikon, had adopted a strategy of dividing its activities among different plants. Zeiss Ikon's Dresden and Berlin factories were destroyed by bombs during the war. In Agfa's case, after 1945, its camera factory was in Munich in the American zone, the paper factory in Leverkusen in the British zone, and the film production facility in Wolfen in the Soviet zone. As a result, no integrated production capabilities remained. Following the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the break up of the company, due to the geographic segregation of its production plants, was accompanied by the Allies' decision to break up the industrial cartels that had operated under National Socialism. Thus, IG Farben (IG for *interessengemeinschaft*, or syndicate), the world leader in the chemical industry, was dismantled.<sup>3</sup>

- 4 'The demands for reparations on the part of the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countr (...)

4 Of the two hundred companies controlled by the cartel, only those with no direct connection to Nazi crimes were allowed to survive. Agfa was one such firm, but now operating under forced autonomy. The firm found itself in a difficult position; it had effectively been dismantled, and on two discrete levels: that of its personnel, with the destruction of production sites and their separation among the various different zones of occupation; and a higher, more overarching level related to the national economy, with the prohibition of industrial associations

(cartels), which had hitherto worked efficiently. To further accentuate this decline and preserve their grip on the economy, the Allies chose to exact reparations in the form of monetary or material levies from the various firms based on their geographic location.<sup>4</sup> Any commercial exchange between the different zones of occupation was forbidden. The companies were obliged to function as autonomous structures – this was the case for Agfa's Leverkusen and Munich factories, whose directors were prohibited from contacting each other.

- 5 Walter FLEMMING, 'Die Bedeutung der deutschen Photo-Industrie,' *Photo-Presse* 4, no. 17 (1949): 3.
- 6 Günther KADLUBEK and Rudolf HILLEBRAND, *Agfa, Geschichte eines deutschen Weltunternehmens von 1867 (...)*
- 7 Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen*, private edition (Cologne: Library of the DGPh, Museum Ludwig, 1970), 287.

5 In addition to cutting off cooperation between the production sites, the Allies also revoked German patents. Research results became public and could now be exploited by foreign firms.<sup>5</sup> Delegations of foreign competitors visited German factories to study their facilities. From June 29, 1945, representatives from DuPont (United States) visited Agfa's Leverkusen factory, followed by those of the British company Ilford. Russian, Czech, French, and Chinese commissions also visited the sites.<sup>6</sup> In 1945, German companies were placed under the authority of the occupying forces. In the case of the British zone, its commander functioned as the director of these companies, and one of his officers supervised the photography industry.<sup>7</sup>

- 8 See Werner MATSCHKE, *Die industrielle Entwicklung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschland* (S (...))
- 9 Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 287.

6 Under these circumstances, the factories of a single firm attempted to diversify in the West, while in the East after 1946 they were nationalized and converted into Soviet stock companies (or SAGs).<sup>8</sup> The senior executives of the firms that had fallen under Soviet domination began to emigrate to the Western zones in 1945. Bruno Uhl of Agfa left Berlin and, in his own words, rescued 'critical documents, important correspondence, dealer files, etc.'<sup>9</sup> Together with a number of colleagues from other departments – technology, Europe, and the transatlantic region – he fled to Leverkusen, while in Munich the Americans appointed Dr. Grieme, the former assistant to the director in Berlin, as director of the Agfa camera factory. The factory producing film, however, was still in Wolfen, in the Eastern zone.

- 10 Ibid., 288.
- 11 Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre. Fotografie im sich teilenden Deutschland* (Ma (...))

7In 1945, when Uhl took over the leadership of the Agfa paper facility in Leverkusen, the offices were in the basement, and he, acting as marketing director worked in a little room under the stairs.<sup>10</sup> And yet, as early as August 1945 Uhl made plans to construct a film factory in Leverkusen to replace the production of that in Wolfen. To avoid a veto by the British authorities, these plans went forward in secret. In 1949, the Leverkusen factory produced its first rolls of film,<sup>11</sup> demonstrating the fierce determination of the company's directors to offer a complete range of products and services. This quest to manufacture a comprehensive line of photography-related products enabled Agfa to assume the status of a major brand in a specialized domain, in contrast to IG Farben.

- 12 Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 288.

8Uhl also endeavored to create connections between the factories in the different zones. Beginning in 1945, the segregation of the Western and Eastern zones prohibited any joint commercial operations between them, but despite that, the new director of Agfa's Munich factory invited Uhl to take over the leadership of the company, dividing it between Leverkusen and Munich, that is, within the limits of the Western zone. Uhl declined and, in an effort to formulate a common strategy, began to correspond in secret with Hans von Werthern, the company's former president, who had settled in Frankfurt in the American zone.<sup>12</sup> Uhl's business plan for Agfa went beyond the Leverkusen factory, and he would go on to consolidate the company by diversifying its products and setting up offices in various zones of occupation, in direct contravention of the economic laws established by the Allies.

## [From Monopoly to Marketplace](#)

- 13 Günther KADLUBEK and Rudolf HILLEBRAND, *Agfa* (note 6), 71.

9Despite the impossibility of trade between the different occupied zones, even within the bounds of a single company, the industry got back on its feet quickly. On May 4, 1945, the manufacturing of photographic paper resumed in Leverkusen. The same year, production of cameras was relaunched in Munich, in a factory where more than sixty percent of the machines and installations had been destroyed.<sup>13</sup> Production of Agfacolor film resumed in 1945–46. But these products primarily went to the occupying troops or were destined for export. In 1947, almost 90 percent of the output was exported.

- 14 Bruno UHL explains in his memoir that he accepted this invitation reluctantly, since he did not fee (...)

10Faced with the foreign market's hold over German industry, Uhl contacted the manufacturers in the British zone to discuss what steps should be taken. In an effort to construct a stable and autonomous economic sector independent of

foreign domination, an association that would group together photography-related industries appeared necessary. Uhl went ahead by stages. On October 23, 1946, in Leverkusen, he organized the first congress of photographic equipment manufacturers located in the British zone. This meeting marked the birth of the Association of Manufacturers of Photographic Articles (Verein der Fabrikanten Photographischer Artikel). Bruno Uhl was appointed its president.<sup>14</sup> Despite the ban on forming cartels, this association was able to circumvent the rules by adopting appropriate terminology.

11 In reality, this economic unification openly led to a horizontal integration that, while not institutionalized, with its lack of competition recalled the economic structure of the totalitarian regime after 1933, but with one important difference: until this time, the photography industry had developed by joining cartels made up of firms from different fields. The Agfa photographic equipment company had belonged to the IG Farben group of chemical companies. IG Farben comprised firms with similar areas of expertise and a common need for high-tech engineering. At the end of the war, the senior executives of IG Farben, who had been close to the Nazi regime, were placed on trial. In addition to serving as an exemplary condemnation of the close links between industrialists and National Socialist politicians, this trial enabled the Allies to weaken German economic institutions that had competed with American companies during the war. The German economic system was now no longer based on specific fields of expertise such as chemical engineering (in the case of IG Farben). It had to find a new development plan. Constrained by the autonomy imposed upon them and the reality of foreign competition, German firms no longer entered into partnerships based on common areas of expertise. They formed associations based on the markets they sought to reach. The economic unification of the American and British zones in October 1946 permitted the Association of Manufacturers of Photographic Articles to become active in the American zone the following year. The French zone of occupation joined this Bizone in August 1948, turning it into a Trizone. But Agfa had anticipated this unification. The first joint congress of the photographic equipment manufacturers of all the Western zones was held in Frankfurt on January 9, 1948: even before the monetary reform, the photography industry had succeeded in uniting itself.

12 On June 20, 1948, the economic unification of the three Western zones culminated in a monetary reform and the birth of the Deutsche Mark. At this time, Bruno Uhl founded Apho (the Arbeitsausschuss der deutschen Photowirtschaft, or Task Force on the German Photography Industry). It was made up of the presidents of all the economic associations that were involved, in some way, in the field of photography: photographic equipment manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers as well as photographers, laboratories, and photocopy firms. Joining this committee were other associations with related interests, such as those of amateur photographers and the film industry. Chaired by Uhl, Apho was conceived as a forum in which all of the issues and events that had some bearing on the photography sector could be considered and discussed. This body

united the common interests of all the companies whose businesses involved photography. Cooperation was no longer purely horizontal, as in the Association of Manufacturers of Photographic Articles of 1946, but vertical as well; it went beyond the status of a cartel to approach that of a *Konzern*.

- 15 See 'Photoindustrie beim Export an der Spitze,' *Photo-Presse* 6, no. 17 (1951): 3–5.

13 Within three years, Uhl had brought together all of the branches of West Germany's photography industry, to the point of creating a unified photography sector capable of responding to the economic challenges confronting it. Until 1948, sales were aimed at foreign markets and dependent on orders from abroad. The photographic industry led all other industrial sectors of the German economy in terms of exports.<sup>15</sup> By consolidating, the German market now became an economic player. As a result of this transformation, the photography sector, like much of the West German economy during these years of reconstruction, was able to move from a sector of industry-based cartels, to a sector based on service-oriented consortiums. The potential market became the dominant factor in this process of economic integration, and the movement toward a service sector helped cultivate customer loyalty, which had become unpredictable in the face of foreign competition.

## The Strategy of Recapitalization

- 16 Timm STARL, *Knipser: Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1 (...)*
- 17 As reported in *Photo-Presse* 2, no. 14 (1947): 3.
- 18 Jörn GLASENAPP, *Die deutsche Nachkriegsfotografie* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008), 141.
- 19 'Die Welt des Lichtbildes,' *Rheinischer Merkur*, May 2, 1952, p. 11.

14 With the monetary reform of 1948, the development of a domestic market was realizable. Until then, the state of deprivation in which the population lived, the cost of reparations, and the stranglehold of the occupying forces had made the development of a domestic market in Germany impossible and had forced German firms to turn to export as their primary focus. With the economic miracle engendered by the 1948 reform, they were able to gain access to an enormous market share. As a result of the war and subsequent requisitions, two thirds of the cameras belonging to Germans had been lost.<sup>16</sup> Yet in 1947, only 5 to 10 percent of cameras produced in Germany went to the German population.<sup>17</sup> Barter and black-market economies developed. After 1948, demand for photographic equipment blossomed, and the industry responded by selling pre-war models. Old Agfa camera bodies were sold for 9.90 DM.<sup>18</sup> In the following years, manufacturers adopted a strategy of minor modifications and produced a wide range of accessories, trying in this way to keep their cameras attractive as well as

to cultivate a loyal base of customers who they hoped would then turn to more expensive models. Sensing the possibility of a new market, Apho, at the instigation of Bruno Uhl, emphasized the cultural aspect of the photographic medium, which the *Rheinischer Merkur* described in 1952 as the 'great passion of our time.'<sup>19</sup>

- 20 Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 289.
- 21 In 1951, Apho created the Advertising Association of the German Photography Industry (Werbegegemeinsc [\(...\)](#))
- 22 'Durch die Photographie Freude bereiten,' *Photo-Technik und -Wirtschaft*, Sonderheft 50 Jahre Verban [\(...\)](#)

15How would it be possible to develop and promote a culture of photography whose institutions dated from before the war and whose new practitioners were still so few in number? It was in this transitional period that Agfa pursued its program of recapitalizing financially troubled institutions on the one hand, while creating an innovative framework for photography on the other. This ambition, however, did not immediately meet with success. In his speech before the Federation of German Industries on January 9, 1948, Uhl spoke of mobilizing Apho around four different events and activities, all of them economic as well as cultural: a photography trade fair, a specialized press, a school, and photography itself.<sup>20</sup> The trade fair and the magazines were intended to help disseminate the technological advances of the photography industry as well as to serve as vehicles for advertising. Uhl wished to create two magazines: a trade magazine for the entire photography sector and a large-circulation amateur magazine, first in German, then in English and French and even in Spanish, whose mission would be to 'bring German photography to the entire world.'<sup>21</sup> The goal of this amateur magazine would be to turn weekend photographers into loyal users of the products of German industry, creating a new market.<sup>22</sup> Both plans fell through, but the various efforts demonstrate the underlying desire to create specifically photographic institutions and to spark an independent process of reconstruction in this domain.

- 23 Hanna SEEWALD, *Rechenschaftsbericht 1948/49*, referred to in Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- u* [\(...\)](#)
- 24 Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre* (note 11), 157.

16In the early 1950s, thanks to Bruno Uhl, Agfa came to the aid of financially troubled organizations. The Bayerische Staatslehranstalt für Lichtbildwesen (Bavarian State Institute for Photography), a public photography school in Munich, was in serious financial straits. Although it was the only public photography school in West Germany at the time, neither the Bavarian government nor the Ministry of Culture provided it with sufficient funding to cover its operating expenses.<sup>23</sup> The administration found itself compelled to solicit industry for donations. Agfa offered financial support to the school and required, in exchange, that it adopt the company's technology by setting up an



## Agfa color photography studio.[24](#)

- 25 Ibid., 120.
- 26 Ibid., 123.

17The situation was similar for the Society of German Photographers (Gesellschaft Deutscher Lichtbildner, or GDL). This association of professional photographers was one of the only organizations that had not disbanded under National Socialism. Until February 1948 and the death of its president, Franz Grainer, as well as that of Hugo Erfurth, the president of the jury, no real efforts were made to revive it,[25](#) since Grainer was busy with the Munich school and Erfurth was elderly. It was not until July 14, 1948, that the GDL held its first postwar meeting in Düsseldorf and elected a new executive committee. It planned, at the time, to pursue a ‘cultural mission’ by exhibiting the works of its members. Left with a sizeable budget deficit after its first large exhibition in Cologne in 1949, it borrowed money from Agfa, which stipulated, in return, the right to use the photographs of some of its members for advertising purposes.[26](#) In 1951, Agfa invited the organization’s members to take classes using the Agfacolor process and created an award for color photography.

18Agfa’s support for the older generation of photographers, who still controlled the existing organizations, brought it the backing of photographic institutions that were stable, smoothly functioning, and widely known in the cultural realm. It also introduced the photographic industry into a highly circumscribed field, conferring a historical sanction upon not only the photography sector, which acquired intellectual legitimacy, but also upon the old institutions themselves, which acquired new vitality at the very moment when they were suffering from their strong association with National Socialism and a discredited economic system. But in financing these two (public and professional) structures, Agfa also encountered a problem. The Munich school and the GDL – both of them institutions that had been active under National Socialism – were guardians of photographic conservatism, not exponents of the modernity that the photography industry sought to promote. While it was appropriate to rescue these two organizations in the name of getting the German photography industry back on an even keel – they were the only major West German institutions in existence at the time – it was also imperative that new structures be created that would be better able to fuel the German revival.

## [Financing New Cultural Institutions](#)

- 27 Bernd LOHSE, ‘Statt eines Geleitworts,’ *Photo-Magazin* 1, no. 1 (April 1949): 11.

19In the early 1950s, Apho launched a number of new cultural initiatives intended to better support the reemerging photography industry. A photography trade fair,

specialized magazines, and a school were now gradually established. The amateur magazine *Photo-Magazin* was created in April 1949, and Bernd Lohse, in the first issue's letter from the editor, describes its 'primary and overriding mission' to 'present exemplary works of photography from a dignified nation.'<sup>27</sup> This was the first time that the postwar photography industry had emphasized the notion of a unified 'country' with national characteristics.

20Initially, in addition to supporting the state photography school in Munich, the magazine also championed the new German avant-garde photography with articles on the two groups Fotoform and Subjektive Fotografie, often written by the photographers themselves. In 1952, however, *Photo-Magazin* began to distance itself from experimentation and to support a practice that was more direct and closer to amateur photography. In response to the exhibitions *The German Photoreports* (Die Deutschen Bildberichte) and *The Photographs of Life* at Photokina in 1952, the March issue featured an article entitled 'A Photographer Like You and Me,' which urged German amateurs to turn toward a more spontaneous type of photography. The preference for a photograph made from real life – in contrast to the typical artist photograph of the time, which was highly formalized and carefully constructed – may be explained by the desire to rally amateur photographers around a practice and shared vision that were close to their aspirations of the time. It also encouraged a sense of personal investment in the effort to promote photography and lent an intellectual legitimacy to their practice, a legitimacy that served both the clients and the industrial firms.

- 28 Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 290.
- 29 Ulrich POHLMANN, *Kultur, Technik und Kommerz. Die photokina – Bilderschauen, 1950–1980* (Cologne: Hi (...))

21Photokina was the focal point of the expanded photography sector of these postwar years, when there was still a sense of solidarity among the various branches of the medium, and before the rifts of the late 1950s. Like *Photo-Magazin*, this trade fair owed its existence to Apho and Bruno Uhl's vision. Its purpose was to replace the traditional market that had existed before the war. It was also meant to act as a substitute for the Photo-Kino-Optik-Messe (Photography, Film, and Optics Exposition) of Leipzig, now in the Soviet zone, which had resumed in 1946 but from which West German firms were excluded. In 1948, Uhl had emphasized that the German photography sector needed a public presentation of photographic equipment. The trade fair was initially intended to circulate, both within Germany and abroad,<sup>28</sup> but as its first edition of 1950, which featured 289 exhibitors from German industry, was so successful – 75,000 visitors, including 6,000 foreigners attended the event<sup>29</sup> – it didn't seem worth the additional cost. Uhl wished to complement the industrial fair with cultural exhibitions in order to attract new amateur photographers. Photokina was intended both to document the reconstruction of German photography as well as to show visitors the broad potential of the medium. The 1950 fair presented both the German avant-garde group Fotoform as well as an exhibition on the use of

photography in the sciences and a visual introduction entitled *People Who Take Photographs Get More out of Life* (Wer fotografiert hat mehr vom Leben). The organizers revealed a strong interest in amateur photographers, whom they regarded as the driving force behind a kind of photography understood not merely as a pastime, but as a way of life, one that was quintessentially contemporary and embodied the three great interests of the day: art, science, and leisure.

- 30 Fritz L. GRUBER, 'Die Photographische Gesellschaft von Deutschland. Gedanken zur Notwendigkeit ihre (...)
- 31 Those invited include the president of the Federation of Photojournalists, those of the amateur ass (...)

22While the GDL consisted of professional photographers who were often conservative in their practice, the German Photographic Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie, or DGPh) founded in May 1951, at the same time as the second Photokina, saw itself as 'an inclusive community that supplements and enriches the purely technical and economic aspects of photography by adding a conceptual dimension.'<sup>30</sup> This society sought to provide a forum, a specialized library, and a collection, as well as to organize exhibitions and maintain contacts with similar organizations abroad. Thirty public figures were invited to participate in the constitutive assembly, all of them from the photography world, including directors of associations and magazines as well as photographers.<sup>31</sup> Bruno Uhl was the sole potential financial backer to be invited, and indeed the only representative of the entire photography industry. That he alone was extended such an invitation is indicative of the extent to which he dominated the economic world of West German photography at the time.

- 32 Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre* (note 11), 128.
- 33 Ibid., 129.

23Although the society did appeal to Agfa for financial assistance from time to time, it generally kept its distance from the business world. In October 1951, for example, Uhl sponsored the exhibition *Subjektive Fotografie* in Cologne. Agfa's financial support for this event was accompanied by advertising and magazine articles commissioned by its director and carried by large-circulation German photography magazines such as *Foto Prisma*, *Photo-Magazin*, and *Photo-Presse*.<sup>32</sup> As it had previously done for the GDL, Agfa of Leverkusen came to the assistance of the DGPh when the latter found itself in financial difficulty. In 1952, one year after the founding of the Society, Agfa twice provided it with 5,000 DM to cover its debts.<sup>33</sup> From this point on, the DGPh, which had initially sought to avoid close links to industry, found itself dependent on a single source of funding: Agfa in the person of Bruno Uhl.

- 34 Ibid., 160.

24In 1952, Uhl was at the center of the broad-based revival of the West German photography industry, which he promoted by financing photography classes, creating associations, launching magazines, and founding the largest cultural and industrial photography trade fair in the world. His desire to found a specialized public school, a dream he had harbored since the late 1940s, was now within reach. Agfa played an important role in the choice of Cologne as the favored location for this school;<sup>34</sup> Cologne was already the site of Photokina and the DGPh, and it was only fifteen kilometers from Agfa's corporate headquarters in Leverkusen. Uhl wanted to see this new school become a training center for all the professionals in the field, from photojournalists to scientific photographers and dealers – demonstrating once again his desire for an expanded photography sector. However, because there was not a prominent artist on the faculty, it became focused primarily on the training of photographic equipment dealers.

## An Opportune Alliance of Art and Culture

25Commercial interests were not the sole factors in this rapid reconstruction of the German photography industry; the issue of national pride cannot be ignored. It reemerged around two poles: avant-garde artistic production and the utopian idea of an art form for everyone. It is in the alliance of the artistic and the amateur that the originality of the postwar photography world stands out most clearly, and this alliance was a product of Agfa's strategy.

- 35 Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 294.
- 36 Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre* (note 11), 123.

26Certainly, by opening laboratories and financing color photography classes at the public photography school in Munich, Agfa hoped to find new markets for the Agfacolor process, which dated from 1936. Competition from foreign firms – initially American companies such as Kodak and later their Japanese counterparts – was raising fears of a drop in exports. In response, Agfa sought to retain its virtual hegemony over the domestic market by producing cameras that were increasingly easy to use, in hopes of spawning new users among amateurs and the younger generation. To promote student photography, the manufacturer set up photography labs in schools and started a magazine called *Jugend Photographiert* (The Young Take Photographs), both of which were financed by Agfa and the Society for the Advancement of Photography (Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Photographie, or GFP).<sup>35</sup> These efforts were accompanied by competitions and by exhibitions organized to coincide with Photokina. Alongside the economic aspect, there was now the utopian idea of a practice of photography that was an integral part of life, an attempt to turn 'writing with light' into a normal and natural component of the consciousness of ordinary people.<sup>36</sup>

27 This turn toward nonprofessional photographers was also accompanied, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, by support for artistic photography. With magazine articles and with exhibitions such as *Fotoform* within the vast trade fair, Photokina in 1950, 1951, and 1952, the German photography industry championed a national brand of experimental photography. This photography derived from the German modernism of the 1920s, considered a historically legitimate era because it was the only democratic period before the birth of the Federal Republic of Germany. A utopian vision of photography for all and a universal language was reactivated in the 1950s along with experimental photography. With these two parameters – historical sanction and ubiquitousness – which were accompanied by an aesthetic alignment with contemporary trends in painting such as *art informel*, West German postwar photography displayed cultural and international ambitions. Photokina and the participating firms were well served; by mounting exhibitions of this photography, they were able to lay claim to the same qualities of historical legitimacy, universalism, and an intellectual pedigree. This alliance between industry and the avant-garde also served the photographers, giving them a venue in the context of a prominent international event, an opportunity otherwise unavailable in West Germany.

28 As a result, this photography, very innovative for its time, enjoyed a high degree of publicity and reached audiences as far away as Italy and the United States; it brought Germany a new intellectual acceptance at the very time when the idea of constituting a nation was first emerging in the West. The German industrial milieu, and above all Bruno Uhl, recognized that for the economic recovery to last, it had to be sustained by national pride. And that pride was born with the cultural and social ambitions of photography.

29 When Uhl retired in 1955, photography in Germany had been rebuilt and unified, economically as well as culturally. It had responded to the problems of the immediate postwar period – economic reconstruction, the creation of an amateur market, and cultural surplus value – with the real solutions of associations, a trade fair, and magazines that reached a broad audience and participated in public discourse. The associations were permanent and specialized, and they drew strength from the fact that the magazines appeared on a regular schedule and were widely available throughout the entire country, as well as from the cyclical and seductive, almost blockbuster character of the trade fair. But as the industry grew increasingly dynamic, the solidarity of the various domains of photography began to fray, as evidenced by the subdivision of the DGPh into a number of discrete categories – education, art, history, medical photography, and technology. The field was becoming specialized again or, at the very least, abandoning its utopian unity and embracing distinctions. It was also becoming increasingly international in character. From 1956, Photokina was funded by UNESCO. A new era began, centered around the German-speaking world – West Germany, Switzerland, and Austria – with great figures like Karl Pawek and the magazines *Camera* and *Magnum*.

- 37 Bodo von DEWITZ, *Tatsachen, Fotografien des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts / Facts: Photography from the (...)*
- 38 Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 304.

30 Finally, in an equally important development, the issue of the long-term trajectory of photography was raised. A present, characterized by a concern with reconstruction, gave way to a certain interest in historicization. In 1955, in what would be Bruno Uhl's last major act, Agfa purchased Eric Stenger's collection of historical photographs.<sup>37</sup> A consensus arose around the need for a museum of photography.<sup>38</sup> The cultural awards conferred by the DGPh upon Albert Renger-Patzsch in 1960 and August Sander in 1961 would ultimately cement this necessary connection between historical and contemporary photography in late 1950s West Germany.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bodo von DEWITZ, 'Hugo Erfurth. Ein Photograph und die vielen "Köpfe seiner Zeit,"' in *Hugo Erfurth 1874–1948. Photograph zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, ed. Bodo von DEWITZ and Karin SCHULER-PROCOPOVICI, 10–27 (Cologne: Agfa Foto-Historama im Museum für Angewandte Kunst, 1992), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Born in 1895, Bruno UHL went to work for Bayer and Agfa, in their sales divisions, in 1921. He became Agfa's director in Berlin in 1931 and held a senior position in the economic grouping. When Germany lost the war, he was fifty years old and an expert on the photography industry, and he had experienced the oligopolistic market conditions under National Socialism. After the war, he emigrated to Leverkusen in West Germany.

<sup>3</sup> It was an IG Farben company that had manufactured the gas Zyklon B, which was used in the death camps.

<sup>4</sup> 'The demands for reparations on the part of the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries with a right to reparations will be satisfied by means of levies imposed in the Western zones and on German assets abroad that are subject to such levies.' Quoted from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Recueil de textes à l'usage des conférences de la Paix* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1946).

<sup>5</sup> Walter FLEMMING, 'Die Bedeutung der deutschen Photo-Industrie,' *Photo-Presse* 4, no. 17 (1949): 3.

<sup>6</sup> Günther KADLUBEK and Rudolf HILLEBRAND, *Agfa, Geschichte eines deutschen Weltunternehmens von 1867 bis 1997* (Stuttgart: Lindemanns Verlag, 2004), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen*, private edition (Cologne: Library of the DGPh, Museum Ludwig, 1970), 287.

[8](#) See Werner MATSCHKE, *Die industrielle Entwicklung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschland (SBZ) von 1945 bis 1948*, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im geteilten Deutschland 2* (West Berlin: Berlin Verlag A. Spitz, 1988), 204–15.

[9](#) Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 287.

[10](#) *Ibid.*, 288.

[11](#) Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre. Fotografie im sich teilenden Deutschland* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1999), 99.

[12](#) Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 288.

[13](#) Günther KADLUBEK and Rudolf HILLEBRAND, *Agfa* (note 6), 71.

[14](#) Bruno UHL explains in his memoir that he accepted this invitation reluctantly, since he did not feel it was fitting for the interests of an industry-wide association to be served by the country's largest and most powerful manufacturer; he felt that role should be played by a medium-sized manufacturer. See Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 288.

[15](#) See 'Photoindustrie beim Export an der Spitze,' *Photo-Presse* 6, no. 17 (1951): 3–5.

[16](#) Timm STARL, *Knipser: Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1880 bis 1980* (Munich: Koehler & Amelang, 1995), 98.

[17](#) As reported in *Photo-Presse* 2, no. 14 (1947): 3.

[18](#) Jörn GLASENAPP, *Die deutsche Nachkriegsfotografie* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008), 141.

[19](#) 'Die Welt des Lichtbildes,' *Rheinischer Merkur*, May 2, 1952, p. 11.

[20](#) Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 289.

[21](#) In 1951, Apho created the Advertising Association of the German Photography Industry (Werbegemeinschaft der Deutschen Photowirtschaft), which changed its name to the Society for the Advancement of Photography (Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Photographie) in May 1951. This organization took charge of advertising for the sector, using a 'vertical strategy' to compete with the other axes of consumer goods. That advertising was financed by dues from the member companies, which were pegged at 0.5 percent of their sales. Bruno Uhl preferred the term 'cultural propaganda' to that of 'advertising,' since the society also moved quickly to promote new projects involving photography schools and student photography. See Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 292, 294–5.

[22](#) 'Durch die Photographie Freude bereiten,' *Photo-Technik und -Wirtschaft*,

Sonderheft *50 Jahre Verband der Deutschen Photographischen Industrie 1904–1954*, 4 (May 1954): 5–30, here 24.

[23](#) Hanna SEEWALD, *Rechenschaftsbericht 1948/49*, referred to in Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre* (note 11), 157n4.

[24](#) Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre* (note 11), 157.

[25](#) *Ibid.*, 120.

[26](#) *Ibid.*, 123.

[27](#) Bernd LOHSE, 'Statt eines Geleitworts,' *Photo-Magazin* 1, no. 1 (April 1949): 11.

[28](#) Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 290.

[29](#) Ulrich POHLMANN, *Kultur, Technik und Kommerz. Die photokina – Bilderschauen, 1950–1980* (Cologne: Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, 1990), 127.

[30](#) Fritz L. GRUBER, 'Die Photographische Gesellschaft von Deutschland. Gedanken zur Notwendigkeit ihrer Gründung' – memorandum to Robert GÖRLINGER in April 1951 (Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, Acc. 905 [Robert Görlinger]), no. 39.

[31](#) Those invited include the president of the Federation of Photojournalists, those of the amateur association VDAV and the GDL, the president of the University of Cologne, publishers of large-circulation photography magazines, and photographers such as Otto STEINERT (present in his capacity as the 'leader' of the group Fotoform), Adolf LAZI, Liselotte STRELOW, Herbert LIST, and Walter HEGE.

[32](#) Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre* (note 11), 128.

[33](#) *Ibid.*, 129.

[34](#) *Ibid.*, 160.

[35](#) Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 294.

[36](#) Ludger DERENTHAL, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre* (note 11), 123.

[37](#) Bodo von DEWITZ, *Tatsachen, Fotografien des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts / Facts: Photography from the 19th and 20th Century*, Museum Ludwig, Die Sammlung Agfa (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), 20.

[38](#) Bruno UHL, *Erinnerungen* (note 7), 304.

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Anaïs Feyeux, « From Empire to Marketplace », *Études photographiques*, [24 | novembre 2009](#), [En ligne], mis en ligne le 21 mai 2014. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3433>. consulté le 31 juillet 2018.

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