Free-Market Socialists

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Despite the withdrawal of support from the Association of Arts and Industries and the closing of the design school it had established, Moholy would not give up on his dream of reviving the Bauhaus. He scoured the yellow pages for various manufacturers that might be interested in the services of the school. Along with Sibyl, he embarked on another tour of the industrial cities of the Midwest, seeking the support of forward-thinking, progressive industrialists for a new school. He returned to Chicago in January of 1939, where one evening he hosted a meeting in his apartment with Charles Morris, György Kepes, the architect George Fred Keck, the painter and sculptor Robert Jay Wolff, and the workshop assistant Andi Schlitz, who agreed to join Moholy in his new venture, teaching without pay for at least the first semester. On January 17, they sent out an announcement to students of their plan to open a new design school with the same program as the New Bauhaus. If they could get sufficient enrollment, the new “School of Design”—a “modest and colorless name,” in Moholy’s estimation—would open at the end of February. Tuition would be one hundred and fifty dollars for the day school and sixty for the night class. Within two weeks, they would receive sixty inquiries about the school.

Several guest lecturers also signed the announcement, including Morris and David Dushkin. Moholy also made personal appeals to other teachers from the New Bauhaus, including Henry Holmes Smith, who was excited by the idea. But Moholy was unable to promise salaries, and whatever tuition would have to be used for rent, equipment, and other operating expenses. “However,” Moholy speculated hopefully, “it is very possible that we shall have some contributions from the outside, and then we can fill the gap between present reality and wish fulfillment.” Moholy would need more substantial help, and he would find it in
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the most sympathetic board member of the Association: Walter Paepcke, the “enlightened industrialist.” According to Sibyl, Paepcke fully understood Moholy’s obsession with the interrelatedness of art, science, and industry. He was, according to Sibyl, “one of those rare men whose awareness of and respect for creativity was stronger than his material prudence.”

Walter Paepcke was born in Chicago in 1896, the son of a German immigrant, Hermann Paepcke. After he had married Elizabeth Nitze and graduated from Yale, Walter inherited his father’s milling and lumber company in 1922. The company also made wooden crates, and it had begun moving into the business of corrugated paper containers, which were lighter and thus cheaper to ship. When the young Walter Paepcke took over, he consolidated the family business with several companies in the burgeoning paperboard container industry to form the Container Corporation of America (CCA) in 1926. Within two years, it would be operating more than a dozen plants from Chicago to Philadelphia, and within ten years it would be the largest manufacturer of paperboard shipping containers in the US. Because eighty percent of its raw materials were wastepaper (the rest was pulp wood, mostly from slash-pine trees), the company preferred to locate its plants near the source of such waste—in metropolitan centers.

The company provided boxes and other packaging containers of all kinds for use in wholesale and resale, to all kinds of manufacturers, from cigarette companies to sugar refiners. As demand for packaged, branded goods rose in the first half of the twentieth century, the company expanded dramatically, and Paepcke saw an increased need for industrial designers. The trend away from barrels and crates and toward smaller packages and containers in the 1920s and 1930s, and the emergence of self-service in retailing, was a great boon to Paepcke’s business. About half of all paper went into manufacturing boxes. “Fastidious consumers nowadays want even their whisky bottles and cold cream jars boxed,” as one contemporaneous account put it. As a free-market-oriented businessman skeptical of government intervention in economic matters, Paepcke hated Roosevelt’s New Deal, but he welcomed another change that marked the beginning of the Roosevelt era: the end of Prohibition, which was, in his view, just another

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packaging opportunity for the Corporation. Ultimately, Paepcke was a pragmatic and opportunistic businessman with a soft spot for the arts.

Given the nature of his business, the application of art to industry was a longtime concern of Paepcke’s, so his involvement in the Association and its attempts to establish a design school were perfectly consistent. The container business afforded many opportunities for design, not only in the aesthetics of its products but in their physical construction. CCA made paperboard constructions of various thicknesses for three basic types of containers: the solid-fiber shipping containers, which included corrugated containers or boxes, into which various packages or products would be packed; folding boxes or cartons; and finally paperboard or cardboard boxes, which the company called “setup” boxes. Setup boxes consisted of a mounting board onto which some high-grade paper would be pasted; CCA provided these basic materials but not the final construction. These boxes, and particularly the setup boxes, played a practical role in protecting and shipping merchandise en route to a retail outlet, but they also played a promotional or advertising role by virtue of the text, images, and colors used to adorn the boxes. CCA provided a template for those manufacturers and retailers to merchandise their goods, which was the basis for its interest in design, but good design was also central to its own institutional advertising as a business used by manufacturers and retailers. Although it did not typically sell directly to consumers, CCA would become one of the most image-conscious companies in America.

Walter Paepcke’s wife, Elizabeth, was a serious art lover, and she cultivated in her husband an interest in both philanthropy and modern art, which would turn out to be deeply relevant to his interest in improving the public image of his company, particularly in the climate of the 1930s, when trust in big corporations had eroded. Elizabeth made a habit of sharing the German commercial design journal Gebrauchsgraphik with her husband, and eventually she convinced him to refashion CCA’s image and embrace “good design” as a fundamental business principle. Accordingly, Paepcke hired an art director, who initiated a total redesign of the Corporation, from its stationery to its delivery trucks. This aesthetic undertaking succeeded in creating in the public mind an association between the company and modern design. Even more important in conveying this impression was CCA’s institutional advertising of the late 1930s, which employed the works of modern artists such as A. M. Cassandre, Herbert Bayer, Jean Hélion, Fernand Léger, and Man Ray—Moholy’s contemporaries in the world of modern design. As the historian Victor Margolin has pointed out, Paepcke well understood that his association with the modern art world was not merely an act of philanthropy; it was also a calculated business
decision that added value to his company. Cultivating a refined image was part of Paepcke’s business, and it did not hurt that he was, by one account, blonde, athletic, and “Habsburg-handsome.” Moholy would become a central player in the menagerie of “interesting” people that Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke liked to surround themselves with.²

Moholy’s early impression of Paepcke centered on his “public spirit” and “invaluable activities in cultural matters.” Desperate after the Association had abandoned him, Moholy wrote to Paepcke on January 17, 1939 to inform him of his plans to open a new school of design at the end of February, and to ask for his support. “I believe I can promise you one thing sure for your help,” Moholy wrote, “a sound and progressive education which may be valuable for the community.” Paepcke agreed to help, using his prominence in the business community to begin a campaign to enlist support for the project from foundations and other interested industrialists. He also provided grants to the School through his own company. Paepcke even offered a group of farm buildings on his rural estate, the “Rumney Farm,” at Somonauk, Illinois, about seventy miles southwest of Chicago, for use as a summer school, which would begin that July for a period of some six weeks. Moholy was extremely grateful for Paepcke’s gifts and support, returning the favor with the gift of one of his pictures. It was the beginning of what would be a close friendship. Paepcke managed to gather a number of prominent supporters for the new school, a “Sponsors Committee,” which would include Joseph Hudnut, the dean of the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, the publisher W. W. Norton, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Walter Gropius, and John Dewey. Officially, Moholy would serve as president and executive director. The charter also authorized the formation of the “Friends of the School of Design” for supporters. Given the school’s precarious finances at the outset, only a caretaker and secretary were paid. Sibyl would serve a variety of duties as secretary, bookkeeper, registrar, and “auxiliary janitor.”

With the help of a core group of faculty members who agreed to teach for a semester without pay, the School of Design opened on February 22, 1939, in a new location, the second floor of an old commercial building with very high

ceilings on Ontario Street. Moholy had managed to get the space at the very low rent of seventy-five dollars per month; only later did they realize that the space they had acquired was below the dance rehearsal hall for one of the city’s most rollicking nightclubs, the Chez-Paree (a phonetic spelling of the French pronunciation of Paris). Although the Association had sold off much of the equipment, what remained was moved from the Field mansion as part of the settlement. There were eighteen day students and twenty-nine night students enrolled. At least in the beginning, the many workshops typical of the Bauhaus were effectively consolidated into one large workshop, with each student responsible for occupying themselves.

In greeting students, Moholy likened the school to an “experimental collective” that would concern itself with the “needs of the community” and “mass production problems.” “If you succeed in organizing among each other a working community,” Moholy said, “your combined strength will surpass in its results any technical school with the finest equipment.” Following the ethos of the Bauhaus, the corporate charter for the School of Design pledged that it would develop a new system of education based on the “integrated training in arts, science and technology, leading to a thorough consciousness of human needs and of the creative power of the individual student,” and that it would “develop and promote American industry, arts and science, and otherwise to stimulate interest in improving the products of American industry and creating new and useful methods in such industry.” The school would seek to invent and license products for mass manufacture, but being more than a mere vocational school, the School of Design would strive to become a “cultural working center” that would “further and develop a new related and integrated research for artists, technologists, scientists and persons engaged in other professions and occupations, including persons engaged in industrial and commercial pursuits.” Moholy’s head hummed with “figures and projects” for the school. Excited though he was, he trembled at the thought that “this cold heartless thing called reality might thwart all these day dreams.”

3 Moholy-Nagy to Paepcke, January 25, 1939, box 61, folder 1, WPP; Moholy-Nagy to Paepcke, February 24, 1939, box 61, folder 1, WPP; Paepcke to Henry Allen Moe, November 30, 1939, box 61, folder 1, WPP; Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy, 166–75; Daiter, Light and Vision; Charles Morris to Lloyd Engelbrecht, June 3, 1968, box 7, folder 166, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Henry Smith, February 3, 1939, box 7, folder 203, ID; “Application for a Corporate Charter in the State of Illinois, for the Founding of the School of Design,” ca. 1939, box 1, folder 3, ID; “2 Summer Sessions of the School of Design, July 10–August 18, 1939,” box 3, folder 65, ID; Paepcke to “Gentlemen,” November 1, 1944, box 6, folder 184, ID; Findeli, “Design Education,” 97–113; Robert Wolff, “From Prairie Avenue to Ontario Street—1938–39,” n.d., box 7, folder 209, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Paepcke, March 6, 1939, box 61, folder 1, WPP; Engelbrecht, Moholy-Nagy, 585–88; Moholy-Nagy to Elizabeth Paepcke, April 20, 1939, box 61, folder 1, WPP; “Minutes of the First and Joint Meeting of the Board
As much if not more than the New Bauhaus, the School of Design embodied the moral principles and educational methods of the original German Bauhaus, with its emphasis on uniting art, science, and industry toward the end of good design for mass production. The school’s basic course was meant to forge a “working union” among students. Together with their teachers, students would form a “community with common interests and work.” Teachers would refrain from “formal influence” upon students, instead observing and helping them to shape their work “in congruity” with their talents. The students of the School of Design would learn to produce better furniture and fountain pens, but also better buildings and motion pictures, through their deep appreciation of the essence of things and their ability to develop new “habits of imagination.” They would not be designers of things planned for obsolescence or novelty for the sake of novelty; rather, their deep consciousness of the relation between form and function would lead them to produce enduring designs of the highest quality. Freed from the “repressions and hindrances” of tradition and the “depressing clichés” of their previous studies, students would be able to produce new forms in a “spirit of co-operation.” Rather than studying the work of masters, students would study the fundamental principles and facts of design, working in the basic materials of construction—wood, metal, plastic, glass, and textiles—and the forms and media of display—typography, photography, modeling, and painting.

Following the Bauhaus ethos, the School’s pedagogy spurned the isolation of individuals which deprived them of the “powerful creative stimulus” that came from “social integration.” Moholy insisted that designers were not merely technicians but also analysts of the production process who understood their important social obligations and their responsibilities to the group. They were not concerned solely with function in the sense of a “limited mechanical task.” Rather, their purpose was to produce enduring and socially meaningful designs that avoided the temptation of fads, “the easy way out of economic and social responsibilities.” Technology had become part of man’s “metabolism,” and the task of the designer was to reevaluate human needs that had been warped by the “machine civilization” and devise solutions not based on tradition but on experimentation with the fundamentals of design. Cooperation between artists, scientists, and technicians was the ideal of the Bauhaus, and, according to Moholy, the designer had a “sociological responsibility which is founded in mass-production.”

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4 “School of Design,” catalog, 1939–40, box 3, folder 62, ID; Millar’s Chicago Letter 2, no. 23 (August 5, 1940),
The faculty members of the School of Design participated in the common “work of the community” at the School of Design, guiding students but ensuring that they developed their own approaches and did not merely imitate their teachers. They encouraged students to discard their preconceived notions about what proper art or design should be in an effort to help them get over their inferiority complexes. Breaking down design to the fundamentals in this way reduced it to pure form, which helped students to be more creative in their later designs of functional objects and typefaces. This kind of free art, absent the “hindrances of a utilitarian nature,” as Moholy put it, could provide a “good lead to future problems” that might not be discovered through a narrower kind of training. Similarly, experimentation with abstract photographs, photograms, and films in György Kepes’s “light” workshops led to more creative applications of commercial art and advertising. Early, basic exercises like the sculpting of wood blocks helped students to build an appreciation of form and volume that they would draw on in their more advanced designs in the specialized workshops in plastics, textiles, and other materials for mass production. As at the Bauhaus, the specialized workshops, which also included exhibition and display, culminated in courses on architecture and urban design. There were no marks or grades at the School of Design; instead, there were exhibitions at the conclusion of the semester in which the teachers would either approve or reject students’ designs. Moholy was particularly satisfied with a student exhibition held in July, which, he felt, revived the school’s reputation after it was nearly ruined by the “gangsters” in the Association.  

Moholy and Paepcke constantly sought grants for the School. Among those major figures to whom Moholy made appeals for financial support was Nelson Rockefeller, then president of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Writing in the late spring of 1939, Moholy reported the School’s early successes, which included the enrollment of about fifty students in day and night classes and sufficient interest to run two summer sessions. Yet the finances of the school were dire. “I fear that my teachers, sacrificing their time and reducing greatly their standards of living, will not be able to continue their teaching without salaries,”
Moholy pleaded. “So I have to do everything to secure some means, at least for small salaries, for next year.” Moholy had, at that point, already been turned down by several foundations, including the Rockefeller Foundation, which had “no means” to support the industrial arts, yet the Foundation officers insisted that they believed “firmly” in the “necessity” of the School’s educational methods. Moholy was worried that the early closing of the New Bauhaus might give the impression that its methods were “not right, at least not for this country.” He therefore appealed to Rockefeller’s “far-sighted leadership” and sense of an obligation to “culture.” Rockefeller politely declined. 6

Despite the precarious financial situation, Moholy was confident about the future of the School of Design at the start of the fall semester in September of 1939. He expressed faith in the school’s mission as an “experimental collective” that could meet the needs of community life and tackle the problems of mass

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6 Moholy-Nagy to Nelson Rockefeller, June 10, 1939; Nelson Rockefeller to Moholy-Nagy, June 26, 1939, in box 37, folder 252, RG IIIxG, Educational Interests, RAC.
production. Enrollment, including both day and night students, had grown from forty-seven in the first semester in the spring to seventy-five that fall; eighty-five would enroll for the following spring term. Moholy’s “infectious enthusiasm” spread not only to the students and faculty members, but also to prospective industrial supporters of the school. The faculty members were also beginning to establish themselves in the Chicago art scene. Kepes, for example, had a solo exhibition featuring his photograms at the Katherine Kuh Gallery.7

The School made an impact not only in the Midwest but also on the West Coast. Beginning in the summer of 1939, Moholy began corresponding with Alfred Neumeyer, director of the art gallery at Mills College in Oakland and an admirer of the Bauhaus. Neumeyer wanted to bring the School of Design to Mills College for a summer session, and he sent an emissary, Dean Rusk, to Chicago that summer to extend a formal invitation to Moholy. Moholy was flattered by the offer and “definitely interested” in the proposition. He consulted his faculty, who were “very favorable” to the idea, and agreed to move forward with planning for a 1940 summer session. Moholy regretted that the Mills session would preclude another summer school at Paepcke’s Somonauk country home, but the opportunity was simply too tempting to pass up.

Neumeyer arranged to have the Museum of Modern Art’s Bauhaus exhibition, The Bauhaus: 1919–28, show at Mills in May to arouse interest in the summer school. It was a “living example” of the Bauhaus effort to reconcile art with industrial society in a spirit of “internationalism,” according to contemporary reviews. The exhibition debuted in the Mills College art gallery in April of 1940 in anticipation of the School of Design summer session, which ran from June 23 to August 3. The session was self-consciously a part of the American dispersion of the Bauhaus mission to break down the division between applied and fine arts toward the creation of a “modern form of beauty.” Moholy himself offered a range of courses on “contemporary problems” in painting, sculpture, architecture, advertising, typography, product design, and educational matters. Joining Moholy for the summer session at Mills were Kepes and the Bauhaus alumnus Marli Ehrmann, a specialist in weaving and textiles. The summer session was, in Moholy’s view, a great success, with “super attendance” that even allowed Mills to make a small profit.8

7 Findeli, Le Bauhaus, 89; “Report of the Progress of The School of Design in Chicago under the Grant of the Carnegie Corporation of New York of $10,000,” December 1940, box 1, folder 14, ID; George Fred Keck, “History of the Institute of Design,” August 1955, Box 62, folder 1, WPP; “György Kepes,” Katharine Kuh Gallery, Chicago, September 26–October 28, 1939, box 6, folder 170, ID.
8 Moholy-Nagy to Neumeyer, July 3, 1939, box 3, folder 61, ID; Neumeyer to Moholy Nagy, July 3, 1939, box 3, folder 61, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Neumeyer, July 14, 1939, box 3, folder 62, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Neumeyer,
Nevertheless, the School of Design was constantly in need of financial support in its early years. Despite steadily growing enrollment, which would reach 122 day and night students by the fourth semester in the fall of 1940, the School needed to supplement the insufficient income from tuition fees. Moholy and Paepcke endeavored to raise the School’s profile by making it a “nucleus for a community center for contemporary thought,” sponsoring evening lectures that would bring in close to two-thousand people over the course of the year. Paepcke also organized luncheons to solicit the support of major Chicago businessmen, gaining donations from Marshall Field and Company, Sears Roebuck, United Airlines, and other major Chicago firms and industrial concerns, which sometimes offered materials in lieu of money. Paepcke appealed not only to their sense of civic duty and philanthropy but also to their practical need for skilled designers, offering evening classes in design for people employed during the day at department stores and companies such as Florsheim Shoe and Chicago Moulded Products. “Your counsel will be sought in planning part time training of persons now employed in product design (to increase the value of their services to their employers),” Paepcke wrote to one prospect, “and in developing a method of bringing particular design problems from industry into the School for solution.” The commercial designers, in turn, would raise the profile of the School through displays that made innovative use of volume and “light organization.”

Courses were offered in such things as exhibition and window display, stage design, product design, sound production, architectural design, and advertising arts, which included not only technical instruction in such things as layout and lettering, but also lectures on consumer psychology. Kepes, who had made innovations in the use of photography in advertising and produced “striking work” to publicize Paepcke’s Container Corporation, led the advertising arts session. Strengthening the ties between the design school and the businesses that could use the services of students was a “most important” idea, according to one interested wholesaler. Moholy personally asked Oscar G. Mayer, president of the Chicago Association of Commerce, to serve on the School’s advisory board.
committee, which would plan “mutually beneficial co-operation between the School and local enterprise” including a night school and a research institute. Moholy also sought recommendations for other businessmen who might also be interested in taking on that role.

Although it was a “most unusual type of school,” according to one supporter, the School of Design's workshops produced practical designs for such varied things as plywood furniture, radio cabinets, lamps, glass tumblers, dishes, jewelry, wire-mesh shock-absorbers, new fabrics, wallpaper, ergonomic screwdriver handles, and airplane doors. Students’ experiments designing constructions with various new kinds of plastics would be a sign of things to come in the burgeoning market for consumer durables in the postwar era. Public exhibitions of students’ designs were another way to arouse the interest and support of business leaders and industrial associations. The Kaufmann Department Store in Pittsburgh engaged the school to design an exhibition room for a contemporary apartment, and Lord and Taylor was interested in the potential of a prototype from the weaving workshop. Some of these designs, such as a tea table for the Artek-Pascoe company of New York, went into mass production, from which the School and its student designers received royalties. Though the School had been asked to sell its interesting furniture prototypes, it generally declined in the interest of securing royalties from the sale of mass-produced furniture licensed to major manufacturers.9

Over the next several years, Moholy and Paepcke would be successful in winning grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and from the Carnegie Corporation. Carnegie awarded the School a $10,000 grant in 1940, enough to start paying its staff small salaries and eventually bring on new faculty, including Ehrmann, who would head the weaving workshop. Moholy also attempted to get his ex-wife Lucia to come to Chicago to join the faculty, but he was ultimately unsuccessful in this effort. Without outside help, Moholy suggested, the School would be unable to sustain the salaries. Less than half of the School’s annual ex-

9 “Report of the Progress of The School of Design in Chicago under the Grant of the Carnegie Corporation of New York of $10,000,” February 1, 1940, box 1, folder 14, ID; Paepcke to J.J. Finlay, May 29, 1940, box 2, folder 33, ID; Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy, 183–87; Paepcke, “Form Letter A, School of Design Fund Campaign 1942,” box 2, folder 34, ID; “December 1, 1943–March 30, 1944 Contributions to The Institute of Design,” box 1, folder 14, ID; Paepcke to E.P. Brooks, December 29, 1943, box 2, folder 38, ID; Frank Cornell to Paepcke, May 31, 1940, box 2, folder 33, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Oscar Mayer, June 6, 1940, box 6, folder 183, ID; John Millar to Paepcke, June 20, 1940, box 2, folder 57, ID; John Millar to Paepcke, July 24, 1940, box 2, folder 37, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Mr. Lester, September 27, 1941, box 6, folder 183, ID; “School of Design in Chicago,” 1941–42, box 3, folder 63, ID; “Evening Session: School of Design in Chicago,” 1941–42, box 3, folder 71, ID; Illustration, February 1941, box 6, folder 172, ID; Engelbrecht, Moholy-Nagy, 611; “School of Design on Threshold of Fourth Year,” Chicago Sun, January 3, 1942.
penses of roughly $25,000 were covered by tuition fees, and gifts, design fees, and royalties brought in at most $2,000. “Any suggestion on your part as to people and companies whom we may approach, and any personal effort of your own would be received by me and my faculty with the greatest enthusiasm and gratitude,” Moholy wrote to potential supporter David Rockefeller. “I feel in this time of rapidly expanding industry that we need, more than ever, properly trained men responsible for the common welfare of the community.” Initially, Rockefeller offered only a tepid response and little real support.

The School also promoted itself by sponsoring lectures by Gropius and other major figures, and Moholy and Paepcke continually sought the support of industrialists, whom they flattered and dotingly nursed along, “each according to his own private interest in the school.” Circulating exhibitions of the school’s work also served to raise its profile. The Friends of the School of Design, composed of both industrialists and laymen, furthered their cause through financial contributions and professional advice. Moholy boasted of inventions derived from the design workshops for which the School submitted patent applications. While he emphasized the School’s innovative pedagogy before audiences of designers and educators, Moholy pointed to the practical benefits of the School when addressing businessmen and foundation officers. Yet he had a knack for reversing an implicit critique from conservative industrialists, who sometimes rolled their eyes at his “utopianism”; instead, Moholy insisted that “utopian” planning had not even sufficiently mastered the present situation.10

The direction of American industry would shift radically with the entrance of the US into the Second World War in December of 1941. Moholy was prepared, though, sensing that such a need might arise long before the attack on Pearl Harbor. He had been working for months on “defense matters” and had organized a “Defense Council” at the School to investigate ways of giving students a “good feeling of their usefulness at these times.” The School’s supporters contacted the US Office of Civilian Defense (OCD) and the War Production Board to notify the agencies of the valuable services the School could provide to the war effort. When the School reopened in February of 1942, Gropius came to Chicago to give a lecture on the “contemporary problem” of “Site and Shelter.”

10 Margolin, Struggle, 239–40; Moholy-Nagy to David Rockefeller, December 10, 1940, box 37, folder 252, RG III12G, Educational Interests, RAC; David Rockefeller to Moholy-Nagy, January 11, 1941, box 37, folder 252, Record Group III12G, Educational Interests, RAC; Findeli, Le Bauhaus, 90; Inez Cunningham Stark to Moholy-Nagy, May 8, 1940, box 6, folder 183, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Mr. Lester, September 27, 1941, box 6, folder 183, ID; “Designs for a Future World—Moholy-Nagy Speaks on Art,” New York Herald Tribune, September 14, 1941; Engelbrecht, Moholy-Nagy, 595–96.
In addition to a series of lectures by faculty members and guests on the social usefulness of art and its relation to nations mobilizing for war, the School offered two new “National Defense” courses directed specifically to achieving “maximum results” for the war effort: a course on the uses and design of camouflage, taught by Kepes, and a course on “visual propaganda” in wartime, taught by Robert Jay Wolff. The School would also offer practical courses on soldering, brazing, welding, and mechanical drafting, and students would produce experimental designs for such things with wartime applications as barbed wire. Moholy believed that the Bauhaus approach of integrating art, science, and technology was particularly well suited to the needs of the moment, and he speculated about myriad ways the School could contribute, such as improving the design of the standard army field pack. He even considered such prosaic things as alternatives for wooden dowels. In April and May of 1942, the Arts and Crafts Project of the Works Progress Administration sponsored an exhibition, War Art, which featured designs produced by students at the School intended to “meet the requirements of defense.” Kepes also designed posters for the “Buy Victory Bonds” campaign.

Kepes himself had been trained in camouflage techniques by the Army. His camouflage course registered 134 students and was the only one in the area approved by the OCD to certify competence in camouflage. Some students who successfully completed the course would go on to enter the army’s camouflage corps. The School had issued about sixty certificates by January of 1943. As Kepes saw it, camouflage was basically a problem of design that required “protective concealment” in disguising targets from the enemy. The School staged an exhibition to promote the work of students in the course and as an advertisement to boost enrollment. Moholy also hoped that the School’s deep involvement in the war effort would raise its profile more generally and be cited in its appeals for donations.

The School initially lost a good number of students to the army. Moholy sardonically reassured one departing student, Myron Kozman—who would later return to the School as an instructor—that he could be confident in his ability in aiming a rifle because the abstract painting in which he excelled required the “sharpest discrimination for the smallest values, distance or shapes.” Kozman would serve as a sort of envoy for the School as it adjusted to the changes of wartime and made plans for a future, postwar return of veterans looking to receive training as they reintegrated into society. Registration at the School of Design had recovered by the fall 1942 semester, when enrollment reached a record of more than 200 students. There were fewer day students, but this deficiency was more than made up for by the high enrollment in the camouflage course taught by Kepes.
In addition to the courses on camouflage, mechanical drafting, war photography, blueprint reading, soldering, welding, machine shop work, and practical skills in industrial design, the School began offering courses in occupational therapy in the summer of 1943. The occupational therapy course was intended to train therapists, nurses, and laymen in the physical and psychological rehabilitation of physically disabled and psychologically traumatized servicemen with the aim of restoring their consciousness of their own “creative abilities” and their ability to participate in “purposeful production.” It followed the Bauhaus aim of arousing hidden creative capacities toward the end of increasing self-confidence. The course made use of “tactile charts,” which were specially designed constructions that arranged a variety of contrasting textures and materials. Tactile charts were tested by blind people, and they were meant to engage disabled servicemen in a sensory experience that would exercise their hands and fingers and help them to rebuild their skills of coordination and manual articulation. The idea was to “permit emotional experience to be gained from their organized relationships”; this would be accomplished through the tactile experience with or manipulation of ergonomic wooden hand sculptures, for example. Moholy, of course, had personal experience using art as a way to rehabilitate himself after suffering severe injuries and psychological trauma from warfare.

The rationing of essential materials during the war inspired Moholy and students at the School to produce innovative designs from non-rationed materials, such as bedsprings made of wood to replace those that would have been made of war-rationed metals. One student, Charles Niedringhaus, experimented extensively with the idea and would go on to a position as a designer at a plywood company. By the summer of 1942, the School’s wooden springs were on display at an exhibition at the Chicago Furniture Mart’s summer show, and their durability was proved through rigorous testing. Moholy’s association with the Bauhaus, where tubular furniture had been invented and adopted for mass use, piqued the interest of manufacturers in whatever material innovations might arise from the School’s design experiments. The Seng Company of Chicago, a major furniture hardware manufacturer, paid the School $2,500 in advance royalties for the right to produce one of its designs for a wooden bedspring. It was called the “V” or “Victory” spring, named for both its shape and its small part in contributing to the war effort. Paepcke would reach out to the chairman of the War Production Board, convinced that the School could be put into service to design new household goods and appliances for the Consumer Product Branch.

11 “Outline of the Camouflage Course at the School of Design in Chicago 1941–1942,” box 3, folder 64, ID; “Two Summer Sessions of the School of Design in Chicago,” 1943, box 3, folder 77, ID; Betty Prosser, “De-
During the course of the war, Moholy also became involved with a group of exiles called the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy (Amerikai Magyar Demokratikus Tanács), which sought to return the exiled Count Mihály Károlyi as prime minister in a democratic Hungary. The Hungarian actor Béla Lugosi was president and headed the Hollywood chapter; Moholy headed the Chicago chapter, and he even traveled to Washington to meet with Eleanor Roosevelt to gain support for the cause. Despite Moholy’s clear democratic intentions, this association and its implication of leftist allegiances would later become a problem when he applied for US citizenship toward the end of World War II. Apparently, a government bureaucrat believed that Moholy’s support for Károlyi, a socialist, indicated a propensity for subversion, and for that reason Moholy’s application was brought under special scrutiny. After being delayed for some three years as the charge was investigated, Moholy would ultimately be granted citizenship in April of 1946.12

Paepcke, meanwhile, continued to vigorously seek funding for the School, making the case that the services of industrial designers would be even more important in the “coming post war era,” when they would be needed for “prod-
ucts to-be-developed.” Coordinating their efforts and refining the rhetorical slant of their appeals in letters and lectures, Paepcke and Moholy also promoted the immediate practical business applications of the School’s training in the use of various industrial materials such as plastics, as well as its experiments with modern machines such as airbrushes and infra-red ovens. Due mostly to the camouflage courses, the School’s record enrollment numbers were also a source of pride. Paepcke pointed to the School’s success in winning grants from major foundations with “fine standing” such as Carnegie and Rockefeller. A visit to the School in the spring of 1942 by David Stevens, director of Humanities at the Rockefeller Foundation, was sufficient to secure the School a grant that summer of $7,500. The money was to be used for the purpose of developing its motion picture department, especially for educational films and documentaries, which would include one about the work of the School itself. Paepcke was not ashamed to resort to extreme flattery in his appeals, fawningly pointing out the “cultured and esoteric surroundings” that prevailed in the humanities division of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Despite Stevens’s interest in and positive impression of the School, Moholy’s and Paepcke’s continued pleas for additional grants from Rockefeller were frequently declined. However, by January of 1943, Paepcke had secured a total of $8,000 for the School from other big Chicago companies including Marshall Field’s, Sears Roebuck, and United Airlines. His own company provided a grant of $2,500 to the School. Interested industrialists were invited to present their own special manufacturing, merchandising, and advertising problems to the School, where such challenges would be tackled by students and faculty in the experimental workshops. “Slowly we will be discovered,” Moholy wrote optimistically to Paepcke, encouraged by visits to the school from curious journalists and industrialists and favorable coverage in business trade journals as well as mass-market magazines. Yet he still thought it was “something like a miracle” that the School continued to exist.13

13 Paepcke to David Rockefeller, December 9, 1943, box 37, folder 252, RG III 2G, Educational Interests, RAC; Paepcke, “Form Letter A, School of Design Fund Campaign 1942,” box 2, folder 34, ID; Moholy-Nagy to F.P. Keppel, January 7, 1943, box 6, folder 183, ID; Paepcke to David Stevens, April 14, 1942, box 61, folder 1, WPP; Paepcke to David Stevens and John Marshall, April 17, 1942, box 2, folder 41, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Wolff, May 14, 1942, box 7, folder 209, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Paepcke, June 26, 1942, box 6, folder 183, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Walter Jessup, October 19, 1942, box 6, folder 183, ID; Paepcke to F.P. Keppel, January 29, 1943, box 2, folder 41, ID; John Marshall to Moholy-Nagy, May 17, 1943, box 6, folder 183, ID; Paepcke to E.P. Brooks, December 29, 1943, box 2, folder 38, ID; David Stevens to Paepcke, February 19, 1944, box 2, folder 37, ID; Paepcke to William Yates, March 30, 1944, box 2, folder 42, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Paepcke, March 14, 1942, box 6, folder 183, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Paepcke, March 14, 1942, box 6, folder 183, ID; Moholy Nagy to Wolff, June 7, 1942, box 7, folder 209, ID; Paepcke to Moholy-Nagy, October 16, 1942, box 6, folder 184, ID; “December 1, 1943–March 30,
Paepcke began to take on the cause of the School with a zeal that would rival Moholy’s passion for reestablishing the Bauhaus. In February of 1944, Paepcke wired Gropius to request copies of *Bauhaus 1919–1928*, the catalogue from the celebrated MoMA exhibition. Paepcke planned to use the book to promote the School’s famous pedigree as he assembled a “rather distinguished board of directors” and sought additional industrial support. Moholy, for his part, seemed content to have Paepcke take on this more prominent role in shaping the direction of the School, even as he continued his efforts to promote it and seek grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and other philanthropies. But Moholy deferred to Paepcke for his ability to engage industrialists and civic leaders, reporting to Gropius that he “collects money now for the school and his initial success warrants good hopes.” By that time Gropius had been engaged in correspondence with Paepcke, whom he found to be “very active” in getting a board together. Indeed, Paepcke vigorously pursued the top Chicago industrialists, enticing them at luncheons and constantly reminding them that their financial support for the school was not mere altruism but might “lead to something quite important.” Businessmen at big companies like Marshall Field’s and United Airlines would soon begin to see receipts for their investment: their designers were invited to screenings of the School’s promotional films, for example, and were eventually enrolled in its night classes. Paepcke’s industry-centric mindset also began to leave its mark, and it especially had an effect on the constitution of its board: for example, he rejected a proposal to include representatives of labor unions on the board, which, he feared, the other businessmen would find “perhaps a little ultra-liberal.”

Paepcke’s board quickly began to reshape the School as a more bureaucratic institution that was constituted more on the developing norms of the industrial design profession than on Moholy’s personality or the legacy and ethos of the Bauhaus. In a significant gesture that would inaugurate a new era, on March 27, 1944, the Board of Directors passed a resolution to amend its articles of incor-
poration to rename the School of Design: henceforth, it would be known as the Institute of Design. With Paepcke as chairman, the board, which met monthly, voted to increase the number of directors to fifteen and to re-elect Moholy as president and executive director for an indefinite term. Gropius was among those newly admitted as directors; other members of the board included the president of United Airlines and vice presidents of Sears Roebuck and Marshall Field’s. Straightaway, the board would commence with the institutionalization of the school, overseeing its finances, public relations, and the establishment of an administrative bureaucracy that would include a manager, executive secretary, and accountant.

As he took greater control in managing the future of the newly-christened Institute of Design, Paepcke expressed serious concern about Moholy’s health, which, in his view, appeared to have been adversely impacted by his intense devotion to the school and to managing every aspect of it. “For about five years you were trying to prove to yourself, to your public in general that the idea and ideals of the School...could, from a very humble beginning, gradually and slowly grow in the perhaps potentially fertile but not too well cultivated soil of the Middle West,” Paepcke explained to Moholy at the time. “Now the condition is materially changed.” Paepcke wanted Moholy to focus on his strengths as an educator, artist, author, lecturer, and “general educational administrator.” In the interest of his health, Paepcke advised, Moholy would no longer be expected to supervise “all of the one hundred and one details” of managing the school, which would no longer hinge on the well-being of a single person. “You must, therefore, delegate everything you possibly can,” Paepcke concluded. With the help of Gropius, with whom he had begun to cultivate a friendship, Paepcke attempted to convince Moholy of the value of these changes, and Moholy would ultimately relieve himself of the administrative burdens that he had assumed as he fought for several years to keep the school alive and manage it at the same time.

Moholy had ambivalent feelings on the role of businessmen vis-à-vis the arts and humanities. On the one hand, he appreciated their philanthropic role in supporting universities, theaters, museums, and other cultural institutions. Moreover, according to Sibyl, it was on the basis of his “philosophy of total involvement,” that he accepted businessmen “as readily as artists” as “functioning elements in the totality of contemporary life.” And yet, he knew that the vulgarities of profit incentives and free-market competition could drive them to de-value artists, whom they often derided, implicitly or explicitly, as “effeminates” who lacked the endurance to vigorously participate as economic actors. Businessmen often failed to think in “human proportions,” Moholy lamented, but
artists were compelled to humor them because they were ultimately at their mercy. “The provocative statement of modern art is constantly annulled by checkbook and cocktail party,” Moholy joked sardonically. The purported hard-headedness of the typical businessman was ironic, Moholy believed, since he saw himself as the practical realist and the figure of the businessman as a romantic, whimsically dreaming of Horatio Alger stories and ridiculously unattainable financial windfalls. But Paepcke’s board and the business managers that came with it would simply become a fact that Moholy would have to deal with. In the opinion of Sibyl, at least, the business acumen of these professional managers did not carry over well into the field of art education; however, given that she had been handling the school’s administration prior to the reorganization, her view may have been colored by her suddenly diminished role.

New letterhead announced that the Institute was “formerly” the School of Design, but it would, at least officially, retain much of the animating Bauhaus ethos. Particularly important among those ideas was the integration of art and science, or “bridging the gap between the creative artist and the production machine.” Yet the Institute’s public relations communications under the new corporate structure would begin to take on a somewhat more vocational tone, noting that its designers would be equipped to “turn out anything from a kitchen utensil to a prefabricated housing unit.” As noted in the new catalogue, it was “harder to design a first-rate chair than to paint a second-rate painting, and much more useful.” Broad training in a range of materials and techniques would be the special character of the graduates of the Institute of Design. Such training would make them particularly adaptable to whatever new technologies or problems might appear in the rapidly changing industrial landscape. The new, bureaucratized staff of the Institute was on the lookout for practical applications that might have material benefits, such as a contract with an ink company that had the potential to yield a “mass production item,” the royalty returns for which could be “very satisfactory.” In the view of historian James Sloan Allen, the Institute’s new trajectory would amount to “loosening its ties to the early twentieth-century Bauhaus and joining mid-century American culture,” and, as historian Alain Findeli puts it, the board would begin its attempts, “little by little,” to convince Moholy to abandon his Bauhaus ideal in favor of a direction preferred by industry. According to Sibyl, for Moholy it was a matter of steering a “precarious course” between a “board mentality” and his own integrity. 15

15 Paepcke to Moholy-Nagy, April 4, 1944, box 6, folder 184, ID; Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy, 213–19; “Minutes of Adjourned Joint Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors and Members of School of Design,” March 27, 1944, box 1, folder 10, ID; “Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation of School of Design,” March 27, 1944, box 1, folder 32, ID; “Minutes of a Special Joint Meeting of the Members and
To some extent, Moholy embraced the somewhat more vocational, consumer-oriented direction of the Institute, proposing new courses on salesmanship, lectures aimed at executives, typographers, and the art directors of advertising agencies, and courses on dress design to engage the garment industry. He celebrated the Institute’s cooperation with large Chicago firms like Sears Roebuck and Marshall Field’s. Field’s partially subsidized their employees’ night classes at the Institute, especially in advertising and product design, which were
seen as a “good investment.” Moholy considered the school’s offering “consultative services” to businesses, and he proposed a research institute on product development that would take special orders from industrial concerns. He also envisioned the establishment of a marketing department for the Institute’s furniture models and appliances. He became concerned about “a gap between our productive capacity of new materials and public acceptance of the new designs which can be produced with the help of the new technology,” and he believed that the reluctance of the public to take up new designs might be countered with “educational work and active propaganda.” Moholy believed that his school was, in a way, reviving a nineteenth-century tradition of American furniture-making that had been extinguished by the importation of heavily ornamental, Victorian styles that had stifled the public’s willingness to accept modern, functional forms. As a newly-elected board member of the American Designers’ Institute and the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, Moholy believed himself to be in a strong position to influence the direction of design and the tastes of consumers.

As a means of propagandizing the school’s novel pedagogical methods and interesting designs, a documentary color film financed by the grant from the Rockefeller Foundation was produced and shown before a large group of industrialists and artists at MoMA in March of 1944. MoMA would also include a number of designs produced by the Institute in the museum’s “Design for Use” exhibition, which opened in May. Already looking over the horizon to the postwar period, Moholy saw his students’ innovations and odd inventions as essential to the reconversion of industry toward the malleable interests of consumers upon their being freed from wartime restrictions.

The film was shown again in September before a group of Chicago executives from department stores and other industries alongside the first in a new “executive lecture series” on the work of the Institute. These extension courses for executives would inform businesspeople on the latest developments in design, and they were also meant to entice them to send their employees to the school’s “Evening Professional courses for business people” on subjects such as Product Design and Advertising Arts, and to hire graduates of the Institute’s two-year program of day classes. A scholarship program sponsored by industry was also announced to support employee training at the Institute. Engineering, retail, and publishing firms were among the many companies that sent their employees to attend night classes at the Institute. Paepcke even sent a letter to thousands of graduates of Chicago high schools, noting that the Institute’s graduates had found “desirable positions in the industrial life of Chicago.” Such promotional activities worked alongside Paepcke’s relentless correspondence and
fruitful fundraising for the Institute, which sparked discussions of collaborations with furniture manufacturers and other businesses. Paepcke liked to dangle the prospect of the forthcoming postwar era before executives, when ravenous consumers with newly disposable income and leisure time would demand professionally-redesigned products that were “attractive and streamlined.” In addition to this practical businessman’s outlook, Paepcke was also high-minded about the role of the Institute in the community, boasting that its lecture series, which brought the likes of Fernand Léger and Jean Carlu, contributed “not a little to the cultural life of Chicago.”

Paepcke himself donated shares of Container Corporation stock worth more than $10,000, which he hoped would help to “secure the permanency and the future of the institution for the Institute to have an able and efficient business management,” including staff and an assistant to the director who could protect the Institute against any unforeseen “illness or accident which might conceivably befall the Director.” Paepcke’s efforts to bureaucratize the Institute were meant to assuage supporters and Board members, and to convince them that the school was more than “just a one-man show.” The Institute would bring on Crombie Taylor as secretary-treasurer, Loyal Baker as business manager, and Madeline Miller as registrar, a professionalized administration that greatly pleased Paepcke as it gave Moholy someone to delegate things to. The Institute also hired a public relations director, Donald Fairchild, to better publicize its activities, and trade publications once again took an active interest in the activities of the school. According to one flattering contemporary account, the Institute seemed “like a cross between a modern art museum, a well-equipped factory shop and the back-stage of a theater.” Another somewhat prejudiced profile of the Institute assured readers that, although Moholy’s personal finances were in an “interesting state” on account of his being Hungarian, those of his school were well administered by an “array of practical business talent,” including Paepcke, who knew how to effectively mobilize his ideas for commercial design to “enhance American industry and comfort.”

16 “Institute of Design President’s Report,” June 22, 1944, box 1, folder 13, ID; Paepcke to William Yates, March 30, 1944, box 2, folder 42, ID; Loyal Baker to Paepcke, July 25, 1944, box 2, folder 36, ID; Emery Hutchison, “Stories of the Day,” The Daily News, June 28, 1944; Wm. Street to Samuel Hypes, August 28, 1944, box 1, folder 23, ID; Moholy-Nagy to J.V. Spachner, September 27, 1944, box 6, folder 183, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Hughston McBain, September 27, 1944, box 6, folder 183, ID; Paepcke to Donald Fairchild, October 3, 1944, box 2, folder 40, ID; Leverett Lyon to Paepcke, October 9, 1944, box 2, folder 36, ID; Moholy-Nagy to F.L. Bateman, October 20, 1944, box 6, folder 183, ID; “President’s Report,” November 14, 1944, box 1, folder 13, ID; “Design Scholarships of the Institute of Design, Chicago,” n.d., box 1, folder 20, ID; Paepcke to “Gentlemen,” November 1, 1944, box 6, folder 184, ID; Paepcke to Arnold Epstein, January 9, 1945, box 2, folder 39, ID; “Design for Use, Museum of Modern Art, 15th Anniversary Show: Art in Prog-
These publicity items and promotional films captured the unique character of Bauhaus design education just as the Institute was beginning its bureaucratic transformation, which would diminish Sibyl’s role as an administrator of the school. By her own account, it was the beginning of the end of Bauhaus idealism, for while Moholy had been selling prospective donors “a stake in a future world,” the “professional money-raiser” merely wanted to sell “an income tax deduction.” Yet Moholy would soon be able to redirect his creative energies to another project. Not long after Paepcke’s quasi-coup, Moholy learned that he had been given the opportunity to finally put down his pedagogical philosophy and design ethos for posterity: he received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to complete the book that he had been writing for several years and would work on more intensively for the last two years of his life. It would be published shortly after his death as *Vision in Motion*, the final, cumulative statement of his career.

Moholy travelled to Harvard in November of 1944 to give a lecture and to meet his old mentor Gropius, whom he was courting to design a new central building for the Institute. He would also show the Rockefeller-financed color film on the work of the Institute, called “Design Workshops,” and he made a side-trip to New York to give a lecture at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. Perhaps unconsciously, Moholy had begun the process of documenting his life’s work just as his control over the Institute began to slip away from him. Yet he admitted that the new board was “working well” under Paepcke’s leadership, and that the institutional reforms would help to ensure supporters of the school that its method and mission were sound.

Paepcke, meanwhile, had begun to ingratiate himself with Gropius, whom he had invited to be a consultant for the Container Corporation, possibly to design one of its new plants. Gropius would visit Chicago in February of 1945 to deliver a lecture on “Rebuilding our Communities after the War,” which would later be published. The well-attended event, deemed a “great success,” was sponsored by the Chicago Association of Commerce, the Chicago Plan Commission, and the Institute. On the occasion of his visit, Paepcke invited Gropius and his wife, Ise, to be a guest at his home and at his Racquet Club. He meticulously
arranged Gropius’s itinerary to give the best possible impression of the Institute, which would include a brief talk with students, a luncheon with the directors, and a dinner party. Paepcke was maneuvering to bring Gropius into his circle, and he also sought to use this towering figure of industrial design to lend legitimacy to his Institute in the view of the Board and the elite of the Chicago business community. Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke were masters in the art of flattery, and their prodigious wealth and generous hospitality would earn them considerable social dividends. “You represent for me the rare exception of a man in power and leadership who seriously tries to fuse business with cultural progress,” Gropius wrote to Paepcke upon returning home, feeling “deeply satisfied” after his Chicago trip. As the ultimate authority on matters of Bauhaus education, Gropius also assured Paepcke that Moholy would be able to “change some of the debatable features which seem to hurt his prestige” in the view of some of the more practical-minded members of the board. Gropius reasoned that they were “puzzled” by the Bauhaus-style curriculum of the school because they failed to appreciate that the object of the instruction was to “stimulate the inventiveness of the designer.”

As genuine as Paepcke’s friendship with Moholy certainly was, there was a discernable instrumentalism with which Paepcke brought himself into the circle of exiled Bauhäusler as he pursued his own designs, which would extend beyond the Institute. When Paepcke endeavored to rapidly stage an exhibition at the Art Institute to display the last several years of Container Corporation advertisements, he did not engage the experienced exhibit designer Moholy for the task but rather Herbert Bayer, whom Gropius had enthusiastically recommended and whom Elizabeth had succeeded in charming over lunch in New York. Sibyl took Paepcke’s new interest in Bayer as a slight, particularly as Paepcke continued to pass off smaller, lower-profile contract design jobs to Moholy. Succumbing to the Paepckes’ charms, Bayer was “delighted” by the idea of designing the exhibition, which he hoped would become a traveling show. Fea-

17 Moholy-Nagy to Kozman, August 15, 1944, box 1, folder 2, MK; Gropius to Moholy-Nagy, October 30, 1944, Inv. Nr. 2252414, WGOA; Gropius to Moholy-Nagy, January 29, 1945, Inv. Nr. 2252433, WGOA; “Institute of Design,” Tide, January 1, 1945; “Minutes of Board of Directors’ Meeting of Institute of Design,” January 9, 1945, box 1, folder 6, ID; “Minutes of Board of Directors’ Meeting,” November 14, 1944, box 1, folder 6, ID; “President’s Report,” January 9, 1945, box 1, folder 13, ID; Memorandum to Members of the Board, February 6, 1945, box 1, folder 13, ID; Gropius to Paepcke, February 28, 1945, box 8, folder 227, ID; Findeli, Bauhaus, 116–18; Paepcke to Gropius, January 27, 1945, box 24, folder 7, WPP; Moholy-Nagy to Gropius, October 28, 1944, Inv. Nr. 2252414, WGOA; Moholy-Nagy to Gropius, January 30, 1945, Inv. Nr. 2252433, WGOA; Moholy-Nagy to Robert Wolff, February 13, 1945, box 7, folder 209, ID; Engelbrecht, Moholy-Nagy, 616–21; Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy, 217; Memorandum to Members of the Board, March 3, 1945, box 1, folder 13, ID; “The President’s Report,” May 1, 1945, box 1, folder 13, ID; Moholy-Nagy to Jenő Nagy, May 21, 1946, in Passuth, Moholy-Nagy, 409.
turing eighty-nine works by forty-four artists—including Cassandre, Carlu, and Bayer himself—“Modern Art in Advertising” opened at the Art Institute on April 27, 1945. Through these advertisements, Paepcke fancied himself as bringing modern art to the masses. Participation in the celebrated series of ads had seriously interested artists such as Man Ray, who offered a photograph for the campaign and received a dinner invitation from the Paepckes—and the possibility of a peacetime contract. The exhibit was a major success, and it was, in Paepcke’s view, a celebration of the fruitful alliance of “the artist and the businessman” who could “learn much from one another.” With Bayer, Paepcke had found a new artist to confide in, to whom he would confess to being “quite discouraged at times.” He even began to subtly complain about his difficulty in relaying to Moholy the importance of the efficient bureaucratic operation of the Institute, so that potential sponsors, those “somewhat impatient” businessmen, might see the “rapid strides of progress” that they witnessed daily in their own operations. Bayer, in contrast, had a sharp grasp of commercial affairs, and his style of design was immediately amenable to the graphical displays that would interest businessmen. Bayer had his own concerns, and he arranged to meet privately in New York with Paepcke, Sigfried Giedion, and Gropius to discuss the matter of the Institute—without Moholy’s knowledge of the meeting.18

As he reorganized the Institute, Paepcke was already looking ahead to his next big project: the redevelopment of Aspen, Colorado, which was then a dilapidated old mining town that, in Paepcke’s view, had great potential as a ski resort. A new ski lift was in the works, Paepcke boasted, and a group of “Austrian ski experts” were there making plans for a ski school. Paepcke owned a ranch near there, and he was considering buying several additional properties in Aspen that he wished to renovate. He begged Bayer as a potential cultural ambassador of sorts who mightcivilize this still-rather-wild western town. He began a campaign to entice Bayer, whom he flattered as a “lover of beautiful things,” to move from New York to Aspen with his wife, Joella, offering romantic comparisons to Switzerland and the Bavarian Alps. As the war came to an end, the Bayers had been contemplating a possible return to Europe to start a skiing inn, but Paepcke intervened to make a vigorous case that they stake their

18 Walter Paepcke to Elizabeth Paepcke, March 2, 1945, WPP; Findeli, Bauhaus, 118; Dyja, Third Coast, 102; Allen, Romance, 70–71, 128–39; Bayer to Paepcke, March 5, 1945, WPP; Paepcke to Moholy-Nagy, July 30, 1945, box 6, folder 184, ID; L. Moholy-Nagy to Ernest Byfield, August 2, 1945, box 6, folder 185, ID; Paepcke to Bayer, June 15, 1945, box 2, folder 38, ID; Man Ray to Paepcke, May 22, 1945, box 23, folder 5, WPP; Paepcke to Man Ray, May 25, 1945, box 23, folder 5, WPP; Paepcke, “Broadened Horizons for American Business,” WENR, Chicago, May 13, 1945, box 1, folder 8, WPP; Bayer to Paepcke, June 15, 1945, box 96, folder 9, WPP.
claim in Aspen instead. Paepcke plotted to bring the Bayers—and Walter and Ise Gropius—to his Colorado ranch, looking to “expose them to the charms of Aspen.” He promised Walter and Ise rest, lovely scenery, horse-riding, and plenty of wine-drinking, which they would take him up on. He also sought to engage Gropius to serve as a consultant for a redevelopment plan for the town. Paepcke succeeded spectacularly in charming the “father of the whole idea” of the Bauhaus at his ranch and in “the old ghost town” of Aspen, and Gropius would later reciprocate the hospitality with an invitation to his Cambridge house. Although the Bayers would not make it to Colorado that summer of 1945, Paepcke did not cease in his campaign to involve them in his designs for Aspen, and his plans would later bear fruit.19

Conclusion

After the Association of Arts and Industries closed the New Bauhaus, Walter Paepcke, the arts patron and president of the Container Corporation, would help Moholy to reestablish the School of Design in 1939 with himself as the chairman of its board, which was packed with prominent industrialists. Moholy’s close, personal friendship with Paepcke would form the basis of a partnership that would lead to the institutionalization of the school. In its charter, the School adopted the cooperative, socialistic pedagogy of the Bauhaus, which affirmed the project of merging art and industry toward the end of designing useful products for mass production. The designers at the School would be trained to be fully conscious of their social obligations as designers of everyday objects and images, and as architects they would be mindful of creating spaces for harmonious, cooperative living. The openness to experimentation that was established in the foundation courses would help students to arrive at innovative solutions to whatever design problems they would later encounter. With the war came an array of new design challenges, some deriving from the necessity of working with fewer materials due to rationing. Moholy’s School would prove its practical value by producing useful things such as wooden bedsprings, providing training in the use of camouflage, and teaching students to create striking and effective poster art for use as wartime propaganda.

19 Paepcke to Bayer, May 22, 1945, WPP; Paepcke to Bayer, May 31, 1945, box 3, folder 8, WPP; Joella Bayer to Paepcke, June 10, 1945, box 3, folder 8, WPP; Paepcke to Suzie Hamill, June 27, 1945, box 2, folder 40, ID; Paepcke to Gropius, June 15, 1945, box 2, folder 40, ID; Paepcke to Gropius, June 15, 1945, box 96, folder 9, WPP; Paepcke to Herbert and Joella Bayer, June 14, 1945, box 3, folder 8, WPP; Paepcke to Bayer, June 15, 1945, box 2, folder 38, ID; Gropius to Paepcke, October 30, 1945, box 8, folder 227, ID; Paepcke to Bayer, October 23, 1945, box 96, folder 9, WPP.
Although the School would receive recognition in the world of art, architecture, and modern design as the inheritor of the Bauhaus tradition, that positive reputation did not necessarily carry over to the sphere of business. Much of Moholy’s time was occupied by making endless appeals to industrialists and foundation officers for financial support. Although the School produced design prototypes and design training at evening courses for the employees of local businesses—which gave industry a direct interest in the school—securing sufficient financial support was a constant struggle. In an effort to relieve Moholy of administrative and fundraising duties, which appeared to be taking a toll on his health, Paepcke successfully lobbied for a reorganization of the School of Design, which would become the Institute of Design in 1944. The reorganized Institute was directed by the board and run by professional managers who would standardize the admissions process and begin to take the school in a more vocational direction. As the Institute became less tied to Moholy the person, Paepcke would increasingly turn his attention to other Bauhäusler, especially Gropius and Herbert Bayer, who would be central to executing his next enterprise uniting arts and industry: the renaissance of Aspen as a haven for the cultured business elite.