Moholy’s future was uncertain before he was invited in 1937 by a group of industrialists who wanted to reestablish the Bauhaus as a new design school in Chicago. Until then, he would spend more than two years in London beginning in May of 1935, working primarily as a commercial designer. He would design shop windows for a menswear store, create sets and special effects for films, and put together advertisements for airlines and transit authorities. At the same time, he would further his own experiments in avant-garde photography and film. The commercial projects that Moholy would pursue in London were not just diversions for him, nor were they merely the means of making a living—though they were certainly that. The commercial contracts were also avenues through which he could realize his optimistic perspective about the potentially fruitful alliance of arts and industry toward the end of social progress. Indeed, as the historian Terence Senter has noted, Moholy took these commissions with “relish” and was a “shrewd commercial operator.” It was the Bauhaus ideal, privately pursued, preserved in spirit in London before being relaunched by Moholy in America.

When the increasingly racist and reactionary policies of the new Nazi regime finally made it clear that any career prospects in Germany were gone, Moholy had begun to consider London as a possible place to seek refuge and reestablish a career. While he was engaged in a project filming the meeting of the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) on a Mediterranean cruise ship, which sailed from Marseille to Athens in the summer of 1933, Moholy was vigorously encouraged to visit England by P. Morton Shand. Shand was attending the conference on a scouting mission for modern architects. Moholy took up Shand’s suggestion and first made a trip to London in November of
that year. He spent about three weeks investigating the latest developments in color photography and printing, visiting exhibitions of new furniture designs, and discussing commercial projects with potential clients who had already been alerted by Gropius to the genius of Moholy-Nagy. His unorthodox documentary film on the CIAM, *Architects’ Congress*, premiered at the Film Society in London on December 10.

The English-speaking world would also take notice of Moholy by virtue of an article he had written on photography that had recently been translated from German and published in a British magazine. Shand was keen on helping Moholy to get a foothold in England, and he enthusiastically promoted him with a profile published in *The Architectural Review* shortly after Moholy’s visit. While in London, Moholy also met with Lucia, to whom he was still legally married. She had by that time already emigrated to England. Along with Shand, she would occasionally act as his interpreter. Moholy’s films and photographs would be shown in the city over the next year. He had already made a splash in England before he even immigrated there.

Moholy’s exploratory trip to London was made partly in his new capacity as the art director for Ludwig Katz’s *International Textiles* publication, a position which allowed him to employ his typographical ideas and express his colorful Constructivist aesthetic. At the time, Moholy was working mostly out of the Pallas Studio in Amsterdam, a subsidiary of the publisher Spaarnestadt in nearby Haarlem. The Pallas Studio would soon have an office in London, too, which Moholy would use as an address before he eventually moved there.¹

Moholy had become a father just as he was about to embark on this new period of displacement, exile, and uncertainty. Sibyl gave birth to their daughter, Hattula, in Berlin on October 11, 1933. The reality of Moholy’s new family life would begin to settle in, and he would be formally divorced from Lucia in March of 1934. Within a year, Moholy and Sibyl would marry in London. But as Moholy rented rooms and increasingly established himself as a commercial art director in Amsterdam and Haarlem, Sibyl and the baby would remain in Berlin, and György Kepes would manage Moholy’s design studio there. Although his base of operations was in Amsterdam, Moholy would frequently visit his family and studio in Berlin. He would collaborate with Sibyl and the designers who remained in his Berlin studio on various commercial graphic design projects, such as a contract he had with the firm Jenaer Glas. Occasionally, Sibyl would

leave Hattula with a nanny to visit Moholy in Amsterdam. The couple also sometimes went to Paris to visit Piet Mondrian and other modern artists, and for the occasional exhibit of Moholy’s work at galleries such as the one operated by Abstraction-Création.²

Despite his new position and his prospects in London, Moholy had become deeply depressed about the worsening political state of affairs in Germany by the winter of 1934, particularly insofar as it concerned the prospects for artists working there, which he described as “devastating and sterile.” “We are more sad than gay, and we have good reasons,” wrote Moholy to his friend Herbert Read, the English curator, critic, and editor who was a major supporter of the modernist movement in Britain as head of the group Unit One. “[O]ne vegetates in total isolation, as if there were no longer any place in the world for any other form of expression than insignificant journalistic writings.” Goebbels’s culture ministry, established in September of 1933, had required the registration of all artists, and it summoned three of Moholy’s paintings for censorship. By October of 1934, Gropius and his wife Ise had fled the country to find refuge in London, where Gropius hoped to reestablish the Bauhaus. It was at this point that Moholy began to think more seriously about emigrating to Great Britain. Yet he continued his work, both the commercial contracts and his own works, some of which he would exhibit from November to December at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. But all the while he was making moves toward England. He and Sibyl were married in London in January of 1935, and during their visit they were received and assisted by Walter and Ise Gropius. Walter Gropius and Moholy even discussed the possibility of starting up a new leftist art journal. Concerned about the legacy of the Bauhaus, Gropius also consulted with Moholy about compiling a comprehensive record of surviving Bauhaus works, a project that deeply interested Moholy and for which he offered his assistance. At the time, Moholy was thinking seriously about continuing the series of Bauhaus books, and he even had a publisher in mind. Gropius liked the idea, but it would never come to fruition.

Moholy’s experience doing commercial contracts would help to pave his way toward London. Along with fellow Bauhäusler Herbert Bayer and Hin Bredendieck, Moholy had designed an exhibition display for the German construction trade unions at the Exposition de la Société des Artistes Décorateurs in Paris in 1930. Drawing on this experience—and looking to deepen his ties to the burgeoning plastics industry—Moholy, with the assistance of Sibyl, de-

signed and constructed a large exhibition stand of rigid geometric forms for a manufacturer of artificial silk for the 1935 spring trade fair in Utrecht. He also designed a somewhat smaller exhibit for the international exhibition in Brussels that would open in April. By the winter of 1935, Moholy was rapidly winding down his commercial commitments on the Continent, even turning down contracts and complaining that he had no time for private work, as he prepared for the move to Britain. He met with the British consul in Berlin in March. Moholy had the good fortune to encounter an official who had been a supporter of Gropius and the Bauhaus, and the bureaucrat took it upon himself to expedite Moholy’s application, which was sponsored by Herbert Read. Meanwhile, Gropius was busy setting up meetings in Berlin between Moholy and potential future commercial clients, such as Charles Hobson, the head of an advertising agency in London, who made a positive impression on Moholy. Gropius himself met with Moholy in Berlin in late April. Still hopeful that the political situation in Germany might improve, Gropius retained a secretary and apartment in Berlin. He was in town to move his belongings out of his large apartment and into a smaller one for storage.³

Moholy finally arrived in London in mid-May of 1935, and Sibyl and Hattula would join him there in June. They took up temporary residence in the Hampstead area of north London in a small apartment on Lawn Road, just next to the flat occupied by their close friends Walter and Ise Gropius. Moholy and Gropius had been working very closely together in this period, before and after Moholy’s arrival, preparing the photographs and layout of Shand’s English translation of Gropius’s book on Bauhaus theory and method, The New Architecture and the Bauhaus, which would be published that summer with a cover designed by Moholy.⁴ At this stage, they were not only interested in preserving the Bauhaus legacy but also in reestablishing the school. Moholy had begun work in Littlehampton on another short film about the day-to-day work of lobstering (originally titled Life of the Lobster; eventually released as Lobsters) which was produced by


John Mathias. In August, Moholy and Sibyl moved into a modest, semi-detached house at 7 Farm Walk, near the Golders Green station of the London Underground, the next station north of the Hampstead station. As an indication of their continued friendship despite their divorce, Lucia lived with them briefly during this period, though it may have been around the time of Moholy’s annual weeks-long summer holiday to La Sarraz, Switzerland, which Gropius and Kepes also attended. A wealthy arts patron, Madame Hélène de Mandrot, hosted these yearly gatherings of artists and intellectuals, mostly men, from all over Europe. Although he had left the Continent, Moholy kept a foothold there, exhibiting in Brno and Bratislava in the spring and summer of 1935.5

Both Gropius and Moholy struggled to learn English, which proceeded for Gropius at a “snail’s pace,” but their difficulties in no way limited their professional pursuits in London. Their personal charms and expressive gestures likely made up for their linguistic deficits. By all accounts, Moholy was a particularly cheerful and enchanting presence, and his broad, easy, toothy smile earned him the nickname, “Kind Crocodile.” Moholy and Sibyl frequently hosted guests at their Farm Walk house, including old Bauhaus friends like Marcel Breuer, and other artists and designers like Serge Chermayeff, who would later head Moholy’s design institute in Chicago. In arranging such parties, Sibyl acted not merely as Moholy’s wife and professional collaborator, but also as his de facto public relations officer.

The artistic community of Hampstead facilitated an easy socialization that could often lead to useful publicity and commissions. At a party at Gropius’s Lawn Road flat, for example, Moholy first met E. F. Herbert, the assistant editor of Shelf Appeal, a British retail trade and marketing magazine. Moholy was engaged to design the cover of the November 1935 issue, which further introduced him to British marketers and advertisers who were looking for cutting-edge graphic designers. At another party at the Lawn Road flats hosted by the modern architect Wells Coates, Moholy first encountered Ashley Havinden, the head of the design department at the W. S. Crawford advertising agency, which would be a source of many jobs for Moholy. And it was through friendship with Havinden that Moholy would meet Alexander Simpson, for whom he would design department store windows. Gropius’s first flat on Lawn Road was owned by Jack Pritchard, who would found a furniture company called Isokon that would provide Moholy with another important early commission. Moholy would also

work with many of his former collaborators, such as Kepes, with whom he would establish a small office to work mostly on advertising jobs with the help of the London representative of International Textiles, Hans Juda. According to one account, Kepes would become an “extension” of Moholy in executing his ideas. As it was in Amsterdam, they called it Pallas Studio.6

There was little distinction between the social and professional worlds of artists, designers, filmmakers, intellectuals, and designers in Hampstead in these years. Another fixture at Sibyl and Moholy’s parties was Julian Huxley, the evolutionary biologist—and, controversially, eugenicist—who had collaborated with the Hungarian-born filmmaker and former journalist Alexander Korda to produce one of the first-ever nature documentary films, *The Private Life of the Gannets*, in 1934. Huxley would introduce Moholy to the film producer Paul Roth, who would in turn introduce Moholy to C. F. Snowden-Gamble, publicity manager for Imperial Airways, a meeting that would eventually lead to an early commercial commission for Moholy: he would produce posters and other color-accented publicity materials for the airline. Moholy would also design an exhibition called “The Empire’s Airway” and its associated catalogue, which made innovative use of photomontage techniques. Herbert Read also aided his friend Moholy in securing this commission and many others by introducing him to an admirer of the Bauhaus, Marcus Brumwell. Brumwell was managing director of the Stuarts advertising agency, which had Imperial Airways as a client. Vincent Korda, Alexander’s brother and an art director for films, would also come into Moholy and Sibyl’s social sphere, and Moholy showed him and his brother an unedited version of the lobster film as he was putting it together.

The Korda brothers were also present for a showing of Moholy’s short film *Light Display: Black, White, Grey* in September of 1935, which impressed them deeply, and would lead to Moholy’s commission to design sets and special effects for Alexander Korda’s adaptation of H. G. Wells’s 1933 science-fiction novel, *The Shape of Things to Come: The Ultimate Revolution*, the filmic version of which would be released in February of 1936 as *Things to Come*. Alexander Korda had been a longtime admirer of Wells, and he succeeded in persuading him to adapt his novel for the screen. Vincent Korda was the lead art director for the film, and he modeled the sets for his futuristic cities on the works of the modernist architect Le Corbusier. The furniture for the film sets was to be modeled from plastics, and the opportunity to work with such materials presented a special draw for Moholy. Though Moholy would work for months on the project.

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in the fall and winter of 1935 and 1936, most of his contributions would end up cut from the final film. One prominent exception is a single sequence meant to convey a period of rapid technological advance in the central city of “Everytown” over a period of some eighty-four years, for which Moholy’s abstract light patterns and projections were used. Perhaps only ninety seconds of the roughly five-minute sequence used any of Moholy’s effects. He only discovered how little of his work ended up on screen upon seeing a public performance of the film. His name is not listed in the credits.\(^7\)

Moholy’s commercial projects in these years occupied most of his time and brought in most of his income, which would be particularly important given the birth of his second daughter, Claudia, in the spring of 1936. The early jobs were on a smaller scale, for patrons such as Trubenising, a trademarked and patented process for stiffening textiles for collars, and Jack Pritchard’s furniture company, Isokon. Moholy designed a trademark and advertisements for the company, which specialized in lightweight, durable, attractive, and inexpensive plywood furniture.\(^8\)

Moholy’s most important commercial contract, and his most regular and substantial source of income, was for Simpson’s, a menswear store that was opening a new location in Piccadilly. The company would enlist Moholy for his design services. The new store in Piccadilly was meant to be the “shop window” for the parent company, S. Simpson Ltd., in London’s West End. Alexander Simpson, who inherited the company from his father in 1932, was looking to make a splash with the new store, which he wanted to be revolutionary in design. He engaged the aforementioned Ashley Havinden, from the Crawford advertising agency, to lead the design efforts. Havinden brought on Moholy, whom he had, of course, met at the party at the Lawn Road flats. Havinden himself was heavily influenced by the Bauhaus approach to design, and he cherished the Bauhaus books that Moholy had put together, particularly for their novel use of typography. Fortunately for Moholy, Havinden was also his neighbor in the Hampstead area, and he and his wife would frequently have dinner parties with Moholy and Sibyl, where they would exchange ideas about modern design and even get into the very specific problems of window display. Havinden later recounted that it had been a “wild idea” of his to propose Moholy as a design consultant for the project, because at the time, he said, Moholy was known more as a teacher and theoretician. Of course, Moholy did in fact


have much practical experience in designing exhibitions and displays. He succeeded in charming Havinden’s client Simpson and was approved for the job at the rate of £2,000 per annum—an enormous sum for a job that Moholy was to do only half-time.

The main exterior feature of the new, six-story Simpson’s Piccadilly store was a pair of very large, non-reflective curved-glass windows which would be used for the displays. As design consultant, Moholy contributed ideas not only for these windows but also for the interior store layout. The Simpson’s display window would open on April 29, 1936, preceding the opening of the entire store by a day. Moholy’s striking, high-contrast, Constructivist-inspired display made an immediate impression on the public, and it was widely discussed in the trade magazines. After the window display was opened and further modernized by an accompanying aviation exhibition, Moholy would make regular inspections and offer suggestions. It was his assistant Kepes, however, who worked on the project as full-time designer, employing a team of about six other displaymen. Moholy directed his designers to produce a number of innovations for the windows, including dramatic spotlights and cut-outs, which produced a theatrical effect that recalled Moholy’s early work in the avant-garde theater in Berlin. Moholy’s displays of the merchandise were geometrical, dramatically incorporating clothing and other goods into repetitive arrangements that themselves became abstract constructions. 9

Moholy worked half-time on commercial projects such as the Simpson’s contract and a job designing an exhibit for the British Industries Fair. Yet he still found time for his private works, and he continued to exhibit, not only in London but as far away as New York. He also worked on other commissions such as designs for a series of posters for London Transport and a silent film on the new architecture of the London Zoo, which made use of Moholy’s interest in high-contrast chiaroscuro. One of Moholy’s commissions was for a series of photographic illustrations for several books from the publisher John Miles, The Streetmarkets of London, Eton Portrait, and An Oxford University Chest. Moholy made the photos for Streetmarkets using a small, unobtrusive Leica camera, and his intention was to produce an “impressionistic photo-reportage” that would take as its subject a shopping center and its buyers and sellers, which he viewed as a social necessity and a central part of life for the working classes. It was another instance of Moholy’s commitment to documenting and contributing to the vitality of the commercial sphere as a central part of social life.10

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During the summer of 1936, Moholy received a leave of absence from his work at Simpson’s, and initially his plan was to go on holiday in Hungary with his family, but he received a surprise commission to photograph the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, which he seized upon enthusiastically. Moholy went to Berlin as planned, but he soon became so disgusted by the deterioration of the political situation there that he would not stay for long. To his disgust and dismay, he found that old friends defended their conversion to Nazism to him. When he went to retrieve some thirty paintings of his that were being stored by Sibyl’s old housekeeper, he discovered, to his horror, that they had been destroyed by her husband, who threatened to have Moholy arrested for “cultural bolshevism.” Moholy did not complete his photographic project of the Olympics. Instead, he left early to join Sibyl for their holiday at the resort town of Tihany on Lake Balaton in Hungary. After stopping in Switzerland for his annual retreat at La Sarraz, Moholy returned to London in mid-September.11

The one aspect of Moholy’s professional life that was lacking in London was his ability to teach, which he missed dearly. By 1937, his closest companions were beginning to depart, notably Gropius, who had accepted an offer to chair the department of architecture at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. Moholy even designed the menu for his farewell dinner in March. Yet it would not be long before Moholy would join him in America. Apparently out of the blue, Moholy would receive an invitation from an organization of industrialists in Chicago that wanted to reestablish the famous Bauhaus design school in their city. Having just accepted the post at Harvard, Gropius had already turned down the industrialists’ offer to lead the school, but he recommended Moholy as the “best man” for the job. Moholy would soon find himself embarking on a new adventure in the United States, just as several of his works were making a tour of Germany, having been seized by the Nazis as part of their infamous exhibit of “degenerate” art (Entartete Kunst).12

The organization that would invite Moholy to Chicago was the Association of Arts and Industries, which had been formed in 1922 by a group of industrialists, department store executives, financiers, designers, architects, and artists. An artist and designer named Norma K. Stahle was, from the beginning, the dominant figure in the group. She was central to its foundation and served first as the Association’s executive secretary and, later, as its executive director. The raison d’être of the Association was to establish an industrial arts school that would, in the spirit of the Bauhaus, bring together manufacturers and de-

signers in a productive union, and to provide scholarships for young industrial artists. In its first substantial attempt at supporting such a school in 1931, the Association, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, lent financial assistance to the School of Industrial Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, the design department of which was headed by Alfonso Iannelli, who had briefly studied at the Bauhaus.

By 1935, however, the members of the Association had become dissatisfied with the School and withdrew their financial support from the Art Institute. Instead, they decided to found their own industrial design school. In addition to a substantial capital fund of more than one-hundred thousand dollars, they could offer a twenty-five-room, nineteenth-century mansion on South Prairie Avenue that had been donated by department store heir Marshall Field III. The house would be remodeled and used to quarter the school’s classrooms, and the adjacent stables would be converted to workshops. In May of 1937, Stahle offered the position of director of the new school to the famous founder of the Bauhaus himself, Gropius. Gropius, who had toyed with the idea of reestablishing the Bauhaus in England, thought the idea for the school was “splendid,” but he was not about to leave his prestigious new post at Harvard for such a speculative venture. Instead, Gropius recommended his “nearest collaborator” at the Bauhaus, Moholy. Moholy did not have the stature of Gropius, but he was known in modern art circles and through the English translation of his book, Von Material zu Architektur, which had appeared as The New Vision in a translation by Daphne M. Hoffman in 1928. Gropius said that Moholy was ideally suited for the position, endowed with a “rare creative power” and “most energetic character” that would stimulate students.13

Still living in London, Moholy received a terse cablegram from Stahle, offering him the position of director at a new design school in Chicago that would be organized along the lines of the Bauhaus, which was, as far as Stahle was concerned, the paragon of design education. Although Sibyl urged him to decline, Moholy was “highly interested” in the prospect, which struck him “like lightning.” He requested more details. Stahle consulted in person with Gropius about Moholy, and in subsequent correspondence she described the Field mansion and the motivations of the Association to establish a design school.

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school “without any hampering traditions” in “this great manufacturing district of the Middle West.” Gropius encouraged Moholy to take up the offer, suggesting that the pedagogical methods of the Bauhaus had universal validity and could be applied just as well in America as they had been in Europe. On June 14, Stahle invited Moholy to Chicago for negotiations, and a few days later Moholy had already booked his passage to America. After a weeklong journey across the Atlantic on a steamship, he would arrive in New York on July 8. The skyscrapers that greeted him there impressed him as an “incredible symphony of shape and light.” After a brief rendezvous with Walter and Ise Gropius at their summer house on Cape Cod, Moholy made his way to Chicago, where he arrived in mid-July.

Moholy stayed in the Knickerbocker Hotel, where he would remain for nearly three months. His first impressions of Chicago stimulated his creative, progressive inclinations because he felt the city to be “incomplete” in some fascinating way. The city’s culture was nascent, not static or ossified, Moholy observed; it was “just a million beginnings,” and it was far away from the “paralyzing finality of the European disaster.” He was warmly welcomed by the members of the Association and the industrialists who sponsored them. They were, in Moholy’s view, rather ignorant of the Bauhaus, a bit baroque in their tastes, and generally oblivious to modernism insofar as their own interior decorations and architectural preferences went. However, they were exceedingly pleasant and eager to show off their city to Moholy, who was charmed by their efforts.

In early August, Moholy wrote to Walter and Ise Gropius from his temporary home at the Knickerbocker Hotel about the prospects under discussion for the rapid opening that fall of a new institution, the “New Bauhaus, Chicago School of Design.” Moholy excitedly speculated about a catalogue for courses and the teachers he might get to come to the school. Gropius advised Moholy to secure his contract and a core staff, and he looked forward to meeting Moholy and other exiled Bauhäusler, including Herbert Bayer and Alexander (“Xanti”) Schawinsky, for a late-summer vacation on Cape Cod. On the eve of his big presentation to the Association, Moholy was taken with the sense of possibility, newness, and expectation. He resolved to stay in Chicago, and within a week he had signed a five-year contract to direct what would become the New Bauhaus, *American School of Design*, which would open October 18. He told Sibyl to liquidate their belongings in London in preparation for their new life in America.

On August 22, the Association publicly announced the establishment of the New Bauhaus with Moholy as its director. Opening in less than two months, there would be space for seventy students. The aim of the new school, according
to Stahle, would be to “meet the needs of industry and reintegrate the artist into the life of the nation.” Moholy proposed a four-year course that would, as he put it, produce a new breed of catholic designers, not narrow-minded specialists or artists who had no knowledge of practical techniques. Moholy seized the opportunity to return to the original ideas of the Bauhaus, which went beyond mere vocational training and narrow specialization to construct the whole “school and man” in the context of a community. Graduates of the school would learn to work in a variety of materials and media: metals, leather, wood, and plastics, as well as photography and even color itself. The training course would culminate in the design of useful products, such as furniture. After the Bauhaus ideal of universal design was foreclosed by the crude nationalism of the Nazis, the idea of reviving the Bauhaus had become Moholy’s passion. On a trip to New York, he even met with the publisher W. W. Norton about the possibility of publishing a new series of books on the model of the Bauhausbücher that he had edited in the 1920s. Moholy also got in touch with the Museum of Modern Art about the possibility of reviving the Bauhaus books.

Moholy got busy giving a series of interviews and presenting lectures before the city’s elite industrialists, businessmen, and arts patrons, explaining his methods and introducing the school to the citizens of Chicago. A month after the opening of the school was made public, Moholy appeared before a crowd of eight hundred in the ballroom of the Knickerbocker Hotel to outline his plans and describe the essence of the Bauhaus philosophy. At the base of Moholy’s approach to design pedagogy, particularly as he had taught it in his preliminary or foundation course, was the idea that everyone is talented. Rather than studying the finished accomplishments and techniques of masters, students would be encouraged to rediscover the “sensorial directness” of a child. This was a method of teaching that emphasized the fundamentals of materials, color, and space, and the relationship between these basic elements and humans’ interaction with them. Moholy imagined an “illiterate of the future” whose ineptitude would be defined less by an inability to produce and interpret texts than by an incapacity to produce and interpret images, forms, spaces, and materials.

Addressing the industrialists in the audience, Moholy promised that students at the school would undergo a program of “universal usefulness” that would ultimately train them as “art engineers.” “We shall work on your problems,” Moholy promised, listing the many areas of industry and mass production for which graduates of the school could provide their services: textiles, wallpaper, murals, typography, layout, photography, motion pictures, commercial art and advertising, packaging, staging, shop displays, expositions, and all kinds of architecture involving all kinds of materials. The students at the New...
Bauhaus would also receive a liberal education, including philosophy and psychology, to supplement their technical training in the essential skills of design.\textsuperscript{14}

Moholy quickly went about assembling a faculty, drafting the course catalogue, and rapidly making preparations to ready the school’s quarters at the Marshall Field mansion, which would undergo some dramatic renovations including the addition of a box-like, modernist wing to be used for offices. Moholy sought to bring on several alumni of the German Bauhaus as faculty, and he was successful in getting Hin Bredendieck, his former assistant and a Bauhaus graduate, as an instructor for the Basic Design Workshop. However, a lack of funds for salaries and trouble acquiring visas made it impossible for Moholy to recruit as many Bauhäusler as he would have liked. He could not secure Xanti Schawinsky and Herbert Bayer for the first term, for example. He also struggled to convince some prospects, such as the art historian James J. Sweeney, that the school would be financially stable and sufficiently independent from the vocational demands of the Association’s board. To serve as an instructor of drawing and the so-called “light” studio, Moholy called on Kepes, though he would not arrive in Chicago until several weeks after the start of classes: he was delayed by his failed attempt to join the Loyalist antifascist forces fighting Franco in the Spanish Civil War. In the absence of Kepes, Moholy hired the American photographer Henry Holmes Smith, who had been impressed by Moholy’s approach to photography as he had described it in \textit{The New Vision}. Also joining the faculty were the Ukrainian-born sculptor Alexander Archipenko, whom Moholy had known in Berlin and who would oversee the modeling workshop, and David Dushkin, who would lead the music and instrument-building workshops. Gropius would serve as an adviser “in all school matters” to the New Bauhaus, which he granted the right to use the name of the school he had founded. Gropius himself would dedicate the school in Chicago on November 9, 1937. In a speech entitled “Education toward Creative Design,” he reaffirmed the Bauhaus principles of bringing together the arts and industry in the spirit of social democracy.

In reviving the Bauhaus in Chicago, Moholy became invigorated by the work of realizing a holistic educational institution that brought together scientists, designers, artists, and humanists in a collaborative effort to achieve unity and “restore balance to our lives.” The New Bauhaus, in Moholy’s vision, would train designers to deepen their sense of social responsibility, social conscience, and “social integration,” so that they could develop a “universal outlook” and fully comprehend their integral function in the modern world. The school itself would be more than a vocational institution; it would be a cultural community. The training offered by the school would serve the practical task of “reintegrating the artist into the daily work of the nation.”

Having received special permission from their president, faculty members from the University of Chicago would teach various supplementary courses in the humanities under the rubric of “intellectual integration.” They were mostly from the “Unity of Science” movement led by Charles Morris and the German émigré Rudolf Carnap. Morris was a confidant of John Dewey, the progressive
pedagogy theorist who would find a kindred spirit in Moholy. Carnap had been a member of the “Vienna Circle” of logical positivists, the milieu in which he participated in intellectual debates with Paul Lazarsfeld, who himself had been drawn to the problem-solving possibilities of the Unity of Science concept. Carnap had also lectured at the German Bauhaus under Hannes Meyer. A sense of “social integration” was essential for artists to command the “instruments and materials of the modern world,” according to Morris. “The program of the New Bauhaus,” he continued, “with its stress upon the esthetical and intellectual elements, should lead to a clearer understanding of the nature of art and its relation to other human activities. But science has a second contribution to make: it can give new resources for the fulfillment of the artist-designer’s task.”

The program of the New Bauhaus deliberately followed the model of the German Bauhaus. The Bauhaus ethos centered around the idea that everyone had latent creative talents that could be drawn out through practice and technique, synthesizing art and science. Just like at the German Bauhaus, the preliminary or foundation course was meant to teach students to become conscious of their creative powers by rediscovering the sincere emotions and true observations of their inner child. Two semesters of preliminary courses would be followed by six semesters in specialized workshops. After completing this program, students would have the option of taking two additional years of study to attain a degree in architecture. Students would gain practical and theoretical training as designers of hand- and machine-made products in a variety of materials, and they would also learn stage display, exposition construction, typography, modeling, painting, and the “commercial arts.” The basic aim was to make students conscious of volume and space.

Thirty-five students enrolled for classes the first semester, and an additional forty-five students would enroll for day and night classes for the second semester. To matriculate, prospective students needed only a high school diploma, an example of their work, a statement of work, and two references. Tuition was $150 per semester, and there were some scholarships available. In response to the requests of “many persons,” the school would, in its second semester, offer night courses for professionals in addition to the regular daytime students. The school would also offer Saturday classes for children aged six through twelve years. Moholy particularly loved the children’s courses for their similarity to the preliminary Bauhaus courses.  

From the beginning, however, there were obstacles to Moholy’s dream of reviving the Bauhaus in Chicago. Some among the first cohort of students had enrolled with a mistaken impression of the Bauhaus, thinking that it was a free-wheeling “community of free artists” and not the disciplined design school that it was. Their desire for self-direction and individuality—which followed the model of the nineteenth-century independent artist that the Bauhaus had specifically rejected—had to be quickly redirected to the socially-conscious design instruction that was at the heart of the Bauhaus idea. Another threat to the viability of the Bauhaus in Chicago was the news that Mies van der Rohe would be coming to Chicago to direct the architecture program at the Armour Institute. Mies, of course, was the last director of the Bauhaus in Berlin before it was shut down by the Nazis, though under Mies the school had drifted from its founding ideals, and Moholy viewed Mies as a competitor, or even something of a nemesis. Moholy sought to neutralize this apparent challenge to his claim to the Bauhaus by proposing a joint architecture program with Mies. However, the Association, which had little interest in architectural education, opposed it. In any case, a simmering resentment would remain between Mies and Moholy, both of whom felt that they had rightful ownership of the “Bauhaus” name, though only Moholy had been given Gropius’s blessing to use it. Gropius himself believed that the New Bauhaus would not be fully equipped to manage an architecture program, and the imminent arrival of Mies only affirmed that view.¹⁶

Nevertheless, Moholy maintained his fierce devotion to making the New Bauhaus succeed in Chicago. He worked tirelessly, typically spending twelve hours a day at the school. At the conclusion of the first semester, his optimism was still virtually unbounded. “In spite of the short time our students worked like bulls and they accomplished most wonderful things,” Moholy wrote to Gropius, noting that the students’ final exhibition had been a “great success.” Already looking forward to the next year, Moholy wanted to get the Bauhaus alumni Herbert Bayer, whom he wanted to teach typography, and Xanti Schawinsky, who had the intention of coming. The French painter Jean Hélion had also committed himself to teach the following year. Moholy and Sibyl had, meanwhile, become more deeply integrated into the Chicago art and theater

scene, which they enjoyed despite its being, in their view, quite subordinate to Berlin. Yet Chicago industrialists were taking an interest in the work of the school, and Moholy believed that they might be able to help him to use technology in the interest of human progress, to eliminate the gap between the “economic and cultural potentialities of the industrial age and its reality.” Gropius was receiving inquiries from people who wanted to send their children to the New Bauhaus, and Moholy made regular tours of the Midwest to promote the school to potential students and financial backers.

The Association’s board of directors, however, struggled to comprehend Moholy’s method of Bauhaus design education, and they questioned his leadership despite his evident popularity with the students. Enrollment for the second semester had exceeded expectations, adding twenty-two students for the daytime classes in addition to the thirty-three from the first semester, all but three of whom successfully completed the course and elected to return for the second semester. An additional eighteen enrolled for the new evening classes, which would include a lecture series on psychology and arts criticism and a class taught by Morris on “Intellectual Integration,” which was the “verbal correlate” to what the Bauhaus sought to do in practice. The class would furnish students with information on physics, biology, physiology, and other topics that had a bearing on their full understanding of their “surroundings and the world of intellectual activity.” The frenzied atmosphere at the school quickly revealed the limitations of the cramped space available for workshops at the Field Mansion. But in a sign of things to come, the Association would not commit to an expansion.17

Increasingly, the industrialists on the board of the Association would resist Moholy’s direction of the New Bauhaus. According to Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, the members of the board’s executive committee offered an “unending stream of criticism and naïve advice” to the faculty and staff, completely misapprehending Moholy’s pedagogical methods. A few students also complained about the unorthodox Bauhaus approach to design education. In June of 1938, Moholy learned that Stahle was considering replacing him as director, possibly with Archipenko and with the support of Hin Bredendieck. Bredendieck was advocate-

ing for a more vocational, market-based direction for the school. One of his proposed initiatives was to transform the “color” workshop into a more practical course in industrial surface treatments. Nevertheless, Bredendieck, along with Kepes and Archipenko, would commit to returning to teach at the New Bauhaus for the fall term, and eventually they would make amends with Moholy despite their flirting with betrayal.

Knowing that he was in danger of losing the support of the Association’s board and the members of the executive committee, Moholy took it upon himself to tour the industrial cities in the Midwest and along the East Coast in search of support for the New Bauhaus. The arrangement of his tour was somewhat haphazard: he found the names of prospective companies from a Dun and Bradstreet directory and set off on the road with Sibyl. He met with some limited success, and he was able to pique the interest of several industrialists, such as the Du Pont company in Wilmington, Delaware. Having had much experience appealing to and accommodating the desires of industrialists and businesspeople, Moholy managed to convince some of these business leaders of the value of the Bauhaus idea. Their support typically came not in the form of direct grants but rather as arrangements for sponsorships, donations of essential materials, and other kinds of working collaborations. While on his tour, Moholy also visited Gropius, who helped him to arrange a meeting with Frederick Keppel, director of the Carnegie Corporation. Keppel was impressed by Moholy’s pitch and would send an investigator to report on the school’s operations, leaving open the possibility of a future grant.

But by the time Moholy and Sibyl returned to Chicago in the middle of August, they learned that the Association would no longer be able to support the school. Due to its losses in the stock market, the Association’s financial situation had become very dire. Many of the big-name industrialists on the board, it turned out, had merely lent their names and could offer nothing more substantial. Although some members of the Association’s board indicated their desire to support the school, they confessed that the continuing economic depression had so shattered the school’s financial underpinnings that its continuation was no longer viable. Although the catalogue had been printed and the fall term was set to begin on September 26, the president of the Association, E. H. Powell, advised Moholy to notify the faculty that they would likely be relieved of their contracts.

Indeed, the faculty would be notified that the school would probably not open in the fall, and they were advised to look for other positions. The board’s executive committee had made the decision without consulting Moholy, ignoring the time and effort he had spent over the summer building up support for
the school among industrialists. Stahle apologized for the school’s having been “hastily organized,” and she suggested privately that part of the reason the school did not have better success in fundraising may have been because of the presence of “foreigners”—despite the fact that only three of the ten instructors were recent immigrants. At the same time, Stahle flirted with the possibility of reopening the school, but without Moholy. She even considered getting another one of the Bauhäusler, Josef Albers, for the role. According to a student, her aims were “personal, petty, and trivial,” having everything to do with Moholy the man and nothing to do with his intentions and work.

The faculty of the New Bauhaus, including Archipenko, formally pledged their support for Moholy in a declaration prepared by Charles Morris, who felt that the whole situation was a “mess and a great tragedy.” They expressed their deep sense of loss to the cultural and educational community of Chicago for the Association’s failure to open the school. They lamented the “administrative failure” of the Association to live up to its commitment to the school, and in arranging the statement they complained of the “obstructionist policies” and “unenlightened whims” of the Association’s board of directors. Henry Holmes Smith posited that the members of the board wanted “immediate results,” but Moholy’s goal, as Smith saw it, was a long-term project of “modifying a nation’s outlook.” Only Bredendieck, who had questioned Moholy’s methods, initially hesitated in supporting the declaration of loyalty, but even he ultimately signed the document. However, Sibyl would claim that Bredendieck maintained contact with Stahle and even started instructing a small number of former students “somewhere in a basement” but without the support of the Association.

The declaration of support was not successful in convincing the Association to reverse course, but it did lift Moholy’s spirits. Moholy began to frantically search for outside support for the school, possibly from a university in or near Chicago, so that at least the spring semester might be salvaged. At the same time, however, he began to look for work as a commercial designer, and he was lucky to rather quickly find a position as an art advisor for the mail-order house Spiegel, for which he was retained for the substantial sum of $10,000 per year. He would also receive offers to teach at several schools, though he did not like the idea of being merely a “single professor” when he really wanted to strive toward a “great social achievement” along the lines of the Bauhaus. Yet he felt tremendously betrayed by Stahle and the Association. He had been invited to the United States with a five-year contract, but he was left with nothing at all after only a year. Several of the New Bauhaus instructors, who were now broke and jobless, would be forced to rely on the charity of Moholy and Sibyl, who offered their apartment and other basic necessities. The eighty stu-
dents who had registered for classes at the New Bauhaus that fall would have to put their design education on hold.

On October 16, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that the New Bauhaus would close, and that Moholy had filed a lawsuit against the Association for breaching his five-year contract. He had refused their offer of $4,200 in compensation, which would come nowhere near the $800 monthly salary his contract had promised him over the remaining four years of the term. The Association’s attorney offered the bizarre defense that they would not stand for anyone trying to “Hitlerize” the school—a strange line of argument against someone whose European career had been effectively destroyed by the Nazis. Provoked by Moholy’s lawsuit against the Association for back pay, the Association launched a countersuit against Moholy, seeking $50,000 in damages. The Association’s lawsuit was “the most outrageous accumulation of slander and lies,” according to Sibyl, and it was apparently based on Bredendieck’s misleading assertions. Because the Association’s only real asset was the Field mansion, a settlement would ultimately award Moholy a lien on the mortgage for the mansion and the equipment used at the school. Gropius, too, took steps toward legal action against the Association, seeking ownership over the name “Bauhaus.” He secured the pro bono services of a Chicago law firm to represent him. Gropius claimed to have permitted Moholy alone to use the name, and that any design school administered by the Association, but not directed by Moholy, would be forbidden from being called the “Bauhaus.” Schawinsky, Hélion, and Bayer supported Moholy’s claim to the Bauhaus name.

Ironically, just as the New Bauhaus was collapsing, its reputation in the United States was growing. An issue of the trade periodical *More Business* devoted an entire issue to the school in November of 1938. The issue featured an article by Moholy in which he articulated the principles of the Bauhaus pedagogical method and design ethos for an audience of American industrialists. Moholy described the school’s workshops in wood, metal, textiles, color, glass, clay, plastics, display, and “light,” which included photography, motion pictures, and the commercial arts. He also emphasized the basic principles of the Bauhaus. “Based upon the conviction that contemporary education easily leads into isolated specialization,” Moholy wrote, “the Bauhaus education gives first the fundamentals of design, a comprehensive knowledge of all fields connected with the future tasks of a designer.” Through Morris, Moholy had become acquainted with the progressive educational philosophy of John Dewey, with whom he conferred late in 1938. Dewey was positively impressed by Moholy’s approach to design education, and Moholy was, in turn, enthralled by Dewey’s recently-published book, *Experience and Education*. At the same time, a new ex-
hibition had opened at the Museum of Modern Art, *Bauhaus 1919–1928*, which included some works by students at the New Bauhaus and made the school newly relevant to an American audience. A new edition of Moholy’s *New Vision* also appeared that fall from publisher W. W. Norton, which included photographs of students’ work at the New Bauhaus. It had sold out of its first print run by Christmas. Moholy hoped to use it as propaganda for the foundation of a new school, or a “reconstruction.”18

**Conclusion**

London was both a place of refuge and a time of transition for Moholy, as he re-adjusted to life in exile and tried to plan for the future despite the difficult circumstances of the present. After being forced out of Berlin by the Nazi regime’s attack on modernism as a degenerate form of “cultural bolshevism,” Moholy became increasingly involved in commercial projects for industrial exhibitions and advertising campaigns in Amsterdam, which he would continue in London. Moholy’s personal connections to Gropius and other prominent figures in the world of modern art, and his association with the famous Bauhaus school of design, would be essential to the success he had in finding commercial commissions and other opportunities to make a living and support his growing family. In London in the 1930s, the worlds of commercial design, modern art, and radical politics frequently and productively intersected. Although the activist bent to Moholy’s politics began to soften in these years, he became increasingly in-

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interested in the ways in which a progressive, social-democratic politics could be expressed via commercial arts and consumer goods. He saw no contradiction in working on avant-garde films and at the same time designing displays for an upscale menswear store. Working with collaborators such as György Kepes, Moholy established himself as a modern artist who knew how to work well with industry in the true spirit of the Bauhaus. Moholy’s intractable optimism would get him through these years, and it was an attribute that would mark him as the best man to start up the Bauhaus once again in America.

Having turned down the Association of Arts and Industries’ offer himself, Gropius vigorously recommended his close confidant Moholy to lead the New Bauhaus in Chicago. Moholy embraced the role enthusiastically, which he saw as an opportunity to reestablish the Bauhaus and fulfill its pedagogical role and design potential as both an educational institution and a cooperative community that brought together art, science, and modern industry. Moholy had mixed results in his attempts to put together a faculty with experience at the original Bauhaus, but given the extremely compressed timeframe he was forced to work with he did well enough, and the basic program of the Bauhaus was reproduced in Chicago with some success in its first year. Yet the withdrawal of support from the Association—and the difficulty Moholy had in securing support from industry—was an indication of the limits of fully executing the Bauhaus concept in the American context. Still, Moholy’s school had won some prominent academic supporters, including John Dewey, and the business world was beginning to pay more attention. Fortunately, for Moholy and the New Bauhaus, an industrialist with a penchant for modern art would take it upon himself to rescue the school from oblivion.